

Rewriting the Boundaries: Contemporary British Experimental
Theatre and its Relation to Postmodern Cultural Theory.

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Rewriting the Boundaries: Contemporary British Experimental
Theatre and its Relation to Postmodern Cultural Theory.

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Abstract.

This thesis examines contemporary British experimental theatre of the 1990s and its relation to postmodern cultural theory. The practitioners discussed include Forced Entertainment, Third Angel, Stan's Cafe, Blast Theory and Desperate Optimists, who were all practising during the 1990s in Britain, the period during which the examples used in the thesis were produced. The thesis argues that the group of practitioners selected represents a British postmodern theatrical tradition. The contribution to the field of knowledge made by the thesis is the identification of a British postmodern theatrical tradition through the analysis of stylistic features of relevant performances and the relation of the practitioners and their work to postmodern cultural theory. The thesis employs interview material with the relevant practitioners in order to support this argument and draws principally on cultural theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and Jean Francois Lyotard to construct a definition of postmodernism and a theoretical framework for the analysis of the practitioners. The thesis argues that what characterises British Postmodern theatre is its reflexive relationship with postmodern cultural theory, evidenced by numerous examples of the cross-contamination of theory and practice and its self-conscious critique of contemporary theatrical conventions.

The thesis examines the challenge to and deconstruction of contemporary theatrical conventions presented by the selected practitioners, including the deconstruction of theatricality, the tendency towards interdisciplinarity and hybridity, the rejection of narrative and the use of the real. Moreover, the thesis examines the rejection of acting and character by British postmodern theatre practitioners and its subsequent reappraisal of these terms within a postmodern framework. Following on from this, the thesis discusses the use of time and space in performance and how the notion of liveness is central to the practice of postmodern practitioners.

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Introduction.

In 1999, Birmingham based theatre company Stan's Cafe staged a revival of Impact Theatre Co-operative's The Carrier Frequency (30th April 1999). This event is a defining example for the argument this thesis. The work of Impact Theatre Co-operative was highly influential on practitioners such as Forced Entertainment and Stan's Cafe. Pete Brooks of Impact Theatre Co-operative went on to teach members of Stan's Cafe (now based in Birmingham) and Third Angel (now based in Sheffield) at Lancaster University. Together with Forced Entertainment, who are also Sheffield based; these companies in various ways have collaborated with each other and with others like Blast Theory (London based) and Desperate Optimists (who were formed at Dartington College of Arts), all of whom are the focus of this investigation. These connections between practitioners through performance, collaboration, teaching and location do not describe a straight line of progression or a hierarchy of succession. What they describe is a community of 1990s theatre practitioners who have supported and informed each other's work. The starting point of this thesis is that these companies' works share common stylistic features, performance qualities, working processes and perspective on contemporary postmodern culture and a common relation to postmodern critical theory. I will argue that these shared commonalities across the pragmatics of location, teaching, and collaboration, when taken together with similar working processes and products and relation to theory, are evidence that identifies these practitioners as belonging to a tradition of British postmodern theatre.

The performance work studied in this thesis takes place in the cultural context of the 1990s, in the United Kingdom. However, the theoretical context for this thesis is founded on a notion of postmodernism as a cultural condition, and the theories provided by certain critical theorist that provide the best tools for understanding this condition.

As I will demonstrate in chapter 1, postmodernism has developed as a theoretical discourse. The study employs a postmodern theoretical framework drawn from the theories of Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari and Jean Francois Lyotard for the analysis of the selected examples of performance because of their key concepts of rhizome,

event, affect, failure and the postmodern sublime. It is the aim of the thesis to recognise the existence of a British postmodern theatrical tradition through the presence of these qualities in the selected performances. I will later argue in chapter 2, that postmodern performance and theory operate through a mutually dependent and reflexive relationship, and as such, it is key to the thesis that the theoretical framework draws from the work of postmodern theorists.

It is, of course, necessary to limit the definition of postmodernism for the purpose of this thesis. Postmodernism is too contested, fluid and wide ranging a term to be employed without some form of definition, but as a result the definition that this thesis offers cannot be complete given the evasiveness of the term. Through discussion of the theoretical context a working definition is proposed that attempts to explain this very fluidity and draw initial connections between postmodern theory and performance practice that will form the basis of the rest of the thesis.

This thesis identifies a postmodern tradition and develops in-depth analysis of the relation between postmodern culture and theory, and the work of contemporary practitioners, some of whose work has not been sufficiently documented or discussed. Studies by scholars such as Johannes Birringer, Adrian Heathfield, Nick Kaye and Andrew Quick have effectively formed part of the theoretical and conceptual framework for this thesis. All of these scholars have discussed the notion of postmodern performance, either British or otherwise, and the relation of postmodern practice to postmodern theory. It should be noted that Heathfield, Kaye and Quick have discussed work by some of the practitioners whose work I discuss. However, no one has yet linked together these practitioners, using an examination of their relation to theory in order to identify a recognisable British tradition. There are other scholars, who have discussed British practitioners, but they have done so by examining them in isolation without consideration of their relation to their peers or heritage, and it is the work of these scholars whose material forms the basis of the theatrical analysis of the performance under discussion. Moreover the existing texts, although they have identified these practitioners as either postmodern or as having close affinities with postmodern theory, have not explored in depth the nature of the relation between the two as a definitive feature of this genre of work. As such, the aim of the thesis is to do exactly that. It draws together a group of significant but

under represented British experimental theatre practitioners, identifies the defining features of their processes and performances, explores their relation to postmodern theory and culture and creates an argument for their recognition as forming a tradition of British postmodern performance.

At this stage, it is useful to introduce the notion of a postmodern theatrical tradition. The history of postmodern performance as identified is a chronologically brief and under-documented area. The practice had its origins in American theatre and performance art as reaction against minimalist perspectives concerning the purity of theatre as an art form, and in relation to significant cultural changes that were occurring in the mid to late 1970s. The early American postmodern theatre and performance was characterised by groups, companies and practitioners such as the Fluxus movement, Yvonne Rainer, Meredith Monk, Carolee Schneemann, The Wooster Group, Richard Foreman and Robert Wilson. The work of these practitioners was, in comparison with minimalist work, interdisciplinary in its process. It therefore produced hybrid performance events that were fragmentary in terms of structure and use of source material, non-linear in their approach to dealing with narrative. These artists' practices often resulted in the self-conscious deconstruction of theatrical or artistic conventions.¹

These United States companies and directors are still practising today, and their practice is increasingly recognised and documented. However the work of British companies (taking as their primary influence the example of these artists) who went on to create their own culturally and historically distinct postmodern performance practices, have not received sufficient attention and their distinctiveness has not been acknowledged.

The companies that this thesis will examine as representative of the British postmodern theatrical tradition are Forced Entertainment, Desperate Optimists, Stan's Cafe, Third Angel and Blast Theory (company histories, with details of performances and company members, are included as appendices). There is another group of practitioners whose work this thesis does not cover in depth, due to the specific nature of the parameters of selection that I shall define shortly. As the work of Reckless Sleepers, Station House Opera, Gob Squad, Plane Performance and Lone Twin

coincides with the issues that the thesis is exploring, it will not be discussed, and only referred to. These companies are of note as they also form part of this heritage, but either move more into the realm of live art, or have been established for a longer or a shorter duration or are based in other countries. While notions of live art will be discussed in chapter 2.1, the practitioners and practices of the British live art scene are not under discussion in this thesis. This has been decided because of the vast number and range of artists and practices that are often encompassed through this term. To attempt to discuss a postmodern theatrical tradition, while including the work of solo performance-art practitioners, or, digital, new media and time-based artists, would be to dilute the argument of the thesis. Moreover, if the stylistic features of the work being discussed were included with a discussion of a broader range of artists, they might appear to be more generalised features of contemporary western performance. Whereas I shall argue that the specific combination and application of these features within the British postmodern Theatrical tradition distinguishes them. Older companies such as the Station House Opera, Impact Theatre Co-operative, Theatre of Mistakes, Insomniac productions along with the American practitioners already mentioned, have provided an artistic influence on this next generation of practitioners that I am discussing. While some of these practitioners and companies are still actively producing work, it was decided not to include them in the thesis, as they were effectively belong to a previous generation, where the tradition I am proposing, has its roots. However, it is not my intention to define a specific origin to this tradition, as, within the parameters of this thesis, that would be to impose a false or an incomplete history. What is relevant is the way this work indicates a direct link from American postmodern theatre and performance art, through to British experimental theatre and performance art and, in particular, its effect on the practice under discussion.

The three parameters of selection for the principal companies discussed in this thesis are as follows. First, the selected companies should have formed no earlier than 1980, thus keeping the focus of the thesis contemporary. Second, that the companies should have produced a significant body of theatrical work during the 1990s, and, finally, that their work should fall under the general category of small-scale touring theatre. It should be noted that Desperate Optimists might seem to be an exception, given that the two core company members are both of Irish nationality. However, both Jo Lawlor and Christine Molloy met and trained at Dartington College of arts in

England, formed Desperate Optimists, and made and toured all of their small-scale theatre productions in England and collaborate with contemporary English artists. While their Irish nationality is a distinct aspect of their work and has a significant influence on how it should be read, this does not accurately reflect the artistic and cultural context in which their work was created and developed.

I have drawn from the work of the academics identified above, key stylistic features of performances that indicate what can be identified as a postmodern performance. These are the deconstruction of theatrical conventions; self-consciousness and self-referentiality; interdisciplinarity and hybridity; rejection of conventional notions of character and acting; and a use of real time and space. However, in the selection of these practitioners, a large field of work has been excluded that shares similar performance traits, particularly where it was produced by solo practitioners, did not tour small-scale theatres, and would commonly be defined as live art or performance art. While this work is inextricably linked to the tradition that this thesis discusses, I have chosen not to include it, as it would constitute a digression from the discussion of experimental theatre that is the focus of the thesis. As I will outline in my conclusion, the discussion of the live art scene and its relation to experimental theatre would be best pursued as a separate research project.

It should be noted that the tradition I outline in the thesis owes a great deal of its defining characteristics to live/performance art. Roselee Goldberg in her revised 2nd edition of 'Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present' (2001), goes so far as to note some of the general qualities of British 1980s performance work, that gives it its distinctive quality. Working from a statement by Sculptor Jake Chapman Goldberg states:

A similar preoccupation with art humour, but as barbed cultural criticism, has long been at play in the UK. 'There's a tradition in British culture to enjoy abjection,' commented sculptor Jake Chapman in response to a question about the Britishness of British art in the nineties, and it is this mix of self-depreciation and confidence, a residue of colonialism and class distinction, that underscored the humanist comedy of much post-Thatcher performance. (Goldberg, 2001:220)

In doing so Goldberg places recent British performance in a performance art lineage as much as a theatrical one. Intriguingly, she also links the artists through an absence of general markers of twentieth century British national identity: post-colonialism, post-class distinction and post-Thatcher. Goldberg goes on to outline the blurred boundaries between theatre and the live art community and its resultant interdisciplinary company formation, processes and performances:

Not surprisingly, given the importance of an inventive and continuously evolving theatre culture, from agitprop and radical street theatre of the sixties to the vibrant and intellectually demanding text-based theatre of the present, many performers who gravitated to live art did so with a background in theatre studies. They teamed up with others from a range of disciplines and produced a body of distinctive cross-disciplinary material. (Goldberg, 2001:221)

Finally, Goldberg then lists a group of 1980s practitioners, some of whose work is central to this thesis, outlining general stylistic features, and implicitly places them within a rough grouping according to the above stylistic features, link to performance art, and notional British identity:

Founded in the 1980s, Station House Opera and Forced Entertainment set the standard for groups in the nineties such as Desperate Optimists, Reckless Sleepers and Blast Theory, all of whom were committed to large-scale, site-specific work that hovered on the edge of performance art and theatre, the former with its emphasis on visual imagery and the latter on texts – spoken, recorded and projected. (Goldberg, 2001:221)

The artists that Goldberg mentions, and that this thesis discusses, take an approach to the creation of work that has crossed from one art form into another and occurred throughout the 20th, and now 21st, century. They are principally distinguished by their interdisciplinary tendencies. As Robin Arthur, a member of Forced Entertainment notes:

4 or 5 years ago I used to get a sense that there were a lot of fine artists thinking hard about performance, now I have a slight feeling that not surprisingly that space has been colonised by people without the theatre tradition and background partly I think because people from the theatre background tend to work collaboratively together in packs whereas most of those fine artists are much more lone wolves theatre people are much more adept at kind of like... i.e. they understand a certain kind of performative relationship with the public and with bodies that quite often fine artists find it very hard to think about. If

you go to say Germany, people have got a thing about live art they think it is a British phenomenon and the people they're talking about are Desperate Optimists, Blast Theory, Gob Squad and Third Angel. They're talking about people whose background is in theatre. (Arthur, 1999:Unnumbered page)

However, while the statement of an artist may indicate a community of artists who know each other and support each others' work, that does not necessarily indicate a body of work with shared concerns processes and features of performance. The complexities of identifying a postmodern theatrical tradition lie in the nature of postmodernism, and its rejection of linear history. Furthermore, it is necessary to draw on Deleuze and Guattari's use of the concept of the rhizome, rather than on a linear model, to chart the development of this tradition. Given the ephemeral nature of performance and the particularly slippery definition of postmodernism, a rhizomatic tradition (see definition of rhizome in chapter 1.2) is particularly appropriate; it allows connections to be made outside of what might be seen as the parameters of the tradition. It also allows multiple practices to engage in an active relationship of critiquing and feeding into one-another on an immediate basis. In addition to the rhizome, one must also consider the notion of the 'event', also theorised by Deleuze, and employed in a slightly different manner in Nick Kaye's Postmodernism and Performance (1994.a).ⁱⁱ The event is a temporally and spatially specific, unrepeatable occurrence. I shall argue as Kaye does that postmodern performances are events, and as such the shifts and developments in such a tradition are quicker, and function without, or actively resist, the need for immediate documentation or the establishment of a canon. As James Yarker of Stan's Cafe, discussing the companies interest in Impact Theatre Co-operatives work, indicates:

It feels as if artistic generations are very short, and we are driven to build on their best practice. This project is driven by respect and although it is ostensibly about The Carrier Frequency, it is also intended to celebrate a host of lost, but influential, shows. (Yarker, 1999:Unnumbered page)

Yarker indicates both the short life span of most artistic traditions and their construction as a response to certain performances and shows that may or may not directly precede them. Rather than the directly corollary relation that is commonly suggested, the postmodern tradition of work is formed from a range of diverse, non-continuous influences. These obviously include performance but also fine art,

popular culture and critical theory. This tradition is a reaction against a stable notion of the construction of the self; I shall argue that it is a paradigm shift rather than a simple evolution of philosophy. As such, postmodern theatre attempts to undo the enlightenment assumptions of linear progress, art form purity and stable subject from and to draw a new and constantly shifting field of contemporary influences that distinctly reject the temporal model of linear progress. It is this shift of paradigm, which distinguishes the formation of the postmodern theatrical tradition, from the existing traditions that function in a linear fashion. It is possible, and in some ways useful, to give the tradition a hierarchy that can be clearly determined along terms of age, size and reputation of a company. Alex Kelly of Third Angel in an interview suggested one such possible way of perceiving the current scene:

The generation of companies that there are, there is clearly an upper sixth if you want. You've got Forced Entertainment primarily I suppose, and then another generation of companies who have been around eight or nine years like Blast Theory, Reckless Sleepers, Talking Birds, Stan's Cafe and then Desperate Optimists although the actual age isn't necessarily... it is the point the national touring began, and then there's us, Gob Squad and Lone Twin who do more one off stuff. (Kelly and Walton, 1999:Unnumbered page)

Yet, while this is historically useful, practitioners (Third Angel included) are wary of this simplification of their relation to each other and the reification of a company's duration and the size of their creative output. This model does not take into account the impact of particular projects or processes that practitioners instigated. As Matt Adams of Blast Theory observes:

I suppose the best way of putting it is that there are certain people whose work I particularly respect and enjoy and who I would always go and check out and in particular that's Desperate Optimists... (but) we've never spent much time worrying about that community. I mean there is definitely a community of people working in live art who are friends of ours whose work we go and see. Ju is great friends with Alex from Third Angel, we're friends with Robert Pacitti, Franko B, the Forced Entertainment people at a certain stage. That community is something that I really respect... However we feel very schizophrenic and we have a very strongly antithetical sense of the community. I've always had a slightly fuck you attitude to the idea that there is Forced Entertainment and then there's this neat little hierarchy of people in their trail. (Adams, 2001:Unnumbered page)

It is in fact a gross error to simplify the structure of a theatrical tradition when attempting to subject it to academic analysis. The form such a tradition takes and the way in which it interacts with its cultural context, current theory and its own artistic product, is as vital to its definition as the work itself.

Stan's Cafe's restaging of The Carrier Frequency is in my opinion a prime example of the complexities of the postmodern heritage: the restaging of a work that is in itself without many of the features of postmodern performance that I have identified. The performance itself used different performers but retained the original recorded soundtrack and text (written by novelist Russell Hoban) and a set that was as close to the original production as the budget would allow. The stage was flooded 1.5 feet deep and dimly lit. There were scaffolding structures at the back of the space and a small table stood centre stage with a sheet of stiff material draped over it. Four performers entered, two women and two men, who stood at the front of the stage on a dry ledge before entering the space. As they entered the space the lights rose slightly and the repetitive, industrial soundtrack began to play. Two performers began to enact a sequence of physical, ritualistic actions of scooping up water throwing it on the table then wiping the surface of the table clear of the water. The other two performers climbed the scaffold structure and sat at the top wearing headphones and microphones. As the physical ritual continued below these performers began to speak, shout and cry in a broken, post-apocalyptic language. They talked repetitively about gods called 'Ernie Warlin' and 'Big Bad Boom' referencing some kind of nuclear apocalypse, with textual similarities to Hoban's novel Riddley Walker (1980). During the performance, the roles of performers were interchanged and the physical actions became increasingly ferocious, so much so that performers threw themselves headfirst into the water and were seen to be physically exhausted. Accordingly, as the action became more intense, the soundtrack became louder and more aggressive. The performance ended with the performers simply stopping their ritual, lining up at the front of the space as they had at the beginning, and exiting the space. This production was not then a reproduction of a distinctly postmodern work because the original lacked most of the recognisable, key stylistic features of the work discussed in this thesis, yet, it did inspired postmodern practice. It was because of the influence of Impact Theatre Co-operative, that many of the practitioners cited in this thesis began their work. However the reconstruction of the work was much more of a pastiche, as

no completely accurate recording of the show existed: the performance was staged using what remained of the pieces scripts and some incomplete video records. What is most crucial here is the applicability of the notions of the rhizome and of the event as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari. These two terms determine how a postmodern theatrical heritage should be mapped and understood to function. A postmodern tradition is not one of a clear historical lineage. It is evidenced by a sequence of events and networks between practitioners and performances:

The first two shows we made were copies of what we thought Impact did. That's what we wanted to do. We wanted to make theatre like Impact, we liked them a lot. (Arthur, 1999:Unnumbered page)

A chain of influence can be drawn from Impact Theatre Co-operative to Forced Entertainment as they themselves discuss it. However there is not so clear a link from Forced Entertainment to Stan's Cafe and their revival of The Carrier Frequency. Stan's Cafe do not 'follow on' from Forced Entertainment, nor do Third Angel for that matter, even though their ties are strong due to working in close geographical proximity and the occasional collaboration. My intention however is not to limit the number, or types of influence made on a company, nor to expect those influences to form a linear historical chain. When discussing the issue of Stan's Cafe's definition as an experimental theatre company, James Yarker had this to say about the field of influences from which he draws:

I think it is also slightly uneasy in an area whose only defining term is "experimentation". People are a little bit cautious about going into the "oh yeah we're really heavily influenced by so and so" because it somehow has this sense that it is not as original as it ought to be, but I'm not really shy of saying yeah it is all connected, I feel connections with lots of people, in various fields. (Yarker, 2000.a:Unnumbered page)

The notion of a rhizome, and its relation to the structure of the British postmodern theatrical tradition, and the relation between theory and practice is central to this thesis. In each case, by applying the notion of the rhizome one can reject a binary set of relations which are overly essentialist and reductive, in favour of a more symbiotic, interdependent, and reflexive set of relations. Moreover, while symbiosis can be conceived of as a binary structure, I would argue that the degree of integration and cross contamination in this model makes the perception of two distinct bodies

unfeasible. A rhizomatic network of connections avoids totalising linear models, but allows linear structures to occur on a limited, contingent basis within it. It is this rhizomatic approach that I adopt through the rest of the thesis, taking examples of practice and linking them through their relation to theory, indicating their common stylistic features and recurring cultural references and reference points. These various points of connection, as I shall demonstrate, point to the existence of a British tradition of postmodern theatre that is engaged in an interdependent and reflexive relation with postmodern cultural theory.

This study therefore proposes to investigate the hypothesis that the working processes, stylistic features of performance, and modes of representation in contemporary British experimental theatre are involved in a reflexive relationship with postmodernism. In this context, postmodernism will be approached in two ways; first as the current cultural condition of this period; and second, as a theoretical framework which engages in the debates surrounding the formation of the subject and the articulation of experience.

Through this close relationship with cultural theory, and the strategies undertaken by the practice itself, I will argue for the recognition of a British postmodern theatrical tradition. However, it has to be noted that the notion of a postmodern tradition is problematic, in that postmodernism is critical of, and resistant to, a notion of a stable or linear history. Instead, in this thesis I will suggest that the tradition exists specifically in a non-linear, fragmentary and ephemeral manner. As Michal Kobialka argues in his essay 'Historical Archives, Events and Facts: History Writing as Fragmentary Performance' (2002): 'Postmodern Theory redefined the very foundations of history. With the dissolution of centralized perspective, the idea of a single history had to allow for images that were projected from different points of view' (Kobialka, 2002:6). Moreover, the notion of a history had to account for the ephemerality of events and the fragmentary method of their recording, and even more vitally, the non-linear influence of one event upon another. As Kobialka observes:

In the post Einsteinian universe, historical events should be considered in terms of Einstein's famous dictum that, "time and space are modes of thinking and not the conditions by which to live". Consequently, it is no longer a matter of

determinate forms, which would be defined by knowledge, or of constraining rules, which would be defined by the power of the absolute time and space, but a matter of practices or modes of a perpetual movement of reorganization and realignment. (Kobialka, 2002:8-9)

Therefore, according to Kobialka, it is not universal limits that are employed to consider historical events, but rather the processes through which they occur. In much the same way, I am not seeking a linear history of British postmodern performance that fixes the form. Instead, I will propose a tradition that is described through its fluid relation to theory, through its constant process of reengagement with its own form and stylistic features, and through its ephemeral and fragmentary properties of its performance. As Kobialka argues:

An event, or a document, cannot be governed by pre-established rules and categories that archive or simulate its presence or materiality as the object of a historical investigation. An event, or a document, enunciates the taking place of fragments. (Kobialka, 2002:9)

In this thesis I will argue that the British postmodern theatrical tradition is identifiable through its process of re-evaluating how we conceive of a theatrical tradition. This will depend upon Deleuze's notions of the rhizome and event, on an exploration of the practitioner's relation to theory and challenging of theatrical convention, and through an understanding of the importance of ephemerality in their practice. As Kobialka proposes, through this process of analysis, we do not create a fixed record of a theatrical tradition, but, 'we bear witness to that which determines the structure of the *archivable* contents' (Kobialka, 2002:10).

Previous studies of experimental theatre have focused on the influence of American practitioners such as the Wooster Group on British practitioners such as Forced Entertainment and Desperate Optimists. This research, however, will demonstrate that postmodern cultural theory has had a defining influence on contemporary British experimental theatre in three main areas. First, it will demonstrate how the interdisciplinary working processes of contemporary practitioners have, in a reflexive relationship with postmodern theory, initiated a disruption of standard elements of performance such as narrative, meaning, and character. Second, the study will argue

that the central themes explored by practitioners are informed by the current debates in postmodern cultural theory, including the crisis of truth, ambiguity of history and reality, the fragmentation of identity, and the consequences of a media dominated culture. Finally, it will argue that the central features of experimental performance - such as pastiche, self-referential and self-conscious performance, and the disruption of standard theatrical styles - are generated by and comment on a postmodern culture. The study will conclude by arguing that the work of the contemporary practitioners it examines not only represents a postmodern culture, but also actively contributes to the cultural debates surrounding postmodernism and how this condition is defined.

This thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter 1 follows on from this introduction and provides the theoretical context of the thesis by drawing on postmodern theory. It will utilise the theories of Jean Francois Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to explore the notions of the rhizome, event, affect failure and the postmodern sublime. These concepts will provide a means of discussing the key qualities of the performance work under discussion and of describing the specific qualities of the postmodern condition.

Chapter 2 discusses the relation between postmodern theory and contemporary British performance practice, how cross-contamination of the two occurs, and argues for the recognition of theory/practice hybrid performances. Chapters 1 and 2 define the approach to the relation between theory and practice that informs the rest of the thesis.

Chapter 3 examines the various theatrical conventions that British experimental theatre challenged during the 1990s, and considers how these challenges conform to postmodern methodologies. It discusses the development of interdisciplinarity and hybridity, the deconstruction of theatrical conventions, the rejection of linear narratives, and use of the real in performance.

Chapter 4 focuses on the construction and performance of identity in British postmodern theatre. It discusses how, through various stylistic features and methodologies, the theatrical conventions of representation are challenged in favour of a system of performance based on mimicry and on a Deleuzian notion of

‘becomings’ wherein performers engage in actions that draw attention to existing relations between their selves and the subject of their becoming.

Chapter 5 discusses issues of time, space and liveness. It explores how postmodern performance has made use of these factors and how their use differs from other forms of theatre. Moreover, I will argue that the use of time, space and liveness in contemporary British experimental theatre displays an interdependent relation between all three of these conditions. As such, I will argue that time, space and liveness are the three unavoidable conditions of performance, and that it is postmodern performance that has demonstrated this through its complex engagement with these factors.

ⁱ The appropriation and development of these theatrical features by British practitioners will be outlined in chapter 3.

ⁱⁱ See chapters 1 and 2 for Deleuze and Kaye’s respective definitions of an event.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Context.

1.1: Introduction:

POSTMODERN-the very term breeds suspicion, for it is a parasite lodged in the side of the “modern”. (Fuchs, 1996:169)

The performance work that this thesis deals with exhibits a number of key stylistic features that prompt a different approach from Marxist, psychoanalytic or anthropological models in which the construction of the subject is rational and unified. The work can be categorised initially by stylistic features such as the deconstruction of theatrical boundaries, self-consciousness and self-referentiality, interdisciplinarity and hybridity. In this chapter, I will focus exclusively on the work of Jean Francois Lyotard, and the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Their work share many close affiliations and address issues relevant to a discussion of postmodernism as a theory and as cultural practice. The theories of Deleuze and Guattari and Lyotard, offer a range of concepts and approaches that help make sense of the qualities of the work, through their discussion of notion of the rhizome, event, affect and the postmodern sublime. These notions provide a framework for the analysis of the stylistic features and affects of these pieces, drawing attention to more substantial aspects of this work that previous methodologies have failed to do. Through these stylistic features, these practitioners reveal an active internal resistance to a theorisation of the construction of the subject that is stable and linear, begun in the enlightenment and followed through in approaches such as Marxism, psychoanalysis and anthropology. Likewise, Lyotard and Deleuze and Guattari’s theories deconstruct and problematise the 18th century enlightenment notion of the unified subject of Kant and Hegel, in a similar fashion to Walter Benjamin’s recognition of the crisis/catastrophe of the enlightenment, and the fragmentation of subjectivity. Deleuze and Guattari particularly argue that subjectivity needs to be rethought as a more open, associative, fragmented experience. Deleuze and Guattari’s term for this is a becoming, a notion that will be explored fully in chapter 4. The theories of Deleuze, Guattari and Lyotard are in opposition to a notion of the subject as a rational unity, and build on the work of empiricist philosophers such as Spinoza, Hume, Whitehead, Kleist and Schlegel. This chapter will deal with these theories

before moving on to understand how this relates to contemporary lived experience, or the postmodern condition as Lyotard calls it, and the response of performance work to this social and cultural condition.

The chapter will begin by exploring Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome: an open anti-genealogical structure, functioning by contamination. This will lead to a discussion of the event, a temporally and spatially specific occurrence. I will then move on to discuss Deleuze's theory that the role of art is to produce blocs of affects and percepts, sensations and perceptions of experience, which allow or create the experience of the event. A discussion of affect is essential to draw together the theories of Lyotard, and Deleuze and Guattari. The chapter will then link notions of the event and rhizome around a notion of the postmodern and postmodern art, specifically through an investigation of the role of failure and Lyotard's notion of the postmodern sublime. Finally, to conclude the chapter will summarise its points so far and explore their relevance in relation to the lived experience of postmodernism.

The theoretical framework outlined here, in terms of postmodern cultural theory, will be drawn upon, and expanded, through the rest of the thesis. What I have done in this chapter is to introduce and synthesise the key concepts of the relevant theorists to the argument of the thesis. There are a range of other significant theorists and scholars who are not included in the chapter whom I introduced at the beginning, and referred to throughout. Their substantive exclusion is either due to their being introduced later in the thesis alongside specific areas of enquiry, or, resulting from their work sitting outside of the general area that the thesis intends to investigate. Moreover, given the scope of debates and definition around postmodernism it is counterproductive, and, against the very idea of postmodernism, to synthesise all the varying viewpoints on postmodernism to attempt a concrete definition of the term. To fix postmodernism goes against its resistance to totalising definitions, as a set of theories and cultural forms it consistently evades any long-term characterisation; for example early notions of Postmodernism are not necessarily compatible with concepts central to the contemporary understanding and experience of Postmodernism. This will be addressed throughout the thesis also, as each chapter will draw upon the work of these theorists to discuss key areas of concern in relation to examples of practice. The framework I have set out is only intended to providing a working definition of the key

theories, the cultural condition, and the theoretical parameters that I will operate within.

1.2: The Rhizome: Hybridity and Interdisciplinarity

The notion of the rhizome is crucial to understanding postmodern performance. The work that this thesis discusses is perhaps most recognisable for its hybrid forms and interdisciplinary processes. Much of the work covered in this thesis, rather than existing as a closed self-sustaining system, connects and appropriates many other cultural forms. The performances themselves resist simple classification, as they are often experimental combinations of varied cultural forms and discourses. This quality is best given a conceptual basis in Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome.

Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus (1983) and its companion piece A Thousand Plateaus (1987) both subtitled Capitalism and Schizophrenia, revolve around the central issue of Deleuze and Guattari's investigation, that of the operation of desire in capitalist society and the means of surviving or resisting this dominant cultural condition. Their work is so unique in that the very texts they produce are the demonstration of resistance against the capitalist restriction of desire, the means of writing and structuring their texts is simultaneously the discussion of their theories and their manifestation. This feature is particularly evident in A Thousand Plateaus, which is structured along their principle of the rhizome, which they explain within the text. The notion of the rhizome provides a strategy for identifying the processes of postmodern theory as distinct from the centralizing and rationalising structures. The notion of the rhizome is best described in relation to organic structures from which the term is derived.

Let us summarise the principal characteristics of the rhizome: unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to trait of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:21)

When conceived of in terms of a means of mapping the processes of desire (and in fact of any decentralised structure), the rhizome allows the connection of

contradictory matter. As a method of conceiving the process of postmodern culture and the interactions of the conflicting theoretical perspectives, the rhizome is ideal as it highlights the shift from product to process, its alienation from history, its lack of a single origin and seemingly fragmentary nature.

The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple... It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather dimensions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overflows... Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relations between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:21)

The rhizome forms various points of intersection of the lines of motion, that gather together in plateaus, which are quite literally planes of interconnected lines of motion. These plateaus are temporary, but form the basis for long standing conditions in society, for example systems of belief, structures of knowledge and the conception of reality.¹ The plateaus that form within the rhizome, interconnected despite differences, are subject to analysis by cultural theory. It is in this way that the rhizome enables a conception of postmodern culture and cultural theory, without denying its inherent contradictions. Postmodern culture, then, can be envisaged as having a rhizomatic process and form. Therefore, as I will argue, the postmodern condition, as described by Lyotard, is connected to the cynical projections of Baudrillard's theories within the broad scheme of postmodern culture. However, it must be made clear that this is not simply a convenient theory for drawing together disparate notions. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome forms the basis of their notion of micropolitics, and there are broad similarities between this and the postmodern political theories of Lyotard. The acceptance of postmodern theories and culture within the structure of a rhizome produces certain effects. The rhizome excludes any possibility of a *systematic* revision of contemporary culture and society, because it rejects outright the notion of historical progress. Any revision or rewriting of the current cultural condition would be fragmentary: 'The rhizome is an antigenealogy. It is a short-term memory, or antimemory. The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:21). If a postmodern critique does function as a rhizome it will not progressively work through modernism's problems, it will instead continually feed like a parasite on the

subordinated body of modernism. ‘Unlike the tree, the rhizome is not the object of reproduction: neither external reproduction as image-tree nor internal reproduction as tree-structure’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:21).

There is a similarity to be drawn between Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the rhizome and Lyotard’s use of clouds as a metaphor for thought. According to Lyotard:

Thoughts are clouds. The periphery of thoughts is as immeasurable as the fractal lines of Benoit Mandelbrot. Thoughts are pushed and pulled at variable speeds. They are deep, although core and skin are of the same grain. Thoughts never stop changing their location one with the other. When you feel like you have penetrated far into their intimacy in analysing either their so-called structure or genealogy or even post-structure, it is actually too late or too soon. One cloud casts its shadow on another, the shape of clouds varies with the angle from which they are approached. (Lyotard, 1988:5)ⁱⁱ

This description while dealing with the immaterial aspects of thought is closely related to Deleuze’s notion of the rhizome. Within the rhizome, plateaus and nodes are equally in a process of ongoing change, and as such, any notion of defined structure or post-structure is redundant. Any structure perceived is dependant upon the approach taken in analysis, and for Lyotard this is applicable to knowledge and thought. I would argue then that the rhizome is the manifest model for understanding the relation of matter to matter and the structure of experience and affect, whereas the cloud is the model for the immaterial concepts, percepts and knowledge.

Deleuze in ‘What is Philosophy’ (1994) describes what he considers are the specific qualities of a concept. While doing so, he still employs a rhizomatic scheme, in that he ascribes qualities of intensities and co-ordinates rather than of fixed structures, as opposed to an arborescent scheme:

The concept is an incorporeal, even though it is incarnated or effectuated in bodies. But, in fact, it is not mixed up with the state of affairs in which it is effectuated. It does not have spatiotemporal coordinates, only intensive ordinates. It has no energy only intensities; it is anenergetic... The concept speaks the event, not the essence or the thing – pure Event, a hecceity, an entity: the event of the other or of the face (when, in turn, the face is taken as concept)... Concepts are “absolute surfaces or volumes,” forms whose only object is the inseparability of distinct variations. (Deleuze, 1994:21)

Here we can see another aspect of the rhizome, that in concepts and thought, the process can be even more free and open. In the material world, the rhizome is partially constricted by matter and confined culturally and socially by existing models and structures of knowledge. However, Deleuze also indicates that it is through the ephemerality of the event that Rhizomes and concepts achieve this specific quality of fluidity. Therefore we find that the notion of the rhizome, crucial to providing a framework through which to discuss the hybrid and interdisciplinary qualities of the performances discussed in this thesis, links directly to the notion of the event which is also essential for a discussion of postmodern performance.

1.3: Event: The Singular Occurrence.

What characterises the performance work discussed in this thesis, beyond its tendency to function in a rhizomatic fashion, is also its tendency to maximise the eventhood of its occurrence. By which I mean that while any given performance, that involves live elements, can be considered one of spatial and temporally specific events, postmodern performance seeks in almost every aspect of its construction and occurrence to highlight its singularity and equally work against the repeatability of affect for any given audience member. Crucially these performances often produce a deliberate failure in form, function or expectation, to work against the possible completion of the event to some objective standard. These moments of failure function as moments of eruption from the stability of the performance event. While at the same time the denial of a perfect performance acts as a resistance against the closing off and objectification of the moment. Again, the theories of Lyotard and Deleuze illustrate how these aspects of performance are related to a fluid construction of the subject, and an open rhizomatic ontological experience.

Lyotard, when discussing his approach to knowledge makes the following statement, which can be seen to have parallels with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome:

The idea that thinking is able to build a system of total knowledge about clouds of thoughts by passing from one site to another and accumulating the views it

produces at each site – such an idea constitutes *par excellence* the sin, the arrogance of the mind. It implies that thinking has the capacity to be identified with the object to which it refers, as if the gap between thinking and the object could ever be bridged. (Lyotard, 1988:6-7)

We can then begin from a basis that according to Lyotard that a thought, or idea or concept, is unknowable in a total sense. The gap between the thinker and the thought, or as Lyotard point out the thought and its object cannot be bridged.

What prevents this total grasp of knowledge is the event, and this is where the relation of the event to knowledge and to the rhizome becomes clear. Events simply defined, have two key co-ordinates, specific time and specific space, and this is what Lyotard says occurs when a thought is placed in relation to time:

As postponement itself, time does not allow the full synthesis of the moments or positions the mind crossed through in approaching a cloud of thoughts or, *a fortiori*, the sky. Time is what blows a cloud away after we believed it was correctly known and compels thinking to start again on a new enquiry, which includes the anamnesis of former elucidations. (Lyotard, 1988:7)

Therefore, time, as a subjective experience that irrevocably moves on, prevents the synthesis of thought or its context. In this way, while space gives a stable point to anchor a thought or experience, an occurrence without time could not become an event. As it is without time, an occurrence would be permanent; time progress and hides an experience from us in the past, preventing a total synthesis, and this is the central aspect of Lyotard's definition of an event.

An event is unknowable, and so in order to make sense of the world Lyotard employs the notion of the phrase. A phrase is a closed unit of conception and meaning linked to any given event. A phrase may be a sentence, a fixed notion, or any form of embodied knowledge. Yet, the phrase is closed and not open and rhizomatic like the event. Lyotard argues that as phrases are closed, their relation to one another can result in direct contradiction or incompatibility and failure of communication. This problematic aspect however, indicates the existence of event and becomes a strategy to contextualise them:

This is what I have tried to conceive of with the notion of *le différend* and by developing the idea that all linkage between phrases is open. There is a necessity for a phrase to be linked with the event as a happening. Even a silence, being a phrase, is a way of linking. Each time there are many different possible ways of linking phrases so that each moment is a beginning in the middle of time. (Lyotard, 1988:8)

So according to Lyotard all events are open phrases, spatial and temporally specific occurrences, that resist objective commodification and contextualisation. Lyotard's approach to encountering knowledge, events and the construction of one's own subjectivity in relation to them, is then set out in the following way: 'Place oneself in the flood of clouds, disappoint the call for knowledge, disavow the desire to grasp and appropriate thoughts' (Lyotard, 1988:10). Here Lyotard sets out a political and an ontological approach, one without absolute knowledge, ownership of thoughts, authority, or the certainty that would bestow or confer ideological power. This position resists a firm ideology being established, and in doing so Lyotard points out that one is able to encounter an event without closing one's experience to it, and linking it to a phrase. Without the phrase, this encounter with an event remains subtle and ephemeral:

I would like to call an event the face to face with nothing. This sounds like death. Things are not so simple. There are many events whose occurrence doesn't offer any matter to be confronted, many happenings inside of which nothingness remains hidden and imperceptible, events without barricades. They come up to us concealed under the appearance of everyday occurrences. (Lyotard, 1988:18)

The event can then be recognised as an everyday occurrence, a constant presence of nothingness, not of absence, but of openness and a radical rhizomatic capacity of ongoing transformation and connectivity. Later when we discuss Lyotard's notion of the postmodern sublime, this encounter with nothingness is a core element. When Lyotard speaks of Kant's accounts of the sublime he points out that this nothingness, this radical openness was seen as a threat, as it challenged the notion of the stable and unitary self.

Lyotard goes on to set out how one might develop an attitude that is more conducive to receiving events on their own terms:

In order to take on this attitude, you have to impoverish your mind, clean it out as much as possible, so that you make it incapable of anticipating the meaning, the “What” of the “It happens...”. The secret of such asceticism lies in the power to be able to endure occurrences as “directly” as possible without the mediation or protection of a “pre-text”. Thus, to encounter an event is like bordering on nothingness. No event is at all accessible if the self does not renounce the glamour of its culture, its wealth, health, knowledge, and memory. (Lyotard, 1988:18)

What Lyotard has theorized, along with Deleuze’s notion of the rhizome, and as we shall see shortly with his notion of affect is a methodology how to receive events, and accordingly live performances. The qualities of this approach ecstatic, open, renounce glamour, compare remarkably well to aesthetic and formal characteristics of the work discussed in the thesis.

Lyotard later actually sets out two contrasting methodologies on how to encounter the event of temporal art, for which he uses generally musical terms, that is also applicable to performance:

1: Either use the rules of harmony, melody, composition, instrumentation, and the like in order to make the ears capable of mastering the occurrence of sounds; or, at the opposite extreme, to use what ever means possible to knock hearing off its track, in general, to keep it from giving any accounting at all.

2: One might say that the second approach is focused on the destruction or, better, the destruction of a notion that is constitutive of the first approach. (Lyotard, 1988:25)

The second approach, by challenging the foundations of the first approach, can be considered as emphasising the event and its rhizomatic openness, and the ephemeral experience.

