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Ophelia's Intertheatricality, or, How Performance Is History

Gina Bloom, Anston Bosman, and William N. West

In late 1878, Ellen Terry, newly signed to play *Hamlet's* Ophelia at the Lyceum Theatre, had an unoriginal idea: "Like all Ophelias before (and after) me, I went to the madhouse to study wits astray. I was disheartened at first. There was no beauty, no nature, no pity in most of the lunatics. Strange as it may sound, they were too *theatrical* to teach me anything."¹ Like her predecessors and successors, Terry went searching outside the theatre to find a model for Ophelia in a performance that did not know it was one. Yet, as her memoir records, the inmates she observed seemed to her the worst kind of overactors—until, at the point of giving up, she discovered an altogether different scene: "Then, just as I was going away, I noticed a young girl gazing at the wall. I went between her and the wall to see her face. It was quite vacant, but the body expressed that she was waiting, waiting. Suddenly she threw up her hands and sped across the room like a swallow. I never forgot it."² In this account, when Terry moves between the wall and the patient—gazing at her gazing, letting her observe that she is observed—she finds what she is looking for. The girl's face seems to offer Terry a vacuum, but her body stands full of expectation—visibly and, at such close range,

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¹ Ellen Terry, *The Story of My Life* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1908), 154.

² *Ibid.*

doubtless palpably too. The pose erupts into movement, making an indelible effect on Terry: "I never forgot it." The girl darts across the room, bequeathing Terry something to bring onstage when she joins the sisterhood of "all Ophelias before (and after) me."

What can scholars of performance learn from Terry's encounter in the asylum? The answer ought to be that she incorporated the girl's actions into her portrayal of Ophelia, making theatre history by making theatre out of a poignant, because untheatrical, event. Such a case, it must be said, finds little evidence in the formal drawings and photographs of Terry in the role or in the reviews that praise her decorous interpretation of Ophelia as "picturesque."³ True enough, biographers have extrapolated from the madhouse visit to Terry's offstage behavior, citing her premature disappearance from the theatre on *Hamlet's* opening night, when it seems "[s]he felt she had failed, and sped off, like the mad girl she had studied, . . . with the intention of drowning herself," or linking it to contemporary accounts that her "too-nervous, changeable, hysterical nature" made her unable to sit through a dinner without "flitting from one room to another."⁴ But nothing in Terry's biography offers much to suggest why this encounter at the asylum was so important, and so unforgettable.

What is more, attempts to ground Terry's performance in her observation of lunatics miss that Terry was drawn to the asylum patient before any event had occurred. What intrigued her was not the girl's movement, but her surfeit of potential energy, a bodily tension balanced between motions past and future. It was the girl's openness more than her gesture, the quality of a coiled spring rather than a loose cannon, that the actor incorporated. Looking back through this account at Terry's portrayal, we might ask whether her Ophelia was remarkable less for its action than for its hesitation, its ability to hold generations of Ophelias in suspense. In Terry's account, her preparation for the part is both singular (a unique encounter of actor and patient at a lucky moment) and universal (the imagined constant of what it is to be mad and the desire to craft a performance that refers to it). But her account registers something else that can neither be localized in the event of this encounter nor discovered as a constant across time and place: Terry records a moment that is not a moment, of an action that is not an action, but rather a pause—the aptly repeated "waiting, waiting"—that holds in suspense the girl's unforgettable dash across the room. Suspended thus, the girl and Terry and "all Ophelias before (and after)" her share in a potential to act that is neither fully in the past nor fully in the future.

This essay draws on Terry's recognition of theatre's shared potential across time to trouble critics' oft-repeated characterization of performance as a disappearing act, something so local and evanescent that it can only be handled in retrospect, with a pleasurable melancholy at its fading.⁵ In what follows, we identify some of the limita-

³We cite the review in T. Edgar Pemberton, *Ellen Terry and Her Sisters* (London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1902), 222, 224. In *Hamlet and the Visual Arts, 1709–1900* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), Alan R. Young notes, in a representative studio photograph, that "[t]he disturbing visual signs of madness that are evident in surviving photographs of asylum Ophelias are far removed from Terry's poignant appearance with her white lilies" (309).

⁴Both vignettes are cited by Nina Auerbach in *Ellen Terry: Player in Her Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 238, 180.

⁵Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993). Phenomenological explorations of theatrical time, such as Matthew D. Wagner's *Shakespeare, Theatre, and Time* (New York: Routledge, 2011), begin from this fundamental assumption about performance. Although Wagner argues

tions of the idea of performance as evanescence and attempt to press beyond them. In particular, we hold that this model of fleeting performance acknowledges mediation and partiality only to retain the fantasy of some moment of fullness, however inaccessible or irrecoverable, prior to the performance's fading—an event of performance bound by and present in a particular (now past and lost) time and place.⁶ Such posited plenitude, coupled with a sense that performance is always in the process of disappearing, renders performance something that can only be glimpsed from the outside and recovered only in part. Nostalgic treatments of performance restrict historicity to a series of instants, one punctum after another, each maximally dense with meaning and fully present and each, in turn, sliding away.⁷ But accounts like Terry's complicate such a view of performance, suggesting that scholars have been (to echo Hamlet) "thinking too precisely on th' event."⁸

Writing on the related problem of literary history, Wai Chee Dimock notes the "timeful unwieldiness" of texts in which meanings are constantly "attaching themselves to, overlapping with, and sometimes coming into conflict with previous ones."⁹ Theorizing the event along the lines that Dimock suggests—where historicity is not a succession of instants, but the netting together in each new moment of a shifting array of earlier moments—disturbs the assumption (made by performance studies scholars and theatre historians) that performance is something that *takes place*, and thus at a *place* in time.¹⁰ Yet performance does not take place in an instant, as an event, but at many times at once. As the pause of "waiting, waiting" in Terry's account indicates, no Ophelia, including Terry's, reveals herself exclusively or entirely in the supposedly singular event that Terry "never forgot." This essay presents Ophelia as an exemplary alternative to the punctual model of performance as event, arguing that the temporality of performance stretches the event open, such that it is simultaneously a preservation of the past and a preparation for the future. Performance, we argue, is not always already disappearing, but emerges through, is indeed constituted by, dissemination and reverberation. It does not take place in an instant, as an event, but recalls, lingers, and persists, expanding

for a "thickness of theatrical time" in which the present is imbued "with the weight of time gone and time to come" (73, 71), he remains wedded to an idea of theatre as something that passes: "theatre is what it is by virtue of the fact that it must end. . . . [E]ach individual theatrical production is what it is by the same virtue: it must end, and it must have its own particular end, unique to itself" (30).

