THE POLITICS OF POACHING IN POSTMODERN PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF THE SYDNEY FRONT'S DON JUAN IN REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE

PhD
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UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

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The Politics of Poaching in Postmodern Performance: A Case Study of the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* in Rehearsal and Performance

Kerrie Schaefer

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Centre for Performance Studies 1999 University of Sydney

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Abstract

This thesis offers a critical examination and analysis of a rehearsal process and performance by the Australian theatre collective the Sydney Front (1986-1993). *Don Juan*, the Sydney Front's fifth major performance production, premiered at The Performance Space in Sydney in April 1991. A modified version of the original show toured nationally and internationally (to Northern European countries and Hong Kong) in 1992. The Sydney Front's postmodern re-making of the legend of Don Juan affords an opportunity to investigate the practice of poaching in the rehearsal process and in performance. In this thesis the politics of poaching is explored in and through the process of devising a parody, an ironic reinterpretation and reinvention, of a popular legend.

The first part of this thesis provides a definitional outline of the cultural and critical discourses of postmodernism and deconstruction and examines the way in which these discourses inform the Sydney Front's performance practice (Chapters 2 and 3). Part 2 examines how the discourse of postmodern deconstruction in theatre theory and practice actually shapes a rehearsal process, the process of meaning-making. In Chapter 4, postmodern parody is examined in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* rehearsal process in its various forms: nomadic poaching, intertextuality and bricolage. In Chapter 5 it is argued that the practice of poaching extends to the Sydney Front's aesthetic practice in and through which the legend of Don Juan is read and rewritten. Thus, the practice of poaching is further examined as a poetic principle in the making of the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*. The third and final part of this thesis discusses the notion of seduction poached from the legend of Don Juan and put to work in the performance of the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*. In Chapters 6 and 7 I question the efficacy and ethics of the tactic of seduction as a tool of deconstruction in and of the theatre.

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1 Illustration on front of publicity flyer advertising the Sydney Font's *Don Juan.*

2 Program for the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*.

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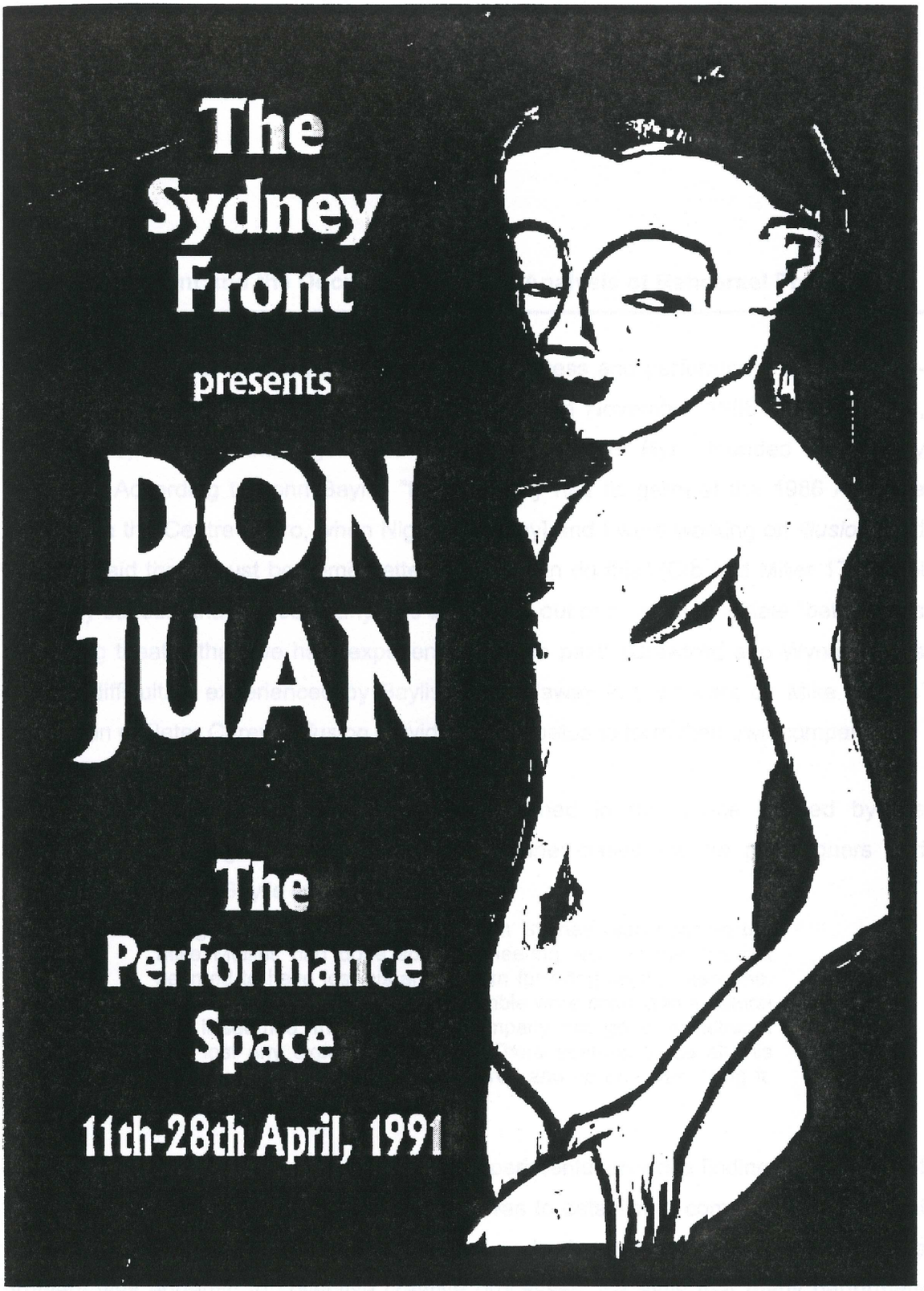


1. Illustration on front of publicity flyer advertising the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*.

1

The Sydney Front and the Documentation and Analysis of Rehearsal Process

This thesis presents an analysis of a rehearsal process and performance by a Sydney-based theatre collective formed in the late 1980s. In November 1986 Andrea Aloise, John Baylis, Clare Grant, Nigel Kellaway and Christopher Ryan founded the Sydney Front Inc. According to John Baylis, "the company had its germ at the 1986 Adelaide Festival, in the Centre Bistro, when Nigel [Kellaway] and I were working on *Illusion*[1] and we both said there must be some better way we can do this" (Olb and Miller 17). Nigel Kellaway concurs that the company was conceived out of a desire to initiate "better ways of making theatre than we had [experienced] in the past" (Crawford and Wynne-Jones 6). The difficulties experienced by Baylis and Kellaway in their work on Mike Mullins' production of Peter Carey's *Illusion* provided the impetus to form their own company.

At the same time, the Sydney Front was formed in the space opened by the simultaneous passing of several innovative Sydney-based theatre practitioners and companies. As John Baylis explains,

> a big vacuum [in theatre practice in Sydney] was opening up. Mike Mullins had done some pioneering work in the 70s but seemed to have lost his enthusiasm for living on the breadline. Nick Tsoutis and the All Out Ensemble were coming to a natural end it seemed, the One Extra Company had gone mainstream and lost any experimental edge. There seemed to be all this territory which needed to be explored and no one was doing it. (Olb and Miller 17)

For those desiring to continue a tradition of experimentation while finding better ways of working within that tradition, a major concern was to establish a company structure that addressed the problem of the ownership of work. According to Nigel Kellaway, this problem was endemic to collective creative processes. He says that many performers had experienced working in companies "where we'd create works in an intensely

collaborative process", only to see creative credit accorded to a writer or director at the production end of the process; "when it goes to production it becomes such and such a work directed by so and so..." (Crawford and Wynne-Jones 7). Thus, the Sydney Front was created and developed as an ensemble company:

> There was a cast list in alphabetical order...We never named a director...It was irrelevant to the process...Everyone working on the piece was responsible and should take equal credit. There was no text in the beginning so there was no individual name that you could put on the work. It was only through that process that the Sydney Front was able to continue, by sticking steadfastly to those rules...the internal processes of making the work, what was happening in the studio, who was taking certain leads in certain areas, that was the Sydney Front's business, no one else's - it was not to be made public what the internal mechanics of the process was. It was to be a united front presented to the world and I think it was the only way the company could have stayed together and developed. (Crawford and Wynne-Jones 7)

In addition to tackling the problem of ownership of work, or at least recognising the process of co-creation, the theatre ensemble was considered "the only way to create good theatre...You've got to stay together for a couple of years so that you begin to read each other and to develop a communal language" (Baylis cited in Olb and Miller 17). The founding members of the Sydney Front shared a particular theatrical orientation and established an ensemble company on that basis: "we had a history going back with the people in the group so it wasn't something completely new. We came together because we knew each other, we knew each other's work and each other's history" (Kellaway cited in Crawford and Wynne-Jones 7). At the same time, this "grounding" in certain specific theatrical knowledges and experiences was acquired outside of major theatre training institutions. Kellaway describes himself as a "non-institutionalised performer" or someone whose theatrical training consists of a "diverse grab-bag of experiences" and who is working or practising "with an enormous variety of training methods" (Crawford and Wynne-Jones 11). Kellaway trained in classical music composition, concert piano and modern dance in Australia and in Butoh and the Suzuki discipline in Japan. The other core members of the ensemble come from similarly varied and diverse backgrounds including mime, improvisation, movement and dance (Western and non-Western), European avant-garde theatre, design, film and video, art criticism, and arts administration. So, although the ensemble work of the company is established and built on a specific theatrical orientation shared by the members of the group, it also extends to and encompasses a broad spectrum of training and performance practices.

The Performance Space,[2] a "black box" theatre and gallery complex in an inner Western suburb of Sydney, provides a second point of continuity for the collective and its work. Nigel Kellaway has referred to the Performance Space as the closest thing to a "sacred space" that "my body remembers" (*Working with Suzuki*). According to Kellaway, the Sydney Front's familiarity with The Performance Space enables the performers to move instinctively in the space and to transform it instantly. In his examination of the semiotics of the space and place of actual theatres or theatre buildings, Marvin Carlson asserts that "the entire theatre, its audience arrangements, its other public spaces, its physical appearance, even its location within a city, are all important elements of the process by which an audience makes meaning of its experience" (*Places of Performance* 2). I want to suggest, further to Carlson, that these elements are also semiotically significant to, and often embodied in the work of, the performers who use these places and spaces. In other words, when Kellaway claims an intimate physical relationship with, or immediate and instinctive knowledge of, The Performance Space theatre, it may be worthwhile examining the kinds of meanings and values that he and other Sydney Front performers have literally in-corporated in their decision to affiliate themselves to one particular kind of theatre or performance space, rather than another.

Carlson's study documents an historical tension between the theatre as an art form and the theatre as a commercial enterprise which, he says, is reflected most notably in theatre structures and theatre locations. The monumental theatre, for example, is not usually found at or near the commercial centre of a city, but more likely near elegant residential areas or surrounded by public parks and gardens. Although not entirely removed from commercial considerations, the location and isolation of this theatre suggests an affinity with other public cultural monuments such as churches and museums. In contrast, more commercially oriented theatres, dating from the Renaissance onwards, have sought a location close to or in the centre of the city business district, and have developed much closer architectural affinities to other commercial structures such as the banks and shops that share the street facade row. As Carlson notes, an important development in recent theatre history, which is most relevant to this discussion, has been the establishment of smaller, experimental theatres that have often appeared in the urban geographical text as facade theatres, though they are much more modest than the regular commercial houses. Like the larger facade theatres, these are often found near one another, but rarely in the sort of entertainment

districts where the larger theatres are located (although perhaps on the very edges of such districts). The marginal location of such theatres is, according to Carlson, a result of the prohibitive expense of central city positions and, at the same time, indicative of the position of experimental theatre in theatrical culture as a whole. These theatres cater for a specialised audience often involved with or strongly interested in experimentation in the other arts as well. Thus, such theatres have often tended to appear not in hotel and entertainment districts, but in areas associated with contemporary artists, their studios and galleries (Carlson *Places of Performance* 116).

The Performance Space is a type of facade theatre in this sense. It is located in the inner-West suburb of Redfern, on the edge of the Sydney central business district, in a mixed business and residential (rather than entertainment) zone. The theatre shares street frontage with several large federation terraces: private dwellings, boarding houses, a brothel, backpacker or budget accommodation, and the Aboriginal Legal Aid Service. The only modern (white, concrete, high security) building in the block is occupied by the ICAC (Independent Commission Against Corruption). However, unlike the theatres Carlson is talking about (mainly American, off off Broadway spaces), The Performance Space is not located close to other experimental theatres. Rather, it is situated on its own in a kind of no-man's-land, a major traffic (road and rail) thoroughfare. Cleveland Street travels East to West from the eastern distributor to the University of Sydney and is criss-crossed by the North-South freeway, which connects the airport and Sydney's Southern suburbs to the city centre. The performance space is located equi-distant from Central and Redfern railway stations. Perhaps due to its awkward location, The Performance Space has not adopted the practice of "official invisibility" that has become common practice in experimental theatres of the East Village, New York City. While these theatres take pride in providing little or no information about their function or activity on the building facade, The Performance Space more resembles a cinema facade, with a bill board advertisement signaling the name of the theatre and the present productions and gallery exhibitions. In other words, The Performance Space promotes a down-beat accessibility rather than high brow (avant-garde) obscurity. Still, the close proximity of The Performance Space to city universities and art colleges means that its audience is mostly made up of the highly educated and the culturally and artistically literate. This positioning is reflected in the theatre's rigorous artistic policy. The aims of the Performance Space theatre and gallery are stated thus:

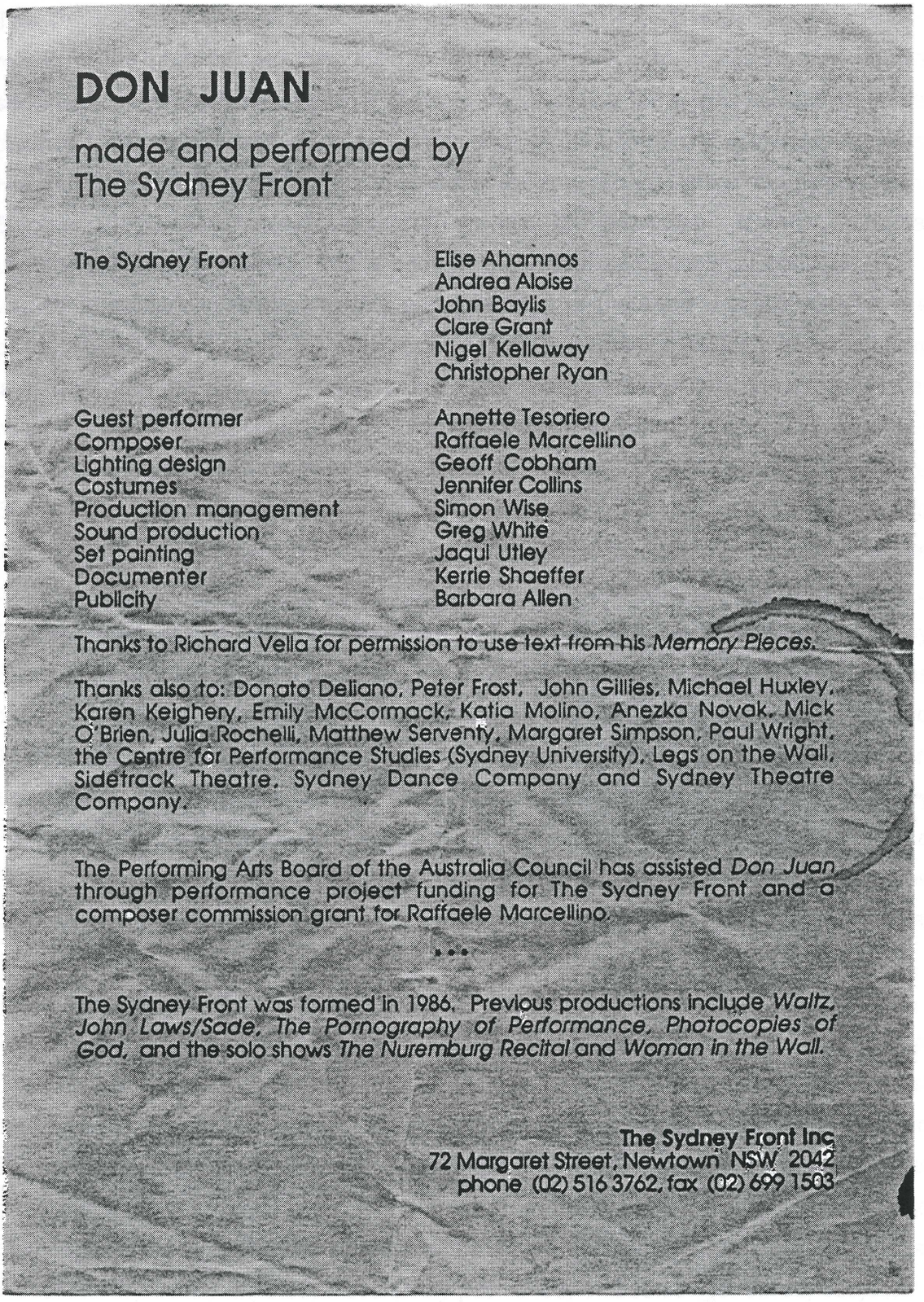
> to provide an opportunity for critical dialogue in the research and development of contemporary arts in Australia; to promote artistic practice which is informed by contemporary cultural theories and critical debates; to promote work which attempts to engage artists and audiences in a more active relationship; to encourage work which questions established art conventions, processes and representational practices; and, to address through performance, the traditional dichotomy between theory and practice.[3]

Between November 1986 and December 1993, when the company disbanded, the core collective of the Sydney Front worked with a multitude of collaborators across a wide range of artistic disciplines, including performers, writers, composers, opera singers, performance artists, video makers and lighting designers. They produced several major performance pieces; *Waltz* (1987), *John Laws/Sade* (1987), *The Pornography of Performance* (1988), *Photocopies of God* (1989), *Don Juan* (1991), *First and Last Warning* (1992) and *Passion* (1993). In addition, the Sydney Front presented the solo performances of Nigel Kellaway in *The Nuremburg Recital* (1989) and Clare Grant in *Woman in the Wall* (1990), collaborated with John Gilles on the video, *Techno/Dumb/Show*, which screened in the Sydney Biennale in 1991, and produced several smaller performance pieces including *The Burnt Wedding* (1988), *Water Work* (1988), *Prescripts* (1989), *Op Cit.* (1991), and *Tourists* (1991). Two of the Sydney Front's major productions toured internationally, *Pornography of Performance* in 1989 and *Don Juan* in 1992. The company was awarded the Sydney Theatre Critics Prize for Fringe Theatre in 1992 for *First and Last Warning*.

When formed in 1986 the Sydney Front understood that experimental theatre work, and, in particular, ensemble based work, was fraught with difficulties, namely small audiences combined with a lack of encouragement from funding bodies. One group member, Christopher Ryan, says that "if theatre artists wait around for funding before they do anything, then nothing will be done and theatre will die. You've got to do it yourself and get money from wherever you can" (Olb and Miller 17). Baylis remarks that "we couldn't expect to be subsidised and we knew that from the beginning. We knew we had to do it ourselves and we have" (Olb and Miller 17). In 1986, the group unsuccessfully lobbied the Performing Arts Board (PAB) of the Australia Council for project funding. As Kellaway explains, "we did a project called Sixty Three Blessings where we actually wrote sixty three grant applications to the PAB. Sixty three perfectly thought out, plausible, experimental theatre projects...All individually budgeted for 1.67 million dollars

in total. And we submitted them all. But we didn't get any" (Olb and Miller 17). Reflecting on this project, he says, "it's easy to be smug about this. It was just an out and out attack on the funding bodies. But in retrospect I think it was to make clear that we are serious - and that the funding of applications is a serious business. I think the funding bodies now consider that we are extremely serious" (Olb and Miller 17). The group self-funded their work for several years, most notably raising the money for the two month Northern European tour of *The Pornography of Performance* by working as street performers (stilt walkers, etc.) for seven months at the World Expo in Brisbane in 1988. Their initiative and cunning, reflected in the Sixty Three Blessings project as well as in clever and aggressive publicity for shows, was rewarded when, for the first time, the company received funding from the Performing Arts Board of the Australia Council for *Photocopies of God* in 1989.

For the *Don Juan* project, the Sydney Front received funding from the Performing Arts Board and the Music Board (a composers grant for Raffaele Marcellino) of the Australia Council. This enabled them the luxury of a longer rehearsal process, and to employ a person to document the process (see Figure 2). My involvement with the Sydney Front began in November 1990 when I accepted an invitation to document the rehearsal process for the ensemble's forthcoming performance piece. At that stage the project was loosely based on the legend of Don Juan. I composed a written casebook of the rehearsal process, which extended over a six-month period. This six-month period was broken into two working blocks; 8 weeks part time (3 days per week) from November 20, 1990 to January 10, 1991, and 6 weeks full time (5 days per week) from February 25, 1991 to "bump in" (April 9 and 10). The rehearsal process was somewhat nomadic with the performers rehearsing in a number of different spaces: the Dark Swan Dance Studio, Rozelle (1 week), the Old School, Sydney University (3 weeks), Sidetrack Theatre, Marrickville (4 weeks) and Hut 24, Addison Rd Community Centre, Marrickville, the home of the acrobatic performance troupe, Legs on the Wall (6 weeks). The Sydney Front's *Don Juan* opened at The Performance Space on April 11, 1991.



DON JUAN

made and performed by
The Sydney Front

The Sydney Front	Elise Ahamnos Andrea Aloise John Baylis Clare Grant Nigel Kellaway Christopher Ryan
Guest performer	Annette Tesoriero
Composer	Raffaele Marcellino
Lighting design	Geoff Cobham
Costumes	Jennifer Collins
Production management	Simon Wise
Sound production	Greg White
Set painting	Jaqui Utley
Documenter	Kerrie Shaeffer
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The Performing Arts Board of the Australia Council has assisted *Don Juan* through performance project funding for The Sydney Front and a composer commission grant for Raffaele Marcellino.

• • •

The Sydney Front was formed in 1986. Previous productions include *Waltz*, *John Laws/Sade*, *The Pornography of Performance*, *Photocopies of God*, and the solo shows *The Nuremburg Recital* and *Woman in the Wall*.

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phone (02) 516 3762, fax (02) 699 1503

2 Program for the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*

This thesis is based on the casebook of the rehearsal process. This document, a written record of the process, provides the raw material for the core analysis in the central section of the dissertation. When I came to documenting the Sydney Front rehearsal process I had no direct knowledge or experience of the company's working processes. However, in and through my undergraduate training in the Centre for Performance Studies (CPS) at Sydney University, I had an orientation toward rehearsal documentation and analysis, and a body of theoretical and analytical concerns that I wished to explore in relation to this particular kind of theatrical practice. One of the projects conducted by the CPS which proved to be particularly significant in terms of my later work with the Sydney Front was the *Body/Space/Meaning/Text* project, held over two weeks in May and June, 1990. This project involved two directors, each with their own cast of three performers, working on a given scene from Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*. The CPS stipulated that one director should be male and the other female and that one should represent a more text-based theatrical tradition and the other some different or experimental orientation. Elizabeth Burke, co-artistic director of Entr'acte, a Sydney-based, visual and movement oriented theatre company founded in 1979 by Burke and her French-Canadian partner and co-artistic director Pierre Thibaudeau, was chosen to direct a more experimental version of *The Three Sisters*. Both Burke and Thibaudeau had collaborated with members of what was to become the Sydney Front in experimental collaborations such as *Ostraka*[4] and were invited members of the Sydney Front in the company's first season (Crawford and Wynne-Jones 6). The *Body/Space/Meaning/Text* project enabled me to examine the processes and activities of a "deconstructive" theatrical practice and it was this experience that shaped my initial understandings of the Sydney Front's work.

The aim of the Centre for Performance Studies' project was to document the rehearsal processes of two generically different theatrical practices and to compare and contrast the ways in which these types of practices made different kinds of meaning with and from the same piece of playtext. Since the expectation was that different kinds of meaning would be made with and from the same piece of playtext, critical and methodological emphasis was placed on the signifying practices and representational processes of socially situated, discursively positioned, embodied (gendered) subjects. I was concerned to know the kinds of meanings produced and reproduced by different types of theatre practitioners as they worked to make meaning with and from the

dramatic playtext. I have written elsewhere at some length on these processes[5] and have there explained why I restricted my final analysis to the text-based process only. The remaining questions concerning the "deconstructive" process seem to have been held over and inform this study. These questions circulate around a notion of deconstruction in the theatre as linked to a repudiation of the verbal playtext as the source of an assumed authority controlling the processes of rehearsal and performance.[6]

At the same time as I considered such questions, I also had to question the knowledges and understandings of the academy and its particular framing of Burke's theatre practice. The academy constructed and constrained Burke's practice in ways that it perhaps wouldn't have been if the aims and objectives of the project hadn't been to compare and contrast the rehearsal processes of two generically different theatrical practices; one in the text-based theatre tradition, and the other more experimental in orientation. Burke indicated in her proposal for the position of director that she had "never directed a scripted play before" and confessed that "the possibilities of modifying it worry me on many levels". Nevertheless, she proposed to take a heightened stylistic approach to the production of the text, "exploring visual, movement and vocal textures".[7] In the rehearsal process, whereas the performers in the text-centred process sat on chairs in the centre of the room with their texts placed on tables in front of them, Burke's group worked on the text sitting in a huddle on the floor off to one side of the room. This was out of the viewing and audio range of the camera recording the rehearsal process, and the group had to be asked to sit in the centre of the space when they weren't involved in the strenuous body and voice work that utilized the entire space. Burke's theatrical practice seemed to unsettle and subvert the literate bodily habitus disciplined and trained by pedagogical institutions. At the same time, the tertiary educational institution could be seen to be re-instating regulatory control over this wayward theatrical practice, re-shaping and transforming it in ways that best suited the aims of the documentation and analysis. What I am talking about here is the construction of Burke's very different and distinct theatrical practice negatively as oppositional, as "non-text based" or an outright rejection of the playtext.

Of course, this particular construction covers over the specificities of Burke's theatrical practice. Some of these are indicated in Entr'acte's artistic statement which describes

the company's work as visual and movement based theatre. The statement explains that Entr'acte's training and performance techniques are founded on the early physical or corporeal mime work of Etienne Decroux, a method which seeks to develop and explore voice and movement techniques and their articulation in and through breathing. This training is meant to promote a style of theatre characterized by the physical intensity of the performer's presence. Exercises in counter weight (actions in which the performers body opposes its own weight to that of an obstacle or object), mobile statuary, awareness of lower body (legs and feet) and rhythm and dynamism *"form a grammar of physical work which can be extended to represent inner or intra actions between characters, based on social/mythical archetypes, and events"*.[8] I have emphasized this work on character since, in my final analysis, I argued that the realistic group deconstructed the patriarchal representations of women in the dramatic text in and through their pre-rehearsal discussions (one performer who hadn't sisters used these meetings and discussions to "get to know my sisters for the first time") and improvisatory work on and with the text in rehearsal. The performers constructed complex interpersonal relationships between the three "sisters" in and through paralinguistic, kinesic, proxemic codes which, in certain cases, played against verbal codes in the written playtext. The deconstructive process, on the other hand, cut the text into pieces and seemed in doing so to curtail any substantial exploration of sisterhood (female-female relationships). The performers reproduced extremely masculinist constructions of femininity as silent, distracted, child-like, mad and hysterical. But once again, this was a comparative analysis and if it had been extended to examine the specifics of the deconstructive process, may have understood the performance as a parody of female historical and social stereotypes reproduced in the writings of the dramatic canon.

It could perhaps be said that Burke's rehearsal process was representative of the interests of a certain kind of theatre practice rather than indicative of her company's (that is, Entr'acte's) working process. This is to partly paraphrase the way Keith Gallasch (in private correspondence) cautiously explained his company's participation in a similar comparative rehearsal processes project held by the CPS in May 1994 (this time involving three different groups rehearsing a particular scene from Molière's *Tartuffe*). According to writers and performers Gallasch and Virginia Baxter, who formed the performance company Open City in Sydney in 1987, their work "begins from numerous points of collaboration and improvisation and moves towards a script rather than

beginning with it" (*West* 106). Gallasch and Baxter were able to negotiate the impositions of the academy - such as having to work from a set piece of playtext - and to elucidate the ways in which the CPS rehearsal process differed from their "ordinary" working process. In this way, Open City successfully resisted the negative reduction of their theatre practice, which Burke was unable to avoid. In the end, according to Gallasch, the CPS rehearsal process reflected some of Open City's interests and concerns, but it did not indicate the company's everyday working processes. Open City's flexibility and self-reflexivity was no doubt due, in large part, to Gallasch's academic training, that is, his trained ability to mediate between the different discourses of the academy and professional theatre and performance practice, which was something Burke lacked.

Considering the problematic that Elizabeth Burke's company found itself working within, it seemed crucially important to me to examine this so-called "non-text based" or, rather, "deconstructive" theatre practice on its own terms. In doing so I aimed to expand the knowledges and understandings of the academy in relation to corporeal, visual, movement and image based theatre processes and practices. The documentation of the Sydney Front's rehearsal process afforded such an opportunity.

This thesis is organised into three parts. Part 1 outlines the cultural contexts and critical positions that influence and inform the Sydney Front's theatre practice. Chapter 2 examines the Sydney Front's claim to an experimental or avant-garde heritage. This investigation revolves around the problematic established by Andreas Huyssen when he asserts that the international endgame of the avant-garde was played out in the United States of America in the 1960s. Given this assertion, how is the claim to avant-garde status of an Australian theatre company formed in the late 1980s to be interpreted? I argue that the discourse of postmodernism describes a locus of debate which readily accommodates the Sydney Front's claim to a tradition of experimentation that continues to be concerned with the problem of meaning and the politics of representation and signification. Chapter 3 examines the link between the discourse of postmodernism and the strategy of deconstruction with particular reference to North American and European theatre theory and practice from the 1960s onwards. The examination ends with a discussion of the Sydney Front's appropriation and use of contemporary cultural and critical discourses and strategies in a peculiarly Australian theatre context.

Part 2 presents a case study of the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* rehearsal process. In this section of the thesis I examine the way in which the cultural and critical discourses defined in Part 1 shape a rehearsal process, the process of the production of meaning. Chapter 4 describes the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* rehearsal process in terms of the key elements of postmodern parody identified in an earlier chapter: appropriation or poaching, ironic quotation, intertextuality and *bricolage.* In this chapter description is coupled with analysis of the rehearsal process as poaching using the theoretical tools provided by de Certeau, Levi-Strauss, Kristeva, Barthes, Derrida, and Bourdieu. Chapter 5 argues that the practice of poaching extends to the Sydney Front's aesthetic practice in and through which the Don Juan legend is read and re-worked into a theatrical performance. In this chapter the tactical practice of poaching is further examined as a poetic or aesthetic principle in the making of the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*.

Part 3 provides an analysis of the performance produced in and through the Sydney Front's very particular and even peculiar type of rehearsal process. A key element appropriated by the Sydney Front from the legend of Don Juan is the notion of seduction. This part of the thesis examines how the Sydney Front put the tactic of seduction into play in the performance of *Don Juan*. Chapter 6 analyses and evaluates the Sydney Front's use of the tactic of seduction as a tool of deconstruction in and of the theatre. Chapter 7, the concluding chapter, examines the ethics of the tactic of seduction in certain other contexts than a specifically theatrical context. I question whether the Sydney Front's theatrical deconstruction extends to a deconstruction of seduction in the theatre of sexual difference. After close analysis of a particular scene in rehearsal and performance, I argue that the game of seduction in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* becomes a disciplinary mechanism in and through which a proper or socially appropriate type of femininity is re-inscribed or re-encoded. Thus the conclusion deals with some of the contradictions which remain unresolved in this study of a postmodern theatre practice.

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[1] The performance, *Illusion*, was a collaborative work between performance artist Michael Mullins and writer Peter Carey. Nigel Kellaway choreographed the piece and performed in it along with John Baylis.

[2] The Performance Space, National Centre for the Research and Development of the Contemporary Arts, was established in October 1982. The building that houses the Performance Space was and still is owned by a Greek film distributor. It was originally used as a transport union headquarters and dance hall. Performance artist Mike Mullins converted the found space in

1980 in order to accommodate the production values of his large-scale performance work, *New Blood*. He became the theatre's first artistic director two years later.

[3] This summary of the Artistic Policy and Principles of The Performance Space was released in a promotional brochure produced by The Performance Space for the 1990 theatre/gallery season (artistic director Sarah Miller). See also "Black box that filled a black hole." Interview with Sarah Miller by Pamela Payne *Sydney Morning Herald* 12 Feb. 1992: 16.

[4] See Baylis, J. (ed.) "Deconstruction in the Theatre/Deconstruction of the Theatre." *Spectator Burns. Performance/Theory* 1 (1987).

[5] See unpublished Honours thesis, "The Representation of Women in Chekhov's *Three Sisters*." University of Sydney, 1990.

[6] Terry Threadgold has since discussed some of these questions at length in "Postmodernism and the Politics of Culture. Chekhov's *Three Sisters* in Rehearsal and Performance." *Southern Review* 28 (July 1995).

[7] Burke made these comments in her application and proposal to the CPS for the position of director.

[8] Entr'acte's artistic statement and other information on the training method was contained in a pamphlet advertising training workshops led by Burke and Thibaudeau. This pamphlet was distributed by Burke to observers and participants in the CPS rehearsal process.

Part 1

Situating The *Sydney Front*: Cultural Contexts and Critical Positions

2

The Sydney Front: a (post-)modern avant-garde?

1 Introduction

In 1986, the year the Sydney Front was formed, founding member John Baylis conducted an interview with Richard Schechner, academic, author, director of The Performance Group, a leading New York-based experimental theatre collective founded in 1967, and then editor of *The Drama Review*. In the interview, which took place in Sydney during Schechner's visit as a guest speaker at the Australasian Drama Studies Association (ADSA) annual conference, Baylis asked Schechner about the theory and practice of avant-garde theatre in New York in the late 1980s:

> John Baylis: What I would like to talk about is the avant-gardes [sic], ideas and realities. How do you see the theory and what is happening in practice in New York at the moment? Has the avant-garde failed?
>
> Richard Schechner: The period of the avant-garde as a bursting forth of something new is significantly over. The best work seems to be being done by the old masters who are doing traditional avant-garde works: Elizabeth LeCompte of the Wooster Group, Lee Breuer and Joanne Akalitis of Mabou Mines, Richard Foreman... Robert Wilson... It is a very quiet time when it comes to avant-garde work in the sense of new things, or of a direct frontal attack on the mainstream political and social values...
>
> The avant-garde as a traditional mode of performance has emerged and there it is. The avant-garde as something in front of everybody else no longer exists. In short, it can be described, and it's what I call the traditional avant-garde...It's one of the traditions, one of the genres. (*The avant-garde is a genre?* 27-29)

Schechner's discussion of the work of an American avant-garde theatre in the interview with Baylis is quite different from comments he made elsewhere earlier. He is cited in

Michael Vanden Heuvel's book, *Performing Drama/Dramatising Performance*, as lamenting that, "My generation [1960s] failed to develop its own means of training – of getting performance texts across to the future. For this reason alone the work of the last thirty years may prove sterile" (39). Based on Schechner's remarks, Heuvel states that the theories, methods and practices of experimental theatre, and specifically the American avant-garde theatre of the 60s, resist reproduction, recapitulation or repetition. He concludes that "the creation of unpublished 'performance texts' and collective, improvisational performance work, as well as highly self referential autodrama, cannot be presented and therefore inscribed within a viable tradition out of which new work and talent can emerge" (Heuvel 39). However, Schechner in Sydney in 1986 contradicts earlier statements that led Vanden Heuvel to his negative conclusion. Schechner asserts that the American avant-garde theatre is a vital and viable tradition of work. Consequently, Baylis does not draw the same conclusion or closure to the era of avant-garde or experimental theatre in America as Vanden Heuvel does.

Baylis echoed Schechner's words some years later, this time in the context of explaining the work of the Sydney Front. In an interview which surveyed the major themes and preoccupations of the company leading up to and previewing the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*, reviewer James Waites initiated an exchange which drew the following response from Baylis:

> ...we're an Australian group, but also an avant-garde company. The only place we can take our history from is the history of the avant-garde, which happens to be a large part European...
>
> James Waites: But wasn't the avant-garde an historical moment peaking around 1910?
>
> John Baylis: It's a genre, still with a connotation of forward edge. Others use words like "performance" or "new form" – performance is good but too general... As far as avant-garde suggesting cultural vanguardism, I don't believe in that. It's a nasty idea anyway - that you're cannon fodder for some kind of mainstream that will come and pick up the goodies for themselves. (Waites 7)

Here, Baylis locates the Sydney Front as an Australian avant-garde theatre company and redefines the "avant-garde" as a genre, rather than a fixed historical moment qua Peter Bürger's "historical avant-garde" (see below) or a trans-historical cultural vanguard. While it might not be unusual for Baylis to position the Sydney Front's theatre practice as an example of a particular genre, when that genre is "avant-garde" certain

questions and problems arise. The very concept of the avant-garde as advanced art is antithetical to definition or description in terms of either genre or tradition. In this chapter I want to examine how the Sydney Front, a contemporary Sydney-based theatre company, can claim the heritage of the avant-garde, stretching from Europe in the first quarter of this century to America in the 1960s, as their own.

Jürgen Habermas is careful to differentiate the term "modern" from what he calls "aesthetic modernism", which includes the avant-garde movements in its terms of reference. He places the term "modern" in the context of the quarrel between Ancients and Moderns and says that it "expresses the consciousness of an epoch that relates itself to the past of antiquity, in order to view itself as the result of a transition from the old to the new" (3). Habermas asserts that unlike the term "modern", which relates or refers back to an historical break or rupture, the more contemporary concept of aesthetic modernity, dating from the nineteenth century, simply makes an abstract opposition between tradition and the present. In other words, aesthetic modernism merely revolts against the normalising functions of tradition; "its subversive force can be accounted for in terms of the anarchistic intention of blowing up the continuum of history" (5). This rejection of traditional norms and values is, according to Habermas, expressed through metaphors of the vanguard: "the avant-garde understands itself as invading unknown territory, exposing itself to the dangers of sudden, shocking encounters, conquering an as yet unoccupied future. The avant-garde must find a direction in a landscape into which no one seems to have yet ventured" (5). Habermas draws attention to the changed consciousness of time attributed to and characterised by the avant-garde break with tradition. He characterises the "forward gropings, the anticipation of an undefined future and the cult of the new" as an exaltation of the present moment. According to Habermas, "the new value placed on the transitory, the elusive and the ephemeral, the very celebration of dynamism, discloses a longing for an undefiled, immaculate and stable present" (5).

Raymond Williams also differentiates between "modernism" and the "avant-garde", although he notes that simple distinctions are difficult to make. In doing so, he attributes the military metaphor of the vanguard to the late nineteenth-century avant-garde movements, which renounced the modern project of general human progress based on a belief in the increasing accumulation of scientific knowledge and power. Lunn, like

Williams, notes that all the major criteria of the modern avant-garde were influenced, in their origins, by the broad crisis of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century enlightenment reason. A major feature of the crisis was a loss of belief in the beneficent course of linear historical development (39). Williams states that the avant-garde, aggressive from the beginning and defined by opposition to tradition, posited itself as a breakthrough to the future: "its members were not the bearers of a progress already repetitiously defined, but the militants of a creativity which would revive and liberate humanity" (51).

Both Habermas and Williams agree that this notion of the avant-garde as vanguard is at an end. Habermas suggests that the spirit of aesthetic modernity has begun to age: "it has been recited once more in the 1960s; after the 1970s, however, we must admit to ourselves that this modernism arouses a much fainter response today than it did fifteen years ago" (6). Raymond Williams concurs when he says that what was avant-garde is now relatively old. According to Williams, the theories and practices of the avant-garde no longer lead the charge toward an unknown future, but reveal an identifiable historical period from which, however, we haven't yet emerged. That is, it is possible to identify as avant-garde a range of diverse and fast-moving artistic methods and practices, and at the same time to attribute to it a set of relatively constant positions and beliefs. This proposition that avant-garde methods and practices are known or recognised, described and defined, is indicative of the failure and end of the idea of modern art.

Of course some critics contest this narrative of devolution, and argue that the avant-garde was always inextricably tied to the traditions, norms and conventions it opposed. Italian critic Renato Poggioli exemplifies such a position. In his retrospective definition of the avant-garde, Poggioli makes the following claim:

> From the reaction of the avant-garde to tradition, we should not deduce that any form of convention is alien to avant-garde art. Like any artistic tradition, however antitraditional it may be, the avant-garde also has its conventions. In the broad sense of the word, it is itself no more than a new system of conventions, despite the contrary opinion of its followers. Naturally, its most obvious function involves its anti-conventional tendency. This means that the conventions of avant-garde art, in a conscious or unconscious way, are directly and rigidly determined by an inverse relation to traditional conventions. Thanks to this relation, a paradoxical one, the conventions of avant-garde art are often as easily deduced as those of the academy: their deviation from the norm is so regular and normal a fact that it is transformed into a canon no less exceptional than predictable. (56)

The failure or end of the avant-garde is the subject and object of a study by Paul Mann called *The Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde* (1991). He notes that although the history of the avant-garde is marked by obituaries,[1] the death theories of recent years are distinctly characterised by a kind of consensus, a generalisation of the idea of the death of the avant-garde across a broad ideological spectrum. Critics as divergent as Robert Hughes, Hilton Kramer, Clement Greenburg, Douglas, Davis, Peter Bürger and Hans Magnus Enzenburger agree that post-1970 the "death of he avant-garde has...become such a commonplace that the very word has an embarrassing aura" (Hughes cited in Mann 31). Despite the fact that the term "avant-garde" may have reached a phase of terminal uselessness, Mann notes that what we witness today is not a terminus or endpoint, but the living on of the avant-garde as a theory-death. He describes this situation as "the becoming death discourse of the avant-garde within an economy in which nothing is more vital than death" (40). Mann insists, therefore, that the avant-garde is primarily a discursive phenomenon.[2] Concerned to explicate the discursive economy in which the term or concept avant-garde operates, Mann asserts that the death of the avant-garde should be included as a distinct phase in any periodisation of the phenomenon. In this way he aims to turn the theory-death of the avant-garde into a question of the viability of critical or oppositional art and of critical theory and criticism itself. Thus, according to Mann, the phase of the death of the avant-garde is central to the shift from the avant-garde to postmodernism. He outlines five different stages of the avant-garde. The first two stages, the *nouveau esprit*:

> The widely-documented epoch of curiosity, experiment, play, cultural optimism. A period in which the term "avant-garde" made the most literal sense, when art movements really conceived of themselves as the saliences of progress-models of cultural history. Utopian, *en avant* the New World of electronics, telecommunications, etc. The impressionist "science" of perception and light; the futurist technolatry of speed, Appolinaire, cubism, the early Marinetti...(64)

and anti-art:

> The destructive frenzy of Jarry and futurism translated into the (anti-)programs of dada and certain modes of surrealism. The heroic era of Bürger's historical avant-gardes: experimental, collaborative, disintegrative, posed against bourgeois institutions, putatively ideological, (mis-)allied with organised political opposition, at times idealistic and at times nihilistic (the same thing). Tzara, Hausmann, Heartfield, Grosz, Duchamp, Picabia, Breton, Aragon, Ernst, Péret...(64-65)

are readily recognisable phases within the period from 1870-1916 and 1916-1939 respectively. After 1945 the avant-garde is spilt into three simultaneously occurring stages whose features overlap. Mann lists the first of these stages as the "consolidation and recuperation of the mode of anti-art" when "the attack on the institution of art becomes (or is revealed as) thoroughly institutional" (65). One of the main features of recuperation is characterised as "the diffusion of shock and its evacuation as a critical standard" (65). Mann also calls this period "the so called Americanisation of the avant-garde" (65), a period of "acceptance" of high-modernist art when, as Poggioli says, "avant-gardism has become the second nature of all art" (230). This transmutes into the fourth stage, the death of the avant-garde. The death of the avant-garde is, in turn, simultaneous with the "atomization or decentring of the avant-garde in the face of the inevitability of recuperation" (65). In this last stage the avant-garde, according to Mann, abandons its traditional dialectic and rhetoric and seeks other or alternative modes. He calls this stage "postmodernism" (65-66).

Mann's five-part periodisation of the avant-garde highlights an inextricable link or connection between the failure and end of the avant-garde and what is called postmodernism. Habermas, for instance, asks us to consider what the failure of the avant-garde means: "Does it signal a farewell to modernity? Does the existence of a 'post-avant-garde' mean there is a transition to that broader phenomenon called postmodernity?"(6). I want to suggest that this is the point at which to begin to locate the Sydney Front's theatre practice. In the following section of the chapter I will examine key definitions of the avant-garde in order to situate the work of Sydney Front in the context of a critical debate concerning the question of the relationship between (post-) modernism and the avant-garde. The field is divided at least three ways into those who connect postmodernism to the end of the avant-garde (Bürger, Huyssen, Jameson), those who view postmodernism as continuing in the spirit or tradition of the so-called "experimental avant-gardes" (Lyotard) and those who posit the postmodern as "doubly coded" (Hutcheon, Jencks). Jencks identifies postmodernism as a "locus of debate" (10), a place where the meanings and values of contemporary life are contested, contradicted and affirmed. In this chapter, I will outline the terrain and terms of this debate with a view to situating the Sydney Front in relation to some of these key sites and critical positions.

2 The origins of the avant-garde

Roger Shattuck locates the origins of the avant-garde in Paris, France, in the period from 1885 to the outbreak of World War One, the so-called *belle époque.*[3] For Shattuck *la belle époque,* meaning beautiful times or the good old days, characterises the final few decades of the nineteenth century following the end of the Franco-Prussian war (1871). Despite defeat and the failure of the Paris Commune, France staged a rapid recovery and, aided by the unexpected stability of the third republican government, entered into a period of peace and economic prosperity. For Paris, the national capital and the centre of cultural activity, these were, Shattuck says, the Banquet Years. The banquet represented the supreme social rite of the propertied, leisure classes: "The cultural capital which set fashions in dress, the arts, and the pleasures of life, celebrated its vitality over a long table loaded with food and wine" (3). Shattuck directly attributes the extraordinary character of this period to upper class leisure. He claims that no working hours for property holders "produced a life of pompous display, frivolity, hypocrisy, cultivated taste, and relaxed morals" (3). In this setting, everyday life took on a theatrical aspect. As Shattuck says, "living had become increasingly a special kind of performance presided over by fashion, innovation and taste" and this was nowhere more apparent than in Paris, a city transformed into a stage, a vast theatre, by Baron Hausmann's architectural renovation completed in 1880 (6).

It was against this heightened theatrical background that the avant-garde emerged, encouraged also by certain other factors in the period from 1885-1914. According to Shattuck, one of the principle changes of *la belle époque* was the decline of the salon and the disappearance of the basic attitude of *hommage* on which the institution rested (10). He characterises the avant-garde as a group of patronless individuals who banded together for support. Their activities were focused around the comparatively more democratic milieu of the café. More than the salon, the café came to provide a free marketplace of ideas and an independent arena in which artists were able to produce "their own variety of conversational wit and brilliance" (Shattuck 25). At the same time, this artistic bohemia in Paris, radicalised by the revolutionary upheavals of the mid-nineteenth century and, more directly, the experience of the commune, tapped into the political discourse and practice of anarchism. Shattuck asserts that anarchism, although a spent political force by 1894, was an important influence on this group of artists who became known as the avant-garde. He notes that the dynamism of pre-War artistic

activity ran a close parallel to anarchism and its challenge to any formulated aesthetic. Like their political predecessors, the avant-garde artists developed a systematic technique of scandal in order to keep their ideas before the public, creating an atmosphere of permanent explosion in artistic activity. Accordingly, Shattuck defines the avant-garde as a "tradition" of heterodoxy, an opposition which defied civilised values in the name of individual consciousness. The avant-garde crystallized, says Shattuck, into a "determined group of artists who maintained a belligerent attitude towards the world and a genuine sympathy for each other" (24).

Like Shattuck, Lunn also observes that modernists were often members of defensive and belligerent coteries, circles of self-proclaimed "avant-gardes". Their revolt against "the tyrannies of commercialisation, conventional public opinion, and an innocuous and clichéd classical or romantic culture" was "exercised within limits that allowed the free play of scandal and experimentation (which themselves eventually could be absorbed and become a new cliché)" (41). Thus, Lunn takes the military connotations of the phrase "avant-garde" to suggest a small and embattled community, falling back on its aesthetic peers in order to launch various attacks on the cultural establishment:

> By the 1880s or 1890s, many writers and artists, breaking fully from mimetic aesthetics, were more than ever thrown back upon their own selves or their own craft as a central object of their work, with only an "avant-garde" circle of initiates to share it with. As with other groups of intellectuals by the last third of the century, they too were becoming "experts" within a delimited field. Championing their own special rights (e.g., "art for art's sake") as another isolated interest group, they were in this respect much like lawyers, journalists, or professors, except that artists, writers, and musicians were less comfortably self-employed, generally lacking a regular clientele. It is easier to condemn this seemingly self-absorbed posture, as many Marxists have done, and the often contemptuous and disdainful aristocratic attitudes it undoubtedly spawned, than to recognise the equally significant, but more promising, other result: a heightened attention to the ways in which all reality allegedly "pictured" in art is, in fact, constructed by aesthetic activity, form, and materials. (42)

Extending a major theme of the period, Shattuck points out that the avant-garde was "neither a place nor a class nor an activity nor a body of work but was, rather, *a way of life*, both dedicated and frivolous" (29). Conventionally, as Shattuck explains, a work of art is considered to be the product of a different self from the one displayed in the habitual practice of everyday life. However, avant-garde artists, represented individually and collectively by Alfred Jarry, Henri Rousseau, Erik Satie and Guillaume Apollinaire,

began to live up to their art or to live on a level with it, which gave the avant-garde its distinct character. These artists deliberately and self-consciously set out to extend the artistic creative self until it displaced all appearances of everyday practice, habit or other forms of socialised behaviour. As Shattuck states:

> [t]he Banquet Years brought on stage a set of artists whose waggishness was not intended to serve as an interlude of comic relief. Their lives matched their art in a fashion that does not even now seem natural. Their "act", an intensification of the exuberant playacting of *la belle époque*, generated the energy necessary to change the direction of things. (27)

Thus, for Shattuck, the avant-garde is an advance guard in the sense that it is the forerunner and revealer of modernism. He concludes that, by 1916, "the great themes had been chosen" and that "the modernist movement of the twenties acted out with energetic devotion a drama conceived and dedicated before the war" (358). Formed by a group of bomemian artists who banded together for support, this cultural-artistic vanguard or advance guard effected a radical reconfiguration of "a mode of vital experience" (Berman 15) in and though art.

3 Peter Bürger's theory of the avant-garde as anti-art

As Paul Mann points out (above), the avant-garde as anti-art is closely associated with Peter Bürger's concept of the "historical avant-garde". In *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984), Bürger characterises with critical accuracy the historical uniqueness of the avant-garde movements in Europe in the 20s. According to Bürger the historical avant-garde represents a radical break in the history of Western art. The European avant-garde of the 20s was the first movement in art history to recognise, identify and criticise art as an autonomous institution. This position is encapsulated in the second of Bürger's two theses in which he asserts:

> ...with the historical avant-garde movements, the social subsystem that is art enters the stage of self criticism. Dadaism, the most radical movement within the European avant-garde, no longer criticizes schools that preceded it, but criticizes art as an institution, and the course its development took in bourgeois society. The concept art as an institution as used here refers to the productive and distributive apparatus and also to the ideas about art that prevail at a given time and that determine the reception of works. The avant-garde turns against both – the distributive apparatus on which the work of art depends, and the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy. (22)

> The European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the autonomous status of art in bourgeois society. What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men. When the avant-gardists demand that art become practical once again, they do not mean that the contents of works of art should be socially significant. The demand is not raised at the level of the contents of individual works. Rather, it directs itself to the way art functions in society, a process that does much to determine the effect that works have as does the particular content. (49)

In contrast to Shattuck who views the avant-garde as the forerunner and revealer of modernism, Bürger does not position the avant-garde in advance of modernism. Rather, he characterises the avant-garde as against or opposed to a particular historical formation within modernism itself. That is, Bürger terms the avant-garde historical because the institution art and the concept of autonomy according to which it functions only became apparent at a specific historical moment. He traces the development of autonomous art in the eighteenth century to its point of completion in the Aestheticism of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The radical shift or paradigm change that the avant-garde represents is a break with Aestheticism and a rejection of the radical separation of art and life that was Aestheticism's defining moment. According to Bürger, the avant-garde clearly recognised Aestheticism's intensification of artistic autonomy and the social inconsequentiality of autonomous art. In doing so, the avant-garde rejected the constitution of a sphere of art and culture removed from that of the political economy. It rejected the notion that art is a separate and independent realm of vital experience reserved for thought, contemplation, reflection, or appreciation, and not action or praxis. The avant-garde intended the abolition of such autonomous art and the reintegration of art into the praxis of life.

Bürger's rejection of a form of high art separate from social praxis marks a second point of difference from Shattuck and his notion of the avant-garde as an elite force ahead of and leading the main body of society into a new era. For Bürger, the avant-garde is opposed to high art, or any form of elitism, and is firmly grounded in social praxis. In fact, the social and political reintegration and re-functioning of art is paramount in Bürger's theory of the avant-garde. He stipulates that the avant-garde does not seek to simply reintegrate art into life; that is, into the means-end rationality of bourgeois society (34). Rather, the avant-garde attempts to organise a new life praxis from a basis in art. As Peter Goodall pointedly notes, "the 'historical avant-garde' as defined by Bürger was not

simply interested in formal change, in art for art's sake, but was committed to social change in a more total sense, to a cultural transformation which included both political radicalism *and* artistic innovation" (50).

The close inter-relationship between social or political praxis and artistic innovation in Bürger's theory of the avant-garde is further explicated in his discussion of Walter Benjamin's essay on art and technological innovation, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". Bürger examines Benjamin's concept of *the loss of aura*, aura being defined by Benjamin as "the unique phenomenon of distance, however close it may be" (Burger 27), and his thesis that *loss of aura* characterises the end of the autonomy of art in an age of the mass production of images. Benjamin traces the loss of aura directly to the change in techniques of reproduction. He argues that categories of uniqueness and authenticity intrinsic to the reception of an auratic art work become irrelevant to an art such as film or photography whose very mode of production entails reproduction. The change in reproduction techniques brings with it a change in forms of perception and, ultimately, a change in the character of art as a whole. Bürger characterises the change in the role of art in the following way: "[t]he contemplative reception of the bourgeois individual is to be supplanted by what is the simultaneously distracted and rationally testing reception of the masses. Instead of being based on ritual, art will now be based on politics" (28).

Bürger does not dispute Benjamin's use of the concept of *loss of aura* to describe the changes that art underwent in the first quarter of the twentieth century. What he disputes is that these changes were wrought as a direct result of new technologies of mechanical reproduction. On this point Bürger asserts that Benjamin's account of the destruction of autonomous art and its aura is historically incorrect. He points out that Benjamin himself acknowledges that the artists of the avant-garde, especially the dadaists, had already attempted to create film like effects (photo-montage) by means used in poetry and painting. Benjamin himself has written that what avant-garde artists "intended and achieved was a relentless destruction of the aura of their creation which they branded as reproductions with the very means of production" (Burger 29). Contrary to Benjamin, who views the role of these avant-garde artists as precursory, Bürger argues that the break with tradition described by Benjamin was the direct result of a historical and social agency. He states that "the change in the 'overall character of art' is no longer the result

of technological innovation but mediated by the conscious acts of a generation of artists" (29). Thus, for Bürger, technical development is a dependent rather than independent variable of overall social development. Following an argument by Brecht, Bürger contests the tendency exhibited by Benjamin to attribute emancipatory qualities to new technical means. He insists that the realisation of the possibilities inherent in technical means depends on the ways in which they are utilised by social agencies. Given these provisos on the role of technological innovation in relation to the re-production of art, Bürger summarises the importance technological development has for the evolution of the fine arts: "because the advent of photography makes possible the precise mechanical reproduction of reality, the mimetic function of the fine arts withers" (32).

After arguing through his position on Benjamin, Bürger states that the historical avant-garde movements produced a decisive break with tradition and effected a radical change in the representational system. The avant-garde movements opposed the mimetic function of art. They rejected mimesis as a mode of representation and replaced the organic work of art with the non-organic work or, rather, fragment produced through the technique of montage. Montage may be considered, Bürger states, as the fundamental (anti-)representational principle of avant-garde art. Below, Bürger examines how the technique of montage unsettles the traditional concept of the work of art and explains the concept of the non-organic work of art, which is central to the theory of the avant-garde:

> Artists who produce an organic work...treat their material as something living. They respect its significance as something that has grown from concrete life situations. For the avant-gardistes, on the other hand, material is just that, material. Their activity initially consists in nothing other than in killing the "life" of the material, that is, in tearing it out of its functional context that gives it meaning. Whereas the classicist (the artist who produces an organic work) recognises and respects in the material the carrier of a meaning, the avant-gardistes see only the empty sign to which only they can impart significance. The classicist correspondingly treats the material as a whole, whereas the avant-gardiste tears it out of the life totality, isolates it and turns it into a fragment...
>
> The avant-gardiste...joins fragments with the intent of positing meaning (where the meaning may well be the message that meaning has ceased to exist). The work is no longer created as an organic whole but put together from fragments. (70)

Bürger goes on to say that whereas the organic work of art hides the fact that it has been made, the avant-garde fragment proclaims itself an artificial construct. By openly

declaring, even celebrating, its status as product, the fragment initiates a radically different mode of reception of art works, as well as different ways of perceiving art *per se*:

> Instead of proceeding according to the hermeneutic circle and trying to grasp a meaning through the nexus of whole and parts, the recipient will suspend the search for meaning and direct attention to the principle of construction that determines the constitution of the work. In the process of reception, the avant-gardiste work thus provokes a break, which is the analogue of the incoherence (non-organicity) of the work. Between the shocklike experience of the inappropriateness of the mode of reception developed through dealing with organic works of art and the effort to grasp the principles of construction, there is a break: the interpretation of meaning is renounced...the recipient's attention no longer turns to a meaning of the work that might be grasped by a reading of its constituent elements, but to the principle of construction. (Bürger 81)

Bürger concludes that the historical avant-garde movements altered traditional notions of the production and reception of art works. He asserts that the most lasting and important (or "revolutionary") effect of the avant-garde was that it destroyed the traditional concept of the organic work of art and replaced it by another; the fragment. As Charles Jencks notes, "this attack on the institutionalisation of art and the attendant notion of the autonomous work of art disconnected from society" (218) is taken to be the essence of the "historical avant-garde". While Bürger acknowledges the significance of the avant-garde, he asserts that the avant-garde failed in its major aim to end the institution art. Hence, his reason for calling the avant-garde "historical". According to Bürger, "the attack of the historical avant-garde movements on art as an institution has failed, and art has not been integrated into the praxis of life, art as an institution continues to survive as something separate from the praxis of life" (57). He therefore dismisses attempts today to continue the tradition of the avant-garde. This "neo-avant-garde", as Bürger calls it, "institutionalises the avant-garde as art and thus negates genuine avant-gardiste intentions" (58).