If we now turn to Deleuze’s notion of the event we can see how well it compares with Lyotard’s description, but also how it leads us to a discussion of affect when viewing works of art.ⁱⁱⁱ In Deleuze’s The Fold (1993) in the chapter titled ‘What is an Event’, he described the various attributes of an event, going further than the simple definition of an event as a spatially and temporally specific occurrence. Deleuze argues that:

An event does not just mean that “a man has been run over.” The Great Pyramid is an event, and it is duration for a period of one hour, thirty minutes, five minutes... What are the conditions that make an event possible? Events are produced in a chaos, in a chaotic multiplicity, but only under the condition that a sort of screen intervenes. (Deleuze, 1993:76)

Here Deleuze proposes that events emerge from the general chaotic multiplicity that forms the background of reality. The event itself is produced when one element of that multiplicity becomes an extension, wherein the one element extends over others to make a screen. The screen acts as a surface, through or upon which individual qualities or components can arise, or be brought into relief. This in turn gives rise to specific qualities, or components, those that can be identified as belonging to the event. At this stage, an event is secured and defined by the presence of an individual, who observes these qualities. Therefore, resulting from this act of prehension the event becomes an event, by becoming and prehensible. However, in emerging from a chaotic multiplicity, the whole event cannot be prehended. The event remains outside of comprehension, but functions as something witnessed, an occurrence that involves the viewer without clear perceivable limits.

The event is a vibration with an infinity of harmonics or submultiples, such as an audible wave, a luminous wave, or even an increasingly smaller part of space over the course of an increasingly shorter duration. For space and time are not limits but abstract coordinates of all series, they are themselves in extension: the minute, the second, the tenth of a second. (Deleuze, 1993:77)

According to Deleuze therefore, it is not so much that events are spatially and temporally specific, even though they may be, that defines them. Instead, it is an event’s continual transformation of present multiplicities, made prehensible by an individual, through a number of framing extensions or screens, identifying it as such. As I will demonstrate in chapter 5, time and space are not limits but rather parameters within which events achieve ephemerality and liveness, as Deleuze observes: ‘Extensions effectively are forever moving, gaining and losing parts carried away in movement; things are being endlessly altered; even prehensions are ceaselessly entering and leaving variable components. Events are fluvia’ (Deleuze, 1993:79). This is the definition of an event to be employed throughout the thesis. It will be supported by Kaye’s discussion of the event, and applied to practice in subsequent chapters.

Deleuze's notion of the event brings to the fore the question of what it is that a subject takes away with them from such an encounter. This relates directly to what an artwork or performance event might produce for its audience. Deleuze answers this with the notion of affect, which as we shall see helps draw together notion of the rhizome, event and Lyotard's notion of the postmodern sublime, via the quality of failure.

1.4: Affect and Failure.

Following on from a description of the subject's formation and relation to events through the rhizome and the primary characteristics of an event, we can now turn to discuss specifically what a subject may experience and possibly obtain from a conscious encounter with a rhizomatic event. Moreover, what occurs between an audience and performance event.

We know that according to Lyotard, events and concepts cannot be apprehended fully, we also know through Lyotard that an event always slips away through the process of time, and from Deleuze we find that the event, even when encountered is not encountered in its totality. Yet as Deleuze goes on to argue in 'What is philosophy' art preserves something of an event, something that is connected to the notions of failure and will later be connected to Lyotard's notion of the sublime:

Arts preserves, and it is the only thing in the world that is preserved. It preserves and is preserved in itself (*quid juris?*) although actually it lasts no longer than its support and materials – stone, canvas, chemical colour, and so on (*quid facti?*)... If art preserves it does not do so like industry, by adding a substance to make the thing last. (Deleuze, 1994:163)

Principally, we can draw from this Deleuze's rejection of industry, and the creation of permanent substance from an art works process of preservation. He asserts the ephemerality of art, even in physical objects such as paintings. Deleuze in discussing this parallels Lyotard's emphasis on the rejection of wealth, knowledge and history in the subject's apprehension of an event. Both are arguing for an interaction between the event and the subject, that while taking place within a historical, social and

cultural context, should attempt to liberate itself from concerns of permanence of substance, certainty of knowledge, and cultural and even economic value:

The thing became independent of its “model” from the start, but it is also independent of other possible personae who are themselves artist-things, personae of painting breathing this air of painting. And it is no less independent of the viewer or hearer, who only experience it after, if they have the strength for it. What about the creator? It is independent of the creator though the self-positing of the created, which is preserved in itself. What is preserved – the thing or the work of art – is *a bloc of sensation, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects*. (Deleuze, 1994:163-164)

What Deleuze proposes then, as the basis for this liberated encounter, beyond the work, the artist, and the prehending subject is the formation of an independent and autonomous group of sensations. These sensations may be physical, emotional, psychological, but should not be discussed as separate categories of sensation as this may lead to a false imposed hierarchy, one that presumes a total knowledge of these sensations and their relation to each other. Each sensation or affect is really a point of connection between the artist, art object/event, and audience or subjective viewer. In this capacity, the affect of an event, of a work of art or performance, is directly linked to a broader notion of the rhizome in relation to the structure of relation between all things, and the fluid process of the construction of the subject. As Deleuze argues, an autonomous bloc of sensations, or an affect, produced from the encountering of an event, will function temporarily as a point where the subject can become, or generate connections with its surroundings:

Affects are precisely these nonhuman becomings of man, just as percepts – including the town – are nonhuman landscapes of nature. Not a “minute of the world passes,” says Cézanne, that we will preserve if we do not “become that minute.” We are not in the world; we become by contemplating it. Everything is vision, becoming. We become universes. Becoming animal, plant, molecular, becoming zero... This is true of all the arts: what strange becomings unleash music across its “melodic landscapes” and its “rhythmic characters,” as Messiaen says, by combining the molecular and the cosmic, stars, atoms, and birds in the same being of sensation?... In each case style is needed... to raise lived perceptions to the percept and lived affections to the affect. (Deleuze, 1994:169-170)

The principle reason why the affect remains autonomous, from the work, the artist and subject, is to resist a total or objective grasp of the work, or for the affect to be

limited to the work. By standing apart and remaining open, the affect is able to function in a rhizomatic fashion, increasing the potential for connections to further events and becomings. Moreover, Deleuze has a particular reason as to how an artist achieves the creation of a work with autonomous affects:

The artist creates blocs of percepts and affects, but the only law of creation is that the compound must stand up on its own. The artist's greatest difficulty is to make it stand up on its own. Sometimes this requires what is, from the viewpoint of an implicit model, from the viewpoint of lived perceptions and affections, great geometrical improbability, physical imperfection, and organic abnormality. But these sublime errors accede to the necessity of art if they are internal means of standing up (or sitting or lying). (Deleuze, 1994:164)

Again here we can see that failure, in the form of imperfections, accidents and anomalies, forms a central methodology for these sensations to be independent of the work and the creating artist and of the prehending subject. Failure, in this respect like time, moves the bloc of sensations, the affect of the work, beyond an objective knowledge, creating within the work itself a series of becoming and rhizomatic connections that are unforeseen by the creator. "A great novelist is above all an artist who invents unknown or unrecognised affects and brings them to light as the becomings of his characters" (Deleuze, 1994:174).

For Lyotard and Deleuze, an open rhizomatic approach, and failure in the manifest reality of a work of art are crucial in the instigation of the event of a work of art. Yet, for both, two further factors remain essential to produce the particular sensation of affect of a work of art. Principally, the form or composition of a work has to be considered. A work's composition serves a number of purposes. Primarily the composition of the work of art provides the frame within which failure can occur, establishing an event that can define itself by failing through operations such as chance, exhaustion, or lapses of technique. Secondly the composition provides a logic through which to perceive the percepts of the work, and thus to experience the affects and sensations that follow. Accordingly, for Deleuze, composition distinguishes art from science or philosophy:

Composition, composition is the sole definition of art. Composition is aesthetic, and what is not composed is not a work of art. However, technical composition, the work of material that often calls on science (mathematics, physics,

chemistry, anatomy), is not to be confused with aesthetic composition, which is the work of sensation. Only the latter fully deserves the name composition, and a work of art is never produced by or for the sake of technique. (Deleuze, 1994:191-192)

Form and composition are vital in creating the scenario in which failure and an event can occur, and as we shall see from Lyotard in the following section, form is vital to the challenge of known forms, and the search for new forms to achieve new affects. However, a specific outcome of this approach to art, performance, and its experience, is that it functions within events, in a singular moment of duration, and not in a linear sequence of social or historic time. This experience is in conflict with a notion of progress, and works against representation. As for Deleuze no sensation can be deemed as a qualitative improvement on another, nor representative as the sensation, the actual result of art, is a component of a real event and not representative of anything:

The relationship of sensation with the material must therefore be assessed within the limits of duration, whatever this may be. If there is progress in art it is because art can live only by creating new percepts and affects as so many detours, returns, dividing lines, changes of level and scale. From this point of view, the distinction between two states of oil painting assumes a completely different, aesthetic and no longer technical aspect – this distinction clearly does not come down to “representational or not,” since no art and no sensation have ever been representational. (Deleuze, 1994:193)

Time then, but more specifically the duration of the affect of a work, is the final aspect that must be considered, in relation to the experience of a postmodern work. The duration, the singular unit of experiential time that occurs in the encountering a work of art, exists outside of linear time. Therefore a different notion must take the place of progress, and for Deleuze this is intensification, an enriching of the potential becoming and affects that can be created in the event of perceiving and experiencing the percepts and affects that are produced in an encounter with a work of art. To describe this process of intensification, and to understand the kinds of work it produces, and the affects that follow from them, we must turn to Lyotard’s notion of the postmodern sublime.

1.5: The Postmodern Sublime.

First of all, the sublime feeling is not mere pleasure as taste is – it is a mixture of pleasure and pain. The entrance of suffering into esthetic feeling must be understood as a shadow cast over imaginative work by an Idea of Reason. Confronted with objects that are too big according to their magnitude or too violent according to their power, the mind experiences its own limitations. For example, situated too close to the side of the pyramid, the eye of a viewer is unable to synthesize its magnitude in a glance, that is, in a unique intuition... There is a failure in either the synthesizing function of either the imagination or the will. (Lyotard, 1988:40)

The sublime exists in art as an attempt to represent a universal concept such as desire or fear. According to Kant, the sublime comes into effect because these universal concepts cannot be represented. Therefore, an effective work of art can only hope to cause the viewer to recognise the concept that the work is attempting to be represent. For Lyotard this recognition causes the pleasure, whereas the pain implicit in the sublime originates from the understanding that the work of art will never fully achieve a true representation of the concept. The sublime work of art therefore, is forever at the point of revealing the unbridgeable distance between the universal concept and its manifestation.

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a greater sense of the unrepresentable. (Lyotard, 1984:81)^{iv}

The postmodern then is the presentation of the unrepresentability of ephemeral and evasive concepts and events. Moreover, in accordance with Lyotard's definition of the postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives, the postmodern artist achieves this sublime state by trying to break out and exceed any boundaries implied by the rules of the art form. The postmodern artist attempts to actively challenge the previously established parameters of art, as established in the modern era, by exposing the inherent flaws in those parameters:

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished

rules, they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. (Lyotard, 1984:81)

Lyotard first outlined his notion of the postmodern sublime in his text *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, at that time he situated it in relation to the contemporary problematic status of knowledge in an information based society. However, as Lyotard argues in later texts such as *'The Inhuman'* (1988), Lyotard is quick to indicate that the postmodern sublime is a critique of more longstanding theories of the construction of the self and the experience of reality. Equally as the above quote indicates there is a clear link between Lyotard's theories of the sublime and Deleuze's notions of the event through the parallel use of example of the pyramid as event and the presence of failure as a crucial aspect of the sublime.

Lyotard starts his definition of the postmodern sublime by citing Alfred Whitehead's notion of the event of the pyramid. Lyotard employs this example as a means of indicating the subjects desire but inability to synthesize any event it encounters. This parallels directly with Deleuze's use of the same example of Pyramid to define his notion of the event. This inability does not cause a rejection but rather terror mixed with pleasure:

While the imagination cannot synthesize and intuitively present the form because it is too big to be comprehended in one instant, the mind discovers that it can conceive of something like the infinite. "Absolute greatness" is only an Idea of Reason, but it is in comparison with it that the vain efforts of the imagination can be felt as deeply moving. (Lyotard, 1988:40-41)

Lyotard, like Deleuze recognises the impossibility of prehending the entirety of an event, and indicates the presence of reason, logic or total knowledge in our understanding of a possible totality, the infinite. Yet he stipulates this is only an idea of reason, there is no total knowing of the infinite. In the place of reason Lyotard, indicates the presence of failure, openness and a rejection of existing forms, the limits of the imagination, as the basis of esthetic feeling:

According to what I have said, it is possible to sketch out a strange esthetics in which what supports the esthetic feeling is no longer the free synthesis of forms by the imagination, as was previously described, but a failure to synthesize. It

does not mean that its form must be monstrous, only that its form is no longer the point of esthetic feeling. (Lyotard, 1988:41)

Here we must return to Lyotard's assertion that the experience of an event is an experience of nothingness. For Lyotard, the postmodern sublime is the pleasure and pain drawn from such an encounter. Specifically, it is in the nothingness of an event, where the subject is fluid and their ontological status is open to becomings, and where all assumed forms of total knowledge are thrown into ambiguity, that the subject experiences the pain of uncertainty and instability, and the pleasure of potential becoming, both an end and a beginning of the self.

What is sublime is the feeling that something will happen, despite everything, within this threatening void, that something will take 'place' and will announce that everything is not over. (Lyotard, 1991:84)

In this moment the self is held in suspense, and that moment of suspense reveals to the subject the duration of the event, and the potential intensification occurring through the rhizomatic encounter of the work, its autonomous affects and the subject, a total experience of immediacy, potential and nothingness, the postmodern sublime:

But suspense can also be accompanied by pleasure, for instance pleasure in welcoming the unknown, and even by joy, to speak like Baruch Spinoza, the joy obtained by the intensification of being that the event brings with it. This is probably a contradictory feeling. It is at the very least a sign, the question-mark itself, the way in which *it happens* is withheld and announced: *is it happening?* The question can be modulated in any tone. But the mark of the question is 'now', *now* like feeling that nothing might happen: the nothingness now. (Lyotard, 1991:92)

Here then Lyotard reveals what the relation of artists seeking the postmodern sublime is to their own work, and to the culture, they function within. The postmodern sublime in a work of art destabilizes and comments on known artistic and aesthetic forms and knowledge. It rejects the fixed and certain and repeatable in favour of the fluid, ambiguous and singular. The artist seeks the instigation of events within the work that are beyond their control and reveal their limits as an individual subject:

The artist ceases to be guided by a culture which made him the sender and master of a message of glory: he becomes, in so far as he is a genius, the involuntary addressee of an inspiration come to him from an 'I know not what'.

The public no longer judges according to the criteria of a taste ruled by the tradition of shared pleasure: individuals unknown to the artist (the 'people') read books, go through the galleries of the Salons, crowd into the theatres and the public concerts, they are prey to unforeseeable feelings: they are shocked, admiring, scornful, indifferent... The very imperfections, the distortions of taste, even ugliness, have their share in the shock effect. Art does not imitate nature, it creates a world apart... one might say in which the monstrous and the formless have their rights because they can be sublime. (Lyotard, 1991:97)

The existing aesthetic forms are rejected by the postmodern sublime, as they reinforce the stability of the self and knowledge. They are rejected in favour of events, and the affects that accompany them. Lyotard argues, as Deleuze argued earlier, that form is essential. Form facilitates the shift in emphasis by away from itself by hiding its recognizable aspect of aesthetic beauty, removing culturally agreed models of appreciation that would be applied immediately onto the event and transform it into a synthesised occurrence:

One result of this is that such a feeling can no longer be called taste. And another is that it is no longer immediate. It requires the mediation of an idea of reason. There is no sublime, therefore, without the development of the speculative and ethical capacities of the mind. (Lyotard, 1988:41)

As Lyotard points out, the postmodern sublime intentionally causes a collapse of the means of judging or valuing a work of art. This causes new parameters to be formed in order to cope with the work, such as new formal structures and interdisciplinarity. Moreover, time is an essential factor of the experience. Through a brief forestalling of total knowledge, the subject must apply thought to the event rather than simply synthesise it into an already fixed framework of understanding. As such while the postmodern sublime is instigated by an event, it occurs only in a mind with an active capacity for reason. Moreover, it is not immediate in the sense that it occurs without understanding, but it is live and ephemeral in that it must arise from a live event, and be carried on by the subject who encounters it through their active consideration of it. Unlike formally recognisable works of art, which are preceded by a programmed synthesis, in failing, a postmodern work develops active thinking, speculative and ethical capacities of the mind; in other words a specific, singular, subjective response. For Lyotard, this response can function in a completely different manner than those that are constricted by an immediate imposition of beauty or knowledge:

Once the imagination is freed from the charge of knowledge, it works not only in a reproductive but also in a productive manner. It reveals an ability to present to the mind unexpected forms on the occasion of perceiving phenomena, to enrich and enlarge the synthetic apprehension of perceptive matter. I would say that it discloses a number of clouds, the thinking of which still remains to be done. (Lyotard, 1988:34)

Therefore Deleuze and Lyotard, while having different ways of describing an encounter with the event of a work of art, both describe the experience of encountering a work of art as an intensification of potential possibilities within a referred to, but unknowable infinite. This is instead of Kant's transcendent accumulation or appropriation of knowledge towards a possible encounter with the absolute:

The artist attempts combinations allowing the event. The art-lover does not experience a simple pleasure, or derive some ethical benefit from his contact with art, but expects an intensification of his conceptual and emotional capacity, an ambivalent enjoyment. Intensity is associated with ontological dislocation. The art-object no longer bends itself to models, but tries to present the fact that there is an unrepresentable. (Lyotard, 1991:1001)

The artist is in the position of working to allow events, and the art viewer experiences the intensification of emotional and conceptual capacity. By allowing a rhizomatic openness, and an event to occur through failure of form, the subject must address the encounter with nothingness, and the imagination creates an ability to perceive new forms, feel new feelings, and crucially to feel the process.

Then according to Lyotard, what postmodern performance achieves is the construction of a temporary and unsustainable occurrence of the real, and in doing so testifies to the infinite and the sublime:

The post-industrial techno-scientific world does not have as a general principle that one must present something that is not presentable, and thus represent it, but obeys the contrary principle, namely that the infinite is a play in the very dialectic of research. It is absurd, impracticable and reactionary to turn aside from this principle. What has to be done is to slip into it the evocation of the absolute. It is not the artist's job to restore a supposed 'reality' that the search for knowledge, techniques and wealth never stops destroying, only to reconstruct a version thought for a while to be more credible, and which will have to be abandoned in its turn. The spirit of the times is definitely not geared to what is pleasing, and the task of art remains that of the immanent sublime,

that of alluding to an unrepresentable which has nothing edifying about it, but which is inscribed in the infinity of the transformation of 'realities'. (Lyotard, 1991:128)

This act is comparable to Deleuze and Guattari's notion that the purpose of a work of art is to reform cultural relations. Although where Deleuze and Guattari see art as a direct influence on reality, Lyotard's strategy differs slightly, as he concludes in the postmodern condition: 'Finally, it must be clear that it is our business not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented... Let us wage war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honour of the name' (Lyotard, 1984:81-82).

1.6: Conclusion: The Lived Experience of Postmodernism.

Lyotard's affiliations here would seem to be with the *Anti-Oedipus* of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, who also warned us, at the end of that work, that the schizophrenic ethic they proposed was not at all a revolutionary one, but a way of surviving under capitalism. (Jameson, 1984:xviii)

What Deleuze, Guattari and Lyotard offer to this thesis, are means of describing and exploring the experience and ideas behind what can generally be called postmodern performance. The notions of rhizome, event, affect and the postmodern sublime all link directly to features of postmodern performance such as self-referentiality and self-consciousness, interdisciplinarity and hybridity, temporal and spatial specificity, a rejection of form, failure and a validation of subjective experience. Moreover, These notions relate to the lived experience of contemporary culture, that Lyotard has called the postmodern condition. This specifically is not a response to a specific historical period, but to certain social and cultural conditions that challenge how we consider the formation of the subject and its relation to its broader context.

Lyotard's book *The Postmodern Condition: A report on knowledge* (1984) is largely an examination of the effects of new technology on the status of knowledge, in a society that is also undergoing a significant cultural paradigm shift. Lyotard, in this work foresaw the mass 'Computerisation of society' and began to reflect on what the eventual outcome of this technological development would be. Furthermore, as a philosopher, Lyotard was concerned with the theoretical notion of postmodernism and

how this was dramatically influencing the cultural changes, which will now be outlined. Lyotard saw postmodernism as the root of the cultural shift, which he defined as 'Incredulity toward metanarratives' (Lyotard. 1984:xxiv). However, it is worth noting that Lyotard's argument was fundamentally an investigation into the approach taken towards the legitimation and authentication of knowledge in late 20th century capitalist cultures, and as such was not an endorsement of other views of postmodernism, that identified it as a historic period. Implicit within his argument was that the postmodern and the modern were not mutually exclusive and that an identification of the two as distinct era or cultural phenomena was a fundamental error.

Lyotard's key symptom of contemporary culture, an incredulity towards metanarratives, involves the loss of faith in, and the subsequently fragmentation of cultural institutions such as government and overarching theories such as religion and science. The incredulity towards metanarratives was preceded by the lack of belief in progress, as caused by the proliferation and increased scale of global conflicts and Western social decay of the 20th Century. Yet, the postmodern age as Lyotard puts it, is not a distinct historic period, but rather the emergence of a resistance to ideas and cultural forms that posit a stable construction of the subject.

Neither modernity nor so-called postmodernity can be identified and defined as clearly circumscribed historical entities, of which the latter would always come 'after' the former. Rather we have to say that the postmodern is always implied in the modern because of the fact that modernity, modern temporality, comprises of in itself an impulsion to exceed itself into a state other than itself. And not only to exceed itself in that way, but to resolve itself into a sort of ultimate stability... Modernity is constitutionally and ceaselessly pregnant with its postmodernity. (Lyotard, 1991:25)

Postmodernism then does not fit a model of chronologically successive of history, as while it exists at a historical moment and within a specific context, it is not a historical epoch marking the end of one era and the instigation of a new one. It is principally a cultural moment of crisis, a condition or lived experience where the foundations of modernity are fundamentally resisted.

As I have outlined, Lyotard resists the notion of postmodernism as having an oppositional or clearly defined relation with the current historic period. As such, descriptions of postmodernism that identify it as a distinct historical period fall outside the definition posited by this thesis. What defines the postmodern condition beyond Lyotard's description are the scientific and technological advances in contemporary culture that have altered how individuals perceive the limits of their subjectivity. Individuals now have the ability to communicate with others at any time with almost any location on the globe; individuals can also carry out numerous aspects of their lives in person, remotely, or play them out virtually through computers and the Internet. Behaviour can be altered through a range of legal, prescription and illegal chemicals, and surgical advances allow for radical reshaping of an individual's appearance and sex. The individual, through global capitalism, the mass media, and mass transportation finds the world to be an experience of immediacy and immanence, where all aspects of experience in the world are ever present and accessible to the subject. In the contemporary world, the subject is fluid, pliable, ceaselessly in the process of interaction and communication, and constantly open to the unfolding of events on a personal, social cultural and global level. In this context Deleuze and Guattari's notion of subjectivity as a becoming is far more appropriate a model to describe these aspects of experience, than a model proposing a fixed and stable subject such as anthropological or psychoanalytic models. Deleuze, Guattari and Lyotard's events and becomings, allow for a flexible subject, connected to their immediate context, able to near seamlessly engage and enter into events.

In the same way, the work under discussion on this thesis functions as a fluid subject, open to events and flexible in its relations to its broader context. The work has not staked out new ground, or foreseen new historical era, or invented artistic strategies for the discovery of truth. Moreover, by seeking the postmodern sublime it actively resists innovation:

But innovating means to behave as though lots of things happened, and to make them happen. Through innovation, the will affirms its hegemony over time. It thus conforms to the metaphysics of capital, which is a technology of time. The innovation 'works'. The question mark of the *Is it happening?* stops. With the occurrence, the will is defeated. The avant-gardist task remains that of undoing the presumption of the mind with respect to time. The sublime feeling is the name of this privation. (Lyotard, 1991:107)

The context, stylistic features, and proximity of companies to each other and their interaction, provide an appearance of a linear notion of tradition and heritage.

However, postmodern art, according to Lyotard, resists this categorisation to keep the experience of artist and audience within the moment of the event. The tradition of the works discussed in this thesis is to a set of ideas, and a conception of the nature of experience and the construction of the subject as fluid. As such, the works discussed in this thesis have resisted capitalism, grasps at objective knowledge, formal perfection, and distance from experience, in favour of rhizomatic connectivity, affect, and a fidelity to the event.

ⁱ The notion of the rhizome will be referred to throughout the thesis when discussing decentred processes, and used as a model for the formation of subjectivity in chapter 4.

ⁱⁱ Benoit Mandelbrot was a 20th century mathematician whose work involved the examination of processes with peculiar statistical properties, particularly natural phenomena, or phenomena for which possible variations appeared infinite. He coined the term 'fractal', for features, with fractional dimensions, that produced self-similarity. Fractals are shapes or behaviours that have similar properties at all levels of magnification or across all times, such as clouds, coastlines and plants.

ⁱⁱⁱ Deleuze's definition of the event will be complemented by Kaye's definition in chapter 2, and in the discussions of liveness in chapter 5.

^{iv} This conception of the postmodern sublime and the function of postmodern art will be referred to throughout the thesis, particularly in chapter 3 when discussing the challenging of theatrical conventions.

Chapter 2: Postmodern Performance Theory and the Relation of Theory to Practice.

2.1: Postmodern Performance Theory.

In this chapter I will outline the history of postmodern performance theory, identifying the key writers in this field and the concepts that are specific to the discussion of theatre. I will then move on to discuss the relation of both cultural and performance theory to postmodern performance practice itself. The chapter identifies key features of postmodern performance theory by addressing the work of Philip Auslander, Johannes Birringer, Hal Foster, Nick Kaye and Patrice Pavis. The first section of this chapter outlines how postmodern performance theory attempts to define key aspects of postmodern performance in particular fragmentation, denial of linear narrative, and the rejection of character. This section also traces the development of postmodern performance discourse, which developed alongside early American experimental theatre and then expanded to include the discussion of European work. The following section, dealing with the relation of theory to practice, will briefly chart the rejection of a range of theoretical discourses by early twentieth century avant-garde theatre and the following development of postmodernism, which exhibits similarities to experimental performance through its anti-theoretical traits. The discussion will then focus on the contemporary relation between postmodern theory and performance through an examination of the collapse of the discursive boundaries between academic criticism and performance, exploring the extent to which, as Patrice Pavis has argued, cultural theory and performance have become cross contaminated.

‘The success, even the survival of arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theatre’ (Fried cited in Copeland, 1989:12). The art historian and critic Michael Fried made this declaration in 1967 and in some senses, it can be regarded as an indicator of when performance that could be termed postmodern, began to appear. Fried, saw the theatricality of minimalism as a degeneration of art, an undisciplined blurring and weakening of artistic integrity instead of a form seeking

its own definition. Fried argued that art should avoid theatricality, in order to maintain the purity of other more distinct arts, such as music, the fine arts and literature. However, artists of the time such as Andre, Judd, Morris, and Rainer were still exploring the possibilities of minimalism. Then, during the late 1960s and 1970s a number of performance and theatre artists moved against Fried's position, favouring theatrical performances, producing both Julian Beck's and Judith Malina's excessively Dionysian Living Theatre happenings, and the Fluxus Groups respectively low-key but still theatrical events. However, these were largely fine artists producing more theatrical work and not theatre practitioners producing work that could be called postmodern. However within this period it should not be assumed that minimalism was the definitive art form or that vice versa theatricality should be seen as synonymous with postmodernism. This would be too simplistic an opposition, and inaccurate, given the 'theatricality' of artists of the time. It was the interdisciplinary tendencies of theatre that disturbed Fried the most, as they were indicative of an approach to art that encouraged a disregard of convention and boundaries between forms. In fact, many of the stylistic features that began to emerge were primarily self-conscious experimentations with form. As such, the intention of practitioners such as Robert Wilson and Richard Foreman was not to create a transcendent or pure art object, but to interrogate and deconstruct one facet of how art and performance functioned.

It was not until the 1970s and 1980s that American performance practitioners, such as Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theatre, the Operas of Robert Wilson and The Wooster Group were exhibiting the characteristics now recognised as postmodern. While clearly developing the ideas of practitioners such as Yvonne Rainer and Meredith Monk, these practitioners were distinct from their predecessors for a number of key performance features. The work of these practitioners either rejected narrative outright, or disrupted it so systematically that it ceased to be the focus of the performance. The disruption of narrative would be achieved through the disruption of time, for example in the work of Robert Wilson a scene could be enacted at such a slow speed that a single gesture could take ten minutes. Alternatively, narrative was disrupted through its constant shifting of context as in the work of Richard Foreman or placed in juxtaposition with other conflicting narratives in the work of The Wooster Group. In addition to the disruption of character,

performers ceased to act in a representational style, this development was to be examined by Philip Auslander, whose work will be introduced later. Finally, each of these practitioners had a radical approach to the staging of performance, and introducing factors of chance into the operation of lighting and sound.

This generation of practitioners were identified early on by Chantal Pontbriand in her article 'The Eye Finds No Fixed Point On Which To Rest' (1982). The title of the article comes from an essay by Walter Benjamin 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936). In this essay Benjamin suggests that contemporary art will exhibit a state of continuous flux, challenging the spectator as their 'Eye finds no fixed point on which to rest' (Benjamin cited in Pontbriand 1982:154). Pontbriand, in her article, argues that Foreman's work displayed a radical decentring and fragmentation of traditional theatrical features, such as narrative and character. Pontbriand's argument is that postmodern theatre, challenged by the decline of live performance and the theoretical challenges of critics such as Fried, attempts to produce a live approximation of cinema: 'I suggest that Foreman's theatre illustrates how theatre today, in order to overcome the impossibility of theatre, has chosen the path of cinema' (Pontbriand, 1982:161). Although Pontbriand discussed postmodern theatre in terms of an imitation of the forms of cinema, it soon became apparent that postmodern performance was in fact more concerned with a deconstruction of the dominant forms of theatrical practice. Robert Corrigan, a contemporary of Pontbriand, began a consideration of the work experimental theatre practitioners in relation to the theoretical developments of the time, drawing on Lyotard's Postmodern Condition and the notion of the postmodern sublime. In his essay 'The Search for New Endings: Theatre in Search of a Fix' (1984) Corrigan argued that:

Postmodern performance is composed in the mode of a radical indeterminacy, and in the conviction that some things are unrepresentable. Rather than the traditional structures of drama, self-absorption, self-reflexiveness, and self-obsession have been the dominant characteristics of the postmodern transition... In that transformation, presentation replaces representation and performance is increasingly about performance itself. (Corrigan, 1984:160)

This is still a view that is currently held, for example writer Susan Melrose considers postmodern performance a 'Metapractice', performance that circles the subject of

performance (Melrose, 1997:Unnumbered pages). However, each of these early perspectives on postmodern performance depended on a solipsistic view of postmodernism, without any relation to its historical lineage or broader cultural context. It was not until 1986 when Patrice Pavis offered a definition of postmodern performance that provided a set of defining features and an examination of its relation to classical and modern theatrical practice. Pavis' article 'The Classical Heritage of Modern Drama: The Case of Postmodern Theatre' (1986) was the first substantial piece of writing to address the origins of postmodern theatre and the features of the postmodern performance heritage. Developing on the ideas of Corrigan and Pontbriand, Pavis argues that postmodern theatre is formed through the rejection of the parameters of classical and modern theatre. Pavis proposes that postmodern performance distances itself from the linear progression of the theatrical tradition, in order to re-examine the fundamental aspects of performance.

Postmodernism... no longer feels the need to deny any dramaturgy or world view (as opposed to the theatre of the absurd, for example); it sets itself the task of effecting its own deconstruction as a way of inscribing itself, no longer in a thematic or formal tradition, but into an auto-reflexive self-consciousness of its enunciation and thus into its very functioning. (Pavis, 1982:65-66)

Pavis argues that this alienation from the line of tradition and the deconstruction of theatre is a response to the threat of technological advances in performance, namely cinema. Pavis argues that performance practitioners foresaw that unless there was a radical shift in the understanding of theatre, alongside to the cultural changes such as the decline of metanarratives that were occurring simultaneously, theatre would decline as an art form. Pavis argues that by making this break with tradition, postmodern theatre is a means of re-evaluating theatre, emphasising its unique ephemeral nature and challenging the features of narrative and character that align it with the tradition of modern theatre. However, in identifying this characteristic of the postmodern theatre heritage, Pavis also indicated a significant problematic feature in its relation to contemporary theory. Postmodern theatre rejects dominant performance features and, according to Pavis, separates itself from a linear model of the development of theatre. What postmodern theatre adopts in their place are the strategies of postmodern and poststructuralist theory to enable what can now be seen as the inherent fragmentation and self-conscious aspects of postmodern theatre. As

Pavis points out, in relation to the development of a tradition, this is extremely problematic.

Thus erasure of character, of inheritance, of memory, entails not the end of humanity, despite what misunderstood structuralist slogans may lead us to believe, but rather - and perhaps not any better - an avalanche of discourse which no longer claims to be linked to a visible action in the world, an inheritance which pours out on to its heirs without giving them the choice of accepting, rejecting or selecting the best of it. (Pavis, 1982:68)

Thus, it can be seen that postmodern theatre partially develops its inheritance through the theoretical perspectives that sustain it, namely postmodernism and poststructuralism. This conclusion allows Pavis to propose three primary features of postmodern performance that are symptoms of this condition.

First, Pavis identifies the depoliticisation of postmodern theatre, that by rejecting modern discourse, postmodern theatre loses its overt political stance. Pavis argues “As a result, a ‘new philosophy’ has arisen, much more cynical and disenchanted, an expert (a bit like postmodern discourse) in the analysis of the cold mechanisms of power and social functioning” (Pavis, 1982:70). Of course, an analysis of the mechanisms of power is political, and therefore postmodern theatre is not adopting an apolitical stance. Postmodern theatre may be depoliticised in a Marxist sense, but conversely it is actively political in the manner of Foucault’s discussions of institutions and Deleuze and Guattari’s micropolitics. Yet, through adopting this theoretical framework, and by concerning its practice with the examination of performance itself, postmodern theatre is accused of losing any relevance to its broader socio/cultural context. However, the perception of postmodern performance’s depoliticisation has been challenged by the work of Philip Auslander, who proposes a politics of resistance, based on Derrida’s theories of deconstruction, which will be explored later.

Secondly, Pavis argues that a challenge to coherence and totality is a further defining feature of postmodern theatre. Developing first point postmodern performance denies totality, by excluding itself from its cultural context. In its place postmodern theatre replaces totality with a plethora of cultural references and appropriations. Rather than revert to attempts to provide meaning, postmodern theatre immerses itself in culture,

crossing boundaries to legitimise its process by engaging with as many relevant artistic forms and contemporary theoretical issues as possible.

The previous two features exhibit the symptoms of Pavis' final characteristic, the contamination of practice by theory. Pavis argues that postmodern theatre practice is the manifestation of a set of theoretical positions in which the defining line between postmodern theatre and postmodern theory is blurred. 'Theory overflows into practice; it becomes difficult to separate or distinguish the apparatus of production/reception from the spectator's hermeneutic activity' (Pavis, 1982:71). Notably, Pavis' observation contains the bias that it is theory that has appropriated performance, but not necessarily vice versa. Thus, Pavis sets up a hierarchy, wherein theoretical developments enable the production of new practice:

Theory is no longer nourished by an uncontested a-priori practice; rather theory generates that practice. Postmodern theatre raises theory to the rank of playful activity; it suggests as the only inheritance the faculty of replaying the past, rather than pretending to recreate and absorb it. (Pavis, 1982:72)

As Pavis outlines, the postmodern heritage is further dislocated from its modern lineage by the contamination of theory. Postmodern theatre's dependence on theory allows only nostalgia in relation to its history, preferring to pursue its subversion of theatrical forms rather than engage in the development of innovative theatrical structures for the sake of innovation.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s postmodern performance theory was becoming an established discourse. This was apparent through its discussion in non-theatrical academic circles, notably by Steven Connor and Hal Foster. Connor's Postmodernist Culture (1997, 2nd ed) contains a significant chapter on postmodern theatre, developing the issue of heritage as raised by Pavis and also examining the inherently postmodern features of theatre. Connor, drawing on Pavis, similarly notes that postmodern performance theory is based on the appropriation of cultural theory from other disciplines. 'The lack of an agreed and coherent version of the modernist history of drama has meant that theories of postmodern drama have had to draw upon postmodern theory in other fields' (Connor, 1997:142). According to Connor, 20th century theatre had no common theoretical ground; instead, theatre was typified by a

set of opposing theatrical methods such as realism and Absurdism, with each claiming to have a greater degree of universal truth. Yet postmodern theatre, despite its fragmentation, decentring and constant ground shifting has managed to construct, through appropriation, an elaborate theoretical framework. Connor argues that this is in part due to the inherently postmodern nature of the theatrical process. In the same way the Fried accused theatricality of being a blurring or degenerating of the boundaries of art, Connor highlights this as the defining element of the theatrical art form, revealing it as fundamentally postmodern:

In these senses the theatre, or theatrical form, encompasses many of the themes that we have already encountered in the postmodern debate, especially the refusal of notions of essential form, the dispersal of the identity of the work of art, and its immersion in social and political contexts. (Connor, 1997:142)

Connor develops this idea to discuss how postmodern theatre is at once a practical engagement in the issues of postmodern cultural theory and the deconstruction of theatricality, yet also a means of resisting the late capitalist drive to commodify art. ‘Presence-as-process is evidenced in a theatre that refuses to deliver itself as commodity, refuses to satisfy the viewer who seeks to abstract or translate performance’ (Connor, 1997:149).ⁱ

The postmodern recasts the modern in this light, and either appropriates desirable features and qualities as its own, effectively rewriting the past, and assigning these qualities as essentially postmodern qualities, latent within the modern. However, it is also worth noting that the items Connor identifies as less desirable, exhaustion and schizophrenia, are in fact desirable strategies to others. Exhaustion features as a crucial strategy in durational work, and in the deconstruction of theatricality and character through repetition. Schizophrenia, even more so, is highlighted as a mode of both action and analysis by Deleuze, and relates directly to the notion of the rhizome. Many of the practitioners discussed or referred to in the thesis employ an intertextual collage or layering of multiple sources (The work of Richard Foreman’s, *Ontological Hysterical Theatre* as a clear example), that in its disregard for convention of genre or style is best described as schizophrenic.

In the creation of a Binary list such as this, Hassan conforms a modern, binary knowledge of his subject and seems to identify points where postmodernism achieves

a clean break from the modern. He does this in contradiction to his own assertion of their interrelation, and against Lyotard's argument that the postmodern should resist such positions.

It is also worth noting out that this contradiction may be a deliberate strategy. It proposes on the surface a separation of the modern and postmodern, and yet at the same time that separation can only exist through and in relation to the language of modernism. The list itself is an active resistance, appropriation and rewriting of philosophical and artistic foundations. The form of the list only serves to highlight this action, of creating a temporary minor language from and within the modern, resisting any firm commodification, and brings the process of the postmodern into high relief.

The rejection of commodification by postmodern theatre is also discussed in the work of Hal Foster whose influential preface to Postmodern Culture (1993) offers the notion of the anti-aesthetic; 'A critique which destructures the orders of representations in order to reinscribe them' (Foster, 1993:xv) which Foster argues is central to postmodern artistic practice. Foster's notion of an anti-aesthetic connects the theory of deconstruction, as developed by Derrida, and merges it with a formalised notion of Lyotard's postmodern sublime. However, the idea of an anti-aesthetic for postmodern theatre is rather constricting, as it limits its influence to a certain set of objectives, namely the reconsideration of representation. Moreover, as this and the following chapters will argue, postmodern theatre and postmodernism have continued to shift their focus and form of discourse over their short history. To attempt to limit postmodern theatre to an aesthetic practice would exclude significant developments, such as the notion of the politics of resistance and the reinvention of theatre as a site where multiple discourses and practices can inhabit the same space. This said, Foster does recognise and articulates the nature of the cross-disciplinary practice of postmodern theatre and its potential effect. 'More locally, anti-aesthetic also signals a practice, cross-disciplinary in nature, that is sensitive to cultural forms engaged in a politic or rooted in a vernacular - that is, to forms that deny the idea of a privileged realm' (Foster, 1993:xv). So what Foster reveals, is the multidisciplinary potential of postmodern theatre. Allowing conflicting or previously separated practices to be employed in a theatrical setting, or indeed the theatrical to be bought

into a new context. As Foster argues, multidisciplinary challenges the Fried's position that art forms must remain distinct to remain valid and to achieve progress. In fact, multidisciplinary furthers the potential of theatre and other artistic practice by challenging the restrictive hierarchies that, for example, place fine art above film.

