Taste, Beauty, Sublime:

Kantian Aesthetics and the Experience of Performance

Andrew David Westerside, BA (Hons), MA

This thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2010

Prolegomena

Contents

Prolegomena

Introduction

Part One: Taste

Transition: Beauty

Part Two: Sublime

Post Facto

LIST OF FIGURES

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ABSTRACT

What does it mean to have aesthetic experience? Is it something we are all capable of? Or is our capacity for aesthetic pleasure something we develop, like a skill? What do we mean when we declare something 'beautiful', or when we dismiss a performance because it is 'not to our taste'? Is taste something we possess, concerned with our own personal likes and dislikes? Or is taste part of aesthetic experience, something that *happens*? Indeed, what *is* aesthetic experience? And what is the place, in theatre and performance, for the aesthetic *qua* aesthetic?

In this thesis I explore and develop the Kantian notion of aesthetic experience by taking three terms central to the *Critique of Judgment* – taste, beauty, sublime – and considering their value in the experience and analysis of contemporary performance.

In exploring these ideas, the thesis centres on a range of works from the early avant-garde, including extended analyses of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1896) and Edward Gordon Craig's *Dido and Æneas*. The contemporary works central to the thesis are Proto-type Theater's *Virtuoso (working title)* (2009), *3rd Person (redux)*

(2010) and *Whisper* (2008). The study also looks at contemporary work from Reckless Sleepers, Station House Opera, and Societas Raffaello Sanzio.

The primary theoretical framework is drawn from the field of philosophical aesthetics, and, specifically, the works of Immanuel Kant. In the post-Kantian era, the works of Arthur Schopenhauer, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Wendy Steiner, Jean-Luc Marion, Arnold Berleant, and Christian H. Wenzel provide a connection to the world of post-Enlightenment aesthetics and interconnect Kantian philosophy with developments in performance and aesthetics. In aiming to uncover the value of the aesthetic *as such*, the thesis looks to reflect on taste, beauty, and the sublime in a way that offers a fresh and vital perspective on the experience of performance.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere

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those who saw the value of my research from its moment of inception.

The now sadly departed Dartington College of Arts, in Devon, where I studied for my undergraduate and master's degrees, deserves the highest praise. It was there that I learned the value of experimentation, play, and the boundless possibilities of the imagination. Thank you to Joe Richards, Barbara Bridger, Sue Palmer, Dr. Misha Myers, and Dr. Simon Persighetti. Thanks also to Will Clarke, who taught me about light, and Jim McCauley, who taught me about sound, in-between talking about football. Special thanks to Dr. Paul Clarke and Professor David Williams, who made me understand what it was that I loved about performance. It seems like a lifetime ago, but their tremendous influence on my life and work should not go unaccredited.

My students at Lancaster University have given me the chance to articulate my research in a unique environment, and their willingness to understand what it means to construct and ultimately manipulate an aesthetic environment has been invaluable. My thanks, then, must also go to the Lancaster University staff that saw fit to expose their students to my teaching, because I have learned as much from them as they have (hopefully) learned from me.

My parents, Ray and Carol Westerside, have given me nothing less than their complete support throughout my studies. Their love, care and generosity humbles me immeasurably, and I fall short of words trying to express the love and gratitude I feel for both of them.

To my parents, Ray & Carol Westerside,
to Rachel Baynton, and to my son, Manny
(Thank you)

Introduction

IMMANUEL KANT

One of enlightenment philosophy's greatest questions was this: how do I know what I know? Responding to this question were two opposing schools of thought. The first was *rationalism*, which asserted that I could know the world – and objects in space and time – through reason alone, without recourse to any particular experience. They called this kind of knowledge *a priori*. Countering this view of knowledge was the school of *empiricism*, which argued that it is only through the sensible experience of the world – the things that I can measure empirically, which I can see, hear or touch – that knowledge is acquired. This kind of knowledge they called *a posteriori*. Then, in the late eighteenth century, a German philosopher by the name of Immanuel Kant arrived with a proposition that brought these two conceptions of knowledge together. Essentially, Kant said that rationalism and empiricism were both correct and incorrect at the same time. His argument, simply put, was that it is only when rationalism and empiricism are joined together – when the powers of reason are used to reflect upon sensible intuition – that true knowledge is attained. In formulating this theory, Kant proposed a special kind of proposition which he called the synthetic *a priori*: something which is both prior to experience and yet fundamentally related to it at the same time. This fusion of rationalist and empiricist theories, brought together so delicately in the form of the synthetic *a priori*, allowed Kant to produce a series of three *Critiques* which addressed epistemology, ethics, and most importantly here, aesthetics.

Kant's aesthetic *Critique*, the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), considered the notion

of *taste*: of what it is and what it means to have aesthetic experience, of how and why we make aesthetic judgments. In it, he introduces an idea called the 'moment'; in German, *das Moment*. *Das Moment*, for Kant, perfectly articulates the idea of the synthetic *a priori*, of a harmony between the world of reason and the world of sensation. What these two things create, through the *Critique of Judgment*, is a triumphant celebration of aesthetic experience as a phenomenon in-and-of-itself, as a fundamental part of what makes us human. It is this triumphant conception of aesthetics, as a powerful and fundamental way of articulating experience, which I will use as way of considering our experiences of contemporary performance, and the theatrical developments of the early avant-gardes. I will demonstrate in the process how the core ideas of Kantian aesthetics – *taste*, *beauty*, and the *sublime* – hold a unique and valuable place in the analysis of theatre and performance that simply cannot be matched by any other approach. To do just that, I will first explain in greater detail the salient points of Kant's work, and how the Enlightenment context lit the way for his powerful and exciting conclusions.

Born in the former Prussian capital of Königsberg (now Kaliningrad, Germany) in 1724, Immanuel Kant has been proclaimed by many as 'the greatest modern philosopher', and yet his life outside of scholarly work was 'unremarkable' (Scruton, 2001: 1). The fourth of nine children, Kant was raised in a devout pietist family, and it was at the pietist 'Collegium Fridericianum' in Königsberg that Kant would receive his early schooling (Kul-Want, 1996: 6). Graduating from the University of Königsberg in 1746, Kant's higher education introduced him to the

leading works of the Enlightenment, including Newton's *Principia* (1687), Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae* (1735) and Descartes' *Discourse on the Method* (1637). Working as a private tutor, or *Hauslehrer*, until the age of thirty-one, 'Kant had already published works on dynamics and mathematics' (Scruton, 2001: 2), including *Thoughts on the True Estimation of Vital Forces* (1746)[1] and *A New Explanation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Knowledge* (1755)[2], by the time he obtained his first university post of *Privatdozent* in 1755. Until this time, Kant's 'intellectual labours were devoted mainly to mathematics and physics' (ibid: 4). Indeed, his *Universal Natural History and Theory of Heaven* (1755)[3], was such an advanced piece of scholarship that it 'contained the first formulation of the nebular hypothesis'[4] (ibid).

In spite of his university post, which required him to 'lecture on a wide variety of subjects, including physical geography' (ibid), Kant 'had the fate to be in love with metaphysics'. As the study of Being *qua* Being, Metaphysics takes its name from the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle, a name so given 'because the topics discussed follow the philosophy of nature (physics), as well as being concerned with reality as a whole (*meta* [...] above or beyond)' (Kul-Want, 1996: 15). It was this

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[1] *Gedanken von der wahren Schätzung der lebendigen Kräfte*

[2] *Neue Erhellung der ersten Grundsätze metaphysischer Erkenntnisse*

[3] *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels*

[4] Indeed, Scruton claims that Kant's work was the first formulation of the nebular hypothesis. However, this comes assertion is disputable when one takes in to consideration Emanuel Swedenborg's *Philosophical and Mineralogical Works* (1734). Nevertheless, as noted by Woolfson (1993) and Palmquist (1987), Kant's work on cosmogony remains a significant contribution to the field.

preoccupation that would provide the 'leitmotif and underlying drama of Kant's whole career' (Kul-Want, 1996: 14). In 1755, Kant published *New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition*, reopening 'the Aristotelian enquiry into the form and structure of the process by which a concept is defined by a predicate'[5] (ibid: 31). This enquiry represents a significant moment in Kant's career, because his belief that 'the relationship between the predicate and concept is central to the question of knowledge', would lead him to a further, more profound question, namely: 'upon what is knowledge predicated?' (ibid). That first enquiry, on the relationship between predicate and concept, was undertaken in-part as a development of the works of mathematician and rationalist philosopher Christian von Wolff.

Wolff is a significant character in Enlightenment philosophy because his work bridges the gap between Kant and the 'founding father of Prussian academic philosophy' (Scruton, 2001: 19), Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Leibniz's work, left chiefly in 'unpublished fragments', was developed into a cogent and complete system by Wolff, and its central principles assert that all knowledge is derived from the exercise of reason. Indeed it was the question of knowledge, or more specifically *objective* knowledge, which dominated eighteenth century philosophy. As Scruton writes:

> The true question of objective knowledge is: how can I know the world as it is? I can have knowledge of the world as it *seems*, since that is merely knowledge of my present perceptions, memories, thoughts, and feelings. But can I have knowledge of the world that is *not* just

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[5] In logic, as Kul-Want writes, 'a predicate is what is affirmed or denied of a subject. For example, in "all men are mortal", mortal is the predicate' (Kul-Want, 1996: 15).

knowledge of how it seems?

(Scruton: 2001, 19)

Leibniz, from the Cartesian school of thought that we now refer to as *rationalism*, asserted that it was possible to have objective knowledge of the world, 'uncontaminated by the point of view of any observer' (ibid). In spite of such a rich tradition, Leibniz's work amounted to more than 'the re-emergence of the romantic rationalistic ideal of Descartes and Malebranche' (Smith, 1915: 295). What Leibniz proposed was that within the mind are innate principles that do not require empirical evidence – that is, *experience* – to prove them as true, and so stands in firm opposition to John Locke's popular conception of the mind as a *tabula rasa* in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). Because these principles do not rely on the subjectivity associated with personal experience, Leibniz argued that they can explain the world 'as it is' (ibid: 22), as opposed to 'how it seems': without recourse to a subjective experience or particular point of view, they are true *independent* of experience, or *a priori*. *A priori*, or, 'from the former', distinguishes knowledge that is independent of experience. The statement 'all bachelors are unmarried' (Scruton, 2001: 19) is a good example of this'[6]. Leibniz's theory, expounded in *La Monadologie*, (1714) was built around the idea of the *monad*: the 'fundamental' substance of the universe, 'self-dependant [...] [and] indestructible' (ibid); indeed, the *monad* for Leibniz is very similar to our conception of the atom in modern physics. His model for the *monad* was the human soul, and it is from this that he developed his rationalist, objective,

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[6] Other kinds of knowledge that fall into the category of the *a priori* are mathematical propositions such as 'two plus two equals four', or, 'the angles of a triangle will add up to one-hundred-and-eighty degrees', because they do not rely on any need for me to go out and examine or prove them in the physical world.

'perspectiveless picture of the world' (ibid: 23). Leibniz recognised, as Kant later did in *New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition*, that there is a 'division in thought between subject and predicate', and it was his assertion that this division related to a 'distinction in reality between substance and property' (ibid: 22). Using the *monad* to articulate this distinction, Leibniz concluded the following:

> The world consists of infinitely many individual monads, which exist in neither space nor time, but eternally. Each monad is different in some respect from the other. [...] The point of view of each monad is simply a way of representing its internal constitution; it does not represent the world as it is in itself. Each monad mirrors the universe from its own point of view, but no monad can enter into real relation, causal or otherwise, with any other. [...] The world will 'appear' to each monad in a way that corresponds to its appearance to every other. [The] ideas, and physical laws that we derive from them [...] do not yield knowledge of the real world of monads except indirectly. [...] The whole world of common-sense belief and perception is no more than an appearance or 'phenomenon'. [...] The real substances, because they are described and identified from no point of view, are without phenomenal characteristics. Reality itself is accessible to reason alone, since only reason can rise above the individual point of view.

(Scruton, 2001: 20-22)

So for Leibniz, the only way that you or I can experience the world 'as it is' is through our faculty of reason, since all of our experiences of the world are merely indirect representations of substances which cannot be perceived in either space or time. The world, then, as we perceive it, is crudely analogous to a hand wearing a glove: in sensible intuition, the gloved shape 'represents' the hand – the internal constitution. But in actuality, the hand itself lies beneath the glove, and it is that

internal constitution which brings that particular representation, the *gloved hand*, into being; beneath the glove, is the thing 'as it is' – the thing which gives the glove its appearance. But according to Leibniz, a thing 'as it is' is without phenomenal characteristics and thus cannot be intuited in or through sensible experience. His argument is that experiences of the world which rely on sensation are merely 'appearance'; that in sensible intuition we engage with a system of things *as they seem*, rather than things *as they are*. It is only through reason, he argues, that we are able gain access to what is 'beneath' those appearances. Indeed, Leibniz would argue that the sensible experience of a performance is not *in any way* the experience of performance 'as it is', and that we must transcend the trappings of phenomenal appearance using our innate powers of reason. Moreover, Leibniz's rationalism is so dogmatic that you, the reader, could attend a performance, and I could just watch a recording, or even just read a detailed description, and both of us would 'know' the performance equally well – since knowing the performance 'as it is' does not depend on experience whatsoever!

So, when Kant asks the question 'upon what is knowledge predicated?', he is really asking a question of the Leibnizian conception of knowledge. He is asking how Leibniz and rationalist thought in general can be so certain that reason provides access to the world 'as it is': how it is that we can regard the world, in principle, as knowable *a priori*. Having 'been trained in the rationalistic metaphysical tradition' of Leibniz and Wolff, 'Kant came to doubt that the assertions' made by rationalism that the world 'in principle, was knowable a *priori*' (Pluhar, 1987: xxx-xxxi). Thus, in his claim that 'dogmatic rationalism had

failed to secure metaphysics' (ibid), Kant had 'staked out his areas of enquiry' (Kul-Want, 1996: 36), and between 1770 and 1780 entered into what is now called his 'silent decade' (ibid). During this time, Kant struggled to 'realize his ideas' (ibid), likely due to his own education. At his time at the University of Königsberg, Kant studied under Martin Knutzen, a rationalist philosopher who taught the work of Decartes, A. G. Baumgarten, Leibniz, and Wolff – systems that became the 'orthodox metaphysics of the German Enlightenment' (Scruton, 2001: 21) – and it is easy to imagine how trying to work both in and against this orthodoxy might have stifled the progress of much of his early critical work. What changed of significance for Kant was that 'during this period, [...he] read the "Empiricist" philosophy of David Hume' (Kul-Want, 1996: 37). The introduction to Hume's work was to be the catalyst Kant needed, and as Kemerling (2001) and others have noted, Kant went so far as to claim that Hume's *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1739-40), 'interrupted my dogmatic slumbers and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy a quite new direction' (Kemerling, 2001: 1).

Hume's work, as Scruton notes, 'is in some measure the opposite of Leibniz's' (Scruton, 2001: 24), because unlike Leibniz, who asserted that we can know the world 'as it is' with recourse to the power of reason, Hume argued that the world 'as it is' is an illusion. Using as a foundation the general assumption of Empiricism, that nothing can be established as true except by reference to the sensory 'impressions' that guarantee experience, Hume denied the possibility of knowledge through reason alone.

Reason, Hume asserted, 'cannot operate without ideas' (ibid), and ideas can only be acquired through sensible intuition, or *a posteriori*[7]. *A posteriori*, or, 'from the latter', is the term used to distinguish knowledge that is dependent on experience or empirical evidence. In *Kant: a Very Short Introduction* (2001), Scruton gives a good example of an *a posteriori* 'truth' when he writes 'all bachelors are unfulfilled' (Scruton, 2001: 28). The implications of this kind of statement are twofold: not only do they demand that experience is a necessary component of knowledge, but that the *only* experience that can confirm anything *for me* is *my* experience. In this claim, Hume reduces knowledge of the world to the knowledge of my own subjective sphere, which in turn precludes the possibility for objective knowledge. According to Hume, a claim to knowledge external to my perceptions is merely the exhibition of 'constancy' between perceptions that generates the illusory idea of an independent world. Thus, Hume equates the Leibnizian world 'as it is' with the subjective perception of constancy, insisting that causal necessity is but the 'regular succession among experiences', and the sense of anticipation this creates (ibid).

However, Hume was not so naïve as to dismiss the power of reason altogether, claiming that the function of reason in experience is to tell us about the 'relation of ideas', such as how the idea of space is 'included' with, and comes as part of, the idea of shape. Indeed this notion of idea can be simplified in many instances to the term 'experience', such that the 'experience of space is included with, and

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[7] As opposed to the statement 'all bachelors are unmarried', which can be held true simply because it reiterates the definition of 'bachelor', the proposition that 'all bachelors are unfulfilled' (ibid) relies unequivocally upon harnessing the 'truth' of that statement from experience.

comes as part of, the experience of shape'. Nevertheless, Hume asserted that the power of reason has limits, indeed, what reason cannot do is generate ideas (experiences) of its own and thus, for Hume, reason alone cannot lead to 'knowledge of matters of fact' (ibid). Indeed, Hume took this view to its dogmatic extreme, and in doing so cast doubt on the very existence of the self, because within his particular logic there is no perceivable experience that would or could give rise to 'self' as an idea. It was this extreme dogmatic scepticism, such that it cast into doubt the possibility for the Leibnizian *monad*, which roused Kant from his 'dogmatic slumbers'.

Thus, 'Kant wished to give an answer to the question of objective knowledge that was neither as absolute as Leibniz's nor as subjective as Hume's' (ibid: 21). To the rationalists, Kant argued that knowledge must have an *a posteriori* element to it, or it might as well (for the sake of argument) not exist, while to the empiricists he argued that without *a priori* concepts, our intuitions of the world would be unintelligible. Thus for Kant, reason without *experience* is illusion, and experience without *reason* is empty, for 'the understanding cannot intuit anything, and the senses cannot think anything' (Kant, 1999: [B76/A52] 40). He called this new conception of objectivity 'transcendental idealism'.

So, in the first instance, one can think about Kant as the meeting point of rationalism and empiricism; the balancing point, or pivot, between the world of sensory experience and the world of reason and concepts. His argument in this regard is very simple: it is only through an immediate bringing together of

experience and reason that I can acquire meaningful knowledge of the world. What is complex and often challenging about Kant's work is understanding exactly how he attempts to bring these two dialectical positions together in a complete and cogent critical system. Nevertheless, it is absolutely crucial that this is explained and understood, because the implications of his unique methodology and thought provide access to a rich and profound way of thinking about performance experience.

To begin his exploration of objective knowledge, Kant proposes that the division between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*, and thus the rational and the empirical positions on objective knowledge, is complicated by two differing 'types' of statement which he calls 'analytic' and 'synthetic'. An analytic statement is one in which the predicate concept is wholly contained within the subject concept, and thus the truth of that statement is determined by the meanings of its terms. For example, in the statement 'monologues are spoken by a single voice', the predicate 'single voice' is contained within the subject concept of a 'monologue' – from the Late Greek *monologos*, 'speaking alone'. Analytic truths, then, since they add nothing to the concept of the subject, are entirely explicative. In synthetic statements, by contrast, the predicate is wholly *different* to the subject concept, and their truth can only be determined by reference to an external principle, fact, or experience. For instance, the statement 'the London Coliseum is the largest theatre in the U.K.' is synthetic because the subject does not *contain* the predicate, rather, its truth can only be determined by the way the world is, and not by linguistic meaning alone. So, in place of the *a priori* versus *a posteriori* dialectic, Kant produces *four* types of proposition: the analytic *a posteriori*; the synthetic *a posteriori*; the analytic *a priori*; and the synthetic *a priori*.

The analytic *a priori* is an analytic statement, like the example above, which does not require empirical evidence to prove it as true. A further example would be 'all bachelors are unmarried': the predicate concept of 'unmarried' is contained within the subject concept of 'bachelor', an unmarried man. Entirely different to this, yet

consonant with its logic is the synthetic *a posteriori*. These are uncontroversial matters of fact that one can only come to know through experience. For example, '*Black Tie* by Rimini Protokoll has three performers who present material in front of a large rear-projected video'. Here, 'three performers' and 'rear-projected video' is not contained within '*Black Tie* by Rimini Protokoll', and so it is only through some form of experience or encounter with the world that I could validate the truth of this statement. Important to note, also, is that the means of 'proof' in synthetic *a posteriori* statements is the methodology of the social sciences: a hypothesis or statement rejected or accepted by empirical study. Likewise in performance analysis, this is the approach of cultural materialism; to look out into the world for some evidence of statements made by or of performance.

The remaining two types of statement operate in a more different way. The only time an analytic *a posteriori* statement is possible, is in those cases where the subject of the statement is a *percept* rather than a *concept*. Otherwise, for Kant the very proposition of an analytic *a posteriori* statement, an explicative statement grounded in experience, is basically self-contradictory for Kant inasmuch as one would never require empirical evidence to validate something that is purely explicative[8]. 'Monologues are spoken by a single voice', for example, demonstrates how analytic statements do not require attention to the empirical

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[8] For example, consider a scenario where a performer holds up a white object, and says to the audience 'This – *pointing to the object* – is white'. In this case, 'the subject [of the statement] is not a concept but something that both speaker and listener are looking at. It is a percept' (Aldrich, 1968: 200). It is Aldrich's argument that 'having the concept of the subject of such singular propositions is not necessary to their intelligibility or to their completeness, as long as their subjects are clearly in view – or as long as the communicants *see* that of which the predicate is predicated' (ibid).

world. Indeed, in the introduction to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant writes:

> *Experiential judgments, as such, are one and all synthetic.* For to base an analytic judgment on experience would be absurd, because in its case I can formulate my judgment without going outside my concept, and hence do not need for it any testimony of experience.

(Kant, 1999: [A9/B13] 16)

The final kind of statement, the synthetic *a priori*, is by far the most crucial for Kant. Indeed, simply asserting the possibility for such statements is his first significant task. A synthetic *a priori* statement, then, is one in which the predicate is not logically or analytically contained within the subject, but is true independent of particular experience. In justifying the grounds for such statements, Kant offers mathematics as his most powerful example. For example, in the sum $7 + 5 = 12$, the predicate '12' is not contained within any of the concepts '5', '7', or '+', and thus is synthetic. Yet unlike synthetic *a posteriori* claims, it does not require experience to prove it true, and so is both synthetic and *a priori* at the same time.

I want to look now in detail at the specific 'conditions' under which Kant claims synthetic *a priori* statements are possible, because doing so will reveal not only the importance of the synthetic *a priori* for Kant, but also its implications for the analysis of performance.

'The first kind of condition', writes Watkins, 'pertains to the way in which we become acquainted with objects, that is, [...] that all objects must be given to us in space and time; space and time are the sensible forms through which we intuit

objects' (Watkins, 1999: xi). So, any object that is the subject of a synthetic *a priori* proposition must exist in space and time, insofar as the experience of it is 'possible'. The second condition is the existence of what Watkins calls 'a set of primitive and nonempirical concepts' (ibid: xii) that we employ to comprehend our sensible intuitions. Kant calls these concepts the 'categories of understanding', and they are as follows:

1
Quantity
Unity
Plurality
Totality

2
Quality
Reality
Negation
Limitation

3
Relation
Inherence and Subsistence
Causality and Dependence
Community

4
Modality
Possibility
Existence
Necessity

(Kant, 1999: [A70/B95] 45)

The categories or 'concepts' (ibid) of the understanding, Kant claims, are 'pure' (ibid: [A76/B102] 46) concepts known to us *a priori*, and in asserting their centrality to knowledge of the world he 'follows that the Leibnizian theory of 'innate ideas' is substantially correct' (Scruton, 2001: 37). These categories, as Scruton explains, are:

> Concepts that cannot be given through experience because they are presupposed in experience. They are involved in every apprehension of the world that I can represent as mine; not to possess them is to have, not experience, but mere intuition, from which no other knowledge can be derived. These 'a priori concepts' of the understanding prescribe the basic 'forms' of judgment. All other concepts can be seen as determinations of them – that is, as special

> cases, more or less adulterated by the reference to observation and experiment.
>
> (Scruton, 2001: 37)

The combination of these two conditions 'by *synthesis*, in the most general sense of the term' (Kant, 1999: [A78/B103] 46) represents the fundamental requirement for synthetic *a priori* propositions and judgments: the *possibility* for the sensible intuition of objects in space and time as grasped by pure concepts of the understanding. What this shows us is that it is the synthetic *a priori* in particular which brings together the assertions of rationalist and empiricist thought; and given that synthetic *a priori* statements are possible, they confirm Kant's assertion that reason and experience in combination is the necessary requirement for true knowledge of the world.

Having explained the nature and role of the synthetic *a priori* in Kant's early critical work, I want to look now at what the synthetic *a priori* means in relation to aesthetic judgment. The answer is complex, relates to the notion of aesthetic judgment in general, and also to the specific architecture that Kant defines for his aesthetics in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790). So, with the intention of developing my argument throughout this section, I will look first at the specific relationship between the synthetic *a priori* and aesthetic judgment in general.

In the previous section, I offered '5 + 7 = 12' as an example of a synthetic *a priori* proposition. There, the predicate concept '12', was not contained within either of the subject concepts '5', '7,' '+' or '=‘, but was nevertheless universally true and required no empirical investigation to prove it so. Bearing this in mind, consider the statement 'one artwork can be more beautiful than another'. If we can agree (in the broadest sense) that claiming one artwork 'more beautiful' than another is a judgment of taste, then judgments of taste must *necessarily* be synthetic *and a priori*. As Pluhar writes, 'we use the predicate 'beautiful' as if beauty were a *property* of things (which everyone ought to see)' (Pluhar, 1987: xlvii) – 'x is a beautiful painting/image/landscape' – and as such these judgments 'claim something with necessity', and in doing so, they 'must be to some extent *a priori*' (ibid). Moreover, 'they are clearly not analytic but synthetic' (ibid) – that is, in the judgment 'Caravaggio's *The Crucifixion of Saint Peter* is beautiful', the predicate 'beautiful' is not contained within the subject '*The Crucifixion of Saint Peter*' – something beyond the meanings of the terms is required to validate that particular

judgment.

Now, this would not occur were it not for the fact that Kant defines aesthetic judgment, judgments of taste, as *non*-cognitive. To explain: if a judgment of taste was cognitive, I would be able to employ pure concepts (the categories of understanding) to prove or disprove my judgment of Caravaggio's work. But as Kant writes in §1, 'if we wish to decide whether something is beautiful or not, we do not use understanding to refer the presentation to the object so as to give rise to cognition; rather we use imagination (perhaps in connection with understanding) to refer the presentation to the subject and his feeling of pleasure or displeasure' (Kant, 1987: §1 [44/204]). Were we to employ cognition in judgments of taste they would be analytic statements, because within the notion of 'x artwork' we would apply certain pure concepts to determine its beauty in comparison with 'artwork y'. This would provide us with a standard, or 'rule' of taste, whereby there could be no argument about an artwork's worth, beauty or validity, because these things would be self evident – and indeed, as in Leibnizian theory, we would not even have to experience them to know their truth. But as Kant clearly states in §7, 'there can be no objective rule of taste, no rule of taste that determines by concepts what is beautiful' (Kant, 1987: §17 [79/232]).

At this point, two problems converge. If taste, which Kant defines as simply 'the ability to judge the beautiful' (Kant, 1987: [42/203]), is in-and-of-itself a synthetic *a priori* judgment, it does not meet the second condition of such judgments, namely, that of having relation to the pure concepts of understanding. And, if

18

those fundamental non-empirical concepts are lacking from the intuition of experience, 'how, if at all, is it possible to judge something in nature (or in art) as beautiful on the basis of something very subjective, a feeling of pleasure, and yet demand for our judgment a universal assent?' (Pluhar, 1987: xlvii). To solve these problems, Kant argues that he must 'find the moments that a judgment takes into consideration when it reflects' (Kant, 1987: [43/203]), but since the aesthetic judgment is different *in kind* to the cognitive judgment, he must find a means of expression that does not use the pure concepts found in the categories of understanding, but one that nevertheless 'has reference to them' (ibid).

What he provides in the stead of the categories are the four *moments* of a judgment of taste: *disinterestedness*, *universality*, *purposiveness*, and *necessity*. Kant sees these moments as the non-cognitive equivalent of the categories of understanding. As such, their relationship would be: quality – disinterestedness; quantity – universality; relation – purposiveness; and modality – necessity. On these particular pairings, Christian H Wenzel writes the following:

> In the first *Critique*, Kant sets up a table of twelve categories and divides these categories into four groups, each having a so-called 'title'. […] It is a general claim from the first *Critique* that any judgment, at least a judgment of cognition, is intrinsically related to exactly one of these four groups. Accordingly, Kant thinks , there must be four 'moments' of a judgment of taste (because it has some relation to cognition), one for each title.

> (Wenzel, 2005: 10)

As Wenzel goes on to note, 'what this [disinterestedness] should have to do with 'quality' is questionable though, and it is hard to avoid finding the correlation

'quality-disinterestedness' artificial and forced' (ibid: 10-11). With other moments, most notably *universality*, the connection to 'quantity' – judgments of the singular or the plural – is much clearer, as I shall demonstrate in the coming chapters.

Ultimately, the virtue of these relationships for Kant is twofold. In the first instance, it allows Kant to form an architectural relationship between cognitive and non-cognitive judgment, asserting what he calls the 'logical function of the understanding in judgments' (Wenzel, 2005: 10). The second reason for this relationship is that synthetic *a priori* judgments must, to meet their second condition, employ 'a set of primitive and nonempirical concepts' (Watkins, 1999: xii) which comprehend sensible intuition. But since aesthetic judgments are non-cognitive, the categories (concepts) of understanding will not suffice, and something must stand in their place. What this means is that in aesthetic judgments the non-conceptual feeling of disinterestedness *replaces* the concepts of *Reality*, *Negation* and *Limitation* (which are arranged under the group of 'quality'). Likewise, universality replaces the concepts of *Unity*, *Plurality*, and *Totality*, and so on with the other two moments of purposiveness and necessity. This structure does not entirely abrogate the conceptual categories from the judgment of taste, but rather the non-conceptual *feeling* that stands in their place does the job of 'freeing' them from their obligations as a determining factor in judgment. Having been 'freed' in this way, these conceptual categories can know no bounds in the imagination, which allows aesthetic experience to consider all *possible* experience as well as the specificities of one *particular* experience. Through this, the judgment of taste is an example of the 'subjective universal' –

particular to me, but valid for everyone.

According to Kant, these 'moments', which I shall explore in greater detail in later analysis, represent a 'check-list', as it were, against which we measure our judgments. In other words, if our judgment can respond positively to all four moments, it is thus a judgment of the beautiful, and a 'pure' judgment of taste. In 'taking over' from the categories of understanding in aesthetic, non-cognitive judgment, Kant provides aesthetics with its own 'faculty', that is, the faculty of aesthetic judgment. By virtue of this faculty being one to which we all have access, like the pure concepts of the categories of understanding, the universal necessity of these judgments can be upheld.

What this means is that the significance of the synthetic *a priori* in relation to aesthetic judgment is twofold. In the first, more general case, the relationship between the aesthetic and the synthetic *a priori* mounts a serious defence of aesthetic experience in-and-of-itself. As Kant provides aesthetics with its own faculty, the aesthetic is no longer impoverished as subjugate to our other mental faculties, what Leibniz and Wolff had called 'lower cognition' (Pluhar, 1987: xlviii). Nor is the aesthetic to be considered as one cultural practice amongst other cultural practices; rather, it is innate to us all. Aesthetic experience resolves, or gives concrete evidence of, Kant's assertions about objective knowledge and both the relation and division between rationalism and empiricism. 'The faculty of [aesthetic] judgment mediates' (Scruton, 2001: 99) between the faculties of understanding and reason, and in so doing proposes aesthetic experience *in*

particular as that which demonstrates how the union between rationalism and empiricism is necessary to gain knowledge of the world. 'It enables us to see the empirical world as conforming to the ends of practical reason, and practical reason as adapted to knowledge of the empirical world' (Scruton, 2001: 99). Scruton continues:

> Only a rational being can experience beauty; and, without the experience of beauty, the exercise of reason is incomplete. It is only in aesthetic experience [...] that we grasp the relation of our faculties to the world, and so understand our own limitations, and the possibility of transcending them.

(Scruton, 2001: 99-100)

As the aesthetic thus bridges the gap for Kant between the rational and the empirical, Kant mirrors this in his deployment of the third *Critique* in relation to the previous two. As Pluhar notes, it is the 'power of judgment, but above all the *aesthetic* power of judgment, that is, the power of judgment unaided by reason, that is responsible for the mediation between the "world" of the first *Critique* and the "world" of the second *Critique* by which the three *Critiques* come to form a system' (Pluhar, 1987: civ).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is that Kant's work 'unexpectedly creates the possibility in principle of making assertions about what lies beyond experience' (Reath, 1997: xi). As Andrews Reath writes in the introduction to the 1997 translation of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, 'the distinction between appearances and things in themselves, along with the claim that spatio-temporal properties and laws do not represent objects as they are in themselves, creates

room for the thought of noumenal objects subject to laws that are different in kind from those governing spatio-temporal events' (ibid). Thus, there is the possibility within the faculty of judgment for the aesthetic experience to exceed the world of appearance, and to speculate on those things which either are not, or cannot be, given in sensible intuition. For the thesis as a whole, this is a significant proposition, because it means that a Kantian approach toward performance frees us from the literal, concrete, empirically knowable objects of the stage to consider them boundlessly and metaphysically.

Bringing to a close this exposition of Kantian thought, I want to introduce a piece of modern scholarship which lies at the heart of my exchange between Kant and performance experience. In *An Introduction to Kant's Aesthetics: Core Concepts and Problems* (2005), Christian H. Wenzel makes a crucial observation about Kant's particular choice of language in his setting out of the four 'moments' of taste. He writes:

> In German there are two words: "*der Moment*" (masc.) and "*das Moment*" (neuter), and they differ in meaning. "*Der Moment*" has a temporal meaning, referring to an instant, a minute portion or point of time. "*Das Moment*", on the other hand, has a very different meaning. It refers to a decisive circumstance, a mark, or an aspect, and it is this word that is also used in physics, as in *das Drehmoment* (torque). In Latin, *momentum* [...]: weight, pressure, push, influence.
>
> (Wenzel, 2005: 13)

It is these four 'moments' that shall provide the backbone for my exploration of the Kantian notion of taste, with specific concern for this differentiation between a moment 'of time', and a moment as *event*, or *force*. Commonly, we might find that the first moment of a judgment of taste '*is*' disinterestedness, the second '*is*' universality, and so forth; or a shorthand might be used in which we hear reference to the 'moment *of* disinterestedness' or even the '*disinterested moment*', and so on. However, a closer look at Kant's language reveals that 'he often thinks of moments as causal activities' (Wenzel, 2005: 13), and if we consider his 'explications of the beautiful' we find that disinterestedness, in the first case, is the 'Explication of The Beautiful *Inferred* from the First Moment'. In other words,

24

disinterestedness is the *product* of the first moment, and not representative of the moment in and of itself.

Thinking about judgments of taste in this way allow us a clearer picture of how the *a priori* and *a posteriori*, and analytic and synthetic, play their part in aesthetic experience. The explication of the moments as Kant sees them represent the *a priori* content of a judgment of taste: a set of fundamental states of mind prior to experience, while the *a posteriori* is represented through the experience itself. *Das Moment*, the thing which 'pushes' or 'forces' that state of mind into the consciousness of the witness is, to borrow the language of the synthetic *a priori*, the thing 'beyond the meanings of the terms' that holds the judgment together. This is of real importance for any application of Kant's aesthetics to performance, because it takes into consideration the *a priori* content of a judgment, the *a posteriori* experience as a whole, and through *das Moment*, attempts to capture that special something which resolves the rational/empirical dialectic. The result is an understanding of performance experience that at once exceeds the empirical world yet constantly and persistently returns to it through the force of *das Moment*. To understand performance in this way is to have taste for and in performance.

What my analysis of performance aims to identify, then, are those 'decisive circumstances' (ibid) in the course of a specific performance work that constitute the *Moment* (n., singular) of aesthetic judgment. By understanding these *Momente* (n., plural) as moments in a performance, it becomes possible to explore how the

subtleties and nuances of performance style, composition and structure can influence and shape our aesthetic experience, and moreover, how the articulation of these experiences begin to consider a Kantian approach to performance analysis. At the same time, by understanding how those *a posteriori* moments can only be fully explicated in terms of *a priori* judgments, we grasp how empirical experience relates fruitfully to rational categories.

It is also important to highlight my own specific contribution to this notion of *das Moment*. While the analysis of performance in the following chapters agrees with Kant insofar as *das Moment* is a 'causal' activity (ibid) – *caused* by the object of judgment and *felt* by the spectator – my position, which I will later demonstrate, is that *das Moment* is not limited to what Kant might call 'judgements of the beautiful'. Indeed, in this thesis I seek to separate the aesthetic notion of taste from cultural materialist ideas of beauty, by proposing in particular that *das Moment*, as a moment of subjective experience, can be thought of as a *principle of aesthetic experience as such* which extends and transcends the boundaries of the Kantian system.

In this way, I also hope to reverse and contest certain criticisms of Kant's aesthetic theory, in particular those that position his system as 'strict and inflexible' (Hill, 1999: 143). Donald Crawford, for example, in *Kant's Aesthetic Theory* (1974) argues that the Kantian notion of disinterest is fundamentally flawed insofar as we will *always* take meaningful interest in the preservation of beautiful objects (Crawford, 1974: 53). Indeed, more broadly, theorists George Dickie (1964) and

Edward Bullough (1912) both dispute the Kantian notion that there is an 'aesthetic attitude' at all (Dickie, 1964: 36); that the Kantian notion of an aesthetic faculty which we employ in our engagement with art is a 'myth' which 'misleads aesthetic theory' (ibid). In this particular case, Dickie's argument is formed in-part from Bullough's notion of 'psychical distance' (Bullough, 1912: 87), which argues that 'movements', 'strains [of hearing]', and forms of 'special, expectant, tacit anxiety and nervousness' (ibid) force us to abstract the object of our judgment from our physical experience of it. This abstraction, or 'necessary' distance, Dickie claims, puts us 'out of gear' with our 'practical life' (Dickie, 1964: 36) and casts a problematic shadow on the meaningfulness of our experiences.

But as I have already explained, I am asserting here a notion of *das Moment* which is connected to ideas of 'feeling' and 'force' in a very physical sense. Perhaps part of the problem with Dickie and Bullough's analysis is that they fall foul of what may also have been Kant's problem (indeed the problem of his age): that they do not give sufficient consideration to the notion of *time*. By dealing specifically with theatre and performance, both time-based practices, I am able to overcome the perceived problems which lead some theorists to see Kant as a force to be opposed.

Indeed, as theatre and performance unfolds *over time*, I am compelled to talk not only about *das Moment*, but also *die Momente*, and forward the idea that aesthetic experiences can shift and change throughout the experience of a single performance. This acknowledgement of time and temporality, then, draws

attention to how performance composition can be intrinsically involved in the creation of a *Moment* (n.). Moreover, attention is then drawn to how important compositional structures are to the experience of *Momente* (n.), as one is forced to consider not one *Moment* (n.) in hypothetical isolation, but the relationships *between Momente* (n.) within a larger performance experience. This further development of the Kantian aesthetic provides me with an opportunity to think about the 'oscillations' and behaviours of a *Moment* (n.) in a way that one is not normally able to observe. In turn, this performance-centred, time-based notion of *Momente* (n.) also enables a more dynamic understanding of Kantian aesthetics. This dynamism is further reflected in the notion, which I will later propose, of 'toggling' between the feelings of interest and disinterest, and beyond that the relationship between beauty and rhythm.

The introduction so far has had three aims: to situate Immanuel Kant's work within the context of his contemporaries; to explain in the clearest possible way the notions of the synthetic *a priori* and *das Moment*, and to highlight my own contribution to this field of research. Developing this, I want to explain why and how these particular ideas are so valuable for the analysis of performance. In this final part of the introduction, then, I will state four key positions that define this thesis. These positions aim to elucidate succinctly for the reader how the thesis is organised as work of scholarship. In doing so, I hope to clearly define the boundaries of the analysis herein, and make explicit the relationship between this work and the analysis of performance experience.

My first position is that the thesis considers aesthetic experience *in and of itself*. The question that emerges from this position is: why consider aesthetic experience and not another approach to performance analysis? To answer this question, I offer Kant's notion of the synthetic *a priori*. Already in this introduction I have demonstrated how the aesthetic, as seen by the synthetic *a priori*, should not be considered as one cultural practice amongst others – rather, that it is innate to us all. This is all the more important because, as I have already made clear, through the synthetic *a priori* there exists the possibility that aesthetic experience can exceed the world of appearance, and to speculate on those things which are not, or cannot, be given in sensible intuition. Thus, as the aesthetic experience defends and champions Kant's assertions concerning the division between rationalism and

empiricism, the notion of the synthetic *a priori* defends and champions aesthetic experience, not only as something vital to the understanding of performance but as a unique approach to performance analysis which at once brings together the universal boundlessness of the *a priori* faculty of imagination and the subjective, *a posteriori*, particularities of *being there*, in a performance, as it unfolds.

My second position is that I will use a Kantian approach to aesthetics as opposed to another aesthetic system. To answer why, I offer four reasons. The first is that a return to Kantian aesthetics gives me the ability to reflect on aesthetic experience using a system which fundamentally underscores (to greater or lesser degrees) every work of aesthetic scholarship from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. Given my focus on the aesthetic *qua* aesthetic, I first began to consider a range of relevant methodological approaches including phenomenology as developed by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Marion[9]; existentialism as developed by Heidegger and Kierkegaard; the critical and Marxist aesthetics of Habermas and Adorno; the postmodern philosophy of Lyotard, and the Hegelian aesthetic tradition, including the writings of Bauer, Feuerbach and Green. What I began to discover through this initial research was the influence of Kant on western thought in the post-Enlightenment period. It became clear that agreements and disagreements with the Kantian system formed the basis of a progression of aesthetic and metaphysical ideas from Schopenhauer's criticism of the Kantian system in *The World as Will and Representation* (1818), to the work of Schelling, Novalis, Foucault, and even

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[9] Husserl's *Experience and Judgment* (1939), Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962), and Marion's *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (2002) exemplify the works of these thinkers central to my early research.

Weber's sociology and the psychology of Jean Piaget[10].

The second reason for addressing Kantian aesthetics specifically can be found in the relationship between Kantian thought and the larger discourse of modernity[11]. As Jochen Schulte-Sasse argues in *The Subject's Aesthetic Foundation (On Kant)* (2000), the discourse of modernity, which 'culminates in Kant', saw a paradigmatic shift toward a conception of knowledge 'no longer based on an *adaequatio intellectus ad rem* emanating from an immaterial, infinite spirit', but 'one which advances the human subject [...] as a centre or midpoint from which the world can be experienced and cognized' (Schulte-Sasse, 2000: 27). With the discourse of modernity, then, comes the assertion that knowledge is the product of 'intricate mental operations' (ibid). This is seen no clearer than in the work of Kant, who explicitly cites the 'faculties' of understanding (*Verstand*) and imagination *(Einbildungskraft)* as the tools by which knowledge and information is made apparent to the viewing and/or experiencing subject. Thus, the significance of the Kantian relationship to modernity, for this thesis, is revealed first in relation to *das Moment* and the physical presence of the viewing subject. As the arguments here unfold, I will address the importance of sensory, as well as cerebral, understanding in the experience of performance. In this, I stress the importance of 'being there', and in this way, a Kantian modernity is one which

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[10] Piaget adopted the Kantian proposition that morality was autonomous from authority in *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (1932), while Schelling's *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795) was both a defence and critique of the Kantian system.

[11] As Jürgen Habermas notes in *Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present* (1984), Foucault 'discovers in Kant, as the first philosopher, an archer who aims his arrow at the heart of the most actual features of the present and so opens the discourse of modernity' (Habermas, 1984)

arises out of and at the same time responds to, one's own subjective situation, the *here-and-now* of experience.

The third reason I propose a Kantian approach articulates a deeper affinity in the thesis that relates to the progression from the *modern* to the *post*modern subject. Where the thesis employs work from the early European avant-garde and contemporary – *post*modern – performance practice as its primary study materials, the developments in spectator experience traced through this historical trajectory highlight the need to *develop* the Kantian model beyond the Enlightenment concept of *modern* subjectivity. As the reader will later note, my analysis of contemporary work often serves as the site for questioning and 'pushing' the Kantian system to account for the intricate, post-dramatic structures and nuances of contemporary theatre and performance. This is seen no clearer than in my analysis of Reckless Sleepers' *The Last Supper*, in which the subtle blending of complex social situations leads the spectator to seemingly contradictory feelings (in the purest Kantian sense) of both interest *and* disinterest at the same time. As Douglas Kellner observes:

> From the postmodern perspective […] identity becomes more and more unstable, more and more fragile. Within this situation, the discourses of postmodernity problematize the very notion of identity, claiming that it is a myth and an illusion. One reads both in modern theorists like the Frankfurt School, and in Baudrillard and other postmodern theorists that the autonomous, self-constituting subject that was the achievement of modern individuals, of a culture of individualism, is fragmenting and disappearing.
>
> (Kellner, 1995: 233)

As the postmodern subject emerges, unstable and variously constituted, the spectator is thrust into a series of ever-shifting positions. However, a post-Kantian analysis which takes on board the notion of time, *das Moment* and the relations between *Momente* (n.), addresses that instability in an efficient way. Indeed, this post-Kantian approach to aesthetics elucidates those shifting positions rather than undermines them, and goes beyond Kant's (modern) notion of a stable subject (and perhaps, also, the implied stable object of aesthetic experience).

The fourth, and final, reason why I have chosen a Kantian approach to aesthetics is that it enables me to address assumptions about performance that are deeply embedded in the very ordinary ways in which people make judgments about performance. Kant's *Critique of Judgment* has at its heart the terms taste, beauty, and the sublime, whereas the works of phenomenology, existentialism, critical theory and Marxism make use of specialised vocabularies and neologisms[12] that are often untranslatable[13]. On the one hand, the three terms absolutely vital to Kant's aesthetic system − taste, beauty and the sublime − have fallen into common parlance and, as I will explain in greater detail in Chapter One, their common use strongly influences the way we think and pass judgments about performance, most notably in the situations of the academy and arts funding. On the other hand, the enormous value of these terms for the articulation of experience has been lost. Indeed, the dilution and obfuscation produced by their use in the everyday

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[12] Husserl's notions of *Noesis*, *Noema* and *Lifeworld* (*Lebenswelt*), Kierkegaard's introduction of *Angst* in *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844), and Foucault's use of *Episteme* in *The Order of Things* (1966) demonstrate well the specialist vocabulary of these disciplines.

[13] Heideggerian terms such as *Dasein*, which is derived from *da-sein* or *there-being* and *Ereignis*, from the German prefix *er-* and *Auge* (eye), exemplify this well.

vernacular has rendered them almost unrecognisable, and thus the time is ripe for their re-appropriation into aesthetic discourse.

My third position is that the thesis will take the early avant-garde and contemporary experimental (postmodern) performance as the focus of analysis, and for this there are two reasons. The first, simply, is that avant-garde theatre and postmodern performance are unquestionably the practical results, outpourings, and artistic manifestations of modernism and postmodernism. And so, just as a Kantian and post-Kantian analysis might elucidate the modern and postmodern subject respectively, my development from modern to postmodern performance practice allows, develops, and substantiates my contributions to the studies of Kant, performance, and aesthetics. The second reason is that essentially, this work is ripe for Kantian analysis. The work of the early avant-garde, which includes the Symbolist, Dada, Futurist, Abstract Expressionist and Constructivist movements amongst others, is symptomatic of the boundless freedom at the heart of Kantian aesthetics. From the sublimity of untamed nature in Romantic painting and literature, to the realms of imagination and play in Symbolist poetry and performance, many works of the early avant-garde focus specifically on the experience of the aesthetic *qua* aesthetic. Moving against the popular forms of Realism and Naturalism – concerned with culturally specific themes and events often bound to a particular historical moment – early avant-garde ideas are analogous to the central principles of Kantian aesthetic thought. In a contemporary context, Kantian aesthetic ideas have been at the forefront of my thinking throughout the making of *Whisper*, *Virtuoso (working title)* and *Third Person*

(redux), which brings me to the conclusion that these works, concerned in many ways with the aesthetic *qua* aesthetic, *need* a Kantian analysis in order that their potency be articulated in full.

More importantly, though, my choice of works emphasises the *connection* between the early avant-garde and contemporary experimental work. In particular, the connection concerns technological innovation. In the performance analysis throughout this thesis, I look extensively at how the technologies of stagecraft play a role in composition, construction, structure, and rhythm. Patrick Geddes, (1915) Landes (1966), and Mokyr (1998) called the late nineteenth century period between 1870 and 1914, which runs parallel to the early avant-garde, the 'Second Industrial Revolution' (Mokyr, 1998: 1). During this period, electricity and steel became more readily available both commercially and domestically. 'Characterised as one of the most fruitful and dense in innovations in history' (ibid: 2), this historical period gave theatre makers a brand new set of technologies and industrial advances to bring into their practices. For contemporary artists, the proliferation of digital technologies which has been growing ever rapidly since the early nineteen-eighties has provided a similar paradigmatic change in how practitioners are able to construct and compose theatrical experiences.

This connection also says something important about the coming together of the *a priori* and *a posteriori* in Kant's aesthetics as opposed to other means of performance analysis. For example, an analysis of performance which employed the methods of identitarian politics would bring *a priori* identitarian categories to

bear on performance – black/white, male/female *et cetera*. This method, however, produces a limited analysis insofar as the evidence taken from performance is used to occupy *only* those predetermined categories. As Walsh and Causey argue in a call for papers for the forthcoming book *Performance After Identity*, 'identitarian discourse […] can engender literal and symbolic violence rather than alleviate it' (Walsh and Causey, 2010). But by showing in detail the technical and scenographic compositions of performance a part of an account of *being there*, the thesis can undertake a much deeper discussion of the textures and rhythms of performance, demonstrating how the spectator is drawn in and 'captured' in spite of identitarian categorisation. Indeed, dealing with scenographic and production data in this way stresses the importance of *a posteriori* information in the consideration of the synthetic *a priori* and demonstrates the necessity of *a priori* and *a posteriori* information in the analysis of judgment. On one hand, the thesis refuses cultural materialism and identitarian politics. But as my explication of the synthetic *a priori* has shown, in a judgment of taste, *a priori* universals are dependent upon *a posteriori* particulars and cannot ignore the evidence of culture and history. Thus, on the other hand, the thesis also demonstrates how it is possible to work with Kant in a way that draws on cultural meaning. It is my goal, then, to use these tensions in such a way that they explain the lived experience of performance.

The fourth and final position concerns the particular works that I have chosen for analysis in this thesis. Firstly, my choice of specific performance works stems from a pragmatic need for information. In Part One, which considers the notion of

taste, my exploration of *Ubu Roi* is indebted to the extensive work done by Frantisek Deak in compiling accounts of the experience of the opening night and his situation of Jarry's masterwork as a formative work of the early avant-garde. Similarly, Edward Gordon Craig's meticulous documentation of his own works and processes provide a rich source of analysis in Chapter Six. With regards contemporary work, it is important that the works I examine in detail are ones that *I* have seen and experienced, and so the analysis of *The Last Supper* in Chapter Three, and *The Salisbury Proverbs* in Chapter Seven, are chosen because my experience of them is crucial to my investigation of aesthetic experience. This pragmatism also extends to my choice of Proto-type Theater as a major source for analysis. I have devised and performed in all three of the Proto-type works examined here, and being a company member has provided me with access to a rich collection of data that would, under normal circumstance, require extensive ethnographic research. In this way, the opportunity to explore the work of my own company was much too fruitful to neglect. I would also add that Proto-type's place in North American and British contemporary experimental performance suggests that the work we make is worthy of critical scrutiny[14].

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[14] Proto-type Theater has been producing work since 1997, in New York City, San Francisco, North Carolina, the Netherlands, Scotland, Russia, China, Korea and most recently in England. Since their formation, Proto-type has created over fifteen original works including: *Frack to Bunt* (1996, 1997), *Poor Angels* (1999), *Cheap Thrills* (2002, 2003), *Three Ring* (2003, 2004), *About Silence* (2003, 2004) *Apostasy* (2005) and *Whisper* (2007).

Critics have called their work 'beautifully crafted stuff that has a broader relevance and audience than a traditional theatre company based in one city could manage' (Jackson, 2010). The critical praise for their work has been matched by a series of commissions from Nuffield Theatre Lancaster, Soho Theatre (London), Performance Space 122 (NYC), Dixon Place (NYC) and Theatre Sandbox (Bristol); residencies at the School of Art and New Media (Scarborough), Battersea Arts Centre (BAC), Lanternhouse International, the Field and Richard Foreman's Ontological Theatre; by the support of a large and loyal audience, and from a significant history of support from Arts Council England through their Grants for the Arts scheme.

Through this section so far, there has been much discussion of, and reference to, someone called 'the spectator', and it is important that I take a moment here to consider who that spectator is and what they might mean to this thesis. In 'Mapping Performance Culture: Locating the Spectator in Theatre History' (2005), Joanne Robinson writes the following:

> It is axiomatic to any definition of performance that it requires the presence of an audience: theatrical meaning is created in the interaction between performer and audience, between stage and auditorium […] all too often in writing about performance the presence of the audience is elided, merely mentioned in passing: the audience is there, imaginatively necessary, but critically unconsidered.

(Robinson, 2005: 3)

This view of an 'unconsidered' spectator in theatre scholarship is one not limited to Robinson. As Susan Bennett argues in *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance,* 'performance criticism, until relatively recently, spent little time and energy discussion the role and importance of the spectator. It was as if the audience was there anyway as a kind of passive 'given' and the performance itself constituted the unique and complex experience which required the full weight and deliberation of the critic's efforts' (Bennett, 1998: 265). What was said about the audience, she argues, considered them 'as a homogenous group […] white, middle class, heterosexual and male' (ibid). Perhaps this is because, as is noted by Tracy C. Davis in 'Riot, Subversion and Discontent in New Victorian Theatre Scholarship' (1994), theatre spectatorship is 'a notoriously difficult subject to pursue', it is, she goes on, both a 'methodological problem and scholarly lacuna' which poses a long-term challenge to performance historians and theorists (Davis,

1994: 307-16). Nevertheless, 'audiences are not', writes Dennis Kennedy, 'homogeneous social and psychological groups, their experiences are not uniform and impossible to standardize' (Kennedy, 2009: 3). So, in an attempt to avoid the kind of criticism levelled by Robinson, Bennett, and Kennedy, and yet to acknowledge as Davis does the lacunose nature of spectatorship, I will lay out here how I perceive the spectator in this thesis, and how the content of analysis in some way encourages a particular spectator construction.

In reality, the nature of my analysis presupposes a multitude of different witnesses. I write about work that I have made, about work I have seen, work I might have seen, and work it would never have been possible for me to see. Spanning in excess of one-hundred years, the relationships between these works are complex, and so by extension are the relationships between 'possible' spectators. And it is that term, *possible spectator*, that I want to use to define who might be watching and experiencing the works which I speculate upon here. What this thesis does not do, for it would lose its focus, is construct an historically precise spectator for each case-study. But at the same time, it does not consider each work through a singularly twenty-first century discourse. For example, in my analysis of *Ubu Roi*, I speculate on the relationship between the geometric swirl which adorns Pa Ubu's costume and the practice at that time of mesmerism, asking whether the images and language of that practice may or may not have played a part in shaping the imaginative play of the audience.

And this in some sense is central to the thesis as such. Throughout the work, I

argue for an aesthetics which is not dependant on cultural materialism and thus politics, identity, gender, race and class; but nonetheless one which does not ignore those concerns entirely. And so in my analysis, I am neither constructing a generic 'model' spectator – without history, bias, memory – nor a culturally and historically specific one which depends upon the cultural nuances of the day, because both are antithetical to my approach. The spectator in this work, then, is a *possible spectator*, somewhere between the silhouette and the actual ticket-holder, between the ideologically neutral and the bum-on-the-seat. Perhaps this only serves to strengthen Davis' claim as to the difficulty of writing about theatre spectatorship and (re)constructing a witness. Nevertheless, it is an approach which has a transparent and useful logic within the boundaries of this thesis. Its value and efficacy beyond my own work is a question for debate, most certainly, but it is necessary, in this instance, to an area of theatre scholarship which is demanding of the utmost care and attention.

In approaching the thesis in this way, I am able to set up a series of tantalising questions that I hope to answer through the course of my analysis. Amongst other more detailed questions that will pertain to individual chapters, the thesis as a whole looks to answer the following questions: can there be a fruitful harmony between the *a priori* and *a posteriori* in performance experience? How can the faculty of imagination, predicated upon a sense of *not-knowing*, be a useful tool in the analysis of historical performance works? What, in performance, is a *das Moment*? How does aesthetic experience relate to other concerns? Is there a difference between aesthetic experience and the experience of art in general?

What is rhythm in performance, and what role does rhythm play in relation to our experience of the aesthetic? How important to aesthetic experience is that sense of *being there* at a performance (either actually or imaginatively)? Is there a way for aesthetic experience to break down, or *decompose*? What is the role of the culturally-situated spectator who embarks on a universal free-play of the imagination? And finally, is the aesthetic *qua* aesthetic experience truly enough to justify the existence of a work of art?

Part One

Taste

CHAPTER ONE – THE FUNDAMENTS OF TASTE

> All of life is a dispute over taste and tasting.

> (Nietzsche, 2010: 74)

TASTE AND CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE

Kant's idea of taste has been the driving force behind my doctoral research since its earliest stages. As I shall explain throughout these three chapters, Kantian aesthetics can elucidate our taste for performance to a degree unmatched by other approaches to performance analysis. But before heading into that analysis, it is important to see how notions of taste repeatedly reveal themselves within both contemporary performance practices and discourses around those practices.

