

“The Charm Dissolves Apace”: Shakespeare and the Self-Dissolution of Drama

Paul A. Kottman

1.

Everything I will try to say in this essay will, I believe, make a bit more sense if I begin with a few words about G. W. F. Hegel’s reflections on the fate of art.

According to Hegel, artistic practices are ways that we try to evaluate and make sense of our lives, of our world, of the claims of nature upon us, and of what we do (or might do) and say with one another. Art is not the only way we do this, of course; there is also mythology, religion, education, science or philosophy. Artistic practices are distinctive, however, in that their sense-making potential is tied to the way they work with and through specific media – stone, paint, sound, or speech – and to the way in which artistic transformations of these media reflect socio-historical transformations in our overall self-understanding.

In Hegel’s account, the development of artistic practices – that is, of historically shifting, context-specific needs for different ‘arts’ (e.g. the need for pyramids in Egypt, for classical sculpture in Greece, or for painting in Christian Europe), as well as internal developments within those arts (from ‘symbolic’ to ‘classical’ to ‘romantic’, for example, or from epic to lyric) – presents an ongoing and increasing de-naturalization or ‘spiritualization’ of our self-understanding. According to Hegel, the more that we see ourselves as – or teach ourselves that we are – free and self-determining subjects, the less we are dependent upon, or needful of, artistic expressions that work with ‘natural’ or sensible media in order to understand ourselves, and our world. The twist in Hegel’s story is that sensuous, representational artistic practices *are* (or ‘were’) a primary way we teach ourselves this

lesson – because by transforming natural material in modes that we can regard as ‘free’ from material or instrumental needs, we express our own liberation and, in this way, *become* free. Art, claims Hegel in a famous passage, allows a free human being to “strip the external world of its inflexible foreignness and to enjoy in the shape of things only an external realization of himself”¹. And once this lesson is absorbed – that is, once we see ourselves as liberated from nature, inasmuch as the terms of our self-understanding no longer depend upon, and are no longer limited by, something ‘out there’ called ‘Nature’ or ‘God’ or the ‘One’ or whatever – we find ourselves less needful of the sensuous representational works by which we ‘taught ourselves’ this lesson. Coming to understand ourselves as free and self-determining entails (and perhaps even requires) a diminishing need to make sensuous, representational artworks, even as it entails a heightened need for ‘philosophical’ reflection on our (past) need for sensuous representation. This is what Hegel means when, famously, he claims: “art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past”². (As others have pointed out, Hegel’s argument is not that art has come to an end, but rather that we can outlive, culturally, our need for sensuous, representational art as a deeply essential mode of self-understanding³.)

Furthermore, for Hegel, this ongoing de-naturalization unfolds (or has unfolded) through an increased awareness *within* artistic practices of artistic practices as medium-specific. So, for instance, classical

¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Engl. transl. by Thomas Malcolm Knox, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, 2 vols, vol. I, p. 31.

² Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 11.

³ So, this is not to say that there are not other ongoing critical ‘needs’ for sensuous, representational art – only that these needs are now less essential to our deepest efforts at self-understanding, what Hegel calls “the deepest interests of mankind, and the most comprehensive truths of the spirit [Geist]”, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 7. For more on this point, see, as a start, the discussions of Hegel – and the debates over this pronouncement – in Dieter Heinrich, “Art and Philosophy of Art Today: Reflections with Reference to Hegel”, in *New Perspectives in German Literary Criticism*, eds Richard E. Amacher and Victor Lange, Engl. transl. by David Henry Wilson *et al.*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979, pp. 107-33; Arthur Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, especially pp. 81-115; Stephen Houlgate, “Hegel and the ‘End’ of Art”, *Owl of Minerva*, 29:1 (1997), pp. 1-19; Gregg Horowitz, *Sustaining Loss: Art and Mournful Life*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001; Eva Geulen, *The End of Art: Readings in a Rumor After Hegel*, Engl. transl. by James McFarland, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2006, especially Chapter 2.

architecture manifests a higher awareness of its own status as architecture – of itself as a freestanding, artificial, material construction – than does symbolic architecture. "The peculiarity of Greek architecture", writes Hegel in a typical formulation, is that by fluting and other means "it gives shape to [...] supporting *as such* and therefore employs the column as the fundamental element in the purposiveness of architecture"⁴. Similarly, as Robert Pippin has convincingly argued, the deepening self-reflexivity of modernist and abstract painting – paintings about painting as such – might be understood to fall within the purview of the overall narrative that Hegel offers⁵. Perhaps the easiest way to see the point here is to consider how artworks – once they no longer need to be about this or that content 'out there' (a material purpose, an animal quarry, a 'god', a bit of shared history) – are freed up to determine *for themselves* their own content. And this 'freeing up' is perhaps most clearly manifested when artworks start to be about themselves. Self-reflexive artworks and practices undeniably assert the autonomy of human artistry.

Now – to move closer to our topic here – thinking along these lines also led Hegel himself, at the end of his *Lectures on Fine Art*, to consider dramatic poetry as "the highest stage of poetry and of art generally" because "in contrast to the other perceptible materials, stone, wood, color and notes, speech is alone the element worthy of the expression of spirit"⁶. Dramatic poetry is, for Hegel, inherently more self-reflexive than sculpture, painting or architecture because its 'medium' – namely, speech – is from the start 'spiritual', human, de-naturalized. Hence, drama is already freer than the other arts when it comes to choosing its content.

A quick way of grasping the stakes of Hegel's high regard for dramatic poetry is to recall his idiosyncratic (for a German writer of his period) disinterest in natural beauty, his assertion that "the beauty

⁴ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. II, p. 666, my emphasis.

⁵ I realize, of course, that I am skipping over a number of important questions – for example, those having to do with the differences between the fates of classical and romantic art in Hegel's account. But I think my overall point about de-naturalization as self-reflexivity can stand, for the moment, without tackling those questions. On this point, I am following Robert Pippin, "What Was Abstract Art? (From the Point of View of Hegel)", *Critical Inquiry*, 29 (August 2002), pp. 1-24.

⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Dramatic Poetry", in *Philosophers on Shakespeare*, ed. Paul A. Kottman, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 57.

of art is *higher* than nature”⁷. (Recall, for instance, Hegel’s blunt declaration that in landscape painting the “work of the spirit acquires a higher rank than the mere natural landscape”; or, similarly, his provocative assertion that Titian, Dürer and others have painted portraits that are “more like the individual than the actual individual himself”⁸.) Only in being transformed artistically do natural materials (stone, sound, color and so on) acquire a specific meaning for us⁹. In Hegel’s view, nature and natural materials are in and of themselves – as the philosopher of history, Hayden White once quipped to me, as we gazed upon a choice piece of California real estate – boring, lacking a plot¹⁰. Northrop Frye expressed the same thought about drama when he wrote that dramatic poetry fully “belongs to the world man constructs, not to the [natural] world he sees; to his home, not his environment”¹¹.

If artistic practices are medium-specific modes of self-understanding, goes the thinking here, then what medium could be more adequate to our reflexive self-understanding than that which, so to speak, we know to be ‘ours’ from the get-go? Not elements ripped from an indifferent domain of nature (sound, color, hard materials like stone or marble), in other words – but rather what Giambattista Vico described in terms of “poetic wisdom”: elements of culture and history, words and deeds, social principles and passionate aims, conflicts between individual characters. Because such elements are the ‘stuff’ of poetry, and in a special way of dramatic poetry, to work in the dramatic arts entails a degree of self-awareness (as a historical being or ‘people’) that is probably missing, say, from most symbolic sculpture.

⁷ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 2. On this point see Pippin, “What Was Abstract Art?”, p. 9.

⁸ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 29; vol. II, pp. 866-67.

⁹ At a minimum, a bit of ‘nature-wrought-into-art’ expresses the capacity of stone, sound or color to transmit meaning for a particular community and its practices. Art, as Hegel puts it, creates a reality that is “besouled” [“für sich beseelt”] – by which, as Robert Pippin aptly states, Hegel does not mean that human freedom re-enchants the world through artistic means but rather that art “elevates us above the need for [the] enchantment [of the natural world]”. See Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. II, p. 834; and Pippin, “What Was Abstract Art?”, p. 8.

¹⁰ Hegel’s way of putting it is to say that nature is “spiritless”.

¹¹ Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination*, Toronto, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1963, p. 8.

Moreover – à propos of our topic here – we will do well to remember not only that Hegel ranks dramatic poetry as the highest (the most prevalently spiritual) artistic practice, but also the fact that he thought among modern dramatists “you will scarcely find any [...] who can be compared with Shakespeare”¹².

And so, although Hegel does not say so explicitly, we can nevertheless infer – from the perspective of my highly condensed account here – that Shakespeare’s pre-eminence in Hegel’s account of the history of human artistic development should have something to do with Shakespeare’s heightened degree of self-reflexivity, his dramatic presentation of drama *as such* and of the sort of self-understanding it affords¹³. Or, at least, I want to assert such an inference as my opening gambit in this short essay.

2.

Now, of course self-reflexivity (or self-referential theatricality) abounds in other pre- or non-Shakespearean dramatic works and practices – for example, in the formal composition of Chorus in Greek Tragedy, or the self-referential character of gestures and costumes in Japanese Noh, Kyogen or Kabuki. (Not to mention in the architectonics and choreographic practices of various types of world drama, whether or not such dramas are ‘scripted’.) So, too – to scoot closer to Shakespeare’s original context – it is by now a scholarly truism to note that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English drama was comprised of a set of highly self-conscious artistic practices, in which a dramatic work’s standing as ‘theater’ was reflexively presented in

¹² Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. II, p. 1228.

¹³ Shakespeare’s pre-eminence in Hegel’s account – the fact, for instance, that Hegel’s discussion of Shakespeare comes at the culmination of his *Lectures on Fine Art* – would, of course, require some qualification. Hegel also seems to claim that Greek art is more fulfilled *as art* than modern art, and his high regard for Sophocles seems of a piece with that view. “There is”, as Robert Pippin notes, however, “another sense in which he claims that the ethical life behind Shakespeare’s presentation and the kind of self-awareness visible in Hamlet, say, does represent an advance or moment of progress”, Robert Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 84, note 12. See, further, the discussion of Hegel and Shakespeare in Henry and Anne Paolucci, *Hegelian Literary Perspectives*, Smyrna, Del., Griffon House, rpt. 2002.

both the composition and performance itself¹⁴. In light of all this, the highly self-conscious nature of so much Shakespearean drama – the play-within-the play of *Hamlet*, the Chorus of *Henry V*, Rosalind's epilogue in *As You Like It* and so forth – can seem, simply, of a piece with so much self-awareness in the dramatic practices of various periods and regions, above all his own native context.

At the same time, one of the distinguishing features of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European dramatic practices – and, especially, of Shakespeare's work – is a double theatrical self-awareness: namely, a certain *historical* self-awareness of their own presentation of theatrical self-reflexivity as such vis-à-vis earlier self-reflexive dramatic practices, in addition to self-referentiality vis-à-vis their own works.

In other words, early modern European (English but also Spanish, French and Italian) dramatists not only presented and composed dramas that referred back to themselves as such; they also showed a keen awareness of earlier dramatic practices *as having been self-reflexive and self-aware*, as well as of the metaphorical status of theatrical space (especially with regard to the image of the 'world stage' or *theatrum mundi*) in classical antiquity and beyond – and they were, furthermore, particularly adept at invoking an awareness of this history *as* a particular form of self-reflexive theater¹⁵.

When, for example, at the outset of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1596), Antonio sighs "I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano / A stage, where every man must play a part, / And mine a sad one" (*The Merchant of Venice*, I.i.77-79), he is manifesting not only an immediate reflection on the 'present' context of the utterance, but also a refined self-awareness of a long and varied history of comparing the world to the stage.

