From the 'New Wave' to the 'Unnameable': post-dramatic theatre & Australia in the 1980s & 1990s

Author:
Hamilton, Margaret

FROM THE 'NEW WAVE' TO THE 'UNNAMEABLE': POST-DRAMATIC THEATRE & AUSTRALIA IN THE 1980s & 1990s

MARGARET HAMILTON

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Abstract

The object of this dissertation is to re-assess Australian examples of 'performance' in light of discourses and directions in dramaturgy that have emerged since the 1970s internationally. The thesis applies Hans-Thies Lehmann's comprehensive theory of post-dramatic theatre to explicate examples of departures from dramatic theatre in view of the expansive field of inquiry implied by the description 'performance' or 'new media arts' and general cultural-political theory. To examine the de-centralisation of text specific to post-dramatic theatre the dissertation analyses firstly, material devised collaboratively at all stages of creative development in its case studies of the Sydney based companies The Sydney Front (1986-1993) and Open City (1987 -); and secondly, Heiner Müller's concept of 'literature' written for the theatre and in opposition to its convention. In addition, the analysis of Müller serves as an introduction to a comparative analysis of a dramatic (literary) theatre project by a group of Aboriginal artists based on a post-dramatic text by Müller.

This dissertation endeavours to contribute to documentation on post-dramatic theatre in Australia and more broadly, to conceptions of contemporary forms of dramaturgy. More specifically, the thesis argues that dramaturgy no longer necessarily concerns the identification of an aesthetic locus that explicitly explicates the audience's relation to a known macrocosm. Instead, the thesis conceives of dramaturgy as a compositional strategy that can be thought of within the bounds of Aristotle's perfunctory visual dimension 'opsis' and elaborated upon in terms of Kristeva's theory of the 'thetic' as regulating 'semiotic' incursions into the 'symbolic' order. In doing so, the thesis proposes the concept of a 'televisual' and an 'abject' dramaturgy, the latter on the basis of a relation to the older tradition of carnival and identifies a link between intertextuality (transposition) and dramaturgical strategies that engage the spectator in the theatre situation and the dissolution of *logocentric* hierarchy.

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Introducing 'limbo': (trans)forming the lexicon of 'new theatre'

Post-script: 'new theatre' & stage fiction

In 1999 Currency Press in association with *RealTime* published *Performing the unNameable*, the first anthology of Australian performance texts to appear in Australia. Only two of the seventeen 'fragments of live works' in the collection, to use the editors' description of its contents, originated from a script completed prior to rehearsal (Allen and Pearlman 1999: xi). The majority of the anthology reflects material prepared by artists interested in production processes that depart from the structural hierarchy intrinsic to established theatre tradition and more specifically, deviate from dramatic theatre's privileging of the text and the word. As a consequence, a number of the manuscripts constitute a record of improvisations, actions and images, as opposed to the dialogue and character form familiar to dramatic literary convention. *Performing the unNameable* is thereby testimony to a significant shift in approaches to the theatre medium in Australia, and more broadly reflects artistic directions transpiring internationally. Unlike the 'new wave' of play writing that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s and its subsequent canonisation as Australian drama, the range of 'new theatre' forms that have developed over the last few decades and this term is in no way to imply a relation to the New Theatre movement[1], has remained a largely negligible sector of the industry,

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[1] Like the left-wing New Theatre movement that emerged in the 1920s and 30s in America, workers' theatre groups operated during the Great Depression up until the advent of television in Australia. In response to local and economic conditions and influenced by international developments, the inaugural meeting of the Sydney Workers' Art Club took place in 1932 at the home of Isaac Gust, a Russian Jewish immigrant. Groups in Sydney and Melbourne established the New Theatre League in 1936 and in 1945 Sydney's New Theatre League shortened its name to the New Theatre. Similarly, the Brisbane Unity Theatre later became known simply as Brisbane's New Theatre, and other centres hosted workers' theatres that came under political pressure when the Communist Party was banned in 1940. Adelaide's New Theatre, for example, was closed in 1960 following its

much to the detriment of the Australian theatre landscape. A number of factors have contributed critically to this situation, including the commitment to specific forms of dramatic theatre by government-subsidised State theatre in Australia. The result, as Veronica Kelly observes, is an increasing dichotomy between mainstage (literary) theatre and innovative hybrids developed and presented at the margins of mainstream production (1998: 6).

It is a bifurcation that has been principally accounted for in terms of the social discourses underpinning this development: the experience of middle-class Anglo-Celtic Australia, as opposed to queer, feminist, Indigenous, migrant Australia. Together, both sides of the spectrum constitute a highly diverse group of practitioners, performance styles and subject matter. Comprehensive studies of contemporary Australian theatre are rare, however, and in comparison to monograph-length research analysing Australian playwrights, articles largely account for research into new forms of theatre or contemporary performance, to use the more common description of the field in Australia[2]. In addition, a number of the studies that emerged in the 1990s apply a specifically post-colonial critique to an examination of alternative theatre 'voices' (Gilbert 1998; Gilbert & Tompkins 1996)[3] or in the case of essay collections and surveys of physical theatre and performance focus on the significance of the 'real-time-space' of the performing body (Tait 2000; Waterlow 1994). As a consequence, departures from the idea of traditional dramatic theatre have been variously explicated in terms of a re-inscription of identity and a preoccupation with the 'live' nature of the medium, its phenomenology.

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infiltration by an Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) agent. My use of the term 'new theatre' denotes contemporary forms of theatre that depart from dramatic theatre form and bears no relation to the New Theatre movement. Instead it derives from Hans-Thies Lehmann's theory of post-dramatic theatre as the aesthetic logic of new theatre and is consistent with the scholarly application of the term by other academics, including Richard Schechner.

[2] See Kelly for a survey of recent critical and historical studies (1998: 9-10).

[3] In addition to Gilbert and Tompkins' specific application of postcolonial theory see Jane Goodall (1993) for an article that addresses the question of identity politics and post-colonialism in relation to The Sydney Front's production *Don Juan.*

The 'unnameable': If performing 'new theatre' relates to the 'unspecifiable', to return to the idea embedded in the title of this dissertation and the anthology referred to above, this ostensibly infers a particular, if not peculiar, complexity. More specifically, it raises the question of the relations underpinning this conception of the practice within the performing arts in Australia; that is, the relationship of 'new theatre' to 'dramatic theatre' and other contemporary cultural phenomena. Practitioners and scholars have consistently lamented the inadequate language used to describe forms characterised by fragmented narration, heterogeneity in style and a non-hierarchical approach to scenic composition that intentionally compromises the dominance of text in the theatrical medium. Anti-character, anti-plot, anti-dialogue are typical of the oft cited labels applied to examples of 'new theatre' and this raises a critical dilemma in terms of its reception. Australian artist Virginia Baxter elaborates on this issue in the following way.

> [...] there are many companies who in an effort to create new forms, have chosen quite legitimately to ignore verbal language in favour of other languages [...] But where does that leave us? To theatre critics! Labelled un-theatrical, misread as un-dramatic [...]. (Baxter in K Schaefer 1999: 96)

It is a problem exacerbated by the erosion of the distinction between theatre craft and television and film and the emergence of industry 'standards'. Critic Bryce Hallett points out that a number of stage plays by prominent Australian playwrights are largely indistinguishable from the screenplay (in Kelly 1998: 6). In the 1990s Louis Nowra's *Così* and *Radiance*, Nick Enright's *Blackrock*, Nicholas Parsons' *Dead Heart*, Hannie Rayson's *Hotel Sorrento* and David Williamson's *Emerald City*, *Travelling North* and *Brilliant Lies*, as Kelly notes, were all quickly transferred to celluloid (1998: 6). It is a pattern that appears to be continuing into the twenty-first century. Andrew Bovell's screen adaptation of his play *Speaking in tongues* as *Lantana*, is perhaps the most recent high profile example of this trend. The increasing affinity between the stageplay and the screenplay not only fosters the development of public expectations about theatre form,

but has serious implications for local artistic development. For Australian theatre director Barrie Kosky, one of the most vocal critics in public debate about directions in the performing arts, it constitutes 'masterpiece-sofa sort of mediocrity' (in Kelly 1998: 6)[4]. It is therefore perhaps not surprising in this context that Australian productions are rarely selected for the programs of European festivals and venues renowned for presenting 'new theatre', like the Hebbel Theater Berlin, Festival Kunsten des Arts and the Kaaitheater in Brussels, Rotterdamse Schouwburg and Künstlerhaus Mousonturm in Frankfurt am Main[5].

In contrast to the 'export' of Australian theatre, a number of high profile international artists attesting to the emergence of new forms of theatre have steadily flowed into Australia. Over the last twenty years the Australian festival circuit has presented key examples of this paradigm including Robert Wilson, Jan Fabre, Wooster Group, Pina Bausch, La Fura dels Baus, Michael Laub and Remote Control Productions, Societas Raffaello Sanzio, Forced Entertainment, Heiner Goebbels and Uwe Mengel. Critical reaction, however, has tended to sensationalise significant deviations from conventions of dramatic theatre and in doing so, reflects the polarisation of the popular press and specialised media[6]. In Hilary Crampton's opinion, for example, Jan Fabre's *I Am Blood* failed as 'Art' on the basis of its lack of structure (in Murphet 2003/4: 5), and was described less elegantly as 'a bloody shambles' by another *Age* reviewer (Jillett 2003: 8). What the Fabre 2003 Melbourne festival coverage reveals is an acute inability to

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[4]   At the age of 26 Barrie Kosky became the youngest director of the Adelaide Festival (1996). In the late 1990s he left Australia, initially for Theater ohne Grenzen in Vienna and in 2001 he took over the direction of Schauspielhaus Wien with Airan Berg.

[5]   Hebbel Theater (Berlin), Künstlerhaus Mousonturm (Frankfurt am Main) and Festival Kunsten Festival des Arts (Brussels) have all presented William Yang, and the Hebbel Theater presented the Elision Ensemble's *Sonorous Bodies* in 2002 and *Yuè Lìng Jié* (*Moon Spirit Feasting*) in 2003. For a description of these performances in the context of an analysis of trans-national theory refer to Hamilton (2005).

[6]   *RealTime*, a bi-monthly arts journal, incorporating the screen culture supplement OnScreen established in 1994, currently constitutes the main source of informed reviews and debate concerning new forms of theatre in Australia. The journal covers festivals, visual arts, music, digital performance and infrastructure and funding issues pertinent to the industry. In the late 1980s the short-lived independent publication *spectator burns: performance/theory* and in the 1990s *The Performance Space* journal provided critical reporting on directions emerging in this field.

critically respond to new forms of theatre. In addition to ineffectual accounts in the daily press, however, a number of factors have contributed to insufficient discussion of the theatre aesthetics integral to these 'new' forms of expression. Kelly, for example, draws attention to the 'diffusion of scholarly energies into more focussed or richly theorised studies' coinciding with the dissolution of grand narratives apparent in the 1990s (1998: 10). The blurring of distinct disciplines of practice and subsequent debate about the expansive field of performance, similarly, tended to impede analysis of new forms of theatre in Australia. In *Body and Self: performance art in Australia 1969-92* Anne Marsh argues that Australian artists in the 1980s and 1990s no longer felt 'impelled' to assert the difference between theatre and performance art (1993: 203). Marsh based her argument on the premise that the distinction between theatrical illusion and 'real' life 'dissolves' in light of theory (1993: 203). It is a claim that clearly reflects the deepening alliance of a number of key practitioners involved in the creation of new forms of theatre with the visual arts sector, on the basis that it provides a significantly more open platform for dialogue and experimentation in Australia.

As a result of the combination of the factors referred to above – industry models and the critique this paradigm has inspired, limited scholarly research and debate, and in particular the language used to describe it – 'new theatre' constitutes a largely neglected field in Australia. It is a field that not only offers a rich panorama of aesthetic exploration, but is critical to the understanding of the written text and its historical dominance in the theatrical medium. In his essay 'From Logos to Landscape: Text in Contemporary Dramaturgy' the German theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann reflects on the conception of the text in the earliest theories of theatre on the basis that:

> At an artform's moment of 'origin' nothing can yet be taken for granted. (Lehmann 1997: 55)

Lehmann's 'return' to a point in the dramatic medium's materialisation opens up not simply the question of clarifying contemporary understandings of the text, but its

expediency. More specifically, the privileging of the text infers the subjugation of a set of elements typical in new forms of theatre with its emphasis on rhythm, the presence of the body and the diffusion of the logic underpinning the transfer of 'meaning' from the stage to spectator. In his reading of the *Poetics*, Lehmann draws attention to Aristotle's conception of the text as an element of 'melopoeia', the part of dramatic art relating to music in order to point out that it is not comprehended as the sole agent of sense and meaning (1997: 55). Music, sound and voice, he reasons, have been consistently understood as fundamental aspects of the text.

In the early 20th century Artaud, whose theories have impacted on generations of 'new theatre' practitioners, called for a 'poetry for the senses' independent of dialogue form, the sound potential of words and the 'undercurrent of impressions, connections and affinities beneath language' in *The Theatre and its Double* (1985: 27). Artaud's philosophy of the theatre corresponds to the experience a diverse group of Australian artists in the 1980s and 1990s sought to create as part of a 'new' conception of text and in particular its assumed monopoly in the hierarchy of elements characterising conventional theatre form. In doing so, these artists, artists who frequently collaborated with practitioners from other fields, found themselves at the fringes, positioned as marginal by many in the broader theatre industry. In Sarah Miller's opinion it constitutes an 'antagonism' between those working in 'legit' theatre, as opposed to 'presumably illegitimate' theatre (in Baxter 1996: 3). As a consequence, the primary motivation behind this study is the need to address a range of pre- and misconceptions that have hindered the reception and more significantly, the development of new forms of theatre in Australia.

Collaboration, Convergence & Divergence: 'new theatre'/performance-/art

In the 1980s and 1990s a number of Australian artists from a variety of disciplines, theatre, dance, opera and the visual arts created a discrete body of work 'loosely referred to as performance, or contemporary performance or live art' (Gallasch 2001: 38). This period constituted a critical time in terms of the emergence of a field of

practice that involved the partial invigoration of avant-garde forms by artists interested in addressing recent developments in philosophy, changes in everyday culture and different conceptions of social and political expression. It was a creative phase influenced by the art practices of the late 1960s and 70s and specifically the shift undertaken by a number of artists to work beyond institutional structures, the theatre and art museum. More specifically, Lehmann points to the connection between the 'Concept Art' of the 1970s and later forms of 'new theatre', and elaborates on the correlation between new forms of theatre and performance art (see 1999: 241-53). The critical understanding of art practice as the experience of the 'real' (that is, real time, space and body), as opposed to representation, evident in 'new theatre' forms that began to emerge in 1970s, for example, can be traced to conceptualism. With reference to RoseLee Goldberg and artists like Jan Fabre, Robert Wilson, Elizabeth LeCompte, Lehmann notes a reversed trend in the flow of influence in the movement towards theatricalisation in the performance art of the 1980s and a new integration of performance, theatre and opera. Furthermore, he discusses the incorporation of elaborate visual and audio structures, as well as the broadening of media technology and the engagement with extended time-frames as a move towards the theatre medium. To describe the aesthetic logic of these forms of 'new theatre' Lehmann developed the concept of post-dramatic theatre into a comprehensive theory[7]. In this dissertation Lehmann's theory of post-dramatic theatre is applied to specific examples in an Australian context to analyse the emergence of forms of new theatre that de-construct the aesthetics specific to dramatic theatre and its major premise – the text.

The term post-dramatic theatre has entered a contested lexicon dedicated to encapsulating the fundamental principles of the 'new theatre' phenomenon. In the decades following the 1970s practitioners and scholars applied a range of labels to describe new forms of theatre. 'Performance' gained currency as a means of elaborating

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[7] In *Performance Theory* Richard Schechner uses the term post-dramatic theatre to describe happenings in his discussion of the incompatibility between established methods of dramatical analysis and non-Aristotelian forms of playwrighting and performance (1988: 21).

upon 'live' experience as a unique self-reflexive situation that contests the fictive cosmos of the theatre and institutes a shift in terms of the performer-spectator relationship. Its current usage, as Marvin Carlson (2004) demonstrates in *performance: a critical introduction*, is not limited to the arts, but extends to the social sciences, anthropology, psychoanalysis and linguistics, as well as technology. In his analysis of performance and its implications for theatre scholarship Lehmann points to ritual, interactive performance and the production of presence as key illuminating features of post-dramatic theatre (1999: 255). In doing so, he qualifies post-dramatic theatre as a theatre of the present by pointing to the slippage of *presence* specific to the medium (1999: 259-60). This latter point is of key consideration in relation to Peta Tait's emphasis on the 'porous meanings of live performing bodies' that cannot be fixed in photographs or film for evaluation (2000: 2). Philip Auslander (1999) challenges precisely the notion of the 'liveness' Tait accentuates by contesting the prevalent conjecture championed by Peggy Phelan (1996) that the 'live' distinguishes an event as 'real' and constitutes it as resistant to mediated reproduction. Other academics have applied the periodising term postmodernism as a theoretical discourse to explicate the features of new forms of theatre in relation to contemporary cultural phenomena. Its application, however, is limited, as Lehmann clarifies, particularly in relation to the breadth of forms – empty spaces to overwhelming stimuli – implied by 'new theatre' (1999: 28). Examples of nihilism and the grotesque are equally valid in earlier theatre periods and are similarly difficult to categorise within the frame of postmodernism. In Australia artists and funding agencies increasingly employed the description 'hybrid' during the 1980s, which was later incorporated into new media arts practice as an explanatory tenet of the field.

Post-dramatic theatre: the development of a 'new' theatre form & discourse

In 1999 Lehmann published his landmark contribution to the understanding of 'new theatre', *Postdramatisches Theater*. The English translation of Lehmann's seminal book is

due for publication shortly. In addition to the range of cross-disciplinary influences alluded to above, Lehmann details the development of a post-dramatic discourse within the theatre medium as a succession of stages from the end of the 19th century to the end of the 20th. Through self-reflexion, decomposition and the practice of breaking down the elements specific to dramatic theatre, the historical avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde of the 1950s and 60s acted as a prelude to post-dramatic theatre form (see Lehmann 1999: 76-93). In this schemata Lehmann links, for example, Gertrude Stein's *Landscape Play* to Robert Wilson's theatre aesthetic and points to the manifestation of aspects of the Theatre of the Absurd in the post-dramatic theatre forms of the 1980s and 1990s. The elements Martin Esslin accounts for as 'metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition' (2001: 23-4) – discontinuity, collage, montage, collapse of narration, speechlessness etc – Lehmann identifies as a cultural given in post-dramatic theatre (1999: 88). In this respect, it is not the presentation of the collapse of *weltanschaulich* certainty that is intrinsic to post-dramatic theatre, but its assumed validity. The Theatre of the Absurd, however, like Brechtian dramaturgy, is underpinned by dramatic tradition even though, as Lehmann notes, a number of texts ride the boundaries of narrative and dramatic logic (1999: 89).

It is a tradition that attests to the fortitude of the fundamental interconnection between drama and logic (or drama and dialectic in the work of Brecht) specific to European theatre forms that derive from the Aristotelian model, as well as infers the radical nature of the post-dramatic theatre project. In the elaboration of post-dramatic theatre as a departure from dramatic 'logic' Aristotle's theoretical formulations constitute a foundational point[8]. The fundamental premises Aristotle devised to elaborate upon unity of plot in the extant notes constituting the *Poetics*, prescribe a *logos* based on imitation in drama as action. Events ('pragmata') function as the primary impulse behind representation or to quote the first tenet of Aristotle's thesis clarifying

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[8] Like Lehmann (1997), Helene Keyssar (1996) returns to Aristotle's *Poetics* in order to clarify departures from dominant understandings of drama, and more specifically to apply Bakhtin's concept of dialogism to argue that feminist drama is characterised by polyphony.

the primacy of plot:

> Tragedy is not an imitation of persons, but of actions and of life. Well-being and ill-being reside in action, and the goal of life is an activity, not a quality; people possess certain qualities in accordance with their character, but they achieve well-being or its opposite on the basis of how they fare. So the imitation of character is not the purpose of what the agents do; character is included along with and on account of the actions. So the events, i.e. the plot, are what tragedy is there for, and that is the most important thing of all. (Aristotle 1996: 11)

More significantly, Aristotle states that the effect of tragedy does not rely on public performance and actors, and Lehmann subsequently concludes that it is 'reading' and not mise-en-scène that permits tragedy to unfold according to a particular hierarchy: plot (*mythos*), character, thought (*dianoia*) and speech (1997: 55). Artistotle's *Poetics* defines the basic structure of the tragic text in terms of its entirety – a beginning, middle and end – universal purpose and coherence of reasoning and unity. It is a configuration that accepts the privileging of the text as testimony to the 'natural state' of tragedy (Aristotle 1996: 8). In Artistotle's ranking of the components of tragedy, spectacle is rendered the least important element of dramatic art. It is emotionally evocative, but does not directly serve the primacy of the plot and the structure of the events, the goal (*telos*) of tragedy. Lehmann therefore emphasises structure, order and *telos* as integral to *logocentricism* and not merely the word (1997: 56). In doing so, he points to an orientation towards an order of meaning that informs all Western systems of reading, interpretation, analysis and exposition and thereby constitutes 'the greatest totality' for de-construction for Jacques Derrida (1976: 46).

As a consequence, the poetic order organising the theatre medium, its practice and reception, is deeply connected to the ascendency of the text[9] despite a variety of

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[9]   In order to critique understandings of the 'text' as a self-enclosed meaning-production system, this study applies poststructuralist theoretical formulations of the 'text' (from Latin *textere/* [*textus*], to weave) as a process or tissue of quotations (Roland Barthes) and deconstruction theory, the method of textual analysis developed by Jacques Derrida.

developments, including the heightened use of non-verbal physical gestures, music, dance and the intention of Brecht's 'theatre for a scientific age', which was designed to supersede dramatic theatre by instituting the 'Epic' form (1964: 179). Brecht objected to the 'inaccurate representations of our social life' in 'so-called Naturalism', but did not denounce the central position of the literary text (1964: 179). Instead, he censured the construction of a dramatic vision of the 'real world' that concurrently asserts its (political) legitimacy by virtue of its form: the illusory basis of mimesis, unity and the claim to representation. The manifold devices Brecht designed to expose the fictive cosmos of the theatrical universe in order to foreground the dialectical capacity of representation (theatre-in-theatre, prologue, epilogue etc) did not, as Lehmann notes, destroy the specific experience of dramatic theatre (1999: 21). Examples of 'new theatre', however, characterised by scenic poems and fragmentation operate beyond a *logocentric* understanding of dramatic discourses. In doing so, they 'de-semanticize' language to follow through Lehmann's argument in his article 'From Logos to Landscape: Text in Contemporary Dramaturgy' (1997: 57). To explicate this realm of practice Lehmann returns to Aristotle's conception of *opsis* as opposed to *pragmata*. *Opsis* is the realm of the visual. In Artistotle's terms it is 'inartistic' and insignificant to poetic art (1996: 13). By implication it is devoid of structure and rationality and infers the possibility of perplexity and sensuality and consequently, undermines the *telos* of tragedy and its structural mainstay: the text. In this context the following statement by the editors of *Performing the unNameable* reflects a shift in the communication process intrinsic to theatre and the understanding of text and its role in the medium.

> The physical texts, visual texts, aural texts, structural devices and other elements may have equal or greater weight to words in performance. (Pearlman and Allen 1999: xii)

It is a shift intrinsic to Lehmann's conception of post-dramatic theatre form. Prior to Lehmann's treatise, however, Peter Szondi speculated on 'Drama in crisis' in his *Theory*

of Modern Drama published in German in 1956. Szondi reasoned that the development of 'theatre' or theatrical works is only comprehensible on the basis of the properties it emerged out of and subsequently disengaged from; that is, 'drama'. For Szondi the drama of modernity that transpired during the Renaissance entailed the eradication of prologue, chorus and epilogue, and in doing so, established a series of distinctions to antique tragedy, medieval clerical plays, baroque theatre and Shakespearean form. As a result, the 'absolute dominance of dialogue' characterised drama as a form dedicated to the reproduction of interpersonal relations and communication (1987: 8). Monologue appeared sporadically in this revision and as a consequence, did not signify the form. Furthermore, the 'absolute' nature of drama inferred a self-contained dialectic conscious only of its internal cosmology. The dilemma for modern playwrights culminated for Szondi in the tension between the constraints of 'absolute' drama (subject-object dialogic unification in form and opposition in content) and attempts at epic resolution (subject-object relations that engender the development of form). That is essentially a Hegelian historical-dialectical form-content conflict in the plays of the late nineteenth century up to the manifestation of a range of 'tentative solutions' in form from Expressionism to Brecht and on to Miller. Lehmann's analysis concerns examples of theatre no longer confined by the paradigm of drama and in this respect proffers a radical transformation of subject-object relations and the problem of form Szondi identified in his theoretical formulation of modern drama.

In his monograph *Postdramatisches Theater*, Lehmann proposes an aesthetic logic of theatrical praxis dating from the 1960s; praxis which operates beyond (*jenseits*) drama and offers new constellations of and subsequently conceptions for subjectivity (see 1999: 30, 14-15). His term post-dramatic theatre acknowledges the dramatic literary heritage intrinsic to new forms of theatre and the consistent contiguity between theatre and text despite its non-hierarchical position in post-dramatic praxis (1999: 13). In doing so, Lehmann applies affirmative language in his comprehensive account of a new vision for the theatre and its structural design. He categorises and explicates aesthetic developments pertaining to post-dramatic theatre in terms of the text, space,

time, the body and media. Furthermore, in his article 'From Logos to Landscape' he stipulates a *'shift of axis from dialogue within theatre to dialogue between theatre and audience'* (1997: 58), which reinforces the concept of participation intrinsic to the *performer-*spectator relationship discussed as key to the distinction between performance and theatre in Australia (see Miller 1994: 10). It is a point that raises the question of dramaturgy specifically in relation to the performance text or theatre situation. The shift in communication associated with post-dramatic theatre infers the creation of a space in which the spectator is responsible for fusing its elements: the musicality of language; the presence of the body; and multi-dimensional auditive and visual moments unfettered by traditional concepts of unity. If the spectator is conceived of as an interactive component of the performance text, and this infers a different understanding of the spectator's role in the linguistic and/or production text, what are the implications for dramaturgy and specifically its political function as a structure instituting aesthetic 'responsibility'?

It is precisely this re-configuration of the role of the spectator from passive witness to active partner, as Lehmann observes, that has lead to an unavoidable association with the criteria of mass communication (1999: 245-6). 'Media reality' and changed conditions of social communication as a result of new technologies have clearly impacted on the development and reception of forms of theatre and their subsequent classification as a medium. In Australia this has manifested in the discussion of 'hybrid' forms of performance as part of new media arts practice, although its formal origins, as Keith Gallasch observes, originate in radical departures from conventional models of theatre, dance and opera (2003: 8). New media arts and the multiplicity of media and disciplines that 'hybridity' implies, constitutes an expansive field of inquiry. Furthermore, it potentially subsumes examples of post-dramatic theatre and suggests a technological platform. The New Media Arts Board (NMAB) of the Australia Council for the Arts, for example, clarified its broad area of practice in its policy statement by stipulating that interdisciplinary art:

> describes a process where artists collaborate and combine conventional artforms to create new forms of artistic expression [...] It does not refer to the theme of the work. There is no necessity for a technological component in [...] interdisciplinary art. (Australia Council for the Arts 2003: 82)

On 8 December 2004 the Australia Council announced as part of its most recent re-structure the dissolution of the NMAB, the re-direction of its responsibility to the Visual Arts/Craft Board and the Music Board and the establishment of an Inter-Arts Office to distribute applications to the relevant traditional artform section of the Australia Council. It is a decision that demonstrates the significance of artform definition in the allocation of financial resources and raises serious issues for the future development of post-dramatic theatre, particularly in light of the emergence of realism as a standard aesthetic dominating the theatre industry. Furthermore, it heightens the urgency intrinsic to a re-consideration of local developments in theatre form.

Post-dramatic theatre does not prefigure the 'end' of classical or modern drama. Instead, it indicates the emergence of a form of theatre that operates on the basis of compositional possibilities, as opposed to conventions specific to dramatic literature and its institution. It necessarily infers, however, the analysis of different approaches to the medium and a new set of criteria to address forms of expression in which the text is merely an equal constituent. Kelly notes in *Our Australian theatre in the 1990s* that performance work, like Aboriginal, circus, multicultural or bilingual theatre, is yet to be synthesised in scholarly literature and this dissertation endeavours to contribute to documentation and analysis in this field (1998: 10). More specifically, this study explicates particular examples of contemporary performance in Australia as post-dramatic theatre in order to provide clarity to an area arguably vulnerable in many respects. It is vulnerable as a result of prevailing standards of media critique, the allocation of subsidy and the wide-ranging semantic implications of the term 'performance' and more recently and specific to an Australian context, the expression new media. In doing so, the study draws significantly on Lehmann's research in order not only to clarify forms of theatre that depart from traditional models, but also to

contextualise Australian practice within a broader discourse concerning developments in 'new theatre' internationally.

Case Studies: Open City & The Sydney Front

Open City, the subject of Chapter 2, and the now defunct The Sydney Front analysed in Chapter 3 attest to the emergence of post-dramatic theatre form in Australia. The largely undocumented companies operated out of Sydney in the late 1980s and 1990s and developed a series of productions that departed from the idea of dramatic theatre premiering to a specialised public at The Performance Space in Sydney. Both companies featured in the anthology of performance texts *Performing the unNameable*, as well as the survey of artists presented in *25 Years of Performance Art in Australia*[10]. Their inclusion in these two volumes indicates the intersection of the concept of performance (art) and new forms of theatre and the difficulty inherent in the idea of categorising these areas of practice definitively.

Open City established a reputation for personal narrative, commonly referred to as spoken performance, and interdisciplinary collaboration frequently involving multi and new media. In a lecture about contemporary performance styles Open City co-founders Keith Gallasch and Virginia Baxter clarified their conception of performance as not simply a hybrid of multi-media and cross artform practices by pointing out that it:

> entails a wariness of rational discourse, an inclination to images, to reverie, to dream, dissociated images, various means of engaging its audience and sharing its space and action with them, that it has a real kinship with performance art concerns with real time, the site-specific, the physical limits of performance and THE BODY. (Baxter and Gallasch 1994: 10-11)

In another lecture to the Visual Arts and Craft Board of the Australia Council for the

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[10] Marsh (1993) did not include Open City or The Sydney Front in her history of performance art in Australia.

Arts, Gallasch aligned Open City's practice 'more with performance and the visual arts than with theatre' ([n.d].: 9). However, the company cites a diverse array of influences in relation to its body of work, including the Futurists' Theatre of Simultaneity for its production *Sum of the Sudden*. The Sydney Front allied itself to the 'avant-garde' as a 'genre' for experimentation[11]. In addition, its performers tended to emphasise their backgrounds in theatre, as opposed to performance art. Nudity, frivolity and audience participation periodically defined the company's reception in the tabloid press, particularly in London. However, the role of the spectator emerged as a key dramaturgical principle for The Sydney Front and its trajectory culminated, to use the words of member John Baylis, in the 'elimination of the performer' (1997: 15).

Despite the differences briefly alluded to above, Open City and The Sydney Front shared a common approach to the performance medium. Firstly, both groups were committed to incorporating the spectator into the processes of the *production*. Secondly, a text did not dictate the development phase or the final presentation; a conventional play neither emerged from the process of creating a new work nor preceded it. As a consequence, Open City and The Sydney Front present highly pertinent case studies not simply as examples of post-dramatic theatre in Australia, but in terms of the articulation of dramaturgical strategies that conceive of the spectator's participation in the creative act.

VALIDITY & VIABILITY
Local contexts: platforms for 'new theatre'

In Australia, key venues such as The Performance Space in Sydney, facilitated the development of cross and interdisciplinary collaboration and consolidated this work as a body of activity. According to a promotional brochure produced by the venue in 1990

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[11] My use of the term 'genre' reflects Richard Schechner's description of the 'avant-garde' as a 'genre' that is 'still rebellious, if not revolutionary' that is modestly financed in comparison to the mainstream. See Schechner interview in *Spectator Burns: performance/theory* conducted by John Baylis

that summarised its artistic policy, The Performance Space aimed:

> to provide an opportunity for critical dialogue in the research and development of contemporary arts in Australia; to promote artistic practice which is informed by contemporary cultural theories and critical debates; to promote work which attempts to engage artists and audiences in a more active relationship; to encourage work which questions established art conventions, processes and representational practices; and, to address through performance, the traditional dichotomy between theory and practice. (The Performance Space's Artistic Policy in Schaefer 1999: 5)

Established in October 1982 by Mike Mullins in the inner city Sydney suburb of Redfern, The Performance Space was formerly used as a union headquarters and dance hall. In the mid-70s Mullins travelled to Poland to study with Grotowski after acting as the company's tour manager in Australia. Upon his return to Sydney he held a series of workshops based on his experiences and in 1980 Mullins located a space for *New Blood*, a large scale performance work. Two years later the site opened as The Performance Space with Mullins as its director. Now known as a national centre for the research and development of the contemporary arts, The Performance Space plays a critical role producing and presenting new forms of artistic expression in both its black box space and gallery. In the 1980s and 1990s it became synonymous with specific companies, including the All Out Ensemble and Open City originally from inter-State and the local companies, One Extra Dance Company, Entr'Acte and The Sydney Front. Nikki Heywood, Regina Heilmann, Meme Thorne, Deborah Pollard and a number of other artists joined established performers like Tess De Quincey regularly working out of venue in the 1990s under the Artistic Direction of Sarah Miller, Angharad Wynne-Jones, Zane Trow and Fiona Winning. Miller broadened the program to physical theatre and presented companies like Legs on the Wall and Party Line and Wynne-Jones, known for her earlier productions *Hydrofictions* on Sydney Harbour and *In Sea and Air*, a sonic taxi trip, developed a site-specific performance program. In this context 'performance' emerged, as Gallasch observes, as a more significant field of practice in

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([c. 1987]: 29).

Sydney than in other parts of Australia (2001: 39). This is not to overlook the development of distinct aesthetics in other centres, of Kosky's Gilgul Theatre Company in Melbourne, for example, or of the writer-director Jenny Kemp. Nor is it to confine forms of 'new theatre' to The Performance Space in Sydney, particularly in light of the Sidetrack Performance Group and independent companies like Gravity Feed.

The Performance Space, however, supported by both the Federal Government through the Australia Council for the Arts and the NSW Ministry for the Arts, constitutes a unique institution in the local theatre landscape. Its façade resembles an art-house style cinema and in many respects signifies its experimental, as opposed to mainstream domain and its mission clearly distinguishes it from the aim of local State Theatre, the Sydney Theatre Company. Established in 1978 Sydney Theatre Company is specifically committed to presenting international plays and Australian drama and is dependent upon approximately 80% of its revenue from box-office and corporate sponsorship. Kelly reasons that commercial pressures have contributed to the company's conservative repertoire for mainstream audiences (1998: 3). In Richard Fotheringham's opinion government subsidy to State Theatre constitutes 'official culture' and more precisely the promotion of nineteenth century artforms underpinned by a range of assumptions about the superiority of high-art, the educational role of these forms and their universal function (1998: 20). The Performance Space's operating agenda is similarly distinct from Belvoir St Theatre Ltd. In 1984 Chris Westwood and Sue Hill convinced Mel Gibson, Nicole Kidman, Gillian Armstrong, Sam Neill, Peter Carey and Robyn Archer among others to form part of a syndicate to purchase the Nimrod Theatre, which was threatened with demolition. In doing so, they created Belvoir St Theatre Ltd. Company B is Belvoir's resident company and B Sharp operates in partnership with Company B to facilitate the development and presentation of the work of small independent theatre teams in a mainstream environment. Belvoir's unique legal structure protects the theatre from box office risk and in addition to a

loose ensemble of actors[12], the company engages playwrights, directors, designers, composers and performers to annually produce new works by Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists, as well as to present a program of new and classic Australian and international drama.

The intention of this study is not to argue against a particular model of State Theatre or other theatre in Australia, particularly given the range of issues shaping the historical development and current predicament of these institutions and theatre practice in general; that is, corporate and government subsidy, public expectations, socio-political circumstances and tradition. Chapter 4's discussion of the German playwright Heiner Müller and the subsequent chapter's analysis of the production of Müller's *Der Auftrag* by a group of Aboriginal artists exemplifies this point and emphasises the significant role context plays in the production and reception of theatre, domestically and internationally. In addition, this thesis recognises that both State and experimental theatre produce artistic product of fluctuating quality. It is worth noting, however, the emphasis placed on 'drama' in the artistic missions of both the Sydney Theatre Company and Belvoir St. While a comprehensive comparative analysis is not the concern of this dissertation, the emphasis on 'drama' reflects more broadly the preoccupations of the local theatre industry. The result is a seemingly endemic inability to explore new forms of theatre and this largely infers the production and presentation of an overwhelmingly conventional repertoire and even in the event of the creation of works by new playwrights, a highly conservative dramaturgy. Furthermore, it limits access to resources for the creation and development of new work beyond 'drama'.

It is an issue hardly specific to Australia. Re-opened in 1989 under the direction of Nele Hertling the Hebbel Theatre Berlin 'was regarded as unusual and highly risky not only in Berlin, but in Germany in general' (Herkenrath 2000: 7). Instead of a permanent ensemble and specific repertoire, the Hebbel based its program on the development of

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[12]   Belvoir St Theatre's ensemble includes Academy award winners Cate Blanchett and Geoffrey Rush.

long-term relationships with international artists and companies, and the production and presentation of collaborative projects for tour. Like The Performance Space, it conceived of itself as a forum facilitating artists to explore the boundaries between dance, performance, theatre and the fine arts through surprising and innovative approaches to the medium. The Podewil, which is also located in Berlin, is in many respects substantially more comparable to The Performance Space in Sydney. Founded in 1992, the Podewil is a production and performance venue that supports interdisciplinary practice through the following artform areas: Music, Dance, Theatre/Performance and Media Art.

Fiscal merit: determining the value of theatre forms

As government funding for the performing arts in Australia has been historically rationalised according to a set of values about aesthetic practice, it becomes increasingly critical to question the assumptions determining the level of support attached to a particular form of artistic expression. The rationale for the allocation of resources is at the core of Fotheringham's argument referred to above and the economic marginalisation of practitioners working in new forms of theatre heightens the need to re-consider developments in this field. Both State Theatre and training models have profoundly shaped the local theatre landscape and significantly impacted on the level of aesthetic exploration that has been undertaken in Australia. In his article *Boundary riders and claim jumpers: the Australian theatre industry* Fotheringham, for example, details the institutionalisation of realism as a dramatic form in Australia (see 1998: 27). For twenty years the National Institute for Dramatic Art (NIDA), set up in 1958 in Sydney, constituted the only government subsidised training school. In this period NIDA acted as a conduit for its graduate actors and directors to the State Theatres and this resulted in the privileging of a particular performance style and dramatic tradition. It is an aesthetic monopoly endorsed and exacerbated by arts funding policy, its structure and terminology. Established as a Commonwealth Statutory Authority in 1975, a key principle of the Australia Council's charter is to promote excellence in the arts and the

semantic application of the term has been the subject of consistent consternation (see Rowse 1985). The Major Organisations Board (MOB) of the Australia Council for the Arts has similarly provoked public debate about its criteria. Set up as part of a major re-structure of the Australia Council in 1995, MOB provides on-going funding to a select group of 'flagship' companies: Sydney Theatre Company, Melbourne Theatre Company, Queensland Theatre Company, State Theatre Company of South Australia, Bell Shakespeare Company, Black Swan Theatre Company, Company B, Playbox Theatre Company. In contrast organisations and individual artists applying for support from other divisions of the Australia Council are eligible for discontinuous project funding and are therefore financially highly vulnerable[13].

International contexts: 'media reality'

Despite the vastly different contexts referred to above, media reality presents a level playing field in so far as it is used, more often than not, to define theatre's (political) viability as an artistic medium. Australian and American scholarly debate in the 1980s and 1990s concerned precisely this question and specifically, the way in which the 'live' aspect of the medium functioned in a mediatised market economy. US theorist Peggy Phelan, for example, privileged live performance as resistant to reproductive representation on the basis of its phenomenological ontology (1996b: 148). As a consequence, a preoccupation with the real time and space of the artist's body in performance and the ephemeral nature of the performative moment tended to dominate explorations of new forms of theatre at the expense not only of theatre as the experience of ritual, but as a revenant of antediluvian proportion. In contrast Lehmann accounts for the political capacity of forms of new theatre in terms of a broader and

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[13] The current organisation of arts funding in Berlin functions as a parallel to the Australian model. In 2002 the Berlin Senate began cutting back the Podewil's budget and in an interview for ARTSELECTRIC its director, Andreas Broeckmann expressed similar concern about the German system of funding to the issues frequently raised by independent artists in Australia. In Broeckmann's words, 'There is a fiscal reason in that Podewil and similar institutions get a lot of project funding on a yearly basis, and unlike maintenance, salaries and long-term contractual commitments that you get in the theatre and music world, this kind of project funding is money

more fundamental paradigm of artistic development (see 1999: 82). Like developments in painting following the advent of photography, for example, theatre has emerged as an increasingly self-reflexive form in the context of the indefinite realm of 'media reality'. It is a realm that fosters a key aspect of the theatrical medium, its ghostliness, particularly as an age of simulation is predominantly an age of spectres – digital appearances function as part of the experience of the everyday. Unlike media dramaturgies, however, post-dramatic theatre consciously foregrounds or actively incorporates the spectator in the process of image construction.

Thinking the 'unthinkable': Plato's 'chora' & the space of post-dramatic theatre

If theatre by virtue of the approach to its structural conditions, the visibility of production and collective interaction, is perceived as the exception to the 'overwhelming power of secondary mediated perception' (Lehmann 1997: 58), what distinguishes its viability as a (political) medium? Theatre after all, as Lehmann points out, is ostensibly an antiquated institution that evidently fulfils a function as a result of its 'disadvantages' in a technologically advanced environment (1999: 12). It is a point that introduces a number of critical theoretical ideas at issue in this dissertation. In the context of recording technology, performance has developed a reputation as a 'live' medium, 'real' and as a consequence, resistant to reproductive representation (see Phelan: 1996). If this supposition is a claim that is ultimately untenable, as Philip Auslander (1999) demonstrates, how does the post-dramatic realm of communication produce a 'new' politically exacting language? In order to expound on this question Julia Kristeva's conception of textual practice as a meter of the presence of a revolutionary poetics emerges as a useful tool in the clarification of post-dramatic theatre as a form of expression that in fact delves into the archaic impulses of the experience of the theatrical medium and subjectivity. In *Postdramatisches Theater* and his essay 'From Logos to Landscape' Lehmann argues that new theatre can be conceived of

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that can be taken away easily' (2002: [n.pag.]).

as the rediscovery of 'a space and a speech without *telos*, hierarchy, without structured meaning and inner unity' (1997: 56; see also 1999: 261-3). That is, it can be understood as an aesthetic quest operating beyond the limitations of *logocentricism* and constituting a space at the threshold of what is 'thinkable' in so far as it exceeds Western constructions of logic and reason. This study applies this fundamental premise as its starting point and proceeds on the basis of Lehmann's understanding of this space as 'thinkable' in terms of Julia Kristeva's conception of the 'chora'[14].

In her psycho-linguistic theory of language *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva posits the dialectical interplay of two modalities – the 'semiotic' and 'symbolic' – within the signifying process and argues that the type of discourse that emerges is dependent upon the interaction between these modes of articulation. Kristeva applies the Greek term 'semiotic' to account for pre-sign functioning, that is, energy transfers, flows and marks in an etymological sense deriving from the 'chora'. The 'chora' reflects a 'non-expressive totality' prior to the institution of social constraints on the body (1984: 40). That is a pre-oedipal feminine realm characterised by infantile drives determined by the mother's body and capable of a range of 'objectives', including contradiction. It is a term taken from Plato's *Timaeus* and Kristeva uses it to denote the indeterminate and provisional articulation (rhythm) that precedes spatiality and temporality, as well as evidence and verisimilitude, to reason that the 'chora' cannot be specified as an axiomatic form (1984: 26). The subject's entry into language is constituted as a 'thetic' phase (from 'thesis') at the threshold between the 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic'. All enunciation is therefore conceived as 'thetic' and by extension, so too are subjectivity, textuality and sociality. The degree of incursion of 'semiotic' drives or pulses in literature amounts to a transgressive re-modelling of the symbolic order. Kristeva describes this breach of 'natural' language as a 'forceful positing of the thetic' that contests the universal signifying order (1984: 62).

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[14]   Like Kristeva and Lehmann this study, similarly, acknowledges the contradictions intrinsic to the

Lehmann uses the term 'chora' to discuss theatrical (poetic) deconstruction, as opposed to destruction, as 'Chora-graphy' (see 1999: 263). 'Chora-graphy' can be thought of in terms of choral and choreographical inscription and corresponds to the deconstruction of the sense underpinning speech and the creation of a space in which the laws of 'meaning' have withdrawn. As a consequence, Lehmann describes the status of the text in new forms of theatre as deconstruction and 'polylogue' and its language as de-semantisation. Furthermore, the space of post-dramatic theatre traverses and dissects *logos*, occurring not in isolation, but like the 'thetic' process of signification at the threshold of the interplay between the 'semiotic' and 'symbolic'. If this theory of signification is applied more broadly to account for the regulation of 'semiotic' incursion in the theatre, dramaturgy can be thought of in terms of the 'thetic'. It either fractures the symbolic code or inhibits the emergence of the semiotic disposition, its articulatory effects, for example, which are consistent with drive-governed sound production, as opposed to syntax. In post-dramatic theatre the stage is no longer structured as a microcosm of a known macrocosm, but constitutes a space that engages the spectator in a compositional 'logic' that privileges 'semiotic' expression. The result is a production characterised by disturbances to representational 'order'. Is it possible then to characterise a system of relations beyond the specifics of syntactic irregularity and the 'indefinite' body?

To answer this question, intertextuality, or the more accurate term transposition, emerges as a key process in poetic communication. For Kristeva the passage from one sign system to another involves the formation of a new position on the basis of the old one's destruction, as opposed to its deconstruction (1984: 59). In doing so, this transposition potentially utilises the 'old', as well as other signifying material. Lehmann's theory of post-dramatic theatre exemplifies the former point and specifically new theatre's relation to earlier forms, which as he points out, is an intrinsic part of the development of any artform (1999: 31). In Chapters 2 and 3 the concept of

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idea of theorising the 'chora', a pre-logical realm.

the 'televisual' and carnival are identified, respectively, as instances of the intertextual transfer of material deriving from other systems of signification. The analysis proceeds philosophically, however, on the basis of deconstruction in order to recognise the contiguity characterising these mediums of experience and expression. In addition, the terms of this analysis are indicative of the potential to re-new the spectator's capacity for heterogeneity. If the open 'structures' specific to post-dramatic theatre, its body and subsequent understanding of temporal rhythm and space are superimposed on Kristeva's model of poetic language, a motile and multiple 'logic' emerges at the interface of the performer/spectator dyad. Figure 1 attempts to account for the compositional operation of a post-dramatic theatre aesthetic in terms of the uneven interaction between two modalities consistently producing a new 'thetic' position.

Figure 1:

SYMBOLIC

THETIC
(body-time-space)
(performer/spectator)
INTERTEXTUALITY

SEMIOTIC
CHORA
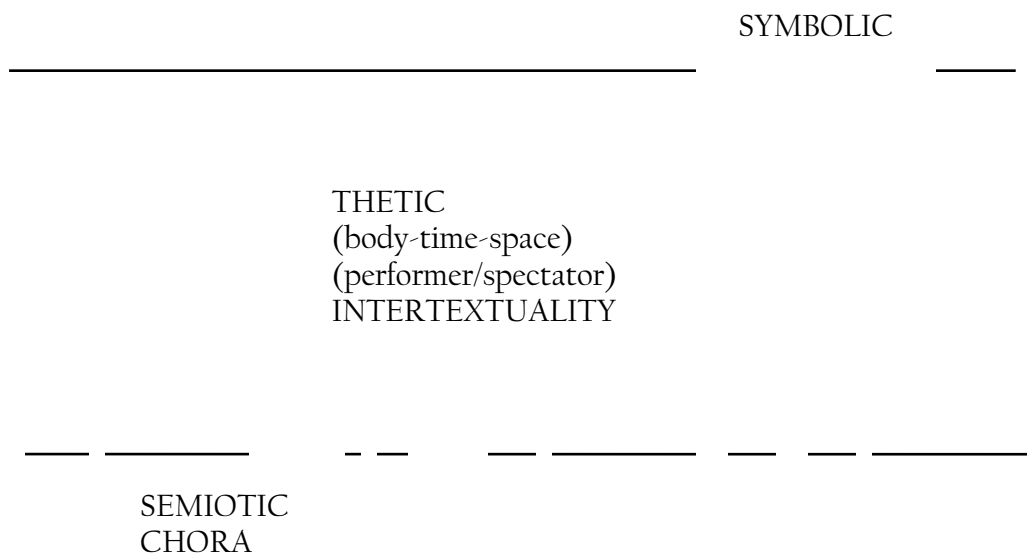
From this perspective dramaturgy can be thought of as regulating the interaction of these modalities and significantly, it is a 'model' that accounts for the spectator's participation in the creative act. To re-think the theory and practice of dramaturgy as a

structure that neither serves the text nor the *telos* of the playwright's vision, beyond dialogue, monologue, character, towards the concept of the 'thetic'[15] as a dynamic 'organising' the flow of the 'semiotic' into the 'symbolic' constitutes a fundamental, speculative challenge for this dissertation. In an essay relating Artaud's aesthetic of cruelty to Robert Wilson and Heiner Müller, Edward Scheer raises the issue of a feasible dramaturgy. Müller's *Hamletmachine* includes 'impossible' stage directions and themes, as Scheer notes, such as 'Snow. Ice age' at the end of part '4' (1995: 202). In the *Poetics* Aristotle conceives of dramaturgy as serving the structure of events ('pragmata'). The brief reference to Müller's writing in contrast infers a construction organised according to a visual domain or the 'spectacle' ('opsis') relegated by Aristotle to the role of the property manager, as opposed to the poet (1996: 13). Müller's texts, however, clearly advocate an approach to the medium that cannot be reduced to the practicalities of stage effects or illustration. Instead, Müller establishes an image repertoire in tension with the formal properties of dramatic theatre and in doing so, re-casts its 'logic'. As a consequence, the question of dramaturgy as a 'thetic' process can be thought of even within the bounds of the Aristotelian paradigm and his perfunctory dimension, 'opsis', its 'semiotic' 'irrational' principles and critical relation to the spectator.

Resisting literature and 'literary' resistance: the spectator & the 'feasibility' of post-dramatic dramaturgy

Dramaturgy is traditionally understood as the art of writing plays according to specific codes (including plot, dialogue, characterisation and theme) and fundamentally concerned with the playwright's vision. Its craft dates back to the 18th century and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's series of essays published from 1767 to 1769 as the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (Hamburg Dramaturgy) that coincided with his appointment as a dramaturg at the Deutsche Nationaltheater in Hamburg. 'New theatre', however, necessarily raises the concept of 'new dramaturgy'. In the 'On Dramaturgy' issue of

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[15]   This is not to infer, as Kristeva notes, all signifying practice functions exclusively out of this phase

Theaterschrift Marianne Van Kerkhoven points out that dramaturgy:

> is no longer a means of bringing out the structure and meaning of the world in a play, but (a quest for) a provisional and possible arrangement which the artist imposes on those elements he gathers from a reality that appears to him chaotic. (Van Kerkhoven 1994: 18)

Marco De Marinis, similarly, elaborates on dramaturgy[16] as:

> the techniques/theory governing the composition of the performance-as-text (*testo spettacolare*); it is, the set of techniques/theories governing the composition of signs/expressive means/actions which are woven together to create the texture of the performance, the performance text. (De Marinis 1987: 100)

Both Van Kerkhoven and De Marinis explicate an art of dramatic composition based on a combination of elements, as opposed to the interpretation of a play, and De Marinis specifically links dramaturgy to the performance situation. In addition, Van Kerkhoven emphasises the contribution of the actors during the rehearsal process and as an example, refers to the introduction of their personal history (1994: 20-2). More significantly, Van Kerkhoven and De Marinis propose a dramaturgy of the audience and in doing so, account for the spectator's incorporation into the processes of (theatrical) *production*. In terms of the practices of Open City and The Sydney Front, however, the spectator's role is more accurately described as 'spectator as dramaturg' on the basis of the aesthetic responsibility accorded to the public in the assembly of the elements on display.

If the predominant aim of the dramaturgies distinguishing post-dramatic theatre is

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[16] (1984: 59).
De Marinis (1987) proposes a dramaturgy of the director, a dramaturgy of the performer and a dramaturgy of the spectator. It is worth noting that De Marinis refers to the avant-garde as frequently creating esoteric work for 'supercompetent theatregoers', and his 'competency' argument tends to limit to the spectator's engagement to 'reading strategies' based on the idea of surprising the spectator. In doing so, he concludes that theatrical expectation hinges on the 'fragile balance' between the pleasure of discovery and the pleasure of recognition.

understood as the creation of a space not simply at the borderline of the structure of theatre, but by implication of identity, how can its language reflect its relation to this 'psychosis'? That is a borderline state, according to Kristeva, that in extreme cases may result in the eradication of symbolic capacity (1984: 126). Both the intertextual concepts of the 'televisual' and carnival are 'dysfunctional' region/s in terms of time, space and logic in so far as they infer the interruption of 'continuity'. In addition, they suggest a particular relation to the spectator that in the case of Open City and The Sydney Front emerges from a process-orientated art of composition. This is not, however, to discard the presence of the 'text' in post-dramatic theatre and its relation to the spectator. Instead, it proposes a new understanding of its role, and the apprehension concerning the execution of Müller's 'material' exemplifies this point. As a consequence, Chapter 4 examines the question of 'dramatic literature' in relation to the texts Müller composed in the final phase of his career as a 'playwright'. In doing so, it considers the diffusion of 'meaning' specific to Müller's manifold application of styles and citation and his subsequent multi-dimensional space of articulation. It is interesting to note in this context that the editors of *Performing the unNameable* point to the potential for a 'new literary form' as a result of the publication of the first anthology of Australian performance texts (Allen and Pearlman 1999: xii).

If post-dramatic theatre is understood at its simplest level as multiplicity on a number of levels, how can it make its heterogeneity speak? The 'thetic' provides a theory of a phase that is key to subject formation, a stage that facilities the human entity to constitute itself as signifying and as a consequence, social. That is the process by which drives are linked/sublated in terms of signifier and signified and as a result move into language. According to Kristeva's application of this supposition to modern literature, textual experience concurrently enables the subject access to constitutive processes and the foundation of the social (1984: 67). In doing so, it potentially obliterates or modifies social experience, its symbolic condition. In post-dramatic theatre this exploration can be articulated as 'literary' resistance, to refer to Müller's celebrated prognosis for the role of the text central to the analysis in Chapter 4. Its 'feasibility'

relates to the domain of *opsis* and not to action and this is apparent in Robert Wilson's productions of Müller's later material. Müller's belief in problems and conflict, as opposed to answers and solutions manifests in a dramaturgical form remarkably similar to Kristeva's understanding of (literary) heterogeneity and specifically her description of the lyric as a 'condensed discursive structure of contradiction' (1984: 189). If heterogeneity does not find expression in the lyric, Kristeva postulates its evocative presence as a subject materialising in the realm of death, its inertia, and this points to another key preoccupation of Müller's theatre philosophy. In Kristeva's terms it is a realm that enables the conflict of socio-historical contradictions, and for Müller:

> One has to accept the presence of the dead as dialogue partners or dialogue-disturbers – the future will emerge only out of dialogue with the dead. (Müller in Kalb 1998: 15)

Performing the post-dramatic text: Heiner Müller & The Aboriginal Protesters

Müller's treatment of socio-historical incongruity has attracted scholars and practitioners internationally. Unlike the unique political context and the revision of Brecht's legacy evident in Müller's earlier writing in East Germany, his later work increasingly referred to apocalyptic landscapes or in the case of *Der Auftrag*, a European consciousness reflected in its relation to the 'third' world. In an article addressing the reception of Müller's work in Latin America, Uta Atzpodien refers to Müller's confrontation with the past and history, his disclosure of global post-colonial structures, as well as his poetic potential and the openness of his texts, their blank spaces and the play with oppositions and contradiction as factors confirming the strength of Müller's texts and their ability to travel (2003: 380). In 1996 a group of Aboriginal artists presented a one-off production involving Müller's *Der Auftrag* at The Performance Space in Sydney and in Weimar and Munich in Germany. Mudrooroo, the prominent author of *Wild Cat Falling*, wrote a play around Müller's text known as *The Aboriginal Protesters confront the declaration of the Australian Republic on 26 January 2001 with the*

production of 'The Commission' by Heiner Müller[17].

Mudrooroo's play and its subsequent production attest to a clash of politics and form that is subject to analysis in Chapter 5. Müller contends that the viability of a theatre text is dependent upon its very infeasibility according to theatre convention (1986: 18). Mudrooroo has argued that 'if we choose white forms we are in effect 'thinking white' ... by using white forms we are leaving ourselves open to be judged purely by white standards' (1990: 45). Despite their radically disparate political motivations, both artists advocate a 'text' beyond the axioms of (theatrical) form. In attempting to negotiate Müller's *Der Auftrag*, however, *The Aboriginal Protesters* transformed a post-dramatic text into dramatic (literary) theatre, a politically powerful and highly emotive yet conventional play. As a consequence, it provides the opportunity to comparatively analyse the two forms, as well as address the specific geo-historical politics intrinsic to modes of expression.

Approaching the ephemeral condition of performance in post-dramatic theatre

In the 1930s Artaud's conception of a dream-like theatre 'imprinted with terror and cruelty' depended upon the abolition of what he identified as its slavish imitation of reality (1985: 65). The socio-political aim of Brecht's self-professed 'non-Aristotlean school of playwrighting' concerned the question of how the theatre can 'be divorced from the spiritual dope traffic and turned from a home of illusions to a home of experiences' (1964: 134, 135). In relation to his production *Genesi* Italian director Romeo Castellucci referred to its source of inspiration as 'the terror of endless possibility, the open sea of potential' (2001: [n.pag.]). For Castellucci the Book of Genesis 'goes beyond the imagination, because it comes from chaos, its substance is chaos – like mine and yours' (2001: [n.pag.]). Artaud, Brecht and Castellucci all point to a domain that exceeds the mode of fiction designed for the stage and as a consequence, the literary

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[17] For the purpose of brevity the title of this production has been shortened to *The Aboriginal*

semiotician. In this respect, Phelan argues that the life of performance exists only in the present and that it can neither be recorded nor documented (1996b: 146). While this study does not dispute the importance of the present moment to post-dramatic theatre, it does not conceive of performance as a privileged realm of 'slippage' devoid of any 'visible trace' of its *presence* (Phelan 1996b: 149). Instead, through the assistance of predominantly video material, it sets out to account for aspects of a highly significant period of contemporary performance in Australia.

Open City and The Sydney Front facilitated the analysis of their performances considerably by providing footage of productions, in depth interviews and discussion over a number of years, as well as by commenting directly on drafts of sections of this dissertation. The Performance Space, similarly, provided visual and other documentation covering the performance of *The Aboriginal Protesters* in Sydney and in Germany. In addition, in order to fully contextualise the work of Open City, The Sydney Front and the production of *The Aboriginal Protesters* in relation to Müller and developments in post-dramatic theatre internationally, part of this dissertation was written in Berlin enabling access to theatre productions and documentary material not readily available in Australia.

Finally, the performances selected for analysis in Chapters 2 and 3 have been used as case material to explore the specific aesthetic logic operating in each production and are not intended as a representative survey of the work of Open City or The Sydney Front. Similarly, the chapter on Müller is not proposed as a comprehensive inventory of his later writing for the theatre medium. Instead, it is designed to elucidate four key aspects of the dissertation. Firstly, Chapter 4 functions as an interim chapter to the subsequent analysis of *The Aboriginal Protesters*. Secondly, it briefly addresses the question of the feasibility of the post-dramatic text by pointing to Robert Wilson's staging of Müller's material. Thirdly, it provides the opportunity to construct a

Protesters in future usage.

comparative field across the dissertation. It presents a survey of dramaturgical time structures, for example; from Open City's transformation of time into an object for contemplation to The Sydney Front's corporeal tempo of 'forgetfulness' and 'thunder', Müller's *différance* of time, to use Lehmann's description (1995: 91), and its fictive representation in Mudrooroo's text. In addition, Chapter 4 attests to the significance placed on post-dramatic theatre internationally, a field largely overlooked in Australia.

2

Open City: a politics of the everyday

'Still' life in 'real' time: media 'reality' & post-dramatic theatre[1]

> No, I'm not myself. I'm no longer mother, sister, father, lover. I'm just
> another Other. (Gallasch, *The Necessary Orgy*)[2]

In one of Open City's last major productions, Gallasch delivered the lines cited above
from behind the screen of a computer terminal. Gallasch's linguistic act of dis-
identification in the 1995 performance *Shop* and *The Necessary Orgy*, underpins Open
City's preoccupation with the trans-linguistic space of the body. What is initially
striking about Gallasch's disidentification is the inversion of Artaud's 'I Antonin
Artaud, am my son, / my father, my mother, / and myself' (in Derrida 1978: 315). Explicit
in Gallasch's opening disavowal, and in contrast to Artaud's radical assimilation of the
Oedipal construction, is computer communication technology, which enacts a
(vanishing of a) specific time and space in the body politic. Gallasch, as just another
'Other', invests in an identification beyond libidinal relations, which is not simply
incapable of knowing itself but more specifically 'is no longer'. Intrinsic to Gallasch's
statement is the suggestion that the conditions or rather the transpersonal movements
affirming identity have altered in the context of a particular cultural configuration. In a
media landscape the body's relationship to time and space is altered and this arguably
precipitates the 'problem' of dramatic structure and raises the question of the limits of

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[1]   The title of this section is taken from Richard Dienst's book *Still Life in Real Time: Theory after Television.*

[2]   This quote is from an unpublished, non-paginated script of *Shop* and *The Necessary Orgy* (1995b) provided by Open City.

theatrical possibility that Artaud and the avant-garde[3] more broadly struggled with in the early decades of the last century. Gallasch's 'Other', however, lacks the melodramatic apprehension characterising analyses of the impact of new technology on theatre, which argue that these developments divest theatre of cultural presence or power[4]. Kristeva addresses the question of the political capacity of aesthetic forms as a more fundamental artistic and, by implication, social dilemma. In relation to French revolutionary poetry she discusses the categorisation and subsequent reduction of transgressive practice to mere fetish in the symbolic order (1984: 83). For Lehmann the potency of post-dramatic theatre hinges on a modification in the politics of perception. By implicating spectator and performer specifically in the production of images ('*Bilderzeugung*'), Lehmann argues that 'new theatre' institutes an aesthetic of responsibility (1999: 471).

It is a responsibility critically important in a social order dominated by the experience of mediated 'reality'. New technology increasingly renders palpable the capacity to construct 'reality' and for Open City this formed part of a broader investigation into the possibility of communication. *Shop* and *The Necessary Orgy*'s visual display unit, particularly its laser disk facility, is characteristic of Open City's integration of multi and new media. This is not, however, to reduce Open City's production history to the incidence of recent technology. Instead, it raises a more primary question about the context of everyday mass media, the machinery of communication and 'new' dramaturgy. If the compositional dimensions organising an Open City production are not subordinate to a text, how can the dynamic in operation be described? And if its aim is not to disclose the meaning of the world in a play, how does it relate to broader

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[3]   The concept of the 'avant-garde', as Lehmann observes, is in urgent need of revision. In making this point Lehmann critiques Christopher Innes' postulation that primitivism defines the different movements of the avant-garde as reductive and underpinned by an analysis of dramatic literature, as opposed to theatre (1999: 34).

