

**Performing Critique:
Towards a Non-Representational Theatre in
Britain**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

July 2012

Declaration

I, Spyros Papaioannou, declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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Abstract

The thesis traces the conditions of possibility for what we came to understand as ‘non-representational’ approaches to performing critique. In assessing different theatrical practitioners in Britain (in the form of case studies) that have challenged a politically prescriptive theatre, the thesis elaborates upon ideologically ‘incomplete’ ways of performing, in order to rethink the staging of critical practice beyond its subjection to mimesis, abstract significations and transcendental politics. Ways of rethinking theatre as a space in which politics is not transcendently transmitted, but rather emerges within the performance-event, as well as questions of spectators’ emancipation from systems of power that have rendered them passive and immobile watchers of a spectacle are examined and challenged. In doing so, the research resonates with many ongoing discussions about the function and performance of critique, placing questions of spectatorship, de-objectification and representation at the heart of its analysis.

Considering political theatre as a plateau on which critique can be actualised as a ‘becoming’ in the ‘here and now’ of the event, the thesis explores the question of non-representational performance along three broad theoretical axes. First, it unfolds and critically exposes the limits of interactivity within performance practices, by considering dialogical processes of performing not as ends-in-themselves, but as starting points of challenging the problem of representation in political theatre. Secondly, the thesis examines ‘incomplete’ and fragmentary performances, suggesting that non-representational approaches to theatre are, in effect, a critique of teleological outcomes and determinate meanings; therefore, theatrical incompleteness is theorised as a tool of critical practices that become non-representational. Thirdly, in destabilising the problematic opposition between conditioning the spectator as object or subject, the thesis argues that the power relations in performance need to be destratified and transformed into productive variations, as a way to endorse a politics of presence in political theatre.

Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to those who have supported my research.

Above all, without the excellent supervision, support, encouraging discussions, inspiring suggestions and patience of Prof. Vikki Bell, this work would not have been possible.

I would like to especially thank my former supervisor Paul Filmer for his immense support during the first stages of my research.

I would like to acknowledge the excellent academic and technical support of the Sociology Department of Goldsmiths and its staff, with whom my collaboration has always been creative and intellectually stimulating. Also, the support of the administrative staff of the department, particularly Bridget Ward and Lauren Sibley, has been extremely valuable for all the organisational matters related to my PhD studies.

I wish to express my gratitude to the theatre company 'Punchdrunk', particularly Colin Marsh, Maxine Doyle, Felix Barrett and Jen Thomas, for providing me with the opportunity to conduct the empirical part of my research during the group's rehearsals.

I could not undertake this PhD without the unconditional support and love that I receive from my family, Yiannis Papaioannou, Massiga Papaioannou and Anastasia Papaioannou. A mere expression of thanks to them does not suffice.

Myrto Karanika, I could thank you for a thousand different things. Your personal support, your creative ideas, your love and caring, and your great patience at all times, kept me going through the period of this research.

I am most grateful to Voula Karanika and Spyridoula Biskou for their continuous support and caring during the PhD.

My personal and creative relationships with Lucia Ariza, Aecio Amaral, Dhan Zunino Singh, Ioannis Bakolis and Claudio Deriu have significantly influenced my thinking as well as the way I work, and they deserve many thanks for their support and friendship.

Finally, I would like to thank all my lovely friends in Patras, Greece, for supporting me and encouraging me throughout the course of this research.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

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I. Thesis's overview

This is a thesis about the politics of theatre and performance. Inevitably, this means that it is also a thesis about the politics of representation and its relation to the possibilities of critique; that is, it makes sense to suggest that a study of political theatre can by no means afford to ignore the past and present discourses on representation, in the same way that it cannot fail to take into account the theoretical discussions of the function of critique. It is perhaps unfortunate, in research terms, that this proposition does not work both ways; that is, it often seems merely a 'question of choice' (which is often an aesthetical or a methodological one) *whether* one should pay attention to questions of theatre and performance when examining the politics of representation and the possibilities of critique. Of course, the point is not to think of this intersection in terms of imperatives. After all, the integration of questions of representation and critique in a research of theatre and performance is not a matter of regulation or obligation. It is however a matter of *need*.

While this introduction is not the place to elaborate on this argument further (I provide a more thorough discussion of this issue in the first chapter), I wanted to begin this thesis by highlighting this problem in order to clarify that my understanding of the politics of theatre and performance cannot be thought

outside discourses of representation and critique; in the same way that, I suggest, such discourses cannot be radically current and politically forceful if they are not informed by questions of performance, spectatorship, theatricality and so on. In other words, I want to make clear that my intention in this thesis is to consider both questions of theatre and performance, and the discourses on representation and critique, as belonging to one broad spectrum of thought that could be described as the ‘politics of performing critique’; not as a way to unify, totalise or generalise the analytical particularities of each area, but rather in an attempt to emphasise the commonalities of their theoretical scopes.

This thesis is an attempt to trace and examine the conditions of possibility for a political theatre beyond ideological dogmatism and mimetic representation. By assessing different ways in which critique has been embedded in theatrical performances, the thesis focuses on theories and practices that challenged representational modes of staging political discourses. Most of all, I consider such theories and practices as critical responses to the political implications of the normative and prescriptive ways of mimetically representing texts, identities, histories, ideas, cultures and conflicts. These implications or problems include: the normalisation of discourses that compress critique’s radical potentialities in performance, and its subsequent typification in the name of a certain commonsense; the production of self-identical meanings, the dissemination of prescriptive ideas and the use of politically dogmatic ways of engaging with audiences – in a word, the political ‘evangelism’ of Western theatre; the transcendental approaches to political action, that is the perpetuation of meanings and values that are always absent from the ‘here and now’ of a performance; and, finally, the resulting hierarchisation or stratification of the relations between the constituent (human and non-human) elements of a theatrical process.

I suggest that by properly analysing what makes these issues problematic in theatre and performance contexts, and, most importantly, by examining the intellectual and practical processes that have confronted them, we can obtain a thorough understanding of the ‘non-representational’ possibilities of political theatre. Of course, it is worth mentioning that the thesis does not consider the problem of representation as a dominant ‘predicament’, of which every other problem in theatre and performance is merely a side-effect; rather, I understand

all the aforementioned implications as important problems that can be studied in their own right, while belonging to representational systems of theatrical practice. Thus, the task of the thesis is not to theorise a theatre that could be labelled as non-representational, but rather to highlight and attribute significance to the processes that challenged the entire domain of representation in Western theatre, by understanding it as a system of power that restrained the potentialities of critique in performance.

Although the objective of the thesis is to undertake a critical analysis of the structural problem of representation in Western theatre as a whole, I give particular focus to British theatre directors and collectives – in the form of analytical case studies – examining their different approaches to the politics of performance, critique and representation in the 20th century. I consider the history of British political theatre (especially in the second half of the century) as a useful context of research that invites a thorough analysis of radical approaches to theatre and performance. On one level, the historical tradition of British theatre, and the richness of its multifaceted development throughout time, provide a platform on which discussions of the politics of performance are always justifiable and important. On a second level, the contradictions that have emerged in this tradition make the British theatrical paradigm a very interesting object of analysis, precisely because the clash of these contrasts has marked a polemic whose elements have been enacted and re-enacted continuously: from aristocratic or bourgeois adaptations of Shakespeare to music hall and melodramas, and from Victorian or neo-Victorian burlesque to street theatre, agit-prop and the iconoclastic interpretations of classical plays, British theatre has always been subject to radical theatrical ‘conflicts’ and sharp dramatic contrasts. Thus, I understand British theatre as a framework within which the juxtaposition of experimental practices and their challenges to normative modes of representation acquire a unique radical character; and, therefore, I suggest that their analysis can offer insightful perspectives in understanding the multiplicity of critical possibilities that political theatre proposes and endorses.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the thesis considers specific instances of *popular theatre* that have theoretically conceptualised and practically affirmed a politicised performance process in their experimental practice. The case studies

have been conducted on the basis of researching and exploring questions that have been brought to the fore by theatre directors and collectives whose performances were widely acclaimed by audiences and critics at the very time in which they were active. I suggest that the rationale behind this specification of my research objects provides an insightful way of understanding and problematising political theatre's non-representational potentials within performance contexts that might be retrospectively considered ordinary or even conventional – especially when compared to other more avant-garde theatre practices. I argue that such theatrical projects – that have been regarded as *ex post facto* mainstream – manifest prolific possibilities of mapping radical challenges to political theatre's representational function. Thus, by examining political theatre practices that have addressed a broad audience (or have attempted to do so), while simultaneously confronting the normative function of representing political discourses on stage, the thesis argues for a popular/political notion of performance as emancipated from dogmatism and mimesis. Of course, this is not to say that I place popular theatre in a somewhat qualitative antithesis to more experimental performance practices; such a hierarchical positioning would stand in opposition to the theoretical scope of the thesis. In this sense, the point of this specification has nothing to do with notions of performance efficacy or aesthetic preferences. Rather, the choice of cases has been made on the basis of acknowledging the potential of certain popular theatre instances to create a shift in the 'politics of performing critique', with view to unravel their non-representational direction and radicalise their resonance.

The theoretical scope through which my analysis is implemented is largely based on Gilles Deleuze's ontological explorations. Although Deleuze's relationship to questions of theatre and performance is often considered as limited, there are number of ways that his theoretical project can be linked to and embedded in discourses of theatre and performance studies (see Murray, 1997; Cull, 2009). Deleuze is important for this thesis for many reasons. I will briefly outline some of them as a way to also substantiate his contribution to discourses and practices of performance – a contribution that resonates with his 'micro-political' approach to critical practice. First, Deleuze's attack on the authority of representation remains at once current, rigorous and radical, while leaving 'open'

spaces for extended analyses of the possibilities of critical practice understood as mobile and creatively incomplete. He considers the function of representation in art, politics and philosophy as a transcendental site that privileges fixed and teleological imitations of identities, cultures, ideologies, histories, theories and so on. Thus, his critique takes the form of a productive encounter with non-representational ways of being, moving, acting and performing. Second, Deleuze's recurring calls for understanding and experiencing politics and art in terms of 'processes' and 'becomings' is of key importance for the thesis, as it is an approach that draws many parallels to questions of performance, while proposing a rethinking of critique as an 'operation' that becomes possible through 'subtractions', 'variations' and 'minor becomings' (Deleuze, 1997 [1979]). A Deleuzian way of thinking the 'political' favours mobile processes rather than static conditions, becomings rather than predetermined theorems, 'ruptures' rather than presets. Third, Deleuze's attack on stratification and fascistic organisation in regards to systems of power provides a platform on which one can theorise revolutionary concepts and practices as *concrete* political mappings without resting on utopian or ultra-idealist directions of thought (although Deleuze is often accused of developing these). Finally, on a more general note, Deleuzian theory provides the thesis with tools and ideas that go beyond a description of 'what is the problem', of 'what makes this problem possible', offering ways of thinking about 'what needs to be done' (though in the least didactic and determinate manner). As Foucault notes in the preface of *Anti-Oedipus*, '[Deleuze's and Guattari's] questions [...] are less concerned with *why* this or that than with *how* to proceed' (Foucault, 2004 [1972]: xiv; original emphasis). Of course, this does not mean that I consider the conditions of possibility for the problem of representation, and their thorough analysis, as less significant for my research. On the contrary, it is on the basis of a careful understanding of these conditions that ways of 'how to proceed' become apparent and justifiable.

It is also important to point out that the thesis takes on a Deleuzian analysis, without however being 'dictated' by a supposedly strict Deleuzian 'line of politics'. While my discussion is informed and inspired by Deleuze's theoretical project, my task is by no means to understand this project as a fixed academic category in which every part of the thesis should essentially and unconditionally fit. My

analysis is also informed by Artaud's deconstructive use of language and body, Derrida's attack on mimetic representation, Foucault's notions of critique and power, as well as by many questions posed by performance studies and theatre studies.

II. Performance as a challenge to representation

Let us now initiate the discussion and contextualise the questions that will be examined in the thesis. One of the most groundbreaking transformations that the 20th century theatre world experienced was the 'turn to performance'. This important shift became possible in the latter half of the century, bringing forth a radical questioning of established theatrical and dramatic forms. Performance, and performance studies as an emergent field of analysis, widened the ways of experiencing and analysing theatrical acts infusing them with qualities that were parallel to the 'performative turn' of social sciences. Although I further expand on both the emergence of 'performance studies' as a discipline and the important role of 'performativity' within theoretical plateaus in the first chapter of the thesis, it is important to make some points that are useful to this introduction. The advance of performance studies, as initiated by the intersection of the works of the director/professor Richard Schechner (1977; 2002) and the anthropologist Victor Turner (1982; 1986) spawned an immense analytical interest in sociocultural practices, claiming that 'everything can be studied "as" performance' (Schechner, 2006: 38-9). Social enactments, rituals, politics, media appearances, gender manifestations and so on, became objects of performance analysis by many theorists, as a way to substantiate the cultural importance, as well as the political possibilities of 'showing doing' (Schechner, 2002: 22). This form of analysis came forward partly in parallel to the academically emergent concept of 'performativity', an interdisciplinary term that encompassed the capacity of individuals to transform their 'being' into 'doing' with the use of language, speech or other non-verbal forms of expression (see Austin, 1975 [1962]; Butler, 1993).

The first question that I want to address in this introduction is the ways in which the 'turn to performance' contributed to a certain destabilisation of the politics of representation in theatre and performance contexts. It is widely

acknowledged that the ‘postmodern condition’, which manifested itself in a range of cultural and artistic practices, and the emergence of poststructuralist theory in France were directly linked to the advance of performance art and the development of performance-discourses. One of the key questions that this intersection brought to the fore was a rethinking of the ways in which theatrical sense is produced. Processes of interpretation, reception, subjectivity and conveyance were placed under serious scrutiny by many practitioners and academics of performance. As Jon Mckenzie points out in a more general tone, ‘between 1955 and 1975 and across a wide range of cultural practice and research, there was an attempt to pass from product to process, from mediated expression to direct contact, from representation to presentation, from discourse to body, from absence to presence’ (Mckenzie, 2001: 38).

In the theatrical context, this radical attempt to break with normative systems of signification and to affirm the ‘live’ qualities of theatrical events resulted in a creative decomposition of traditional forms of performing and engaging with audiences. In this period (from the late 1950s to the early 1970s), theatrical plays began to acquire non-linear and more ‘micropolitical’ narratives, while introducing a radical sense of ephemerality to the act of performing and engaging meaning. The previously uncontested authority of the dramatic text, the power of speech and the supremacy of the author’s and the performer’s intentions were more than useful points of debate; they became areas of theoretical confrontation amongst practitioners and academics of performance. The historical instances that can serve as politically radical insights for the thorough exploration of this questioning are many and diverse. For example, Auslander reminds us of the experimentation of a non-fictional, non-representational theatre that was devised by companies such as The Living Theatre, The Open Theatre and The Performance Group back in the 1960s: ‘Whereas it is usually supposed that the function of actors is to represent fictional beings, the performers in the radical theatres of the 1960s were often present as themselves’ (Auslander, 2004: 109). Also, James Loxley highlights Artaud’s response to a Balinese ritual dancing that the latter attended in Paris: ‘[this performance] could produce something directly striking and meaningful precisely because it was not either given over to narrative

or ideas or consumed in producing images of a world that was forever elsewhere' (Loxley, 2007: 146).

The list of performance artists, directors and collectives whose practice can be placed within this confrontational context is long and probably endless. Without any intention to hierarchise or even categorise the multiplicities of performance projects, I suggest that this list would include: Antonin Artaud, Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski, Julian Beck, John Cage, Richard Foreman, Peter Brook, Robert Wilson, Allan Kaprow, Laurie Anderson, Marina Abramovic, Forced Entertainment, Punchdrunk, Richard Schechner amongst many others. In very different ways, such artists either created the conditions for or directly contributed to a subversive rethinking of theatre's traditional use of representation and power. It is therefore crucial to note that the emergence of a 'postmodern' politics of theatre (which in effect was largely a challenge to the mimetic function of representation on stage) became possible through the radical discourses of performance, while resonating with the poststructuralist attacks on the totalising and teleological ways of constructing subjectivity and agency.

Thus theatre and performance practices obtained a postmodern and poststructuralist polemics that 'distrust[ed] claims to authenticity, originality, or coherence' and 'deflat[ed] master narratives and totalising theories' (Reinelt & Roach, 1992: 1). According to Jill Dolan, 'a postmodernist performance style' can be understood as one that 'breaks with realist narrative strategies, heralds the death of unified characters, decentres the subject, and foregrounds conventions of perception' (Dolan, 1989: 60). The conditions of possibility for what Marvin Carlson calls a 'resistant performance' were created in the form of polemical responses to the hegemony of dramatic representation and the dogmatism of self-identical meanings (Carlson, 1996). Of course, the development of such resistance was by no means simple and untroubled, since the problem of representation had to be found at the very core of performances' function. As Carlson notes, '[u]nable to move outside the operations of performance (or representation), and thus inevitably involved in its codes and reception assumptions, the contemporary performer seeking to resist, challenge, or even subvert these codes and assumptions must find some way of doing this 'from within'' (ibid: 172). According to Carlson, this intricacy is always characteristic of the ways in which postmodern

performances attempted to counter their somewhat inherent mimetic and normative elements. Echoing Auslander's postmodern theatrical theory, Carlson suggests that the development of resistant performance becomes possible always as a result of the interplay 'between complicity and critique' (as cited in Carlson, 1996: 174).

What I suggest is important here is that one of the most radical motivations of such performances was 'to engage in a decidedly political resistance to narrative closure', that is, in a decomposition of the representational ways of signifying meanings that were absent and external to the performance-event (Kaye, 2000 [1994]: 276). In other words, the stimulus for resisting and subverting the function of mimetic representation in theatre and performance was rooted in the desire to challenge 'the 'unification' and 'simplification' of mimesis and its ability to represent reality as an external and universal constant' (Murray, 1997: 2). As Kaye argues, while commenting on Karen Finley's *Constant State of Desire*, '[t]he effect of such a resistance is not to be found in a particular import or articulation of a point of view, but occurs as a destabilising of that which is 'assumed', of that which would appear to the audience as something which is already 'known'' (Kaye, 2000 [1994]: 276). I argue that it is by virtue of this general destabilisation that postmodern performance practice substantiated its confrontation to the implications of mimetic representation; and it is on the basis of this longing for theatrical *presence*, for the creative possibilities of the 'here and now' of the event that such a practice 'resists the attempt to divorce its 'meanings' or political value from its immediate contexts' (ibid). The 1982 essay of Josette Feral *Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified*, is a key instance of scholarship that examines and justifies performance's rejection of mimetic representation. In analysing the specificities of the performance genre and the renewed possibilities of experience that performance has offered, Feral argues that '[p]erformance is the absence of meaning' (Feral, 1997 [1982]: 292). By referring to the performances of The Living Theatre and to the theatres of Robert Wilson and Richard Foreman, she clarifies this argument: '[p]erformance does not aim at *a* meaning, but rather *makes* meaning in so far as it works right in those extremely blurred junctures out of which the subject eventually emerges' (ibid: original emphasis).

Indeed, the question of the ways in which meaning is constructed in performances has been of key importance in discussions of the theatrical politics of representation. In particular, the traditional relationship between text (or language) and the actual event of performance has been rendered problematic by many cultural theorists. Raymond Williams argued that ‘drama’ should be ‘put at some relative distance from ‘literature’’ (Williams, 1983: 5), being understood as ‘writing in performance’ (Regan, 2000: 49). The emergence of ‘[n]ew kinds of text, new kinds of notation, new media and new conventions’ that Williams discussed in his essay *Drama in a Dramatised Society* contributed significantly to this end (Williams, 1983: 11). At the same time, non-linguistic performance mediums came to be considered as non-representational ‘texts’ or non-semiotic ‘languages’. For instance, Theodor Adorno’s 1956 essay *Music and Language: A Fragment*, and Roland Barthes’s 1972 essay *The Grain of the Voice* are two of the most notable analyses of the possibility of ‘music-as-language’ to deconstruct normative processes of signification and representation in performance. For Adorno, ‘[m]usic creates no semiotic system’, since its performance is experienced in the form of what he calls ‘recurring ciphers’ (Adorno, 1998 [1956]: 1-2). It is in a similar way that Barthes suggests the notion of the ‘geno-song’ (elaborating on Kristeva’s idea of ‘geno-text’) to describe these musical melodies that have ‘nothing to do with communication, representation (of feelings), expression’, but rather work through volume and intonation (Barthes & Heath, 1972: 182). The main focus of these discourses was to reveal the productive potential of performances in the process of creating, rather than representing, meaning. In the words of the anthropologist Edward Bruner,

‘performance does not release a preexisting meaning that lies dormant in the text [...] Rather, the performance itself is constitutive. Meaning is always in the present, in the here-and-now, not in such past manifestations as historical origins or the author’s intentions’ (Bruner, 1986: 11).

Bruner argues for the always-performative and ‘active’ aspect of texts, criticising their supposedly ‘silent’ and absent qualities that ‘haunt’, rather than critically engage, meaning. In a sense, this view simultaneously echoes and criticises the idea of deconstructive semiotics, ‘that performance is always *more* than the text’ (Reinelt, 1992: 113; my emphasis); that is, it contends that the question of

emancipating performance from textual and representational authority, is not only a question of ‘addition’ but also a question of ‘presence’. As Tim Etchells argues while describing the thrust of his work with *Forced Entertainment*, this question is ‘[a] concern with language not as text [...], but as an event’ (Etchells, 1999: 105).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the role of feminism in discourses and practices of theatre, and the emergence of feminist performances have been pivotal in the development of challenges to mimetic processes of representation and signification. The polemics of attempting to subvert the mis-representations of women on stage, and the radicalism of introducing agency to women performers and spectators, was fundamental in creating the conditions for critiques of the entire domain and function of representation in theatre. As Carlson notes, ‘[m]aterialist feminism has generally sought to utilise the postmodern decentring of the subject, not to reverse Lacan and to create a new ‘subject’ position for women, but to encourage both performers and spectators to think critically about the whole traditional apparatus of representation, including in particular the subject/object relationship’ (Carlson, 1996: 170). What feminist critique brought to performances was, crucially, a destabilisation of a transcendent politics of identity as represented on stage. As Elin Diamond suggests, it managed to break with the fixed and self-identical positioning of women (and also of other misrepresented communities) creating spaces for more ‘unstable identifications’ in performance (Diamond, 1997: 36). This feminist focus on variations of identity positions and mobile subjectivities contributed significantly to challenging normative significations and ‘mapping discontinuities in representation’ (Case, 1990: 9). Sue-Ellen Case’s (1990) *Performing Feminisms* (edited collection of essays), and Diamond’s (1997) *Unmaking Mimesis* are two of the most extended analyses of the impact of feminist performances to the politics of representation.

Thus, all these discourses that challenged the invariability of meaning, the political limits of mimesis and the essentialism of binary positioning in theatre and performance created renewed conditions of performing that rethought theatrical processes beyond their submission to representation and text. Hans-Thies Lehmann’s (2006 [1999]) *Postdramatic Theatre* is a very comprehensive study of a certain movement in theatre that, from the 1980s onwards, pushed the boundaries of the use of ‘texts’ in performances in order to emancipate the stage and the

auditorium from the production of fixed dramatic representations. Lehmann focused on the virtue of theatrical fragmentation, suggesting that,

‘[postdramatic theatre] renounces the long-incontestable criteria of unity and synthesis and abandons itself to the chance (and risk) of trusting individual impulses, fragments and microstructures of texts in order to become a new kind of practice. In the process it discovers a new continent of performance, a new kind of 'presence' of the 'performers' (into which the 'actors' have mutated) and establishes a multifarious theatre landscape beyond forms focused on drama’ (Lehmann, 2006 [1999]: 56-7).

The impact of Lehmann’s conceptualisation of the ‘postdramatic paradigm’ has been important and useful in theatre and performance discourses that looked for contemporary ways to articulate vocabularies, terminologies and general frameworks to encapsulate the complexity of theatre’s growing distrust of representation. Questions of post-linear and immersive performances have been widely addressed and thoroughly analysed, as a way to affirm a renewed Artaudian and ‘happening-like’ recognition of performances as destratified *mise en scènes*; as spaces in which the multiple elements of performance (performers, spectators, lights, sounds, texts, space, technology and so on) were considered as equally significant for a politics of present experiences – for a politics of the event (see Kaye, 1994; Case, 1996; Kozel, 2000; Bay-Cheng et al, 2010). Susan Kozel’s (2000) account of post-linear performance is characteristic of the way in which the ‘political’ has been transformed in theatrical contexts. She argues that this type of performance produces creative interruptions and gaps in which the engagement between the play and the audience becomes political:

‘Through post-linearity gaps are provided for us to insert our views, our experiences, or for us to self-consciously chart our own course through material based on our likes, dislikes, or habits [...] In this sense, post-linear performance can be called generative performance. If a distopia is presented (for example racial prejudice or sexual abuse) it is rarely presented as fatalistic and unchangeable. Instead, it is presented as a strident revelation: ‘look at this – did you know this is happening?!’ followed by an implicit: ‘do something about this!’ [...] It is political, but it avoids being prescriptive’ (Kozel, 2000: 260).

From this perspective, post-linear performance is a critique of theatrical representation's capacity to signify a teleological and transcendental politics. Kozel makes this clear when she argues that post-linear performance is political 'by engineering a confrontation between the present and the absent, the visible and the invisible' (ibid: 261).

Now, it is important for this thesis to clarify the way in which I will approach the, often oppositional, terms 'theatre' and 'performance'. For many performance theorists, the radically changing politics of representation, along with the emergence of postdramatic and postlinear narratives, constituted a basis on which a sharp contrast between theatre and performance was justified (see Schechner, 2002; Carlson, 2007; Reinelt, 2002). For example, in *Performance and Cultural Politics* (1996) Elin Diamond describes this dissimilarity in a quite unconditional way:

'In brief, theatre was charged with obeisance to the playwright's authority, with actors disciplined to the referential task of representing fictional entities [...] Performance, on the other hand, has been honoured with dismantling textual authority, illusionism, and the canonical actor in favour of the polymorphous body of the performer' (Diamond, 1996: 3).

Other theorists, like Josette Feral, have understood this contrast between the two terms as a 'blurred' relation, specifically while examining practices 'belonging to the limits of theatre' (Feral, 1997 [1982]: 290). Moreover, for performance studies, theatre is mostly understood as a subcategory of the much more broad and open field that the term performance embodies (Reinelt, 2002; Cull, 2009). My intention in this thesis is to use the terms theatre and performance almost interchangeably – not only as a way to emphasise what I believe is a needless rigidity in separating them; but also to insist upon a rethinking of theatre's performance potentials, as well as of performance's continuous relation to theatrical processes. In other words, I am more interested in what unites these two terms (even through their differences), rather than in what divides them. Having said that, it makes sense to restate my primary objective in the thesis, which is to examine the non-representational potentials of political theatre and performance, by considering their political disposition neither as a fixed label, nor as, in the words of Alan Read, '[o]utmoded forms of reference' that 'limit thought to

partitioned realms' (Read, 1993: 1-2); but as a productively incomplete process of critique, an always 'becoming-present' theatrical operation.

III. The question of the spectator: Why is it a bad word?

In concluding the fourth section (*Poetics of the Oppressed*) of *Theatre of the Oppressed* (2000 [1979]), Augusto Boal writes:

“Spectator’ is a bad word! The spectator is less than a man and it is necessary to humanise him, to restore to him his capacity of action in all its fullness. He too must be a subject, an actor on an equal plane with those generally accepted as actors, who must also be spectators. All these experiments of a people’s theatre have the same objective – the liberation of the spectator, on whom the theatre has imposed finished visions of the world’ (Boal, 2000 [1979]: 154-5).

Boal’s theatrical model, as described in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, with its focus on process, on the dialogical exchange between the on stage action and the audience, and with its Marxist lines of thought and critique, still echoes as one of the deepest explorations of the problem of audience’s passivity and inaction. In particular, Boal’s ‘Forum Theatre’ is a theatrical technique that allows the audience to intervene (with a guidance of a facilitator – a Joker) in the plays and develop alternative ways of resolving a specific conflict that involves oppression and inequality. Boal’s theatre, along with his proposal for engaging with ‘spect-actors’, has been a polemical critique (a theatrical manifesto) of bourgeois representational theatre that resonates with many initiatives of political theatre that followed. Indeed, the question of the spectators’ de-objectification and the enabling of their agential possibilities are directly connected to the problem of representation in Boal’s theory. He writes:

‘And since those responsible for theatrical performances are in general people who belong directly or indirectly to the ruling classes, obviously their finished images will be reflections of themselves. The spectators in the people’s theatre (i.e. the people themselves) cannot go on being the passive victims of those images’ (ibid: 155).

