
The Mickery's Production of "Hamlet"

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Theatre Reports

The Mickery's Production of *Hamlet*

by Liesbeth Jansen

Downstage center five plexiglass cubes are arranged in a row from left to right. Each cube has a sword stuck into it from above and a cassette-recorder lying on the bottom. On the top side of each cube are five illustrations of a hand holding a sword. One illustration is a photo of a hand and sword, one an x-ray, one words, one an echo, and one a black silhouette.

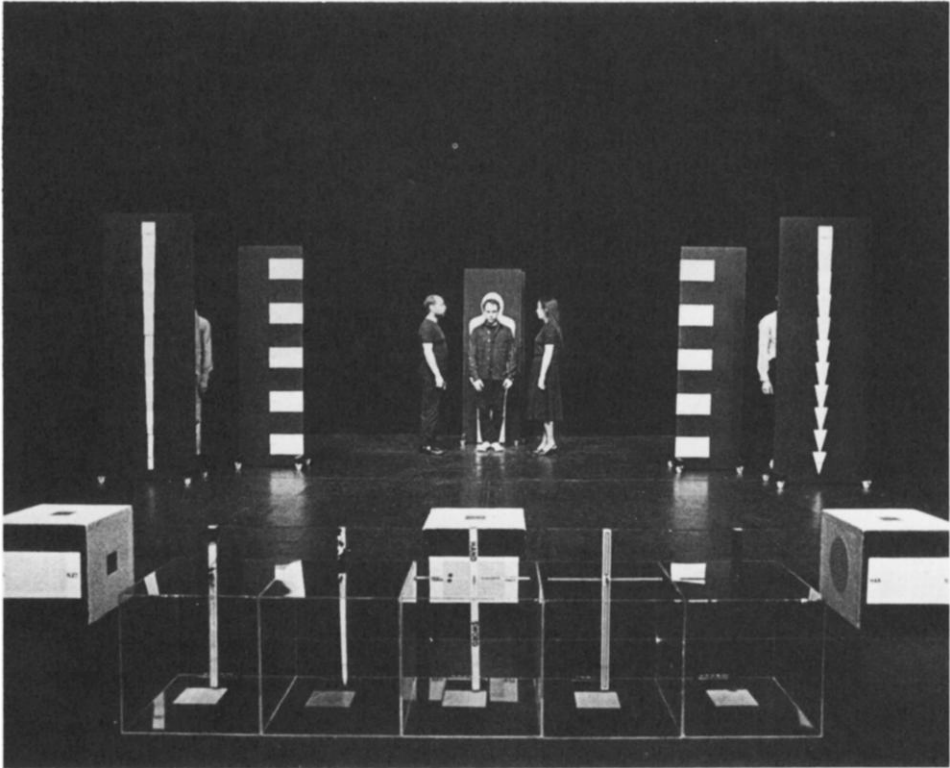
Upstage center is what appears to be a screen on wheels. On the left flat are three white rectangles the size of small paperback books, one above the other. The word "Hamlet" is printed on each.

The performing area is lit in even white light from the moment the audience enters. When all are seated, the performers enter from the upstage corners. Stuart Sherman takes his place behind a tower of white styrofoam cubes, which are the same size as the plexiglass cubes downstage. The tower is at this point hidden by flats, which the other performers take their places behind: Hamlets 1, 2, and 3 behind the left, upstage flats, Hamlets 4 and 5 behind the right downstage flats. The man and woman take their places behind the downstage flats, the man behind the left, the woman behind the right.

The audience sees the performers disappearing behind the flats. The Hamlets wear unobtrusive colors: brown, light-blue and beige. The man and the woman wear dark-blue clothes. Sherman wears black trousers, and a black T-shirt with a dark red shirt over it.

The downstage flats are wheeled to the side. The two upstage flats are now visible. In the middle of them are five rectangles with the word "Hamlet" split into halves. The downstage flats are turned around, revealing vertical rows of book-pages, each page smaller than the one above it. The pages on the left flat are rectangular, those on the right flat, triangular.

The upstage flats are then wheeled to the side, not quite as far out as the downstage flats, and turned around. Five horizontal rows of pages from *Hamlet* are seen on each flat. Behind the flats, now visible, is the tower of five white cubes, with a small red square on the front side of each. The other sides of the cubes show the following:



Stuart Sherman, as Hamlet, appears in front of door flat

Cube No. 1: A photo of Sherman's face, of a cassette-recorder and of a hand holding a sword.

