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Identities and Representations

Reaching One Another Language as Interface and Performance

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About ICON

ICON Mainz is an interdisciplinary and international students' conference at the University of Mainz. ICON offers students from all over the world a platform to exchange ideas and broaden their horizon by connecting with other students across all borders.

The ongoing goal of ICON is to further the recognition of students within academia and beyond. We want to prove that students and their research can make important and valuable contributions to science and the world. Thus, we strive to provide students with a stage to present and discuss their findings and network across disciplines.

What is special about ICON is that the organization team is made up of students from different disciplines and nationalities: It is a conference organized by students for students.



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Part II:
Reaching One
Another
Language as Interface and
Performance

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Should You Let Your Computer Do The Reading?

A Discussion on the Benefits of Distant Reading for Literary Studies, with a Quantitative Study on the Development of Stage Directions in European Drama¹

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La pendule ne sonne aucune fois.
Eugène Ionesco, *La Cantatrice chauve*

The question “should you let your computer do the reading?” is—not just in Literary Studies—sure to raise a few eyebrows and spark some lively, but not always productive debate. Between the two problematic extremes in this debate that either sacralize literature or fetishize technology, I would like to show, as somberly as possible, what a computerized approach in the form of Distant Reading might offer for Literary Studies. Instead of approaching this problem theoretically and only discussing the ifs and coulds of the different approaches hypothetically—as seems to be done in this discourse a lot—I would like to build my case and my discussion around my own quantitative study² on the development of stage directions in European—really only a fraction of Dutch, English, French, and German—drama.³ For this, I want to start out by extensively acknowledging the Close Reading research on this topic, show its findings, illustrate its shortcomings, and introduce my own Distant Reading study against this backdrop. The problems and shortcomings of the computerized researched will also be discussed in

¹ My thanks go to a few people who helped immensely with this research. There are the amazing folks at *EMED* and the *Folger Shakespeare Library* who were a great help with establishing some of my database. I am further indebted to the people from the *WWP* for access to their databases, a genuine interest in my work, and the resulting encouragement. Thanks go to Els Pelekman and Rico de Bruin for helping me with my, at that time, almost nonexistent Flemish and Dutch and thereby allowing me to work with the *Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren*. And most of all, my thanks go to Vittorio Codogno, who, from my very first programming attempts, was there to support me, guide me, and never let me give up. I owe a lot to him and his expertise in programming.

² At the time of the conference, this was my first venture into the Digital Humanities and programming. The study itself was devised and conducted within my first 6 months of learning how to program. That means that obvious shortcomings are to be expected. However, it also helps to illustrate at what an early stage of programming computerized methods can already be fruitfully applied to aid Literary Studies.

³ There is another more detailed study with a smaller corpus and a somewhat different focus that was conducted by Peer Trileke, Christopher Kittel, Nils Reiter, Daria Maximova, and Frank Fischer under the name “Opening the Stage—A Quantitative Look at Stage Directions in German Drama.” Since it uses token analysis and tries to analyze more aspects of the text and the stage directions, it can function as a helpful look into what else is possible with a computerized approach. Another shorter study by Dasha Maximova, Frank Fischer, and Daniil Skorinkin on “A Quantitative Study of Stage Directions in Russian Drama” also exists with a smaller corpus and a more detailed approach.

detail. Ultimately, I will try to show that Close and Distant Reading—both with their strengths and weaknesses—should be reconciled in a mixed method approach.

What is Close and what is Distant about Reading?

There is a train of thought introduced in 1958 by the still very early scholar of Comparative Literature René Wellek, that Comparative Literature—and to some extent Literary Studies as a whole—has always been in a crisis. The exact extent of this crisis has changed, but it has never actually been resolved. The history of Literary Studies, in fact, is generally (re-)constructed as the history of different crises surpassed by an ever-new method and supposed paradigm shift.⁴ This is not the place to attempt an overview of these approaches, but I think it is important to understand that the methodological push of Distant Reading, in essence, isn't something external to the discipline, but fits in line with the attempts of Literary Studies to find its object, method, and, above all, purpose.

Distant Reading—as the name clearly indicates—was designed and coined in opposition to the already established method of Close Reading. In its strictest sense, Close Reading as a conscious method arose in the West in the 1920s and, institutionalized through the school of New Criticism, became the dominant method in Literary Studies. In a broader sense, however, the basic principles of Close Reading have always been the core of virtually all concepts of Literary Studies, easily dating back as far as their conception in the earliest forms of hermeneutics and exegesis in Classical Antiquity.⁵ They still remain that way even today in the new poststructuralist approaches that were responsible for New Criticism's downfall in the first place. The basic idea is to focus on certain texts that are assumed to be important and thus deserve an extra level of attention and a thorough interpretation that assumes that virtually all parts of the text contain meaning. The text becomes a complex network of references both to itself and intertextually to other—ideally canonical—texts. The act of Close Reading is then to discover this network of interrelations, to uncover its hidden truth, or to offer an especially original reading of the interpretative possibilities the text offers. Or as Rita Felski put it in her discussion of Critique in Anglo-American Literary Studies:

Matters of import are shrouded, obscured, and inaccessible to the casual observer; they can only be mined via an exacting technique of close reading. What a text seems to be saying is either distracting or deceptive; its subterfuges must be resisted, its superficiality proclaimed. The task of interpretation is to burrow beneath these layers of concealment to arrive at a

⁴ As this paper will surely show, I have my own list of issues with Literary Studies and would like to push the discipline past its problems which, in my opinion, largely spring from virtually none of the paradigm shifts of the 20th century addressing the historical-theoretical misconceptions of the discipline—if anything, they have been augmenting them. I have grown to call this problem the *Fetish of Exegesis*. The basic idea of the Fetish of Exegesis—and I can really only give a rough sketch here—is that Literary Studies, instead of overcoming the Romanticist and pre-Romanticist notions of the genius author and the sacred text, have adopted these concepts in their approach to theory. There is an obsession with obscure, obtuse, and non-self-explanatory theoretical writing that is itself in need of a thorough interpretation, of a discourse that discusses the right exegesis of these authors more than it tries to critically reflect and apply their theories—if they even produce a clear theoretical structure rigorous enough to be applied. This ultimately sacrifices progress for the tacit assumption that those authors and their texts, like the geniuses and sacred texts of earlier times, possess some access to higher knowledge that merits an extensive practice of exegesis.

⁵ Herrnstein Smith phrases it like this: “The practice [of Close Readings] has multiple ancestors, including classical rhetorical analysis, biblical exegesis, and legal interpretation, and it also has some cousins, such as iconology and psychoanalysis” (58).

more fundamental grasp of how things are. Real meaning is at odds with apparent meaning and must be painstakingly exhumed by the critic (56).

Distant Reading sets out to do the very opposite. Franco Moretti established the term in his 2000 article “Conjectures on World Literature.” What Moretti criticizes is that Close Reading is stuck with the detailed analysis of singular texts while being unable to generate the basis of knowledge required to make broader statements about bigger developments in literature and the history of literature. As Moretti puts it:

Distant reading: where distance, let me repeat it, *is a condition of knowledge*: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems. And if, between the very small and the very large, the text itself disappears, well, it is one of those cases when one can justifiably say, Less is more. If we want to understand the system in its entirety, we must accept losing something. We always pay a price for theoretical knowledge: reality is infinitely rich; concepts are abstract, are poor. But it’s precisely this ‘poverty’ that makes it possible to handle them, and therefore to know. This is why less is actually more (“Conjectures” 48-49).

If we want to talk about the development of the postcolonial novel, of feminist literature, sonnets, magical realism, or free verses, reading only a handful of—most likely canonical—texts won’t cut it. We need bigger corpora, need to consider more and more varied texts. According to Moretti’s earliest idea, literary history performed through Distant Reading “[...] will become ‘second hand’: a patchwork of other people’s research, *without a single direct textual reading*” (“Conjectures” 48). This idea didn’t stick around for too long and instead merged partially with the budding Digital Humanities. Distant Reading wasn’t performed anymore by reading secondary texts—texts about other texts—but by writing programs that would allow a computer to analyze larger datasets, corpora that greatly exceeded the tens of, maybe hundreds of texts that could otherwise be analyzed in a study employing Close Reading. By going beyond the canon that Close Reading necessarily presupposes⁶ Distant Reading is trying to tap into the easily 99.5% of literature that hasn’t been canonized, what Margaret Cohen so strikingly calls *the Big Unread*:⁷

But as soon as scholars start to work on the archive of forgotten literature, techniques of close reading come up short. Problems range from the simple lack of time critics have to read closely all the texts that make up the great unread to the failure of some of these texts to signify in fashions that are meaningful using the criteria of close, formal analysis (*Sentimental Education* 59).

⁶ Matthew Wilkens explains Close Reading’s need for a canon—or at least multiple canons—as follows: “The answer to the question ‘Why do we still have canons?’ is as simple to articulate as it is apparently difficult to solve. We don’t read any faster than we ever did, even as the quantity of text produced grows larger by the year. If we need to read books in order to extract information from them and if we need to have read things in common in order to talk about them, we’re going to spend most of our time dealing with a relatively small set of texts. The composition of that set will change over time, but it will never get any bigger. This is a canon” (249-250). It is, as the classic criticism of Distant Reading goes, a matter of scope capped by a time-intensive method.

⁷ To be frank, Cohen, in fact, does not think that Distant Reading can address this problem fully. We are going to address her criticism towards the end of this paper.