Before proceeding to specify the way in which the thesis addresses the question of ‘spect-actor’, it is useful to first outline two broad theatrologies that had a significant impact on the development of responses to spectators’ submission to the power of representation – that played a crucial role in creating the conditions for the ‘spect-actor’.

The first one, as developed by Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht, is epic theatre; that is, a political form of theatre that focused on the critical and rational engagement of the audience with the play (see Piscator, 1980 [1929]; Brecht, 1964). Having obvious Marxist references and showing an emphasis on the performance’s capacity to make the spectators think critically – and not emotionally – about the subject matter and the staging conditions, epic theatre made use of important socio-historical events in order to enhance the political perception of the audience. Brecht’s ‘alienation effect’ became one of the most important techniques of political theatre that focused on performance as a critical engagement beyond illusion and transcendence. Brechtian theatre pushed the boundaries of critique to a point in which the representational faculties of the audience, their capacity to let themselves be illusioned by abstract significations, were almost ‘forbidden’. This ‘alienating’ process was facilitated by means of interruptions of and contradictions in the narrative of the performances. Brecht’s understanding of representation is interestingly portrayed by Walter Benjamin in *Understanding Brecht*:

‘The task of epic theatre, Brecht believes, is not so much to develop actions as to represent conditions. But ‘represent’ does not here signify ‘reproduce’ in the sense used by the theoreticians of Naturalism. Rather, the first point at issue is to *uncover* those conditions [...] This uncovering (making strange, or alienating) is brought about by processes being interrupted’ (Benjamin, 1998 [1966]: 18; original emphasis).

Brecht believed that interruptions and contradictions could de-objectify the spectators, transforming them from passive objects of representation into critical agents of the performance. He notes that ‘artistic appreciation’ is ‘quite a different matter from being required to observe not a representation of the world but the world itself in a critical, contradictory, detached manner’ (Brecht, 1964: 146).

Theatre directors whose work has a direct Brechtian influence include Joan Littlewood, Augusto Boal, Dario Fo, Heiner Muller amongst many others.

The second teatrology that challenged the representational mode of engaging with audiences is the one developed by Antonin Artaud: the theatre of cruelty. Although I further expand on Artaud's theatrical philosophy in the first chapter of the thesis, it is important to note here that the impact of the theatre of cruelty was fundamental in rethinking audience engagement through desire, magic and sacredness beyond their representational imitations. Artaud talked about a theatre in which the spectator is present in the 'blazing centre' of the *mise en scène*, intoxicated with unpredictable emotions that function in tangible rather than transcendental ways. Unlike epic theatre, the theatre of cruelty argued for the necessity of magic, illusion and emotional engagement in so far as the performers and the audience were immersed in a non-representational theatrical plane. Artaud writes:

'We want to make out of the theatre a believable reality which gives the heart and the senses that kind of concrete bite which all true sensation requires [...] And the public will believe in the theatre's dreams on condition they take them for true dreams and not for a servile copy of reality; on condition that they allow the public to liberate within itself the magical liberties of dreams which it can only recognise when they are imprinted with terror and cruelty' (Artaud, 1958: 85-6).

Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba and Peter Brook are three of the most notable directors whose practice was inspired by Artaudian theatre; a theatre that Christopher Innes calls the 'primitivist' avant-garde (Innes, 1993).

It is the *relation* between the impacts of these two theatre modes that gave rise to a postmodern conception of active spectatorship. It is their difference that created the conditions for problematising the question of audience de-objectification in the most radically political ways. If Brechtian theatre was 'consistently secular' in its political rationale, then the theatre of Artaud became an attempt to rediscover the 'mythopoeic' and sacred processes that redefined a politics of experience in performance (Michelson, 1974: 57). As Peter Brook would say, the difference between Brecht and Artaud is a difference between a 'rough' and a 'holy' theatre (Brook, 1990 [1968]).

Now, returning to the notion of ‘spect-actor’, it is important to note that Boal’s theatre was largely a Brechtian, or rather, a post-Brechtian theatre of which Artaud would have lots of questions to ask. In other words, the ‘theatre of the oppressed’ is a model that was inspired by the questions that Brecht posed, but in the end, was unable to satisfy the answers that Artaud was looking for. One of my intentions in this thesis is to place the question of the spectator at the centre of a non-representational approach to theatre and performance. At the same time, my analysis is informed on one hand by a longing for emancipating the spectator from political prescription and dogmatism; and on the other hand, by the need to understand interactive and participatory theatrical techniques not as ends in themselves, but as starting points of problematisation and critique. In this sense, Artaudian thought is given particular attention (elaborating on it through Derrida and Deleuze). It is worth mentioning however, that I do not aim to theorise an Artaudian theatre in the same way that I do not intend to depart from everything that Brecht or Boal have proposed. Rather, I want develop a critical analysis of the ways in which the non-representational potentials of theatre practice connect with a rethinking of the problem of audience’s passivity.

Boal argues that spectator is a bad word. This bold statement echoes a significant body of critique that has highlighted the need of making the audience agents of meaning and active subjects in performances. From Raymond Williams who argued that, ‘[w]atching itself has become problematic’ (Williams, 1983: 11); to Baz Kershaw who maintained that, ‘[t]he totally passive audience is a figment of the imagination, a practical impossibility’, inactive spectatorship has been rendered one of the most important problems not only in theatre, but also in the entire realm of cultural politics (Kershaw, 1992: 16). But why is spectator a bad word? And, most importantly, what are the assumptions that need further analysis in the act of de-objectifying and emancipating spectators from a condition of passivity and inaction?

Recently, in *The Emancipated Spectator* (2011 [2009]), Jacques Ranciere gives an account of the complexity inherent in the problem of spectatorship that is very useful here; particularly if seen as a response to these forms of theatre and performance that understand audience participation as a teleological solution of this problem. Interestingly, Ranciere also uses the adjective ‘bad’ to describe the

condition of traditional spectatorship, whilst formulating what he calls ‘the paradox of the spectator’:

‘there is no theatre without a spectator [...] But [...] being a spectator is a bad thing for two reasons. First, viewing is the opposite of knowing: the spectator is held before an appearance in a state of ignorance about the process of production of this appearance and about the reality it conceals. Second, it is the opposite of acting: the spectator remains immobile in her seat, passive. To be a spectator is to be separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act’ (Ranciere, 2011 [2009]: 2).

In problematising this contradiction, Ranciere underlines the need to subvert the power of representation as projected from the spectacle to the spectators, by focusing on the ways in which knowledge becomes possible. He argues for ‘a theatre without spectators, where those in attendance learn from as opposed to being seduced by images; where they become active participants as opposed to passive voyeurs’ (ibid: 4). In describing the problem, Ranciere’s critique is at first glance compatible both to Brecht’s anti-illusory theatre and to Boal’s opposition to the bourgeois spectacle-performances. However, I suggest that it is in his critical analysis of ‘how to proceed’ that his differentiation from Brecht and Boal becomes evident and his contribution to the discourse on spectatorship is most useful.

Ranciere does not advocate a Brechtian theatre in which the spectator occupies a rational position of watching the on stage action from a relative distance. He is critical of this distance in so far as it maintains an opposition between knowledge and ignorance. By pointing out that, ‘[t]he spectator must be removed from the position of observer calmly examining the spectacle offered to her’ Ranciere, echoing Artaud, argues that ‘she will exchange the privilege of rational observer for that of the being in possession of all her vital energies’ (ibid). Thus, on one level Ranciere’s argument stresses the importance of breaking with a notion of spectatorship conceived as a passive condition of attending, viewing or witnessing something that exceeds his/her reach. On a second level, and this is where his account can be seen as critical not only of Boal’s theatre but of participatory theatres in general, Ranciere identifies important problems in the processes of de-objectifying spectators. He argues that those who ‘intend to teach their spectators ways of ceasing to be spectators’ assume a different form of subjection that has to

do with the distance between knowledge and ignorance (ibid: 7-8). To make his point, Ranciere uses the example of the distance between a schoolmaster and a pupil, an ignoramus (borrowed from his 1991 work *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*) which is maintained not because of the pupil's inability to understand but because of his/her continuous *inaccessibility* to what the schoolmaster knows. He notes that,

‘[the schoolmaster] can only reduce the distance on condition that he constantly re-creates it. To replace ignorance by knowledge, he must always be one step ahead, install a new form of ignorance between the pupil and himself’ (ibid: 8).

Thus, Ranciere goes on to argue that the capacity to know, and consequently the power to act, is not a matter of quantity of knowledge (of how much one knows or does not know), but a position. In other words, he makes clear that what is at stake is not giving the spectator or the pupil the opportunity to know more (since the director or the schoolmaster will always know even more), but destabilising the fixed subject-positioning that produces subjection and creates hierarchical conditions in theatrical performances or learning processes. He suggests that,

‘[e]mancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions’ (ibid: 13).

Ranciere's critique is a very helpful introductory point for the way in which the thesis discusses the question of spectator alongside the non-representational possibilities of theatre and performance. It paves the way not only for a destabilisation of the problematic opposition between activity and passivity in performance contexts, but also opens the discussion to the non-hierarchical possibilities of critical practice by emphasising the need to thoroughly problematise spectatorship. Although the thesis focuses more on the critical possibilities of what we can understand as ‘experience’, rather than knowledge, Ranciere's emphasis on the limits of participatory models and his critique of hierarchical positioning are important elements that will prove central to my analysis of non-representational approaches to theatre and performance.

IV. The chapters

As a way to conclude this introduction and begin the main body of the work, it is useful to briefly outline the chapters that structure the thesis and frame its arguments. The five chapters to follow are interconnected and inform one another, maintaining at the same time what I believe is a necessary possibility to be read independently as autonomous parts.

The second chapter offers a review of some of the ways in which the intersection between theatre and theory has been thought within academic scholarship. Focusing on the notions of dramaturgy, theatricality and performativity, the chapter critiques the conventional relation between the 'theatrical' and the 'theoretical', suggesting that theory and critique need to be transformed from abstract and transcendental representations, or methodological tools, to radical actualisations in the 'here and now' of the performance-events. Accordingly, the chapter goes on to examine two discussions between theatre and theory: Artaud and Derrida, Bene and Deleuze. I consider these two 'meetings' as crucial theoretical instances that enrich the arguments of the thesis and prepare the reader for the case studies to follow.

The third chapter initiates the thesis's critical analysis of specific theatre directors in Britain that experimented extensively with challenging representation in performing critique. The case of Joan Littlewood is of particular importance as her post-Brechtian approach to popular theatre is, in a way, characteristic of political theatre's development in 20th century Britain. For this reason, this case study is the most historical of the three, following Littlewood's radical theatre practice from her agit-prop projects (that were inspired by her communist background) to her postmodern ideas on space and interactivity. The chapter presents a critical analysis of Littlewood's political theatre as expressed through ensembles (with Ewan McColl), focusing on her simultaneous influence and disparity from Brecht, raising the question of the 'popular' in political theatre and examining Littlewood's contribution to the emancipation of theatrical expression and reception from teleology and mimetic representation.

Partly in keeping with the questions explored in the preceding chapter, the fourth chapter discusses the possibility of a 'pre-cultural' theatre. Focusing on the

Artaudian expression of Peter Brook's theatre, this case study examines Brook's attempt to theorise and practice a theatre that bypasses linguistic normativity and representation, by creating affective conditions of direct contact with audiences. The chapter is divided into two subsections: The first one considers the theoretical significance of *The Empty Space*, paying particular attention to what Brook calls a 'holy theatre', in order to examine the non-representational way in which he understands metaphysics in performance. In a more particular manner, the second subsection of the chapter provides a critical analysis of *Orghast*, a performance that was devised in an invented (neologistic) language, considering the processes of onomatopoeia and glossopoeia as critical possibilities of a non-representational approach to theatre and performance.

The fifth chapter examines the promenade theatre of the London-based collective Punchdrunk. In this final case study of the thesis I discuss the impact of the postdramatic paradigm in political theatre, with a view to examining contemporary challenges to mimetic representation and ideological teleology. Considering Punchdrunk's immersive approach to theatre-making, I examine the framework and the work process of this theatre collective especially in relation to: their ideas concerning space and installation, their use of masks for the spectators (on which I elaborate to suggest a critical view of voyeurism), the use of dancers as opposed to actors, and the political significance of their fragmented and incomplete narratives. For the implementation of this case study and the enrichment of its analysis I have conducted interviews with members of the directorial and the managerial team. These interviews helped me capture the theatrical 'philosophy' of Punchdrunk and discuss some important points directly with the group. Furthermore, my work with the group over a period of three months, during which I had the opportunity to observe their rehearsals for the staging of *The Duchess of Malfi* (2010), gave me unique insights into their performance practice.

Building on the analysis of the preceding case studies the last chapter of the thesis presents the arguments and explores in more depth the concepts that, I suggest, are crucial for the discussion and development of a non-representational approach to theatre and performance. My intention in this sixth chapter is to further elaborate on those 'lines of thought' that conditioned and radicalised

critique in performance, discussing the ‘non-representational’ as a political ‘becoming’, rather than a static condition, and clarifying the theoretically obscure notion of ‘incompleteness’ in theatre and performance contexts. Finally, the chapter concludes by critiquing the traditional processes of de-objectifying spectators, emphasising the need for destratification of the power relations in political theatre.

Chapter 2

On theory and theatre: towards a notion of critique that challenges representation on stage

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Introduction

The role that theatre and performance has taken in theoretical writing has certainly been a very important one. In particular, from the 1960s onwards, theatrical terminology has become embedded in discourses whose mode of analysis entails either a ‘turn to performance’, or a dramatisation of theoretical narratives and methods. As Maria Minich Brewer argues in her 1985 essay *Performing Theory*, ‘[m]etaphors of the theatre such as *mise-en-scène*, staging, performance, production, play, and act pervade the major discourses of contemporary theory’ (Brewer, 1985: 13; original emphasis). Also, as Kelleher and Ridout note, ‘the practices of theatre and philosophy have for so long worked hand in hand (or wrestled arm against arm) over similar questions (representation, human nature, truth, illusion)’ (Kelleher & Ridout, 2006: 4). The reference to the theatre as a theoretical tool was promoted especially by French critical thought, giving rise to discourses that problematised the politics of representation in different ways. Timothy Murray notes that, ‘[r]egardless of the particular school or method being advanced, whether feminism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, or ideology critique, French theoreticians invariably reflect on the structural and epistemological status of mimesis (imitation)’ (Murray, 1997: 1). Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Ranciere are only a few amongst many French theorists who drew extensively from ‘theatologies’ as a way to suggest renewed critiques of representation and to account for a new – broadly conceived – ‘politics of performance’ (see Foucault, 1997 [1977]; Derrida, 2001 [1978]; Deleuze, 1997 [1979]; Ranciere, 2011 [2009]). From Greek tragedy to Shakespeare, and from the plays of Moliere to Artaudian fragments, theatrical languages have been valorised by postmodern critical theory both for their potential to provide methodologies with performative directions, as well as for their capacity to describe cultural conditions of enactment and ‘social performances’.

While considering the use of theatologies as methodological mediums, this chapter takes on a critical analysis of the relation between theory and theatre from a different perspective. It examines the ‘meeting’ of theatre and theory (that is, the actual performance of theory) by looking at the possibility of theatre to challenge the mimetic and representational mode in which theory functions. Thus, the

chapter addresses the following question: What can theory become within the micropolitical ‘sphere’ of a theatrical performance? My intention is to account for the possibility of theory to *become* theatre – that is, to be performed without being imitated or conveyed through theatre as a transcendental representation or an absent abstraction; but rather, by being actualised as a mobile and essentially incomplete *becoming* in the ‘here and now’ of a theatrical performance.

The intricacy of this task lies primarily in the attempt to understand theatre as a space in which the process of representation can be subtracted or decomposed. Considering the strong relation between performance (as conceptualised mainly in Occidental theatre) and signification of meanings (as expressed through dramatic texts, theory, ideology and ethics) whose substance is non-existent within the performing act, this chapter examines the conditions for the destabilisation of this connection as a means to discuss ‘lines of escape’ from mimetic representation. Thus, the objective of the chapter is not to define or theorise a mode of performance that stands in direct opposition to representation as such; but rather, in highlighting what is politically at stake in understanding and experiencing theatre predominantly as a representational medium, the chapter suggests a rethinking of the relation between theatre and theory that challenges mimesis and abstract significations of meaning. In order to do so, I will examine the extent to which the performance of theory can be experienced as a critical process that emerges ephemerally, without essentially corresponding to any external transcendental significations beyond the theatrical event. In this sense, the question of how theatre can create the conditions of possibility for what Bryan Reynolds calls ‘productively agential’ subjectivities, whilst critiquing representational systems of performance, is one of the tasks of this chapter as well as of the thesis as a whole (Reynolds, 2009: 2). In discussing this challenge, I want to focus on the capacity of performance to be a non-teleological, incomplete process that draws its political force from its own variations, rather than from stratification and ideological coherence.

In the first section of this chapter, I will encounter some of the reasons that explain the lack of scholarly attention to the problematic coexistence of theory and theatre. By addressing diverse theoretical frameworks within the latter half of the 20th century, as well as by taking into account the ‘postdramatic shift’ in theatre, I

will suggest that the question of performing theory needs to be re-posed and thoroughly problematised. I will argue that theatre is a space in which theory becomes critique; and it is by virtue of this ‘becoming’ that theory relates to theatre in a politically relevant, as well as radical, way. It is in this way that theory emancipates itself from producing self-identical and fixed images of meaning, acquiring the potential of becoming a non-representational process and practice. At the same time, I will argue that a significant part of theatre and performance studies have not been able to break with a bold dichotomy that separates academic theory and performing; resulting in theory’s refusal to acknowledge theatrical performances as critical spaces within which meaning can be produced, extended and performed.

Furthermore, I intend to theoretically contextualise what I consider to be two useful starting points for the thesis’s arguments. First, by examining Derrida’s discussion of Antonin Artaud in *The Theatre of Cruelty and The Closure of Representation* (2001 [1978]), I will inquire into the Derridean idea of presence as a non-mimetic re-presentation; and, second, by analysing Deleuze’s discussion of Carmelo Bene in *One less Manifesto* (1997 [1977]), I will look at the possibility of performing critique as de-stratified process of variation – as a becoming-minor theatrical process.

It is crucial to note at this point that, in this chapter, theatre theory (the theory produced within the discipline of theatre studies) is ‘treated’ in the same way as any scholarship that is ‘imported’ in the theatrical realm from other disciplines (e.g. philosophy, sociology, cultural studies and so on). Despite the claims that theatre theory should distinguish itself from other disciplines as a means to empower its influence upon them, I argue that this sort of territorial classification and its resulted demarcation prevents, rather than animates, a critical discussion of the role of theory in theatrical practice. In contrast to this aspired sense of ‘belonging’, I suggest that theory should always be understood as mobile and incomplete – as a process that simply does not ‘belong’, but is rather constantly negotiated, even interterritorially and interdisciplinarily, according to present conditions.

I. Theory and theatre: dramaturgy, performativity, theatricality and the postdramatic shift

(a) Dramaturgy and the 'linguistic turn'

The lack of scholarly attention to the possibility of theory's performance in theatre practice is by no means unsurprising. In a sense, it partially explains the problematic relationship between theatre and theory both in textual representations, as well as in performance practices. A significant body of social theory in the 20th century has been approaching theatre and performance mainly complementarily, as an 'add-on' tool to methodological design or philosophical narratives and, therefore, the use of *dramaturgy* in theory as such has somehow diminished the study of theory's potential to be performed. In other words, the study of theory's capacity to become theatre, to be staged as an *event* of performance has been marginalised in favour of the dramaturgical perspectives that have been instilled in social and cultural analysis.

Instances of this type of theatrical valorisation as a tool of theoretical scholarship are many and significant. For example, Erving Goffman's 1959 breakthrough work *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* marked a very important turn to our understanding of social relations as performances (as role-playing interfaces), and thus redefined the study of symbolic interactionism through the notions and processes of theatre (Goffman, 1959). Goffman's work was influenced by the American philosopher Kenneth Burke who was one of the first theorists to use dramaturgy to describe human motives and experiences by creating the model of *dramatism*. Dramatism suggested a pentad of terms that explained the conditions of human interaction; these were, 'Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, Purpose' (Burke, 1969 [1945]: xv). Also, in the late 1960s, and in a similar vein to that of Goffman's, the cultural anthropologist Victor Turner attempted to find a creative intersection between performance and anthropological research. Through acknowledging 'the [continuous] power of symbols in human communication', Turner stressed the importance of enacting rituals in social life, by proposing 'a unit of description and analysis' for social theory, which he termed 'social drama' (Turner, 1982: 9).

Whether similar or not in scope, such theoretical explorations share a common characteristic, or objective, which is their focus on drawing elements *from* theatre by elaborating dramaturgical perspectives in their analysis. Although the significance of such theoretical accounts has proved central to the development of social theory and philosophy, I argue that, at the same time, the use of dramaturgy as a methodological tool has limited the possibility of studying the relation between theatre and theory in its own right. As Brewer argues, '[t]heory's theatres have many stages, but what they have in common is that they are imaginary theatres, theatrical fictions that are staged as a by-product of or supplement to the stated methodological goals of theory' (Brewer, 1985: 14).

Furthermore, the so-called 'linguistic turn' in theory of the late 1960s, that was initiated by theorists such as Saussure, Lacan and Levi-Strauss, occurred during a period when theatre and performance research pushed the boundaries of language towards non-linguistic conceptions of performing (see Fortier, 1997; Lehmann, 1999; Buse, 2001). The study of language and its relation to the politics of truth, to the new ways of constructing and performing subjectivity, human agency and the possibilities of critique, marked a very important theoretical territory – i.e. structuralism – that partly contrasted with the explorations of theatre and performance practices at the time. Grotowski's non-linear theatre, Kaprow's happenings and 'assemblages', Brook's experimentation with non-verbal expression are only a few of such practices. Thus, one of the emerging questions was to what extent could the new theoretical frameworks account for the non-verbal aspects of expression and interaction that avant-garde performances endorsed.

In his important 1997 work *Theory/Theatre: An Introduction*, Mark Fortier argued that all theory is at great risk of becoming exclusively *literary theory*. Suggesting that the study of the real theatrical experience should not be excluded from theoretical accounts of subjectivity and agency, Fortier accused this linguistic orientation of narrowing the lens of theory, and by extension, of limiting its possibilities. He writes: 'To treat everything as language or as dominated by language seems a distortion of the nature of theatre as rooted in the physical and the sensual, as much as it is in words and ideas' (Fortier, 1997: 3-4). Also, in *Drama+Theory: Critical Approaches to Modern British Drama* (2001), Peter Buse underlined the same

problem arguing for an autonomisation of drama and theatre, and their emancipation from being ‘subsumed again as mere genres of literature’ (Buse, 2001: 4). Buse argued that, giving a ‘special status to language could only mean a narrow focus on the dramatic text at the expense of the performed event’ (ibid).

(b) Performativity

Indeed, theory eventually turned to the study of performance in an attempt to widen the scope of its sociocultural discourses. The so-called ‘performative turn’ resonated in a wide part of academic theory during the last two decades of the 20th century and was taken up by philosophers and cultural scholars such as Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. The origin of this shift in theory, however, derives in part from the 1960s, and more particularly from the work of the British philosopher J. L. Austin. In *How to do Things with Words* (1975 [1962]), Austin attempted to subvert the traditional philosophical notion of self-identical statements, by introducing the concept of ‘performative utterances’ as a new way to understand statements that are performed by being uttered (Austin, 1975 [1962]: 2). Derrida elaborated Austin’s analysis in his 1977 essay *Signature Event Context* (1988), considering it as a starting point to discuss the enabling of communication through citational acts of language. The widely debated concept of *performativity* has thereafter played an important role in discourses of subjectification, power, language and gender.

Judith Butler was particularly instrumental in postmodern conceptualisations of performativity. She described performativity as the ‘reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains’ (Butler, 1993: 2). According to Butler, the process of subject formation should be understood as occurring exclusively within regulatory norms and ritualistic repetitions of sociality. She argued that each subject ‘performs’ its formation by ‘doing’ its identity, not by ‘being’ something prior to this ‘doing’. Therefore, as Geoff Boucher remarks, Butler’s ‘theory of performativity seeks to explain how the subversion of power emerges within a dialectical relation between constraint and agency’ (Boucher, 2006: 112-3).

Although Butler rarely focused her analyses on theatrical performances,¹ it can be argued that the subversive potentials that she identified in the notion of performativity can be also thought in theatrical terms. For example, I would argue that theatrical normativity becomes apparent through certain performances that occur between constraints and privileges that take the form of repetitive rituals: e.g. a spectator is constituted on one hand by performing-clapping, performing-laughing or performing-silence, and on the other by *not*-performing noise, interruptions or interventions. Therefore, a spectator is constituted as a subject in theatre by performing certain rituals and by *not* performing others (because even the constraints of a performance can take the form of rituals when they occur – rituals of non-performance). Just like the Butlerian ‘subject’, the spectator of Western theatre exists in the borderline between constraint and agency – in the interrelation of the two – and this is why s/he is in a position to potentially challenge the theatrical power relations and the authority of performance. At the same time, whereas Butler’s concept of performativity has opened up the ways in which we came to understand the complexity of subject-formation, recent critiques insist that her account focuses exclusively on the individualistic process that occurs within a subject, giving less weight to contextual issues (spatial or temporal), as well as to the contingent possibilities of a performative event (see Lloyd, 1999).

Furthermore, even though the notion of performativity gave rise to revised questions of embodiment and subjectivity, I argue that theory’s ‘refusal’ to thoroughly explore the concept’s possibilities *within* the context of theatre sustained – rather than bridged – the preexisting distance between academia and performance art. Theatre was detached from theory, being considered as an external aesthetic site rather than as an opportunity to actualise critique and political intervention. As Brewer comments, ‘theory often invokes theatre as if it had no specific features, attributes or effects’ (Brewer, 1985: 14).

¹ An interesting exception is Butler’s book *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship between life and death* (2000), in which she reconceptualises Antigone’s revolutionary potential (drawing on Sophocles’s *Antigone*), arguing for a reconsideration of incest’s relation to kinship.

(c) *Theatricality*

At the same time, many French theorists had integrated in their research the concept of *theatricality*, which was considered to signify or embody the liminal space between theory and performance. While the concept has been used to describe stagings and re-stagings of thought in social life, less attention has been paid to the role of theatricality as a process or medium of performing thought in theatre itself. In particular, theatricality was used extensively in anti-textual and anti-representational critiques of modernism. For example, in his essay *Baudelaire's Theatre*, Roland Barthes describes theatricality as a 'theatre-minus-text' condition, an 'ecumenical perception of sensuous artifice – gesture, tone, distance, substance, light' (Barthes, 1972: 26). Similarly, in *Theatrum Analyticum* (1977), Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe uses the concept of theatricality to discuss a deconstructed emancipation of the text from its absolutist projections in sociality. Further, in his essay *The Psycho-analytic Reading of Tragedy* (1979), André Green discusses theatricality's capacity to function as the medium that constitutes the author, the performers and the spectators as the objectified 'Others' of performance.

More recent accounts of theatricality are examined in Brewer's 1985 essay *Performing Theory*, in Murray's 1997 edited collection *Mimesis, Masochism and Mime: The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought*, in *Theatricality* (2003), a collection of case studies edited by Davis and Postlewait and in Samuel Weber's (2004) *Theatricality as Medium*. Brewer finds in theatricality the desire 'to erase and to reinscribe the relation of interpretation to contextual and situational frames', by positioning its projections in the 'critical space *between* theory and practice' (Brewer, 1985:14; original emphasis); while Davis and Postlewait 'totalise' the paradoxical function of theatricality, arguing that, '[i]t is a sign empty of meaning' while being, at the same time, 'the meaning of all signs' (Davis & Postlewait, 2003: 1). Moreover, Murray is interested in the 'masochistic' and self-reflexive potential of theatricality. He argues that, '[w]hat lies at the heart of theatricality [...] is the ambivalent pathos evoked by the divisions of mimesis and their profound turn of subject and socius against themselves' (Murray, 1997: 14). Thus, it is the 'plastic' way in which the concept of theatricality can be used that provides fertile conditions for theory to be thought *as* theatre. As Herbert Blau argues in his essay *Ideology and Performance*, theory can be understood as theatre when it is restaged or

reinterpreted (Blau, 1983). He notes that this process of re-signifying, ‘transforms the real only as the theatre can, by producing meanings in the act of performance’ (ibid: 457).

