Introduction

Materializing the Immaterial

In Shakespeare's *King Lear,* after Gloucester is viciously blinded by Regan and Cornwall, he is turned out of the house to wander comfortless and alone. Deceived by Lear's children and by his own bastard son, Edmund, he recognizes the full extent of their treachery only when his eyes are brutally destroyed. Gloucester cries out that he has no more need for mortal vision: "I haue no way, and therefore want no eyes: / I stumbled when I saw" (TLN 2199–200; 4.1.18–19). Bloody mutilation is here presented as potent reflection on the play's larger themes: it is only when Gloucester's eyes are ripped out that he can finally "see" the truth. Modern theatrical productions underscore this convergence of the literal and the figurative when they creatively stage the episode to avoid showing the blinding itself. Directors often present Gloucester bound to a chair that is then tipped back for the gruesome act. Just as the obliteration of physical vision ultimately enhances his perceptions, spectators who cannot literally view the violent action see its representation all the more clearly in their "mind's eye."

When *King Lear* was originally performed in Shakespeare's day, the theatrical strategies for presenting this scene were startlingly different. In the outdoor amphitheatres of early modern London, playgoers surrounded the stage on three—or sometimes even four—sides. Hiding the blinding by tipping back Gloucester's chair would have been difficult. Yet early modern evidence indicates no such attempts at theatrical subterfuge. English records of the technologies used for onstage blindings are scarce, but sources from the European Continent point to extremely graphic forms of stage violence. The contracts for the 1580 Modane Antichrist play, for example, describe how actors must "put out the eyes of the catholic with pointed skewers (*brochettes poignantes*), and to this end they shall make the necessary eyes and false faces or some alternative as skillfully as they can."[1] In the 1536 Bourges Acts of the Apostles, fake eyes were mounted on augers so that they emerged from the tools when Saint Matthew was blinded.[2] Such references underscore not so much the transcendent power of tragedy as the crude corporeality of vision. Eyes are treated as gross matter, akin to the fleshy substances described in anatomical

treatises such as Helkiah Crooke's *Mikrokosmographia* (figure 0.1). In early modern stage performance, the figurative meanings of sight take a backseat to the gory physicality of eyeballs dripping with blood and spitted on sharp pokers.

Shakespeare's dialogue, too, curiously foregrounds the materiality of vision when it transforms metaphors of sight into bodily action. When interrogated as to why he sent the King to Dover, Gloucester defiantly declares, "Because I would not see thy cruell Nailes / Plucke out his poore old eyes" (TLN 2128–29; 3.7.56–57), and vows that "I shall see / The winged Vengeance ouertake such Children" (TLN 2137–38; 3.7.63–64). The word "see," which Gloucester uses figuratively, is made literal when Cornwall promptly responds by putting out one of his eyes: "See't shalt thou neuer. Fellowes hold y^e Chaire, / Vpon these eyes of thine, Ile set my foote" (TLN 2139–40; 3.7.65–66). The immediate trigger for Gloucester's mutilation is the word itself. This pattern continues when Cornwall's servant tries to end the torture and dies,
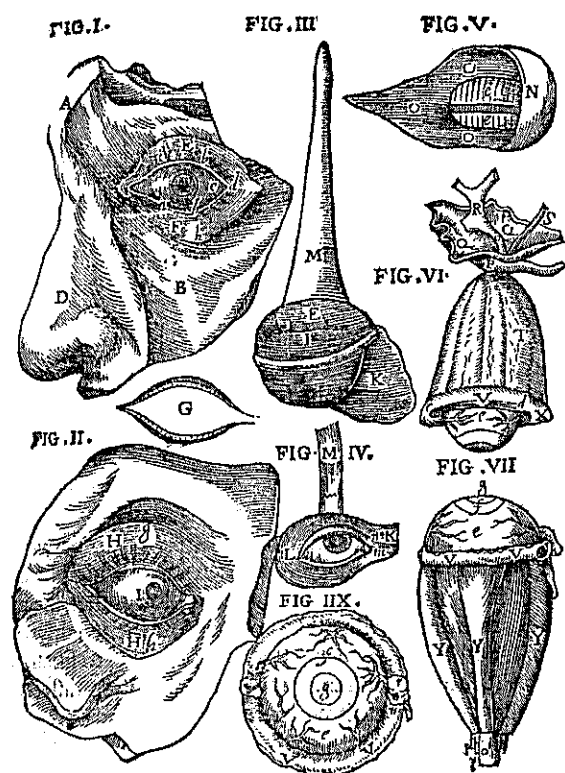
TABVLA.I.

saying, "Oh I am slaine: my Lord, you haue one eye left / To see some mischefe on him" (TLN 2156–57; 3.7.78–79). The word "see" here becomes the pretext for blinding the second eye: "Lest it see more, preuent it; Out vilde gelly: / Where is thy luster now?" (TLN 2158–59; 3.7.80–81). Unlike modern productions that try to conceal the violent act so as to enhance its tragic force, Shakespeare's dialogue consistently guides the spectator's gaze back to its horrifying specifics.

Rather than naturalizing the artificiality of the blinding, *King Lear* bizarrely foregrounds it by drawing attention to that which cannot be real: onstage mutilation. In doing so, it highlights theatre's special effects and flaunts the technical resources required for staging such a scene. In addition, the play does not simply perform the blinding; it also narrates the performance of the blinding. Having the bloody deed prompted by the immediately preceding dialogue, the episode constructs the act as curiously motivated not by character or theme but by the presentationality of rhetoric: the immediate pretext for the violence is the fact that a certain word is spoken at a certain moment onstage. The perfunctoriness of the local impetus for the blinding within the representational frame here complements the artificiality of the presentational action. Drawing attention to stage technologies, the play reminds spectators that what they see is *not* a blinding but a simulation of one.

Why would actors have gone to the trouble of offering such spectacular displays of violence only to undercut their believability? How did playgoers respond to such gruesome acts? What cultural resonances would blinding have had in early modern England, and how did they shape its onstage representation? When we read Shakespeare, it is easy to project our own modern theatrical practices and cultural meanings back onto an earlier era. When we consider his plays on their own terms, however, the answers to these kinds of questions are markedly different. Every time and place has its own particular style of performance and a set of unspoken assumptions taken for granted by players and spectators alike: a boy actor may play a female character, unbound hair may indicate madness, a trapdoor may represent hell, the color white may signify death. To those within a culture, this theatrical language is so obvious as to require no explanation; to those on the outside, it is ripe for misinterpretation. In our own theatres today, we do not need to be told explicitly that illuminated emergency exit signs are not part of the set, nor do we wonder at the dimming of house lights at the start of a show. We can well imagine how confusing such features might be for an early modern viewer magically transplanted to our own time—yet we easily forget just how foreign and opaque *their* theatrical standards might be to *us*.