⁶ The punctual localizability of the event is characteristic of both sophisticated ontologies of the event, like Alain Badiou's, and more naïve, intuitive ones. The notion of performance as ephemeral is critiqued in William N. West, "Replaying Early Modern Performances," in *New Directions in Renaissance Drama and Performance Studies*, ed. Sarah Werner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 30–50.

⁷ Erika Fischer-Lichte refers to this imagined density as the idea of art as a "cache of truth"; see her *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain (New York: Routledge, 2008), 161.

⁸ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden, 2006), 4.4.40. All citations of the play follow this edition (Arden 3) and henceforward shall appear in the body of the text.

⁹ Wai Chee Dimock, "A Theory of Resonance," *PMLA* 112, no. 5 (1997): 1062.

¹⁰ We specify "place" here not in distinction to time, but rather because the event is a way of treating time as if it were spatial, thereby locating and fixing it. It might be better simply to leave the event behind, together with evanescence, as a rubric, or at least to recognize that its punctuality alone does not define performance. Tracy C. Davis discusses how *event* and *continuity* relate to performativity and theatricality in her "Performative Time" (in *Representing the Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, ed. Charlotte M. Canning and Thomas Postlewait [Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010], 142–67). Although her terminology differs from ours, Davis shares our concern about theories of theatricality that reduce theatre-time to that of the event, memory, and history.

and even exploding the confines of synchronic temporality, appearing as the ongoing opening of history rather than the closing gates of its departure.

Although any character in and out of Shakespeare's corpus might be used to illustrate this openness of performance, performances of Ophelia do so with particular sharpness. Illuminated by centuries of attention to Hamlet and *Hamlet*, yet always to the side of the hero's fascination with actions and origins, appearances and disappearances, Ophelia holds a heuristic position through which to extend and critique scholarship that has taken the play's Ghost as an iconic example of performance. In a startling range of work, the Ghost has been used to explain how performance outlives its event and continues to address the present.¹¹ To quote Marvin Carlson quoting Freddie Rokem quoting Herbert Blau quoting either the Folio's Marcellus or the Second Quarto's Horatio, the question of the Ghost in *Hamlet*—"What, has this thing appeared again tonight?"—is a question that theatre repeatedly and essentially asks itself.¹² But the Ghost has not answered this question effectively, perhaps because it has often been used to reconstitute what it might have been thought to critique: the localization of performance into a single, selfsame moment of what Rebecca Schneider has called "the missed encounter," foreclosed to us though still imaginable as having taken place in another place or time, for another audience.¹³ Even in as critically astute an engagement as Schneider's, which invokes old Hamlet's specter as an example of the power of what has disappeared, the Ghost unavoidably reintroduces a nostalgia for the full presence of a singular origin. Acknowledging that the moment of contact has passed does not change its singularity, but merely shows us that we are missing something. As an example of this absence, *Hamlet's* Ghost is paradoxically clear and distinct: it is an encounter that we know well enough to see that it has been missed, and that we miss it. In taking the Ghost as iconic, scholars risk overlooking how the work they attribute to the Ghost is distributed more broadly across other characters, scenes, lines, and gestures.

¹¹ Endorsed by the Derridean concept of *hauntology*, the Ghost has come to dominate studies of theatricality more generally, whether the approach has been historicist or political, psychoanalytic or phenomenological. For examples of these four approaches, see, respectively, Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Richard Halpern, "An Impure History of Ghosts," in *Marxist Shakespeares*, ed. Jean E. Howard and Scott Cutler Shershow (New York: Routledge, 2001); Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers* (1987; reprint, New York: Routledge, 2010), 31–52; and Alice Rayner, *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). On *hauntology*, see Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (1994; reprint, New York: Routledge, 2006), 63. *Hauntology* has also inspired studies of Victorian and modernist literature in which Shakespeare plays a key role: see, for example, Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); and Helen Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

¹² Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 7; Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), xi, 6; Herbert Blau, *Take Up the Bodies: Theater at the Vanishing Point* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 213; Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.1.20. Recent research on this question includes Freddie Rokem's *Philosophers and Thespians: Thinking Performance* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 77.

¹³ In *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), Schneider argues that what appears in performance is not presence, but rather what she calls "the missed encounter" (102); yet, even Schneider's term invests what is missing from the stage with a kind of spurious concreteness.

This essay turns to Ophelia not in order to set up an alternative singular and iconic figure of performance, but instead to explain that broad distribution. Ophelia's performances resist singularity and iconicity because her character lacks the privilege and authority of the Ghost.¹⁴ They underscore that theatrical actions are not necessarily subordinated to larger categories of plot, purpose, or character—one gesture can recall another without being named, grouped, sorted, or passed through an intervening conceptualization. Ophelia is no accident—but neither does she seem to rise, misleadingly, toward any claims of essentiality. For these reasons, Ophelia's performances demonstrate a theatricality that is productive rather than reflective or derivative. We call Ophelia's way of looking at performance, and her way of performing, "intertheatrical."

Appropriately, the term "intertheatricality" comes from many sources. Anston Bosman uses it to characterize the various kinds of medial theatre that emerge between more obviously visible national and linguistic traditions, "systematic, permeable, and dynamic."¹⁵ Jonathan Gil Harris locates it in "the keen self-reflexivity about styles of acting" that are remembered through histrionic performances in Shakespeare's *Henriad*.¹⁶ The use closest to ours in this essay is Jacky Bratton's, whose intertheatricality names "the mesh of connections between all kinds of theatre texts, and between texts and their users," who carry with them into the theatre memories of other performances, including "dances, spectacles, plays and songs."¹⁷ What all these approaches share is an emphasis on how systems of theatrical performance contribute to and draw from a nonsequential field of performance possibilities, so that "individual" performances become intelligible or even possible only in light of their shared repertoire of gestures, actions, and styles.¹⁸ Intertheatricality foregrounds how theatrical performances relate to one another, presenting a form of citationality that is not allusive, in the sense that it does not primarily point toward past performances. Instead, intertheatrical citationality thickens present performance by mediating it with other performances, and in the same way—at the same time?—prepares future performances.¹⁹

¹⁴ Indeed, Ophelia resists what Derrida called the "patrimonial logic of the generations of ghosts," a father/son lineage whose deconstruction, as he later wrote, his readers seem not to have noted. See Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 133–34; and "Marx & Sons," in Jacques Derrida, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Antonio Negri et al., *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1999), 213–69, esp. 231.