However, I argue that by focusing more on privileging the idea of ‘*as if it were theatre*’, what most theories of theatricality finally achieved was to draw from theatre the necessary elements that would enable a critique of representation and validate the capacity of reinterpretation to create meanings within social interaction. The possibility of considering theatre as a site of performing theory – and not as a representational podium – was fundamentally overlooked. In other words, I argue that while the concept of theatricality was instrumental in the ‘displacement of pictorial metaphors by scenic ones’, the idea, as well as the importance of metaphors (of symbolisation) remained, to a great extent, intact (Brewer, 1985: 15).

(d) Performance studies

Of course, to accuse only social theory or philosophy of not paying enough considered attention to theatre, without taking into account theatre scholarship, would be to address the issue in a biased manner. There is, indeed, another parameter that complicates the problematic relationship between theatre and theory even more: that is, the weakness of Western theatre and performance studies to conduct a critique of the dichotomy between theoretical frameworks and performing itself. I argue that the failing to account for a renewed relationship between theatre and theory through blurring the boundaries that demarcate them, was also a result of postmodern models of performance; or, to be more precise, it was a side effect of the polemical response to modernist theatre as initiated by performance studies as a discipline, and by the ‘postdramatic’ theatrical streams that flourished within postmodernism.

Performance studies emerged in the late 1960s as a distinctive field within cultural analysis, introduced through the collaborative work of director Richard Schechner and anthropologist Victor Turner. Schechner in particular, was instrumental in the gradual development of performance studies as an academic discipline, as he was one of the founders of the first department of performance

studies in the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. Schechner approaches performance as,

‘a ‘broad spectrum’ or ‘continuum’ of human actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainments, the performing arts (theatre, dance, music), and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race, and class roles, and onto healing (from shamanism to surgery), the media, and the internet’ (Schechner, 2006: 2).

Schechner positions performance as an umbrella-term that includes but is not limited to theatre. He goes on to argue that performance studies is a broad, widely inclusive plateau of analysis, to which theatre ‘belongs’ as an expression of performance. At the same time, other theorists tend to differentiate performance art from theatrical plays. For instance, Marvin Carlson notes that practitioners of performance art ‘do not base their work upon characters previously created by other artists, but upon their own bodies, their own autobiographies, their own specific experiences in a culture or in the world, made performative by their consciousness of them and the process of displaying them for audiences’ (Carlson, 1996: 6). Carlson argues, therefore, that whereas in theatre one can observe a process of embodying the ‘other’, performance art is a more self-reflexive operation through which the body enables dialogue *with* the ‘other’ (ibid). This is one of the reasons that performance studies have insisted on privileging questions of interculturalism, in pursuit of a productive interzone between theatre and anthropology. The political ethnographies of Dwight Conquergood and the theoretical work of Patrice Pavis are some of the most important attempts to merge intercultural discourses with performance.

Furthermore, Diana Taylor has studied performance from a Latin American perspective, raising questions of agency and mnemonic enactment. For Taylor, what performance studies brought to the academic world is a platform in which memory can be studied in the form of embodiment. As she notes, ‘[a]nalyzing enactment became crucial in establishing claims to cultural agency’ (Taylor, 2003: 7). Also, Bryan Reynolds has attempted to expand the influence of performance studies in other academic disciplines, by introducing a hybrid form of analysis (merging performance theory, history, and critical methodology), known as ‘transversal poetics’ (Reynolds, 2009).

The evident anti-finality of performance studies, and its proponents' claim that 'everything can be studied 'as' performance', is what makes this field both challenging and contested (Schechner, 2006: 38-9: original emphasis). The most frequent critical objections towards performance studies focus on the incapacity of the field to have integrity as a discipline, and claim that although its project seems to be post- or inter-disciplinary, it is in fact *anti*-disciplinary (Napoleon, 1995). I suggest that what is at stake here, in relation to performance studies, is the birth of an interesting paradox. On one hand, the field of performance studies seems to have avoided a direct encounter with theatre practice in favour of combined forms of cultural analysis, by compressing theatre in order to fit into the categorisation of performance. On the other hand, the 'performance paradigm' that was promoted by performance studies and theories of theatricality and performativity has signalled a shift in the mode of analysis, by regarding what is being analysed as a process, a practice or an event, rather than an object – and this turned out to be a crucial input in devising and implementing theatrical performances (Schechner, 2006: 2). It signalled the age of *postdramatic* theatre; a non-linear, less-teleological practice of theatrical art within the so-called postmodern condition.

(e) Postdramatic theatre

In 1999, the German theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehman attempted to capture this new 'language' of the emerging theatre forms by introducing the notion of the 'postdramatic paradigm' in his seminal *Postdramatic Theatre*. As Karen Jurs-Munby notes in the introduction, '[despite the delayed English translation (2006)], *Postdramatic Theatre* has already become a key reference point in international discussions of contemporary theatre' (Lehmann & Jurs-Munby, 2006: 1). Indeed, Lehmann's socio-historical analysis of an 'incomplete' theatre that strived to escape normative classifications and conformist interpretations has played a significant role in understanding, let alone justifying, the possibilities of theatrical expressivity in postmodernism. In a clarifying tone, he writes:

'The adjective 'postdramatic' denotes a theatre that feels bound to operate beyond drama, at a time 'after' the authority of the dramatic paradigm in

theatre. What it does not mean is an abstract negation and mere looking away from the tradition of drama' (Lehmann, 2006 [1999]: 27).

Thus, the new theatre that spawned mainly from the 70s avant-garde and the performative orientation of theory was, for Lehmann, an important 'turning away' from the dominance of the dramatic text – not a wholesale rejection of its qualities and possibilities. Lehmann continues:

'Similarly, one can speak of a 'post-Brechtian theatre', which is precisely not a theatre that has nothing to do with Brecht but a theatre which knows that it is affected by the demands and questions for theatre that are sedimented in Brecht's work but can no longer accept Brecht's answers' (ibid).

At the same time, in drawing and assessing the topography of the 'postdramatic', Lehmann makes an argument that has become commonplace in postmodern accounts of theatre and performance: While acknowledging that "theory' [...] invade[s] art to a previously unknown degree', he argues that its task 'is to articulate, conceptualise and find terms for that which has come into being, not to postulate it as a norm' (ibid: 25). In making this claim, Lehmann predetermines the way he positions theory in relation to postdramatic theatre – he presupposes theory as a reflection of practice, without taking into account theory's possibility to be performed or actualised in practice. In other words, I argue that, in setting his aim of analysis, Lehmann is actually narrowing the potentials of theory within the postdramatic field. In a similar vein, the New York theatre critic Elinor Fuchs (1996) introduces her critical project in *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theatre after Modernism*. In relating theatre and performance to postmodern streams of thought, she points out that she is 'in search of language in which to describe new forms that have appeared both in actual theatres and in the theatricalised surround of our contemporary public life and discourse' (Fuchs, 1996: 1).

(f) Theory as critique?

Both Fuchs and Lehmann identify the potential of theory in its capacity to generate terms – in short, to produce language. However, it is worth noting that language as a medium has the power to normalise practice while conceptualising

it. Language wields the power to become the authority that categorises what does not essentially belong to any given category. It also has the power to create categories for that which is yet unclassified. At the same time, a significant part of the new theatrical streams that flourished within postmodernism endorse a critique of categorisation itself, and, therefore, to group them in boldly defined 'territories' is to normalise their political potentials in ways that cancel the prefix '*post*' from their intellectual projects.

Thus, I suggest that understanding theory as an 'immobile' authority that is used exclusively to explain and clarify practice in theatrical performances should be rendered problematic. If the task of theory is conceived as driven merely by the need for understanding and, by extension, by the need for representing practices through language, then it becomes necessary to ask: Are there no other needs and desires that might constitute the use of theory as an important process of experiencing theatrical practice? To pose the question differently, what is the relation between theory and critique within the analytical aims of postdramatic thought and scholarship? Could we think of the role of theory as an active, productive and mobile plateau of expression and intervention in this context? Could we think of theory as critique within performance events?

According to the leading Marivaux scholar Patrice Pavis, 'theory must be distinguished from critical discourse' (Pavis, 1992: 77). Coming from a more 'performance-studies' perspective than Lehmann and Fuchs, Pavis argues that,

'[critical discourse] demands an immediate, committed, evaluative reaction that cannot often be verified by the performance; it allows for the right to error, correction and polemic; it involves a judgement that is not only aesthetic, but also ideological and moral' (ibid).

Inherent in this conceptualisation of critique is the elevation of theory to a state of self-identical pureness and ideological transparency. In other words, Pavis draws a bold distinguishing line between what he implies to be an established 'pureness' of theory and the, often 'invalid', polemical dissidence of critical discourse. In presupposing that theory should utilise a neutral language, emancipated from ideology and subjectivist morality, Pavis is not taking into account that language can be always already ideologically informed and morally loaded. As Catherine Belsey reminds us in *Critical Practice* (2002), '[w]hat we do when we read, however

natural it seems, presupposes a whole theoretical vocabulary, even if unspoken, which define certain relationships between meaning and the world [...] The transparency of language is an illusion' (Belsey, 2002: 4). Pavis seems to imply that theory, in contrast to critical discourse, should not be considered as a process of trial and error; in other words, he excludes the possibility of theory being considered as an active experimentation of conceptual positions, that not only explains, but is also in direct contact and continuous negotiation with present social reality. I argue that, in effect, such an approach puts unnecessary limitations both to the possibility of performing theory, and also to a rethinking of theory as an open and productively incomplete critical process.

Thus, in considering the ways in which theatre and performance scholars have approached the role of theory – and its relation to critique – it is justified to argue that it follows three essential directions: (1) Theory is detached from theatrical practice, functioning either as its reflection (production of knowledge after practice), or as its animation (practice that corresponds to theory); (2) The relation between theatre and theory is based on the 'traditional' capacity of the latter to make the former available for understanding, and by extension, to produce knowledge about theatre; (3) Critique occupies an interzone between theory and theatre, operating mostly as a polemical tool whose validity depends on the extent to which it is sustained through theory. In other words, theory wields the power to subjugate critique, even if the object of critique is theory itself.

I suggest that it is crucial to discuss the possibility of destabilising this normative relation between theory, critique and theatre. Taking into account intellectual mappings that aim to emancipate critique's accountability to theory, I want to suggest that theatrical plays are sites of political engagement that enable a performance of critique as a challenge of mimetic representation; as a mobile and productively incomplete process. In other words, I argue that what is missing from the role of theory is its capacity to 'expand' its function towards critique. I suggest that this 'expansion' can take place in the context of theatre and performance. In a word, I argue that theory becomes critique when it is performed as a *becoming*; that is, when it does not signify self-identical truths, transcendental meanings or theoretical abstractions, but rather when it becomes open to present variations, contingencies and differences.

At this point, it is worth noting that in examining a function of theory that challenges its own representation on stage, I intend to include dramatic texts in the wider theoretical realm of theatre and performance. I suggest that the extent to which dramatic texts operate as immobile self-identical scripts within a performance, they can be studied as theoretical inputs of theatre. In as much as they correspond to the rules of authorship, to the elements of power, and to the capacity of performing subjects to mimetically represent their content, dramatic texts are ideologically predetermined events. Thus, the critical analysis offered throughout the thesis is largely a critique of the way in which textual representations have dominated the theatrical stage. I suggest that, we can consider theory as emancipated from its fixed academic categories, examining the use of dramatic scripts not only as fiction or as poetry, but also as carriers of theoretical positions – as ideological texts.

(g) The problems and the questions

To sum up the analysis, I have thus far considered the multiple ways in which diverse streams of academic theory have significantly overlooked the political potentials of staging critique in performance. In short, I argued that, despite their academic significance, the ‘dramaturgical perspectives’ that were instilled in social theory utilised theatologies in a way that diminished a potential ‘staging’ of theory in live performance. Further, by taking into account the linguistic orientation of theory in the 1970s, I went on to endorse the objection of theatre and performance studies in regards to the possibilities of non-verbal aspects of expression and production of meaning. At the same time, I argued that although the concepts of performativity and theatricality – as embedded in theoretical discourses – provided new lines of thought to reconceptualising questions of subjectivity and agency in relation to performance, they did not address theatrical processes directly; and, as a result, these concepts did not create the conditions for a substantial critique of mimetic representation in performance. Finally, by examining the inclusive mappings – as well as the limits – that the field of performance studies has offered to postmodern theory and theatrical practices, I suggested that postdramatic scholarship needs to rethink the convergence of theory and critique as a possibility of actualising politics in a theatrical space.

In keeping with these debates, the following sections of the chapter elaborate on the non-representational possibilities of performing critique through examining two theoretical ‘discussions’ between Derrida-Artaud and Deleuze-Bene. I consider these discussions as very useful starting points for the thesis, as by challenging the politics of representation in theatre, they suggest a more directly informed relationship between theory and performance. Before proceeding to do so however, I want to specify the problems and the questions that lie behind the analysis to follow; that is, I want to map out the ‘space’ of inquiry in which Derrida’s and Deleuze’s accounts intervene.

One of the most important implications of mimetic representation in theatre and performance is the problem of hierarchy in regards to power relations. I argue that the function of textual representations as transcendental significations produces a stratified theatrical process by means of centralising the multiplicity of its elements. In other words, the power of Text – whether dramatic or theoretical – becomes the central substance of the performance endorsing a hierarchical systematisation of performing-signifiers that correspond to a self-identical content by means of codification of language and gestures. At the same time, the extent to which these performing-signifiers (actors, directors, designers, light etc.) represent the text as such depends on their capacity to act as predetermined subjects. Their agential possibilities are provided by their ability to associate their performance to the text, and, therefore, their capacity to perform depends on the extent to which they are *subjected* to an absent meaning. From this perspective, these theatrical subjects perform a critique of absence; that is, they imitate a transcendental critique by maintaining a distance between them as signifiers and what they signify, as well as between them and the spectators. The question is: How can these performing subjects perform a critique that becomes possible within the presence of the event? In what ways can they perform a critique that becomes non-representational by being actualised in and through the event – and to what extent this ‘critical operation’ (as Deleuze puts it) potentially challenges our experience of performance as a condition of completeness?

II. Artaud through Derrida: Re-presentation and metaphysics in theatre

In a significant part of his theoretical work, Jacques Derrida has employed the politics and metaphysics of theatre as a narrative of analysis. His 1978 essay *The Theatre of Cruelty and The Closure of Representation* is a theoretical contribution that places the questions of representation and spectatorship at the heart of a rethinking of metaphysics in political theatre. Derrida's discussion of Artaud's theatre of cruelty is a very useful theoretical instance here for two reasons: first, it considers the problem of representation as rooted in the entire underlying structuration of Western theatre; and secondly, his analysis departs from a hegemonic or fictional manner of approaching theatre and performance – aiming at a direct relation between the 'theatrical' and the 'theoretical'.

Drawing from Antonin Artaud's writings and dramatic practice, Derrida attempts to offer ways of challenging normative and mimetic representation in Western theatre. As he notes, 'more than any other art, [theatre] has been marked by the labour of total representation in which the affirmation of life lets itself be doubled and emptied by negation' (Derrida, 2001 [1978]: 295). Indeed, what Derrida identifies as problematic with representation in theatre and performance is the act of signifying something absent from the event, as a mimetic image of thought or action; the act of symbolising transcendental ideas, texts, or 'messages' to be conveyed, whose reality is external to the performance itself. According to Derrida, this external reality functions as a self-identical presence, as an underlying substance of the play, as the *hypokeimenon* of a theatrical performance. Thus, one of the problems of mimetic representation, as Derrida understands it, is that it sustains the fixed condition of theatrical meanings and ensures the static character of theatrical forms. In other words, representation creates the conditions for the invariability of both theatrical matter and manner, functioning as a stratified 'organism' within a performance. This insistence on static forms and fixed images of meaning is for Derrida what confines *creation* within Western theatre. In discussing the nature of the author in theatre, Derrida points out that he 'creates nothing, [he] has only the illusion of having created, because he only transcribes and makes available for reading a text whose nature is itself necessarily

representative' (ibid: 296). It is worth noting that although Derrida is distrustful of theatre's historical attempts to revolutionise the relation between author and performance, between stage and auditorium (as he believes that they occurred within ideological or sociopolitical conditions in which the structure of representation was always considered to be an invariable theatrical domain), he identifies a unique possibility to challenge theatrical representation and its implications in the Artaudian proposal for a theatre of cruelty.

(a) Cruelty as life

The theatre of cruelty is Artaud's radical theory and practice of performance. It is a non-representational challenge to theatrical normativity. Artaud's concept of cruelty refers to a sequence of unmediated actions that are rooted in what he terms as 'cruel' foundations of the self. 'Everything that acts is cruelty', notes Artaud in *The Theatre and Its Double*, insisting that '[i]t is upon this idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits, that theatre must be rebuilt' (Artaud, 1958: 85). In other words, Artaud understands cruelty as a dynamic process through which every human or non-human element of the performance acquires an agential drive as a result of its exposure to the centre of the event. The shocking implications of this exposure constitute, for Artaud, a cruel, yet utterly essential step away from the complacency he felt existed in Western theatre.

According to Artaud theatre 'requires *expression in space*' (ibid: 89; original emphasis); highlighting that this can be accomplished through the organic synthesis of 'the magical means of art and speech' (ibid). Pushing the boundaries of theatre towards a non-representational approach, Artaud's theatre of cruelty rejects the transcendence of a dominant author and the existence of a 'static' dramatic text, offering a renewed expression to what activates a performance; that is, *life* itself, perceived not as the hypokeimenon or the substrata of a theatrical event, but rather he suggests an immanent idea of life as cruelty and magic: 'I have therefore said 'cruelty' as I might have said 'life' or 'necessity', because I want to indicate especially that for me the theatre is act and perpetual emanation, and that there is nothing congealed about it, that I turn it into a true act, hence living, hence magical', writes Artaud (ibid. 114); and Derrida responds that,

‘[t]he theatre of cruelty is not a *representation*. It is life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable. Life is the nonrepresentable origin of representation’ (Derrida, 2001 [1978]: 294; original emphasis).

Thus, Derrida understands mimetic representation as a limitation of life – a cultural limitation that prevents an experiencing of its nonrepresentable origin. In the poetics of Artaudian cruelty, life is not simply an origin, a point of departure or even a destination; it is a ‘becoming’. For Artaud, life creates and is created by life itself, and Derrida continues by stating that,

‘[t]his life carries man along with it, but it is not primarily the life of man. The latter is only a representation of life, and such is the limit – the humanist limit – of the metaphysics of classical theatre’ (ibid: 294-95).

(b) *The ‘end of Man-as-God’: a non-theological theatre*

Both Artaud and Derrida wanted to break with an abstract and finite idea of Man. As Artaud argues, ‘[t]heatre was never meant to describe man and what he does’, thereby emphasising that the aim of theatre is to *create* and not to describe or symbolise abstractions (Artaud, 1989: 171). According to Artaud and Derrida, the idea of Man – as the author of the Text, as the actor who represents and as the ultimate narrator and ‘designer’ of theatrical space – is conceived as a messianic manifestation *of* Western theatre and *for* Western theatre; both its origin and *telos*; in short, Man is transformed into a God.

Derrida argues that, ‘[t]he theatre of cruelty expulses God from the stage’, but without constructing a platform for a ‘new atheist discourse on stage’ (Derrida, 2001 [1978]: 296). This may seem paradoxical, but it is precisely within this paradox that Derrida’s inquiry into a new metaphysics of theatre resides. For Derrida, the theatre of cruelty does not announce the death of God. Rather, it challenges Western theatre’s *logocentrism*, in so far as the latter becomes transcendental, authoritative and, therefore, *theological*. He argues that, ‘[t]he theatrical practice of cruelty, in its action and structure, inhabits or rather *produces* a nontheological space’ (ibid; original emphasis). Derrida is therefore looking for a vocabulary that renders a space nontheological, emphasising that such a space is not essentially a non-sacred one. From this perspective, thinking ‘nontheologically’

is not the opposite of sacredness, or magic, in so far as one perceives sacredness, or magic as *presence*. It is, however, the opposite of thinking theologically, in as much as the latter is dictated by speech, by the transcendental Logos that becomes the authoritative power that transforms performance into mimesis.

It is worth noting here that, for Derrida, the careful selection of language is crucial in order to disrupt normative patterns of meaning. ‘I am writing *from within the substance* of the French language’, he notes in *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, pointing out his object of deconstruction within cultural discourses (Derrida et al, 1998: 66; original emphasis). Therefore, for Derrida, the critique of ‘theological space’ in theatre, and thus critique in general, becomes possible as a process of cautious scrutiny of vocabularies that need to be interrupted and deconstructed.

Through Artaud, Derrida proposes a metaphysics of theatre, a process of sacred presence that changes the theatrical stage emancipating it from the domination of speech. He suggests that the theatrical stage should break free from its subjection to the author, the speech and the text, transforming itself into a space in which magic is experienced not as an absence, but as a presence. He argues for a stage in which the actors themselves are truly emancipated from a given identity or position as ‘interpretive slaves’ of the author and the director (Derrida, 2001 [1978]: 296). For Derrida, the poetics of cruelty urge the actors to act, rather than execute; to create rather than represent. This approach also reshapes the relationship between the performance and the audience. In his critique of the conditions that create a passive spectator, Derrida argues that, ‘the theological stage comports a passive, seated public, a public of spectators, of consumers, of ‘enjoyers’ – as Nietzsche and Artaud both say – attending a production that lacks true volume or depth, a production that is level, offered to their voyeuristic scrutiny’ (ibid: 296-7). He thus describes the nontheological stage as a space in which the passivity and submissiveness of the audience are forcefully deconstructed; a space in which the spectators are rather immersed in the experiencing of the event, than merely watching it. As he notes, ‘[i]n the theatre of cruelty, pure visibility is not exposed to voyeurism’ (ibid: 297).²

² In different ways, both Derrida and Ranciere (2011 [2009]) attack the notion of spectatorship-as-voyeurism in their discussions about theatre. While my critique unfolds in a parallel line of thought, in chapter 5 I discuss the capacity of Punchdrunk performances to redefine the critical

(c) *The mise en scène: a sacred stage without ‘Speech’*

Thus, Derrida understands the theatre of cruelty as a theory and practice that destabilises the existence of a ‘pure’ reality that exists outside of the event. As Artaud wonders, ‘why not conceive of a play composed directly on the stage, realised on the stage’ (Artaud, 1958: 41). In Artaud’s theatre, Derrida sees a possibility of creating and experiencing a different kind of theatrical space; a more inclusive and autonomous space that is not constructed in relation to exteriorities, and does not function through representational binaries (i.e. subject-object, performance-audience, stage-auditorium). He argues for the reconstitution of the *mise en scène*, as Artaud theorised it. The *mise en scène* is, for Artaud, the sacred space that needs to be reconstituted in order for the art of performance to be reinvented. It is an open synthesis or an assemblage of the elements that exist, act and create experience and meaning within the event – the experiencing of lights, colours, sounds, props, actors, spectators, stage etc. Artaud writes: ‘it is the *mise en scène* that is theatre, much more than the written and spoken play’, (ibid: 41; original emphasis); and Derrida continues:

‘Released from the text and the author-god, *mise en scène* would be returned to its creative and founding freedom. The director and the participants (who would no longer be actors *or* spectators) would cease to be the instruments and organs of representation’ (Derrida, 2001 [1978]: 299, original emphasis).

In the Artaudian conception of the *mise en scène*, Derrida identifies a potential of performance to produce a present which will be impossible to be reiterated; that is, to be imitatively *re-presented*. He argues that, ‘[t]he stage, certainly, *will no longer represent*, since it will not operate as an addition, as the sensory illustration of a text already written, thought, or lived outside the stage, which the stage would then only repeat but whose fabric it would not constitute’ (ibid; original emphasis). Thus, Derrida describes a performance-event without a prescriptive content, a transcendental origin or an eventual catharsis.

In a letter to Benjamin Crémieux (Paris, 15 September 1931), Artaud writes that, ‘the theatre, an independent and autonomous art, must, in order to revive or simply to live, realise what differentiates it from text, pure speech, literature, and

possibilities of the voyeuristic act as emancipated from subjection to the power implications of watching and gazing.

all other fixed and written means' (as cited in Artaud, 1958: 106). In making this argument, Artaud is not trying to denounce speech and language as such. Rather, he wants to subordinate the authoritative importance that speech is given in the structure of Western theatre. As Derrida comments accordingly, 'speech and writing will be erased on the stage of cruelty only in the extent to which they were allegedly *dictation*' (Derrida, 2001 [1978]: 302; original emphasis); understanding 'dictation' as a fixed relation that exists between a subject-author of the 'real' and an object-interpreter of the 'virtual'. Therefore, the theatre of cruelty does not suggest a mute performance, but an event, a *mise en scène* that functions not through words, but *before* words. Speech and writing, Derrida suggests, 'will once more become *gestures*; and the logical and discursive intentions which speech ordinarily uses to ensure its rational transparency, [...] will be reduced or subordinated' (ibid). This notion of language-prior-to-words will function 'as the visual and plastic materialisation of speech' (Artaud, 1958: 69). It is, thus, a reinvention of language – or a 'glossopoeia'³ as Derrida calls it – in theatre through intonations, visuality, movements and gestural contact. Artaud describes this potential of language in *Mise en scène and Metaphysics*:

'To make metaphysics out of spoken language is to make language convey what it does not normally convey. That is to use it in a new, exceptional and unusual way, to give it its full, physical shock potential, to split it up and distribute it actively in space, to treat inflections in a completely tangible manner and restore their shattering power and really to manifest something; to turn against language and its basely utilitarian, one might almost say alimentary, sources, against its origins as a haunted beast, and finally to consider language in the form of *Incantation*' (Artaud, 1958: 46; original emphasis).

Thus, Artaud is calling for a transformation of prescriptive language into a destratified *glossopoeia*. One instance of such an approach to language is Artaud's 1947 censored radio broadcast *To Have Done with the Judgement of God*, in which Artaud's voice gets much closer to music than to ordinary speech. In this radio play, he expresses his thoughts using a destratified voice; a voice that resembles weep, laughter, a song or animal talk, through continuously changing language's

³ I examine this concept more thoroughly in chapter 4 while looking at Peter Brook's *Orghast*.

pitch, intonation and content. As Nicholas Ridout notes, '[w]hat Artaud is proposing is a use of sound for its material, vibratory qualities as much as for its organization into musical form' (Ridout, 2008: 229). Thus, Artaud does not denounce language. He rather activates its potential to be 'concrete' in 'an actual spatial sense', in as much as he attempts to break with the immobile semantics of the *keimenon*, i.e. the codified substrata of language (Artaud, 1989: 123). As Laura Cull clarifies, '[i]t is not language itself that is the problem [for Artaud], so much as the codified ways in which it is used' (Cull, 2009: 248).

(d) Concluding remarks

The *Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation* is one of Derrida's most 'romantic' moments of thought. It is the essay in which Derrida is more affirmative and positive in his argumentation than ever. In *Differentiating Derrida and Deleuze* Gordon C.F. Bearn claims that Derridean philosophy has been a proponent of 'No' as opposed to 'Yes', 'a philosophy trapped in the frame of representation', 'a Derridean game you can never win' (Bearn, 2000: 441). Although this seems to be a quite sweeping claim, Bearn makes a fair point in relation to much Derridean thought. Nevertheless, in Artaud's work, Derrida finds an opening of a discourse that could break the barriers of the 'text'. In this particular essay, Derrida sees a potential of performance to produce a language that challenges representation and mimesis; even if he understands it as an impossibility. As he notes, 'if the idea of a theatre without representation, the idea of the impossible, does not help us to regulate theatrical practice, it does, perhaps, permit us to conceive its origin, eve and limit, and the horizon of death' (Derrida, 2001 [1978]: 314).

Thus, it is worth noting that Derrida seems to perceive his own analysis as a brainstorming process which, however, aims at an unattainable theatre. Even while deconstructing Artaud's theory, Derrida insists on *textualism* and the inevitability of repetition. His analysis seems like a 'thought experiment' since his conclusions 'affirm' the inescapability from representation to the extent that the latter is a re-presentation of presence. He wants to deconstruct representation, emancipating it from mimesis and transcendence; but his search is one of a lost

presence, rather than of a possibility of presence. Thus, claiming that representation is inescapable in actual terms, Derrida argues for a transformation of representation since, for Derrida, 'presence, in order to be presence and self-presence, has already begun to represent itself, has always already been penetrated' (ibid). Derrida claims that the creative force of Artaud's theatre is rather its potential to challenge the transcendentalism of repetition and representation, and not its possibility to subvert it on a theatrical stage. It is the possibility of converting the substance of representation into a non-repetitive representation. From this perspective, Artaud's theatre of cruelty is, for Derrida, a *critique* that can influence the conditions of performing on stage. In other words, he argues that the virtue of the theatre of cruelty rests in its capacity to break the association of representation with transcendental repetition.

