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*Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino: Martin Crimp at the Cutting Edge of Representation*

**Vicky Angelaki**

In the post-event conversation at the *Dealing with Martin Crimp* conference, Martin Crimp discussed the effect upon his writing of a play as powerful and unpredictable as *In the Republic of Happiness* (2012), commenting: ‘I don’t know what happens after this play, I really don’t’.<sup>1</sup> This candid remark is particularly interesting in the context of *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino* (2013). Like its predecessor, this play ventures into visually and textually unfamiliar territory, even despite thematic links to previous works, which in any case stem from a recurring preoccupation with formally adventurous social critique. *In the Republic of Happiness* was the product of a four-year period of reflection after *The City* (2008), Crimp’s most recent full-length play until that point (with the interjection of the short piece *Play House* in spring 2012 and the text for George Benjamin’s *Written on Skin* in the summer of 2012). It arrived as a loud indication of an already ‘versatile, creative, aesthetically prolific’<sup>2</sup> author branching out to new, more expansive and expressionistic forms of theatre.

Since 2012, Crimp’s work is even more strikingly dominated by the need to capture and emit a multitude of ideas, or conflicting viewpoints. The expansiveness is also mirrored in the choice of titles – in recent years Crimp’s theatre uses more words

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Crimp in conversation with Dan Rebellato, *Dealing with Martin Crimp* conference, Royal Court Theatre, London, 12 January 2013. Author’s transcription.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Middeke, ‘The Undecidable and the Event: Ethics of Unrest in Martin Crimp’s *Attempts on Her Life* and debbie tucker green’s *truth and reconciliation*’, in *Ethical Speculations in Contemporary British Theatre*, ed. by Mireia Aragay and Enric Monforte (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 96-113 (p. 101).

to describe itself, without, at the same time, sacrificing any of its vagueness. It is the reverse turn from what happened to Crimp's theatre in 2000, when, after his early occupation with larger casts and wide-ranging plots, most notably in *The Treatment* (1993) and the seismic release of that energy in *Attempts on Her Life* (1997), Crimp delved into minimalist and introspective representation resulting in plays like *The Country* (2000), *Fewer Emergencies* (2002; 2005) and *The City*. If the latter already points to a burgeoning neo-absurdism and a broadening field of concerns, *In the Republic of Happiness* delivers on that promise with its plot twists and turns and the non-nucleic approach to staging, as it opens up to more characters, intermixing perspectives and, of course, means of storytelling. At the same time, Crimp retains the family as the axon around which society revolves; it is seen as our first conditioning element and permanent angle of vision for the contact we make with the world, or the choice of the life we lead.

In 2013, Crimp and his regular collaborator Katie Mitchell produced a version of *The Phoenician Women* by Euripides for the Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg. As Mitchell notes regarding the choice of text, for this project she wanted a traditional piece that would provide a solid structure for Crimp to be adventurous with, reaching out to the unknown.<sup>3</sup> She adds that the strangeness of the specific text made it a rare find.<sup>4</sup> The play, therefore, presented an appealing ground for Crimp and Mitchell's individual and shared vision.

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<sup>3</sup> Katie Mitchell, quoted in 'Regisseurin Katie Mitchell im Gespräch', *Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg Spielzeit 2013-14*, p. 27. The full quote is: 'Ich wollte zunächst ein gut gabautes, tradiertes Stück finden, das Martin hin und her wenden und frei behandeln könnte. Es sollte ein Sprungbrett für ihn sein, von dem aus er sich ins Unbekannte aufmachen kann. Die Texte von Euripides sind mir immer sehr nah gewesen und dieses Stück ist das merkwürdigste und eigenwilligste seiner Werke – ein seltsames Juwel' ('Firstly I wanted to find a well-built, traditional [in the sense of passed on from one generation to another] piece, that Martin could turn this way and that and be free with. It should be a springboard for him, from where he could start out towards the unknown. The texts of Euripides have always felt very close to me and this piece is the strangest and most idiosyncratic of his works – a rare jewel').

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Attending a performance of the play was an experience in itself: on an otherwise quiet December Sunday evening in Hamburg, as the city centre was winding down, bright letters were flashing at the Schauspielhaus, advertising Crimp's latest play, not unlike at a cinema. The performance, however, was not actually to take place at the main venue housed in the imposing building directly opposite Hamburg's Hauptbahnhof. Instead, quaint double-decker buses normally used for sightseeing were waiting to transport spectators to the off-centre venue for the evening's performance – Atelier 9/10 Studio Hamburg – away from the trodden path and into the city's dark and quiet suburbia. For those initiated in Crimp's work, which often deals with disturbing events unfolding behind closed doors in the otherwise quiet suburbs, there was an eerie resonance. At the same time, this piece would prove to be unlike anything we had witnessed before in Crimp's theatre. The first major surprise was that a studio tucked away from the main artistic scene would have the capacity to accommodate so fittingly a show as ambitious and large-scale as *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino*, or *The Rest Will Be Familiar to You from Cinema*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The English title is provided in the German playtext. Like *In the Republic of Happiness*, this play, too, delves into the intimate worlds of families as conditioning mechanisms and mirrors of society to establish parallels between the private and the public. The thematic correspondences between these two otherwise very different plays came to the foreground for Hamburg audiences all the more intensely, as in the 2013-14 season they had the opportunity to see both plays in major theatres in the city. The Thalia Theater gave *In the Republic of Happiness* (*In der Republik des Glücks*) its Hamburg premiere, directed by Anne Lenk, on 19 January 2014 at the Thalia in der Gaußstrasse. Later performance dates included 25 and 28 April 2014. See <[http://www.thalia-theater.de/h/repertoire\\_33\\_de.php?play=1035](http://www.thalia-theater.de/h/repertoire_33_de.php?play=1035)> [accessed 6 March 2014]. (The play had already received its German language premiere at Berlin's Deutsches Theater on 28 November 2013, directed by Rafael Sanchez; see <[http://www.deutschestheater.de/kontakt/impressum/republik\\_des\\_gluecks/](http://www.deutschestheater.de/kontakt/impressum/republik_des_gluecks/)> [accessed 6 March 2014]). The dates for the Thalia Theater production in spring 2014 essentially coincided with the repeat performances of *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino*, meaning that particularly at that time Crimp's work – and importantly new or very recent plays – dominated Hamburg stages; *In der Republik des Glücks* also continued its run in Berlin into spring 2014, creating the opportunity for audiences to experience Crimp's work within a broader context, in a way we have not seen in the UK in a singular season, except for cases where translations were involved. For example, *The Chairs*, *One More Wasted Year* and *Roberto Zucco* ran in the autumn of 1997, *The Maids* and *The Triumph of Love* in the summer of 1999, *Cruel and Tender* (itself a radical adaptation) and *The False Servant* in spring 2004, or *Rhinoceros* and Crimp's then new play *The City* in autumn 2007 and spring 2008 respectively, though the latter was more a testament to Dominic Cooke's consistent commitment to Crimp's work during his tenure at the Royal Court. In the spring of 2012 the short pieces *Play House* and *Definitely the Bahamas* (the latter dating back to 1987) broadly coincided with the production of Crimp's version of