¹⁴ The scholarship that treats this topic is extensive. A particularly astute, philosophically informed place to start is Anne Barton's classic study, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play*, New York, Greenwood, rpt. 1977. Barton, illustratively, points out that, with very few exceptions, the discursive comparison of the world with the stage is not uttered in what we might call an explicitly dramatic context until the middle of the sixteenth century, when the theater began to acquire its modern, secularized form in London. She lists moments from Greek New Comedy and the Roman comedies of Plautus, which were among the first to be rediscovered by the early English dramatists, as exceptions to this. See pp. 60-61.

¹⁵ There would be much more to say about Spanish, Italian or French dramas in this regard. See, as only a start, Louise George Clubb's study of theatregrams in *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989.

Elsewhere, I have argued that what distinguishes the early modern English theater (and above all Shakespeare) in this regard is the way in which Shakespearean drama erodes the representational difference between 'world' and 'stage', purposefully accomplishing a 'literalization' of what had been an ancient, philosophical metaphor¹⁶.

Here, however, I would like to take a different approach by suggesting that the self-reflexivity of Shakespearean drama manifests a lessening need for the material-site-specific context of the playhouse, for the concrete practice of what we now call 'theatricality' – to the point of accomplishing a self-dissolution of drama as a sensuous, material representational practice¹⁷. By using scare quotes, I mean to leave open the possibility that what I am about to say does not pertain exclusively to Shakespeare – that it expresses something about modernist drama since, at least, the early modern period – though I will try to say why I think it does pertain to Shakespeare in a special way.

Such a claim is bound to raise the hackles of (or, more likely these days, to simply be ignored by) cultural-materialist scholars of early modern drama – not to mention those invested in the ongoing practical work of staging Shakespeare's plays. Which is to say, also, that this claim will need further explaining and defending. But, before I begin the explanation and defense, let me once again try to state the thesis in the plainest terms possible: the self-reflexive character of Shakespearean drama – both its manifest awareness of past, self-reflective dramatic practices *and* its own self-referential character (the so-called 'meta-theatricality' of Shakespeare) – portends the historical self-dissolution of drama as a sensuous, representational artistic practice.

Even more plainly: Shakespeare – perhaps the world's pre-eminent dramatist – stages, from within his drama, the self-dissolution of our *need* for the sensuous, material representation of human actions

¹⁶ See the "Epilogue: The World Stage" of Paul A. Kottman, *A Politics of the Scene*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2008.

¹⁷ By 'theatricality' I mean what Henry Turner has described as "the clusters of techniques, objects, bodies, conventions, signs, and other significant elements that characterized early modern performance and that extended beyond the public theaters to public entertainments and spectacles of all types, from the Tudor period to the Restoration". I am citing from his remarks on the occasion of a conference held at Rutgers University in December 2011 entitled "Early Modern Theatricality in the 21st Century"; see <http://earlymoderntheatricality.com>.

in order to understand ourselves as actors, as free self-determining agents in the world¹⁸.

Put yet another way: the depiction of our lessening need for sensuous representational drama becomes, itself, a primary task of Shakespearean drama – as if being a dramatist, for Shakespeare, means making the historical disappearance of the conditions under which traditional (sensuous, representational) forms of drama matter into the very stuff of a dramatic work.

Moreover, *this* kind of dramatic self-reflexivity demands something not required, I think, of analogous modernist movements in the other arts – the abstract expressionism of Pollock, say, or the music of John Cage – inasmuch as the Shakespearean self-dissolution of drama cannot ‘fall back’ on its own sensuous medium (paint, canvas, instrument) in order to thematize its own expressive material capacities. Because speaking and doing – the ‘material’ of drama – is already de-naturalized, Shakespeare cannot expose the expressive capacities of speech and action in the same way that Pollack can drip paint, or that Cage can pluck a piano string. Part of my effort here, then, is also to suggest that Shakespearean drama offers an alternative future for modernism to the one presented in recent philosophical work on modernist painting¹⁹. Precisely because Shakespeare’s artistic hori-

¹⁸ Again, this does not mean that we now have no need for drama, Shakespearean or other – just that this need is no longer deeply essential to our own self-understanding as free and self-determining. I would even suggest that Shakespeare’s pre-eminence among modern dramatists – for Hegel, for German philosophy and for most of us – is connected to his ‘modernist’ reflexivity as an artist, to the force of artistic response to the challenge of making art after its ‘highest’ vocation has ended. I realize, of course, that stating matters thus might seem anachronistic – given that Hegel’s pronouncement postdates Shakespeare by more than two centuries. But given the extent to which Hegel himself grappled with what he himself called Shakespeare’s modernity, from his earliest writings to his Berlin lectures on art, there is certainly a basis for considering Shakespeare as a necessary touchstone for later developments in Hegel’s aesthetic philosophy. (Incidentally, by ‘earliest writings’, I mean not only the remarks on Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* from Hegel’s “Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” but also the very earliest document of Hegel’s to have come down to us – a ‘rewriting’ of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, composed when Hegel was a teenager.)

¹⁹ I am thinking of accounts of modernist painting that, albeit in different and even diverging ways, defend a future for modernist painting on the basis of art’s reflection on its material medium. See, as two different instances of this, the defenses of painting and modernist art given by Yves-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1990, especially pp. 229-44; and Jay M. Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2006.

zons are less limited than other modernist movements – his dramatic work is not nearly as restricted (not nearly as precious, some might say) as Cage's or Pollock's – it is to Shakespeare's radical modernism that we might turn to find a more capacious future for art (and, hence, for philosophical reflection on art) beyond both its sensuous and its representational form.

These are, at any rate, my primary arguments here.

3.

Let me now proceed, first, by discussing the dissolution of sensuousness in drama – the materiality of its being performed for eyes and ears – before turning, second, to the dissolution of its representational, mimetic character in Shakespeare.

Perhaps the simplest way to begin defending my claim with regard to the self-dissolution of sensuous materiality in drama is by noting that, since at least Aristotle's *Poetics*, dramatic works have been understood to be graspable apart from – at a minimum – the sensuousness of their material performance. Here we can recall, for instance, Aristotle's well-known assertion that plot (*mythos*), rather than diction or spectacle (*opsis*), is the soul of tragedy – and that, furthermore, "the plot [of a tragedy] should be so structured that, even without seeing it performed, the person [...] experiences horror and pity at what comes about"²⁰. For Aristotle, tragedies are gripping quite apart from their reliance on sensuous representation – indeed, for the author of the *Poetics*, it is enough to recall to mind a tragic *mythos* in order to be moved by it.

