(Re)presenting drama: adaptation in postdramatic theatre

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines three adaptations of dramatic texts for postdramatic performance by two experimental theatre companies: the Wooster Group's *L.S.D.* (1984) and *Brace Up!* (1991), and La Fura dels Baus' *F@ust 3.0* (1998). Of particular significance to this study is the notion that these companies do not simply restage the texts they engage with in lieu of creating new and original material, nor do they only present a "version" of the texts in their own aesthetic style. Instead both companies self-consciously explore their personal relationship with dramatic text by making the processes of adapting and interrogating the material the theme of their performance. This is achieved by juxtaposing the text against a landscape of newer media and digital technologies which complicate the traditional forms of mimetic representation found in the purely dramatic text. As such, both the Wooster Group and La Fura dels Baus question the very notion of "representability": that is both (a) the ability of the postdramatic to accommodate a mimetic form of representation in light of the integration of digital technologies into performance, and (b) the capability of the dramatic text as an older form of media to represent and reflect the highly mediated, technologically-driven contemporary moment.

for my parents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines how three adaptations of dramatic theatre texts for postdramatic performance can illuminate some of the problems of "representation" in the non-mimetic form of postdramatic theatre. As the adaptation of existing material for new work continues to evoke debates surrounding the legitimacy of "older" narratives in "newer" forms of media, the three adaptations I investigate confront this practice directly by immersing the dramatic text in environments constructed of new media and digital technologies. By adapting the dramatic text in both form and content for the new environment, these adaptations ask what is left of the traditional, mimetic form of dramatic representation once its very facets are complicated and attenuated by processes of mediation and mediatisation.

Over the past decade there have been significant developments within the field of adaptation studies. Seminal works such as James Naremore's *Film Adaptation* (2000) and Stam and Raengo's three volume work *Literature and Film: a guide to the theory and practice of adaptation* (2004/5), have been instrumental in validating the necessity for academics to further engage with the theories and practices of adaptation. Their analyses renewed interest in the field, as, since its arrival via literary studies in George Bluestone's study *Novels into Film* (1957), adaptation had been attacked by literary and cultural theorists as a contentious, sub-standard discourse (Leitch 2008: 63).

However, approaches to adaptation theory are still often defined in relation to literary, film, or cultural studies, with case studies themselves analysing the adapted material in relation to (a) the perceived worthiness of the source material to be adapted and (b) the extent to which the new work is a success or failure as a reproduction or representation of the original. Though Robert Stam asserts that in recent years there has been a movement away from a 'moralistic approach' to adaptation studies – from those critics who consider the adaptation as an '*infidelity, betrayal, deformation, violation, vulgarization* and *desecration*' of

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the source material (in Naremore 2000: 54: original emphases) – his fundamental thesis argues that 'adaptation is automatically different and original due to the change of the medium' (55). Whilst his stance accepts the history of denigration that has been associated with the field, his analysis predominantly invites us to speculate on the precise changes made to the adapted material as it makes a transition across media.

A similar response is garnered from the literary critic Linda Hutcheon in her recent study *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006). In it she foregoes independent case studies in favour of a more theoretical inquiry, in which she regards adaptation as materials that are capable of asking questions not only of the content, but also of the form of media they encompass. From this position she regards adaptation as a particular form of imitation which produces the 'curious double fact' of the new work being at once both a 'deliberate, announced, and extended revisitation of [the] prior work' as well as being an autonomous piece of art in its own right (xiv).

Though Hutcheon's study does much to widen the discourse of adaptation, her analysis at times - particularly her position on the legitimacy of adaptations of existing theatre and performance into new works for the theatre – is contentious. In her chapter examining "form", Hutcheon argues that when an adaptation crosses media it 'inevitably invokes that long history of debate about the formal specificity of the arts – and thus of media' (34). Here she surmises that adaptations are most effective when they cross media, as when this occurs the act of transference enables reflection and critique upon both forms of media encountered. By contrast she argues that

> [a]daptations are obviously least involved in these debates when there is no change in medium or mode of engagement […] Heiner Müller's *Hamletmaschine* (1979) may adapt Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but it is still a stage play, however different. Rather, it is when adaptations make the move across modes of engagement, and thus across media, especially in the most common shift, that is, from the printed page to performance in stage and radio plays, dance, opera, musical, film, or television, that

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they find themselves most enmeshed in the intricacies of the medium-specificity debates.

(34-5)

Hutcheon's interpretation makes the fallacious assumption that theatre is an absolute, unchanging form, rather than one which is historically and culturally relative. As such, her analysis regarding the adapted work's capability to form a critique of its source material is predicated on the notion that, like Stam's argument, a movement across media is a requirement of legitimate adaptation. Whereas adaptation theory has largely focused on a movement across media (the transition from novel to film), this thesis regards the adaptation of already existing theatrical material into new theatre works as a movement across modes of representation. In doing so, I argue that the new work is efficacious in providing the same level of critique to the original material as that ascribed to adaptations in which there is an evident change in medium.

Recent studies in the theory of adapting for the theatre have been interested in fostering dialogue based on adaptations of existing theatre material where there has been no change of medium. For example the theatre scholar Graham Ley's keynote article in a recent edition of the *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance* (2(3): 201-209) divides theatrical adaptation into "primary" and "secondary" modes. Primary adaptation, he argues, constitutes the 'adaptation of non-theatrical material into theatre' whilst secondary adaptation uses existing material from the theatre in new ways such as 'Arthur Miller and John Osborne adapting Ibsen, and the role of adaptations of Greek tragedy in the formation of modern dramatic movements'. With particular reference to Bertolt Brecht's adaptations, Ley argues that the adaptation of existing theatre works 'is more than a casual mechanism' in modern theatre (2009: 206), and that instead by reusing material theatre practitioners are 'breach[ing] zones of demarcation radically, just as [the texts] are beginning to become historically entrenched' (201). Ley's interpretation is a timely and welcomed addition to the debate, as not

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only does it treat adaptations in which there is no change in medium as legitimate, but he also proposes that in renewing the text through such secondary types of adaptation practitioners are likewise engaging with the original text's significance to the contemporary moment.

One of the most important critiques on the relevancy of the dramatic form in contemporary theatre and performance is Hans-Thies Lehmann's seminal study *Postdramatic Theatre* (1999: English trans. 2006). In it, Lehmann argues that since the 1970s there have been a considerable number of playwrights, directors, practitioners, and companies who have made a conscious movement away from traditional notions of drama, and whose work can be defined as 'postdramatic' (2006: 17). Such postdramatic practices favour a pluralistic approach towards creation, in which the work is not centrally defined by, nor subordinate to, the primacy of the dramatic text (21), which Lehmann considers as an imposing element of the dramatic theatre, leading to notions of rigid structures and hierarchy (50). By contrast, the dramaturgy of postdramatic theatre is oriented towards the visual experience of the theatre event (80) which is often achieved through the integration of new media and technologies. As such, the scenic elements of a performance constitutes a much broader "performance text", which Lehmann defines as the combination of 'linguistic material and the texture[s] of the staging' (85).

In her introduction to the English language version, translator Karen Jürs-Munby describes the relationship between the dramatic and postdramatic theatres as 'neither an epochal category, nor simply as a chronological 'after' drama, a 'forgetting' of the dramatic 'past', but rather as a rupture and a beyond that continue[s] to entertain a relationship with drama' (2). Thus one of the fundamental aspects of postdramatic theatre is the way in which it views its own exploits in relation to, or against, the dramatic theatre. By engaging with its predecessor, postdramatic theatre can thus be viewed as a critique of the limiting nature of the dramatic to meet the requirements of such postdramatic practitioners in contemporary theatre practice.

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Though Lehmann asserts that much postdramatic theatre is no longer subordinate to the primacy of the dramatic text, there are nevertheless a significant number of postdramatic playwrights, practitioners, and directors who have adapted material from the dramatic canon. These include Heiner Müller, Sarah Kane, the Wooster Group, The Builders Association, La Fura dels Baus, Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, Frank Castorf, and Michael Thalheimer, amongst others. Instead of the visual elements of their work being subordinate to the requirements of the text, these practitioners have often used the processes of adaptation and the appropriation of text as a discursive tool, whereby "adaptation" becomes a dramaturgical device in itself. In these instances the text becomes the object of inquiry, through which these practitioners explore their own relationships with, and anxieties towards, inheriting the forms and content of the dramatic theatre.

Conversely, Jürs-Munby views the adaptation of dramatic material for postdramatic performance as playing a relatively minor role in fostering a dialogue between the two forms. Though she acknowledges that in the past there have been 'innovative stagings of classical drama that push drama into the postdramatic' (2) she reasons that:

> [g]iven that the new theatre in this way is much more immediately informed by cultural practices other than traditional drama (from visual art and live art, to movies, TV channel hopping, pop music and the internet), the question may be asked why it would still be necessary or even appropriate to relate new theatre and performance work to drama at all. While the work of The Wooster Group or The Builders Association *has* often included an engagement with classic dramatic texts (e.g. with *Three Sisters* in The Wooster Group's *Brace Up!* or with various Faust dramatizations in The Builders Association's *Imperial Motel (Faust)* and *Jump Cut (Faust)*), this is not true of much of the new theatre that Lehmann invites us to consider.
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> (10: original emphasis)

In light of Jürs-Munby's position, this thesis therefore considers postdramatic adaptations of dramatic texts as being significant discursive tools that are capable of questioning the extent to which postdramatic theatre distances itself from the traditions and discourses of the dramatic: of how postdramatic adaptations are themselves representative of the dramatic tradition, and likewise how they re-present material from the canon. Beginning with both Hutcheon's premise that one of the foremost qualities of adaptations is their ability to make inquiries into the form of the source medium through imitation, and Ley's analysis that adaptations of existing theatre material engage with the history of the text, subsequent chapters will explore how, and to what effect, postdramatic theatre reconfigures some of the defining aspects of drama in both form and content. In doing so I hope to provide some provisional conclusions as to how adaptation functions as a provocative site for further discussions to emerge on the relationship between the dramatic and postdramatic forms.

CHAPTER ONE
MIMESIS

> Having buried the Author, the modern scriptor can thus no longer believe, as according to the pathetic view of his predecessors, that this hand is too slow for his thought or passion and that consequently, making a law of necessity, he must emphasize this delay and indefinitely 'polish' his form. For him, on the contrary, the hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin – or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins.
>
> **Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author***

In his prologue to *Postdramatic Theatre* Hans-Thies Lehmann argues that one of the key tenets of the postdramatic form is its interrogation and reconfiguration of the dramatic form of representation: mimesis. Mimesis constitutes a form of representation and imitation which is ubiquitous within Western dramatic theatre, as its presence can be found in each aspect of its dramaturgy; when the playwright decides upon a location, it is anticipated that it will bear a resemblance to the place upon which it is based; when a tree is part of the scenography it is anticipated that it will look exactly as we know a tree to look, no matter whether it is made of plastic, cardboard, or had been painted onto the set; when the actor takes up the role of a king or an historical figure, it is assumed that they will closely imitate their subject and present themselves exactly as one would find them in real life; and when their script indicate that their character is angry, it is anticipated that they will bear this emotion as though they were not just simulating it, but experiencing it for themselves. Thus the tradition of mimesis in dramatic theatre dictates that the stage-world is representative of reality, and that it be received as such.

Postdramatic theatre by contrast highlights the inherent fictionality of dramatic mimesis by openly engaging with the question of "representation" in performance, thereby placing it under censure. As Lehmann surmises:

the theatre shares with other arts of (post)modernity the tendency for self-reflexivity and self-thematization. Just as, according to Roland Barthes, in modernism every text poses the problem of its own possibility (can its language attain the real?), radical staging practice problematizes its status of illusory reality.

(2006: 17)

In an earlier essay Lehmann argues that due to the capacity of mimesis to render fiction as though it were real, the fictive dramatic text has since imposed itself upon the theatre. This leads to what he defines as a 'logocentric' view of theatre practice (1997: 55), whereby the text is the *de facto* source of meaning in the reception process. This imbalance, he argues, means that traditionally the dramatic theatre has been 'subordinated to the primacy of the text' (2006: 21), which leads to the dislocation - and thus marginalisation – of the immaterial visual elements that are essential to the success of performance.

However, just as Barthes conceptualises that the author's role in the reception process of literature diminishes through their proverbial "death" - in which meaning has 'no other origin than [in] language itself' (in Leitch 2001: 1468) - Lehmann argues that the key principles of mimesis, narration, figuration and fable (story) are similarly disappearing in contemporary postdramatic theatre (2006: 18). Postdramatic theatre thus questions the very assumptions and expectations of the dramatic, Aristotelian, and Naturalistic forms by way of a conscious, self-reflexive encounter with these principles. This is often explored through a more scenic-oriented discourse (17), which emphasises the visual dramaturgy over the textual (93). When playwrights, practitioners, directors, or companies use these self-reflexive practices in lieu of the dramatic form, their engagement with the dramatic text is often one that is presented as a struggle. The struggle often becomes the 'content and theme of its presentation' (17) in which the performer comes to terms with the traumatic loss of the dramatic.

Lehmann's assessment that postdramatic theatre questions its own identity in relation to the historical traditions of drama stems from his much broader observations on the changing forms of representation in the late-twentieth century. He argues that the emergence of new technologies has prompted us to question the legitimacy of older media such as the printed word (16) and consequently our relationship with the dramatic theatre in light of new media's global effects. This question of legitimacy is not only theoretical in scope but is a very real and direct consequence of our modern, profit driven, capitalist economy because

> theatre and literature are textures which are especially dependant on the active energies of imagination, energies that become weaker in a civilization of the primarily passive consumption of images and data […] theatre does not produce a tangible object which may enter into circulation as a marketable commodity, such as a video, a film, a disc, or even a book. The new technologies and media are becoming increasingly 'immaterial'.