Since this was a Schauspielhaus Hamburg production, the piece was directly translated into German and has not yet been published in English.<sup>6</sup> Any references to the text will therefore be to the published version, including character names as provided in German, accompanied by my literal translation, while references to the live performance stem from my experience of the show on 15 December 2013. This was one of a handful of performances that constituted the first cycle of shows for the play, which opened on 24 November 2013.<sup>7</sup> The German repertoire system meant that the rotational run spanning November and December 2013 was not entirely out of the ordinary, though it felt somewhat limited, as this system traditionally ensures the stage longevity of a given production over an extensive time period. Due to different parameters ranging from the topicality of the subject matter – primarily military brutality and displacement – to the ambitious staging aesthetics and international team of contributors, this is a piece that fits the remit of European festivals, having the potential to attract a broader audience. In any case, the relative ephemerality of the production added to the monumentality of an event that, as I will discuss, would already be noteworthy in the context of Crimp and Mitchell’s collaboration, but also of their individual artistic trajectories.

**‘Helles Licht. Vergangenheit.’ / Bright Light. The Past.**

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*Gross und Klein*, however the latter was in any case a show that toured extensively. For more details see Vicky Angelaki, *The Plays of Martin Crimp: Making Theatre Strange* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 191-99. The only somewhat comparable instance to the Hamburg/Berlin example in the UK has been the premiere of *In the Republic of Happiness* followed by the London staging of *Written on Skin* at the Royal Opera House in the 2012-13 season.

<sup>6</sup> The text was translated by Ulrike Syha.

<sup>7</sup> As this article was being finalised, three more shows had been added on 26 April, 1 and 17 May 2014, <[http://schauspielhaus.de/de\\_DE/kalender/alles\\_weitere\\_kennen\\_sie\\_aus\\_dem\\_kino.11568542](http://schauspielhaus.de/de_DE/kalender/alles_weitere_kennen_sie_aus_dem_kino.11568542)> [accessed 29 March 2014].

A malleable performance space, the Atelier 9/10 Studio Hamburg also resembles the vast performance spaces often used by European festivals. One such example was the production of *Cruel and Tender* (2004), Crimp's adaptation of *Trachiniae* by Sophocles in the context of the military conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. In many respects *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino* resembles *Cruel and Tender*: both take a peering look at the diachronically and synchronically relevant themes of ancient Greek tragedy; they are built around strong female characters, with the weaknesses of the male protagonists exposed and brutally dissected; they demand a responsive space that will accommodate but also complement their energy, without absorbing it; they enabled Crimp to work with directors whose own practice spans different performance genres, from opera to the classics and the cutting edge contemporary text (in the case of *Cruel and Tender* the director was Luc Bondy, then artistic director of the Wiener Festwochen). However, whereas *Cruel and Tender* was an international co-commission always intended to tour, *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino* was a product of the generous approach that some German theatres take to the exploration of innovation in contemporary performance practices. This is regularly conceptualised in the space of interaction between the classical text and its modern-day urgency that produces a radically innovative artistic result thriving in boldness and relevance.

Even though it is an important step in Crimp's engagement with existing narratives through adaptations or versions, to define *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino* on the basis of similarities to *Cruel and Tender* would ultimately be to limit it, especially since, as I proposed earlier, it so clearly embodies a departure in Crimp's work and is very much a product of his playwriting present. Notably ambitious in its

staging requirements, the piece features a large cast of 23,<sup>8</sup> supporting its thematic and formal expansiveness with storytelling extrinsic to speech, using music, objects and projected imagery. The play delves into the creative clashes of the intellectual and corporeal, which it intermixes on the stage. Characters bounce off one another on these impassioned canvases of lived experience, interacting in unpredictable ways and producing an image of visceral and affective performative energy. Meanwhile, classical music recurs throughout; a symbol of timelessness and emotional exaltation, utterly clashing with the precariousness and inhumanity that follow war.

The play narrates its ancient story in fifteen scenes of varying length. Crimp's text combines the sinister with the humorous, the realist with the metaphysical, the verbal with the physical, the naturalist with the absurdist, and the sensuous with the sexual. As I argued throughout in *The Plays of Martin Crimp: Making Theatre Strange*, binaries do not apply to Crimp's work as it purposefully eludes them, constructing a space where assumed contradictions meld into a state of co-existence to produce powerfully defamiliarising and affective performance.<sup>9</sup> With his latest play Crimp confirms what began with *The City* and continued with *In the Republic of Happiness*: his work is now at the stage of radical reconnaissance, not only with itself, but with text-based theatre more broadly, posing urgent questions about how much can be achieved through playwriting today, and by which methods. Recent work renders it evident that Crimp remains uninterested in copying himself or past playwriting traditions; rather, his theatre faces forward and thrives through collaborations with practitioners equally invested in pushing the boundaries of writing and representation.

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<sup>8</sup> This was the number on the evening I attended the performance (15 December 2013).

<sup>9</sup> See Angelaki, *The Plays of Martin Crimp*.

Mitchell describes the staging aesthetics of *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino* as a marriage between naturalism and science fiction.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the elements of precision and the uncanny made for a disturbing piece of theatre, as became evident from the start of the performance and our first encounter with the set. The grand yet now dishevelled house that we see in front of us, with two levels connecting through an imposing staircase, is only dimly lit. Upstairs and downstairs, there are rooms that we have visual access to; there are also doors leading to the rear parts of the house, of which we only have restricted view, if any at all, even though they are used for the action of the play. Already, there are physical obstructions to our attempts at gauging a full understanding of who inhabits the house, or what is happening behind closed doors. The intrigue deepens when doors begin to prop open and slam shut with no obvious meddling by a human hand. Similarly, chairs begin to move seemingly by themselves. The house is as much waiting to be inhabited as it is showing signs of a presence and having been inhabited – it is the stage on which history has been *and* is about to be played out, forever ghosted by bodies, emotions and crises. Individuals are transient, whereas space endures, commanding a permanence unattainable by the humans who exert their authority over it. As one reviewer put it, ‘Die Gewalt der Vergangenheit pflanzt sich fort in die Zukunft’<sup>11</sup> (‘the violence of the past continues to breed into the future’). What we are about to see in the next hour and forty-five minutes is a depiction of and attack on how our present and future experience as spectators and citizens has been transfused with a past that still haunts us, setting the

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<sup>10</sup> Mitchell cited in ‘Regisseurin Katie Mitchell im Gespräch’, p. 27: ‘Diese Inszenierung wird versuchen, sich auf einer feinen Linie zwischen Naturalismus und Science Fiction zu bewegen’ (‘this staging will attempt to walk a fine line between naturalism and science fiction’).