This book reveals the unique and often surprising assumptions that governed theatrical performance for Shakespeare's original audience members. It analyzes the cultural attitudes and practices that conditioned typical ways of thinking and feeling, and it demonstrates how these familiar interpretive and experiential modes permeated the medium of performance. To uncover such intangible, yet crucial, aspects of early modern theatre, I survey a wide range of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts, from learned discussions of epistemology to popular accounts of violent sports, from religious treatises on visual perception to legal records of holiday festivity. Reading between the lines of these myriad forms of evidence, I reconstruct the underlying principles that framed the perception, interpretation,

SHAKESPEARE AND MATERIALITY

and phenomenological impact of early modern performance: the historically specific markers that distinguished meaningful theatrical signifiers from undifferentiated "background noise"; the interpretive paradigms that circumscribed audience understandings of mimesis; the affective responses generated by spectacle; and the dynamic interplay between theatre's representational strategies and presentational effects. My study moves beyond the cultural genesis of specific stage conventions to expose the fundamental assumptions that were constitutive of early modern theatrical literacy and that rendered performance intelligible. Any given individual may have deviated from these practices: actors could devise new styles of entertainment, and audience members could respond in a range of ways. Without detracting from the agency of individuals and their heterogeneous actions, however, this book aims to lay out the commonalities that tied them together, the shared habits of mind that circumscribed performance and the cultural logics that undergirded these collective understandings.

The Materiality of Performance

The paradigms that structured the production and reception of early modern performance grew out of a dynamic cultural field. Since the New Historicism of the mid-1980s, scholars have produced a significant body of work analyzing how plays both reflected broader cultural discourses and produced them. The same was true of the material practices through which these discourses were disseminated. As scholars of book history have shown, print was not merely the inert medium through which verbal content was conveyed but itself participated in the process of meaning-making. If these studies focus on "the materiality of the text," my project might rightly be called "the materiality of performance." Textual scholars have explored how printing and reading conventions actively constructed meaning rather than merely transmitting it; I demonstrate the ways in which cultural attitudes and practices were mediated through performance. Because performance is not a concrete object, however, it reveals aspects of materiality that we might miss in the case of printed texts. Performance's materiality cannot be reduced to the nuts and bolts of stagecraft that have long interested historians of early modern theatre: costumes and properties, playing spaces, technical resources, and repertory schedules.[3] Nor can its processes of production and reception be equated simply with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century acting and spectatorship.[4] Performance is, moreover, not the same as early modern theatre as a commercial entity, whose economic transactions constituted the institutional preconditions of performance but not performance itself.[5] All of these material objects and practices made possible the ephemeral experiences that took place in the theatre, but that experience is marked primarily by its *im*materiality.[6]

In order to understand the cultural implications of early modern theatrical performance, then, we must develop a more capacious sense of what materiality is and how it functions. In recent years, early modern scholars have been particularly interested in studying everyday objects, such as handkerchiefs, mirrors, furniture,

clothing, jewelry, and tobacco.[7] This strand of criticism—variously dubbed "new materialism," "new antiquarianism," and "thing theory"—has departed from Marxist understandings of materiality to put the focus back on objects themselves. Rather than attending to how social relations are shaped by modes of production, distribution, and consumption, scholars working in this vein tend to favor thick descriptions of physical artifacts and their local circumstances.[8] Studies of book history draw more explicitly on Marxist notions of materiality in investigating the economic specifics of publication and reception, yet they share thing theory's preference for concrete, tangible forms. What counts as evidence in this strand of criticism are the material remains of ephemeral reading and writing practices: handwritten marginalia, archival documents, antique printing presses, even the composition of papers and inks. In both intellectual trends, scholarly energy has ultimately centered on objects, even when particular research projects have been devoted to the dynamics of production and circulation.

This narrowing of the definition of materiality to that which seems solid, physical, and concrete suggests the lure of a fixity that is specifically at odds with the fluidity of performance. Far from a physical object, performance is an action, an experience. It is more verb than noun, more sensation than thing. What, then, constitutes the materiality of performance? Judith Butler offers one compelling—and incredibly generative—answer to this question. She argues that matter becomes intelligible only through a process of reiterative citation, which actively produces the very terms for understanding that which it describes. Matter is thus inherently performative, a contingent stability that is constructed through repetition and exists in comprehensible form only within a discursive nexus that gives it meaning.[9] These citational acts tend to be naturalized and their material consequences effaced. In the case of performance, however, because we cannot lean on the physical artifact as a crutch, the semiotic and experiential processes through which meaning is produced come more readily into view. In this book, I take performance both as an object of study, located in the interstices between the tangible and the intangible, and as an epistemology, a way of knowing that bears within it transformative force. Its immateriality as the former is essential to its materiality as the latter: it is only because performance is *not* fixed that it can take one thing and turn it into something else. This process of transformation happens most overtly in theatre's semiotic function, as when a chair becomes a throne or a boy actor becomes a female character, and it is sometimes effected through speech acts, as when Rosalind in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* declares the bare platform stage to be the Forest of Arden. But speech is only one subset of the full range of theatre's signifying practices, which also includes bodily gestures, the use of space, iconography, nonverbal sounds, and a whole host of other material signifiers.[10]

When I speak of "the materiality of performance," then, I mean these sorts of theatrical conventions—but I also mean something more. To call theatre's signifying practices "conventions" presumes that the symbolic realm in which these practices exist is well-bounded, yet that semiotic system is likewise produced through a process of reiterative citation that may stabilize into a semblance of regularity but contains numerous gaps and fissures. For theatre to be legible as representation, it must cite cultural understandings that circumscribe what counts as semiotically

viable. These understandings are constitutive of thought; they are that without which it is impossible for meaning to come into existence. By "the materiality of performance," then, I also mean these baseline assumptions and expectations, the codes of intelligibility imbricated in all aspects of social life. Foucault refers to these underlying cultural logics as the historical a priori, that which need never be spoken but which tacitly structures modes of comprehension. This historical a priori is nonmonolithic and never fully recoverable; moreover, it is always in the process of being constructed. My project might therefore be described as an archaeology of early modern performance, what Foucault calls the "never wholly achieved uncovering of the archive."[11]

This act of uncovering, though never complete, is also ultimately productive— and I use that word advisedly here. In analyzing the materiality of performance, I also analyze the process through which performance actively *produces* the historical a priori. Butler has pointed out that in Marx "[t]he materiality of objects... is constituted in and as transformative activity."[12] For Butler, "performativity" is this act of transformation; it brings matter into being in and through discourse. In Marxist theory, matter as such preexists culture, but "materiality" describes the social relations produced by physical conditions; discourse mystifies the uneven distribution of resources and labor. I am sympathetic to Marxist criticism in that I view the kind of transformative labor applied to physical objects by workers as of a different character entirely from the kind of transformative activity that Butler means when she speaks of matter being produced through a process of citation. However, what I find compelling about Butler's formulation is her central insight that, in rendering certain experiences intelligible, citational practices have social and physical consequences—material consequences. We might say at first glance that, as a representational practice, theatre takes on a second-order relationship to matter; the imaginative labor required to transform a chair into a throne is significantly less taxing than the labor, both physical and cognitive, of the carpenter who carves a throne out of oak. When we expand our view, however, to consider theatrical representation as itself inseparable from the broader social attitudes and practices that authorize its existence, we can see how enacting semiotic transformations onstage— say, chair to throne—might produce real material effects.