4 Andreas Huyssen: postmodernism as the international endgame of the avant-garde

Andreas Huyssen (1986, 1992) takes and extends Bürger's notion of the historical avant-garde and links the particular theories and practices of this avant-garde to postmodernism. In the introduction to this chapter I noted that John Baylis asserts that the Sydney Front is an avant-garde company in the tradition of the European avant-

garde. In this section of the chapter I wish to explore Huyssen's mapping of the postmodern, which outlines a connection between the classical European avant-garde and an American counter-culture in the 1960s.

Huyssen, after Bürger, characterises the historical avant-garde as a sustained assault on modern aestheticist notions of the autonomy and self-sufficiency of high art. According to Huyssen, each of the constitutive features of modern aestheticism was challenged immediately by an emergent avant-garde. He states that the avant-garde in the first three decades of this century disputed aestheticism's "insistence on the autonomy of the art work, its obsessive hostility to mass culture, its radical separation from the culture of everyday life, and its programmatic distance from political, economic and social concerns" (*After the Great Divide* 2). Huyssen's contribution to the critical question of the relationship between the historical avant-garde, modernism and the postmodern is to connect the historical avant-garde's revolt against modern aestheticism to postmodernism. Postmodernism is, according to Huyssen, a relational phenomenon: "the term '*post*modernism' itself...positions the phenomenon as relational. Modernism as that from which postmodernism is breaking away remains inscribed into the very word with which we describe our distance from modernism" (*Mapping the Postmodern* 43). So in many ways postmodernism, as characterised by Huyssen, is a continuation of an earlier problematic. Huyssen views postmodernism as a continuation into the present of the historical avant-garde's attack on the institutionalised dichotomy (the so called "great divide") between high and low culture.

Huyssen connects the theories and practices of the classical European avant-garde to an American avant-garde in the 1960s. He describes the activity in America as a self-conscious attempt by the counter-culture movement to revitalise the avant-garde and to utilise the heritage of these movements to create an alternative society.[4] At the same time, he keeps strictly to Bürger's narrow definition, reserving the use of the term "historical avant-garde" for those "authentic" anti-art movements in Europe in the 20s. Thus, he terms the American phenomenon "postmodernism":

> ...the postmodernism of the 1960s had some of the makings of a genuine avant-garde movement, even if the overall political situation of a 1960s America was in no way comparable to that of Berlin or Moscow in the early 1920s when the tenuous and short lived alliance between avant-gardism and vanguard politics was forged. For a number of historical reasons the ethos of avant-gardism as iconoclasm, as probing reflection on the ontological

> status of art in modern society, as an attempt to forge another life was culturally not yet as exhausted in the US of the 1960s as it was in Europe at the same time. (*Mapping the Postmodern* 51)

In his final analysis, however, Huyssen, after outlining the critical potential of postmodernism, argues that this potential is foreclosed. He claims that postmodernism is the end of the avant-garde in the international arena:

> From a European perspective...[the American avantgarde] looked like the endgame of the historical avantgarde rather than like the breakthrough to new frontiers it claimed to be. My point here is that American postmodernism of the 1960s was both: an American avantgarde *and* the endgame of international avantgardism. (*Mapping the Postmodern* 51)

Zurbrugg draws attention to a curious double bind marking Huyssen's analysis (130). On one hand, Huyssen argues that the postmodern avant-garde actively challenges the divide between high and low culture. This would seem to suggest that the postmodern avant-garde is ideally placed to critique what Huyssen himself describes as "a technologically and economically fully developed media culture" [which] has mastered "the high art of integrating, diffusing and marketing even the most serious challenges", making "the shock of the new much harder perhaps even impossible to sustain" (Zurbrugg 130-131). However, on the other hand, Huyssen conflates the worst aspects of a developing and near dominant mass culture with the postmodern avant-garde. According to Huyssen, the incorporation and recuperation of the historical avant-garde by postmodernism is exemplary of kitsch nostalgia, one of the main characteristics of mass culture. Postmodernism, he states, "has always been in search of a tradition while pretending to innovation" (*After the Great Divide* 170). Furthermore, as Huyssen points out, "the postmodernist search for cultural tradition and continuity, which underlies all the radical rhetoric of rupture, discontinuity, and epistemological breaks, has turned to that tradition which fundamentally and on principle despised and denied all traditions" (*After the Great Divide* 169). Consequently, postmodernism must be viewed as invalidating or voiding the avant-garde project by taking the historical avant-garde, embodiment of anti-tradition, as a tradition. Postmodernism, in this sense, neutralises an "authentic" avant-garde, "authentic" experimentation or invention. Thus, in the final analysis, Huyssen's position rehearses Bürger's death of the avant-garde. For both Bürger and Huyssen, the postmodern era witnesses the end of the historical avant-garde movements.

In many ways, Huyssen's mapping of postmodernism assumes the work of earlier theorists such as Habermas and Jameson. Habermas' solution might seem a sensible one given these conceptions of the neo-avant-garde (Bürger) or postmodernism (Huyssen). He continues to uphold the modern enlightenment project against an emergent postmodernity or, as he calls it, neo-conservatism. Habermas reminds us that the project of modernity, formulated in the eighteenth century by philosophers of the Enlightenment, worked within the increasing autonomy of separate areas of culture - divided into science, morality and art - in order to utilise the accumulation of specialised knowledge(s) for the enrichment of everyday life (9). He claims that this culture of expertise was negated by the avant-garde in its radical rejection of the split between art and life (*pace* Bürger). However, as Habermas argues, and Bürger and Huyssen would seem to agree, the avant-garde failed to abolish the institution art and to reintegrate art into the praxis of life. Given that the problem of the autonomy of separate areas of lived experience remains, Habermas asks "should we try to hold onto the intentions of the Enlightenment, feeble as they may be, or should we declare the project of modernity a lost cause?" (9-10). His position is that rather than abandon the project of modernity as a lost cause, an attempt should be made to "learn from the mistakes of those extravagant programs which have tried to negate modernity" (12). Modernity, according to Habermas, is an incomplete project, narrowly conceived and misunderstood by those who seek to move beyond it. His point is that the proponents of postmodernity have a short memory, a restricted historical understanding of the broad parameters of the "modern". The project of modernity, he states, "has not yet been fulfilled" (13).

Jameson and Lyotard, who hold contrary views on postmodernism,[5] both contend that there is no return to a modern Enlightenment project. Jameson, like Habermas in some respects, regards modernism in positive terms and conceptualises postmodernism negatively as reactionary conservatism. At the same time, Jameson's position is not directly linked to reviving an Enlightenment spirit or, more generally, a form of critical modernism. Jameson's position on postmodernism is implicit in David Harvey's argument that there has been a sea-change in political, economical and cultural practices since around 1972. According to Harvey, this sea change is inextricably linked to the emergence of new dominant ways in which space and time are experienced today (299). As Harvey suggests, for Jameson the postmodern condition is inescapable in the sense that it is not simply a style or an aesthetic but is installed as a cultural dominant of

late capitalism. Lyotard, on the other hand, posits the postmodern condition as a definitive rupture with the past. His position reflects a deep skepticism of the modern enlightenment project, and he is highly critical of a philosopher such as Habermas who retains an interest in the possibility of historical continuity.

5 Jean-François Lyotard: postmodernism and the paradox of the future (post) anterior (modo)

> The work of Jean-François Lyotard...calls into question what could be described as the interplay of interdependence between the unity of tradition, consensus and universality... The advent of postmodernism allows for a distinction to be made - within interpretation - between artistic practices that aim at repeating that "interplay of interdependence", and ones that via experimentation can no longer be accounted for within the terms set by tradition. It is in the movement beyond a mere negative response to tradition that the avant-garde can be situated. (Benjamin, A. 134)

Lyotard's definition of the postmodern is formed in relation to the condition of knowledge in post-industrial, information-based societies where new technologies of communication promote knowledge as a "principle force of production" (Harvey 307-308). Lyotard defines the postmodern as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (138), which reflects his suspicions concerning the place of knowledge as narrative in advanced capitalist societies. Lyotard's notion of the postmodern condition of knowledge is implicitly critical of the Enlightenment narrative in which a subject of knowledge works toward a "good ethico-political end: the universal good" (138). He argues that postmodernity imposes a rigorous re-examination of the thought of the Enlightenment: the idea of a rational subject of knowledge working for the greater good within a universal history of mankind. In opposition to any kind of totalising or universalizing thought, postmodern knowledge, Lyotard asserts, understands and accounts for so-called "grand narratives" or "transcendent truths" in terms of a theory of dissensus; one which recognises the absence of a final resolution (Benjamin, A. 134-135). In other words, postmodern knowledge is produced by dissent, by interrogating or putting into question existing or dominant paradigms, and by inventing new ones, rather than assenting to universal truths or agreeing to a consensus. Thus Lyotard can be seen to champion dissensus over consensus, diversity and dissent over conformity and consensus, and heterogeneity and the incommensurable over homogeneity and universality. "Postmodern knowledge",

he claims, "is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable" (139).

In Lyotard's account of the postmodern condition, the "post" is not a simple chronology. He states that postmodernism is undoubtedly part of the modern, but that the postmodern precedes the modern: "All that has been received, if only yesterday... must be suspected...A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state and this state is constant" (147). Thus, implicit in Lyotard's definition of the postmodern is a notion of experimentation as a form of critical resistance.[6] As Andrew Benjamin (above) suggests, Lyotard views the postmodern not as a definitive break with modernism but as a moment of working though the past. Postmodernism is not so much a negative reaction to tradition, but, rather, a form of critical resistance which, through ceaseless experimentation and invention, calls into question all that is taken for granted as given, natural and normal. It is in this context that Lyotard's statement that the principle of postmodern knowledge is "not the expert's homology but the inventor's paralogy" (139) should be understood.

Lyotard is determined to reject any single unifying explanation of the world that is based on a fixed ontology. The radical potential of postmodernism lies in this fundamental resistance to any imposed pre-given meaning. In his discussion of the differences between the distinct aesthetics of the modern and postmodern, Lyotard outlines this potential. Modernism, he contends, is in the grip of an "aesthetic of the sublime" which "allows the unpresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents", as some kind of transcendental value (148). That is, it continues to offer the reader and viewer the solace and pleasure of a recognisable form. In contrast, the postmodern embodies a certain resistance to definition and description in terms of known categories. That is, the postmodern work or text is not a manifestation of pre-existent rules and categories but an essaying forth in search of those rules and categories, and in search of new presentations in order to represent the unrepresentable. Lyotard states:

> The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense

> of the unpresentable. A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or the work. Those rules or categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer then are working without rules in order to formulate the rules for what *will have been done*. Hence the fact that the work and text have the character of an *event*; hence, also, they always come too late for their author, or, what amounts to the same thing, their being put into work, their realisation (*mise en oeuvre*) always begin too soon. (148)

6 Fredric Jameson: postmodernism as a cultural dominant of late capitalism

Jameson's account of postmodernism (1983, 1984) contradicts Lyotard's concept of an experimental and critical postmodernism. Along with Habermas, Jameson led the counter-attack against Lyotard's celebration of postmodernism. In his landmark essay of 1982,[7] Jameson characterises postmodernism[8] as a specific reaction against the institutional ascendancy and commercial success of high modernism. Like Habermas, Jameson views postmodernism as a mere rejection of "established forms of high modernism" (*Postmodernism and Consumer Society* 111) and, thus, characterises the phenomenon as ahistorical and politically conservative since "those formerly subversive and embattled styles, felt to be scandalous or shocking" by one generation are felt by the following generation of the 60s "to be establishment and the enemy – dead, stifling, canonical, the reified monuments one has to destroy to do anything new" (*Postmodernism and Consumer Society* 112). But while Habermas believes that we must retain modernity's project of emancipation through reason, Jameson argues that we need an art capable of representing the complex realities of a global economic order. Postmodernism, according to Jameson, is the direct product of this order and not the radical political culture he attempts to theorise in opposition to it.

Jameson's intervention into the postmodern debate shifts the terms of the debate by positioning postmodernism in the economic system of late capitalism. Drawing directly on Ernest Mandel's major work *Late Capitalism* (1975), Jameson asserts that postmodernism is a periodising concept which describes not a mere aesthetic break or epistemological shift, but nothing less than "the cultural logic of late capitalism" (*Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 53-92). Edward Soja states that "the most rigorous and revealing analyses of the crises laden macro-rhythm in the historical geography of capitalism have been made by Ernest Mandel" (28). According to

Soja, Mandel makes the key connection between periodisation and spatialisation in the political economy of capitalism. He states that "the 'long wave' periodicity of crises and restructuring defines not only historical eras but simultaneously a sequence of spatialities" which Soja describes as "a changing regional configuration of 'uneven and combined' capitalist development that can be mapped on to the sequence of modernities" (64). This spatio-temporal patterning plays a significant role in Jameson's critique of reactionary postmodernism. He ties three key Mandelian phases, namely market, monopoly and multinational capital, to cultural phases identified in the realism, modernism, postmodernism triumvirate. Jameson asserts that "late or multinational or consumer capitalism, far from being inconsistent with Marx's great nineteenth century analysis, constitutes on the contrary the purest form of capital yet to have emerged, a prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas" (*Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 78). The sphere of the aesthetic is one of the key areas that Jameson identifies as being subsumed by the logic of commodity production. He contends that "the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods, at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation" (*Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 56). This extends not only to aesthetic experience, but to experience in general. Reactionary postmodernism, according to Jameson, converts all sensuous experience to the "pleasure" of the merely "culinary" or "consumable" (*Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 57).

Jameson is careful to state that his determination of postmodernism does not apply universally. He qualifies his case by stating that the postmodern is the "force field in which very different kinds of cultural impulses – what Raymond Williams has usefully termed 'residual' and 'emergent' forms of cultural production – must make their way" (*Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 57). His aim in identifying postmodernism as a cultural dominant is, he asserts, "to project some conception of a new systemic cultural norm and its reproduction, in order to reflect more adequately on the most effective forms of any radical cultural politics today" (*Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 57).

The defining feature of postmodernism for Jameson is the erasure of the boundary line dividing and separating high culture and so-called mass or popular culture. He states:

> Postmodernism is fascinated precisely by this whole "degraded" landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Reader's Digest culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B Hollywood film, of so-called paraliterature with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery and science-fiction or fantasy novel: materials they no longer simple "quote", as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance. (*Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 54-55)

Jameson characterises the postmodern appropriation and assimilation of the forms, categories and contents of mass culture as pastiche. He asserts that postmodern pastiche is distinct from and eclipses the parodic "quotation" that modernists like Joyce or Mahler performed on borrowed materials. These modern artists, by way of sympathetic or malicious parody, revitalised their target and thereby granted it some kind of authentic historical existence. In contrast, Jameson contends that postmodern pastiche is the product of a highly commodified aesthetic production, which has lost all sense of its own history and, thus, produces works with no original or authentic existence. Advertising exemplifies this kind of production for it is, Jameson contends, "fed by postmodernism in all the arts and inconceivable without it" (*Postmodernism and Consumer Society* 124). He characterises the postmodern aesthetic as flat or lacking in depth; it merely presents a superficial surface lacking in meaning or value, which reduces the viewer's experience to "intensities" ultimately lacking in any "real" emotion or feeling. So, for Jameson, cultural producers have exhausted creative resources and thus raid past styles, simply poaching and re-combining or recycling various bits and pieces to make an image that sells itself or consumer commodities. Such pastiche is, he argues, to be sharply distinguished from parody:

> Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in a dead language, but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction... Pastiche is thus blank parody...
>
> With the collapse of the high-modernist ideology of style...the producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles...the random cannibalisation of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion, and in general what Henri Lefebvre has called the increasing primacy of the "neo"... Pastiche is...not incompatible with...[the] appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself and for pseudo-events and "spectacles" (the term of the Situationists). (*Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 65-66)

Implicit in this outline of postmodern pastiche is a rigorous questioning of the possibility of critical space, particularly with reference to cultural production in an age of multinational capitalism. In Jameson's account, postmodern pastiche not only lacks the critical potential of high modernism, it serves to reinforce and reproduce the logic of consumer capitalism.

Jameson's problem with postmodernism is precisely that it abolishes conventional notions of space and, most importantly, critical distance. As Donna Haraway notes, Jameson's writings alert us to the fact that "postmodernism is not an option, a style among others, but a cultural dominant requiring radical reinvention of left politics from within; there is no longer any place from without that gives meaning to the comforting fiction of critical distance" (6). This criticism of postmodernism derives largely from Jameson's study of postmodern architecture. He performs a detailed semiotic reading and analysis of the public space(s) of what is taken to be a primary example of postmodern architecture: the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in downtown Los Angeles (see *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 80-85). According to Jameson, there has been a "mutation in space" which has been unaccompanied by an equivalent mutation in the subject who, therefore, does not possess the perceptual equipment to process the new "hyperspace". He describes the space of the Westin Bonaventure as a "hyperspace" since the subject's experience of this space can only be characterized as bewildering immersion and milling confusion. Jameson concludes that the postmodern hyperspace "has finally succeeded in transforming the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organise immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world" (*Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 83). Furthermore, he contends that this disjunction between the body and the built environment can stand as an analogy for "the incapacity of our minds...to map the great global multinational and decentred communicational networks in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects" (*Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 83-84). Based on this analysis, Jameson concludes that distance in general, and critical distance in particular, has been abolished in the new space of postmodernism. He states that "our now postmodern bodies are bereft of spatial co-ordinates and practically incapable of distantiation" (*Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 87). Furthermore, Jameson contends that "political interventions (even guerilla ones) are disarmed, reabsorbed by a system of which they themselves

might be considered a part, since they can achieve no distance from it" (*Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 87).

As Haraway points out, Jameson's criticism of reactionary postmodernism reveals the fiction of critical distance in the political and economic system of late capitalism. However, Jameson seems to imply that political intervention will inevitably be re-absorbed since this intervention comes from within the very system under attack. He equates the problem of critical distance with the impossibility of any kind of political criticism at all. Haraway implies that this doesn't necessarily follow. Given that there is no longer a without or an outside to this global economic order, Haraway suggests that traditional political and critical strategies should be revisited and that other forms of resistance should be explored. These alternative forms of resistance to the political economy of late capitalism will not make recourse to the series of binary oppositions (within and without, inside and outside, self and other, subject and object) on which the fiction of critical distance relies.

Like Haraway, Edward Soja highlights Jameson's focus on space and the problem of critical distance within a reactionary postmodernism. Soja positions Jameson's work within a critical tradition (Lefebvre, Mandel, Foucault, Berger) which studies the significance of spatiality at crucial historical moments in the global political economy. Soja states that "space makes a critical difference" and "that revealing how spatial restructuring hides consequences from us is the key to making political and theoretical sense of the changing political economy of the contemporary world" (62). Soja credits Jameson with capturing the spatial specificity of the contemporary era. Jameson states:

> Postmodern (or multinational) space is not merely a cultural ideology or fantasy, but has genuine historical (and socio-economic) reality as a third great original expansion of capitalism around the globe (after the earlier expansions of the national market and the older imperialist system, which each had their own cultural specificity and generated new types of space appropriate to their dynamics) ...we cannot...return to aesthetic practices elaborated on the basis of historical situations and dilemmas which are no longer ours...the conception of space that has been developed here suggests that a model of political culture appropriate to our own situation will necessarily have to raise spatial issues as its fundamental organizing concern. (*Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 88-89)

Based on his reading of this passage from Jameson, cited in full in his own book, Soja asserts that

> Jameson provisionally defines the spatialised model of radical political culture appropriate to the contemporary (postmodern) situation as an "aesthetic of cognitive mapping", an ability to see in the cultural logic and forms of postmodernism an instrumental cartography of power and social control; in other words, a more acute way of seeing how space hides consequences from us. (63)

Such a mapping of postmodern space-scapes is meant to reveal an otherwise hidden and insidious human geography. These hidden spaces, according to Soja, must become the target for a radical and postmodern politics of resistance. Thus Haraway and Soja read into Jameson the possibility for critical resistance within postmodernism, which isn't explicit in Jameson's theoretical framework. Their lead has been taken up by other critical theorists (such as Hutcheon, below), who seek to explicate postmodernism as a form of resistance best described as complicit critique, that is, criticism produced from inside (and not outside, at a critical, objective distance from) the very system under attack.

7 Linda Hutcheon: postmodern parody

A very different picture of postmodernism, one which draws on Lyotard's notion of a critical and experimental, or resistant postmodernism, is presented by literary, feminist and film theorist and cultural critic, Linda Hutcheon (1989, 1992). Hutcheon does not dispute Jameson's general theoretical framework characterising postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism. She states that "most theorists of postmodernism who see it as a 'cultural dominant' agree that it is characterised by the results of late-capitalist dissolution of bourgeois hegemony and the development of mass culture" (*Theorising the Postmodern* 78). However, she argues, contrary to Jameson, that "the increasing uniformisation of mass culture is one of the totalising forces that postmodernism exists to challenge" (*Theorising the Postmodern* 78). In other words, for Hutcheon, postmodernism offers a critical interrogation of the development and near dominance of commodity culture, and a reinvention of aesthetic and social reproduction within the same.

Hutcheon identifies parody as key concept in postmodernism, directly challenging Jameson's notion of postmodernism as a form of pastiche. She asserts that parody,

often called ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality is the essential feature of a resistant postmodernism. The main difference between modern and postmodern parodic representation, according to Hutcheon, is that the ironic representation of postmodern parody resists the resolving urge of modernism toward closure. She states:

> Postmodernism is a fundamentally contradictory enterprise: its art forms (and its theory) at once use and abuse, install and then destabilise convention in parodic ways, self-consciously pointing both to their own inherent paradoxes and provisionality and, of course, to their critical or ironic re-reading of the art of the past. In implicitly contesting in this way such concepts as aesthetic originality and textual closure, postmodernist art offers a new model for mapping the borderland between art and the world, a model that works from a position within both and yet not totally within either, a model that is profoundly implicated in, yet still capable of criticising, that which it seeks to describe. (*Theorising the Postmodern* 80-81)

Against Jameson's view of postmodernism as tied to a culture oversaturated with images offering a value-free, decorative, de-historicised quotation of past forms, Hutcheon describes postmodern parody as a value-problematising, de-naturalising form which self-consciously acknowledges, through irony, the history and politics of representation. As Hutcheon argues in *The Politics of Postmodernism* in reference to the postmodern novel and film, postmodern parody is different from an ahistorical empty realm of pastiche, the nostalgic neoconservative recovery of past meaning (62-69). The ironic and duplicitous re-use of past art is not nostalgic, but is always critical. It does not wrest past art from its original historical context and reassemble it into some sort of presentist spectacle. Instead through a double process of installing and ironising, postmodern parody foregrounds, rather than resolves, contradictions inherent in the continuity and difference of history. It foregrounds the impossibility of finding any totalising model to resolve the resulting postmodern contradictions (Hutcheon *The Politics of Postmodernism* 93-117).

8 Conclusion

Writing on two significant Sydney-based productions, Entr'acte's *Ostraka* (1986) and the Sydney Front's *Waltz* (1986), Christopher Allen identifies parody as a key strategy in these performance productions. He states:

> Both these works use physical and emotional violence, hysteria, sadism, and the erotic, undercut by irony, changing with the speed of mass media into their opposites or into parody and burlesque. This is the theatre of dissociation. It exists in the

> disjunction of signifier and signified. The physical violence of the emotional expression is such as to overpower the audience, and yet there is no expression; the hysteria reveals the emptiness beneath. We watch with fascination the utterly opaque play of signs, we *see* passion but don't *feel* it. (45-46, Allen's emphasis)

Allen seems to suggest that these two performances parody the audience's expectation of the communication of a meaning or message in and through theatrical performance. He claims that these performances stress, instead, the overpowering force of the images and representations in the performance itself. Allen argues that parody has the effect of dissociating what is seen from what is felt by the spectator. I would liken what he calls the "theatre of dissociation" to the technique of estrangement in Brecht's Epic theatre. Parody, in the sense meant by Allen, seems to produce an alienation-like effect, defamiliarising what is seen from what is felt by the spectator. As in Brecht's Epic theatre, the performers do not allow the spectator to identify or empathise with the actions or images that they see in front of them. Jameson might connect the rapid-fire procession of empty images to a breakdown in meaning and communication generally, leading to a sense of confusion and bewilderment symptomatic of human experience in the political economy of late capitalism. Allen would seem to suggest to the contrary that this type of theatre constructs a critical frame in and through which the spectator is invited or persuaded to question what they see. Through parody this type of theatre playfully encourages a critical awareness in the spectator who, although thoroughly enmeshed in networks of representation and reproduction, is able, at the same time, to interrogate the history and politics of these representations, as well as the terms of their production and reception.

In the introduction to this chapter, I noted Charles Jencks' characterisation of postmodernism as the "locus of a debate", a locale where the meanings and values of contemporary existence are offered forth for argument and discussion. As discussed in the body of this chapter, Jameson argues that this experience of the contemporary is lived out in the political economy of late capitalism, which is not an even or undifferentiated space or time. Postmodernism as a dominant formation holds within it "residual and "emergent", or competing forms of social reproduction. Jencks implies that the difficulties involved in defining or describing the postmodern reflect a more general dilemma of definition and description directly related to our present situation. Lyotard

argues that meta-narratives with their totalising, foundation-seeking explanations no longer apply to the current situation.

What I hope to have communicated is a sense of postmodernism as a "complex mixture of disjunctive practices, a set of processes and practices where 'modernist' structures continue to contest and to produce real and disjunctive effects within the postmodern as dominant formation" (Threadgold *Postmodernism and the Politics of Culture* 176). Jencks asserts that "the theories of the modern paradigm have not been overturned so much as transformed into parts of a larger framework *where they still keep their identity*" (11, his emphasis). He understands the shift from modernism to postmodernism not as a reversal or opposition but, rather, as a doubling and complexification of modern with other heterogenous elements:

> Post-modernism means the end of a single world view and, by extension, "a war on totality", a resistance to single explanations, a respect for difference and a celebration of the regional, local and particular. Yet in its suffix "modern", it still carries the burden of a process which is international and in some senses universal. In this sense it has a permanent tension and is always hybrid, mixed, ambiguous, or what I have called "doubly-coded". (11)

Noting the definitional dilemmas that attend the place of the postmodern, Noel King argues that postmodernism is "the latest name given to an enduring problem in cultural commentary" concerning "the familiar gap which opens between certain kinds of cultural discourse and the objects they purport to describe or explain" (cited in Threadgold *Postmodernism and the Politics of Culture* 176). Threadgold suggests that we should follow King in understanding postmodernism as "what one finds in explanations of postmodernism" (*Postmodernism and the Politics of Culture* 176). That is, we should refer to the discourse of postmodernism and look to "the field in which it is deployed" (*Postmodernism and the Politics of Culture* 176). In the following chapter, I will examine the discourse of postmodernism in relation to theatre theory and practice before moving on, in the second part of this thesis, to analyse how such a discourse actually shapes rehearsal process, the process of production of meaning.

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[1] Mann states that "for the most part these claims have been matters of polemic, attempts by conservative forces to discredit an opposition that might still exert some influence, or by one equally ephemeral faction or style to usurp the dominance of another" (31).

[2] For Mann the avant-garde is primarily a discursive phenomenon. He points to the fact that many of the artistic theories, methods and practices of the avant-garde were first announced in written

manifestos. Mann points to the fact that Marinetti's first Futurist manifesto, published in the French newspaper *Le Figaro* in 1909, preceded the existence of any Futurist movement. At that moment, Mann asserts, the Futurists existed nowhere but in Marinetti's discursive prose (6).

[3] Contrary to Shattuck's use of the term, left historian Eric Hobsbawm contends that the description of the era or times as *belle époque* is quite unsatisfactory. He claims that, "the least perceptive and most sentimental constantly try to recapture the attractions of an era which upper- and middle-class memories have tended to see through a golden haze" (7). Allan Bullock makes a similar point remarking that "much has been written nostalgically about *la belle époque*, much of it exaggerated in reminiscence" (62). At the same time, Hobsbawm and Bullock admit that the label undoubtedly catches one highly visible aspect of the period that brought such terms as "plutocracy" and "leisure" class into the public discourse. Neither Hobsbawm nor Bullock dispute Shattuck's claim that the last years of the nineteenth century were an era of unparalleled peace and prosperity in the western world. Both agree that it was an era of growing social stability within the zone of developed industrial economies, and of national growth and expansion through imperialism so that, for a moment and temporarily, the development of the contemporary world was identified with that of nineteenth-century liberal bourgeois society (Hobsbawm 11). At the same time, Hobsbawm notes that it was a fundamentally conflicted and inherently contradictory era:

> It was an era of profound identity crises and transformation for a bourgeoisie whose traditional moral foundation crumbled under the very pressure of its own accumulations of wealth and comfort. Its very existence as a class of masters was undermined by the transformation of its own economic system. Juridical persons (i.e. large business organisations or corporations), owned by shareholders, employing hired managers and executives, began to replace real persons and their families owning and managing their own enterprises…
> The basic pattern [of the history of the Age of Empire] is of the society and world of bourgeois liberalism advancing towards what has been called its 'strange death' as it reaches its apogee, victim of the very contradictions inherent in its advance. (10)

If, as Shattuck contends, the avant-garde is a product of a society in flux, transported on a specific, and historically peculiar and fragile vehicle in the form of early (1870) capitalism, then the avant-garde must embody the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in a society whose very development undermines its own foundations (Hobsbawm 11).

[4] Huyssen states that the American 'counter-culture' of the 1960s self-consciously projected an image of an avant-garde leading the way to an alternative society. He refers to the work of Peter Brook and the Living Theatre in theatre. Huyssen states that these theatres "attempted to bridge the gap between stage and audience and experimented with new forms of immediacy and spontaneity in performance. There was a participatory ethos in theatre and in the arts which can easily be linked to the teach-ins and sit-ins of the pretest movement" (*After the Great Divide* 164). While I do not dispute Huyssen's characterisation of the American experimental theatre of 1960s, I do not agree with Huyssen's suggestion that this theatre is postmodern. In the following chapter I elucidate some of the key differences between the American avant-garde theatre and a postmodern theatre.

[5] As Perry Anderson notes in *The Origins of Postmodernity* (1998), "postmodernism" as a term has been variously and even randomly used since the 1890s and up to the 1960s (see, for instance, Ortega y Gasset, Arnold Toynbee, Charles Olson, C.Wright Mills and Leslie Fielder). According to Anderson, the terms of the debate as we have come to know it "crystallised" in the decade between the mid-70s and mid-80s largely in the domain of architecture (Graves, Jencks, Venturi), but also in the work of culture critics such as Ihab Hassan, J.-F. Lyotard and Habermas. In a separate chapter Andersen considers Jameson's contribution to the debate. He argues that

Jameson's work captures the terms of the debate around the concept of postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism.

[6] Against increasing demands "to liquidate the heritage of the avant-gardes" (143), Lyotard's notion of the postmodern draws on the heritage of the experimental avant-garde. Lyotard argues that these demands to suspend artistic experimentation exemplify an "identical call for order, a desire for unity, for identity, for security or popularity (in the sense of *Öffentlichkeit*, of 'finding a public')" (143). His notion of the postmodern condition may be defined in opposition to the desire for unity, identity, popularity, security, etc.

[7] This essay, published in 1983, was first presented as a lecture for the Whitney Museum in 1982.

[8] Jameson actually refers to "postmodernisms" to capture the variety and diversity of the aesthetic practices covered by the concept. He contends that postmodernism is not a coherent entity although it may be said to constitute "a unifying principle" in so far as postmodernism seeks to displace the dominance of modern theories, methods and practices in architecture, art and photography, music, film and video, and the novel.

3

Deconstruction: theory and theatre

> Theory and theatre are undergoing the same deconstruction so that representation at either level is displaced from a "natural" to an "artificial" mode of repetition: "Re-presentation: theatre does not show 'things in themselves', nor does it represent them; it shows a representation, shows itself to be a fiction; it is less engaged in setting forth things or the image of things than it is in *setting up a machine*". (Derrida cited in Ulmer 180, Ulmer's emphasis)

> Deconstruction within theatre...examines certain elements like narration and character, picking them to pieces and playing with them. ...deconstruction of the theatre...looks at more basic concepts in the theatre: concepts of theatre that most of us take for granted: notions of formal structure, pacing and rhythm, elements that we often think are "natural" or at least basic stagecraft but which are of course just other variables. ...

> It is certainly not destruction. Deconstruction tries to open out meaning. Instead of meaning being confined within certain cultural modes where language is perceived to be a transparent tool for saying precisely "what you mean", deconstruction is a tool for breaking down the allotted meaning, the normal reference. (Baylis *Deconstruction in the Theatre/Deconstruction of the Theatre* 30-31)

1 Introduction: deconstruction and the postmodern

In an explication of postmodernism and the commodification of culture, Jameson points to "a kind of writing simply called theory", which he says specifically refers to French theory, and suggests that this "theoretical discourse" is also to be numbered among the manifestations of postmodernism (*Postmodernism and Consumer Society* 112). Jameson means to problematise this particular kind of writing, a key example of which is the theoretical discourse of deconstruction. He refuses to call this "new kind of writing" philosophy, reserving the term "theory" to describe what he refers to as "the end of philosophy" (*Postmodernism and Consumer Society* 112). In this sense, his position is very close to that of Habermas who also conceives of French theory as a negation of philosophy. Habermas asserts that this particular theoretical discourse reflects a conservative critical and political position since it recapitulates the basic

experience of aesthetic modernism. The "young conservatives", as he labels them in a line from Bataille via Foucault to Derrida, "claim as their own the revelations of a decentred subjectivity, emancipated from the imperatives of work and usefulness, and with this experience they step outside the modern world. On the basis of modernistic attitudes they justify an irreconcilable anti-modernism" (13-14).

Writing on the place of Derrida's notion of "difference" in modern French philosophy, Vincent Descombes states that there was much talk concerning the "end of philosophy" at the beginning of the sixties. Then, he says, it was thought that the Western ratio had exhausted its critical resources and was nearing a definitive end point. Against this background, as Descombes explains, the idea of the end of philosophy more commonly amounted to the accusation that "philosophy is the ideology of the western ethnos" (138). That is, the perception was that philosophy had become an absolute and overarching discourse, which encapsulated everything there was to say concerning reason, morality, meaning or truth (138). Habermas would assert that this conception of philosophy exemplifies the position of a theorist such as Derrida. Descombes, however, presents a more complex picture of Derrida's critical position. He states that Derrida has no objection to a reductive formula such as "philosophy is the ideology of the western ethnos", except for the fact that to say it is impossible (137). Derrida's departure point is precisely the impossibility of absolute knowledge, which he characterises as a closure of discourse "leaving no other recourse than to stratagem and strategy" (Descombes 138). "Deconstruction" is a term invented by Derrida to describe a strategic intervention or "the ruse that makes it possible to speak at the very moment when there is, 'when all is said and done', nothing more to say since the absolute discourse has been achieved" (Descombes 139). Derrida, himself, distinguishes his position from one that would simply confirm or contradict "the end of philosophy". He states:

> I try to keep myself at the *limit* of philosophical discourse. I say limit and not death, for I do not at all believe in what today is so easily called the death of philosophy (nor, moreover, in the simple death of whatever – the book, man, or god, especially since, as we all know, what is dead wields a very specific power). Thus, [I try to keep myself at] the limit on the basis of which philosophy became possible, defined itself as the *epistēmē*, functioning within a system of fundamental constraints, conceptual oppositions outside of which philosophy becomes impracticable. (*Positions* 6)

Conceived in this way, the critical project of deconstruction is not a purely oppositional mode of criticism, deploying an almost nihilistic negation of all institutions, hierarchies, and values. That is, deconstruction is not simply negative or

destructive as Baylis (see above) notes when he identifies the strategy of deconstruction as an important tool used by the Sydney Front in their work in the theatre. My point is that, and here I am in agreement with Jameson, the theoretical discourse of deconstruction is closely allied to the postmodern moment. Contrary to Jameson, however, I would argue that the strategy of deconstruction represents a critical project markedly different from the oppositional or purely negative critique offered by the 'historical avant-garde' or an aesthetic modernism. Derrida's critical project simultaneously interrogates and intervenes in the violent hierarchy of binary oppositions absolutely necessary and essential to the functioning of the Western ratio in its current form. The strategy of deconstruction operates by means of a double gesture to invert the hierarchy of binary oppositions and to displace this dual and duplicitous conceptual order. Derrida identifies this conceptual closure as the metaphysics of presence and describes the complex procedure and manoeuvre necessary to effect a displacement of the system:

> I try to respect as rigorously as possible the internal regulated play of philosophemes or epistimemes by making them slide – without mistreating them - to the point of their nonpertinence, their exhaustion, their closure. To "deconstruct" philosophy, thus, would be to think – in the most faithful, interior way – the structured genealogy of philosophy's concepts, but at the same time to determine – from a certain exterior that is unqualifiable or unnamable by philosophy – what this history has been able to dissimulate or forbid, making itself into a history by means of this somewhere motivated repression...This simultaneously faithful and violent circulation between the inside and the outside of philosophy...enables us to read philosophemes ...as kinds of symptoms...of something that *could not be presented* in the history of philosophy, and which, moreover, is *nowhere present*, since all of this concerns putting into question the major determination of the meaning of being as *presence*. (*Positions* 6-7)

German theatre scholar, Helga Finter, has written that the strategy of deconstruction explicated by Derrida offers a critical working through, rather than an outright rejection or nihilistic negation, of historical tradition. She argues that there is a close connection between postmodern theatre and the theoretical discourse of deconstruction. She states:

> [postmodern theatre] does not destroy the achievements of historical theatre in the name of a blind faith in progress and in the myths of origins, as was still the case in the historical avant-garde. Rather it dramatises the constituent elements of theatricality as signs. This process of negativity does not destroy but rather produces in its deconstructive gesture its own metadiscourse...Postmodernism, understood as the practice of deconstruction, bears a semiotic relation to the historical tradition and to its own impact, i.e., its practice

> generated its own metadiscourse, in that it opens up to the infinity of signs and makes the conditions of its own impact perceptible. (cited in Pavis 65)

These comments by Finter support my argument that the postmodern practice of deconstruction represents a different critical praxis to that of the "historical avant-garde". In the previous chapter I situated the Sydney Front's theatre theory and practice very broadly within postmodernism, which I understand as a discursive field concerned predominantly with the politics of representation and signification. In this chapter, I wish to further elaborate the postmodern parody of the politics of representation through an explication of the theoretical discourse of deconstruction. I will, firstly, examine the "*general strategy of deconstruction*" (*Positions* 41) elaborated by Derrida in certain key texts. I will then examine the closely allied deconstruction of Western thought and theatre. Ulmer, above, suggests that the theatre is a privileged site for the critical interrogation of representation and its capture by the metaphysics of Western logocentrism. This study will, finally, examine the strategy of deconstruction as it is deployed within a resistant postmodern theatre.

2 Derrida's theory-strategy of deconstruction

Deconstruction, as defined by Derrida, is at once a method of textual analysis and a mode of philosophical or conceptual interrogation. Derrida performs a close, critical reading of texts drawn from across a multitude of disciplines; literature, philosophy, psychoanalysis, linguistics, and anthropology. He subjects these texts to a method of critique which seeks to reveal inconsistencies and incompatibilities in the logical or rhetorical structure of the text itself. He interprets these inconsistencies as indicative of what cannot be presented, or what cannot be said, in terms of the history of philosophy and the Western tradition of thought. In this sense, Derrida asserts that every text is, in fact, always two texts in one, or a double text. Vincent Descombes explains further:

> Only the first of these "two texts in one" is preserved by classical interpretation; it is written under the aegis of presence, favoring meaning, reason and truth. Here all negation is a superior affirmation. If I denounce this or that unreason within reason, I am denying only the negative of reason, a defect of reason within reason. The second text – other and yet the same – is that which the classical reading never deciphers. The first text, however, the one which it is prepared to read, contains fissures or traces which give indications of the second. Now comes the vital point: between the two texts no synthesis is possible, no fusing into one, for the second is not the *opposite* of the first (which might be reconciled with it by a "surmounting" of their "differences"), but rather its *counterpart, slightly phased*. (150-151)

Derrida's close reading of philosophical or theoretical texts aims to show how they actively participate in maintaining the unitary identity of the Western *logos* by subordinating and assimilating difference, contradiction and complexity. According to Derrida, Western philosophy is based on the law of identity, or self-same presence. Within this philosophy, metaphysical notions such as truth, being and reality are determined in relation to an ontological centre, essence, origin (*archè*), or end (*telos*), in and through a process which actively excludes difference, absence, other-ness or alterity for the sake of metaphysical unity and stability. Derrida calls this philosophy "logocentrism" or "phonocentrism" in that it is based on a belief in a *logos* or *phone*, a concept or word constituted by presence in the form of consciousness or voice. Derrida's analysis of texts as symptomatic of logocentrism aims to disclose the illusion on which their authority and legitimacy is based. He demonstrates that such authority is claimed by reference to some quasi-divine, transcendental signified allowing direct and unmediated access to reality, truth, etc. Derrida's project is to expose the illusion in and through a thorough reevaluation of the structuring principles of the Western metaphysical tradition.

The strategy of deconstruction plots a double-edged course which at once describes and delimits the closed conceptual field mapped out by a series of binary oppositions. These dichotomies are, for instance, identity and difference, presence and absence, rational and emotional, conceptual and material, culture and nature, soul and body, spirit and letter, speech and writing, inside and outside, system and process, male and female, masculine and feminine. The primacy of the first term ensures the subordination and devaluation of the second term in the opposition. This process of exclusion grounds the structure and system of logocentrism, giving it the appearance of a singular, unified order when it is in fact a dual and duplicitous system. Derrida's task has been to explicate this dualistic structure in order to demonstrate the "conflictual and subordinating" nature of opposition. Given two terms in a system of binary oppositions, the first term is given priority and has a positive meaning and value. The second term takes on a negative definition as other than or opposite to the primary term. While the first term has an existence independent of the other, the second term has no contours of its own; its defining or limiting boundaries are those which give positive definition to the primary term. As dichotomies are inherently non-reversible, non-reciprocal hierarchies, Derrida asserts that they thus describe systems of domination. Logocentrism is, in other words, the order of a violent hierarchy.

A reading of the general text, therefore, requires a *double science*, rendering apparent the duplicity of any text (Descombes 151). This double science is a complex operation aimed at splitting the metaphysical text into two using the very conceptual tools provided by the text itself. It is, as Descombes explains, "the text's duplicity which enables the manifest text to 'exceed' or 'transgress' in the direction of the latent text. ...In a way the transgression is thus literally *justified* (which is strange indeed for a transgression)" (151). The double gesture of deconstruction as a form of critical reading seeks, firstly, to overturn the hierarchy of binary oppositions intrinsic to the text. It aims, secondly, to displace this binary conceptual order, based on the law of identity or non-contradiction, and to redistribute both terms of the opposition within a non-hierarchical relationship of "difference". Derrida is careful to state, however, that the work of deconstructing the systematic structure of logocentrism is, essentially and necessarily, an ongoing or interminable project:

> One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand. To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment. To overlook this phase of overturning is to forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition. Therefore one might proceed too quickly to a *neutralisation* that *in practice* would leave the previous field untouched, leaving one no hold on the previous opposition, thereby preventing any means of *intervening* in the field effectively. We know what always have been the *practical* (particularly *political*) effects of *immediately* jumping *beyond* oppositions, and of protests in the simple form of *neither* this *nor* that. ...the necessity of this phase [of overturning] is structural; it is the necessity of an interminable analysis: the hierarchy of dual oppositions always reestablishes itself. (*Positions* 41-42)

One of the most significant and clearest examples of a deconstructive reading by Derrida concerns the relation between speech and writing in Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*. Derrida locates this particular, yet exemplary, reading of Saussure in relation to his general project which aims to outline a science of writing. This science of writing, or grammatology as he also calls it, forms a counterpart to the Saussurian science of linguistics. In the *Course*, Saussure outlined a science of linguistics based on structural or "synchronic" as opposed to historical or "diachronic" properties of language. He defined linguistics as the study of the system of language (*langue*) as opposed to the individual act or process of speaking (*parole*). This was based on Saussure's belief that "[l]anguage is homogenous. It is a system of signs in which the only essential thing is the union of meanings and sound images" (34). That is, Saussure conceived of language as an autonomous, closed system composed of indivisible units of thought and sound. He called this unit of thought-sound the linguistic sign, a double sided entity which unites

not a thing and a name, but a concept and sound-image, or signified and signifier as Saussure later renamed these terms (36-37).

Although a series of binary oppositions (synchronic/diachronic, system/process) marks the inception of Saussure's science of linguistics, Derrida seizes on the fact that the privileged unity which founds the acts of language and significance in general is, as he states, "the articulated unity of sound and sense within the phonie" (*Of Grammatology* 29). Given that the linguistic sign is the most fundamental element in and of the language system, Derrida protests that the object of study in linguistics is not defined by the combination of the written word and the spoken word. He notes, rather, that the spoken word alone is said by Saussure to constitute the object of linguistic study (*Of Grammatology* 31). Derrida thus reads into the very movement by which the science of linguistics is instituted, and at an absolutely fundamental level, a metaphysical presupposition about the relationship between speech and writing.

In a critical interrogation of the structural unconscious or unsaid of Saussure's text, Derrida argues that the distinction between speech and writing is the order of a metaphysical opposition and hierarchy. Saussure privileges the spoken word as the basic unit of the language system and the primary object of linguistics. For Saussure, speech represents the externalization of an unmediated inner speech; it materializes the primary conception of thought. Hence speech is identified with immediacy, presence and life itself. Derrida asserts that in relation to this primacy of speech, writing could only be narrowly identified as secondary, the representation of an originary thought expressed directly through voice. Writing is the deferment and delay of this thought as speech. Saussure expresses this quite clearly when he says that "language and writing are two distinct systems of signs: writing exists for the sole purpose of representing the first" (cited in Derrida *Of Grammatology* 30). Derrida points out that the distinction is not a neutral or abstract difference as Saussure proposes. Rather, in relation to the positive identity and value granted to speech, writing is conceived negatively as the outside, the other, external to thought and to (spoken or verbal) language. For these reasons, Derrida reads Saussure within the broad tradition of Western thought since Plato and Aristotle that has always controlled, in theory and in practice, the relationship between speech and writing. Saussure reiterates the model of certain type of writing: phonetic writing, within whose element, according to Derrida, the episteme in general (science and philosophy), and linguistics in particular is founded (*Of Grammatology* 30). In other words, Saussure retraces an old argument based on the denial of thought as type of

writing. This denigration is, Derrida argues, part of logocentrism which dreams or desires the given immediacy or self-presence of the word or concept to itself. Hence, as he states,

> As long as one poses the question of the relationship between speech and writing in the light of the indivisible units of the "thought-sound", there will always be the ready response. Writing will be "phonetic", it will be the outside, the exterior representation of language and of this "thought-sound". It must necessarily operate from already constituted units of signification, in the formation of which it has played no part. (*Of Grammatology* 31)

Saussure's narrow conception of writing as phonetic script adheres to a tradition of Western thought which has always seen writing as external to thought as speech; and as unrelated to the inner system of spoken language and having only a derivative or representative function in relation to it. At the same time, Saussure indicates that the relation between speech and writing has not always been one of simple opposition. This weighs heavily on Saussure and it is the point on which Derrida applies most pressure to the oppositional hierarchy. Derrida notes that while Saussure maintains that writing is unrelated to the inner system of language, it is, at the same time, used constantly to represent language. For this reason, Saussure warns that it is not possible to simply disregard writing. "We must", he says, "become acquainted with its usefulness, shortcomings and dangers" (cited in Derrida *Of Grammatology* 34). At this point, Derrida asks why Saussure judges it impossible 'to simply disregard' what is nevertheless designated as the outside or abstract itself with respect to the inside of language (*Of Grammatology* 34). Faced with the problem of contradiction and complexity with respect to the difference between speech and writing, Saussure attempts to recover the natural – that is, the simple and original - relationship between speech and writing. In the process of warding off the threat of writing, he characterises writing as having, as Derrida says, "the exteriority that one attributes to utensils; to what is even an imperfect tool and a dangerous, almost maleficent, technique" (*Of Grammatology* 34). The distinction between speech and writing then becomes, according to Derrida,

> less a question of outlining than of protecting, and even of restoring the internal system of the language in the purity of its concept against the gravest, most perfidious, most permanent contamination which has not ceased to menace, even to corrupt that system, in the course of what Saussure strongly wishes, despite all opposition, to consider as an external history, as a series of accidents affecting the language and befalling it from without, at the moment of "notation", as if writing has begun and ended with notation. (*Of Grammatology* 34)

Derrida describes this attack by Saussure on the threat of the contamination of speech by writing, as having the tone of the moralist or preacher. It is, he says, "as if at the moment when the modern science of the logos would come into its autonomy and its scientificity, it became necessary again to attack a heresy" (*Of Grammatology* 34). Saussure's assertions that the relationship between speech and writing is of the order of a "dangerous promiscuity" indicate, to Derrida, the inversion of the so-called natural relationship between speech and writing. In other words Saussure himself reveals that the two terms speech and writing are inter-dependent or interpenetrated: "The outside bears with the inside a relationship that is, as usual, anything but simple exteriority. The meaning of the outside was always present within the inside, imprisoned outside the outside and vice versa (Derrida *Of Grammatology* 35).

Derrida's reading of Saussure is a double reading. He reads simultaneously the two opposing or contradictory discourses operating in Saussure's writing. One enacts a certain fidelity to the Western tradition of thought and therefore reiterates a conception of writing as secondary to speech. The other discourse points to cracks or fissures in that same tradition. These cracks or fissures, Derrida shows, point to a fundamental difference that cannot be reconciled as the self-same. Thus Derrida takes apart Saussure's binary logic and rhetoric. His deconstruction dismantles the hierarchical opposition in such a way as to indicate how writing gets inside and affects the centre of the system of language. Derrida shows that writing in the most general sense is primary to or precedes thought as speech. Derrida's analysis reveals that Saussure's attempt to privilege speech as immediate and living presence cannot eliminate the fact that speech, like writing, is based on the difference between signifier and signified, the two parts of the sign. Based on this deconstruction of Saussure, Derrida reveals that speech is fundamentally like "writing":

> What Saussure saw without seeing, knew without being able to take into account, following in that the entire metaphysical tradition, is that a certain model of writing was necessarily but provisionally imposed...as instrument and technique of representation of a system of language. And that this movement, unique in style, was so profound that it permitted the thinking, within language, of concepts like those of the sign, technique, representation, language. The system of language associated with phonetic-alphabetic writing is that within which logocentric metaphysics, determining the sense of being as presence, has been produced...it is when he is not expressly dealing with writing, when he feels that he has closed the parenthesis on that subject, that Saussure opens the field of a general grammatology. (*Of Grammatology* 43)

Derrida's emphasis on writing as the more originary category is designed to counter the history of Western logocentrism since Plato and Aristotle, and to track the functioning of difference in structures of signification. With reference to Saussure, Derrida's conclusion is ambivalent or, rather, irresolute; he cannot wholly reject or negate Saussure's conceptual framework. Rather, he reads into Saussure the possibility for a powerful assault on the presence of identity, while acknowledging, at the same time, that Saussure gives away any cutting edge and actively participates in logocentrism by privileging speech over writing. The tension in Saussure that Derrida makes manifest is the tension between an affirmation and a critique of logocentrism. That is, while participating in series of logocentric commitments, Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* contains the seeds for a radical assault on logocentrism. Much of this potential exists in Saussure's notion of pure difference which acts as a powerful counterpoint to the metaphysical imperative to a logical identity.

Saussure put forth a notion of difference, and not identity, as the origin of meaning and signification. According to Saussure, the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary but agreed upon by social convention. There is, in other words, no natural correspondence between a word and reality, or a name and a thing. Once the relation between signified and signifier is fixed and the meaning of a word is set, it becomes a convention that cannot be modified at will by an individual speaker. The structural study of language thus focuses on the way in which signs acquire identity, meaning and value through each element's differential relation to every other element within a system of interdependence. That is, signs signify not as independently meaningful units corresponding to external objects, objects outside the closed system of signs. Rather, they are elements whose meaning and value is generated by their difference from other elements in the closed system.

Derrida takes up Saussure's notion of irreducible difference, a difference that cannot be reduced to sameness or identity, and invents a new term to describe the differential structure of signifying systems. Derrida describes the play of difference as *différance*, spelled with an "a" because in French there is no phonetic difference between difference and *différance*: the difference is seen or read in writing but cannot be heard, thus presenting in writing something that cannot be presented in speech (*Differance* 131). *Différance* means both to "differ" and "defer" which captures what is, for Derrida, the (spatio-temporal) interval or movement between different elements in a signifying system. In this way, the term *différance* points to the conditions of

possibility of the conceptual system and conceptuality itself. That is, the play or movement of *différance* points to and underlines the process or practice of signification. "Play", another term for *différance*, is another word Derrida uses to describe the interpenetration of terms, which is how each sign simultaneously confers and derives meaning with respect to other signs, so that any given sign is tacitly implied in another as "trace" or an effect of linguistic interdependence (see *Differance 129-160)*.

The concept of a linguistic system structured by differences raises questions concerning representation as referential meaning in language, as well as other signifying systems. Derrida's analysis of Saussure's linguistics puts into question any notion upholding a belief in the ability of the sign to embody meaning, or to refer simply and directly to an object existing in the outside world. Instead, Derrida affirms there is "nothing outside the text" (*pas de hors-texte*), which is also to say that meaning and reference must be constituted from within the system itself as functions of difference. Such a notion problematises the activity of reference. In this way, deconstruction turns reference into self-reference. Meaning is not created from a sign to real objects or things, but from sign to sign in an intertextual play or (infinite) semiosis. Linguistic representation in this view becomes less a mimesis of the world than a self-referential representation in which rhetorical operations at once repress and foreground themselves, creating an illusion of referentiality that veils representation as the material process and practice of signification.

3 Derrida (re)reading Artaud: the closure of theatrical re-presentation

Derrida reevaluates theatrical representation after Antonin Artaud who, he claims, "wants to have done with the *imitative* concept of art, with the Aristotelian aesthetics in which the metaphysics of Western art comes into its own" (*Writing and Difference* 234). Derrida re-reads Artaud's work as a desperate and not entirely successful struggle against logocentrism. He perceives Artaud's break with the idea of theatre in Western culture as a break with the tradition of representation in which the text or spoken language dominates the stage. This leads Derrida to claim that the questions put forward by Artaud concerning the problem of mimetic representation exceed the bounds of theatrical technology (*Writing and Difference* 234). He therefore links Artaud's opposition to theatrical representation to his own project; the deconstruction of the general system of logocentrism or phonocentrism which, according to Derrida, covers the entire culture of the West, its religions, philosophies, politics and arts (*Writing and Difference* 234).

With the Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud sought to destroy the base of imitation, the structures that promote mimesis in theatrical representation. For Derrida, this attack on Aristotelian aesthetics underlined the structural principles of mimetic representation. Contrary to Artaud, however, Derrida argues that the structures of imitation themselves effect the closure of representation. In other words, Artaud's rejection of mimesis describes for Derrida the general structure of a closed system of representation. Each agency in this closed and hierarchical system (from author to director to actor to spectator) is serially linked to all the others by a relationship of representation. This closure of representation as imitation produces what Derrida calls "a theological stage", a space in which the will to speak, to offer a meaning or message, actively masks or conceals the frame or scene and the process of representation. Derrida outlined the fundamental characteristics of this particular representational structure thus:

> The stage is theological for as long as it is dominated by speech, by a will to speech, by the layout of a primary logos which does not belong to the theatrical site and governs it from a distance. The stage is theological for as long as its structure, following the entirety of a tradition, comports the following elements: an author-creator who, absent and from afar, is armed with a text and keeps watch over, assembles, regulates the rime or the meaning of representation, letting this latter represent him as concerns what is called the content of his thoughts, his intentions, his ideas. He lets representation represent him through 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 organises all these relationships – creates nothing, has only the illusion of having created, because he only transcribes and makes available for reading a text whose nature is itself necessarily representative; and this representative text maintains with what is called the "real"...an imitative and reproductive relationship. Finally, the theological stage comports a passive, seated public, a public of spectators, of consumers, of "enjoyers"...attending a production...offered to their voyeuristic scrutiny. (*Writing and Difference* 235)

According to Derrida, Artaud argues that the theatre should abandon its fidelity to the authority of the dramatic playtext and attempt to rediscover its own unique and originary signifying potential by means of those elements specific to the theatre such as light, sound, colour, movement, gesture and space. Artaud, Derrida says, asserts that classical representation actively forgets the stage; the time and space of representation. It is characterised by the fact that, "Whatever their importance, all the pictorial, musical, and even gesticular forms introduced into Western theatre can

only, in the best of cases, illustrate, accompany, serve or decorate a text, a verbal fabric, a logos which *is said* in the beginning" (Derrida *Writing and Difference* 236). Artaud argues that speech or spoken language, rather than being the primary, dominant mode of expression, should be brought back in line with other modes of signification and explored in terms of its physical or material force. He claims that in the theatre of cruelty, the mise en scene, "released from the text and the author-god, would be returned to its creative and founding freedom" (cited in Derrida *Writing and Difference* 237). In this space,

> The stage, certainly, *will no longer represent*, since it will not operate as an addition, as the sensory illustration of a text already written, thought, or lived outside the stage, which the stage would only repeat but whose fabric it would not constitute. The stage will no longer operate as the repetition of a *present*, will no longer *re*-present a present that would exist elsewhere and prior to it, a present whose plenitude would be older than it, absent from it, and rightfully capable of doing without it: the being-present-to-itself of the absolute Logos, the living present of God. (Derrida *Writing and Difference* 237)

In its refusal of representation, the Theatre of Cruelty, it is claimed, would create a non-representational space, thus doubling as the space of original representation because it would present "the unfolding of a volume, a multidimensional milieu, an experience which produces its own space" (*Writing and Difference* 237). Artaud conceived of this act as the closure of classical representation but also the reconstitution of a closed space of original representation, that is, a space produced from within itself and no longer organised from the vantage point of an other, absent site. This would be representation, then, as auto-presentation; a theatre of pure visibility, pure sound and even pure sensibility or sensation.