[4]   Auslander identifies the tendency to polarise the relationship between live performance and technological forms by critics such as Peggy Phelan and Patrice Pavis, as an anxiety that is understandable in a cultural context that favours mediatized forms (see 1999: 40-2). It is an anxiety that can be traced to Artaud, who reasoned that the cinematic screen and more specifically its projected images dis-connect the audience from sensibility (1985: 64).

politico-social phenomena? Frederic Jameson has explained 'spatialisation' as the development of a consciousness of a traditional artform's position within and in relation to a mediatic system (1991: 162). He reasons that conventional paradigms of the fine arts are 'mediatised' and in doing so, is able to distinguish the (political) function of 'reflexivity', for example, in the application of 'mixed media'. Jameson's term 'mediatised' is a key concept in Auslander's analysis of 'live performance' in a 'televisual' cultural formation (see 1999: 5). In *Liveness* Auslander addresses the assumptions underpinned by the critical question of the relation between 'live' performance and recordings on the basis of the premise that the 'televisual' is not a product of television as a distinct medium or discourse, but a seminal environment. If television and by implication the 'televisual' is no longer understood as merely an element of mass media representation, how does the dramaturgy of Open City relate to a cultural formation characterised by the idea of 'still' life in 'real' time?

In an interview for *Theaterschrift* Robert Lepage pointed out that television drama is discernible in the dramatic and dramaturgic structures of North American theatre (1994: 212). Lepage's comment reiterates the erosion of the distinction between the stage and screen play referred to in the opening chapter. In doing so, it points to the inversion of a fundamental connection between the older art form of dramatic theatre and the new medium of television. In addition, it raises the question of the instance of televisual structures in forms of expression that operate 'beyond' drama. Post-dramatic theatre infers a shift in praxis and self-reflexivity. It cannot, however, be explicated simply as evidence of the foregrounding of communication strategies pertaining to media society – simulation and repetition – on the basis of the relation established with the spectator, and a comparative analysis of Open City and The Sydney Front demonstrates this point. As a consequence, this chapter deliberates on the relation between specific productions by Open City and the concept of a compositional 'logic' that is fundamentally televisual. In doing so, it considers the idea of a televisual dramaturgy in order to contribute to the field of language that has been developed to describe the dramaturgy specific to new forms of theatre. Lehmann, for example, refers

in his discussion of 'new theatre' and the media landscape to 'dramaturgy à la minute' and clarifies the way in which post-dramatic theatre maintains an ironic distance to all-pervading news and storytelling even in the event of media usage (1999: 421-22). Curator Christine Hill provides an interesting parallel to Auslander's argument in her understanding of the modus operandi of the first generation of video artists as televisual. According to Hill, these artists reasoned that in order to establish a critical relationship with a televisual society, they had to participate 'televisually' (in Rush 1999: 78). In this broad configuration of fine and performing arts and cultural theory, Open City presents a pertinent case study; not in terms of an argument about the nature and/or impact of television or the question of 'the postmodern' as a necessary precursor to Jameson's conception of 'spatialisation', but in terms of its dramaturgical relation to the realm of the everyday.

From 'social realism' to 'new naturalism': Keith Gallasch & Virginia Baxter's Open City

Gallasch and Baxter first performed as Open City in 1987. Prior to forming the Sydney based company, they had worked together in the 1970s in Adelaide as members of Troupe; a social realist theatre company. Troupe was a small collective working out of The Red Shed or in Baxter's words, 'an old taxi garage owned by the Communist Party of South Australia who leased it to us for very low rent' (in Open City 1994: 6). In 1980 Troupe moved into the Unley Town Hall theatre and in 1986 Gallasch and Baxter permanently relocated to Sydney. However, Gallasch views these years as 'a formative experience', which Baxter reinforces in an interview with Billy Crawford and Angharad Wynne-Jones for *The Performance Space*'s journal:

> A lot of seminal things happened in that period for us. Neither of us had any formal training in theatre so we learnt a lot of theatre craft and skills and how to put a show together. It was a time rich in ideas. Around 1980/81 we sowed the seeds of what we're doing now. (Gallasch in Open City 1994: 6)

A pivotal experience for Baxter and Gallasch at this time emerged as a result of an increasing desire to collaborate more broadly. In order to work across art forms, Baxter and Gallasch began introducing artists from non-theatrical backgrounds to Troupe, which contributed to tensions and ultimately lead to the development of a new company. The company had divided over the question of a naturalistic, as opposed to a non-illusionary aesthetic, and Baxter and Gallasch left. During the years between Troupe and Open City Baxter performed a number of solo shows, the first of which was performed at the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide in 1983. Gallasch worked as a writer with Gail Kelly at the Canberra Youth Theatre, with Brigid Kitchen for Unley Youth Theatre and was the Artistic Director of the State Theatre Company of South Australia. Gallasch's experience with the State Theatre Company was a difficult period. In an interview with the editors of The Performance Space's journal, he emphasised that, 'one of the things that kept me sane during that very tough time was writing for youth theatre and for Virginia' (in Open City 1994: 8). His 'state theatre company struggle', as he describes it, concerned 'the premiering of new Australian plays to a hostile press, politicians and resistant audiences' (2003b: [n.pag.]).

In Sydney, Baxter and Gallasch began Open City's long association with The Performance Space. Between 1987 and 1993 the company's first production, *Tokyo/Now/Thriller*, was followed by seven premiers at The Performance Space: *Photoplay* (The Performance Space, 1988; Adelaide Festival Artists' Week, Griffith University, Gold Coast, 1994; Australian Centre for Photography, Australian National Gallery, Canberra, 1995); *The Girl with a Stone in her Shoe* (The Performance Space, 1989); *All that Flows* (The Performance Space, 1990); *The Museum of Accidents* (The Performance Space, 1991; The Back Space Theatre, Hobart, 1991); *Tokyo Two* (The Performance Space, 1992; Gasworks Theatre, Melbourne); *Sense* (The Performance Space, 1992 & 1993); and *Sum of the Sudden* (The Performance Space, 1993). In addition, Open City performed in non-theatrical spaces: *SMALL TALK IN BIG ROOMS* took place in the Art Gallery of NSW in 1990, and *Shop* and *The Necessary Orgy* played at the Australian Steam Navigation

Company Building as part of the Sydney Festival and Carnivale in 1995[5]. The larger project *MondoLingo* about Australian 'English' or more specifically, 'Englishes', shaped the performances Open City presented in 1996: *Talk Studio*; *Promiscuous Spaces*: *Table Talk* and *Joke Joke*. Baxter and Gallasch have also created a substantial body of work for radio, and now edit *RealTime*, a national journal covering the contemporary arts, which constitutes the company's core activity.

Open City's artistic policy specifically states that it is committed to an investigation into the politics of everyday life in Australian culture and to collaboration with a wide range of artists, theatrical and non-theatrical, from across Australia. The latter tenet of this policy played an increasingly important role in the company's creative process as it developed. In Gallasch's words:

> What we began to see was that rather than say here is a text, here are the director's ideas and how is a designer going to realise that idea, we were treating the components as discrete. It's how they rub against each other that's interesting. You say to a designer or a visual artist we want to do a show about this or create this kind of experience. They then go away and create something and give it back to us. We don't say 'that doesn't fit' but respond to it creatively and I think that's the critical thing. There is no attempt to force things together. It's like what's offered is the next round of inspiration and we respond to that. (Gallasch in Open City 1994: 8)

Through this co-operative policy the company generated a body of work that involved multi-media, from basic slide projectors in *Photoplay* in 1988 to new media with the use of laser disks in *Shop* and *The Necessary Orgy* in 1995. Not all Open City productions, however, employed electronic or new media. In 1991, for example, the company created the *Museum of Accidents* around a series of installations, including a sound sculpture by the Australian artist Nigel Helyer. In terms of new media the company specified that it was an engagement that emerged not from an interest 'in the technologies themselves but in how we engage with them, in our everyday lives, in our fantasies and at the

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[5]   The Sydney Festival and Carnivale is now simply known as the Sydney Festival.

intersections' (Open City 1995d: [n.pag.]).

Photoplay

In 1988 Open City presented its production *Photoplay* at The Performance Space and six years later it was featured as part of the Artists' Week at the Adelaide Festival. The following year the Canberra Word Festival presented it at the Australian National Gallery. Its selection for the Word Festival immediately raises the question of the status of the text in the production. Australia's national art museum, however, is suggestive of another context, the visual dimension embodied in the performance's title, and appears to infer at least an equal relationship between these two forms of expression. As a consequence, *Photoplay*, one of Baxter and Gallasch's earliest productions as Open City, is explicitly dependent upon the de-centralisation of the text in relation to another compositional element. In addition, Open City's increasing preference to perform in non-theatrical spaces reflects an awareness of the traditional expectations of the theatre public and more precisely, the link between institution (theatre) and form (drama). That is, the historical and social principles or 'frames' organising the reception of a particular event, and in the case of theatre, its aesthetic 'logic', the dominance of the Aristotelian plot as a fundamental theatrical code and/or convention.

Photoplay like a number of Open City productions has been re-worked since its premier. Written and performed by Gallasch and Baxter the sixty minute production stages the process by which the subject constructs a sense of self through the medium of photography and in memory. The minimal set designed by Michael Geissler consists simply of a clear water container and three large slide-screens on to which coloured gels and photographs of Gallasch are projected. Against this backdrop, Gallasch and Baxter sit opposite each other and engage in a series of dialogues and monologues predominantly from behind a large desk. Spotlights illuminate Gallasch and Baxter and

increase the intimacy of the production, while microphones amplify their verbal tones and the quality of the oral content is most obviously modulated when the performers occasionally stand and move towards the slide screens surrounding them to deliver text. The script is consulted at times during the performance with Gallasch and Baxter referring to a written text. Gallasch has described the 'slide night model' as 'a very everyday framework' (2003b: [n.pag.]). At first glance it is a device for implicating the audience in a form of personal social 'entertainment' popular in the 1950s and 1960s. Its scenography, however, cannot be exclusively reduced to this analogy.

In Gallasch and Baxter's 'slide night' the photographs do not simply function to illustrate the discrete narratives or vice versa. Instead, the images are isolated, subject to periodic repetition and duration and as a consequence, emerge as a distinct entity for contemplation. A talk show format correspondingly distinguishes the musicality of Gallasch and Baxter's spoken language and presents a situation based on personal history as opposed to a plot. In this configuration, the experience of physical proximity, immediacy and the Open City persona coalesce to produce intertextuality. There is a passage from the idea of the fictive cosmos of a 'slide night', its representation in the theatre, to the 'real' time of the talk show that yields a tele-visual rhythm of culture and identity. Auslander has discussed Spalding Gray's monologues as televisual on the basis that the narrative structure consists of a small group of consistent characters that resemble the television serial, and the creation of his own performance persona (1992: 76). Baxter and Gallasch, similarly, assume personas in performance; however, these personas and their narrative function depart from the Spalding Gray model. Instead, 'the relationship of the performers to the circumstances of performance', to cite Auslander's analysis of The Wooster Group (1997: 41), characterises the Open City approach. Baxter has described the basis of this approach as:

> A 'what if' self ... Like that American comedian Steve Wright says, 'I got home last night, all my furniture had been stolen and replaced with exact replicas'. A persona. (Baxter in Baxter and Grant 1995: 161)

The way in which Baxter conceives of the persona complicates Walter Benjamin's notion that the presence of the original constitutes a sign of authenticity (1968: 214)[6]. Implicit in this statement is not simply the rejection of the illusion of 'character', but the idea of a replica; that is, reproduction, a copy. The actor, as Auslander points out in *From Acting to Performance*, is often constructed and understood as a vehicle to 'truth' (1997: 29); and in his essay on Artaud, Derrida identifies the most naive form of the representation of this 'truth' as mimesis (1978: 295). However, the actor as a medium for Stanislavski's 'inner truth', Grotowski's 'excess of truth' and Brecht's 'social truth' is fundamental to the *logos* or 'order' of meaning prescribed in twentieth century theatre[7], and this is perpetuated by Phelan's notion of the presence of 'real' bodies as a fundamental element verifying the ontology of the 'live' medium.

Performance is an 'undocumentable event', according to Phelan, given the presence of 'real' bodies and its disappearance 'into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control' (1996b: 148). By 'undocumentable' Phelan is specifically positing performance as a 'non-reproductive' mode of artistic expression. For Phelan the very act of writing about performance subjects it to the 'rules' of written documentation and necessarily infers an essential modification of the event. Performance is subsequently resistant to reproductive representation, according to Phelan, and more significantly to the circulation of capital. Auslander disputes this argument thoroughly in *Liveness*, where he demonstrates that these assumptions are dependent upon the introduction of recording technology (see 1999: 51-2). It is technology that has produced the very concept of 'live', which is a contemporary phenomenon. Performance was not conceived of as live prior to the mid-nineteenth century and in his analysis of the relationship between memory and the law Auslander

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[6] Benjamin is specifically referring to the fine arts in his seminal essay analysing the decline of the unique aura of the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction.

[7] Auslander's chapter '*Just be yourself: Logocentrism* and *différance* in performance theory' in *From Acting to Performance* (1997) examines Stanislavski, Brecht and Grotowski's theories of acting from the perspective of deconstructive philosophy in order to examine the modernist conception of the actor and to develop a way of describing and engaging with the concept of deconstructive theatre practice in a contemporary context.

demonstrates that memory does not escape jurisdiction[8]. Furthermore, despite Phelan's clear problematisation of the 'visible real', her emphasis on the 'non-reproductive' ontology of the medium as a basis for its political viability suggests the privileging attributed to 'presence' in Western metaphysics, which as Judith Butler points out in her influential account of signification as performatively enacted, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Lacan subverts by posing the question 'How is 'being' instituted?', as opposed to 'What is/has being?' (1999: 55-6).

In spite of critical re-assessments of the conflation of consciousness and subjectivity by Lacan, Kristeva and Derrida that build on the developments of Freud, Marx and Nietzsche, a notion of the validity of 'pure' presence, its 'realness', largely dictated discussion of performance practice during the 1980s and 1990s in Australia. Marsh's observation, published in 1993, that the 'realities of space and time, once seen as sites of 'authenticity', were reconsidered' through an analysis of the social body in this period does not account for the continued insistence on the presence of 'living bodies' as sites of the 'real' and therefore distinct from reproduction (1993: 184). In *25 Years of Performance Art in Australia*, published in 1994 and featuring Open City and The Sydney Front in its survey of the key contributors to the development of performance art in Australia, Charles Green described this presence in the following terms:

> Since performances are ephemeral, they survive in photographs, videos and written descriptions; they linger in archives and artists' cupboards as props and memories. Through documentation, the exemplary 'truthfulness' of performance deteriorates. (Green 1994: 15)

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[8] In his chapter 'Legally Live: Law, performance, memory' in *Liveness* Auslander points to the legal function of the presence of the witness in the courtroom as testimony to memory. In court a witness is required to recollect, that is perform memory and is scrutinised according to the question of reliability. To substantiate his point Auslander addresses the complexity of the legal foundation of the law and more precisely, the enactment of memory, through a discussion of the integration of videotape technology in the legal process and copyright. Performance, for example, is not recognised under the copyright act on the basis that it cannot be 'fixed'. In apparent contradiction to the question of copyright litigation in relation to performance is the rejection of videotaped testimony as a substitute for live presence in a courtroom (see 1999: 112-157).

Green's statement, although from the perspective of a fine arts critic, is typical of the tendency to reduce performance to a transitory experience and to account for its singularity, albeit with self-conscious reservation, in terms of a fundamental tenet of the classical aesthetic: 'truth'. It is a tendency that significantly limited the emergence of critical debate exploring dramaturgical developments in Australia in this period.

The re-assessment of the function of presence in performance necessarily accompanied the emergence of new forms of theatre that departed from conventions of the dramatic text and specifically departed from the presentation of the human figure as defined according to textual roles – character, chorus, narrator. Peta Tait, for example, emphasised the 'elusive quality of the liveness of performing bodies' in her phenomenological analysis of the relationship between cultural theory and experimental works in her introduction to *Body Show/s: Australian viewings of live performance* (2000: 3). In response to Auslander's argument that 'the live' is the product of technology Tait refers to the crucial argument that the written word, that is dramatic literature, has 'flattened' bodies and limited critical accounts of the expression of ideas in the performance medium. However, her premise that 'intellectual ideas can be embodied' (2000: 1) is dependent upon Phelan's conception of ontology: the 'live' presence of the performer and the 'visceral meta-body' of the audience (2000: 5) or to borrow from Lehmann the fetish of full presence at the expense of the ghosts of (theatrical) history (2002: 294). It is not surprising that corporeal presence has dominated discussion about the performance text. In contrast to other art forms, the body is a fundamental tenet of the theatrical medium. As a consequence, there is no question about the significance of the presence of living bodies Phelan and Tait discuss in relation to performance, articulated here as the post-dramatic body. However, the multifarious theatrical landscape of post-dramatic theatre infers the dissolution of hierarchy or an aesthetic logic no longer underpinned by unity of word, sense, gesture and sound. From this perspective, it is a landscape that cannot be reduced to performer presence or privileged as an autonomous realm independent of a broader cultural framework.

In the theatre the human subject functions according to an auxiliary mode as either a fictional or 'non-fictional' identity or in terms of the dimension in between – the persona. These categories are codified modes of experience shaped and re-shaped by new media. *Photoplay*, for example, arguably opens up spectator expectation to a televisual dramaturgy through the application of a persona that invokes the reception habits or contemporary rituals specific to the medium of television. It is an audio-visual space that entails a peculiar transposition of the customs of storytelling intrinsic to (cultural) memory. Carlson points out that more than any other literary form drama appears to be related in all societies to the repetition of religious, social or politically significant stories for its audiences (2001: 8). For Lehmann its spectre has drifted into cinema and increasingly into television (1999: 126). Auslander argues that the incidence of not simply media technics, but practices similar to the adoption of a persona like Spalding Gray's are evidence of performance's incorporation of a media derived epistemology and this suggests the inverse of Lehmann's point (1999: 33). This raises the question of the parameters informing human cognition, the absorption of one medium by another and the ensuing reaction of the preceding art form to developments in the field of expression. If the moving image is more suited to simulation and the habits of consumption, what are the implications for not only dramatic, but post-dramatic theatre?

In Benjamin's seminal discussion of the work of art's unique aura in the age of mechanical reproduction he makes the point that 'human sense perception ... is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well' (1968: 216). The organisation of perception and its relation to social transformation is intrinsic to Benjamin's argument. In *Photoplay* the Open City personas re-count the past by juxtaposing a mechanical and 'natural' mode of reproduction: photography and memory. The compositional 'logic' of the narrative units that constitute Baxter and Gallasch's series of conversational exchanges and verbal cues to the audience reflect highly influential modes of television broadcast. In *Photoplay* interpersonal 'dialogue' is

not simply verbal, but visual. As a consequence, Baxter and Gallasch point to the formal limitations of dialogue as a theatrical mode in light of developments determining the spectator's perceptual-cognitive repertoire in the everyday realm. In doing so, Baxter and Gallasch stage an epistemological dyad. *Photoplay* explores the manner in which the subject's knowledge is constructed. Like Benjamin's description of photography as the 'cult of remembrance of love ones' in its earliest manifestation and his conception of the medium's subsequent political significance as historical documentary evidence, Open City explore the social transformation that accompanies the idea of the portrait (1968: 219-20). That is, precisely 'how' Gallasch and Baxter 'know' and this infers the process of recognition fundamental to the operations of the theatre medium. It is, however, a process of recognition dependent on a modification of the perception of *presence* as a result of changes in communication.

Baxter and Gallasch's personas replace the actor as the core component of theatre, classical and modern. In doing so the function of theatricality emerges as an issue in the work of Open City. Erika Fischer-Lichte defines theatricality on the basis that the human subject and objects are utilised as signs of signs and that this necessarily infers a doubling up (1995: 88). That is, the signs produced in the theatre designate the signs created by the relevant cultural system. Baxter and Gallasch constitute the source material – lived experience and its materialisation in memory and in objects – constructing the linguistic and production text, and function as signs of these signs in *Photoplay*. Baxter's memories of growing up in Adelaide in the 1950s are told against a series of coloured gels, while slides of Gallasch show photographs of him taken during a session with photographer Sandy Edwards, as well as images from his family photograph album. In the words of *Sydney Morning Herald* critic Doug Anderson it's a 'fictional autobiography' (1988: 16). The Open City personas, which referentially embody the 'redundant' actor and simultaneously deny its 'truth', are subject to a particular communicative structure or more specifically what Elizabeth LeCompte from The Wooster Group has described as:

one-sided conversations connected by electronic means (the film cut, the 'other' implied by a telephone conversation). (LeCompte 1994: 200)

The slides 'cut', that is edit or structure the talk-show format, and institute specific rhythms that shift focus between the personas and the medium of photography and memory. They enact mood swings comparable to the shift of 'feeling' LeCompte attributes to the effect of a TV visual in a stage production, an effect she argues operates in a similar way to music in film (1994: 202).

Open City explicitly deploy in *Photoplay* the very economy of representation, the 'cut-in', for example, that Phelan argues 'live' performance resists, as a discrete and integral component of the production's composition. Through examples similar to the machinery of reproduction cited above, Open City's photographic 'cut-in', Auslander demonstrates that 'mediatization' is already entrenched in the language of 'live' performance[9]. In doing so, he refutes Phelan's argument that performance is able to assert its linguistic autonomy, given that it cannot be reproduced in writing, as essentially tautological in so far as it posits performance as 'non-reproductive' and writing as a mode of reproduction (see 1999: 39-40). Phelan argues that writing about performance functions as a substitute, and therefore institutes a distance that corrupts the self-presence of the ephemeral work (1996b: 148-9). In his analysis of Saussurian linguistics and Rousseau's conception that 'Writing is nothing but the representation of speech' (1976: 36), Derrida demonstrates in *Of Grammatology* that this conception is dependent upon the positing of these two terms as presence and absence, that is, as immediacy (in the case of speech) as opposed to representation (in writing). The persona embodies both; it is immediate presence and a replica. As a consequence, the trace, the term Derrida uses to indicate the concealment of an anterior presence,

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[9]   Auslander cites Phelan's discussion of Angelika Festa's performance *Untitled Dance (with fish and others)* and specifically the use of a video camera in the performance to reinforce his argument. The machinery of reproduction central to Phelan's understanding of performance as ontologically distinct is a fundamental element of Angelika Festa's *Untitled Dance* (see Auslander 1999: 40).

elaborates upon the way in which the persona functions in a theatrical context. The sign, Derrida argues, is not conceived of as the sum of its binary parts; that is, as an origin in the form of a referent and closure in the form of a 'meaning'. Instead, it is inhabited by the trace of another sign and, significantly for Kristeva, the trace refers to a fundamental aspect of the semiotic or that which escapes 'Bedeutung' (1984: 40-1); that is, what is not and it is the movement of this non-presence, which Derrida calls *différance*, that produces meaning. At the risk of compromising the complex motion that negates the principle of unequivocal 'signification' intrinsic to Derrida's writing, the following extract from *Of Grammatology* demonstrates this concept:

> Without a retention in the minimal unit of temporal experience, without a trace retaining the other as other in the same, no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear. It is not the question of a constituted difference here, but rather, before all determination of the content, of the *pure* movement which produces difference. *The (pure) trace is differance.* (Derrida 1976: 62)

As a consequence:

> To recognize writing in speech, that is to say differance and the absence of speech, is to begin to think the lure. There is no ethics without the presence *of the other* but also, and consequently, without absence, dissimulation, detour, differance, writing. (Derrida 1976: 139-140)

In the context of the Open City persona as it is expressed in *Photoplay*, the question that arises relates to the relationship between Baxter and Gallasch's 'what if self', the trace of an anterior presence and the idea of the original ('truth'), which for Benjamin and the twentieth century's key theatre practitioners constituted a sign of authenticity[10].

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[10] Auslander's (1997) chapter '*Just be yourself: Logocentrism* and *différance* in performance theory' details the way in which Stanislavski, Brecht and Grotowski's processes are dependent upon the 'truth' of the personal experience of the actor. Stanislavski's method is based on recalling the actor's own experience and thereby emotion. Brecht argues that in order for the actor to comment from a correct social perspective on the character, private social personal experience is necessary. In terms of Grotowski, which Auslander describes as prescribing a more radical privileging of the self in comparison to Stanislavski and Brecht, the actor's self-exposure and sacrifice is

Photoplay consists of sixteen scenes and the first seven engage predominantly with Gallasch and his family history. Gallasch accounts for his sudden desire to construct a 'real' image of himself in the third person:

> One day he looks into the mirror and he doesn't recognise himself. He turns to the family album for a true picture. He's desperate.
>
> …
>
> There is one in here. One good one. One true one. This is the one. This photo is true. (Gallasch, 'The Feeling's Not Mutual – Depression', sc. 6, p. 16)[11]

The use of the 'distal' marker 'he' simultaneously emphasises the presence of his persona and the point of Gallasch's subjective disjunction. *Photoplay* opens with Gallasch reviving his session with the photographer, who has taken a range of pictures of fragments of his body. It is an uneasy experience emphasised by the short sharp dialogue exchange between Gallasch and Baxter. The impetus behind the visit, according to Baxter, is that 'someone said that her pictures were *very real*' (sc. 1, p. 2). Baxter and Gallasch debate the outcome of this session by verbally interacting with the photographs of his feet, hands etc taken from various angles and distances, which are projected onto the screens as Gallasch anxiously awaits the final result.

> Gallasch: When do we get the full picture?
> Baxter: 'We'll build up to it', she said.
> Gallasch: The whole picture? (sc. 1, p. 4)[12]

Uncomfortable with Edwards' images in which he cannot recognise himself, his fingers, for example 'look like someone else's' (sc. 4, p. 3) and unhappy with his 'genetic hand-me-downs' (sc. 1, p. 4) Gallasch seeks solace in the mirror, 'my own best photographer, my own camera' (sc. 2, p. 5). Baxter points out that this is 'a mirror view' and therefore

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fundamentally an act of self-examination.

[11]   All quotes from *Photoplay* (1988) are from an unpublished, paginated script provided by Open City.
[12]   Scene 1 of *Photoplay* is not specifically titled.

'only a fragment'. To which he responds, 'It can be a reassuring fragment. It feels whole' (sc. 2, p. 5).

By Scene 6, however, Gallasch is unable to identify himself in his reflection. He has arrived at this impasse after a search through slides from his family album; a number of which are held in his hands and framed by his presence in the projection. In Scene 5, 'Backwards and Forwards Through History', Gallasch foregrounds the way in which photographic archives function not simply as empirical evidence and consequently, sites of historical conjecture, but as a mechanism, a (social) pattern, mediating the way in which the individual 'thinks' and 'unthinks' the historical 'self'. 'For years', Gallasch says:

> I used to think this was my grandfather. I liked this photograph. A cigarette hanging from the lip, a hand caught reaching into a pocket. A tough old man caught in a generous moment with a bunch of flowers. But it turned out not to be him because these turned up. (Gallasch, 'Backwards and Forwards through History', sc. 5, p. 13)

The visual annals of Gallasch's family 'history' create a pictorial 'syntax' that dramaturg Bettina Masuch similarly attributes to Pina Bausch's choreography. At an international symposium exploring dramaturgy and 'new theatre' in Amsterdam, Masuch commented:

> Pina Bausch shows the dancers in her performances as (de-)formed by culture and society, arrested in traditional roles and clichés, she tries to make the encrustment of language imprisoning the body audible and perceptible, without being devoted to Duncan's illusion of being able to rediscover the original body. The natural 'freed' body is rather exposed as a dream of immediacy that was from the beginning an illusion. (Masuch 1994: 186)

The 'dream of immediacy', to use Masuch's words, physically de-mobilises the body in *Photoplay*. Apart from Gallasch and Baxter swapping positions and delivering text from the slide screens, minimal kinesics characterises the presentation. The dynamic is

dependent upon a set of dis-connected spatial relations: Gallasch and Baxter situate themselves at opposite ends of a large desk and the field of vision leading to the slide screens infers a further dimension of (body-image) detachment. Like Susan Sontag's conception of distance as a marker of the intensity of feeling that an object generates for the viewer, its 'coolness' or 'impersonality' correlating to its level of interest, Gallasch's reaction is intimately linked to his propinquity to his visual material (1969: 26).

The passive illusion of proximity moves Gallasch to distinct instances of action. In Scene 7, 'This Photo is True', Gallasch rushes towards the slide screen and eventually wraps himself in a projection of himself at age five. From the screen he answers Baxter's indictment, 'This photo's a lie', with 'It's true. We were a happy family' (sc. 7, p. 19). This experience replicates the diegetic act of Scene 9, in which Gallasch and Baxter recall Gallasch's session in the photographer's studio, where he is photographed playing dead in amongst the photographs from his family album. Ultimately, these images constitute a dissatisfying experience of proximity for Gallasch. In Scene 9, 'The Mother's Gaze', Gallasch concedes:

> I want to get closer ... But there's a point where there's nothing but dots or flecks and then you're on your way to atoms and you're well past what you want to see. (Gallasch, 'The Mother's Gaze', sc. 9, p. 24)

Later in the scene Gallasch's own reflection is the source of frustration. As he stares down into his image in the water container, he responds to Baxter's question 'What do you see?' with 'No one at home', and Baxter replies with, 'When he touched it, his image dissolved into ripples' (sc. 9, p. 25). The water Gallasch splashes on his face foregrounds the mirage of the narcissistic ego, and in what Kristeva calls 'Narcissus: The New Insanity' in *Tales of Love*, the power of the image (1987: 104). In Ovid's words:

> What you seek is nowhere ... The vision is only shadow, only reflection, lacking any substance. It comes with you, it stays with you, it goes away with you, if you can go away. (Ovid in Kristeva 1987: 104)

It is an image or rather a narcissism that is inaccurately represented in its contemporary usage, according to Kristeva. In *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, Kristeva refers to Freud's conception of narcissism as a borderline state underpinned by identity insecurity (2000: 46). That is, the Freudian Narcissus is unsure of his identity and invests in his image on this basis, rather than vanity.

In Christianity archetypal man constitutes a primary and complete, exterior reflection, a replica. It is therefore not surprising that Gallasch returns to the water container in Scene 12, 'My Father's Hand', to sink his hand into the water and examine it as projections of his father are screened, including an image of father and son. In *Photoplay* the immediacy of the photographic image is underpinned by a desire to unmask 'the whole picture' (sc. 16, p. 36). Gallasch wants 'to get these … into perspective; get them into some sort of order' (sc. 2, p. 7). 'These' are photographs from 'albums, shoe boxes and biscuit tins' (sc. 2, p. 7) now contained in the worn brown suitcase he has kept them in prior to his visit to Sandy Edwards' studio to pose for the photographs used in the production. In *The Order of Things* Foucault describes the conception of 'History' in the 19th century not as a succession of facts, but rather as a mode of empiricism that requires arrangement and affirmation (1970: 219). It is a mode that elaborates upon the way in which Gallasch attempts to posit himself within a genealogical order. However, he is unable to experience or affirm this chronology. That is, assert his identity, his 'I' over time via photographic memorabilia. Instead, he is left with a series of repetitive, clichéd images of relatives:

> Known only by their wedding portraits, baptism and birthdates. A flood of veils, moustaches, best suits, the shock of sacred water on the baby's brow, fob watches controlling time, the Arcadian backdrops of photographers studios, the serious looks of cousins, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, mums and dads trailing back across a century.
>
> […]
>
> And before this … no photographs. No photography. The family history treads water. (Gallasch, 'Backwards and Forwards through History', sc. 5,

p. 14)

Gallasch arrives at a void. In his discussion of the presence distinguishing the post-dramatic body, Lehmann illustrates his understanding of the body in post-dramatic theatre as a pause in meaning by referring to the term Roland Barthes applied to photography: *punctum* (see 1999: 368-70). Barthes uses the Latin word *punctum* to describe a detail that attracts the viewer. *Punctum* designates a perforatory mark that determines the idiosyncratic character of a particular image (see Barthes 1981: 40-59). For Lehmann post-dramatic theatre draws the spectator to this point, to the sheer visibility of the body and its incomprehensible peculiarity. Gallasch is searching for a unique, defining moment in an image to identify his 'inexplicable' body. The conduit to this vortex consists of a series of deflections that not only direct the gaze to a duplicated, dis-embodied field of vision, but implicate the spectator in the process of personal history. Gallasch and Baxter function as vivid mediators directing the spectator's encounter with a series of photographs, historical and contemporary. In this respect *Photoplay* corresponds to the transmission of 'live' events most commonly associated with the television talk show. The television talk show is underpinned by the idea of public/private intimacy and it is fundamentally experienced in the present tense, whether relayed or taped in front of a studio audience, and this applies to both the way in which the show is conducted by its host and to how it is received by the viewer. Anderson describes this effect in his review of *Photoplay*:

> These are provocative concepts kept casually accessible by a conversational
> manner and an easy familiarity. (Anderson 1988: 16)

This atmosphere similarly characterised *Tokyo Two*, which lead reviewer Bob Evans to refer to 'the casual presentation' as 'more like lounge-room conversation than acting' (1992: 16).

The television talk show operates on the basis of an artificially constructed

spontaneity. Baxter and Gallasch's scripts remind the spectator that the conversations carried out by their personas, like the daily speech of television, constitute a highly structured and ritualised encounter. In their exploration of issues, predominantly topical news and entertainment, the various modes of the televised talk show are marketed as forums sensitive to the historical moment. They derive from antecedent practices in radio, vaudeville and popular theatre. In *Photoplay* the talk show format points to changes in modes of communication and the impact of mass communication on empirical and participation habits or to what Barthes describes as 'domestication' in relation to photography. In *Camera Lucida* Barthes concludes that the tyranny of images dominating contemporary society constitutes a simplified pictorial-repertoire that subdues the menacing quality of the photograph, its madness, by generalising the image's unique character (1981: 118-9). He points to the United States as an example of the overwhelming production and consumption of images that illustrate the world and in doing so, 'de-realise' the conflicts and desires specific to humanity. Like the economy of images, Barthes argues, that deprives the photograph of its power, Gallasch's slides ultimately constitute a typecast collection of social portraits coinciding with the advent of mechanical reproduction.

Beyond photography, however, intergenerational memory connects Gallasch to narratives of the past:

> I crawl over to him and look at my reflection in his big shiny black shoes. I can't remember this, but I've been told so often that I see it like a black and white photograph.
>
> I've just turned one and this old man whose family have finished with him and who has finished with the land; this old man takes off his clothes, places them in a neat pile at the edge of a small dam on the edge of a paddock and walks into the water and drowns. (Gallasch, 'Backwards and Forwards Through History', sc. 5, p. 15)

In *Photoplay* the talk show format codifies Gallasch's familial system of narrative in terms of the cataloguing of oral history that is common in the public domain. It

establishes a parallel to the way in which the genre of the television talk show 'peers' into the lives of its guests and commodifies their stories to create a repertoire that generalises and potentially trivialises personal experience and collective links to the past. In this respect, Auslander's understanding of the way in which older cultural forms, in this instance theatre, incorporate newer ones elaborates on the form-content relationship in *Photoplay* (see 1999: 11-12, 32-4).

Open City's talk-show can be linked to other examples that integrate not simply multi- and/or new media into performance, but invert the (historical) relationship between theatre and new forms of broadcast this century. The New York based Caden Manson's Big Art Group describes its performance *Flicker* as the 'collision' of two movies that 'bleed into a single screen' by virtue of the 'real-time film technique of live video projection and split second choreography' (Big Art Group 2005: [n.pag.]). *Flicker*[13] consists of three screens mounted at the front of a black rostrum, which allow the audience to view the heads and shoulders of the eight performers, who undertake costume changes from time to time at the side of the performance platform. Three cameras record and project the movements of the actors, who are spliced both between the screens and to the eye of the spectator. Two different darkly comic stories intersect: Justin's search for salvation and path to self-destruction, and the slaying of three friends in a forest. In the company's words what emerges is a 'tale of disjunction … exploring a complex affinity between quotidian voyeurism and spectacular death' (Big Art Group 2005: [n.pag.]). Created in a vastly different context Frank Castorf's *Forever Young* based on Tennessee William's *Sweet Bird of Youth* is another example of the incorporation of new mediums of broadcast. In this production a live camera man weaves between the

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[13] The fusion of fixed frames of film depends upon the human visual system's capacity to perceive steady light from the flicker motion of still picture splices and takes advantage of the retina's inability to grasp rapidly changing light intensities. By presenting film as a string of images on the screen subject to jump cuts and the 'blinking' of the performers' bodies as they step into, and occupy the space around the video frame, the Big Art Group foreground the discontinuous movement behind the illusion of continuous motion intrinsic to the perceptive 'reality' of film. That is, the illusion that makes cinema possible and it is an illusion situated in the medium of the theatre, cinema's antecedent form.

actors in order to record and project close-ups that create extra theatrical spaces on a single large bamboo framed screen that forms part of the tropical set at Volksbühne in Berlin. The screened action allows the audience access to the interior of a room, as well as a backstage area otherwise hidden to the spectator's eye, and frames events visible on stage as well as projects a range of images, including Japanese comic strip pornography.

Manson's concept of 'real-time film', to refer back to the example of *Flicker*, is a device exploring 'voyeurism' and the 'spectacular', a condition frequently attributed to a mediatised cultural formation yet deriving from the theatrical medium. In *Flicker*, like the group's later show *Shelf Life*, the Big Art Group arguably subvert Diderot's notion of the theatre as a 'dark little place' by instituting what Artaud reasoned a theatre of cruelty with its 'new imagery' would 'recapture' from the cinema (1985: 66). Over ten years prior to Manson's application of video technology, Open City's 'slide night' privileged the visual realm Aristotle had relegated to the affair of the property manager as a key compositional element. Through the corpus of the still image, a forerunner of television and film, Baxter and Gallasch's personas establish a poetic structure that re-configures the role of the text and the spectator's relation to visual media. In *Liveness* Auslander demonstrates that not only television, but also early film modelled itself on the theatre medium. If this largely forgotten legacy is applied to *Photoplay*, a highly reflexive relation emerges that recognises the incorporation of theatre's language and structure by a mediatic system and reclaims from it the art of moderating a story. As a result, the Big Art Group and Open City's *Photoplay* embody a dialectic of shifting relations, as opposed to the radical break fundamental to Frederic Jameson's *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), which periodises postmodernism as an irrevocable change in the mode of representation.

In *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* Carlson describes theatre as a repository of cultural memory consistently modified as it is evoked in different circumstances and he points out that in this respect it functions like individual memory

(2001: 2). Carlson identifies the dramatic text as the foundation for the physical experience constituting the theatre and discusses this medium as haunted by a pre-existing text (2001: 16). It is not the text that 'ghosts' *Photoplay*, but rather the (historical) circumstances key to its compositional tension: photographic immediacy and (collective) memory. Gallasch's urge to mythologise his grandfather according to a particular cliché, for example, imposes a language, the technological language of photography, on, in this instance, the (deceased) body. A photograph, like the persona, is a constructed 'absence', pure 'presence' itself, which at the same time signifies the virtual absence of some a priori experience. It brings 'death' into the economy of repetition[14] and in Gallasch's narrative literally arrests the body in the traditional roles that Masuch ascribes to Pina Bausch. Derrida elaborates upon this double bind and the implication of repetition in terms of the signifying act:

> Nonpresence is presence. Differance, the disappearance of any originary presence, is *at once* the condition of possibility *and* the condition of impossibility of truth. At once. 'At once' means that the being-present *(on)* in its truth, in the presence of its identity and in the identity of its presence, is *doubled* as soon as it appears, as soon as it presents itself. *It appears, in its essence, as* the possibility of its own most proper non-truth, of its pseudo truth reflected in the icon, the phantasm, or the simulacrum. What is is not what it is, identical and identical to itself, unique, unless it *adds to itself* the possibility of being *repeated* as such. And its identity is hollowed out by that addition, withdraws itself in the supplement that presents it. (Derrida 1981: 168)

Lehmann articulates the movement of this non-presence in a theatrical context temporally. 'Time' he says:

> in theatre was always a time of memory. This is obvious for theatre, where often very old texts are repeated. But even without old texts, a certain quality of the theatre-process makes it seem to be a revenant from an earlier

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[14] In *Liveness* Auslander refers to Eric Clapton's Grammy Award winning memorial to his deceased son, 'Tears in Heaven', and the posthumous duo between Nat King Cole and his daughter by means of digital recording technologies to illustrate the way in which 'death' enters the economy of commodification and repetition in the context of the music industry (1999: 109-111).

> time. Maybe, that all actors, confined to the world of the stage as an imaginary cave/ sphere/ 'hades' seem to be a ghost, specter or spook, shadows from another world. If it can be demonstrated that this connotation is necessarily inscribed in the structure of the theatre, many aspects of the latter, for example, the play of presence and absence, would become clearer. (Lehmann 1994: 270)

In the experimental theatre that emerged in the late 1970s through to the 1990s Lehmann has identified a shift in the dramaturgical function of the time-structures characterising the theatrical medium. Lehmann describes this shift as time presented, as opposed to represented (1997b: 35). In the article 'Time Structures/Time Sculptures: On Some Theatrical Forms at the End of the Twentieth Century', Lehmann specifies three temporal forms intrinsic to theatre: repetition, rhythm and memory (see 1997b: 31). Lehmann uses Aristotle's concept of 'anagnorisis' to distinguish recognition from mimesis in order to describe the process by which theatre is linked to a recognisable story. As a consequence, it is the way in which the temporal sequence 'translates' a familiar 'narrative' that underpins the theatrical moment. The experience of this temporality is the result of scenic development, its construction and deconstruction and the musicality of sentences, that is, as rhythm, and therefore cannot be understood simply in terms of tension and resolution. Memory, the third temporal form is constituted by the combination of repetition and rhythm. Beyond the archetypal basis of mythology, theatre activates repressed images and experiences at the level of human subjectivity.

Time is presented in a number of ways as an object of contemplation in *Photoplay*. In and through Gallasch's oral and visual narrative historical time endeavours to take shape; however, its 'representability' is rendered incredulous not simply by the content of the narratives and the ironic tone underpinning the exchange between Baxter and Gallasch, which is often humorous, but the artificiality of the mechanical sound of the slide changes, which emphasises the organisation of time in the production. The hum of the projector throughout the performance reinforces the 'ticking' of this imposition.

Gallasch literally presents visual documents attesting to a subjective-historical time, which are systematically contested and 'drained' emotionally and visually. This process of suspension and disappearance constitutes the scenic key to the aesthetic of duration structuring *Photoplay*. Each slide change is accompanied by a delay that separates the images on the screen and the projections of Baxter's coloured gels present the space of time, its very timelessness beyond systematisation, particularly given that she never comments on them. In contrast Gallasch's slides can be elaborated on in terms of the process Benjamin ascribes to universal history, its essential additive quality, the way in which 'it musters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time' (1968b: 254). For Gallasch it is a precious 'time' that ultimately emerges as a 'tasteless seed' as a result of what Benjamin in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' describes as the 'nourishing fruit of the historically understood' (1968b: 254).

Classic realism is dependent upon the illusion of a narrative development that results in closure in so far as it establishes the 'truth' of the story. This 'truth' or the re-establishment of order follows a crisis or in Roland Barthes' terms the creation of an enigma, an event that challenges conventional cultural and signifying systems, for example, war, love, murder (Barthes in Belsey 1985: 53). Gallasch's narrative, which is based on the familiar, an identity crisis, attempts to institute or uncover precisely this 'truth'. However, for Open City a crisis does not precipitate resolution. Instead as Gallasch points out:

> we're not into a conflict model. We're into a dynamic, a dialectic of shifting relations where a crisis doesn't mean the end, just a new phase. (Gallasch in Open City 1994: 10)

In Scene 8, 'This Memory is Photographic', Baxter recollects fragments of impressions of growing up in Adelaide in the 1950s, and in doing so ruptures the (historical) course of time in Gallasch's narrative and introduces the space of recollection. As a consequence, Gallasch's world of images and Baxter's embodied experience radically intersect. Scene 8 is the first complete scenic monologue of the performance, although

Gallasch's 'Backwards and Forwards Through History' consists of only one 'interruption' by Baxter. Baxter's assertion 'No one photo is true. This memory is photographic' (sc. 8, p. 20), opens up a space fundamental to the theatrical medium: memory.

Memory was the subject of the 8th edition of *Theaterschrift*, which begins its discussion with a number of questions central to the political space of recollection, which despite Phelan's claims about the unconscious, constitutes a realm subject to intervention and regulation. In Baxter's words:

> When was it exactly that they started imagining our lives for us
> Without chaos or crisis?
> No more Hiroshimas
> There we all were all lined up like in a school photograph with our
> good educations and
> There they all were imagining themselves as ideal parents raising ideal
> families
>
> I read somewhere that anyone born after 1945 was born old, knowing too
> much about death. (Baxter, 'This Memory is Photographic', sc. 8, p. 20)

To what extent, then, does the subject consciously and unconsciously 'think' and 'unthink' memory? Like the repetitive images of Gallasch's family, which exist by virtue of stereotypical photographic portraits, Baxter's memory is the repository of a series of clichés: 'MAN magazines', 'Mothers with their mouths full of clothspegs', 'Little girls demure on the first day of communion' (sc. 8, p. 20-21). It is a repository embedded, like Gallasch's, in a narrative rhythm, which in the example cited above is apparent in the form of the written text which indicates a lyrical quality; a musicality intrinsic to the work of Open City.

In *Photoplay* the musicality of Baxter and Gallasch's spoken language points to the acoustic space of the body as a site of memory. Time underpins music, but this is not to infer that it moves in a linear pattern. Sound artist and composer Hans-Peter Kuhn, for

example, points to the perception of time as relative on the basis of the attitudes and location of the listener in a particular context (1997: 109). The Japanese choreographer Saburo Teshigawara, similarly, describes the concept of time in terms of the sensory pulsations internal and external to the body; that is, time as a spatial sensation (1997: 57-61). In *Photoplay* the emphasis on the melodic quality of the voice suggests the interrelationship between temporal forms, rhythm and repetition as distinct from chronology and individual and collective memory – history. From this perspective Baxter and Gallasch created sound patterns that correlate with Derrida's elaboration of spacing (*éspacement*) in his article on Artaud's theatre of cruelty (1978: 299). Derrida conceives of Artaud's understanding of a new notion of time and space as the production of space beyond phonic linearity and thereby a multi-dimensional milieu. It is a hypothesis that raises an interesting parallel to memory. Sontag reminds us by paraphrasing Benjamin that memory collapses time and in doing so the process of recollection is a condensement of spatial forms into tableaux (1982: 389).

In the context of *Photoplay*, the way in which a (physical) movement is linguistically present in many of Baxter's recollections evokes the 'living picture' specific to memory. Here the flow of time is temporarily arrested in the temporal moment of the accident, which is explicitly explored in the 1991 Open City production *The Museum of Accidents*. For example, Baxter says:

> I had a happy childhood.
> On the run most of the time and every now and again, skidding to a halt to stare at something like:
>
> I froze when I caught my finger in a door and watched the blood drip down my angel wings for the school play …
>
> I dropped a stitch when I was told that a girl had been sleepwalking on the traintracks in the early hours of the morning when her father, the engine driver, had run her down by accident. (Baxter, 'This memory is Photographic', sc. 8, p. 21)

Baxter's vignettes, like Gallasch's, lack a conventional narrative developmental structure that in effect breaks down the experience of temporality and relinquishes identity to a particular shock or *punctum*, literally that 'accident which pricks me' in Barthes terms, albeit subtle in delivery (1981: 27). Furthermore, Baxter's unconscious encounters are juxtaposed against Gallasch's stockpiling of images and this is compounded by the coloured gels, which visually collapse the spatial terrain of memory to the sensations inspired by hues of red, green, blue and yellow. Baxter's slides function as an intellectual montage coalescing to produce an abstract idea in contrast to the portraits, cuts, close-ups and shifts from distant framing to a closer view that characterises the presentation of Gallasch's photographic collection.

The re-telling and re-enactment of existing stories and events is fundamental to the theatre and according to Carlson, the process of recognition specific to the theatre is not simply a question of textual genre, but rather identity and he labels this process as 'ghosting' (2001: 7). Neither the dramatic literary text nor the explicit body function as evocative, material sources of memory and identity in *Photoplay*. As a consequence, *Photoplay* departs from the 'hauntings' traditionally attributed to the theatre and constituted by the identity of the actor's body and/or prior stagings of the dramatic literary text. There is, however, a highly reflexive form of 'ghosting' in operation in the production. The 'haunting' that emerges in *Photoplay* originates from the persona's past and this raises the question of individual and collective experience key to the theatrical medium and its relation to recent modes of broadcast. That is the way in which the subject is linked to narratives of the past. In *Postdramatisches Theater* Lehmann makes the point that collective experience is the result of the conjunction of individual and collective history and that it is quite distinct from the recognition signals articulated by media culture as behavioural norms (1999: 404). Gallasch elaborates on this issue in the following quote, which is accompanied by a series of projections of portraits, by referring to the 'hauntings' of social (symbolic) identity – family, State, religious and historical:

> Before this, no German Lutherans. Only Polish Catholics! Big Shock! Big family rethink. Poles! Catholics! (Dad hated Catholics) And before that? Evangelical Flemish weavers or Moravians brought into Poland to improve the weaving industry in the seventeenth century.
> They live in a small town in Poland called Sbazsyn, but that turns into Bentschen when Prussia partitions Poland in 1971. The Polish language is suppressed and what's worse, weavers are being displaced by machines. It's time to get out. So, my Polish Catholic family joins up with a group of German Lutherans fleeing the Prussian State for Lithuania or America or Australia. By 1835, the family is German Lutheran. Now, either these people are pragmatists or very bad Catholics!
>
> Weaving's no good in Australia either, so they turn into market gardeners. They settle in a green valley which they call Grunthal which means 'green valley' with a river called Onkaparinga by the Aboriginals ...
>
> It's World War I and Grunthal is no longer a suitable name for an Australian town and so the authorities change it to Verdun ... The locals would have preferred Tumbeela, the Aboriginal name for the area, meaning 'green valley'. The waters of history shift. They're not fixed like these portraits. (Gallasch, 'Backwards and Forwards through History', sc. 5, p. 14-15)

Gallasch's passage points to the instability inherent in the intergenerational 'impulses' of collective corporeal history that linger as (ghostly) traces framed by the flash of each slide change and the modulating rhythms of speech. If an age of simulation is predominantly an age of spectres by virtue of 'media reality', Gallasch's past is seemingly his future, a photographic line that transforms material embodiment into digital appearance, the immaterial. Consciousness is underpinned by memory and the uncanniness of time and history is intrinsically connected to the idea of the spectre and the realm of death. Baxter's pivotal monologue re-positions the synchronic memory-scape of the body, and by extension the theatre, in relation to Gallasch's social-historical subject, which is in a perpetual state of mis-recognition. Psychoanalytic theory provides a broadly applied strategy for explicating the dynamic in operation in modes of spectatorship and elaborates on the dilemma of identity that manifests as a

question of proximity for Gallasch. More specifically, film has been frequently discussed as an 'imaginary discourse' on the basis of Lacan's conception of the 'mirror stage' pertaining to the 'imaginary order' and Rebecca Schneider applies Slavoj Žižek's reading of Lacan to link the role of reflexivity to both the post-structuralist premise of the death of the subject and Hal Foster's theorisation of its return as a *performative* ghost (see 1997: 179-81).

Lacan's 'mirror stage' proposes a model of identity formation based on Freud's conceptions of the maturity process structuring the ego, described by Grosz as vacillating between narcissistic and realist (see 1990: 24-31). Infantile development, Lacan reasons, is dependent upon the 'illusion' of unity. Prior to this transformative phase the infant relates to itself as a series of parts that Lacan designates the 'Real'. Between the ages of six and eighteen months the child's image, according to Lacan, emerges initially as a distinction between itself and an 'other' until the child recognises itself in a reflection and gains a sense of independent, spatial unity. However, it is a (false) identification. The image the child identifies with is precisely that – an image, a resemblance distinctly different from the human subject. As a consequence, Lacan's mirror stage postulates the foundation of the fascination with the image on the basis that it instigates a two-person structure of (imaginary) identification and in doing so conceives of a subject eternally dependent upon representations of its forms in social-symbolic activity (Grosz 1990: 48). The mirror stage, the severance of the connection with the mother, is completed through the discovery of castration and as a consequence, the perception of lack institutes the phallic function as symbolic (Kristeva 1984: 47).

For Kristeva the thetic phase of the signifying process is constituted by these two ruptures at the threshold of structuration. More significantly, Kristeva unlike Lacan, does not privilege the visual over other sensory experiences in the process of language

acquisition[15]. As a consequence, Kristeva's concept of poetic distortions or drives that elude the structure of signification finds particular resonance in the explication of sound production as is evident in the following analysis of *Tokyo Two* by Open City. In harnessing biological urges the transitional phase Kristeva posits produces an excess within the code of linguistic and social communication. Its materialisation in the text constitutes Kristeva's revolutionary poetics, and an interesting parallel emerges in terms of the spectre of 'mysterious forces' Lehmann articulates in his analysis of Heiner Müller's ghosts in *Das Politische Schreiben*[16]. Kristeva's 'semiotic' impulses might be thought of as forceful 'ghostings' that breach the symbolic order and potentially institute a new disposition. The ghost not only 'embodies' the ambiguity inherent in the boundary, its (physical) margins, and the way in which it violates the laws governing language and history, its temporal flow, but corresponds to excess and a realm beyond the known macrocosm.

It is clear in *Photoplay* that the process of identification and indeed its formative tension, mis/recognition, which cannot be reduced to an understanding of language as a system of naming, is essential to the imaginary order engendering social relations with others and that this raises the question of mediated proximity or the persona. If it is language, increasingly a televisual language, that 'has the power to link our knowledge of things together across the dimension of time', to cite Foucault (1970: 113) and 'If everything is memory, where is our identity to be found, our originality and individuality?' (Van Kerkhoven 1994c: 10). This is one of the questions Van Kerkhoven asks in her introduction to the edition of *Theaterschrift* dedicated to memory. In *Photoplay*, unlike the abject horror that an affirmation of the 'I' inflames and tortures in Artaud, Gallasch concedes that he can only uncover spectres, traces of identity.

> I wanted a whole picture, but Dad and those ghosts of grandfathers are hard
> to grasp and too easy to forgive because they're so sad.

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[15]   See Grosz (1990) for an examination of Kristeva's work in relation to Lacan.
[16]   See Lehmann in Fischer (1995) for a condensed English translation of the central concerns in this paper.

> Now I arrange and rearrange these photographs into smaller pictures, patterns and stories. I catch glimpses of my selves. (Gallasch, 'Letter to a Photographer', sc. 16, p. 36)

With the music of 'Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White', 'a potent nostalgic pop hit from my 50s childhood' in Gallasch's words, Open City concluded *Photoplay* and abandoned its audience to the familiar realm of the cadence of memory (2003b: [n.pag.]).

Tokyo Two

> Baxter: A word of warning. If you should feel lost at any time, listen for this sound.
>
> All: *a six beat clap with calls*: Hey? What? Finishing with: This is 'Tokyo Two'.
>
> Baxter: So, when you hear that sound you'll know you're not lost, you're in the theatre and this is 'Tokyo Two'. By the way, we'll be on shortly. (56)[17]

A blend of rehearsed material and improvisation, including the dialogue above, opened the 'Pre-Show' section of Open City's *Tokyo Two*, which premiered in 1992. It is an introduction that explicitly foregrounds the musicality intrinsic to Open City's 'talk show' and the poetical force of silence; that is visual silence and the silence behind the sound. 'That's my favourite, the fullness of sound disappearing into silence' (56), says composer Robert Lloyd after allowing the chime of a gong to fade into the distance of the black box auditorium. Lloyd and musician Claire Jordan collaborated with Gallasch, Baxter and Mari Shimizu, The Interpreter[18], to create *Tokyo Two*, which was a re-working of the company's first production *Tokyo/Now/Thriller*. It is not surprising, given the way in which the musicality of the sentences structure the experience of temporality in this performance, that it was successfully adapted for ABC FM's The

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[17]   All quotes from *Tokyo Two* (1993) are from the version published in the *Canadian Theatre Review*.
[18]   'The Interpreter' was performed by Tomoko Furushima in the Sydney season of *Tokyo Two*.

Listening Room. *Australia-Japan: A Love Story* as the radio version was known won the New South Wales Premier's Literary Award for Radio Writing and the Australian HiFi Award for Drama Production in 1988. *Tokyo Two* revives Baxter and Gallasch's first encounter with the Japanese capital at a time when their own relationship as a couple had transformed into a difficult romance, like the Australian flirtation in the early 1980s and 1990s with Japan[19]. It is a narrative consisting of numerous micro-narratives, as Tony McGregor says in his introduction to the radio adaptation. It is:

> the story of a couple who go to Japan, have series of encounters, come back, wait a few years, then make a radio program about the journey. Or perhaps this is the story of an Australian man who falls in love with a city, and then six weeks later his lover arrives and he wants her to fall in love to; or perhaps it's totally a fiction, a series of invented moments from an imaginary journey. (McGregor in Open City 1993b: [n.pag.])

Like *Photoplay*, the proximity between performer and spectator and the narrative delivery produced the feel of a talk or as the company described in its note on the set accompanying the published text, a radio show. In contrast to the anonymity of a radio show, however, Open City created a perspectival eye for the visible observer. Furthermore, the reflexivity intrinsic to Open City's talk show mode of address is significantly more explicit in *Tokyo Two* than in *Photoplay*. Baxter welcomes the audience to the show and introduces herself. The Interpreter, similarly, greets the spectators and identifies herself. Gallasch repeats this gesture and then introduces the musicians and comments on the opening composition, 'The City'. Throughout the show the series of one-liners, short dialogue exchanges and rhythmic narratives conveying snippets of

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[19] In July 1986 the Australian dollar fell significantly and this prompted the Labor Treasurer Paul Keating to remark that the Australian economy was in danger of becoming a 'banana republic'. It became clear that Australia's economic future was closely linked to the Asian region. As a consequence, in the late 1980s Australia endeavored to create closer political and economic links to Japan and collaborated on the development of the regional forums, Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). This lead to the signing of the 'Joint Declaration of the Australia-Japan Partnership' by the then Prime Minister Paul Keating and Tomiichi Murayama in May 1995.

information reinforce this format. In the most unambiguous instance of this style Baxter says, 'We'll go to the weather'. Gallasch simultaneously translates The Interpreter's mock report. 'Humidity in Tokyo is beyond reason. Rain springs from the pavements', he says:

> Office workers gather beneath railway bridges for steaming yakitori and frothing Kirin beer. (Gallasch: 61).

Each of the performers self-consciously works from a visible script, which distinctly references the talk show model and allows for improvisation. The performers predominantly faced and addressed the audience directly, as opposed to each other, and this foregrounded the experience of the one-sided conversation formulated by LeCompte, which was referred to in the previous section of this chapter. In addition, the set consisted of swivel office chairs for the performers and four independent cone shaped, metal, mesh-based desks, each with a set of lights (one on a car aerial, another on an adjustable gooseneck arm) and a microphone, which were designed by Michael Geissler and Stefan Kahn of NPG. Informality and a sleek high-tech atmosphere were integral to the design concept. Each of these desks allowed the performers the ability to control their own lighting, individually or collectively. The minimal lighting intensified the spectators' focus on the performers and increased the intimacy of the production. A highly limited use of kinesics compounded this effect, given that apart from sudden movements on the swivel chairs, the performers remained seated for the duration of the show.

Not only did *Tokyo Two*'s set up literally reflect the televisual metaphor of 'still' life in 'real' time, but it transformed the theatre into a site dedicated to the act of narration. Lehmann describes this quality as specific to post-dramatic theatre and attributes its emergence to the engulfment of storytelling in the media world (see 1999: 196-8). Furthermore, he points to personal memory and the narrative of the performers as

constituting a 'new theatre' form and its relationship to the practices of theatre and performance artists in the 1970s. That is, the privileging of presence as opposed to representation. In *Tokyo Two* the act of storytelling is not simply rehabilitated through presence, but through the soniferous depth key to its narrative scenography. Like Robert Ashley's performance *Celestial Excursions*, the narratives specific to *Tokyo Two* open spectator experience to the rhythmic sensuality of words, as opposed to signification. This 'deprives' the 'telling' of its 'purely' analogical quality and erodes the verisimilitude underpinning classical conceptions of mimetic narrative and by extension enunciation. If, however, 'truth' is no longer a reference point pertaining to an object outside of language, as Kristeva reasons, mimesis produces the verisimilar in so far as it does not conceal the semiotic processes generating the thetic (1984: 58). Kristeva's conclusion raises an interesting parallel to LeCompte's re-conceptualisation of the electronic and digital realm as constituting contemporary 'naturalism', particularly given the scrupulous verisimilitude attributed to this form. If the 'thetic' function of dramaturgy is understood as regulating 'semiotic' incursion from the perspective of performer and spectator, LeCompte's postulation suggests the intertextual formation of a new disposition.

Open City transformed the black box auditorium into a sound-box. At one end of the desks in a similar cone-shaped stand stood a set of drums and at the other, two Yamaha DX7 keyboards. The performers generated melodic percussive sounds in the case of the drums or through the keyboards music in the direction of percussion. This was enhanced by the drumming rhythm of the chop-sticks and rice bowls, which were used as instruments by the cast. Almost two-thirds of the ninety minute production consists of a self-conscious engagement with music, and this reflects the way in which Open City approach the musicality inherent in the sentence and in the narratives, which are scripted as lyrics, polyphonic and monologic across two languages, Japanese and English. The soundscape consists of a number of (overlapping) layers: the discrete tones of the performers' voices; silence; 'ready-made' sound in the form of clapping and make-shift instruments; live music; the sound-images produced as a result of the

narratives; and, the rhythm of distinct cultures, Japan and Australia. For *The Australian's* reviewer Rosemary Neill the sensory effect:

> [was such a] strong sense of the idiosyncrasies and ambience of Tokyo that you leave their show feeling as if you have just visited the Japanese capital. (Neill 1992: 10)

Bill Viola has pointed out that western music is composed on the basis of silence; that is, it adds notes on top of notes and is constructed from this principle point. This contrasts to Indian music, which is underscored by a drone instrument or a continuing sound field (1993: 25-6). The consistent hum of the slide projector in *Photoplay* re-produced this effect. However, in the 'Pre-Show' section of *Tokyo Two*, Open City emphasise not simply the concept of silence, but its experience: the noise of silence behind sound. Baxter says:

> In fact, you might note the variety of silences you'll hear tonight in 'Tokyo Two'. Here's one now.
>
> *Silence*. (Baxter: 56)

The 'variety' of silences points to the noise behind vocal or musical respite, which is unrecognised by the symbolic order. That is, it points to a sound-image-space primarily hidden by signification. In doing so, it allows a range of 'disturbances' to surface, the sounds of the spectator's body, for example, to enter the field of perception. This invites the spectator to listen inwardly, to hear the 'loudness' of silence and feel more closely 'oneself'; not simply the cognitive self, but the pre-sign functioning of the rhythm of the body in space, which impacts on the experience of temporality. For sound artist Hans Peter Kuhn these 'open spaces' enable the listener to 'hear the flow of time within themselves' (1997: 117)[20], which is an inherently political act. As in *Photoplay* time is presented as a distinct entity for reflection in *Tokyo Two*. Inscribed in the over-

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[20]   Kuhn is referring more broadly here to the way in which he approaches installation work.

simulation of the Tokyo experience are pauses or what Lehmann has described as productive emptiness (1997b: 31); time, silences for reflection upon the time and space of perception in a theatrical context. Sabine Pochhammer has described this experience:

> Without openly declaring itself political, the theatre demonstrates how the structures of temporal flow influence our perception and our cognitive abilities and how the management of time, like all management, signifies power. (Pochhammer 1997: 13)

The 'flow' of 'embodied' time in *Tokyo Two*, to borrow from Proust, manifests spatially. Each of the narrative units is equally weighted in terms of its significance and privileges sound, as opposed to a linear-temporal construction. Open City invites the spectator to experience the 'time' of memory. 'Understanding' in this configuration is not dependent upon the relationship between each narrative unit. Instead, the units compound upon each other to heighten the instability of Gallasch's mode of perception in the unfamiliar landscape of the Japanese capital. In order to locate the 'centre' of Tokyo, Gallasch attempts to orientate himself historically. Once Gallasch pictures 'the past continuous with the present', he reasons, 'it all makes sense' (58). Railway lines and highways, for example, have been built over the course of an ancient moat. Despite his ability to establish a chronological 'logic' linking the modern city of Tokyo to its past, however, it is a time-space fraught or difficult to manage – or in his words:

> I'm in a bit of a panic because
> It's the noise. Tokyo noise is getting me down because ...
> I look at your photo and I don't quite recognise you
> And I begin to think I've invented you and then
> If I've invented you, Who are we?
> I look at the map of Tokyo and that doesn't make much sense
>   either.
> I'm not lost but where do you start?
> Where is the centre of Tokyo?
> I'm feeling unstable. Tokyo's being torn down and rebuilt with

> every glance and pile-drivers simulate earthquakes so I spend a
>   lot of time in doorways before ... finally I get on a train
> With a million other people on the Yamanote Line,
> A vast stretched circle of railway that links
> The cities of Tokyo: (Gallasch: 59)

Gallasch's sense of (dis)location coincides with the 'lost' time of his memory. He cannot recognise the photo of Baxter and this inability to identify with his partner persists as Tokyo 'noise' disperses in the handclaps and silence of a temple in Ueno Keon. The Interpreter contributes to the 'sound-logue' of Gallasch's confessional 'travel-monologue' by repeating successively the names of areas in Tokyo and clapping her hands as his narrative moves to Ueno and the sanctuary of prayer. The effect is a tapestry of sound that intensifies the auditory roots intrinsic to the symbolic references constituting (narrative) space and identity.