The material effects I trace in this book are not simply a consequence of theatre's function as representation, however, but also inhere in the presentational dimension of performance. In addition to the stories, characters, speeches, and themes mobilized within its fictional worlds, theatre also encompasses a range of nonmimetic performance practices that act upon playgoers. The material effects of these practices have been most fully explored in Marxist accounts of the political consequences of spectacle, an issue I discuss and complicate further in chapter 4. Yet nonverbal spectacle and other *presentational* effects also impact the way spectators experience theatre as a *representational* system. Interlocking puzzle pieces, representation and presentation are mutually constitutive citational practices that, taken together, impact the cultural attitudes and practices that give rise to the particular specificities of their relationship in the first place. Performance, then, "materializes" (in Butler's sense of the term) in two spheres at once: it cites particular cultural dis-
courses and ... specific semiotic transformations occurring within a play, *and* it

cites affective and experiential dimensions of social life in its presentational effects. The dynamic interplay between these two sides of performance, between representation and presentation, further cites social logics underpinning theatrical performance as a whole. Performance is unique in that it itself is also the *act* of production; the medium *is* the process of transformation. This distinctive quality allows the study of performance to expand our view of materiality more generally: it reveals and exemplifies the ways presentationality informs *all* representational practices.

Theatrical performance is thus material in more than one sense. First, its signifiers are themselves material objects, such as chairs and bodies, rather than simply words (which, as we shall see in chapter 3, were understood in early modern England as also profoundly material). Second, performance as signifying practice "materializes" in Butler's sense: it is a transformative activity that turns onstage action into fictional representation in the manner of a speech act, though it is not limited to speech. Third, theatrical performance as a semiotic system is not a fixed, bounded set of conventions but is produced in dynamic relation to attitudes and practices outside the playhouse. Fourth, and most importantly, theatrical performance has real social and physical consequences. It differs from other representational practices in that it itself is also the presentational act of transformation and thus *by definition* produces material effects. We might conceive of these effects as the material "traces" of performance, but that would be to reify the object as the primary form of materiality and performance as its second cousin. I would argue, conversely, that, as the only material medium that is also simultaneously the act of becoming, performance opens up a whole range of questions about the materiality of other cultural practices. It highlights dynamics that are happening far beyond theatre, in cases where the empirical presence of physical artifacts might otherwise deflect attention away from the more intangible, yet still profoundly consequential, dimensions of materiality. To analyze the materiality of performance, then, is also to analyze the presentational process through which all materiality is (per)formed.

From Drama to Theatrical Event

Studying the materiality of performance thus poses some serious methodological challenges to conventional modes of scholarly inquiry. Indeed, the questions I ask are ultimately unanswerable by traditional evidentiary standards. Given that multiple and contradictory discourses can and will coexist simultaneously, how are we to choose dramatic examples that are representative of early modern English culture, a concept that itself cannot be defined because it is always in the process of being produced? And how many data points constitute a sampling broad enough for us to begin to theorize performance practices as a medium? There are no good answers to these questions, and my work is thus ultimately theoretical—and as with all theory, answers depend upon imaginative extrapolation. But these same objections necessarily characterize all scholarship: it is only because performance is explicitly defined as *im*material that analyzing its materiality exposes methodological difficulties obscured by the seeming solidity of other objects of study. Given that performance

complicates and works against these epistemological paradigms, I have elected to be provocative rather than comprehensive in my choice of examples, to model a *way* of looking rather than to offer a seemingly conclusive set of evidence that imagines a closed system where none exists. To that end, I have limited my theatrical examples to a few brief snapshots from early modern plays instead of attempting a more comprehensive assessment of the dramatic canon. Although many of my examples are from Shakespeare and his more famous contemporaries, I choose them not because of their authorship but precisely because they are convenient: they are drawn from plays I expect my readers will know well. Likewise, although the same plays were sometimes performed in a variety of venues—not only in public and private theatres but also at court and on tour in the provinces—I constrain my geographical scope to London's public amphitheatres because these are the playing spaces most familiar to us today. This principle of selection underscores the fact that ultimately *any* example will do. The claims I make about particular theatrical episodes are, I contend, broadly applicable *across* early modern drama because my argument specifically concerns the medium itself. It is only because performance is not a physical object that the material conditions and practices that characterize and circumscribe it are seen as more amorphous and up for debate—and thus more in need of grounding through the seemingly concrete epistemological categories of evidence and scope.

I have applied a similar methodology in deciding which cultural factors to highlight in this book. Since theatre was ultimately informed by an endless number of discourses, I have chosen to concentrate on key issues that most tellingly reveal the contours and fissures of the medium of performance, even as I gesture toward the range and variety of these attitudes and practices. Because I treat theatre as popular entertainment, not high art, I have tended to pay particular attention to cultural practices that would have been shared by large sectors of the society. However, despite the care I have taken to provide a balanced view when drawing on anatomy texts, religious treatises, and other learned works, reliance on textual sources is unavoidable and will necessarily disadvantage popular beliefs and practices for which written evidence is scarce. To counteract this methodological difficulty, I have surveyed a wide cross section of early modern texts, and I have analyzed these sources not only for their surface content but also for what remains unsaid, for the unstated assumptions and attitudes that lie beneath the words. In addition, I incorporate some discussion of nontextual material, in particular visual artifacts and architecture, and I am especially attentive to the phenomenological dimensions of sight and sound. Because texts remain privileged sources of evidence for scholarly studies of earlier eras, popular performance can too easily disappear from view; drawing on texts from many different genres and reading between the lines are therefore essential components of this project.