If the thought that dramas matter – grip us, move us, offer an occasion for self-understanding and reflection – independent of their material performance is not new, then of course we still need to consider *why*, after all, Greek tragedies were performed in such a highly ritualized, formalized, choreographed manner in such precise, concrete, specially constructed settings. Aristotle may have thought the performance relatively unnecessary with respect to the plot Sophocles composed; but, obviously, Sophocles himself had written for the

²⁰ See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1453b1-4, Engl. transl. by Stephen Halliwell, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Greek stage and its peculiar material conventions. And if the fifth-century BCE Athenians felt a *need* for the sensuous representation of tragedies (masks, choruses, ritualized festivals and so on) then this deep need still requires explaining in the context of my claim about Shakespeare – if, that is, we are going to understand what it means that Shakespeare stages the self-dissolution of our ‘highest need’ for the sensuous representation of human actions.

At the risk of oversimplification – and just for the sake of generating the discussion – my rough and ready understanding of the deep Athenian need for the sensuous representation of tragedies goes like this. Unlike epic, which offered occasions for self-understanding (of human life, of our place with respect to nature, of our natality and mortality and so forth) through idealized uttered representations of *past* actions – hence, the central role famously played by Mnemosyne and her daughters the Muses in the performance of Homeric epic – tragedy expanded occasions for self-understanding by bringing us ‘into the presence’ of these same idealized representations, so that we might watch the protagonists suffer before our eyes (not just our ears) in the theater. Hence, these heroes, legends or divinities had to appear not only in the material form of the audible ‘once upon a time’ as in Homer, but also in the flesh, ‘here and now’, before us: history made sensuously present because both audible and visible.

Of course, that we are still dealing with a historical world that could understand itself only in heroic terms is manifest in the idealized aesthetic portrayal of the tragic mask, not to mention in the ritualized structure of the tragic festival itself. In other words, because the tragic hero ‘represented’ shared concerns and occasioned new collective self-understandings on the part of the Athenians (as Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet have so elegantly demonstrated), an idealized material representation of the hero on stage was both possible and required. This social-historical need for the particular formal innovations of classical drama at the sensuous, material level can thus be explained by a continued dependence on normative idealized representations of human life (namely, ‘tragic-heroic figures’) coupled with the expansion of that representation from the imagistic and narrative into the ‘here and now’ of the stage and its scenic, spatial-temporal representation of actions.

But – and this is the turn that leads to Aristotle’s insight – once dramas were actually performed in Athens, *once tragedy became a self-*

consciously ritual activity, it became clear that what was being sensuously represented were not only the idealized representations of human life (characters like Oedipus, say, to stick with Aristotle's favorite example) but the *actions themselves* of these figures – their words, their gestures, their individual deeds. And furthermore, once it became clear that tragedies represented human *actions* – that tragedies were sensuous representations of an action and its consequences for the agent and his world (*mimeseos praxis* to use Aristotle's famous definition of tragedy)²¹ – then the specific power of drama with respect to the other arts (image, narrative, dance) was seen to lie, significantly, *not* in its status as sensuous performance (*mousike*) but rather in its capacity to yield understanding about what it is for human beings to act, a philosophical understanding in light of which the poetic mimesis of action becomes philosophically defensible, as in Aristotle's own account. (That tragic drama – as the representation of action – yields a special understanding not available elsewhere was, of course, central to Aristotle's defense of tragedy in the face of Plato's criticism of tragic drama. Note: Aristotle did not defend tragedy as sensuous presentation – *mousike* – against Plato's attack; his defense of tragedy lay in his view of tragedy as yielding an understanding of an action in light of its unintended consequences.)

And once it was recognized that the chief accomplishment of the sensuous performance was, at bottom, a new understanding of human *praxis* through its mimetic representation, the tragic drama ended up *by means of its ritualized sensuous performance* obviating – in Aristotle's own view – the need for that very sensuous performance. That this obviation was not only Aristotle's idiosyncratic opinion is, of course, borne out by the historical fact that performances of tragic dramas were well on the wane in Athens by the time Aristotle composed the *Poetics*.

In light of all this, it could be said that the self-dissolution of the *sensuous* material performance of drama belongs, already, to its classical milieu as a formal artistic practice.

Classical drama *lends itself to this self-dissolution* inasmuch as it succeeds in bringing what it represents – human actions – to the understanding. The understanding, as it were, takes over for our eyes

²¹ *Mimeseos* is the genitive of *mimesis*, indicating that the representation 'belongs' to the action, not the reverse.

and ears – hence, again, Aristotle’s claims about the ability of a tragic *mythos* to move us independent of its sensuous performance.

The same self-dissolution does not, I would argue, apply to the other arts in their classical forms: epic narrative still requires the spoken word if it is to represent *the past* (that is, the temporal distance between the speaker and that of which he speaks) – so the fate of epic narration is, as Walter Benjamin aptly suggested, tied to a tradition in which the physical act of speaking is capable of transmitting historical experience²². Similarly, the performance of music obviously requires the hearing of sound; images require light and surfaces²³. Drama alone among the classical fine arts emerges as a practice that tends toward self-dissolution because the medium of its artifice – the ‘here and now’ performance of human words and deeds – invariably evacuates the ‘here and now’, leaving behind only an *ex post facto* practical understanding of the deeds that have been represented²⁴. (It would be important to consider drama’s special significance for Greek philosophy’s own self-authorization in light of drama’s distinctiveness in this regard.)

So, by sensuously representing human beings in action, drama obviates the need for the sensuousness of that very representation. *This obviation is nothing less than the temporality of the performance of drama itself* – its resistance to sensuous reification, its dependence on a shared ‘here and now’ context, its inevitable vanishing at the ‘end’ of the play, its iterability, its retrospective fulfillment in the understanding or collective judgment (*phronesis*) that the performance occasions²⁵. Drama is intrinsically self-dissolving as a sensuous practice

²² Cf. Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller”, in *Selected Writings*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2002, vol. III.