The Close Reading View on Stage Directions

Generally, and up until recently when stage directions were once again—for the first time—(re-)discovered by Literary Studies,⁸ they have been brutally marginalized in the broader field of drama studies. As Eric Rasmussen puts it so ironically, “Stage directions, quite literally, don’t count” (226)—addressing both the fact that stage directions don’t possess line numbers in a play and that they, aside from very scant studies, have mostly been overlooked by drama and theater research alike.⁹ In German, they are part of an aptly named distinction that was introduced by the Polish phenomenologist and literary scholar Roman Ingarden in his 1931 work *Das literarische Kunstwerk*. Stage directions are part of the *Nebentext*, the *side text* or *secondary text*, that, like a catch-all of disparate categories, contains every textual occurrence that isn’t part of the *Haupttext*, the *main text*, the text actually spoken by the characters (Ingarden 220-222). It is thus put aside literally and figuratively together with paratextual information like titles and prefaces, metatextual information like commentary, and purely structural information like act and scene divisions. The added irony to Rasmussen’s statement isn’t just that stage directions obviously do count, that they obviously perform an important function in the communication both between drama and performance and between drama and reader, but that they are countable, not just a qualitative category, but also a quantitative one. To understand this, we will quickly examine the kinds of statements generally made about stage directions.

Before I start with my proper quantitative study, I want to compile the already ample quantitative claims made within the study of stage directions in the established Close Reading part of Literary Studies. I have tried my best to compile all the quantitative research I could find on this matter. Since the number of monographs published on stage directions isn’t overly extensive and only a fraction of them is chiefly concerned with their historical dimension—most of my findings come from encyclopedia articles, small chapters in bigger publications, or tiny asides and footnotes. Assembling this overview was tedious and I am sure that I have missed a large portion of remarks made on stage directions hidden in larger—at times barely related—publications and overlooked other publications entirely.

Not only my research was tedious but so is the resulting chapter. It is, however, important in the larger scale of this paper as it serves a double purpose: on the one hand, it will extensively illustrate that quantitative questions are already established in Literary Studies¹⁰—even when chiefly qualitative approaches and methods are employed—and

⁸ This is excluding the constant interest of researchers in the stage directions of Elizabethan theater, especially of Shakespeare. Also noteworthy is the 2018 claim by Tonger-Erk and Werber that Anke Detken’s study *Im Nebenraum des Textes* (2009) is the only monograph about *Nebentext*—and I am sure this also includes stage directions proper—that has been published in German studies in the last 50 years (Tonger-Erk and Werber 418).

⁹ For an overview regarding this last point see: Detken 1-4. Also interesting is Lily Tonger-Erk and Niels Werber’s diagnosis: “Eine mögliche Nebentext-Forschung steht insofern zwischen den Stühlen: einer Literaturwissenschaft, welche die doppelte Medialität der Gattung Drama als Text und als Aufführung nicht selten zum Anlass nimmt, einen der Pole zu übersehen, und einer Theaterwissenschaft, die in der Bemühung um institutionelle Eigenständigkeit die Loslösung des Theaters vom dramatischen Text betreibt.” (413; “A possible institutionalized study of the side text [*Nebentext*] thus falls between two cracks: of Literary Studies, who usually takes the double mediality of the genre of drama—as text and as performance—as a reason to ignore one of the two poles, and of Theater Studies, who, in an effort to establish institutional autonomy, pursues the uncoupling of theater from the dramatic text. [transl. J.J.]”)

¹⁰ This goes especially for the research on stage directions where grand quantitative-historical claims are almost commonplace. Erika Sterz already noted this in 1963, and immediately added that she finds these

on the other hand, it will allow us to compare our own findings with the already established research and thus judge both the validity and the contribution of my research while pointing out shortcomings of previous attempts.

The general consensus on Classical Antiquity is that stage directions did not really exist yet. Since the stage was considered the space for rhetoric and spoken words, everything had to be coded in dialogue and therefore all actions and descriptions appeared only (Asmuth 51; Grillo Torres 57; Schonlau 79) or almost exclusively (Cuomo 828-829; Pfister 37; Platz-Waury 694) in the form of implicit stage directions. Marx and Pavis claim something similar for the Greek drama when they say that stage directions just did not exist (Marx 145; Pavis 172). Instead, the choir performed the classic functions of the stage direction—like informing about time, place, and occurrences (Thillmann 17). Cuomo, at least, mentions specific reoccurring concepts like *παρεπιγραφαί*—literally, “that which is written next to/to the side of it”—and the phrasing *χοροῦ (μέλος)*—“song of the choir”—that appear in multiple manuscripts (828-829).

Since most of the dramatic texts of the Early Middle Ages haven’t been archived and haven’t survived, there doesn’t seem to be any research—or even speculation—on the stage directions in plays of this time.

Plays of the High and Late Middle Ages had an abundance of stage directions. This goes especially for religious theater and morality plays—Marx specifically mentions “frühe geistliche Spiele des Mittelalters” [“early religious medieval drama”]—where the amount of stage directions oftentimes exceeded the amount of primary text (145) or, at least, took up a notable amount of space (Westphal 14). This is due to different aspects, partly the detailed descriptions of the stage (Mauermann 10-12), the captions that summarize the content of the following speech (16), their origin in the performance heavy liturgy (Marx 145), and their formatting that resembled a prose text (Weimar 252)—which, in part, shows the epic influence of the Bible (Mauermann 16, 24-25) and the lack of a typographic dispositive for drama at this time. Mauermann goes as far as to call many of them “überflüssig oder doch entbehrlich” [“redundant or at least expandable”] (27). The situation seems to be different for English morality plays and interludes. Lauf mentions that information about stage, costumes, and gestures in stage directions are scarce—with the latter only changing in early Elizabethan drama—(3, 43, 58). Other dramatic forms of that time—the profane plays—however, barely have any stage directions (Mauermann 34-38; Thillmann 20-22; seems to be implied by Stuart 3)¹¹ and Nöcker claims this explicitly for the *Fastnachtsspiele* [Shrovetide Plays] (469-470), while

kinds of questions regarding the “development”—she demonstratively puts it in quotation—meaningless, since she claims “[e]s gibt *keine* Entwicklung der szenischen Bemerkungen als solche, für sich!” (49; “There is *no* development of the stage direction as such, by itself! [transl. J.J.]”). Her criticism mostly aims at people who assume that there is a quasi-evolutionary development of stage directions towards better if not an ideal concept of the stage direction—and I share her criticism of that. However, she argues this, among other things, by saying: “Die gleiche Vielfältigkeit in der Anwendung der szenischen Bemerkungen hat es immer schon gegeben, und sie ist geblieben” (55; “The same richness in the use of stage directions has always existed, and still does so today [transl. J.J.]”). I not only think that the same richness in stage directions has not always existed—and I am sure the qualitative research more than adequately proves that—but even if that were the case, the specific uses of stage directions aren’t the only important aspect to their development. There is obviously also a more strictly quantitative dimension to that development that can show their relevance within the overall structure of the dramatic text.

¹¹ In a text-critical analysis employing quantitative linguistics, Gerd Simon additionally shows that many of the stage directions of that time—and most likely to be attributed to the same author—have such a high level of inconsistency that they probably did not originate from the author and in that time but were added by different scribes later (27-35). More on this topic later.

also acknowledging that the “späte Nürnberger Spieltradition des 15. Jahrhunderts” [“late Nuremberg tradition of the 15th century”] contained precise information regarding pantomime, movement, voice, costume, and props (470; Mauermann 53).

Renaissance drama obviously picks up central ideas from Classic Antiquity. There is another clear lack of stage directions (Mauermann 71, 90) since the stage again is considered a space for rhetoric and the spoken word and thus for implicit stage directions (Asmuth 51; Thillmann 23-27). Mauermann contrasts this to the contemporary 16th century German movement of the *Volkstheater*, which developed out of the *Fastnachtsspiele*, and contains a larger—and larger than the *Fastnachtsspiele*—amount of stage directions, which he sees as a growing appreciation for the theatrical (53). This especially includes descriptions of gestures and movements (64). He also acknowledges divergent authors who, despite the prevalence of a humanist drama tradition, use a greater amount of stage directions—most notably Albrecht von Eyb (Mauermann 98-101).

In Elizabethan and Jacobean Theater—generally considered part of the Renaissance—there is an absolute minimum of stage directions (Cuddon 680). The *Nebentext* at best contains references to prior performances. Both of those aspects result from the fact that drama wasn’t considered an important and autonomous textual form that deserved the same editorial efforts and attention as other literary forms (Fielitz 40; Pfister 35). Lauf, however, mentions an increase in stage directions in morality plays and interludes in early Elizabethan drama compared to earlier times (3). At the same, there is a budding understanding of drama as its own literary genre that isn’t just aimed at a stage but also at readers—e.g., Ben Jonson’s *Works* (Marx 145; Pfister 35-36).