> (ibid.)

Postdramatic theatre therefore finds itself entrenched within the polemic of subscribing to, or opposing, the demands of competition with other forms of contemporary media. Thus according to Lehmann the overwhelming domination of newer media should actively prompt the theatre to reconsider what it is about its own form of representation that makes it distinctive from any other (50). Rather than the theatre remaining a static art form in the wake of contemporary media, postdramatic theatre engages with the history and traditions of the dramatic theatre and questions theatre's capability to accurately depict the contemporary world through mimetic representation. As such, an analysis of the regression of mimetic representation in contemporary theatre – and the subsequent emergence of an alternative, self-reflexive form of representation informed by the co-presence of new technologies in the theatre space – is necessary if we are to consider postdramatic theatre as a powerful discursive form in a culture dominated by new media.

In this chapter I discuss the history of mimesis in relation to some of these self-reflexive practices found in postdramatic theatre, and argue that traditional forms of mimesis are no longer capable of representation in the postdramatic. My discussion of these aspects derives from a close analysis of two critical passages from *Postdramatic Theatre*, which I reproduce here. This initial theoretical work will in turn underpin the arguments that emerge throughout those case studies analysed in subsequent chapters.

> By regarding the theatre text as an independent poetic dimension and simultaneously considering the 'poetry' of the stage uncoupled from the text as an independent atmospheric poetry of space and light, a new theatrical disposition becomes possible. In it, the automatic unity of text and stage is superseded by their separation and subsequently in turn by their free (liberated) combination, and eventually the free combinatorics of all theatrical signs.

> (59)

> Representation and presence, mimetic play and performance, the represented realities and the process of representation itself: from this structural split the contemporary theatre has extracted a central element of the postdramatic paradigm – by radically thematizing it and by putting the real on equal footing with the fictive. It is not the occurrence of anything 'real' as such but its *self-reflexive* use that characterizes the aesthetic of postdramatic theatre.

> (103: original emphasis)

1.1 – Mimesis in its cultural and historical contexts

Many of the underlying concepts that inform our understanding of mimesis in Western theatre have derived from Aristotle's use of the term in his *Poetics*[1]. The *Poetics* is a source which

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[1] It is necessary at this point to give some context regarding my choice in translation. As with all translations of the *Poetics* there is a great deal of discrepancy regarding Aristotle's intentions when he used the term mimesis, and whether this should be translated as "imitation" or "representation". Both Gerald F. Else (1967) and Malcolm Heath's translations (1996) amongst others for the most part prefer to translate it as "imitation". Though in his introduction Heath recognises that even "imitation" proves an inadequate

remains both lauded and derided in equal measure, with some writers considering it 'the cornerstone of Western dramatic criticism' (Else in Worthen 2004: 94) while others criticise its lasting influence on contemporary writing for its dogmatism and prescriptive account of the dramatic form (Waters 2010). Even the essence of Aristotle's proposition has been found distilled and repackaged to accommodate other media, as with *Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters*, in which author Michael Tierno attests to the widely held belief amongst Hollywood professionals that the *Poetics* is considered '"the bible of screenwriting"' (2002: xviii).

Though highly contentious, the *Poetics* remains one of the most authoritative sources of not only the craft of playwriting, but of dramatic criticism and dramaturgy. In this seminal treatise on the dramatic form Aristotle considers 'the art of poetry in general, as well as the potential of each of its types' (in Halliwell 2006: 31), with mimesis being central to the creation and reception processes. Mimesis, he argues, is an aspect that is not only found in drama but in all forms of art, as 'epic and tragic poetry, as well as comedy and dithyramb (and most music for the pipe or lyre), are all, taken as a whole, kinds of mimesis' (ibid.).

But what is the significance of mimesis to theatre? How and why has the term, whose definitions include the 'act of resembling, of presenting the self, and expression as well as mimicry, *imitatio*, representation and nonsensuous similarity' (Gebauer and Wulf 1995: 1) slipped in and out of use in Western theatre? In what ways has mimesis been a foundational aspect in the construction of theatrical texts, performance, and pedagogy? Is mimesis an inadequate or limiting form of representation in specific theatrical contexts (such as in certain plays where it may undermine political or aesthetic intentions)? and finally, how and why

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translation, he argues that "representation" seems somewhat arbitrary and fails to convey the similarities or likenesses which Aristotle argues is observed between objects in dramatic poetry (1996: xiii). Conversely, Stephen Halliwell recommends that the word is best translated as "representation", as it best conveys the 'basic concept of the (fictional) relation between arts (poems, pictures, dances, etc.) and the world' with 'a strong inclination to associate it with direct speech or enactment' (2006: 192). In light of Lehmann's critique of the fictive nature of drama, and his assertion that postdramatic theatre deconstructs the very process of representation (*darstellung*) itself (2006: 103), I have chosen to use Halliwell's translation.

does the postdramatic overcome the impulse to imitate? These are all pertinent questions which I raise in order to contextualise my discussion on the retreating function of mimesis in postdramatic theatre and performance.

Greek scholar Stephen Halliwell, in his study *Aristotle's Poetics* (1998), explains that the historian Herodotus made one of the earliest records of mimesis that conforms to our contemporary understanding of the term. Halliwell suggests that Herodotus uses the term mimesis to describe both static simulations and the copying of images with little or no connotation of 'the underlying notion of enactment' (111). Writing in the fifth century BCE, Herodotus observed that at Egyptian banquets guests would carry with them 'a miniature wooden effigy of a corpse as a *memento mori'*, which he described as 'extremely realistic (*memimêmenon*) in both painting and carving' (in Halliwell 1998: 110: original emphasis). Herodotus similarly used the cognate form of the word to refer to visual copying or resemblance: '[t]hus the carved columns around the tomb of Amasis are said by [Herodotus] to look like palm trees' (111). Herodotus' account outlines imitation as part of a specific religious and spiritual practice, as the acts of honouring and remembering the deceased were determined by the mimetic capabilities of these static objects. So at what point does mimesis begin to evolve into ideas with which we are more familiar: those concerning the act of imitating objects by real bodies in space?

In their key study *Mimesis: culture, art, society* (1995), Gunter Gebauer and Christopher Wulf return to the etymology of the word (*mimos*) to highlight its particular meaning in the context of the Dionysian cult festivals. They point out that whilst '"Mimeisthati" denotes imitation, representation, or portrayal' the word mimesis refers to 'the action itself' (27), and explain that '[o]ften, though not exclusively, the concept of mimesis is used in the context of dance and music' (28). In its original context mimesis 'designate[d] either a *recitation* with several parts delivered by one performer or a dramatic *performance* by two or more persons' (ibid.: original emphases). Mimesis in this context therefore equates to

both the act of representing and the completed action itself. This indicates that in the period

following Herodotus' observation of the Egyptian banquet statues, mimesis was developing

beyond its function as a kind of sympathetic magic and towards an enactive form of artistic

practice.

A significant development in the history of mimetic theory is Plato's use of the term,

which brought discourses of mimesis into the realm of aesthetic theory (Gebauer and Wulf

1995: 31). In the *Republic* Plato discusses the function of art and poetry and the role they play

in the construction of functioning society. One of his principle arguments was that children

would seek to imitate those objects which they encountered every day. Plato recognised that

these imitations played an important role in shaping their future: '[s]ince young people learn

essentially through imitation, one of the most important tasks of education is the selection of

objects to which they will be exposed' (33). Art and poetry were the mimetic forms which

Plato concluded could potentially both aid and hinder the development of children in

becoming better citizens. Good models of art and poetry would produce future citizens to

benefit society, and children should be shielded from those forms which could potentially

interfere with or prevent them from doing their duty to the state (ibid.).

Plato's argument for mimesis as a tool capable of instruction or education relied on the

premise that (a) art is capable of representing a part of our immediate reality and (b) that such

representations were made possible through visual or oral media. Plato believed that it was the

duty of the artists, painters, and poets to create work which represented the best models of

behaviour for society, and that they should be well equipped to reproduce these kinds of

objects. He called this the ability to reproduce 'the phenomenal form of things'[2] (37). Plato's

conception of mimesis therefore expanded upon the idea of mimesis as simply the creation of

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[2] Plato conversely suggested that artists, painters and poets were incapable of producing physical objects
which represent abstract or metaphysical ideas. The production of ideas, he argued, was the function of the
philosopher. (Gebauer and Wulf 1995: 39)

similarity through copying and emphasised that the reception and recognition of similarity between the original and the imitation was fundamental for the creation of meaning.

Plato's distrust towards bad models of art (which he wrote in the *Republic* included theatre and live performance) is magnified when reading it against his student Aristotle's comparatively progressive ideas of the function of mimesis in dramatic poetry. Theatre scholar J. Michael Walton argues that Aristotle wrote the *Poetics* 'as a direct challenge to his mentor', describing it as 'a philosophical refutation of Plato's theory of Art, a re-examination of the concept of *mimesis* and a declaration in favour of the emotional impact of dramatic performance' (1984: 16). Conversely, Aryeh Kosman states that whilst it would be hyperbole to call Aristotle's *Poetics* a treatise on the nature of mimesis in the same way it defines tragedy, he considers the term an important one in relation to Aristotle's outline of tragedy in drama (in Rorty 1992: 51).

Though Aristotle is more famous for his specific dissection of the tragic form than he is for his theory of mimesis, it is important to consider that his very use of the term in relation to the genre of tragedy has had a lasting effect upon the conventions of representation in the theatre. As such, the *Poetics* can be seen as one of the first major works of dramatic theory from which the parameters of mimesis have been read against, and its influence is ubiquitous.

1.2 – Mimesis and its significance to the tradition of dramatic theatre

Whereas Plato believed that dramatic representation was limited due to its inability to convey the goals and aims of the ideal republic or state, Aristotle understood drama as being able to provide a connection between the actual and fictional worlds. Marvin Carlson's *Theories of the Theatre* (1993) provides us with a useful analysis on the distinction between the Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of mimesis, and it is worth quoting at length here.

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The basis of reality, according to Plato, is the realm of pure "Ideas," dimly reflected in the material world and in turn copied by art. Aristotle sees reality as a process, a becoming, with the material world composed of partially realized forms, moving – through natural processes – toward their ideal realization. The artist who gives form to raw material thus works in a manner parallel to that of nature itself, and by observing the partially realized forms in nature, may anticipate their own completion. In this way he shows things not as they are but as they "ought to be".

(17)

Carlson's statement demonstrates the contrast between how these respective models of mimesis achieve their purpose in representing reality. Both Plato and Aristotle considered mimesis to be important in producing moral and ethical models of behaviour, however their understanding of it diverges at a critical point: whereas Plato believed that mimesis was part of the visual culture of images pertaining to immediate reality, for Aristotle 'the critical point is that mimesis produces *fiction* [and that] whatever reference to reality remains is shed entirely of immediacy' (Gebauer and Wulf 1995: 55: original emphasis).

Throughout the *Poetics* Aristotle emphasises that good tragedy relies on the necessity of fiction. He articulates that the plot (*mythos*) and the words themselves (*logos*) are both constructed through reference to reality but are ultimately fictional, and that the playwright's role is to 'speak not of events which have occurred, but of the kind of events which *could* occur' (in Halliwell 2006: 40: original emphasis). To hear of events which could conceivably occur is fundamental in creating pathos[3].

Aristotle formulated what is perhaps considered one of the seminal appraisals of dramatic theory: his notion that tragedy is 'a representation [mimesis] of an action which is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude' (37). Like Plato, Aristotle recognised that

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[3] Conversely, Aristotle's treatment of the role of the more immediate elements of performance such as "spectacle" (*opsis*) in dramatic poetry receives a disproportionate amount of attention in his writing. This elision perhaps accounts for Lehmann's vehemence in arguing that "spectacle" is indispensable to the dramaturgy of the postdramatic if theatre is to break free of its logocentric qualities.

mimesis had its roots outside of the creation of art, observing that 'there is a natural propensity, from childhood onwards, to engage in mimetic activity' which derives from the pleasure that all men take in mimetic objects. This pleasure, he argues, is most effective when it is 'observed in practice: for we take pleasure in contemplating the most precise images of things whose sight in itself causes us pain' (34). With reference to this notion of representation through practice (*mimesis praxeos*), Paul A. Kottman argues that Aristotle sought to develop the theatre beyond 'the Platonic definition of tragedy as poetic production' and direct it towards praxis (2003: 82). But what does Aristotle's idea of *mimesis praxeos* entail in relation to his notion of the art of dramatic poetry? What kind of practice is he suggesting, and how does it differ from the postdramatic's treatment of mimesis?

A play's "action" may be considered one form of dramatic praxis, as it arises through the constitutive moments of tension throughout the duration of the plot, which Aristotle proposed to be the most significant element in the construction of tragedy: '[t]he poet should be a maker of plot-structures [...] in so far as his status as a poet depends on mimesis, and the object of his mimesis is actions' (in Halliwell 2006: 41). Thus Aristotle's idea of theatre is one in which the object of mimesis is related to the situation (action) rather than a mimesis of characters and people. This is expressed in his argument that it is not 'the function of the agents' action to allow the portrayal of their characters; it is, rather, for the sake of their actions that characterisation is included' (37). His rhetoric indicates a kind of logic in proposing that character is subordinate to plot. The question of how then "plot" – rather than the enactive mimesis of the actor/agent – constitutes practice, remains pertinent.