²³ Unless, of course, one sees in the Pythagorean (or Platonic) conception of music as an invisible *harmonia* (a ‘harmony of the spheres’) a similar ‘philosophical’ self-dissolution of the sensuousness of music. See the discussion in Adriana Cavarero, “The Harmony of the Spheres”, in *For More than One Voice*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005. But here philosophy would silence music from the outside, in mute opposition to its sonority – whereas I am arguing, pace Aristotle, that drama is self-dissolving and this historical self-dissolution is noted by, but not enacted by, philosophy.

²⁴ Although I do not have the space to defend the exclusion of dance in this context, I am agreeing with Hegel, and more or less for the reasons he provides in the *Lectures on Fine Art*, that dance does not rise to the same level as music and drama among the so-called performing arts.

²⁵ It is this last element, especially, that distinguishes the performance of spoken drama from the acoustics of music in classical accounts like Aristotle’s.

– both as a historical-artistic practice and at the level of each individual performance.

4.

The first remnant of this dissolution of the sensuous performance of drama would seem to be the stand-alone dramatic 'work' or poetic product that survives – that has a life beyond – its individual performances. In the ancient world, we need only think of the way in which Aristotle's notion of a poetic product – namely, the *mythos* that the poet fabricates – became the locus of interest, exerting an immense influence over literary history and the treatment of uniquely literary works. For modern Shakespeareans, this remnant is most obviously the 'script' or literary text that stands at the center of the English canon – although corollary remnants can be found in the way that certain performances, once recorded or otherwise reified, can come to stand as 'artworks' in their own right.

So, at first blush, it would appear that the self-dissolution of the sensuous performance does not necessarily entail the dissolution of the dramatic work as *representation* – as belonging, say, to an aesthetic domain of art-objects set apart from the 'real life' of subjects. (Indeed, for Aristotle, the *mythos* – the imitation of a significant action – was more fundamentally mimetic than was the sensuousness of the optics or the diction. And, working under the long shadow cast by Aristotle, scholars in Literature departments have long been studying the texts of Shakespeare's plays as aesthetic, textual artifacts, free from their sensuous performance as drama.) In short, it would appear that the representational character of drama has proven more durable and essential than its sensuousness as visible or audible performance – and, more importantly, has proven that drama can survive as poetic *representation* without needing its sensuous context in dramatic practices.

On closer inspection, however, we should see that the mimetic-representational or aesthetic status of the dramatic-poetic work is tightly bound up with the 'distance' between spectacle and spectator that belongs to the sensuous performance of representational works of drama – whether of Attic tragedy or Shakespeare or other dramatists. The sensuous character of the performance – hearing and seeing of actors in a 'here and now' context – corresponds to the way

the dramatic work comes to be perceived as a mimetic or aesthetic work. I sensuously perceive the performer and the role *as performer and role* – I sensuously experience the drama *as dramatic art*, in other words – inasmuch as I also recognize *through the sensuous performance* that I am watching a mimetic performance (a performer's representation of Hamlet the aesthetic creation, not Hamlet himself²⁶). In short, it turns out not to be so clear that a dramatic work (as distinct, say, from a novelistic or lyric or narrative work) would ever have been grasped as mimetic (as aesthetic) were it not sensuously performed – even as, at the same time, the 'literary-mimetic-aesthetic' status of the dramatic work (as plot, as script, as text) springs from the perception of its having an existence *apart from* its sensuous presentation before an audience.

So we are left with a kind of chiasmus with respect to the sensuous, representational status of drama – such that the sensuous performance of a dramatic work continues, even after the classical era, to be bound up with its status as a mimetic artwork, and vice-versa. If the dramatic work were not reifiable as a representational artwork (a plot, a story, a script) – as belonging to the domain of aesthetics – then nothing would assure us that what we watch is 'just a fiction' and not really history itself unfolding before our eyes. At the same time, without the sensuous experience of watching something we take to be somehow unreal, we would probably have no concept of a reified dramatic artwork²⁷.

Here, then, we trip upon the traditional (and thorny) question of what we are doing when we ritually enact a dramatic work as *representational*, as an aesthetic object, that stands apart from our own actions and lives. (Remember, for instance, Plato's worry – in the

²⁶ Recall that, for Aristotle, the sensuous perception of a mimetic work *as mimetic* requires and entails perceiving the sensuous material as something more than sensuous material; namely, perceiving that it is mimetic. Hence, the 'pleasure' afforded in understanding that a given sensuous presentation is mimetic is different from the pleasure taken in the mere sensuousness itself (pretty colors or sounds). Think of the pleasure taken by very young children in 'seeing' that yellow and brown combine to represent a giraffe, rather than present just the prettiness of yellow and brown.

²⁷ We might still, of course, have the concept of a literary or poetic document or text, or of some other aesthetic reification – but it would not be a work of *drama*, a specifically *dramatic* artwork. For a fuller discussion of this same problem, see chapter 6, "Memory, Mimesis, Tragedy: The Scene Before Philosophy", of my *A Politics of the Scene*.

tenth book of the *Republic* – that tragedies are not so distant from us after all, that they affectively worm their way into our psychic and somatic lives²⁸. Plato had a point, after all: if we were to go through life weeping and grieving the way we do when we watch tragedies, then our capacity to carry out ordinary, desirable lives would be diminished. It was in part to respond to Plato's worry that Aristotle insisted on the significance of tragic drama as *mimetic* – inasmuch as tragedy might thereby afford an experience that in 'real life' would be impossible and hence provide a necessary outlet for feelings and affects that cannot be, and ought not be, felt in the same way in 'real life'²⁹.) Aristotle's answer to this question, at any rate, is well known: because we *need* feelings of fear and pity in order to understand our social or existential predicament we need a 'safe place' (the theater) to experience these feelings without having to 'really' go through the predicaments themselves. The relief of *catharsis* is feeling fear and pity without having to suffer their empirical consequences, and without having to feel 'real' shame for feeling the way we do.