<sup>11</sup> Armgard Seegers, ‘Dunkle Vision eines Terrorstaates als innovatives Theater’, Hamburger Abendblatt, 26 November 2013, <<http://www.abendblatt.de/kultur-live/article122262164/Dunkle-Vision-eines-Terrorstaates-als-innovatives-Theater.html>> [accessed 17 December 2013].



standards for how current battles must be fought and won, but also, on a meta-representational level, how they are meant to be staged.

Mitchell employs a device of physical rewinding, which many critics also single out in their reviews.<sup>12</sup> It is the most striking manifestation of the perfectly stylised movement work that characterises the entire performance. Sparingly used in strategic moments, the physical rewinding, which involves performers retracing and reproducing their actions in extreme detail back to the beginning of a scene or segment, becomes both memorable and impactful. By accentuating the body in this way the device of rewinding fleshes out and captures otherwise fleeting human action, so it may be in a way recorded in the audience's frame of reference, its signification and weightiness registering more intently through extraordinary precision. The rewinding makes a strong statement about the production and consumption of history, the versions of events that we inherit and what may be gained if we actively revisit the past for the lessons to be learned, but also the narratives to be rewritten. It also playfully alludes to the title of the piece, pointing to what happens in the editing room, when the recorded action is surveyed and choices are made as to which 'cut' of the narrative the audience will actually be shown and what might be sacrificed.

Meanwhile, objects that have acted as catalysts for the historical events whose aftermath the play explores are interjected in performance, brought onto the stage by the Phoenician women, or, as they are called in this version, the Mädchen (girls) in glass exhibition cases commonly used in museums. Illuminated in their vitrines and handled with utmost care, the objects – the knife, the stone, but also the history book, where events are logged – appear as accentuated as they are decontextualised. As in a

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<sup>12</sup> See Seegers, 'Dunkle Vision'; also Andrew Haydon, 'Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem kino – Deutsches Schauspielhaus, Hamburg', 27 November 2013, <<http://postcardsgods.blogspot.co.uk/2013/11/alles-weitere-kennen-sie-aus-dem-kino.html>> [accessed 17 December 2013].

museum, they invite spectators to ponder on their significance. In the space of the performance, though, their unexpected presence is conspicuous, pointing to a history of violence. Placed in front of us now, these objects are removed from the sanctity of the past, their value as artefacts thwarted by the suffering they have been used to inflict on humans throughout time, or, in the case of the book, by the canonical interpretation of events that has led to the marginalisation of any alternative experiences to the received version of history. The lighting employed to showcase the objects is significant: it complements the fluctuation between light and darkness during performance and ties in with Iokaste's repeated references to how the different moments in her life are conceptualised under changing light; in themselves, these references are stage directions, adding to the meta-theatrical element in the play. Iokaste only reserves the 'Helles Licht' ('bright light') for the 'Vergangenheit' ('past') of prosperity and blissful ignorance, before her second husband's own past was revealed, and for the apocalyptic 'Jetztzeit' ('present time') which, in a radical post-crisis moment, offers itself as another monumental junction.<sup>13</sup> The piece implies that surrendering to fate is a chimera and that, regardless of the dominant narrative of powers outside our control, the individual always has an element of choice.

The rewinding effect mentioned earlier works in tandem with the central theme of the play: the importance of revisiting our reverent attachment to the past and questioning dominant artistic and historical narratives that we have taken at face value, breaking them down to their constituent parts, inscribing new understanding to them, re-interpreting them and moving forward with new narratives. The play does not ask us to dismiss, but, rather, to be critical towards the past. It suggests that nothing should be exempt from judgement and re-evaluation, not even canonical forms of

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Crimp, *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino*, trans. by Ulrike Syha (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Theater Verlag, 2013), pp. 27-29.

representation. This is our responsibility as contemporary spectators and citizens who are both intellectually and corporeally present.

### **‘Kleine wütende Mädchen’ / Angry Little Girls**

The multiplicity of ‘woman’ has always been crucial to Crimp’s work, whether when probing the possibilities of female representation as in *Attempts on Her Life* and *The Treatment*, or when clearly prioritising the female narratorial viewpoint as he has done in most of his work to date. In *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino* this multiplicity is afforded entirely new dimensions as the issue of war is broached from a distinctly and unapologetically female perspective. This applies to the Mädchen, as well as to the foregrounding of the mother-daughter pair of Iokaste and Antigone. Conversely, male protagonists are depicted as myopic, ineffectual and blinded by their ambition – quite literally in the case of Ödipus.

Iokaste’s presence towers over the entire structure of the play, both textually and physically. She navigates her disordered stately house, a metaphor for an entire city in disarray, with the unease and determination of a woman who is committed to the preservation of self and family, an individual on a mission to salvage as much as she can from a world collapsing around her. Iokaste is an über-matriarch unafraid to face past demons; she is aware that exorcising them is the only way through the severe crisis of the present. The inability of the men in her life to negotiate turbulence on a personal level has not only destroyed her domestic life, but has also caused the political and military situation in Thebes to spin out of control. After all, these men – her sons Polyneikes and Eteokles, her brother Kreon, and of course Ödipus, who is both her husband and her son – are also public figures. Now, it is a city that is at stake.

In Crimp's playwriting the city is the ultimate framework of meaning and action, reality and metaphor, a geographical space and a mental state. The characters in this play mirror their surroundings; we mostly see physically and/or emotionally unhinged and wounded characters inhabit the stage. With the city and their own authority under attack, they become bereft of their identity.

This is in stark contrast to the Mädchen, who remain in mental and physical control throughout. These women are far from sidelined as casualties of war; they are the pivots for action. Their sleek appearance and choreographed movement betrays the level of their authority: dressed in austere black dresses occasionally complemented by trench coats, hair mostly worn up in tight buns, the Mädchen traverse and regulate the set, imposing their confident presence and establishing themselves as protagonists.<sup>14</sup> In his thoughtful review Andrew Haydon proposes that an element arising from Mitchell's direction rather than Crimp's text is 'that this chorus seem to have all the named characters held prisoner. Rather than re-staging a world which leaves unchallenged that miserable lot of these women held prisoner Mitchell has rewritten the balance of power'.<sup>15</sup> Though I do not ultimately agree with Haydon's reading of the Mädchen as a kind of warden, it is imperative to probe their omniscience and omnipresence. I argue that the stage behaviour of these women, who show respect where required (predominantly to the female characters) but defer to no one, highlights the agility and flexibility of the displaced individual in the process of

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<sup>14</sup> Even though this kind of almost clinical precision can be directly attributed to Mitchell who relies on such scenic images throughout her work, it also emulates the imagery of the Greek tragedy, particularly when it comes to the Mädchen's movement. For example, Marilyn B. Arthur in 'The Curse of Civilization: The Choral Odes of the *Phoenissae*', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 81 (1977), 163-85 (pp. 166-67), characteristically refers to the 'patterned rhythms of the[ir] ritual dance' at Delphi, where these women will enter a life of devoted servitude "'like golden statues'". The latter also reflects the taut movement and perfectly upright posture of the Mädchen throughout the play.