The first British academic to significantly engage with postmodern theatre was Nick Kaye, who wrote the influential text Postmodernism and Performance (1994.a). Kaye, rather than trying to prescribe a theoretical agenda to postmodern performance, examines some of the work of the most influential postmodern practitioners such as Foreman, Wilson and The Wooster Group in order to attempt to limit the possible definitions of postmodern performance to a key set of stylistic and methodological features. Kaye identifies what he considers to be the common of features of postmodern performance, discussing how these challenge or disrupt traditional notions of performance. Moreover, he compiles this set of characteristics to identify the theatrical agenda that is being pursued and, by association, the means by which postmodern work can be classified without compromising its desire to remain outside of fixed categories. Kaye's examination of a number performances that range from dance, to theatre, to multi-media events identifies a number of key features that are still valid: a disruption or rejection of narrative; language, and character; and a tendency toward interdisciplinarity and multimedia work. Kaye, developing the ideas of Pavis, proposes that the postmodern theatre tradition itself is not linear, but is composed of a series of events.ⁱⁱ The postmodern event is a shift in the ground of postmodern theory or practice, making it impossible to establish a definitive statement on the form of postmodern theatre:

This idea of the postmodern event allows an exploration of connections between very obviously divergent kinds of work which meet in a making visible of the unsteady agreements and circumstances upon which the work of art and its meanings depend. (Kaye 1994.a:145)

The notion of a postmodern event is both enabling and disabling, by allowing the postmodern theatrical scene to be revealed, while simultaneously denying the means to make any lasting definition:

Where the postmodern is represented in one way... then the postmodern event will come into play at the very moment of this limitation, and so the move toward closure, is disrupted. Such definitions cannot arrive at the postmodern, but can only set out a ground which might be challenged. (Kaye 1994.a:145)

The postmodern theatrical heritage is marked by a series of movements against and away from the definitions of critics and cultural theorists; therefore it can be argued that to an extent, postmodern theatre is largely based on a series of developments that attempt to elude any long lasting definition. This thesis itself will only provide a temporary definition of postmodern theatre as it continues to evolve. However, one must not ignore, as Birringer points out, the radical and fundamental changes in the perception of theatre that postmodernism has produced, which continue to have lasting effects.

Kaye has also set out in his essay 'Live Art: Definition and Documentation' (1994.b) a brief history of the field of British Live Art and its relation to American Performance Art. Kaye argues that British Live Art is a distinct practice from American Performance Art that emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s, and is markedly different because of its use of failure in performance systems and because of the overtly more theatrical nature of the work (Kaye, 1994.b:2-3). Kaye also states that:

'Live Art', in this sense, is as much an attitude as it might be a performance practice, a term that invokes a particular way of looking at work, a frame through which presentations generated in relation to sculpture, installation, dance, music or 'theatre' present themselves as time-based 'live' activities implicitly sharing some vocabulary, interest or aesthetic. (Kaye, 1994.b:1)

It is these stylistic traits and the 'particular way of looking at work' that I would argue, within the practitioners that I have selected, begins to lead to the recognition of a British theatrical tradition. This work is attached to the Live Art scene, though not completely part of it due to its overt theatricality and as such the two should not be conflated even though their practice may frequently become difficult to distinguish.

More recently Kaye published a text that represents his notion of the postmodern event as postmodern tradition. Art into Theatre (1996.a) is a collection of interviews with significant (arguably postmodern) practitioners that explore the hybridity of contemporary performance, specifically discussing the appropriation of art and

cultural theory into theatre. Without imposing a constricting theoretical agenda, the text privileges the voice of the artist, discussing the events that their performances represented and making connections with other practitioners and events within the same volume.

By this point in the development of postmodern performance theory, the broad characteristics of the form had been identified and writers began to engage with its more complex theoretical issues, such as the representation of character, the body and space and the political status of postmodern theatre. One of the most important writers to discuss the theoretical aspects of politics and representation in postmodern performance is Philip Auslander. Auslander's work covers a broad range of issues including the politics of postmodern performance and the shift from acting to performance. Auslander's theory of resistant politics was originally developed in an earlier text Presence and Resistance (1992). However it was not until Auslander's text From Acting to Performance: Essays in Modernism and Postmodernism (1997) that the term resistance was clearly defined and placed in relation to actual performances. The political nature of postmodern performance for Auslander is of resistance, a term that he appropriates from Derrida's notion of deconstruction. Auslander suggests that postmodern performance does not have a progressive political agenda through which it intends to cause social change. Instead, Auslander argues that postmodern theatre is adept at the revelation of the 'mechanisms of power' as Pavis would say and the resistance to their constraints. So postmodern theatre is, in the political sense, theatre that enters into the heart of the political situation it wishes to resist, in order to expose it. However, Auslander recognises that the potential dangers of this method are the same that Derrida foresaw when describing the two possible types of deconstruction discussed earlier.

Auslander suggests that the means by which postmodern performance escapes these potential risks is through the broad features of postmodernism that have already been considered. The fragmentation of theatre and the denial of character and narrative make it difficult for the work to be subsumed within the political framework it is resisting. Furthermore, the contamination of practice by theory enables postmodern performances to engage with their subject on a theoretical as well as a manifest level, challenging the notion of the intellectual naivety of the work. 'In theatre, presence is

the matrix of power; the postmodern theatre of resistance must therefore both expose the collusion of presence with authority and resist such collusion' (Auslander, 1997:63).

As well as the notion of the postmodern political, Auslander also charts the move from acting to performance in postmodern theatre. Through an examination of the performance process of Willem Dafoe from The Wooster Group, Auslander argues that the mode of performance in postmodern theatre is an attempt to heighten the presence and theatricality of the performer and their critical position within the performance. To an extent acting remains in performance, but is also co-joined with self-awareness, a presentation of the self, a fulfilling of tasks and the consideration of theoretical concepts: 'The multiple, divided consciousness produced by doing something with the knowledge that it is being observed, while simultaneously observing oneself doing it, yields a complex confrontation with self' (Auslander, 1997:42). This then constitutes a basic working definition of postmodern performance. Postmodern performance is a self-conscious critique of the assumptions and intentions of contemporary culture.

The particular stylistic and conceptual features of postmodern performance, as a subject of theoretical discussion as outlined here, could clearly apply to work from any region. Postmodern performance in America and Europe exhibits the same general features and is discussed in similar terms as work in the United Kingdom. Yet, this is not to say that the practices are the same. It would be an oversimplification to suggest that performance practice made in different cultural contexts, same way, or with the same intent. As such, it should be noted that the examples under discussion, as stated in the introduction, focus on the practice of the five selected companies. To include examples of practice from the live art sector and from Europe and America would alter the argument of the thesis. As such, within this thesis, while the features may be described as general to postmodern performance, the particular examples in the thesis are specific to their context and of the range of practitioners under discussion. Therefore it is now important to discuss the relation of theory to practice, in order to understand how this impacts upon the practitioners themselves and to begin outlining some of the more specific details and comparable features of the selected companies.

2.2: The Relation of Theory to Practice.

The hierarchical relationship between cultural and performance theory and performance itself has become increasingly complex and ambiguous since the advent of both postmodern cultural theory and performance. However, the ambiguity between theory and practice that this chapter will focus on originated in the 1960s, largely due to a dissatisfaction with the constraints of parameters in the creation of performance and the inability of anthropological, psychoanalytic, and Marxist theoretical frameworks to account for the radical cultural changes of the time.

The avant-garde movement in the twentieth century instigated the consideration of the relation of theory to practice. Alfred Jarry, creator of the iconoclastic Ubu trilogy invented the theory of Pataphysics, outlining a philosophy that encompassed both his reality and artistic practice. Jarry in many ways acts as the precursor for many of the theatrical developments in the twentieth century, aspects of his work prefiguring the work of the Absurdist, Surrealist, Artaudian and ritual theatre movements of the avant-garde. Moreover, his work can be seen as fundamental in the founding of the Dadaists and Futurists, whose work in turn prefigured the contemporary postmodern scene. While these movements are significant in tracing the overall lineage of postmodern theatre, what I would like to focus on here is Jarry's invention of Pataphysics, its relation to the theatre that it produced and the parameters it then imposed for subsequent practitioners. Jarry's theory of Pataphysics was defined as a "science of imaginary solutions" (Jarry cited in Innes, 1993:26) a philosophy that stated that reality was only a mental construct. Furthermore, according to Pataphysics our understanding of reality is a lie; Forms of knowledge such as science have no actual truth to them as they are only "Correlations of... accidental data which, reduced to the status of unexceptional exceptions, possess no longer even the virtue of originality" (Jarry cited in Innes, 1993:26). Pataphysics attempted the systematic contradiction of every general principle of reality. Surprisingly Jarry's Pataphysics, like other philosophy of his time e.g. Nietzsche and Bergson, constitutes a theoretical precursor of postmodernism. As I will later indicate, the work of the postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard can be seen as observing a media lead process of contradiction that Jarry outlined.

There has been a history of philosophers, whose work challenged the rational assumptions of western philosophy, becoming associated with experimental theatre. The Absurdist movement, fronted by figures such as Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionescu, had strong connections with Existentialist theory and the work of philosopher/playwrights Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. There has also been a relation between the then current theories of identity and psychology, which is usually reflected in the broader concerns of the theatrical movement of the time. Statements from early avant-garde practitioners with their emphasis on primitivism refer to notions that can be compared to Jungian notions of the collective unconscious; this can be seen in the work of Artaud. This is in contrast to the mainstream theatre where naturalism took dominance as an acting form that gained its authority from claiming emotional truth, produced through Stanislavski's system, which has parallels with Freudian notions of the subconscious, through its use of motivation and subtext. Recent feminist theatre writers such as Caryl Churchill and Deborah Levy have made use of the work of Jacques Lacan exposing the gender relations imposed through language. The contemporary theatrical condition, wherein fragmented characters match current notions of schizoid identity, is formed by, and in reaction to, these same ideas and practices. American experimental theatre of the 1960s began to move away from the heritage of literary theatre as exemplified at its best by Beckett. Instead, practitioners like the Fluxus group emerged from music and fine art, whose working practices owed more to the Dadaists and Duchamp than literary theatre. However, it was with the appearance of work by practitioners such as Richard Foreman and the Ontological-Hysteric Theatre, Robert Wilson and Mabou Mines, and The Wooster Group that the theories of Richard Schechner and Eugenio Barba began to fail to take account of the radical developments in performance. It is from this point that theorists, such as Patrice Pavis, argue that postmodern theatre and postmodern performance theory began to take shape.

Before moving on to discuss the formation of postmodern performance theory, it is necessary to identify what is meant by the term 'performance theory'. 'A theory implies a relatively coherent group of verifiable hypotheses on the functioning of text and performance' (Pavis, 1992:77). Patrice Pavis in his chapter 'On Theory as one of the Fine Arts and its limited influence on Contemporary Drama whether Majority or

Minority' (Pavis, 1992) provides a useful definition of theory. It should be stated of that, as Barthes has pointed out, the term 'text' may be seen in a much broader context than that of a written play, as of course many performances exist without such a written 'text'. The term text can be identified as the structured order of events or elements that takes place within a performance, which can be represented by a written record of some sort i.e. text, score, stage directions etc. Moreover, Pavis identifies that performance theory examines the functioning of the text and performance, distinguishing it from literary theory that solely examines the classical or canonised written text:

Theory tends to generalize and to integrate diverse languages into a coherent whole. By way of hypotheses and hypothetical-deductive procedures, it constructs models that can be modified, often criticized, but are at least coherent, and which investigate both an internal logic and link to a theory of knowledge. (Pavis, 1992:77)

It is important at this point to distinguish between cultural theory and performance theory. When discussing theory I am addressing it in its broadest sense unless I otherwise specify, as many of the issues under discussion apply as much to cultural theory as to performance theory. Cultural theory concerns itself with the impact of culture on society, though it may employ examples of performance or performance theory to map this process. Cultural theory examines all cultural forms and theories to mark the emergence of movements and the projected course of culture.

Performance theory is concerned with the definition of performance within its cultural context, employing cultural theory as its tool in this process. Moreover, performance theory acts as the framework for performance criticism and for the academic teaching and training of future academics, critics and practitioners.

As one would expect postmodern performance theory is very different to other modes of thought. What has occurred is the fragmentation of culture, specifically with respect to collapses of distinctions between high and low culture, and, culture and society. In theoretical terms, it is difficult for a fragmented culture to remain the subject of a unified theoretical model that expects unity to be the natural state, and the move away from this represents the theoretical initiation of postmodern theory. The overall defining characteristic of postmodern theory in relation to its predecessors is

the move from an attempted or perceived centralized structure of knowledge to a decentred, rhizomatic and processual concept of knowledge (as discussed in chapter 1). Within this significant change, Pavis has identified two strategies that theory has pursued in order to secure its position and role within the cultural landscape: interdisciplinarity and contamination.

According to Pavis, theory has become interdisciplinary. Drawing on other disciplines, performance theory attempts to mirror the activity of cultural practice by becoming fragmented. This lack of boundary definition, leads to Pavis' second theoretical strategy, that theory has contaminated practice, implicating itself in the production and reception of culture thus making itself indispensable. How this contamination is manifest in practice, I will discuss in the second part of this chapter. For the moment, I would like to discuss the implications that this contamination has for postmodern performance theory and how a blurring of the boundary between theory and practice can risk obscurity and a collapse of critical distance. Certainly, these tendencies can occur within postmodern performance theory, especially as it is highly specific and deals with performance that is itself theoretically self-conscious. However, rather than observing these as negative traits, I would argue that they should in fact be seen as a symptom of postmodern performance theory (which is clearly a minor theory) becoming a minor art as Pavis suggests theory can become.

Pavis, working from Deleuze and Guattari's Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature (1986), defines minor art as having three features; it is constructed out of the process of the deterritorialization of a major language; it connects the individual to the political; and it has collective enunciative value (Pavis, 1992:80-81). The major languages are the metanarratives as described by Lyotard. As such, postmodern theory is constructed from a process of challenging and deconstructing the boundaries that exist within it. As Pavis argues: 'Theatre theory is not limited to a restricted group of those concerned with theatre. It involves the use by a... limited group of tools, borrowed from semiology and the humanities, within the discourse of criticism there is no point in a new metalanguage' (Pavis, 1992:80). This process leads to the individual, now no longer rigidly fixed as a subject within the discourse, to be connected with the political on a personal level, able to 'connect every aesthetic observation, every apparently formal description of performance to politics, that is to

a reflection on the ideology of forms' (Pavis, 1992:80). Finally, this produces in postmodern theory a collective enunciation, a multiplicity of perspectives, as Pavis states:

Minor theory does not try to describe the individual talents which supposedly express themselves in the *mise en scene*; it rather reconstructs a polyphonic system of enunciation, refusing the distinction... between central and derived speech of the author versus individual, primitive speech of the characters. (Pavis, 1992:81)

In this way, postmodern theory, already involved in an interdependent relationship with performance practice, begins to take on the qualities of postmodern performance practice.

Yet, if that were the case, would postmodern theory suffer from the same difficulties of identification and definition as postmodern art? For example, if postmodern performance theory is an art, will it lack the linear heritage, and instead experience the singular event structure as suggested by Nick Kaye in 'Postmodernism and Performance'? Has postmodern theory evolved or is it a sporadic occurrence in relation to certain cultural conditions? Clearly the answer is no, as, although postmodern theory does suffer from these features, it cannot stand outside of the history of ideas. Despite the differences between the philosophers that I have drawn upon in the previous chapter, they are generally recognised as a collective theoretical movement, and the same is equally true of postmodern performance theory. So, how do these strategies manifest themselves in the construction of postmodern performance theory?

Postmodern performance theory draws from three different areas; it has used cultural theory such as the work of Deleuze and Guattari, and Lyotard for a cultural context. Second, postmodern performance theory borrows from a wide range of other critical discourses to create a fragmented perspective of performance. Third, postmodern performance theory appropriates the writings of practitioners to be found in manifestos, interviews, and their own writings on theatre as a primary source. The theories of practitioners are largely produced in opposition to academic discourse, often being produced as a work of art in themselves or a practical example of the

practitioners' theories in practice, or even as a claiming of academic ownership of the discussion of work by the artists themselves.ⁱⁱⁱ This produces extremely plural theoretical constructs which, as I will now argue, are evasive, rhizomatic, interdisciplinary, performative, and in the majority nihilistic to their own detriment.

Without being reductive, as I mentioned earlier postmodernism can be seen to owe something to Alfred Jarry, specifically his notion of Pataphysics. This can be observed in Baudrillard's chapter 'Pataphysics of the year 2000' in The Illusion of the End (1994). Postmodernism's obsession with endings is illustrated as Baudrillard argues that the year 2000 may not happen. What Baudrillard proposes is that humanity has escaped history and reality and this is producing a desire for envisioning endings to this condition, none of which will succeed. Each vision only possesses the ability to maintain the interest of the masses, distracting them from the lack of linear historical time. Therefore, Baudrillard proposes that theory is suggesting solutions to the postmodern condition, but that these are imaginary solutions to an inescapable situation. It may be said that in many ways the year 2000 did not happen, the world did not end and many celebrations were deemed 'anti-climactic' by the press. The escape from the twentieth century was not provided. Equally, this sense of Pataphysics can be observed in postmodern performance theory through its determination to disrupt convention and posit impossibility as a strategy. The title of Corrigan's article 'The Search for New Endings: The Theatre in Search of a Fix, Part III' (1984) takes on a different resonance. Postmodern performance is caught in the cultural absence of history and reality, where progress seems impossible, and is attempting to offer radical revisions of what is known. Both theatre and culture are searching for an ending that will never happen. Conventional performance theory such as Schechner's anthropological model was beginning to seem inflexible, so it is unsurprising that postmodern performance theory has begun to rewrite its own boundaries, exhibiting similar traits to postmodern performance.

Postmodern performance is a decentred practice and likewise postmodern performance theory is a non-binary, decentred, rhizomatic theory or an anti-theory and that is what has made it so appealing. There is no single authority on what fundamentally defines postmodern performance and there cannot be, primarily because theatrical movements are best defined in retrospect, this will not be the case

with postmodern performance. As it rejects linear history it cannot be said to have passed in a linear sense, and so definition may be impossible. The theory is equally dispersed, consisting of several very specific positions that have originated from different schools of thought. Each of these positions deals with selected areas of postmodern performance that they identify as the dominant factors. Yet no theory provides any form of over arching structure, at best we are provided with notions of anti-aesthetic (Hal Foster), the postmodern event (Nick Kaye) and the rhizomatic process (Deleuze and Guattari). This has already been examined in the previous chapter and now needs to be discussed with reference to the effect this has on the reception of postmodern performance in academic terms.

Furthermore, postmodern performance theory is a hybrid form constructed from whatever other theoretical discourses necessary to provide the appropriate structures with which to analyse the works. Postmodern performance theory is a theoretical construct that includes semiotics, psychoanalysis and sexual politics each themselves vying for the position of a minor art as discussed earlier. As a result of this move towards becoming a minor art, theory has begun to enact its own hypothesis. This is inevitable as it is the logical progression of philosophy that originally talked about its subject, then adopted a specific narrative form to best illustrate the argument and now finally has produced writing that *is* the demonstration of the argument, a clear example of this is Deleuze and Guattari's Thousand Plateaus (1988) which demonstrates their notion of the rhizome through the structure of the book and their arguments. This symptom has many differing examples from the work of practitioners, whose work is most often a written example of practice, or the work of academics such as Peggy Phelan who promote performative writing, based on the theory of speech acts by J.L. Austin which will be discussed shortly.

Inherent within postmodern performance theory is the pessimism that comes from the postmodern cultural theory of Baudrillard and the panic of an end of millennium culture. This theory is constantly in a discussion of endings: Philip Auslander discusses the end of liveness; Elinor Fuchs writes about the death of character; and Johannes Birringer's Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism (1991) opens with the chapter 'The Postmodern Scene' subtitled 'Exhausted and/exhausted theory' which links in with a quotation from Baudrillard concerning the cultural desert and disappearance.^{iv}

Baudrillard has in fact adopted, probably unwillingly, the role of Jarry for postmodern theatre, a nightmarish prophet of the end of culture and reality. As theory and practice grow ever closer, it is quite clear why contemporary artists so often reference Baudrillard's theories. Baudrillard's theories support the anti-rational vision, that throughout the twentieth century has so often inspired the avant-garde, and now postmodern, practitioners.

The relation between performance theory and practice is symbiotic. Inevitably, postmodern performance theory exhibits similar tendencies of fragmentation, interdisciplinarity and finally the contamination of practice. I will now address the blurring of the boundaries between theory and practice and examine how they have started to become inseparable and potentially self-legitimizing, by looking at the work of Peggy Phelan. This will be supported through a discussion of practitioners such as Richard Foreman and Tim Etchells of Forced Entertainment, who have become theorists through their practice.

It is common that theory should mirror the practice it purports to represent. So it is unsurprising that postmodern performance theory should exhibit the factors that I have outlined, even though the factors can prove problematic. However, due to the nature of postmodern practice and the complexity of postmodern culture it seems that previously drawn boundaries between theory and practice established in the enlightenment, have now become blurred. The interdisciplinary tendency of postmodern performance to appropriate other performative styles has been mirrored by theory (as I will argue when looking at the work of Phelan) as it appropriates other theoretical models of discourse. Yet, it is now apparent that theory and performance have begun to appropriate the dominant features of each other. Increasingly, theory and practice within the context of postmodernism are becoming inseparable and self-legitimizing. Additionally, theory is becoming ever more performative, and performance ever more theoretical, as each field attempts to gain greater cultural value.

The economy of performance depends on academics, not only for legitimation but also for value judgements and for a framework through which work can be understood and developed, while scholars require work to justify their arguments and

further their research. Both modes of discourse depend explicitly upon the other. What is occurring is a confirmation of that dependant relationship, and a move to ensure that they cannot be separated, through a dismantling of the divide between the two. Again, this is the development from a centred and structured relationship to a decentred rhizomatic one.

A clear indication of this change in the climate is the ongoing debate in academia over the validity and status of performance as academic research. This debate, centring on research groups such as PARIP (Practice as Research in Performance) based at Bristol university, ResCen (Centre for Research into Creation in Performing Arts) at Middlesex university, and amongst other universities and research groups nationwide, has been involved in the process of promoting and legitimating performance practice as comparable in its own way to academic research.^v The debate over whether practice actually constitutes research is still ongoing. However, practice based PhDs and research programmes are now widely available in England, when at the beginning of the 1990s very few institutions had clear guidelines as to how this might occur. Moreover, an increasing number of both artists and academics are in universities, engaged in research collaborations and performance-based projects of one form or another. This is clearly indicative of an integrated relationship between academia and the artistic community. While there are still numerous issues to be worked out in the debate, such as how practice-based research is documented and distributed, and how value is determined and estimated, the culture of academics producing performance projects and artists conducting what might be considered conventional academic research, is quickly developing.

An example of this shift, relevant to the argument of this thesis, is Forced Entertainment's project 'Ten Years of Forced Entertainment' (1996) which existed as both a performance/lecture and a journal article. 'Ten Years of Forced Entertainment' was described in its preface as follows,

What follows is part autobiography, part archive, part historical meditation and part theoretical speculation – a look back on ten years of the company's work and on ten years of change in the British urban culture from which it has sprung. (Forced Entertainment, 1996:73)

The project was conceived not only as a piece of performance examining the past ten years of the company's work, but also as a response to a threatened cut in funding by the Arts Council, which could have ended the work of the company. Following the project and many letters of complaint to the Arts Council from audience members and scholars, the cut did not occur. Importantly, what the work achieves is the presentation of the performance practice of the company within the form of a journal article, or at least something that takes the form of a performance text and a journal article. This was in fact something that the company had dealt with in 1994 when making documentation, for an academic journal, of their performance 'Emmanuel Enchanted' but this will be dealt with later.

A further example of the inseparable nature of theory and practice is the Shattered Anatomies (1997) box set produced by the Arnolfini Gallery. A collection of articles, performance documentation and remnants of performance, Shattered Anatomies amongst other things, dealt with the problem of how the extremely ephemeral nature of contemporary performance was best discussed:

It quickly became apparent that the responses which contributors wished to make would not only entail creative approaches to the critical languages employed, but also innovations in the formal properties of the publication: bound pages and textual expressions would not suffice. (Heathfield, 1997:Unnumbered page)

This raises questions about the nature and status of performance with some form of documentation, remnants of performance, or a performative element available within the writing.^{vi} There are numerous examples of these in existence that relate to British performance. Nick Kaye's Art into Theatre, by privileging the voice of the artist includes many diagrams and documentary records of performances. The Language Alive series edited by Chris Cheek offers texts of contemporary performances. A Split Second of Paradise (1998) by Nicky Childs and Jeni Walwin has written contributions from both artists and academics.

An additional aspect of the blurring of theory and practice is the use of performativity. As I indicated earlier, the work of Peggy Phelan uses performative writing, whilst also being interdisciplinary. Phelan's work has made use of poststructuralist theory,

psychoanalytic theory, and queer theory, and as subject matter, she has covered such varied areas as art, performance, film, archaeology and law. Clearly, Phelan's writing is eclectic in both style and subject matter but is coherent in its mode of operation and overall interrogation of the nature of performance in its many cultural incarnations. Phelan's mode of enquiry has been that of performative writing (this is explicit in Mourning Sex (1997)). Performative writing makes use of J.L. Austin's theory of performative speech, which is language that 'acts'. For example, the declaration 'I pronounce you man and wife' by a priest is a performative statement that brings into existence the cultural and legal state of marriage, likewise when dignitaries name ships, or when a judge pronounces sentence in court. As with these examples, performative writing in an academic context is writing that wishes to act, or perform, for the reader to demonstrate the argument at hand. As Phelan herself acknowledges, the appearance of performative writing in academia is in part due to the crisis of uncertainty within theory.

Contemporary theory's paranoia animates the ash of critical writing, transforms it into a landscape composed of thousands of horizontal breathropes. These prose ropes slap the page like jump ropes sweeping concrete. Its nervous mutating catastrophic reach propels what I call performative writing. Performative writing is different from personal criticism or autobiographical essay, although it owes a lot to both genres. Performative writing is an attempt to find a form for 'what philosophy wishes all the same to say.' Rather than describing the performance event in 'direct signification', a task I believe to be impossible and not terrifically interesting, I want this writing to enact the affective force of the performance event again. (Phelan, 1997:11-12)

What becomes apparent when examining performative writing by both Phelan and others is that the combination of theory and practice is being formed in order to address another problem that is unique to contemporary performance. The problem under discussion is that of performance's ephemerality and tendency to disappear with little trace or the countering problem that once documented, performance becomes something entirely different, As Phelan indicates, straight description is imprecise for performances that are dependant on their liveness. With the combination of theory and practice and especially by performative writing, an additional discursive space is created, wherein the documentation of performance exists alongside theoretical analysis and an element of the performance is retained. Again, while this could be seen as an undermining of the position of each field of

discourse, I would add that, through this process, a reordering of the relation between theory and practice allows postmodern works to be accommodated within the theoretical framework. Essentially, the field of performance theory and criticism has learnt from the manifestoes and writings of performance companies on how to embody a sense of performance within theory, further evidence that postmodern performance theory is becoming a minor art. This is, of course, a reversal of what Pavis observed as the contamination of practice by theory and, although I will show this is occurring, it would seem that a more fundamental contamination of theory by practice is developing. As with most areas, cultural trends are dictating by the manner in which theory must develop and so theory has had to catch up with the fragmented and interdisciplinary traits of performance. While Pavis observed a contamination of practice, it could be argued that in some ways this was prefigured by a contamination of theory.

So far I have discussed the writing of performance theorists whose work has blurred the boundaries between theory and performance. There are equally, a number of practitioners whose work exhibits an engagement with the forms and processes of theory. There have, of course, been many artists who have written theoretical texts or implicitly dealt with theory in manifestoes or performance. However, far fewer artists have explored the potential merging of the two forms. An important example, especially in relation to postmodern theatre is the work of Richard Foreman. Foreman is an artist for whom theory is a crucial element in his work. One of the seminal American practitioners whose work since the 1970s featured many of the trends that were later identified as fundamental to postmodern performance, Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theatre Company stages plays that form a challenge to the understanding of what theatre is, and to the functioning of meaning in works of art and the relationship between the audience and performer. Foreman's plays are fragmentary, without a conventional sense of meaning and, importantly, self-referential. Self-referential aspects of works of postmodern theatre are often used to highlight what critics have identified as solipsistic and apolitical tendencies. However, I would argue that this is a symptom of the contamination of practice by theory that Pavis identifies, as it reveals an inclusion of a theoretical and critical awareness of the performance within the performance.

I've always wanted my art to be about whatever it was that gave me the energy to make it. My works, therefore, are a mode of literary criticism, in which the object under analysis is itself... So the critique of the play is not so much built into the play it is the body and flesh of the play. (Foreman, 1999:170-171)

Moreover, Foreman has often written with extreme lucidity about his own work and the processes behind it. His writings, as the above statement demonstrates, indicate that the theoretical aspect of his work is crucial. Equally, Foreman's manifestos are representative of a postmodern approach to theory, which is exemplified through a particularly unique approach to their writing and presentation. The manifestos are a collection of typed notes that are arranged seemingly at random across the page. These are accompanied by written annotations and diagrams that illustrate the notes, or draw connections between notes on separate pages. Although the manifestos may not seem to make immediate sense, once the reader has read into the text, a circular logic starts to form a field of meaning that the reader can interpret. This is of course a rhizomatic process of writing similar to that employed by Deleuze and Guattari in Thousand Plateaus (1988) and, although the terminology employed is different, Foreman describes a similar decentred state that determines the shape and structure of his writing 'We lack a centre, always. By definition (man). It is wrong to provide a centre (the play should imitate what-it-is to be a self, which is to be centreless)' (Foreman, 1999:171).

Unsurprisingly, just as American postmodern performance has influenced British postmodern performance, the relation between theory and practice has become blurred in relation to contemporary British practitioners. Forced Entertainment's work has always found a myriad of forms in which to become manifest; a journal bound presentation of a performance was perhaps inevitable. The first projects by the company to attempt this were The Red Room (1994) and Emmanuel Enchanted (1994.c). These were followed by projects such as Ten Years of Forced Entertainment (1996) which was also published with a photographic project by Hugo Glendenning Looking Forward (1996) and more recently Tim Etchell's book Certain Fragments (1999) has been published and the company's Void Spaces (2000) was produced to accompany an exhibition combining some of their earlier digital and video work with a new photography project at the Site Gallery in Sheffield.

Forced Entertainment is the strongest example of the practice/theory crossover due to the length of time the company has been operating and the manner by which their work has spread into many areas other than live performance. The early publications by the company were produced for academic journals on request to accompany articles. It is also more likely that these were seen as documentation rather than a merging of theory and practice. However, the presentation of 'Emmanuel Enchanted' in Contemporary Theatre Review to accompany the article by Andrew Quick, associated the company with Quick's analysis of Lyotard's notion of the postmodern sublime. In that way, Forced Entertainment's documentation of Emmanuel Enchanted took on a performative element (which had been intended), in relation to the theoretical argument provided by Quick. Thus, an independent reading of either becomes impossible and the boundaries between the theory and practice are blurred. This blurring is also apparent in their latest text Void Spaces, that juxtaposes the photographic material with commissioned articles, which is a reversal of the usual situation, in that Forced Entertainment are appropriating the academic material for an artistic context.

However, Certain Fragments is the best example of Forced Entertainment's merging of theory and practice. Certain Fragments has a foreword by Peggy Phelan making an implicit connection between her performative style of writing and those of Tim Etchells performance texts that are themselves theoretical to some degree, 'Ten Years of Forced Entertainment' being the obvious example. However, the text for the performance Speak Bitterness (1994), also included in the book, is not an example of this as it contains within itself an interrogation of contemporary confessional/voyeuristic culture. Certain Fragments includes the scripts of performances, essays on performance by Tim Etchells (which vary from fragmented performative texts to more conventional essays and interviews), reviews of performances that were regarded as important by the company and programme notes from their performances. The essays give no overall argument, only providing what the title promises. The text is thus by turns documentation, theory and practice. Again, this is an example of the decentred, fragmentary or rhizomatic approach to postmodern performance theory that has been exhibited in the work of the other writers I have detailed.

As I mentioned in the introduction, Stan's Cafe's revival of Impact's Carrier Frequency (1999) was a unique performance that made explicit the existence of a British heritage of contemporary experimental performance. However, the revival has also demonstrated the dependence on theory by practitioners. Coinciding with the performance, a symposium was held on the subject of documentation and heritage, at which speakers, including James Yarker, the director of Stan's Cafe, were invited to speak. The result of this was a level of theoretical discussion around issues of documentation, liveness and heritage, about which practitioners have become very concerned. Moreover, I propose that this rise in practitioner led theoretical discourse indicates that theoretical discourse itself has become a form of documentation. This theory as documentation is valued; as it does not infringe upon the artwork in the way that Phelan identifies other forms of documentation as doing, such as video or textual description. Just as it may be increasingly difficult to write about performance without a performative element, practitioners seem ever more dependent on a theoretical framework or vocabulary to ensure the reception and continuation of their performances.

As illustrated earlier by Forced Entertainment, the presentation of a journal bound project in conjunction with an academic article, allows a theoretical reading to be made of the practice. The journal Performance Research actively promotes this theoretical contextualisation of performance by including 'artists pages' as well as scholarly essays that deal with the theme of the journal. As well as Forced Entertainment, there have been other practitioners who have published work in this way. Desperate Optimists have published a collaboration with Chris Dorley-Brown 'Photogrammetry' (1997) along side an article that discussed the work of the company by Andrew Quick. Additionally, in the same issue Primitive Science published 'After the Hunt (after Ovid)' (1997).

Unfortunately, unless the relation is made explicit, either through the choice of a theoretical form or subject matter, a blurring of the boundaries between theory and practice can remain unidentified. I propose that many of the performances by the contemporary practitioners selected for this thesis exhibit a strong use of theory; however, this appropriation remains largely implicit within the work, as the ideas are best interrogated theatrically. In any case, it is theory that has undergone the most

significant developments in mirroring features of postmodern performance i.e. interdisciplinarity, fragmentation and performativity. Moreover, in subsequent chapters I will illustrate the connections between postmodern performance and theory, through the close analysis of specific performances.

Postmodern theory has become a minor art, and postmodern performance has a very specific theoretical framework that mirrors the practice of artists. As a result there are examples of theory/practice hybridity both in the academic and performance based mediums. Pavis argued that theory was contaminating practice and that there was a case for considering theory as a minor art. I therefore argue that it is now feasible to state that theory and practice are becoming integrally cross contaminated, with and within the work of the practitioners discussed in this thesis, to produce theory/practice hybrids. The following chapter will employ postmodern theory, with an understanding of its relation to performance, in an examination of the development of postmodern performance practice and how it has challenged the fundamental aspects of performance.

ⁱ See chapter 5, for Peggy Phelan's definition of the ontology of performance, to which Connor's statement has striking similarities.

ⁱⁱ See Deleuze's definition of an event in chapter 1.

ⁱⁱⁱ For example the manifestoes of Richard Foreman in Rabkin, Gerald ed. (1999) Richard Foreman, London: John Hopkins University Press.

^{iv} In relation to discussions on the end of history see Fukuyama, Francis (1992) The End of History and the Last Man, London:Penguin, and Derrida, Jacques (1994) Spectres of Marx, the state of the debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International, London:Routledge.

^v It should be noted that Graeme Miller, one of the founder members of Impact Theatre Co-operative, is a member of this research group.

^{vi} See the discussion of Phelan's argument about ontology and performance in chapter5.

Chapter 3: Breaking the Boundaries.

This chapter will look at a range of elements of postmodern theatre: hybridity and interdisciplinarity, the deconstruction of theatricality, the rejection of narrative, and the intervention into reality. Through the examination of these elements, one can better understand the British postmodern theatrical heritage and how it is connected to postmodern culture and theory. Moreover, this chapter will serve as a means to introduce the primary practitioners that this thesis seeks to examine and to establish a set of parameters for the in-depth discussion of performance in the following chapters.

3.1: Hybridity and Interdisciplinarity.

Hybridity and interdisciplinarity are the two features of postmodern performance that it has so far proved to be almost impossible to escape. Although practice frequently may seem to be without an aspect of hybridity, the working process behind a piece will often reveal an interdisciplinary or conceptual form of appropriation in the generation of the performance. Moreover, hybridity and interdisciplinarity have become increasingly sophisticated and subtle in their manifestation so that it becomes increasingly difficult to recognise hybridity in an artwork. Additionally, companies may not produce specifically hybrid works, yet the history of their performances may cross a range of disciplines, for example Stan's Cafe who have produced theatre, radio productions and installations, yet have not combined these media to produce explicitly hybrid performances. As a result of the pervasive nature of hybrid activity in the British postmodern tradition, it has been used as the primary term used to describe the tradition. This can be seen in the choice of the name of 'Hybrid Magazine', which was first published in December 1992 to address the lack of coverage then given to the field by academia (This publication has recently been superseded by Live Art Magazine and Performance Research).

Interdisciplinarity is the working process behind hybridity, but as such it often operates on a conceptual rather than a physical level. Practitioners appropriate ideas from fields as diverse as mathematics, fine art, philosophy and physics in order to produce work that is unique and experimental, in that the result of importing these

ideas is unknown. In this role interdisciplinarity is also related to Lyotard's notion of the postmodern condition, as it signifies a crisis of legitimation within individual disciplines and the incredulity towards metanarratives:

The idea of an interdisciplinary approach is specific to the age of delegitimation and its hurried empiricism. The relation to knowledge is not articulated in terms of the realisation of the life of the spirit or the emancipation of humanity, but in terms of users of a complex conceptual and material machinery and those who benefit from its performance capabilities. They have at their disposal no metalanguage or metanarrative in which to formulate the final goal and correct use of that machinery. But they do have brainstorming to improve its performance. (Lyotard, 1984:52)

Therefore an interdisciplinary working process can be seen as a dominant feature of postmodern performance, in that it is part of the apparatus that produces works that deny singular meaning, embrace fragmentation and cross boundaries, forming connections between artistic disciplines and fields of discourse, redefining the relation between the audience and the artwork and challenging the definitions of theatre:

'Live Art' is invariably identified with inter-disciplinarity and a challenge to the recognisable limits and distinctions between media, whether these are theatre, dance, installation, sculpture or musical composition. (Kaye, 1994.b:1)

The problem with hybrid work is paradoxically the lack of definition, as companies have to contend with the fact that their work may be received differently by different groups of artists whose agendas differ slightly as of those between experimental theatre practitioners and Live Art practitioners. Third Angel are a clear example of this as their work has from the beginning, covered both installation, duration, theatre and film, which has led to some varying responses to their work, as Walton indicates:

We know people who are more straight theatre and young writing, and they'll see us as a little bit wacky and a little bit odd but kind of doing something that is maybe related to them. Whereas the Live Art people consider us quite tame and theatrical, so it is always in relation to themselves rather than us. (Kelly and Walton, 1999:Unnumbered page)

Interdisciplinary and hybrid performances are good examples of conceptual and material rhizomes. The performances that this chapter examines are decentred, and cross boundaries in their connections to other art forms and fields of discourse.

Additionally I will demonstrate that hybrid performances frequently rely on formal structures in the generation and performance of the shows, thus creating performances that function as machines in a decentred rhizome paralleling Deleuze and Guattari's exploration of the notion of machines and rhizomes. Postmodern performance is a cultural machine connected to the machine of cultural theory:

Everywhere it is machines—real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984:1)

David Hughes in *Hybrid Magazine* gave a succinct and accurate definition of hybridity that covers the relevant areas this chapter will address:

Hybridity is the result of the combination of the materials, concerns, products, processes or media of two or more art forms. Jerrold Levinson suggests three kinds of combination:

1. Juxtaposition: the products or objects of two or more art forms are simply shown together, the objects/forms still recognisable as themselves. The elements add up to the total event, but could be separated and shown individually...

We could extend the range of what counts as a juxtapositional hybrid to include all "mixed-media" work.

2. Synthesis: changes the elements formally, so that they cannot be separated...

3. Transformation: relates to a work clearly within one art form which shows the profound influence of another, or the perception of which is necessarily altered by its interpenetration, to some degree, of another art. (Hughes, 1993:37)

It is fair to say that the large majority of the performances that this thesis will cover fit broadly into one of the above categories of hybrid work. If there is not any evident juxtaposition, these productions are often hybrid through the way they transform another art formally absorbing it into their performance practice, or the principals of another art form during the rehearsal of the show, producing an interdisciplinary or hybrid working process. Most of the performances contain the use of video or other technological media. This is in itself an extension of Hughes' notion of hybridity as only with the advent of digital art has technology been perceived as a cultural form capable of producing art, rather than simply a means of presentation. Previously the

use of technology may not have been considered interdisciplinary. However now, due to the division of live and mediated performance, the inclusion of technology can produce hybrid works. Furthermore, Hughes expands on his definition to say of the term hybridity:

When we come across unfamiliar art practice, it [hybridity] is a useful strategy to unpick the work's history, identifying the disparate art practices that are combined in it or which influence it. It also relieves us of the impulse to consign everything to single convenient and comfortable categories, thus denying them the special life they possess by virtue of cross-fertilisation and sometimes calling into question their status as art at all. (Hughes, 1993:37)

As Hughes points out hybrid artworks prevent convenient categories being formed and this is parallel with the decentred nature of postmodernism. Essentially hybridity can be seen a strategy within postmodern performance to evade easy definition, allowing more freedom in experimentation and reception. Moreover Hughes, in an essay expanding on his definition of hybridity identifies a further effects on artworks:

The whole music sub culture of live mixing in the dance gig takes away the notion of the single author, things are re-authored in the mix, but now we have a new kind of artist, the DJ who mixes, and they are becoming highly paid unifiers with a marketable brand name and brand identity. However far we move from the unifying sensibility model in practice, it seems it is always reintroduced in some way. (Hughes, 1996:7)

This again reveals a parallel with poststructuralism in that hybridity causes an initial death of authorial identity. Hybridity removes the possibility of assigning an autonomous art form to the work, and by association a single authorial identity to the work, because there are often numerous collaborators. Yet, this lack of an authorial voice produces a problem concerning how the work is identified and marketed. As performance needs to be recognised, what occurs is the use of company names to identify work regardless of changes in personnel that frequently occur. In addition to this there is also the use of a spokesperson (or persons) for the company, who writes and speaks for the company, providing a figure through whom the company can be recognised but holds no more real authority than any other of the key members of the company. So for example in the companies under discussion, I have already drawn attention to Tim Etchells and James Yarker, who act as the spokespersons for their respective companies. This figure can be observed in the production of operas that

fell under the authority of the composer despite the existence of directors, designers, conductors and librettists.