Thus, Derrida conceives Artaud's theatre of cruelty as a possibility of critique, which is nevertheless trapped in the limit between a possible and an impossible theatre. In emphasising the paradox of the theatre of cruelty, he notes that, '[Artaud] cannot resign himself to theatre as repetition, and cannot renounce theatre as nonrepetition' (ibid: 315). He goes on to argue that fidelity to Artaud is impossible – even in Artaud's own attempts to put the theatre of cruelty into practice. For Derrida, the contribution of the theatre of cruelty, or as he notes, its 'grammar' is always 'to be found' (ibid: 313). He concludes that, '[the theatre of cruelty] will always remain the inaccessible limit of a representation which is not repetition, of a *re*-presentation which is full presence, which does not carry its double within itself as its death, of a present which does not repeat itself, that is, of a present outside time, a nonpresent' (ibid).

There exist a number of critical insights into Derrida's discussion of theatre, and most of them draw their arguments from a bold opposition between Derrida and Deleuze. For example, Gordon C.F. Bearn argues that while Derrida insists by all means on negation and cynicism, Deleuze attempts to 'break on through to the other side of representation', moving toward an affirmation of possibilities beyond codifications (Bearn, 2000: 441). Further, Martin Puchner states that the fundamental difference between Derrida and Deleuze in relation to theatre, lies in the opposition between the former's 'textualism' and the latter's 'theatricalism' – an opposition between drama and performance (Puchner, 2002: 526). Also, Laura

Cull criticises Derrida's insistence on representation as an essential precondition of presence, by proposing the Deleuzian concept of 'differential presence', as an encounter with 'continuous variation' in theatrical performance (Cull, 2009: 244). Without overlooking the critical polemics of such accounts, in the following subchapter I will consider Deleuze's impact on theatre and performance without focusing on an opposition to Derrida, but rather in order to unfold a different perspective on the possibility of performing critique. In other words, I take on a Deleuzian analysis of the problem of representation in theatre, not essentially as a counterargument to Derrida's analysis of Artaud's thought, but rather as a 'line of thought' that focuses less on limits and more on the possibility of breaking them.

III. Deleuze on theatre: *One less Manifesto*

(a) Deleuze and theatre?

In choosing to merge the intellectual project of Gilles Deleuze with the art of theatre, we are confronted with a rather discouraging common belief: A broad part of academia sustains the impression that Deleuze and theatre are two incompatible 'milieus'. Indeed, many scholars from Deleuze studies argue that theatrical performances and theatre directors were of no great interest to Deleuze, though with some exceptions (such as Antonin Artaud, Carmelo Bene and Robert Wilson). In particular, it could be argued that in certain Deleuzian writings on art, theatre has been treated as inferior to the experience that cinema provides. For example, in *Cinema 2*, Deleuze privileges cinema as being the only art form that can capture 'conversation for itself' (Deleuze, 2005 [1985]: 222). In *Deleuze and Performance*, Laura Cull attempts to explain this Deleuzian 'preference', arguing that, for Deleuze '[t]he stage has no equivalent of the camera-eye [...] with its capacity to reveal inhuman viewpoints, to deterritorialise the eye and the ear of the spectator' (Cull, 2009: 2). Nevertheless, to assert that Deleuze was an anti-theatricalist would certainly be a biased postulation. In fact, in the following paragraphs, I intend not only to demonstrate the opposite, but also to show that Deleuzian thought draws distinctive mappings in the ways we understand and experience theatrical performances.

Interestingly, to encounter a potential intersection between Deleuze and theatre is to face a rather interesting paradox. Whereas his writings on art focus predominantly on painting, music and cinema, and while his arguable sympathy for both the canvas and the camera still echoes in contemporary theory, Deleuze's lines of thought are recurrently depicted through notions of theatricality and performance. As Foucault argues in *Theatrum Philosophicum*, the work of Deleuze is 'philosophy not as thought but as theatre' (Foucault, 1997 [1977]: 237). Deleuzian ontology, far from being a transcendentalist or an idealist project, can be understood as a *practice* that affirms difference within monism, variation within presence. His rhizomatic cosmology offers a unique aspect of understanding and experiencing subjectivity, and by extension, performance. One could argue that Deleuzian theory gives a renewed expression to the idea of praxis – to the potential synthesis between theory and practice. For example, in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze not only uses instances of theatre in order to reveal the fundamental drives of being, but also seeks to 'invent an equivalent of theatre within philosophy' (Deleuze, 2004 [1968]: 9). As Martin Puchner argues in *The Theatre in Modernist Thought*, '[c]learly, the theatre, [in *Difference and Repetition*], is not simply a metaphor or a communicative device, but lies at the heart of Deleuze's project, determining its terms, constructions, and arguments' (Puchner, 2002: 524). Furthermore, Laura Cull notes that, 'Deleuze's thought not only adopts the language of performance, but intervenes critically in the field with the production of a new vision of performance as a vital and philosophical force' (Cull, 2009: 2). I argue that in thinking theatre and performance *through* and *with* Deleuze, we can arrive at a 'minor' notion of political theatre that not only disturbs mimetic representation, but also produces a possibility of performing critique as an immanent process within the theatrical event: a possibility of performing presence.

(b) One less Manifesto: Deleuze's description of a 'critical operation'

In *One less Manifesto* (1997 [1979]), Deleuze's most direct encounter with theatre, the French theorist proposes a revolutionary way of thinking and performing on stage. Considering the practice of the Italian actor, filmmaker and

director Carmelo Bene, Deleuze unfolds a potential of theatre as ‘an always unbalanced, non-representative force’ (Deleuze, 1997 [1979]: 242). Through examining Bene’s methodological adaptation of classical plays – mainly Shakespeare – Deleuze offers ‘lines of escape’ from what sustains the importance of elements of power and representation in Western theatre. In short, Deleuze proposes a destratified theatrical process, which in all its complexity and variability allows us to rethink the philosopher’s ontology in direct relation to theatre and performance. It is worth noting here, that what seems to be one of Deleuze’s objectives in writing *One less Manifesto* is a call for a renewed relation between theory and practice; between critical discourse and performance. It is an essay that brings forward the political potentials of performing critique through breaking with representational mimesis. As Mohammad Kowsar notes in his case study of Carmelo Bene’s *Richard III*, ‘Gilles Deleuze meets Carmelo Bene at the crossroads where theory and theatrical practice converge’ (Kowsar, 1986: 19). Therefore, one of the main questions that Deleuze undertakes in this essay is the question of endorsing and radicalising this convergence.

Deleuze inquires into the ‘critical function’ of Carmelo Bene’s theatre by means of examining its capacity to actualise a critique of presence, as opposed to a critique of absence. He writes:

‘Carmelo Bene describes his play *Romeo and Juliet* as a “critical essay on Shakespeare”. But the fact is that Carmelo Bene does not write on Shakespeare; the critical essay is actually a play’ (Deleuze, 1997 [1979]: 239).

Through the theatre of Bene, Deleuze describes the relationship between theatre and critique through the capacity of the latter to be performed; to be staged rather than documented – to operate through present intensities rather than absent extensities. ‘One less Hamlet’, says Bene, and Deleuze agrees that a birth of something new and politically forceful in theatre occurs ‘not by addition but by subtraction, by amputation’ (ibid). Let us then unfold this idea that aims at transposing major theatrical processes into minor ones.

By arguing for a process of amputation, Deleuze does not negate addition, or creation. On the contrary, the amputating operation that he observes in Bene’s plays carries with it a productive force of multiplication. He notes:

‘If you amputate Romeo, you will witness an astonishing development, the development of Mercutio, who was only a virtuality in the play by Shakespeare’ (ibid).

Deleuze argues that the development of Mercutio is not a result of a lack of Romeo – it does not imply the emergence of a new sovereign theatrical subject-as-Mercutio. In other words, Mercutio is not occupying the subject-position of Romeo. Through Bene’s approach, Deleuze suggests a ‘treatment’ of Shakespeare’s play that does not focus on the finality of a character through maintaining fidelity to the text. He argues for a process of becoming a character through destabilising its static positioning; that is, its capacity to act as a ‘major’ subject. Thus, Deleuze contends that Bene’s subtractive process does not replace Romeo with Mercutio, but rather suggests that an amputation of Romeo creates the conditions for a becoming-Mercutio. This becoming, a becoming that emerges through amputating a major character, is for Deleuze what matters the most in Bene’s theatre. He writes:

‘The theatre maker is no longer an author, an actor, or a director. S/he is an operator. Operation must be understood as the movement of subtraction, of amputation, one already covered by the other movement that gives birth to and multiplies something unexpected, like a prosthesis: the amputation of Romeo and the colossal development of Mercutio, one in the other’ (ibid).

So, what Carmelo Bene achieves through this process, and what Deleuze observes in *One less Manifesto*, is the emergence of new characters, emancipated from a fixed positioning or a self-identical presence; that is, the creation of ‘minor’ performing subjects. Yet, it is crucial to reiterate that for Deleuze, what matters is the process of emerging, rather than the character as such. He pays attention to the *becoming of a character*, rather than what might result from this becoming (i.e. a sovereign character, another Romeo in the place of Romeo). As Allen S. Weiss notes in his 2002 article about Bene’s death,

‘[Bene’s plays] were largely based on a radical principle of adaptation: to work in the ‘hollow’ spaces of a text; to eliminate or ‘subtract’ the major dramatic structures of a play in order to reveal a revolutionary ‘minor’ discourse; to break open the representational system of both text and theatre’ (Weiss, 2002: 8).

Deleuze's idea of becoming, and particularly of becoming-minor, is described mostly in his collaborations with Félix Guattari. From *Anti-Oedipus* (2004) and *Kafka: toward a minor literature* (1986), to *A Thousand Plateaus* and *What is Philosophy?* (1994), the concept of 'minority consciousness' has been used by Deleuze and Guattari as a proposal of deterritorialization of major subjectivities and normalised discourses of power. Becoming-minor is a process that affirms the virtue of becoming itself, since, '[t]here is no becoming-majoritarian; majority is never becoming. All becoming is minoritarian', as Deleuze and Guattari argue in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 [1987]: 117). Verena Conley emphasises this point, arguing that, '[m]inorities are defined not by number but by becoming and by their lines of fluctuation' (Conley, 2005: 165). Thus, Deleuze's insistence on subtraction underlines the importance of becomings within a theatrical process, not as a way to repeat the construction of an authoritative and unified body; but, as Laura Cull puts it, 'becomings constitute attempts to come into contact with the speeds and affects of a different kind of body, to break with a discrete self and to uproot the organs from the functions assigned to them by this 'molar' identity' (Cull, 2009: 7).

The title of the essay clearly 'betrays' its content: *One less Manifesto*, or else a minor manifesto, a manifesto that is subtracted in order to be multiplied as something else – or as Deleuze would clarify, a major form (a manifesto) with a minor treatment (one less). Deleuze describes Bene's minor treatment in relation to Master-Servant interaction. By amputating the Master (e.g. Romeo), one magnifies the potential autonomisation of the Servant (e.g. Marcutio), but this process does not generate a new Master, since, as Deleuze argues, '[t]he Servant is not at all the reverse image of the Master, nor his replica or contradictory identity' (Deleuze, 1997 [1979]: 240). What is important for Deleuze is the becoming, not its origin or resolution. He writes:

'What is interesting is never the way in which someone starts or finishes. Of interest is the middle (*le milieu*), what is happening in the middle. It is not by chance that the greatest speed is in the middle' (ibid: 242).

What are then the elements that Carmelo Bene amputates in his theatrical process? What does it mean 'to amputate Romeo'? What does this amputation entail, and in what ways it creates new possibilities for staging critique? Deleuze

argues that Carmelo Bene's theatrical operation ultimately subtracts the stable 'elements of power, the elements that constitute or represent a system of power' (ibid: 241). Romeo, the Master, the King, the state power, all these are constituents of a stratified system of representation of power in Western theatre. To deduct their organic function is, thus, to enact a critical operation that destratifies a system in which these elements of power acquire both their coherency as well as their capacity to symbolise transcendental social relations. In this sense, becoming-minor is becoming a body without organs (BwO) – a destratified body that operates by affection as an assemblage, without being subjected to a hierarchically structured organism. As Laura Cull notes in her proposal for a 'theatre without organs', '[destratification] is a question of taking away that which attempts to fix the moving and homogenise the differing, a matter of undoing that which forms speed and subjectifies affect' (Cull, 2009: 247). It is then a question of exposing, within theatre, an entire system of stratified representation of power, of conflicts, of History, of Culture, of Texts – in short, of everything that, instead of providing 'lines of flight', in fact normalises, territorialises possibilities of performing critique as presence.

Now, the complexity of this process lies for Deleuze in the essentialist connection between power and representation in Western theatre. Coming closer to the Derridean account of representation in theatre, Deleuze argues that, '[t]he actual power of theatre is inseparable from a representation of power in theatre, even if it is a critical representation' (Deleuze, 1997 [1979]: 241). However, by contrast to Derrida's cynical view of Artaudian theatre, Deleuze finds in Carmelo Bene (as well as in his readings of Artaud, Bob Wilson, Grotowski and The Living Theatre) a potential that destabilises this essentialist connection. He sees a radical change both in the matter and in the manner of performing; a deterritorialisation of theatrical elements that function through representation. For example, Deleuze suggests that in Bene's theatre, the subject-actor is desubjectified by becoming an *operator*. The theatrical subject is not an actor, it does not have a stable self-identical presence, but becomes an operator through taking part in a constant variation and mobility of theatrical elements. Deleuze argues that by subtracting the theatrical invariants of power and representation, and by placing the

constituents of the *mise en scène* in continuous variation, Bene achieves a becoming-minor potential of theatre as a ‘non-representative force’ (ibid: 242).

Thus, Deleuze reveals a potential of critique-as-presence; a possibility of staging a non-codified critical operation that is produced within the event of performance. It is a critique that cannot be represented or symbolised, because it does not correspond to any ideological invariants or fixed images of meaning, but rather changes and differentiates itself within the performance. I argue that what Deleuze identifies in Bene’s theatre is a use of critique that becomes non-teleological and productively *incomplete*, in as much as it is not normalised as a political commonsense, but rather ‘proposes the presence of variation as a more active, more aggressive element’ (ibid: 252).

How could we describe an incomplete critical process though? In particular, how can we use a language of critique in an incomplete manner? I suggest that the minor usage of language in theatre, as Deleuze understands it, not only denormalises its codified expression, but also disturbs its determinacy in ways that produce an incomplete performing language. It is incomplete in so far as it no longer symbolises transcendence, in as much as it does not represent a critique that corresponds to a self-identical truth; but rather, it is used to create the conditions for a becoming-critical experience. I argue then, that a minor treatment of language in theatre is, in effect, an incomplete treatment of its performance. I suggest that Deleuze’s proposal in *One less Manifesto* is a call to a performance of language in an incomplete and mobile manner. Ronald Bogue notes in *Deleuze on Literature* that, ‘Deleuze’s concept of a minor usage of language necessarily extends well beyond that of a writer’s manipulation of words on a page, and that *the performance of language provides Deleuze with the fullest instance of a minor style*’ (Bogue, 2003: 141; original emphasis). I would argue therefore that Deleuze’s argument on critique in *One less Manifesto* could be read as follows: to perform critique is to ‘mis-perform’ (that is, not to perform in normative ways, to perform almost in a ‘deviant’ manner). In a word, to perform in a productively incomplete manner. As Deleuze writes, ‘[t]o be bilingual, *but* in a single language, in a unique language [...] to be a foreigner, *but* in one’s own tongue’ (Deleuze, 1997 [1979]: 246; original emphasis). In a sense, this critical operation challenges

the classical meaning of performance as a complete act of expression (*parfounir* [Old French]: to complete, to carry out thoroughly).

From this perspective, following Deleuze reading of Bene's theatre, I argue that the 'art' of critique is performed when it is exposed to the variability, and even contingency, of the theatrical event. Deleuze endorses this point further by challenging Brecht's idea of critique. He notes that, 'Brecht performed the greatest 'critical operation', but this operation was enacted 'on the text and not on the stage'' (ibid). In making this point, Deleuze implies that Brecht understood critique as a brainstorming process that requires rigorous thought for a resolution of a problem; without, however, addressing the possibility of critique to act as a challenge of the representational systems that create problems. Hence, according to Deleuze, Brecht displaces what is signified in theatre, but he does not destabilise the system of significations as a whole. He clarifies that,

'[w]ithout a doubt, there is Brecht's attempt to make contradictions and oppositions something other than represented; but Brecht himself only wants them to be 'understood' and for the spectator to have the elements of possible 'solution'. This is not to leave the domain of representation but only to pass from one dramatic pole of bourgeois representation to an epic pole of popular representation. Brecht does not push the 'critique' far enough' (ibid: 252).

To sum up therefore, in *One less Manifesto*, Deleuze proposes a specific theatrical method of performing critique in a non-representational way. This method, or as Deleuze puts it, this 'complete critical operation consists of (1) deducting the stable elements, (2) placing everything in continuous variation, (3) then transposing everything in *minor*' (ibid: 246; original emphasis).

(c) Concluding remarks

It is important to raise some questions in relation to two specific points in Deleuze's analysis. They are rather conceptual questions that could be addressed in relation to Deleuzian ontology in general. In other words, without intending to become rhetorical, I want to pose these questions as creative challenges to Deleuzian thought.

The first point comes out of Deleuze's idea of a character's *becoming* in Bene's theatre. It is evident throughout the essay that Deleuze endorses Bene's theatrical insistence on ephemerality. Quoting Bene, Deleuze writes that '[t]he spectacle begins and ends at the same moment it occurs' (ibid: 240). Deleuze argues that the event takes place as a becoming of a character; the becoming of a theatrical subject. He notes however that,

'the play ends with the creation of the character. It has no other purpose and does not extend further than the process of this creation. It ends with birth when it normally ends with death' (ibid).

Yet, in making this anti-Aristotelian point (this critique of transcendental catharsis), Deleuze remains unclear about what this birth entails. Is this purpose, i.e. the birth of the character, an essential end of its process? What if the purpose of a play is *not* the creation of the character? What if there is no purpose? Without intending to ask a question that may lead to a nihilist conception of theatre, the point that I want to make is *whether such a purpose* is what makes its becoming so important and productive in Deleuzian thought? Can a play end with desire, with anger, with pain or happiness – with subjectless and, perhaps, unintentional intensities or experiences? In other words, I wonder whether birth (the birth of a character) constitutes the sole end of becoming in theatre?

Of course, it is clear that Deleuze gives importance to the *process* of birth, rather than the act of birth as such. Yet, the question remains. Reformulated it would be: Do we need birth in theatre? Does becoming need a point of termination, or as Deleuze would say, a point of territorialisation? The reason I insist on this question is because I believe that birth carries within it a certain kind of 'death': the 'death' of the *process* of giving birth. Is, therefore, the birth of a character what ideologically, politically or even aesthetically *completes* a play? If so, I argue that this completion produces a perhaps displaced, yet largely representational and finite subject in performance. Thus, if performance ends with the creation of a character, does the critical function of performance end with the construction of a subject? Through Bene's theatre, Deleuze suggests a theatrical process in which the characters are not unified subjects – they do not have an 'Ego', as he mentions (ibid: 241); their identities are nothing less and nothing more than becomings. However, if the play *ends* with the construction of an identity, with a production of

an image that is static and fixed, what effect does this creation have to critique as a process? Does critique cease to be process, a mobile and incomplete practice? Does critique become a ‘message’ to be conveyed to the audience? I want to take these questions into account throughout the thesis, although I believe that raising them here is very important in its own right.

The second point that I want to briefly elaborate upon is the way in which Deleuze understands the function of *power* in Bene’s theatre. Deleuze argues that in order to create variations that render a performance minor, one has to subtract the stable elements of power that dominate and stratify Western theatre. This is a process that deterritorialises the representational power of a play, the ‘despotism of the invariant’ as he puts it, transforming it into minor becomings (ibid: 254). Since what matters to Deleuze is the process of *becoming*-minor rather than *being* minor in its own right, the existence of major elements is pivotal to this transformation: (re)territorialisation is essential to deterritorialisation. Although throughout *One less Manifesto* Deleuze’s critique of power and representation in theatre is substantial and polemic, he does not thoroughly describe the positive and productive role that power can play in Bene’s performances; as well as in theatre in general. He writes:

“[a]rt is not a form of power except when it ceases to be art and begins to become demagoguery’. Art is subject to many powers, but it is not a form of power’ (ibid).

Deleuze suggests that the presence of variations and becomings operate as responses to power – as the resulting processes of subtracting power, in so far as the latter becomes representational and authoritative. Now, although Deleuze highlights that these variations are not powers in themselves, I suggest however that they result from power and end with power; therefore, they are, in a sense, powerful or forceful. Deleuze would probably use the word ‘desire’ to describe them, whereas Foucault would prefer the term ‘power’ as such. What I want to suggest here is that we need to account for the creative form of power that is immanent in becomings in a much more detailed manner. If, in *One less Manifesto*, Deleuze does not want to speak of variations and becomings as processes that are antithetical to power, this is not made clear through his analysis; that is, he seems to place power and becoming in a binary-like relation. While his critique of power

is very descriptive and useful for the hypothesis that I want to examine, what he suggests is not entirely clear in relation to power as a positive and productive process. In other words, while I agree with Deleuze's understanding of variations and becomings in theatre as impersonal 'lines of escape' from the power of representation, I argue however that they need to be acknowledged as powerful presences, as 'desiring' movements in performance. If they acquire an entirely different form of power, as Deleuze seems to imply, I suggest that this has to be made clearer; not for clarity's sake, but as a way to attribute specific qualities and potentialities to the function of becomings in theatre and performance. In short, I argue that theatrical becomings have to be 'vitalised' as theatrical processes; they have to be approached as lively and powerful challenges to representation and mimesis.

Interestingly, this is perhaps a Deleuzian critique to Deleuze. Since his accounts on theatre and performance are limited, it makes sense that *One less Manifesto* can be understood as a critical text whose aim is hardly to provide an extremely in-depth analysis of political theatre and its non-representational possibilities. However, it is a text that not only motivates, but also initiates a rethinking of political theatre as an experience of processes, transformations, changes and differences, rather than fixed ideological messages, rhetorics and hierarchies. Indeed, it is the most useful starting point for this thesis.

Conclusion

Before proceeding to trace the ways in which British theatre directors and collectives have experimented with non-representational potentials of 'performing critique', I want to provide some concluding thoughts in order to connect this discussion in the case studies of the thesis.

In the first section of the chapter, I attempted to examine the problematic relationship between theoretical frameworks and theatrical practices as it has been discussed or overlooked in academic scholarship during the latter half of the 20th century. In particular, I focused on the seeming reluctance of a significant body of theory to consider its own potential to be performed as an actual possibility that breaks with a transcendental representation of knowledge. Further, I went on to

examine two theoretical ‘discussions’ made between two philosophers (Derrida and Deleuze) and two theatre practitioners (Artaud and Bene) that prepare the theoretical ground on which I wish to step on with this thesis.

Following from this analysis, it seems to me that the question of critique as a non-representational process that merges theory with its performance on stage is key to our understanding of the politics of theatre, as well as of the possibilities of critique itself. Accordingly, I argue that this process can be thought in a number of ways – either Artaudian, Derridean, Deleuzian or others – yet, I believe that in each one of them one has to thoroughly address the urgent issues of representational forms and teleological outcomes. I thereby argue that studying the experimental challenges to mimetic representation and theatrical teleology, initiated by different British directors and groups, is more important than attempting to ‘locate’ one of them that fulfils the subversive potentials of an incomplete critique as non-representation – not to mention that, perhaps, the latter would be an impossible task. Thus, rather than seeking to find the ‘ideal’ instances of a theatre that was or is incomplete and non-representational, I am interested in tracing the conditions for the becoming of such a theatre through drawing elements from diverse approaches and perspectives as conceptualised and put into practice on the British stage. My critical analysis, then, will not be based on a potential discovery of a ‘lost treasure’, but on placing under discussion the different processes of such a discovery.

Chapter 3

Beyond agit-prop: the popular theatre of Joan Littlewood

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Introduction

As suggested in the second chapter, it is mainly during the second half of the 20th century that theatre began to be understood as a 'space' in which political discourse and critique could acquire the potential to be performed to and engaged with audiences. In different ways, critique became a process of discussion with spectators, rather than an ideological product to be conveyed or transmitted. The changing sociopolitical conditions of post-World War II transformed the art of theatre from a 'podium', from which ideas were represented as rhetorical questions, into a productive cultural space in which critical practice could emerge.

This is not to say that theatre, and art in general, stopped functioning as ‘mediums’, i.e. as ways of expressing and communicating concepts, or as the ‘substance’ through which artists were able to articulate their imagination; quite the contrary. Yet it is crucial, I suggest, to consider the post-war period as one in which artistic mediums obtained the capacity to also operate beyond symbolisations, significations and codifications of meaning – they acquired agency as the producers, and not only ‘carriers’, of social and political reality.

In a more general tone, Murray Edelman argues that,

‘works of art do not represent ‘reality,’ ‘the real world,’ or ‘everyday life,’ even if those terms are taken to carry a specific or meaningful reference. Rather, art creates realities and worlds. People perceive and conceive in the light of narratives, pictures, and images. That is why art is central to politics, just as it is central to social relationships [...]’ (Edelman, 1995: 7; original emphasis).

While Edelman makes a very useful point, I would argue that this function of art cannot be thought in a transhistorical way; that is, the manner in which political art is practiced and perceived, changes according to different historical, political and cultural conditions. For example, putting the Soviet movement of *socialist realism* or the early-20th-century *expressionist realism* of Germany under this theoretical framework is, I suggest, largely debatable. The ways in which such historical art movements made use of art is ambiguous in this respect. While indeed socialist realist or German expressionist artworks depicted social reality, their objective was not one of intervention, creation or change. Rather, their primary function was to disseminate and maintain a certain political and ideological status quo that was often manifested through extinguishing different (usually more avant-garde) approaches to artistic process.

Thus, what I want to underline here is that especially in the second part of the 20th century, there emerged a crisis in art’s representational function that gradually challenged the propagandistic and metaphorical role that art forms had been forced to play in the immediate past, and began to emancipate artistic creation and perception from ideological dogmatism and aesthetic determinacy. This gradual shift became particularly visible in theatrical contexts. Theatre spaces were unique in this respect, not only because this critique of dogmatic

representation was more relevant to theatre than in other art forms; but also because theatrical plays were inviting sites of political engagement in which such a critique could make a radical difference in both artistic expression and perception. Lehmann's description of theatre's function as an art form captures this particular 'uniqueness':

'Theatre is the site not only of 'heavy' *bodies* but also of a *real gathering*, a place where a unique intersection of aesthetically organised and everyday real life takes place. In contrast to other arts, which produce an object and/or are communicated through media, here the aesthetic act itself (the performing) as well as the act of reception (the theatre going) take place as a real doing in the here and now' (Lehmann, 2006 [1999]: 17; original emphasis).

At the same time, the increasing production of theoretical texts by modern theatre practitioners (from Meyerhold and Copeau, to Brecht and Artaud) was a distinctive phenomenon that played a significant role in challenging the representational boundaries of theatrical processes. The advance of what Milling and Ley (2001) call the 'theoretical practitioner' became possible during modernity. This new theatrical subject became very influential and politically involved in ongoing discourses, as it transformed theatre art into a cultural space that 'produced ideas as well as performances' (Milling & Ley, 2001: vi). This creative exchange between theatre and theory was instrumental in producing non-representational possibilities of staging critique that shaped and altered the function of political theatre in the second half of the 20th century.

It is worth noting therefore, that the materialisation of these possibilities is not to be thought of as an impulsive or sudden shift in theatre-making. On the contrary, apart from the political impact of the 'theoretical practitioners', there were several important conditions that prepared the ground for non-representational approaches to theatre in the latter part of the 20th century. To put it differently, the sociopolitical and artistic unrest of the pre-1950s period not only conditioned the 'turn to performance' (and its creative exchange with theory), but also composed a chain of theatrical events and milestones that resulted in transforming many parts of the theatrical avant-garde into ensembles and collectives that looked at different ways to stage political critique. After all, the term 'political' or 'politicised' theatre was born and practiced during the first half

of the 20th century. I suggest that looking at the pre-1950s period, and particularly at the sociohistorical developments that took place between the General Strike in England (1926) and the Second World War, is an important starting point for understanding these changing conditions in theatre and performance.