Cube No. 2: An x-ray photo of Sherman's face, cassette-recorder, hand holding a sword.

Cube No. 3: The words: "Hamlet," "Cassette-recorder," "Hand," and "Sword."

Cube No. 4: A concentric oval, concentric rectangle, and the figure of a sword with the same concentric lines.

Cube No. 5: A black oval, a black rectangle, and a black sword.

The cubes also have a small red door, about three inches square, a small hole in a red square of the same size as the small door, and a black side with pages arranged horizontally.

The man and the woman appear from behind the downstage flats and stand on either side of the tower of cubes. The Hamlets appear from behind the downstage flats in the same left-right division. By turns, the man and the woman take the cubes from the tower and place them downstage, the sides with the pages on them turned towards the audience. With the removal of each cube, one sees more of Sherman, standing behind the tower. Behind him, five new black flats are now visible, which have white doors on them in the

shape of a man. In the door of the first flat one sees an oval with a photograph of Sherman's face.

After the man and the woman have placed the last cube, which is the furthest to the right, they walk back to the first one on the left. They pick it up and start tumbling it. Sherman walks to the left plexiglass cube, removes the sword and the cassette-recorder and steps behind the tumbling cube. The man and the woman stop tumbling it, and hold the cube with the picture of the cassette-recorder on top. Sherman raises his sword and turns on the cassette-recorder. The sound of a sword fight is heard. Slowly, he lowers the sword with his outstretched arm until it is horizontal above the cube. He switches off the cassette-recorder. This is the cue for a short black-out. After the black-out the man opens the small door in the cube under the photo of the cassette-recorder. Sherman puts the cassette-recorder into the hole, the man closes the door, and the man and the woman put the cube down.

At that moment, a pocket-sized rectangle is removed from the left downstage flat. Hamlet 1 appears from behind it and walks to the doorflats upstage while putting a "book" in the back of his trousers in such a way that the word "Hamlet" is visible. He takes the first doorflat and wheels it to a position behind Sherman, who is still standing behind the first cube on the left. The man and the woman walk to the next cube, and start tumbling it. Hamlet 1 takes the sword out of Sherman's hand and opens the door. Sherman walks backwards through it. Hamlet 1 closes the door and puts the sword vertically through the small black cube which functions as a doorknob. He walks over to the left side of the doorflat, takes the "book" from the back of his trousers and holds it in front of his face.

From behind the door, Sherman takes a mask with a photograph of his face on it out of the door and appears on the right, holding the mask in front of his face. Hamlet 1 steps behind the door and holds his book in the now empty oval opening left by the mask. Sherman hangs his mask over the sword in the doorknob and walks to the second plexiglass cube from the left. He takes out the sword and the cassette-recorder and stands behind the cube which the man and the woman stop tumbling.

From this point on, the actions are repeated with the four other Hamlets, cubes and doorflats. The other Hamlets repeat the actions done by Hamlet 1: they take out a book, place a doorflat behind Sherman, hold the book, and stand behind the empty oval. The position of each oval is successively lower in each new door. The sound of the sword fight from the cassette-recorders have the same layers as the masks, swords, and pictures on the cubes: realistic, x-ray, words "sword play," spoken, echo (to parallel concentric) and a steady tone (to parallel the black).

At the end of these five actions Sherman is left standing at the right side of the right door holding a black mask in front of his face. After they place the fifth white cube on the ground, the man and the woman move to the left and the right side of the line of plexiglass cubes. The Hamlets are now behind the doors, holding their books in the oval openings.

At this point there is an almost total black-out leaving only a small circle of white light on the center plexiglass cube (No. 3). At the same time, the words "Swordplay, swordplay, swordplay . . ." are heard on tape. The circle of light begins to move slowly to the right. As it reaches the fourth cube from the left, the sound changes to the echo of a sword fight; at the fifth cube it becomes a steady tone. The spot moves from the fifth cube to the woman, traveling slowly up her body, while the steady tone continues. Her mouth is open. The spot moves back to the fifth cube, then to the fourth, etc. As it does so, the sound changes from the steady tone to the echo sound, to the words "swordplay," and "x-ray." The spot then travels up the man's body to his head. His mouth is also wide open. The spot moves back along the cubes to the woman and back again to the man,

increasing in speed. The sound continues to change with the movement. At a certain point, these swordplay sounds are replaced by the spoken text of *Hamlet* (Act III, Scene 2).