Finally, hybridity is also the first step towards a deconstruction of performance conventions and boundaries. This serves as an identifying feature of postmodern theatre as it relates to both Lyotard's notion of the postmodern arts as searching for new forms and Jameson's notion of Pastiche that argues that postmodern art has become a depoliticised collision of images; similarly, pastiche if extended, frames the decentred collision of art forms. In addition to this, Hughes notes that without a singular author, hybrid artworks both defy definition and singular meaning. This again parallels Lyotard's notion of incredulity towards metanarratives and the fragmentation of postmodern art. These features also redefine the audience's role in relation to the work of art:

The audience then becomes a kind of collaborator, making the meanings of the work, re-authoring the work as text, through site specific context. It is not closed and presented for consumption, it remains relatively open so that the plays of signification across the fields of sound, movement and architecture (the division of the space by settings, lights and so on) are constituted by the observer. These pieces resist one interpretation. (Hughes, 1996:14-15)

As I have indicated, there is a fine line between postmodern theatre/performance and Live Art and the distinction should be clarified, as the two forms contain unique features even though, as I will argue, they frequently merge. Nick Kaye has described Live Art as follows:

The term 'Live Art' marks out a space for experimentation, a name given... to a forum in which practices derived from a diverse set of disciplines meet in *performance*. Yet... that 'Live Art' is linked to performance does not mean that it offers itself up straightforwardly as a genre of 'theatre' or 'drama'. 'Live Art', in this sense, is as much an attitude as it might be a performance practice, a term that invokes a particular way of looking at work, a frame through which presentations generated in relation to sculpture, installation, dance, music or 'theatre' present themselves as time-based 'live' activities implicitly sharing some vocabulary, interest or aesthetic. (Kaye, 1994.b:1)

Hybridity in theatre is not a recent development, having evolved from a long tradition in Europe dominated by Opera as perhaps the most striking and successful hybrid art form. However, during the 20th century, hybridity in theatre and in performance was

in sometimes reduced, in the search for purity of art and supporting Michael Fried's claim that art degenerated as it approached the condition of theatre. However, when postmodern practitioners began to emerge in the 1970s, hybridity became a central feature of this work as a refutation of the minimalist ideal. American performance such as the work of Robert Wilson worked upon a massive operatic scale, combining different forms of art in a massive juxtapositional form of hybridity. Furthermore, the Wooster Group produced transformational hybrid works that combined real events with video and merged high and low cultural material in a radical performance gesture. These were the early and most visually extreme uses of hybridity in the postmodern tradition. Since these performances the hybridity of postmodern performance has not lessened, but has become ever more complex.

As I indicated earlier, within Hughes' definition there are numerous ways in which hybridity can be manifested, both in process and practice and with varying levels of subtlety and sophistication. These can take the form of the influences of theory as discussed in chapter 2, musical patterns, a formal rather than theatrical consideration of performance elements in rehearsal, and the influence of non-performance art forms such as novels.

The company Stan's Cafe exemplifies the subtle hybridity of recent British postmodern performance. Although they see themselves as a theatre company and promote themselves as such, they have used interdisciplinary sources to produce performances. Simple Maths (1998) is a performance almost entirely based on the execution of a structural pattern. In the performance five performers sit on a line of six chairs in an otherwise empty space. The ground is covered by a wet, black rubber flooring that reflects the performers and behind them, there is a white-lit back wall. The performers then begin to slowly exchange places on the chairs, seemingly at random. However there are rules governing the performance that dictate the starting and ending chair of each performer, and during the hour that the performance takes place the performers move twice through this sequence of changing chairs until they all reach their intended destination. In addition to this, the performers are required in certain chairs to adopt an attitude such as boredom or perform small random acts such as blowing their noses. This formal structure originated in an interest in non-theatrical ideas:

I really like Steve Reich the minimalist composer and for a long time I was obsessed that formal patterning and material phasing patterns and how when you start to apply those ideas to other material you can get quite emotive stuff being chucked up out of it and I think that using slightly mathematic formulae to generate emotive material is quite familiar to Stan's Cafe. (Yarker, 2000.a:Unnumbered page)

This is not only an example of transformative hybridity as suggested by Hughes, but also an example of an interdisciplinary working process leading to an extremely subtle hybrid performance. So subtle in fact is the hybrid element of the performance, that it is absorbed into the theatrical framework, allowing the work to be identified as experimental theatre and not as a hybrid artwork. Effectively this is a covert form of hybridity attempting to extend the boundary of theatrical definition while not attempting to escape it. In addition to Simple Maths Stan's Cafe have produced a range of shows that have extended the role of the audience in the experience and interpretation of the work. It's Your Film (1998) is a short performance for one audience member at a time. The production is a hybrid, due to the use of slide and film projection; however the audience's view is completely controlled by the limited view offered by the company. While this might seem to actually reduce the possibility of an open interpretation by the audience, the performance uses a mirror device to project the image of the single audience member into the mise-en-scene. This offers the audience the potential to construct their own narrative sequence in relation to him or herself. I will return to this use of narrative later in this chapter. An extension of this idea also appeared in Black Maze (2000) another hybrid production that, according to James Yarker, functions as a theatre piece although it seems to be installation. Black Maze is a constructed 3D environment through which the audience can move, but because it is without lights the audience have to negotiate their way through the maze which is filled with tactile and audio stimulus almost like a fun house at a fairground. This extends Yarker's idea of bringing the audience into the performance:

There is no performer except the audience. It is a 20ft by 8ft maze, which for the most part hasn't got any lights, but has triggered sounds that are amplified, that kind of thing so it is tactile. (Yarker, 2000.a:Unnumbered page)

In Blast Theory's productions of Stampede (1993) and Chemical Wedding (1992) there are clear examples of the synthesis of the collected elements. The performances place the music, dance/physical theatre, direct address, video projection, voice amplification and computer technology installation within the context of a promenade. This has a significant effect; the formal elements in many cases are placed in relation to others and although the elements have been determined to work in conjunction with each other, none are shifted from their status as separate forms, nor can they be separated for viewing on their own as they are usually framed by the other activities. This provides, on the surface, what may seem to be a fragmentary experience. However, coherence is not completely absent, as the relative perspectives of the audience members construct it. The various elements take place simultaneously, the audience acting as their own editors of the material choosing what they select to view. This conforms to a breakdown of metanarratives and the lack of an authorial voice within these performances. The audience, through programme material and by default, are encouraged and expected to form their experience from the material provided.

In addition to this, there is the issue of theoretical hybridity that was discussed in the previous chapter, where the contamination of theory by practice in itself constitutes a kind of hybridity. The work of Blast Theory is strong example of this condition. For example, the programme material for their piece Desert Rain (1999) includes quotes referring to the work of Jean Baudrillard:

The sense in which Baudrillard speak of events as virtual is related to the idea that real events lose their identity when they attain the velocity of real time information. (Patton cited in Blast Theory, 1999:Unnumbered page)

Furthermore in the journal Live 5: My Perfect theatre (1999) an article by Blast Theory, 'Ten Notes on Theatre', discusses the theories of Paul Virilio:

Paul Virilio makes the point that the history of the last two centuries is a transition from the importance of territory to the importance of time. (Adams and Row Farr, 1997:44)

I will return to the issue of theoretical hybridity later. The issue of hybridity also raises questions about the intentions of companies producing this work. Do

contemporary companies intend to produce work that is interdisciplinary, and how does this influence their self-definition as a company? Third Angel produce a wide variety of work that is mostly hybridised. Alex Kelly and Rachel Walton from Third Angel have stated in interview that work they produced for theatre raises the profile of the company and secures funding and this is the necessity of the working environment. However, they have also stated that they do not work in those terms to begin with:

We're made to classify the work before it is made. I think that if we weren't made to classify it, then we wouldn't particularly say 'Oh lets do one theatre show a year', or 'Lets do an installation' we'd just make work and if it ended up in a theatre then it did. (Kelly and Walton, 1999:Unnumbered page)

Third Angel's notable uses of hybridity can be seen in productions such as Experiment Zero (1998), and the gallery installation Saved (1999) and Hang Up (2000). Each of these productions made use of projection, video amplification of the performers voice and sets that were more akin to installations. Third Angel have produced interdisciplinary performances, drawing on their expertise as a film company and their skills in producing installations. However, the hybridity within these performances is not transformative but constitutes a synthesis of the elements into a coherent yet singular event. This indicates awareness within the company of the distinctions between the various art forms being employed and a desire to maintain those distinctions in order to heighten their unique qualities. For example in the theatre production Hang Up the use of video projection was the only element of the performance that could be seen during the opening section until the lights eventually came up on the rest of the stage. This limiting of the performance to the projected film had the effect of focusing the audience's attention solely on this element. Then as the performance proceeded the audience were no longer distracted by the seductive nature of the film projections and were able to select more easily between the live and mediated elements of the action.

This mirrors the commitment by other companies who have told me that they utilize a particular working method and it is process, when at all possible, which dictates the presentational form and content of their work. Further examples of this are Forced Entertainment's collaborations with photographer Hugo Glendenning such as The

Red Room (1993), Ground Plans for Paradise (1994) and Void Spaces (2000). These productions might indicate a specific agenda by the company to produce this kind of work yet, in actuality it is more determined by opportunities:

There was a drive towards digital work with site specific and installation work, it is a response to what's available, the days when you could genuinely plan to do site specific work in the abstract are practically gone, because the spaces are no longer available, if you happen to chance upon place that you can use and is available then that tends to make you sit down and think well I'll use that because it is an opportunity. (Arthur, 1999:Unnumbered page)

In addition to their non-theatrical work, Forced Entertainment's works are good examples of subtle interdisciplinarity; a clear example of this is Dirty Work (1998), a performance that is heavily influenced by the work of American novelist Donald Barthelme. Dirty Work consists of two performers giving an account of an impossible show while another plays a record on occasion during the performance, the opening line of the performance is as follows:

Act One begins with five great nuclear explosions. A man delivers a letter to the wrong address, causing months of confusion and unhappiness. There are scenes of betrayal, romance and great anguish. (Forced Entertainment, 1998:Unnumbered page)

If this is compared with a section of Donald Barthelme's short story 'The Flight of Pigeons from the Palace' a formal similarity emerges:

Famous graves were robbed, before your eyes. Winding-sheets were unwound and things best forgotten were remembered. Sad themes were played by the band, bereft of its mind by the death of its tradition. (Barthelme, 1989:135)

Dirty Work will be examined later when discussing the rejection of narrative. In addition to the issue of hybridity, it is also worth commenting on the nature of collaboration in the British postmodern theatre scene, as it is often this practice that produces hybrid works. Third Angel have also collaborated on projects with Forced Entertainment including Dreams Winter (1994) and the Third Angel film With the Lights On. Alex Kelly of Third Angel directed the South Bank Show programme on Forced Entertainment. The majority of contemporary practitioners seem to dislike

being seen only as theatre practitioners when their work covers far more areas and furthermore seeks to disrupt or challenge normative definitions of theatre.

Another company who exemplify this are Desperate Optimists. Founded by Joe Lawlor and Christine Molloy, this company have always produced hybrid performances that involve the use of photography, video, live DJs and dancing. They have also collaborated with photographer Chris Dorley-Brown on 'Photogrammetry' a partial visual essay in the Refuge issue of the journal 'Performance Research'. They have also collaborated with the company Curious.Com. These collaborations are facilitated by a working process that is interdisciplinary, but most importantly one that does not seem to consider theatricality:

Its structural completely, research, trying to build up structural units not worrying too much about how they might interrelate, just trying to get the grasp of the different elements together and then finding structural ways of making the material work. Text, never deal with that until the end or deal with it all along, never fix it, I've never done it for any of our shows. (Molloy, 2000:Unnumbered page)

This way of working has more in common with the practice of Live Art and is consistent with the current direction of the company as Desperate Optimists have since moved out of theatre into producing video and digital projects 'That's why I think maybe as theatre makers we've failed, because we never think about theatre' (Molloy, 2000:Unnumbered page).

The implications of hybridity in postmodern theatre might first lead one to assume that the inevitable outcome will be one of a complete dissolution of the distinctions of theatre and dance into a broad category of Live Art or Live Performance. However, companies such as Stan's Cafe demonstrate that while hybridity disrupts the definition of theatre, it does abolish it entirely as a framework through which work can be conceived. Older companies such as Forced Entertainment and Blast Theory create work which steps out of the boundaries of what is defined as theatre into areas such as installation and digital projects without damaging their company identity, thus extending usual parameters of what kinds of work a theatre company can produce. Moreover a company like Third Angel exemplify contemporary attitudes towards performance wherein companies produce work and the form which it takes, be that a

touring theatre production or an installation, is dictated by the work itself or the necessities of the company's funding and profile rather than a commitment to only produce one kind of work. The potential and opportunities for contemporary practitioners to produce work outside of theatre are too valuable to overlook. However, beside the issues of definition, hybridity has had and continues to have a direct impact on the nature of theatre. Hybridity and interdisciplinarity have opened up the interpretation of performances as well as leading to the reconsideration of performance conventions such as the function of representation, aesthetics and politics in performance. The following section will examine how these three central features of theatre have been deconstructed within postmodern performance because of hybridity and through the general agenda of postmodernism as a challenge to stable theatrical forms.

3.2: The Deconstruction of Theatricality.

I do not believe that postmodernist critical art can, or need, escape representation, though it must always deconstruct its own representational means. (Auslander, 1994:31)

The deconstruction of performance conventions and theatrical conventions in particular can be seen as the initial agenda of postmodern performance. The distinction between these two terms is important, as it limits that which can be defined as performance and separates specific categories of performance i.e. Dance, Theatre, Music and Live Art. Broadly speaking performance conventions include the definition of the roles of the audience and performers and the space and location of performance, whereas theatrical conventions overall include narrative, illusionistic sets and the representation of character.¹

It is not surprising that there were radical experiments in theatre, as due to the discussions of the degeneration of art as it approached theatricality, the emergence of postmodern performance was inevitably going to prove to be a contentious site. The primary focus of early American postmodern theatre practitioners such as Richard Foreman was the deconstruction of representation, which was also the means of attaining the modern sublime experience and inextricably linked to the desire for the purity of the artwork. Above these crucial factors, there are a group of other theatrical

conventions that postmodern theatre deconstructs and disrupts through experimental practice.ⁱⁱ

This section concerns itself with the initial deconstruction of representation that in turn had implications on the two further inescapable elements of performance, aesthetics and politics. Early Postmodern performance intended to challenge the principles of representation, aesthetics and the politics of performance and to identify them as inherently flawed. If the postmodern agenda was to question these aspects, then the initial strategy was one of the complete disruption within or removal of these aspects from the theatrical work. A means of understanding postmodern work was that of the postmodern sublime as posited by Lyotard, in which the attempt to represent the universal concepts is rejected in an attempt to expose the inevitable failure of such a task.ⁱⁱⁱ The result of the postmodern sublime was to produce the postmodern aesthetic, which was described by Hal Foster as an anti-aesthetic (As discussed in chapter 2). However, there is a discontinuity between Foster's definition of the anti-aesthetic as "a critique which destructures the orders of representations in order to reinscribe them" (Foster, 1993:xv) and Kaye's description of postmodern performance as, "a turning against modernity in a question of legitimacy which refuses to supplant that which is called into question with the *newly legitimate*" (Kaye, 1994.a:1-2). Foster's postmodern performance seeks to reinscribe modernist conventions. However, I must agree with Kaye that this would be contrary to the process of postmodernism that resists such attempts at stable knowledge and therefore would not reinscribe it. The postmodern aesthetic then is an aesthetic of failure. Not only is it, as Lyotard suggests, an aesthetic that derives from the failure of art to achieve universal concepts, but also from its acknowledged impotence to restore or replace these conventions with anything more successful. Despite all of the radical experimentation of postmodern performance, it is permanently trapped within representation. The works of American companies such as the Wooster Group display this through the endless intertextuality of their performances, finding the infinite combinations of the text in performance and revealing the processes of representation, yet unable to step outside of this process.

The strategy for undermining representation and meaning in postmodern theatre was the fragmentation of language and imagery and a denial of an overall narrative

meaning to the work. In many cases this produced an unpicking of linguistic and representational codes, as language would be broken down, separated from the performer and display no relevance to the action on stage. The work of Robert Wilson exemplifies this in his collaborations with an autistic performer Christopher Knowles, whose experience of life is, from an outsider's perspective at least, one of a failure of language and representation. The massive size of Wilson's works stretches the scale in both spatial and temporal terms of the representation of images in order to make them alien to themselves, as well as the theatrical context that contained them. Moreover, the work of Richard Foreman directly confronts the act of representation and the attempt to construct meaning from performances by creating works that shift linguistic register. This complicates the act of reading the performance and disrupts the action so aggressively that representation in the process of failure and an absence of meaning is all that can be drawn from these performances. Inevitably, this aggressive challenging of theatricality has subsequently given way, especially in recent British performance, to a more particular and subtle analysis of these features. However, as I will later discuss in this chapter, early British postmodern theatre was just as aggressive, Forced Entertainment's Club of No Regrets (1993), which attacks the processes of theatrical representation and meaning, while visually providing a useful example of an aesthetic of theatrical failure.

Auslander's notion of the politics of postmodern performance, is drawn from Derrida's the notion of deconstruction. This functions in theatrical terms by the performance itself acting as a disruption of the political forms of representation established around the area of contention, rather than acting as an outside entity that attempts to provoke change. As Linda Hutcheon observes: 'One of the lessons of the doubleness of postmodernism is that you cannot step outside that which you contest, that you are always implicated in the value you choose to challenge' (Hutcheon, 1988:223). In effect, this politics of resistance functions on similar terms as Lyotard's postmodern sublime. Rather than attempting to cause revolutionary action, postmodern theatre, at its most political, attempts to reveal the impossibility of revolutionary action, but nevertheless that it is possible to exist within a given set of political values without becoming subject to the constraints of their power relations:

As Lyotard points out, critical art that refuses to provide political “messages” that can be easily assimilated into systems of political thought and action implicitly criticizes or challenges “politics as representation.” This challenging of representation through representation is a crucial postmodernist strategy of resistance. Politics as representation is precisely one of the major issues addressed by the performance work of the Wooster Group, Laurie Anderson, and others. (Auslander, 1994:31)

Therefore, in effect, it is the refusal by postmodern companies to make explicit or reducible political statements that enables their work to escape categorisation and furthermore, to maintain a constant ability to raise complex political issues within performance.

Deconstruction and resistance are the political strategies of postmodern performance. For example, when the Wooster group adopted ‘black face’ they used representation to implicate themselves in discussion of race without making explicit political statements, while their use of the sections of ‘The Crucible’ in Highway 1 + 9: L.S.D Just the High Points (1985) and the resultant copyright discussion raises issues of authorship in postmodern work and in the same performance the use of a video of performance members taking L.S.D. which was then reconstructed on stage challenged the representation of drug use. These performances deliberately stepped into the issue they challenged, without making an explicit statement. However, there is also the notion that postmodern performance is, as Susan Melrose suggests, a metatheatre. “Performance we might call ‘new’ ... is always about (not as in ‘subtext’, but as in ‘*around and about*’) performance.” (Melrose, 1994:76) However, whereas Melrose argues that postmodern performance is not about theatre as in subtext, I nevertheless maintain that a very vital aspect of the work that I discuss in this thesis is a constantly updating discussion of the nature of performance. Melrose discusses Live Art practices that move around theatre. In my view these practices draw attention to areas which theatre practice colonises thus furthering the inward discussion. Therefore, this, in one sense, counters the potential for an accusation of solipsism, as the field is changing so swiftly and moving into new areas through interdisciplinarity, that an internally directed discourse is necessary to retain the definition of theatre.

Forced Entertainment's Club of No Regrets (1993) exemplifies the postmodern anti-aesthetic/sublime; a performance that holds as its defining principle the failure of the protagonists to make sense of the very show they are attempting to perform. Set in front of a large backdrop of blackboards, on which appears a chalked on cityscape of tower blocks, a further three boards form a room within the performance space. In this context, Helen X, a deranged director, reads from a collection of notes that she carries as she and paces around the space, impatiently attempting to make sense or coherence of the fragments of text while drinking from a bottle with which she frequently hits the set. She climbs to appear over the top of the inner set, looking down expectantly for some impending action. Two performers and two stagehands join her. The performers are gagged and bound to the chairs of the inner set with masking tape at gunpoint by the stagehands. Helen X then begins to prompt the gagged performers into enacting a number of scenes comprising of a 'Telegram Scene', a 'Troubled Scene', a 'Just As They're About To Kiss The Telephone Rings Scene', a 'Drugs Trip Scene' and a 'Procedures Scene'. The stagehands attempt to bring in the correct props for the scene and encourage the actors to use them. They struggle to enact the scenes bound and gagged and at gunpoint. The performers escape from the chairs but continue to repeat the enactment of the scenes, becoming covered in water for fake tears and being manhandled into wearing spectacles and changing costume. During the performance, the staging of the scenes changes, as does the appearance of the set, shifting the meaning and context of the scenes each time they are performed. Eventually the stagehands dismantle the inner set, leaving the performers embracing alone in the space and the stagehands drawing on the blackboards. The show is concluded by Helen X who calls for the final 'Big Escape Routine'. 'Helen's intention is always thwarted by the inadequacy of her materials and by the unsuitability of her circumstances' (Etchells, 1999:216). Just as Foster argues that the postmodern aesthetic is one of failure, the aesthetic of Club of No Regrets, with the shambolic set and props, is a critique of theatrical representation. Rather than attempting to produce a seamlessly illusionistic set, the performance heightens the haphazard appearance and additionally the performers seem no better off, ignorant of their role in the performance and receiving their direction from Helen X who seems to know as little as they do. Scenes are repeated with differing levels of emotion, with different actors in the roles and the context constantly changing from an actor being held at gunpoint in one scene to the same actor being the one with the gun

in a repetition of the same scene. Ambiguity as well as failure is the hallmarks of the British postmodern experimental theatre aesthetic. However, as I argued earlier, there is no replacement for the values being critiqued, the show offers no alternative other than its own portrayal of failure. Although both Foster and Lyotard propose a search for new forms, early British practitioners only seemed to achieve the fragmented postmodern sublime and a depthless pastiche of cultural genres such as detective or romance fiction. Although, as I will discuss later in this chapter and in chapter 5, this has led to the development of increasingly sophisticated practice that opens new spaces for theatre and performance to explore, rather than proposing new forms.

However, although the aesthetic of the performance yields only the failure in its fragmentation, Club of No Regrets is also a sophisticated deconstruction of the process of representation and meaning. Using a limited number of scenes, the performance employs relentless repetition, fragmentation and evolution to create a presence in the performance other than the failure of the surface meaning of the texts. Tim Etchells states in the programme material for Club of No Regrets that “The quest for us, as usual, is to force the stories we do know to yield us the stories we don’t” (Etchells, 1999:215). Essentially this is what occurs in the performance, that the performers attempt to manifest the texts provided to them, in order to function as a screen over the actual focus of the piece: their struggle to represent or to mean something. The texts for the scenes themselves are almost without narrative and are only recognisable through their clichés, genre appropriations, and by the titles of scenes as Helen X calls for them to be performed. They cannot be recognised through any narrative coherence or meaning within them. The scenes allow for multiple versions of their performance because they are written without context or specificity and replete with ambiguity. This critique of representation can be seen throughout the work of Forced Entertainment from their use of cardboard signs to denote character in Emanuelle Enchanted (1992) (as identified by Andrew Quick (1994) in his article ‘Searching for Redemption with Cardboard Wings’) or in the use of props, such as a tin of spaghetti to represent a bullet wound in the stomach in Showtime (1996).

Club of No Regrets also illustrates Melrose’s definition of ‘Metatheatre’, as theatre that is *around and about* performance but also, as I argued, discussing the parameters

of theatre.^{iv} Clearly as the performance is centred around the attempted performance of the text, Club of No Regrets functions as a show within a show and deals with issues of the difference of being on stage and performing on stage, the impossibility of closure of representation in theatre and the ambiguity of language when placed in a constantly shifting context. Moreover, the performance confronts the audience's reception of the work following the tradition established by Foreman, Wilson and the Wooster Group. 'Club of No Regrets, then, is a performance about the work of seeing, about the quick joy of it and the slow joy of it and the hard work of it, too' (Etchells, 1999:216). Metatheatre is a term that can usefully be applied to the work of a number of the practitioners, as it does not reduce the range of practice. The companies under discussion engage, in formal terms, with a performative discussion of the nature of theatre and what it involves. Moreover, as we shall see later in this chapter, Third Angel, Desperate Optimists and, most notably, Blast Theory have all made works that in some way employ or challenge notions of reality, again seeking to define the limits of the boundary between performance and reality.

Finally as part of the deconstruction of theatricality one must also take into account the notion of resistant politics as discussed earlier. A poststructuralist alternative to what can be considered as the futile task of attempting political or social change through performance, resistant politics is particularly relevant to the work of Forced Entertainment especially in relation to a production such as Speak Bitterness (1995). In Speak Bitterness, the cast confess to an endless list of crimes from the minor (stealing milk), to the major (genocide), the performance takes place in a direct confrontation with the audience who are themselves partially lit. The lighting and the direct address have the effect of confronting the audience with their own crimes and their own guilt. The audience are in the impossible position of being not only judges of the crimes confessed on stage, but also the perpetrators of their own unacknowledged crimes. In the context of a culture based on confession in religion, on television shows and through trials by media, the performance opens the complex issues between crime, guilt, confession, complicity and responsibility that are glossed over in culture through safe definitions of proven guilt, proven innocence and proportionate punishment. Therefore, the deconstruction of theatricality in this performance problematises the relation between reality and performance, and in doing so the performance becomes politically resistant to normative theatrical conventions.

Moreover, this context of resistance then provides the performers with the opportunity to make their confessions, while resisting a closed moral framework that would be applied in conventional theatre. This allows the performance to remain morally ambiguous and implicate the audience in the act of confession.

In the work of Blast Theory, for example Chemical Wedding (1992) and Stampede (1993), the performances emulate club culture and take place in club settings, rather than taking place in a theatre. Their later work Kidnap (1998) involves the consensual but actual kidnap of members of the public, raises serious issues about crime, voyeurism and leisure in contemporary culture. Moreover, in Desert Rain (2000), which functions as a computer game, the performance acts as a revelation of unreported aspects of the gulf war, and critiques the mass media's role in sanitising the conflict.

A further example of resistant politics at work through the deconstruction theatricality is in Desperate Optimists' production of Dedicated in which their creation of meaningless communiqués, sent to real political figures, acts as a exploration of the nature of political action and the desire for anonymity, while also demonstrating the importance of the political gesture. The performance heightens a sense of alienation from conventional culture and society, the direct address to the audience implicating them within this distancing and making them complicit in the creation of the communiqués. The performance both acknowledges a sense of political disempowerment, while also enacting means of redressing that balance.

The deconstruction of theatrical conventions is a constant part of the postmodern theatre scene, largely because theatre continues to evolve new conventions. That postmodern theatre does not seek to replace these conventions with a new set is what distinguishes it from the avant-garde. Moreover, postmodern theatre has never claimed to be the leading edge of progress, or to move outside of the basic parameters of performance. Postmodern theatre has only ever developed through the colonisation of other areas of performance such as that produced by live art, film, radio, and the club scene. Postmodern theatre has always worked within theatre. The means by which postmodern theatre offers up new challenges is often through experimentation with narrative, one of the highly traditional aspects of western theatre. In the

following section I will discuss how postmodern theatre has rejected, disrupted and rewritten the rules of narrative and how it serves as a tool for the disruption of many other elements within theatre.

3.3: The Rejection of Narrative.

Narrative is the standard form of mainstream theatre. Narrative within theatre acts as its connection to literature, and theatre's inclusion within the historical canon of literature is largely confined to those scripts that employ the narrative form. Narrative is also considered the most effective way of representing meaning, as it attempts to mirror the action of reality in its flow of causally related actions. Narrative attempts to present events as if they were occurring whilst also allowing, through the reordering of this material, its dramatisation. On a broader perspective, narrative is the means through which communication of knowledge is largely carried out.

Lyotard, in his examination of the postmodern condition, argues that the changing construction of narrative and a shift in the balance of its elements is one of the factors producing the emergence of postmodernism, as Nick Kaye points out:

Lyotard takes narrative to have two aspects: *figure*, the event of narrativity, or the telling, and *discourse*, the process by which narrative represents and gives meaning. (Kaye, 1994.a:18)

As Lyotard breaks narrative into these two constituent parts, he uncovers an explanation for the emphasis of style over substance in contemporary culture. Lyotard argues that figure has now superseded discourse in its cultural value. This favouring of figure is due to the increasing specialisation of knowledge and the need for ever more sophisticated means of presenting and disseminating knowledge in order to exploit its value. Moreover, this factor contributes to the decline of belief in metanarratives. This shift from discourse to figure is therefore culturally apparent, causing the doubt in the validity of knowledge when increasing emphasis is placed on the presentation of information rather than the value of the information itself. This is the central point of Lyotard's argument in the discussion of the narratives that legitimate knowledge. These narratives, given the shift described above, become suspect, as, by association, does the knowledge itself.

The function of narrative in theatre is similar to the function of narrative for knowledge. Within mainstream theatre, narrative is the manipulation of imagery or a plot, structuring the sequence of information and the context of the information to elicit the correct response from the audience. Narrative has largely been used in order to channel the audience's possible readings of a work of theatre. Furthermore, narrative style within theatre is largely governed by its cultural context, and an attempt to produce a representation of reality that is in line with these contemporary views. Avant-garde narrative stays within the parameters of attempting to represent a world view in accordance with its theoretical perspective, but this view is generally opposed to the majority and often involves a theatrical disruption of that narrative style; thus for example the work of the Absurdists such as Ionescu and Beckett initially pursued a disruption of naturalistic theatre before arriving at a distinctive style that opposed it.

Postmodern narratives are imbued with many of the characteristics of postmodern culture in general. They confuse time and space, and present schizoid characters. These narratives are self-aware and draw attention to their own construction in order to disrupt it. They are interdisciplinary often breaking out of narrative convention to employ other forms such as lists or different modes of language. Moreover, these narratives are often concerned with loss, failure and are fragmentary. They often employ quotation, referencing and appropriation of other material without acknowledgement often denying an authorial voice.^v

Narrative is a contentious issue in postmodern theatre. As Auslander observes Josette Feral and Chantal Pontbriand believe postmodern performance is a conflict between presence and theatricality:

Both [Feral and Pontbriand] claim that performance is characterised by fragmentation and discontinuity (rather than theatrical coherence) in narrative... Thus understood, performance deconstructs and demystifies theatre. (Auslander, 54:1997)

Auslander proposes that presence is opposed to theatricality, essentially as presence on stage is concerned with actuality while theatricality is concerned with illusion, of which narrative is a constitutive element. Yet this indicates a larger conflict, that

postmodern theatre is the clash between the broad characteristics of performance and the stricter elements of theatricality. Therefore, the oppositions between the two forms run deeper than presence; there are differences in the relation to narrative linearity, the representation of character, liveness and the duration and location of performances. If this kind of work actively engages with these elements then it further explains the confusion of definition in the field: live-art, experimental theatre, interdisciplinary performance, postmodern theatre etc. As Feral has argued:

If we agree with Derrida that theatre cannot escape from representation... and we also agree that theatre cannot escape narrativity... then it would seem that theatre and art are incompatible. (Feral, 1982:294)

If Feral believes that theatre and art are incompatible, then postmodern theatre is the exploration of that failure of compatibility. It is the location of the postmodern sublime where representation and presence are under threat of destabilising each other; narrative is the indicator of this friction and disruption.

However, there is a second strand to the position of narrative within postmodern theatre. Aside from the development of postmodern narrative there is also the complete rejection of narrative or the substantial disruption of its form and function through fragmentation, self-referentiality, self-consciousness and working outside of a linear structure that is often replaced with formal patterning structures. It is from this rejection or disruption that the postmodern narratives emerge. However, this should not be interpreted as a replacement for the linear narrative form. These postmodern narratives are events. Kaye argues that they do not carry with them a coherent set of principles that can be employed to produce further postmodern narratives. An attempt to do so may produce works that stylistically ape postmodern performance but are underpinned by a stabilising agenda i.e. the installation of a new theatre that encompasses and defines the postmodern experience. As has already been pointed out in relation to Kaye's definition of postmodern performance, this is impossible. Narrative, as it represents a valued element of conventional theatre has been employed as the theatrical tool of postmodern deconstruction and disruption.

When examining how postmodern theatre has rejected narrative, another element has to take its place, as without an organising principle the subsequent performance would

be incomprehensible. As has been indicated when discussing the deconstruction of theatricality, it is often a formal structure that takes the place of narrative. In an example that I have already mentioned in relation to hybridity, Stan's Cafe replaced narrative with a mathematically designed game in Simple Maths. The rejection of narrative precedes the arrival of theoretical hybridity. The narrative of theory is one of the elements that can counteract the absence of dramatic narrative. This is also the case in another the example where narrative is replaced with a performative interpretation of a law of physics. Reckless Sleepers' Schrödinger's Box (2000) explores the theory proposed by physicist Erwin Schrödinger to explain a peculiar aspect of quantum theory, as Mole Wetherell, the company director, describes:

One of its paradoxical features is that subatomic particles appear to be able to be in two different states of being at the same time. Only when a measurement is made do particles 'collapse' into just one state. In 1935 Schrödinger provided his famous 'cat' illustration of the paradox: a cat is placed in a box with an unopened bottle of poisonous gas. Whether or not the bottle opens – and the cat is poisoned – depends on whether a radioactive atom decays which will trigger the poison to be released. According to the principles of quantum theory, until the box is opened the atom is both 'decayed' and 'not decayed' at the same time. So the cat must be both dead and alive at the same time. (Wetherell, 2000:106-111)

The performance replaces narrative with a interpretation of this paradox, a frantic performance of adhering to conflicting rules within a black box, a box that mimics the box in Schrödinger's theory and the clichéd black-box setting of theatre; the paradox of quantum theory as metaphor for the paradox of performance versus theatre. The performance charts these impossibilities, with the lack of any given narrative, by expecting the audience to construct one. Mole Wetherell, the director of the company, notes how the performers have altered the performance through the creation of their own personal narratives:

But we haven't changed the structure of the show since the premier; although it has changed. I think that's an internal thing. It is about performers knowing, finding roots, narratives, making up their own narratives within the structure. (Wetherell, 2000:106-111)

Moreover, this process must occur for the audience but with a significant distinction. For the audience, the construction of narrative when none is supplied is a process of

immediacy. For example in mainstream performance the audience is perceived as a passive consumer of meaning, whereas in avant-garde or experimental theatre, there is no consumable meaning to be received and therefore the audience have to become active readers and make sense of the performance. Unlike performers whose narratives can evolve over the duration of touring the piece, the audience have three options: to impose a narrative as the piece proceeds, to form a narrative after the performance, or to reject a narrative understanding of the piece.

In Stan's Cafe's Simple Maths there is a different set of concerns in place. The audience is expected and encouraged to construct a narrative during the piece in order to confront the changing nature of the performance and to attempt to resolve it. Additionally the role of the performers is task based but leads to narrative. This seems an extension of the Bauhaus edict that, in architecture and design, that form dictates content. Although in Simple Maths the content is never fixed or decided upon but is left open and the form itself is fluid rather than concrete, there is a random production of form (within parameters) through a game. Therefore, this is an example the postmodern infiltration of ambiguity into the formal exercises of minimalist theatre. Where Beckett had arrived at formally rigid theatre in which narrative was at its most reduced, postmodern performance allows the form to become ambiguous, blurred at the edges and for grand narratives to be excised, only for 'little' narratives to be re-imposed in response to the individual desire of the performers and audience.

Narrative within contemporary British experimental theatre has within the nineties been rejected, replaced and reconsidered. Narrative is one of the most flexible elements of theatre and one of the most persistent. Despite postmodernism's outright rejection of metanarratives and the acknowledged problem of the style of narrative outweighing the substance, narrative continues to return through theory, chance, and audience/performer interpretation or just in fragments; it no longer makes a singular narrative, but multiple narratives. That, it seems has been the general outcome. Theatre, even postmodern theatre, cannot do without narrative, but can no longer function with a linear notion of it. It was not until narratives failed or were constructed to evade interpretation, that they could be included in postmodern theatre. Therefore, postmodern narratives can be defined as narratives that are hybrids outside of their discipline, that reject singularity in favour of multiplicity, that demonstrate an

awareness of their inclusion within a performance context and that make use of the tensions between fiction and reality, which is what the following section will in part address.

3.4: Interventions into Reality.

In this chapter, I have outlined some of the ways in which the selected practitioners have challenged theatrical boundaries. However, these are not all new developments. Hybridity, deconstruction of theatricality, and the rejection of narrative have been part of the agenda of postmodern performance since its inception. The difference between early and contemporary postmodern performance is that these features have now become standard. Yet, there is a recent aspect to postmodern performance that is currently extending itself far beyond its origins in live art, this aspect being the negotiation with reality in performance. The primary reason for this extension is largely due to the increasing dominance of postmodern culture, in relation to the mass media and the impact of Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality upon the understanding of the previous notions of reality.^{vi}

Fundamentally, this discussion hinges on how one defines reality and hyperreality. In this case, I will refer back to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the event, outlined in chapter 1. This concept provides us not with a definition of what reality is, but in defining how a 'real' event is formed and perceived, it provides a working means of defining the real. In this respect, reality is the multiplicitous chaos of which Deleuze and Guattari speak. We as individual subjects are able to perceive, interact with and understand reality through prehending distinct features. These features such as time space and action, stretch across our perception of the chaos to help us frame and codify what we perceive. In this way we can see that it is the individual subject's specific and relative prehensions of events that form reality. How we understand and communicate this notion of reality is predominantly through language. Sign and language systems and institutions are created to enable communication, agreement and coherence of what we apprehend, and therefore what constitutes reality

Yet, within postmodern critical discourse, there is a second term that must be acknowledged, that of hyperreality. This is where the production of the linguistic codes that define reality, are removed from the individual and fundamentally removed from reality, thus bringing into being an experience that has been produced without relation to the reality it originated from:

Now, the image can no longer imagine the real, because it is the real. It can no longer dream it, since it is its virtual reality. It is as though things had swallowed their own mirrors and had become transparent to themselves, entirely present to themselves in a ruthless transcription, full in the light and in real time. Instead of being absent from themselves in illusion, they are forced to register on thousands of screens, off whose horizons not only the real has disappeared, but the image too. The reality has been driven out of reality. Only technology perhaps still binds together the scattered fragments of the real. (Baudrillard, 1996:4)

However, the notion of event must still be taken into account. If reality is founded on events, then by the same process, so is hyperreality. The whole of culture does not slip into hyperreality at once nor does it remain there. Hyperreality is defined by space and time. Disneyland is a spatially contained phenomena and the mediatisation of the first gulf war, may have meant that in the west it did not occur, but in the Gulf it most certainly did. If these examples are seen as having spatial and temporal dimensions, one can compare the complex negotiations between reality and Hyperreality, to the metaphor of the rhizome as posited by Deleuze and Guattari. The tension between reality and hyperreality are not unlike separate nodes on a rhizome, constantly in contact with the other, moving and infringing on the others territory.

This situation is manifested in postmodern culture in a peculiar fashion. Over the past ten years, there has been a sudden growth of a number of cultural fashions that are based upon the presentation of reality; for example Docu-dramas, real life Soap Operas and Reality TV game shows. In these formats, reality is completely commodified. This is a precursor to domestic reality becoming hyperreality. Effectively these programmes are a cloning of reality, a duplication of the conditions of reality placed within the frame of the media:

This is what we do with the problem of the truth or reality of this world: we have resolved it by technical simulation, and by creating a profusion of images in which there is nothing to see. (Baudrillard, 1996:5)

Secondly, due to the production in culture and society of hyperreal spaces and events, there has been a sudden boom in extreme sports/activities. These are sports which risk the life of the participant and provide a near death experience, such as base jumping, where the participant leaps from tall buildings with a single minute of time to successfully release their parachute to prevent death, all the while evading apprehension by the police, as this is understandably an illegal activity. These activities are a search for encounters with reality, in a culture where everyday reality has been alienated from its unmediated origin and replaced with a senseless torrent of signs.