Patrice Pavis is fairly disparaging of Aristotle's notion of plot and argues that the *Poetics* never fully explains the nature of dramatic action, nor demonstrates with reference to the drama of its time how plot can be articulated through the use of action (1998: 9). Throughout the course of the *Poetics* it is not evident as to the exact form which the dramatic action should take. It is also unclear as to whether by "action" Aristotle is referring to the

performance of a rudimentary gesture (what we may call a particular action); a greater

dialogue between characters limited by temporality (through what is now conventionally

broken up into scenes); or a more precise set of interactions between characters in which a

important moment occurs (for example as in Stanislavsky's sense of breaking up scenes into

units, each with their own particular focus or objective). Whatever this unit of action may

consist of, it is significant that Aristotle placed a great degree of value against the act of

representing such actions and their ability to invoke particular emotions upon an audience.

Aristotle's insistence upon plot as integral to producing mimesis over any other formal

elements of the dramatic poetry is unsurprising given the period in which he was writing the

Poetics. Richard Graff acknowledges the widely held belief that Aristotle stood in a 'pivotal

position' during a period in which there was a major transition from an oral culture to a

literary one in Athenian life and art (2001: 19). In his account of reconstructing Aristotle's

Rhetoric, Graff concludes that whilst Aristotle referred to '"hearers," "audience members,"

even "spectators," he was less interested in oratory performances than he was with poetry'

(37). Similarly Stephen Halliwell cites the growing availability of dramatic texts in a culture

which had 'previously relied predominantly on performance for its access to drama' as

evidence of Aristotle's fascination with the written drama (1998: 343). Broadly speaking, the

Athenian cultural milieu was distinguishing itself as a society of writer-poets in which oratory

was quickly subsumed by the written word.

In his comparative examination of three theorists of Greek, Sanskrit, and Nōh theatre,

Graham Ley says this of Aristotle's *Poetics*:

> [b]oth mimesis and the concept of action entailed by it result in the
> domination of plot (*muthos*), action, and incident in the theoretical
> analysis of tragedy as a *poiesis*, and these matters are in the control of
> the *poietes*, the playwright, who directs his own composition.

(2000: 200)

Unlike the creation of poetry through other types of mimesis such as the epic, dithyramb, and musical forms, Ley argues that plot-structures are a form unique to dramatic poetry. This is perhaps due to the fact that unlike other forms of mimesis, dramatic poetry is distinctive because it is created in the written form but conveyed through performance: through the enactive mimesis of its agents (Halliwell 2006: 33). Whereas the epic and narrative forms were written and conveyed through oration without performance, and dance and the dithyramb were performance driven, the dramatic form is one in which the production of text is predicated on the expectation of its performance (even if Aristotle does argue that performance is not entirely necessary for tragedy's success).

Plot-structures are thus unique to dramatic poetry, as Ley argues, because they are an element that no other form of mimesis explores. I would go further in arguing that it is precisely because of the playwright, as the creator of fictional mimesis through the dramatic text, that mimesis has shifted from an enactive mode of engagement to a primarily literary one. This transition likewise accounts for Aristotle's logic in declaring that the plot-structure of dramatic poetry constitutes a mimesis complete in itself. Thus if we return to Gebauer and Wulf's definition of mimesis as a complete, performed action, we witness a distinction between the dancer's means of conveying mimesis and the playwright's. The dancer – or for that matter the orator, musician, and singer – principally enact mimesis in the same moment at which the audience engages with it[4]. Conversely the reproducibility of the text, at least on a fundamental level, ensures its own longevity and can more readily avoid the problem of ephemerality faced by the mimesis of the oral and visual kinds[5].

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[4] Gebauer and Wulf call these types performative in character, as each performance is unique and non-reproducible (1995: 48).

[5] Of course any anthropologist knows that entire communities still thrive today by communicating their histories, myths, and ways of living through the oral and visual modes of mimesis. Far from wishing to give the impression that these means of transferring knowledge are somehow inefficient when rendered in the theatre I wish to draw specific attention towards the complex nature of the play text's reproducibility, especially with regards to the polarity between the text and live performance.

The playwright, whose art is created through literary means, writes outside of the temporal and spatial constraints of live performance and thus transcends the limits of producing mimesis in the live moment within a material space. Anagnorisis, harmartia, and peripeteia are equally literary traits which exist inside of the fictive mimesis of the predetermined plot. The location in which a play is set exists simultaneously in (a) the fictive location determined by the playwright, (b) the reader's imagination, and (c) the live spectator's imagination, which reaches beyond the materiality and mise-en-scène of the theatre space. Even catharsis, which is not so much a creation of the playwright as it is a quietly anticipated reaction from an audience, is embedded within the playwright's craft. As Aristotle remarks:

> [t]he effect of fear and pity can arise from theatrical spectacle, but it can also arise from the intrinsic structure of events […] [f]or the plot-structure ought to be composed that, even without seeing a performance, anyone who hears the events which occur will experience terror and pity as a result of the outcome.

(Hailliwell 2006: 45)

The logical structure and progression of the order of events gives the impression of cohesion between the passing of time and the intensity of action. Catharsis takes its effect when the order of events leads to the inevitable peak of intensity. Unlike other forms of mimesis where the performer controls or guides the constitutive elements and can incite reactions through their own agency, the Aristotelian model relies on the relationship between the fictional time and events, and how these unfold, to produce an effect. Lehmann argues that the supreme 'logification' of tragedy (2006: 41) – that is the logical progression of the order of events – is precisely the catalyst that subsequently enabled the proliferation of a theatre practice dominated by logocentricity.

Lehmann is however not the first to express concern over the primacy of plot-structures in the Aristotelian conception of playwriting. The Hungarian playwright and theorist Lajos Egri argued against the hierarchical position of plot-structures in drama in his highly informed work on the subject, *The Art of Dramatic Writing* (1946). In reading against the formal qualities of tragedy, Egri argues that in regarding for example a play's exposition as only occurring in the opening of a play, a playwright creates limiting structures that deny characters from developing any more than the exposition demands, and thus with it, the development of the play entirely (2004: 253). With reference to the ways in which writers such as Ibsen began to question the traditional dramatic form, Egri is clearly contesting the rationale for Aristotle's formula of tragedy when he states that

> "Exposition" as the word generally used, is misleading. If our great writers had taken the advice of the "authorities," and confined exposition to the opening of the play, or to odd spots between action, the greatest characters would have died stillborn. Helmer's big exposition comes at the end of [*A Doll's House*] – and it could not have come anywhere else. Mrs. Alving kills her son at the end of *Ghosts* because we have seen her growth through uninterrupted exposition. Nor does it end there. Mrs. Alving could go on for the rest of her life, exposing herself constantly, as everyone does.

(ibid.)

Similarly, in his groundbreaking study *Theory of the Modern Drama* (1956) literary theorist Peter Szondi outlines his own anxieties towards the Aristotelian model of playwriting. Szondi argues that the content of Modern drama can no longer accommodate the structures and types of representation found in the Aristotelian model and that 'the indisputable fixed statement of the form is called into question by the content' (1987: 5). Like Egri, Szondi recognised that the drama of Ibsen presented a contradiction between the Classical and Modern types. He argues that whilst 'Ibsen did not take a critical stance vis-à-vis traditional dramatic form' his mastery of dramatic convention nevertheless 'masked an internal crisis in

the Drama' (12). Szondi's close reading of Ibsen's penultimate play, *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896), confirms his theory that Modern drama had begun to outgrow the limitations of Aristotelian dramatic form. He observed that

> [t]ruth in *Oedipus Rex* is objective in nature. It belongs to the world. Only Oedipus lives in ignorance, and his road to the truth forms the tragic action. For Ibsen, on the other hand, truth is that of interiority. There lie the motives for the decisions that emerge in the light of day, there the traumatic effects of these decisions lie hidden and live on despite all external changes**.**

> (Szondi and Hays 1983: 202-203)

Szondi regarded the Aristotelian model as representing an outdated 'systematic normative poetics' (197) based solely on the objective truths as set out by the dominating plot-structure. For Szondi, Ibsen foregrounded the end of "absolute drama". Szondi argued that 'to be purely relational – that is, to be dramatic, [the theatre] must break loose from everything external. It can be conscious of nothing outside itself.' (1987: 8).

Both theatricality and relativity, Szondi argued, were prevalent in the Epic form most closely tied to the theatres of Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht, as the Epic constituted a model which was 'more closely aligned to historical developments' than the Classical, Neoclassical, and Renaissance forms (Norden 2007: 7). Brecht's theatre practice – in particular his theory of Epic or non-Aristotelian drama – is a significant counterpoint to the absolute drama which Szondi describes, as it moves beyond the fictive elements of the plot-structure towards a theatre of social praxis (1987: xvi), capable of encompassing the empirical world of experience created by an 'empiricist author' (40). This is what Brecht meant when he termed his own practice as "theatre for a scientific age".

Brecht's own critical writing demonstrates that throughout his career he was highly concerned how the theatre as a space for mimesis, imitation, and representation could be

utilised and transformed to convey 'socio-historically specific and particular instances' (88).

His "Short Organum for the Theatre" (1948) outlines the basic tenets of his theatre practice,

which include observations on the inaccuracies of Naturalism to represent 'our social life'

(Willett 1978: 179) as well as his ideas on *gestus* (185) and defamiliarisation

(*verfremdungseffekt*) (192). Whilst this remains perhaps the most recognisable and concise

account of Brecht's theatre theory, other theoretical works such as *The Messingkauf*

Dialogues (1963) present an equally promising engagement concerning ideas of

representation in the theatre for a scientific age.

     The Messingkauf Dialogues was written 'sporadically between 1939 and 1955'

(Luckhurst 2006: 110) and predated the "Short Organum" by almost a decade whilst

continuing to be of major concern for Brecht up until his death. The text proper takes the form

of a Socratic dialogue and 'conveys his interest in the age-old practice of collaborative

thinking' (Mumford 2009: 49). *Messingkauf* consists of four "nights", each addressing a

different line of inquiry, with conversations ranging from the illusion of empathy in

Naturalistic theatre to definitions of art. Each discussion concerns the social and political

implications of the theatre. John Willett explains that the phrase "messingkauf" translates as

"buying brass" and that

> [t]he cryptic title derives from the analogy with a man who buys a brass
> instrument for the metal it is made of rather than for the music it makes.
> The theatre, in other words, is being cross-examined about its content,
> from a hard-headed practical point of view.

> (1978: 170)

Thus Brecht calls for a theatre which is no longer valued against its artistic or aesthetic virtues

alone, but one which requires an uncompromising inspection of its interior processes, and

how such an interrogation can be used to transform society. As Brecht writes in his notes to

Messingkauf: '[t]he time has passed when a reproduction of the world by means of theatre need only be capable of being experienced' (in Willett 1978: 274).

The dialogues themselves are composed of a veritable cast of theatre makers including a Dramaturg, Actor, Actress, and Stage Technician all in conversation with a Brechtian Philosopher. According to the *dramatis personae* the Philosopher wishes to understand how he can convert the current, predominantly Naturalistic theatre into theatre of rigorous political inquiry. It is the Dramaturg's responsibility to help clarify such a conversion, and he 'puts himself at the Philosopher's disposal' hoping that 'the theatre will get a new lease of life' through this transformation (Brecht 1974: 10). For the most part, the conversations in *Messingkauf* take place between these two figures interspersed with various interjections and resistance from the three minor characters.

Brecht enables a fruitful debate on the nature of imitation and representation throughout *Messingkauf* in a particularly effective rhetorical manner. For instance, on the opening night the Dramaturg asks the Philosopher what his specific interest in the theatre is. The Philosopher replies: '[w]hat interests me [...] is the fact that you apply your art and your whole apparatus to imitating incidents that take place between people, with the result that one feels one is in the presence of real life' (11-12). What the Philosopher is articulating here is that he holds utmost reverence for the theatre's ability to command the audience through the persuasive power of mimesis, but that, as he goes on to mention, he is specifically interested in the ways in which mimesis is capable of conveying to an audience 'the matter in hand' (55). The Philosopher's viewpoint is polemic to that of the Actor, who is more concerned with imitations for the purpose of pleasure:

> THE ACTOR: It's quite true that we imitate events from real life, but there's more to it than that. To hell with incidents. What counts is our reason for imitating them.
>
> THE PHILOSOPHER: Well, what is the reason?

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THE ACTOR: Because we want to fill people with sensations and passions, to take them out of their everyday life and its event.

(14)

Through this simple dialogue with the Actor, Brecht establishes the central challenge the Philosopher must face if he is to achieve his goals. Here Brecht produces a dialectic between old traditions and new forms; theatre for art and theatre for social praxis; drama and Epic; and the Aristotelian versus Brechtian dramaturgy.

The first night's discussion debates the significance of Naturalism in the theatre and is guided preponderantly by the Dramaturg. In this section he is critical of the Naturalist ideology in creating illusion: 'Naturalistic performances gave one the *illusion* of being at a real place [...] [The playwright] stopped short as soon as there was any danger of spoiling one's illusion of dealing with reality' (22: original emphasis). Though Brecht himself recognised Stanislavsky's achievement in creating a theatre practice based on experimentation, his contentions with Stanislavsky are voiced through the Dramaturg.

Action in these plays is reduced to a minimum, the whole of the time is devoted to depicting conditions; it's a matter of probing the inner life of individuals, though there is something for social scientists too. When Stanislavsky was at the height of his powers the Revolution broke out. They treated his theatre with great respect. Twenty years after the Revolution it was like a museum where you could still study the way of life of social classes that had meantime vanished from the scene.