In 2005 I studied for a Masters degree in Devised Theatre. As part of the programme, students were encouraged to meet once a week in a studio space to test ideas, show works-in-progress, or lead workshops that would produce tactics and strategies for devising. In these sessions, we could agree on very little. Over and over we found ourselves in heated debate over what was 'working' for us as spectators. Points of contention would focus on the clarity or obscurity of, for instance, intent, narrative, visual and spatial composition, temporal structure, or use of text or motif. But across all of these elements of performance, our discussions would rarely come to a satisfactory end. Unable to come to a decision, a disputed matter would be written-off as a mere 'question of taste'. For us, taste was an easy catch-all term that disguised our inability to find a shared basis for understanding our experiences of performance. But what did we mean when we

referred to taste in this way? To come to the conclusion that something was merely a 'question of taste' assumed that taste is an affinity to a particular concept extrinsic to the work, or a personal preference – and above all else as something which avoided a thorough examination. But this is not what *Kantian* taste is about. Indeed for Kant, taste is precisely the opposite. A judgment of artistic quality or success based upon extrinsic concepts or personal preference is what Kant calls a judgment of the *agreeable*: based upon an interaction between the object of judgment and my own 'psychological proclivities' (Herwitz, 2008: 59); something merely agreeable *to me*. Whilst anecdotal, my experience does illustrate how a common conception of taste can be profoundly different from taste as Kant sees it. In my experience, taste was a *negative* term, used to dismiss a particular judgment as trivial or inconsequential or beyond shared purpose. For Kant, however, taste is a fertile and valuable process through which we tune-in to the subtleties and nuances of our experiences of artworks in-and-of-themselves. It is with that richness in mind that I want to approach my task.

The assumption that taste is trivial, as was the case in my MA programme, is a considerable problem in the arts because, as I shall argue, taste is crucial to areas where the judgment and evaluation of artistic experience is of decisive importance. Indeed, in my professional practices as a teacher and maker of performance I find myself frustrated, time and again, by approaches to judgment fostered by higher education and arts funding. What I want to do, then, is to find an alternative way of thinking about artistic judgments for myself as a spectator and for my colleagues in professional work. I want to start by looking at how taste

and judgment manifests in these influential institutions.

The interesting thing about judgment-making in higher education and arts funding is that they both employ methods that are loosely comparable with aspects of Kant's theory of taste, and I will outline some of these shortly. In spite of this, however, there remains a prevailing sense that taste can obfuscate, rather than illuminate, the experience of performance. In an Arts Council England (ACE) artistic assessment form from 2009, an introductory statement suggests that 'assessors should avoid judgments based on their own taste' (ACE, 2009: 1). Here again, it is presupposed that taste is something that I *possess*, much like a belief or prejudice, and which I *apply* to my experience of an artwork. But taste, recalling the notion of *das Moment*, can be better understood as something that happens, a kind of event, which is concerned specifically with the moment of experience as opposed to a later, reflective evaluation.

Instead of how it thinks of taste, the Arts Council values impartiality, and there are a number of instances in which impartiality is an important idea. Their process of assessment, as outlined in a document called 'How We Assess Artistic Quality', is divided into three strands: 'self assessment', 'peer assessment', and 'independent arts reporters' (Arts Council England, 2009: 2), and through that structure they are able to garner judgments of an artwork that transcend the personal preferences of the individual. Kant calls this kind of engagement *disinterestedness*, and it is one of the most fundamental aspects of his notion of *taste*! Indeed, if the artistic assessment form is asking assessors to avoid personal preference, then, *ipso facto*,

assessors are being asked to employ a tactic in their judgment that is comparable to taste in the Kantian sense.

However, public funding is firmly *non*-Kantian in its stance on purpose. Where Kant's notion of *purposiveness* in effect insists upon the value of aesthetic experience as an end in-and-of-itself, public funding bodies seek to reward and support work that has a strong sense of *instrumental* purpose[15]. Arts Council England, for example, considers in their assessment of quality 'the contribution the work makes to the development of the artist, the artform and the arts more widely' (Arts Council England, 2009: 2). This is, of course, useful in many ways. There are many theatre practices, such as community theatre or drama therapy, that are absolutely instrumental in purpose, and the direct impact of those practices can often be measured in empirical ways. But those measurements of success are difficult to apply, for instance, to experimental work that makes a case for artistic value in-and-of-itself. In these kinds of works, it is crucial for the immediate experience of the artwork to be the primary concern of judgment.

Like the Arts Council, Higher Education bodies employ methods of artistic judgment that are both comparable and opposed to Kantian taste, relating in this instance to the assessment of student work through criteria. By judging performance alongside criteria, the assessment of work transcends the interests of the individual examiner. Those feelings of 'I don't (personally) like this piece, but

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[15] Instrumental purpose, in its most general sense, can be defined as that which acts as a means or agency for the accomplishment of a certain goal. For example, one could claim that agit-prop theatre has a clear sense of instrumental purpose insofar as it is the agent, or means by which, political thought and action can be incited.

I *can* recognise certain elements within it that demonstrate a certain quality' are *disinterested*, and by implication they are approaches to academic assessment analogous to Kantian notions of taste. However, assessment criteria are problematic for an analysis that aims to reflect on experience *qua* experience. Criteria are, in-and-of-themselves, based on *concepts*. For example, an undergraduate course on which I have taught has as one of its criteria for assessment 'the student's ability to work collaboratively and where appropriate with directors'. To be able to assess students in this way, an examiner needs to have an understanding of both collaboration and the processes of directing as *concepts*. It is only when the judging subject, in this case the examiner, can articulate a response through this frame of reference, that accurate judgments can be made. The Kantian notion of *universality*, on the other hand, argues that 'concepts give rules and are applied to objects [...] but judging subjects are not objects in that sense, they are not subjected to rules, and it is such judging subjects that are in question here' (Wenzel, 2005: 33)[16].

Importantly, I am not the only person to be frustrated or dissatisfied by assessment methods in the creative industries. Teresa Amabile, Edsel Bryant Ford Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School, developed the 'consensual assessment' theory in an attempt to move away from the pitfalls of criteria-based

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[16] As I have already explained, Kant sees a judgement of taste as an *aesthetic* judgment, and entirely different in kind from a *cognitive* one. Criteria then, because they can be thought of as 'rules' (and rules must have proofs based on concepts) are cognitive. In practice, what this means is that the disinterested engagement that criteria promotes is undone by the cognitive requirements of criteria: I am 'freed' to judge an artwork beyond my own prejudices, but only insofar as I must adopt the prejudices of another system; my freedom, as it were, is not entirely free.

assessment. Significantly, Amabile's method is analogous to the Kantian notion of *universality*, or inter-subjective agreement. 'This technique', writes Hickey, 'requires judges to rate the creativity of an artistic product by using their own subjective definition rather than any given objective criteria or checklist', the justification being that 'ultimately, it is impossible to articulate clear, objective criteria for a creative product' (Hickey, 2001: 235). This echoes the Kantian assertion that one cannot have proof for aesthetic judgments, and stresses the idea behind the consensual assessment method, which is that for something to be assessed against criteria, it has to be something *known*[17]. Above all else, though, Amabile's method reinforces something central to this whole thesis: that for the judgement of things that can be considered original or unique (like performance), it is crucial for the immediate experience of that thing to be the primary concern of judgment.

What has becomes clear thus far is that the Kantian notion of taste is not divorced

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[17] The idea of an object or experience being 'known' relates to a presupposition Amabile's method makes concerning creativity. For her, creativity is defined by uniqueness or individuality, which means that one cannot consider a creative product as merely an extension, or re-interpretation of an existing thing. If I wanted to assess the quality of a new *industrial* product, for instance a kettle (or watch, DVD player, car, and so on), I could judge it against criteria like 'time taken to boil', or 'capacity', because I *know* what a kettle is and what it is supposed to do. In essence, it is possible to judge the successes of a non-creative product using standards derived from *previous iterations* of that product.

In contrast, Amabile argues that *creative* products are *unknown* to me because her understanding of 'creativity' insists that the creative product possesses qualities, or provides experiences, that are unlike anything else. Thus, judging a creative product by means of criteria is challenged by the fact that there are no *previous iterations* from which standards, and subsequently criteria, can be derived. For example, my experience of Mondrian's *Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red* (1937-42), might provide an understanding of colour which influences or even enriches my experience of Rothko's *Four Darks in Red* (1958), but the former cannot prescribe my experience of the latter in the moment of encounter, because the creativity which defines them insists that in-and-of-itself, one is fundamentally different from the other. Thus, in the application of criteria, the judgement of what is unique about my experience is lost.

from, or necessarily alternative to contemporary methods of artistic assessment. Even so, it draws our attention to something often neglected by prevailing approaches to judgment, namely, what is already going on in the experience of an artwork. The above examples reveal pedagogical and axiological problems that can be answered by an analysis of taste which represents and articulates the *experience* of an artwork – that provides a way of talking about 'the important stuff' of performance. My belief is that by recuperating Kantian aesthetics this becomes possible. This means of analysis must be able to reclaim terms such as taste, value, and judgment in such a way that allows for a study of aesthetic experience in-and-of-itself without having to depend upon an extrinsic set of circumstances; and which offers before anything else a method of judgment that considers the immediate exchange between performance and its witnesses. This is what Kant's system enables. Indeed, in asserting the importance of aesthetic experience as a thing unto itself, I take a different path from sociological and cultural materialist studies, such as Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1979), in favour of finding a way for performance to navigate issues of taste in a way that befits the immediate nature of performance itself[18]. The premise of this thesis is also not to couple aesthetics with wider cultural concerns in the synthetic *a posteriori* manner of Ranciére (2004), Sundstrom (2009), Sontag (1964), Taylor (2005)[19]; but rather to give the

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[18] Bourdieu's work, hugely influential in the study of social stratification and central to the work of social theorists in the decades following its publication, proposes a study in which taste is a purely social phenomenon. If we can consider, for the sake of illustration, Bourdieu's study as an exemplar of sociological studies *as such*, it is a means of analysis that provides a proportionally representational snapshot of a particular culture at a particular historical moment.

[19] Ranciére's *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004), Sundstrom's *Mixed Race and the Ethics of Identity* (forthcoming), Susan Sontag's *Notes on Camp* (1964), which aligns particular kinds of taste to

complex issues of aesthetic experience the freedom to be fully explored in their own, synthetic *a priori* terms.

Over the coming two chapters, I will consider therefore the implications of the four moments of a judgment of taste as they relate to performance, this includes: the universality of taste; the relation of rational explanation to lived experience; the importance of sensory and somatic knowledge in judgment; the importance of the qualia of olfactory experience; the distinction between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic; and the lasting content of experience – all amongst a series of key issues that emerge when Kantian aesthetics encounters the aesthetics of avant-garde and contemporary experimental performance. In the next chapter, I will examine 'moments' from performances of the early avant-garde as instances of the four moments of taste, and so demonstrate the value of Kantian aesthetics to performance analysis and the implicit influence of Kantian aesthetics on the European avant-garde. Finally, having revealed how a Kantian analysis of performance can elucidate our ideas of taste, Chapter Three will explore contemporary performance works that build on and further the aesthetics of the early avant-garde in order to better understand the significance of Kantian ideas to the culture, practice, and analysis of contemporary performance.

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certain cultural milieus, and Taylor's *Social Aesthetics and the Emergence of Civic Discourse from the Shipman's Tale to Melibee* (2005) come to mind as good examples of these kinds of interdisciplinary studies.

CHAPTER TWO – THE EXPERIENCE OF EXPERIENCE

THE CONNOISSEUR

The main focus of analysis in this chapter will be the opening night of Alfred

Jarry's *Ubu Roi* in December 1896. I shall explore in detail the aesthetic

'moments' – *Momente* (n.) – that typify the significance of this Kantian approach

to performance analysis. But it is important that *Ubu Roi* is not considered in a

vacuum. To make a strong case for just how useful this Kantian framework is, I

want to begin by looking briefly at some precursors to *Ubu Roi*, and in doing so

demonstrate how the experimental practices of the early avant-garde can be

elucidated by Kantian aesthetics. As Frantisek Deak argues in *Symbolist Theatre:*

the Formation of an Avant-Garde (1993), *Ubu Roi* 'has come to mark the official

beginning of avant-garde theater' (Deak, 1993: 227), but to fully contextualise

Jarry's achievement, it is important to note that there are earlier works that appear

to be scratching at the surface of the aesthetic issues Jarry brings to the fore.

I had intended, initially, to use an in-depth analysis of Oscar Wilde's *The*

Importance of Being Earnest as a precursor to *Ubu Roi*. I thought that Wilde's

play involved an exploration of taste in the Kantian sense, and that Wilde's sense

of taste was developed and further explored in *Ubu Roi*. However, after a close

examination of the premiere performance of *The Importance of Being Earnest* in

February 1895, I discovered that the ideas of taste prevalent in Wilde's work were

much closer to what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls *fashion*. In *fashion*, Gadamer tells

us, 'the element of social generalization implicit in the idea of taste becomes a

determining reality' (Gadamer, 2004: 33), and it creates, he continues, 'a social dependence that is difficult to shake off' (ibid). Taken as simply a farce, the first production of *The Importance* follows the script with reasonable success. Like other farces of the day, such as Georges Feydeau's *Le Dindon* (*Sauce for the Goose*) (1896) and Carl Laufs and Wilhelm Jacoby's *Pension Schöller* (1890), improbable situations, mistaken identity, sexual innuendo and *deus ex machina* all have their place[20]. But 'by exposing and burlesquing the vacuities of a moribund literature', writes Foster, 'Wilde satirizes, too, the society that sustains and produces it' (Foster, 1956: 23). Understanding Wilde's referencing – Algernon's constant substitution of food for sex, 'Earnest' as code for homosexual, Miss Prism's name as a play on the old legal term 'misprison' (to conceal a crime or illegal act), and ridiculous epigrams such as Lady Bracknell's '*The chin a little higher, dear. Style largely depends on the way the chin is worn, they are worn very high, just at present*' (Act III) – is paramount in understanding the performance. Wilde's text, a highly nuanced '*rondo capriccioso*' (Archer, 1895), ensures that for each spectator, making the right inferences – 'getting it' – takes precedence over any other experience of the work. Daniel Cottom, in 'Taste and the Civilized Imagination' (1981) writes:

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[20] Set in London's fashionable West End, the play revolves around the friendship of Jack and Algernon, two wealthy, yet irresponsible, young Englishmen. Algernon avoids obligations by fleeing to the country, while Jack evades his own responsibilities by escaping to the city. Cecily, Jack's ward in the country, believes that Jack is looking after his younger, profligate (and fabricated) brother Ernest – a name he uses while in London. Jack wishes to marry Gwendolen, Algernon's cousin, but is dismayed to learn that she could only love a man named Ernest. Lady Bracknell, Gwendolen's mother, refuses to give her consent when she learns that Jack is an orphan. Algernon, intrigued by Cecily, travels to the countryside pretending to be 'Ernest', Jack's non-existent brother. Cecily, naturally, is delighted to meet the man she has only heard about for years. When Jack returns to the country estate however, to announce that his brother has died, chaos ensues. As Cecily and Gwendolen discover they are both engaged to Ernest, the characters become entangled in a series of mistaken identities.

> The individual who happens upon a work of art without an educated judgment has no experience of that work. Whatever may have happened has not involved this object called "art", for the eighteenth-century object of art – and this statement should be taken quite literally – does not appear to anyone who does not have good taste.

> (Cottom, 1981: 368)

As I will later demonstrate, Cottom's definition of taste is profoundly different to taste as Kant sees it. Rather, the notion of taste that Cottom defines is instead synonymous with the idea of the Connoisseur. From the French *connaître* 'to know' and the Latin *cognoscere*[21], a Connoisseur is a person assumed expert enough in matters of taste that they are considered able to act as critical judges.

Engaging with *The Importance...* in this way can be attributed in part to the mechanics of the parodic form. Built upon a slavish relationship to that which it critiques, parody requires a foundation of knowledge external to the work through which the spectator gains meaningful access to its content. Highlighting connoisseurship as a concept within which value and quality can be derived from a socially stipulated standard of "taste", it is clear that this conception of taste is precisely what Kant is working against. In *Structuralist Poetics* (1975), Jonathan Culler considers the operation of parody in literature. He writes:

> When a text cites or parodies the conventions of a genre one interprets it by moving to another level of interpretation where both terms of the opposition can be held together by the theme of literature itself. But the text which parodies a particular work requires a somewhat different mode of reading. Though two different orders

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[21] This is an interesting piece of etymology if we consider that *cognoscere* is derived from *cognitio*; and cognitive judgments, if we recall Kant – are antitheses to aesthetic ones.

> must be held together in the mind – the order of the original – and the point of view which undermines the original – this does not generally lead to synthesis and to naturalisation at another level but rather to an exploration of the difference and resemblance. [...]   In calling something parody we are specifying how it should be read, freeing ourselves from the demands of poetic seriousness.

(Culler, 2008: 178)

Here, Culler reinforces the almost cognitive nature of parody, asserting it as a mental task concerned with comparing and contrasting two separate concepts of authorial register. Indeed, where Culler argues that parody is 'freeing' because it demands a certain reading, it diminishes a Kantian sense of taste not only because it denies 'free-play' of the imagination and understanding central to the moment of universality, but also because at a fundamental level, the experience of parody is one of analytic *a priori* propositions which undermines the value of *a posteriori* experience in aesthetic judgment.

Figure 1 (L): Ladies evening dress, circa 1896
Figure 2 (R): Algy, Cecily and Jack in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895)

In performance, the costume design and scenic arrangement can be critiqued in terms of the socially conventional, or *fashionable*. Cecily's dress for example, as seen in the production image above (Fig. 2), was most contemporary. As McNaughton notes on the high-fashion of 1896-7, 'fullness was added to the bodice at the bust. Tight lacing corsets were needed to achieve the fashionably small waist [...] sleeves lost the fullness at the elbow, retaining a puff at the shoulder' (McNaughton, 2009). Likewise, the male costumes conformed to recognised social standards: 'for afternoon calls or garden-parties, a lady wears an afternoon frock; a gentleman wears a lounge suit and soft felt hat [...] gloves and stick, or umbrella, should be carried' (Ings, 1918: 36).
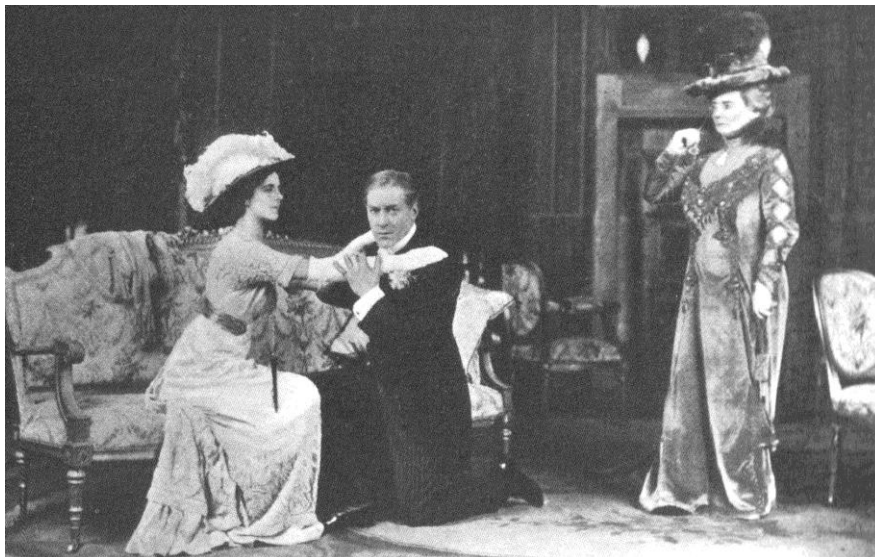
Figure 3: Production still from *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895)

The same conventionality was present in the scenic arrangement. The production stills available show glimpses of the social observation symptomatic of late-Victorian realism. Furniture, wallpaper, carpet, ornaments, all meticulously chosen to complete a facsimile of the real world, and so to be judged by real-world, cognitive, empirical standards. Worked on for the premiere by H. P. Hall and

Walter Hann[22], Michael R. Booth, in *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (1991), summarises the design of the age well:

> For better or worse, the Victorian stage was a neutral space; it did not make statements about content because all it tried to do, sometimes with archaeological punctiliousness, was reproduce by illusionistic means the complete physical environment of a play, whether historical or contemporary.

(Booth, 1991: 139)

Bound to reproduction and illusion, *The Importance* denies the spectator the opportunity for experiences which transcend the materiality of the stage and its dramatic 'world'. After parody, which had as its grounds the analytic *a priori*, *The Importance* shifts its concerns to judgments of the synthetic *a posteriori*: the uncontroversial matters of fact that one can only come to know through experience – Gadamer's 'social dependence that is hard to shake off' (Gadamer, 2004: 33). And despite the central role of experience in these judgments, its purpose is not to reveal something which exceeds the work or its world through imaginative play, but rather to simply give justification for a series of dramatic or directorial decisions – the way a performer looks or moves, the design of a furniture piece, or the appropriateness of a particular witticism. In a way, it seems that the greatest illusion of all is a theatre praised for its banal conformity to our own understanding of the material world, when its potential to think about the noumenal object, and through experience speculate on what lies beyond experience, is so much greater and filled with boundless possibility.

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[22] Walter Hann was one of the well-respected scenic artists of his time, and his name can be found on credits for productions of George Dance's *A Chinese Honeymoon* (1901) and Charles Calvert's *Henry V* (1872).

Having been able to differentiate between Kantian taste and the *a posteriori* demands of fashion through *The Importance of Being Earnest*, I began to look in greater detail at the specific context of performance out of which *Ubu Roi* was developed in the hope that Jarry's predecessors would be able to demonstrate an aesthetic practice that could enter into dialogue with Kant's idea of taste. In Villiers de l'Isle Adam's 1870 production of *La Revolte*, I discovered an early example of how aesthetic ideas which we might call Kantian in analysis begin to emerge. Deak gives a useful synopsis of the piece:

> The plot resembles a commonplace domestic drama with a few novel twists. A wife [Elisabeth] decides to leave her husband because he is a bourgeois who does not understand her spiritual aspirations.

> (Deak, 1993: 34)

Deak goes on to argue its difference from the domestic drama by comparison to Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879). He notes that the relationship between the spectator and Nora in *A Doll's House*, in which 'the spectators wonder how she will survive once she leaves her husband' (Deak, 1993: 34), is not necessarily active in *La Revolte*. This is an important distinction, because such judgments – 'Nora will survive once she leaves her husband' – are synthetic *a posteriori*: something beyond the meanings of the terms is required, but can only be resolved through experience. So, when Deak claims that *La Revolte* is essentially 'devoid' of the 'incidents and complexities' (ibid: 35) needed for the emotional involvement of an audience, he is at the same time stating that Villiers is 'stripping-out' the social or psychological relationships that might ground the

56

work in the realm of the empirical. In the piece, Elisabeth possesses 'some important bourgeois qualities, mainly the ability to make money' (ibid), which nullifies any concern a spectator might have for her survival outside of the family unit. Indeed, Deak notes that critics 'did not see any reason' (ibid: 36) for Elisabeth leaving her family. Deak argues on this basis that 'aspects of the play dislocate the structure of the domestic drama' (ibid). It is that 'dislocation', that fissure in the texture of the piece that creates the space for a Kantian sense of aesthetic judgment – the non-conceptual shift to synthetic *a priori* boundlessness. Indeed, there is a specific event in the piece which I believe approaches the idea of a disinterested aesthetic experience. On the event in question, Deak writes:

> In the stage directions Villiers asks for a large sitting room, decorated in red, black, and gold, plunged in semiobscurity. Elisabeth is dressed in a simple black dress. Night looms outside. At one point, when Felix offends Elisabeth by suggesting that she has a lover, Villiers has Elisabeth come downstage ("She comes forward again, leaning against the mantelpiece. Her head is lit by the candles behind her")

> (Deak, 1993: 35-6)

So Elisabeth is in a large sitting room, its size large enough to be noteworthy. The room is decorated in red, black and gold – an opulent mix of colours on the edge of visibility in the darkened space. Elisabeth comes downstage and is lit from behind by the candles which at this point are the sole sources of light on stage. Such scenographic and spatial detail is important to acknowledge because it appears to be serving the purpose of heightening dramatic tension, or strengthening an empathetic relationship between the protagonist and the spectator. To illustrate: Elisabeth moves downstage, away from her home both

physically and symbolically. Next, the home plunges into darkness, and as Elisabeth moves into the light of candles, there is a visual representation of her release, 'suggesting her saintliness' (Deak, 1993: 34). As a dramatic device, the physical movement away from the home, and indeed closer to the spectator, might amplify the tension of the narrative by strengthening the spectators' level of emotional investment. Likewise, the darkened home, and illuminated Elisabeth, seems to indicate or reinforce the way one should respond to the work: Elisabeth is 'light', pure, good, and innocent, while the home and its other occupants are dark and sinister.

But in *La Revolte*, the potency of these dramatic devices as prompts to our social or psychological interest is neutered because, as I have already indicated, Villiers has constructed the character of Elisabeth in such a way that the spectator is dissuaded from forming the empathic or social attachments that would lead to synthetic *a posteriori* judgments. Instead then, the sequence is an instance of Deak's 'dislocation', and something beyond the limits of the work is able to emerge. In this particular instance, the physical enactment of *dis*location – the movement away from home – is what I propose to be working as a *das Moment*. The lack of moral or empathic attachment to either Elisabeth or her situation allows the spectator to engage with the more sensuous qualities of her movement, and her relationship to the scenic composition and other textural elements of production. Liberated from social or emotional *interest*, the spectator is 'free' to experience the sequence in a radically different way, and I want to muse here on what that experience might have been like.

58

As Elisabeth moves downstage, and the home becomes dark, the reds and gold of the scenery take on a new, more subtle texture: they darken, and peering through the gloom the furniture and ornaments of the room transform from solid, tangible objects into shadow and outline. What was once a clear visual picture becomes murky and opaque, like looking at a city through a dense fog. Losing the sense of sight in this regard, Elisabeth's measured footsteps ring through a spectator's heightened and keen hearing: her footfalls become more articulate and complex, the leather of the shoe, wood and varnish of the floor all contribute to a rich and full sound that almost imperceptibly vibrates throughout the theatre. The candles too are allowed to become objects of contemplation: the ever-changing form of the flames; how they illuminate their immediate surroundings; how the spill of that illumination disperses across the stage. What are the candles doing to Elisabeth's dress as she approaches? Do they give it a transparent quality so that I can see her flesh, or do they pick out areas of light and dark on her dress, stressing the texture of the fabric? In contrast to the theatrical light, the softer, less abrasive quality of light from the flames becomes alien and transfixing. Are the candles close enough to let their heat be felt, is Elisabeth close enough to pick up on the smell of her perfume? Can I see the detail and imperfections of her face; the subtle movements of eye, cheek and jaw as she speaks. All of these considerations become possible when a spectator is not *interested* in Elisabeth's plight. Indeed, the emotional, social and contextual concerns that produce interest actually delimit the extent to which one can engage with these visual and sensuous qualities of performance. Accordingly, our judgments of Elisabeth and her surroundings in this scene transcend the personal, and can be seen to represent a

59

judgment of taste in the Kantian sense. Here then is a perfect example of how *das Moment* (n.) reveals itself as the 'something else' between the worlds of the *a priori* and *a posteriori*. Elisabeth's movement, once detached from psychological and sociological readings is the 'push' toward a consideration of the *a posteriori* experience in *a priori* terms.

To explain just how this moment, indeed this *das moment*, might forward the notion of disinterest, it is important first to understand exactly what Kant means by this term. A disinterested judgment of the beautiful (*Das Schöne*), Kant tells us, is a judgment closely associated – yet different entirely in kind – to two others: judgments of the *agreeable* (*Das Angenehme)*, and judgments of the *good* (*Das Gute*); and in order to understand the unique position of the disinterested judgment as Kant sees it, one must first understand the structure of these other two types. In the case of the former, a liking for the agreeable (or an *agreeable judgment*, or *satisfaction in the agreeable*) is the estimation of objects in terms of 'the gratification they promise' in sensation (Kant, 1987: §3 [47/206]): the agreeable is something agreeable to *me*. 'This holds moreover not only for the taste of the tongue, palate, and throat, but also for what may be agreeable to one's eyes and ears' (Kant, 1987: §7 [55/212]). Or, to quote Herwitz: 'What satisfies me satisfies me – period. I do not speak beyond myself and my inclinations when I state my preferences' (Herwitz, 2008: 58). That a judgment of the agreeable is recognised as private to me – 'to one person the colour violet is gentle and lovely, to another lifeless and faded' (Kant, 1987: §7 [55/213]) – is, writes Herwitz, 'caused by objective properties of the object of taste which interact with my psychological

60

proclivities' (Herwitz, 2008: 59)[23]. The latter, likings for the good (or *satisfaction in the good*), 'is what, by means of reason, we like through its mere concept' (Kant, 1987 §4 [48/207]). As Kant explains, if we call something '*good for* [this or that]' (ibid.) or '*intrinsically good*' (ibid.) we base our judgment on the concept of a purpose, and when we conceive of the good (and here Kant refers to the morally good at the centre of his concerns in the *Critique of Practical Reason*) our recognition of it in the object of our judgment is determined by our will to action – thus it is 'consequently a relation of a reason to a volition' (Kant, 1987: §4 [49/208]). For both of these 'likings', the *agreeable* and the *good*, our judgments are *interested*.

To return back to the aesthetic in relation to Kant's philosophy in general, the *agreeable* can be thought of as strictly *a posteriori* – based in sensuous experience – and the *good* as strictly *a priori* – not dependent upon experience; an operation for reason alone. But how, in experience, does disinterest actually differ from one's 'psychological proclivities'? To answer, it is important to define precisely what Herwitz means when he says 'psychological'. To my understanding, his definition of the psychological refers to what can be intuited and understood purely cognitively, and *a posteriori*. A 'psychological proclivity', then, can be understood as something that pleases us in terms of its direct effect on our state of mind. For example, if I like the colour blue, because I find it relaxing and soothing, or the colour red, because I find it stimulating and invigorating, I like

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[23]Significantly then, like Husserlian phenomenology, which takes as a given the rejection of psychologism (the absorption of logic into empirical psychology), Kant eschews empirical psychology by considering it cognitive and thus non-aesthetic.

that colour because of what I perceive to be the effect of that colour, *for me*. Moreover, this is something quantifiable – this blue is *better*, or *more effective*, than that blue, and so on – and is related to my cognitive – psychological – relationship to that object. Indeed, one can claim that one's 'psychological proclivities' are *interested* judgments. Disinterestedness, on the other hand, transcends the empirical world (though is grounded in it), and speaks of a satisfaction or pleasure that exceeds, or 'goes beyond' the concept of personal, idiosyncratic pleasure.

In an interested judgment, as in the previous examples, my liking is concerned with the existence of the object insofar as its prolonged existence has the capacity to provide prolonged gratification, either sensory (*Das Angenehme*) or morally (*Das Gute*). In *La Revolte*, if a spectator were to reason the following: 'I like gold, it is my favourite colour. There is gold in the scenographic composition of this play, therefore I like this play', that is a syllogistic judgment based upon sensory *interest* (*Das Angenehme*) in the gold backdrop, a pleasure derived from its prolonged existence – that is, the longer it is there, the 'more' pleasure that particular spectator could be said to experience. Likewise, reasoning that 'Elisabeth is making a noble and laudable decision to leave her home given her stultifying home life, therefore I like Elisabeth', is an interested judgment of the morally good (*Das Gute*).

However, judgments of taste, or rather, *aesthetic* judgments, cannot account for interest. A disinterested judgment is one *without concern for the existence of the*

object of appreciation. If we can say that our appreciation of a flower, or of a sunset, or whatever is without any care for how that object affects us other than in our contemplation of it, that appreciation (or judgment) is *disinterested*. It is crucial though not to confuse disinterestedness with indifference or un-interest: with disinterestedness comes an aesthetic pleasure, which it might be useful to think about as a kind of investment on our part that simply goes beyond – transcends – any moral concern or personal pleasure that is particular to me. What disinterestedness allows is a mode of aesthetic engagement that removes me from concerns beyond, or extrinsic to, the aesthetic: the moral, political, ethical and so on. In doing so, I am able to experience a *das moment* – sound, gesture, image, smell – in-and-of-itself.

So in *La Revolve* a disinterested aesthetic appreciation emerges from a *das moment* in which objects, sounds, temperatures, textures and tones are presented without literal reference to the empirical world from which they originate. Freed from the constraints of a synthetic *a posteriori* relationship to some extrinsic dramatic concern, the spectator can consider these features of experience as noumena, in-and-of-themselves, and for their own sake.

It is useful to touch upon the idea universality here too inasmuch as disinterestedness is the condition upon which it emerges. The *universality* of judgment is the claim I can make for *everyone* to take the *same pleasure as me*. The explication, from §9, states that '*Beautiful* is what without a concept, is liked universally' (Kant, 1987: §9 [64/220]). Kant explains:

Many things may be charming and agreeable to him; no one cares about that. But if he proclaims something to be beautiful, then he requires the same liking from others; he then judges not just for himself but for everyone, and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. That is why he says: The *thing* is beautiful, and does not count on the other people to agree with his liking [...] rather, he *demands* that they agree.

(Kant, 1987: § 7 [56/213])

To understand universality as Kant sees it, it is important to think about the clause in Kant's second explication, '*without a concept*' (Kant, 1987: §9 [64/220]). In cognitive judgments, the object of judgment behaves as a third term to negotiate agreement precisely *because* it is based upon concepts – the *a priori* categories of understanding. For example, if two people look at a triangle, there can be no argument that it is *not* a triangle because they are making their judgments based on *concepts* (from the categories of understanding), and if we have a concept for something (a triangle) we also have a set of given *rules* for the application of the concept (i.e. three sides). Indeed, as Kant uses geometry as an exemplar of *a priori* knowledge, there does not even need to be an *a posteriori* element to this judgment, that is, the confirmation that the shape in question is a triangle can be done by reason alone. An aesthetic judgment of taste, on the other hand, is not so simple: because I cannot use the object of my judgment as the third term between my judgments with others, and because a judgment of taste must have an *a posteriori* element to it, Kant must find a substitute if he is to be able to argue his case for a subjective universality. What he offers is the 'free-play of the cognitive powers' (Kant, 1987: §9 [62/218/]). The 'cognitive powers' (ibid), or *faculties*, defined by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* are *imagination (Einbildungskraft)*

and *understanding (Verstand). Imagination* is the means by which we creatively combine that which is given to us via the senses, and this, as Wenzel remarks, 'is not just fantasy' (Wenzel, 2005: 152); rather, 'imagination plays an essential part in cognition' (ibid). A 'free-play' of these faculties of cognition is what happens when the imagination and understanding can, 'play' or 'toy' with the presentation of an object because they are 'freed' from their obligation to the categories of understanding. But how is it that these subjective elements can be offered as a substitute for a mediation by the object and retain universal status? In Kant's view, it would seem this is rather simple. Wenzel writes:

> According to Kant, these subjective elements are themselves universal, because they are accessible to every human being. You can engage in free play as well as I can.
>
> (Wenzel, 2005: 35)

Under these conditions, my free-play becomes 'harmonious': I take a pleasure in 'toying' with the object and so, because this is based on *universal* grounds (that is, *through the faculties*) it holds that *this pleasure should be the same for everyone*, making me justified in the claim for universal assent to my judgment. Importantly, this pleasure is not specific, but rather points to *our capacity for pleasure in general* – our capacity, as it were, for tasting. As Herwitz notes:

> Because the source of my judgment is disinterested pleasure, pleasure taken in the exercise of a faculty all others ought to have, all others ought to similarly exercise it and feel the pleasure. What is being communicated through this judgment is a shared sensibility about the faculty itself: the faculty we all share, and which is critical to making us humans.
>
> (Herwitz, 2008: 64)

65

This brings me to the proposition in Chapter One concerning the universality of taste, and provides a further argument for the separation of the aesthetic from other sociological or cultural ideas. It is with the notion of universality that Kant makes a strong connection between the aesthetic 'moment' and its correlative term from the categories of understanding, so I want to begin by looking at universality in relation to the category of *quantity*. As well as a table of categories Kant also provided – again using the four groupings of *quantity, quality, relation, modality* – a table of *judgments*, which for Kant demonstrates the ways in which we judge all objects *in general*. The table, using the same structure as for the categories, looks like this:

1
Quantity
Universal
Particular
Singular

2
Quality
Affirmative
Negative
Infinite

3
Relation
Categorical
Hypothetical
Disjunctive

4
Modality
Problematic
Assertoric
Apodeictic

(Kant, 1999: [A70/B95] 45)

Under the heading of *quantity*, Kant places the *singular*, the *particular*, and the *universal*, and they should be understood as *quantative* values, such that their progression is 'singular – one', 'particular – some', and 'universal – all'. Judgements of taste, since they are based on *a priori* grounds, are universal: *all*, valid for everyone. A sociological model of cultures and communities, by contrast,

might tell us that the tastes of a social group who earn above-average salaries are different to the tastes of those who are unemployed[24]. But Kant is not interested in the particularities of 'some' social groups as they relate to aesthetic judgments, because the aesthetic is concerned with the 'subjective universal' – the meeting point of the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*. Wenzel explains:

> Particular (even if only implicit) judgments would move the whole discussion into the empirical realm and out of the transcendental one. It seems to me that there is no place for considerations of particular groups of people in Kant's transcendental philosophy. Either you think of yourself as an individual with personal interests, or you think of yourself as a representative of humanity in general. Within the framework of transcendental philosophy, there is nothing in between: you cannot think of yourself as a member of a particular group because the characteristics of such a group would be empirical and never a priori [...] We may find this unsatisfying, but Kant's aesthetics, as far as it is part of his transcendental system, simply cannot deal with such phenomena as cultures and communities. You are an individual and you are also part of humanity in general. Transcendentally speaking, there is nothing in between.

(Wenzel, 2005: 29)

So we can grasp three points regarding the moment of universality: first, that (pure, aesthetic) taste cannot be particular, nor can it be singular or partial, it *must* be universal; second, that Kantian aesthetics can therefore not adopt sociological or cultural perspectives – the culturally-determined views of 'some'; and third, universality in the Kantian sense does not refer to universal meaning, nor does it

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[24]Bourdieu, for example, tells us in *Distinction* that Johann Strauss' waltz *Blue Danube* (*An der schönen blauen Donau*, 1866) is 48% more popular with the working classes than with the upper class based on a similar level of education. Conversely, Maurice Ravel's *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand in D Major* (1930) is 8% more popular with the upper classes (Bourdieu, 2006: 15). These examples though, both fall in to the category of the particular: some have a liking for this, others do not.

speak of cultural, social or political generalisations, but the ability we all share to engage aesthetically. Moreover, this ability to freely engage is like a signpost or reminder, for Kant, of our own free-will and our duty (or at least ability) to behave in a morally appropriate way.

In relation to the aesthetic encounter, what is important about this universal capacity is what it allows us to *do*. In essence, the free-play of the faculties allows us freedom and speculation – a non-determining relationship between subject and object. Indeed, ideas of universality are present in avant-garde works from this formative, pre-*Ubu* period. Herman Bang, who was sent by Ibsen to assist on Aurélien Lugné-Poe's premiere of *Rosmersholm* in January 1886, made these observations on the performance:

> The mise-en-scéne of Rosmersholm is without any firm contours. The actors drift restlessly across the stage, resembling shadows drifting continuously across the wall. They like to move with their arms spread out, their elbows at their sides and their fingers stretched out like the apostles in old paintings who look as if they had been surprised in their worship. The diction corresponds to this strange appearance. The contours of the lines are erased in an ascending and descending chant that is never-ending in its monotony. Like in a Russian hymn, its aim is to create a single ongoing mood, and it takes the life out of the individual words by weaving them into some kind of spoken song.
>
> (Bang, 1893)

By 'taking the life out of the individual' Lugné-Poe creates an experience implicitly disinterested and universal. Lugné-Poe's compositional ambiguity – the 'drift' of the performers, in a world 'without any firm contours' – invites the kind of speculation that Kant's free-play provides. The 'restless' movement of the

ensemble might have been a fruitful point of departure for such a free play. Indeed, Bang himself speculates on the nature of their actions when he compares them to 'the apostles in old paintings' (ibid). The spectator, too, might have toyed with this idea, perhaps not. Perhaps they perceived the actors as ghosts, or shadowy outlines of proto-beings, communicating with each other through the 'chant that is never-ending in its monotony' (ibid); perhaps, through their ensemble, their individuality dissolved, and their forms and limbs become the living contours of the physical space. Whether it was these particular associations that the piece evoked or others entirely different is not the main point. What is important is that one can recognise that the performance created the space for that play at all.

The third 'moment' as defined by Kant is the moment of purposiveness, and in his *Explication of the Beautiful Inferred from the Third Moment*, he states that 'beauty is an object's form of purposiveness insofar as it is perceived in the object without the presentation of a purpose' (Kant, 1987: §17[84/236]). This is a rich and complex idea that I will explore in much greater detail through the analysis of *Ubu Roi*, so for now the following from Christian H. Wenzel will serve as a brief illustration:

> Imagine someone a thousand years ago finding a watch lying on the ground. He or she picks it up, opens it, studies it, and admires it. He sees how the parts fit nicely together and interact in various ways, but the general idea of what the thing and its purpose might be escapes him.

> (Wenzel, 2005: 57)

This is a superb illustration of what Kant meant. In understanding that the parts of

69

the watch are combined *necessarily* in the way they are, while being unaware of precisely *what* a watch *is* or *is supposed to do*, the subject finds a purposiveness (a necessary and harmonious set of relationships) *without* instrumental purpose (without the emergence of a guiding principle or rule). Since this principle allows us to forego concerns of instrumental purpose, or of a central logic that might underpin a relationship to an object set of objects, it in turn enables us – indeed compels us – to use the entire breadth of our imagination in aesthetic engagement. In Wagner's *Das Rheingold* (1869) and Edouard Dujardin's *Le Chevalier du Passé* (1892), it is possible to identify elements of the productions that play with this idea of purposiveness. The mise-en-scéne of *Das Rheingold* in the 1876 Bayreuth production[25] (Fig. 4) provides the clearest example of this. As the first part of Wagner's cycle, *Das Rheingold* serves as a prologue to three subsequent works that enunciate the central narrative strand, and is concerned with revealing the mythologies and philosophies of those later works. There are no human characters in the piece, and its geography sits outside of human history in a 'legendary' time and place. In the case of *Das* Rheingold, it is these fantastical foundations that translate into a mise-en-scéne which evokes a sense of purposiveness.

Like the context in which the work unfolds, the scenography bears few temporal or geographical anchor points for an audience. In Figure 4 there are two female figures[26] suspended in mid-air, and central to the composition is a tower-like

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[25] The Bayreuth production of 1876 was the first performance of *Das Rheingold* as part one of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (The Ring of the Nibelung), a cycle of four operas that also included *Die Walküre* (The Valkyrie), *Seigfried*, and *Götterdämmerung* (The Twilight of the Gods)

[26] These figures are the goddesses (Fricka, Freia, and Erda) or the 'Rhine Daughters' (Woglinde,

structure, lit from below that dominates the landscape. It is possible to recognise a formal unity between these elements: structurally, in their tall and slender construction, and compositionally, in that they are concerned with height and elevation and draw focus to a particular section of the stage space. But because of their contextual framework, outside of chronological time and recognisable geography, there is no apparent rule that lets me know – *instrumentally* – why these things are the way they are. All I have to navigate by is what might be construed as a 'rule of elevation' which is outside the extent of my logic but appears harmonious and fitting in such a way that I experience a felt sense of unity and integration.

There is support for this analysis in musicological studies also. What J. Merrill Knapp calls Wagner's 'musical vision' (Knapp, 1977: 3), incorporating the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*[27], 'came to him on the afternoon and evening of September 5, 1853 at La Spezia, Italy, when he was on his way back to Zurich after a trip to the south' (Knapp, 1977: 3). Radically different from his previous works, *Das Rheingold* is 'remarkable for its freedom from the echos [sic] of the old operatic style' (Whittall, 1983: 270), and it evokes a sense of elevation, or 'building up', from the outset of the musical score. The 16-bar exposition, which begins with a low E flat, 'leads to a development which is more than twice as long' (ibid: 275), and as it does so is 'performed at a faster tempo'. From E flat, the key shifts

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Wellgunde, and Flosshilde).

[27] First used by German writer and philosopher Eusebius Trahndorff in 1827, *Gesamkunstwerk* is a work of art that employs a variety of different art-forms to achieve the 'total' artwork. It was through Wagner's 1849 essay 'Art and Revolution' that the term found popularity in the early avant-garde.

upwards to A flat as Woglinde begins a song whose melody is repeated later in the cycle. The sun begins to rise, and the maidens look up at the top of a nearby rock. Indeed, as elevation and height can come from lightness and freedom, the text of *Das Rheingold* is an example of 'Wagner's new poetic style, in its general avoidance of end-rhyme and its consistent use of *Stabreim*, alliteration' (ibid: 271). Also using triple meter, with a primary division of three beats to the bar, Wagner's deviation from 'eight lines of eight syllables each, in regular iambs' (ibid: 272), emancipates the textual rhythms from 'rhythmic predictability and monotony' (ibid: 273), enhancing the felt sense of lightness and elevation. Indeed, while it might carry implications of social and historical context, the low E flat of the introduction is cited by Rita Steblin, in *A History of Key Characteristics in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (1996), as an 'extremely majestic' key (Steblin, 1996: 111).

Notice too, in Figure 4, the shaft of light marking out the highest point in the space; drawing the gaze of the spectator upwards, elongating the neck, physically mirroring that sense of height. This kind of purposeless unity is analogous with Wenzel's example of the watch. I can admire how these parts fit together and interact with one another, but the *purpose* of that interaction escapes me. As such, these scenographic exchanges demonstrate the idea of a *das moment* that evokes a sense of purposiveness without purpose.
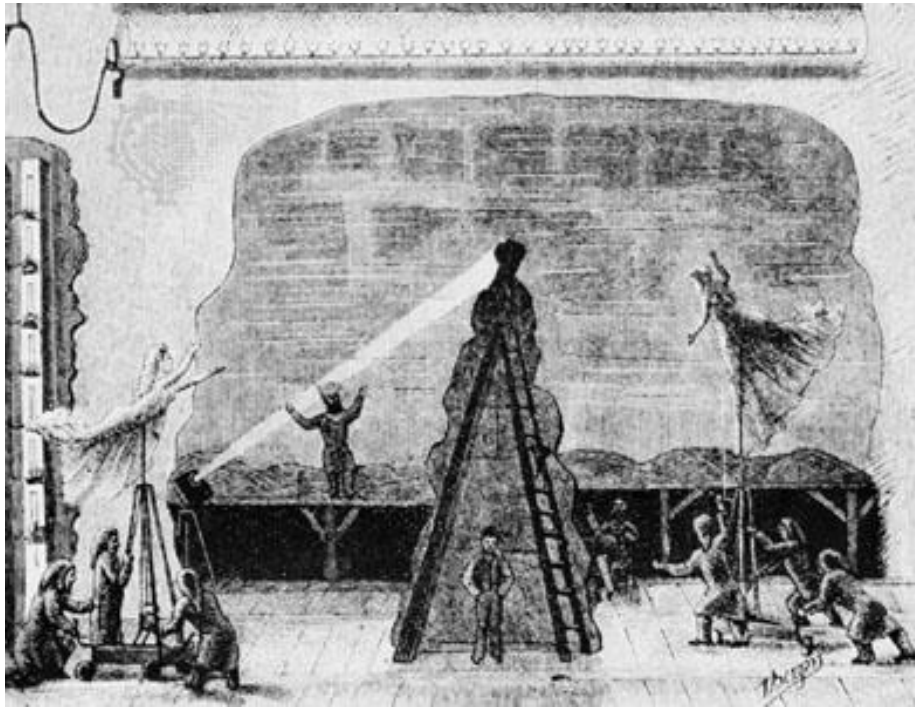
Figure 4: Print by Bergen showing Wagner's production of *Das Rheingold* at Bayreuth, 1876.

Similarly, *Le Chevalier du Passé* creates a sense of purposiveness through its use of colour. Deak notes that the women's costumes, 'rose, yellow, pearl gray and sea blue' (Deak, 1993: 114), relate to the set 'through the red of the orchids and the washed-out blue and yellow of the landscape in the background' (ibid). Deak goes on to comment that the 'overall visual composition of the stage picture is then the result of the reciprocal relationship of individual stage figures to each other and to the set' (ibid: 114/5). Subsumed under a rule of colour, the clothed human body and the landscape take on a kind of visual equivalence that *appears* to serve some kind of purpose. But because the piece never explicitly refers to that equivalence or fixes its meaning, it is only possible for the spectator to appreciate the harmony the colour creates and to 'toy' with what such a formal connection might represent. The pleasure that such a toying creates is directly derived from this sense of purposiveness without purpose.

The fourth and final moment, *necessity*, is unique in that 'it contributes nothing to the content of a judgment […] but rather concerns only the value of the copula in relation to thinking in general' (Kant, 1998: [A74/B99-100]). What this means in short, is that unlike the moments of disinterestedness, universality, and purposiveness, the moment of necessity does not appear in experience but rather as a conclusion, or indeed a precondition, of the judgment of taste as a whole. As defined by Kant: '*beautiful* is what without a concept is cognized as the object of a *necessary* liking' (Kant, 1987: §22 [90/240]). Unlike the first three moments, Kant puts aside the object in relation to our feeling and focuses on the *communication* of our experience: what we think and say regarding it.

The '*necessary* liking' (ibid) that Kant suggests is the firm belief that the object of our experience is necessarily related to the satisfaction or pleasure we take in that experience; that we talk about the experience itself rather than something particular to us that might have been the cause of that pleasure. Here, the notion of *necessity* can be better understood by its relationship to the category of *modality* from the categories and table of judgments. Under modality in the table of judgments there are *problematic*, *assertoric*, and *apodeictic* judgments, and at their simplest, these three kinds of judgment relate, respectively, to *possibility*, *actuality*, and *necessity*. But what does this mean? As Wenzel writes, 'one might ask whether the question should be whether a judgment of taste is possible, actual, or necessary' (Wenzel, 2005: 77), that is, is my experience *possibly* related to my pleasure, does it *actually* produce pleasure, or is it *necessarily* related to my pleasure? It is when my pleasure has a necessary relation to an object or its

representation, that the judgment of taste is pure. The case studies from this chapter so far can help to illuminate these differences. In general, 'we can always "say" that an object, or a representation of it, is *possibly* related to pleasure' (ibid). *Das Rheingold's* tower, in relation its compositional placement when I first encounter it, could *possibly* be related to my pleasure at that moment − as could any number of things. In *La Revolte*, if I told you that when Elisabeth walked downstage I could smell her perfume, and that the sensation was pleasurable because my partner wears that perfume, and it reminded me of her, then the judgment, and indeed the pleasure, is particular to *me* − and would classify as 'actually' producing pleasure, or an *assertoric* judgment. In general, it is the agreeable (*Das Angenehme*) which '*actually* produces pleasure' (Wenzel, 2005: 77). But if, for example, I tell you that when Elisabeth walked downstage I could smell her perfume, and that the sensation was pleasurable because it caused in me an awareness of the actress spatially and physically, of her flesh and her presence, of those objects as objects for their own sake then that liking is *necessary* − not particular to me in terms of personal preference, but rather *apodeictic*, and thus exemplary for everyone. What is important is that *apodeictic* judgments, which are necessarily or self-evidently true, are *a priori*.

Thus, for Kant, the aesthetic judgment itself is 'regarded as an example of a universal rule that we are unable to state' (Kant, 1987: §18 [85/237]). What this means is that such is the force of *necessary* liking, that it appears as if it must be governed by a rule or principle that insists upon its universality. But because this is neither a logical nor an objective judgment, and by virtue of itself is *synthetic*

75

rather than *analytic*, Kant asserts that in place of a rule, we encounter a *sensus communis*. The *sensus communis* for Kant is a direct offspring of the judgment of taste itself, and conversely 'only under the presupposition of such a common sense […] can judgments of taste be made' (Kant, 1987: §20 [87/238]). We have to imagine the existence of a *sensus communis*, Kant asserts, to provide feeling of authority to our judgment since we cannot find a rule. This *sensus communis* is not a *Gemeinsinn* (common sense, in the usual meaning of the term) or a *gemeiner Menschenverstand* (common understanding), or indeed a new sense at all but rather a recognition 'of the free play' (Wenzel, 2005: 83) of our faculties, which feels so *necessary* in its relation to the object of our pleasure that it provides a shared feeling which transcends the need for a justification by means of proof.

Having introduced the four interrelated aspects of a Kantian judgment of taste, I want to turn now to the analysis of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, exploring first and foremost how Jarry's development of early avant-garde ideas evoke an aesthetic experience that can be uniquely articulated through Kant's premise of taste.

Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* subverts established theatrical norms in a way that develops the aesthetic experiments of Villiers, Lugné-Poe and their fellow avant-gardists, and I want to focus my attentions specifically on the premiere performance in Paris on the 10 December 1896[28]. Anyone familiar with Jarry's work will know well that a plot summary is not necessarily the most important piece of information to have at hand, but a brief synopsis of the piece is useful in understanding the context of the forthcoming analysis.

At its simplest, *Ubu Roi* tells the story of a man's ridiculous rise to power and his equally ridiculous fall. Erin Williams Hyman suggests that 'one might say it was a parody of *Macbeth*' (Hyman, 2005: 11). Its protagonist, Pa Ubu, 'notorious for his infantile engagement with the world' (Taylor, 1998: 3), is deceitful, brainless, gluttonous, cowardly and evil. Told in an eccentric and idiosyncratic style, its outlandish, absurd characters, and inventive use of language places *Ubu Roi* beyond the realms of narrative theatre and into something much more at home in

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[28] For this analysis, I will focus on the reconstruction of events as told by Frantisek Deak in *Symbolist Theater: The Formation of an Avant-Garde* (1993). There are three reasons for this. First is the lack of reliable reconstructive material available that addresses the premiere performance in sufficient depth. The second is that Deak's work is the most comprehensive study of Jarry's piece in terms of the early avant-garde. The third is the ground-breaking nature of Deak's analysis, including his appropriation of Jarry as a symbolist.

the categories of Surrealism, Absurdism, and Dada. If there is such a thing as 'bad taste', then the 1896 premiere of *Ubu Roi* was the definition of it. But 'bad taste', it must be stressed, does not exist in a Kantian aesthetic, and falls instead into the connoisseurship of art in general: a regulative function designed to separate the 'good' from the 'bad'. As Gadamer points out:

> Taste is defined precisely by the fact that it is offended by what is tasteless and thus avoids it, like anything else that threatens injury. Thus the opposite of "good taste" actually is not "bad taste". Its opposite is rather to have "no taste".

(Gadamer, 2004: 33)

There is little evidence, owing to the fact that it was banned after only two performances, of what the premiere of *Ubu Roi* looked like aside from a handful of descriptions of the painted backdrop. But one revealing piece of information that gives us a real insight into how the piece might have been seen is an introduction to the work given by Jarry himself on that infamous opening night. Including playful quips such as 'to our orchestra that isn't here, we'll miss only its brilliance and tone' (Jarry, 2003: 1-3), Jarry firmly nails his colours to the mast when he says:

> Our stage setting is very appropriate, because, even though it's an easy trick to lay your scene in eternity, and, for instance, to have someone shoot off a revolver in the year one-thousand-and-such, here you must accept doors that open out on plains covered with snow falling from a clear sky, chimneys adorned with clocks splitting to serve as doors, and palm-trees growing at the foot of bedsteads for little elephants sitting on shelves to munch on.

(Jarry, 2003: 1-3)

The very fact that Jarry felt the need to explain his scenographic devices and the

78

spectators' part in imagining the mise-en-scéne is relevant. French theatre in 1896 was still very much concerned with the production values associated with naturalism[29], With the mid-century plays of dramatists such as Eugène Marin Labiche (*Le Voyage de Monsieur Perrichon*) and Émile Augier (*Madame Caverlet*, *Les Fourchambault*) still proving popular with audiences, so too did the production values associated with naturalism, and despite arriving a full ten years after Jean Moréas Symbolist Manifesto of 1886, the visual and compositional style Jarry presented was nonetheless radical and provocative. Indeed, the influence of Symbolist literature is evident in Jarry's preamble; his references to 'palm-trees growing at the foot of bedsteads for little elephants sitting on shelves to munch on' (Jarry, 2003: 1-3) makes a clear statement that he finds in the unconventionality of symbolism a route to the absurd.

It is difficult, however, to imagine that Jarry had not expected the backlash that *Ubu Roi* received. On 17 October of the same year, roughly seven weeks prior to the premiere of *Ubu Roi*, Chekhov's *The Seagull* had opened in St. Petersburg and had been booed heavily by its audience simply for having – as Chekhov had put in a letter to A. S. Suvorin the year previous – 'little action' (Chekhov, 1895). If a lack of dramatic action was enough to spark dissent in Chekov's audience then, while not wanting to underestimate the impact of Stanislavskian realism, *Ubu Roi* was to be something else altogether.