The representation of reality in traditional theatre has been largely based on illusion, even in avant-garde theatre, such as the work of the Absurdist such as Ionescu; it was an illusionistic representation of an alternate reality. However, as I have already indicated, with the appearance of performance art and live art, there has been a recognition that experiments with the presence of the performer were in relation to reality rather than representation and as such developed into a desire for live art to be able to produce a real event, or as Quick terms them a 'real effect' (1994).

Quick's article deals with performance that attempts to locate reality and blurs the distinction between the real and the representational. This section will look at performances that reject representation to certain degrees, attempting to achieve reality by making interventions into it, and most radically attempting to become real through the use of simulacra, the media, and hyperreality. These are the modes of interacting with reality and hyperreality that are present in contemporary performance. The clearest and most documented mode is the attempt to achieve reality in performance. It can be argued that Artaud's theatre was a theatre that desired to invoke a visceral experience for the audience and actors alike and following Artaud, a tendency has developed in a great deal of contemporary performance for extreme physical action. An example of this can be seen in Third Angel's durational performance Test Card (1995) in which the performers watch a pre-produced television show called 'Violence':

It starts off as very film noir, Rachel and Rob as fifties movie stars, he catches her stealing a pass or something, she makes to leave, and its all low angles, she's wearing heels and its all those icons. Then he stops her and he slaps her and he obviously really slaps her in the face, at this point you would expect it to cut away, because it has be shot and edited like a film sequence and instead of it cutting to another point of view and her pulling away and charging out the door, he slaps her again and he slaps her again, then he slaps her and he really did slap her and knocked one of her teeth out, for something like five minutes. And two members of the crew walked out while we were doing it and they were going 'Stop stop, make them stop' but in the end Rachel said that Rob hadn't gone far enough. And we took every other frame out so it was slightly, not very filmic and people found it disturbing because it was a man beating a woman, but also that Rachel was watching herself getting hit and people generally watched it on two monitors that Rachel wasn't watching and we were sort of interested in do they think its real or, don't they think it is real. (Kelly and Walton, 1999:Unnumbered page)

The performance in 'Violence' is an encounter with the real given a typically postmodern twist. Framed as a televised performance within a performance, the reality is contained within hyperreality, which does not lessen its impact. Rather the three events cause a friction that highlights their difference and simultaneous presence, as Andrew Quick argues:

Consequently it might be more useful to see physical actions whether they be visceral or real time as effects, generated by the encounter with the real, felt as trauma or loss, which are scored across and into the shifting fictional or narrative frames which exist within the theatre space and machine: effects which vitiate the theatrical representational apparatus. Of course this encounter might not be real itself but performed as if it were a 'genuine' (whatever that might be) encounter with the real. (Quick, 1996:17)

It is important to notice that the use of reality in performance is an extension of the tension between performance and theatricality in postmodern theatre. When reality is included or attempted to be included in performance there is a tension between the illusion of theatre and the presence of reality. This is because presence originates and is recognised in relation to reality. Therefore, it should be noted that the performances that are under discussion are furthering the deconstruction of theatricality through their disturbingly disruptive appropriations of reality.

A second example this time of the interaction with reality is Desperate Optimist's Dedicated (1994) in which the performers produced communiqués that were sent to people who the company perceived as important social, cultural and political figures. In the course of the performances a communiqué was sent to a Northern Irish politician and prompted a police investigation. This was a performance that through written communiqués, places itself within the linguistic structure of reality. This kind of performance is of course extremely common. Performance frequently attempts to break its frame. For example political theatre that takes the form of street demonstrations in the case of the group Reclaim the Streets.

However the most radical of the encounters with reality are those which explore the notion of hyperreality whilst also engaging with reality simultaneously, as seen with the previous examples on a small scale. A production that did this was Blast Theory's Kidnap (1998). Kidnap was a unique performance, it occurred only once; it had a large cast, and a live, directly participating, audience of two. Hybridising leisure, crime and performance Kidnap was a pay for entry chance to be kidnapped by the company for 48 hours during that time you would be fed, sheltered. Depending on options that could have been purchased with the application form, the entrants could be supplied with extra food, music, a book or more bizarre options such as to have your kidnappers dressed in New York cop outfits, receive secretarial support for writing letters or to be kept naked and receive verbal abuse.

For Kidnap, as in hyperreality, everything is a model, a simulation. Kidnap is framed as a leisure activity not unlike perhaps an extreme sport, 'Have you ever wanted to be on your own for a while? Ever wanted to get away from it all? Have you ever wanted to leave everything behind for a few days?' (Blast Theory, 1998:Unnumbered page). There is also the promise of a prize if a winning participant can escape. The application form for Kidnap sets out the experience with a range of purchasable options. It is as if you were purchasing a package holiday. Furthering the hyperreal nature of the experience Kidnap was a fully mediated event. First, there was a test kidnap of a member of the press, who then wrote an accompanying article in The Times, the kidnap entrants were selected for surveillance and were followed and photographed for ten days. When the kidnap occurred the entire event was videoed. During their captivity the entrants were displayed over the Internet. Finally, after the

release of the kidnap victims a press conference was held. The entire event, in terms of the imagery and its documentation, was produced in order to facilitate the largest possible mediatisation and conformity to the model of how a kidnap should proceed.

Yet, in addition to the hyperreality of the event, there was also a large degree of interaction with reality, primarily because this was not solely a performance, a fake kidnap. Two members of the public were taken without warning and held for 48 hours, only with the knowledge that that they would not be harmed and after that time would be released. The contradictory introduction of non-performers as the central performers of the piece ensures that an interaction with reality is produced. There were, in this aspect of Kidnap, so many elements of chance and so many ramifications beyond the predictability of the model they had produced, that the performance was not so much an interaction with reality but rather reality being framed as performance, just as in a documentary or reality television. Kidnap could be a prophetic example of the future of leisure and television. Additionally, a further aspect, which defines Kidnap as an event that is part of reality, is its legal dimension. Legal consultations for the performance took nine months, resulting in a twelve point legal disclaimer.^{vii}

Legality is a determining factor in the decision over whether something is part of reality or fiction, if it were not it would not need a legal framework. On one level Kidnap needed a legal framework to ensure the safety of all the parties involved, and to prevent the event from being perceived as a criminal activity, rather than as a simulation of a crime without an original: a simulacra. In that way the legal framework served a functional purpose, which could be disregarded in the analysis of the performance. Moreover, the concern for legality implies that this is a live event, specifically between the kidnapers and the entrants, where the legal issues are most applicable. Furthermore, it acts as a representation of the reality of the event: written law makes the event part of reality. This is not an illusion but is inescapably part of our received notion of reality as defined by language.

The experience of the participants both kidnapers and participants includes exhaustion and a disconnection from everyday reality. These two primary factors do not in themselves indicate an encounter with a essential reality, but as I have already indicated there is a great deal of reality and hyperreality at play, that in fact

respectively suppresses or alienates a coherent or consistent experience of reality. Yet one of the entrants states, in the Kidnap video (1998), how real the experience is. This indicates that she expected the experience to feel artificial and it did not. I would argue that the hyperreality of the event for the participants was perceptible in the application forms, but not in the event in itself, and accordingly although the event was carefully structured for the kidnapers and the audience on the internet and in subsequent video viewings, for the participants this element was also unseen and therefore without a linguistic means of framing the experience until after their release after the confirmation that the event went as planned. It was from their perspective real, for the duration of the kidnap the participants were without the frame of reality or hyperreality. This raises an interesting point, just as Quick argued the boundary of reality can flicker from the hyperreality of the application to the reality of the event, additionally, the event can be simultaneously hyperreal and part of reality, dependant on relative perspective. Even if the real experience of the participants was an effect, as Quick might well argue, it remains a real effect in the same instant as hyperreality. The overall result of these performances is the confirmation that in postmodern culture and theatre, reality is not singular or stable; instead it is a scene of constant events, and the hyperreal. Through their performances British experimental theatre practitioners are performing the same function as the surrealists and Absurdist, challenging the accepted notion of reality, but rather than replace it with a new version, postmodern theatre proposes that these modes of reality are in constant negotiation, despite Baudrillard's claims that the real is lost. Instead of reality being lost, postmodern theatre is a theatre where there is only difference between the modes of reality and no value inherent to any mode that cannot be compensated with another.

In conclusion, I have argued in this chapter that the result of hybridity in British Postmodern Theatre Companies has been to disassemble the framework of theatrical definition. While not completely erased, the framework for defining performances, as theatre, is now far more fluid and flexible, and Stan's Cafe's Black Maze demonstrates this. Moreover, Blast Theory, Forced Entertainment and Third Angel create installations and digital projects without contradicting their theatrical identity. In this way, these particular practitioners, as an identifiable group, are extending the limits of what practice defines a theatre company. This exemplifies the unique

approach of these companies, wherein the form of the practice is determined by the project, and with each new project a new form and set of parameters can be adopted.

This continuous shifting, of the form and parameters of theatre, is also combined with an ongoing deconstruction of theatrical conventions. British postmodern theatre's avoidance of proposing new conventions, distances it from the avant-garde and other contemporary performance. The practitioners discussed in this thesis, have developed their practice through appropriating performance forms that emerged in live art, film, radio, the club scene and virtual technology. Yet, what also marks out the British postmodern theatrical tradition is their commitment to producing challenging work within, and in relation to theatre.

As such, the use of narrative by the selected practitioners is a defining aspect of their work. The British postmodern theatrical tradition does not dispense with narrative, but only engages with it through failure, multiple interpretation, chance construction and self-referentiality. Although postmodern theory rejects metanarratives, smaller and more ephemeral narratives remain. As I indicated earlier, the narratives employed by the British postmodern theatrical tradition are hybrids; they move away from their discipline, favour of multiplicity, indicate an awareness of their context and play on the boundary of the real and the fictional.

When they occurred, the performances that I have outlined were at the cutting edge of current experimental theatre, attempting to break down the established cultural forms of theatre. Each of these performances displays hybridity, the deconstruction of theatricality, a rejection of narrative and an interaction with modes of reality. Yet it is not the fact alone that these elements are present that marks them out as radical; it is the ways in which these diverse features coalesce into a recognisably postmodern form of theatre. Hybridity in these performances ranges from theoretical hybridity that includes postmodern theory, hybridity with narrative formations from postmodern literature, and hybridity with performance and reality that, standing alone, challenges the definition of theatre and, when placed within the same context, results in the radical experiments such as Kidnap. The deconstruction of theatricality therefore is not only the self-referential, self-conscious activity of postmodern practitioners; it is a symptom of postmodern culture as a whole; with performance, reality and hybridity

all challenging the validity of the form. Postmodern theatre is perceived as becoming solipsistic when in actuality it is being rewritten from the inside in relation to the cultural changes that surround it. Theatre, in becoming postmodern, had to reject narrative as the governing principle and replace it with formal experimentation, theory, hybridity and, reality, before reconsidering narrative and the fragmentary means in which it can be included in postmodern theatre.

ⁱ There are of course notable exceptions, particularly that of Brecht who rejected illusionistic sets and the representation of character in favour of the *Verfremdung* effect. The impact of Brecht on postmodern theatre's rejection of character will be discussed in chapter 4.

ⁱⁱ These were broad elements such as acting and performance, character, narrative, location, duration, the body, aesthetics and politics that will be discussed later on in this, and in subsequent chapters.

ⁱⁱⁱ For a discussion of an interrogation of Lyotard's postmodern sublime that rejects the platonic ideals, see Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe (1997) 'Theatrum Analyticum' in Murray, Timothy, ed. (1997) Mimesis, Masochism and Mime: The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought, Michigan: University of Michigan.

^{iv} See chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of Melrose's notion of 'Metatheatre'.

^v These references often draw from popular culture such as film and television, employing a narrative of media-scapes, as suggested by Tim Etchells, which relies heavily on a view of reality informed by Baudrillard's notion of reality as a simulacrum.

^{vi} For a further example of Baudrillard's discussion of hyperreality in culture see Cholodenko, Alan (1997) 'Objects in the rear mirror are closer than they appear: The Virtual reality of Jurassic Park and Jean Baudrillard' in Zurbrugg, Nicholas, ed. (1997) Jean Baudrillard: Art and Artefact, pp. 64-90 London: Sage.

^{vii} 'By signing the registration form the entrant consents to be kidnapped. The entrant agrees that on 15th July 1998 representatives of blast theory may visit the entrant and take the entrant to an undisclosed location where the entrant will be held for up to 48 hours. Blast theory will provide food, heat, light and shelter for that period. The entrant will not be abused either physically or mentally during any part of the kidnap. However by signing the registration form the entrant indicates his or her consent to the options specified above notwithstanding the fact that some of these options and the kidnap itself involve being put under surveillance as well as a degree of physical contact and verbal abuse. If selected to participate in KIDNAP the applicant will obtain, if required to do so by Blast Theory, a doctor's certificate proving that the applicant is fit both physically and mentally to undergo the kidnap including any options that the entrant may have specified above. The entrant will take all necessary precautions and make all necessary arrangements for the eventuality of being kidnapped. Blast theory is not responsible for missed appointments, disruption to domestic affairs or any other outcome of KIDNAP' (Blast Theory, 1998:Unnumbered page).

Chapter 4: Identity Crisis.

4.1: Identity and Fictional Characterisation in Postmodern Performance.

The idea of what constitutes identity has shifted throughout the twentieth century, and these shifts have followed the social and cultural changes that have occurred during the emergence of postmodernism. As argued by Erving Goffman identity was seen as a role, emerging from an essential psychologically and biologically determined self, adopted depending on the context and acted out. With the advent of postmodern discourse identity as a concept was stripped of its internal ontological distinction, and became perceived of as a social construct. Without essential or universal notions of the self to rely upon theorists such as Michel Foucault and Jean Francois Lyotard proposed that identity was locus for social and cultural structures to be this as I will later point out. However, this proposition left identity without any form of autonomy or means of self-determination, simply existing as superficial sign system. However, as I will indicate through theorists such as Judith Butler and particularly Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, identity was then subject to a reconsideration of its constituents and how it functioned. While still a social construct, it was proposed that identity was performative, in that it was formed and defined through enacting itself, and constructed, not only from its social context, but also from a process of creating blocks of relations with everything that it meets. As a result, Identity was seen to lose its distinct ontological boundaries, and to instead participate in a constant process of recreation and negotiation with its context. This section of this chapter will discuss these notions of identity, before moving onto an analysis of how they are played out in British postmodern theatre.

In his book The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1969) The sociologist Erving Goffman states:

As human beings we are presumably creatures of variable impulse with moods and energies that change from one moment to the next. As characters put on for an audience, however, we must not be subject to ups and downs... A certain bureaucratisation of the spirit is expected so that we can be relied upon to give a perfectly homogeneous performance at every appointed time. (Goffman, 1969:63-64)

His argument, simply put is that identity, while arising out of an essential internal psychological process, has to be performed, in and that that performance must be controlled by the identity, if it is to achieve what it wants, and to achieve the appearance of a consistent identity. Goffman's position is essentially one that the subject is a stable construct, but is useful in the respect that it proposes identity as being performative, and that that performance takes place in the external reality of the subject, interacting with the social and cultural context. Goffman uses the term performance as follows:

I have been using the term 'performance' to refer to all the activity of an individual that occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers. It will be convenient to label as 'front' that part of the individual's performance that regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. (Goffman, 1969:32)

What distinguishes Goffman is his proposal of a changing but stable internalised self, and also his subsequent conflation of the external and internal self. While he does not completely erase the distinction between them, he integrates them so that the external self is more of an extension rather than a separate entity, so as to remove any significant distinction between them and to maintain the centralized hierarchy that favours the internal self. Goffman's distinction between a notion of ones self and ones performed self is described as follows:

In our society the character one performs and one's self are somewhat equated, and this self-as-character is usually seen as something housed within the body of its possessor... the performed self was seen as some kind of image, usually creditable, which the individual on stage and in character effectively attempts to induce others to hold in regard to him. (Goffman, 1969:244)

Goffman proposes out that the two identities are distinct, but perceived by both the subject and others as the same, and that they are seen to exist in the body of the individual. However, while distinct the external 'front' is simply a performance that reflects the internal identity. We should also note that Goffman states that identity is 'housed within the body', and so identity has an essentially biological and internal foundation, is stable and singular, and is ontologically separate and distinct from other

subjects. Goffman argues that identity is essentially internalised, and that it performs a 'front' to the external world. However, as I shall argue, during postmodernism, the notions of identity's location and boundaries have radically shifted.

There are various postmodern theorists whose work challenges Goffman's argument. The scholar Judith Butler, in her essay 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory' (1990), provides the most concise summarisation of the postmodern approach to identity in relation Goffman's argument, she states:

As opposed to a view such as Erving Goffman's which posits a self which assumes and exchanges various 'roles' within the complex social expectations of the 'game' of modern life, I am suggesting that this self is not only irretrievably 'outside,' constituted in social discourse, but that the ascription of interiority is itself a publicly regulated and sanctioned form of essence fabrication. (Butler, 1990:129)

From Butler's argument, we can see how the consideration of the self, and its enactment, have shifted in relation to the postmodern condition.¹ In postmodern discourse, identity has numerous externalised aspects, formed in the specific but constantly changing social and cultural context of the subject. According to Butler, the notion of an internalised self is also a construct and has become performative. That is to say, identity comes into being and defines itself, through its enactment in the external world. Even Goffman, though arguing from the perspective of an internalised identity, realised that social establishments were where notions of self were developed:

In analysing the self, then, we are drawn from the person who will profit or lose most by it, for he and his body merely provide the peg on which something of collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time. The means for producing and maintaining selves do not reside in the peg; in fact these means are often bolted down in social establishments. (Goffman, 1969:245)

The problematic status of identity in postmodern culture is apparent in the deconstruction of the representation of identity and character in British Experimental Theatre. Identity has become a cultural sign system that is exchanged and consumed on high-capitalist terms rather than a complex psychological formation. As such,

there is slippage between identity in terms of the presentation of the self through image and action, and subjectivity, i.e. the sense that the self is separate from another. As the presentation of identity relies increasingly on the consumption of signs, the subjectivity of any one individual becomes invested in the externally produced and constantly shifting signs being consumed. Therefore the operation of capitalism in its current globalised phase, in relation to identity, belies a crisis occurring at the level of the individual, a crisis concerned with the collapse of the notion of a singular, stable and coherent self. This notion of the self as a complex and shifting entity has similarities to Lyotard's view of the self in relation to the collapse of metanarratives where he states: 'A *self* does not amount to much, no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before' (Lyotard 1984:15)

The notion that identity has a structure that is composed of parts and is subject to change is not a product of the postmodern condition, as the work of Goffman demonstrates. This process orientated model, where identity is constantly redefining itself is similar to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's proposed model of subjectivity as rhizome of becomings, this is not a coincidence as Guattari was a practising psychoanalyst and their co-authored texts Anti-Oedipus and Thousand Plateaus, subtitled Capitalism and Schizophrenia, are critiques of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. Yet as evidenced by Butler's argument, the emergence of the postmodern condition resulted in social and cultural conditions that prompted theorists to make the radical departure of proposing that identity lacked any inner coherence and that the fragments that formed identity were not necessarily internally determined, nor originated from within the subject. An identity in postmodern terms consisted of fragments of internally and externally determined signs and language, held within a process of language that could consume and reject them leading to radically altered process of identity formation.

The influence of such a radical view of identity upon performance, with its complex negotiation between signs and supposed universal truths such as time, space and the body is significant. Within the framework of the ongoing deconstruction and rejection conventional performance practices, the representation of character and identity became an area through which the initial wave of American postmodern

theatre practitioners defined their work. The most powerful example is from the Wooster Group, through their complex negotiations between fictional, found and personal materials, in the presentation of character and the re-presentation of themselves. Perhaps more fundamentally the work of Richard Foreman and Robert Wilson demonstrated the shift from avant-garde practice into the postmodern through Foreman's aggressive fragmentation of a linear character and Wilson's foregrounding of the body and text as aesthetic objects. Wilson presented the bodies of performers and of audibly or visually perceived text as signs in themselves, operating through patterns in time and space instead of determining a narrative context within which the performer might represent character in a more conventional manner.

This chapter will examine the complex relation of postmodern cultural theory, contemporary British experimental theatre and the construction and performance of identity. The chapter will begin by outlining the rejection of stable singular forms of identity as initiated by postmodern culture and theory, examining how this is manifest in a variety of ways in performance through a discussion of Stan's Cafe's Simple Maths (1997) and Good and True (2000). The discussion will then move on to examine how the boundaries of identity in postmodern performance have become ambiguous, allowing for a new set of relations between identity and the body, site and fictional material to be explored. The chapter will examine the initial rejection of character in performance and the shift from acting to performance as highlighted by Philip Auslander. Subsequently there will be a discussion of the collapse in distance between the identity of the performer and the performed fictions, resulting in interplay between reality and fiction on the level of the performer. The chapter will conclude by examining the complexities of the self-conscious performance of identity and character drawing heavily on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming.

There is a recognisable continuity among postmodern approaches to performing identity and character. These methods reveal different aspects of postmodern performance and culture, demonstrating different political positions and means of cultural engagement or resistance within the practices. Rather than drawing lines of distinction between the modernist and postmodern approaches to performing, which has already been done by Auslander, Fuchs and Kaye, I have chosen to explore the differing modes of negotiating with identity within British postmodern theatre. In this

way, this chapter will further demonstrate the thesis' argument that, while British postmodern theatre is a fluid and changing phenomena, it can be mapped and theorised effectively. This chapter therefore aims to prove the extent to which the method and the modes of performing that a performer employs, can act as the means by which a theatrical movement is defined. Moreover, the manner of the performance of identity in a given style informs and is informed by all other theatrical concerns of that said style. As such this chapter, whilst discussing the construction and performance of identity, will provide examples illustrating and expanding on arguments raised in other chapters.

However, the core argument of this chapter centres on how the three concepts of repetition, mimicry and the Deleuzian notion of becoming function in performance and can be used as a means of reconsidering the representation of identity. Theatre and live performance depend upon an economy of repetition. While emphasizing the ephemerality of the event, scholarship must recognise that performance must be repeated either in actuality or by report in order to gain cultural weight.ⁱⁱ In the first part of the chapter I will argue that, in an analogous fashion this is how the performance of identity acquires its presence in postmodern works. Secondly, I will introduce the notion of mimicry, arguing that this is distinctly different to mimesis or representation. When employed in postmodern performance, in conjunction with repetition, it results in a form of representation that can be classified as postmodern due to the unique relation between the presence of the performer's identity and the identity they are mimicking/repeating. There are, of course, many different accounts of mimicry and mimesis. Homi Bhabha's definition of mimicry in 'The Location of Culture' (1994) is particularly relevant in the present context: 'Mimicry... differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part metonymically [and it is] elusive because it hides no essence no itself' (Bhabha. 1994:90).ⁱⁱⁱ Bhabha himself is of course building upon a Lacanian reading of the notion:

Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage... It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practised in human warfare. (Lacan cited in Bhabha, 1994:85)

The revision of representation that I am proposing here, in favour of one based on mimicry, is constructed from postmodern theory. I therefore propose that the shift from representation in modernist theatre to mimicry in postmodern theatre is a defining characteristic of postmodern representation. Finally, in the third part of the chapter I will link repetition and mimicry to the Deleuzian notion of becoming. This describes the acts of two fluid identities engaging in an exchange of similarities and negation of difference, without altering the nature of the self but rather drawing attention to commonalities. This is analogous to the process of mimicry and I therefore argue that acts of mimicry can be constructed or read as performative becomings. This notion of becoming can account for the ambiguity of boundaries between the self and the other, and the real and the fictional in British postmodern performance. Company members of Third Angel, when discussing how they approach performing, illustrate the ambiguity over the performance of identity:

Alex: I think we use character, we present character to the audience and we never for a moment try to get the audience to believe that we are these characters, it is a little bit about that Brechtian thing of when someone's illustrating a road accident that they say 'The man was walking down like this' it is a hint of that but it is still not exactly that... I think its a bit more fictional than that, the performers investment in it is different.

Rachel: We're not saying this is a performer representing this, we're not doing that we're kind of saying this is this, but there's an awareness that you're there.

Alex: Even the character knows that the audience is there.

Rachel: But we're not presenting it as 'This is a performer who's doing a character'. (Kelly and Walton, 1999:Unnumbered page)

I will argue that this confusion indicates a lack of a coherent language or a framework to describe the shift in the performance of identity, from resemblances between fixed states, to the fluid exploration of relationships between fluid features or 'Intersections' as Matthew Goulsh of Goat Island argues, or the constant exchange of connections in a rhizome. Moreover, I will argue that this confusion has been brought about by the growth and development of cultural features that are best described by postmodern theory. For example, when discussing Kidnap, Matt Adams raises issues of the representation of identity in the media and in 'real life' and the slippage between the two.^{iv} Significantly, Adams' identifies a performative aspect within identity and suggests that the ambiguity of its border between the real and the fictional is connected to and prefigured by a culture saturated by representation.

What happens to you in an environment where representation is so predominant around you that you ingest representation until you are slightly yourself representing in yourself? And I do think that that's the stage we're at in that we have a slight sense in which we are all acting out our own identities... and that that was what Kidnap tried to deal with, was to say what's the difference pretending to be a kidnapper and me being a kidnapper and to what extent were people in the Bader Meinhoff gang pretending to be kidnappers but they just happened to have a gun and really take people, that sense in which there's this incredible interpenetration between areas that we always situate ourselves. (Adams, 2001:Unnumbered page)

It is my contention that key examples of British postmodern performance display an approach to the performance of identity that is based on processes of becoming, mimicry and repetition. I shall analyse these works in these terms as they have been described by American performance company Goat Island and drawing on the theories of Deleuze and Guattari. This approach, as I have already indicated, typifies a reengagement with representation from a postmodern perspective, revising it in the light of notions of becoming and mimicry. This further demonstrates the existence of a clear means of defining and characterising a British postmodern theatrical heritage.

4.2: The Rejection of Character.

Repetition comes again everywhere. (Kierkegaard, 1983:326)

Rollo said: What is the reason for all this repetition?
And I said: What Repetition? (Goulish, 2000:33)

This section discusses the impact of postmodern theory on the representation of identity, indicating in British work what Philip Auslander identified in U.S. work as the shift from acting to performance. I will examine the rejection of character through an analysis of Forced Entertainment's Emanuelle Enchanted, focusing on their deconstruction of character, I then chart the methods and strategies of the theatrical rejection of character focusing on rule or task based performance, character as surface and the performance of self through an examination of Stan's Cafe's Simple Maths and Good and True.

The postmodern crisis of identity is a result of society's crisis of the real and our crisis of language. The crisis of the real was explored in chapter 3 and I will return to this later in the present chapter. At stake here is how the changing understanding and use of language, undergoing a significant alteration within western culture identified by Baudrillard, Derrida, and Lyotard has in part instituted, or at least framed our current crisis of identity. Part of the complication of postmodern performance's rejection of character is that other performance styles share similar traits to the postmodern. The postmodern rejection of character, is not solely a rejection of psychological realism, it is the critique and rejection of all theatrical constructions of character that present a stable self. Therefore it should be expected that stylistic traits from practitioners such as Brecht and Grotowski should be encountered within postmodern performance, but one must realise that their intention, purpose and context have shifted so as to refigure the meaning entirely.

What postmodern theatre has taken from philosophy in a loose appropriation are notions of investment, repetition and how performance and theatricality are the parameters for the construction of identity. These features of repetition, investment and performance are the initial means through which postmodern theatre has engaged in the cultural crisis of identity, by rejecting characters constructed on notions of essential truths or political, social and cultural realities. Instead, in continuation of the American postmodern theatre tradition, British experimental theatre has begun to investigate how identity is constructed, represented and read by an audience in performance and in postmodern culture, through use of repetition, task-based work and the personal investment of the performer in their actions.

As was indicated in the introduction to this chapter, in postmodern cultural terms, identity has become a coalescence of signs that can be consumed and exchanged as part of the larger economy of the sign. Therefore, I will be using the theories of Baudrillard to analyse the British postmodern performances that initially reject character and acting. However, in the following sections I will return to the theories of Deleuze and Guattari when discussing more complex relations to character and acting displayed in the work of the selected practitioners. So returning to a notion of identity as a coalescence of signs with cultural value, I would argue that it can therefore become drained of meaning and become part of Baudrillard's precession of

Simulacra. A consequence of this is that the authenticity, coherence and stability of an identity come into question. As such in addition to Baudrillard, this crisis can be connected to the work of various theorists, Lyotard and the crisis of authenticity and legitimation, Jameson and pastiche, Derrida and undecidability.^v An early example of how this is manifest in performance can be seen in Forced Entertainment's work, since the link between language, character and instability was a recurring theme of their initial performances. The opening section of Emanuelle Enchanted (1992) foregrounds the crisis of identity and its representation. At the beginning of the performance five performers enter the stage and pull back a curtain that divides the audience from the rest of the stage. Then a loud fast guitar track begins to play, one that is reminiscent of action movie soundtracks. This atmosphere is built upon as the performers run on the spot in randomly chosen costumes and holding cardboard signs that describe a character. The names written on the signs range from historic figures to popular cultural icons, for example 'Elvis Presley the Dead Singer', 'Banquo's Ghost' and 'Jack Ruby' (Forced Entertainment, 1994.c:16-19). Moreover, as the signs indicate, many of these figures are placed within situations either appropriate or inappropriate to what is understood of the character, for example when they hold the signs 'A King (Usurped)', 'A Terrorist in Hiding' and 'Ex-Lovers (Not speaking)' (ibid.) the performers often respond with poses or actions. This procession of quite literally cardboard thin characters mirrors the postmodern crisis of identity. We observe a procession of simulacra, a scene in which identity is a play on the surface of meaning, a parade of identities without meaning or context. What Emanuelle Enchanted deconstructs is the audience's attempts to construct a relation to a character, be that through empathy or political allegiance. As Andrew Quick argues in his essay on Emanuelle Enchanted (Quick, 1994), the performance is an attempt to perform the postmodern sublime in that it foregrounds the failure of representation. The endless sequence of characters passed in front of the audience without context, narrative or individuality deny the opportunity of lasting or complex attachment, but moreover in their critical mass they cease to become singular representations and rather a flow of undifferentiated fictions. This approach to character is not an innovation in itself as I would argue that it could be compared to Richard Foreman's directing, in which Kaye observes a similar approach:

While indications of individual roles are clear, the dispersal and fragmentation of dialogue, the performers' attention to the audience rather than each other, as well as the self reflective nature of the text, work against a coherent reading of these indications and frustrate the coming into being of any particular 'characterisation'. (Kaye, 1994.a:52)

In each case the stylistic conventions that we have come to associate with character are fore-grounded and then subverted in order to expose the methods of their construction and the audience's effectively futile attempts to read depth of meaning into and make associations with the action in which the performers are engaged. Moreover, it is not just the subversion of convention that problematises the construction of character. The process, stylistic feature and structural device of repetition are central in British experimental theatre's deconstruction of character and performance of identity. Within the opening scene of Emmanuel Enchanted, and as I shall indicate also in the work of Stan's Cafe and other practitioners, repetition is employed and made central to the deconstruction of character, in that its self-conscious extremity defeats its own theatrical purpose:

What some see as a single moment repeating, others see as a nonrepeating series of similar moments... As John Cage said in his 'lecture on nothing', "Repetition is only repetition if we feel that we own it." To restate the problem: does one see the repeating/nonrepeating moment as occurring *inside* or *outside* of a language? Because with his evocation of *ownership*, Cage perhaps refers not only to possession, but also to understanding, recognition, and especially familiarity. (Goulish, 2000:33)

Goulish adds: 'what we call repetition presents an instability of differences. What we call repetition presents a permeability of identities. The individual meets the collective' (Goulish 2000:37). It is important to realise that a repetition is a difficult pattern/process/object to define, as it may be all of the previous forms. Repetition may be defined as a pattern in time: an action that is repeated enough times ceases to become a single moment but rather an undifferentiated flow where the beginning and end of the repeated action are impossible to distinguish. However, there is also the possibility that a repetition may be a process, one that takes into account the impossibility of repeating a moment precisely and therefore allows or encourages change to take place. Within this process there may be small repetitions within a brief period of time, or repetitions that are spread apart within the process. Finally there is the object of a repetition where a moment is repeated a defined number of times and

framed as such. The difficulty of the definitions I am setting out is that they flow into each other and can contain other forms of repetition within themselves. Moreover, there is a distinction that can be made between a moment that occurs twice and a repetition, as the former could be considered a doubling, a mirroring or an accident. It is the third occurrence that frames the recognition of distinctiveness and pattern. At the other limit of this definition, of course, is the fact that a repetition can escape that definition through excess. As indicated with the notion of a process-orientated repetition, there is an unmarked moment or event in perception when a repetition can, after a duration, shift into the undifferentiated flow mentioned above.

The exploration of these notions of repetition is vital as it has ramifications on the use of repetition as a theatrical device, in the performance of identity during the reading process of the audience, and in the establishment of a performer's presence. Repetition has the capability to empty the conventional means of constructing character of meaning. In a similar fashion Baudrillard's notion of a culture of reproduction, through their repetition empties signs of meaning and turns them into simulacra. Within performance, which itself is a medium conventionally based on reproduction, the event of a repetition carries the same impact as reproduction does culturally. Repetition as a broad stylistic feature can be seen in most of the performance work discussed in the thesis and should therefore be regarded as a common feature of postmodern performance, if its usage emphasises the eventhood of the performance. More often than not in these examples, repetition is manifest both in the devising process as well as a stylistic feature of performance, in the form of task-based work.

The show Simple Maths (1997) by Stan's Cafe offers the audience an even more reduced performance or construction of identity than Forced Entertainment's Emmanuel Enchanted. Simple Maths is a performance where the only dictated action is the performers' movements from one seated position to another: on a row of chairs, with the addition of a few momentary images and actions, a bleeding man, a cough. This piece could in fact be argued to be an attempt at minimalism in performance, in the manner that the work of Robert Wilson can be seen as minimalist, and to a degree

this is correct. The drive behind Simple Maths is certainly to reflect back upon the audience the consciousness of their active construction of narrative and character. Even if the audience do not engage in this, it is almost impossible for an audience member to realise the search for patterns and meaning, as they are refused by the performance at nearly every turn. Simple Maths is structured on a very simple principle: the performers have a seating arrangement they must reach from their starting point and they repeat this pattern twice before finishing. Where Simple Maths clarifies its position as postmodern performance is in its refusal to enter into an aesthetic concerned with bodies and movement in space and time. Instead, Simple Maths, constructed through task-based work, maintains a postmodern agenda because of a reliance upon and acceptance of multiple subjective readings of the performance on a number of levels, none of which are privileged above another. This is demonstrated by the instances of coughing, laughing or bleeding that the performers initiate but never form into any meaningful sequence, thus allowing meanings to be constructed by the audience in addition to the pattern of movement. This marks the separation of these works from other works as their focus resides in how the sets of relations between performance and meaning, performer and audience, and performer and character are formed rather than in their inherent meaning. The place of verbal language in Simple Maths is rejected or at least avoided altogether, as distinct from Emanuelle Enchanted. Here it is the absence of language that frees up the performance to a far wider range of readings, although one should note that while language of a textual nature is absent, the performance is structured with a clear mathematic form that has its own grammar and syntax. So, in addition to reading meaning into the work, the audience are engaged in an act of translation from one form of language into another, substituting the lack of clearly recognisable theatrical conventions for other parameters onto which meanings and narratives are projected.

Again, this kind of work is not new and has clear similarities with the American approach to postmodern performance. For example, Nick Kaye in his discussion of the work of Yvonne Rainer has drawn attention to the task orientated aspects of her performances and their subsequent relation to identity:

Free of disciplines or controls, performers tend to interact on levels other than the formal, where a development and interweaving of performance elements,

developing tasks, behaviours and references may imply or invite a reading of subject-matters, narratives, even relationships and ‘character’. (Kaye, 1994.a:116)

Therefore, a direct comparison can be drawn then between the work of American postmodern performance artists and their approach to the construction and performance of identity and the work of British practitioners. Moreover, this issue of the influence of American practice on British practice is apparent when examining the work of Third Angel, as it shares common features relating to the construction and performance of identity with the work of the contemporary American performance group Goat Island. I would argue this also indicates the non-linear aspect of the British postmodern theatrical tradition in that its influences can come from both inside and outside the UK and consist of both their contemporary peers and their artistic predecessors in other fields of performance practice. This possible interdisciplinary aspect of the heritage is borne out by the reception of Simple Maths as indicated by Yarker.

Possibly the most successful performance of Simple Maths was at Preset, in Nottingham, as part of the “Body, Space, Image” season where the dance setting appeared to contextualise the performance to good effect. (Yarker, 2000.b:Unnumbered page)

Preset is the headquarters of Dance4 National Dance Agency and this recognition of the effectiveness of a more dance-orientated context for what could be described as a theatrical experiment, does more than simply highlight the hybrid nature of the work and its context. I propose that the efficacy of the context suggests that character and identity in postmodern performance is being read in terms of investment and risk, terms generally considered more appropriate to dance than theatre. These factors are replacing the meaning that is emptied out of character by the repetition and self-conscious performance in the work under discussion. In my view what has shifted between the early American approach and the current British scene is the level, nature and attitude towards the investment made by the performer. This connects to a far wider issue that will be discussed in the rest of the chapter, as Yarker observes:

The delight and risk of simple maths is that it contains no mechanism for self defence... For those who fail to make that connection... there is little

conventional 'entertainment' to carry them to the end. (Yarker, 2000.b:Unnumbered page)

Good and True (2000) by Stan's Cafe offers a version of identity that actually does conform to the extreme view of identity proposed by Baudrillard, that we are effectively screens upon which the simulacra of signs are displayed and exchanged. Good and True is effectively the story of a construction of a postmodern identity, one that is a complete construct and is itself built within the simulated context of a pastiche of crime drama interrogation scenes. In the piece the four characters play at interrogating each other, taking turns in being good cop, bad cop and suspect on a revolving platform with only three chairs and a table as set. As the piece proceeds, it becomes apparent that none of the characters knows of any specific crime that has been committed, nor even who each other are and what the correct roles for their interaction should be. Then within the performance the mutual interrogation begins to focus on one performer and her responses to the answers. Slowly, through her admittedly hypothetical answers to questions the interrogators construct an identity for her. Finally they attempt to confirm this identity through making the female performer admit that she could not deny that this was her identity and the piece concludes with the performer leaving the space with her new identity, but with the interrogators no better off. However, what is developed in the piece goes beyond a simple task based exercise rehearsed into a piece:

Good and True is about asking questions. It is about the motivations, tactics, revelations and assumptions embedded in questioning. It is about the troubled relationship between questions and answers. Except in the loosest possible sense it is not a story, though it can be found to contain fragments of many stories. (Yarker, 2000.c:Unnumbered page)

This approach to performance can also be found in Forced Entertainment's Quizoola (1996), a 12 hour durational performance consisting entirely of 2000 scripted questions and improvised answers between pairs of performers working in shifts, wearing bad clown make-up and lit by fairy-lights in non-traditional theatre spaces. Through this model any closure or fixing of meaning or identity is resisted, and instead, the process of these performances leads inexorably towards a proliferation of meaning that goes beyond the frame of the performance itself.^{vi} This is not however a transcendent experience, but rather a conscious playing with the process of creating

and reading meaning. Importantly this resistance of character but proliferation of meaning foregrounds the presence of the performer's persona. Engaged as they are in task-based work that is designed in order to deny conventional readings of character, what is read in this absence are the actions of the performers. Moreover, being focused on task-based work the performers may not attempt to portray any persona, and the self-conscious, self-referential nature of the work focuses the audience's reading on this contradiction. The performer's actions deny the construction of a fictional character, but in doing so foreground their performance of themselves. Clearly, this appears to suggest the possibility of an essential, or at least authentic, stable identity that underlies a constructed fictional character. However, this is far from the case, because, as has already been argued, there is no stable, coherent self to begin with, and this is what their performance of themselves demonstrates. What audiences read is a further layer of fiction that is imposed onto the actions of the performers, as Robin Arthur of *Forced Entertainment* has observed:

Robin: Richard's position in Pleasure which is extraordinarily fictional, still allows him to be in some kind of very peculiar relationship with the audience... In the Blast Theory piece Something American Matt and Jo would address the audience very barely as themselves, as Matt and Jo as ordinary decent upright folk but in a way I remember thinking what does that allow you to do with us, not very much really, it allows you to come in at quite an odd relationship. It is very formal, very based on the niceties of being some people presenting the show, it doesn't allow them to do things like... well there's a section in Pleasure where Richard's rambling on the pantomime horse, flops down on the floor, and he sort of goes something like 'the crowds part and in the sheltered theatre we see, a fucking horse'. Then he says 'where are we, where the fuck are we?'. You can't say that if your standing out in front of he audience being your normal self. You can't ask or pose those questions unless you are covered by some kind of fiction, and ironically enough the withdrawal of all the pretence, or whatever, allows you to say 'what are we really doing here'. In a very strange way, and that for us is theatrical, we're sliding that question underneath the question, if you abandon the fiction entirely then its quite tricky to get to the point where you ask the question you want to ask or address the problem you want to address within that framework. There are things you can't actually ask if you're being nice. (Arthur, 1999:Unnumbered page)

The level of investment made by performers in these works can be seen as a symptom of a lack of boundaries. The collapse of distance between the fictional and self through task-based worked leads to an altered form of relation to character and representation instigated through mimicry. Moreover, task-based work as mentioned

earlier is a crucial link between the notion of repetition in performance and the rejection of character in favour of performer persona in postmodern theatre.