Hamlet: Now this overdone or come tardy off, though it make the unskillful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve; the censure of the which one must in your allowance o'er weigh a whole theatre of others. O there be players that I have seen play—and heard others praise, and that highly—not to speak it profanely, that neither having the accent of Christians nor the gait of Christians, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellowed, that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.

First Player: I hope we have reformed that indifferently with us.

Hamlet: O reform it altogether, and let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them, for there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too, though in the mean time some necessary question of the play be then considered; that's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it.

Enter Polonius, Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern.

How now my lord, will the king hear this piece of work?

Polonius: And the queen too, and that presently.

Hamlet: Bid the players to make haste. (Exit Polonius) Will you two help hasten them?

Ros., Guil.: We will my lord. (Exeunt. Enter Horatio)

Hamlet: What, ho, Horatio!

Horatio: Here sweet lord, and at your service.

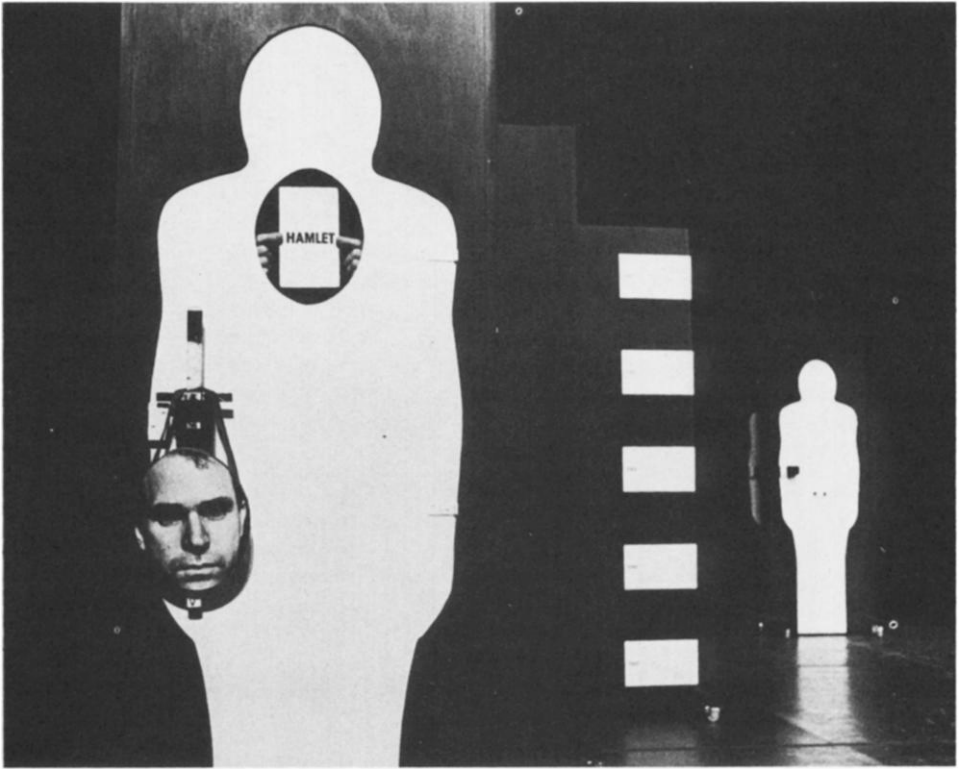
Hamlet: Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man as e'er my conversation coped withal.

Horatio: O my dear lord—

Hamlet: Nay, do not think I flatter, for what advancement may I hope from thee . . .

At the moment the text begins, the spot turns red. The man and the woman make their mouths move as if they are talking. The spot continues to move from the one to the other. The second time the red spot passes the center cube, a second red follow spot fades in, and moves in the opposite direction of the first spot. The effect is as if the original spot slowly splits in two.