All of these familiar Aristotelian thoughts can also be gathered up as follows: the sensuous performance of a representational work before an audience – spectators watching or hearing actors perform a drama on stage (or screen) – is precisely what *assures* us of the 'safe' distance between the representation and what is represented. Inasmuch as we see and hear actors act a drama, to invoke Stanley Cavell's framing of the same problem, we feel free not to intervene – we feel assured that what we are seeing and watching is not the thing itself, and therefore requires no active participation on our part³⁰.

So, our sensuous perception of the drama as drama goes hand in hand with our grasp of the drama as *mimetic* or *representational*. It turns out that the two cannot be separated. Hence, the sensuous self-dissolution of the theater – to which, as I have already suggest-

²⁸ Remember that Plato's real concern with tragedy was not just part of his general worry about mimetic artists, but a specific concern about tragedy's capacity to exacerbate grief, psychic pain and its attendant displays.

²⁹ I am thinking, for instance, of Aristotle's famous observation that we take pleasure in seeing represented in tragedies that which would cause pain were it seen in real life.

³⁰ See Cavell's discussion of Aristotle as offering a theory of tragedy that establishes the aesthetic domain as "a context in which I am to do nothing", Stanley Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love", in *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* [1987], Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 91.

ed, Aristotle and the classical theater already pointed – necessarily begs as well the question of the fate of drama as representational or aesthetic.

5.

This brings me to the problem that will occupy me through the rest of this essay. If, as I am arguing, the fate of drama as *sensuous performance* is necessarily tied to the fate of drama as *mimetic* – that is, to the representation of actions that are safely at a distance from the rest of us – then the self-dissolution of drama as sensuous performance (which I described in section 3 above) ought to entail, or come to be seen as, a self-dissolution of drama as mimetic.

I want to propose that we regard Shakespeare's drama as bearing out this inevitability.

Before defending this proposition, a few clarifications must be made to avoid confusion. First, let me make clear that I am discussing the fate of *drama* as it appears in Shakespeare. (Inasmuch as Shakespeare's plays are understood to constitute a *literary-aesthetic* artifact – poetry or narrative, say – the question of Shakespeare's relation to the fate of dramatic practices simply gets shoved to the side, or begged, without being adequately addressed. As if Shakespeare's status as literary-aesthetic artifact secretly required, as its disavowed precondition, that Shakespeare's role in the fate of dramatic practices not be seen as mattering to the achievement of that status³¹.)

Second, and to repeat a point I made earlier, I am not suggesting that we no longer (or no longer should) engage in the sensuous representation of dramatic works after Shakespeare. Rather, I am suggesting that Shakespeare's drama reveals – that Shakespeare depicts, from within the practice of dramatic art – our diminishing need for the sensuous, representational practice of drama as an essential mode of our collective self-understanding. (Clearly, we still 'need' to perform Shakespeare for other perfectly valid educational, cultur-

³¹ This disavowal has been the topic of probing work done by William B. Worthen in *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002; *Print and the Poetics of Modern Drama*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006; and *Drama Between Poetry and Performance*, New York, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

al, economic, personal or professional reasons, and I do not wish to claim otherwise³².)

Let me now build outward from this last point. I argued at the outset that we might understand Shakespeare's place in the history of dramatic practices – and in the history of artistic practices generally – in light of the self-reflexive character of his drama: both Shakespeare's historical reflection on prior dramatic practices (including, perhaps especially, his own) and the self-referential character of his individual works, with respect to their own portrayal of themselves as 'dramatic'. I now want to try to explain both why and how the special self-reflexive character of Shakespearean drama shows – from inside its own dramatic practices – the dissolution of our need for sensuous, representational drama.

First, the 'why'. And here I need to simply to make an assertion: drama becomes more self-reflexive the more it realizes that it cannot adequately capture or express an idealized picture of any particular aspect of human-historical experience (let alone of our existence as a whole).

The less that the ambition of furnishing an idealized representation of some feature of human existence is felt to drive the making of a drama, the more that drama is able to – the more it *must* (however inadequately) – reflect on its own status as a dramatic work, in light of those diminished idealizing ambitions. Conversely, the more that a dramatic practice understands itself to aspire to the idealized representation of some fundamental aspect of human experience – the way, say, that death is represented in *Oedipus at Colonus*, or sexual obsession in *Antony and Cleopatra* – the less that drama will be able to reflect explicitly on its own status as drama, on its own idealizing ambitions. In short: *if no idealized dramatic representation can capture or express a shared feature of human existence, then the task of drama must involve expressively reflecting on its failure to offer such an idealized representation.*

³² For instance, I think we continue to 'need' Shakespeare (or the theater generally) to do important work for, and by, the imagination (what the Chorus in *Henry V* calls our "imaginary forces"). I am thinking, especially, of the way in which reading or performing Shakespeare can, from a young age, 'educate the imagination' (to use Northrop Frye's felicitous phrase) or cultivate emotional sensibility to, and practical judgments about, intractably difficult human predicaments. This is a deeply important cultural need, surely, and one that Shakespeare and great literature meet better, probably, than any other human product.

Corollary to this suggestion is the following: self-reflexivity in drama (and in artistic practices generally) is a reflection on the prior ambition of art to furnish an adequate or idealized picture of some aspect of human life; self-reflexive art thus presupposes that prior ambition – and the failure to achieve it – as critical to its own capacity for self-reflection, and not just as a mistake to be disowned. (Hence: Shakespeare's own attempts at representing something fundamental in human existence – for instance, over-riding passions, like murderousness in *Othello*, sexual obsession in *Antony and Cleopatra*, ambition in *Macbeth* – are part and parcel of what I am calling his self-reflexive dramatic practice; even though, by the same token, these idealizing plays or moments are among his least self-reflexively dramatic.)