¹⁵ Anston Bosman, "Renaissance Intertheatre and the Staging of Nobody," *ELH: English Literary History* 71, no. 3 (2004): 559–85, esp. 565.

¹⁶ Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 67.

¹⁷ Jacky Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 37–38. In the field of early modern drama, other precursors to our idea of "intertheatricality" include the concept of "theatergrams" in Louise George Clubb, *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); the examination of particular theatre conventions in Jeremy Lopez, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); what Douglas Bruster calls "quoting" in *Quoting Shakespeare: Form and Culture in Early Modern Drama* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); and investigations into the "theatrical vocabulary" of stage action in Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson, *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580–1642* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). The parallel term "intertextuality" in the work of Roland Barthes, Julie Kristeva, and others is another important source, but we resist their qualification of it as particular to writing.

¹⁸ On nonsequentiality as a hallmark of repertoire, see Tracy C. Davis, "Introduction: Repertoire," in *The Broadview Anthology of Nineteenth-Century British Performance* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2012).

¹⁹ In a critique of linear temporality as deployed in performance studies, Schneider has theorized the ongoing "meantime" in Hamlet's instructions to the players as "an indeterminate tangle between

This mechanism of relationality, memory, and projection becomes particularly energized, we argue, in the institution of the theatre, where performance knows and shows itself as participating in a history of gestures. The field of performance studies has tended to set aside scripted dramatic performance in favor of more obviously experimental, often contemporary performances that seem better suited to theories of performativity. But traditional, scripted dramatic performances, such as *Hamlet*, are also constituted by a recursive temporality of enaction. In fact, the long history of the performance of early modern drama and its intense self-awareness of its traditions, both as performed and as narrated in informal theatrical histories and scholarly theatre history, give intertheatricality a special and constitutive prominence and a visibility that a more iconoclastic performance studies cannot wholly share.²⁰ Although the intertheatrical relations we describe are part of performance practice more generally, they are particularly clearly and visibly articulated in this theatrical tradition.

Intertheatrical Ophelia

Hamlet carefully cues its audiences for the range of responses to Ophelia's appearance in the mad scene of act 4. As the scene opens, a courtier instructs the onstage Queen and the offstage audience to respond to her as an emblem of female grief: "Her mood will needs be pitied" (4.5.3). Like an emblem, moreover, Ophelia is presented as a rich texture of words and images, a summons not to a unitary recollection (as of the missed encounter), but instead to multiple acts of "collection" that may or may not add up:

Her speech is nothing,
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
The hearers to collection. They yawn at it
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts
Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,
Indeed would make one think there might be thought,
Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily. (4.5.7–13)

Here, the present tense conflates the past reaction of dramatic characters with a possible future response of future theatregoers: "doth" encodes "did" and "will." The courtier's forecast is that observers both onstage and off will "yawn" or gape with wonder at Ophelia, and then recover sufficient verbal reasoning to "botch" or patch her speech together. Their interpretations will depend on "her winks and nods and gestures," which hint at, but do not disclose "thought" on the part of either Ophelia or her observers. To what extent can Ophelia's body "yield" the meaning in her language?²¹ Unlike the compliant maiden of the first part of the play, mad Ophelia defies Hamlet's prescription to "Suit the action to the word, the word to the action" (3.2.17–18).

the done, the re-done, and the not yet done"; see her *Performing Remains*, 87–110. Our essay extends Schneider's insightful discussion to issues particular to the institution of theatre.

²⁰Marjorie Garber claims that "[t]he timelessness of Shakespeare is achieved by his recurrent timeliness, the way his plays seem to reflect upon, and to speak to, what Cassius . . . called 'states unborn and accents unknown.'" In recovering Cassius's vision of a theatrical future for his theatrical past and present, Garber suggests that "timelessness" does not depend on an origin, but is recreated again and again from an open-ended array of gestures that through their transformation preserve, extend, and project themselves. See Garber, *Shakespeare and Modern Culture* (New York: Pantheon, 2008), 273.

²¹Terry claimed that her research for the part of Ophelia taught her that "[i]t is no good observing life and bringing the result to the stage without selection, without a definite idea. The idea must come first, the realism afterwards" (*The Story of My Life*, 155).

Her words and actions are so out of joint that audience members must relate them in their own ways, "fit to their own thoughts." "Pray you, mark," Ophelia twice begs the queen (4.5.28, 35), in words that echo and thereby hollow out the Ghost's opening imperative to Hamlet: "Mark me" (1.5.2). Whereas the Ghost delivers a polished admonition, Ophelia presents "unshaped" fragments of speech and posture, challenging other characters and critics to assemble them.

Once attended to by her addressees, Ophelia communicates in starkly different ways than does the Ghost. Whereas the Ghost demands that Hamlet "lend thy serious hearing / To what I shall unfold"—employing the verb of the sentinel's challenge in the play's second line—Ophelia seems rather to *enfold herself* in an intricate web of gesture, movement, and song.²² Terry said that Ophelia "only *perovades* the scenes in which she is concerned until the mad scene"; the success of her performance, she felt, lay in how she had slowly prepared for the scene that she saw as Ophelia's real intervention.²³ But even in that scene, Ophelia's appearance is pervasive rather than intensive, referring itself and its audiences to many other places rather than focusing them into just one. Her exit mid-scene (4.5.73), only to return after Laertes has burst in to attack the King, further distributes what might otherwise seem the punctual event of her madness, resisting any easy reduction of her appearance to a unitary form and physically demonstrating how her actions may echo into both past and future. Like the prediction of the Gentleman, her premature appearance to Gertrude and Horatio, "distracted" (Q1, 4.5.sd16), cues or primes the audience's response to her more iconic entrance "as before" (Q2, 4.5.sd151) to distribute flowers. To ask, as the Queen does, what Ophelia's song "imports" (4.5.27) is to misconstrue its value as singular, as if it were a vatic pronouncement like the Ghost's; the Queen may mark Ophelia, but Ophelia's songs are marked, in contrast, by sampling, layering, and interference, a noisy materiality in which "her personal voice is estranged, filtered through the anonymous voices of the ballads, multiplying and thereby rendering indeterminate the relationships between singer, personae, and audience."²⁴ The song "imports," therefore, not in the sense of funneling down to one meaning, but in the sense of bringing in unrefined material from somewhere else. If a dichotomy of message and medium overstates the case here, it is certainly true that onstage and theatre audiences are called to attend primarily to what the Ghost is *saying*, but to what Ophelia is *doing*. To say this is not to "silence" Ophelia, as an earlier wave of feminist critics warned against doing, but to understand her speaking and singing as an excessive performance, irreducible to a "commandment" or a "tale" that one "could . . . unfold" and transcribe on literal or metaphorical "tables" (1.5.102, 1.5.15, 1.5.107). If the Ghost deploys his voice in the service of verbal meaning that can be recovered, then Ophelia displays her voice as productive theatrical work, making meaning perhaps, but much else besides.