(23)

Whilst it is evident that Brecht admired Stanislavsky for creating a method which was systematically capable of affecting the spectator's mood (Brecht and Mueller 1964: 155), Brecht accuses Stanislavsky of creating amusement and frivolity rather than serious deliberation (Willett 1978: 72). By contrast to the "museum-like" representations of the

Naturalistic stage, Brecht wanted to demonstrate characters who were the products of ongoing historical and social circumstances, arguing that an 'image that gives historical definition will retain something of the rough sketching [...] [of] the fully-worked-out figure' (191). According to Wolfgang Sohlich such representations were conveyed in performances of Brecht's plays by means of 'expressive gestures, which mark not only the objective social conditions (social *gestus*), but convey an uninterrupted connection of humans with their own and with surrounding nature' (1993: 54: original emphasis).

Ultimately for Brecht, representation was a means for his actors to convey the 'necessity and possibility of change' with 'characters and relationships as constituting an unstable unity of contradiction' (Mumford 2009: 86). Like many of the theories which he developed, Brecht's perception of imitation and representation confirmed the dialectical nature of his theatre practice: the conversations between the characters in *The Messingkauf Dialogues* being a manifestation of the ongoing dialogue between people and their environment.

In the final entry to his "Short Organum", Brecht distinguishes between the artistic representations of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and the utilitarian representations of his Epic and dialectical theatre:

> [t]hat it is to say, our representations must take second place to what is represented, men's life together in society; and the pleasure felt in their perfection must be converted into the higher pleasure felt when the rules emerging from this life in society are treated as imperfect and provisional.

> (Brecht in Willett 1978: 205)

This succinct summary on the matter evokes the two ideals which Brecht believed could bring about social change: firstly that the actor's representations must be able to reflect the material instability of the individual and the forces of history, and secondly that the audience gains

pleasure from recognising and understanding the character's situation. Thus Brecht sought to move beyond the affirmation of illusion and the misrepresentation of individuals' lives as insular and paralysed by their social conditions. Interestingly, this "misrepresentation" is precisely the element that the Actor in *The Messingkauf Dialogues* believes to be most sacrosanct to theatre if it is to retain its artistic merits.

1.3 – Mimesis and its role in the postdramatic

According to Lehmann, traces of Brecht's dramaturgy – particularly Brecht's scope in exposing the illusion of representation – are evident in postdramatic theatre writing and performance since the 1970s (2006: 35). This development 'leaves behind the political style, the tendency towards dogmatization, and the emphasis on the rational we find in Brechtian theatre' (33), culminating in an aesthetic which examines the irrationality, instability, and impermanence of representation in the wake of anxieties towards the dramatic text and the encroachment of new media into our everyday lives. As a result, the output of postdramatic texts and performances expose the materiality of the theatre, as a means of articulating the ontological problems of "performing" and "performance" in response to such uncertainties.

In his rigorous study on the subject of the ontology of representation, *To All Appearances* (1992), Herbert Blau examines the history of contemporary theatre and the impact of self-reflexivity in performance. He observes that contemporary performance is 'emptying out', leading to presences on stage with little or no representation of character: 'a mirror without an image, the apotheosis of absence' (2). He articulates that this problematic encounter is the result of discourses of postmodernity, in which the spectacle of the theatre becomes the theme of performance. This self-reflexivity, he argues, commodifies the spectacle whilst simultaneously constituting 'the pure venereal "nature" of commodification' itself (12).

The theatre of appearances is one in which the actor no longer need experience the emotion nor the socio-historic forces at play within their character, but instead present these aspects as independent objects of inquiry. Whilst Brecht's Philosopher in *Messingkauf* is interested in the ways in which mimesis can make the spectator feel as though they are in the presence of real life, Blau's conception of contemporary theatre argues that this aspect of representation is near impossible. Instead the unstable postmodern performer both acknowledges and foregrounds the "unrepresentability" of the object of mimesis, leading to a dynamic shift in which the act of representation itself becomes an autonomous element of performance. With the actor no longer dependant on text or character as prerequisites of a performance, the spectator witnesses more acutely the ontology and corporeality of the performer themselves. As a result, those elements upon which Western theatre was founded – Aristotle's six elements of tragedy and his famous formula – also begin to break down, which leads to the estrangement of unity from the theatre event. When these elements resurface, they return with 'a high quotient or consciousness of theatricality' and an awareness of each component as emblematic of the 'autonomous phenomena' to which it refers (11). In essence; plot; character; thought; diction; melody; and spectacle no longer constitute elements which when combined equate to dramatic unity. Rather these elements represent themselves for themselves and no longer necessarily need to pertain to a higher order.

As noted, much postdramatic theatre attempts to stage or thematise the unrepresentability of the "older" form of drama in the media-driven contemporary moment. With this, postdramatic theatre develops beyond the postmodern dramaturgy of playful theatricality and fragmentation of unity by using digital technologies and new media to interrupt the process of mimetic representation. Some of the techniques to which I refer in the following chapters – such as the simultaneous reproduction of live and projected bodies, offstage feeds engaging with onstage bodies, or the use of pre-recorded video – reify Lehmann's assertion that contemporary culture is fixated on the passive consumption of

immaterial images and data (2006: 16), as these techniques act to interrupt mimetic representations of character and structure inherent in the original work by shifting the spectator's gaze away from the drama and towards the technology present.

Similar to Brecht's dramaturgy in which the individual is shown as marked by their historical and social circumstances, the three performances that I examine demonstrate the postdramatic subject as visibly affected – in some instances even altered – by the co-presence of technology in the space. A significant number of academics within the field of theatre and performance studies have been engaging with these concerns over the past two decades, and have begun to chart the ways in which the interaction between technology and the body has continued the postmodernist project in unsettling the ontology of the theatrical performer. For example, performance theorist Johannes Birringer describes the introduction of digital technology into theatre as capable of creating 'noncentric spaces' in which the body is transformed 'in many unforeseeable ways' (1999: 381). This notion of technology in relation to space and the body is evident in the Wooster Group's *Brace Up!* (1991) in which the company performs Chekhov's *Three Sisters* as though each of the characters' interactions existed within their own self contained plane of space-time. The multiple layers of technology used throughout the performance, in which live feeds and pre-recorded video footage of the performers "address" or "speak" to onstage bodies, can be thought of as displaced, noncentric spaces that work to undermine the unity of Chekhov's text.

As the German theatre critic Thomas Oberender observes, the use of videoscreens in performance leads to the 'simultaneous presence of the actor as a person and also as an image on the stage' (in Carlson 2008: 22). In such instances the citation of the digital copy alongside the analogue body complicates an objective, unified, and stable representation of the individual, as the videoscreen demonstrates its avatar is just as capable of representation as the physical counterpart. I will return to this aspect of simultaneous presence in my discussion of La Fura dels Baus' *F@ust 3.0* (1998), a performance which mimics the emphasis on

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dichotomy found in the original Faust narrative and contemporises it in order to focus on the technologically-centred individual in contemporary culture.

More recently, scholars have been interested in asking to what extent we can understand the presence of technology in the theatre space as a problem of "embodiment": how technology inscribes itself upon the actor's body, and whether such a distinction between technology and the body can be discerned in contemporary digital culture. For instance, Jennifer Parker-Starbuck refers to the self-reflexive interaction between bodies and technology in some postdramatic performances as a kind of 'contemporary metatheatricality', in which the distinction between analogue bodies and staged technology becomes blurred as a result of the theatre's appropriation of digital technologies (2009: 24). Similarly, Matthew Causey proposes that over the past decade a radical shift has taken place in technologically-informed theatre practices, which he describes as a movement away from a mode of "simulation" and towards a model of "embeddedness". For Causey, "simulation" is characteristic of much performance influenced by the techniques employed by television - throughout his study he identifies the Wooster Group as exemplar of this - in which the simulation of actions replace the actions themselves. "Embeddedness" by contrast, 'alter[s] simulation's masking of the real with a dataflow that could inhabit the real itself and alter its essence' (2006: 3). Here Causey proposes that as a result of the integration of technology into our everyday lives the separateness of the human body and technology, and thus the very freedom of the human subject in digital culture (4), becomes questionable. Both Parker-Starbuck and Causey posit the body as being informed, affected, and irrevocably change by the embeddedness of technology upon the actor's body. In these instances the performer's essential autonomy is complicated, as they show themselves to be subjects – rather than operators – of the technology they perform with.

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1.4 – Postdramatic representation: adaptation and remediation

Like Blau's argument that the postmodern performer makes their appearance known to the spectator and Parker-Starbuck's analysis that mediating technologies produce a metatheatrical element in performance, the process of "remediation" in postdramatic theatre can similarly be seen as a conscious attempt to imitate, adapt, and incorporate the dramaturgical strategies used in dramatic theatre for the purpose of critique. The theory of remediation derives from a monograph of the same name by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000), in which they theorise that contemporary culture is fascinated by refashioning older forms of media, such as text, painting, and the photograph into newer forms of – primarily digital - media. They argue that '[o]ur culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: ideally, it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them' (5), whereby the imitative media attempts to ghost the older form while simultaneously attempting to present itself as immediate (6), thus denying both 'the presence of the [new] medium and the act of mediation' (11). However, as Bolter and Grusin outline, this quest for immediacy is fallacious because '[a]lthough each medium promises to reform its predecessors by offering a more immediate or authentic experience, the promise of reform inevitably leads us to become aware of the new medium as a medium' (19). In an attempt to make the process of mediation inconspicuous, the act of remediation hails the spectre of the older medium. In doing so, some semblance of the material in its original form makes its presence inadvertently known to the viewer, albeit it filtered and made imperfect through its transposition.

As with remediation theory, the postdramatic adaptations I examine here similarly challenge the supposed "immediacy" of mediating technologies by making the spectator aware of the technology's attempt to make the mediated experience appear as though it were a naturalised element of the live event. As will be evidenced in subsequent chapters, both "immediacy" and access to the object of mimesis (the dramatic text) are denied through the

intervention of digital technologies, as the use of these devices ultimately complicates a mimetic representation of the texts that the Wooster Group and La Fura dels Baus adapt for performance. As a result of this remediation of the dramatic text, the technology used by the two companies cannot be regarded as merely an attempt to sensationalise the theatre event. Instead, the presence of technology puts into question the legitimacy of analogue forms of mimetic representation, and, by extension, the mimetic nature of the theatrical text.

It has been argued here that the dramatic form of mimesis has retreated in postdramatic theatre in favour of a more self-reflexive model of representation, which is informed by, and shows anxiety towards, the ontological instability of the performer and the encroachment of digital technologies and newer forms of media into the theatre space. As a continuation of Brecht's project in effacing Naturalism's illusion of mimetic representation, postdramatic theatre uses material from the dramatic canon in order to critique the tradition of mimesis in drama, and to question the status of mimetic representation in the contemporary moment. This is often attained, as will be demonstrated, by censuring the dramatic text via playful juxtaposition and simultaneity, in which the content of drama and its canon is readily critiqued using the formal qualities of the postdramatic. In postdramatic theatre a complete mimesis of the object of inquiry is foregone in order to prioritise the problem of representation in environments saturated by new media. These essential principles will recur throughout the following case studies in order that we may begin to understand the specific ways in which dramatic texts are adapted for the postdramatic theatre.

CHAPTER TWO
ADAPTING THE CLASSICS: THE WOOSTER GROUP'S *L.S.D.* AND *BRACE UP!*

In their anthology of *Adaptations of Shakespeare* (2000) the editors Fischlin and Fortier arrive at a critical juncture in clarifying the specific importance of adapting theatrical material for new theatre works. Evidencing Robert Lepage's technologically-driven performance *Elsinore* (1996) as a radical adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, they contend that in order to understand the process of adaptation 'it is necessary to see it as often largely, sometimes solely, [as] a theatrical practice' (2000: 7). They conclude their introduction with an equally salient point by outlining that whilst every performance in which a text is restaged offers a new reading of the original, adaptation by contrast 'features a specific and explicit form of criticism: a marked change from [the] original cannot help but indicate a critical difference' (8). Here Fischlin and Fortier distinguish between restagings which attempt to contemporise, politicise, or make relevant the context of the play for a specific audience, and more critical adaptations which interrogate the very fabric of the original piece by effacing its political and aesthetic dimensions.

Fischlin and Fortier's conception of theatrical adaptation resonates with those views held by Graham Ley, as noted in the introduction to this thesis. Contrary to the adaptation theories proposed by Hutcheon and Stam, in which movement from one medium to another is a formal requirement in regarding work as a legitimate adaptation, theatrical adaptations are predicated on the dynamic of performance as a self-contained entity which is closely tied with, but at the same time distinctive from, the dramatic text. As will be evidenced over the next two chapters there is no formal change in medium for all three adaptations I examine: indeed it can be said that these examples resist this aspect of more traditional forms of adaptation, as the performances continue to take place in conventional theatre spaces. Rather, these performances should be regarded as adaptations that enable alternative ways of viewing the

original material as a result of the movement across modes of theatrical representation, as opposed to a movement across media.

In the previous chapter I examined some of the theoretical implications of the shift from mimetic representations in the dramatic theatre to those types found in postdramatic theatre. In this chapter I look at some of the techniques used by the New York-based theatre company the Wooster Group through their adaptations of quintessentially popular dramatic texts. Their engagement with these texts is sustained through their highly innovative, thoroughly media-driven approach to performance and addresses the encounter between history and its manifestation in a brutalised, mediatised contemporary urban reality (Knowles in Callens 2004: 189). Nowhere are these sentiments more explicit than in the their performance pieces *L.S.D. (…Just the High Points…)* (1984), which uses fragments from Arthur Miller's perennial anti-authoritarian play *The Crucible*, and *Brace Up!* (1991), an adaptation of Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. I place these two pieces in relation to the newer forms of representation found in postdramatic theatre and likewise frame them in the context of Fischlin and Fortier's understanding of the work being done through radical adaptations for the theatre. In this case study, the Wooster Group's work is not read as a purely materialist process (of how they take and transform texts for their intended purpose), rather I read their adaptations as critically engaging with the work of their theatrical predecessors in order to demonstrate why their disruption of the text is a necessary departure. In doing so I provide an analysis of how postdramatic theatre contests, extends, and develops from the dramatic form in new work, and how adaptation theory constitutes a site for such discussions to emerge.