In terms of temporal scope, although my book centers on the decades immediately before and after the turn of the seventeenth century, I am especially attentive to connections with prior performance traditions. The problematic tendency to imagine early modern theatre primarily as dramatic representation and, thus, to disregard its function as presentational spectacle derives in part from a peculiar critical myopia that relegates specific *types* of sixteenth-century British and European theatre
~~... "~~ ~~...~~ ~~drama and biblical cycle plays,~~ for example—while

elevating those with a more obvious classical heritage, such as the Tudor interludes, to the "early modern." Beneath such otherwise innocuous disciplinary practices and genre assignments lie implicit class distinctions: medieval drama is imagined as the Other, that which exhibits strange and vulgar behaviors and whose Catholic rituals prove not only religious alterity but also ignorant superstition; Shakespeare, by contrast, is thought of as the enlightened self—learned, secular, and inherently ennobling. My use of the term "early modern," then, should be construed not as an attempt to treat Shakespeare and his contemporaries as the venerable forefathers of modern drama but rather as dissatisfaction with the emphasis on social elitism implicit in the classical roots of the "Renaissance."[13]

The political implications of this study cannot be straightforwardly mapped onto designations of evidence and scope, however. As historians have noted, the construction of "popular" and "elite" as social categories can, in fact, be traced back to this period, when discursive distinctions between them were still quite permeable.[14] It is, therefore, worth underscoring Peter Burke's caution against homogenizing and romanticizing the popular: we should be careful, he reminds us, not to "equate the 'popular' with the 'radical,' ignoring evidence for popular conservatism."[15] If the theatrical practices I describe in this book seem politically progressive from our own post-Brechtian vantage point, it is important to historicize how we interpret these effects. Breaking the fourth wall, for instance, had very different valences in a culture whose assumptions about the nature of representation were markedly unlike those most prevalent in twentieth-century Europe and America. Moreover, as I demonstrate throughout this book, the kinds of affective experiences produced by early modern theatrical performance tended to construct playgoers as part of a communal whole, often reinscribing existing social hierarchies and belief systems rather than challenging them. This is not to say that moments of agency and subversion did not occur but instead to reframe the political implications of my work. In describing commonalities across diverse populations' ways of understanding and experiencing performance, I honor the deeply held beliefs, feelings, and practices that structured people's daily lives and that were refracted in, transformed by, and produced through the public theatre. Those attitudes were often founded on longstanding traditions and tended not to lead to unrest or revolution, but they were important to the people who possessed them. Writing this history is thus a particular kind of intervention, but my own political investments should not be confused with some sort of radicalism on the part of early modern plays or playgoers.

Nevertheless, my choice to focus on theatre as performance, not drama, does have distinct class valences. In analyzing the typical habits of mind that produced early modern theatre's signifying practices as well as the cultural consequences of embodied performance, my project shares certain affinities with recent work on "historical phenomenology," which attends to culturally specific experiences of bodily affect and perception,[16] and "historical formalism," which addresses the social and material implications of dramatic form and structure.[17] Where I differ from these approaches, however, is in my attention to the presentational dimensions of plays; in this, my project more closely resembles "material text studies," which considers the medium of print through which drama was circulated.[18] Yet in the case of Shakespeare and his fellow playwrights, the initial physical form was not the

printed book. Plays were first performed and only later published, as numerous references on the title pages of playbooks attest. Moreover, the authority of these texts derived from the stage: the names of acting companies, playing venues, and even the feast days on which famous performances occurred featured more prominently on title pages than the names of the writers who penned the texts. Indeed, the number of people who encountered plays in the theatre was vastly greater than the number of people who could have read them in print. When Elizabeth I first came to the throne in 1558, only about 20 percent of men and 5 percent of women in England could sign their own names. By 1642, these numbers had risen to 30 percent and 10 percent respectively across the country and, in London, comprised about two-thirds of the total adult population.[19] It is true that counting signatures as an index of reading ability has its methodological drawbacks. Nevertheless, even assuming that these statistics are underestimates, it is clear that at least one out of every three people would have been unable to read plays in printed form.

Even the segment of the population that had achieved fluency with the written vernacular, however, was much more likely to have experienced plays on the stage than on the page. Though book publication as a whole increased during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the number of dramatic titles printed each year was only a tiny fraction of this total. In 1530, there were only 214 different books published in all of England; by 1600, that number had increased slightly to 259; and by 1640, it had risen to 577.[20] In absolute terms, these numbers are quite small. Of the modest total number of books in print, only a handful were plays. As Peter Blayney describes, "In the two decades before the accession of James I, then, the average number of new plays published each year was 4.8. In the next two decades it was 5.75, and in the last two decades before the theaters were closed, exactly it was 8.0....[P]rinted plays never accounted for a very significant fraction of the trade in English books."[21] Moreover, of those plays published, print runs were generally no more than 800 to 1,000 copies for first editions.[22] A good number of those books never sold but sat in booksellers' stalls gathering dust. The first print run of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, for example, was probably no more than 700 copies at most, and a portion of even that small quantity remained unsold over a decade later.[23] This situation was not uncommon, as Blayney attests: "Fewer than 21 percent of the plays published in the sixty years under discussion reached a second edition inside nine years. What that means is that no more than one play in five would have returned the publisher's initial investment inside five years. Not one in twenty would have paid for itself during its first year."[24]

When these publication figures are compared to the number of plays in performance, the difference is staggering. As W. R. Streitberger reminds us, "Between the time Shakespeare began his active career in the early 1590s and the closing of the theatres in 1642, there were about twenty professional companies that performed at one time or another in London."[25] Each of the playing companies produced approximately 35 plays a year, more than half of which were new.[26] Not only were there vastly more plays in the repertory than in print, the sheer numbers of people exposed to this medium were far greater than those who bought or read playbooks. Each new play had a run of roughly 8 to 12 performances distributed across four to

3,000 spectators, with average attendance hovering around half capacity,[28] a single performance of a play in the theatre could reach more people than the entire print run of that play as a book.

As a rough comparison, then, let us imagine a hypothetical year in which five plays were published with print runs on the high side—say, 1,000 copies each for a total of 5,000 copies. And let us assume that one of these titles was a raging success and sold half its stock within the first year—a situation that Blayney tells us had less than a 1 in 20 chance, not 1 in 5—and the rest sold a good amount—say, a quarter of their stock. The total number of playbooks distributed to readers over the course of that year would be no more than 1,500. During that same year, let us estimate that only three acting companies were active in London, and for simplicity let us ignore performances in the provinces. Thirty-five plays at an average of ten performances per play and audiences of about 1,000 per performance comes out to 350,000. Andrew Gurr's own "conservative estimate" would almost double this figure: his total of almost 50 million visits for the period 1567 to 1642 puts the yearly average at 650,000.[29] But even sticking with my more modest number, for every individual who bought a play as a book, at least 233 spectators would have flocked to the theatre—or, to put it even more starkly, 99.6 percent of all unique interactions with a play occurred in theatrical performance. In an era before silent reading was the norm, books may well have been read aloud to other people once purchased. But even if we assume that each playbook was read to five other people, we are still looking at a ratio of 1 to 47; that is, 97.9 percent of all encounters with drama would have taken place in the theatre.[30] In terms of sheer exposure, the stage had far more influence than the page. Focusing on the tiny percentage of the population that actually read drama says less about early modern experiences and more about the primacy of the written word today.