²² The Ghost first demands Hamlet's attention to "what I shall unfold," and then admits that he is forbidden to "unfold" the whole tale (1.5.6, 15).

²³ Terry, *The Story of My Life*, 168. On Ophelia's continual reshaping of bits of language that she takes from other characters into her own discourses, see Ella Finer, "'The composition is different, that is certain': Ophelia Composing Herself," *Kenyon Review Online*, available at <http://www.kenyonreview.org/kr-online-issue/2013-winter/selections/ella-finer-656342/> (accessed 14 February 2013).

²⁴ Leslie C. Dunn, "Ophelia's Songs in *Hamlet*: Music, Madness, and the Feminine," in *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*, ed. Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 58. See also Carol Thomas Neely, *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 50–56.

Although Ophelia demands, like the Ghost, to be recognized, she does not, in turn, recognize her interlocutors. Bearing a single message for a single recipient and silent to all others, the Ghost is in no danger of delivering the wrong message or addressing the wrong person. By contrast, Ophelia scatters a surfeit of messages around her. Her line at 4.5.21, for instance—"Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?"—may refer to the Queen or the King, Hamlet, or even Ophelia herself in some unrealized future. The text of the ballad she sings, "How should I your true love know / From another one?" (23–24), has been scrutinized for allusions to *Hamlet's* plot.²⁵ Notably, however, many of the lines of the ballad are not given by Ophelia, but must be supplied by the listener as a kind of counterpoint to Ophelia's patched discourse. Glossing her opening line, the Arden 3 editors modestly note that "[i]t is not clear how far she recognizes (or half-recognizes) the other characters throughout her two appearances in this scene; performers have explored a range of options."²⁶ In fact, the editors' judgment here is seismic, pointing to an epistemological crisis. What matters is not only that in contrast to the Ghost's "complete steel" (1.4.52) we have Ophelia "[d]ivided from herself" (4.5.85); it is that in contrast to *the* Ghost, with its reassuring definite article, the fourth act of *Hamlet* gives us not one, but too many Ophelias, too many voices from too many places. Years ago, feminist critics called off the search for a single authentic Ophelia, resolving instead to speak of a "Cubist Ophelia of multiple perspectives."²⁷ A "Cubist Ophelia" is fragmented but finished and suggests a rich though limited resource that can be unpacked in performance. Intertheatrically, however, Ophelia intimates a generativity without finitude; the range of interpretive options for her character is necessarily and explicitly extended in each performance by actors and audiences alike, as they invoke and absorb Ophelia's enactment.²⁸

There may be no better way to explore Ophelia's capacities than by turning to a few "moments" in the character's performance history, not to fill out a history of Ophelia performances, but to bear witness to the workings of intertheatricality. Here, a recent historian of performance lists actions that an Ophelia might play:

Generations of Ophelias, with some dim perception that acting-out will get the message across, and in the service of their own mourning, have sustained the play motif with a demonstration: by reverently stretching across the floor their veils, or scarves, or cloaks, or imaginary materials, or fragments of Hamlet's letters, and covering them with real or imaginary flowers (or flowery wreaths or crosses), as over a grave.²⁹

The phrase "[g]enerations of Ophelias" epitomizes the paradox by which Shakespeare's figure of premature death has become one of the most prolific archetypes of modern

²⁵ Harold Jenkins assembles plot allusions in a long note to his Arden 2 edition (London: Methuen, 1982), 531.

²⁶ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 375.

²⁷ Elaine Showalter, "Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism," in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia A. Parker and Geoffrey H. Hartman (London: Routledge, 1986), 91.

²⁸ Those options do not, however, follow the cumulative sequence that Bert O. States considers as producing "character"; see his *Hamlet and the Concept of Character* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). For States, who was influenced by Francis Fergusson, a character acquires depth as others, in turn, iterate or "reflect" him or her. The *intertheatrical* Ophelia we are describing in this essay never coheres in this way.

²⁹ Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Hamlet* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), 780.

culture.³⁰ Ophelia's life ends beneath a willow tree, an "emblem of spoiled genealogy," and her corpse, strewn with flowers though closed up in earth, symbolizes the "blasted dynastic promise" of Denmark, a land doomed to "copulation but no generation."³¹ So much, at least, for Ophelia—single, storied, spoiled—but what about *Ophelias*? Performing makes them plural. Such "generations" are easily observed in the sequences beloved of theatre history, which note, for instance, how Mrs. Patrick Campbell gave way to Gertrude Elliott in consecutive productions of Forbes-Robertson's *Hamlet*. In theatrical practice, however, such inheritances are seldom linear; a modern Ophelia might choose her costume for the fourth act from any number of traditions: a dress in white or black; some underwear; clothes belonging to Polonius; or even a straitjacket.³²

To be sure, one could trace such "generations" for other figures in the play, but the Ophelia of the fourth act hosts an unusually large and explicitly displayed array of Ophelias because of the "dim perception" on the part of performers that "acting-out" of some sort is required. Whether such action will "get the message across" surely begs the question. What, after all, is "the message" to be? It is scarcely something as clearly defined or narrowly directed as that of the Ghost. Of the several possible answers, the crudest message would be "I am mad." A list of the so-called stage conventions for a madwoman (hair down, clothes torn, sudden movements) helps the critic or the actor as little as the "winks and nods and gestures" reported by the Second Quarto's Gentleman as he (or, as is often the case in recent performances, she) prepares the Queen for Ophelia's transmogrified appearance. But Ophelia's message, if received, is not so much recognized in a momentary flash of insight as it is felt to be familiar. Prepared for by the courtier's warning, thickened by memories of other performances and culturally specific competencies in recognizing madness, interpreting women's behavior, and attending theatre, the present Ophelia gathers and distributes all these gestures and knowledges continuously, as a condensed potential of numberless moments. In performance history, Ophelia becomes a switch point or lightning rod of theatrical possibility.

