

PERFORMING SELVES: DISTANCE AND
IDENTIFICATION IN THE EXPERIMENTAL
PERFORMANCE WORK OF IMITATING THE DOG
(ITD), DESPERATE OPTIMISTS AND INSOMNIAC
PRODUCTIONS

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**Performing Selves: Distance and Identification in the Experimental Performance
Work of itd, Desperate Optimists and Insomniac Productions**

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Abstract:

This thesis counters the common postmodern privileging of distance over identification within artistic practice.

After Brecht, identification in the theatre has predominantly been imagined as a conservative operation that *always* aligns us with the status quo. These theories could be described in Eve Sedgwick's terms as 'paranoid' practices that necessarily detest the objects they investigate. At the same time, as Sedgwick maintains, they assume a position of absolute knowledge (2003, p. 138). In other words, paranoid practices implicitly claim to *reveal or expose* underlying formations of brutality.

I argue instead that itd's practice is not intent on *denying* identification, but rather holds distance and identification together. Our work recognises that identification is a necessary subjective practice, whilst also asking what is at stake in our specific investments and identifications. I maintain that itd's work gets close to its objects: it caresses their forms with love. At the same time, it always negotiates the place of distance, yet without disgust and without definite knowledge. Distance, in this thesis, is a place of engagement and contemplation: even of provisional judgement. Concomitantly, I argue that these very investments sustain us, give us a place to be in the world, whilst being the most productive form of giving and understanding.

Declaration:

I declare that the material that is presented in this thesis is my own work, that it has not been presented in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere, and that due acknowledgement has been given to the references in all sources.

Alice Booth

September 2004

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INTRODUCTION

Beginning the Story

When embarking on this thesis I wanted to get to the heart of what Imitating the Dog (itd) try to achieve when making performance work. While it is self-evident that the company aims to experiment with theatre's form – for all sorts of reasons that I will go on to discuss in due course – we also endeavour to construct worlds that audiences can be sucked into or seduced by in the act of spectating.¹ All of the company love film. We are attracted to the sensuousness of soundtracks and lighting and the way you can be transported into other worlds. Perhaps even more so than in the theatre. Our first two shows, *Einmal ist Keinmal* and *Ark* were highly realised imaginary worlds in which we attempted to *draw* audiences into a fictional landscape. In fact, I often think of them as *metaphorical* worlds, since metaphorical theatre implies a world that 'stands in' for our own. In other words, it suggests some kind of parallel environment that does not try to *literally* represent the world around us (in the way some realisms attempt), but rather endeavours to explore the territory of dreams, memory, longing and desire that are seductive but sometimes seem disconnected from everyday experience. Metaphorical theatre, in my conceptualisation, describes a particular paradigm of theatre that is not primarily text-bound, but uses other mechanisms in order to evoke an otherworldly landscape. This theatre considers music, visual and physical performance and sometimes technological landscape as primary elements in its composition; that is, they are not just 'extra' components that are used to elucidate or bring life to the text. Although they may not use the word

‘metaphorical’ to describe their own creative practice, Impact Theatre’s work is clearly based on such a model, particularly their seminal piece *The Carrier Frequency* (1984).² This particular performance has inspired and influenced many practitioners and theatre companies since its tour in 1984, and even though we did not see an original version of this piece, it definitely had a significant effect on us and informed the making of our first two shows.³ Our fourth show, *Five Miles and Falling* (2002)⁴, could also be described as metaphorical, although this piece is a lot less physical than the others. In this specific case, as I will discuss later, it creates an otherworldly environment through the use of live and technological landscapes, and places the audience inside its representational machine.⁵ It also deals with the generic pull of the filmic romance narrative. Our third production, *Guilty Pleasures* (2000)⁶ does not remain inside a fictional world, but rather explores a number of fictional strands from the ‘outside’. It also lays bare the workings and technologies of each fiction we were practising. Instead of being on the inside of the worlds that we had created, we would ‘present’ them. This piece takes as its starting point the classic canonical text, *The Family Reunion* by T.S. Eliot. Overall, despite their differences, all its performance works are based on the creation or exploration of *alluring fictions*.

So what we are interested in is, essentially, narratives. In fact my original research questions concentrated on the ways in which fiction might be ‘reclaimed’ by an experimental practice, having been derided for so long as the form most suited to mainstream culture. The research questions were as follows:

1. What is the role of narrative in contemporary performance?
2. What are the ranges of genres of fiction that are evident in contemporary performance?

3. What are the theories surrounding narrative and narrative structures that can be applied to contemporary performance?
4. How do film genres interface with the narratives in contemporary performance?
5. How can a matrix that permits different forms of narrative to co-exist be created as practice?
6. Can models for the use of narrative be identified within the work of other contemporary performance practitioners? What relationship do these models have to an understanding of the role of narrative in contemporary culture and to the specific performance making practices of it?

This thesis is *still* concerned with narrative, although its emphasis has shifted to specific aspects of narrative, namely theories of identification and distance in relation to character, canonicity and genre. This is because, whilst immersing myself in dry narrative theory, I realised that this theoretical discourse was of little help in understanding the role of fiction in the company's work. The formal accounts of deep structures, patterns and blueprints so widely explored by narratological study did not appear to get me closer to what narratives actually *do*. In other words, how do these narratives, these stories, seduce us? What is it that *absorbs* us, that draws us in to the fictions we are exploring? It appeared that I was searching for something I had hitherto left unarticulated – that is, theories surrounding identification. A simple example. When we created *Guilty Pleasures* we chose to place T. S. Eliot's play *The Family Reunion* (1939) against a range of 'other' material. This is by no means a new practice. The New York based performance company, the Wooster Group, probably pioneered the deconstruction of canonical texts, and their work had a particular influence on *Guilty Pleasures*. The Wooster Group are indeed widely praised for their innovative placing of canonical texts against what David Savran has described as "wildly contrasting material" (1986, p. 1). Savran describes The Wooster Group's

use of juxtaposition as the performance of “incisive critiques that expose the contradictions lurking in each text” (1986, p. 1).

However, it is important to point out that we did not select Eliot’s text merely to *undermine* it (*undermine*: “to weaken gradually or insidiously” – in (ed.) Sinclair 1992, p. 1629), which is a common (mis)conception of a deconstructive aesthetic. The dominance of the play in the structure of *Guilty Pleasures* would suggest otherwise: forty minutes is rather a long time to rubbish something. Indeed, Peggy Kamuf speaks of the “widely circulated image of deconstruction as an essentially negative operation, as if the term were really a synonym of ‘destruction’ and the additional syllable merely superfluous” (in (ed.) Royle 2000, p. 151). Indeed, Jacques Derrida, pioneer of deconstruction, speaks of his *love* of the text in his defence of a deconstructive practice:

I don’t feel that I’m in a position to *choose* between an operation that we’ll call negative or nihilist, an operation that would set about furiously dismantling systems, and the other operation. I love very much everything that I deconstruct in my own manner; the texts I want to read from a deconstructive point of view are texts I love, with that impulse of identification which is indispensable for reading.

(Derrida 1988, p. 152, emphasis in original)

And there you have it. *Identification... is indispensable for reading*. Although we could not help but ask questions of it, Eliot’s text is a text we *love* – the rich complexity of Eliot’s alternating language structures, his quirky characters and their relationships, his philosophical ‘take’ on the operations of memory. The list goes on. These are all components (and ones that I will elaborate on later on) that we were intrigued and fascinated by. Indeed, this is a text with which we found various points

of identification (a process that Derrida clearly sees as connected to or caught up in an act of love).⁷ Furthermore, if we imagine identification as an inescapable process of reading, then it follows that it is *a necessary subjective practice*. Indeed, Sara Ahmed substantiates this very point when she states, “reading is an enactment of subjectivity” (1998, p. 149). If this is the case, then making shows that offer exhaustive critiques of cultural material can never *ensure* the suppression of identificatory practices. Nor would we want to.

So whilst wanting to question the culture in which we live through the performance we make, we also want to acknowledge our particular attachments to, our loves of, and affections for the objects of culture that we choose to make performance from. This is intrinsic to the work of *itd* and absolutely essential to my argument in this thesis. Rather than ‘exposing’ what lurks beneath canonical texts or filmic genres (the basic territory of the practice that I will be discussing herein) for what they are – as if we are in a position to ‘know’ anyway – it might be more useful to describe our position in relation to these objects as *beside*. Standing beside objects of culture, certainly in Eve Sedgwick’s terms, “seems to offer some useful resistance to the ease with which *beneath* and *beyond* turn from spatial descriptions into explicit narratives of, respectively, origin and telos” (2003, p. 8, emphasis in original). Sedgwick goes on, “[b]eside comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivalling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations” (2003, p. 8). For now, I will concentrate on identification (which probably includes many of the verbs listed here).

Methodology – Engaging with and Practicing Identification

In this thesis, I have chosen to analyse other performance works alongside or *beside* the work of itd. These are *Play-boy* (1998) by Desperate Optimists and *L'Ascensore* (1992) by Insomniac Productions. These are two pieces of work that have specifically influenced itd. After all, it is important to acknowledge the obvious fact that itd's work exists in a more contemporary context also. Our choice of company name, *Imitating the Dog*, is a rather ironic admission of this. Furthermore, these other works, as I will argue later, demonstrate a real affection for the cultural materials they select for performances. In each chapter that analyses practice, I begin by interrogating the works of either Desperate Optimists or Insomniac Productions before moving on to my own practice with itd. This method allows me to explore identification from the 'outside', in relation to the work of others, and then from the 'inside' (or inside/outside) in negotiation with itd's performance pieces. The focussed nature of my investigation (always the demand of a thesis) will allow me to get close to the practice without making broad generalisations. All the practice analysed in these pages explores critical questions about the construction of subjectivity and identity. Whilst I am concerned with the intricacies and implications of my practice in relation to the specific work of named practitioners, I also recognise that questions surrounding subjectivity and identity circulate in the practice of much contemporary British and American experimental performance: these include Forced Entertainment, Bobby Baker, Curious, The Wooster Group, Station House Opera, Split Britches, Bodies in Flight, Goat Island and others.

Further, it is important to note at this stage that writing *within* practice must necessarily differ from writing *about* practice. In my attempt to write from a place within itd's work, I have been prompted to reflect on my specific, embodied relationship to the material that makes up our performances – as a practitioner but also as a *performer*. How do I fit in to this work? How do I identify with its specific components? What am I actually *doing* and feeling as a performer, and how does this alter and change from moment to moment in the performative situation? Stanislavski and Brecht, among others, devised specific rules for performing or acting, or in other words, they told us *what to do* in the act of performance. I shall be discussing these theorists in due course, but for now it is worth asking: without *absolute* rules for acting and performing that are based on certain stable notions of subjectivity, how can acting practices be described, embodied, and represented? Phillip Zarilli describes a 'postmodern' acting practice thus:

What the actor 'does' on stage may range from a psychologically motivated realist character, through a character-structure into and out of which the actor steps on a moment-to-moment basis, to the sequential playing of multiple roles or sequences of action which require the development of a specific relationship to the audience as part of one's score, to the playing of multiple personae, to the enactment of tasks without any characterological implications. (1995, p. 21)

These movements between different ways of being on stage certainly have something in common with the performance practices of itd, as well as the other work I will be discussing in this thesis. *Guilty Pleasures* particularly operates in the above way, since I, as a performer, am required to move between a number of different roles.⁸ This piece is constructed rather like Zarilli's 'map to action', in which he describes a play text as being the:

point of departure from which the [...] collective [...] devise and develop their own performance text which becomes the map to the set of actions that the actors will either perform as ‘themselves’ or as fictional characters.

(1995, p. 19)

However, Zarilli’s construction pays no attention to the specific relation between performer and the detailed material that makes up a devised performance. For example, how do acting practices connect to the *personal interaction* or investment with the materials encountered and negotiated in the rehearsal and performance structuring process? Such practices, as I will go on to show, are shaped and informed by specific cultural vocabularies. The vocabularies or ‘languages’ that I address specifically in this thesis are those of ‘authored’ canonical texts and (filmic) genres. However, despite the insertion of ‘self’ into performance – in terms that connote autobiography or authorship – performance is always and necessarily *restored behaviour*, to use Richard Schechner’s term (Schechner 1985, pp. 35-116). As Marvin Carlson points out, restored behaviour refers to a quality of performance that comprises a:

certain distance between ‘self’ and behavior (*sic*), analogous to that between an actor and the role the actor plays on stage. Even if an action on stage is identical to one in real life, on stage it is considered ‘performed’ and off stage merely ‘done’. [This demonstrates] a consciousness of [the] signifying potential [of actions].

(1996, p. 4)

This is one of the reasons why character, although displaced, has *not* been evacuated from experimental performance. I now want to address the grounds for which character remains significant in the works included in this thesis.

Awaking the 'dead' – Character in Experimental Theatre

I would like to consider the role that character, with its implicit connection to identification, plays on experimental stages, particularly bearing in mind the following words by Elinor Fuchs:

[I]f character is 'dead,' then what notion of ourselves as audience is theater (*sic*) reflecting back to us? Perhaps we are coming to perceive ourselves as the fragmented, ephemeral constellations of thought, vision and action that the Buddha saw as the truth of human nature.

(1996, p. 176)

This quote fascinates me as, if read definitively, it is entirely incongruous. That is, if I am to assume, rather audaciously, that Fuchs is making positive statements rather than suggesting possibilities, that is, she is declaring that character *is* dead, and that there *is* a true human nature, the contradictions within her paragraph are striking.⁹ Let me explain. In like manner to many other theorists of 'postmodern' art forms, Fuchs appears to pronounce character, the 'figure' of narrative, 'dead'.¹⁰ In her terms, character has met its demise based on its *failure* to represent, or mirror the contemporary self; after all, she would seem to have faith that theatre (throughout time?) has necessarily reflected back to us notions of "ourselves" as audience members. So if character can no longer represent the contemporary self, the self that is "fragmented and ephemeral", it might be a fair assumption that Fuchs determines character as *opposite* to this construction, which would be the stable and coherent 'figure' of modern stages. Fuchs certainly gives the impression of equating the death of character with the 'death' of the founding subject of modernity, the latter of which is arguably the most consistent expression of postmodernism's "crisis of legitimation" (Ahmed 1998, p. 94). In fact, Fuchs admits elsewhere in her book that her "death of

character” idea “started out as a spark of insight ignited in alternative theaters (*sic*) and fanned by the various poststructuralist ‘deaths’ announced in the 1970s and 1980s” (1996, p. 9). This crisis or death of the subject marks an interrogation of the humanist assumption that we have unmediated access to the world and knowledge of it, and consequently, can assume ‘mastery of the self’. Fuchs then, appears to be taking the classic postmodern stance that there has been a shift from the disembodied, autonomous, rational (and masculine) self to a self that is textual, contradictory and ‘in process’. She maintains:

One of the meanings of “postmodern” – its psychological formation [...] [is] a dispersed idea of self, and [...] this dispersal [is] represented in many different ways in the contemporary alternative theater (*sic*).

(Fuchs 1996, p. 9)

However, as Ahmed points out, “an association has been set up between postmodernism and Death (the Death of the subject) such that the paradoxical question, ‘who comes after the subject,’ is askable” (1998, p. 94). In a note, Ahmed explains this paradox: “The ‘who’ evokes a subject as the question itself assumes its passing” (1998, p. 200). She asks, “does the narrative of the passing by of the subject itself constitute a writing of a form of subjectivity?” (1998, p. 200). Or in to sum up Derrida’s position, the line which *crosses out* subjectivity, ironically, permits it to go on being read (Derrida 1981, pp. 45-80). In other words, the very act of theorising subjectivity’s downfall, which cannot help but name the subject *in writing*, *confirms the subject’s continued existence*.

Yet if I were to believe that Fuchs invests in Buddha’s ‘truthful’ notion of (our)selves, that is, “ourselves as fragmented, ephemeral constellations of thought, vision and

action” (1996, p. 176), the contradiction in her writing would appear more fundamental. Firstly, she effectively *removes* the subject, represented through character, from experimental stages yet in the same movement re-instates it as “fragmented and ephemeral” (1996, p. 176). Further, she invokes this alternative subjectivity as *absolute truth*. That is, the fragmented and ephemeral assemblage of self is indeed the very “truth of human nature” (1996, p. 176). This, on the one hand, would appear to re-inscribe the “ontological security” of modernism that she claims postmodernism undermines (Fuchs 1996, p. 1). Yet importantly, in her terms, this reinstatement of subjectivity can no longer be channelled through the inadequate container of character, so to re-phrase Ahmed’s question, *who comes after the character?* That is, what are we *faced with* on stage when characters have been, in effect, forsaken? Do we, as Fuchs is possibly suggesting, witness the *truth of human nature*, the self revealed in its purest form, as Artaud indeed dreamt of?¹¹

Considering that theatre, by its very nature, *represents* (selfhood) rather than reveals (selfhood), then the enactment of absolutely ‘true’ selves does not seem possible.

Indeed as Herbert Blau points out, theatre, which comprises both mediation and repetition, “haunts *all* performance,” acknowledging that there is something in the character of theatre that “implies no first time, no origin, but only recurrence and reproduction” (1983, p. 143). However, Fuchs does consider *another* interesting perspective on character that appears to counter her assertion that character is ‘dead’.

Elsewhere in her book, she invokes Bruce Wiltshire’s definition of character. He describes character as the theatrical element that “stands in”, that is, in a performance “an actor must stand in for a character... and through this standing in the audience member stands in for this character” (Wiltshire in Fuchs, 1996, p. 8). This implies

that the character of fiction “stands in” for the subject of culture and history, or more specifically, theatrical fictions represent versions of (how we understand) *ourselves* in the specific period and culture in which we live. Fuchs interprets this as signifying that the ‘character’ of representational forms throughout the ages “constitutes at the same time the manifestation of a change in the larger culture concerning the perception of self and the relations of self and world” (Fuchs 1996, p. 8). In other words, the way character is presented in narrative forms might reflect the way in which the culture at large views subjectivity itself, proclaiming an unequivocal correlation between character and subjectivity, and also implying *an inevitable and necessary identification of audience with character*. After all, Fuchs claims that as audience we see “ourselves” upon the stage before us. Phillip Zarilli again connects performer and audience in a dialectical relation that suggests identification:

For the actor, whatever the actions to be performed, these actions are the ‘material’ conditions of his or her work. By means of these material conditions not only are meanings created for, by, and with the spectators but also the actor’s ‘who I am’ cannot be divorced from the ‘who *we* are.’ Individual and collective identities form a negotiable dialectic within the arena of performance practice.

(1995, p. 21)

I will return to the specific performer/audience relation in just a moment, but for now I want to make the point that if Fuchs understands character as reflective of current perspectives on subjectivity, character itself, in her terms, might be represented in contemporary narrative forms as “fragmented and ephemeral.” In this case, character is *not* dead in experimental theatre, but *differently constructed*. However, although I agree that character might be manifested in contemporary performance in *different ways* than the modern production, and that there is an implicit connection between

(fictional) characters and (embodied) subjects, the problem still remains that character, and thus subjectivity in Fuchs are still invoked *as truth*: both are “fragmented and ephemeral”. Further, this postmodern construction of the self is actually internally done, as the perpetually shifting subject is paradoxically *fixed* (*as truth*).

I have to admit here that I have been somewhat misleading about Fuchs’ argument in order to elucidate my own. My intention was to explore, through Fuchs, the possibility that character has indeed ‘survived’ in some way on experimental stages, especially if, as Wiltshire implies, character itself is representative of the historical and cultural subject. However, as I mentioned earlier, my unpicking of Fuchs’ paragraph quoted at the opening of this chapter required that I make her suppositions definitive; and I also chose to overlook, temporarily, the confession she makes regarding the essay included in her book entitled “The Death of Character” from which the quote is extracted, and from which indeed her publication is given its title. She feels that looking back, her essay appears “idealistic in tone” and from the “first wave of deconstructionist postmodernism” (Fuchs 1996, p. 9). She goes on to admit that when she returned to the essay years later she was “more inclined to regard the loss of grounding principles in postmodern culture as transitional” (1996, p. 10)¹². However, I do not wish to return to ‘grounding principles’ of subjectivity *per se*, but rather intend to exploit Fuchs’ model of the eternally fragmenting self to account for a general trend in much postmodern theory that forecloses the possibility of attaching any value to the self or indeed grounding it or consequently the character in any way *whatsoever*.¹³ This is a tendency Marvin Carlson in fact refers to:

[T]he frequent associations of the postmodern [...] with a loss of origins, a free play of signification, and an instability of truth claims seem to suggest that to the extent that performance is a significantly postmodern form it is very ill-suited to the grounding of subjectivity or identity either for the purposes of defining and exploring the self or for providing a position for political or social commentary or action.

(1996, p. 8)

That is, the textual character of subjectivity – its lack of a referent or ontology – is taken to mean that it is *indeterminate and unintelligible*, which excludes the prospect of ever identifying oneself or indeed furnishing a point from which one can act politically. Additionally, this postmodern construction of the self divides the play of the subject from the relations within which it is entrenched, that is, it refuses to acknowledge the impact of power structures that define and determine the subject in the social world. Foucault in fact claims that although the subject can no longer be thought of as possessing a “transcendental consciousness” or essential meaning, it is still constrained by the ‘discursive practices’ to which in society, it is inevitably tied (Foucault 1970 p. xiv). Judith Butler expands on Foucault’s argument in relation to the sexed subject specifically:

The category of ‘sex’ is from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a ‘regulatory ideal.’ In this sense, then, ‘sex’ not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces [through the repetition of a norm with a ‘lost’ origin] the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls. [...] ‘sex’ is an ideal construct that is forcibly materialised through time [...] [it] is... not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which ‘one’ becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility.

(1993, p. 1-2)

That is, the (sexed) subject is not free floating, as the postmodern fragmented and ephemeral subject implies, but is rather materialised or embodied through highly

regulated and normalised identifications that are made ‘natural’ through constant repetition: *they are forcibly materialised through time*. This suggests that identification, sexed or otherwise, which Hall describes in basic terms as “constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation” (1998, p. 2) is the means by which subjects *become* subjects, even though the discursive approach “sees identification as a construction, a process never completed – always ‘in process’” (1998, p. 2). He claims that through identifications, subjects are “multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions” (1998, p. 4).

If identification can be thought of as a necessary and inevitable subjective practice, it is no surprise that it is one of the ways in which audiences are often described as interacting with (fictional) characters. Indeed, as I mentioned earlier, Fuchs asserts that theatre inevitably mirrors conceptions of “ourselves” as audience members. That is, in her terms, I should come to perceive myself as “fragmented and ephemeral” in relation to the figures (characters?) on the (contemporary) stage, which I take to mean that I would make an *absolute identification* with them. In other words, I recognise, in her terms, *myself* in the fragmented and ephemeral figures that are presented on stage before me. However, although I intend to deal specifically with the possibility of identification in experimental theatre in the course of this thesis, in the context of Fuchs’ argument it is problematic. First of all, it is at odds with a statement she makes elsewhere in her writing, in which she claims that experimentation in fact *prevents* “the sedimentation of empathy or identification with character” (Fuchs 1996, p. 173). As Ahmed points out, Raymond Federman similarly asserts that self-

conscious fictions make identifications within the reading process impossible (Ahmed 1998, p. 149). Ahmed maintains that Federman's claim is in line with much postmodern (literary) theory (see Ahmed, 1998, chapter 6).¹⁴ Yet even if for the moment I overlook this discrepancy, and accept that identification does indeed take place, I am faced with yet another dilemma. If I am to conclude that both the figures on stage and I are both "fragmented and ephemeral", which already marks an determination by an indetermination, my very act of identification is made *impossible*, as it has the effect of further consolidating what is perceived by Fuchs to be in infinite deferral, that is, *subjectivity itself*. After all, does not identification *fix* the self in relation to the Other? Indeed, to identify is to make a determination, however temporary or fleeting: *identify* 1. to prove or recognize as *being* a certain person or thing; *determine* the identity of" (Sinclair 1992, p. 753, my emphasis).

Of course, Lacan would argue that identification is not a fixing *as such* because it is always in the realm of the imaginary.¹⁵ He would explain the identifications that a subject makes as a result of the occurrence of the 'mirror phase' that apparently takes place in early infancy. The mirror phase is basically this. The child sees itself in the mirror as a unified 'whole' and thus misrecognises itself as a complete, autonomous Other. From this moment on the subject begins to establish an identity through a series of similar imaginary identifications, provoked by this initial sense of detachment, or difference. That is, the way we identify with other people throughout our lives and indeed with the characters of fiction are configured by this first, misrecognised identification with our own image.¹⁶ However, and this point is a critical one, Lacan's model of the mythic and 'failed' condition of identification does not expel its part in specifying subjects in material terms, that is, in producing genuine

and regulated *social* effects. For example, as Ahmed points out in relation to sexual identity specifically, “although the notion of sexual identity, of the intelligibility of sex, remains imaginary, it nevertheless organises the relations between subjects” (1998, p. 109). Ahmed refers to Lacan’s notion of *point de caption*, or ‘quilting’ where there is a temporary, although phantasmatic “fixing of the relation between signifiers and signified, leading to the securing of patterns of intelligibility, without which differences would become sheer indifference” (1998, p. 109).

To draw on the arguments of Foucault, Butler, Hall, Lacan and Ahmed, it would appear that the ‘identities’ of subjects are formed in the crucible of various and sometimes conflicting identifications that are simultaneously illusionary and material; they are a *mirage* of presence that distinguishes the subject, unachievable in any absolute or complete form, but are *normative and regulative* in their configuration. This would suggest, contrary to Fuchs’ construction, that the meanings of the subject *do* become fixed in time and space, however provisionally, in a way that constitutes the boundaries of the *embodied* subject. Or similarly in Stuart Hall’s words, “identities are [...] points of temporary attachment [through identifications] to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (1998, p. 6).

However, if identification can be understood as a highly regulated practice, would it be a fair assumption that, in Fuchs’ terms, when we recognise “ourselves” in the figures on stage before us, we are indeed *always* fraternising or aligning ourselves with the established order of things? This is certainly the estimation of Bertolt Brecht, who devoted his career to investigating the problematics of spectatorial

identification. He perceives identification as a reading relation of capitalism, as it reinforces the myth of a unitary bourgeois ego. He states:

The drama of our time still follows Aristotle's recipe for achieving what he calls catharsis (the spiritual cleansing [through identification] of the spectator). In Aristotelian drama the plot leads the hero into situations where he reveals his innermost being. All the incidents shown have the object of driving the hero into spiritual conflicts. [...] The individual whose innermost being is thus driven into the open then of course comes to stand for Man with a capital M. Everyone (including every spectator) is then carried away by the momentum of the events portrayed, so that in a performance of Oedipus (*sic*) one has for all practical purposes an auditorium full of little Oedipuses [...] [events are bundled] together [and] portrayed [as] an inexorable fate, to which the human being is handed over helpless despite the beauty and significance of his reactions; [Aristotelian drama is made up of] human contriving.

(Brecht 1964, p. 87)

In this model, spectators become generalised beings, forced to subsume or repress their historical specificity in their identification. Brecht claims that this cultural regulation is the condition occasioned in dramatic realism, since realism is not a reflection of reality but reality's *production*: it positions its spectators to identify and authenticate its truths. This is because realism naturalises the relation between character and actor, setting and world, in a process of fusion that, in Brecht's terms:

extends to the spectator, who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art. Witchcraft of this sort must of course be fought against. Whatever is intended to produce hypnosis, is likely to induce sordid intoxication, or creates fog, has to be given up.

(1964, p. 38)

This is the classic critique of identification in the theatre: it is through our identifications with the cultural ideals inherent in realist drama that the norms of society are upheld, maintained and policed.

Detour through Aristotle

It is worth noting that although Brecht uses Aristotle as a model around which to construct his critique of realism, much theory written in the twentieth century privileges a 'psychological' understanding of realism. Realism and Aristotle come together through a drive towards narrative coherence, although the tradition of realism itself is a more recent one that has developed in the West since the Renaissance. A good definition of psychological theatre can be located in the theories of Constantin Stanislavski, for whom the inward, or subjective, was elevated to a transcendental principle. Character, for him, was both the subject and the structural axis of narrative. To create a 'complete' character (in the Stanislavskian sense) is to imbue it with an inner truth or essential nature, reaching or tapping into a genuine sense of what it is to be a 'self'. Edward Braun maintains that Stanislavski was engaged in the "corporate search for the psychological truth of the character's behaviour, directed through the revelation of that truth through all the available means of the production" (1982 p. 65). John Fiske similarly argues that in realism, audiences are usually thought to "experience the representation as though it were the real, and, in particular, to see characters as individually real people" (1987, p. 169). In other words, according to this argument, there is an assumption that character comes into existence through its 'embodiment' by an actor: it is this embodiment that is often assumed to provoke identification, through a perception that the character is 'real'. In other words, we identify with the characters in realism *as though they are actual people*, in much the same way as we might identify with the people we encounter in our daily lives. Aristotle, on the other hand, subordinated character to action in his construction of theatre:

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

(1996, p. 11)

Characters, then, exist within plot structures for the sake of their actions *only*. That is, the sum of their total ‘doings’ adds up to character.

It is the thematic content then, that is important to Aristotle, represented through action and structured through plot. As Weber points out, “much of Aristotle’s discussion of tragedy [...] focuses on the question of how effective tragic plots are constructed”, and this “effectiveness” is measured by whether or not the spectators have a “*learning experience*” that “proceeds through feeling, *pathos*, [rather] than through conceptual understanding” (in (ed.) Scheer 2000, p. 10, emphasis in original).

This learning experience is achieved through mimetic behaviour and actions.

Importantly, similarly to realism, Aristotle insisted that a tragic plot should be “taken in at a single view” (Weber in (ed.) Scheer 2000: 10, p. 15), as unified narratives shape and lend coherence to human experience. That is to say that the coherence of such a view presumes a steadfast and removed ‘point of view’ from which “the plot can be taken in as a unified whole” (Weber in (ed.) Scheer 2000, p. 15). Like realism, Aristotle’s notion of tragedy is, most importantly, *plot* recognised as the temporal order of events so as to create a consequential and intelligible totality.

It is important to point out at this stage that there are many theorisations regarding the human desire for ‘whole’ narratives, since they reflect a condition of (imagined) replete subjectivity. Indeed, the symbolic order only exists by virtue of the fact that individuals desire a unified identity within it – despite the impossibility of attaining (or sustaining) that unity. As Elizabeth Cowie states with reference to Aumont *et al*:

The desire for narrative has [...] been stressed as a desire for identity, as an identification *with* the narrative and its contents, and hence a desire for such an identification so that ‘This capturing of the subject by a narrative, any narrative, reveals some primordial condition of identification by which every story told is, to some slight degree, our story.’

(1997, p. 117)

Paul Ricoeur again asserts:

Our own existence cannot be separated from the account we can give ourselves. It is in telling our own stories that we give ourselves identity. We recognise ourselves in the stories that we tell about ourselves. It makes very little difference whether these stories are true or false, fiction as well as verifiable history provides us with an identity.

(1985 p. 214)

Mark Currie, in *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, also proposes that identity exists *as* narrative, as we explain who we are by telling our own story. He argues that we select significant events and organise them according to the formal principles of narrative (a beginning-middle-end structure) as well as learning to self-narrate from outside ourselves sometimes constructing identities in relation to others around us, or from those ‘characters’ that impact upon us – these might include figures from fiction, from film and television as well as ‘real’ people that we encounter in our daily lives (Currie 1998, p. 17). This appears to suggest that narratives of the self always take

the Other into account. As Cowie claims, “Narratives set out stories of not how to *be* but how to be *for* someone” (1997, p. 117).

To return to Aristotle, the figure of Other plays a significant part in his ideal narrative. This is because much of the ‘learning’ that is supposed to take place in tragedy, is achieved through *recognition*, especially the “recognition of similitude between spectator and hero, no matter how great the distance between them” (Weber in (ed.) Scheer 2000, p. 17). As a spectator of tragedy then, I identify with the ‘actions’ of the hero by acknowledging that *these things could happen to me*. As Weber astutely points out, in Aristotle, character *still* becomes the *driving force* of action, even if the action is not psychologically motivated:¹⁷

The placing of human figures, otherwise known as ‘heroes,’ at the centre of the tragic ‘action,’ even if the significance of this action does not derive from them as individuals, gives to the action the requisite unity, coherence and wholeness required by theatre if it is to exercise its pedagogic function as Aristotle conceives it. For however one chooses to read the Aristotelian notion of ‘purification,’ catharsis, the result of such ‘expulsion’ is more a unified conception of human beings and their relation to the world than that which was manifested by the tragic conflict. It is the confirmation of such unity through conflict that is the ultimate ‘goal’ of the theatre qua tragedy – and for Aristotle, we recall, the “goal is the greatest thing of all.”

(Weber in (ed.) Scheer 2000, p. 18)

That is, the characters are not psychologically rounded but they do exhibit the *particulars of human behaviour* through their representation of purposeful ‘actions’. Spectators ‘recognise’ these actions that are presented to them in a linear, logical fashion (through possibly relating them to their own lives), and thus can ‘imitate’ them appropriately. Through catharsis, the spectators are guided to the recognition of ethical universals – that is, they ‘learn’ to accept the truth of the hero’s destiny (since

they ‘make sense’ in human terms) and they can transfer this understanding to their own way of living.