2.1 – The influence of deconstruction

The Wooster Group emerged on the Manhattan theatre scene in the late 1970s. Founded by Liz LeCompte and Spalding Gray, the pair began their careers in the theatre as actors in The

Performance Group, an experimental collective led by the director and academic Richard Schechner. Some of the Performance Group's most recognised work includes a reworking of Euripides' *Bacchae* entitled *Dionysus in '69* (1968), Brecht's *Mother Courage* (1974) and Jean Genet's *The Balcony* (1979). These restagings attempted to 'attenuate the literary and mimetic dimensions of the theatre' (Savran 1988: 3) through an exploration of the psychological encounters between the actor and the audience (Champagne 1981: 20). Schechner's process was one that foregrounded a psychological exploration of the text, developing from the theatre practices emerging in Eastern Europe by the Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski. LeCompte quickly became disillusioned with Schechner's conception of theatre, later arguing that her own practice of working and reworking texts was ultimately a rebuttal to Schechner's approach (ibid.: 26). Between 1975 and 1980 LeCompte and Gray drafted in Jim Clayburgh, Ron Vawter, Willem Dafoe, Kate Valk, and Peyton Smith, who formed the core ensemble of the Wooster Group.

Over the past three decades the Group's work has incorporated a number of technologies into their performances which are coterminous with the text and performer. Using media such as film, videotape, audiotape, the telephone, computerised voices, sounds, and images the Wooster Group create 'a new conception of *dramaturgy*, not merely a play or a text, and more than drama' (Marranca 2003: 4: original emphasis). The relationships which develop between text, performer, and technology ensure a kind of performance in itself: the process of working with and against technology is displayed consciously as an element of the performance proper. In highlighting their advocacy of technology as a naturalised player in performance, the Wooster Group have captured the essence of an aesthetic which academics have often described as 'deconstructive theatre'[1] (Auslander 1997: 6; Vanden Heuvel 1995: 65; Wohl 1984: 414).

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[1] It should be noted here that relatively few theatre practitioners seek to create deconstructive theatre in the first instance, and that this language has been applied to these performances by academics upon reflection. For example, Martin Banham in *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre* notes that structuralism,

Deconstructive theatre stems from the perceived relationship between the work of theatre practitioners and the poststructuralist theories of Jacques Derrida, most notably with his critical essay on the theatre of Antonin Artaud entitled "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation" (1978). In this seminal essay Derrida reads Artaud's theatre as one which does not pertain to theatrical representation, but 'is life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable' (2008: 294). Derrida deems mimesis to be 'the most naïve form of representation' as its presence in the theatre marks 'the labor of total representation in which the affirmation of life lets itself be doubled and emptied by negation' (295). Mimesis for Derrida therefore constitutes a form of representation which directs the gaze of the spectator away from that which is present on stage and back towards the literary author.

> [The author] lets representation represent him through representatives, directors or actors, enslaved interpreters who represent characters who, primarily through what they say, more or less directly represent the thought of the "creator". Interpretive slaves who faithfully execute the providential designs of the "master". Who moreover – and this is the ironic rule of the representative structure which organizes all these relationships – creates nothing, has only the illusion of having been created.

> (296)

Deconstructive theatre displaces the notion of the author as the absolute creator and instead treats performance as 'an autonomous art form, as an alternative to "literary" drama' (Vanden Heuvel 1991: 6). In doing so, it eschews the Aristotelian conception of mimesis by replacing the structural unity that was once present in drama with an acknowledgement of its lack of congruity in their particular theatre practices. In the deconstructionist model the meaning of

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poststructuralism and deconstruction became fashionable words amongst the postwar generation of academics in universities around Europe. He argues that by contrast most journalists were not influenced by these discourses and as such this led to a 'separation between journalism and academic criticism [that] tended to weaken both modes of describing the theatre' (1995: 262-3). Similarly both LeCompte (in Yablonsky 1991) and Dafoe (in Morra 1987) have stated that whilst they regard the importance of the vocabulary of deconstruction, they explain that its principles do not govern the creation process.

the work is 'produced by the action of something which is not present, which exists only in absence' and where there is 'no order of meaning which grounds the activity of signification' (Auslander 1997: 28).

The transcendence of a mimetic approach towards creating theatre is evident in the style of delivery that the Wooster Group have developed throughout their history. In his highly informed study on their earlier pieces, David Savran describes the Group's acting style as representative of the fact that none of the core members had received any formal training beyond their involvement in Schechner's Performance Group (1988: 2). Having not been assimilated into the Stella Adler, Lee Strasberg, or Sanford Meisner schools of acting which dominated the popular New York theatre scene in the late 1970s, the Wooster Group experimented throughout their rehearsals with an open rejection of the hegemonic "Method" and "System" approaches to creating performance. For instance, Kate Valk recalls being 'incredibly mov[ed]' when she witnessed Ron Vawter putting glycerine in his eyes to simulate that he had just been crying in a production of *L.S.D.*: '[e]ven though there were a lot of devices that you could see were being manipulated, it felt more authentic and real to me' (Valk in Salle and French 2007). In this scene the use of glycerine to simulate the act of crying not only replaces the absence of the physical tears themselves, but signifies the absence of the psychophysical process that an actor would be required to undergo in order to achieve the desired effect. By deconstructing the relationship between process and product, the Wooster Group created an aesthetic which was not only for them the most accessible and pragmatic approach to creating, but also made visible their own perception and experience of contemporary life.

2.2 – L.S.D. (…Just the High Points…)

Both *L.S.D.* and *Brace Up!* are seminal pieces in the history of the Wooster Group. Not only did these pieces transform the landscape of experimental and avant-garde theatre irrevocably, but they also symbolise a transitional phase within the overall body of the Group's work. *L.S.D.* was arguably the last piece of work – in the decade since LeCompte and Gray's departure from the Performance Group – which would take fragments of text from the American literary and dramatic canon as a means of interrogating the microhistories of America. By comparison, *Brace Up!* can be considered as the first in a succession of performance pieces which breaches the wider canon of Western dramatic literature. For example their first trilogy, collectively entitled *Three Places in Rhode Island* (1975-1979), consisted of readings of T.S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* and devised work based on Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*. *Route 1&9 (the Last Act)* (1981) presents excerpts from Thornton Wilder's modernist play *Our Town* through the guise of a televisual lecture delivered by Ron Vawter (Figure 2.1) in lieu of the Wilder estate's permission for the Group to stage a full production of the play (Shewey 1981).
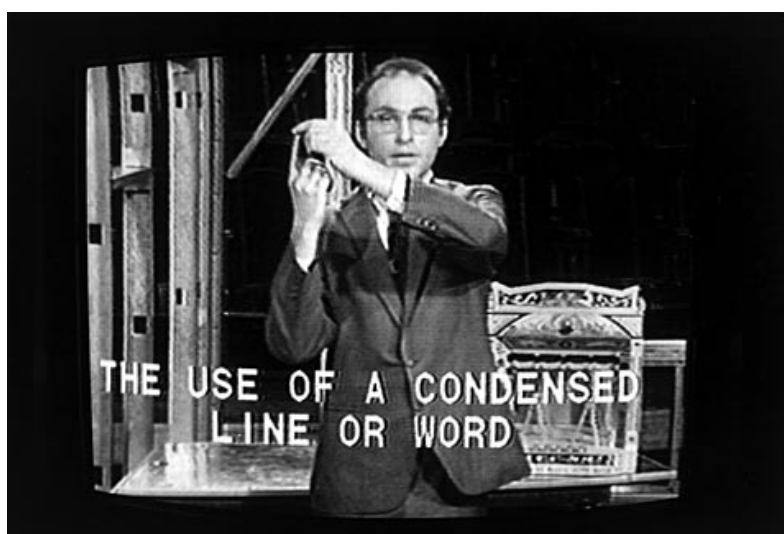

Figure 2.1: Ron Vawter as "The Lecturer" in a videotape still from a segment entitled "The Lesson" in *Route 1 & 9 (the Last Act)*. (Photograph: Nancy Campbell)

Their later work reinterprets and adapts such canonical writers as Eugene O'Neill in *The Emperor Jones* (1993) and *The Hairy Ape* (1995), Racine's *Phèdre* in *To You, The Birdie!* (2002), Francesco Cavalli's opera *La Didone* (2008), and most recently Tennessee Williams' autobiographical play *Vieux Carré* (2009).

L.S.D., like much of the Group's earlier work, had attracted a great deal of controversy not only due to the content of the production, but also on account of the legal battle which at times impeded the rehearsal of the work[2]. Having founded their practice upon a re-examination of the great American texts of the twentieth-century, Liz LeCompte wanted to use Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* as a counterpoint to a devised piece of work based on a collaged biography of Timothy Leary, the Harvard psychology professor who advocated the use of psychedelic drugs through the infamous slogan "Turn on, tune in, drop out". By drawing a parallel between the hysteria of witchcraft at the Salem witch trials in *The Crucible* and the late-1950s and early-1960s fear of the psychedelic drug culture in America, the Group attempted to create a politicised historical portraiture of America by reconfiguring the accolades of *The Crucible* against the repressed countercultural narratives of those of Leary and his contemporaries.

Having hoped to stage a more sustained version of Miller's play initially, progress on *L.S.D.* was hindered when one night in October 1983 Miller attended a showing of the work-in-progress after a request made by Peyton Smith (Savran 1988: 192). The piece Miller watched lasted fifty minutes, after which he met with LeCompte and the performers to talk about the work. Upon reflection, Miller and his attorneys denied the Group the rights to perform excerpts from *The Crucible* on the grounds that their treatment of his play may deter any future plans for a revival in New York. Gerald Rabkin, having interviewed Liz LeCompte regarding the debacle, summarised that Miller's contention with the Group's incorporation of

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[2] For a more detailed account of the dispute between Arthur Miller and the Wooster Group's *L.S.D.* see (Aronson 1985) and (Savran 1988, Part III).

his text was twofold, as not only had the Group been denied permission to stage the play in the first instance, but also because '*L.S.D.* never represented itself as [*The Crucible*]' (1985: 144). To bolster her own position, LeCompte welcomed Miller to participate further in the project and was willing to cite the piece as material which had been adapted from *The Crucible*. However Miller's ardent refusal to collaborate with the Group subsequently shaped the development of the piece, and *L.S.D.* was quickly becoming a staged reflection of the political stand off between the two camps.

Figure 2.2: **Ron Vawter (centre) as Congressman Donald Hall in Part II ("Salem") of the Wooster Group's *L.S.D. (…Just the High Points…)*. (Photograph: Nancy Campbell)**

Nevertheless, LeCompte sought to include text from the play into the performance, albeit in another form that would attempt to circumvent the licensing. What resulted is perhaps one of the most infamous examples of radical performance making in the history of contemporary theatre. As Arnold Aronson writes:

> [LeCompte] recalled the ongoing discussion in the '60s as to whether artists could create while on acid or whether creation was a rational process. So she decided to take a section of *The Crucible* that the company already knew very well, have the actors take LSD and see what happened. She videotaped the result, although frequently she

taped only closeups of the performers rather than the whole stage. The result, LeCompte felt, was the "disintegration" she had sought. The scene, therefore, is an attempt by the actors to recreate 15 minutes of this event using the videotape as text and score.

(1985: 73)

The inclusion of the reconstructed material led to the emergence of a new dialogue between the original text and its manifestation in performance. Since any accurate recitation of the text had already been compromised through the use of psychedelic drugs in rehearsal, the reconstruction of the material on the videotapes took precedence over the Group's attempts to recall the text. The physical score of the actors created the illusion of an attempt to reconstruct a phenomenological experience by showing the text behind the video to be of tremendous significance, yet ultimately unobtainable. On occasion the company would present the same section in gibberish or, as Samuel G. Freedman noted from one performance, 'as pantomime, with no dialogue from the play' (1984).

The very act of making the text the inconsequential object of inquiry thus attempted to shift the gaze of the spectator from the text to the performer. With no semblance of mimetic narrative to imitate, the performers were acting as conduits by supplying the audience with images and movements that were not present: neither directly lifted from the text nor immediately available to question the performer's accuracy in their portrayal. With the original tapes not present on stage, the spectators were unable to either accept or reject the verisimilitude of the Group's performance of *The Crucible*. This radical gesture is not only an aesthetic choice on the part of LeCompte, but firmly rooted in the politics between Miller and the Group. By obstructing access to the original words through the text's mediation, the Wooster Group make reference to its presence through the absence of similarity. By turning away from it, they move towards a closer representation of what the text now signified to them: a symbol of the rejection of the playwright's authority.