<sup>15</sup> Haydon, 'Alles weitere kennen sie aus dem kino'.

transcending the state of victimhood.<sup>16</sup> These women focus on playing the survivor, metabolising their inevitable mobility into power in a radical act of defiance.

The description of ‘playing’ is appropriate as there is a distinctive meta-element in the play: meta-historical, meta-theatrical, even meta-representational in the sense of media (film, theatre action) combining to tell the same story from different angles and interacting with each other, creating a dialogue on the staging of war across genres and an overall impression of interweaving narratives in the play. Haydon also refers to ‘meta-theatrics’ albeit in a different way, linking the piece to Mitchell’s previous work and especially *Women of Troy* (National Theatre, London, 2007).<sup>17</sup> In addition to this, the play needs to be doubly located within the meta-theatrical field in relation to Crimp’s own existing work, as well as the very text of *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino*. Firstly, Crimp has previously explored the atrocities of war in *Cruel and Tender*, but also *Advice to Iraqi Women* (2003), where he strived to find ways of building dramatic resonance for Western audiences who are physically and conceptually detached from the battlefield. Secondly, the current play deploys devices that are meta-theatrical in formal terms, pointing to the concoction of the story presented rather than its verisimilitude. The constant prompting and feeding of lines to the main characters on the part of the Mädchen is the main example of this. The concerns of Crimp’s play extend beyond the victim becoming the perpetrator and into how the spectator might become the perpetrator in real life by continuing to observe global crises unaffected, consuming dominant narratives on war rather than morally intervening and questioning.

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<sup>16</sup> I argue that the Mädchen exist on a different ground from the characters of the play, over whose action they exercise authority. Therefore, I do not call the Mädchen ‘characters’, as they are devoid of the distinguishing features of, for example, Iokaste or Antigone.

<sup>17</sup> Haydon, ‘Alles weitere kennen sie aus dem kino’.

The role of the Mädchen is vital to this. I argue that Mitchell's technique for how these women handle the so-called main characters in the play does not so much furnish the text with new dimensions, but, rather, serves to underline what is already in its core. Specifically, in this play characters function as human props, not unlike how objects have been purposefully used in this and other work by Crimp, such as *The Treatment*, *The Country* or *The City*. The moment conspicuous objects – and in the case of this play, subjects – are suddenly introduced there is a new story to tell, the one they act as prompts for.<sup>18</sup> However vital their presence for storytelling, ultimately it is someone else who controls the strings. In this case, it is the Mädchen, whose role in the play is to expose the absurdity of war by attacking linearity, imposing fragments to the structure of the play and ultimately leading us to question why we should ever subscribe to artificial rhetoric, in the theatre or beyond. The Mädchen exist on a separate level from the actual characters, occupying a superstructural role of narration, observation and intervention.<sup>19</sup> The treatment of the main characters by the Mädchen is emblematic of the fact that these figures are decoys, essentially dehumanised players in the field of war, through whom the perpetuating need for violence is justified. This is emphasised through the inability of the characters to act of their own accord or convince us of their justification of war. The Mädchen, therefore, are not guards, but storytellers. As we have seen in, notably, *Attempts on Her Life*, *Fewer Emergencies*, or *The City*, the storyteller possesses the supreme power in the play and not the characters, actual or narrated, that we at first assume to be its subject. Even if the characters wish to think of themselves as individuals they

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<sup>18</sup> For a detailed analysis of the use of objects in Crimp's theatre, see recurring references in Angelaki, *The Plays of Martin Crimp*.

<sup>19</sup> For an interesting analysis of the Mädchen's role see also Jens Fischer, 'Spielt mir das Lied der Labdakiden', 24 November 2013, <[http://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=8791:alles-weitere-kennen-sie-aus-dem-kino-martin-crimp-uebermalt-euripides-katie-mitchell-inszeniert-im-ndr-studio-in-hamburg&catid=38:die-nachtkritik&Itemid=40](http://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8791:alles-weitere-kennen-sie-aus-dem-kino-martin-crimp-uebermalt-euripides-katie-mitchell-inszeniert-im-ndr-studio-in-hamburg&catid=38:die-nachtkritik&Itemid=40)> [accessed 17 December 2013].

are not; they are merely archetypes. In a literal manifestation of their control, the Mädchen ask or condition characters to add the verb 'sagt' ('says'), before their names as part of their speeches throughout, pointing to the fact that these words are not their own, but, rather, externally determined.<sup>20</sup> The occasional outrage this instigates in characters is emblematic of the play's treatment of the audience: it urges us to consider whether our own existence, too, is determined by a form of externally prescribed stage directions.

The Mädchen also determine the length of scenes as well as the transitions between them. Aided by the spatial context of the studio in which it was staged, the meta-impression of the piece became doubly effective. It may be an unconventional theatre space, but the studio was a natural choice for accommodating any stage narrative in the process of being created. The inclusion of the word 'cinema' in the play's title adds to the intrigue. The performance lacks cameras, unlike other work by Mitchell where technology features heavily. Nevertheless, Mitchell creates the sensation that the action is filmed in front of a live studio audience, through the structure of the performance, and particularly the fact that at the end of each scene one of the Mädchen lowers a switch to mark the finale and transition to the next segment. We become doubly a spectator, both of the live theatre action and the filming of the narrative that the play alludes to. With the Mädchen's lowering of the switch comes the distinctive sound of an alarm that indicates a stage door is closing. Even though there was no such physical action, both event and transition were marked by a change in lighting as a shadow descended over stage and auditorium. In the space of moments, the necessary changes in cast positions and set occurred, darkness evaporated into light, and the next scene began.

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<sup>20</sup> In *Written on Skin*, characters also use third person singular to refer to themselves. In that case, it is the storytelling process that is doubly emphasised, from the personal events to the production of the book.