What is important here is that to identify, which can mean to make ourselves ‘identical’ – to *imitate*, does not necessarily require that a character is psychologically motivated. It is clear that if ‘pity’ or ‘fear’ (forms of identification) can be elicited by tragedy (assuming spectators interact with Greek Drama in the way Aristotle describes) then this invocation occurs through the *recognition of human behaviour or actions* on stage, not through the (mis)identification of a ‘real’ individual. Pity is certainly a form of empathetic identification (*I know how you feel and I feel compassion for you*) and fear seems to suggest a psychic identification (*I see what you see, from your position, and I am frightened*). Having said this, Weber suggests that it is through the representation of the *logics* of human behaviour that catharsis is made to ‘happen’. This corresponds to certain realisms since subjectivity is still represented in tragedy as unified and seamless (and *made sense of* in relation to the logic of the plot) even if it is *not* psychological. In this case, we do not identify with the characters as if they are ‘real’, but rather, as if they are *truthful*. In other words, the characters communicate ‘truths’ about existence that we acknowledge and then (theoretically) go on to imitate. Aristotle then, may dismiss the notion of ‘character’ (as the *subject* of narrative), but he certainly seems interested in the notion of (influencing through instruction) the subjectivities of spectators.¹⁸

Realism is Not Believed to be 'Real'

Aristotle's construction is useful since it foregrounds that we identify with what we believe to be *truthful* in a particular moment rather than 'really true'. John Fiske claims, in relation to television (which I suggest transfers to theatre spectatorship), that we by no means believe that the fictions we are confronted with in realism are real *as such*.¹⁹ Rather, he claims that much of the pleasure we gain from viewing realism derives from a double relationship of the reader with the text that he describes as "*implication-extrication*" (Fiske 1987, p. 174, emphasis in original). This is a process whereby the viewer is concurrently "self-implicated in, and self-extricated from, the text" (1987, p.175). He continues:

The viewer's choice of certain points of identification does not preclude the ability to achieve an actively critical distance from other points, and these dual relationships with the text can be engaged with simultaneously. There is no pleasure in being 'duped' by the text into a helpless viewer, but there is considerable pleasure in selectively viewing the text for points of identification and distance, in controlling one's relationship with the represented characters in the light of one's own social and psychological context.

(1987, p.175)

Fiske recognises that realism is unable to do what it says on the tin: it must, by its very nature, *fail* to convince us that the events which appear on screen [or stage] before us are enactment's of the 'truth' or the real world, by the very fact it is (and we *know* it is) a representation, or a bounded 'act' to use Judith Butler's term (1993, p. 234). Rather, we are disbelieving viewers, who *know* the events on screen are fictional, who nevertheless *allow* ourselves, at certain points, to be believing viewers in order to feel the pleasure of *recognition* (or indeed, difference). We are 'double'

spectators, to use Fiske's term, that move selectively back and forth between wisdom – knowing that the fiction *is* a fiction, and having some critical perspective on it – and conviction – that the fiction is in some sense, 'truthful.'

However, although I am interested in Fiske's conception of an interchange between distance and identification in relation to representation (a movement that I intend to reformulate in just a moment), his argument is problematic, since it suggests a notion of *pure agency* in relation to identification. To propose that audiences have *total control* over the ways in which they identify fails to take into account issues of desire and ideological power that I have already discussed. Firstly, we may, according to Elizabeth Cowie, be "moved by images [or indeed language, or other forms of representation] in ways which we neither expect nor seek nor want" (1997, p. 5) and cannot necessarily reject them as an act of conscious will. Furthermore, Fiske's model fails to recognise the related issue that identifications, at least according to Foucault and Butler, are highly *regulated* practices. To elaborate, we remain subjects of ideology and are not entirely 'free agents' able to overthrow the establishment through reading against the grain, or indeed identifying against the grain – that is, assuming antithetical subject positions in relation to the text. Reading, it must be remembered, is a socially (and psychically) determined activity, so although there appears to be the possibility of 'openness' occurring in relation to realism that allows for oppositional readings or identifications, this does not *necessarily* interrogate the ideological infrastructure inherent in the form that makes (or aspires to make) meanings that promote the dominant interests in society.

Brecht and the (Perceived) Obstruction of Identification

To counteract what Brecht saw as the surreptitious ideological effects of realism (and its concomitant production of identification) he sought to impose an ‘actively critical distance’ between actor and spectator. Brecht aimed to prevent identification by defamiliarising or ‘alienating’ his audiences in the performance scene. He believed he could do this by encouraging a performance style that shored up the distinction between player and character, permitting the actor to be understood as ‘demonstrating’ as opposed to (creating the impression of) ‘being’ a character. The audience could, theoretically, be distanced enough to recognise that the performance was an arbitrary manufacture of the real; consequently they were mindful that the people and events occurring before them were *ideologically determined* as opposed to being innocent reflections of an external reality. This ‘coming into recognition’ that was (designed to be) experienced by the audience members supposedly sanctioned the possibility that they could conduct themselves differently in a social existence that was both changing and *changeable*. Yet as Geraldine Harris points out, there is a fundamental contradiction in Brecht’s argument. That is, he believed he could shore up a unified identity as a preface to political identity:

Brecht’s theory implicitly places both the performer and the author (Brecht) ‘outside’ the fiction in a position of ‘mastery’, implying the existence of a stable subject position from which to quote the character and indeed from which to represent ‘social reality’. The audience is then presumed to identify with the author or actor, who are constructed as knowledgeable, objective observers of social reality for whom the contradictions have actually already been resolved.

(Harris 1999, p. 78-79)

In other words, he attempted to supplant the ‘falsehood’ of ideological structures with the ‘truth’ of socialism. Brecht, then, makes the predetermined judgement that the ramifications of his theatre are always *unmistakable* to his audience members, and although they may be “temporarily ‘split’ and caught up in contradiction” they will ultimately “achieve a state of synthesis or ‘wholeness’ through grasping the fundamental truth of social reality when it is presented to them in the correct scientific fashion” (Harris 1999, p. 79). In this sense he reinscribes the ‘fixing of the subject’ that is central to his critique of realism, as he seeks to assert an alternative ‘truth’ about existence which can only come about through the (re)grounding of selfhood. Interestingly, his theatre does not (attempt to) close down identification absolutely, as some theorists of Brecht take for granted. Rather, he advocates (complete) identification, paradoxically, when (he believes) it *intensifies* the alienation effect:

The performer’s self observation, an artful and artistic act of self-alienation stop[s] the spectator from losing himself (*sic*) in the character completely, i.e. to the point of giving up his own identity, and len[d]s a splendid remoteness to the events. Yet the spectator’s empathy [is] not entirely rejected. The audience identifies itself with the actor as being an observer, and accordingly develops his [self-conscious] attitude of observing or looking on.
(Brecht 1964, p. 92-3)

The spectator then, according to Brecht, cannot ‘lose’ herself in the character, but rather, by implication, is lost in the *actor* as being an observer of social reality. There appear to be two immediately recognisable problems with Brecht’s ‘construction’ of his spectators. The first is that there is an unproven assumption that formal performance methods can *always* close down identifications. I will come back to this line of reasoning in just a moment in relation to Sara Ahmed’s argument. Secondly, if I, as a spectator of Brecht’s theatre, make a *complete identification* with the actor

(who is a representative of Brecht, the author), I am not “pulled out of [my] fixity” (as Stephen Heath places the Brechtian spectator, 1974 p. 112), but secured *in Brecht’s place*: I take his place and ground my identity as the authoritative observer of social truths. This is a clear reinscription of the violence of assimilation (I become a copy of the Other or the Other becomes a copy of me) that Brecht and indeed many postmodernists ascribe to realism. However, as I have thus far pointed out, Brecht, as author, cannot hope to guide all of his spectators (through them effectively taking his place or metaphorically *becoming* him) towards (his) path to the revolution. Furthermore, his construction assumes that we *always* identify with realism in the first place, and that realism can *always* direct (ideological) meanings and identifications absolutely.

Identification in ‘Self-Conscious’ Fictions

In the wake of Brecht, it could be argued that a work of art has too often been considered subversive simply by opposing itself to realism. This has frequently led to the privileging of alternative aesthetic forms as more ‘politically progressive’ *per se*. Sara Ahmed illustrates how certain readings of postmodern texts privilege the *subversion* of realism as the correct method to obstruct identification – and these subverted texts are, by extension, thought to be politically progressive. Countering this claim, she characterises identification as a more complex operation than many postmodernists have taken for granted:

Raymond Federman makes the claim that self-conscious fictions make identifications within the reading process *impossible*. But I think

identifications are more complex than this. [S]ubjectivity itself is a complex process of identification and dis-identification entailing phantasmatic acts of (mis)recognition in the daily meetings of others. If we understand reading as an enactment of subjectivity (a production of the reader as subject), then the processes of identification do not simply depend on the coherence of the text (as image, illusion, or real) but rest precisely on the complex investment of the reader in the process of self making.

(Ahmed 1998, p. 149, emphasis in original)

As she rightly points out, any artwork, whether formally experimental ('self-conscious' is her term) or 'realistic', that is, work that attempts to curb its fictional status, traditionally understood to *promote* or *demand* identification, has the potential to elicit a range of identifications and dis-identifications depending on the "complex investment of the reader in the process of self-making" (Ahmed 1998, p. 149). In other words, although self-referential texts may expose their fictionality, it *cannot* be taken for granted that the reader will not make (partial or fragmentary) investments in the material, and similarly, it is not a given that realist texts will elicit any identifications at all – especially since identifications are very much bound up with the ways in which we are materially, historically and experientially constituted.

To expand, Ahmed is alluding to the fundamental problem with much postmodern theory, which is often formulated as the "*over-coming* of the generic limits of realism (as the over-coming of identity, fixity, transparency, closure and so on)" that is based on a notion of progress which relies on the premise that realism is a necessary mechanism of the establishment (Ahmed 1998, p. 48, emphasis in original). Realism, then, is posited as always 'successful' as an ideological construct – either "in the form of the passive interpellation of the reader into a dominant subject position, or the transmission of common sense from text to reader." (Ahmed 1998, p. 147). That is, all interpreters of the material unconditionally identify with the subject position

offered to them in the text (so they make easy, obvious sense of it) as they are ‘duped’ by realism’s ability to conceal its constructedness and appear as ‘the truth’. This, she suggests, designates all realist texts as “already read”, and by implication, already read in the *same way* (Ahmed 1998, p. 147). She points out that this reading of postmodernism against realism presupposes that “the realist text *can* successfully resolve the contradictions it opens out in the form of a symbolic closure (in which ‘the real’ is maintained as the cohesion or even the destiny of the text itself)” (Ahmed 1998, p. 147, emphasis in original). She decides that this reading of realism, which fastens it in place in order to position postmodernism as the ‘conqueror’ or overcoming of realism, effectively ‘does’ two things. The first is that it takes for granted that the ‘real’ can be secured in the text, which is the very concept of realism that is being opposed. The second is that the politics of the text, or the ideological implications of realism, are decided by its *formal properties alone*. The political value of postmodernism or meta-fiction then is based on a *subversion* of realism, as it “works to make readers aware of both its production and reception as cultural product, as a fiction which is about itself, and the process of its own construction”, thus ‘overcoming’ the possibility of (ideological) representation (Hutcheon in Ahmed’s words, 1998, p. 148).²⁰ This reading, Ahmed argues, fails to tackle the role that specific representations might play *within* (postmodern) narratives in the instigation of reader identification (1998, p. 149). Put another way, this tradition of postmodern criticism erases what has traditionally been termed as ‘content’ as a feature of narratives that experiment with artistic form. In Ahmed’s terms then, it is arguably the content of these narratives, that is, ‘what’ happens, as opposed to ‘how’, that may cause certain identifications to take (their) place.

However, I would argue that it is important not to reverse the terms of the form/content dichotomy, that is, to return to the privileging of content over form. Indeed, Ahmed does state that “differences and identifications may be *partially* fixed through formal experimentation” which is an admission that experimentation can certainly go some way towards distancing identifications, or complicating their operations, even if it cannot obstruct them entirely (1998, p. 150, my emphasis). This is an acknowledgment that the formal properties of narratives *can make a difference* to our practices of identification. This will be central to my analysis in the course of this thesis. However, as Ahmed persistently demonstrates, form, or specific formal techniques, cannot *guarantee* particular readings or identifications. Consequently form must always be analysed alongside its specific contexts of enunciation. In this thesis, I will always address form and content side by side.

As Ahmed maintains, postmodern theory tends to privilege distance or the suppression of identifications within (the reading of) artistic practice. On the contrary, I would like to explore theatre-making practices that are not intent on *denying* identification, but rather stage or perform a *movement between* distance and identification. In relation to its performance making specifically, I suggest that our interest in identificatory practices lies in the recognition that as subjects in culture, we exercise varying processes of identification and dis-identification that potentially transform us. These are the ways in which we are made, or *make*, and are unmade, or we *un-make*, ourselves and our worlds (allowing for varying degrees of agency).

Perhaps I need to make a qualification before I continue. I have suggested above that the performances that I will be addressing in this thesis *stage a movement between*

distance and identification. However, I am aware that distance and identification are not mutually exclusive categories. Here are my provisional lists that divide identification and distance (that I will go on to complicate). Identification could include similarity, recognition, implication, fixation, imitation, nourishment, comfort, sympathy, affinity, love, rapport, bonding, intimacy, closeness, seduction, desire, empathy, affirmation, acceptance, understanding, investment, appreciation, familiarity, warmth, absorption, emotion, feeling, affect, proximity, movement towards objects and knowledge. Identification could be expressed in Bill Nichols' terms as "embodied (local, concrete, experiential)" (in (ed.) Sobchack 1996, p. 62).

Distance might comprise difference, withdrawal, perspective, intellectual reflection, contemplation, detachment, disconnection, competition, freeing, unearthing, extrication, objectivity, neutrality, impartiality, remoteness, alienation, gap, divide, break, breach, space, separation, division, severance, judgment, thinking, movement away from objects and knowledge. Distance could be described in Nichols' terms as "disembodied (general, abstract, conceptual)" (in (ed.) Sobchack 1996, p. 62).

There are many ways in which the division I have made can be problematised.

Cowie, in terms of a psychoanalytical understanding of the subject, attempts to re-establish difference as an implicit function of identification:

Psychoanalysis has traditionally been concerned with the process of identification as the production of identity [...] that is, with those mechanisms which involve the subject making itself the same as another subject or an aspect of another subject or object. As a result, the process of differentiation [...] has not been addressed. It is Lacan's concept of identification in the mirror phase and his resulting theory of the subject which brings to centre-stage the issue of difference, in what Lacan terms the alienation of the subject in the process of identification. The reintroduction of differentiation as an

element in this process shows what is central to and for identification is not in the first instance a set of contents, but a *position* in relation to the other of identification.

(1997, p. 74, emphasis in original)

In this sense, *alienation or distance is already written into the process of identification*. However, I must say that I regard Lacan's construction of the mirror phase with some suspicion, which explains why I have not used his psychoanalytical model of identification in any detail in this thesis. Stuart Hall gets to the heart of the matter with the following description. The mirror phase, he argues, is a "sensationalist proposition" in which "*everything* constitutive of the subject not only happens through the resolution of the Oedipal crisis, but happens at the same moment" (Hall 1998, p. 8, emphasis in original). Even as a metaphor, the mirror phase operates as an over-determination that ultimately troubles or questions the possibility of a subject in process. This is because Lacan's mirror phase marks the *constitution* of the subject as the subject of lack.²¹ However, a subject in process by no means suggests an indiscriminate movement that operates without (necessary) points of delimitation and fixation. This is a subject that is potentially transformed by differing and multiple identificatory practices. As I have shown thus far in this introduction, these points of fixation both indicate and separate the embodiment of the subject. However, Lacan's construction is useful in order to account for seeing the Other *as other* as well as the same. Similarly, this theory of alienation implicates identification in the operations of loss and potential rivalry since the Other can never be truly possessed. Identification, then, both anchors and unties at the same time. This would suggest that identification and difference are always and inevitably intertwined. In this sense it is perhaps not always possible to discern *exactly* what constitutes either distance or identification, or indeed where one stops and the other

begins. However, as I will elucidate in the analysis of my own practice, distance and identification cannot simply be conflated. As Nichols hints at in his analysis of the film *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (1988) there is a “pivoting [that] upholds a tension between the particular and the general, the local and the historical, the need for abstract or conceptual knowledge, and the desire to impart knowledge rooted in the concrete” (Nichols in (ed.) Sobchack 1996, p. 62). This appears to describe a movement between distance and identification, whereby distance constitutes seeing the ‘bigger’ picture or meta-discourses (in this case race, gender and class) and identification comprises the personal, the specific, the embodied. Of course, embodiment, as I will discuss, is the primary task of the performer – either to perform a ‘characterisation’ of oneself or a fictional character. In my analysis of my own performance practice in the following two chapters, I will explore in detail this complex relationship of being distanced and locating identifications.

Nichols’ astute observations would contradict or at least complicate Fiske’s assumption that alienation or distance always places the viewing subject in a position in which objects are seen negatively. He cites such negativity as being unpleasurable. Consider, for example, his analysis of “*implication-extrication*” or the “double relationship of the reader with the text” (Fiske 1987, p. 174, emphasis in original). Here, he elaborates, “*implication-extrication* is closely connected with pleasure and unpleasure, with liking and disliking, and with the real and unreal” (Fiske 1987, p. 174). In other words, extrication, in Fiske’s terms, is always a disinvestment, a denial or *rejection* of the object. In relation to viewers surveyed by Ien Ang and Dorothy Hobson, Fiske goes on to remark:

Both Hobson's and Ang's subjects judged characters on how real they seemed, but revealed that the characters they liked appeared more real than those they disliked. The 'real' characters were the one's they identified with: Ang (1996, p. 30-1) also reports that her subjects were detached from the characters they disliked and were therefore more inclined to read them as embodiments of socio-political values.

(1987, p. 174)

Put another way, 'liking' a character makes her/him appear more 'real' and thus sets in motion an identificatory relation. Disliking a fictional figure apparently institutes a divide or distance that permits a 'textual' reading of character. What strikes me here is that there is a connection between Fiske's analysis and the practices that constitute 'postmodernism' as Ahmed defines it. This postmodernism, which is positioned as *underscoring* (or at least attempting to underscore) the ideological practices of cultural forms, falls in line with a current critical ethos that Sedgwick describes as 'paranoid'. These practices necessarily loathe the objects they engage with, whilst at the same time, as Sedgwick maintains, assuming a position of 'all-knowingness' (2003, p. 138). In other words, paranoid practices implicitly claim to *make known* underlying formations of brutality. It would seem that we can only be distanced from what we despise.

Distance, in this thesis, is approached as a position that is without loathing and without (absolute) knowledge. Rather, it is a place of questioning, of thought, of contemplation: even of (provisional) judgment. It is a place from which to ask what is at stake in our investments and identifications. At the same time, as I will explore in the following chapters, these very investments give us sustenance, give us a place to be in the world, whilst being the most productive mode of giving and understanding.

Theoretical Framework

Since itd's work and the work of the companies I discuss in this thesis might be described as postmodern, my theoretical framework initially developed through a reading of Sara Ahmed.²² She argues that postmodernism is generally constructed as a self-referential distancing strategy that exposes ideological forms. She maintains that this construction, as a practice of reading, privileges form over content, and fails to recognise that identifications might be made with the representations existent *within* postmodern forms (and that these representations might be ideological). She claims, like Jacques Derrida, that we always read through identification since it is a *necessary subjective practice*. Indeed, as I have thus far mentioned, Derrida claims that identification is in fact related to or entangled in an act of love.²³ In this sense then, identifications cannot simply be suppressed. For me, Ahmed and Derrida appeared to articulate a key concern of itd's work; that, is, our attachment to and identification with the objects or discourses that we engage with in our performance making.

I extend this argument through a reading of Eve Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling* (2003). Here she does not use the word postmodernism as such, yet describes a 'paranoid' reading practice that would seem to correlate to Ahmed's postmodern practice of reading. According to Sedgwick, paranoid reading always seeks to expose or reveal ideological forms whilst at the same time assuming a position of absolute knowledge. That is, the practice of exposure implicitly claims to unmask the *facts*. This makes paranoid reading always negative and destructive. Through Sedgwick, I argue in the thesis that paranoia can be isolating and that identifications are not always and

necessarily ideological. After all, they also nourish us and give us a way to be situated in the world.

I develop these arguments by examining how itd embrace identification as a self-making practice, whilst still wanting to ask questions of the specific investments that we make in cultural forms.²⁴ We do this, I argue, through a specific *staging* of a movement between identification and distance. This is a reformulation of John Fiske's "*implication-extrication*" or the "double relationship of the reader with the text" (Fiske 1987, p. 174, emphasis in original). This staging acknowledges our love and attachment to certain objects or discourses, whilst at the same time interrogating our investments in them. As I have already made clear, the position of distance that I explore is certainly related to Brecht's conceptualisation, which seeks to bring to light the *constructed* character of narrative forms (this is in order to show that the culture and society are equally constructed and thus subject to change or transformation). However, I acknowledge that this place of distance cannot simply be prescribed through formal strategies. That is, form and content need to be worked through practice and then subsequently analysed *together*. Also, the place of distance in this thesis is not one of absolute knowledge or perspective in the way Brecht imagined. Rather, it is a contemplative space that is necessary in order to assess the implications or consequences of our identifications – which are, after all, according to Foucault and Butler, normative and regulative in their configuration.

To sum up, itd deal with the way subjects negotiate cultural material through identification and distance in a performance context. Indeed, as Stuart Hall claims, individuals construct their identities in relation to what he calls the "positions' to

which they are summoned” by their culture and society (1998, p. 14). Observing that they perform these positions, he also explains that such positions are never completely realised, since the subject constantly struggles with (resists) the regulative rules that would order and fix them (1998, p. 14).²⁵ In other words, as subjects of culture we play an active role in self construction, since we always contest and re-negotiate the discursive positions to which we are beckoned. Furthermore, as Ahmed makes clear, identificatory practices are *differing and multiple*, so these points of fixation both specify and divide the embodiment of the subject.²⁶

My interrogation of identificatory practices is carried out in this thesis in relation to two particular aspects of narrative: canonicity (Chapter 1) and genre (Chapter 2). I deal especially with how the subject interacts with these cultural languages or discursive formations in terms of differing and sometimes contradictory identifications and measures of distance. However, despite the insertion of ‘self’ into performance – in terms that might be imagined as autobiographical or authored – I also acknowledge that performance is always and necessarily *restored behaviour*, to use Richard Schechner’s term (Schechner 1985, pp. 35-116). This is one of the grounds for which, I maintain, character, although displaced, has *not* disappeared from experimental performance. I maintain that character has indeed endured in some way on experimental stages, especially if, as Bruce Wiltshire implies, character itself is illustrative of the historical and cultural subject. This is particularly relevant for itd’s work since there is no attempt to display the ‘selves’ we present to the outside world. In other words, we do not try to utilise explicitly autobiographical material in our performances. The self is rather negotiated through formal and characterological means.

This thesis tells a story of the *lure* of the fictive practices and how we become attached to them as a way of carrying out our lives. They help us subsist and *be* in the world, which is why itd choose to deal with them in a performance context. These fictive practices are, I argue, stories of a culture and by extension, the stories of the self and how it relates to others. Indeed, as Martin Esslin astutely maintains, “without identification and empathy, each person would be irrecoverably imprisoned within himself (*sic*)” (1971, p. 131).

¹ This is the mission statement of the company:

itd make performance work for national and international touring that experiments with the role of story-telling and narrative in the contemporary theatrical experience.

itd make innovative use of digital media, design and physical performance to create off-kilter worlds within which public and private obsessions - identity, death, love and sexuality - are explored.

(<http://www.imitatingthedog.co.uk/company/default.asp>)

For public information on the company, see <http://imitatingthedog.co.uk>

² Pete Brooks, a founder member of Impact Theatre, has been known to describe his work as 'magical realism'.

³ We saw Stan's Cafe 'restage' *The Carrier Frequency* in April 1999 as part of Birmingham's Towards The Millennium Eighties Festival.

⁴ *Five Miles and Falling* is the second show submitted as practice-as-research for this thesis.

⁵ The audience stands inside the lift when viewing *Five Miles and Falling*, looking one way to see live performance action and then turning in the opposite way to see recording events on a screen. Although this places them within the wider operating framework of the representational machinery of the performance, it is important to note that in crucial ways the audience are excluded from the performance's representational mechanisms: certain divisions such as performer/spectator persist. I shall discuss this further in chapter two.

⁶ *Guilty Pleasures* is the first show submitted as practice-as-research for this thesis.

⁷ Of course, love as Derrida points out, is an impulse of identification, however, love is also caught up in the dynamic of profound loss. This is explored in Gillian Rose's *Love's Work*. The philosopher Lyotard also describes the desolating effect of love. He writes: "And yet, if you ever happen to be in love, really in love, the vista of the face continues to grip you even as you bow to the law that emanates from the countenance. And that is why you no longer know where you are" (Lyotard 1989, p. 218). Love, it would seem, both fastens and undoes at the same time. I discuss this further in my exploration of *Five Miles and Falling*.

⁸ See my discussion of *Guilty Pleasures* in chapter one.

⁹ Fuchs admits that her 'death of character' essay is now old fashioned. I will return to this point later.

¹⁰ See, for example, Jill Dolan in Carlson's *Performance*, 1996, p. 170, and Phillip Zarilli in *Acting (Re)Considered*, 1995, p. 19.

¹¹ Artaud constantly invokes a mode of being that exists outside representational frameworks; this is one definition of cruelty (see Derrida's essay, 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation', in *Writing and Difference* (1978). See also *Antonin Artaud: The Collected Works - Volume 4*: "Life-manifestation: theatre-manifestation and cruelty-exactness, for it is intense, for life is present." (Preface 11, *The Theatre and its Double*, p. 159).

¹² Rather confusingly, she claims on only the next page that her "entire project has been tutored by deconstructive ideas" (1996, p. 11) suggesting that she does not in fact invest in a return to foundational concepts.

¹³ Fuchs' 'The Death of Character' essay does in fact mention the danger of postmodernism's potential loss of values when she writes, "It is a frightening thought that theater (*sic*) could well be on its way to becoming a vast supermarket, a Bloomingdale's of empty signs from ever more exotic sources recombined to create an artificial and dehumanized culture" (1996, p. 175) but she admits in her book that this idea "finds its way into the essay more as a threat than as an inevitable 'cultural logic' (1996, p. 9).

¹⁴ Yet Ahmed would say that preventing identification is not possible. I will return to this shortly.

¹⁵ For an excellent summary of Lacan's theories of subjectivity, see Jane Gallop's *Reading Lacan* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca 1985)

¹⁶ I shall be offering a critique of the mirror phase on page 33 of this introduction.

¹⁷ Aristotle clearly describes preindividualistic narratives; that is, they emerge from a social world in which the psychological subject has not yet been constituted as such, and, therefore, in which later categories of the subject, such as the 'character', are not relevant. It is important to acknowledge that 'modern' performance texts also engage with an unconstituted psychological subject as well, although it is highly probable that psychological motivations are constantly projected by spectators in the West. See my discussion of *L'Ascensore* in chapter two.

¹⁸ Brecht did not like realism's characters because they were not real enough - they resolved contradictions.

¹⁹ I do not want to suggest that identification in television and theatre (and indeed film) are synonymous - merely that they have certain similarities. I will explore these differences in the course of this thesis.

²⁰ Hutcheon defines meta-fiction as a ‘manifestation’ of postmodernism (in Ahmed 1998, p. 148).

²¹ For a more detailed critique of the limitations of the mirror phase see Ahmed 1998, p. 98.

²² Ihab Hassan describes postmodernism thus: “postmodernism veers towards open, playful, optive, disjunctive, displaced or indeterminate forms, a discourse of fragments, an ideology of fracture, a will to unmaking, and invocation of silence – implies all of these yet implies their very opposition, their antithetical realities” (Hassan 1980; 125). The practices of formal experimentation that we engage in, for example, the collaging of genres of story-telling such as theatre, film, video, pop-video and photography, as well as the utilisation of techniques such as montage, repetition, physical expression and non-linear narratives (stretching, compressing, re-configuring time), to name but a few, could be said to correspond to Hassan’s formulation.

²³ See introduction, pages 4-5.

²⁴ If we accept that theatre always deals with subjective practices.

²⁵ See chapter 1.

²⁶ This is discussed more fully in relation to Desperate Optimist’s *Play-boy* on page 63.

CHAPTER ONE

CONTRADICTIONARY AND CONFLICTING IDENTIFICATIONS IN PRESENTATIONAL THEATRE: MECHANISMS OF THE CANON AND NOTIONS OF AUTHORSHIP AND AUTHORITY IN *PLAY-BOY* BY DESPERATE OPTIMISTS AND *GUILTY PLEASURES* BY ITD

As I pointed out in my introduction, our third production, *Guilty Pleasures*, took a different direction to *Einmal ist Keinmal* and *Ark*. In this performance, we wanted to change our relationship to ‘fiction’. We had felt very restricted by the rigidity of the narrative structure that dominated the previous two shows, and wanted space in the performance to ‘step’ outside the fiction and ‘look on’, in the same or similar privileged position that an audience member has.¹ What had become limiting in our adherence to specific logics of narrative was the demand that closure, bringing into resolution, made upon us as makers. The rules of the diegetic worlds created meant that only certain paths were open to us for exploration and the logics of character came to dominate stage action. In a deliberate move away from these enclosed worlds we wanted to create self-conscious fictions (and present more than one fictional strand) as well as showing the ‘workings’ and technologies of each fiction we were pursuing. Instead of being ‘inside’ the worlds that we were exploring, we would ‘present’ them.

Indeed, the style of both the performances I will be discussing in this chapter, *Play-boy* by Desperate Optimists and *Guilty Pleasures* made by itd, is presentational, and both take a canonical text, *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) by John Millington Synge and *The Family Reunion* (1939) by T. S. Eliot respectively, around which to construct their

action. Neither company entirely ‘embodies’ the texts, but rather negotiates them from the ‘outside’.² Presentational theatre, in which the actor’s ‘persona’ is foregrounded, could be described as a common trope of experimental performance, and has some parallels to Brechtian concept of ‘alienation’. However, as I pointed out in the introduction, Brecht sought to use presentation rather than embodiment of character as a means to replace the dominant ‘false’ understanding of reality with the ‘truth’ of social justice. Yet as many critics have pointed out, Brecht’s theory intrinsically situates both the actor and author (Brecht) as exterior to the fiction and thus in a position of mastery, suggesting “the existence of a stable subject position from which to quote the character and indeed from which to represent ‘social reality’” (Harris 1999 p. 79). In other words, his methods reinstate concepts of a fixed subjectivity and the restoration of ‘author’s intentions’.

However, without wanting to return to the grounding principles of a Brechtian method, I would like to consider Philip Auslander’s conception of a possible “deconstructive theatre.”³ Auslander compares the Brechtian model with a deconstructive practice in the following way. He claims that Brecht posits “the self as the autonomous foundation for acting” since, in Roland Barthes’ terms, “the [Brechtian] actor must present the very knowledge of the [play’s] meaning... The actor must prove... that [she] guides meaning towards its ideality” (Auslander 1987 pp. 30 and 33, brackets are Auslander’s). Thus, in theory, we identify with the *actor* as the purveyor of authoritative truths. Instead, deconstructive theatre, according to Auslander, has the capacity to *undermine* “theatrical presence” which he defines as “the actor’s revelation of self through performance” (1987

p. 36). This is because it *prevents*, through the actor's deliberate acknowledgement that s/he cannot 'master' the material that makes up the performance, the actor's self from securing, or attempting to secure, "a grounding presence that precedes the performance" (1987 p. 36). By implication then, since the actor's subjectivity is not defined in advance, or rather, is generated by the performance context, (complete) identification with her or him is prevented or made difficult. This is because, if I follow Auslander's argument through, the performing self has no ground or fixed points of reference that an audience could identify with.⁴ Furthermore, although he states that he could not possibly speculate on what deconstructive acting might "look like" as it "runs counter to the spirit of deconstruction itself", he goes on to do so in a detailed exploration of the performance style of the New York based theatre company, the Wooster Group (1987 p. 38).⁵ Rather than 'revealing the self' through performance, Auslander sees their approach to performance as being principally exemplified by Elinor Fuchs' portrayal of a 'postmodern' theatre. This is:

[A] stage turned curiously upon itself, blurring the old distinctions between self and world, being and thing; and in doing so not through a representation of the outside world but through the development of a performance art 'about' performance itself.

(in Auslander 1987 p. 41)

That is, in Auslander's words, "Wooster Group performances, indeed, are less representations of an exterior reality than of the relationship of the performers to the circumstances of the performance" (1987 p. 41).

However, the extensive quotations that he uses by Willem Dafoe, a key ‘player’ in the Wooster Group’s twenty odd year performance history, seem to suggest that the negotiation of Dafoe’s embodied ‘self’ is a crucial and necessary dynamic of the work. Although Dafoe, in the Wooster Group performances, enacts a performance ‘persona’, incorporating for example, the ‘playing’ of himself, of re-enacted versions of himself on acid trips, as well as various fictional characters, he, perhaps inevitably, sees the ‘constant’ of these roles as his embodied self. This is a ‘grounding’ of sorts upon which his performance persona is pinned. Consider the following statements:

I am this particular guy that has to go through these particular paces. It’s not so much that I am putting forward my personality, but because of the various actions I have to do, I’m presenting my personality in how I field those actions [...] how I field them is how I live in this piece.

These [pieces] are made specifically for us.

When we make a theatre piece, we kind of accommodate what [the performers] are good at or how they read. They have functions, so it’s not like we treat each other as actors and there has to be this transformation. We just put what Ron brings to a text and formalize it: it definitely comes from Ron as we know him, as he presents himself to the world and then, of course, when you formalize it and it becomes a public performance it ups the stakes a little bit. That’s not to say Ron is just being himself, but you are taking those qualities that he has and pumping them up and putting them in the structure.

The way I get off in performances is when I hit those moments of real pleasure and real clarity and an understanding about myself in relationship to the structure; it is work, it is an exercise of me for two hours, behaving a certain way, and it can become meditative.

(Dafoe, cited in Auslander, 1997 p. 39-44)

These quotations suggest that Dafoe sees the performances as a structure through which to present and negotiate the self, as he makes identifications with the characters, actions and objects that are woven into the performance, as he “hits those moments”, as he comes

to points of self understanding through the work. Arguably, devised performance is more *about* the ‘self’ of the performer/maker because there is a specific, personal investment in the material than in, say, a scripted play by Chekhov or Brecht, in which the actors embody or present the author’s words and actions on stage.⁶ This is particularly true of the Wooster Group since they bring many of their own objects, interests, past experiences and obsessions into the rehearsal room. However, Auslander describes Dafoe’s relationship to his work as a kind of ‘catharsis’ which “takes self understanding as its object, and is therefore therapeutic rather than communal” (1997 p.44). At the same time, Auslander maintains, Dafoe’s “understanding is limited to a clarity of perception about the relation of the self to the performance” (1997 p. 44). He goes on:

No larger structure of knowledge, whether of the individual psyche or the collective unconscious, is invoked. If, in postmodern performance, the self is understood to be a persona, a textual entity generated by the performance context, catharsis too, must be defined in textual terms.