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[29] 1896, incidentally, was the year that André Antonin's censorship-exempt Théâtre Libre (*Free Theatre*) – arguably the most influential naturalist theatre exponent in Europe for nearly a decade – folded as result of heavy debt.
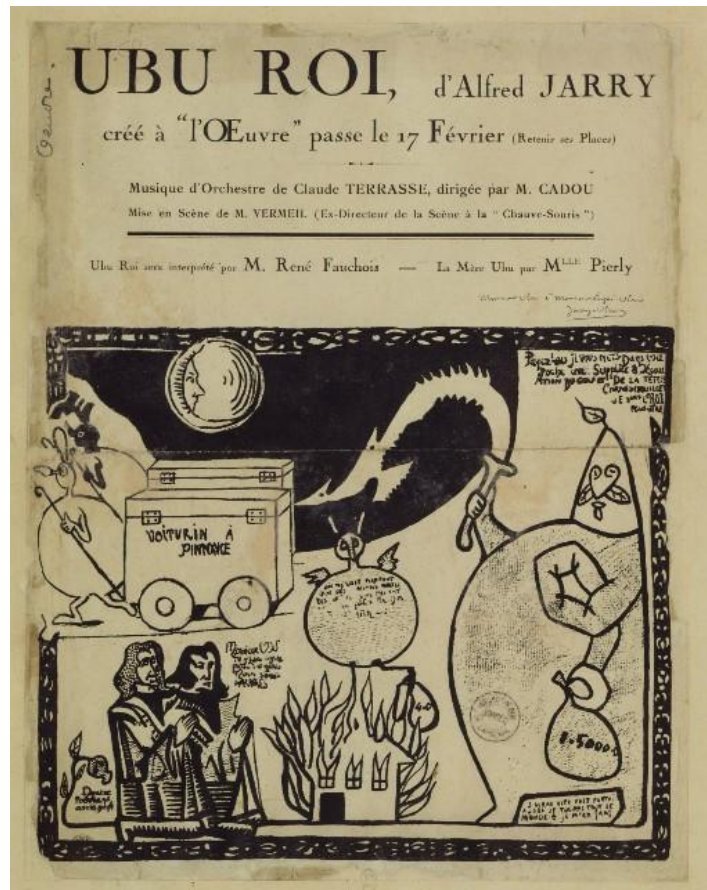
Figure 5: Programme for Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* at l'œvre (1896)

By considering *Ubu Roi* through the frame of Kantian aesthetics, I aim to achieve three things: to imagine how *Ubu Roi* might have been experienced, to show how the imagining of this experience can stem from documentary evidence of the premiere performance; to demonstrate how Kant's theory of taste can be used in the analysis of a performance as a whole; and to reveal the tensions that this creates for a Kantian approach to performance analysis in general. Instead of moving through the piece chronologically, I will structure my analysis such that it corresponds to Kant's progression of the moments of a judgement of taste, making note of the pivotal *Momente* (n.) that shape an aesthetic engagement with the work, beginning with disinterestedness.

In my analysis of *La Revolte*, I argued that by removing the need for emotional engagement with the protagonist, Elisabeth, Villiers created a scenic and kinaesthetic experience that would allow for a disinterested aesthetic engagement; an engagement which, in turn, allowed the spectator to consider objects and experiences in-and-of-themselves: boundlessly, and *a priori*. In the analysis of *Ubu Roi*, I want to show how Jarry, through the guiding principles of Absurdism and Pataphysics, evokes a sense of disinterestedness structured around a kind of 'toying', or play, with the boundaries of mimesis and mimetic art. In doing so, I hope also to respond to certain critical arguments against the notion of aesthetic disinterestedness in general.

In Scene V, Ubu, who by this point in the piece has been crowned King, visits an imprisoned Captain Burdure in the 'Dungeons of Thorn'. Firmin Gémier, who played the role of Pa Ubu in the premiere production, recalls:

> Instead of an actual prison door, an actor was standing on stage with an extended left hand representing the door. I put the key into his outstretched hand as if it were a lock. I made the sound of a turning bolt "cric crac" and turned his hand as if opening a door. At that moment, the audience, which without a doubt thought that the joking had been going on for too long, began to roar and rage.

> (Gémier, 1921)

I want to argue that this 'cric-crac' (krik krak)[30] sound-gesture is an exemplary *das Moment* which brings about the possibility for aesthetic disinterest, and

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[30] As translated into IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet).

furthermore that the audience's reaction, their 'roar and rage' (ibid), was a result of interested judgment. I will begin by exploring what the 'cric-crac' sound gesture might have been like in experience, hopefully enriching our understanding of this performance moment as I then relate it to notions of mimesis.

Two performers are on the stage, *Pa Ubu*, and another character, possibly a prison guard, perhaps even Captain Burdure himself. Gémier, playing Ubu, approaches the other man, whose arm is outstretched. He then slides, or slots, a key into his hand and turns it – as if the other performer were a lock on a prison door. At the same time, Gémier makes the sound: 'cric-crac'. That sound – 'cric-crac' – might have been performed in a number of ways: an exaggerated, 'krjɛ-kark' of a creaky, rusty, old prison door, accompanied by ridiculous and strained facial expression; it might have been the 'kr-kr' of a well maintained if slightly old lock slipping into place along the teeth of the key, performed with a slickness and precision; or indeed it might have been executed very plainly, a dropped, monotone 'kric' 'krac' – simply 'saying' the sounds without any other kind of physical investment.

However it was performed, the 'cric-crac' exposes, or 'announces', the materiality of the performers; indeed, of the performance act itself. Such exposure situates the performer as a property of the stage, sublimated under the rules of the production as opposed to an autonomous body within it, and it is on these grounds that I forward the 'cric-crac' as a *das Moment* which offers the spectator a disinterested aesthetic experience. Indebted, as I noted earlier, to Jarry's notion of

82

Pataphysics[31], for 'which all things are equal' (Coe, 1961: 8), the performance creates a material and compositional equality that 'frees' the spectator from the obligations of emotional or moral *interest*. Here, exposing the materiality of the event allows the event *qua* event to take centre-stage. The spectator is not being asked to involve themselves with the action, nor are they being asked to take a critical distance that might lead to judgments of the *Good* (*das Gute*), but rather to apprehend that 'the "scientific" and the "nonsensical" weigh alike in the scale of eternity, [and] since both are arbitrary, both are absurd' (ibid). Having done this, the spectator bridges the gap between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*. The *a posteriori* sensuous elements of performance, e.g. the timbre and intensity of a voice, 'krjɛ-kark', the warmth of a light, the smells and textures of an environment, those things which remind me that 'I am here, and this is live', become individual morsels of pleasure for my *a priori* faculties. I do not care for their prolonged existence, I do not care what they 'mean', but while they are there I enjoy them for what they are: ephemeral, live, and unrepeatable. My experience, then, is one of the synthetic *a priori*, and my pleasure is disinterested.

Indeed, thinking about the 'cric-crac' in this way provides response to a claim from Daniel Herwitz that 'the side which sharply defines taste as disinterestedness [...] must say something positive and believable about the character of a 'disinterested' regard for an object: and about what the experience is like' (Herwitz, 2008: 31). And, to also answer Herwitz's call for an explanation of how

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[31] Pataphysics is a pseudo-philosophy that studies phenomena beyond the realm of metaphysics: a parody of the methods and theories of modern science, pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions. The French, *pataphysique*, is an alteration of the Greek *tae pi ta metaphusika*, which itself is a play on *ta meta ta phusika*, or, 'the (works) after the physics'.

'taste stands to one side from all other interests, which enter into its deployment only marginally [such as...] intellectual, financial, erotic, moral and psychological interests' (ibid), I offer the following from Robert Musil's essay 'The Obscene and Pathological in Art':

> If one has other than artistic desires, one does not gratify them through art; it is much simpler to gratify them without distraction in the real world, and they can be sufficiently gratified only in the real world. To experience the need for (artistic) representation means – even if desires in real life should provide the impulse – not to have a pressing need to gratify them directly. It means to depict something: to represent its connections to a hundred other things; because nothing else is possible, because only in this way can one make something comprehensible and tangible.

> (Musil, 1990: 7)

While Musil does not refer directly to disinterestedness, his understanding of gratification through art implies a need for disinterested pleasure especially when the 'intellectual, financial, moral and psychological interests' that Herwitz (2008: 31) mentions can only be 'sufficiently gratified' in and through engagement with the 'real world' (Musil, 1990: 7).

So, unlike *La Revolte*, which emphasised the visual form of disinterestedness, *Ubu Roi* instead stresses equality as a key characteristic of disinterested engagement, and it is through the construction of that equality other non-thematic, non-narrative elements of the production can be judged more fully as contributing to the theatrical experience. Now, I want to continue on to look at the idea of universality.

If the notion of equality in *Ubu Roi* can be seen as a dissolution of conventional theatrical hierarchies, from Pa Ubu's capturing of the throne to the equalising function of pataphysics, then the performance mode itself dissolves the psychologically-rounded character in favour of an abstracted subject that typifies Kant's universal *das Moment*. Deak writes:

> Gestures were angular, the bearing of the body stiff and mechanical. Arthur Symons described it as "mimicking the rigid inflexibility and spasmodic life of puppets by a hopping a reeling gait." Actors wore cardboard masks. Ubu's mask was pear-shaped with a protruding nose and moustache. Actors talked into the masks, which made their voices sound muted and unnatural. Each of them also assumed a particular accent and tone of voice. Gémier imitated Jarry's speech. Mother Ubu spoke patois, Burdure had an English accent, the Polish Queen an Auvergnon accent and the Tzar a Russian accent.

(Deak, 1993: 232)

A look at Jarry's costume sketch for Pa Ubu's (Fig. 6) provides a good example of how the performance made the transition from the particular to the universal, and thus to the speculative free-play of the faculties. The most important aspect of Jarry's sketch is that Pa Ubu's costume evokes many things, but fixes itself on none, and I think the key to this experience for a spectator would have been the swirl on Pa Ubu's front (Fig. 6). Evoking the imagery of mesmerism and the new practice of hypnosis[32], the 'swirl' image would have been familiar to Jarry's audience and indeed loaded with a particular cultural significance. Imagine the

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[32] It was with James Braid's *Hypnotic Therapeutics* (1853) that the study of hypnosis began to receive serious scholarly attention. The 'production of a trance state by means of firm suggestion' (Webster, 1981: 1266) developed on studies in 'animal magnetism' carried out by Franz Anton Mesmer (the origin of the term 'mesmerism') in the late eighteenth century.

slight circling movement of the spectators heads as they trace the swirl with their eyes: clockwise, and then counter-clockwise. As in hypnosis, where a swirl or movement of some other object (e.g. 'swinging pendulum') is used to focus attention while the hypnotist speaks, Pa Ubu's swirl thrusts outwards from his fat stomach, overpowering and overwhelming the spectator's field of attention. Behind the swirl, Pa Ubu appears blurry and out of focus, his body morphing and shifting shape. He becomes indefinable: is the swirl transforming his belly into the shell of a giant snail? Is his hat working with the body-piece to further distort the human form? Or is it perhaps a parody of religious iconography, like the mitre or the papal tiara? It might have been all, or indeed none of those things, but what is important is that through the swirl, and the swirling and disorienting of the spectator which represents *das Moment* (n.), Pa Ubu's costume provides the grounds for a Kantian free-play. Authorial intention does not matter to our sense of taste here because universality, as noted in the example of *Rosmersholm*, does not refer to universal meaning. To reiterate, it refers rather to the *range* of meanings or purposes that it is possible to generate through the play between imagination and understanding, and the pleasure that such a play creates. Pa Ubu's costume is the site for such a play following the *Moment* of the swirl. That such pleasure is universal, despite the subjective nature of this free play, relates to Kant's first condition for synthetic *a priori* judgments, the *possibility* for the sensible intuition of objects in space and time (see: introduction, pp 13-14). The swirl, *das Moment* (n.), invites from the spectator a disorienting relationship to Pa Ubu's physical form, which in turn presents to the spectator not simply *one* man, or *one* costume, but the *possibility* for *all* men, and *all* costumes. It is from this

86

place of *a priori* experiential possibility, which is absolutely dependant on the *a posteriori* sensation that evokes it, that the costume design transcends its empirical reference points to allow a free-play of the imagination which exceeds the literality of the concrete stage object. The pleasure of this free-play is universal, and a synthetic *a priori* act of taste.

Figure 6: Sketch for Pa Ubu's costume

By 'mimicking the rigid inflexibility and spasmodic life of puppets' (Deak, 1993: 232), the experience of the universal *das Moment* extended to the physical language of the piece. Louise France, who played the part of Mother Ubu, excelled in this performance mode, as Deak notes:

> Louise France went further in this direction than any of the others and reportedly truly enjoyed herself in the part. She used rigid mechanical movements with purposefully short gestures. She carried her head stiffly, but at certain moments it would come alive with a fluttering movement and then a moment later become rigid again.

> (Deak, 1993: 233)

Like the costume design, the physical performance mode transcends the notion of the individual through the abstraction of movement – indeed, this occurred with the 'cric-crac' sound effect and the construction of the 'human lock'. With reference to the notion of universality, however, imaginative free-play emerges in the instances where a character or performer's idiosyncrasies puncture the surface of uniform physicality. In effect, Mother Ubu's 'fluttering movement' is what Jarry gives his audience in place of a character psychology. As the toggling between fluttering and rigidity becomes clear as a performance motif, the spectator can speculate, or toy with, the contrast and contradiction between these two states of being.

But like the mesmeric swirl, the physical response of the spectator also plays an important part. The violent movement of the flutter, its unexpectedness and radical difference to Ma Ubu's physical norm, takes the spectator by surprise. The spectator's response is to try and 'keep up', to follow the movements. This means a rapid movement of their own eyes, perhaps coupled with a slight fluttering of their own head. That fluttering, that imprecision, breaking out of a severe rigidity is – like the swirling motion – *das Moment* (n.). When Ma Ubu 'flutters', the spectator flutters too, and in so doing they can begin to play with what this gesture might be. Is it a nervous tick? Is there something bird-like about it? Does it represent two personas, a kind of split personality? Perhaps it demonstrates some kind of ethical struggle that Ma Ubu has with her husband's despicable actions. Again, all or none of these things might have occurred to a spectator, but what is significant is the scope of *possibility* that the gesture creates, and indeed how the

physical response of the spectator is central to exploring those possibilities. Other examples of how significant the audience's free-play was to the experience of *Ubu Roi* can be seen in the decisions Jarry made in order to further his 'greater ambition to articulate a new theatrical aesthetic' (Deak, 1993: 230). In the scenes where Pa Ubu was leading the army, Jarry wanted a cardboard horse's head hanging round his neck, and no more. In the army parade, or 'other scenes that would conventionally require crowds' (ibid), Jarry insisted on using a single performer. In essence, it seems that what Jarry wanted was a piece of work with a writerly aesthetic[33], a theatrical language of imagination and of active spectatorship; and while these latter two examples might not express the same range of possibility as Ma Ubu's 'flutter', it is possible to envisage the spectator imaginatively 'playing' with the 'one-man-army' and the cardboard horse to fill-in the missing visual parts. The pleasure of theatre, as Jarry creates it, is not forged out of a relentless didacticism or passive catharsis, but instead from an imaginative and playful engagement that can be accessed universally.

This tells us something about *Ubu Roi* that has hitherto not been explored even by prominent scholars of the work such as L. C. Pronko and Frantisek Deak: that central to a spectator's aesthetic experience of the work is a series of physical traces through the air made in response to stimuli from aspects of the mise-en-scéne; and that only through engaging in these motions does the full possibility of *Ubu Roi* reveal itself to the spectator in terms of taste. Indeed, this series of

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[33] As defined by Structuralist philosopher Roland Barthes in *S/Z* (1970), a 'writerly' engagement is one in which the spectator or reader is active in the creative process. This is opposed to a 'readerly' engagement, which is restrictive and prohibits an openness of interpretation.

motions – the 'flutter', the 'swirl' – supports Jarry's own observation that it 'has the advantage of being accessible to the majority of the audience' (Pronko, 1964: 7). Pronko argues that it was by avoiding 'obscurity and confused symbolism' (ibid) that Jarry achieved such accessibility, comparing its devices and characterisation to Apollinaire's *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*. While thematically this might hold true, what truly unlocked *Ubu Roi* for its audience was its ability not only to 'push' or 'force' its audience into aesthetic contemplation through *das Moment*, but also how that pushing unfixed or made boundless the kinds of experience the spectator might have had. What Jarry thought of as 'accessibility' was in fact *possibility*; a loosening of our empirical grasp, and a playful disregard for verisimilitude.

As the analysis of disinterestedness and universality has shown, a dominant feature of *Ubu* Roi was its scenic mise-en-scéne. When the curtain lifted, as Deak writes:

> The audience was faced with the single set. [...] The backdrop was quite large, spanning almost the entire width of the stage. On the extreme left a bed with yellow curtains was painted. Next to it was a chamber pot. A bare tree grew out of the foot of the bed. From above, snow fell from a blue sky. A fireplace with an alchemist's crucible was painted center stage. Above it was a big pendulum clock. A double swinging door opened through the middle of the fireplace, through which the actors made entrances and exits. Above, to the right of the fireplace, was a closed window with owls sitting on the sill. Next to it, bats flew over sparsely wooded mountains. Next to this was a gallows with a dangling skeleton. On the extreme right was a view of countryside with woods and an ocean with a descending scarlet sun. Also painted on the backdrop were a cave, palm trees with a boa constrictor coiled around one of them, an elephant in profile probably facing the scarlet sun, and a dog.

(Deak, 1993: 231)

As he goes on to note, 'Jarry's set was a combination of symbolist synthetic design and [...] a principle of Elizabethan theater design: the use of written signs' (Deak, 1993: 231). The backdrop was painted with images of places, locations and objects that represented all the different locations in which the play was set. Framed by the borders of the canvas, and seeming to adhere to an unarticulated rule of geography, location, or habitat, the paintings presented a sense of unity or harmony, despite their wide range of subject: a cave here, a snake there, a scarlet sun below. It is from this that Jarry approaches a *das moment* culminating in a sense of purposiveness. But unlike my earlier examples of *Das Rheingold* and *Le*

91

Chevalier du Passé, this sense of purposiveness, and indeed the *Moment* (n.), is troubled by the use of the written sign (which from this point I will refer to as 'subtitles'). Deak writes:

> Scene changes were announced by a venerable old man with a big white beard in a black tail coat. Before each change of scenery he brought out a sign with a written indication of where the scene took place. For example, one of the signs read: "A cave in Lithuania. It's snowing".

(Deak, 1993: 231)

'The result of this alliance', writes Deak, 'was quite unusual [...] it not only communicated this information of dramatic space and specific circumstance, but also, since somewhere on the painted backdrop there was a cave and somewhere else snow falling, it actualized part of the backdrop for a specific scene' (ibid). More than this, though, is that the subtitle implicates the spectator in an act of composition. Here, as with Pa Ubu's 'swirl' and Ma Ubu's 'flutter', it is the physical experience for the spectator which might define this act of composition as a *das Moment*. As the subtitle is introduced, it is easy to imagine how a spectator might respond to the montage-effect of the backdrop. They read, 'A cave in Lithuania, it's snowing', and scan the backdrop searching for visual fragments that correspond to the sign: 'yes, I see a cave in the upper-left corner of the backdrop – perhaps that cave is the cave to which the subtitle refers. And over there, near the middle of the backdrop, is some snow – perhaps this is Lithuanian snow. It must be those images, those fragments, which are particular to this scene.' But to organise and realign such a complex system of images, they must 'draw themselves back' and attempt to intuit the backdrop as a complete gestalt. That

92

'drawing back', like sitting back in your seat, or shifting the focus of your gaze from this sentence to the page as a whole, 'pulls forwards' the elements of the backdrop relevant to the dramatic action. Like a viscous substance, like elastic, like a relief, the cave and the snow are brought to the fore from the 2-dimensional backdrop and activated by the spectator.

How, then, does this relate to a *das Moment* that might evoke a sense of purposiveness? This 'drawing back' and 'pulling forward' seems to be indicative of a Kantian *das Moment* similar to those of *Das Rheingold* and *Le Chevalier du Passé*: a scenic or visual unity is perceived despite the absence of a determining concept or grounds – what was a rule of 'elevation' in *Das Rhinegold* or 'colour' in *Chevalier* is a rule of 'compositional realigning' in *Ubu Roi*, instigated again by physical response.

But in contrast to *Das Rheingold* and *Le Chevalier du Passé*, *Ubu Roi* never quite achieves that sense of purposiveness because of the interruption of the subtitles. In encountering the backdrop, the spectator is presented with a pattern of visual images that *appear* to be arranged according to some rule – perhaps geographical or psychological. However, it is not until the spectator is invited to realign the scene through the introduction of the subtitle that the backdrop can present itself as a potential *das Moment*. Because of this, the sense of purposiveness that the backdrop might offer is circumvented, or withheld, because the subtitle gives the rule to the backdrop at the moment of a spectators engagement with it and so its function – what it is or is supposed to do – is revealed; that this is so stems from

93

the Kantian understanding of causality, and causality's relationship to purposiveness.

For Kant, causality concerns objects and purposes, and it his assertion that 'the concept of an object is regarded as the cause of that object' (Wenzel, 2005: 55), which is a *transcendental*, rather than *empirical*, understanding of ends (or *purposes*). In an empirical understanding of ends, concepts and objects become causally effective when there exists a *will* to realise the concept, a *causa efficiens*, or 'efficient cause'. Wenzel gives the following example:

> When thinking of a purpose (shelter) we usually think of a thing (a roof) or an act (opening your umbrella) that can serve this purpose, and of someone who has such a purpose in mind when producing the thing (the architect of the house) or who acts in a certain way (your friend who opens the umbrella for you). We think of someone having an intention and a will that cause the thing to come into existence or to be carried out.

> (Wenzel, 2005: 55)

In a *transcendental* understanding of ends, Kant argues that a causal relationship between concept and object does not require either a purpose in my concept of the object nor a determination to realize it. Rather, the imagination of the *effect of the concept* (via the imagination) will suffice. In this way, a transcendental understanding of the previous example would thus propose that 'the presentation of the effect is the basis that determines the effect's cause and precedes it' (Kant, 1987: §10 [64/220]), which means that we only have to imagine the *effect* of a roof as grounds for its realisation. In *Ubu Roi* then, the subtitle acts as an efficient cause – the will which brings the realigning of the backdrop into being – and thus

94

presupposes the purpose of isolating fragments of the backdrop such that they become relevant to the scene.

But the subtitle in-and-of-itself is a curious object in these particular circumstances. 'A cave in Lithuania, it's snowing', was the subtitle presented at the start of Act II Scene IV, in which Queen Rosamund and her son, Buggerlas, had fled from Pa Ubu's invasion of the palace. At its simplest, the subtitle performs the function that Deak ascribes to it, that of communicating the 'information of dramatic space and specific circumstance' (Deak, 1993: 231). But it also troubles the performance space and the spectator's experience because there is a question over whether or not it is actually necessary.

Take for example the scenes in King Wenceslas' palace. Is it not reasonable to assume that the presence of the king and his sons would be enough for the spectator to compose a suitable setting from the backdrop? Likewise in Ubu's house, in Act I Scene II, where Pa and Ma Ubu prepare a feast for their guests, and make specific reference to the food on the table and architectural features of the house; is this information, communicated by the text, not enough to infer the location of the action? And so I find the subtitle performing a strange function: practically redundant in terms of the information it provides, but in some sense overwhelming and exceeding its purpose. It is like someone standing in a church, holding a subtitle that reads '*This Is a Church*'. The information carried in the subtitle, at its most literal, merely echoes what I already know (or am able to infer) from the situation. Yet the intervention of the subtitle goes beyond the role

of a tool. Phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion, discussing his notion of the 'saturated phenomenon'[34] in relation to Kantian metaphysics, writes the following:

> When the gaze cannot bear what it sees, it suffers bedazzlement. For not bearing is not simply equivalent to not seeing: one must first perceive, if not clearly see, in order to undergo what one cannot bear. [...] The gaze no longer keeps anything in reserve from free vision; the visible invades all its intended angles; it accomplishes *adaquatio* – it fills. But the filling goes by itself beyond itself; it goes to the brink, too far.

> (Marion, 2002: 204)

It is that going 'to the brink, too far', that occurs with the subtitles in *Ubu Roi*. The subtitle fills – dominates and overwhelms – the aesthetic field. At this point, 'perception crosses its tolerable maximum' (Marion, 2002: 206). Indeed, the subtitle used in this way paradoxically predates and extends the 'Brechtian project of making the apparatus of theatre visible' (Jürs-Munby, 2010: 2). But where Brecht would later use 'written placards, text banners (*Spruchbänder*) or projections to [...] increase the spectators' awareness of the real-life political contexts of the play' (ibid), Jarry's sign pulls away from the real world by dominating the spectator with its 'bedazzling' theatricality. Such 'Bedazzlement and overwhelmingness', writes Merold Westphal, 'are marks of the saturated phenomenon' (Westphal, 2003: 26), in which the spectator is 'more the subject constituted by its givenness than it is the object constituted by [their] subjectivity' (ibid). In terms of a Kantian aesthetic, the subtitle is a kind of 'red herring', or false hope. Its dramatic function promises aesthetic stimulation: it is the 'push' –

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[34] Former student of Jacques Derrida, Marion's work brings questions of Heideggerian and Husserlian phenomenology to the field of Catholicism and divinity in general. Indeed, one might call Marion's specialism phenomenological theology.

das Moment – which draws the spectator *in* (to the backdrop) and *out* (to the composition of performance elements) at the same time. But rather than leading to a pleasurable 'toying' with the backdrop in relation to the live action, the subtitle bedazzles the spectator and something happens in that moment of experience that bears the marks of the sublime more clearly than it does those of taste. Whether or not it is indeed the sublime at play in this moment is something I shall explore later in the thesis, but nevertheless, the notion of 'saturation' or 'bedazzlement' in a broader sense proposes that taste can find itself overwhelmed or exceeded by acts of performance. The pertinent question here, then, is what impact does this have in considering and judging the experience of a work as a whole? To answer that question, and to conclude this chapter, I will continue on to the final 'moment': necessity.

I noted earlier that it was difficult to talk about the 'moment' of necessity, because it has no direct correlation to the experience of performance, rather to what we think and say about it. As such, necessity – in both a judgment of taste and in the structure of this analysis – is responsible for articulating the culmination, or *aggregate*, of experience.

In light of this, it seems proper to begin by addressing the question left over from the last section, namely: where aesthetic experience is resisted or interrupted by a work, how might that interruption impact my experience of the work as a whole? I want to approach an answer by way of analogy, taking inspiration from Erin Williams Hyman's essay 'Theatrical Terror: Attentats and Symbolist Spectacle' (2005), which situates Jarry and other early avant-gardists including Henrik Ibsen and Pierre Quillard, as exponents of the theatre 'as a kind of violent action [...] outdoing the bomb by perpetrating a more enduring destruction' (Hyman, 2005 111).

Between 1892 and 1894 the city of Paris was subject to more than a dozen anarchist bombings, referred to as 'propaganda by the deed' (Hyman, 2005: 101). A number of works staged during this period of violence, including *Ubu Roi*, were also labelled by the press as *attentats* ([bomb] attacks), and with specific reference to *Ubu Roi*, Richard Sonn notes that 'the play resembled an anarchist *attentat* in its violent assault upon the sensibilities of the audience, upsetting their expectations of theatrical decorum and dramatically involving them in the

performance' (Sonn, 1989: 77). Indeed the *attentat*, the 'bomb attack', is the perfect analogy for the *Moment* (n.) as it appears in Ubu Roi. The period of violence in Paris, punctuated by anarchist bomb attacks, is a useful way of thinking about the duration of Ubu Roi and each *Moment* (n.) within it. In the same way that the *attentats* stand out as the 'highlights' or 'exclamation marks' of that particular political period, each *Moment* (n.) of Ubu Roi rises above its temporal structure as an individual peak or 'pocket' of experience. Indeed, *das Moment* is to *Ubu Roi* what Laurent Tailhade claimed the *attentat* was to that episode of French history: *le beau geste*, the 'beautiful gesture'. What I am proposing, then, is that aesthetic experiences – the exercising of taste – occur multiple times during the course of a single work and not just in terms of that work in general. Thinking back to the last section on purposiveness, the 'bedazzling' subtitle which intervened in a potential free-play between spectator and backdrop, simply stands as one experience amongst many, and does not – or at least should not – speak for the judgment or experience of the whole work. To explain this in greater detail, and to think about whether or not an aesthetic judgment of the whole can be reached in the first place, I want to consider the notion of *Erlebnis*.

Erlebnis, a common German word for 'event' or 'experience' – *something memorable that happens to someone* – was introduced to the sphere of art by hermeneutic philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey in the nineteenth century as he and others tried to introduce an experience-based methodology for the human sciences. 'At its zenith', writes John Arthos, it was 'an extraordinarily rich and

powerful idea that founded thought in the inexhaustible meaning of experience'
(Arthos, 2000). Taken from its root verb *Erleben* – 'to still be alive when
something happens' – *Erlebnis*, writes Gadamer, is 'something whose meaning
cannot be exhausted by conceptual determination' (Gadamer, 2003: 58). What
Erlebnis takes from *Erleben* then is the idea of immediacy: a felt sense of what
Gadamer calls an 'irreplaceable relation' (ibid) to one's own self and involvement
in the experience. *Erlebnis*, concerned as it is with the qualia of experience,
demands that experience be 'lived' and thus it is fitting to suggest that the idea of
Erlebnis is comparable, if not analogous, to Wenzel's translation of the moment –
where push, force, and weight, demand as much attention physically and
sensorially as they do conceptually.

What I am most interested in, however, through its relation to the Kantian notion
of necessity, is the form *das Erlebte*, which describes the 'permanent content'
(Gadamer, 2003: 53) of experience. Such content, writes Gadamer, 'is like a yield
or result that achieves permanence, weight, and significance from out of the
transience of experiencing' (ibid). Indeed, one might propose that *das Erlebte* –
the yield of the experience – reflects the *necessary*, *apodeictic* outcome of the sum
of aesthetic judgments over an entire work, and provides a way thinking about
Kant's concept of necessity in a medium which unfolds *over time*.

What, then, might constitute the yield, the permanent content, for the spectator of
Ubu Roi? While I can only conjecture about the content of that 'permanent
content', it is possible to understand its form by consolidating each *Moment* (n.) I

100

have already identified in the work: the 'cric-crac' sound gesture; Ma Ubu's 'flutter'; Pa Ubu's 'swirl'. As the aesthetic 'peaks' of the work, the *attentats* of the experience of *Ubu Roi*, it is the memory – the *aftertaste* – of them that shapes the necessary 'yield'. The 'cric-crac' was disembodying and equalising and allowed me to go beyond my own psychological domain, Ma Ubu's 'flutter' was polarising and rapid, while Pa Ubu's 'swirl' was mesmerising, disorienting, and shape-shifting – structurally amorphous and universal. If, as Kant says, necessity is concerned with 'what we say' about a judgment or judgments, then the language that is used to recall the sensation of *das Moment* represents that permanent content: the things we take with us. Of course, this view is open to criticism. Taking the position that language is discourse, and that discourse organises experience, there is a problem with the notion that a particular use of language can be seen as a distillation of experience. In defence of this, however, I will turn to Gadamer where he writes that:

> Language has no independent life apart from the world that comes to language within it. Not only is the world world only insofar as it comes into language, but language too, has its real being only in the fact that the world is presented in it.
>
> (Gadamer, 2004: 440)

Thinking about necessity and *das Erlebte* in this way produces a rich and evocative recall of experience, a linguistic picture of the kinds of feeling *necessary* to our experience. It is this lasting shape, this aftertaste, which exists universally as the *sensus communis*, the shared sense. Through the *a posteriori* 'push' of *das Moment*, and the *a priori* faculties which reflect upon it, a body of *apodeictic* feeling is formed which allows an articulation of *das Erlebte* –

disembodying, *polarising*, *disorienting*, *rapid* – that is both fundamentally related to the object of experience, and universally communicable.

Indeed, could these notions of *necessity*, *das Erlebte* and the *sensus communis* not be a model for judging performance in academic and professional contexts? In Chapter One I argued against criteria-based assessment on the grounds that it either undercut or ignored the value of lived experience and the aesthetic in-and-of-itself. But in using this Kantian approach, I am able to harness that experience to enable and encourage a kind of speculative, inconclusive historiography, a rigorous 'not-knowing' in favour of an engagement with the material 'facts' of a work; demonstrating just how precise and flexible this approach is, and how valuable it might be where judgment has real-world implications.

What remains in this chapter is to think back to the questions posed at the end of Chapter One, and to consider them in light of the analysis thus far. In closing Chapter One, I had proposed the early avant-garde as a 'site of radical changes to the notion of aesthetic experience in theatre'. And indeed, *Ubu Roi* and its predecessors, through this analysis, demonstrate a performance genre experimenting with notions of form, texture, mise-en-scene, structural cohesion and hierarchy, and pushing at the boundaries of aesthetic experience. I asked questions of the universality of taste; developed an understanding of the universal that transcended universal meaning, and discovered how the imagination and understanding can be opened up in play from the ensemble masses of *Rosmersholm* to the minute detail of the swirl in *Ubu Roi*. Through the model of

analysis as a whole, the importance of physical, sensory, 'lived' experience is defensible not only because it offers an alternative to assessment methods in the arts, but also because it allows a kind of performance re-enactment that starts with but ultimately goes beyond historical reconstruction. And while there are those who might disagree with the approach, with the inclusion of conjecture, the reclamation of the Kantian notion of taste in turn allows for speculative exploration of the experience of works that are over one-hundred years old. As this analysis of *Ubu Roi* has shown, thinking about a specific moment of performance in terms of *das Moment* reveals something about *Ubu Roi* that other forms of analysis cannot. Where Hyman's work serves to reconstruct the performance in terms of a political atmosphere, and Deak's to create important links between Jarry and early symbolism, this analysis imagines what it was like for a spectator to be there, in that theatre, on that night – and through the notion of *das Moment* reveals *Ubu Roi* as an aesthetically liberating, playful and physically involving experience.

In Chapter Three, I will expand on the distinctions made here and consider how contemporary performance practices have taken early avant-garde experiments into territories which provoke further, even more radical departures into the notion of taste as a means of theorising aesthetic experience. In particular, Chapter Three considers the impact of olfactory sensation on judgments of taste, the distinction between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic, the impact of digital technologies on the aesthetic experience, and what happens when *a posteriori* experience and *a priori* understanding contradict each other at the point of *das Moment*.

CHAPTER THREE – OF TASTE AND TASTING

> The importance of the sensual in art has varied; after an age of asceticism pleasure becomes an organ of liberation and vivaciousness, as it did in the renaissance and then again in the anti-Victorian impulse of impressionism.

> (Adorno, 2004: 17)

At the end of the last chapter I explored the relationship between *das Moment* and *das Erlebte* – the permanent content of experience. Furthering those ideas, I want to address them in a context that would seem almost criminal to omit when talking about taste: food.

'Over the course of the 20ᵗʰ century', writes Sally Baines, 'various artists (both mainstream and avant-garde) repeatedly attempted to renew the sense of smell as part of the theatrical experience' (Baines, 2001: 68). This 'largely unexplored rhetoric' of what Baines calls the 'olfactory effect' (ibid) is where this chapter will begin. Receiving 'surprisingly little critical or scholarly attention' it may seem that the use of smell is 'merely iconic and illustrative, a weak link in a chain of redundancy across sensory channels that does nothing more than repeat what is already available visually and aurally' (Baines, 2001: 69). But when considered in conjunction with the Kantian notion of taste and *das Moment*, a study of Baines' 'olfactory performance' (ibid) proves itself as an area of vital importance. However, allowing olfactory sensation into the field of Kantian taste and of aesthetic judgment departs from distinctions Kant makes between beauty (*das Schöne*) and the merely *agreeable* (*das Angenehme*). Recalling Kant, a liking for

the agreeable (or an *agreeable judgment*, or *satisfaction in the agreeable*) is the estimation of objects in terms of 'the gratification they promise' in sensation (Kant, 1987: §3 [47/206]), 'this holds moreover not only for the taste of the tongue, palate, and throat, but also for what may be agreeable to one's eyes and ears' (Kant, 1987: §7 [55/212]). Olfactory sensations, for Kant, cannot factor in judgments of taste because they bring with them charm (*Reiz*) and emotion (*Rührung*), and as such can never move beyond personal *interest*. Moreover these sensations, he argues, lack '*design*' and '*composition*', things which 'constitute the proper object of taste' (Kant, 1987: §14 [72/226]). To counter this omission, I want to think about olfactory sensation as having both *design* and *composition* both conceptually and practically. In §14 of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant notes that 'if, following *Euler*, we assume that colours are vibrations (*pulsus*) of the aether in uniform temporal sequence, as, in the case of sound, tones are such vibrations of the air, [...] then color and tone would not be mere sensations' (Kant, 1987: §14 [70/224]). Indeed, Kant goes on to state that if 'the mind perceives not only, by sense, the effect that these vibrations have on the excitement of the organ, but also, by reflection, the regular play of the impressions (and hence the form in the connection of different presentations) [...] they could even by themselves be considered beauties' (ibid). Essentially, Kant mistrusts colours, tones, and olfactory sensations in-and-of-themselves because of their absolute reliance on *a posteriori* knowledge. However, a consideration of olfactory sensation as proposed by Swiss mathematician and physicist Leonard Euler in *Letters*[35] (1773-4), allows for sensory experience that has an *a priori* element to it. Reflecting

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[35] Letters to a German Princess: On Different Subjects in Physics and Philosophy (*Briefe an eine deutsche Prinzessinn über verschiedene Gegenstünd aus der Physik und Philosophie*)

upon the 'regular play of the impressions' (ibid), provides *a priori* grounds for the judgment of these experiences through the engagement of the faculties, thus allowing a consideration of both *design* and *composition* in *addition to* the purely sensory 'excitement of the organ'.

For every contemporary analysis in this thesis, there are clear links back to techniques and devices first developed in the early avant-garde, and the analysis of olfactory sensation here is no exception. While perhaps illustrative and serving the single purpose of enhancing a realist aesthetic, early recorded uses of aroma in theatrical events, such as David Belasco's productions of *The First Born* (1897), and *The Governor's Lady* (1912), highlight the connection Adorno makes between the sensual experience in anti-Victorian and more contemporary practices. In *The First Born*, set in San Francisco's Chinatown district, Chinese incense was burned, and in *The Governor's Lady*, an onstage replica kitchen was used to create the aroma of cooking pancakes. Using aroma for purposes outside the illustrative bounds of realism, such as creating ambient mood or atmosphere, was employed by Vsevolod Meyerhold in his 1910 production of *Don Juan*, where 'proscenium servants' (Baines, 2001: 70) sprayed expensive perfumes into the audience to create 'an aura of luxury' (ibid). Paul Roinard, in accordance with the symbolist's idea of synaesthesia, also sprayed perfumes into the audience during his production of the *Song of Songs* at the Théâtre D'art in 1891. Valentine de St.-Point's 'metáchorie dance performances' (ibid) from 1913 used pots of burning incense in conjunction with the 'predominant color, musical environment, and central poetic idea' (ibid) derived from the symbolist doctrine of correspondences,

demonstrating clearly how the senses and sensation can be built into, and work with, the design and composition of performance. In short, though, as Baines notes, the use of aroma in the early avant-garde was employed 'to illustrate the dramatic or visual text specifically or, more generally, to create a mood' (ibid). If the sensual in art is functional or merely 'illustrative' (ibid) for the early avant-gardes, for contemporary practices it proves itself as a more complex device with a wider dramaturgical significance. Baines gives a good example of this when she discusses how the 'olfactory effect' can foreground 'its own operation as a semiotic system' (ibid). She writes:

> In the Irish troupe Barrabas's production of *The Whiteheaded Boy* (1997), aroma calls attention to the artifice of theatre (and perhaps of representation altogether) when an actor holds a piece of bread up to a patently fake fireplace and suddenly, magically, the smell of toast wafts through the theatre.

(Baines, 2001: 70)

What is significant about this in contrast to the early avant-garde use of aroma is the rift it creates between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*. Here, the audience is presented with the *a posteriori* experience of smelling toast. However, that experience is troubled by the *a priori* concept of *cause* and *effect*[36] insofar as one knows, *a priori*, that the 'patently fake fireplace' is unable to create the *a posteriori* experience which is being presented. So far, my analysis has explored how material *a posteriori* experiences can provoke or enable the speculative *a priori* experience of universal play. This example from *The Whiteheaded Boy*, however, has shown that there can be moments of performance which pull-apart,

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[36] Kant, in the category of *Relation*, calls this concept *causality and dependence*.

or sever, that complimentary connection. To explore this further, I want to move on from the notions of *a priori* and *a posteriori* to consider another set of terms which develop out of them, namely, the distinction between *interest* and *disinterest*.

In this section I will demonstrate how structure and performance style can problematise the Kantian notion of taste. In my analysis of *Ubu Roi* and works of the early avant-garde, I began to define the aesthetic experience as a playful excursion into the realm of imagination, a peak, or 'pocket' of extraordinary experience. What I aim to do here is demonstrate not only how an experience can change from one of *interest* to *disinterest* − from ordinary to extraordinary − but also to show how the experience of performance can 'toggle', or 'switch back and forth', between both *interest* and *disinterest*.

My analysis here concerns Reckless Sleepers' performance of the *The Last Supper* at the Arnolfini in 2007. To begin, I will briefly describe the performance and its scenic composition. Following this, I will explain how food is used in the performance to create aesthetic experience and play. Once these two things have been established, I will then look at three key moments in the piece that exemplify the movement between interest and disinterest. Reckless Sleepers describe *The Last Supper* as:

> A performance piece where we invite our audience to dinner, to eat and drink with us while we tell, and then eat the last words of the famous, the not so famous, criminals, victims, heroes, heroines and stars... (sic) With real scenarios, invented scenarios, scenarios in the future, scenarios from the past. Each audience member is given a table number, their case number, their incident number. Thirteen of these are last suppers.

(Reckless Sleepers, 2008)

The audience are seated at three long tables placed in a 'U' formation (Fig. 7). A

fourth table, set slightly apart from the other three, is where the performers sit. This separation allows them to inhabit the central space bounded by the tables themselves, and desired or otherwise, this separation incurs an unavoidable symbolic elevation of the head table, making a visual connection to Leonardo's iconic *Last Supper* (1498) fresco.

Figure 7: Last Suppers; Table Formation - *The Last Supper* (2007)

The central motif of the piece is the delivery, by the performers, of famous last words – Rasputin's 'Ha ha! It is the Devil revived', Anna Demindova's 'God has saved me. God has saved me', and so on. Interspersed with these famous and infamous quotations is the calling of a number which corresponds to the seat of an audience member. Upon calling the number, one of the performers reads the last meal request of a prisoner death row. Nine of these meals (thirteen in total) are cooked backstage and then presented to the audience member in the corresponding seat. The first of these, presented to prisoner/seat number 658, was the last meal request of Clifton Russell Jr.:

> No preference asked for whatever was on the menu. Chilli dogs baked beans corn and peanut butter cookies.

> (Wetherell, 2007)

110

Developing the ideas central to Baines' notion of 'olfactory' performance, what I am interested in here is how the food functions as the *Moment* (n.) of the work. As they are presented, the meals pose the spectator-cum-dinner-guest-cum-prisoner with an ontological dilemma. Existing in the same territory as readymade art (like Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917), or Craig-Martin's *Oak Tree* (2008)), the meals are presented as *acheropoietoi* objects: physically unaltered by the hand of the artist, yet functioning not only as a meal *qua* food, but also as an object contextualised such that it might invite aesthetic contemplation and reflection. Being integrated into the rhythmic composition of the performance, the meals transcend the simplicity of what Kant calls 'charm' (*Reiz*) and the concrete literality of what they provide *a posteriori*. Instead, the food reorients the spectators relationship to the object such that it can be considered in terms of *design* and *composition* precisely because of how it '[excites] the organ' of olfactory reception (Kant, 1987: §14 [72/226]). Because of this, the use of food and drink in *The Last Supper* raises a question of Kantian epistemology in general.

Figure 8: lettuce, sliced tomato, sliced cucumber, 4 celery stalks, 4 sticks of American or cheddar cheese, 2 bananas and two cold half pints of milk (Reckless Sleepers, 2007)

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant takes as a necessary prerequisite of thought that there is an external world with which I have some kind of phenomenal interplay. Were this not the case, he argues, there would be nothing given to the senses and it would be impossible for me to acquire knowledge of the world; my existence would be synonymous with that of the anaqualiac[37] – indeed, recalling the introduction to the thesis (pp 11-15), this is fundamental to his notion of the synthetic *a priori*. Kant calls this sensory information 'content': which is given to the perceiver by objects, and is *a posteriori*. There is no way – for Kant – that I can get beyond how I perceive the presentation of an object to know the 'thing in itself'. I can never tell, for example, how 'much' of the object is the thing-in-itself forcing me see it the way I see it, or indeed how much I (unintentionally, through the very structure of my mind) am forcing the object to look the way it looks. All I can know is that there are indeed things in the world, *external* to me, but not *independent* of me[38], from which I gain the *a posteriori* content from which cognition arises. It follows for Kant, then, that when we encounter an object, we perceive only what is called its 'accidental' features[39]. In the case of a meal, or

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[37]The term anaqualiac is found most commonly in thought experiments concerning the nature of consciousness. In this instance, the anaqualiac is a person who has certain innate mental capabilities '(attention, short-term memory, etc.) but lacking qualia. This person would be *exactly* like us, save that he would be a zombie – an anaqualiac' (Hameroff, 1998: 104). The argument follows that since this is a conceivable scenario, consciousness must exist independently of qualia.

[38] Heidegger echoes this sentiment when he talks of '*being-in-the-world*'. There is no way that I cannot be *in* the world, aside from in death – upon which I would cease to exist. The division between *external* and *independent* then can be exemplified through my relationship to any object. The chair I am sitting on as I write this for example, is *external* to me: it does not have governance over me in any way. Nevertheless I am not *independent* of it: if I leave this chair and walk to another room, there will still be a relationship between me and the chair that can be measured in space. I am constantly in relation to the chair in some way, in the same way that I am 'in relation' to the Sydney Opera House, from here in the UK – my relationship to it can be measured because I am, ultimately, *in* the world.

[39] This is in opposition to an object's 'essential' properties. Essential properties are roughly defined

food, this might consist of colour, smell, or texture. In §13 of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant tells us that 'beauty should actually concern only form' (Kant, 1987: §13 [69/224]), and it seems that what he is really saying here is that 'content', the sensory or 'accidental' properties of an object, are not sufficient on their own to constitute a pure judgment of taste. But the 'accidental' properties of the meals in *The Last Supper* – their colour, smell, even their taste – inform our judgment as a direct result of their sensorial (in this case olfactory) effect. And while their properties as objects might be 'accidental', their specific point of introduction and relationship to the work is part of a larger, more complex system of aesthetic *design* and *composition* than Kant would be remiss to associate with the triviality of 'charm'. Where charm, for Kant, 'hinders the impartiality that is required for a judgment of taste' (Wenzel, 2005: 61), and objects of charm 'impair the judgment of taste if they draw attention to themselves' (Kant, 1987: §14 [71/225]), what makes these meals – these 'suppers' – different, is that one encounters them as aestheticised objects *within* a larger system of composition and design.

Now that I have explained how sensory experience in *The Last Supper* can invite aesthetic play, I will look at the three key moments in the piece which demonstrate this notion of 'toggling' between *interest* and *disinterest*. The first key moment takes place *before* the performance begins, before I enter the theatre space. Waiting for the show to begin, I sat in the Arnolfini bar and had a glass of wine.

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by those things which we cannot perceive such as space and time. Essential properties then include spatial and temporal shape, and structure. Accidental properties may change, and the substance (the thing-in-itself) remains the same, while any essential changes also change the substance (that which it is).

My relationship to that glass of wine was one of *interest*, to satisfy a particular appetite by taking pleasure in the consumption, the existence, of an object. It is this common practice of a pre-show drink that holds the toggling between interest and disinterest together. And I will now explain why.

When the house was opened, I finished my drink and headed for the performance space. The audience were being ushered in individually, greeted by a performer who asked to us to choose a raffle ticket from large champagne bucket. When it was my turn, the ticket I chose was taken from my hand, examined, and the number upon it read aloud into the main room. Then another performer arrived, and I was seated at the table. As I was seated, I was casually offered a glass of wine by my host. And this offering is the second key moment of the piece. Crucially, there was no sense of a 'performance' happening: other spectators chatted casually amongst themselves and settled into their seats, while the performers conversed with the audience in an informal and colloquial way. Having just finished one glass of wine in the bar, another seemed like a good idea, and my engagement with the wine remained *interested*. That it does so is a result of how the performers merge the social context of the 'pre-show drink' into the context of performance, and they do this in two ways. The first is that after the 'greeting' in the doorway, the mode of performance is one of familiarity. The language the performers use is colloquial and ad-libbed, their movements casual and unconsidered. Nothing is being presented; the wine is offered to individuals, privately, with no sense of show or spectacle. The second element that aids in this 'merging' of contexts is the social custom of food and of eating. As a cultural

114

practice with its own patterns, structures and rules, my (usual) sense of distance between audience and performer in this situation was blurred by the fact that we were, in a sense, playing a game that we all knew the rules to – the 'eating game'. So, the rules and behaviours inherent to the context of service, being served, and of social consumption that were present for me in the bar return again here and become interwoven with this delicately poised performance style.

The third key moment occurs half-way through the piece. After the third of the suppers (a jar of dill pickles) is served, the performers leave the head-table and return round to their 'guests' to offer them another glass of wine. By this point in the piece, the ontological 'transformation' of the food – into objects capable of stimulating aesthetic play – has been clearly established. Thus, as the performers return to offer another glass of wine, the wine itself has the same aesthetic potentiality as the 'last suppers'. Moreover, the wine is now burdened with an explicitly theological set of references, and has a symbolic elevation that differentiates it from the wine in the first two key moments.

For Kant, as I explained with reference to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, sensory information gives content to thought. But in this instance, that is not the case. By reconfiguring the spectators' relationship to the food and wine, these olfactory offerings are encountered as aesthetic objects, and the excitement of the sensory organs leads to the faculty of imagination (aesthetic), rather than those of cognition. The result is that those *olfactory sensations*, which Kant would dismiss in the *Critique of Judgment* in order to exclude from my aesthetic experience the

115

charm which 'hinders all impartiality' (Kant, 1987: §13 [69/224]), are now providing me with the actual matter, or substance, of my experience. This experience, then, is a judgment of the synthetic *a priori*.

So, the question 'would you like more wine?' becomes the pivotal *das Moment* of *The Last Supper*. In that moment of being asked, I perceive a discontinuity between the first offering of wine and this second one. The first offering was informal and borrowed from the customs of social practice; an informality that relies on the first key moment in the bar. In this second offering, the 'push' toward aesthetic play and speculation takes place, but it is troubled by the situations which have preceded it. In that moment of choice, of deciding whether to take more, I am asked to capitulate to the world of the performance, to my role as stand-in, to accepting the falseness of things. In this aestheticised relationship, a refusal to take more denotes a rejection: to my role at the table, to being a stand-in, to playing the game. But because this offering comes in a sequence of offerings which have to this point been *interested*, my ability to accept and engage with the wine in an entirely *disinterested* way is stifled. So there is a layering in this moment of both *interested* and *disinterested* concerns, an overlapping of what Kant calls 'practical' and 'contemplative' pleasure:

> The pleasure which is necessarily connected with desire (for an object whose representation affects feeling in this way) may be called practical pleasure, whether it is the cause or the effect of the desire. On the other hand, the pleasure which is not necessarily connected with a desire for the object and which, therefore, is not a pleasure taken in the existence of the object of the representation, can be called a mere contemplative pleasure, or passive delight.

116

The feeling of the latter kind of pleasure is called taste.

(Kant, 1987: § 7 [56/213])

What I am suggesting then is that in *The Last Supper*, the 'accidental' properties of the wine (and food) represent more than the possibility for charming affectation. The spectators who receive the food are in some sense distanced from the meal in front of them. The ersatz 'dinner party' highlights the theatricality of my engagement with these social conventions rather than drawing 'attention to themselves' (Baines, 2001: 70). Objectified in this way, my sensation of the object, of its heat and of its smells, became not de-contextualised, but rather *inter*-contextualised. In experiencing the suppers and glasses of wine as *aesthetic* objects, the logical and biological connection between the heat and smell of the food and drink, its consumption, and the primal will to survive − the *a priori universal* − is confused with the conventions and etiquettes of theatrical engagement − the *a posteriori particular*. While my immediate, arguably subconscious thought relays sensory information that carries the message 'food is coming, you will eat', my aesthetic faculties (*imagination* and *understanding*) ignore this information in favour of playing with the formal and thematic relationships that the food creates as an object aesthetically encountered.

It is my conclusion then that this particular *das Moment* is markedly different to those explored so far because it asks the spectator to be both *interested* and *disinterested*. As troubling as this might seem for the strictly Kantian notion of 'pure' taste, Arnold Berleant, in 'An Exchange on Disinterestedness', believes that an experience of such ambivalence is indeed possible:

117

> Intrinsic value need not be exclusive but can occur in harmonious juxtaposition with instrumental concerns [...] the moral effects of theatre, literature and music have been recognized since Plato. Furthermore, there is no need to sacrifice the distinctive, complex quality of aesthetic appreciation without separating such experience from its other modes.
>
> (Berleant, 2007)

While Berleant's argument is that disinterestedness 'cannot adequately account for much in the contemporary development in the arts' (Berleant, 2007), his proposition that aesthetic value can occur in 'harmonious juxtaposition with instrumental concerns' (ibid) signals that it is possible to talk about an aesthetic experience which can move between both interested *and* disinterested engagement. Indeed, in 'Response to Arnold Berleant on Disinterestedness', Ronald Hepburn clarifies this point:

> Disinterestedness need not be thought of as a "separate mode of existence". It plays more roles than one, for instance, in the demarcation of aesthetic from non-aesthetic, art from non-art.
>
> (Hepburn, 2007)

Hepburn's argument here is significant because his assertion claims that the non-aesthetic is *ipso facto* non-artistic, or as Adorno's writes, 'art perceived strictly aesthetically is art aesthetically misperceived' (Adorno, 2004: 7). Now, as with the analysis of *Ubu Roi*, my proposition remains that aesthetic experience *vis-a-vis* a *das Moment* is a discrete, extraordinary event that invites a form of contemplative response from the faculties of imagination and understanding. Importantly though, what is left unsaid in this proposition is that it is *only* the experience of *das Moment* – and thus the experience of the synthetic *a priori* – that can give rise to

aesthetic experience[40]. *Das Moment* implies that the idea of 'the aesthetic' is not so much related to the peculiarities of one experience as it is to a particular way of engaging with art (or indeed the world). For something to 'be' aesthetic, then, is to require a particular form of engagement at a particular (temporal) moment. This is potentially problematic though, because if, as Hepburn suggests, the non-aesthetic is non-artistic, then those 'moments-between-moments', the experiences of performance which do not directly inform our judgement aesthetically, surely cannot be considered as art.

This need not necessarily be the case, however. Because I think that this example in *The Last Supper* provides a way to once again develop the pairings of terms central my discussion. Where the chapter so far has seen the development from *a priori* and *a posteriori* to *interest* and *disinterest*, this notion of 'toggling' highlights a difference between the *aesthetic* and the *artistic.* Specifically, from that question, 'would you like more wine?' comes two separate branches of engagement – the *aesthetic* and the *artistic* – that run parallel to one another. On one hand, my engagement is defined by the contemplative, *aesthetic*, pleasure of toying with the wine in its new-found context: of the meal that accompanied it, of the smell of a death row cell, of the silence as the prisoner is led to their death; of Jesus and his disciples, of Judas' betrayal, and the transubstantiation of wine into

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[40] It becomes important then to define the difference between an 'aesthetic situation' and 'aesthetic experience'. The food, for example, is aestheticised by virtue of its place within a structure that offers aesthetic experiences: its position as an *objet d'art* is one of being contextually aesthetic, rather than being that particular thing – *das Moment* – which is the spark for aesthetic contemplation. Additionally, 'aesthetic' as used in this sense is fundamentally different to how we might understand it when someone describes the 'aesthetic of work'. These instances refer instead to one of two things, either how the piece looks and feels in relationship to certain ideas of genre and tradition, or to an attempt at communicating a work's *das Erlebte*; in this instance, all art *is* (or has an) aesthetic.

blood. But on the other hand I have an *interested*, *artistic* set of concerns which are to do with the revealing of the means by which I arrived at this situation, of retracing my steps through the two offerings, and back to the bar, and taking pleasure in my understanding of that structure, and enjoying the flavour of the wine all the while.

So there is an intertwining within this *das Moment* of interest and disinterest, the artistic and the aesthetic, both of which are mutually reliant on the other. Adorno echoes this sentiment in *Aesthetic Theory* (2004), and while he ultimately claims that the 'doctrine of disinterested satisfaction is impoverished *vis-a-vis* the aesthetic' (Adorno, 2004: 12), he goes on to argue that Kantian disinterestedness 'must be shadowed by the wildest interest, and [...] that the dignity of artworks depends on the intensity of the interest from which they are wrested' (Adorno, 2004: 13). It is, according to Adorno, the presence of disinterestedness' other that might prevent Kant's aesthetics from becoming what he calls 'a castrated hedonism, a desire without desire' (Adorno, 2004: 14). Of course, this becomes possible when 'the aesthetic' is considered only as the speculative play that comes from *das Moment*. As a 'pocket', or 'bubble' of experience that stands as a unique way of experiencing a work, it becomes evident that in time-based practices like theatre and performance, movement into, out of and through these experiences is possible without destroying Berleant's 'harmonious juxtaposition with instrumental concerns' (Berleant, 2007). In this way, the 'castrated hedonism' of which Kant is accused by Adorno is negated. That 'pleasure masquerades beyond recognition in the Kantian disinterestedness', or that 'for the sake of happiness,

happiness is renounced', is only applicable in a world where aesthetic experience means exactly the same thing as the experience of art (Adorno, 2004: 14). The role of *das Moment*, as an event, or push, speaks – by way of its secondary temporal meaning – of something that occurs outside or alongside, yet intrinsically related to, experience as a whole. In his discussion of *Erlebnis* in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer considers *Erlebnis'* relationship to the notion of adventure. An adventure, he writes:

> Interrupts the customary course of events, but is positively and significantly related to the context which it interrupts. Thus an adventure lets life be felt as a whole, in its breadth and in its strength. Here lies the fascination of an adventure. It removes the conditions and obligations of everyday life. It ventures out into the uncertain. But at the same time it knows that, as an adventure, it is exceptional and thus remains related to the return of the everyday, into which adventure cannot be taken. Thus the adventure is "undergone", like a test or trial from which one emerges enriched and more mature.