Derrida explains Artaud's writings on the Theatre of Cruelty as a search for the origin of representation and an attempt to represent this originary signifying force or potential. However, for Derrida, Artaud's project is an impossibility. He writes that Artaud "knew that the Theatre of Cruelty neither begins nor is completed within the purity of simple presence, but rather is already within representation, in the 'Second time of creation', in the conflict of forces which could not be that of simple origin" (*Writing and Difference* 248). In other words, Derrida argues that no matter how vitally present and forcefully original or spontaneous any act of theatre might seem, it must always to some degree involve representation and repetition, by virtue of the fact of being theatre. Derrida shows that at the base of Artaud's search to rediscover the primal essence of theatre, one is always going to encounter the fact of difference,

the fact that theatre is a derivation, a representation, a fiction. Helga Finter succinctly summarises Derrida's point by saying that in the theatre "every institution of a scene, every frame of play, implies absence and presence; therefore all scenic deconstruction of representation always, at the same time, plays the tragedy of representation as the tragedy of repetition" (*Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 156).

Derrida's argument concerning Artaud and the Theatre of Cruelty is consistent with his theory that there can never be an origin of representation or original representation. Derrida asserts that difference, understood as deferral and delay, is absolutely necessary and essential to the process of signification or representation, and therefore to the strategy of deconstruction. Coincidentally, Descombes uses a theatrical metaphor to describe this notion of originary delay grounding the play of *différance*:

> If from the origin onwards (each time there is an origin), from the "first time" onwards, there were no difference, then the first time would not be the "first time", for it would not be followed by a "second time"; and if the "first time" were the "only time", it would not be at the origin of anything at all...The first cannot be the first unaided, by its own properties alone: the second, with all the force of its delay, must come to the assistance of the first. It is through the second that the first is the first. The "second time" thus has priority of a kind over the "first time": it is present from the first time onwards as the prerequisite of the first's priority without itself being a more primitive "first time", of course it follows that the "first time" is in reality the "third time".
>
> Origin must therefore be conceived as a dress rehearsal (*la répétition d'une première*), in the theatrical sense of these words: the reproduction of the first public performance, yet prior to this performance. Thus it is non-origin that is originary. (Descombes 145)

In summary, Derrida's reading of Artaud reveals that the base of imitation grounding theatrical representation as mimesis is already a closed representational structure. Furthermore, Derrida conceives of Artaud's project, which would seek to destroy the infinite chain of representations and reveal, instead, the conditions of representation for the representation of original representation, as also submitted to closure. Artaud imagined that the founding of the Theatre of Cruelty on these principles would initiate an original and, therefore, intensely violent and virulent gesture which would show us how to live beyond the image of an evil creator (author-God). What Derrida argues is that for theatrical representation to signify and to be significant, whether as classical meaning or as a violent force, it must already be a form of fiction, a mode of

repetition founded on the difference between presence and absence, a finding which must necessarily foreclose the Artaudian project.

Helga Finter proposes that Artaud's search proved ultimately to be a search for an "impossible" theatre, for a theatre of the impossible (*Antonin Artaud and the Impossible Theatre* 18). She states that this unlikely situation underscores the difficulty of assessing his relevance to contemporary theatre. Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, she says, can hardly be thought of as tradition building in the sense of an aesthetic (*Antonin Artaud and the Impossible Theatre* 18). At the same time, Finter contends that it has been the questions Artaud posed rather than the individual answers he offered that have contributed to the development of a tradition around his ideas on the theatre. This tradition is firmly focused on the question of the relationship between presence and representation, performance and theatricality, in the theatre (*Antonin Artaud and the Impossible Theatre* 18). These are key themes involved in the definitional outline of postmodern theatre. It is my aim in the remainder of this chapter to relate deconstruction to theatre through Derrida's reading of Artaud. The question or issue of the link between Artaud's Theater of Cruelty and a postmodern deconstructive theatre is difficult to determine. Derrida regards Artaud as a key critical figure who kept himself as close as possible to the limits or margins of theatre, and to the (im)possibility of theatre as both representation and presence. In theatre theory and practice, Artaud is viewed, on one hand, as a proponent of presence and as a preeminent source for much of the ecstatic experimental theatre in America in the 1960s. On the other hand, it is asserted that Artaud's opposition to representation in his idea for a Theatre of Cruelty forms the outline for performance, a concept and cultural form absolutely central to the deconstruction of representation and the structures of authority in Western theatre. In the following sections of this chapter, I will examine both positions in explicating the terrain of postmodern deconstructive theatre.

4 Postmodern deconstruction and the critique of theatrical presence

In a critical survey of the theory and practice of postmodern performance, Steven Connor suggests that the difficulty involved in defining postmodernism in drama is due, in large part, to the problem of determining a distinctly modern moment in the history of drama. According to Connor, the discipline of drama is marked by a fundamental inability to agree on a coherent version of the modernist history of drama, at least until Brecht or the so-called Theatre of the Absurd (132-133). This situation has meant that theories of postmodern drama and theatre have had to draw

upon postmodern theory in other cultural fields. Hence, postmodern theatre is often dated from the emergence of performance art during the 1960s. He goes on to identify one strain of radical American theatre theory and practice in the sixties as an emergent postmodern theatre. This theatre sought to free performance from its relegation to a secondary and subservient status in relation to the pre-existing written playscript. He counts Artaud, who persuasively argued that the theatre was a colonised cultural form dominated by the verbal playtext, as a key influence. It is possible to characterise the movement that was the experimental American theatre of the sixties as a turn away from the "literary" theatre, following Artaud's call for "no more masterpieces" (55).

Following Connor, Auslander admits that in relation to the modern movement in drama represented by Brecht and the Absurdists, the American experimental theatre of the 1960s might count as postmodernist (35). As exponents of a radical revaluation of the dramatic text as the basis of performance, Auslander suggests that this experimental theatre movement would certainly seem to be placed or positioned in opposition to the history of modernist theatre since the late nineteenth century (35). Writing on what he calls the "ecstatic" theater, a term borrowed from Richard Schechner, Auslander asserts that one of the major theoretical positions taken up by practitioners of the experimental American theatre of the sixties was that the actor's presence before the audience is the essence of theatre. This kind of theatre promoted and celebrated an intensified theatrical presence in an attempt to displace what it construed as the domination of the authorial dramatic playtext.

Elinor Fuchs has noted that "the physico-spiritual 'aura' of theatrical Presence" (163) became an absolute value in American experimental theatre of late sixties and early seventies. According to Fuchs the notion of theatrical presence has two fundamental components: the unique self-completion of the world of the spectacle, and the circle of heightened awareness flowing from actor to spectator and back that sustains the spectacle. These elements of performance were given priority in the work of Jerzy Grotowski, Richard Schechner and the Performance Group, Joseph Chaikin and the Open Theatre, Joseph Beck and Judith Malina of the Living Theater and Peter Brook. She states that:

> The presence cultivated by such theatre practitioners as the Becks, Richard Schechner, Joseph Chaikin, and Peter Brook was staked on the revelations of the self and a corresponding suspicion of the text. To the positive value assigned to improvisation, audience participation, myth, ritual, and communion they opposed a view of the author's script as a

> politically oppressive intruder, demanding submission to author-ity. The speech that bubbled up from the inner depths was more trustworthy than the alien written word, and many of them experimented with efforts to slip the constricting knot of language altogether. The desire was to come closer and closer to a centre of human experience through a self-conscious exploration of such intensity that it redefined the self. "I have reached into my entrails and strewn them about the stage in the form of questions", writes Beck. (164)

Like Fuchs, Auslander asserts that this radical interrogation of human experience focuses on the actor as a physical manifestation before an audience. He contends that for the practitioners in question, theatrical presence stems from archetypal psychic impulses directly accessible through the actor's physicality. According to Auslander, the experimental theatre of the 60s upheld the radical belief that the presence of the actor as one living human being before others is spiritually and psychologically liberating in itself. Hence, the pure physical presentation of the performer to the audience was held to be the best means available to the theatre to make a radical spiritual and political statement (37). Thus, further to Fuchs, Auslander notes that this communitarian and environmental model of theatre presented itself as a radically alternative mode of social collectivity, and as an anti-hierarchical political organisation:

> This theatre necessarily sought to undermine representation, since it was by accessing the actor's spiritual capacities directly rather than by representing them that it was to make its effect. Frequently this theatre would also invite audience participation, thus theoretically placing the audience on an equal footing with the performers in the creation of the event, privileging its communal aspect and, paradoxically, deprivileging the authority of the performers while simultaneously offering them as models. The desired result is what Schechner calls "symbolic reality" rather than fictional representation that is at once ritual, theatre, art, and reality. (38)

The agenda of the American experimental theatre of the 60s was to break down the distinction between art and life. This radical project entailed a basic impetus to recreate another, alternative reality in and through theatrical experimentation, a project characteristic of the European avant-garde between the Wars. In its attempts to achieve this aim, the radical American theatre rejected the dramatic text and put in its place live performance which was valorised as an anti-authoritarian response to the repressive authority of the dramatic text (Heuvel 34). The illusion and artifice of theatre, which was said to reside in the representation of an absent textual source, was contrasted unfavourably to the live unmediated presence of the performer in real space and time. This attack on theatrical representation by the American avant-garde

theatre of the sixties can not be regarded as a form of deconstruction. Rather, its protest took the form of a simple reversal or overturning. This oppositional stance simply privileged presence in performance over and above theatrical representation, reproducing, in effect, a series of binarisms which have proved difficult to dislodge, such as those between theatre and live performance, representation and presence, text/language and body/space, meaning and embodiment. Accordingly, Fuchs identifies this idealisation of presence in the theatre theory and practice of the sixties as a rear-guard action. While Beck declared that "the Theatre of Character is over", Fuchs asserts that a simple substitution took place on stage: "We can now see that the radical presence of the earlier generation was only an extreme version of the traditional theatrical Presence that has always banished textuality per se, and enshrined the (apparently) spontaneous speaking character at the centre of action" (164). In other words, for Fuchs, the values of spontaneity, authenticity and presence implicit in the notion of performance adhered to by experimental American theatre reflects the Renaissance humanist program of Cartesian self-centred signification (165).

Leaving aside the specific problems identified by Fuchs concerning the absolute value of presence in the experimental American theatre of the sixties, she observes that the theoretical base of presence was being submitted to relentless interrogation in the work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida. In his critique of the speech/writing distinction it becomes clear, says Fuchs, that,

> if there can be no reassurance of the bond between thought and speech, there can be no single moment at which utterance originates: and if no originary principle can be identified, then such a thing as self same Presence is merely a self-serving illusion. Thus Derrida's attack on phonocentrism has the aim of undoing not only the speech writing binary, but two thousand years of the "metaphysics of Presence". (166)

According to Fuchs, Derrida's critique of logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence holds important implications for theatre theory and practice. His argument that there is no primordial or self-same present that is not always already infiltrated by the trace or mark of difference, entails an understanding of subjectivity as a product of the movement of difference, the play of both presence and absence. In other words, the material (spatio-temporal) process of meaning-making is beyond the reach of a stable, self-authenticating, self-knowing subject. Knowledge of self, like meaning, must always be retrospective, arriving after the fact of its production. Thus, the speaking or performing subject is a product of this material process of

signification, which implies that an actor cannot gain privileged access to an author's ideas, thoughts or intentions through the text, nor can the spectator access human truths or spiritual depths through the mere fact of the actor's physical presence. Fuchs argues that what we have been witnessing in theatre since the sixties is "a representation of the failure of the theatrical enterprise of spontaneous speech with its logocentric claims to origin, authority, authenticity – in short, Presence" (172).

In her essay, Fuchs points to a new generation of theatre practitioners from the seventies onwards, whose work began to challenge the absolute value of presence in the theatre. She says that the work of groups and individuals such as Mabou Mines, Robert Wilson, the Wooster Group and Richard Foreman was increasingly marked by an aesthetics of Absence rather than Presence: A theatre of Absence "disperses the centre, displaces the Subject and destabilises meaning" (165). What Fuchs indicates is the beginnings of postmodern theatre, and that the emergence of a postmodern moment in theatre is closely linked to the critique of presence in poststructuralist theory. Postmodern theatre sets out to deconstruct theatrical presence, particularly that presence reified by practitioners of the American avant-garde theatre of the sixties.

Most theater scholars and critics agree with Fuchs' broadly indicative outline of postmodern theatre. Auslander, while considering the notion that avant-garde experimentation in the sixites may constitute a postmodern moment in theatre theory and practice, locates the emergence of postmodern theatre in the seventies and eighties as a thoroughgoing interrogation of the radical presence celebrated by the American avant-garde theatre. Similarly, Roger Copeland identifies a marked shift in theatre theory and practice from the sixties through to the eighties. He describes this shift as a movement away from live, unmediated presence toward a critique of such pure presence on stage. Copeland asserts that the critique of theatrical presence is closely aligned to the way in which poststructuralist thinkers, most notably Derrida, have complicated and complexified the distinction between interpenetrated terms such as presence and absence, reality and representation.

This body of criticism reveals that the reification of theatrical presence is a thoroughly modernist concern. The American avant-garde theatre's embrace of the immediate, unique and ephemeral nature of theatrical performance may be considered modernist in its attempts to discover the essence of theatre and to restore the theatre to this primordial state, to its own intrinsic conditions. For the theorists mentioned

above, postmodern theatre and postmodern theories of theatre have their point of origin in a break with this modernist notion of a pure or primal theatre, a break marked by Derrida's re-reading of Artaud (1966/1968). Copeland, for instance, explores the value of the Derridian concept of the intermediary in relation to theatre. He argues that a wider application of Derrida's work to the theatre needs to be recognised. Here Copeland counters what he regards as too great a focus on phonocentrism, on the verbal playtext at the centre of representation in the theatre, as in the work of Fuchs for instance. He states that it is essential that our conception of theatrical presence include but not be wholly confined to a critique of "phonocentrism". According to Copeland, presence in the theatre has less to do with the distinction between speaking and writing than with the way in which the architectural and technological components of the performance space either promote or inhibit a sense of "reciprocity" between actors and spectators (30).

The deconstruction of theatrical presence in postmodern theatre theory and practice applies Derrida's critique of Artaud to the theatrical technology in its broadest sense. One of the major differences between the modern and postmodern theatre is that in postmodern theatre theory and practice the relationship between the performer and spectator is mediated in order to underline to the spectator, in a kind of alienation effect, the politics of presence in theatre. Writing for a conference on theatre and performance in Sydney in 1986, Susan Melrose outlined the politics of theatrical presence thus:

> Presence is always a presence performed for someone, whose condition is the offering of a something which can always be used as a something else by the spectator...so that the very moment of achieving euphoric presence for the performer, is the moment of the most heightened in-corporation into the schemata and scenarios (actional frames and sequences, acquisitional and evaluative modes) of consuming-desire of both performer and spectator...So that the moment of the most intense "being there", "in the present" of theatre's event, is always pre-written and regulated and evaluated, rehearsed in terms of the body's desires of a spectator unknown but known in advance. So that Artaud's "frightful transfer of forces/from body/to body" not only can "be reproduced twice", but markets that precise "unique instant", which itself always already represents what permits its occurrence and meta-discourse – i.e. the conditions of theatre consumption in a luxury economy of specific tastes. (*Beyond Presence? Repoliticising Theatre's Bodies* 53)

5 Postmodernism and performance: deconstruction in and of the theatre

In the section above I have been writing about how a certain kind of theoretical discourse articulates a critique of the theatrical presence reified within the radical

American theatre of the 60s. In this section I wish to explore how a type of theatre theory and practice in the 70s responded to the body- and flow-centred communitarian theatre of the 60s, which dismissed drama and the written text as the aesthetic manifestation of a repressive social apparatus based on the politics of representation. Post-60s, the American theatre began to explore the interrelationship between language or representation and the production of the social (speaking, reading, writing, performing) subject. Helga Finter describes this situation as the coincidence of poststructuralist critical discourse with postmodern theatre theory and practice. She writes that in the 70s a certain current of the (later called "postmodern") American theatre happened to practise in actuality what a certain current of French (later called "poststructuralist") theory was simultaneously talking about, without the two having come in contact with one another (*Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 153-154). In this section of the chapter, I will explore this combination of poststructuralist theory and postmodern theatre theory and practice, and then link this to the Sydney Front's theatre aesthetic.

The French theoretical tradition that Finter refers to includes the work of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva. These names have been linked to postmodern and, particularly, poststructuralist politics and theory within a post-1968 framework. In a survey of modern French philosophy, Elizabeth Grosz[1] asserts that the crucial concepts connecting the work of the proper names associated with this intellectual tradition are the relations between language as representation and subjectivity. According to Grosz, in this theoretical framework language and systems of representation are necessarily linked to the structure and forms of subjectivity. In an interview with Derrida, Kristeva asks how the notion of the text in his theory of grammatology, replaces the linguistic and semiological notion of what is enunciated (*Positions* 29). Derrida's reply theorises subjectivity, after Saussure,[2] as the product of the movement of *différance*: "the subject and first of all the conscious speaking subject, depends on the system of differences and the movement of *différance*" (*Positions* 29). In other words, language is not merely a system of naming or labelling, nor is it simply a system for the communication of a meaning or message. Language is, rather, a threshhold of all possible meaning and value. Most importantly, language or representation is posited as a condition for the production of social subjectivity (Grosz *Sexual Subversions* 39).

The work of Julia Kristeva has been particularly significant in terms of theorising the connection between language and the formation of subjectivity. Kristeva's work unites Lacan's (after Freud's) notion of the split or divided subject (a subject of sexual drives and social inhibitions) and Derrida's notion of the text as different from itself (Grosz *Sexual Subversions* 41), to place the speaking subject, the subject of enunciation, and the poetic text in a direct relationship to each other. In her Prolegomenon to *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974/1984), Kristeva states:

> If there exists a "discourse" which is not a mere depository of thin linguistic layers, an archive of structures, or the testimony of a withdrawn body, and is, instead, the essential element of a practice involving the sum of unconscious, subjective, and social relations in gestures of confrontation and appropriation, destruction and construction – productive violence in short – it is literature or, more specifically, the *text.* (16)

In this critical turn to the text, there is a perceptible shift away from Saussure's concept of *langue* (the language system) towards a re-establishment of the speaking subject as an object for linguistics. According to Kristeva, structural linguistics studies a dead, absent or silent body (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 13). She is concerned to bring the speaking body back into linguistics. This focus on the speaking subject moves linguistics away from a concern with language as a monolithic, homogenous structure or system and towards an understanding of language as a heterogeneous process. The study of language as a heterogeneous signifying process located in and between speaking subjects is at the same time a study of language as specific discourse rather than as universal *langue*. The text, in the sense meant by Kristeva, thus presumes a politics in the production of subjectivity. The subject is not the author of the text: the very concept of author presumes an existence prior to and independent of the text. The subjectivity to which Kristeva refers is constructed within the text, intra- and inter-textually.

One of Kristeva's major contributions to literary theory is her distinction between two heterogenous elements in signification: the semiotic and the symbolic. For Kristeva, the subject is produced as such by the interrelationship between the semiotic and the symbolic, which should be understood as two modalities of the same signifying process (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 23-24). Signification as a process both semiotic and symbolic places emphasis on the process of generating significance, a process pervading the body and subject, very often repressed by the social mechanism (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 13). Finter asserts that, for Kristeva, signification was no longer a merely automatic result but the result of a singular

activity undertaken by an individual body, which thus opened the way for the emergence of the subject in process (*Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 154).

It is this critical turn to textuality to which Finter draws the reader's attention. She states that:

> The theory of what the French called the modern text stressed the process of production and reception, showing that the text was a disposition to be actualized by each individual reader, a process which also commanded the production of the text, the writing, in terms of intertextuality…Writing no longer produced something closed or finished, because reading a text was no longer an objective fact of sense-constitution; it demanded a desiring subject, in a psychoanalytic terms, a subject becoming aware of his/her desire to see, to hear and therefore to imagine.
>
> A modern text showed that in order to exist it had to be embodied: the reader had to give to it through his own eyes the voices which would open a singular mental stage of memory and imagination. So *theatricality was the boundary of the text to be transgressed and, at the same time, the condition for its being.* (*Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 154-155, my emphasis)

Kristeva's privileged object of study is what she calls the avant-garde text, which taps into the semiotic, in the sense meant by Kristeva, and embodies the materiality of poetic language. The poetic text therefore incorporates a sense of theatricality into the fabric of the text. According to Kristeva, writers such as Lautrémont, Mallarmé, Jarry, Roussel, Artaud and Bataille proposed to consider the text as a poetic process and no longer as a product, objectively meaningful in and of itself. The avant-garde text as process, with its attention to the sounds and rhythms in language, points to the semiotic element in signification out of which the symbolic and any subject position come. Thus, the avant-garde text is the only type of signifying practice that resists the constrictions and limits of symbolic unity, order and coherence imposed on representation. It contains the potential to disrupt meaning, or at least opens the way to a range of new meanings and even to new ways of understanding. The inability, initially, to understand poetic language is the first perceptible index of its real effects.[3] For Finter there is a sense of theatricality, a performance quality, implicit in these texts which play the limits of signification, putting the coherent text and the unified subject on trial:

> The performance-quality was a structural part of these texts. Representation was a possible, virtual but often undecidable effect of signifying potentials. Performance-quality was related to theatricality… The performance quality of a text has to do with its theatrical power, the power to transform a reader into a *théatès* by polylogue and intertextual dialogue. It questioned the process of representation as a result of an

> imaginary staging, implicating the voice, memory and desire of a reader. Only he/she could realise the translinguistic subjective space of a subject in process, which the text proposed as a disseminated space. (*Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 155-156)

The question that Finter sets forth is how this literary notion of theatricality in and of the modern avant-garde text, the drama of subject (de)formation played out in and through the written script, relates to theatre itself as a concrete or material playing space. For Finter the point of connection is performance, posited as an answer to the issue or problem of representation in theatre. She notes that in the late 60s and early 70s theatre practitioners[4] rejected all the points that Derrida enumerated as characteristic features of the closed structure of representation and produced, paradoxically, a performance-theatre very similar to what Artaud wanted to achieve with the Theatre of Cruelty. This performance-theatre explored the limits of theatrical representation in and through the construction of a scenic text as the play of separate, simultaneously occurring sign systems of performance. Finter compares the scenic text of this performance-theatre to the poetic text, creating in and through the process of its production the space for the play of the spectator's desire or imagination. In other words, she argues that in performance, as in the modern poetic text, social subjectivity is undergoing a constant process of (de)formation:

> The author and creator of a text was no longer determinant, nor was the text. There is no longer a representation of something having existed before and in another context. Performance created its reality in the process, *in actu*. If there was still a text...the text had the same importance as other theatrical sign systems such as music, noise, movement, dance, light and stage setting...Each form had its own value. They had been put together as in a scientific experiment to observe their virtual interaction, with a given space and time as their only organising parameters...These production-principles demanded the specific participation of the audience: It was their task to construct a virtual relationship between the different orders of perception, to make their own text out of the scenic material offered...The scenic text to be constructed was therefore like a poetic text, projecting a metaphorical principle from the paradigma to the syntagma. (*Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 157)

Implicit in Finter's argument is a body of work which conceptualises this performance theatre as a deconstruction of pure presence, after Derrida's critique of Artaud. Her work incorporates and develops the insights of Chantal Pontbriand and Josette Féral, in particular. Chantal Pontbriand conceives of performance as a phenomenon of the 60s and 70s which has given impetus to a kind of theatricality in art. It is characterised by a re-examination of the artistic codes including painting, sculpture,

architecture, poetry, music and dance; by a shifting of the fields between these codes; and also by an emphasis given to the nexus of spectator, stage and spectacle as process (154). With this notion of performance, Pontbriand aims to distinguish between "postmodern presence" and "classical presence". The difference between these two types of presence is, she asserts, dependent on the problem of representation (155). According to Pontbriand, the classical theatre creates a sense of presence by making the theatre the shadowing forth of some ideal truth that lies beyond it. In this way, the theatre acknowledges its fallen or secondary nature and, in doing so, confirms the absolute status of this transcendent and timeless meaning as true knowledge. This is to say that performance establishes presence through repetition or re-presentation, the acting out in a specific time and place of universal truths that are essentially timeless and placeless (Connor 140). In contrast to this classical presence, "performance presents; it does not represent" (Pontbriand 155), which is also to say that performance unfolds in real space and time without any imaginary or transcendental space-time a priori. Performance, in other words, actualises time and place (Pontbriand 155). In fact, Pontbriand argues that actuality is all important, for it foregrounds the role of situation and presentation in performance. In other words, performance in postmodern theatre does not put forth the pure presence or full plenitude of the classical theatre, established on the basis of truth or being. Rather it presents presence as thoroughly contingent and dependent on the time, space and situation in which it takes place.

Josette Féral takes this notion of performance to correspond to Artaud's concept of a Theatre of Cruelty. Performance, on this account, is "a theatre of cruelty and violence, of the body and its drives, of displacement and 'disruption', a non-narrative and non-representational theatre" (171). This non-representational performance-theatre is what Fuchs alludes to in making the link between the theory of deconstruction and the practice of a theatre of Absence. What Fuchs refers to as a theatre of Absence may be construed as a theatre of the absence of classical presence in the form of stable subjectivity or unified and coherent meaning. Féral asserts that this practice of performance, characterised by fragmentation and discontinuity in narrative, in the use of the body and the performance space, and in the relationship between performer and audience, exists in an antagonistic relationship to "theatre". She states that the multiple and simultaneously interacting sign-systems at work in performance constitute "an authorless, actorless and directorless infratheatricality" (178). Performance, she argues, is "an art form whose primary aim is to undo 'competencies' (which are primarily theatrical). Performance

readjusts these competencies and redistributes them in a desystematised arrangement" (179). Thus understood, the purpose of performance is to deconstruct theatre:

> since it tells of nothing and imitates no one, performance escapes illusion and representation. With neither past nor future performance takes place. It turns the stage into an event...As long as performance rejects narrativity and representation in this way, it also rejects the symbolic organisation dominating theatre and exposes the conditions of theatricality as they are. Theatricality is made of this endless play and of these continuous displacements of the position of desire, in other words, of the position of the subject in process within an imaginary constructive space...
>
> We cannot help speaking of "deconstruction" here...performance poses a challenge to the theatre and to any reflection that theatre might make upon itself... performance...explores the margins of theatre. (177-179)

Auslander acknowledges the problematic theoretical opposition drawn between theatre and performance in these accounts of postmodern theatricality. At the same time, he argues that this opposition constitutes a key transitional moment in theorizing the history of performance beginning with the American avant-garde theatres of the 60s (45). He argues that the theoretical moment represented by Pontbriand and Féral offers a provocative analysis of conceptual performance that points the way toward strategies of resistant postmodern theatre. According to Auslander, Pontbriand and Féral conceptualise performance as inextricably implicated in the problem of theatrical representation. Performance can be seen as deconstructing the structures of authority within the theatre and exposing the processes and practices of theatrical representation, without presenting itself as an alternative "truth" or "reality" (47). According to Auslander, it is possible to contrast the reaction of postmodernist performance, "impatient of all fictions", to the radical theatre's project of offering "surrogates of an alternative conduct" (44). He asserts that it is precisely the adumbration of such alternative truths or realities that postmodern political art challenges in arguing the need for an art that will "question the assumption of truth" in its own representations (44). Thus, what is absolutely central to postmodern theatre is the refusal to establish itself as a charasmatic Other and to propose itself as an alternative model of social organisation. Postmodern theatre and performance, Auslander contends, offers forth "positions from which to critique postmodern culture - not by claiming to stand aside from it, to present an alternative to it, or to place the spectator in a privileged position with respect to it but, rather, deconstructively, resistantly, from *within*" (51).

Like Auslander, Finter refuses to draw an opposition between the terms of theatre and performance. Rather, she characterises this performance theatre as a negative or reactive response to representation in the theatre which, at the same time, discloses the workings of theatrical representation. She writes that one should read this performance-theatre as:

> a negative theory of how to generate representation as verisimilitude: the identity of vocal source and present body, normally creating on stage a verisimilar dramatis persona by giving expressive intonation and gesture to what is said, was replaced by the separation of voice and body, of text and voice, of gesture and movement and their potential purpose. The disarticulation of what was normally co-occurent *deconstructed* the verisimliar character of representational theater and demonstrated how sense was created on stage. (*Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 158; my emphasis)

Finter completes her argument by reassessing the concept of performance as a category of philosophy and linguistics, specifically since the 60s and 70s. In this way she links the philosophical and linguistic turn to the text (as process) back to the American performance-theatre of the 70s, in which the objecthood of art was questioned, and process and performance became central concepts.[5] Finally, Finter links this notion of performance as process to theatre and representation generally. Finter acknowledges Lyotard's influential argument in *The Postmodern Condition* (1978) which posited performance as the criterion of a society caught up in the postmodern crises of representation and legitimation. According to Lyotard, in the postmodern society the possibility of cohesion was no longer given by trust in the grand *récit* or the *metanarrative*. Instead, social consensus gave way to a provisional mode of cohesion produced by other types of utterances obeying the rules of language-games. Lyotard privileges performative over other types of utterances qua language games since the specificity of these reality-creating speech acts constitutes a kind of legitimacy (an authority or mastery) appropriate to the postmodern condition of knowledge. In performative speech-acts (Searle 1969, Austin 1975, Derrida 1988), legitimacy is attributed to the speaking subject in specific instances in and through the act of speaking itself. The mastery or authority of the speaking subject is contingent on the specific situation in which he or she is present as a discursive "I". Performative speech-acts implicate the legitimacy of the performer, who at the same time derives this legitimacy from performance. It is a circular, self-contained and closed structure, which operates without reference to an outside of the act of speech, the utterance. Finter asserts that "the specificity of a reality creating performative act may explain the illusion of presence and also of the immanence of performance in art

and theatre: art and theatre are still saying by doing; doing is their saying" (*Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 160).

Here, Finter is trying to reveal the illusion of performance as pure presence and immanence. She argues that this illusion is based precisely on the closed structure of the performative speech-act, stabilised in advance by the very contract it generates. Finter then turns her attention to an examination of the structure of performative speech acts. She claims that "as language games which create a new reality in presence" they are "the implicit model of that other play or game called performance" (*Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 159). She claims further that "through an examination of the structure of this language game it might be possible to gain an avenue of access to the relationship of performance to another form of play, that of theatre and representation" (*Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 159). Finter states in regard to the performative speech-act that while it may seem that these acts of speaking are present or immanent to themselves, the speaker is still dealing with a code, the code of language in this case. In other words, Finter, recalling Kristeva's theory of language as a heterogeneous process, argues that the present act of speaking receives the significance of that act only by reference to something else and other, to the symbolic system of language in this case. This does not mean that the speaker makes reference to something external to the field of signification but, rather, that signification is split in and of itself into heterogeneous elements; semiotic and symbolic, absence and presence. Similarly, in theatre it is cultural or aesthetic and social codes that performers borrow and use to make meaning.

In this way Finter argues that there is always a ground to representation, a contract on which the process and practice of representation is founded. Here she confronts the performative contract with the theatrical one:

> Performance might realise what it is doing; but, in so doing, it presupposes a contract which distributes the performer(s), his/their doing and the addressee(s) in a given/delineated space and time. So even if there is no story told or dramatic action to be staged, there is still a minimal structure which separates the performer from the audience by determining who is the performer, what he has to do in what time-frame and sequence and in what space, distinguished from the identity, time and place of the audience. Such a contract is the prerequisite for performance...At this point it may be helpful to remember the structure of another contract, that of theatrical representation: in theatre, the separation of scene and public is architecturally institutionalised by the ramp. This spatial barrier permits us to follow the drama shown by the actors as virtual reality. We are looking at them as if they were real, well aware of the fact that they are playing, that

> they are re-presenting. But there is also fascination of their present voices and bodies, forbidden and far away in their presence, drawing imagination along in an erotic impulse. (*Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 161)

Thus, for Finter, the separation of the performance and spectator in the divided theatre space grounds theatrical representation. Postmodern performance draws our attention to this minimal contract as the fundamental construct and constraint which makes representation or signification possible. Finter states that "performance has revealed the fact that representation in theatre has always been a process and the work of staging" (*Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 162). In the end, Finter would appear to agree with Auslander's characterisation of the trajectory from the ecstatic theatre through performance-theatre to postmodern theatre when she says that "performance and performance-theatre in attacking representation and aiming at presence, have certainly revealed the representational function of presence and the necessary function of representation in the process of subject constitution" (*Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 165). I will argue, following on from these findings, that the Sydney Front's focus is on the construction of individual bodies in the theatre as performing and spectating subjects. Theatre is an institution that divides and differentiates space, creating a physical separation between performer and spectator. This division of space and separation of bodies in the space, in turn, produces material effects in the form of specific modes of spectating and performing. It is precisely the institutional production of theatrical subjects that the Sydney Front aims to disclose in and through the very act of theatrical performance itself. The Sydney Front's seduction of the spectator aims to unsettle the institutional and theatrical relation on which body-identity as performer or spectator is founded. Finter identifies this relationship between performer and spectator in the theatre as an erotic impulse. The Sydney Front play on the nature of this relationship of seduction throughout the performance of *Don Juan*. The Sydney Front's deployment of the tactics of seduction in *Don Juan* is the focus of discussion in Chapters 6 and 7.

6 Conclusion: embodied performance and postmodern personae

> First, a model or "fiction", namely a *text*; second, the instruments of its application or its writing, namely *tools*; finally, the material that is both bearer and incarnation of the model, namely a nature essentially a *flesh* that writing changes into a *body*... At the outset, the fiction is determined by a "symbolic" system which is law, therefore a representation (a theatre) or a fable (a "saying") of the body, namely a body posed as the signifier (the term) of a *contract*. This discursive image must inform an *unknown* "reality", formerly designated as "flesh". From the fiction to the

> unknown that will embody it, the relay is effected by instruments which multiply and diversify the unforseeable resistances of the body to be (con)formed. An indefinite fragmentation of the installation is necessary for adjusting and applying each of these sayings and/or knowledges of the body, these unifying models, to the opaque carnal reality whose complex organisation is revealed – as fast as the interventions – by its resistance to them. Therefore, the play between the tool and the flesh is translated on the one hand by a change in the fiction (a correction of knowledge), and on the other by the cry, an inarticulable, unthought suffering of corporeal difference. (De Certeau *Tools for Body Writing* 10)

Toward the end of Helga Finter's discussion of the performance-theatre of the 70s she states that it has been particularly successful in the field of deconstructing the myth of presence, thereby showing what generates verisimilar presence on the theatre stage (*Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 162). Finter says further that this experience of the delimitation of presence in the form of body, voice, movement, gesture and stage-setting, has permitted performance to turn more and more into theatre and theatricality (*Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 162). She points specifically to the reappearance of the text in performance since the end of the 70s. Performance, she claims, deals increasingly with texts but in such a way as to call into question the function of narrative. Unlike in Brechtian epic theatre where narrative performs the function of estrangement, creating a critical distance from theatrical presence, the function of narrative in performance is to explore its role in the identity process of every single subject (*Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 163). Given this movement back to the text, to narrative, I want to examine in this closing section of the chapter, a statement made by John Baylis claiming that the Sydney Front take the body as the raw material of the performance making process (*Performance Making Strategies*). This would appear to be a re-turn to the body-centred performance aesthetic of the radical American theatre of the 60s, which celebrated the live physical presence of the performer and spectator in the event of performance at the expense of the representational or authorial dramatic text. In closing this chapter, I will examine the theoretical framework underpinning the Sydney Front's appropriation and use of the body in rehearsal and performance. I will argue that this body is not a natural given, a transcendent presence allowing direct or unmediated access to authorial truths or spiritual depths. The Sydney Front's notion of the body is informed by critical theories (see de Certeau, above) which posit the body as inscribed by social narratives, meanings and values, and transformed in and through the process of intextuation into a body that is subjectively and socially significant.

In *Talking Back*, a performance co-written by Clare Grant and Virginia Baxter, Grant and Baxter discuss their solo and group performance work, Grant as a founding member of The Sydney Front (1986-1994) and Baxter as a founding member of Open City (1987). Baxter compared and contrasted Grant's performance making process for *Woman in the Wall* to her own for *What Time Is This House?* Baxter wrote *What time is this House?* in collaboration with another writer, two visual artists and a composer. Like Baxter, Grant collaborated with a writer, composer, and dramaturge in making *Woman in the Wall*. In other words, both women were involved in collaborative creative processes concerned with writing and representing the body and self in and through performance. But on this point there is some difference. While Baxter admits that she and her collaborators drew directly on their own comparative personal histories and experiences, Grant does not admit to a level of subjective engagement in the process. When Baxter asks "Were you in there?", Grant replies "No. I did tell stories in the rehearsal room but they were well and truly deflected...(in and through the process)". Grant and Baxter do finally agree that the term persona describes the modality of performance:

> VB: ...the voice of the solo performer is my own. I address the audience intimately as myself.
> CG: You play yourself?...There we would disagree.
> VB: Why?
> CG: For me the theatre has a different reality...In performance I can do exuberant, outrageous things but it's not me.
> VB: Who is it then?
> CG: I am the person who can let myself do certain things in performance.
> VB: I'd say we're probably closer than you think.
> CG: But you speak as yourself.
> VB: A version of myself. A "what if" self. More or less myself...A persona.
> CG: We could possibly agree on persona. (*Talking Back* 19)

The notion of persona puts into question the identity of the performer. Neither performer presents themselves as a wholly fictional character nor as real or authentic selves on stage. Rather, they explore the issue of the interval between reality and representation with respect to theatre-performance and identity. Implicit in this investigation is the issue of the (re-)production of subjectivity in and as performance. These are questions which would seem to back onto recent theories of performing body-identity such as those developed by Judith Butler (1990, 1993) and Rosalyn Diprose (1994/1995). Diprose says that the idea of "performing body identity" refers to the fact that "the self does not have an identity except through action. The deed, act or performance is the self actualized. And as action implicates the body, then the self's identity is performed through the body. Self-identity is equivalent to body performance"

(*Performing Body-Identity* 8). The connection between performance and identity in Diprose is also central to the work of Butler, although Butler's focus is on the formation and subversion of sexual identities in and through body-performance.

Elizabeth Grosz (1987, 1990 and 1994) in developing a corporeal feminism that is, at the same time, a philosophy of the body, has argued that the body is primary in the process through which subjectivity is constructed. It is the materiality of the body that is targeted as the primary object of institutional discourses. Relations of power and knowledge target individual bodies making them, through modes of discipline, training and punishment, into docile subjects amenable to the prevailing exigencies of power. De Certeau characterises this process as writing the body which, he says, involves two complementary operations: "by means of them, living beings are 'textualised' or changed into signifiers of rules (an intextuation), and on the other hand, the reason or *Logos* of a society 'becomes flesh' (an incarnation)" (*Tools for Body Writing* 7). I think these theories of embodied subjectivity inform and are utilised in the performance practices I have briefly outlined above. However, they are utilised in different ways by different performers, as is evident in *Talking Back*. While Virginia Baxter asserts a continuity between the performer and the representations or constructions made in and through the performance process, which authenticate her own voice and authorise her to speak as herself in performance, Clare Grant posits a disjunction or separation. These different ways of thinking embodied subjectivity, as represented in Grant's and Baxter's discourses, were delineated by Philipa Rothfield in an article from the *Thinking Bodies* conference held in Melbourne in 1993. In her paper titled "Points of Contact - Philosophies of Movement", she outlined the different critical perspectives on embodiment from phenomenological and post-structuralist positions.

If I can characterise it in this way, I would say that Baxter works more with a phenomenological understanding of embodiment; she works from the inside, from the lived experience of the body situated in space and time, the body as lived, felt and intuited. She works from the personal, private, specific: "All writing begins with the personal. Hopefully you use your writing skills to detach yourself and turn it into something that other people recognise" (*Talking Back* 20). While Baxter acknowledges that this risks the negative charge of "indulgence and confession" (*Talking Back* 20), she is able to claim a certain specificity when speaking as herself in performance. In contrast to this phenomenological perspective, a poststructuralist position, Rothfield states, "looks at the body via culture, representation, knowledge and society...it highlights social and cultural forces with regards to the body...it is counter intuitive; it

questions our experience and claims that what we think and feel is the result of social forces not the product of our own understanding" (80-81). Clare Grant maintains a radical separation between the performer - "...who must keep going no matter what, move through the performance to its conclusion in approximately 50 minutes, always with her eye on the audience" (*Talking Back* 19) - and the performer's identity - "She who is I but not I" (*Talking Back* 19). She seems to claim that there is no relationship between the performer and the constructions or representations made in and through the rehearsal process. Or, perhaps, if there is some kind of connection, she would claim that it is tenuous and would not legitimate her speaking as herself in performance.

I wish to propose that the difference between a performer speaking or not speaking as herself hinges on different kinds of rehearsal or performance making processes, which I will examine in the second part of this thesis. Whereas, for Baxter, a continuity between lived experience of self and others is permitted and built upon in the rehearsal process, Grant allows her identity to be "swamped" (*Talking Back* 19) in the rehearsal process. Any sense of self-identity is subordinated to having to make a performance piece, that is, to the requirements and concerns of the theatrical institution. She would seem to be putting into question, or putting on trial, the authority and authenticity of the writing, speaking and performing subject.

I should state at this point that it is not my wish to construct a strict dichotomy between phenomenological and poststructuralist positions and perspectives, nor between Grant's and Baxter's discourses and performance practices. I note that contemporary critical cultural theory utilises both phenomenological and poststructuralist (as well as, for instance, psychoanalytic, semiotic and feminist) discourses simultaneously in order to theorise the real effects of representation or, in other words, how the subject lives or experiences its social inscription.[6] My use of the differences between phenomenological and poststructuralist discourses is provisional. It is aimed at addressing some of the issues raised in and through the performed dialogue *Talking Back*, issues which were first raised for me when I was employed by the Sydney Front to document a rehearsal process.

While the Sydney Front's rehearsal process radically questioned the meanings and values that subjects give to their own lived experience, it placed great emphasis on the meanings and values of the body understood as a product of social and cultural forces. On this view, the body is a material surface or texture onto which social

significations are inscribed: "Inscriptions of corporeal differences between bodies can be seen to produce body-subjects as living significations, social texts capable of being read or interpreted" (Grosz *Inscriptions and body-maps: representations and the corporeal* 63). In the rehearsal process, the Sydney Front does not work to create meaning because it is always already present and written on the body. This makes the socially significant body the primary resource for performance making. For instance, the social meanings and values of the sexed - male or female - body are constantly interrogated in and through the work of The Sydney Front. These ready made meanings inscribed and lived by body subjects are played with, parodied and re-positioned in the Sydney Front's rehearsal process and in performance. In addition, the inscription of bodies in and through the theatrical institution itself - the physical separation of the bodies of the performer and spectator into what is coded as active or passive space - is subject to close scrutiny. Now I will further examine these issues in the Sydney Front's rehearsal process for *Don Juan*.

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[1] Grosz follows Descombes by dividing modern French philosophy into two broad categories or generations. The first is located in the traditions of humanism and structuralism (Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger and Husserl). The major sources for the second generation are the anti-humanists of the nineteenth century, Marx, Freud and Nietzsche. Major figures of the second or 1960s generation philosophers are Lacan, Althusser, Levi-Strauss, Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida. For Grosz's account of modern French philosophy see *Sexual Subversions* 1-38.

[2] Derrida quotes Saussure stating that "language [which consists only of differences] is not a function of the speaking subject" (*Positions* 29).

[3] Grosz describes the disruption of the avant-garde text as "moments of revolution and transformation which, although they cannot be articulated in and of themselves, transgress the limits of the symbolic and thus regenerate it in a different form" (*Sexual Subversions* 68).

[4] See, for instance, Robert Wilson, Richard Forman, the Wooster Group, Mabou Mines, etc.

[5] See Henry Sayre *The Object of Performance.*

[6] See anthologies such as *Feminine Masculine and Representation* (eds. T. Threadgold and A. Cranny-Francis 1990) and *Cartographies: poststructuralism and the mapping of bodies and spaces* (eds. R. Diprose and R. Ferrell 1991).

Part 2

The Rehearsal Process and a Poetics of Poaching: A case study of the Sydney Front in rehearsal for *Don Juan*.

> Certainly it [The Sydney Front's *Don Juan*] has nothing to do with the traditional narrative of Don Juan and we're not dealing in psychological characters. What we have taken from the idea of Don Juan is seduction...Other things that come in from the Don Juan story are the baroque, excess and we also use Mozart's *Don Giovanni* as the basis for all the music in the show...so we're drawing all kinds of strings from the Don Juan legend, trying to use the cultural resonances that it has. (Sydney Front [John Baylis] *Arts Magazine*)

> We started looking at the legend of Don Juan and what ideas that bought forth, you know, like the idea of seduction. We started off looking at male sexuality and the idea of a party, a masked ball, and drew upon those ideas and images and put them on the floor in the studio and looked at what kinds of things we came up with. (Sydney Front [Andrea Aloise] *Arts Magazine*)

> In reality, the activity of reading has...all the characteristics of a silent production: the drift across the page, the metamorphosis of the text effected by the wandering eyes of the reader, the improvisation and expectation of meanings inferred from a few words, leaps over written spaces in an ephemeral dance...[The reader] insinuates into another person's text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation: he poaches on it, is transported into it, pluralises himself in it like the internal rumblings of one's body...Reading thus introduces an "art" which is anything but passive. (Michel de Certeau xxi -xxii)

1 Foreword

In a preview of the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*, Nigel Kellaway stated that the company conceived of the idea to create a show based on the legend of Don Juan[1] "only in time to meet an Australia Council grant application deadline" (Waites 7). This mischievous assertion implies that the Sydney Front's reading of the legend is, in many ways, improper or unfaithful to the Letter or law of the traditional story. Adopting a more serious tone, Kellaway suggested that the Sydney Front's irregular or unconventional adaptation of the Don Juan legend had as much to do with constraints placed on the creativity of the performers by the theatrical institution, broadly conceived in its economic and political contexts, as with a particular way of working in the theatre. He said that after the grant application was submitted, "there were a few [company] meetings, a lot of related reading" (Waites 7). However, this pre-rehearsal reading and discussion of materials related to the legend of Don Juan is considered to be less significant than, in the case of the Sydney Front, the very active and physical rehearsal process. As one performer noted, "Most happens on the rehearsal [room] floor...I can't think until I see the bodies moving. Until then it's all just ideas, and it's dangerous to think beforehand that you're getting anywhere" (Waites 7).

John Baylis and Andrea Aloise, cited above, similarly characterise the Sydney Front's rehearsal process as an active and embodied reading of the legend of Don Juan. They describe the performers as participants engaged in active processes such as "looking", "taking", "drawing upon", "using" and "putting on the floor". Speaking in these terms, Baylis and Aloise suggest that although the Sydney Front may utilise texts drawn from the dramatic canon, these writings do not in any way constitute a fixed reference point or linear narrative support in the production process. Rather, the Sydney Front, like scavengers, pick at and break apart the Don Juan legend, taking away only those things they find useful (images, thematic ideas, songs and music). They work with and from these ready-made representations in rehearsal, re-combining and incorporating the fragments to create their own piece of theatre. Aloise, in particular, emphasises the importance of the process of "putting ideas and images on the floor". She notes that through this embodied re-working these borrowed terms are adapted, transformed and altered, necessitating a re-examination, a re-reading, of the new, different and double meanings created by the group.

French sociologist and cultural ethnographer, Michel de Certeau, has characterised this active reading described by Aloise and Baylis as "poaching". In de Certeau's work, reading is conceptualised not as a passive absorption or assimilation of information, an effect of the book (Frow 58), but as an active and creative processing, a "silent production" (see above). In order to describe this type of creative activity, which he also calls "an art of manipulating and enjoying" (xxii), de Certeau characterises reading as insinuation, ruse, invention, self-pluralisation, adaptation, mutation, transformation and poaching. Reading as poaching is, however, the analogy that de Certeau uses most frequently and forcefully in his work (see *The Practice of Everyday Life* xx-xxii, 165-176). I want to suggest that this poaching analogy entails a conceptual framework within which it is possible to begin to articulate a way of working in the theatre which is as peculiar or perverse as the Sydney Front's.

De Certeau's poaching analogy applies to a set of practices or operations performed upon textual or text-like structures (Frow 52). Reading is one activity in this set which also includes speaking, strolling, dwelling, shopping, cooking, desiring, watching television, etc. What these different kinds of operationality have in common is that they are (re)*uses* of representations rather than representations in their own right. In the

General Introduction to *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), de Certeau has described his work as "a continuing investigation of the ways in which users - commonly assumed to be passive and guided by established rules - operate" (xi). Here, he indicates the critical shift represented by the foregrounding of what he calls "usage or consumption". De Certeau suggests that established social rules and regulations do not always function properly, or produce the effects they are meant or expected to. People's practices, their ways of using imposed systems and social codes, their ways of making do in certain situations, actually effect innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy as they adapt it to accommodate their own interests and ends (xiv). In other words, usage, in de Certeau's account, does not simply mean to apply, to put into practice, but to evade the prescriptions embedded in official practice (Frow 53). For this reason, de Certeau asserts that "the presence and circulation of a representation...tells us nothing about what it is for its users. We must first analyse its manipulation by users who are not its makers" (xiii).

De Certeau's notion of reading as poaching points toward a kind of production (a making or a poiesis) different from the primary or "official" system of production, hidden beneath its surface. De Certeau often refers to this other system as "consumption". But this is not consumption as inertia or as receptacle, as the extraordinary efficiency of its opposite principle tends to imply. De Certeau refuses absolutely the prioritisation and valorisation of "authors, educators, revolutionaries, in a word, 'producers', in contrast with those who apparently do not produce" (167). Against how these authorial enterprises conceive of and confirm usage or consumption, de Certeau asserts that such kinds of practice are a creative activity, a particular (even peculiar) kind of production:

> In reality, a rationalised, expansionist, centralised, spectacular and clamorous production is confronted by an entirely different kind of production, called "consumption" and characterised by its ruses, its fragmentation (the result of circumstances), its poaching, its clandestine nature, its tireless but quiet activity, in short by its quasi-invisibility, since it shows itself not in its own products (where would it place them?) but in an art of using those imposed on it. (31)

The central metaphor that de Certeau invents (borrowing on the work of Bourdieu on strategy and F. Deligny on errant trajectories) and introduces to explicate the operational logic of poaching is the distinction between "strategy" and "tactics" (xix-xx, 34-39). This distinction, which displaces the binary sets of production-consumption and writing-

reading, is not oppositional. Rather it elaborates different but imbricated models of action which are complementary and combinational. Citing de Certeau, Meaghan Morris elaborates these two interrelated schemata of action thus:

> "Strategy" is the name of a mode of action specific to regimes of *place*: It is "the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an 'environment'". It also requires, and produces, an Other: strategy "assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* (*propre*) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it...Political, economic, and scientific rationality has been constructed on this strategic model."
>
> A "tactic", in contrast, is a mode of action determined by not having a place of one's own. It is "a calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a border-line distinguishing the other as a visible totality". However, this does not imply a dystopian *state*, or condition, of placeless-ness; for de Certeau, "the place of a tactic belongs to the other". In other words, as a way of operating available to people displaced and excluded as "Other" by the bordering-actions of strategy, a tactic maintains an *active* relationship to place by means of what he calls an art of "insinuation". Tactics are opportunist: they involve seizing the chance to take what de Certeau calls a "turn" (*un tour*) through the other's terrain, and so depend for their success on a "clever utilisation of time." (27)

I have quoted Morris' definition of the strategy-tactic double at length due to her excellent use of de Certeau's model of modes of practical action in an analysis of two very different kinds of cultural production centred on the commercial property boom in the Sydney CBD in the 1980s. In this long essay Morris questions the kinds of critical tools available to academics seeking to analyse the modes of action deployed in different types of cultural spectacles and events. In this case, she contrasts an independent video, called *A Spire*, made by friends of a young stunt man who climbed the Sydney Tower, and a piece of corporate advertising in the form of a postmodern comic strip promotion advertising available space in a city office tower. Morris is particularly concerned that the home made video, which is juxtaposed in her argument to the discourses and narratives of property developers and commercial advertising agencies, not be simply reduced to an allegory of opposition or popular resistance to the corporate. She points to the complex and contradictory positioning of the video which simultaneously parodies the meanings and values given to commercial property in 1980s Sydney, while promoting the "boys own adventure" film genre. Acting in the entrepreneurial space of the 1980s Sydney CBD property market, the video, Morris says,

"should not only bear witness to popular opposition, but provide us with terms of riposte" (26). It isn't that Morris wants to deny that the video is a political intervention combined with a social critique; "a political practice of opposition and transformation" (26). As she says, "I also want to learn something from *A Spire*, to respond to, and extend, its productivity. Instead of reading it as a confirmation of the general models of action - resistance, opposition, critique - already available to Cultural Studies, I want to read it as inventing a practice for a particular time and place" (26).

The point I want to make here is that Morris finds de Certeau's model of a double action implied in the powerful distinction between "strategy" and "tactics" particularly useful in responding to and extending the productivity of an independently made video of one man's stunt climb of Sydney Tower. At the start of her paper Morris notes her reliance on the work of de Certeau. She explains that this is due in large part to his "notion of the popular as a modus operandi - a way of doing things characterised by an art of timing, rather than a topological relation to some other "zone" (whether 'high', or 'elite', or 'mass') of cultural space" (5). John Frow similarly recognises the importance of this critical and non-essentializing move: "rather than defining popular culture as a domain of texts or of artifacts, he [de Certeau] understands it as a set of practices or operations performed on textual or text-like structures" (52). What both Morris and Frow seem to agree is that de Certeau provides us with critical terms which make it possible to theorise the tactics of an "other", produced by the border-constructing actions of strategy, in ways that are not simply oppositional or resistant but complementary and combinatory; an art of "insinuation" (Morris 27).

What does all this mean in terms of my writing on the Sydney Front's rehearsal process? Like Meaghan Morris writing on her use of an independent video, I would like to learn something from the Sydney Front's rehearsal and theatrical practice. Morris notes that such learning is "...not hostile to general models (on which it depends for its materials), nor to the abstraction required by theorisation, but... [it] does assume that the objects we read provide...terms for questioning and revising the models we bring to them" (47). Some of the theoretical models or abstractions I have explored in the previous two chapters, in situating and contextualizing the work of the Sydney Front in terms of theatrical genres, are the discourses of postmodernism and deconstruction.

The work of the Sydney Front (1986-1993) marks a critical conjunction between "post-structuralist" theory and a "postmodern" aesthetic in a specifically Australian theatre context. The coincidence of poststructuralist critical discourse and postmodern theatre practice dates from the beginning of the 1970s. As discussed in the first part of this thesis, Helga Finter states that at that time a certain current of the (later called "postmodern") American theatre happened to practice in actuality what a certain current of French theory (later called "poststructuralist") was simultaneously talking about (*Disclosure(s)* 153-154). In the quarter of a century since that time, this accidental coincidence of theory and practice has come to constitute an increasingly expanding field of research. In one recent study, *Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism* (1991), Johannes Birringer claims postmodern theatre is concerned with the ways in which "current practices on the critical margin of the body and the image" have "fundamentally altered our perception of the traditional dichotomy of text and stage, and of the whole structure of relationships (between actor, character, script, space, time, narrative content, image, design) implied by that historical dichotomy" (47).

However, whereas Birringer conceptualises postmodern theatre as actively resisting or deconstructing an historical binarism, writers like Helga Finter (above) characterise this type of theatre as extending the project of theatrical representation in its exploration of the changing social dynamic of the lived experience of subjectivity. Helga Finter indicates that the major theoretical implications of this type of theatre are somewhat broader than Birringer describes in the above statement and should not be reduced to the deconstruction of a (putative) binarism in theatre history between text and stage, language and body, image and space. Following Julia Kristeva and her theory of the speaking subject as the "the locus of textual production and deformation" (Grosz *Sexual Subversions* 42), Finter characterises the questioning of modes and processes of theatrical representation as a staging of the drama of subject-constitution:

> Performance activity in the last fifteen years has taken upon itself the problem which theatrical representation has dealt with ever since theatre existed: to present models of the human subject. Yet these subjects in process, projected in moving spaces, can no longer be models in the old sense. They offer structures, integrations of the Other, which possess only an individual truth. One can thus gain through performance today the experience of an otherness which in a way may also be one's own. (*Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 165)

If, as I think Finter cautions, theatrical postmodernism is in danger of being reduced to mere resistance to binary historical theatre structures, there is another direction from which caution should be demonstrated. One strand of critical and cultural theory understands postmodernism (post-68, American) as a re-invention of historical avant-garde anti-art sentiments (see Part 1). Central to this reinvigoration of the oppositional or iconoclastic position and discourse of the 1920s European avant-garde is the destruction of the division between high culture and mass or popular culture. Certainly, the work of the Sydney Front would seem to fit this particular strand of postmodernism. Reviewing the Sydney Front's *The Pornography of Performance* in the London *Guardian*, Betty Caplan remarked that "never was the line between bullshit and fine art so delicately drawn" (cited in Baylis *Performance Making Strategies*). While this mixing of high and low or mass culture is conceived negatively as pastiche (Jameson) and positively as parody (Hutcheon), I am more interested in the way Caplan's remark was cited and celebrated in a paper, called "Performance Making Strategies", presented by Sydney Front member John Baylis at the inaugural *Contemporary Performance Week.*[2] It seemed to me that what was being celebrated was not some of the difficulties or complexities involved in maintaining a doubly coded or complicit critique of Theatre as a socio-cultural institution, but an upending of traditional categories of judgement about art. What was found and judged to be valuable in the work of the Sydney Front was precisely what was formerly dismissed as trash, or "bullshit" in this case. Peter Goodall has noted that this celebration of "bullshit" seems to nourish a peculiarly 1980s Australian critical cultural practice or habit. He states that the promotion of the popular as counter-aesthetic "has been a particular feature in the Australian context in the 1980s", and warns that "it is in danger of becoming our house style" (75).

Having outlined the tendencies of criticism to characterise postmodern practices, including the Sydney Front's practice, as either resisting or ridiculing established institutions, values, tastes, etc., in this section of the thesis I wish to apply de Certeau's conceptual framework to an analysis of the Sydney Front rehearsal process. I aim to explore the critical and cultural spaces that the Sydney Front acts or engages in and to examine some of the ways in which such actions and engagements might alter the way we understand certain genres or types of practice. In *A Semiotics of the Dramatic Text*, Susan Melrose argues that what is invaluable in de Certeau's breakdown of cultural practice into complementary and combinatory schemata of action is the implication for a

double action on the part of theatre practitioners. She suggests that de Certeau provides a methodology for studying theatrical practices and processes in so far as "complex practices, such as those set in motion by the dramatic actor in rehearsal conditions, seem to function as an oscillation between two modes of practice...leading to recognisable and 'inventive' combinations in all 'effective practice'" (78-9). Following this insight, in Chapter 4 I will explore the Sydney Front's rehearsal process as a practice of "poaching" and examine the fit between this theory of appropriation and the critical cultural discourses of postmodernism and deconstruction discussed in the first part of the thesis. In chapter 5, it is the Sydney Front's inventive and productive practice in the rehearsal process that I will turn my attention to. What I want to examine here is poaching as an art form: an aesthetic of appropriation and re-combination.

