Having stirred critical debates concerning its generic status, its ambivalent use of Shakespeare, and its vision of Italy’s current „country disposition“ (Cfr. Calbi, 2014, Bassi, 2016 and Valentini, 2016), Cesare deve morire will here be primarily interpreted as a film that foregrounds the phenomenon of playacting. Instead however of focussing on the effects of Shakespeare’s text on prisoners of Rebibbia engaged in the theatrical production of Julius Caesar, I shall be interested in the affects elicited by these non-actors in the cinematic viewers trying to disentangle the blurred ontological boundaries of the film. The meta-theatricality on which this blurring relies will be set against the background of René Girard’s anthropological reading of Julius Caesar in the light of this critic’s theory of mimetic desire and violence. The rich genealogy of “homo mimeticus”, leading from Plato to Lacoue-Labarthe, has recently been revisited by the Belgian philosopher Nidesh Lawtoo (Cfr. Lawtoo, 2013, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019) in order to address various predicaments of our present age – one of them being the re-appearance of mimetic phantoms in new fascist movements - as also to point to the productive, creative, poetici force of mimesis, making one capable of breaking with the past. I shall analyse the ways in which Cesare deve morire exemplifies both these aspects of mimesis by emphasising its transformation of impressionable theatrical amateurs into impressive cinematic artists.

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