Figure 2.3: **(from L-R) Jeff Webster, Michael Kirby (monitor), Peyton Smith, and Willem Dafoe recreate excerpts from the videotape in *L.S.D. (…Just the High Points…).* (Photograph: Bob Van Dantzig)**

LeCompte similarly recalls her attempt to emulate a particularly amateurish aesthetic, which she argues is embedded within the tradition of *The Crucible*:

> I went to Salem and at one of the tourist traps I saw a re-enactment of the trial testimony by two high school girls surrounded by all these mannequins. And it was horribly done. So I took the idea of working on *The Crucible* as a high school play, so to speak, well-done and totally committed, but finally divinely amateur in a way that Arthur Miller sensed, I think. His vision of himself is in the realm of high moral art. But this is a play that most people see in high school productions, with people wearing cornstarch in their hair.
>
> (in Savran 1988: 191)

In eschewing the more slick representations of *The Crucible* that were found on the professional stages for those types that were showing up perennially in high schools all across America, LeCompte attempted to contest the privileging of "invisible" forms of acting that were becoming increasingly familiar on the American stage. The glycerine tears of Ron Vawter; the text blurred by the reconstruction itself; the unreliability of the speaker's words compromised through the use of psychedelic drugs; and the unreliability of the technology

used to capture it, all led to a presentation of *The Crucible* whereby meaning is lost, or at best misplaced. In these instances the "activity of signification", to borrow from Philip Auslander, produces references to ideas and imitations of objects which have through the process of deconstruction become hyperbolic and parodied. Beyond the imitation of a gesture or the fragment of text which the performer quotes from, lies the absence of the unified, authorial meaning which Miller imbued upon the text. Instead, the meaning of *The Crucible* in the Wooster Group's *L.S.D.* becomes symbolic of a gestural turn away from the closed-off fiction of the stage-world, and turns to gaze back upon the audience. Throughout *L.S.D.* the Wooster Group indicate that if the adapted material is to have any significant impact or semblance of meaning beyond its mere citation within production, the text must first be used as a discursive tool to highlight the aesthetic and political powers that are present within it.

2.3 – *Brace Up!*, after Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*

> Writers who are considered immortal or just plain good and who intoxicate us have one very important trait in common: they are going somewhere and call you with them.
>
> **Anton Chekhov in a letter to A.S. Suvorin (dated 25th November 1892)**

The Group's 1991 production *Brace Up!* can be seen as a conscious movement towards what would continue to be a sustained engagement with particular playwrights and texts from the wider dramatic canon. Though not a full staging of Chekhov's text – the actors wilfully miss out sections of text in which comparatively little "action" takes place and fast forward further along – it is unlike their previous work, which up until this point had taken partial texts and used them to support larger ideas that emerged from the rehearsal process. In *Brace Up!* however, Chekhov's *Three Sisters* constitutes the main source of inspiration around which other images and footage are interspersed to create a collage of inter-texts.

The language used to define the production, and its precise relationship with the Chekhov text, is as interesting as it is varied. Academic perspectives on the performance offer up the work as being simultaneously a 'version' of the original (Bell 2005: 565); a 'performance text' encompassing the narrative threads of Chekhov (Arratia 1992: 121); and a work 'based on' *Three Sisters* (Mee 1992: 144; Lehmann 2006: 169). The *New York Times* theatre critic Ben Brantley described the production as a 'fairly systematic deconstruction of Chekhov's original text' (1994), whilst those who worked on the development of the piece were more acutely aware of the specific ways in which Chekhov's text intersected with the overall ambitions of the piece. For instance the text's translator, Paul Schmidt – who also played the role of Dr. Chebutýkin and acted as an onstage literary advisor – notes that whilst the company did not attempt to stage *Three Sisters* in its entirety, there was never any intention on the part of Liz LeCompte to distort the text (1992: 156). Alternatively, the production's dramaturg and assistant director Marianne Weems describes the performance text as primarily a collaborative one, with Schmidt's translation developing upon hearing how the Group read Chekhov over the course of rehearsals (in Mee 1992: 147). Liz LeCompte is more resolute in her advocacy of *Brace Up!* as not so much an adaptation of Chekhov but instead 'as a double portrait of Chekhov and The Wooster Group', readily assuring those who may consider *Brace Up!* as a violation of Chekhov that 'we're not interpreting him. We're putting him on. We're inhabiting him' (ibid.). More economically, *Brace Up!* can be described as a production which adapts and stages the material of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* through an amalgamation of the central text with inter-texts. These materials are merged across a range of analogue and digital technologies, which impose themselves upon one another through varying degrees of synchronicity and juxtaposition.

Some insight as to why the Wooster Group chose to contrast the words of Chekhov against the backdrop of the incessant, unrelenting digital media can be gleamed from Schmidt, who surmises that 'we in America no longer admire the autumnal melancholy, the wistful

nostalgia for gentility that so many English productions have laid upon Chekhov's plays' (1992: 157). Thus the images which are synonymous with Chekhovian theatre are readily treated to deconstruction; the samovar is replaced by a microphone governed by an omniscient narrator; the piano replaced with static noise from looped footage of two Japanese cult movies of the 1950s and 1960s; and a pre-recorded rendition of Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" appears in place of a Russian folk song as a source of entertainment for the Prózorov household and its guests. The performance therefore critically appraises both the value and relevancy of Chekhov's text in the contemporary moment, and places it under scrutiny through the use of technology and media in a manner which makes technology appear as a naturalised element of the mise-en-scène, just as the samovar would have appeared to Chekhov's contemporary audience.

The Wooster Group's adaptation thus forms not only a critique of the mimetic representations inherent in the original text, but also a makes rigorous deconstruction of the scenography of Naturalism: a rebuttal to the elegiac nature of the images found in Chekhovian theatre and their significance to the theatre of today, in a world only a decade away from a new millennium. *Brace Up!* adapts the words of Chekhov to create a symphony of sound and images which engages with the temperament of the media world and represents its significance to the cultural landscape of contemporary America.

The use of electronic media in the performance constitutes a critical appraisal of the value and relevance of Chekhov's text in the contemporary moment by polarising the moving electronic image against the spoken word. This invasion of media acts to make apparent the potential for alternative "versions" of reality to be present simultaneously on stage, occurring between the simulated and mediated images of the screen and those real, live bodies which inhabit the performance space. Stephen Watt argues that contemporary media – especially the electronic images found in film or on cinema screens – leave indelible marks on other forms, including the theatre. He states that the

television has insinuated itself so irrevocably into everyday life that its blue haze seems almost inseparable from lived experience. It's not so much that television images can be mistaken for the real thing, though of course they frequently are, but that some of these images have so penetrated the real that once stable binarisms are no longer so stable, so absolute.

(1998: 159)

In the opening scene Kate Valk walks to the centre of the stage and takes a microphone. Throughout the piece she acts as a narrator, a role that developed over the course of the rehearsal period. She reads the stage directions as they appear in Schmidt's translation: '*the Prózorov house. A big living room, separated by columns from a dining room in the rear. It is noon; the weather is sunny and bright. In the dining room, the table is being set for lunch*'[3]. However there is a significant lack of the decorous elements to which she refers, and instead the columns are replaced by a mechanical, utilitarian structure which houses the wires and cables powering the television screens and microphones that dominate the stage. The few lighting states which do occur are extreme, either flooding the stage with an intense white or muting it in total darkness. In these moments it is only the ephemeral glow of the television which provides a source of light. Valk remains central during the initial prologue as the televisions flank to her peripheral.

The televisions present a number of images throughout *Brace Up!*; they emit live feeds of the performers delivering their lines (usually with the performer standing to the side of the stage and shielded from the sight of the audience by large screens); they broadcast pre-recorded video footage which is often sped up or paused at certain moments in which dialogue occurs; and there is also footage from the Japanese films which compliment, contrast, or reify the live action as it happens. Dialogue takes place between live performers and their

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[3] All quotations from *Brace Up!* are taken from the DVD recording (2009), which is based on Paul Schmidt's translation of *Three Sisters* (1997).

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digital counterparts (as in Figure 2.4) and occasionally between the live performer and pre-recorded footage of absent performers, whereby the live actor literally plays a game of catch-up with the footage whilst they wait for the tapes to be loaded and played. This gives the televised performers a transient presence, as once they have delivered their lines they promptly disappear or are replaced by another image.

Figure 2.4: **(From L-R) A conversation between Túzenbach (Jeff Webster), Dr. Chebutýkin (Paul Schmidt), and the Narrator (Kate Valk) in *Brace Up!* (Photograph: Mary Gearhart)**

The electronic images and digital technologies used in *Brace Up!* are often presented as an extension of the performers' bodies and are used to consolidate motifs which are already present in the analogue aspects of the performance. For example Beatrice Roth, who played the youngest sister Irína, was the eldest member of the cast at the age of seventy two in the performance's first run. Her delivery was languorous throughout, making frequent use of a chair with castors, which Kate Valk used to lead Roth around the space with. Whereas the other performers played their roles with microphones, Roth delivered a large number of her lines without one, often having to speak over the amplified voices and television sets to be heard. By forcing her to compete with it, the technology evidences Roth's age and likewise illuminates her character Irína's internal anxieties.

The accumulative effect of the media's intrusion is evident in the final moments of Act II, in which the carnival folk finally arrive outside the Prózorov household. An image of a clock appears displaying the time 5:10am, and footage from one of the Japanese movies is played in which the voices of musicians can be heard. Solyóny and Natásha appear on the television sets and Solyóny proclaims his love to Irína whilst Natásha tells her that she must give up her bedroom for Andréy and Natásha's young boy, Bóbik. There is a brief, erratic conversation between Vershínin and Kulýgin across the length of the stage and voices continue to surround Irína's silent, contemplative space. Finally a shrill piece of accordion music deafens the stage whilst an image of Natásha appears, riding on Protopópov's sleigh. Kate Valk hands Beatrice Roth a microphone and Roth speaks Irína's line, 'I want to go to Moscow! Moscow! Moscow!'. This moment mirrors one of the major themes portrayed throughout Chekhov's *Three Sisters*: that of Irína's anxiety towards the increasing confinement of life in a provincial town, and the effect of the environment upon her sense of purpose and meaning within it.

In *Three Sisters* the desire for Moscow is a metaphor for the rejection of provinciality, whereas *Brace Up!*, by making constant use of the proximity between real bodies and electronic images, replaces the provincial space with a space dominated and informed by technology. Rose Whyman writes with reference to *Uncle Vanya* (1896) that Chekhov's portrayal of 'provincial Russian life in the 1890s is anything but idyllic' (2011: 98) and that imagery of spatial confinement signifies an important relationship between character and environment (106). These sentiments are similarly strong within *Three Sisters*, however in *Brace Up!* the performers make little reference to life outside of their immediate environment. When they do so it is purely with reference to Chekhov's text, and the setting in which their adaptation takes place remains unspecified. Thus if we consider the Wooster Group's environment to be one which is simultaneously immediate (in the acting space) and mediated (by technologies), it can be understood that Irína's anxiety in *Brace Up!* is one towards the

landscape of media which encircles the stage-world. Both the electronic images and amplified voices achieve a marked effect on her character: in this instance the overwhelming and impalpable confinement of the intrusive media is the externalised horror which seizes Irína and motivates her longing for Moscow (Figure 2.5). The droning voices emitting from all around her signifies the intolerable immediate reality presented.

This presentation of the media as part of lived experience resonates with Stephen Watt's theory that media penetrates the aesthetic boundaries of performance in order to demonstrate its effect upon the individual. Throughout *Brace Up!*, the Wooster Group present a vision of reality in which new media appears to directly influence the individual's perception and attitude towards their environment. The television is transformed from an object which enables transmission of images and information to an active participant that is capable of consuming its subject.

Figure 2.5: **A video still from the 2009 DVD of *Brace Up!* with Beatrice Roth as Irína, Kate Valk as the Narrator, and the production's assistant director/dramaturg Marianne Weems (at the rear) in the final moments of Act II.**

Though the use of technology often seeks to expose the fragmentary nature of performer/character identity, it can also be used to provide a means of unifying the non-dramatic elements of the performance through an attempt to reconcile the chaos that it

represents. Nick Kaye states that unlike earlier Wooster Group productions such as *L.S.D.* and *Frank Dell's The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (1987), *Brace Up!* develops from the fragmentation of character and narrative to explore 'the production of [a] complete or virtually complete text' (2007: 147). This is achieved, according to LeCompte, through the imposition of different relationships between the displaced bodies and images (LeCompte in Kaye 2007: 148). Rather than engaging in action between the performers and images through the virtual space that exists between them, the performers sustain unity with the text through narrative cohesion. By engaging in action via the proximities of bodies and images through narrative rather than the virtual space, the performers are able to sustain a sense of unity with the text. No matter how fragmentary their performance may appear, the Wooster Group find firm ground from which to establish a relationship with the text. In doing so, they are successful in evidencing the process of mediatising Chekhov whilst maintaining a semblance between the original text and their adaptation of it.

2.4 – Deconstructive adaptation

It is clear in the case of the Wooster Group that their practice of interpreting, restaging, and performing these canonical texts must be viewed to a greater extent as a practice of adaptation, because, as in line with Fischlin and Fortier's interpretation of theatrical adaptation, the Group continue to critique the political and aesthetic choices of the source texts that they interrogate. In its conception *L.S.D.* was a performance which used scenes from Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* to mimic attitudes of fear and prejudice towards the 1950s and 1960s counterculture, and to find a relevant comparative depiction of this attitude for the stage. However by the end of its run the emphasis had shifted towards an examination of the limits of adaptability and the sanctity of the playwright's words in the mouths of performers who were not influenced by the prevailing ideologies of Method acting. With the Wooster Group having been informed

that their version of *The Crucible* could potentially deter future productions, *L.S.D.* became a piece that eschewed the hegemonic representations of Miller's text that were found in other productions of the play for a specific political purpose.

Conversely *Brace Up!* began with the text of *Three Sisters* in its entirety, giving the Group's disparate and fragmentary approach to performance a foundation based on unity for further inquiry. Upon this structure and unity the Wooster Group transfers their own pleasures, fears, and anxieties through a confrontation with the processes of mediatisation. Through their incarnation of *Three Sisters* both the notion of "Chekhov" and "his play" become one of many ideas rather than the status quo. From this perspective, *Brace Up!* gives us more clues into the workings of the Wooster Group and their processes of plurality when building a performance based on existing dramatic work. Perhaps then, *Three Sisters* constitutes the site of investigation and *Brace Up!* the platform from which we learn more about the Wooster Group's creative processes than we do of Chekhov and his characters.