Kristeva makes the point in *Revolution in Poetic Language* that 'incomprehensible' poetry not only highlights the limits of social discourse, but what it represses, that is the processes beyond communicative structures and thereby the subject (1984: 16). These poetic texts, according to Kristeva, are merely evidence of the crucible that exposes the subject to dissipation or a mobile discontinuity in which the subject surrenders his identity in rhythm (see 1984: 103-4). The lyrical narratives of *Tokyo Two* are highly accessible and far from incomprehensible; however, without the classical construction of a story unfolding in time, the performer's voices, the 'noise' of their movements and the percussive effect of Lloyd's score merge and re-merge to highlight the rhythmic processes pertaining to the choral space of the body. In this respect, *Tokyo Two* can be elaborated upon in terms of the aesthetic developments proffered by John Cage and Gertrude Stein. Cage, highly influenced by Stein, concluded in an anechoic chamber in 1951 that the sounds of his nervous and blood circulatory system invalidated the concept of absolute silence and pointed to the intentional and unintentional taxonomy of sound. As a consequence, he reasoned, that every action produces sound and that music from this standpoint is merely an arbitrary classification based on a value

judgement. From this perspective, Open City's minimal kinesic language links 'enactment' to the multi-layered 'act' of speech as a form of oral articulation, cognition and an internal dialogue of memory or heterogeneous 'music' of the everyday.

In doing so and in contrast to a linear sequence of events, *Tokyo Two* corresponds to the 'continuous present' of Gertrude Stein's theory of composition, which re-thought time-bound, fixed-setting drama. However, unlike the theatre of Robert Wilson, Stein's successor neither the visual aesthetic nor the kinetic body ultimately function as a temporal sculpture[21] in *Tokyo Two*. Instead, the sensorial, visual and sonorous nature of words and actions coalesce with music to foreground the sensory space of the (de-mobilised) body of the performer and spectator. The following sequence, for example, produces a sensory message consciously open to the subjective images and memories of the listener.

Keith:	... and the freeways ...
Mari:	*interpreting consecutively*: Ko-soko do-ro.
Keith:	... among the fish-*Shop*s ...
Mari:	Sakanaya.
Keith:	... and the tofu *Shop*s ...
Mari:	... To-fuya ...
Keith:	... the patisseries ...
Mari:	Ke-kiya.
Keith:	... and the sweet bean *Shop*s.
Maria:	Wagashiya.
Keith:	Thursday: ... (57)

Gallasch's series of 'impressions' point to the delicate intensity of the body as a repository of immediate sensation, taste, smell and look. It is not simply memory that Gallasch puts into words as he reminiscences about Tokyo and his tourist meter 'ticks' to the days of the week. The sensory exteriority of the language that he evokes implicates the spectator in a sound-landscape structured according to a talk show format.

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[21]   See Lehmann (1997b) for an analysis of time in Wilson's work.

LeCompte conceives of 'a new naturalism' as electronic and filmic on the basis that:

> you can have a dialogue between two characters and through editing they do not have to be in the same room [...]. Meanings come across through association: you see somebody and then you see a reaction-shot, or you see what someone else is seeing. (Le Compte 1994: 202)

In contrast to the other performers, Open City's audience functions directly as the addressee in *Tokyo Two* and has access to the reaction shots LeCompte elaborates upon through the analogy to recording technology, although occasionally the performers turn to each other. The production operates in a way similar to television programs that literally watch the viewer as the viewer is watching 'it', the broadcasting technology itself. Like LeCompte's 'new naturalism' *Tokyo Two* presumes radical shifts in terms of scenic location. These, however, are linguistically constructed spaces opening up cerebral visualisation that can be elaborated upon in terms of LeCompte's fondness for the 'cut':

> I love the ability to shift the scene radically in one second. (LeCompte 1994: 202)

In other words, Open City's aesthetic is dependent upon a dialogue with the 'observer' and consists of spatial constructs that are not the result of external actions moved forward through the convention of speech acts in the theatrical medium. Instead, the 'conversation' is self-consciously marked. In a gesture analogous to the role of a host on the small screen, The Interpreter welcomes the audience back to *Tokyo Two*, the now of the theatrical present, and the following exchange reproduces not simply the way in which television edits and traverses and re-positions the image in space, but the vast spatial terrains pertaining to conscious and unconscious subjectivity.

> Virginia: Lovely, lovely, lovely ... Where are we?
> Mari: Nandeshitakke?

> Keith: This is 'Tokyo Two' and I'm speaking with …
> *He throws to her but she's lost.*
> Virginia: Sorry, I was somewhere else. I think I was in Osutoraria.
> Mari: Shidonii?
> Virginia: Shidonii?
> Mari: Meruborun?
> Virginia: Meruborun?
> Keith: I think we will go to the weather. (60-61)

As a consequence, Open City's storytelling arguably invokes the perceptive processes commonly associated with televisual reception or the way of speaking and listening that lead Raymond Williams to recognise that drama was no longer coextensive with theatre in light of the development of television studios and film (1989: 3).

In his renowned lecture delivered in 1974, 'Drama in a Dramatised Society', Williams reasoned that the 'dramatic time' of Shakespeare and Greek tragedy operates in new ways as a result of developments altering actor and audience relations and the role of editing in film and television (1989: 3). In doing so, he coined the term 'dramatised society' on the basis of not simply the constant and mass access to drama as a result of electronic forms of transmission, but his conception of drama as part of the fabric of the *rhythms* of everyday life (1989: 4). Williams significantly points to a major preoccupation for Gallasch and Baxter as Open City. That is, the *rhythms* constituting the politics of the everyday. It is not 'drama', however, that characterises Open City's *Tokyo Two*, but the inverse of Williams' sociological conclusion. A televisual rhythm of culture and identity forms the habitual experiences and more precisely, the organisation of narrative and the perception of time and space for a significant percentage of today's population. Tim Etchells, director of Forced Entertainment, like Open City, is interested in the effect of mediatised culture on the material world and imagination. As a consequence, he clarifies the responsibility of theatre in relation to technology and more specifically, the way in which technology has altered the public's understanding of presence, narratives, places and the body (1999: 97). For Etchells television is 'in our blood' and Forced Entertainment is 'understandable by anybody

brought up in a house with a television on' (1999: 95-6). Etchells bases his argument on the premise that narrative in a televisual culture is fundamentally fragmented. The viewer catches snippets of stories on the television as he/she flips between channels or arrives half way through a program or alternatively, it might simply function as background noise in a household.

Etchells reaffirms Williams' concept of the emergence of a particular consciousness; however, as opposed to the 'dramatised society' of Williams' thought, Etchells identifies the medium of television as a pervasive mode of perception. In this context, *Tokyo Two*'s sound-scenography intensifies the temporal experience of the actual theatrical moment as an object for contemplation. Baxter's gentle reminder 'This is Tokyo Two' is reinforced and punctuated by the real-time of the performance in her announcements that 'The time is 8.00pm' and then later '8.15pm'. It is a temporal condition that opens up the space Kristeva describes with reference to Mallarmé as underlying the written. That is, what is rhythmic, unregulated, musical, prior to judgment, yet ultimately controlled by syntax (1984: 29). The narrative structure of *Tokyo Two* consists of five dialogues and five encounters, which correspond to the number of years Baxter and Gallasch were together as a couple prior to their trip to the Japanese capital. It is a configuration that captures in a montage of close-ups, linguistic and musical, the unfamiliar world of Tokyo and Baxter and Gallasch's relationship. These dialogues and encounters are divided by eight 'Segues' and a number of narratives relating to places in Tokyo or experiences like 'Sex in Tokyo' or 'Big Shoes Asakusa'. In addition, the narratives are interrupted by two 'Program Identifications' in which the performers re-affirm the sound-field that signifies the performance through a collective clapping beat and the melodic sound of:

All: 'Hey! What!
Baxter: This is 'Tokyo Two'. (63)

These 'identifications', periodically, disrupt the 'flow' of the performance in order to alert the spectator to the rhythms they are relinquishing themselves to in the production by reminding and/or returning the audience to the 'Pre-Show' section. That is, the intentional and non-intentional sound-space constituting *Tokyo Two*, generated by performer and spectator respectively. In doing so, these 'identifications' characterise the production as a repository of sounds and styles, and point to the way in which intricate connections are forged between personal experience and 'music' or more specifically, its role in processes of self-definition, contemplation and identification. Rituals and conventions, such as the classical concert orchestra or musical, obscure the spectator's role in sound *production*. Hearing, as Cage demonstrated in his pioneering 'composition' *4'33"*[22], is the result of the spectator or listener's action. It is a point Kristeva alludes to her discussion of the relationship between verbal and musical language in *Language: The Unknown*, which is influenced by Pierre Boulez's approach to music theory. Verbal language and musical language are similarly dependent upon a material sound that is received by the sensory organs, a writing system, and both are organised according to difference in terms of their elements and composition. However, music, as Kristeva points out, produces a message without a precise meaning, and as a consequence it is a formalism that does not signify in this respect (1989: 309-10).

Tokyo Two's choral emphasis establishes a soundscape that treats the poly-linguistic dimensions of the human voice as an instrument. 'Experience' is rendered possible both through the multi-layered vocal inflections of the narrative in *Tokyo Two* and its musical composition. In this context the choral effect in fact strengthens the credibility of Baxter and Gallasch's personas mediated by The Interpreter. Television, as Auslander has pointed out, relies on a persuasive persona, the personality signifying a talk or game show or the news broadcaster (1992: 77). *Tokyo Two*, similarly, operates on the basis of a persona synonymous with Open City, a fictional identity difficult to distinguish from

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[22] In *4'33"* a pianist sits at a piano for four minutes and thirty-three seconds and lifts the lid three times to indicate three movements, but does not play a note during the 'concert'. Instead, the sounds of the hall and the audience's movements constitute the music of Cage's composition.

the concept of the 'real' couple, Baxter and Gallasch. In light of the biographical content of *Photoplay*, *Tokyo Two* replicates the format of the television serial and its open narrative structure, episodic in form. This is not to infer, however, that personal history explicitly characterised all productions created by Open City. Instead, the parallel that can be drawn to 'televisual' identity is indicative of a symbolic code that regulates not simply palpable visual elements, but sound production. As a consequence, *Tokyo Two* situates aural 'signifiers' at the threshold of the interplay between modes of articulation. The sound-body that emerges beneath 'meaning' in *Tokyo Two* is organised according to a normalising order or the 'new naturalism' that re-constructs verbal exchanges in terms of the familiar format of the talk show.

Kristeva argues in *Revolution in Poetic Language* that regardless of how musicalised a text is, it is never devoid of meaning, given that it functions as a sign, as opposed to a substitute, that is a fetish (1984: 65). For Kristeva:

> The text signifies the un-signifying: it assumes [relève] within a signifying practice this functioning (the semiotic), which ignores meaning and operates before meaning or despite it [...] the text offers itself as the dialectic of two heterogeneous operations that are, reciprocally and inseparably, preconditions for each other. (Kristeva 1984: 65-66)

As a consequence, the text is the experience of semiotic in the thetic, according to Kristeva. That is, it is the result of the phase that posits the breach between signifier and signified as the possibility of every desire and act, as well as the *jouissance* that in fact surpasses both yearning and deed. In the section from *Tokyo Two* cited above, the text signifies the un-signifying in so far as its musicality and the way in which it interacts with Japanese, intimates the experience of the semiotic and symbolic. The Interpreter explicitly opens up the pre-sign 'silence' of language, given that Japanese is inaccessible to a majority of the audience and is thereby experienced purely as sound-rhythm. In this context, Japanese functions as a genotext. This term, developed by Kristeva to identify instances of poetic language, refers to the threads that are spun by

drives and are intrinsic to the semiotic disposition. It is formally unintelligible and dependent upon the process of translation. The incidence of translation, however, is linked to meaning and effectively reduces the experience of the genotext. In *Tokyo Two* Baxter and Gallasch subsequently, limit the incursion of semiotic poetry.

Beyond translation Japanese is not simply a linguistic 'silence' in *Tokyo Two*, but a 'cultural silence', which indicates the positing of the subject in specific cultural-historical circumstances and to use Lehmann's term transforms language into an exhibition object (see 1999: 266-8). Chopsticks, guidebooks and books on Japanese culture: these props used by the performers in the production reinforce simplistic and clichéd entry points for complex questions of cultural identity. Gallasch contends that he 'could adjust to Tokyo time and space, the food, the manners', which The Interpreter contests:

> But I'm Japanese and sometimes I feel like an outsider in Japan. There's a slang term for it – 'henjapa'. It means 'weird Japanese'. The usual term is 'kaigai kikoku shijo' which means 'the child who has returned from living overseas'. (68)

Ultimately, Gallasch concedes that he 'can't keep up: one thousand books published since 1945 on what it is to be Japanese and how unique it is' (65). He is unable to access a specific phenotext, to apply Kristeva's term, intrinsic to communication, its social, cultural, syntactical and grammatical elements and is constrained to imposing his symbolic order on the semiotic experience of Japan. It is a conclusion that points to the extraordinary depth of culture and the performer and spectator's incessant participation in the 'everyday' as a creative act.

Sum of the Sudden

Without formal seating the action in *Sum of the Sudden*, one of Open City's last major productions, is situated around three installation pieces designed by NPG – the Box;

Shadow Box and the Shadow Mirror. The Box resembles a constructivist enclosure with geometrical circles and rectangular windows cut into its surface, which are divided by metal supports and at one side the vertical rectangles are almost large enough to indicate a door. These allow Gallasch and the audience to 'interact' with dancer Steev Zane who is confined inside with a limited number of objects: a telephone on a platform, which literally exhibits itself as an 'intrusion' into the space, a telephone directory, an oval shaped flat seat and a mirror attached to the wall of the box.

A large open metal frame forming a cube constitutes the Shadow Box. The corners of its perimeters in the darkened space are highlighted by white strips creating a zebra pattern. Choreographer and dancer Julie Anne Long paces along its exterior and in doing so demarcates another 'independent reality' within the cube, which she enters at different points in her repetitive movement vocabulary. Long strides along its interior and comes to a sudden halt at its invisible border. The less finite structure of the Shadow Box, which appears to organise Long's graceful actions, as well as suddenly interrupt the hectic directions and sharp shifts constituting her movement, contrasts to Zane's disorientating spins within the box, his pacing, suicidal gestures, and child-like humming as he slides down the mirror, crouches and rocks on the floor. Long, for example, pivots round and round confidently carrying an imaginary tray at shoulder height. Tripped or pushed by an invisible source she suddenly finds herself beyond the Shadow Box. Excerpts from Bach's Suite No. 2 in B Minor accompany her three dances – 'Quiet Moment', 'Hurry Hurry', 'Domestic Slapstick: The Towel, the Telephone & the Tortilla'. Bach's intimate orchestral sequencing based on a set of dance movements designed to follow in succession juxtaposes the ordinary gestus of Long's repetitive pattern which is abruptly broken.

Baxter's Shadow Mirror completes the installation series, and the way in which each represents a movement from a permanent structure to a temporary condition. The Shadow Mirror literally captures, that is, freeze-frames Baxter's physical outline, but only momentarily as it fades away a few seconds after she has stepped beyond its frame

on the wall of the performance area. It is a moment, however, that moves into corporeal memory as she repeats and holds the gesture independently of the mirror. At times the mirror would also capture a trace of Long. The Shadow Mirror conceived as a parallel to the mirror in Zane's Box completed the lighting mirage – (Mirror) Box, (Shadow) Box and (Shadow) Mirror.

The performance's scheduled events consist of 'In Sleep', five sudden fictions – '1. In Suspension', '2. In Smoke', '3. In a Word', '4. In Sleep', '5. In Flagrante' – performed in two cycles by Baxter and 'Conversations for the Dissolving Ego' – '1. Losing It', '2. Strangers', '3. A Floating You', '4. Losing You', '5. The Sudden If' – a dialogue between Gallasch and Baxter. The evening's ongoing events include: Zane performing a version of autism in fifty minute cycles as the man in the box; Long repeating 'Three Dances' in and around the Shadow Box, and in various locations 'Three Stories' – '1. Spell', '2. Needle', '3. Kiss' – and Gallasch's 'Short Talks' – 'In a Box', 'Spontaneous Combustion', 'For Fear of the News', 'For You', 'Nothing Unusual' – along with his unscheduled attempts at conversation with the man in the box and Simon Wise and Janine Peacock's 'Lighting Cycle'. Despite the minimal set and everyday costumes worn by the performers what we have in *Sum of the Sudden* is an accumulative 'Overload!' (64) [23] to quote Long in the production. In his article 'A tantalising wander to the verge of reality' *Sydney Morning Herald* critic Doug Anderson pointed out that the simultaneous and overlapping events 'start before the audience arrives and continues after it has left' (1993: 15). Spectators were formally invited in the Program to come and go as they pleased, to get a new perspective on an 'event' by re-encountering it at a different point in its cycle of performance and to leave when it all adds up or simply when they wished between 7.00pm and 10.00pm.

Subtitled 'A Performance Event', Open City described the dramaturgical process underpinning the performance and its central preoccupation in its program, 'Advice to

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[23] All quotes from *Sum of the Sudden* by Open City are from the version published in Allen and Pearlmann (1999).

the Visitor'. The company published this information with the text in *Performing the unNameable*, and its 'Advice' includes the following extract:

> SUM OF THE SUDDEN is a cycle of performances devised independently and in collaboration and drawn together in workshop and rehearsal. The elements of SUM OF THE SUDDEN connect by design and chance focusing on the moment as it happens or in reflection.
> Our preoccupation is with the moment, that unmediated sudden where our sense of self and community can dissolve, where language cannot cohere, where the body loses self-reference – we are disorientated, suddenly lost, fumbling for words and meaning, bewildered, angry, panicky. (Open City, 'Advice to the Visitor': 63)

Open City's first paragraph in the statement above clearly indicates a specific approach to the creative and workshop processes shaping *Sum of the Sudden*, and there is a transparency in performance, given that the various 'moments' self-consciously maintain their independent 'reality'. This corresponds to Lehmann's understanding of post-dramatic theatre as a withdrawal of synthesis that flagrantly contradicts the hierarchy of dramatic theatre and its fundamental principles designed to produce harmony. Lehmann elaborates on this conception by specifically referring to Van Kerkhoven's reference to Chaos-Theory as a language of 'new theatre', and later in *Postdramatisches Theater* he points to the conception of stage discourse as relating to the structures specific to the dream world and the concept of synaesthesia (see 1999: 139-144). Dream machinery is rendered explicit by the performers in *Sense*, an earlier work by Open City. *Sense* lends itself to explication in terms of Chaos-Theory and its conception of the unstable systems constituting 'reality'. Chaos-Theory accounts for the emergence of ambiguity, polyvalence and simultaneity in the arts, according to dramaturg Van Kerkhoven, and a dramaturgy that repudiates dramatic structure in its entirety in favour of its elements (in Lehmann 1999: 141). It is a point that appears to clarify the 'logic' of the composition of *Sum of the Sudden*. However, the shifts in perspective constituting *Sum of the Sudden* arguably correlate with televisual structures of communication and particularly so, if Etchells' understanding of the layers and

degrees that complicate contemporary presence is taken into consideration. In 'these strange times', Etchells' notes:

> one can feel closer to a person, sometimes, when they are further away than when they are fully and simply before us. (Etchells 1999: 97)[24]

Apart from the specific constellation of a 'televisual' logic, Etchells statement raises a number of interesting issues for a medium traditionally understood in terms of its immediacy and the perspectival relation established between stage and auditorium. In response to the ideas and practices exemplified not only by Etchells' notion of presence, but Van Kerkhoven's compositional 'fragments', local discussion platforms have periodically returned to the quest of theorising the craft that has accompanied the emergence of new forms of theatre in Australia. Melanie Beddie, for example, opened the conference 'Dramaturgies: the artist as 'agent provocateur' and cultural interventionist' on 1 November 2002 in Melbourne with the following clarification of dramaturgy:

> Dramaturgy could be considered to be the midwife between theory and practice. It provides a process of bringing performance ideas into a concrete form, and it can also allow for the essential luxury of contemplation and evaluation of both process and product. (Beddie 2002: [n.pag.])

If the intent of Beddie's elaboration of dramaturgy is temporarily displaced, what emerges in her supposition is a critical space of reflection not simply for the creative team, but the spectator. The latter point of Beddie's analysis opens up the question of the operation of dramaturgy in performance, as opposed to the rehearsal room. If this line of inquiry is applied to *Sum of the Sudden* the audience emerges as the key constituent actively responsible for organising its elements; that is, the production is the effect of audience as dramaturg. What type of dramaturg then is required by *Sum of the Sudden*?

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[24] Etchells' comment is an interpretation of a remark made by the director of Hotel Pro Forma, Kirstin Denholm. Denholm felt that the presentations at a seminar on hybridity might have been more interesting if certain talks had been undertaken from within a glass box.

And how explicit are the cultural frames of reference inherent in this question to the spectator?

Baxter has argued that performance 'can deal with theoretical concepts and doesn't have to disguise itself in character and plot. Its text is not sub-text' (1995: 169). Here the relationship between theory and practice leads to a peculiar observation. Influenced by a number of thinkers like neurologist Israel Rosenfield, scientist Nicholas Humphrey author of 'A History of the Mind', and the widely published Oliver Sacks, *Sum of the Sudden* is a considered exploration of the:

> various layers of ourselves (sensory, feeling, physiological) [...] shaped into
> narratives mediated by language. (Open City, 'Advice to the Visitor': 63)

In doing so, it consolidated the reserved fascination expressed by a number of critics in relation to the work of Open City. Angela Bennie provides an extreme example of this attitude in her review of *Sense* entitled 'Sixth sense essential'. In her critique, Bennie infers that the performance is bloodless on the basis of its self-reflexivity (1993: 22). There appears to be an interesting correlation between the degree of visibility of the dramaturgical process, which permitted a high level of proximity for spectators in the final product, and its lack of emotion, particularly in a production exploring the sensory, albeit sensory defect. This contrasts significantly with The Sydney Front, which did not allow theoretical ideas in its workshop process and ardently argued against interpretation in favour of improvisation.

Gallasch has pointed out that *Sum of the Sudden*, like *The Museum of Accidents*, *All that Flows*, *The Girl with a Stone in Her Shoe* and *Sense*, did not use a talk show framework as its basic dramaturgical device in production (2003b: [n.pag.]). *The Museum of Accidents*, nevertheless, included an interchange between Baxter and Gallasch based on this model. Instead, Gallasch argues that a 'preoccupation with creating a framework in which the audience is implicated' is the common element across Open City's body of

work (2003b: [n.pag.]). In their article 'Dramaturgy in the age of ambient anxiety', Peter Eckersall, Melanie Beddie and Paul Monaghan link the growing interest in the application of dramaturgy to the emergence of hybrid spaces and practices in Australia, which have increased the significance of dramaturgical processes in production (2003: 43). It is worth noting that the inclusion of a dramaturg as a standard member of the theatrical team is a fairly recent phenomenon in Australia. However, it is not the practical role of the dramaturg that is the focus of this dissertation. Instead, it is the operation of dramaturgy in the theatre situation and its relation to the spectator that is of principle importance on the basis that this constitutes the medium's social and political dimension. This raises the question of the scope of spectator expectation in relation to the theatre medium. Carlson, like Lehmann, points out that repetition is the chief element informing the reception process in theatre, that the spectator is aware that s/he is witnessing 'something' again. It is a fundamental condition of not simply dramatic theatre, but increasingly television and film. In *Sum of the Sudden* Open City self-consciously exploit the dynamic of repetition intrinsic to recognition (or more precisely [re-]cognition): the spectator is invited to enter and exit in order to re-encounter an event. If the spectator, however, is directly implicated in this process, how do departures from traditional form transpose the rituals specific to reception?

The term 'televisual' has been applied to dramaturgy in this chapter to explore not simply the work of Open City, but with broader application to specific examples of post-dramatic theatre that embody a relation to global changes in everyday culture as a result of the development of new technologies of communication. This is not to automatically infer the incorporation of 'media' into the performance medium. *Sum of the Sudden*, for example, employs lighting techniques specific to the theatre and not multi or new media. As a consequence, the term relates to a different understanding of the social and political effects theatre can produce in relation to a particular cultural configuration. In addition, it does not apply to every example of post-dramatic theatre as is evident in the earlier reference to Castorf's *Forever Young*. What then distinguishes

the dramaturgy of *Sum of the Sudden* as 'televisual'?

Firstly, the style of delivery and the specific dynamic it establishes with the spectator, although not explicitly a talk show format. Zane performed a vocabulary of nine psychological and neurological dis-orders in the Box, while audience members peered through the slits in the sides of his 'pen'. Gallasch literally creates a frame demarcated by the installation. He offers his hand repeatedly to the 'autistic' man inside, who is unable to react and engage in the symbolic economy of communication. What follows is a commentary. That is, Gallasch, who positions himself 'in front' of the 'action' taking place in the Box – Zane undertakes a range of movements in his 'world' seemingly unaware of the presence of Gallasch – remarks on what he has observed with a 'coolness' reminiscent of a news broadcaster or documentary reporter:

> The man in the box
> has lost a hand.
>
> Lost is not the right word
> It suggests he's misplaced it.
> Or forgotten it.
>
> Lost is our word.
> He experiences no loss.
>
> You cannot teach him to find it
> Or trick him into remembering it. (Gallasch, '6. Minor conversation 2': 71)

After all:

> We are IN the world.
> He IS the world. (Gallasch, '3. Do not look the man in the box in the eye 1':
> 69)

Gallasch's action literally elaborates upon Etchells' conception of the complexity of the idea of the actor in front of an audience and precisely what is meant by 'in front' in light of the modification of the public's relation to cultural forms as a result of technology

(1999: 97).

Secondly, to continue the analysis of the dramaturgy in operation in *Sum of the Sudden*, audience mobility differentiates the production as 'televisual' on the basis that it creates a situation similar to what Jane Feuer attributes specifically to television. By inviting the spectator to re-experience an event at a different point in its presentation, Open City reproduce the idea and experience that television can 'go live' at any moment. An improvised lighting cycle compounded this effect. The spectator is confronted with the live unpredictability that Feuer argues is a vital part of the televisual imaginary (in Auslander 1999: 12-3). It is an 'unpredictability' that breaks down narrative structure, a structure ironically underpinned by a cycle of presentation; and this 'volatile' cycle, volatile in so far as it is subject to interruption, is the temporal key to *Sum of the Sudden.*

Thirdly, Open City de-constructs the idea that theatre is dependent upon a continuous use of space, which Sontag argues distinguishes it from cinema (in Auslander 1999: 20). Cinema (and by implication television), according to Sontag, utilises an alogical or discontinuous use of space and Open City's open ended practice in *Sum of the Sudden* and *Shop* and *The Necessary Orgy* refutes the idea that this is specific to moving image technology. This effect is accentuated by the independent verbal and kinesic narratives, which establish frames of reference that emphasise the significance of the way in which immediacy arbitrates 'meaning' organised according to a cycle of interruption. From this perspective, *Sum of the Sudden* contrasts dramatically to Robert Wilson's theatre, for example, where the visual aesthetic demands an entirely different engagement from the spectator. Furthermore, in a section of the performance reminiscent of Heiner Müller's Hamlet in *Hamletmachine*[25], Gallasch comments on the effect of technologically mediated perception:

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[25]   Compare Gallasch's 'Short Talk' to the following text from Müller's *Hamletmachine*: 'Television The daily nausea Nausea/ Of prefabricated babble Of decreed cheerfulness/ How do you spell GEMÜTLICHKEIT/ Give us this day our daily murder/ Since thine is nothingness Nausea' (1984: 56)

> For fear of the news
> He has become afraid
> Of the television
> and the telephone
>
> The daily dead
> Flicker by shock by shock
> Soulless on the TV
>
> The disembodied
> Address him on the phone
> With Is that you? Did you hear ... ?
>
> He has enough Bosnias of his own he says
> He too, he says, is an innocent victim
> (although not a woman or a child)
> He has learned, like you, to keep his finger on
> the remote at all times,
> Like you he has learned, when the phone rings
> At all times, to answer: 'I can't come to the
> phone right now but if you leave your name and
> number I'll get back to you. (Gallasch, 'Short talk: For Fear of the News': 72)

In the example above media 'reality' provides access to the dis-embodied and/or the dead by virtue of proximity. It is a 'reality' that Lehmann describes as 'ghostly' and specific to the everyday, that is 'normal' experience and communication (in Fischer 1995: 91). In making this point Lehmann observes that Marx's conception of the 'ghostly concreteness' of the products of labour has itself fallen into 'ghostly oblivion'. Sue-Ellen Case's understanding of Müller's later material as compositions reflecting the conscious bombardment of images comparable to the model of advertising in the context of high capitalism and susceptible to reception as examples of the 'postmodern' in the West, similarly, infers a backdrop of ghostly (dis)location (1996: 78, 137). More significantly, Case's analysis points to the displacement of the ritual of theatre as a result of the language of the mass market. It is a point that ostensibly neglects the wider sense of communication intrinsic to post-dramatic theatre and its emphasis on the 'possibility', as opposed to the production of 'meaning'.

Despite the availability and potential incorporation of technology, the process of theatre suggests a model of communication based on a physical relation between performer and spectator. For Castellucci the collective impulse of theatre functions as a seminal element of the medium. At the 'Dramaturgies: the artist as 'agent provocateur' and cultural interventionist' conference Castellucci responded via video to the notion of the artist as agent provocateur in the following way.

> More than someone who provokes I feel like someone who is provoked, someone who is acted upon. And in this way art is something religious because it is something that combines a community just like religion even if this community is something of an accidental community.
>
> This fact that theatre creates a community is also about politics in theatre. Politics in its primary political sense: the idea of politics in the individual. It creates this need in the individuals. Here is how theatre can once more be a dangerous art. And from this point of view theatre must be a dangerous art.
>
> [...]
>
> When I talk about danger, I talk about tearing apart the law that governs that language as we know it. Language we belong to but language that keeps us prisoners. (Castellucci in Beddie 2002: [n.pag.])

Castellucci's expression of inverted agency based on a 'mysterious force' and the metaphysics of the collective embedded in religion describes the danger intrinsic to a collapse of 'the social' or law-as-language to refer to Lacan. In *Sum of the Sudden* these moments are not only expressed at the level of the individual ostensibly as physiological dysfunction, a break down that highlights the very concept of intelligibility, but in terms of audience mobility. Open City's spectator is explicitly subject to the experience of disjunctive perception. In Lacanian theory this underpins the underlying vulnerability of ego development. The illusion of unity that is central to the formation of the ego (and dramatic theatre) through the mirror stage that manifests itself in the idea of self-mastery is eternally open to the threat of pre-Oedipal chaos (1953: 15) or the incursion of the semiotic threads of the chora, according to Kristeva.

For Lacan this constitutes the essence of Anxiety, and for Kristeva the degree to which this uncontrollable excess is textually present indicates upheaval. Kristeva argues that the revolutionary text is linked to specific historical moments, and if postmodernism is understood as a periodising term in a Jamesonian sense as the cultural logic of late capitalism, its rupture theoretically should produce instances of semiotic overflows that challenge the 'readerly text'.

It is perhaps not surprising that cultural theorists informing the development of postmodern theory, particularly Jean Baudrillard, responded to the influx of images associated with mass media with a conception of the subject as a 'pure screen, a switching centre for all the networks of influence' (1983: 133) and that Jameson, drawing on Lacan, elaborated upon the 'postmodern' condition through an understanding of schizophrenia as a breakdown in the temporal chain uniting material signifiers (1991: 26-27). For Auslander Baudrillard's paradigm of simulation best describes the relationship between the live and the mediatised (1999: 39). In the context of post-dramatic theatre Lehmann identifies a 'strategy of repudiation ('Refus')' in the face of the bombardment of signs specific to the everyday (1999: 153). In *Sum of the Sudden* the moment of upheaval, the sense when self and community dissolve, is largely quarantined according to a demarcated 'reality', the installation and presentation cycles of the production and the additional instability introduced through improvisation. The political question, to refer back to Castellucci, is the degree to which the mobile spectator is acted upon and how, given that this potentially manifests 'danger'.

In the company's words *Sum of the Sudden* is an exploration based on the premise that:

> the sensory moment is the first and most critical point of our being. (Open City, 'Advice to the Visitor': 63)

Open City situates the primary 'Anxiety' that Lacan posits as a 'threat' to self-mastery not simply in terms of a condition such as autism, but as an experience embedded in the

'everyday'. The ironic titles of many of the monologues and dialogues in *Sum of the Sudden* indicate 'moments' of communication that do not necessarily add up. In Baxter's 'In Sleep – Five Sudden Fictions' her 'interrupted rhythm', explicit in the text excerpt below, constitutes a self-conscious narrative consisting of suspenseful temporal gaps that culminate in disjunction.

> Women   like me   who like Hitchcock films
> are not   masochistic
> They're caught   in a double desire
> They identify with the male   and female
>   characters
> At the same time   Yes!   Yes!
> I was up to page 77   SHADOW OF A DOUBT
> When the book   suddenly vanishes
> I'm lost   without it. ('1. In Suspension': 65)

Neither the fiction nor the mise-en-scène discloses a coherent 'reality' beyond the moment, its 'independent reality'. Instead, Baxter's monologues spiral and like Gallasch and Long's presentations are delivered in a detached tone, despite the desire and fantasy insinuated by her subject matter. In the context of the production, the narrative sequences function as discrete commentaries cyclically spliced together. They are snippets that not only correspond to the changing perceptions of narrative in a televisual culture, but appear to actually 'anthropomorphise' the text, 'as if it had desires of its own', to borrow from Etchells' description of the collaborative process key to the creation of material by Forced Entertainment (1999: 62).

Long's 'Three Stories', similarly, consist of three short narrative monologues about ordinary events and each contains a fictional, yet associative detour. In '1. Spell', for example, Long's account of her verbal attack following 'the boys' failure to pick her and her companion up includes a verbalised chain of thought that mentions a fuse blowing on the same night she possibly caught a cold while she waited for the lift. Long's oblique 'ready-made' monologues expose the illusion of stage fiction. Her accounts are emblematic of the mimetic properties typically attributed to a highly structured plot in

so far as her digressions are characteristic of a 'real' internal dialogue or conversation. In addition, her third story, '3. Kiss', replicates the overwhelming absorption of narrative by the media world. Long ponders whether Sharon Stone of 'Basic Instinct' could play the main role in 'Sleeping Beauty' and refers to reading about the public's inability to recognise Stone directly after a head on car accident. Stone, Long emphasises, is no overnight success in the film industry. In the same issue of 'Vanity Fair' that reported on Stone's collision, Long describes 'a photograph called':

> *Le Baiser's* (The Kiss)
> Fashioned from a corpse's head
> Sliced in two
> By a photographer
> And smushed
> Lip to lip (like this)
> A dead head
> Kissing itself.
> It sold at Sotheby's for $27,500.
> (Long, '3. Kiss': 64)

Like the myth of Medusa and its transformation into the prototype of the image of the severed head, Long sutures her narrative together by turning it against itself and in doing so, ironically repudiates the petrification of socially significant stories into commercial form.

In contrast to the concept of dramatic theatre as a representation of a known macrocosm, *Sum of the Sudden* is eternally subject to 'The Sudden If', the title of one of Baxter and Gallasch's 'Dialogues to Dissolve the Ego'. It is a dissolution doubly expressed: firstly, it is literally embodied in the migratory patterns of the spectator and secondly, it is evident in the tangential pulses of the narratives that dissipate the 'semantic' unity of words and gestures and in doing so, a coherent experience of subjectivity. Kristeva explicates textual practice politically.

> The text is a practice that could be compared to political revolution: the one

brings about in the subject what the other introduces into society. (Kristeva 1984:17)

To paraphrase the 'Advice to the Visitor', *Sum of the Sudden* points to layers of disturbance *dis*orders that endanger the entire system, but it does not replicate the transgressive breaches that reveal the uncontrollable excess of the semiotic. In this respect it is similar to a number of Open City's other productions and in particular *The Museum of Accidents* which explored the technological language of breakdown. Gallasch's 'specialty' in this performance was:

> the language of accidents, the meanings of words with which we attribute cause and effect and the escape mechanisms for avoiding responsibility for accidents we have precipitated ... as in the case of Chernobyl where words like disaster and accident can cover up criminal negligence. (Gallasch, *The Museum of Accidents*)[26]

As a consequence, discursive *production* emerges as a fundamental issue for Open City, which is made explicit in the following statement by Gallasch.

> A rocket is a bomb. All it wants to do is explode. Challenger. (Gallasch, *The Museum of Accidents*)

Discourse, according to Kristeva, if it exists is dependent upon a withdrawn body in so far as it is a stockpile of linguistic layers and structures (1984: 17), and in the context of the immediacy essential to a televisual cultural formation, proximity provides access to and perverts unspeakable acts and (cultural) practices – or in Gallasch's words in relation to the Gulf War:

> We viewers were complicit in the bombing of one of the world's great cities. TO SEE IS TO KILL. (Gallasch, *The Museum of Accidents*)

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[26]   All quotes from *The Museum of Accidents* (1991b) are from an unpublished, non-paginated script provided by Open City.

In Elizabeth Grosz's analysis of Kristeva's theory of the subject in relation to Lacan, she discusses Kristeva's later works *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection* and *Tales of Love* as fascinating elaborations on the subversive forces of madness, holiness and poetry (1990: 153). In contrast to lyrical convention, psychosis, orgy, the ecstatic heights of love and disgust are fitting topics of inhumanity in the wake of Artaud and Lautréamont, according to Kristeva (1982: 137). That is, conditions that 'haunt' the margins of intelligibility. The televisual medium in fact subverts Kristeva's subversive forces – madness, holiness and poetry – by rendering them 'bloodless' in discourse, and this poses a challenge for post-dramatic forms operating at the borderline of a textual logic closely connected to the current dominant cultural economy. Just as the symbolic 'digitalises'[27] libidinal flows into signifying elements, the potential emerges for examples of post-dramatic theatre to merely correspond to conventional representational patterns and systems, particularly as contemporary audiences are increasingly more accustomed to discontinuous images as a result of technology.

Shop and The Necessary Orgy

> It is an old idea from Stanislavski, a pre-film idea about naturalism, that if you are really acting, you have to look at the character you are talking to. Now it is rare that we are ever in the same room with the person we are talking to [...]. We have learned to make logic out of such fragmented connections; it is more 'real' than the old style of theatre. (LeCompte 1994: 200-2)

The 'new naturalism' ascribed by LeCompte to the theatrical medium as a result of technology, is typically discernible in Open City's last major work, *Shop* and *The Necessary Orgy*. With the opening of this production in 1995 Open City had been exploring changes in contemporary culture for over a decade in the context of Australia. Like *Photoplay*, *Shop* and *The Necessary Orgy* depended upon the juxtaposition of two

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[27]   The term 'digitalise' is taken from Grosz's application of Wilden's expression (see Grosz 1990: 153).

subject positions; however, the actualisation of 'desire', as opposed to memory, underpinned this production. In addition, *Shop* and *The Necessary Orgy*'s colour monitors superseded the extra-theatrical spaces evoked by *Photoplay*'s 'slide show' model. As a consequence, visual literacy is no longer restricted to the 'object' in *Shop* and *The Necessary Orgy*. Instead, the images screened throughout the three hour sequence of performances by Baxter and Gallasch were created through interactive video-computer technology. Digital artist Bill Seaman and sound designer, Virginia Madsen collaborated with Baxter and Gallasch to develop the production. Baxter's *Shop* and Gallasch's *The Necessary Orgy* were presented alternately with the two performers taking turns sitting or standing in the case of Baxter at a computer terminal. It was from here, through video and sound software, that they generated a soundscape, and projected and manipulated a range of images that appeared on the large colour monitors throughout the performance space in the Australian Steam Navigation Building in Sydney.

Baxter and Gallasch's minimal kinesic language, which is consistent with *Photoplay* and *Tokyo Two*, did not reinforce the verbal text, and the activity taking place on the screens consisted of a series of images suspended, re-framed and re-played. The spoken text and visual images of Gallasch's performances were constructed from a range of possibilities, that is, a series of selections from a mock computer program, and these selections varied from show to show. More specifically, the blanks in his monologues are filled with selections from a finite range of prepositions or verbs which he inserts and then reads from the screen. To demonstrate the way in which this program functions, Gallasch would choose from a set of fragmentary images of bodies stored on laser disk – a naked man, a woman in gym clothes, a tongue, an eye, an Adam's apple etc – and at particular points in the performance this choice manifested itself as a temporary fixation on a specific body part. This part would then be seen through various projections; at close range, for example, or at different angles as he carries out a 'dialogue' with himself. 'Speak to me', he asks the screen[28]. 'Why don't they speak?' Gallasch, like his mute

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[28]   All quotes from *Shop* and *The Necessary Orgy* are from an unpublished, non-paginated script (1995b)

images, are limited according to a fixed set of co-ordinates or choices from a selection. A digitally recorded voice over, the voice of 'Orgy' asks 'Which are you now? Male, female, other?' and it calmly and seductively reassures him that 'your many selves are permissible'. Clare Grant's deep androgynous tones as the voice of 'Orgy' reinforce the spacious, floating sensation invoked by the idea of disembodied identities traversing time and space in the network of new media. The voice of 'Orgy', however, is posing a question of identity fundamental to theatre and its stockpile of (ghostly) characters, or in the words of the Duke in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*:

> One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons,
> A natural Perspective, that is, and is not (Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* 5.1)

Audience members were free to come and go throughout the cycle of performances, and could choose what to watch, when and in which room. For example, some spectators chose to watch an uninterrupted version of the laser disk on video monitors in one of the rooms, as opposed to the live performance undertaken by Baxter and Gallasch. This corresponds to the experience of John Jesurun's 'Blue Heat'. In this production Jesurun provided video, as opposed to direct access to the actors, who performed in a room adjacent to an empty stage. Like Jesurun Open City creates a situation that encourages the spectator to explore the public's fascination with the (moving) image and its impact on the imaginary. The power of Gallasch's body, like Baxter's appears to 'fade' in comparison to the magnetism of the screen. In *Shop* and *The Necessary Orgy* the decision by certain spectators to exclusively view the laser disk adds a new dimension to Auslander's application of Benjaminian thought in *Liveness*, which he uses to elaborate upon the relationship between live and mediatised forms with regard to audience participation. Auslander argues that the need for aural intimacy explains the use of headphones by spectators simultaneously watching a large scale live performance of a rock/pop band (1999: 34). The choice of watching the pre-recorded as opposed to the

and video recording (1995c) of the production provided by Open City.

live in the context of *Shop* and *The Necessary Orgy*, which provided the spectator with access to aural and physiological intimacy, literally enacts 'the bent' Benjamin attributes to the contemporary masses 'toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction' (1968: 217).

In addition, it appears to literally confirm the observation raised by Auslander that audiences are reacting to the live event according to television (1999: 25). Auslander's comment relates more specifically to form and is dependent upon Patrice Pavis' claim that the increasing demand for realism in the theatre is the result of tastes determined by the television medium[29]. It is a 'demand' potentially specific to cultural contexts ostensibly characterised by recent theatre histories, like Australia and the US, as opposed to Germany with its Brechtian tradition and over two hundred year history of the State supported theatre institution. Country specific or not Pavis' assertion points to the emergence of a dominant aesthetic that potentially jeopardizes the breadth of artistic expression. Müller's comment that naturalism 'nearly killed the theatre' with its 'strategy of doubling [reality]' reinforces Pavis' conclusion and Kosky's assessment of Australian theatre in the opening chapter of this dissertation (1984: 19). The increasingly international conventions of mainstream television and film undoubtedly exert a considerable influence on conceptions of theatre form, and have prompted debate, scholarly, industry and public, about the value and political viability of theatre as an artistic form. For Etchells' a mediatised environment necessitates a particular response from theatre or in his words:

> And if these things, and a million others do not change the theatre it will
> not survive, and I personally couldn't care. I don't mean change in the way
> of content – like the three or four people I speak to each year now who
> want to write a play about virtual reality (I mean, really, why would
> anybody do that?) And I don't mean necessarily that theatre should

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29   Further to LeCompte's re-conceptualisation of 'naturalism', the term 'realism' is, similarly, characterised by semantic shifts in its application, particularly in light of the 'real events' specific to performance art. There are many instances of duration performances that preceded the 'reality television' phenomena, for example, and arguably strengthen Auslander's argument about the way in which newer cultural forms incorporate aspects of older platforms of expression.

embrace new technology and bring it onto the stage – I can image the question 'Where shall we put the Apple Macs?' getting every bit as dull as 'Where shall we put the televisions?' – in fact it's the same question, pretty well. (Etchells 1999: 97)

In the statement above, Etchells cautions against the conflation of aesthetic development with technology. Theatre after all has always been a site of mechanics and technology. That is, a specific technology of representation and from this perspective the incorporation of multi and new media simply constitutes a phase in its history. As a consequence, it is not a question of the presence of technology in performance that determines the way in which post-dramatic theatre can produce social and political effects as a medium. Nor is it a question resolved on the basis of the 'live' nature of the medium to return to Auslander's objection to Phelan's argument, and in many respects, Open City's *Shop* and *The Necessary Orgy* confront precisely Phelan's idea of the 'truth-effect' of the 'visible real' (1996: 3). This is not to neglect the fact that at first glance Baxter and Gallasch's presentations appear to endorse Phelan's conception of performance as distinct from reproduction. Baxter and Gallasch's performances differed each night on the basis of the selections generated from the computer program. Similarly, Gallasch's persona, for example, linguistically accentuates the 'now' Phelan articulates is intrinsic to performance's status as independent from mass reproduction. The absence of temporal deictic markers in Gallasch's speech, that is, the adverbs 'there' and 'then', emphasised the proximal deictic markers 'here' and 'now' and in doing so the theatrical now of the performance venue, its temporal 'reality' or immediacy. In doing so, however, Gallasch's linguistic selections and the manipulation of sound and image via the computer terminal emphasised the correlation between mediation and the 'im-mediate' or what Auslander points out is the etymological development of the word: 'immediate' is based upon 'mediate', which is embedded in its form (1999: 53). As a consequence, Auslander argues that live performance is in fact already inscribed in the notion of technical mediation, and thereby not a privileged site of representation by virtue of ontology.

In this 'mediated' context corporeal, sensual associations dominate Gallasch's oral and visual vocabulary, which are underpinned by a yearning constructed through the verbal tones of his speech and the way in which he searches for the appropriate body part, preposition or verb. In addition the soundscape and in particular what appears to be the manipulated pitch of string instruments, which produce a strained atmosphere or rather an 'industrial aching', contribute to the escalating tension. The effect is a suspenseful and frustrating immediacy. Not simply as a result of the principle of insatiable desire informing the performance, but the 'cool' distance separating body and screen driving this voracious lack. As a consequence, *The Necessary Orgy* replicates the dissatisfying experience of proximity evident in Open City's earlier work *Photoplay*; the interface is not the path to corporeal 'union'. Instead it foregrounds the concept of the role of the 'intermediary', which as Kristeva reminds us Freud assigns to language and in doing so, argues that this fundamental point is too often simply subsumed in Lacan's statement that the 'sub-conscious is structured like language' (2000: 35). A critical aspect of Freud's model of language, according to Kristeva, is its transmission of anamnesis, given that it is physical and psychological. Language is felt, its words are sensory and it operates at the threshold of body and mind, and thought and perception. Verbal associations in fact 'put thought-processes on a level with perceptual processes', that is, 'lend them reality and *make memory of them possible*' (Freud in Kristeva 2000: 35). Language, Kristeva subsequently reasons, is situated between energetic charge (for example, pain) and its perception and thoughts or logical activity. As a consequence, to paraphrase Kristeva, knowledge and consciousness is underpinned by heterogeneous representation (sensation and perception) (2000: 36).

If we have learned to make logic out of fragmented connections to return to LeCompte's conception of 'new naturalism', Kristeva's point elaborates on the sensation ascribed to the image in Open City's *Shop* and *The Necessary Orgy*. Sensation 'drives' the following text snippets delivered by Gallasch, as opposed to syntax, and his

neuronal excitations are inspired by the ocular immediacy of the terminal and the images screened:

> You're part of a semi-instinctual
> Surprising reserves
> An exponential increase
> Hormones rush accelerated by skin/nape/gold/buttock
> /navel ... Everything says let go.
> Control. Speak to me. Arts. Sport.
> When to speak. Where did you learn that?
> Next? A wink, a possessive tug ...
> A good pair, couple well ... (Gallasch 1995b: [n.pag.])[30]

In the Program Open City describe *The Necessary Orgy* in the following way.

> It is the dream of transforming the self (namelessness), erasing difference, time and space, but not of losing them – in orgy your identity becomes other (bodies), you control time, you intensify space, you multiply meanings. (Open City 1995d: [n.pag.])

Open City's use of the word 'dream' is highly significant, particularly as it proposes a 'normalising logic' for a 'pervertible' order. Gallasch's orgy is the illusion of a (visual) narrative unable to unfold. Instead, body parts, sound, video images, monitors create a circuitry of impulses corresponding to the sensual irrationality of Aristotle's visual realm. In *Postdramatisches Theater* Lehmann poses the following question as a fundamental issue in what he terms media theatre: Why is it the image that is more fascinating? (1999: 440). In response Lehmann contends that the image liberates desire from the burden of the real body, its troublesome circumstances and transforms it into an entrancing dream vision. It is a vision that contrasts radically to the corporeal veracity of The Sydney Front. For Gallasch, however, desire is underpinned by the issue of control and this raises the question of the power essential to the image's appeal. It is an appeal that is rendered site-specific in *Shop* and *The Necessary Orgy*. The fascination

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[30] This monologue varied from performance to performance on the basis of Gallasch's engagement with the computer program.

pertaining to the new medium of the image is positioned in relation to the old medium of the tangible industry of the body.

Open City's decision to present the production in the Australian Steam Navigation Building in Sydney foregrounded the tension embedded in communication, its re-mediation, given that the Australian Steam Navigation Building was constructed in the early 1800s and is therefore classified as a heritage building in Australia. The three-room space in which the performance took place was open to the Harbour and the international shipping terminal. As a consequence, the very location of the production situated new modes of communication at the intersection of the old. More fundamentally, as Gallasch sits at the computer terminal the spectator is reminded of the traditional rubric of the theatre, the actor's body. The way in which older cultural forms of expression intersect with new media is intrinsic to the articulation of the 'social' in the production, given that as the title suggests, the performance ostensibly explored two seemingly distinct languages of desire subject to the power of the image – discourses concerning consumer goods and sexuality. A female voice, Baxter, reproduced a domain traditionally associated with women, shopping, and Gallasch, similarly reproduced a language attributed stereotypically to men, which reflected conventional frames of orientation. In her feminist introduction to Lacan, Grosz points out that as distinct from biology, the body is experienced, that is lived, according to not simply the individual's concepts of biology, but a culture's (1990: 44), and in terms of post-Oedipal formation, televisual discourses are the dominant modes articulating concepts of identity.

Jameson argues that technology is 'mesmerizing' on the basis that it provides a representational impression for a network of power beyond our imaginary capacity and that this corresponds to the third stage of capital (1991: 37-8). By technology he is referring directly to the computer terminal's role in a system of communication. It is an apt symbol in Baxter's engagement with the image and capital as she, like Gallasch performs behind an installation that alludes to a contemporary 'work-station'. More

significantly, the spectator is placed inside the environment of stage pictures generated by the installations and as a consequence, *Shop* and *The Necessary Orgy* point to the organisation of perception according to the plethora of visual sign systems dominating the realm of the everyday. Baxter's *Shop* engaged with the fantasy worlds of the department store and the arcade or mall. That is, the similarly mesmerizing environment of the shopping experience dependent upon 'artificialities of time (where are the clocks?), space, light and sound, walking trajectories' (Open City 1995d: [n.pag.]). *Shop* consisted of five scenes, each of which involved the purchase of a distinct item, and were titled according to the days of the working week. That is, labour organised according to the time of production. The impact of the past, capitalism in the Marxian sense, on the present, Jameson's cultural theory of late capitalism, is intrinsic to this theoretical shift in temporal management. Despite the illusion of the temporal and spatial freedom of new media Baxter's presentations reminded the audience that as shopping 'threatens to become virtual – buying by computer and television' representations adhere to pre-determined social subject positions underpinned by desire based on a perceived lack (Open City 1995d: [n.pag.]). In the virtual world of on-line shopping Baxter encounters a specific configuration of her identity. Her spending profile listed her 'as a $55 sort of customer', as she gazes at a $2,000 item. In Baxter's engagement with 'new' technology it is clear that Lehmann's modification of Gertrude Stein's statement 'People come and go, party talk stays the same' to 'Users come and go, the world wide web stays the same' applies to the apparatus negotiating social relations in this production (1999: 403). Desire, to paraphrase Grosz's reading of Lacan, in fact opens the subject to infinite and unregulated semiosis in contrast to demand, which is the explicit verbalisation of self-other relations, the imaginary (1990: 66). However, in doing so, desire is an entry point into 'the Other', that is the domain of order.

As the program accompanying the production indicates, *The Necessary Orgy* was influenced by Karl Toepfer's book *Theatre, Aristocracy & Pornography*, and specifically the

notion of the orgy as a terroristic surplus of meanings. Indeed, the production's program refers to the fears associated with this multiplicity; that is, a fear of the body and a fear of language; an anxiety derived from the terror of the mass. As Gallasch says in his performance, this orgy is necessary, precisely because 'It will help you safely organise the everyday excess of sexual images … that threaten to overwhelm' (Open City 1995d: [n.pag.]). For Open City:

> Compared to the absolutes many of us grew up with, we live in an orgiastic time of shifting meanings and possible transformations. (Open City 1995d: [n.pag.])

In *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt* Kristeva makes the point that the resurgence of nationalism, traditionalism, conservatism, fundamentalism, in other words vanguards asserting identity, or what Gallasch refers to as 'absolutes', are the product of a museum-like culture and in terms of its popular variants a culture of distraction (2000: 19). It is a point that indicates a reactionary logic that can be clarified in light of Lehmann's understanding of global developments and the ensuing implications for subjectivity. For Lehmann the threshold is being crossed to an epoch which cannot guarantee corporeal or even mental identity anywhere as a matter of fact (1999: 412). As a consequence, he reasons that it is possible that not only hybrid photographies will emerge, but hybrid worlds of experience that can only be attributed to a blending of diverse, interlinked organisms and systems of thought.

The body of work Baxter and Gallasch developed as Open City played a key role in the development of the concept of hybrid performance in Australia. Open City's approach to the medium of performance reflected a growing movement and as a result of lobbying by key members of the arts community including Open City and The Sydney Front, it was acknowledged at the level of arts funding policy in Australia. Between 1989 and 1994 the Australia Council for the Arts established a number of committees to address the emergence of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary arts in Australia, and by 1996 the Hybrid Arts Committee of the Performing Arts Board was formed. Two years later

it was replaced by the New Media Arts Board. In the essay 'Hybrid art: hybrid nation', commissioned by the Australia Council for the Arts for its 2003 guide to New Media Art, Gallasch locates the 'formal origins of this kind of integrative work':

> in the 1980s with the emergence of what was simply called performance, a hybrid appearing in many shapes that departed radically from conventional theatre, dance and opera models. It crossbred these forms and drew (and continues to do so) on performance art, Japanese performance methodologies (Suzuki, Body Weather), architecture and installation, growing multimedia possibilities, sound art, new attitudes to text, and ideas about sharing the performance space with audiences. (Gallasch 2003: 8)

Furthermore, he contends that:

> Through art, principally hybrid art, a space has been opened for successful intercultural collaboration. (Gallasch 2003: 7)

It is interesting to note that a description of television as 'hybrid' accompanied its emergence in the early 1940s in the United States of America following its broadcasting in New York in 1939. The relationship, as Auslander notes, between television and existing forms of entertainment, 'radio with sight, movies with the zest of immediacy, theatre (intimate or spectacular)' (Wade in Auslander 1999: 15), characterised discussion prior to the assertion or rather the assumption of its mastery as a form in its own right.

Open City arguably exploited the non-hierarchical combination of elements intrinsic to initial conceptions of television. In contrast to the literary dramatic text, Baxter and Gallasch re-modelled realms of gesture and sound to privilege sensation as opposed to signification, and the compositional 'logic' that emerges implicates the spectator in the *rhythms* mediating the everyday. Both Open City's aesthetic and the spectator's responsibility in the creative act correspond to a system of relations organised according to a 'televisual' dramaturgy. The Open City persona positioned the spectator

as either the addressee of a talk show mode of communication or as a mobile agent free to interact with a particular moment in a cycle of presentation. What emerges is an exchange of ideas with the spectator, as opposed to an exchange of speech roles on stage, dependent upon the intertextual transfer of material relating to other systems of signification and it is this axis that clarifies the changed artistic and political role of the theatre medium. Open City posit a shift in the 'speaking' subject and more precisely, the subject's capacity to distort the dominant 'order' and this leads the spectator towards operations that are heterogenous of the symbolic system. In contrast to a dramaturgy that aims to establish a relation between the spectator and a known macrocosm, Open City implicated its audience not simply in the process of producing images, but the *possibility* of communication (conscious and unconscious) more broadly. In doing so, it involved the spectator in the dissolution of the hierarchy specific to theatre convention, and ironically, by instituting structural relations associated with more recent forms of broadcast that have in fact absorbed older traditions of the theatre medium.

3

The Sydney Front: the grotesque body

Visions of excess: the egalitarian body of carnival & post-dramatic theatre

> There is no need for The Sydney Front to exist – we are a superfluous gesture. In a market economy for the arts, we are that which is left out of the neat sum. We are the supplement, the excess. (The Sydney Front in Goodall 1993: 33)[1]

In its first year of performance this is how The Sydney Front described or rather disavowed itself. Instead of rationalising its existence as fulfilling a lack in the currency of representation, The Sydney Front announced its redundancy. Similarly, the company did not attempt to justify itself as resistant to market and media and thereby argue the value of live performance in 'mediatized' culture or what Auslander takes issue with in *Liveness* as a common and flawed line of reasoning. However, in the seven years that followed its formation in 1986, The Sydney Front left an indelible impression on the Australian performance scene, occasioned sensation in London's tabloid press and inadvertently outraged members of its audience in Hong Kong. At first glance The Sydney Front's 'excess' depended upon the 'explicit' body in performance, the term Rebecca Schneider applies to discuss the development of a feminist performance art in her analysis of a range of US artists, including Carolee Schneemann, Annie Sprinkle and Karen Finley. Schneider coined the term 'the explicit body in performance' to examine the ways in which specific artists disclose the body as it is engendered in social relation (1997: 2). One of the key themes Schneider identifies in her research of thirty years of feminist performance dating from the 1960s is an engagement with the construction of

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[1] The Sydney Front published this description of the company in the program for The Sydney Front's second production, *John Laws/Sade* (The Performance Space, October/November 1987).

desire, its representation in commodity capitalism. For Phelan it is an engagement that amounts to an oppositional edge and testimony to performance as a medium technologically and linguistically, as well as economically independent of mass reproduction (1996b: 148-9).

More broadly than feminist discourses Schneider's analysis, like Phelan's, raises the question of the status of the performing arts as a commodity sign in a system that situates The Sydney Front at its borderline, albeit at the company's own admission. For Susan Melrose the controlled public space of theatre is the product of an indulgent, non-subsistence system. In her article 'Beyond Presence? Repoliticising Theatre's Bodies' Melrose addresses the issue of the 'intolerable structure' of theatre in a luxury economy. Published in Sydney in the short-lived journal *Spectator Burns: performance/theory* in 1988, 'Beyond Presence? Repoliticising Theatre's Bodies' contributed to local debate designed to expand the understanding of the parameters of theatre and Clare Grant of The Sydney Front has referred to the issues Melrose raises as of principal concern in the work of The Sydney Front (2004: [n.pag.]). Melrose points out in her essay that theatre '*always* (all ways) offer bodies to the gaze, to the senses, even if their goal is to 'transcend' them' (1988: 51). Political theatre, she reasons, functions in a luxury economy like 'a good meal', and involves a consensual consuming, a 'cannibal-eye-station'. It relies on a spectator 'touched' but not physically 'moved'. Through the example of P.E.T.A's account of rape and torture under the Marcos regime in the Philippines, Melrose draws a parallel between a spectator transfixed with horror (provided that the performance is 'well done') and the similarly spellbound spectator responding to the pleasure of other stage experiences in order to demonstrate the lack of political intervention produced by both examples of 'viewing' in the theatre medium (1988: 56). By referring to Bourdieu's theory of 'taste', Melrose speculates on the function of political theatre as a sensory ingestion and poses the question, 'Is eating people wrong?' (1988: 50).

