# Sharing Vision, Interrupting Speech: *Hamlet*'s Spectacular Community

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*Hamlet* opens with the sharing of a spectacle, a vision. Horatio is invited by Marcellus to share in the experience of seeing the Ghost, "twice seen" by him and Barnardo. Curiously, Marcellus is not satisfied with simply *telling* Horatio about the Ghost; just as Horatio himself "will not let belief take hold of him," as he puts it, "without the sensible and true avouch" of sight.[1] Verbal narration, it seems, does not suffice; for Marcellus wants not simply to share the *story* of the Ghost with Horatio, but wants him to share in the experience of seeing it. He wants Horatio to be there with him, when "this apparition comes."

Sharing a spectacle is, thus, introduced as being of a different order than sharing a story, or verbal narration. Of course, it is obvious that hearing a verbal account is not the same as seeing with one's own eyes. And indeed, it seems quite common to want to trust one's own sight over the words of others. "Eyes are more accurate witnesses than ears," wrote Heraclitus, expressing an ancient prejudice (*Early Greek Philosophy*, 113). However, for Marcellus, the chief difference between words and visions appears to lie not in the "believability" of one sense over the other, but rather more precisely in the extent to which

the experience of a spectacle can be more fully *shared* than a narration. That is to say, what is at stake in the opening scenes of *Hamlet* is not merely the valuation of visibility over speech, or seeing over hearing. Rather, I will suggest that Marcellus' entreaty to Horatio indicates that the relation into which those who share a spectacle enter is different from the relation between those who share a verbal tale. In other words, what is at stake is this *relation* through the sharing of a spectacle.

This essay is first of all an attempt to think through what it might mean to share in the experience of a spectacle rather than a verbal narration, and to consider what *Hamlet*'s unique thematization of this difference might tell us about what distinguishes Shakespeare's work from a more narrative theatricality. I will then argue furthermore that *Hamlet* represents, or inaugurates, a novel kind of shared theatrical experience or event which offers nothing less than a radical re-configuration of the way in which people relate through a shared experience. I will show first how *Hamlet* opens through a break with storytelling, presenting us with a gathering which is predicated not upon the spoken word, but rather a plurality brought together by a spectacle. This shift from the verbal to the spectacular, I will argue, alters the nature of the relation between those gathered, re-figuring the connection between the 'theater' and 'community.' Secondly, I will show that *Hamlet*'s theatrical model of 'sharing' is one in which people not only gather around a spectacle—but moreover do so, paradoxically, through a suspension of spoken interaction. The spectacle is shared, in other words, only through a suspension of interactive speech. Finally, I will try to offer some possible consequences of this new paradoxical

relationality which is founded upon a disjunction between spectacle and speech. What does it mean, for instance, to share an experience with another only by suspending interaction with that other? What insights might the sharing of this 'spectral spectacle' in *Hamlet* tell us about our own communities, and the way in which we relate through spectacle? How does the suspension of spoken interaction constitute our own communal experience?

## I

In order to better ground my analysis, I want first to briefly recall two features of the theater which have traditionally been used to distinguish theatrical performance from the other arts. (Let me hastily qualify this outline by saying that I am not interested in recycling generic truisms about theatricality; instead I am interested in the unique way in which these features are problematized in *Hamlet*. In other words, I am not interested in timeless truths about *Hamlet* or the theater—rather I am interested in determining, if possible, what the advent of *Hamlet* inaugurates within an inherited notion or practice of the theater. In this sense, I am attributing a certain historicity to *Hamlet*, if by that we understand not that *Hamlet* is merely an historicizable chapter in the narrative *telos* of dramatic practice, but rather a work or event whose impact is still palpable.)

First, according to its etymology, the theater works visually. The word "theater" itself derives from the Greek term *theatron*, "place for viewing," which in turn derives from the verb *theasthai* meaning "to behold," or from *thea* meaning "sight, or

view."[2] This does not mean of course that in practice the theater has even been reducible to a purely visual experience; certainly not in ancient Greece any more than Renaissance England.[3] Rather, it is simply to point out that the term "theater" distinguishes itself, at least semantically and conceptually, through an invocation of the problem of sight—although clearly dramatic performances can involve sound, or even other senses, as well.[4]

Shakespeare himself often uses the word "vision" to characterize theatrical experience, usually by invoking spirits, dreams and apparitions. Indeed, the polysemy of the word "vision" itself contains the paradox upon which Shakespeare's sense of the theater, and of ghosts and apparitions, thrives. On the one hand, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "vision" designates "the action of seeing with the bodily eye" or "the ordinary faculty of sight." On the other hand, the word "vision" can refer to an illusory object; a fantasy, or "something which is seen otherwise than by ordinary sight."[5] Thus, the word "vision" refers to both a faculty of the subject, and also names a grammatical object which casts a shadow of doubt over that subject's very faculty. It is as if the experience of the theater, like a Ghost, plays upon sight by putting it into question. Allow me to offer two short, familiar moments from different points in Shakespeare's career where the theater is characterized as a "vision," in order to underscore the centrality of the problem. At the conclusion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1594), Puck addresses the audience through a well-known coda:

> If we shadows have offended,

> Think but this, and all is mended:
> That you have but slumber'd here,
> While these *visions* did appear...
> (Epilogue, 1-4, my emphasis)

As he likens the play to a dream, Puck seems to be suggesting that the theater, like a dream, is composed of "visions" which are perceived by the eyes, but which cast a shadow of doubt over the status of that perception.[6] Likewise, at the end of his career in *The Tempest* (1611), Shakespeare has Prospero reflect upon his "art" in a manner which has seemed to many to express something about Shakespeare's sense of the theater more generally.[7]

> Our revels are now ended. These our actors,
> As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
> are melted into air, into thin air;
> And like the baseless fabric of this *vision*,
> . . . . . . . . .
> Leave not a rack behind. (4.1.148-56, my emphasis)

Here too, theatrical art is figured as a shared "vision," with fantasmatic valences.

Secondly, the theater is distinguished from the other arts by being a necessarily shared event. Unlike the other arts—music, painting, poetry—a work of theater, a play cannot be experienced in solitude. Plurality is a necessary condition for the theater. A performance does not occur unless it is shared. That is to say, a theatrical event depends upon the presence of others, and at the same time gathers them together.[8] Moreover, it gathers them together *as an event*—in other words, the spectators were not gathered in this way before. The duration of the

gathering or assembly is commensurate with the duration of the spectacle. In addition to being spatially bound or located, a theatrical performance, and the community of spectators which forms around it, have a temporal dimension which distinguishes the scene from, say, the contemplation of a marble sculpture or natural rock formation. Put simply, spectators at the theater share in the event of the spectacle by being there together while it happens.

Thus, the theater is generally defined 1) through its peculiar, fantasmatic visuality and 2) by being a shared event. I recall these two features of the theater in order to underscore the unique way in which 'sharing' and 'spectatorship' come together in *Hamlet*. Indeed, while 'sharing' and 'seeing' are integral features of the theatrical experience, these two activities are not immediately compatible—given that 'seeing,' especially in its metaphysical determination as 'contemplation,' is generally prized for its being a solitary activity, internal and proper to the seeing-subject.[9] As Friedrich Nietzsche once wrote, with not a little irony towards Plato: "One no longer loves insight enough when one shares it" (*Beyond Good and Evil*, no. 160). In fact, in its metaphysical determination, seeing turns out to be antithetical to sharing.[10]

In any case, as we will see through an analysis of the Ghost's appearances, sharing and seeing constitute a peculiar pairing in *Hamlet*. Let us now turn to the play itself.

## II

The contrast between hearing a narration about something and seeing the "thing" itself is apparent not only in Marcellus' motive for inviting Horatio to "watch the minutes of this night," but is made explicit throughout the opening scenes of the play. Seeing alternates noticeably with speaking in *Hamlet*, and there is a conspicuous oscillation between a verbal and a visual register whose implications I will try to trace here. This shift between speaking and seeing in the play gives us, I think, some understanding of how *Hamlet* stages its own break with a more manifestly 'verbal' or narrative type of performance.

It is a matter of general agreement among theater-historians that, in the generations prior to Shakespeare, 'epic-narration' was a preferred form of public theater in Elizabethan England. The influence of the sensational, epic language of Seneca, for instance, can be detected in Elizabethan performances of plays like *Gorboduc* (1561) and *Jocasta* (1566), through Thomas Kyd's popular *Spanish Tragedy* (1587).[11] This is a topic which has been treated quite thoroughly in scholarship on the period; I bring it up here simply in order to underscore the extent to which the visual appearance of the Ghost in *Hamlet* represents a break, or interruption, within this tradition.[12] What we need to understand, of course, is the significance of this break.

First, however, in order to make the claim that *Hamlet* gives us something other than the theater-as-storytelling, it is important to take note of the fact that the play does appear, at least, to begin with the sharing of a story; Barnardo and Marcellus do not simply await the Ghost's return in silence. Instead,

Barnardo offers to tell Horatio a 'ghost-story;' he puts into words, as he says, what he "saw" with his own eyes, translating sight into speech:

> *Barnardo*: Sit down awhile,
> And let us once again assail your ears,
> That are so fortified against our story,
> What we two nights have seen.
> *Horatio*: Well, sit we down,
> And let us hear Barnardo speak of this. (1.1.28-31)