The methods through which the play delves into the power reserves, but also the primal resistance and survival instincts of women, extend beyond the Mädchen to include the two female characters of Iokaste and Antigone, the only ones towards whom the Mädchen appear empathic. Even Iokaste's offstage suicide – described first by an Officer and then by Antigone – comes across as an act of defiance against the narrative of tragic wife and mother. Like Amelia in *Cruel and Tender*, Iokaste refuses to let fate determine her decisions. She is an angry woman, after all – the same adjective that she uses to describe her own 'kleinen wütenden Mädchen'<sup>21</sup> ('angry little girls'), Antigone and Ismene. However, as the play suggests, anger and defiance are not traditionally staged or viewed as female emotions. To exemplify this, in their prologue the Mädchen refer to Pier Paolo Pasolini's film *Edipo re (Oedipus Rex)*, (1967) asking what it is that instigates within the spectator the sudden urge to cry when the camera angle wanders off from the image of Jocasta and into the deep green tree tops in the finale.<sup>22</sup> They wonder whether it is the music that induces this effect, or perhaps the female protagonist, Silvana Mangano.<sup>23</sup> Justifying its title, further to these verbal references to Pasolini's film, the production also transfixes our gaze onto Mangano's facial expression in the segment, shown at the beginning of the performance and revisited in the finale, projected on two screens simultaneously. The wholesome femininity that Mangano brings to the depiction of the Jocasta archetype is the instigator of emotion, as the Mädchen suggest, but the clip also functions to create a premonition early on in the show. As opposed to the supple image that we are looking at in Pasolini's finale, the action for us is only about to start. Meanwhile, we have already been attacked with information verbally and visually, from the striking set designed by Alex Eales to the narration of the Mädchen, so when the play moves

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<sup>21</sup> Crimp, *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino*, p. 28.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*



to the first scene featuring Iokaste, we inevitably feel there is catching up to do, a piecing together of the puzzle that we are actively invited to participate in.<sup>24</sup> The Mädchen probe whether it is Mangano's dress, mouth or hair that incites our envy and causes us to cry, or perhaps it is a sense of anger that overwhelms us,<sup>25</sup> presumably at the injustices of war. The play therefore begins to establish the ground on which it will launch its attack on male military 'common' sense: it is through the stage representation of the counteractive force of female corporeality, sensuousness and emotional strength.<sup>26</sup>

Dressed in black and physically carrying the weight of her unhappiness, anxiety and impending grief, Julia Wieninger's Iokaste cuts a Chekhovian figure burdened with all of the world's primal tragedy. She is a forceful presence who utterly

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<sup>24</sup> As opposed to how, in the ancient text, the Chorus serves to ground us into the action, its odes 'organized in the form of a survey of the history of Thebes which leaves off only as the last chapter is about to be added [...] provid[ing] the critical link between the themes of fatherland and family, of the heroics of the past and the disgrace of the present [...]' as Arthur notes in 'The Curse of Civilization' (pp. 163-64), in *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino* the Mädchen purposefully obscure meaning by pointing to an absurdist relationship between past and present, individual and history, representation and reality, only teasing at the broken links that must be reconstituted. Even though we go on to learn about the men who have left their mark on Thebes, Crimp's play is geared on the city as motherland, rather than fatherland, through its emphasis on the feminine and its perseverance.

<sup>25</sup> Crimp, *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino*, p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> Writing about *The Country* in 'Violence, Testimony and Ethics in Martin Crimp's *The Country* and *The City*', in *Ethical Speculations in Contemporary British Theatre*, ed. by Mireia Aragay and Enric Monforte (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 25-41 (p. 31), Clara Escoda argues that 'the play encodes a critique of the late capitalist (male) subject and alerts spectators as to the continuing presence of the seeds of violence and barbarism within late capitalist, "civilized" relationships'. It is a fair observation, which, to an extent could also be applied to *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino*. However, Escoda's subsequent description of Crimp's female characters as attempting to 'liberate themselves' (p. 31) from the male character who represents 'late capitalist individualism [. . .], which infuses [. . .] the female character's life with violence' (p. 33), since the female character is, as Escoda goes on to add, 'victimized' (ibid.), invites some consideration. In Crimp's plays, I argue, the women are equally capable of violence as the men (and not merely as a mode of retort), and, indeed, equally duplicitous; they never appear as oppressed by men, but, rather, by their own choices as they, too, opt for the capitalist model of life and its presumed comforts. For each of Crimp's female characters, it is *herself* who is the major antagonist; the male character does not pose any kind of threat that she cannot predict or counteract and, as I will go on to discuss, she avoids the victim label at all costs, as opposed to Escoda's suggestion that [on the basis of Richard's example in *The Country*] the male character has the capacity to cause 'the women [to] feel victims of a totalitarian type of violence, which prompts them to deliver their testimony to one another and to spectators' (p. 35). As I will go on to show, when women deliver their monologues in Crimp's plays this is not an act of self-restitution, but a pre-emptive act of self-defence; a conscious, vigorous effort to articulate the self and guide the action. This is reminiscent of Amelia's statement in *Cruel and Tender*, at the end of one of her own long monologues: '[...] I could be mistaken for a victim and that's not a part [...] that I'm prepared to play', Martin Crimp, *Cruel and Tender* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), p. 46.

clashes with the near tactile softness of Mangano's Jocasta as we have mere moments ago witnessed her through the screen. The woman we are looking at now is a dramatically different version of the character. The myth of Oedipus that we have inherited is a story of war and familial violence, but in Crimp's version Iokaste's narration infuses some of this violence to the intense sexual bond she has shared with her husbands. Still alive against the odds, Iokaste now emerges as a fully sensitised body. Commanding the stage through her central position and imposing physical presence, she speaks pragmatically about her private and public history. We hear her candidly narrate the experience of her first orgasm after Laios returns to her having received Apollo's oracle; he is determined to penetrate her even though he has been given insights as to how events will unfold if he and Iokaste have children.<sup>27</sup> She continues with the facts following Laios' death and Ödipus' solution to the riddle of the Sphinx, which leads to him becoming her second husband.<sup>28</sup> Again, the description of her physical reaction to him emanates lust and we understand that Iokaste's private and public trajectory is one of sexuality. Iokaste concludes her narration with the reference to how Ödipus, having learnt the truth as to his family lineage, blinds himself.<sup>29</sup> The ferocity of her speech emits a firm indication for the central role she commands in the events, a creature immune to pity and externally imposed vulnerability.