Investment comes when we're beaten so complex and so personal that we move beyond rhetorics into events... All that has to happen is that the direct lines of investment get drawn – between performers and task, between witnesses and performers. (Etchells, 1999:49)

It is investment and the postmodern need for authenticity that provides the direct stimulus to the stylistic feature explored in the following section of the chapter. When task work has reached its limit and established presence, or when a more complex negotiation with a sense of character is required, postmodern performers invest into the performance aspects of their own memories, experience, action, and thought. These are placed in as close a relation as possible to their performed persona in order to enact a collapse in the distance between their real selves and the performed, fictional other.

4.3: Mimicry and the Collapse of Distance.

The discourse of mimicry is centred around an ambivalence; in order to be effective mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. (Bhabha, 1994:86)

The examples of British postmodern theatre discussed have a recurring stylistic approach to representing and performing identity; they employ actual memory, appropriation of cultural imagery and forms, and the performer's body to represent a complex, decentred notion of identity. These features can be seen in relation to postmodern notions of the flattening of culture and the blurring of the distinction between culture and society, and as I will argue that these contribute to the collapse of distance between the performer and character. I shall demonstrate this through an analysis of Desperate Optimists' Dedicated (1994) and Third Angel's The Killing Show (1996) with reference to interview material. This section is therefore concerned with the complexities of the performance of identity, examining the dual alienation and intimacy of identity in British experimental theatre. This will be supported by an analysis of Blast Theory's Something American (1995) with reference to interview material. Through an examination of those examples this section focuses on the

collapse of distance between performer and character in contemporary British experimental theatre.^{vii}

The rejection of character in British postmodern theatre foregrounds the persona of the performer, and this has resulted in the use of direct address and a self-conscious/self-referential style seen in the work. Moreover this rejection of character foregrounds the boundary between the performance of the self and performance of a fiction. Yet, once character had been rejected in certain works, it was reintroduced as a problematic construct, whose presence commented upon both the attempt to perform a character and postmodern culture's relation to identity. In addition, the engagement with a notion of character subverts the process of representation, effectively altering the process from representation to mimicry. While these terms may not seem exclusive, I will argue that the distinction between the two marks a significant alteration in how identity and character are constructed and performed in British postmodern theatre.

Erving Goffman discusses mimicry, as distinct from representation, in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1969). Goffman observes that mimicry is the fulfilment of a performance role, for which one has no externally authorised legitimacy, and the surrounding of oneself with the signs that constitute a 'setting'. The foregrounding of this setting, instead of the individual, supports the illusion that this is a real performance. Specifically, this is done through adopting all the external signs that would be associated with a legitimised performance, and so, mimicry relies on foregrounding the contextual background to draw attention away from the illegitimacy of the performance. However, mimicry it is a performance without legitimacy. Mimicry in this sense is not representation because it is an actual performance of identity rather than a representation of one. It is a real performance of self, but one that has not been sanctioned. Goffman discusses why the mimicry of identity is troubling:

Paradoxically, the more closely the imposter's performance approximates to the real thing, the more intensely we may be threatened, for a competent performance by someone who proves to be an imposter may weaken in our minds the moral connection between legitimate authorization to play a part and the capacity to play it. (Skilled mimics, who admit all along that their intentions

are unserious, seem to provide one way in we can ‘work through’ some of these anxieties. (Goffman, 1969:66-67)

If one takes Goffman’s observations of mimicry and places them within a postmodern context where there is no internal identity, no ‘real thing’ other than those given legitimacy, one can see why mimicry is so threatening. If identity is external, and formed in the social and cultural context through performance, then mimicry reflects a postmodern anxiety that our identities are not ontologically separate or distinct, and that they can be duplicated, destabilized and subverted.

Desperate Optimists’ performance Dedicated exemplifies this problematisation of the presentation of self. This is because within the performance any moves towards portraying a fictional character are clearly marked by the performers themselves, and little or no attempt is made by the performers to adopt a separate persona. As an example, the performers are seen to start a phone ringing before they themselves go to answer it and pretend that there is someone on the end of the line. When discussing another Desperate Optimist production of Anatomy of Two Exiles (1992) Quick describes their approach to the construction of identity, and his description is equally applicable to Dedicated and to their work in general. Quick writes:

[Anatomy of Two Exiles] is constructed through a mixture of direct address to the audience and dialogue between the two people on stage who speak and wander about the playing space ‘without’ the conventional theatrical framework of sustained fictional characterisation. Here the performers present ‘themselves’, constructing a performance through confession, through storytelling, through minor disagreements, through the endeavour to link disparate phrases and artefacts into an impossible whole... multiple narratives relate directly to the artist’s personal experiences. (Quick, 1998:27)

Dedicated includes people whose role would not normally be directly categorised as performer. There is also a DJ on stage, playing music throughout the performance at the request of the ‘performers’ and a woman who operates a digital camera and computer, distorting the images she collects of the ‘performers’ during the show. At the beginning of the show, the function of these people seems completely task orientated requiring no explicit performance beyond their presence on stage. However, shortly into the piece one of the performers activates a phone, answers it and hands it to the DJ claiming that it is his mother, even though the audience know there

is no one on the other end of the phone. Despite this awareness and the role established, the DJ then begins to have a conversation on the phone, supposedly with his mother and this breaks the non-performer/performer distinction previously established. This action therefore establishes the moves between performer-persona and character that occurs later in the piece. Moreover, this play on appearance is conceptually echoed by the task of the woman operating the camera, as she takes photographs of the performers and then distorting them so that they cannot be recognised.

In addition, throughout the performance, the performer Michael Weaver repeatedly changes his t-shirt. Each one has a phrase printed on the front. One reads 'I'm only pretending' while another reads 'I'm not myself today'. In one section of the performance whilst wearing the latter t-shirt and the red wig of the fictional character Vera, Weaver stands alone listening to a personal stereo. As the section proceeds, Weaver begins to cry, then starts to smile and eventually dances slowly on the spot apparently to what he is listening. This moment functions as a complex layering of the modes of performance at work in Dedicated. Weaver is performing himself whilst mimicking Vera with the wig, whilst involved in an action that can be read as a task, a performance, or a genuine response. None of these layers denies the presence of the other, Weaver's own identity is not subsumed by his imitation of Vera. Instead, the various layers in conflict with each other heighten the visibility and distinctiveness of each component, the t-shirt marking out Weaver's identity from the persona the wig refers to and the action in which he is involved. Again, the notion of investment is crucial in the presentation of self. Dedicated produces the level of investment through the feature of the performance that some of the communiqués produced are sent to friends and family of the performers, therefore increasing the potential risk of the performance.^{viii} What then is interesting about Dedicated is that there are moments in which the performers approach a performance of the fictional character of Vera, without denying or subsuming their own presence. The action I would argue is not representation in the conventionally understood sense but rather mimicry.

Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage... It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled

background, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practised in human warfare. (Lacan cited in Bhabha, 1994:85)

This camouflaging of the self and referral to another is not representation as it avoids a transformation of the subject into the object, but refers instead to something that is apart from the performer.^{ix} Therefore, the presence of the mimicking performer is not hidden or transcended. As Bhabha explains: ‘Mimicry... differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part metonymically [and it is] elusive because it hides no essence no itself’ (Bhabha, 1994:90) Moreover the relation between performer and performed identity is metonymic, each standing in and referring to the other, rather than a metaphoric referring to an external meaning or truth. Therefore, mimicry, whilst appearing as a form of representation, is distinctly different as it rejects inherent meaning and reaffirms the presence of the performer in conjunction with the connection to rather than assumption of a fiction character. ‘Mimicry rearticulates presence in terms of its “otherness”, that which it disavows’ (Bhabha, 1994:91)

Blast Theory’s production of Something American (1996) demonstrates this notion of mimicry on a far more comprehensive level. The performance is, as one of the performers states to the audience at the beginning of the show: ‘A collage of our responses of America’. In many ways Something American is an excellent example of a British postmodern performance. It rejects narrative in favour of a series of isolated fragments and vignettes; it blurs the boundary of the real and the fictional; it is a hybrid performance containing dance and video; and as a result it deals with issues of liveness and mediation and finally its actual subject matter is American postmodern culture. Pertinent to the concerns of this chapter, Something American requires the performers to be involved in physical task work, to perform as themselves to the audience, and in one case, which I will discuss more fully later, to negotiate a complex, structured sequence of mimicry.

Two pertinent examples of task work in Something American are the American dancing competition section and the scene of mimicking cowboys. In the first of these, two performers dance in their respective individual styles, rock and funk, to an appropriate soundtrack. Both styles of dancing are American, and the music is influenced by American culture. During this section the performers attempt to outdo

each other with their solo performances and the increasing extremity of their dancing, until at one point a performer's dancing is so extreme that he appears to lose control and falls over in a spasmodic manner. He then stands up and waves his hand in a gesture of submission, then walks off stage. What is interesting about this section is that the performers are skilful and engaged in the competition. There does not appear to be a focus on precise choreography but rather on the adherence to rules of the game, to outdo the other performer's dancing. Beyond this, there is no pretension or attempt at characterisation. Yet, despite this, both the performers' personae are apparent through the tasks engagement with what is in certain terms a foreign, cultural phenomenon.

In the second example of mimicking, the performers duplicate cowboys. The performers simply walk in exaggerated slow motion across the stage to the soundtrack of the song 'I was born under a wandering star' taken from Paint your Wagon the musical concerning the wild west. On the screen behind them is a montage of images from cowboy movies and still images of cowboys is projected. The performers themselves make no further attempt to reference to cowboys apart from the manner of their walking. In fact, their slow motion walking makes no explicit reference at all, though it could be argued that their movement is representative of the clichéd movement quality of cultural images of cowboys, but still cannot help but draw attention to its context, and the context causes these associations. Therefore, what their actions do is to produce a directing of attention from them to the visual and aural soundscape that surrounds them. This is a moment of mimicry rather than representation in that while we may read the performers' postures and walk as an attempt to represent cowboys, it is in actuality the direction of attention towards the background and surroundings to which they are connected, that layers onto their actions the cowboy reading. The distinction is that the performers' identities are not read as cowboys but as performer indicating cowboys. This may incidentally seem similar to the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, with a performer who stands aside from the role they are playing to allow critical distance. It could be argued that this is the notion which postmodern performance of this kind is interrogating. Although this action in postmodern work still allows a critical distance to be produced, its intention is fundamentally altered, as it produces a more direct investment by the performer in the task they are fulfilling as the maintenance of the presentation of themselves

remains vital to the process of indication. Without a present and invested performer, the action would revert to representational acting or Brechtian alienation. Auslander observes that:

Derrida, who denies the existence of such a foundation [logos], points out that every mental or phenomenal event is a product of difference, is defined by its relation to what it is not rather than by its essence. (Auslander, 1997:28)

I suggest that this can be seen as directly comparable with the notion of mimicry, in that the construction of an event in relation to what it is not - and the construction of identity by referring to that which it is not - are almost identical. Both Derrida and Bhabha identify this foregrounding of difference as a means of defending presence or encouraging indeterminacy. It should be noted that Bhabha's use of difference is concerned with the mimicry of colonial discourse and the deconstruction of closed systems of cultural representation, and the possibility of a subversive practice of representation based on opening up and shifting social and political meanings and Derrida's initial usage of difference was concerned with its relation to shifting and displaced meaning in language. As such Bhabha's notion of mimicry comes from a Derridean framework, and so both notions are inherently political and an anti-establishment in their use.

As a further example of this, in Something American there is a recurring character of a New York Cop who gives monologues in direct address to the audience. At the beginning of the show we see the performer change into the uniform of a New York Police Officer and when he comes on stage to talk for the first time the screen behind him displays the phrase 'He is a cop'. The performer then performs a brief monologue, an anecdote of one of his work related experiences. As the performance proceeds, the same performer in the same costume returns to the stage but each time he is accompanied by a different display on the screen, which are ordered as follows:

- 1: He is a Cop.
- 2: He is pretending to be a New York Cop.
- 3: He likes dressing up as a Cop.
- 4: He is a performer in a Cop's uniform.

With each section, his monologues increasingly problematise the performer's supposed relation to being a policeman. This is heightened as the display subverts our understanding of his identity, and the subject matter of the monologues veers away from direct reference of police activities towards references to American popular culture. This included his claims to have had sex with Meryl Streep, and his discussion of his favourite explosions, which I will discuss shortly. The performer's actions in this range of tasks are then prefigured with a notion of a separate identity that is involved to various degrees in the practice of being, representing and mimicking a New York cop. This use of the range of acting styles is not uncommon in postmodern performance, as Auslander points out in discussion of the Wooster group: 'Deconstructive theatre, therefore, might simultaneously use the vocabularies of conventional acting methods and styles and undermine them' (Auslander, 1997:38).

Later in Something American the New York Cop returns and further breaks down the, 'is he isn't he' binary relation between performer identity and character, by entering the stage and saying 'Hello my name is David, I was born in London and I have been to America twice, on holiday'. By this point the audience are quite uncertain as to the status of the performer. His statement can seemingly act in two ways to either reveal or confirm his actual identity or to function as another fiction leaving him as a complete simulacrum, an empty sign of character. However, it would be more accurate to say that the final assertion of his 'real' identity is itself uncertain and can neither confirm nor deny any element of what has come before. What the statement does is to complete the range of possibilities explored during the performance, from 'He is a cop' to 'My name is David' with all the possibilities in-between. One should also note the shift in emphasis that occurs moving from the third person to the first person from 'he' to 'my' and from the screen projecting texts signifying his identity to his self assertion, and shifting the signifying mode from the mediated to the live. Moreover, this shift draws attention to the live presence of the performer David, finally clarifying his performance as an act of mimicry, through revealing his 'real' self and thus distinguishing the range of other personas explored as distinct from his self. This range of possibilities is not, however, a hierarchy with extremes at either end of a scale. Instead, this range of possibilities is what Deleuze and Guattari would

call a field of connected intersections in the area of becoming a New York Cop, as I will argue in the next section when discussing the notion of becoming.

Through the act of mimicry, therefore, both the identity of the performer and the character of the policeman he portrays are subverted in terms of their presence. The boundary between the fictional and actual is blurred from one scene to another. Moreover, the context of the character/actor is problematised as in the ‘favourite explosions’ section. In this, the explosions refer to both real and fictional explosions, therefore doubling the confusion between the real and the fictional, drawing on films such as Back Draft and Alien and real events such as the Gulf War. To complete this ambiguity the performance takes place live before a very large projection screen. The actions that the performers take part in as ‘themselves’ are framed overtly as imitations of already existing mediated signs and their presence is placed in a continuum of slippage from the live into the mediated and vice versa.^x

In Third Angel’s performance of The Killing Show (1996) Rachel Walton demonstrates the collapse of distance between her own personae and her fictional characterisation, and while later performances may have a more complex approach to this same issue, I will identify those techniques in the next part of the chapter. For the moment, it is important to analyse the key issues at stake. Alex Kelly here describes the approach to character in The Killing Show and how it related to Rachel Walton as a performer.

Character is a tool to use. The Killing Show was the most obvious use of character, but it was something that Rachel picked up in certain sections and then sort of like she picked up the naturalistic Mary character, and then there was the Mary dead character, in that she responded in a particular way to her environment. (Kelly and Walton, 1999:Unnumbered page)

In the Killing Show Rachel Walton performs both as herself and as a character called Mary. Furthermore, the role of Mary is split into Mary before her murder and the dead Mary after her murder. All three roles are performed as if they are conscious of their part in the performance and involve direct address to the audience. The piece itself is an examination of the murder a fictional character, based on research into other real crimes, and so the murder of Mary is based on factual material. The

performance moves through various sections, each involving a different kind of performance from Rachel. First of all Rachel plays the dead Mary being questioned by a man offstage.^{xi} Then Rachel performs as the living Rachel before her murder. She is clearly addressing the audience and not providing an internal monologue. This is indicated by lines such as: ‘I had a speech prepared and everything’. This provides a multiple formation of character that cuts across time and the life/death divide and is aware of the audience. This does not constitute a postmodern approach to character, but establishes an extremely complex set of boundaries in the performance that are almost immediately transgressed. This level of self-conscious boundary breaking is, however, deconstructive of common theatrical boundaries and therefore prepares the audience for the even more complex exploration of identity boundaries that follows.

Rachel then performs as herself giving a slide show, discussing the bodies of murder victims. The manner of delivery is interesting because Rachel uses cue cards which she reads from and also speaks the grammar of the speech she is giving stating the punctuation from the cards. This suggests that Rachel is reading verbatim from what is in front of her and, by that approach; the text is framed as something that requires an accurate rendition. As Rachel is not performing a character, the audience are encouraged to read the text as authentic. However, this clearly may not be the case. To complicate the matter further in the slide show, the photos of the bodies of victims are of Rachel herself. This means Rachel needs to constantly redraw distinctions between herself and the characters in performance. When interviewed later about the Killing Show, she explained:

I think it is that constant putting challenges to the performers that interests me. I think that’s why we have big discussions with a lot of our friends over this idea of actors and performers. And we never call ourselves actors and they’re trying to pin down this idea of performing something. And I think it is that we never have the belief that we’re not something we can’t kind of give credence to. (Kelly and Walton, 1999:unnumbered page)

One of the most powerful moments in The Killing Show involves Rachel pouring out a glass of fake blood from a jug in front of the audience and then proceeding to pour it down her throat and choke on it, while at the same time attempting to recite text of the words spoken by the character Mary whilst being murdered, for example ‘I’m not that kind of girl’ and ‘Please let go of me, you’re hurting me’. During this scene, a

photograph of Rachel smiling while wearing the costume of Mary is projected onto the backdrop behind her. This moment in the performance is crucial as it collapses the distance between Rachel and the characters she is playing. Rachel is the performer who is fulfilling the task of pouring the fake blood. However, it presents the text of Mary dying, thus merging the two Marys into one at the temporal point of their separation and placing their/the text in the context of Rachel's actual choking body. Rachel's identity and her body in this moment are shown to be capable of separate action. Nevertheless, the action taken serves only to remove the distinctions between herself and her body. The central narrative point of meaning for the performance, the point at which Mary is killed, is therefore also the point at which Rachel's embodied identity is blurred with the performed body and collapsed identities of Mary. Therefore, all of the elements of identity are combined in this moment. As Alex Kelly observes:

It is the area in between, because when you watch the blood in The Killing Show... I always found that very moving on a fictional level because the character she hasn't done anything and she finds herself in this situation where she's being attacked. The minimal bits of dialogue that, 'she's not that kind of girl'... Her protest is so insubstantial and incorrect. Then there's also a real abstraction, in that when you're strangled your throat does bleed inside and you do sick up blood and then also you feel for Rachel, because she really is coughing up her guts, she's not faking that. You have real physical emotional reaction to watching this woman's experience, that and it ties in with the fictional world that you set up. And for the other elements, the blood thing, it looked brilliant, so it works on all those levels. (Kelly and Walton, 1999:Unnumbered page)

What The Killing Show achieves is an experience that is constructed from the fluid state and boundaries of identity rather than constructed upon stable notions of self and other which would not necessarily allow the degree of slippage needed to implicate the audience in an act of witnessing. There is even confusion about the relation between states of awareness, presentation, representation and self-referentiality as indicated by Third Angel. As such, Rachel's performance in The Killing Show is constructed as a Deleuzian assemblage, with various components of thought, action and image forming a recognisable, though multiple and shifting identity, and Rachel's experience of this borders on the notion of a Deleuzian becoming. It is these notions that I will discuss in the following section.

4.4: Assemblages and Becomings.

I do not consider myself a male performer. I consider myself The Creature from the Black Lagoon. (Goulish, 2000:77)

As I have argued the performance of an identity in British postmodern theatre is constructed through task-based work, repetition, the use of the self, appropriation of cultural signifiers, self-conscious and self-referential performance styles, and mimicry. As such, I have argued that this is a rejection of representational practices and a negotiation with the cultural notion of self as decentred, fragmentary, and subject to change. However, I believe that the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari, through their notions of becoming and assemblages, and the work of American practitioners Goat Island have, respectively, theoretically framed and provided the leading example of the current approach to the performance of identity in contemporary British postmodern theatre. Moreover, these connections further demonstrate the indirect linking of postmodern practice in America and Britain through contemporary theory. Yet, even though there are commonalities between these practices, which I will indicate shortly, the context and background of British postmodern theatre has led to distinct differences in practice when compared to its American counterpart. Therefore, by using both the theories of Deleuze and Guattari, the work of Matthew Goulish and the historical precedents of performance, this section will focus on moments in Third Angel's performances Experiment Zero (1998) and Forced Entertainment's Pleasure (1997) and Who Can Sing a Song to Unfrighten Me (1999). I will examine how the features of performance listed above exemplify a performance of identity that functions according to the parameters set out by Deleuze and Guattari when discussing the notion of a becoming.

Before defining Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a becoming, it is important to discuss their notion of an assemblage. In Thousand Plateaus (1987), when discussing the book's form and function as a rhizome, as I outlined in the chapter 1, the authors describe a book as follows:

In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification. Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena

of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of acceleration and rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds, constitutes an *assemblage*. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:3-4)

It is important to note here that they state in all seriousness that this description of the qualities of a book is applicable to anything, so that this description of a book is not only that, but also a description of Deleuze and Guattari's views on how Being is constituted. This outline for the nature of being covers both objects and subjects, and is challenging the notion of clearly defined, centred, fixed identities.

Deleuze and Guattari propose that identity and presence are assemblages, a heterogeneous collection of material including ideas, concepts, actions, and of lines of motion that intersect at varying speeds in a certain space. What constitutes a line of motion is quite complex as it can refer to a host of materials, objects, bodily parts or thoughts, desires and actions over time and space. For example a desire to move across a space becomes a line of desire that occurs over the time and space that it takes to complete this action whilst also intersecting with the assemblage of the body and the roles of body parts in this line, therefore walking is an assemblage in itself of a body, lines of desire, and a particular geographical or architectural space. Again, this action can take place without an original or centred identity; the walking is its own assemblage. Therefore, identity remains more than the sum of its parts and functions as the intersection of fragments within their context, constantly shifting and without a centre, but held together by the dependence of any one line on another. Where the notion of becoming fits into this scheme, is in the connections between assemblages. A becoming can first be described as a process that defines how an assemblage is formed. For example:

A man can never say: "I am a bull, a wolf..." But he can say: "I am to a Woman what the bull is to a cow, I am to another man what the wolf is to the sheep." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:237)

What Deleuze and Guattari are arguing is that identity is not based on an ontologically internalised process of 'I think therefore I am' but rather based on internal and external relations. Moreover, these sets of relations are not limited to direct connection of relation, but go beyond that to establish relations based on other external relations, for example by making connections through the nature of the

relation such as A is to B, as C is to D. As the above quote indicates, subjectivity is formed through blocks of relations. However Deleuze and Guattari go on to define becoming further: ‘a becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:237), this then shifts the emphasis away from a relation based on representation and towards one of mimicry, not one of imitation but one of reference. The becoming is an event limited in time and space and, while correspondences or resemblances can be inferred, they are not an integral part of the event. ‘Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce or lead back to, “appearing,” “being,” “equalling,” or “producing”’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:239). As such, becoming, while indicating the sets of relations between assemblages, does not indicate a process of development in the sense of an assemblage starting out in one state, entering into a becoming and developing into something different. Instead a becoming foregrounds difference, whilst establishing the connections between assemblages:

Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:238)

The becoming is therefore a model that rejects binary distinctions and conceives of identity not as a fixed state which can be placed in opposition to another, but as a continuum that moves in and out of proximity and relation with others. Becoming therefore precedes a representational framework as it is through the process of being that representation attempts to limit or duplicate. ‘One does not imitate; one constitutes a block of becoming. Imitation enters in only as an adjustment of the block, like a finishing touch, a wink, a signature’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:305). This is important in terms of the discussion of the performance of identity because, as the above quote indicates, imitation appears after a becoming has occurred. In this order then, mimicry can be seen as a performative component of a becoming, while becoming can be seen as the event by which a fragmentary and fluid model of identity is performed in postmodern theatre. When discussing becoming, Deleuze and Guattari provide an example that could easily read as an instruction on how to achieve a moment of becoming in performance. This is not a coincidence, as I would argue

that they recognise that identity is performative and relies on the reestablishment of and investment in connections to its context or surroundings:

An example: Do not imitate a dog, but make your organism enter into composition with *something else* in such a way that the particles emitted from the aggregate thus composed will be canine as a function of the relation of movement and rest, or of molecular proximity, into which they enter. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:274)

Effectively this indicates that a becoming is an event that depends upon an indirect approach to the block of relations being produced. A performer would not attempt to duplicate the subject of the becoming but rather work with a separate assemblage, be it another performer or an object, in order to create the becoming. Through this method, a becoming avoids representation and functions in a similar fashion to mimicry as I have already described. To continue Deleuze's example, a performer therefore does not attempt to bring in an external influence or element that relates to the becoming-dog, but rather finds in the block of relations produced, for example by working with a piece of costume, the already existing relations that connect performer to dog:

Becoming is neither the dynamic opposition of opposites nor the unfolding of an essence in a teleologically ordained process leading to a synthesizing identity. The Deleuzian becoming is an affirmation of the positivity of difference, meant as a multiple and constant process of transformation. Both teleological order and fixed identities are relinquished in favour of a flux of multiple becoming. (Braidotti, 1994:111)

As such time, space and material context are absolutely vital in the construction of a becoming as it is clearly possible for there to be a becoming of anything, a becoming woman, animal, object, movement or thought. The blocks of relations that form a becoming are not necessarily representational either; a block of relations could consist of cultural references, laterally produced connections, or moments of personal resonance. As a result, a becoming can function with a high degree of investment on behalf of the performer and contain many external cultural references. Moreover, there can be more than one becoming at any given time, a performer could conceivably be involved in a number of becomings, including the becoming of another performer becoming at the same time. Even Goffman, though flawed in his

reading of these acts, maintaining that these acts are representational, recognises the cultural specificity of such acts of becoming:

In readings of persons in the West Indies who become the 'horse' or the one possessed of a voodoo spirit, it is enlightening to learn that the person possessed will be able to provide a correct portrayal of the god that has entered him because of 'the knowledge and memories accumulated in a life spent visiting congregations of the cult'... It is important to see that this contextual structuring of the horses's role still allows participants in the cult to believe that possession is a real thing and that persons are possessed at random by gods whom they cannot select.' (Goffman, 1969:80-81)

For an example of this practice, we can turn to the American performance company Goat Island. They have been working since 1986, and their hybrid performance works crossing boundaries of performance art, dance and theatre. Company member Matthew Goulish's book 39 Microlectures: In Proximity of Performance (2000) states very clearly how, in his view, their performances work within the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari:

Performance, like dreaming, presents us with intersections. In a performance, a performer is not a single entity. Instead of a unit, a performer is an identity in motion in a particular direction. A performer is a BECOMING. (Goulish, 2000:79)

Goulish marks out two main points here: that performance is an intersection, and that the performer is a becoming. This notion of an intersection is drawn from the notion of an assemblage, Goulish indicates that the intersections performance presents us with are like those in dreaming, seemingly unconnected imagery out of which we piece together meaning. While this relates to the specific nature of the work of Goat Island, which we cannot go into here, we can see that their conception of performance is similar to the examples of British performance. In both there is a rejection of narrative in favour of a fragmentary experience, a rejection of a unified notion of character in favour of a performer as becoming and, most tellingly, their close relation to postmodern theory particularly that of Deleuze and Guattari.

With regards to Goulish's notion of performer functioning as a becoming, this could position the performer as an assemblage connecting to the rest of the performance. Yet, Goulish states that the performer *is* a becoming, the performer is not the

assemblage alone, which by no means could a performer cease to be, but also the block of relations between assemblages. In performance then, the identity of a performer, is the event of the performance, a spatially and temporally specific occurrence. Moreover, this performer as becoming only appears because of the blocks of relations produced with other assemblages, performers and identities in the space. Therefore, the performer is always in a process of creating and reinvesting in blocks of connections with other elements of the performance:

In fact my identities only came into existence in relation to their identities, or in relation to my sense of their identities, and only lasted as long as the performance provided a space/time proximity for us to share. (Goulish, 2000:77-78)

In other words Goulish has no stable identity, as such, only the provisional identities that are in the process of becoming throughout the duration of the piece. I wish to argue that this is how British postmodern theatre conceives of identity in performance. However, the practitioners under discussion are more closely concerned with narrative and character than Goat Island. While the British works that have been discussed have rejected character and narrative at certain points, these rejections have taken place within a framework of critique and so these forms are not disposed of completely. These works cannot completely dispose of character. For example, as I have already argued, Third Angel's Killing Show involves a complex negotiation of the boundary between performer's identity and character. In addition, when interviewed, Third Angel are quite clear that fictional characterisation is important in their work, but it is the notion of acting that is problematic.

I think we like characters but we don't believe in acting and that's the thing, that if you don't believe in acting, how do you make a character. (Kelly and Walton, 1999:Unnumbered page)

In Third Angel's Experiment Zero (1997) concerns a group of people who try to act out their lives as if they were movie stars, however this narrative is fragmented and the performance of character highly self-conscious. The performance opens with the performers curled up naked on sets of shelves in the space. They then move out from these spaces and dress into costumes for the beginning of the show. This opening sets out the identity of the performers as something that is equal to the other objects on the

shelves including suitcases, pill bottles, cigarette boxes, alcohol bottles and syringes. Whilst most of these objects are linked to narcotics, it should be noticed that they are all storage devices of one kind or another. The opening suggests two points. First, an assemblage has been formed of storage devices that the performers are part of, and that the performers are the active part. Second, the performers have already entered into their first becoming, that of a becoming-receptacle, to be specific a receptacle for identities or effects on identities to be contained within. This becoming-receptacle ties in directly to the narrative of the piece in which the performers attempt to become movies stars. As Alex Kelly and Rachel Walton observed:

Rachel: Experiment Zero was about movies. It was about being a movie star
 Alex: Trying to live a fictional existence. (Kelly and Walton, 1999:Unnumbered page)

The performers in a becoming-receptacle attempt to both put on and ingest signs of movies stars: they wear dark sunglasses; adopt movie star poses; smoke cigarettes; drink alcohol and take pills. However, none of these activities is genuinely representative. The performers do not take on specific attributes or try to duplicate movie stars, as the performers main concern is with becoming-receptacle through interacting with the assemblage of movie star. To indicate that the representation of character through acting is not possible, the suitcases in the performance space are mistreated. In one section of task based work, a performer runs across the space, carrying a suitcase, repeatedly until exhausted. Then the performer takes a screwdriver and stabs the suitcase full of holes. In this moment there is a double event as the receptacle and the performer becoming-receptacle are both damaged to a certain degree: the performer is exhausted and the suitcase full of holes. Therefore, what occurs is a further becoming, that of becoming-damaged/exhausted in conjunction with the becoming receptacle, and these two becomings reject the notion of containing character. This point is developed in another section of the performance where the same performer attempts to swallow handfuls of Smarties from the pill bottles. While he does this he is given a microphone, the sounds he makes are amplified, and his image is relayed by a camera onto a screen at the front of the space. Once he has swallowed handfuls of the Smarties he then proceeds to vomit them back onto the stage, the screen and the microphone framing the moment. Here again the performer enters into a becoming-receptacle and then a failed receptacle in the

attempt to assume a movie star character. The attempt at representing another or transcending the self, to assume another identity is always denied. Finally, the narrative of the performance resolves this idea by presenting the failure of the fictional characters' attempts to 'become' movie stars. This results in the murder of another person and so the possibility of transformation is closed by death.

There are other indications of how the becoming functions in Experiment Zero. In one section of the performance, a performer recites a list of destinations along a journey that takes place within the narrative of the piece. In discussion with the performer after the show it became apparent that she personally collected all the train and bus tickets of any journey she took and while the speech fitted into the narrative of the performance it contained specific personal resonance. Moreover, the speech, working both across fictional and real experiences, is describing the line and direction of movement in the journey rather the destination. The points used to mark the route of the journey are simply intersections used for navigation and to describe the line. Therefore, the performer was entering into a becoming-process, a deliberate rejection of a steady state of identity. The form of the list, through blurring the real and the fictional and through constant repetition, is overriding the focus on destination and slowly replacing the notion of a starting point and destination with a constantly unfolding process. So, just as in postmodern culture, identity is seen as a fluid and constantly changing entity, the becomings in Third Angel's Experiment Zero, perform this shifting state. The performers are becomings. They are blocks of constantly changing relations, intersections between assemblages.

We do characters and identities more than others that are operating in our framework. People like Forced Entertainment or Desperate Optimists or Blast Theory who are very much presenting performers, who then do their thing, but your always aware that it is performers. It is now almost like you've got these stock characters that are Forced Entertainment and its them operating within whatever world they're thrown into. I don't know whether they're aware of or not, but it seems like that from an outsiders point of view if you see a lot of their work. (Kelly and Walton, 1999:Unnumbered page)

Other practitioners such as Forced Entertainment and Blast Theory deal far less with character, although there are exceptions such as 10 Backwards (1999) and the early work of Forced Entertainment such as Marina and Lee (1991). Yet, overall, the work

of these practitioners is far more centred on the performer's persona rather than character. Each of these practitioners deals with fragments of identity, and establishes complex parameters in which these can interact. The performers effectively construct an assemblage built out of appropriations, given the territory of time and space of the performance, in which becomings can occur. 'The territory is made of decoded fragments of all kinds, which are borrowed from the milieus but then assume the value of properties... The territory makes the assemblage' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:504). Accordingly, a field of fragments creates the territory of the performance from which assemblages and becoming emerge. This is similar to notions outlined by Matt Adams of Blast Theory when discussing the performance of identity:

I think what's interesting is that internally we have these different maps about how we function, and what you do in life, and how you achieve things, and what it is to be ambitious. And that these are constant clashing paradigms for what that might be, and that you have Bill Gates and Steven Hawking, and Richard Branson, and they're all acting paradigmatically in terms of how you might create a successful career, or be ambitious, or embody a certain set of ideal that you might aspire to. But that each one of them we kind of disassemble moment by moment and reassemble in way that we want to and we reject them and there is a constant sense of contesting views. (Adams, 2001:Unnumbered page)

In Forced Entertainment's Pleasure, there is an air of exhaustion to everything that the performers say and do. It is not slow motion but in a state of exhaustion, as if the performers had just come on stage from an all night party, and this is emphasised by the constant drinking by the performers. During the show, bottles are drunk, spilt, and used to simulate bodily fluids. There is such an overflowing of drink that the body seems to have none of its own fluids. In the performance, one actor often wears the head of a pantomime horse. Bottles of alcohol are used at one point to simulate the horse urinating. At another point, bottles are pushed out and tipped up from the inside of the horse's head to simulate a torrent of tears. At no point do they attempt to convince us that this is an attempt to be a horse. This is a becoming-horse using the head and the bottles. The number of people in the costume changes from two to one, sometimes involving two performers in the same becoming or in different becomings in the same costume. Another performer, wearing clown make up, plays records incredibly slowly on a gramophone. The uses of becoming, in which exhaustion and failure to represent are inseparable, are of course comparable with the failures seen in

Third Angel's work, and, as Tim Etchells points out, they are concerned with the failure of representation:

I wanted to write you about the joke of representing, about the impossibility of being other, and about the furthest limits of this joke – the human that pretends to be a dead man, a crocodile or tree. (Etchells, 2000:57)

In Forced Entertainment's 24 hour, durational performance Who can Sing a Song to Unfrighten Me (1999) there are a host of becomings; becoming-animals, becoming-death, becoming-stories and, in a repeat from Showtime, becoming-trees. The performers on stage are almost always in a state of half-costume, wearing a skeleton costume but with the hood pulled back, climbing into and falling out of cardboard tree outfits, or being seen to change into all or a bit of an animal costume. Throughout the performance, as in Pleasure, there are performances at work: that of the assemblage of performers, and that of the becomings that they constitute forming connections.

Etchells explains:

In the half-light this scene is a double-scene. Actors on the way to transformation and at the same time a freak-show of distorted or incomplete beasts – foul rejects, comical experiments – men, women and animals mixed in the parlour-game consequences, the floor of God's workshop. (Etchells, 2000:57)

The numerous becomings in Who Can Sing are complex enough for them to intersect with each other. At one stage in the piece, performers line up dressed in skeleton outfits and repeatedly tell us how they would like to die. Of course, none of them enacts a death; rather they establish scenarios or narratives that connect them to death. Later in the performance, the performers, changing in and out of varying animal costumes, play a game wherein a performer stands on a platform in the centre of the space and adopts a pose. Another performer who is observing then writes 'alive' on the nearby blackboard. Then the performer in costume enacts a death. The other performers and the audience applaud and the word 'alive' is erased and replaced with 'dead'. The dead performer gets up, takes a bow to more applause, and gets out of their costume. This scenario is repeatedly many times by most of the performers throughout the show:

One by one the animals and other storybook figures (kings, angels, ballerinas, princesses) are paraded to the stage and put through their ontological paces, slaughtered and then revived in this way – as if the stage were a machine, at once a storybook Belsen and a storybook Paradise, where the mass deaths are endless but never permanent. (Etchells, 2000:58)

In this case, there is both a becoming-animal and a becoming-death in the same event, but in neither case is any progress made towards a transformation. Costumes are put on badly and eventually removed. Poses struck do not always correspond to the costume, and the deaths are either overacted or underdone, but, as Etchells says, ‘endless but never permanent’ (Etchells, 2000:58).

It would seem that postmodern theatre effectively either will not or cannot escape notions of character and identity. What it has succeeded in doing is to reform the methods and performative techniques that are used to construct a performance of identity, and to alter the parameters within which they function in any given performance. Using appropriation of cultural and personal material, the performer can become invested in the construction of an identity that is placed in a context. Moreover, task based work involving repetition sets in place physical presence and an orientation towards process and fluidity. Finally, the performer, in many of these examples, functions as an assemblage in a process of becoming, linking the performer and their identity inextricably to the specific time and space of the event of performance. The process of performance in these cases moves away from representation to a process of mimicry in which the presence of the performer is not erased but rather stands as a point of reference, as the block of connections in a becoming. Elizabeth Fuchs says in *The Death of Character* (1996) that what is occurring in postmodern performance is the death of our conventional way of perceiving and presenting character: ‘Perhaps we are coming to perceive ourselves as the fragmented, ephemeral constellations of thought, vision, and action’ (Fuchs, 1996:176). Accordingly, what is being developed as an alternative to representational practices and the construction of fixed identities is a model of performing the self that requires a vital investment by the performer, a complex and political connection to context, and an affirmation of the ephemeral moment of performance.

I have argued that British postmodern theatre's strategies for the performance of identity are composed from a complex mix of culturally specific references, theatrical deconstructions and theoretical concerns regarding the way in which we describe our experience of being. The strategies for the performance of identity by the practitioners above, occupies the same conceptual framework and agenda as other aspects of their work. The challenge to theatrical conventions, hybridity and interdisciplinarity, the rejection of narrative and the blurring between the real and the fictional can all be seen at work within the postmodern approach to the performance of identity.

The challenge to theatrical conventions and the rejection of narrative work in parallel with the initial postmodern rejection of character, as one cannot deconstruct one feature of performance without altering another. The use of task-based work in the performance of identity displays an interdisciplinary approach, resulting in a hybrid work, as does the blurring of the boundary between the real and the fictional. All of which serves to produce the view demonstrated through the practice of the discussed practitioners that identity functions across these boundaries. In the following chapter on time, space and liveness I will argue that liveness as described by Phelan and Auslander depends upon a notion of eventhood that is produced by temporally and spatially specific performance. Within this, the notion of the performance of identity as a becoming, as a spatially and temporally specific event, is crucial to the integration of the self into the performance and the creation of a coherent postmodern performative event.

ⁱ Butler's arguments on identity, while relevant with this example, have not been used in this chapter because of their focus on the performance of Gender and Psychoanalytic theory, which fall outside the parameters of the thesis.

ⁱⁱ See Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked* (1993).

ⁱⁱⁱ Bhabha's notion of mimicry is raised and discussed in relation to colonialism, although this field has no direct significance, its relation to issues of self and otherness are comparable in certain terms to the issues of self and re/presentation of self that I wish to discuss.

^{iv} See chapter 3.

^v See chapter 1.

^{vi} Yarker has indicated in relation to *Good and True* that 'Much of the text is the result of improvisations by the cast which have been transcribed then edited, rewritten, rehearsed, edited and rewritten again. Other passages have been written from scratch by me according to speech patterns and themes brought into currency through improvisation. There remain a few passages which are

improvised afresh with each performance. In such circumstances authorship is clearly shared' (Yarker, 2000.c:Unnumbered page). This leaves the ownership, meaning and status of character in the piece open and undecidable.

^{vii} 'I've been to screenings of With The Light On where people have thought they're brilliant performers, sometimes they think they really are sisters, sometimes people think its a real documentary. I was at a screening in Leeds where someone said, "I know its short film before hand, but it is so real"... And Claire especially plays to the camera, but is it Claire playing the camera or is it Gail. After The Killing Show people came up to me and told me what a great actress Rachel is, she's such a good "Actress", but then Tim Etchells had a problem with The Killing Show, what he didn't like about it was the naturalistic portrayal of Mary, whereas we thought it was so over the top... We thought it was very obvious that we weren't trying to present a really realistic character, but mainly just in contrast because we have the short section the interview section before hand which is so flat and monotone, it did surprise me that people thought that was great acting' (Kelly and Walton, 1999:Unnumbered page).