Indeed, so far as the audience is concerned, the Ghost is introduced verbally before being presented visually. For *Hamlet* does not open—as, for instance, Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* does—with the Ghost already visible on stage, narrating its own story.[13] By contrast, in *Hamlet* we are presented with what appears to be a scene of story telling *about* the Ghost, albeit a highly peculiar one. After all, Barnardo is not reciting just any old yarn, but is instead telling a tale which bears directly and uniquely upon the circumstances in which he tells it. Moreover, his tale is not invented but draws upon his *own* lived, autobiographical experience ["what we two nights have seen"]. Barnardo's ghost-story, therefore, represents the play's first presentation of the very problem Horatio faces a moment later—namely, how to respond verbally to what one sees. In other words, Barnardo's tale functions as a linguistic response to something which appeared first to his eyes. To use Walter Benjamin's axiom: "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience" (*Illuminations*, 114). By telling the story, therefore, Barnardo is not simply entertaining Horatio, nor does his speech merely describe or explain the situation— rather, his

tale is an attempt to *share* his experience, something which happened to *him*. Barnardo is sharing a secret—a secret shared only by those present; as Horatio later says, "This to me / In dreadful secrecy impart they did" (1.2.206-7).[14] Put simply, Barnardo's tale is *Hamlet*'s initial model for the problem which concerns us here—his "story" is offered as a model for how to share or "impart" the experience of a vision, or spectacular event.[15]

Of course, in this case, the narration concerns a Ghost—a peculiarity which allows us to make some further assertions about the sharing of this story. First, the 'ghostly' object of the narration makes clear that Barnardo's tale is 'blind';[16] that is to say, his words cannot make the actual object of the narration appear, but instead "assails the ears" alone. Indeed, we might assert more generally that the object of narration is always something ghostly, that *all stories are ghost stories.* For all stories, whether fictional of real, recount something which cannot be made to re-appear presently before the eyes, other than by conjuration through speech. Philip Sidney, in a brief comparison of poetic language and dramatic action, wrote that "many things can be told which cannot be showed"—noting that, although he may be in England, he can still speak of Peru or Calicut (*A Defence of Poetry*, 66). While Sidney offers this axiom as a defense of poetic speech, his theory renders clear a limit of such speech: Saying is not the same as showing.

Secondly, Barnardo's tale tells of an experience which is temporally heterogeneous to the narration of that story. In other words, the 'time' in which the narration unfolds is foreign to the 'time' of the narrated experience. (This, according to Sid-

ney and many others before and after him, is what links the bard to the historian.) Just as most tales begin with "once upon a time," so too Barnardo opens his story by marking its time—"Last night of all...The bell then beating one—" (1.1.33, 37). Indeed, we might say generally that storytelling is a mark of temporal heterogeneity or disjunction. Consequently, when Barnardo and Marcellus share with Horatio the "story" of what they "have two nights seen," they are not sharing the time of the experience itself. Despite Barnardo's best efforts, there is no tale which can be told through which he can truly "share" the experience with Horatio: He is "imparting" words, not the thing itself.

Thus, an initial distinction between "storytelling" and spectacle begins to reveal itself: A narration can only be shared 'after the fact,' or after the events of which it tells have past. Indeed, the very fact of narration marks this blindness, this temporal otherness. By contrast, a theatrical spectacle is an event which, if it is to take place, must be shared *as it happens.*

## III

Now, *Hamlet* presents not only the limits of linguistic narration, but also shows us the way in which the theater has the power to transgress these limits. For no sooner does Barnardo begin his narration, then Marcellus cuts him off. The tale is interrupted by the *sight* of the very "thing" of which it tells:

> *Enter the Ghost*
> *Marcellus*: Peace, break thee off. Look where it comes again. (1.1.38)

Likewise, a few lines later, Horatio interrupts his own discourse upon the Ghost's return:

*Enter the Ghost*
But soft, behold—lo where it comes again! (1.1.107)

There is, thus, a sudden and decisive break from speech to sight, from narration to spectacle. Marcellus' injunction marks, I think, an extremely important moment not only within the play *Hamlet*, but also within our experience of the theater as well, for reasons I will now try to outline.

First, with this injunction *Hamlet* interrupts or suspends the "theater-as-storytelling" and inaugurates a more spectacular theater—both within the unfolding of *Hamlet*, and within the history of the Western theatrical experience more generally.[17] The Ghost's entrance, unlike Barnardo's narration, "assails" the eyes rather than the ears. To be sure, this break would not be possible without an anterior emphasis on storytelling. Nonetheless, the interruption of the Ghost's appearance renders superfluous the verbal narration of its appearance—as Marcellus intuitively understands when he interrupts his companion—for the "thing" of which Barnardo spoke is now there before us. Storytelling is rendered superfluous, in other words, because the object of narration is no longer simply "past" or invisible, but has re-appeared in the "present" before those gathered. The blindness and temporal heterogeneity which characterize storytelling are superseded by the Ghost's appearance, the spectacle of the specter.