(Gadamer, 2004: 60)

Like an adventure then, *das Moment* removes the 'conditions and obligations of everyday life' (Gadamer, 2004: 60): liking, interest, and desire, and replaces these more primal practices – the need to devour or consume – with a way of engaging that as Gadamer states, 'ventures out into the uncertain' (Gadamer, 2004: 60). What happens in these moments of adventure, of uncertainty, is what Kant calls 'pure' taste. Indeed, uncertainty is precisely what defines these moments as aesthetic. The 'free-play' of disinterested engagement does not require resolution or end, only that the playing takes place, and the pleasure emancipated from determinate cause in the moment of purposiveness is built entirely on uncertainty,

on the idea of the *je ne sais quoi*, I *don't know* what that is. It is this 'adventure' that takes place in *The Last Supper*: I have *interested* concerns, such as a personal pleasure I take in the wine, and my *artistic* understanding of the piece's structure. But I also have *disinterested* concerns which temporarily remove me from the 'obligations of everyday life' (ibid) and venture out into the 'uncertain' territory of *aesthetic* speculation. To explore this idea of the *aesthetic* versus the *artistic* in greater detail, I want to conclude this chapter with an analysis of Proto-type Theater's *Virtuoso (working title)* (2009).

Following on directly from the analysis of *The Last Supper*, my aim in this final section is to explore in greater detail the difference between *artistic* and *aesthetic* experience, and also to think about that relationship with regard to the visual and scenic compositions of performance. To do that, I will propose that *Virtuoso (working title)* is situated at the meeting point of these two kinds of engagement, and that the work itself is compositionally and scenographically structured around this difference. To begin, I will explain the key thematic and formal devices of the piece. Describing the narrative content of *Virtuoso...*, the company write:

> With *Virtuoso (working title)* [...] three performers stage the story of a stagnant American suburbia, circa 1963, where the minutiae of everyday life has become strange: glass windows portend violence, a spot on the wall promises freedom, a stranger appears in the living room. Playing games to keep boredom at bay, they switch virtuosically from persona to persona, never content to idly wait for something to happen.
>
> (Proto-type Theater, 2009)

While technically:

> The audience witnesses the construction of this strange world on three flat screen monitors, behind which the performers can be seen assembling the backgrounds, costumes and props necessary to crafting a series of perfect images. Building the visual world in front of the audience using live video feeds, the performers also manipulate miniature figurines, houses and scenery in a play on scale that toys with the boundaries of perception.
>
> (Proto-type Theater, 2009)

To explain how the piece is built technically, first consider the following:

123
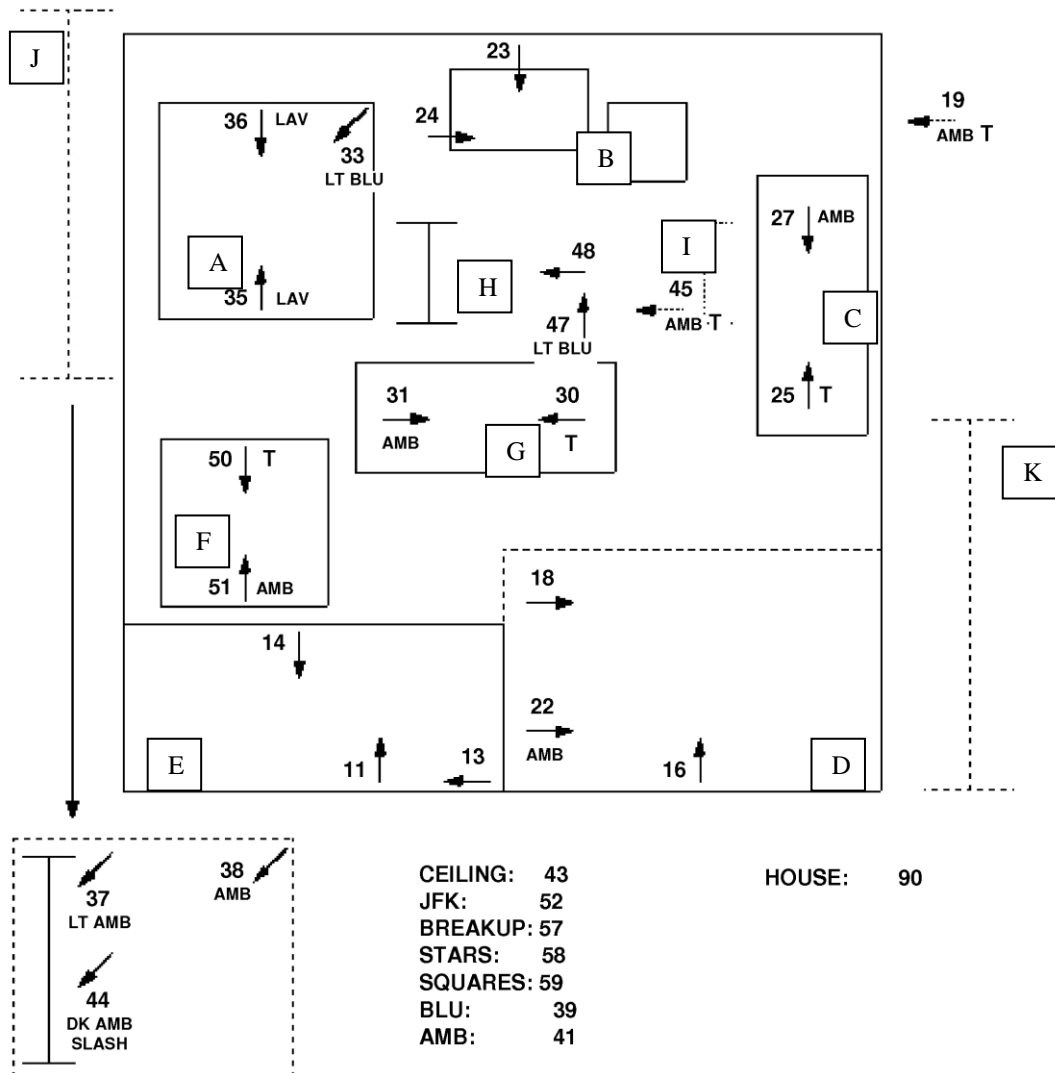
Figure 9: *Virtuoso (working title)*: **Magic Sheet**

124

The Magic Sheet (Fig. 9) shows an aerial view of the space, and what is useful here is that each of the square and rectangular areas represents a piece of scenery. This layout is important to understand. The large outer rectangle is the main performance space, outlined in white tape and measuring precisely 18'11" x 18'11$^{1/2}$". Inside of this, the other square and rectangular areas are: (A) a rooftop; (B) a dolls house; (C) grass; (D) a hallway; (E) a lounge; (F) a picnic blanket; (G) grass; (H) a ceiling, suspended from the rig; and (I) venetian blinds/a window. Outside of the taped space there are sections (J): a wall in a hallway; and (K) a wall in a kitchen.

Figure 10: Proto-type Theater's *Virtuoso (working title)*, (2009)

The arrangement of the actual space in Figure 10 demonstrates two things. The first is that there is no *apparent* logic concerning the placement of these scenic pieces, and the second is that while the scenography is comprised of domestic furnishings, their arrangement is fractured and does not present an image of domesticity that one might call 'a house' in more realist notion of mise-en-scene.

125

However, the three screens at the front (1: left; 2: centre; 3: right) tell a different story. Showing live images captured by cameras in the space (which can be seen in Figure 11) and routed through a four-way video-switcher, screen 1 shows a performer 'in' location (J), while screens 2 and 3 both show two more performers, again 'in' location (J), but from the point-of-view of location (I). The effect over the three screens, then, is such that the three performers on-screen are all inhabiting location (J), and can be seen from both inside and outside of the 'house'. Thus, there is a dissonance between the cohesion presented on the screens and the fractured, seemingly disorganised positioning in the live space. On the three screens this section of dialogue

> Woman: Oh
> Man 2: Have I frightened you?
> Woman: Well.
> Man: No.
> Woman: Well, a bit yes.
> Man 2: I'm terribly sorry.
> Man: Not at all.
> Man 2: Oh good.
> Woman: Who are you?
> Man 2: Me?
> Woman: Yes.
> Man 2: You don't remember?
> Woman: Of course I remember. You're the astronaut.

> (Proto-type Theater, 2009)

is visually composed so that on those screens it appears to take place within a single discernable location, in which the occupants address each other face-to-face. What can be seen live, 'off-screen' (Fig. 10), is that 'Man 2' and 'Woman' have their backs to each other, and are standing in the fragments of other scenic pieces: 'Man 2' is standing on the rooftop area, while 'Man 1' and 'Woman'

126

appear sandwiched between the doll's house and a strip of artificial grass. The coming together of these fractured 'slices' or 'sections' of domestic environments, to create complete images in and through which the performers engage with one another, is a formal device throughout the piece. In Figure 11, it is possible to see an effect being created similar to that of Figure 10. In Figure 11, the three performers are 'in the garden' (F/G/C on Magic Sheet), and with a tight focus of the cameras on the relevant scenic pieces, the screens suggest that there is a cohesive 'outside' space that the performers occupy.

Figure 11: 'The Garden Scene' *Virtuoso (working title)*

What I propose with *Virtuoso...*, then, is that there is a compositional rift between the live image and the mediated image which can be articulated in terms of *artistic* versus *aesthetic* engagement. To demonstrate what I mean by 'compositional rift', I will briefly compare *Virtuoso (working title)* with a Big Art Group's *House of No More* (2004)[41].

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[41] The company write:

> *House of No More* is the third and final part of a conceptual trilogy of Real Time Film begun with the works *Shelf Life* and *Flicker*. The performance starts with the re-enactment of a crime told by a mother who thrusts herself on screen in her quest for her missing child. But simultaneously as this premise unfolds, the performers develop an antithesis– that the story is being faked as it is being created, dispelled

Figure 12: Edward Otto and Heather Litteer in Big Art Group's *House of No More* (2004)

In *House of No More*, the stage action (Fig. 12), takes place on a Chroma-Key[42] set. This colour separation technique allows for the transposition of the performers into a 'live film' that constitutes the central narrative threads of the work. Like *Virtuoso...*, *House of No More* uses live-feed cameras and screens to create a cinematic geography from the live performance space. However, as Figure 12 demonstrates, the scenic arrangement of *House of No More* is notably different to that of *Virtuoso...*, and it is through this difference that *Virtuoso's* 'compositional rift' can be understood.

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at the same moment as it is conjured. As the characters dissolve into this corrupt transmission, becoming ghostly and multiplied across the surface of the "film," what emerges is not a battle for the ownership of an absolute truth, but a thirst for a satiating lie.

(Big Art Group, 2010)

[42] Developed in the 1930s, and also referred to as 'colour keying', 'colour-separation overlay (CSO)', 'greenscreen' or 'bluescreen', Chroma Key is a technique used to combine two images in which a colour or small colour range from one image is made transparent. In *House of No More*, the green palette colour from the live image is 'removed' from the combined video feed which results in our seeing the performers 'in' the second (pre-recorded) image.

In Figure 12, the live scenic arrangement of *House of No More* is organised functionally. The large screen upstage-centre is flanked on either side by two static cameras. Also upstage are three smaller monitors, equidistant from each other, which display the same image as the main screen. Here, there is a symmetry at work which gives a sense of cleanliness and clarity. The orderly, rectangular shape of the screens systematises the space, and speaks of precision. In effect, the scenic arrangement is wholly committed to bringing the cinematic space, on the screens, into being. There is nothing superfluous in the live space, nothing to distract the performer or the spectator from the task of creating or watching the action unfold on the screen.

The scenic arrangement of *Virtuoso...*, by contrast, is much more fragmented. Where the ordered scenic arrangement of *House of No More* is designed to facilitate the smooth creation of the image on-screen, the scenic arrangement of *Virtuoso...* − through a sense of *dis*order − appears to make life more difficult for the performers. Moreover, unlike *House of No More*, which uses static cameras at two locations downstage, the cameras of *Virtuoso...* are on movable tripods, and the performers must contend with them in their task of framing each shot correctly.

It is the images that appear on the screens − as created by the cameras − in *Virtuoso...* which to my mind represent the *Momente* (n.) of the work. As seen in Figure 11, the images that appear on the screens appear 'complete', that is, their framing conceals the incompleteness and fragmentation of the scenic arrangement.

129

That momentary cohesion is what provides the spectator with the room to speculate on the things that might exist in the wider 'world' that the fiction of the screens creates. In Figure 11, for example, are the figures in the screens by a pool? Is the sun shining? What kind of natural environments make up the rest of the landscape? Is it trees, hedges, or fencing? Is the man who is digging in the plant pot on the other side of the garden, and what is he doing with the objects he is removing from the soil? How far away are they from the house? Are they right outside the back door, or have they gone to a public green or common to relax in the good weather? Again, as always, it could be any or none of these things, but what is important is how the mediated images promote this kind of imaginative play.

However, there is a compositional 'rift' between the mediated screen images and the fragmented scenic arrangement that works against the coherence of the mediated images. That is not to say that this rift is forcibly working against the *construction* of the image itself, but rather there appears to be a *formal purposiveness* to the live scenographic composition which has a different agenda to the 'perfect' screen image. In experience, as the spectator embarks on the imaginative play of extending the screen space to encompass a wider world, that disinterested *aesthetic* encounter is counteracted by a set of interested *artistic* concerns, namely: the pleasure in seeing the fragmented scenic arrangement coalesce into a unified image; the complex adjustments of the cameras that are necessary to the creation of the shot; the spatial relationship between performer and camera, the alteration of the body to 'fit' the shot, and so on.

130

In *Virtuoso...*, then, the formal device upon which the piece is built – the dissonance between the live and the mediated – is also the means by which spectators 'toggle' between aesthetic and artistic concerns. Indeed, this opposition in *Virtuoso...* exemplifies perfectly the three sets of dialectical terms around which these opening three chapters have been organised, namely: the *a priori* and *a posteriori* dialectic, or the universal, imaginative play of extending the screen-space versus the material pleasure of watching the shots as they are constructed; the *interest* and *disinterest* dialectic, or the pleasure taken in understanding how the disorganised fragments coalesce on screen, versus a playful consideration of the texture, temperature, shape and smell of the fictional environments; and finally, the *aesthetic* and *artistic* dialectic, or the unbounded uncertainty of *das Moment*, its speculation and satisfactions, versus the pleasure of order, of structural correlation and compositional integrity.

In this way, aesthetic experience is the pleasure that cannot be articulated in artistic terms. It overwhelms logic and order; it is an 'uncertain venture'. Like the subtitles of *Ubu Roi*, the aesthetic encounter 'bedazzles' the artistic, removes the spectator from the pedestrian concerns of the everyday and revels in potentiality, in 'maybe' and 'I don't know'. In this way, the artistic keeps the aesthetic within our reach. Like Gadamer's insistence that an adventure 'remains related to the return of the everyday', aesthetic speculation draws its potency from the fact that it *must* at some point return from the freedom of imaginative play (Gadamer, 2004: 60). Indeed, it is from this *a posteriori* data that the *a priori* imagination can begin to speculate, a synthesis which is demanded by the Kantian notion of the

synthetic *a priori*.

This notion of moving to and from aesthetic experience will be the focus of the following section. Unlike Kant, I propose that a judgment of taste is not *ipso facto* a judgment of beauty, and rather that the judgment of taste marks my participation in aesthetic experience. Beauty, as I will argue in the next chapter, is found in the temporal movement between aesthetic and non-aesthetic concerns. I have no doubt that the Kantian aesthetic model has immense value for the articulation of contemporary performance experience, as my analysis to this point has shown. But along with those benefits, as we have seen with *The Last Supper* and *Virtuoso (working title)*, come frictions, interruptions and interventions that require a reconfiguration or re-thinking of not only what it means to be using this aesthetic terminology, but also what it means to consider the position of the aesthetic in relation to what we can confidently say about experience. The next logical step is to move now to the idea of beauty with the following questions in mind: what does Kant think it is? What do we think it is? How does it relate to taste? How do we experience it, think about it, and talk about it? And how, most importantly of all, can it be useful to us in the languages and analysis of performance experience?

Transition

Beauty

CHAPTER FOUR – BEAUTY

BALANCE

> Only in the course of the nineteenth century, and in the wake of Hegel's posthumously published lectures on aesthetics, did the topic of art come to replace that of natural beauty as the core subject-matter of aesthetics. And this change was part of the great shift in educated opinion which we know as the romantic movement, and which placed feelings of the individual, for whom self is more interesting than other and wandering more noble than belonging, at the centre of our culture. Art became that enterprise through which the individual announces himself to the world and calls on the gods for vindication. Yet it has proved singularly unreliable as the guardian of our higher aspirations. Art picked up the torch of beauty, ran with it for a while, and then dropped it in the pissoirs of Paris.

(Scruton, 2009: 97)

I concluded Part One by looking at moments of performance in *The Last Supper* and *Virtuoso (working title)* where the notion of taste was troubled by interested, non-aesthetic concerns. The question that remained was how aesthetic experience – *das Moment*, the extra-ordinary 'adventure' – relates to and harmonises with the experience of performance in general. This problem, as I suggested at the end of the last chapter, can be solved by looking more closely at the Kantian relationship between taste and beauty. In this middle, pivotal section of the thesis then, I want to propose that the most cohesive and satisfying experience of taste, and indeed the richest experiences of beauty, can be found in the movement between the Kantian notions of *free* and *dependant* beauty. Thus, moving on from the notion of *aesthetic* versus *artistic*, it is the *free* versus *dependent* beauty dialectic that sits at the heart of this chapter. Here then, Chapter Four looks to answer, at least in Kantian terms, the question: what is beauty?

Now for Kant, the judgment of taste *is* the act through which I feel a satisfaction, or pleasure, in the *beautiful*. Aesthetic experience, as he would have it, is *without exception* the experience of beauty. For Kant, and indeed for other scholars in the pre- and post-Kantian tradition – for instance, Baumgarten, Leibniz, Hume, Hegel and Schopenhauer – beauty is the *central tenet of aesthetic experience* and the *goal toward which all art aims*. Thinking back to the analysis of Part One then, Fermin Gémier's 'cric-crac' and Ma Ubu's 'flutter' in *Ubu Roi*, the offering of wine in *The Last Supper*, and indeed each *Moment* (n.) of those first three chapters, is without exception a moment of beauty. But as my analysis of taste has shown, experiences of theatre and performance can problematise the principles of a Kantian aesthetic, and it is with this in mind that I propose further investigation of the Kantian notion of beauty.

In a way different to taste, beauty seems to be very *important* to us. Over the last decade, scholarly examinations of beauty in contemporary arts and cultures have been numerous and broad in approach[43]. In the mainstream media too, contributions from Hughes (2009), Bayley (2009), McGuirk (2009) and Scruton (2009) reinforce the notion that there is an important relationship between beauty and cultural life in general. Nevertheless, there remains conflicting ideas about what beauty actually *is*.

On one hand, beauty seems to speak of an ineffable universal. It is sometimes tied to myth, and legend, and given a face, a history, a home. It is personified in stories

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[43] See: Steiner (2001), Gilbert-Rolfe (2005), Hickey (2009), Scruton (2009).

of Andromeda, Agave and Medea – sacrificed, or banished like an outcast. The notions of 'a beautiful death', 'a beautiful ending', 'or a beautiful lie', speak for themselves because we seem (or want) to implicitly understand something fundamental about them: something to do with story and narrative, ideals and morals, truth and justice, love and comfort.

But on the other hand, this conception of physical beauty as a 'universal' is troubled by its use in historically specific and value-laden ways. In ancient China the 'Lotus Foot' was the paragon of beauty; in Egypt, Rome and Persia, it was sparkling eyes; for the Elizabethans, a high forehead. From the fourteenth to the nineteenth century it was corseting, and in the sixteenth and seventeenth, dilated pupils. In the eighteenth it was vermillion rouge, and in the twentieth 'heroin chic'. But these paragons point to the Gadamerian notion of *fashion* – preventing them from ever being beautiful in the Kantian sense, and the former notions of beauty relate directly to certain concepts and perhaps culturally-specific ideas of morality and parable. Let us not forget also that the lotus foot, sparkling eyes, vermillion rouge and so on, are all primarily concerned with the image of woman, and it should come as no surprise to note that there is a view of beauty that is 'irreducibly feminine'[44]. If nothing else, beauty in its broadest cultural sense is a profoundly complex idea, with universal, transcendental themes like love, goodness, truth and justice woven into its fabric. But also in that fabric are the

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[44]In *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* (1999), Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe argues that beauty is 'irreducibly feminine'. For him, it is through femininity that beauty can be 'irresponsible'. As 'beauty stands in opposition to the idea of productive thought and perhaps to the idea of production itself', the male, he argues, 'can't detach itself from the principle of production' (Gilbert-Rolfe, 1999: 69).

135

culturally-specific and historically-evolved ideas of femininity and gender, fashion, sex, and desire, and ideas linked to power, class, and status, of social ideology and identity.

Is it the case, then, that the notion beauty in aesthetic experience is impossible to grasp because of the sheer multitude of ways in which beauty can be conceived? Or is it that these differing conceptions of beauty arise out of a struggle to pinpoint an essential need for beauty in our experiences? I want to begin by looking at what *Kant* says about beauty, using that as a basis for an interrogation of beauty in contemporary performance experience. What I hope to achieve in doing so is a fresh perspective on beauty that can, like my analysis of taste, elucidate our experiences of performance in a surprising, and perhaps unique way; but at the same time further our understanding of beauty and reveal its crucial place in the analysis of performance.

At the very start of §16, in the *Analytic*, Kant writes the following:

> There are two kinds of beauty, free beauty (*pulchritudo vagas*) and merely accessory beauty (*pulchritudo adhaerens*). Free beauty does not presuppose a concept of what the object is [meant] to be. Accessory beauty does presuppose such a concept, as well as the object's perfection in terms of that concept. The free kinds of beauty are called (self-subsistent) beauties of this or that thing. The other kind of beauty is accessory to a concept (i.e. it is conditioned beauty) and as such is attributed to objects that fall under the concept of a particular purpose.
>
> (Kant, 1987: §16 [76/229])

The most important part of this passage is its opening sentence, because here Kant legislates for two 'kinds' of beauty, the latter of which sits *outside* of, and is *fundamentally different* to, the judgment of taste. The first kind of beauty, 'free' beauty, is what Kant sees as the 'result' of a judgment of taste, and Kant refers to the form of purposiveness – 'free beauty does not presuppose a concept of what this object is' – to make that clear (Kant, 1987: §16 [76/229]). But Kant then introduces another kind of beauty, which he calls 'accessory' beauty'. So what is it, and where might we find it?

First, it will be more useful to think about 'accessory' beauty as 'dependant' beauty, and it is the latter term that I will use from this point onwards. On defining dependent beauty, Wenzel writes:

> The entrance of a gothic church, for example, its decorations and its shape, might be beautiful. But if it is essential that they belong to a church (or even more conceptually determined: a *gothic* church), their beauty is

137

not free, that is, we are not free from conceptual considerations in our aesthetic contemplation of them.

(Wenzel, 2005: 71)

So dependent beauty, which Kant states is 'attributed to objects that fall under the concept of a particular purpose', is concerned with questions of context, instrumental purpose, and conceptual framing (Kant, 1987: §16 [76/229]). Crucial to the experience of dependent beauty, then, is how the object of judgment relates to its surroundings – both geographic and intellectual. In contrast to 'free' beauty, dependent beauty employs the *cognitive* rather than the *aesthetic* faculties. So if dependent beauty is not of the same stuff as a judgment of taste – if it does not concern the aesthetic 'push' of *das Moment* – how might we experience dependent beauty?

In a stroke of fortunate timing, a retrospective of American artist John Baldessari's work opened at the Tate Modern as I was researching this section of the thesis. The signature work of the exhibition, his 'black caps on a neutral background' *Pure Beauty* (1967-68), epitomises the Kant notion of *dependent* beauty, and is not an example of *free* beauty (Steiner, 2001: 116). I shall now explain why.

Figure 13: John Baldessari's *Pure Beauty* (1967-68)

According to James Hugunin, *Pure Beauty*, and other Baldessari pieces (including *Throwing Three Balls in the Air to Get an Equilateral Triangle (Best of 36 Tries)* (1972-75), *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet* (1972), and *Six Colorful Inside Jobs* (1977)), represent 'significant contributions to conceptualist art and offer critical reflections on the trends, greed, and careerism characterizing the art world, as well as being imaginative objectifications of the epistemological dilemma of our Postmodern times' (Hugunin, 1990: 9). This kind of mid-century conceptualism, writes Wendy Steiner, attempted to 'restore the edge to avant-garde aesthetics by depriving its audience of not only of ornamental and female beauty, but of all beauty beyond ideas as such' (Steiner, 2001: 116). Indeed, Steiner argues that *Pure Beauty* reiterates Balzac's assertion in '*Le Chef-d'ouvere inconnu* [that] the surest way to protect the aesthetic was to eliminate it' (ibid). In her analysis of this style, she also points to Arthur Danto's 'Beauty for Ashes', in which he writes:

> That art need not be constrained by aesthetic
> considerations was probably the major conceptual

139

discovery in the twentieth century. If effectively liberated artists from the imperative to create only what is beautiful, and at the same time freed the philosophy of art from having to concern itself with the analysis of beauty, which had been the central preoccupation of the discipline of aesthetics since its establishment in the eighteenth century. [...] It follows that creating beauty is but one option for artists, who also have their choice of injuring or merely disregarding beauty.

(Danto, 1999: 184)

But *Pure Beauty* neither injures beauty or disregards it, and instead employs a 'dependent', cognitive beauty which sits outside of, or perhaps parallel to, aesthetic experience. Lacking the physical potency of *das Moment*, *Pure Beauty's* 'sensory deprivation' employs language as a vehicle for 'hyperationality' and 'thought' (Steiner, 2001: 116). The 'beauty' of the work is one of contextual association, a challenge to conceptual and minimalist artists in their pursuit of 'purity' (ibid). Arguably the most indicative (if not the shortest) artistic manifesto of a generation, *Pure Beauty* stands as the 'gothic entrance' which belongs *fundamentally* to the 'gothic church' of modernist conceptualism. In encountering *Pure Beauty*, a number of things begin to occur for the spectator that can be understood in relation of the table of categories and table of judgments (see pp 15 and 59). Indeed, the piece's grand, central claim of 'pure beauty' refers the viewer to the category of *modality*, and more specifically, to *assertoric* judgments – an assertion that something is or is not the case. In subsequent contemplative reflection, the viewer is drawn back, time and again, to the assertion of the work: 'this is beautiful, this is pure beauty'. In the experience of the work, the viewer looks for justification for either affirming or negating Baldessari's claim, through the choice of font, or colour – judgments which fall under the category of *quality*.

140

Similarly, scale and proportion might play a role – falling under the category of *quantity*, which concerns magnitude, multitude, and plurality. The category of *relation* is called into action here too, as the concept of 'community' asks the viewer to consider how this works speaks to and of other artworks. In this way, the beauty of *Pure Beauty*, should the viewer argue its existence in Baldessari's work, is purely *dependent*.

Of course, there is a counter-argument to this notion of a beauty of pure *dependence*. It might be argued that the *Moment* (n.) of Baldessari's work can be found in its stark contrast to other works of the period. Compared to the abstract expressionism of Jackson Pollack, Jane Frank, Willem de Kooning, or Franz Kline, Baldessari's laid-bare style in-and-of-itself might have been so powerful a juxtaposition that the 'shock' of absence provided the viewer with a 'push' into an abundant playground of imaginative possibility. But this is to misunderstand the role of *das Moment* and to forget the role of *universality* in a synthetic *a priori* judgment. If, as a viewer, I am shocked by Baldessari's emptiness in comparison to the rich and wild canvases of Pollack *et al*, this shock is not *universal*. Here, my experience of the work is preconditioned by my knowledge of works which are not *necessary* to the judgment of *Pure Beauty*. Indeed if you, the reader, had never seen a work of abstract expressionism, then you could not be shocked by the difference between abstract expressionist works and those of Baldessari. In this instance, any claim to have found a *das Moment* in that radical shift *between* styles is false, since the statement 'everyone who has seen *Pure Beauty* is familiar with the works of abstract expressionism', cannot be true *a priori* and thus cannot

be upheld *universally* as a *das Moment*.

So in the experience of *Pure Beauty*, unlike experiences of taste – of *das Moment* and the aesthetic 'adventure' – the spectator is invisible to the work, but is nevertheless required to carry out the labour of critical and contextual interpretation. Beholden to the critical outlook of the artist in the case of *Pure Beauty*, judgments can never achieve the universal claim of free beauty, nor can they be *necessarily* related to the work, because they will ultimately *depend* upon a wider set of knowledge external to that particular experience. 'In this way', Steiner argues, 'twentieth-century modernism perpetrated a cultural deprivation from which we are only now recovering' (Steiner, 2001: XXII). She continues:

> The avant-garde operated with a one-way model of power, attempting to limit the artwork to the status of a thing – a form, a machine, an ethnographic fetish, the merest hint of an idea, a nought. The perceiver, perplexed and ungratified by such a work, had no choice but to see the artist as the centre of attention. [...] If perceivers experienced any pleasure or transport in contemplating such cerebral, alienating works, they could credit the artist's genius, or perhaps his uncompromising honesty in presenting this minimal pleasure as all that modern life could afford. So much for pleasured beauty!

> (Steiner, 2001: XXII)

In contrast to dependent beauty, then, Kant cites 'free' beauty. Objects and experiences of free beauty, for Kant, are the result of the judgment of taste. Indeed for him, the very fact that a judgment of taste has taken place defines that object, experience, or *das Moment*, as beautiful. But what I want to argue here, as I stated at the very beginning of the chapter, is that movement *between free* and *dependant*

beauty – the *aesthetic* and the *conceptual* – evokes a richer and more profound sense of Kantian beauty that exceeds the sum of its parts. In order to do that, I must demonstrate how works of performance can take the freedom of imaginative speculation to its extremes, and that in this *extremis*, such freedom is actually delimiting rather than liberating.

As a contrasting example to the cerebral *Pure Beauty*, I want to consider Kurt Schwitters' performance of the *Ursonate* from 1922-32, a vocal performance sonata of four movements, an overture, finale, and a cadenza in the fourth movement. Below is the opening section to the Jan Tschichold score of Schwitters' work.

Introduction:

Fümms bö wö tää zää Uu,

                       pögiff,

                            kwii Ee.

Ooooooooooooooooooooooooo,

dll rrrrr beeeee bö
dll rrrrr beeeee bö fümms
bö,   **(A)**
   rrrrr beeeee bö fümms bö wö,
       beeeee bö fümms bö wö tää,
          bö fümms bö wö tää zää,
             fümms bö wö tää zää Uu:

First Movement:

Tema 1:
Fümms bö wö tää zää Uu,

                       pögiff,

                            Kwii Ee.

Tema 2:
Dedesnn nn rrrrr,

               Ii Ee,

                  mpiff tillff too,

                            tillll,

                              Jüü Kaa?

Tema 3:
Rinnzekete bee bee nnz krr müü?

                        ziiuu ennze, ziiuu
rinnzkrrmüü,

    rakete bee bee,

Tema 4
Rrummpff tillff toooo?

Figure 14: Section of the Jan Tschichold score of Kurt Schwitters' *Ursonate* (1922-32)

On the experience of the *Ursonate*, Schwitters writes:

> You yourself will certainly feel the rhythm, slack or strong, high or low, taut or loose. To explain in detail the variations and compositions of the themes would be tiresome in the end and detrimental to the pleasure of reading and listening [...] In the first movement I draw your attention to the word for word repeats of the themes before each variation, to the explosive beginning of the first movement, to the pure lyricism of the sung "Jüü-Kaa", to the military severity of the quite masculine third theme next to the fourth theme which is tremulous and mild as a lamb.
>
> (Schwitters, 2002)

What I propose with *Ursonate* is that the almost boundless freedom of imagination created by Schwitters' nonsensical language (based upon Germanic syllables), *needs* a performance context, an *occasion*, in order that the spectator is able to engage the imagination in a meaningful way. In this analysis, I will compare Schwitters' 1932 audio performance of the *Ursonate* with Jaap Blonk and Golan Levin's collaboration *Ursonography* from 2005, and also with the anecdotal account of Jazz musician George Melly, who used the *Ursonate* as a form of self-defence!

In Schwitters' 1932 Frankfurt recording[45], the lack of performance context, occasion, the *a posteriori* 'being there', makes aesthetic play difficult for the listener. 'Somewhere between spoken language and music' (Ox, 1993: 59), Schwitters performs the *Ursonate* as a hybrid of song and poem.

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[45] This recording can be found online at: http://www.ubu.com/sound/schwitters.html

front   central   back

close   i: y: u:
              I • Y   • U
close
mid   e: ø   o:
                      ə
open
mid   ε(:) œ   ɔ

open   a   a:

The symbol to the right
of the dot represents a rounded vowel;
the symbol to the left represents
an unrounded vowel.
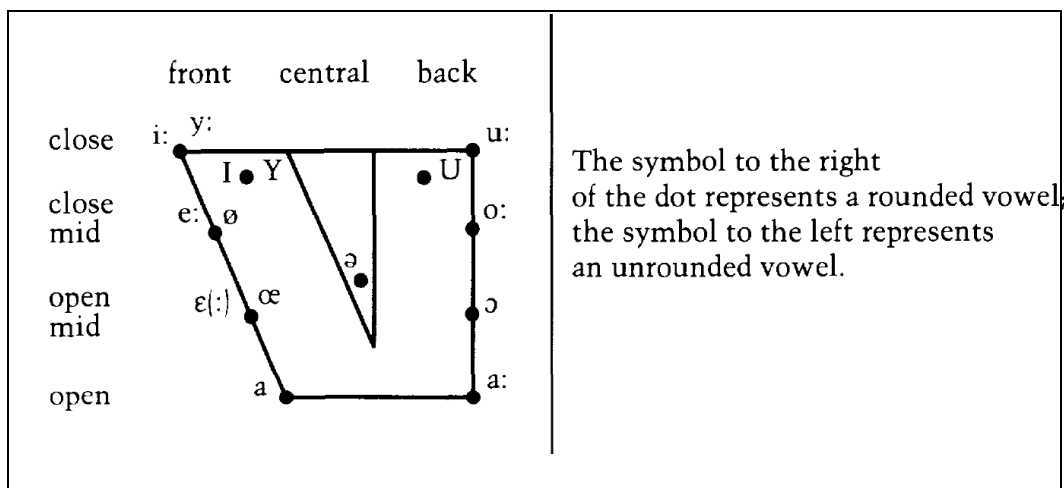
Figure 15: Jack Ox's diagram of the vowel symbols used in the transcription of the *Ursonate*

The diagram above, taken from Jack Ox's study of the *Ursonate*, shows 'the 16 vowel sounds from the German language [and] [...] how and where they are produced in the oral cavity' (Ox, 1993: 60). In his phonetic analysis of Schwitters' recordings, Ox created a 'color chart which corresponds to this vowel chart' (ibid). The 'unrounded vowels', Ox argues, correspond to the 'warm' colours violet and orange, while the rounded vowels correspond to the 'cool' blue, and yellow. In his attempt to create a 'visual translation' of the *Ursonate*, Ox describes how 'diphthongs slide between two colors', and how 'vowels made with the tongue in a high position are warmer than vowels made with a low position' (ibid). What Ox's analysis shows is how the 'easily discernable' rhythm of Schwitters' performance of the *Ursonate* could provoke aesthetic play (ibid). Where Ox finds colour and shape, which he translates into 'solid blocks of cadmium colors' (ibid), one might also find in the 'the explosive beginning' (Schwitters, 2002) of the first movement a *das Moment* which provokes a wholly different set of imaginative journeys. For instance, Schwitters' extension and elongation of the 'mm' sound in 'Fümms' might conjure images of something revving-up, charging or accelerating

146

– is it a meteor heading to earth, military aircraft swooping, a wild animal starting to roar? In the Frankfurt recording, Schwitters performs the 'Ooooooooooooooo' of the introduction as a rounded, frontal cavity sound. Where for Ox this might translate into the colour orange, or violet, it might also evoke the image of gentle wind, of cavernous spaces, or of something hovering above the ground.

The constellations or groupings of certain sound values might also promote a sense of harmony or purposiveness in the listener. In the introduction, as 'rrrrr beeeee bö fümms bö wö' [pronounced: err baaay ber fums ber ver] morphs to 'beeeee bö fümms bö wö tää' [pronounced: baaay ber fums ber ver tay], and then in to 'bö fümms bö wö tää zää' [pronounced: ber fums ber ver tay tsay], Schwitters extends the use of sharp consonants at the end of each line: 'ber vay' into 'ber vay tay' into 'ber vay tay zay'. In this, the spectator hears and feels something beginning to coalesce, but has no fixed point, no anchor to determine what the rules of this composition might be beyond the pure grouping of sound.

Broken down and analysed separately from the act of performance itself, this unravelling of the 1932 *Ursonate* recording is possible, but in the act of listening, the nuances, motifs, micro-structures and repetitions Schwitters creates are easy to miss. Such is the unrelenting pace of Schwitters' performance that there is little time for a contemplative reflection that feels like it could go anywhere in its play. There is an openness about this particular performance of the *Ursonate* in which the lack of framing is detrimental to the aesthetic potentiality of the experience. In Kantian terms, this performance is the opposite of Baldessari's *Pure Beauty*. In

Baldessari's work, where structure and critical agenda are so clear and apparent that the possibility for pleasurable play is delimited, this performance of the *Ursonate* takes the freedom of *pure* beauty to an almost crippling extreme.

In Jaap Blonk and Golan Levin's 2005 performance of the *Ursonate*, titled *Ursonography*, the pair introduced a form of 'intelligent subtitles' (Levin, 2008). Levin writes:

> Blonk's performance is augmented with a modest but elegant new form of expressive, real-time, "intelligent subtitles." With the help of computer-based speech recognition and score-following technologies, projected subtitles are tightly locked to the timing and timbre of Blonk's voice, and brought forth with a variety of dynamic typographic transformations that reveal new dimensions of the poem's structure.
>
> (Levin, 2008)

Figure 16: Jaap Blonk performs *Ursonate* at the Ars Electronica Festival, 2005

Figure 17: Jaap Blonk performs *Ursonate* at the Ars Electronica Festival, 2005

Figures 16 and 17, taken from Blonk's 2005 performance of the *Ursonate* demonstrate the 'intelligent' subtitling that recognises the nuances and timbres in his voice. This graphic representation of the nonsensical sounds is like an invisible boundary for the imagination. In Figure 16, where the syllables float upwards after Blonk speaks them, spectator is given an aesthetic 'push' into contemplating the potential meaning in the sound as contextualised by this sense of floating, or drifting away, of lightness. Likewise in Figure 17, where the syllables repeat and extend, the effect on the screen is similar to a rolling credit, and it conjures images of construction, building, perhaps even heredity and genetics; of ancestry and lineage, tradition or evolution. Whether it is any or none of these things, what is important is that, unlike the Frankfurt recording, Blonk's performance has a central device which subtly directs and 'manages' the boundlessness of the imagination.

Where Blonk's performance gives the *Ursonate* a thematic context, George Melly's anecdotal account of performing the *Ursonate* as self-defence gives it an *occasion*. In his autobiography *Owning Up* (2000), Melly recounts an incident outside the 'Band on the Wall' venue in Manchester where he was confronted by a group of robbers carrying knives. Realising his inability to counter them with violence he stood his ground, and in a flash of inspiration, began to recite the *Ursonate* at his would-be attackers! Shocked, scared, and confused, they ran away. Apart from being a wonderful testament to the calm and quick mind of Melly, this anecdote provides another example of how the *Ursonate* needs a critical frame or occasion to bring out the most satisfying aesthetic play. In some sense, I am suggesting that what Melly's attackers ran away from that night was the playful speculation of aesthetic experience. As Melly, backed in to a corner, starts to recite Schwitters' piece, what were the thoughts running through their minds? Who is this man? Why is he doing this? Is he foreign? Is he having a fit? Is he going to die? Is this a trap set by the police? Can I still rob him? What if he does something else weird? What will he do if I go any closer? Unable to answer these questions, able only to *speculate*, his attackers did not take any chances, and fled. But they were not fleeing from Melly as such, but rather from the uncertainty of the imagination in a situation where certainty and confidence is half of the battle.

So in Blonk's 'intelligent' visualisation, and Melly's startlingly jarring context, there is a sense of framing which eases the imagination into work. Unlike Schwitters' 1932 recording, both of these pieces gently direct and guide

150

imaginative play. In essence, they strike a balance between the alienating and cerebral *dependant* beauty, and the sometimes overpowering expansiveness of *pure* beauty. This kind of balance can be seen in Roy Lichtenstein's *Whaaam!* (1963).
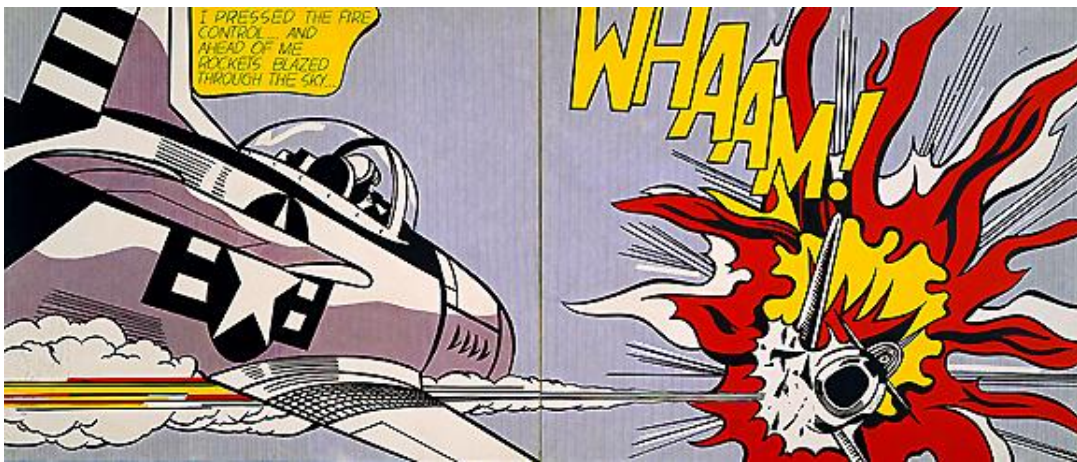
Figure 18: Roy Lichtenstein *Whaam!* (1963)

In *Whaam!*, the right hand panel *hurls* a *das Moment* at the viewer, where the red and yellow explosion and the onomatopoeic lettering saturate the frame to Marion-esque excess. The comic-book style abstracts the flames and their scale is at the same time made obscure by the large font 'WHAAM!' that appears to fly out from its centre. Such is that *das Moment* that it might be possible to engage in a disinterested relationship with the colours and textures of the right-hand panel. But 'borrowing as opposed to originating' (Steiner, 2001: 112) is central to this work, and as an adaptation of a 1962 edition of DC Comics' *All-American Men of War*, the left panel makes reference to cultural tropes outside of the experience of the work. Here, the re-appropriation and mixed referencing so crucial to Pop Art gives the imagination a starting point. Rather than simply asserting the 'impurity of pictorial functionalism', the left hand panel acts as a stabiliser, giving the

151

imagination room to play, but not so much room that – as Gadamer might have it –

it is unable to return from its pleasurable adventure.

So between the two extremes of free and dependent beauty there exists a balancing point which provides the link, the tissue, between the aesthetic experience of taste and the experience of an artwork in general. To illustrate, I will give some short examples from my own experience which led me to this notion of beauty as the fibrous substance which binds together our experience of performance, starting with Michelangelo's 1504 sculpture *David* (Fig. 19), in contrast to the 1624 baroque *David* of Bernini (Fig. 20).

Figure 19 (L): Michelangelo's *David* at the Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence (1504)
Figure 20 (R): Bernini's *David* at the Galleria Borghese, Rome (1624)

In Michelangelo's work, David is calm and poised, holding a rock in his hand as he prepares to take on Goliath. Bernini's *David*, on the other hand, is quite different. Unlike Michelangelo's austere creation, where the calm rationality so cherished in the High Renaissance shines through, Bernini's *David* offers power and motion as he prepares to hurl his rock at a Goliath that becomes present for us

somewhere outside of the statue's frame. Standing in front of Bernini's *David* at the Galleria Borghese in Rome, a *das Moment* occurs as I hold my breath, as if I were part of the Israelite army at the Valley of Elah. From my own drawing-in of breath, I start to physically mimic the tension in the statue's posture and intricately defined musculature, which appears to flex and contract. Like *David*, I am readying myself to take on Goliath; I am becoming part of this image. But this is not simply about taste, because where that *das Moment* takes me is related to concepts and knowledge extrinsic to my actual experience of the work. That I can imagine the Israelite and Philistine armies, the awesome Goliath, and let that scene wrap itself around me is not implicit in the work. Rather, there is a pleasure at play which *depends* upon the cognitive categories of understanding. The work gives me a *das Moment*, a drawing-up and drawing-in of breath; a tensing. In return I employ the relational category of *community* to give the work a landscape, a wider world, a moment in time. At that point between give and take is a disinterested regard for the statue itself, and an intense interest that comes from how I 'play out' the moment of action. In that play too is another concept of relation, that of *causality*: I hear the deafening cries of the armies, and the tension that this creates, as well as the beating of a hot sun, causing sweat, fatigue and anxiety. A temporary, fleeting agreement emerges in the here-and-now of this experience: not only am I 'moved' by the work through *das Moment*, but I have something to 'give' to it also. In that exchange, both of us fit harmoniously into the world. Here, Steiner's 'one-way model of power' (pp. 136) becomes a two-way street: the non-conceptual feelings of aesthetic experience rub up against their conceptual counterparts from the categories of understanding: where

154

disinterestedness exists, so does *quality* in my detailed imagining of the armies (their armour, their expressions); where universality exists so too does *quantity* (battle formations, number and scale). It is this process of exchange, this *balance* between the *free* and the *dependant* that makes beauty whole and transforms it in to something which frees us and grounds us at the same time, opening up all possible worlds of play and imagination while keeping hold of us and 'connecting' our Gadamerian 'adventure' to the tangible world of our experience.

In more contemporary work, this notion of beauty-as-exchange accounts well for my experience of American photographer Gregory Crewdson's work, most notably the 2003 *Twilight* series. The image below (Fig. 21), exemplifies these ideas well.

Figure 21: Gregory Crewdson (*untitled*) from the *Twilight* series (2001)

What Crewdson's work often depicts are the events just before or after some kind of narrative climax. In Figure 21, the pleasure of Kantian free-play, taste, arrives from the ambiguity of the image: a strong, provocative visual form that is at the same time an echo of an event that will remain unknown – purposiveness in combination with the speculative play of universality. Crucial to Crewdson's composition, though, are the details, the cultural nuances of small town America: the brown grocery bag, rows of ordered houses, the Chevrolet Caprice. These jigsaw pieces, like clues, allow the spectator to enter into a world of 'possible' narratives and narrative resolutions, extending and completing the image both forwards and backwards in time. Importantly, how we engage with these objects of detail, and indeed the very fact that one would seek them out at all, is governed by a fundamental *dependence* upon the perceiver's recognition of their place in the canon of American iconography. So here again the cognitive faculties are employed in tandem with those of the aesthetic. Indeed, the very setup of the image thrives upon considerations of *causality*, of '*how* this happened' and 'what happens *next*'. Before moving forward to consider what this notion of beauty-as-balance means for performance, I want to refer the reader to the diagram below, which is a visualisation of how a coming together of free and dependant beauty might operate in experience.
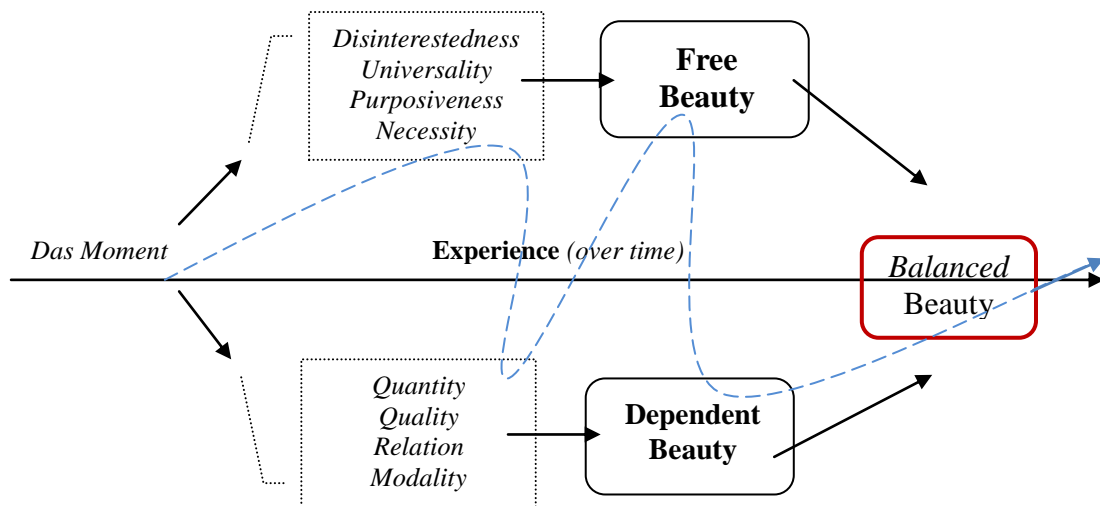
Figure 22: diagram of free/dependent beauty in experience

In the diagram above (Fig. 22), the spectator experiences in their encounter with the work a *Das Moment* which invites an aesthetic reflection relating to the aesthetic 'categories' of disinterestedness, universality, purposiveness, or necessity. But unlike the experiences of taste I have shown thus far, the experience is diverted, or interrupted, by conceptual considerations which fall under the rubric of cognitive judgments. Thus, the spectator moves in to, out of, and between the aesthetic and cognitive realms in their consideration of the work, and this is demonstrated by the blue dashed line which undulates over the course of the experience. In this way, the aesthetic play 'anchors' or 'roots' itself in conceptual understanding. This kind of pleasure, which shifts between the *a priori* and a *posteriori*, *interest* and disinterest, the *aesthetic* and the *artistic*, and the *free* and *dependent*, is a *balanced* beauty. What balanced beauty does for us, in experience, is to create a traversable passage between the material, conceptually dependent world of the work and the free, transcendental world of aesthetic pleasure and play. This connection is the guide-rope that brings us back from our

157

'adventure', and at the same time is the thing which reminds us that it was in this particular here-and-now that that adventure was possible. Indeed, in performance practices, that notion of being 'brought back' is all the more important, as I want to demonstrate now by looking at Proto-type Theater's *Third Person (redux)*. In addition, I will show how this notion of balanced beauty is a way of identifying and thinking more closely about complex and nuanced rhythmical shifts that performance work can create.

Proto-type Theater's *Third Person (redux)* 'investigates the events that unfolded out of the electric meeting' of America's most notorious lovers, Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow. 'As they illustrate, control and sometimes mis-communicate the story, the performers veer between the emotional, the factual and the fantastical as they pick-apart the particulars of this strange love affair' (Proto-type Theater, 2010). The reason I am so interested in this performance in relation to beauty is because the piece's fluidity – scenographically, sonically, and in its careful construction of performance style – creates an experience that I think exemplifies beauty at the meeting point of aesthetic and cognitive concerns. From this fluidity, its sense of the in-between, and the recurrent movement to and from the extremes of this limbo state, it offers a new perspective on some of the questions left unanswered in the final section of Chapter Three which looked at notions of taste in *The Last Supper* and *Virtuoso (Working Title)*. To begin by explaining the space, Figure 23 shows the LX plot, and the red highlighted area indicates the performance space.
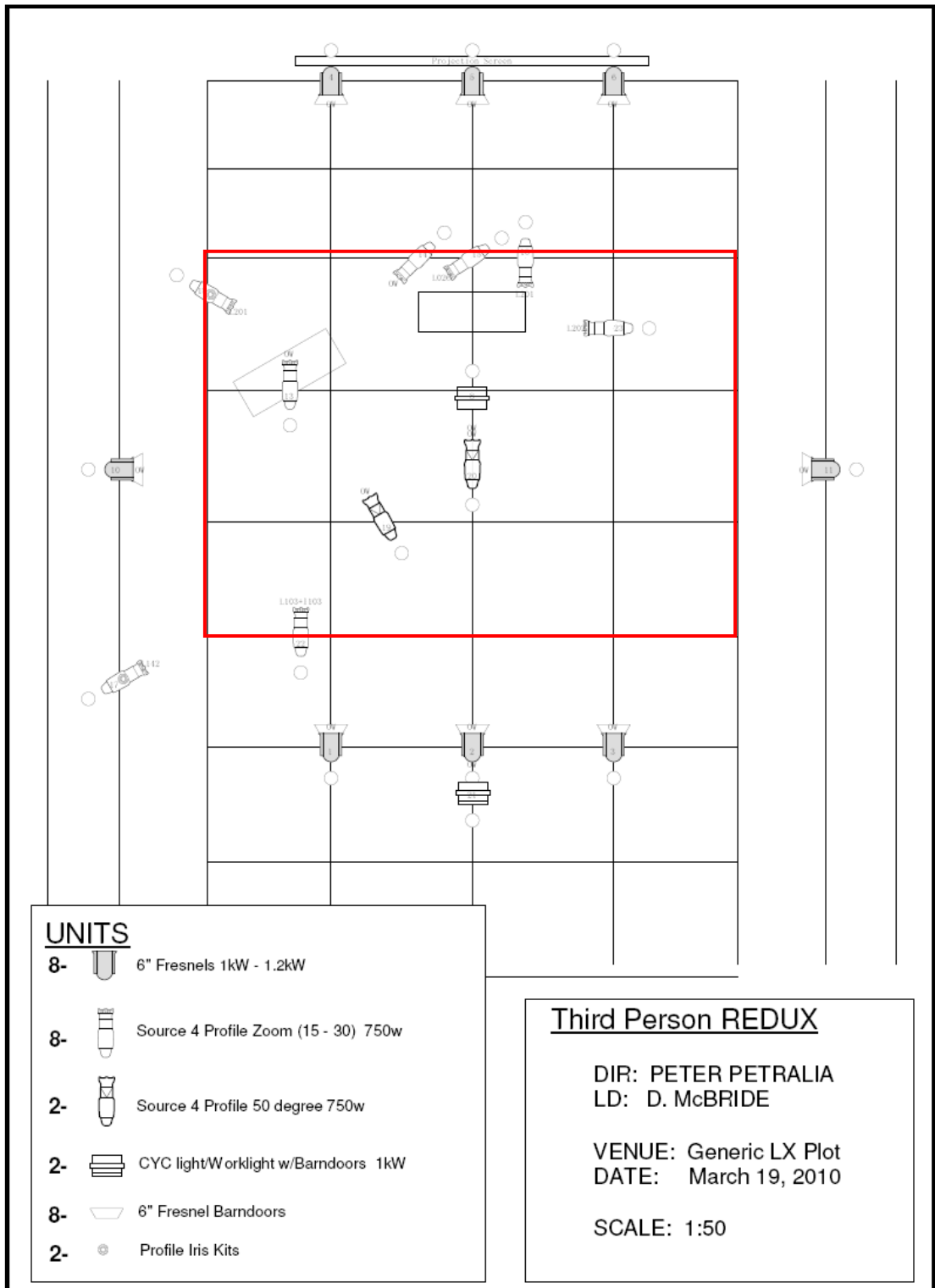
Figure 23: LX Plot for Proto-type Theater's *Third Person (redux)* (2010)

160

The performance space, measuring 6.800m (22'3") x 7.100m (23'3") contains two industrial-looking tables, with horizontal bars on the flats – which house various props – two stationary cameras and an overhead projector, which projects onto a screen directly upstage of the central table, as can be seen clearly in Figure 24, below.

Figure 24: Proto-type Theater's *Third Person (redux)* (2010)

The piece begins with the performers entering the space from stage right. The space is minimally lit: gently washed by the six upstage and downstage Fresnels, the stage left table is highlighted by a profile hung from the central bar. The performers acknowledge the audience's presence with a look, perhaps a smile, glance momentarily at the blank projection screen, and then take up the positions seen in Figure 24, above. After pausing for a beat, the performers deliver the following lines directly to the audience. On the fifth line, 'humans are made up of cells', the projector blinks into life, showing an extreme close up of a palm as seen in Figure 24.

161

B: We are human.
A: We are not lovers.
B: But we sometimes play lovers.
A: We are human.
B: Humans are made up of cells.
A: And cells, like all living matter die.
B: Eventually.

(Proto-type Theater, 2010: 1)

This opening section of text is important insofar as it gives the spectator a certain amount of instruction as to how their experience is going to unfold, and this is built through the text itself, the delivery from the performers, and the scenic arrangement at that particular moment. The text itself has two important notions attached to it: mortality, and pretending. The lines 'we are human', 'humans are made up of cells', and 'cells, like all living matter die', press upon the spectator thoughts of the material world, of decay, and death. At the same time though, the lines 'we are not lovers' and 'but sometimes we play lovers', make a strange interjection that has something to do with playing, dreaming, and the ultimate freedom of the imagination. In combination, these opening lines of text look to the impossible and fantastical, and also to stuff and matter of life: to the *free* and the *dependant*.