(Auslander, 1997 p. 44)

However, although it might be a fair assumption that no “larger structure of knowledge is invoked” Auslander appears to overlook what I would describe as a fascinating tension between Dafoe as an embodied, specific person *as* performer and Dafoe as textual or *as* persona. According to Auslander, the audience witness only the exploration of ‘acting’ processes, *not* the processes by which the self might reach temporary points of cohesion, of a fragile sense of *being*, through performance. This hints at a mode of self-authorship, which I will elaborate on in just a moment. Furthermore, since Auslander defines the Wooster Group’s work as an “investigation of the suppression of difference within

political and cultural representations” and a “deconstruction of presence [that] avoid[s] merely restating the images and structure it invokes”, he leaves unaddressed the ways in which authoritative structures or voices might be repeated, or re-circulated within the frame of the performance (Auslander 1997, p. 38). I will now move on to a consideration of authorship and authority, in order to unravel some of Auslander’s assumptions.

Authorship and Authority

Auslander describes the Wooster Group’s aesthetic as consistent with a “poststructuralist idea of textuality”, and indeed quotes Roland Barthes in order to describe their work (1997 p. 71). He claims that Barthes’ description of a text could be used to describe a Wooster Group show, that is, “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (Barthes, in Auslander, 1997 p. 71). Indeed, in relation to the Wooster Group’s production of *LSD (...Just the High Points...)* (1984), which incorporates a significant portion of Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* (1952), he makes the case that Miller, *as* author, disappears.⁷ That is not to say that the Wooster Group actually expel his name in their own re-rendering of his text, but instead (or as well as) the author *as figure* in *all* contemporary culture, is no longer relevant. He asserts, again in line with Barthes, “the text is made up of quotations to begin with” and “it arises in some sense from the culture itself and not from the idiosyncratic mind of the writer” (Auslander 1997, p. 71). To elucidate, Barthes claims that the authority of the author cannot predominate since “language knows a ‘subject’, not a ‘person’” (Barthes,

1977 p. 145). In this sense the use of language in writing is always socially and culturally situated. Furthermore, language is a “gesture of inscription (and not of expression)” as it always incorporates quotations or references to writings from the past (1977, p. 146). Barthes states that:

As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.

(1977, p. 146 emphasis in original)

Barthes intimates that the author, in the act of writing, cannot prevent her or himself from being lost in a ceaseless process of imitation, since s/he must always operate within symbolic structures. However, it may be a little hasty to assume the total annihilation of the author, and this is important, since it will facilitate a crucial distinction between authored and genre texts – the latter of which I will discuss in chapter two.⁸ In his essay ‘What is an Author?’ Foucault, without attempting to reassert the author as transcendental signifier, points out:

It is not enough [...] to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared. For the same reason, it is not enough (after Nietzsche) that God and man have died a common death. Instead, we must locate the space left empty by the author’s disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers.

(1984, p. 105)

Indeed, to rephrase Foucault, the question is not ‘who is the author?’ as if the title of author is connected to a specific individual or subject, but rather, ‘what is the author’s

function within our society?’ In this sense, the author becomes a crucial operation of discourse. Indeed, the return of the subject as author is not “in order to re-establish the theme of an originating subject” but rather to “grasp the subject’s points of insertion, modes of functioning, and system of dependencies” (Foucault 1984, p. 118). Indeed, the authors I will be addressing in this chapter, John Millington Synge and T. S. Eliot, operate within specific terms and contexts. First of all, we must take into account the precise ‘status’ and circulation of each author *as author*. This is particularly clear in relation to the canonical authors I am discussing herein, since the canon is widely understood as a container of traditional cultural value. In other words, as Charles Altieri rephrases Samuel Johnson, canons “play obvious social roles as selective memories of traditions or ideals” (1990, p. 21). Further, we must consider the impact of critical writings (especially Eliot’s own) that have the effect of ‘situating’ the meanings of an author’s text. In other words, authored texts, particularly of the canonical variety, can be described as already (culturally) read or as having ‘authoritative’ interpretations. Authored texts are also broadly positioned within certain movements or traditions. In this sense, the figure of the author has the effect of limiting, taming and containing meaning, or in other words, s/he is an ‘anchor’ of meaning. As Foucault points out: “we are used to thinking that the author is so different from all other men (*sic*), and so transcendent with regard to all languages that, as soon as he (*sic*) speaks, meanings begin to proliferate indefinitely” (1994, p. 118). In reaction, he pertinently remarks: “the author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning” (1994 p. 118). He goes on:

[T]he author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill the work; the author does not precede the works; he (*sic*) is a certain functional principle by

which, in our culture, one limits, excludes and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction. [...] The author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning.

(1994, p. 118-19)

To reiterate, the author is a figure or function that actually *closes down* meaning's potential multiplication. Therefore, whilst I am prepared to accept the 'textuality' of the author that Auslander (in relation to Barthes) describes, I think it is important to remember that there is a contextual and historical 'weight' to the author's name that Auslander fails to acknowledge. I would like to claim, on the other hand, that even in the reframing of the authored text – as in the Wooster Group's (re)rendering of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* – the figure or function of the author and his contexts still maintain a presence in the work. In fact, it could be argued that the author's name in fact becomes *more concrete* in a Wooster Group performance. This is because Miller's work is placed in parenthesis, rather than being hidden behind the seeming transparency of the realist text. Put another way, since the reframed play is thrown into relief, arguably, so are its specific contexts and modes of functioning. It is significant, for example, that Elizabeth LeCompte (director of the Wooster Group) describes Miller's vision of himself as "in the realm of high moral art," whilst most Americans, she claims, see his play "in high school productions, with people wearing cornstarch in their hair" (in Savran, 1986 p. 191).⁹ This is because his text is studied on the standard school syllabus as part of the established American canon. In *LSD*, LeCompte actually had the actors working on *The Crucible* as if in a high school play.

Whilst not wishing to dwell on this particular piece by the Wooster Group (it is not in the remit of this thesis), I will take care to foreground the ways in which the authors and their contexts might still function within the performances that I will be discussing: *Play-boy* by Desperate Optimists and *Guilty Pleasures* by itd. It is true that in the re-framing of a (canonical) text, the original meanings will undoubtedly pass into the texture of the new text's significations. Furthermore, I will also take into account the possible effects of *de-centring* (rather than obliterating) an authored text in terms of *other* modes of authority or authorship. To put it a different way, if we imagine *Play-boy* and *Guilty Pleasures* as 'texts' that are created through a devising process, then the performers/makers are not *properly* outside of them. This is to say, performers/makers also operate as authors (of a kind). To use Foucault again, I will attempt to: "grasp the subject's points of insertion, modes of functioning, and system of dependencies" (1984, p. 118).

In *Play-boy* and *Guilty Pleasures*, both Desperate Optimists and itd stage the relationship of the subject to discursive formations (such as the canonical text) in terms of an *articulation*. In other words, since "all articulations are properly relations of 'no necessary correspondence'" they are "founded on that contingency which 'reactivates the historical'" (Hall, citing Laclau, 1998 p. 14). This may be where the possibility of agency lies. In other words, the historical material (of the canonical text) is re-animated or *read again in the act of performance*. Stuart Hall maintains that:

Individuals as subjects identify (or do not identify) with the 'positions' to which they are summoned; [they also] fashion, stylise, produce and 'perform' these positions, and [...] they never do so completely, for once and for all time, and some never do, or are in a constant, agonistic process of struggling with, resisting,

re-negotiating and accommodating the normative or regulative rules with which they confront and regulate themselves.

(1998, p. 14)

In other words, what the performers appear to foreground in *Play-boy* and *Guilty Pleasures* is not an overriding meta-narrative that solidifies identity, as Stanislavski's realism or Brecht's alienation arguably seeks, but rather a negotiation of *identificatory processes* that mark and divide the subject. Both performances are elaborately structured and scripted, so neither Molloy, Lawlor nor any of its identifications are made in the 'present moment' of performance, at least, not in the same way that an audience member might identify whilst engaging with the material for the first time. Rather, audiences witness identificatory processes 'at work' in the performances themselves. Put another way, we, as performers, (even though this is an 'effect' of the performance and not what is 'truly' occurring) construct versions of 'ourselves' as we negotiate, read and field the elements that make up our performances. In Auslander's terms, the 'self' is not 'revealed' as such in *Play-boy* or *Guilty Pleasures*, as both *Desperate Optimists* and it do not provide "the audience with access to human truths" (Auslander, 1997 p. 30). Rather, the 'making' or negotiation of self is manifested through, or is an effect of, the performer's identifications with or investments in different sets of (hi)stories and materials.

***Play-boy* by Desperate Optimists**

Production Details: *Play-boy* was devised and performed by Desperate Optimists: Joe Lawlor and Christine Malloy. The video element was directed and edited by Desperate Optimists and filmed by Chris Dorley-Brown. *Play-boy* toured extensively in 1998-99 throughout the UK and also toured to Dublin, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden.

Let me begin by setting the scene of the performance itself. There are two ‘live’ performers in *Play-boy*, a woman and a man, clearly of Irish origin, wielding microphones and wearing simple white shirts and plain trousers, with identical pairs of cowboy boots. They have apparently come as ‘themselves’. As our ‘hosts’, the two performers, Molloy and Lawlor, weave a number of stories, mythologies, legends and anecdotes around the ‘concept’ of *The Playboy of the Western World* by John Millington Synge. I use the word ‘concept’ as the *text itself* is notably absent in the playing space of the theatre, as well as all the mechanisms, or machinery, that are usually manipulated, at least within traditional Irish theatre, to make the text ‘come to life’ – the costumes, the scenery, the properties, the sound and lighting effects and notably, the actors that play the characters. The performance space is very pared down, with a hardboard floor broken up into even squares with black tape, a green tarpaulin backdrop, and dual video monitors placed centre stage, one set slightly farther back than the other. At the front and running across the width of the stage is a raised platform, about two feet high and two feet deep. There are two high stools, one up stage and one down stage, and two microphone stands. There is a smoke machine that pumps out a burst of smoke every so often. There are no other objects on the set.

As the performance unfolds we are accorded, courtesy of our hosts and their pre-recorded 'guests' that appear on the video monitors, all the elements that are kept hidden or are cast out in the making of a coherent theatrical narrative such as *The Playboy of the Western World*: direct references to the play's 'staging' through accounts of its early production at the Abbey Theatre in Ireland, tales about the life and times of its Irish writer, Synge, and importantly, reconstructions of the story and the characters Synge invented by the video taped guests who are introduced to us by the performers as their friends and family.¹⁰ Sometimes the video recorded figures hold guns loaded with blanks up to the camera and fire at the screen. We are also told a seemingly random set of stories about (mainly South American) revolutions, both historically 'real' and fictional, which are more or less related to *The Playboy of the Western World*, and occasionally Molloy and Lawlor embody the characters from stories during the course of the show.¹¹ It might be interpreted that these stories generally have some sort of connection to Ireland. Intermittently, and often in the middle of a story, the performer who is not speaking holds the gun loaded with blanks up to the other and shoots. Using pins, they take it in turns to pierce blood bags that are somehow attached to the inside of their shirts. They work the blood out by crushing the bags with their fingers, dousing their shirts with uneven bloodstains. At particular moments, a samba track, which is accompanied by an intricately rehearsed dance sequence, is played over the loud speakers. This always ends or temporarily interrupts the flow of a given speech or story.

If Sara Ahmed insists that the 'about-ness' of experimental forms is too often overlooked, I would argue that although *Play-boy* is not reducible to the politics of place, of national

identity, it could be read as circulating principally around certain notions of *Irishness*.

However, crucially, when watching the show, these notions of Irish national identity are not explored through continued fictional characterisation, which, according to Alex Johnston, is contrary to Irish theatrical custom:

The overwhelmingly dominant theatrical tradition in Ireland is psychological realism. [...] Irish actors love to show you that while the characters they're playing may be behaving in objectionable ways, it's only because they have complex and tortured inner lives, which if you but understood, you wouldn't judge them. So that normally we look into Irish theatre, rather than at it.

(2000)

I love his expression of looking 'into' Irish theatre. Yet, as Johnston points out, audiences of traditional Irish theatre are expected to identify with the fictional characters in a way that brings them to a recognition of what Irish national identity *actually is*. In other words, all of us, in the same way, will come to a (perfect) understanding of Irishness by identifying with the characters that embody the "complex and tortured inner lives" of an historically poor and subordinated people: *I can understand your turmoil (which is outside my own comprehension) by putting myself in your position*. It is allegedly through (complete) empathetic identification then, that Irish drama can summon the outside world to understand what Irishness really, or essentially *is*. In other words, traditional Irish theatre attempts, however successfully, to delimit an essential Irish sensibility (an Irish 'self').¹²

Interestingly, as Alex Johnston points out, Irish reviewers were “less than happy” with the Desperate Optimist’s performance, apparently wishing that the fake blood bags concealed in Molloy’s shirt were real (2000). Johnston believes that the Irish press would prefer politics to be tackled in “a measured, literary manner with a strong dose of humanism”, rather like the plays of the popular Irish playwright Brian Friel (2000). As he remarks ironically, “Brian Friel’s characters don’t interrupt passionate speeches to engage in carefully choreographed samba dancing” (Johnston, 2000). The reviewers seemed to be identifying what they saw as a ‘failure’ by the Desperate Optimists to acknowledge Ireland as the ‘romantic land’ that figures in much celebrated Irish art and literature. This is an Ireland with which its people can make a strong and confirmatory identification.

However, whilst not wanting to undermine the importance of affirmative identifications, it is important to point out that the definition an essential Irish character seeks to conceal the power relations at work in the making or fixing of any category. In other words, it fails to take into consideration the question of who has the authority to fix the limits of or sanction the criteria for what constitutes national identity. Indeed, how can it be possible that the “dominant theatrical tradition” of Ireland, as Johnston puts it, can ‘speak for’ what Irishness is and indeed *always will be*? Especially since, as Derridian deconstruction would indicate, essentialism is always impossible as such. Any conception of pure essence always necessitates contingent and supplementary details and so is always already tainted by what is other to it, or outside of it. To assert an autonomous identity then, requires that everything other to it is either consumed, or

another autonomous identity has to be placed in opposition, which demands violent exclusion. Moreover, the attempt to define Irishness absolutely works to expel the heterogeneity that inflects the category, as well as working to prevent the possibility, in Butler's terms, of *transformation of that meaning*.

However, importantly, Irishness or 'being Irish' may not have an essential or 'pure' meaning, although the de-essentialisation of any collective identity category leaves it without reference to, in Jane Flax's words, "any historical, specific beings constituted by and through different sets of social experience" (in Ahmed, 1998 p. 89).¹³ Yet it is arguably a way, and certainly only one way among others, in which a set of people, particularly in a nationalistic country, come to *identify* themselves, and indeed are differentiated by others. After all, as Stuart Hall reminds us:

Identities are, as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always 'knowing' (the language of consciousness betrays us here) that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a 'lack', across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate – identical – to the subject processes that are invested in them.

(1998 p. 6)

In other words, on the one hand, we are compelled to take up identities that are regulated by and through representation. At the same time, however, these very same regulatory processes of identity creation fall short of corresponding exactly to our lived or embodied experience. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that there is a level at which we *want* to identify ourselves with specific objects or representations, in order to feel a sense of belonging, or to have 'self-knowledge', even if this can only ever be provisional.

In *Play-boy*, through a certain characterisation of the self, there is a *playing through* of the tension between the performers identification with the regulatory fictions of Irishness, and a distinct embodied-ness or individuality that the performers appear to possess.

Consider the opening words of the show spoken by Joe Lawlor:

Good evening. We have been thinking about a question for quite some time now and the question goes as follows: What do we need to know? And we've decided in response to this question that what we really need to know are the facts. And that's just about it. The plain, simple, ordinary, no messing about, cutting straight to the chase, down on the farm, home cooked facts. Facts unencumbered by our opinion, any subjectivity we might possess, fancy digressions, literary ornamentation, irrelevant embellishments. Just the facts. So for what it's worth, that's exactly what we're going to give you this evening. Just the facts. No more, no less.

(Desperate Optimists, 1998)

There are probably a number of reasons why I found myself laughing out loud at these definitive opening statements. It may be my doubt that the truth can ever be captured completely, or the irony with which his words are spoken – although this irony may only be recognisable to me since I have seen previous performances by Desperate Optimists. In *Play-boy*, Desperate Optimists do not even attempt an apparently factual account of the events they describe. Instead, as I anticipated, they perform exactly what Lawlor insisted they would not. This show is full of opinions, anecdotes, digressions, downright lies and extravagant embellishments. All of this is, of course, played through a heavy dose of 'subjectivity' as Lawlor describes it, which happens to be what makes this show so pleasurable. It is the performers apparent embodiedness or *authorship* of this performance (and themselves) that makes them so attractive and makes me identify with them and want to invest in them. Interestingly, the performers in *Play-boy* have a

charismatic presence, which Auslander argues historically demonstrates a “collusion [with] repressive power structures” (1997, p. 63). He maintains:

In theatre, presence is the matrix of power; a postmodern theatre of resistance must therefore both expose the collusion of presence with authority and resist such a collusion by refusing to establish itself as the charismatic Other. Bertolt Brecht’s theory and practice are exemplary in this regard, but [...] Brecht’s formulation of the need to maintain a distance between actor and character depend on a traditional notion of presence to the extent that the actor’s persona as commentator on the character must be invested with the authority of presence in order for that commentary to carry more weight than the character itself. There is much that a postmodern political theatre can learn from Brecht, but such a theatre must also move beyond Brecht...

(1997, p. 62-3)

It is fair to say that *Play-boy* does not attempt to offer an indisputably ‘true’ way of seeing the world. However, at the same time, it would be too simple to argue that Desperate Optimists simply undermine the facticity of the stories they present in their performance. Instead, we are bombarded with tales that appear to be ‘true’ yet turn out to be fictional, or seem fictional yet turn out to be ‘true’ – at least in as far as we can believe the records of history which are always a matter of perspective. Lawlor and Molloy appear to have some sort of control over the narratives they tell, by *the way in which they tell them*. That is, I never quite knew if they were being honest (if I can indeed expect honesty from a *performance*) or not. The effect of this process was disorientating although ultimately led me to question how I make decisions about what to invest or believe in – especially since they *performed* their particular investments in the material they engaged with.

The telling of a good story is a notably, or indeed stereotypically, *Irish* ability, and this seems to be a trait the performers both purposefully manipulate. The supposed *characteristically* Irish ability to come across as knowledgeable about a subject one knows little or nothing about or to ‘spin a good yarn’ is repeatedly emphasised in the performance. Yet this ‘playing’ of the Irish character, as I have already implied, also seems to be *embodied* by the performers. As Tim Etchells remarks in a short essay on their first touring show, *The Anatomy of Two Exiles*:

They have this way of telling it whereby they own their statements utterly, straight-up and no messing but at the same time they make it absolutely clear that they are talking nothing but shit. I have seen Jo and Christine [Desperate Optimists] doing this in bars. I have seen them doing it on stage for years. They have a blank commitment as speakers, a commitment to what they say which seems to value no part of the sentence more than any other, as if every fact were vital, or, and always at the same time, everything they speak is the biggest amount of nonsense ever invented.

(2000)

This is exemplified in *Play-boy* time and time again. For instance, in one narrative, Lawlor, betraying the blank commitment that Etchells speaks of, tells the story of Don Bernardo O’Higgins, who apparently had an Irish father and a Chilean mother, and was the first Chilean leader after the collapse of Spanish rule. To paraphrase Lawlor, the Chilean people finally realised they could not tolerate a leader with an Irish name, and this ultimately led to his downfall. Having been (almost) certain that Lawlor had invented the story, as it sounds too ridiculous to be true, I have since found out, from a quick and curious search on the web, that O’Higgins *was* in fact a dictator in Chile at the turn of the Eighteenth century. This is a classic representation of the stories that are told in *Play-boy*. In my delight and astonishment that (at least some of) Lawlor’s story is

bona fide, I am reminded of how I was continually in the rather disorientating process of being torn between ‘buying in’ and indeed ‘wanting’ or desiring to buy in, to the stories I was party to when watching *Play-boy* and at the same time finding them utterly far-fetched and absurd. The performers seem only too aware of their ability to manipulate this dynamic in the performance. Early on in the show, Lawlor introduces a group of video recorded ‘guests’ who are ‘played back’ on two video monitors centre stage. He proclaims: “We have invited some guests to talk about *The Playboy of the Western World* – some of which have read the play, some of which have seen a production, and some have frankly done neither but being Irish they are going to give it a go anyway” (Desperate Optimists, 1998). Later, Molloy translates the word ‘gringo’ as being Spanish for “an Irishman that speaks a load of shite” (Desperate Optimists, 1998). This exercise of “giving it a go anyway” or indeed, speaking a “load of shite” is exactly what Molloy and Lawlor have the effect of ‘doing’ in *Play-boy*. This suggests that is not necessarily the integrity of the story that matters, but *their* (stereotypically Irish?) need or demand to have an opinion on the matter, whether rooted in ‘truth’ or not. Their behaviour not only reminds me that ‘history is in the telling’ but also appears to tell me *something* about Lawlor and Molloy. This autobiographical feel is further emphasised by the fact that the video recorded ‘guests’ that appear in the show are, as I have already mentioned, their family and friends. This is the putting of one’s subjectivity into the act of articulation that Lawlor (ironically) denied would take place in the performance.

So what, then, is the consequence of this ‘characterisation of the self’ in *Play-boy*?¹⁴ For me, while I engaged with the show, I felt as if I was constantly in negotiation with them

as apparently embodied people/performers and as seeming *authors* of the narratives they spun in the performance. Their style of narration put me in the perpetual, uncertain situation of being determined not to be ‘had’, or for the joke to be on me. I had to ask myself the question, does it *matter* if the stories they tell are true or not and why should this concern me so much? After all, this is a *performance* – the territory of fiction! But somehow *it did matter*, since it made me reflect on the decision-making process that is necessary to distinguish between what constitutes belief or non-belief. How do I decide to believe and invest in representations, and what might be at stake in such choices and alignments?

However, significantly, at other instances in the show, the actual ‘truth’ seemed secondary to other resonances their stories had. Indeed, the first story Lawlor tells us is about the way in which Synge, author of *The Playboy of the Western World*, was condemned by the public who attended the play’s first showing in 1907. This is because the images he presented of the Irish people were not exemplary enough. Lawlor remarks that, at a time of political unrest in Ireland, the Irish people were looking for positive images of themselves in literature and theatre. Lawlor claims that pandemonium broke out in the auditorium as the viewers stomped their feet and became violent. He enacts this feet stomping for a very long time. He then goes on to tell us that the second performance of Synge’s play was presented with all the ‘offensive’ parts removed, which happened to be “all of the words” (Desperate Optimists, 1998). This story sounds absurd, although I discovered later on that this is how the history books tell it.

Significantly though, the ‘truth’ of this story, as I have already stated, is not necessarily what is at stake in its telling. Two things strike me here. The first is that the Desperate Optimists frequently suffer, in the same way Synge did when his show was first received, a ‘rejection’ or their work by Irish spectators and press. This clearly shows *their identification with him*, as author, as well as bringing to light the identificatory expectations and demands that audiences make when coming to the theatre.

Furthermore, it reflects on the *process* of canonisation itself – after all, Synge’s play is now seen as a respected Irish classic. This points towards the transformation of the Irish sensibility *over time*, rather than a static ahistorical notion that essentialism and canons would seem to privilege. It is also significant (and witty) that Desperate Optimists mirror this *removal of the text* by taking Synge’s dialogue out of their own ‘illustration’ of the playwright’s narrative.

Perhaps paradoxically, I often *wanted* the stories Molloy and Lawlor told to be true, partly, I suggest, because they were *good* stories: there is a lot of pleasure to be had in finding out that a fantastic or improbable story *did* actually occur. But also because, as I have already mentioned, the performers had a mischievous appeal that I found *attractive* and wanted to invest in, in the same way that one might want to invest or believe in a fictional character. This is one of the ways in which I identified with Molloy and Lawlor. This is possibly why I felt a little cheated and disappointed, as well as wryly amused, at the moment late on in the performance when Molloy confesses to Lawlor that she had invented one of her narratives (which incidentally, is a great story):

Lawlor: Now you said that at the time Trotsky got murdered, he was sitting at his desk, writing.

Molloy: Yes.

Lawlor: And you said that his last words were, “is there another way to live?”

Molloy: Yes. I did say that.

Lawlor: Is it true?

Molloy: No, it’s not true.

Lawlor: So you made that bit up then.

Molloy: Yes, I just made that bit up.

Lawlor: Why? Why did you make that bit up?

(A man on the video monitor shoots a gun loaded with blanks at the camera)

Molloy: I don’t know.

(Desperate Optimists, 1998)

I suggest that this story also appealed to me because I identify with Trotsky’s (made up) last words, and thus would *like* to believe that he had such a pointed, philosophical demise. At the risk of gross generalisation, it is the classic question that we spend our lives asking (and if I cannot speak for others, then I can at least make this claim myself): would life be better/more rewarding/more worthy if we (I) had made different choices or different judgments?

The making of judgements appears to be required of me as a spectator, as I make multiple and simultaneous identifications in my confrontation with *what it might mean to have an Irish background* when engaging with *Play-boy*. This is particularly brought to the fore when I read the ‘troubles’ through Molloy and Lawlor’s various enactments of violence in the performance. There are several examples of this that are layered into the structure of *Play-boy*. One instance, which does not reference Ireland directly, is when Molloy describes the revolutionary sentiments of the character and figure from history Zapata in

the film *Viva Zapata*. She begins, “Now Brando’s playing the part of Zapata and he’s standing by the window with his back to his beautiful young bride whose being played by Jean Peters....” and then Molloy describes Brando as becoming angry and passionate about the revolution in response to his wife’s longing for peace (Desperate Optimists, 1998). Here Molloy *embodies his character* and completely flies off the handle, shouting at an excruciating volume:

And then he gets very wound up and angry and he says, “THIS LAND, THIS LAND, THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND. BUT IT WON’T BE YOURS LONG IF YOU DON’T PROTECT IT, IF NECCESARY WITH YOUR LIFE, AND YOUR CHILDREN WITH THEIR LIVES. AND IF YOUR HOUSE IS BURNED, WILL YOU REBUILD? AND IF YOUR LAND IS DESTROYED, WILL YOU REPLANT? AND IF THEY DRIVE YOU OUT OF THE VALLEY WILL YOU LIVE ON THE SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN? AND *EXACTLY* WHAT ARE YOU PREPARED TO DO TO PROTECT WHAT BELONGS TO YOU? ARE YOU PREPARED TO KILL AND MAIM INNOCENT PEOPLE IN THE NAME OF WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN? ARE YOU PREPARED FOR A CAMPAIGN OF TERROR AND VIOLENCE... AND FOR MANY YEARS OF PAIN AND SUFFERING TO ENSUE? ARE YOU PREPARED TO HAVE BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS AND TO KILL.
AND TO KILL.
AND TO KILL.
AND TO KILL.
AND TO KILL.

(Desperate Optimists, 1998)

Firstly, as Molloy launches into her angry and passionate address, I am startled into an identification with her. After all, it is through witnessing another’s emotion that we recognise that *another human being is another human being*. But I must ‘allow’ or desire this identification, as I am simultaneously aware that it is a female Irish performer standing before me. She is speaking, or rather screaming, through a microphone, wearing cowboy boots enacting the words of a character from a film. Here, Molloy appears to

stage *the differences between identifications*. Indeed, her ‘convincing’ rendition *not only* transports me momentarily into the world of the film, or even the world of the historical Zapata. I am also made to confront the fact that she is a woman shouting the words of a male revolutionary, and I reflect on all the implications this enactment has – especially since the woman in the narrative she has just described is a beautiful innocent bride and seeker of peace. Here Molloy dislocates the myths, both fictional and historical, that circulate around the figure of Zapata. Consequently his authority and status as a masculine presence (and canonical figure) are subtly brought into question. At the same time the classic feminine portrayal of the subservient woman is also displaced since Malloy embodies *Zapata’s* role in the scene rather than taking on the role of his bride.

Furthermore, I read the *Irish* fight for land and liberty through Malloy’s ‘frame’ (or frame within in frame, as she references a film version) of South American history. This reading is perhaps inevitable since it is Synge’s Irish text, *The Playboy of the Western World*, which structures the whole performance. The Irish conflict may also be invoked because Lawlor and Molloy shoot at each other throughout the show, and the figures on the video monitors point guns at us in the audience, provoking an unmistakable sense of violence. But what strikes me is that my identifications are fragile, confusing and contradictory, since the operations of place, home, (fictional) film and history are made to overlap. I feel compassion, bewilderment as well as displaced colonial guilt.

Molloy's apparent simultaneous identifications with various sets of histories and materials appear to correspond to Ahmed's *rewriting* of Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation. Althusser describes interpellation thus:

Ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'hey, you over there!'
(in Ahmed, 1998 p. 114)

However, contrary to Althusser's construction, Ahmed stresses the possibility that interpellation "*may miss its mark*" (1998, p. 114). This is because a subject "may think she or he is being hailed or addressed (when they are not) or not think they are being hailed or addressed (when they are)" (1998, p. 114). She goes on:

This may suggest that the process of becoming a subject is more fractured and potentially unsuccessful than Althusser's schema seems on the surface to suggest, and that this fracturing and failure is a way of theorising differences *between* structures of identification does not fully or adequately name the subject, or divides subjects by naming them in contradictory and conflicting ways. Given this, the subject as such is never the subject as such, because its points of excess to the very name or signifier of 'the subject' locates it precisely as marked or named by colliding regimes of address which attach (asymmetrical) value and meaning to specific subject positions.

(1998, p. 114, emphasis in original)

In other words, the passage into subjecthood is always a constant negotiation of colliding or contrasting identifications. In *Play-boy*, Malloy and Lawlor actually *enact* the divisions that frustrate the identity of the subject in the first place. Furthermore, the

overlapping of Malloy's (performed) identifications that I described above suggests that identification is constitutive but also conflict-ridden, since the situation of the subject is continually allocated and endangered by their designation in connected, but distinct systems of difference. Furthermore, whilst watching identificatory processes at work in *Play-boy*, I felt compelled to make a (distanced) judgment about what it means to come from a land where there has never been peace, as Molloy (and indeed Lawlor) perform the violence that has become the central response in Ireland for autonomy itself. This is what happens when people stake their claims for place, for home, for identity.

As I have thus far explained, factual and fictional accounts appear to bleed into each other in *Play-boy*. The conflation of fact and fiction, according to Baudrillard, marks out the contemporary condition. He maintains in his book *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* that the war in the Gulf became fictionalised or "simulated" as a result of its excessive media coverage (1995). It is perhaps the case that the current Hollywood obsession with the 'historical epic' (*JFK* 1991, *Braveheart* 1995, *Schindler's List* 1993, *Gladiator* 2000, *Pearl Harbor (sic)* 2001) indicates that it is becoming increasingly more difficult to discern where history ends and fiction begins. However, unlike Baudrillard, *Desperate Optimists* do not appear to flatten the world out into an indistinguishable and indifferent fiction. In a world where truth is never absolutely certain, *Desperate Optimists* appear to ask, what exactly are our specific alignments? How do we decide? What can we believe in? What is at stake in our investments, and in the assertion of the self?

What is evident in the performance of *Playboy* is that narratives (of the self) are never allowed to come to an easy resolution. In fact, an anxiety is created by the fractured and

dislocated nature of the narratives they present. Dancing or the firing of the gun continually interrupt these narratives or they simply disappear as other narratives take over or gain prominence in the performance moment. What seems to be occurring in *Playboy* is the continual struggle to create a sense of identity through identifications with personal and national narratives. Indeed, the coherent self demands a procedure, a narrative or performance that is always authoritative; a performance in which narratives (or the parts of a 'whole' narrative) are consolidated into an ordered system that forms a unequivocal history, a certain and determined account of the individual and the national.

Instead, *Playboy* yields an *excess* of narratives that cannot be absolutely controlled, contained or mastered; even when Lawlor assembles all the individuals from the various stories in the Mexican cabaret venue 'Casa Amores'. This fictional scene gathers together all the figures that have been mentioned thus far in *Play-boy*. These include actors and directors, revolutionary figures from history, surrealist painters, Don Bernardo O'Higgins and of course John Millington Synge himself, in an attempt to find some sort of ending or resolution – this, of course, is what all narratives require. According to Lawlor, there is much drinking and excitement in the cabaret venue. Pablo and his dancing chiwawas perform extraordinary tricks and, of course, scenes from *The Playboy of the Western World* are carried out. But he describes the final act as the most sensational of all. The female actor Molly Allgood stands up in the bar with a big pistol in her hands and blows away John Millington Synge. Lawlor describes the moment when the audience comprehends that this incident is not an act, but the 'real' murder of the Irish playwright (or indeed the 'death' of the author):

(The audience realises) that what they are looking at is not theatrical blood, but real blood. And this is no stage death they are watching, but a very real death. And before anyone gets the chance to call for help, raise an alarm, the audience at the Casa Amores has to try and make sense of what they are looking at. They have to work that little bit harder to fill in the gaps and make sense of this world they are seeing. And they are sure, although they can't name it, that they have seen a scene like this before somewhere...

(Desperate Optimists, 1998)

And as I am left to make sense of the world *I* am seeing, the world of *Play-boy*, Molloy and Lawlor perform the theatrical death that in *their* version of events should have been Synge's. On the one hand, this could be read as a performed identification with death as a form of closure. Or, on the other, death provides the limit from which the self is defined. In other words, it is an identificatory act. For it is the very concept of death that compels the subject to *be* a subject.¹⁵ In this closing moment, Molloy and Lawlor lie down on the platform at the front of the set, their shirts splattered with fake blood, and shut their eyes.

And as I attempt to draw my own conclusions and trace my own trajectories through the events that make up *Play-boy*, I am reminded of Walter Benjamin's assertion. Death, he claims, marks the closure for every storyteller, since every story is told in the face of death: "Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death" (Benjamin, 1973 p. 94). This is certainly the implication in the metaphorical demise in *Play-boy* of Molloy, Lawlor and their principal hero, John Millington Synge. Narrative always demands the 'casting out' of all that is other to its operations, and always requires an ending. These necessities make the passage of

coherent narrative (or self) savage, violent and exclusionary. Instead, the self, as reflected in *Play-boy*, is temporarily fixed at certain moments through the continual negotiation of identifications.