A simpler way of putting all this is to note that modern drama knows, less and less, just what exactly it is supposed to depict or represent, and why. If Aeschylus and Sophocles had, at least, some sense of what the appropriate purview of tragedy was – the relation between family life and city life, or the struggle between ancient religious beliefs and (then) contemporary political values – then Shakespeare and modern dramatists have far fewer productive limitations. So, even though Shakespeare of course continued to represent historically significant figures (Princes, Kings, Generals) as well as apparently 'universal' concerns (death, family life, sexual desire) he nevertheless leaves us with no sense that he knew, finally, just what exactly he was supposed to show us about any of these things. And this is why, after all, we see Shakespeare as possessed (as *needing* to be possessed) of far more imaginative energy than, say, Sophocles. Indeed, Shakespeare continually expands his dramatic vision to include whores, merchants, beggars, children, spirits and so on in a seemingly infinite variety of worldly contexts – to the point that we (modern directors and actors) must also imaginatively *choose* how, where and in what way to perform multifarious 'Shakespearean' works which seem suitable to so many domains and, hence, representative of no single, particular viewpoint on human life.

All of which is to say that Shakespeare did not regard being a dramatist as an activity that could be fixed or governed by taking for granted what a drama should do, should depict, should accomplish. Instead, he seemed to regard the task of drama – as Johann Gottfried Herder observed about Shakespeare over two hundred years ago – to involve figuring out what, exactly, drama should or could do. Hence,

the sense of ongoing revisions in Shakespeare – the feeling that *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* re-visit *Othello* and *King Lear*; that each new comedy is a self-critical vision of its predecessor. Think, too, of the way that Hamlet's inability to furnish an answer to his own rhetorical question – "What is Hecuba to him, or he to her, / That he should weep for her?" (II.ii.494-95) – necessitates and prompts Hamlet's reflection not on his or our connection to the events of the *Iliad*, but on the dramatically self-reflexive question of whether the sensuous performance of a mimetic action can (still) grip an audience in a meaningful way. In sum: Shakespeare challenges us to understand drama – *his* drama – not as responding to given facts of human existence (desire, or mortality) or to a historical situation (Henry V's invasion of France, or the fate of the Roman republic), but as responding to the fact that *there are no givens that govern our dramatic activity, and hence the task of drama must be in part to come to terms with our self-determination, with our relative freedom from given authorities that might determine or make sense of what we do and say with one another.*

The special self-reflexivity of Shakespearean drama is, under this light, an expression of the self-determining, self-authorizing character of our experience as subjects – as human beings who feel 'freed' from the determinacy of nature and history. If we sense that Shakespeare represents us, then, it is because he does not simply 'represent' our lives; he refuses to capture or offer an idealized version of (modern) human beings. He presents us to ourselves – our self-determination as actors in the world – through the erosion of a mediating representational distance between the play and that which it depicts³³.

6.

How, then, does the special self-reflexive character of Shakespearean drama show – from inside its own dramatic practices – the dissolution of our need for sensuous, representational drama?

Here one could continue to invoke a great many moments from the Shakespearean corpus. But because its conclusion now seems to

³³ For more on the dissolution of mimetic distance in Shakespeare, see my *Tragic Conditions in Shakespeare: Disinheriting the Globe*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009, especially pp. 18-20.

us indicative of Shakespeare's (the artist's) own self-reflexive 'leave-taking' of drama – let me close with a few words about *The Tempest* (1610-11), in light of what I have said in the previous five sections of this essay. (By 'leave-taking' I do not at all mean to imply that Shakespeare-the-artist meant to leave drama or art *behind*; rather, as I hope I have been making clear throughout, I see a self-dissolution of drama that is accomplished from *within* and *by* Shakespearean drama. I see this self-dissolution at work in virtually the entire Shakespearean corpus, and so I see *The Tempest* not as closing or transcending drama, but as a culminating achievement of Shakespeare's dramatic self-reflexivity – his drama's attempt at self-transcendence from within its own sphere, to borrow Hegel's turn of phrase³⁴.)

In the first section, recall, I invoked Hegel's claim about the way in which the history of art presents an ongoing and increasing de-naturalization or 'spiritualization' of our self-understanding. If Hegel is right, then we are less and less dependent upon – less needful of – artistic expressions that work with the given-ness of 'natural' or sensible media in order to understand ourselves, and our world. Does not Prospero's 'art' – not simply as a fictional device (since, I want to claim, Prospero is not simply a fictional character) but also as a reflective presentation of the dramatic arts – express this de-naturalization, the denial of nature's claims upon us? And does not the tempest itself depict this humanization or 'spiritualization' (to use Hegel's parlance) of the seeming indifference of nature's elements – wind, water and air? Recall Prospero's own words:

I have bedimm'd
The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd vault
Set roaring war: to the dread rattling thunder
Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
With his own bolt; the strong-bas'd promontory
Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck'd up
The pine and cedar: graves at my command
Have wak'd their sleepers, op'd forth, and let 'em forth
By my so potent Art. (*The Tempest*, V.i.41-50)

³⁴ Hegel predicted that post-Romantic art would entail "the self-transcendence of art but within its own sphere and in the form of art itself", *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 80 (cited in Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity*, p. 306). As I indicated in note 18 above, I see Shakespeare as post-Romantic in Hegel's sense – and I tend to think that Hegel himself saw Shakespeare as his contemporary, too.

Moreover, Shakespeare's dramatic interest – I mean, his interest in Prospero's 'art' and in the achievement of our de-naturalization as a dramatically motivational predicament – lies in the manifestly social-historical (human) consequences of this 'art', in the 'spiritual' stakes of our de-naturalization. As if the very experience of natural elements – the storm, the waves – was to be regarded as an artistic accomplishment.

At any rate, the significance of Prospero's art is obviously not to be found in the frothy waves he whips up but – as Miranda, and the rest of us find out – in the stirring social consequences that follow upon the roaring storm. Indeed, even those on the ship feel that their fate lies not in the sublime indifference of the roaring waves to the King's command, but in the autonomous capacities of their own hands – inebriated as they are ("We are merely cheated of our lives by drunkards", I.i.55).