One of the most polemical and influential directors of this period was Joan Littlewood. She was a theatre practitioner that not only ‘co-authored’ the making and development of political theatre in Britain, but also played a crucial role in revolutionising the notion of critical practice, by experimenting with its multiple expressions in her radical performances. This chapter is, thus, an attempt to understand these conditions that initiated the process for a rethinking of the ways in which critique is performed, by putting a spotlight on the theatre of Joan Littlewood. I argue that the case of Littlewood is particularly interesting, as her iconoclastic theatrical narratives and her post-Brechtian approach to popular theatre gave new insights to the potentials of relating politics to theatre in Britain. The chapter briefly examines some of the most important milestones in Littlewood’s directorial career, considering the artistic practice and intellectual resonances of her theatrical projects that were carried out under the umbrella of theatrical collectives and ensembles.

I. Early years and the Soviet impact

The period that followed the General Strike in England in 1926 was crucial in many respects. One of them was that politics and critique began to be understood as potentialities with aesthetic, creative and even theatrical expressions. Although the aftermath of the strike was not what the unions and the workers had been hoping for, there emerged a new sense of critical practice that inspired and boosted the dissenting voices of the British social world – particularly these intellectual and artistic communities that had been looking for more engaging ways to express their political commitment. As Robert Leach notes,

‘[t]he 1926 General Strike was a marvellous ‘performance’. It had almost no direct political impact, but it conveyed a whiff of revolution and exposed the

smooth betrayal of the workers by their political and trade union leaders' (Leach, 2006: 3).

Within these changing sociopolitical conditions the idea of communism gained significant ground during the 1930s, especially after the communists' clash with the subsequently unsuccessful and politically fragile labour government. The 'communist dream' had never before been felt so real for a large part of the working people of England, who approached the communist party not only as a genuine political support, but also as a tangible way of preparing a radically effective uprising. Leach points out that,

'though few in number, Communists were always to be found at the battlefield of the class war, and they added a noisy, flamboyant, even theatrical, element to the workers' struggles' (ibid: 5).

The Soviet avant-garde theatre – that had been active since the beginnings of the 20th century – was significantly influential in the emergence of agit-prop performances throughout a large part of the Western world, including England. James Roose-Evans (1989 [1970]) gives us a very comprehensive picture of the way in which these forms of theatre developed in Russia:

'The idea of open air collective spectacles as the theatre form of the future had been discussed in Russia from the time of the 1905 revolution, and became popular after the October 1917 revolution. These mass spectacles were characterised by collective authorship, military-like organisation, and the participation of different segments of society. They were not only conscious attempts to create a new, distinctly proletarian theatre but also an attempt to establish a new social ritual, re-enacting and celebrating the events of the revolution' (Roose-Evans, 1989 [1970]: 27).

Indeed, the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 was instrumental in bringing forth ideas, methods and techniques that could generate a theatre of 'the people' – a theatre that would be produced by, and speak for the needs of the working class. Platon Kerzhentzev's *The Creative Theatre*,⁴ published in 1918 – a work that was influenced by Romain Rolland's book *The People's Theatre* (2007 [1903]) – was one of the first intellectual endeavours that supported and pushed for the

⁴ See Roose-Evans (1989 [1970]: 27).

disintegration of traditional theatre and its replacement with performances authored and devised by the (frequently proletarian) audience. The majority of modernist Soviet directors working towards this end – such as Alexander Tairov, Vyacheslav Ivanov and Vsevolod Meyerhold – challenged the artistically ‘exhausted’ form of realism in theatre (in Moscow Theatre, Stanislavski was one of the most important supporters of this type of theatre, with his psychological realist performances), by proposing symbolist and anti-realist techniques through which they could engage spectators while experimenting with sociopolitical commentary.

Meyerhold, in particular, was sharply critical of realism because he understood it as a form that eradicated the richness of theatricality, imagination and improvisation. As Roose-Evans comments, Meyerhold was an advocate of a theatre that ‘should not mirror reality but should transcend the commonplace of everyday life by deliberately exaggerating and distorting reality through stylised theatrical techniques’ (Roose-Evans, 1989 [1970]: 24). Of course, it is worth noting that while experimenting with theatrical illusion and artistically complex performances, Meyerhold and many other avant-garde theatre directors simultaneously created a significant distance between their practices and the Soviet Union’s established art form at the time, which was socialist realism. This is the main reason why the leaders of the Communist state in Russia gradually subordinated avant-garde’s initiatives in favour of more straightforward theatrical techniques that supported the state’s propaganda. Bruce McConachie (2010) points out that,

‘[a]fter the mid-1920s [...] when hopes for international revolution had dimmed, Stalin and his bureaucrats began tightening the funding and freedoms of the avant-garde. They squeezed out and eventually eliminated those who would not conform to the narrow political and aesthetic constraints of ‘socialist realism,’ a mix of realism and communist party propaganda’ (McConachie et al, 2010: 426).

However, the creative radicalism of the avant-garde could not be moderated or diminished by the Soviet state’s restrictive policies. On the contrary, this continuous censorship and control in one way or another empowered many dissident voices within theatre by challenging their ways of production. In fact, this anti-realist and modernist wave – that had begun in the Soviet Union –

spread around many parts of the industrial West. Directors such as the German Erwin Piscator, who called for a re-politicisation of theatre by evoking epic forms of sociohistorical analysis, the French Jacques Copeau with his revolutionary anti-naturalist methods of devising political performances and Tristan Tzara, one of the initiators of the anti-art Dada movements in France, are celebrating cases of avant-garde's resonance throughout Europe. Even though this wave of theatrical modernism was not as strong, or as enduring as the one of the 1950s (when the theoretical writings of Artaud and the impact of Brecht activated a much wider reverberation of avant-garde performances), it certainly was extremely important in the transformation of political theatre.

II. Littlewood and the condition of English theatre: from RADA to Theatre of Action and Theatre Union

(a) English theatre's 'representationalism' and RADA

Joan Littlewood holds a distinctive position within the spectrum of these directors and performance artists that attempted to re-politicise theatre while challenging established and conventional methods of performing. Based in England, Littlewood faced enormous difficulties of surpassing the ongoing traditionalism of theatrical naturalism, or 'representationalism' as she preferred to describe it. During the mid-1930s the patterns of English theatre were limited to mere depictions of classical plays. Whereas the terms 'theatre' and 'performance' were commonsensically associated with West End commercial productions, most modern approaches to directing were considered as ideologically 'suspicious' and, therefore, highly improper. While the critical reactions to this condition of English theatre were few in number, their tone was very polemical and even aggressive. In *The English Theatre* (1936), Allardyce Nicoll noted that, '[t]he English theatre, lacking the spirit for experimentation, is artistically and mentally moribund' (Nicoll, 1936: 188). The challenge of 'aestheticism' and the radicalisation of the means of producing theatre in England (as well as in Europe) become gradually visible, with the French communist writer Leon Moussinac famously declaring: 'We no longer ask for beauty, that dead thing, but for the shock-values' (as cited in Leach, 2006: 9). Indeed, although Moussinac's writings were foremost critical

interventions to the art of cinema, his seminal 1931 work *The New Movement in the Theatre* had a significant impact to directors of political theatre, including Littlewood. As Derek Paget (1995) argues in his paper *Theatre Workshop, Moussinac, and the European Connection*, through Moussinac's work, Littlewood's Theatre Workshop 'gained an understanding of European theatre' (Paget, 1995: 212).

Littlewood started working in the theatre during a period in which the prevailing modes of performing were based, according to Paget, on 'a seamless narrative chronology and a surface realism (especially of 'character' – a 'good' actor becoming a performer who can present a set of recognizably believable behaviours to an audience)' (ibid: 212-3). The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) was, at the time, one of the major hegemonic institutions that promoted this 'high-art' approach to theatre making, by simultaneously excluding avant-garde initiatives and politically informed performances. Ironically, however, RADA was the first place in which Littlewood engaged with theatre after winning a scholarship in 1932 that would financially secure her studies in the academy. Eventually, Littlewood realised that this was not the appropriate place for developing her theatrical skills and perspectives, since she believed that the restrictive ideological stance of RADA, as well as the elitist approach of both professors and students did not endorse a theatre of change, as she understood it; that is, a theatre that could speak about the condition of the working-class. Holdsworth (2006) points out that,

'[Littlewood] hated the concentration on classics, classical verse speaking and drawing room comedies that bore little relation to the 'real' world and her experience growing up in East London. The prospect of a theatre capable of contributing to the widespread calls for social change excited Littlewood and she did not find these represented at RADA' (Holdsworth, 2006: 5).

Thus, the institutional and ideological barriers that RADA (and other drama universities) were raising, pushed Littlewood away from a possible academic engagement with theatre. In fact, she became a sharp critic of theatre's academisation, as she felt that it was normalising and limiting the possibility of a political theatre that could be direct and radical. Littlewood's primary objective was to learn how to develop innovative and experimental theatrical methods

through which it would be feasible to create politicised performances for working class audiences.

(b) Theatre of Action

Following her resignation from her studies and a brief stay in Paris, where she worked as a painter, Littlewood settled in Manchester where she looked for a way to integrate in the theatre world. In 1934, while being employed as a documentary writer by the BBC, Littlewood met Ewan MacColl (then known as Jimmy Miller), an active agit-prop writer and performer. MacColl was at the time engaged in several politically informed theatrical projects that were active in the wider area of Manchester and were mainly a product of *the Workers' Theatre Movement's*⁵ counteraction to Ramsay MacDonald's administration. In particular, the *Red Megaphones*⁶, with its nomadic potentials, managed to transfer the agitational spirit of radical plays to the neighbourhoods of Manchester, by employing techniques inspired by the Italian commedia dell' arte and the Soviet agit-prop.

In the mean time, while the current urgency in Europe's political climate (due to the dissemination of fascism and the rise of Hitler) was becoming growingly apparent throughout Britain, Littlewood and MacColl decided to collaborate and create a company that would provide a much more structured and organised support to strikes and demonstrations than that of street theatre's spontaneous acts. As Leach points out,

‘[a]fter 1933 [...] simple agit-prop was seen as too crude for the new purposes of revolutionary theatre in the time of the rise of Fascism. It was dynamic and immediate, but was unable to deal with historical processes or an increasingly complex political situation’ (Leach, 2006: 25).

Thus, MacColl formed the *Theatre of Action* in 1934 (a group which was, in fact, a reformation of the *Red Megaphones*) and Littlewood joined the group a short time

⁵ Robert Leach describes *Worker's Theatre Movement* (WTM) as a theatre organisation whose ‘drama drew both form and ideas from working-class experience, culture and entertainment’ (Leach, 2006: 13). He notes that, ‘[t]he movement's proponents argued that all art was effectively propaganda, and therefore proletarian art should be used unashamedly to that end – to raise workers' consciousness, or highlight particular issues, or support workers in struggle’ (ibid: 14).

⁶ Agit-prop theatre collective (in which MacColl was a member), mainly active in the broader Manchester area, famous for its didactic sketches and caustic songs.

later. It was an initiative that was considered as an artistic up-to-date response to the ongoing sociopolitical conditions. Provided that they shared very similar political and ideological beliefs, Littlewood and MacColl managed to collaborate effortlessly. They were talking the same artistic and political ‘language’, therefore it was obvious to them that they could work together creatively. In his autobiography, entitled *Journeyman*, MacColl shares the excitement of one of their first meetings:

‘[We] told each other the story of our lives and discussed what we called real theatre. Our views, we found, coincided at almost every point. We were drunk with ideas, lightheaded with talk and lack of sleep and each of us jubilant at having discovered an ally’ (MacColl, 1990: 211).

Theatre of Action’s theatrical methods were initially influenced by the work of Meyerhold, Piscator and Laban. Meyerhold’s scenic constructivism, Piscator’s epic forms of historical analysis and Laban’s perspectives on body language and movement were fundamental in the construction of the group’s process for creating radical performances. It is worth noting that the group was interested in amateur actors whose ‘anti-professionalism’ could contribute to the experimental character of the performances. As Leiter comments, ‘[t]hey rejected the trained and polished actors of the repertory theatres as being too mannered and artificial, and looked instead for untrained, natural, and even slovenly spoken performers, hoping to build their method from the ground up, through trial and error’ (Leiter, 1991: 184). In *The Theatre Workshop Story* (1981), Howard Goorney outlines the four basic points on which the group focused the most:

- ‘(1) An awareness of the social issues of the time, and in that sense, a political theatre;
- (2) A theatrical language that working people could understand, but that was capable of reflecting, when necessary, ideas, either simple or involved, in a poetic form;
- (3) An expressive and flexible form of movement, and a high standard of skill and technique in acting;
- (4) A high level of technical expertise capable of integrating sound and light into the production’ (Goorney, 1981: 8).

Gradually, the group became interested in experimenting with different techniques of embodying critique in performances. Plays such as *Free Thaelmann* (initially a film written in 1935 for the imprisonment of Ernst Thaelmann, the leader of the German Communist Party), Funarov's *The Fire Sermon* and the political drama *Newsboy* are striking examples of the company's endeavour to blend diverse theatrical methods and narratives.

In one of his articles about the Theatre of Action, MacColl describes the group's approach to theatre-making in a quite expressive way:

'An actor', we said, 'should be like an athlete, he should be in complete control of his body, he should be able to make his body do anything that he calls upon it to do. Thus far we agree with Meyerhold. On the other hand we don't want a theatre which is just a troupe of acrobats. Then again, we don't want a theatre like Stanislavsky's where everybody is so busy living the role that they cannot step out of the role and comment on it from time to time.' Strange territory we were exploring - exploring is the right word. But we weren't like modern explorers who go out with botanists, biologists, radio engineers and all the rest of it - we were exploring from a position of ignorance. None of us could be said to have had any kind of education, we'd all left school when we were fourteen. We weren't merely exploring the theories, we were having to learn the words that described the theories [...] We were teaching each other' (MacColl et al, 1985: 244).

MacColl's testimony shows that the group was trying to produce politically 'effective' performances, by understanding their theatrical practice as a learning process. Littlewood and MacColl wanted to expose their own exploration and their continuous pursuit of knowledge by making it visible for the spectators in the performances. If Meyerhold's theatrical 'mechanics' were considered too sophisticated and Stanislavski's persistence on the actors' emotional involvement with their character was seen as an apolitical approach, it was Brechtian theatre that provided a platform on which the Theatre of Action could step on.

Brecht was becoming increasingly known amongst the European theatre world, and satirical-political plays such as *The Threepenny Opera* (1928) and the *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1930) already had a significant impact on theatre collectives and directors. The Theatre of Action produced pieces of theatre whose

sociopolitical commentary could be well understood by the audiences, without excluding imaginative and poetic narratives. Like Brecht, they were trying to attract audiences derived from diverse social groupings, and make them reflect on what they were watching by exposing the ways in which their performances were constructed and arranged. In this sense, the group was oscillating between illusion and anti-illusion, between sociopolitical critique and imagination. They wanted to entertain the spectators by performing politically informed plays that raised the sociopolitical awareness of the audience, as well as of the group.

(c) Theatre Union

Theatre of Action's distancing from the philosophy of socialist realism was considered as a threatening futurist tendency by the communist party, whose leaders rushed to expel MacColl and Littlewood from their political circles. Ironically however, they were both offered scholarships to study theatre in Russia, but while waiting for their visas to be issued in London they decided to return in Manchester in 1936, where they formed a new group: *Theatre Union*. Their radical political framework continued to shape their approach to performance; *Living Newspaper*⁷ techniques were employed more consciously and more systematically, as the principal aims of the group (as expressed in the Theatre Union's manifesto) were to 'present to the widest possible public, and particularly to that section of the public which has been starved theatrically, plays of social significance' (MacColl & Goorney, 1986: xxxix). With the Theatre Union, Littlewood and MacColl worked towards the materialisation of a truly *popular* theatre that would address the living conditions of working people as a whole. This is why, as Holdsworth points out, 'they appealed to Trade Unions and to all groups engaged in political struggle to affiliate with this new organisation in order to build up a network of supporters who could promote shows in their local community and/or workplace' (Holdsworth, 2006: 9). This was surely a political project, with clear ideological standpoints, references and objectives. At the same time, as MacColl clarifies,

⁷ Living Newspaper was a narrative mode of popular theatre, through which the performers were presenting current socio-political issues (derived from the daily news) to an audience, in order to urge for social agitation and action. Direct techniques of experimentation, combined with the frequent use of multi-media, were Living Newspaper's alternatives to naturalistic conventions.

‘[i]t wasn’t a matter of having less art and more politics but of having more clearly stated politics and more powerful art. The better the politics, we reasoned, the better the art and the nearer we would be to achieving our goal of a truly popular theatre’ (MacColl, 1986: xlv).

In theatrical terms, this approach was translated in Brechtian-like performances in which the audience would be able to observe enacted social contradictions and reflect on the ongoing action. Many performances were *interrupted* as a way to endorse audience intervention to what was happening on the stage. Littlewood and MacColl were great supporters of Brechtian interruptions⁸ in their theatre, challenging the intellectual reflexes of their spectators in different ways. Some of these ways ‘included action on stage interrupted by the use of ‘plants’ in the audience, or conventional stage action by direct address to the audience’ (Leach, 2006: 35).

In aesthetic terms, Theatre Union’s performances prescribed the regular use of music as a central element of the plays. In fact, satisfactory musical education became a selective prerequisite during the actors’ auditions. The epic-theatre style became a norm in Theatre Union’s work, and its combination with Living Newspaper techniques produced many sociopolitically informed and audiovisually arranged shows. Meanwhile, the Second World War had begun, and although the group managed to continue working in the early stages of the conflicts, it soon became impossible for Littlewood and MacColl to carry on.

III. Theatre Workshop and Theatre Royal: a shift in perspective

After the break up of the company in 1942, each member followed their own path in theatre education and performance practice for the next three years. Even in the times of war, Littlewood and MacColl urged the former members of Theatre Union to continue their education, maintaining their desire for theatre

⁸ Walter Benjamin was one of the first theoreticians that analysed and supported the theatrical practices of Brecht, advocating the value of ‘interruption’ as a key element of ‘epic theatre’. For Benjamin, ‘[q]uoting a text implies interrupting its context’, which means that the capacity to distance oneself from the flow of a narrative and reflect upon its meaning is not only a prerequisite of epic theatre, but also an essential tool for examining any cultural and critical discourse (Benjamin, 1998 [1966]: 19).

making. During these unstable and shocking conditions, they dedicated themselves in exploring diverse models of dramaturgy, ranging from *commedia dell' arte* to Elizabethan, Roman and Chinese theatre.

After the end of the war, and while artistic expression and intellectual initiatives were urgently needed throughout England – not only as a cultural relief from the war, but also as a part of a new beginning in post-war social life – the group reformed in 1945 in Kendal as *Theatre Workshop*. This was a very crucial turn in Littlewood's theatre project. It was the beginning of a touring theatre collective that, while living together 'on the road', produced popular and political theatre by mostly focusing on improvisation and workshops. As Holdsworth notes, '[t]he new name signalled a growing concern with making theatre as an on-going process that grew out of research, training and collaboration' (Holdsworth, 2006: 13). Even though the artistic and political intentions of Theatre Workshop were not very different from the ones of Theatre Union, there was an important shift in the materialisation of the group's ways to engage audiences, as well as in the manner in which the company was working. The intensification of Littlewood's vision and objectives was clearly manifested in her aspiration for the emergence of more direct ways to *interact with*, rather than educate, working-class audiences, through focusing on theatrical modes such as 'direct address', unexpected happenings and spectators' participation. As noted in Theatre Workshop's manifesto, the experimentation with space in arranging the performances (which was facilitated by the application of technological mediums) was fundamental in terms of the spectators' accessibility to the on-stage action. Furthermore, the nomadic character of the company and its flexibility as a touring collective became an asset with regards to attracting audiences, since Theatre Workshop's performances took place wherever it was easier for many spectators to gather.

Despite the fact that the agit-prop quality of the work had remained visible (shocking audiovisuals combined with leftist rhetoric still was one of the basic theatrical elements of the group's performances), Littlewood's attention had shifted towards de-objectifying the spectators, transforming them into theatrical *subjects*. The process of creating an intimate socio-theatrical platform, on which audience and performers could co-exist, interact and share experiences, was a task of primary importance for Littlewood, who wanted to destabilise the passive

condition of her spectators. For example, in MacColl's *Uranium 235* (1946), there was an evening experimentation by the performers, during which they were repeating selected scenes from the play, inviting audience's comments, interventions and interruptions. In *Uranium 235*, MacColl's text attempted to raise awareness about the devastating potentiality of nuclear war, pointing the audience's attention to the explosions in Japan in 1945. Based on challenge and exaggeration, Littlewood directed the play in a melodramatic way that alarmed the spectators by means of surprise. The actors were instructed to spontaneously address the audience and give way to their reactions. The reception of the play was enthusiastic, especially for young audiences, and left a promising feeling for radical theatre initiatives to follow. In her autobiography, Littlewood writes:

‘At the end of the show the stage was packed with young people arguing, questioning, examining our sound and lighting equipment, wanting to know how to start a ‘Workshop’ (Littlewood, 2003 [1994]: 191).

Similarly directed, but with a different set design, the political thriller *The Travellers* was presented in Edinburgh's annual theatre festival in 1952. Responding to the Europe's war tendencies, the aisle of the auditorium was transformed into a spatial and audiovisual simulation of a train in motion. The evident influence of Eisenstein's cinematic approach to audiovisual effects enhanced the aesthetic, as well as the political canvas of the play, producing an obscure sensation of ‘traveling’ amongst the audience. This displacing feeling shaped the interactive narrative of the play, as the spectators, who were set to face the aisle and therefore each other as well, had the feeling that they were in the interior of the train traveling with the performers (Leiter, 1991).

Although its reception was also enthusiastic, *The Travellers* signaled the end of Theatre Workshop as an on-the-road ensemble. Littlewood's efforts to stabilise the financial situation of the touring group, forced her, as well as the rest of the members, to relocate permanently in an East London venue called *Theatre Royal*.⁹ Ewan MacColl, a founding member of Theatre Workshop, opposed to that move, ‘as he feared a London setting and reliance on critical acclaim would undermine the ideological basis of the company's work’ (Holdsworth, 2006: 22). His

⁹ Also widely known as Stratford East.

resignation from the group was inevitable. Littlewood's ambivalent, but emotionally powerful view on his departure, is described in her autobiography:

‘One day, Ewan MacColl, James H. Miller, Jimmie, call him what you will, prime mover, inspiration, Daddy o’ t, walked out, quit, buggered off – and, not to put too fine a point on it, resigned’ (Littlewood, 2003 [1994]: 434).

Despite her disappointment, Littlewood was willing to form a genuine repertory company, and thus encountered the Stratford East residency as a distinctive opportunity. After all, the city of London provided a stimulating urban context in which Theatre Workshop could function as a long-standing ensemble. The company's work in Theatre Royal gradually became more systematic and organised. The status of Theatre Workshop was radically climbing levels, especially after the group's participation at the Paris International Theatre Festival in May 1955, and the extremely enthusiastic feedback they received from French critics, for the presentation of the plays *Volpone* and the Elizabethan *Arden of Faversham*. The Paris success and the subsequent productions of the 1955-56 seasons began to grow the company's reputation within the British Theatre establishment.

One of the most interesting performances that Littlewood directed during this period was *A Taste of Honey* (1958), a play written by Shelagh Delaney. Littlewood employed a serio-comic approach to Delaney's challenging text in order to describe extravagant themes of everyday life. Complex human relationships and homosexuality were the basic subjects addressed in *A Taste of Honey*, through which Littlewood satirised the ways that society produces marginalisation and sustains its contradictions. The play portrayed and reflected upon ‘inordinate’ characters of everyday life and discussed their alleged ‘queerness’ in a critical, as well as entertaining manner. The emotional density of the performance was combined with a cabaret-style jazz trio, sudden questions and frequent comments to the audience. It was a Brechtian theatrical event, mostly based on an anti-illusionist and intimate way of engaging with the spectators. As Arthur K. Oberg notes in his 1966 review of the performance, ‘[t]here are not only the direct addresses to the audience in Joan Littlewood's fashion, but also the use of the extended tale or the dirty joke (‘Did I ever tell you about the ...’), and the detached and beyond-character remark’ (Oberg, 1966: 162). At the same time, rather than investing on

pessimism and despair, the sensation that the performance conveyed was both affirmative and radical. Delaney's text was written in this direction and Littlewood wanted to emphasise and enrich this positive narrative in the performance. Delaney notes:

‘no one in my play despairs. Like the majority of people they take in their stride whatever happens to them and remain cheerful [...] I see the theatre as a place where you should go not only to be entertained but where the audience has contact with *real* people, people who are *alive*’ (as cited in Speakman, 1989: v; original emphasis).

The radical quality of the play was not only manifested in its political commentary, but also in Littlewood's achievement to present marginalised characters in a non-stereotypical way. Indeed, the play was largely a critique of typified representations of minorities and repressed communities. This approach is well depicted by the novelist and journalist Colin Macinnes in *Encounter* (1959):

‘[...] the first English play I've seen in which a coloured man, and a queer boy, are presented as natural characters, factually without a nudge or shudder. It is also the first play I can remember about working-class people that entirely escapes being a ‘working-class play’: no patronage, no dogma, just the thing as it is, taken straight’ (as cited in Speakman, 1989: vi).

Thus, it was this challenge to dogmatic representation, this ‘escape’ from a patronising depiction of different identities, that gave a unique political disposition to the staging of *A Taste of Honey*. The level of agency that the play introduced to real characters (whose life stories were typically hidden from the public eye), along with the interactive sensation of the performance, were a radical breakthrough for the British theatre of the late 1950s. As Oberg notes,

‘[a]lthough *A Taste of Honey* is never prescriptively social or political in the way that other Joan Littlewood presentations were, the text and the kind of production it received earmark *A Taste of Honey* for importance in the history of the revival of the grass-roots, popular play’ (Oberg, 1966: 160).

At the same time, even though Littlewood used Brechtian anti-illusionist techniques to raise the critical perception of the audience in a tangible way, the absence of props from the performance was considered as a theatrical attempt to

address a transcendental idea of life. For example, in 1962, John Russell Taylor pointed out that, '[A Taste of Honey] was in Joan Littlewood's characteristic manner, a sort of magnified realism in which everything is lifelike but somehow larger than life' (Taylor, 1962: 132).

While the staging of Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* was an illustration of Littlewood's relation to the *Berliner Ensemble*,¹⁰ the subsequent production of Brendan Behan's *The Hostage* (1958-59) demonstrated Littlewood's capacity to go beyond Brecht's theatrical 'severity' by transforming the play into an improvisational burlesque. The narrative, as well as the conceptual structure of *The Hostage* was actually created during the rehearsals, since Behan's failure to submit the script on time urged Littlewood to begin working on a coarse draft. The end result had hardly any similarities with the original dramatic text. However, Behan's admiration of Littlewood's theatrical philosophy provided Theatre Workshop with confidence to experiment, and placed emphasis on the mode of presentation, rather than the illustration of the story's morale. Behan was in agreement with Littlewood that music hall¹¹ style could politically entertain working-class audiences.

The subject matter of *The Hostage* is indeed very political. It follows the story of a young British soldier's kidnapping by the IRA (he was kept as a hostage in order to pressure for the release of an IRA prisoner who was facing execution). The plot of the play focuses on the discussions about Irish nationalism and British colonialism that emerged in the place where the soldier was kept. To consider the political questions around the relationship between Britain and Ireland was very important during the late 1950s, as the conflict in Northern Ireland was brewing. In a sense, *The Hostage* was a dialogue between Irish and British theatre and politics.

Littlewood directed the play according to a mixture of certain techniques of *commedia dell'arte* and music hall spontaneity. The performance transformed the text's sociopolitical 'message' into a wide discussion with the audience, especially since the play had been converted into a celebratory and impromptu

¹⁰ Famous German Theatre Company, established by Bertolt Brecht and his wife Helen Weigel in East Berlin in 1949.

¹¹ Similar to the American vaudeville, music hall refers to a particular form of musical theatre usually composed by agitational songs and serio-comic elements.

happening-like event. Furthermore, the diffused serio-comic element of the staging came together with 'living newspaper' techniques, producing a multi-temporal and multidimensional experience. What was eventually considered as the triumph of the play was its 'unexpectedness', which resulted in the emergence of an intimate relation between the performers and the audience. Direct address to the spectators, particularly the latecomers and the early-leavers, was once more the tool of engagement that Theatre Workshop employed. Howard Goorney, who worked with Littlewood from 1937 to 1960, refers to the staging of *The Hostage* pointing out that,

'we allowed for improvisation in the actual performance, particularly in relation to the audience: interruptions were never ignored, we dealt with what was given to us. If someone walked out, we turned it to our advantage, and late-comers were treated roughly' (Goorney, 1966: 103).