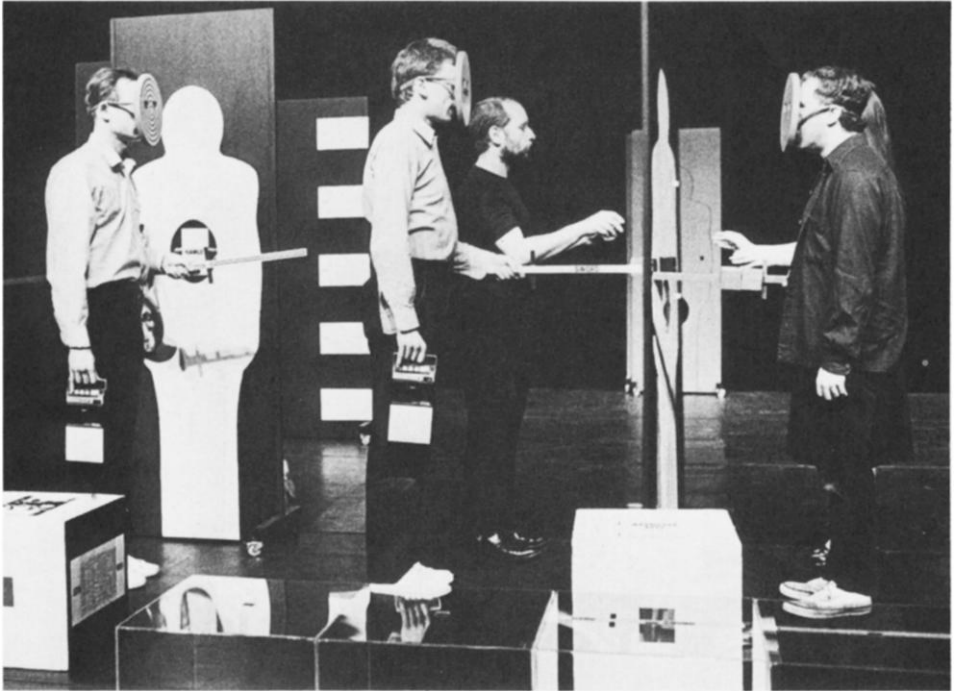
One spot moves very slowly to the woman's head, while the other one continues to the man's head. When the red lights strike both their heads, the man and woman start walking backwards, he to the left, she to the right. After a few seconds, they stop walking,



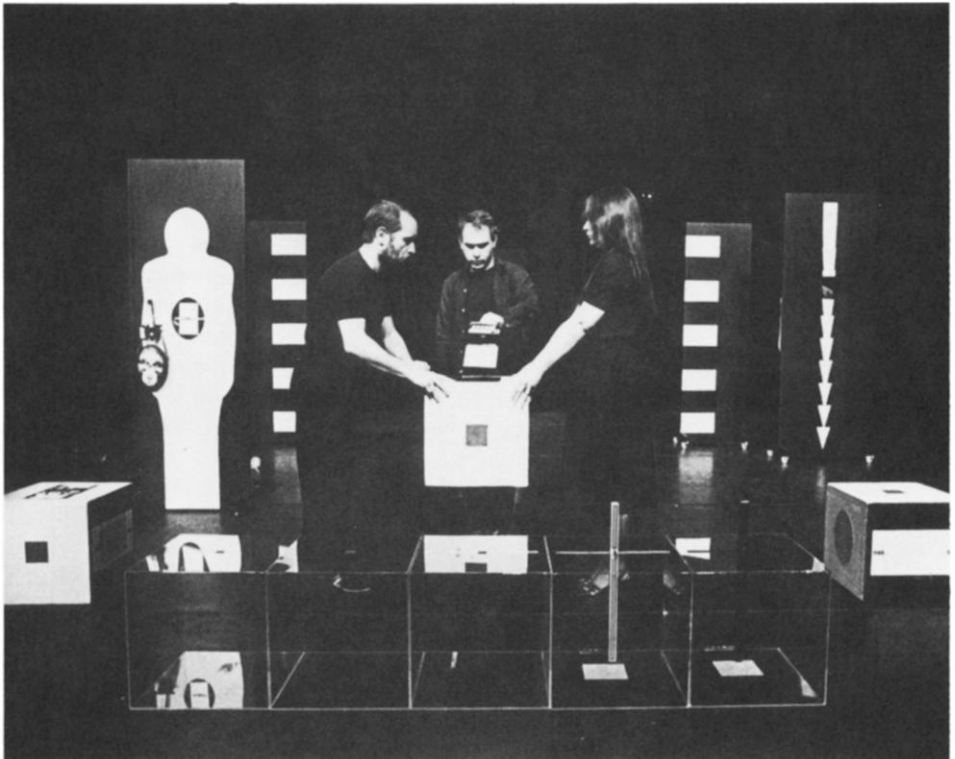
Hamlet #1 holds book in empty oval opening

and the red lights are taken out. At the same time, the tape stops and a red spot lights Sherman's face. He lowers his mask and looks to the left. A small square of red light (just covering the oval) appears on the fifth door (the furthest to the right). Hamlet 5 lowers his book, and turns his head to the left. A red spot appears on the second doorflat from the right and Hamlet 4 lowers his book, turns his head to the left, and then so on to the farthest left doorflat, where Hamlet 1 lowers his book, turns his head to the left and then to the right. In a domino-like effect, all the heads are turned to the right, one just after the other. When Hamlet 5 has made his head movement, the red spots on the doorflats go out. At the same moment, a white spot lights Sherman's face. The tape starts again. Sherman makes mouth movements. He puts his mask in front of his face and the stage is once again lit in even white light.