Baroque, due to its closeness to Renaissance and, in turn, to Classical Antiquity, again possesses a fairly low stage direction count (Asmuth 51) and instead primarily employs implicit stage directions (51; Platz-Waury 694). According to Asmuth it, at most, contains descriptions of the stage (51), according to Jeßing, at most little footnotes with descriptions of actions like kneeling down or standing up (31). Grillo Torres attests the same lack of stage directions for the Spanish Baroque drama (58). The situation seems different for the German Baroque. Baum directly contests Asmuth’s claim and refers to the notable stage direction usage of different important authors of that time—among them Jakob Ayryer, Johann Christian Hallmann, and Andreas Gryphius (Baum 447-449). Westphal also mentions Gryphius specifically and additionally points to the Jesuit drama of the second half of the 17th century, which valued an optical and acoustic spectacle over the dominance of the spoken text and thus used a higher amount of stage directions (14-15). Marx seems to imply a medium amount of stage directions, which, together with long and commentated titles, play into the textual emblematic of the drama (145). Mauermann¹² also mentions ample usage to the point where he seems able to conclude that they become scarcer when the situation is serious (210).

French Classicism has a high infrequency in stage directions with them generally being shunned as external to the text—partially since they were absent in Classical Antiquity—but with some central authors—most notably Corneille—defending their use to keep the spoken text clean (Pavis 172). Kolesch also seems to hint at a lower amount of stage directions when she says that

Auch die Dramen der französischen Klassik lassen die sinnlich-dynamische Aktion häufig nur als rhetorisch verarbeitete und distanzierte Erzählung zu,

¹² Mauermann confusingly calls this *Renaissancedrama* (209-228).

indem die Protagonisten in langen Monologen eine N[arration] vergangener Geschehnisse bieten (228).

The plays of French Classicism also oftentimes only allow the sensual-dynamic actions to appear in rhetorized and distant accounts in which the protagonists use long monologues to give a narrative of past occurrences. [transl. J.J.].

Researchers who hold that stage directions have been scarce to non-existent prior usually attest a significant shift around this time or shortly after. Platz-Waury claims an increase in stage directions in the 17th century (694), which Aston and Savona see explained in an aesthetic development towards an illusionistic theater, which started with the late Renaissance (93). Pavis holds that stage directions did not really appear until the beginning of the 18th century (172), Grillo Torres remarks that they become more abundant at that time (58), and Detken points to the 18th century for a development from implicit to more explicit stage directions (11, 290). Asmuth and Fielitz claim that stage directions in mundane or profane drama were sparse prior to 1750 (Asmuth 51; Fielitz 40). Westphal, finally, points towards the *Sturm und Drang*—roughly the 1770s and 1780s—as the time when stage directions were seized properly for the first time and acknowledged as literary devices in German drama (15).

The general consensus on the Enlightenment—especially the second half of the 18th century—seems to be that stage directions are firmly established by now. Asmuth argues that the reason for this is an overcoming of the panlogism of earlier ages—most notably Classical Antiquity, Renaissance, and Baroque—in a new understanding of sentimentalism and human emotion as something beyond the realm of rhetoric and language (52). Thillmann mentions a shift towards realism, a growing acknowledgment of movements, expressions, and actions as an alternative to mere dialogues, and an understanding of theater as a multifaceted construct with verbal and non-verbal semiotic components (28). At the same time, there is a growing understanding of drama as an autonomous literary form that isn't tied to a performance. This is due to and encouraged by a development of imaginary theater—the act of reading becomes an imaginative act of staging—(Marx 145) as well as a growing literacy in the population that creates a wider potential audience for printed plays (Detken 392-393).

In Romanticism—especially around 1800—imaginary theater becomes even more established as a practice within the social practice of literature (Marx 145). Stage directions grow to become an autonomous commentary, which, in its literariness, at times almost replaces the actual scene (145). According to Andrea Heinz, this can be seen as a general development that starts with the 18th century and culminates in Naturalism (108).

In Naturalism, there is a growing amount of stage directions, especially descriptions, that often times aim at sketching a specific social milieu and can turn into small or longer prose passages (Asmuth 53; Grillo Torres 59; Marx 145; Pavis 172; Thillmann 35-36; Weimar 252), which aren't necessarily stageable (Westphal 15-16). This is coupled with elaborate directions and instructions that fill even greater gaps between the play and the staging in an (imaginary) theater (Cuddon 680; Platz-Waury 694).

The 20th century sees two opposite developments. On the one hand, stage directions keep growing, sometimes even surpassing the amount of main text in a drama—as is the

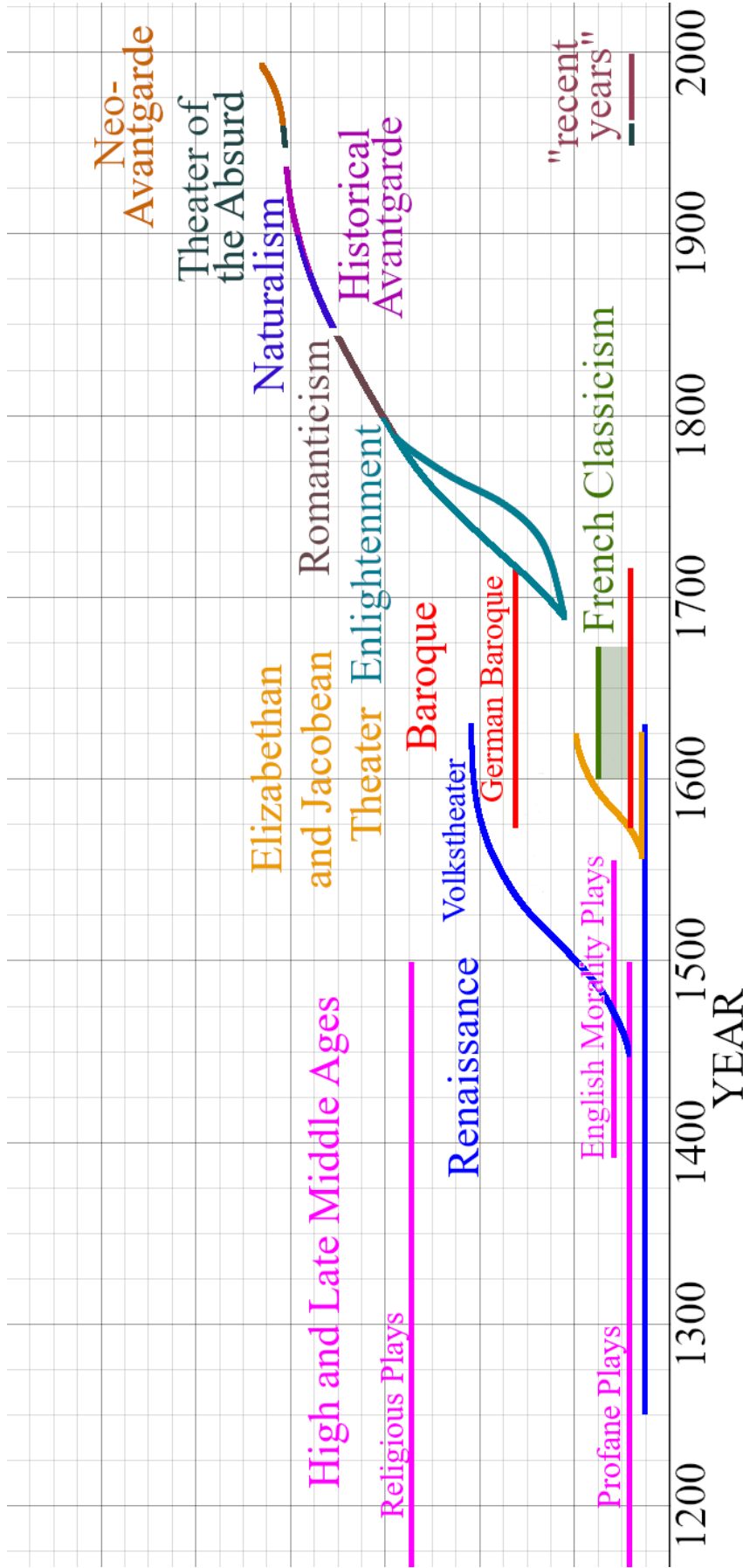


Figure 1: Graphical approximation of the qualitative research. Lines indicate average ratio of stage directions to text length and correspond to the labels of their color. Anything prior to 1100 has been omitted since the Classical Antiquity had no stage directions, we have no predictions about the Early Middle Ages, and no changes were predicted for the Late Middle Ages. The ambiguity of French Classicism is indicated by an opaque area. The possible developments of stage directions during the Enlightenment are indicated by their two most extreme predictions.

case with some plays by, e.g., Shaw, Handke, and Beckett (Asmuth 53; Pavis 172). Grillo Torres speaks of a very liberal use of stage directions, among that one of total excess—as he demonstrates with Beckett’s *Happy Days* (60-61). Stage directions often time intentionally exceed the means of performance (Baumbach and Nünning 51-52). On the other hand, researchers like Cuddon and Fielitz point at specific developments that lean towards a reduction of stage directions (Cuddon 680; Fielitz 40).

Looking at the 20th century in more detail, we see that the Historical Avantgarde employs a de-literalization and re-theatralization of theater, which led to a re-evaluation of the role of the text in theater. Drama—especially spoken text—isn’t the center of a theater production anymore, which led to stage directions growing to account for the growing performativity of theater (Marx 145; Thillmann 42; Westphal 16-17). For the Theater of the Absurd, Fielitz claims that barely any stage directions exist (40). Thillmann, however, holds the opposite belief and considers stage directions—not just because of their quantity—an important characteristic of the Theater of the Absurd (4).¹³ The Neo-Avantgarde—especially since 1960—builds on developments fostered by the Historical Avantgarde. There is a strong development towards post-dramatic theater, the distinction between primary and secondary text becomes muddled, and stage directions don’t dictate a production anymore but become textual code that a production has to interpret (Marx 146). Cuddon claims that “in recent years”—recent from the perspective of 1991¹⁴—“[s]ome dramatists have gone to the other extreme and pared directions to an austere simplicity” (680).