Of course, it is the performance experience which is important to this analysis, and it is in the subtleties of the performance that the audience is able to really grasp the duality of the ideas embedded in the text. When the performers enter the space, the simple acknowledgement of the audience as a presence in the room makes conscious reference to their understanding of the situation of performing, of being watched live. At the same time, their formalised entrance – timed, and

162

paced 'just so' – marks their entry into a world of pre-meditated play. The scenic arrangement here, which points overtly to the mode of lecture demonstration is toyed with and pulled at by theatrical lighting. The soft wash from the Fresnels, which gently illuminates the table around which the performers stand, complicates the notion of the lecture as a place of truth, that this theatrical intervention might ask us to pick and sift our way between fictions, facts, and half-truths. The symmetries and cleanliness of the performance area please and reassure. They create a *dependent* pleasure founded in lecture halls, laboratories and cultural references to forensic examination. All the while, the gentle but generous theatrical light casts doubt and speculation on the truthfulness of this place, and the spectator is tugged between these two layers.

Between the text, the nuances of performance and the visual composition, these first few moments sit balanced between an invitation to 'learn' something about the material world and an opportunity to leap into imaginative play. This foundation is an important one for the spectator as it is from this early instruction that *das Moment* might lead the spectator toward universal, unbounded aesthetic experience and also to cognitive considerations of the material world. A good example of this a scene in which the performers 'demonstrate' what it would feel like to be shot (Fig. 25). The text is as follows:

Figure 25: 'When a human is shot by a gun, [...] a hole cuts its way through the fleshy tissue of the lungs. This is not good.' (Proto-type Theater, 2010)

A: Chest wounds are almost always fatal. This is what it looks like to be shot in the chest.
Show shot in the chest.
A: That was really good.
B: Thank you.
B: This is what it looks like to be shot in the head.
Show shot in the head.
B: You okay?
A: Un hunh.
[...]
A: [...] this is what it looks like to be shot in the foot.
Show foot shot.
A: *recoils a bit*
B: I'd like to shoot you in the stomach. That wouldn't feel good at all and would make eating difficult, I imagine.
[...]
A: Okay.
Show stomach shot.
A: Yes. That would really hurt.
[...]
A: Yes.
Both shoot each other.

(Proto-type Theater, 2010: 12)

164

Again, as ever, it is the live experience of this material that is the real focus of analysis, and so it is the italicised directions – i.e., '*show stomach shot*' – that are the most important. Using cap-guns to re-create the sound of gunfire, the 'bangs' from the guns are also *Momente* (n.) which puncture this section in such a way that one is able to understand the spectator's experience as one of both *free* and *dependant* beauty. Before each gunshot, the performers tell us something about the effects of being shot in that particular area of the body. 'A' says: 'being shot in the foot isn't always fatal. If you get to a doctor quickly, or if you know how to stop blood from flowing, you can survive a foot wound. This is what it looks like to be shot in the foot.' She then points the gun at 'B's' left foot, and fires. The loud 'BANG' sound that accompanies the shot invites us to imaginative play: its intensity and its volume, its contrast to the tone of the voices, is the push towards imagining the pouring blood and the searing pain, to wonder whether or not this 'victim' did indeed know how to 'stop blood from flowing'. The adventure invites the spectator to create a micro-fiction predicated on the pretext of the shot, a universal free-play common in kind – yet different in degree – for each member of the audience. This play is *free* beauty.

What differentiates this from the beauty of a judgment of taste, however, is how the performers react to the process of shooting and being shot. In this case, 'B', having been shot in the foot, lets out a short yelp of pain and abruptly stops, signalling that he is 'no longer' in pain. In doing this, the 'adventure' of the spectator is compromised by the performers' refusal to fully invest in the game of 'being shot'. The spectator, then, is being 'tugged back' from their aesthetic play.

Being reminded of the theatricality of the situation in this way, the piece encourages the non-aesthetic concepts of *cause and effect*, from the category of *relation*. At work too is the concept of *possibility* (from the category of *modality*); where one is aware, *a priori* (both logically and nomologically), that the 'effect' of *das Moment* could never lead – in reality – to the fantastical content of the imaginative play. Ongoing throughout this *das Moment* of speculative play, then, is a set of cognitive concerns brought about by the reaction of the performers to each gunshot. What is experienced, then, is the imaginative play of synthetic *a priori* judgment curtailed by an *a posteriori* experience that brings into consideration *dependent* cognitive categories.

In articulating the difference between a pure judgment of taste and a beauty which moves the spectator between concerns of the *free* and the *dependant*, the latter demonstrates how non-linear, post-dramatic performance practices are able to create aesthetic *rhythm*. In my experience of contemporary performance making, it is usual to borrow from musical terminology to reflect on the experience of a performance work. Talking about rhythm, tempo, or pace in this way is to try to get to grips with a temporal trajectory that cannot be explained – experientially – in terms of narrative, plot, or a super-objective. We replace the narrative twist with the rhythmical crescendo, or the revelatory monologue with the slow composition of an image. Here I suggest that these moments of rhythmical composition can be created and thus understood by moving an audience between the states of *free* and *dependent* beauty, between the liberation of taste and the materiality of cognitive judgment. To explain this further, I will now look at two moments in *Third*

Person... where it is possible to identify how *free* and *dependent* beauty can create rhythm.

The first of these instances occurs near the beginning of the piece, and it begins with the two performers discussing Bonnie and Clyde's private life. They say:

> B: They must have had sex.
> A: Is it grotesque to wonder what it was like?
> B: No.
> A: I think it was innocent and sweet.
> B: Maybe.
> A: Bonnie could have become pregnant.
> B: Yes. A month is enough time to conceive a baby.
> A: But not to give birth to it.
> B: What would their baby have been called?
> A: I don't know.
> B: It would have changed a lot of things.
> A: Probably.
> B: But it didn't. All we know is that they had a month of love.

(Proto-type Theater, 2010: 7)

During this text, 'A' is stood in front of the angled table (Fig. 23), while 'B' sits on the floor in front of the table which runs parallel with the projection screen. The lighting is functional: a localised wash, without colour. The tone of delivery from the performers is conversational, and directed to each other and also out to the audience. The mood is set as if this dialogue were a momentary aside: a pause to take stock of small details, and also to recognise the gaps in information. The performers' responses – 'maybe', 'I don't know', 'probably' – acknowledge the futility of trying to paint an accurate picture of Bonnie and Clyde's lives through these details, inclined instead towards what we *do* know, or what can be known, *a posteriori*. Here, the text and its delivery afford the spectator room for imaginative

167

speculation, but that opportunity for speculation – unlike the freedom of *free beauty* – is conceptually determined. To think about how a child would have impacted the course of their lives, for instance, is to know something about their lives already; to fully speculate on whether or not their sex was 'innocent and sweet' is to have experienced sex, and so the imagination is bounded by a set of historical and contextual constraints. Furthermore, the line 'It would have changed a lot of things' refers the spectator directly to a conceptual consideration of *cause* and *effect*. Structurally speaking, this ties the elements of fiction, of *not knowing*, to the factual conditions of the occasion of performance. This solidifies – indeed makes *necessary* – the movement between *free* and *dependent* concerns. Such a movement occurs following the last line, where 'A' and 'B' shift their positions: 'A' lays on top of a table, and 'B' underneath the other. The lighting state changes from the functional white/yellow wash to a deep, almost viscous red, and the screen shows an extreme close-up of 'A's face – eyes closed (Fig. 26).

Figure 26: Proto-type Theater's *Third Person (redux)* (2010)

168

This shift toward a more overtly theatrical mode is sudden, and to this point in the piece unseen. In this shift, a number of factors contribute to create a *das Moment* for the spectator: the introduction of a rich and decadent colour into the lighting design; the sudden impact of 'A's face in extreme close-up; and the manipulation of the tables outside of their previously functional use sharply reorient the spectators understanding of how this performance space functions. In that sudden change of direction something opens up for the spectator, things become possible that before were not, and in 'B's text, a different theatrical language emerges. He begins:

> This cell smells of sweat and death. This is a place for dying. Bonnie I'm laying here looking at the ceiling and wondering what you are wearing. Red? Is that your favorite color? Is your dress short? I love the place behind your knees where your lower leg meets your upper leg. Delicate and sweet smelling. Bonnie, I think you know me. I think you know something about me that no one knows. I'm a good man. Believe it. I'm laying here looking at the pattern on the ceiling and it looks like nothing. I don't see nothing. Am I a corpse laying here on the floor? I don't see nothing in the ceiling. Are you supposed to be able to imagine patterns or faces or something? I'm looking for you in the ceiling paint. What are you wearing? [...]

(Proto-type Theater, 2010: 8)

If the swift 'theatricalisation' of the performance space is a *das Moment* insofar as it almost stuns the spectator through its jarring interruption, then through the text that follows comes the freedom of imaginative play one associates with a judgment of taste and the notion of *free* beauty. The most noticeable shift in the delivery is the movement to the first person, and here 'B' approaches an embodiment of Clyde. In a way this text operates on two levels: narratively, we

understand something more about Clyde's enforced separation from Bonnie, and how his confinement brings thoughts of the outside world. But what drives this moment aesthetically is the constant referencing of sensory stimulation: the colour red, the smell of flesh, patterns in the ceiling. By weaving in these sensuous experiences, the spectator is allowed to *imagine boundlessly*, and from this imagining comes a further imagined reorientation of the space. As 'B' speaks from under the table, he is lit from above by a profile that casts the shadow of the table's bars onto his face and upper torso. The shadow transforms the table, and indeed the light, and transcends their *artistic* materiality in favour of speculative play. The shadows cast conjure images of prison, of being 'behind-bars', and provide entry into a world of smells, temperatures and emotions – is the profile that shines on his face the warm, southern sun? Is it the lantern of a prison guard? What is the sweat Clyde can smell? Is it from a crowded cell full of other inmates, or poor sanitation perhaps? Maybe the small cell is baking hot, with no chance of a cooling breeze? Perhaps this is not a prison at all, and Clyde has woken from a terrible dream? As 'B' looks for 'patterns in the ceiling', where he 'don't see nothing', the spectator's focus is directed upward, and their gaze shifts from the cramped under-table space to the extreme close-up of 'A' (Bonnie) on the screen. Like 'B', 'A' has 'misused' the table and now lies on top, motionless. The cold steel of the table, the stillness, and 'B's line 'am I a corpse laying here on the floor' brings to mind autopsy rooms, and the solemnity of death. But maybe she is just sleeping? As ever, the spectator might search out all or none of these questions, but they are nevertheless made possible by the *Moment* (n.) which comes from the sudden rhythmic 'turn' between scenes.

The sense of rhythm, then, is created by the sudden 'explosion' of aesthetic possibility. In the text prior to the textural shift, the spectator can take a pleasure in thinking about events and consequences tied to historical fact. This *dependent* pleasure is interrupted unexpectedly by the *Moment* (n.) of the decadent lighting, the extreme close-up, and the first person delivery. Without warning, the imagination is suddenly loosed, and such is the immediate contrast between these two modes of engagement that the spectator keenly feels something swelling, rising, gaining *momentum* – the 'arrival', as it were, of synthetic *a priori* judgment. It is this feeling of 'arrival' that denotes the evocation of *rhythm*.

However, this shift is not so simple as to just move from one thing to another. In 'B's monologue, he uses a North American idiom with a northern English accent. The lines 'I don't see nothing' and 'we have to leave this shit hole town' leap out at the spectator as unusual. The sentence structure and choice of vocabulary is opposed to what one might expect from this particular voice (perhaps 'I can't see anything' or 'we're leaving this dump' would be less aberrant). This laid-bare falsity somehow 'tugs' at the free imaginative play. Noticing the juxtaposition between the text and its delivery requires a contextual and conceptual understanding of language and accent outside of the performance work. It is a *dependent* concern. This is only momentary, but it manifests like a tiny 'rip' or 'tear' in the fabric of the free-play. Demonstrating how the movement between the *free* and *dependent* concerns can and must go in both directions, this is a miniature-, or micro-, shift in rhythm that is like a brief oscillation in the piece's larger rhythmical architectonic.

171

As 'B' finishes, with the line 'When I'm out of here, we have to leave this shit hole town. I can't take the disgrace of living life so low. We got to go, Bonnie. We got to go. Who am I even talking to?', the two profiles fade down to black and the lights return to their previous state. 'B' emerges from under the table, and with a 'job-well-done' smile, extends his hand to help 'A' down from the tabletop. They move from here to behind the angled table, where the camera switches to a close-up of a sketch pad (Fig. 27), and the performers begin again with the following lines:

> A: Bonnie was four foot eleven inches tall.
> B: Clyde was five foot seven inches and he weighed a hundred and thirty pounds.
> A: She was ninety pounds.
> B: Petite.
> A: With strawberry blond hair, worn in ringlets.
> B: She was beautiful.
> A: He parted his hair on the left.
> B: He had ten fingers and ten toes.

> (Proto-type Theater, 2010: 9)

Like the rhythmical shift into the last scene, the tonal change here swings dramatically. The opening lines, concerned with 'fact' and precision, conclude the imaginative play, and return the spectator to an empirical world which chronicles observed events, and recorded details. Back from their 'adventure' the spectator is concerned with the cognitive categories of *quality* and *quantity*: height, weight, and hair colour. The details given allow the spectator to form a picture of Bonnie and Clyde, and this 'photo-fit' act of construction is pleasurable. But having returned to cognitive judgment, concerned with *quality* and *quantity*, the beauty to be found here is *dependant*.

As they continue to describe the pair, the performers record the numbers they

speak on to the sketchpad, making a mathematical formula from them (Fig. 28).
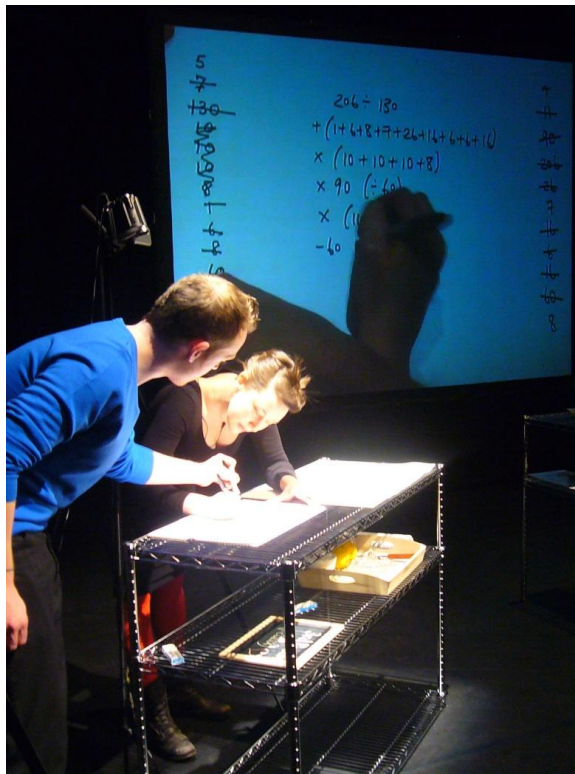
Figure 27: 'Murder By Numbers' – Proto-type Theater's *Third Person (redux)* **(2010)**

As the formula grows, the spectators' conceptual, cognitive, engagement with the

numbers is changed, and another rhythmical shift starts to occur.

206 / 130
+(1+6+8+7+26+16+6+6+16)
/(10+10+10+8)
x90 / 60
x(11+13)
-60+[(4x5)x(8-7)] =

50

Figure 28: Proto-type Theater's *Third Person (redux)* **(2010)**

The fourth line of Figure 28, for example, is the 90 pounds of Bonnie's weight divided by the 60 calories in a chestnut (Chestnut was Clyde's middle name), and the fifth line is the 11 inches of Bonnie's 4'11" added to the 13 deaths for which they were responsible. The solution to the sum, 50, is the number of times Bonnie and Clyde were shot in Louisiana and in relation to the formula as a whole, it scratches at the surface of notions of fate, or at the very least inevitability.

At first concerned solely with empirical evidence, the *synthetic a posteriori*, the spectator simply tries to keep up with the data being presented – line after line of facts, figures, and observations – and uses them pleasurably to create a mental image of the lovers. Then, as the numbers are manipulated to reach that final '50', the absurd notion of adding 11 inches to 13 fatalities urges the spectator to consider a series of 'what ifs': what if the 206 (bones in the body) were divided by 7 (the atomic number for Nitrogen), instead of 130 (Clyde's weight in pounds)? Does that mean they would never have met? What if the 8 (from Ford V8, Clyde's getaway car of choice) in '10+10+10+8' was a 5 (from Clyde's 5'7" height)? Would they have got away with it? Would they have found jobs and had children? What happens here is a playful, imaginative disruption into the category of *causality*, whereby the logic of the sum is undone, and left vulnerable to chance and imagination by its sheer illogic. Flitting between the cognitive and the aesthetic here, a rhythm is found in which, like the 'oscillation' of the US idiom, the spectator 'leaps' for a brief moment into a *micro*-adventure of aesthetic play but is immediately 'sucked back' by the cognitive premise of the formula itself. So in these three sections there are two distinct rhythmical movements. The first is a

174

sharp shift from dependent beauty towards the free aesthetic, and the second is a rapid movement back-and-forth between these two modes of experience. The line graph below, (Fig. 29) graphically represents the rhythm of these three sections.
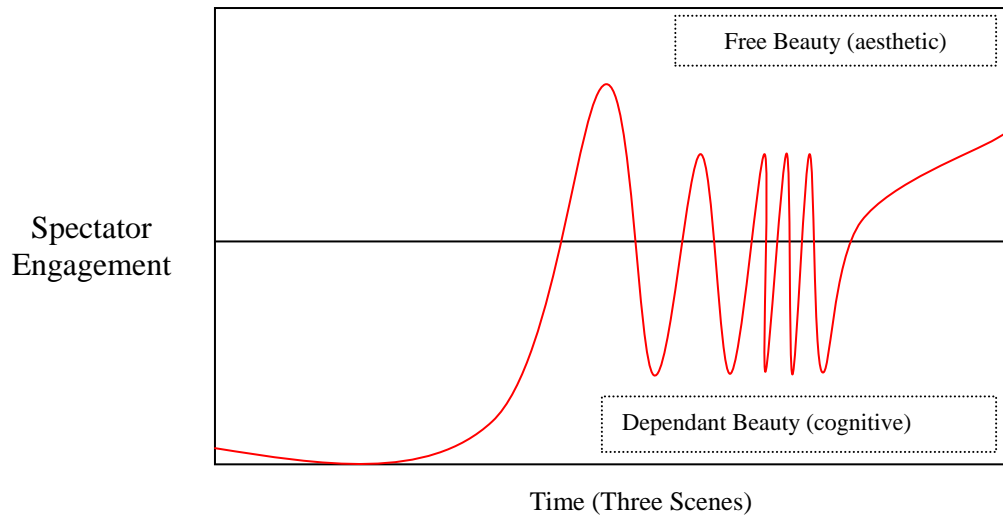
Figure 29: Graphical representation of rhythm in *Third Person (redux)* (2010)

Finally, I want to look at how these rhythmical shifts between *free* and *dependant* beauty can be used in performance structures to enrich the aesthetic experience. In one of the final scenes of the piece, the performers describe how the police raided Bonnie and Clyde's Missouri hideout. In the frantic climax of the scene, the lines below are delivered at pace:

> B: A bang on the door, and a voice demanding they open.
> A: They woke.
> B: It happened fast.
> A: Again. It happened fast, again.
> B: Guns fired.
> A: Buck, two shots to the head.
> B: Poor buck.
> A: Blanche caught him.
> B: She was covered in blood.
> A: Poor Blanche.
> B: They climbed into the car, hit the ignition and roared through the night.
> A: Poor Bonnie.

> B: Poor Clyde.
> A: Everything comes to an end.
> B: Eventually.
> A: But not yet.

<div align="right">(Proto-type Theater, 2010: 21)</div>

Performed without emotional investment, this moment prioritises again the empirical details of the event rather than reflection or effusive commentary. At the end of the sequence, 'but not yet', 'A' moves to behind the angled table, and 'B' to downstage centre, where he sits on the floor in the light of a yellow tinted Fresnel. Meanwhile, 'A' removes three lemons, a glass, some sugar and a juicing bowl from under the table and, lit in the same gentle yellow, begins as follows:

> A: Clyde, I used to want children. I imagined myself with little ones tugging on my apron strings, my handsome husband out in the fields working, something good baking in the oven. I imagined myself as a stereotype of simple pleasures, hard work and a long life. I don't know what happened but I cannot even imagine that anymore. Some people think we are cold-blooded killers, but we know that isn't true. Killing lacks passion; it's easy and mechanical, which is why love is for me. I love you, Clyde Chestnut Barrow. I do [...]

<div align="right">(Proto-type Theater, 2010: 22)</div>

Figure 30: Proto-type Theater's *Third Person (redux)* (2010)

Like the 'prison' scene, the shift between first and third person modes of address, and the softening and 'theatricalisation' of the scenic arrangement is sudden. As 'A' speaks, she rolls the lemons under her palm (Fig. 30), and then proceeds to cut them in half and juice them. Like the light filtering through the bars in the prison scene, the smell of the cut lemons pushes the spectator into aesthetic play, acting as *das Moment*. But as important as the smell of the lemons, is how the scene prior to it sets a contrasting pace to the delicate labour of making lemonade. The shift in engagement here is gradual, as the audience catch their breath from the panic of the raid. The shift in lighting tone here is like an exhalation of breath, and as 'B' sits down, and 'A' moves to collect the lemonade-making apparatus, a sense of calm is crafted. Unlike other *Momente* (n.) in my analysis thus far, the smell of the lemons drifts slowly and almost imperceptibly into the audience, and rather than the sharp 'push' of the aesthetic, here the transition is much gentler, like a leading

hand. So in this rhythmical movement there is a climax at the end of the raid, which is blown-away, like a mist, by the soft yellow light. Slowly, as the lemon smell reaches the spectator, the olfactory sensation acts as a transport to the vivid imagery of the text, of growing 'old in Texas, on a rocking chair watching the grandkids play', of touching 'your hand to my face, to feel how soft it is'. Indeed, here is a *das Moment* that invites *disinterested* play, to savour the image in the imagination, and *universality*, the free-play of imagining Bonnie's forever elusive 'other life'.

Through Part One I explored how the Kantian notion of taste can examine the detailed nuances of performance to elucidate our understanding of aesthetic experience. In my analysis there, I showed how this post-Kantian means of analysis can pinpoint the events in a performance which have a lasting effect, *das Erlebte*, on our overall experience of a work. Here in this transitional chapter, I have looked at how a recuperated Kantian notion of beauty, which focuses on his distinction between the *free* and the *dependant*, can articulate and analyse our experience of particular rhythms and textures in performance, and in doing so provide an analytic methodology which deals with the cognitive concerns surrounding the transcendent aesthetic 'adventure'.

In experiences of taste and also in beauty, there is a harmony between the object of judgment and the spectator. As the object of judgment presents itself as suitable for aesthetic play or conceptual consideration, so too does the spectator find his or her self suitable for performing that task. This harmony is reassuring and

welcome; we feel that we 'fit in' with the objects and world around us. But there is another side to aesthetic experience which is built upon difference. In this kind of experience, the spectator finds the object of judgment unsuitable for their intuitive faculties. Unable to grasp the size, shape, force or placed*ness* of the object, the spectator is overwhelmed, and a turbulent exchange occurs whereby the spectator becomes aware of the sheer *otherness* of the object. This experience, which as I will show, can be likened to a vast 'opening-up', a groundlessness which Kant calls the *sublime*.

Keeping in step with the progression of the *Critique of Judgment* then, the third and final part of the thesis is devoted to an examination of the Kantian sublime. Considering first how it differs from the judgment of taste, and I will then explore how the Kantian sublime might have more to offer than the 'inhumanity' and 'alienation' (Steiner, 2001: 8/9) of groundless incomprehensibility.

Part Two

The Sublime

CHAPTER FIVE – THE MONSTER SUBLIME

BEFORE KANT

> Sublimity, then, refers to the moment when the ability to apprehend, to know, and to express a thought or sensation is defeated. Yet through this very defeat, the mind gets a feeling for that which lies beyond thought and language.

> (Shaw, 2006: 3)

The second part of this thesis will explore in detail the Kantian notion of the sublime. As an aesthetic experience, I propose that the experience of the sublime can be thought of, like taste and beauty, as something which stems from the forceful 'push' of *das Moment*. But as I shall explain, the experience of the sublime is profoundly different to that of taste or beauty, and is one which stretches and strains at the boundaries of our imaginative and cognitive faculties – an experience which ultimately reveals the power of the human mind and the boundlessness of infinity.

In 1989, Station House Opera were jointly commissioned by Theatre De Cherbourg and LIFT (London International Theatre Festival) to make a performance work which marked the bicentenary of the French Revolution. In the resulting piece, titled *The Bastille Dances*, fifteen performers over fifteen days and nights arranged and re-arranged eight thousand breeze blocks into a series of half-finished, half-emerged structures and fragments of buildings developed from the image of the storming of the Bastille, its subsequent destruction and the dispersing of its stones around the streets of Paris. They went on to make a series of these pieces, under the rubric of the *Breeze Block* series. In 1997, I was

fortunate enough to see the final instalment of the series, *The Salisbury Proverbs*, in which twenty-five performers responded to Salisbury Cathedral and its immediate surroundings. The piece, which Station House Opera describe as a performance that 'consisted of a network of proverbial and allegorical narratives which were given an architectural and sculptural form - a version of Breughel's Netherlandish Proverbs' (Station House Opera: 2008), simply took my breath away. At that time, I had never seen anything like it. Never had I been so awed, so overpowered by a performance work. Now, almost thirteen years later, I can hope to understand my experience. It was, as I shall explain over the coming three chapters, an experience of the *sublime*. To begin, I want to spend some time looking at the history of the sublime from Ancient Greece to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, in order to better understand how it came to play such an important part in Enlightenment aesthetics.

Accredited to an unknown Greek writer[46] sometime around 100CE, *Peri Hupsos* (ΠΕΡΙ ΥΨΟΥΣ) – which has been translated as widely as *On the Sublime* (Roberts, 1935), *On the Highest*, or *On Sublimity* (which I shall use here) – is an appraisal of the contemporary techniques in both persuasive writing and oration. Inferring from its title (and its reference to the work of Caecilius[47]) that a scholarly concept of the sublime was already established, the significance of this

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[46] Credit is given mistakenly on occasion to Cassius Dionysius Longinus (213-273CE) after a misprint in the authors' name, the true creator of *Peri Hupsos* remains something of a mystery. In the reference manuscript, the heading reports 'Dionysius or Longinus' which in subsequent publication became 'Dionysius Longinus', and was the basis for the following incorrect accreditations.

[47] Caecilius – a prominent Greek rhetorician and author of *On the Style of the Ten Orators*.

text over others is in 'the stress its author places on a mode of speech that is indeterminate or without form; a quality that renders the pedagogical aspect of the work extremely problematic' (Shaw, 2006: 12). A sublime mode of speech, insofar as Longinus defines one, has an effect on its witness which: 'flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt, and at once displays the power of the orator in all its plenitude' (Longinus, 1935: 43). Longinus, as Shaw notes, offers 'hyperbole, periphrasis [...] comparisons, similes and metaphor' as linguistic tools which might be engaged in a way that evokes the sublime (Shaw, 2006: 14). Such categorisation fails however, to provide an accurate definition of the sublime. Shaw argues that 'one can use hyperbole, for example, without inducing the sublime, and same is true of all the devices Longinus states' (ibid). For Longinus, this renders the sublime: (1) un-teachable; (2) devoid of the formal literary qualities we would find in the techniques of '*dispositio* (the process of composition)', '*elocutio* (the use of rhetorical style)' or '*actio* (the delivery or punctuation of speech)' (ibid: 12), (3) elusive in definition. One can interpret from this, as many such as Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux[48] and Jean-François Lyotard have also done, that the sublime (at the very least for Longinus) is *beyond* definition; that in comparison with the more conventional (or at least formal) rhetorical techniques it stands as a potential Other whose manifestation cannot be governed by a rule or law[49].

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[48] Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux translated ΠΕΡΙ ΥΨΟΥΣ into French in 1674, producing a revised edition in 1693 that included a critical commentary.

[49] Despite this, as Neil Hertz points out in his *Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime* (1985), the awe-inspiring 'thunderbolt' of sublime experience relies heavily on the ability to conceal its reliance on the materiality of language. Shaw writes:

To Longinus' anguish, the means through which the sublime is experienced and that which it should transcend are the same thing, and in his extolling of Ajax's 'silence that is more sublime than any speech' (Deguy, 1993: 24) (in the Vision of the Dead from Homer's *Odyssey*), a desire for a less materially bound means of expression is evident.

Before moving forward, it would be useful here to make a brief summary of the Longinian sublime. For him, the sublime is an *effect of oration* that inspires rapture and wonderment in its listener. It is the 'echo of a noble mind' (Shaw, 2006: 18) which *cannot be represented formally* and yet is such a strong force that it possesses the capacity to compensate for any lack of technical accomplishment in a speaker. More than this, the Longinian sublime is reflective of moral and ethical nobility, which we might consider analogous to that of Kantian *disinterest,* insofar as the Longinian sublime elevates the mind of man above concerns of the flesh (vanity and sexual desire) and of earthly value (wealth and social status).

It was in 1674, with Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux's French translation of *On Sublimity* that a renaissance of interest in the sublime was sparked for a small number of English readers. This small-scale interest led in part to the William Smith edition of *On Sublimity*, published in 1739, and by the mid-1740s, the

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Just as nature conceals 'the private parts' of the body 'so as not to spoil the beauty of the creature as a whole', so sublimity works to hide its shameful dependence on the stuff of language.

(Shaw, 2006: 17)

sublime had been elevated academically to a matter of ever-increasing interest[50].
So, let us look now at two prominent figures whose work on the sublime can be
regarded as symptomatic of the development of 'sublime theory' during this
seventeenth century renaissance, John Dennis, and Anthony Ashley Cooper.

In recognising what Shaw calls 'the idea of the sublime as a mode of divine
excess, disclosed only where the orders of beauty [harmony, regularity] collapse'
(Shaw, 2006: 30), John Dennis treats the notion of the 'natural sublime'[51] to a
rigorous analysis, and brings to the notion of sublimity the concepts of terror and
God. In his view of beauty, Dennis suggests that its formal qualities – 'Rule and
Order and Harmony' (Dennis, 1701) – provide evidence of God, that is, of a
creator with the capacity for perfect design insofar as we feel ourselves to be
'suitable' for the contemplation of the beautiful[52]. However, Dennis proposes that
it is in what he calls the 'Extravagancies' of nature that we find the true
'intimation of the divine' (Shaw: 2006, 31). Quite different from a loving, artisan
God of beauty, Dennis' sublime God is one of power, terror and
incommensurability. What stands out most about Dennis's work is that he
demands a view of the sublime which acknowledges a synthesis of mind and

[50] In this period, the transition from 'rhetorical' to 'natural' sublimity in Thomas Burnet's *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1680-1689); Joseph Addison's *The Pleasure of the Imagination* series (1712); Mark Akenside's *Pleasures of the Imagination* (1744); and John Baillie's *An Essay on the Sublime* (1747) are all important contributions to the development of the pre-Kantian sublime.

[51] By which we simply mean instances of the sublime encountered in nature and natural environments as opposed to the more familiar territory of rhetoric and/or oration. Burnet, for example, uses 'Regions where the Stars inhabit' and the 'wide Sea and the Mountains of the Earth' of examples of a grandiosity in nature that is 'too big for our Comprehension' with things which 'fill and overbear the Mind with their Excess' (Burnet, 1776).

[52] Indeed here is an analogous connection to the Kantian notions of *necessity*, and *purposiveness*, where I perceive myself as 'fitting in' or 'belonging' to the world.

object which insists, as Kant later would in his assessment of rational and empirical thought, that in neither alone can we come to locate the 'site' of sublimity. In *The Grounds of Criticism* (1704), Dennis explains this relationship through what he calls 'passions', a distinction which is similar to Kant's notion of the 'moment' of a judgment of taste. Here, Dennis cites two types of 'passion': the first, 'whose cause is clearly comprehended by him who feels it, whether it be admiration, terror or joy' (Ashfield and de Bolla, 1996: 33), and the second, which is found in 'objects themselves, or in the ordinary course of life' (ibid: 35). For Dennis, the latter are 'vulgar' passions, such as an 'admiration or wonder' caused by an encounter with 'a strange object' (ibid). The passions of the first kind, however, when their cause is either not fully comprehended or indeed knowable to the subject, Dennis calls 'Enthusiasms'[53]: a rarefying of the information given to our empirical senses, through a case of exchange between mind and nature, which results in sublime experience. In Dennis' vision of the sublime, as with Milton and Baillie, the more inexpressible an idea, the more sublime power it holds, and for all of the three, in terms of the unknowable, 'God trumps all' (Shaw, 2006: 32)[54].

Finally, before looking specifically at the Kantian sublime, I would like to turn the

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[53] Specifically, an 'Enthusiasm' is a particular class of pleasure informed by an engagement with an idea or *idea of things* outside the domain of the everyday. The example he gives in *The Grounds of Criticism* is the contemplation of the image of the sun. In our 'common', everyday relationship with the sun, or, what we can deduce empirically about the sun from what is given to us through the immediate senses, it is 'a round flat shining body, of about two foot diameter' (ibid). In a more contemplative engagement however (an *Enthusiasm*), the sun becomes 'a vast and glorious body' and the 'brightest material image of divinity' (ibid: 36).

[54] A similar notion of the divine absolute can be found in Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinion, Times* (1963). Crucially, however, Shaftesbury sought to preserve the realm of the mind, or that which Kant would later call the *Faculty of Reason*, from the dominion of nature when he writes: '[I]t is mind alone which forms. All that is void of mind is horrid: and matter formless is deformity itself' (Shaftesbury, 1963).

reader's attention to Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), because Burke's *Enquiry* represents a radical departure from the epiphanic and natural sublime of Burnet, Dennis, and Addison, and finds itself more closely aligned to the work of John Baillie[55]. What Burke offers in the *Enquiry*, through its ambiguity concerning the sublime as either natural phenomenon or linguistic happenstance, is a kind of psychophysiology that indicates the mind not simply as the location of the sublime, but also as its efficient cause. In *Part Four, Section IX* of the *Enquiry*, titled *Why Visual Objects of Great Dimensions are Sublime*, Burke gives the following example:

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[55] Unlike Dennis and scholars like him, Baillie proposed that the sublime resided neither in the viewed object nor the mind of the viewing subject, but rather in the discourse which framed it. For Baillie, the sublime is a product of language; not in Longinian terms, as a quasi-mysterious awe-inspiring force, but as a kind of accident, or blip in the system of language. To illustrate Baillie's theory of the sublime, Philip Shaw draws upon the arguments of Saussure (Ferdinand de Saussure – an influential linguist who proposed that language is built on a system of difference containing no 'positive' terms.

To exemplify this, one might suggest that language defines things by what they *are not*, as opposed to what they *are*. The most well known text is the *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), compiled by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye from Saussure's University of Geneva lecture notes. The passive assimilation of language that Saussure proposes, in opposition to the view that language is a function of the speaker, makes way for a theory of language that is similar to a code – as stated, that things are, in relation to what they are not. For Baillie, 'that the 'vastness' of mind and nature are in some way related [...], such a conclusion would have seemed absurd to an earlier generation for whom mountains signified only the deformed and the execrable. The association between the vast in nature and the vast in mind is itself therefore a product of language.' (Shaw, 2006: 45). As a feeling created through a system of 'differences' and 'relations', sublimity for Baillie is a product of the 'operations of an arbitrary code' (Shaw, 2006: 45) which 'embodies the transformational power of language, its ability to link disparate entities (both physical and mental objects) by analogy' (ibid: 47).

> Vision is performed by having a picture formed by the rays of light which are reflected from the object, painted in one piece, instantaneously, on the retina, or the last nervous part of the eye. [...] all the light reflected from a large body should strike the eye in one instant; yet we must suppose that the body itself is formed of a vast number of distinct points. [...] so that, though the image of one point should cause but a small tension of this membrane, another, and another, and another stroke, must in their progress cause a very great one [...] and the whole capacity of the eye, vibrating in all its parts must approach near to the nature of what causes pain, and consequently must produce an idea of the sublime.
>
> (Burke, 1990: 124-5)

As Shaw tells us, 'it is not that the dilation of the pupil is analogous to the expansion of the mind, but rather that it actually produces the idea of the sublime' (Shaw, 2006: 49). While Burke's psychophysiology itself stands open to criticism, insofar as 'it is one thing, for instance, to claim that my feeling of lethargy is caused by the physical state of hunger and quite another to state that my idea of infinity is produced by eyestrain' (ibid: 49-50), his argument in relation to his contemporaries is a simple one: 'God is no longer required to guarantee the authenticity of our experience' (ibid: 49). This claim, and the length Burke goes to in asserting the essential nature of *negative* pleasure in the experience of the sublime, are arguably the two crucial differences between Burke and other post-Longinian theorists of the sublime. Regarding this 'negative pleasure', he writes:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.
>
> (Burke, 1990: 36)

187

Key to Burke's concept of the sublime then is the 'exciting of ideas'. In this, Burke relays an important piece of information concerning sublime experience. To excite an idea of the sublime, he says, we must distinguish 'between engaging in a fight for survival and contemplating it from afar [...] where the former involves a real possibility of annihilation, the latter treats it merely as an idea' (Shaw, 2006: 54). Now this is incredibly important, because Burke is making a huge distinction between real feelings of terror and a kind of simulation of that terror which has within it a kind of safety. In his summary of Burke, Shaw provides an insightful illustration of this idea:

> The experience of bungee jumping is pleasurable because the person who engages in this activity is reasonably certain that the elastic cord will rescue him or her from catastrophe. The bungee jump mimics the suicidal descent into the abyss, providing the person who falls with a glimpse of what that descent might really entail.
>
> (Shaw, 2006: 54)

In Burke's theory of sublimity then, we find a distrust of the sublime as being fully realised in either raw nature or the mechanisms of language, and instead in a constructed 'act' whereby the perceiver to some degree understands the distinction between what we might call a 'safe' terror, and the numbing terror of mortal peril – a distinction which will be important in the forthcoming chapters.

So, in the development of the theory of the sublime in the period one could call *post-Longinian* to *pre-Kantian*, by the time of Burke's *Enquiry* the sublime had certainly taken hold as an important philosophical concept. But as with Longinus,

its inclusion into a larger philosophical system had again proven difficult, as is evident in Burke's attempt to use the language of empiricism to make the sublime an object of scientific enquiry. As Shaw comments:

> [A]s soon as emotions enter into the empirical calculus, ideas of truth and knowledge are placed under considerable stress. For if the authority of verbal descriptions is defined as purely affective, so that one may persuade but not prove, evoke but not show, then it becomes very difficult to establish the veracity of such descriptions.

(Shaw, 2006: 50)

In this period, we can trace sublime as shifting through three phases: the natural and religious sublime of Burnet and Dennis, the linguistic sublime of Baillie, and the psycho-physiological sublime of Burke. Following them, the next major contribution to the concept of the sublime would come from Kant.

Despite the pre-*critical Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), where Kant explores how certain human characteristics such as race, sex, and temperament, might affect our 'feelings' of the beautiful and the sublime, it is in the *Analytic of the Sublime*, from *Book II* of the *Critique of Judgment*, that one sees Kant approach the sublime from the point of view of the *Critiques* in general. This approach couches the sublime into a fully formed philosophical system for the first time and as such, enables Kant to remove the religious, semiotic and psychosocial concepts that had become the mainstay of its early eighteenth century development.

To understand how Kant forms the sublime as a part of his overall system one needs, in the first instance, to compare it with the judgment of taste. A judgment of the sublime involves, unlike taste, a 'two-step structure', and one that is based upon a *negation* (Wenzel, 2005: 106). In a judgment of taste, the form of *purposiveness*[56] finds the object of my judgment suitable for my powers of imagination, and makes me feel that I 'fit in' with the world. Similarly, purposive teleological judgments reveal the same thing – that nature suits my mind and its demand for order. What this means then is that experiences of subjective and objective purposiveness are in some way a confirmation of my place within nature. By contrast, objects – or *experiences* of objects – that are *counter-*

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[56] 'That which fits as if it were arranged according to some plan, intention, or purpose. In an organism for instance, the parts fit harmoniously with each other as if they were designed that way' (Wenzel, 2005: 153).

purposive to our power of imagination evoke the sublime; that is to say, that the purposiveness found in a sublime judgment is merely indirect, and this is true for both of Kant's divisions of the sublime, the *mathematical* and the *dynamical*. Indeed, this division between the *mathematical* versus the *dynamical* sublime will be the dialectic at the centre of this chapter. So I will now explain this division in detail, and why Kant finds it necessary.

It important to make clear that Kant's division of the sublime is not a correlative of the linguistic-natural binary I have already established. Indeed, it may be best to understand the Kantian notion of the sublime as a 're-imagining' of the natural sublime[57], which he then goes on to divide into those two kinds of sublimity already mentioned, the *mathematical* and *dynamical*. The primary reason for such a division is a formal one and as such we need to recall that the *Critique of Judgment* is the third in a sequence of critiques which all share the same fundamental principles concerning the structure, behaviour and relation of our faculties of understanding: *imagination*, *understanding* and *reason* (*Einbildungskraft*, *Verstand* and *Vernunft*).

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant distinguishes between two types of principle[58], the *mathematical* and the *dynamical*. These principles, Kant argues,

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[57] If only because Kant only gives examples of the sublime in nature, architecture and mathematics: never citing language. Furthermore, the sublime in art – for Kant – may only manifest when the art in question is concerned with, or 'mimics' nature.

[58] Where a principle, or *prinzip*, is 'a basic proposition or law of reason, from which, or according to which, specific kinds of particular knowledge can be derived' (Wenzel, 2005: 153).

are formed through (or can be best understood as) either *composition* or *connection*. In a composition (which we equate to a *mathematical* principle), I find homogenous parts that do not necessarily belong to each other[59], whereas in a *connection* (which we equate to a *dynamical* principle) I find heterogeneous parts that necessarily belong to one another.

How this translates into an understanding of the sublime is as follows: with the *mathematical*, my imagination (and by imagination I speak not of fantasy, but the faculty through which I receive and then creatively combine that which is given through the senses) is required to comprehend an intuitively given object as a whole. My faculty of imagination attempts a *composition* of the parts presented to the senses (that do not necessarily belong together into a whole). To illustrate this, imagine looking at a fruit bowl sitting on a table. To apprehend the fruit bowl as a whole, my imagination must compose each fruit as a distinct object and as a set of objects (via complex associations involving not only the physical senses but of memory and language), and also as an object or objects in both *time* and *space*. Now, Kant believes that it is possible for the process of such a composition to fail,

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[59] To illustrate this, I offer the following from Wenzel, which considers a square, intersected on its diagonal to form two triangles:

> These two triangles make up a square and they are homogenous parts in space and can therefore be treated mathematically (making use of Cartesian coordinates). Furthermore, they just happen to be side by side (forming a square). They could be anywhere (within a Cartesian coordinate system; there are linear transformations that are isomorphisms and that could move either of the two triangles around in space without changing its inner structure). Therefore they do not necessarily belong together.
>
> (Wenzel, 2005: 108)

and it is this which he calls the *mathematical* sublime.

The problem, or, the cause of my potential for failure, is not a logical one. It is intuitive, and relates to the *size* or *scale* of the objects I attempt to intuit. It is Kant's belief that *logical* composition will never fail, because I could use a base unit of measurement (the height of a tree, the size of a hand) and then apply numbers to this measurement to express a given magnitude (of height, depth or length in either time or space). For example, I might be able to logically grasp the height of the Eiffel Tower by using the trees which surround it as a base unit of measurement, i.e., 'it is *x* trees high'. To put this into Kantian terms: 'the logical estimation of magnitude progresses without hindrance to infinity' (Kant, 1987 §. 26 [111/255]). Now, Kant argues that these objects of basic measurement (the height of a tree, the size of a hand) are things that I must be able to grasp immediately in their totality, and he clearly states that the 'estimation of magnitudes in mere intuition (by the eye) is aesthetic' (Kant, 1987 §. 26: [107/251])) – and by aesthetic here he refers to the Greek *aesthesis*: from perception. Thus, Kant claims that there is a finite limit to how large an object of basic measurement can be whilst remaining aesthetic, *grasped in a single intuition*. As Wenzel writes:

> As apprehension advances, the ability of our imagination to hold the parts of what we imagine [...] together "soon reaches its maximum" (252). Thus, "for the aesthetic estimation of magnitude there is certainly a greatest" unit of measure (which "brings with it the idea of the sublime," 251). And in any case, being faced with the object, being exposed to it in an immediate way, it is our senses that are overwhelmed, and against this it does not help to try to do

mathematics.

The mathematical sublime, then, is encountered in the size of objects and the aesthetic (perceived) composition of their parts without the concept of a number. At certain moments, the possible size of such a composition comes to its boundary. I am no longer able to compose my intuition, and am overwhelmed. For Kant, this demonstrates a triumph of reason over the senses of perception because reason (or, *logical* composition, which has no boundary) 'has the ability to demand "absolute totality" (250) and to think "the given infinite"' (Wenzel, 2005: 110).

So if it is in *size* that I encounter the mathematical sublime, it is in *force* that I find the dynamical. To explain, let me return to Kant's distinction between 'principles', where one finds, in reference to dynamical principles, the idea of *connection*. In a connection, there exist heterogeneous parts that are *necessarily* connected. The clearest example of this is the notion of *cause and effect*. If I fall (cause), and cut my knee (effect), those two elements (the fall, and the cut) are heterogeneous, and yet are necessarily connected insofar as in they each depend upon the other to be part of this event. In special cases, this necessary heterogeny can lead to experience of the dynamical sublime.

'Nature considered in aesthetic judgment as a power that has no dominion over us is dynamically sublime' (Kant, 1890 §28 [260]), writes Kant in his introduction to the dynamical sublime. When confronted with the power of nature, of which Kant

194

cites 'the wide oceans, enraged by storms' (245), 'shapeless mountain masses', and 'pyramids of ice' (256) as examples, the momentary fear I feel in my inability to physically repel or challenge these forces initiates a shift in my perspective. Aware that I cannot physically match such objects for power, I search 'inside myself' for an element I believe to be greater and more powerful than the object that caused our fear. The element I turn to is the idea of morality, of something perceived as quintessentially and inherently human, Wenzel writes:

> In this respect we are, so to speak, untouchable. The forces of outer nature (objects in time and space) do not reach into our inner nature (the idea of humanity and morality in us, not something in time and space). Thus we connect two "heterogeneous" elements in a judgment about the sublime: the size and power of outer nature on the one hand, and the idea of (theoretical) absolute totality and (practical) human morality in us on the other.

> (Wenzel, 2005: 110)

So, it is Kant's assertion that the (mental) experience of our physical limitations evokes (in certain situations) a response which looks inward, to our humanity and mortality. These heterogeneous elements are the root, or cause, of an experience of the dynamical sublime. Like the restitution of the bungee cord, it is my very humanity, free and untouchable, which rescues my mind from the terror of my encounter.

Having explored the distinction that Kant makes between the mathematical and dynamical sublime, it is important to note that they should not necessarily be considered as mutually exclusive, that is, I do not necessarily experience one or the other. Rather, the conditions for mathematical and dynamical sublimes are to a

195

degree co-dependent on each other. What is important about this conception of the sublime is that unlike Shaftesbury, who claimed that the sublime is an attribute of nature, Kant positions the sublime as an ability of the *mind*. This brings the sublime in-line with the notion of taste[60] – not socially determined, not a quality of objects, but rather something *universal*, that I 'do' as I encounter the world. Moreover, and given that the sublime (or its potential) belongs to *me*, it becomes possible to think about the sublime outside of the savagery of nature and in the realms of art and the aesthetic experience of performance.

To close, let me refer the reader back to the quote opening this section:

> Sublimity, then, refers to the moment when the ability to apprehend, to know, and to express a thought or sensation is defeated. Yet through this very defeat, the mind gets a feeling for that which lies beyond thought and language.

(Shaw, 2006: 3)

It should be evident at this point why the quote above goes some way to giving as accurate a representation of sublime experience as is possible within its multifarious definitions over the last two millennia. For Longinus and the early rhetoricians, the ability to apprehend was 'defeated', the sublime in their case remaining an elusive and yet powerful demonstration of the capabilities of the spoken word. For the eighteenth century mind, the sublime itself was far less elusive, and yet gave fleeting access to ideas or things beyond the noumenal world; for Kant in particular, not only was the sublime a 'gateway' to such things,

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[60] In addition, it is through the mathematical and dynamical sublime respectively that Kant claims we gain access to the supersensible ideas of *reason* and *freedom* which, rather neatly for Kant, ties the experience of the sublime to the dominant concepts of the previous two *Critiques*; reason, in *Critique of Pure Reason* and freedom, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

196

it was by its own composition the *proof* of them, extolling in abundance the power of the human mind. In the following section, I shall explore the impact of the sublime in the art of the early twentieth century, paying particular attention to the role of the sublime in modernist ideologies, performance theory, and the techniques of the early avant-garde.

CHAPTER SIX – TOWARD A THEATRICAL SUBLIME

LYOTARD, NEWMAN, AND THE RETURN OF *DAS MOMENT*

Now that I have explained how the sublime developed as a concept in both pre-Kantian philosophy and in Kant's third *Critique*, I want to make clear the structure and basic proposition of my forthcoming analysis, and thus how I intend to situate the sublime in terms of theatre and performance experience. As I did with my analysis of taste, this chapter looks to build upon the philosophical foundations of the sublime such that I can consider the experience of the sublime in contemporary performance practice in Chapter Seven, using as a starting point the work and techniques of the early avant-garde movements. It is my intention, then, to ensure that the questions posed here will allow for a clearer understanding of the sublime in art, and indeed also how one might best go about analysing it in that context.

My argument is that conceptions of the sublime as defined by Kant (in *The Analytic of the Sublime*), the aesthetic ideology of modernism, and of post-Kantian scholars such as Schopenhauer and Lyotard, are insufficient for the analysis of sublime experience as it relates to theatre and performance. Moreover, an analysis of sublime experience which adopts these conceptions produces a tension which necessitates a reappraisal of sublime theory; moreover, one that recognises the sublime, like taste, as a unique agent of experience. In structural terms, this chapter will substantiate this claim through an examination of the modernist sublime, of the conceptual fundaments of formalism, and then from an

analysis of avant-garde performances evoking the sublime through means both complementary and contrary to Kant's definition of sublime experience.

Before proceeding into analysis however, the question I must ask here is: how does the sublime relate to the conclusions drawn in Part One concerning taste, and the notion of aesthetic experience in general? The answer, I think, is that the relationship between the sublime and aesthetic experience (taste), is one of formal similarity. Like taste, the sublime experience is one of *adventure*, of extra-ordinary experience markedly different from the everyday. Like the adventure of the aesthetic, the sublime adventure is 'significantly related to the context which it interrupts' and 'lets life be felt as a whole, in its breadth and in its strength' (Gadamer, 2004: 60). Indeed, it 'ventures out into the uncertain', but unlike the uncertainty of taste which concerns speculation and play, 'but at the same time [...] knows' (ibid) it is an adventure, the sublime presents itself as an adventure from which we might never return, a perilous journey that offers a champion's reward. Like taste, the sublime too is a meeting point of *a priori* and *a posteriori* concerns. Indeed, like taste, it is predicated upon the existence of the synthetic *a priori*. Where in taste, the experience of the work was met with the notions of disinterest, universality, and so on; the sublime experience is a coming together of *a posteriori* experience and *a priori* notions of freedom and reason. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, is that both taste and the sublime (at least in performance) appear to share *das Moment* as their experiential starting-point or 'push', and whether or not this sharing is of significance in relation to our understanding of performance experience is something I hope to answer over

199

these final two chapters.

As a first step into thinking about the sublime as an experience of artistic work, I want to look at the work of American artist, theorist and critic Barnett Newman (1905-70), taking his work as an exemplar of a particular type of modernist painting engaged with a 'desire for the exalted, for a concern with our relationship to the absolute emotions' (Newman, 1990: 170). Philip Shaw, in *The Sublime*, asks in what sense Newman's work can be described as sublime when he 'does not gesture towards anything beyond the work' (Shaw, 2006: 121). 'There is no hidden depth', he writes, 'and no complex meaning to be deciphered; its subject matter is itself' (ibid). Jean-François Lyotard, however, who analyses Newman's work at length in his essays 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde' (1989) and 'Newman: the Instant' (1991), attributes the presence of sublime feeling to a technique Newman calls the 'zip'[61]. Working with large blocks of uniform colour,

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[61] Lyotard's evaluation of Kantian aesthetics (and implicitly, aesthetics in general) is that the aesthetic cannot serve as a means of bridging the gap between epistemology (*The Critique of Pure Reason*) and ethics (*The Critique of Practical Reason*). Unlike Kant however, it is in Lyotard's consideration of the political that we sees this distrust emerge. So how exactly does such distrust arise for Lyotard? In politics (more specifically here, political systems or modes of government) he argues that any attempt to unite a determinate with an indeterminate concept (insofar as it would become the grounds on which one would govern) ultimately results in disaster. The example Lyotard gives, and the one discussed by Philip Shaw in *The Sublime*, is Totalitarianism, implicit in which is the assumption that the *true* (a determinate object of cognition) and the *just* (an indeterminate Idea) may become one. The reason this synthesis results in Totalitarianism, reasons Lyotard, is that 'any society claiming to embody the idea of the just is immediately unjust, for it precludes the possibility of dissent' (Shaw, 2006: 126). Thus, an embodiment by a culture or group of peoples of the idea of the just is not impossible *as such*, but fails to produce a structure in which any given *Differend* can be resolved case-by-case. Lyotard gives a good example of what he calls the *Differend* in *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (1988), where he writes:

> As distinguished from a litigation, a differend would be a case of conflict, between two parties, that cannot be resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both of the arguments. One side's legitimacy does not imply the other's lack of legitimacy. However, applying a single rule of judgment to both in order to settle their differend as though it were merely a litigation would wrong (at least) one of them

as seen in *Onement 1* (1948) *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1950) (Fig. 31), and *Eighteen Cantos* (1963-4) , Newman uses the 'zip' – frequently a single line of a contrasting colour to that of the main field – to draw the eye to the canvas. The 'zip' in both Lyotard and Shaw's estimation, marks the difference between a work which 'ushers in a universe of death with no promise of restitution' (Shaw, 2006: 122) and one which leaves us with 'a profound sense of fragility, of a sense of teetering on the edge of nothingness' (ibid).

(and both of them if neither side admits this rule.

(Lyotard, 1988: xi)

To some extent then, the differend is, as Simon Malpas states, signalled by an 'inability to prove' (Malpas, 2003: 60). Alternatively, in terms of a situation that cannot call upon the rule of a universal law, we can liken it in some way to Kant's theory of taste, in which disputes over a claim to taste have *no universal law*, and yet *act or behave as if they do.* Or, as Lyotard might say, justice is not reducible to a single *metalanguage* capable of governing the differences between the *separate languages* of discourse.

So, the way in which Lyotard treats the sublime is to clarify the gulf between the theoretical (in this case truth) and the practical (in this case justice). What is key to this understanding of the sublime is the attempt it makes to represent something un-representable; an indication, through art or otherwise, that there are things which available linguistic discourses or permissible representations of the world are unable or unwilling to fully communicate, be it ideas, voices, or modes of governance. The manifestation of the sublime (in art) for Lyotard can occur in either of two forms, the modern and the postmodern, where the modern is represented through a 'nostalgia for presence' and the postmodern through a 'jubilation that come[s] from inventing new rules of the game' (Barry, 1992: 13). What is fundamentally at stake therefore in Lyotard's vision of the sublime is the very rationale that makes it such a prominent element of his philosophy; and that is the potential for art to incite, or at the very least signal toward the prospect for, change. In opposition to what we find in the mathematical and dynamical sublimes of Kant (a testament to the power of reason), in Lyotard's 'un-representable' we see a ghosting, or a trace, of the wronged in the differend: the shadow of the voiceless, the impermissible in politically governed discourse.

201
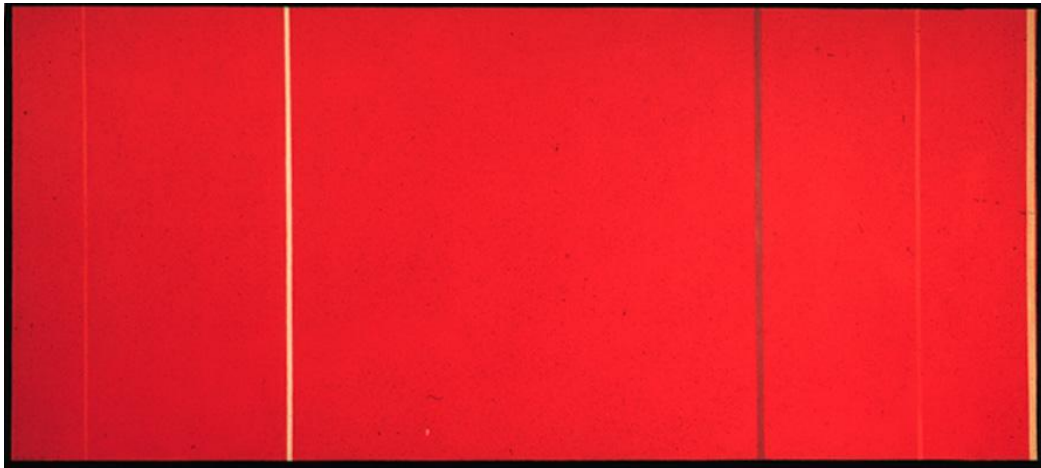
Figure 31: Barnett Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1950)

The 'zip', says Lyotard, like the effects of the Longinian sublime, 'descends like a

thunderbolt' (Lyotard, 1989: 249). Given that restitution is a necessary component

of sublime experience for Burke, as we saw earlier in the case of the bungee

jumper, this behaviour in Newman's work becomes all the more clear if we take

into account Paul Crowther's claim in *Barnett Newman and the Sublime* (1984)

that he 'dismisses Kant summarily', attesting that 'it was Burke alone who

articulated some essentials of the sublime' (Crowther, 1984: 53). That this feeling

is present in Newman's work might be attributed in part to the fact that the

discourses of the sublime were far from alien to him. On the contrary, Newman

wrote extensively on the sublime in his art and the art of others, and his 1948

treatise on aesthetics, *The Sublime is Now* (to which Crowther referred), remains a

critical text on modernism. But this idea of the 'zip' or 'thunderbolt', which

resonates with Roland Barthes' notion of the *punctum* in *Camera Lucida* (1982)[62],

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[62] The *punctum*, he writes (in relation to photography), 'is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me' (Barthes, 1982: 26). Through the punctum Barthes explains that a picture represents 'what was' (as opposed to 'what is'), and hence that which is no longer. A reminder of the fragility of existence, the punctum is the effect of subjective significance meeting the permanence of the photographic object: the recurrent feeling of loss, lack, of nothingness.