The man and the woman walk to the doorflat farthest to the left, each holding one side of the flat. Sherman removes the mask and sword from the doorknob and opens the door. Hamlet 5 stands up from his position behind the oval opening (the lowest opening of the five doors). Hamlet 5 puts his "book" in his back pocket, steps through the door and faces Sherman. Sherman closes the door and gives Hamlet 5 the black mask and sword. Hamlet 5 puts the mask on and holds the sword in his left hand. Sherman takes a red mask and sword from the back of the door, puts on the mask and opens the cassette-recorder lid of the fifth white cube. He removes the cassette-recorder, turns the cassette over to side two, which is painted red, leaving the recorder on pause. He hands the cassette-recorder to Hamlet 5. Sherman, facing Hamlet 5, points his sword so that their



The Hamlets align their swords



Sherman puts cassette-recorder in cube

swords are aligned. Hamlet 5 releases the pause button on the cassette-recorder; a portion of the text of *Hamlet* is played while Hamlet 5 moves his mouth as if speaking.

The man and woman turn the doorflat around. The side now facing forward is painted red. Sherman turns toward the door and Hamlet 5 stops the cassette-recorder, setting it again on pause. Sherman thrusts his sword through the doorknob (on this side a red cube with a square hole in the center just large enough for the sword). The stage is immediately flooded with red light. When Sherman withdraws the sword the little red cube remains on it, and the light returns to white. Sherman turns back to Hamlet 5. The man and woman wheel the door back to upstage center, with the red side facing front. Sherman and Hamlet 5 aim their swords at each other, so that they are again aligned. Hamlet 5 turns on the cassette-recorder; he and Sherman make mouth movements while Sherman walks forward and Hamlet 5 walks backward to doorflat No. 4. Sherman stops in front of the next door and Hamlet 5 makes several more fast steps backwards.

The man and woman come from upstage and hold doorflat No. 4 at both sides. Hamlets 4, 3, 2 and 1 are liberated from their doors by the same actions. As the last doorflat is wheeled away the five Hamlets walk backwards, all five of their cassette-recorders playing different pieces of *Hamlet* text. The man and woman walk from upstage, where they have just wheeled the last doorflat, to the cube farthest to the left and stand at either side of it. Sherman turns around, so that he is now leading the others, and points his sword up. All cassette-recorders are stopped; the swords and cassette-recorders are switched from hand to hand, and the swords pointed up.

The man and woman bring each cube to center stage. They put them down in a row (downstage to upstage) with the red doors on top. After the last one is in place they walk forward. The row of Hamlets with Sherman in the lead walks over to the cubes and takes position on either side of the row of cubes, their faces (masks) turned toward the audience. Sherman stands upstage of the row of cubes. The cassette-recorders are turned on and slowly, all swords are lowered to a horizontal position. They turn toward the cubes, bend, and thrust their swords in the small square holes in the side of each cube. They open the small red doors, and one by one take a red cube from Sherman's sword. When they each have a cube they hold it above the small hole, place it in the hole simultaneously, and close the small red door. The moment they close the doors all cassette-recorders are turned off. The Hamlets stand upright, place the cassette-recorders on the floor, take off their masks and place them on top of the cassette-recorders.

Sherman thrusts his sword into the cube in front of him; the sword makes a sharp slap against the side of the cube. Sherman then turns to face upstage. Each Hamlet takes hold of the handle of the sword beside him and lifts a cube. All five cubes are lifted simultaneously and held in one unbroken row so that they appear to be a coffin. Slowly Sherman walks upstage to the red doorflats, followed by the Hamlets bearing the coffin. Sherman stops just downstage of the door; the coffin is erected like a tower just downstage of him. Hamlets 1, 2, and 3 take their places behind the left upstage flat; the man and the woman stand behind the left and right downstage flats. The upstage flats are turned around and wheeled towards each other, to make one unit. The Hamlets walk behind the downstage flats; one by one the books are put back into the flats. The flats are turned around and wheeled to the center, returning to the position they were in at the beginning.

The performance was done twice each evening for the same audience without intermission. After the last two flats had been wheeled to the center, the stage is reset and the performance repeated.