I have tried my best to sketch these statements as a “graph” in Figure 1. There are two central problems in translating the fuzzier qualitative research into graphs, whose level of precision comes down to literally having to draw a line somewhere. Firstly, dating the periods is complicated since most authors don’t generally add specific start and end dates to their claims about periods and, even in the best of cases, those start and end points can vary widely between countries, languages, disciplines, and specific researchers—for a detailed summary of how I approximated my dates, please see Appendix II. Secondly, since many authors give their assessment of a time without directly contrasting it with a prior or later time, many of those differences in the frequency of stage directions are extrapolations and interpretation. Do Renaissance plays have less stage directions than the profane plays of the High and Late Middle Ages? How about the works of Ben Jonson and likeminded playwrights compared to the German Baroque? Is the increase from the Enlightenment over Romanticism, Naturalism, up to the Avant-garde and Neo-Avantgarde linear or logarithmic? How great is its rate of change? Does it happen homogenously, or does it plateau out within or between periods? The cited research does not answer these questions. So, take this graph as a rough estimate, just one possible visual interpretation capable of capturing the essential information in broad strokes while taking a more creative stance on the details—due to a lack of those details in the research.

Based on the research and further exemplified by Figure 1, the following predictions can be made, and the following points of interest open up. We will expect a noticeable increase sometime around 1700 to 1750—when “exactly” is the question—that will continue at least until the mid-20th century—though the shape of this curve is

¹³ Thillmann’s claim is further backed up by her writing an almost 500-page book of analyzing the stage directions of the Theater of the Absurd.

¹⁴ Seeing how the entry in the third edition from 1991 is identical to the one in the fourth edition from 1999 and the fifth edition from 2013—I couldn’t get access to the first two editions—and that the example used in all of them is Harold Pinter, “recent years” might be relative to the first edition from 1977.

yet unknown. In the 20th century, we should encounter a wider spread between plays with a high amount of stage directions and those who barely contain any. Lastly, the high complexity of the time between the 15th century and the early 18th century will be especially interesting. How did the change from religious plays with a high amount of stage directions to the barren plays of the Renaissance occur? How do developments like the growing autonomy of drama as an autonomous literary form in Elizabethan and Jacobean Theater as well as the *Volkstheater* and the German Baroque play into this time? It is this patchwork character of the qualitative research and Figure 1 that lends its potential to a proper quantitative study.

The Problems of the Close Reading Research

There are some problems with this research. Stage directions do count, but Close Reading doesn't. No approach within Close Reading accounts for counting. So, the question—and the problem I want to address primarily here—really is: Where are those claims coming from? What are those quantitative claims based on? Obviously, nobody here sat down and counted the stage directions. This general question breaks down into smaller ones: Do those claims hold generally or just for a certain corpus of canonical works? Does it hold for all dramatic forms or just specific ones, like three or five act plays, for example? Or, to ask this differently: What here is the underlying assumption of what a drama is—what about pantomimes, opera, puppet theater? Finally, for what countries and languages does this hold? And are there different developments in different languages?

The research as is does not address any of those problems, or, at best, addresses them superficially. It is an absolute black box of claims that are made without any proper or sufficient citation and without explaining how their conclusions were ever reached in the first place. It is a testimony to the literally quantitative—and therefore qualitative—limits of Close Reading.

Regarding the question of what Close Reading bases those claims on, I would like to point out two quotes by previously cited researchers. Firstly, Siegfried Mauermann gives an interesting insight in his 1911 study about the German stage direction that—regardless its age—still seems to express the general idea behind Close Reading research. Commenting on two monographs on Goethe's and Schiller's use of stage directions, he says: “Erst wenn über alle bedeutenden und einflußreichen deutschen Dramatiker derartige Monographien geschrieben sind, wird es möglich sein, eine vollständige Geschichte der deutschen Bühnenanweisung zu geben.” (246; “Only when monographs like these have been written on every important and influential German playwright will we be able to write a complete history of the German stage direction [transl. J.J.]”). The assumption here being that an understanding of the canonical works is necessary and sufficient to sketch out literary history. This might be either because the bulk of non-canonical works will ultimately follow the example of some of the canonical ones or—even worse—since only the canonical works are important to us in our skewed concept of literary history as the history of revolutionary geniuses.

Secondly, I find a phrasing by Constanze Baum telling—the one person who regarding the Baroque opposes Asmuth's statement, using central texts of the time to point out that a large amount of stage directions exists during the Baroque period:

Dieser in sich schlüssigen Argumentation stehen jedoch zahlreiche Textbefunde [...] entgegen, die sehr wohl zeigen, dass Nebentexte im Sinne der von Asmuth gemeinten Bühnenanweisungen in der Frühen Neuzeit in allen Dramenformen zum Einsatz kommen [...] (447).

Contrary to this in-itself coherent line of reasoning [...] there exist numerous texts, which actually show that side text in the sense of Asmuth's stage directions were used in the early modern period throughout all dramatic forms [...] [transl. J.J.].

That means—and is essential to how any deductive reasoning works—that the explanation has primacy over the empirical reality of a circumstance. In this case, the line of reasoning—based both in the history of literature and the history of ideas—is coherent, Asmuth's train of thought immediately appears valid and sound, its truth is backed by the coherence to a larger body of knowledge. At this point, the actual historical reality of the stage directions as we can research them in the actual preserved texts of that time becomes an afterthought. What matters is that the reasoning is coherent, not that it actually applies to reality. As an additional problem, the lack of any real corpus those statements are supposed to be based on makes refuting them even harder. While it should be easy to find more counterexamples along the line of Baum's, their use in arguing against the status quo is questionable. They can be dismissed easily as isolated cases, individual occurrences that ultimately only play a minor role in the grand narrative literary history.

Large parts of literary history seem to come down to this paradoxical interplay. On the one hand, a certain number of texts is considered exemplary for a time and is analyzed and treated with the highest level of respect and care. On the other hand, those insights are used together with historical research and—more often than not—the authors' self-descriptions to make general statements about most if not all of the literature of a period or movement, while engaging with even a fraction of the texts, at best—a “reading” that is even more distant than Distant Reading.

Some Preliminary Considerations on the Quantitative Study

Before we finally tackle my own research, I want to introduce three additional issues.

There is a general problem when approaching stage directions. Their fairly low status in the structure of the play—remember Ingarden's *Nebentext*—has sometimes led to them being considered a merely functional text that could be omitted, changed or expanded on as a specific editor or scribe saw fit. A notable example of this practice can be found in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Hardin L. Aasand impressively showed how the two expressions “Pah” and “Puh” that can be found during the famous skull scene in the second quarto edition from 1604 and the first folio edition from 1623 respectively¹⁵ have been interpreted as implicit stage directions and were at different times complemented by an explicit stage direction by different editors: “Following from the direction-less quarto ‘Pah’ and folio ‘Puh,’ we have three distinct kinetic supplements for Hamlet's ‘Pah/Puh’: *smelling to the skull; throwing down the skull; puts down the skull*” (220).

Cases of such editorial liberties with stage directions exist and can obviously skew a historical study like ours. There is no way to deny this as a general margin of error within our study. The question, however, is how numerous those examples are and if they could introduce a significant uncertainty into this study. This is ultimately hard to tell, but at least according to Alan C. Dessen, a scholar who has been engaged with the study of stage directions since the 1980s, at least for early modern English drama—a period that would be especially prone to this kind of scrutiny—this seems like a negligible factor. He claims “[r]ecent scholarship [...] has demonstrated that a high percentage of stage

¹⁵ “3388 *Ham.* And smelt thus? (Q1) /And smelt so pah.(Q2) /And smelt so? Puh.(F1)” (qtd. in Aasand 219).

directions are authorial in origin” (514). We will thus proceed with the study as planned, while keeping in mind that the editions we use can have an influence—even if most likely negligible—on our results and that a general margin of error has to be assumed.

The next problem is somewhat related to the first and concerns dating the plays. In analyzing the dramas historically, we will have to assign each of them a specific year. This can be a very hard task. Some plays are performed long before they are ever properly published in print. They might have been written even earlier, or went through vastly different editions. With others, all these dates might be uncertain. How are we to proceed with that? Most of the databases already provide appropriate dates—as far as I can judge this, those usually refer to the publication date. When no such date was provided, I opted for the earliest year given—be this the year it was written, performed, or published. For Shakespeare’s plays, I chose the dates suggested by the second edition of *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*. For a handful of even older works, I had to use an approximated date—as is the case with the anonymously published play *La farce nouvelle fort joyeuse du Pont aux asgnes*. This obviously is another level of uncertainty. Again, I believe that this affects so few plays and to such a marginal degree—probably not more than 5-10 years on average—that this can also be neglected in the grand scheme of this study. At the same time, keeping this in mind as a general margin of error that comes with any largescale historical study is important.