Secondly, for a moment Barnardo, Marcellus and Horatio form a part of the 'audience' more generally, by becoming

spectators. The appearance of the Ghost, therefore, might be taken to reveal something about the power of the theater itself. For the power of the Ghost, like that of the play *Hamlet*, is its ability to *re-appear* before those gathered. In other words, both the theater and the Ghost survive through the promise that what has already been seen will appear again.[18] This is, I hasten to add, not a simple 'repetition.' Contrary to what many theorists of the theater have claimed, the theater is not constituted simply through 'repetition.' Whereas a tale can obviously be repeated without there being a visual re-appearance of the events which that tale recounts, the theater does not work this way.[19] *Hamlet*, like its Ghost, re-appears visually through the event of its own spectacle, in a manner which interrupts the linguistic repetition inherent in storytelling.[20]

Lastly, I want to suggest that the thrust of Marcellus' command—*cease speaking and look*—lies at the heart of our modern experience of the theater, which the Ghost's appearance in *Hamlet* might be understood to inaugurate. Not only does Marcellus' injunction represent a break from story-telling in favor of the appearance of "this thing" itself, but his words also indicate that this spectacle compels a (momentary) suspension of speech. The very apprehension of the vision, or the spectacle, interrupts the spoken narration and suspends verbal interaction. It is as though one ought not behold a spectacle and hold discourse with another at the same time, as any contemporary usher will remind you.

Put another way, the sharing of a spectacle seems, paradoxically, to oblige a suspension of spoken interaction with those with whom one is sharing the event. One might object that an

audience quiets down in order to hear a tale as well. However, the hush which accompanies the apparition of a spectacle is—I want to claim—quite different from the hush of those gathered around a fire to hear a tale. For, although there are silences, suspensions, or dramatic pauses in the speech of the storyteller, such a scene is nonetheless fundamentally oral, verbal. Those gathered at the scene of storytelling relate, chiefly, through the orality of the tale.[21] By contrast, the Ghost of Old Hamlet does not speak when it first appears: Here the spectacle is mute.

We are confronted, therefore, with a new scene of relation, one where those gathered share in the event of an appearance not only through the suspension of speech with each other, but moreover in the absence of any verbal or linguistic tie to what they behold. What kind of sharing is this? What does it mean that this sharing is founded upon the visual interruption or suspension of intersubjective discourse? Are we perhaps witnessing a shift, as subtle as it is inescapable, to a community of *spectators*? One in which sharing takes place, paradoxically, through a suspension of spoken interaction?[22]

Consider furthermore that, of the many scenes involving ghosts or apparitions in Shakespeare, there are only two instances where what appears is shared by more than one person. Besides the opening scenes of *Hamlet,* the only other instance occurs towards the end of *The Tempest*. It is significant, I think, that there again we find that the sharing of a spectacle requires a suspension of spoken interaction. Prospero marks the apparition of his spirits by demanding of his companions:

> No tongue. All eyes! Be silent! (4.1.59)

And when, upon seeing Prospero's spirits, Ferdinand gives voice to his amazed eyes ["This is a most majestic vision!" (4.1.118)], Prospero reprimands him with the same injunction:

> Sweet now, silence.
> . . . . . . . . . .
> Hush, and be mute,
> Or else our spell is marred. (4.1.124-7)

Let us then pose our question in another way: Why ought an audience fall silent upon the appearance of a spectacle?[23] Or, more generally, what can account for this shift from oral interaction to a silent spectatorship which one finds wherever an apparition is shared in Shakespeare? Or, more pertinently, what does this shift reveal about our contemporary experience at the playhouse or cinema—and consequently about current occasions, and conditions, for social gathering?

An obvious answer might be that this obligation has to do with a polite consideration for others in the audience, as well as for the performers themselves. While this phenomenon is no doubt in part a question of etiquette, culture or custom, I want to argue that it is not reducible to custom or politesse. Rather, I want to claim that this polite custom derives from a more originary acknowledgment that the spectacle is to be *shared*. In other words, the suspension of speaking that accompanies the appearance of the spectacle does not simply signal a retreat into isolated contemplation of the show—but instead reflects the constitutive *plurality* of the theater. For in the theater, the suspension of interaction with others is, paradoxically, the silent

affirmation of a *relation* with others; albeit a novel sort of relation—one through which the theater opens onto a community grounded not in unmediated interaction, but rather detoured through a spectacular event which suspends interaction. In short, *Hamlet* offers us a model of sharing in which a relation to others is predicated upon a disjunction between seeing and speaking, upon a spectacle which suspends spoken interaction.

What is shared in the theater, therefore, is precisely this suspension of interaction. This is a sharing that, as Hamlet says about the time, is "out of joint." We find ourselves in the company of others who are now, like us, spectators—a gathering which is formed through the deeply uncanny activity of beholding a ghost.

## IV

I noted at the outset that Marcellus invites Horatio along with them in order to share in the experience of seeing the Ghost. And I have been trying to show why this emphasis on sharing the spectacle of the Ghost's appearance is significant for the development of the theater; and indeed what all of this might teach us about the underpinnings of communal interaction and sharing more generally in the wake of *Hamlet*. We need, however, to go a step further.

Now, what is even more peculiar about Marcellus' invitation to Horatio is that he wants him not only to share in the experience of seeing the Ghost, but to *speak* to it as well. Indeed, Marcellus seems to believe that Horatio's speech will, as he says, "approve our eyes." If, as I have been claiming, Marcellus

wants Horatio to share in the experience of the spectacle, he seems to be furthermore convinced that this is a sharing which, in order to be complete, requires some subsequent affirmation through speech.