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[1] In this thesis, I refer to the "legend of Don Juan" or the "Don Juan legend" in acknowledgement that the story, first plotted by a Spanish monk in the seventeenth century, is largely based on medieval legend. At the same time, I recognise that there is some question today of whether the story of Don Juan is legend or myth. Tirso de Molina's, *The Joker of Seville and the Guest of Stone* (1630) combines medieval folk legend, tales telling of statues of the dead coming to life to exact retribution from the living, with the story of an unrepentant womaniser. The morality play follows the outrageous adventures of Don Juan Tenorio and recounts his punishment by the stone statue of a Commander whom he had killed, and whose daughter he had attempted to seduce or rape. In the final scene of the play, the stone statue is resurrected to attend a supper invitation with Don Juan whereupon he drags the sinner down to a fiery Hell.

According to David Whitton, Molina unwittingly created a "mythical archetype" in the figure of Don Juan (1). The fusion of the Stone Guest motif with that of the fiercely non-believing, and therefore unrepentant, master of seduction proved an extremely popular combination and the play traveled quickly to Italy and France. In 17th and 18th century Italian and French re-workings of the play, the figure of Don Juan became increasingly dominant as did the role of his servant:

> The story was becoming that of a couple, with the servant (Molière's Sganarelle, Mozart's [and de Ponte's] Leporello) having equal dramatic status to the master. In addition the focus was shifting from the moral lesson to the central character's motivation, thus laying the groundwork for the emergence of Don Juan as a modern psychological type rather than Tirso's morality play Everyman. (2)

The Sydney Front's *Don Juan* tends to avoid the modern theatre's fascination and preoccupation with the psychological motivation of Don Juan and the master/servant relationship. Focusing on the art/ifice of seduction, the company combines certain aspects of Molina's morality play with the da Ponte/Mozart baroque opera, *Don Giovanni*. From the tradition of the morality play they borrow the idea that "we're all Don Juan's". One performer made this comment during a rehearsal run of the Opening Scene. At the time, the performers were dressed in white wedding dresses and were seated in the audience seating. They were pretending to watch the spectators enter the performance space and were practicing seducing them through looks, winks, positions of the head, etc. At the same time, the Sydney Front rejects Molina's moral didacticism and diverts its attention to Mozart's musical score which is, Julia Kristeva asserts, the penultimate celebration of the art of seduction:

> it was not until Mozart came along with the 1787 Prague production of his Opera Buffa, Don Giovanni, that the fearsome seduction of the Spanish nobleman was freed from the moral condemnation that accompanied it...and found within music the direct language of amoral eroticism. (*Don Juan, or Loving To Be Able To* 191)

[2] The inaugural Contemporary Performance Week was held at Sidetrack Theatre, Addison Rd, Marrickville, in September 1990.

2 Rehearsal documentation and analysis: a pragmatic methodology

> To raise the question of representing the Other is...to reopen endlessly the fundamental issue of science and art; documentary and fiction; universal and personal; objectivity and subjectivity; masculine and feminine; outside and inside. (Trinh T Minh-Ha 65)

The critical analysis in the second part of this thesis is based on documentation of the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* rehearsal process.[1] In this section I wish to outline the methodology underpinning the documentation and analysis of the rehearsal process. This methodology is largely informed by critical discourse concerning the problem of ethnographic authority in the contemporary social sciences. A tradition of objective, disinterested and abstracted ethnography is questioned by writers such as Clifford and Marcus (1986) and ethnographic feminist film maker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha. These ethnographic writers assert that greater critical attention should be given to the subject position and situated knowledges of the ethnographer and the relations of power, knowledge and desire (re)produced by specific encounters between researcher and community. Contemporary ethnography, as James Clifford claims, questions "overly transparent modes of authority" and draws attention to the fact that ethnography is an historical practice which is "always caught up in the invention, not simply the representation, of cultures" (2).

According to James Clifford a direct result of the accumulating theoretical critique of anthropology has been a rejection of "visualism". He writes that "once cultures are no longer prefigured visually – as objects, theatres, texts – it becomes possible to think of a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances" (12). In the shift from visual to discursive paradigm "the dominant metaphors for ethnography shift away from the observing eye...the writer's 'voice' pervades and situates the analysis, and objective, distancing rhetoric is renounced" (Clifford 12). Trinh examines the "speaking voice" of the ethnographer in greater detail than Clifford does. She distinguishes between two different modes of "speaking": "speaking about" and "speaking to" (12). Trinh claims that speaking about partakes in the reproduction of the system of binary oppositions on which territorialised knowledge depends. She writes that speaking about "places a semantic distance between oneself and the work; oneself (the maker) and the receiver; oneself and the other" (12). This mode of speaking "secures for the speaker a position of mastery; I am in the midst of a knowing, acquiring, deploying world – I appropriate, own and demarcate my sovereign territory as I advance – while the 'other'

remains in the sphere of acquisition. Truth is the instrument of a mastery which I exert over areas of the unknown as I gather them within the fold of the known" (12). "Speaking to", on the other hand, is described by Trinh as a form of mediation: "the story and its telling are always adaptive" (13). In other words, in "speaking to" the position of the speaking subject is foregrounded and is self-reflexive in relation to the production of the story itself. At the same time, this mode of storytelling allows other voices, besides the one telling the story, to be heard.

In this sense, Trinh's notion of "speaking to" is similar to Bakhtin's notion of dialogism. Clifford asserts that "dialogic processes proliferate in any complexly represented discursive space" (15). He takes this to apply equally to the discursive space of the realist novel, as was Bakhtin's particular focus, or ethnography. According to Clifford, the self-reflexive discursive space of contemporary ethnography is dialogic, rather than monologic, with many voices clamoring for expression. He states that

> Polyvocality was restrained and orchestrated in traditional ethnographies by giving to one voice a pervasive authorial function and to others the role of sources, "informants", to be quoted or paraphrased. Once dialogism and polyphony are recognised as modes of textual production, monophonic authority is questioned, and revealed to be characteristic of a science that has claimed to represent cultures. The tendency to specify discourses – historically and intersubjectively – recasts this authority, and in the process alters the questions we put to cultural descriptions. (15)

Implicit in the shift from a visual to discursive and dialogic mode of knowledge is an acknowledgment that ethnographic knowledges are inherently partial, committed and incomplete (Clifford 7). Noting a common tendency to conflate true knowledge and meaning, Trinh asserts that "truth, even when 'caught on the run', does not yield itself either in names or in (filmic) frames; and meaning should be prevented from coming to closure at what is said and what is shown. Truth and meaning: the two are likely to be equated with one another. Yet, what is put forth as truth is often nothing more than *a* meaning" (30). Such a position recognises that there is no privileged position from which to survey a culture or cultural objects. Thus, totalising accounts of social and cultural processes are replaced by admittedly partial, particularised and contingent accounts of specific encounters within and between different cultures.

In this particular analysis of a theatrical rehearsal process the voices of the Sydney Front performers are taken as theoretical ones. Through speaking they position themselves in relation to certain theories and practices and become theorists themselves. These performers can be regarded as critical thinkers who interrogate theatre theory. Their practice engages in and negotiates with theoretical and aesthetic positions and perspectives. In incorporating their knowledges I am able to position their thinking alongside the academic signatures of theorists and other commentators, including myself. I use excerpts from the rehearsal process as points of intersection with my narratives on their work and critical cultural discourses.

As for speaking, there are difficulties involved in writing on a process that is as extraordinarily complex (synchronically and diachronically) as rehearsal. Writing tends to impose a serial or sequential linearity and uni-dimensional flatness onto the rehearsal process when the complexity of this process consists in the variety of performers' practices such as, for instance, reading, writing, speaking, improvising, choreographing and conceptualizing. These practices construct meanings and interpretations in and across many simultaneously occurring and interacting semiotic systems; verbal, visual, kinesthetic, proxemic, aural, etc. It is possible to indicate some of the enormous complexity of this multi-variate and multi-medial process in diagrammatic form (see Appendix 1).[2] This graphic representation of the rehearsal process indicates that what I am attempting to describe and critically analyse within the constraints of language is actually a non-linear, multi-dimensional and many-directional process. In this way, it is possible to characterise performers' practices as synoptic and/or dynamic and to describe phenomena such as embedding (for instance, the "collective aesthetic"; the literate, bodily habitus of the performing subject, etc.) and recursion (the repetition or re-visiting of certain practices such as reading, improvisation, choreography at different times throughout the process).

On the question of representing the rehearsal process, Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* propose a radical project, termed "rhizomatics", to replace conventional modes of explanation, interpretation and analysis (psychoanalytic, linguistic, literary or semiotic). They oppose to these latter types of tree- and root-like (aborescent) systems of thought or representation, the metaphor of the rhizome:

> Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome...is not a multiple derived from the One, or to which the One is added (n + 1). It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills...Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions...The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots... the rhizome is an acentred, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system [open to] all manner of becomings. (21)

With the concept of the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari attempt to problematise and displace the system and structure of binary logic central to and pervasive throughout Western thought since the time of Plato. The rhizome is constituted by flows, processes (of proliferation), intensities, and lines of speed and slowness, rather than comprised of two terms organised into an oppositional pairing. It is, in other words, a horizontal network of multiple branching stems and shoots, with no central axis, no unified point or origin, and no given direction of growth. Rhizomatics is an anti-method, a mode of analysis that refutes the projection of some kind of hidden depth onto a manifest surface. Deleuze and Guattari, therefore, closely identify rhizomatics with pragmatics rather than with science or ideology: "RHIZOMATICS = ... = PRAGMATICS = MICROPOLITICS" (22). For Deleuze and Guattari, because the rhizome has "no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo", questions such as "Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for?...are totally useless questions. Making a clean slate, starting or beginning again from ground zero, seeking a beginning or a foundation – all imply a false conception of voyage and movement" (25). They state that to "proceed from the middle, through the middle, coming and going rather than starting and finishing" is to know how to practise pragmatics (25).

As Samuel Webber notes, C.S. Peirce's triadic model of infinite semiosis is pragmatics (or "pragmaticism") in action (12-13). Pierce defines the sign or representamen as "something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity" (Innis 5). In doing so he describes a process without an absolute beginning or end: infinite semiosis. Sign interpretational processes are circular in the sense that they are both prospective and retrospective. In establishing an equivalence between a sign or representamen and an object, the signifying function is dependent on and relational to

the already existing interpretive possibilities that it chooses from or combines to produce an interpretant which itself, in turn, becomes a sign or representamen requiring future interpretation. In other words, the sign or representamen and the interpretant are always already situated in a dense network of previous signs and interpretations. It can seem an impossibly complex situation. However Pierce's pragmaticism anchors or grounds sign processes:

> There is but one state of mind from which you can "set out", namely, the very state of mind in which you already find yourself at the time you do "set out" - a state in which you are laden with an immense mass of cognition already formed, of which you cannot divest yourself even if you would. (Webber 12)

When I joined the Sydney Front's rehearsal process, I had little direct knowledge of the company's way of working or the pre-history of the Don Juan project.[3] What I did have was a body of theoretical or analytical concerns that I wished to explore in relation to this particular kind of theatre practice. My position as documentor was somewhere in between being a spectator[4] and a new (non-performing, except as spectator) performer.[5] At times during the process, I identified most strongly with one of the collaborators who was working with the Sydney Front for the first time. This re-construction and analysis of the rehearsal process is heavily weighted towards her questioning of the process. It was only at these times that the Sydney Front articulated why and how they were doing what they were doing, or what Bourdieu would call the company's logic of practice.

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[1] I was invited by the company to document the rehearsal process for *Don Juan* and worked with them for the entire six-month long period from November 1990 to April 1991. The rehearsal process was divided into two parts; an eight week part-time rehearsal period and a six week full-time rehearsal period. *Don Juan* opened at the Performance Space, Redfern, on April 11 and ran for three weeks, closing on April 28, 1991. I composed a written casebook of the rehearsal process and, with the permission of the Sydney Front, video recorded particular performances in the performance season.

[2] My model is an adaptation for this particular process of Terry Threadgold's unpublished model of text-centred rehearsal process.

[3] In a meeting with John Baylis, where he invited me to document the Sydney Front's rehearsal process, Baylis explained that the project I would be working on was loosely based on the Don Juan legend. He said that the Sydney Front was most interested in exploring the theme of seduction taken from the legend. He also explained that the Sydney Front was a collective that worked without a script or a director as outside eye to the process.

[4] In rehearsal, the Sydney Front practiced their interactive mode of performance on my body. I was often used to represent "the audience" or an audience member singled out by the Sydney Front.

[5] The Sydney Front trained for 11/2 hours each day of rehearsal. Training was a combination of the Suzuki discipline (led by Nigel Kellaway) and Iyengar Yoga (led by Andrea Aloise). I participated in these sessions which alternated daily between I hour of stomping, 1/2 an hour of yoga and 1/2 hour of stomping and 1 hour of yoga.

4

Rehearsal as a Process of Poaching

1 The collective aesthetic (part 1)

The activities and practices of the performers in the Sydney Front rehearsal process are embedded in what one company member has termed "the collective aesthetic" (Baylis *Lecture*). This collective way of working is indicated throughout rehearsal in the dominant usage of the collective pronoun "we". Instead of one single, central focus in rehearsal, such as the written dramatic playtext containing an author-creator's ideas, thoughts, intentions, or a directorial vision, the Sydney Front takes as its starting point the embodied subjectivities of the seven different individuals constituting the core collective and their collaborators. In other words, there is no one single, quasi-God-like individual - author or director - organising, controlling, regulating or supervising, dominating the rehearsal process. The seven different performers, rather than an autonomous creative source, constitute the collective creative process.

The Sydney Front do not view the performer-oriented, collective organisation of their theatre practice as essentially emancipatory or liberating for the performers. One performer acknowledged, at a particularly difficult point in the rehearsal process, that the absence of a written text and director might free up the practices of the performers to a certain extent, but that it also introduced a new set of different responsibilities and pressures on the group:

This way of working without a script and without a director gives us a lot more freedom in some respects but also places a lot more pressure on us. We take responsibility for the process. We take responsibility when it breaks down.

Before I began documenting the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* rehearsal process, I was warned that the collective working process could sometimes be marked by awkward

frustrations and uncomfortable tensions, as performers struggled to generate ideas, combine borrowed and self-revised materials, and to resolve or otherwise manage conflicts or disagreements between the performers themselves. It was explained, again in the rehearsal process itself, that these kinds of tensions were inevitable given the diverse influences and orientations, and different skills and expertise of the group members:

It's a working process that has developed from years of working together. It would take hours to go through and explain. It has to do with each person having different expertise. Some people have certain skills established through ten to fifteen years of work in the theatre. We're not all equals.

This emphasis on the difference and inequality of members of the Sydney Front collective seems somewhat conspicuous alongside certain understandings of the theatre collective, "where all participants work in partnership on all aspects of the production" (Arden cited in Birch *Drama, Praxis, Performance* 172). According to Arden, the question of authority is displaced in such non-hierarchical organisations whose members operate on the basis of co-creation, co-operation (skill sharing and such like) and agreement. In a study of particular instances of conflict of authorship between dramatic playwrights and theatrical directors, David Birch argues that disputes over what is seen as a director's faulty, as opposed to faithful, interpretation of the meaning of the play "put into the text" by the writer, are not simply conflicts of authorship but a struggle for the ownership and control of dramatic meaning in performance praxis (*Drama, Praxis, Performance* 171). Moreover, he says, this struggle extends across all the activities of performance making; writing, reading, analysis, rehearsal, production and reception. In other words, it is not so much authority (whether of the playwright or director) in itself that is problematic, but the assumption that there is, at any moment, only one and the same set of meanings to be made in and through all these processes of performance. The issue is how a notion of authorship is mobilized and how deterministic this idea is in terms of the ownership and control of meaning-making or interpretation in performance praxis (*Drama, Praxis, Performance* Birch 172).

The Sydney Front foregrounds this struggle for meaning in rehearsal. The Sydney Front ensemble creates work collectively. At the same time, the group's emphasis on the values of difference, dissensus and the incommensurabililty of knowledges and

experiences distinguish it from collectives based on co- operation and agreement. The Sydney Front collective is premised on the presence of at least seven (for *Don Juan*) different performers, each making contradictory and conflicting meanings and interpretations at any moment in and across the performance making processes. The performers negotiate and mediate their differences and disagreements. This process of struggle and compromise is evident in the end product which, to use the metaphor of the text as a weave of traces, is frayed or open at the seams, the performance pulling and straining in many different directions simultaneously. The resulting performance self-consciously refers to the process of its own production, as it is created collectively and collaboratively by seven different individuals.

In the introduction to a special edition of *Theaterschrift* entitled "On Dramaturgy", Marianne Van Kerkhoven writes that one of the fundamental characteristics of a new and different dramaturgy emergent in current European and American theatre is the choice of a process oriented work method. She says this type of working process places great emphasis on the contribution actors make in terms of the material they supply during the rehearsals. This material may be in the form of text, of course, but may also be images, sounds, movements: "dramaturgy is no longer a means of bringing out the structure of the meaning of the world in a play, but (a quest for) a provisional and possible arrangement which the artist imposes on those elements [s/]he gathers [together]" (Van Kerkhoven 18).

The question of a new theatre, a new and different dramaturgy, in the context of current theatre practice in Europe and America, was the subject of a symposium hosted by the Felix Meritis theatre, Amsterdam, in August 1993. This symposium was organised on the premise that "in everyday dramaturgy the only system known universally is still Aristotle's unity of time, space and action", yet in many countries forms of theatre are being produced which answer to models other than this traditional one. However, because there is no terminology available to describe these models in all their aspects, the work of many artists who choose entirely different criteria when creating plays and performances "are either portrayed and interpreted in negative terms (it isn't a story, the actor is not a different person, etc.) or described extremely subjectively" (Van Kerkhoven 12-14).

Certainly this problem of the negative definition of new work is evident in the context of contemporary Australian theatre and performance practice. It was the topic of a forum hosted by The Performance Space, in conjunction with Belvior St Theatre, which took place in between Belvoir St Theatre's Open House, a festival presenting new modes of writing, directing and acting in theatre, and The Performance Space's Open Season, an annual celebration of new live art. In this forum, writer and performer Virginia Baxter discussed some of the difficulties involved in defining the kind of work created by Open City, the performance company she formed with partner Keith Gallasch in Sydney in 1987. Baxter says that the work of Open City is marked by a preoccupation with language(s) in performance; with the speaking and performing body in real time and space. The rehearsal process does not begin with a script. Rather, she explains,

> It begins with notes, alliteratively visual and verbal, performative and participatory...Once we have a set of ideas, images, we go to work on them, write to find out what we're thinking, bounce ideas and creations back and forth between collaborators and end up with a script. Obviously this means we could be implicated in the plot to dispense with the playwright. But...we are not interested in plots and endings don't come easy to us. (*Explaining her position in 10 minutes*)

Baxter asserts that because Open City doesn't share "Theatre's" primary concern with language in the context of character and story, where bodies, space and times are fictional and the audience barely visible, the company's work in "Performance" has been represented and interpreted negatively or pejoratively:

> Open City, the company I work with - we work with language in what has been defined by some as a Non-Text Based Performance medium. Lovely! So where does that leave us? With the up shit creek colloquialism? No. In a quick huddle with our peers to determine that this new definition exists because there are many companies who in an effort to create new forms, have chosen quite legitimately to ignore verbal language in favour of other languages. Good-oh! Good for them. But where does that leave us? To theatre critics! Labeled un-theatrical, misread as un-dramatic, called refugees from radio, nit picked not for what we have created but for what we have left out. (*Explaining her position in 10 minutes)*

The Sydney Front's 1989 artistic statement tackles the same problem cited by Baxter. This statement parodies the problem of the definition and description of new work in theatre and performance. It overturns the situation that Baxter describes, where new work is judged "not for what we have created but for what we have left out". The Sydney Front's artistic statement suggests that existing critical discourses lack the complexity

and sophistication to account for the Sydney Front's work. It suggests that the Sydney Front's work exceeds the boundaries of conventional critical theory on theatrical performance. In other words, the problem isn't that the work of the Sydney Front is lacking in any way but, rather, that certain critical discourses cannot account for the Sydney Front's work and are therefore inadequate or impoverished:

> Our work is about excess, about a gesturing that goes far beyond that necessary for any reasonable discourse. The super-abundance of our work has the paradoxical aim of releasing the spectator from false complicatedness. We continually collapse our own rhetoric and bring the focus back to the body's fleshy organs. By thus returning to where meaning is embodied, we aim to protect ourselves and the spectator from the terrorism of grand abstractions that cannot be lived out. (*25 Years of Performance Art in Australia* 54)

In this statement the Sydney Front hit on what Marianne Van Kerkhoven identifies as central to the new dramaturgy. For Van Kerkhoven, the performers themselves are key dramaturgical principles. The performers, and most significantly, their lived experiences, constitute a theatre production's primary "building blocks" (20). Van Kerkhoven notes that these performers, and their increasingly important personal, social and theatrical histories, do not take the stage individually as author-performers or masters of an owned (self-possessed), authentic subjectivity. Rather, the individual author-creator of a play is replaced by a collective. Moreover, this collective "has a nature different from the one we remember from the seventies: at that time the groups all tended to rally themselves behind one single (political) conviction; these days the collectives (cf. Wooster Group, BAK-Truppen, Theatre Repere-Robert Lepage, De Vere etc) are, rather...expected to provide 'many voices' " (21).

2 *Don't talk about it, just do it.*

AA: *So, what shall we do?*

NK: *Improvise and get as much material as possible with not much talking.*

JB: *Improvise themes. Don't intellectualize. We'll write the themes down and put them in a hat then pick one out and just do it. We'll have lots of different themes. They can be as tangential as you like. Don't feel you have to justify them.*

At the Dark Swan Dance Studio in Rozelle, the Sydney Front performers sat in a line along one side of a large, square wooden dance floor. There they discussed how the rehearsal process itself should proceed. It was decided that the group would generate

material by improvising themes taken from their readings of the Don Juan legend. This process was circumscribed by the performer's own idiosyncratic set of rules stipulating that there be no talk, discussion or intellectual justification of chosen themes. Emphasis was placed on the active embodiment of word-themes. The performers were encouraged to "do" them, to "put them on the floor". Having set in place this working procedure, one of the performers read from a list of word-themes composed in a pre-rehearsal meeting. They included: *hysterical men, eroticism, abandonment, invitation, seduction, compulsion, disguise, permission, patricide.*

When two performers initiated a discussion of one of these word-themes, another performer intervened (both verbally and non-verbally) and reiterated that the group should "do" these themes rather than talk about them:

JB: Well, let's get up and do them then...

AA: What do you think of when you think of hysterical men?

JB: Do you want a definition?

CG: Yes!

AT: The context we took hysterical men from was the idea of Don Juan being all over the place, sticking his cock anywhere. He has no center or intentionality. He's all over the joint...

AA: They're egomaniacs.

AT: [Reading from Opera or the Undoing of Women by Catherine Clement] "Don Giovanni goes beyond the mythical differences between the sexes to join his female accomplices, by a subtle ellipse. He is hysterical like them".

CG: Don Juan is bursting to get outside himself, to be non-human...

JB: (standing) Well, let's go then...

With this instruction, discussion ceased and two performers took the floor to begin the process of improvisation.

3 Generating material: improvisation

EA said, "We've got one" and, with CR, walked onto the floor. EA climbed onto CR's shoulders with her groin into his face. CR frantically danced a tap dance. The group, sitting on the edge of the floor space, directed CR to do different things, for example, "now do the uncontained version", "run around screaming", "try it with two women, one front and back". NK and JB walked into the space. NK hoisted EA onto his shoulders,

her groin into his face, while JB shouldered AA in the same way. The two men then shadow boxed with each other. CR suggested that two performers throw one of the women up to one of the men's shoulders: "Add verbose text like in a lecture with him prattling on then smash! He gets a cunt in his face". One performer suggested that both performers should be naked while they shoulder the women and shadow box: '"tie a ribbon in a bow around the man's penis". The group agreed that the improvisation made "a nice image".

Through improvisation, the group devised a set of action-images that they tagged with a name depicting that particular visual image or action; for example, "cunt face" (above), "chair fuck", and "hysterical men". John Baylis has said elsewhere that the group only kept those action-images that "we sensed had something interesting in it", a "tone" or "taste" that appealed to the group (unpublished lecture, the Centre for Performance Studies, 1992). They retained those "bits" that seemed to "fit" with the Sydney Front aesthetic or which could be worked to fit in with it. These bits and pieces were given a name so they could be called upon in further work, while the rest was discarded.

At a certain point, the group found that it had exhausted the list of themes it had used for improvisation. One performer suggested that they think up some topics to "do":

JB: We should think up some specific impro topics for tomorrow and then put them in a hat and pull them out and do them.

NK: Why don't we think up some more topics now, that way we'll be able to prepare for tomorrow. It won't be such a surprise then and the impros should be better.

JB: If you don't want to prepare, don't.

AA: Yeah, I'm not going to.

The group then divided and each individual performer found his or her own space in which to think up topics to improvise. The performers worked separately without discussing their thoughts with the others. After about ten minutes, the group re-formed and each performer added his or her topic(s) to a list. These included: *pursue yourself using a mirror*; *engulfed by the cape*; *the skill of pole balancing*; *the privileges of femininity*; *promote your dick*; *molest yourself while molesting someone else*; *blockages and barriers*; *stop yourself from becoming hysterical*; *seduce, violate and dominate a woman*; *is it in?*; *a compulsive person with too many alternatives*.

Although it was possible to identify a relationship between the Don Juan story and the word-themes listed at the start of rehearsal, the topics listed by the performers appeared to draw on a much wider range of inter-textual materials and social and subjective experiences. Following the instructions given earlier, the performers were not required to discuss their choice of topic(s) or to explain the thought processes leading to their particular choices, and the performers themselves seemed radically uninterested in how or why each person had made the choices they had. The performers were not required to justify, defend or otherwise explain their choices. No topic was rejected. The list was simply collated and the performers immediately began improvising topics at random. Again, the collective immediately identified what they liked or didn't like. Those "bits" the group liked were kept and named for further use. The rest was discarded.

Promote your Dick: JB stood on a chair in front of the group. AT stood on the floor below him pointing a broom handle at his groin spruiking, "roll up! roll up!" etc. A different interpretation had CR standing beside AA and saying to her, "show us your dick". In another interpretation, JB stood naked on a chair. AA took his penis in her hand and began a very long and detailed lecture on the anatomy and biological function of the male member. The group named this improvisation "dick lecture".

Is it in?: AT walked onto the floor and stood in front of the group. She remained still and silent for some time. Then she asked, "Is it in?" In another version, CR and EA simulated sex on the floor in front of the group. JB and AT stood above them asking questions – "What muscles are you using?", "What temperature is it?", "Is it in?" - and taking notes. NK suggested that AT kneel down on the floor on all fours and that EA and AA fling JB at her upturned rump. The performers followed NK's suggestion. AT knelt on all fours. EA and AA took hold of JB's arms and flung him at AT. CG asked, "Is it in?" EA and AA kept flinging JB at AT until AT answered "yes".

Some days later, having moved from the Dark Swan Dance Studio to a much smaller space, the Centre for Performance Studies' rehearsal room in the Old School, Sydney University, the performers set up *Is it in?* AT, positioned centre, front stage, faced the group, kneeling on all fours. From the opposite end of the space EA and AA held JB's arms and ran him down the space towards AT's upturned rump. There was some discussion about this scene. One of the women holding onto JB said, "what if we're

talking and holding JB then we fling him onto AT and get back on with our conversation". They tried this. CR provided some direction saying, "AT needs to be doing something. Face her towards the audience to tell a story". NK suddenly said, "I've got an idea", and quickly walked over to the piano conveniently located in the space. NK played an aria from Don Giovanni. He instructed AT to sing while JB is flung at her. AT sang along to NK playing the piano while EA and AA ran JB down the space toward AT. NK, from the piano, instructed EA and AA to pull JB off AT and to drag him back up the space to begin the sequence again. CR commented that, "It's like a duck and drake". On the following run, when JB connected with AT's rump, he made a humping motion, up and down. He refused to be pulled off AT by the two handmaidens. They grabbed CR instead and ran him down the space toward AT. JB rolled off onto the floor before CR connected with the singer. JB jumped up off the floor and walked sprightly upstage towards EA and AA who took hold of his arms to repeat the cycle. NK called the improvisation "Thump Rump".

JB: *What else could be put with that?*

CG: *We could have people wiping AT's brow.*

AA: *After each of the men are finished we could throw a bucket of water over AT and then quickly wipe her down before the next one.*

CG: *It's a total attack on her orifice.*

NK: *I'm imagining AT wearing a deCameron petticoat or a plastic dress with her rump showing and JB naked.*

JB: *All the rest are her attendants.*

NK: *The scene has its momentum. The music drives the scene.*

CR: *If the men are to be naked then they could be undressed ceremoniously. You could have the whole grand adornment of the male body happening here, carefully combing and teasing their pubic hair, adorning the penis with ribbons and then...wham!*

JB: *Where does the scene go then?*

AA: *It would be nice if it rolled into another scene rather than short sharp changes from one extreme to another. I'm sick of that.*

JB: *I like the old slash and cut. It's more honest.*

AA: *The cutting method might be more honest but it leaves me feeling a bit cold and vacuous as a performer.*

NK: *The show will have a musical continuity.*

Seduce, Violate and Dominate a Woman: AA and EA stood facing each other. AT circled the two whispering into EA's ear. EA pulled AA's shirt off her shoulder. AT then whispered into AA's ear. AA slapped EA, etc. In another interpretation of the same topic, JB said to AA, "trust me, I'll catch you". AA fell backwards onto the floor as JB took his support away. In another different interpretation, EA stood in the middle of a circle of four other performers. The four performers stroked and caressed EA and, after some time of this kind of attention, slowly began to undress her. When the performer was naked the other performers' gestures changed from gentle caresses to harsh picks, prods and pokes. They then began hitting, slapping and biting her and spitting on her. EA slumped to the floor and was kicked and rolled along the ground.

NK: *Women on stage are sacrosanct. You can't have a go at them. It would be ideologically unsound. So, should we do it and humiliate a woman on stage? How can we be ideologically unsound?*

AA: *I thought of it as a scene where a woman throws a man around the room wanting him, commanding him to "fuck me", but the man wanting nothing to do with her.*

JB: *Men always make the first move. The male is active, the female passive. Rape is an extension of that.*

CG: *It has to do with economic power.*

AA: *You belong to the world or the world belongs to you.*

NK: *A woman in hot pursuit of a man is a different kind of offensiveness to a man in hot pursuit of a woman. A whole different set of values apply.*

CG: *She's called a slut*

AT: *A woman taking the initiative turns a lot of guys off.*

JB: *Well, I guess it comes back to seduction in the end, the game, the play. It really doesn't matter who says, "let's fuck" in the end as long as there's the game, the play, making the other person feel special.* [He paraphrases the argument of Baudrillard's *Seduction* and reads some sections of it.] *The concept of seduction critiques the psychoanalytic concepts of repression and the unconscious. It critiques the ideology of depth, of the real and the true. Seduction denies things their truth, it turns truth into play. It foils all systems of power and meaning. Seduction is subversive. It is a game, the manipulation of appearances: "the terms of play, challenges, duels, the strategy of appearances - that is, the terms of seduction" (7).*

NK: *The show is missing something offensive. A clever thing that will deeply offend the audience and make them love us. The Cup Cake scene in The Pornography of Performance done to a woman.*

AA called CR, NK and JB onto the floor. She undressed and then approached each man in turn, shoving him and saying, "fuck me".

CG: *Throw yourself at them in desperation.*

JB: *And what should we do?*

AA: *React, push me away.*

They ran the improvisation a second time. AA approached each man individually prodding them and saying, "fuck me". They turned away. AA approached the men again, this time grabbing them, taking their arms and putting them around her waist saying, "fuck me. C'mon, put your arms around me". They struggled out of her embrace. In the next round, she became even rougher with the men. In one instance she pushed JB to the ground and climbed on top of him saying, "fuck me, hit me". He threw her off to the side and picked himself up off the floor.

The group ran the improvisation a third time. CR suggested that AA begin by being a bit more sensual. She approached the men slowly, throwing them furtive glances at first, which they returned. On her second approach, she physically took hold of the men. CG directed AA to plead with the men to "fuck her" rather than command them. The men turned away in disgust. The improvisation stopped. CR suggested that three women and three men perform the improvisation. They tried this variation with the women moving from man to man. JB interrupted the run: "It's not working. In the first version there was a fascination with AA to see how far she would go. Can we work that? Shall we try to give the first version some form?"

Fuck Me: AA began by approaching each man in turn, caressing him gently. They engaged with her, returning her attention and caresses, until she was attracted away from them by another man. On her second approach to each man, they turned away and attempted to brush off her advances. One man pulled off the shoulder of her shirt as he struggled out of her embrace. Her third approach to the men was a lot rougher. She pushed, shoved and grabbed them, saying, "fuck me". They pushed and shoved her

back. She approached one man, took his arms and put them around her. He struggled with the woman and, in the process, pulled her shirt off. He walked away holding the shirt like a trophy. She wrestled another man to the ground demanding, "fuck me! C'mon, kiss me!" He threw her off and quickly stood up and walked away. While she was on the ground one of the men approached her. She called him closer saying, "c'mon, fuck me! Fuck me!" He moved in, grabbed her hips and removed her leggings. He then walked away. AA, naked on the floor, screamed at his retreating figure, '"fuck me". Another man approached her quickly, sneered and threw a piece of her clothing at her. At that point, all the men turn their backs and walked away from her.

CG: *I liked the men undressing her and the fetishisation of her clothing but the distaste for her...*

EA: *What was visible was her humiliation as she pleads with them to fuck her.*

CR: *I liked her being thrown to the ground nude and the men looking up her cunt then the throwing of her clothes on her body at the end.*

NK: *I don't think we need to take that any further. Now we need a reversal scene in which a woman comes out as a carnivalesque, joyous figure. At the end of Fuck Me just leave the woman there naked on stage for a few moments. Leave the body there and go off on a different tangent.*

JB: *It would be great if what she falls onto - a wooden board or something, a bier - could rise and go into carnival. Now we've got our ideologically unsound bit, we'll have to cram in ideologically sound bits.*

NK: *What's offensive is that we don't tie it up and make a statement.*

4 Generating material: conceptual scenes

At certain points in this early phase of the process, performers might come to rehearsal with a complete concept for a scene. These scenes were formulated and discussed outside the regular space and time of rehearsal. Then, in rehearsal, the performer(s) presented their idea to the group who would then set about formatting and shaping the scene. Outside the rehearsal process performers would develop quite sophisticated and complete concepts for scenes in performance. Dutch dramaturge Mira Rafalowicz, perhaps best known to Anglo-American theatre critics for her collaboration with Joseph Chaikin of the Open Theatre on *Nightwalk*, terms this "pub or kitchen dramaturgy": "[t]he conversations in the pub after the rehearsals are an extension of the rehearsals and are at least as important. I believe in pub dramaturgy and kitchen dramaturgy, in thought

refined by a glass of wine or inspiration from an active palate" (132). Pub dramaturgy was an important feature in the Sydney Front rehearsal process. Most of the audience interaction scenes were devised in this way, including the Opening Scene, Audience Kidnap and Audience Strip.

The Opening Scene was devised by two performers who fronted up to rehearsal and explained their idea for the opening to the show which they had discussed the previous night over a beer at the pub:

JB: *The idea is to have the audience seating roped off with barbed wire. The performers will be dressed in wedding dresses and scattered across the audience seating. The audience will enter and be corralled in single file in front of the performers. On the floor they will be divided into two groups, the ones you find desirable and the ones you don't.*

NK: *We'll have the whole scene happening through musical and lighting changes and effects so that there is this sense that we are watching the audience perform. It's a reversal of the actor/audience relationship. They are putting on a show for us.*

JB: *Let's impro ideas about what we might do.*

NK: *We should format and shape the scene rather than improvise.*

AA: *What shall we do with the audience once we want to reclaim the space?*

NK: *Learn gestures of manipulation. Develop those ideas from The Pornography of Performance relating to exploring ways of making contact with the audience. Really manipulate the audience this time.*

CR: *Bring in the John Laws Sade ideas about touring the audience through the dressing room.*

NK: *Set the audience seating up but at no stage do the audience get to sit down.*

JB: *There's the promise that eventually they'll get to sit down but it remains unfulfilled.*

NK: *We shouldn't trap ourselves into a staging as we did in Pornography and John Laws Sade. Leave everything quite open. Ditch the idea of front on if the material we've got demands front on.*

JB: *Is there any other way we can think of using the space?*

5 Generating material: choreography

Choreography was another way in which the group devised material. When the performers tired of improvisation or conceptual work, they turned to the more physical work of choreography, "to let ideas have time to turn over". At the same time, the group

was asked in rehearsal if they wanted a lot of choreography in the show. It was agreed that there should be. As in the open improvisations, the starting point for the choreography of dance or movement sequences was a theme (for example, seduction and desire) or an idea (for example, the idea for a refined sixteenth-century court dance or a masked ball like the one in Mozart's opera, *Don Giovanni*).

In one instance, the group decided to choreograph a piece on the theme of seduction.
CR: *Let's try everyone in a semi-circle walking up the space desiring the same person.*
JB: *Can you sing something AT?*

The group formed a semi-circle in the space. AT was positioned at the centre point of the semi-circle. The group walked forward, slowly, while AT sang an aria. The other performers stole glances at AT and then quickly turned their faces, inscribed with an expression of ecstasy, away. CR, who had stood out of the run, directed the group to "use the audience as the desired one". The group repeated the walk up the space in a semi-circle with AT in the middle singing. This time their attention was turned on a single audience member. JB, whose turn it was to stand out, directed the group to "try it once more in a fantasy land of your own. You're at a party where everyone loves you. You're in an erotic wonderland. Keep it luscious". They performed the Seduction Walk scene a third time following JB's direction. In this run, NK stood out and offered directorial advice:
NK: *Keep it very still. What's it like with everybody a bit shy and coy? Keep it very small. Don't give away the intention, the desire. Just let the entire environment - the music, the lighting, the costumes, the speed and tension - work for it. So the audience don't know what's happening until right up till the very last moment. I imagine it as a full choral number, a Verdi chorus.*
AA: I see us coming out of the audience seating into the audience.
CG: Yes it's quite connected.
CR*: How does it look?*
NK: It's nice.
CG: It's a nice image.
NK: It's very nice, very serene, very un-Sydney Front...we need a bit of violence now.
JB: It's very beautiful and all that. We'll have to step on it and squash it a bit yet.

In another instance, the performers brainstormed ideas for a dance:

CR: *Does anyone have any ideas for a dance?*
AT: *A cape dance.*
JB: *An intricate and frantic dance.*
CG: *The pavan, a dignified court dance.*

NK demonstrated the basic steps of the Pavan dance to the group.
CR: *Yeah, the Don Juan myth is set in another world physically - that of the 16th century. It's so contained and controlled.*
AT: *The court dance is a kind of formalized seduction.*
NK: *I see it as happening all the time throughout the show with scenes breaking out of it. Seduce the audience with the dance. Everyone will have to be doing exactly the same thing so that it's something beautiful to look at.*

NK choreographed the Pavan dance for the rest of the group, adding in a Butoh variation. The group followed his steps.
JB: *We should work on it until we've got the precise thing we want with everyone doing exactly the same thing*
NK: *Those who can do it, teach it to the others. Remember, everyone will be wearing wedding dresses.*
AA: *The opposite to the formality and refinement of the court dance is the grotesque.*
CR: *We need something quite macabre. Something about death and destruction to follow the Pavan.*

At another time, the group decided that they needed "a strong, endurance dance for the women".
AA: With lots of falling down and getting back up.
EA: And lots of jumps and leaps.
CG: Something non-balletic preferably because some people wont be able to do the leaps and jumps. Something grounded would be better.

AA demonstrated what she called the "java dance", a dance she learnt in Java, Indonesia. In the basic pose, the performer stood with the legs shoulder-width apart, the knees bent low, and the feet turned out. The dance was performed by stomping or stamping from one foot to the other. One performer (AT) commented that "that's a ten

second dance". NK added a forward, pelvic thrusting movement to the dance. Everyone on the floor attempted this dance. NK then choreographed the Java Dance scene. He turned the basic forward thrusting motion into nine sets with each set directed in a different direction in the space. The whole dance used the entire space. NK ran the dance to music (the Catalogue Aria) already composed by RM. The performers decided that the dance fitted the music well. They joined in the dance, following NK. It seemed that they liked it so much that the whole group decided to perform it, not just the women.

CG: The dance has a nice shape to it.

NK: We can change the music to follow the shape of the dance. I'll see RM.

JB: It's a relentless dance. The endless fucking of Don Juan.

NK: We can work some breaks into it where we take a minute to do or say something to the audience then get back into the dance. I think we can run it for about 15 minutes.

6 *Shouldn't we read the playtext and libretto? How horrible! Do it yourself, otherwise it's like being in a play with characters...*

At one point in this phase of the rehearsal process, one performer (AT) said that she thought the material the group had devised up to that point wasn't very interesting and suggested that the company read Molina's seventeenth-century morality play or da Ponte's libretto: *Shouldn't we read the playtext and libretto?* She argued that a closer reading of these texts, including an analysis of character, would furnish a deeper understanding of the set of themes glossed in rehearsal including seduction, desire, male sexuality, hysteria and sexual violence. This suggestion was immediately rejected by another performer (JB), his negative response registering distaste or disgust at the notion of reading the playtext and libretto in rehearsal: *How horrible! Do it yourself, otherwise it's like being in a play with characters. Watch the videos. They're good for the music and plot.*

The reading practice preferred or allowed by the Sydney Front was exemplified by this second performer early in the process when he said, *From my reading last night we need three scenes. We need a seduction scene, a rape scene and a scene of death or retribution.* This comment was made at the end of the first week of the rehearsal process and passed unremarked upon at the time, seemingly unheard or ignored by the rest of the group. The silence of the collective should be understood, retrospectively, as tacit

agreement and co-operation since, at the end of the rehearsal process, the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* closely followed the shape prescribed in this initial, schematic reading of the legend of Don Juan. The performance opened with the seduction of the audience in the Opening Scene (including Seduction Walk), positioned toward the middle of the show was the "offensive" Pavan/Fuck Me scene, while in the Finale scene the performers enacted the death of Don Juan by throwing themselves backwards from the upper, back row of the rostra of audience seating as the audience watched from a proscenium arch stage at the opposite end of The Performance Space.

The texts mentioned by both performers, Tirso de Molina's *The Playboy of Seville or Supper with a Statue* (1630) and Lorenzo da Ponte's *The Punished Libertine or Don Giovanni* (1787), were distributed to company members prior to the beginning of the rehearsal process. However, these texts were not permitted or allowed in the rehearsal process itself. In the above exchange, JB directs AT to read the playtext and libretto (and to watch and listen to audio-visual recordings of Mozart's opera, *Don Giovanni*) in private, that is, outside the time and space of the rehearsal process proper. This prohibition on reading the playtext or libretto (and watching videos and listening to music) in rehearsal extended to the discussion of themes and the use, as explanatory or intellectual tools, of secondary critical texts such as Catherine Clement's *Opera or the Undoing of Women.* Any mode of talk or discussion in rehearsal was limited to naming "bits" or "scenes" or to technical directions and instructions offered to the group by a performer standing on the sideline watching the process. The rehearsal process itself was reserved for "doing" words and themes taken from the Don Juan legend and topics devised by the performers themselves, based on their own research and reading. Through improvisation, conceptual work and choreography, the collective transformed these borrowed (thematic and topical) terms into action-images, dance or movement pieces, or a concrete (spatio-temporal) arrangement of the relationship between performer and spectator.

This difference or dispute between the two performers, above, revolves around conflicting notions of the status and use of the written dramatic playtext and libretto in the rehearsal process. One performer affords these texts the status of the "well made play".[1] She suggests that an appropriate reading should construe or take the text apart in the same careful and logical manner in which it was constructed. The implication is that

the Sydney Front's "doing" - taking words or themes and improvising them - is an improper and, thus, impoverished, superficial or shallow reading of the Don Juan legend.

For the Sydney Front collective, however, a text is a resource to be used rather than an object of reverence to be understood in all its coherence, completeness and intricate complexity. In rehearsal, the performers regarded the playtext and libretto, and the audio-visual recording of the opera, as cultural resources to be plundered and used in ways determined by their own social and theatrical interests and orientations, not by the structure of the text itself, nor by the intentions (however they may be discerned) of its author. Asserting a lack of interest in and distaste for the well made play formula, the traditional model of play construction and deconstruction, and against a reading that faithfully followed the narrative or psychological through line of the dramatic plot, the Sydney Front encouraged and, in fact, re-trained or disciplined what might be conceived, paradoxically, as a wilfully mischievous, deliberately inappropriate or undisciplined reading of the *Don Juan* legend.

As I argued in the foreword to this second part of the thesis, Michel de Certeau provides a conceptual framework within which it is possible to begin to articulate the Sydney Front's distinctive way of working in the theatre. De Certeau's work focuses on the undisciplined subject, the rogue reader or poacher, and on the tactical operations of these social agents. He describes these operations as "*a way of thinking invested in a way of acting*" and "an art of combination which cannot be dissociated from an art of using" (xv; my emphasis). I want to suggest that the Sydney Front's "doing" should be understood as a reading , in the sense meant by de Certeau, that emphasizes the use or (re)combination of ready made representations (words, plot-themes, visual images, songs and musical pieces, etc.) appropriated from the legend of Don Juan.

7 Nomadic readers and textual poachers

Michel de Certeau has characterized the active reading exemplified in the Sydney Front's rehearsal process as nomadic and as a kind of textual poaching. He says that "[f]ar from being writers... readers are travelers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves" (174). In other words, reading as poaching is an impertinent raid launched upon the terrain of literary landowners that

takes away only those materials that are useful or pleasurable to the reader. The text, then, may be compared to the terrain of a landowner and the reader to a poacher: readers poach meanings that promote their own interests while avoiding capture by an ideological gamekeeper who controls the overall structure of the text itself.

De Certeau's poaching analogy describes the relationship between readers and writers as an ongoing struggle for possession of the text and for control over its meanings. This struggle, however, is not fought on equal ground or a level playing field. There is a significant power differential between readers as nomadic poachers and writers as proprietorial gamekeepers of the text and the literary preserve. De Certeau speaks of this unequal power relationship in terms of the "scriptural economy"; the dominant mode of production organised according to the "scriptural apparatus of modern discipline" (131). In this way, he suggests that readers do not confront writers as individual authors but, rather, the force of institutional regulation and control.

According to de Certeau, the scriptural economy is dominated by textual producers and institutionally sanctioned interpreters working to administer, regulate and control the production and circulation of meanings. He says,

> [r]eading is as it were overprinted by a relationship of forces (between teachers and pupils, or between producers and consumers) whose instrument it becomes. The use made of the book by privileged readers constitutes it as a secret of which they are the "true" interpreters. It interposes a frontier between the text and its readers that can be crossed only if one has a passport delivered by these official interpreters, who transform their own reading (which is *also* a legitimate one) into an orthodox "literality" that makes other (equally legitimate) readings either heretical (not "in conformity" with the meaning of the text) or insignificant (to be forgotten). From this point of view "literal" meaning is the index and the result of a social power, that of an elite...the text becomes a cultural weapon, a private hunting reserve, the pretext for a law that legitimates as "literal" the interpretation given by *socially* authorized professionals and intellectuals (*clercs*). (171)

Under this model explicated by de Certeau the reader is supposed to serve as the more or less passive recipient of authorial meaning, while any deviation from meanings clearly encoded into the text is viewed negatively, as a failure to properly or successfully understand what the author meant to say. Henry Jenkins notes that educational institutions normalize such practice in and through literacy training; disciplining and

teaching school children to read for authorial meaning, that is, to consume the narrative without leaving their own marks upon it. The teachers' red pen rewards those who correctly decipher or decode the text and penalizes those who get it wrong while students' personal feelings and associations are judged as irrelevant to the task of literary analysis. De Certeau states that "[t]his fiction condemns consumers to subjection because they are guilty of infidelity or ignorance when confronted by the mute "riches" of the treasury...hidden in the work...the text" (171). The student is expected to show proper respect for the expertise of specially trained and sanctioned interpreters, and to value this specialist knowledge over the street knowledge of the everyday reader. In this sense, the teacher's authority becomes vitally linked to the authority which readers grant to textual producers. The mastery of language becomes emblematic of the cultural authority and social power exercised by the dominant classes within the social formation (Jenkins 25).

Although de Certeau's account of the scriptural economy is informed by Foucault's theory of a mode of power termed discipline, his task is almost the exact opposite of Foucault's. In contrast to Foucault, de Certeau is interested in the various ways of operating that "constitute the innumerable practices by means of which users re-appropriate the space organised by techniques of sociocultural production" (xiv). He attempts to articulate a mode of practice in and through which populations manage to resist the encroachment of disciplinary mechanisms and to thwart the normalisation of subjectivity through an institutional complex of power, knowledge and bodies. As John Frow notes, "de Certeau's task is not to make clear how the violence of order is transmuted into a disciplinary technology, but rather to bring to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the networks of disciplinary power" (55).

De Certeau insists that behind the "monotheism" of the dominant panoptical procedures there exists a "polytheism" of scattered practices: concealed or disseminated but not silenced and erased by the dominant forms. These are the practices or tactics of evasive conformity by which users, consumers or readers camouflage their miniscule disruptions of an order they cannot openly contest. According to de Certeau, these innumerable other practices, called "minor" because they have failed to give rise to either a discursive

configuration or to a technological system, hold the potential for change. Reading is one of these privileged, in the sense of potentially destabilising, practices.

The inevitable starting point for de Certeau's description of tactical practices is reading, since the scriptural economy prioritises writing as a form of social inscription or imprinting: "informing the population", "moulding the public" (166). This notion of writing as a form of social production reduces and relegates reading to a secondary position, where it is misrecognised as passive consumption or reception. Reading is, in other words, potentially a political activity since it is the basis for a broader transformation of the social relationships that overdetermine the reader's relation to texts (Frow 58). According to de Certeau, there already exists an experience of reading other than that of passivity, although this activity of reading tends to remain unrecognised and unacknowledged since it is outside the range of the panoptic gaze of disciplinary institutions: "to read is to be elsewhere, where *they* are not, in another world; it is to constitute a secret scene, a place one can enter and leave when one wishes; to create dark corners into which no one can see within an existence subjected to technocratic transparency" (173).

De Certeau speaks of reading as an "exercise in ubiquity", an "impertinent absence". He asserts that "sometimes, like a hunter in the forest, the reader spots the written quarry, follows a trail, laughs, plays tricks, or else like a gambler, lets himself be taken in by it" (173). In one instance, the reader is totally absorbed in the activity of reading, to the extent that this immersion in the book results in the loss of any sense of time and place; "darkness gathers around the book" (173). In contrast to this undivided reading, a kind of active letting go, there is the almost opposite experience of the reader who refuses to follow the narrative flow, who plays diverting games or clever tricks. Although de Certeau isn't explicit about the relationship between these two instances of reading, it does seem that they are, in fact, closely related, even simultaneous activities, in so far as readers can only play diverting games and clever tricks if they are in an intimate and proximate relationship to the text.

As Henry Jenkins notes, this aspect of de Certeau's work is largely ignored and, indeed, de Certeau himself seems to disregard the import of his argument (61). He constructs a problematic historical argument, "positing a movement within Western culture from

orality towards literacy which has worked to free the reader from textually imposed ideologies" (Jenkins 61). De Certeau writes that in earlier times when an oral culture was dominant, the reader interiorised the text by speaking it aloud. That is, the reader "made his voice the body of the other; he was its [the text's] actor" (176). De Certeau asserts that today the text is read "without uttering the words aloud" (175). Thus, the text "no longer imposes its own rhythm on the subject, it no longer manifests itself through the reader's voice. This withdrawal of the body, which is the condition of its autonomy, is a distancing of the text. It is the reader's *habeas corpus*" (176). So, according to de Certeau, modern readers experience the text without speaking the words, without moving their lips, and without engaging their bodies. The result is that today readers are able to hold the text at a distance and to gain mastery over its meanings. The separation of speech from reading releases the reader to engage freely in the nomadic poaching that de Certeau attributes to popular reading practice (Jenkins 62).

In taking this line of argument, which is an endorsement of critical distance, de Certeau fails to recognise the most profound aspects of his own argument. His minor argument implies that poachers do not read or observe the text from a physical, emotional or cognitive distance. Rather, poachers trespass on the property of others; they appropriate it and hold onto it, incorporate its meanings and remake these borrowed materials in their own terms (Jenkins 62). On this account, critical distance is seen as one of the means by which the scriptural economy works to keep the reader's hands off the text. For the distanced reader, the text remains an object outside the bounds of the reading subject. It is thus unavailable for appropriation because its materials can never fully become the reader's own property. Jenkins asserts that this would suggest that proximity is a necessary precondition for the re-appropriations and re-workings de Certeau's theory suggests. The text is drawn close not so that the reader can be possessed by it, but rather so that the reader may more fully possess it. Only by close engagement with the text's meanings and materials can the reader consume the fiction and make it an active resource (Jenkins 62).

For Jenkins, de Certeau's minor argument focuses attention on the social agency of readers as poachers. He claims that the position of the reader is not merely an effect of the textual structure; the reader is not drawn into the pre-constituted world of the fiction, but rather into a world she has created from borrowed textual materials (62-63). Here the

reader's pre-established values (past history, experience, habits, tastes, desires, etc.) are at least as important as those preferred by the narrative system. Reading as poaching is "advances and retreats, tactics and games played with the text" (de Certeau 175).

In this critical context, the Sydney Front's refusal to allow the playtext by Molina and the libretto by da Ponte to be read in rehearsal should be understood as a tactical manoeuvre, an attempt to resist a certain kind of discipline and training related to the reading and production of the dramatic playtext and the libretto. David Birch has identified a scriptural model operating in certain current, but traditional, critical perceptions of Drama. It is, Birch says, a view that sees meaning as belonging only to the writer of the dramatic playtext and, furthermore, a view that sees meaning as belonging only to a particular semiotic system - writing (*Drama, Praxis, Performance* 170). Examining actual instances in which dramatic writers have disputed a director's production of their play, Birch shows that certain writers hold the view that meaning is an absolute reality encoded into the dramatic playtext by the writer. According to this model of dramatic production, the task of the director and performers is not to change or alter this reality but to stage it faithfully. In this model, meaning is viewed as something quite distinct from interpretation. The meaning of the play belongs absolutely to the writer, not the director or performers, and will always remain the same. In other words, reading or interpretation should not change or distort the reality of the meaning encoded into the text by the writer(s). Such views on meaning and interpretation reflect a traditional understanding of the role of the writer which ties intentions, desires and meanings to an individual insight which others by a process of interpretation must eventually come to share. If they do not then the meaning of the play put into the text by the writer has not been understood and the interpretation would therefore be considered faulty. According to such views, as Birch notes, interpretation is reduced to the re-presentation or expression of someone else's - a writer's - language, effectively limiting the role of the director and privileging the role of the writer (*Drama, Praxis, Performance* 170-171).

De Certeau argues that this model of reading is not based on the productivity of the reader but on the social institution that overdetermines the reader's relationship to the text (171). Birch similarly challenges the scriptural model. He insists that "there is no fixed meaning which is 'brought to life' in production" (*Drama, Praxis, Performance* 170).

He argues that the dramatic playtext is a site or surface for the construction of meaning, the realisation of which depends on the contexts or social situations in which the text is made or produced. The different contexts in which the dramatic playtext is instantiated - reading, analysis, rehearsal, production, reception - are (social) processes which are controlled to a large extent by people other than writers. In and through a creative process such as rehearsal, then, many new meanings, new texts, new languages are created and constructed. These new meanings and interpretations are not simply presentations as expressions of someone else's - a writer's – language. As Birch states, "meanings differ according to different, though often related, semiotic systems. The according of prime status to one system only is untenable. Intentions to mean in one system should not therefore, be used as a means of privileging meanings in another system" (*Drama, Praxis, Performance* 170).

The Sydney Front's refusal to allow the playtext or the libretto to be read in rehearsal should be viewed as an attempt to subvert the power of the scriptural economy. The Sydney Front recognise the fact that the text does position the reader and this is the main reason for the prohibition of the play text and libretto in the rehearsal process. Molina's and Da Ponte's texts are only permitted or allowed to be read outside the collective creative process, that is, outside of official interpretive practice (rehearsal), in relatively autonomous times and spaces where educational or theatrical institutions have a limited or, at least, a reduced hold over the practices and processes of the reader and performer. This is also the case for the texts and other sources read alongside, and sometimes against, the playtext and libretto. In the early stages of the rehearsal process, the performers drew on and introduced a vast reserve of other inter-textual meanings and materials into the process. For example, alongside their reading and use of the Don Juan legend (the playtext and libretto), the performers watched and frequently referred to a video recording of a production of the Mozart opera, *Don Giovanni*. Some of the performers read an array of academic or critical texts to flesh out certain words, themes and concepts related to staging seduction. These texts included, for example, Baudrillard's *Seduction*, Andrea Dworkin's *Against Pornography*, Georges Bataille's *Visions of Excess*, the "polysexuality" issue of *semiotext[e]* edited by Francois Peraldi, Klaus Thewleweit's *Male Fantasies*, Catherine Clement's *Opera or the Undoing of Women*, Kristeva's *Tales of Love*, Stallybrass' *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression,* and Kroker/Kroker's *The Hysterical Male*. The performers also made associations with

Independent American cinema; for example, Dennis Hopper's character in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (on the theme of hysterical men), Lynch's *Wild at Heart* (the *Fuck Me* scene), and an Andy Warhol film (on the theme of humiliate a woman). British film and television comedian John Cleese provided a contrastive example of male hysteria to Hopper in *Blue Velvet* and Willem Dafoe in *Wild at Heart*. The company also viewed video recordings of the work of Pina Bausch's Wuppertal Dance Theatre and DV8 Physical Theatre. This is work that is predominantly concerned with issues of sexed bodies, that is, with the representation of male and female bodies, and masculinity and femininity, and associated topics such as sexual violence. The Sydney Front drew on the style or aesthetic of these companies and used moments from individual performances. The Sydney Front's own history of performance work (*Pornography of Performance*, etc.) provided significant input concerning the use of the performance space and the staging of seduction.

In the rehearsal process itself, the performers literally embodied or incorporated what they had taken from their intertextual reading of the Don Juan legend - words, themes, ideas, concepts and images – through processes such as improvisation and choreography, and through ideas for staging. John Baylis has referred to a significant part of this process as "word, as opposed to character, based improvisation" (*Lecture*). He asserts that the Sydney Front's process of improvisation does not follow a narrative or psychological through line but is, rather, associative or nomadic. De Certeau's notion of textual poaching is inseparable from his notion of nomadic reading. For de Certeau, readers are always in movement, "not here or there" (174), not constrained by permanent property ownership but, rather, constantly moving from one text to another, appropriating and using new materials, making new meanings.