Theatrical adaptations are thus capable of radically reshaping and altering material from the dramatic canon, whilst still maintaining their efficacy in the theatre space. Unlike traditional forms of adaptation, the new work that is produced in a theatrical adaptation creates a dialogue between the material in its original dramatic form, and the new theatre environment for which the text is adapted. Both *L.S.D.* and *Brace Up!* are arguably exemplar of this mode of adaptation, as throughout these performances the Wooster Group undermine the relationship between dramatic text and its staging through their non-mimetic performance strategies. As a result, both performances can be read as operating in accordance with the logic of the postdramatic, as the Group's staging of these classic plays questions the significance of the dramatic text to their creative process.

These two pieces likewise resist many of the conventions and strategies of traditional forms of adaptation, as they treat the texts that they employ with scrutiny rather than the reverence which is inherent in more faithful adaptations. The texts themselves, in line with the

postdramatic's reconfiguration of the structural elements of drama, are de-hierarchised from their position at the centre of the reception process. The privileging of narrative, character, authorial intention, and, above all, a mimetic representation of the stage-world are similarly reconfigured through the co-presence of technology alongside the text and performers. This alternative dramaturgy produces a plurality of voices and images that emerge throughout the process of performing these texts.

The Group's unique style of creating new work from old texts treats "the performance event" and the distinctive dramaturgies of performance-based practice, as an alternative mode of theatrical representation to that of the dramatic text. Thus when we consider the work of companies such as the Wooster Group through the lens of adaptation theory we observe that their inclusion of material from the dramatic canon goes beyond the mere citation of text, and is more than simply a non-mimetic representation of actions and events that are present in the original work. Instead, what the application of theatrical adaptation theory reveals in the case of the Wooster Group's practices are the ways in which processes of interrogation and deconstruction are capable of revealing the questionable position of the text in contemporary theatre, and with it, the questionable nature of mimetic representation itself.

CHAPTER THREE
ADAPTING MYTH: LA FURA DELS BAUS' POSTDRAMATIC *FAUST*

Myths may be considered narratives which maintain their relevancy within a culture between epochs: stories which transcend the historical moment because their representation of reality is in some ways aligned with or viewed against contemporary ways of perceiving the world. Th. P. van Baaren conceptualises myths as flexible cultural material, as over time they incur subtle changes that often happen in order to prevent 'loss of function or total disappearance by changing it in such a way that it can be maintained' (1984: 218). Van Baaren describes myths as aetiological narratives which 'tell us how and why something came into existence' (222). Myths prevail over time, and as a result become the narratives which inform and shape culture.

Given their evolution and adaptation over the course of history, myths survive despite their often fictive or hyperbolic nature because of a desire to find semblance between the past and the present, in which the myth becomes a metaphor or allegory for an entire people or culture. However, in 1971 Roland Barthes made the case for a reading of myth that moves beyond the metaphorical. In his essay "Change the Object Itself", Barthes argued that structuralism had created a new science of reading which was capable of transforming the myth into a different object (Barthes and Heath 1977: 166). The objective of a structuralist's inquiry was 'not to reveal the (latent) meaning of an utterance, of a trait, of a narrative, but to fissure the very representation of meaning […] not to change or purify the symbols but to challenge the symbolic itself' (167). Barthes argued that in order to achieve a greater understanding of the significance of mythical narratives and how they conceivably represent the world as it actually is, a composite examination of the myth's internal structure is necessary. As each element undergoes scrutiny, so a deeper level of understanding of the myth's significance to society is achieved.

It is for this reason that at their core myths possess the ability to be adapted over time. Just as Rachel Carroll regards adaptation as a form which is symptomatic of a cultural

compulsion to repeat (2009: 1), myths persist because of a compulsion for cultures to posit their own sense of self either in relation or opposition to the paradigm. As Julie Sanders describes, adaptations have an ability to evoke a parallel between history and the present for the purpose of 'comparison or contrast' (2006: 140), whilst Laurence Coupe describes those literary or dramatic works which imitate or position themselves in relation to myths as 'mythopoetic' (2009: 4). Here the new work operates within the boundaries of the canon or history in order to reinforce its own presence within the myth dissemination process, or to mount a critique in deference to its properties as a stalwart of cultural zeitgeist.

In this chapter I argue that the latter is the more radical type of adaptation, as a critique of the myth will seek to dismantle its form from its content in order to scrutinise its adequacy in representing the contemporary moment. I cite the Catalonian performance company La Fura dels Baus and their postdramatic theatre piece *F@ust 3.0* as an example of this radical approach to adapting myth, as through their engagement with Goethe's *Faust* they address the fundamental problem of representing myth at the end of the twentieth-century, which Barthes articulates is at the centre of the structuralist's inquiry.

3.1 – *Faust*: its sources and legacy

The first printed source for the Faust legend appeared in 1587, anonymously penned as a chapbook under the title *Historia von D. Johann Fausten*. Five years later the chapbook was translated into English as the *Historia of the Damnable Life, and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus*[1] (1592). The first dramatised version of the legend to appear in English was Christopher Marlowe's *Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, which was written, according to I.A. Shapiro, 'before the middle of 1589, perhaps in 1588' on account of the 'demand for plays introducing magicians and 'magical' effects' by 1589 (1955: 102).

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[1] Commonly known as *The English Faust Book* (Jones 1994).

Over the next two centuries variations of the Faustus legend flourished on European stages, particularly in the puppet theatres of Germany. In the eighteenth century Faustus was reimagined on the English stage in a comic inversion of his learned and scholarly characteristics and became the 'Harlequin Doctor Faustus' (Potter 2004: 263).

However, it was the first part of Goethe's monumental 'dramatic poem' *Faust* (1808) (Goethe and Luke 2008: x) which elevated Faustus from a folk legend to the mythic totem of modern European man. In the text he is personified by the Earth Spirit as 'Faust the superman' (l. 490): a reflection of the mythical status he had already achieved across Europe. In Goethe's poem Faust is depicted as a young scholar grappling with a dichotomy between an earthbound, ephemeral existence and his longing for a pursuit of metaphysical knowledge in 'the realm of high ancestral minds' (l. 1117). Goethe dramatises these two conflicting aspects of Faust's morality as a problem which Faust must decide of his own volition. His dilemma is shown to be one that highlights the dual pursuits of man, as Faust rejects both Nature and the books which had provided him with sustenance, in order that he may 'embrace/ The experience allotted to the whole/ Race of Mankind' (ll. 1770-2). This is in contrast to Marlowe's Faustus, whose dilemma is immediately presented as one between Man and God: the appearance of the Good Angel and Bad Angel highlights the dichotomy between the pursuits of 'heaven and heavenly things' and 'honour and wealth' respectively (Marlowe and Jump 1976: v, ll. 21-2). In voiding Faust's dilemma of its theistic dimensions, it is evident that Goethe was already an adapter, rewriting the parochial, medieval representation of Faustus that had dominated the European canon up until this moment. Instead, his Faust is portrayed as a subject breaching the limits of humanity in a way that is similarly a conscious gesture of Goethe's own sense of epistemic transition between historical epochs.

Some significant reinterpretations of the Faust myth proliferated throughout Europe and North America during the 1990s; Richard Schechner and his East Coast Artists collectively adapted Goethe's text for a performance piece entitled *Faust/Gastronome* (1993);

in 1996 Mark Ravenhill was commissioned to write a play for the Actors' Touring Company, which he titled *Faust is Dead*. In this version, Faust becomes the twentieth-century academic Alain, who writes a book entitled *The Death of Man*. Alain's book evokes the theories of writers such as Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jean Baudrillard (Rebellato in Ravenhill 2001: xiv), which Ravenhill puts under censure when Alain appears on *Letterman* along with guest star Madonna.

> **DAVID LETTERMAN**: So…you're here, you're in America. And you've written a book. And you've called it *The Death of Man...*
>
> **ALAIN**: Yes. That is correct. Yes.
>
> **DAVID LETTERMAN**: Neat title. What exactly does it mean?
>
> **ALAIN**: Well, it's a complex thing to explain in a few minutes.
>
> **DAVID LETTERMAN**: Because I have to tell you right now I feel pretty much alive.
>
> *Laughter*.
>
> […]
>
> **DAVID LETTERMAN**: Madonna, have you read the book?
>
> **MADONNA**: Not yet, David.
>
> (Ravenhill 2001: 97-8)

In the same year the performance artist and director John Jesurun wrote a performance text entitled *Faust/How I Rose*, elements of which were later incorporated into two productions by The Builders Association: *Imperial Motel* (1996) and *Jump Cut* (1997); in 1997 Michael D'Antonio wrote and directed *Faust in Vitro*, which was performed at La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club; in 1998 La Fura dels Baus staged *F@ust 3.0*; and in 1999 the Wooster Group produced *House/Lights*, a textual deconstruction of Gertrude Stein's *Doctor*

Faustus Lights the Lights (1938), for which the Group won an OBIE. Other important

versions include Target Margin and the Classic Stage Company's collaboration on Goethe's

Faust, which played alongside Euripides' *Helena* as part of their 2005/6 season entitled "The

Eternal Feminine", and in 2006 the British company Punchdrunk staged *Faust* in promenade

at an abandoned London warehouse (Lichtig 2007).

In *Postdramatic Theatre* Lehmann cites Faust as one of the most recognisable

mythical figures of post-antiquity: an unconscious operating figure of cultural discourse, with

the same legitimacy as figures like Medea, Heracles, or Prometheus (2006: 80). The status to

which we ascribe him is commensurable to the significance of the world in which he operates.

As Inez Hedges describes:

> [i]n Western culture, the story of Faust has played the role of a
> constitutive myth, one that prescribes, as well as describes, a particular
> kind of experience and a way of relating to the world […] [t]hese
> multiple transformations show that the Faust myth still has the power to
> shape our reality rather than just to explain it.

(2009: 7)

It is clear that the citation of *Faust* throughout European (and later North American) theatre

history can be attributed to our continuing fascination with the narrative, and its ability to

draw a parallel between the fictional circumstances of the Faust myth and those ideas which

we perceive as innately representative of the contemporary moment.

3. 2 – *F@ust 3.0*

Regarded as one of Catalonia's 'most revered, provocative, and successful performance

groups' (Feldman 1998: 449), La Fura's work began in the 1970s with the imperative to

create a non-verbal experience of theatre in line with the 'dramaturgy of images' that had

began to appear throughout the rest of Europe and North America in the previous decade (Ollé and Mauri 2004: 381). Their aesthetic is one which primarily focuses on the relationship between the body and its mediatised or mechanised counterpart (the confrontation between the real and the simulated), which has informed the major body of their work since the early 1990s. La Fura's artistic director Àlex Ollé describes this relationship as one between 'binomial pairs': a co-presentation of 'nature and artifice, crudeness and sophistication, primitivism and technology' (ibid.) simultaneously displayed onstage.

La Fura's adaptation of Goethe's *Faust* was their first foray into predominantly text-based theatre[2]. Using the text as a point of departure, *F@ust 3.0* transports Goethe's modern man from nineteenth-century Europe to an unnamed celluloid cyberspace, in which La Fura explore the duality of Faust's character through the simultaneous presentation of live and mediated bodies. The production made use of video and cinematic techniques, animatronics and robotic mobile installations, and referenced the internet and cyberspace to create a dialogue between the 'real and projected self' (Baker 1998: 511).

Using text as a source of inspiration was similarly in contrast to La Fura's conventional approach to creating performance, as until *F@ust 3.0* the company had made work solely through devising and improvisation. The production's director Magda Puyo recalls the company's anxiety towards starting their rehearsals using Goethe's text, which she describes as a 'paradigm of textuality':

> [d]uring eight months, an unusual amount of time in the theatre practice in our country, we were building, starting from a method based on friction, a dramaturgy where we put together not so much a reading of the text as what La Fura wanted to say about Faust.
>
> (in Ollé and Mauri 2004: 397)

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[2] *F@ust 3.0* was likewise the first of the company's three engagements with the Faust myth. In 1999 the company staged a version of Hector Berlioz's opera *The Damnation of Faust* and in 2001 collaborated with film director Isidro Ortiz to create a piece for the cinema entitled *Fausto 5.0*.

The premise was to explore the sense of paradox in staging *Faust* at the end of the twentieth-century, as a conscious gesture of the company's anxieties towards the exploration of text-based theatre. Their thesis for the performance was simple: how to relate the central narrative thread of the Faustian pursuit of knowledge and its consequence, to an audience who are conscious that knowledge is now communicated at the same speed as the image that produces it. In essence, how the staging of *Faust* can be made relevant for a society saturated by digital technologies.

The piece weaves between Goethe's plot-structure and an invented virtual reality non-space. Some narrative and scenic elements from Goethe's poem are retained (such as Auerbach's Tavern and the episode from Walpurgis Night), albeit with minor modifications. For the most part though, La Fura freely adapts some of the central themes of the Goethe's text to create a vibrant contemporary adaptation of *Faust*. For example, the dialogue between the live performers and those on the cinema-style screen is foregrounded over a strict adherence to Goethe's plot.

In the opening scene Faust attempts suicide: disenfranchised with his world, he wraps an extension cord around his neck and drops from a height (Figure 3.1). At this moment, Mephistopheles appears to him. Unclear as to whether Faust is alive or dead, the audience is transported with Faust through the World Wide Web into a virtual reality created by Mephistopheles, inside which Mephistopheles grants Faust his every desire.

The first location at which Faust and Mephistopheles arrive is Auerbach's Tavern, whereupon Faust sees Gretchen in the crowd and is overcome with desire for her. Mephistopheles, knowing Faust's desire, turns Gretchen against herself. Gretchen kills her mother by dropping poison into her wine and Faust, distraught by Gretchen's act of malevolence (for which he ultimately blames himself), likewise kills in an attempt to redeem his lover. Faust then takes his own life within the virtual world.