202

demonstrates a relationship to Kantian thought that Newman perhaps overlooked. Like the experience of taste, the sublime must begin *somewhere*. The 'thunderbolt' zip, which Lyotard quite rightly identified as the heart of the work, is in every respect the definition of a Kantian *das Moment* – pushing (or, more aptly if we think back to case of the 'bungee' cord, pulling) the spectator into an intuitive composition that will ultimately fail.

More broadly, the sublime we see in Newman is the sublime of the modernist project as a whole: the desire to represent that which is resistant to representation, which further underlines the 'relationship to the absolute' (Newman, 1990: 170) with which high modernism was so concerned. In the *Sublime and the Avant-Garde*, which considers Newman's work in relationship to notions of time and event, Lyotard addresses an issue pertinent here, namely, the locating of 'the advent of the aesthetics of the sublime' (Lyotard, 1999: 318). On this, he writes:

> There are in general no direct influences, no empirically observable connections. Manet, Cézanne, Braque and Picasso probably did not read Kant or Burke. It is more a matter of an irreversible deviation in the destination of art.
>
> (Lyotard, 1999: 318)

In his analysis, which draws on the writings of Longinus, Kant, Burke, and Heidegger's notion of *ein Ereignis*[63], Lyotard posits Impressionist painters such

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[63] *Ereignis* belongs to that peculiar category of German word which means (in its simplest and most literal translation) 'Event'. Eigen in German is 'own', in the sense that one might own a property. One might also consider the root *augen* here, which is the 'eye'. In *On Time and Being* (2002) Heidegger locates *Ereignis* as being, 'Being as Propriation' (Heidegger, 2002: 22).

It is of value here to explore precisely why Lyotard would make connections between Newman and Heidegger with respect to how close some of Heidegger's ideas are to the notion of the sublime. While *Ereignis* is bound up with ideas of time and event, it arrives through his notion of

Cézanne, Renoir, and Manet as the catalyst for the advent which he describes as an 'irreversible deviation in the destination of art' (Lyotard, 1999: 318). Lyotard, however, makes no differentiation between artworks in which the sublime arrives simply as *experience*, and modernist works which would herald the sublime as an avant-garde concept indicative of a *raison d'être* for art itself. Perhaps this has something to do with the nature of Newman's work in particular, insofar as the *Moment* (n.) of the 'zip' brings to the spectator the same feeling of sublimity which is at the heart of the modernist agenda. Away from Newman, though, the difference between these two approaches to the sublime is more apparent. Consider as an example Renoir's *Dance at Le Moulin de la Galette (Le Bal au Moulin de la Galette)* (1876) or *Girls at the Piano* (1892). While Renoir *was* a leading figure in an Impressionist movement concerned with the defiance of the traditional 'rules' of pictorial realism[64] (concerning brushstroke and composition), there remains a centrality in his work to ideas of female beauty and sensuality; a

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Dasein, from the German *Da* (there) and *Sein* (being) – the 'human entity in all its ways of being' (Collins, 1998: 84), and his striking similarities in to the sublime. One of two basic ways in which *Dasein* can '*be*', for Heidegger, is authentic, and in *authentic being*, 'being-toward-death', that is, the future possibility of death as part of present being, is an integral component. For *Dasein* to achieve authenticity, it 'has to arrive out of [...] inauthenticity' (ibid: 85). For the change to occur, *Dasein* must experience *anxiety*. *Anxiety*, similar to existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's notion of *Angst*, is characterised as a fear that 'has no specific object' (ibid). It arises 'in *Dasein* itself, as an anxiety for its own being' (ibid). As such, the feeling of experiencing itself as a disturbing awareness, anxiety for *Dasein* is analogous to the groundlessness, the *opening up*, of sublime experience.

[64] In *Pictorial Realism* (1995), Dominic Lopes defines the genre as:

> Realism in pictorial representation takes many forms, most blurring one into another. The nineteenth-century "Realist" school of painting championed realism in choice of subject matter. Courbet directed that pictures should portray the commonplace rather than the lofty or idealized; they should depict actual objects rather than fantasies or fictions.
>
> (Lopes, 1995: 277)

far cry from the bleak sterility of later 'sublime' painting[65], there is a composition and materiality that warrants my *being there*, the work is something to be experienced. This holds true for other painters and visual artists of Renoir's age, such as Frederic Dezille and Edgar Degas[66], and I consider these painters to be in the category of the former, that is, those who acknowledge the notion of the 'sublime-as-experience' that may or may not be part of the experience of a work of art. This is in opposition to forms or styles that would view the sublime as an integral component of its conceptual justification. Indeed, in looking at those cited by Lyotard as instrumental in the 'irreversible deviation' (Lyotard, 1999: 318), such as Manet or Cezanne, how one charts a line from the sexual confrontation of *Olympia* (1863) and the animacy of *The Cardplayers* (1892) to Barnett Newman's *Onement 1* (1948) or Robert Motherwell's *Elegy to the Spanish Republic No. 110* (1971), is confusing – in the first case because of the development of arts and cultural discourse in general in the half-century separating them, but more so because these latter works belong to a genre whose concept of the sublime is of integral importance to the very nature of its art: purely *a priori*, cerebral, alienating.

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[65] Renoir's 1867 work *Diana* is a useful example of this. *Diana* is symptomatic of both Renoir's strong connections to Realism and his affinity for feminine sensuality.

[66] In the work of Edgar Degas, we see this affinity for the feminine and the sensual further still. In his *Musicians in the Orchestra* (1872) and *The Dance Class* (1873), which both have ballet dancers as their subject, Degas uses little of the startling properties of light and colour concerned with the Impressionist desire for 'immediacy'. Indeed, Degas himself was quoted as saying 'no art was ever less spontaneous than mine' (Armstrong, 2000: 22).

Figure 32 : *The Cardplayers* (1892)
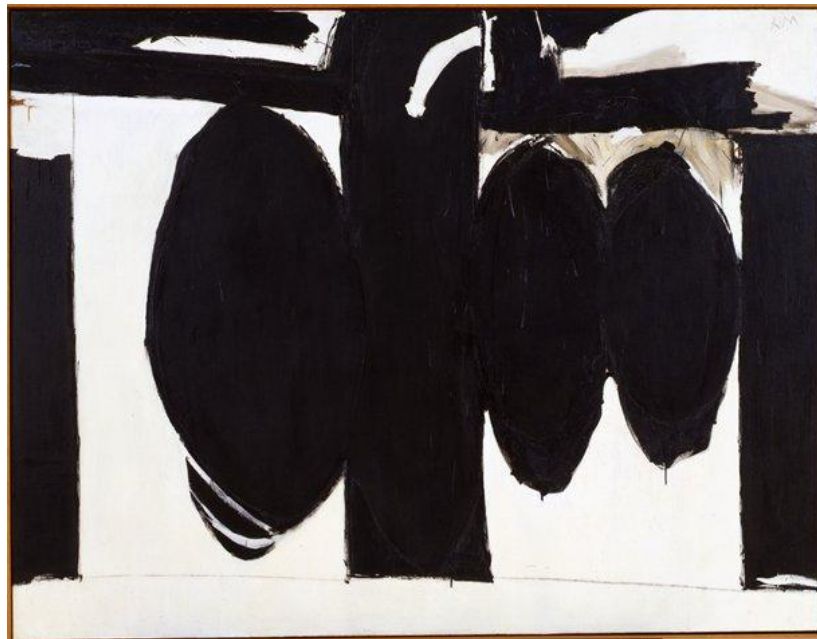
Figure 33: *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* (1953-54)

But as I demonstrated in relation to taste in Part One, theatre and performance practices can give insight and clarity to certain ideas that painting, sculpture and the static arts cannot. To develop this enquiry further, then, I want to look now at the place of the sublime in early symbolist theatre, and then what might be called

the 'second generation' symbolist work of Edward Gordon Craig. While it is with Craig's work that the majority of this analysis will concern itself, it is important to explore early symbolist performances insofar as their thematic content and compositional strategies are the building blocks of Craig's theatre, and in those works are the formative explorations into a means for sublime experience refined and crystallised by Craig.

Vyacheslav Ivanov defined Symbolism as an art form 'able to "suggest" that which in itself purposely remains unexpressed' (Ivanov, 1966: 24), and it is possible to find in Symbolist theatre a probing and testing of the sublime of Kantian formulation. Indeed, there are analogies to be made between what Symbolism did for theatre – in its questioning of the experience and ontology of performance – and what Formalism had previously done for painting. In his 1993 essay *Artistic Formalism: Its Achievements and Weaknesses*, published in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Bohdan Dziemidok offers the following definition of Formalism:

> [A] theory according to which the value of a work of art *qua* artwork – its artistic value – is constituted *exclusively* (radical version) or *primarily* (moderate version) by its formal aspects. Its "meaning" or its (conceptual, cognitive, material, etc.) "content" has no important consequences for its value. Hence, only the formal aspects should be considered as criteria of aesthetic excellence.[67]

> (Dziemidok, 1993)

In order that it might 'escape' axiological questions of content and representation, which in Kantian terms might be understood as a connoisseurship based upon

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[67] In a form '*versus content*' scenario, such as the one above, Dziemidok gives two examples of how we might understand these terms and I shall offer them both here so that we might understand them better individually through viewing them side by side. The simplest, and most palpable, offers *content* as 'everything expressed and represented in a work' (ibid), and *form* as 'the means and ways of representing that something' (ibid). His second definition of these terms offers *form* as 'a certain arrangement of parts, a structure of elements, or a global composition of elements of a work or some other object' (ibid). Highlighting the work of David Pole, who asserts that form derives directly from the relationship it has to its correlates, Dziemidok argues that content is 'a selection of all the elements of the work, its "matter" ("material") or [...] "the material endowment"' (ibid). Dziemidok goes on to stress, in the second example, that 'when form is understood so narrowly, the individual sensual qualities (colors, lines, shapes, sounds, sonorities, etc.) are not considered to be formal elements [...] they are the substance of the artwork' (ibid).

anachronistic *interest*, the Formalist movement found in the sublime a loop-hole that legitimised its methodologies. Where the sublime indicates a *breakdown*, an *inability to represent*, it finds itself as a suitable candidate for the underlying needs of Formalist production because *its* content can never truly be present. Stood unyielding to the demands of representational axiology, and in some sense not knowing what it wants to *be*, the sublime allowed formalism to declaim: 'we will represent *this*, for this *cannot* be represented'. As Kant writes in § 23 of *The Critique of Judgment*:

> For what is sublime, in the proper meaning of the term, cannot be contained in any sensible form but concerns only ideas of reason, which, though they cannot be exhibited adequately, are aroused and called to mind by this very inadequacy, which can be exhibited in sensibility.

> (Kant, 1980: §23 [99/246])

As Kant states, a formalist work cannot contain (i.e. represent) the sublime but can, through avoiding narrative and representational content, be something in which a failure to express discloses a clearer sense of that which is beyond expression. Like *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, which does not 'contain' the sublime, but through the push/pull *das Moment* of the 'zip' can send me hurtling towards it, formalist work opens the door for an art which can rejoice (as Newman's does), in the failure to represent – thus taking the mind beyond that which is apprehensible. There are problems with this, though, in relation to a strictly Kantian sublime. As he writes:

> [T]he sublime can also be found in a formless object, insofar as we present *unboundedness*, either [as] in the object or because the object prompts us to present it, while

> yet we add to this unboundedness the thought of its totality.

<div align="right">(Kant, 1980: §23 [98/245])</div>

The 1970 Meredith translation of *The Critique of Judgment* offers the same passage as:

> The sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes a representation of limitlessness, yet with a super-added thought of its totality.

<div align="right">(Kant, 1970: §23, 90)</div>

The first problem, as the above quotations demonstrate, from the passages above, is that in terms of a *mathematical* sublime – which arises from the failure to form a composition of an object in a single aesthetic intuition – the formal qualities of a work in their very nature *oppose* a formlessness which eludes apprehension. That they are indeed formal qualities *demands* that they be measurable. If we think of representational works for instance, in which formal qualities serve to express or represent some other thing, their *measurability* – that we can apprehend them – is precisely what makes them the tools through which meaning is made.

The correlation between Symbolism and Formalism in painting then is in their desire to represent the un-representable, to speak through form. What we can say for certain of Symbolism as a practice inclusive (in its formative period) of literature, poetry, painting and theatre, is that like Formalism, is that it established itself (in terms of a theory of what art should be) in clear opposition to a representational style. As Quillard records, 'Theatre will be what it should be: a pretext for dream' (in Deák, 1993: 145). Through the theatre in particular – as a

movement which was against pictorial realism – Symbolism sought a return to, and re-elevation of the ideal. As most rudimentary definitions of the genre will tell us, the power of dreams and the unconscious was a constant source of interest for the symbolists – primarily, we must suppose, because it presented an arena far removed from the realist scenarios they so opposed. In a wider cultural context however, we can also note that we are ascribing early symbolist theatre (in the 1890s), to the same decade that Freud began his first excursion into the field of psychoanalysis with *A Project for Scientific Psychology* (1895). That their focus on the realm of the unconscious is related in any way to the notion of the sublime is of considerable doubt, and is not a proposition I intend to claim or support. Nevertheless, the symbolist's *symbolic retreat*, as it were, into the exploration of the power and scope of the human mind is analogous at the very least to the first step – that *recoiling in horror* – of sublime experience.

To look at symbolist theatre in particular as a form indicating that an analysis of the theatre – as a medium unique in its relationship to the sublime – is necessary, I must first examine the core principles of Symbolism in general; only after this can I examine them in practice and explore their relationship to the sublime. Five years prior to Jean Moréas' Symbolist Manifesto of 1896, Albert Aurier's *Le Symbolisme en Peinture: Paul Gauguin* (1891) defined symbolism – *the 'new art'* – 'in terms that are equally applicable to symbolist painting as well as the [theatre]' (Deák, 1993: 146). This 'new art', according to Aurier, must be 'Ideatic, since its unique ideal will be the expression of the idea [...] Symbolist, since it will express this Idea through forms [...] Synthetic [...] [and] Subjective, since the

object will never be considered as an object but as a sign of an idea perceived by the subject' (Aurier in Deák, 1993: 146). As I shall now explain, this manifesto is a clear indication of the influence Schopenhaurian aesthetics had on the symbolist movement.

In *The World as Will and Representation* (1819), German idealist Arthur Schopenhauer aimed to clarify the feelings of the Kantian sublime by introducing the 'degrees of this feeling of the sublime' (Schopenhauer, 1966: 202). Primarily a Kantian thinker, who agreed with the Kantian separation of the phenomenal and noumenal world[68], he suggests 'transitions from the beautiful to the sublime' in which we can see how the sublime, 'in the main [...] is identical with the feeling of the beautiful' (ibid). Unlike Kant, then, the sublime for Schopenhauer was different to beauty not by kind, but rather by degree. In *The World as Will* Schopenhauer defines beauty as closely connected to the idea of truth. Beauty for Schopenhauer is constituted by the awareness of an object as an idea, the more 'important' the idea, and the more clearly it is expressed (via the form of the object), the more beautiful the object of our contemplation is[69]. In § 41 of *The World as Will* he writes:

> By calling an object beautiful, we thereby assert that it is an object of our aesthetic contemplation [...] in contemplating it we are no longer conscious of ourselves

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[68] In the appendix at the end of *Book IV* of *The World as Will and Representation*, which provides a systematic appraisal of Kant's methodologies and conclusions, further examples of connections between Kant and Schopenhauer can be found.

[69] Here we find connections between Schopenhauer's notion of beauty as truth and Kant's proposition of beauty as the symbol of morality.

as individuals, but as pure, will-less subjects of knowing. [...] [W]e recognize in the object not the individual thing, but an Idea.

(Schopenhauer, 1966: 209)[70]

Inasmuch as for Schopenhauer 'we recognize in the object not the individual thing, but an Idea' (Schopenhauer, 1966: 209), it becomes possible to see the development from Schopenhauer's view on aesthetic contemplation to a symbolic system derived from to symbolist 'doctrine of correspondence'. The doctrine of correspondence, conceived in the 1740s by Swedish philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg, 'casts the entire natural world as a hypostasis of the spiritual world, i.e., as a complex series of physical symbols instantiating deeper levels of spiritual reality' (Cody, 1996). Charles Baudelaire championed this idea again in 1857 in his poem *Correspondences*:

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[70] The sublime though, Schopenhauer says, is '[in the main] identical with the feeling of the beautiful, with pure will-less knowing' (Schopenhauer, 1966: 202). But as Young notes, the sublime stands in 'hostile relation to the will' (Young, 2005: 116), and as such the experience of the sublime cannot be present without some affirmation of the presence of the will in sublime experience. Thus, the sublime is not a will-less knowing, as it is 'known' or 'felt' only in relation to the will itself. In beautiful objects, argues Schopenhauer, we lose sight of the egocentric nature of our consciousness, and our subjective relationship to the object becomes immaterial. The threat of the sublime by contrast is constantly reminding us of our 'causal insignificance' (ibid), our 'being aware of the vanishing nothingness of our own body in the presence of a greatness' (Schopenhauer, 1966: 206).

Nature is a temple where living pillars
Let escape sometimes confused words;
Man traverses it through forests of symbols
That observe him with familiar glances.
Like long echoes that intermingle from afar
In a dark and profound unity,
Vast like the night and like the light,
The perfumes, the colours and the sounds respond.
There are perfumes fresh like the skin of infants
Sweet like oboes, green like prairies,
And others corrupted, rich and triumphant
That have the expanse of infinite things,
Like ambergris, musk, balsam and incense,
Which sing the ecstasies of the mind and senses.

(Baudelaire, 1857)

It is through the doctrine of correspondence that Baudelaire introduced the notion of synaesthesia to the work of art. The idea that the senses can, and should, intermingle to evoke a higher ideal – repeating again Schopenhauer's vision for aesthetic experience – can be seen in Paul Roinard's Théâtre d'Art production of the *Song of Songs*:

> With the idea of synthesizing the atmosphere of the dream which envelopes the *Song of Songs*, the composition of the decor attempts to make vivid in a simple and more condensed manner the principal symbols in which the general ideas of the great lyric poem are revealed. The composition of the decor aspires to represent: by Lebanon, saintly domination; by the cedar tree, incorruptibility; by the cypress tree, imperishability; by the climbing vine that surrounds the Oriental altar of the Wife, the enclosed garden and the vine of election.

(Champagne and Deak in: Deák, 1993: 154)

To consider the symbol outside of Schopenhaurian terms, one can go further back in the history of the sublime and compare the *experience* of the symbol to Dennis' *Enthusiasms*. Dennis, as I noted in Chapter Five, suggests that an Enthusiasm is a

particular kind of pleasure informed by an engagement with an idea or idea of things outside of the everyday – and where better to encounter this than in the experience of the symbol? Contemplating the idea of imperishability in the 'climbing vine that surrounds the Oriental altar [...]' (ibid) is no different to the example Dennis gives of finding the sun as an image of divinity. For Dennis, the symbol in and of itself must be in some sense sublime because the synthesis of mind and object that Dennis asserts is the root of sublime experience is its most fundamental property. If nothing else, considering the symbol in terms of Dennis' sublime gives an illumination of the logic behind symbolist methodology and its relationship to their aesthetic concerns. Indeed, one might argue that it is not the symbol *per se* that evokes the sublime idea, rather the way in which one must teleologically engage with the symbol is what lets us make that 'first step' into the transcendental nature of the symbolist aesthetic.

The sensory explosion made possible by the theatre, as opposed to literature or painting, meant that Baudelaire's idea of synaesthesia could be pushed to its limits: a colour could represent a sound, and *vice versa*; a smell, emotion; the illumination of a figure, a virtue. Indeed, in ways similar to those I explored in Chapter Three, scent was used in Roinard's production, released from hand-operated vaporisers; the potency of the scent varying from person to person dependent upon their location in the auditorium. While 'some found the whole thing preposterous' writes Deák, 'others found it, even while recognizing certain problems, a sublime experience' (Deák, 1993: 155). That this experience can be ascribed to a sublime theory in particular is doubtful, and Deák himself does not

continue to quantify this statement, but in this one can see echoes of both Schopenhauer's will-less knowing and Burke's psychophysiology.

Of the eighty-seven first generation symbolist theatre pieces staged between 1890 and 1897, the works staged at le Théâtre de l'Œuvre[71] and le Théâtre d'Art[72], as is made evident in texts by Deák, Jasper, Robichez and Marie, can be considered as the most significant works of early symbolist performance. With this in mind, it is through the examination of a small selection of this canon of works – as emblematic of the period as a whole – that I shall explore symbolist systems of construction and their signature techniques in relation to an emerging concern with the sublime and/or sublime ideas. Whilst not related specifically to the notion of the sublime, but to the proposition of this section as a whole, it is interesting to note that in the analysis of symbolist theatre in general, there are those who consider its theatricality, its very theatre-*ness*, enough to warrant a separation from the symbolism of other more static forms. Frantiŝek Deák's methodology for example, in *Symbolist Theater: The Formation of an Avant-Garde* (1993), approaches symbolism not from its literary forbears such as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Verlaine, instead taking 'as a premise that theatre exists in performance' (Deák, 1993: 7). The value of this, as Deák writes, is that

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[71] Le Théâtre de l'Œuvre, founded in Paris in 1893 by actor/director Aurélien Lugné-Poe (curator also of the Nabis) was an experimental collective responsible for staging the work of the most influential figures in symbolist and surrealist theatre including, Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, Alfred Jarry, Paul Claudel and Maurice Maeterlinck.

[72] The Théâtre d'Art, as Frantiŝek Deák tells us in *Symbolist Staging at the Théâtre d'Art* (1976), between 1890 and 1892 'staged seven productions. It was during these two years that it became associated with the symbolist poets and finally came to represent the symbolist poetic in theatre' (Deak, 1976: 117).

approaches which scrutinise symbolist theatre from the perspective of literary Symbolism often conclude them 'doomed to failure' through the 'inherent opposition between symbolist premises and the demands of theatrical elaboration' (ibid). To untie theatrical and literary symbolism, Deák claims, is to take 'the text into consideration as one aspect of the structure' (ibid: 10), allowing us to examine with a certain parity the *performance experience* of symbolist theatre, accepting as its constituent parts all of the complexities, including what Deák calls the 'gestural theatricality' (ibid: 21) that performance provides.

Of course, no analysis of the devices of symbolist theatre would be complete without an examination of one of its signature techniques: the gauze scrim. Introduced in 1891 in the Théâtre d'Art production of Pierre Quillard's *La filles aux mains coupée (The Girl with Cut-off Hands)* (see: Deák, 1993: 142), the gauze scrim, stretched across the front of the stage and 'immediately behind the footlights' (ibid: 142), is arguably the most important component in the evocation of the sublime in these early symbolist works. Indeed, *La filles aux mains coupée*, Deák argues, was 'the first fully realised symbolist production'. Interestingly however, in his analysis of 'The Invention of Symbolist Mise-en-Scène' (ibid) in *La filles aux mains coupée*, Deák says little about the gauze scrim other than it was there, and that along with soft light placed the actors as 'distant, dreamlike shadows' (Deák, 1993: 145). That Deák's analysis is so concise is perhaps because the scrim became *such* a recognisable device for the symbolists, its importance in symbolism's formative years is ironically overlooked. The possibilities that the scrim provides above and beyond creating a 'dreamlike' visual effect can be seen in Aurélien Lugné-Poe's production of Maurice Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* – a work critical to the formation of the Théâtre de l'Œuvre – from 1892. *Pelléas et Mélisande* (not to be confused with the Debussy opera it inspired), writes Joan Pataky Kosove, 'deals with an intriguing and complex irony, the presentiment of disaster at the moment of happiness and calm' (Kosove, 1967: 781).

While it is not my intention to place the weight of my investigation on a textual

218

analysis and rather to look at performance itself as the means through which the sublime is evoked, in this case it is interesting to note, as a work of a fledgling movement, the sublime ideas within the narrative of the work.

> If one defines the tragic outlook as embracing a belief that our actions can control events, we have, in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, a play in which action is seen as futile. Further belief in the efficacy of action leads to an acceptance of responsibility just as failure to believe in action negates responsibility. [...] Indeed, if one must speak of Maeterlinck as an innovator, then he must be looked upon as the architect of an anti-tragic form where the characters in a play view their life as it were in a play in which all the lines and action were already written by the unseen author.

> (Kosove, 1967: 783-84)

Perhaps here, Kosove's 'anti-tragedy' is the result of a tragedy that leans toward a sublime aesthetic experience. In the fatalistic approach from the characters, the form produces an interplay between the work and the spectator in which responsibility for the experience of the sublime logic is split in half. To illustrate, let me return to the quotation from Julian Young, which illustrated a kind of sublimity distinctive to Schopenhauer, which speaks of a loneliness that reflects,

> [T]he total indifference of nature to oneself. It doesn't care […] whether one lives or dies – whichever it is, its processes carry on just the same. It is, I think, this humbling of one's pretence that one's existence actually matters, this indifference – bitter, yet at the same time obscurely wholesome.

> (Young, 2005: 118)

In encountering as it were a kind of 'sublime tale' – one in which I cannot intervene, where the action, indifferent to the spectator, carries on 'just the same' (ibid) – I am reminded again of the 'safe distance' required to realise the

219

possibility for restitution that the sublime promises.

The division of sublime responsibility, the agreement that *we here*, on the stage, will experience the terror of the sublime on the provision that *you, out there*, will claim (by getting out of here alive) the restitution we seek, is emphasised through the use of the scrim. Its most simple signification in *Pelléas...,* (remembering that this is in an age before cinema) makes an abrupt statement about the division of space, again like the 'zip', only in this case decisively marking out *here* from *there*, *real* from *unreal*, *noumenal* from *phenomenal*; and, most importantly, the *safe* from the *unsafe*. The scrim, as the quotation from Deák on page 218 tells us, serves to make the action seem distant and dream-like. However, the gauze scrim is much more significant than simply a mode of design that allows the symbolist director to privilege an anti-realist, anti-anthropocentric view of theatre in order to evoke sublime ideas safely through expressive content. While the dream-like visual aesthetic that the symbolists promoted is certainly prominent – in the silhouette, the half-seen image, the confusion of depth and place – it first and foremost allows for a sublime experience that contradicts Kant's rule. In *Pelléas...* the scrim can be understood in two ways: a means for the spectator to be removed from the performance insofar as the (sublime) power of the narrative cannot 'get' to them (like a safety-net), or a means for the performance to conceal its theatricality in order to express the sublime – if indeed theatricality would compromise the sublime experience.

This distinguishes the scrim from the invisible 'fourth wall' in a rather important

way. The realist fourth wall *asks us* to accept the action before us as *of our world*, having a history and future *outside of now*. The scrim, on the other hand (in this kind of symbolist work), explicitly *demands* that we understand that what is happening 'behind there' is not of the phenomenal or conscious world, rather that it is a representation of the ideal or unconscious that the theatre can uniquely bring into being. It points directly to a theatricalisation of the sublime whilst obfuscating the materiality of performance, showing us what theatre can *do* whilst concealing what theatre *is*.

In §23 of *The Critique of Judgment* (the opening section of *Book II – Analytic of the Sublime*), Kant tells us that 'we start by considering only the sublime in natural objects (since the sublime in art is always confined to the conditions that [art] must meet to be in harmony with nature)' (Kant, 1980: §23 [98/245]). These 'conditions that [art] must meet' (ibid); that it imitates the beauty of nature; that it appears purposive to nature (i.e. in accordance with it); and that nature 'looks like art', are not necessarily present in symbolist theatre, which Kant refers to as *drama*: 'Oratory [...] combined with a pictorial exhibition of its subjects and objects' (Kant, 1980: §52 [195/326]). What this also indicates, significantly, is that Kant is restricted in his views by the art forms of his own time, that is, that the *post*-dramatic forms of performance analysed here would have been so alien to Kant that one must consider the Kantian model in relation to that severe otherness.

An element of symbolist performance I have not yet considered, and will do so briefly now in order that I might consider it again in the analysis of Edward

221

Gordon Craig's *Dido & Æneas*, is sound. There is scant record of any of the early symbolist productions using anything more than the voice to create the aural textures of their works, and this, one might suggest, is a result of the influence of Richard Wagner on the likes of the early literary symbolists such as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. They were, Deák tells us, 'faithful and fervent Wagnerians' (Deák, 1993: 96), and his concept of *The Gesamtkunstwerk* left a deep impression on them.

Gesamtkunstwerk, as the reader might recall from Chapter Two, is in its simplest form the 'total' or 'complete' artwork: the integration of music, theatre and visual arts into a complete and unified performance. *The Gesamtkunstwerk*, it was concluded, 'was not a feasible concept of art at the present', and with 'no possibility for adequate production of Wagner's operas', or 'an artist capable of uniting the arts in a single work' (ibid: 103), the fusion of sound and image would remain unexplored until Craig. In addition, *Gesamtkunstwerk* was in fundamental contradiction with the doctrine of correspondences, insofar as 'the concept of correspondences suggests, contrary to the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, that as one sense can replace another, so can one art replace another in view of the common aim of all arts' (ibid: 102). Nevertheless, the textures created by the voice in the symbolist work, from the delivery of the spoken word, in which 'the depersonalized voice [...] is an emblem of a specific psychological state' (ibid: 171), to the declamatory style which 'put the existence of the live actor into question' (ibid), and the stylisation of vocal gesture, would have certainly been at work in the evocation of the sublime that these works produce. Returning to

222

Roinard's *Song of Songs*, one can see the attention he pays to the impact of the sonorous qualities of speech in his *Orchestration of the First Device*, where the first line reads: 'speech: in *i* illuminated with *o* (white)' (Deák, 1993: 154). In placing the stress on the vowels in this way, the sonorous qualities of the words themselves begin to emerge, the deep, hollow sound of the '*o*' echoing the endless, sublime depth found in the series of painted drops – some of which had an empty centre, accentuating depth – that he employed at the rear of the space.

The question that remains of the symbolist theatre in general though is whether or not what it evokes (i.e., what the spectator experiences) is *actually* sublime or an effect of theatrical trickery – perhaps even a combination of the two. To try to answer this, I will now examine in detail the sublime as manifest in the work of Edward Gordon Craig. In addition, I want consider carefully the following question: is it possible to replicate the sublime through theatre, and if so, is there a difference between this kind of sublime experience and the sublime of nature?

While Craig's work said nothing profound about lighting and scenography that the Symbolists or Appia[73] had not already said, his meticulous documentation of performance, personal writings, and designs for the theatre (via the notion of 'scene'), through which he hoped to 'preserve' his discoveries 'for those who come after' (Craig, 1983: 128), provide a valuable insight into a critical engagement which develops symbolist composition and presents a series of proposals concerning the nature of the sublime in the theatre[74]. Since I was concerned at the close of my discussion of Théâtre de l'Œuvre and Théâtre d'Art with the ties between a sublimity of theatre and the experience of theatre itself, I would like to develop these ideas, and pull together what might to this point appear to be disparate strands of thought through two of Craig's productions. The works in question, which I will additionally support with designs and writing Craig made for the illustration of *scene*, are *Dido & Æneas* (1900-01) and his collaboration with Constantin Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre on a 1910–11 production of *Hamlet*.

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[73] Adolphe Appia (1862-1928) was a Swiss theorist whose work focussed on the role of design and lighting in the theatre. Like Craig, Appia was concerned with depth and spacial dynamics, in conjunction with a totality of the theatrical event. Indeed, having designed scenography and lighting for a number of Wagner's operas, one might argue that Craig himself began with *Dido & Æneas* (an opera by Henry Purcell) in order that he might compare his own and Appia's achievements through a similar medium of performance.

[74] As Christopher Innes states in *Edward Gordon Craig: A Vision of Theatre*, the extensive amount of documentation available of Craig's work makes it 'possible to reconstruct to a large degree what actually occurred on the stage, and even [...] audience response' (Innes, 2004: 1). And given that my analysis of *Ubu Roi* was in part a demonstration of how this Kantian framework can be used to speculate on audience experiences in historical works, Craig's extensive documenting affords me the opportunity to compare this speculative analysis with the thoughts and opinions of scholars and witnesses alike.

What I am most concerned with in Craig's work is an apparent dissonance between the sublime effect that his techniques create, and the means by which he creates them. That is, in Craig's methodology I find an evocation of the sublime that exemplifies the kind of theatrical sublime I have referred to a number of times so far. Moreover, the sublime of Craig is a noticeably Kantian sublime, markedly different to the Schopenhaurian outlook of the symbolists; and yet despite its clear links to the sublime of Kantian conception, Craig's sublime places the theatre as something for which the Kantian sublime cannot quite account. In order that I might explore *Dido & Æneas* and *Hamlet* in detail, it is necessary that I explain briefly Craig's theories concerning design, light, and the totality of the theatrical event. To provide this framework, I will briefly explain what Craig calls 'scene'.

When he talks of 'scene', Craig is referring to the scenographic constant of all his works, the *screen*: 'the scene stands by itself – and is monotone'. Scene represents 'the essential form of the habitation of man' (Craig, 1983: 122). He writes:

> The scene is made up usually of four, six, eight, ten or twelve screens, and, although sometimes of more than twelve, seldom of less than four. Each part or leaf of a screen is alike in every particular except breadth, and these parts together form a screen, composed of two, four, six, eight or ten leaves. These leaves fold and are monochrome in tint. [...] capable of all varieties of expression, [...] the scene remains always the same, while incessantly changing.
>
> (Craig, 1983: 129-30)

Craig describes 'making rapidly' models of man's habitations throughout history

225

(Craig, 1983: 122). Totalling two hundred and fifty, he makes 'two as used by him 5000 B.C, three 2000 B.C., five 500 B.C...' *et cetera* until he reaches seventy models from 1900 A.D (ibid). Studying them, and claiming to reject any element not found in all the others, he is left with only walls. Thus these walls, given 'mobility', become screens – *scene* – which can seem like 'four hundred different places' (ibid: 124), all pointing towards the essential condition for the habitation of human beings. Hence, the scene becomes the foundation of Craig's aesthetic vision: his techniques for lighting, his experiments with gauze, and his almost scientific approach to the expression of 'feeling' are all supported by his fundamental belief in the transformational power of the *scene*. From here, I have two aims: to locate the sublime at work in both of these productions, and to explore the technical precision at work 'behind the scene'. In so doing, I will argue that the experience for the spectator is that of the sublime, specifically a manifestation of Kant's mathematical sublime, and that the techniques Craig used to evoke the sublime stand in direct opposition to the sublime experience as defined by Kant.

Thus far in the thesis, my major points of argument have been organised around dialectical pairings of terms: *interest* and *disinterest*, *aesthetic* and *artistic*, *free* and *dependant*. In keeping with that practice, I want to think about the sublime in Craig as an exchange between *composition* and *decomposition*. To begin thinking about this opposition more closely, I will first provide a thematic and technical overview of the piece.

Dido & Æneas was the first work Craig managed to take all the way through from planning to actual performance. In it, Craig opts not to use the 'scene' of screens, but instead works with the gauze scrim techniques employed by Aurélien Lugné-Poe, Quillard, and others in the early symbolist movement. His explorations with gauze, while much more technically accomplished than those before him, would be eventually replaced by the screen – as seen in *Hamlet* – which he considered an infinitely more versatile and simple tool for his needs. Nevertheless, in the ambitious and complex use of gauze in the scenography of *Dido & Æneas*, and the information contained within the accompanying technical drawings, it is possible to begin drawing a picture of the experience of Craig's work as it would have been in performance. The following is a brief overview of *Dido & Æneas'* narrative and structure.

Based on Virgil's *Aeneid*, the action of *Dido & Æneas* takes place in Carthage (now Tunisia), at the court of Queen Dido. Her courtiers and sister Belinda persuade her to admit her love for Æneas, a Trojan prince who has stopped in

Carthage (on his journey to Italy) and is showing signs of affection toward her. Meanwhile, witches plot the downfall of Queen Dido and her city, and arrange to raise a storm so that the two lovers, who are out hunting, are forced to seek shelter in a cave. There, one of the witches (disguised as Mercury, the messenger god), reminds Æneas of his duty to resume his passage to Italy. Being persuaded to leave, he makes preparations for his departure. He tries to explain his destiny to Dido, but she brushes his explanations aside, and makes ready for her 'tragic' suicide[75].

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[75] A brief note here on the similarities between *Dido & Æneas* and the 'anti-tragic' form of *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Of note, as Innes tells us, is that Craig altered the libretto in such a way that 'Dido was assumed to have acknowledged her love before the opening of the opera. Her inner conflict became "a presentiment that her love for Æneas will end in disaster"' (Innes, 1998: 41) – a recurrence of the ideas Kosove attests are present in *Pelléas...* We see this developed in *Dido & Æneas* however through the witches' 'storm' (the event that instigates their doom). The storm becomes the sublime climax of the narrative structure, representing the 'idea' of disaster from which the protagonists do not (again like *Pelléas...*) attain any form of restitution.

A. Two backcloths—one blue, one grey. B. Grey gauze on a stretcher.
C. Temporary Proscenium-cum-spotting rail, faced with grey canvas.
D. Slender scaffold poles and thin rope to suggest ship's masts. E. Battery
of 5 electric lamps with coloured filters. F. Floor lamps on either side of
Proscenium. G. Auditorium lights concealed in boxes. H. Permanent
platform of concert hall. I. Orchestra. J. Grey curtains. K. Auditorium.

Figure 34: Technical designs for *Dido & Æneas*

The sketches above (Fig. 34) show the spectators' vision of the massed chorus and

army in *Dido & Æneas* (upper), and a cross-section view revealing the action both

in front of and behind the gauzes (lower). But how, exactly, does this develop the

compositional processes of early symbolist work? In the accounts of Lugné-Poe's

production of *Pelléas...*, the gauze scrim has (for the experience of the spectator)

only one function: marking *there* from *here*: the 'real' world, from the

subconscious world they promote, the empirical world of the *a posteriori* from the

transcendental world of the *a priori*; and this was useful insofar as it laid a foundation on which to build my analysis of Craig. In *Pelléas...*, the scrim stands to re-enforce the sublime nature of the experience of the work. For Craig, however, that delineation is only the first of many exchanges that are taking place between the spectator and the work.

What Craig does, is create, through a meticulously precise, technical, and measured process of production, the effect for the spectator of the mathematical sublime. And it is within Craig's meticulous method that I find a problem that explicates in full the proposition upon which this section is based. Craig, in short, evokes a sense of the *immeasurable* through the *measured*, the vast from the minute, and the overwhelming from the logical. In evoking an experience of the sublime in his theatre, it emerges from a place it should not – that is, the totality of Craig's means goes above and beyond the possibility for their division in the experience of them in a theatrical context.

The upper sketch shows the massed chorus from the perspective of the audience. While not being the most evocative indication of the sublime effect Craig produces, it is one in which the reader is able to see most clearly what is being done technically, and it is from here that it becomes possible to understand how experiences of the mathematical sublime might emerge. The most important thing that Craig produces is a spatial effect which according to Yeats seemed 'like the edge of eternity' (Innes, 1998: 46). The impression of spacial depth he creates is achieved not through a single 'wall' of gauze as seen in the Théâtre de l'Œuvre

and Théâtre d'Art performances, but rather through a series of gauzes and cloths situated in areas of the performance space which allow them to be lit in a specific way. Indeed, if the reader recalls the experience at the heart of the mathematical sublime – the failure to compose a given object or image in its entirety in a single intuition – it becomes possible to locate specifically in the drawings exactly how this failure, this breakdown in intuition, is being 'forced' by Craig to dramatic effect.

(J.) and (G.), in the lower sketch, shows a downstage grey curtain which is lit from the front by lamps out in the auditorium. Being gauze, and being lit from this position, produces two contrasting effects: at the same time, light is reflected back from the fibre of the gauze (which obfuscates the action behind), but also lets small amounts of light through the gaps in the gauze as to illuminate the action in a fractured, almost pixellated way[76]. Having these two effects work against each other is how Craig (and Théâtre de l'Œuvre and Théâtre d'Art) use light and gauze to create the 'ghostly' or 'dreamy' sense of action behind the scrim (Fig. 35). But Craig does not stop there. He now places within this half revealed, half concealed space more gauze, and more light. Between (F.) and (B.) he places (on incrementally rising levels) the actors. (B.) upstage, is another gauze which has been angled toward the action, and lighting this is (F.), free-standing floor lamps emphasising (adding a dimensionality) to the monotone picture created by the gauze at (J.). This multiplies the effects of the rising platforms, and thus the

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[76] The amount of light cast on the gauze is important here too. Too much, and the gauze will become totally opaque; too little, and the amount of light reflected back at the spectator will not be sufficient to create the 'clouded' effect. Such precision, at a time before the simplicity of semi-automated dimmer systems, is noteworthy and impressive.

silhouettes of the performers reflect a depth that firstly is not there, and secondly, is an impossible distance to be housed by a theatre building. Craig furthers this again, in the section (A. B. D.), by placing (between the angled cloth of B. and the large backcloth of A., and we remember that he is now using B. in reverse – which exaggerates its distance from those in front of it) a set of poles and flags arranged to look like the masts of distant ships. This is lit primarily by (E.) and (F.), the lamps and lanterns illuminating the actors, but into this Craig adds *another* floor lamp (not labelled in the drawing, but can be seen at the base of (A.) and to the left of (D.)), which captures the light of (E.) and (F.) and effectively places it onto another horizon.
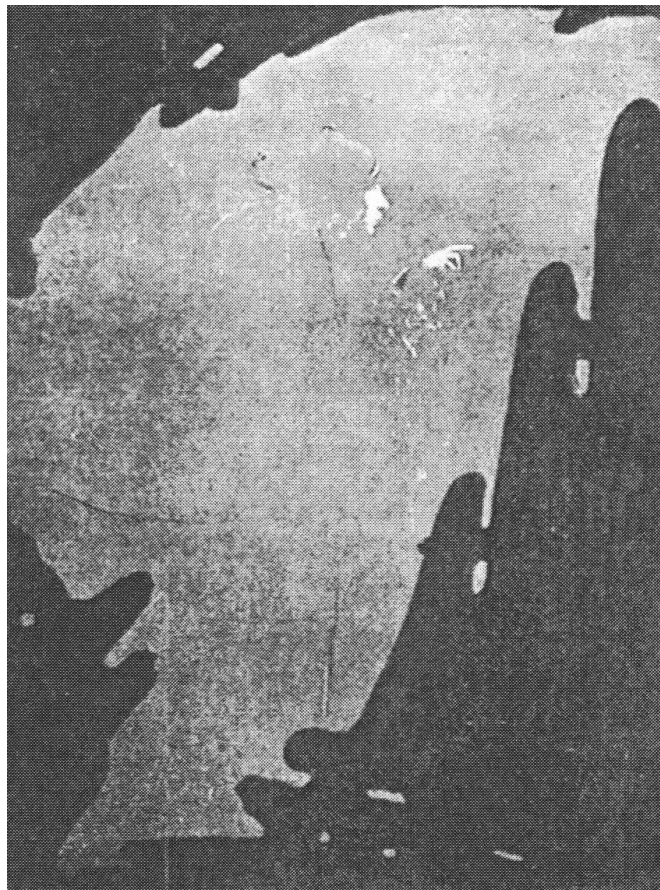

**Figure 35: Behind the gauze scrim, The Witches -** *Dido & Æneas*

From this, the sublime experience, or 'effect', is created in two ways. The first is concerned with the amount of spatial depth Craig manages to create through this technique, and the second with the performers that move in relation to it. In negotiating these fields of light and gauze, the 'horizon' of the image concludes on the backdrop at (A.), but due to the 'splitting' of his fields of light and gauze (from (G.) to (J.), (F.) to (B.) *et cetera*) neither of these sections 'move' in relation to this final horizon. These sections, and the bodies and objects within them, operate, as it were, within their own 'field', which deceives the spectator into perceiving a great deal more space on the stage than there actually is. In Kantian terms, Craig denies the spectator a common unit of measurement by which the distance of the upstage horizon can be measured, forcing a *composition* of the image without any intuitive rules for its coming together. Compounding this illusion of depth is the material of the gauze itself. It is hard work for the eye to track objects behind the gauze at (J.), because of the light reflecting back at the spectator. But because Craig conceals this light source, it becomes as if the light is emitting from the stage, which gives through a combination of this, and the two backcloths at (A.), 'an astoundingly three dimensional effect' (Innes, 1998: 46).

Thus, Craig creates the mathematical sublime, the 'representation of limitlessness' (Kant, 1987: §23 [90]) in a space where one should not be able to experience it. And so, as the spectator's act of *composition* fails, an act of *decomposition* occurs. Significantly, this pairing develops my earlier parings from Part One. In the spectators' inability to *compose* the image in a single intuition, the world of the performance is *decomposed*. In this, the spectator loses their grip on depth

perception and on spatial relativity. The feeling of freedom that this creates – unlike that of taste – is vast and wild, and threatens disaster; yet it is *aesthetic* as opposed to *artistic*. Indeed, the *artistic* concerns *composition*, as my analysis in Chapter Three demonstrated. Moreover, the sublime is *disinterested*, rather than *interested*. It must be so, because *interest* is about ownership and the domination of an object. In the boundlessness of the sublime, it is the subject which is dominated, and I am made fully aware that I have no power over the experience such that I could prolong it.

The key to this, of course, is in the fact that Craig works with *depth* and not *height*. An immeasurable sense of height on the stage would be usurped by the height of the auditorium in which the spectators sit; providing a reference point from which they could make a *logical* intuition concerning the physical dimensions of the space. In this lies the major change between Lugné-Poe's *Pelléas et Mélisande* and Craig's *Dido & Æneas*. In *Dido & Æneas*, the presentiment of danger is a constant feeling for the spectator because the action itself unfolds in a 'sublime space'. This kind of space, one which on a certain level I know *has* a logic, leaves me constantly unsettled – *threatened with disaster* – because it is a logic (according to sublime rule) which I cannot *compose*. What is so powerful about this evocation of the sublime is that the formal *composition* of the work, that is, the image that strikes the spectator as they watch, is like an incessant, *perpetually decomposing das Moment*. Unlike the *Momente* (n.) of *Ubu Roi*, or indeed of other works I explored in Part One, where the rhythms or narratives of the work drew the spectator into a pocket or window of extraordinary

experience, Craig hammers the sublime experience into the auditorium by relentlessly challenging the spectators' powers of visual composition. That insistence is what makes Craig's work on *Dido...* so significant. Unlike taste, or indeed beauty, here the sublime seems to break out of the Gadamerian mould of adventure and begins to fill, and even dominate, the entire rhythm of the piece. Unlike the notion of the adventure, which is an aesthetic 'aside', Craig's sublime becomes the foundation upon which all other experience is built. The 'hard work' of tracking objects in their endless depth adds an *a posteriori* element to the sublime experience, and in some sense the leaning forward, then backward, squinting, seasickness, becomes an unending *das Moment* which locks the unsettled spectator into the uneasy territory of vast, uncontrollable nothingness.
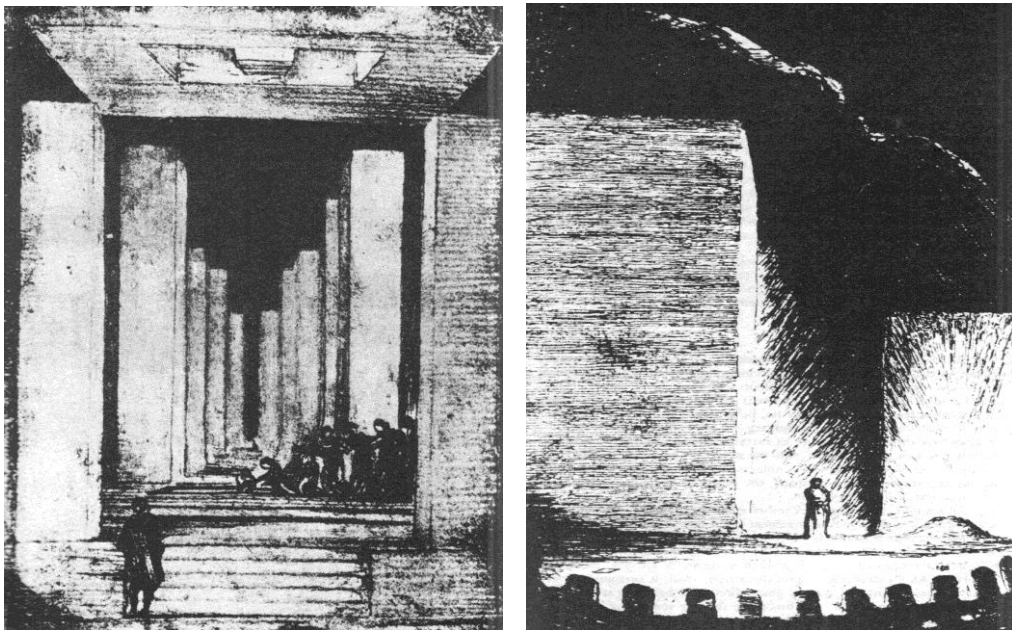
(L-R) Figure 36: Image from *Scene* (1923), and Figure 37: sketch for *Hamlet* (1907, right)

The images above, from *Scene* (1923) form further examples of how Craig creates a sense of depth through lighting and scenographic positioning. In Figure 36, the

space is arranged so that focus of the space is the vanishing point at the rear. By contrast Figure 37, a 1907 sketch for *Hamlet*, illustrates why a mathematical sublime effect that tries to exploit the vertical plane is difficult to achieve in a finite theatre space. The large object to the left of the figure (which one might consider sublime in the dynamical sense) is composed intuitively and at once because I can use (as a unit of familiar measurement) the figure over which it looms (and perhaps the height of the proscenium), to make a reasonable estimation of its height. Thus, in this case, from the 'success' of my composition, I evade the *de-compositional* effect of the mathematical sublime.

It is interesting to wonder perhaps how much of Craig's design for *Dido & Æneas* was borne out of necessity rather than artistic vision. The Purcell Society, with whom Craig produced the work, was forced into using the Hampstead Conservatoire owing to a lack of finances. The main concert hall, which was an astounding forty-four feet wide, with a lowered proscenium constructed by Craig to accommodate the lighting rig, and an 'exceedingly shallow' (Innes, 1998: 38) stage space , produced an effect that was 'strikingly panoramic' (ibid). The simple fact that the performance space was both wider and shorter than conventional theatres by some distance would have played some part in rendering the sublime effects created with the gauze and lights – so much so that Craig would later lower 'existing prosceniums by as much as twelve feet' (ibid). These 'letterbox' style dimensions demanded a way of viewing that perpetuated the 'mathematical' problems that Craig's overall scenic arrangement initiated: the width of the space, like a panorama, asks the spectator to compose the image, in its entirety, in a

236

single intuition. The sheer size of the image, however, problematises this composition. The spectator finds themselves shifting their gaze in broad horizontal strokes to follow the action, but as they do so they are attempting, through that squinted, subtle, back and forth motion, to negotiate planes of gauze and light which create a sense of depth so vast, across a space so wide, that composing the action in relationship to the scenic arrangement as a whole – in a single intuition – becomes impossible. Here again, from the failure of artistic *composition*, aesthetic *decomposition* occurs. The Hampstead Conservatoire also housed a 'fixed series of steplike platforms built across one end to seat an orchestra' (ibid), and this initial disadvantage gave Craig the impetus to create 'rhythms and patterns more appropriate to the rendering of dreams than drama' (Styan, 1981: 11), much like Appia and Dalcroze's design for Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice* (1913) (Fig. 38).
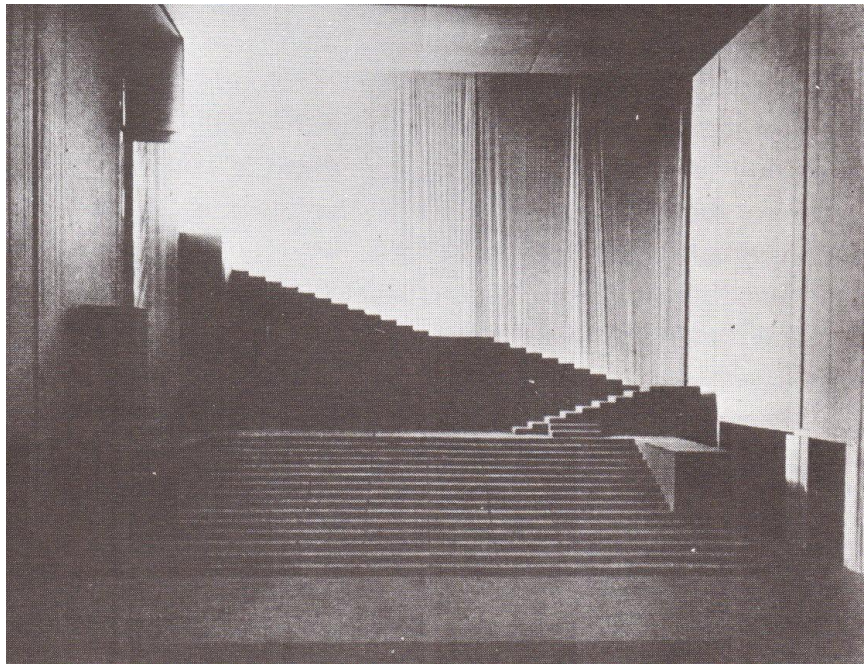

Figure 38: Appia and Dalcroze's design for Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice* (1913)

Like Appia, Craig had a holistic approach to design and direction that aimed towards a unity of visual and temporal experience, and as such, the experience of

time, and the movement of bodies through space and time, plays an important part in his sublime decomposition. Considering, as Innes does, the choreography of the witches in the thunderstorm of Act II, it becomes apparent how Craig applies movement to highlight the depth and disorientation that comes with his 'splitting' of the fields of action behind the gauze. Innes writes:

> As the witches appeared, writhing in the shadows sweeping across the floor, structural patterns of sound were created. First "ah," which was picked up person by person across the stage from left to right. Then one wail at the right and a sigh travelling around from the left, then "whine (one) – 2 guttural noises and wail. Whine." The line rose silently up, starting at one side, "arms slowly out and up." Singing "Harm's our delight," they advanced one pace and sank a little at each line, to gather in a half circle with the tallest in the center, until "on the end of the last note the hands sweep round from R to L near floor."

> (Innes, 1993: 49)

Not only does this demonstrate how important movement and temporality was to Craig's sublime evocation – insofar as the movement provides a sense of depth to the shallow working dimensions and a fluidity of gesture that makes tracing individual forms through the gauze difficult – it also returns us to questions of sound and sonority explored in Roinard's *Song of Songs*. The stress placed again on vowel sounds in "ah", "Ho! Ho! Ho!" and the non-verbal 'whine' and 'wail' noises present a sense of the sublime in dynamical terms. To understand this, one must be able to imagine the experience of these sounds in relationship to the mathematical sublime evoked through Craig's visual devices. Having noted already how Craig 'splits' the performance space into 'fields', two things are apparent: first, that my ability to compose a relationship between these fields and

238

the final horizon is under strain, and second, that my visual acuity is impaired and blurred by the way in which Craig organises his lighting. Taking into account what Innes tells us, that the witches' sounds travel between them, 'picked up person by person' (ibid), they attain a disembodied quality – their cries emanate not from an individual but from a collective body – and this disembodiment – the gap in my knowledge between sound and source – illicits a kind of forceful terror. Being unable to locate the precise source of the sound as it moves across the space, the spectators' aural *composition* fails, and thus Craig achieves a *decomposition* of sound as well as of the image. The witches here, represented through sound as a formless mass, give a clear example through performance of Kant's proposals for the dynamical sublime in nature found in § 28, *On Nature as Might*. In this section, Kant tells us that 'if we are to judge something as sublime dynamically, we must present it as arousing fear [...] and it is an object of fear if we find that our ability [to resist it] is no match for it' (Kant, 1987: § 28 [119/260]. So first I must be specific about why the witches chanting and wailing is fearful. To do so, I turn again to Kant in § 28 where he states that I can:

> Consider an object *fearful* without being afraid *of it*, namely, if we judge it in such a way that we merely *think* of the case where we might possibly want to put up resistance against it, and that any resistance would be utterly futile. Thus a virtuous person fears God without being afraid of him. For he does not think of wanting to resist God and his commandments as a possibility that should worry *him*. But for every such case, which he thinks of as not impossible intrinsically, he recognizes God as fearful.