Despite the vastly larger crowds that flocked to the theatre, it is true that the financial gains to be had in the nascent publishing industry were not insignificant. Lukas Erne has recently argued compellingly for dramatic authorship as a parallel business track for Shakespeare and other playwrights. Acting companies, he contends, could expand their theatrical audiences through print publication, so the two markets may well have complemented each other. He concludes that the concerns of print publication thus crucially shaped Shakespeare's plays as we know them today, since the only versions now extant were originally intended to be read as books.[31] Indeed, as Zachary Lesser has rightly pointed out, making a profit on plays was easier than it was for actors, who had to lay out money for expensive costumes, properties, and numerous other expenses. A playbook selling for 6 or 7d., Lesser notes, was "roughly equivalent to the cost of entrance to Blackfriars....But while the cost to the consumer of an indoor stage play and a printed play are about the same, an utter disaster in the theatre...would be a fair success if the same number of people bought the play as saw it."[32] Money talks, Lesser argues: as book-buyers came to understand printed plays in the context of publishers' specialized lines, the "politics of publication" may have influenced "the text that early modern audiences heard in the theatre, turning it into the one that they bought in the bookshop and that we study today."[33] Shifting from the politics of production to the politics of reception, however, it becomes evident that the issue at stake is *scale*. If it takes the

better part of a decade to turn a profit on a printed play, that won't help pay the rent today. Economically, the consumers one must please are those who will otherwise pelt the stage with debris.

Treating plays as books rather than as performances not only artificially inflates the impact of printed drama but also effaces the experiences of those lower in various social hierarchies. The price of a playbook would have been six times the cost of standing-room admission to the yard in a public playhouse. Not everyone had that much ready cash. For many members of society, an afternoon's entertainment at the outdoor amphitheatres was the more affordable option. Even for those more privileged, the public playhouses offered an indulgence that could be enjoyed with greater frequency than either books or Blackfriars, and reading ability varied widely among geographic locations, social classes, and genders. Studying the history of the book serves as a valuable corrective to treating plays as disembodied texts, floating free of the material conditions of their production, distribution, and reception, and it usefully complements work in historical formalism by attending to the medium of transmission. At the same time, treating theatre primarily as printed text skews our perception of the cultural landscape by ignoring over 99 percent of early modern encounters with plays. The history of the book offers an interesting window into the past, but, in the case of drama, it also necessarily privileges the history of the elite. In order to understand how everyone else experienced the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, we must shift our frame of reference from drama to theatrical event.

The Boundaries of Theatrical Performance

How did early modern spectators conceptualize the theatrical event? To analyze performance as a material medium, we must first define what counted as theatrical performance. In her article, "What Was Performance?" Mary Thomas Crane usefully surveys the relevant early modern terminology to argue that performance was understood not as hollow, deceptive show but as potentially efficacious and transformative in the real world.[34] Here, I focus on a slightly different question: what exactly did audience members in Shakespeare's day think they were going to see or experience at the playhouse? By this, I do not mean how early modern theorists of theatre described it but rather the general expectations of everyday playgoers: what were their common understandings about the boundaries of performance?

The answer to this question lies not in the title of a play—the key determinant of a theatrical event today—but in the combination of seemingly disparate modes of entertainment, only some of which involved the representation of fictional characters and narratives. Turning to early modern texts, we find that John Rainolds's *Th'Overthrow of Stage-Playes* positions theatre as one among a range of dissolute "pleasures" and "vanities," as he condemns "apparell, gamening [*sic*], gadding to plaies, masking, dauncing, bellicheare, shewes, or such like."[35] In a similar vein, Francis Lenton's *Characterismi* satirically describes the quintessential "yong Innes . . . Court Gentleman" whose "Recreations and loose expence of time, are his only

studies (as Plaies, Dancing, Fencing, Tauerns, Tobacco, [*sic*]) and Dalliance."[36] These accounts of theatre as akin to other leisure pursuits gesture toward the range of entertainments on offer at playhouses. The letter to the reader prefacing Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* laments that in theatres "the Concupiscence of Iigges, and Daunces so raigneth, as to runne away from Nature, and be afraid of her, is the onely point of art that tickles the *Spectators*."[37] A playbill from around 1630 likewise describes dancing and other spectacles as among the chief entertainments of English players on tour through Germany. The generically varied routines promised by the troupe's "right merry Clown, who will act every day fine Comedies, Tragedies, Pastorals, and Histories, intermixed with lovely and merry Interludes," were complemented by the stylistic hybridity on offer "to-day Wednesday the 21 April. . . . After the Comedy will be presented a fine Ballet and laughable Droll. The Lovers of such plays must make their appearance at the Fencing-house in the afternoon at 2 o'clock."[38] Intermingled with longer scripted scenarios were music, dance, and comic sketches—all deemed "plays" that might be presented at a "Fencing-house." Far from an ontologically distinct aesthetic mode, drama overlapped significantly with other recreations.

This slippage between theatre and entertainment more broadly defined becomes especially evident when we consider the early modern jig. Generically related to the "fine Ballet and laughable Droll" that followed the English comedy described in the previous playbill, the jig was a song and dance routine that sometimes involved a rudimentary plot dealing with adultery or other bawdy themes. It was regularly enacted at the public playhouses, but its precise bodily form is poorly understood. In his foundational study, *The Elizabethan Jig*, C. R. Baskervill carefully analyzed early modern uses of the term *jig* to reveal conceptual overlaps between stage jigs, songs and dialogues printed in broadside ballads, popular dances, and festive games.[39] Bruce Smith comes to a similar conclusion, noting that the term *jig* probably referred to "any number of devices: a one-person song like [that which] . . . concludes *Twelfth Night;* a song in dialogue like the printed broadside 'Frauncis new Iigge . . .' . . . ; dancing without a dramatic scenario . . . ; or dancing *with* a dramatic scenario."[40] William West takes this one step further, arguing that the jig was whatever "happened" or "was reminiscent of what happened at the end of the play" or was associated "with people . . . associated with jigging."[41] The difficulties involved in defining the jig as a form arise in part because this mode of entertainment made use of nonverbal, spectacular, and ephemeral elements—precisely those actions that did not lend themselves to setting down in print and which, we would do well not to forget, were also essential to dramatic narratives.