In the meantime, Littlewood's residency at the Theatre Royal had begun to be surrounded by growing concerns and tension. The pressure that Littlewood experienced in attempting to achieve the simultaneous satisfaction of actors, audience and critics made her devise some revisionist (and more conventional) performances that could be transferred to the commercial context of the West End. Situated in the middle of this intensity, which was further manifested by the Lord Chamberlain's strict censorship, Theatre Workshop persisted on promoting popular theatre inventiveness, through maintaining its radical iconoclastic approach. Littlewood's insistence on experimenting through improvisation and especially the latter's placement as a fundamental component of both the rehearsals and the performances, was often criticised by censors who encountered the 'unexpected' elements of the plays as threatening initiatives. Moreover, financial matters kept raising the urgency of the situation since the Arts Council was refusing to support such avant-garde versions of the classical works, in favour of the dissemination of 'high' culture (Holdsworth, 2006). The mistrustful atmosphere of the Cold War had had significant influence to the function of the British state, and constituted one of the principal alibis for such a restrictive attitude towards theatrical experimentation and grassroots activities. Several writers' frustration about Littlewood's deconstructive effects on their scripts, as well as the critical reaction to the West End staging of Goldman's *They Might Be*

Giants constituted the occasions for Littlewood's two-year resignation from Theatre Workshop in 1961. However, the most important reasons that urged her to that decision remained her powerlessness to attract a permanent working-class audience, and the tight conditions of a play's rehearsal and staging.

IV. The Fun Palace: an 'incomplete' project

The beginning of the end of Theatre Workshop (which practically occurred in 1975) was partly a consequence of the transitional character of the early and mid 1960s, and came in parallel to significant changes in the political terrain of the Western world. In the beginning of the 1960s there emerged a shift in the ways in which politics and critique were conceptualised and expressed. 'Youth culture' became popular in conjunction with the blossoming of pop and rock music (The Beatles, Bob Dylan etc.) and, subsequently, 'style – to some extent at least – became generational rather than class-based' (Leach, 2006: 199). Ironically, while the 1960s was a decade of radicalisation and subversion within political discourses, and despite the fact that arts were becoming more and more connected to the political sphere¹², Littlewood could not 'follow' these developments – at least, not in the same way as before. Theatre Workshop's sociopolitical and aesthetic relevance to the times was widely questioned (even by Littlewood), and while the establishment of the Royal Shakespeare Company (1960) and National Theatre (1963) in some way 'legitimised' and gave a renewed status to the theatre as an art form, it also marginalised the dynamics and potentials of avant-garde collectives. Besides, Littlewood was disappointed with the ways in which theatrical productions were taking place in London, especially due to the increased pressure created by the West End domination over independent theatrical initiatives. The tight conditions of a play's rehearsal process and staging, as well as the advancing marketisation of the theatre industry made Littlewood skeptical towards theatre itself. In a 1961 article, published in *The Times*, she stated that, 'when you have to live by exporting bowdlerized versions of your shows as light entertainments for sophisticated West End audiences you're through' (Littlewood, 1961: 5).

¹² As Leach observes, '[d]uring the 1960s a number of matters that had been of particular concern to Theatre Workshop were legislated on, including in 1965 the abolition of the death penalty and in 1968 the abolition of the Lord Chamberlain's power to censor stage plays' (Leach, 2006: 200).

Thus, being semi-detached from directorial activity and while dedicating significant time to travelling and working for diverse artistic projects – such as the attempt to create a film based on Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (1959), in Nigeria – Littlewood entered into a self-reflexive period during which she was able to look at her past experiences with the ensembles in retrospect, while getting synchronised to the ongoing social and political discourses. The need for the democratisation of the arts together with the growing demand for a more egalitarian educational system were for Littlewood two of the most important sociocultural questions of the 1960s in England. In a critical tone, she notes that,

‘[n]ineteenth century society worked on the principle of ‘higher education’ for a minority, and that education was designed merely to perpetuate the status quo; museums and art centres were built ‘to form and promote a taste for the beautiful ... [and to] humanise, educate and refine a practical and laborious people’. These concepts have not changed and our society is perpetuating obsolete forms in which human energy can no longer be contained. The most important aspects of human development are still ignored by town planners and the problem of alleviating human misery, despair and apathy is so acute that every skilled teacher, cybernetician and artist must be recruited for the war on dullness’.¹³

Littlewood's social concern was shifted toward criticising the ongoing stratification of the English educational and artistic sectors. At the same time, she approached the role of the ‘people’ (either the students, spectators, users or the workers) as fundamental in their substantial emancipation from the social implications of these hierarchies. Her visualisation of a genuine cultural democracy demanded a more actual participation and involvement of the ‘people’ in the production of culture, as well as in the distribution of knowledge, than what Theatre Workshop had suggested in the past.

Thus, as a result of this reflective period and while still in Nigeria, Littlewood began shaping some of her thoughts about the creation of an artistic multi-space – a ‘Fun Palace’ (as she termed it) that would somehow ‘embody’ and invite productive responses to the social problems of English society. Although the

¹³ Littlewood, Joan, notes, 1964. Littlewood does not identify the source of her citation; (as cited in Mathews, 2007: 69).

project never actually materialised – because of lack of potential funding – the resonance of its concept proved to be extremely influential to many artists, architects and directors, and highlighted the question of interactivity within art and education settings. Architecturally conceived as a multimedia fun park by Littlewood’s collaborator Cedric Price (an innovative English architect), the Fun Palace was meant to attract the widest possible public, by offering artistic experiences, interactive educational exchanges and, most of all, fun to its users. Cedric Price, who was at that time teaching at the AA and at the Council of Industrial Design, was equally motivated by this idea. He notes that,

‘[w]e are apathetic people, if we do not now attempt to make a new art of living, instead of escaping from living into rather dreary art. As a temporary measure the proposal has been put forward that every town should have a space at its disposal where the latest discoveries of engineering and science can provide an environment for pleasure and discovery, a place to look at the stars, to eat, stroll, meet and play’.¹⁴

Indeed, the concept of the Fun Palace required the deployment of technologically up-to-date mediums (and thus an extensive knowledge of cybernetics) that would be used as interfaces for the animation of community-based activity and interactive learning processes.

Although coming from different backgrounds, Littlewood and Price shared a similar desire to go beyond ordinary practices of artistic and cultural engagement, breaking with the dogmatic barriers that modernist England had imposed to the ways in which art and education was disseminated. While Littlewood was looking for a way to attract and engage with working-class people by destabilising the political ‘evangelism’ inherent within agit-prop theatre and performance, Price wanted to re-conceive the potentialities of a ‘building’s worth not in terms of its durability or the quality of its construction material, but in terms of its use and social value’ (Holdsworth, 2006: 35).

At the same time, both Littlewood and Price wanted to address and provide responses to the ongoing debate around the question of *leisure* in England. By critiquing the rather patronising manner in which critics and politicians had

¹⁴ Price, Cedric, “Pensées” (1963); (as cited in Mathews, 2007: 66).

approached the problem of leisure time (which was expected to increase during the 1960s) and its usefulness – i.e. the indirect channelling of free time towards liberal and consumer-based behaviours as a means to stay away from crime and dissident conduct – Littlewood and Price argued for a less demarcated relation between work and leisure, suggesting a new conception of the ‘social’ and the ‘political’. Price notes that, ‘[t]he division between work and leisure has never been more than a convenient generalisation used in summarising conscious human activity – voluntary and imposed’ (Mathews, 2007: 70). In a more polemical tone, Littlewood writes:

‘So, how are we to use our freedom from unnecessary labour? We shall be caught short again, as we were after the invention of the steam engine, if we don’t look out [...] ‘work’ and ‘leisure’ overlap and merge: life becomes a whole’.¹⁵

Thus, this ambitious project was ultimately an attempt to unify the notions of work and free time, by providing its users with educational and artistic platforms on which they could become the *agents* of their own social reality; the authors of their own sociocultural exchanges. As Mathews states, ‘the Fun Palace was intended explicitly as a response to the social and economic crises that plagued post-war England, and especially to the way in which technology promised to erase the distinctions between work, education, and leisure’ (ibid: 69).

In terms of its functionality, the Fun Palace was conceived as a complex space in which spontaneous way-finding and flexibility would invite the users’ participation. Cedric’s final plans illustrated spatial representations within the topographical plan intended to function as interactive playrooms. For instance, there would be a ‘science playground’, suitable for exploration and learning, alongside an interactive ‘fun arcade’ where the users were invited to participate in a playroom of educational and artistic experiences drawn from current social contexts (Littlewood & Price, 1968: 130). Moreover, a space dedicated to the development of craft skills, and an additional one that would facilitate musical learning, would constitute a ‘plastic’ and a ‘music area’ respectively. As expected, Littlewood was more actively involved in the making of the ‘acting area’ of the

¹⁵ Price, Cedric, notes on Fun Palace, 19 February 1964, Cedric Price Archives; (as cited in Mathews, 2007: 70).

Fun Palace. Although the authorship of a huge part of the project belonged to her, Littlewood's familiarity with such a space was explicitly present. She envisaged the specific section of the space as a type of an open space, where individuals could theatrically enact instances of their lives and take advantage of theatre's capacity to enable critical thinking and empowerment. As Holdsworth observes, 'rather than performing to an audience, she proposed a theatre of everyday life in which people would use theatre to explore ideas, events and dilemmas that directly affected them' (Holdsworth, 2006: 34). For the implementation of this part of the Fun Palace, Littlewood was inspired by the techniques of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, and more particularly from Forum Theatre.¹⁶ Littlewood wanted to make use of Boal's notion of 'spect-actor' as she believed that this was a truly revolutionary way to introduce political agency to her audiences. In other words, she was interested in enabling the users of the Fun Palace to *position themselves politically* within the space, by inviting them to participate in the space's functionality.

Now, I argue that it is important to observe an interesting turn in the way that Littlewood understood the staging of sociopolitical critique in her post-Theatre Workshop period. Not only did she change her line of thinking – from agit-prop art and didactic ways of performing to a more engaging form of theatre – but also, she became interested in decomposing the teleology and the implied grand narratives of political theatre of the past. In effect, in conceiving the Fun Palace idea, Littlewood and Price suggested non-permanent, mobile and open-ended ways to engage with people. In a sense, they suggested and advocated the creation of an 'incomplete' space in which individuals would be able to experience a multiplicity of activities by having the opportunity to shape them collectively either in advance or in the course of this experiencing. In framing the project's aims and objectives, Littlewood and Price note:

'By careful planning we could have an environment in which the human mind and spirit may either relax or find the stimulus and delight which leads to creative activity [...] This series of forms, these ideas, shall not be sealed or enclosed by some limiting scheme or statistical or sociological theories regarding the activity of the people, but in their incompleteness the place will

¹⁶ I offer a brief discussion of Boal's theatre in the introduction of the thesis.

leave to people themselves the possibility of developing new experiences for themselves'.¹⁷

Thus, they visualised a space that would not impose any specific process (artistic or educational); a space that would not assume any definite theoretical or political agenda, but would rather 'invite' its users to generate the activities they want to do while discussing the political resonances of these activities. In fact, Price went even further to suggest that since the function of the Fun Palace would not be fixed, and given that the entire structure would be based on variability, then the building itself should be left open to changes and interventions by the users. As Mathews notes:

'It would not be truly 'complete' or even a 'building' in any conventional sense of the word. Was it possible that the users could 'design' it as they used it?' (Mathews, 2007: 72).

Therefore, the users of the Fun Palace would not only be able to determine the content of their experiences, but they would also obtain the capacity to create, and subsequently modify, the conditions of their own *presence* within the space. For Price, this would be the quality of an 'anti-building', as he termed it:

'The varied and ever-changing activities will determine the form of the site. To enclose these activities the anti-building must have equal flexibility. Thus the prime motivation of the area is caused by the people and their activities and the resultant form is continually dependent on them'.¹⁸

Undoubtedly, it is not easy to think of the Fun Palace idea as a physically possible one – especially during the 1960s. Perhaps, the whole project could be accused for vagueness or even utopianism. However, I suggest that it is crucial to understand the conception of the Fun Palace as an important attempt to challenge the established meeting points of politics and theatre, by proposing a revolutionary way in which people would engage with sociopolitical reality and enhance their critical perception. I argue that all these ambitiously 'imprecise' ideas of Littlewood and Price (the mobile space, the 'anti-building', the more or less 'rhizomatic' structure of the Fun Palace) should be acknowledged and appreciated

¹⁷ Price, Cedric, "Objectives: Glengall Wharf, Isle of Dogs" (1963); (as cited in Mathews, 2007: 68).

¹⁸ Price Cedric, (1963), Cedric Price Archives; (as cited in Mathews, 2007:73).

as vital parts of a transitional period in British theatre; a period during which theatre performances began to be intentionally less prescriptive, less subjective and less didactic. It was this period when the grand narratives of performing critique began to fade more visibly than ever before; allowing space for more micropolitical and non-representational approaches to political theatre.

V. Critical reflections: (Post)-Brecht, popular theatre and ‘the people’

The reverberation of Littlewood’s project in the way that British theatre understood the question of critique in performance is substantial and important. In particular, the collaborative theatrical processes, as well as the revolutionary approaches to live performance that Theatre Workshop suggested and endorsed, produced renewed possibilities for staging critical practice. In Robert Leach’s words,

‘Theatre Workshop changed – and failed to change – British theatre in extraordinary ways. It may be that without Theatre Workshop, the theatre in Britain would still be languishing in the drawing-room representationalism and the decorative plangency of escapist Shakespeare that was the norm before Theatre Workshop appeared. Theatre Workshop’s modernism was often rejected, but by the 1960s its influence was pervasive’ (Leach, 2006: 203).

For Leach, the primary contribution of Theatre Workshop lies in its capacity to somehow ‘impose’ a modernist radicalisation of theatre, especially in relation to its politics of representation. Indeed, Littlewood was instrumental in destabilising the bourgeois mode of representation that the reiteration of classic dramatic texts was maintaining. She modernised British theatre to the extent that her productions confronted a long-established ideological and textual *mimeticism* that was inherent in traditional theatre. From this perspective, I would argue that Littlewood was also one of the harbingers of postmodern theatre, since her performances (especially with the Theatre Workshop) were, directly or not, informed by the need to challenge the ideological, political and cultural implications of grand dramatic narratives and predetermined political outcomes. This became obvious

in Littlewood's late projects, and especially in her conception and framing of the Fun Palace, but also in her continuous attempts to creatively 'de-specify' the process of communicating with audiences as a means to introduce substantial agency to working-class people. In other words, I suggest that by transforming the mode of engaging with audiences into an 'inexact' (that is, a less predetermined), yet polemical interplay, Littlewood managed to challenge, and frequently subvert, the stratification in the power relations of her theatre.

In what follows I want to briefly reflect on three critical points in relation to Littlewood's teatrology, in an attempt to conclude this chapter by focusing on the importance of her role in British political theatre. Firstly, I want to argue that the mode of critique in Littlewood's theatre was situated in the interval between a Brechtian and a post-Brechtian approach; secondly, I want to examine Littlewood's experimentation with a polemical conception of 'popularity' in theatrical settings – especially in relation to the way in which she addressed 'the people' as constituting the working-class subject; and thirdly, I want to close the chapter with a brief remark on Littlewood's contribution to the emancipation of theatrical expression (and its reception) from teleological outcomes.

Littlewood's theatre drew extensively from Brecht. In particular, the *Berliner Ensemble* had a direct influence in the way in which Theatre Workshop managed to discuss the sociohistorical context of the performances, while providing a critical commentary on crucial political discourses. At the same time, Littlewood's theatre was essentially a post-Brechtian one. On one level, this became possible due to the wide misconception of Brechtian theatre in England during the 1950s. I argue that, paradoxically, Littlewood was post-Brechtian to the extent that in her performances she used genuine interpretations of Brecht's ideas. To illustrate this point, during the 1950s Brechtian theatre in England was not *really* Brechtian. It was rather a theatrical amalgam based on several misrepresentations of the Berliner Ensemble's way of working with actors and of presenting plays. In his 1966 essay, *Brecht and the English Theatre*, Martin Esslin captures this problem. He points out that,

'[the] Brechtian era had a great deal of talk and discussion *about* Brecht and what he was *thought* to stand for, but few valid productions of Brecht, little genuine knowledge about Brecht, and hence little evidence of any influence of

Brecht's actual work and thought. The 'Brechtian' era in England stood under the aegis not of Brecht himself but of various second-hand ideas and concepts *about* Brecht, an image of Brecht created from misunderstandings and misconceptions' (Esslin, 1966: 63; original emphasis).

Thus, from this perspective it makes sense to think of Littlewood's theatre as a post-Brechtian one, since she was amongst these directors whose practice was *genuinely* informed by Brecht's epic theatre. In other words, I suggest that in this case the prefix 'post' signifies Littlewood's move beyond the misrepresentation of Brecht in English theatre towards a theatrical project that did not imitate Brecht, but one that certainly did not misconceive him. According to Esslin, 'Joan Littlewood's and Peter Brook's work on plays by other authors, must, on the whole, be regarded as the most positive result of Brechtian influence on the art of stage directing in England' (ibid: 66). While commenting on Brechtian theatre in an interview with Janelle G. Reinelt, John McGrath makes a similar claim stating that, '[t]his was a very big, very major theatrical creation, of which the imitations were travesties, and it was only Joan who got through to some of what Brecht was about'.¹⁹

On a second level, Littlewood's theatre was *indeed* post-Brechtian. Although Littlewood employed the anti-illusionist techniques that Brecht used, in order to maintain rotation around the sociopolitical context of the plays, she also experimented with the development of an emotionally intense dialogue between the actors and the audience, as a means to expand the narrative of the performances towards ephemeral and unexpected directions. In his 1969 essay, *Brecht's Baby, A Misconception about Joan Littlewood*, John Harrop points out that,

'[i]n Littlewood's theatre there is an emphatic and sensual cooperation between the actor and the audience which Brecht avoided. For her the actors, while playing their parts, are still people who are talking to other people; therefore an actor can ad-lib on stage, or can talk directly to the audience without any conspicuous purpose of breaking the audience's illusion – the truth of the theatre includes the spectator's emotional agreement to participate in the sensual and intellectual experience' (Harrop, 1969: 78).

¹⁹ Interview with John McGrath, October 15, 1985; (as cited in Reinelt, 1994: 179).

From this perspective, Littlewood's theatre raised questions that were directly informed by Brecht's problematisations, but she also pushed the form of epic theatre towards a more *affective* level in terms of the relation between performers and audience. Unlike Brecht, Littlewood believed that the 'alienation effect' – achieved by making the artifices visible as a means to break any illusionary emotions that the spectators may have – could be *shared with the audience*, rather than being imposed by the performance. Whereas Brecht wanted to be in total control of a theatrical event, Littlewood wanted to be surprised by the 'becoming' of the event by inviting the audience to intervene and alter its progress. In this sense, I argue that her difference with Brecht's theatre should be thought not only on a formalist basis, as both McGrath and Reinelt seem to suggest: McGrath argues that Littlewood differentiated her theatrical project from Brecht in so far as she was working with a purely 'British popular theatre tradition',²⁰ and Reinelt goes on to add that, '[w]hile Brecht used the cabaret, or café, culture of Germany combined with some regional folk traditions from Bavaria, or source material taken from oral as well as written traditions, Littlewood used music hall and variety show forms, British seaside entertainment, and panto' (Reinelt, 1994: 179). What I argue does not essentially stand in contrast to these accounts, since popularising the form and the style of the performances was in effect a move towards a more engaging mode of theatre; however, I suggest that in contrast to Brecht's assumption that the staging of critique should be presented to disillusioned spectators, it is crucial to consider Littlewood's theatre as one that created the conditions for critique's becoming as a shared process within the event. Thus, it makes sense to argue that, in a way, Littlewood redefined Brechtian theatre by investing in the revolutionary aspect of *emotions* and *empathy*, in as much as these qualities become shared experiences that produce critical engagement with a performance. While Brecht argued that, '[f]eelings are private and limited', Littlewood introduced the critical value of emotional 'vibrations' within the context of epic theatre (Brecht, 1964: 15). Considered as such, I suggest that Littlewood's theatre belongs to an 'interval' between a Brechtian and post-Brechtian approach. Implicit in this belonging, is the need for transforming the 'theatre of the people' into a theatre of *presence*. In other words, despite the fact

²⁰ Interview with John McGrath, October 15, 1985; (as cited in Reinelt, 1994: 179).

that Littlewood is known as the director of a ‘theatre of the people’, I argue that one of her most unique contributions to political theatre is the attempt to create (and also theorise) a ‘theatre of the event’: namely, a theatre of the ‘here and now’. As Leach notes,

‘[Littlewood’s] actors [...] were expected to act ‘in the present’, to listen to their partners on the stage and to react honestly to what those partners said or did. Never was a Theatre Workshop actor to serve up memories of rehearsals’ (Leach, 2006: 209).

Now, in keeping with this argument, I suggest that it is important to understand Littlewood’s theatrical method as a revolutionary approach to *popular theatre*. After all, Littlewood is amongst these directors that attempted to emancipate the term ‘popular theatre’ from its apolitical and ‘soft entertaining’ representations in bourgeois and middle-class contexts. According to Prentki and Selman, ‘[p]opular theatre is the practice of theatre as an expression of specific communities’ stories, issues, knowledge and needs’ (Prentki & Selman, 2000: 8). This sort of definition is clear and comprehensive in outlining the basic need that makes popular theatre possible; but, at the same time, I argue that it does not answer the question: Is popular theatre political? Prentki and Selman clarify that, ‘[p]opular theatre is a *process* of theatre which deeply involves specific communities in identifying issues of concern, analysing current conditions and causes of a situation, identifying points of change, and analysing how change could happen and/or contributing to the actions implied’ (ibid; original emphasis). In this second description of popular theatre, one can make the connections between the ‘popular’ and the ‘political’ in a much more justifiable manner. As Joel Schechter points out, ‘the term ‘popular theatre’ is still associated with democratic, proletarian, and politically progressive theatre’ (Schechter, 2003: 3).

For Littlewood, a true popular theatre is fundamentally a political theatre; seen both as practice and as a process that contributes to social change through its engagement with working-class people. In this sense, Littlewood drew a sharp dividing line between a popular and a *populist* theatre. She openly opposed any comparisons to be made between West End productions, ‘escapist’ plays of no relevance to the working-class communities and the popular ‘theatre of the people’ that she, Ewan MacColl, John McGrath and other similar directors had practiced.

In fact, Littlewood's conception of the 'popular' can be considered as very similar to Brecht's description of *Volkstümlich* (which in German means something between popular and traditional), as a 'becoming' condition, rather than as a 'static one, without background or development' (Brecht, 1964: 108). Brecht offered one of the most revolutionary descriptions of popular theatre – one that Littlewood wholeheartedly embraced:

'Our conception of 'popular' refers to the people who are not only fully involved in the process of development but are actually taking it over, forcing it, deciding it. We have in mind a people that is making history and altering the world and itself. We have in mind a fighting people and also a fighting conception of 'popularity'' (ibid).

Thus, Littlewood and Brecht shared a parallel perspective about the radical potential of popular theatre. They both believed in the possibility of modern theatre to become more popular, more familiar, and therefore more effective, to the working class audiences than the conventional realist theatre of the past.

Now, amongst these theorists that have criticised the function of popular theatre and its political role, Gilles Deleuze is one that challenges its form, content and social implications in the most unconditional way. In *One less Manifesto* (1979), an essay in which he discusses the theatre of Carmelo Bene,²¹ Deleuze counters the practice of popular theatre focusing on the latter's incapacity to challenge the normalisation of sociopolitical reality and its representation on stage. He argues that, 'when one speaks of a popular theatre, one always privileges a certain *representation of conflicts*, conflicts of the individual and society, of life and history, contradictions and oppositions of all kinds that cut across a society as well as its individuals' (Deleuze, 1997 [1979]: 252; original emphasis). Deleuze criticises the attempts to create a 'theatre for all', as he believes that, no matter how political or avant-garde they can be, they all fail to challenge and subvert the hierarchically structured power relations that emerge from representing society in a 'major' manner, i.e. in a generalising and territorial way. He writes:

'But why do conflicts generally depend on representation? Why does theatre remain representative each time it focuses on conflicts, contradictions, and

²¹ A more detailed discussion of this particular essay is offered in chapter 2.

oppositions? It is because conflicts are already normalised, codified and institutionalised. They are ‘products’. They are already a representation that can be represented so much the better on stage’ (ibid).

Thus, Deleuze argues that popular theatre lacks any radical potential, in so far as it continues to become possible through abstract significations that function as normative enactments of social life.

Although Deleuze’s position is inspiring and justifiable, I argue that it does not make a distinction between a ‘static’ and a ‘becoming’ notion of popular theatre. Deleuze denounces popular theatre on the basis of its capacity to address a mass public through representing a codified mixture of ideologies and/or social situations; but, at the same time, he overlooks specific instances of popular theatrical practice which not only challenge normative representations of society, but also operate through theatrical variations, creative unexpectedness and ‘minor’ approaches to political critique. I suggest that Littlewood’s project belongs to this kind of theatrical practice by means of her attempt to create the conditions for a more actual process of critique, rather than a representational one. The practice of Theatre Workshop profoundly rejected the institutionalisation of critical processes and their representation either as ideological doctrines or self-identical truths (or in Deleuze’s words as ‘products’). The way in which Littlewood directed her performances was (especially with the Theatre Workshop) based on de-stratifying the power relations that emerge during a theatrical play, through the de-objectification of the audience. From this perspective, Littlewood’s theatre was not a static expression of popular theatre (that is, a normalised practice of representing abstract political ideas and concepts). Rather, it was a ‘becoming’ political theatre that employed popular forms not as a means to please and preserve a working-class audience, but as a means to enrich the political potentiality of a ‘becoming theatre of the people’.

At the same time however, Deleuze makes a fair point:

‘Everyone appeals to the people in the name of the majority language. But where are the people? ‘The people are missing’’ (ibid: 254).

Although Littlewood did not use a ‘majority language’ in the performances, that is a language that would convey institutionalised representations of predetermined

meanings, she surely sought for a ‘major’ audience; not in the sense of the identity (individual or collective) of the people that composed her audiences, but in the way that she was addressing them as a *unified subject* that was abstractly (and debatably) constituted. In other words, even though Littlewood did not ‘speak’ the codified language of an established leftist rhetoric, she nevertheless approached her audiences as a codified representation of the working-class condition, of its conflicts and, by extension, of its revolutionary possibilities. As Leiter notes, ‘Littlewood’s career reveals her consuming passion for a relevant theatre that would appeal to the average man’ (Leiter, 1991:203). Thus, in this sense, Littlewood attempted to de-objectify and introduce political agency to a ‘body’ of working people by assuming both its political consistency and its cultural homogeneity. They were ‘the people’, that is Littlewood’s desired addressees whom she considered as a homogeneous whole: the working-class subject. It is at this point, I argue, that Littlewood’s theatrical project is at odds with her anti-normative political aspirations. Because, in so far as Littlewood ‘theorised’ her spectators as ‘the people’ and framed them under a specific political discourse, she simultaneously gave way to their standardisation as potential ‘seeds’ of sociopolitical change, as well as to their normalisation within a representation of the working-class condition. While commenting on the constitution of ‘the people’ as a unified working-class subject, Deleuze describes this process as an important territorial operation:

‘But we have subjected them to a strange graft, to a strange operation: we have mapped, represented, normalised, historicised them, integrated them into majority rule. And there, indeed, we have made them poor. We have made them slaves. We have turned them into the people. We have rendered them major in History’ (ibid: 254-5).

Viewed as such, Littlewood’s endeavour to constantly push for the composition of a homogeneous and consistent audience was problematic to the extent that it compressed the politically subversive potentials of *difference* amongst and within this audience. At the same time, I argue that this cannot be generalised as a structural problem of popular theatre: seeking for a wide resonance, for a large popular audience, does not essentially imply the latter’s representation as a homogeneous entity that thinks, feels, understands, experiences and acts identically.

Furthermore, identifying the same contradictions within the sociopolitical and economic system of a society does not imply the formation of a counter-body of action that, in one way or another, *signifies* subversion in a macro-political level and should behave as a unified organism.