When it comes to the male characters in the play, regardless of internal conflicts and individual agendas, all interactions are tainted by their attempt to subjugate women. What motivates each male character in the play may vary, but what they all share is the coordinated effort to convince women to subscribe to their logic and surrender to tacit compliance with their decided course of military and political

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<sup>27</sup> Crimp, *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

action. The male characters' hegemonic attitude is complemented by their appearance: dressed in suits, they are the prototypical authority figures. Iokaste and Antigone, however, actively undermine this conventionality of authority. They may be different versions of femininity when compared to each other, but they are equally defiant. As the play unfolds they voice their resistance to the men who attempt to colonise their hearts and minds. Kreon, Ödipus, Polyneikes, Eteokles, or even the secondary male characters, such as Teiresias, Menoikeus and the military figures who enter the performance field in successive scenes, attempting to impose their leadership, appear inadequate. After all, considering the role of the Mädchen, in this version the story is told by women and this carries strong significance; that the culpability for war rests with men is never ambiguous, but, rather, an undisputed fact. Meanwhile, the determination to find a sustainable alternative outside of the failed and corrupt logic that led to conflict and fatalities stems from women. Iokaste and Antigone are not perfect; they are not shielded from errors in judgement, nor are they free from hesitation and turmoil. Ultimately, however, they are defined less by their flaws and more by their willingness to endure in spite of them. On the stage, while the body language of men is mostly static and/or tentative, Iokaste and Antigone navigate the set with the agility and determination of one who is unable to sit still, whether this means being docile in the house, or assuming a passive position in the political field.

This is strongly evident in Scene Five, an uncharacteristically protracted segment and defining moment of the play. Titled 'Polyneikes und Mädchen', it also features Iokaste and Eteokles. As befits the form of the original genre, the scene affords characters not only a sustained presence in the dialogue, but also extensive and impactful monologues that reveal personalities and agendas. The outward violence injected to verbal exchanges early on continues to permeate a text in any

case laced with the quietly threatening undertones that have always marked Crimp's playwriting. What is also observable here, continuing from *The City* and *In the Republic of Happiness*, is that these tones assume absurdist/surrealist dimensions. As Crimp observed – referring to the final scene of *In the Republic of Happiness*, where a couple appear to have founded their own sovereign state consisting of only the two of them – it was intriguing to him to explore what staging and interpretative possibilities opened up through the notion of a state created and run by one couple.<sup>30</sup> In *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino* though certainly the 'state', or the city of Thebes, includes a body of citizens whose very livelihood and future are at stake, it is ultimately only two individuals – Eteokles and Polyneikes – who are in control, and they come from the same family unit. We can see how the family element survives as the pivot in the play and the particular scene, which, like *In the Republic of Happiness* is also concerned with tracing the genealogies of failure, though from a different perspective particularly angled on war. It is a question of families committing the cardinal sin of insularity, pursuing own ambitions and agendas regardless of the repercussions that decisions made in private carry for the social whole.

As *In the Republic of Happiness*, in this play, too, we find ourselves watching familial drama unfold at the dining room table. In an act evocative of her overarching significance, Iokaste is firmly positioned at the centre, with her two sons at the extreme left and right ends. Although Polyneikes repeats that he is the one in control,<sup>31</sup> the moment Iokaste enters the conversation, it becomes obvious that her level of authority extends well beyond her son's military jurisdiction. Iokaste's tenderness is matched by her resolve and the first lines she speaks to her son carry

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<sup>30</sup> Crimp in conversation with Rebellato. Author's transcription.

<sup>31</sup> Crimp, *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino*, pp. 36-37.

some of the most intimate and affective undertones of Crimp's text. She asks Polyneikes to acknowledge her, or, at least, to kiss her and continues:<sup>32</sup>

IOKASTE      Ja, genau: Küß mich. So.  
                   Schau, und ich werde meine Arme  
                   ganz um dich legen  
                   ganz um dich herum  
                   und meinem Kopf lege ich genau hierhin  
                   an dein Herz.<sup>33</sup>

(IOKASTE      Yes, exactly: kiss me. Like this.  
                   Look, how I will lay my arms  
                   all over you  
                   all around you  
                   and I will lay my head exactly here  
                   on your heart).

These seemingly simple phrases carry the depth of Iokaste's tenderness and frustration, demonstrating the extent to which she is convinced that motherly love can remedy her sons' political conflict. However, more is accomplished here, as Iokaste's words also function to underscore the meta-representational element. As Iokaste, in the above-quoted lines, invites her son to kiss her so that she can then throw her arms open to welcome him, resting her head on the exact spot of his heart, she alludes to all the intimate scenes of reconnecting with loved ones under turmoil. As per the title of the play, these will be familiar to us from the cinema. The remainder of Iokaste's monologue also hints at how such stories have been told, staged and watched until

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

now, but also at how they will likely continue to be represented in future attempts that deal with such universal subject matter and primal emotions.

As the scene continues, the image of Polyneikes running his fingers through his mother's hair in quiet recognition marks a particularly poignant moment in the play. Iokaste immediately offers that she cut her hair of her own accord, asking whether this was too melodramatic an act, using a word that represents both an emotion and a form of theatre.<sup>34</sup> She adds that, even when in distress, a woman's role is not to give in to tears and hysteria, but to manage the crisis as best as she can – which is what she has done.<sup>35</sup> The dialogue between Iokaste and Polyneikes is a fierce negotiation of emotions: from the disappointment of abandonment that she has experienced, to her disapproval of his too young wife and the way in which he has thrown his city in disarray by claiming his stake.<sup>36</sup> In performance, the atmosphere is electric: despite the obvious emotional connection between mother and son, Iokaste's words pierce right through as she entwines the awkwardness that his stance has caused to the awkwardness of his first sexual encounter with his child bride.<sup>37</sup>

The scene is imbued with femininity, anchored in female experience from sexuality to motherhood: the hair, primary symbol of the female, purposefully features here, as it does throughout the play.<sup>38</sup> For Iokaste, cutting her hair is an act of

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 36-37.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Women's hair emerges as a key point of reference and scenic image throughout the play and even though this is made all the more visually striking through Mitchell's direction, the relevant references are written into Crimp's text. In his theatre Crimp has often returned to specific preoccupations, but this emphasis on the female body and mentality through the lens of physical appearance is new. The only comparable instance occurs in *Cruel and Tender*, where two very different personalities, Amelia and Laela, both undergo a process of exposure to the standards set for women today as the Chorus have been replaced by a team of a housekeeper, a physiotherapist and a beautician who exert authority over the female protagonists. Amelia's resistance to the oppressive – to herself – ideal of a thin, immaculate woman as a necessary emblem of social status is noteworthy. The fact that this preoccupation, albeit differently, returns in *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino* suggests that Crimp is responding to the original genre of the Greek tragedy, where hair, especially in the context of familial traditions, carries

defiance, of decided deviation from the wholesome stereotype of the wife and mother; it is a break with the past and a determined dispensing with a physical hindrance that inhibits her course towards physical action. Indeed, it is also a break with the soft image that Mangano's luscious tresses offer in our early introduction to the character of Jocasta. The corporeally present version of the character rather than the one whose presence is mediated via a screen, the one that we now see verbally and physically intervening between two aggressive men, inspires neither emotional reactions, nor tears. Rather, she openly dismisses crying, or grieving, as an option. The play consistently asks the question of how unconventional femininity, demonstrated equally by unruly hair and personalities through Iokaste and Antigone, might fit within the limits of representation and whether that field stands to be expanded. In this play, this is achieved by the female characters forcing their way through against odds and expectations. When Iokaste asks Polyneikes whether her short hair makes her seem 'merkwürdig'<sup>39</sup> ('odd'), the question is rhetorical. The proposition extends out into the auditorium. It forces us to consider our own conventional spectatorial expectations, as well as how they may be undermined and countered to actively attack the submissiveness of the female embedded in many of the archetypal narratives we have unquestioningly inherited and propagated by consuming them.