The Royal Shakespeare Company's 2008–09 *Hamlet* is one example of how Ophelia performed can assemble and distribute multiple, logically unconnected strands of action, events, attitudes, and histories experienced and anticipated with effects that vibrate throughout the entire play, and even beyond it.³³ This production initially made headlines for casting two celebrities from science-fiction television: as the King, Patrick Stewart, whose distinguished Shakespearean career has been rather overshadowed by his role as Captain Jean-Luc Picard in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*; and as Hamlet,

³⁰ Kaara L. Peterson and Deanne Williams, ed., *The Afterlife of Ophelia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Fittingly—or, perhaps, ironically in light of our essay's claims—Peterson and Williams argue that the "reviv[al]" of Ophelia in recent popular culture suggests that she "is no longer merely the ghost in *Hamlet's* machine" (1).

³¹ Margreta de Grazia, *Hamlet without Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 119, 126.

³² Instead of the traditional white, Gertrude Elliot wore complete black in 1902; Linda Marsh wore an open blouse in 1964; Glenda Jackson wore Polonius's robe in 1965; and Kate Winslet wore a straitjacket in the 1996 film. See Robert Hapgood, ed., *Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 231.

³³ The Royal Shakespeare Company's *Hamlet* directed by Gregory Doran played at Stratford in 2008, transferred to the West End until early 2009, was filmed by the BBC later that year, and is now available globally on DVD and online via iTunes and YouTube. Part 1 of act 4, scene 5 can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4hwj8_mBeiQ, and part 2 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7iFIBZLNm6g&feature=related>.

David Tennant, the actor best-known as the tenth incarnation of the protagonist of the long-running series *Doctor Who*. Ophelia was played by Mariah Gale, a relative newcomer whose previous theatre roles included Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Miranda in *The Tempest*. Facing a shattered mirror in which she was kaleidoscopically reflected, Gale's Ophelia appeared to the Queen (Penny Downie) as a literally "Cubist Ophelia of multiple perspectives." Her fragmentation was also performative, however, not merely because she reactivated prestigious forebears and fabricated new memories, but because she imported and, we shall suggest, scrambled the performance histories of the actors with whom she shared the stage.³⁴ It was in this importing of other performances that Gale's Ophelia left behind any possibility of tidy reassembly. Her Ophelia toyed perilously with reflections in two senses: first, by reaching for the broken glass through which Hamlet had recently shot Polonius dead; and then by mimicking the voice and gesture of her fellow performers: when the King asked "How long hath she been thus?" (4.5.67), she derisively mirrored him, crossing her arms and raising her hands in a parody of thought. The attitude is, of course, typical of Stewart's television character Captain Picard (among whose other habits is quoting Shakespeare); Gale's Ophelia seemed to recognize the captain rather than the king, mocking Claudius's concern as a performance, but also Stewart's performance as a misplaced bit of business.

Yet Ophelia's next appearance, interrupting Laertes, represented something of performance's inertia. Instead of giving Ophelia the typical posy of blooms, this production overloaded her with armfuls of foliage that Gale could barely manage to hold. To be sure, "[g]enerations of Ophelias" have distributed all manner of plants and substitutes, both real and imaginary,³⁵ but rarely has the distribution itself appeared so freighted, not to say fraught, an act. As she stood against the shattered mirror, "waiting, waiting," Gale seemed to physicalize the burden of her performance, as if she were carrying the props of the sum of Ophelias past. At London's National Theatre in 2010, Ruth Negga undertook a similar act of recycling. Rather than playing a direct variation on the flowers that Ophelia distributes, Negga's Ophelia passed around used girls' toys and other assorted trash from a supermarket trolley. To Laertes she gave a Babar soft toy; to Claudius an empty bottle; to Gertrude a naked Barbie with wild hair and splayed legs.

Although it is tempting to reduce each of these ungainly things to some message, they can instead be seen as a materialization of the resources of performance, a semi-sorted collection that draws from past performances and readies potential future ones. Resisting the pull of allegory toward "reading" these Ophelias, the observer can, alternatively, try to gather. These performances recall the long, varied tradition of performing Ophelia—of performing a range of characteristics like innocence, madness, virginity, sexuality, of physically carrying, strewing, and distributing, and the possibilities of engaging in these or the other actions that can be recognized in Ophelia, and by which Ophelia is recognized. They are closer to something like the *collecting* or *recycling* that they represent, in that they do not simply point elsewhere for meaning, but strew it as variously and productively as Ophelia's flowers or her trash. To be sure,

³⁴Ophelia's fragmentation is underscored in the 2009 filming of the production, wherein the camera first picks up her reflection in the shards of a mirror through which Hamlet has recently shot Polonius. Interestingly, the cover of the DVD places Hamlet in the broken mirror, transferring the fragmentation to him.

³⁵See Rosenberg, *The Masks of Hamlet*, 804–7; and Hapgood, ed., *Hamlet*, 238–40.

Ophelia is represented semantically as shattered, de-romanticized by ugly vegetation or garbage from what will be Gertrude's description of her innocence. But in addition to such legible meanings, these performances demonstrate that Ophelia's division is not only characterological or psychological, but performative in how it reflects on theatrical action. Ophelia's moment is not wholly onstage even as she performs it; it does not look back to any prior moment of amplitude that it echoes or unpacks, nor is such a moment of fullness to be expected, although the present action attends future performances—waiting, waiting. It is divided with all the other moments of which it is a recollection or anticipation.

Each of these recent Ophelias invites observers to shuck the familiar glosses of "remembrance" and "thoughts" (4.5.172) and feel instead the future in action, as the performance transforms observers anew into the misrecognized objects of Ophelia's tenderness and contempt. In a 2012 performance at Writers' Theatre outside Chicago, Liesel Matthews's Ophelia—still recognizable, as reviews testified, as the child actor who played the title role in *The Little Princess* (1997)—distributed locks of her shorn hair, recalling both the echoes of celebrity that attended Gale's Ophelia and the trash, some of it of childhood, featured in Negga's.³⁶ Matthews's Ophelia was not exactly in dialogue with either of them, but it nevertheless was familiar from, or through, each of them, as well as others. One cannot, of course, anticipate which, if any, past Ophelias will appear in future performances, or even how much of any of them; as Ophelia observes, "we know what we are, but know not what we may be" (4.5.43–44). Yet, through their visible acts of gathering, these recent Ophelias make clear how performance prepares new performances, projecting them intertheatrically toward "states unborn and accents unknown." Their recycling of gestures, postures, and actions finds an analogy in stage props to Ophelia's "snatches of old lauds." They are embodied analogues to the mental state that Terry attributed to the young girl who became her model. Rather than waiting for what comes next in time, these Ophelias have laid out in their piles of trash, or in the recollected mannerisms of their fellow cast members from other shows, cullings from the range of possibilities that can be called upon. Such assemblages cannot be exhaustive, but they suggest how each enaction arises from a web of potential actions, bits, or gestures and what Ophelia's attendant gentleman exhorts his audiences to—"collection."