So, too, the Sydney Front performers are not just textual poachers but also nomadic readers, advancing on and raiding their (inter-)textual reserve, then retreating to work themselves on what they have taken, to make or create something out of their borrowings, then advancing again on their textual resources to borrow a basic scenic shape or outline for this self-devised material. At the same time, the performers' trajectories should not be understood as determined by (or at least seen as always in reference to) the playtext and libretto. They do not move back and forth between the playtext and libretto and the rehearsal, as if the written texts formed some kind of

boundary or border line, delimiting their meaning-making practices and processes in rehearsal. In the first phase of rehearsal ("Don't talk about it, just do it"), the performers took words, themes and ideas from their private readings of the Don Juan legend and used these as the basis for improvisation and choreography. Additionally, they borrowed concepts and directly "put them on the floor", as in the example of the Opening Scene. In and through this active, physically oriented working process, the group amassed enough material to begin thinking about combining the bits and pieces, and some "scenes", to create their own piece of theatre. In order to do so, the collective took three key themes or actions (seduction, rape and death or retribution) gleaned from one member's private reading of the Don Juan legend to give some kind of basic scenic shape or outline to their own self-devised material.

8 Poaching as *bricolage*: the Sydney Front's intertextual re-working of the Don Juan legend.

> This activity of reading...can be considered as a form of...*bricolage*...an arrangement made with "the materials at hand", a production "that has no relationship to a project", and which readjusts "the residues of previous construction and destruction"...This production...does not compose a unified set: it is...dispersed in time, a sequence of temporal fragments not joined together but disseminated through repetitions and different modes of enjoyment, in memories and successive knowledges. (de Certeau 174-175)

De Certeau draws a close connection between reading as poaching and what is called *bricolage*, as defined by Levi-Strauss and cited by de Certeau above. In drawing a relationship between poaching and *bricolage*, de Certeau characterises the activity of reading as a form of meaning-making, of semiosis, which is implicitly intertextual. Readers as poachers take other people's property and incorporate or assimilate these appropriated terms into their own schemas. These textual fragments are the intertextual resources that readers re-assemble according to their own blueprints. The activity of reading is thus a re-writing or re-making of text in the image of the reader rather than a textual authority (writer, producer, etc.). In this way, de Certeau's notion of poaching is linked to the theoretical concept of intertextuality. At this point, I wish to consider some key points of comparison between de Certeau's concept of the reader as a *bricoleur* and this concept of intertexuality.

Like de Certeau, critical theory has challenged and rejected the primacy and privilege accorded to authorial authority, that is, to the authorial ownership and control of meaning and interpretation. Reading Bakhtin against the background of Russian Formalism and Prague Structuralism, Kristeva attributes to Bakhtin the insight that "literary structure does not simply exist but is generated in relation to another structure" (*Desire in Language* 64-65). Bakhtin asserts that the literary word is that other structure: the literary word is "an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning)" (Kristeva *Desire in Language* 65, Kristeva's emphasis). On this account, the word – or dynamic gram, gram being a word that Derrida borrows from Kristeva - is "a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addessee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context" (*Desire in Language* 65). Bakhtin's dialogism is, in turn, conceptualised by Kristeva as intertextuality. She states: "each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read...any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (*Desire in Language* 66).

Roland Barthes' notion of textuality as the practice of reading and re-writing assumes Kristeva's notion of intertextuality. In his seminal essay, "The Death of the Author", Barthes calls into question a notion of the author as the origin and owner of meaning and interpretation. He contends that:

> Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance saying *I*: language knows a 'subject', not a 'person', and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together', suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it. (145)

Barthes rejects authorial authority and focuses critical attention on the speaking, writing and reading subject. He conceives of this subject as always already spoken or written in and by language: "it is language that speaks, not the author; to write is...to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'"(143). What Barthes means to say is that the reading and writing subject is not an original, authentic or self-identical source of textual meaning and interpretation. He claims that the text "is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (146). In other words, Barthes calls into question the very notion of origin with respect to writing and reading. Textual practice, according to Barthes, describes a field

without origin, a terrain comprised of traces of other discourses or writings. Similarly Foucault in "What is an Author?" suggests that we analyse the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse rather than as its originator. He asserts that the author is only a functional principle, a name given to what is essentially the anonymous murmur of discourse, an inter-discursivity or what for Barthes is inter-textuality. Bathes states:

> The inter-textual in which every text is held, itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the "sources", the "influences" of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas. (*From Work to Text* 160)

The radical rejection of an authorial authority is absolute in Derrida's critique of the capture of representation by the metaphysics of "logocentrism". As discussed in an earlier part of this thesis (see Chapter 3), logocentrism refers to the reduction of writing (or all manner of inscription) to a secondary status as "vehicle". It is concomitant with the privileging of the transcendental signified over the material sign, or the purely intelligible or rational over the merely sensible. In an interview with Julia Kristeva, Derrida challenges the concept of writing as a form of mimesis, that is, as the re-presentation of an author-creator's thoughts, ideas and intentions. He outlines a new theory and concept of writing based on a notion of the *gram*, the mark or inscribed trace of différance. The gram replaces de Saussure's concept of the sign (signifier and signified), formerly the word (sound and thought), as the most basic unit of language. According to Derrida,

> Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each "element" - phoneme or grapheme - being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the text produced only in the transformation of another text. Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only everywhere, differences and traces of traces. The gram then is the most general concept of semiology – which thus becomes grammatology. (*Positions* 26)

Derrida's concept of grammatology is a theory of writing as citation and iteration. He is emphatic that the intention, thoughts and ideas of an author-creator do not underlie or produce writing. Rather, writing is manifest marks on the page. As material inscription the condition and possibility of writing is that it is iterable or able to be read, re-marked and re-made differently, that is, not in the self-same image of any original. Writing and

reading form a single signifying practice (see also Barthes *The Death of the Author* 142-148), an autonomous and anonymous machine-like procedure in and through which the subject is produced and re-produced as an effect (and not the point of origin) of this textual operation:

> For a writing to be a writing it must continue to "act" and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, be it because of a temporary absence, because he is dead or, more generally, because he has not employed his absolutely actual and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his desire to say what he means, in order to sustain what seems to be written "in his name". (*Limited Inc* 8)

Derrida's theory of writing as iteration and citation describes the practice of *bricolage* if we take Ulmer's summary of Levi-Strauss' conceptual term as a definition. According to Ulmer there are four characteristics basic to the activity of *bricolage*: decoupage (or severing); preformed or extant messages or materials; assemblage (montage); discontinuity or heterogeneity (Foster 84). Derrida argues that the trace-structure of writing implies that "the possibility of disengagement and citational graft belongs to the structure of every mark, spoken or written, and constitutes every mark in writing before and outside of every horizon of semio-linguistic communication" (*Limited Inc* 12). He says that the activity of writing necessarily entails,

> ...the possibility of its functioning being cut off, at a certain point, from its "original" desire-to-say-what-one-means and from its participation in a saturable and constraining context. Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written (in the current sense of this opposition), can be cited, put between quotation marks; in doing so it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable. (*Limited Inc* 12)

Thus, Derrida's concept of writing describes the activity and practice of bricolage, as writers select and take pre-formed meanings or messages from one context and re-distribute and re-assemble these ready-made meanings in other contexts to create new and different, and sometimes contradictory, meanings.

I have spent some time elucidating poststructuralist theories of intertextuality since there is a tendency in current theatre research to utilise such a notion to conceptualise the relations of production between dramatic text and theatrical performance in certain kinds of (so-called "postmodern") performance practices. That is, there is a tendency to explain

work such as the Sydney Front's in terms of performativity with its associated values of undecidability, indeterminacy and unlimited semiosis, as opposed to linear, hierarchical, author-itarian theatrical or text-bound representation. A leading example of this tendency can be found in the work of American theatre theorist, John Rouse. In "Textuality and Authority in Theatre and Drama: Some Contemporary Possibilities", Rouse focuses on current work which puts into question the ways in which a theatrical performance can be said to be a production "of" a pre-existing playtext. He examines the work of New York based experimental theatre company, The Wooster Group (dir. Liz LeCompte) and, in particular, the company's 1984/5 production entitled *L.S.D (...Just The High Points...)*, which was an adaptation of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. Rouse provides a short summary of this theatre piece:

> The piece was divided into four sections. Part 1 collaged a selection of texts by Timothy Leary, William Burroughs, and other gurus of the 1960s drug culture, read spontaneously and at random by male company members wearing 1980s street clothes, against the delivery of set selections from a taped interview with Ann Rower, Leary's babysitter. In Part 2, female and adolescent performers in historical costume joined the men for rapid passage through "just the high points" of *The Crucible*; the scene ended with a dance. Part 3 set a recreation of the group rehearsing Part 2 while on acid against a video that moved from the New England woods (Leary's territory) to locations in Miami (land of Gordon G. Liddy). Part 4 took up the connections introduced geographically by this video; performers at the table recreated part of one of the Liddy-Leary debates. The piece ended with a grotesque dance by the performers, again in costume, this time pseudo-Latino. (148-9)

What most concerns Rouse in his account of the production is the controversy surrounding it. As he explains, the playwright, Arthur Miller, took legal action claiming violation of copyright and, despite a series of alterations subsequently made by the Wooster Group to make their adaptation more acceptable to the author, forced the show to close. Rouse indicates a point of disjunction between a particular mode of production (postmodern bricolage) and copyright law, an eighteenth-century invention. He notes that although certain scenes selected for inclusion in *L.S.D...* were recognisable and performed in sequence as they were written in *The Crucible*, the Wooster Group's *L.S.D...* was clearly not a "normal" production "of" *The Crucible* in any other sense. The Wooster Group's performance piece did not tell the drama's story. The company performed what the performers considered to be the high points of Miller's play in combination with a selection of other texts of lower or non-artistic status. As Rouse says,

they "made dramaturgic use of fragmentation and collage techniques to fracture the narrative spine around which realistic drama organises its embodiment of a possible world, hiding its status as discourse behind a referential illusion" (149). He concludes that given this "activity of citation, it doesn't seem quite accurate to call *L.S.D...* an interpretation of *The Crucible*, but we may call it a reading of the play, a reading staged as an activity of intertextuality" (150). Rouse suggests, in other words, that the activity of reading is not a meaning making or interpretive activity but is play, a practical re-writing of the text, a dissemination or deferral and delay of meaning.

I have selected the above example in order to demonstrate some of the strengths of de Certeau's conceptual system and, alternatively, the shortcomings of a certain theory of intertextuality, particularly as it tends to be used to explain relations of production between dramatic playtext and theatrical performance, as well as tensions between the author of the dramatic playtext and those whose task it is to produce or perform the text; director, performers, designers, technicians, etc. Based on de Certeau's work, it would seem that, contrary to Rouse, the issue of meaning and interpretation is central to the conflict between The Wooster Group and Arthur Miller. Whereas Rouse thinks Miller's intervention absurd and the copyright laws that supported his move to close The Wooster Group's production of *L.S.D...* outdated, I wish to suggest that this example illustrates, par excellence, the workings of the scriptural economy. Within the scriptural economy writers or producers, that is, institutionally sanctioned interpreters, have control over and regulate the kinds of meanings that can be made and that are in circulation. Copyright laws must be viewed as a vital mechanism of the scriptural economy which serves to ensure the power and privilege of writer-producers over reader-poachers. In the practice of enforcing certain laws, the legal institution preserves the privilege of socially authorised professionals and intellectuals over the interests of textual consumers. In the above example, Miller's authorial authority was upheld by social and legal institutions, and it was determined that the reader or performer had no proper or legitimate claim to the text. In other words, official textuality only acknowledges and admits those meanings and interpretations that accord with those they prescribe. At the same time, it works to systematically exclude alternative or other voices. That certain kinds of meanings and interpretations are not only considered undesirable but are disallowed, indicates that at some level the process of reading and re-writing texts is not an unlimited process producing undecidable or indeterminate reading effects. In other

words, readers as poachers and *bricoleurs* produce meanings that may, potentially, contest and compete with those of textual producers who actually make the meanings readers borrow and take as their own. Although poachers are essentially powerless or dependent on the strategic power of producers, at the level of symbolic interpretation and appropriation poachers' tactical actions challenge and resist the power and control of the scriptural economy to regulate and control meaning and interpretation. The issues that I have examined in this section of the chapter highlight the potentially conflicting interests of producers and consumers, writers and readers.

9 *If it doesn't come from the story, where does it come from?* Reading formations: lived experience and an inter-textual horizon of expectation

AT: *We haven't really looked at the Don Juan story yet.*

JB: *That wasn't our intention.*

AA: *Pluck bits out of it.*

AT: *But if it doesn't come from the story, where does it come from?*

JB: *From where here (pointing to his head) meets the Don Juan story.*

In response to one performer's extended questioning of the nature of the group's reading and interpretative practice in rehearsal, some members of the Sydney Front were explicit as to what their reading of the Don Juan legend entails. The performers admit that they did not intend to read the story closely, nor did they intend to faithfully follow the narrative flow of the playtext or libretto. They state that their aim was, rather, to pluck or "poach" bits and pieces from the text. Poaching, as the performers themselves acknowledge, is an active process in which the performers bring to the legend of Don Juan their own internalised knowledges and experiences. These other materials, inter-textual resources borrowed from other writings, internalised as the performers' own (held in their heads), brought to the rehearsal process and insinuated into the reading of the Don Juan legend, introduce the element of difference into the process of meaning-making. In this way, the Sydney Front's reading and re-writing of the legend of Don Juan operates on two levels: an official and an unofficial level. The Sydney Front's reading and re-writing practice points to the conflict that can potentially arise from differences between what an author meant to say and what a reader makes of what is written. Thus,

the Sydney Front's rehearsal process can be viewed as a literal demonstration of the theoretical concept of *bricolage*.

At the same time, for cultural theorist, Tony Bennett, the Sydney Front's practice should be understood as an untutored or undisciplined reading; "a reading produced from outside rather than inside the disciplines, outside rather than inside the academy" (cited in Threadgold *Feminist Poetics* 32). It is, in other words, not only intertextual but also interdisciplinary (Threadgold *Feminist Poetics* 31). With the notion of reading formation Bennett provides a way of tracing where some readings which seem to come from nowhere (or, I would add, anywhere) actually come from. These stories are the product of a reading formation which the academy cannot comprehend because the reading comes from outside it: the reader has literally "been looking up from the text, his body and memory working to produce the opinions which, when asked, he said, 'came out of my head'" (Bennett cited in Threadgold *Feminist Poetics* 32). The Sydney Front performers assert that the other materials they draw on came out of their head, thus pointing to their activity as the product of a particular reading formation.

Drawing on Bennett and Woollacott's notion of reading formation, John Tulloch asserts that readers as bricoleurs make texts work by way of *other* materials, or reading formations, already at hand (224). Bennett and Woollacott define the notion of reading formation as,

> the intertextual relations which prevail in a particular context, thereby activating a given body of texts by ordering the relation between them in a specific way such that their reading is already cued in specific directions from such relations ...
>
> Reading formations are...the product of definite social and ideological relations of reading composed, in the main, of those apparatuses – schools, the press, critical reviews, fanzines – within and between which the socially dominant forms for the superintendence of reading are both constructed and contested. (cited in Tulloch 221)

The reading formation accounts for the regulation of the encounter between reader and text. The notion of reading formation suggests that the encounter between the reader and the text is a product of and productively reactivated within the complex social, historical, institutional and material relationships that constitute a particular subject's world of experience (Threadgold *Feminist Poetics* 32-33). Which is to say that these

other materials that the reader brings to the textual encounter are not randomly selected or indiscriminately used by readers. Rather, readers carry to the reading of texts their cultural (inter-textual, context-bound, embodied and situated) experience as readers. They bring with them to each new situation pre-established expectancies and plans, or schema, which are based on previous social experience. Thus, citing Bennett, Threadgold writes that "only knowledge of the historical and social variability of the reader will enable a full understanding of this particular encounter between the reader and the text" (*Feminist Poetics* 32).

Paradoxically, in the Sydney Front rehearsal process the performers refuse to divulge the other meanings and significations that they introduce or artfully insinuate into the process of meaning-making. The performers refuse to discuss where they are coming from as readers; that is, what they are introducing into the reading of the legend of Don Juan, and why. Thus, while the performers can be seen to be working within an academic context and are influenced by the network of texts circulating around the Don Juan legend, the refusal to discuss the textual resources and critical or theoretical ideas that the performers are drawing on represents a negation of the particular reading formation that regulates their encounter with the legend of Don Juan. In the Don Juan rehearsal process, the performers appear to be interested in introducing other materials into the meaning-making process in order to demonstrate a theoretical point with respect to that meaning-making process. The Sydney Front appears to be interested in difference in and for the sake of difference itself. This, I would argue, is a negative reading formation.

At the same time, the performers do borrow certain themes and ideas (for example, seduction, rape, death and retribution) from their reading of the story of Don Juan. In an earlier section of this chapter, I acknowledged some of the inter-textual and multi-medial resources that the performers drew on and utilised in rehearsal. In stating specific texts and materials that certain performers were reading (outside the rehearsal process), watching and/or listening to, it is also important to acknowledge the various contexts – social, professional, etc. – which influence or shape the performers' choice of materials and on which the performers draw. It is at the intersections of these and the story that the Sydney Front's reading of the Don Juan legend is re-produced. Thus, the Sydney Front does have a reading formation, but it is one that establishes an opposition

between academic and other kinds of practice. Their reworking of the legend of Don Juan reflects this. The performers poach themes and ideas from their reading of the legend of Don Juan. Then without discussion or debate, they re-work these themes according to a reading formation that includes acting, theatre and opera practice, and which draws heavily on performers' training in classical music, opera, dance theatre, physical theatre, and corporeal mime. This is the "stuff" that gets into the rehearsal process.

To understand the Sydney Front's re-working of the legend of Don Juan, it is important to know, for instance, that some of the performers have an intimate working knowledge of the libretto and of Mozart's score. AT is a trained opera singer and NK is a trained concert pianist, which is why they are both able to instantly utilise this knowledge in rehearsal. For example, in an early rehearsal of the Is It In? scene, NK was able to move straight to the piano, which happened to be in a corner of the rehearsal space and play an aria/music from the opera. Similarly AT was able to sing an aria in rehearsal on cue, as she did in the Seduction Walk scene. The strong musical aesthetic in the Don Juan rehearsal process derives from these performers' training and competencies. Similarly, there is a strong dance aesthetic that is part of the rehearsal process. Again NK is a key figure here. His training in modern dance and his experience as a dancer in The One Extra Dance Company provides significant input into the rehearsal process, as does AA's exposure to Javanese dance on a tour of Indonesia with Entr'acte (see the Java Dance scene). Another performer, CR, was very familiar with Entr'acte's movement based aesthetic having worked previously with the company, and before that with Kiss, a European avant-garde theatre company that CG also worked with for a time. Also, the co-founders of Entr'acte worked with the Sydney Front in the early days of the company's development so, in this sense, a physical/movement based focus is a mutual orientation. The Sydney Front's oeuvre (*Pornography of Performance*, *John Laws Sade*, *Woman in the Wall*, etc.) and the group's history as a collective acted as an important resource in terms of staging seduction. Finally, another point of intersection, another layer to the Sydney Front's reading of the Don Juan legend, was JB's dramaturgical skills. His selection and reading of a range of critical texts complemented the other performers' focus on music, the body in performance, and dance and movement.

The notion of reading formation is therefore crucial to understanding the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* rehearsal process. The company's reading formation apparently establishes an opposition between academic practice (close reading, analysis, discussion, debate, etc.) and other kinds of practices such as acting, dance, physical theatre, corporeal mime and opera. The Sydney Front rejects analysis and discussion of the ideas and themes taken from the legend of Don Juan for "doing" or performing them. Thus, the Sydney Front's reading and re-working of the legend of Don Juan reflects the performers and their worlds more than it does the world of the legend.

10 "Habitus": the reader-performer as "a world within the world"

> Every quotation or found text broadens a theatre production. They bring a whole world with them. The world. (Mira Rafalowicz 138)

> The *habitus* - embodied history, internalised as second nature and so forgotten as history - is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. As such, it is what gives practices their relative autonomy with respect to external determinations of the immediate present. This autonomy is that of the past, enacted and acting, which, functioning as accumulated capital, produces history on the basis of history and so ensures permanence in change that makes *the individual agent a world within the world.* (Bourdieu *The Logic Of Practice* 56, my emphasis)

> I use whatever I can...I ask people to bring in images and they bring in what they find or like. It is like a library of cultural detritus. (Elizabeth LeCompte 196)

Speaking on the topic of dramaturgy, Mira Rafalowicz and Elizabeth LeCompte each describe practices that de Certeau has characterised as "nomadic poaching", and as a form of bricolage. Rafalowicz says that she doesn't like to "read plays that are finished, they are too complete". Instead she prefers "unfinished scripts, where the loose ends are still showing, and fragments, free to go where they like" (128). Similarly, LeCompte indicates that the beginning of her process is other than the well made play: "Often I have an architectonic idea of the piece which I want to see before I even know the text I am using. The text has to come up against my preconceived structure...I do not like to illustrate texts, that is kind of boring. I like to reinvent what would be happening on the stage" (198-9). In the case of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, which the Wooster Group used in *L.S.D. (...Just The High Points...)*, LeCompte admits that the company was attracted to the playtext not because they found Miller to be a particularly interesting

writer, but rather, because it dealt with a very contemporary American subject (right-wing hysteria) and, therefore, "had a lot of cultural resonance" (198).

Rafalowicz speaks of dramaturgy as a collaborative process of constructing the playtext, "we made up a play from fragments". She explains that these fragments consisted of "improvisations, text we wrote or found, music...half formed thoughts, dreams and visions", or bits and pieces lifted or taken from "newspapers, television, the street, the cafe" (128-130). LeCompte similarly constructs or makes something out of whatever she can lay her hands on, whatever materials are easily or readily accessible and useful. In this, she relies heavily on her performers to bring materials they find and like to the rehearsal process; "the meaning of the piece is a kind of construction by everybody in the company out of a personal shared zeitgeist" (196).

In these two separate accounts of dramaturgical processes, Rafalowicz conceptualises the activity of quotation or citational graft as a broadening or opening out of an otherwise autonomous, self contained, closed dramatic work (in Barthes' sense of the term),[2] while LeCompte adds another dimension. She locates the performers as social agencies, actively appropriating pieces of text and other materials they find or like. The intertextual materials introduced into the rehearsal process by the performer indicate the position of the individual reader and performer. Thus, LeCompte admits questions of access and of the experiences (values, expectations, orientations, dispositions, tendencies, habits, tastes, etc.) of the embodied performer into the process of production. It is to a discussion of this that I will now turn.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, de Certeau has posited a relationship of intimate proximity between reader and text. His point is that readers do not maintain a respectful distance from the text when reading. Rather, reading is an activity in and through which the reading body intrudes or insinuates itself into the text, interrupting the narrative flow. He states, "from the nooks of all sorts of 'reading rooms' (including lavatories) emerge subconscious gestures, grumblings, tics, stretchings, rustlings, unexpected noises, in short a wild orchestration of the body" (175). In other words, though the reader may give the text their undivided attention, other things – sounds, gestures, thoughts, ideas - manage to insinuate their way into the reading. Here, de Certeau suggests that the body is a disruptive force and that through the body other things get into the reading. But this

is as far as de Certeau ventures with respect to how the body gets into the text (and texts get into bodies). Barthes suggests something very similar when he says that the logic of reading is associative (in Threadgold *Feminist Poetics* 31). The difference is that Barthes has in mind the divided subject of psychoanalysis, split into conscious and unconscious being. For Barthes, then, and perhaps to a lesser extent for de Certeau, the activity of reading is a kind of return of the repressed.

As signaled in the above citation, the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, and in particular his notion of "habitus", is especially important to understanding the practice of poaching in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* rehearsal process. Bourdieu tells a slightly different story to de Certeau and Barthes with respect to the activity of reading. In *The Logic of Practice* Bourdieu critiques the binary opposition in social sciences between subjective and objective practices (25). Contrary to this most fundamental of all oppositions that artificially divides the social sciences, he argues that there is an inextricably close inter-relationship between the "objective" structures of a culture – the values, ideas, desires and narratives embodied in social institutions - and the "subjective" or specific behaviors - tendencies, values, dispositions - of individuals (25). Bourdieu's famous statement, "it is because agents never know completely what they are doing that what they do has more sense than they know" (69) indicates the impossibility of maintaining a strict distinction between objective and subjective structures . It is the interplay between subjectivism and objectivism as different modes of experience that makes practice possible; one side of the equation stresses agency, the other the regulation imposed by social structures.

Bourdieu's work approaches the question of the input of socio-economic conditions of lived history into human agency. He locates what he terms the "habitus" at the point of conjunction between social structures (social rules and regulations) and agency:

> The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to obtain them. Objectively "regulated" and "regular" without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organising action of a conductor. (53)

Thus, Bourdieu refigures the theoretical ground for Barthes' concept of reading as associative, based as it is on the premise of divided subject, split into conscious and unconscious being. Psychoanalytic theory, according to Bourdieu, reproduces the system of binary oppositions that he refers to with respect to the social sciences: subjective and objective, inside and outside, conscious and unconscious. Bourdieu therefore re-figures the concept of the unconscious. He claims that the "unconscious" is that which enables one to dispense with the interrelationship between

> the social conditions in which the *habitus* that generated them was constituted [and] the social conditions in which it is implemented ...these two states of the social world that the *habitus* performs, while concealing it, in and through practice. The "unconscious", which allows one to dispense with this interrelating, is never anything other than the forgetting of history which history itself produces by realising the objective structures that it generates in the quasi-natures of *habitus*. (56)

Formed at the intersection point of objective and subjective experiences, Bourdieu's notion of "habitus" may be more useful in the task of explaining the rehearsal process than either de Certeau's or Barthes' notion of reading as a kind of return of the repressed. Bourdieu intimates that reading is not a return of the repressed, nor is the body simply a disruptive semiotic (in Kristeva's sense) force.

The body figures centrally and prominently in Bourdieu's description of the "habitus". Inevitably inscribed within the embodied "dispositions" of the "habitus" is the whole structure of the systems of conditions, as it presents itself in the experience of a life-condition. Thus, the "habitus" is posited as a "structuring structure" of generative and constraining dispositions, properties, schemas, habits, tastes and so forth - all of which can be traced to differences objectively inscribed in conditions of existence. In other words, in Bourdieu's account of "habitus", particular modes of subjectivity are shaped through symbolic violence: the inscription of social laws and prescriptions on individual bodies. This is why Terry Threadgold writes that "part of what the body is, is the history of the texts and the places and the networks of bodies where it has been before: the ways in which it has been materially marked, 'branded' by and in practice, the sexed and coloured differences it has lived, the limits that have been imposed on its access to cultural and symbolic capital" (*Feminist Poetics* 101). Thus a key function of "habitus" as a theoretical concept involves the regulation of the relationship between social

institutions and individual agency. As Bourdieu argues, "habitus" ensures that "The most improbable practices are therefore excluded, as unthinkable, by a kind of immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity" (54). The bodily "habitus" propels social subjects, he states, "to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable" (54).

As I have emphasised in previous sections of this chapter, the Sydney Front do not allow texts (in particular the playtext or libretto) into the institutional space of rehearsal, nor do they permit reading or discussion of secondary critical texts. They insist that readers read and discuss meanings and interpretations of the Don Juan story outside rehearsal. In rehearsal the performers literally incorporate and re-enact narratives, plots, discourses, ideas, words, themes, etc. That is, the performers put their bodies to work in the rehearsal process, which is largely oriented toward practice. In doing so, the performers re-enact the whole process of the production of the "habitus" and apply it in their re-production of the Don Juan story. In the rehearsal process, the performers are incredibly active in terms of bringing together their lived experience, as embodied knowledge, with the legend of Don Juan. Hence, the Sydney Front's rehearsal process is a reading and re-writing of the legend and, at the same time, a performance of the performer's relationship to the story. "Habitus" is therefore an important critical term in understanding what is taking place in the rehearsal process, particularly one as practice based as The Sydney Front's. At the same time, the Sydney Front's rehearsal process seems to be an interrogation of "habitus". That is, the performers work in a much more active manner than Bourdieu would suggest. It is of the order of an active remembering of the "habitus", and the making of a new one.

11 The Sydney Front's "habitus": a "library of cultural detritus"?

> Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed. (Bourdieu *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* 6)

One area that Bourdieu brings within the scope of his work is aesthetic practice. He locates aesthetic practice in relation to a range of other everyday practices of "taste", in order to, as John Frow asserts, reconstruct the systematic unity of socially differentiated

"lifestyles", which in turn are generated by the "habitus" (Frow *Accounting for Tastes* 60). That is, Bourdieu's concept of the "habitus" makes it possible to discover the intelligible relations which unite apparently incommensurable lifestyle "choices", such as preferences in music and food, painting and sport, literature and hairstyle (*Distinction* 6). For Bourdieu, such lifestyle choices are practices of cultural consumption and judgments of taste which, like aesthetic consumption, "are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences" (*Distinction* 7).

Within Bourdieu's sociology of culture concepts such as "good taste", appropriate conduct and aesthetic merit are not natural or universal; rather they are grounded in social experience and reflect particular social interests, that is, those of class, sex, and race or colour. Bourdieu says that these tastes often seem "natural" to those who share them precisely because they are shaped by our earliest experiences as members of a particular cultural group and within a particular social field. These early experiences are further reinforced by social exchanges and rationalised through encounters with higher education and other basic institutions that reward appropriate conduct and proper tastes (Jenkins 16). Competence in cultural codes, or what Bourdieu calls "cultural capital", is linked to social origin and educational level. It is unequally distributed among social classes, although it has the appearance of an innate talent, a "natural gift". The investment of cultural capital in the exercise of taste yields, Bourdieu states, "a profit in distinction, proportionate to the rarity of the means required to appropriate cultural products and a profit in legitimacy, the profit par excellence, which consists in the fact of feeling justified in being (what one is), being what it is right to be" (*Distinction* 228). Taste is therefore one of the important means by which socially differentiated identities are produced and reproduced and social distinctions are maintained. Those who naturally possess "good" or appropriate taste(s) deserve a privileged and powerful position within the institutional hierarchy and reap the greatest benefits from the educational system, while the tastes of others are seen as "uncouth" or underdeveloped (Jenkins 16).

As Frow argues, "the point of this is not to establish the truism that different classes adopt different lifestyles, but to explore the process by which differences in cultural preference become socially functional" (*Accounting for Tastes* 60). It is a question not of differences in themselves but of the ability of those whose social, educational or

institutional position bestows on them a certain power and "natural" authority to impose the value given to these differences. It is a question, in other words, of the power and authority of the dominant class "to impose a recognition of the distinction between "good" taste and "vulgar" taste, between legitimate and illegitimate styles" (*Accounting for Taste* 60). Thus, for Bourdieu, aesthetic judgements do not obey an autonomous aesthetic logic. Rather, they transpose distinctions of class into distinctions of taste and, in the process, reproduce socially differentiated (classed, sexed, coloured) subject positions.

While John Frow points out some of the political limitations of Bourdieu's sociology of culture (in particular the limitations of the rigid opposition between a "high" and "popular" aesthetic), Henry Jenkins asserts that Bourdieu's concept of "taste" is key to understanding the practices of textual poachers. Jenkins does not adhere to the strict distinction that Bourdieu makes between a "high" and "popular" aesthetic. Rather, he characterises "taste" as in a constant state of flux. According to Jenkins though the enculturation of particular tastes is so powerful that we are often inclined to describe our cultural preferences not simply as natural but as universal and eternal, that is as fixed and static, taste is always in crisis (16). He claims that taste can never remain stable, because it is challenged by the existence of other tastes that often seems as "natural" and "normal" to their proponents: "The boundaries of 'good taste' then must be constantly policed; proper tastes must be separated from improper tastes; those who possess the wrong tastes must be distinguished from those whose tastes conform more closely to our own expectations" (16). Thus, legitimate culture must be defined by its opposition to the "vulgar" or "common".

It is because personal taste is so interwoven with all other aspects of social and cultural experience that aesthetic distaste brings with it the full force of moral excommunication and social rejection (Jenkins 16). In other words, "bad taste" is not simply undesirable; it is unacceptable, as Bourdieu asserts and as was evidenced in the situation between Arthur Miller and the Wooster Group:

> Tastes (i.e. manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference. It is no accident that, when they have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes. In matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation; and tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance ("sick-making") of the tastes of others...each taste feels itself to be natural - and so it almost is, being a habitus -

> which amounts to rejecting others as unnatural and therefore vicious. Aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent. (*Distinction* 56)

This tension between different types of taste is played out in the Sydney Front's rehearsal process. The company's rehearsal process is founded on a violent rejection of a certain kind of reading practice. The Sydney Front performers openly admit their distaste for the well made play genre, and their resistance to reading the playtext or libretto as "a [psychologically motivated] play with characters". In doing so, the performers strongly and emphatically reject an official, or institutionally disciplined or trained, reading and interpretive practice. In the very way in which the Sydney Front performers approach the playtext and the libretto, and in the type of reading and interpretive practice that they employ, the performers mark out the difference and distance between their practice and that fostered by the educational system and preferred by "official" (bourgeois) culture. In and through the work of the Sydney Front in rehearsal, the functional differences between good and bad taste, aesthetic merit and demerit, and legitimate and illegitimate styles with respect to social and aesthetic practice are problematised.

The Sydney Front carries this resistance through into the rehearsal process itself. It is predominantly a physical or "practical" process. That is, great emphasis is placed on *doing* themes or ideas taken from the playtext and libretto, in opposition to the analysis or discussion of borrowed terms. The Sydney Front performers are more concerned to use these borrowed terms in ways determined by the performers themselves, and in contexts that relate more directly to their lived experiences, rather than to read or understand them "properly", which means according to an institutionally sanctioned authority.

This rejection of interpretive authority or expertise actually affects the kinds or types of physical actions that the company generates and performs. Significantly, Clare Grant has indicated this elsewhere. In the script of a performance entitled *Talking Back*, by Clare Grant and Virginia Baxter, Grant explains to Baxter how the Sydney Front's theatrical work was made. She explains that "Someone would suggest an action" and then "Everyone would say no":

> CG 1988. *Pornography of Performance*. "We'll stand naked inside cylinders and invite the audience to touch."

VB No.
CG Yes. 1991. *Don Juan*. "We'll ask someone in the audience to take off their clothes and stand naked for exactly two minutes."
VB No.
CG Yes. (18)

As Grant suggests, the Sydney Front do or perform what might be considered improper or improbable stage actions and behaviours. In this deliberate decision to turn a "no" into a "yes", to do what is considered impossible or what is disallowed, the Sydney Front invert or pervert dominant aesthetic logic.

An adjunct to the heightened physicality of the Sydney Front's rehearsal process is an extreme, even excessive, focus on the body in performance. This body is explored and displayed in explicit detail, indicating a somewhat obscene preoccupation on behalf of the Sydney Front with the sexed body or the sexually explicit body in performance. In rehearsal, the performers create scenes that require them to perform semi-naked or naked. For example, Dick Lecture, Thump Rump, Fuck Me, La Chi Darem. The performers frequently make reference to genitalia – "dicks", "cunts" – and there is a coupling of the genitals with other parts of the body throwing the focus onto the sex act, for instance in "cunt face". Also, the performers simulate "fucking" as in the Chair Fuck, Fuck Me, Is It In?, Thump Rump. Even the spectator is projected into this bodily erotics. In rehearsal, the relationship between the performer and spectator is explored as an erotic relationship, that is, in terms of seduction, as in the Opening Scene.

Given the Sydney Front's focus on the sexually explicit body in the rehearsal process, it isn't surprising that obscenity is a fundamental, though rarely acknowledged, part of rehearsal. Much of the material that the Sydney Front generates could be termed offensive or obscene. It is in the names the performers call their improvisations and scenes, for instance, Fuck Me, Dick Lecture, Thump Rump, Chair Fuck, and Cunt Face. These scenes, moreover, simulate and depict actions and behaviours that would probably be judged to be not only improper or inappropriate but also "coarse", "vulgar" and "common". In one instance, the performers devised a scene of sexual violence that they acknowledged would be offensive for its violence and sexism. The group deliberately meant to offend the audience in this case, and in particular the female and/or feminist section of the audience. The challenge that the performers then set themselves was to seduce the audience all over again.

In this way, the Sydney Front's work is an affront to "good" taste and to aesthetic merit, not to mention modes of appropriate conduct on the stage. At the same time, in the Sydney Front's inversion of "good" taste is the kernel of a company aesthetic or style, largely based on irony and parody. The Sydney Front does not reject "good" taste or aesthetic merit outright. Rather, they play with notions of good taste, aesethtic merit and appropriate conduct. They show that they know what a "nice", "beautiful" or "serene" image is, and then they literally stomp on good taste, squashing it underfoot, to "muddy" or obscure legitimate styles. The Sydney Front juxtapose "nice" and "nasty" images, movements, gestures and scenes. In this sense, the company aesthetic is a negation and reversal or inversion of the traditional bourgeois aesthetic.

12 Conclusion

In this chapter I have described a very particular kind of rehearsal process that begins with a collective of performers poaching themes, ideas, images and music from the legend of Don Juan. Working as an ensemble the Sydney Front performers use these themes to generate their own material by means of improvisation and choreography, and by way of conceptual application in the theatre. Using de Certeau's critical framework, which characterises a range of everyday practices as poaching, I analysed the Sydney Front's rehearsal process as a type of poaching that produces a performance that is no longer a reproduction of Don Juan according to the legend (1-7). The Sydney Front's *Don Juan* does not resemble the legend according to, for instance, de Molina, da Ponte, Mozart or Molière. Rather, it reflects the many competing interests and investments of the performers in the Sydney Front collective.

In the second half of the chapter (8-11) I examined what it is that the Sydney Front performers bring to the rehearsal process and to their reading and re-writing of the legend of Don Juan. The theoretical concepts of reading formation and habitus are crucial to the discussion in this part of the chapter. The reading formation and habitus of the Sydney Front performers are defined in binary terms. In terms of the performers' reading formation there is a distinction made between reading, discussion or analysis and "doing", which actually opposes academic practice to theatre and other types of practice. The habitus of the performers is also reworked so that the performance

constructed from the bits and pieces generated by the group of performers opposes or negates conventional (bourgeois) aesthetic practice.

The Sydney Front's rehearsal process could therefore be argued not to be a deconstruction, in the sense meant by Derrida, of the legend of Don Juan. The Sydney Front do not analyse, problematise or strategically rework the textual meanings and significations that they appropriate. In fact, the Sydney Front tends to ignore the meanings they are making, particularly meanings of patriarchal violence, of violence to women's bodies and identities (see Chapter 7). In rehearsal, the Sydney Front performers focus on the "tone", "feel", "taste" or "look" of the bits and scenes they devise. They judge or assess this material according to the immediate or sensible impression that it makes on them, and instantly decide where certain bits and pieces will fit in opposition to certain others. This reading practice replaces one performer's (AT's) wish to focus more closely on the texts the group borrows from. The refusal to do anything but decide "if it [an idea or scene, a bit or scene] works" also refuses any notion of materials or meanings being positioned and (re)produced in cultural, socio-political or gendered contexts. The next chapter explores this in greater depth and detail. Rather than analyse the meanings that they are making in and through the rehearsal process, the Sydney Front works according to an aesthetic logic, which tends not to be made obvious or apparent in rehearsal. In Chapter 5 I unpack the aesthetic logic through which the Don Juan legend is read and re-worked by the Sydney Front.

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[1] In the early part of the 19th century, prolific French dramatist Eugene Scribe (1791-1861) established a type of dramatic writing that relied structurally on logic and inevitability. This dramatic formula became known as the "well made play", due to the emphasis placed on the careful and logical construction of the dramatic plot. In the late 19th century, through the efforts of the realist dramatists, most notably Ibsen, who drew upon Scribe's techniques of careful construction and preparation of effects, the "well made play" became and still remains the traditional model of play construction (Carlson *Theories of the Theatre* 216).

[2] See "From Work to Text" in *Image-Music-Text* 155-164.

5

A Poetics of Poaching: toward an aesthetic of appropriation and re-combination

1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine Henry Jenkins' argument for a poetics of poaching, which expands de Certeau's notion of poaching into an aesthetic of appropriation and re-combination, against Richard Schechner's ethologically and anthropologically grounded theory for a poetics of performance. I then apply Jenkins' critical framework for a poetics of poaching in an analysis of the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* rehearsal process. The Sydney Front's *Don Juan* rehearsal process is analysed alongside and together with the eclectic range of critical and aesthetic theories, strategies and practices that inform the performers' postmodern re-making of the Don Juan legend. The Sydney Front's composite aesthetic combines the theory-strategy of deconstruction and the aesthetic theories of Barthes and Brecht to critique a mimetic mode of representation, and to move towards the practice of montage which disrupts the reproduction of theatrical illusion on stage. It brings to this movement from mimesis to montage the dance and physical theatre aesthetics of Pina Bausch and Tadashi Suzuki, and postmodern theatre theories which underline the actual time and space of performance and the relationship between the performer and spectator in the theatrical event. The Sydney Front's theatre aesthetic also includes a radical reworking of a notion of the theatre collective from the 1970s. As a theatre collective, the Sydney Front's organisation mirrors that of collective companies formed especially in Europe in the late 1980s. This mode of collective organisation is best described as "many-voiced". In this chapter I describe and analyse these theories, strategies and aesthetic practices which combine to form the Sydney Front's composite theatre aesthetic. Finally, I take and examine a key moment from the rehearsal process that raises incisive questions concerning this aesthetic practice and the Sydney Front's postmodern remaking of the Don Juan story. The outcome is discussed in the conclusion to the chapter.

2 *It doesn't matter what Don Juan is about. I've got a taste of the style and types of scenes we're working with...*

At a certain point approximately midway through the first stage of the rehearsal process, there is some discussion in rehearsal about combining the material the group has devised to create a show. One performer, in particular, feels that it is time to begin to make the performance piece:

NK: *I think that in the next few weeks we should start making a show and really start working on that. We should find the problem scenes and if we can't solve them then chuck them out so that we're not making up transitions, we're not tying scenes together for the sake of it...it would be really nice to have a show by January* [i.e. before the second stage of the rehearsal process].

EA: *We need to go through what we've got and pick out possible scenes.*

CG: *How are we going to approach new things to produce new material?*

NK: *My feeling is we see what we've got and go from there.*

JB: *Well, does anyone feel any yawning gaps?*

The performers mention some themes they haven't yet touched on, such as the idea of "the stone statue" and "the impenetrable body". Before they get started on this conversation, a performer interjects saying:

JB: *It doesn't matter what Don Juan's about. The question is what's missing. I'm getting a sense of my own show. I've got a taste of the style and types of scenes we're working with. As that takes form we'll find what's missing.*

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau asserts that the art of consumption is the ancient art of "making do". In his discussion of ordinary or everyday practices, which he also refers to as "ways of operating" or doing things, de Certeau frequently adopts aesthetic metaphors, speaking of consumers as poets, comparing styles of consumption with literary styles, and characterizing readers as nomads and poachers, or bricoleurs. He says of reading that it resembles that art "whose theory was developed by medieval poets and romancers: an innovation infiltrated into the text and even into the terms of a tradition" (xxii). And, so, for the range of practices (walking, speaking, cooking, etc.) de Certeau groups together as "ways of operating" or "arts of making this or that", he asserts that "the "making" in question is a production, a *poi sis*" (xii). Henry Jenkins asserts that like much of de Certeau's evocative writing, these analogies drawn

between poaching and a poetics are rhetorical flourishes. Nevertheless, he questions whether there isn't something more substantial to this talk of an art of "making do". Jenkins expands de Certeau's notion of poaching into an aesthetic of appropriation, and it is this poetics of poaching that forms the basis of my investigation in this section of the thesis.

In this chapter I wish to investigate what an aesthetic of appropriation might consist in, particularly in relation to the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* rehearsal process. Certainly the performers involved in the *Don Juan* process are not simply nomadic readers and textual poachers, but are actively making or creating something out of the materials they borrow and (re-)use. Moreover, in making a show or a piece of performance, as is explicitly stated at certain moments in rehearsal, such as the one above, the performers are working according to their own particular sense of style and according to specific aesthetic conventions and practices.

3 Rehearsal, poaching and a poetics of performance?

In *Performance Theory* (1988), Richard Schechner extends his anthropological account of theatrical performance to the rehearsal process. At the end of a chapter entitled "Towards a Poetics of Performance", he asserts that the rehearsal process (including training and performance preparation) is the essential and fundamental component of the theatrical event: "*the essential ritual action of theatre takes places during rehearsals*" (*Performance Theory* 180, his emphasis). Here, Schechner is applying a definition of social process derived and adapted from Victor Turner, who viewed crisis or conflict situations as dramatic, thereby drawing a link between social and aesthetic drama through ritual: the performance of complex sequences of symbolic actions bringing about "restoration of behavior" (Turner 7). Schechner claims that, at the level of performance, aesthetic and social drama converge. He adopts Turner's definition of ritual and applies it to theatrical performance with one minor alteration. Whereas Turner locates the essence of drama in conflict and conflict resolution, Schechner finds the essence of aesthetic drama in transformation, that is, in how people use theatre to experiment with, act out and ratify change. He writes: "[t]he function of aesthetic drama is to do for the consciousness of the audience what social drama does for its participants: providing a place for, and means of, transformation" (*Performance Theory* 171).

For Schechner, the rehearsal process exemplifies the process of transformation that is, by his definition, a fundamental feature of the ritual process. He asserts that in and through rehearsal natural, variable and unstructured sequences of behavior are transformed, by means of repetition, simplification, exaggeration and rhythmic action, into composed or coherent sequences of behavior, or symbolic actions. He models the rehearsal process on ethological accounts of nonverbal acts of communication (dance, movement etc.) and animal behavior. Theorists such as Birdwhistle, Walter and Lorenz claim that the most effective actions and behaviors are graceful ones: "the things we call graceful are always multi-message acts in which the secondary messages are minimized, and where the role of the whole is maximized", and that "there is a strong selection pressure working in the direction of making all signal movements...more and more graceful" (Schechner *Performance Theory* 180). By analogy, Schechner suggests that rehearsal is a goal-oriented activity directed toward transforming mess into meaning, and chaos and disorder into order and coherency. Hence, according to Schechner:

> Early rehearsals, or workshops, are jerky and disjointed, often incoherent. The work is indeed a hunt, full of actions with "high information potential", but very low goal orientation. Even in working on texted material this kind of "looking around" marks early rehearsals: actors try a variety of interpretations, designers bring in many sketches and models most of which are rejected, the director doesn't really know what he/she wants...if the project is to develop its own text and actions the basic question of the early work is an anxiety laden "what are we doing?" (*Performance Theory* 182)

> In every case, the rehearsal is a way of selecting from the possible actions those to be performed, of simplifying these, making them as clear as possible in regard to both the matrix from which they have been taken and the audience with which they are meant to communicate. (*Performance Theory* 183)

I wish to note here that Schechner's notion of rehearsal process includes poaching as an integral part of that process. However, the poaching that takes place in rehearsal - the hunting behavior, the looking around, the questioning, asking "what are we doing?" etc. – belongs to the early or initial stage of the process only. If rehearsal is to proceed, to work successfully, then, at a certain point, this material, consisting of many different and competing meanings or actions, must be transformed (organized, simplified and reduced) into one single, meaningful and coherent message or signal.

Schechner suggests that this anthropological and ethological understanding of rehearsal as a process of ritual transformation, centred on transforming chaos and disorder into state of grace with maximal efficiency of the signal-message, is the key to unlocking a "poetics of performance". He states:

> Clearly a single, normative standard for "evaluating art" abolishes various cultural, historical, or evolutionary perspectives. The difficulty is solved by relocating the question of simplification (grace) from a comparison of works in their exhibition phase to works in the process of being made: the selection-of-what's-done-as-against-all-other-possibilities phase. It is not a matter of comparing one work to other works, or to the world...One must fold each work back in on itself, comparing its completed state to the process of inventing it, to its own internal procedures during that time when it was not yet ready for showing. (*Performance Theory* 181)

In this way, Schechner attempts to displace questions of aesthetic judgment and distinctions of taste into a poetics of performance wherein the process of making or creating the performance is the central concern or issue, and the change from a chaotic state to one of order, simplicity, or grace, is understood in anthropological and ethological terms. In other words, the poaching activity that takes place in rehearsal is subsumed within a poetics of performance which is radically anti-aesthetic.

Writing on *yagé* (drug) induced [Indian] healing ritual in the Putumayo foothills of Colombia, Michael Taussig contests Western anthropological accounts of ritual which have, by and large, he asserts, bound the concept of ritual to the imagery of order. He flatly rejects models that conceptualize ritual as serving to structure and solidify society, including the *communitas* model that Victor Turner, and Schechner after him, postulates as a fundamental feature of ritual. Turner's model, for example, stresses the values of unity and homogeneity as the product of the ritual process: "what is sought is unity, not the unity which represents a sum of fractions and is susceptible of division and subtraction, but an indivisible unity, 'white', 'pure', 'primary', 'seamless'..." (Turner, E. and V. 254). Against this model of ritual, Taussig juxtaposes the *yagé* ritual which, he asserts, works by way of splintering and decomposing structures and cracking open meanings. That is, Taussig contends that fundamental to the power of the *yagé* healing ritual was montage:

> The "mystical insights" given by visions and tumbling fragments of memory pictures oscillating in a polyphonic discursive room full of leaping shadows and sensory pandemonium are not insights granted by depths mysterious and other. Rather, they are made,

> not granted, in the ability of montage to provoke sudden and infinite connections between dis-similars in an endless or almost endless process of connection-making and connection-breaking. (441)

Taussig breaks with Western anthropological accounts of ritual when he refuses to concede that the concept of ritual is tied to the imagery of order. He proposes that montage is a fundamental feature of the ritual process:

> Montage: oscillating in and out of oneself; feeling sensations so intensely that you become the stuff sensed. But then you're standing outside the experience and coldly analyzing it...standing outside of one's now defamiliarised experience and analyzing that experience, is inconstant and constantly so, flickering, alternating with absorption in the events and their magic. (443)

Taussig's experience and account of *yagé* nights challenges the ritual of explanation of ritual. In other words, the *yagé* nights, with their violent juxtapositions, awkwardness of fit, breaking-up, scrambling and fragmentation, "make us wonder at the unstated rights of academic text-making, at the means for creating intellectual authority, and, above all, at the conventions of sense-making thereby inscribed through conventions of 'ordering' the chaos of that which has to be explained" (443).

Taussig's alternative notion of ritual challenges the conceptual ground on which Schechner founds his poetics of performance. Schechner attempts to displace the question of aesthetic judgment in relation to performance by only allowing comparison between the performance and its process, that is, the rehearsal process. In this way, the question of the relationship between the rehearsal process and performance becomes, and remains, an anthropological or ethological, rather than an aesthetic, question or concern. Taussig, on the other hand, radically and deliberately re-figures ritual in terms of certain theatre aesthetics. He suggests that the ritual process more closely resembles Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty in the way that it throws up an "infinite perspective of conflicts" (442), and then models the ritual process on the alienation effects of Brecht's epic theatre. That is, Taussig takes Bertolt Brecht's Epic theatre aesthetic as model for the *yagé* healing ritual:

> As a form of epic theatre, these *yagé* nights succeed not by suffusing the participants in unrelieved fantasies. Instead their effect lies in juxtapositioning to a heightened sense of reality, one of fantasy – thereby encouraging among the participants speculation into the why and wherefores of representation itself. (444-445)

I will return to montage, a concept outlined in the first part of this thesis (see Chapter 2), later in the chapter to argue that it is a key principle in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* rehearsal process. My point here, as I have argued, is that within Schechner's conceptual system, it is impossible to conceive of a poetics of poaching, an aesthetic of appropriation. He effectively subsumes the activity of poaching within an anti-aesthetic poetics of performance. I will now turn to what I think is much more useful and effective position for conceptualizing the Sydney Front's poaching activity in the *Don Juan* rehearsal process.

4 Henry Jenkins and a poetics of poaching

In *Textual Poachers* (1992), Henry Jenkins makes significant use of de Certeau's notions of nomadic reading and textual poaching to argue for the social agency of a particular type of mass media consumer, the fan, and the cultural legitimacy of fan "readings" of their favorite television shows. Jenkins credits de Certeau with raising the theoretical possibility that readers or consumers may become writers or authors, if only by scribbling in the margins of the page or by underlining key passages in the text: "The child still scrawls and daubs on his schoolbooks even if he is punished for his crime, he has made a space for himself and signs his existence as an author on it" (de Certeau in Jenkins 152). At the same time, Jenkins challenges de Certeau's emphasis on the tactical nature of consumption and the nomadic character of consumer culture. He argues that de Certeau underestimates and misrepresents the reader's creative activities when he says that the signs of consumption are "protean in form, blending in with their surroundings, and liable to disappear into the colonizing organizations whose products leave no room where consumers can show their activity" (in Jenkins 152). If as de Certeau says, the marks of consumption are invisible and transient, fluid and uncontainable then, as Jenkins notes, they are also not open to direct examination or reproduction (223). Jenkins' problem is that de Certeau tends more towards theorizing rather than documenting reader's activities and practices; he depends on the metaphorical evocation rather than the ethnographic documentation of the practical art of poaching (223).

John Frow has made a similar criticism of the work of de Certeau. He notes that reading, on de Certeau's account, is pure process, lacking in textual form and producing no storage of information. According to de Certeau, research into reading is rendered

difficult by the lack of traces left behind by a practice that slips through all sorts of "writings" (Frow 58). As for reading, so for all the different practices or operations grouped together under the concept of "doings" (walking, speaking, cooking etc.): all seem to lack textual realization, which prompts Frow to question how it is possible to gain access to the doings of popular culture to which de Certeau draws attention.

This is the second of two criticisms directed by Frow toward de Certeau's conceptual framework. The first concerns de Certeau's understanding of power and, although Frow does not make the link between them explicit, I would argue that the two criticisms are closely related. Frow states that de Certeau maintains a polar model of domination, according to which sovereign power is exercised by a ruling class or an elite over a mass of oppressed popular subjects who lack all power (57-58). This model of monolithic power, Frow argues, forgoes notions of complexity, diversity and ambiguity; it leaves little room for figuring the complexities and confusions of hegemonic struggle, that is, for struggles and rivalries between the groups comprising "the people". Instead, the struggle for social power is conceived in terms of a simple pathos of resistance (58).

The difficulty becomes clear in the distinction that de Certeau draws between strategies and tactics, particularly as it applies in the binary opposition between writing and reading. According to de Certeau, strategies are operations performed from a position of power and strength, employing the property and authority that belong exclusively to literary "landowners", while tactics belong to the mobile population of the dispossessed and the powerless, gaining in speed and mobility what they lack in stability. De Certeau applies this distinction to the corresponding relationship between writing and reading. Writing, he says, "accumulates, stocks up, [and] resists time by the establishment of a place and multiplies its production through the expansionism of reproduction" (174). Reading, on the other hand, says de Certeau, "takes no measures against the erosion of time (one forgets oneself *and* also forgets), it does not keep what it acquires, or it does so poorly" (174). Writing for de Certeau has a materiality and permanence that the poached culture of the reader is unable to match; the reader's meaning production remains temporary and transient. That is, meaning is made on the run, in response to immediate concerns as the reader moves nomadically from place to place. These meanings are discarded when they are no longer useful to the reader at a later time and place. The tactical strength and strategic vulnerability of reading, de Certeau contends,

lies in its inability to form the basis for a stable or permanent culture; readers maintain a freedom of movement at the expense of acquiring resources which might allow them to fight from a position of power and authority.

Both Frow and Jenkins problematise the binary division that de Certeau makes between writing (or strategy) and reading (or tactic). Frow offers a re-reading of de Certeau in which he stresses the systemic and semiotic features of de Certeau's theory of practices or doings. He points out that it is important to remember that while de Certeau speaks about practices, he is in fact concerned with modes of operation or schemata of action, rather than with individual, singular or particular actions. That is, in relation to the official systems governing the organization of life, these disruptive or intrusive styles of operating are equally systemic, as de Certeau himself suggests: "These 'ways of operating' are similar to 'instructions for use', and they create a certain play in the machine through a stratification of different and interfering kinds of functioning" (30). Frow argues that de Certeau is elaborating something like an ethnography of actions through an analysis of the codes of practice that constitute a culture. In other words, Frow responds to his own question concerning the textual form in which we can access practices or doings by suggesting that these practices must be codified in some way since they are inextricably linked to official operating systems. Frow suggests that uses or doings as codes of practice are situation specific; any act implies a logic of the operations of actions relative to certain kinds of situation.

Jenkins is, by comparison, far more critical of de Certeau's concept of nomadic poaching. He rejects outright de Certeau's notion that readers or poachers do not get to keep what they take and argues that serious consideration must be given to the aesthetic dimensions of the reader's or poacher's artifacts. Based on ethnographic documentation of the material signs produced by poachers (TV soap fans, in this case), Jenkins asserts that fans are poachers who get to keep what they take and use their plundered goods as the foundations for the construction of an alternative cultural community. Fan culture is, according to Jenkins, nomadic, ever-expanding, seemingly all encompassing yet, at the same time, permanent, capable of maintaining strong traditions and creating enduring works. Fan-generated texts cannot simply be interpreted as the material traces of interpretive acts but need to be understood within their own terms as cultural artifacts. That is, fan productions are aesthetic objects shaped through the social

norms, aesthetic conventions, interpretive protocols and technical competence of the larger fan community, as well as through the personal creativity and insights of individual consumer artists. Through his rigorous study of fan culture Jenkins provides some concept of what a poached aesthetic might be:

> If there is an art of making do as opposed to a vocabulary of tactics or a configuration of local practices, that art lies in transforming "borrowed materials" from mass culture into new texts. A fan aesthetic centres on the selection, inflection, juxtaposition and recirculation of ready-made images and discourses. In short, a poached culture requires a conception of aesthetics emphasizing borrowing and recombination as much or more than original creation and artistic innovation. (224)

5 Making a show: the Sydney Front's poached aesthetic

In making a piece of performance the Sydney Front were not at all concerned with the fit between the material generated in rehearsal and the Don Juan legend that ideas and themes were originally taken from. The performers were preoccupied mainly with the "taste", "feel" or style of the scenes they had devised in rehearsal rather than the legend of Don Juan. The Don Juan legend was secondary to, and read through, the Sydney Front's composite performance aesthetic. Having examined the reading or poaching activities of the Sydney Front performers in the previous chapter, I will now examine the ways in which the Sydney Front shaped borrowed materials into a work of performance. To borrow Henry Jenkins' terms, this process of shaping a work of performance involves the personal creativity and insights of individual readers and performers as well as the interpretive norms and aesthetic codes and conventions of the larger community, in this case a particular theatre community. In order to understand the Sydney Front's reading or poaching of the Don Juan legend, it is necessary at this point in the chapter to identify the major interpretive norms and aesthetic codes and conventions that the Sydney Front brought to the production of *Don Juan*.