Guilty Pleasures

Production details: *Guilty Pleasures* was devised by itd in collaboration with Andrea Carpenter. itd are Alice Booth, Seth Honnor, Richard Malcolm, Andrew Quick and Simon Wainwright. *Guilty Pleasures* was made in 2000 and was commissioned by the Nuffield Theatre and additionally supported by Yorkshire Arts. The show toured to 20 professional theatres across the UK in Autumn 2000 and Spring 2001.

In *Guilty Pleasures*, the style of presentation differs in some ways from that of Desperate Optimists. Although, like Lawlor and Molloy, we, as performers, place ourselves outside of the fictions that are incorporated into the performance, there is no explicit ‘characterisation of the self’, which, as I pointed out earlier, dominates the structure of *Play-boy*. Rather, we negotiate sets of materials without commenting on them explicitly. Although I will deal with notions of ‘Englishness’ in due course, our choice not to ‘express ourselves’ overtly or to show a repressed outward face as (embodied) people/performers perhaps characterises a stereotypically *English* sensibility, as opposed to Desperate Optimists’ performance/embodiment of a certain stereotypical Irishness.

Let me begin by setting the scene. *Guilty Pleasures* marks our three ‘terrains’ or styles of performance, which are divided into rooms drawn out (like a ‘ground plan’ of rooms yet to be erected) with green tape on the floor. The neat, sleek lines of aluminium trussing frame each section. The central ‘technology area’ or control booth divides the performance space, and is flanked by two distinct rooms. This contains all the sound equipment and technology for the show (bar the lighting), and houses two video monitors on top of a flight case, which are high enough to conceal all except the head and shoulders of the ‘technician’, who is one of the five performers, behind. The (floating) technician is lit for the duration of the performance. The monitors show either a pre-

recorded piece of video footage, or a live-relay, and we switch between these images throughout the show. The pre-recorded footage is of a real-time car journey from night to dawn, which is played on either one, or the other, or both of the screens at any one time. This lasts the exact time of the show, and, providing our timing is right, the sun comes up just as the show comes to an end. At other times, live-relays of events occurring on stage in one of the rooms each side of the control booth are shown. We named the chamber to the right of the control booth the 'Eliot room', in which sections (totalling about forty minutes) from T.S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion* are presented (along with short clips from a radio version of the play). This room contains a white chair and three microphones on stands. There is no other furniture. The room to the left of the control box is the 'bathroom', where a contemporary party occurs. There is a sink, a toilet and a plain white chair in the back corner. In this room (but often spreading across the whole space) vodka is drunk, karaoke is sung, dances are performed and a number of morally questionable (enacted) happenings occur – failed sexual relations, sado-masochistic fantasies and finally murders.

The first stage in the making of this show was the selection of Eliot's text, *The Family Reunion*. We were interested in this play for many reasons. We were fascinated by Eliot's exploration of alienation and violence, his investments in history and tradition, his examination of how desire distorts experience and how the 'real' event is restructured by memory's failure. We were also intrigued by his representation of a certain performed 'Englishness' as well as his search for a new dramatic means. I will return to some of these points of interest in just a moment, but for now I will clarify the last one – Eliot's

search for a new dramatic method. In *The Family Reunion*, Eliot has taken a well-worked genre, the drawing-room drama, and endeavoured to *change the form*. He does this by utilising a conventional theatrical structure and destabilising it from within through his use of language and particular thematics, especially the question of finding a meaningful pattern of existence behind the materialism of the modern world. As the main character Harry proclaims in Act Two of *The Family Reunion*, “Oh there must be another way of talking that would get us somewhere” (Eliot, 1969 p. 327). Eliot seems to be expressing a desire that is still at the heart of much contemporary thinking: the need to find ways of locating ‘meaning’ and thus a sense of identity (however fragile and transitory) in a world where language always appears to be inadequate. It is, of course, the search for a coherent and stable identity that is the major thematic of Eliot’s play. The anguished central character, Harry, suffering guilt for the death of his wife, returns to the family home in search of a redeeming ‘truth’ in the landscape of his childhood. To Eliot, this pursuit for authenticity and Being is a necessary journey in a world he believed to be spiritually empty. He elucidates this search in the final chorus in *The Family*

Reunion:

We do not know what we are doing
And even, when you think it,
We do not know much about thinking.
What is happening outside of the circle?
And what is the meaning of happening?
What ambush lies beyond the heather
And behind the Standing Stones?
Beyond the Heavyside Layer
And behind the smiling moon?
And what is being done to us?
And what are we, and what are we doing?
To each and all of these questions

There is no conceivable answer.
We have suffered far more than personal loss –
We have lost our way in the dark.
(Eliot 1969, p. 348-9)

This constant barrage of questions manifests a sense of urgency to locate the ‘secret knowledge of the self’ withheld behind the “Standing Stones”, beyond the “Heavside Layer” and behind the “smiling moon”. Importantly, for Eliot such questions are not solely problems presented to individuals. The line “We have lost our way in the dark” also reflects the spiritual void that Eliot identified as being at the heart of contemporary life, a thematic that is central to much of his writing.

Yet the play *does* offer a ‘conceivable answer’ to these soul-searching questions – that the ‘true’ self can find explanation in God, or at least by accepting God’s existence and seeking salvation by acknowledging his presence. This is the (sentimental) pathway to spiritual enlightenment that Harry, in the course of *The Family Reunion*, embarks upon. Eliot’s use of a “spiritual substructure” was utilised to *penetrate the true nature of religious experience*, in order, ultimately, to bring about Harry’s transformation and indeed the “spiritual transformation of society” (Innes, 1992 p. 388). Here it is possible to see how his theatre connects to that of Antonin Artaud: he sought the metamorphosis of the bourgeois social order through *formal innovation*. What is required of the actor when playing a character in *The Family Reunion*, at least in terms of Eliot’s ‘intentions’, are two distinct performance registers. The first is a naturalistic style, or ‘imitation’ of ordinary social discourse. The second, is a heightened, rhythmic delivery, that in Eliot’s terms, might have the effect of penetrating reality itself, by *concealing its own condition*

as language. As Maud Ellman points out, Eliot longed to write “poetry so transparent that we should not see the poetry, but [...] see through the poetry [...] To get *beyond poetry*, as Beethoven, in his later works, strives to get *beyond music*” (1987 p. 42, emphasis in original). So despite the repeated acknowledgment by Harry in *The Family Reunion* that language cannot express the true nature of feeling and experience, language itself is meant to disappear behind the divine manifestation or true logic of the self.¹⁶ Ellman maintains that in Eliot’s terms, “when the ‘formula’ is right, the subject’s feelings will transmit themselves in tact, in spite of their translation into objects” (1987 p. 42). Eliot appears to be asserting that for his audience, *pure and complete psychic identification is possible*. That is, the actor (as character) does not *express* feeling, which must be *translated* by the spectator (*I – the spectator – know how you – the character – feels*) but rather, I, as spectator, experience the feelings, in Eliot’s terms *exactly as they are*, or in other words, I become consumed (traversed) by the desires and fears of the Other (actor/character). This, theoretically, will have the effect of bringing me closer (or making me at one with) God.

One of our main concerns in *Guilty Pleasures* was to *put into question* or displace the two key principles of Eliot’s writing that I have outlined above. The first is that he believes it is possible to evade expression (language) itself through a musical or poetic order, revealing pure and unqualified human feeling. The second is that he defines and explains the self in continuous relation to God, which is the ultimate identification: human subjectivity is thought of as a direct reflection or mirror of God (man – *sic* – is made in God’s image). In other words, faith can promise that one’s identity is made coherent and

complete in direct relation to the deity. Such an economy, from which the concept of replete human subjectivity is established, relies on the concept of God as its foundation stone. This is the ‘rock’ that figures in much of Eliot’s poetry. Interestingly, such metaphors of the rock are absent from *The Family Reunion* and the concept of God is built around the repeated reference to an “All Seeing Eye” and references to the story of Jesus.¹⁷

However, as I expressed in my introduction, we did not select Eliot’s text merely to *undermine* it, as this is suggestive of a negative aesthetic, an aesthetic of undoing or effacing, that might designate Eliot’s play as being *without contemporary value*. The dominance of the play in the structure of *Guilty Pleasures* would certainly suggest otherwise. Rather, through the presentation rather than embodiment of *The Family Reunion* characters, and the strategic juxtaposition of the text with other elements (for example, the contemporary party) we were attempting to acknowledge that in some ways Eliot’s thematics are still deeply ingrained in the culture in which we live.

Take this example. The performance was physically shut down since we did not attempt to ‘stage’ *The Family Reunion*. Rather, we were interested in the aural texture of the radio play that we had found, so the small actions that did take place in the Eliot room, we felt, were less important. The stage was a manifestation of the conceptual space of the recording, not as a place where drama occurs or where actions take their place. In rehearsal we were amazed by the hypnotic quality that the text took on when spoken without emotion and amplified through the microphones. It seemed to encourage a mode

of attention that belongs to a forgotten wireless culture – that of simply *listening* to the flow of words and conjuring up one’s own images. It seemed to offer us, and hopefully the audience, a way to engage with the text, leaving it open to a kind of identification with the Eliot characters. We did not want to ‘put on’ Eliot’s drawing room drama, but were still interested in finding a way back to it. We wanted the play, in a sense, to still carry out its ‘work’ on us and on the audience.¹⁸

I remember being so excited when we found the old record of *The Family Reunion* in the library. It is a solid historical document of a certain dusty and old fashioned Englishness, with vintage actors such as Alec Guinness working their magic on Eliot’s text. We liked this idea that echoes from the dead could come back through our layering of them into our contemporary performance. English history was literally *traced through* the texture of the show. This seemed very much in the spirit of Eliot’s vision as well – his strong sense that the best literature listens to the voices of the past:

This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place time, of his own contemporaneity. No poet, no artist of any art, has complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.

(Eliot, ‘Tradition and individual talent’ p4, ref?)

In other words, to *be* contemporary requires an explicit understanding of our historical context. Of course, Eliot had a rather romantic conception of an English tradition, which he imagined as a container of cultural importance and worth. As A. Marshall points out, “England was the scene of Eliot’s encounter as a poet with the particularities of history

and place. He went on to develop an idea of England of classical proportions.” (in Moody (Ed.) 1994, p.94). Marshall also claims that Eliot, “elicited what he saw as the essentials of empire from the absence of empire, by addressing the civic void in Christian terms” (in Moody (Ed.) 1994, p. 96). This obsession with England’s religious traditions is interesting considering that Eliot was in fact born in the USA. Indeed, Eliot admitted that his writing would be very different had he stayed in the USA or been born in England. This provides a sense that Eliot’s England is more mythology than geography, and highlights the difficulty of “taking place or past for granted” (Marshall in Moody (Ed.) 1994, p. 97). It also connects to Eliot’s idea that personal identity is connected to historicity. Indeed, Harry in *The Family Reunion* replays inherited patterns, since, like his father before him, he desires the death of his wife. Eliot felt strongly that “history is the record of the struggle to understand why, given the feeling of individuality, the shape of a person’s life is not unique: there is always a precedent, another version, a mocking mirror image” (Marshall in Moody (Ed.) 1994 p.97). We repeat this idea by presenting Eliot’s text *as* document, *as* history. Importantly, as a company, what we were trying to express is that our own identities are not original but enmeshed in a cultural tradition (of which Eliot’s writings are a part).

Furthermore, Foucault’s words in relation to the death of the author, God and man that I cited in the introduction to this chapter are particularly pertinent in terms of the maintenance of *God’s* presence in contemporary culture: “It is not enough [...] to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared. For the same reason, it is not enough (after Nietzsche) that *God* and man have died a common death” (1984, p. 105,

my emphasis). Instead, to reword Foucault, we must review “the space left empty by [God’s] disappearance, and follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers” (1984, p. 105). After all, there is no doubt that Judaeo-Christian morality is still very much part of the fabric of our everyday lives, particularly in terms of (re)viewing moral codes and behaviour in society. Also, finding a meaningful pattern of existence behind the materialism of the modern world is arguably an ongoing contemporary obsession or even a necessity.

However, it might be possible to argue that the narrow intertextual practice of re-framing a canonical text might have the effect of providing a *shared space of interpretation*, both for us as performers, as well as for the audience. Let me expand. In *Guilty Pleasures* what was attempted was to stage a practice of reading from within the playing space of the performance itself. What might be a result of this process is an examination of the processes of interpretation and the forces that govern this activity. In the context of the deeply layered and self-examining text of Eliot we felt that there was a meeting ground between the thematics of coming to a sense of self-understanding and the dynamic practices of readership (identification) that an audience might be subject to. In the introduction to this chapter, I described the way in which canonical texts are ‘already read’. Our process of ‘dealing with’ the text in the moment of performance might constitute a practice that asks for the text to be *read again*. This might produce a space for Lyotard’s “reading as anamnesis”, which works through an initial *forgetting* of what is ‘already read’ in order to begin (Lyotard, 1992 p. 93). As Bill Readings elaborates further:

The canon should not stand as a concept of value but as the figure for the encounter with all reading with an immemorial past, an encounter that may give reading itself the status of an event, an experiment. Not a pure innovation, a new modernity, but a paralogical re-writing. To return to the Latin '*invenire*', to find out by reading is to perform an act, an act of both rendition and ingenious fabrication.

(1991, p. 139)

In this sense then, in *Guilty Pleasures*, we *perform the act of reading*, in order that reading can move towards an encounter with an indeterminate law, or a law reconsidered, instead of the determined interpretation that canonicity implicitly prescribes. One of the possibilities that we were exploring was to set up situations where the audience are invited to examine their own (possibly contradictory) identifications with the material presented in *Guilty Pleasures*, as we negotiate the elements of the show *in front of them*.

At this point it is worth considering how *I* identify with or relate to the differing roles and/or components that make up *Guilty Pleasures*. After all, our layering of performance styles and textures prevents a naturalistic interpretation of character. Is there an extent to which I play a character, am I myself, or do I *play* myself? Or do these performance registers overlap, or move into each other over the course of the performance? I walk onto the stage and stand in front of the blue backdrop, on the edge of the set. I have arrived on stage as Alice, although I never introduce myself as such to the audience. At this stage I do not consider myself a character, as I am not pretending to *be* someone else. However, it is difficult to 'feel' like myself because my action of walking on stage and the position that I take up has been decided on in advance. I stand silently, observing the audience, although I can only make out the faces of those in the front row. They are in

darkness apart from the glow of light that spreads across them from the stage. I am aware that they are observing me, and that I am on 'show'. Of course I am conscious of the fact that I am in a performance and that those sitting in the dark have been given permission, by paying for their ticket, to scrutinise my every word, movement, or just my body as it is now, relatively still and silent. I do not 'feel' like myself because I know that those sitting in the dark are watching me, and that I am here for a specific purpose: to allow them to experience the ordered and rehearsed world of *Guilty Pleasures*.

I am myself and *not* myself, but in a different sense to Constantin Stanislavski's Third Being, in which the "the actor/role begins to emerge" (Benedetti, 1998 p. 10). This is the combination of the "life experience and imagination [of the actor], physical characterisation and the written script" (1998 p. 10). There is a score to this performance, as it is intricately structured, and there will be a (traditional) 'script', and even some physical characterisation, but they come later. In this moment, I am not myself, because I am performing pre-determined actions under the observation of an audience. I am myself, that is, the embodied, social Alice, because firstly, as Stanislavski recognised, the social and bodily self can never truly disappear, even in a make-believe performance situation. This is why, in his opinion, the actor only has the resources of her/his own life experience, imagination and physicality to bring to the creation of a role. But I might be *more of myself* in *Guilty Pleasures* than Stanislavski's Third Being because the structure of the show allows me to be an *observer* as well as an actor/performer. At certain points I can stand outside of the fictions that are (re)presented by the other performers in a similar (but not equivalent) way to an audience. I can also acknowledge the *actual*

audience. Arguably I am *performing* the act of observing, but it *feels* different to the embodiment of a role, and will presumably *appear* different to an audience, as they can experience my act of watching, or of 'looking on'. I extract myself at certain points from the action, giving me the time and space to consider how the machine of the performance operates, and giving the audience an opportunity, through me and the other performers, to see the show as a 'machine', that is, to see the representational apparatus 'at work'.

Although I am never *truly* outside of the performance, it *feels* different. I feel as though I have an *outside* perspective on what is occurring on stage. I have time to consider my relationship to the material. I can watch, I can have distance, I can contemplate. I am inside and outside of the performance at the same time (however, I don't wish to be as romantic as Brecht – I will explore in a moment the difficulty of attaining knowledge through having a visual perspective).

Standing at the back of the performance space and watching the world of *Guilty Pleasures* unfold is just one of the ways that we attempted to mirror and re-configure Eliot's obsession with the 'All Seeing Eye' that I mentioned earlier. Further, the set itself would appear to reflect the mechanisms of vision. Indeed, the configuration of two rooms astride a small area of technical control gives the impression of two eyes with a brain behind. The two video monitors that are placed on top of the flight-case inside the technical 'booth' mirror this impression; they seem like two eyes staring out of the set, and the audience effectively 'see through' these eyes, occupying the space of the unknown driver in the 'road movie' travelling into the emerging daylight. We also

manipulate the camera in various ways, perhaps the embodiment of an all-seeing
visuality that defines meaning and creates subjectivity in our contemporary society.

The camera that is directed into the Eliot Room frames extreme close-ups of lips, hands
and especially eyes, scrutinising the small, usually un-noticed movements of social
interaction (here the tiny actions that allow us ‘read’ people’s emotions, to identify with
them, are magnified). The camera that is directed into the bathroom watches and
penetrates with digital intimacy the orifices of bodies. (I imagine that the audience might
distinguish a similarity between the repeated textual and visual figure of the eye and
seeing, and their own voyeuristic practice). This super-abundance of the visual image is
the defining feature of what Jean Baudrillard has called the “pornographic culture” that
he claims marks contemporary experience. Such a culture, according to Baudrillard, is
formed out of an:

ideology of the concrete, of facticity and use, and its concern with the pre-eminence
of use value, the material infrastructure of things, and the body as the material
infrastructure of desire. A one-dimensional culture that exalts everything in the
“concreteness of production” or of pleasure – unlimited mechanical labour or
copulation. What is obscene about this world is that nothing is left to appearances or
to chance. Everything is a visible, necessary sign.

(Baudrillard 1990, p. 34)

In other words, that which is ‘seen’ becomes commodifiable and exchangeable within the
capitalist system. Subjectivity resides in the visible, as that which is made visible is
configured as the real. That which exists outside the visible is expendable, and indeed
forced out of the system.

One way that we explored the limitations of the 'visual' was through the camera's penetration of bodies in *Guilty Pleasures*. At the close of each bathroom scene the camera zooms into someone's mouth, eye, bellybutton and finally Simon's anus. Each close-up concludes with the screen going into pixelated darkness. This was in fact a peculiarity of one of our cameras. The mechanism switched from an optical to a digital zoom and enlarged the pixels to fill up the frame. We became fascinated by this and imagined it as the limit of the camera's field of vision – the frontier, perhaps, of Baudrillard's pornographic culture. To us, the camera finally failed to see the figure it was objectifying – the figure indeed, disappears. The digital black hole, the image without object, became for us a space that might lie outside language and signification – a space that Eliot indeed frantically searched for. This move to the body's voids became, for us, the playing space of the imagination (that which *cannot* be seen) where narrative closure (and indeed the closure of subjectivity itself) might be delayed. Here we repeat Eliot's failure to get beyond language, as we fail to penetrate or get beyond the visual field. This signified for us the fact that there are always holes and blind spots in our perception, and that the subjective practices of desire, memory and imagining have the capacity to exceed what can be known and understood (about ourselves).

In terms of visual practices, it is interesting to me that our set design took us down a particular route in terms of how we presented the material in the bathroom. We chose the bathroom as our 'other' room since it seemed like an appropriate 'abject' space with which to contradict, conflict with and sometimes illuminate the former, ordered world of T.S. Eliot. The bathroom is a private place of excretion and waste but also a place for

cleansing and preparing for the real or outside world – a place to ‘drop the mask’. The bathroom is also the only room in the house where the door can be locked, so it is the place at a party where ‘things happen’ – where people go to be sick, to tell secrets and to take part in sordid sexual encounters. In very simple terms, we imagined the bathroom as a place of the body, and the Eliot room as the place of the mind. The bathroom is perhaps a literal representation of Harry’s guilt and passions, the underbelly of drawing room austerity. This world of passion or of guilty pleasures was originally meant to occur behind a reveal in the bathroom. In this way, terrible or explicit occurrences could be *implied* by us and then *imagined* by audiences, rather than ‘really’ shown on stage. I envisaged these sections as something like the climactic scene in the film *Psycho* when what was *not* shown in the shower was far more horrific than what might have been manageable with the rather primitive special effects of the 1970s. However, our final set design – sleek clean lines of aluminium trussing – put everything on view and made ‘realistic’ violence or sexual acts difficult to represent on stage. Instead, over the rehearsal period, these scenes developed into violent or sexual *constructions* or *reconstructions*.

The show’s structure of ‘composing’ fictions for an audience could be said to provoke a network of exhibitionist behaviour – behaviour *to be seen* – a layering of constructions and poses. In the bathroom, we ‘set up’ the scenes to be enacted (the seductions, drunken games and murders) and then performed them ‘for’ the camera rather than ‘for’ the auditorium. For example, in the second of the bathroom scenes, Richard and I perform a series of kissing actions into the camera, operated by Seth. We contort ourselves into

obviously unnatural and uncomfortable positions in order that Seth can capture our mouths and tongues in tight camera shots. We have to stay as still as possible. The ‘realness’ of the kissing on camera – the swilling of saliva, the movement of lips and tongues, the flashing of teeth – contrasts with the awkwardness of our bodies, the need to stay still so we could remain ‘in shot’. It would seem that the confines of the process of filming made demands on our bodies and ensured our failure to present a ‘convincing’ passionate embrace. We were emphasising the constructed nature of these acts, so despite their explicit or violent character they remained in the sphere of play acting – that is, they were not just carried out, but *shown to be carried out*. The shots were intended to present another view to the audience – something like a reconstruction of a reconstruction. We were interested in the secondary act of framing that the camera achieved and the possible effects of this framing on our bodies. Here I present myself *presenting* myself, or producing a performing self. The camera, the apparent marker of authenticity in the news, documentary footage and the recurrent reality TV shows, does not just ‘show’ in *Guilty Pleasures*, but instead is shown *showing*. In this sense the object is complicit with the camera’s eye. The effect of this is an interrogation of what the camera, such a prevalent signifier of the world we live in, actually bestows upon us, what it promises us, what beliefs are embodied in its picture of the world.¹⁹ But perhaps another interpretation of these scenes, and more Baudrillardian, might be our representation of a series of surfaces, that could only ever refer to other surfaces – in other words, the ‘real’ referent is lost.

Having said this though, there was something really interesting to me in terms of this presentation of a ‘double’ performance – one for the auditorium and one for the camera. Here I imagine myself attached to two different and contrasting subject positions or discourses. This playing out of ‘doubles’ is something that runs through almost every aspect of *Guilty Pleasures*. In the Eliot Room, there is clear evidence of the ‘real’ performer behind the façade of ‘character’ in the presentation of *The Family Reunion*. All five of us ‘play’ roles in the Eliot drama, but ‘drop out’ of character between lines, relaxing our bodies and casually drinking out of glasses or vodka bottles. Here we appear to watch the action before us in an objective way, as if we are (like the external audience) onlookers to the ‘performance’. We also whisper to each other and take it in turns to make hand signals, directing the action on stage. In effect, I ‘play’ Agatha (the character) but I also appear as Alice (myself). The process of dropping in and out of roles recalls the behaviour of musicians in a band, stage managing between songs, making adjustments to their musical instruments and having a rapport with each other. Our orchestration of the scenes on stage is of course choreographed (our conducting of the action is slick and clearly ‘designed’ within the piece) which presents yet another double – the ‘real’ performer is also performed. That is, I *am* Alice and at the same time, a *representation* of Alice – the real me ‘playing’ the performed me. The double is doubled again in the enactment of the self. Throughout the performance, I occupy sets of identity doubles that are set against each other:

1. I am the performed Alice and Agatha, the Eliot character
2. I am the performed Alice and the ‘drunk’ kissing in the bathroom at a contemporary party

3. I am the performed Alice and the silent witness watching the performance
4. I am the performed Alice and the technician
5. I am the performed Alice and the singer
6. I am the performed Alice and the dancer
7. I am the performed Alice and the televisual Alice
8. I am the performed Alice *and Alice* (although Alice, being part of the real, is never truly visible)

This is in recognition of the argument that the process of becoming a subject is fractured and contradictory, since we are attached to different ways of being in the world.

However, it is significant that these doubles are not always clearly separated.

In *Guilty Pleasures*, ‘getting in to character’ literally means taking a deep breath and throwing myself into the next performance register. There is little or no time to prepare for the next performance moment and rarely time to ‘get into’ a role – as one might have the opportunity to do when embodying a ‘realistic’ and logical character with several lines and/or actions that (usually) occur in a coherent sequence. Stanislavski believed that the time would come in rehearsal when stage situations would take on a ‘reality’ for the actor. As his character Tortsov explains in *An Actor Prepares*, if you sense the truth in a play subconsciously, your faith in it will naturally follow, and the state of “I am” (Stanislavski, 1980 p. 291) will come into being. The move between performance registers in *Guilty Pleasures* does not allow for this sustained and almost transcendental state, if indeed this state is possible. After all, even Stanislavski admits that *if* this state is ever reached, it is unlikely that it can be sustained for a whole performance:

‘of course, it wasn’t *real truth* and a *real sense of faith*,’ Tortsov said as he recalled his sensations. ‘Although we might almost say that, for the purposes of theatre, I really did live those sensations. And yet there was no solid stretch of believing in what I was undergoing. There was a constant wavering back and forth between belief and doubt, real sensations and the illusion of having them [...] ...the illusion left traces...’

(1980 p. 284)

Instead of trying to conceal this ‘wavering back and forth’ we stage this process as a dynamic within the work. As a performer, Stanislavski’s notion of ‘I am’ is useful way to create a set of performance instructions. However, as opposed to a Stanislavskian method that follows a single progressive through line, *Guilty Pleasures* is structured around many different and incomplete performances of “I am”. Here is an example of my shift between various performance registers in literally a few minute section of the piece:

1. I am being (the performed) Alice drinking water out of a vodka bottle in the Eliot room, making faces as I pretend that the liquid is burning my throat.
2. I am being (the performed) Alice (functionally) setting up the microphone in order that it is correctly placed for the delivery of my lines. (Note: I could have set up my microphone before the performance, but the deliberate and staged ‘setting up’ of each scene is an important dynamic of the performance. We wanted to foreground the process of putting fictions together. In this sense my action is not *entirely* functional).
3. I am being (the performed) Alice awaiting my lines in the first *The Family Reunion* scene. I am ‘really’ waiting, although when my lines approach, I straighten my posture and prepare to speak.
4. I am being (the performed) Alice and Agatha, *The Family Reunion* character. I partially embody the role of Agatha only as I attempt the clear, fast delivery of her lines. I have used the word ‘partial’ since, as I have already mentioned, we perform *The Family Reunion* as though it is a radio play; that is, I do not fill my body with the character. I remain as still as possible and do not perform any gestures. Nevertheless the text, and our use of sections from Eliot’s radio play impacted on our performance

style of *The Family Reunion*. We play a very theatrical mode of upper-class 'Englishness'.

5. I am being (the performed) Alice promptly dropping my stance and swigging more from the bottle, repeating the expression signifying that the water (vodka) tastes bitter.
6. I am being (the performed) Alice exiting the Eliot Room, and then taking my place before the blue screen at the back of the set. To a certain extent, I feign curiosity about *The Family Reunion* scene that is spoken before me: after all, I have heard it performed many times before. However, I usually listen carefully to what is being said, as it gives me pleasure. I enjoy listening to Eliot's words. At the same time the very act of my watching reminds me that at this very moment the audience could be watching me. I become more self-conscious. This has the effect of making me 'perform' more. My slight movements, the turn of my head, the shifting from one foot to another, become more considered.
7. I am being (the performed) Alice preparing to enter the bathroom. I am *actually* preparing myself, but at the same time, I want to communicate this act of preparation to the audience. I take a calculated deep breath before stepping over the green line into the bathroom.
8. I am being 'a drunk' at an unspecified party, so I allow my character's body to weaken at the knees in order that she appears unbalanced (drunk). I completely embody the character's physicality, and attempt to totally conceal (the performed) Alice. As my character approaches the toilet, which has its lid down, she (I) slump(s) onto it. I bring some of Alice to my characterisation: I use a combination of the memory of what it feels like to be drunk, with the movements I have rehearsed for this scene many times in preparation for the show. I remember to contort my face ever so slightly, and allow my eyes to roll and shift slightly out of focus. (What is my relationship to these scenes in the bathroom? I have been here before. I have witnessed a scene like this. I saw a scene like this in a film).
9. I am being 'a drunk' suddenly recovering some of my composure and becoming (the performed) Alice again. I stand up and execute a short dance, which although is based on movements that represent those from a real (drunken) party, they have actually been cleaned up and incorporated into a polished, choreographed sequence.

This series of actions should present an impression of the how the roles that I occupy throughout *Guilty Pleasures* are not entirely separated. Indeed, what is interesting for me about this movement between roles is the bruising around the edges. For example,

performing a dance and then arriving, out of breath, trying to recover my composure to perform Agatha's lines in *The Family Reunion*. In other words, there are points when the transition between each 'I am' is not smooth and seamless. (However, I think this could have been pushed even more in the performance).

In *Guilty Pleasures*, I move in and out of roles but the 'constant' is always the performance of (my)self, since my own relationship to the material is always being negotiated. However, the wavering back and forth that Stanislavski describes denotes a subject always on the move, always moving from one state to another, or from one identification to another. Further, these identifications can never be absolutely separated. I would argue that although this performance is intricately rehearsed, it is also *always a matter of process*, since finding a route through this show, for me as a performer (and I imagine for the audience too), is always difficult. In other words, performing in *Guilty Pleasures* is a practice of navigation or a mapping through of different elements. Since we generally maintain the coherence of Eliot's text, the elements that make up this show do have *some* progressive logic. However, they often feel un-connected since they involve different ways of 'being' in the performance. These are the various demands that are made of me throughout the show's one-hour-and-ten-minute duration. Without absolute logic, my formal journey through this show always compels me to trace the interconnections, disparities, oppositions, clashes and parallels between its components, and my specific relationship and to, and identifications with, them.

One element of the show that I haven't discussed in any detail is the pre-recorded 'road movie' of a journey into the emerging sunlight. This video recording actually opens the show, since Simon walks onto the set and switches on the monitors to show the recording. For me this section seems the most unconstructed in the whole show, since it was filmed in real time, and only once. We actually scheduled a rehearsal of this journey, but the recording turned out so perfectly that we used this footage in the show itself. At moments whilst performing in *Guilty Pleasures*, I would catch a glimpse of the car's progression and think back to that journey into the daylight. I planned to go on the ride from Leeds to Filey beach with Seth and Richard at five in the morning. Richard had agreed to drive and Seth would hold the camera whilst sitting in the passenger seat. I had no particular job to do but just went along for the ride (and for a slap up breakfast on Scarborough seafront). The trip was just flawless – the beautiful scenery cooled by the shadows of the night, and our arrival at Filey at exactly the right time. As Richard pulled the car up the sun was just rising over the sea. This simple and rather romantic journey operated as an overall framing mechanism for the show, since, as I mentioned earlier, we timed the show itself to fit into the length of the recording – just about one hour and ten minutes. This real time narrative journey concluding with the sunrise could be seen as a moment of redemption for Harry, after a harrowing journey of self-discovery. It may be interpreted as an ironic picture-postcard ending; a cheap offering in a world represented as being spiritually empty. For me, it was a really reassuring element of the show – a structure that moves the clashing textures of *Guilty Pleasures* forward, that pushes it towards some kind of narrative closure, despite the ambiguity of the show's overall message. It is a kind of ironic but also hopeful journey of self progression and discovery.

It is a life story, continually disrupted and punctured by the 'other' elements of *Guilty Pleasures*. In perhaps a similar way to *Play-boy*, the self is revealed in *Guilty Pleasures* as continually on the move, but fixed at certain points by various and sometimes conflicting identifications.

¹ Nevertheless, we return to a fictional structure in *Five Miles and Falling*.

² However, there are moments of ‘embodiment’ in both shows, as I will go on to describe.

³ Our work and Desperate Optimist’s might be described as being deconstructive.

⁴ Auslander’s argument relates to Fuchs’ argument that I criticised in the introduction.

⁵ The Wooster Group’s work influenced *Guilty Pleasures* in a number of ways. One example is the deconstruction of a canonical text, a practice undertaken frequently by the Wooster Group. Another is our set design for *Guilty Pleasures*. The two rooms in perspective and a technology section in between is actually a direct steal from The Wooster Group’s *Rumstick Road* – although their set comprised fully constructed rooms with walls and ceilings, and just the ‘fourth wall’ opened out for the audience.

⁶ This does not mean to say that the ‘author’ or authority disappears.

⁷ *LSD* is structured in four parts: the first consists of readings from Beat literature from the 1950s and 60s, the second a highly speeded up version of Miller’s *The Crucible*, the third is a reconstruction of the company’s rehearsal of Miller’s text while on acid and the final part incorporates the Liddy/Leary debates from the 1970s. For a full description of this performance, see Savran 1986, pp. 169 – 220.

⁸ Authors arguably always write within genre. Derrida, in his essay ‘The Law of Genre’, poses the following rhetorical question: “can one identify a work of art, of whatever sort, but especially a work of discursive art, if it does not bear the mark of genre, if it does not signal or mention it or make it remarkable in any way?” (Derrida, in Duff 2000, p. 229).

⁹ Miller indeed shut down the production of *LSD* for a time as he claimed the Wooster Group’s use of his text breached his copyright. See Savran 1986, pp. 188-195.

¹⁰ It is interesting that the various family and friends that describe their responses to *The Playboy of the Western World* often refer to the play’s fictional characters as if they are real people.

¹¹ Some of the stories they tell appear to be real, but it is not always possible to separate ‘real’ stories from fictional ones. I will be addressing this in the course of my analysis.

¹² For an excellent history of Irish theatre, see Christopher Fitz-Simon (1983). For an exhaustive study of Synge and the Abbey Theatre, see Kilroy (1978).

¹³ Flax refers to the category of ‘woman’, but arguably her theory transfers to all collective identity categories.