The last issue is a purely technical and definitory one. There have been different attempts to classify stage directions further. Generally, this has been done by referring to their function. Elaine Aston and George Savona, for example, distinguish between 57 different functions in six broad categories (82-90). Even if such an in-depth taxonomy is useful—which it will be only very rarely—trying to recreate something like that with the means of Distant Reading would be complicated, if at all possible. Important to me in this context—and way more useful—is the more general distinction—understood and used as such by Anke Detken—between stage directions that are aimed at an actor and those that aren’t (20-21).¹⁶ The downside of this distinction and its underlying naming scheme, however, is that it ties drama to an im- or explicit practice of performance or staging instead of regarding it primarily as an autonomous literary text.¹⁷ Because of that, I want to introduce my own distinction based on Detken’s and want to—purely formalistically—distinguish between stage directions that are tied to a speaker and those that aren’t. For the purpose of this paper, I will call the first ones *actions* and the second ones *descriptions*¹⁸ since those are the functions they generally perform—denote a speaker’s

¹⁶ Detken uses the terms “schauspielerbezogene und nicht-schauspielerbezogene Regiebemerkungen” (20).

¹⁷ It is odd to me that Detken introduces those terms since she strongly argues to have drama be seen, read, and analyzed as an autonomous textual form and not just as something dependent on theater or staging.

¹⁸ Baumbach and Nünning’s terminology contains a form of stage direction called “expository stage directions” which is more or less identical to what I want to call *descriptions* (52).

Erfter Akt.

(Kleiner, blaugetünchter, flacher Küchenraum mit niedriger Decke; ein Fenster links; eine rohgezimmerte Thür in's Freie führend rechts; eine Thür mit ausgehobenem Flügel mitten in der Hinterwand. —

```
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- <head>
  <hi rendition="#b">Erfter Akt.</hi>
</head>
<lb/>
- <stage>
  (Kleiner, blaugetünchter, flacher Küchenraum mit niedriger Decke; ein
  <lb/>
  Fenster links; eine rohgezimmerte Thür in's Freie führend rechts;
  <lb/>
  eine Thür mit ausgehobenem Flügel mitten in der Hinterwand. —
- <sp who="#WOLFF">
  - <speaker>
    <hi rendition="#g">Frau Wolff</hi>
  </speaker>
  <stage>(unfichtbar, von außen).</stage>
- <p>
  Adelheid!
  <lb/>
  Adelheid!
  </p>
- <stage>
  (Stille; dann wird von der andern Seite an's Fenster
  <lb/>
  gepocht).
  </stage>
  <p>Wirfchte gleich uffmachen!</p>
</sp>
```

Frau Wolff (*unfichtbar, von außen*). Adelheid!
Adelheid! (*Stille; dann wird von der andern Seite an's Fenster gepocht*). Wirfchte gleich uffmachen!

Figure 2: Hauptmann's *Biberpelz* as Text and XML (Hauptmann, Gerhart: *Der Biberpelz*. Berlin, 1893. In: *Deutsches Textarchiv*, <https://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/hauptmann_biberpelz_1893>, page 6. Accessed Jan 6, 2022.) Purple highlighting was added to indicate a "description," yellow to indicate an "action."

action or describe a scene or an occurrence happening on stage that is not explicitly tied to a speaker. Obviously, it is no coincidence that this distinction aligns with the TEI¹⁹ markup of the plays. As you can see in Figure 2, the beginning of Gerhard Hauptmann's *Der Biberpelz*, actions are stage direction nodes <stage> that are child nodes of speech nodes <sp> (marked by me in yellow), while descriptions are all other stage direction nodes (marked by me in purple).

As the example also intentionally illustrates, this purely formalistic distinction in actions and descriptions does not always meet their interpretative function. "Actions" do not always containing information about a speaker's actions, and "description" are sometimes tied directly to specific speaker. The line "(Stille; dann wird von der andern Seite an's Fenster gepocht)" ["(Silence; then there is a knock coming from the other side of the window)"], for example, is not one of Frau Wolff's actions but a description of something happening on stage that does not originate from her. The distinction overall should still have a fairly high accuracy and is important for a more nuanced look at stage directions. After all, it makes a difference if the stage directions are largely used to set a stage—appearing as descriptions mostly at the start of a scene and rarely throughout it—or if they affect the characters during the scene, dictating their movements, pauses, manner of speech, and thus aim at more dynamic and performative scenes.

The Development of Stage Directions in European Drama

The corpus I used was assembled using seven different databases. Alphabetically, those are: the Deutsches Textarchiv (DTA), the Digital Anthology of Early Modern English Drama (EMED), the Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren (DBNL), Folger

¹⁹ The Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) is a consortium that was founded in 1987 with the goal of establishing certain standards and guidelines in the encoding of machine-readable texts, specifically in the humanities, social sciences, and in linguistics. Since the labels used for node names in XML are technically arbitrary, following the TEI guidelines guarantees that TEI XML are machine-readable ideally regardless of the encoder. The fact that <stage> denominates a stage direction, for example, is not an XML inherent feature but a convention introduced by the TEI.

Shakespeare, the German part of TextGrid Repository, Théâtre Classique, and the Women Writers Project (WWP). It contains 2844 dramas in four languages, coming down to 228 Dutch, 430 English, 1519 French, and 667 German plays.²⁰ They roughly span a period of 800 years, but since there are only seven works prior to 1500 and only one after 1939, it is effectively only 440 years (see Figure 3).

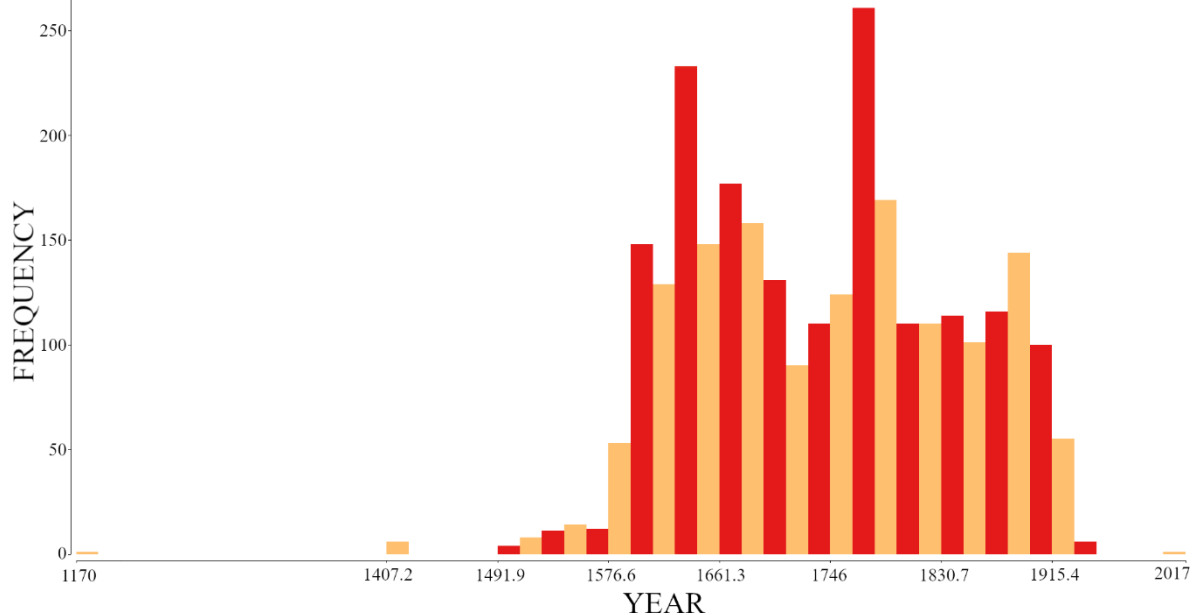


Figure 3 Historical distribution of all plays by year.

The corpus is distributed differently through the separate languages. English is confined mostly between 1580 and 1650, with an almost negligible number of plays trickling in until the 1820s. Dutch is also reasonably old, properly starting around 1600, but reaches up until 1847, while, however, on average providing less than one play per year and therefore, on its own, not being able to provide any proper information. French only really picks up around 1630, but then has a fairly homogenous distribution with more than 1149 plays until 1800 alone and another 331 until 1930. German has 111 plays between 1510 and 1740 and its actual bulk with 556 plays between 1740 and the end of the corpus in 1931. Because of that significantly inconsistent historical distribution of plays in the different languages, comparisons between languages won't be possible or at least won't yield any reliable results. Because of that I will primarily focus on looking at my corpus as a whole to approximate something like "European" drama, a construction that I—due to the relative closeness of the development of Dutch, English, French, and German literature—feel confident in applying as an auxiliary solution at this point in time.²¹ However, I want to make clear that this is at best a temporary solution to investigate a very general trend in European drama. A more detailed study with a better corpus and more sophisticated methods will be necessary to investigate the rich and complex history of stage directions for different literatures comparatively.

²⁰ There is a not insignificant overlap between the corpus of Deutsches Textarchiv and the one of TextGrid Repository. Because of the higher quality of the Deutsches Textarchiv XML, I have opted to employ those whenever a play was in both databases.

²¹ My thanks go to Lily Carr, who, in the discussion following my presentation, pointed out that this somewhat unorthodox approach should be clearly marked and discussed as such.