As opposed to Mangano's silence in the clip from Pasolini's film that, again, as the title of the play suggests, we will be familiar with from the cinema, Iokaste is anything but tacit. When an official arrives to deliver news of the battlefield, her dramatic intervention reaches new dimensions. Even though, until then, characters take their orders from the Mädchen as to what to say, Iokaste soon assumes the right of speaking the official's words, bypassing his military authority. In that moment,

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the importance of recognition and belonging. See, for example, Chris Vervain, 'Performing Ancient Drama in Mask: the Case of Greek Tragedy', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 28 (May 2012), 163-81.

<sup>39</sup> Crimp, *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino*, p. 36.

Iokaste is essentially given the power by the Mädchen to take over the story. What ensues is a torrent of words; a lengthy monologue only occasionally interrupted for a brief exchange with the Mädchen. It is an intensely corporeal moment, demanding all of Iokaste's energy and commanding the audience's attention, as she narrates the events of the battlefield in painstaking detail, including the brutal conflict between her two sons. When Iokaste, through her own words that establish the events for her as much as for the audience, realises the extent of the trauma about to be sustained as Polyneikes and Eteokles are entirely prepared to kill each other, she abruptly halts her narration to call on Antigone for support. Told by the Mädchen that Antigone is busy dancing, Iokaste dismisses it as unlikely given the circumstances, even though when Antigone appears her explanation of having been occupied in washing her hair seems equally trivial.<sup>40</sup> However, there is significance to the mention of these acts; they both relate to sustaining the body despite the odds, while of course the new mention to a woman's hair re-establishes it as a key symbol in the play. The cleansing of the hair is laden with meaning; for Antigone, it is what separates her from the dirty men of the battlefield, as she describes them.<sup>41</sup> Reluctant to follow her mother there, since, as she argues 'da sind überall nur Männer' ('they are all men over there'), she eventually agrees when Iokaste retorts that this is always the situation: the world is mostly about men.<sup>42</sup> As she adds, this is precisely why Antigone needs to live on.<sup>43</sup>

The final moments of Iokaste's life, as narrated by an official in a later scene, are particularly meaningful in the context of her communication with her daughter, now established on a non-verbal level. What the official calls a 'schamlos'<sup>44</sup> ('shameless') act on Iokaste's part, bringing her young daughter along to the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 63.



battlefield, is in fact a baptism under fire for the girl; it marks the moment when Antigone transitions into adulthood. The way in which the facts are communicated to the audience creates an element of conflict; the official, dispassionate and dismissive of Iokaste's behaviour has been given the remit of divulging information about the only characters that have so far seemed worthy of our compassion. The fact that he speaks softly, his full description in the playtext being 'Leise sprechender offizier',<sup>45</sup> ('official speaking in a low voice'), with no variation in tone despite the atrocities that he describes, works to build not only tension, but also impatience. In that moment, spectators are encouraged into a state of vested interest in Antigone's fate; there is palpable anticipation for how she may counter this feeble male figure with the assumed authority to speak of her dead mother. We come to understand the importance of Antigone's hair as an anchoring device for action in the play when we hear the official describe how Iokaste tucked her daughter's hair behind her ears, whispering to her before she walked away, never to return.<sup>46</sup> Though we never visually experience this moment, the imagery developing through the official's words persists. In a moment of silent recognition, Iokaste has literally and metaphorically cleared Antigone's field of vision, preparing and inviting her to step forward into taking control of the situation, since all the individuals she had come to think of as protectors are vanishing from her life. In the absence of a viable next of kin, Antigone must become the protector of herself and her city.

When the penultimate scene of the play, bearing Antigone's name as its title, opens, and we see the young woman pacing the stage frantic and determined, dishevelled yet in control, the resonance of the confusing opening of the play comes to be revealed as precursor to later action. The first words Antigone speaks are a

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

direct dismissal of anyone's right to look at her as though she were fragile, or to pass superficial judgement on the basis of her appearance. She attracts the gaze of the audience and the male characters surrounding her and in that moment, bereft of a mother and in a precarious political state, she runs the risk of being treated as the prey of war, or as a scared child in need of protection. Antigone, however, is a ferocious creature; she wonders why the official is staring at her and boldly asks: 'Liegt es an meinen Kleidern? Stinke ich? Oder an meinen Haaren?'<sup>47</sup> ('Is it my clothes? Do I stink? Is it my hair?'). In the Mädchen's prologue, when they were still alone on the stage, dispersed throughout the set, questions were asked of us, but no answers were forthcoming. One of these questions involved the Mädchen, whose appearance, as stated earlier, is otherwise nothing if not orderly throughout, creating the first humorous moment of the play by reaching to the back of their heads, then tightly holding their long hair up above their heads and asking: 'Was halten Sie von meinen Haaren? Ja, was halten Sie von meinen Haaren wenn ich DAS damit mache?'<sup>48</sup> ('What do you think of my hair? Yes, what do you think of my hair when I do THIS with it?'). Early on, the 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of women was replaced by an unpredictable ferocity, which is particularly important given that all the women we see on the stage are, theoretically, in a vulnerable state. The sentiment now becomes fully embodied even before Antigone's speech floods through, as we see a different woman appear in front of us, one that in a moment will aggressively voice her resistance to being condescendingly called a 'Kind'<sup>49</sup> ('child') by her uncle Kreon.

As Antigone narrates her final moments with her mother, she recreates the opening of the play by uttering the same words the Mädchen had and we come to see their rich signification. We hear that when Iokaste walked away from Antigone in the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 67-68.

battlefield she promised to return, but also asked her daughter to be brave, a request that Antigone now repeats to herself as an order.<sup>50</sup> In an act of defiance of a mother who abandoned her, Antigone holds up her hair, restaging the Mädchen's early question, except this time it is she who poses it directly to her dead mother. The symbol of tacit understanding between her and her mother, the hair that Iokaste made neat for her daughter as one does for a child, now draws Antigone's full wrath, as she can no longer be bound to others' expectations. She relinquishes the pose of the hair held tightly away from her face, an exaggerated gesture pointing to her mother's earlier action, beginning to pull and tangle it. The only duty Antigone feels now is to herself and to the unrelenting sense of justice she feels must be done to her family.