Thus, if the Ghost's appearance marks the suspension of speech, and of oral narration, as an *initial* condition or acknowledgment that the spectacle is to be shared, it is nonetheless true that this suspension is not a total silencing. It goes without saying we are not left with a dumb show; on the contrary *Hamlet* is Shakespeare's wordiest play. Instead, one kind speech is broken off by the Ghost's appearance, only to then give way to another, re-doubled speech as a response to that apparition. What necessitates this return of language, this time in response to the Ghost? And what might it have to do with the problem of sharing a spectacle with which we are concerned?

Allow me to introduce what I have to say here by looking momentarily at a short scene from the conclusion of *1 Henry IV*. Prince Henry has just vanquished Hotspur and he spies Falstaff lying on the ground nearby. Henry presumes him dead and, after a few words, leaves him there. Falstaff, of course, is not dead—and instead rises and stabs Hotspur once more, in order to claim that he, and not the Prince, has killed him. His resurrection goes unseen; indeed, Falstaff notes that this is precisely what allows him to claim to have killed Hotspur: "Nothing confutes me but eyes, and nobody sees me" (5.4.123). In this way, Falstaff becomes, to the other characters on stage, a kind of Ghost; a Ghost may even be loosely defined as something whose resurrection is unseen by others, something which

re-appears after death without warning. This is how Falstaff appears to the Prince and Lancaster—the latter who, upon seeing Falstaff, interrupts the Prince, as a kind of comic proto-Marcellus with lines that appear to have an echo in *Hamlet*:

> But soft; whom have we here?
> Did you not tell me this fat man was dead? (5.4.127-8)

Falstaff is thus received by the Prince and Lancaster as though he were a "fantasy" [again, a word later used by Marcellus in reference to Old Hamlet's Ghost]. Now, what interests me in particular about this scene, and what makes it a useful in-road to what I want to say about *Hamlet*, is the way in which the Prince responds to the vision of Falstaff. He demands that Falstaff *speak*.

> Art thou alive?
> Or is it fantasy that plays upon our eyesight?
> I prithee speak; we will not trust our eyes
> Without our ears. Thou art not what thou seem'st.
> (5.4.130-33)

The similarities between this scene and the opening scenes of *Hamlet* are, I think, rather striking. For here, too, we are presented with the impulse to address what "plays upon our eyesight," and the desire to make a "fantasy" speak, and to speak to a vision. It is as though what appears as a vision must—if it is to be more than solitary "fantasy"—be spoken to, and heard from. This is not an inconsequential desire. In fact, the desire to speak *to*, *of*, or *with* a "fantasy" is, I think, bound up with the desire to *share* what one sees, to overcome the solitude of visu-

ality. The desired affirmation of sight through speech (which, in Shakespeare, almost universally follows the appearance of a Ghost) manifests not simply—as is the general interpretation—a desire to 'know' something about what one sees. Rather, I want to suggest that the impulse to speech manifests a more originary impulse to affirm a relation with others through what one sees; namely, to a desire to confirm that one is not alone in what one sees.[24]

Indeed, in the absence of speech, a "vision" is an essentially solitary experience. This is the problem facing Marcellus and Barnardo at the outset of *Hamlet*. It is helpful to recall here that Marcellus and Barnardo themselves were unable to speak to the Ghost when they first saw it:

> Thrice he walked
> By their oppressed and fear-surprised eyes
> Within his truncheon's length, whilst they, distilled
> Almost to jelly with the act of fear
> Stand dumb and speak not to him. This to me
> In dreadful secrecy impart they did,
> And I with them the third night kept the watch,
> Where, as they had delivered, both in time,
> Form of the thing, each word made true and good,
> The apparition comes. (1.2.202-11)

Horatio is called upon, as a third-party, to "approve" "their oppress'd and fear-surprised eyes" through speech because alone they were unable to do so. Horatio is called upon, therefore, not as many have assumed—to affirm the veracity of the Ghost. The "truth" of the vision is not what concerns Marcellus and Barnardo. In other words, they do not need Horatio in order to confirm that what they have seen is, indeed, a Ghost—as if to

say, "Yes, that's a Ghost alright."[25] Instead, they call upon Horatio in order to have their own vision confirmed through the speech of *another*, where their own speech failed. In other words, Marcellus wants Horatio to "approve" their eyes through speech in order to affirm that the spectacle is shared, and not an isolated "fantasy."

> *Marcellus:* Horatio says 'tis but fantasy,
> And will not let belief take hold of him
> Touching this dreaded sight twice seen of us.
> Therefore I have entreated him along
> With us to watch the minutes of this night,
> That if this apparition come
> He may approve our eyes and speak to it.
> (1.1.21-27)

Audibly addressing through speech, in the presence of another, what that other presently sees does more than simply transfer a visual horizon to a verbal one. For this transference from the 'vision of one' to the 'words of another' serves to confirm that the experience in question is, indeed, a shared one. Put another way, Marcellus and Barnardo desire to hear Horatio speak to the Ghost to confirm that he too shares the experience with them. Here it seems that only such a shift between the eyes of one, and the words of another, can confirm that the experience in question is indeed shared. Hence the necessity of the third party, Horatio; Marcellus and Barnardo are not satisfied with simply speaking to the Ghost alone. The compulsion to verbalize sight—to approve eyes through speech—is inextricably linked to the desire that the experience be shared, and that it found a relation.