¹⁴ I do not want to suggest that this is the ‘real’ Molloy and Lawlor teasing and testing their audiences – after all, this is a performance.

¹⁵ This connects to Freud’s conceptualisation of the Death Drive. I have not time in the thesis to engage fully with Freud’s thinking on the Death Drive. For a definition of what he calls the death instinct see Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973, pp 97-103.

¹⁶ There is a clear connection to Artaud here. See, for example, ‘Production and Metaphysics’ in Artaud 1974, p. 164:

From language to reality.
The stage, the place where art comes closest to life.
Dreams of effective language.
The temptations to go from this imitation of life to life
Itself.

¹⁷ For example, in the scene where Harry is confronted by his father and his Aunt Agatha’s relationship in the past Harry refers to the wilderness within which he has been lost:

To and fro, dragging my feet
Among inner shadows in the smoky wilderness,
Trying to avoid the clasping branches
And the giant lizard. To and fro.
Until the chain breaks.
The chain breaks,
The wheel stops, and the noise of machinery,
And the desert is cleared, under the judicial sun
Of the final eye, and the awful evacuation

Cleanses.

(Eliot 1969, p. 335)

It is clear that Eliot is referring to Jesus in his description of Harry's journey to self-discovery. Indeed, Harry's path to salvation mirrors the story of Jesus although Harry's departure at the end of the play is perhaps more hopeful than the crucifixion that marks the end in the Biblical narrative. Interestingly, as is evident from the section above, Eliot relates technology to the wilderness, and by doing so marks the limit of the endeavour to master the environment, to control human destiny through the machine: a world in which man literally, as Eliot would have it, plays at being God.

¹⁸ The drawback to this approach however, meant that we became a little bit trapped by it. I wish that we had pushed the relationship between Harry and Agatha for example – even in rehearsal – to see where it would take us. This scene *moved* me. Yet somehow it felt like a part of the performance that was bursting to get out. I performed it with my left eye in the frame of the camera, so I could barely move at all. In my opinion, it was finally too rigid and restrained. Where to take this scene exactly is a question that needed to be answered in the rehearsal room. Lastly, I feel we should have broken up the monumentality of Eliot's text, since it came to dominate stage action. The structure of the play with the most important and revealing scene coming near the end meant that it was difficult for the structure to be broken up, and the two worlds (the Eliot room and the bathroom) never really coalesced. But it is probably a result of our seduction by Eliot's richly metaphorical drama. We wanted to maintain its through line, to keep some of what Eliot intended. (Perhaps one can love too much).

¹⁹ However, writing this whilst distanced in time from *Guilty Pleasures*, my feelings for, and attachment to the 'doubled' bathroom scenes is ambivalent. In my opinion, these sections were finally too distancing. These *entirely constructed* scenes meant that tactile relations were driven out of the performance as a whole. Everything, it seemed, was kept at arms length, and the boundaries were finally too rigid. Maybe it would have been too obvious to have been really explicit or plausibly violent in *Guilty Pleasures*, but somehow the repression in the performance became felt, embodied, and in the end something that was too deliberately held back.

CHAPTER TWO

COMPLICATING IDENTIFICATIONS: MANIPULATING GENRE THROUGH THE MEETING POINT BETWEEN THE FILMIC AND THE THEATRICAL IN *L'ASCENSORE* BY INSOMNIAC AND *FIVE MILES AND FALLING* BY ITD

As I described in my introduction, itd have always focussed on the 'lure' of popular or mainstream film. In our first show, *Einmal ist Keinmal*, our aim was to create a really solid, sensual world that had a 'filmic' atmosphere and intensity. We also used music in a similar way to film: to create a mood, as well as to invoke humour, sometimes heightening the sense of tension in a scene, and at other times undercutting the action in an ironic way. An example of the latter. A speeded-up version of an Elvis Presley song was played while a performer (diagetically) attempted to escape the dramatic world. He frantically built a tower out of all the furniture in the box set and climbed right to the top of the theatre space. Once again in *Ark*, our aesthetic was dominated by the creation of vivid and atmospheric filmic moments on the small stage. *Guilty Pleasures* is probably our least 'filmic' show so far although there were instances that we saw as very much connected to film; for example, the use of 'close-ups' shown on the video monitors that occupied centre stage.¹

In this chapter I want to focus on *Five Miles and Falling*, our most cinematic work to date. However, before discussing the show in detail, it is important to point out that in the sphere of experimental theatre, the exploration of filmic fictions has a particular history. Indeed, Insomniac Productions, artistically directed by Pete Brooks, have made several shows that explicitly traverse cinematic territory. His show

L'Ascensore, made in 1992, had a great influence on us and informed the making of *Five Miles*. *L'Ascensore* presents a pastiche of the cinematic gangster genre.² In the *mise-en-scène* of the show, *Insomniac* both reference and re-construct the cinematic apparatus, as well as employ a genre distinctively associated with film. Two things are particularly significant here, and they bring *L'Ascensore* and *Five Miles* together. The first is the meeting point between the theatrical and the cinematic, and the second is the use of *generic* structures by both companies.

Utilising Genre

Since I am interested in how we identify or interact with specific narrative forms and components, it should be no great revelation that it'd are concerned with the popular narrative form of 'genre': a recurring type or class of narrative that is "defined by structural, thematic and / or functional criteria" (Duff 2000 p. xiii). After all, genre is one of the key indices we use to understand the culture in which we live. It is also perhaps no surprise that a company working within the domain of what would often be described as 'postmodern' performance is re-looking at a form that is usually derided as the formulaic and standardised province of the mainstream. After all, does not, as Duff argues, postmodernism's "elevation of popular culture" have a much more "favourable estimate of the value of genre" (2000, p. 2) compared with the literary avant-garde? Especially since, as Peter Barry proclaims, postmodernism "rejects the distinction between 'high' and 'popular' art" (1995, p. 84). However, it is important not to resort to the 'anything goes' philosophy that is often ascribed to postmodernism; that is, genre is thrown into the mix as just another element in

postmodernism's eclectic 'free-play' of signification. Rather, I would like to explore the idea that Günther Kress proposes; that genre could be, "precisely that theoretical term which encapsulates, in the problems that it poses, all the uncertainties, contradictions, and confusions of the post-modern era, whether in the cultural, intellectual, or political domains" (in Duff: 2000, p. 15).

Jacques Derrida characterises genre as being paradoxical in his essay, 'The Law of Genre' (in Duff, 2000). Firstly, he is troubled by the authoritarian imperative of genre in relation to literary genres specifically:

As soon as the word genre is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind: 'Do', 'Do not', says 'genre', the word 'genre', the figure, the voice, or the law of genre.

(Derrida in Duff, 2000, p. 221)

That is, genre implicitly demands limits and draws boundaries. Indeed, genres could be described as 'reiterative', to appropriate Judith Butler's use of the term. That is, genres are normative and regulative in their configuration. In this sense it could be argued that the criteria of judgement about how to formulate a genre have already been decided on *in advance* by an irrecoverable authority. In other words, genre implies systematic thought, and upholds an understanding of events according to what is already grasped about the world. It follows that the components that make up a generic framework then are not innately meaningful since they actually have the effect of *defining* or closing down meanings and identifications for us. Put another way, they do not tell the 'truth' about the world around us, rather, the world is *made sense of* according to the 'law' of genre. This law is indeed a set of conventions

naturalised through the process of the reiteration and re-inscription of an authority.

Also, significantly, in the realms of television and film, where genre fiction tends to dominate, genres themselves are controlled by powerful commercial industries that attempt to 'channel' popular culture. As Steve Neale maintains:

it is 'popular culture', mass culture, that is generic, ruled as it is by market pressures to differentiate to a limited degree in order to cater to various sectors of consumers, and to repeat commercially successful patterns, ingredients and formulas.

(1990, p. 63)

Again Tzvetan Todorov points out:

In a given society, the recurrence of certain discursive properties is institutionalized (*sic*), and individual texts are produced and perceived in relation to the norm constituted by that codification. A genre, whether literary or not, is nothing other than the codification of discursive properties [...] It is because genres exist as an institution that they function as 'horizons of expectation' for readers and as 'models of writing' for authors [...] Like any other institution, genres bring to light the constitutive features of the society to which they belong.

(Todorov in Duff 2000, p. 198-200)

He goes on to state, "Society chooses and codifies the acts that correspond most closely to its ideology" (2000, p. 200). In other words, genre is a system of discursive properties.

However, as Derrida would have it, any authority, which would include that of genre, necessarily 'creates' that which is other to it, outside it, around it, or in Butler's words, "A constitutive or relative outside is, of course, composed of a set of exclusions that are nevertheless *internal* to that system as its own nonthematizable necessity. It emerges within the system as incoherence, disruption, a threat to its own

systematicity” (1993, p. 39). Indeed, this uncontainability is particularly prevalent in genre since, as Derrida maintains, genres are formed out of a set of indicators or textual signals that paradoxically cannot be *contained* by the genre itself. That is, an individual component or ‘textual signal’ that supposedly forms part of the definition of a genre could quite feasibly be present in *another* genre at the same time. Consequently, genres are very precarious institutions, since the generic frontier is disbanded at the very point of its institution.

Further, and significantly, since genres exist in the space between artists, audiences and texts, the diverse practices of spectatorship potentially dislocate genres from their ideological stranglehold. It is also worth taking into account that genres are not static forms, but are subject to a continual process of evolution. Duff, in reference to Todorov, describes the condition of genre itself as, “something like a state of permanent revolution” since “genres ‘evolve’ because the act of belonging to a genre involves both adoption of and resistance to its conventions” (2000, p. 7). This is indeed another of genre’s contradictions – it implies the maintenance of specific conventions while necessarily *having* to evolve or change as well.

However, the agency implied by the performative character of genre needs to be carefully considered. It could be argued that a genre text actually *conceals* its intertextual status by only *implicitly* referring to the genre texts that have preceded it. In other words, as I have thus far stated, if genre can be understood as a collective of enunciations, it actually enacts its own uncontainability in its numerous replications with differences. However, importantly, this uncontainability is denied or suppressed in each individual generic example, indeed, on whose repression its authority is

grounded. This authority is definitely vigorous, since as Martin Amis proclaims: “I am a comic writer. You have to submit to the huge power of the genre you are in. Genre really does determine outcomes” (in Duff 2000, p. 1).

To counteract the authoritarian imperative of genre, Dubrow claims that the re-shaping or re-interpretation of a genre could be seen as, “a highly polemical gesture, a way of attempting to initiate a new chapter of literary history through the act of creating a single work of art” (1982, p. 30). However, this movement attempts to attach genre to an author’s name – that is, to show how the ingenuity of an author can revolutionise a generic structure. Without wanting to negate this possibility, it perhaps neglects something very particular about genre that separates it from the institution of authorship discussed in chapter one.³ That is, that genres are *cultural property* that can be appropriated by anyone without restriction. After all, the collective material of genre is, what Donna Haraway might describe as, the “literary commons” (1997 p. 71). Indeed, she argues that the ‘author’ with “legally enforceable rights to intellectual property” (1997 p. 71) and indeed copyright law are somewhat recent institutions that: “rework the collective material and semiotic processes that constitute public and private life” (1997 p. 74). Genres are indeed that ‘collective material’, which perhaps partly explains why they continue to endure as dominant cultural forms. It also possibly accounts for why postmodernists take a keen interest in genre, since the form implicitly questions the unqualified command of authorship. Genre theory similarly counters the assumption that texts are autonomous or ‘original’ objects that have no stake in culture, society and history.

In terms of *access* to meanings and identifications then, genre texts appear to indicate democratic meaning. In other words, they belong to *everyone* in a particular culture. Put another way, we identify with (filmic) genres and their constituents because we *know* them culturally. Genre then, is a 'shared' language and shared knowledge, which perhaps reflects the process of its construction in the television and film industries.⁴ That is, genre fictions are often made collectively. This certainly connects genre to the mutual creation of our own devised work, which perhaps makes it appealing to us as makers. But what do we love about these democratic objects of culture? What is their lure? As Neale points out, "these systems [genres] provide spectators with means of recognition and understanding. They help render films, and the elements within them, intelligible and therefore explicable" (1990, p. 46). Therefore, it could be argued that generic structures put us in the position of narrative mastery since we experience the pleasure of our predictions being proved right. In our culture, it is probably fair to say that one of the reasons we *like* genres is because we know how to identify with them. For example, (Western) audiences have no problem differentiating between the conventions of Shakespearian comedy and tragedy, which arguably channels the way each genre is read, understood and felt. For example, in relation to Shakespearian comedy, Dubrow points out:

We know *The Comedy of Errors* is, as its title announces, comedic, and thus we do not take the threats of death in the opening scene seriously. Rather than being distracted by fears for the well-being of the characters, we remain free to focus on the most important and most delightful element of the play, the convolutions of the plot.

(1982, p. 32)

In other words, audiences are aware of the assumptions behind the genre of Shakespearian comedy; that is, that they habitually end in marriage rather than death.

In this sense, as Dubrow goes on to state, “our knowledge of the generic contract allows us to maintain the appropriate mood and to concentrate on what is most significant about the work” (1982, p. 32).

However, what is important about genre ‘knowledge’ for us as makers is that it allows for *narrative economy*. As a culture, Dubrow points out that we are sophisticated readers of genre. She states that in reading only a paragraph of text, “we are inevitably, though perhaps unwittingly, responding to generic signals” (1982, p. 32).

In other words, when we read, and indeed when we watch films, television and theatre, we are usually directed by our ‘learned’ generic expectations. This may mean ‘knowing’ how to respond emotionally, as in Shakespeare’s comedies that I mentioned above, or in Aristotle’s characterisation of tragedy. Here he describes not only the subject matter appropriate to that genre but also the effect it should have on its audience – “the plot ought to be so constructed that, even without the aid of the eye, he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes place” (Aristotle 1996 p. 17). This is his renowned theory that tragedy generates the identificatory practices of pity or fear. In this case experimental theatre can use genre as a way of condensing and or extending the possible mechanisms (meaning creating regimes) that narrative offers without resorting to the potentially cumbersome and rule bound order of the realist text.

Introducing Film into the Scene of the Theatre

When looking back on its work, I remember discussing how we wanted to provide a (relatively) coherent and pleasurable generic landscape that our audience's could navigate, as well as explore the possible disruptive mechanisms that genre, as an 'uncontainable' form, can bring to bear on narrative structures. In other words, we attempt to 'stage' the uncontainability of genre rather than allow genre to appear stable in the discrete instance of its citation (this is perhaps less true of *Insomniac's L'Ascensore*, although I will discuss this in more detail when I come on to analysing the show). At the same time, however, we were interested, following *Insomniac*, in the possibilities of juxtaposing two representational discourses within the same frame, or two *genres of discourse* as Lyotard might describe them (1988 p. 13).⁵ These are the discourses of the filmic and the theatrical. Much theory has been written concerning the differing practices of identification that theatre and film might invoke in their spectators. Here, I would like to trace the general thrust of these arguments, before going on to show how the interaction of these two regimes within the space of the theatre might effect, explore or even question the processes of identification that each is said to bring into play.

It is no secret that film is more readily considered to invoke spectatorial identification than theatre, through the simple fact that theatre cannot equal cinema's powers of verisimilitude. Indeed André Bazin makes this very argument in *What is Cinema?* Here he claims that cinema is a far superior form to theatre since the former has access to the 'real' or 'natural' world. He states, "if the cinema makes use of nature it is because it is able to. [...] Drama is freed by the camera from all contingencies of

time and space” (Bazin in Mast, Cohen and Braudy 1992, p. 379). He goes on: “the screen is not a frame, but a mask which allows only part of the action to be seen. When a character moves off the screen, we accept that he is out of sight, but he continues to exist in his own capacity at some other place in the décor which is hidden from us” (1992, p. 379). In this sense, the characters that are not ‘seen’ are still in the world of the film; the camera can simply pan back to them, or reintroduce them in the editing process. The camera then, according to Bazin, can reveal everything, it can show us “*the world*” (1992, p. 379). The theatre, on the contrary, operates through a continuous use of space. When characters leave the stage, they no longer exist as part of the play’s action since we always ‘know’, in the back of our minds, that they have gone to the dressing room, or are waiting in the wings for their next cue. The theatre is not “*the world*”, since its architecture “serves in greater or less degree to set the place apart, to specify” (1992, p. 380). Theatre, according to Bazin, is a façade that is separate from the world around it, since the scenery, no matter how elaborate and detailed, conceals what is behind; that is, cloth, nails and wood. The viewer is much more conscious that the fiction *is a fiction*, and thus must actively and consciously invest in its illusions.

However, the ‘active’ suspension of disbelief that Bazin accords to theatre, is, in his terms, also tied to the actor’s *live presence* in the theatre event. He quotes Rosenkrantz (1937) thus:

[T]he characters on the screen are quite naturally objects of identification, while those on stage, are, rather, objects of mental opposition because their real presence gives them an objective reality and to transpose them into beings in an imaginary world the will of the spectator has to intervene actively, that is to say, the will to transform their physical reality into an abstraction. This

abstraction being the result of a process of the intelligence that we can only ask of a person that is fully conscious.

(Rosenkrantz in Bazin in Mast, Cohen and Braudy 1992, p. 377)

In other words, the cinema offers the abundance of the image whilst the theatre requires a literal *leap of faith*; this is because the materiality of the actor on stage is at odds with her/his fictional function. Bazin's overall argument is that theatre and film demand two separate attitudes of mind, or in his words, "two psychological modalities of performance" (1992, p. 379). He asserts:

[T]he theatre acts on us by virtue of our participation in a theatrical action across the footlights and as it were under the protection of their censorship. The opposite is true of the cinema. Alone, hidden in a dark room, we watch through half open blinds a spectacle that is unaware of our existence and which is part of the universe. There is nothing to prevent us from identifying ourselves in the imagination with the moving world before us, which becomes *the world*. [...] the ensemble conditions that constitute the theatrical play [...] deprive the spectator of active participation.

(1992, p. 379)

Cinema, he maintains, operates through identification, and theatre, through *collusion*. This argument would appear to be in line with Christian Metz's: that is, that cinema is, from the outset, "more strongly established than that of the theater (*sic*) in direct line from the primal scene" (Metz 1982, p. 63). He goes on: "certain features of the institution contribute to this affinity: the obscurity of the onlooker, the aperture of the screen with its inevitable key hole effect" (1982 p, 64). Cinema, he insists, "is more radically ignorant of its spectator, since he is not there, than the theatre can ever be" (1982 p, 63). Thus, according to Metz, cinematic viewing is voyeuristic and *unauthorised* (1982 p. 62).

However, although I agree that that the cinema's keyhole effect is perhaps more suited to (the manipulation of) our desires than the theatre, Bazin and Metz describe a very monolithic version of identification. Identification, for both of them, seems to imply an absolute 'loss' of self into the image (if indeed this is really possible).⁶ Furthermore, the binary between film and theatre that both Bazin and Metz set up is probably not as rigid as they imagine. Bazin's assertion that in the cinema, we see the world literally *as it is* is a startling oversight, since it suggests that cinema does not engage in artifice. After all, in the cinema, we do not see the world, but instead, *we see what the camera (wants us to) see(s)*. As Susan Sontag points out, "In the cinema, narrative proceeds by ellipsis (the 'cut' or change of shot); the camera eye is a unified point of view that continually displaces itself" (in Mast, Cohen and Braudy 1992, p. 368). The fact that we can identify with film (project ourselves into it) and its characters is only because we understand and accept *cinematic conventions* – thus we (want to?) *stop seeing* how cinema is constructed – we (want to?) stop seeing the cinematic edits. In other words, we *disavow*.⁷ Nevertheless, it is interesting that Bazin's argument hinges upon the different 'real' to which each art form lays claim – cinema's being the implied reality of the image and theatre's being the physical reality of the human body on stage. Indeed, as he points out:

The human being is all-important in the theater. The drama on the screen can exist without actors. [...] some (cinematic) masterpieces use man only as an accessory, like an extra, or a counterpoint to nature which is the true leading character.

(Bazin in (eds.) Mast, Cohen and Braudy 1992, p. 379)

For this reason, as Metz indicates, theatre might be more naturally aligned with the *representer* rather than the represented (Metz 1982 p, 67). This is certainly the case

in the 'presentational' work that I discussed in the last chapter, although as I have shown, this did not prevent identification. However, it is true that theatre operates through a 'feedback loop', however 'fictional' the representation. Even if the actors do not refer to the audience directly, there is always an extent to which the audience and performers *interact*. This possibly allows audience identification to shift from fictional character to performer, but importantly does not exclude identification all together. I shall explore the audience/performer relationship over the next few pages. What becomes clear in my analysis of both *L'Ascensore* and *Five Miles and Falling* is that the very act of attempting to present the cinematic within the context of the theatre seems to emphasise theatre's obstinate 'liveness'.

The performance pieces that I interrogate in this chapter could be described as 'closed fictional worlds' in the sense that both erect a fictitious fourth wall between stage and audience, and perhaps a return to the Aristotelian aesthetics that Brecht so deplored. However, both pieces (metafictionally) refer to filmic genres, so arguably the fourth wall is indicative of the *actual* cinematic screen (as well as, inevitably, replicating the conventional divide in which the spectator – metaphorically at least – sees without being seen in turn). In the following pages, I intend to explore how identification might be negotiated through and across this boundary.

L'Ascensore (The Lift)

Performance details: *L'Ascensore* was written and directed by Pete Brooks, Artistic Director of Insomniac Productions. The show was performed by Richard Hawley, Sarah Bailes and Andy Frame (principal actors) and toured nationally and internationally from 1992-1996. *L'Ascensore* was funded by the Arts Council.

As I have thus far mentioned, *L'Ascensore* operates through a classic generic structure – that of the gangster movie. Let me begin by describing how the show is established as specifically *generic*. The set is a detailed imitation of a 1930s hotel elevator, and the audience watch the action through its back or ‘fourth’ wall.⁸ Indeed, the first image reveals the empty interior of the lift with open doors and a replicated hotel corridor behind. The hotel setting is a classic of the genre. Indeed, as Kitses points out, settings in gangster films are places that low-life’s inhabit, for example, “seedy bars and nightclubs, cheap hotels and precinct stations” (Kitses, in Lacey 2000, p. 135). Furthermore, in *L'Ascensore*, Insomniac clearly mimic the dress and speech patterns of stock gangster characters from cinema. Indeed, as soon as the characters enter the space, the audience members who have knowledge of 1930s gangster films or even more contemporary versions such as the *Godfather Trilogy* (1972, 1974 and 1990) or *Casino* (1995), are likely to take pleasure in recognising the ‘filmic worlds’ from which these characters have been extracted. The first figure we see is a room service attendant who enters the lift area, and is followed by Salvatore, the show’s central character. The protagonist of the drama is dressed in a smart suit, a long coat, and he is smoking a cigarette. His hair is slicked back, he speaks in a clipped, hardboiled New York drawl, and he quickly begins to wave a gun around – all these signifiers immediately identify him as a character from a gangster film.

Again, in classic gangster genre style, Salvatore kills the attendant in order to wear his uniform as a disguise. (Indeed, gangster films are developed around the sinister actions of their heroes, who operate outside the law, stealing and murdering their way through life). Our protagonist drags the dead body out of the enclosure, and then hurriedly returns to select the 'floor' where his boss is staying.⁹ The lift apparently grinds to a halt, and Salvatore exits via the sliding doors. He announces "room service!" (Brooks, 1992) off-stage, seemingly outside his boss's room. Then we hear two gunshots and the dying man's cry, again in the 'off-stage' area. Salvatore returns to the lift to meet his accomplice and lover Maria, the beautiful 'gangster's moll'. Their conversation indicates the closing moments of the classic gangster genre scenario, whereby the *femme fatale* uses seduction to lure the male protagonist to a 'bad end'¹⁰. The conversation runs as follows:

Maria: Did you do it?
Salvatore: Yes, I did it.
Maria: Are you sure?
Salvatore: Yes, I'm sure. Just like you told me.
Maria: One in the head and one in the heart?
Salvatore: One in the head and one in the heart.
(Brooks 1992)

The couple kiss and Maria raises a knife above Salvatore's head. She plays out the archetypal double-cross by stabbing him in the stomach and leaving him to die. Gangsters, indeed, are doomed to failure and inevitable death (usually violent).¹¹ Salvatore then slips into a delirium, and the show takes us, via the lift (a descent in to hell?), on a dream-like journey of the stretched out moments of a dying man's final imaginings. Here Salvatore attempts to comprehend his own downfall by facing the consequences of his actions and working out the discontinuities in his knowledge.

The visions, which he both watches and participates in, are both fantasises and memories and they include the following. There are re-enacted meetings with his lover, Maria (which establish the involvement of her *other* lover, and his part in Salvatore's downfall) as well as scenes that revisit his expulsion from his community and family.

Yet up until the moment of Salvatore's death, despite the 'liveness' of its enactment, we have remained within the conventions of the generic gangster film. From this moment on, the show appears to perform a more complex allusion to the gangster genre, and to the 'cinematic' in general. Indeed, Salvatore's death at the *beginning* of the film rather than the end is probably more typical of the *film noir* tradition of which the gangster genre is a precursor. This would also hold true for the flashback sequences that form the greater part of the performance. *Insomniac's* inclusion of characteristics from *film noir* perhaps illustrates Derrida's theory that any genre must contain indicators of *other* genres as well as their own, referred to earlier on in this chapter. However, the flashback sequences also appear to be a device for bringing into play the *discourses* that surround film, since Salvatore's unconscious journey would seem to parallel psychoanalytical film theory's construction of the 'dreaming' cinema viewer.¹² Indeed, the show contains several examples that refer explicitly to psychoanalytical film theory. I will elaborate on these in just a moment, since they are, in my opinion, a crucial dynamic of the performance.

However, for now it seems important to consider how the piece might operate in terms of exploring, or eliciting identifications. The first and most obvious point to make on this count is that *L'Ascensore* is a *metafiction*. Metafiction, as the reader

will be aware, is put forward as a key ‘distancing’ strategy in postmodern art forms. That is, although *L’Ascensore* plays out the classic gangster drama, it draws attention to its frame by literally staging the cinematic in the space of the theatre – thus pointing to the construction of a cinematic original. Indeed, Patricia Waugh describes metafiction thus:

[W]riting which consistently displays its conventionality, which consistently lays bare its conditions of artifice [which] problematises more or less explicitly the ways in which narrative codes – whether literary or ‘social’ – artificially construct apparently ‘real’ and imaginary worlds in the terms of the particular ideologies while presenting these as transparently ‘natural’ and ‘eternal’.

(in Ahmed 1998, p. 148)

Theoretically then, the self-conscious process of reflection allows the text to avoid replicating the conservative values of the ‘original’ text, and consequently prevents us identifying with these values, since they are exposed as ‘fictional’. As I mentioned in my introduction, Ahmed’s critique of this position is as follows. She claims that identifications *can be made* with the values of the original text, on the basis that identifications are more complex than a “singular investment in the ‘real’” (1998, p. 149). In addition to Ahmed’s argument (and critical for mine), Waugh’s postmodern stance appears to assume that identifications are *necessarily* reactionary. That is, they always align us with the status quo.

Interestingly, Sarah Gorman appears to stake out the identificatory lure of *Insomniac*’s work, although only by assuming that our identification returns us to ideological stasis. She maintains that *L’Ascensore* provokes identification with its *conventional* structural logic:

The narratives of *L'Ascensore*, *Still Life*, *The Möbius Room* and *Clair de Luz* [all shows by Insomniac Productions] each take place in what could be understood to be 'post-apocalyptic' settings, in so far as they occur 'after the trauma', which was, an abused childhood, the loss of the child, and a murder. They all invoke a sense of crisis which continues into the present, but which can be retrospectively solved by conferring a sense of order on the past. The linear narratives present in this work are shown to be therapeutic and to encourage the main protagonists towards a moment of self-realisation. (2002, p. 151)

In other words and in relation to *L'Ascensore* specifically, she asserts that Salvatore is shown to erect the stabilising paradigms of narrative in order to come to sense of self-understanding, albeit, she points out, "in a self-conscious act of creating 'discourse'" (2002, p. 151). This, she argues, is "an engagement with a structural understanding of narrative, and a causal, diachronic model of history" (2002, p. 147).

I must say that I am drawn to Gorman's argument, even though her 'spin' on identification appears to be a negative one. I am also interested in the fact that she does not resort to the traditional idea that it must be rounded psychological characters that we identify with. Indeed, in *L'Ascensore*, the characters are probably too stereotypical for that.¹³ Gorman seems to foreground the specific *actions* of the characters as the source of our identificatory attachment. In this case, we do not identify with the characters as if they are 'real' (in the way John Fiske describes our relationship to realism), but rather, as if they are *truthful*, that is, the characters communicate 'truths' about existence that, in her terms, *reinforce our place in the ideological stranglehold*. In *L'Ascensore*, according to Gorman's argument, the (reactionary) 'truth' we come to understand in *L'Ascensore* is that "a late 20th century society still has linear strategies of organisation" (2002, p. 152).

However, as Jackie Stacey points out:

Any cultural process that is productive of identities is seen as confirming the fixed place of the subject within discourse and thus reinforcing the dominant culture; it further offers the subject the pleasure of illusory unity, it is claimed. The implied corollary of this is the claim that cultural forms that fragment and deny identity are necessarily radical and transgress bourgeois, patriarchal norms.

(1994, p. 172)

L'Ascensore, I would argue, neither advocates a *denial* of identity, nor asserts an absolute coherence of the self. Rather, it is possible to argue that the show does the following. That is, *Insomniac* use specific strategies to disrupt epistemological closure and thus prevent the full re-installation of the symbolic/discursive authority, *whilst at the same time articulating their dependence on that symbolic framework for their very identity*. In other words, *Insomniac* have created a relatively linear narrative, whilst concurrently showing how difficult is to make the narrative(s) (of identity) cohere or stick. In simple terms, *Insomniac* accept the rules of the game (the game of genre) in order to interrogate our investments in it.

Gorman suggests that the formal strategies at work in *L'Ascensore* operate as a self-reflexive 'frame' to *L'Ascensore*'s action. This implies an edging or border that surrounds its totality. Rather, I think it is possible to observe that, within the structure of *L'Ascensore*, the theatrical and the filmic are continually played against each other. That is, instead of operating as a frame, these conflicts are worked into the body of the performance, potentially disturbing the closure implied by Gorman's analysis. It is arguably this play between the cinematic and the theatrical that articulates the rules by which we continue to revolutionise our identities through identifications. However,

importantly, *L'Ascensore* appears to be an affectionate celebration of the gangster genre, rather than a suspicious practice intent on revealing the genre's underlying 'truths'.

Indeed, one of the most striking features of *L'Ascensore* is the pleasure it brings. I would argue that much of this pleasure is simply induced through sets of recognitions. Insomniac do not need to tell the *whole* story. As a culture exposed to a plethora of American gangster films, and through the way in which they are continually referenced in popular cultural forms, we already know the plots, characters and iconography of the genre so well¹⁴. In this instance, the company offer us a condensed gangster drama (only forty minutes) that uses clever ways to approximate the cinematic within the context of the theatre – and we take delight in watching this 'play' carried out before us. This is the operation of repetition (we know how this genre operates) and difference (it is played in the theatre, not the cinema). Indeed, it is through the processes of repetition and difference that we establish our identities through identifications.

Eve Sedgwick implies that much cultural theory written in the last twenty years has repeatedly denigrated pleasure as a "merely aesthetic" affect (2003, p. 114) and thus without critical or historical value. As I mentioned in the introduction, she describes a current critical culture of 'paranoid theory' that places its faith in exposure or the unveiling of "hidden patterns of violence" (2003, p. 143). She uses the specific example of the queer-identified practice of camp to illustrate her theory. As she explains, "camp is most often understood as uniquely appropriate to the projects of parody, denaturalization (*sic*), demystification, and mocking exposure of the elements

and assumptions of a dominant culture” (2003, p. 149). These practices, Sedgwick maintains, are negative, suspicious and intent on humiliation, as well as “masquerading as the stuff of truth” (2003, p. 138). In other words, within the practices of exposure, there is an implicit claim to ‘unmask’ or *expose the facts*. She goes on to state that:

[T]he degree to which camping is motivated by love seems often to be understood mainly as the degree of its self-hating complicity with an oppressive status quo. By this account, the x-ray gaze of the paranoid impulse in camp sees through to an unfleshed skeleton of the culture; the paranoid aesthetic on view here is one of minimalist elegance and conceptual economy. (2003, p. 114)

Or put another way, ‘paranoid theory’ is a taut and scientific practice that denies the ‘flesh’ of cultural forms or objects that might provide pleasure, comfort and nourishment to specific selves and communities. That is, there might be valid and substantial rewards from pleasurable feeling and identifications that do not always denote collusion with the dominant ideology. Or indeed, in Sedgwick’s terms:

[F]or someone to have an unmystified view of systematic oppressions does not *intrinsically* or *necessarily* enjoin that person to any specific train of epistemological or narrative consequences. [...] to practice other than paranoid forms of knowing does not, in itself, entail a denial of the reality or gravity of enmity or oppression. (2003, p. 127-8)

In other words, to have an understanding of how oppression operates in society does not automatically prescribe a confrontational course of action.

Yet I do not wish to elide or stifle the importance of subversive practices and the necessity to always ask questions of the culture in which one lives. After all, it could

be argued that this is one of the key generic features of an experimental cultural practice.¹⁵ Yet, like Sedgwick, I think it is essential to recognise that a paranoid practice is just “one practice among other, alternative ones” (2003, p. 128), and as she succinctly asserts, “paranoia knows some things well and other things poorly” (2003, p. 130). Over the following pages, I will suggest a possible subversive practice that I think is taking place in *L'Ascensore*; that is, the way in which the cinematic and the theatrical are played through and against each other in the course of the performance. In this sense they appear to complicate each other's signifying practices, and potentially question, as well as affirm and honour our investments in, and identifications with, both. However, I will argue that this ‘clash’ of two, potentially opposing discourses is not a totally violent, undermining practice. Rather, I will keep in mind one of the key operations of the performance that a paranoid practice probably knows poorly; that of the generation or proliferation of pleasurable effects.

It is probably fair to say that audiences do not take *L'Ascensore* for a tragedy *as such*. This is because the main appeal of the show is the ways in which Insomniac work so hard to replicate film in the space of the theatre, and this ‘play’ makes the ill-fated consequences for the hero of the action (mainly) pleasurable and entertaining.