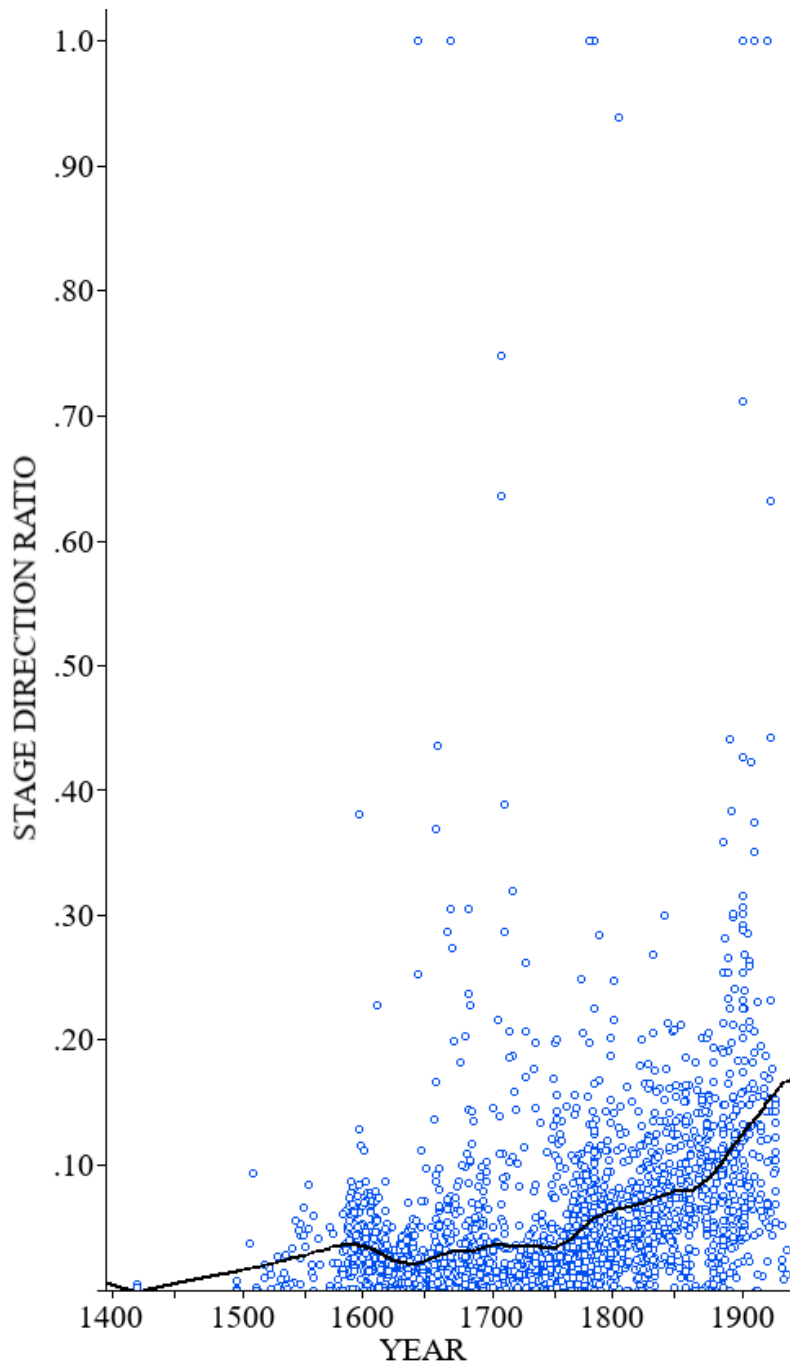


Figure 4: Ratio of stage directions to text length by year with a LOWESS regression.

Figure 4 shows a scatterplot of the ratio of stage directions to the text length plotted by year. Additionally, it has a LOWESS function fitted to it that should give us a fairly confident estimate of the medium development of the stage direction ratio between 1580 and 1930. Going through the LOWESS graph chronologically, there are some interesting findings worth pointing out.²²

The fairly high amount of stage directions around 1580-1600 that then decreases to the lowest level in the whole scope of this study in around 1640 is surprising. The corpus at this point is almost exclusively English and nothing in the research would suggest that this was the case in the English literature at that time. In fact, the consensus is the very opposite. Scholarly research on Elizabethan and

Jacobean Theater seems to indicate that stage directions only really developed in that time. Our research, however, seems to indicate that they already existed prior and, for some reason, started to decline at this time.

The renewed increase in stage directions starting around 1640 is interesting. According to the qualitative research, one would assume that this has its origin in the German part of the corpus, since *Volkstheater* and German Baroque were identified as containing a higher amount of stage directions. Despite the assumption that, aside from

²² Appendix I contains the same graph broken up by languages.

some authors, French Classicism is mostly devoid of stage directions, it is the prevalence of the French part of the corpus here that is responsible for this increase. It seems to plateau at around 1700 and even decrease a little before it finally picks up again around 1750.

The stark increase around 1750 was fairly confidently—although with predictions reaching from 1700 to 1770—predicted by the qualitative research. It exists almost identically for German and French (see Appendix I)—the only two languages we have reliable data for in this time. There seems to be a common consent that this development keeps going through Romanticism, Naturalism, and into the Avantgarde and Neo-Avantgarde. We can now see that this did not take place linearly but in multiple steps. Those periods roughly seem to be 1750-1800, 1800-1860—with a slight plateauing in 1850-1860—and, finally, 1860, around the time of Naturalism, until the end of our reliable corpus. French and German seem to develop differently here. German seems to increase until 1780 and then plateaus or slightly decreases until around 1810 when it again increases until around 1840 and then plateaus again until 1860 when it has the same increase as the whole corpus. French also increases around 1750 with the slope again increasing around 1775 until it peaks around 1800. At this point, the amount of stage directions actually decreases until it slowly picks up again around 1850 and properly around 1870. Therefore, vastly different developments might have taken place here.

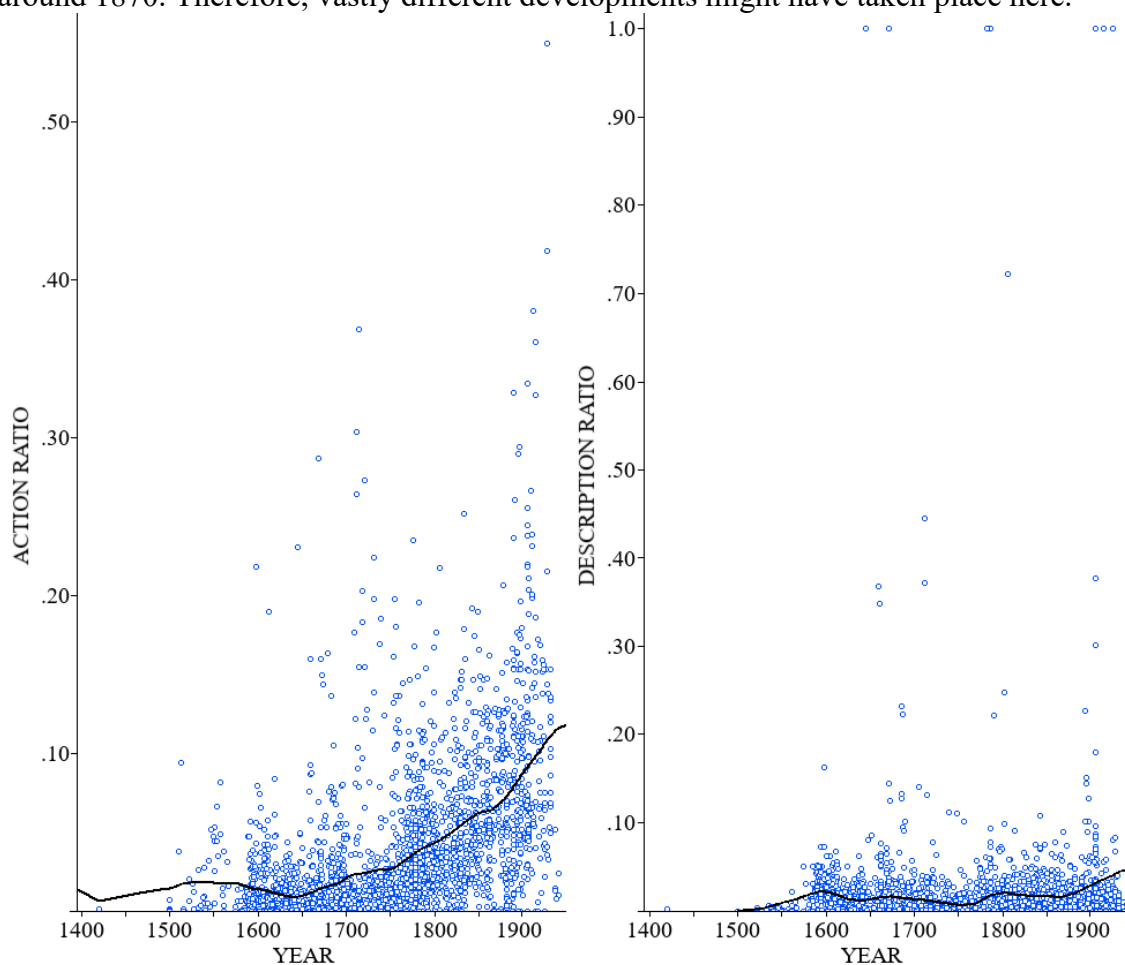


Figure 5: The ratio of actions and descriptions respectively to the total text length by year with a LOWESS regression.

Stage directions seem to fan out more with the 20th century, meaning that there seems less unity between plays in this category. At the same time, it seems as if plays with a low

ratio of stage directions have steadily decreased since 1800 with the majority of plays in our corpus in the 20th century containing more stage directions than plays prior to 1750 had on average.

Comparing what I call actions and descriptions yields some other important insights (Figure 5). Descriptions seem to play a smaller role in plays and do not change much throughout the years. They instead average somewhere at around 1-2.5% of the plays' total length. Although, there is a reasonable number of plays with more than 5% descriptions. Actions, on the other hand, make up the bulk of stage directions. While their lower average is also around 1%, their later averages range between 10 and 12% and for a reasonable number of plays easily over 15% of their total length. Actions, however, have a stricter fall-off. There are plays that are 100% descriptions—specifically pantomimes—while the same is not true for actions. Even having a play that is 50% actions is already an insane rarity.