Of course, one might object that there is a difference between speaking "to" the Ghost and speaking "of" the Ghost. Indeed it is important that Marcellus calls upon Horatio not to speak to him and Barnardo, but rather to the Ghost itself. Thus by speaking *to* the Ghost, Horatio is surely trying not only to establish a relation with Barnardo and Marcellus, but with the Ghost as well. Indeed, Horatio seems to want to stop the Ghost with his speech, to arrest its movement through discourse:

> Stay, illusion.
> If thou hast any sound or use of voice,
> Speak to me.
> . . . . . . . . .
> stay and speak. —Stop it, Marcellus.
> (1.1.108-10,120)

Horatio's speech is thus a kind of apostrophe, an attempt to interact with the spectacle, with an appearance. To be sure, speech directed "to" the Ghost is not the same as speaking to his companions "of" the Ghost. Nonetheless, Horatio is called upon by Marcellus to speak *to* the Ghost *in their presence*—namely, in the presence of the Ghost, and in the presence of Marcellus and Barnardo. Horatio speaks to the Ghost, not in solitude or in private discourse with the Ghost (as Hamlet will later do) but with the others there. It is this being-there, I think, which makes all the difference; and which makes the question of sharing so central. Again, Marcellus does not ask Horatio to approve his own eyes by speaking alone, by himself on the ramparts, to the Ghost; instead, the scene is structured upon this plurality, whereby Horatio speaks "to" the Ghost in a way which is at the same time, to the others present, a speaking "of"

the Ghost. By asking Horatio to speak *to* Ghost, Marcellus therefore compels Horatio to speak *while the Ghost is there* in order to confirm that what is shared is the event itself, and not a subsequent narration.

Speaking in the presence of the spectacle, and in response to its apparition, is thus decisive, for it is an affirmation that what is seen by one is seen by another. Consider, as a further instance of this, the play-within-the-play. Like the opening scenes we have been following, Act III, scene ii begins with an emphasis on vision and appearance. Horatio is once again called upon, this time by Hamlet himself, to approve Hamlet's eyes through their observation of the King during the "Mousetrap." Hamlet informs Horatio that one particular scene in the play "comes near the circumstance" of the poisoning as it was told by the Ghost. I underscore the emphasis on vision:

> I prithee, when thou *seest* that act afoot,
> Even with the very comment of thy soul
> *Observe* my uncle. If his occulted guilt
> Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
> It is a damned ghost that we have *seen*,
> . . . . . . . . . .
> Give him heedful note,
> For I mine *eyes* will rivet to his face,
> And after, we will both our judgment join
> To censure of his *seeming*. (3.2.71-79, my emphasis)

The effect of the spectacle is, therefore, to be observed visually—although what is decisive for our analysis here is that Hamlet does not simply rely upon his own sight, but calls upon Horatio to "keep watch" as well, as it were. Like Marcellus earlier, Hamlet relies upon Horatio's words or "judgment" in

order to affirm his own eyes. Once again, a subsequent shift to language in response to what another sees works as an affirmation that what was seen was shared.

Consider as a further twist that the King's reaction itself—whatever one makes of it (whether it is a sign of guilt, or a full bladder)—comes only when the spectacle is played with words. The visual enactment of the scene of poisoning has no visible effect upon Claudius; rather the King's reaction is to the *speech*: "Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in't?" (3.2.212-13). While the moment of poisoning itself is performed by the actors both times without words, Hamlet provides some narration the second time around: "A poisons him i'th' garden for 's estate...The story is extent, and writ in choice Italian" (3.2.239-40). This, of course, is the moment at which "the King rises." It is, therefore, the move from spectacle to *speech* which proves decisive. I would thus suggest that the King reacts to Hamlet's speech about the spectacle, because that is the moment at which there is some affirmation that what the King sees is, in fact, seen by others. Like Horatio's speech in response to the Ghost, Hamlet's speech is effective in that it comes while the spectacle is occurring. Hamlet's speech, in other words, drives home to the Claudius that the spectacle has been, or is being, shared. Indeed, later when Hamlet and Horatio meet to speak of what they have seen (namely, the King rising—itself another spectacle), they underscore this move to language as the decisive moment:

> O, good Horatio, I'll take the Ghost's word for a thousand pound. Didst perceive? . . . Upon the talk of poisoning?
> (3.2.263-66)

The sharing of the spectacle is thus affirmed through speech; the approval of sight lies in the tongue.

A subtle, but profound shift has taken place. Speaking "to," and thus "of," what one sees with another makes speech into something more than a referential designator. It becomes something rather like bearing witness—as Horatio is repeatedly called upon to do through his speech. A spectacle, paradoxically, cannot be shared through spectacle alone—to be what it is, an eye-witness must testify in language.