However, it is significant that the show's framing through film certainly, at moments, led me to attach psychological attributes to the flat, stereotyped figure of Salvatore, played by Richard Hawley. Indeed, this feeling was bolstered by Hawley's rather gripping and sustained performance throughout the show. I found, despite his overplayed New York drawl and clipped, hard-boiled language, that his investment in each terrifying moment of his nightmare did have the effect of transporting me (at least at certain moments) on his rather disturbing, hallucinogenic journey.¹⁶

Indeed in *L'Ascensore*, theatre and film are brought into a constant and excessive confrontation with each other. The theatricality of *L'Ascensore* is brought to the fore straight away since the lift that Salvatore travels in approximates a miniature 'box set'. The necessary tabs are erected either side to conceal its supporting structure. *L'Ascensore's* lift doors could be understood as a theatrical 'interpretation' of a film edit. In this sense the cinematic is *subjected* to a theatrical treatment, which suggests that the signifying practices of theatre are literally imposed on the world of the generic gangster film. At the same time, the opposite is also true; that the very imposition of the 'edit' in the realm of the theatrical subjects the latter to *cinematic* signifying practices, since the show borrows cinema's *discontinuous* use of space. In other words, the scene changes can happen entirely out of the audience's view. This makes the 'edit' really gratifying. This is how it operates. Salvatore and the audience witness a series of 'shots' or spectacles beyond the lift's boundary that always change from one to the other after the doors have closed. The noise generated by the set change is clearly concealed by the loud rattle apparently caused by the lift's mechanisms of motion. Each 'new' scene is then revealed as the doors slide open again. What is so pleasurable about these moments in *L'Ascensore* is the speed at which these changes take place, and the sheer delight of witnessing the way the space has transformed when the lift doors open again. This is one of the enchanting things about theatre: the way it has to work so hard to literally *construct* illusions or transformations, since, as Susan Sontag points out, "the theatre's capacities for manipulating space are simply much cruder and more laboured than film's" (in Mast, Cohen and Braudy 1992, p. 368). In other words, we are aware of how clever theatre has to be to produce that sense of effortlessness that film can simply put together in

the edit suite.¹⁷ Indeed, in film, a cut to a different location is par for the course and thus does not invoke wonder or surprise in this way.

If, as I have described, the lift doors operate as an edit, then it follows that the space beyond the lift signifies the 'screen' that Salvatore both watches, and at certain points enters into. This 'screen' space is the 'filmic' past of Salvatore. Indeed, this, as I have already mentioned, is an appropriation of the classic flashback device that is a key convention of *film noir*. Salvatore then, watches his past life *as if it is a film*. It would appear significant then, that our central character is both the viewer of the screen action as well as a figure who can literally *walk into* his celluloid past. In this regard he is both the subject of the spectating world (looking *at* the screen) as well as the subject of the filmic world (enacting *in* the film). What is interesting about this is the fact that Salvatore crosses the impossible boundary of the screen by literally *walking through it* – drawing attention to the liveness and immediacy that characterises the theatrical.

If we can differentiate the economies of the filmic and the theatrical temporally, then in simple terms, film, as pre-recorded, or *as object*, could be situated in the past, as already completed. On the other hand, theatre, as live event, at least in the sense that the audience share the same temporality as the actors, could be placed in the present. After all, as Christian Metz reminds us:¹⁸

It is the segregation of spaces that characterises a cinema performance and not a theatrical one. [...] [T]he space of film, represented by the screen, is utterly heterogeneous, it no longer communicates with that of the auditorium: one is real, the other perspective: a stronger break than any line of footlights.

(1982: 64)

Salvatore then, traverses the 'break' of the screen. However, I would argue that *L'Ascensore's* staging of the 'split' between what could be described as the pre-recorded (the diegetic past) and the live (the diegetic present) moments is more complicated than I have thus far described. For example, when Salvatore walks into the alterior space behind the lift, he is not always (diegetically) 'seen' by the characters that occupy his remembered or fantasised past. In a sense then, he is simultaneously inside and outside of his 'projected' past experiences, neither entirely inhabiting them, nor having a perspectival point of view that might offer him narrative (and self) mastery.

Let me describe the first of Salvatore's hallucinations, in order to describe what I mean. This scene occurs just moments after Salvatore collapses from the injuries Maria has bestowed upon him. After the dramatic stabbing the following takes place. The lights momentarily go out, and then they flicker: Salvatore remains on the floor of the lift, motionless. Then he stirs. He gets to his feet, apparently unhurt – his knife wound seems to have vanished. He hurriedly presses the buttons of the lift; it would seem in an attempt to exit the confines of the hotel. Instead he only arrives at an unspecified floor. He wanders out of the lift, into the hotel corridor, but appears unable to find a way out. Already it is clear that *something* about the world Salvatore inhabits has changed. Inside the lift again, he frantically selects another floor. This time, the lift doors open to reveal an eerie space. A group of party guests are lined up in a darkened area, facing the lift enclosure. Suddenly they begin to clap in unison. Salvatore acknowledges the clapping as if it is for him, and, still inside the lift, he executes a low, overstated bow. However, the ensemble fail to 'see' him: it is clear that he exists in an alternative temporal register. The crowd disperse, and congregate

around a transversely positioned table. An Italian ballad begins to play and Salvatore crouches in the lift enclosure to light a cigarette. A group of men enter the space in shirts, trousers and waistcoats; they are larking around. Salvatore clearly knows them, so he calls out to them and follows them into the space. They appear not to hear or see him. The incompatible time frames of Salvatore and the ensemble figures becomes more pronounced since the women and men begin to perform a menacing yet perfectly timed eating and drinking ritual, whilst Salvatore moves around them in 'real' time. Salvatore looks on, exasperated. The figures begin to filter out of the dream-like world, disappearing in to the shadows, and Salvatore moves out of view. Just a man and a woman remain behind, and they start to kiss – they are later identified as Salvatore's parents. The music gets louder and the temporal register appears to shift again as the sounds of a violent windstorm create a threatening atmosphere. Salvatore's mother and father mount the table and perform a simulated act of sexual intercourse, and then finally his mother lets out a devastating scream. Salvatore appears from out of the shadows and runs to the safety of the lift enclosure. He hurriedly shuts the gate. The lift doors slam closed and the elevator appears to plunge downwards.

In this scene, as I have already mentioned, Salvatore moves into the territory of the 'screen' space – however, distinctive time frames separate him narratively from the characters of his past. It would appear that he remains temporally, although not spatially, in the landscape of the 'present' time. In this sense, Salvatore's time frame is still in the theatrical realm. However, importantly, the 'split' that divides our main protagonist from the other figures is not only temporal. Strangely, the 'filmic' world that is inhabited by the party guests and the 'theatrical' world that Salvatore occupies

do not appear to hold fast. As the party guest's actions become increasingly ritualised, they arrive at a distinctly *theatrical* mode of presentation. Their expressionistic movements separate them from Salvatore's pared down, arguably *filmic* style of acting. It is clear that the split between the realms of the filmic and the theatrical are always doubled over and played across each other in *L'Ascensore*.

It could be argued that in *L'Ascensore*, through the device of flashback, the theatrical 'live' is caught in the frame of film's dependence on repetition, of *having to repeat* the events of the past.¹⁹ Indeed, the flashbacks that structure the piece as a whole signify the return to numerous moments of Salvatore's previous existence. At the same time, however, the 'past' of film is both narratively (as Salvatore's life) and literally (as a pre-recorded and edited document) caught up in the moment of the theatrical present – in the space of immediacy, of material bodies, of 'live' voices. Furthermore and crucially, the immediacy of the 'live' is not placed outside the frame of Salvatore's past experiences, which might be the case if our hero was to remain in the confines of the 'proscenium arch' lift. Instead, through the figure of Salvatore, who straddles the 'filmic' and 'theatrical' worlds, the filmic past (as *object*) is constantly contaminated by the live's *materiality*. In other words, the interruption of the live potentially has the effect of questioning the fixture of Salvatore's life as a document or object that is ordered, made sense of and ultimately left unquestioned and unquestionable (like the physical manifestation of a reel of film). This might challenge Gorman's assumption thus:

Post-structuralist theory implies that the concept of historical 'epochs' and 'periods' has been problematised and must be acknowledged as illusory concepts constructed through language. Similarly, contemporary historical research must acknowledge the ideological values of progress and causality

thought to be conferred through the process of ‘periodization’ (*sic*) (Ledger and McCracken 1995). In the light of this theorising of historicisation, the process of retrospectively ordering events at the end of the century and millennium end [in *L’Ascensore*] must be deemed as reactionary.

(2002, p.150)

Alternatively, I suggest that the intrusion of the ‘live’ or the theatrical in the space of the ‘filmic’ implies that that Salvatore’s narrative cannot be completely tied down, thus questioning the absolute closure that Gorman subjects *L’Ascensore* to. Of course, I am aware that I could be charged with romanticising the live in this instance, since I am suggesting that the live operates *without mediation* – as if the live is always an unruly force that ‘undoes’ the teleologies of fixture, imposition and order. Indeed, *L’Ascensore* is tied down by its dependence on the tragic structure of the gangster genre, which always involves the playing out of fated situations. Salvatore’s journey in the fiction *can only have one destiny* since we know the outcome must be his eventual death. However, I would contend that *L’Ascensore*’s operates through a continual and disorientating (formal and diegetic) exploration of time frames. This exploration is carried out through the placing together of the theatrical and the filmic, and arguably invites a comparison of their particular temporal modalities. This distinction, I would say, rests on film’s *already completed-ness*, and theatre’s attachment to *the happening now*. My identification with the narrative journey of Salvatore then, reminds me that my search for a fixed identity (through identification) is desirable, but always based on unstable premises.

Importantly, in the scene that I described at length above, there is a literal enactment of the primal scene. This demonstrates one of the ways in which the critical discourses that encircle film saturate the theatrical structure of *L’Ascensore*.²⁰ In the show, this scene is made narratively plausible since the show represents the extended

moment of Salvatore's life flashing before his eyes. Peggy Phelan argues that the primal scene is "remembered and (re)visited through the dream and the symptom – through the imaginative attempt of the unconscious to replay the (past) scene on the stage of the present" (1993, p. 4). Within the logics of psychoanalysis then, Salvatore can be seen to be tracking back over his life, in an attempt to unearth the events leading to Maria's betrayal. In other words, to pinpoint the origin of his own demise. However, it is significant that the primal scene is considered a key moment in the formation of the subject in psychoanalytical theory, since this could be understood as deliberately related to (and indeed in excess of) the cinematic mode. After all, as I have already implied, film theorists frequently describe the form in psychoanalytical terms. Furthermore, the gangster genre is arguably well suited to this mode of explanation since its recurrent thematics of familial relations and conflicts place it distinctly within psychoanalytic territory. But what is striking about the situation of the primal scene within *L'Ascensore* is the downright frankness of its presentation. In other words, the show's material is *not just predisposed* to a psychoanalytical reading which fits easily and logically into the narrative flow. This is arguably the case in the *Godfather* films. Rather, in *L'Ascensore* the very *discourse of the psychoanalytical*, which has come to function as a metanarrative for understanding film, is thrown into relief. Furthermore, psychoanalysis *as* discourse is emphasised by the sheer *overindulgence* of its staging. The shattering crescendo of operatic music, the windstorm and indeed the grunting noises made by the actors playing Salvatore's parents, almost turn the menacing scene into something exquisitely ridiculous. So much theatrical abundance appears to be invested in this instance, which is extremely pleasurable, and also could be said to bring us into the 'live moment' of its enaction. In other words, in *L'Ascensore*, we are denied the covert, keyhole effect of the

cinematic screen that draws us in to a forbidden world. Instead, the ‘cultural truth’ of the primal scene and our specific investments in it as a ‘formative’ moment is arguably brought into question through its overt theatrical staging. This is a staging of what Nichols would describe as a ‘disembodied’ knowledge that produces a distancing effect (in Sobchack 1996, p. 62).

L'Ascensore also invokes film by using the theatrical machinery in order to approximate classic film ‘shots’. For instance, there is one scene that is cleverly constructed as if it is an overhead camera view. This time, when the lift doors open, we see a group of men seated around a table, one of whom is speaking into a telephone. Again it is clear that Salvatore occupies a different time frame than the figures situated here, since this scene is viewed over the top of the men’s heads, as if we are peering down on them. Salvatore is not ‘seen’ but he is nonetheless the focus of the telephone discussion. The man on the telephone says, “Where is Salvatore?” And then: “we have given him chances, Lucio. He has betrayed the family and now he cannot be our son” (Brooks, 1992).²¹ Despite the seeming seriousness of the telephone discussion, I would argue that this moment is visually very amusing. On the one hand, it invokes recognition – we identify it as a classic shot from the cinematic gangster genre. Indeed, this is a view that we are likely to accept unproblematically in the cinema. On the other hand, however, in the theatrical realm, it is *impossible*, and as an audience we are ‘in on the joke’. It is clear that the actors must have climbed into a rather elaborate and secure structure that allowed them to be wedged in horizontally so they did not fall out. It is also evident that all the items on the table itself must be ‘stuck on’ in some way – the phone, the drinking glasses, the cards that are not in the men’s hands. However, I would argue that this ‘shot’ does

not only invoke laughter. The way that the view is so literally constructed indicates that the machinery of the theatre has to work very hard in order to approximate film. It also has the effect of drawing attention to the way filmic fictions are put together. In other words, we see the shot *as a shot*, so cinema's mode of production is brought to the fore.

In *L'Ascensore*, narrative closure is achieved, but the means by which closure is attained produces such a spillage of meaning as to invite an ironic reading. This is mainly through the clash between the filmic and the theatrical, and questions the passive adherence to the generic order that the show might appear, at first sight, to prescribe. I would argue that the ways in which film and theatre are made to confront each other in *L'Ascensore* shows that each discourse cannot be contained or contain everything. This causes a displacement of familiar frames of understanding that attempt to put the self in (absolute) order.

(In the final moments of *L'Ascensore*, as Salvatore lay spluttering and writhing inside the lift enclosure, a smile came to my face. I realised that I did not mourn the demise of this character, but actually wanted to *be* Richard Hawley in this exquisite theatrical moment. I could be lying there instead of Hawley, thrashing about covered in profuse amounts of glorious, gloopy stage blood).

Five Miles and Falling

Production details: the concept for *Five Miles* was devised by imitating the dog: Alice Booth, Seth Honnor, Richard Malcolm and Simon Wainwright. Text written by Andrew Quick with small sections by myself. Camera work was carried out by filmmakers Mate Toth and Mark Wordsworth. The show was commissioned by the Studio Theatre and Gallery, Leeds Metropolitan Theatre, and supported additionally by Arts Council England. It toured in Spring and Summer 2002²².

One of the obvious connections between *Five Miles and Falling* and *L'Ascensore* is that both involve a lift. However, quite early on in the rehearsal process we decided to abandon the idea of our lift being part of a hotel, as in *L'Ascensore*. We wanted to portray a filmic romance that occurred across different meeting places; so each 'floor' now represents another location. The lift, then, signifies a journey. I suppose in this sense the lift developed a metaphorical rather than a literal function. Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey point out that a prominent feature of the romance narrative is a *transformation*; often represented through some sort of journey or passage. They claim:

This transformative promise holds out possibilities of change, progress and escape, which the romance facilitates through its power to make things seem possible and to enable us to feel we can overcome all adversities. Such possibilities are often figured through both a literal and metaphorical journey (to a new self); hence travel, relocation and movement have been central to such romantic trajectories [...] In this way, romance offers its subjects the possibility of a new 'becoming': through the encounter/fusion of the self and the other, a new self might be imagined.

(1995, p. 18)

In other words, romance narratives often give us hope of a new and different future, and possibly a new *self*, through their transformative potential. *Five Miles* certainly explores the possibility of change through love's work, and I will go on to discuss this further in due course. But for now it is worth mentioning that this performance resurrects the beautiful dead that Sontag connects specifically to film. As she claims,

“movies preserve the past, while theatres – no matter how devoted to the classics, to old plays – can only ‘modernize’. Movies resurrect the beautiful dead...” (in (eds.) Mast, Cohen and Braudy 1992, p. 370). In other words, the show enacts the journey of a *potential* relationship, since the couple’s union is actually thwarted in their simultaneous demise (although by the end of the show, it becomes clear that the Woman is the very signifier of death itself – a fallen angel – condemned to repeat love trysts for eternity). In this case the metaphor of the lift is stronger than just the development or trajectory of a romantic affair. The lift could also be said to signify purgatory itself. That is, it represents a transitory, liminal or in-between space that can never be concretely placed. Further, this ‘in-between’ could be described as a metaphor for the show itself, which, I think, works in-between the gaps of binary oppositions. The first is the Filmic/Theatrical as in *L’Ascensore*, although others are Man/Woman, Alive/Dead, Inside/Outside, Past/Present, Judgement/Redemption, Watcher/Watched, and perhaps one of the oldest binary oppositions – the debate between two lovers.

The lift also allowed us to keep the audience in the ‘frame’. In other words, it permitted us to make them part of the *Five Miles* experience. We wanted the audience to go on some sort of physical journey that was intrinsically connected to their intellectual and empathetic one. The play’s thematics circle around the processes of judgement and redemption. That is, the woman ‘judges’ the man in the context of a failing romance. The idea is that the audience reflect on the journeys and consequences of their own relationships, and as the Man walks towards the lift at the end of the show, that they might be ‘next’ in line for judgement. (Perhaps the aftermath of love’s fall or promise always demands some sort of ethical assessment?)

We were interested in the intimacy of the lift, in the difficulty for the audience of having to stand for the entire show, and in the sensuality of having the images and soundscape come at them in an intense way. We were attracted to the affective possibilities of this sort of experience. We also wanted to make the audience part of the machine, having to turn to watch the two areas of action. This turn then mimicks the Woman's (my) turn away in the final scene, 'Leaving'. It also tangentially refers to the turn of Orpheus; the 'looking back' that transforms his lover, Euridice, into stone.

Five Miles draws on the (generic) film romance as a structuring device although the show is in many ways very theatrical. Indeed, as I showed in relation to *L'Ascensore*, the very act of attempting to present the cinematic within the context of the theatre seems to emphasise theatre's obstinate 'liveness'. Unlike *L'Ascensore* though, we do not attempt to 'reconstruct' film through the manipulation of the theatrical machinery. Rather, film is referenced in various ways throughout the performance, and we also incorporate actual pre-recorded material, which arguably invokes film's *material* conditions. It could be maintained that the pre-recorded and the live demand not only different modes of 'being' for us as performers, but also different 'contracts' of viewing for the audience. In this sense varying identificatory interactions possibly occur. I will elaborate on these in relation to my own experience as a performer and my speculations on audience interactions in just a moment.

However, for now, it is important to point out that I do not wish to assume a binary relation between the live and the pre-recorded (present and absent?) in *Five Miles*, and that there is a clear 'switch' back and forth between these two viewing practices.

Indeed, this switch is probably impossible since within the show, the two modes of enunciation are not strictly separated. Rather, the co-presentation of the live and the pre-recorded might have the effect of *complicating* identificatory processes, through their specific interrelations. However, critically, over the next few pages, I intend to conjoin the material conditions of viewing with an integral consideration of the show's narrative 'content'. Indeed, when invoking film we were not just attempting to mimic film's inherent segregation of itself from the auditorium. Also, in line with mainstream generic film, we wanted to maintain a certain degree of narrative coherence, taking into account "the evident centrality of narrative to dominant film cultures" (Rosen 1986, p. ix). We further intended to bring into play the specific thematic concerns of a generic film romance, since, as I remarked earlier, genre is a collective cultural language that we were intent on drawing from. Indeed, we take scenes from the generic romance such as: "The Meeting Scene" that takes place in a restaurant, "The Flirting Scene" (in a bar) "The Argument Scene" (in a café) "The Passion Scene" (in a hotel room), and finally "The Leaving Scene" (in a car park).

Yet the show is much more eclectic in its references than *L'Ascensore*. The video sections on the screen in the lift featuring the Man's 'nightmare' draw on surreal film, as well as pop videos and advertising.²³ The show itself, for the audience, is probably reminiscent of a fairground ride or simulator since the spectators are herded into an enclosed space and subjected to sets of rather disorientating images and experiences. The narrative of *Five Miles* as a whole is partly taken from the film *Magnolia*, which is structured on the principle of a set of extraordinary chance coincidences. In the film, a number of narrative strands are presented and then converge. One is the meeting of a couple through a lonely heart's column, and we decided to purloin this

idea, as well as the notion of an extraordinary chance co-incidence. This is where we took the narrative in our own direction, since we decided the fate of our couple would be the following. They would arrange to meet, and on the way to the meeting the man would run the woman over. Our story would be the potential relationship of this couple, which was thwarted in death. The figure of the Woman as the Saviour or angel of death combines ideas from ancient mythology as well as Christian concepts such as the notions of redemption and judgement (which, importantly, still have a strong influence in our secular culture). We also draw on specific biblical stories, such as the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, as expressed by the Man in scene four. Indeed, in some ways this show makes me think of a Quentin Tarantino film, since, although it has a distinct generic frame, it draws on many other genres as well as *specific* films/texts/myths/stories.

Free Fall – Performing in, and Speculating on, *Five Miles*

It is strange trying to capture the experience, the materiality, the ‘liveness’ of performing a show. It is so difficult to describe how it *feels* for us and, indeed, how we imagine the audience will experience it. Because it really *is* an experience, this show. The audience are really put inside its world. However, even though *Five Miles* is very self-contained, with the lift as a constant space for the audience (its own stage for us, the actors, and all its own internal components) the ‘outside’ space always impacts on the show itself and makes the show *feel* different. The sound is sometimes flat and dead, at others, rich and echoey, bouncing around the space. The temperature varies. We try to make the performance space as cold as possible, to reduce the risk

of audience members feeling woozy, although some venues are hotter than others. If it is too warm, I start to panic that the audience will get uncomfortable, restless, or at worst, faint. However, when my body feels too cold, it is more difficult to perform.

The show begins with waiting. At least it does for Richard and me. The audience have entered the corridor, and the lift doors have shut behind them. I love the fact that I know this show so well. The first section is a voiceover played as the audience stand inside the lift. It is Richard's lonely heart advert. There is no music, so Richard and I remain quiet, staying still and listening, waiting for the music to kick in before we can move about without being heard by the audience. When the music starts, we (ever so quietly) put the set in place for the first live scene. We have it all mapped out, we do the same things each time, there is a rhythm. I hold the curtain for Richard as he carries on the table. He can never decide where to place it – he moves it forward, then back, then stands some distance from it to check it is in the right place. I lay down my props, I catch Richard's eye. He winks. These are the little rituals we allow ourselves before each scene, and again after the lift doors close, shutting the audience out of sight. We always give each other the thumbs up, hearten each other, congratulate each other if all goes well. Something to calm the nerves. Meanwhile:

In the first moments of the show the audience are subjected to various modes of viewing which could be described as sets of alienation techniques as well as modes of drawing them into to the world of *Five Miles*. There always seems to be a 'pull' between these two practices of viewing or interacting. They walk into the lift with a number of other people. This is not like a film: they are not in a darkened room, separated from everyone around them, able to focus on and project themselves into an

'absent' celluloid world. They are in an intimate space; they are standing close to others. They are aware of each other. Smells are probably prominent – shampoo, deodorant, sweat. Their bodies brush up against other bodies. Then the show begins. The doors close behind them. A voiceover starts.

[SOUND: It is the Man (Richard) announcing his lonely heart advert.]

The sound appears to be coming from the screen although there are no visuals. Where do the audience look? They might shut their eyes, so they do not have to make eye contact with anyone standing around them. Otherwise their eyes might wonder up, as if the sound is emanating from somewhere above them. This is different from being in one's own world, like in the cinema, or to a lesser extent, in a conventional theatre set up. Here the audience will be distinctly conscious of others – and it might make them more aware of themselves. A moment of crisis perhaps? They are (almost) part of this performance.²⁴ Indeed it would seem that to a certain extent, they are performing too. Throughout the show, they are watching, but also potentially being *watched* watching, by the other viewers standing so close to them. They are aware that others will probably notice their reactions or interactions with the performance. Suddenly the screen switches on and the audience turn to look in the direction of the light.

[IMAGE: It is the Woman (me) and then the Man (Richard), her in a café, him in a car; SOUND: The Woman's voice is heard over the images, she responds to his ad with a few words of her own. SOUND: He leaves a message on her mobile. IMAGE: You see her listening to it. SOUND: He asks to meet her and tells her when and where].

The images give the audience something to focus on. Now they can watch, direct their attention, look away from those standing close to them. This contract is a straightforward one. The image is pre-recorded, we, the actors, have 'gone'. In other words, the audience occupy a different time/space to us. They can be a little more voyeuristic, since they can watch without us knowing they are there. They can play the 'role' of being invisible. The film sections can be viewed in the comfort that we cannot see or acknowledge them. Perhaps contradictorily, the distance or divide of the screen allows them to move *closer* to the action. That is, the screen positions them in a perspectival relation, as a passive receiver of its spectacle whilst permitting them the illusion of specular mastery. This is because they see without being seen in return. Thus the screen facilitates their projection into this imaginary world. Of course, at the same time, they know that they are not in command of this narrative. After all, it already has its own destiny, and the audience willingly let it unfold before them. As Elizabeth Cowie reminds us:

Voyeurism is not a relation of unmitigated mastery. In identifying with the other (the mirror image) we are also separated from it as other. It is this which allows us to both be and not be the camera. We take the camera's look as our own, yet we are not at all disturbed when it suddenly pans, although we have not turned our own heads [...] cinema depends on producing in the spectator an oscillation between two knowledges, between seeing events for the first time (identification with the camera) and knowing that the events being seen have already happened, in so far as the spectator is aware that the scene he or she is now seeing precedes scenes which are yet-to-be-seen *but which the spectator knows he or she will see*, implying a separation from the camera. What is involved here is a disavowal.

(1997, p. 101, emphasis in original)

It is through a process of disavowal then, that the audience, if they so wish, can get sucked into the recognisable narrative flow. Simple, sequential edits with alternate voiceovers (him, then her) that suture the images together, and allow them to

interchange identifications between the two characters. This is a convention of film that is easy to follow.²⁵

[IMAGE: She leaves the café to meet him. He is still driving. By terrible and chance coincidence, she crosses the road in front of his car. He knocks her over and kills her. There is a tremendous CRASH].

The screen switches off abruptly.

[SOUND: A voiceover, although this time the voice fills the whole of the lift. It is the Woman].

Their attention is drawn away from the screen. The lift doors open and the voiceover continues. It connects the two spaces. In the lift, there is a shuffle to turn around and see what is beyond the lift doors. There is usually an audible intake of breath from the audience members closest to the front, since the Woman (me) seems to have just appeared in the corridor space wearing a sparkling dress. Ahead is a raised stage, and the Man is seated at a table. Beyond him is a projected backdrop that gives a false impression of space. It is a restaurant.²⁶

In the performance, I feel reassured listening to my voiceovers. The same each time, same words, no mistakes. No slight deviations. Same rhythm, same intonation. My own soft whispery voice, calm and assured. It is me but it is not me – rather like looking at a photo of myself. That picture, staring back at me, as if it does not know me either – has never seen me before in its life. But, of course, it *is* me and I sometimes think back to recording those voiceovers. Sitting at a table in an empty theatre, quietly leafing through the script. Sitting there, with my microphone, speaking those soft words – very quiet and underplayed – like film. And when I slipped up and went wrong (tripped up over my words or put emphasis in the wrong place) I could just stop the recording and start again. That was the beauty of it. But

that very recording, in the moments of the performance, ensures that there are no more mistakes. This final version of my voice that I listen to in the show reflects a version of me that is infallible; I just cannot go wrong. It is a rendering of Alice (and indeed the character of the Woman) that has the whole thing worked out. I like her. I like her a lot. That air of control and the seeming ownership of all those well-ordered words. In fact, the text for the whole show is so rhythmical – so placed. Each word is significant, like poetry, mimicking real speech with a little bit more. Heightened. I know each word and their order so well. I always listen, rarely losing concentration, letting myself be taken on the journey of my character's thoughts, letting her words pull the character around me, like clothing. In this way I can project myself into the words instead of embodying them – I am my Other – removed but sucked in at the same time.

The voiceovers are one of the ways in which 'interiority' is touched on in *Five Miles*. They are the classic (*film noir*) device used to allow audiences 'access' to the character, or the narrator's thoughts. In style, they border on the poetic, although they probably represent the most 'naturally' spoken parts of the show. As the Woman, I adopt a mode of delivery that is suitably underplayed, gently attempting to draw the audience into my world. However, significantly, *Five Miles* is *not* the Woman's world, even though the technique of the voiceover usually signifies a single narrative perspective or point of view. In *Five Miles* the audience are also taken on the Man's journey through his nightmarish visions shown on the screen inside the lift. Arguably then, throughout the show, identification moves back and forth between the Woman and Man. In fact, the Man's hallucinogenic moments frame him in close-up, a device often considered to deliver the 'emotional truth' of a character. He is shown in a

number of disorientating situations, accompanied by corresponding soundtracks, plainly indicative of his existential crisis. One shows him in a cinema, with a projected 'credit sequence' running across his face. The camera pans out to reveal rows and rows of empty seats. He is clearly trapped, alone and terrified. Another sequence places him in kitchen, and as the camera pulls out it becomes clear that he is not in a conventional kitchen at all. Rather, he is standing in a kitchen showroom, and the camera rotates around and around depicting kitchen after empty kitchen, compounding his isolation and detachment from the world.

Back in the performance (and rewinding a little – the Man's nightmare scenes have not happened yet) I am walking towards Richard as he sits at the table. As my first voiceover ends I utter my first line. I am facing the audience now. To the Man I say, "I'm not sure this is going to work" and the Man replies, "It can, it will, I promise" (itd, 2002). In this moment, I can feel the audience's presence, although I honour the classic 'fourth wall' contract. This is theatre's version of the silver screen, although, of course, it pre-dates cinema. In *Five Miles* this 'fourth wall' actually refers to the concrete divide of the screen in the cinema rather (or as well as) reinstating the 'false' divide between audience and players in the space of the theatre. To make it work, we lock ourselves inside the action and stare through the audience in front of us. Of course, we know the audience are there. The audience know *we know* they are there. Yet they obediently play the parts of theatre viewers, standing only a few feet away from us but treating us like 'actors'. That is, they do not attempting to interact with us in any way. (However, we have had young audiences that seem to think we cannot hear them talking in the lift. They make me angry and nervous. Can't they adhere to the very British tradition of shutting the hell up when they come and see a piece of theatre? On occasion I have wanted so much to break the performance contract and

tell them to be quiet and concentrate. After all, if they do not listen to the text they are likely to lose the thread of the narrative and then we will never get them back²⁷).

It is here, in the live moment, that we ‘play’ our characters. These characters are not psychologically rounded, although they bear traces of psychology. I would say that they move between the psychological, the stereotypical and the archetypal, and that the staging of the show itself, as I will go on to demonstrate, reflects these transitions (even though they are not always easy to separate). The Man is individualistic, driven by money and the pursuit of profit, and sees the world as a place that can be rationally calculated and measured. The Woman, on the contrary, believes in the disorderly forces of the earth, flesh, blood and desire – a vision of mythological proportions. It is true that these viewpoints are attached to classic gender representations, since the Man represents the Head and the ‘real’ or mortal world, and the Woman represents the Body and the metaphorical world. However, within the *mise-en-scène* of the performance, the Woman apparently sets herself up as the Man’s antithesis, in order to disrupt or question his rigid worldview. Nevertheless, even though the Woman’s ‘stance’ appears to be taken up by choice, I attempt to embody the ‘reality’ of her discursive position. In other words, I *identify with it*. In this sense each worldview has equal ‘authority’ within the piece.

The conflict between the two potential lovers as a barrier to fulfilment is indeed a classic of the romance genre. As Pearce and Stacey state:

Typically, the [romance] story offers the potential of a heterosexual love union whose fulfilment is threatened by a series of barriers or problems. At the most general level, then, romance might be described as a *quest* for love; a quest for another about whom the subject has very definite fantasies, investments and beliefs. This quest involves the staging of desire whose fulfilment may be realised with attainment, or just as likely, with loss. To whichever closure the

narrative tends, however, like all quests its structure involves the overcoming of obstacles: in the case of romance this means the conquest of barriers in the name of love, and perhaps, by extension, also in the name of truth, knowledge, justice or freedom.

(1995, p. 15-16, emphasis in original)

However, within our 'quest' narrative we were aware when making the piece that the risk of instituting archetypes and/or stereotypes in fictional structures is that these depictions will be reinforced rather than put into question. Indeed, these stereotyped figures appear to obey the 'Law of Genre' that Derrida describes, since they sustain an interpretation of things according to what is *already understood about the world*. However, specific formal and narrative operations at work in the show are an attempt to disrupt these belief systems or 'self-ordering' mechanisms. In other words, there are certain ways in which we (itd) attempted to wear away at the rigidity of such entrenched ways of being. As I will go on to show, this 'wearing away' at the character's identificatory positions required that Richard and I 'embodied' our roles.

Indeed, while performing in *Five Miles*, I attempt a certain psychological investment in my character in order to prepare me for scene three, 'The Argument'. My character is hard-nosed, but also sympathetic, and she clearly has real affection for the Man. I imagine that there has to be something at stake in this partnership, otherwise its eventual failure does not work as well.²⁸ In the scene, before the lift doors open, I sit at the café table and watch the projected sea behind me, lapping at the shore. Here I 'get into character' by working myself up to deliver a torrent of angry words. Despite the poetic style of the text, I really try to play this scene 'for real', and to make my vehemence convincing.²⁹ I imagine the rows that might have gone before this one, the endless rows, and I attempt to inject enough emotion into my words as if this speech stands in for a whole host of rows and battles that have gone before it. I try to

embody, to a certain extent, the tension between couples on the brink of love, on the edge of that devastating fall that is tearing them apart. It is generic and stereotypical, that is, the relationship between the Man and the Woman stands in for many relationships, but as actors embodying characters we make it *particular* as well. Like Richard Hawley playing Salvatore in *L'Ascensore*, we invest in the moment. This is perhaps one of the difficulties (or one of the interesting things?) about *Five Miles*. It almost makes the promise of realism but never fully delivers it. The flirting scene moves towards the awkwardness of a first or second date, where conversation is strained and the whole thing is a bit embarrassing, yet never quite sees it through since the scene is so formal. The scene is too ordered and controlled for that – it hurtles forward at great speed, spinning through the question-and-answer game with slick precision. There is a possibility of identification here but probably always distance as well.