Despite the seemingly idiosyncratic character of Melrose's line of inquiry, the concept

of 'eating' is germane not only to The Sydney Front, but also to Müller. To refer back to the company's statement opening this chapter, it is an 'overkill' that correlates to Melrose's conception of the impotency inherent in theatre as a commodity in a market economy. More specifically, The Sydney Front's self-confessed marginalisation constitutes a response to the formula-like productions of the local theatre industry and a culture designated as 'televisual' in the analysis of Open City. In this context The Sydney Front readily offered bodies for the gaze and the 'act' of observation integral to the idea of the spectacle emerged as a critical issue in the work of the company. 'Why do people like to look?' This fundamental question and the ensuing line of inquiry 'why do others enjoy being looked at?' started The Sydney Front. For the company these questions underpinned a theatrical project:

> that began with the performer as diva (*Waltz*) and ended with the performer as stage manager (*Passion*). (The Sydney Front in Allen & Pearlmann 1999: 2)

In the brief sketch of the company's history in the quote above the performer converts into the (typically impalpable) stage manager and this infers, firstly, a re-evaluation of the politics of *presence*, performer and spectator, and secondly, its manifestation as a compositional 'logic' of the theatre situation. Melrose elaborates upon presence in performance as an 'offering' '*performed for someone*' that in turn can be used as a '*something else*' by the spectator (1988: 52). In terms of the conventions of dramatic theatre it is an interaction that privileges a 'subject' grounded in sight. Just how the subject is constructed as a 'mirror-image' or microcosmography concerns the role of perspective in the (cultural) 'imaginary', to use and extend Lacan's term. Psychoanalytically, vision implies distance and infers a looker unimplicated, uncontaminated by its object[2]. This raises the question of *performative*[3] 'seeing' and the possibility of a configuration that

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[2] See Grosz for clarification of the hierarchical privileging of 'vision' in relation to the other senses in Lacanian theory (1990: 38-9).

[3] I am using Judith Butler's conception of the term to emphasise that 'seeing' like language infers a process of signification that is performatively enacted in so far as it recognises the body as a set of boundaries politically signified. (In doing so, I acknowledge debate that falls beyond the scope of

contests the rigid muscular system that Melrose attributes to the fixity of the gaze (1988: 56), and in doing so, spans the orchestra pit, the abyss, separating performer and spectator lambasted by Benjamin in his explication in favour of the Epic theatre form in *Understanding Brecht*.

Scenic space, its picture, its frame and more specifically, its division and organisation according to the optical vantage point of an implied spectator, has acted as a primary mainstay in the apparatus of western theatre convention since the 17th century. It is a design dependent upon an imaginary 'pointer' stabilising a single space and the stage as a symbol of a distinct realm or 'totality'. In contrast, through a range of practices, that includes collage, simultaneity, open-ended 'events' and spectator mobility, post-dramatic theatre emphasises space or in Lehmann's terms, a fragment of the world that is continuous with the 'real', a spatially and temporally framed excerpt that is still an extension of and thus a particle of 'life reality' (1999: 288). In addition to psychoanalytic accounts of the genesis of the subject, mediatized culture is the condition most commonly associated with a conception of fragmented 'reality' and a subsequent de-stabilisation of the experience of cohesive identity. Carnival, however, presents a significantly older incidence of rupture in which the body transgresses its own limits and in doing so, counters the complete, closed unit of the modern canon. Theological and legal codes, 'normative' poetics and class structures break down during this festivity, which is organised according to the principal of participation. John Baylis in an interview in London elaborated on The Sydney Front's practice in terms of this sanctioned social violation.

> In the end it is about carnival – the sense of that special occasion where normal rules and barriers are broken down so anything can happen. (Baylis in Conway 1989: [n. pag.])

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this dissertation, and critiques the application of J L Austin's theory of speech acts in contemporary literary theory. For an example of this debate see Gorman 1999). For a brief elaboration of Butler's application of Nietzsche in her re-consideration of substantive identity see *Gender Trouble* (1999: 33).

On the basis of analyses of the social history of carnival, this festive event has been portrayed as a political menace that endangers the stability of dominant ideology[4]. Peter Stallybrass and Allan White, for example, point to the non-literary tradition of carnival as a threat to all official words and hierarchies (1986: 7).

Bakhtin expounds upon carnival in terms of a specific material bodily principle, the grotesque, which manifestly contests the artistic canon of antiquity, its static ideals embodied in the classical Greek statue, and the foundational principles of Renaissance aesthetics and its articulation in the modern (1984: 28-9). In *Postdramatisches Theater* Lehmann identifies the grotesque as a typical feature of post-dramatic theatre (1999: 26). The grotesque body is unequivocally linked to a period dependent not simply on the suspension of hierarchy, but its debasement and de-construction. In contrast to Schneider's 'explicit body', the grotesque embodies active defilement and historically constitutes a periodic danger to systems of classification. Furthermore, carnival implies egalitarian participation, the mobility of a spect-actor and therefore addresses the problem of dramatic structure Melrose raises in relation to conventions of 'viewing', and specifically her conception of the spectator-consumer devouring the performer. In terms of Melrose's discussion of the arts as a culinary discourse an interesting parallel arises in relation to medieval folk traditions, which situate seasonal festivities at the marketplace, a primary site of fiscal activity and food consumption.

If post-dramatic theatre is not designed to aid the spectator's comprehension of a story, if its central (cognitive) goal is not the construction of an 'intelligible' narrative and it is instead intent on implicating the spectator in its processes of *production*, what kind of dramaturgy accounts for the dynamic in operation in the carnivalesque performances of The Sydney Front? Kristeva's understanding of carnival's 'semantic ambivalences' as the

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[4]   A number of commentators, including Terry Eagleton, disagree with Bakhtin's 'utopian' reading of carnival and arguments that assert the political agency of the event. Eagleton, for example, dismisses carnival as a 'licensed' occasion that rather than undermining official culture restores order. Refer to Stallybrass & White for an overview of this line of reasoning (1986: 12-14), as well as research that substantiates the political role of carnival, including reference to the application

coupling of the high and low, the sublime and the abject in *Powers of Horror*, and more specifically, the term 'abject', provides a way of conceiving of The Sydney Front's grotesque body and the relationship it institutes between spectator and performer and body and text (1982: 138). It not only explicates the compositional 'logic' of a dramaturgical 'model' that accounts for the system of human relations in a specific theatre situation, but it indicates an aesthetic response to philosophical developments concerning the construction of subjectivity.

From pornography to the Passion: grotesque realism & The Sydney Front

John Baylis, Nigel Kellaway, Clare Grant, Christopher Ryan, Andrea Aloise and Ros Hervey formed The Sydney Front in November 1986. In addition, writer and periodical contributor Mickey Furuya constituted the final member of the original team. These artists had diverse backgrounds in music, dance and physical theatre, and brought a range of artistic experiences to the group. Kellaway had studied classical composition and piano in Melbourne and Adelaide, trained in modern dance and from 1981 to 1984 performed with the One Extra Dance Company then directed by Kai Tai Chan[5]. In Japan he studied Butoh with Min Tanaka and became the first Australian to train with Suzuki Tadashi and his Suzuki Company of Toga (SCOT). The exercises and performance methods he studied in Toga fed directly into the company's rehearsal process in the creation of all The Sydney Front's work. The Sydney Front's 1991 production process for *Don Juan*, for example, consisted of training exercises based on stomping and sessions led by Aloise in Iyengar Yoga. Both Ryan and Aloise had worked with Entr'Acte Theatre, and Grant had been a member of the Kiss Theatre Company based in Holland and had worked for One Extra Dance Company. In addition, the company collaborated with a number of other artists including opera singer, Annette

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of defilement in the German Reformation struggles against Catholicism (1986: 15-6).

[5] Julie Anne Long, who collaborated with Open City on its production *Sum of the Sudden*, co-directed One Extra with Graeme Watson from 1992 to 1996.

Tesoriero, composer Raffaele Marcellino[6] and performer Elise Ahamnos on *Don Juan* in 1990/1. Composer Andrée Greenwell worked on *John Laws/Sade* and the *Passion*, Peter Wells on *First and Last Warning* and Sarah de Jong scored for piano for *The Pornography of Performance*. Choreographer and dancer Sue-ellen Kohler replaced Ros Hervey in 1989. At the time Kohler's main training base was Iyengar Yoga. However, Kohler left the group soon after the Australian performances of *The Pornography of Performance* due to injury. In his 'Obituary' following The Sydney Front's decision to disband, Alex Broun attributes the success of the company partially to the recognition its members had achieved independently prior to the formation of the group (1994: 29).

After the dissolution of the company in 1994, Kellaway, Grant, Ryan and Baylis continued to play a significant role in the Australian arts community. In the years that followed The Sydney Front, Kellaway co-founded The Opera Project with mezzo-soprano, Tesoriero, and in 1994 he presented a 240-hour (ten day) marathon performance with percussionist David Montgomery, video artist Peter Oldham and restaurateur Gay Bilson known as *This Most Wicked Body*. He has worked as a director and performer for a range of companies, including the Sydney Theatre Company, Australian Dance Theatre and The Song Company. Baylis went on to direct Urban Theatre Projects (1997-2001) before taking up a position as the Manager of the Theatre section in the Australia Council for the Arts' Arts Funding Division. Grant teaches and directs contemporary performance in the School of Media, Film & Theatre at the University of New South Wales and continues to perform. In 1996 and 1998 she performed in Nikki Heywood's acclaimed *Burn Sonata* and in collaboration with new media artist John Gillies she worked on *The Mary Stuart Tapes*, a performance-video screened as part of the Sydney and Melbourne International Film Festivals in 2000. Ryan directed PACT Youth Theatre and with his staging of *Marat/Sade* (1997) based on Peter Weiss' play and the 1998 production *www.ophelia/hamlet.au*, which drew on Heiner

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[6]   Raffaele Marcellino's music has been performed by a range of ensembles, including the Sydney, Tasmanian and Adelaide Symphony Orchestras, as well as Ensemble Modern (Germany) and

Müller's *Hamletmachine*, he sustained a number of the 'traditions' established by The Sydney Front.

Now synonymous with the members of The Sydney Front these 'traditions' emerged in the mid-80s as a response to the local industry. In 1986 at The Brasserie at the Adelaide Festival, Baylis and Kellaway concluded in the since oft cited statement that the 'balls had gone out of Avant Garde theatre' and decided to form The Sydney Front (in Broun 1994: 29). The company responded to the transformations taking place at the time in the performance scene in Sydney, which included, according to Baylis, the One Extra Company losing its experimental edge in favor of a more mainstream approach (in Olb and Miller 1989: 17). In Baylis' words:

> There seemed to be all this territory which needed to be explored and no one was doing it. (Baylis in Olb and Miller 1989: 17)

The Sydney Front did not regard itself as a performance art troupe, as Broun points out in his 'Obituary', and instead consistently emphasised the theatrical explorations essential to the company's work (1994: 29). During its seven years as an ensemble, The Sydney Front produced seven major productions, *Waltz* (1987), *John Laws/Sade*[7] (1987), *The Pornography of Performance* (1988), which was based on and incorporated elements of the two earlier works, *Photocopies of God* (1989), *Don Juan* (1991), *First and Last Warning* (1992) and *Passion* (1993). In addition to this body of work, the company produced the solo shows *The Nuremberg Recital* (1988) performed by Kellaway and *Woman in the Wall* (1990) performed by Grant. *First and Last Warning* received The Sydney Theatre Critics Prize for Fringe Theatre in 1992.

Notoriety as opposed to critical appraisal, however, marked the company's early years in Sydney and particularly in London. *The Pornography of Performance* sparked public

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[7]   Nouvel Ensemble Moderne (Canada).
      John Laws is Australia's highest-paid and most controversial talk-back radio host.

controversy in Australia following the Reverend Fred Nile and his Festival of Light Party's call for an official investigation into the performance in the interest of 'community standards' to be conducted by the vice squad under the directive of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services (HANSARD 1988: 3583). In London the company, to use Baylis' words, 'discovered what happens when you allow a performance piece to sail unprotected into popular culture' (in Arnott 1989: 1122). The sensational headlines 'Theatre of the Orgasm?', 'A night bound to thrill the dirty mac brigade' and '*Porn* play for London', are indicative of the reaction of the popular press, and according to People magazine's 'Kulcher Korner' the plastic raincoat brigade were indeed 'storming the London theatre scene to fondle the private bits of Australian actors'[8].

Each of the captions above refer or infer not simply nudity, but access to the private world of the body. The cycle of medieval carnival hinges on this civic condition. It is a time dedicated to the display of the typically concealed functions of the body and excess in the form of sexual life, cursing, gorging and drinking in public. All that is divine, ideal, high or abstract is degraded to the bodily level of orifices in the grotesque realism of carnival. In his analysis and subsequent periodisation of grotesque imagery as archaic, classic and late, Bakhtin points to the exclusion of this form of expression in the great literature of the classical canon of the 17th and early 18th century (1984: 31-3). It is an exclusion underpinned by the marked difference between the conception of the body in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, which defined the borders of the individual human subject as stable, finished, fixed. Bakhtin argues that the Renaissance did not entirely relinquish the material bodily principle of the medieval carnival spirit. However, the gradual erosion of folk culture and its festive forms took place during this period and Bakhtin demonstrates that the Enlightenment emerges as an epoch least able to understand Rabelais' grotesque (see 1984: 116-120). As a consequence,

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[8] Conway, Lydia (1989) 'Theatre of the orgasm?', *What's On*, 16 August; MacDonaugh, Melanie (1989) 'A night bound to thrill the dirty mac brigade', *Evening Standard*, 23 August; Garment, Liz (1989) '*Porn* play for London', *Evening Standard*, 18 August; 'Give 'em a big hand' (1989) *People*, September.

subsequent understandings in later centuries have been limited as a result of the modified 'meaning' of grotesque imagery. It is an important point in relation to the grotesque realism invoked by The Sydney Front, which sources an older experience of the body in order to explore modern conceptions of the voyeuristic exchange specific to the theatre in the 20th century.

This is not to essentialise carnival and its material bodily principle, the grotesque, in relation to The Sydney Front. Instead, it provides a rich and complex panorama of a non-literary social (theatrical) language that elaborates on the post-dramatic theatre practice specific to The Sydney Front and the broader public irreverence displayed by the company. In the context of the Australian arts bureaucracy, for example, The Sydney Front had from its earliest days attracted the attention of the Performing Arts Board (PAB) of the Australia Council for the Arts by becoming, in the words of Kellaway, 'briefly, terrorists' (2002: [n.pag.]). In 1986, as Baylis and Kellaway explained:

> Baylis: [...] We did a project called Sixty Three Blessings where we actually wrote 63 grant applications to the Performing Arts Board. Sixty three perfectly thought out, plausible, experimental theatre projects.
>
> Kellaway: All individually budgeted for 1.67 million dollars in total. And we submitted them all.
>
> Baylis: But we didn't get any. (Baylis and Kellaway in Olb and Miller 1989: 17)

In 1989, however, the PAB supported *Photocopies of God* and The Sydney Front ended its days as a self-funded company. Prior to this the company had, for example, financed its eight week European tour of *The Pornography of Performance* through performances at the World Expo in Brisbane in 1988, where members of The Sydney Front worked as street performers for seven months: '2 street parades, on stilts, 7 days a week' (Kellaway 2002: [n.pag.]). Even with the support of the PAB The Sydney Front devised and presented its productions on the basis of extremely limited financial resources, and this continues to characterise the budget situation for artists working in 'experimental' performance in

Australia[9].

All of The Sydney Front's productions were performed at The Performance Space and the company, like Open City, applied a number of devices that directly addressed one of the venue's key aims:

> to promote work which attempts to engage artists and audiences in a more active relationship. (The Performance Space's Artistic Policy in K Schaefer 1999: 5)

As a result by 1994, to quote Gallasch, The Sydney Front had become:

> the most prominent and playful of the performance companies, provocatively and progressively undoing all the rules of audience engagement from the 1980s into the 1990s. (Gallasch 2001: 39)

The Pornography of Performance

> It is obviously insufficient to repeat empty slogans: the author has disappeared; God and man died a common death. Rather, we should reexamine the empty space left by the author's disappearance; we should attentively examine, along its gaps and fault lines, its new demarcations, and the reapportionment of this void; we should await the fluid functions released by this disappearance. (Foucault 1977: 121)

> Audience participation, sex rituals, acres of naked flesh – and they call this theatre. (Moore 1989: 20)

Without Federal or State funding The Sydney Front aimed to do 'all those things that

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[9] The following quote by Nigel Kellaway encapsulates the impact of limited funding opportunities on the careers of many artists, and by implication the effect on the development of post-dramatic theatre/contemporary performance in Australia: 'Which leads me to reflect on where my peers from 1981 are now. Most of us are still alive but not many of us are still regularly practicing. Australia is not that comfortable about performing artists over the age of 40 tackling anything too adventurous. Try to name 5 contemporary performance artists actively creating fulltime, in Sydney, over the age of 50' (2002: [n.pag.]) The Theatre Board of the Australia Council for the Arts did not support Kellaway's The Opera Project from 2000 to 2002, and the company existed solely on funding from the NSW Ministry for the Arts during this period.

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were going to make a noise', to cite Kellaway, to generate publicity and ticket sales for the company (1995: 1). It wasn't, however, until *The Pornography of Performance* that the group achieved public recognition. The Sydney Front launched *The Pornography of Performance* at the Adelaide Festival in 1988, before staging the production at The Performance Space in Sydney and touring it to Europe in 1989. Kohler replaced Hervey for the performances in Adelaide as part of the Fringe Festival. In the context of a Fringe Festival, the following excerpts from critical reviews are indicative of the positive reception the company received.

> It is the most powerful piece of theatre to emerge from the Fringe, acted out superbly by The Sydney Front. (Armstrong 1988: 142)

> *The Pornography of Performance* leaves its audience elated by the sheer power of the theatre and, by way of the theatre, life itself. (Goers 1988: 39)

In London the question of context similarly shaped the production's critical and public reception. *The Independent*'s theatre critic, Paul Arnott, pointed out that its critical reception was prejudiced on the basis that it was staged at the Riverside Studios as opposed to the ICA, where:

> it would have been seen by a switched-on crowd who would have placed it firmly in the tradition of avant-garde work. (Arnott 1989: 1122)

Tabloid reviewer, Charles Spencer of the *Daily Telegraph*, felt:

> A government more solicitous of Australia's image overseas would have paid the performers large sums to stay at home. (Spencer 1989: 1121)

The 'hype' in the tabloid press primarily concerned The Sydney Front's use of nudity and in particular the opening scene of the production. Audience members entered the performance space to find large metal cylinders with curtained portholes and queues

quickly formed around the objects in the seatless auditorium. 'Spectators' were free to explore the naked bodies of the performers by reaching through the portholes in the cylinders; a tactile as opposed to a visual experience that immediately inverted the passive voyeuristic pleasure of the theatrical medium. Word of mouth, that is, discussion among spectators upon discovery of 'the corporeal content' in the tubes, similarly constituted a key aspect of audience mobility. Arnott commented in his review, for example, that a member of the audience keen to ensure that each spectator patiently waited in line, slapped the hand of an eager onlooker with the objection, 'Do you mind?', before pointing out, 'This is a queue' (1989: 1122). Like Carolee Schneemann's concept of the body as a personal and social environment, The Sydney Front's cylinders facilitated the interchange of 'bodily parts', and in contrast to the New York Loft installations of the 1960s by the American artist, The Sydney Front's spectator enjoyed a brief moment of anonymous contact. Scene 1, candidly entitled 'Grope Booths', concluded its interaction with the lifting of the cylinders and exposed Baylis, Ryan, Kohler and Aloise's bodies to the spectators' full view. It is a scene that The Sydney Front returns to in the closing stages of the production by alluding to the prerogatives of theatrical convention. Aloise addresses the audience directly to state:

> You touched us in the first scene. You had your way with us under the cloak
> of anonymity, an anonymity you still enjoy. (Aloise, sc. 26) [10]

Throughout 'Grope Booths' another body lies partially concealed under an elaborate cloth in a bath tub. A leg hangs over the edge and following the recorded applause that coincides with the booths' ascent, harpsichord music signals the commencement of scene two, 'Bath Dance'. Kellaway's naked body optically incapacitated by his single item of clothing, a hood, twitches, jerks and awkwardly clambers along the ledge of the tub half filled with water. Under the light shadows form in and around his contorted muscles and rib cage, which are temporarily disturbed by the splashing of water as he

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[10]   All quotes from *The Pornography of Performance* (1988b) are from an unpublished, non-paginated

stamps the bottom of the tub. Roped off from audience members roaming the space, Kellaway is unable to return the spectators' gaze from the cold voluptuousness of his hood and resembles a masochistic court jester. The gauze covering his mouth inhales and exhales with each breath and punctuates his awkward, tormented movements in the bath. Kellaway's 'dance', like the first scene, suggests a particular power relation that is visually accentuated by the ornate tassels hanging from the handrail barrier that cordons him off and by connotation 'exploits' him as a human exhibit. In the final minutes of Kellaway's bath scene Baylis, Ryan and Kohler begin to nosily set up chairs for the audience, who are self-consciously re-positioned in the performance venue according to the convention of passive theatrical proximity.

Abruptly cut music indicates a clear division between 'Bath Dance' and Scene 3. A spot lights up Grant sitting at a table as she identifies herself as a man, Grant McPherson, in a conversation with Aloise, whose live off-stage voice has the quality of a telephone conversation. 'Sex Call', the third scene, consists of explicit language, language specific to an 'untheatrical' discourse dependent upon an aurally-voyeuristic exchange or as Aloise suggests:

> Why don't you eat my cunt while I lick your balls?
> Then you can ram your throbbing gristle down my throat and I'll [...]
> (Aloise, sc. 3)

In the exchange of credit card details prior to delivering the lines above, Grant gives the performance venue's address as part of what seemingly constitutes frustrating detail, particularly given that the scene is only two minutes in length. However, it reinforces the connection between the 'pornography' of the performance's title and theatrical space, a fundamental transgression, which is doubly apparent in the 'Rolling Logs' scene that directly follows and in which Grant plays 'The Confiteor' repeating an overzealous confessional prayer. Her sin in 'thought, word and deed' is exceeding, she declares, through her 'most grievous fault'.

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script provided by Nigel Kellaway of The Sydney Front.

Grant emerges in the black box auditorium in a low necked evening ball gown solemnly encircled by a single follow spot. Baylis is dressed conspiratorially in a black cape, rimmed broad hat and face scarf and as Grant walks across the space, Baylis whispers in her ear. A shirtless Ryan completes the party holding a candelabrum. In front of the congregation the log-like bodies of Aloise and Kellaway, visible in the outer rim of the narrowing spot, roll slowly at Grant's feet. Ryan drags Aloise out of the line of figures turning on the stage behind Grant's expansive skirt, where he is suddenly discovered on top of the performer. The Sydney Front's radical shift to a confessional scene associated with ecclesiastic ritual and in particular the dark oppressive pattern suggested by the contracted vision of the tunnel of the spot, points to the Church's absolute hierarchy and the possibility of descent; that is, the lower stratum. In Bakhtin's reading of carnival in Rabelais' novels this descent into the 'underworld' contests the principle that the higher and lower never merge and subsequently, the principle of a fixed and unalterable hierarchy. In a modern context carnival, like Bakhtin's understanding of the 'degradation' of the grotesque, is a largely impoverished (and in many contexts an extinct) event, as well as a concept. Despite its marginalisation as a result of Enlightenment aesthetics it represents a significant critique of 'order', the dogma of eternal rationalism and 'truth'. In carnival these conditions are exposed as relative constructs and the ominous teachings and dignified ceremonies of the dominant institution at the height of medieval folk culture and festive upheaval, the Church, is subject to ridicule and disruption.

This is not to reduce *The Pornography of Performance* to 'The Confiteor' scene on the basis that it directly undermines the ministry of the Church. Instead, key aspects of carnivalesque culture elaborate on The Sydney Front's approach to the surface of the body and (theatrical) institution. The 'Grope Booths', for example, persuade audience members to mingle with other bodies, spectator and performer, and de-homogenize the exterior boundaries of the individual in a group. In contrast to the systematic representation of behavioural patterns and gestural habits pertaining to a 'restricted'

body, the opening scenes of the production consistently expose all that is hidden or moderated: the booths' lift, Kellaway's beleaguered body is merely masked, and Aloise relinquishes any restraint on speech. Interpenetration is implied by the movement from loitering to groping and through the 'presence' of 'heterodox' ideas in the production. Each of *The Pornography of Performance's* initial irreverent scenes counters the concept of high culture attached to official art. The diegetic spaces and discourses not simply referred to, but emphatically appropriated by the company in the early sequences are predominantly 'non-theatrical' and subject to inversion. In an analogous re-direction of the human sense organs similar to 'Sex Call' the first scene is a 'peep show' entirely dependent on touch. Kellaway's jester transforms Peter Weiss/Peter Brook's Marat into a vaudeville exhibit, and the cleric sincerity of Grant's confession is undermined by the inference to Machiavellian machinations and the lewd activity beyond the light of the spot.

Twenty-seven distinctly disjointed scenes constituted *The Pornography of Performance* production. Most of these ran for approximately only four minutes with the longest just under thirteen minutes and the shortest at thirty seconds involving a radio controlled car. Not a single scene built on the action of the one prior to it. Instead, the composition of the twenty-seven scenes constituting the ninety-minute production frustrated the process of narrative development. The dramaturgical logic, according to Grant (1998: [n.pag.]), aimed to close each moment precisely at the point of expansion, and functioned in Benjamin's sense of montage as a device used to join disparate elements in such a way as to produce new insights through the interruption of action (1973: 21). However, in contrast to Benjamin and Brecht's belief in the dialectical capacity of representation The Sydney Front's 'excess', although linked to a disruption of axiomatic ways of seeing, concerns itself with visceral processes of *production*. It wasn't simply the bodies of the performers that constituted the key dramaturgical principles, but those of the spectators, and unlike the Open City persona members of The Sydney Front did not bring their 'lived' experiences into the creative phase and presentation. Instead, The Sydney Front conceived of its audience as a participatory

body intimately connected to the idea of a civic realm. In this respect and in contrast to Phelan's conception of art spectatorship as an attempt to grasp the details of the fleeting 'moment' The Sydney Front's radically disjointed scenography prefigures an older experience or 'residual eruption' of the collective inherited body (1996b: 148).

Bakhtin describes the special mode of communication specific to the carnivalesque suspension of hierarchy as impossible in official life (1984: 10). It is a type of exchange that depends on the dissolution of the border dividing the stage from the gallery. More precisely, carnival operates according to permutation and uncertainty, and in The Sydney Front's particular rendition of the carnivalesque spirit it embodies an ambiguity intrinsic to abjection. From the opening scene The Sydney Front entices its audience to participate in the 'obscene', and it's an exchange of bodily sensation that involves the spectator in a series of incidents that have been orchestrated to engender the experience of 'ebullient disgust'. It is a disgust that is highly liberating in so far as the empirical quintessence of the body emerges as overwhelmingly incomplete, and challenges, if not emasculates the signifying power consolidating the formal properties of text. The Sydney Front's language is in fact a 'language that gives up, a structure within the body' to cite Kristeva's description of the symptoms identifying this condition (1982: 11). For Kristeva the writer fascinated by the abject 'imagines its logic, projects himself into it, introjects it, and as a consequence, perverts language – style and content' (1982: 16). This statement literally describes the reproduction of written textual material in *The Pornography of Performance*, which consists of a series of extracts from Euripides *Trojan Women*, Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine*, Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*, Peter Weiss' *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*, and the Marquis de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*.

In Scene 5, the 'Stoning Sequence', fragments of identifiable written text emerge for the first time in the darkness of the black box space as a spot demarcates various points of

action. Grant and Aloise verbally compete with each other with identical lines from Müller's *Hamletmachine*, and later in the scene the beam of light swings abruptly to capture Kellaway reciting de Sade from his copy of *120 Days of Sodom*. In Scene 6, 'Grand Inquisition', Baylis delivers lines from sections '1' and '4' from Müller's *Hamletmachine* and more specifically his Hamlet. At a later point in the performance Grant blends an extract from Euripides' Chorus with a section of Poseidon's opening monologue from *Trojan Women*, which is followed by a condensed version of Andromache's dialogue with Talthybius, who brings the news that the Greeks will kill her son. Similarly in Scene 16, 'Andromache Bound', Ryan's words are extracted from Euripides' Andromache and the following Scene, 'Clytemnestra', includes Kellaway as Aeschylus' Clytemnestra and the simultaneous delivery of text. By reciting what is arguably recognised as one of the most powerful moments in ancient Greek drama, the entire cast concludes the scene with Clytemnestra's defiant admission of the murder of her husband.

> This is my husband, Agamemnon, now stone dead.
> His death the work of my right hand, whose craftsmanship
>   justice acknowledges.
> There lies the truth! (The Sydney Front [Aeschylus], sc. 17)

Clearly 'meaning' in the examples cited above is not the product of a dialogue structure or a dramaturgical sub-text. Instead, the emphasis is on a form of monologue that corresponds to Lehmann's understanding of the impression of a chorus arising from utterances delivered 'unidirectionally', an additive language, as opposed to speech delivered at cross-purposes (1999: 233). In addition, there is an opening and diffusion of *logos* that does not limit signification to the harmonious relationship between scene and text.

Appropriation or postmodern recycling, to refer to Carlson's term, constitute the most common theoretical descriptions used to explicate the instance of polyvocal citations from pre-existing text, popular, dramatic and/or literary. The application of these terms to *The Pornography of Performance*, however, does not adequately account for the 'de-

semanticisation' of text in relation to the body. Schneider has pointed out that 'the explicit body' exposes the ghosts of historical meaning, or rather, by returning to the etymological root of the word 'explicit', unfolds layers of signification (1997: 2). Its orifices and appendages, she argues, embody the markings of social hierarchy. More specific to a theatrical context, Lehmann describes these spectres as prophets or reminders, who open the world of contemporary stage protagonists to messengers from the past (2002: 284). They are envoys demanding a future and constitute a stock item in theatre repertoire that can be traced to Athenian drama. In this context Kellaway's allusion to Peter Weiss' Marat, a bodily signifier later reinforced in the performers' verbal text, functions as a precursor ushering in a stockpile of theatrical 'phantoms', including Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, Shakespeare's Hamlet and Ophelia and Weiss' Corday. In contrast to the illusion of the absolute presence of character, the bodies of the performers are 'inhabited' by the pulses of theatrical ghosts that point to the seminal system of textual references constituting the history and hierarchy of dramatic theatre or 'generalised theatrical tropes' in Carlson's words (2001: 171). More significantly, the grotesque transfers the closed, high or ideal principles of the text to the material bodily level. As a consequence, The Sydney Front's creative phase can be thought of in terms of 'ingesting' the basic constituents of analogical models of dramaturgy, its time, space, dramatis personae and cosmology.

Kerrie Schaefer's unpublished doctoral dissertation completed in 1999, which is the first full-length study of the work of The Sydney Front, formally documented the creative development process that culminated in the company's 1991 performance *Don Juan*. In Schaefer's record of the workshops leading to the performance, a member of The Sydney Front emphasised the following to another member of the group:

> Don't relate the two or try to justify using the theme of war and disorder in relation to *Don Juan*. The material we have is removed from *Don Juan*. Relate disorder to the material. Link them to *Don Juan* through the rhetoric of staging. Don't worry about justifying it, just work out if it is theatrically interesting. (Baylis in K Schaefer 1999: 165)

In rehearsal The Sydney Front devised scenes predominantly through improvisation, and the group vigorously discouraged intellectual justifications with regard to the way in which it shaped its material. Jane Gallop distinguishes in *Reading Lacan* between interpretation and (psychoanalytic) transference on the basis that the former is underpinned by the exercise of power, and the latter by a structuring of authority (1985: 27). In doing so she cites Kristeva's premise that:

> the propagation of psychoanalysis ... has shown us, ever since Freud, that interpretation necessarily represents appropriation, and thus an act of desire and murder. (Kristeva in Gallop 1985: 27)

In the essay Gallop quotes *Within the Microcosm of 'The Talking Cure'*, Kristeva goes on to point out that aesthetic production in fact defers castration and death by bringing its 'perverse economy to *jouissance*' (1983: 39). That is, it appears within the signifying process as alogical constructions, for example, or ellipses that elude the speaking subject. The act of interpretation in contrast is dependent upon castration, that is, separation from the mother, the source of the semiotic mode, and subsequently, posits the subject as signifiable within the codified discourses of language and the ensuing limitations of representation. In a theatrical context Derrida elaborates upon this representative structure in his analysis of conventional stage production as the ironic result of 'interpretive slaves' (directors or actors), implementing the designs of an absent 'master', the playwright, who in fact 'creates nothing', or what Artaud referred to as the 'excrement of the mind' (1978: 296). It is 'nothing', according to Derrida, by virtue of reproduction. That is, the author transcribes a text that is representative by its very nature and its 'reality' simply embodies the illusion of creation. Carnival, in contrast, correlates to a cyclical 'historical' event that tolerates and arguably necessitates poetic form, that is, the eruption of heterogeneous excess in Kristeva's opinion (see 1984: 16). In doing so, Kristeva argues that it is an event that points to the functional boundaries of social discourse and confirms the processes it represses;

processes that in fact surpass the communicative structures of the subject. Unlike the (appropriative) act of interpretation, carnival is conceived as a unique time dedicated to revival and renewal (birth and death) dependent upon a collective body, as opposed to an isolated organic individual.

Like The Sydney Front, the Italian director Romeo Castellucci expresses disinterest in the codified discourses of language and the act of interpretation. Instead, he discusses the language of 'Oresteia' as having to pass through its own death, through entities, animals, sounds, places and beings in order to reach re-birth in a contemporary context. Language is simply one of a number of elements, 'basic', in his words, given that names withdraw and in doing so 'deprive it of its codified royalty' (1997: 193). The non-hierarchical structure Castellucci describes in relation to his staging of Aeschylus' tragedy provides a parallel to the treatment of text in *The Pornography of Performance* and elaborates on Lehmann's understanding of post-dramatic theatre as an attempt to restore the chora (1999: 263). In conflict with *logos* the semiotic pre-signification pulses of the chora manifest as rhythm, sound and reflect conditions that are biophysiological. These pulsations embody a state of uncertainty, of fragile borders and thereby a threat to identity. Castellucci used an 'outdated' translation by Mario Valgimigli and F. Savino for his 'Oresteia' on the basis that he was 'interested in the dead state of the work, its dreamlike dust' and by applying the adjectives 'vain' and 'intolerable' to attempts to revive tragedy elucidates on the rationale behind his methodology (1997: 191). For Castellucci:

> To make a tragic text 'contemporary' is a lie, and especially pathetic [...]. It betrays a missionary spirit in its perpetrators, an attempt to 'reconstruct the true spirit of tragedy' in its contemporaneity, as if tragedy were a ball to be kicked around in the lofty realms of poetry. But all of us know that the tragedy is not poetry! The core of the tragedy isn't tragic at all, but rather pre-tragic, and it constantly retracts into itself like the eye of a snail. The 'great names', again today, want to dry out that which is mucous and pulsing. (Castellucci 1997: 191-3)

Castellucci's 'pre-tragic' realm infers a compositional 'logic' independent of the *telos* of interpretation.

In a statement analogous to Castellucci's sentiments, Kellaway points to the conflation of literature and drama at the expense of theatre in a market economy:

> Text might legitimise, but text is not theatre, that is not theatre in any stretch of the imagination. What you buy, your collected texts of Heiner Müller – I mean it's a fantastic book, fantastic words – but that's not theatre. It has nothing to do with theatre. It's just the words. That is not the actual experience of seeing a Heiner Müller play. Theatre is not about text, but ideas, but that is not to devaluate it. It is one of my favorite books and I keep going back to it. But it's not theatre and the more thoroughly written a play is it's still not theatre. It might have all the directions and you can imagine it through – I mean your Chekhov, your Shakespeare and so on – it's all there down on the page, but the theatre's not. So, this legitimising is only because it's printed; it's sellable. It sells for $14.95 in a shop, so it becomes valid. A saleable commodity and theatre is not that, it is only saleable on the night it is performed [...]. It's the one art form that is not retrievable [...]. It's the same as a music score. It's not the performance, that's just dots on the page. That's all text is, dots on the page. (Kellaway 1995: 6)

As a consequence, Kellaway reasoned in the following extract from the same interview recorded in 1995:

> [...] why write more text when there is so much text around? [...] However, with Müller [...] I mean it was deconstructionist, that's what we were interested in and it seemed so valid to lift hunks of his text and take them totally out of context, throw them on stage and scream them out – fantastic words. They are potent. They talked about the kind of things we wanted to talk about. About the visceral sense of the body as did the Marquis de Sade text [...]. There was something cheeky about taking the Müller text, because when we went and played in Europe and Germany we credited him. We never paid for it and we would refuse to pay for it, and if Heiner Müller found out that we were using huge hunks of his text, well we'd send him a ticket and we would have thought well, we'll fight this one out, because we are doing precisely what you are talking about. (Kellaway 1995: 1-2)

The question of artistic license intrinsic to the citation directly above is closely linked to the apparatus Kellaway argues legitimates the text. Kristeva has identified prohibition as the foundational logic of the abject on the basis of anthropological research into the function of defilement and in particular the findings of Mary Douglas, as well as the correlation established by George Bataille between the production of the abject and the weakness of prohibition (see 1982: 64-67). In *The Pornography of Performance* the grotesque body despoils literary material. Furthermore, it is not the private, egotistic 'economic man', to use Bakhtin's words, but a collective body that is in operation at all levels of the creative process specific to The Sydney Front, including the disgorgement of text (1984: 19). In his application of Derrida's critique of the 'metaphysics of presence' to performance theory, Auslander reinforces Derrida's conception of conventional theatre as theological on the basis of *logocentricism*. Dramatic theatre is not simply dependent upon the playwright (author-creator), who governs the theatrical site from a distance and the passive spectator as emphasised by Derrida (1978: 296-7), but the director, and as the last chapter demonstrated with reference to Auslander, the actor as a vehicle to 'truth'. In this context, Kellaway's irreverent comments in fact challenge the authority of *the* presence behind the sign and make explicit the vulnerability constituting the idea of a prescribed signification. In doing so, Kellaway makes sport of theatre to apply Kristeva's understanding of the way in which abjection relates to perversion. The Sydney Front take advantage of the author-creator in a manner comparable to Kristeva's description of contemporary literature's use of Religion, Law and Morality by occupying the untenable space of what she terms superego positions, and thereby exposing, for example, the power play essential to Prohibition and Law (1982: 16).

Kellaway has clarified the theoretical principle behind this approach as deconstructive or in an article for *RealTime* as self-mockingly postmodern:

> We began with a handful of ancient Greek monologues, and via Peter
> Weiss, Peter Brook and Heiner Müller we arrived at POST MODERNISM –
> it took us ALMOST by surprise! (Kellaway 2002: [n.pag.])

It is a deceptively flippant précis for a broader investigation of the communication systems – linguistic, visual, aural, olfactory and tactile – defining the structures of the theatrical medium. In Broun's words by the final production, *Passion*, The Sydney Front's trademark had reached a 'new high':

> We lucky voyeurs got to help assemble a ramp, throw rotten tomatoes,
> announce our favorite book, hurl abuse and for one very special audience
> member, get crucified. (Broun 1994: 28-29)

On this 'omnific stage' the role of The Sydney Front spectator is subject to inversion. It is a reversal that at its most superficial reading is easily misconstrued as the type of 'participatory theatre' Herbert Blau has dismissed as a legacy of the 1960s (1990: 27). Similarly, The Sydney Front's operational structure corresponds to the non-hierarchical creative process first championed by a number of collective models in the 1960s, including the San Francisco Mime Troupe, Bread and Puppet Theatre, Teatro Campesino, Open Theatre and the Performance Group. In an interview for The Performance Space's journal Kellaway reinforces this point by expressing intense dissatisfaction with the structure of conventional theatre companies on the basis that the collaborative process of creating a work is credited to a writer and/or director in terms of the final product. As a consequence, The Sydney Front ensured that:

> Everyone working on the piece was responsible and should take equal
> credit. There was no text in the beginning so there was no individual name
> that you could put on the work. (Kellaway 1994: 7)

In spite of a range of parallels to the techniques and principals of an earlier period of experimentation, The Sydney Front's aesthetic project is not to be confused with the concept of solidarity that Richard Schechner, for example, sought to institute between all members of the company and the spectator in the Performance Group. Instead,

The Sydney Front actively promoted difference in the creative and rehearsal phase of development. Each of the performers and by extension members of its audience contributed contradictory and conflicting images, interpretations and meanings to the production. For Schaefer:

> The resulting performance self-consciously refers to the process of its own production, as it is created collectively and collaboratively by seven different individuals. (K Schaefer 1999: 95)

Like Kellaway, Baylis has elaborated on this process in terms of deconstruction:

> Deconstruction within theatre … examines certain elements like narration and character, picking them to pieces and playing with them. … deconstruction of theatre … looks at more basic concepts in the theatre: concepts of theatre that most of us take for granted: notions of formal structure, pacing and rhythm, elements that we often think are 'natural' or at least basic stagecraft but which are of course just other variables. …
>
> It is certainly not destruction. Deconstruction tries to open out meaning. Instead of meaning being confined within certain cultural modes where language is perceived to be a transparent tool for saying precisely 'what you mean', deconstruction is a tool for breaking down the allotted meaning, the normal reference. (Baylis in K Schaefer 1999: 44)

In his essay 'Just be yourself: *Logocentricism* and *différance* in performance theory' Auslander points out that the very act of speculating on the 'appearance' of deconstructive acting or what may constitute such a (new) poetics of theatre counteracts the idea of deconstruction (see 1997: 38). Auslander reinforces this statement by qualifying Derrida's philosophical *practice* as descriptive and analytical, as opposed to a prescriptive or programmatic system. Différance is a term describing the movement of non-presence or that which does not exist. As a consequence, Auslander concludes that as opposed to the 'impossible task of imaging the performance of *différance*' that Derrida's process of writing 'under erasure' is a more viable conceptual point for exploring forms of theatre that undermine conventional codes in the theatrical

medium (1997: 38). He points to Brecht as a precursor of a form of theatre that applies typical methods of acting to counteract convention. Auslander acknowledges, however, that the goal of Brecht's political theatre is underpinned by (social) resolution and is subsequently, teleological and theological. In contrast to the impossible task Auslander links to 'acting' *différance*, Lehmann postulates Müller's temporal 'structure' in precisely these terms and posits it as a tool against the 'cult of presence' in favour of the transindividual dimension of the human subject (1995: 91).

In spite of Auslander's conclusion, a poetics of 'non-presence' is arguably evident in *The Pornography of Performance*, and both The Sydney Front's 'ghosts' and collective body attest to the function of the grotesque as 'transindividual'. In Scene 6, 'Grand Inquisition', Baylis, isolated under a spotlight, is the subject of an inquisition. Baylis, centre stage and motionless, is the target of a series of cross-examining prompts which ricochet across the performance space to reduce the 'I-You' exchange to a verbal battle entirely appropriated from section '1' and '3' of *Hamletmachine* by Müller. Baylis' intonation, which begins as a flat delivery of Müller's text, escalates to fever pitch as he answered his inquirers, 'where', 'when', 'who', 'you', with the corporeal nouns 'flesh', 'skull', 'scar', and finally with 'machine'; a desire to renounce the flesh. His body, after all, according to Müller's text is a lesion; an orifice loosely sewed up as a scar. His drama, 'if it still would happen', is an interrogation of the 'I' of (historical-literary) subjectivity. Baylis/Müller's emphasis on spatial and temporal indicators ('where', 'when') point to an unidentified diegetic space ('at the time of the uprising', 'on both sides of the Police line'); a hypothetical time/ 'history'. There is no clarification of the object of reference, given the absence of the interrogative pronoun 'what'. Instead, the emphasis is on the interrogative pronoun 'who', that is, on the subject. The dramatic present of the text shifts from 'the pedestrians', 'the people', 'the crowd' to the speaker. It is, however, the speaker's inability to locate himself historically in Müller's text that implodes the diachronic into a synchronic linguistic spatial domain. In this context, the omission of distal markers (he/she-there-then) and the insistence on proximal deictic

markers (I-here-now) in fact point to a transindividual corporeal history. As a consequence, this temporal collapse re-instates significantly more than the presence of the theatrical moment. Neither object nor subject can be named. The 'I' who speaks consciously rejects, and is at the same time incapable of assuming the identity of the 'I' of representation. It is a representational subjectivity twice repudiated; firstly in the 'act' of 'appropriating' a text that disavows literary signification ('I'm not Hamlet'), and secondly in the 'act' of interrogating the very 'act' of 'appropriation'.

Scene 9 and 14, *Short Time Capsule* and *Long Time Capsule* respectively, similarly, resurrect the unpredictability of ghostly traces as a tension intrinsic to the vocabulary of the 'theatre' body. Euripides and Aeschylus' 'drama' emerge as pulsations, corporeal eruptions comparable to spoils of the text. In the second scene the ensemble, dressed in long black 'cleric' robes adorned with white tulle at the neck, freeze and slowly contort into a highly stylized (de-psychologised) image of 'anguish', 'joy'. Frozen temporarily in silence their bodies twist: a grin transforms into a chorus of traumatic gaping mouths in a scene reminiscent of Edvard Munch's *The Scream*. It is an image the audience is able to contemplate in its act of becoming as the minutes 'stretch' with each member's unique contribution to the tableau. A performer in an Islamic prayer position flexes and strains and is immersed in the chorus of cloaks, which are unsettlingly tranquil. Aloise metamorphoses into the figure of a mardi-gras procession as she is raised to the shoulders of the other performers and her gown falls approximately ten feet to cover her human carriage. The painstaking action of the individual performers as they realise each image is subsumed by the overwhelming image of the group and both scenes shift into sudden villainous action.

Baylis abruptly removes his tulle and top and drops to his knees moaning in *Short Time Capsule*. The over-enunciated words of Andromache's monologue follow and the scene collapses into simultaneous verbalisation. Each performer then draws reference to their presence as an object on display. By activating an overhead pull-switch the individual

members of the cast illuminate themselves in a moment of calm silence, before they step beyond the makeshift spotlight into the darkened auditorium. It is a lull quickly annulled. Soon after Grant delivers the lines 'Now all Troy lies dead' and exchanges a glance with Aloise the scene erupts into fierce action. Aloise and Grant run towards the back of the black box space. Baylis' walk breaks into a charge and a scream. Grant and Aloise impatiently slap Baylis' face and force him towards the back of the venue as they defiantly recite lines from Euripides' *Trojan Women*. Thrown onto his hands and knees Baylis' leaps to his feet and charges away from the women laughing hysterically. Ryan, Kohler and Kellaway follow until the cast freezes once again into a grotesque convoy of contorted faces: screams became laughter, just as gregarious smiles transform into agonised expression. In the condensed structure of the 'Capsules' the successive shock of contradiction manifests in the elapse of time specific to the ghostly freezes of The Sydney Front tableau. To cite Artaud, it is an inertia that suggests:

> Feelings are nothing,
> nor are ideas
> everything lies in motility
> from which, like the rest, humanity has taken
>   nothing but a ghost. (Artaud in Kristeva 1984: 170)

In an article exploring Heiner Müller's spectres, Lehmann cites the following line from Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*:

> Life, observed from the point of view of death, is the production of the corpse. (Lehmann 1995: 92)

He applies Benjamin's observation to elaborate on the concept that the *I* incorporates the 'ghost of itself as dead' in so far as it is 'that which will have been' (1995: 92). In doing so, Lehmann refers to Derrida's thesis of writing as 'testamentary' or dependent upon a structurally dead and/or absent author. Like Müller The Sydney Front establish a proximity in *The Pornography of Performance* to a stockpile of ghosts, the dead. They

remind the spectator that the Renaissance and its re-awakening of Greek and Roman culture reinstated its ancient ghosts, soliloquies and choruses into Elizabethan drama. In over-laying these texts The Sydney Front radically re-configure the way in which the question of (canonical) authorship underpins the subject's relation to discourse and identity. The grotesque body, however, institutes a temporal structure peculiar to the abject. Kristeva describes the temporal structures constituting this condition as forgetfulness and thunder in *Powers of Horror* (1982: 8-9). An abject subject is in fact a deject, who on the basis of an acute inability to assimilate, strays constantly and as a result occupies what Kristeva refers to as a '*land of oblivion*'. Far from a wasteland, however, this territory is a site of infinite activity or in Kristeva's words:

> A deviser of territories, languages, works, the *deject* never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines – for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject – constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh. (Kristeva 1982: 8)

According to this logic, oblivion is a 'blotted-out time' continually remembered. It is a time of repugnant spectres that emerge in sudden, violent flashes or moments of revelation: 'jouissance, in short' (Kristeva 1982: 9). Kristeva's concept describes a sporadic rhythm applicable to the radical shifts within and between the scenes constituting *The Pornography of Performance*, as well as the way in which and in contrast to Müller's landscapes, skeletal remains and the dead, The Sydney Front introduce the ambivalent collective body of carnival. Throughout the 'Grand Inquisition' Baylis is increasingly prompted by different members of the cast. At the end of the first in what are effectively a series of monologues, Aloise answers Baylis' 'Behind me the set is put up' with 'WHERE'. He repeats his final line and following his delivery of the text, 'My drama, if it would still happen, would happen at the time of the uprising', Grant intercedes with 'WHEN'. Baylis repeats his last sentence a second time and recommences his monologue until he is interrupted yet again. In an unspecified space, or Kristeva's oblivion, Baylis is reminded of not an 'ahistorical time', but the inescapably

'blotted-out' experience of fear, humiliation and submission. That is, the repressive powers of official life upon which medieval carnival rituals were based and by extension the transindividual dimension of political action, past, future, present. 'Somewhere bodies are torn apart so I can dwell in my shit', Baylis quotes Müller. 'Somewhere bodies are opened so I can dwell in my blood', and at the moment of nauseating revelation he concludes the scene with 'I want to be a machine … MACHINE … I want to be a machine', as the fading spot heightens the spectator's awareness of his panting breath, his sweat; the corporeal impulses of the body.

The termination of Baylis' interrogation provides a brief moment of calm proximity; a pause in the linguistic and trans-linguistic 'chaos' of the production. Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, Müller's (Shakespeare's) Ophelia, Weiss' Corday, and de Sade proceed in unrelenting flashes, emerging and re-emerging. After the distinct installation action of the first three scenes and the stealth-like physical tempo of the fourth, 'Rolling Logs', *The Pornography of Performance* erupts into simultaneous spatially demarcated activity. The 'Stoning Sequence', which consists of nine events within its five minute frame, switches wildly from an interrogative spotlight on Ryan, who wrenches himself free of the penetrative light, gasping, to Aloise's frustrated attempts to deliver a revolutionary address from Müller's 'Electra'. Grant declares, 'This is Electra speaking'. Aloise, her arms raised in the air, repeats the lines and continues the passage until she is interrupted by Grant. As a result, Aloise begins the section again with an affirming tone; however, she is unable to prevent Grant's interjections, which are punctuated by her laughter, and finally asserts herself by yelling out the concluding word and its article from Müller's *Hamletmachine*, 'the truth'. Baylis is subsequently illuminated by the spot, but only long enough to announce, 'I didn't use those words'. A return to Ryan's tormented ramblings is followed by a kneeling Grant who is hindered by an automaton-like Kohler, who consistently pushes Grant's hair over her face the moment she attempts to speak. Kellaway then re-emerges re-citing de Sade's text as Ryan slams his body into the walls of the space, Aloise thrashes as her head is submerged in the

bath tub until the frenzy is brought to a sudden halt with Ryan's scream, 'YES!!!'[11].

This simultaneity is similarly reproduced in Scene 22 'Restaurant Scene', as Kellaway dressed in a plain shirt and trousers delivers lines from de Sade, while Grant and Aloise are reproducing text from Müller's Ophelia from section '5'. In the production in Adelaide Ryan then enters from behind a roller door he has hoisted above his head, manically looks from left to right and then stomps into the venue with his fists clenched to his side before aggressively bawling out the words of 'You make me feel like' made famous by the 'Queen of Soul' Aretha Franklin. He is naked beneath the 'open' curtains of the outer skirt of a 'Shepherdess' gown. In the next scene, the 'Penultimate Scene', Ryan's 'song' is increasingly intercut with Kohler yelling the words of Weiss' Corday, harpsichord music, a John Laws voice-over that degenerates into distorted feedback and cries, a telephone ringing and concludes with de Sade's justification of murder as natural and its relationship to history.

> I hate nature. This passionless spectator. This unbearable iceberg face that can bear everything, that goads us on to greater and greater acts. But even though I hate this goddess I can see that the greatest acts of history have followed her laws. Nature tells a man to fight for his happiness and if he must kill to attain it, why then, the murder is natural [...]. (Kellaway [de Sade], sc. 24)

Quick pacing and arbitrary cuts characterise the thoroughly dis-jointed assembly of text in the scenes referred to above and from this perspective, the compositional 'logic' seemingly corresponds to the structures and sensibilities frequently ascribed to performance to account for its relation to contemporary media. It is a supposition patently untenable as a theory of the composition peculiar to The Sydney Front. In

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[11]   The use of the adverb, 'hysterically', is not to confuse the argument here with hysteria. Kristeva points out clearly in the quote below the distinction she makes between this condition and abjection. 'In abjection, revolt is completely within being. Within the being of language. Contrary to hysteria, which brings about, ignores or seduces the symbolic but does not produce it, the subject of abjection is eminently productive of culture. Its symptom is the rejection and reconstruction of languages' (1982: 45). Kristeva argues that poetic language verges on psychosis on the basis of the incoherence of the semiotic order, as opposed to hysteria.

contrast to the multiple layers of experience specific to media perception, The Sydney Front's mise-en-scène in *The Pornography of Performance* is more accurately described as open scenic montage.

The effect is a type of experience not easily recuperated by the mind, to refer to Lehmann's understanding of the poly-logic space of post-dramatic theatre, and specifically its distortion of text (1997: 57a). In this respect the presence of the body, its rhythm, breathing, suffering and pain corresponds to aspects of ritual. Kristeva links the desire for purification through ritual to the sacred in both *Powers of Horror* and *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt* (see 1982: 17-8; 2000: 20-25). In doing so, she points to the rites of art and literature and Aristotle's concept of catharsis as the mimesis of a complex array of passions intended to purify the body (see 1982: 27-9). The Platonic lesson, however, as Kristeva points out, reveals the inability to eradicate the impure, and the repetition of the abject through rhyme and song subsequently institutes a reoccurrence markedly different. Through repetition the 'original' contamination is subject to a harmonising 'order'. In *Powers of Horror* Kristeva points to a crisis in Christianity and in the light of what she explicates as the collapse of the Other argues that the aesthetic task constitutes a 'descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct' (1982: 18). In a religious context abjection extracts more than archaic resonances located prior to sin, according to Kristeva. It retraces the brittle limits of the speaking subject, its infinite 'primacy'. As a consequence, these reverberations enable abjection to presuppose not only biblical status for Kristeva, but defilement in pre-industrial cultures, and explicate the numerous measures designed to purify the abject. The impure mixes structures and identities, it does not respect boundaries and for Kristeva it is therefore fundamentally maternal. It is a description that not only elaborates upon the operation of the grotesque in *The Pornography of Performance*, but the significance of the body as an interface between the living and the dead.

Grotesque imagery and more specifically, The Sydney Front's particular application of

this style in performance accentuates the body's proximity to its 'base' as both a noun signifying in English a foundation and an adjective for the improper, corrupt, sordid. From this perspective subjectivity emerges as a construct that necessitates and is founded upon self-deception. In contrast to the harmonising 'logic' attributed to the repetition and subsequent modification of 'original' texts, The Sydney Front's aesthetic is underpinned by an inability to eliminate the fragility intrinsic to the idea of form. Kristeva elaborates upon this predicament in her description of the circumstances determining the abject condition:

> No, as in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being [...]. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. [...]
>
> The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. [...]
>
> It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. (Kristeva 1982: 3-4)

Hal Foster subsequently concludes in his application of Kristeva's theory of abjection to artists like Andres Serrano and in particular his *Piss Christ* (1987), that if a subject exists it is *the* Corpse of history (1996: 166 [my emphasis])[12], and this is the Corpse that arguably 'haunts' Müller. For The Sydney Front the 'realism' of the grotesque body embraces the anarchy and malady of the corpse, its dynamic *presence*, as opposed to the static, finished body of the modern canon. If the movement of this 'non-presence' is

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[12] Foster applies what he identifies as Kristeva's 'slippage' between the abject as a condition ('to be') and its operation ('to abject') to suggest that abject art has proceeded in two directions depending upon whether the abject object triggers identification or its operation through its representation (see 1996: 153-166). To elaborate on this point he clarifies the role of the 'spectator' in relation to the object. Identification, according to Foster, occurs in response to a work that invites the viewer to approach the 'obscene', and on the other hand, 'to abject', infers a reflexive relation in which the viewer is repelled or disgusted.

taken into consideration it is increasingly possible to imagine the performance of *différance* Auslander deemed impossible in his analysis of a poetics of deconstruction.

To disturb identity, system, order: This last point of Kristeva's, cited above, is crucial to understanding the irruptive capacity and archaic possibility of the grotesque as an expression of the excess of the 'uncontrollable' body. For The Sydney Front its incessant *presence* belies 'rational' discourses and identity. A sudden and brief burst of music from the Austrian composer Johann Strauss I's *Radetsky's March*, which provoked a personal reaction from the audience – delight and horror – for the company's performance at the Petersbrunnhof in Salzburg, formed part of Scene 18 and exemplifies this point. Upon hearing the music the cast promptly remove their skirts and march around the space according to Kellaway's orders, 'left, right', with their genitals on display. By Scene 25 Müller's Ophelia re-emerges in a monologue spoken into a red telephone receiver held by Grant that includes Müller's entire section '2' from 'I am Ophelia' to 'I walk into the street clothed in my blood' from *Hamletmachine*, and concludes with 'Hamlet, do you want to eat my heart?' extracted from Müller's Hamlet/Ophelia dialogue in section '3'. The scene shifts into a ritualistically choreographed mise-en-scène in which the performers walk 'purposefully' to cite the stage direction towards the audience and Ryan completes the verbal content of the scene with 'I WANT TO BE A WOMAN!'. In synchronised action the cast then hurl their arms across their bodies, grasp their heads and stomp. By 'Sodomy', the next scene, Kellaway is traversing the stage repeating lines from his copy of de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*. De Sade's prose transforms into stage directions for Baylis and Ryan, who enact the 'desecrations and tortures' to a 'bound and beaten' Kellaway, which Kellaway himself has read aloud.

Bakhtin points out that life and death are integral and interactive, as opposed to binary, components in his discussion of the images of grotesque realism. In doing so, he distinguishes between Romantic and modernist types of the grotesque and the

grotesque of the medieval and Renaissance tradition. In this context life embodies death and he uses the example of the Kerch terracotta collection of figurines of pregnant hags, who are laughing, to visually illustrate this point (see 1984: 25-26). The corpse Kristeva refers to above as 'infecting life' is always present in this equation. More specifically or rather more illuminating in terms of the development of (dramatic) literary representation, is Bakhtin's point that the grotesque imagery of the medieval and Renaissance period, that is, the folk carnival culture apparent in Rabelais, Shakespeare and Cervantes influenced, directly or indirectly, the literary realism of Stendal, Balzac, Hugo and Dickens (1984: 52). He discusses the break from the Renaissance tradition in terms of a transformation into naturalist empiricism.

> What remains is nothing but a corpse, old age deprived of pregnancy, equal to itself alone; it is alienated and torn away from the whole in which it had been linked to that other, younger link in the chain of growth and development. The result is a broken grotesque figure, the demon of fertility with phallus cut off and belly crushed. Hence all these sterile images representing 'character', all these professional lawyers, merchants, matchmakers, old men and women, all these masks offered by degenerate, petty realism. These types also existed in grotesque realism, but they were not expected to build the picture of life as a whole; they were but the dying part of the life which gave birth. The fact is that the new concept of realism has a different way of drawing the boundaries between bodies and objects. (Bakhtin 1984: 53)

By reinstating the grotesque The Sydney Front effectively precludes the barren transmogrification of the body that Bakhtin laments as character form. More broadly, the company circumvents the deadlock intrinsic to the constellations of drama that Samuel Beckett renders explicit in *Endgame* – In response to Clov's question 'What is there to keep me here?' Hamm replies, 'The dialogue' (1958: 39). It is a structure The Sydney Front flagrantly re-models by 'collapsing' the temporality intrinsic to interpersonal speech.

Prior to the finished, restricted body of the modern canon, the grotesque offered a drama of renewal based on the orifices that betray the boundaries of the body. In

addition to the display of genital organs, the grotesque finds expression in *The Pornography of Performance* in acts of violation. In a concluding scene of the production, a naked member of the ensemble is physically up-ended, cream buns are rammed against his anus and his tormented screams can be heard as he is hosed out of the performance arena. It is a public degradation in which the subjected body produces an uncertain reaction in the audience; a spectacle that enacts and ridicules fear, suffering and violence in a production that was described as 'a jubilant celebration of the resilience of body and spirit' by *New Theatre Australia* critic Russell Walsh (1988: 31). Kristeva correspondingly recognises in Paul Céline the uncertainty of 'the inhumanity of the poet' (1982: 137). In her analysis of Céline in *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva applies the semantic ambivalence or dialogism that Bakhtin identifies in literary works stemming from the carnivalesque tradition to pose the question:

> Can one tell whether the bombing of Hamburg, as written by Céline, represents the height of tragedy or the most cavalier mockery of mankind? (Kristeva 1982: 138)

Lehmann, similarly, points to the moral and aesthetic ambiguity in what he identifies as a shift in the incidence of 'pain' in post-dramatic theatre and it is a modification he posits as a question for representation (1999: 392-3). If Lehmann's understanding of the transition from represented pain to pain experienced through representation ('von *dargestelltem Schmerz* zu einem *in der Darstellung erfahrenen Schmerz*') is applied to The Sydney Front's abject episode with a series of cream buns, a Rabelaisian laughter emerges as a type of curtain raiser or turn in the screw that discredits the belief in the dialectical capacity of the sign.

Bakhtin points out that in the ages that followed the Renaissance grotesque that the principle of laughter was increasingly disassociated from macabre images, and that the bourgeois 19th century was characterised by a satirical laughter; that is rhetoric (1984: 51). For Kristeva, Céline adds to carnival's semantic ambivalence 'the merciless crashing

of the *apocalypse*' and she concludes that it is 'a burst of laughter and a mark of death' (1982: 138). Madness, orgy, the intoxicating and heinous experience of passion and war, disease, the very idea of monstrosity and above all the organs of the lower stratum intersect in the language of the grotesque realism of carnival. It is a language of 'excess' that corresponds to The Sydney Front's consistent elaboration of its practice, or to quote the company in the critical survey *25 Years of Performance Art in Australia*:

> Our work is about excess, about a gesturing that goes far beyond that necessary for any reasonable discourse. The superabundance of our work has the paradoxical aim of releasing the spectator from false complicatedness. We continually collapse our own rhetoric and bring the focus back to the body's fleshy organs. By thus returning to where meaning is embodied, we aim to protect ourselves and the spectator from the terrorism of grand abstractions that cannot be lived out. (The Sydney Front in Waterlow 1994: 54)

In the quote above The Sydney Front counters the idea of a reference point external to the body. For Bakhtin Rabelais degrades the hidden meaning, secrets and/or terrifying mysteries of religion, economics and politics in the prologue of *Gargantua* (1984: 174). A gay truth, its laughter, liberates the solemn tone of medieval ideology. This distrust of official 'truth', or grand abstraction in The Sydney Front's words, is peculiar to the grotesque body and it is a body specific to the people, as opposed to the biological individual. It is a broader body politic that is necessarily grandiose and/or exaggerated in Bakhtin's view.