Figure 3.1: **Faust attempts suicide. The projection in the background shows a superimposed silhouette of the performer framed by the image of a lightbulb.**

The second half of the performance returns to Faust's study as in the opening scene, where Faust lies prostrate on a hospital bed. He is wired up to various monitors that record his progress whilst his body is sustained via an intravenous drip: '[i]f before he was trying to live his dreams through his own body, now he is looking through his dreams for a body' (La Fura dels Baus 2009). Throughout these vivid dreams he sees multiple versions of his own life. In one, he envisions himself returning to the womb and is reborn as 'a human embryo' (ibid.: Figure 3.2), and in another he witnesses the marriage between himself and Helen of Troy. In the final vision he is strapped to a frame in which his own body is fused with mechanical wings. Soaring high into the air, Faust takes up stylised gestures and fashions himself into the image of Icarus before plummeting into the void (Figure 3.3). In the final moments of the performance multiple images of Faust and Mephistopheles appear whereby the 'stagelights suddenly blaze […] up on the audience, and the performance [is] over' (Baker 1998: 513).

Though Kit Baker was critical about the open-ended nature of the piece when it was performed as part of the Lincoln Center Festival in 1998[3], it is necessary to consider *F@ust 3.0* in the context of La Fura's overall aesthetic approach to the piece, and the specific form which their version of the Faust myth had taken.

Figure 3.2: **Faust returns to "the placenta". (Photograph: Ros Ribas)**

Figure 3.3: **Faust in the final moments of the performance. Icarus like, he plummets into the void. (Photograph: Ros Ribas)**

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[3] For similar responses to the Lincoln Center Festival performance see Marks 1998 and Gutman 1998.

Àlex Ollé suggests that the company's obsession in showing the encounter between the human body and technology derives from their collective interest in the 'plasticity of performance art' (2004: 381). Here, "plasticity" is synonymous with both the artificial nature of "performance" – of being conscious of the innate theatricality of performance as an imitation of something real – and the artificiality of the projected, digitised human on screen.

As *F@ust 3.0* relocates the episodes of Goethe's text into a non-descript virtual reality, La Fura thus present the episodes from *Faust* as though they were confrontations between the authentic and the simulated. As the programme notes dictate (La Fura dels Baus 2009), the company wanted to present the inherent simultaneity between such interactions throughout the performance. For example, in one scene Gretchen is revealed taking a shower on one of the upper platforms (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4: Gretchen takes a shower. (Photograph: Ros Ribas)

The harsh white of the lighting state reveals her naked body, and the lines of her form are made explicit by the scantly lit space around her. A digital portraiture appears to her immediate left, however only the top half of her body is lit. The shape of her lower torso is distinguished by an outline, in which the contours of the performer's body appear more subtle: flattened by the process of digitisation. Both the live and digital bodies are revealed to be two differing representations of the same object, as they reveal particular aspects of Gretchen's

character. Although these representations are divided between two sites and act as independent, autonomous broadcasts, there still remains an irrevocable unity between them.

Maaike Bleeker terms this unavoidable unity between such fragmented representations of the same object as the "paradox of perspective" in postdramatic theatre. She argues that if, as Lehmann theorises, the spectator is no longer required to seek a logical unity in the stage semiotics, they will be 'granted more direct access to the thing itself' (2004: 30). By removing the semblance between narrative structure and those images presented on stage – between the signifier and the signified – the spectator's gaze should fall on the object itself (the performer) rather than its masked representation (their character). Bleeker argues that problem with this conceptualisation is that the spectator will invariably seek to create a cohesive narrative between these two elements, despite the image's fragmentation. Instead of breaking with dramatic unity, in this instance the postdramatic staging of these images leads to the multiplication of frames, which manifests itself through the increased perceptibility of the signified (ibid.).

Bleeker's paradox thus illuminates some of the phenomenological problems that a "dramatic" spectator may encounter when witnessing a postdramatic performance. In an attempt to unify the two images and relate them to the character of Gretchen, access to the performer, and what they in themselves may signify, is denied by the spectator's impulse to relate the signifier to character; character to narrative; and eventually narrative to myth. Lehmann himself laments that the majority of theatre audiences refer back to the structures and terminology of drama when they articulate their experiences of the theatre event (2006: 35). Such inevitabilities are a constant reminder that the postdramatic is always haunted – and to some extent perhaps even limited – by the spectres of the dramatic tradition.

Though, as Lehmann suggests, the language we use to describe the experience of the theatre is often defined by the vocabulary of the dramatic tradition, it can be argued that the incorporation of technologies into performance has led to developments in both the ways that

we perceive the theatre and the vocabulary we use to describe it. For example the film theorist Vivian Sobchack argues that the encroachment of new media such as television, personal computers, and video games into everyday life 'incorporates the spectator/user into [the] spatially decentred, weakly temporized, and quasi-disembodied state' of the very media they interface with (in Stam and Miller 2000: 78). By interfacing with the technology the user is absorbed into its processes of transmission, and in turn they appropriate the medium's formal qualities as a model for their own transmission and dissemination of information.

In his seminal book *Liveness* (1999: 2nd edition 2008), Philip Auslander articulates this concept of transmission with specific reference to live performance by describing a similar effect, whereby the theatre absorbs 'media-derived epistemology' to mimic those types of mediation found in new technologies such as the television (2008: 37). When the theatre imitates these processes of transmission it consciously presents itself as akin to the media which the spectator engages with in their own homes. However, unlike the unmediated live event, those processes which attempt to imitate or replicate discourses of new technologies 'fails to replicate the perceptual discourse of the spectator's eye because whereas in the theatre spectators direct their own vision, the television camera does not permit them to choose their own perspectives' (19). Like Sobchack's assessment, Auslander concludes that the spectator of mediatised events is significantly more restricted by the perspectives of technology than they are in unmediatised ones, as the information disseminated is one of imposition rather than choice.

Throughout *F@ust 3.0* La Fura use citations of the digital and corporeal side-by-side as means of provoking the spectator's passive engagement with technology. For example, at the end of the first act Gretchen's body lies at the centre of the stage attached to a crane hook (Figure 3.5). The performer depicts Gretchen's agony as fragile and broken in the foreground, whilst the digital copy on the screen renders her pain as expressive and stylised. Whereas the tangible body shows Gretchen at the point of physical exhaustion, it is the projected image

which dominates the space. This is not merely due to its size but rather because it articulates a more instantly recognisable pain: an external one which quantifies the pain through the face, fetishising the digital body through the exposure of skin, muscles, and bones. In this instance the representation of Gretchen's pain through the digital projection arguably shows an experience of pain that is measurably more "real" in accordance with the logic of dramatic theatre than the immediate body of the performer due to its recognisable theatrical qualities. This haunting quality of La Fura's simultaneous transmission of the real and the digital body is perhaps the logical conclusion to the company's engagement with the real and the simulated, whereby the spectator is left to reflect upon this paradox whilst they continue to consume the digital images that are co-present in the space.

Figure 3.5: **The agony of Gretchen is represented as doubled through the live body and its digital copy. (Photograph: Ros Ribas)**

The spectators' passive consumption of images here plays an integral part in La Fura's meditation on the immersive nature of new technologies. As with the Wooster Group's

treatment of Irína in *Brace Up!*, this aspect is accomplished through the manner in which La Fura present the characters' relationships with technology. For instance, if we understand Gretchen's character to represent fetishism for the digital, Faust thus comes to symbolise the realisation of the digital dystopia. In voyaging through the alternative reality of the Internet, Faust seeks an experience outside of nature only to find that it is more violent than the one he left behind. The final image in which Faust takes on the gestures of Icarus is symbolic of a transcendental state: by binding himself to mechanical wings he surpasses both the analogue and the digital body by becoming post-human. By the end of the performance this conception of the human body is rejected in equal measure, as by plunging to his death he returns to nature, effacing the realities which he has encountered across his journey. Faust's realisation should ultimately act as a warning to the spectator because, as Karen Jürs-Munby reminds us, postdramatic theatre signals not only a development beyond the dramatic text and form but 'at the same time is always a turn towards the audience' (in Lehmann 2006: 5).

La Fura dels Baus' return to the Faust myth does not simply satisfy a desire for the company to place themselves within the long tradition of adapting material from the established canon of the European cultural heritage. Some significant elisions from Goethe's original text signify the company's preference in examining the architecture of the myth over its content in facilitating their adaptation of the Faust narrative. In deference to its mythical protagonist and its mythic place in the European psyche, La Fura use *Faust*'s allegorical framework to share their own anxieties about text-based theatre in an age where the text is often displaced in favour of visual dramaturgies. Through their unabashedly spectacle-oriented aesthetic they convey a familiar apocalyptic message of distrust towards the very mediating technologies which they use in order to present their story.

Although *F@ust 3.0* takes its premise in an exploration of how the Faust myth can be represented at the end of the twentieth-century, in doing so it also asks questions about the ramifications of representation itself. By foregoing fidelity to Goethe's text, La Fura

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foregrounds the crux of the Faust myth: the dilemma of pursuing polemic ideals in a world which cannot accommodate both. This dichotomy manifests itself in this performance as an exploration into discourses of the real, and asks whether the simulated experience has taken precedence over the live, unmediated event in the contemporary moment. Most importantly, La Fura present Faust's journey into a new world of discovery (and ultimately despair) as a parallel to the spectator's own journey. This is not to say that the company present the stage-world as a direct comparison to our own, but rather that they present the potential for such an occurrence. Their world is one in which the protagonist becomes immersed into an entirely simulated reality, which is in contrast with our own, partially mediated one. The virtual world in *F@ust 3.0* 'turns every representation into representability' as Lehmann would have it (2006: 174): that is that representations of things are capable of shaping reality, not simply reflecting it. Here the electronic image does not provide access to an alternate, otherwise unobtainable reality, but instead is a self-conscious gesture, warning of the dangers of the media's appropriation and absorption of live, unmediated human experience.

Each of the performances discussed throughout this thesis have, through processes of adapting their respective source texts for environments constructed of new media and digital technologies, sought to challenge the relevancy of the traditional dramatic form to the contemporary theatre. In their treatment of the dramatic text as an artefact of critical inquiry, rather than with the reverence implicit in many conventional adaptations, these performances exemplify Lehmann's logic that the postdramatic seeks to dissolve the absolute unity between the text and the stage in order to replace it with a more dynamic interplay between all theatrical signs through a visual dramaturgy (2006: 59). By using text from the dramatic canon as point of departure, these postdramatic adaptations thus question the possibility of mimetic representation of dramatic text in light of the co-presence of newer forms of media and technology in the theatre space.

It has been argued here that the dramatic tradition of mimesis, in which actions are rendered in drama similar to those objects and actions found in real life, is retreating in postdramatic theatre in favour of a more self-reflexive form. This aspect of postdramatic dramaturgy is evident throughout these case studies, as both the Wooster Group and La Fura dels Baus foreground the mechanics of adapting the text over its mimetic staging in performance. Contrary to Aristotle's argument in the *Poetics* that the playwright should seek to create mimesis through plot-structures, these companies attenuate the mimetic staging of the original work by continually interrupting the process of performing the text. As a result, the spectator comes to the realisation that any semblance of a "truthful", "accurate", or "complete" representation of the text is lost to them, and what they witness by contrast is the interruptive behaviour of the technologies that dominate the theatre event.

Both the Wooster Group and La Fura dels Baus forego any allegiance to the playwrights and their work throughout the process of staging the text, and instead the playtext

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becomes one of many materials that are woven into their performance. The much broader "performance text" which emerges is created from a collage of inter-texts, images, video footage, sound, improvisation, and play. Through this collaging of sensorial and inter-textual material the representation of the dramatic text – and the place it occupies in the reception process – is wholly reconfigured, as the extraneous material shifts focus away from the text and towards the performance of the materials themselves as autonomous elements of the theatre event. In this sense postdramatic theatre is akin to what Lehmann, appropriating the terminology identified with Gertrude Stein's texts, describes as 'the new theatre as landscapes', resulting in the '*defocalization* [of the dramatic text] and equal status for all parts [of the theatre apparatus], a renunciation of teleological time, and the dominance of an 'atmosphere' above dramatic and narrative forms of progression' (2006: 63: original emphasis).

Whilst postdramatic theatre may abandon the structures found in the dramatic text in eschewing its mimetic staging, it is evident that there is a strong tendency amongst the many prevalent writers and practitioners whose work operates within the parameters of the postdramatic form (including Heiner Müller, Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, the Wooster Group, and La Fura dels Baus) to adapt material from the dramatic canon. This stylistic trait must be seen, as with the Wooster Group and La Fura's adaptations, as a means of expressing an anxiety towards the appropriation of old narratives for a new theatrical form. The adaptation of material by postdramatic practitioners here suggests both a liberation from, and a continuing struggle with, the dramatic form and its traditions; "liberation" occurs when postdramatic practitioners, who, like Barthes envisioning the death of the author-function in literature, break their ties to the requirement of the text (its structures and its mimetic staging); whereas the "struggle" is literally theatricalised in the performance event itself through the self-reflexive nature of the text's staging.

All three of the adaptations cited here are successful in their interrogation of the dramatic text through its postdramatic staging. Though the performances themselves seek to fracture the dramatic elements of the text through its non-mimetic representation, both the process of adapting the original material and the presentation of the new work itself, act as conduits which work to sustain, rather than diminish, the connection between the two theatrical forms. As such, the application of theatrical adaptation theory to the practices of contemporary experimental theatre work is seen here to be an important discursive tool capable of showing the extent to which the postdramatic form simultaneously operates independently from, and inherits the traditions of, the dramatic theatre and its canon.

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