Approximately half way through the first block of the rehearsal process, the Sydney Front met together at the inner city apartment of one of the company members to discuss shaping or formulating the show. For most of the morning and early afternoon the group watched a selection of videos including a documentary on the legend of Don Juan, a version of the opera *Don Giovanni*, a documentary of Pina Bausch's Wuppertal Dance Theater, and recordings of performances by DV8 Physical Theatre. After a late break, the group resumed rehearsal and composed a list of "bit-pieces" and possible "scenes"

to be included or formulated into a performance piece. In an earlier rehearsal session Nigel Kellaway had read out his preliminary list of the scenes that he thought should be included in the show (see Appendix 2). On this day, taking Nigel's list as a starting point, the performers composed an exhaustive list of all the material they had devised up to that point in rehearsal, organising this material into "bits" and "scenes or semi-scenes" (see Appendix 3 for full list). One performer (NK) then suggested that the group assess each of the scenes in order to "find out what they're about so that we can start formulating a show". The instruction given was to:

NK: *See all the scenes and what we want to do with them. See the scene's context within the show.*

CG: *The audience will interpret it in any way they like. We have to come to some agreement about what it means for us.*

In their reading or assessment of their own material, the performers worked through each individual item on their list, describing the theme, idea or concept associated with that particular bit or scene. For example, the Opening Scene was tagged as "a reversal of the actor-audience relationship". Dick Lecture was tagged as "the objectification of the male genitalia, something normally shrouded in mystery". Hysterical Men/Fetal Mania was characterised as a scene about "the fragility of masculinity". It provided, according to one performer, "an opportunity to look at sheer hysterical male desire...we want, we want, we want". Another performer suggested that "the men are completely out of control and so the scene provides good contrast to other scenes where the women are out of control". Pleasure Victim was glossed as "a scene of audience humiliation". Pig Woman was described as being about "excess and orifices". For one performer it was a contrasting or "opposite scene to Stone Statue which is about blockages and barriers, the impenetrable". For another performer "it's a celebration of a voracious appetite – sexual or otherwise, and also of the carnal". The Pavan was tagged as a "stately" dance that provided a "sense of order and social structuring or patterning" (see Appendix 4 for full list).

At the end of this "tag" session there was some discussion of the nature of the material the company had devised, and the question concerning the arrangement of this material into a show was considered:

JB: We've got a lot of desiring, a bit of humiliation, a bit of mechanical humping and then the patterns of the dances.
NK: How do we start to put this into some kind of form?
CG: Stone Statue and Pig Woman are opposite scenes. Organise all the material around those two poles.
JB: With Fuck Me in the middle. Let's not repeat the ending of JohnLaws/Sade with the girl left hanging upside down at the end of the show. The audience didn't find it very funny at all. We got a very negative reaction from the audience at the end of the show.

At this point in rehearsal one performer (JB) produced a pack of Post-It notes. On each note he wrote the name of a scene until all the bits or (semi-)scenes on the performers' list were individually noted. He then posted these notes randomly on an empty wall. The group then set about organising the bits and (semi-)scenes posted on this makeshift storyboard into some kind of running order. After some discussion and re-arranging of notes on the wall, the group decided on two versions of a show (see Appendix 5). After some further discussion, the members of the Sydney Front agreed to organise the show around the framework provided by three main dance or choreographed movement pieces: the Pavan, the Java Dance and Fuck Me. They also agreed that the Seduction Walk/Procession should occur at regular intervals throughout the performance.

This moment in rehearsal recalls an earlier direction or instruction issued by JB to watch videos (audio-visual) for the music and high points of the plot rather than read the playtext for character or narrative. In this instance, although not explicitly noted by the performers in rehearsal, video watching plays an important and influential role in shaping or forming a piece of performance. After watching videos of the opera *Don Giovanni* and of dance theatre companies (Pina Bausch and DV8), the decision is made to link the Sydney Front material through choreographed dance sequences. Furthermore, in a related discussion in rehearsal one performer states that the montage of scenes will have musical continuity:
AA: It would be nice if one scene rolled into another rather than short sharp changes from one extreme to another. I'm sick of that.
JB: I like the old slash and cut. It's more honest.
AA: The cutting method might be more honest but it leaves me a bit vacuous and empty as a performer.

JB: I don't want to get into making up transition scenes.

NK: The show will have musical continuity.

Watching videos therefore denotes not just a reading strategy but also an aesthetic orientation. The individual bits and scenes devised by the Sydney Front are woven together into a performance through dance, choreography and music. These elements, rather than narrative, link the autonomous fragments. What is revealed in this moment in rehearsal is the composite and complex aesthetic through which the Sydney Front reads the legend of Don Juan. While rejecting particular (not all) elements of dramatic representation, the Sydney Front borrow other elements or aesthetic codes and conventions from other performance disciplines such as film and video (montage), dance and music. It is this composite and combinational – or poached – aesthetic that I will now unpack in order to explicate the Sydney Front's reading of the legend of Don Juan.

John Baylis has described the work of the Sydney Front in the following way: "I don't want to position us within video-clip culture but our work carries the audience along in much the same way, from image to image, from high point to high point without the padding in between" (cited in Payne 3). Given that Baylis made this statement in a short preview of the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* which appeared in the entertainment supplement of the Sydney Morning Herald, I do not wish to make too much of his comments on their own. However, the statement is supported by the Sydney Front's practice in rehearsal. It recalls Baylis' instruction to a member of the group to watch videos for the music and the high points of the plot rather than read the playtext or libretto for narrative or character. It also recalls Baylis' own summary reading of the plotline for three key scenes: a rape scene, a seduction scene and a scene on death or retribution. Finally, it fits with the Sydney Front having, at this point in rehearsal, a collection of individual and autonomous bits and scenes each glossed with a word or phrase that designates the concept, idea, action or image of that particular piece. What is implicitly indicated in this is the Sydney Front's criticism of dramatic representation and the company's use of an alternative compositional technique developed in avant-garde art and film/video, namely montage. Russian avant-garde film director Sergi Eisenstein defined montage as "opposed to the 'dramatic' or 'unrolling' methods of representation associated with the theatre. Instead it is an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots" (Cohen 6).

5.1 Brecht, Barthes and Derrida: from mimesis to montage

Montage, a technique made familiar through film and radio, photography and the press, was adopted by modern German dramatist and director Bertolt Brecht, and applied to his epic theatre. Walter Benjamin has said of the epic theatre that it corresponds to the modern level of technology:

> In film, the theory has become more and more accepted that the audience should be able to "come in" at any point, that complicated plot developments should be avoided and that each part, besides the value it has for the whole, should also possess its own episodic value. For radio, with its public which can freely switch on or off at any moment, this becomes a strict necessity. Epic theatre introduces the same principle to the stage. (6)

> ...[It] proceeds by fits and starts, in a manner comparable to the images on a filmstrip. Its basic form is that of the forceful impact on one another of separate, sharply distinct situations in the play. The songs, the captions, the gestural conventions differentiate the scenes. As a result intervals occur which tend to destroy illusion. These intervals paralyse the audience's readiness for empathy. (21)

By introducing the innovations of modern technology and, in particular, the technique of montage to the theatre, Brecht sought to effect a radical re-functioning of Western drama as text and as performance. Brecht opposed what he called the Aristotelian or dramatic tradition of Western theatre, that is, theatre "which is dramatic in the narrow sense and whose theory was formulated by Aristotle" (Benjamin 18). To be even more specific, what Brecht refuses is Aristotelian catharsis, the purging of emotions (pity and fear) through a process of identification with the destiny which rules the hero's life (Benjamin 18). At the level of the drama this process of identification involves the interior transformation of the actor into the fictional character, and the audience's empathy inspired by a sense of recognition of themselves in the character. Brecht likened the actor's process to hypnosis: "they go into a trance and take the audience with them" (Willett 26). He further claimed that "If the seance is successful it ends up with nobody seeing any further, nobody learning any lessons, at best everyone recollecting" (Willett 26). At the level of performance or the spectacle, Brecht asserts that this process of identification involves the broad assimilation of the play's events and characters to an ahistorical and universal human sameness:

> The bourgeois theatre emphasised the timelessness of its objects. Its representation of people is bound up by the alleged "eternally human". Its story is arranged in such a way as to create "universal" situations that allow Man with a capital M to express himself... All its incidents are just one enormous cue, and this cue

> is followed by the "eternal" response: the inevitable, usual, natural, purely human response. (Willett 96-97)

In his opposition to the Western dramatic tradition which extends from Greek tragedy to Naturalism, Brecht is coming up against what Deleuze has called the "philosophy of representation". The practice and politics of this *sedentary* philosophy has been subject to intense critical questioning and strategic interrogation in the theatre since at least Artaud and Brecht. According to Deleuze, this particular mode of representation is governed by the logic of identity. The mark of this founding principle is evident, he states, "in the iterative prefix RE- of the word 'representation'. Every present must be re-presented, in order that it may be re-discovered as the same" (Descombes 154). According to Deleuze it follows that in this philosophy, "the unknown is only ever a not-yet-recognised known, that to learn is to remember, that to encounter is to meet again, that to leave is to return, etc." (Descombes 154).

As discussed in the first part of this thesis, Derrida undertakes a deconstruction of this capture of representation by what he calls "logocentrism" or the metaphysics of presence. Logocentrism is, according to Derrida, a system of domination, a violent hierarchy of binary oppositions. A key oppositional pairing that Derrida subjects to intense scrutiny as the defining moment of Logocentrism is the distinction between speech and writing. He claims that,

> Writing, the letter, sensible inscription, has always been considered by Western tradition as the body and matter external to the spirit, to breath, and to the logos. And the problem of soul and body is no doubt derived from the problem of writing from which it seems conversely to borrow its metaphors. (*Of Grammatology* 35)

In other words, logocentrism is the reduction of writing and all kind of material inscription to a secondary status as a mere "vehicle" or empty carrier for the thoughts, concepts and signifiers of a speaker. While the voice represents the transparency and immediacy of thought, logic or reason to itself, as well as the self-identity or self-certainty of the speaking subject, writing is merely the material record or reproduction of the spoken word. In this equation, the signified or referent is always prior to the material sign; the purely intelligible prior to the merely sensible.

Brecht, and Barthes after him, has identified a similar logic operating in Western Naturalistic theatre where theatrical representation is subordinated to the reproduction of reality on stage. Brecht identifies the duplicity of the Naturalistic theatre when he says "the Naturalistic stage is in no sense a public platform; it is entirely illusionistic. Its own awareness that it is theatre cannot fertilise it; like every theatre of unfolding action, it must repress this awareness so as to pursue undistracted its aims of portraying the real" (Benjamin 4). Brecht's complaint centres on the fact that the artistic armature of the theatre is hidden or suppressed so that a copy or reproduction of reality can be presented on stage. The material elements of theatre - songs, gestures, costume, set, props, etc. - are secondary and subordinated to the illusion of reality on stage.

In his writing on Japanese Bunraku puppet theatre, Barthes extends Brecht's critique of the Naturalistic theatre arguing that its methods of production and reception involve organising the spectacle into an organic unity or totality which is underwritten by a series of dualisms central to Western metaphysics (*Lesson in Writing* 174). For example: animate and inanimate, soul and body, inside and outside, exterior and interior, organic and artificial. According to Barthes, the body of the actor and the fictional narrative of the play are invested with an organic unity that enables them to dissimulate what he refers to as the unity of the soul or of life (*Lesson in Writing* 171-172). The actor's body becomes a projection of the identity of the character, which Barthes claims is conceived "as the express channel of an interiority" (*Lesson in Writing* 173). The exterior signs of the actor's body - voice, gesture and actions - are subjected or made instrumental to an inferred interiority of the character. This function is carried across into the production as a whole. Barthes claims that the function of Western theatre is essentially to reveal what is reputed to be secret ("feelings", "situations", "conflicts") while concealing the very artifice of the process of revelation (machinery, painting, make-up, sources of light) (*Lesson in Writing* 172-173). These production codes maintain only a metaphorical or metonymic status as bearers, but not owners, of the author's "meanings" they are made to signify. For Barthes, Bunraku demonstrates Brecht's technique of defamiliarisation: "the discontinuity of the codes, a caesura imposed in the different traits of the representation, which breaks with this metaphysical tradition of mimesis" (*Lesson in Writing* 177).

It is precisely this instrumentalist or technicist view of writing entailed in the conceptual structure of Western metaphysics, which opposes soul to body and the spiritual or the ideal over the material, that Derrida aims to deconstruct. The obstacle Derrida wishes to remove is this conception of the exteriority of writing to speech and of speech to thought; that is, the view that language is an instrument of thought, and writing only the extension of an "instrument" (Ulmer 7). He does this by replacing the sign (signifier-signified) with the gram or trace as the fundamental unit of language, spoken or written. The gram or mark remains iterable and still functions as sense or significance (because language is a system) despite being cut off from the origins of a receiver or ends of a referent, from a signified or a context. Once iterability is identified as the fundamental feature of language, one must acknowledge the possibility of disengagement and citational graft. This possibility of cutting free and re-grafting deconstructs the narrow idea of writing as re-production and opens up a new mode of (de)composition; a breaking apart or severing of the whole and a provisional and contingent re-assemblage of the fragments or shards. As a mode of composition, iterability may be recognised as montage and collage.

The concept of the gram is the principle governing montage and collage. The gram "produces a signification which could be neither univocal nor stable. Each cited element breaks the continuity or the linearity of the discourse and leads necessarily to a double reading: that of the fragment perceived in relation to its text of origin, that of the same fragment as incorporated into a new whole, a different totality" (Ulmer *The Object of Post-Criticism* 88). Moreover, montage and collage never entirely suppress the "alterity of these elements reunited in a temporary composition". It is this alterity, a fundamental difference at the centre or core of writing/representation or composition as montage and collage, that proves to be one of "the most effective strategies in the putting into question of all the illusions of representation" (Ulmer *The Object of Post-Criticism* 88).

Brecht introduced the technique of montage and collage to theatre to unsettle and disrupt the illusions of theatrical representation. He claimed that,

> In the Aristotelian composition of plays and the acting that goes along with it...the delusion of the spectator concerning the way events on stage take place in real life and come about there is furthered by the fact that the presentation of the fable constitutes an absolute whole. The details cannot be individually compared with those parts, which correspond to them in real life. Nothing

> must be "taken out of" to set it into the context of reality. (Cited in Bürger 91)

According to Benjamin, montage interrupts the context into which it is inserted. The interrupting of the action works against creating an illusion among the audience. Brecht used montage in order to interrupt the dramatic action and processes. He claims that "such interruption brings the action to a standstill in mid course and thereby compels the spectator to take up a position toward the action... here the progress of the fable is discontinuous, the unified whole consists of independent parts each of which can and indeed must be directly confronted with the corresponding partial events in reality" (in Bürger 91). These conditions are not brought close to the spectator; they are distanced from him. He recognises them as real, not as in the theatre of Naturalism, with complacency, but with astonishment. Montage is, in other words, fundamental to the outcome of epic theatre: "the task of epic theatre is not so much to develop actions as to represent conditions. But 'represent' does not here signify 'reproduce' in the sense used by the theoreticians of Naturalism. Rather the first point at issue is to *uncover* these conditions, *to make them strange* [*verfremden*]" (Benjamin 18).

The estrangement effected by montage in Epic theatre takes several modalities including the displacement of emotional interiority, the discontinuation of the linear progress of the fable, the separation or dissociation of autonomous theatrical elements (such as gesture, costume, set, props, etc), and the disruption of habitual recognition. In other words, "distance" as the designated outcome of the epic theatre describes the detachment of theatrical codes as much as a desired intellectual position to be taken up by the actor or spectator. Brecht detached the actor from the character, the voice from its origin, and he introduced non-traditional elements into the spectacle - song, written text, film, etc. - in order to produce a multi-layered texture of different and competing codes. The aim was to defamiliarise the character and narratives of the play, to show them as singular instances affected by particular social and political circumstances, and to bring the audience to an awareness of the historical constructedness of theatre and of reality itself. Brecht self stated agenda here was to make the theatre fit for an audience of the scientific age. To this end, he proposed to treat elements of reality as if they were elements of an experimental set-up, portraying them as strange and unusual, and therefore requiring further critical inquiry. He explicitly linked the reflective action of the spectator to that of the scientist who must not take for granted the phenomena of the

natural world as given, but must perceive them always with a critical, inquiring and interrogative eye as strange in order to uncover their secrets or hidden depths. This was part of Brecht's broad political program for the theatre: "to make the audience interested in the theatre as experts - not at all for cultural reasons" (Benjamin 16).

This is where Derrida differs from Brecht on the subject of montage and collage. Although Derrida didn't discover the technique of montage - this technique was in general the most characteristic mode of composition and decomposition in the modern arts - he does, in conceptualising the gram or trace as the foundational principle of language, provide a theory that conceptualises the practice of montage. Ulmer asserts that in Derrida's reliance on montage as the stylistic device with which to deconstruct mimesis, he is doing for this new mode of writing, and representation, what Aristotle in the *Poetics* did for mimesis. He celebrates Derrida as "the 'Aristotle' of Montage" (*The Object of Post-Criticism* 87). In this way, Ulmer links Derrida's project of the deconstruction of Western philosophy to the deconstruction of Western theatre. He states: "theory and theatre are undergoing the same deconstruction so that representation at either level is displaced from a 'natural' to an 'artificial' mode of repetition" (Ulmer 180). Thus, whereas Brecht attempts to hold onto some notion of rational thinking, situating the actor and spectator as distanced, objective and critical observers of the dramatic action, Derrida's fully developed theory of montage breaks or severs the humanist link to a rational subject. Derrida's deconstruction of mimesis using the device of montage produces an alterity, an irreducible difference, a double meaning that *cannot be mastered* (Descombes 151; my emphasis). Descombes claims that the outcome of the game of deconstruction is undecidable and that the game will be indeterminable. It is this undecidablity and indeterminacy that features in the work of theatre artists working in a post-Brechtian tradition, or what Elizabeth Wright terms the "Brechtian postmodern" (113). It is this work in theatre that greatly influences and shapes the Sydney Front's aesthetic.

5.2 Pina Bausch's *tanztheater*: the intolerability of indeterminacy

In the *Don Juan* rehearsal process, the Sydney Front read or studied audio-visual recordings of work by Pina Bausch's Wuppertal Tanztheater and DV8 Physical Theater. After paying extremely close attention to these videos, as mentioned above, the Sydney Front decided to introduce a strong dance or choreographic element into the production

of *Don Juan*. That is, the group decided to form their production of *Don Juan* around certain devised pieces of dance or choreography. The key influence or impact of the dance theatre and physical theatre aesthetic on the Sydney Front's creative process did not stop there. The Sydney Front lifted whole chunks of Bausch's choreography for use in their show. For instance, the company modeled Fuck Me on a scene in Bausch's *tanztheater* in which a female dancer is surrounded by a pack of men who pick and push and prod her until she falls limp to the ground only to be raised to her feet by the men who continue to pick and prod at the limp body. At the same time the group devised other scenes in the *tanztheater* style. For example, the Sydney Front called one scene "Pina Bausch Gestures" in reference to the repetition of a set of provocative gestures performed by the group. The Sydney Front also shared certain thematic concerns with both dance theatre and physical theatre companies such as an interest in the sexed body-subject, representations and technologies of gender, hysteria and sexual violence. In addition, the Sydney Front borrowed costume ideas from scenes in Bausch's dance pieces. For example the formal dress – tails and trousers - worn in a Bausch dance piece called "Komm Tanz Mit Mir", was lifted and used in the Sydney Front's Pavan/Fuck Me scene. Given the close connections between Brecht's work and Pina Bausch's *tanztheater*, the extent to which Bausch's aesthetic – a dance or physical theatre aesthetic - influenced the Sydney Front's production of *Don Juan* is significant but not surprising. In this section I wish to explore and draw out some of these connections as they impact on the Sydney Front's production of *Don Juan*.

Writing on the Brechtian postmodern, Elizabeth Wright asserts that Brecht's theatre provided the impetus for the dissolution of traditional stage dialogue. She writes that "his theory points forcefully to the fact that theatrical utterance is made up of a contradictory structure of verbal, gestural and auditory elements and is far from being merely a literary mode of speech" (114). Targeting Brecht's notion of the separation of the elements, Wright argues that Brecht's theories led to a dramatic form based on a semiotic understanding of theatrical practice. In this postmodern, non-narrative, non-representational theatre traditional forms, genres and practices of theatre dissolve and the professional distinctions of actor, playwright, director, stage manager and spectator disappear. Most notably, as Wright notes by citing Finter, the fictitious unity between voice and word is revealed by making speech compete with other elements on the stage

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such as music, sound effects, gestures, sets, props, lighting, mime, mask, costume (114).

Like Brecht, Pina Bausch works with a variety of performance genres – dance (including parodies of classical dance), recorded music, song and mime – preserving the autonomy of the individual media and exploiting the resulting dissonances. She uses the principle of montage – the associative but discontinuous linkage of scenic material – as the compositional principle of her work. There is, however, one particular and striking difference from Brecht's use of montage. In Brecht's work the disruptions of the form were generally held together by the content of the fable. In Bausch's theatre, as Wright states, there is no unity and no centring of the action (118). The extraordinary effect of Bausch's dance theatre resides in the constant lack of fit between the stage space and setting, music and sound, the actor's speech and the actor's body and movement:

> Bausch's aim is not that of transmitting knowledge rationally, by presenting the spectator with a fable, in the style of Brecht. Her V-effects contain no guide to interpretation via various programmatic texts...the essential material of this new theatricality is bodily movement in space and hence the body in all its aspects will become the focus of the performance, a source of continual upsetting and ironising of gesture, voice, role, action, custom and timing. (Wright 120)

Johannes Birringer has pointed to the central importance of the body in Bausch's *tanztheater*. He states, "[t]he borderline in Pina Bausch's *tanztheater* is the concrete human body, a body that has certain specific qualities and a personal history, but also a body that is written about, and written into social representations of gender, race and class" (133). Birringer is talking here about the body as a specific and universal, individual and social, entity; that is, the body as site of slippage between opposing terms in a series of dualisms (self and other, individual and social, particular and universal, etc). He is talking about a body that is a site of inherent ambiguity or indeterminacy with respect to meaning and significance. Writing on performances which work to problematise the "attribution of meaning to the body" (126), Melissa McMahon, like Birringer, singles out Pina Bausch's dance theatre for particular attention. McMahon argues that Bausch's dance theatre may be situated within the Brechtian tradition, but that her work extends and transforms this tradition in fundamental ways. According to McMahon, Bausch does away with the residual humanism of the rational and critical

subject and, in doing so, displaces Brecht's preoccupation with the "strangeness of a socio-political context onto a foreignness of the body" (140). She states:

> The bodies of Bausch's performers are traversed by and immersed in a montage of disjunctive codes (dress, gender, music, gesture, etc). The minimal unity that the body presents is disturbed by repetition and ritualisation, by the mechanisation of its movements, and by its displacement from any coherent context. In this way Bausch truncates or shatters the possibility of a Brechtian "overall attitude" as manifested by the *gestus* or fable. She cuts the remaining Brechtian link. The unfamiliar is not the precursor of a greater understanding rather the opposite: the minimal extent to which one can identify a gesture or posture leads only to a greater unease when its distortion or exacerbation confounds the easy attribution of meaning. The effect is of a violent polemic. (140-141)

Thus, further to Birringer, McMahon asserts that the indeterminacy produced by Bausch's dancers – a product of the (un)easy attribution of meaning and significance to the body - generates a sense of discomfort or displeasure in and for the spectator. Bausch's work is an exemplary study "in the shattering of narrative and subject into irreducible fragments of intense affect" (McMahon 140). The perceptible after-affect of this type of performance is a feeling of intolerable indeterminacy.

5.3 The Sydney Front's use of Tadashi Suzuki's method: the illusion of intensely meaningful moments

The Sydney Front play on this uncertainty or undecidability that Bausch creates between the meaning or meaninglessness of the stage image (body, space, sound, etc.) through her refusal to hollow the body out, to make it a more or less transparent container conveying a subjectivity or driving a tight narrative. The Sydney Front's playful exploration of the space between meaning and meaninglessness is grounded in a particular training, a physical discipline which enables the performers to move from image to image, from one high point to another, without psychology or emotion. The Suzuki technique is used by the Sydney Front specifically for the purpose of producing or creating the illusion of intensely meaningful or motivated moments which are, in fact, not motivated by a subjective interiority but which are, rather, manufactured or artificially produced.

The theatrical career of Tadashi Suzuki, after whom the set of training techniques and performance aesthetic is named, began as a student at Waseda University in Tokyo, 1958. As a student activist in the 1960s, he became a central figure in the anti-Shingeki,

underground theatre movement. In 1972, after witnessing a Noh performance at a theatre festival in Paris, Suzuki began to explore traditional Japanese theatre genres, such as Noh and Kabuki, and to integrate them into his work "in an attempt to create a new form of stage expression" (Goto 104). In the mid-1970s, Suzuki created a unique synthesis of Western drama and Japanese theatre by combining Western content with traditional Japanese forms.[1] He also formulated his actor training system, known as the "Suzuki method", and built the farmhouse theatre complex where he trained performers and held an annual theatre festival. The farmhouse theatre became known in 1984 as the Suzuki Company of Toga (SCOT), named after the small mountain village where it was located.

Nigel Kellaway studied with SCOT on an Australia Council Theatre Board grant in between working for Kai Tai Chan's One Extra Dance Company (1981-1984) and co-founding the Sydney Front (1986). Elsewhere I have written about different moments of appropriation of Suzuki's training technique and performance aesthetic by Australian theatre and performance practitioners.[2] Here I wish to note that Kellaway borrows and uses the method of corporeal discipline and training of the performer that he learnt in Japan while living and performing with Suzuki's company. Kellaway asserts that he was most interested in Suzuki's actor training method:

> He taught me things that I had always thought were possible but didn't know how to do. He showed me that there was a particular technique for doing the kind of things I wanted to do. *I wasn't interested in Suzuki's work per se but rather the craft of the actor, and Suzuki had this set of exercises. I'd never seen such a simple set of exercises which seemed to teach the actor everything they needed to know to walk on stage and to sustain themselves on stage.* I discovered that the brain was a fairly flawed instrument and that the body was more reliable. It was a total denial of head acting...it was a method, a codified method...it was a much more articulate method than even Grotowski's...His [Suzuki's] roots, though informed as an academic in western theatre, are in traditional Japanese theatre, particularly Noh and Kabuki. I came back to Australia with this new wealth of information wondering what I was going to do with it. (Crawford and Wynne-Jones 6, my emphasis)

The Sydney Front share Kellaway's fascination with Suzuki centring on the corporeal discipline and training of the performer devising original performance pieces. This physically grounded technique which develops an intensity of concentration not common

to the Western theatre creates an illusion that there is a deeper meaning, a psychological motivation, an intention, when in fact there is not:

> JB: We're not interested in psychological through lines. A lot of actors who come through the classic method or Stanislavskian training get very precious about through lines and allowing something to grow organically. Improvisations with them can be frustrating.
>
> NK: We never get precious, everything can be chopped up. You can come up with something in improvisation and then reverse it and find a new logic through it. We use whatever tricks we can.
>
> JB: We often undercut any psychological motivation. For example in *John Laws Sade* and *Pornography*, I deliver a monologue based on a Heiner Muller text as fast as I can – which automatically makes me look like a person under stress.
>
> NK: The point of this machine speech is that what the audience reads as an emotional state has nothing to do with what John is doing. We're more interested in what the audience sees than what an actor experiences.
>
> JB: And the difference between them. (Miller and Olb 23).

5.4 The rhetoric of staging or deliberately creating ambiguity and indeterminacy

According to Elizabeth Wright, the most significant features of postmodern performance are "the subjection of the body to analysis, the use of space as an experimental object, and the disturbance of certain boundaries, namely those between artist and spectator, spectator and art 'object', art 'object' and artist" (115). Brecht's continuing influence can be felt in the area of involving or implicating the audience, which has become the basic structure of contemporary drama, although this may rarely take the strategic form of a direct address (115). Wright credits Bausch with the "radical re-functioning of the theatre which Brecht could not undertake, committed as he was to the spectator's discovery of his own contradictory production process via a theatre of consciousness" (115). Bausch severs the remaining humanist and rationalist link that Brecht maintained in his attempt to raise the critical consciousness of the spectator. In her *tanztheater* there is a violent intensity to her work that makes it difficult or painful to watch. Heiner Müller has commented that the stage images created by Bausch and her dances are "a thorn in our eye" (Birringer 140). Johannes Birringer has remarked similarly that in Bausch's *tanztheater* "the silent dances and strangely familiar rituals are performed with such emotional intensity that the process of watching the scene makes us painfully aware of the convention of watching" (136). In Bausch's *tanztheater*, as Wright states, the

"normal" voyeuristic modes of sorting out the world are thus exposed and deconstructed: the onlooker begins to feel the force of his or her own determining fantasies (118).

In the rehearsal process, the Sydney Front shift the burden of meaning making onto the relationship between performer and spectator. This relationship and the problem of staging or arranging physical bodies (the performer's and spectator's) in real space and time becomes the main concern of the performers in rehearsal and certainly determines the meaning making process more than the Don Juan legend. At one point, one performer (NK) remonstrates that: *What we're forgetting in our work is the relationship with the audience, the to and fro between us and the audience which makes it interesting.* His complaint initiates a discussion on staging:

AT: *Why do we want the audience standing in the actor's space?*

NK: *Because the traditional arrangement precludes so many possibilities of performer/spectator interaction. They're set in a comfy viewing position.*

AA: *We want to explore different kinds of relationships.*

JB: *Putting the audience on the floor also precludes the attention of the audience. Everything has its drawbacks. I worry about a wandering audience not forced to confront anything.*

With these concerns uppermost in their minds, the performers decide to work through the list of devised scenes and to re-assess each scene in terms of whether or not it will work with the audience on the floor with the performers. This is the Sydney Front's main concern rather than the "meaning" of the scene or its fit in relation to the Don Juan story. It is decided that certain scenes such as Pavan, Spread-eagle, Dick lecture, Fuck Me, Thump Rump, Men's Strip and Seduction Procession will work because the audience on the floor will be able to see the actions performed. It is also decided that certain other scenes such as Fetuses, Sea Slug, and Chair Fuck will not work. These scenes are rejected since "the audience won't be able to see it" (see Appendix 6 for full list).

This physical positioning of the performer in relation to the spectator in the performance space has to do with a disorientation effect which is the result of a particular dramatic logic, as one performer explains:

> There is always a logic to our work – not a narrative logic, and not an emotional logic. There is a strong dramatic logic – very classical – usually expositional, moving towards climax, anti-

> climax. Someone trying to follow a narrative line might find it obscure, but someone who is prepared to go along with the dramatic logic usually experiences a sense of drama – stripped of all the barnacles...We work by taking something, gutting it and filling it full of other things. *We move in one direction and then suddenly change course so the audience feels the vertigo of not knowing where they stand.* When I go to "straight" theatre, the things I enjoy just jump out suddenly. All the rest is just the trash you have to go through to get to those moments. (Baylis cited in Miller and Olb 16, my emphasis).

In performance, the Sydney Front rarely follows a linear narrative path but, rather, "move in one direction and suddenly change course". The cumulative effect of this patterning of short intervals marked by sudden, sharp changes in direction is not dissimilar to Brechtian estrangement or distancing. However, the Sydney Front's method affects the audience not at a primarily critical or rational level but at an experiential one. As the performer (above) notes, the spectator is unsettled, disoriented, put off balance, rendered unstable: they are made to "feel the vertigo of not knowing where they stand". In this way, it is shown to them that they have certain expectations and that these are being unsettled in and through the performance itself. As in Bausch's *tanztheater*, the spectator here is made to feel the force of his or her own determining fantasies, desires and expectations.

In order to achieve the dramatic effects outlined above, the Sydney Front worked strategically with devised scenes in rehearsal. Firstly, the group combined often contrastive scenes into one composite scene. For example, in rehearsal it was suggested that the group combine Java Dance and Seduction Walk. The juxtapositioning of the strong, powerful, pelvic thrusting Java Dance and the slow, snaking Seduction Walk provided different modes of audience attack in the one scene. At one moment, the performers would be thrusting in one direction towards a particular part of the audience. At another moment, the dance would stop and the performers would fan out to all areas of the space only to regroup a little later for the Java Dance. Each scene is a different tone, pitched at a different level, and confronts the audience in different ways. The combination of these two almost opposite scenes is an increase in the intensity or power of the new composite scene, as one performer noted: "[s]educe the audience by having lots of interesting things happening all over the place then do Java Dance and mow the audience down. Add to the power of it" (NK). The combination of the Fuck Me and Pavan scenes worked in a similar way. In this example, the stately

court dance was juxtaposed against the brutal scene in which a woman's rough, clumsy and increasingly desperate advances to three men are violently and perversely rejected. The strong contrast between the tone of the two scenes added to the power of the violence against the woman. In this way, the Sydney Front created a multi-layered, textured piece of performance.

Another strategy used in rehearsal to disorient the spectator was the idea to improvise themes to make scenes for inclusion in the show which were unrelated to the story of Don Juan. When the group had come to the end of combining scenes one performer said, *the antidote we need to all the stuff we've got in Don Juan is the idea of war and disorder/destruction* (NK). Another performer agreed, but with some reservation: *My worry is that the idea of war and disorder is a bit clichéd. It's OK if we just take the images to make the audience feel that something is going on but they don't know what it is. So what are the images?* (JB).

The group then began brainstorming themes and ideas to improvise on the topic of war and disorder. At this point, one performer questions what the group is doing thinking up themes and ideas to improvise on a topic that is totally unrelated to anything they've looked at so far concerning the Don Juan story:

AT: *How can you relate Don Juan with war and disorder?*

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

CG: *The idea of seduction has reached its limit at the moment in so far as producing material is concerned.*

AA: *Where you go from this point is always different and tangential.*

NK: *We just want something to make our minds function away from seduction.*

AT: *Why don't we go over what we've got? If something comes up then we'll work on it.*

NK: *So, we start improvising again?*

AT: *But Ray's (Ray Marcellino, the composer) here. It's the last time he'll be here before the break. It will be good for him to see what we've got before the break.*

NK: *He's seen it and knows the material as well as we do.*

CR: *We're going to be coming up with new things. It's best for him to see the new material.*

CG: *The music is not to follow each scene but to be a broad wash.*

NK: *War is merely some new way of providing material, a tool to think something different. The material we get from it will have nothing to do with war. We're purposefully creating ambiguity in relation to the audience's reading of the show.*

JB: *Where we take things from is irrelevant. It doesn't matter anymore.*

CR: *Where it sits in the piece changes where it came from.*

AT: *Instead of looking at war and disorder, why don't we look at what Donna Anna and Leporello signify?*

NK: *They're characters with names. We want to stay away from that.*

These rehearsal techniques are very much directed at a postmodern sceneography: a deconstruction of theatre. The Sydney Front is deliberately building ambiguity, indeterminacy and undecidability into the performance piece. They overlay contrasts and add (under-)tones in order to create a textured work, a work that would appear to be laden with meaning and significance, but which, in fact, engages the audience in a parodic play on meaning and meaninglessness. For the Sydney Front this play on illusion parodies the audience's expectation to find meaning and significance underneath the surface of the stage image.

In this deconstructive or postmodern aesthetic the Sydney Front have moved very far away from the Don Juan story, as one performer points out. It would appear that the Sydney Front are borrowing different aesthetic practices and re-combining them into a composite aesthetic through which the group produces their particular version of the Don Juan story (see Appendix 7 for draft and final running orders of scenes in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*). In this regard, the Sydney Front seem more interested in this poached aesthetic and what it means in terms of the deconstruction of the theatre than they do in the Don Juan story. The question is whether the Sydney Front's rehearsal processes and practices are 'poaching' in the sense meant by de Certeau and Henry Jenkins after him. It is this concern that I wish to address in the following section.

6 The collective aesthetic (part 2)

> Everything that is said, expressed, is located outside of the "soul" of the speaker and does not belong to him. The word cannot be assigned to a single speaker. The author (speaker) has an inalienable right to the work, but the listener also has his rights, and those whose voices were heard in the word before the author comes upon it also have their rights (after all there are no words that belong to no-one). *The word is a drama in which three characters participate*. It is performed outside the author and cannot be introjected into the author. (Bakhtin *Speech Genres* 121-122, *my emphasis*)

Henry Jenkins' work on textual poachers, as discussed above, has rendered the distinction between writers and readers, producers and consumers, problematic. He argues that readers as poachers are also writers or producers of their own aesthetic artifacts. In investigating the process(es) by which fan artists transform "borrowed materials" into resources for the creation of new texts, Jenkins turns to the work of Bakhtin on heteroglossia. Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia conceptualises writing and authorship as a drama of appropriation (see above) which provides insight into the particular mode of writing or authorship employed in the activity of poaching.

Bakhtin rejects notions of original authorship in favor of a conception of the writer as always already confronting a history of previous authorship. He contends that the author's words do not exist in abstract form in a neutral and impersonal language. Words are not taken from a dictionary but, rather, out of other people's mouths. Bakhtin states that words exist "in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own" (Bakhtin *Social Heteroglossia* 77). That is, each word an author chooses from the cultural lexicon already bears previous associations, meanings and values: "the word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention" (Bakhtin *Social Heteroglossia* 77).

As Bakhtin implies, a writer's mastery over his or her appropriated terms does not come easily or freely. Writers struggle against already made meanings, which are not simply removed when a term is appropriated. In fact, Bakhtin acknowledges that writers can never fully erase the history of a term's previous use or the complex grid of associations each term generates in the reader's mind. He says, "not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private

property...expropriating [words], forcing [them] to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process" (Bakhtin *Social Heteroglossia* 77). At most writers can hope to activate certain pre-existing meanings while suppressing, albeit imperfectly, others. Some words yield readily to the writer's demands while others persistently refuse "assimilation". The finished text thus represents an attempt to interweave the diverse materials the writer has appropriated, to evoke or to erase previous meanings, to bestow coherence and consistency. Bahktin's term, heteroglossia, refers to the conditions against which any creator must struggle in specifying a terms meaning within a particular context. This heteroglossia is what Maryanne Van Kerkhoven refers to when she describes the 90s' theatre collective as many-voiced.

In Chapter 4, in a section entitled "the collective aesthetic (part 1)", I established that the Sydney Front was modeled on the 90s version of the theatre collective. The mode of authorship of the contemporary theatre collective is, as Maryanne Van Kerkhoven has stated, many-voiced, distinct from the singular, univocal or monologic voice of the original 70s theatre collectives such as The Living Theatre, The Performance Group and The Open Theatre. In this section, I wish to revisit the Sydney Front's claim to a style of authorship as 'many-voiced' in the sense defined by Bakhtin and meant by Van Kerkhoven. I will argue that the Sydney Front's creative voice does differ markedly from the 70s model of the theatre collective, and in the process I will point out some serious problems with that particular model. However, I stop short at agreeing that the Sydney Front's mode of authorship is many-voiced and, by association, that the Sydney Front as readers and writers are poachers.

6.1 The 70s theatre collective: collective communality

> ...my life...is a record of the struggle to become part of a commune. The Living Theatre is that struggle. My one unique life. (Julian Beck #54)

This statement by Julian Beck, a founding member of the Living Theatre, embodies the impulse of the historical avant-garde to break down the distinction between life and art and to "organise a new life praxis from a basis in art" (Bürger 49). In this sense, The Living Theatre is exemplary of a number of theatre collectives such as The Open Theatre and the Performance Group, formed in the 70s by groups of individuals committed to a common purpose or goal: the destruction of socio-political institutions and the creation of an alternative society through art: a counter culture. Conjoining an

anti-art impulse and socio-political action, the theatre collective became a model in micro for an alternative socio-cultural organisation. As Richard Schechner has said, these theatre collectives made of themselves examples of group life and collective creativity (*Environmental Theatre* 251).

Collective creation was at the core of Julian Beck's revolutionary, new, "living" as opposed to "deadly" (Brook 1968), theatre. Beck outlined the main points of this type of theatre in "The Seven Imperatives of Contemporary Theatre":

> 1. In the street: outside of the cultural and economic limitations of institutionalised theatre.
> 2. Free: Performances for the proletariat, the Lumpenproletariat, the poor, the poorest of the poor, without admission charge.
> 3. Open Participation: Break Thru, Unification: Collective Creation
> 4. Spontaneous Creation: Improvisation: Freedom
> 5. Physical Life: Body: Sexual Liberation
> 6. Change: Increase of Conscious Awareness: Permanent Revolution: Unfixed (Flexible, Free) Ideology
> 7. Acting as Action. (#40)

As a model of the 70s theatre collective, Beck's imperatives summarise opposition to the Western bourgeois (private, commercial) theatre. The 70s collectives rejected the hierarchical chain of representation, with the actor subject to the authority of a dramatic author or theatrical director. They sought to liberate the actor from these authorities and, in so doing, to free the performer's authentic (spontaneous and physical) expressivity from the thoughts, ideas or intentions of an-other. Equally as important as the liberation of the actor from the hierarchical authorities of Western representational theatre was the emancipation of the spectator. The theatre collective removed the barrier separating performer and spectator, uniting them in a "community of participants" (Schechner *Environmental Theatre* 243).

Here Schechner hints at the type of group life promoted by the 70s theatre collectives. He has said that the collectives aimed to restore a sense of wholeness and community or communality to theatre. They wanted to achieve the wholeness of tribal experience of primeval shamanistic performance cultures (Schechner *Environmental Theatre* 252). On this point, the collectives diverge from the avant-garde's experimental and innovative impetus and seek in ritual – a Western romantic notion of non-Western primitive societies - a model for contemporary theatre and life. Beck exemplifies this (re-)turn to ritual performance when he describes the collective as a tribe:

> The word tribe is being used nowadays to describe those groups which are close to those ethnic groups which never lost their relationship to the earth the sun the wind water fire flesh. The primal things. Whose being is testament to some kind of natural, that is, non-artificial, tenderness for unspoiled life, life in harmony with the nature of things, and yet beyond the conflicts common to nature. The tribe is a way of grooving together. Each member is looking out for the benefit and well-being of all the members. They constitute a community in which individuals are not alienated from each other. (#54)

6.2 The postmodern critique of collective creation and communality

In Part 1 of this thesis, I examined Lyotard's notion of the postmodern condition. Writing on the differences between the grand narratives of traditional Western philosophy and what he describes as the postmodern condition of knowledge, Lyotard advises caution in relation to modern knowledges which, he asserts, legitimate their position by appealing to grand narratives such as the narratives of progress and emancipation, the dialectics of history or spirit, or the inscription of meaning and truth. In his comparative definition of postmodern knowledge Lyotard reminds us that modern discourses are totalising, even terroristic, forms of knowledge. In their tendency toward exclusion and a desire for universalising meta-prescriptives, these discourses enact a form of symbolic violence against difference or dissensus. Implicit in Lyotard's attack on modern enlightenment thought is a critique of the philosophical underpinnings of the 70s theatre collectives. In the case of these kinds of collectives, universal norms, standards, criteria and prescriptives are imposed on individual members of the group, leaving little room for disagreement. Dissenting voices are subordinated to the greater project: the liberation or emancipation of the performer from the domination of the authorial text, the recovery of the authentic voice of the performer, and the establishment of a participatory ethos incorporating the spectator in an alternative form of social communality, a unified social order.

Michael Taussig also points to the authoritarian or totalitarian nature of philosophies such as those underpinning the 70s theatre collectives. He describes any desire for order and unity which involves the organic absorption of the individual into the "tribe" as a fascist fascination: "that cosmology we know well, and it's a fascist fascination too, with the ritual leader, with the harmonics of heroism, with order, with mystical flight, with the organic absorption of the individual into the 'tribe' and so forth" (443). In his critique of ritual, which I have cited earlier and will not re-rehearse here (see Chapter 6), Taussig is

able to identify and specify the assumptions and values of the philosophy underpinning the 70s collectives. He convincingly argues that Western anthropology has bound the concept of ritual hand and foot to the imagery of order, to such an extent that order is identified with the sacred itself, thereby casting disorder into the pit of evil (442). He notes further that "if evil is coextensive with the origin of things, as primeval chaos and theogonic strife, then the elimination of evil and of the wicked must belong to the creative act as such" (442). In other words, Taussig identifies the strong narrative driving the formation of theatre collectives in the 70s as the theological or Christian narrative of creation. By revealing the quasi-religious foundations of the theatre collectives Taussig puts into question the collectives claims to a free, open or flexible ideological position.

6.3 The Sydney Front as a 90s theatre collective: heteroglossia?

The Sydney Front rejects outright the organic absorption of the individual into the group. In the organisation of the company, each member remains a separate and discrete unit inputting different ideas, actions and images. Furthermore, the Sydney Front's rehearsal process and the performance produced through that process do not evolve organically. The Sydney Front maintains a certain sense of self-awareness or self-consciousness concerning the artificiality or constructed-ness of the finished performance product. This awareness is in built into the rehearsal process in the way that the Sydney Front generates material largely through the process of improvisation. This process of improvisation is, as John Baylis has said, a very mechanical process (*Lecture*). The performers are not precious about their improvisations, that is, the improvisations do not belong to the performer who invented or initiated them. The performers have no attachments to particular improvisations and the improvisation has no authentic or organic connection to a source point of origin in the form of a performer. As Baylis claimed, anybody can do any improvisation. Performing an improvisation is then likened to performing or doing a task: it is a mechanical or automatic operation rather than an investment of selfhood or subjectivity in the improvisation.

Clare Grant has mentioned feeling "swamped" in rehearsal processes of this type: "you start with an image...you open yourself to the possibility that others may swamp your vision...you collaborate with them at the same time as holding onto your own strong personal vision and together you create a work...I held onto my ideas and at the same time gave them up completely if that makes sense" (*Talking Back* 19). Here, Grant does

not mean "swamped" in the sense of losing or giving up her-self identity in the unity – the wholeness, oneness, indissolubility - of the group. Rather, she is talking about disconnection and being radically disconnected from her own ideas by the ideas of others and by their appropriation and re-use of her ideas. In this regard, the Sydney Front would seem to be putting into question, rather extremely, the authority and authenticity of the speaking, self-knowing and self-identical subject. The mode of authorship that the Sydney Front adopts is authorial anonymity ("anyone can do it") and collective factory production (that is, the creation of actions and images as scenes that can stand on their own and that can fit into any part of the performance). By adopting this particular mode of (anti)authorship as production, the Sydney Front seem to avoid some of the problems associated with the 70s theatre collectives. The question remains as to how authorial anonymity and collective factory production works in practice, in the Sydney Front rehearsal process. Certainly, some questions were raised in one particular moment in rehearsal which I will examine now.

At the end of the first block of rehearsal one performer stated:
NK: *I'm excited that the work is a very different aesthetic to anything we've done before. I've got the feeling of something very different emerging in the shape of the work, the structure of the work...the theatrical images...I'm not sure how it's going to happen, or what the show is going to look and taste like, but in the next six weeks we can give aesthetic shape and structure to the material we've got rather than grabbing and slamming things together like in the normal six week rehearsal time.*

At this point, another performer who did not share these feelings, raised her dissatisfaction with the collective way of working. This same performer had ongoing problems with the group's working method throughout the process. She said that she was unhappy with the lack of discussion in rehearsal, and with the way in which certain discussions were cut short. She said that she felt that her contribution to the work wasn't valued and that there was a set of unarticulated rules according to which the group operated which were never explained to her. She said that she felt the group closed ranks on her especially when she disagreed with what they were doing, for example in her disagreement with the group devising new material from the random idea of war and disorder.

There was some response from the group to the issues raised by AT:

NK: *This work process is one that the group has developed over a number of years and productions. It would take hours to go through and explain that history.*

JB: *We all have different expertise. We wouldn't tell you about music. We have 10-15 years of experience in theatre. We're not all equals.*

NK: *There have been rough times in the company. We are aware that a new person has different needs and different thinking processes. We are aware of conflict arising out of your different working/thinking processes and your different interests and your feeling not a part of the process. It sometimes feels like a frustratingly impossible situation but it can be resolved.*

CG: *This way of working without a script and without a director gives us a lot more freedom in some respects but it also places more pressure on us, the performers. We take responsibility when the process breaks down. So it's in our interests to resolve difficulties. Keep your idea if you think/know that it's a good one. Part of the process is being able to say 'hey, stop! I need a minute here'.*

AT: *I have an image in my head that I try to talk through but it's being blocked.*

JB: *Just do it, then it becomes a talking point.*

NK: *Don't explain it, do it. It has to be do-able on the floor or go away and think about it, shape it and mould it in your head and then put it on stage. Leave the interpretation to everyone else. It's partly a very private, partly very group thing. We shape and mould things in our head. We don't negate the thought process.*

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

NK: *Take the two boys dancing for instance. It's a nice image so leave it. Don't try and justify or categorise it. Don't talk about the homoerotics and homosexuality of it. Leave it open so it can fit in somewhere and be developed. The physical moment is at risk in the rehearsal room. Out of the context of the rehearsal room and improvisation we can talk, intellectualise, etc.*

Guest composer Raffaelle Marcellino joined the discussion and reiterated some of the points made by AT throughout the rehearsal process and above. He said that he, like AT, wanted to work more closely with and from the libretto and that he wanted to find and explore in detail points of intersection between the music from Mozart's opera and other performance elements such as the space and the body:

RM: *I'm interested in a musical reworking of Don Giovanni which means working closely with the opera.*

NK: *That's great. Does it have to go parallel with what's happening in the space?*

RM: *Well I want to look at the relationships between the space and the music. Don't you feel that there is that sense of impending doom or danger that you're looking for already in the music, in the Mozart score, in the libretto?*

NK: *I'm talking about a different kind of danger where the whole space is a death trap so that the audience feels surrounded by this feeling of something lurking just underneath the surface but they can never quite tell what it is.*

It seems that while Grant might be able to both hold onto and give up her ideas at the same time, others in the group are unable to do the same. In the above example, the Sydney Front, when confronted with a moment of disagreement or difference in rehearsal, seem to revert to a position of radical individualism. Rather than taking on or considering one performer's criticism of the Sydney Front's rehearsal methodology, they rode roughshod over this particular performer's complaints and suggestions. The counter suggestion is made that she should do what she does and the Sydney Front will do their thing: "we wouldn't tell you about music so don't tell us about making performance". Of further concern is that this isn't an isolated instance. When the composer attempts to challenge the Sydney Front methodology and to explain what he wants to do with the music, the group ignores him and refuses to engage with his ideas. Again it is a matter of him doing his own thing and the Sydney Front doing their own thing.

Clearly this is not what Bakhtin means by heteroglossia. The collective in these instances is not many-voiced. Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia captures the conditions against which any creator must struggle in specifying a term's meaning within a particular context. Certainly disagreement, difference and dissensus feature in this struggle, but the necessary and essential process of appropriating terms that come with ready made meanings and values also involves re-shaping borrowed terms in order to bestow coherence and consistency on what the speaker is saying in a particular situation. This is where the Sydney Front's emphasis on postmodern themes becomes rather narrow and limiting. They take what are rather problematic arguments anyway (for example, Lyotard's dualistic and reductive distinction between modern and postmodern knowledge) and privilege difference in and for its own sake. In regard to the theatre

collective, the Sydney Front eschew engagement, negotiation or struggle with different ideas or concepts – that is, a many-voiced model of meaning making - for a stance of radical individualism which is misinterpreted as the postmodern sensitivity to difference and incommensurability (*pace* Lyotard).

7 Conclusion

At the end of the previous chapter I concluded that the Sydney Front's poaching was not a random or indiscriminate practice, but one performed in accordance with a particularly strong poetic or aesthetic logic. My aim in this chapter has been to explicate the Sydney Front's poetics of poaching, the eclectic range of critical and aesthetic theories, methods and practices which the Sydney Front brings to the reading and re-writing of the legend of Don Juan. In this chapter I have sought to examine how a postmodern performance aesthetic has formed or shaped the Sydney Front's reading and reworking of the Don Juan legend to produce a performance wholly different from and irreducible to that same legend.

As I conclude this analysis of the rehearsal process, I wish to outline some areas of concern with respect to the Sydney Front's postmodern poetics of performance making. It seems to me that the criticism leveled at the Sydney Front's model of the theatre collective can be directed toward the Sydney Front's rehearsal process more broadly. At times in the rehearsal process, it can seem that there is little engagement, negotiation or struggle with meanings the performers make with and from borrowed terms. The call from certain performers in rehearsal is to "leave it [the meaning of a scene] open", to not close or fix a single meaning to a scene. The Sydney Front performers seem to think that they will somehow close or fix the meaning of a scene if they talk about a scene or subject a scene to close or rigorous intellectual analysis. This would seem to suggest that the performers know the meanings and significations of the terms they borrow and that they know exactly what their own self-devised material means. They simply refuse to discuss meanings borrowed or made in the process and call this "leaving it open". The point that I am making is that this "open" meaning is not necessarily the ambiguity, indeterminacy or undecidability that Derrida, for instance, theorises, or that Pina Bausch, for example, practises in her dance theatre pieces. The Sydney Front leave the meaning of scenes open so that they can combine contrasting scenes to "muddy" (to take a term well-used in the rehearsal process) meaning, to make it opaque. By combining opposite

or strongly contrastive scenes, the Sydney Front imposes a certain ambiguity and indeterminacy on their material. That this is a form of postmodern deconstruction is highly questionable. It seems to work according to a binary logic in which difference is reduced to opposition. Certainly in terms of the collective, difference seems to reside in the negation of another individual's viewpoint. The process of the production of meaning in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* rehearsal process is therefore tightly regulated and controlled: only certain meanings are "open", or acceptable and allowable, while certain other meanings are "closed". The question is which meanings are, or are not, open and acceptable, and who decides?

Questions also have to be asked of how this refusal to examine the social or political positioning of the performers' signifying practices in the process of meaning-making is felt, if at all, in performance. In the rehearsal process one performer asserted that "the theatre is the theatre and it can't be anything else". Another performer agreed stating, "yes", but with the proviso that "you can push it [the theatre] to its contradictory limits". What does it mean to create ambiguity or indeterminacy in performance, to create contradictory and conflicting meanings, if these meanings are not contextualised socially, politically, etc.? What kind of experience is left for the spectator? Is such self-referential theatre limiting? If so, how and why? It is these types of questions that frame the analysis of performance in the third and final part of this thesis.

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[1] See *The Way of Acting* 1986.
[2] See "Intercultural Dramaturgy in Contemporary Australian Performance. A Rehearsal Case Study of Zen Zen Zo." *ADSA Conference Proceedings.* Monash University, 1997.

Part 3

Seduction and the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*: An Analysis of Performance

Foreword

As argued in the second part of this thesis, the Sydney Front performers have mastered the art of poaching. In the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* rehearsal process the performers poached themes and ideas from the legend of Don Juan and used these themes and ideas to generate material and to devise an original performance. One of the key themes borrowed by the Sydney Front from the Don Juan legend was the idea of seduction, which also became a significant poetic principle in the making of the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*. In this third and final part of the thesis, I will examine the notion of seduction poached from the legend of Don Juan and tactically deployed by the Sydney Front in their production of *Don Juan*.

The reader will note that although critical focus shifts from the documentation and analysis of the rehearsal process in Part 2 to the description and analysis of performance in Part 3, the theoretical framework operating in and across the second and third parts of the thesis is continuous. It is my contention that the Sydney Front's seduction of the spectator makes use of certain kinds of theatrical codes and conventions in much the same way as de Certeau suggests when he describes the tactical operations of nomadic poachers who "make do" with ready made cultural products. That is, in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* seduction is used as a tactical ploy to draw out, dramatise and disrupt the rhetorical conceit or deceit of the "critical distance" on which the theatrical contract, the relationship between performer and spectator, is based. Specific reference will be made to how seduction operates in relation to theatre spectatorship, which I, after Susan Melrose, characterise as "eating with the eyes". The consistency of the critical framework used in Parts 2 and 3 allows close examination and evaluation of the Sydney Front's poetic practice as elaborated in and through the rehearsal process. In the following two chapters I will question the efficacy (Chapter 6) and ethics (Chapter 7) of the tactic of seduction as a tool of deconstruction in and of the theatre.

This part of the thesis is concerned with analysis of performance. I approach the performance work of the Sydney Front as a spectator and as a participant in the performance making process. Thus, my analysis of the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* is informed by reception of various performances and by knowledges from the process. When I do speak as a spectator I speak from my own experience of the Sydney Front's

Don Juan without attempting to generalise my response to that of the audience as a whole entity. At the same time, I do refer to rehearsal discourse and to the ways in which the performers seek to position the spectator in performance. In the following section of this thesis, I outline the ways in which the Sydney Front attempted to position the spectator in relation to the performer and in doing this they did refer to "the spectator" as part of a single entity, "the audience".

6

Staging Seduction: the Sydney Front and the postmodern geopolitics of theatre's bodies and spaces

1 Introduction

In 7 years the Sydney Front created 7 major performance pieces; *Waltz* (1987), *John Laws/Sade* (1987), *The Pornography of Performance* (1988), *Photocopies of God* (1989), *Don Juan* (1991), *First and Last Warning* (1992) and *Passion* (1993). In this body of work the Sydney Front staged a relentless interrogation and playful manipulation of the rules and conventions of theatrical representation. One Sydney Front member has described the company's work in the following way: "it is work that takes as its basic subject the moment of performance, not the script that precedes it" (cited in Waites 7). Writing on the discourse of representation in the theatre, Herbert Blau asserts that the subversion of the authority of the dramatic text has shifted critical focus onto the live performance in such a way that the audience has taken the stage (27). The locus of the Sydney Front's mischievous exploration and testing of the limits of theatrical representation is the relationship between performer and spectator in live performance. This was expressed by a member of the Sydney Front in a radio interview previewing *Don Juan*: "All our work is about the relationship between the performer and the spectator and that relationship takes different forms...that's the essential relationship of theatre so often lost in the naturalistic tradition which pretends the audience isn't there" (*Arts Magazine*).