Importantly, however, the Woman speaks the *Man's* words in this scene and not her own. We always understood this as a crucial dynamic of the show. We were really interested in the notion of 'replay', which is something we probably all associate with matters the heart. This is that classic argument that is rerun again and again after it is all over. It is the clichéd ritual of going over and over what was said, as well as rehearsing what one should have said, or could have said, given the chance to go back in time. This is reversed in scene four when the Man recounts the Woman's words. The Man and the Woman both describe, in exact detail, the worldview of the other, and the other replies, "you've quite a memory". This is perhaps unusual of these kinds of arguments, since the rejoinder might usually be "I never said that!" or "you are taking my argument the wrong way" or "out of context". Instead, the precise

replicas of each other's arguments intimate a rehearsal of these ideas, in the rehearsal of the show itself as well as the plethora of cultural narratives of romance. In *Five Miles*, the repetition of arguments also implies the actual 'enactment' of memory space, since the 'real' argument is accurately re-constructed after it is said and done. Indeed, the more I thought about it while enacting the show, I felt that we spoke each other's voices *as* memory.

It seems to me that these scenes explore the very processes of identification, since they reveal an attempt by both characters to actually occupy the position of the other by literally *taking on the other's words*. If we observe that our image of ourselves always comes to us from outside ourselves, from the place of the other, then I would say that *Five Miles* re-enacts this process through the way the Man and Woman speak. As Elizabeth Cowie makes clear, "our image of ourselves always comes to us from outside ourselves, from the place of the other. The story of our identities is the negotiation of this otherness of ourselves" (1997, p. 3-4). Put another way, we can only ever see ourselves through the other, from the other's point of view or even *as other in time*, thus as other to the self. It could be argued then, that the 'I' only enters consciousness as a delayed reproduction. Thus there is no true self to be retrospectively recovered, or real self to be uncovered, since the self is continually revised from the point of view of the present and in relation to future imaginings. Recognition, then, is also *re-cognition*. In this respect identity cannot be seen as an unchanging set of contents but a position in relation to the other of identification. In *Five Miles*, when I actually speak the Man's words, I actually give up my own position through my identification with, or contamination by, his.

The notion of ‘replay’ is emphasised since the real me disappears altogether in the fourth performed scene, as my voice and image are literally ‘played’ on the projection screen with Richard interacting, live. The process of my character being recorded also refers to the line in the play when Richard says:

When I first heard your voice, it sounds stupid to say this, but it...it electrified me – I played the message again and again. Moving the words back and forth. As if they might let me know what you looked like, what you would be wearing, your occupation, your age, your scent.

(itd 2002)

And my character repeats this later on, when she says, “To push me, like my words on your answer machine, back and forth in your imagination” (itd 2002). I am recorded in the scene itself, so the Man can literally ‘play’ the Woman again and again. This hints at this narrative having been told over and over again. Not only in the three performances a night, but in the classic (film) romance that everyone knows. Indeed, Pearce and Stacey explore the argument that romance is indeed still a central pre-occupation in society precisely because of its *narrativity*, or as a phenomenon that is “always already written” (1994, p. 12), and is, in Stevi Jackson’s terms, “one of the most compelling discourses by which any one of us is inscribed” (in Pearce and Stacey’s words, 1994, p. 12). In this sense romantic discourse survives as a set of conventions (in film, literature, theatre and life) since it exerts an extraordinary power over us.

I think the formal construction of this scene in *Five Miles* is highly significant since, for the first time in the show, the human figure is imprinted on the projected backdrop behind the stage. I love this part of the performance. Partly, of course, because my

work is done: I can sit with my feet up behind the set and simply enjoy the last half of the show. But I also think this is a huge turning point in *Five Miles*. Prior to this, the ‘picture’ on the screen has been motionless, save for the flickering of candle flames on the tables in scene one, a fan rotating on the bar in scene two and the lapping of the waves on the shore in scene three. Thinking about it when the show was made, and while having time to reflect on it on tour, these backdrops remind me of nineteenth century illusionistic theatre, in which painted scenery is made to look as ‘real’ as possible, rather than appearing to reference the cinematic screen. It is interesting that when we conceived of these ‘backdrops’ we had in mind 1950s and 60s film sets in which the background of the action was faked. Sometimes they were studio constructions of certain locations that the actors would perform in front of, for example, in *Mary Poppins* (1964). Another classic device is where a static car is made to appear ‘in motion’ using projected film. That is, when pieces of film depicting disappearing landscapes are played through the back window of a stationary, and studio-housed, vehicle. Yet in reality, these backdrops are much more ‘theatrical’ than we had first anticipated. It is not until the moment when my life-sized body stretches out on a projected bed that cinema appears to be invoked directly. However, where traditional narrative cinema seeks to cancel out the screen through the three dimensional continuity of space and sound, this screen seems to become stubbornly visible at the back of the stage. It is no longer a backdrop or support for the action but a solid structure, cut out from the cinema’s Imaginary continuity (or the ‘world’ as Bazin might describe it). I would argue that this device pulls the action even farther away from realism since the audience must negotiate Richard’s spoken text played against my already-said utterances, as well as move between my screened body and Richard’s live one.

Because of this interplay, it is not appropriate to argue that the audience identify with my character instead of Richard's, since I am 'cut off' from the audience and Richard is not. If we accept Bazin's assertion that film invokes identification more readily than theatre, since we can project ourselves into its absent world, then in this case, the absent screen is *made present* by its contrast with Richard's body on stage. In this case there is probably a measure of distance existent between my character and the audience. Furthermore, Richard's heightened theatrical language and declamatory delivery are arguably *already* distancing, since poetry is an opening onto an abstracted encounter with language, where one is presented with the materiality of language itself rather than (or as well as) its signifying components. But it might seem more so when compared to my underplayed voice and movements reminiscent of film acting (and I really did have to underplay this scene – it is funny how the camera really emphasises everything). Finally, there must be an extent to which the audience *know* they are being cheated, thus separating them further from the fictional action. In fact, I wonder if they try to work out how this scene *actually operates*, since Richard performs in perfect synch with my speaking image.

However, since the formal arrangement of this scene actually impacts on the narrative meaning of this scene, I wonder if the audience still get sucked into its world. I would say that the scene could be read in the following ways. The first is that the Woman, once she is 'screened', is revealed *as* archetype or mythical fiction, whereas the Man, at least within the diagesis, is 'real'. The Woman could also be seen as a spectre of his imagination, since she actually dissolves into the world of the screen. In fact, this is how we had originally understood this scene in its making. Otherwise, she might

seem destined to play out her role within the repetitive structure of this and other relationships, since she occupies the ‘repetitive’ medium of the cinematic itself. Furthermore and significantly, her existence inside the screen world suggests that she remains out of the reach (and out of the time-space) of the Man. This would appear to secure the eventual failure of their love affair since the Woman’s plea to the Man at the end of the scene, “take my hand” is *literally* impossible (itd, 2002).

However, whilst I sit behind the set watching my (back-to-front) imprinted body on the screen, I listen to the way Richard’s words are perfectly timed with mine. It seems to me that these characters are irrefutably connected. Each character, and each medium, that is, the live and the pre-recorded, occupies the other, produces the other and leans on the other in a symbiotic relationship. Indeed, if I am trapped by the technological frame then so is he – he must stick unremittingly to the track I have laid down for him. Put another way, his words must always fit ‘in-between’ mine (or my character’s). Also, as I have thus far mentioned, he is destined to speak in *her* words, since his voice, the very origin of presence as Plato would have it, is denied. It would appear that he too is trapped within this mediating apparatus; he can only speak as *part of her*.

The Man and Woman are connected in *Five Miles*, yet they never actually fall in love. This is their destiny within the *mise-en-scène* of the performance. After all, narratives of romance, as Pearce and Stacey remind us, are just as likely to end with loss (1994, p. 18). He must walk away (to death, it is suggested) and she must continue the process of meeting other lovers for eternity. In the final corridor section, the Man stands before the backdrop whilst the Woman’s (my) last recorded voiceover is

played. I am projected onto the screen and my image circles a camera that spins on its axis. Her last few lines are as follows:

So much already endured but nothing but time lies ahead of me. You see, I would like the chance to fall, to be utterly lost, to submit myself to somebody else, to be at their mercy, to ask them for forgiveness, to give myself over utterly, selflessly, to always coming back, whatever happens, to always coming back, whatever is said and done.

(itd 2000)

The Woman's greatest desire then, is to fall in love, since love signals an escape from the endless cycle of affairs. This desire possibly falls in line with Pearce and Stacey's statement that "we may (as individuals, as communities, as nations) no longer *believe* in love, but we still fall for it" (1995, p. 12). Love's ability to transcend all is perhaps why the question raised at the opening of romance narratives is, according to Pearce and Stacey, "'will they or won't they?'" or, rather, *how* will they?" (1995, p. 16). They claim, "Pleasure in the 'progress of romance' lies in the solution to the narrative problems, and the affirmation of the desire to see 'love conquering all', thus confirming its transcendental power" (1995, p. 16). In *Five Miles*, the Man and the Woman do not fall in love, although the Woman still puts her trust in the ultimate 'fall' as a chance to take flight, to break away from a succession of hollow and unfulfilling partnerships.

It is clear then, that we wanted love and its intricacies to frame *Five Miles*. However, whilst being interested in the conventions of romance narratives that tend to explore love's transformative power, we were also drawn to the *dangerous* characteristics of love. After all, love itself is an identification that might signify the loss of self into an Other. Love, according to Jean-Luc Nancy, is a cut, or cleft in the self. In other

words, love, however affirmative it may be, always *undoes* the self, and might have the capacity to trouble such deep-rooted systems of understanding and configuring the world that are presented by the Man and the Woman in *Five Miles*. Love's potential to 'disrupt' the self is articulated by Nancy:

Love presents the 'I' to itself as broken... To the 'I' it presents this: that it, this subject, has been touched, breached in its subjectivity, and from now on, it *is*, for the time of love, broken or cracked, however slightly. It *is* so, which means that the break or the wound is neither an accident nor a property that the subject could make its own. Since it is a break of its property as subject, it is, essentially, an interruption in the process of relating to oneself outside oneself... For as long as it lasts, love does not cease to come from without and to remain, not outside but this outside itself, each time singular, a blade plunged into me and that I cannot rejoin because it disjoins me.

(in (ed.) Royle 2000 p. 155-6)

Love is perhaps the strongest form of identification and identification's ultimate risk. However, the framing of *Five Miles* as a *filmic romance narrative*, particularly in terms of our emphasis on the notion of replay and the interactions between the filmic and the theatrical, are important since they implicitly recognise the *cultural* dimension of love relations. After all, even though love can be imagined as "mysterious, inexplicable, irrational, uncontrollable, compelling and ecstatic" and appears to be "experienced as a dramatic, deeply felt inner transformation, as something that lifts us above the everyday world", I would argue that romantic narratives themselves contribute to the cultural construction of love – which arguably *style* or fashion our emotions on the matter (Stevi Jackson in ed. Pearce and Stacey 1995, p. 58). As Michelle Rosaldo claims, "feelings are not substances to be discovered in our blood, but social practices organised by stories that we both enact and tell. They are structured by our forms of understanding" (1985 p. 243). In other words, the love we feel for others is learnt, cultured and ritualised through discourses such as the classic

romance narrative and its derivatives, and these discourses arguably help us *know what to do* when we have loving feelings. However, as Jackson points out, as subjects, we play an active role in negotiating cultural discourses in order to locate our own ways of being in the world and in our interaction with others. Indeed, she locates a need to:

explore further the possibility that our subjectivities – including our emotions – are shaped by the social and cultural milieu we inhabit through processes that involve our active participation. We create for ourselves a sense of what our emotions are, of what being in love is, through positioning ourselves within discourses, constructing narratives of the self, drawing on whatever cultural resources are available to us.

(1995, p. 58)

In other words, as subjects of culture we play an active role in self construction, since we are both complicit with, as well as actively resist, the cultural objects (such as film romances) to which we are attached.

As *Five Miles* draws to a close, I sit behind the set and listen, or occasionally leave before the end of the show. I tiptoe out in the final ('night-club') video section; go back to the dressing room. I abandon the finale, leaving the machine to play itself out, leaving my recorded voice to speak out the show for me. The show loses its ending as I get ready for the next one or get changed to go home. Yet sometimes I stay to hear the story out, listen to the final words, and try to catch the audience's reaction. The music is always too loud so I can only ever hear a low murmur. I press my ear to the drapes as the audience walk out, imagining their words, picturing their expressions. We never get to see them, to look them in the eye, as we do not perform the rather strange and slightly embarrassing ritual of the curtain call. As we do not

see this show as strictly a theatre piece, so we felt we could get away with not bowing. Mind you, this leaves us with no finality, nothing to mark the end. Instead we get caught in the cycle of the performance, its endless repetition, three times a night. The love story endlessly circulated, spun and re-spun. And here I am now, repeating (and rewriting) it all again as I contemplate the show in my own narrativisation.

¹ Although, of course, their presentation on small monitor screens might associate them more specifically with television.

² Pastiche: unlike the satire and parody that show a critical attitude, pastiche does not display a specific attitude – is usually affectionate/celebratory/nostalgic.

³ However, Derrida would argue that genre is always attached to the author's name since it is impossible to write outside of genre.

⁴ Since my discussion here will revolve around specific *theatre* pieces, perhaps it is important to point out at this stage that the theatre is rarely discussed in explicitly generic terms. (This is paradoxical since it was probably Aristotle who invented the concept of generic kinds). This could be said about the depiction of plays themselves as well as associated critical and analytical material. Mainstream theatre particularly tends to be referred to by author or director rather than by genre; a Shakespeare or Beckett performance say, or a Peter Brook production. However, that does not mean to say that theatrical genres do not exist. Indeed, comedy of manners, farce, melodrama, theatre of the absurd, (German) expressionism etc. could be described as genres, although they tend to be referred to instead as 'historical movements'. Also Shakespeare clearly uses the generic structures of comedy and tragedy (or tragi-comedy), which I will discuss in more detail in just a moment. It is perhaps fair to say that is the more commercial art forms, such as film, television and popular (written) fiction, which are regularly defined in generic terms. It is interesting that the West End musical is probably the exception in the realm of theatre, although this is probably the most commercial form of theatre in Western societies.

⁵ It is important to point out that genres do not only refer to specific narrative kinds. Indeed, Lyotard finds a philosophical use for the word to describe the 'norms' by which human beings make sense of who or what they are. He uses the phrase "genres of discourse" (Lyotard 1988 p. 29) to describe meaning-making paradigms such as history, biology, psychology or philosophy. The filmic and the theatrical could, as meaning making paradigms, be duly added to this list. As Simon Malpas explains in reference to Lyotard's argument:

Different genres of discourse have different criteria for judging the value of particular ways of linking onto phrases, and each genre would forbid certain forms of linking. In science, for instance, it would not be legitimate to link the phrase 'Isn't that pretty!' to 'Copper sulphate in a solid state consists of blue crystals' as to do so would take one out of the discourse of science and into aesthetics.

(2003, p. 65)

A genre of discourse is, therefore, a way of giving *authority* to particular types of linkage and categorising phrases into a body of knowledge. These bodies of knowledge provide recognisable and established parameters for understanding. He contends that a genre of discourse "imposes its mode of linking onto 'our' phrase and onto 'us'" (Malpas 2003, p. 65) and that this is so because:

No phrase is the first. This does not only mean that others precede it, but also that the modes of linking implied in the preceding phrases – possible modes of linking therefore – are ready to take the phrase into account and to inscribe it into the pursuit of certain stakes, to actualize themselves by means of it. In this sense, a phrase that comes along is put into play within a conflict between genres of discourse.

(2003, p. 65)

He declares that "[t]his conflict is a differend, since the success (or the validation) proper to one genre is not proper to the others" (Lyotard 1988, p. 136). Put another way, whenever a particular link is made, all other possible linkages (that is, ones that are not legitimate within the particular genre one is employing) are suppressed. Several linkages are viable, but only one can be instituted at any one time. This triumph of one phrase over all other potential phrases invokes the politics of the differend, since certain possibilities of speaking are excluded, certain voices are silenced and there is a failure to represent the importance of some events. In other words, genres of discourse permit only select forms of phrasing. Furthermore, those linkages impose silences since genres always operate through a process of exclusion. In the show, *L'Ascensore*, it could be argued that the consensus generated by the dominant generic discourses of both the filmic and the theatrical might be tested by the differend that emerges when the two are placed in opposition.

⁶ In Christian Metz's landmark essay, "The Imaginary Signifier", he maintains that the crucial identification that we make in film, what he terms 'primary cinematic identification, is fundamentally

tied up with Lacan's formation of the constitutive instance of identity: that is, the mirror phase that I have already discussed. Christian Metz assumes that the spectator identifies, not with her own image, as in the mirror phase, but *with the act of looking itself*. In other words, the spectator sees herself seeing herself (from the place of the other). The cinema spectator imagines thus:

I am *all-perceiving*. All perceiving as one says all-powerful [...] the instance, in other words, which *constitutes* the cinematic signifier (it is I who make the film). [T]he spectator *identifies with himself*, with himself as a pure act of perception (as wakefulness, alertness): as the condition of possibility of the perceived and hence as a kind of transcendental subject, which comes before every *there is*.

(Metz 1982, p. 48)

According to Metz then, the primary identification in mainstream cinema is an identification with the *camera itself*. Indeed, the spectator takes on the 'look' of the director through specific shots, as if it was by her own look that the images unfold on the screen before her. This identification subsequently places the subject everywhere at once, and is thus a repetition of the formative moment in which the subject imagines itself as complete, autonomous and all-powerful. In other words, the 'pull' of cinema is that it offers us the pleasure and security of imagined unity. This theory is a very narrow conceptualisation of identification, which is opened up by Elizabeth Cowie in her exploration of identifications that are not specifically connected to cinema's 'apparatus'. See Cowie, 1984, chapter two.

⁷ Of course realist cinema demands a transparency of form, so every effort is made to conceal and contain the camera.

⁸ The 1930s is the classic age of the gangster movie – see Haywood 1996, p. 148.

⁹ The elevator appears to transport him to his destination, and this passage is indicated using the creaking sounds of the lift's mechanisms, and the display of floor numbers on an overhead panel that light up in succession.

¹⁰ The *Femme Fatale* is also clearly a figure from theatre, although tends now to be associated with film. Clytemnestra (from Greek Mythology) and Lady Macbeth (from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*) are obvious *Femme Fatale* heroines.

¹¹ Although reversed here, since his death happens at the beginning of the drama, Haywood maintains that the gangster's "death at the end of the film is an ideological necessity" because as a member of the "proletarian class", this was the only way he could achieve success was "by stealing it". He must "ultimately fail because the American Dream cannot be fulfilled in this cynical way" (Haywood 1996, p. 146).

¹² Indeed, cinema is characterised as form able to set in motion the unconscious fantasies of the spectator. This is because arguably, as Robert Stam and company point out, "the signifiers [of film] (its mode of meaning production) are activated in the viewing. The film's images and sounds are not meaningful without the (unconscious) work of the spectator, and it is in this sense that every film is a construction of its viewer" (Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis 1992, p. 139). So it follows, as Stam and company elucidate, "The cinema-spectator of psychoanalytic film theory is thus central to the "mechanism" of the entire cinematic operation" (1992, p. 142). They continue "The film-text – whose affinity with the dream is signalled by the fact that both are "stories told in images" that the subject recounts to itself – engages this viewer in a complex of pleasure and meaning by mobilizing deep-rooted structures of fantasy, identification and vision, and it does this through interlocking systems of narrative, continuity and point of view. The result is that in every viewing of a film, spectators can be said to repeatedly 'enunciate their own economy of desire.'" (1992, p. 139). In other words, the practices of dreaming and watching film are understood to similarly activate the subject's subconscious desires.

¹³ However, there are possible ways that we do identify with the characters, and the actors behind the characters, at certain moments in the show. I will go on to explore these in due course.

¹⁴ Music videos, advertising, etc.

¹⁵ However, as Harris astutely points out:

There is no *one* theory, strategy or form that can ensure, provoke or even explicate how subversion may be achieved in any given situation in any given sphere. To imply that there is, is to reinstate a notion of author's intentions and to ignore the significance of the staging, deciding in advance on the terms and conditions of any future subversion or contestation.

(1999, p. 80, emphasis in original)

¹⁶ It is perhaps interesting that Richard Hawley now works in soap opera, a 'realistic' form that habitually uses the 'close up' shot as a means to deliver the emotional truth of a particular character's situation.

¹⁷ This is apparent again in a scene where Salvatore's father, Lucio, shoots himself in the head. At this moment, what appears to be the character's brains spurt out of the back of his head. This instance is so gratifying because the illusion is so convincing – yet, as is classic when watching theatre, I could not help wondering how on earth it was achieved. I found out later that an air pipe containing the 'brains' was attached to the actor's back and up to his head. At the moment of the shot, a button was pressed which released the air and the 'brains'. If this scene was in a film, I am sure I would have been totally 'taken in' by this moment and responded with horror rather than delight.

¹⁸ Of course, the piece has already been conceived and rehearsed, so in this sense it is 'historical', that is, already made.

¹⁹ Flashback literally refers to the past whereas narrative itself is established as in the 'present' but with a destiny – the end has already been decided.

²⁰ Insomniac clearly demonstrate a knowledge of 'film theory' in the show, which may effect spectator identification – after all, not all audience members will be familiar with the way theorists have frequently read film through a psychoanalytical lens. However, arguably Freudian theories of child development are very ingrained in culture and events/stories such as the 'primal scene' can probably be assumed to be widely understood.

²¹ We find out later on that Lucio is Salvatore's father when the scene is replayed from the other end of the telephone.

²² See Appendix 1 for a detailed description of roles and responsibilities.

²³ I sometimes think of these nightmare scenes as similar to advertisements since a condensed story is told through images in just a few seconds.

²⁴ It is worth noting however that the audience are never addressed directly.

²⁵ And indeed television and video.

²⁶ I will comment on these backdrops shortly.

²⁷ It is perhaps interesting that in the context of experimental performance that apparently breaks with certain theatrical conventions, I still want, as a performer, the traditional boundaries between performer and audience to remain in tact. I see that this is a contradiction, yet in the performance moment I am trying to stick to a rather regimented theatrical score, and require the audience's attention and concentration in order to carry the performance out. I also want them to follow the narrative thread of the performance, which is again an adherence to a more traditional mode of theatre, and perhaps part of the generic 'trap'. However, I have to accept that their placing in an unconventional audience space might open out their interpretation of their 'role' as spectators – they may not feel they have to stick to the traditional audience/performer contract. Or more simply, they may assume that we just can't hear them chattering in the lift enclosure! It is perhaps interesting that the maintenance of the symbolic world we have created is still so important for us as performers, and this is certainly related to the traditional fourth wall and generic contract. Take another example. Now and again, a member of the audience gets hot, dizzy or claustrophobic, and has to leave the performance. The usher presses the panic button and our technician closes the show down until she can restore order. The first time it happened was in Richard's scene, the part that has to be the most precise, and the most ordered. Our technician suddenly stopped the video, and asked if everyone would 'bear with us for a moment'. Richard was in the middle of his first long speech. My image on screen flicked off and turned to static, and Richard stood on stage. I couldn't see him, but imagined him standing, head down, waiting. I stood by the technician's box, horrified. The worst had happened. The boundary was broken. The space-time co-ordinates of the performance had been shattered, ripped apart. It's surprising how unbreakable that boundary is. When the show is stopped, the rhythm punctured, when time is made to slow down. It is literally a matter out of place, a violation of the symbolic world. As a performer, it is utterly terrifying. This is the ultimate interruption of the 'live' in the theatre space – this is indeed the *really live* – not the structured and rehearsed performance of *Five Miles*. In this instance the man in the lift was led out, and the usher asked Richard if he was ready to continue. He said he was. I stood behind the set, in nervous anticipation. The video was switched on again and my image reappeared. Richard promptly jumped forward a couple of lines (good judgement – VHS always reels on a little bit) and the video me came in right on cue. It was really something. It could not have been better had it been planned. It happened again just a couple of weeks later with a lift full of reviewers. This time it was during my long speech, and someone in the audience fainted. The light came on in the lift and I froze, stock-still, frightened to catch anyone's eye, desperate to maintain some semblance of the

performance contract, the 'illusion', the pretence. How foolish I felt, and how ridiculous. What a strange thing to do, make a bargain with the audience, pretend they are not there and look through them. I could do nothing but wait until those around me could establish some sort of order. I just wanted to remain *in* the performance; not letting the outside world let me loose my train of thought. In retrospect I feel I should have looked at the audience and said without embarrassment, "Don't worry. We will get the show back on as soon as possible. Is everyone else feeling alright?" This would have allowed the interruption to become a part of the show's order – an integrated moment – the order one so desires as a performer in a show bound by a fourth wall generic structure. I should have handed out glasses of water and observed everyone in the lift, perhaps even acknowledging the people in the audience that I knew. "How are you? Ok? See you after the show." But in that moment I could not. I was stupefied. All I could think was, "what is my next line? Where am I?" My mind had gone blank and I was starting to panic. I was convinced I could not go on. Until: Are you ready to continue? I nodded, automatically. Then we'll begin. Again. And in the machine, just like clockwork, I came back in on cue.

²⁸ Having said all this I suppose I have always considered my character as part of a relationship rather than being a character in her own right. This is partly because her 'job' is to set herself up in opposition to the partners she meets, in order that she might bring them to a better understanding of themselves. A feminist critique of my role in the show might be raised by Sally Potter's experimental film *Thriller* (1989) in which the heroine returns to life and asks, "why is it that the romantic heroines must suffer, if not die, for the tragic heroes to achieve universal transcendence?" My character is indeed an angel of death, attempting to bring the man's character to a sense of self understanding. We do attempt to address these stereotyped positions through our wearing away at the male/female cultural positions.

²⁹ We wanted to use a stylised language for a number of reasons. One is that we required a space in which quite philosophical ideas about love and partnership might be explored. For example, the notion of the rational mind versus the unruly flesh in the context of the story of the Garden of Eden. We also feel that in such a short space of time the story needed a stylised frame in order that quite a lot of information could be revealed. Further, we like the poetry and beauty of the language as a way of exploring notions of love, which is difficult to express in ordinary speech.

CONCLUSION

I don't feel that I'm in a position to choose between an operation that we'll call negative a nihilist, an operation that would set about furiously dismantling systems, and the other operation. I love very much everything that I deconstruct in my own manner; the texts I want to read from a deconstructive point of view are texts I love, with that impulse of identification which is indispensable for reading.

(Derrida 1988, p. 152, emphasis in original)

Individuals as subjects identify (or do not identify) with the 'positions' to which they are summoned; [they also] fashion, stylise, produce and 'perform' these positions, and [...] they never do so completely, for once and for all time, and some never do, or are in a constant, agonistic process of struggling with, resisting, re-negotiating and accommodating the normative or regulative rules with which they confront and regulate themselves.

(Hall 1998, p. 4)

...the process of becoming a subject is more fractured and potentially unsuccessful than Althusser's schema seems on the surface to suggest, and that this fracturing and failure is a way of theorising differences between structures of identification does not fully or adequately name the subject, or divides subjects by naming them in contradictory and conflicting ways. Given this, the subject as such is never the subject as such, because its points of excess to the very name or signifier of 'the subject' locates it precisely as marked or named by colliding regimes of address which attach (asymmetrical) value and meaning to specific subject positions.

(Ahmed 1998, p. 114, emphasis in original)

It is [...] characteristic that not only a man's (sic) knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life – and this is the stuff that stories are made of – first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death. Just as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life comes to an end – unfolding the views of himself under which he has encountered himself without being aware of it – suddenly in his expressions and looks the unforgettable emerges and imparts to everything that concerned him that authority which even the poorest wretch in dying possesses for the living around him. This authority is at the very source of the story.

(Benjamin 1973, p. 94)

So here it is. The ending. This project has had so many beginnings and so many endings that I feel somewhat at a loss in my confrontation with the actual and final end of it all. I

suppose it all began in 1998 when a group of us decided to establish a performance company. But was that the ‘real’ beginning? My practice-as-research actually began after we had made and toured both *Einmal ist Keinmal* and *Ark*. Armed with research questions that were written in response to our first two pieces, I embarked, with the other company members, on another piece. *Guilty Pleasures* began, was in some sense ‘finished’, taken on tour and then finally laid to rest, after many months of intensity: the process and then performance after performance. Eventually I moved on to the task of finding ways to express it all in writing, piecing together my notes and anecdotes as well as reflecting on and judging what we had made. Then I began it all again with another show. Finally, here I am now, searching for the right words to sum it all up, to conclude, to bring it all together.

The writing of this thesis began with a struggle of expression: a grappling with what it means to write about its work from a place *within*. Another complication, perhaps, is that this work is not *my* work, but the endeavour of a collective. We are a group of people that make work together and apparently share a common vision. Of course, the process of making theatre is nowhere near as romantic as the consummation of a shared vision or practice. It is always a struggle – a movement with and between ideas, an effort to agree without yielding to compromise, a negotiation of personalities, personal interests as well as a race against the clock. Both pieces were made in only four weeks each. Such is the pressure of making work in a professional context.

However, in some senses *Guilty Pleasures* and *Five Miles* were less difficult than our first two shows, since they both had very clear starting points and sites of reference. *Guilty Pleasures* was made in response to Eliot's text. This response took place through play – playing with the words, improvising around them. Attempting different stagings. We also talked. A lot. In *Five Miles*, the original ideas and concepts for the show came about through a series of long conversations, where one idea led on from another, so it's impossible to attribute particular ideas to individual group members. I worked with Andrew Quick on the script, read and commented on his drafts and came up with the concept for scene two (Flirting), although he extended it and altered the voiceover so it suited the style of the rest of the piece. I liked the stylised nature of the question-and-answer game, as it gave us a mechanism that allowed us to avoid the 'soap opera' of general chitchat. It also permitted our characters to 'reveal themselves', as answering a question (making a choice) is always ethical. I am also convinced that it was my idea to have my image projected onto the backdrop, with Richard interacting 'live'. I was interested in the narrative possibilities of the Woman becoming trapped in the televisual world, out of the Man's grasp. However, it was a pinch from Station House Opera's *Roadmetal Sweetbread* (1998).

The 'we' and the 'our' that I have continually referred to in this thesis then, is the collaborative eye/I of itd. However, whilst I am going about attributing authorship, then it is obviously the case that the words and that fall outside quotation marks in these pages are mine. Nevertheless I have tried not to submit our performance work to a single academic voice. Of course I am compelled, within the rigor of a thesis to present a

relatively 'linear' argument, drawing 'evidence' from philosophical writings, history and cultural theory. In my search for this verification and in keeping with the tradition of thesis writing, I have abandoned one source for another, slashed sentences or whole paragraphs out of the writings of others in order to create quotable quotations: quotations that (at least in my opinion) get to the heart of my argument.

At the same time I have tried to explore what it means to *return* – that is, to go back to a performance in writing. The act of remembering, or reminiscing, is always critical, affirmative and selective. It always involves the placing of edges around a story to give it shape and coherence. My story presents its own omissions, confections and forgettings. It also involves re-writing. In the 'repeat' there is always shifting or movement. Movement away from the truth – if that is ever graspable – and movement towards something other. A gift to the event of our performances maybe? In my writing, I have always attempted to do justice to our work, to be as honest and open as I can, to offer my love. Like any act of love, frustration, loss and anguish surround and penetrate it. Making these shows, and submitting them to an exploration in this thesis, has had its difficult and painful moments.

Further, re-visiting these shows has inevitably provoked my own critical reflection, since now, with the benefit of hindsight, I have more distance. I can see ways in which these shows could have developed and moved on. As I mentioned in chapter one, I feel there was too much distance and not enough closeness or intimacy in our execution of *Guilty Pleasures*. My own personal closeness and attachment to this show, I feel, has much to

do with the *time* I had to share with it. I learnt to love this show through performing it and contemplating its operations night after night. On a single viewing, some audiences found it difficult to ‘access’. It was a complex piece that required a really attentive and switched on audience. (However, the performance work I like most is that which demands a second or third viewing. When I saw *Play-boy* for the first time my response at the end was: I have to see that piece again.)

So to return from my digression, how can I place myself inside the work, speak from inside it, explore its very mechanisms from the very place that I occupy – its inside? At the same time, how can I speak of my position outside the work since, as I have argued throughout this thesis, our work always negotiates the place of detachment? Further, as I have just mentioned, I have accrued or built up a distance from the work by performing it again and again, reading it again, imagining it all over again. Now, writing this, I am distanced in time. It has been almost two years since *Five Miles* stopped touring. Of course, the risk of distanciation is the attempt to fix objects in space and time, and accede to the violence of universalism. This is why I have tried to move from closeness and distance in negotiation with my own work, which also, as I have argued throughout this thesis, reflects its very practices. I have used different registers of expression, such as the academic Alice, the practitioner Alice, the performer Alice, as well as the Alice that is one fifth of itd. I have also moved between different temporalities in my writing. I have attempted to *return*, to get back inside those moments of the performance, to occupy them once more, to read the work as an insider. This, of course, is partly narrative technique – a ‘true’ return is not really possible.

Of course, identification in performance is a difficult subject to address since one's own identifications, although regulated, also depend on the ways in which one is materially, historically and experientially constituted. This is where autobiographical criticism potentially undoes itself. To speak of my own placing through identification is how I speak of and for myself. How then, to speak of oneself without presuming to speak for others, for you, who is already absent? How can I speak of your identifications? Of course, I cannot. As I have already described, my relationship with my work is a long one that includes many extensive and involved discussions with other company members (in the theatre, in the pub, late-night phone-calls, long car journeys), rehearsals, writing, performing, touring and performing. My identifications have shifted, I have cared more about some things than others, I have fallen in love with moments in our shows and fallen out of love with others. In *Five Miles and Falling* a huge part of our preparation for the show was the taking hundreds of photographs of me in various places all over the country. This took several months, and was done for the gallery installation that accompanied the performance. Here the floor outside the performance space was covered with thousands of photographs that piled up on a desk and then flowed onto the floor. Each photograph depicts me as the Woman dressed in the purple sequined dress that I wore throughout the show. On a tape player my voice called out different names and meeting places in a kind of litany. We imagined that audience members might hear their own name, to implicate them in the narratives that this scene provokes, encouraging them to contemplate how they might act (or have previously behaved) in such an encounter. The taking of these photographs took up many hours of our time, and was

fascinating to me during the process since it marked a departure from our other work. For the first time we had included an 'installation' aspect to *Five Miles*. It gave the performance 'another' element, and other narrative possibilities. I suppose whilst writing this I have concentrated on the performance elements of the show since they are what I finally felt closer to – I had a deeper attachment to them since they are what I really experienced night after night on tour. I felt a little separated from the installation, and it was almost lost to me. It seems a shame that all those hours of posing and snapping away have disappeared in my final rendering of the show. Here, as I have inevitably succumbed to narrative's exclusionary practice, I have had to cut some things out. (At least I have managed to mention it here. What a relief).