Conclusion: So, what can your computer do?

I hope the above example has shown that compared to the problems in Close Reading that I have pointed out before, my study—and with it Distant Reading as a whole—presents an alternative that addresses most of these problems sufficiently. Instead of a research black box, we have a transparent corpus of texts that functions as data for my empirical claims. There is no question on what my claims are based because everyone can access the data. Any form of criticism becomes easier too since it can be addressed to my corpus or method. Further, there are mathematical models that can be employed to criticize a study like mine on a statistical and stochastic level. Finally, since the data is available to everyone, everyone is at least theoretically capable of duplicating my study and determining if my conclusions hold.

The most important point, however, is that Distant Reading allows us to bridge the inductive chasm. Realistically, the researchers making those broad quantitative claims before might have read a few hundred plays in total,²³ obviously not engaging thoroughly with the stage directions of all of them—maybe with half of them—and clearly not to the point of counting them—thoroughly or not. I, on the other hand, have the detailed quantitative information of 2844 plays and I am therefore better equipped to make these kinds of broad quantitative claims with less time needed and a higher overall accuracy.

Truth be told, however, there is one central problem that I am also unable to escape and that is the problem of the canon. Encoding a text in a markup language like XML—although the process has been simplified with different programs—takes time and effort. Therefore, the texts currently encoded are virtually exclusively texts that are canonized—or otherwise highly regarded—at least by some groups within Literary Studies. A flaw that hopefully will resolve itself as more and more texts are digitalized.

This admission of the limits of this method is only one of many. There are, of course, real concerns when it comes to Distant Reading, and I would like to address two of them—one of the less obvious ones and the most glaring one—to finish up this paper. For starters, Moretti rightfully claims that “[q]uantitative research provides a type of data

²³ This is obviously a rough estimate. It is rare to find any more or less definitive answer regarding the corpus used in any larger scale study—including the ones, I have quoted earlier. A general idea, however, is given by Erika Sterz, who based her study *Der Theaterwert der szenischen Bemerkungen im deutschen Drama von Kleist bis zur Gegenwart*—spanning roughly 160 years between Kleist's earliest dramas around 1800 to the publication of her study in 1962—on 2060 selected stage directions from 160 plays by 60 different authors (15).

which is ideally independent of interpretations [...] and that is of course also its limit: it provides *data*, not interpretation” (*Graphs* 9). However, as Margaret Cohen (“Narratology” 59) and Maurizio Ascari (5) point out, this shift from interpretation to data in Distant Reading is often only superficial. Distant Reading still uses the approaches, categories, and assumptions introduced by Close Reading both in generating these data and in interpreting them. It isn’t so much asking new questions as it is providing new tools to answer the already proposed ones. I think this very valid criticism can be addressed in different ways. Firstly, if Distant Reading does so and thereby allows additional insight into classical problems of Close Reading, there seems to be little harm in employing this method. However, Distant Reading originally set out to do more than just fill some holes in the corpus of knowledge of Close Reading. It wanted to go beyond it and address the great unread. If Cohen and Ascari’s criticism holds, Distant Reading falls more than short of that original promise. This, however, is not an internal flaw of Distant Reading. The categories used to generate and interpret data obviously can be replaced. Margaret Cohen introduces her own methods of reading²⁴ to move beyond Close Reading and I don’t see why the thereby generated findings couldn’t be used as the boundary conditions for new computerized studies. Not to mention Distant Reading’s own ability to generate and distinguish meaningful categories and patterns, something that researchers can theorize and employ in future studies. Nevertheless, this criticism—and Moretti’s own research—should function as a cautionary tale. There is a real danger in Distant Reading of leaving central questions of theory up to other parts of the discipline and only blindly employing already established categories and terms. A warning that does not only apply to Distant Reading, however.

The central objection from established Literary Studies to Distant Reading, however, comes from the assumption that they are both mutually exclusive methods, undeniably antithetical in their features²⁵, and that one will ultimately replace the other. This problem goes back to a formulation of Moretti, who, in coining the term Distant Reading, calls it “[...] a patchwork of other people’s research, *without a single direct textual reading*” (“Conjectures” 48). Personally, I think this was just rhetorical. The problem with Moretti’s first concept of Distant Reading—reading texts about literature—was that it is already how research always worked. All the authors I have quoted before on the development of stage directions drew their conclusions from other people’s readings more than from their own. They are engaged already with a form of this earliest concept of Distant Reading.²⁶ The only difference is that they are also still reading some of the texts and drawing conclusions from them. Therefore, the extra clause of prohibiting any and all reading of literary texts was—in my opinion—nothing but a trick to escape a certain criticism that his method was nothing but reframing an already institutionalized practice as something original. And as things usually go, it is the most controversial ideas that get remembered. But this rivalry is based on nothing. Close and Distant Reading—and all the other kinds of reading like Surface Reading or Cohen’s many approaches—

²⁴ For Cohen those are: reading for patterns, just reading, just enough reading, the representative example, scaling to the case, different modes of forgetting, the forgotten canon (“Narratology” 59-62)

²⁵ See van de Ven (3, 7), for a brief but telling comparison.

²⁶ I think, however, there is a real danger in this, and ironically, it is fairly similar to Distant Reading’s problem of blindly employing theoretical terms. The obscurity of qualitative Close Reading research in combination with the constant repetition of certain claims whose origin is unclear can easily lead to certain assumptions being considered commonplace while being both false and insanely hard to disprove with the means of Close Reading. Research—to some extent—is replaced by quoting some canonical theorists without properly engaging with the validity of their claims.

are rivals as much as a hammer and a screwdriver are. They are different tools in the toolbox of Literary Studies, different approaches to roughly the same subject, but they come with their own strengths and weaknesses, their own problems. Denying that—on either side of the argument—is stripping Literary Studies of a whole array of powerful tools.²⁷

Luckily, in recent years there has been a growing number of attempts to reconcile Close and Distant Reading. I want to add this paper to the list. My research undeniably started off from Close Reading. It was my involvements with Close Reading that made me aware of this topic in the first place, I have repeatedly compared my own findings with the predictions made by Close Reading—thereby employing an early form of Distant Reading—and the next step of this study will involve me returning to a form of Close Reading. I don't expect that a program can be written that can create something akin to Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson's *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama 1580-1642*²⁸ or really any study that tries to explain the use, function, form, or development of stage directions. The interpretative power required to make sense of my findings cannot come from a computer. It will mean closely analyzing outliers or texts in certain central positions, engaging with classic historical research—history proper, literary history, and theater history—and trying to find explanations that will, hopefully, shed light on some less explored areas of literary history and correct some of the more blanket assumptions on stage directions currently held by Literary Studies. It is an interlocking of Close and Distant Reading. No single method could achieve that. And keeping up the current rivalry would mean missing out on research such as mine,²⁹ on entirely new avenues of inquiry.

I would like to employ Matthew Lee Jockers' phrasing in this context:

Like it or not, today's literary-historical scholar can no longer risk being just a close reader: the sheer quantity of available data makes the traditional practice of close reading untenable as an exhaustive or definitive method of evidence gathering. Something important will inevitably be missed. The same argument, however, may be leveled against the macroscale; from thirty thousand feet, something important will inevitably be missed. The two scales of analysis, therefore, should and need to coexist. [...] Today's student of literature must be adept at reading and gathering evidence from individual texts and equally adept at accessing and mining digital-text repositories (9).

There is no *one* method to approach the vastness of Literary Studies. What we need instead are mixed methods, approaches employing both qualitative and quantitative methods to connect the microlevel of concrete textual phenomena with the macrolevel of historical developments and intertextuality.³⁰ Finally, to answer the question posed in the

²⁷ This argument obviously goes beyond a mere opposition of Close and Distant Reading and instead considers all kinds of "reading" practiced or developed in Literary Studies. I am indebted to Ismail Frouini, who pointed out to me that my original argument—mainly focusing on the dichotomy of Close and Distant Reading—only cemented Close Reading's central position within Literary Studies and, thus, ultimately hindered my aspiration of properly moving with Distant Reading beyond Close Reading.