In an introductory discussion of theatre audiences, Susan Bennett remarks that "the intensity of interest in the audience sparked by the rejection of naturalist practice has, in the latter part of the twentieth century, become an obsession" (7). The Sydney Front share this obsession, a self-admittedly excessive preoccupation with the spectator and the dynamic of the performer/spectator relationship in live performance. The short history of the Sydney Front's work represents different stages in the development of their ideas concerning the performer, the spectator and the relations of power and knowledge

between these different kinds of bodies in the theatre space. In their first show, *Waltz*, the Sydney Front performed extreme physical actions in an attempt to exceed the spectator's appetite for spectacle. In *The Pornography of Performance* the performers offered up their bodies to the gaze *and* touch of the audience in order to demonstrate literally the spectator's insatiable desire for flesh. Ushered into the performance space by a member of the company, the audience was encouraged to place their hands through holes punched into large cylindrical shaped objects standing in the space. Standing inside each tube was a naked performer. In *Don Juan* the performers changed tack and required that the spectator place his or her body equally in the theatrical frame of the performance. The Sydney Front asked and paid an audience member to take his or her clothes off and to then stand naked on stage for two minutes.[1] During this time the performers disappeared, leaving the audience in a circle around the naked spectator. The performers returned only to receive the audience's applause. In *First and Last Warning* the audience was required to undress and wear black negligees given to them by a performer at the theatre door for the entire performance. In *Passion*, the performers disappeared themselves almost completely, appearing only at certain strategic moments on the margins of performance. The performance script for *Passion* – a set of written instructions for the audience to perform - was delivered to an audience member chosen by a small girl in a Holy Communion dress.

The subject and object of this chapter is the Sydney Front's fifth major production *Don Juan.* The Sydney Front's *Don Juan* did not follow the conventional plot or characterisation of works based on the legendary seducer. These include Tirso de Molina's morality play, *The Joker of Seville and the Guest of Stone* (1630), Lorenzo Da Ponte's libretto to the Mozart opera, *The Punished Libertine or Don Giovanni* (1787), or Molière's *Don Juan* (1655). Displaying an irreverence matching the mythical libertine's roaming infidelities, the Sydney Front poached the theme of seduction from the legend of Don Juan and employed its dynamics to interrogate the relationship between performer and spectator in theatrical performance. The Sydney Front's *Don Juan* was the first major show produced after the company's 1989 European tour of *The Pornography of Performance*. It marked a significant change in direction for the group. This was articulated in the publicity for Don Juan where it was announced that, "Having allowed the public to fondle our bodies in *The Pornography of Performance*, the members of the Sydney Front now intend to redress the balance" (see Figure 3). In an

interview, a company member explained that "In *The Pornography of Performance* we didn't challenge the roles between the performer as exhibitionists and the spectators as voyeurs. In *Don Juan* we play with this relationship throughout the show. We take the idea of seduction in the Don Juan myth and apply it to the theatrical relationship between the actor and spectator" (cited in Waites 7). The Sydney Front's use of the audience in *Don Juan* was notably more considered and proficient than in the early work. This level of complexity was carried through into later work, which is why *Don Juan* is a key performance piece in the Sydney Front's oeuvre and worthy of significant critical attention.

2 The Sydney Front's *Don Juan*: the Opening Scene

The Opening Scene[2] of the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* began as the double doors of The Performance Space theatre slammed open. The sound of the doors hitting the walls of the theatre was amplified by two resounding chords which, in Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*, announce the appearance of the ghost of the Commendatore, the avenging stone statue, come to dine with Don Giovanni on his impudent invitation. The solemn mood invoked by these notes and the associated thematic undertones of revenge and divine retribution - in this case, the performers getting their own back - were almost immediately overturned by a baroque soundtrack composed by Raffaele Marcellino. Marcellino's composition played the entire Mozart opera in a continuous loop at twenty times its normal speed. This highly embellished soundscape accompanied the audience's entrance into the performance space. At the box office each spectator was supplied with a black mask and asked to wear it for the duration of the show. At the door to the theatre, the spectator was supplied with a small, plastic cup of wine. With the mask affixed and glass of wine in hand, the spectator entered the black box theatre to find the performers sitting in the audience seating.

Six performers, attired in white wedding gowns with white powdered faces, were positioned randomly throughout the tiered audience seating which was secured against the audience by a rough barricade on three sides. The entire fortification was covered in barbed wire. Barricades also blocked easy access into the performance space. Each spectator was forced to walk in single file in a line before the performers. The performers eyed the spectators seductively; they looked and smiled, licked their lips, and at times noted down personal details in small black books. At the end of the line, the audience

THE SYDNEY FRONT

presents

DON JUAN

'extreme seductiveness is probably at the boundary of horror'
Georges Bataille

There are still a few slits in the curtain, still a few breaches in the barbed wire through which a ceremony of seduction can be acted out.

Having allowed the public to fondle their bodies in **THE PORNOGRAPHY OF PERFORMANCE**, the members of the Sydney Front now intend to redress the balance. **DON JUAN** is a fevered speculation on operatic excess, sex, desire and seduction.

This is the Sydney Front's first major work since its 1989 European tour. Previous productions include THE PORNOGRAPHY OF PERFORMANCE, PHOTOCOPIES OF GOD, and the solo shows THE NUREMBERG RECITAL and WOMAN IN THE WALL.

8 pm Wed-Sun
11-28 April 1991

$14 full price, $10 concessions
($8 for preview Wed 10 April)

THE PERFORMANCE SPACE

199 Cleveland St, Redfern
Bookings 319 5091

3 Back of flyer advertising the Sydney Front's Don Juan

assembled together in the empty space on the opposite side of the barricade, facing the performers.

The movement of the audience milling in the theatre accompanied by an extravagant musical score and lit by medium bright lighting that covered the entire space – including both performers and spectators - created the illusion that the audience was performing for the performers. This reversal was underlined by Marcellino's score which sampled dance tracks into the opera mix so that recognisable lines from commercially popular songs by well known artists, such as the artist formerly known as Prince and Madonna, could be distinguished over and above the gibberish. The spectator was, alternately, interrogated, "what are you lookin' at?", and entreated to actively participate in the performance, "get up on the dance floor", by the voices of the singers sampled into the sound mix.

In a discussion in the rehearsal process a performer stated that the Opening Scene of *Don Juan* was pivotal to the performance as a whole. Another performer asserted that the whole show should refer back to this scene, that is, "to the relationship between the watching performers and the watched audience". It was remarked that "this concrete relationship is the essential dramaturgy for the entire piece". Given these comments it would be possible to read this scene as simply a reversal or inversion of the conventional relationship between performer and spectator in the theatre space, which was how one performer in rehearsal characterised the scene; "the audience are putting on a show for us". While the Opening Scene is in some ways a reversal of the conventional relationship between performer and spectator, making the passive viewing audience active, I want to argue that it is not entirely reducible to such a reading. Firstly, the audience's activity in *Don Juan* is strictly controlled and directed by the Sydney Front. Secondly, the performers are not converted into wholly passive viewers. Located in the audience seating, they watch and actively record and respond to the appearance, actions and behaviours of the audience filing into the theatre one by one. The performers, in fact, actively re-assert their presence to a present and fully visible audience. This situation is designed to be most unsettling or agonising for the spectator drawn into the soft glare of public focus and away from the power and privilege of invisibility. In other words, the front on, face to face physical arrangement of the performer and spectator in the Opening Scene of *Don Juan* establishes an encounter of

two-way gazes which is, I want to argue, of the order of seduction. I am drawing here on a notion of seduction described by Baudrillard, a critical source in the rehearsal process. According to Baudrillard,

> In seduction we are not dealing with a new version of universal attraction. The diagonals or transversals of seduction may well break the opposition between terms; they do not lead to fused or confused relations but to dual relations. It is not a matter of a mystical fusion of subject or object, or signifier or signified, masculine and feminine etc., but of a seduction, that is, *a duel* (sic) *and agonistic* relation. (105, Baudrillard's emphasis)

3 Theorising seduction

The Sydney Front name seduction as one of two major themes in their work.[3] Seduction is defined as "a game of identity for adults" and as "mastery of the strategy of appearances against the force of being and reality" (*25 Years of Performance Art in Australia* 54). This definition makes direct reference to Baudrillard who writes that seduction stakes "mastery of the strategy of appearances, against the force of being and reality" (10). He states, "There is no need to play being against being or truth against truth; why undermine foundations, when a *light* manipulation of appearances will do?" (10, Baudrillard's emphasis). For Baudrillard, seduction is a mode of action that operates outside of and as a foil to the forces of power that perpetuate belief in truth, reality and identity. The attributes of seduction are not those of the real, the true or the self-identical, but are, instead, those of play and gaming, challenges and duels. As seduction cannot take on the terms of power directly, it plays on the surface appearances of things, denying them their truth and turning them into a game. Through this game or play, seduction thwarts all systems of power and meaning. Seduction is, in other words, a triumph of seeming over meaning, of representation or the lie over the real or the true. In this sense, it is possible to compare seduction characterised by Baudrillard as mastery of the arts of trickery, deceit, subterfuge, disguise and deception, to what de Certeau calls a tactic: "ways of operating" which are "clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, 'hunter's cunning,' maneuvers, manipulations" (xix).[4] As seduction is strange to the terms of power, yet actively related to power through deceit and trickery raised to an art form, it can be likened to what de Certeau calls a tactic. Seduction therefore shares the same capabilities as a tactic, that is, "a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the moment, and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment. It must vigilantly make use of he cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates

surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse" (de Certeau 37).

It is precisely this mastery of illusion over reality that is celebrated by Julia Kristeva in her writings on the mythical figure of Don Juan. In "Don Juan, or Loving to be Able To" Kristeva, another critical source referred to by the Sydney Front, examines the "wicked yet laughable and compelling" (191) mode of masculine seduction portrayed in Mozart's *Opera Buffa*, *Don Giovanni*. She claims that in Mozart's music, the figure of Don Giovanni is transformed into a being without an inner (psychological or moral) self: "His polytopicalness, his combinative pleasure, his lack of attachment, his laughter with and at prohibitions, turn him into a being without internality..." (197). Don Giovanni lacks, in other words, what might be called a psychological subjectivity, an authentic sense of identity. Attracted to secrecy and disguise he asserts himself, "through a play of inconsistencies, seemings and fascinations" (198). He is, in other words, "an artist with no authenticity other than his ability to change, to live without internality, to put on masks for fun" (199). Implicit in Kristeva's description of Don Giovanni's lack of character is the assertion that what he lacks he makes up for in other ways. She states, "He has no internality but, as his roamings, his flights, his many as well as unbearable residences show him to be, he is a multiplicity, a polyphony. Don Giovanni is the harmonisation of the multiple" (193). In other words, the figure of Don Juan asserts an alternative yet still affirmative, or positive and desiring, mode of being which is more akin to what Deleuze and Guattari would call "becoming" (232-309). The presentation of a positive and productive alternative to a conventional mode of existence as ego-based subjectivity is, as Kristeva notes, a great achievement. She states, "Don Giovanni succeeds...He succeeds in conquering women, challenging God, putting together an existence just as one puts together an opera, for instance. Don Giovanni is able to. Don Juanism is an art, as have been, during given periods, aristocracy or the dandy's stance" (194). Such accomplishment, Kristeva suggests, demands that we therefore understand the libertine attitude as a "longing to change existence into a form, a game, jouissance" and that we view the libertine outlook as an "extraordinary claim to change life in to art" (197-198).

Kristeva's examination leads her to conclude that the mythical master of seduction depicted in Mozart's opera offers a radical alternative to the dominant theatrical mode of narrative-based representation centred on revealing the psychological interiority of a

character. She asserts that the myth of Don Juan should be read allegorically in so far as it represents a challenge to psychological realism as an aesthetic, and signals its replacement by a baroque aesthetic. Don Juan is, she says, "*a myth transformed into an esthetics*" (208, Kristeva's emphasis):

> baroque esthetics induces the audience to dream and to hallucinate while pointing out that it is only a game never to be confused with reality. Such exhilaration through seeming does not become for baroque man any more than for Don Juan a "second nature" (as nineteenth-century realists were asking actors to have)...The fire that engulfs Don Juan is the same as the one that swept away the baroque set. It is a triumph of the seeming, which after having captivated its amorous victims and enthralled us, the hallucinated audience, allows itself the luxury of expending itself...Beyond baroque art, is not all art essentially baroque, that is, Don Juanistic? (198-199)

Following Kristeva the Sydney Front read the legend of Don Juan allegorically, taking seduction as a key theme and using it as a tactical ploy to destabilise a series of binary oppositions underpinning the contractual relationship between performer and spectator within the frame of theatrical representation: stage and auditorium, performer and spectator, active and passive, doer and viewer, body and mind, visible and invisible, public and private, etc. In the following section of this chapter, I will explicate the type of theatre that differentiates stage space and audience space, performer and spectators, doers and viewers.

4 Theorising modern theatre spectatorship

The separation of stage and auditorium began in the seventeenth century with the establishment of private theatres in France and England. The higher ticket prices asked by these profit-oriented theatres affected the social composition of the audience, leading to changes in the codes and conventions of behaviour. As audiences became increasingly bourgeois, audience behaviour became more and more refined and orderly, which is to say, passive. In *Spectators on the Paris Stage in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Barbara Mittman explains that a reformation of the French theatre, in 1759, enforced the separation of stage and auditorium by ending the tradition of audience seating on stage (121). This reform effected the removal of the *petits marquis* from the stage of the Comédie Française. The *petits marquis* were petty aristocracy or dandies for whom attendance at the theatre was a significant social and cultural event: both to see and to be seen. Outrageous and shocking in their dress and libertine behaviour, the *petits marquis* often interfered with the action on stage, disrupting

performances by attacking the performers (particularly actresses) and insulting the bourgeois audience in the boxes above the stage. The removal of spectator seating from the stage ended these spontaneous interruptions of the performance.

In 1782, the Comédie Française installed seating in the *parterre* of its new theatre. Similarly, in 1850, English theatres replaced the pits with stalls. The ease and freedom of movement previously enjoyed by the audience was curtailed, ensuring the more sedate and refined behaviour of the audience. Most importantly, these structural changes, along with the installation of footlights in seventeenth-century private playhouses, emphasised the proscenium stage as a division between active players and an immobile and passive public. They instituted the stage as a box without one side. Commonly referred to as fourth-wall-removed naturalism, this type of theatre is characterised by the split between fictional stage world and audience, representation and reality, art and life.

The changes made to French and English theatres in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries improved modes of behaviour so that there were few reports of audience disorder. Michael Booth asserts that the major problem became audience passivity: "After 1850 behavior improved, and complaints were eventually made not of uproar in the pit and gallery, but of stolid indifference in the stalls" (in Bennett 3-4). In other words, the spectator as uninhibited quasi-participant in the spectacle was giving way to modes of audience behaviour common to modern theatre and drama: politeness, docility and remoteness. As Booth suggests these ways of behaving may be taken as tangible signs of audience indifference or boredom.

The absence or invisibility of the spectator from the scene of representation, a product of the historical division between stage and audience, is installed as a given in modern drama and theatre. In *Modern Drama and the Rhetoric of Theatre* William Worthen conceptualises theatricality in terms of a particular relationship between drama, stage production and audience interpretation. He argues that modern theatricality is determined by the rhetoric of realism, modern realism being the dominant formation residing over a particular "arrangement of practices developed as part of a cultural milieu of which we are still a part" (14). He states:

> As a performance rhetoric, modern theatrical realism embraces several dramatic genres - experimental naturalism, modern realism, expressionism, the theatre of the absurd - that stage the

> text within its rhetorical priorities: a proscenium stage, often implying a box set; a fourth wall discriminating between the stage and audience; objects that both constitute and express character and action; the necessary erasure of the activities of production from the realm of the audience's legitimate interpretation. *The rhetoric of realism opposes the visible and integrated scene onstage to the invisible, indeterminate, absent scene of the spectator's interpretation.* (5, my emphasis)

According to Worthen, modern realism provides a way to hold audiences, performers and drama in a particular relationship. He claims that the stage deploys its dramatic and theatrical style to shape certain forms of audience attention, experience and interpretation. He notes that the formal and stylistic features of realistic drama are readily identifiable as features of "realism" that the drama appropriated from the novel in the late nineteenth century. The common element linking such features as prosaic dialogue, bourgeois setting and subject matter, conflict between internal psychological motives and external economic or social pressures, a rigorously "causal" plotting, predominance of incident, and so on, is the assertion of "the drama's unmediated transparency to the offstage reality it presents" (15).

It is the production of this dramatic effect on stage that Worthen's work specifically focuses on. He asserts that the production of a realistic effect on stage requires an equally elaborate theatrical rhetoric. The first two points of this theatrical or performance style are articulated thus: the pictorial, "photographic" objectivity claimed for the mise-en-scene, and its ability to govern a behaviouristic style of acting. However, according to Worthen,

> The third moment of this rhetoric – how this complex of dramatic, staging, and acting techniques produces a characteristic experience for its audience – is more difficult to bring into focus, because the realistic theatre negates the audience's overt participation in the theatre as a necessary part of its proper interpretive activity. Defining verisimilitude as a thorough identification of the drama (present) with its performance (transparent), the theatre casts its audience as absent from the field of representation. Legitimate theatre experience, and so a proper interpretation of the "knowledge" that realistic drama often promises, can only occur when we have been apparently exiled from the field of theatre itself.
>
> The realistic stage works to arouse a familiar modern appetite: the desire to view others as theatre from a position of unstaged freedom. We might think of the realistic rhetoric as the body of practices that both stimulate and satisfy the peculiar modern appetite for "objectivity". (15)

Thus for Worthen, the modern theatre spectator is best characterised as a voyeur objectifying "others as public, as controlled by an 'environment' which operates as fate, while remaining in a privileged position of observation, beyond representation" (21). In a critique of Naturalistic theatre Bertolt Brecht comments that the audience, sitting in a darkened auditorium invisible to the performers on stage, has the illusion of not being in the theatre at all. This illusion is so powerful, he says, that the audience shouldn't start clapping until they are in the foyer collecting their hats and coats. Brecht compares the experience of the spectator in this type of theatre to that of a voyeur sitting in front of a keyhole watching as a private and secret world is revealed before his or her eyes (*Messingkauf Dialogues* 51).

Derrida, after Artaud, also characterises theatre spectatorship as a form of voyeurism. He describes the structure of mimesis as hierarchical and text-centred. According to Derrida, all the agencies involved in the act of imitation are related in a chain of representation beginning with the author-creator of the dramatic playtext and ending with the audience as passive consumers of the author's ideas, thoughts and intentions embodied in his or her text. Helga Finter states that Derrida describes the audience as a "passive seated public of spectators and consumers, jouisseurs of a spectacle that interpellates them as voyeurs without questioning that relationship" (*Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 156). In other words, Derrida's argument against mimesis is precisely that it obscures the technologies of the stage that frame representation. Mimesis is based on "an historical forgetting of the scene of representation" (Finter *Disclosure(s) of Re-Presentation* 156).

Closely following the points enumerated by Derrida in his outline of the closed structure of theatrical representation, the experimental American theatre of the 60s attempted to subvert the power and control of the dramatic author and, concomitantly, to liberate the spectator from the passivity forced on them by textual authorities. The aim was to empower the spectator in terms of making the passive spectator an active and equal participant in the theatre event. In other words, reactiviating or re-energising the relationship between the performer and spectator was the main aim of this avant-garde theatre movement. Their aims were couched in the discourse of liberation and empowerment; that is, the audience was perceived as passive and powerless. The idea was to free the spectator from the domination and control of textual authorities over

representation so that the spectator could actively partake in the process of creating meaning.

Herbert Blau has acknowledged that "there is no doubt something beneficial in imagining the undoing of repression in a sort of participatory theatre", which he notes is "a legacy of the sixties that persists in theory" (27). At the same time he cites Brecht who cautioned long before the 60s that although the participatory ethos might sound like good therapy it was probably bad politics (27). Brecht's notion of the spectator as voyeur hits upon the paradoxical positioning of the spectator in naturalistic theatre as immobile yet active (seeing, as opposed to being seen) and, therefore, powerful. In relation to Naturalistic theatre, it may be argued that the separation of proscenium and audience, doers and viewers, places the spectator in a position of mastery and domination. In this type of theatre all representation is addressed to the omnipotent gaze of the spectator which serves, in turn, to reinforce the spectator's socio-cultural identity and (class) position of power and privilege.

Brecht's criticism points to the apparatus or mechanism that deploys a very subtle and complex mode of power, and which produces a particular relationship between spectator and performer in the theatre. Worthen asserts that theatrical realism claims to stage an objective representation by integrating dramatic and performance style into the pictorial consistency of the material scene onstage. He claims, indicating the limits of Derrida's argument, that the purpose of this pictorial consistency is not, in the end, simply mimetic. The aim of realism is to produce an audience and to legitimate its private acts of interpretation as objective (17). Thus, for Worthen, modern theatrical realism produces an audience through the institution of "critical" distance; a division, differentiation and distribution of individual bodies in space that opposes performer and spectator in such a way as to construct the spectator as outside the spectacle, observing it objectively from a distance. Worthen states, "the objectivity of the pictorial stage both withdraws it from the audience's influence, and claims to render to drama 'absolute', as though it were not implicated in the activities of performance and of observation that fabricate it on the stage" (18). At one level, the drama is taken to be a re-presentation of reality in the plenitude of its presence. At another level, this reality is taken to be transparently evident to spectator. In other words, the relationship between stage and audience, the drama (present) and its interpretation (transparent), is posited as unmediated. In both cases,

therefore, the ideological position of the drama and the audience's experience and interpretation of the drama is and remains unquestioned. Worthen contends that this ideological neutrality is an illusion produced by an institutional technology, a panoptic machinery, which also operates in the modern realistic theatre. That is, Worthen argues that the modern realistic theatre is an architectural apparatus and an institutional formation in the image of Bentham's Panopticon.

In *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison* Foucault examines Bentham's Panopticon as the architectural figure of disciplinary or institutional power. He sets forth its principle of operation thus:

> at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed then is to place a supervisor in a central tower...By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualised and constantly visible...Visibility is a trap. (200)

For Foucault the Panopticon is "a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another" (205). The primary task of this machine-like apparatus is to differentiate between individual bodies in space: it is "a machinery that assures dissymmetery, disequilibrium, difference" (202). This differentiation of individual bodies in space seeks to establish a distinction between the one who sees all and those who are seen: "The panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/beeing seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower one sees everything without ever being seen" (201-202). This schema is used, Foucault writes, "whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behaviour must be imposed" (205). Thus, the model of the Panopticon outlines a type of productive power exercised on individual bodies to make them subject to a particular relationship of power, and to internalise this power relation so as to re-produce it. Foucault states that, "Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up...A

real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation" (202). The theatre operates this disciplinary mechanism of power by instituting a difference or separation and disequilibrium along a see/being seen dyad. It is this apparatus of power and production – more than any one person, whether author, director, actor, designer, spectator, etc., as outlined in Derrida's hierarchy of textual representation - that the Sydney Front seeks to demonstrate through mediating the relationship between stage and audience, performer and spectator. The group's seduction of the spectator is thus interpreted as an attempt to lure or entice the spectator away from the power and privilege of private viewing.

The Sydney Front's seduction of the spectator in *Don Juan* cannot be reduced to an attempt to lead or draw a putatively passive or disinterested spectator into the performance, to engage them in a participatory way with the action onstage. The Sydney Front did not seek to furnish the spectator with a complete or undivided experience of collective action, a communicative synthesis through performance called *communitas* by Victor Turner. Rather, the Sydney Front targeted the machinery of theatrical representation itself, to show how individuals are transformed into spectators through a specifically theatrical making and doing, or disciplining. Through the tactic of seduction, a play on distance and proximity, alienation and attraction, the Sydney Front demonstrated that the spectator's "critical distance" from the performer on stage is the product of an institutional practice, a panoptic machinery, which works to conceal its productive operations. The tactic of seduction in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* dramatises the rhetorical conceit or, rather, deceit of the "critical distance" on which the contractual relationship between performer and spectator in the theatre is based. At the same time, seduction insinuates an element of play and in(s)anity into the theatre relation, as did the dandy's interruptions of theatrical performance, to stave off the indifference or boredom of spectators in private, commercial theatres after 1850.

5 Seduction and the subversion of the theatrical contract

According to Susan Melrose the theatre relation operates according to the institution of a critical distance that separates and differentiates performer and spectator in the theatre space. In "Beyond Presence? Repoliticising Theatre's Bodies", she writes:

> The theatre relation is one of difference, in controlled conditions which maintain that difference; which seeks transcendency of maintained difference through an ingurgitation, through direct and oblique two way gazes (in the late 80s), which perform as the lips and tongue of desire. Its metteurs-en-scene choose and combine

> and offer bodies to be licked by the gaze, which I am seeing here as oral, as a mouth, a play of lips and tongue, a drama of feeding, rather than as culpabilisingly phallic, a violent penetration as much film theory would have it. (51)

Adopting Zoe Sofoulis's term cannibal-eye-sation, Melrose terms this theatre practice "eating with the eyes". The theatre, she claims, "will always (all ways) offer bodies to the gaze" (58). In examining this offering of bodies to the gaze, Melrose does not work through film theory but rather through a political theory of the culinary arts, following the work of Bourdieu and de Certeau in particular. Melrose rejects the application of film theory to the theatre. She argues that theatre spectators are devourers of a presence offered up to them in a particular way night after night. It is the visible presence of the performer, a real live body sweating on stage rather than an image projected and objectified on screen, that draws the spectator in again and again. As Melrose states, "we are bound in at these moments, but this binding in has little to do with the Aristotelian empathic projection into 'character', and much to do with eating the raw and the live, our own kind...a cannibal-eye-sation of the body-beyond-reasonable-endurance and loving-it of the performer" (54). Accordingly, Melrose says that what is needed is "a theory of theatre's passionate economy, stressing the two way encounters that lift the medium away from encroachment by film theory's own discourses" (54). In arguing that the theatre is a culinary art, the art of serving up and eating bodies in a particular way, Melrose suggests that the critical question we should be asking is, "the performer likes to be licked, is eating people wrong?" (50). In other words, Melrose examines theatre spectatorship as a mode of consumption, and explores consumption as a particular appetite, the desire to eat what is offered up. In this sense her work is very different to certain other notions of theatre spectatorship as consumption, which dismiss the spectator as a voyeur, a passive consumer, as Derrida's deconstruction of theatrical representation does.

Melrose's paper is on the question of a political/adversary theatre in the luxury, as opposed to subsistence, economy we are part of. In this context she suggests a mode of political intervention which may simultaneously elicit and frustrate the desires or appetite of the theatre spectator. She says that "we might have to deny the spectators the time to get their teeth into the bodies dished up, deny them even the time to determine what to eat, what to call it, whether to predicate it as edible" (*Beyond Presence?* 51). I want to argue that this is exactly what the seduction in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* achieves.

According to William Worthen, Brecht understood that political theatre works to disclose and dramatise (rather than to conceal) the spectator's performance (7). Seduction is, in this sense, a tactical ploy to draw out and dramatise the spectator's appetite for flesh.

Writing on seduction Baudrillard says that "the most immediate and purest form of seduction, one that bypasses words" is the seduction of the eyes: "Where looks alone join in a sort of duel" and where "once the delightful tension of the gazes gives way to words or loving gestures, the intensity declines". He describes the seduction of the eyes as, "a tactility of gazes...a duel that is simultaneously sensual, even voluptuous, but disincarnated - a perfect foretaste of seduction's vertigo, which the more carnal pleasures that follow will not equal" (77). The encounter of two-way gazes is pure seduction because it is incarnate. The embodied subjects can't consummate their desire over the distance it takes to look or gaze, so the desire intensifies. Seduction is a state in which the subject is empty of everything but the agony and ecstasy of looking and being looked at, desiring and being desired. In this sense the subject is what Deleuze and Guattari have called a Body Without Organs, that is, a body empty of anything but desire as an intensity circulating on the surface of the body (149-166).

A similar story of seduction is told and dramatised in Heiner Müller's adaptation of the classic book on seduction, the French novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. In Müller's performance text, *Quartet*, Merteuil offers her old sparring partner in seduction, Valmont, her virgin niece "fresh from a convent's discipline" for his pleasure. The aristocrat, Valmont, strenuously rejects the marchioness' offer, registering an insult in plain or rough language:

> She will run into my knife before I have even drawn it. She won't even double once: she doesn't know the thrill of the hunt. What is game to me without the lust of the chase. Without the sweat of fear, the choked breath, the turning upward of the white in the eye. What's left is digestion. My best tricks will make a fool of me like the empty theatre does of the actor. I will have to applaud myself. (104)

It is the reference to digestion that is revealing here as it directly links seduction and consumption in such a way as to suggest that seduction is a pleasure that is pre-digestive. It is a foretaste that plays with food and the idea of eating but which refuses, finally, the eating or consumption of food, and so for sex, etc. Seduction elicits a dizzying hunger, the delirium of starvation similar to that of the anorexic whose whole body is

taken over and surrendered completely to the simultaneous craving and disgust for food. Coincidentally, Deleuze and Guattari refer to the anorexic body as a Body Without Organs and I want to connect that refusal to eat with the seduction of the spectator in the Sydney Front's theatre. Seduction in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* becomes a tactical ploy that ruthlessly interrogates and ironizes the notion of "eating with the eyes". Seduction endlessly plays on the critical distance that produces difference and desire between performer and spectator in the theatre. The Sydney Front use the dynamic of seduction to alternately attract and then repel or alienate the spectator. They move the audience from one arrangement (spatial configuration) to another so much so that it becomes quite unsettling and confusing as to where the performer/spectator will be next. The audience can never relax, sink their teeth in, chew, swallow or consume the bodies on offer. They are always being moved on before they get a chance. Also the tone of the scenes themselves often changes so that just as the audience gets comfortable and think they know where things are going the tone changes quite inexplicably. In the following section I will examine how the Sydney Front put seduction into play in their production of *Don Juan*.

6 The postmodern geopolitics of the Sydney Front's seduction in *Don Juan*

As discussed in an earlier chapter, Edward Soja describes postmodernism as "a theoretical discourse and a periodizing concept in which geography increasingly matters as a vantage point of critical insight" (62). He attributes to Jameson "an ability to see in the cultural logic and forms of postmodernism an instrumental cartography of power and social control; in other words a more acute way of seeing how space hides consequences from us" (62-63). Marrying Jameson's postmodernism of resistance and Foucault's critical analysis of disciplinary technologies, Soja asserts that postmodernism is "an expressly geopolitical strategy in which spatial issues are the fundamental organising concern, for disciplinary power proceeds primarily through the organisation, enclosure, and control of individuals in space" (63). The Sydney Front's manipulation of the spectator in *Don Juan* effects multiple transformations in the organisation of bodies in space in order to underline, and to introduce some play into, the relations of power and knowledge instituted by the particular arrangements of these semiotic elements in the theatre.

As I described earlier, on entering the Performance Space theatre the spectator is corralled in single file in front of male and female performers in white wedding dresses (expectant brides?) sitting in the rostrum of audience seating roped off with barbed wire. As the masked spectators file into the auditorium they gather on the opposite side of the barrier, face to face with the performers. The spatial arrangement, soundscape and lighting effects institute the challenge and game of seduction. To reinforce this, the Opening Scene is comprised of a number of different actions that play on the motif of seduction. In one piece, for instance, three performers take fishing rods to the front of the barricade and cast their bait of red plastic roses into the audience. The roses land on the floor at the feet of various spectators. They ignore these offerings which are slowly reeled in by the dejected performers.

At the end of the first scene, one performer leaves the barricaded rostrum and ventures into the audience. He is directed by the other performers to choose one spectator, a man. This man is singled out from the rest of the audience. He is seated on a chair in the centre of the floor space directly in front of the performers. The audience around him forms a semi-circle to better view the performer's verbal seduction of the man. They ask the man a set of leading questions from a prewritten script, for example, "did you come here alone tonight?", "do you have a lover at home?", "are you looking for a change?", "do you have any un-nameable desires?", etc. The scene was tagged Seduction Victim in rehearsal because the idea was to humiliate this one person or to make him, at least, feel extremely uncomfortable singled out, individually from the rest of the audience for the pleasure and enjoyment of the performers and spectators. The position of the lone spectator is potentially a horrible and agonisingly painful one as he is subject to the gaze of both performers and spectators. For the rest of the audience I suspect that the feeling is, at first, one of immense relief at not being chosen. Then it is likely that a creeping sense of uneasiness arrives with the realisation that any individual spectator could be singled out and seated alone in the middle of the space, left to sweat and squirm under the stage lights and salacious questions of the performers. The spectator's enjoyment of the spectacle of the performers seducing the lone spectator is designed to be tempered by this awareness.



4 Seducing a spectator (from L to R): John Baylis, Andrea Aloise and Annette Tesoriero. Copyright Heidrun Löhr.

At one point a performer from the back of the rostrum says to the seduction victim, "I think I'd like to touch you". He stands and begins to walk down the stairs toward the spectator. At the same time, the barbed-wire-covered bar blocking the audience's entrance to the rostrum of seating lifts (the stage manager operates the mechanism that raises the bar). The way is made clear for the performer to have his way with the spectator. At this point, the rest of the performers rise from their seats, one saying "I think we all want to touch you", as they proceed down the stairs and into the auditorium behind the leading performer. The leading performer walks right up to the seated audience member as the other performers fan out behind him. This moment is designed to produce intense apprehension, to make the audience wonder whether the performer will, in fact, "touch" or fondle the spectator. At the same time as this is happening, the other performers target and close in on the audience standing in a semi-circle around the seated spectator. I noted that at this point laughter from the audience was transmuted into silence as the situation appears to turn back on the spectator. The

Sydney Front, having created what I perceived to be a moment of intense anxiety, then let it go and, asking spectators to move to the side for the next part of the performance, move onto the next scene.

As directed by the performers, the audience divides into two groups standing on opposite sides of the performance space, leaving a passageway down the middle for the performance. This is the spatial configuration for several pieces to follow including Java Dance, Dick Lecture, Thump Rump and the Pavan/Fuck Me scene. The first three scenes are parodies of different kinds. Java Dance, for instance, parodies the dance of seduction, while Dick Lecture ridicules male sexuality. In Java Dance the performers hitch up their wedding dresses to thigh height and, adopting a wide-legged stance with knees slightly bent, perform a physically demanding, sexually suggestive (pelvic thrusting) dance. The performers move in a pack targeting one section of the audience by dancing directly toward them. When the dancers come face to face with the target audience they stop and fan out throughout the performance space. They walk slowly up and down the line of spectators on both sides of the performance space, eyeing them off, winking seductively, and licking their lips before rejoining the group to dance in a different direction. In the middle of Java Dance, one performer points to a single spectator and shouts "you". Two other performers approach the spectator singled out by the performer, and take hold of her by the arms. The first performer opens and moves through a door leading to the dressing rooms at the back of the space. The two performers who have hold of the spectator rush her backstage behind the first performer. They disappear backstage while the remaining performers prowl the space whistling an aria from *Don Giovanni*. After a while the backstage door opens and the performer re-appears followed some moments later by the spectator. She walks back to her original position and the dance resumes.

Java Dance is meant as a parody of the "endless fucking of Don Juan", as one performer says in the rehearsal process. At the same time the dance plays with audience expectations and sensibilities. The performers dance in a grotesque manner directly at sections of the audience. When they reach their target the group breaks apart and spreads throughout the space. The performers close in on individual spectators in the front row of the audience. They gesture suggestively at them before moving onto the next spectator and then the next. The tone in this first half of the scene is light and

playful. The spectator is potentially amused by the gross physicality of dance, and by the performers' somewhat brazen attempts at serial seduction directed at spectators in the front row of the audience. However, the tone of the scene changes half way through when the performers kidnap a member of the audience (in rehearsal this scene was called Audience Kidnap). Again, as in an earlier scene, an audience member is singled out individually and is, in this instance, taken backstage into the performers' dressing rooms. In this way, the performers mean to unsettle the spectators, making them feel extremely uncomfortable and unsure of their anonymity, which is necessary for the spectators' enjoyment of the spectacle of seduction (whether this is the performer's crude, pelvic-thrusting dance or their attempted seductions of spectators). Java Dance



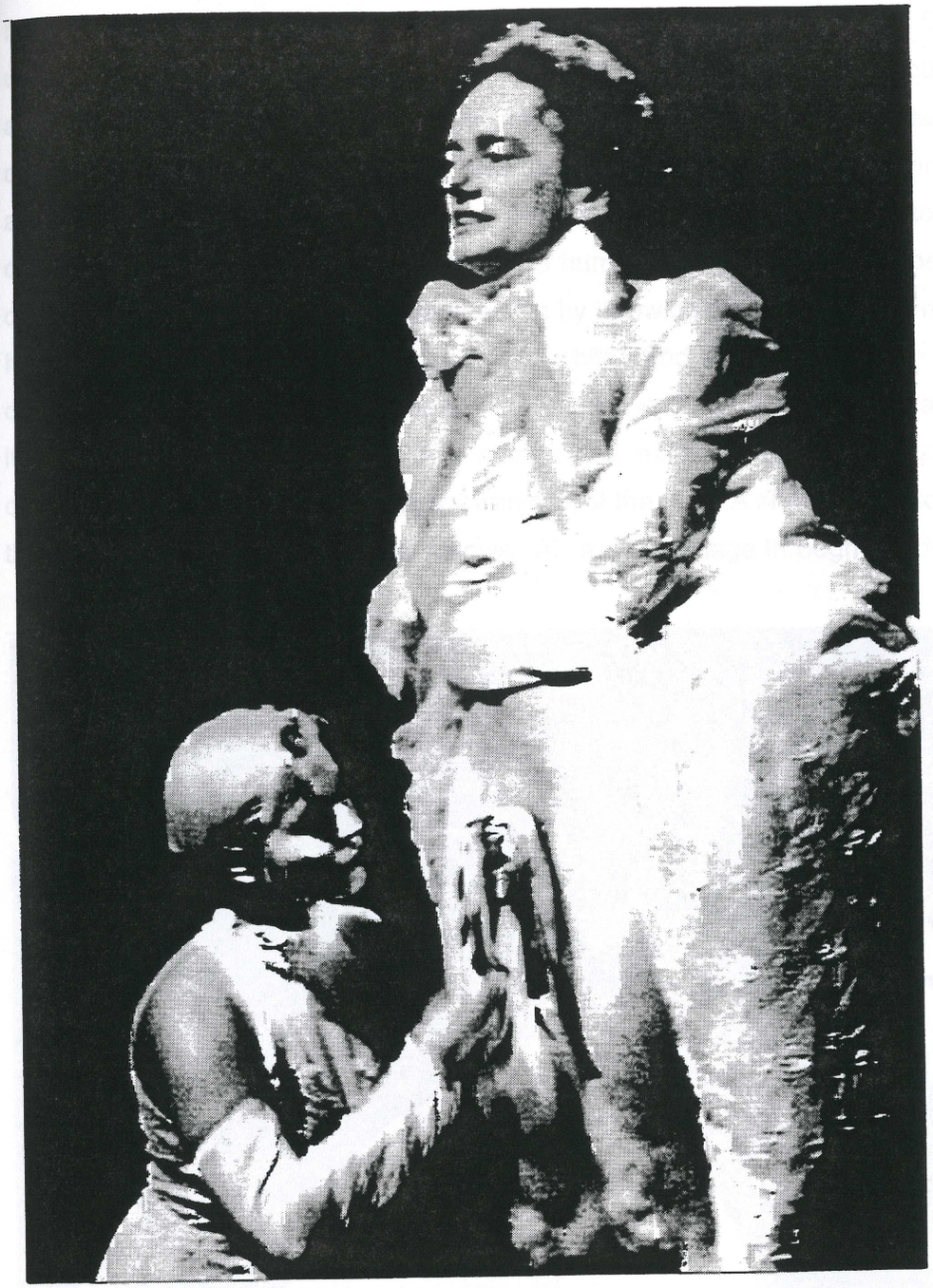
5 Java Dance (from L to R): Christopher Ryan, Andrea Aloise, John Baylis, spectator or seduction victim, Nigel Kellaway and Elise Ahomnos. Note the masked spectators on both sides of the playing space. Copyright Heidrun Löhr.

increases the degree of uneasiness felt in the theatre by the spectator. The scene works in this way because the performers maintain coverage of the whole space throughout

the scene, to the point of patrolling the space while a spectator is ensconced backstage. Thus in this scene the performer's surveillance of the spectator is evident and tangible at all times.

At the end of the Java Dance the performers ask the spectators if they would like more wine and then set about refilling their plastic glasses. While several performers serve wine, a performer in the back left-hand corner of the space stands on a chair and lifts his dress to above his waist. He is naked underneath. He begins a monologue: "I remember the time I bought my very first Mozart record". The man tells the story of buying his very first Mozart record. Recalling the experience, he describes his longing to take the record home and to be alone with it. He imagines opening the package, slipping the record from its protective sheath, gently placing the record on the player and lifting the needle of the player above the "untouched vinyl". He describes the intense anticipation and desire invested in this moment as the needle hovers above the black plastic. While the man is speaking, a female performer noisily wheels a trolley, laden with scissors, a comb, a powder puff and a set of multi-coloured ribbons, to the man's side. She takes some of these implements and begins to preen, that is, to cut, comb, tease and powder, the man's pubic hair. As she does this she talks over the top of the man's monologue. Thus, as the man relates his desire to the audience, he stands exposed from the waist down while a female performer attends to his flaccid penis, speaking about the male member in clinical terms: "John's penis, the head the shaft and the pubic hair". The scene ends as the female performer attaches a bunch of multi-coloured ribbons to the man's penis. Dick Lecture is meant to point to the space between imaginary and real realms of desire, specifically in relation to male sexuality. In this sense, Dick Lecture can be interpreted as a parody of male desire and seduction.

Thump Rump follows directly on from Dick Lecture. In this scene, five performers appear along the back row of the rostrum of audience seating. They are in a line holding hands. In the middle is the opera diva dressed in a white muslin dress with a full hooped skirt. At the side of the diva are naked men, each one wearing a multi-coloured ribbon tied around his penis. Last in the line, on either side, are two female handmaidens dressed in black skirt and tailcoat. The diva begins singing an aria from Don Giovanni. As she sings she beings to walk down the rostrum of audience seating. She is accompanied in song and movement by the other performers who have to step inelegantly over chairs and



6 Elise Ahomnos and John Baylis in Dick Lecture. Copyright Heidrun Löhr.

scramble around behind the diva to get to the floor below. As the diva steps off the rostrum and onto the floor, there is a pause in the singing and she bounds back to the top of the rostrum followed by the rest of the group to begin the second verse of the song. At the end of the second verse the music, played by Nigel Kellaway on a DX7 keyboard, changes tune. On this cue the opera singer flings herself to the floor on all

fours in front of one half of the audience and lifts her hooped skirt. She is naked underneath. The diva sings an aria from *Don Giovanni* with her naked bottom up in the air. Meanwhile the handmaidens take hold of one man: the man still standing on the chair directly across from where the diva has placed herself. They take this man by the arms and propel him down the space toward the diva's upturned bottom. The man connects with the woman quite abruptly. He humps the diva and when spent falls off to one side. The handmaidens douche the diva by throwing water from small red buckets at her backside, before wiping her down with white hand towels. They then return to the chair next to which the men are now lining up and jostling for a turn. The action repeats itself several times before the diva stands and exits the stage through one of the dressing room doors, obviously upset with one of the men. A short comic scene between the men and the handmaidens follows. All exit backstage through the dressing room



7 Thump Rump (L to R): Nigel Kellaway, Annette Tesoriero and Christopher Ryan. Copyright Heidrun Löhr.

doors on either side of the space. This utterly grotesque yet farcical scene is meant as a parody of the role of the diva in opera. Her beautiful voice often gives lie to the carnality of her desires. All through Thump Rump, the diva continues to sing though her voice is severely affected and altered by the gross physicality of the stage action.

It has been important to explain these scenes in full because what follows on from Dick Lecture and Thump Rump represents a radical change in the tone of the performance. The Pavan/Fuck Me scene is opposite in tone to the preceding scenes. After a short transitional scene, the entire cast reappears in a new costume. The men wear black pants and coat tails and a white shirt. The women wear the same white shirt and black coat tails but a knee length black skirt instead of pants. In a staggered line the group begin to dance a slow and elegant dance, a variation of the stately court dance called the Pavan. The choreography of the Pavan dance - small steps, twirling, gliding combined with coordinated leg and arm movements – is very different to the thumping gyrations of the Java dance. The performers dance through one round of the Pavan and go on to repeat the dance, which is the pattern some of the dancers carry through till the end of the scene. One female performer, however, breaks the pattern of the dance and approaches one of the male dancers. She turns him toward her and pulls him close to her body in an embrace. Her legs wrap round his and she pushes his head down to her chest. At this point the man resists and struggles out of her embrace. She leaves him and moves onto another man. Against the background of the slow, stately court dance, the female performer makes repeated rough sexual advances toward her male counterparts. Her advances are violently rejected by the men.

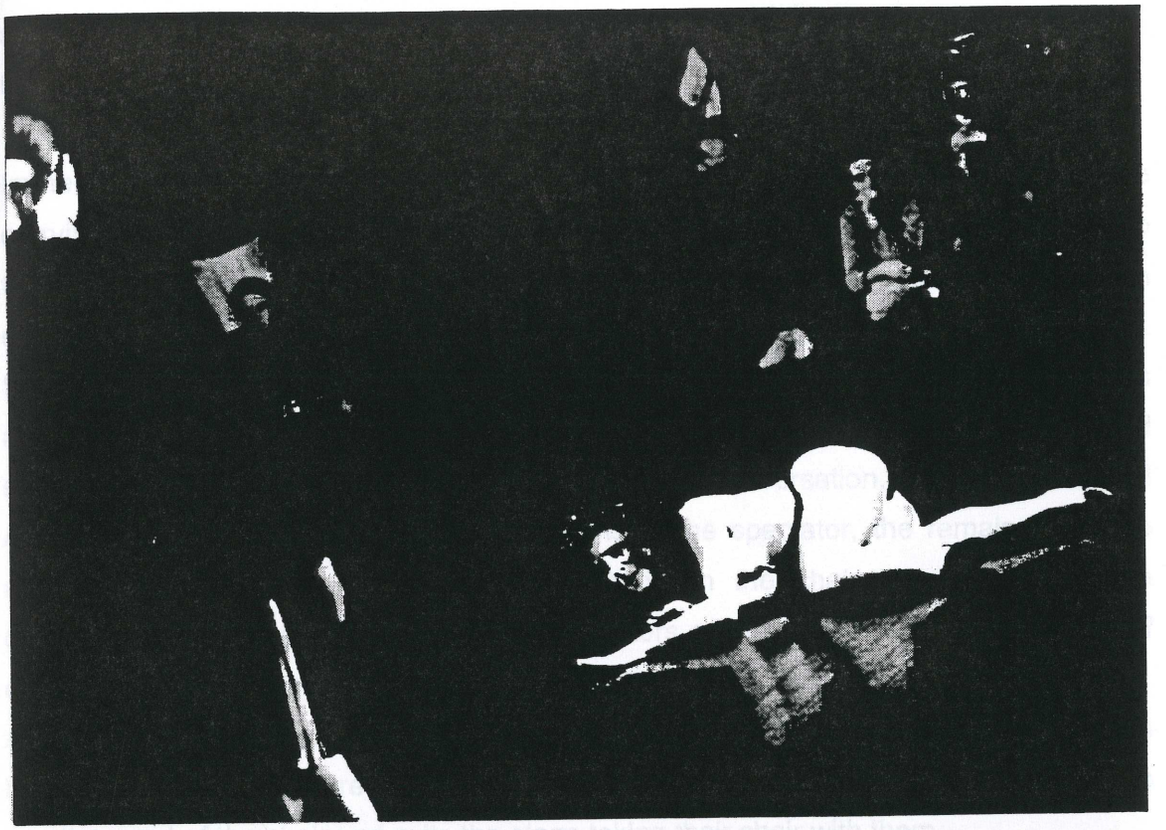
In each round of the dance the woman becomes more and more forceful in her attempts to wrest affection from the men. They in turn become more forceful in pushing her away. Throughout the action the woman keeps up a steady chorus cajoling the men to "kiss me", "c'mon kiss me", "fuck me", "you know you like it", "oh yes", "c'mon fuck me", etc. At a certain point the men begin to tear off pieces of the woman's costume. They fondle and fetishise the clothing while rejecting her body quite violently. She becomes more and more desperate, screaming at the men in turn to "fuck me". In the final action of the scene, the woman leaps at one of the men. In an acrobatic piece of choreography he ducks and at the same time lifts her up so that she sails over the top of his head. She lands roughly on the ground behind him. Then the man turns around to look at her. She

screams at him to "fuck me". Then another man zeros in. He walks up to the woman and standing over her (she is supine) removes her pants, the last article of her costume. The third man walks up to the woman takes hold of her knees and pushes them sidewards, opening the woman's legs to the audience. At this point the three men turn and walk off stage, leaving the woman exposed in the space. The music has stopped.



8 Pavan/Fuck Me (L to R): Andrea Aloise, Nigel Kellaway, John Baylis, Elise Ahomnos, Annette Tesoriero and Clare Grant. Copyright Heidrun Löhr.

At the end of the scene the woman lies sprawled on her back, legs splayed apart, in the middle of the space. She is naked and exposed to the audience on either side of the space. The theatre at this point is silent and still. I found this moment to be an extremely uncomfortable one, a feeling intensified by the sudden change in tone from the previous scenes, a series of humorous parodies. At this moment, as the audience is left to take in the extreme gravity of the sexual violence depicted in the Pavan/Fuck Me scene, their voyeurism is exposed by the open arrangement of the audience on both sides of the space, both watching and watched. When the men have exited the stage, the woman





9 & 10 Andrea Aloise in the Pavan/Fuck Me scene. Copyright Heidrun Löhr.

simply stands and begins to retrieve her clothing. Once she is dressed again she exits the stage.

Immediate on her exit the entire cast walks purposely into the centre of the space carrying two chairs each. The last performer to enter is the female performer who featured in the Pavan/Fuck Me scene. The performers place the seats opposite each other and take a seat on one while motioning to the audience to take up the other seat. Spectators accept the invitation and take a seat opposite a performer. The performers ask questions such as "how are you feeling?", "have you had any problems lately?" and so on to draw the spectator into and engage them in a conversation. This scene is called Audience Counseling. As the performer counsels the spectator, the remainder of the audience rearranges itself around and in between the chairs to better hear the conversation. The space becomes full of spectators as they mill around the five pairs of chairs, getting in close to listen to the intimate conversation of the performer/spectator. At this point, the tone of the scene changes suddenly. The performers frown and then begin to cry until they are quite hysterical, at which point the performer pushes the spectator out of the chair and exits the stage taking their chair with them.

Audience Strip begins with the space in black out. The audience is still occupying most of the performance space in a random fashion after Audience Counseling. Suddenly a performer appears under a spotlight in the middle of the space. He asks the audience to gather round him in a circle. He then announces that he has a request to make: "We would like one member of the audience to take their clothes off". The performer explains that the audience member will be required to stand naked for two minutes. He reassures the group that nothing further will be required of them. A spectator steps forward.[5] The performer asks the man to remove his clothing. While the spectator does so, the performer finds someone in the audience with a watch and asks them to time the two minutes. When the spectator is fully undressed the performer asks that the count begin and exits backstage to where the rest of the cast is assembled in the dressing rooms, leaving the naked spectator alone on stage in the middle of a circle of spectators.[6]

The final scene follows a short transition scene after Audience Strip. For the Finale, the performers herd the spectators onto a small stage located at the opposite end of the performance space to the rostrum of audience seating. The audience are taken through

the dressing rooms on either side of the stage and led onto the small stage. In the Finale, therefore, the configuration of the space reflected that of the Opening Scene. The audience was placed onstage (although the performers hardly used this stage during the performance), while the performers took over the floor (which was the playing space during the performance).



11 Finale (L to R): Andrea Aloise, Elise Ahomnos, Clare Grant, Christopher Ryan. Copyright Heidrun Löhr.

Three painted scrims fell from the ceiling to create an illusion of perspective, stretching back towards the rostrum of audience seating. The performers played out a sequence of stylised actions on the floor below. Some performers began the scene sitting in the rostrum of audience seating. They carried rows of seating from the rostrum onto the floor. As some performers dismantled the audience seating, watched by the audience on stage, a couple – a man and a woman - walked across the floor parallel to the front of the stage. They walked in a straight line, he standing slightly behind her with his hands on her shoulders. After a few steps the man pushed the woman to the ground. He stopped while she regained her position. They walked a few more steps until he pushed

her to the ground again. This pattern continues until the couple reached the end of the line. Toward the end of this piece, a woman stood on a box in front of the stage. She unzipped her dress to the waist and stood half-naked on the box while talking directly to the audience. She told the audience a story which could not be heard over loud bursts of music, as some of the performers – one by one - threw themselves off the back of the rostrum structure. As she spoke another woman placed pegs on parts of her naked upper body. She didn't flinch as her arms, fingers, neck and breasts and nipples were pegged. Finally the woman stood down from the box and walked towards the back of the space. As she walked toward the audience seating the set fell down behind her. She walked up the stairs and to the back of the structure that had held the audience seating. The final image of the performance was the performers lined up against the back of the structure toppling backwards into the void as the theatre lights fade to black.

Conclusion

In *Talking Back*, the dialogue performed between Virginia Baxter and Clare Grant, Baxter asks Grant why the Sydney Front creates or constructs certain kinds of situations between the performer and spectator in performance. Baxter wonders why, for instance, the Sydney Front invited spectators to insert their hands into holes in cylinders containing a naked performer (*Pornography of Performance*) and why the company asked a spectator to take his or her clothes off and stand naked on stage for two minutes (*Don Juan*). Grant responds by citing a statement made by Sydney Front member John Baylis:

> Because it is in these actions that performers or audience or both find themselves in situations where they must react in ways similar to the ways they react when they are not in the theatre. But these actions are not "real". They are highly contrived situations that resist contemplation alone as a response. They seem to demand a decision. But making a decision means entering into an unreal world where the consequences do not match those of the other world outside the walls [of the theatre]. (*Talking Back* 18)

As Baylis suggests, the Sydney Front aims to draw the spectator out of their "proper" place in the theatre (removed from the scene of representation as objective and disinterested interpreters of the stage action) and into the frame of theatrical representation. The Sydney Front's seduction of the spectator draws forth the eye of the spectator and re-introduces the physical presence of the spectator, a corporeal entity complete with desires, appetites, expectations etc., into the theatre. In this way, the play

of seduction in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* ruthlessly parodies a mode of theatre called "culinary" and the associated notion of theatre spectatorship as "eating with the eyes".

In publicity for *Don Juan* the Sydney Front quotes Georges Bataille who, in a short essay entitled "Eye" (1929/1985), claims that "extreme seductiveness is probably at the boundary of horror" (17, see Figure 3). In this essay Bataille addresses the ambiguous status of the eye in Western, civilised cultures. "It seems impossible", according to Bataille, "to judge the eye using any word other than seductive, since nothing is more attractive in the bodies of animals and men" (17). At the same time, he writes that "It is known that civilised man is characterised by an often inexplicable acuity of horror" and that "one of the most developed of these horrors...is... the fear of the eye" (17). The Sydney Front play on this indeterminate status of the eye as an object simultaneously desired and feared. "If the audience has power", as Jane Goodall notes in her excellent review of the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*, "it is in its very immunity to identification. Its power is the power of the eye" (34). In the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* the performers appropriate or seize the power of the eye, and turn the gaze back on the spectator, therefore exposing them as guilty voyeurs. The spectators' loss of anonymity and innocence evokes what Susan Sontag has called an "erotics of agony" which is how she characterises Bataille's "pornographic imagination" in *Story of the Eye* (107). Sontag writes on the "aesthetic possibilities of pornography as an art form and as a form of thinking" (111). She asserts that "pornography uses a small crude vocabulary of feeling, all relating to the prospects of action: feeling like one would like to act (lust); feeling like one would not like to act (shame, fear, aversion) (111). It seems that such an erotics of thought and feeling is in operation in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*. The performers call the spectator to actively engage in and with the performance. In this way, the spectator is shown negotiating the agony and ecstasy of acting within the theatrical frame under the "obsessive and lugubrious eye" (Bataille 17) of the performer.

In the Audience Strip scene of *Don Juan*, the Sydney Front achieved their ultimate aim to seduce a spectator into becoming the spectacle. The willing compliance of the spectator to assume the "role" prescribed by performers at this and other points in performance, for example, as masked party revelers, victims of seduction, voyeurs, patients/clients or strippers, raises a question concerning the power of seduction in the theatre. The Sydney Front did not reflect on or resist the power of seduction in their

performance of *Don Juan*. They used seduction as a tactical ploy and, through a combination of intimate and distancing modes of performance, attracted or enticed and, at the same time, alienated or estranged the spectator. The simultaneous solicitation and frustration of the spectator's participation in the performance is meant to be intensely unsettling and discomforting in a way that is designed to dismantle the spectator's ability to take something (a message or meaning) away from the event. What is left over, or what remains, is a sense of the intolerable indeterminacy of theatrical performance. That is, it is left for the spectator to reflect on their split or differentiated experience of the spectacle, as well as on what they were seduced away from and what they were, willingly or not, led into.

It should be noted that this disruption or mediation of the spectator's perceptual experience of the performance was achieved primarily through force or coercion (in the scripting of performance in rehearsal and in the performers' relations with the spectator in the performance). In their seduction of the spectator, the Sydney Front performers appeared to reinstate a mode of mastery and domination that left little room for audience participation or in(ter)vention. The spectator was, at times, reduced to utter submission to the will of the performers. He or she became the submissive slave of the cold and cruel performers; an experience best characterised as masochistic (Deleuze 1989). However in the absence of a contract between performer and spectator, torturer and victim – the contract being the necessary precondition of the masochistic relationship, according to Deleuze, and the thing that "presupposes in principle the free consent of the contracting parties and determines between them a system of reciprocal rights and duties" (75-77) - the performer holds absolute power and control over the spectator. At the end of the following and final chapter, it should be clear to the reader as to why this unchecked power of the performer-seducer over the spectator-victim is highly problematic and troubling.

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[1] A cash amount of up to $50 was set aside each night to bribe spectators into performing naked. The Sydney Front always managed to bribe an audience member into performing naked, often for less than the $50 amount set aside. Occasionally a bribe was not required at all.

[2] As noted in Part 2 of this thesis, in rehearsal the Sydney Front gave names to the scenes they devised. In this chapter I use these titles when discussing particular scenes.

[3] In *25 Years of Performance Art in Australia* the Sydney Front set out the company's major themes:

> Theme 1: seduction: a game of identity for adults ('mastery of the strategy of appearances, against the force of being and reality').

> Theme 2: sacrifice: the one magnificent gesture that would put an end to games once and for all, every night, again and again.
>
> House style: the body's lurid bruises veiled and revealed by an ornate theatricality…
>
> Ideal spectator: one who would surrender to us for one night, and think better of it in the morning.
>
> Overwhelming vice: a stifling need for control.
>
> Redeeming virtue: a passionate scepticism. (54)

[4] I have discussed de Certeau's notion of dual modes of action – strategies and tactics - in detail elsewhere (see pp. 81-83).

[5] Here I will refer to a particular production recorded on video in which a male spectator did step forward at this point.