The 2012 production of *Hamlet* at the California Shakespeare Theater used a junkyard set to invite just such acts of collection on the part of audiences. The action took place in and around an old, abandoned, and waterless swimming pool, anticipating without ever gesturing explicitly toward Ophelia's fate, which pervaded the production whether she was onstage or not. What is more, the pool was filled with objects that resembled the garbage distributed by Negga's Ophelia: pink plastic flamingoes, old lamps, children's toys, and so forth. Zainab Jah's Ophelia was not the only character to take up and give out trash in this production, for scattered among these supposedly useless items were most of the play's necessary props. When the gravedigger needed his skull, it was already there, waiting, waiting, to be picked up and mobilized into action. Clint Ramos's set design produced deep confusion for some spectators who

³⁶ *Hamlet*, Writers' Theatre, directed by Michael Halberstam (2012). We thank the staff of Writers' Theatre, in particular Liesel Matthews and artistic director Halberstam, for generously discussing their production.

felt the production lacked “a clear concept.”³⁷ As one reviewer put it, “I just plain didn’t get it and never felt the production did anything to clarify the characters, their stories or their landscape, emotional or otherwise.”³⁸ But what was the “it” the reviewer sought to “get”? Perhaps he was stymied by his desire to get in the first place instead of simply to gather, as did the characters in the production. What resonated in the California Shakespeare *Hamlet* was how the set managed to embody the constant unfolding over time that defines performance, even the performances of still objects. In contrast to those reviewers who saw these “haunting” objects as “beauty lost and happiness sacrificed,”³⁹ poignant remnants of a once-powerful Denmark that had faded from existence—like the Ophelia who would drown later in the play—these objects and the characters who carried them captured the generativity of *Hamlet*, of Ophelia, and of performance generally. They served as an image not of what once was, but of what could be as it passes through our present moment from the past to the as-yet-unacted future.

Intertheatricality and Performativity

Thus far we have argued that a dramatic gesture, figure, or trope like those collected by, or in, the “distracted” Ophelia emerges as a node in a net of performance practices that precede, coincide with, and even follow it. Applying this model of performance to the theatre raises a host of theoretical and practical questions, the answers to which have significant implications for theatre history and performance studies. How do producers and receivers of a performance recognize the relationship between any specific node and other nodes in the same net? What is the mechanism by which producers and receivers anticipate Ophelia’s appearance and all that it entails? The basis for these perceptions, we argue, is an overlapping set of familiarities or competencies of audience and actors, which include the tradition of the part of Ophelia, the gestures in which female madness is staged, and the codes of particular kinds of theatrical performance, as well as others that are harder to specify or more particular to certain occasions. None, however, is wholly original or unconnected, and it is for this reason that Ophelia *feels familiar* to audiences.

The imprecise term “feel” distinguishes our approach from the usual ways that critics of drama and theatre theorize theatrical competence. Consider, for example, just one aspect of Ophelia’s performance—madness. Scholars might approach this phenomenon synchronically, analyzing representations of madness in early modern discourses—religious, medical, legal, and so on—coterminous with a production of *Hamlet*. Or they might work diachronically, tracing the properties of staged madness in the plays that precede and follow the performance in question. Both approaches assume that audiences come to *Hamlet* trained to apply what they already know, as if audiences were always already competent in recognizing madness. But recognition, an Aristotelian notion centered on the development and resolution of plot, may be

³⁷ Chad Jones, “Cal Shakes Ends Season with a Moody ‘Hamlet,’” *Theaterdogs*, 23 September 2012, available at <http://www.theaterdogs.net/2012/09/23/cal-shakes-ends-season-with-a-moody-hamlet/> (accessed 12 February 2013).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Charles Kruger, “‘Hamlet’: Cal Shakes Season Closer Is Brilliant in Every Respect,” *TheatreStorm*, 23 September 2012, available at <http://theatrestorm.com/2012/09/23/hamlet-cal-shakes-season-closer-is-brilliant-in-every-respect/> (accessed 12 February 2013).

too limiting and ratiocinative and may imply an exclusively mental activity, a door suddenly opening or a light illuminating something previously dark. By contrast, the concept of intertheatricality reframes the polarity of diachronic and synchronic analyses. The relation of time is less relevant than other relations of *re*-performance, where *re*- stands not for temporal seriality, but for something like *familiarity* without any clear temporal location implied or sought. Performances like Ophelia's produce a distributed awareness that cannot be placed in one moment or tied to one meaning. For example, Ophelia replays a repertoire of ballads with a difference; while spectators do not need to know the ballads, they need to experience them as already known, as citations of prior discourses—to feel them, that is, as familiar, without needing to place them or have them placed by more expert interpreters. The strewing of discrete flowers, or awkward vegetation, or trash, or hair, all draw on and challenge a spectator's singular or an audience's collective sense of Ophelia's familiarity. Each enactment recalls other similar, differing ones, whether experienced or only imagined.

We suggest that rather than being recognized, performances like Ophelia's feel familiar in ways that are more radically dependent on somatic experience. Familiarity is less momentary and less binary than recognition; it does not require a before and an after or a critical moment of change from one state to another. Unlike recognition, familiarity need not even be conscious to be theatrically effective; it is an attentive response that is felt rather than precisely named, and capable of happening below the horizon of conscious cognition. One defining feature of live theatre is that it includes spectators and actors who are equally embodied. Although their roles in the theatre might seem very different—supposedly actors *produce* and spectators *receive*—they share a platform of embodiment that allows utterances, postures, or actions to circulate among them without programmatic reflection or mediation. Indeed, as we shall discuss below, the engagement of the body in performance tends to blur the line between reception and production.

Our theory of theatrical production and reception therefore follows, but also parts ways with, theories of performativity that have been outlined most influentially by Judith Butler. Like Butler, we are interested in the ways that meaning emerges through a process of repetition and is concretized in material gestures or features. Letting loose the hair, for instance, is not an essential feature of madness; it is a gesture that, repeated over and over and in and out of theatres, has come to be perceived as a sign of madness, whether symptomatic or semiotic.⁴⁰ What an actor like Terry or a spectator who sees Terry's performance perceives as "madness" is something like the sum of gestures that Ophelias have performed and are expected to perform. Significantly, as Butler argues with regard to gender, these gestures of madness become naturalized over time so that performers and audiences apprehend madness without consciously interpreting its signs, without intentionally breaking it down into its components. We differ from Butler, however, in seeing the theatre as a privileged and, indeed, a foundational medium for this process of materialization through repetition.