This is not to suggest that Littlewood's theatre was politically unproductive or ideologically institutionalised. After all, Littlewood was the first one to quit when institutionalisation became a serious threat to the practice of Theatre Workshop. Although Littlewood's way of attracting and 'labelling' her spectators was perhaps problematic (most probably because of her polemical attitude and her motivation to respond to ongoing sociopolitical problems), that was not the case with her way to critically engage with them. I suggest that Littlewood managed to create the conditions of possibility for critique to be thought, performed and actualised in a micropolitical manner – beyond its representation as a normalised discourse. Her 'immaturity' as a political commentator or an academic critic, in a way, gave her this capacity in so far as it functioned as a creative asset within her theatre. In a sense, Littlewood's theatre could never be institutionalised, and therefore hierarchically structured, because it was practiced in unexpected, incomplete and politically 'immature' ways. It is not by chance that the most common objects of censorship to Littlewood's theatre were the free improvisation of classical texts and the unexpected happenings that were taking place in the theatrical events of Theatre Workshop. The fact that the establishment considered these qualities as potentially 'dangerous' is a verification of their radical possibilities, as well as of their political relevance. Littlewood was a problem for Lord Chamberlain because: firstly, she transformed the traditional mode of engaging with audiences, instilling unexpected (even to the performers) ways of coming into contact with the spectators – and, as a result, she introduced more politically forceful agential possibilities to them; secondly, Littlewood's continuous experimentation and improvisation of classical plays was an important threat to the conformist representations of directors such as Shakespeare, Moliere and Heywood – representations through which bourgeois values were sustained and endorsed; and thirdly, as a result of the unexpected ways in which Littlewood's theatrical events were performed, Littlewood managed to emancipate political theatre from a notion of teleology, both in terms of political but also of artistic outcomes. The

‘incompleteness’ of Theatre Workshop’s theatre was used by Littlewood as a productive and critical possibility that could destabilise teleology and normativity in the way of perceiving and experiencing political theatre. I argue that this sense of the ‘unfinished experience’ – that was so frequent in Theatre Workshop’s plays – played a crucial role in the decomposition of normative representation of sociopolitical conflicts and also created the conditions for an always becoming-critique that was, in part, produced within the event.

Chapter 4

Peter Brook: the challenge of pre-cultural theatre

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Introduction

This chapter examines the way in which the British director Peter Brook attempted to conceptualise and put into practice a so-called 'pre-cultural' theatre; that is, a potential of performance to have an affective and pre-cognitive relation to the audience. Brook took up this challenge particularly during his work with the *Theatre of Cruelty Workshop* in the mid-1960s, as well as with the *International Centre for Theatre Research* in the 1970s. I suggest that it is during this particular period that Brook made a significant contribution to political theatre, since his work

challenged the function of representation and radicalised metaphysics in performance. Through examining Brook's theatre project, and therefore capturing a sense of the transitional 1960s-1970s period, we can address the question of a non-representational approach to theatre in a way that still echoes in contemporary performance practices.

Peter Brook has been a researcher of the possibilities that emerge from exploring the 'primal' aspect of performance. Describing this 'area of research' as a common ground of many theatrical initiatives of the 1960s, Innes notes that,

'[i]n theatrical terms this is reflected by a reversion to 'original' forms: the Dionysian rituals of Ancient Greece, shamanistic performances, the Balinese dance-drama' (ibid: 3).

Belonging to the 1960s avant-garde, Brook's theatrical project can be thought as an important part of what Innes calls 'primitivist theatre'. He writes:

'Perhaps paradoxically, what defines this avant garde movement is not overtly modern qualities [...] but primitivism. This has two complementary facets: the exploration of dream states or the instinctive and subconscious levels of the psyche; and the quasi-religious focus on myth and magic, which in the theatre leads to experiments with ritual and ritualistic patterning of performance' (Innes, 1993: 2-3).

In this chapter, I will argue that Brook's theatre can be thought of as a radicalisation of this primitivist shift that Innes observes. I will suggest that while experimenting with metaphysics in theatre, Brook challenged the transcendental function of representation and proposed a theatre that breaks with the *imitation* of rituals or myths.

From his first directorial attempt with *Dr Faustus* in 1942, to the reformation of the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1962 (with Peter Hall and Michel Saint-Denis) – and from the *Theatre of Cruelty Workshop* (with Charles Marowitz) to the establishment of the International Centre for Theatre Research in Paris in 1970 (with Micheline Rozan), Brook's initiatives were performed in response to a crucial inquiry: Why theatre? (Brook, 1990 [1968]; 2005 [1993]; Smith, 1972). As Thomas R. Whitaker remarks, '[n]o contemporary director has more fully engaged that question than Brook' (Whitaker, 1999: 224). Throughout his career,

and by looking at multiple ways to engage with this inquiry, Brook was led to another very important area of research: that is, the reconstitution of the *relation* between performers and spectators in political theatre. In an interview with Margaret Croyden in 1970, Brook argues that,

‘[t]here is not theatre, there is nothing that one can examine, or discuss, or feel, or think, or argue about except at the moment when the actor and the audience are related. The question of what makes this a satisfactory relationship is the deepest and perhaps the only question in the theatre of our time’ (Croyden & Brook, 2003: 28).

Following this argument, I would add that this question is also one that redefines critical practice. It is a question that considers the critical function of theatre as a *process* that becomes possible between the performance and the audience. Elaborating on this question, this chapter considers the ways through which Peter Brook attempted to defamiliarise commonsensical notions of the conceptual and pragmatic ‘space’ that separates a performer and a spectator.

The chapter is divided into two sections. In the first one, I consider Brook’s theoretical project, focusing on his central notion of the ‘empty space’. In assessing Brook’s ideas (especially his descriptions of a deadly and a holy theatre), an explicit emphasis is given to *The Empty Space*, as I suggest, this influential work provides the necessary tools for a thorough examination of Brookian theory, while opening a dialogue with metaphysics in theatre. In the second section, I offer a critical analysis (in the form of a case study) of *Orghast*, which was the first public production of the International Centre for Theatre Research in Persepolis, Iran in 1971. My intention in this second section is to trace, in a more particular vein, the way in which Brook materialised a theatrical challenge to mimetic representation, through his experimentation with a pre-cultural performance.

The aim of the chapter is by no means to give a general account of Brook’s teatrology; it is rather to trace those singular, ‘micropolitical’ parts of his theatre project that challenged the stratified structure of theatrical binaries, by mapping theatrical territories beyond (or before) representation and linguistic normativity.

I. 'Emptying' the Space: Brook's theatre

(a) *A (non)-defined theatre*

The Empty Space is a work derived from a series of lectures given by Brook at various universities and colleges in the pre-70s period of his career.²² The oral element of the lectures has remained 'visible' in the text, enriching the narrative of the book. Although its writing style and structure resemble the form of a manifesto for theatre, its tone remains explicitly conversational producing a 'lively' sense, with the book seemingly unfolding *through* the reader. As Michael Kustow remarks in his biography of Peter Brook, '[*The Empty Space*] moves smoothly between magisterial abstractions [...] and easygoing vernacular anecdote' (Kustow, 2005: 153).

The resonance of *The Empty Space* has been evident in the work of many artists and theatre collectives that framed their practices around basic and site-specific ideas of theatre; mainly because of Brook's ability to address theatre as a simple art form that stems from the elementary intensities that produce the human need for performance. Accordingly, I argue that Brook's methodology was based on a certain minimalism. He defined theatre by the fewest elements possible, as a means to understand and explore the desires that motivate human beings to become performers. Particularly, in *The Empty Space* he is critical of Western theatre's tendency to approach dramatic texts (most of all Shakespearean texts) as immobile and self-identical truths, rather than as open-ended processes of theatrical meaning. He argues that, '[a] word does not start as a word – it is an end product which begins as an impulse, stimulated by attitude and behaviour which dictates the need for expression' (Brook, 1990 [1968]: 15). Interestingly, in *Evoking Shakespeare*, Brook notes that, 'it is almost impossible to discover a Shakespeare point of view, unless you say that being Shakespeare he contained in himself at least a thousand Shakespeares' (Brook, 1999: 21-22).

In a similar manner, Jerzy Grotowski described his pursuit of a 'poor theatre' during the same period. Looking for a non-linear approach to communication in theatre, Grotowski argued that, '[t]he acceptance of poverty in theatre, stripped of all that is not essential to it, revealed to us not only the backbone of the medium,

²² These lectures were given at the universities of Hull, Keele, Manchester and Sheffield.

but also the deep riches which lie in the very nature of the art-form' (Grotowski, 1975 [1968]: 21). Both Brook and Grotowski had rejected the essentialism and the limitations of realism and naturalism (two of the inherited forms of pre-modernist theatre), in favour of a 'sacred theatre' that would emerge out of decomposing existing theatrical forms. It is not by coincidence that their projects were frequently overlapping, as they collaborated repeatedly throughout the years.²³ However, despite this commonness in approach, they were ultimately looking at different perspectives in performance; in a sense, they posed divergent research questions. Whereas for Grotowski the point was, mainly, to explore the psychic potentials of an actor through self-penetration and exposure, Brook's research has been conducted on the basis of discovering the 'pre-cultural' possibilities that emerge in the relation between an actor and a spectator. In other words, Brook was interested in rethinking theatrical expression and engagement in a way that bypasses or challenges normative and linguistic signification in performance.

Brook's understanding of a theatrical process is one that stresses the importance of constant shifts in perspectives. He advocates an experimental approach in his work that develops and progresses through trial and error. Considering this rather 'plastic' approach to performance practice, Brook's attempt to define theatre can be seen as unexpected or even paradoxical. The opening passage of *The Empty Space* – Brook's most famous and widely quoted statement – has been interpreted as a clear attempt to define the fundamental nature of theatre and performance. He writes:

'I can take an empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged' (Brook, 1990 [1968]: 11).

Indeed, the impact of this simple, yet powerful, formulation has been catalytic in reshaping the idea of site-specific performance in Britain and elsewhere. It is, I argue, foremost its resonance rather than its intention that has converted this conception into a definition. Richard Gilman, drama professor at Yale University, notes in an interview with Margaret Croyden in *The New York Times* that, '[Brook] defined the nature of directing more than anyone else' (Croyden &

²³ Interestingly, both *The Empty Space* and Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre* were originally published in 1968.

Gilman, 1987: 36). Kustow refers to these two sentences as being ‘arguably the most inspiring theatre writing since Aristotle’ (Kustow, 2005: 153). Also, when Brook was in South Africa, a local director (initiator of a Black Theatre Movement in the area of Soweto) acknowledged the importance of *The Empty Space* in his work, and when Brook asked him what link did he make between the text of the book and the conditions of theatre-making in Soweto, the director answered: ‘The first sentence!’ (Brook, 2005 [1993]: 5). Thus, in so far as this statement has evolved from a specific account into a trans-temporal model of performance, it can be understood as a potential definition of theatre – at least Brook’s definition of theatre; his point of view. At the same time, in *The Shifting Point*, Brook writes:

‘For a point of view to be of any use at all, one must commit oneself totally to it, one must defend it to the very death. Yet, at the same time, there is an inner voice that murmurs: “Don’t take it too seriously. Hold on tightly, let go lightly”’ (Brook, 1987: preface).

In other words, Brook argues that subjective and bold beliefs are very important in as much as they are subject to change and experimentation. He understands theatre as a ‘space’ that although constructed through passionate and subjectivist commitment, it is open to constant discussion and reconstruction. For Brook this is a great challenge in theatre – a challenge for which he does not seek resolution. The shifts in his thoughts on theatre do not imply a negation of the former ones. Thus, the purpose of his descriptions of theatre is in effect to create the conditions for next descriptions to emerge. I argue, therefore, that Brook’s idea of progress is not a movement towards a ‘better defined’ theatre. He starts from scratch as a way of modifying points of view. He looks for constant shifts in perspectives. As he notes in *The Empty Space*, he has been looking for ‘the moving towards a less deadly, but, as yet, largely undefined theatre’ (Brook, 1990 [1968]: 36).

Thus, I argue that the opening passage of *The Empty Space* should not be considered as a trans-temporal ‘truth’ of theatre. At the very moment when it functions as such, it becomes problematically inflexible and potentially misleading. For instance, Carlson spots two reasons why this ‘striking statement’, as he calls it, may become problematic (Carlson, 2003: 132). Firstly, Carlson argues that the action of one person (walking across an empty space) and the respective response of another one (watching) do not create a theatrical act. He notes that, ‘[a] certain

perceptual contract is also necessary, an agreement that this action will be framed as theatre' (ibid; my emphasis). Of course, it might be argued that this 'perceptual contract' is described in the phrase: 'and call it a bare stage'. However, what Carlson observes is important: it is the *relation* between the person who performs and the one that observes within the performatively constituted 'stage', that makes an act of theatre being engaged – and not the acts of 'walking' and 'watching' by themselves. Secondly, Carlson is critical of the hypothetical 'spatial emptiness' that Brook's account implies. How empty can a space be? He notes that, '[u]nlike that of Genesis, Brook's creative interpellation does not create a theatre out of a void but makes a theatre out of a space that previously was thought of as something else' (ibid: 133). Carlson compares the interpellation of space into a stage with the interpellation of a person into a character. A person becomes a character, or is interpellated into a performer; yet, he argues that this new identity emerges from and is related to the historicity of the person. According to Carlson, the same process applies to the interpellation of a space into a stage. A similar critical view is that of Allain and Harvie, who point out that,

'any space comes already ideologically loaded with meanings [...] There are no empty spaces, only variably different spaces' (Allain & Harvie, 2006: 207).

Considered as such, the notion of the 'empty space' is problematic because it implies the existence of a neutral or pre-discursive site. However, I argue that what Brook proposes through the idea of the empty space can be read in a different way. I suggest that Brook implies neither that emptiness is the 'ontological atom' of theatre, nor that there are pure and neutral spaces. Rather he points out the importance of *relating* to a space *as if* it were empty. The difference here is important, since what Brook does is to argue for a non-prescriptive theatre; for a non-prescriptive theatrical space. As Schechner argues in *Performance Theory*, 'sometimes – especially in the theatre – it is necessary to live as if 'as if' = 'is'' (Schechner, 2003: xviii). I suggest that, in a sense, the interpellation of a place into an 'empty space' is what Carlson calls a 'perceptual contract' amongst the interpellators. It is an ephemeral agreement that creates the conditions for a theatre of *presence*. As Innes notes, it makes possible '[an] imaginative neutrality [...] which allows the actor to move freely through the entire physical world and into subjective experience' (Innes, 1981:129). Therefore,

I argue that Brook's idea of the 'empty space' does not imply a negation of the space's historical, architectural or emotional qualities. Instead, it suggests that such qualities, rather than being essentially predefined and prescribed, should be initially negotiated, discussed, or even disregarded – while acquiring the potential of being fostered, changed and multiplied.²⁴

(b) *Deadly, Holy, Rough*

In order to provide a lucid theorisation of his theatre, Brook drew dividing – although, frequently intertwining – lines between different conceptions of theatrical practice: He spoke about a Deadly Theatre, a Holy Theatre, a Rough Theatre and an Immediate Theatre.²⁵ This taxonomical arrangement of theatre modes forms the structure of *The Empty Space* while, at the same time, it is descriptive of the book's main thesis. In what follows, I focus on Brook's notions of deadly and holy Theatre, as it is through these two notions that Brook engages with the complexity and interrelation between what he rejects and what he proposes.

Brook uses the term 'deadly' to discuss the entire spectrum of commercialised theatre (ranging from Broadway to the West End) and its implications in commonsensical notions of performance art. At the same time though, Brook clarifies that, 'deadliness is deceptive and can appear anywhere' – for instance, in 'the plays of Moliere and the plays of Brecht', and above all Shakespeare (Brook, 1990 [1968]: 12). For Brook, a deadly theatre is largely based on strict *repetition*, especially in the way that it is dictated in the continuous mode of theatrical production. According to Brook, the repetitive function of commercial theatre promotes an apolitical and static theatrical tradition, because it fails to question existing forms of engaging with audiences. He notes:

²⁴ In this sense, Brook's notion of the 'empty space' could be understood as similar to Deleuze's reading of Bene's theatre (as discussed in chapter 2). In both ideas, we can observe a productive possibility of subtracting prescribed elements, in creating the conditions for a theatre that escapes representational normativity.

²⁵ The chapter will not discuss the last chapter of *The Empty Space* (Immediate Theatre), which is predominantly a reflexive account of Brook's directorial practices, techniques and emotions.

‘Deadliness always brings us back to repetition [...] A deadly director is a director who brings no challenge to the conditioned reflexes that every [theatre] department must contain’ (ibid: 44).

Thus, what Brook identifies as a ‘deadly’ aspect of theatre is a fixed and static understanding of theatrical processes, which is promoted and sustained by theatre’s repetitive function. Interestingly, Brook chose the term ‘deadly’, instead of ‘dead’, to attribute an active sense to the term. He wanted to emphasise the potential of deadly theatre to become something different. He writes:

‘When we say deadly, we never mean dead: we mean something depressingly active, but for this very reason capable of change’ (ibid: 45).

Furthermore, Brook argues that in a deadly theatre the relation between the performance and the spectators is based on a transcendental commonsense. He opposes the theatre forms that ‘divide the eternal truths from the superficial variations’ (ibid: 19). According to Brook, such theatre forms prohibit the intensity and the presence that the relation of the performance to the audience should have. On one hand, the actors who perform e.g. Shakespeare or Moliere, believe that their artistic mission is accomplished if they remain faithful to the exact texts. In doing so, such actors become ‘executors of a past’ – they become docile to a dogmatic textualism and a mimetic representation (which, in any case, is subject to interpretation) that put limits to their capacity to engage with the audience. In this sense, these actors’ capacity to create art, as well as to communicate with the spectators, becomes limited, since their main purpose is to carry out a predetermined task. On the other hand, according to Brook, the spectators can also be held responsible for this. For Brook, a ‘deadly spectator’ is one who craves for a ‘theatre that is nobler-than-life’, and in so doing s/he feels content with a certain level of ‘intellectual satisfaction’ that confirms his/her theoretical views of the world (ibid: 13).

In contrast to this confusion between theatrical engagement and excessive ‘intellectualism’, Brook suggests an alternative way of experiencing metaphysics in theatre: He suggests a ‘Holy Theatre’. In the respective section of *The Empty Space*, Brook describes this theatre as being ‘The Theatre of the Invisible-made-Visible’ (ibid: 47). For Brook, theatre is the place where this ‘metamorphosis’ takes place in an actual, rather than symbolic way. Demastes draws a parallel between Brook’s

holy theatre and religious processes, emphasising communion rather than mimesis or symbolism. He notes:

‘The invisible-made-visible clearly echoes the trick of the magician, but the theatre’s event is no more trick than a Christian’s act of communion (at least for the believer). In the theatre the invisible *is* made visible; the immaterial *is* made material in a genuine and not just metaphorical sense’ (Demastes, 2002: 16; original emphasis).

The difference between actualising and symbolising metaphysics in theatre is a crucial point of challenge of mimetic representation in Brook’s theatre. I argue that it is a difference between a real experience and an abstract *idea* of experience. In a similar way to that of Derrida and Artaud (as seen in chapter 2), with his proposal for a holy theatre, Brook wants to challenge the mimetic function of metaphysics in theatre, experimenting with tangible ways to encounter unexpected, inexact, or even unexplainable experiences. He suggests an actual sacred theatre, rather than an image of a sacred theatre.

In order to explore the possibility of such a theatre, Brook experiments with the potential of communication to be achieved as an immediate, pre-cognitive and affective encounter between performers and spectators. Opposing a transcendental representation of religiosity – a tradition of imitating rituals (e.g. pagan or baroque ceremonies), which according to Brook, has been inserted into performance art by the bourgeoisie – Brook proposes the performance of ‘true rituals’ on stage (Brook, 1990 [1968]: 51). In making this argument, Brook suggests a ritualisation of the ‘here and now’ of theatrical performances; that is, he does not argue for a certain ‘trueness’ or purity in performing rituals, but for a true presence in experiencing them. I argue that it is by virtue of this desire for presence, or this theatrical immediacy, that Brook’s holy theatre can be considered as an attempt to actualise or materialise metaphysics (in Artaud’s sense) in theatre.

Brook’s opposition to the Stanislavskian-ethic – according to which a character is being built (as described in Stanislavski’s *Building a Character*, 1950) – is a useful point for understanding what a holy theatre is. In contrast to Stanislavski’s proposal for a step-by-step process in which a character develops gradually, Brook

argues that a character, rather than being built, is *born*. Highlighting that this is a difficult process, he writes:

‘The role that has been *built* is the same every night – except that it slowly erodes. For the part that is born to be the same it must always be reborn, which makes it always difficult’ (Brook, 1990 [1968]: 129).

Brook’s disagreement with Stanislavski lies at the process of becoming a character. While Stanislavski understands this process as a rational and methodical one, Brook argues that ‘becoming a character’ is both immediate and irrational.²⁶ Brook emphasises that immediacy in theatrical expression destabilises repetition and embraces difference. A character is born and reborn every moment when s/he transforms the ‘invisible’ into ‘visible’; that is, when s/he manages to interrupt mimetic and representational processes of creation in performance. What is born in theatre is, therefore, not developed as a symbol or reflection of an underlying substance (e.g. a text, an idea). Rather it is created within the event by considering the text or speech as another theatrical layer – another productive force. This is why, according to Brook, theatrical forms are important in so far as they create the conditions for their own deconstruction; forms are composed in order to acquire the potential of being decomposed. In other words, to structure a theatre process in a holy theatre is not an end in itself; it is a starting point for raising different problems and raising different questions about theatre. It is an endless process of experimentation with, and challenge of, one’s own questions.

The influence of Artaud’s theatre of cruelty is, indeed, central to Brook’s theatre. Brook relates his notion of holy theatre to Artaudian thought when he argues for ‘powerful immediate explosions of human matter’ (ibid: 61); that create ‘[a] theatre working like the plague, by intoxication, by infection, by analogy, by magic; a theatre in which the play, the event itself, stands in place of a text’ (ibid: 55). In 1964 – following the establishment of Royal Shakespeare Company (a.k.a. RSC) at Stratford, with Michel-Saint Denis and Peter Hall – Brook collaborated with the critic and director Charles Marowitz in the formation of an experimental

²⁶ It is interesting to compare this view to Deleuze’s idea of ‘becoming a character’ in Carmelo Bene’s theatre (as discussed in chapter 2). In contrast to Deleuze, who suggests that one becomes a character only at the end of the play (focusing on the character’s becoming-minor during the play), Brook argues that in a holy theatre one becomes a character immediately, unexpectedly and even violently; almost as an ‘explosion’. In this sense, Brook’s theory is closer to Artaudian thought.

laboratory called the *Theatre of Cruelty Workshop*. The majority of the experiments and exercises that the laboratory undertook were ‘directly stimulated by Artaud’s thought’ (ibid: 55). In a sense, The Theatre of Cruelty Workshop was an attempt to experiment with Artaud’s pursuit of a theatre space as ‘a concrete physical place which asks to be filled, and to be given its own concrete language to speak’ (Artaud, 1958: 37). The following experiment with actors (directed by Brook and Marowitz) captures the workshop’s way of working toward the construction of an ‘Artaudian’ language:

‘An actor sits at one end of the room, facing the wall. At the other end is another actor, looking at the first one’s back, not allowed to move. The second actor must make the first one obey him. As the first one has his back turned, the second has no way of communicating his wishes except through sounds, for he is allowed no words. This seems impossible, but it can be done. It is like crossing an abyss on a tightrope: necessity suddenly produces strange powers’ (Brook, 1990 [1968]: 56).

Of course, the point as well as the challenge of this Artaudian-experiment was to create such affective conditions between performers and spectators in actual performance contexts. As Ridout writes, ‘[t]he logic of [Artaud’s] desire is that the theatrical image and the audience should end up wired to each other by the transmission of vibrations that are sensed immediately rather than translated or decoded into specific sense data (sound, light, heat), let alone into representational form (image, sign, language)’ (Ridout, 2008: 230). It is therefore on the basis of these ‘vibratory’ moments, or these interruptions of normative dialogue, that Brook suggests a more actual (non-representational) way of experiencing metaphysics in a holy theatre. Such ‘strange powers’ are possible in theatre in as much as one does not imitate or represent them (by presuming they are absolutely unreal), but rather experiences *what is real and present about them*. Brook writes: ‘[W]e need desperately to experience magic in so direct a way that our very notion of what is substantial could be changed’ (ibid:108). For Brook, a direct experience of magic, its materialisation in performance is possible and differs fundamentally from a representation of magic. He notes that, ‘[w]e may want magic, but we confuse it with hocus-pocus, and we have hopelessly mixed up love with sex, beauty with aestheticism’ (ibid).

Now, while The Theatre of Cruelty Workshop experimented extensively with Artaud's ideas, Brook insists that his intention with Marowitz was not to apply an Artaudian model to performances, or 'to reconstruct Artaud's own theatre' (ibid: 55). He argues that 'Artaud applied is Artaud betrayed' (ibid: 60). This bold statement is interesting and useful here. Indeed, I would agree with Brook that if one applies Artaudian theory to a theatrical event, one loses the point of Artaud's philosophy. In most of Artaud's writings it is evident that he did not want his ideas to be understood as a coherent model of theatre. On the contrary, he was critical of a theatre that becomes dominated by closed-up frameworks, whether theoretical, dramatic, ideological or political. From this perspective, I argue that the function of Artaud's theory is to activate and vitalise a theatre of presence; a theatre that does not imitate techniques or represent concepts, but rather uses them as theatrical *drives* or *forces*. At the same time, how could someone 'betray' Artaud? Brook notes that 'it is always just a portion of his thought that is exploited, betrayed because it is easier to apply rules to the work of a handful of dedicated actors than to the lives of the unknown spectators [...]' (ibid: 60-1). Although Brook's makes a fair point, it could be argued that, in a sense, Artaud *wanted to be betrayed*, in so far as he wanted his theory (even the bold statements of the two manifestos for a theatre of cruelty) to express a *need*, a *desire* for different theatre practices, rather than a coherent framework according to which a new theatre should emerge. From this perspective, one could argue that 'to betray' Artaud is to create a genuine Artaudian performance. If the function of his theory is to give new potentials to theatre practice, then it is not a matter of 'betrayal' but one of experimentation. Thus, I argue that Artaud cannot be betrayed in the way that Brook suggests; precisely because Artaud cannot be applied as a structured and methodical form of theatre.

In *The Empty Space*, Brook shares a very interesting experience he had as a spectator of a clown-performance in Hamburg, in 1946. In a way, his account of this experience clarifies what he understands as the invisible-made-visible. Two clowns were performing on stage, discussing what should they ask for from the 'Queen of Heaven'. When one of them said, 'dinner', the audience (composed mainly by children) 'screamed approval' (ibid: 49). Then, the clown started listing

all the possible foods that they could ask for, but which nevertheless they were unable to actually obtain on stage. Brook notes:

‘[T]he squeals of excitement were gradually replaced by a hush – a hush that settled into a deep and true theatrical silence. An image was being made real, in answer to the *need* for something that was not there’ (ibid; my emphasis).

Brook makes this observation to emphasise an aspect of holy theatre: something invisible was made visible on stage. What was made visible was, fundamentally, a *need* for something, rather than this something itself. In other words, what Brook experienced on that day, was an actualisation of a need, the materialisation of a desire for something, and not a representation of something.

In fact, I suggest that we could think of Brook’s holy theatre as a critique of the theological process of *transubstantiation*;²⁷ that is, I would argue that Brook’s holy theatre endorses a direct experience of transubstantiation (or *metousiosis*), by considering the metaphorical use of this theological process as problematic. In *Poetics of Transubstantiation*, Douglas Burnham argues that ‘[t]ransubstantiation, taken out of its theological context [...] is a metaphor of the power and even the danger of metaphorical language itself’ (Burnham, 2005: 1; original emphasis). I suggest that it is the power of this metaphorical language, through which metaphysics are represented on stage, that Brook wants to challenge and destabilise. In other words, I argue that a deadly theatre is one that focuses on the power of metaphors; whereas a holy theatre is one that endorses direct and affective experiences, by creating what Derrida calls a sacred, yet non-theological, space (as seen in chapter 2). Addressing the question of a substantial (and non-transcendental) encounter with metaphysics in theatre is, according to Brook, the most important undertaking of a holy theatre.

At the same time, Brook holds that a holy theatre distorts realism in such a way, that it transforms a play into an event of creative contradictions. In a letter to

²⁷ Considering the concept outside of its theological context, Burnham suggests that, ‘[w]ithin recent European culture [...] transubstantiation is the ‘metaphor’ *par excellence* of the dissolution or intermingling of identities, the exposure of closed systems of thought and expression to what has been excluded, the poverty of reductively material accounts of human bodies or experiences, and thus also of the giving of a voice to tongues, truths and visions more alien than any barbarian’ (Burnham, 2005: 9-10; original emphasis).