This flexibility in the early modern jig extended also to its multivalent and malleable relationship to theatrical representation. Just as the early modern staging of Gloucester's blinding in *King Lear* challenges modern conceptions of tragedy, the jig complicates typical assumptions about the emotional tenor and consistency of theatrical performance. Jigs took place after all kinds of plays, not just comedies. As the Swiss doctor Thomas Platter writes in his description of his 1599 visit to England,

On September 21st after lunch, about two o'clock, I and my party crossed the water, and there in the house with the thatched roof witnessed an excellent performance of

the tragedy of the first Emperor Julius Caesar with a cast of some fifteen people; when the play was over, they danced very marvellously and gracefully together as is their wont, two dressed as men and two as women.[42]

Thomas Dekker's *Strange Horse-Race* likewise notes that jigs were performed after tragedies: "I haue often seene, after the finishing of some worthy Tragedy, or Catastrophe in the open Theaters, that the Sceane after the Epilogue hath beene more blacke (about a nasty bawdy Iigge) then the most horrid Sceane in the Play was."[43] Such generic incongruities do not seem to have troubled early modern spectators, who never remark on the inappropriateness of this juxtaposition. In fact, it is noteworthy that many playgoers appear to have *preferred* the jig to dramatic narratives. A 1612 "Order for suppressinge of Jigges att the ende of Playes," for instance, describes how

Complaynte have beene made at this last Generall Sessions, that by reason of certayne lewde Jigges songes and daunces vsed and accustomed at the play-house called the Fortune in Gouldinglane, divers cutt-purses and other lewde and ill disposed persons in greate multitudes doe resorte thither at th'end of euerye playe, many tymes causinge tumultes and outrages.[44]

The fact that "great multitudes" went to the playhouses for what today might be considered merely ancillary entertainments suggests that drama constituted only one part of a larger performance event—and, in many cases, the plays of Shakespeare and his fellow playwrights were not even the primary show early modern spectators wanted to see.

Indeed, the fact that references from Shakespeare's day regularly refer to jigs coming "after" plays also sheds light on early modern conceptions of the theatrical event. For instance, James Shirley's *Changes* complains,

> Many Gentlemen
> Are not, as in the dayes of understanding,
> Now satisfied without a Iigge, which since
> They cannot, with their honour, call for, after
> The play, they looke to be serv'd up ith' middle.[45]

Shirley's comments are typical of the Caroline tendency to bemoan the decline of plays and the poor quality of playgoers, and his joke depends on understanding the jig as an after-show. Yet what is striking about his remarks and those of his contemporaries is that they never describe exactly *when* theatrical representation shifts to the modes of performance found in the jig. The obvious conclusion is that, although the two forms of entertainment were distinct, the difference between them had nothing to do with fidelity to a verisimilar frame. Plays, in other words, were internally inconsistent and bore a fluid relationship to other forms of entertainment. Whereas actors today often make their curtain calls in costume—and sometimes even in the costume that most epitomizes their character rather than the one they last wore during the play—the final image left with early modern spectators did ... have anything to do with the scripted play at all. Yet there is no

indication that early modern audiences found this unusual or jarring. Rather, the boundary between the play and the jig was permeable because both were understood as part of the larger performance event.

If jigs challenge our modern notions of the boundaries of the theatrical event, about what defines its outside perimeter, dances incorporated into dramatic narratives complicate how we imagine the internal edges distinguishing theatre's various parts. Directors often cut these episodes from modern productions of the plays; scholars, too, tend to view dances as gratuitous action, taking place while "in the meane time, some necessary Question of the Play be then to be considered" (*Hamlet*, TLN 1890–91; 3.2.42–43). The witches' dance in act 4, scene 1 of *Macbeth* is a case in point. Often treated as superfluous to the play proper, the episode is generally relegated to Thomas Middleton, whose textual authority fails to match that of Shakespeare. To make matters worse, the episode bears some relationship to similar dances in two other dramatic works: Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queens*, performed at Whitehall on February 2, 1609, and Middleton's *The Witch*, performed by the King's Men sometime between 1613 and 1616.[46] Spectacle, here the product of secondary authorship and dubious lineage, seems from a modern perspective to complicate the integrity of the play. Even scholars interested in theatre as embodied performance have difficulty with the episode. Alan Brissenden considers the narrative pretext for the witches' dance in *Macbeth* to be "a rather thin excuse."[47] John Russell Brown reads the moment as a "wordless show of evil," which "can seem entirely purposeless, except as an expression of triumph" since "it alone is without specific meaning."[48] The dance's failure to mobilize a convincing explanation within the representational narrative results in a kind of semiotic void, rendering the spectacle unintelligible in these accounts.[49]

Yet dancing—and singing—witches were, in fact, the norm on the early modern stage,[50] and their popularity led to the elaboration of such episodes during the course of the seventeenth century. In William Davenant's 1674 revision of *Macbeth*, the spectacular elements of the play were enhanced with flying machines for the witches. Pepys wrote in 1667 that, "though I have seen it often, yet is it one of the best plays for a stage, and variety of dancing and music, that ever I saw."[51] Interestingly, the witches' dances in these episodes were generically related to the jig. As musicologist Amanda Winkler notes, in Davenant's play, the witches' dance was "diatonic, triple meter, and major key" with "jig dance rhythms" similar to those of other late seventeenth-century stage witches: "[O]ne of the sources for Locke's dance, *Musicks Delight on the Cithren*, labels it 'A Jigg called Macbeth.'"[52] And records of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century performances of *Macbeth* indicate the ongoing centrality of the witches' dance.[53] Far from being "extra," it was an integral part of the performance event, offering onstage spectacle exciting for its own sake and connected to the musical form of the jig.