[6] In the Sydney Front's second season of *Don Juan*, the performance concluded at the end of this scene. One of the reasons for ending the show with this scene in the reworked version of *Don Juan* was that the set required for the final scene was considered too unwieldy to tour. At the same time, the Sydney Front's decision to end the show at the end of Audience Strip was readily apparent. In this scene the Sydney Front achieve their main aim which was to seduce the spectator into making a spectacle of themselves, into taking responsibility for the working of the spectacle. In this sense, the performance concludes with the ultimate seduction of the spectator.

7

"She asked for it"? The sexual ethics of seduction in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*

1 Introduction

In this concluding chapter I will analyse a particular scene in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*. The Pavan/Fuck Me scene is a pivotal scene in the performance as it plays on the theme of seduction which is central to the Sydney Front's postmodern re-making of the Don Juan legend. In this chapter I will examine the scene in performance and then explore the making of the scene in and through the *Don Juan* rehearsal process. This analysis of the Pavan/Fuck Me scene in rehearsal and performance exemplifies the main argument of this thesis.

It has been my aim in this thesis to explicate and investigate the meaning making processes of a contemporary Australian theatre company working in the genre of theatrical postmodernism (see Part 1). In the third part of this thesis critical focus has been on the Sydney Front's use of seduction as a tool of deconstruction in and of the theatre. In Chapter 6 I examined the ways in which the Sydney Front put seduction into play in the performance of Don Juan to disclose a particular configuration of the relationship between performer and spectator in the theatre. The Sydney Front's seduction of the spectator parodies certain relations of power, knowledge and desire implicit in the theatrical contract. At the same time a question was raised concerning the power and control of the performer over the spectator in the performance itself. It seemed to me that the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*, a postmodern deconstruction of the legend of Don Juan, severely restricted the spectator's experience of the performance. The spectator was allowed only a narrow or limited position from which to engage in and with the performance. The reduction of viewing and "reading" options in performance seemed at odds with the performers' own open approach to the reading of the legend of Don Juan in the rehearsal process (see Part 2). In this chapter, I want to suggest that

although the tactic of seduction may seem an effective tool for destabilising the terms of the theatrical contract, in certain other contexts the ethics of the game of seduction is highly questionable. In this chapter I will examine the extent to which the Sydney Front's tactical use of seduction is limited by a refusal to consider these other contexts; ones which are not outside of or beyond theatrical contexts, but present and thoroughly implicated in rehearsal and performance, that is, theatrical processes. The argument in this chapter specifically examines seduction and rape, the violence done to women's bodies and identities in patriarchal contexts, and the Sydney Front's reproduction of patriarchal violence in the performance of *Don Juan*.

2 Seduction or Rape in Da Ponte's libretto: was Donna Anna asking for it?

Lorenzo Da Ponte's libretto, "The Punished Libertine or Don Giovanni" (1787), begins with the attempted rape of Donna Anna by Don Giovanni. Disguised as her fiancé, Don Ottavio, Don Giovanni steals into Donna Anna's bedroom at night to "seduce" her. She uncovers the disguise and pursues Don Giovanni noisily, calling out for help, as he attempts to flee. Donna Anna's screams are heard by her father, the Commander, who comes to her aid and surprises the "villain", Don Giovanni. The commander challenges him to a duel. He accepts and slays the Commander. Don Giovanni then makes good his escape and meets up with his loyal servant, Leporello. They leave the scene. Donna Anna and Don Ottavio enter and discover the corpse of the Commander. At the end of Act 1 Scene 1, the distraught Donna Anna makes Don Ottavio swear to avenge her father's murder, which establishes the action of the plot.

Before Don Giovanni and Leporello leave the stage there is a verbal exchange between the servant and his master wherein Leporello, shaken by his part as the sentinel in yet "another outrage", challenges his master's actions:

> Don Giovanni:...[softly] Leporello, where are you?
> Leporello: Here, unfortunately. And you?
> Don Giovanni: Here.
> Leporello: Who is dead? You or the old man?
> Don Giovanni: Stupid! the old man.
> Leporello: Splendid. Two charming adventures - raping the daughter and killing the father.
> Don Giovanni: He looked for it.
> Leporello: What about Donna Anna?
> Don Giovanni: Shut your mouth. Don't irritate me, and come along unless you want a taste of something too.
> Leporello: I don't want a thing, sir, and my mouth is shut. (289)

In this instance of what Birch refers to as "language as a struggle for power amongst multiple meanings" (*The Language of Drama* 55), Leporello takes advantage of the confusion immediately after the murder of the Commander and attempts to influence Don Giovanni against undertaking any further "seductions". When Don Giovanni calls uncertainly after Leporello, the servant reassures his master, at the same time adding his displeasure at being implicated in his dubious adventures. Leporello suggests that Don Giovanni was lucky to escape with his life from this particular encounter. Don Giovanni rejects Leporello's insinuations, calling him "stupid". In a clever lexical manoeuvre, Leporello again attempts to underline the seriousness of Don Giovanni's libertine behaviour in an effort to dissuade him from any further "seductions" or "outrages", as Leporello calls them. He suggests that what his master might indignantly dismiss as "charming adventures", others may re-interpret as rape and murder. Don Giovanni argues counter to Leporello that the old man "asked for it" (as certain modern opera productions translate these lines, for instance, the 1995 Glyndebourne Opera Festival production of *Don Giovanni*). Leporello, in quick repartee, asks if Donna Anna "asked for it". At this point in the interaction, Don Giovanni rebukes Leporello, threatening violence if he is not silent. Leporello accedes to the higher power and authority of his libertine master, formally addressing him as "sir", and follows Don Giovanni off stage. In this instance of struggle between two competing and conflicting voices, Don Giovanni effectively silences Leporello. He secures the termination and closure of the conversation by re-asserting his higher socio-economic status, but not before Leporello manages to call into question his master's highly unethical behaviour.

3 Seduction in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*: "she's asking for it"

The Pavan/Fuck Me scene in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* is the object of close analysis in this concluding chapter. The significance of the Pavan/Fuck Me scene is related to the fact that it occurs mid-way through the performance of *Don Juan*, after the Opera scene and before scenes like Audience Counselling, Audience Strip and the Finale (see Appendix 7 for order of scenes in *Don Juan*). In this location the scene is at the centre of the game of seduction played out between performers and spectators in the performance of *Don Juan*. At the same time, the action performed in the scene refers directly to seduction and raises the issue of violence or coercion in sexual relations between men and women. I have described the action of the scene in Chapter 6. In this concluding chapter I wish to present my reading of the scene and to state the way in

which this reading challenges what the Sydney Front performers seemed to think the scene said or did in performance. Given these conflicting interpretations of the scene in performance, I examine the making of the Pavan/Fuck Me scene in and through the rehearsal process paying particular attention to a key moment in rehearsal called "she asked for it". This moment in rehearsal is the central reference point for the analysis and argument in this chapter.

For the Sydney Front, the Pavan/Fuck Me scene was about a woman who flouts the codes and conventions of social and sexual intercourse and is in turn punished for breaking the rules. She attempts to seduce a series of men but each one rejects the woman's advances because she takes an active, even aggressive, role in the "seductions". The woman approaches the men, initiates physical contact and issues commands to them: "fuck me". Confronted with such assertive behaviour, the men exhibit neurotic symptoms: they strip the woman, fetishise bits of her costume, look voyeuristically at her naked body, but apparently do nothing. As the woman becomes more aggressive and violent in her handling of the men, they respond with equal violence and either push her away or struggle out of her unsolicited and unwanted embraces. The men, in other words, assume a passive and responsive role in opposition to the active and assertive role taken by the woman. In rehearsal a performer described the scene as a "deconstructed rape scene" because a woman sets out to "seduce" a group of men and is, in turn, violently rejected by the men for taking an active role in the seduction. It is implied that within the heterosexual economy of desire men are active, desiring subjects and women are passive objects of male desire. The woman upsets this (unequal) balance and is therefore censured for her actions. The Pavan/Fuck Me scene performs or puts on display the violence implicit in the fundamentally unequal relationships between men and women in a heterosexual economy of desire.

I also read the Pavan/Fuck Me scene as a reversal of sorts. In the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* the figure of Don Juan in the legend, or Don Giovanni in the opera, is replaced by a woman. The Sydney Front's *Don Juan* features a woman seducing a series of men. However, unlike the Don of legend, who steals into women's bedrooms in the middle of the night under the cover of darkness wearing a sophisticated disguise, in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* the woman's actions are blatantly aggressive, violent, invasive and therefore provocative. In this sense, her actions and behaviours seem to call for the

strong censure that they receive as a form of protection for others and from herself (see Threadgold's (1997) analysis of social and legal discourses of care and protection and how they work in patriarchal contexts on a range of bodies: male and female, black and white, adult and child). In other words, the reversal of the values (active and passive) connected to the terms male and female, masculine and feminine, in the Pavan/Fuck Me scene is incomplete. Moreover, the Sydney Front performers fail to realise or acknowledge the failure of their attempted reversal of an active masculinity and a passive femininity. The woman in the Pavan/Fuck Me scene is supposed to be performing an active and desiring form of femininity, but this registers in the performance of *Don Juan* as aggressive, desperate, irrational and violent. It presents a grotesque and monstrous image of a particular kind of femininity. Similarly the men are not simply passive in response to this attack. They display an active aversion to her "seductions", and is it any wonder? My point is that this performance of particular kinds of masculinity and femininity licenses the violence done to the woman in such a way as to suggest that the woman's actions and behaviours called for strong censure. The Pavan/Fuck Me scene constructs an active and desiring mode of femininity as rampant or out of control, and extremely troubling to begin with; that is, as always already problematic. The construction of a particular type of femininity in this way means that the woman's actions and behaviours support the notion that "she asked for it". That is, it gives credence to the notion that a particular type of femininity warrants containment and control.

My reading of the scene in performance resonates with a particular moment in the rehearsal process. In rehearsal of the Pavan/Fuck Me scene, one of the female performers, who dances the Pavan the entire way through the scene, commented on how difficult it was to maintain the dance when "something horrible" was happening to another woman in the same space. Another female performer replied, "she's asking for it". I want to closely examine this particular moment in the rehearsal process, which passed unremarked upon and uncontested. What I wish to subject to critical analysis is that in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* rehearsal process an answer was given to the question asked of Don Giovanni's actions and behaviours by his man-servant, Leporello, in Da Ponte's libretto. Here, in a postmodern deconstructive rehearsal process, with all its values of openness, difference, undecidability and indeterminacy, the question left open in a 1787 libretto was closed. Furthermore, the answer locates femininity in

particular as the problem.[1] This postmodern deconstuctive practice can be seen to reify a sexism and misogyny definitely in the Don Juan legend but questioned in certain eighteenth-century renderings of it. The Sydney Front's is a very unimaginative and uninventive practice in this sense.[2]

As noted above, my reading of the performance of the Pavan/Fuck Me scene is supported by one moment in rehearsal, that is, a rehearsal run. Before I make any further conclusions in this argument, I will examine the making of the Pavan/Fuck me scene in greater detail. It is necessary to explicate how the performers in the Sydney Front rehearsal process came to the particular point mentioned above. This is a difficult story to tell given the complexity of the creative process. The Sydney Front are working consciously and unconsciously with many intersecting stories, discourses and narratives which are fed into and act through different practices in the rehearsal process including improvisations, reading film, reading theory, group discussion, etc. I will begin this analysis by examining the performers' appropriation and use of a key scene from a David Lynch film.

4 This world's wild at heart and weird on top: "say, 'fuck me'"

In the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* rehearsal process one performer read the legend of Don Juan for key scenes to be included in the performance. He argued that the group needed three scenes: a seduction scene, a rape scene and scene of death or retribution. The other performers in the group took up this performer's reading of the legend of Don Juan. In a discussion in the rehearsal process a scene from David Lynch's *Wild at Heart* was mentioned as the prototype for a rape scene to be performed by the Sydney Front. The words that the woman in the Pavan/Fuck Me scene says, "fuck me", are actually taken directly from this scene in the film. Here I will locate the scene in terms of the narrative of the film and then examine the sexual violence performed in the scene as part of a postmodern aesthetic in film.

The film focuses on a young couple, Lula (Laura Dern) and Sailor (Nicholas Cage), passionately in love in a world which is, as Lula says half way through the film, "wild at heart and weird on top". Suspecting that Lula's mother has put another contract out on his life, Sailor breaks parole and he and Lula set out on a road journey to begin a new life in California.[3] Sailor and Lula run out of money half way into their journey. They are

stranded in a small mid-Western American town called Big Tuna, Texas. Big Tuna is a nightmarish place full of strange and awful characters including Bobby Peru (Willem Dafoe) an ex-US Marine and Vietnam veteran who, unbeknownst to Sailor and Lula, has been contracted to kill Sailor.[4] He plans to involve Sailor in a robbery and to stage a shoot out between Sailor and the bank guards in which Sailor is killed. Looking for any information he can use to pressure Sailor into doing the job he visits Lula alone in the motel room she and Sailor are renting in Big Tuna.

In the scene that takes place inside the motel room Peru discovers that Lula is pregnant. Once he has the key piece of information that he will use to leverage Sailor into the position he wants him in, Peru becomes extremely violent and threatening towards Lula. He grabs Lula and manoeuvres himself into a position of physical dominance over her. He stands behind her and holds her so tightly that she cannot move. He forces her head backwards and twists her face to the side so that his face is in hers. Peru then whispers into Lula's ear very slowly, "say, 'fuck me'". Then he repeats the words "fuck me" again and again, coaxing Lula to say the words. At the same time, he runs a hand down her body, feeling her breasts, etc. In this way he forces her to utter the words, "fuck me". At this point the scene ends. Peru releases Lula and moves quickly toward the door of the motel room saying, "Some day, honey, I will, but today I've gotta get going". Then he exits the motel room, leaving Lula in a state of extreme distress.

This scene in Lynch's film sets sexual violence within a patriarchal context of power and control (in this case Peru's over Sailor and Lula). In relation to Lula, Peru's power is absolute: he takes control of her physically, mentally, emotionally and sexually. He forces her to ask for her own rape. At the same time, it is quite clear in Lynch's film that Lula only utters the words "fuck me" under the threat of extreme violence, which is all the more terrifying because the attack is unprovoked and unpredictable. This is why I think that the performers in the Sydney Front rehearsal process can recognise, as they do, that the scene is a "symbolic rape scene", or that although Peru doesn't legally rape Lula, the experience for her is "as bad as rape". The Sydney Front borrow large chunks of this scene from the film for use in the Pavan/Fuck Me scene. In this way the performers introduce into the reading and re-writing of the Don Juan legend a perspective on seduction as rape. However, the idea that "she's asking for it" in the context of the scene in Lynch's film signifies something very different to what the

performer means when she says "she's asking for it" in the Sydney Front's rehearsal process. The slippage from one meaning to another is what I am interested in exploring here.

I will argue that the reason for the slippage from one meaning to another has to do with the postmodern film aesthetic which encompasses the performance of violence in Lynch's films. Norman K. Denzin in "*Blue Velvet*: Postmodern Contradictions" asserts that Lynch's film may be read as a cultural statement which locates within small-town America, all the terrors and simulated realities that Lyotard and Baudrillard see operating in the late postmodern period (225). Denzin's analysis of *Blue Velvet* (1986) is readily applicable to *Wild at Heart* (1990). He describes *Blue Velvet* as a morality tale that tells the story of a young man who takes on evil in the world. As Denzin describes it, the young man "succumbs to this evil, but is ultimately redeemed, and finds his place back within the safe, sexual confines of married middle class life, with a beautiful young bride" (227). However, this passage of life story is not as straightforward as this description would seem to suggest. As Denzin notes, the story locates a series of unpresentables (cut off ears, murders, wild sexuality, alcohol and drug-related violence, sado-masochistic rituals) within the everyday lives of the characters, and within a nostalgia for the past exemplified by a sound track full of 1950s and 1960s rock and roll songs. These unpresentables are seen as existing next door to and just below the surface of small town, homespun American life (227). *Wild at Heart* is very similar in so far as it is also a morality tale that portrays the struggles of a young couple in love attempting to find their way together in an evil world. In Big Tuna, Texas, the couple's love is tested. Sailor makes a bad decision when he agrees to rob a bank with Bobby Peru, the embodiment of evil. At the end of the film, Sailor is reunited with his family (Lula and their son) after serving a jail term for armed robbery. This rite of passage story also locates a series of unpresentable elements (lack of parental guidance, incest, rape, poverty, crime and corruption, murder, sado-masochistic rituals, the occult, alcohol and drug-related violence, wild sexuality, crazy dancing, fatal car accidents, shootings, etc.) within the everyday lives of the characters and within a nostalgia for the past exemplified by a soundtrack of Elvis songs. And it all comes together in a small town in the American mid-West. Thus Denzin's analysis of *Blue Velvet* also applies to *Wild at Heart*. He writes:

> First, films like *Blue Velvet* simultaneously display the two features of postmodernist texts that Jameson has identified. Namely an effacement of the boundaries between the past and

> the present (typically given in the form of pastiche and parody), and a treatment of time which locates the viewing subject in a perpetual present. Second, these films, which I shall call late-postmodern nostalgia, bring the unpresentable (rotting, cut off ears, sexual violence, brutality, insanity, homosexuality, the degradation of women, sado-masochistic rituals, drug and alcohol abuse) in front of the viewer in ways that challenge the boundaries that ordinarily separate private and public life. Third the wild sexuality and violence that these films represent signify, in the Bataille sense, modes of freedom and self-expression that the late-postmodern period is both fearful of and drawn to at the same time.
>
> Fourth, *Blue velvet*, and the other films in this emerging genre, have been read as denigrating women. These are not proto-feminist social texts. Women are treated as traditional sexual objects, and in *Blue Velvet* the recipients of sexual and physical violence. Women are contained within one of two categories: respectable, middleclass marriage, or disrespectable, occupational and sexual categories. These cultural texts maintain images of the gender stratification system that are decidedly pre-postmodern.
>
> Fifth, these films do not just return to the past in a nostalgic sense, and bring the past into the present, as Jameson suggests. They make the past the present, but they locate terror in nostalgia for the past...In Lyotard's sense, these films wage a war on nostalgia.
>
> Sixth, on doing so they identify two forms of nostalgia: the safe and the unsafe...
>
> Seventh, by moving two versions of the past (the sacred and the profane) into the present, *Blue Velvet* pushed the boundaries of the present farther into the future where the unreal and the hyperreal are always real, and not just possibilities.
>
> Eighth, in the process, films like *Blue Velvet* expose and bring to the centre of safe society, the margins of the social. These violent margins (dope fiends, sexual perverts) are now placed in small towns, next door to middle- and lower-class Americans who are attempting to live safe, respectable lives. These late postmodern films locate violence and the simulacrum, not just in Disneyland, MTV or in television commercials. They locate these phenomena within the everyday (225-226).

As Denzin makes abundantly clear, the violence performed in Lynch's films is set in the context of a complex analysis of small town, homespun American life. Lynch's postmodern aesthetic targets the contradictions inherent in the wholesome image of small town America. Through the breakdown and interpenetration of a series of binary oppositions Lynch shows that the construction of the wholesome image of small town life involves the violent repression of other or different forms of existence, which are

characterised as evil or corrupt. Lynch's films explore the violent and disruptive forces operating just underneath the surface of the small town everyday. In this way, he locates the strange, horrible, violent and disturbing margins at the centre of the everyday. The threat, as Lynch identities it, is not imposed from the outside, but resides within. Violence and horror in Lynch's films therefore problematise a wholesale nostalgia for the past (or, alternatively, an uncritical acceptance of future possibilities). Lynch asks the film viewer to adopt a critical and self-reflexive position in relation to what they might choose to venerate in (past or future) American culture. I would argue that it is precisely this contextual analysis that is lost in the Sydney Front's performance of generic violence. Admittedly, Lynch's contextual references are specifically American, and one wouldn't expect the Sydney Front to reproduce these. However, given that the Sydney Front appropriate and use a particular scene from Lynch's *Wild at Heart*, the question is, how is the performance of generic violence re-set and re-contextualised in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*? How does the Sydney Front ask the audience to relate to the violence performed on stage?

5 The making of the Pavan/Fuck Me scene

Early in the rehearsal process the Sydney Front performed several improvisations on the topic of "seduce, dominate and violate a woman". They came up with various actions but none of these actions or images became a scene in itself until later in the process. Then one performer had the idea to create an ideologically unsound or politically incorrect scene that involved the humiliation of a woman on stage. This idea initiated a group discussion:

AA: *I thought of it as a scene where a woman throws a man around the room wanting him, commanding him to "fuck me", but the man wanting nothing to do with her.*

NK: *That sounds like that Andy Warhol movie about a blond skinny woman in leather [who] asks a bunch of gay cowboys to fuck her, to violate her, and of course they don't. She just looks so pathetic and humiliated.*

JB: *Men always make the first move. The male is active, the female passive. Rape is an extension of that.*

CG: *It has to do with economic power.*

AA: *You belong to the world or the world belongs to you.*

NK: *A woman in hot pursuit of a man is a different kind of offensiveness to a man in hot pursuit of a woman. A whole different set of values apply.*

CG: *She's called a slut.*

AT: *A woman taking the initiative turns a lot of guys off.*

JB: *Well I guess it comes back to the game of seduction in the end. It doesn't really matter who says "let's fuck" in the end as long as there is the game, the play, making the other person feel special. [He reads from Baudrillard's Seduction.]*

NK: *The show is missing something offensive, a clever thing that will deeply offend the audience and make them love us. The Cup Cake scene done to a woman.*

At this point the performers ended the discussion and began to improvise. Through the process of improvisation the performers devised a scene which they called "Fuck Me".

Sometime later in the rehearsal process the decision was made to combine the Fuck Me scene with the Pavan dance. The Pavan was devised as a dance of refined seduction to contrast with the pelvic thrusting gyrations of the Java Dance. In contrast to the rough and ready Java Dance, NK desired to choreograph a "beautiful and seductive court dance". He envisaged the Pavan dance as "something beautiful that the audience want to look at", and aimed to "seduce the audience with the dance". The Fuck Me scene and the Pavan dance were combined into a single scene to achieve the effect of overlaying different tones. This is in line with the Sydney Front's aesthetic (Chapter 5) which seeks to create difference and ambiguity through the juxtaposition of opposites. Thus, the slow, stately dance of the Pavan was combined with the ugly and violent actions of the Fuck Me scene. In this way the Sydney Front brought together in opposition the "beautiful and seductive" Pavan dance and the "ugly and offensive" Fuck Me scene. Commenting on a rehearsal run of the Pavan/Fuck Me scene one performer (who stood out watching and directing the scene) instructs the men in the scene: "It's the body not the clothes that you should be interested in. The focus should be on her body". At the same time he instructs the women performing in the scene to "watch what's taking place between the woman and the men but don't show approval or disapproval". At the end of this run CR describes the scene as "the flirt that gets out of control". RM states "AA violates the power structure and is in turn violated". CG remarks that "it's hard to keep up the Pavan while something horrible is happening on stage to another woman" to which EA responds "she's asking for it".

From the making of the Pavan/Fuck Me scene it is possible to conclude that the violence performed on and to male and female bodies in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* is not

located or examined in social, cultural or gendered contexts. With the Pavan/Fuck Me scene the Sydney Front set out to shock and offend the audience. The performance of generic violence, in this sense, serves the logic of the performance, which is in this case the logic of seduction, that is, the logic of attraction and repulsion and attraction, etc. The Pavan/Fuck Me scene is meant to offend and repulse the audience, which would establish the circular spiral of seduction and give the performance of *Don Juan* its shape and, ultimately, a kind of formal closure. There is a notable slippage here from the exploration of patriarchal violence as a fundamental part of seduction (as rape), to the use of generic violence to offend the audience, which is also, I would argue, an aestheticisation of violence. Seduction is described as "a pact" (Baudrillard 83) made between equal and consenting adults. It is characterised as the play or game of desire from one person to another and back again in a "dizzying spiral of responses and counter-responses" (Baudrillard 83). The issue of difference, sexual difference in particular, but also differences in age, race, wealth, power, etc., is forgotten or ignored in this account of seduction. In the following section of this chapter I will examine the violence (symbolic and real) done to certain kinds of bodies and identities when seduction is conceptualised without reference to sexual (and other kinds of) difference. Such an investigation might also account for some of the problems I raised at the end of the previous chapter concerning the performer's re-assertion of something like authorial power and control over the spectator in the performance of the Sydney Front's *Don Juan*.

6 Baudrillard's notion of seduction: a feminist tactic?

Baudrillard's *Seduction* is a key source for the Sydney Front, and one of the few written texts that actually makes it into, and is read, in the rehearsal process. In "The Ecliptic of Sex", the first part of Baudrillard's book, he locates his examination of seduction (explicated in Chapter 6) as a response to a particular strand of French feminist theory. He cites a key passage from the writings of Luce Irigaray,[5] where Irigaray addresses the morphology of the female body and the intimate relationship between the female body and female sexual desire. Baudrillard asserts that Irigaray's notion of a "female imaginary", as she calls it, exemplifies a theoretical position that he wishes to problematise in his book. In this part of the chapter I will examine Baudrillard's critique of the feminist position represented by Irigaray and her work. It will be argued that Baudrillard misreads the feminist argument and therefore misrecognises the play of

seduction as an answer to the issue of sexual difference, when it is the movement of seduction itself which is perhaps the problem. Irigarary, herself, suggests as much when she asserts that a woman's "entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies, again, her consignment to passivity: she is to be the beautiful object of contemplation...her body finds itself thus eroticized, and called to a double movement of exhibition and of chaste retreat in order to stimulate the drives of the [male] 'subject'" (26).

In *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977/1985) Irigaray argues the case for the difference and specificity of the female body. She seeks to re-imagine the female body and to reconceptualise female pleasure and desire as "far more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is commonly imagined – in an imaginary rather too narrowly focused on sameness" (28). In other words, the issue for Irigaray is sexual difference "as it is imagined – or not imagined, the other sex [female] being only the indispensable complement to the only sex [male]" (28). The metaphor of the "two lips" contradicts the representation of the female sex organ as "*the horror of nothing to see*" (26, Irigaray's emphasis) and describes, instead, a plural, multiple or polymorphous experience of the sexed (female) body and of sexual desire. Irigaray suggests that it is from this embodied experience of female desire that the female subject can begin to write and speak back to phallocentric systems of representation, and can begin to re-position herself in autonomous terms, or at least in terms that take account of positive difference.

Baudrillard's criticism is directed toward feminist theories of sexual difference which seek to address the specificity of the female body and female desire, knowledge, etc. In opposition to the difference and specificity that these theories seek to assert, Baudrillard suggests seduction as an alternative feminist tactic: "What does the women's movement oppose to the phallocratic structure? Autonomy, difference, a specificity of desire and pleasure, a different relation to the female body, a speech, a writing – but never seduction" (8). Baudrillard rejects Irigaray's description of a different and specific experience of female embodiment, arguing that it is just another form of the anatomy as destiny argument. He states that "with this body speech, this woman speech, we have, very definitely, entered into an anatomical destiny, into anatomy as destiny. There is nothing here radically opposed to Freud's maxim" (9). He asserts that feminists would do well to return to Freud and to accept his thesis that there is only one sex and one form of

sexual desire: "Freud was right: there is but one sexuality, one libido – and it is masculine...The feminine...is, and always has been, somewhere else. That is the strength of its strength...This strength of the feminine is that of seduction" (6-7).

Baudrillard views Irigaray's argument for difference, which is actually a complex deconstruction of phallocentrism in psychoanalytic theory, as essentialist. Baudrillard asserts that Irigaray's argument is essentialist because it claims authentic knowledge of the female body or biology. Rather than claim an essence with respect to "woman", Baudrillard suggests seduction as a tactical reversal of the differentiation of the sexes and the attribution of non-value to the female sex. He states, "Seduction alone is radically opposed to anatomy as destiny. Seduction alone breaks the distinctive sexualisation of bodies and the inevitable phallic economy that results" (10). In other words, Baudrillard seeks to replace the issue or problem of sexual difference with seduction. He contends that seduction, which plays appearances against reality, artifice against authenticity, reverses and overturns the natural fact of biology. Thus, women need not be restricted by the fact of their biological sex, or by a form of femininity modeled on the sexed body. In this way, Baudrillard draws together seduction, simulation or parody, and femininity as imagined and performed in male-defined terms:

> ...there is no other femininity than that of appearances...
>
> This strange coincidence points to the ambiguity of the feminine: it simultaneously provides radical evidence of simulation and the only possibility of its overcoming – in seduction precisely. (11)
>
> ...to over simulate femininity is to suggest that woman is but a masculine model of simulation. Here is a challenge to the female/woman by way of the female/sign. Contrary to every search for an authentic femininity...the claim here is that the female is nothing, and that that is her strength. (14)

In sum, Baudrillard argues that, regardless of biological sex (female/woman), it is possible to move beyond the so-called phallocratic structure of sexual difference. Moreover, he suggests that women are in a privileged position to lead the way beyond sexual difference by over simulating or parodying a particular mode of femininity (female/sign). This activity of simulation, which Baudrillard also refers to as seduction, produces images of femininity in excess so that the reality on which the copies are modeled is forgotten or obscured. He asserts that "in the space of simulation...one cannot distinguish between reality and its models, there being no other reality than that

secreted by the simulative models" (11). Thus, according to Baudrillard, in the postmodern space of simulation the question or problem of the non-value of the female sex is buried under the weight of a mass of simulations of femininity. He suggests that the difficulty of negotiating with sexual difference or with the attribution of non-value to the female sex is replaced by the more pleasurable activity of invention. In other words, Baudrillard suggests that the possibilities for women are not reduced to the nothing of the female sex, but are unlimited according to a capacity to create.

7 From (sexual) difference to seduction: rehearsing, performing and reproducing generic violence

Baudrillard's argument is itself very seductive in so far as it suggests that women can simply turn away from and move beyond phallocentrism. However, as Elizabeth Grosz remarks toward the end of *Volatile Bodies*, "the question of sexual difference admits of no outside position" (191). She asserts that:

> The proclamation of a position outside, beyond, sexual difference is a luxury that only male arrogance allows. It is only men who can afford the belief that their perspective is an outside, disinterested, or objective position. The enigma that woman has posed for men is an enigma only because the male subject has constructed itself as the subject par excellence. The way (he fantasizes) that Woman differs from him makes her containable within his imagination (reduced to his size) but also produces her as a mystery for him to master and decipher within safe or unthreatening borders (the fantasy of the inscrutable that man attributes to women and the West attributes to its other as well). But if one takes seriously the problematic of sexual difference, then as mysterious as Woman must be for men, so too must men be for women (and indeed so too must Woman be for women, and Man for men). (Grosz *Volatile Bodies* 191)

Grosz's understanding of the dynamics of sexual difference is underpinned by a notion of corporeality, which shows up significant problems in Baudrillard's reading of Irigaray's "female imaginary" and his conception of the body and sexual difference. In Grosz's corporeal feminism the body, as much as the psyche or the subject, is situated and produced within networks of power and knowledge circulating in historical and cultural formations (*Volatile Bodies* 187). Moira Gatens asserts, in support of Grosz, that "theorists of sexual difference do not take as their object of study the physical body, the anatomical body, the neutral, dead body, but the body as lived, the animate body – the *situated* body" (*A critique of the sex/gender distinction* 11). Grosz describes the body as a "pliable entity" whose determinate form is given not simply by biology, "but through the

interaction of modes of psychical and physical inscription and the provision of a set of limiting biological codes" (*Volatile Bodies* 187). On the subject of biology Grosz asserts that:

> It cannot be regarded as a form whose contents are historically provided, nor as a base on which cultural constructs are founded, nor indeed as a container for a mixture of culturally or individually specific ingredients. It is an open materiality, a set of (possibly infinite) tendencies and potentialities which may be developed, yet whose development will necessarily hinder or induce other developments and trajectories. These are not individually or consciously chosen, nor are they amenable to will or intentionality: *they are more like bodily styles, habits, practices, whose logic entails that one preference, one modality excludes or makes difficult other possibilities.* (*Volatile Bodies* 191, my emphasis)

As I have established, Baudrillard's argument obscures the significance of the sexed body as a site of social and personal meaning and significance by distinguishing between female/woman (an authentic or universal female entity) and female/sign (a simulated femininity). Baudrillard's rejection of Irigaray's re-imagining of the female body and female desire, which he characterises rather reductively as a form of essentialism (the female/woman complex), betrays his conception of the body as inert matter and sex as a biological given. For Baudrillard, sexual difference is not the issue precisely because he views the sexed body as given, fixed and immutable or unalterable according to the determinants of nature or biology. The issue for Baudrillard is, rather, how femininity is imagined and reinvented beyond the model supplied by the sexed (female) body. He aims to promote the invention of other model-copies that do not refer to any "original".

Implicit in Baudrillard's theory of seduction is a distinction between sex and gender which, Moira Gatens writes, typically understands sex as a biological given and gender as a social construction which overlays much of this biology (*Woman and her double(s)* 30-31). Gatens contests the sex/gender distinction in "feminist theory of Anglo-American orientation" (*A critique of the sex/gender distinction* 3), but her argument applies also to Baudrillard's notion of seduction because it draws a questionable line of separation between the body and the cultural and historical contexts in which the body is situated and lived. The sex/gender distinction, according to Gatens, reproduces a series of binary oppositions which underpin the Western *ratio*: sex and gender, nature and culture, body and consciousness, rational and emotional, private and public, male and female, subject

and object, etc. In contradistinction to adherents of the sex/gender distinction, Gatens argues that there is an intimate relationship between the meaning and significance of gender (masculinity and femininity) and biology (male/female) as lived in social and historical contexts. She states that "masculinity and femininity as forms of sex-appropriate behaviours are manifestations of a historically based, culturally shared phantasy about male and female biologies, and as such sex and gender are not arbitrarily connected" (*A critique of the sex/gender distinction* 13). In other words, the differences between male masculinity and female femininity are qualitative and not simply quantitative differences. Thus, the relationship between masculine behaviour acted out by a male subject and masculine behaviour acted out by a female subject (or feminine behaviour acted out by a female subject and feminine behaviour acted out by a male subject) cannot be symmetrical (*A critique of the sex/gender distinction* 14). This may explain why the Sydney Front's reversal of an active male masculinity and a passive female femininity in the rehearsal process and performance of *Don Juan* is incomplete or unsuccessful. The incompleteness of the attempted reversal points to the impossibility of disconnecting interpenetrated terms such as sex and gender, nature and culture, mind and body, subject and object, self and other, male and female, active and passive, etc.

For corporeal feminists or feminists of sexual difference (Irigaray, Grosz, Gatens, Kirby (1997), Diprose (1994)) it is the meaning and significance of the sexed body in culture and as "lived" by individual social subjects that is the issue. Gatens uses the term "imaginary body" to describe the ways in which the body is given social and personal meaning and significance in culture. She contends that this imaginary body is a body double and that the complicity between self and other, based on the necessary interconnectedness of our social images of ourselves, is particularly strong in relations between the sexes. According to Gatens, in the gendered relations between the sexes,

> Each gender is at once the antithesis of, and the complement to, the other. Each projects (and so, predictably, finds) those qualities antithetical to oneself, to its "ideal image", onto its double. Each therefore becomes the indispensible complement to the other. Each is deeply complicit in maintaining not only her or his *own* body image, but also that which it assumes: the body image *of the other*...This reciprocal interdefinition makes the relations between the sexes seem natural, necessary and immutable. (*Woman and her double(s)* 36-37, Gatens' emphasis)

Thus, Gatens claims that "the full phallic, masculine body necessarily assumes its antithesis: the lacking, castrated feminine body, which is its complement, its body double" (*Woman and her double(s)* 38). Taking Freud's psychoanalytic theory of the genesis of the adult subject as representative of the ways in which bodies and selves are constructed in Western culture, Gatens argues that the body is not a neutral surface for the social inscription of meaning. Rather, the morphology (the physical form or shape) of the body is given social meaning and significance in these theory-knowledges and this, according to Gatens, determines the form of subjectivity available to adult bodies. Gatens observes that the adult male body image is of a whole, active *subject* – a phallic body. At the same time, the adult female body image is that of a partial, passive *object* – a castrated body that requires first a man and then a baby to "complete" it (*Woman and her double(s)* 41). In this equation, the male masculine body image takes over the active, positively valued side of the sexual dichotomy, while the female feminine type combines the passive, negatively (de)valued side of the dichotomy. Gatens concludes that it is because the female body is not seen to be a whole or integral body, that female subjects (women) are socially constructed as partial and lacking (*Woman and her double(s)* 41).

Gatens suggests that the fact that women are not thought of as *whole* beings can be connected to the fact that women are not thought to be "morally sound", to possess "honour" or to have integrity. She points to the relevance of questioning the etymological link between integrity and morality in the context of an investigation of the sexual abuse and rape of women. Gatens wonders whether "the social complacence concerning the rape of women and girls" isn't connected to "the idea that women's bodies 'beg the question' of their completion by the sexual act?" (*Woman and her double(s)* 41-42). She identifies the problem as an ethical one: "Ethical relations take place only between whole persons and consequently they are the preserve of men. It is only men who emerge from culturalisation as whole and independent subjects, that is, as *human beings*" (*Woman and her double(s)* 42, Gatens' emphasis). In this social and political context the sexual abuse of women "is not considered to be an *ethical* outrage committed against women so much as a *legal* problem upon which 'men among men' arbitrate" (Gatens *Woman and her double(s)* 42; see also Threadgold 1997). This is precisely why feminists such as Irigaray, Gatens and Diprose argue for an ethics of sexual difference.

Given that feminist socio-cultural and political theory argues for an ethics of sexual difference, one would have to conclude that seduction is an extremely limited and dangerous tactical game for women to play. Baudrillard characterises the game of seduction as a "pact", presupposing in principle the free consent of contracting parties and that the consenting adults freely entering into the contract are rational, wholly conscious, neutral subjects. However, as the feminist theorists examined here argue, women are not considered to be whole, integral or independent body-subjects. This notion of the rational humanist subject implies an intrinsically male masculine subject. Grosz's work on the body has been concerned with precisely this problem. She seeks to disclose the way in which, as she states,

> a corporeal "universal" has in fact functioned as a veiled representation and projection of a masculine which takes itself as the unquestioned norm, the ideal representative without any idea of the violence that this representational positioning does to its others – women, the "disabled", cultural and racial minorities, different classes, homosexuals – who are reduced to the role of modifications or variations of the (implicitly white, male, youthful, heterosexual, middle-class) human body. (*Volatile Bodies* 188)

If women are "other", in a negative or oppositional sense, to the rational human (male) subject, then one must question the ways in which their entry into the pact of seduction is facilitated. In *Corporeal representation in/and the body politic* Gatens examines the extension, though metaphor and metonymy, of the image of human (male) body to the construction of the image of the modern body politic (artificial man). She argues that woman, excluded from the man-made body by virtue of her corporeal specificity, is "made part of the corporation not by pact, nor by covenant, but by incorporation" (*Corporeal Representation* 23). According to Gatens, "the modern body politic has 'lived off' its consumption of women's bodies. Women have serviced the internal organs and needs of this artificial body, preserving its viability, its unity and integrity, replacing its bodyparts, without ever being seen to do so" (*Corporeal Representation* 23). She then outlines the way in which the image or metaphor of the unified body politic has functioned to achieve two important effects:

> First, the artificial man incorporates and so controls and regulates women's bodies in a manner which does not undermine his claim to autonomy, since her contributions are neither visible or acknowledged. Second, in so far as he can maintain his apparent unity through incorporation, he is not required to acknowledge difference. The metaphor functions to restrict out political vocabulary to one voice only: a voice that can speak of only *one* body, *one* reason, and *one* ethic. (*Corporeal representation* 23)

I suggest that women are similarly incorporated and assimilated into the game of seduction. It seems to me that seduction is an extension of the sexual contract, in the sense meant by Carole Pateman when she rewrites the social contract as "a mechanism through which sex-right is renewed and maintained" (10-11), to the realm of fantasy and desire. In the game of seduction the female subject must adopt and play up to a certain kind of femininity. That is, she must become the object of male masculine desire, or, in other words, a seductive, erotic and exotic "other" to the male masculine subject. The play of seduction therefore reduces women to the position of erotic "other" serving and servicing the fantasy world of male desire. This is a form of symbolic violence in so far as women are contained and controlled in terms of a narrowly defined and reductive notion of femininity. At the same time, the potential for real violence is enormous. If the woman refuses the narrowly defined limits of the proper (feminine) place allotted to her in the social and sexual order, the disorder and disturbance that this refusal sets off returns to her. That is, the full force of social and moral censure is visited on her being. This is because the place of the feminine is always already open to question and to doubt or suspicion as different or other to a model of the human subject constructed in the image of and therefore congruent with the masculine. Given the negative value attributed to the female body and the secondary and subordinate position of the female subject in the social and sexual order, the game of seduction carries with it the very real risk of violence (abuse, assault, rape, etc.) to women's bodies and identities.

The issues discussed above are played out in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* rehearsal process. Terry Threadgold has argued that the theatrical rehearsal process "offers a place to read the disciplinary effects of patriarchal discourse on the bodies of masculine and feminine subjects, the violence which attends the making of masculine and feminine subjectivities" (*Feminist Poetics* 129). According to Threadgold, rehearsal demonstrates in microcosm, and therefore makes visible in poignant and accessible ways, the social disciplining and training of bodies to take up their assigned or proper positions in the genres and the discourses and the narratives of a patriarchal order (*Feminist Poetics* 129). In the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* rehearsal process what was demonstrated to this observer was the process by which men and women are taught or disciplined to be either active subjects or passive objects of power, knowledge and desire. In one particular rehearsal run, for instance, the men performing in the Pavan/Fuck Me scene

are instructed to focus on the body of the female performer attempting to "seduce" them. In this way, the men are taught to view the female body as a site of potential social disruption and disorder. They are, in other words, trained to doubt and suspect women, to question her actions and motivations and to take action to curb her "wayward" behaviour, if necessary. In the same rehearsal run, the women performing in the scene are disciplined to be complicit in and with male violence toward women. They are told not to watch what is going on between the other woman and the men in the scene. That is, they are taught to ignore the violence done to another woman on stage. The tactic of seduction therefore operates in the *Don Juan* rehearsal process and in performance as a means of extending disciplinary power to body-subjects rather than as a tool of deconstruction. The Sydney Front's *Don Juan* disciplines the feminine type as a passive object of masculine desire in and through the construction of an active and desiring femininity as monstrous.

8 Conclusion

In this third part of the thesis I have examined and evaluated the efficacy and ethics of the tactic of seduction deployed in the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* as a tool of deconstruction in and of the theatre. This analysis has yielded quite different and even contradictory conclusions. Chapter 6 concluded that the tactic of seduction is effective in disclosing certain relations of power, knowledge and desire implicit in the contract between performer and spectator in the theatre. The game of seduction betrays the spectator out of a false innocence and lures them into a struggle with the performer over the very terms and conditions of power, knowledge and desire in the theatre. At the same time, questions were raised concerning the ability of the Sydney Front performer to assume power and authority over the spectator in performance. Chapter 7 explored the ethics of the tactic of seduction with respect to the question of sexual difference. It was argued that the Sydney Front's *Don Juan* decidedly and unambiguously reproduced sexist and misogynist images of female femininity, and that these were exactly the type of images which reinforce social complacence concerning real and symbolic violence against women's bodies and identities in Western cultures. Thus Chapter 7, more than Chapter 6, bears out the argument developed in Part 2 of the thesis, presented in the conclusions to Chapters 4 and 5. What this points to is the need to undertake further study and critical analysis of particular examples of postmodern parody and deconstruction. Certainly the contradictions encompassed in the conclusion to this first

major study of the Sydney Front's rehearsal and performance practice should act as critical sites for further investigation of the Sydney Front's performance practice and that of other contemporary Australian performance practitioners.

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[1] Despite this particular example, I would suggest that there is no necessary or essential antithesis between the discourses of postmodernism and deconstruction, or the notion of difference, and the discourses of feminism(s). See, for instance, Owens (1983), Hutcheon (1989), Nicholson (1990), Flax (1993), Elam (1994), Braidotti (1994) and Threadgold (1997).

[2] Moira Gatens asserts that we need to imagine and invent new conditions of possibility for intersexual relations with the full awareness that our "imaginings" and "creations" will probably turn out to be limited in some way (*Woman and her double(s)* 37). These imaginings and creations, she suggests, are necessarily limited in so far as they must take into account the phallocentric or dualistic system within which male and female bodies and identities are given meaning and significance in Western culture. I am arguing here that the Sydney Front seem to lack an essential awareness of the nature of the negative difference in which different kinds of bodies and identities are held in Western culture. I am arguing that the Sydney Front's practice is limited not only by the conditions which prefigure any deconstructive work, as Gatens argues, but by a lack of awareness of these pre-conditions. Thus, the Sydney Front ends up simply reversing (and re-producing) the doubled and dualistic image of male and female bodies and identities, rather than deconstructing the binary oppositions.

[3] Sailor is on parole for manslaughter for killing a hitman contracted by Lula's mother to murder him. Lula's mother wants Sailor dead because he can link her to her husband's death. Sailor drove the car that delivered mobsters hired by Lula's mother to her house the night Lula's father was murdered. Lula's mother wants to dispose of Sailor before he makes the connection (for himself and Lula) between the fire and the murder of Lula's father.

[4] The first time Sailor and Lula meet Bobby Peru he comes out of a motel room where a pornographic film is being made. He is an ex-US Marine and a veteran of the war in Vietnam. When questioned on the role he played in a well-known war massacre, his behaviour becomes erratic and violent. He is offered a shot of strong alcohol and a short while after leaves the table. He gives a rather crude reason for his departure saying, "one eyed Jack needs to take a visit to the seafood store". Sometime later it is revealed that he has links to the same criminal underworld Lula's mother is connected to and has been contracted to murder Sailor.

[5] Baudrillard attributes the passage cited to Irigaray but he does not acknowledge where the passage is taken from. The passage is taken from a chapter called "This Sex Which Is Not One" in the book of the same name:

> Indeed, woman's pleasure does not have to choose between clitoral activity and vaginal passivity, for example. The pleasure of the vaginal caress does not have to be substituted for that of the clitoral caress. They each contribute, irreplaceably, to woman's pleasure. Among other caresses…Fondling the breasts, touching the vulva, spreading the lips, stroking the posterior wall of the vagina, brushing against the mouth of the uterus, and so on. To evoke only a few of the most specifically female pleasures. (9)

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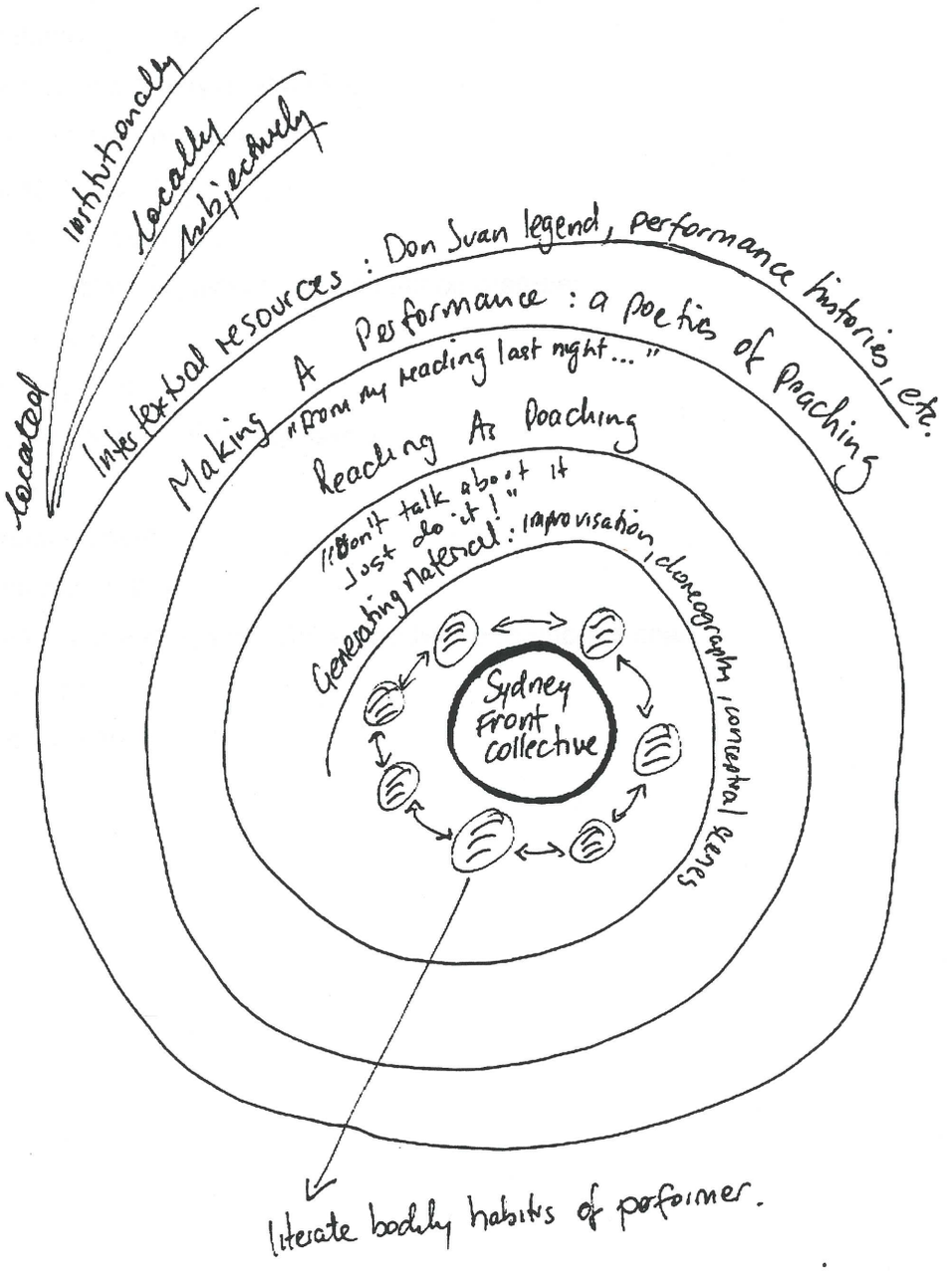
Appendix 1: diagram of the Sydney Front rehearsal process



Appendix 2: Nigel Kellaway's list of scenes

Opening scene/audience entrance (performers doing things in audience seating such as eating, powdering their faces, whining, singing/chorus, separating the audience into desirable and undesirable ones)

Seduction walks

Undressing/glorifying the dick

Pavan (four times through)

Dicks on demi-point

AA's dick lecture

Victimisation or seduction of audience member

Java dance

Thump rump

Hysterical men and fetal mania

Is it in?

Crucified man

Gymnastic stuff

Seduction walk/gang bang an audience member's chair

Fuck me

Pig woman

Appendix 3: list of "bits", and "scenes or semi-scenes"

Bits	Scenes or Semi-Scenes
Cunt face	Chair, room, chalk circle fuck
Dare you (with CR and JB)	Is it in?
Mirror fuck	Thump rump
Toe in ear	Spit/abuse
Hold your own	Dick lecture
Talking fuck	Crutch dance
Hysterical fingers	Hysterical men and fetal mania
Kiss, punish, whisper	Seduction walk/procession
Drawing penis on tights	Pleasure victim
Therapy fuck	Dick dance
Drop jumps	Opening scene
Tit suck	Java dance
Whining	Fuck me
AA on "is it in?" panel screaming "be gentle"	Pig woman
CG's finger prick	Heavy breathing
	Sea slug
	Stone statue/crucified man

Appendix 4: full list of scenes and tags

Scenes or Semi-Scenes	
Chair, room, chalk circle fuck	mechanical obsession with fucking.
Is it in?	
Thump rump	objectification of the process of fucking, performing a duty, fucking as torture.
Spit/abuse	
Dick lecture	objectification of the male genitalia - something normally shrouded in mystery.
Crutch dance	
Hysterical men and fetal mania	the fragility of masculinity. It's an opportunity to look at sheer hysterical male desire...we want we want we want. The men are completely out of control. Provides a good contrast to other scenes where the women are out of control.
Seduction walk/procession	desiring the audience, seducing and playing with the audience.
Pleasure victim	audience humiliation.
Dick dance	
Opening scene	a reversal of actor/audience relationship.
Java dance	
Fuck me	humiliation of a woman.
Pig woman	excesses and orifices, opposite scene to stone statue which is about blockages/barriers, the impenetrable. It's a celebration of a voracious appetite –sexual or otherwise, and also of the carnal.
Heavy breathing	desire and anticipation.
Sea slug	animalistic desire, desire that never finds/hits its target.
Stone statue/crucified man	I have no idea what that's about.
Pavanne	Sense of order, social structure, pattern, stately.

Appendix 5: versions of the show

Version 1:	Version 2:
Opening Scene	Opening Scene
Pavanne	Seduction Processions
Dick Dance	Fuck Me
Spread-eagled Man	Pig Woman
Fetal Mania	Thump Rump
Dick Lecture	Pleasure Victim
Fuck Me	Spread-eagled Man
Java Dance	Dick Dance
Pig Woman	Is it In?
Thump Rump	Spit/abuse
Spit/Abuse	Fetal Mania
Sea Slug	Dick Lecture
Heavy Breathing	Java Dance
Fuck Me	Pavanne
Chair, Room, and Chalk Circle Fuck	Opening Scene
Is It In?	Fuck Me
• Still to slot in audience reference scenes i.e. Seduction Procession and Pleasure Victim	Heavy Breathing
	Chair Fuck
	Sea Slug

Appendix 6: assessment of scenes

Pavan: *yes, the audience won't be able to see our feet and the forward progression won't work that well but they'll get an idea of the up and down motion of it.*

Spread-Eagle: *yes, it'll work.*

Fetuses: *no, the audience won't be able to see it.*

Dick Lecture: *yes.*

Fuck Me: *yes.*

Pig Woman: *could be made to work.*

Thump Rump: *yes.*

Men's Strip: *yes.*

Sea Slug: *no.*

Chair Fuck: *no.*

Seduction Procession: *yes.*

Appendix 7: draft and final running orders of scenes in *Don Juan*

16.2.91

DON JUAN - draft running order

Throughout: wine serving (inexhaustable, constantly watered down)

1. Opening

   a audience entering, a variety of stage and lighting effects

   b DX7 solo

   c choosing pleasure victim

   d sacrificing pleasure victim

   e proscenium scene

   f communal song (based on second part of *Catalogue Aria*)

   g move into audience (puppets? curtains?)

2. Java

   a java dance downstage (repeated 5 times)
   - in between dances (in the non-rhythm parts of the aria), a series of mini seduction walks: some upstage, some downstage, some standing still

   b java dance changes direction en mass: diagonals, upstage etc. Ends abruptly

   c male triangle immediately

3. Pig women

   a pig woman on stage, Chris interacts

   b carrying the bier, anointing the body, John spreadeagled

   c ascent with aria. The others grope audience in the dark

4. Counselling

We all sit on chairs, with desks and visitor's chair waiting for spectators to sit with us and talk. Audience stands behind white line. Madam who checks that all is well.

5. Pavanne

a pavanne dance (throughout)

b tit rape

c fuck me

d get up

6. Opera

a **dick dance & lecture**

b **La chi darem chorus**

c **thump rump** **Rossini aria**

d **recitative**

e **sea slug** **Commandatore aria on accordian**

7. Finale

a exhibits

audience escorted through dressing rooms, where there are exhibits (us?), and onto stage.

b boarding

we all cross stage and board raft. Andrea is left behind, and heavy breathes from the stage/dock

c journey - various events (hell of desire)

d descent

we dock at grandstand, and throw ourselves over edge. Curtain calls by clambering back up.

Loose bits: male strip, fuck dance, foetuses, cuntface, chair fucking, dare you

5. Pavanne

   a pavanne dance (throughout)

   b tit rape

   c fuck me

   d get up

6. Opera

   a **dick dance & lecture**

   b **La chi darem chorus**

   c **thump rump** **Rossini aria**

   d **recitative**

   e **sea slug** **Commandatore aria on accordian**

7. Finale

   a exhibits

   audience escorted through dressing rooms, where there are exhibits (us?), and onto stage.

   b boarding

   we all cross stage and board raft, Andrea is left behind, and heavy breathes from the stage/dock

   c journey - various events (hell of desire)

   d descent

   we dock at grandstand, and throw ourselves over edge. Curtain calls by clambering back up.

Loose bits: male strip, fuck dance, foetuses, cuntface, chair fucking, dare you

DON JUAN

18/3/91

1. **Opening**
   a) impassive looking
   b) stand & sit
   c) you! #1 - uproarious laugh & clap
   d) whisper
   e) look back
   f) bug-eye
   g) Clare's cry
   h) you! #2 - polite laugh & clap
   i) Nigel goes to DX7 - wine serve #1
   j) DX7
   k) victim selection
   l) sacrifice
   m)
   n) song
   o)
   p) seduction walk upstage

2. **Java**
   a) java #1 - downstage three times
   b) audience kidnap
   c) java #2 - to the fan out

3. **Opera**
   a) ~~male hysteria~~ wine serve
   b) men's triangle
   c) dick lecture
   d) la ci darem - wine serve #~~2~~ 3
   e) thump rump
   f) recitative

4. **Pavanne**
   a) sea slug
   b) calighari/shintaro
   c) pavanne - intro
   d) pavanne - ensemble
   e) pavanne - canon
   f) pavanne - fuck me

5. **Counselling**
   a) interviews - wine serve #~~3~~4
   b) weeping
   c) wall fuck

6. **Pig Woman**
   a) entry
   b) escort
   c) love arias/beat-up

7. **Audience strip**

8. **Madamina**
   a) whispers
   b) song
   c) shouting - wine serve #~~4~~5 - party

   AA: we need sit [illegible] Only for for 5 mins

9. **Raft**
   a) herding audience upstage
   b) embarking
   c) journey
   d) flaming statue
   e) the jump

DON JUAN

23.3.91

1. **Opening**
   - a) impassive looking
   - b) look back
   - c) bug-eye
   - d) Clare's cry
   - e) stand and sit
   - k) victim selection - wine serve #1
   - l) pleasure victim
   - p) seduction walk upstage

2. **Java**
   - a) java #1 - downstage three times
   - b) audience kidnap/whistling
   - c) java #2 - to the fan out

3. **Opera**
   - a) men's triangle
   - b) dick lecture
   - c) la ci darem - wine serve #2
   - d) thump rump
   - e) recitative

4. **Pavanne**
   - a) sea slug
   - b) calighari/shintaro
   - c) pavanne - intro
   - d) pavanne - ensemble
   - e) pavanne - canon
   - f) pavanne - fuck me

5. **Counselling**
   - a) interviews - wine serve #3
   - b) weeping
   - c) Chris' suicide
   - d) tell me nice things
   - c) love arias/beat-up

6. **Audience strip**

7. **Madamina**
   - a) whispers
   - b) song
   - c) shouting - wine serve #4

8. **Finale**
   - a) herding audience upstage/changing costumes
   - b) theatre arrives/grandstand events
   - e) the leap