> (Kant, 1987: § 28 [119-20/260-1])

Such is the case with the witches. I am not afraid of them insofar as I fear their

tearing through the scrim and inflicting their wickedness upon me, but insofar as their presence is often manifest through natural force itself – thunder, lashing rain – or evil thought and deed. Indeed, this is analogous to the 'real' and 'ideal' objects of Shaftesbury: the witches in-and-of-themselves are *not* sublime, but rather it is their abstract manifestation – the storm and rain, the cries and wails that have no discernable source – that produces a *decomposition*, and thus fear, that demonstrates them as part of Craig's larger sublime architecture. Analysing speech and the sonorous qualities of the voice in this way also requires due consideration of the principles of the Longinian sublime, and one can use *Dido & Æneas* to illuminate Longinus' theories in two ways. Through the medium of performance itself (and I speak not only of *Dido & Æneas* but of performance in general), one can understand more clearly how the sublime in speech is 'formally unteachable'. That one might experience the sublime in the vocal performance of the witches belongs as much to the framework within which it performed as it does to the sonorous qualities that I have already explored. So *necessary* is this relationship that I would argue that the 'thunderbolt' moment in sublime speech is the point at which this relationship is forged. Before explicating this in greater detail, consider the following from Shaw:

> Against the standard course of rhetorical instruction, which proceeds methodically and with due care to the entire range of the work, the thunderbolt of sublimity can emerge from a single phrase. What strikes an audience with wonder (ekplexis) is more powerful than what merely persuades or pleases us. Unlike conventional public speech, therefore, the sublime is a discourse of domination; it seeks to ravish and intoxicate [...]

> (Shaw, 2006: 14)

240

Essentially, what Shaw proposes here is that the sublime 'thing' or 'moment' – perhaps, *das Moment* – descends into the speech, as opposed to being a product of it – that a single turn of phrase can, in-and-of-itself, be the stimulus for sublime experience. While perhaps in public speaking or conventional political rhetoric this may be so, I suggest that performance evokes the sublime in speech in slightly different ways.

Considering Purcell's score for *Dido and Æneas*, Dido's lamenting aria *When I am Laid in Earth* employs a ground bass – almost ostinato – falling second that emphasises the importance of sound in the evocation of the sublime[77]. In *Dido & Æneas* that ground bass, a full four bars below the rest of the music, rumbles and bellows in the fires below Dido's voice. This has an effect not just on the *way* I hear the music – the lamenting, despairing tone – but also on *how* I hear it. The ground bass is *so much* lower, that it might be possible to actually feel the vibrations of the music rumbling and churning over me, like an avalanche on a mountainside, or a great wave crashing against rocks. Like the aroma of the food in *The Last Supper*, the heat of the candles in *La Revolte*, or the 'swirling' of the head in *Ubu Roi*, the *a posteriori* rumbling, the *physical sensation* (and thus *present experience*), plays a crucial role in the evocation of sublime experience.

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[77] A good example of a two note ostinato is John Williams' theme music to the 1975 film *Jaws*. In Williams' piece, the repetitive notes (played at different tempos) mimic the movement of the shark in the water, hunting its prey.

Ten years after his work on *Dido...*, Craig again created his sublime-space in his
work on *Hamlet*, but this time abandoning the gauze scrim in favour of screens
which, as noted, are the mainstay of his notion of *scene*. The following images are
illustrations from his 1923 book *Scene*, photographs from the 1910-11 production
of *Hamlet* itself, and models Craig made for the planning and design of the
Moscow production, showing also some of the possibilities for the play of light
and depth that these screens provide. Let us consider these now, and then look at
how Craig manages to turn away from seemingly endless possibilities of gauze
scrim, and crystallise his evocation of the sublime in a single stroke.

Figure 39: Bas-relief figures with screens
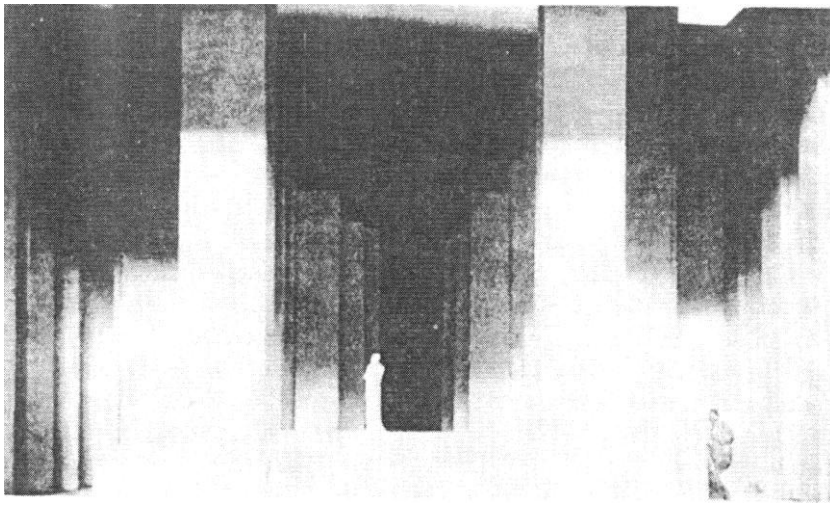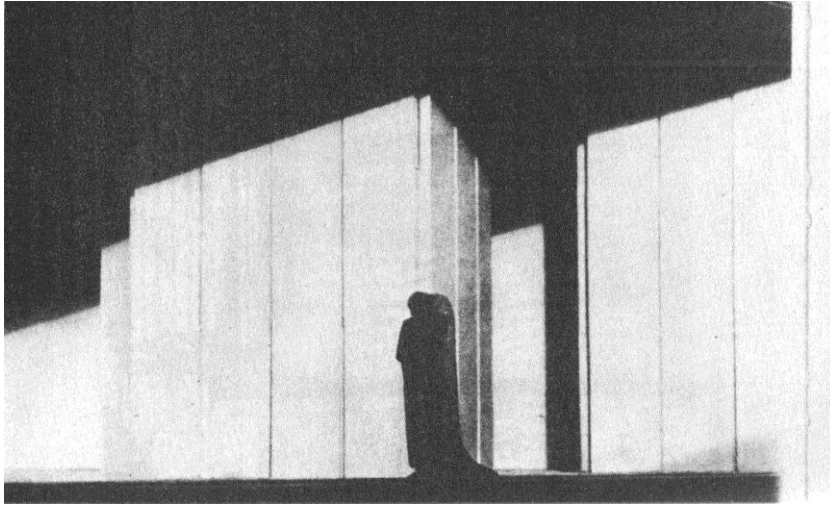
Figure 40 (above, top): Bas-relief figure w/screens and Figure 41 (bottom): Model for *Hamlet*

Figure 42 (below): Final scene from *Hamlet* as presented - Moscow 1910
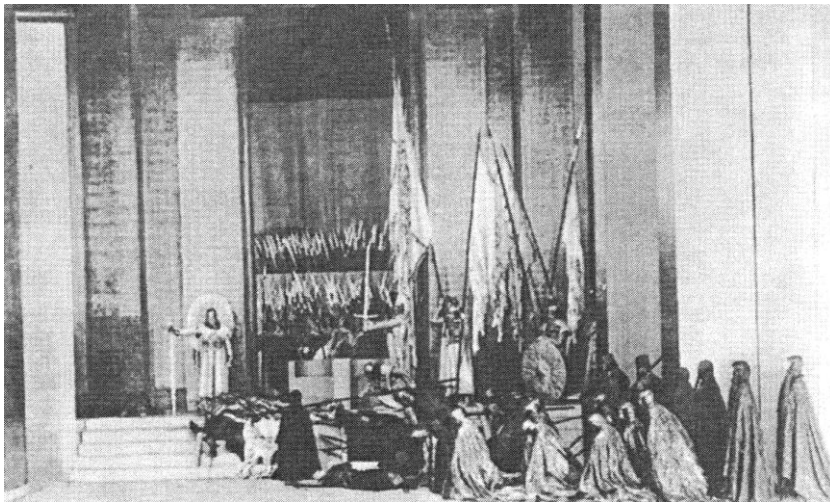
From the final two images of the series above, of which the former (Fig. 41) is a model Craig made in planning for the final scene of *Hamlet* and the latter (Fig. 42) a photograph of final scene as presented in Moscow, it is possible to create a sense of how Craig evoked that same sublime feeling without the aid of gauze. In both the model and the realised staging, Craig uses the placing of the screens up and down the performance space to create the initial depth found in the 'splitting' technique in *Dido...*. In this construction, however, the use of internal and overhead lighting simplifies the illusion of depth in such a way that instead of producing a vast horizon (the distance to which we cannot measure), Craig forms the screens to suggest a vanishing point way off in the distance. What Craig presents, though, is not a vague, 'shadowy' or 'murky' depth, but distances so great it is suggestive of the absence of light itself. To compensate for the greater clarity restored to the spectator by the removal of the gauze, Craig's screens make further hindrances to the aesthetic composition of the performance.[78]

As Craig later stated in *Scene*, the 'anywhere, anywhen' [sic] nature of the screens

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[78] Something I find particularly interesting about Craig's transition to linear perspective depth as a means of evoking the sublime is that one feels he missed the opportunity to explore the idea of fullness or vastness possible in the Byzantine technique of reverse perspective. This effect, often referred to as Byzantine or Russian Orthodox perspective can be most commonly found in the painting of religious icons in the Byzantine period (circa. 650B.C-1350A.D), and is, in its simplest form, the opposite of the linear perspective insofar as the vanishing points exist in a conal space in front of the painting. Thus, the lines of perspective meet in the area immediately in front of the painting where a spectator would stand and view the work, the effect of this being that the spectator is being 'viewed' by the painting, and not the other way around.

With regard to this as a device of religious art, rather than looking upon god or the divine, the omnipresence of divinity actually looks at, and by technique, overwhelms the spectator with its apparent emergence from the pictorial frame. We might argue that in this way, these two methods of perspective each offer a sense of the sublime, where in linear perspective we find the depth and limitlessness associated with the mathematical, and in the reverse perspective of Byzantine iconography we find the immediate, overwhelming power of the dynamical.

removes some of the temporal and geographical markers laid out in the backdrops that *Dido...* provided. The scene at the harbour in *Dido...*, which I have already examined, is a good example of this. The blue/grey back-cloths, alongside the impression he creates of the masts of large ships in the distance, provides a clear sense of where the action is taking place, outside of any understanding of the dialogue. In *Hamlet,* Craig removes this, and the screens are woven more delicately into the fabric of the performance itself. This comes in part from the design of the screens themselves, as it is Craig's intention that the screens can be moved within the action of the work, eliminating the need for set changes and maintaining a sense of rhythmic continuity for the work. A side effect of this, if one were to imagine it in *Hamlet* (although it never happened in this production as Stanislavski insisted on closed scene changes), is that the causal relationship between *location* and *necessary action* is blurred, that is: does the action develop in response to the transformation of the screen or *vice versa*? In Craig's view, I am certain, he would suggest that they both (action and screen) are responding to the larger, architectural 'pulse' of the work that the director imposes. Nevertheless, the spectators' sense of place and/or placeless-*ness* is exacerbated by this process, and the sense of occupying a sublime space – infinite and minuscule, manoeuvrable and insurmountable, is heightened.

I believe also that the transition Craig makes from gauze to screen (as the foundation for a particular design philosophy and division of space) makes some statement about his understanding of, or at least sensitivity to, the 'experience' of the theatrical event. Craig's removal of the symbolist-style gauze indicates a

245

desire to express the 'liveness' of performance, a desire to ensure that we *know that we are here* – that *something is happening now*, whereas *Pelléas et Mélisande*, for example, relied on an agreement that what was 'behind there' (the gauze) was not of our 'world' or 'time'. That Craig's sublime succeeds in evoking that feeling of being on the brink of overwhelming ruin is in no small way contributed to by the overall unity that his methodology creates within his mise-en-scène. As Innes writes (in summary of the reviews of *Dido & Æneas*):

> Craig's mise-en-scène harmonized with the dramatic emotion of the opera, creating a remarkable unity of figures, scene, music, and mood through "simplicity both in colour and form." "For the first time perhaps, those present saw operatic singers using gestures of real dramatic significance."

(Innes, 1998: 44)

If Craig's performers play a crucial part in maintaining the unity of his sublime effects, as the above quotation, and my analysis of the witches would suggest, what questions does this pose concerning the performer and the performing body in respect to an evocation of the sublime? Indeed, Craig may have had similar questions himself, as his studies into the notion of the Übermarionette indicate. The Übermarionette, writes Craig, is characterised by 'a new form of acting, consisting for the main part of symbolical gesture. Today they '*impersonate* [...] *tomorrow they must represent*' (Innes, 1998: 124). His maxim that 'the highest art is that which conceals the craft and forgets the craftsman' (ibid: 124), as Innes remarks, is 'unexceptional' (ibid). However, as Innes continues, 'for the stage to be judged by the same criteria as sculpture or music demands a level of abstraction that rules out what is normally thought of as "dramatic"' (ibid). What

246

Craig ultimately wanted from his actors – 'an emotional unity in which all the gestures [...] would form a clear and distinct intellectual image' (ibid), and what the acting profession could offer – 'an impossible state of perfection' (ibid) – were very much at odds. With no system of training capable of achieving his goals, the only resolution to this problem, as Craig saw it, was to 'replace the human being on stage with inanimate figures or puppets' (ibid).

How does this relate though to an embodiment of the sublime? In short, it is possible to argue that of all the places one is likely to encounter the mathematical sublime (in art or otherwise), we should (hypothetically) never be able to experience that feeling through an encounter with the human form[79]. While Craig never articulated this desire for a sublime gesture or body *per se*, his interest and respect for Nō theatre, where the body approaches 'the stately and splendid ceremonies of the past' (Craig, 1983: 74), tells us something about a desire for the body to be able to go beyond itself. To make use of the body as a microcosm, or machine, so that in the moment of performance the individuality (and thus measurability) of parts begin to blur could be as close as one can get to the sublime body, without making a material alteration to the human figure.

So is the sublime body possible then? Well, yes and no. As I have demonstrated in the experience of theatre and performance thus far, sublime experience and/or

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[79] Indeed, it is the human form that one might argue would most vehemently oppose sublime interpretation. If we think of some of the earliest units of measurement, Hands, Cubits etc, we can argue that in terms of measurement as an action in and of itself prior to decimalisation, every system draws either on parts of the body or other familiar units. In so doing, distance, proportion, height and scale becomes known to us through a relationship to the body (as a whole or otherwise).

effect often arrives from those areas in which the more formal philosophical constitutions of the sublime argue it should not. I would like to propose a similar experience in relation to the human body from the principles of Craig's Übermarionette, and will illuminate my argument by making a comparison between the human form as expressed in Oskar Schlemmer's Bauhaus theatre and in the actor training system of Vsevolod Meyerhold.

One might argue that the Übermarionette, in practice, is best exemplified through Meyerhold's Biomechanical *etudes*. The etudes, sixteen in total, were designed by Meyerhold to 'create a limited and precise system of exercises that contained all the fundamental expressive situations that an actor would encounter on the stage' (Gordon, 1995: 86). The etudes provided the actor with an economic repertoire of movement that placed communicability as a priority. An example of a simple etude, taken from Mel Gordon's *Meyerhold's Biomechanics* (1995) can be seen in footnote 80 (below)[80].

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[80] **11 Carrying the Sack**

> (a) From a distance, two actors execute a *dactyl*.
> (b) The first actor, holding an imaginary dagger, pursues his partner.
> (c) Switching his direction, the partner still cannot escape the first actor, who stabs him in the back.
> (d) The partner slowly falls to the floor.
> (e) The first actor bends down to his knees and very slowly lifts his partner's rigid body.
> (f) Then, suddenly, he throws the body over his shoulder.
> (g) The first actor begins to run wildly in a wide circle.
> (h) He stops and slowly lowers the body.

> **Objectives**
> Development of reflex excitability. Exploration of psycho/physical emotional states.

> **Comment**
> *Etude* seems closely to resemble a standard clowning action.

In breaking down the etude into steps (a) – (h), 'Meyerhold was able to apply both Taylorist principles of motion economy and James' emotion theory to the actor, causing him automatically to experience an entire gamut of emotions owing to a constantly changing arrangement of his musculature' (Gordon, 1995: 91). This shows clearly the connection between these Meyerhold's ideas and those of Craig's 'super-puppet'; that the actor, in learning all of the etudes could achieve the 'emotional unity' that Craig desired for his theatre. But Meyerhold's training does not exactly mirror the technical processes of Craig. Where Craig sought to reveal a whole greater and beyond the sum of the parts it concealed, Meyerhold's 'sum', was that we could recognise the 'parts' individually in terms of the emotive state they expressed. Also, being behaviourist in orientation, the emotive as such is always a psychological reaction. Thus, Meyerhold concealed nothing, and the dissonance between execution and experience is absent. In Schlemmer's work however, we see a synthesis of these two modes of presentation that go some way towards a physical or gestural sublime. In *Triadisches Ballett* (*Triadic Ballet*) (1922) Schlemmer, true to Bauhaus design principles concerning geometry and ergonomics, produced a dance work which explored the transformation of the human body via costume. The function of costume for Schlemmer then was based upon one simple tenet: it emphasises the identity of the body, or it changes it. Figures 43-45 show the three costumes used by Schlemmer in *Triadisches...*

(Gordon, 1995: 105)

249
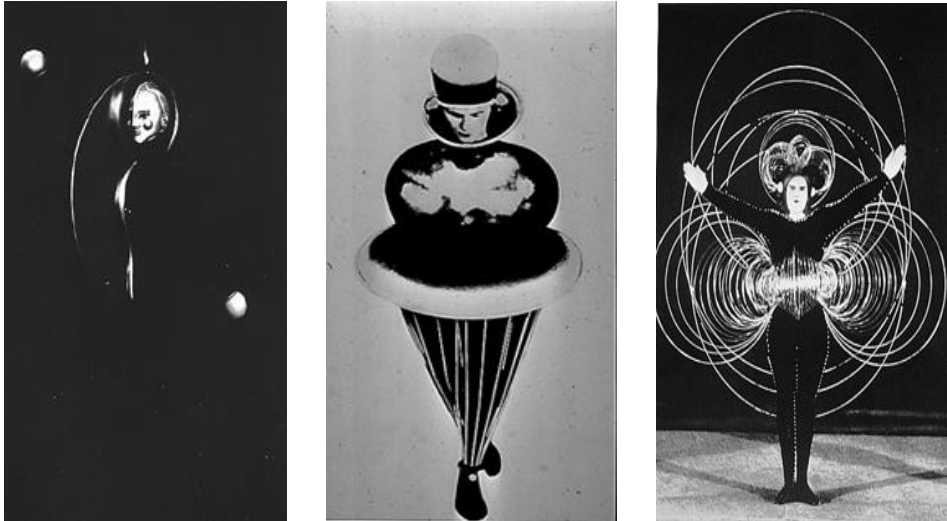
(L-R) Figures 43-45: The *Disk*, the *Golden Sphere*, and the *Wire Frame*

Designing costume from the existing proportions and scale of the human form allowed Schlemmer to produce moving bodies in space which, while at once presenting a creative representation of the body, distorts it in such a way that while we can recognise the play, we cannot necessarily 'see' the body in its familial terms. The clearest example of this is in the 1927 piece *Slat Dance* (Fig. 46).
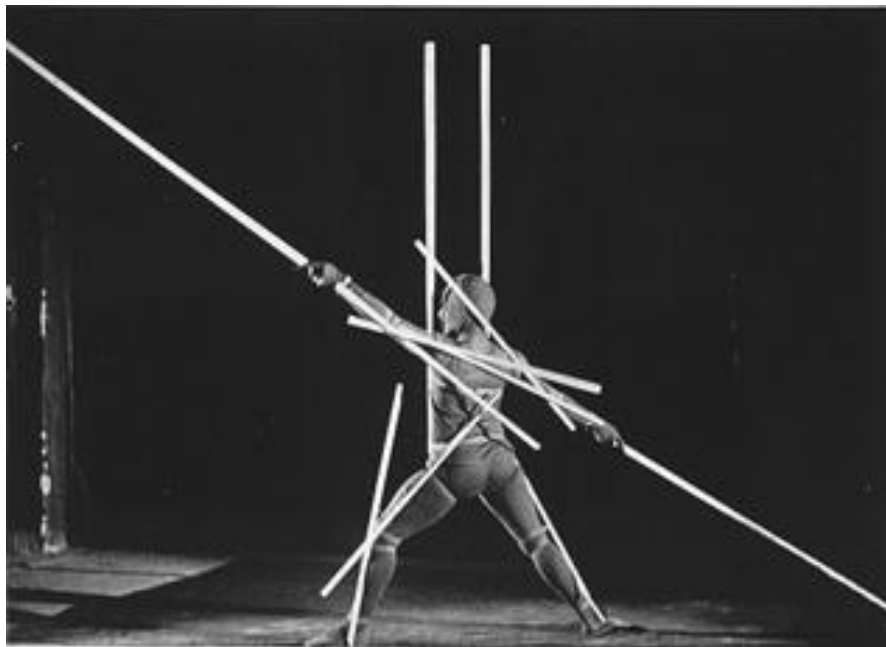

Figure 46: Figure from *Slat Dance* (1927)

The *Slat Dance* encapsulates the quandary concerning the sublime and the body. In *Slat Dance*, the combination of the poles as an abstract representation of the human form and the dull colours of the tight fitting costume provide the antithesis to Craig's method. In both *Dido & Æneas* and *Hamlet*, the very reason I can experience the sublime is that the means through which it is constructed are hidden. In *Slat Dance*, however, the means through which the figure is abstracted is that which makes witnessing it sublime. Like the 'Disk', 'Golden Sphere' and 'Wire Frame' designs for *Triadisches Ballett*, the figure in *Slat Dance* is represented through abstract geometrical lines and curves, and as such, our synthesising of the parts to the whole (or, how we begin to differentiate between what does and does not 'belong' to this form) is put under duress. A toggling of vision is produced whereby I focus my attention to the movement of the frame, and then look back to the dancer to 'understand' his or her direction and position in the space. Likewise, as I watch the dancer in the frame, I become aware that the dancer's movement is not the dance itself, rather, a necessary movement to create the 'dance' of the frame, and there is a *das Moment* created in the flitting of my eye between dancer and slat. The result, for Schlemmer's audience, is a failure of intuitive composition, and the decomposition of sublime experience occurs.

To use choreographic terminology, one can consider the sublime effect in *Slat Dance* in terms of Rudolf Laban's notion of the 'trace form'. The trace form, put simply, is the 'virtual' shape made in space by the dancer's movement[81]. The

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[81] To give an example: if I stand up, with my arms by my sides, and then raise one arm to shoulder height, such that it would be perpendicular to my standing body, the 'arc' created through space by my fingertips – the most extreme part of my body in this gesture – would be the 'trace form' of my

'toggling', or 'flitting of the eye' in the spectators 'tracing' of the figure in *Slat Dance*, is a discrepancy created by having two possible trace forms attached to a single body. The dancer has, if you will, two separate kinaesthetic spheres – one of the body, and one of the prosthesis. While both spheres are related, that is, I could predict the position of one from the position of the other, the scale of their possible trace forms are radically different[82]. This means that over a given period, the dancer dancing within the kind of prosthesis that *Slat Dance* provides is dancing at *two different velocities, through two different yet related spaces, at the same time*. The disorientation that the uncoupling of space and time in this way provides a sublime experience insofar as I am unable to compose both the dance and the frame in the same image. This spatial and indeed temporal rift *decomposes* the image, and the feeling of size greater than I can intuitively compose – contradictorily, in the shape of the human form – is evoked.

What has this section produced and what questions, or problems, has it raised for an analysis of the sublime in contemporary performance practice? The first and most crucial observation drawn so far is related to the proposition laid out at the very start of the section, that within theatre and performance there lies the possibility for an evocation of the sublime for which Kantian aesthetics cannot account. Exploring this through (primarily) the work of the first generation Symbolist movement and the second generation symbolist Edward Gordon Craig,

movement.

[82] To illustrate, if we return to the previous example of how we might understand trace form *per se*, let us now suppose that extending from my hand is a pole of one metre in length. As I raise my arm this time, the trace form of the pole will be making a much larger shape through space and must travel further than my fingertips to reach its destination. Yet because the two trace forms are related, the differing distances are travelled in the same amount of time.

I have explicated a sense of sublimity which highlights the need to engage with (rather than ignore) the processes and artifice of theatre as a site able to evoke a sense of the sublime. This is a notion of sublimity different from the natural or epiphanic encounters of Burke, Kant, and Schopenhauer *et al*. In the final chapter, I want to look at how the 'construction' of the sublime in contemporary work has been altered both by critical perspectives on performance practice and, in the case of my final case-study *Whisper* (2008), think about how technological advancements have altered the contemporary sense of sublimity and sublime experience.

CHAPTER SEVEN – PERFORMANCE AND THE CONTEMPORARY SUBLIME

RE-COMPOSITION

Moving into the final chapter of this second part, and indeed the final chapter of the thesis as a whole, it is my intention to bring together the philosophical and theatrical notions of the sublime considered thus far in order to approach an analysis of the sublime in contemporary performance practices. In order that I might give an account that considers contemporary performance as a paradigm in and of itself, and one working very much within a tradition of the avant-garde, I propose the following. My first engagement in this section will be with Station House Opera's 1989 and 1997 performances of *The Bastille Dances* and *The Salisbury Proverbs* (part of the *Breeze Block* series of works). Following this, I will examine the site specific and land art practices of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, with supporting material from other practitioners and likeminded research in order that I might address in detail ideas of the dynamical sublime and the role of nature in the contemporary sublime encounter. Finally, I shall conclude the chapter by conducting an analysis of Proto-type Theater's *Whisper* (2007). As a work in which the technical and experiential ideas of Edward Gordon Craig are recast through the one-hundred years of theoretical and industrial development that separates them, I shall consider the emergence of what Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe calls the technological, or 'techno' sublime (Gilbert-Rolfe, 1999).

At the very beginning of Chapter Five, I recalled my experience of Station House Opera's *The Salisbury Proverbs*, and the profound impact it had on my perceptions of theatre and performance. Here then, I will look closely at *The*

Bastille Dances and *The Salisbury Proverbs* and demonstrate how the spectators'
experience of these works can be articulated in terms of the Kantian sublime.
Before continuing, however, an introduction to the specifics of these works will be
beneficial. As such, consider the following images from *The Salisbury Proverbs*
(which I use here as indicative of the formal and visual aspects of the *Breeze
Block* series in general).
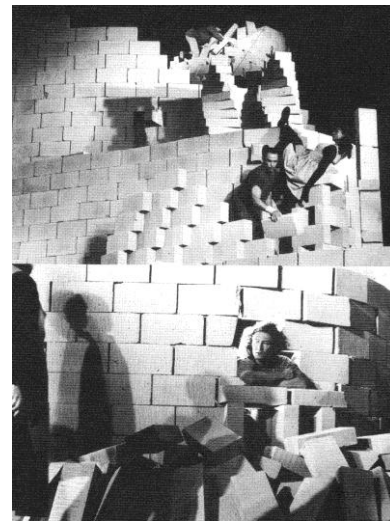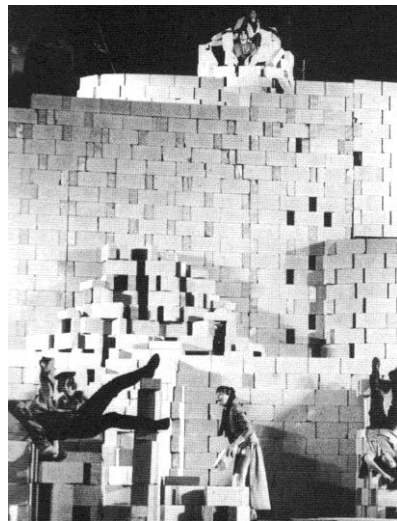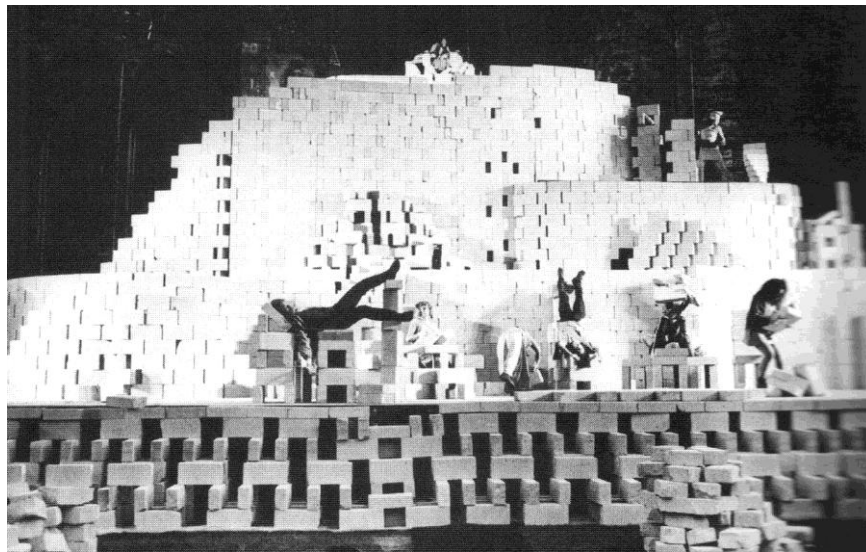
Figure 47 (top), and Figures 48-49 (bottom, L-R): *The Breeze Block Series*
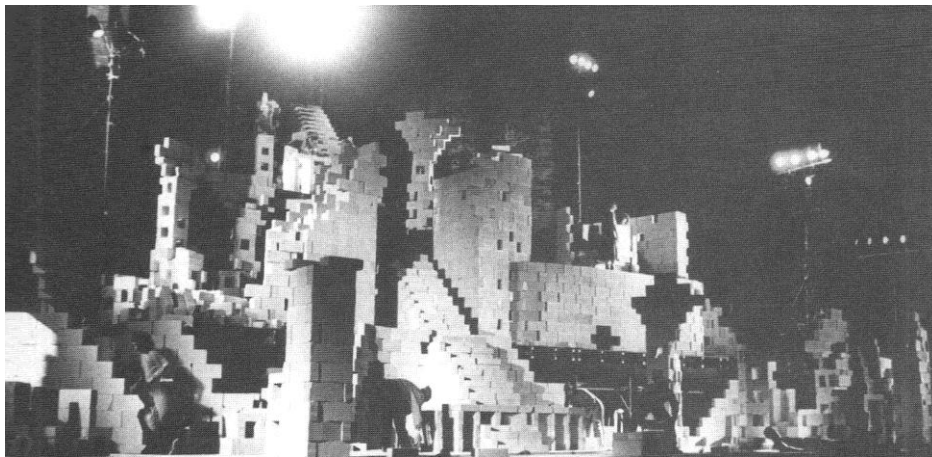
Figure 50 (top), and Figure 51, (bottom): *The Breeze Block Series*

As with my analysis of *Dido & Æneas*, and indeed any analysis in relation to the

sublime, the concept of perspective is crucial to the ways in which one can gain a

sense of the experience of a work for the spectator. With this in mind, look first at

Figure 52, in which it is possible to see the entire width of *The Salisbury Proverbs*

structure and its spatial relationship to the Cathedral that looms behind it. This

image shows how the performance looks in the first few hours. The dense mass of

bricks in the centre of the playing space, which will become a kind of axis from

which all other construction will emerge is almost complete, and on the turf in

front of the construction space we can also observe piles of bricks yet to be used.

256

It must be noted that the blocks are not endless in supply: once they are laid, something must be taken down in order that something else might be built, and if we compare Figures 47 and 50, we can see that the central wall in Figure 47 has been partially dismantled in 50, providing the materials for the staircase below.

The task of building is not the only job of the performers however. Looking at Figure 47, one can see how the bodies in centre stage move within, and physically explore the environment they create. Indeed, it might be useful to think of the performance in such a way that the 'act' of building can be considered as the pulse, or base-rhythm, of the work, which is punctured or highlighted by smaller interventions, discoveries and/or collaborations with other builders/bodies. This can be in Figure 50 where the performers help each other to construct, in this case by tossing blocks to one another, and also in Figure 49 where a male figure is being 'discovered' through the process of re-cycling the blocks: as they are moved to assist another structural shape, a room is found, and in the room, a man. That this kind of revealing is possible at all can be attributed in part to the way in which the performance space has been designed (Fig. 53).
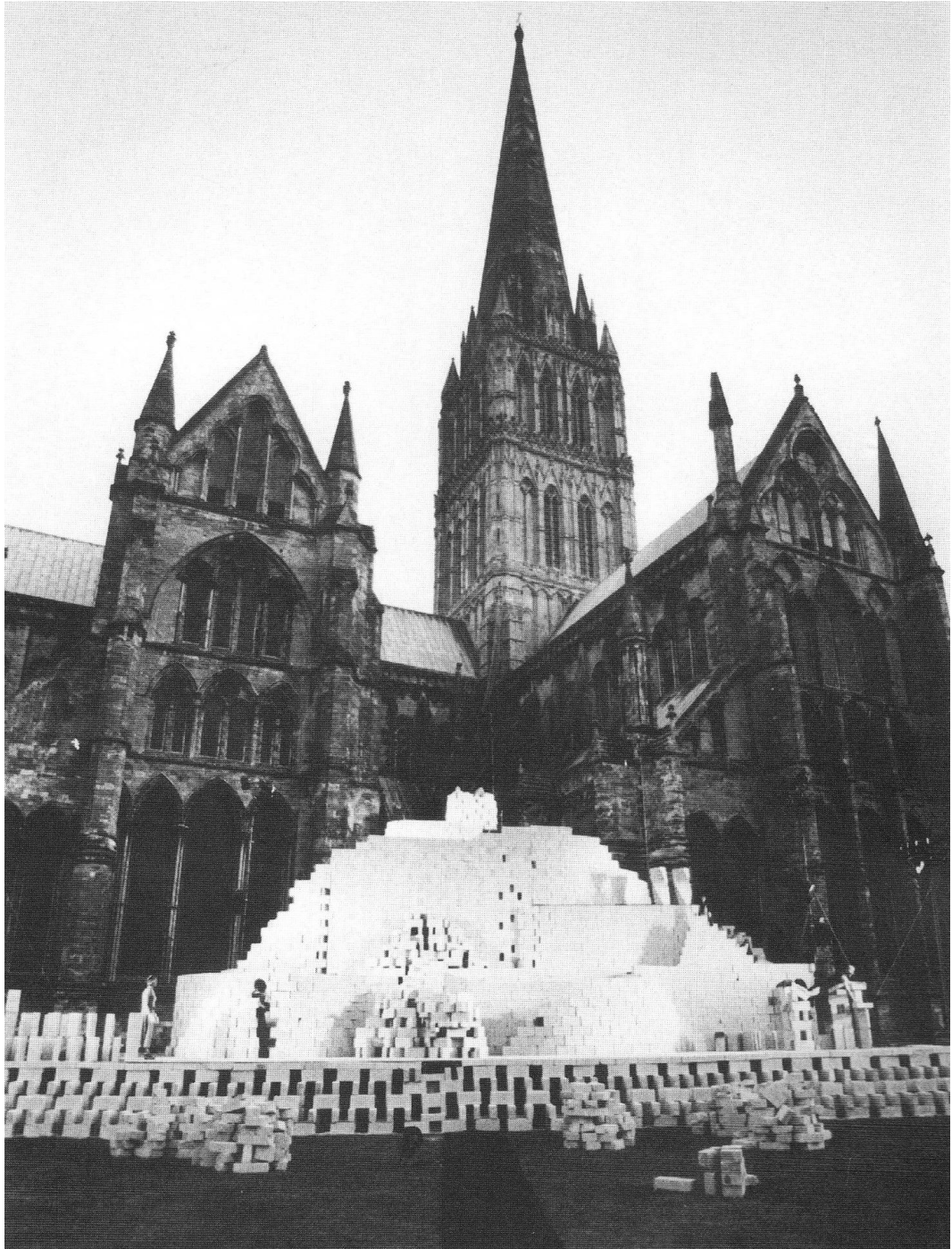
Figure 52: Station House Opera's *The Salisbury Proverbs* (1997)
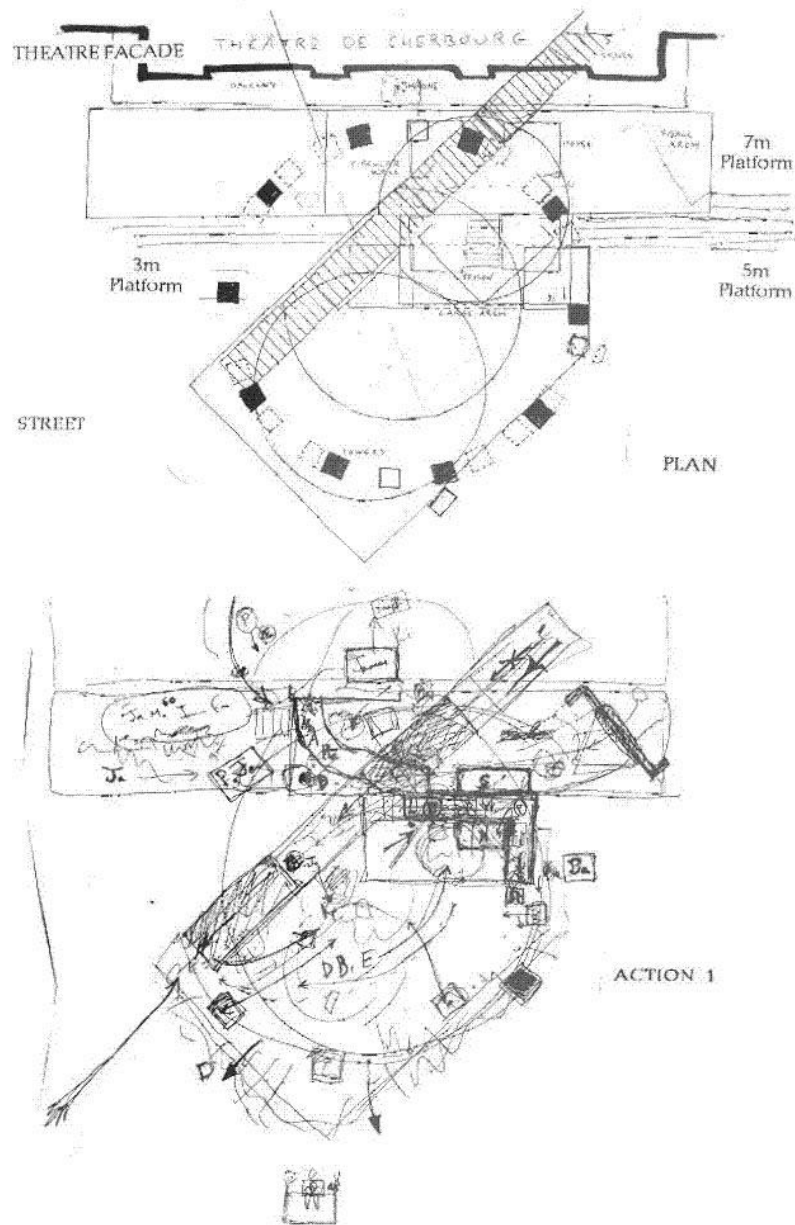
Figure 53: *The Bastille Dances* **(1989) – rehearsal sketches and plan**

What this overhead view shows us is that the spectator sees the performance space such that the structure is angled at 45 degrees against its base platform, as opposed to running parallel or perpendicular to it. In practice, this means that when the blocks begin to shift and move to other areas and structures, the view 'inside', as it were, functions much like a cross-section which in turn allows the structure a

259

greater structural stability as it attempts to reveal its innards.

Nick Kaye, in *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (2000) writes the following of the *The Salisbury Proverbs* in particular, which speaks well of the *Breeze Block* works in general:

> Everything strives for a single image of harmony, yet this focus is split; aside from the local irregularities – victims in towers, colliding walls, corridors and furniture, a prison where the pulpit should be – there is more basic instability, a discordance in the geometry, two close but clashing axes, with an insidious, whispering interchange of forms.

(Kaye, 2000: 180)

The question that remains, then, is how these pieces relate to (and deviate from) the sublime interventions occurring in Craig and other works from Chapter Six. The first point I think it is necessary to make, as it relates once again to the perspective of the spectator, is where the performance itself takes place. As I demonstrated in the analysis of *Dido & Æneas*, the success of Craig's exploitation of depth to invite mathematically sublime ideas in the spectator is counterbalanced by the restrictions placed on the performance by the auditorium itself. In the previous chapter, I indicated that the possibility for experiences of the dynamical sublime via height was impossible in *Dido & Æneas* because the spectators could use the ceiling or proscenium as a tool for intuiting the size of objects on the stage, but it becomes apparent that this restriction is not present in the *Breeze Block* works. In the case of the *Breeze Block* works, then, there exists the potential for a sublime experience which is evoked from the exploitation of height. To think about this further, I want to consider the blocks themselves, and they ways in

260

which they support and disrupt the performance.

'Having to shifts the block one by one', Kaye tells us, 'limited movement and kept horizons earth-bound. They were strong and large enough to make architectonic, load bearing structures, yet light enough to hold in one hand' (Kaye, 2000: 170). Each individual block has standardised dimensions, a consistency in weight, and uniformity in appearance; each block is a child of the 'mother-block', the mould – they are endless clones. This makes them measurable, understandable; we *use* them precisely *because* of these properties; commercially and domestically, in structures and designs that demand the highest level of mathematical and industrial precision, they are man-made, man-designed, and everywhere: in and of themselves, they are *not* sublime. Yet in spite of their homogeneity, their nondescript and unexceptional appearance holds the key to their evocation of the sublime when they converge *en masse* in the performances. Theirs is a 'sublime made out of specificity and hardness (and mathematics)' (Gilbert-Rolfe, 1999: 44).

> Everything follows from the simplicity and mobility of the blocks. Gesture, imprisonment, release, support, removal of support, enclosure, shelter, concealment, exposure, entombment, resurrection, bringing together, splitting apart, are simple functions of performers moving blocks in relation to each other.
>
> (Kaye, 2000: 170)

The mathematical sublime, to address that first, is experienced first and foremost through the experience of the blocks in relation to time and the piece's temporal structure. Over the fifteen hours (in the case of *The Bastille Dances*), the blocks

are placed, replaced, shifted and rearranged so that they propose 'a sculpturally defined world, and in the interplay between performers, a substitute for speech' (Kaye, 2000: 170). The ways in which images and structures appear and disappear, rise and fall, is counter-purposive to our intuitive (aesthetic) faculties, but why? Implicit in Kant's observance of the failings of intuitive composition and apprehension is the *lack of time*. The feeling of overwhelming power, size, and force of sublime experience is immediate; it is in that rapidity that I am overcome. But in the *Breeze Block* works, the slow process of building by hand provides the spectator with an abundance, indeed an *excess*, of time, so much so that the object I attempt to intuit is never fully present. Moving at a slow, yet rhythmic tempo dictated by the physical task of moving blocks, the piece is never 'at rest'; images and structures never fully coalesce. In an interview with Nick Kaye in *Art Into Theatre* (1996), Station House Opera director Julian Maynard-Smith concedes that 'some of the images are very strong, but in performance you start seeing other things – you start worrying about other things – things which operate in time' (Kaye, 1996: 207). Indeed, in the same interview, Kaye argues for a sense of watching the 'building arise and disappear [...which] seems quite distinct from actually building a building – to use the materials for what they are but to allow the image of a building to alight upon them' (Kaye, 1996: 195).

To understand this sharp contrast, one can compare the experience of the *Breeze Block* works with Craig's 'field splitting' technique in *Dido & Æneas*. The uneasiness in Craig's piece is the result of a disharmony between what I see, and where I perceive what I see to be. Thinking back to the analysis of the witches, for

example, their movements within the field of light in which they perform present an evocation of the sublime as a result of the way in which the overall design of space and light communicates that movement to the spectator. Also, and in contrast to the *Breeze Block* works, that larger design structure is in place, in its entirety, from the outset of the piece, whereas in the *Breeze Block* works the performance environments are literally built in 'real-time'. The real-time of this labour-intensive task is thus extremely slow, and it is from the attempt to intuit the form and shape of the images and structures over an extended period that Kaye's sense of 'alighting' occurs. Thus, the heightened awareness of the temporal plane – the drawn-out process of 'architectural evolution' – disturbs our demand for a clear and distinct architectonic from which we can make (aesthetic, *compositional*) sense of the structure.

This demandingly slow tempo sets a heavy, metronomic rhythm to the piece, with little in the way of the peaks and troughs to be found in the free/dependent 'rhythms of beauty'. It also asks questions of *das Moment*, specifically: does it manifest here? The answer is that yes, it does, but unlike the very physical *Momente* (n.) seen so far, the 'push' of the *Breeze Block* works is almost entirely mental.

To explain how a *Moment* (n.) evoking experiences of the sublime exist in these works, I want to draw the reader's attention back to figures 50 and 51. Both figures contain a half-constructed staircase, which leads to empty plateaus and strives towards the highest point of the structure. In experience, as I see the blocks

being placed one by one to form the staircase, it is possible to intuit and compose them individually. I sense their weight as the performers pick them up and transport them from place to place, or toss them to each other, and I note their position as they are set down. More blocks arrive, and more are placed, so that I begin to see a staircase forming. By now there are three or four stairs, I 'think I know' what will happen next: blocks will continue to be laid until the stairs provide access to a previously inaccessible area of the structure. But this process is a lengthy one, and structures are not built one at a time. As such, I am inclined to 'predict' where this new path will lead, and I invent a final image – a resting point – mentally, trying to assert steadfast reason over the unruly present; it is where I 'start worrying about […] things that operate in time' (Kaye, 1996: 207). This process of predicting the outcome of a build, or the coalescence of an image, can be explained with clarity using the Gestalt[83] principle of *Prägnanz* and its related principle of Amodal Perception.

In Gestalt theory, this experience can be thought of as a combination of two concepts: the (*Prägnanz*) law of *closure*: that the mind experiences elements it does not perceive through sensation, and *continuity*: that the mind continues and extends visual, auditory, and kinetic patterns. The *Prägnanz* laws, simply speaking, propose that our minds will, wherever possible, try to direct our experiences in ways that are orderly, simple, or symmetrical. But the 'whispering

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[83] Gestalt: a 'German word for a configuration, pattern or organized whole with qualities different from those of its components separately considered' (Koffka, 1999: 365). Not to be confused with the Gestalt *Therapy* of Conrad and Jaspers, Gestalt Psychology is a particular school of psychological thought in which the 'key argument [is] that the nature of the parts is determined by, and secondary to, the whole' (Koffka, 1999: 365). Gestalt theory can be successfully applied to a wide range of phenomena in perception, social psychology and aesthetics.

interchange of forms' (Kaye, 2000: 180), that is, the performance area never being in a dormant structural state, problematises that act.

In the *Breeze Block* works, then, the notion of *re-composition* enters into the *composition* versus *decomposition* dialectic. In *Dido...*, my attempt to intuitively compose the scenic mise-en-scene fails and thus ultimately my perception of it decomposes. But in the *Breeze Block* works, the scenic mise-en-scene is never at rest, it is constantly evolving. The process of *composition*, which fails and becomes one of *decomposition*, is then extended to include an act *re-composition*, in which a new image is built, only for me to try – and fail – to visualise the outcome all over again.

An example of this can be seen when performers are 'revealed' from within the structure. On a section of *The Salisbury Proverbs* Kaye writes:

> Stuck in a wall for ages, she grinds a piece of broken block into a ball. It is thrown away. Below her a man is revealed also in a wall. In front of him, a singing woman is put into a tower. From under a pile of rubble used for building emerges a singing man.

> (Kaye, 2000: 177)

The concealment of these figures within the bowels of the structure, and thus the potential for them to emerge unexpectedly, illustrates how the piece demands its audience to form a Gestalt of the shifting structure. As figures are revealed and/or uncovered – *dis*covered – within the structure, I perceive a sense of depth beyond the frontal façade (something that is set in motion by the angled position of the

structure indicated in Figure 53). This experience, which is related to the concept

of *Reification*[84] in Gestalt systems, is called *amodal perception*, and describes the

full perception of an object or structure when it is only partially perceived in

sensation. Much like the *Prägnanz* concepts of *closure* and *continuity*, this

perceptive response is also disrupted in the *Breeze Block* works. When a wall is

taken down (Fig. 49), what was previously hidden 'inside' the building is now at

the forefront. As this process of *composition* and *decomposition* continues, I

realise that there is the potential for a vastness beyond the finitude of the

performance area: an infinite *re-composition* of the structure. As such, my amodal

perceptions of the structure never fully satisfy my intuitive or compositional

needs, *there is always room for more*, and this tension – the mental desire to

apprehend a complete volumetric structure – complements and compounds the

disruptions of *closure* and *continuity* already experienced. Evoking a sense of

depth in a fashion similar to Craig's models and illustrations in *Scene* and

reminiscent of Appia and Dalcroze's design for *Orpheus and Eurydice*, there

emerges the feeling that one could walk into the structure and keep walking

indefinitely without ever reaching the Cathedral behind. Kaye echoes this feeling

of depth when he writes:

> A wall uncoils and traverses the floor, interleaving with
> spiral arches. It coils back again, turning the outside
> inside, inverting the space. A human vortex appears at its
> centre.

> (Kaye, 2000: 179)

As suggested earlier, the experience of the sublime in these works extends also to

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[84] *Reification* is a property of Gestalt systems whereby the experienced object or image contains
more spatial information than its components.

the dynamical. That 'presentiment of disaster' which Kosove proposed in the narrative cycle of *Pelléas et Mélisande* is a very real material threat to both the performers and spectators in the *Breeze Block* series. While, as Maynard-Smith attests, the structure was 'designed to allow for collapses', he states also that 'the Bastille outdoors was immensely tall – nine meters high or something. We were afraid of it blowing down' (Kaye, 1996: 204). Concluding his analysis of *The Salisbury Proverbs*, Kaye himself recognises the importance of potential for disaster: 'only when a block is dropped', he argues, 'is the weight understood. Only when a wall collapses is danger apparent' (Kaye, 2000: 179). Reminiscent of both a Burkian and Kantian sublime, the safety of the structural design acts as the 'bungee rope' for the performance: the structure as a whole is sound and secure, but the little frailties, the misplaced block, the exterior wall, human error, serve as a reminder that the 'rope' might suddenly snap.

(L-R, top to bottom) Figures 54-61: *The Breeze Block Series*, **rehearsing with blocks.**

268

What brings this experience into the specifically Kantian domain of the dynamical is the way the performers deal with this tension. Their actions, at times risky, at others – for the more safety conscious – outright reckless (Figs. 54-61), demonstrate a deferral of present fear akin to Kant's proposition that we can 'consider an object *fearful* without being afraid *of it* [...] that we merely *think* of the case where we might possibly want to put up resistance against it' (Kant, 1987: § 28 [119-20/260-1]). This performance quality, the invested fearlessness that sees performers skateboarding down stairs and having themselves 'bricked-in' to a section of wall (Fig. 59) is crucial to the feeling of the dynamical sublime that the piece creates. It is crucial because in their evocation of the mathematical sublime, the performers demonstrate a clear mastery of their space; the precision building of large and impressive images, which disrupt our methods of perception, negates the 'force' of the blocks as a whole. As spectators, we feel – despite the sublime of compositional failure that we find in watching – that this anxiety is ours and not theirs, that they are the orchestrators of our experience and thus exempt from our perception that in its full standing, the piece is too big, too unwieldy for them to ever control. And so the performers appear to will the whole thing to fall down on them, as seen in the precarious balancing acts of Figures 54-61. Their recklessness in the face of danger, the fear without *being afraid*, destabilises the spectators' experience of the performance and the power of the sublime becomes immediate and real[85].

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[85] Recalling Heidegger, where the dynamical sublime's ability to arouse fear without making afraid appears similar to *Dasein's* relationship to mortality and the question of authenticity, we could propose in analogous terms that the performance recognises the need for authenticity, and that it succeeds in communicating sublime experience at the moment when the performers engage in a relationship with the structure that echoes the anxiety inherent in the transition from inauthenticity

Considering more contemporary notions of the sublime, one can single out of the *Breeze Block* canon *The Bastille Dances* as a work which promotes (consciously or otherwise) Lyotard's perspective on the postmodern. The over-arching suggestion of the piece's narrative – or, if narrative is too conspicuous a term, provocation – is that 'belief' or 'faith' in meta-narrative is fading, and that formal processes in which narratives are assembled and disassembled can be a joyful experiment. Having noted in Chapter Five how Lyotard sees the 'post' in postmodern as a substitute for 'before', 'after' and 'within' the modern, consider the following from his 1984 text, *The Postmodern Condition*: 'the postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies the solace of good forms' (Lyotard, 1984: 81). This view of the postmodern places it in contrast with the modern, which is 'an aesthetics of the sublime, though a nostalgic one. It allows the unpresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents' (Lyotard, 1984: 81). Like Formalism and Symbolism, then, the postmodern 'aesthetic' is one in which formal concerns can attempt to present the un-presentable, as opposed to acknowledging its absence. It 'searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable' (ibid: 81).

Different to other works that point to something out of reach, absent, like Mother Courage's silent scream in Brecht's 1939 play of the same name, and Ajax's 'silence that is more sublime than any speech' in the *Odyssey* (Deguy, 1993: 24), *The Bastille Dances*, intimates something very different, something present – the

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to an authentic being-toward-death.

failure of form presents the unpresentable, and answers Derrida's question of 'what forms and frames the formless and unframable so that one may see them' (Gilbert-Rolfe, 1999: 43). *The Bastille Dances*, through its problematising of form and of master-narratives – that the duration and architectonic of the performance never attempts to fully express an image or 'formal resolution', that they are in a state of *re-composition* – approaches the sublime with a kind of careless optimism. There is something joyful about this play with structure and form that sets this work aside from the bleakness of the high modernist sublime, or the constant 'pressure' of the sublime in *Dido and Æneas*. The *re-composition*, the structures that rise and fall, the archways, staircases, and porticoes that appear for a glimpse then melt away into another shape, and the experience of them, speak of the storming of the Bastille not as a knowable historical 'event', a determinate object of existence with a unified objective or 'meaning', but as a collision of silences and unrepresented histories. The representational architecture of the performance mirrors its physical one – the melting and intertwining structures suggest historical narration as closer to a bowl of spaghetti than a hard and fast 'timeline'. They suggest in their presentation that which was lost or left unsaid, reclaiming the idea of recreation or re-enactment so that the invisible is made visible, a postmodern presenting rather than a modernist, nostalgic, lament.

Before moving on to the final case study for this chapter, Proto-type Theater's *Whisper* (2007), I would like to use the site-based circumstance of the *Breeze Block* performances as a way of segueing into a brief discussion of the sublime in site-specific practices. Taking inspiration from Kant, who states that 'we start by considering only the sublime in natural objects' (Kant, 1980: §23 [98/245]), I want to consider how site-based art and performance evokes experiences of the sublime to a greater or lesser degree. In this, it is my aim to show how site works which champion the notion of 'being there' (analogous to Heideggerian notions of *Dasein*: a concernful 'there-being'), produce the richest and most satisfying experiences of the aesthetic *qua* aesthetic. To do this, I will consider three specific kinds of site performance. First, I will address large scale land art of the late 1960s and early 1970s, in particular the work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude. Then, I will explore the work the work of Richard Long as an exemplar of British Conceptualist site work. Finally, I will consider immersive environmental arts, specifically Nigel Stewart and Jennifer Monson's work in the *Re-enchantment and Re-clamation* project.

Figure 62: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Wrapped Coast*, Little Bay, Australia (1969)

Collaborating artists and married couple Christo and Jeanne-Claude have been making interventions into site and environment since their first full scale project together, *Rideau de Fer* (*Iron Curtain*) in 1962[86]. Their work since *Rideau de Fer* has varied in size and scale and it is for their 'wrapping' works – in which they cover sites or monuments (such as the Reichstag building in Berlin, Germany) with woven polypropylene fabric – that they are arguably best known. The *Wrapped Coast* project from 1969 (Fig. 62) saw the pair cover a stretch of Australian coastline 'approximately 2.4 kilometers (1.5 miles) long, 46 to 244 meters (150 to 800 feet) wide, 26 meters (85 feet) high at the northern cliffs, and was at sea level at the southern sandy beach' (Christo and Jeanne-Claude: 2007). The process of the wrapping itself was undertaken over four weeks, by one-

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[86] In *Rideau de Fer* the pair, without permission (having had it refused twelve months earlier in 1961), blocked off the Rue Visconte in Paris – a small side-street running off the River Seine – with two-hundred and forty oil barrels, an act in opposition to the Berlin Wall.

hundred and twenty-five people at a total of seventeen-thousand hours of manpower. Once complete, the coast remained wrapped for seven weeks.

Figures 63-65 (L-R) – *Spiral Jetty* (1970), *Whirlpool* (1973), *Roden Crater* (1978)

It is my belief that Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Wrapped Coast*, which I use here as an example of a larger body of works – including Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), Oppenheim's *Whirlpool* (1973) and Turell's *Roden Crater* (1978) (Figs. 63-65) – denies the spectator the opportunity for sublime experience because of the distance at which it must be viewed. This work – as well as that of Smithson, Turell, *et al* – does, on a conceptual level, represent the transcendent triumph of the mind that Kantian sublime experience creates. Despite this, however, its sheer size means that the spectator lacks the sense of immersion or terror that should antecede sublime experience. As Kant states, the sublime experience occurs when our intuitive composition of an object or objects breaks down – *decomposes*. But in order that I might intuitively compose *Wrapped Coast* as a complete image I must be so far away that any sense of size or force is negated. At a width of 2.4 kilometres, I calculate that I must be approximately 550 meters – over half a kilometre – away from *Wrapped Coast* simply to view the whole thing[87]. That

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[87] To calculate this, I must first know the angle by which my field of view stretches. This is the

distance means that *Wrapped Coast* is encountered as a document of process –
from afar – rather than as an experience in which one finds oneself visually and
sensorially immersed. The same can be said of *Whirlpool* and *Spiral Jetty*. Indeed
Spiral Jetty, which at its maximum is 1500 meters in length, can only be viewed
in its entirety either from the air – as in Figure 63 – or from the 'safe' distance of
Rozel Point (Fig. 66). These works then, unlike the *Breeze Block* works, lack the
intimacy required for an experience of the sublime. They are works that are made
to be photographed rather than *experienced*.