The oddity that was first alluded to in the Mädchen's prologue – that same feeling that Iokaste talks about when her son's stroking of her short hair implies to her that she has become unfamiliar – persists throughout the play. As we are now confronted with Antigone's restless energy, her hair unkempt and untameable, her clothes uncared for, it becomes obvious that her presence on the stage embodies one of the main aims of the play: attacking traditional portrayals of femininity.<sup>51</sup>

Emerging from the shadows of those family members that have thus far seemed to be

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>51</sup> That this image is reserved for the finale of the play is particularly meaningful – it points to a release of angst for Antigone and connects Crimp's play to the ancient text since he preserves Antigone's rebellious form as a subject who feels the feminine and sexual awaken within herself. L. A. Swift, in 'Sexual and Familial Distortion in Euripides' *Phoenissae*', *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 139 (Spring 2009), 53-87, characteristically mentions that the 'loose and flowing hair' is a major symbol of this (p. 64). Antigone's words, quoted in Swift's article, further underline the self-assertion and deviation from decorum that Crimp's version of Antigone also presents to us: 'I do not cover up the delicate skin of my cheek, where locks of hair fall, nor do I feel shame because of maidenly modesty when I display the scarlet beneath my eyes, the blush on my face. I rush forward, a Bacchant of the dead, tossing back the veil from my hair, loosening my luxurious saffron robe, an escort of corpses, full of tears' (ibid.). In Crimp's play the rite of passage into adulthood is predominantly political, but it is still executed through the physical transition to womanhood and the awkwardness of that process. There is also evidence of an aesthetic sensibility of Crimp's: referring to a production of *Attempts on Her Life*, he characteristically mentions the moment when, in the finale, the show 'releas[ed] feeling' as the female performers removed the wigs they had worn throughout 'and their natural hair revealed their individuality. [... S]imple and beautiful'. See Martin Crimp, 'Martin Crimp in Conversation with Aleks Sierz: The Question is the Ultimate in Discomfort', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 22.4 (Autumn 2006), 352-60 (p. 360).

in positions of power, Antigone refuses to either be treated as a passive child or surrender to the notion that women are ineffectual and public action is a male domain. Even though Antigone's scene ends in ambiguity and we are left only to hypothesise as to her course of action when she leaves the stage for the final time examining the kind of life that lies ahead, a certain sensation emerges strongly. That is, a story that seemed to be anchored on two men's lust over authority and their battle over it, has in fact been about one woman's conscious death and another's conscious birth. It has been about an attempt to get closer to the truth amidst all the riddles of the myth and accept responsibility for what happens next in the story, in the moment when an opportunity for change arises, however radical the action it demands.

## **Conclusion**

In the increasingly expansive field of Crimp's theatre, *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino* emerges as a play that invites much discourse, incorporating textual and staging techniques that present us with rich material for analysis. In this article my aim has been to show how this piece established its resonance in performance, equally as a visually stunning work of theatre and uncompromising text. It is evident early on, even in the minutiae, for example when the Mädchen begin with questions such as 'Wenn Carolin 3 Äpfel hat und Luise hat 3 Äpfel wie viele Orangen hat Sabine?' (If Carolin has three apples and Luise has three apples, then how many oranges does Sabine have?) or 'Wenn Anna 2 Ponys mehr hat als Miriam und Miriams Katze Bobby 7 Junge wie ist es dann zu töten?'<sup>52</sup> (If Anna has two ponies more than Miriam and Miriam's cat Bobby has seven kittens, then what is it like to kill?). We feel the

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<sup>52</sup> Crimp, *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino*, p. 26.

humour, but a sinister element is already embedded in these girls' dialogue as images of quiet playfulness and contentment begin to intermix with brutality. There is a sensation of impending violence even in societies seemingly shielded from harm with one's civic wellbeing guaranteed, as the play emphasises the absurdity of war-related public discourse. Crimp uses material from the toolkit of *Advice to Iraqi Women*, but *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino* achieves a less historically contingent applicability as to how tacit compliance with war, displacement and genocide can be overcome. Dealing with displaced individuals, the play is made all the more timely in the context of the Syrian crisis, for example. Its fervent negotiation of women's roles and their defiance in the face of persecution and violence is also reflective of a broader social context that at the time included, indicatively, the case of Pussy Riot.<sup>53</sup> Crimp and Mitchell pose the question of what the trigger is that awakens our emotion, challenging our detachment, but also how this emotion may be conditioned or even manipulated by popular art forms and the media.

Like the transient space where the Mädchen find themselves in, so we are an audience in transit, travellers to partake in this narrative in formation, 'the rest', or the non-staged component of which depends on us, as the journey of storytelling continues. The play trusts us to answer the question of what our present historical moment means and how we can position ourselves against the circle of violence, if at

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<sup>53</sup> Maria Alyokhina, Yekaterina Samutsevich and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, members of the Pussy Riot collective, which has combined music with political activism, were arrested in 2012, following a protest event they staged in a Moscow cathedral, and subsequently imprisoned. Samutsevich was released in October 2012, while Alyokhina and Tolokonnikova were released in December 2013, an event which, like their arrest, attracted widespread media coverage, also in terms of their criticism of the penal system as they experienced it. Anna Nemtsova and Shaun Walker provide Alyokhina's account of her time in prison as one of "endless humiliations", including forced gynaecological examinations almost every day for three weeks'; see Anna Nemtsova and Shaun Walker, 'Freed Pussy Riot Members Say prison Was Time of "endless humiliations"', *Guardian*, 23 December 2013, <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/23/freed-pussy-riot-amnesty-prison-putin-humiliation>>, [accessed 7 March 2014]. See also Miriam Elder, 'Pussy Riot Sentenced to Two Years in Prison Colony over Anti-Putin Protest', *Guardian*, 17 August 2012, <<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/aug/17/pussy-riot-sentenced-prison-putin>>, [accessed 7 March 2014].

all. The piece makes repeated reference to the Sphinx, and the Mädchen speak of a ‘Menschenopfer’<sup>54</sup> (‘human sacrifice’) – the kind that is traditionally needed in myths to appease the Gods and serve the greater good. But what this play suggests is that there are lessons to be learnt from the past and human sacrifices are neither necessary nor inevitable. The Mädchen ask: ‘Wenn die Antwort der Mensch ist was ist dann die Frage?’<sup>55</sup> (‘if the answer is man [human], then what is the question?’). The invitation to solve this new riddle has been extended to the audience; whether we conceptualise ourselves as active agents of history or as its passive observers, the play implies, ultimately depends on us.

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<sup>54</sup> Crimp, *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino*, p. 48.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.