Thus, even as *Hamlet* breaks with oral narration, presenting us with a disjointed community founded upon spectatorship and the suspension of spoken interaction—the play also presents us with the compulsion to speak *in response* to this spectacle. We might be tempted to conclude, therefore, that speech is thus reified as the privileged mode of human interaction, that language is what we unceasingly share, that the words are at the foundation of human interrelation.

But this would be to overlook the nature of the experience we have just been through, the drama of *Hamlet*. For while it is true that speech inevitably, and necessarily, occurs as the response to what was seen in order to affirm that it was shared—speech and human interaction have now been irrevocably marked by their own suspension. Indeed, to understand with *Hamlet* that speech occurs in *response* to spectacle is to understand that speech occurs in response to its own suspension, to an experience which is shared, and yet not through interaction. What we share when we speak or interact, therefore, in this age of spectacle, this age of ghostly community, is the very

suspension of speech and interaction. Indeed, our speech, like that of Horatio, is an affirmation of that suspension, as well as a response to that interruptive break. For there is no longer a recourse to an undisturbed time, to a community or shared experience which has not undergone this suspension, the ghostly intrusion of spectacle.

## NOTES

1. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 1.1.22, 55. All citations of Shakespeare's plays are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*, and future references will be in parentheses.

2. See the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The word "theater" has, interestingly, the same roots as the word "theory". It has been surmised, moreover, that both *theorein* and *theatron* derive, according to an ancient etymology, from the word *theos*, meaning "god" or "deity". For more on this etymology see, David Michael Levin, *The Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation* , 99f; and, Nicholas Lobkowicz, *Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx*, 7n.

3.To give just two exemplary figures, one from each period—both Aristotle and, later, Sir Philip Sidney considered visual spectacle merely one part of tragedy. In Aristotle's *Poetics*, for instance, "Spectacle" [*opsis*] is simply "one" of the six "parts" of tragedy. Of course, Aristotle is hardly consistent when it comes to defining the place of "spectacle" within tragedy. At times *opsis* is valued over the other parts, and at times it is de-valued. See Aristotle's *Poetics* 1450a-1451a. Likewise, although Sidney devotes only a few paragraphs to "tragedy" in *A Defence of Poetry*, he nonetheless emphasizes the widely-held belief that the theater was "tied to the laws of poetry" first, and that spectacle was secondary to the "matter." C.f. *A Defence of Poetry*, 64-7.

4. I note in passing that the first public theater constructed in London, in 1576, was indeed called "The Theatre," a fact which makes it difficult to overlook the significance of the term's cultural and etymological significance for the Elizabethan theatrical community.

5. See the *Oxford English Dictionary*, definitions 3a and 1a respectively.

6. For a longer discussion of the connection between dreams and the sense of sight in Shakespeare, and in Renaissance England more generally, see Marjorie

Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare; From Metaphor to Metamorphosis*.

7. This is an interpretation which was initiated in large part by the Romantics' reception of Shakespeare, and by Coleridge's and Keats' remarks on *The Tempest*—especially with regard to Shakespeare and allegory. See John Keats, *Letters*, ed. M. Buxton Forman, 305; and J. Dowden, *Shakespeare: His Mind and his Art*, 424, which gives an account of the various parallels drawn by the Romantics. For a recent re-assessment of the history of this interpretation, see John Lee, "On Reading *The Tempest* Autobiographically."

8. This plurality is one way in which the "theater" was initially distinguished from "theory": whereas *theorein* names the solitary contemplation of the philosopher, *theatron* names an event which is shared by a plurality of spectators. This is one reason why Plato, for instance, distinguished sharply between philosophers (who contemplate truth with the "eyes of the soul") and spectators at a theater—valuing the one over the other. In *The Republic* and elsewhere, Plato distinguishes between the kind of proper contemplation that the philosopher does and the lower kind of vision of a spectator at the theater. In Book V, 475d-e, he writes that the lover of theatrical spectacles are *philotheamones*, while philosophers are *philothamons* of truth. The philosopher contemplates truth with "the eyes of the soul," through intellection—while the bodily sense of sight, like all bodily senses through which all forms of *mimesis* are perceived, is to be distrusted. For a thorough discussion of Plato's views on this point, see Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato* , 240-3, and *passim.* See also, Hannah Arendt, *The Life of Mind*, 119-131. I wish also to thank Adriana Cavarero for her help on this point.

9. There is an immense literature on the metaphysical, or philosophical, determination of "sight" as the noblest of the senses—reaching all the way back to Plato's "ideas", from *idein*, to see. One of the most salient features of this tradition, however, is the emphasis upon the *solitude* of philosopher-as-seer. For an interesting, recent discussion of the incompatibility between classical philosophical contemplation and social interaction, see Adriana Cavarero, "Regarding the Cave," 1-21; for a more general overview of the problem of vision in metaphysical thought, see Martin Jay, "The Noblest of Senses: Vision from Plato to Descartes" in *Downcast Eyes*, 21-83.