Yet, whilst being my own story of identification in relation to narrative practices, I feel that my practice with itd has taken into account an operation or set of operations that have often been excluded from experimental performance. This, I feel, is our contribution to knowledge through practice-as-research. As I have shown in this thesis, after Brecht, identification in the theatre has predominantly been imagined as a conservative practice that *always* aligns us with the status quo. Indeed, identification in experimental performance is very rarely, if ever, addressed. Having said this it would be remiss to suggest that other experimental work does not invoke my identifications; indeed, as I have argued throughout this thesis, the absolute suppression of identifications is probably not really possible. However, it is important to note that itd's work and the other work analysed in this thesis stage the movement between identification and distance as a *deliberate or conscious practice* (although of course, consciousness perhaps does not take

into account the un-conscious aspects of identification). In other words, the way in which we feel love or attachment to the objects of culture that we choose to make performance from *is something we embrace and try to accentuate*, whilst also taking into account the place of distance and contemplation. This is in recognition of the shifting sense of ourselves as subjects and objects, as being acted upon in the world and acting upon it, of living with and without certainty, of belonging and also being estranged or having to ask questions of our investments. I would also like to take into account the way in which identificatory practices are undervalued and undermined by critical discourse, which creates a problem for practitioners. After all, as Sedgwick maintains in relation to what she describes as the ‘reparative motive’:

The vocabulary for articulating any reader’s reparative motive toward a text or a culture has long been so sappy, aestheticizing, defensive, anti-intellectual, or reactionary that it’s no wonder that few critics are willing to describe their acquaintance with such motives.

(2003, p. 150)

In this sense it is not just the practice that matters, but the practice of *reading* – it marks a refusal to see certain elements in performance as legitimate or worthwhile. One particular example is Elin Diamond’s chapter entitled “Identification and Mimesis: The theatre of Adrienne Kennedy” (1997). According to Diamond, Kennedy actually stages the ways in which her historical identifications are felt and *embodied*. In Diamond’s terms, this demonstrates the “historisizing power of identification” (1997, p. 109). Let me elaborate. Through a reading of Freud, Diamond explores the ways in which historical identifications bear consequences for the subject. As Freud describes in ‘The

Ego and the Id' (1923), the human ego is made up of 'lost' or forgotten object identifications:

It may be that identification is the sole condition under which the id can give up its objects. At any rate, the process, especially in the early phases of development is a very frequent one, and it makes it possible to suppose that the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object cathexes and that it contains the history of those object choices.

(in Diamond, 1997 p. 111)

In this case, the ego is not a fixed place of origin but a site of discarded objects that have been introjected and assimilated by the subject. In other words, the subject's identity represents the amassed history of her/his identifications.

This theory certainly relates to the argument I have been making all along in this thesis: that through identificatory practices, we are made (or make) or are unmade (or we unmake) ourselves and our worlds. However, according to Diamond, in interaction with Kennedy's theatre, identifications between performer and spectator never actually *take place*. Instead, they are shown by Kennedy to, "have material effects – in the imaginary coherences that smooth over the racism of everyday modes of thought, and in the 'abraded' bodies we choose not to see" (1997, p. 115). As maintained by Diamond, identifications need to be recognised and narrated from a temporal distance, in order to "permit access to subjective, cultural, finally political meanings" (1997, p. 109).

Whilst I am interested in Diamond's investigation of the *processes* of subjective identifications, she appears to assume that reflective distance can be *absolute* in a

performative situation. This supposition falls in line with a Brechtian notion of (good) practice. She also appears to characterise identification as *always* and necessarily violent. Indeed, Diamond proposes that through Kennedy's performance practice we can see identifications for *what they really are*, that is, fantasies of annihilation and destruction. I cannot comment here on Kennedy's work specifically, since I have not seen it. Nor do I wish to undermine the value and significance of addressing the violence, inequality and injustices that are normalised and naturalised in our world. However, Diamond's paradigm for a subversive practice that imagines identifications as *always* and inevitably monstrous is, as Sedgwick would describe, a distinctly paranoid position. To respond in Sedgwick's terms, "to recognize (*sic*) in paranoia a distinctively rigid relation to temporality, at once anticipatory and retroactive averse above all to surprise, is also to glimpse the lineaments of other possibilities" (2003, p. 146). Sedgwick elucidates these "other possibilities" in relation to the reparative motive that I mentioned above:

No less acute than the paranoid position, no less realistic, no less attached to a project of survival, and neither less nor more delusional or fantasmatic, the reparative reading position undertakes a different range of affects, ambitions and risks. What we can best learn from such practices are, perhaps, the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of culture – even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them.

(2003, p. 150)

In this thesis, I have shown that itd, like *Desperate Optimists* and *Insomniac*, make work from a 'reparative' position, since we are enriched by an affectionate engagement with cultural objects. However, I would be interested in developing our performance work by exploring other ways in which we have contact or connect with the stuff of culture.

These might be other emotional states that are not loving, such as pain, hate, fear, disgust or even shame. These, after all, are different sorts of investments, but no less compelling. Nevertheless in these pages what I have attempted to do is describe how we are *moved* in a loving way by cultural objects. We move, and that movement denotes the negotiation of proximity and distance. This movement, this constant negotiation of identifications means that we never stop in place, but are in the place of becoming, of coming into place. Our work, and the work of *Desperate Optimists* and *Insomniac*, follows the trajectory of our uncertain and messy embodiment. After all, this is the stuff that stories are made of.

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Appendix 1: Roles and Responsibilities

Guilty Pleasures (2000) and *Five Miles and Falling* (2002) were both created in collaboration with the other members of the performance collective Imitating the Dog (itd). These are: Seth Honnor, Richard Malcolm, Andrew Quick and Simon Wainwright. itd are a group of artists with direction mainly taken on by Andrew Quick, although all the members take responsibility for the conceptual development, devising and technical design of these works. However, within this collaborative framework, there are certain aspects of the production in which I have taken a lead role. These are, in *Guilty Pleasures*, the cutting and arrangement of the T.S Eliot text in *Guilty Pleasures*, and the design and sourcing of costumes and props. In *Five Miles and Falling*, I collaborated with Seth Honnor and Richard Malcolm on the conceptualisation, storyboarding and direction of recorded material for projection and the television screen. I also wrote sections of the script. In *Five Miles and Falling*, the actual camerawork was carried out by filmmakers Mate Toth and Mark Wordsworth.

Other important credits are as follows: the text of *Five Miles and Falling* was written in the main by Andrew Quick. The soundtrack for both productions was principally sourced and designed by Simon Wainwright; the directing of performers in both shows was principally carried out by Andrew Quick. *Guilty Pleasures* was performed by Andrea Carpenter, Seth Honnor, Richard Malcolm, Simon Wainwright and myself. *Five Miles and Falling* was performed by Richard Malcolm and myself.

Appendix 2: Performance Texts

***Guilty Pleasures* – MAP OF ACTION**

The Stage:

There are three rooms (The Eliot Room, The Control Box and The Bathroom) that are divided with silver trussing (i.e. no solid walls) which is eight foot high.

Each room is marked out on the floor with green tape.

Behind the set is a blue-cloth backdrop.

The Eliot Room:

This room contains just 3 mics on stands and one white chair.

The Control Box:

This room contains all the technology for the show bar the lighting – the board, as well as two television monitors that are housed on top of a flight case and positioned laterally across the front of the room. They play a road movie or live-relay scenes from the two video cameras that are pointed towards each room either side of the box.

The Bathroom:

This room contains a sink SL and a toilet SR, as well as a white chair SR at the back of the room.

There are Vodka bottles and drinking glasses in all rooms.

Cast of Eliot Character's:

Alice – Agatha

Rich – Charles

Si – Violet, Downing and Policeman

Andrea – Amy

Seth – Harry

Abbreviations:

E/R – Eliot Room

T/B – Technical Box

B/R – Bathroom

O/S – Off Stage (back of the set or at the edges – still 'on view')

ECU – Extreme Close Up

TVR – TV on the Right

TVL – TV on the left

| Eliot Room (E/R) | Technical Box (T/B) | Bathroom (B/R) |
|---|--|---|
| <p>(3 Mics)</p> <p><u>Scene 1a</u> <i>Agatha, Amy and Charles</i> enter.</p> <p>Actors 'drop out' of the action and drink vodka when they are not speaking.</p> <p>They occasionally acknowledge the TV's and the T/B and B/R.</p> <p>They wisper to each other as 'themselves' and command the action.</p> <p>The actors appear to listen to the music and tap their feet in time to the beat. They wisper to each other and pour drinks.</p> <p><u>Scene 1b</u> Seth enters. He sets up the camera and his mic before his speech begins. The other actors acknowledge his presence but do not acknowledge him as '<i>Harry</i>' until Simon 'plays' his footsteps.</p> <p>'Eye' speech by <i>Harry</i></p> <p>All actors leave except <i>Charles</i>. He swaps places with Simon, and Simon plays <i>Downing</i></p> <p>Andrea enters and DANCES Andrea jumps back and Simon DANCES. Simon jumps back and Andrea DANCES.</p> <p>Andrea jumps back and Simon DANCES.</p> | <p>Simon enters. Swiches on TV's. The Road Movie. Music from Radio Play.</p> <p>Andrea's mouth in ECU on TVR. Road on TVL.</p> <p>Simon plays <i>Violet</i> (a female character)</p> <p>Simon films Seth on the floor and zooms into a digital close up into his mouth.</p> <p>Characters not filled by actors are 'played' on the radio.</p> <p>Sound effects of doors opening and closing, clocks ticking etc. Some non-literal sound effects, like the sound of the storm.</p> <p>Scene ends and CHORUS 1 is played on the radio with a contemporary dance track played underneath. TVL back to road.</p> <p>TVR goes back to the road movie.</p> <p>TVR ECU on <i>Harry</i>'s eye. Then back to road.</p> <p>Rich, 'playing' <i>Charles</i> operates the technology.</p> <p>Rich ends the scene and plays loud dance music.</p> <p>Richard DANCES behind the technology.</p> | <p>Seth Enters, naked.</p> <p>Drinks vodka, acts drunk and attempts to get dressed. Prepares to enter the E/R.</p> <p>Seth lies on the floor.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the others stand in before of the blue cloth, drink and watch the action. <p>Alice enters the B/R and sits on the chair drinking vodka.</p> <p>Seth enters and DANCES Seth jumps back and Alice DANCES. Alice jumps back and Seth DANCES.</p> |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Simon sings: BLUE MOON</p> <p><u>Scene 2a</u> <i>Mary and Agatha enter.</i></p> <p><u>Scene 2b</u> <i>Agatha exits and Harry enters.</i></p> <p>Performers 'control' the music. (Made louder etc.)</p> <p><i>Harry and Mary exit.</i></p> <p><u>Scene 3</u> <i>Agatha and Harry enter. (then Andrea)</i></p> <p><i>Harry leaves at end.</i></p> <p><i>Agatha whispers curse</i></p> <p>Alice sings: CAN'T TAKE MY EYES OFF YOU.</p> <p><u>Scene 4</u> <i>Downing scene. Accident with John.</i></p> | <p>Richard exits the T/B.</p> <p>Seth operates the camera.</p> <p>Digital close up on Richard's wet pants.</p> <p>Seth operates the technology. ECU on Alice's eyes.</p> <p>Alice operates the technology. ECU on Seth's hands.</p> <p>"The Past" – Alice plays romantic music.</p> <p>Alice plays loud music. Alice leaves the tec. Box.</p> <p>Si enters the tec box and films a digital close up into Rich's mouth.</p> <p>Si 'playing' Violet.</p> <p>Si goes into B/R. Rich operates technology.</p> <p>Alice operates tec. Si operates tec.</p> <p>CHORUS 2</p> | <p>Alice sits on the toilet and Richard DANCES. Rich signals for Simon to stop. Rich whispers to Alice.</p> <p>Rich and Alice kiss into the camera, kiss belly button and nipple. Alice pushes Rich over and pours vodka on his crotch.</p> <p>Rich and Simon talk and prepare.</p> <p>Si ties Rich up with the mic cord, puts a plastic bag over his head etc.</p> <p>Rich puts on his shirt for the next scene.</p> <p>Si plays drunk – falls down and gets up repeatedly.</p> <p>Pissing Scene – seth enacts pissing on Simons face using a water bottle.</p> |
|--|---|--|

ALL ACTORS GO TO THE FRONT OF THE STAGE AND DANCE – all drop out except Seth

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Alice puts chair in the middle of the room and sits, talks into mic.</p> <p><u>Scene 5</u> <i>Harry enters.</i></p> | <p>Si whispers into the mic.</p> <p>Shouts: SHUT THE FUCK UP!</p> <p>Alice's eye in ECU.</p> | <p>Rich, drunk, bellows into the toilet. Andrea enters and slouches at the sink, crying.</p> <p>Si and Rich drunk Si and Rich blindfold each other</p> |
|--|--|--|

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Rich bursts into the room.</p> <p>Alice leaves.</p> <p>Richard sings: SWEET CAROLINE.</p> <p><u>Scene 6a</u> (starts with Rich lying on the floor) <i>Amy</i> in chair. <i>Agatha</i> front stage right. (Big argument).</p> | <p>Andrea's mouth in ECU Si operates the tec.</p> <p>Si plays dance music.</p> | <p>and spin. Si wispers "I only looked through the little door..." with Als. Lots of laughter, Si pushes Rich and falls over.</p> <p>Seth comes in with Andrea. Slapping and drowning scene.</p> <p>Seth and Rich drink vodka</p> |
|---|--|---|

DANCE IN THE THREE ROOMS. EVERYONE STAYS WHERE THEY ARE. EXTRA SLOW.

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p><u>Scene 6b</u> <i>Amy and Harry.</i></p> <p>Seth sings: THE GOOD LIFE</p> <p><u>Scene 6c</u> Si plays <i>Downing</i>.</p> | <p>Rich operates the tec.</p> <p>Andrea films the B/R</p> <p>Seth operates the tec.</p> <p>Amy says her last lines from here "Agatha, Mary come! The clock has stopped in the dark."</p> <p>Sound of a car driving away.</p> <p>Seth plays the CHORUS 3</p> <p>SUNRISE.</p> | <p>Rich and Seth continue to dance. They leave.</p> <p>Si comes in and pulls down his trousers, and lies on the floor in front of the toilet.</p> <p>Alice enters, drunk. Throws vodka around, drinks, pours vodka on Simon's arse and gets Andrea to film.</p> <p>Simon dresses and goes to the E/R</p> <p>Alice remains in the B/R and Seth brings her a mic so she can play <i>Agatha</i> from here</p> |
|---|---|--|

Five Miles and Falling

Below are the texts written for this piece by Andrew Quick (and myself).

Scene 1: Rendezvous

Voice-over as Alice walks towards the raised platform. The voice-over continues while the two figures eat a meal at a restaurant table. A glass is knocked over. They sit in silence until the final lines are spoken live on stage.

(Alice): What do look for when you first meet someone? A smile of recognition – a meeting of souls? That they look you directly in the eye, an unflinching contact in which nothing is left to chance? Do they stand up to greet you or do they feign indifference, even though you are always expected? Will I have to speak first, soft words to break the ice? A contradiction don't you think? Or will it be all nerves, the body barely in control, jerking and shuddering, arms all over the place. A move to shake the hand or a clumsy kiss placed on my cheek, a tiny moist patch a promise of something to come. A knocked over wineglass, liquid disappearing into a thick white tablecloth. Confused apologies in which verbs, prepositions, indefinite articles hover un- connected, swirling in the mouth leaving sentences broken and unfinished. Then silence. That terrifying cold silence, thinking what do I say, what story to tell? Until, 'It's alright, don't worry, it's only wine. Salt, yes, salt that's the answer, call the waiter, ask for the salt.'

Will he speak first, make small talk: the journey here – snow, ice, rain, heat, traffic congestion, pedestrians, condensation – wiping away at a windscreen dripping with water, peering into the mist, everything blurred?

Or will there be sweeping gestures, large talk – of economics, politics, the latest war, foreign policies? Why bombs fall on a particular people. Who's safe and who's at risk. Who will be captured and who will be released? What will be the punishment? Will there be a reprieve? Numbers, calculations, statistics, financial advice. Conversation, assured and uncluttered – efficient, balanced, and full of restraint.

What do you look for when you first meet someone? A sign of recognition, something different but the same. Promise? Promise: a little word overburdened with expectation. The promise of something more...exciting, something more...exhilarating, something...utterly new.

Alice: I'm not sure this is...

Richard: It can. It will, I promise...

Alice: Ok. Let's meet again.

The lift doors close

Scene 2: Flirting

Voice over of Alice. Alice and Richard are at a bar.

(Alice): Meeting a second time is always a challenge. It's easy to leave after the first occasion, promise to get back in touch and then break off all contact, never speak again. Put the answer machine on and hope he stops calling. Then move on. A new beginning. *Pause.* I mean, what am I looking for? What am I doing now? Making this small talk. Trying to move it on, on to something... significant. But here I am again, attempting to look him in the eye, glimpse behind the mask, 'Is anybody there?' And what do I think I'll find? Solace?

Richard: You're lost in thought.

Alice: Am I?

Richard: I feel like I'm losing you. This is difficult...meeting like this...It's so artificial...thinking of something to say. I'm not sure I'm good at conversation, making small...

Alice: It's okay...lets just be normal shall we...just relax.

There is a short silence, they do not relax.

Alice: Hey, let's ask each other questions, in turn.

Richard: Okay.

Alice: But there are rules.

Richard: Rules?

Alice: Yes. We get ten questions each, but they have to be about preference, not incident, you know, choice, not fact.

Richard: Example?

Alice: Well, I can ask you your favourite colour, but not what car you drive, or where you live.

Richard: I'll start then. What's your favourite colour?

Alice: That's cheating.

Richard: Okay.

Alice: Another then.

Richard: I can't think.

Alice: Me then. Your first love, did they chose you or did you chose them?

Richard: They chose me.

Alice: Did you end it?

Richard: No, but surely the questions can't all be related.

Alice: You're right. You ask.

Richard: What's your mother's maiden name?

Alice: That's incidental.

Richard: If your mother and your lover were drowning, who would you save?

Alice: I don't have a lover.

Richard: That's what I wanted to know, only the question was incidental.

Alice: You're cheating!

Richard: You didn't answer my question though.

Alice: I can't answer it. I told you.

Richard: Well, past lovers, when you loved them, who would you choose?

Alice: It will never happen.

Richard: Hypothetically.

Alice: My mother.

Richard: Why?

Alice: She came first. Anyway, lovers come and go.

Richard: Do they?

Alice: Not always.

Richard: Do you remember your dreams?

Alice: Never

Richard: Do you smoke?

Alice: Incidental

Richard: No I mean, do you smoke – do you want one?

Both laugh. They light up.

Alice: *Looking at the cigarette.* What would you choose, health or pleasure, or do I really mean virtue or vice?

Richard: Is this still the game?

Alice: It's always a bit of a game isn't it?

Richard: Even when things get serious?

Alice: Yes. I think so. Even when things are serious. Let's stick to the rules. This is breaking into conversation. We can't have that. Too successful too soon. You're giving yourself away. Health or pleasure?

Richard: Health, but I don't feel virtuous.

Alice: Maybe you're just kidding yourself.

Richard: 'Vice', not an attractive word, not like pleasure.

Alice: No, but you know where you are with vice, whereas pleasure... well where do you begin?

Richard: Well I could think of somewhere...

Alice: What would you choose, security or hope?

Richard: Surely, the ten questions are up?

Alice: What would you choose, security or hope?

Richard: Security. It might buy me hope.

Alice: Can hope really be bought?

Richard: I think so. Yes. Suffering, poverty, illness. To solve these would bring hope to many people.

Alice: I read somewhere that only humans can feel hope, it's not experienced by animals. What you're saying is that humanity can be purchased, bought off.

Richard: You're taking my logic too far. It's obvious, though, isn't it, that having a bit of money solves people's problems? Do you have a problem with money?

Alice: Not personally. I'm not looking for a loan.

Richard: I don't mean that. I mean in principle, with the 'filthy lucre'.

Alice: It is filthy isn't it, how it grinds everything into submission?

Richard: Well, that's a shame.

Alice: Why?

Richard: I'm sure we've broken the rules.

Alice: It's only a game.

Richard: It's a shame because I work in the dirty, grubby world of finance. I'm a banker.

Alice: 'The banker'.

Richard: And you?

Alice: Let's say goodbye to the rules. Let's say I work in gristle and bone, in flesh and blood, in sinew and muscle. Just to make things exciting, let's say I'm a butcher. *She kisses him lightly on the mouth. He's slightly taken aback.* The butcher and the banker, it's almost too neat isn't it, but it will make a great story.

Richard: Is this part of the game?

Alice: As I said, it's always a bit of a game. *Pause.* It's a beautiful day outside. Almost balmy.

Richard: That doesn't appear to be a question.

Alice: No. It's the warmest it's been in ages.

Richard: You're right. I've got a question. The last one.

Alice: Oh?

Richard: Can we do this again?

Alice: Yes.

Scene 3: Argument

Voice-over as Alice sits at a café table looking at a view of the sea. It is daytime. Richard enters the space at the end of the voice-over.

(Alice): How do you mark the first argument? I mean it doesn't have an anniversary, does it? Do minor disagreements, small quibbles, little irritations count? Or is it violence? Not fists, I mean harsh words, phrases that bite and scar, that leave you reeling, with nowhere to go. Is it rowing that tips the balance away from companionship and moves everything relentlessly towards love?

It's alarming how quickly conversation can slide into conflict. Sitting by the sea. Looking out. Listening and reacting. Argument has a rhythm, a tempo – like the waves – force meeting force, motion against inertia. Beat. Beat. Beat. He'll be back soon. 'Got to go to the bathroom', he said. Time out. Round one. The bell is ringing.

Richard returns and sits at the table.

Richard: I'm sorry.

Alice: Sorry? Sorry about what?

Richard: I'm sorry.

Alice: There's nothing...

Richard: When I'm on a roll I go too far...

Alice: *Too herself.* When you're on a roll...

Richard: ... go too far

Alice: ...Look

Richard: ...and push at things...

Alice: Look...

Richard: ...to lay everything out...

Alice: ...on the table.

Richard: Yes. No, no not literally...not on the...

Alice: I was joking.

Richard: ... so that you might know me, who I am, that...

Alice: ...look, I was joking.

Richard: ... that you might see beyond this. *Points at himself.*

Alice: I was...

Richard: I'm more than a ...

Alice: Suit.

Richard: What?.

Alice: You're more than that suit.

Richard: Meaning?

Alice: Meaning, I look beyond the surface.

Richard: It's starting again isn't it?

Alice: No. No. Let's straighten this out...

Richard: This conversation...it's up and off again isn't it, like a mad...

Alice: Horse?

Richard: No, like...

Alice: Donkey?

Richard: No, let me...

Alice: Train, yes a mad train...

Richard: Listen!

Alice: Out of control...

Richard: Listen!

Alice: ...careering towards a disastrous conclusion.

Richard: Listen! *Richard slams his hand on the table.*

Silence.

Alice: I've heard. I have been listening. I've taken it in. Your talk of circulation. Your laws of motion. How money moves everything, or is it everything moves with money? I got confused, no, no...let me speak. Just so I know I've got it right. *She recounts a previous conversation.* There is no law but money. Money is the law, you say. But this does not mean chaos, anarchy produced through the pursuit of endless greed. No, quite the contrary, this means order, and sanity. Correct me if I'm wrong. *Richard attempts to interrupt.* No, I'll continue. I think this is right. The circulation of money encourages value, moral value, because when everything has its price, and everything can be priced – like beauty, like pain, like love - then through a process of differentiation, the true worth of what we really want can be calculated. That which is good will then be marked down as expensive, a gold standard of value- highly prized.

That which is bad will be placed at such a low level that nobody will be interested in it. 'Morality - only for the rich', I countered. 'The poor are damned'. 'No', you said, money circulates, it filters, it falls, touching everyone and everything. Everybody takes their share in proportion to what they produced. Those who make less receive less. Demands are not met through need or greed but on what the market will offer. This system is just. Just. Just. Just. The judge being the market place and the law that rules it: the law of supply and demand. People, you say, are always ambitious, wanting the best, seeking comfort, both materially and spiritually. They will rise to the good and money paves the way, forges a way forward, cuts a path through the cant, the blather of history and culture that holds us all back. Aspiration you call it, and money gives aspiration its fuel, its very energy. Once everybody grasps this then the world might really change, although concepts such as nation and community will have to be abandoned. Hospitals will be built, malaria extinguished, AIDS cured, encyclopaedia's read, child mortality rates lowered, racial hatred eradicated, wars ended - all through the operation, the eddy and flow of money changing hands across the globe.

Silence.

Richard: You've quite a memory.

Scene 4: Passion

A hotel bedroom, early morning, soft light just coming in through a net curtained window. The room is sparsely furnished- bed, bedside table, a landscape painting by an unknown artist. Alice is sitting on a chair and Richard is standing by the window as if looking out. Voice-over.

(Alice): Somehow it always comes to this. There's a moment, isn't there, when you let go of everything, take a risk, abandon yourself to... that other person, so utterly different. This is when the talking has to stop. You think, no more chitter chatter, no more hedging your bets, no more procrastination. *Softly sings.* 'It's now or never'. And then, after the battle - if there's been a bloody battle - what have you learned? What can you actually remember? What do you take back with you? Maybe, no matter how beautiful the song, you don't look back, you just move on and out. To look back, to want too, too much, why that would turn you to stone.

Richard: I'm sorry.

Alice: Stop saying that word.

Richard: I mean it.

Alice: I know. I don't doubt it.

Richard: It's just...

Alice: Do we have to talk about it, I mean it's such a bloody cliché...

Richard: I think that...

Alice: Men do, though, don't they? *Pause*. Have to talk about it – as if it's just up to them. This messy, stupid, ridiculous thing that we seem to have to do to each other. And if it goes wrong, doesn't quite come off, if you excuse the pun, it's somehow all down them to sort out and explain.

Richard: I don't seem to be able to get things together at the moment. Lost in...

Alice: Why don't you turn around and look at me? Then we might be able to talk to each other. And then we might...

Richard: It's not that simple is it? Do this and then that happens. Consequences. Painting by numbers.

Alice: I thought you were into numbers.

Richard: Haven't we exhausted this?

Alice: You're the one that speaks so eloquently, once you get going, past the stop-start, the stammer, of casual conversation....

Richard: Well, words fail me now. *Laughs to himself*. Everything failing.

Alice: We could always try again?

Richard: No, I'm not sure I'm up to it.

Alice: *Laughs*.

Richard: It is ridiculous, you're right. This thing that we're supposed to do. We can put a name to it you know. Face it unabashed, without shame. Sex. Fucking. Or rather, not fucking.

Alice: *Softly*. There's no shame. I can say those words too. Fucking, or rather, not fucking.

Richard: *Pause*. When I first heard your voice, it sounds stupid to say this, but it...it electrified me – I played the message again and again. Moving the words back and forth. As if they might let me know what you looked like, what you would be wearing, your occupation, your age, your scent.

Alice: So, have I disappointed you?

Richard: No, no, that's not what I'm trying to say. When, you first appeared in the doorway, I couldn't quite make you out, the light behind you blinded me. I held a dirty serviette to my face to shield my eyes, it spotted my shirt with olive oil – something you pointed out a little later. Even in the shadows you were intriguing and half of me wanted you to stay in the dark. Forever unknown, only imagined. Then walking forward, you almost appeared to fall into the light.

Alice: You make me sound like an angel.

Richard: Don't worry, no choral music accompanied your grand entrance. I can't remember what was playing in the restaurant. Something smulchy ...unmemorable. And when you sat down at the table, the light somehow seemed to stay with you.

Alice: It was the dress.

Richard: That dress. Well it certainly catches the eye.

Alice: And takes away the tongue. *Long pause.* And now the cat's got it?

Richard: What?

Alice: Your tongue, the cats got it.

Richard: And I couldn't think of anything to say, not even blather. *Pause.* At the table, when you sat down. And usually I'm good at blather, letting the words run free, adding a bit of humour here and pathos there, you know, to keep somebody interested. In me. To get their attention. On me. Good at spinning a bit of a tale, making life an adventure. It's seduction, I know, seduction bordering on down right bloody lying. You start with a half-truth, an embellishment and before you know it you're in charge of the company, driving a merc., flying planes, snow boarding in Canada, taking a cocktail of drugs that would finish off an elephant, clubbing all night, making two million pounds in a fortnight on options, driving off on a whim to Land's End and swimming bollock freezing naked in the Atlantic Ocean at midnight, fucking flat out through the whole weekend drinking and living off nothing but vodka and Doritos. All that energy expended, all that imagination used up, wrung dry, for this. This. This moment when the talking has to stop. No more flannel. No more hard sell. No hesitation. When the blathering ends and the body takes over. *Pause.* And now I can't stop talking. I'm awash with fucking words.

Alice: Then stop. Stop talking and come over here.

Richard: I can't.

Alice: There's no shame in...

Richard: Shame in the fact that I've been here before. Many times. So many times. All great successes, at least as far as I was concerned.

Alice: Satisfied customers.

Richard: Yes. I think so. Yes. Satisfied. As much as you can be, as much as you can be...

Alice: In an evening...

Richard: Passing time together,

Alice: ... of pleasure.

Richard: Passing time without ...

Alice: Restraint? Guilt? Without history, the baggage of years of being together.

Richard: Maybe we've said too much. Maybe we know too much about each other. Too many words, opinions exchanged.

Alice: I don't think it's that.

Richard: I wanted you to be a stranger, you know.

Alice: That's obvious.

Richard: That's why I wanted you to remain in the dark, so I could always...

Alice: Dress and undress me.

Richard: No, too... raw, too...uncomplicated.

Alice: To push me, like my words on your answer machine, back and forth in your imagination.

Richard: Too judgmental. A stranger, so that we couldn't have any hold on each other.

Alice: A stranger to make your life comfortable, keeping it simple, with you always in control.

Richard: A stranger to leave us our freedom, to keep us wanting and coming back for more.

Alice: And this talking...

Richard: ...this talking taking over, consuming everything, all my energies. Endless driving accompanied by debate, arguments in café's, in shopping malls, walking along the beach. Everything I ...believed in, unpicked and ...

Alice: I wasn't always being serious.

Richard: I know. So hard to tell with you. Your stories. 'You're the banker', you'd say. 'What'll that make me... Butcher, baker, candlestick maker?' And before I can answer you reply, 'butcher, yes, today, I'll be the butcher.' And then you're off with your 'Economy of flesh' or whatever you bloody well call it. Bit of a laugh now isn't it, thinking of the flesh after this fiasco. Or maybe not. Maybe you've been here before, as many times as me. I mean your words sound pretty rehearsed, like you've often repeated them. So I'd put my money on a few hearing it before me, flinching at the way you describe the world. How does it go, so bloody weird I should be able to

remember it. *Alice moves to interrupt.* No, no I'll get it, yes. Let's see if I can get this right. OK. Something like: *Recounts her speech.* The butcher touches things as they really are, unhidden, unabashed, unashamed. The carcass naked, unburdened by morality or conscience. The butcher cuts and scapes, renders and skins. How did you describe it? 'A modern day anatomist', hidden right in the heart of us without the mask of qualification that distinguishes doctors and surgeons from the rest. There is a beauty to this meat, this blood, a beauty that we're all drawn to and yet vehemently deny. We all live in world that has become so disconnected, where we're removed from anything visceral. Everything is neat, cleansed, boxed, cling-wrapped, take-away. We've banished the slaughterhouses and the cemeteries to the edge of our cities. The dead and the dying are no longer with us, they've been removed from view.

Alice: I spoke of hope; you seemed to have forgotten hope.

Richard: Have I?

Alice: Don't you remember, I tried to tell you a story about falling, about a fall from grace. How your version of the Garden of Eden was a complete lie. How, in reality ...

Richard: ...the garden is ugly, horrible, terrifying. Cold and terrible winds blow, snow and ice arrive with a frightening frequency. Everything the man and woman build rots away and falls to pieces. They find solace and comfort in the warmth of their bodies. They bury themselves in the smell of hair, in the scent of sweat, excrement and sex. They walk on all fours, noses glued to the forest floor. Being so connected with the bare earth, they become obsessed with their hands and feet. Soon they are fascinated by their thumbs and big toes. These gnarled, broken and blistered parts of the body are picked over and sucked, groomed, and revered. They become the sites of intense pleasure, worship even. Then a snake enters the garden and holds an apple above the man and woman's heads. Every time they reach up to grab at the fruit, the snake would pull it a little further out of reach. After many months, maybe even years, the man and woman finally find themselves able to stand upright and they reach for the apple and snatch it from the serpent's mouth. Eating the apple, they spit out the pips and as they look down, the ground now seems very far away. Overcome with guilt they kill the snake and blame it for having lured them from the safety of the forest floor. And, try as they might, they find that they are unable to return to their life close to the ground. The soil disgusts them, they flinch at the sight of their bare flesh and cover their bodies with animal skins. Soon houses are built and as the man and woman increasingly drift apart they discover language and tell stories to themselves to mask the loneliness of their separation.

Alice: You've quite a memory.

Richard: Ascension is the fall. The further we think we have climbed, the more, in reality we have descended. Is that it, is that the moral of your tale?

Alice: It's just a story...it's just ...

Richard: ...about me, about my life, picking me apart. And then I'm expected to...

Alice: We're back to you again, aren't we? At the centre, as if you're expected to do anything.

Richard: So where's the hope? Where's the bloody hope that you talked of?

Alice: It's in the realisation.

Richard: Realisation?

Alice: In the realisation of what we are really doing. Then we might truly see once more. Come here. Turn around and look at me. Take my arms.

Richard moves towards Alice and the doors shut