Figure 66: Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), as seen from Rozel Point

There is, of course, a counter-argument. One might argue, for instance, that the
distance between the viewer and the work is unimportant. Instead, it is the

angle between the line of sight farthest left to the line of sight farthest right. This can be calculated
by first measuring the length of the object (L). Knowing this, I must now determine how close I
can get to it before it gets too wide to see it in its entirety (D). The angle of my field of view is
A=2*arctan(L/2D), where arctan is the inverse function (tan^-1).

My own field of vision is 126 degrees. From this I can calculate how far away I would need to be
from *Wrapped Coast* (W), using the sum D = W/(2*tan(a/2)). Rounding up *Wrapped Coast's* 2400
metre length to 3000m, I would need to be 500m away from the object to see it in its entirety.

concealment of the coast, and thus the vast unknown which lies underneath the fabric, that invites feelings of the sublime. But this argument is flawed for two reasons. The first is that in this case, there is no *das Moment* to 'push' or 'force' the spectator into such a feeling. At such a distance, I am not immersed in the immediate environment of the work. Sensorially, I do not and cannot know what it is like to be 'over there', 'in that place'. While the distance at which I stand might provide an approximation of that environment, it is only through 'being there', right where the work is, that I can truly begin to understand the geographical surroundings of the work. The second reason is that the mathematical sublime (concerning size and scale) is borne out of a *failure* of composition, rather than just an inability to compose. In this instance, where the sublime is found in the *possibility* of the size *behind* the fabric, the opportunity to attempt a composition does not occur. Because of this, my attempt to intuitively compose *Wrapped Coast cannot fail* because I cannot even *see* the object of composition. Likewise, it is not possible to experience the sublime in the dynamical sense. The dynamical sublime concerns the *force* of an object, and its absolute difference to me as a human being. Being hidden, I cannot see how the natural coastline repels that wind and waves that batter against it, how it stands in bold defiance of the elements.

Despite the 'safe' distance of the spectator, one could still argue that *Wrapped Coast* does evoke a sublime experience for its maker. The act of wrapping, which for Christo and Jeanne-Claude required a team of over one-hundred people, requires a proximity to the coastline that the spectator does not experience. It might be argued that scaling the face of the coast with the fabric, feeling and

276

hearing the crash of the waves, the roar of the wind, and realising ones vulnerability to the unforgiving elements creates for the 'wrapper' a feeling of the dynamical sublime. Indeed, Kant cites 'the wide oceans, enraged by storms' as an example of the dynamical sublime in the *Critique of Judgment* (Kant, 1890 §28 [245]).

This idea that an artwork can evoke sublime experience for its maker, but not for its spectator, can be seen more clearly in the work of British conceptual artist Richard Long. Long's work, at its simplest, culminates in installation, photography, text or sculpture that is what he calls 'the distillation of experience' (Long: 2008) – the *das Erlebte* of the experience of nature. The experience to which he refers here is walking. Regarding his practice of walking-*as-art*, he writes:

> My first work made by walking, in 1967, was a straight line in a grass field, which was also my own path, going 'nowhere' [...] a new way of walking: walking as art. Each walk followed my own unique, formal route, for an original reason, which was different from other categories of walking, like travelling. Each walk, though not by definition conceptual, realised a particular idea. Thus walking – as art – provided an ideal means for me to explore relationships between time, distance, geography and measurement.

> (Long: 2008)

In Long's work, including more recent examples such as *Walk of Seven Cairns* (1992) and *River Severn Walk* (2005), there is a difference between the experience that inspired the work, and the experience *of* the work. For example, *Walk of Seven Cairns* (1992), a short text piece written as a response to a four day walk in

the Brecon Beacons and Fforest Fawr, reads:

WALK OF SEVEN CAIRNS

A CAIRN BUILT NEAR SHEEP BONES
A CAIRN BUILT AT A WINDY PLACE
A CAIRN BUILT WHERE A RAVEN FLEW OFF
A CAIRN BUILT ON THE FLOODLINE OF A RIVER
A CAIRN BUILT AFTER A ROLL OF THUNDER
A CAIRN BUILT AT MY CAMPSITE
A CAIRN BUILT IN A HAILSTORM

(Long, 1992)

In this 'distillation', Long recounts and crystallises experiences which *for him*, might have been sublime. In the final line, 'A CAIRN BUILT IN A HAILSTORM', the reader can only *imagine* the struggle, the cold, and the stinging sensation as the frozen lumps of ice strike bare flesh. The crucial point, thought, is without a *das Moment* that warrants the spectators' *a posteriori* experience of the text, the feeling of being overwhelmed by nature which leads to the sublime is specific to Long. This can be seen again in the *Cairngorm* installation at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (Fig. 67).

Figure 67: Richard Long, *Cairngorm* **(2007)**

Cairngorm, for Long, is the result of a process which allowed him to 'explore

278

relationships between time, distance, geography and measurement' (Long, 2008).

It is easy to see, then, how this kind of experience in *practice* might be conducive

to sublime experience or ideas. But this does not, and cannot, be reflected in the

experience of the spectator. This is not to criticise Long's work, however. Indeed,

the vast mental imagery Long is able to create from such a minimal style in *Walk

of Seven Cairns* is a testament to his obvious skill as an artist dealing with the

experience of the natural world. But it *does* reinforce the claim that the sense of

being there, so profoundly crucial to the synthetic *a priori*, is also crucial to the

evocation of the sublime. To conclude this section, and to demonstrate how site

work can harness that notion of *being there*, of *Dasein* and *there-being*, to create

powerful aesthetic experiences, I want to look now at *Re-enchantment &

Reclamation*.

Led by choreographer and dance scholar Nigel Stewart, *Re-enchantment and Re-

clamation* (2006-8) was a two-year project with 'aims to develop methods in

dance, film, and the sonic arts for transforming the perceptions that different

communities have of the place to which they belong' (Stewart, 2008)[88].

Through the methodologies used in the practice elements of *Re-enchantment &

Reclamation*, it is possible to see how it has at its very centre the notion of *being

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[88] In the contextual outline of the project, its creators assert:

> There is widespread concern about our current relationship with the
> natural environment. The problems go beyond those posed by specific
> initiatives (new power plants, industries, housing, roads etc.) to the
> routine and pervasive ways in which environmental features are
> thought about and perceived, that is, as a problem to be dealt with or
> an exploitable resource.
>
> (Stewart, 2008)

there, and it is because of this that the sublime aesthetic experience can be much more keenly felt than in the works of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Long, and Smithson. In April 2007, Stewart and Jennifer Monson from iLAND, New York curated a three-week dance intensive entitled 'Water Log: Dancing in between the Wet and the Dry'. One of the sites used during this intensive was the sands of Morecambe Bay, Lancashire, in which *Erlebnis*, and developing a relationship with this environment, was both integral to the creative process of the intensive and a creative output in and of itself. On *Water Log*, Nigel Stewart suggests that:

> To spin, spiral or travel in curvilinear patterns on that desert-like expanse of sand, which offers no coordinates other than the most fleeting phenomena, is to engage and yield to centripetal and -fugal gravitational forces that are exterior to and powerfully greater than my own. Having lost place centre, I had a sickening but ultimately joyful experience of abandonment to the alterity of this place-world -- an alterity grasped as a gravitational power of a place that would, if I was to persist in it, literally engulf me in over 12 feet of water when the moon pulls that water over the earth and as the earth tilts towards that water.

(Stewart, 2010)

Unlike dancing in a studio space, Stewart and Monson's exploration of the Morecambe sands creates an environmental relationship with the dancing body that echoes an evocation of the sublime. The 'losing' place, 'yielding' to forces more powerful than oneself, and a fearful yet *un*-afraid awareness that a vast expanse of water will 'engulf me', all suggest experiences that contain elements that one might consider sublime in experience. Unlike the work of Smithson or Long, these feelings of the sublime in natural environments keep returning to the Heideggerian notion of *Dasein*, of being there.

The importance of being there, for Stewart, which for him manifests Heidegger's 'concernful there-being' (ibid), is exemplified when he refers to Levinas' notion of *face*[89]. In encountering the 'existential facticity, singularity and alterity' (ibid) of the Morecambe sands, there is a sense of overpowering *otherness* – of having no dominion over the natural world that is analogous to the Kantian dynamical sublime. For Stewart and Monson's work, then, the threat of being engulfed by '12 feet of water' (ibid) *is* the aesthetic heart of the work. Through that terror, the dancing body 'finds oneself again' (ibid). Here, then, is a work meant to be lived rather than viewed from afar. In opposition to the somehow sterile, singularly conceptual experience of *Wrapped Coast*, *Roden Crater* or *Cairngorm*, the coming together of body and environment is what makes this project so potent in its evocation of the aesthetic. As Stewart asserts:

> Here the dancing body develops into a symptom (not merely a sign) of the landscape, and is therefore into not just a body moving *in* a landscape but rather a 'bodiescape' or 'body topography', that is, an intertwining of the elements of the world which surround the dancer and the dancer as he or she moves in those elements.

> (Stewart, 2007: 4)

This encapsulates excellently the difference between the art of Christo and Jeanne-Claude and practices that preserve the sublime for those immersed in the kind of experience that shapes both methodology and axiology. And, again, this is a sublime of hopefulness, of enriching experiences. To 'not have been there' is for these works a lament; the immersion in the volatility of nature for Long and Stewart is to experience aesthetic adventure.

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[89] For Levinas, the notion of the *face-to-face* encounter is an encounter with the *Other*. For him, the sheer alterity of the Other through the face evokes within the self an ethical responsibility.

But this is not to dismiss the power of theatrical technologies in the construction and evocation of the sublime. Indeed, the analysis of *Dido and Æneas* demonstrated how theatrical technologies can forge the sublime in the most *un-sublime* of spaces. This is not limited to Craig and the second generation symbolists, though. In Societas Raffaello Sanzio's *Tragedia Endogonidia P. #06* (Paris, 2003), three cars 'suddenly fall down from the ceiling, whereafter they park themselves without any human interaction' (Hillaert and Crombez, 2005: 3). What is so wonderful about this moment, indeed, this *das Moment* is that it does something in a theatrical space that Craig for pragmatic reasons could *not* do, which is to find a dynamical and mathematical sublime that emanates from height and verticality.

Figure 68: 'cars falling from the sky', *Tragedia Endogonidia P. #06* **(2003)**

What is important to the way Societas craft this experience is the male figure stood downstage centre (Fig. 68). As the cars come crashing unexpectedly from a place high above, the figure, who is 'naked except for a white cloth wrapped around his loins, a twist of thorn twigs upon his brows' (Kelleher, 2009: 127),

282

stands motionless. His vulnerability in this moment is what makes the dynamical

sublime so keenly felt. Kelleher writes:

> And, over all, a deadening, ungenerative grey light, more
> like a gloom than an illumination, spacing out the pieces
> of the tableau, soaking the interminable moment into
> which... a car falls, out of the roof of the theatre, onto the
> stage. Smash. [...] And here's another one. While we
> attempt to assimilate, another car crashes onto the stage
> behind the first one. And then immediately another one,
> beside this one. Smash. Smash. These cars fall in a way
> that we might suppose meaning, or understanding, to fall.
> With the weight of an event, set into motion and
> apprehended. And it happens now, not later.
>
> (Kelleher, 2009: 129)

As the cars crash down behind the semi-naked figure, the rush of air, the smashing

glass and the cacophonous sound blasts out into the auditorium, and the sheer

power of the three cars as they fall overwhelms the spectator. Once released from

above, their fall is inevitable, and that inevitability, so close to the vulnerable man,

presses on to the spectator how powerless the body would be against such

enormous force. Indeed, the figure is instrumental in the evocation of the

mathematical sublime. As the cars enter the field of vision, their height is

measurable against the height of the human form – they are eight, nine, maybe ten

humans high, and their distance from the ground is immediately intuited and

apprehended, despite the speed of their descent. This is a fascinating example

because it seems to combine the limitlessness of the mathematical sublime with

the playful imagination of taste. As the cars come crashing down, the *Moment* (n.)

that instantly evokes the dynamical sublime also encourages us into imaginative

play. Despite being able to intuit the cars compositionally in relation to the figure

downstage, what remains unknown is how much further the ceiling extends

beyond the frame of the performance space. We know, *a priori*, that the ceiling of the building can only really be another or thirty feet or forty feet beyond what we can see, that it must have a finite end. But the descent of these vehicles, without an apparent *purpose*, but in such a way that we 'suppose meaning' (ibid), allows us to speculate on 'where', imaginatively speaking' the cars are coming *from*. In doing so, I might imagine that they have fallen from the heavens, that they have been dropped from the hand of a towering *Godzilla*, that they are 'loose change from the pocket of the gods maybe' (ibid), or that they simply *appeared*. Whether the spectator imagines either or none of these things, the possibility for the ceiling to be of immeasurable height can be imagined in this aesthetic adventure, and that sense of vast limitlessness also brings with it the terror of the mathematical sublime.

But Societas, like Craig, are dealing with mechanical technologies which can disrupt our perceptions of a space in a very *industrial* way. What I still want to know, in relation to the sublime and theatrical technologies, is how more advanced twenty-first century technologies, specifically ones of a digital nature, might evoke sublime experiences without falling foul of the 'nullifying' effects of those large-scale land works. To begin that examination, consider the following quotation from aesthetician and philosopher Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, who in *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* (1999) suggests that:

> The limitlessness once found in nature gives way, in technology, to a limitlessness produced out of an idea which is not interested in being an idea of nature, but one which replaces the idea of nature. Nature sublimated in a

sublime that comes after it and in, or with, which it is now
obliged to live.

(Gilbert-Rolfe, 1999: 67)

Where, and how, then, does one find a technological sublime that has an autonomy from the sublime of nature? To explore, rather than answer this question, and to bring this chapter to its conclusion, I want to look at the notion of the 'technological sublime' in relation to Proto-type Theater's *Whisper*. In addition, I propose *Whisper* as an ideal candidate for examination at this juncture as it presents itself – albeit on different terms – as progeny of the theatre of Edward Gordon Craig. Before going into technical and conceptual detail with *Whisper* and its relevance to the concerns of the sublime, the following is a short synopsis of the piece:

As you enter the theatre for *Whisper*, you find headphones on your seat. You put them on. In front of you, a huge cinematic canvas obscures the bodies of three performers. You listen and watch as homemade sound effects echo through your head. Visuals mutate, transform and disappear, and a whole dream-like world of sound and image builds up, drawing you into an extraordinary journey through a mysterious city.

(Proto-type Theater, 2008)

Concerned in the most part with creating dissonances between sight and sound, and developing an intimacy via mediation in the perfect site for such a disjuncture, the textural and narrative landscape of *Whisper* emerges through the transmission of lo-fi Foley[90] via sophisticated multi-channel amplification. Utilising the

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[90] Foley is a sound effects technique for the creation of synchronous or live sound effects. Foley art in popular media might include sound effects for a radio play or overdub on a cinematic score. A peculiarity of Foley that was exploited in *Whisper* is the use of mundane or household objects to

headphones in a similar manner to Canadian installation artist Janet Cardiff – who uses the augmented space paradigm 'cellspace'[91] to create artworks known as 'audio walks'[92] – *Whisper* collides the visceral with the virtual, and makes a play on experience and performance that is at the core of the technological sublime. Regarding a methodology for my analysis of *Whisper*, I want to emulate the progression of my analysis of *Dido & Æneas* in order that I might begin to draw parallels between their means of sublime evocation, to draw some conclusions about the different but related 'kinds' of sublime experience that these two works respectively evoke. As with *Dido & Æneas*, then, my analysis of *Whisper* will begin with a detailed examination of how space and light are configured within the work to sublime effect, and as such, consider the following images:

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create the sound of a specific action or event. Examples of this in *Whisper* include a soluble alka-seltzer tablet emulating the sound of the sea, a desktop fan emulating the sound of traffic congestion and air expelled from a balloon – a gas leak.

[91] As a model for augmented space, cellspace is what occurs when physical space is 'filled' with electronic data, which can be retrieved by a user via a personal communication device. Data may come from global networks; some may be embedded in objects located in the space around the user. Moreover, while some data may be available regardless of where the user is in the space, it can also be location-specific.

[92] Janet Cardiff, on her website http://www.cardiffmiller.com, tells us that,

> The format of the audio walks is similar to that of an audio guide. You are given a CD player or iPod and told to stand or sit in a particular spot and press play. On the CD you hear my voice giving directions, like "turn left here" or "go through this gateway", layered on a background of sounds [...]The virtual recorded soundscape has to mimic the real physical one in order to create a new world as a seamless combination of the two.

(Cardiff: 2007)
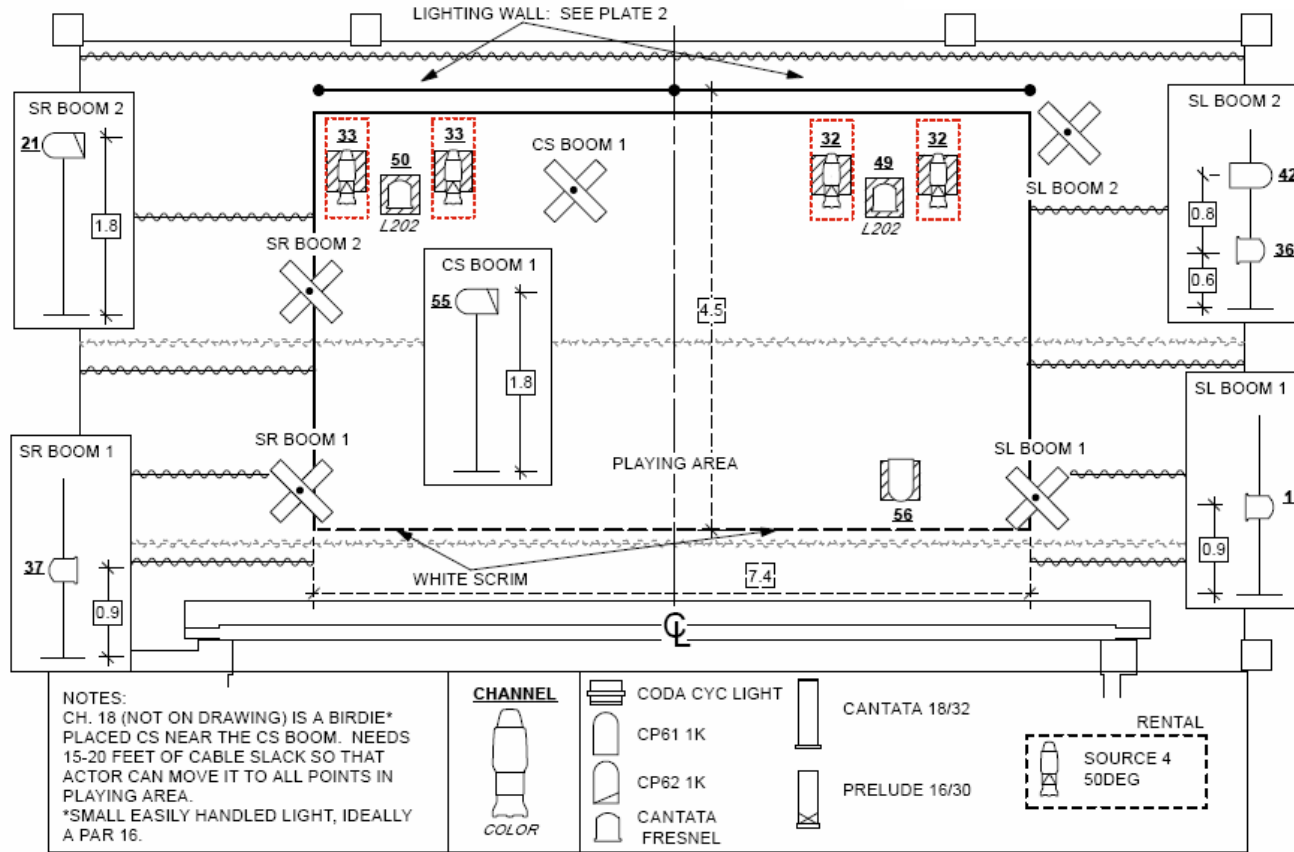
Figure 69: Specification for lighting hang: aerial master view – Proto-type Theater's *Whisper* (2007)
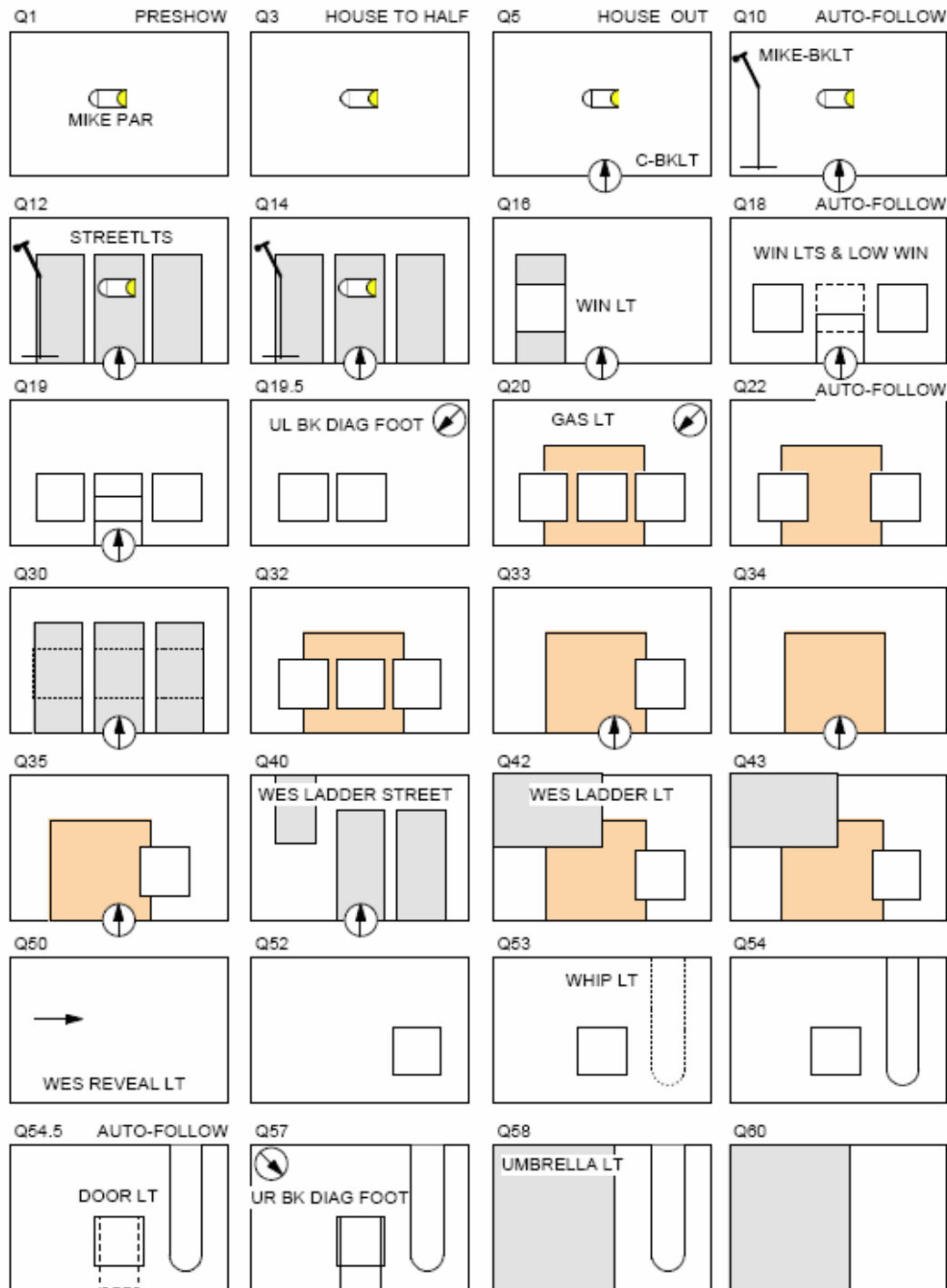
Figure 70: Section of MS Sheet for *Whisper* (December 2007)

To begin by looking at Figure 69, comparisons can be drawn between the ways in which *Dido & Æneas* and *Whisper* appropriate light to alter the spectator's perception of the performance space. *Whisper*, like *Dido & Æneas*, uses separate fields of light to give the space a sense of dimension or existence beyond its actual measurements and boundaries. In *Whisper*, however, this is done through the creation of two 'modes' of seeing that the light sets up, as shown below in the differences between Figures 71 and 72 and Figures 73 and 74:

Figure 71 (top), and Figure 72 (bottom): 'windows and columns', *Whisper* (2007)

Figure 73 (top), and Figure 74 (bottom): 'the reveal', *Whisper* **(2007)**

The first 'mode', the silhouette framed onto the gauze scrim, is created quite simply by moving the lighting from an overhead rig to a rear wall – as can be seen in Figure 69. Notably, this move is comparable to Craig's decision to relocate his lighting source from footlighting to an overhead rig. With tight focussing of the units and precision movement from the performers, the backlighting can be framed to produce the 'windowed' effect seen in the Figures 71 and 72. This allows for a suggestion of depth in number of ways: the idea of the light forming a rectangular 'window' shape allows a speculation which might suggests to the spectator that they are looking 'through' the scrim into a world of shadow and light. A close look at Q12-18 on the Q by Q Magic Sheet (Fig. 70) shows how it is

possible to transform the 'windows' in both height and width, which adds a clear sense of temporality and movement to the windowed effect. Indeed, the rear lighting wall allows as much for a play of height as it does depth, and cues 42/43 exemplify this well.

Related to this play of height and depth is the second lighting mode made possible by the stage right and stage left booms positioned at the sides of the performance space in Figure 69. Using these instead of the lighting wall places the focus of the light onto the performance space itself and hits the scrim only by diffusion – thus the scrim becomes transparent and reveals the 'mechanics' of the space behind the gauze. Toggling between these two lighting states produces interesting effects in terms of the mathematical sublime. Going back to Q42/43, where a performer is windowed at the top left of the scrim, Q50 switches from the lighting wall to the stage right booms – revealing the performer positioned at upstage left. In understanding the performers positioning, in an area seemingly incongruous to the window their silhouette occupied on the scrim, sets up a tension for the spectator concerning not so much measurability, as in the case of the horizon of *Dido & Æneas*, but what indeed is being measured at all. From this reveal, the spectator becomes aware that the configuration of light on the scrim may or may not bear any relevance to the position of the performers in the playing space and, *mutatis mutandis*, we can say the same of this procedure in reverse. In Craig's *Dido & Æneas*, where intuitive composition fails because the spectator cannot find a means to measure the spatial depth, *Whisper* asks the more fundamental question of 'what is it that is being measured?' In proposing neither the performers in the

space, nor the images on the scrim as the visual centre, composition fails not because one fails to find a base unit of measurement *per se*, but rather because it remains unclear what is being measured against what. This can in part be attributed to the introduction of a scrim in a post-cinematic theatre, and indeed, the scrim itself is referred to by the company as a 'cinematic canvas' in their description of the work. In Craig and the early symbolists the scrim is, as I have already suggested, more like a barrier, a tool for marking *here* from *there* in order that it might mediate the passage from the 'reality' of the auditorium to the world of dreams and the unconscious that lies behind it. For the audience of *Whisper*, the scrim is a place where the eye would more commonly rest, viewing a film or other projected media. Borrowing from both Symbolist and cinematic traditions *Whisper* invites the spectator to experience the performance in such a way that the scrim itself *is* the performance space, to assume that the relationship between the silhouettes and windows constitute the visual heart of the work.

At certain moments in the performance, these two lighting states converge, synchronising with each other in such a way that a third mode of visual engagement is shaped.

Figure 75: Convergence of lighting states, *Whisper* (2007)

Figure 75 shows how the shadow of the figure on the right is being used not only as a part of the central image, but also to 'reveal' the performer whose shadow it is. In disclosing precisely how close these two 'modes of viewing' are to each other in terms of their technical relationship, our sense of the mathematical sublime is altered in a different way to the 'full reveal' seen in Figures 73 and 74. Here, the two seemingly incompatible lighting states come together – if only for about forty seconds – and it is this sense of correlation between the two 'worlds' of the work that provides a sense of restitution analogous to Newman's *zip*, insofar as the spectator is given a momentary glimpse of 'order'. This 'order', which gives the spectator a way of understanding the relationship between the shadow-space and the performer-space behind, operates as a calming influence amidst the confusion and dissonance of the performance.

As with my analysis of *Dido & Æneas*, I want to consider how the soundscape of *Whisper* impacts on the experience of the work, and it is in this particular area that I find *Whisper* deviating not only from Edward Gordon Craig's use of sonorous qualities to evoke a sense of the sublime, but also from the very nature of the sublime itself. Describing for the most part a fictional journey through a fictional city, with fantastical twists and turns, *Whisper* uses sound to create its fictional geography. On each seat in the theatre is a set of stereo headphones, through which the spectators listen to the action taking place in the performance area – which is being picked up by three SM58 (cardoid dynamic) microphones and one unidirectional plate microphone. The vocal microphones, lined up from left to right across the performance space, correspond to an audio channel with regard to their position in the space. In practice then, the microphone to the spectator's left (stage right), will transmit sound to the left ear only, the right microphone to the right ear only and the centre microphone transmits in stereo. Stereo transmission is also active for the unidirectional plate microphone which is used primarily to pick up ambient, 'background' noise – such as rain, wind and other constant, non-incidental sound.

The idea of sound as something forceful, something *felt*, is perhaps even more apparent in *Whisper* than it is in Craig's exploration of sonic qualities in *Dido & Æneas*. In *Whisper*, this can be seen in two ways. The first is quite literal, and can be found in the last lines of text in the piece, which read as follows:

<pre>
A: And then
B: A Sound
A: You hear a sound
C: No, you feel a sound
B: You look in the mirror and you see sound
A: You hear sound
C: You feel sound
A: Yes
</pre>

<div align="right">(Proto-type Theater, 2008: 44)</div>

The text here is referring – outside of the narrative relationships of the work – to a sound technique employed during the last ten minutes of the piece. Beginning at a section referred to in the score as the 'Storm Sequence' (Proto-type Theater, 2008: 34), sound is slowly transferred from the headphones to amplifiers concealed under the seating bank. The non-foley sound effects for this section, as a storm would suggest, are deep and intensive in their use of bass. This bass effect is amplified further through the speakers so that the depth of frequency creates an almost imperceptible rumbling in the seating bank. Sound-as-feeling is also expressed elsewhere in the work, and in such a way that the gulf in technological capability between the likes of Maurice Maeterlinck and Proto-type is markedly highlighted. In a section titled *Falling* – where the narration and images on the scrim describe climbing onto the window-ledge of a tower-block, and ultimately jumping off – sound once again intervenes to add a depth of sensation to the experience of the piece using a technique called Shepard Tone. An auditory 'illusion' of a tone in a continuous state of ascending or descending (while seeming to keep the same pitch), Shepard Tone is the effect of a 'superposition of sine waves separated by octaves' (Shepard, 1964). When created, the result is almost nauseating and the vertiginous aspects of height (of the tower block) and of

<div align="center">295</div>

falling (in the concluding line 'and you jump') create a tense physical relationship with the images passing over the scrim. Moreover, the perception of endless depth, of a continuous falling, is confluent with a technique that is not just evocative of the sublime in terms of its use in *Whisper*, but one that has sublime qualities as an effect of sound in and of itself.

As already stated, one of the key areas of exploration for *Whisper* was the dissonances possible between sight and sound, and the Foley score that dictates the sonic environment of the performance exemplifies this well. For instance, in the section titled *Gas Memory One*, the performers tell the story of a woman who, wanting to commit suicide, turns the oven on in her high-rise flat and opens the door. As the story is being narrated, the spectator hears the hissing of gas coming into their left ear, and their focus is drawn to the appropriate area (stage right) of the performance space. What the spectator sees, instead of a woman with her head in an oven, is the silhouette of a male figure letting air out of a balloon into the microphone. It is in this disturbance between realities that Gilbert-Rolfe's technological sublime exists. He writes:

> [T]he techno-sublime [...] substitutes a heteronomous subject with the autonomous one inherited from the eighteenth century. Contemplating nature requires that one take note of one's continuity with it, as part of the same life force, but one cannot experience the same kind of continuity with the technological. One experiences instead another kind, of which it is much harder to conceptualize an independence that follows from the act of conceptualizing, because it is precisely there that one can more readily see dependence.
>
> (Beckley, 2001: 84-5)

In the technological sublime, Gilbert-Rolfe argues that the corporeal experience of size or distance is no longer necessary. In Newman, for example, where the physical dimensions of *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* are critical to the sublime experience, or in *Wrapped Coast*, where previously the jagged coastline itself would have been sufficient to evoke feelings of the sublime, these are things that the technological sublime makes redundant through immediacy and augmented space. Indeed, Gilbert-Rolfe proposes that Lyotard's discussion of time and event in relation to Newman's work was an astute foreshadowing of the technological sublime, and we can see in the disorienting relationship that sound has to the image in *Whisper*, how technological mediation has the capacity to open out endless landscapes of sound in otherwise *un*-sublime locations. But this is a sublime of a different kind to that of Kant and the eighteenth century, and indeed to Craig and the *Breeze Block Series*. This sublime is the 'nightmare of a technology that pretends to be useful but instead takes over', Gilbert-Rolfe states with reference to Heideggerian fears about technology, 'replacing the world it was supposed to facilitate with quite another' (Gilbert-Rolfe, 1999: 85). Such is at play in the aural and visual dissonances that *Whisper* provides. The technology which mediates the experience of the spectator – the light, the sound – replaces the world behind the scrim with a mediated series of conflicting realities which is:

> Terrifying in the limitless unknowability of its potential, while being entirely a product of knowledge – i.e., it combines limitlessness with pure ratio – and is thus at once unbounded by the human, and, as knowledge, a trace of the human now out of the latter's control. To the extent that it has its own logic it's independent; to the extent that it's parasitic on human logic it's uncontrollable because it does more than it's meant to (transforms rather than

297

serves).

Like any experience of the sublime though, technological or natural, there must be

hope – the promise of restitution. It is, in the case of *Whisper* at the very least, the

medium of theatre itself that provides such salvation. In a 2008 review of *Whisper*

in *The Guardian*, theatre critic Lyn Gardner argues that the piece 'uses the

headphone technology [...] to spin a story in your head that unfolds like a

nightmare' (Gardner, 2008: 42). Gardner's suggestion that *Whisper* is 'like' a

nightmare is the crucial clause that pulls one back from being swallowed up by the

sublime expanses the work creates in the wedge that the technology places

between sensation and reason, *a posteriori* and *a priori*. The disorienting

experience of seeing and hearing things beyond the logic of the performance space

is punctuated by the lighting state that makes the scrim transparent. *Whisper* in

this sense is aware of its own responsibility in the Faustian pact it has taken with

the sublime: it must constantly remind us that it is 'in control', that the performers

represent more than conduits for the environment that the technology allows them

to create. The concept of immediacy, Gilbert-Rolfe states, is key to the idea of a

technological sublime, being a 'state in which the message is already at its

destination, or where one could not separate start from finish' (Gilbert-Rolfe,

1999: 55). This sense of immediacy, for Gilbert-Rolfe, is what polarises the

natural and technological sublimes. He makes note of Newman's 'expressed

desire' to 'go to the tundra [...] limitlessness with a fixed center [...] of unimpeded

extension and, by implication, of uninterrupted movement' (Gilbert-Rolfe, 1999:

54). Through technology, he argues, the freedom to move, of being uninterrupted,

has been 'replaced with the knowledge that invisibility itself, the air, is filled with electronic signals' (ibid), stifling ones' perceived freedom and thus autonomy in space. *Whisper* creates its sense of immediacy through sound – seemingly instant transmission from the microphone to the headphone – and through light – the performers 'ready' to be lit at the right times, they must constantly 'keep up' with the technology in the work, it will not wait for them, they cannot be late, they must be there. This is broken down, however, when the performance space is revealed and the heteronomy imposed by the technology 'slows down'; the process of the performance is unmasked and the performers regain their position as autonomous subjects (not that they were ever otherwise, it is simply that as a spectator we need to 'see it', as it were, 'to believe it').

Gilbert-Rolfe's notion of the techno-sublime, and my analysis of that within *Whisper*, makes a significant statement about the sublime in contemporary philosophical thought. It intimates, as Gilbert-Rolfe suggests, 'that any talk about the sublime being historically specific if that means that it is an idea that only applies to the late eighteenth century and the art [...] it helped to elaborate and create' (Beckley, 2001: 85), is refutable, being a term which needs 'to be reconsidered' because 'it cannot be done without' (ibid). That it cannot be done without in terms of performance because, as the work of writers such as Gilbert-Rolfe, Beckley, Steiner and Guspit has shown, the 'old rules' no longer apply, and that insofar as the sublime remains an experience intrinsically bound up in the concept of the aesthetic, it remains as such concerned with the experience of art in general. To consider my analysis so far, however, it would seem nonsensical to try

and legitimise a re-evaluation of the sublime outside of Kant's key principles of sublime experience. But Gilbert-Rolfe's technological sublime is less a dismissal of Kantian ideas and more a re-contextualising of the tenets of sublime discourse in the twenty-first century world. The fear of force we find in Kant's dynamical is replaced by a fear of becoming an indeterminate subject wavering on the threshold of natural autonomy and the technological heteronomy of the post-human.

The fundamental challenge to Kant's sublime in the contemporary context – it would appear – is within Lyotard's postmodern distrust of the supersensible. As the objects or events capable of producing sublime terror shift from the natural to the synthetic, from nature to art, the responsibility for the restitution critical to sublime experience is transferred. In *Whisper*, such transference is represented by a shift from the subject's conceiving of itself as a being that has a capacity for conceptualisation above and beyond the noumenal world to one in which it must be reminded that postmodern discontinuity can only exist as an extension of the unified and hopeful modern. In the Kantian sublime, autonomy from nature is at first terrifying, and then ultimately liberating. In a contemporary sublime, such as is experienced in *Whisper*, the fear of nature is displaced by the fear of technologies which threaten to engulf its creators without the promise of being saved. Thus, the sublime binary between man and nature becomes a triad between man, technological progression, and art. 'Like' a nightmare, *Whisper*, in its first mode, offers a picture of post-human heteronomy which we are liberated from if only because performance – and *Whisper's* second mode – offers the illusion of autonomous existence in which the subject is given the time and space to

300

'remember' its capacity for conceptualisation. Thus the work is 'like' a nightmare in the respect that the performance offers us a moment in which we can 'wake up', albeit in a cold sweat of panic tinged with the adrenaline of relief. This is the contemporary sublime.

Post Facto

CONCLUSION

Throughout the thesis, I developed a series of dialectical pairings through which I have articulated a post-Kantian sense of aesthetic experience. To begin this conclusion I will recall and summarise those pairings, beginning with the opposition between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*.

The coming together of the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* which was central to Kant's philosophical system also proved important in my consideration of aesthetic experience. In my analysis of *Ubu Roi* in Chapter Two, I demonstrated in detail how the sensuous, *a posteriori* elements of performance can play harmoniously with my *a priori* faculties of imagination and understanding. In this play, invited and stimulated by the Kantian notion of *das Moment* – a push, or force – I demonstrated how the imagination can embark on a rigorous speculation, a pleasurable *not-knowing*. This play was significant in two ways. Firstly, because it freed the spectator from the obligations of emotional, moral, or contextual interest, and championed the physical experience of the work in harmony with the *a priori* imagination. The second point of significance was that this kind of rigorous speculation allowed for an analysis of historical performance works which re-constructed the experience of the spectator without being beholden to the historical, political or cultural circumstances of the performance. Here, the acknowledgement of '*not-knowing*' circumvented many of the problems inherent to making determinate conclusions about past experience. Finally, I concluded that aesthetic experience could be thought of as a 'pocket' or 'bubble' of extra-ordinary

experience that occurs within performance. This allowed me to consider specific temporal moments of performance, right down to the detail of a single gesture or sound, as the *Moment* (n.) which invites aesthetic play.

In Chapter Three, I began by considering how olfactory sensations can shape and influence that aesthetic play. My analysis of *The Last Supper* expanded this in detail, and demonstrated how contemporary performance practices can toggle the spectator between aesthetic and non-aesthetic engagement. This notion of toggling produced my second dialectical pairing: *interest* and *disinterest*. What my analysis of *The Last Supper* demonstrated was that the aesthetic experience of performance need not necessarily be considered as something entirely exclusive from other concerns. In one central moment of *The Last Supper*, I showed how the spectator toggled between *interested* and *disinterested* engagement, a shifting between the freedom of imagination and the implications of aesthetic play.

This opposition between *interest* and *disinterest* indicated a larger difference between the *aesthetic* and the *artistic*. Having considered the aesthetic experience as analogous to Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of *adventure*, I used the analysis of Proto-type Theater's *Virtuoso (working title)* as an exemplar of the division between *artistic* and *aesthetic* engagement. I argued that aesthetic experience is a pleasure that cannot be articulated in artistic terms. Overwhelming logic and order, the aesthetic is an 'uncertain venture' which does not linger on the particularities of composition and structure, but rather uses them as platforms for imaginative speculation. Nevertheless, the artistic keeps the aesthetic within reach,

and my development from *interest* versus *disinterest* to *aesthetic* versus *artistic* was crucial in identifying how aesthetic experience is drawn from, but also indifferent to, the material structures of performance. Like Gadamer's insistence that the adventure 'remains related to the return of the everyday', however, aesthetic speculation draws its potency from the fact that it *must* at some point return from the freedom of imaginative play (Gadamer, 2004: 60).

The transition section, which took the Kantian notion of beauty as its starting point, looked at the distinction Kant made between *free* and *dependent* beauty and used this distinction as the dialectical pairing of Chapter Four. Within the concept of *dependent* beauty, Kant legislated for a beauty unrelated to the judgment of taste. This particular kind of beauty was conceptual, and related – in my analysis of Baldessari's *Pure Beauty* – to the political, contextual, and geographical surroundings of a work. After case studies which identified the difference between *free* and *dependent* beauty *in experience*, I proposed that movement between these two kinds of beauty is a way for theatre and performance to create *rhythm*. This Kantian sense of rhythm allowed me to articulate how the relationship between free and dependent beauty can create pleasurable textures in performance, and how the transition between these forms of beauty can enrich our experience of a work.

In Part Two, which was concerned with the sublime, I looked first at Kant's division of the sublime into the *mathematical* and *dynamical*. Through an analysis of sublime experience in the work of Edward Gordon Craig, I proposed that

sublime is built upon an opposition between *composition* and *decomposition*. It was this dialectic, between *composition* and *decomposition*, which represented the source of enquiry for Chapters Six and Seven. In Chapter Seven, rather than developing this pairing by replacing the two terms, I introduced the notion of *re-composition* in my analysis of Station House Opera's *Breeze Block* series of works. Looking in detail at *The Salisbury Proverbs*, I demonstrated how the shifting, evolving, mise-en-scene of the work allowed the experience of the sublime to emerge, fade, and re-emerge. This experience of *re-composition* demonstrated how site-based performance which is not confined to the readily perceptible boundaries of a theatre or studio space can have a profound effect upon the aesthetic experience of the sublime.

To develop this notion further, I looked in detail at a series of site-specific works to consider how the sublime can be evoked to a greater or lesser degree in relation to the Heideggerian concept of *Dasein*, or being-there. Concluding with an analysis of Stewart and Monson's *Water Log*, I demonstrated how a coming together of body and environment can enrich and make potent the evocation of the sublime aesthetic as it relates to the natural world. Moreover, this sublime was a sublime of hopefulness, of enriching experiences. To 'not have been there' for these experiences of the sublime was a lament. Far from the terror and despair promoted by Steiner and other critics of the Kantian sublime aesthetic, the immersion in the volatility of nature is to *be there*, to experience aesthetic adventure.

The final study of the thesis looked at Proto-type Theater's *Whisper*. In that section of analysis I forwarded *Whisper* as a performance which developed the avant-garde experiments of Craig using twenty-first century technologies. I demonstrated how contemporary performance technologies can create an experience akin to what Gilbert-Rolfe called the 'techno-sublime', in which the 'limitlessness once found in nature gives way, in technology, to a limitlessness produced out of an idea which is not interested in being an idea of nature, but one which replaces the idea of nature' (Gilbert-Rolfe, 1999: 67).

Ultimately, I have demonstrated that there is a place for this kind of analysis in the scholarship of theatre and performance. Indeed, such is the flexibility of this methodology that it could serve as a fundamental tool for anyone who thinks seriously about performance. Before rushing to the nearest extrinsic concept, academic hot-topic, or political struggle to which we can relate our aesthetic experiences, this post-Kantian analysis allows us to start with the experience itself, with an method that concentrates on here and now, this *moment*. Of course, performance analysis in terms of the aesthetic *qua* aesthetic will not always be the correct tool for analysis. It cannot articulate why a work of political satire is so significant or timely, but it can articulate how we feel as we embark on the experiential journey of the piece, and so help us to understand the *relationship* between the work of art and the world on which it comments.

Most importantly though, is that this thesis recognises aesthetic *qua* aesthetic experience as *enough*; that the pleasures of taste, beauty, and indeed the

306

pleasure/pain of the sublime are something in which we can all − *universally* − take part. Indeed, in taking the lead from Kant, who asserted that beauty was the symbol of morality, of something *good for us* that is enriching to our minds and our lives, the presence of the aesthetic in a work justifies the work, in spite of other extrinsic concerns.

It is crucial, however, to understand that in this thesis, the Kantian notion of the aesthetic *qua* aesthetic also depends upon cultural meaning. Different to the Neo-Kantian position of 'art for art's sake', like that of the Marburg school[93], the 'push' of *das Moment* allows cultural meaning to infiltrate and affect the synthetic element of the synthetic *a priori*. Indeed, the strategy this thesis employs provides a counter-argument to those who would claim that 'the philosophical source of artistic formalism is in the Kantian aesthetics as presented in the *Critique of Judgment*' (Dziemidok, 1993). But where Formalist doctrine unequivocally insists that 'to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing but a sense of form and color and a knowledge of three dimensional space' (ibid), the very notion of the synthetic *a priori* requires us to bring bodies and sensory organs; to embrace the lived experience. In this way, 'the formal elements [...] and elements of contents are united into a certain organic totality' (ibid). This thesis, then, is a *post*-Kantian rather than Neo-Kantian study. It is against *pure* formalism and recognises the evidence of culture and history in the shaping of aesthetic

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[93] The 'Marburg School', led by Hermann Cohen and other prominent thinkers including Paul Natorp and Ernst Cassirer, was emblematic of Neo-Kantian ideas concerning epistemology and social ethics. Their limited revision of Kant's work reflected only a partial reading of Kantian thought which dismissed intuition in favour of concepts; something this thesis, through its focus on the role of the synthetic *a priori* in judgment, has attempted to avoid.

experience.

There is, also, an ethics that begins to emerge from this *post*-Kantian position, and its source can be found in Kant's notion of beauty as the symbol of morality. In §59 of the *Dialectic*, Kant claims that 'the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good' (Kant, 1987: §59 [228/353]). While at first glance this might seem contradictory to his assertion in the *Analytic* that aesthetic judgments are not judgments of the '*Good*' *(Das Gute)*, there is a crucial distinction to be found in the translation of Kant's terms. 'Morality', in English, can be translated from *two* German words that mean profoundly different things: *Sittlichkeit*, and *Moralität*. As Wenzel notes:

> *Moralität* goes "deeper": it is related to our free will, motivation and moral laws. *Sittlichkeit*, on the other hand, is more on the surface. It is more about empirical and social phenomena of behaviour, manner, politeness and customs.

(Wenzel, 2005: 113)

Essentially, Kant sees the beautiful and the morally good as two *independent* things. The connection he makes between them is one of *analogy*: where the *ways* in which we reflect in moral and aesthetic judgments are analogous to one another. Both, he argues, require a 'broadened way of thinking' (Kant, 1987: §40 [161/295]), that Wenzel notes is 'my ability to reflect about the other person's position as compared with mine, and to reflect about various forms of purposiveness' (Wenzel, 2005: 116). As Robert Wicks asserts: 'Kant's project was to walk a tightrope: he must defend the autonomy of aesthetic values, while

308

showing how such values nonetheless operate in the service of morality' (Wicks, 1995: 336). As I have demonstrated throughout the thesis, 'aesthetic experience is characterized by a freedom of the imagination' (ibid), and this sense of freedom is also central to the ethical aspect of aesthetic experience. Where moral action, for Kant, 'is grounded upon the freedom of the will [...] imaginative freedom makes moral freedom "palpable" [...] by providing a sensory correlate to the rational freedom of the will' (ibid).

Kant's argument, then, is that concepts of reason – like God, or freedom – cannot be intuited in the same way as concepts of the understanding. For concepts of the understanding, notes Wenzel, 'there are ways of finding an intuition for a concept' (ibid). For instance, 'it is by associating the concept of a tree [...] with an intuitive representation of it (a mental picture), that we see a tree *as* a tree' (ibid). For concepts of reason, however, there are no intuitions adequate enough, and so a 'symbolic way' of representing them is needed to make them 'palpable'. In §59, Kant gives an example of how symbolic representation might function in expressing a concept of reason:

> A monarchy ruled according to its own constitutional laws would be presented as an animate body, but a monarchy ruled by an individual absolute would be presented as a mere machine (such as a hand-mill)

> (Kant, 1987: §59 [227/352])

Art, of course, can create symbolic representations to house certain ideas, and as such it is possible for art to represent concepts of reason – indeed, Kant's example

309

of the hand-mill often conjures up (at least, for me) the image of a painting, of a human-sized hand-mill on a throne. His point though, is that through the judgment of taste, which has *a priori* justifying grounds (like *Moralität*), and the object of reflection itself which belongs to the *a posteriori* empirical world (like *Sittlichkeit*), beauty becomes 'the symbol' of morality (Kant, 1987: §59 [227/352]). Through beauty, that is, through experience of the synthetic *a priori*, one is able to learn about – or at least better understand – the ways of thinking and being that represent moral goodness. Indeed in this way, Kant might argue that aesthetic experience in-and-of-itself is *good* for us. As moral goodness becomes 'palpable' through the imaginative play of the aesthetic, 'aesthetic responses to the beautiful and the sublime have moral value insofar as they prepare us for disinterested attachments [...] [thus] we have a Kantian duty to develop our aesthetic awareness' (ibid).

The next logical step for this Kantian approach to performance analysis, to my mind, is to find a way to bring it in to teaching practice. While I am not an expert in the field of pedagogy, a sound understanding of aesthetic experience as it pertains to the analysis, and construction, of performance is of tremendous use to students and scholars of theatre. In academic assessment too, as I outlined in Chapter One, this approach to *judgment* might well provide a fruitful counterpoint to academic criteria, and so reward student work that plays with our aesthetic capabilities even if it fails to quite match up to what our criteria think a 'good' piece of work is. The same can be said for funding bodies. In an arts economy driven by searching out the 'value' of arts both in the community and nationally,

310

recognising that 'value' is not limited to immediate, tangible, social change can only benefit the kinds of artists and performance makers who are concerned with the shape and structure of art *qua* aesthetic experience.

AFTERWORD

It's late July, and I'm at the Tate Modern with Gavin, an old friend, to see the latest exhibition. We wander through the *Poetry and Dream* collection, and come across *The Pack* (1969), by Joseph Beuys. I've seen *The Pack* at least five times previously, and every time it fascinates and excites me as if I'm seeing it for the first time. But Gavin doesn't share my excitement. He asks what the draw is to this particular piece. For anyone who hasn't seen it, *The Pack* (Fig. 76), 'consists of 24 sledges tumbling from the back of a VW van, each carrying a survival kit made up of a roll of felt for warmth and protection, a lump of animal fat for sustenance, and a torch for energy and navigation' (Bolitho, 2010).

Figure 76: Joseph Beuys, *The Pack*, (1969)

Later on that day, we say our goodbyes. Then I start to understand the significance of what I'd said in response. I can't quite remember my words verbatim, but I want to put down on paper what I told him, being as faithful as I can to my memory. This is (almost) what I said:

312

The thing about this Beuys' piece is it just grabs me, somehow, in a million different ways. I guess the first thing is the story, funnily. Maybe not 'story', like narrative, but I want to know *things. I don't care that this thing, van, is here, but now that it is, I've got questions about it. Where are we? Who do those packs belong to? And if they're all laid out like that, where did the people go? Clearly they're going somewhere with the packs, and they can't use the van anymore. So I have all these questions, and then I look at the van and the packs. I look hard, hoping that if I really concentrate I'll get an answer. And then I do get an answer. These walls, this place, disappear, and I'm there, I can see everything. We're at the foot of some mountain range, and the sky and the ground is full of snow. It's really cold, so cold you can see your breath hanging in the air. Over there* (I point to the right) *is a huddle of about seven guys, in big parka-style coats. They're stamping their feet and smoking really thin roll-ups. Most of them have got beards, or heavy stubble, so I don't think they've been anywhere that they can call home in a while. And then once I've seen all this, I don't have any more questions, I've just played around with what's there, extended the frame a little bit, and I get something exciting. It won't happen with everything, some things won't let you play, they're too self-assured. This one has lots of gaps though; it's set up so that I can see its composition and its failures in equal measure. But it's not really about what I can see, or what the work wants me to see, it's that there's room there for something to happen. And when there's room for that, I can intervene a little. And we can all do that, all of us. I think that's why I like it so much, because I think it's a kind of 'perfect' piece of art. It's what art should be, something beautiful that's not so cocky, that* wants *me to be here, that* needs *me to be here.*

Now, I've tidied that up a little bit, because I'm pretty certain that this monologue lasted for a good five minutes. But I meant it, and believed it, and I still do. And then later on, as I was sitting alone on the train, it dawned on me that my analysis was entirely Kantian, and that I'd made complete and utter sense of the work using a Kantian aesthetic framework, only never mentioning it. As you follow the line of packs and sleds up to the van, your eyes make an upwards sweeping curve, and there's an expectancy about what should be at the end. But it's just an empty, abandoned van, and that absence of life is striking, indeed, it is the *Moment* (n.) of the work. I'm not concerned about the object(s), though, I'm *disinterested*, they're just there, and since they are, I'm going to think about their textures, colours, and shapes. From that first 'push', I'm allowed to play, to speculate, *universally*, about these objects, their context, and their formation. There seems to be a *purposiveness* to the objects and their layout. They speak of readiness, and preparation, but I don't know why, there is no rule telling me why things are the way they are, but I feel a harmony nonetheless. The speculation is pleasurable, because I am reconciling this *a posteriori* moment of *being here* with my *a priori* faculties. The van and the objects are vital to this pleasure, and I am aware of the *necessity* of this relationship, without feeling possessive of the object(s). I am having an *aesthetic* experience, an extra-ordinary *adventure*.

For me, this post-Kantian approach to aesthetics is the simplest and most unfettered there is. It's not concerned with tradition, or politics. It doesn't care what you've got between your legs. It cares about the experience you have, and how you and a work of performance deal with each other in that brief coming

314

together. Most importantly of all, though, is that it doesn't ask for anyone to think about it as the 'right' way to articulate our experiences of art, but simply to recognise it's there. Art, and that includes music, painting, sculpture, photography, pottery, collage, poetry and literature, as well as dance, theatre and performance, is and must be socially or politically self-aware, it must strike out into the real world and upset or re-orient the status quo. That's good. It's hard to ignore how some artworks and artists have dedicated themselves to real-world change. In the theatre, we can see that in the works of Brecht, Boal, Weiss, 7:84, David Hare, David Edgar, and Caryl Churchill. That kind of art has a unique social value, but that doesn't mean it's any better than something purely aesthetic. In the imaginative speculation of aesthetic play, we enrich ourselves and our minds, we probe and push at the boundaries of what we know and what we imagine, and that stimulates thought, and thought can lead to action.

To finish, I want to take one more brief moment to reflect on taste, beauty, and the sublime, and try to crystallise what these terms should mean for us as performance makers, thinker, commentators, funders, programmers, and educators. Having come through the writing of the thesis, the notion of aesthetic experience conjures up the image of a seesaw in my mind. We arrive there through *das Moment*, something we feel in performance that forces us to alter our engagement with the work. Depending on what that 'moment' of performance is, the seesaw falls to either taste, or the sublime; sometimes, it might even stay still. This experience is a like an adventure, a journey into the vast potential of our imaginations brought about by *this* engagement, with *this* thing, *now*. In that adventure, as Kant himself

claimed, we achieve a perfect harmony between the empirical and the rational worlds, between the things we can see, touch, and smell, and the untouchable, unbounded faculties of the mind that make us human. Sometimes, we drift in and out of this playful state with such grace or sharpness that the adventure seems to burst at its seams, and flood, like a burst dam, into the ordinary course of things. That overflow is the experience of beauty, an experience so delicately crafted that the pleasure of aesthetic experience seems to swell within us and dominate every sinew.

It is my ultimate conclusion, then, that aesthetic experience can be articulated in two ways: taste, or sublime. There are occasional overlaps and meetings, as I found with the *Tragedia Endogonidia*, but in essence, it is possible to consider and unpick all aesthetic experiences in these terms. Beauty is something else, something special that can happen during aesthetic play. But what's important to me is that it can be given over to as rigorous an analysis of any performance theory. These aren't wishy-washy terms to describe subjective tendencies, or ways of covering up a lack of articulate response. They are legitimate experiences that champion the notion of aesthetic experience in-and-of-itself, of the aesthetic *qua* aesthetic. Sir Joshua Reynolds, an eighteenth century English artist wrote that 'could we teach taste and genius by rules, they would no longer be taste and genius' (Reynolds, 1809: 57). And, while there certainly aren't any rules for taste, it is something we can grab hold of, understand, and share. So we should.

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317

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