In his study of the carnivalesque tradition in *Rabelais and his world*, Bakhtin identifies the grotesque body as above all deeply positive and utopian. It connects cosmic, social and bodily elements and represents 'the people' as an abundant totality in the process of budding renewal (1984: 19). He distinguishes between modern formal parody and carnival on the basis of folk humour (1984: 11). It is not the intention of this chapter to claim a direct correlation between a four hundred year old tradition culminating in the work of Rabelais, a 16th century novelist. However, both Kristeva's revision of carnival

to account for Céline's apocalyptic and hallucinatory leveling of modern culture and Bakhtin's elaboration of humour provide a framework for understanding The Sydney Front's 'Saturnalia', its unsettling potential and frivolity. Kellaway, for example, orchestrates an acting lesson with Kohler and Ryan, who create a range of ritualised moments corresponding to 'sorrow', 'terror', 'joy', 'stab, stagger, die', 'coy giggle', 'pray, drop and crawl' on the basis of Suzuki training. In contrast to the psychology of emotion intrinsic to the subjective interiority of the Stanislavski technique, The Sydney Front's series of images derived from Kellaway's training with SCOT. Suzuki's emphasis is on the physicality and energy of the body, and entails significant lower body work. As a consequence, the movements that emerge in the 'Studio Lesson' of Scene 10 entitled 'Prompting' are sparse and formalistic and in the context of *The Pornography of Performance*, attain a 'madness' that engages the spectator in the corporeal 'logic' of grotesque imagery.

Similarly, approximately mid-way through the performance, the cast deliver simultaneous statements and Baylis gestures to the audience to ask, 'Where shall I sit?'. Grant then pulls a curtain across the space and recorded audience applause is played as the cast bow elaborately with their backs to the audience. *The Pornography of Performance*'s finale in which the company 'do it all again', to cite Aloise's introduction to the speeded up version of the show, is an unequivocal acknowledgment of the time of theatre as a form of reiteration. It is a comic treatment suggestive of Bakhtin's explication of the liberating function of laughter. Laughter in the middle ages, according to Bakhtin, neither recognised inhibition or limitation (1984: 90). More significantly, these scenes critique the stylistic effects of modernity and by implication, the restrictions of this form on human possibility and cultural production. In this respect The Sydney Front's project corresponds to Bakhtin's opinion of the ascetic tendencies of the modern and his attempt to restore the spirit of the grotesque in light of what he perceived as its inaccurate and retrospective epithet, gross naturalism. In addition to Bakhtin, it is possible to identify an analogous parallel to Kristeva's *Powers of*

Horror and specifically, the way in which her writing assumes attributes of the grotesque and in doing so, operates at the threshold of the abject.

Like Bakhtin, Kristeva identifies a shift in the aesthetic episteme in the 17th and 18th century. Kristeva argues that from the Renaissance and in the celebration of the sacrifices of the French revolution poetry became merely a surrogate for the thetic; that is, a fetish, mere formalism, the decorative uselessness of art, which reflects Baylis and Kellaway's sentiments expressed at the time they formed The Sydney Front. As a result she identifies only certain literary texts of the avant-garde in the capitalist mode of production as accessing the semiotic chora, which modify linguistic structures and are thereby constitutive of a revolutionary poetics. A revolutionary poetics confronts order, according to Kristeva, that is the logic of language and the principle of the State, at its most basic level by opening it up to drives engendered by differences, vocal and kinetic (see 1984: 79-83). Instead of allowing poetry to be understood as a 'flight into madness', she argues that revolutionary writers of the late nineteenth century both struggled against poetry as fetish and produced a literature that within the signifying process tested the subject's dialectic. As a consequence, a revolutionary poetics opens up the text to the crucible of its production and in a theatrical context this implies the role of dramaturgy and its 'thetic' function as gauge or meter of semiotic incursion.

Kristeva is interested in the operations by which the symbolic is corrupted on the basis of understanding mimesis as pluralising denotation and poetic language as undermining meaning (see 1984: 57-61). To explore this Kristeva adds a third 'process' to Freud's conception of displacement and condensation. That is the primary motivational processes of the unconscious, which when combined with drives link empty signifiers to psychosomatic function or establish a sequence of metaphor and metonymies that produces enunciation out of an arbitrary association (1984: 22). Kristeva makes a connection between Freud's fundamental processes and Kruszewski and Jakobson's formulation of metonymy and metaphor in the initial development of structural linguistics, which in the context of psychoanalysis have been reassessed. The

third process, according to Kristeva, is the passage of one sign to another and the result is a new signifying system; for example, narrative to text in the case of common signifying material or the carnival scene to the written text. As a consequence, she discusses the novel as a 'redistribution' of a number of sign systems and more explicitly as carnival, courtly poetry and scholastic discourse; that is, as the result of intertextuality. A range of signifying material, including literary and dramatic texts, popular lyrics and carnival can be ascertained as restructuring the convention of dramatic theatre, if this hypothesis is applied to The Sydney Front's production. In light of the absence of an 'intelligible' narrative, a compositional 'logic' inherently abject privileges drive-governed sound production and a 'dubious' set of intertextual relations in the theatre situation.

> What kind of town is this
> Why are they howling
> What are they dragging through the streets
> They carry stakes, but what is impaled on those stakes
> Why do they hop, what are they dancing for
> Why are they racked with laughter
> Why do the children scream (Kohler [Peter Weiss' Corday], sc. 24)

Kohler delivers these lines from Weiss' Corday. Prior to this text excerpt the audience has heard a verse from Franklin's famous pop track and directly after Kohler's passage Ryan continues the song:

> O baby, what you done to me
> You make me feel good inside
> You make me feel so good inside (Ryan [Gerry Goffin and Carole King], Scene 24)

The ambiguity inherent in this transposition of sign systems renders identification uncanny. It is an incredulous and unsympathetic mingling of pop, gender, (in)human violence and putrescence that invokes a highly ambivalent position: laughter on the

brink of disgust. Language, its betrayal, is commandeered by the body. Robert Wilson's *The Black Rider: the casting of the magic bullets* provides an interesting parallel to *The Pornography of Performance* in terms of the series of relations disjointed or otherwise that coalesce as a result of intertextuality and clarify a particular aspect of the political role of transposition. In *The Black Rider* Wilson marshals the traditions of folk opera, circus, pantomime and cabaret according to a visual dramaturgy. Its macabre expressionistic fairytale quality based on *Der Freischütz* and the stories it has inspired, along with its fleeting references to a range of genres, including the Western, heightens what can be read as a 'delightfully disturbing' comment on the current political situation in the United States of America. The somnambulistic delirium of Wilson's archetypal homage to German Expressionism, arguably, encapsulates the fatal consequences of the misguided nature of US foreign policy. Instead of a dove, Wilson's Wilhelm shoots his betrothed Käthchen with a magic bullet from the second round of ammunition he has procured from the devil.

The very title of The Sydney Front's production is highly ambivalent and implies prohibition and censorship. Pornography is understood etymologically as a description of prostitutes and their trade, which is underpinned by the idea of exposure, 'exposure to lust', to 'expose publicly'. Theatre is a 'place for viewing' and its association with prostitution characterised the public Elizabethan stage from the establishment of the first professional English playhouse in the 1570s to its prohibition in 1642. Prostitution, disease and the theatre flourished in common vicinity during this period. In London the clientele of brothels and its harlots frequented the theatre and periodic outbreaks of the plague shaped the iconography of the theatrical spectacle, an over-exposed immoral and pestilent public display that consistently attracted the attention of health officials and vigorous Puritanical opposition. The Lord Mayor of London petitioned Queen Elizabeth's government throughout the 1580s on the basis that the theatre solicited:

> great multitudes of the basist sort of people; and many enfected with sores [...]. (Lord Mayor of London in Lenz 1993: 836)

Lenz points out that the perceived relationship between theatre and prostitution derived from both site and sight. That is, it was not simply the dubious locale of the theatrical venue that determined its questionable reputation. Instead, the voyeuristic stage with its alluring cross-dressed male actors adorned in feathers and silk provoked the licentious intent of vagabonds and exposed the 'innocent' spectator in the pit, public galleries and private boxes to moral corruption. In the eyes of John Northbrooke writing in 1598 this exhibition amounted to ocular fornication.

> He that looketh on a woman, and desireth to have hir, he hath committed aulterie alredie in his heart .... I dare boldlye say, that fewe men or women come from Plays and resorts of men with safe and chaste minds .... Those filthie and unhonest gestures and movings of the Interlude Players, what other thing doe they reache, than wanton pleasure, and stirring up of fleshly lustes and unlawfull appetites and desires? With their bawdie and filthie sayings and counterfeyt do. (Northbrooke in Lenz 1993: 839)

Reports of *The Pornography of Performance* similarly invoked charges of public indecency; charges rejected on the grounds that members of the New South Wales police force are not expected 'to be arbiters of good taste' (HANSARD 1988: 3583-3584). Ironically, The Performance Space is located on the same street frontage as a brothel, as well as a boarding house and budget accommodation. The historical link between prostitution and theatre concerned its commercial nature and the distinction between the professional actor and the respectable pursuits of the collegial player in a scholastic environment. As a consequence, Shakespeare's 'sanitised' contemporary status entails the displacement of a former sign system, which has transformed the aesthetic value of the theatre and its 'Good traders in the flesh' (5.10), to cite Shakespeare's Pandarus in *Troilus and Cressida*, in a similar way to the dismissal of Rabelais as obscene and formless by the neo-classical canon. Nineteenth century theatrical ideals have impacted on the enunciative and denotative positionality of the Elizabethan stage and its era by virtue of the transposition of the social scene to the written text. Ironically, twentieth and

twenty-first century official culture in Australia credits itself with preserving through subsidy to its State theatres specific values, values embodied in theatrical forms recognised as high arts, such as the Shakespearean play. That is, the text reduced to (literary) fetish rendered visible by a director.

In a theatrical situation the logic of this relationship is embedded in the structure of vision or what The Sydney Front identified as the primary questions preoccupying the company: Why do people like to look? Why do others enjoy being looked at? Inherent in the concept of theatrical scenography is the concept of masquerade or illusory deception, and the result is a masochist contract to refer to Deleuze's analysis of Masoch in *Masochism: Coldness & Cruelty*, a voyeuristic bind. In The Sydney Front's words:

> Is the spectator the passive recipient of the artists' god-like manipulations? Or are the performers desperate whores constantly incited by the spectators' appetites to greater and greater acts of self-abuse? (The Sydney Front in Barnes 1988: 112)

In his analysis of both de Sade and Masoch, Deleuze points out that the fetish relates to masochism on the basis that it is defined according to the process of disavowal and suspension (1989: 31). As a consequence, Deleuze argues, the fetish is not a symbol, but rather a means of exorcising the dangerous consequences of exploration. As a result, it is a defensive neutralisation that potentially could be applied to explicate the suspension of illusion specific to naturalistic theatre and its fundamental process of disavowal. Kristeva refers to the symbolic as corrupted in *Revolution in Poetic Language* in so far as an object, a book or a work, for example, is understood as a substitute for the thetic phase (1984: 64-5). Furthermore, she regards this fetishised object, which asserts its pretension to universality through presence, as a poor disguise for its archaeology – the belief in a phallic mother on the basis that 'no symbol is strong enough to sever this

dependence' (1984: 65)[13]. In this context Kristeva reasons all art requires the maternal chora in order to breach the symbolic order. In *The Pornography of Performance* this amounts to a dramaturgy that returns the spectator to a 'pre-logical', 'incomplete' space that defies the principles of unity. It is a space that correlates to the experience of carnival; a time where laws dissolve and the private world finds itself on display. In his review in *De Volkskrant* of the performance at Danslab in Amsterdam, Ariejan Korteweg recognised this older social-literary allusion, albeit through Pier Pasolini's 1971 film. For Korteweg The Sydney Front:

> take off their clothes quite a bit, and their nakedness is as grotesque and unselfconscious as the windy backsides of Pasolini's Canterbury Tales. (Korteweg 1989: [n.pag.])

Don Juan

> [...] Melodrama draws attention to its own histrionic display. It presents a public language of the emotions ... capitalism has divided work from pleasure and located them in different worlds of discourse [...]. In a world of alienation [...] melodrama is a link with a saner society, one that allowed for a grammar and lexicon of emotional display, before the private world made a fetish of our emotional life ... In the melodramatic discourse, it is the circumstance that determines us, not inner division ... This then is the age of a new melodrama. We deny the double, the divided self. We are not split, we are shattered. Our minds are pure, but many. The pieces gather together in gestures of pure display. (Baylis in Jenkins and Linz 1997: 128)

From its outset The Sydney Front explored elements of a range of genres and physical training techniques, such as Suzuki 'stomping', in order to address the local theatre industry's dominant form. In his description of the overt 'theatricality' specific to *Waltz*, The Sydney Front's first production, Baylis clarified the company's interest in melodrama by stipulating that 'it does not ... conform to the dictates of naturalism'

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[13]   Kristeva argues that poetic language necessarily converges with fetishism, but that it remains distinct on the basis that it signifies the 'un-signifying' (or pre-symbolic semiotic stases) and as a consequence, does not function as a substitute for a sign. See *Revolution in Poetic Language* for clarification of this point (1984: 65-6).

(Baylis in Jenkins and Linz 1997: 128). Like the grotesque imagery of medieval carnival, melodrama is an ambivalent genre that has transformed significantly. Drama + *melos* (music) constitutes the literal meaning of melodrama and its forms have differed considerably over the centuries from country to country. Italian grand opera preserves its 'original' meaning, although its genealogy reflects the late medieval morality play and other forms of storytelling and drama. The melodramatic aspects of the plot of bourgeoisie consciousness emphasised the highly individualised aspirations of its characters in the 18th century. This is not, however, to infer psychological motivation. In Lessing's *Emilia Galotti* (1768) and Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe* (1776), for example, the *dramatis personae* drive the action of the plot. The moral idealism of the heroes suffers at the hands of, and subsequently discloses, the *Realpolitik* of the epoch and this constitutes their primary function. As a consequence, the social configurations behind power and exploitation are arguably highly discernable through the genre of melodrama, and it is this philosophical and aesthetic aspect of the form that attains particular relevance in relation to The Sydney Front.

In the quote opening this section Baylis points to circumstance, as opposed to private inner division, and the deterioration of the civic function of language and by implication the ornamental role of art. In doing so, he echoes Kristeva's cautionary explication of the politics intrinsic to the reduction of the transgressive possibilities of poetry to fetish or sheer formalism (see 1984: 83). At a forum at The Performance Space on 9 November 1986 Baylis questioned the symbolic order's propensity to compartmentalise transgressive practice by referring to the avant-garde as 'the lackey of ruling culture', on the basis that the term infers 'a main army behind us for whom we are doing the scouting' ([c. 1987]: 34). With these issues in mind it is perhaps not surprising that The Sydney Front (re)turned to the legendary figure of Don Juan for its fifth production and second major international tour. Like the fate of Rabelais' grotesque and the dismissal of his novels as excessive and barbaric by the Enlightenment aesthetic referred to above, the Romantic nineteenth century and the

Modernist twentieth century have detached the 'demonic' qualities of the Don Giovanni of Mozart's opera from the era of its composition. In his clarification of *Don Juan* as a response to the 'modernisation' of Mozart, Marcellino, The Sydney Front's composer for the *Don Juan* project, reinforces this point:

> What we're doing is putting the body back into Mozart's music. It's become abstracted, sanitised to the point where there's no acknowledgement that there's a performer connected to the larynx. But Mozart was really an earthy character, and the sexual licentiousness of *Don Giovanni* is actually connected to political freedom in the 1780s when he was writing. (Marcellino in Payne 1991: 16)

This is not to confuse Marcellino's statement with the idea of reinstating the 'original'. Instead, The Sydney Front re-establishes the de-semanticising potential of the body, to cite a principle tenet of Lehmann's description of theatre that operates beyond the dominance of text (1997: 60). There is a deprivileging of the text or absence of hierarchy. Nick Tsoutas, the director of Entr'acte Theatre's *ON ARCHAEOLOGY* spoke about his production in precisely these terms as part of the panel discussing deconstruction in and of theatre that Baylis participated in at The Performance Space in Sydney.

> What I'm saying to an audience by denying aspects such as the text and so on is that I am changing the axis. The piece is a piece of theatre, I can't deny that. That is the basic relationship set up. (Tsoutas in Baylis [c. 1987]: 34)

Tsoutas' 'basic relationship' reflects the fundamental foundation of theatre as opposed to other art forms: it is the simultaneous experience of the production of art and its reception. 'New theatre', however, implies different theatre ideas and in doing so, an adjustment of the criteria applied in critique, both scholarly and more broadly in the public domain. Lehmann, for example, has referred to the bewilderment of theatre theoreticians in response to practices jeopardizising the text (1997: 59). Nonetheless, it

is in print media criticism that the problem of accounting for departures from dramatic form can be most obviously observed and The Sydney Front's media documentation attests to this dilemma.

The Sydney Front's sixty minute production of *Don Juan* attracted extensive and predominately positive media coverage in most of the major newspapers in Australia, although a number of critics expressed reservation. Reservation tended to derive from the following three concerns: its intentional 'lack' of narrative structure, the question of seduction and the performer-spectator relation. *The Australian* critic Rosemary Neill's skepticism related to precisely what she perceived as the incoherence between performer-spectator seduction and sensuality. Angela Bennie, similarly, felt in her didactic review in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that:

> Throughout all this busy speculation, The Sydney Front seems to forget to do one thing: seduce. Seduction is theatre's most powerful, most dangerous, most political process. Theatre can seduce people into changing their beliefs, their whole moral systems.
>
> It is why Plato wanted it banned from his Utopia, why Brecht did his darnedest to subvert it, harness it, expose how it works.
>
> And for more than 2,000 years, it is known by most people involved in the theatre that this highly explosive process lies essentially in the nature of the relationship between audience and performer, and that that relationship has to have some kind of *affective* component. (Bennie 1991: 12)

In Pamela Payne's opinion published in the same newspaper the company pushed the boundaries between the spectator and performer. Two years later she applauded the 1993 performance and noted that it was much sharper than its original production. The *Evening Standard*'s Michael Arditti advocated the redefinition of the audience/performer dyad, rather than what he considered its rejection in *Don Juan.* Alexander Gorkow in the regional newspaper, the *Rheinische Post*, recognised the quality of Tesoriero's voice and appreciated the production's comic and grotesque fervor. The over-exposed body in

Hong Kong or, in Margaret Harris' words, the 'less-than-perfect bodies' (1993: 21), emerged as a point of contention in a number of reviews, both Chinese[14] and English, and in London, like *The Pornography of Performance*, *Don Juan* attracted sensational press in the tabloid media.

Don Juan was funded by the Australia Council's Performing Arts Board which provided project funding and supported the commissioning of a composition. As a consequence, the creative process extended over a six-month period and was considerably longer than the period leading up to the performance of the company's earlier work. Rehearsals began on 20 November 1990. The first block consisted of a part-time (three days per week) period over eight weeks and concluded on 10 January 1991. The group then rehearsed five days a week from 25 February 1991 until *Don Juan* opened at The Performance Space on 11 April 1991. Over the six month period The Sydney Front worked on the show in four different spaces in inner city Sydney: the Dark Swan Studio (1 week); the Old School, Sydney University (3 weeks); Sidetrack Theatre (4 weeks); and, Hut 24, Addison Road Community Centre. The Sydney Front's tour of *Don Juan* consisted of performances in Adelaide (Balcony Theatre), Perth (PICA), Düsseldorf (Werkstatt Bühne), Klagenfurt (Uni-Kulturzentrums), Brussels (Halles de Schaerbeek), Copenhagen (Kanonhallen), London (ICA) and Hong Kong (The Fringe Club). In addition to its original presentation at The Performance Space in Sydney the production, as Payne mentions above, was remounted in 1993. It is worth noting that The Sydney Front's tour, particularly to Europe as discrete from Britain, represents a significant endeavor in an Australian context. An extremely limited number of Australian companies have toured to Europe over the past twenty years, and in contrast to the productions mounted by The Sydney Front, those that have appeared at major European venues and festivals have been largely the result of comparatively well-financed commissions by festivals in Australia[15].

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14 Translations of Chinese reviews held in Nigel Kellaway's Personal Archive, Newtown, Sydney.
15 For a discussion of the international strategies of Australian cultural policy makers in relation to European presenters and producers see Hamilton (2003).

Prior to the rehearsal process for *Don Juan* Tirso de Molina's *The Playboy of Seville or Supper with a Statue* (1630) and *The Punished Libertine or Don Giovanni* (1787) were distributed to members of the company. Opera singer Annette Tesoriero and performer Elise Ahamnos joined the company for this project. The following studies were used as reference material by the company: Jean Baudrillard's *Seduction*; Andrea Dworkin's *Against Pornography*; George Bataille's *Visions of Excess*; the *Polysexuality* issue of semiotext[e] edited by Francois Peraldi; Klaus Thewleweit's *Male Fantasies*; Stallybrass and White's *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*; and, Kroker and Kroker's *The Hysterical Male*. The chapter 'From Carnival to Transgression' in Stallybrass and White's monograph deals specifically with carnival as a 'mode of understanding' as distinct from ritual (1986: 6). In addition, The Sydney Front returned to live recordings of Pina Bausch's Wuppertal Dance Theatre and DV8 Physical Theatre during the rehearsal process for inspiration. Schaefer documents broader associations to a number of films made by the performers in rehearsal. For example, the performers referred to Dennis Hopper in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* and John Cleese in relation to the theme of hysterical men. Similarly, members of the company talked about Lynch's *Wild at Heart* with respect to the *Don Juan* 'Fuck Me' scene, and an Andy Warhol film on the theme of how to humiliate a woman. More specifically, a video production of the Mozart Opera *Don Giovanni* and the critical secondary texts, Catherine Clément's *Opera or the Undoing of Woman* and Kristeva's essay on Don Juan in *Tales of Love*, informed the creative process outside of the rehearsal studio, where intellectual justifications were excluded. The following dialogue by Baylis and Kellaway to a project member of the cast clarifies this approach and the company's use of this material.

> Kellaway: Don't explain it, do it [...]. Leave the interpretation to everyone else. It's partly a very private, partly very group thing. We shape and mould things in our head. We don't negate the thought process.

Baylis: I found out very early that intellectual justifications don't work.

Kellaway: [...] Out of the context of the rehearsal room and improvisation
           we can talk, intellectualise, etc. (Kellaway and Baylis in K
           Schaefer 1999: 173)

Don Juan is the myth of the legendary seducer; ostensibly a ubiquitous expression of phallic power despite a polyphony of extant literary and musical 'voices': Tirso de Molina's morality play, Lorenzo da Ponte's libretto for the Mozart opera, Moliere's *Don Juan* (1655) and Richard Strauss' symphonic poem *Don Juan* (1888). In The Sydney Front's *Don Juan* the 'deprivileging' of text through a complex network of references institutes a highly self-conscious 'aesthetic of responsibility' for members of the audience, to rephrase Baylis' understanding of deconstruction. For Baylis the audience 'can choose a meaning instead of having one chosen for them' ([c. 1987]: 33). In this respect the spectator is asked to return to the revenant of Don Juan on a 'stage' that neither actualises nor historicises its source material. Mozart's score proclaims the appearance of the ghost of the Commendatore through two resounding chords that invoke a solemn mood. In *Don Juan* these chords are subject to amplification and signal the start of the production. The double doors of the theatre literally slam open and effectively herald the moment of grand opera. Prior to entering the space audience members are supplied with a black mask. Inside, a complimentary glass of wine is offered to the spectator as Mozart's complete opera is played at twenty times its normal speed and in a continuous loop.

Upon entry to the black box space the spectators were forced to walk single file and found themselves the object of exhibition. Cordoned off by barbed wire the rows of ranked seating usually reserved for the spectator are occupied by the six performers costumed in white wedding dresses. More than simply gazing the performers' surveying eyes appeared to hunt or stalk the incoming crowd. The spectators mingle, unable to occupy the gallery, unnerved by their scrutinisation by the performers, who

record the spectators' personal details in black books, lick their lips, smile longingly and on occasion appear indifferent. In the lit space the spectators find themselves unintentionally on stage, as well as in front of an 'inverted stage' listening to a depository of musical layers, including verbal babble and commercial songs by pop artists such as Madonna. Marcellino's score is inconsistent with the exaggerated pattern and more precisely, the movement of rise-and-fall in the music that punctuates the emotional effects of melodrama. Instead, assemblies of semantically indifferent identifiable moments emerge out of the composition. Marcellino privileges polyphony over the homophonic principles that distinguish the modern musical age and subsequently, dispenses with the hierarchy modeled on ancient Greek drama that accompanied the development of opera and conceived of music as the servant of the text.

On a chord the performers stand to signal the 'official' commencement of the production. Ryan points to a person in the audience and declares, 'You', and the cast laugh in a forced, over-enunciated manner and clap. Nothing happens: the cast take their seat. Ryan, a dandy, places his hand loosely on his chest. Aloise's ecstatic laughter degenerates into howls as she suddenly collapses in the gallery. It is a melodramatic act the rest of the cast acknowledge with disdain. These peculiar machinations continue until the upright yet limp body of each performer is pushed into a sway by another member of the cast. The performers delight in the motion of this chorus of movement. The miming of laughter reaches an ecstatic silent crescendo that plummets into the horror of grotesque gestures, apart from Grant and Kellaway who are strangely out of synch and concludes with a static ensemble until the action begins again. A number of mischievous deeds dominate the resumption of activity. Baylis knees Aloise gently in the head to maintain the trajectory of her movement, and shields his mouth with his hand to hide his silent snigger. Aloise's pleasure turns to pain as Tesoriero sadistically clutches her head. Grant moves towards the barbed wire until the music reaches a crescendo and the entire cast stands and faces the audience sternly.

> I want to fuck you. I want to kiss you. I want you to fuck me. I want to fuck you. (Grant)[16]

Grant grabs at her dress as if there was a repressed craving behind the above admission. The cast appear increasingly anxious as a result of this revelation, but there is absolutely no indication of character development. Finally, Ryan leaps towards Grant, covers her mouth with his hand and wrestles her to a seat in the middle row where he ties her to a chair and Aloise gags her with a piece of cloth. Grant jerks and struggles in her seat as she is terrorised by Aloise, and Baylis appears to relish in this event. In the meantime the rest of the group cast and retrieve fake roses that have been flung from fishing rods deep into the audience over the barbed wire barrier. Oblivious to the audience Ryan fixates on the scent of his rose as Baylis affects disinterest. Kellaway then leaves the ranked seating and walks into the crowd in order to single out a spectator for interrogation.

In doing so, Kellaway changes the dynamics of the performance by threatening the privilege of masked anonymity. During the interrogation of a spectator the performers comment on the spectator's looks and pose personal questions from behind the barbed wire separating the audience from the ranked seating. On one occasion at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, a spectator's plea for help acts as a cue for the barbed wire to be lifted, establishing an ominous proximity between performer-spectator in the now undivided performance arena. It is a proximity that The Sydney Front consistently foreground in order to emphasise the structure of the theatre medium or what Kristeva describes in her reading of Bakhtin as the essentially dialogical nature of carnival, which '*exists only in or through relationship*' (1986: 48). For Kristeva the dialogical character of carnival is residue of a cosmology in which substance, causality and identity do not exist beyond their link to a total body. In terms of The Sydney Front this residue manifests in a post-dramatic form of theatre based on direct interaction with the spectator. It is subsequently an excess dependent upon a configuration that

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[16]   All quotes from *Don Juan* (1992) are from a video recording of the production provided by Nigel

eliminates the dialogue and character form specific to the stage language of modern drama and in this respect it builds on modern drama's own eradication strategy; that is, the precedent set by the removal of the classical prologue and chorus that coincided with the development of the drama of modernity. The subsequent fate of the subject and its representation as a character for The Sydney Front can be posed in the anti-theological terms of Kristeva's analysis of carnival:

> Within the carnival, the subject is reduced to nothingness, while the structure of the *author* emerges as anonymity that creates and sees itself created as self and other, as man and mask. (Kristeva 1986: 49)

To take up the literal subject of the mask in *Don Juan*, the spectator's 'disguise' establishes an anonymity that ostensibly authorises voyeurism. In *Rabelais and his World* Bakhtin describes the mask as a device of extreme and comic caricature, transition and transformation and as a consequence, intrinsic to the grotesque (1984: 40). He distinguishes its use in folk culture from Romanticism. In Romanticism the mask, according to Bakhtin, operates to conceal a secret or hide something and in doing so, loses its regenerative function and this later application appears to elaborate on the sleek black masks worn by the spectator at the outset of *Don Juan*. In *Don Juan* the mask, like the barbed wire, points to the inability to assimilate and thereby establishes the traditional terms of theatre, a space organised according to the division of the performer and spectator. It initiates the spectator into an overtly recognisable situation. Ironically, however, The Sydney Front creates this situation by indicating that the company will not comply with the rules of the 'game', and the action that unfolds corresponds to neither the moral or intellectual myth-making function of melodrama nor the seduction Bennie bemoans in her critique of the production.

In 25 *Years of Performance Art* The Sydney Front point to seduction and sacrifice as key aspects of the company's work (see Waterlow 1994: 54). The company understood

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Kellaway of The Sydney Front.

seduction as 'a game of identity for adults', which it clarified by citing the following phrase from Baudrillard's *Seduction*: 'mastery of the strategy of appearances, against the force of being and reality'. For The Sydney Front sacrifice referred to 'the one magnificent gesture that would put an end to games once and for all, every night, again and again'. In the same article, The Sydney Front described its 'House Style' as 'the body's lurid bruises veiled and revealed by an ornate theatricality' and the 'Ideal Spectator' as 'one who would surrender to us for one night, and think better of it in the morning'. Schaefer noted in her documentation of rehearsals that a performer identified the opening scene of *Don Juan* as a pivotal reference point for the entire production; that is, 'the relationship between the watching performers and the watched audience' (1999: 184). For Schaefer this scene operates more broadly than an inversion of the conventions of the gaze in the theatre and points to the idea of seduction. Schaefer subsequently interprets Baudrillard's understanding of seduction as the 'triumph of seeming over meaning, of representation or the lie over the real or the true' and refers to Michel de Certeau's 'tactics' as an operational strategy comparable to trickery in order to advance her discussion of The Sydney Front's practice in *Don Juan* as an example of 'postmodern poaching' (1999: 185). In addition, she cites Kristeva's understanding of Don Juan in *Tales of Love* as polyphonic, lacking internality and an Ego, that is, ultimately a desire to transform 'existence into a form, a game, a jouissance' (K Schaefer 1999: 186; Kristeva 1987: 197). Implicit in the notion of seduction as a strategy of appearance opposed to 'reality' is the idea of an underlying condition. In *Don Juan* the force of 'being' that Baudrillard refers to is embedded in the body and its grotesque 'reality'.

Seduction originates from within the protocols of the other, which is transformed into an object, a challenge, in what Baudrillard calls the ironic strategy of the seducer (see 1990: 98-100). That is, it derives from mythical enchantment and in Baudrillard's example it is the alluring innocent girl in Kierkegaard's *Diary of a Seducer*. Baudrillard reasons that seduction is in fact not a libertine activity, and instead acquires the

dimension of sacrifice by virtue of the ease with which the victim surrenders and becomes the subject of divine intoxication. Kristeva conceives of sacrifice anthropologically as not simply violent, but regulatory. 'Far from unleashing violence', Kristeva argues, 'sacrifice shows how representing that violence is enough to stop it and to concatenate an order' (1984: 75). In doing so, Kristeva argues that sacrifice reveals that all order is underpinned by representation and material carnage is in fact an act of signification. For Bataille literature is the 'bloody' offspring of sacrifice (religion), where the reader eagerly 'devours' and in doing so reveals his/her deepest aspirations (1962: 87). In this respect the novel constitutes elementary stage drama, according to Bataille, and unsurprisingly so, given the ritual sacrifice dramatised in the mass of Church ceremony. Order, that is, its preservation, is of primary importance in all the accounts of sacrifice above and even Baudrillard refers to Kierkegaard's character, Johannes, as simply righting a natural imbalance in seducing Cordelia (1990: 99). In this context The Sydney Front's conception of the ultimate sacrifice as eliminating all 'games' acknowledges a set of rules and practices that function to maintain order.

In contrast to 'order' and the *logos* of drama, post-dramatic theatre form is underpinned by a broader sense of communication. Chorus, monologue, polyglossia, visuality and so on, interlock a complex network of connections or textuality that characterises post-dramatic theatre as a form that situates itself at the brink of the possibility of 'meaning', as opposed to the transmission of signification. Kristeva terms the state of upheaval issuing from beyond the reach of the possible, reasonable, 'thinkable' as abjection in *Powers of Horror*. It is a condition incapable of concurring with the rules of the game as prescribed by a superego position. Like The Sydney Front's 'lurid bruises' it posits the subject at the border of itself as living through defilement. The desire for meaning necessarily infers exclusion, and prohibition lures the subject to a space in which signification dissolves into heterogeneity. From the perspective of this aesthetic logic, the melodramatic 'theatrics' of the grotesque body in *Don Juan* function in a similar way to the pre-war porn movies in Societas Raffaello Sanzio's *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (*Voyage*

to the End of the Night) based on Louis-Ferdinand Céline's 1932 novel. The spectator is positioned at a corporeal boundary governed by a narcissistic bind. It is a narcissism constituted by a discord of drives, drives that have not been assimilated into a system of signs, as opposed to the Greek image of youthful reflection (Kristeva 1982: 14). On the basis of this reading of Freud, Kristeva is able to discuss abjection as a 'narcissistic crisis' and this explicates the dynamic that exists in *Don Juan* between performer ('watching') and spectator ('watched'). The 'seeming' Schaefer identifies above is not the result of seduction, but abjection. In *Don Juan* The Sydney Front harness the fragility of identity and structural relations in order to render explicit 'our part' in 'intolerable structures', to return to Melrose's point in her article opening this chapter (1988: 51).

By broadening J Rose's feminist argument in *Sexuality and the Field of Vision*, Melrose raises the dilemma of the relation between image-makers and consumers, or the body as 'licked by gaze' to use her terminology (1988: 51). Inherent in this exploration is the question of the victim and neither performer nor spectator is protected by the proviso of a role in *Don Juan*. Upon breach of the divide separating the audience and the performers, The Sydney Front ensemble forms a triangle as soon as it has cleared a make-shift space for performance in amongst the crowd. With their skirts lifted to their thighs, legs straddled and squatting slightly in a Suzuki inspired position the performers thump forward through a pelvic thrust action towards the audience and almost at the point of contact undertake graceful, courtly movements and return to their initial position in order to start again. On the third repetition of this dance the performers suddenly flank to the sides and directly confront members of the audience, who might have hoped to avoid a potentially invasive pelvic thrust. The body vacillates in this scene between a mobilised statue weighed down by the elaborate garments and the expression of social rites specific to courtly ritual. However, it is a body propelled forward by its erogenous region and carnal rhythm even though it is momentarily disguised by elegant gesture. Unlike the veritable fetish of La La La Human Steps or the crashing figures of Wim Vandekeybus, to use Lehmann's description, The Sydney

Front's imperfect, excessive bodies always infer a glimpse of 'unrestrained' flesh (1999: 381-2). Bakhtin has described the artistic logic of the grotesque image as one which:

> ignores the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body's limited space or into the body's depths. Mountains and abysses, such is the relief of the grotesque body; or speaking in architectural terms, towers and subterranean passages. (Bakhtin 1984: 317-18)

It is an aesthetic logic rendered explicit in the action that follows the pelvic dance section. In the next scene Baylis delivers the only monologue of the production. On a platform elevated above the crowd Baylis hoists his wedding gown above his waist. Grant places her hand under Baylis' exposed appendage and lightly declares directly to the audience, 'This is John's penis'. Aloise stands at Grant's side holding a silver tray with scissors, a comb and a powder puff on it. As Baylis reminisces about his first purchase of a record by Mozart, Grant combs and trims his pubic hair, before tying a flamboyant ribbon into a bow around his penis and for the finale she gently slaps his genitals with the powder puff leaving a thin white coat of loose dusting powder. This complete phallic body triumphantly on display derives pleasure not from the music, but the fanciful image of the young Mozart. That is, the gaze of an inanimate object; an object that increased Baylis' novice delight. 'To think nobody else had ever laid a finger on it', he says, seduced by the 'black voluptuous prize' that takes on attributes of virginal proportion. It is a self-consciously ludicrous incident dedicated to emphasising the objectification of desire; a desire resolved through a neutral pronoun. The 'I' of Baylis' narrative is substituted with 'it'. The 'I' of 'I got home', 'I took the record from its jacket', 'I slid the untarnished black disk from its soft protective shield' vanishes as 'it slowly began to move'. After all, the 'very best part of listening to Mozart', according to Baylis, is 'that trembling expectation, just before the sound begins to press itself against the thin membrane that lies deep within the moist hole' of his inner ear. As a consequence, what begins as the farcical eroticisation of an object outside the body

penetrates its orifices, and the acts of the next scene reinforce the semiotic delinquency, masquerade, seduction, counter-seduction or abject poetics of the grotesque imagery of carnival in *Don Juan*.

Towards the end of Baylis' overtly public display, the voices of Kellaway, Ryan and Tesoriero divert attention back to the ranked seating. Kellaway and Ryan stand to either side of Tesoriero, the diva, who walks through the gap separating the rows of chairs towards the audience directly in front of her. Her approach is overtly laughable, given that Ryan and Kellaway are required to gracefully climb over the chairs in order to accompany her, and their peni are magnificently adorned with extravagant bows similar to Baylis'. Once deep within the crowd shrieks are heard from the diva, who is now on her hands and knees, and a space is cleared for the next scene of the production. Her wails continue as she hitches her dress over her hips and exposes her naked buttocks to the crowd. Baylis, Kellaway and Ryan then take turns leaping from a platform or 'launching pad' to run and feverishly mount the diva. Tesoriero sings wildly during Baylis, Kellaway and Ryan's over-excited thrusts into her posterior, which end in exhaustion. The 'launch' of each of the male cast members is assisted by Grant and Aloise, who stand to either side of the platform and appear to authorise the ascent of the performer awaiting his turn. At one point Kellaway throws a bucket of water on the diva's buttocks and Baylis who slides off his 'mount' wipes down her hindquarters audaciously. Later Ryan is the target of a splash of water. Tesoriero's gesticulations transform into 'Yes, yes, yes' and 'Basta, Basta' until she stands up in the crowd. The chaos continues as Baylis lies weary on the floor, Ryan receives a slap from the diva, Aloise tries to calm her down and Baylis finds his energy and begins 'humping' her leg, crawls under her skirt and is finally discovered at which point the diva storms off through the crowd. It is a scene that totally shatters the triumphant conquests of the figure of Don Giovanni, as well as any trace of the opera's origins in a medieval morality play.

Despite the adornment of their genitals, the over-exposed, feverish activity of the male

performers, who appear to act on command, obliterates any association with seductive, phallic power. Instead, the diva emerges as both catalyst and agent. Tesoriero is the source of *jouissance*, its multiplication. Kristeva's application of Lacanian theory, or what she identifies as the phallic function of the mother[17] is embodied in the diva, and two significant symbolic inversions follow the last scene ('Thump Rump')[18]. A naked Kellaway gracefully crosses the space with his invisible penis visibly held out of sight. It is a scene that correlates to the tradition of transvestism specific to carnival. Like a clown or trickster the transvestite foregrounds the arbitrary structures organising the everyday. It is an 'inversion' that corresponds to the grotesque principle of the body as mobile or multiple and points to the centrality of the socially peripheral in the institutionalisation of 'normality'. Digression as the expression of the publicly marginal highlights the ideological field of the dominant social system and more significantly accentuates its underlying fragility. In this context Kellaway foregrounds the body as an object of exhibition. For Lehmann the age old association between the actor and a whore, mannequin, athlete or shaman arises from the fact that the living body can be transformed into a motif, an object, a 'thing' in the theatre (1999: 383). It is a point that raises the classificatory status of the body as a site of symbolic and metaphorical intensity that The Sydney Front consistently subverts in *Don Juan.* The dance subsequent to Kellaway's solo consists of courtly gestures, uncouth movements and the cast scuffling quickly across the performance venue in squat position. Maximum speed is immediately achieved by the performers without a graded build-up as their torsos glide across the space and they shed the economy of signs traditionally associated with the actor for a sculptural configuration underpinned by ambiguity and incongruity.

From this strange, uncanny image of the group, *Don Juan* shifts into the most

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[17]   In *Revolution in Poetic Language* Kristeva describes the mother as the phallus on the basis that her body is both the receptacle and guarantor of demands and thereby is the site of all narcissistic and imaginary realisations and pleasures (1984: 47).

[18]   See Schaefer (1999: App. 2, 244) for a list of *Don Juan's* scenes prepared by Nigel Kellaway. Schaefer's appendices also include a draft and final running order of the scenes in *Don Juan* (App. 7: 249), a list of 'bits' and 'scenes or semi-scenes' (App. 3: 245), an assessment of scenes (App. 6: 248) and two versions of the show (App. 5: 247).

controversial moment of the production and a scene that anchors the feminine body in abjection. Aloise grabs Kellaway and kisses him until he forces her away. A black slip is visible under the knee length Prussian-style coat that she has unbuttoned as she stalks across the space approaching each of the male performers. Aloise clings to Kellaway, who finally flings her off, and then straddles Baylis who she has pushed to the floor. 'C'mon kiss me', she demands, as he throws her off his body. Ryan responds to her advance and bends to his knees in order to kiss her breasts, and Kellaway assists by taking off her coat. Aloise wraps one of her legs around Kellaway and Baylis removes her slip. In contrast to the frivolity of the 'romp' with the diva, the 'Fuck Me' scene heightens tension considerably among spectators, who are unsure of the transgression that is about to unfold. In black underwear Aloise grabs Baylis from behind only to be thrown to the floor. 'Make love to me. C'mon make love to me', she demands, as her body is shunted across the space and repeatedly physically rejected by Baylis, Kellaway and Ryan. The barrage of explicit sexual commands continues – 'C'mon, fuck me. Fuck me. C'mon fuck me. Do it now' – until Kellaway pulls off her underwear and Baylis flings her legs apart. The three male performers stare at her vagina and then turn and walk away. Aloise sits in silence and finally stands up, puts on her underwear, slip, her white frilly collar and then her coat. The three female performers leave the performance space simultaneously. In one performance a female member of the audience attempted to obstruct the scene by pulling down a light before exiting in protest.

Annie Sprinkle's performance *Post Porn Modernism*, which captured international attention in the late 1980s, appears to offer a broader framework for a discussion of this scene in *Don Juan*. *Post Porn Modernism's* best known incident consists of an invitation to spectators to view Sprinkle's cervix made visible by means of a speculum and a flashlight. Sprinkle engages in active dialogue with her audience throughout this scene in her solo show, which functions like an anatomy class within a specific discourse about pornography in a performance context. In contrast Aloise's scene is played out entirely with the male performers and the final image can be read in relation to Gustav Courbet's *Origin of the World*, painted in 1866 or Marcel Duchamp's 1946 *Etant donnés: la*

chute d'eau; le gaz d'eclairage, both of which Schneider raises in relation to Sprinkle in *The Explicit Body in Performance* (see 1997: 60-64). Courbet and Duchamp's pieces posit the torso of a woman within an over-exposed 'peep show': Courbet's 'headless' female lies on white bedding and Duchamp's similarly appears through a door and then a hole in a brick wall. At the centre of classical perspective, the parted legs expose the female sex organs to the viewer. The critical distinction between these works and Aloise's final pose is the positing of the body-object of a woman returning the gaze of the spectator, doubly; the eye of the vagina (a traumatic encounter in Bataille's *Story of the Eye*) and ocular vision. It is a pivotal point in the performance, which explicitly shifts the spectator's observation of a threatening act into an active confrontation between the performer and spectator. In her analysis of Sprinkle's performance in *Staging Femininities: performance and performativity*, Geraldine Harris points to the shifting and contradictory identifications in the spectator integral to *Post Porn Modernism* (1999: 145), and this illustrates a key aspect of the performer-spectator relation in The Sydney Front's *Don Juan*.

The ambivalence intrinsic to the 'Fuck Me' scene, however, raises a broader gender issue concerning protection against the maternal. In *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt* Kristeva reasons that paternal identity fortifies itself by manufacturing woman as sacred and fetishised (2000: 145). In making this point she observes that women manifest in the surrealist movement as an image both fascinating and abject. Voyeurism for Kristeva necessarily constitutes object relation, which she describes as accompanying the writing of abjection (1982: 46). Lacan distinguishes between geometrical gaze as dependent upon the measurable line/s from the viewer to the object and the scopic function in order to foreground that the eye is outside the field of its own vision. The subject's recognition of its own image infers a perspective of exteriority. As a consequence, Grosz reasons this is the basis for Sartre's understanding of 'the look', which provides access without contact, as a site of domination and mastery (1990: 38). What happens then when 'the look' is unmediated? When the

artificial coolness of distance arbitrated by the image, painted, photographic or televisual, is absent? And the orderly queues leading to Sprinkle's cervix are replaced by an aggressive agency and a menacing signifier? There is no doubt that the 'Fuck Me' scene concerns the humiliation of a woman. However, this is evident in the lead up to Aloise's final pose and not in her calm, silent exposure on the floor. Instead, it highlights the way in which Foucault describes power knowledge relations effecting and affecting control over the operations of the body.

> [...] the body [...] is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold on it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations [...] the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. (1977: 25-6)

Lehmann observes this phenomenon in the context of contemporary dance in *Postdramatisches Theater*. He points out that the history of 'new theatre' can be read as an attempt to render the illusion of theatre visible, perceptible; that is, to show both the body in its ideal form and the origin of ideal beauty in the controlled force of drills (1999: 388).

In the 'Fuck Me' scene the spectator is left with a loss of narrative and structure, bereft of the laughter accompanying the audacious romp with the diva. Silence remains and it is a silence that points to Lehmann's understanding of the unconscious, veiled intention of poetry: 'the silence of logos, silence as a structural interruption of any continuity of logos' (1997: 57). Artaud has pointed out that laughter is stifled as murder and revolution not because it is parody (in Kristeva 1986: 50). This statement expresses the gravity underpinning the 'Fuck Me' scene and in particular its realisation in the context of *Don Juan*. Schneider argues that the explicit body in performance interrogates binary distinctions (male/female; civilised/primitive; art/porn), and in doing so exposes the corporeal markings or ghosts of historical meaning. That is, history marks certain bodies in terms of privilege and disprivilege, and in Judith Butler's argument in relation

to gender this is the result of 'the repeated stylization of the body ... within a highly rigid regulatory frame' (1999: 43). Butler applies Michel Haar's argument, based on an exploration of Nietzsche's critique of the metaphysics of substance, that substantial identity is an illusion underpinned by the psychological categories: ego, individual, person (1999: 27-8). The Sydney Front dispensed with these categories through a form of 'representation' that could be described as 'nonmatrixed', to use Michael Kirby's term, which infers a mode of performance in which the performer does not attempt to embody a fictional character[19], and the use of grotesque realism, where the body is not presented in a private, egoistic form. In doing so, the Sydney Front leads the spectator to a place where meaning collapses through a dramaturgy arguably 'immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady', 'a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it', to use Kristeva's description of the abject subject in *Powers of Horror* (1982: 4). This violent crucible betrays the finitude of discourse, the logic of signifying systems and its social organism.

Schaefer concludes that the spectator is subjected to a mode of domination in *Don Juan* that is highly problematic and disturbing both in terms of its scripting in rehearsal and its live presentation. In her dissertation she describes this experience as 'the unchecked power of the performer-seducer over the spectator-victim' (1999: 211). In 1989 the Spanish group La Fura dels Baus presented *SUZ/O/SUZ* at the Horden Pavilion in Sydney. This company approached its audience, like The Sydney Front, directly and at times indifferently. The spectator for both groups functioned as a mobile part of the performance, given the absence of seating and the shifting action which utilised the entire black box performance area. However, The Sydney Front did not display the masochistic aggression integral to a performance like *SUZ/O/SUZ*; nor did it apply the force and coercion that Schaefer alludes to in the presentation of the work. Ultimately, the question of the power of the performer as seducer is a ruse, particularly given that over-exposure nullifies the very idea of seduction. Instead, what emerges is a

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[19]   See Michael Kirby (1987) 'acting and non-acting' in *a formalist theatre* for his theory of a 'symbolized

performativity in Butler's sense of the term that is applicable to carnival; a condition that at once represents and obliterates the (grammatical) categories of identity – performer/spectator; male/female; exterior/interior etc – and the aesthetic forms regulating these relations in a theatrical context. In the final scene of the performance, Kellaway, in a long black formal suit jacket asks for a member of the audience to strip and in the absence of a volunteer offers increasing sums of cash until a spectator surrenders, although The Sydney Front rarely had to pay. The performers exit during this impromptu 'strip-tease' and allow the spect-actor to effectively close the show. It is a finale that triumphs in a carnivalesque change of roles that arguably liberates theatre from the masquerade of drama.

First and Last Warning

From the 19 November to 6 December 1992, audience members who arrived at The Performance Space's box office to buy tickets for *First and Last Warning* were offered two choices: First Class Tickets ($40) or Standard ($18 or $10 concession). Members of the public were asked not to purchase tickets if they did not intend to adhere to the conditions sign-posted. A notice advised that first class ticket holders gained access to a special area and would be served champagne and hors d'oeuvres for the duration of the production. Fifteen of these tickets were available each night, and according to the notice first class ticket holders retained their clothing. For the cost of a standard ticket audience members received a black slip from the performers, who were similarly attired, along with a paper bag. In two gender segregated areas divided by a red curtain cutting the performance space into zones, these members of the audience were required to take off their clothes, apart from their underwear, place their clothing in their paper carry bag and change into the black slip. Outside the theatre the fifteen first class ticket holders were offered champagne and entertained by a hostess as the standard-ticket audience undressed. Inside, the curtain drop exposed the male spectators to their female counterparts and opened up space for the third scene of the production.

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matrix' of acting that accounts for 'non-acting' as part of its continuum.

Contrary to the typical machinations of foyer protocol and the burgeoning silence that permits the audience to hear the creaky machinery of the stage as the house lights fade, the actions of the spectators open *First and Last Warning.* In this respect, The Sydney Front's second last performance as a company can be thought of as a resumption of the spectator involvement that 'closed' The Sydney Front's previous production *Don Juan.* Both the purchase of admission tickets and the ritual of a pre-show drink in the case of the 1st class audience or the more unusual change of clothes for the 'standard crowd' are integral to the performance text of *First and Last Warning* and are included in the version published in *Performing the unNameable: an anthology of Australian performance texts* in 1999. Scene 1 and 2, 'Box Office' and 'Audience Entry', point to the ritual of theatre by emphasising the set of relations beyond the fictional world of the stage. The effect is a re-textualisation of the social formation of theatre as an institution that demarcates its stockpile or resource of actions, images and roles according to a particular cultural model. In *First and Last Warning* the stage loses its autonomy, and instead constitutes a time and space consciously manipulated and managed by those collectively present. Lehmann has described the differentiation between theatre time and the time of fiction as critical to post-dramatic theatre on the basis that it establishes a concrete and complex relation between these two dimensions, as opposed to its fusion (1999: 319). For The Sydney Front this distinction manifests in a dramaturgy dependent upon the abject participation of the spectator (among strangers) and performer in the excesses of the creative act.

Victoria Spence and photographer Heidrun Löhr joined Sydney Front members Aloise, Baylis, Grant, Kellaway and Ryan as performers in the production. Mickey Furuya, who wrote the text for the solo shows *The Nuremberg Recital* and *Woman in the Wall* and The Sydney Front's final production, *Passion*, prepared a number of monologues and speaking voices, which were used by the company as a starting point in the creative process and of her fifteen pages, two remained in the final work. The Sydney suburb of

Kings Cross and more specifically what the company described as its 'corporeal transactions' constituted the impetus for the subject matter explored by Furuya (in Allen and Pearlman 1999: 2). Apart from teaching writing at the University of New South Wales' College of Fine Arts, Furuya had worked for many years in a Kings Cross bar. Kings Cross is a 'red light district' famous for its seedy bars, drug deals and brothels, which are in easy reach of the port. At no stage in the production process was Furuya commissioned to write a script structuring the production or providing scenic direction. Instead, Furuya attended approximately one-fifth of the rehearsal period, and The Sydney Front used the material she produced as a basis for improvisation. As a consequence, the references to Kings Cross were replaced by a number of events/scenes underpinned by power relations graphically played out by the cast.

In Scene 3, 'The Dance', Ryan crosses the space to the female area where he asks Grant to dance and launches the 'official' performance in the area occupied by the standard price spectator. The two proceed to rock tenderly in the centre of the black box auditorium to the sounds of Peter Wells' composition. Ryan gently caresses Grant's face and without warning punches her. Grant is pushed to the ground, kicked and slapped and the attack continues for seven minutes and involves a repetition of the gestures specific to the action. Grant is paraded in front of the spectators on each side of the auditorium. It is during a lull in this violent scene that the first class ticket holders are ushered into the performance venue. The traditional location of the proscenium stage constitutes the viewing area that members of the first class audience are slowly seated in by their hostess, Spence. In contrast to the empty arena offered to the standard spectator, first class ticket holders are accommodated on a series of lounge chairs behind coffee tables, and this arrangement encapsulates the divided class relations historically attributed to theatre as a social event. Soon after the first class audience occupies its vantage point and is safely removed from the action taking place amongst the standard audience below, Ryan resumes his hostile behaviour. Grant is forced to put on roller skates by Ryan, and awkwardly walks out of the space and the sober mood is compounded by the cigarette Ryan lights and proceeds to smoke in the

darkened auditorium. Ryan then approaches a female member of the standard price audience and asks her to dance as Kellaway stands motionless in the zone occupied by women.

Like the threatening unpredictability of Ryan's invitation, the black box auditorium is consistently re-designed into makeshift demarcated spaces of action. For the spectator The Sydney Front's erratic rearrangement of space throughout the production increasingly erodes the experience of security and control. Scene 4 to 9, however, largely revolves around the use of a portable cassette player and a single chair. The actions within the following scenes are performed to the 1st Class Ticket holders according to classical perspective: '4 – Yellow Text'; '5 – Fascination 1'; '6 – Mop'; '7 – Fascination 2'; '8 – Water Bearer'; '9 – Fascination 3'. Baylis' 'Yellow Text' is a fragmentary narrative that begins with 'No. I don't know' and concludes with the repetitive 'semantic' assertion 'I am Yellow' (4) [20]. It is an admission that accentuates the disjunction between *First and Last Warning* and typical conceptions of theatre as a linguistic medium dedicated to delivering 'meaning'. Baylis' text initially alludes to a repressed recollection of violence that he experiences at night, to marks on his arms and legs and screams, and then shifts to involve the 1st Class Ticket spectators directly. He asks, 'Why are you looking at me like that?' (4). As a consequence, Baylis' 'dialogic-monologue' positions these audience members as sadistic voyeurs in a masochist display deprived of the fictive 'reality' of stage convention. Even though he admits he likes to be looked at, he is pleading. He refers to something cutting into him and declares, 'you won't get away with it', that 'there are laws' only to concede that 'no, no, you are strong' (4).

In all three 'Fascination' scenes the song is turned on by a different member of the cast. Aloise weeps to the music on the cassette deck she has taken from Baylis, but immediately stops at the end of the song and turns off the recorder. Baylis, on his knees,

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[20] All quotes from *First and Last Warning* by The Sydney Front are from the version published in Allen and Pearlmann (1999).

rubs his face into the flesh of Grant's stomach as she sucks her finger. At the end of the scene Grant leaves the space and Baylis crouched on the floor. Ryan, like Aloise, is overwhelmed with 'histrionic emotion' and in an attempt to regain composure turns off the music periodically. Finally, he implores a member of the audience to turn the tape recorder off. Water acts as a repetitive interruption, both breaking the scenes and constituting an independent moment. Ryan concludes Baylis' narrative by throwing a glass of water in his face and Aloise throws herself into three pools of water Grant has poured from a watering can, before Grant rubs Aloise's face in the puddles on the floor. Aloise is left to clean up the 'mess' with the mop and bucket Grant has brought into the auditorium. In the final act involving water in this part of the production, '8-Water Bearer', Aloise enters to offer Baylis a glass of water, but in nervous tension spills it accidentally. Aloise exits and is abruptly followed by Baylis, who like the mechanical termination of each of the 'Fascination' scenes appears to 'switch off' his performance as he leaves the space in order to signal the next incident in *First and Last Warning*. As a result, the brutality of each interaction attains a dissonant 'logic' through repetition.

Broken repetition subsequently transforms the stage into an installation space in the scenes above and creates the impression of a series of prompts, sonic and visual, that are re-played. Deleuze has discussed forms of repetition as conditional to both masochism and sadism. In *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* he elaborates on repetition in terms of the pleasure principle to argue that it deviates from its normal function (1989: 120-1). Repetition is not controlled by the notion of experiencing or re-experiencing pleasure and instead constitutes an idea or ideal in itself, according to Deleuze's reading of its operation in de Sade and von Sacher-Masoch. Deleuze argues that the 'mysterious' condition linking pain and pleasure is in fact the result of desexualisation and the polarisation of pleasure and pain. It is in re-sexualisation, he contends, that pain seemingly stems from the pleasure of repetition. As a consequence, Deleuze reasons pain is in fact merely *effect*. Melrose, similarly, points to a logic of pain, but in her article the 'body-beyond-reasonable-endurance' is articulated as the result of a specific reciprocal encounter: elated performer and spectator adulation (1988: 54). If Melrose is

read in relation to Deleuze's point and the specifics of his argument are temporarily overlooked, repetition can be conceived of as a deviation from normal function that is built into the structure of theatre convention and this infers Kristeva's understanding of the purifying function of repetition as a means of establishing 'order' on the basis of the abject.

For Melrose two fundamental issues emerge: firstly, representation and its staging as unproblematic, and secondly, general exclusion from the institution of the theatre on the basis of ticket cost (1988: 55). The Sydney Front addressed these concerns explicitly and more broadly, questioned its role in what Baylis described as a 'closed system' ([c. 1987]: 34). Baylis' conception of the 'closed' architecture of theatre infers a sacred space dependent upon identity and inclusion, and in this respect it functions as a rite or narcissistic realm. Despite the radically different objectives of many of the alternative theatre movements of the 1960s, these experiments operated, similarly, according to the principle of a symbolic pact founded on the abolition of exclusion in the theatre medium. Sam Shepard, for example, described the Off Off Broadway sensibility in terms of artist-audience solidarity:

> You were so close to the people who were going to the plays, there was really no difference between you and them – your own experience was their experience, so that you began to develop that consciousness of what was happening. (Shepard in Aronson 2000: 78)

In contrast, the dissolution of the boundary separating performer and spectator and the incessant power relations played out in *First and Last Warning* foreground segregation and discord. Like the schism determining the structures governing participation, repetition is critical to reinforcing the exclusory tactics key to the production. For Lehmann the incidence of repetition in post-dramatic theatre implicates the spectator. He refers to the visibility of spectator response as a result of repetition, that is, the impatience, equanimity, attention or displeasure of the audience, as heightening the temporal situation (1999: 337). It is a temporality dependent upon an interaction both

dissonant and carnivalesque in *First and Last Warning.*

Several sight lines provide the spectators with access not only to the performers, but the varied reactions of other spectators or strangers in addition to opportunities to confer about the actions taking place during the production. They are reactions and/or deliberations that function as part of the masochistic/sadistic paradigm explored by the company, and are subject to a broader theatrical construct. *First and Last Warning* situates the spectator in a complex and variable position in relation to a fictional stage, pit and gallery that alludes to the organisation of the public playhouse in the Elizabethan era. Like *Don Juan* the role of spectator and performer consistently merge in *First and Last Warning.* However, it is not simply a question of the spectator/performer dyad in the later production. In *First and Last Warning* the spectators are stratified into three groups according to financial outlay for the performance and gender. As a consequence, the roles of the spectators multiply in comparison to the dual responsibility enacted by The Sydney Front performer/spectator. Standard price ticket holders constitute an audience for both the 'official' performers and the 1st Class crowd. In addition, they are 'unofficial' performers for members of The Sydney Front, as well as for the ticket holders occupying the lounges that form a proscenium arch stage. The standard price ticket holders are further implicated visually through the black slips identical to the ones worn by the 'official' performers and are not simply physically present in the space of aesthetic activity. Apart from their entry and exit the 1st Class audience constitutes a body of spectators for the action taking place in the stage and/or pit. However, they are clearly on display and there is no illusion of a fourth wall. The multi-dimensional perspective intrinsic to *First and Last Warning* establishes a self-contemplative position for the spectator that is inherently insecure and in opposition to the linear, solid, fixed, closed form that defines the ubiquity of vision dominating the modern era.

What emerges is a configuration explicable as a narcissistic quandary in Kristeva's

sense of the term. Prior to autonomy the human subject invests in the image as a primary organiser of identity, according to psychoanalytic theory. For Kristeva, however, it reflects a borderline state dependent upon the other, that is, the mother, the source of separation (2000: 46). Abjection emerges as a result of a conflict of drives clouding the calm waters of narcissistic reflection and Kristeva subsequently, describes the 'chora' as a receptacle of narcissism (see 1982: 13-15). From this perspective, The Sydney Front's composition based on a series of strategies – rejection, separation, repetition – attains an aesthetic 'logic' that is inherently abject. In addition to spatial dislocation, the rhythm of the scenes 'puncture' the field of the subject in so far as they thud on and off and enact a transmutation from passive to active, sadist to masochist, that ultimately embodies contradiction. In contrast to the tunnel vision that produces an object for a subject, The Sydney Front discloses how power disguises and conceals its operations in the social construct of vision. Once severed from a stable point of reference, sight invests in the instability of symbolic function and arguably lodges itself in the body of the spectator in *First and Last Warning* to effectively heighten the carnal density of the observer. It is a condition that permits the 'horror within' to manifest, to use Kristeva's words, as the body emerges as 'a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's 'own and 'clean self' ' (1982: 53). The terror of maternal flows subsequently finds expression, and in *First and Last Warning*, denies the subject both its autonomy and sense of 'self' as uncontaminated.

At all levels in *First and Last Warning* The Sydney Front disturbs structures and identities; from its re-configuration of performer-spectator relations to its treatment of text. In Scene 10, 'Dog Text', Aloise addresses female members of the standard price audience flanking one side of the auditorium. Her short narrative overtly equates the female spectators to bitches on heat. 'You're wet and you'll show it', she declares and refers to the divide, literally in the space and socially, between women and men. Aloise urges the standard priced female spectators to:

Take your cunt for a walk. Ride the night. You're off the chain and running.

> Arch into a full-throttled howl. Echoes down the darkened street: the wound calling to the wound.
> Let's take a good look around. (Aloise, '10 – Dog Text', 4)

Aloise's provocation is intentionally degraded by a base relation to a dog and her allusion to the female genitals as a lesion. In doing so, this scene not only foregrounds associations with the female anatomy as impure, injured and secreting, but as the potential source of threatening agency comparable to Hélène Cixous' (1986) conception of the explosive return of 'The Repressed' in *The Newly Born Woman*. Schneider argues that acts that disrupt habits of vision or modes of anxiety collapse the symbolic markers of the female body as 'ghosted by historical delimitations' (1997: 23). The psychosis or hysteria this invokes, according to Schneider, culminates in a double bind on the basis that the feminine is historically understood as aberrant (1997: 184). Schneider subsequently reasons that feminist performance artists simultaneously explicate and illustrate this bind across the body in the context of the symbolic order. In *First and Last Warning*, however, it is not simply sexual identity that is at issue and unlike hysteria, as Kristeva points out, abjection is productive of culture in so far as it rejects and re-constructs languages (1982: 45). It is from this perspective that the somatic quality of The Sydney Front's grotesque vernacular re-configures the classical body and its function as a corpus structuring a series of discourses – philosophy, literature, theology and law – understood as 'high' as a result of the Renaissance aesthetic[21].