Although the theatre inspired Butler's earliest ideas about gender performance, both she and scholars indebted to her work have steadily disarticulated dramatic

⁴⁰ That this gesture is not essentially linked to madness is made clear by its very different meanings in other performance contexts. In modern Hollywood films, for instance, a previously uptight female character can deliberately signal her new sexual availability by shaking loose her locks: examples include Jane's ponytail in *American Beauty* (1999) and Lena's bun in *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (2005).

theatre from performativity.⁴¹ Butler initially turned to theatrical performance to help combat phenomenology's atomizing view of acts. In her earliest essay on concepts that were later elaborated in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, Butler set out her foundational claim that gender is a "stylized repetition of acts through time."⁴² Her essay, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (first published, significantly, in *Theatre Journal*), argues that the gender "act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene." An unwritten gender "script" exists before and "survives" those who act gender, but "requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality."⁴³ But gender performances conceal the script that is their genesis. It is partly for that reason that Butler views conventional dramatic theatre, such as Shakespeare's, as of limited value to theorizing gender performance. Since gender performances onstage are framed as fictions, Butler explains, an audience or theorist always retains the capacity to say "this is just an act."⁴⁴ A dramatic performance such as *Hamlet* fails to exemplify Butler's argument about citationality and the principles of performativity because the "performance" is always expressive of "reality"—a pre-written, identifiable (usually literal) script. W. B. Worthen's powerful argument that theorists of performativity have misunderstood the script as a stable entity that precedes a performance and lends it "force" seems to apply in a different sense to Butler as well.⁴⁵ Butler's distinction is not between text and performance, but between prescription and realization. But the radicality of performance, its capacity to develop its own ground through repetition rather than reference, is itself opened to examination first within the theatre precisely because of the *conventionality* of theatrical performance. Indeed, the most canonical playscripts, among them Shakespeare's, can define filial chains of performances, as well as a continually ramifying world theatrical tradition, in part because of their canonicity. It is in the theatre that these traditions of performance, as performance, are most fully fleshed out. Theatre turns out to be not the dead end of performance, but one of its live ones.

When an actor playing Ophelia appears onstage "*distracted . . . as before*," she is never an/the original act. Her acts of gender, madness, Ophelia-ness are constituted by the kind of "social temporality" that Butler describes, and that social field encompasses every instance of performance of the play of all types, in any media, as well as actions associated with madness in extra-theatrical contexts. Ophelia's gestures are all (re)iterations that contribute to the synthetic and fuzzy identities of Ophelia/mad/woman. Like the iterations of gender that Butler discusses, these gestures usually obscure their sources. To be sure, actors may claim to be performing and critics and audiences may claim to be seeing a Gale-Ophelia or a Terry-Ophelia, but even the latter identities are nominal stabilizations of other materially realized performances,

⁴¹ Perhaps the seminal effort to disarticulate performativity from conventional theatrical performance is the introduction to Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, eds., *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 1–18.

⁴² Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 520.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 526.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 527. Butler accepts that some kinds of theatre can break down the barrier between performed and real action, but argues, rightly, that ultimately, even the most avant-garde theatre foregrounds and recognizes a difference between performance and "reality."

⁴⁵ W. B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 12.

some of which exceed the parameters of *Hamlet* and stretch outward to include even the actions of those labeled as "mad." Attempts to trace elements back to any stable source—the nature of madness, a great prior performance, the power inherent in the text—are limiting because their backward look is in search of fixity. An intertheatrical view of Ophelia's performance history underscores, instead, how the work of collecting gestures prepares for future performances as a range of possibilities.

Moreover, whereas foundational theories of performativity emphasize the discursive realm, *intertheatricality* highlights the realm of embodied action and lived experience, both on the side of performers and on the side of those before whom they perform. This view of iteration as existing outside of discourse—outside, even, of the usual distinction of action and observation—has been the subject of recent research in cognitive science on the embodied mechanisms of materialization.⁴⁶ Although this research has been imagined to provide a naturalistic understanding of embodied action, we do not turn to it in order to validate, through "hard" science, our theory of intertheatricality. Rather, it offers an analogous way of thinking about how performativity can work in the theatre at a material, and not simply a discursive, level. Motion researcher Alain Berthoz and others have argued, for instance, that observers of things experience "an anticipatory quality of attention."⁴⁷ When observers see a cup, before they or anyone else touches it their brains begin to rehearse all the things their bodies can do with it: for example, they can pick it up, clean it, drink from it, or do anything else that one conventionally does with a cup. Thus just as objects of perception are taken up as objects for potential action, observers similarly grasp the intent of someone else's actions through a process of "embodied simulation," without the need to move through representation. By performing an action like strewing flowers, or watching scenes of others doing this action, a spectator can become familiar with the arc of this action so that each of its moments suggests possible others: for example, I hold the flowers, I separate a smaller bundle from the larger, I spread it across the ground in front of me. This gestural arc becomes part of the spectator's embodied memory without having a specific temporal position: I need not know when it was that I learned to strew flowers; I need not consciously divide strewing into more elemental gestures; I just (know how to) strew flowers. Moreover, this knowledge need not be hierarchized or even articulated: I do not have to imagine some model of strewing from which others more or less deviate, and I may not even know that I know how to strew flowers; nevertheless, given flowers, I strew them. Any action primes for further action. To be shown Ophelia holding a bouquet, a hand poised to pluck one flower from it, is also

⁴⁶ Scholars in the humanities who have applied these theories to early modern drama and theatre include Evelyn B. Tribble, *Cognition in the Globe: Attention and Memory in Shakespeare's Theatre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Mary Thomas Crane, *Shakespeare's Brain: Reading with Cognitive Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Amy Cook, "Wrinkles, Wormholes, and *Hamlet*: The Wooster Group's *Hamlet* as a Challenge to Periodicity," *TDR: The Drama Review* 53, no. 4 (2009): 104–19.

⁴⁷ The phrase is from the discussion of Berthoz's work in Susan Foster, "Movement's Contagion: The Kinesthetic Impact of Performance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, ed. Tracy C. Davis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 53. See Alain Berthoz, *The Brain's Sense of Movement*, trans. Giselle Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). We remain skeptical of the explanatory value of cognitive science for theatrical practice, in particular of its claims as "science" to be able to turn performance into words that are strictly referential. We are calling upon it here *heuristically*, as one description of how gesture might respond immediately to other gestures, and as an elegant articulation of a phenomenon that is, in fact, fundamentally theatrical.

to feel how to strew flowers; that is, spectators can feel the action without naming or interpreting it—they can, as it were, take it up from Ophelia.