Such terpsichorean extravaganzas also appear to have been related to entertainments offered during intermissions—further complicating the boundaries of the performance event. Breaks between acts of plays were originally introduced in the indoor theatres for the purpose of trimming the lights and seem to have spread from the private to the public playhouses after 1607.[54] Such intervals were usually brief—no more than the equivalent of about thirty lines of verse[55]—and often

involved music and dancing. Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is an especially telling example of the fluidity between dramatic narratives and such entertainments. As with the witches' dance in *Macbeth*, this episode has often been treated as an unnecessary interpolation. John Forrest, for instance, describes it as "clearly an interruption to the main narrative of the play, and the whole conceit rather artificially grafted in."[56] In the quarto edition of the play is a peculiar stage direction scribbled in the margins of the page: "Knocke for Schoole. Enter The Dance."[57] Although *knock* typically referred to a sound related to a visitor's arrival, here the use of the term suggests a kind of conceptual slippage in the minds of theatrical personnel between the play proper and the music and dancing offered during intervals. Alan Dessen and Leslie Thomson point out that, "in the annotated quarto of *Two Merry Milkmaids* a bookkeeper wrote '*Knock Act*' (E2r) before the first *entr'acte* entertainment, probably as a reminder to call up the performers."[58] The stage direction in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, they suggest, "may carry a similar meaning."[59] Playgoers were no strangers to such narrative incongruities. Indeed, as Edmund Gayton colorfully describes, they sometimes demanded that players

> act what the major part of the company had a mind to; sometimes *Tamerlane*, sometimes *Iugurth*, sometimes the Jew of *Malta*, and sometimes parts of all these, and at last, none of the three taking, they were forc'd to undresse and put off their Tragick habits, and conclude the day with the merry milk-maides. And unlesse this were done, and the popular humour satisfied, as sometimes it so fortun'd, that the Players were refractory; the Benches, the tiles, the laths, the stones, Oranges, Apples, Nuts, flew about most liberally.[60]

Gayton's comment about the popularity of *The Two Merry Milkmaids* is noteworthy, given the annotation regarding between-act entertainments in the quarto of the play. Such references suggest that, for early modern spectators, theatrical performance was defined less as representational coherence than as spectacular entertainment.

The fluidity of form that characterized theatrical performance also extended to its temporal boundaries, which were informed by the cyclical rhythms of the ritual year. As Roslyn Knutson notes, playing companies nearly always performed on certain holidays, which tended to draw larger-than-normal crowds. These feast days included, among others, "Easter Week, Whitsun Week, and the Nativity of John the Baptist," also known as Midsummer.[61] Although scholars of early modern drama have tended to focus on thematic and ideological issues related to depictions of calendar customs within plays, thinking about theatrical performance as a presentational form reveals numerous overlaps with popular festivity.[62] Take, for example, the dance of the courtiers dressed as shepherds in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*. The burning of the Globe Theatre on Tuesday, June 29, 1613, allows us to fix this play's temporal coordinates with more precision than most. According to a letter from Henry Bluett to his uncle Richard Weekes, the fire occurred only shortly after the play had been introduced into the repertory:

> On tewsday last there was acted at the Globe a new play called all is triewe which had beene acted not passinge 2 or 3 times before there came many people to see it in

> somuch that ye howse was very full and as the play was almost ended the house was fired with shooting off a Chamber which was stopt with towe which was blown vp into the thetch of the house and so burnt downe to the ground.[63]

Roslyn Knutson has demonstrated that "[t]he first few performances of a new offering were often scheduled within a week of one another, but by the fourth show the performances were more widely spaced," with only one or two performances each month.[64] If, as Bluett's letter suggests, *Henry VIII* "had beene acted not passinge 2 or 3 times before" the Globe fire, it seems likely that the play's original debut was in May or early June of 1613.

The major holidays during the season between Easter and Midsummer—May Day, Whitsuntide, and the Feast of Corpus Christi—often involved the crowning of a "summer lord." Recent work associated with the *Records of Early English Drama* (REED) project has demonstrated the continuing popularity of Robin Hood gatherings, the election of mock kings and queens, and other forms of class inversion and role-playing at this time of year. It is frequently assumed that these activities were the legacy of dying "medieval" practices, but they actually continued to flourish long after the Protestant Reformation purged the liturgical calendar of the feast days of saints.[65] Although the traditional custom of "bringing in the May" (that is, the medieval practice of fetching greenery and making garlands to bedeck houses and churches—a practice that continued into the nineteenth century) led Sir James Frazer to view the summer lord as the legacy of pagan agricultural rites,[66] mock kings were also closely linked to role-playing games in the urban context. In his *Anatomie of Abuses*, the notorious antitheatricalist Philip Stubbes describes summer games as being organized by the "Graund-Captain (of all mischeefe) whome they innoble with the title of my Lord of Mis-rule."[67] Other accounts more frequently give this title to the leader of *winter* revels at universities, aristocratic households, and the Inns of Court. The overlapping terminology reveals a similarity of function between winter Lords of Misrule and the summer lords incorrectly imagined as rural.[68] The episode in *Henry VIII* in which the monarch and his courtiers dress as shepherds can be seen as part and parcel of this festive tradition. At a time of year when games involving class inversion were so popular, representing a king taking part in festive disguise foregrounds the role-playing in which the actors themselves engaged. Moreover, the courtiers' shepherd costumes resonated with the annual sheep-shearing festivals that took place in May and June.[69] Such instances expose the permeability of early modern dramatic representation to festive customs associated not with the temporalities of the fictional narrative but with the seasonality of its performance.

Moreover, because portraying dancing within the imaginary world of the play required actors to actually dance onstage, representation was also necessarily enactment. This phenomenological condition not only suggests overlaps between theatrical performance, festive practices, and spectacular entertainments (such as the jig and the witches' dance) but also exemplifies how the presentational dimension of performance might reshape the implications of dramatic narratives. Drawn from a purportedly historical event narrated in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, the scene from *Henry VIII* has been read as a kind of antimasque in which the aristocrats' seemingly

subversive costumes ultimately function to consolidate and legitimate royal authority.[70] This interpretation, though certainly compelling, focuses primarily on the dramatic representation: as masked "disguisers," the nobles represent a festive dance taking place within the imaginary world of the play. The political valences of this moment become more complicated, however, when we consider its onstage presentation. Although the King and his followers are dressed as shepherds, they most likely performed a *courtly* dance onstage, as can be seen when Cardinal Wolsey remarks, "Your Grace / I feare, with dancing is a little heated," and the King responds, "I feare too much" (TLN 807–9; 1.4.99–101). Beyond offering oblique commentary on Henry's attraction to Anne, these remarks would be particularly appropriate after a fast courtly dance, such as a *coranto, galliard,* or *volta.*[71] Courtly dancing in early modern England was an essential form of aristocratic self-fashioning, a rarefied skill that required the tutelage of expensive instructors.[72] Skiles Howard has argued that courtly dancing onstage destabilized social hierarchies: when actors demonstrated their mastery of such exclusive skills, they revealed that aristocratic identities, like dance steps, could be learned and performed.[73] The scene from *Henry VIII* takes this dynamic one step further by integrating this potential subversiveness into the semiotics of theatre: by presenting a dance where the performers are dressed as shepherds yet are enacting a courtly dance, the scene highlights the fact that these dancers are not nobles but rather actors from lower social stations. The play here not only represents class cross-dressing within the fictional narrative but also draws attention to the presentational dynamics of theatrical performance—undermining the consolidation of royal authority and interpolating the play into the popular tradition of festive class inversion. Continuities between theatrical performance and seasonal customs in early modern England indicate more than simply the existence of overlapping and contemporaneous cultural practices; they suggest that generic distinctions between theatre and festivity are, for this period, very difficult to sustain.[74] For Shakespeare's playgoers, the boundaries of performance were extremely porous, encompassing a range of spectacular entertainments integrated in complex ways into social life.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