As a consequence, a radically different measure of expression and 'rationality' emerges that can be broadly elaborated upon in terms of the language of analysis applied to a range of 'pornological' writers in French literary theory. For Deleuze, for example, the 'ascent from the human body to the work of art and from the work of art to the Idea' takes place 'under the shadow of a whip' (1989: 22). As part of his treatise in *Masochism:*

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[21]   Stallybrass and White demonstrate the function of the classical body as more than an aesthetic model by elaborating on Vasari's system of Vitruvian categories – *regola*, *ordine*, *misura*, *disegno*, *maniera*. In addition, they link the code of behaviour determined by the discursive classical body to progressive rationalism and Foucault and Weber's subsequent understanding of forms of functional purity and institutionalisation (1986: 22).

Coldness and Cruelty, he differentiates de Sade's practice from von Sacher-Masoch on a number of levels, including the former as demonstrative and the latter as dialectical and thereby fetishistic[22]. Literature that is 'pornological', according to Deleuze, confronts language with its own limits and corresponds to Foucault's understanding of de Sade in *The Order of Things* as 'an immense expanse of shade' below the level of representation (1970: 211). For Foucault this is the level de Sade employed against the repetitiveness of discourse and in his discussion of de Sade, as well as Fourier and Loyola, Barthes argues that theatricalisation is required in order to 'found a new language' (1976: 5). Barthes is referring to a process by which a 'formulator', according to his conception of the 'revolutionary' writer, unlimits language, as opposed to constructing a setting for representation (1976: 5-6). Post-dramatic theatre, similarly, produces a new textuality and for Lehmann this does not infer the disappearance of dialogue, but rather its return in the form of an emphasis between performer (stage) and spectator (1997: 58). It is a point that clarifies Grant's 'dialogic-monologue' and specifically the compositional responsibility she confers to the spectator in Scene 13. Grant delivers the following text to all present in the space, performer and spectator, as the lights in the venue fade gradually.

> Here is the place. Now you must be prepared to enter. Wipe clean your thoughts. Put away your memories as of another season. Here you will enter uncovered and helpless. Listen. Your body knows before you know it. Now from your body take your cue. Here among these solid walls let your lonely spirit crumble. I see a mighty gust crack open walls into a ruinous heap. Roof is wrenched from stay and hurled skyward. Do not be discouraged. We will blowtorch the darkness and burn a play of shadows on these ruined walls. Bring out the trestles and prop them up amongst this mess of stone and timber. This crush of iron, this tangle of wire streamers. Now, as we stand facing one another in mutual estrangement, let us lean forward and kiss the past, so that the passing of time may bring a pleasurable reunion with what is yet to come. (Grant, '13 – Here is the Place Text', 5)

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[22]   For a summary of Deleuze's (1989) account of the distinction between sadism and masochism see page 134.

Grant's 'Here is the Place Text' assumes an auspicious tone, particularly in light of the next scene, and signals the descent into a carnivalesque disassembly of power or, more specifically, its perspective as it is embodied in the structure and (historical) hierarchy of the theatre medium. In scene 14, 'The Wall', members of the cast wheel in a large trolley loaded up with cardboard. The cardboard is assembled into boxes by both the performers and standard price members of the audience and laid across the space in front of the gallery occupied by the 1st Class Ticket holders. Gradually the 1st Class audience is cut off from the performance space in front of them as the boxes are piled on top of each other forming a wall in an action the company described in the published text as a 'building project' (5). Ryan is partitioned with the 1st Class Ticket holders and as the wall is erected repeatedly and increasingly anxiously declares, 'I love you' to them (5). As a consequence, the first class audience is unable to see the next scene and this not only alters their interpretation of it considerably, but in fact usurps their role (and 'right') as a spectator. Similarly, the Standard price audience is cut off from the action taking place behind the cardboard barrier and instead, witnesses Aloise stalking Baylis with a chair. Baylis is momentarily pinned to the wall by the object as Aloise delivers a prose fragment describing how she is beaten and tied up by a man for sexual gratification. At the conclusion of this scene Aloise and Baylis sit on two separate chairs placed on top of tables in front of the wall. Like Grant located on a rostrum, Aloise and Baylis face the 1st Class audience concealed by the cardboard barrier. Behind the fortification Ryan is hoisting himself into the air on a pulley. He hangs by his feet until the hostess for the 1st Class spectators, Spence, swings him crashing through the wall. In the next scene Grant addresses the spectators directly once again about the events they are experiencing and emphasises that there can be no 'concord, unity, sympathy, mass', and that 'we play in the ruins of our origins' (5).

Like the pre-tragic realm of Castellucci's thought and Kristeva's conception of the uncertain borders of narcissism arising from the archaic relation to the mother, Grant suggests the 'dis-order' of semiotic incursion. It is a 'regression' that raises the broader question of the movement of theatrical exploration embodied in Peter Brook's

conception of 'a way forward, back to Shakespeare' (in Pochhammer 1997: 15). For The Sydney Front it is not Shakespeare and his co-option as an epistemological standard in service of the tyranny of the text, but the retrograde heterogeneity of the grotesque body that provides a way forward. Heiner Müller has said that, 'We have not arrived at ourselves as long as Shakespeare writes our plays' (in Pochhammer 1997: 15). 'Ourselves' for The Sydney Front signifies the indissociable relationship between performer and spectator in the creative act; a spectator that has more in common with the grotesque figures of a painting by the Flemish artists, Bosch or Bruegel, than the stationary gaze of an audience directed towards the monumental, pedestal, proscenium-arch stage. By the final scenes of *First and Last Warning* both spectator and performer have mingled as observers, martyrs and tyrants in a grotesque 'excess' that challenges the dictates of conformism. Baylis attempts to reconstruct the wall, rather awkwardly on stilts, and Aloise throws a container of water over Kellaway. Aloise then proceeds to forcibly transform Kellaway into a clown in a tuxedo shirt before he is winched in a harness above the performers and spectators below. From here he is swung in the harness and sings, while members of the first class audience are ushered to positions around the space with their lounge chair. Kellaway invites the standard price audience to change into their own clothes and is released from the harness by a volunteer. *First and Last Warning* concludes with Kellaway telling stories about theatre celebrities he has met as audience members choose to leave the auditorium, and self-consciously close the production.

The Sydney Front presented its final production *Passion* at The Performance Space in November 1993. In *Passion* the members of the company acted as facilitators assisting the audience to construct the set and act out the performance event. One spectator, for example, had the opportunity to sit at a table with bread and wine, and to recite text relayed through a head-set. In 1993 The Sydney Front decided to return the funding ($125,000) it had received from the Australia Council for the Arts and the New South Wales Ministry for the Arts for its 1994 season, and stated that to continue would be

superfluous or worse repetitious, to cite Baylis, as the 'living dead' (in Dwyer 1994: 20). Despite its decision to disband The Sydney Front has attained an enduring resonance in the performance scene in Australia. In 1989 in an interview with Caroline Moore for the *London Australian Weekly*, Baylis pointed out:

> There is nothing really Australian about us, not in the jingoistic or obvious sense. Of course there is an Australian feel, and this is most obvious by our irreverent style. We're irreverent to institutions and ourselves. (Baylis in Moore 1989: 20)

A spirit of irreverence has been popularised as inherent to the Australian character from the days of early settlement to the present, and in the context of this dissertation it raises a broader question about cultural heritage and frames of 'meaning' particularly relevant in Chapter 4 and 5. The following quote by Baylis about performing *The Pornography of Performance* in Salzburg exemplifies this point.

> It's odd here in Austria. There are obvious sexual things which offend some people, but here the biggest problems came when we used a piece of classical Viennese music, *The Radetzky March*, and we treated it rather badly. We march around with our pants off to it. I think that offended the middle-class Austrians more than anything we did with the cup-cakes. (Baylis in Urban and Morrish 1989: [n.pag.])

Baylis' perplexity attains a fittingly comic resonance, particularly in light of Kristeva's understanding of the abject as a narcissistic crisis heard at the fringes of the feminine (1982: 209).

As this chapter nears its conclusion it is worth returning to the debate that accompanied the period that members of The Sydney Front performed together as a company. Soon after the group launched its first production Christopher Allen explored the question of political theatre and referred to The Sydney Front's *Waltz* and Entr'acte's *OSTRAKA* as examples of a possible direction for political theatre form in Australia (see [c. 1987]: 45-6). He described these productions as 'theatre of

disassociation' and the radical shifts from 'sadism', for example, to 'parody' as correlating to the 'speed of mass media'. In doing so, Allen concluded that the hysteria of these works 'reveals the emptiness beneath' signification and subsequently addresses the problem of 'meaning' and dramatic structure or 'art that continues the lie of transparence and communication'. Allen's reading reflects the influence of Baudrillard's critique of the mass media in the 1980s in local debate by practitioners and scholars in Sydney[23]. It is not the radical application of either hysteria or sadism, however, that reflects the borderline state intrinsic to the productions analysed above by The Sydney Front, and the 'beneath' Allen refers to is hardly an empty gesture or the sign. Instead, the principles of abjection incorporate the spectator in a dramaturgy that opens up a space comparable to the pre-logical realm of the 'chora' and its highly charged political dimensions: non-hierarchy and heterogeneity.

If the idea of a dominant (historical) model of dramaturgy, such as naturalism, is applied to post-dramatic theatre, a non-homogeneous practice emerges that addresses a fundamental shift in terms of the spectator. It is a shift that alters the terms of dramaturgy and more specifically, the principles of composition. In *Passion*, for example, the spectator is not only responsible for fusing its elements, but assembling the components of the performance-text. Within the intertextual cosmology of carnival, The Sydney Front's grotesque body embroils the spectator in an insecure narcissistic bind. For Kristeva the sacred power of horror infers a 'hallowing out of abjection through the Crisis of the Word' (1982: 208). Modern literature, she reasons, discloses the abject and it is a supposition highly applicable to the aesthetic 'logic' of The Sydney Front. It is perhaps not surprising that the potential of the body in post-dramatic theatre, the 'pulsating mucous' Castellucci re-claims through the Oedipal dimensions of tragedy, is intimately connected to the horror of being, its incompleteness, or what for Kristeva 'shows up with a comic gleam the religious and political pretensions that attempt to give meaning to the human adventure' (1982: 209). Far from constituting a

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[23]   Marsh points out in *Body and Self: performance art in Australia 1969-92* that Baudrillard's critique of the media in the context of capitalism 'were well know to artists in Australia' (1993: 194).

residual category of practice The Sydney Front's 'excess' exposes the longevity of the *logos* of drama and its psycho-symbolic domain.

4

Heiner Müller: 'I TOLD YOU YOU SHOULDN'T COME BACK DEAD IS DEAD'[1]

Disturbing 'business-as-usual': liquidating the 'author' in the post-dramatic text

> Ich glaube grundsätzlich, daß Literatur dazu ist, dem Theater Widerstand zu leisten. Nur wenn ein Text nicht zu machen ist, so wie das Theater beschaffen ist, ist er für das Theater produktiv, oder interessant. (Müller 1986: 18)

> I believe fundamentally that literature is there to pose resistance to the theatre. Only when a text cannot be done within the way theatre is constructed is it productive or interesting for the theatre.

In 1984 the Performing Arts Journal published the first collection of texts by Heiner Müller in English in America. Carl Weber edited the collection and based his selection on the 'plays' Müller wrote and/or completed after his visit to the United States in 1975/76. Weber identifies *Germania Death in Berlin* ('Germania Tod in Berlin') as Müller's 'first leap out of the confinements of Brecht's model' (1984: 17). Finished in 1971 *Germania Death in Berlin* is a 'kind of assemblage', according to Weber, and evidence of the new form Müller developed in his later works and referred to as 'synthetic fragment' (1984: 17). Volker Bohn has remarked that an analysis of the relational framework underpinning the scenes, characters, stylistic elements and political references integral to *Germania Death in Berlin* constitutes the only option for a wholistic interpretation, albeit provisional, that avoids the convenient adoption of any one of the following conflicting standpoints: critic of Federal Republic of Germany/critic of the German Democratic Republic, victory of the workers/defeat of the workers, historical

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[1] Heiner Müller *Explosion of a Memory/Description of a Picture* (1989: 101)

pessimism/historical optimism (2003: 208). In a broader context these standpoints contributed to the structural dyad defining Müller's singularity in theatre and literature in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s, and the range of misunderstandings that resulted. A marginal figure in the GDR despite the origins of his work and his conception of himself as a GDR writer, Müller's texts were increasingly staged from the 1970s in West Germany, France, Italy and Switzerland[2]. Hailed as postmodern and anchored in social emancipation Müller's later work, like his earlier pieces in the GDR where he endured a publishing and production ban, cannot be reduced to specific dramaturgical 'traditions' and instead manifest developments critical to re-conceptualising theatre at its literary 'genesis' – the dramatic text and its privileged position in the compositional hierarchy of the theatre medium. As a consequence, for Lehmann, Müller constitutes the most important author of post-dramatic texts (2002: 340).

Müller presents a pertinent case study in the context of this dissertation not simply on the basis of the 'literary' aesthetic he developed in opposition to conventional theatre, but more broadly in terms of the discourses elaborating on theatre aesthetics in a contemporary context. More specifically, Müller's textual form has contributed to discussion of the implementation of Artaud's ideas for the theatre and has been read in relation to larger cultural theoretical debates – poststructuralism and postmodernism. In her article 'Vom Theater der Revolution zur Revolution des Theaters', Katharina Keim points out that Müller's writing practice is nothing less than an aesthetic inspired by Artaud and the French poststructuralist critique of western representational systems reflected in the modern theatre model, and not simply a development of Brecht's theatre project focusing on a re-literarisation of the stage (1997: 86). Lehmann has analysed the significant correlation between the poststructuralist thought emerging in the mid-1960s and the development of Müller's realm of images, his 'timeless' spatial treatment of historical teleology as 'slippage' and the implications for the author and subjectivity as a result of the 'assembly' process specific to his writing (see 1982: 71-81). In doing so, he cautiously qualifies the entirely different context in

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[2]   The Zürcher Schauspielhaus presented the premiere of Müller's *Prometheus* in 1969.

which Müller's 'drama' developed (1992: 71). The tendency to interpret Müller's montage of heterogeneous forms – fragmentary prose, letters, scenes etc – and extensive incorporation of historical and literary citations as postmodern infers the imposition of a general cultural theory and the subsequent abrogation of the practices and discourses specific to the theatrical spectrum: classic, modern and 'postmodern'. In 1978 in a lecture in New York Müller addressed the periodising nature of postmodern theory as colonial politics, before clarifying the 'disappearance of the author' in terms of Kafka's understanding of literature as '*an affair of the people*' and for Müller that constitutes a language liberated from the page (1979: 56-57).

Müller's 'synthetic fragments' subsequently question the basic Aristotelian construction of drama, the privileging of the plot and explicitly the idea of authorial intention. As a consequence, his work addresses the fundamental tension differentiating traditional understandings of dramaturgy as the art of writing a play and a conception of dramaturgy as a compositional logic of the theatre situation. In light of the stronghold that the 'new wave' of Australian playwriting continues to exert locally and the presentation of plays by a younger generation of German writers over the last few years in Australia[3] and most notably the recent selection of the Sydney Theatre Company's Benedict Andrews[4] as a guest director under Thomas Ostermeier at the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz in Berlin, it is worth briefly considering the familiarity of Müller's material in Australia. In his 1993 theatrical casebook *The Mudrooroo/Müller*

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[3] The presence of German plays performed in Australia strengthened in the first half of the decade. Sydney Theatre Company, for example, presented a program of plays and readings by a younger generation of German writers, including Marius von Mayenburg (*Fireface* directed by Benedict Andrews for the 2001 Sydney Festival), David Gieselman (*Mr Kolpert* directed by Benedict Andrews at the Wharf) and Rainald Goetz (*Jeff Koons* directed by Falk Richter for the 2002 Sydney Writers' Festival). Chris Bendall, similarly, directed the following plays by Roland Schimmelpfennig for Melbourne's Theatre@Risk: *Arabian Night* (10-22 February 2004); *The Woman Before* (4-20 November 2005). In addition, Schimmelpfennig presented a reading of his play *Before/After* at the 2005 Australian National Playwrights' Conference and NIDA has presented a production of his play *Push Up 1-3* (8 September-1 October 2005).

[4] Benedict Andrews was a Resident Director at the Sydney Theatre Company from 2000 to 2003. For the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz in Berlin he has directed Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* (June 2004) and he is due to direct the up-coming production of David Harrower's *Blackbird* (November 2005).

Project, initiator of *The Aboriginal Protesters* Gerhard Fischer emphasises that Müller 'is unknown in Australia' (1995: 5) and in Lehmann and Patrick Primavesi's *Heiner Müller Handbuch*, Fischer details the non or at best marginal reaction to the 'radical challenge' of Müller's texts by the official theatre system in Australia (2003: 361). Fischer points out independent groups typically staged Müller's *Quartet* on the basis of its relatively cost-effective two character structure[5] and the success of the film adaptation of Christopher Hampton's play *Dangerous Liaisons* based on Choderlos de Laclos novel *Les Liaison Dangereuses*[6]. Despite the fact that stagings of Müller's work have been largely limited to an academic context apart from productions of *Quartet*, Weber's collection influenced a number of artists key to the development of post-dramatic theatre in Australia. In a recent article reflecting on the performance scene in the 1980s and 1990s Kellaway commented on the awareness of Müller at the outset of the 80s in the following way.

> Heiner Müller was ripping European theatre apart (though we really hadn't heard much about it in those days). (Kellaway 2002: [n.pag.])

Both Kellaway and Ryan continued to stage Müller as part of a polymorphous synergy of texts beyond The Sydney Front. In The Opera Project's 2003 production *another night: medea*[7], the company combined the Greek classic with Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, as well as Müller's *Medea Material* and *Landscape with Argonauts* and Ryan

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[5]   The written content of Müller's *Quartet* consists of an exchange between Choderlos de Laclos' characters, the Marquise de Merteuil and Vicomte de Valmont.

[6]   *Quartet* has been staged by the following groups in Australia. The Sydney group Harlos Productions presented the work as part of the Adelaide Fringe Festival in February 1990. (Director and Valmont, David Ritche; Merteuil, Gertraud Ingeborg). Malthouse Theatre in Melbourne staged the production two years later. (Director, Ariette Taylor; Merteuil, Melita Jurisic; Valmont, Robert Morgan). In 2000 Brink Theatre Company performed the piece in the Queens Theatre in Adelaide in May. (Director, Gerard McArthur; Merteuil, Collen Cross; Valmont, Syd Brisbane). In June (8-18) that year the La Mama Theatre in Melbourne, highly regarded for its critical contribution to the 'revolution' establishing an 'Australian' drama at the end of the 1960s, presented Müller's *Quartet*. (Director, David Symons; Merteuil, Susan Bamford; Valmont, Bernard Caleo).

[7]   The Performance Space, Sydney, presented The Opera Project's production *another night: medea* in April/May 2003.

presented *www.ophelia/hamlet.au*, a re-working of *Hamletmachine* at PACT Youth Theatre in August 1998. Like Kellaway and Ryan's later treatment of Müller's text, the explication of *The Pornography of Performance* in Chapter 3 attests to the emergence of artistic directions – fragmentation, simultaneity, the (grotesque) desemanticisation of the (classical) body – pointing to broader developments in post-dramatic theatre internationally and not simply the re-staging of material. The following chapter, however, indicates the complexity inherent in geographically transposing the cultural politics of a particular text to another (national) context. Furthermore, the following summary of Müller's biography, like the description of Mudrooroo's background in Chapter 5, elaborates on the extraordinarily different modes of experience and frames of 'meaning' contributing to aesthetic praxis, its creative and institutional production and reception.

'Necrophilia is love of the future'[8]: Heiner Müller & the 'weight' of history

Born in 1929 in Saxony in Germany, Müller died on 20 December 1995. He was buried in the Dorothenstädtischen Friedhof in Berlin in the company of a number of eminent German philosophers and literary figures, including Brecht, Hegel and Heinrich Mann. Müller's life, or at least what John Milfull refers to as his 'conscious lifespan':

> mirrors that of the GDR – from the bloody end of World War II through the difficult years of socialist reconstruction to the profound disillusionment of the 'years of stagnation' and the ultimate implosion of the GDR, which he survived by only five depressive years of black clownery. (Milfull 2004: [n.pag.])

From a very early age the political rationale behind State borders impressed itself on Müller. His father, Kurt Müller, a functionary in the Social Democrat Party during the Weimar Republic was interned in the Sachsenburg concentration camp upon Hitler's appointment as Chancellor of the German Reich in 1933. Upon his release he was

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[8]   Heiner Müller in Kalb (1998: 15).

unable to find employment. In 1943 Müller was required to undertake official duty in the Hitler Youth and his father was conscripted into the armed forces (or Wehrmacht). Drafted into the Reichsarbeitsdienst (German Labor Service)[9] in the last year of World War II, Müller witnessed the final stages of fighting in Mecklenburg in Northern Germany. At the end of the war he spent two days as a POW with American soldiers before returning to his home in Soviet occupied Germany. After completing high school Müller served as a librarian and began to write, initially finding work with the *Volksstimme* in Chemnitz as a journalist. In 1947 Müller moved to Frankenberg/Sachsen, where his father had been elected the mayor of Frankenberg. With the final partition of Germany into two countries in 1949, Müller's father, who had resumed his activity with the Social Democrat Party, found himself expelled from the newly formed Socialist Unity Party (SED) as a Titoist[10] two years later. Müller's parents fled to West Germany and Müller remained in the GDR. Weber entitled his introduction to the *Hamletmachine* volume, 'The Pressure of Experience' and this phrase encapsulates not simply Müller's early life but the acute uncertainty that continued to impact on Müller's artistic development in the GDR. It is an experience that resonates powerfully in terms of the politics of perception, a politics that finds expression in Lehmann's point that theatre, like all art, asks for justice, a justice that might well be 'impossible' to attain (2002: 19) or in Müller's words:

> I have always been an object of history and am therefore trying to become a subject. (Müller 1986: 88)

In the year the Soviet Union formed an East German State, Bertolt Brecht and Helene Weigel founded the Berliner Ensemble in East Berlin. A few years later Müller applied for the position of *Meisterschüler* with Brecht. His application was unsuccessful.

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[9]   On the basis of the Labor Service Act of 1935 every German male between the ages of 19-25 was required to serve for a year in the Reichsarbeitsdienst prior to entering the army.

[10] From 1943 Josip Broz Tito was the prime minister (and later president until his death in 1980) of Yugoslavia. His nationalistic policies consistently conflicted with the Soviet Union.

However, his first play performed in 1957, *Der Lohndrücker* ('The Scab') received an acknowledgement prize (Anerkennungspreis) from the Culture Ministry. In 1958 and 1959 he worked as a dramaturg at the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin. But by 1961, the year the Berlin Wall was erected, a production of Müller's play *Die Umsiedlerin oder Das Leben auf dem Land* ('The Resettler') lead to Party criticism and his expulsion from the Writers Association (DSV) and a publishing and production ban. He continued to write under pseudonyms and severely restrictive financial conditions, and it was not until 1988 that his expulsion from the DSV was formally revised. The situation had been exacerbated by another SED censure in 1965 which resulted in the cancellation of the production of his play *Der Bau* ('The Construction Site') before its premiere at the Deutsches Theater. *Der Bau* would receive its premiere fifteen years later at the Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz in Berlin. On a personal level, the suicide of his second wife and collaborator Inge Müller in 1966 added to Müller's difficult circumstances in the GDR.

Despite his 'illegitimate' professional status, Müller maintained highly influential support. Composer Paul Dessau and director Ruth Berghaus remained loyal advocates and provided financial assistance following his expulsion from the Writers' Association. Berghaus demonstrated her professional respect for the politically censured artist when she assumed the direction of the Berliner Ensemble in 1970 and offered him the position of dramaturg. Müller stayed at the Berliner Ensemble until his appointment as a dramaturg at the Volksbühne under the Swiss director Benno Besson in 1976. From the late 1960s and during the 1970s Müller adapted ancient Greek drama and Attic references span his work. Müller's treatments of *Philoctetes*, *Herakles 5*, *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Prometheus* were written from 1961 and 1968. His adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* had been prepared for Benno Besson's production at the Deutsches Theater in 1967. *Philoctetes* formed the first of a trilogy of pieces that attempted to re-examine Brecht's *Lehrstücke*. The final work of the series *Mauser*, based on *The Measures Taken*, was deemed counter-revolutionary and explicitly prohibited. As a consequence,

it was never performed in the GDR[11] and its premiere took place in the USA in 1975. It was hardly 'a good start for his life as house-author at the new Berliner Ensemble', in Alexander Karschnia and Lehmann's words (2003: 14). Karschnia and Lehmann attribute Müller's swift 'rehabilitation' in the GDR to Berghaus' staging of Müller's *Zement* (Cement) in 1973. Müller described the Berliner Ensemble's performance in Budapest two years later as a 'heroic endeavour' (1994b: 243); an endeavour that ultimately resulted in the lifting of sanctions against him, officially acknowledged by the GDR's Lessing Prize which he received in 1975.

In addition to ancient Greek drama, Müller adapted Shakespeare in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, and it is Shakespeare Müller credits with liberating him from the simplification of Brecht (1994b: 265), the fable and parable form. Shakespeare's 'time', a synonym for war and revolution for Müller, corresponded to the October revolution and thereby provided him with material to explore communist history, according to Karschnia (2003: 164). In Müller's words:

> Lenin was a shakespearean [*sic*] character, Trotsky was a shakespearean [*sic*] character, Stalin was a shakespearean [*sic*] character. (Müller in Karschnia 2003: 164)

Müller's best known work internationally, *Hamletmachine*, took its final form during the process of translating *Hamlet* with Matthias Langhoff for Benno Besson at the Volksbühne in East Berlin. Müller had prepared his text as a commentary to Shakespeare's play and in 1990 staged *Hamletmachine* prior to the final act of Shakespeare's play at the Deutsches Theater. From 29 August 1989 to 24 March 1990 Müller rehearsed a cast of East German actors and the West German actress Margarita Broich for his *Hamlet/Maschine* production. *Hamletmachine* directly followed his staging of Shakespeare's play and coincided with a turning point in German history. The exodus of East German citizens through Czechoslovakia and Hungry had begun during the

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[11] Hans Diether Meves' attempt to mount the production in 1972 lead to his dismissal as General

rehearsal period. On the 4 November 1989 the largest demonstration ever staged in East Germany took place at Alexanderplatz. Heiner Müller and Ulrich Mühe, the actor playing Hamlet, addressed the crowd of protesters, alongside actors, authors, students and politicians and the Wall fell five days later on the 9 November 1989. In this context, Müller's comment about *Hamlet* re-politicises his ghost.

> *Hamlet* truly reflects the situation for the intellectual in German history, a situation which seemed to change after 1945, at least in East Germany. However, in 1956 – and for me even earlier in the fifties – it became evident that Hamlet was becoming a topical character again. Quite as Brecht once defined him: The man between the ages who knows that the old age is obsolete, yet the new age has barbarian features he simply cannot stomach. (Müller in Weber 1980: 137)

In Andzrej Wirth's opinion, however, it is Robert Wilson's production of *Hamletmachine* that is considered as 'a kind of theatrical masterpiece among all productions of Müller's plays to date' (1995: 213). Wirth's comment, which appeared as part of a collection of texts presented at a symposium dedicated to Müller in Sydney in 1994, has arguably maintained its currency. Furthermore, it is difficult to disagree with Lehmann's assessment of Wilson as the most influential theatre artist of the last thirty years (1999: 130). Müller met Wilson in California during his second trip to America in 1977, but his collaboration with Wilson did not begin until 1983 for the *CIVIL warS* project. In the 1970s and 1980s Müller received permission to travel to Western Europe and North America. The University of Texas in Austin invited him to undertake a writer-in-residency program in 1975 and this not only advanced the international reception of his work, but injected a new impulse into his art: the experience of landscape, a horizon beyond human beings, according to Karschnia and Lehmann (2003: 11). In addition, Karschnia and Lehmann point out that the United States presented Müller with a rich terrain of images and his sharp criticism of GDR bureaucrats equally applied to the figures behind the commodity-driven West. The mid-70s marked a significant

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Director of the Magdeburg Theatre.

transition not simply in Müller's work, but his status as a GDR-Author. Karschnia and Lehmann contend that Müller's 'entity' and more specifically the moment it ceased to be that of a classic GDR-Author coincided with his emancipation from the 'shackles of the old dramaturgy' (2003: 9). It is a point they qualify, however, by referring to the fact that Müller did not entirely relinquish the political and intellectual implications of this dramaturgy. For Müller:

> The net of Brecht's dramaturgy was too widespread for the microstructure of the new problems: 'class' was already a fiction. In reality, there was a conglomerate of old and new elements … the Great Model of Brecht was swept over by the sandstorm of reality. (Müller in Case 1983: 97)

Müller's resonance in West Germany and internationally increased rapidly with the publication of his texts by Rotbuch Verlag, which began in 1974. The Rotbuch editions, which were compiled by Müller, provided *a priori* access to his work. This enabled Girshausen to refer in 1978 to a 'Müller-Boom', and the first monograph on Müller's work in German followed two years later. It was not the stage but the published texts that predominantly introduced Müller's work to a broad public. As his biographer Jan-Christoph Hauschild points out, up until 1979 Müller's texts were rarely performed (2001: 312) and in 1988 critic Rüdiger Schaper reinforced this point by referring to the fact that considerably more had been written and debated about Müller than stagings of his material (in Hauschild 2001: 525-6). In addition, in Karschnia and Lehmann's view Müller's charisma contributed significantly to his popularity and his reception as a cult figure and 'world author' (2003: 10). Apart from the number of prestigious prizes Müller received in Germany, including the Georg Büchner Prize (1985), the National Prize for Art and Literature in the GDR (1986) and the Heinrich von Kleist Prize (1990), Müller's recognition spread as a result of the European Theatre Prize which he was awarded in 1991. That year the Festival d'Avignon's focus on Müller consisted of multiple presentations of a number of productions of his work. In Berlin Müller had re-joined Brecht's old theatre on the Schiffbauerdamm. From 1992 he joined Peter Zadek,

Fritz Marquardt, Peter Palitzsch and Matthias Langhoff (who was replaced by Eva Mattes shortly after his appointment) as part of its directorial team. Finally, in 1995 Müller was appointed the Artistic Director of the Berliner Ensemble and died later that year.

For Weber:

> Of all the riches of drama from the non-English speaking world, the playwrights who have attained a somewhat stable position in the American repertoire can be counted on ten fingers. From the 20th century, there seem to be only two or three authors who effectively joined this small group: Beckett, Brecht and Pirandello. It was hardly probable that a playwright whose work is as exacting in form and substance as Müller's would be among them. (Weber 2003: 3)

Interest in Müller as a playwright outside of Germany is highly significant, as Weber infers, on the basis of the form of writing he produced for the stage in the final of the phases constituting his career[12]. It is precisely the question of dramatic form that is at issue in this chapter. This is not to circumvent the attention Müller deserves in Australia in production or to undermine his fascination for a number of critics, including Jonathan Kalb. For Kalb the primary question of Müller's identity remains the most interesting aspect of his work despite the level of research undertaken by German journalists and scholars into this subject. Kalb's interest in Müller is partially the result of the dichotomy between Müller's legendary status in Germany and what he perceives as Müller's absolute marginality in the United States of America. As a consequence, he positioned his monograph *The Theater of Heiner Müller* as a general study and in this respect it is the first of its kind to appear in English. It aims to elucidate Müller's work through an analysis of what he identifies as the alter egos Müller

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[12] Müller's career can be divided into the production plays he wrote about the GDR (*The Scab*, *The Correction*, *The Construction Site*), his literary and mythological adaptations (*Philoctetes*, *Herakles 5*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *The Horation*, *Prometheus*, *Macbeth*), the material dealing with the question of the revolution after Leninism (*Masuer*, *Cement*, *Germania Death in Berlin*) and his final 'synthetic fragments' (*Hamletmachine*, *Bildbeschreibung*, *Landscape with Argonauts*).

constructed: Brecht, Kleist, Mayakovsky, Shakespeare, Artaud, Genet, Wagner, Beckett and Proteus. That is, the authors and cultural-historical paradigms Kalb argues inspired Müller's creative activity (1998: 14). In addition, Kalb draws attention to Müller's often contradictory and at times politically 'incorrect' statements, the latter of which attains particular resonance in the context of the next chapter. As a result he concludes that:

> Half of his prodigious artistic effort went into formulating sensible sounding social and political ideas while he other half went into throwing up smokescreens to prevent close rational scrutiny and extended argument of them. His famous hit-an-run aphorisms, a sort of conversational terrorism, were, in this sense, his compromises with himself.

> Müller was not merely a provocateur; he was a clownish provocateur [...]. The way he played fast and loose with facts from history and politics was, among other things, a clownish provocation geared specifically to his German context. (Kalb 1998: 12)

In this context, a potentially more productive way of understanding Müller's paradoxical attitude exists in an analysis of his writing, its process, and the way in which his texts actively oppose the idea of a dramaturgy consistent with the playwright's vision. That is, proposing a correlation between the positional instability inherent in his post-dramatic material and his approach to language in a range of contexts, including the interview which he developed into his own genre, according to Lehmann (2002: 339). In a conversation with Rick Takvorian in the second volume of the *Gesammelte Irrtümer* series, Müller posits a pre-linguistic realm as a starting point for his writing (1990: 41) and advocates that theatre must once again find its 'Nullpunkt' in a pre-language territory (1990: 45). Müller describes the inception of a text as 'a feeling for the space and the position of the figures in it and to one another' (1990: 41). Dialogue or text, he points out, emerge gradually from the non-verbal. In his explanation of the writing process Müller refers to a theory of silence as the most elementary basis of tragedy. That is, what lies beneath language and cannot be reduced in understanding to the idea of simple interruption, to a gap. Furthermore, as a result of his collaboration

with Wilson and specifically Wilson's production of *Hamletmachine* in New York, Müller refers to the treatment of text, of language as corporeal.

GUNDLING'S LIFE FREDERICK OF PRUSSIA LESSING'S SLEEP DREAM SCREAM: A Horror Story

In the first monograph examining Müller's texts in detail published in English *The Silence of Entropy or Universal Discourse: The Postmodernist Poetics of Heiner Müller*, Arlene Akiko Teraoka identifies *Gundling's Life ...* as a transitional work (1985: 51). In doing so, Teraoka links it to *Germania Death in Berlin* and *The Battle* ('Die Schlacht') as a continuation of Müller's critical engagement with modern German history, its structural myths and the period of German Enlightenment. It is pivotal, according to Teraoka, in so far as it introduces Müller's preoccupation with the intellectual and revolution, and the development of an artistic form that deconstructs dramatic convention. The latter point is fundamental to Lehmann's conception of post-dramatic theatre as not simply a relation-less form existing beyond 'drama' but as a development in terms of the possibility of decomposition and disassembly within drama itself (1999: 68). Teraoka associates *Gundling's Life ...* specifically with *Hamletmachine* and *The Task* ('Der Auftrag') as a work that exposes the inherently flawed model of bourgeois drama and draws on Lessing's dramatic theories, as well as Hegel's *Vorlesung über die Ästhetik* (1820-29) in order to clarify the fundamental aspects of this paradigm (see 1985: 81-6). In his *Hamburg Dramaturgy* Lessing posed the 'problem of drama'; that is, questioned the validity of the dramatic genre as an artistic medium. 'To what end the hard work of dramatic form?' he asked:

> Why build a theatre, disguise men and women, torture their memories, invite the whole town to assemble at one place if I intend to produce nothing more with my work and its representation, than some of those emotions that would be produced as well by any good story that every one could ready by his chimney-corner at home? (Lessing 1962: [No. 80] 198)

The comparative uniqueness of this question in late 18th and early 19th century Europe derived from an intellectual need to establish a German (dramatic) literary tradition. It is a point Schulz reinforces by pointing to the references in *Gundling's Life …* attesting to the dominance of French culture and the difficulty this infers in the assertion of Germany as a sphere of culture during this period (1980: 139). In the context of Enlightenment thought the dramatic model Lessing proposed depended upon the intention of a resolute protagonist propelling the action towards a logical conclusion, rational dialogue and a teleological conception of action and identity. For Teraoka, this is precisely the tradition Heiner Müller undermines in his later work. Beyond German dramatic heritage, however, *Gundling's Life …* opens up other possibilities for communication that resist more broadly Western theatre convention, as Wilson's staging of the German component of the *CIVIL warS* suggested in Cologne in 1984.

Gundling's Life …, written in 1977, can be divided into the triptych of its title: 'Gundling's Life'; 'Frederick of Prussia'; 'Lessing's Sleep Dream Scream'. 'Frederick of Prussia' includes the section 'HEINRICH VON KLEIST PLAYS MICHAEL KOHLHAAS'. It is a prose scene that appears to function as an anomaly and arguably reflects what Teraoka refers to as Kleist's uneasy incorporation into German Romanticism in the context of traditional literary history (1985: 69). Or in Müller's words:

> Kleist is something strange. The strange is actually what one wants to be.
> (Müller in Kalb 1998: 44)

Müller's textual partitions according to the figures, Gundling, Frederick of Prussia and Lessing present distinct aspects of the relationship between the 'intellectual' and State power. This is not to infer, however, a clear demarcation between these 'dignitaries' or to overlook the complex interconnection between Müller's 'voices', literary, intellectual and historical. In his autobiography *Krieg ohne Schlacht: Leben in zwei Diktaturen* Müller refers to the significance of a single actor playing the young Frederick the Great, Kleist and Lessing (1994b: 269). Furthermore, he points out that it is erroneous to read the

piece as a montage of its parts and instead emphasises the fluid transitions of the disparate elements constituting the production. Both the amalgamation of Müller's figures and his conception of *Gundling's Life's* ... transitional structure suggest an auditive space emerging from the unanimous experience and expression of Gundling, Frederick II, Lessing and Kleist, despite the seeming anomaly of the King's inclusion. Frederick II, as Georg Wieghaus points out, was an 'enlightened' and artistically talented monarch or at least according to the history books (1981: 101)[13]. In his article discussing Heiner Müller's dramaturgy 'Between Monologue and Chorus', Lehmann reasons that Müller's choral dimension simultaneously adopts the monologue mode and equally significantly, that this configuration is overwhelmingly neutral on the basis that Müller (like The Sydney Front) refuses to articulate a position in relation to the disparate theories, intentions and slogans in the text (2002: 343). It is a point that not only clarifies the political and aesthetic function of Müller's dramaturgical approach, but the way in which a space for the spectator is inscribed into the text.

The first scene of the triptych in *Gundling's Life* ... is set in a garden in Potsdam, the seat of the Prussian throne. Jakob Paul von Gundling was a Baron in the court of Frederick William I of Prussia and President of the Academy of the Arts and Mechanical Sciences (Akademie der Künste und der Mechanischen Wissenschaften)[14]. Frederick William I consistently tormented the scholar until his death in 1731; at which time Gundling was entombed in a beer barrel by the Prussian King. In his autobiography Müller described *Gundling's Life* ... as a self-portrait in many respects and it is a statement that attains subjective-historical resonance in light of this chapter's earlier reference to Müller's conception of himself as an object of history (1994b: 270). More specifically, Müller explicitly expresses empathy with Gundling, the first intellectual of his triptych.

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[13] Wieghaus also points to Lessing as a critic of Prussian power politics, which he emphasises as a lesser known fact about the famous dramatist and critic (1981: 101).

[14] This institution is known simply today as the Academy of the Arts (Akademie der Künste) and consisted of two separate academies during the Cold War. Heiner Müller was elected the President of the Berlin Academy of the Arts (Akademie der Künste zu Berlin), that is the Academy located in the East, following the re-unification of Germany until its amalgamation into a single institution in 1991.

Gundling's Life … opens with a dialogue between Frederick William I, the Soldier King of Prussia, his son Frederick in a Lieutenant's uniform, Gundling and three Officers of the Prussian army. In a grotesque act Frederick William I's flatulence literally introduces the corporeal 'reality' of the text, along with Frederick William I's brutal censure of his son's artistic passion. Müller's stage direction indicates that Frederick's flute is broken by his father, who reproaches his son – 'I shall teach him manners, the French frog. To turn up his nose at his father's farts!' (61)[15]. Frederick William I's flatulence is followed by a beer drinking ritual at a table during which Gundling refers to 'the fate of the philosophers … Socrates, the father of philosophy' (62). Müller's allusion to State persecution as a result of a philosopher's critical reasoning establishes an ironic trajectory from Attic classicism to the Enlightenment period of Frederick's reign.

Müller's text shifts from Frederick William I's handling of his son to a description of an emasculated bear pursuing Gundling around the table until he is brought to a halt. Blocked by the Officers' swords Gundling is embraced by the toothless and claw-clipped bear. It is an incident that alludes to Kleist's essay *On the Marionette Theatre* and specifically the parable of a fencing bear. Officer I's line 'The bride is aflame' (62) points to an actual event, the setting alight of Gundling at court. In response to the young Frederick's optimistic question – 'Will he tear him apart, Papa?' (62) – Frederick William I laughs and dispassionately accentuates the plight of the intellectual:

> He should take it as a lesson in what to make of philosophers [...]. Clip the paws of the people, those animals, and pull their teeth. Ridicule the intellectuals so the rabble won't get ideas. (Müller *Gundling's Life …*: 63)

Released from the grip of the bear, Gundling drops onto his back on the stage floor and delivers the following line in English from Shakespeare's Ophelia (Act 3, Scene 1):

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[15]   All quotes from Müller's *Gundling's Life Frederick of Prussia Lessing's Sleep Dream Scream: A Horror Story* are from Carl Weber's (ed and trans) collection *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage* (1984: 61-79).

> O WHAT A NOBLE MIND IS HERE O'ERTHROWN. (Müller [Shakespeare] *Gundling's Life ...*: 63)

Müller's citation from Shakespeare institutes an inter-textual dialogue that links Gundling's persecution to Hamlet's inability to act and more specifically, Ophelia's conception of Hamlet's capacity as a result of the state of his mental health. In doing so, Müller establishes not simply a parallel, firstly through Hamlet to Gundling and secondly to Frederick II in the next triptych, but a chorus of 'voices' funneling into monologic form. In the opening scene the young Frederick has already refused to follow the soldiers' example and urinate on Gundling, and as a consequence has had the epaulettes ripped off his uniform. Müller's initial triptych, explicitly loaded with references to historic incidents, not only foregrounds Frederick William I's militaristic rule, but transforms the tyrannical mandate of the Prussian State into a grotesque body; a body that can be elaborated upon in Bakhtin's sense of the term as a corpus continually transfiguring itself and creating another body (1984: 317) across time and space, across history.

'Prussian Games' is the first scene of the second triptych 'Frederick of Prussia' and opens with a children's game – blind man's bluff. Frederick and his sister Wilhelmina dress in each other's clothes, while Lieutenant Katte gropes towards them blindfolded. Wilhelmina regulates the relationship between the two boys by slapping their hands as they reach for each other. The historical figure Hans-Hermann von Katte aided Frederick in an attempt to flee Prussia and on Frederick William I's orders was beheaded in front of Frederick. Frederick's merciless rule is widely attributed to this event and the punishment he received. Frederick's authoritarian childhood and specifically the suppression of his homosexuality during his youth arguably contributed to his transformation into a merciless militarist. In this context Frederick's behest to Katte – 'Let's play tragedy. I shall be Phaedra' – and the quote from Racine's play[16] that follows in Müller's text heightens the shift from the paternal obliteration of Frederick's

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[16]   'Give me your sword if you refuse the arm.

youthful cultural aspirations and independence to the subsequent butchery it unleashes as the young Frederick assumes power and wages a ruthless, bloody war. 'Frederick of Prussia' is subsequently underpinned by the interrelation between play-acting (the body as idea-image) and a mechanistic concept of matter (the body as an instrument of the State) and this is rendered explicit through the references to masks, puppets and the marionette throughout the text. Müller's game of blind man's bluff draws to conclusion with Wilhelmina in a crude mask caricaturing Frederick William I. Wilhelmina mimics the King as she beats Frederick and Katte before they tie her to a chair in strips torn from Frederick's clothes and enact a mock execution. Müller then radically re-configures Frederick, Katte and Wilhelmina's infantile diversions by pointing to the primary potency of the interchangeability of the icon. The blindfold of a childhood game is transposed as an insignia of imminent death. In Müller's text Frederick is lead blindfolded in front of the firing squad his father has organised for Katte and is then forced to view the execution. Müller's historical 'modification', the substitution of a firing squad for the executioner's block situates the Prussian militarism of the 18th and 19th century as a precursor to twentieth century fascism. As Frederick's blindfold is removed, Katte's is tied.

In the next scene Müller's prose refers to Frederick pitilessly hurling fleeing soldiers back into battle, before he requests to be read to as he reclines in a folding chair. Frederick opts for Racine as opposed to Plutarch and listens to an extract from the French dramatist's *Brittanicus*. Müller's text then shifts to a title, the fairytale Rumpelstiltskin or 'THE SCHOOL OF THE NATION', which he sub-titles as 'A patriotic puppet play'. The following prose juxtaposes soldier puppets in uniforms of the Wehrmacht, which refers to the official name of the German armed forces from 1935-45, and John Bull and Marianne, the French national emblem. The armed forces of national-socialist Germany are goose-stepping into a fire in front of a snow storm as John Bull and Marianne throw knives at a world globe, which they have pulled from the bodies of dead Indians and 'Negroes' (66) . Frederick is simultaneously awarding grades

Give.' (Müller [Racine] *Gundling's Life …*: 64).

for soldiers on a blackboard – A for Outstanding, the Dead; B and C for the seriously wounded and F for Fail, the unscathed. In the meantime, John Bull and Marianne 'having eaten their fill' from the globe that they are cutting up and ingesting on each hit watch Frederick 'playing at war with his soldier-dolls' (66). It is an image that alludes to England (John Bull) and France's (Marianne) colonial conquests and the subsequent decimation of Indigenous peoples, as well as the Seven Year's War (1756-1763). In this period Prussia established herself as a major power and, at France's expense, England consolidated the British Empire; military accomplishments, as Teraoka notes, that had powerful ramifications for the modern world (see 1985: 57-58). Apart from the specific historical allusion, however, Müller's superimposition of the literary and cartoon character John Bull, created to personify Britain, and the French emblem of Marianne onto Prussia's military trajectory from mastery to 20th century defeat sketches an architecture of timelessness that reveals a relative 'truth' accessible to the future; a porthole of visibility not on logic and action, but rather oblivion. As the snow escalates and extinguishes the fire Müller's scene freezes and the stage is transformed into a ghost ship. Müller's prose describes the sailors nailing the captain to the mast, while a film runs forwards and backwards through the centuries to the sounds of *The Musical Sacrifice* by Handel.

'Prussian Games' is constituted by three primary images and an escalating number of tangential allusions: firstly, the infantile game of blind man's bluff and Racine's *Phaedra*; secondly, Frederick witnessing Katte's execution; and, thirdly, a war-mongering adult Frederick, infantile and psychotic, both protagonist and victim. In this final image Müller has replaced the disclosure of the prohibited feelings specific to Act II, Scene 5 of the love tragedy *Phaedra* with the heroic tragedy of *Britannicus* and the struggle against the tyrannical rule of the Roman Emperor Nero, before the reference to Rumpelstiltskin plummets the text into a fiery blizzard culminating in an oscillating film movement. As a consequence, it is highly difficult to verify, as Schulz and Lehmann point out, which passages can be traced to Müller the author and which to Müller the reader (1980: 149).

Furthermore, the incorporation of powerful imagery in 'Prussian Games' signals an internal shift that increasingly dissolves the dialogue form in order to privilege the amalgam of prose images constituting its visual domain. The temporal and spatial transitions Müller inscribes infer not simply a radically different approach to dramatic composition, but an attempt to release an unexplored level of experience in the spectator. In an article for *Text + Kritik* Lehmann described the 'engine room' of Müller's later writing as the aggregation of 'the theme of sliding historical teleology' ('das Thema der entgleitenden Geschichtsteleologie') and the 'image world gravitating towards the spatial' ('zum Räumlichen gravitierende Bildwelt') (1982: 75). Lehmann reasons that the result is a disturbance of historical and chronological reception comparable to the intense modification of the experience of normal time in Wilson's theatre and subsequently perception. It is a 'disturbance' that has raised the question of the feasibility of Müller's dramaturgy and in doing so, the termination of *logocentric* hierarchy associated with Artaud.

In his article '*Under the Sun of Torture*: A New Aesthetic of Cruelty: Artaud, Wilson and Müller', Scheer articulates Müller's Artaudian influence as less radical than the function of cruelty Artaud stipulated, which is to destroy 'our contemporary mode of thought'; an aim underpinned by the renunciation of life and its reformulation as a 'forceful becoming' (1995: 201). The consequence is a more viable dramaturgy in Scheer's analysis of *Hamletmachine*, although it is a point he qualifies by referring to the 'impossible' stage directions and imploded subjectivity of Müller's later work as divulging a connection to a more primary Artaud (1995: 201-2). For Müller, Artaud constituted a significant 'disturbance' on the basis that he did not conceive of theatre in terms of the separation of stage from auditorium (1986: 45-6). Artaud's 'psychosis' functioned as a point of departure, according to Müller (in Weber 1980: 140). In this context Müller clarifies the function of the contemporary playwright and practitioner as disturbing 'business-as-usual'; that is, theatre conventions, securities, distortions and harmony to paraphrase the late (East) German 'playwright'. The issues that materialise for Müller in the late

1970s are embedded in the problem of dramatic form. Müller articulated his critique of Brecht's parable as proof of the 'changing function of literature in a transition period' (in Girshausen 1981: 412). In Fiebach's assessment Müller's texts blatantly insist on a form of cultural production distinct from the printed script (1998: 88). It is not simply the de-privileging of the word that distinguishes the 'withdrawal' of conventional theatre language specific to Müller's writing, but the way in which his texts create a visual dimension. Imagery, Müller's 'dialogue with the dead' (1990: 64), the body and landscape open up a synchronic realm for analysis explicable in terms of the 'logic' Aristotle attributes to *opsis*, a space beyond the *telos* of 'plotted' dramatic form. In doing so, the resistance Müller's post-dramatic 'literary' form poses to (dramatic) theatre concerns its order of events ('pragmata'), its causal structure or logic, character and speech. Or in Müllers words:

> I believe the essential function of art on the whole is to challenge value and thought systems, in fact to explode them under certain circumstances. Very simply formulated: the function of art is to render 'reality' impossible. (Müller 1990: 24)

Lehmann and Patrick Primavesi discuss Müller's modus operandi as an 'author' in their introduction to the *Heiner Müller Handbuch* as a process of consistent adaptation, translation, commentary and quotation, and the culmination as an intertextual repository (2003: X). Lehmann and Primavesi subsequently reason that a clear, fixed meaning is acutely questionable in relation to Müller's work on the basis that the text itself is comprehended as 'material' and consciously surrendered to the reading/theatre process in terms of interpretation (2003: XIII). As a result Müller's work has been increasingly subject to debate about the 'author' or what Kalb describes as 'exaggerated reports about the death of the Author' and attributes to the 'paradigm Artaud' (1998: 105). Artaud advocated the idea of a play that does not pass through words, but is rather created directly on the stage on the basis that 'staging is theatre far more than a written, spoken play' (1985: 30). It is a concept that reflects both Open City and The

Sydney Front's approach to the theatrical medium and The Sydney Front's *Passion* is potentially one of the most explicit applications of Artaud's sentiment. In his seminal essay 'The Death of the Author' Roland Barthes postulates that writing is a 'neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away' and that language speaks, that is, 'performs', as opposed to the author (1977: 142-3). He refers to the Brechtian technique of distancing in order to elaborate on the structurally absent author and the implications this infers for temporality and the reader (spectator) (1977: 145, 148). It is an 'absence' rendered explicit in Müller's intertextual strategy and the multi-dimensional choral space that emerges is intimately connected to the idea of the 'dead'.

In *Gesammelte Irrtümer 2* Müller points out that the dead are not extinguished in history and their evocation is a function of drama and will remain so until what has been buried with them has been released (1990: 64). It is the future and not the past that Müller stipulated as the temporal condition of this buried state in his 1986 discussion with Wolfgang Heise. Furthermore, in a conversation about Shakespeare, Genet and dramaturgy, Müller described the adaptation or translation of the Elizabethan dramatist as comparable to a blood transfusion, a 'vampiristic' activity (1986: 145). Lehmann refers to this point in his article 'Heiner Müller's spectres' in order to clarify the function of the ghost, temporally and in terms of identity. For Lehmann Müller's phantoms fracture the writer's 'self' and institute discontinuous time-spaces and thereby 'resistance to the process of history becoming a ghost' (1995: 88). From this perspective the 'paradigm Artaud' liberates the dialogue form from the written page and opens up a theatrical dimension for the spectator to engage in an interchange with the structurally absent and/or chronologically 'dead'. It is not a question of inflated accounts of the passing of the author, but rather of re-conceiving the space of memory ('Gedächtnisraum') specific to post-dramatic textuality, its 'polyglossia'. Like Melrose's 'culinary' approach to the institution of theatre and The Sydney Front's grotesque ingurgitation of (dramatic) literature, Müller describes artistic production as a 'carnivorous' occupation that re-configures the 'material' of the 'dead':

> To know [the dead], you have to eat them. And then you spit out the living particles [...] [Reading is] an absolute luxury. Eating literature is faster. (Müller in Kalb 1998: 18)

To read infers interpretation and translation and from this perspective it is perhaps not surprising that Müller's 'methodology' insinuates a bodily (and by implication theatrical) relation to the dead state of literature as a corpse and corpus of ghosts or altar to history. Contrary to a conception of the theatre as a (literary) instant, universally 'frozen' for the spectator, the 'particles' Müller 'resurrects' oppose the distance implied by chronology and the temporal frames structuring the totality of Aristotelian poetics – a beginning, middle and end. In an interview with Sylvère Lotringer Müller reinforced this point by referring to a critic's observation that his later 'plays' violate a linear concept of history and in doing so, equate to the 'impact of ideas, and of the idea of history, on human bodies' (in Fiebach 1998: 82). For Müller this constitutes the aim of his theatre or in his words:

> [...] the thrusting on stage of bodies and their conflict with ideas. As long as there are ideas, there are wounds. Ideas are inflicting wounds on the body. (Müller in Fiebach 1998: [Note 3] 82)

Ideas that procure corporeal wounds: The scenes constituting 'Frederick of Prussia' are tantamount to Müller's understanding of pedagogics through terror ('Pädagogik durch Schrecken') developed by Brecht in his *Lehrstücke*, although Müller's later form departs radically from Brecht's dramaturgy (1990: 23). Each (linguistic) image distends into the shock of its dilation in the next. In this respect, Müller's poetry of the senses functions like a series of physical tremors or quakes fracturing the incontestable 'logic' of the historic-political fabric of experience and thought. Schools, barracks, prisons, asylums and the ideology of pragmatic 'reason' and 'rationality' of action maim the body. Müller's dramaturgy of time, its différance, pulses as a series of sensations in the shredded flesh of language and imposes on the body a timeless regime of abuse, death and decay.

At the close of the cinematic transposition of centuries of history, elements of the next scene in *Gundling's Life …* are suggestive of Kleist's *Prince of Homburg.* The stage directions preceding the dialogue describe Frederick playing with a Prussian doll in a mask of his father in front of a mirror. In Müller's text a Saxon woman pleads for the life of her husband, who 'Out of pure love' (67) has deserted and broken Prussian military law. Kleist's *Prince of Homburg* disobeyed orders and lead his troops into battle against the Swedes and to victory. Despite his triumph he is condemned to death for insubordination, which he accepts only to be pardoned as a result of the pleas of his fiancée to the Elector of Brandenburg. The Prince's 'unPrussian' response, 'Since I have seen my grave I care for nothing/Except to live', acknowledges fear and the relative, as opposed to the absolute nature of the human condition advocated by Prussia (3.2: 1002-3). Müller's soldier is not pardoned and is executed in front of his wife, while Frederick hides behind the Saxon Lady. It is a scene that parallels the execution of Katte in front of Frederick. In the earlier scene Frederick responds to Katte's capital punishment with the words, 'Sire, that was I' (65). Müller has pointed to this line as a core sentence in, and by implication the nucleus of, *Gundling's Life …* (1994b: 269). It is a moment that links the act of identification to horror and virtually renders the experience of terror perceptible on a physical level (Korte 1997: 80). In the scene with the Saxon Lady Frederick comments on the squirt of blood and this indicates a development on the part of the King in relation to cruelty. Frederick wearing a mask of the eagle, the symbol of Prussia, responds to the Saxon Lady's 'My children' with 'My cannons need their fodder, breed it, mare' (70). His identity has merged or rather 'hemorrhaged' with the bloody ghost of Prussia.

A Professor conducting a tour of an insane asylum with his students follows and the 'educational value' of the straight jacket is described as dialectical: 'The more the patient struggles, the tighter he straps himself, mark my words, into his own destiny' (72), remarks the Professor. 'Man, unfortunately, is not a machine' (73): these words sum up the Professor's admiration for the practical application of a masturbation bandage that prevents a boy from returning to his habit as soon as the cane is lifted.

According to the Professor, the Enlightenment State is founded on the masses' sweat, excretion and catatonia. In this context the Absolutism of Prussian and German Idealism is equated to a sanitarium for the mentally ill and the pedagogic basis for this scene extends to God's sacrifice of Christ. 'Zebahl, Zebaoth, also called the Bloody Baal by those pupils who were entrusted to his punishing hand' (73) culminates in the following text which is whispered by ZEBAHL:

> Yes, I created the world. I am the fool, I am the criminal. I can gouge my eyes out and yet I see you. If I could only die. I have butchered my son. I, the dung of my creation vomit of my angels putrid cyst in my harmonies. I am the slaughterhouse. I am the earthquake. I am the animal. The war. I am the desert. (Müller *Gundling's Life ...*: 74)

The figure named Zebahl by his students alludes to the sergeants and lowly ranked professional soldiers from Frederick's Prussian army assigned to positions as primary school teachers following the Seven Years War. Müller refers to a scream directly after Zebahl's lines above and an invasion into the theatre by black angels, who silently attack the audience and which Teraoka interprets as a visual quote from Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1985: 67). In the first performance of *Gundling's Life ...* directed by Horst Laube at the Schauspielhaus in Frankfurt am Main in 1979, a black angel reads from an extract from Lautréamont's novel. Lautréamont's hallucinatory narrative constitutes a number of preoccupations of direct relevance to Müller's work: firstly, the dialogue with an anterior corpus of literature and secondly, its poetic quality. In *Gundling's Life ...* the invasion of these dark spirits plunges the text into the non-verbal structure of a dream that challenges not simply the idiom of conventional 'directions', but its staging and in this respect appeals to the imagination of both theatre practitioner and spectator.

Ironically, it is a space at the borderline of logic and reason that Müller accentuates precisely at the point 'Frederick of Prussia' arrives at an impasse in the figure/s Zebahl, Zebaoth, Baal. From Zebahl, the prince of demons in the New Testament, Müller enacts

a contradictory abridgment to Zebaoth, a Biblical name for God and Baal, the Old Testament's West-Semitic storm God. It is a condensement that can be read in relation to the tradition of antithesis embodied in the idea of The Prince of Evil as the twin brother of the *Logos* or Christ as reflected through the Prince's gaze in a dark mirror. In contrast to the dyad of the mirror image intrinsic to the stage as a symbol of life 'reality' and the system of polarities of Western thought ('good' versus 'evil'), Müller's black angels 'spew' forth, in Zebahl's terms, and suggest a diffusion of structure and order and not merely the Word. It is a key point in Müller's imaginative strategy in so far as it suggests the evocative power of the dark collective unconscious and in doing so, accentuates its subjugation to progressive rationalism and the great age of institutionalisation. Müller described the experience of reading Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment* as a confirmation in *Krieg ohne Schlacht* (1994b: 270). In Foucault's analysis referred to in the last chapter, the 'natural' body is subject to manipulation by authority, effectively policed and thereby a mechanism of power (1977: 155). The mad, sexually transgressive and unruly define dominant ideology on the basis of exclusion. In 'Frederick of Prussia' the series of images enact the various systems that control and exploit the body in the service of authority and this continues as the action shifts back to the final scene of 'Frederick of Prussia'.

Prussia's peasants are at the mercy of Frederick's command. Schiller recites 'The Promenade' from a lectern, as painters set up easels and the court sculptor, Johann Gottfried Schadow, carves into marble the figure of a peasant woman, who stands to stretch and is beaten into a pose by her husband. Frederick points out to Voltaire that his 'Prussians' are 'an art-loving people' (75) and Voltaire picks up a turnip from the vegetables that have been thrown at the peasants, as a souvenir. The scene concludes with the exit of Müller's figures apart from Schiller and the peasant family. Schiller coughs from under the sack that has been pulled over his head by officials during his recital. The peasant father topples the statue and beats his wife and children in order to make them work faster. Voltaire's presence in this scene emphasises the gulf between

'Enlightened' thinkers and the rural population. It is a point Bakhtin elaborates upon in *Rabelais and his World* and particularly in his conclusion that Voltaire's assessment of Rabelais' novel as 'erudition, filth and boredom' reveals the weaker rather than the strong points of the Enlightenment (1984: 116). 'Frederick of Prussia' concludes with a prose segment that refers to Frederick the Great's death at Sanssouci in Potsdam and a curtain displaying a black eagle, the symbol of the Kingdom of Prussia founded by Frederick's grandfather in 1701. In her article on *Gundling's Life …* Schulz points to Müller's text as testimony to the failure of the Enlightenment and thereby an exposé of the task of the Enlightener as manufacturer of humanistic thought, the education and cultural advancement of the people and the ruling power, as well as the development of dream logic, fantasy and human dignity (1980: 139).

'HEINRICH VON KLEIST PLAYS MICHAEL KOHLHAAS' is constituted by a prose scene that both fractures and acts as a bridge to the final triptych. Kleist's novella *Michael Kohlhaas* portrays an honorable horse dealer provoked into vengeance as a result of unfair dealings by a Saxon Junker. Kohlhaas rallies a motley army to fight his cause and the Junker is sentenced to a prison term, while Kohlhaas is hanged for breaking the peace of the land. Müller's text finds Kleist in a uniform at a 'despoiled shore' near Strausberg, a doll of Kleist, a woman and a horse, as well as an executioner's block. Kleist plays with and dismembers the female doll and the horse, before ripping the uniform off his body, and continuing to slice and decapitate the objects and spreading the hair of the female doll on the block. He then bites his own artery and trickles the sawdust that emerges from his arm over the hair. Müller ends the scene by referring to a white cloth that is thrown from the flies onto the stage. Its red spot rapidly spreads across the fabric. Kohlhaas is mute, inhuman – sawdust spills from his body. Puppets appear yet again in Müller's text. Like the earlier allusion to the older paradigm, the marionette of Romanticism in the form of Müller's Wehrmacht soldier-puppets, Kohlhaas emerges as a casualty of a seemingly inhuman force: cold, objective, autistic. Interestingly, Bakhtin points out that the grotesque subject of the tragic doll only

emerges in Romanticism (1984: 40). In her analysis, Schulz links the independent and self-destructive impulse of Kohlhaas to an aspect of failed romantic intelligentsia in order to argue that the pantomime of a destroyed man reflects Kleist's suicide, particularly in light of Kleist's relation to the Prussian army (1980: 146)[17].