^{viii} See the discussion of Dedicated in chapter 3 when discussing the blurring of the real and the fictional.

^{ix} It would be convenient to couch this discussion in terms of the psychoanalytic notion of the other, this would be misleading as it is psychological frames that this technique in fact attempts to evade.

^x This connects with Blast Theory's later production of Kidnap and Third Angel's production Saved both of which construct a performance whose live elements slip into mediatization and the presence of identity is subverted by this action. Saved framing it as disappearance, Kidnap as multiplication.

^{xi} According to video documentation which has been edited post performance.

Chapter 5: Time, Space and Liveness.

5.1: Theories of Time, Space, and Liveness.

There are three elements of theatre that, despite the postmodern assertions of no universal concepts and no metanarratives, remain unshakable. These are time, space, and liveness. Yet, this is in part a deception as the term liveness has only recently entered the common vocabulary of academic and artistic practice. The focus of practice on temporal and spatial issues, although present throughout theatrical history, is largely framed by the current cultural condition. This condition is the sudden change in the perception of space-time in the nineteenth and twentieth century due to both scientific theoretical advances; Einstein's theory of relativity, and technological advancements such as photography, cinema, mass global communications and increasingly fast and efficient means of transport. This chapter discusses the ways in which cultural instability in relation to time, space, and liveness has contributed to a situation in which contemporary practitioners have employed durational and site-specific performances (which frequently engage with the issue of liveness) to produce a new set of underlying principles for theatre and live performance in general, from a postmodern perspective. Again, this may seem a contradiction in terms of a standard definition of postmodern theatre. Yet I shall argue that this is simply part of a latter stage of postmodern theatre: having deconstructed principles, it then seeks to rethink them albeit from a radically altered premise.

The postmodern, cultural experience of space and time is, as I have said, one of instability. This instability is due to the difference between the individual's experience of time and space, and the social, historical and economic factors that attempt to force other modes of perceiving and operating within time and space. Therefore, to proceed we must clarify these terms. To begin with space, or more particularly space, place, and non-place, are terms that cover most individuals experiences of locations. The distinction of these terms comes primarily from two theorists Auge and De Certeau. According to these writers, a location can initially be broken down into two parts: that of space and place. Space is generally taken to mean the physical actuality while place refers to the methods and ideas by which

individuals understand and employ that space. Crucially, De Certeau defined place as an ordering system, for example language (place) and the speaking of language (space). Subsequently however, as Nick Kaye observes:

Space, as a *practiced place*, admits of unpredictability. Rather than mirror the orderliness of place, space might be subject not only to transformation, but ambiguity. If space is like the word when it is spoken, then a single 'place' will be realised in successive, multiple and even irreconcilable spaces. It follows that, paradoxically, 'space' cannot manifest the order and stability of its place. (Kaye, 2000:5)

As a whole, these theories offer the notion that space and place are not the same thing nor are they singular or even binary oppositions. Any location or the experience of location is subjective, based within time, and is as rife with complexity and ambiguity as language. Of particular interest is Auge's concept of non-place which Kaye defines by saying that 'Non-place' is produced by a *passing over* of place' (Kaye, 2000:9). Non-place, if seen through a decentred notion of space, is the notion of place as experience while in transit.

Non-place has become a vital theoretical concept for the contemporary experience of space and for contemporary performance because of its compatibility with Baudrillard's notion of the precession simulacrum, as introduced in chapter 1. Baudrillard's metaphor for the disappearance of reality, and its succession by the Simulacrum is that of a map. This is not simply a rhetorical device. Hyperreality, a symptom of the simulacrum, is manifested in place, particularly, as Baudrillard's examples demonstrate, in the use of shopping malls and Disneyland. The notion of non-place is as much a symptomatic reaction as well as a strategic activity forming resistance against hyperreal locations. Following Baudrillard, the exploitation of non-place in performance can be seen as a form of resistance against high capitalist coercion to perceived space as a commodity rather than act and place, and as a screen for the precession of simulacra rather than as an ordering system. Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that simulation is not simply restricted to the control of space and place but also to the governing of time:

In this respect it [simultaneity] is an illusion, just as it is clear that within the world of physics there can be no simultaneity. In contrast to the bold promise

of one commentator at the turn of the century, space and time have not been annihilated. (Nowotny, 1994:33)

Time is not what it was; it has changed and fragmented more in the twentieth century than any other. This has not been an actual change in Time itself but in our perception of and relation to it. Essentially our understanding of time has taken a quantum leap, and because of which its position in western society has radically altered. French theorist Paul Virilio has argued that we now exist in a culture governed by speed, the time which time takes to happen. This is because of the collapse of time and space referred to by numerous other writers.¹ However, as Helga Nowotny (whose work I shall refer to throughout this chapter) indicates, there is no death of time or of space if one understands that simultaneity is an illusion. Nothing happens in the same place. Nothing happens in or at the same time. As I shall later discuss, Kaye argues that a site-specific artwork can attempt to achieve a proper relationship with its site. A notion of a proper relationship to space, mirrors the notion of proper time as formed in the scientific and theoretical understanding of time, and a discussion of either time or space without consideration of the other is incomplete. As I shall now indicate, the laws of time and space have very similar parameters to each other. The notion of proper time is fundamental in considering the relation of the individual to time in contemporary culture. Proper time is time as experienced by an individual from their relative position in space. Proper time is also in itself a refutation of simultaneity. Since once proper time is established as the fundamental experience of time for any individual, then nothing can happen at the same time as all individuals experience a unique and relative proper time:

If two observers are equipped with clocks and move at a constant speed relatively to one another, the clock of one or other will be slow in comparison... Each observer has his or her 'proper' time, which is measured by an accurate clock which is always borne with him or her. (Nowotny, 1994:36)

The relevance of proper time to the experience of the postmodern condition relies upon the difference between the fragmentation of time throughout society: every individual runs according to their proper time and the demand on western society, determined by high capitalism, to run according to one global 24 hour clock. It is this tension between capitalist global 24-hour culture and the individual experience of time that characterises the postmodern understanding of time.

Further to this, Nowotny argues that the postmodern experience of time is exemplified by the cultural condition of an extended present, a concept that is very similar to Jameson's notion of the constant present in relation to the death of history (Jameson, 1991). Whereas Jameson places culture in a constant present because of the crisis of history, Nowotny places culture in an extended present due to the colonisation of the future. As Nowotny argues: 'The extended present has chosen the future and not vice versa' (Nowotny, 1994:52). This inversion of the future through commodification within the present has much in common with Paul Virilio's exploration of time and speed.

Clearly, time and space are inseparable. Our experience of the one is bound in the other. When we talk of a proper relation to space, we are also discussing a proper relation to time. When we talk of site-specific works, we are implicitly discussing temporally specific works, regardless of whether or not the artists saw this as a determining factor. Moreover, the various crises that postmodernism has given rise to in terms of either time or space are essentially the same crisis. This is the case, as Bogard has indicated, in Baudrillard's concept of the simulation of the real: 'Simulation, we could say, is the disenchanted ecstasy of time. It kills time... it makes time split off from itself' (Bogard, 1994:319). Likewise space has been killed and has split off from itself, as can be seen in Baudrillard's discussions of locations such as Disneyland and shopping malls. This crisis of space and time is inextricably linked with the crisis of reality. As Baudrillard indicates, it is the ecstasy of the real, the same as the ecstasy of time and space, which results in simulation. Furthermore, simulation results in the crisis of time and space: 'Ecstasy is that quality specific to each body that spirals in on itself until it has lost all meaning, and thus radiates as pure and empty form... Simulation is the ecstasy of the real' (Baudrillard, 1983:187). If, according to Lefebvre the experience of space and place is a linguistically framed one, then I propose that the use of time and space in performance are undergoing the same crisis, and this crisis is founded upon the linguistic framing of these terms.

Thus far, I have avoided defining liveness for the specific reason that, as I have already pointed out it is a term that has only come into common usage in recent years. I wish to expand the notion of the event as described by Kaye, by adding that they are

usually spatially and temporally specific and crucially (either in their performance or framing), live. If this is the case then there is a common recurring feature to events that can be identified, that of disappearance. As Derrida observes:

Time, in any case, gives nothing to see. It is at the very least the element of invisibility itself. It withdraws whatever could give itself to be seen. It itself withdraws itself from visibility. One can only be blind to time, to the essential disappearance of time even as, nevertheless, in a certain manner nothing appears that does not require and take time. (Derrida, 1992:6)

Time and space evade representation, just as Liveness, as I shall later indicate, cannot exist within reproduction. As such, liveness corresponds with Baudrillard's discussion of time, space and reality as far as it is reproduction that leads to their simulation. The dependence upon and exploration of time and space within contemporary performance constitutes an extension of the notion of liveness. Through the creation of temporally and spatially specific events, the role of the audience shifts from spectator to witness. Therefore, my argument within this chapter is that, as a response to the postmodern crisis, contemporary British theatre has engaged with time and space in order to state new certainties for performance.

5.2: Space.

What constitutes site-specific work in Britain? What is the fascination with locations particularly cities? What are the issues at stake? How is this a new certainty how does this combine with time and liveness? Installations and events that work against the conventional use of a theatre location, although not site-specific, engage in the disruption of the hierarchically established performance space, in order to access particular qualities with a work rather than as a wilful act of experimentation or of disobedience in the face of tradition. There are a large number of performances, undertaken by all of the practitioners whose work is discussed in this thesis, that either engage with the experience of space, or are actually site-specific works. Although this could be said to refer to any particular tradition of work, there is continuity across the focus of attention and strategies employed within the work. This section of the chapter will discuss Where from Here (2000) a theatre based production by Third Angel that engages with the experience of space, Dreams Winter (1994) a

site specific work set in a Library by Forced Entertainment, and another of their productions Nights in this City (1995), as an example of work that is a distortion of the site-specific form. What also makes the work comparable is an urban or city based focus, which will become apparent in their analysis. This can be seen as a symptom and causal factor of the move towards a radical, decentring process, and a move towards nomadcity as defined by Deleuze and Guattari, as a state of being constantly in-between locations:

The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points... But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence. To Begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:380)

However, increasingly, space has become a vital commodity because technology renders more and more activities mobile, through increased ease of communications and work, through the increasing availability of mobile phones and laptops. In this context, the notions of space and a practiced place offered by Auge become shallow definitions, as multiple activities can operate in the same space challenging spatial ordering systems. This leads to what Baudrillard calls anti-theatre.

The anti-theatre is the ecstatic form of theatre: no more stage no more content; theatre in the streets, without actors, theatre for everyone by everyone, which, to a certain extent, would merge with the exact unfolding of our lives, lives without illusion. (Baudrillard, 1983:187)

Tim Etchells talks of valuable spaces and Lynne MacRitchie talks of live-art surviving in the ruins of the eighties and nineties 'boom and bust culture'.ⁱⁱ While initially that may have been the case, the ground has subsequently shifted and these valuable spaces are not valued for their economy and freedom but for the possibilities they offer for their rediscovery. One might even stretch Mike Pearson's discussion of archaeology to articulate the un/recovered sense of resonance concerning our experience of space (particularly the urban) and its use (McLucas and Pearson, 1996). As I have suggested, with reference to Fuchs, postmodernism functions through symbiosis. Equally, the postmodern use of spaces such as factories, shop fronts, terminals, bus stations and train stations by artists, as a location for performance is equally symbiotic. However, it proceeds with a view to maintaining the life of the

site itself, as Nick Kaye proposes:

A 'site-specific work' might articulate and define itself through properties qualities or meanings produced in specific relationships between an 'object' or 'event' and a position it occupies. After the 'substantive' notion of site, such site specific work might even assert a 'proper' relationship with its location, claiming an 'original and fixed position' associated with what it *is*. (Kaye, 2000:1)

The proper relationship is the symbiotic one: a decentred hierarchy where the boundaries between artwork and site are indistinguishable. However, when separated the artwork cannot function, but the place is revitalised having added to its ordering system, not only its original definition but also that of performance venue. Forced Entertainment's site specific performance Dreams Winter (1994) demonstrates this example.ⁱⁱⁱ Created specifically for the Manchester Library, the performance could not exist in any other venue because of the building's unique design, which includes a whisper gallery. Moreover, as Etchells indicated, the performance establishes a proper relationship with the space as evidenced by the comments of one of the librarians. 'What did the director of the library say after the first performance of that piece? That the building wouldn't ever be the same again' (Etchells, 2000:15).^{iv} Moreover, this performance challenges the function of the place through its performance material. Again, we can make a literary connection from a Jorge Louis Borges' essay 'The Analytical Language of John Wilkins' (1975) as referred to by Connor in Postmodern Performance. Borges' essay describes an ordering system for animals under random, contradictory headings. Likewise, in Dreams Winter the alphabetical list of categories for books includes Irwin, Jealousy, Jobs, Johnson, Joltowski, Journals, Jupiter, and Kalashnikov. This is not only a foregrounding of minority voices of knowledge, there are no metanarratives, at most there are broad inclusive categories, but no hierarchy other than alphabetisation. Dreams Winter challenges the traditional library with a library of specific and personal narratives. This is an extension of the linguistic aspect of space. In addition to uniquely site-specific works, there are performances such as Quizoola that tour non-theatre spaces and generate a degree of site-specificity through the fluid nature of the event. Rather than a performance tailored to the physical aspects of a unique space, it becomes a performance specific to that space and time. Whether this is a diluted form of site-specificity, little different from any touring show that accommodates itself to its

current venue, is a complex question as the parameters of the event remain solid but the possibilities for variation can be almost infinite within that. However, the question of what constitutes a different or individual performance is not relevant to the present discussion. A show like Quizoola itself tours and illuminates spaces. Its effect is not to become a new performance each time but to allow the space itself to perform.

What these shows indicate is the collapse of the boundaries surrounding the hierarchy of space. Before the emergence of postmodernism, performance spaces generally conformed to one of two models: that the space should be an empty one in which the performance created its own world, or in a specifically created performance venue. Each of these spaces established the parameters that the space itself was irrelevant to the performance's meaning, although perhaps relevant for the framing of the event.^v It is interesting to note to note that Primitive Science created the performance Icarus Falling specifically for the Oxo Tower venue in London. Its use of space was radically different to Quizoola, which performed in the same space. The difference was so marked as to imply a completely different space to any audience member who had witnessed both performances. Each used a separate entrance and exit and the second performance took place where its counterpart's audience had been positioned for the first show. Through this simple repositioning, the experience of the space was radically altered. Therefore, these two performances reject the principle of the performance space or theatrical venue as a place with a defined ordering system. To adopt a previously non-theatrical space for performance is to place the ordering system into flux. To produce a show that tours both performance and non-performance venues is to radically challenge the hierarchy as a whole. Quizoola operates as a performance that attempts to contradict the place's ordering system. Furthermore, this reversal can be considered in temporal terms (I shall return to this in the section on durational performances while discussing Who Can Sing a Song to Unfrighten Me).

These performances place the audience in a unique position of complicity, because of the site's demands on the audience in terms of time, liveness and the event.^{vi} In Forced Entertainment's Nights in this City (1995) the company make a use of city space that is contrary to its normal conventions which themselves depend upon the

involvement of the audience in the event. In the performance, the audience board a bus and are taken on a nighttime tour of the city of Sheffield, during which the tour-guide, a performer from the company, gives a running description of the city outside the bus. However, the description given by the guide departs further and further from the truth, the bus driver apparently gets lost, and the guide becomes confused. The bus is taken away from the centre of the city and the tour guide deserts the bus. Finally, after the journey, the audience were returned to an old tram depot with an A-Z list of every street name in Sheffield written in chalk on the concrete floor with the phrase 'Floating & Falling' hanging in a neon strip light above the audience. The audience are then given the opportunity to place themselves within the event by finding their street name. In discussing Dreams Winter, Etchells describes the piece as 'Not so much what you should do in a space as what you'd like to do in it – a kind of intervention 'against' its everyday – and, in some ways, as we saw it, a voodoo transformation' (Etchells, 2000:15).^{vii} In the same way, this is what Nights in this City attempted to do. Through the spatial and temporal specificity of the event (as each performance consists as much of what happens outside of the bus) the performance attempts to make the structured and ordered space of the city, reductive in terms of meaning and function, into a decentralised and open space, in terms of meaning and function. Therefore the sensation of nomadism given to the audience, both in terms of their geographical wandering through the city and the subjective experience in relation to the text delivered by the tour-guide, because it opens up the potential meaning of the events and city outside of the bus, quite literally shifts the experience of the city towards a rhizomatic one. Nick Kaye, in his analysis of Nights in this City argues that this process is akin to a palimpsest, a writing over of the city, and for the audience member is more of an erasing process by highlighting the city grid, its roads. Then, in writing over the audiences received notions of what the city is and how it functions, they draw attention to the linguistic framing of the event and the creation of space, but the language is flawed, the guide is a failure and more is unwritten than written over (Kaye, 2000:11). Nights in this City then, is a laying bare of place and space within a live event. It creates a rhizome that allows the audience to invest in the city personally, to accept certain norms and reject others, to write over their own meaning and experience or accept that provided by the performance. Effectively this is the postmodern reinvention of space as fluid and unframed. There are still parameters but the performance demonstrates that it is possible to resist or in

some cases alter them, all of which depends upon a temporal and spatial specificity. “‘We’re off the route...’”. Isn’t that the definition of liveness? When the thing which began as nothing more than a theatrical act has turned into an event?’ (Etchells, 1999:81) The tour of Nights in this City exceeds its own limits, spreading virally into the audiences’ relative perceptions of time and space and into the spaces with which they are familiar. The phrase floating and falling in the station at the end of the performance asserts the fluidity of place and space, and the movement through it, and the response of the individual to it.

These particularly site-specific performances are only part of postmodern theatre’s response to the crisis of space. This section will now move onto discuss works that deal with space as a crucial concern in the performance whilst refraining from site specificity. Moreover, this will expand on the relevance of city or urban spaces and the inseparable nature of time and space in these performances. Hang Up (2000) by Third Angel demonstrates a further aspect to the perception of urban space. The performance consists of the presentation of four telephone boxes in which events and micro-narratives of failure take place, highlighting the fragmentary and non-functional perception of space. Although, within the performance, telephone calls are frequently made, they are mostly failed attempts at communication. There is no unity to the stage space itself, which not only refuses a single location, but also refuses any distinct, separate assignation of location; all that is provided in terms of spatial/temporal context is the information: ‘One single night, across a number of cities’. As in Nights in this City, the use of the city at night is a significant element of the performance. Doubling the space are screens that duplicate the action seen or otherwise from voyeuristic camera angles reminiscent of security close circuit television, which I would argue is similar to a postmodern double coding of space as outlined by Jencks.^{viii} As can be seen in Where From Here and Senseless:

Real space and virtual space are defined only in each other. Here, real space must be approached in its absence, at the limit or disruption of the work’s virtual spaces, for to ‘conceptualise’ real space is precisely to write over it. (Kaye, 2000:32)

Where From Here is a breakthrough piece for Third Angel. Here the issues of all their previous performances are refined and reassessed. The issues of memory, fiction,

reality, murder, death, nostalgia and the desire to escape from mundane existence that have infiltrated all their previous works have been neatly distilled into this one performance. Cinematic and cultural references are deftly integrated into the performance, whereas in previous performances their presence had been highlighted and their disruptive nature exploited. Additionally, language figures far more strongly in this performance, it is from language as much as the framing of the work from which the characters desire escape; In Where From Here they confront both. Within a performance that discusses the lies told within intimate relations, personal material reads inseparably from lies. The audience's intimate relation with the performers is exposed and compared to their relation to each other and the real and fictional material in the performance.

Where From Here exhibits a frustrated desire for escape from the constrictions of the past, countered against the failure of nostalgia to resurrect a perfect past into the present. Through memory, the past proposes an irretrievable model of happiness for the performers, but it cannot help them escape; it cannot create a spontaneous present. Accordingly within the show the performers are doomed to re-enact sequences from their past with the hope of new occurrences. However, the repetition of the past only prompts their realisation of the flawed reality of their memories and the futility of their actions. A further element of focus in the performance is the distrust of sight and vision. During Where From Here the performers willingly close their eyes to mark out the spaces of the past, overlapping the past over the present space. This action exhibits a desire to believe the body and memory rather than sight, even though the diagrams produced are inaccurate, or in other words, their bodies and memories lie to them. Yet, the characters hope that an escape from vision might provide an escape from history, from time, from language, toward a truth that eludes them due to their irresistible compulsion to lie.

The performance, if it can be identified as such, Black Maze (2000) by Stan's Cafe further complicates the relation to space and the distinction between site-specific, installation and theatre works. Existing as an extension of one section of the fairground mad house where the audience make their way through a darkened passage with uneven flooring, Black Maze puts into question several definitions of the performance event and the relationship of the audience to the event. Can Black Maze

be called a theatre show, or should it be defined as an installation, or a site-specific performance that creates its own place, its own ordering system, and space through audience participation? As with most performances by these companies the answer may merely be a matter of terminology, since the performance can be pigeonholed however one desires. Yet, I would argue against a definition of Black Maze as theatre, because it lacks any audience/performer distinction in terms of role or spatial distinction. Moreover, the piece lacks any relation to its immediate spatial context and cannot strictly be identified as a site-specific work. Therefore, strictly speaking, Black Maze is an installation. However, like Third Angel's Saved, it contains various elements that complicate this definition. In discussion of site specific art works, Kaye refers to artist and key member of the Judson group Robert Morris' identification of a feature of site-specificity as 'The intimate inseparability of the experience of physical space and that of an ongoing immediate present' exposing and articulating the viewers performance' (Morris cited in Kaye, 2000:30). This clearly is a factor in the viewer's experience of Black Maze. The definition of Stan's Cafe as a theatre company is split when they produce a piece such as Black Maze, following on from the multi-media performance of Its your Film and the theatre work Carrier Frequency. What Stan's Cafe demonstrate is that it is acceptable for a theatre company to move into installations, site specific works and historical revivals without altering their definition as a theatre company. This is not only a shift in the parameters of grants from funding organisations. It is, as discussed in chapter 2, a re-evaluation of the work produced by theatre companies. Instead of simply producing touring theatre shows, contemporary companies are expected to produce installations, site-specific, durational work. As Desperate Optimists' Christine Molloy identified, her company are artists who happened to produce theatre work, but the reverse is also true: They can also be seen as theatre practitioners who happen to produce what can broadly be called live art. Moreover, this kind of work is often based on the shared concern of space and time. Desperate Optimists' piece in Performance Research, 'Photogrammetry' (As mentioned in chapter 2) focuses on the distortion of space. As Robin Arthur of Forced Entertainment suggested, the area of live art is increasingly being colonised by theatre practitioners and it is around the themes of time and space that this work is largely being pursued. Therefore, an area that was created by art school practitioners such as Stationhouse Opera, Theatre of Mistakes and Brith Gof is now 'Sailing into the theatrical world from art school, without baggage, without self-

consciousness' (Maynard cited in MacRitchie, 1998:22). It has now been colonised by the companies under discussion. From this I would suggest that the contemporary perception and use of space (particularly urban or city space) is a fundamental aspect of contemporary British experimental theatre.

We can therefore see that the city represents the locus of action that marks out the subject matter for contemporary British experimental theatre, through its dominant spatial experience and its collection of other relevant postmodern cultural issues such as temporal distortion, consumer culture, crisis of history and of the real. Site is largely treated as fluid and the variety of uses of space is broad enough to include the complicity with, or archaeology of a space's ordering system or the specific resistance of those ordering codes. This further indicates that British experimental theatre deals with place and space as constructs of a system within a linguistic order. Moreover, through these points we can see how these uses of space are a symptomatic of the interdisciplinary or hybrid activity of contemporary British experimental theatre, who are adopting areas and modes of practice first established by performance artists. These points combine to demonstrate that these critical/practical engagements with space amount to a new set of concerns in the critical/practical vocabulary of contemporary British experimental theatre.

The framing of these performances as either dealing with space or our subjective experience of it, ties each of these performances likewise to time, or our subjective experience of time. As both time and space are crucial to these performances, the aspect that each of these performances relies is the notion of the event and crucially the liveness of the event.

5.3: Time.

The use of time as a governing principal of, or as subject matter for performance constantly places time in deferral. This occurs in a variety of ways. Time is deferred through its relation to another aspect of the performance: Time and the body, time and space, time and liveness, time and theatrical convention. These are examples with which this thesis engages. Moreover, as was indicated earlier in this chapter, time is

fundamentally experienced through its disappearance; time withdraws itself and is at the same time constantly present.^{ix} In this manner time is a constant and under acknowledged element of performance. Essentially this is due to time's own reticence in coming forward rather than as a consequence of academic neglect. As one might realise, time has always been a fundamental element of performance. Consistency of time is a feature of Aristotle's unities. Yet, it may seem strange that it is only at the end of the twentieth century that it is considered. This is largely for two reasons: The radical shift in performance conventions with the emergence of postmodernism; and global/personal shifts in the understanding and manipulation of time which I discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

Before moving on to discuss durational performances, it is first important to discuss the general cultural and theatrical relation to time in contemporary performance as exemplified in Blast Theory's Ten Backwards (1999). In respect of the cultural experience of time, it can be argued that time is a construct of human culture that has hitherto gone unremarked as a result of the assumption that it was a universal constant. As I indicated earlier, the developments of science in the 20th century placed time in a wholly different sphere, that of cultural construct, and due to technological advancements, as Paul Virilio argues in Pure War (1997.b), time is under threat from speed. If we continue on the basis that time and space are integrally linked, we should also be aware of the possibility that time can become a commodified and hyperrealised aspect of western culture, in much the same that Baudrillard argues, space has become.

So how does a performance such as Blast Theory's Ten Backwards represent this temporal cultural crisis? Fundamentally, Ten Backwards proposes a world where time is multiple and fractured, and demonstrates an integral link to space which can be disrupted. We see, in the performance, the central performer engaged in eating a bowl of cereal. She is recorded on video and then has to attempt to eat a second bowl at the same speed as her recorded self on a screen in front of her. However, this task is complicated by the fact that she herself is altering the speed of her screened image and therefore her own actions using a video remote control. First, this demonstrates the doubling of time and space, suggesting the existence of the same time and space in relatively the same position. Second, it demonstrates that, through this representation

(the technology is incidental) that time can be perceived as a subjective and easily distorted experience. The action of doubly controlling the speed whilst being led by the video counterpart demonstrates something further. The representation/technology is not precise, especially while controlled single handed by a performer engaged in another task. Each action impacts upon another in a spiral of deferral. To concentrate on the time-based action of eating means that the control of the counterpart will become more difficult, causing radical shifts in speed and a difficulty in following the action of eating. This likewise is equally true of concentrating on the control of the speed of the other. This demonstrates the relative, proper time of each framed image. Even though there is only one originator, we see what was one time frame fractured and doubled into two interdependent frames. The attempt to deny or concentrate on the other disrupts the individual's ability to function. This is a clear metaphor for the contemporary temporal crisis, as the increasing relativising of time expands. At the same time, it demonstrates the still vital, causal relationship between different times/spaces. These issues arise out of the live performance because of the instability of certainty in the present moment. Just as in language, according to Derrida, each enunciated or written word never reaches its precise intended meaning whilst always producing more meanings than intended, in the present moment of a performance the proper space and time is never shared by the audience whilst numerous other time/spaces are created. As Adrian Heathfield observes:

Performance institutes a crisis in our ways of rationalising time: it leads us back to our elemental physical relation to time, where time is not simply experienced as linear, progressive and accumulative, but is also infused with suspension and loss. Performance makes apparent that it is neither original nor secondary, new nor old, but a kind of physical and imagistic repetition, in which the distinction between past and present falters and slides... What then can be learnt in the instance of disappearance... How might the temporality of performance be connected to the contemporary experience of time? (Heathfield, 2000:107)

Heathfield points out that the present in performance is ambiguous both for the actors and for the audience. One can see this issue raised in Ten Backwards as the central character suffers from a fictional disease that displaces her temporally from where (and by default when) she 'actually' is. The disease makes the character perceive herself ten feet from where she actually is. This is both a temporal as well as a spatial condition as the displacement is determined by when she is. The condition, in displacing her perception, also problematises her relation to time. Clearly, it is a

problem being in two different places synchronously but vitally it poses the crucial question: are both versions occurring at the same time? This is the horror of our contemporary relation to time that, through its fractured and multiple aspects, we are displaced from ourselves and from the present. The central character's journey into the future is a result of making a video diary of what her life will be like in ten years time. Again, the theme is of temporal displacement through the comparison of her present self against her future self, her present self against the video double, and her present self against her abject self, the version that is both her and not her.

What is a durational performance? Extending Kaye's examination of the site-specific work, we can presume there is a separate agenda to be pursued for time specific events. If this is the case, why are time-specific works generally works whose relation to time is that of extension hence durational performances, rather than reduction of time? Although shorter works exist, for example Its Your Film by Stan's Cafe and Desert Rain by Blast Theory, the general pattern is that of longer pieces. This can largely be connected to the perception of convention rather than its historical reality and the concern of current practitioners in the experience of the body in time and resistance to the increasing speed of contemporary culture. As Heathfield observes:

Performance has long tested the nature and resonance of temporal structures. Since happenings this experimentation has found many different forms: creating fleeting works; diminishing the 'known' and rehearsed dynamics of performance by opening it to improvisation and chance; employing actions in 'real time and space'; banishing, rupturing or warping fictional time and narration; scheduling works at 'improper' times; creating works whose time is autonomous and exceeds the spectator's ability to watch them; extending or shrinking duration beyond existing conventions; presenting the experience of duration through the body; deploying aesthetics of repetition which undo flow and progression. (Heathfield, 2000:107)

A clear example of the issue of what constitutes a durational performance is in the comparison between a work such as Third Angel's Testcard with a duration of 72 hours for a passing audience and Stan's Cafe's It's your Film with a duration of three minutes for an audience of one. Testcard is a formally conventional durational performance, performers constantly on show, audience free to come and go, periods of action and inaction. The piece is set in a store window and highlights the

difference between working time, home time, and with the television, mediated time. An engagement with space is also present with their use of themselves as television broadcast material. Through this piece, we can identify the use of the body, repetition and the event as apparently central to durational performances.^x However, if we turn to Its Your Film, we find that these features are current issues of concern best examined through a consideration of duration rather than examinations of specific elements of that duration itself.

Given the content, we thought it would particularly suit the workstation foyer, because you see in from the street and you get lots of through traffic and we knew the people that operate the workstation could get us the space for free. (Kelly and Walton, 1999:Unnumbered page)

What can be primarily observed in this piece is the use of a publicly accessible space. As discussed in chapter 3, the use of the video ‘violence’ highlights the use of physical violence to examine the border of representing reality. However, this section has a further impact in terms of the issue of identifying durational performance. In the film, what is crucial is the repetition of the violent act.

Then he stops her and he slaps her and he obviously really slaps her in the face, at this point you would expect it to cut away, because it has to be shot and edited like a film sequence and instead of it cutting to another point of view and her pulling away and charging out the door, he slaps her again and he slaps her again, then he slaps her and he really did slap her and knocked one of her teeth out, for something like five minutes. (Kelly and Walton, 1999:Unnumbered page)

This both stylistically and physically engages with repetition and physical endurance. Yet, is this a mediated, durational performance? Perhaps at the time of its actual occurrence it could be seen to function as one. Although its duration was not specifically tailored, it was determined by how long it went on by the performers in the moment, crucially not for a determined duration at a specific time for a specific reason. The performance itself uses repetition and duration to question repetition in the formation of narrative and character. Moreover, the television medium explores repetition and physical exhaustion/trauma in parallel to the live performance itself. This, in itself, demonstrates that repetition and exhaustion are not alone defining

features. What stands apart is the event of the performance, within which the relation of the act and its relation to time and the live audience are foregrounded.

Described by the company as a durational performance installation, Third Angel's Senseless (1998) foregrounds and explores the relationship between the performers the audience and the subjective experience of time. First of all, Senseless sets up a situation in which the audience have a number of forms of isolated contact with the performers, touching them through the plastic sheeting that defines the performer's space, viewing them through distorting fish-eye peepholes and hearing them through the headphones that transmit the speech or heartbeats of the performers. Yet each of these methods is indirect, each is mediated or distorted in some way and furthermore each individual audience member can only use one method of contact at a time. The headphones and peepholes are distanced from each other and from the performers so that the combination of all these mediated sensory experiences cannot be achieved. This effectively produces a disjunction in the audience's temporal understanding of the performers' experiences, as each method, through its separation, reveals a different time frame through which to perceive the action, which is in conflict with the other methods. Should the audience trust the internal time provided by the headphones, or by touching through the opaque sheeting, or that of the distorted peepholes? Moreover, the fish-eye peepholes in effect create a distortion of space through time which parallels the distortion of space as demonstrated by misrepresentation of remembered spaces in the 'rooms' corridor. In this element of the event the blindfolded performers attempt to draw the outlines of spaces they remember visiting in the past, onto the plastic sheets that constitute the walls of the corridor, inevitably getting them wrong due to the blindfolds. What is created by the performance is an interrogation of the relation between time and memory, the body and space with time as the central factor. Time distorts memory, time distorts the body and time distorts space. Perhaps the 'heartbeat' corridor, where the blindfolded performer wears headphones that amplify their own heartbeat back to them, tells us something specific, in that Third Angel recognise the distinction between proper time and clock time:

Listen to your heartbeat, your own internal rhythm, your own body is your only certainty. Can you begin to measure time with your own heartbeat, begin to

negotiate a personal time scale that may or may not be conducive with real time? (Third Angel, 1998.a:Unnumbered page)

Each of these performers is exploring a sense of proper or personal time and the audience, through one mediated method of contact or another, become a process of engaging their time to the performers' times.^{xi} If one accepts that this is the case, and that this could occur in a short, limited period of time, why is Senseless a ten-hour durational performance? To understand this we should turn to what Alex Kelly of Third Angel, in discussion of Senseless, identifies as his main interest for making durational work.

I like doing work that isn't fixed and surprises me, that isn't rehearsable. It is a little bit clichéd but the work begins to take on a life of its own, you set up this thing in motion and then you just watch it. (Kelly and Walton, 1999:Unnumbered page)

Specifically what Kelly identifies is 'motion' and autonomy. The focus of a durational piece is in the self-sufficiency of the performance to exist in time and to develop through the actions of the performers along a certain set of guidelines. Here is where a durational performance differs from other types performance. Through its relation to time and the audience/performers, durational performances have their content decided during the event, hence one possible way of interpreting durational. The logic of these events is often figured in order to allow a range of deviations whilst maintaining a meaningful focus and tight structure. Within durational performances, postmodern theatre finds an object that extends its interest in process.

Its Your Film on the other hand is not what would be conventionally identified as a durational performance, specifically as it last only three minutes and therefore cannot engage in the issues of repetition, exhaustion and the event, that Heathfield identifies as recurring features. Crucially, Yarker, on the Stan's Cafe website, links the style of the piece to what he considers fundamentally important about the piece: 'It looks like a film and yet is performed live, the piece is about what an audience contributes in the act of viewing'. What does the single audience contribute within those three minutes? The image of themselves certainly and their response to the piece is observed by themselves, they are in real time as opposed to mediation thrown back at themselves as audience and performer, both at the same time, there being at least no perceptible

difference. With an acknowledged three-minute durational focus, the piece is far more disturbing on a temporal rather than a spatial level. The audience member, who attempts to experience everything, because if it only takes three minutes it must be quick, is confronted with themselves and their experience of themselves in time.

If these pieces are taken in relation to the work of a performance artist like Teching Hsieh whose performances last for a year at a time, it may appear that these are minor pieces. Yet, it is important to understand that the aim of creating durational pieces is not to create the longest lasting performance, inversely not the shortest either. Contradictorily the duration of a durational piece is not its defining factor. It is the relation between what action occurs, the duration (any) it occurs within, and its relation to external time. Beyond this equation, however, the issue of the audience becomes pertinent.

Who Can Sing a Song to Unfrighten Me (1999) by Forced Entertainment represents an example of performance engaged in resistance against the capitalist organisation of time. Lasting 24 hours, from day to night to day again, the performance highlights the time frame of the decent into night and out again yet within the performance space. There is no reference to the time, no clock or timekeeping device in the space apart from the audience's wrist watches. Moreover, with no direct link to the external world, the most common indicator of time, the changing intensity of daylight, is also excluded. Therefore, the piece, through this exclusion, establishes its own proper time. This, of course, occurs with any performance, however the extended duration and specific time frame are counter to convention. The performers themselves are not on stage for the entire performance, working in shifts they have the opportunity to take breaks and sleep during the event. Equally, the audience can come and go as they please, each performer and audience establishing their own proper time for the event. In this sense a durational performance could be seen as impossible since the relative experiences of time of the participants destroys the intention of a unified temporal experience. Yet, durational performance always necessarily exceeds the limits of any observer or participant's possible experience because it is always beyond an individual's capability to stand outside of the event. As such, it is the interrelation between space, time, the live event and the individual that enables a durational

performance to achieve its specific definition. Establishing a proper relation to time also necessitates a proper relation to space.

Who Can Sing is typical of durational performances in promoting the freedom of the spectator to take on the role of witness as defined by Phelan as the event exceeding the audience's capacity to digest or see the entire event. This is done through selling tickets that do not run for the entirety of the performance 12 noon until midnight or 12 midnight till 12 noon. Alternatively, those who purchased tickets for the entire event were encouraged within the programme to come and go as they pleased and the length of the event almost precludes an audience member being either physically or consciously present unless they commit themselves to a particularly arduous task. Therefore Who Can Sing is a pure event as no one, not even the performers, takes in the entire event. The event exceeds everyone, but it is never left to its own devices: the auditorium was never empty of either performer or spectator. It is this feature that reveals how Who Can Sing functions. It was a series of interwoven and overlapping micro events within a greater one, the performers and audience creating their own relative, proper relation to the time and space. This carries through to the structure of the piece itself with its numerous, repeating 'game' sections of dead and alive, if I ruled the world, I want to die by. Each of these forms a sub-event concerned with extreme fantasies or traumatic events. The games centre back on trauma as performance. As Etchells points out in an article in Performance Research, the games played, dressed or half dressed in animal costumes, evoke the nightmarish image of god's workshop:

No seeming self-denial on the part of an actor, no pretense of immediacy, however momentarily powerful or time effacing, can amplify the privileged instant, for it is only for the instant timeless – and once again the theatre suffuses the truth with its presence, the only *presence* which is there. It is then that we realise that approval has been, in our very assent to the transgression of performance, institutionalised, historicised, *on borrowed time*. (Blau, 1987:170)

The transgression of clock time that Quick suggests is the political function of durational performance, is as Blau puts it, 'borrowed', as in borrowed time. Therefore, this is a sanctioned resistance to the power structure, rather than a rewriting, and an offer to the audience to make a brief individual and temporary resistance. The performers themselves have a more complex relation to time. They

have set up a binary distinction between their own proper time and clocktime. In site-specific pieces, as Kaye observes, the performance attempts to establish a proper relationship with the space, this includes the performers. However, within durational performances there is no fixed locus with which to establish a relationship, so in its place each performer establishes their own proper time as distinct from clock time. In this way, durational performances enact a fragmentation of time. However, by the establishment of a particular duration 6, 12, 24 or 72 hours,^{xii} the performance attempts to manifest a temporal object, outside of, or resistant to conventional time within which performers and audience can establish a proper relationship. Alternatively, a live communal experience of time is founded on the proper experience of each individual. In those terms, this sounds no different from any performance. Interestingly Stan's Cafe's Black Maze installation partially fits into the durational criteria, due to the single audience member's experience of their own proper time outside of clock time. Although, clearly, there is no fixed duration on the activity and no resistance of globalised time, there is, however, a kind of communal event. Despite the fact that the piece is experienced alone, there is a distinct identification with those who have also participated. Like people who have seen a film with a twist at the end, there is cultural value in belonging to a group who have this inside knowledge. That said, it is durational performance's resistance of globalised or socio/culturally instituted structures of time (clock time) by emphasising the fragmentation of the individual experience that marks such performances apart from other modes of performance and suggests them as postmodern.

Durational performances require the performers and audience to witness the event of the passing of personal time, while promising a communal experience. This, of course, is an impossible task, focused as it is on the ephemerality of time, in terms of its constant self deferral and disappearance, all of which draws attention to the performance's own construction. All of these features, as we shall now see, factor heavily in the definition of liveness, which as I have indicated earlier in the chapter, also depends partially upon a degree of site specificity. The following section of this chapter will examine the notion of liveness in relation to time and space.

5.4: Liveness.

The artist, not the audience, was the judge of the works aesthetic merit, performing in 'real time' that is, the time it took for the artist, not the audience, to consider that the work had achieved aesthetic completeness. (MacRitchie, 1998:25-26)

I like durational work because I like the nature of something changing, of a performance changing and being able to witness that change and whether it changes in time, or a change in environment, or a change in performance. (Kelly and Walton, 1999:Unnumbered page)

I have argued that the examples of performance discussed in the previous sections of this chapter have been attempted to heighten their spatial and temporal specificity, especially with regard to the experience of the performers and audience. The practitioners whose work I am discussing hold space and time as the unavoidable parameters of live performance. Therefore, I would argue that liveness is primarily defined by the subjective, specific experience of time and space. Moreover, if time and space are perceived or held to be the predicates of liveness, the most significant impact of new technology on progressive theatre practice has been to question the validity of a distinction between live and mediatised forms of performance. Philip Auslander has argued that as film, television, video and now digital forms of presentation continue to hold cultural dominance. It is the case that there is very little that is unique about live performance. In fact live performance really exists as a separate model of from mediatised performance (Performance that is presented through a technological medium such as film, television and radio) at all. Contrary to this view is Peggy Phelan's argument that live performance is unique due to its ephemerality, as it exists in one specific moment, and it is able to avoid reproduction. This section will begin by outlining what I consider to be the most incisive arguments on the subject, those of Auslander and Phelan articulated in their books Liveness (1993) and Unmarked (1993). Through drawing out specific points raised within these texts, the forthcoming section will expand their definition of live performance with the intention of reconciling aspects of Phelan's and Auslander's perspectives that should not be seen as mutually exclusive through an analysis of examples of British experimental theatre. The discussion will then examine the impact of mediatised forms of performance on the cultural value and individuality of live performance. Finally, the section will examine the various ways in which contemporary British

experimental theatre has responded to the increasing cultural dominance of technology and the mediatization of performance.