What lay within the permeable and flexible boundaries of the theatrical event is the subject of my first chapter, "Theorizing Theatrical Privilege." If not all moments in plays are created equal, which ones would the medium of early modern performance itself have privileged? Revising Robert Weimann's influential concepts of *locus* and *platea,* this chapter argues that theatrical authority derived not from stage geography and actor-audience interactivity but from the dynamic interplay between representation and presentation. Through careful analysis of a range of scenes from Shakespeare's plays, I demonstrate that moments in plays that self-referentially highlighted their own semiotic strategies were precisely those privileged by performance in early modern England. Building on this discussion, each of the subsequent chapters focuses on a different kind of theatrically privileged episode in order to illuminate the cultural implications of the performance

Part II, "Theatrical Ways of Knowing," examines the historically specific perceptual and interpretive practices through which playgoers made sense of what they saw onstage. Chapter 2, "Staging Sight," begins with a seemingly simple question: What counted as an intentional theatrical signifier? Using as my case study the sonnet-reading episode from Shakespeare's *Love's Labor's Lost,* I demonstrate how visual paradigms in early modern art, science, and religion shaped which stage actions were understood as visible within the dramatic representation. Because these habits of mind run counter to the perceptual logics upon which modern scholarly reconstructions of Shakespearean stagecraft depend, I argue that they have significant implications for how we conceptualize early modern theatrical blocking and dramatic asides. Chapter 3, "Imaginary Forces," builds on this discussion of perception to address the modes of interpretation required by the medium of performance. Rather than assuming that spectators valued verisimilitude and thus used their imaginations to make onstage action seem more real, I demonstrate how overlaps between allegorical and mimetic modes in early modern theatre complicated the act of decoding performance. Juxtaposing several scenes from Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* with early modern accounts of ghosts, demons, and false dreams, I articulate the challenges early modern spectators faced when they attempted to decipher visual information presented onstage, and I show how these interpretive difficulties were not merely thematized within the dramatic fiction but woven into the semiotics of the medium itself. Metatheatricality and plays-within-plays, I contend, thus served not as dramatic commentary on the interplay between illusion and reality; rather, they integrated early modern understandings of spectatorship's moral and epistemological stakes into the very medium of performance.

In Part III, "Experiencing Embodied Spectacle," I turn to the presentational impact of spectacular display. Chapter 4, "Dancing and Other Delights," begins by analyzing how feats of physical skill were understood in travel narratives, medical texts, and other extratheatrical discourses in addition to the playhouses. I argue that the language of pleasure and delight, often used to describe spectator responses, encoded within it contradictory notions of spectacle as both healthfully refreshing and dangerously seductive. I then turn to two specific examples—the dance of the devils in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and that of the witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*—to show how watching spectacle did not dazzle audience members into passivity (as we might assume from our post-Brechtian, post-Benjaminian perspective) but interpellated them as active participants complicit in what they saw. Playgoers, I maintain, were thus imagined as actors long after the audience's central role in medieval religious drama had supposedly disappeared, a dynamic that contributed to theatre's continued viability as a communal social practice. With chapter 5, "Artful Sport," I move from bodily feats directly experienced by audiences to spectacles produced through the power of representation. Early modern plays repeatedly foregrounded the semiotic practices through which property heads and limbs came to stand in for human parts. I argue that this theatrical tendency produced not a pseudo-Brechtian alienation effect but a peculiar emphasis on the ontological status of the actor's body. Focusing in particular on Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and *Cymbeline* as well as Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus,* I analyze the theatrical effects generated when the theatrical constraints of staging violence clashed

with cultural discourses surrounding justice, martyrdom, and murder. Bodily fragmentation in the playhouses, I reveal, functioned as enactment of festive sport, akin to popular practices such as football and animal baiting. Extending beyond the dramatic narrative, theatrical dismemberment served as efficacious performance, reinscribing paradigms of social integration that lay at the heart of the violence of stake, scaffold, and sport.

The kinds of questions with which this book concludes take us back full circle to the issue of materiality with which I began. In representing the *un*presentable, that which could not literally be shown onstage, theatrical violence made material the very social formations out of which early modern theatre grew. It exemplifies how performance produced the attitudes, discourses, and institutional structures that rendered it intelligible as a semiotic system. The process through which theatre became culturally legible and the consequences of its performance dynamics were bound up with the historical particularities of early modern England. Yet the story I tell is ultimately not just about Shakespeare's theatre but about performance as a material medium. Foucault describes the system of implicit cultural rules that constitute the historical a priori as that which can only be seen from the outside: "[I]t is not possible," he says, "for us to describe our own archive, since it is from within these rules that we speak."[75] The cultural meanings and effects produced by performance may be more difficult to see in a contemporary context whose epistemological categories and generic forms permeate our everyday lives. Looking at early modern theatre, then, is one way of imaginatively exploring how performance might function in our own era. Performance as a material practice is historically specific; as a materializing force, however, it is not of an age but for all time.

Chapter 1

Theorizing Theatrical Privilege: Rethinking Weimann's Concepts of *Locus* and *Platea*

Not all moments in plays are created equal. Some scenes, characters, and actions imprint themselves indelibly on the minds of theatregoers, whereas others are quickly forgotten. The plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries are often used as evidence for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century social attitudes and practices, yet interpreting these references without considering the varying impact of different moments in performance can skew our perceptions of the cultural landscape. Soliloquies affected spectators differently from dialogue; pronouncements made during battles scenes were less likely to have been heard than those during quieter interludes. Such concerns shaped the experiences of early modern audience members, yet drama has often been read in a "flat" way, as if its discursive practices were verbal utterances separate from the material conditions of performance. To understand the cultural implications and effects of early modern theatre, we must first theorize how the performance medium shaped the impact of different moments in plays.

This chapter maps the contours of the medium of performance by asking which elements might have been most privileged by early modern dramaturgy. It lays the groundwork for subsequent chapters by theorizing the relative weight accorded to different aspects of performance, aspects whose cultural valences I explore later in this book. I take as my starting point Robert Weimann's well-established but still enormously influential concepts of *locus* and *platea*. I suggest both the ways his formulation is useful and the ways it needs to be revised. Then, focusing, as Weimann does, primarily on Shakespeare's plays, I propose an alternative model for understanding the authority of performance in early modern drama. This analysis establishes the foundational principles through which early modern theatre produced its effects and outlines the kinds of privileged moments that will be investigated in greater detail in later chapters.