Kleist functions as Kalb's alter-ego for Müller in his discussion of both *Gundling's Life …* and the later text *Volokolamsk Highway*. Kalb draws a parallel between Müller and Kleist on the basis of their treatment of military imagery and war (1998: 46). Not only does Kalb make the point that Kleist's celebration of military valour on the stage infers Shakespearean usage, but that these battle scenes for Müller and his predecessor Brecht functioned partly as a means of alluding to historical movements, as opposed to individual psychology. In the prose scene above, however, the primacy of the image as a spectral mutilated orchestration assumes a rupture between words and the body. Müller's Kleist functions as a 'haunting', a landscape that collapses the corporeal 'reality' of the auditory and visual domain. Like Artaud's understanding of the body as an entity destroyed by the scourge of the plague that lives on in dreams (1985: 7), Müller's aesthetic logic emerges as theatrically (and historically) germane to (visual) disorder. In the *Heiner Müller Handbuch* Lehmann remarks that Kleist's importance for Müller has not received adequate attention generally, particularly given that he offers a vision of excess, of irrationality as opposed to tasteful, educated, orderly theatre (2003: 127). A critic of the Enlightenment, Kleist is a key figure in *Gundling's Life …* and its critique of the intellectual as the quintessential champion of democratic and humanistic thought in 18th century militaristic Prussia with its brutal form of Absolutism.

The final triptych of *Gundling's Life …* begins with a projection of a spoken quote from the dramatist, Johann Anton Leisewitz, before an actor, dressed in a costume to resemble Lessing, 'reads':

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[17] Kleist's father was a captain in the Prussian army and the family was renowned in military circles;

> My name is Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. I am 47 years of age. I have stuffed one/two dozen dolls with sawdust that was my blood, have dreamed a dream of theatre in Germany [...]. Yesterday, I discovered a dead spot on my skin, a piece of desert: Dying begins. Or rather: is accelerating. (Müller *Gundling's Life ...*: 77)

Lessing, a prototype of Enlightenment, to use Schulz's description (1980: 146), acts as a prelude to Müller's Hamlet in *Hamletmachine* in so far as he is 'beginning to forget my text' (77). Similarly, as an introduction to Müller's Ophelia he refers to 'The woman dangling from the rope The woman with her arteries cut open The woman with the overdose SNOW ON HER LIPS The woman with her head in the gas oven' (77). 'For thirty years', he says:

> I have tried to keep myself from the chasm with words, consumptive from the dust of the archives and from the ashes which drift from the pages of books, choked by my growing disgust with literature, burned by my ever more fervent desire for silence. (Müller *Gundling's Life ...*: 77)

'Death', Müller's Lessing declares, 'is a woman' (77). In his chapter 'Die Rächenden Frauen' Frank Raddatz links Müller's repetition of the suicide motive in his later work to the actual suicide of Müller's wife in 1966 (see 1991: 21-33). Like Raddatz, Schulz points to a correlation between the radicalisation of female figures in the final phase of Müller's career and the dissolution of dramatic form (1982: 59). However, Schulz does not postulate a further relation to the death of Inge Müller. In *Hamletmachine* it is apparent that the increasing importance of female voices/discourses coincides with the emergence of Müller's post-dramatic writing towards the end of the 1970s. It is the female form that develops a revolutionary (in *Hamletmachine* and *Der Auftrag*) and counter-revolutionary presence as a lure of betrayal (in *Der Auftrag*). The question of representation and gender politics emerges as a specific issue in Chapter 5. For Mudrooroo Müller's women 'are overcome with lust, they fuck, or they emote', as opposed to embodying or conveying intellect (1993b: 29).

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however, Kleist resigned his commission in 1799.

In the second tableau of 'Lessing Sleep Dream Scream' a projection describes Lessing encountering the last president of the United States of America in an auto junkyard. Classical stage characters and film stars 'in various poses of accidental death' (78) appear between the car wrecks and a faceless robot sits in an electric chair. Müller's stage direction/prose refers to Pink Floyd's 'Wish you were here' as the soundtrack, as well as Lessing's characters Nathan the Wise and Emilia Galotti, who appear with their names written on their costumes. Emilia Galotti and Nathan simultaneously recite verbal text, including the end of the Ring parable, which is directly followed by an apocalyptic voice and projection.

> HOUR OF WHITE HEAT DEAD BUFFALOS FROM THE CANYONS SQUADS OF SHARKS TEETH OF BLACK LIGHT THE ALLIGATORS MY FRIENDS GRAMMAR OF EARTHQUAKES WEDDING OF FIRE AND WATER MEN OF A NEW FLESH LAUTREAMONTMALDOROR PRINCE OF ATLANTIS SON OF THE DEAD' (Müller *Gundling's Life ...*: 78)

The concluding image introduced by the projection, 'APOTHESIS SPARTACUS A FRAGMENT', is of a torso under a pile of sand. Busts of poets and philosophers are brought onto the stage by waiters and stagehands costumed as audience members. They pour sand on the pile as Lessing excavates limbs from the mound. Stagehands fit Lessing with a bust. Unsuccessfully he struggles to free himself. Finally, his muffled screams are met by applause from the stagehands which concludes the text in conjunction with applause from the auditorium.

In the 1980s and 1990s, a number of theatre scholars publishing in English addressed the instance of citation and the compilation of images in Müller's writing in terms of the question of postmodern cultural politics: Elizabeth Wright approached Müller as the 'Brechtian postmodern' in her analysis of a theatre form indicative of a postmodern political art (1989: 122-137); Zurbrugg referred to the 'relatively staid, monodimensional quality of Müller's Post-Modernity' in an article that examined Robert Wilson's production of *Hamletmachine* (1988: 439); Sue-Ellen Case discussed the postmodern co-

option of Müller's later work as an example of the broadening of global first-world capitalism in *The Domain-Matrix: Performing Lesbian at the End of Print Culture* (1996); Steven Taubeneck explicates 'deconstruction' in Müller's writing as characteristically postmodern (1991: 86-7) and Marc Silbermann posed the question of Müller as a 'postmodernised Brecht', albeit by qualifying his use of the term as a descriptive tool as distinct from theories of cultural rupture (1993: 2). In this list of scholarly articles and monographs it is clear that the development of Müller's style afforded a particular conceptual vocabulary. It is a point Joachim Fiebach reinforces more broadly than the discourse of postmodernism in his analysis of Müller's dramaturgy. For Fiebach the montage or collage of 'synthetic fragments' constituting Müller's dramaturgy emerging in the 1970s concurred with the fundamental structures of mediatisation Müller censured (1998: 86). As a consequence, Kalb's understanding of Müller's practice as 'half-serious shadowboxing with literary forebears' (1998b: 49) manifests more significantly in the issue of resisting simulation, according to Fiebach (see 1998: 81-94). That is, resisting the mode of perception associated with the proliferation and acceleration of images specific to media society.

It is perhaps not surprising that Müller's application of heterogeneous forms and extensive citation was read in relation to periodising elaborations of the experience of contemporary culture dating from approximately the end of the 1960s as postmodern. Jameson and Jean-François Lyotard emerged as the chief proponents of this term. The former articulated an aesthetic logic coinciding with new types of consumption as a reaction to forms of high modernism. Pastiche and schizophrenia characterised the erosion of boundaries separating genres, high and popular (mass), according to Jameson (see 1983; 1991). Lyotard postulated the dissolution of grand narratives and more specifically, their capacity for integrity (see 1984). The question of postmodern style can be linked firstly to the collage of images and subsequent collapse of temporality evident in Müller's work and secondly to a reading of Müller's prose segments as stage directions and this relates more broadly to the question of the feasibility of Müller's dramaturgy. To label Müller's collages postmodern misconstrues and undermines the

complexity of the choral fusion intrinsic to his texts and the possibilities offered for staging, and subsequently, the creative space opened for the spectator. Fiebach, for example, argues that Müller evokes the slow movements of the body on stage, as opposed to the video-clip-like pace inferred by Baudrillard's concept of simulation (1998: 88-9). In contrast, for Case the landscapes of Müller's later texts are not simply commodified, but only accessible through the machinery of the screen (1996: 138). The resistance Müller's 'literature' poses to the theatre, however, does not necessarily infer the application of the technology associated with new mediums of broadcast to realise its images, nor does it dictate the text as its starting point and Wilson's treatment of Müller's material is testimony to both of these lines of reasoning. Instead, Müller's post-dramatic textual practice is underpinned by a dramaturgy that accords the spectator an aesthetic responsibility on the basis of its departure from dramatic theatre's compositional hierarchy.

Many of the literary and historical allusions constituting *Gundling's Life …* are inaccessible for an audience unfamiliar with Prussian history. Despite the specialised nature of the text Weber contends that 'even when read without such knowledge the text amounts to a compelling account of the intellectual's misery in German history' (1984: 60). *Gundling's Life …* formed the basis of part of the text for the Cologne component of Wilson's *CIVIL warS*. Conceived as a twelve-hour multi-lingual, multi-media opera and never completed, the hour long opening of the production in Cologne in 1984 featured two figures in space suits floating, as well as a drummer boy resembling Frederick, Voltaire and a toy American civil war solider. Müller contributed critically to Wilson's project as a 'theatre co-author', according to Wirth, by inscribing distinct German 'traditions' and subsequently, 'freeing Wilson of the fear of being only theatrically relevant' (1995: 214). Wirth points to the example of a Brechtian 'mute' death cry and a Virginia-cigar-smoking 'Verfremdung' effect, Kleist's marionettes and references to Schlemmer's *Ballett* and Piscator in the production. In addition, Wirth credits Wilson with:

> protecting Müller from the criticism of arriving at a dead end with his marxist-fundamentalist notion of class struggle, inherited from Bertolt Brecht. (Wirth 1995: 214-5)

It is a significant outcome, particularly in light of the next chapter's analysis of the 'use' of Müller's text. In Wilson's production words are liberated from the paradigm of signification and as a consequence, function as a synthetic aesthetic component. Similarly, Wilson's androgynous stage figures are inscribed in grotesque or formalist beauty. As a consequence, the audience's aesthetic responsibility is not limited to constructing the 'meaning' of the text, but rather this infers a temporal and spatial *experience* 'thinkable' in terms of the 'chora'.

For Lehmann visual dramaturgy constitutes the other side of textual landscape; that is, it is tantamount to *opsis* or the non-hierarchical (1997: 59). As a consequence, he is not inferring the absence of text, but rather the loss of structure fundamental to *logocentric* tradition. With reference to directors like Wilson and Tadeusz Kantor, Lehmann refers to the opening of an auditive space that invites the spectator to fuse the elements (1997: 57). In an interview involving Müller following the re-mounting of the Cologne component of the *CIVIL warS* project at Robert Brustein's American Repertory Theatre in 1985 in Cambridge, Massuchuttes, Wilson commented that:

> The audience has the same role as the author, the director, or the actor. All of us are engaged in the process of asking 'What is it?' We don't try to say what it is or what it means. So we're all the same from that point of view. Our theatre is an open-ended form, and the audience has the responsibility to bring an open mind. (Wilson in Holmberg 1988: 455)

What is it?: Wilson emphasised this question as a core issue in his artistic practice in a lecture he delivered at the Sydney Theatre Company on 10 January 2005. If Lehmann's earlier point explicating Müller's text as the composition of choral voices configured neutrally into a monologue form is extended to encapsulate the spectator's

contribution in the theatre, Müller's material suggests the possibility of 'a writing' of *opsis* that is exactingly explicit in *Description of a Picture*, one of Müller's last works prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and his death in 1995. From this perspective Müller's dramaturgy is a highly feasible attempt to 'change the theatre'; a goal that Wilson and Müller concurred is possible in the interview following the Cambridge presentation of the *CIVIL warS* (in Holmberg 1988: 455). Ironically, a theatre in Cologne abandoned its production of *Hamletmachine* two weeks prior to its premiere in 1978. Girshausen documented the project[18] and in his opinion:

> *Hamletmachine* placed demands on a 'normally' functioning state theatre that pushed its capacity for freedom and facilities to the limit. (Girshausen in Kalb 1998b: 63)

Hamletmachine

In 1977 Müller completed *Hamletmachine*, a six page text in Weber's English edition. This text was finished soon after Müller translated *Hamlet* in collaboration with Matthias Langhoff for the Volksbühne in Berlin. Müller reduced the 200 page text he had envisaged to six pages and the world premiere staged by Jean Jourdheuil on 30 January 1979 took place outside of Paris at the Théâtre Gérard Philipe in Saint Denis, along with a production of *Mauser*. Wilson's staging of *Hamletmachine* with undergraduate students enrolled in the Drama Program in New York University's Tisch School of Arts not only introduced Müller to the general theatre and academic community, according to Weber, but 'established him as one of the important playwrights of the 20th century' (2003: 6). In a public dialogue Wilson commented that the production in America 'gave a space to the intellectualism' (in Friedman 2003: 122). Wilson based his observation on the lack of resonance the piece had for the students participating in the project. The Hungarian uprising of 1956, for example, did not necessarily form part of the undergraduates' field of knowledge and signify historically. It is a point that appears to

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[18]   See Girshausen, Theo (1978) (ed.) *Die Hamletmaschine: Heiner Müller's Endspiel*, Cologne: Prometh.

raise the issue of de-contextualising a 'play'. If, however, Lehmann and Primavesi's understanding of Müller's texts as 'material', referred above, is read in relation to the Wilson project, a 'new' conception of the role of text emerges, or in Wilson words:

> If his body of work is going to last 500 years from now, it won't be looked at as a political voice, but as a philosophical voice. (Wilson in Friedman 2003: 122)

As a consequence, it is not a question of revealing the structure and meaning of the world in a play, to return to Van Kerkhoven's statement in the opening chapter, but rather a provisional arrangement or the process of implementing and responding to a new dramaturgical form. Müller's later texts attest to the emancipation from the fundamental elements prescribing dramatic theatre and institute a new set of 'building blocks' for the creative team and more significantly, the spectator. Chapter 5 presents an extraordinary example of the inversion of this process in its examination of a dramatic play constructed on the basis of a post-dramatic text.

In Müller's *Hamletmachine* the 'script' does not prescribe language or action for the subject or the self. Instead, the first 'act', '1/ FAMILY SCRAPBOOK', opens with the lines:

> I was Hamlet. I stood at the shore and talked with the surf BLABLA, the ruins of Europe in the back of me. (Müller *Hamletmachine*: 53)[19]

Müller immediately points to the (contemporary) 'impossibility' of (historical) drama. Hamlet's consciousness or the 'voice' ascribed to his entity situates himself as a 'past' (dramatic) subject. For Schulz and Lehmann, the form of the text, a 'drama' designed as a prose poem that shimmers between scenes of dialogue, monologue prose and pantomime, corresponds to the premise that history can no longer be thought of as

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[19]   All quotes from Müller's *Hamletmachine* are from Carl Weber's (ed and trans) collection *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage* (1984: 52-58).

drama (1980: 149). Like *Gundling's life …*, *Hamletmachine* presents the plight of the intellectual. In the earlier text, however, it is a plight concerned with the acquiescence of the German intellectual in the context of Prussian authoritarianism, and in *Hamletmachine* it is the Marxist 'thinker' in the context of European communist history. In an interview about the text Müller stated that:

> All that is left of Shakespeare's play went into this first scene. (Müller in Teraoka 1985: 91)

Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, Horatio, Ophelia, the ghost (and the corpse of the ghost) are all evoked in the text constituting number '1/ FAMILY SCRAPBOOK'. Apart from the 'identity' of the performer implicit in 'I was Hamlet' and the events and sentiments attributable to Shakespeare's play, the speaking role(/s) remain undesignated. Multiple 'Hamlets' and 'Ophelias', for example, constituted the roles corresponding to Shakespeare's characters in Wilson's production of Müller's *Hamletmachine* in New York.

FAMILY SCRAPBOOK shifts from the ruins of history to his father's State funeral and an 'imaginary' intervention by Hamlet. The direct citations from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* begin almost immediately with a line from the first Act of Shakespeare's play: 'HE WAS A MAN HE TOOK THEM ALL FOR ALL' (53)[20]. Hamlet's 'voice' then claims to have stopped the procession to force open the coffin. On the first attempt the blade breaks, but with the 'blunt reminder' the 'voice' indicates that the casket has been pried open. Müller's prose poem continues with the Hamlet 'voice' declaring that it has distributed the flesh of the corpse amongst the now rejoicing crowd and that the murderer 'humps' the widow on top of Hamlet's father's coffin. 'LET ME HELP YOU UP, UNCLE, OPEN YOUR LEGS MAMA', the 'voice' pronounces before the text re-counts an image of the figure of Hamlet lying on the ground to listen to 'the world doing its turns in step with the putrefaction' (53). A series of quotations spoken in English and German, according

to the original German text, constitute the next text segment. Müller transforms Shakespeare's 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark'[21] into 'SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN THE AGE OF HOPE' (53), and includes the line, 'But I will delve one yard below their mines, /And blow them at the moon'[22]. The only lines that appear in German and anchor the situation in a specific context in this compact list of statements consist of Müller's 'Hamlet' 'LUGGING' his 'OVERWEIGHT BRAIN LIKE A HUNCHBACK' as 'CLOWN NUMBER TWO IN THE SPRING OF COMMUNISM' (53). The ghost emerges with the 'ax still in his skull' (53) and shifts the text into the present tense as the 'voice' of Hamlet censures Gertrude: 'Women should be sewed up – a world without mothers' (53). Hamlet's 'voice' moves from questioning his father's demands, 'What do you want of me?' to Horatio, 'do you know me?' (54).

Horatio signals the second of three explicit exposés of the dramatic situation in the text:

> YOU'LL BE TOO LATE MY FRIEND FOR YOUR PAY CHECK/NO PART FOR YOU IN THIS MY TRAGEDY. (Müller *Hamletmachine*: 54)

After Müller fuses Shakespeare's characters into the single word 'HoratioPolonius' the 'voice' announces, 'I knew you're an actor. I am too, I'm playing Hamlet' (54). 'Entry' and 'exit' directions are written directly into the text block and Gertrude is asked, 'Have you forgotten your lines, Mama. I'll prompt you' (54). The narrative transforms into a rape of the Queen of Denmark: 'Now, I take you, my mother, in his, my father's invisible tracks' (54) and closes with an appeal to eat Ophelia's heart, which weeps his tears according to the 'voice' of Müller's Hamlet. The irrefutable clarity with which Müller asserts his post-dramatic aesthetic intimates an almost absurd intolerance for conceptions of drama as a monological (*monos-logos*) function. Müller's amalgamation of increasingly contradictory images operates like a sepulchral lamp illuminating the

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[20]   Act I, Scene II, 187, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.
[21]   Act I, Scene VI, 90, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.
[22]   Act III, Scene IV, 209-10, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

masquerade of the old text of 'culture' in order to inter its formal logic and superimpose *ad infinitum* a new poetics of the imagination. Hamlet's body, that is the performer's, is only accessible as an object when it leaves its role and from here Müller is able to regenerate the object's relationship in and to composition. It is perhaps not surprising from this perspective that Müller's later texts appealed on a number of levels to Wilson. In the first major review of Wilson's work and specifically *The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud* written by Richard Foreman for the *Village Voice*, Foreman emphasised precisely the significance of the concept of the 'object', as opposed to the role, in composition.

> Wilson also seems to transcend the popular notion of theatre as universally centered upon the talents of the specially trained and developed performer, and returns to a healthier 'compositional' theatre in which the directorial effort is not a straining after more and more intense 'expression' of predetermined material, but is a sweet and powerful 'placing' of various found and invented stage objects and actions – so placed and interwoven as to 'show' at each moment as many of the implications and multi-level relations between objects and effects as possible. (Foreman in Aronson 2000: 126)

Wilson's *Hamletmachine* instituted a spatial geometry that 'comprehended' or rather rendered Müller's text 'comprehensible' choreographically. At the end of each section the set rotated a quarter turn, before the slightly modified action was repeated. The remote howl of an animal, the sound of the female performers scratching the tables with their nails and a book being dropped punctuated the highly focused and minimal movement of Wilson's cast. Müller's lines subsequently attain a mechanized musicality in the production in so far as their 'meaning' is embedded in the experience of their choral quality. It is an experience that can be read in relation to Kristeva's account of the economy of poetic language and specifically 'the subject in process/on trial' (see 1984: 126). Kristeva conceives of the re-modeling of the historically established signifying device as the result of the representation of a different relation not only to natural objects and social systems, but the body proper. She argues that the 'subject in

process/on trial' indicates through hieroglyph or anaphoric repetition that the linguistic network submerges instinctual processes, but is never detached from these drives and cannot be understood as distinct from this pre-logical domain. As a consequence, the subject is not a subject of enunciation, but rather acts through the text's organisational structure in terms of the chora's process, its 'rhythmicity'. As metaphors for this process, Kristeva points to both architecture and music.

In light of Kristeva's elaboration of the 'subject in process/on trial', Müller's text can be understood as evidence of a re-modelling of the historically acknowledged apparatus of drama as a mechanism serving a particular system of signification. The first section in Müller's disavowal of Shakespeare's five act dramatic structure privileges the orifices, fluids and carnage of the (grotesque) body. 'Flesh', 'hole' 'butcher', 'blood', 'corpse', 'shit': Müller's corporeal vocabulary dominates Hamlet's relation to the 'living' and the 'dead'. Müller replaces the language of Shakespeare's/history's ghost with a decaying corpse that defiles the boundaries of the self, its clean and genteel body. In Wilson's production these bloody, polluting pulses are restrained by the contemplative grid of its silent geometry. This is not, however, to undermine the presence of the body. Lehmann discusses the embodiment of a time aesthetic in human figures in *Postdramatisches Theater* specifically in relation to Wilson's 1974 production *A Letter for Queen Victoria* (1999: 327-8). He transforms the German word '*FigUhren*' to express this function. 'Uhr' in German signifies a clock and for Lehmann Wilson's figures operate (tick) like the hand of a clock ('Uhrzeiger'): time literally moves before the eyes of the spectator. Lehmann's explication reflects Wilson's own understanding of his meticulous choreography as 'beating a machine', 'automatic' (in Holmberg 1988: 455). It is a conception that points to the *experience* of theatre time: time presented, as opposed to 'represented'. Time, however, is a highly complex concept as Lehmann points out in his article 'Raum-Zeit'. If it is understood as rhythm this infers phenomenological conditions – heartbeat and breathing – as well as day and night, work and rest (1982: 77). That is, a syntax, and Müller's 'rhythmicity' increasingly indicates the time, the

revolt of the (feminine) body, as opposed to history.

'2/ The Europe of Women' consists of three succinct prose 'directions': enormous room, Ophelia, and 'Her heart is a clock' (54). The spatial situation inferred by the first linguistic indicator in this triptych is taken from E E Cummings novel. Ophelia the subject, however, is not equivalent to a monolinguistic character and is instead distinguished as Ophelia (Chorus/Hamlet) prior to the spoken text. In contrast to the 'voice' of Hamlet, the 'voices' of Ophelia open up 'her' prose poem with the assertion of present tense identity, 'I am Ophelia' (54). Instead of silence in suicide, Müller's Ophelia is the 'one the river didn't keep', the 'woman dangling from the rope' and clothed in 'her' blood 'she' walks into the streets seeking retribution (54-5). It is not simply the fate of Shakespeare's character that is 'resurrected' in Müller's allusions to the 'river', the 'rope', 'arteries cut open', 'the overdose' and 'the gas stove', but Virginia Woolf, Ulrike Meinhof, Sylvia Plath and the countless casualties of chronology. Schulz subsequently reasons that it is not the theme of women at issue in Müller's writing, but rather the question of the constellation of problems connected to the image of women. (1982: 68). Ophelia's body measures the bloody time of day. In Müller's text she wrenches 'the clock that was my heart out of my breast' (55). It is an 'act' Vaßen elaborates upon by linking Müller's understanding of sexuality and death and more specifically, the difficulty of regulating and disciplining this 'corporeality' to Lautrémont, Artaud and the Surrealists as embodying the potential to violate the rationality of alienated processes of production (1982: 54-5). As a consequence, he argues it is not a case of the sublimation of sexual and death drives in Müller's work, but rather the revolt of the living body and by extension those condemned, tortured and destroyed in history. From this perspective, the feminine violence specific to the following segment of the Ophelia (Chorus/Hamlet) passage points to a broader revolutionary 'desire' implicit in the 'voice' of Hamlet, through the references to Richard III in the first act, Macbeth and Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov in the fourth act:

I fling open the doors so the wind gets in and the scream of the world. I

smash the window. With my bleeding hands I tear the photos of the men I loved and who used me on the bed on the table on the chair on the ground. I set fire to my prison. (Müller *Hamletmachine*: 54-5)

Müller's phrase 'The University of the dead' opens '3/ SCHERZO'. Section 3 consists predominately of prose apart from a single exchange of 'dialogue' and what is potentially a multi-voicing of a line of spoken text. Dead philosophers hurl books at Hamlet from gravestone-lecterns amongst whispering and muttering, according to the prose form. Müller's text then refers to a gallery or ballet of dead women and specifically the female suicide, 'The woman dangling from the rope. The woman with her arteries cut open, etc' (55). Hamlet surveys the gallery of corpses with the fascinated detachment of a museum or theatre visitor and is then stripped by the 'dead' women until Claudius and Ophelia step out of a coffin labeled HAMLET 1. Ophelia dressed like a prostitute performs a striptease and asks Hamlet if he would like to eat her heart. His laugh is followed by an admission that he wants to be a woman. Hamlet subsequently dresses in Ophelia's clothes, Claudius transforms into Hamlet's father and steps into the coffin with Ophelia, who has blown Hamlet a kiss, as Hamlet poses as a harlot. From the coffin 'VOICE(S)' deliver the distorted biblical decree, 'What thou killed thou shalt love' (55). Hamlet and Horatio begin to dance, which escalates as laughter emerges from the coffin. Müller's text refers to the Madonna on a swing with breast cancer. Hamlet and Horatio embrace under an umbrella and through the allusion to Artaud's *Jet of Blood* the 'breast cancer radiates like a sun' (55).

'4/ PEST IN BUDA / BATTLE FOR GREENLAND' is set in the space destroyed by Ophelia. In addition, Müller's prose describes empty armor with an axe lodged in the helmet. Müller assigns the speaking voice at the outset of part four to Hamlet. In an allusion to Lenin and the Russian revolution, October is identified as the worst time of year for a revolution. The mordant pessimism is intensified by Müller's line, 'A BAD COLD HE HAD OF IT JUST THE WORST TIME' (55) and the reference to Doctor

Zhivago[23]. Zhivago weeps for his wolves, the wolves that occasionally enter the villages in winter to tear apart a peasant. In the final explicit reference to the deconstruction of the dramatic situation 'THE ACTOR PLAYING HAMLET' proclaims:

> I'm not Hamlet. I don't take part any more. My words have nothing to tell me anymore. My thoughts suck the blood out of the images. My drama doesn't happen anymore. Behind me the set is put up. By people who aren't interested in my drama, for people to whom it means nothing. (Müller *Hamletmachine*: 56)

The 'I' of the subject, protagonist, *dramatis persona*, its locus, de-inscribes itself on the page and in production. A reverberating refrigerator and three soundless TV sets are placed on the stage unknown to the actor playing Hamlet. The actor refers to 'a man who made history, enlarged a hundred times' as the 'petrification of hope' (56). His name is 'interchangeable', a statue topples, a hated and honored leader receives a state funeral and the hope has not been fulfilled. The poor reside in the canals and crevices of the stone monument. If Hamlet's drama 'still would happen' it 'would happen at the time of the uprising' (56). Müller's text points to the start of the revolution as a 'stroll' in the streets belonging to the pedestrians; cars are turned over, policemen are swept to the curb as the actor playing Hamlet positions himself on both sides of the front once again on the proviso that his 'drama would still happen' (56). He is the solider in the gun turret; his head is under the helmet. He is the typewriter, the executioner, his own prisoner and the data processor: a depository. But his 'drama didn't happen' and the 'script has been lost. The actors put their faces on the rack in the dressing room. In his box, the prompter is rotting' (56). Inventories, copies, archives, memorials and monuments underpin the futility of Müller's 'words' and ultimately, point to the deadening of sensibility or narcosis arising from the dead state of prescribed literature and more precisely, the inability to 'represent' history and to enact a 'cure' through catharsis or dialectics and its (paternal) motif. Stalin's death and the subsequent period constitute the politico-historical 'reality' informing Müller's text.

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[23] Müller's '4' alludes to the Hungarian revolution in 1956, as well as to the uprising in East Berlin on

Everyday 'reality' or more precisely the elevation of its inconsequential elements usurps the monumental 'historical' past: 'Television The daily nausea Nausea/ Of prefabricated babble Of decreed cheerfulness' (57). Müller points to the irreconcilable nature of the current global order, 'Laughter from dead bellies/ Hail Coca Cola', and the position, the complicity of the individual, 'A privileged person My nausea' (57). A photograph of the author is torn as the actor playing Hamlet declares, 'I don't want to kill anymore' in an exposé of the predicament of the intellectual, 'My thoughts are lesions in my brain. My brain is a scar. I want to be a machine. Arms for grabbing Legs to walk on, no pain no thoughts' (57). It is a corporeal machine, however, dependent upon a retreat into the body. In order to reach this 'state' the actor playing Hamlet recounts the desire to force open his flesh, to dwell in his veins, the marrow of his bones, the maze of his skull, his entrails, his excretion. Furthermore, Müller's prose indicates that blood oozes from the refrigerator and the TV screens turn black as three naked women symbolizing Marx, Lenin and Mao deliver a multi-lingual text from Marx. For Müller the terror and bureaucracy that manifests as the failure of revolutionary ideologies does not simply emerge in the question of the surge of consumer culture and popular forms of distraction. Instead, Müller's textuality like The Sydney Front enacts a violence that exceeds the ideological and philosophical 'logic' of historical intelligibility. The actor playing Hamlet puts on a costume and make-up, before stepping into the armor and splitting the heads of Marx, Lenin and Mao with the axe. '4' concludes with the 'directions', 'Snow. Ice Age'.

'5/ FIERCELY ENDURING MILLENIUMS IN THE FEARFUL ARMOR' opens in the deep sea. Fish, corpses, debris and body parts drift, according to the text, as Ophelia sits in a wheelchair. Dressed in white gowns resembling the uniforms worn in a clinical context, two men wrap gauze around her from the bottom of the wheelchair to the top. Ophelia's 'This is Electra speaking' continues through an allusion to Conrad and Sartre's introduction to Franz Fanzon novel *The Wretched of the Earth*: 'In the heart of

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17 June 1953, which Müller witnessed.

darkness. Under the sun of torture' (58). Her revolutionary 'voice' rejects the 'happiness of submission' in favour of hate, contempt, rebellion and death. 'When she walks through your bedrooms carrying butcher knives', Ophelia cites Susan Atkins, 'you'll know the truth' (58). Ophelia motionless in the wheelchair, alone on stage, constitutes the final image of *Hamletmachine*. From the ruins of Europe Müller's *Hamletmachine* concludes in a mythical realm symbolised by the feminine elements, the sea, water, snow, ice and in doing so, the last words of Hamlet's Shakespeare manifest in signs of silence connected to the female form, according to Schulz (1982: 62). Words literally dissolve into the landscape and require the type of stage language that Artaud anticipated as a physical poetry for the senses that was alluded to in Chapter 1. Müller's 'literature', its highly self-reflexive choral 'presence', resists not simply dialogue form and its sequential ordering of time and by inference syntactic logic, denotation and judgment, but opens the stage to the re-discovery of elements of ritual, to the conversion of speech into 'choral murmur', for example, that Lehmann attributes to directors like Robert Wilson and Christoph Marthaler (1997: 57).

Despite the polylogic potential that this infers, Müller's later work has been periodically criticised as a 'dead-end' or in Zurbrugg's terms as 'morose literary intertextuality' (1988: 449) and it is a point that emerges as an issue in the following chapter. In his comment on Wilson's production of *Hamletmachine* Blau points to a 'split between art and politics' and while he praises Wilson's imagination he ultimately dismisses it as exquisite imagery (see 1990: 108-111). Müller's text, however, like Wilson's visual dramaturgy neither relies on nor explores language as a form of wisdom. Instead, Kantor's Lesson 12 and the idea that the 20th century has 'TAUGHT US THAT/ LIFE DOES NOT RECOGNISE RATIONAL/ ARGUMENTS' undermines the value of *logos* and its architecture as an instrument of communication (1993: 309). As a consequence, 'possibility' in theatre, the way in which the spectator's visions translate Wilson's visions, for example, simply constitutes a different dramaturgical aim rather than a 'dead-end'. In this respect Lehmann proposes a history of new

theatre[24] as the mutual disturbance of text and stage ('die Geschichte der *wechselseitigen Störung von Text und Bühne*') in *Postdramatisches Theater* (1999: 264). Speech, its presence, he argues, prevents the pull ('der Sog') of the visual and it is a point he clarifies with reference to a number of artists, including Wilson's staging of Müller's *Hamletmachine* in 1986. During rehearsals for the production Wilson spoke of Müller's text in terms of its capacity to disrupt his images (in Lehmann 1999: 264). Wilson described the process in the following way:

> I came to Berlin to see Heiner before I went to New York and asked him whether he could say something to me about it. He said, 'No, do it however you want'. 'Help me out just a little'. (*laughs*) He said: 'It shouldn't be longer than fifty minutes'. I said, 'Okay'. Then I went to New York, worked for ten days – I had only three weeks – and brought all the action and movements onto the stage without thinking about the text and then laid the text over the movements and then began to fit the movements to the text. (Müller in Kalb 1998: 123)

In Müller's words:

> usually you begin with a text and then think over which gestures to take with it, but that way you usually fall into a trap. (Müller in Kalb 1998: 123)

It is a trap that ultimately reduces the theatrical experience to the articulation of content, as opposed to form. What emerges as unfeasible in Müller's later 'literature' is not the question of 'new' dramaturgy, a different type of composition or architecture, but conventional theatre form.

Description of a Picture (Bildbeschreibung)

Completed in 1984 *Description of a Picture* has been comprehended as a revival of the medieval tableau vivant by a number of commentators as a result of its acute lack of

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[24]   Lehmann qualifies his concept of a history of new theatre by pointing out that this also applies to modern theatre (1999: 264).

dramatic indicators and free prose poem text form. In Müller's six pages of text there is neither a paragraph nor sentence break or a designated speaking voice and in a concluding note to the text Müller points out that it can be read as an 'overpainting' of Euripides' *Alcestis* citing the Noh play *Kumasaka*, the Eleventh Canto of the *Odyssey* and Hitchcock's *The Birds*. In doing so, Müller clarifies *Description of a Picture* as a 'landscape beyond death' and describes its actions as 'optional' on the basis that 'its consequences are past' and that it is an 'explosion of a memory in an extinct dramatic structure' (102)[25]. For Jorge Riechmann Müller's last point confirms *Description of a Picture's* link to the theatre tradition of the tableau vivant (1989: 204). Müller's tableau posits three organic figures: a female resurrected and returning to the dead; a man, hunter and murderer; and a bird. It depicts seemingly interminable sadistic menace, homicidal copulation and the eruption of the natural environment. Commissioned for the Steirischen Herbst theatre festival in 1985 in Graz, *Description of a Picture* is in Müller's words an 'autodrama' (1994b: 342). That is:

> a piece that you stage with yourself, that you act with yourself. The author becomes his own director and actor. (Müller 1994b: 342-3)

In addition, Müller recognised it as an end or zero point (or 'Nullpunkt') in his writing career (1986: 184).

The text block opens with an uncertain 'narration' of a landscape 'neither quite steppe nor savannah, the sky a Prussian blue' (97). Its 'two colossal clouds float in it as though held together by wires, or some other structure that can't be determined' (97). The larger cloud, according to the text, might be an inflated rubber animal that has broken from its mooring at an amusement park or a chunk of Antarctica. Müller's prose poem scrutinises the landscape and uncovers a tree and then three trees and a house draped in the leaves of a tree bearing fruit: edible or 'fit for poisoning guests' (97). The moves of

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[25]   All quotes from Müller's *Description of a Picture* are from Carl Weber's (ed and trans) collection *Explosion of a Memory* (1989: 93-102).

the sun cannot be verified from the perspective of the picture and a bird emerges that cannot be identified due to the leaves on the branch. A woman is in the right side of the picture and the 'vulture or peacock or a vulture with a peacock's head' points at her with its gaze and beak (97). Her gentle face splits the mountain range in half and her nose is swollen at its base – 'perhaps a fist hit her' (97). The text re-counts her clothing and her forearm is lifted in defense or 'from the language of deaf-mutes', but either way the terror is familiar. Müller lists multiple sources of the violence that has happened: 'blow', 'shove', 'stab', 'the shot has been fired' (97). But the wound has ceased bleeding. Repetition eradicates fear, according to the text. The woman's face is potentially readable as 'an angel of the rodents, the jaws grinding word carcasses and language debris' (98). There are signs of an attack by the fangs of a beast or a machine and the condition of the arm 'amputated by the picture's edge' is unclear (98). The frame of the image leads the narrator to question the woman's realm as a man steps from the house and the eternal movement infers fire and water.

The woman's body is possibly 'on loan from the graveyard's stockpile' and a man emerges holding a bird in a hunter's grip (98). The bird utters a shriek in deathly fear and the text details its audible imperceptibility for the viewer. Still heavy from the soil of the cemetery the woman has liberated herself from in order to visit the man, the man and the woman break the chair in the escalating momentum of a sex act. The man and the woman sink their teeth into each other's neck until the man begins strangling her. Her nails tear into his muscles as her veins protrude and her legs twitch and knock the bowl and glass of wine off the table top. His work is concluded with the fracture of the larynx of the vertebrae and the wine or blood trickles to the ground. Müller's text refers to a knife incision and the murderer's 'writing' from right to left. The weapon bulges under his jacket and 'he'll need it again' (99). His work is unimaginable: 'what might his work be', the text asks, 'apart from the perhaps daily murder of the perhaps daily resurrected woman' (100). Soon after Müller alludes to an uprising of corpses a rock slide is triggered by the itinerant movement of the subterranean realm of the dead:

> when the growth of the graveyards will have reached its limit with the small weight of the presumed murderer on the threshold, of the swiftly digested bird on the tree, there's a space on the wall for its skeleton, or will the movement go into reverse when the number of dead is complete, will the throng of graves turn into the tempest of resurrection that will drive the snakes out of the mountain.' (100)

Müller refers to the resurrection of the flesh inhabiting the wind and the murderer as potentially simply a 'corpse-on-duty' (100). In this context his task may be the annihilation of birds and the woman may be returning underground 'pregnant by the storm' (101). Despite an earthquake blowing apart the planet's surface it will reassemble, inseminated by the dead. In the network of expanding tree roots Müller points to the movement of a crayon that increasingly culminates in the incursion of an incompatible built environment, its concrete, before Müller's organic figures are pitted against each other and the 'speechless text' reaches 'ERROR' (101). The murderer's gaze is unfocused and the woman laughs as the blood sprays in a tempest whirl. Müller questions this opening in time and points to the existence of hope on the edge of a knife spiraling out of control. It is not the inanimate object that is a weapon, but the body: 'the knife is the wound, the neck is the axe' (102). Like the incessant transmogrification intrinsic to Müller's language that has been rendered explicit in the account of *Description of Picture* above, his ethereal 'perpetrators' function as part of, and mutate according to, a grotesque continuum. His 'man' and 'woman' are indissolubly connected to both graveyard and resurrection and thereby the collapse of temporality characteristic of Müller's later work. It is a contemporaneity of past, present and future that can be elaborated in terms of Lehmann's understanding of Müller's work as a fusion of temporal plains into a new theatre-time ('eine Verschmelzung der Zeitebenen zu einer neuen Theater-Zeit') (2002: 286-7).

Description of a Picture is constructed on the basis of a series of 'uncertain' conjunctives – 'perhaps', 'or', 'might' – until the 'subject' implodes in the final statement: 'I: the frozen storm' (102). Despite the linguistic basis of these connections, Müller's taxonomy is

dependent upon the 'reality' of the theatre situation. It is a 'reality' that on closer inspection contests the conception of the self-conscious subject grounded in sight and subsequently, representation. Lehmann clarifies this point in his analysis of *Description of a Picture* as a drama enacted between two gazes: firstly, a gaze of ossification, of stillness in eternity, of repetition (1987: 191). This mythical gaze blocks perception of a new 'reality', of another theatre and 'theoria'[26], another way of seeing that exists 'between gaze and gaze' (1987: 191). It is an elucidation Müller reinforces with reference to Robert Wilson. In the final volume of the *Gesammelte Irrtümer* series he refers to Wilson's explanation of his work in terms of what is seen during a blink (1994: 214). During the bat of an eyelid Müller points to a continually altered image of the world, of reality, that is forgotten. Lehmann subsequently interprets Müller's text as the description of a conflict of two ways of seeing, whose theoretical, political implications are obvious, but written into and on top of each other (1987: 191-2). Directed by Ginka Tscholakowa for its premiere in 1985 in Graz, the text formed part of Robert Wilson's *Alcestis* production performed in America a year later. Wilson's influence on Müller cannot be underestimated and it is an aesthetic debt or 'gift of discontinuity', to apply Stefan Brecht's description of Wilson, that manifests uncannily in Brecht's description of insanity in *The Theatre of Visions: Robert Wilson* (1978: 177). 'Insanity', Brecht points out:

> is partly the universal condition, no mere deficiency of intellect or excess of emotion, but the sub-stratum of the soul, like the earth's sometimes supposed molten core, a chaos in turmoil, slowly or rapidly turning, the rabid morass that's the heart of the forest, perch of certain birds, underneath, more prosaically the faculty of perception, viz. violent imagination, map-maker to the will and furnisher with privilege to royal reason, a confusion: but partly it is a special vice, a perversion, the hidden violence of some, gourmets of dissolution who are therefore amateurs of drama, toward which they work a little. If in the sane insanity is a small frozen tremor, in the insane it is a constant ray of blue light, their quirk. (S Brecht 1978: 178)

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[26]   Theoria derives from *theo-* or *thao-* [*thea = spectacle; th(e)aomai = to gaze at wonderingly*] and thus constitutes the object of seeing or in its Hellenic sense that which is contemplated.

Brecht's account parallels in many respects the 'logic' of the subterranean dimension of *Description of a Picture* and its de-semanticisation of language and termination of *logocentric* hierarchy. It is a dramaturgy of 'spectacle' in the most literal sense of the term; that is, a 'writing' that embodies the ocular processes intrinsic to the dynamic of the theatre medium itself and its transindividual character. The 'unthinkable' presence of discontinuity and the incessant 'slippage' that temporality infers is inscribed in the perpetual movement of text or to borrow from Müller, the 'utopian feature is in the form, and not in the content' (1989: 163). Nine times during the text Müller directly refers to the picture: firstly, to posit the unverifiable nature of the transit of the sun; secondly, to position the woman in its right section; thirdly and fourthly, to dismember the woman's body in the frame – the edge of the image severs her arm at the wrist and amputates her lower legs; fifthly, to refer to the action of the eye squinting and thereby blocking the vision of the image momentarily; sixth, to question the moment of the picture; seventh, to identify its representational aim, 'the wanderings of the dead', 'the secret pulse of the planet' (100); eight, to articulate its rough design and experimental set up as contemptuous 'for the experimental animals man, bird, woman, the blood pump of the daily murder, man against bird and woman, woman against bird and man, bird against woman and man' (101); and finally, to ask who or what makes inquiries about the picture and culminates in the idea of living in a mirror, or in Müller's words, 'TO LIVE IN A MIRROR' (102).

To live in a mirror: The form of Müller's *Description of a Picture* renders 'impossible' the possibility of a dramaturgic locus and in doing so, arrives at a critical dilemma. 'Isn't it a problem', Müller asks:

> of the audience that refuses to accept that the theatre has a reality of its own and doesn't portray, mirror, or copy the reality of the audience? (Müller 1984: 19).

It is not simply audience expectations that Müller's post-dramatic theatre texts

confront, but conventional models of theatre communication based on the verbatim delivery of text. Philip Tiedemann's staging of *Description of a Picture*, for example, at the Berliner's Ensemble's studio approached Müller's text literally as an extended sentence offering a narrative of altered interpretations spoken by its four member cast. In doing so, Tiedermann negated its spectral language and the subsequent potential for abstraction by reducing its visual dimension to a picture frame culminating in a Beckettian concentration on isolated parts of the body. In response to a question about the comprehensibility of *Description of a Picture* and more precisely its form, Müller emphasised that his own staging of the text involves a similar process of discovery (1990: 98) and went on to remark:

> My intention and the text are two completely different things. (Müller 1990: 99)

As a consequence, Müller's material departs radically from the idea of referential theatre and the assumption that his texts transmit an explicit message from the creator to the spectator. Instead, to apply Foucault's reading of Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, *Description of a Picture* operates on the basis of the disappearance of its (dramatic) foundation (see 1970: 3-16). By relinquishing the terms of 'resemblance', its time, space, dramatis personae and cosmology, Müller's 'landscape beyond death' infers the exclusive realm of possibility.

5

THE ABORIGINAL PROTESTERS: 'Nobody knows Müller here'[1]

'The theatre of the White Revolution is over'[2]: 'highjacking' the post-dramatic text

> Do these events belong together? Is there a link between the dumping of convicts, the hapless refuse of the overcrowded jails of London and Manchester, the wretched of the British Empire transported half-way around the world to a place of desolation and hostility, and the almost simultaneous liberation of the prisoners of la Bastille and their self-enthronement as the sovereign of a country that throws off the shackles of a repressive feudal society? Is there a connection between the uprising of the masses ending in the European wars of Napoleon, and the establishment of a colony in New South Wales leading to a campaign of extermination waged against a race perceived as uncivilised? (Fischer 1993: 3)

Gerhard Fischer posed the questions above in his theatrical casebook documenting the Mudrooroo/Müller project prior to its production at The Performance Space and tour to Germany. A historian in the German Department at the University of New South Wales, Fischer initiated the development of the script that culminated in the performance *THE ABORIGINAL PROTESTERS CONFRONT THE DECLARATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN REPUBLIC ON 26 JANUARY 2001 WITH THE PRODUCTION OF 'THE COMMISSION' BY HEINER MÜLLER*. Fischer had been grappling with 'conflicting feelings' in the lead up to the bicentennial celebrations in Australia commemorating the arrival of the First Fleet in Sydney Harbour in 1788 (1993: 3). Increasingly labelled Invasion Day, the 26th January marks European settlement in Australia. For Fischer in 1987, the upcoming bicentennial of the French Revolution raised an interesting parallel

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[1]   Gerhard Fischer (1993: 5).
[2]   Heiner Müller's Sasportas in *The Commission* (in Fischer 1993: 51).

to official history (white Australian) and its counter version (Aboriginal[3]) and subsequently, the question of 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' in the context of politically sanctioned festivities staged two hundred years later (1993: 4). After exploring the idea of a play based on the figure of Georg Forster, who accompanied Cook on his second voyage, Fischer found a link between the two events and specifically the idea of betrayal in Heiner Müller's *Der Auftrag: Erinnerung an eine Revolution*, which he translated as *The Commission: Memory of a Revolution*. Originally conceived by Fischer as a 'counter-event to bicentennial commemoration' (1993: 5) Müller's *The Commission* deals with:

> the European intellectual who turns his back on his comrades and so betrays the revolution, and in turn about the European intellectual who turns his back on the indigenous people he has come to liberate. (Fischer 1993: 4)

Like a number of commentators, Fischer believed that Aboriginal theatre had the potential to be at the forefront of Australian theatre particularly against a backdrop of what he termed the 'moribund if not dead' 'mainstream theatre of white Australia' (1993: 15). Implicit in this statement and the positioning of Aboriginal theatre as the most likely source of an avant-garde movement in contemporary Australian theatre is the question of resistance politics and artistic form. It is a question Mudrooroo addressed in *Writing from the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature*, which analyses the marginalisation of Aboriginal writing as protest literature and the criticism of Aboriginal arts according to standards specific to the Western canon and a white readership. Mudrooroo elaborates on the latter point by referring to critiques of Aboriginal writing on the basis of their relation to other Australian works, as opposed

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[3] The term Aboriginal in its general usage is inclusive of Torres Strait Islander peoples, although there is an increasing tendency to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or to apply the broader term 'Indigenous' to describe 'first nation peoples', particularly in government policy. The following regional terms appeared to increase in usage in the 1980s: Koori (areas of New South Wales, Victoria), Nyoongah (or Noongar/Nyungar) (Perth area), Yolngu (north-eastern Arnhem Land), Anangu (central Australia), Pallawah (or Palawah) (Tasmania), Murri (south and central Queensland), Nungar (southern South Australia).

to traditional Aboriginal song-texts like the tyabi or pre-Invasion Aboriginal poetry (1990: 44). The frames of reference Mudrooroo identifies as pre and/or post-settlement are further complicated by the concept of authenticity and the role assigned to mediation in the endorsement of cultural production; that is, the relation between traditional and contemporary ways of cultural expression in a post-colonial context. Alan Filewood, for example, elaborates on this dilemma in his article on the Canadian Native Indian writer Tomson Highway in terms of the perception of Western realist dramaturgy as minimally mediated and thereby the '*most* natural theatrical form' (1994: 365). For Filewood this assumption not only reflects an inherent contradiction in analysis that attempts to reconcile essentialist ideas of Aboriginality and artistic form, but the process of European colonisation. Western realist form, similarly, emerges as a contested topic of discussion with respect to Aboriginal theatre in Australia.

Müller's Sasportas declares in *The Commission* that the theatre of white revolution is over and it is a statement that manifests doubly: firstly, on a political level and secondly, in its denunciation of dramatic theatre as a mode of representation. Transferred to an Australian context these issues infer a highly specific cultural historico-political framework. Fischer immediately encountered local infrastructure problems and operational protocols increasingly important to the Aboriginal community as he attempted to initiate the project. In order to realise the project 'the historian', to cite the German scholar, metamorphosed into a dramaturg, as well as producer and 'sets out to find the Aboriginal Theatre Company that does not exist' (1993: 6). Both the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre and the Aboriginal National Theatre Trust (ANTT) rejected the project; the latter on the basis that:

> their priority is Aboriginal theatre, done by and for Aborigines, with Aboriginal writers, directors, performers, reflecting Aboriginal concerns, directed towards the Aboriginal community. (Fischer 1993: 6)

It is a policy Mudrooroo reinforces by questioning the validity of texts not exclusively produced by Aboriginal people and more precisely, by referring to the role of white

editors and the prefaces that up until recently introduced Aboriginal literature (1990: 19, 47-8). In the sphere of government funding for the arts, the guidelines cited above are increasingly evident in policy. The Australia Council operates according to a set of principles – National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Policy (NATSIAP) – designed to protect and respect the cultural heritage and protocols of the Indigenous peoples of Australia. Prior to the formalisation of this policy across all levels of the Australia Council, the Aboriginal Arts Unit clarified its initial rejection of an application for funding from Fischer and his colleagues by stipulating its priority for Aboriginal work. At the time the Unit's priority was to 'fund Aboriginal plays that educate and entertain the Aboriginal community and that reflect the concerns of that community', according to Fischer's account of the decision relayed to him by John Baylis (1993: 15).

This is not to undermine the role of projects involving Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists in contemporary theatre in Australia[4]. The production of Jack Davis' epic *The First Born* trilogy comprising of *The Dreamers*, *Barungin* and *No Sugar*[5], staged by the Marli Biyol Theatre Company at the Fitzroy Town Hall in Melbourne and similarly conceived of as a counter-bicentennial project despite its funding source[6], was the result of a long and close collaboration between Davis and Andrew Ross, a non-Indigenous director/dramaturg. Davis has emerged as arguably Australia's best known Aboriginal playwright and in Mudrooroo's opinion:

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[4]   Helen Gilbert points to the difficulty inherent in attempting to implement Aboriginal control at all levels of the theatre process in *Sightlines: Race, Gender and Nation in Contemporary Australian Theatre*. Despite Aboriginal control being 'strategically desirable' the level of mediation required in theatre projects usually involves non-Aboriginal involvement in technical and other aspects of workshopping, rehearsal and production (1998: 51).

[5]   Jack Davis' trilogy is referred to as *Barungin (Smell the Wind)*, the title of the last play, in press accounts of its national tour as part of the bicentennial.

[6]   *First Born Trilogy* received financial support from the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. The Trust received financial assistance from the Australian Bicentennial Authority and the NSW Bicentennial Council. Davis commented about this seeming incongruity in the following way: 'I believe because it's an important year to get the message across of what's happened to the Aborigines over the last two hundred years, we have to use all the money we can get. If I have used Bicentennial money, if I have used it from any source – I would even take it from a mining company because they, too, get a kick in the pants – I'm just taking their money to produce that

> His productions are constantly moving towards pure Aboriginality in that they have from the beginning explored the limitations of the conventional European theatre, but as yet there is no escape from realism into a Theatre of Aboriginality utilising the Aboriginal environment of ceremony to recreate a symbolic drama drawing heavily on traditional structures. (Mudrooroo 1990: 27)

The Marrugeku Company arguably exemplifies Mudrooroo's concept of an Aboriginal setting in spite of the collaboration of Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists that is essential to its creative process. Marrugeku consists of Western Australian urban Indigenous dancers and musicians, Kunwinjku dancers, and storytellers and musicians from Kunbarllanjnja, a remote community in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, as well as non-Indigenous members of Stalker Theatre Company. Established in 1994 to create *MIMI* for the Perth Festival, Marrugeku specifically creates and presents its performances in the natural landscape and incorporates traditional storytelling in local languages and in English translation, dance rituals, as well as contemporary artistic practices, including the choreographic representation of spirits on stilts and multi-media. In the company's words:

> At Marrugeku's heart is a process of reconciliation, not in the sense of searching for a universal theatrical language, but rather through the process of making performances that respects difference while working together. (The Marrugeku Company 2001: 13)

Created as a one-off production originating from a German writer's 'script', *The Aboriginal Protesters* differed markedly from the Australian content specific to Davis' trilogy and the aesthetic of The Marrugeku Company, and would take approximately eight years from its conception in 1987 to its realisation as a full production in January 1996. Two years after the bicentiennal and Fischer's initial rejection by the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre and ANTT, Fischer attempted to again realise the project and

kick, make them sit up and take notice.' (in Olb 1988: 6)

approached the Director of the Aboriginal Research and Resource Centre at the University of New South Wales, Paul Behrendt. Behrendt facilitated contact with the Indigenous actor and director, Brian Syron, who expressed interest in Fischer's exposé and specifically the idea of a play-within-a-play influenced by Peter Weiss' *The Persecution and assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as performed by the inmates of the asylum of Charenton under the direction of the Marquis de Sade* (*Marat/Sade*). Syron recommended Mudrooroo as the writer responsible for preparing a scenario around Müller's *The Commission*, which Fischer and Syron agreed should remain in its entirety in production. According to Fischer, the project appealed to Syron as 'an alternative vision to the naturalistic Aboriginal theatre of the Jack Davis-type' (1993: 9)[7]. That is, the type of theatre considered stylistically conventional and this leads once again to a broader question concerning directions dominating theatre in Australia.

In *Sightlines: Race, Gender and Nation in Contemporary Australian Theatre* Helen Gilbert differentiates between the new wave of male Anglo-Celtic playwrights that established a misleading conception of 'Australian' drama as mono-vocal in the late 1960s and 70s through the use of Australian vernacular, 'Ocker' humour[8] and nationalist preoccupations and the critical role of the 'quiet revolutions' in Australian theatre that have taken place over the last twenty years (1998: 2-3). Gilbert identifies Aboriginal theatre as one of the most recent and significant of these 'revolutions' and points to the

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[7] Gilbert points out specifically in relation to Davis' play *Kullak* that those critics who discuss the work in terms of naturalism or documentary realism overlook its structure and the representation of time, which she argues is non-linear and subsequently undercuts a conception of history as a master narrative (1998: 54). Mudrooroo refers to the supernatural and surrealist elements of Davis' *The Dreamers*, as well as the use of dance as a means of shifting a play from realism into 'Aboriginal reality' (1990: 124-5). However, he refers to *No Sugar* as limited to the genre of naturalism (1990: 126). Criticism of Davis' work has generally discussed his productions in relation to the paradigm Gilbert refers to in her analysis of the playwright. Bob Evans described Davis' trilogy as having 'all the trappings of naturalism and none of the makings' in his review (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 March 1988). Sue Gough, similarly, categorises *Barugnin* as 'simple realism' (*Australian*, 29 July 1988). The presentation of Davis' *No Sugar* at the Riverside Studios in London attracted a comparable reaction. Michael Billington (*The Guardian*, 18 June 1988) and Claire Armitstead (*Financial Times*, 20 June 1988) both referred to Davis' production as documentary drama.

[8] 'Ocker' is a colloquial expression for the archetypal uncultivated Australian working man (Macquarie Dictionary 1985).

influence of Australia's increasing perception of its position in Asia with regard to the question of racial difference and its dramatisation. In Gilbert's view these alternative theatrical voices both challenge dominant Anglo-European perspectives and their representational forms and subsequently counter imperialism, which in her analysis remains the chief historical force determining contemporary Australian society[9]. According to Gilbert, non-naturalistic theatre is a key proponent in the politicisation of non-mainstream theatre, given that it promotes the spectator's awareness of narrative construction; that is, disrupts 'scopic pleasure' and in doing so the relations specific to the imperialist gaze (1998: 25). The character of King George in Mudrooroo's script explicitly refers to the power relations intrinsic to the gaze of the coloniser:

> Ah, you know, how they always looking at blacks. Look at us out of the corner of their eye. Well, now they can look us in the eye, or they'll get it in the eye. (Mudrooroo *The Aboriginal Protesters*: 87)[10]

Gilbert's link between mainstream institutions and dramaturgy and genre raises a broader issue concerning the question of cultural-political endeavours and the ideological and/or social positions they reinforce or contest. In her critique of interculturalism and the practitioners and theorists Peter Brook, Richard Schechner and Eugenio Barba, for example, Gilbert describes the Mudrooroo/Müller project as a rare example of the reversal of the tendency by Western directors to appropriate aspects of non-Western cultures without acknowledging the power structures inherent in this relationship (1998: 9-10). Kalb, similarly, addresses what he perceives as Müller's ill-informed identification with the Third World through reference to the

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[9]   See Hamilton (2005) for a discussion of the role of what Arujun Appadurai describes in *Modernity at Large* as the post-territorial cultural flows or 'scapes' (ethno-, media-, techno-, finance-, ideoscapes) constituting transnational movements that can be read as a conceptual departure from the rationalist divisions (coloniser/colonised; white/black; first world/third world) specific to postcolonial theory.

[10]   All quotes from 'The Aboriginal Protesters confront the declaration of the Australian Republic on 26 January 2001 with the production of *The Commission* by Heiner Müller' are from Gerhard Fischer's (ed) casebook *The Mudrooroo/Müller Project* (1993: 75-121).

Mudrooroo script (see 1998: 134-7). In Kalb's opinion the highjacking of Müller's text by Mudrooroo amounted to a 'defiant celebration' from a 'real Third World voice' (1998: 137). For Lehmann the project constituted a good example of the possibilities and problems of intercultural theatre and in conclusion he points to the gulf separating the political consciousness of the actors in *The Aboriginal Protesters* and the deeply skeptical position of the European author (1999: 454-5).

'Tell them you're Indian'[11]: Mudrooroo & the politics of identity

Born Colin Thomas Johnson in the wheat-belt district near Narogin, south-east of Perth, two and a half months after his father's death in 1938, Mudrooroo changed his name in 1988 in a political gesture similar to the poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker). In the Bibbulumun language Mudrooroo means paperbark. Mudrooroo added Narogin (the town near his birth place) and later changed this to Nyoongah (the south-western language group) before dropping the second name completely. According to Mudrooroo, the name change was a 'definite statement of identity' on the basis that:

> No one would not mistake me for an Aborigine with a name like Mudrooroo. (Mudrooroo in O'Connor 1998: 24)

Mudrooroo's early years reflected the experiences of a high percentage of Aboriginal youth taken from their families as part of a history of removal that stretches from the turn of the 19th century. Later legislated in Government policy the subsequent displacement of children produced what is now known as 'The Stolen Generation'. At the age of nine Child Welfare placed Mudrooroo in an orphanage, Clontarf Boys' Town. An elder brother and two sisters had been already sent to an orphanage in Perth by the time of his birth. Welfare officers at the time noted confusion about Mudrooroo's racial heritage, which they described as a 'dash of Indian or Negro' and in 1955 the Department of Aboriginal Affairs advised it had no knowledge of him (in Laurie 1996: 31). In 1956 Mudrooroo was charged with breaking and entering, unlawful possession

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[11]   This quote is taken from the title of Mudrooroo's (1997) article in Cowlishaw and Barry.

and assault and sentenced by the Perth Children's Court to twelve months in prison. Soon after his release from prison he was charged with car theft and the term of his sentence was extended to eighteen months imprisonment. Upon his second release from Fremantle Jail Mudrooroo was sent to the Aboriginal Advancement League in Melbourne, where he started to write: 'There was a sort of pub there which Bohemians and people like that went to', Mudrooroo stated in 1992, 'and I used to go there and I was mixing with poets, artists and so on, and so that's where the inspiration came from' (in Laurie 1996: 31).

The release of Mudrooroo's first book at the age of 27 constituted a seminal literary event. Dame Mary Durack, who had met Mudrooroo while he was still in prison, edited and found a publisher for Mudrooroo's *Wild Cat Falling*. *Wild Cat Falling* appeared a year after Noonuccal's best selling collection of poetry *We are Going* (1964). Widely acknowledged as the first novel published by an Aboriginal writer in Australia, *Wild Cat Falling* contributed to the development of not simply an Aboriginal literature, but a visible anti-colonial identity and collective political consciousness for Aboriginal people in Australia. In the foreword to the novel below, Durack's 'paternalistic assumptions from another era', as journalist Victoria Laurie notes, 'placed Colin Johnson firmly in the category of 'exceptional black' ' (Laurie 1996: 31).

> He was nineteen years old and part Aboriginal, though his features would not have betrayed him and his skin colour was no darker than that of a southern European [...].
>
> [...] In fact he showed little obvious trace of native blood, but had what most darker people have lost, the proud stance and sinuous carriage of the tall, tribal Aboriginal [...].
>
> An above-average IQ could, however, have been more burden than advantage had he inherited the typical instability of the out-camp people. We observed that Colin was not apparently lazy. He found jobs for himself about the place and did them well. He also had a sense of time and he began to seem – was it possible? – even dependable. (Durack in *Wild Cat Falling* 1965: 133-6)

Durack's colonial sensibility provides an insight into the attitudes underpinning a period in which 'colour dominated the landscape', to quote Mudrooroo 'and Aborigines were rounded up to be shipped to missions or were allowed to remain on the outskirts of the towns' (1997: 259). Mudrooroo's latter point reflects the practical implementation of separatist attitudes rooted in legislation.

In the 1960s in Australia, however, a number of factors influenced the emergence of a pan-Aboriginal political movement, including the black civil rights movement in the United States of America. Freedom Rides through New South Wales, the Gurindji land claim of 1966, the 1967 national referendum that incorporated Aboriginal people into the census and provided them with citizenship and the right to vote, and the Canberra Aboriginal Tent Embassy of 1972 all mobilised demands for self-determination and the question of civil rights for Indigenous people continues to impact significantly on Australia's social and political agenda, domestically and internationally. From the mid-1960s and coinciding with the publication of Mudrooroo's first novel, academic circles increasingly institutionalised the 'voice' of Aboriginal literature in Australia. Against this background, Mudrooroo has developed a highly influential and more recently controversial presence over the last thirty years and his fiction, poetry and scholarly writing is taught on school curricula and at a tertiary level in Australia. Soon after the release of *Wild Cat Falling*, however, Mudrooroo left Australia to travel to South East Asia and ended up in London. He returned to Melbourne before moving to India and during this extended period practiced as a Buddhist monk, and after another stint in Australia he travelled to the US and Canada.