Peggy Phelan's chapter 'The Ontology of Performance' which appeared in *Unmarked* (1993) initiated the debate in the performance studies field as to what made live performance distinct. Phelan is quite clear that liveness comes down to one thing, that '(Live) Performance honours the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward' (Phelan, 1993:149). This is supported by her argument that 'Performance's independence from mass reproduction, technologically, economically, and linguistically, is its greatest strength' (Phelan, 1993:149). Auslander counters this view by suggesting that distinguishing live performance by its instantaneous disappearance and irreproducibility is an untenable position. Auslander argues that all mediated forms of presentation such as film and television operate on a basis of a continuously disappearing image, and furthermore each presentation is different due to image degradation and subjective perception. Auslander's definition of live performance is far more restrictive, based on a notion offered by Herbert Blau that 'There is no theatre without *separation*, there is no appeasing of desire' (Blau, 1990:10). Auslander argues that:

By reasserting the unbridgeable distinction between the audience and performance, live performance foregrounds its own fractious nature and the unlikelihood of community in a way that mediated representations, which never hold out the promise of unity, do not. (Auslander, 1993:57)

It is this sense of fracture of community that is live performance's only self-generated, distinguishing feature. Auslander only offers in support of live performance that, 'Live events have cultural value' (Auslander, 1999:57) and, whereas Phelan proposes that the visible disappearance of live performance makes it unique, Auslander argues that 'It is performance's very evanescence that gives it value in terms of cultural prestige' (Auslander, 1999:58). This again demonstrates the difference between Auslander and Phelan's positions. Auslander believes that liveness is about an audience accumulating desire and collecting cultural value from performance. Phelan offers a different view, one of investing or spending desire and cultural value in a disappearing, ephemeral event and thereby escaping the repressive capitalist economy

of ownership of material goods. According to Auslander, there is little reassurance (after finding that a sense of communal distance is all that privileges live performance) to support live performance through pointing out that it has cultural value, as it is based on an already disappearing feature, due to its increasing documentation. The increasing documentation of live performance is steadily eroding the rarity of the live event. If an event can be filmed to give a better experience than being there, live performance will lose its cultural value. Yet, Auslander's argument seems to be based on an almost deliberate misrecognition of Phelan's notion of liveness. Phelan is not concerned with the relative impermanence of film as a material; her concern is with the subjective experience of time and space, and crucially of presence and absence. Phelan is drawing on Lacan, Derrida and J.L Austin's notions of performativity in her construction of liveness. Auslander sidesteps Phelan's theoretical argument and interprets her literally. Phelan's definition of liveness points to the subjective experience of both viewer and performer in the specific spatial and temporal moment, the experience of shared relative space and time. Therefore, the live event is indicated by a possibility, even if not taken, of a reflexive relationship between the audience and event that could alter both. A recorded or fixed object cannot offer this, as it cannot respond, when played again in different circumstances, to its new environment without a live intervention.

Phelan deals with a similar issue to Auslander's sense of fracture, as she describes, in reference to performative writing, that 'For Derrida, performative writing promises fidelity only to the utterance of the promise: I promise to utter this promise' (Phelan 1993:149). Phelan expands on this by using this notion in relation to the 'performance' of the Catholic Mass:

The promise evoked by this performance then is to learn to value what is lost, to learn not the meaning but the value of what cannot be reproduced or seen (again). It begins with the knowledge of its own failure, that it cannot *be* achieved. (Phelan, 1993:152)

It is the combination of Phelan's (Lacanian) notion of a knowing failed promise and Auslander's sense of fracture, which are the basis for the distinctiveness of live performance. The combination of these two notions reduces the dependence on the impossibility of reproduction as posited by Phelan, but also increases the range of

features that distinguish live performance in Auslander's account. I propose that, in keeping with both arguments, live performance is distinguished from other mediated forms by three implicit promises made between the performer and audience that cannot be achieved. These promises include the promise of community as suggested by Auslander, but furthermore include the promise of the singular event dependent upon a specific relationship with space and time, with unique cultural value, and finally the promise of the ownership of the absence produced from the failure of these promises. As Phelan points out, performance, like performative speech acts, promises fidelity only to the utterance of the promise.

This definition of live performance, in relation to the contemporary performance scene and due to the dominance of contemporary social experience by mass media and technology, makes much of what was previously considered live performance to now tread the line between live and mediated performance, or to be no longer live at all. Events such as stadium concerts involve the use of large screens on which the audience watch the action because they are too far away. In this case, the audience are watching a mediated performance, which is to all intents and purposes no longer live. Auslander describes the dilemma of definition in relation to performance that combines the live with technology or mediation.

We now experience such work as fusion, not a con-fusion, of realms, a fusion that we see as taking place within a digital environment that incorporates the live elements as part of its raw material. (Auslander, 1999:38)

The situation is one in which the live is disappearing and becoming virtual, just as the real is disappearing into reproduction and simulacra in postmodern culture. However, British experimental theatre is critically engaged in this disappearance, both supporting the continuation of live performance in relation to technology, as well as charting its own disappearance.

In order to frame a discussion of the response of contemporary British experimental theatre to the increasing instability of liveness I will look at two performance pieces; Forced Entertainment's Speak Bitterness (1995) and Blast Theory's Kidnap (1998). This section will examine how these performances move respectively from an examination of liveness, to a testing of its limits.

Speak Bitterness - a kind of degree zero piece for us in which the microphones, cameras, video monitors, continuous soundtrack and filmic lighting of the previous work have all but disappeared - replaced by a long table, seven performers and a strewn pile of papers, the whole scene presented in bright white light. As if after years of evading it we've finally come down to the irreducible fact of theatre - actors and an audience to whom they must speak, and in this case, confess. (EtcHELLS, 1999:94)

Speak Bitterness is a useful piece to examine in this context, as it is a piece that rejects technology and mediatisation, in order to expose and deconstruct the defining characteristics of performance that have come into being as a result of the influence of technology. In the performance seven performers stand against the back of the space behind a long table at the front of the space, covered with papers, which dominates the space, behind them on a blue backdrop the words 'Speak Bitterness' are painted in bold capital letters across the backdrop above the performers heads. The performance begins with the performers one at a time moving forward to the table, sorting through the papers, selecting one and reading from it to the audience. On the papers are a range of confessions, 'we confess to murder, we confess to leaving the milk out' etc. The confessions ranging from the mundane to the horrific, the fictional to the feasible are always in the plural and directed at the audience, they are delivered by one or any number of the performers who stand at the table and are carefully ordered in sequences involving common factors or juxtaposition in order to provoke responses from the audience that are at times humorous and at other times horrified. Speak Bitterness is almost a literal enactment of Lyotard's notion of the postmodern sublime. Knowing that live performance is founded on the attempt and failure to keep promises, Speak Bitterness stops making promises and confesses to failures/crimes. Furthermore, the validity of the confessions is ambiguous as they range from the believable to the outrageous, confusing the ability of the audience to judge the confessions as either true or false:

If *Speak Bitterness* was a textual form of bearing witness to the dreams and failings of a culture, the light on those watching meant, above all, that eye contact was possible, so the two way nature of every line was emphasised - something spoken, something heard - eye contact made and then broken again, eye contact offered, rejected, then offered again - a series of complex negotiations of complicity, about who has done what or who is implicated in what. (EtcHELLS, 1999:18)

However, the performance still reaffirms the defining features of performance. The performance offers community through the lighting of the audience and eye contact. The structure of the piece is loose and the relation with the audience is individual, offering a singular experience and, by making the audience witnesses, they become the receivers of the confessions. The audience are offered the ownership of the confessions, and of the performance's failure to achieve its sense of community because, with the raised lighting, they simultaneously become complicit in the confessions but alienated from the performers as they recognise their roles as witnesses. In 1994 when it was made Speak Bitterness also worked so well, because of the cultural atmosphere of the time. At the time of the tour, the O.J. Simpson trial was underway, the television series Murder One, which focused on one trial for an entire series, was being broadcast on British television, and there were reports of war crimes in Bosnia. Many people's cultural experience in Britain at the time was filled with images of crime, trial and, of course, confession. Speak Bitterness played on these images, making the audience the potential judge and jury of the confessions made by the performers, further complicating the levels at which the performer audience relationship operated. Some time after the original production of Speak Bitterness, a revival of the performance was staged in 1999. I believe that this was prompted in equal part by the success of the original performance and the continuing relevance of the piece in the light of the South African truth and reconciliation commission, the war in Kosovo, and the pre-millennial tensions of society revealing the desire of culture to enact or experience confession. It is important to note that Speak Bitterness only functions because it is without mediatisation. If there were any further technological intervention, the performance would lose its potency. This is supported by the original presentation of Speak Bitterness as a durational piece in 1994, which further emphasised its dependence on the performer and audiences' live presence.

Blast Theory's performance Kidnap in contrast resides at the extreme edge of the disappearance of live performance. It is a performance that defies its categorisation as either live or mediatised. Even though Auslander argues that we see these works as fusions, Kidnap complicates this definition by taking the liveness and mediatisation to its extreme by placing the performance in conflict with reality. Kidnap is a

performance with a simple premise. Members of the public can pay for the chance to be kidnapped, held for 48 hours and then released. 'It primarily invites someone to live their life as if it were a work of fiction for two days' (Adams cited in Glaister, 1998:9). In the performance members of the public, contacted via cinema adverts and mailing lists were invited to send off for an application form. The form requires the participant to fill in certain personal details, sign a legal disclaimer. It gives the participant the opportunity to buy 'options' for their kidnap. 'Options' include having your kidnappers wearing costumes, having music played during your kidnap, making a phone-call, receiving a massage and a bedtime story. When the form was sent in, it entered a lottery system and the company put ten randomly selected applicants under surveillance. Then two applicants were selected, kidnapped, held for 48 hours (their confinement was broadcast onto the internet through web cameras) and then released with a press conference. However, the performance is so complicated as to provoke confusion as to its own status. The performance lacks a present audience except the participants, the role of whom is blurred between audience, performer and victim.

In many ways this mirrors the relationship of the performer to audience in traditional theatre, where the audience is told where to sit and behave and persuaded to believe in a scenario that is false. If almost all theatre is a mutual act of seduction, then the surveillance necessary to undertake the kidnap is about the subsumation of the self in the image of another. (Gardner, 1998:22)

If there is indeed any audience for Kidnap, they are the observers over the Internet, whose view, mediated through the surveillance cameras, places them as witnesses of a real event just as much as witnesses of a performance. Furthermore, the performance actively includes the press who are also used as a means of mediating the performance to a wider audience. The performance uses a large range of technological devices and systems in order to be successfully completed. Surveillance techniques were employed to observe the prospective kidnap victims. These involved the use of cameras and videos over long periods, as did the observation of the participants while held. The Internet was used in conjunction with the cameras and microphones to allow the entire experience of the participants to become a mediated performance.

One web terminal will allow control over a moveable video camera in the safe house which the viewer will be able to pan, tilt or zoom in and out as they wish. It will also be able to e-mail the kidnappers, although whether they reply is

another matter. Press briefings will take place regularly throughout the event which will itself be an exercise in media manipulation and a study of the way the media responds. (Gardner, 1998:22)

Defining the performance as live is extremely difficult as there is nothing to prove that it is not a complete hoax, pre-planned and pre-recorded, with the only live element the press conferences. This is most probably not the case, yet the experience for the majority of the audience is a mediated one and suffers the fate of a work that is a fusion of these elements; it becomes a mediated performance with elements of Liveness, rather than the opposite. At the centre of the performance is the more complex question of whether this is actually a performance or a real event, or does any such distinction exist? 'Part of what interests us about the whole idea of kidnapping is the ambiguous relationship between the kidnappers and the kidnapped... who has real control in a situation where neither party know the outcome?' (Adams cited in Gardner, 1998:22). In the event of Kidnap the nature of the relationship between the live and mediated and kidnapper/kidnapped became increasingly layered. For example, one participant, effectively performer for the company as they observed him on screen, had purchased a request for the song 'Nowhere To Run' to be played and the kidnapper's to dance to it. As this was done, the kidnapped man became the kidnapper's audience, whilst all the time on the Internet, they were all the performers. With each shift in role from performer to audience, the performance moved from live to mediated. This element of the performance is not directly due to the influence of technology mediating the Kidnapper/Kidnapped relationship, but rather a result of the unpredictable nature of the interaction between the event and its method of reception. However, it is interesting to note how the press responded to the enactment of this relationship in terms of filmic images when talking about the possible particulars of the kidnap experience. The Suzy Lamplugh Trust responded as follows:

All these extra options sound like scenes from a horror or pornographic film, except here it will be much more real. How much are these things likely to influence people? How do these people know if the volunteers are unbalanced? The idea sounds quite distasteful and fairly sick. (Suzy Lamplugh Trust cited in Glaister, 1998:9)

The implication of this response to Kidnap is that, although the distinction between live and mediated performance exists, it has become, along with reality, so

infiltrated by the language and viewing conditions of the mass media, as to seem indistinguishable from it.

The impact of technology on live performance, which produced the need for it to be defined, is a relatively recent event. Therefore, whatever definitions of liveness remain, entail the most general aspects of performance in an attempt to secure it, rather than attempting to discuss its role in relation to the culturally dominant form of mediated performance. I would argue that claims that liveness refers back to essential features of human culture are more nostalgia than fact. However, I must also argue that even within postmodern performance, the defining features of live performance have not and will not change, even though our relation to them and ways of valuing them frequently has done. This shift in value is supported by the growth in experimental performances that almost entirely exclude technology, but that are nevertheless formed as responses to the implications of technology. These performances are not rejections of technology but reassertions of the value of live performance in a culture where the latter is increasingly rare. They are performances that attempt to function without the hidden restrictions of technology. As Tim Etchells says, performance that feeds 'the desire... for nakedness, defencelessness. An exposure that does not have a name. Something beyond' (Etchells, 1999:65).

I have argued in this chapter that there are three common parameters to British postmodern theatre: time, space and liveness. Even though I have followed Lyotard's definition of postmodernism as a rejection of universal truths and a rejection of metanarratives, these parameters seem to remain, by agreement and example, relatively constant. Part of this is due to the inescapable experience and influence of space and time on our subjective being, and due to the fact that the production of the experience of liveness arises from our experience of these parameters. Yet, the works discussed in this chapter can still be defined as postmodern. While they accept time, space and liveness as constant parameters, the works challenge or disturb the socio/cultural conventions for the experience of these parameters. These conventions include clearly defined and separated spaces and units of time, and a valorising of the permanent over the ephemeral experience.

As I indicated at the beginning of the chapter, this revision of the understanding of time and space and the introduction of a recent concept such as liveness is part of a latter stage of postmodern theatre. Having deconstructed principles, theatre then seeks to reinvent them in a manner that accommodates a postmodern viewpoint. Each term becoming politicised and emphasising the importance of the subjective experience.

As such, notions of space and time in performance become increasingly singular. The use of location in performances such as Nights In This City depends not only on the particular geography of Sheffield, but also its cultural history. Creating a site-specific performance Nights in this City challenges the notion of space through creating a performance in motion through space. However, it is also a time-specific piece, performed only at night, drawing on the experience of the city at night and the individual audiences experience of 'night-time'. Furthermore, the experience of time in British postmodern theatre is explicitly the personal subjective experience of time as a challenge to socio/cultural construct of a working day. The works discussed in this chapter are performances that exist across the temporal conventions of work-time and leisure-time, and remove the audience and performers from a context where these boundaries are apparent. While the audience may look at their watches and know what time it is, their experience of that time is radically altered from the norm and is defined by their subjective understanding of it. Therefore, within these events, the audience can begin to participate in a live experience where their subjective notions of time and space are released from social conventions, and the audience are invited to join a communal experience that attempts to resist these constraints. This is not transcendence, but a form of political resistance against western, capitalist culture's control over time and space. The liveness of postmodern performance then is a cultural instability, an ephemeral, singular spatial and temporal event that refuses reproduction.

ⁱ See Herbert Blau, (1987), Steven Connor (1997), Frederic Jameson (1991), and Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984).

ⁱⁱ See Etchells in Childs and Walwin (1998:31).

ⁱⁱⁱ Alex Kelly and Rachel Walton from Third Angel performed in Dreams Winter.

^{iv} This again emphasises Forced Entertainment's fascination with the city at night, in each of the following performances the night-time cityscape features prominently: Dreams Winter (1994), Hidden J (1994), Nights in this City (1995), Quizoola (1996), Paradise (1998), and Nightwalks (1998).

^v Clearly Brechtian theatre, with its *Verfremdung* effect, employed the use of exposing the site as a means towards didacticism. This however was not used to generate a resonance with the spaces function.

^{vi} See Etchells (1998:31).

^{vii} There is also connection between the use of the term Voodoo by Etchells and the title of Stan's Cafe show Voodoo City, although no specific point or intertextual link is being made here it is the notion that the city or the use of city space is a ritualistic act of magic.

^{viii} See Jencks, Charles (1986) What is Post-Modernism?, London: Academy Editions.

^{ix} Time can be seen as an integral part of Phelan's notion of the unmarked.

^x Heathfield discusses durational performance within the same article.

^{xi} That the contact methods are all distorting or mediating prevents the promise of direct contact or community that the performance seems to make. This failure of the promise of contact will be discussed in the following section of this chapter in relation to the problematic issues of liveness.

^{xii} Saved (1998), Senseless (1998), Who Can Sing a Song to Unfrighten Me (1999), and Testcard (1995) respectively.

Conclusion: The British Postmodern Theatrical Tradition.

While completing this thesis it has become apparent that it has already become a historical document, not only in terms of the cultural condition with which it deals, but also in relation to the theoretical framework it applies to that field of investigation. The cultural scene that produced the 1990s in Britain has already begun to change, and theatre and performance in general have responded swiftly. Work of the kind discussed in the thesis is increasingly defined as Live Art and has parameters, though fluid, by which it can be defined. Moreover, due to the ephemerality of the work, the practitioners included in the thesis represent a necessarily small cross section of the work going on at the time that my research for this thesis has been carried out. This small area of cultural production, too, has changed over the past few years. The use of technology has increased and therefore practitioner's work is usually documented and available through various archives. In addition to this, as the sector grows in strength, there are more festivals, platform events and venues that are willing to book this kind of work. As such, there is clearly an active sector of performance responding to the work of the practitioners discussed in the thesis. Although whether or not these practitioners share the same qualities of rhizomaticity, eventhood, affect, failure and the postmodern sublime is another matter. Postmodern theatre is not a heritage that can be succeeded and improved upon.

The relation of postmodern critical theory to the establishment and development of postmodern practice and, by default, the British postmodern theatrical tradition should neither be overstated nor over simplified. Clearly, theory has not produced postmodern theatre. This I have argued in chapter 2, and elsewhere, is evident through the interaction of the practitioners and similarities in both processes and products. Nor can theory limit or precisely define postmodern theatre. Equally, postmodern theory has not simply been a discourse employed to describe how the practice is connected to its broader context. Postmodern theory and practice have been involved in a dialogical exchange due to similarities within of their respective projects. Therefore, this thesis has charted that relation between theory, practice, and the postmodern theatre heritage and it is this relation that provides the most insight into the practice. Postmodern performance is not concerned with the complete

dissolution of the boundaries of performance that assumes a stable subject and a possibility of objective knowledge. Instead they have rewritten and re-constituted the boundaries of performance, with reference to contemporary culture and have evaluated how to map and negotiate the new terrain, with an acceptance of its fluidity. An exploration of the workings of the relationship between postmodern culture, theory, and performance has been undertaken in this thesis that enables the outlining of the British postmodern theatre tradition, detailing its unique resistance to linear historicisation, rhizomatic organisation, fluid relation to culture and the development of companies within it.

The British postmodern theatrical tradition then is evidenced by the work of the companies covered in the thesis including; Forced Entertainment, Blast Theory, Desperate Optimists, Third Angel and Stan's Cafe. However, as pointed out in the introduction and throughout the thesis, other practitioners of the same period whose work would also contribute to an understanding of the field. These include: Gob Squad, Reckless Sleepers, Pacitti Company, Plane Performance, Primitive Science, Forkbeard Fantasy, Volcano Theatre, and more recently Lone Twin, Reader, Deer Park. Some of these practitioners' works sit on the fringes of the area described by the thesis, either because of their relation to theory and to the concerns and agenda of the performances, or to the theatrical stylistic features. However, the work of these other companies share a quality common to the central practitioners discussed. Earlier practitioners of the 1970s and 1980s, whose work represents the foundation of the British postmodern theatrical heritage include: Impact Theatre Company, Theatre of Mistakes, Station House Opera, and Brith Gof. The work of these practitioners was highly influential on the scene described in this thesis and some of these practitioners, in different groupings, are still making work. Of course, in addition to the companies mentioned above, there are new practitioners whose importance it is too early to predict, who are working in theatre, dance, live art and digital media. Moreover, the tradition continues to make itself more visible and to construct a history, albeit confined to a short period, through events such as Stan's Cafe's version of Impact Theatre Company's Carrier Frequency and the recent revivals by Forced Entertainment of their early performances Emmanuel Enchanted and Club of No Regrets. It is in this way that the tradition is formed and sustained, by returning to the events and rediscovering them, rather than seeking to construct a linear development

on from the specific moment. The creation and agreement of a set of events and principles that with repeated use or staging across a range of examples becomes both the history and the theatrical vocabulary of the tradition. In this way a theatrical tradition has formed, through the inheritance of events and theatrical concerns, passed in a rhizomatic way from one ephemeral event to another. In some cases performances are significant enough or carry enough cultural weight that a return to that event is desired in order to reinforce the memory of that event, or possibly to canonise it. I would argue that this return to a performance is direct evidence of the existence of the tradition, but also of its finite aspect, given that the nature of postmodernism is to be a singular event, the postmodern theatrical tradition must also be so.

While I have argued that there is a non-linear and event-based tradition of British postmodern theatre, which may have already reached its end, there must also be a continuing linear theatrical tradition. So there are two theatrical traditions operating simultaneously with different methodologies and separate agendas. Additionally, when traced back far enough, these traditions originate from the same and not separate traditions. It could be argued that postmodern theatre, whilst challenging theatrical conventions, developed as a dissident apostate from the avant-garde, a continuation of experimentation and the challenging of convention but without the agenda of progress. As I have pointed out in chapter 1, the postmodern condition is the pervasive social and cultural experience of Western societies that cannot exist within a linear structure. Nevertheless, it is quite apparent that the commonly received stylistic features of postmodern theatre continue to be employed in performance that does not necessarily share the same agenda or specific qualities.

The project of postmodern art, according to Lyotard, is to reject the notion of irreducible essences and to multiply and diversify the potential functions and definitions of art. Therefore, practitioners of postmodern art, including those in theatre, refuse to have their methodologies and stylistic feature become established as cultural norms, as new irreducible essences. Moreover, postmodern theatre, in most cases, resists introduction into the mainstream as its multiple agendas contain a common thread of prioritising minority cultures. Postmodern theatre, then, could be said to prefer its place at the margins of cultural production. What remains to be

discussed is the emergence in British theatre of a postmodern approach, and what part American and continental European practitioners influenced the shift in methodologies.

This affirmation of the fringes of cultural production is best exemplified by the British live art scene, with which British postmodern theatre, as I have stated frequently, is inextricably connected. In many ways, the British postmodern theatrical tradition I have outlined in this thesis while resistant to being placed in an ongoing linear context will have the results and responses to its performances carried on within the live art sector. This is because, as certain stylistic features of performance become introduced into the mainstream, the innovative nature of the work will become less distinct and will eventually enter into conventional theatrical discourse. In this fashion, postmodern theatrical conventions will become mainstream theatrical conventions. Secondly, the motivations of practitioners involved in making the kind of work discussed in this thesis will be increasingly accepted into the live art sector. This can already be seen in the non-theatrically based work of the practitioners mentioned, particularly the move by Blast Theory and Desperate Optimists away from touring theatre works. In some ways, the British postmodern theatrical tradition and performance arts are what constitute the live art scene. Therefore, a further avenue of research, beyond the scope of this thesis, that needs to be undertaken is to investigate that converging of artistic movements.

Further clarifying the identity of postmodern theatrical tradition, is the argument that postmodern theatre rejects the notion of a linear and clearly defined heritage and the possibility that the ongoing tradition is developing in such a way. I have argued in the introduction and chapter 1 and 2 that the postmodern theatrical tradition functions as a rhizome, as numerous intersecting lines without centre, defined by particular limited convergences, or to put it another way, defined by events. Throughout the thesis I have discussed the nature of events, a concept introduced in chapter 1 and expanded upon in relation to postmodern theatre by Nick Kaye in chapter 2, who describes them as spatially and temporally specific live occurrences that intersect with reality beyond the framing of the performance itself. I believe that it is only through the charting of events that the British postmodern theatrical tradition can be outlined.

The event-based structure of postmodern theatre also reinforces the mainstream/margin dichotomy I described earlier. The events form a marginal and shifting tradition that bases its activity on a critique of the mainstream, but, through their action, inevitably contribute to the mainstream. Therefore, postmodern performance revitalises the ongoing linear tradition. It is the resistance of form in postmodern performance that gives rise to new manifestations of formal stability in performance, new forms that ascribe to a linear progress.

The place of theory in relation to postmodern theatre and to its tradition then is symbiotic. Because the stylistic features of the practice do not remain constant, one is left with the relation to theory as the identifying characteristic of this form of performance. Moreover, the increasing formalisation of the relation between the academy and theoretically literate performance, through the notion of practice based research and practitioners working within institutions, will only serve to cross-contaminate the two sets of activities further. Additionally, increasing demands to produce academic outcomes and reach new audiences face practitioners within institutions, and so academic discourse is altering as more practitioners move into the field. There will continue to be, as there always has been, work that rejects the manner and type of theorisation that academia offers. Yet what remains to be approached in detail are the training methodologies of postmodern performance and the new training methodologies that will be constructed. Moreover, on what principles does a practitioner train a performer, now that the longstanding conventions of performance remain deeply problematic? I expect that the practitioners working in institutions will be the ones to pursue these lines of research. However, it is also likely that the practitioners whose work rejects or evades the academic framework and such lines of enquiry, and seeks to deconstruct these conventions of practice based research, are the practitioners whose work will carry the tradition of postmodern theatre.

What this thesis has demonstrated is that this tradition depends on a definition of the postmodern that relies upon the recognition of its fluid and shifting focus. Once accepted, postmodernism could be seen as having a symbiotic relation with existing stable cultural forms, in that it existed as a pervasive cultural condition predicated upon the resistance to the notion of a stable subject. Equally, postmodern

performance was concerned with the reworking of stable notions and practices of performance. Following on from this, the thesis has demonstrated that postmodern theory and practice are involved in a mutually dependent and reflexive relation, each discourse feeding into and supporting the other. Examples of theory and practice drawn upon in the thesis, which were at some level merged in a symbiotic relation, demonstrated that it was possible to produce a theory/practice hybrid.

As such, the fundamental agenda of British postmodern theatre is the move towards hybridity and interdisciplinarity of art forms, the deconstruction of stable notions of theatricality, the rejection of conventional linear narrative and the blurring of the distinction between performance and reality. The tradition is also characterised by a collapse in the performed separation or distance between performer and character, which I have argued is identifiable by the use of becoming as opposed to representation in performance. Moreover by attempting to achieve a proper relation (in the terms that I described in chapter 5) with time and space and pursuing an agenda that considers time and space to be relative constructs, the practitioners of the tradition engage, through their work, in a politically resistant action against models of time and space imposed by capitalist culture. Therefore, it is the response of contemporary British postmodern theatre to develop works that explore their liveness and ephemerality, which is one of the most important features of the tradition. As I have shown, the British postmodern theatrical tradition has rejected an integrated use of new technology, and instead favours the liveness and ephemerality of performance.

Principally these practitioners can be recognised through their distinct combination of stylistic conventions and generative practices: the deconstruction of theatrical conventions and narrative, interdisciplinary and hybridised processes and performances, interventions with reality, a decentred and rhizomatic approach to the performance of subjectivity, the temporal and spatial specificity of their events, and a critical engagement with new technologies. As I have said, these features themselves are not wholly unique, as practitioners from Europe and America employ them too. However, the extent and intent with which these techniques are used, in relation to cultural context and theoretical concerns, determines the singularity of the British postmodern theatrical tradition, as opposed to similar practices elsewhere. Performances such as Kidnap (1998), Who can Sing a Song to Unfrighten Me

(1999), *Saved* (1998), *Black Maze* (2000), and *Stalking Realness* (1997), could only have emerged from the postmodern cultural context of the late 1990s Britain, and through their developing relationship with their artistic peers. In this respect, the British postmodern theatrical tradition is unique, and it is therefore vital that presence and influence is noted.

The value of recognising these practitioners as a tradition is essential so as to give credit to the influence of companies such as Impact theatre co-operative, whose work provided part of the artistic impetus for a tradition to form, to recognise the developments and innovations of the practitioners themselves, and to note the influence of the British postmodern theatrical tradition on the British live art scene. In many ways the practitioners discussed in this thesis, presented an accessible and recognisable front to the Live-Art, experimental theatre, and performance art scenes in Britain during the 1990s. Moreover, the recognition of this tradition of practitioners and their work is essential for charting their contribution to the language and repertoire of performance skills and techniques that emerged during this time. Without understanding that these practitioners worked within a specific cultural and theoretical environment, with a group of peers engaged in similar practices, the value and distinctiveness of British practice might well be misrepresented in relation to the influence of American and European practice. The ongoing practices of Goat Island, the Wooster Group, Robert Wilson and Richard Foreman in America, or, of Jan Fabre, Wim Vandekeybus, Jerome Bell, Pina Bausch, or Romeo Castellucci in Europe, must not be conflated with this community of practitioners, or with the cultural, practical or theoretical specificity of their practice.

The practitioners discussed in this thesis represent the core of the British postmodern theatrical tradition of the 1990s; their performance work is founded upon an interdependent relationship with postmodern critical theory, a response to the issues of the cultural condition, and a deconstruction of stable forms of performance. This tradition, due to its formation from works engaged with postmodern modes of theory and practice, functions as a rhizome of events. Each performance by these companies, Blast Theory, Desperate Optimists, Forced Entertainment, Stan's Cafe and Third Angel, connects through its process of creation, its mode of performance, and its conceptualisation, with other performances that have already happened and are

simultaneously happening. This engagement is not stable; it is fluid, constantly shifting and critical. This is because the British postmodern theatrical tradition is constantly involved in a self-conscious process of deconstruction and transformation, marked, charted and defined by the ephemeral events of performance that produce it.

Appendices.

1: Company Histories.

1.1: Forced Entertainment.

Forced Entertainment were formed in 1984 in Sheffield by Tim Etchells, Deborah Chadbourne, Cathy Naden, Robin Arthur, Richard Lowdon, Terry O'Connor and Claire Marshall.

1984

Jessica in the Room of Lights.

First performed 14th December, Yorkshire Arts Space Society, Sheffield.

1985

The Set-Up. (National Review of Live Art).

First performed Spring, The Leadmill Sheffield.

Nighthawks.

First performed 23rd October, North Riding College, Scarborough.

1986

The Day that Serenity Returned to the Ground. (Commissioned by The Zap Club).

Performances in January, The Zap Club, Brighton.

(Let the Water Run its Course) to the Sea that Made the Promise.

First performed 6th October, Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham.

1988

200% & Bloody Thirsty.

First performed 10th October 1988, Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham.

1990

Some Confusions in the Law about Love.

First performed 19th February, The Leadmill, Sheffield.

1991

Marina & Lee. (Barclays New Stages Award).

First performed 18th March, Nuffield Studio, Lancaster.

Welcome to Dreamland. (Retrospective trilogy comprising the three theatre works, sponsored by The Leadmill/Becks Bier).

Performances 15th-18th July.

1992

Emmanuel Enchanted. (Barclays New Stages Award).

First performed 6th October, Nuffield Studio, Lancaster.

Cardboard Sign Photographs. (Exhibition).

First exhibited 8th December, ICA, London.

1993

Club of No Regrets.

First performed 5th October, Nuffield Studio, Lancaster.

12 am: Awake and Looking Down. (Durational/Installation commissioned by National Review of Live Art).

First performed 22nd October.

Red Room. (Performance installation commissioned by National Review of Live Art).

First presentation 30th November to 12th December.

1994

Ground Plans for Paradise. (Installation in collaboration with Hugo Glendenning for Leeds Metropolitan University Gallery).

First presentation 15th March.

Dreams' Winter. (Site-specific work, commissioned by National Review of Live Art).

Performed 15th-20th July.

Hidden J.

First performed 10th October, Nuffield Studio, Lancaster.

Speak Bitterness. (Durational/Installation commissioned by National Review of Live Art).

First performed 23rd October, Glasgow.

Hotel Photographs. (Exhibition).

First exhibited 19th November, The Gantry, Southampton.

1995

A Decade of Forced Entertainment. (Performance/Lecture).

First performed 4th February, ICA London.

Nights in This City. (Site-specific work, Sheffield).

First performed 16th May Sheffield.

Speak Bitterness. (Theatre version).

First performed 26th September, Alsager Arts Centre, Stoke-on-Trent.

1996

Break In!. (Childrens project in collaboration with Sheffield theatres).

First performed 30th January, Crucible Theatre, Sheffield.

Looking Forward. (Photographic project).

Published in Performance Research, Vol.1, Issue 1, Spring 2006.

Quizoola! (Durational Work commissioned by ICA Live Arts and National Review of Live Art).

First performed 9th September, ICA London.

Frozen Palaces R&D. (Digital media R&D, in collaboration with Hugo Glendenning).

Showtime.

First performed 25th September, Alsagar Arts Centre, Stoke-on-Trent.

1997

Nights in This City. (Rotterdam version commissioned by Rotterdamse Shouwburg and R Festival).

First performed 23rd September.

Pleasure.

First performed 14th November, Arnolfini, Bristol.

DIY. (Short film).

First broadcast 12th July, Channel 4.

1998

Filthy Words & Phrases. (Seven-hour video installation, directed by Tim Etchells and Hugo Glendenning).

First screened 13th January, International Film Festival, Rotterdam.

Paradise. (Internet project commissioned by Love Bytes/Channel).

Launched on 23rd April 1998.

Nightwalks. (CD-ROM in collaboration with Hugo Glendenning, commissioned by Photo 98).

Launched 2nd October, Site Gallery, Sheffield.

Frozen Palaces. (CD-ROM).

Released on Artintact Edition 5, November.

Dirty Work.

First performed 12th November, Phoenix Arts, Leicester.

1999

Who can Sing a Song to Unfrighten Me. (24 hour durational performance,

Commissioned by the London International Festival of Theatre 99).

First performed 18th-19th June, South Bank Centre, London.

Spin. (CD-ROM).

Launched 1st October, Sheffield.

Disco Relax.

First performed 19th October, Forced Entertainment Studio, Sheffield.

2000

Hotel Binary. (Five-channel video installation).

First exhibited 28th March, Site Gallery, Sheffield.

Rules of The Game. (Text and Photographic project).

First exhibited 28th March, Site Gallery, Sheffield.

Scar Stories. (Installation).

First exhibited 5th May, KunstenFESTIVALdesArts, Brussels.

Scar Stories. (Performance Version).

First performed 16th May, KunstenFESTIVALdesArts, Brussels.

And on the Thousandth Night... (Durational performance).

First performed 3rd September, Festival Ayloul, Beirut.

1.2: Desperate Optimists.

Desperate Optimists were formed in 1992 by Christine Molloy and Jo Lawlor.

1992

Anatomy of Two Exiles.

First performed February, Studio 2 Dartington College of Arts.

1993

Hope.

First performed November, ICA London.

1994

Dedicated.

First performed Stage 1: April Showroom Gallery Sheffield, Stage 2: October.

1996

Indulgence.

First performed October, Project Arts Centre Dublin.

1997

Blipverts. (45 Sec Film).

Evidence.

First performed European theatre festival Transeuropa in Hildesheim Germany.

Stalking Realness.

First performed October, Podewil.

1998

Playboy.

First performed November, Prema Arts Centre.

1999

Shot 7. (9 min film for Urban Shots as part of Weimar 1999 cultural capital of Europe programme).

2000

Time Bomb. (Performance with Dublin Youth Theatre).

First performed in autumn 2000.

No Motive. (17 Minute Video).

First shown August, Portobello film festival.

Lost Cause.

Irish Cultural Programme Expo 2000.

1.3: Blast Theory.

Blast Theory were formed in 1991 in London by Matt Adams, Jamie Iddon, Ju Row Farr and Nicholas Tandavanitj, with Helen Kirelew as administrator and Catherine Williams as development officer.

1991

Gunmen Kill Three.

First performed Union Chapel London.

1992

Tomorrows' People Now. (Photographic exhibition).

First performed Imagination, Store Street London.

Chemical Wedding.

First performed ICA, London.

1993

Chemical Wedding. (A 5 night event including live graffiti, installation, bands and DJ's).

First performed December, Union Chapel, London.

Stampede the Club.

First performed The Junction, Cambridge.

Stampede.

First performed The Junction, Cambridge.

1994

Invisible Bullets.

First performed Fete Worse Than Death, Hoxton, London.

1995-6

Something American.

First performed Contemporary Archives, Nottingham.

1997C'mon Baby, Fight! Fight! Fight!

First performed February, The Junction, Cambridge.

Club Spotter.

First performed June, Transeuropa, Hildesheim, Germany.

Atomic.

First performed August, Kunstlerhaus, Bethanien, Berlin.

Invisible Bullets. (Video).

First performed November, Kunstlerhaus, Bethanien, Berlin.

Kidnap. (Blipvert).

First performed November, The Gate Cinema, Nottinghill, London.

Safehouse. (Installation).

First performed November-December, Kunstlerhaus, Bethanien, Berlin.

1998Atomic Installation.

First performed March, Casco, Utrecht, Netherlands.

Kidnap.

First presented July, England and Wales.

Kidnap Documentary.

First presented September, The Green Room, Manchester.

Interactive Sound Piece.

First performed October, Architecture Foundation, Tower Hamlets, London.

1999Route12:36.

First presented March, South London Gallery, London.

10 Backwards.

First performed April-November, ICA, London.

Desert Rain.

First performed NOW Festival, Nottingham.

2000Sidetracks.

First performed January, Shift 00, London.

1.4: Third Angel.

Third Angel were formed in 1995 in Sheffield by Alex Kelly and Rachel Walton.

1995

Testcard.

First performed 3rd October, The Workstation, Sheffield.

1996

Experiment Zero 1.

First performed May/Nov Dec 1996 as part of the Quarterlight Project, Sheffield.

The Killing Show.

First performed May as part of the Lovebytes Festival, Workstation, Sheffield.

With the Light On.

First screened March at the Showroom Cinema, Sheffield.

Candle Table and Barcode.

First performed March as part of the Quarterlight Project, Sheffield.

1997

Experiment Zero 2.

First performed as work in Progress January, Site Gallery, Sheffield.

Shallow Water.

First performed May, Ferens Gallery, Sheffield.

On Pleasure.

First broadcast July as part of the South Bank Show.

Experiment Zero 3.

First performed October, Nuffield Theatre, Lancaster.

1998

Saved.

First performed October/November, B.F.V.T., BAC, London.

Experiment Zero.

First performed June 1998 as part of the Quarterlight Project, Sheffield.

Senseless.

First performed January, Arnolfini, Bristol.

2000

Class of 76.

First performed 5th May, Chuckery Infants School, Walsall.

Hang up.

First performed October, Arnolfini, Bristol.

Where From Here.

First performed October, Roadmender, Nottingham.

1.5: Stan's Cafe.

Stan's Cafe were formed in 1991 in Birmingham by James Yarker and Graeme Rose.

1991

Perry Comos Christmas Cracker.

First performed 11th December, Emmbrook School, Wokingham.

1992

Memoirs of an Amnesiac.

First performed 11th April, the MAC, Birmingham.

1993

Canute the King.

First performed 26th February, Mosely Road Swimming Baths, Birmingham.

1994

Bingo in the House of Babel.

First performed 30th March, the MAC, Birmingham.

1995

Voodoo City.

First performed 15th February, the MAC, Birmingham.

1996

Ocean of Storms.

First performed 5th June, the MAC, Birmingham.

1997

Simple Maths.

First performed 5th March, Belgrade Studio Theatre, Coventry.

1998

It's Your Film.

First performed 5th June, Bond Gallery, Birmingham.

1999The Carrier Frequency.

First performed 30th April, The Crescent Theatre, Birmingham.

2000Good and True.

First performed 21st October, the Junction, Cambridge.

Black Maze.

First performed 2nd January, Revolution Festival, The Gas Hall, Birmingham.

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