Second, the unraveling of art's purpose requires, from Prospero, a highly self-aware choreography of happenings on the island: individuals are brought into carefully arranged contact, as if on cue (Miranda and Ferdinand); the most refined spectacular techniques of the era (masques and so forth) are pressed into the service of filling the island with sights and sounds – spirits, trances, somnolence, charms – so that we might see others in the grip of the same sensuous display that commands our attention.

Why this exhibition of sensuousness 'theatricality'? It is difficult not to see these displays as self-reflexively presenting the sensuous capacities of drama in order to show – importantly – the relative freedom of drama with respect to other material media. Drama can *contain* music without being reducible to a musical performance, can *contain* dance without being confused with an occasion to move one's body about, can *contain* spectacles of all sorts without being thereby reducible to mere show. Moreover, drama can purposefully *show* this containment – and, hence, supersession – of other media as essential to its *own* specifically expressive power. Which is, of course, just what Prospero demonstrates. And all of this – whatever else it might mean in the context of *The Tempest* (and it is not at all clear what *else* the demonstrations from Act IV, scene i are 'about') – can be taken as a self-conscious presentation of various components of dramatic practices that would normally escape our special attention, that we might otherwise pass over as simply part

of the proceedings at a playhouse. Prospero, however, does not let us pass over these elements un-attentively – “No tongue! all eyes! be silent” (IV.i.59).

To what ‘end’ are we asked to be thus attentive to the elements of drama, its constitutive de-naturalization? Simply so that we might perceive the special sensuous power of the theater – its *containment* and *supersession* of other arts, its “spell” as Prospero calls it – and its eventual self-dissolution at Prospero’s own command: “Well done! avoid; no more!” (IV.i.142).

Were this all, however, we would not be sure that Prospero himself sees matters as we do – we would not be sure that the self-dissolution of the drama were his (or the play’s) *purpose*. So, as if to erase all doubts, Shakespeare has Prospero address his own activity, in order to underscore that the fulfillment of his drama lies in its foretold dissolution:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air. (IV.i.148-50)

I cannot be the first to hear in Prospero’s lines not only a description of the limits of dramatic revels, but also a *reflective stance* on the significance of those limits. Ferdinand and Miranda themselves give voice to this same perception: “This is strange: your father’s in some passion / That works him strongly” (IV.i.143-44). At any rate, Prospero leaves no doubt about his reflective stance on the revels’ end when he continues:

And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp’d towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. (IV.i.151-56)

And once this *reflective stance* – if revels end it is because *we* end – comes into view, we see that our condition was not fully captured or represented by the spatial-temporal limitations of drama. Rather, by virtue of the self-reflexive presentation of drama’s sensuous-representational *limitations* – and by virtue of our reflective stance on these limitations – we gain a perspective on what we were struggling all along to see more clearly: ourselves.

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep. (IV.i.156-58)

If "we are such stuff as dreams are made on" (and we can think here, too, of Puck's address at the close of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) then is it not because our imaginative capacities as free self-determining beings refuse the limitations of sensuous, material representation?

At the same time, if the sensuousness of the representation is to be truly *self-dissolving* – and not just a further display of aesthetic autonomy (of Prospero's artistic power) – then this self-dissolution cannot itself be aesthetically accomplished, cannot be merely offered as the self-conscious 'representation' of a play coming to its close. Shakespeare is not just rehearsing, in other words, the standard Elizabethan-Jacobean 'epilogue' about a play's ending.

Instead, sensuous representational artistry as such must be disavowed, revels ended – first of all by the artist, who drowns his book and staff: "Now my charms are all o'erthrown, / And what strength I have's mine own" (Epilogue.1-2). Thus, the challenge is: how is artistry to be dissolved *by the artist himself*? How can drama transcend itself, from within its own sphere?

To address this challenge, several moments seem to be required³⁵. First, the artist must risk appearing otherwise than as an artist. It is not (yet) a matter of the artist's disappearance, pure and simple, but rather of a risk that the artist takes – namely, appearing otherwise than as an artist. Certain trappings have to be jettisoned:

I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fadoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my book. (V.i.54-57)

This is not only a matter of trading one guise for another, nor is it merely that the artist is undergoing a shift within himself. Rather, and this is the second requirement, it must be seen that the risk he has taken, in appearing otherwise than as an artist, *also* means that

³⁵ Here I am echoing the conclusion offered in the final pages of my *Tragic Conditions in Shakespeare*.

the way things stand for others, too, changes. It would not be enough for the artist to appear as otherwise than an artist if everyone persisted in their assumption or belief or stupor – if everyone were still held, as it were, by the enduring effects of art's spell. The spell also must dissolve – so that we, too, might see how things between us really stand now:

The charm dissolves apace;
 And as the morning steals upon the night,
 Melting the darkness, so their rising senses
 Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle
 Their clearer reason. (V.i.64-68)

Third, to truly risk appearing to others as otherwise than an artist – if it is to be a risk and not merely a further demonstration of artistry – requires the recognition that letting go of art (if it is a real 'letting go') cannot itself be artfully accomplished. To appear as otherwise than an artist therefore could not be accomplished by an artist – lest that 'appearance' be taken for another demonstration of artistry. Only a human being could appear as otherwise than as an artist.

And so, finally – as if Shakespeare's drama, *as if all of drama*, had been a preparation for this moment – a human being stands forth, and steps away from the 'art' he made and from what that art itself wrought:

Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
 And what strength I have's mine own,
 Which is most faint. (Epilogue.1-3)

But even at this point, another moment is still required. The sensuous-mimetic distance between what we see and our own lives must dissolve. *We* must acknowledge that Prospero is not just a 'fictional character', that is the 'island' is not a safely distant aesthetic domain...

I must be here confin'd by you
 [...] Let me not
 [...] dwell
 In this bare island by your spell;
 But release me from my bands
 With the help of your good hands. (Epilogue.4-10)

... hence, that we are no longer acquitted from the obligation to intervene.

Nothing is sacred in Shakespeare's drama – not even its own status as dramatic art.

Drama as sensuous representation dissolves the moment that it wants something other than passivity from *us* – when it asks us not to represent ourselves, but to become ourselves.