By the time Mudrooroo arrived back in Australia in 1976 and took up a position with the Aboriginal Research Centre at Monash University, the political climate concerning Aboriginal affairs had altered radically as a result of the increasingly public struggle for the rights of Indigenous people in Australia. The Racial Discrimination Act had been passed in 1975 and the Aboriginal Land Rights Bill the following year. Published in 1979

his second novel *Long Live Sandawara* was followed by a work of non-fiction, *Before the Invasion*, which he wrote with Colin Bourke and Isobel White. By the beginning of the 1990s and with the publication of the second of the Wildcat trilogy *Doin Wildcat*, the historical novel *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* and *Writing from the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature*, Mudrooroo had emerged as key figure in and advocate of Aboriginal writing, reluctant to consider any text not entirely produced by Indigenous Australians as an example of Aboriginality. As the Head of Aboriginal Studies at Murdoch University he lectured in Aboriginal literature and in 1996 he received the Ruth Adeney Koori Award (RAKA Award) for creative prose for *Us Mob*. Mudrooroo's involvement in public debate about Aboriginality invited criticism as a result of his remarks about a number of writers, according to journalist Terry O'Connor, including the author of *My Place*, Sally Morgan, who had discovered her Aboriginal ancestry as an adult (1998: 24). For Mudrooroo Morgan's novel:

> marks a stage when it is considered to be okay to be Aboriginal as long as you are young, gifted and not very black. (Mudrooroo in O'Connor 1998: 24)

As a consequence, revelations that entered the public domain in the mid-1990s that challenged Mudrooroo's Aboriginal heritage and formed part of debate about definitions of Aboriginality, exemplified with reference to the ancestry of a number of Australian artists identifying as Aboriginal/assuming Aboriginal identity, incited highly sensitive and heated discussion about the question of authenticity[12]. In a paper

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[12] See Amanda Meade (1997) 'Novelist defends his black identity', *Weekend Australian*, 5-6 April: 3; Victoria Laurie (1996) 'Identity Crisis', *The Australian Magazine*, 20-21 July: 28-32; Roger Martin and Shaun Anthony (1996) 'Author urged to prove Aboriginal heritage', 24 July: 7 & (1996) 'Mudrooroo sales ban sought', *West Australian*, 25 July: 11; Terry O'Connor (1998) 'A question of race', *Courier-Mail*, 28 March: 24. In addition to Mudrooroo, Archie Weller's identity was subject to public scrutiny, particularly in relation to the $35,000 fellowship he received from the Australia Council's Aboriginal Arts Board in 1994. See Debra Jopson (1997) 'Now a black writer confesses: I can't prove that I'm Aboriginal', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 March: 1; Sian Powell (1997) 'Writer's black ancestry stranger than fiction', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 March: 6 & (1997) 'Author chose Aboriginality', *Australian*, 25 March: 3. Rosemary van der Berg also censured Elizabeth Durack and

delivered at a Conference in Utrecht in 1997 Rosemary van der Berg discussed 'thefts of Aboriginal cultural identity' as a breach of intellectual property rights, as well as a 'farce and an insult to my people, the Nyoongars of the south-west of Western Australia' and specifically censured Mudrooroo (2000: 77). For Ruby Langford (Ginibi) in a letter published in *The Australian* on 7 August 1996, Mudrooroo 'couldn't write the way he does if he is not Aboriginal' (1996: 12). Noel Tovey, similarly, commented:

> If you have been beaten up and called an Aboriginal bastard for most of your life, if you have been abused and denied, if you have been raised as an Aboriginal, and all that you have had to succour you has been a belief in the Aboriginal culture, then as far as I am concerned you *are* an Aboriginal. (Tovey in Bennie 1996b: 13)

Mudrooroo neither refuted nor verified the claim about his identity. After a period of silence, however, he addressed the issue in the article 'Tell them you're Indian'[13] in *Race Matters.* 'The question of blood' he stated with reference to Goldhagen:

> is what else but a clinging onto Victorian classifications of race, classifications which reached their fulfilment in the Nuremberg race laws (1935), set in place by the National Socialist government of Germany and which led to the genocidal practices of Auschwitz. (Mudrooroo 1997: 262)

Later in the article Mudrooroo pointed out that:

> I had discovered that identity is a fragile thing and can be taken away, just as it can be given. As I had not confronted such a crisis before, did it mean that through a genetic oversight I had lost my culture and had become unauthentic? Though with a little diligent research I might re-establish my racial credentials; but then for what? Australia was multicultural and the world was postmodern. A fixed identity really did not exist for writers such as myself [*sic*] who, every day, were creating identities in language. Identity itself, seeing it could be given and taken away, was as much pastiche as any

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13   Leon Carmen in her article 'Intellectual Property Rights for Aboriginal People' (2000: 77-79). In his article Mudrooroo qualifies the title 'Tell them you're Indian' as a response that inferred a 'different Other, more civilised than Aborigines, mixed or otherwise' (1997: 259-60).

other contemporary structure. (Mudrooroo 1997: 263)

Australia was multicultural and the world was postmodern: Despite the incongruent relation Mudrooroo points to between global cultural theoretical politics and Australian (government) rhetoric, he reinforces a concept of identity in language as a discursively and performatively instituted mode of semiosis subject to temporality. Mudrooroo emphasises that his identity was 'established' in 1965 as that of a 'crossblood' (1997: 262). In doing so, he refers to Durack's foreword to *Wild Cat Falling* cited above and specifically the notion that his features would not have 'betrayed' him. This raises a significant parallel to the figure of Sasportas in *The Commission* and specifically the function of skin colour as a corporeal political marking. Mudrooroo's identity and subsequent debate about his 'authenticity', however, does not fall within the scope of this analysis, although it foregrounds the social complexities of what Mudrooroo describes as the textualisation of identity and the very concept of Aboriginality as a cultural construct (1997: 262)[14]. Or in Mudrooroo's words:

> such constructions do not come from Aboriginal people but from those Europeans who want their pet Other to be constructed as The Aboriginal, which includes a spirituality and an affinity to the land and environment. (Mudrooroo 1997: 265-6)

Marcia Langton, an Aboriginal sociologist and film critic, similarly, points to the on-going process of 'remaking' Aboriginality, which she explicates in terms of the following three categories: interactions between Aboriginal peoples within Aboriginal cultural contexts; mythologised/stereotyped representations of Aboriginal people by white people; and dialogue that results in mutual comprehension through the exchange

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[14] The question of Mudrooroo's identity as a marker of authenticity formed part of a broader debate that emerged as the result of a number of scandals concerning cultural identity and authorial rights in the 1990s in Australia. In 1994 Helen Demidenko received the Vogel Prize for a first novel for *The Hand That Signed the Paper*. The following year Demidenko was awarded the most prestigious literary prize in Australia, the Miles Franklin Award, as well as the Gold Medal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature. Demidenko claimed to have based the novel, which is set during the Holocaust and focuses on Ukrainian-Jewish relations, on the experience of her Ukrainian family. In 1995 Demidenko was revealed to be the daughter of Harry and Grace Darville originally from Scunthorpe, England, and the book was increasingly attacked as anti-Semitic.

of imagined models of each other (in Gilbert 1998: 52). Langton's point illustrates the inherently fraught project of homogenising Indigenous politics and in particular, in terms of the category 'Third World'.

From the post-dramatic text to dramatic literary theatre: Müller's 'The Commission' in Mudrooroo's 'Protesters'

Müller's *The Commission* is the story of three revolutionary emissaries of the French Republic – Debuisson, Galloudec and Sasportas – sent to the British colony of Jamaica in 1793 to incite a slave rebellion. Debuisson is the son of a Jamaican slave owner, Sasportas a former black slave from Haiti, and Galloudec a peasant from Brittany. Debuisson had travelled to Paris to study medicine where he took up the cause of the revolution. Upon learning that Napoleon will assume power in France and be crowned Emperor, Debuisson betrays the revolutionary uprising he sailed to Jamaica to instigate, while Galloudec and Sasportas remain committed to the principles of insurgency. Sasportas, as Galloudec remarks, after all is 'playing the most difficult part. It's been written onto your body' (47)[15]. The fate of the two revolutionaries, Galloudec and Sasportas opens *The Commission.* Galloudec is writing a letter from his deathbed in fever to inform Antoine that the uprising has been a failure and that Sasportas has been hanged in Port Royal. The Sailor who delivers the letter tells Antoine that Galloudec has died of gangrene in a half-hospital, half-prison in Cuba. His left leg had been amputated, initially at the knee and then at the hip. As for Sasportas the Sailor explains that the bodies are cut from their nooses and drop into the ocean for the sharks below the gallows at the edge of a cliff. Antoine had commissioned the plot against British rule in the colony and with the ascendency of Napoleon is in hiding. The address of the office Galloudec had provided the Sailor with is no longer valid. Müller's Antoine as the guilt ridden arbitrator of death in a failed revolution conducts a mordant, futile 'dialogue' with the ghosts of the dead:

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[15]   All quotes from Müller's *The Commission* are from Gerhard Fischer's translation (1993: 41-61).

> Galloudec, Sasportas. Where is your leg, Galloudec. Why is your tongue hanging out of your mouth, Sasportas. What do you want from me. Am I responsible for your stump. And for your rope. Shall I cut off one of my legs. Do you want me to hang myself next to you. Ask your emperor about your leg, Galloudec. Show the emperor your tongue, Sasportas. He is winning wars in Russia. (Müller *The Commission*: 45)

Debuisson on the other hand 'is fine' (43). 'It seems', Galloudec states in his letter, 'that traitors are having a good time when people are walking in blood' (43).

Inspired by Anna Segher's story *The Light on the Gallows* and specifically Segher's engagement with the figure of Stalin through Napoleon, liquidators of the revolution according to Müller, *The Commission* roughly consists of nine scenes[16] and in addition to Debuisson, Galloudec, Sasportas, Antoine and the Sailor Müller's figures include FirstLove and Woman (1994b: 297). However, as the self-proclaimed Angel of Despair Woman's function extends to an 'apparition/voice' and a man in an elevator emerges from the text as an unspecified narrator. The man in the elevator is a record of a dream Müller had in Mexico, which he described as 'A walk of fear through the Third World' (1994b: 297). It also refers to his visit to the machine gun guarded, lift-labyrinth of Honnecker's bureaucracy. In addition to the man in the elevator scene the prose text preceding the first dialogue between Sasportas, Debuisson and Galloudec is not assigned to a particular character. In Ulrich Mühe's production of *Der Auftrag* at the Haus der Berliner Festspiele in Berlin in January 2004 the actors playing Sasportas, Debuisson and Galloudec delivered this scene in unison, apart from identifying themselves as a character by individually speaking their name as they directly addressed the spectator. *The Commission* is organised according to a series of narratives, temporally unsequential. The first three scenes are set after Napoleon's ascendency of 9 November 1799 and subsequently account for the end of the mission. Müller's remaining scenes with the exception of the unidentified text block dealing with the man in the elevator introduce the emissaries from their arrival in Jamaica to Napoleon's

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[16]   See Fischer for a scene by scene synopsis of Müller's play (1993: 181-84).

coronation signalling the end of the French of Revolution. As a consequence, the fated Galloudec and Sasportas function structurally as enunciations issuing from the realm of the dead in the last six scenes of the text.

Financed by the Literature Board of the Australia Council and the Centre for Performance Studies at the University of Sydney, Mudrooroo commenced the process of drafting a script around Müller's *The Commission* during a twelve week writer-in-residence in Sydney in 1991. Fischer's dramaturgical concept outlined a theatre-within-a-theatre situation and for Mudrooroo it resulted in an attempt, to use his words, to 'highjack the text' (1993b: 21). In this respect it reflects aspects of a number of the productions and plays Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins refer to in *Post-colonial drama: theory, practice, politics* as examples of projects developed to counter 'classics' or juxtapose texts: Tomson Highway's *The Rez Sisters* (1986), for example, a re-working of Michel Tremblay's counter-discursive play *Les Belles Soeurs* (1996: 47-48); and, Stella Kon's Singaporean drama *The Bridge*, which consisted of *The Ramayana* as a play-within-a-play, as well as references to Weiss' *Marat/Sade* in the context of a Help Service Centre for drug addicts in therapy (1996: 17). Explicit in the Weiss inspired title of *The Aboriginal Protesters*, is the representation of an illusory cosmos consistent with the structures of dramatic action. Mudrooroo's play consists of Aboriginal actors rehearsing *The Commission* in a fictional future – the eve of the announcement of an Australian Republic in 2001[17]. For Mudrooroo, Müller's *The Commission* constituted 'a circular essay on defeat' and he consequently aimed to present Aboriginal people in the 'urgency of protest' (1993b: 21, 20). In doing so, Mudrooroo differentiated Müller's European (German) context from his own by making the point in his essay in Fischer's casebook that political struggle is still possible in Australia (1993b: 31).

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[17] Australia remains a constitutional monarchy after the referendum of 6 November 1999 failed to deliver a majority vote in favor of a republic.

A two-week workshop period from 2 to 12 October 1991 involving six actors concluded Mudrooroo's residency period. In the initial pre-production period significant cultural and dramaturgical differences emerged. Mudrooroo, Syron and Fischer all refer to a constant search for parallels between the two texts, and in an interview with Fischer Syron stated:

> There were many difficulties, many problems. I think it's got to do with the difference between colonisation of the countries that Müller writes about, and the experience here in Australia. What you have here are the lies that this nation was founded on, the lie of *terra nullius*, that no-one was here. That's the first lie. Then you go on – the lies of how the land was taken, the covering up in this country of the massacres, the lies about the massacres, the lies about the decimation of whole tribes of people through smallpox and measles and syphilis and gonorrhoea, diseases that were brought into the country that Aboriginal people had absolutely no defence against. That's without the poisoning of the waterholes and the handing out of damper laced with strychnine, the sweet cake to give to the natives. The lies through to today where they are not told the history of their country, they are told an Englishman's version of it. Of how the country was taken. Müller writes about Jamaica, Haiti, France, Germany. Different countries, different histories. So that was the first problem. (Syron in Fischer 1993: 131-2)

In addition, according to Fischer and Syron, the lack of familiarity of the actors with a range of events necessary to the understanding of Müller's text as a result of limited formal education and training surfaced in the workshop (see Fischer 1993: 134). From the outset the workshop involved an extraordinary combination of background information and technique development, including an introduction to Müller and Brecht, as well as a demonstration of the Stella Adler method by Syron. It is highly interesting in this context that the actors 'instinctively like', to use Fischer's words, the man in the elevator scene, seemingly the most obscure aspect of the text (1993: 128). The surrealistic nature of the section, Fischer explained, constituted its appeal. Unlike Robert Wilson's approach to the 'words' of Müller's material, however, it is clear from the workshop notes that the team with the exception of Fischer struggled with the text on the basis that they approached its form from the perspective of drama.

Byron Syron directed Justine Saunders (Aboriginal Medical Service Woman/MaryAnne), Pamela Young (Aboriginal Legal Service Woman/Eve), David Kennedy (Black Bureaucrat/Peter), Ray Kelly (Goomee/King George), Gary Cooper (Black Activist and Director of Play/Bob), Michael Watson (Black Academic/Clint), Bradley Byquar (the narrator/stage directions) and Suzanne Butt (musician) in the workshop. The following roles corresponded to Müller's text: Bob, the Black Activist and Director of the Play played Debuisson; the Goomee/King George, the Sailor and the first section of Sasportas; Clint, the Black Academic, Galloudec; Peter, the Black Bureaucrat, Antoine, the old slave, part of the black man in a cage and the last part of Sasportas; MaryAnne, the Aboriginal Medical Service Woman, Müller's Woman, a female slave, and a woman in a cage; and Eve, the Aboriginal Medical Service Woman, FirstLove. On 14 October 1991 the performers involved in the workshop presented a staged reading under the name The Aboriginal Actors Company at Belvoir Street Theatre in Sydney. In 1993 aged 53 Syron died.

Actor and former director of the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Arts Board of the Australia Council, Lydia Miller, sent Noel Tovey the script and he agreed to direct the production. Noel Tovey had returned to Australia in 1991. The son of an Aboriginal mother and African-American father, Tovey had been removed from his family as a child and grew up in a town in New South Wales. He had left school by the age of twelve, suffered abuse as a foster child and in his words had 'brushes with the law' (1995/6: 8). In the 1960s he immigrated to Britain where he worked as a principal dancer with the Sadler's Wells Opera Ballet and John Cranko in Stuttgart, before directing/choreographing music theatre in London and founding a Theatre for Children and later opening L'Odeon Art Gallery in London. For the staged version of Mudrooroo's script Justine Saunders and Gary Cooper remained in the cast: Saunders as Aboriginal Medical Service Woman/MaryAnne and Gary Cooper as the Black Bureaucrat/Peter. Rachel Maza played the Aboriginal Legal Service Woman/Eve; Billy McPherson, Black Academic/Clint; Glen Shea, Black Activist and Director of Play/Bob;

Kevin Smith, Goomee/King George; and Victoria Kennedy joined the team as the Angel of Despair, along with dancers Jason Moore and Sue-Ann Williams for the staging of the final scene of Müller's text presented in *The Aboriginal Protesters*. Most of the cast would be now familiar to audiences from Australian television. Smith had won Aboriginal Performer of the year in 1994, and Maza had played a number of well-known roles in television drama and film. Saunders is arguably the most prominent Aboriginal actor working in Australian television today.

Produced by The Performance Space in association with the Sydney Festival, The Aboriginal Protesters was first staged at The Performance Space in Sydney as part of the festival from 10 to 28 January 1996. For Mudrooroo the play had already been a success through the workshop process, given that it strengthened 'our Aboriginality':

> A Nyoogah, Murris and Kooris came together in a community which sweated over the difficult text of Müller to produce a hybrid [...]. I believe that the workshopping of a black play is as important as in sending it out to the universal world of the European to be admired as a work of art. (Mudrooroo in Fischer 1993: 143)

In the Australian press the production attracted attention as a landmark theatre event. Angela Bennie remarked that:

> There are occasions, all too rare, when, as a member of the audience, one is privileged to have witnessed what took place. There are moments when one wants to stand up and bear witness. This is one of those occasions. (Bennie 1996: 14)

In spite of its predominately positive critical reception, a number of commentators, including the *Australian*'s John McCallum, the *Sydney Review*'s Patrick Nolan and the *Telegraph*'s Stewart Hawkins pointed to Mudrooroo's limited ability as a playwright. For Nolan:

> While Mudrooroo's writing was fuelled by argument about the Aboriginal predicament, it tended towards simplicity when dealing with the questions provoked by the Müller text and in doing so, robbed itself of a good deal of power. (Nolan 1996: 15)

As a consequence, Nolan concludes that Mudrooroo in fact negates the potential in Müller's *The Commission*, which he contends constitutes a 'different' language and space for negotiation.

The 'different' language of Nolan's thought is symptomatic of the 'formal' tensions distinguishing Mudrooroo's drama from Müller's post-dramatic text. Mudrooroo's play constructs a dialectical response to Müller's material through the interpersonal dialogue of its characters and its coherent plot leads to a 'closure' impossible from the perspective of post-dramatic theatre form. In Mudrooroo's script the Black Activist and the Director of the Play, Bob, functions fundamentally as a historical narrator delivering information about Aboriginal struggle as a result of European settlement in Australia and introducing the thematic concerns of *The Commission* prior to the actors playing the scenes from Müller's text. As arguments develop within the cast about their relation to each other and the play he acts as a mediator by periodically calling for unity and a return to the political task of the play. The interactions between Goomee/King George and the Black Bureaucrat, Peter, constitute the main tension in Mudrooroo's script. King George, Bob's father, has been recently released from prison and in the words of Mudrooroo's MaryAnne:

> [...] That old fella, he's been in the struggle long before there was even a struggle. I'm a nurse. I've seen his body, broken and battered by the boots and fists and sticks of the pigs. Miracle that he's managed to keep going all these years. Strong black spirit, that one; strong black spirit, sis ... And there's something else – makes my heart cry to think about it. He's got that pleurisy. It's a jail disease, the dampness, the concrete attacks your lungs.[...]. (Mudrooroo *The Aboriginal Protesters*: 94)

In contrast, Peter, adopted by a middle-class white family attended a private school and

apart from his government position has had limited contact with his Indigenous heritage. Like the uneasy relationship between King George and the Black Bureaucrat, Peter, Mudrooroo juxtaposes the Aboriginal Medical Service Woman, MaryAnne in relation to Eve, the Aboriginal Legal Service Woman, Peter's girlfriend. The older characters of King George and MaryAnne provide a 'grass roots' education for the younger characters of Peter and Eve and foreground the connection between generations of Aboriginal people in Australia. Clint, as the Black Academic, elaborates upon the links between *The Commission* and the Australian situation and specifically the early stages of the French Republic and the fictional Republic to be declared in Australia.

Fischer raised concern in the original workshop about the lack of character development in Mudrooroo's script with the exception of the figure of Goomee/King George, and generally the absence of a correlation between the Aboriginal characters and the figures in Müller's text. In the workshop Fischer observed that Mudrooroo's characters are 'little more than the 'social' identity suggested by their professions' (1993: 127). Character development emerges in the published play as a construction fundamentally dependent upon King George, who instigates the expansion of the Black Bureaucrat's Aboriginal consciousness that reaches resolve prior to the unanimous call for sovereignty. Peter's Indigenous identity is confirmed by King George following his admission that this is the 'first time I've felt really black, part of a mob' (113) and is subsequently permitted to play Sasportas, a 'Strong black man to give you strong back spirit', in the words of King George (113). As a consequence, Mudrooroo's social identities largely foreground the contradictions inherent in the interrelationships specific to urban Aboriginality and attain resolution in political unity as part of an allegorical herald of 'new' justice through the repudiation of European art. More specific to a local context, Mudrooroo's characters directly reflect the areas of concern Noonuccal covered in her opening address at the Second Aboriginal Writers' Conference held in Melbourne in November 1983. In this speech Noonuccal called for Aboriginal public servants to be written about and she identified legal and medical

services, as well as education, as key subjects in a program of action for Aboriginal writers and people[18].

Like Noonuccal's vision for contemporary Aboriginal literature, Mudrooroo's characters represent well-educated Indigenous people from the public sector. It is a point Fischer reinforces in his article '*Twoccing*: 'Der Auftrag' to Black Australia: Heiner Müller 'Aboriginalised' by Mudrooroo', and he subsequently concludes that the play is indicative of a significant departure in 'Black Australian theatre' (1995: 145). In *The Aboriginal Protesters* Mudrooroo repeatedly precludes and foregrounds the presentation of Indigenous characters as victims, literary and social. As part of the extended debate opening Mudrooroo's play Peter, for example, refers to:

> That fucking old stereotype. Why don't we introduce him: Ladies and Gentlemen: This is how you see us: The Drunken Coon! (Mudrooroo *The Aboriginal Protesters*: 84)

Later in the text, the Black Academic, Clint explicitly reinforces this issue:

> We've talked it over before. We want to get away from Poor Bugger Me Gurindji. NO MORE VICTIMS! Action not reaction. (Mudrooroo *The Aboriginal Protesters*: 100)

Tovey, similarly, points to character representation as critically important in an Australian context:

> It's a great statement about Aboriginal theatre, that we are actors first and foremost and we don't have to portray drunks in the gutter. It's an opportunity for Aboriginal actors to show their skills. It's also great to do the Müller with white masks. The combination of the two revolutions ie. Müller's fable and the Aboriginal revolution is really exciting. It's a plea for everyone to find their own voice. It will also be a role model for young Aboriginal people. Yothu Yindi and Christine Anu have done more good

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[18]   Mudrooroo reproduces in full Noonuccal's speech in *Writing from the Fringe* (see 1990: 21-23).

than all the schooling and the police stations. (Tovey 1995/6: 10)

Apart from the literary associations intrinsic to Müller's text, Fischer refers to a number of dramaturgical models as influential in the development of Mudrooroo's script in his article *Twoccing*: Günter Grass' *The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising*; Jean Genet's skin colour as a mask; Pirandello's *teatro nel teatro*, its role-play with psychological identity. The Berlin GRIPS Theatre's production of *Voll auf der Rolle* by Leonie Ossowski constitutes a special note in Fischer's record in relation to the initial phase of script development. It is a production, according to Fischer, that transforms the rehearsal of a historical play 'into a fictive *Lehrstück* experience within the performance reality of a Brechtian *Schaustück*' and thereby heightens the contradictions between both plays (1995: 143). Mudrooroo's framework, his play around *The Commission*, predominantly functions on the basis of a series of dis-identifications interrupting the play-within-the-play: the Aboriginal characters' reactions to the representational roles of Müller's figures, their interpretation of his portrayal of women and slaves in the text. Ultimately, these disruptions lead to a vote about whether the cast will proceed and perform the 'play' that culminates in a rejection of *The Commission*. In the process of denouncing the play the cast have performed it and the social division that emerged in rehearsal is resolved in the unanimous decision not to present it upon the declaration of an Australian republic. Social unity is embedded in agit-prop protest and specifically the demand for self-determination; a demand that shifts from a call for sovereignty in Mudrooroo's text to its execution. The cast answer Bob's questions, 'WHAT HAVE WE GOT?' 'WHEN DID WE GET IT?', emphatically: 'SOVEREIGNTY', 'NOW, NOW, NOW' (121).

It is clear in Mudrooroo's resolution of what his characters identify as Müller's 'play' that he locates subjectivity and its operational systems or literary structures in writing and performance within the material conditions of power. In his treatise on Aboriginality and the politics of aesthetic production in *Writing from the Fringe* he points to the development of artistic criteria according to a set of standards dictated by

Western literary criticism (see 1990: 43-8). Mudrooroo explicates the imposition of this paradigm as 'white forms' and in his chapter dealing with dramatic literature argues Aboriginality of discourse and structure destablises the European play and that this infers the reverse effect or the weakening of an Aboriginal piece as a result of the incursion of European convention (1990: 125). It is a point he qualifies by referring to the 'schizophrenic' nature of the Aboriginal dramatist on the basis that the material is often prepared for an audience both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. For Mudrooroo modern Aboriginal drama relies on the intrusion of Aboriginal 'reality' (1990: 124). Dance, supernatural or surreal[19] elements characterise the 'disturbance' to the predominant European model: realism or naturalism. Mudrooroo is not promoting a perception of Aboriginal culture as static and a return to traditional expression, but rather a connection to the past that raises the question of the loss of cultural 'reality'. In doing so, he identifies the disparate experience constituting the erosion of traditional culture in the urban environment of Sydney, for example, and the contact and connection forging Aboriginal structures of the old and the new in Western Australia (1990: 122). From *Writing from the Fringe*, however, it is difficult to ascertain if Mudrooroo is advocating style or content as the most constructive site to advance Aboriginal politics and it is a tension, as Andrew Lattas observes, that remains largely unresolved (1993: 256). If *The Aboriginal Protesters* is considered as a case in point, Mudrooroo locates its political voice clearly in the domain of content. A number of issues – political, social and aesthetic – arise as a consequence of Mudrooroo's application of a dramatic structure that corresponds to Aristotle's basic unities of action, place and time deriving from unity of plot. Ironically, it is an accord that subsumes, and in doing so, annuls Müller's post-dramatic form.

Mudrooroo examines writing styles in *Writing from the Fringe* in order to expound upon

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[19]   Mudrooroo differentiates Aboriginal from white 'reality' on the basis that the former is an expanded sense of consciousness akin to 'dreaming'. He exemplifies this point by referring to songs and rituals as 'imparted in dreams' in Aboriginal culture, as opposed to being 'brain-made', and subsequently describes this process as similar to the unconscious impulse of European surrealism (see 1990: 37-8).

the politics inherent in European mediums of expression on the basis that:

> cultural genocide is still a potent force in Australia. We Aboriginal writers must be aware and remain aware that if we choose to use white forms we are in effect 'thinking white'; that by using these forms we are leaving ourselves open to be judged purely by white standards. (Mudrooroo 1990: 45)

In his analysis of the political intention behind *Writing from the Fringe* Lattas interprets Mudrooroo's treatise as an explication of the implications of adopting a Western style or model to reason that it explores the idea of the Aboriginal writer as an 'accomplice' as a consequence of form (see 1993: 256). Lattas elaborates on this point by referring to the question of 'authenticity' and the operational politics inherent in structures of communication. He subsequently articulates Mudrooroo's aim as a question of whether another voice imposes itself through a Western mode of expression and thereby structures and controls, subverts even, the Aboriginality of the writer. Mudrooroo's conscious engagement with the question of form parallels Müller's understanding of the politics of literary and dramatic production:

> As long as freedom is based on violence and the practice of art on privileges, works of art will tend to be prisons; the great works, accomplices of power. (Müller 1979: 57)

The question of the literary complicity intrinsic to Müller's statement manifests in the form of an indictment against the European author in *The Aboriginal Protesters* play. Mudrooroo's 'highjacking' of Müller's text consciously recognises the political presence of a white (Western) 'voice' in the figure of the (East) German 'playwright', despite what Lehmann identifies as Müller's sympathy for the 'Third World' (1999: 455). Müller is repeatedly categorised in terms of the rationalist divisions (coloniser/colonised; white/black) specific to postcolonial theory.

> Eve: Does Müller really think of women like that? (86)
> King George: [...]. And do we need Müller to tell us who we are; do we

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need any white man to tell who they are [...]. (100)

King George: And yet you give us Müller, which is about victim. Worse victim, Man who lost his soul, heart and relations and spirit. You want that for us? You want that white way for us to walk along? In that university, you learn a little bit, then try to bring it over to us. We don't want it. (100)

MaryAnne: [...]. It's a fucking male white text! (101)

MaryAnne: Don't you see what role you have put me in here? Am I not, yet again the black woman as naked as those white men can get her, ready to be raped in their male art. (103)

MaryAnne: It's written by a man, a white man [...]. (103)

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(Mudrooroo *The Aboriginal Protesters*)

For Fischer Mudrooroo's play avoids the dichotomy of 'us' and 'them' or 'victim' and 'oppressor' common in Aboriginal literature on the basis of the all Aboriginal cast (1995: 147). He subsequently interprets Mudrooroo's 'altercation' with Müller's text as a struggle against the voice of the European oppressor that can be read as an attempt to attain the cultural space advocated in *Writing from the Fringe* (1995: 147). It is a struggle limited to the content of Müller's material, as opposed to its post-dramatic aesthetic. From this perspective Mudrooroo, like Kalb's assessment of the (East) German's inability to identify with the experience of Black and Indigenous populations, points to the lack of empowerment in the representation of Indigenous 'voices' in Müller's text[20].

The Commission is constituted by a revolutionary consciousness imported from France (Debuisson, Antoine, Galloudec) and even its Indigenous emissary, Sasportas, is not a citizen of Jamaica. In his article *The Aboriginalising of Heiner Müller* Mudrooroo pointed to the nationality of Müller's proponents of the revolution as evidence that the Jamaican

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[20]   In *The Theater of Heiner Müller* (1998) Kalb examines Müller's 'The Mission' (his translation of *Der Auftrag*) in relation to Jean Genet's 'The Blacks', to reason, arguably excessively, that it is to an extent a 'straightforward imitation' of Genet's work (130). In addition, he refers to the comparison Müller drew between the treatment of the citizens of the GDR and Negroes (Note 8, p. 224) and himself (134) to subsequently, warn that, 'The Mission is an important reminder that, for all his youthful isolation and poverty, Müller learned socialist principles from a blood parent, was comfortable from a young age with High German, and never suffered anything like the sort of segregation and degradation that made literary production unthinkable for the young Genet and continues to do so for multitudes of real untouchables and foundlings of all colors' (134).

slaves function as a backdrop, as opposed to a direct voice in Müller's text (1993b: 20). In FirstLove's narrative, for example, slaves are depicted as dogs at the hands of Galloudec's whip. As a consequence, Mudrooroo points to Müller's intellectual relationship to the Third World:

> But then Müller is really not interested in the blacks of Jamaica. He is, as an East German, interested in the stagnation of defeat; whereas I, as an Aborigine, a Nyoongah, am interested in combating the stagnation of defeat, and so in the process of Aboriginalisation, I establish a dialectic which sets up against the Müller text to create a tension of blackness, as well as to give a voice to those black people who are denied one. (Mudrooroo 1993b: 20)

More specifically, Müller's 'colonial' sensibility derives from the fall of the Wall, the West's inner colonisation of Germany as a result of unification. Mudrooroo's sentiment, however, reinforces the different subject positions and objectives distinguishing the writers and in particular in relation to the concept of 'colonisation'. In Mudrooroo's play and the staged version the parallel between Müller's figures and the characters developed by Mudrooroo in his script fundamentally relate to Sasportas, the ex-slave from Haiti and in general to slavery. Tovey, arguably, heightened the correlation. King George's descent into panic as he recalls his prison cell and the tug of the rope around his neck is triggered directly by the visibility of the bars as he plays Müller's slave in a cage, as opposed to the surrealism of the Angel of Despair scene in Mudrooroo's text. Both versions, however, constitute powerful indictments of Black Deaths in Custody.

Furthermore, in what might be contrasted to the 'socialist Intelligensia' of Müller's text, Mudrooroo's vernacular diverges lexically and semantically in *The Aboriginal Protesters* from what Mudrooroo terms in *Writing from the Fringe* as Standard English. 'youse', 'cuz', 'mate', 'gotta', 'oldies', 'gubbament' and ironic expressions like 'Koori Standard Time' reflect speech patterns specific to an urban Aboriginal environment and a structure of communication that attempts to resist Western modes of expression. Mudrooroo refers to the hegemony of Standard English throughout the British colonies

with the exception of Pidgin in New Guinea in *Writing from the Fringe* (see 1990: 111-12). He points to the adoption of Standard English as an act of conformity that in fact constitutes the production of texts that sustain 'ideologies and mechanisms of oppression characteristic of conquest and colonisation' (1990: 110). As a consequence, in King George's words:

> [...] We want to keep seeing through black mind, through black heart, through black eyes. [...]. (Mudrooroo *The Aboriginal Protesters*: 100)

King George's sentiments raise a broader question concerning the imposition of European history. *The Commission*, as Lehmann notes in his analysis of the text in relation to Büchner's *Danton's Death*, expresses deep uncertainty as to the validity of history as a transparent text ('an der Gültigkeit eines Klartextes der Geschichte') (1985: 120). As a consequence, it calls into question the concept of history for European thought and more significantly in this context, it points to the tension underpinning Müller's politico-philosophical aesthetic and Mudrooroo's conscious attempt to acknowledge and thereby resist the history of inculcation into a Western corpus and cultural territory.

Even when a text appears to occupy a central position in 'new theatre' there are endeavours to deform or defile it, according to Lehmann (1997: 57). Ironically, it is a statement that ostensibly describes Mudrooroo's approach to Müller's text. Mudrooroo, however, basically leaves Müller's material intact, while Tovey as a result of key cuts to the text transforms *The Commission* into a mise-en-scène of word drama. The dramatic play that Mudrooroo constructed directly criticises the politics of Müller's text through the characters' interpersonal communication. In addition to the specific issues deriving from Müller's text, Mudrooroo utilised the project as an opportunity to address highly charged international issues, including the call for Aboriginal remains held in German museums to be returned. It is the question of Müller's treatment of women, however, that emerges as a highly poignant topic in

Mudrooroo's play. In the creative phase of the workshop Mudrooroo expressed concern with the way in which women function in Müller's text and this permeates the dialogue of his female characters, the Aboriginal Medical Service Woman, MaryAnne and Eve, the Aboriginal Legal Service Woman. MaryAnne in the final script, for example, breaks her role in the Müller text and declares:

> [...] What I don't like about this play – and I've told you this, time after time, Bob, is that women in it are treated like fuck bags. [...]. (Mudrooroo *The Aboriginal Protesters*: 86)

Fischer introduced an excerpt from Müller's *Hamletmachine* in the workshop to generally illustrate another aspect of the function of female figures in Müller's work. As a consequence, Mudrooroo wrote Müller's revolutionary Ophelia into the script and the excerpt from *Hamletmachine* follows the first of the two narratives by FirstLove and specifically the lines, 'One should not leave a woman alone' (102). In Tovey's production Rachel Maza (FirstLove) offered Justine Saunders to Debuisson: 'I'll give you this bitch as a gift, little Victor, so that you can fill her up with your spoiled seed' (102). Maza pushed Saunders to her knees in front of Debuisson, before Saunders stood up and bellowed out the first section of text from Müller's Ophelia.

> I smash the tools of my captivity, the chair the table the bed [...]. I set fire to my prison. (Mudrooroo [Müller *Hamletmachine*] *The Aboriginal Protesters*: 103)

The brief description of Tovey's direction above points to action moved forward through speech acts and this characterised his methodology. Tovey commented unenthusiastically in an interview with Angharad Wynne-Jones and Jonathan Parsons about the quality of Mudrooroo's script (1995/6: 9). However, he qualified his remark by referring to the fact that he found it hard to believe that the script had emerged from a series of workshops and that he felt that there was a good play in the text. Not surprisingly, Tovey's staged version of Mudrooroo's work consisted of a number of key

changes to the published script.

In Tovey's production rehearsals of Müller's *The Commission* commence after pre-rehearsal bickering and in contrast to Mudrooroo's historical narrative, the framework of the play is explicitly introduced by its director, Bob:

> Lights. Ladies and Gentlemen how many commissions have been set up to deal with us 'poor bloody blacks' (*mimics inverted commas*). Well it seems like they were doing it in other times to other black races and as usual they failed. Tonight on the day of the proclamation of the Republic of Australia we, the Aboriginal Theatre of Australia are going to present a play for you about one such failure and betrayal set in Paris and Jamaica at the time of the French revolution. It is 'The Commission' by Heiner Müller.[21]

Tovey cut Mudrooroo's songs in the staged production and many of the narratives, such as the performers' rejection of Müller's representation of 'women' recur less often. Similarly, Tovey curtailed significantly the role of the Djangara or spirits that appear periodically in Mudrooroo's script. Instead, shadows of Aboriginal people are visible throughout the performance on two screens in the wings of the black box auditorium. These are back-lit during the black-outs signalling the rehearsals of Müller's text, while spotlights predominately distinguish the action on a large gangway leading to an elevated improvised proscenium stage. From the large rehearsal table to the right of the gangway the actors prepare to perform and interrupt the action on the stage-within-the-stage with arguments about the verbal content of *The Commission*. The makeshift quality of the rehearsal space, its scaffolding in the wings reflected Mudrooroo's suggested set modelled on the tent embassies that have characterised Aboriginal struggle. At the outset of the production, the actors exchange their casual clothes in order to commence the dress rehearsal. The white tailcoats and hats reminiscent of late eighteenth century European maritime dress worn by the male performers and the white dresses of the female members of the cast foreground skin colour as a marker of

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[21]   This quote is taken from a video recording of *The Aboriginal Protesters* (1996b) provided by The Performance Space, Sydney.

identity.

To play the characters of Müller's *The Commission* Tovey's actors donned masks in the production. Müller's *The Commission* explicitly alludes to Brecht's *The Measures Taken.* Debuisson, Galloudec and Sasportas land in Port Royal wearing masks mirroring Brecht's three comrades upon arrival in China. In contrast to Brecht's piece, the masks in Müller's text fail to eradicate the social identity of his characters: Galloudec and Sasportas disclose their roles and Debuisson is playing himself: 'I am who I was: Debuisson' (46). As a consequence, socio-political divisions – Debuisson (Master/Privilege), Galloudec (Peasant/Servant) and Sasportas (Slave/Exploited) – remain categorically evident beneath the functional anonymity of Brecht's mask. Mudrooroo's characters, similarly, maintain their identity by consistently breaking their roles and more significantly, the masks highlight the distinction between the Indigenous 'reality' of the actors and the stage-figures of Müller's *The Commission.* Transplanted to an Australian context the masks typically understood as a legacy of ancient Greek drama are specifically invested with the imperial discourse of the coloniser. From this perspective the cast symbolically occupy the subject position of the European oppressor and in doing so, subvert the logic of dispossession specific to Australian history. It is an inversion that can be read in relation to Ntozake Shange's *spell #7* and in particular her critical use of the minstrel tradition.

In an article analysing the use of the minstrel in *spell #7* by the African-American playwright[22], Karen Cronacher applies psychoanalytic theory to discuss the white male experience of minstrelsy. Cronacher employs Homi Bhabha's reconceptualisation of the process of fetishisation and in particular his understanding of minstrelsy as a cultural expression underpinned by a desire for authenticity and more specifically, a nineteenth century desire for an authentic European historical consciousness (1996: 203-4). In *The*

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[22]   Like Müller, Shange has been influenced by Frantz Fanon's account of the colonised struggle in French-occupied territory (see Cronacher 1996: 192).

Aboriginal Protesters the masks and costumes not only reflect the imposition of a colonial sensibility, but the menace of mimicry that Bhabha attributes to double vision (in Schneider 1997: 170). It is a process that displaces the gaze and points to the erasure of other bodies as a consequence of colonial authority. Like Cronacher's reading of *spell #7* white Europeans emerge as the Other in *The Aboriginal Protesters*, that is, as an ethnic category, and this contrasts significantly to the construction of a European consciousness in Müller's text (1996: 193). Ironically, the mask signifies dominant representation as a white 'Other' in *The Aboriginal Protesters*, but in doing so, also points to the difficulty of conceiving of Aboriginality in a culture of 'white standards' to refer back to Mudrooroo's argument in *Writing from the Fringe.* As a consequence, it heightens the visibility of the political and historical connotations and complexity specific to the representation of Indigenous/-European Australia, as well as the stage and the actor as a construct dramatising a particular cosmology.

Müller's treatment of Brecht's mask foregrounds the difference Brecht disavows in *The Measures Taken* and culminates in the extended repetition of the following slogan.

> REVOLUTION IS THE MASK OF DEATH DEATH IS THE MASK OF REVOLUTION (Müller *The Commission*: 48)

While these lines appear in other parts of Müller's text, Tovey's production cut the text block above and under Müller's direction at the Volksbühne in East Berlin it was printed on large cloth that dropped down from above the stage. Debuisson and Antoine survive the revolution and counter-revolution in *The Commission* and in doing so perpetuate a particular trajectory, European consciousness and its zenith in Woman and FirstLove as a substitute for the seductive and bloody lure of the revolution and its seemingly logical conclusion, treason. David Bathrick makes the important point in his essay in *Blacks and German Culture* that Sasportas' body *is* history (1986: 144). Bathrick contends that the composite of signifieds the figure of Sasportas generates is the starting point for revolutionary theatre, and it is a composite embodied in Mudrooroo's

King George in *The Aboriginal Protesters*, who enters wearing a breast plate on his bare chest. King George sardonically claims he has received it from the monarchy and that he has been declared King of the Aborigines of Australia. The Black Academic Clint elaborates on its colonial meaning:

> [...] It was a symbol of slavery, of subjection. There is a history of divide and rule behind it. They took some Jacky and decided that he was a chief just as they done in Africa and America. [...]. (Mudrooroo *The Aboriginal Protesters*: 81)

Mudrooroo's character King George symbolises the physical and unconscious scars of the history of Aboriginal struggle in Australia from his jail pleurisy to the displaced ancestral bones that in MaryAnne's words 'call him' (111).

In the staged version of Mudrooroo's play, Müller's directions in the FirstLove narrative are entirely cut from the production. They are neither verbally delivered as part of the scene nor enacted. FirstLove's narrative is framed by what Müller refers to as the return of the prodigal son, Debuisson. Müller's scene consists of Debuisson's mother and father in an open closet and FirstLove on a throne, while slaves undress and costume Debuisson as a slaveholder, Galloudec as an overseer with a whip and Sasportas as a slave, himself. The prose that follows describes slaves lifting the skirt of the mother over her head, a female slave painting the mother 'a big mouth' (49), her nipples and a blue heart, before the slave puts on a tiger mask. Clearly the power-laden signifiers intrinsic to Müller's prose attain a readability that is politically highly charged in a post-colonial context. If, however, Homi Bhabha's explication of the racial stereotype as a discourse of fetishism is applied to this scene an extraordinary parallel emerges in terms of the fantasy of Oedipal and racial purity, as well as in relation to its female signifiers typically suspended between the myth of Medusa and oblivion in what Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément term the dark continent of female sexuality (1986: 68). FirstLove's vindictive, psychotic address to 'Little Victor' is steeped in the refuse of the body. Her tears, sweat and cries of lust are to be sketched in Debuisson's

polluted flesh with the fangs of her slave-dogs and her wedding dress carved from his skin. According to Bhabha 'the scene of fetishism is also the scene of the reactivation and repetition of primary fantasy – the subject's desire for a pure origin that is always threatened by its division' (in Cronacher 1996: 202). FirstLove's narrative fundamentally re-enacts the process of fetishisation at precisely its fissure, the threat of contamination. Debuisson's origin 'the gaping hole of home … the womb of the family' is dramatically on display under the mother's skirt: the scent of her flowers – rotten. Müller juxtaposes the passivity of the female slave framing the mother's mouth (saliva), nipples (milk) and heart (blood) against the backdrop of FirstLove's menacing account of savage bestiality. At the level of the body Müller foregrounds the repressions, anxieties and ambivalences that Cronacher attributes to the colonial encounter (1996: 202)[23].

Müller's Angel of Despair, the voice of Woman, is a lure, a seductive conduit of the revolution. More significantly, it associates feminine sex with death. Antoine's Angel of Despair appears during the act of copulation. Her revolt is the oblivion of tomorrow and subsequently a voice from the future, as well as a herald of the corpses of the past. Displaced from its distinct Benjaminian reference[24] in *The Aboriginal Protesters*, the parameters of reading the iconic nature of Müller's female voices shift dramatically. This is compounded by the narrative of FirstLove in *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. Debuisson, FirstLove declares has betrayed her with his 'blood-smeared second love', the revolution, a 'whore', the 'viper with the blood-sucking vulva' (49). His FirstLove,

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[23]   It is possible to draw a parallel between Müller's FirstLove prose and Shange's strategy in *spell #7* and specifically, the way in which she reclaims 'black magic' and its negative signification. However, it is essential to qualify that Shange, in contrast to Müller, is speaking from the perspective of an African-American woman. As a consequence, a highly sensitive political power relation is intrinsic to Müller's historical position as a subject and author of this particular text that Kalb elaborates on in his monograph and which is referred to in footnote 19.

[24]   Benjamin's section IX in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* refers to Klee's painting 'Angelus Novus'. For Benjamin, Klee's image depicts the angel of history. That is, a figure interminably propelled towards the future as it looks at the past. The angel is caught in the storm of 'progress', which blows so forcefully from 'Paradise' that the angel cannot resist its movement (1968b: 249). Like the angel of history, Müller's angel of despair symbolises the oblivion of tomorrow. The face of Debuisson's FirstLove is Treason and ultimately triumphs over his second love, the revolution.

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however, is Treason and in the final scene of the text Debuisson is unable to resist the temptation of his FirstLove:

> Treason, smiling, showed her breasts, silently spread her legs, her beauty hit Debuisson like an axe. He forgot the storming of the Bastille, the hunger-march of the eighty thousand, the end of the Gironde, their Last Supper, a dead body at the table, Saint-Just, the black angel, Danton, the voice of the revolution, Marat hunched over the dagger, the broken jaw of Robespierre, his scream when the executioner tore off the bandage, his last pitying look on the applauding crowd. (Müller *The Commission*: 60-61)

After a brief allusion to Debuisson hanging on to his last remaining memory, a sandstorm off las Palmas, he is lost to Treason.

> Then Treason threw herself upon him like a heaven, the happiness of the labia a break at dawn. (Müller *The Commission*: 61).

Rachel Maza played FirstLove in Tovey's version of *The Aboriginal Protesters.* Framed under a spotlight on an elevated platform to the left of the stage-within-the-stage Maza narrated FirstLove's text. Dancers Jason Moore and Sue Anne Williams performed Debuisson's embrace of FirstLove/Treason to the sounds of the didgeridoo on the stage drenched in red light. FirstLove's narrative increasingly functioned as stage directions as the female dancer opened her legs and like 'Treason' threw herself on Moore before rolling down the gangway to a halt. Tovey's choreography built on the expressive properties of a modern movement vocabulary constituted one of the most intense anomalies of the production in terms of its relation to Müller's material. It fixed a (frontal-proscenium) point in space to illustrate and literally interpret Müller's 'words' for the spectator and in doing so, imposed the linear-temporal structure of a dance-drama on a post-dramatic aesthetic.

This is not to undermine the escalating pace that Tovey instituted in order to heighten the application of what Fischer referred to as the basic Brechtian idea of theatre as social-protest addressed to an audience through an actors' collective (1995: 149). Tovey

re-positioned Mudrooroo's introductory historical narrative about Aboriginal oppression to the concluding stages of the production. As a consequence, this enabled the cast to build considerable continuity, rhythm and emotive power in the lead up to a call for sovereignty. Bob's narrative as the Director of the Play points to key events from the forming of the colony of Port Jackson to its diseases and massacres, the formation of crucial lobbying bodies, such as The Australian Aborigines Protection Society and the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, 'an enduring symbol of our struggle' (80). In doing so, he attains a highly engaging and confronting momentum as members of the cast punctuate his account by individually identifying Aboriginal activists and sites of resistance by name, from Faith Bandler to Coranderrk. Apart from Bob, who addresses the audience directly, each of the actors stand with their backs to the spectators awaiting their turn to swing around to face the audience to deliver their lines and in doing so, effectively form the ranks of a demonstration. Until this closing protest scene of the production, the Director of the Play, Bob, has predominately established a fourth wall by directing the play from the space in front of the audience's ranked seating. Tovey intensifies considerably the impact of the call for sovereignty or in his words in the program:

> Ultimately, we reject the play because Müller's revolution is not our revolution, his language is not our language and to gain sovereignty we must find our voice. (Tovey in *The Aboriginal Protesters* 1996c: [n.pag.])

Unity of action, place and time ultimately shaped Mudrooroo and Tovey's quest for a language and political voice distinctly Aboriginal. Mudrooroo's dramaturgy depended upon the central position of the text and interpersonal dialogue to establish Brechtian critical distance to a post-dramatic theatre text through the convention of a play-within-a-play. It is clear that Mudrooroo is acutely conscious of the problem of dramatic structure and its articulation and reception within a nexus of power. Despite his political engagement concerning 'white content', however, the question of 'white form' remained entirely unresolved. *The Aboriginal Protesters* transformed Müller's *The Commission* into a series of text blocks and the decision to remove the man in the

elevator scene in the staged version imposed a form of cohesion foreign to Müller's text. Furthermore, Mudrooroo and Tovey predominately relied on dialogue as action and strategies consistent with conventional dramaturgy. As a consequence, *The Aboriginal Protesters* re-configured the possibility of a multiplicity of (political) voices and corporeal inflections into the concord of social protest. This is not to underestimate or undervalue its impact both in Australia and abroad. In addition to its performance at The Performance Space, the Kunstfest Weimar and the Muffathalle in Munich presented *The Aboriginal Protesters* in Germany in July 1996. Rolf Michaelis opened his review of the production in Sydney for *Die Zeit* with:

> Heiner Müller's theatre was never more revolutionary than in [sic] this hot summer night in the Australian harbour city of Sydney. The theatrical anarchist – who all his life thought about rebellion and betrayal, resistance and adapting to circumstances – is not yet buried in Berlin when he experiences one of his greatest triumphs. (Michaelis 1996: 51)[25]

In Ernst Schumacher's opinion it was the high point of Kunstfest Weimar, while *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reviewer Marion Ammicht opted to leave the last word to Mudrooroo and Müller. Müller reportedly commented on the Mudrooroo piece with the remark, 'Somehow very nice, but difficult to assess' and in Ammicht's view this corresponded to Mudrooroo's reading of Müller's text (1996: 17).

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[25] Translation by Gerhard Fischer provided by The Performance Space, Sydney.

6

Conclusion

If Ammicht's précis of the unsettling interaction underpinning the Mudrooroo/Müller project is applied more broadly to describe the predicament of post-dramatic theatre in Australia, Müller's assertion 'difficult to assess', paradoxically, pinpoints the elusive appeal and marginalisation of new forms of theatre in relation to the mainstream. It is elusive in so far as the political and imaginary possibility of post-dramatic theatre depends upon the capacity to relinquish the aesthetic locus or hierarchy intrinsic to theatrical models based on a 2000 year old definition of drama. Despite the challenges inherent in any departure from a historical precedent, recognition of the emergence of a new poetics is of critical importance to local artistic development as the controversy surrounding the presentation of Jan Fabre's *I Am Blood* as part of the Melbourne Festival demonstrated. In response to Fabre's inclusion in Robyn Archer's festival, the Victorian State Opposition called for government control of the festival and its program. For the Opposition's arts spokesman, Andrew Olexander, the experience of torture and menstruation in *I Am Blood* not only represented an 'appalling lack of judgment by the minister and artistic director', but exceeded previously 'offensive' festival content, including Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* (in Usher 2003: 3). In a statement remarkably consistent with the Reverend Fred Nile's moral objection to The Sydney Front's *The Pornography of Performance* lodged in the NSW Legislative Council and Assembly fifteen years earlier, Olexander asserted that in the interests of the taxpayer 'community standards have to be upheld' (in Usher 2003: 3). Perhaps not surprisingly, Olexander couches the question of the validity of artistic content (and form) in terms of resourcing priorities and a set of conventions or standards, as opposed to theatre's

aesthetic possibilities as a medium.

Beyond the public sphere, the spectator is more often than not cited as the standard in this debate as the German journalist Anke Schaefer observed during her visit to Melbourne in 2002. Stuart Maunder, the Artistic Director of Opera Australia, defended his program by pointing to the 'very traditional part of the audience' in his response to Schaefer's question:

> Why on earth would you present such an old fashioned interpretation to an audience in a large cosmopolitan city in the year 2002? (A Schaefer 2003: 11)

Markets or more precisely preconceptions concerning the audience and potential audiences for theatre is an issue not limited to opera in Australia. Schaefer's experience at the State theatre company in Melbourne (MTC), for example, highlighted the erosion between stage and screen craft referred to in the opening chapter. The Marketing Director of the Victorian Arts Centre, Jeremy Vincent, discussed the presence of television actors on the stage specifically in terms of their ability to bring a film and television audience to the theatre, as well as a younger community. Vincent's response left Schaefer speculating as to whether theatre should offer stars and light entertainment and after interviewing the Associate Director of the MTC, Julian Meyrick, keen to return to Germany to warn against the danger of increasing a company's reliance on box office income in light of declining government subsidy. For Schaefer the price can be calculated directly in terms of a deficit of sophisticated ideas, and her observations arguably reinforce the ramifications of the endemic institutionalisation of industry standards from training schools in Australia to the application of a set of techniques across a range of diverse mediums: theatre, film and TV. Schaefer, fortunately, did uncover engaging work during her trip to Australia. However, the independent artists and companies that captivated her imagination lead her to conclude that in this sector, 'Nobody here seems to be doing anything for the money' (2003: 11). In an article for the *Australian*, John McCallum and Paul Newman,

more cynically, elaborated upon the backbone of artist and project support in relation to the institution of infrastructure funding through the establishment of the Major Organisations Board of the Australia Council:

> The most important source of arts subsidy in this country, at the base level, is the Department of Social Security. Private sponsorship comes from the taxi companies and restaurants that employ artists between projects. It is a ludicrously inadequate way of nurturing talent and developing new work. (McCallum and Newman 1996: 13)

In terms of the question of resourcing the artistic endeavors of independent artists Schaefer makes a critical distinction between the German experience and the Australian. Audiences in Germany do not necessarily have to go to the fringe to encounter what the German journalist terms the 'cutting edge' (2003: 11). While Schaefer is referring to Thomas Ostermeier's[1] shift from the modest and now defunct The Baracke to the multi-functional institution of the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz most often linked to the celebrated productions of Peter Stein[2] and a theatre history and industry potentially unrivalled, comparisons shed light on the artistic and organisational development of the local industry and its relation to the international arena. Unlike the increasing recognition and multi-lateral co-production opportunities that support younger artists like the US playwright Richard Maxwell, the polish director Krzysztof Warlikowski and the Lithuanian director Oskaras Korsunovas from Vilnius, Australian theatre artists producing new forms of theatre struggle for

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[1] From 1999 until 2005 Thomas Ostermeier shared the artistic direction of the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz with choreographer Sasha Waltz (and theatre dramaturg Jens Hillje und dance dramaturg Jochen Sandig). Waltz, similarly, established her career at a small independent venue, the Sopiensaele in Berlin and her company now co-operates with the Schaubühne, which has re-structured to focus on theatre.

[2] The Schaubühne was founded in 1962. In 1970, as a reaction to existing repertoires and the State theatre system in Germany, the company under Peter Stein's influence began experimenting with new forms of theatre, as well as administrative and creative structures that included involving all members of staff in the decision-making process, and it subsequently developed an international reputation staging the works of playwrights like Botho Strauß and Peter Handke. The theatre was originally located at Hallesches Ufer, before it moved to Kurfürstendamm and became known as the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz in 1981.

international partnerships as a result of a lack of performance platforms, critical dialogue and conservative government funding for the arts in Australia. At a one-day symposium held in conjunction with The Performance Space's 21st Birthday, former director of the Sydney Festival Anthony Steel phrased the issue in the following way:

> Very seldom do governments and funding bodies talk about the arts in philosophical terms, and it is that debate that is so urgently needed. (Steel in RealTime 2004: 11)

Over twenty years after the establishment of The Performance Space and almost two decades since Open City and The Sydney Front first performed at the venue, inadequate and monopolising assertions about the nature of artistic practice from a range of sectors continue to hinder aesthetic exploration and subsequently, the development of the theatre industry.

Form remains one of the most contentious issues dominating debate about the contemporary theatre landscape and its political agenda. Does it fuse *logos* in an illusion of reality or transform theatrical structures – narrative, dialogue, the body – into a polylogic space? The broader political intention of this question concerns the privileging of one set of 'realities' over all others and in particular, as theatrical form is engendered in the idea of public culture, the function of the medium as an organisational structure propagating on the one hand a limited, or on the other hand manifold, perception of the social human subject. Choice and a sense of potential are intrinsic to the idea of communication attributable to post-dramatic theatre form. It is a mode of perception, however, that continues to perplex commentators in the public domain. In her review of the 2002 Melbourne Festival's presentation of Michael Laub's *Total Masala Slammer* Helen Thomson concluded that the work failed on the basis that the production did not understand the formal conventions it set out to critique. Without entering into a detailed discussion of the merits and shortcomings of the production, Thomson's evaluation exemplified an acute inability to clarify Laub's aesthetic strategy in relation to the *logos* of composition. What Thomson described as a

grab bag of styles, genres and cultures and patronisingly applauded as performers 'obviously trained' in the classical Indian style Kathakali, in fact accentuated the historic manipulation of dance and sound and, more significantly in light of Thomson's conclusion, the act of interpretation (2002: 27). From this perspective Laub's production can be read in relation to post-dramatic forms that attempt to liberate (dramatic) memory from the scriptures that have formed and de-formed not simply the culture of images dominating theatre as an institution, but the symbolic order.

Schaefer wrapped up her article on the theatre scene in Melbourne with the comment that:

> Talking to lots of people, I am still not convinced that Australian audiences are really such mainstream lovers. I think if the big theatre and opera companies took some new approaches and presented work that is more than the expected light entertainment, they could be successful. It is just a matter of time and any transition process involves risk. Theatre should be interesting and innovative. It should make us think. It shouldn't degenerate into just another turn-on-turn-off event. It should creep under our skins. (A Schaefer 2003: 11)

Like all theatrical enterprises, post-dramatic theatre entails risk. However, it rarely attracts the research, development and production opportunities of the mainstream in Australia. Instead, it is increasingly subject to scrutiny as an anomaly in relation to the genres of naturalism and realism common to mainstage theatre and electronic forms of reproduction considered more proficient in the art of illusion. Ironically, as chapter 2 demonstrated new forms of broadcast have modeled themselves on the older traditions of theatre and in doing so, have produced a dramaturgy predominately dedicated to suppressing the spectator's perception of the processes of image construction. In response, post-dramatic theatre has emerged as a self-reflexive medium. In this respect, it corresponds to not only Kristeva's, but Marx and Hegel's conception of the link between the revolutionary transformation of form as a result of changes in material content or the mode of production. From this perspective the varying relations and

conditions that necessitate poetic form compel the spectator (and commentator) to apply a new set of critical concepts that challenge codified interpretations of 'reality'. If text and the word, and its vehicle to 'truth', the actor, no longer necessarily structure the theatre, how can its form and mode of relation to the spectator be described? This is the question that this study has set out to address through its analysis of compositional strategies that critically engage the spectator not simply in the theatre situation, but in the dissolution of *logocentric* hierarchy.

If post-dramatic theatre is understood in terms of multiple *logos*, dramaturgy no longer concerns the construction of an aesthetic locus that specifically explicates the audience's relation to a known macrocosm that can be categorised according to a historical epoch. Couched in Aristotelian terms, o*psis* and the loss of structure this dimension infers for the classical Greek theorist emerges as an autonomous compositional principle that contests the supremacy of the text and its doctrine of unity. From this point of view, a new art of composition or dramaturgy transpires at the brink of what is logical and reasonable in light of the historic influence of the *Poetics* and more specifically, its impact on post-Renaissance understandings of poetry and drama. Against this backdrop, Open City and The Sydney Front's compositional de-privileging of the text results in a choral space that can be thought of as the experience of a pre-logical realm open to 'semiotic' incursion and the shifting dynamic intrinsic to the perceptual processes of the spectator. In this respect the concepts proposed in Chapter 2 and 3 of a 'televisual' and 'abject' dramaturgy attempt to explicate compositional structures that account for the critical idea of intertextuality and the aesthetic of responsibility key to participation in the creative act. Chapter 4's discussion of Heiner Müller's 'literature', similarly, attests not only to the necessary revision of the practice and critique of dramaturgy, but the longevity of the challenge concerning the question of the feasibility of executing a post-dramatic text. It is a challenge that abated in *The Aboriginal Protesters*, despite Mudrooroo's cognizance of the highly charged politics of Western European form. Ultimately, it is perhaps not

surprising that Mudrooroo could do little more than reject the text on the basis of the political 'reality' of Müller's non-Indigenous 'voice' in the context of post-colonial Australia. What the Mudrooroo/Müller project rendered explicit philosophically and politically in terms of the work of art as an aesthetic prison and accomplice of power, however, is applicable more broadly to the formal concerns of this study.

When Nigel Kellaway incarcerated himself in The Performance Space in 1994 for approximately 240 hours to present *This Most Wicked Body*, he transformed his body into a time sculpture quite distinct from the concept of the actor. Unendurable for many, Kellaway magnified theatre time as a construct entirely independent of the representational properties that limit theatrical perception to a specific model. This study has endeavored, similarly, to re-consider theatre aesthetics radically opposed to the popular icon dominating the local theatre industry, its self-enclosed living room based on the literary text, in the context of artistic and philosophical developments that have taken place over the last three to four decades internationally. Kellaway's self-imposed confinement fused stage and auditorium and paid homage to both Artaud's image of a theatre of cruelty and Müller's concept of the theatre as an entity that has a 'reality' of its own. In contrast to the accelerated temporality of the everyday, *This Most Wicked Body* reclaimed a space of contemplation for the spectator, and it is a space urgently required as the artform transforms and is increasingly revolutionised into a realm that operates beyond the quotidian. Kellaway's performance relied on theatre's oldest rubric – the actor's body – to simultaneously hold the spectator 'captive' and remind the audience of the medium's openness and enigma. This marathon endeavour is a pertinent example of the emergence of an aesthetic that has inspired a reaction from sectors of the community that can be articulated in terms of Müller's concept:

> The first shape of hope is fear, the first appearance of the new arouses a feeling of horror. (Müller 1979: 57)

Or to conclude this study with Kellaway's polyphonic adapation of Müller's Lessing

that opened *This Most Wicked Body*:

> I was born on the 30 September 19... . I am an actor.
> I have stuffed 20 or 30 dolls with the sawdust that was my blood.
> Have dreamt a dream of a theatre in this country.
> And have reflected in public on things that were of no interest to me.
> That is all over now.
>
> Well, no it isn't – or so it seems not. (Kellaway 2002: [n.pag.])

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