This insight relates to the distinction that we argue exists between recognition and familiarity: before a spectator can name what an actor before him/her does, before being able to remember prior instances of it, the watching body answers the acting body, an answer that sometimes involves holding action in suspense—waiting, waiting. The neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese underscores that “internal motor knowledge is *procedural* and *not representational*.”⁴⁸ Mutual understanding is direct, automatic, and gestural and not necessarily mediated through an external semiotic system. Even without an empirical theory of mirror neurons, this familiarity can be seen in promissory gestures—namely, ways of moving, standing, or being that open old familiar gestures toward multiple new ones.

One need not endorse the empirical methods of cognitive science to appreciate how a theory of mirror neurons resonates with the concept of intertheatricality that we have presented here, offering a similar bridge between performativity and dramatic performance. For actors and audiences, knowledge of Ophelia is generated not only through representation, but through embodied assimilation. When an actor performing Ophelia comes onto the stage with loose hair for the mad scene, she does not simply recognize prior Ophelias or conventions of madness or rules of female comportment—nor do her onlookers. The actor materializes the action that can be expressed discursively as “hair down equals mad.” This is a conventional symbol rather than an index or icon, of course, and one that is particular to the Elizabethan stage.⁴⁹ It is handed down by historical scholarship, not least by the traditions of performing Ophelia. It is also conflated with other conventional interpretations, such as sexual attractiveness, availability, vulnerability, carelessness, or youth. But the members of an audience need not interpret Ophelia’s loosened hair at all, nor even be aware of it. Audience members feel the letting down of her hair not as if their own hair were down, but as if Ophelia’s loosened hair were preparing for their own response to it. The perceiving body of the spectator or the performer, for example, reaches back into embodied memories of madness—forged through accounts and experiences of madness in and out of the theatre—while at the same time anticipating further such performances in unspecified future moments. As an actor builds the part of Ophelia, and as a playgoer watches that actor’s performance unfold onstage, this Ophelia’s connection to other Ophelias and other mad women can, to those open to it, offer a grounding, a sense of comfortable familiarity through responses like “I have seen this before, and I’ll see it again” or “it makes sense to me.” In the case of theatre, and perhaps especially early modern theatre, familiarity develops as an important foundation for competency and a matrix for future actions. Spectatorship and performance alike are intertheatrical, structured by, made from, their repetitions and variations.

To be sure, this kind of familiarity and atemporality is precisely what Butler warns against in the case of gender performativity, which, after all, is also a competency. Conventional gender performances *are* comfortable and familiar, which is why they

⁴⁸ Vittorio Gallese, “Mirror Neurons and the Neural Exploitation Hypothesis: From Embodied Simulation to Social Cognition,” in *Mirror Neuron Systems: The Role of Mirroring Processes in Social Cognition*, ed. Jaime A. Pineda (New York: Humana Press, 2009), 167.

⁴⁹ The distinction between *index*, *icon*, and *symbol* is Charles S. Peirce’s.

can be so coercive. The comforts of familiarity present much less of a crisis in theatre, however, especially for the emerging professional theatre of Shakespeare's day, which, far more than concealing its theatricality, was actively engaged in demonstrating it and preparing its audiences for new examples.⁵⁰ As this theatre sought to define itself as an institution and to create a consumer base, generating a sense of familiarity (for both actors and audiences) was a useful tool. For instance, theatrically competent on-lookers—those who felt familiar with the theatre's characters, stories, props, gestures, music—became possible partakers in future performances. More than just being an instrument for selecting audiences, however, familiarity with new modes of playing was what this theatre was made of: repeated scenes, situations, words, characters. This is not to say that the theatre discouraged innovation, but that even the best of innovations are only recognized *as* innovations because they develop or overturn something that is, on some level, familiar. Theatre is crucial to performance more broadly because it collects the actions of performance and readies them for recollection in new ways. We are not suggesting, then, that there is nothing new under the sun, but that the new, startling, unexpected, and even the accidental take part in recurrent forms that enable them to stand out as departures. And this creativity of response does not even depend on an ability to articulate or recognize newness. Indeed, an intertheatrical approach shows how nothing under the sun *is not new*. Theatre is the solvent within which these otherwise distinct temporalities blend. Each new performance selects the chain of works that it completes or constructs out of the debris of past performances; each performance gesture makes a history for itself as much as it is made from an existing history, and each contributes to the repertoire of future performances.⁵¹

Instead of offering a straightforward performance history of Ophelia, this essay has used Ophelia to advance a view of performance as itself a kind of history of theatre. Understood intertheatrically, performance can be seen to overflow its immediate historical and cultural contexts into others—not to become timeless, but to redefine timeliness itself. If Ophelia's performances of seemingly time-bound words, songs, and gestures account for her recurrent timeliness in modern culture, it is, in part, because as they unravel, they entangle the audience whose bodily co-presence she shares, recalls, and reenergizes. Irreducible to one motive or message, less revenant than *arrivant*, destined not to cleansing fire but to muddy water, Ophelia represents a striking example of how theatre makes itself and of theatre's particularity among other kinds of performance. Certainly Ophelia better suits that purpose than does the Ghost, which, almost in spite of itself, has ended up modeling performance as singular event. In criticism, the Ghost is seen to establish clear and direct lines of reference, even of filiation; it emblemizes trauma, irruption, the unique and irrevocable call, the perfect event—a time-stamp after which everything is different. Ophelia challenges this view because she is *not* the sole icon for the workings of intertheatricality; her figurations help us to see what in performance is not exemplary or singular, but instead familiar. Ophelia is not one realization of potential, but a moment full of other moments—an instance not of one from many, but of many in one. Hamlet's address to the Ghost as “[h]ic et ubique?”

⁵⁰Contemporary performances of canonical plays, arguably, grapple more actively with the coercive pressures of familiarity.

⁵¹We are inspired here by Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood's account of the dynamically layered temporalities of early modern images and artifacts; see their *Anachronic Renaissance* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2010).

(1.5.156) applies better to Ophelia, who is truly both here and everywhere. She hosts an open and mobile array of memories, gestures, and analogs in a figure that vibrates, out of order, across space and time without asserting an identity beyond what can be recollected or projected. As Ophelia resists being traced to some unrecoverable origin, serving instead to gather what has been and will be used again and again, she models the creativity of theatre itself.