10. At the beginning of a longer version of this essay, I compare this break with what Eric Havelock has identified in ancient Greece as the shift from an oral culture to a visual culture, exemplified in the paradigmatic struggle between Homer and Plato, or between poetry and philosophy. I argue that the

break between storytelling and spectacle implicit in the Ghost's entrance is qualitatively different from the cultural shift which Havelock sees at work in ancient Greece. For it seems to me that *Hamlet* introduces a spectacular visuality which is quite different from philosophical, theoretical, speculation by virtue of its being shared, or communal. C.f. Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* .

11. For a good overview of the influence of Seneca, and classical epic-narration more generally, upon the Elizabethan theater see J. L. Styan, *The English Stage: A History of Drama and Performance*, 76-85, 110-17.

12. I note in passing that the fact that the Player's speech in *Hamlet* is often taken to be 1) either a parody of the bombastic, Senecan style, or else 2) written by someone besides Shakespeare, makes clear how distant *Hamlet* is felt to be from that earlier style. C.f. A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 371-8; A. Johnston, "The Player's Speech in *Hamlet*."

13. As is well-known, Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* is widely considered to have directly influenced Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and numerous critical studies have been devoted to the connection between the two plays. As a start, see Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources*, 110-11.

14. For the moment, I will leave aside further consideration of the audience of *Hamlet*, focusing simply on those personages "internal" to the play itself.

15. This emphasis on "imparting a vision" recurs later in the same scene, when the three decide to tell Hamlet about the Ghost.—"Let us impart what we have seen tonight/ Unto young Hamlet..." (1.1.150-51).

16. There has been a lot of interesting scholarship devoted to the classical figure of the blind rhapsod, or bard, in ancient Greece. Eric Havelock, for instance, has written about the Muse in this regard, noting that "logically, if the message is a song or verse sung aloud, you don't see it." See his *The Muse Learns to Write*, 22. See also Hannah Arendt's suggestive discussion of the poet's blindness in *The Life of Mind*, 132-4.

17. Incidentally, Antonin Artaud, in *The Theater and Its Double*, repeatedly expresses his desire that the modern theater be freed from what he sees as the dominance of "storytelling." Ironically, he names Shakespeare as the one who is responsible for inaugurating the theater as storytelling. He writes: "We have been accustomed for four-hundred years, that is since the Renaissance, to a purely descriptive and narrative theater—storytelling psychology... Shakespeare himself is responsible for this aberration and decline." 76. What I am claiming here would thus represent a contradiction of Artaud's characterization of Shakespeare. In my view, *Hamlet* ought to be understood as a break with story-

telling—or the continual imposition and struggle of the visual with the verbal.

18. For a slightly different take on the structural similarities between the theater and the Ghost in *Hamlet*, see Jacques Derrida's discussion of ghosts and what he calls a "*hauntology"* in his remarkable *Specters of Marx*, especially the first and last chapters. For an analogous discussion of the relation between the "ghost" and Shakespeare's "text", see Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality*.

19. The notion that the theater is founded on "repetition" can be found in the works of a number of theorists of the theater, including such thinkers as Artaud and Brecht, and can be found most prominently in those who see the theater as originating in "ritual" or social festivities. I do not have the space here to do justice to these accounts, which are, of course, quite varied. I simply want to take note of the traditional emphasis on "repetition" in order to distinguish my own reflections here; for I want to emphasize "re-appearance" over simple repetition.

20. Barnardo's tale is introduced to us as a repetition—"Let us *once again* assail your ears..."

21. Not to mention that they most likely, although not necessarily, share a certain mastery of the idiom in which the story is told.

22. C.f. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*. Towards the end of a longer version of this essay, I attempt to connect this problem to current debates over the impact of television, film, computers, and video games upon contemporary debates around 'community'. Teen violence, for instance, is often attributed to the influence of chiefly *visual* media upon young people, where that visual attention is thought to supplement or replace, in rather unhealthy ways, other forms of verbal or social interaction. I do not want to suggest that such problems are pre-figured by *Hamlet*; rather I am interested in the play's the problematization of specularity as the interruption of spoken interaction, and in understanding some consequences of this sharing-as-suspended-interaction.

23. I realize, of course, that Elizabethan audiences were not as well-behaved as contemporary audiences at the Royal Shakespeare Theater. My claim is not that audiences did, as a matter of historical fact, fall silent at the opening of the first performances of *Hamlet*. On the contrary, I want to suggest that, with *Hamlet*, one finds an inaugural thematization within the theater of the break between sharing words and the silent sharing of a vision. And this break has, within certain historical and cultural limits, subsequently become a foundational part of our modern experience of the theater, whose conventions do

indeed seem to oblige an audience to cease speaking to one another during a performance. This phenomenon would need to be analyzed historically, socially and so forth—I know of no study which does so.

24. Hence, I think, Henry's use of the plural "we" in his address to Falstaff.

25. For this reason, recent scholarship which reads *Hamlet* alongside other treatises on "ghosts" from the seventeenth century are of little help to us here.

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