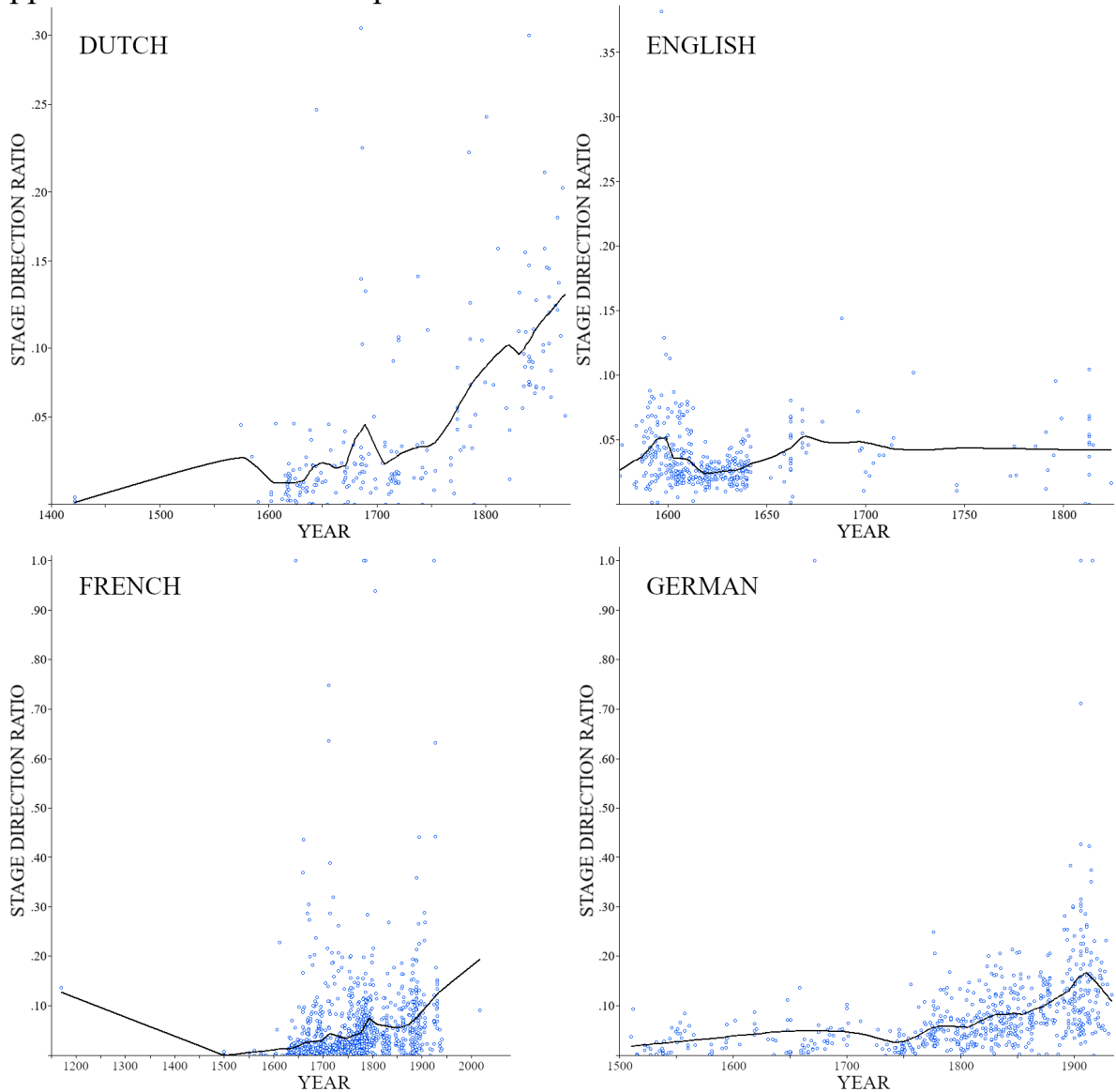
²⁸ I do not bring up this groundbreaking work just randomly. In fact, Dessen and Thompson's work was aided by a database and computational methods.

²⁹ See, for example, Oleg Sobchuk's interesting study "The Evolution of Dialogues: A Quantitative Study of Russian Novels (1830–1900)."

³⁰ For an interesting example, see Johannes Molz' *A Close and Distant Reading of Shakespearean Intertextuality: Towards a Mixed Methods Approach for Literary Studies*.

title of this paper: yes, you should let the computer do the reading; and that means specifically: some of it, for specific purposes, and it does not relieve you from the burden of engaging with some of the texts and areas of the more established research as well as engaging with fundamental questions of theory and the limits of the terms employed.

Appendix I: Additional Graphs



Appendix II: Literary-historical dating

Exact or even semi-exact dating of literary periods is tedious and might even be considered all together pointless. Periods are functional categories used to capture certain historical developments in broad strokes, while staying very fuzzy about their historical extension, and covering up phenomena and movements that aren't dominant or are unable to signify meaningfully in broader historical narratives. Moving away from periodization—or decreasing the influence of periodization—and instead appreciating a more directly year-based historical model might therefore be preferable. Nevertheless, in translating the qualitative research into something more strictly numerical or quantitative,

the question of dating has to be posed. What follows is the still very superficial research on which I based my approximations of the historical extension of the periods in Figure 1.

Classical Antiquity: Usually starts around 800 BC and generally ends with the death of Justinian I in 565 (Meier 187) or—according to the Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire (PLRE)—with the death of Heraclius in 641 (191 FN 22).

Early Middle Ages: According to historiographic convention, the starting point of the Early Middle Ages is usually set around 500—see, for example, the title of Paul Fouracre’s *The New Cambridge Medieval History Volume 1: c.500–c.700*.

High and Late Middle Ages: The transition from Early to High Middle Ages usually occurs around 1000—see, for example, the titles of Hermann Jakobs’ *Kirchenreform und Hochmittelalter 1046–1215*, and David Luscombe and Jonathan Riley-Smith’s *The New Cambridge Medieval History Volume 4: c.1024–c.1198 Part 1 and 2*. It ends around 1500—see, for example, Christopher Allmand’s *The New Cambridge Medieval History Volume 7: c.1415–c.1500*, the last volume of this series.

Renaissance: Dating the Renaissance is rather complicated since it developed in different times in Europe. Beutin sees its starting in 1250 Italy—according to him the older research situated it in 1450—and in Germany around 1400-1450 (59-60). Barbara Mahlmann-Bauer claims it started in 1300 Italy and was continued by intellectuals north of the Alps until roughly 1630 (262). Heyl says it started in 14th century Italy and was established in the British Isles in the 15th and 16th century (49). Bernhard Huß’ assessment for France is that it lasted from roughly 1490 until 1600 or 1610 (115).

Elizabethan and Jacobean Theater: generally is dated starting with the reign of Queen Elisabeth I in 1558 and ending with the reign of King James I in 1625.

Baroque: According to Herbert Jaumann, German Baroque starts in the last third of the 16th century and ends at the end of the 17th century (199). For Jörg Welsch, German Baroque lasted from ca. 1620 until 1720 (69). Jeremy Robbins defines the Baroque—in this context the Spanish Baroque—as “[...] the period when the optimism and idealism of the Renaissance gave way to intellectual and existential pessimism” (143) and sees this as a slow decline that starts around 1600 and “whose outcome was not settled until the mid-century” (144), and ends in 1700 (137).

French Classicism: According to Grimm, French Classicism can refer to three periods: the period 1660-1680, in which many now canonized works were created, 1643-1715, the period of the reign of King Louis XIV, or—the option he opts for—1598-1715, which would line it up more or less with the Baroque (150).

Enlightenment: Schlüter sees its starting point in the *Glorious Revolution* in England in 1688/1689 and its end in the French Revolution in 1789 (196). Heyl also sees the starting point in the *Glorious Revolution* (119). Jutta Heinz follows a—in Germany fairly common—systematic and distinguishes three sub-periods of the Enlightenment, *Frühaufklärung* (1690–1740), *Hochaufklärung* (1740–70), and *Spätaufklärung* (1770–1800) (53).

Romanticism: German Romanticism is dated either 1790-1840 (Matuschek 664) or 1795 until mid-19th century (Kremer 326), and French Romanticism from 1792/1793 until 1830 (Föcking 244). For English Romanticism, Joel Faflak and Julia M. Wright state: “1789 (French Revolution) and 1798 (Wordsworth and Coleridge’s Lyrical Ballads) were traditionally used starting dates, and the most common end-dates are still 1837 (Queen Victoria’s ascension to the throne) and 1850 (the death of Wordsworth). In recent years, the starting date has been pushed back to 1785, to approach the publication dates of early

volumes by William Blake, Robert Burns, and Charlotte Smith, and even back to 1750 [...]” (3).

Naturalism: The problem with dating Naturalism is its low internal consistency. Dirk Kemper goes as far as denying Naturalism its standing as an epoch due to its lack of programmatic closeness and of a self-referential discourse capable of establishing a naturalistic identity (534). He only sees German Naturalism as a heuristic category pertaining to the years 1882/83-1892/93. Föcking starts it as early as Honoré de Balzac’s *Comédie humaine* (1842-1850) (246), Christine Kanz, like many others, points towards Émile Zola’s *Le roman expérimental* (1879) (347), and Marx situates it in the last third of the 19th century (145). Consensus seems to exist that Naturalism proper ended around 1900.

Historical Avantgarde: One classic way of situating the Historical Avantgarde is between Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s *Manifesto del Futurismo* in 1909 and the establishment of fascistic regimes in many parts of Europe by 1938 (Kraß 63). Other approaches start it off earlier and consider a strict naturalism—especially since 1880—as part of the Avantgarde (Jäger 185) and opt to let it end in 1930 (Daus 4-27). Hubert van den Berg and Walter Fähnders, on the other hand, directly exclude Naturalism and other “-isms” prior to 1910 from the Avantgarde (2).

Theater of the Absurd: Ute Frackowiak defines it as an avant-gardist theater form from 1950s France (6), Karin Becker as developing in France after 1945 (767), and Ronald Daus sees its starting point in 1950 and its end in 1960 (37, 115).

Neo-Avantgarde: According to Hubert van den Berg and Walter Fähnders, a classic way to date the Neo-Avantgarde is 1945-1980 (10)—even though they hold that no real distinction between Avantgarde and Neo-Avantgarde exists. Since the claim about the Neo-Avantgarde is made only by Marx, who mentions its starting point as the 1960s, I have used Marx’s starting point (146) and van den Berg’s and Fähnders’ end point.

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