Grigori Kosintsev, while commenting on The Theatre of Cruelty 1965 production of *King Lear*, Brook writes:

‘[W]e are searching to interrupt the consistency of style, so that the many-levelled contradictions of the play can appear’ (as cited in Mitter, 1992: 136).

In order to achieve this creative ‘inconsistency’, Brook explored a combination between a holy theatre and what he calls a ‘rough theatre’. A rough theatre is, for Brook, a ‘popular theatre, freed of unity and style’, a ‘theatre of noise’, as he writes (Brook, 1990 [1968]: 75-6). At the same time, a rough theatre is not a theatre that negates style, as Brook claims in his interview by Margaret Croyden, but a theatre that is devised on the basis of a ‘superstyle’ – just like Brechtian theatre, or the popular theatre of Littlewood (Croyden & Brook, 2003: 86). What Brook sought therefore, was a synthesis between the experience of metaphysics in theatre and the tangible relation that one develops to a – politically informed – popular theatre. In a sense, it could be argued that Brook’s theatre is a fusion of Artaud and Brecht; that is, an intersection between a sacred immediacy of holy theatre, and the ‘rough’ or secular intimacy of popular theatre. I argue that it is within this intersection that Brook’s theatre can be placed and understood.

II. *Orghast*: a pre-symbolic performance?

(a) The ‘International Centre for Theatre Research’ in context

In 1970, Peter Brook and the French producer Micheline Rozan established the International Centre for Theatre Research in Paris (*Le Centre Internationale de Recherches Théâtrales*). Working with an international ensemble of actors, this was an experimental initiative,²⁸ focused both on research and production that would operate independently of commercialised productions and conformist performance practices. Indeed, the cultural terrain of the late 1960s-early 1970s, in which the Centre was founded, was increasingly inviting for art projects whose aim was to raise political awareness through research; thus, to a certain extent, the International Centre for Theatre Research managed to occupy a privileged place

²⁸ Brook and Rozan had secured funding for at least three years from the French government, as well as from certain international foundations.

within the French cultural milieu. The Vietnam War was rousing substantial reactions worldwide (especially after the revelation of the 'My Lai massacre' in 1968) and, at the same time, avant-garde performance groups were progressively gaining ground in Europe and the United States. The sociocultural effects of May 1968 were also beginning to emerge, as radical collectives and community art movements were organising political interventions in many parts of the world. To a significant extent, the resonance of these worldwide-effecting shocks was expressed and embodied in theatrical projects. In particular, the 'Living Theatre' of Julian Beck and Judith Malina had reached a creative peak, promoting a nomadic conception of politicised performances, while guerrilla performances by the 'San Francisco Mime Troupe' and the 'Bread and Puppet Theatre' were active all over the US. Also, Joseph Chalkin's 'Open Theatre' had begun touring, while in Brazil Augusto Boal was internationally experimenting with audience participation with his 'Theatre of the Oppressed'. At the same time, in Britain there was an explosion of theatrical ideas coming from the practices of agitprop groups like John McGrath's '7:84 Theatre Company', the 'Red Ladder' (a.k.a. 'Agitprop Street Players'), 'Belt and Braces' and 'Monstrous Regiment'. Importantly, the *Theatres Act 1968* had provided a fertile ground for the emancipation of theatrical expression in the United Kingdom, after abolishing censorship of the stage by the Lord Chamberlain's Office. It was the 'Age of Aquarius' – a transitional era of self-determination, sexual revolution, 'recreational drug-taking' and artistic freedom, that was sustained by the apparent 'economic boom' in Britain and US (Kelly, 1984: 9-10). The challenges to artistic stratification and conformist morality grew stronger in the mid-late 1960s drawing on statements such as the Balinese saying: 'we have no art, we do everything as well as possible', that was popularised by Marshall McLuhan (McLuhan 1964: 66).

At the same time, the influence of post-Marxist critique, such as the second wave of feminism, the Frankfurt School and the rise of the debates of structuralism and poststructuralism, had been significantly felt both in performance contexts and in ethnographic work on avant-garde theatre practices. There emerged an important link between academia and Western dramaturgies, between critical theory and theatrical narratives, which had had a crucial impact on

reconceptualising the social trajectories of performance and its relation to cultural analysis. For instance, one of the first academic institutions for studying theatre and performance, namely the *Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama* had been established in Toronto in the mid-1960s. Moreover, important works such as *Culture and Society* by Raymond Williams that was published in 1958, inspired a large proportion of theatre practitioners to rethink the notions of art, culture, class and democracy in relation to socio-historical changes, as emancipated from transcendental connotations and essentialist dogmas that had detached the value of these concepts from everyday experience. It was also precisely within these revolutionary changes that performance studies emerged as an autonomous methodological plateau of cultural analysis, mainly through the works of the director Richard Schechner and his collaboration with the anthropologist Victor Turner. This synthesis between multiple (modern and postmodern) theoretical inputs and avant-garde theatrical practices produced and radicalised new ways of understanding theatre and performance. One of them was the advance of 'postdramatic theatre'. As discussed in chapter 2, this theatrical movement signalled a shift in the mode of perception that subordinated the importance of text and linear narratives of performance.

Thus, it is not easy to say whether the late 1960s and early 1970s can be thought more as a period of 'doing' rather than as a period of 'discussing' within theatre and performance. What is evident though, is that the link between academic milieus and performance practices was gradually becoming stronger, raising questions of identity and subjectivity, ideas of interactive theatre and experimentations of the potential roles that dramatic texts could play on stage. Experimenting with different ways to 'give theatre back to the people' was, at that point, the most powerful and controversial question in the field. As Margaret Croyden argues, Peter Brook and his Centre in Paris were 'in the middle of it all' (Croyden, 2003: xi). In this explosive context, choosing sides in discourses of theatre and performance was extremely important. Croyden notes that,

'two camps were forming in the theatre: that of traditional naturalism, represented by the dominance of the playwright and the staging of conventional productions, and the experimental nonliterary theatre of images

and nonverbal behaviour, represented by the counter-culture groups that were flourishing in basements, studios, and storefronts' (ibid: xii).

Being a proponent of the second camp, Jerzy Grotowski was, at the same time, entering his paratheatrical phase²⁹ of experimenting with interactive theatre. Sharing a mutual respect and a parallel understanding of theatre, Brook and Grotowski drew motivation from each other's similarities and differences in pursuing diverse conceptions of performance practice through working with ensembles. The aim was to study and problematise the discursive and non-discursive processes that operate between performers and audiences. More specifically, as I mentioned in the first section of the chapter, Brook understood this process as an exploration of a pre-symbolic, pre-cultural process of expression. As Brook put it, the Centre was 'seeking for what gives a form of culture its life – not studying the culture itself but what is behind it' (Brook, 1987: 106). The International Centre for Theatre Research was, therefore, an attempt to create the conditions for researching the energy, the desire, the instinct or the 'firing' – as Artaud would prefer to call it – that operate prior to symbolic and representational discursive practices.

Brook and Rozan invited artists from many parts of the world that had diverse theatrical backgrounds and different conceptions of what this artistic direction would entail. A multicultural group would ensure, for Brook, a certain 'emptiness' in regards to hegemonic preconceptions of forms in directing, performing and engaging theatre. Brook believed that the cultural differences amongst the members of the group would potentially result in theatre projects with less pre-defined elements. While describing the process of selecting actors in an *American Theatre* (1970-71) interview, Brook commented:

'Partly for what they can do. They can't come empty handed. Partly for how open they are toward what they can't do' (as cited in Smith, 1972: 31).

Accordingly, one of the Centre's intentions was to lower the importance of cultural significations in performance without however reducing 'everyone to a

²⁹ Grotowski's para-theatre experimented with 'the isolation of a chosen group of people in a remote place, in an attempt to create a genuine encounter between individuals who meet, at first, as complete strangers and then, gradually, as they lose their fear and distrust of each other, move towards a fundamental encounter in which they themselves are the active and creative participants in their own drama of rituals and ceremonials' (Roose-Evans, 1989: 154).

neutral anonymity' (Brook, 1987: 106). I argue then that it was a question of emancipating performance from a power of discourse that is practiced through signs, repetition and representation; a question of the possibility of performance to become something other than what Schechner terms 'twice-behaved' pattern. I suggest that this question encompasses the 'raison d' être' of this chapter's analysis while addressing the non-representational potential of Brook's theatre. I argue that Peter Brook was one of the first British directors that attempted to examine this question from multiple perspectives; that is, for example, through notions of being, space, time, memory and instinct. Probably, one of Brook's most interesting attempts to raise this question and study its potential implications was a controversial performance entitled *Orghast*. In what follows, I provide a critical analysis of *Orghast* considering: (1) What can we learn from the project in relation to Brook's way of challenging mimetic representation and linguistic normativity? (2) What were the project's potentials in regards to theoretical claims and performance practices?

(b) Orghast in context

*Orghast*³⁰ was the first public production of the Centre's work and took place at the Fifth Shiraz International Festival of the Arts in Persepolis, Iran in 1971. The festival was founded in 1967 under the umbrella of the Shah's regime, especially Empress Farah Diba, who was the main director of its artistic programmes. It was an international and intercultural festival that brought together Western and Eastern arts, music, theatre, dance and cinema – aiming at experimenting with the differences between these two 'art worlds' and finding ways in which they could inform one another through their meeting points. The rationale behind the festival's founding was twofold: First, it embodied the long-term policy of

³⁰ The performance was divided in two parts and each of them was played twice in different sites of Persepolis. The first performance of Part I took place on the 28th of August, just after sunset, on a stage before the Royal Tombs of the Persian Kings Darius and Artaxerxes I, and it was repeated the following day before sunrise. Part I was a boldly concentrated, mystical and intimate performance that drew much of its 'energy' from the spatial conditions of the location. *Orghast* Part II was presented at Naqsh-e-Rustam, which was another royal burial site located six miles away from Persepolis. This part was far more epic and 'explosive', replacing the spectators' immobility in Part I with an invitation to choose their own path within the performance, being simultaneously at the centre of the event, aside of it, outside of it or in between stages (Smith, 1972). Due to the very limited documentation of the actual performance, I will focus more on the group's theoretical frameworks of staging *Orghast*, than on its actual plot.

Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (the Shah of Persia from 1941 to 1979) to modernise Iran while maintaining its independence from the West; a policy that resonated with Shah's secular state (distinguishing Islam from the public sphere). It was believed that hosting a wide array of Western avant-garde artists in an international festival would make Iran look more tolerant and open to modernity. Secondly, one of the aspirations of the organisers was the eventual creation of an art centre that could invite residencies, both local and international, continuing the legacy of the festival and further developing Iran's cultural terrain. Greek avant-garde composer Iannis Xenakis had designed plans for a 'scientific research centre' for the arts, but his proposal was not materialised because of political controversy and suspicion from Islamic enemies of the Shah. Indeed, the political complexity of the Shah's regime, being an authoritarian and repressive state on one hand, and a target of increasing critique by the Islamists on the other, sabotaged the potentials of the festival. During the gradual decline of the Shah, and the approaching of the Islamic revolution (which eventually took place in 1979), the sociopolitical condition of Iran was characterised by mistrust, tension and controversy. In this context, an international arts festival could not be sustained. At the same time, it is worth noting that the festival remains one of the most important 20th century attempts to bring together Eastern and Western art in an experimental context. As Robert Gluck notes,

'Iran in the 1970s presents a fascinating case study of how an authoritarian government can remain officially open to forward-looking Western ideas, while still strictly limiting its citizens' free political speech. This unstable model could not survive for long, especially in the face of declining popular support' (Gluck, 2007: 27).

Peter Brook and the company experienced the unstable political condition of Iran mostly through struggling with a few bureaucratic obstacles, and as with the rest of the artists, through noticing police and army force in almost every part of Shiraz and Persepolis. Brook was criticised by the German critic Ernst Wendt and the Persian writer Saedi for allegedly supporting Shah's regime after accepting to participate in the festival. After labelling these criticisms 'naïve and hysterical', Brook elaborated on the issue in an interview with Smith (Smith, 1972: 258):

‘It would be complete humbug for us to work in France as though we naively believed that there was no repression or police brutality there, and suddenly discover this in Iran. The desert island in which one can work outside a complex, largely repressive social machine does not exist’ (ibid: 259).

Written by the British poet Ted Hughes, *Orghast* was a hybrid performance based on Hughes’s adaptation of Aeschylus’s *Prometheus Bound*, and further composed by fragments from Calderon’s *Life is a Dream*, scriptures of Zoroastrianism,³¹ and other Greek and Persian myths (Smith, 1972). Due to this plethora of different sources that were used in devising the narrative of *Orghast*, there was no fixed storyline that could impose a univocal experiencing of the performance, or even direct the audience towards perceiving an articulate conceptual content of the play. As Brook insisted throughout the project development, *Orghast* was and had to be approached as a ‘work in progress’, not as a finished production (ibid: 125). Thus, *Orghast* was a theatrical experiment whose implementation was its very performance in public – it was not a presentation of outcomes, but the research process itself.

Since the process of elaborating myths and stories was based on collective work (Hughes collaborated extensively with Brook and the performers in many stages of the process), improvisation was central for stimulating ideas for the performance. For this reason, Brook and Hughes considered *Prometheus Bound* to be a useful starting point from which they could enable discussion and, potentially, production of ideas. Indeed, Aeschylus’s text offered multiple possibilities for experimentation: The repercussions of the ‘gift of fire’ to humanity by Prometheus and his subsequent punishment by Zeus, provided the conditions for a flexible dramatic platform on which the group could explore questions of pre-cultural expression. By considering ‘fire’ as a metaphor of ‘language’, Brook and Hughes attempted to build on the discourse of cultural refinement (culture Vs nature), through exploring the liminal condition between cosmological dyadic relations – i.e. God and matter, Light and Darkness, the spiritual and the material. Thus, along with scriptures of Zoroastrianism, the group also studied the Persian religion

³¹ An ancient Persian religion and philosophy that dates back to the mid-fifth century BCE (in documented history). In Zoroastrianism, life develops around the constant conflict between *Ahura Mazda* who is the transcendental source of truth and goodness, and *Angra Mainyu* his evil antithesis. In Zoroastrian scriptures, it is argued that the role of humanity should always be directed towards the resolution of this conflict, and the ultimate prevailing of *Ahura Mazda*.

of Manichaeism – whose doctrines were also based on the constant conflict between metaphysical dyads. The aim of this elaboration of ancient inputs was the potential discovery of an imaginary ‘silenced cosmology’, as Joanny Moulin (1996) put it; a discovery of a ‘lost’ ontology framed in pre-linguistic conditions of expression. As A.C.H. Smith described it, ‘[*Orghast*] was a controlled experiment in abstraction’ (Smith, 1972: 181).

Brook was the main director of *Orghast*, being assisted in his task by Geoffrey Reeves from UK, Arby Ovanessian from Persia and Andrei Serban from Romania. Their collaboration with Hughes focused primarily on studying the possibilities of language as pre-symbolic communication. They were seeking for the conditions that would enable a non-articulated communication through paying attention to the affective potential of gestures, sounds and lights. In short, they were trying to merge verbal with non-verbal communication. For this reason, the group wanted to find or create a text for the performance, in which language would not function as a representation of content, but as its incarnation within the play. To this end, Hughes carried out extensive research on the hybridisation of syllables and phonemes – a process that was regularly in direct collaboration with the whole group – in order to invent a new language; namely, the *Orghast*-language. This conceived language was used by the actors along with Ancient Greek, Latin and Avesta (an Ancient Persian language), which were also included in *Orghast*’s text. As Patrice Pavis notes, the fact that the *Orghast*-language was mixed with three ‘dead’ languages, shows that, ‘[t]he project was an attempt to return to the very source of language as incantatory sound, when an act of communication was synonymous with an act of communion’ (Pavis, 1996: 69).

Thus, the aim of the *Orghast*-language was to produce a theatrical mode that could generate a *physiological experience* of the text; that is, a corporeal relation to the pulsations produced by the soundings of a language that was not meant to symbolise meaning, but rather to enact it in the language’s musicality and intonations. For this reason, the methodology of the pre-performance period was based on the process of *onomatopoeia*, which means working towards the creation of words that imitate the sounds that correspond to these words (see Chomsky et al, 1983; Hervey & Higgings, 1992). A.C.H. Smith, who observed the entire project and dedicated a book to the performance (*Orghast at Persepolis*, 1972) notes that,

‘[t]he very words themselves embodied, in vocal form, the experiences they described’ (Smith, 1972: 39). So, this invented language was built on the basis of enacting, rather than representing, its content in its very form.

It is worth noting that in this case onomatopoeia was both ‘directly *iconic*’, which according to Hervey and Higgins refers to the language in which ‘the phonic form of a word impressionistically imitates a sound which is the referent of the word’, and ‘*iconically* motivated’, which refers to an imitation of a ‘sound associated with the referent of the word’ (Hervey & Higgins, 1992: 75, original emphasis). For example, while the syllables ULL and ORG meant ‘swallow’ and ‘life’ respectively, the word BULLORGA was used to signify ‘darkness’ (that which swallows life).³² Also, the word Orghast was a combination of two referents: ORG that meant ‘life’ or ‘being’, and GHAST that meant ‘spirit, flame’ (Smith, 1972: 50-51). The following fragment is, according to Smith, one of the first that Hughes created, and as he notes, ‘[it] was exceptional in remaining unchanged right through to the performance at Persepolis’ (ibid: 50):

BULLORGA OMBOLOM FROR darkness opens its womb	SHARSAYA NULBULDA BRARG I hear chaos roar
IN OMBOLOM BULLORGA in the womb of darkness	NILD US GLITTALUGH rivets like stars
FREEASTAV OMBOLOM freeze her womb	CLID OSTA BULLORGA lock up the mouth of darkness
ASTA BEORBITTA icy chains	

(c) Onomatopoeia: between language and music

Let us now be a bit more analytical as to why Brook and Hughes chose to experiment with onomatopoeia. What were they looking for? As they both maintained, their primary intention was to devise a performance in which communication would occur *directly*; that is, by means of bypassing the human intellect – the linguistic performance of actors and the cognitive receptivity of spectators. In other words, Brook and Hughes wanted to create blocks of sound that could function as ‘emotional vibrations’, by surpassing the limitations and

³² Of course, it is worth mentioning that the process of onomatopoeia cannot be the same in each cultural milieu, as the corresponding sound of an experience may differ in dissimilar socio-cultural contexts and historical periods.

preconceptions of the human brain (Leiter, 1991: 234). Indeed, the notion of theatrical *vibration*, understood as an affective process that connects performers and spectators, is very useful here. As Nicholas Ridout points out in his 2008 paper *Welcome to the Vibratorium*, '[i]t is the idea of vibration that allow us to think this movement between [performers and spectators] as social and physical at one and the same time' (Ridout, 2008: 225). In a sense, I would suggest that *Orghast* was meant to be performed within what Ridout calls a 'Vibratorium': that is, a theatrical space 'before it becomes either theatron or auditorium, the theatre as sensory threshold that momentarily precedes, or temporarily closes, representation' (ibid: 230).

Brook and Hughes wanted to explore a language that operates before the intellectual process of representation, constructing an intuitive event through a becoming pre-symbolic (or 'vibratory') mode of communication. The *Orghast*-language was, then, a text that could function through its mode – i.e. through its overtones, intonations, pauses, mis-sounds etc. – in direct relation to the bodily responses of everyone that was present in the performance. I suggest that the basis of the Centre's research with *Orghast* can be found in a sequence of questions, which Brook posed in *The Empty Space*:

'Is there another language, just as exacting for the author as a language of words? Is there a language of actions, a language of sounds – a language of word-as-part-of-movement, of word-as-lie, word-as-parody, of word-as-rubbish, of word-as-contradiction, of word-shock or word-cry' (Brook, 1990 [1968]: 55)?

Brook was interested in emancipating the 'word' from its conventional dramatic value and, in so doing, opening up its potential function within theatre. At the same time, the *Orghast* text was not essentially a negation of content, because the very process of using language in this onomatopoeic way was by itself a critique of the dichotomy between mode and meaning, manner and matter, form and content. Considered as such, Hughes's invention was a language that explored the primal intensities that might exist before language itself: a language whose subject matter was the possibility of a *pre-language*.

Thus, it seems to me that, on one level, the aim of the *Orghast*-experiment was closely related to the Artaudian understanding of performance as '*fire*'; that is, a

performance that fundamentally breaks with rational discourse and the stratified teleology of Occidental theatre, by embracing cruelty-as-force and desire (Artaud, 1958). As I mentioned in the first section of the chapter, Artaudian theatrology played a crucial role in Brook's directorial narratives – even if Brook would agree with Derrida that fidelity to Artaud is impossible.

On a second level, I argue that we could think of *Orghast* in parallel to Deleuze's and Guattari's theorisation of the 'body without organs' (borrowing the term from Artaud). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari stress the importance of conceiving the body as a non-stratified multiplicity, rather than singularity, that acts and performs through affection and difference (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 [1987]). In describing the process of becoming a body without organs, their analysis clarifies that the point of critique is the stratified organism of the body, rather than the organs themselves. Their theoretical project in relation to corporeality addresses an understanding of the body as an assemblage whose parts can operate autonomously, without corresponding or being 'represented' by a hierarchical process: a body without organ-ism. Similarly, Brook and Hughes did not intend to create a headless performer, an acephalic actor. Rather, they were interested in creating the appropriate conditions for a performance that could appeal in the human instinct through stimulating singular responses from the *organs* of the body (the stomach, the nose, the heart, the genitals etc.) and not by its organism as a whole. Thus, I argue that, in effect, their ultimate point of critique was not the intellect itself, but its hierarchical relation to the body: i.e. the stratified subjection of the body to the intellect.

This is one of the reasons why *Orghast* was a text that was designed to operate more as a musical score than a dramatic script. As Hughes notes in a *Times Literary Supplement* interview in 1971, the group was looking for what was 'mainly a way of hanging together musical moments' (as cited in Smith, 1972: 44). Certainly this sounds like a very interesting, albeit vague, idea but what is significant, I argue, is to ask what is unique in conceiving and experiencing language as music; how do these two modes of expression interrelate? I suggest that this question is of great importance if we bear in mind that the complex relationship between music and language was at the core of the project's intentions.

Hughes addresses this question by drawing on biology. Taking into account the biological function of the human body, Hughes argues that every human body engages ‘primal’ modes and structures of meaning. He goes on to note that, in looking for an ‘open and inviting language’ that could be ‘expressive to all people, powerfully, truly, precisely’, one has to *unearth* the musicality of language, together with its capacity to affect, to disturb and to engage with the complexity of the human body (ibid: 45). In explaining to Smith his idea of ‘*unearthing*’, Hughes writes:

‘The deeper into language one goes, the less visual/conceptual its imagery, and the more audial/visceral/muscular its system of tensions. This accords with the biological fact that the visual nerves connect with the modern human brain, while the audial nerves connect with the cerebellum, the primal animal brain and nervous system, direct. In other words, the deeper into language one goes, the more dominated it becomes by purely musical modes [...]’ (ibid).

It is important to note that, in *Orghast at Persepolis*, Smith praises the theoretical model of ‘unearthing’ by simultaneously drawing a parallel between the Orghast experiment and the ideas of Levi-Strauss – in relation to music, mythology and language – as described in his book *The Raw and the Cooked* (1969). What seems to be the pivotal argument that Smith makes in this comparison is the extent to which the perpetual nature of music and mythology can transcend normative patterns of linguistic communication. He states that,

‘[f]or Levi-Strauss, as for Hughes and Brook, myth and music alike are languages that can communicate before and below intellectual understanding, through their structure: the actual content is more of a restraint on the structure than vice versa’ (Smith, 1972: 118).

Through Smith’s writing, it seems that Brook was interested in Hughes’s biological perspective of music, because he understood it as an appropriate framework according to which the group could experiment with the pre-symbolic origins of performance; a theoretical stimulus to begin with. At the same time, it is not clear in any documented source whether Brook justified his work with *Orghast* through biological arguments. In fact, he never used a biological vocabulary in his discussions of the performance. In his interview with Smith, Brook points out that,

‘in looking for the forms that speak directly we are, at the same time, looking for everything that can throw evidence on what can make an act of theatre more dense’ (as cited in Smith, 1972: 248). In making this claim, Brook stresses the importance of exploring theatrical methods which can materialise human intensities that operate on a pre-cultural (which is not essentially biological) level. In other words, Brook does not essentially argue for a ‘return to human nature’, but in the possibility of emancipating performance from linguistic codifications and references. It is precisely this possibility that Brook acknowledges in the relationship between music and language. For instance, while rehearsing *Orghast* in Persepolis, Brook asked the group whether they could define a musical song, and a Persian actor replied: ‘Something that comes from the heart’ – and Brook commented: ‘It can’t be defined in words [...] When the heart wants to speak – or the stomach – it knows that words from the head aren’t enough’ (ibid: 113).

Despite the very interesting elements that one can draw from Hughes’s idea of ‘unearthing’, I argue that discussing the music-language relationship on a strictly biological basis is a limited way of approaching these two modes of expression. It is, I suggest, at least debatable whether biology can be distinguished from more socio-culturally oriented perspectives, especially in a theatrical context. Critical and philosophical studies of the relation between music and language can prove very helpful in regards to this question. Although I do not have the space to outline many of them in this chapter, in what follows, I will draw first on Adorno, and second on Deleuze and Guattari in order to elaborate on this question further. In fact, I will argue for an intersection between their accounts of musical expression and language.

In his essay, *Music and Language: A Fragment*, Adorno (1998 [1956]) observes a dialectical relation between language and music that concerns the question of intentionality. He argues that although normative conceptualisation is excluded in music, primitive epistemological concepts can be manifested in musical pieces in the form of ‘recurring ciphers’ (Adorno, 1998 [1956]: 2). For Adorno, these musical concepts operate outside a system of representation, because they become through tonality; they do not convey meanings, but they rather correspond to ‘their own nature and not in a signified outside them’ (ibid). ‘Music creates no semiotic system’, Adorno highlights, before proceeding to argue that music

becomes a less intentional medium than language because musical and linguistic interpretation are two different things (ibid: 1). He notes that,

‘To interpret language means: to understand language. To interpret music means: to make music. Musical interpretation is performance [...]’ (ibid: 3).

Therefore, Adorno distinguishes musical language from intentional language, but, at the same time, he argues that,

‘the demarcation line between [them] is not absolute; we are not confronted by two wholly separate realms. There is a dialectic at work. Music is permeated through and through with intentionality’ (ibid: 2-3).

In other words, Adorno holds that music is a language that constantly tends to *interrupt* intentionality through a dialectical relation to intentional language. It is by virtue of this dialectical movement that Adorno draws a theoretical mapping to ‘true’ language – to a language which is not empty of content, but freed from pre-defined meaning. He notes that,

‘[m]usic points to true language in the sense that content is apparent in it, but it does so at the cost of unambiguous meaning, which has migrated to the languages of intentionality’ (ibid).

Thus, Adorno’s account of the intersection between language and music is one that pays attention to non-intentional interruptions. His analysis correlates with the philosophical views of the Centre to the extent that both approaches argue for the existence of a musicality of language in the latter’s ‘true’ nature. However, by contrast to Hughes’s idea of ‘unearthing’, Adorno suggests a less ‘essentialist’ manner of explaining this intersection, and this is, perhaps, one of the reasons why he is not giving a biological dimension to the issue. Coming from a more sociological perspective than that of Hughes, Adorno is careful not to focus on a dichotomy between intentionality and contingency, but on their potential dialectic. Whereas, according to Brook and Hughes, the point of thinking music in parallel to language lies in the discovery of pre-cultural expression, and therefore to a negation of intentionality, Adorno’s account destabilises the essentialism of this ‘one-directional’ process, claiming that there is a constant interrelation between music and language. In a sense, I suggest that Adorno’s analysis describes music as being a deterritorialization of language, to the extent that language

always comes together with a prescribed meaning. From this perspective, music may be viewed as a deterritorialization of meaning.

It is in a similar manner that Deleuze and Guattari discuss the function of music in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Their analysis examines the deterritorializing potentials of music – just like in other art forms – in relation to its own intentional lines of meaning. For music it is the refrain, or the voice itself, for painting it is the face, the portrait, that become elements of intentional expression through art. They note that, ‘[m]usic is a deterritorialization of the voice, which becomes less and less tied to language, just as painting is a deterritorialization of the face’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004 [1987]: 333). The refrain or the voice is, for Deleuze and Guattari, the content of music, not its origin. They argue that the refrain and the musical content (in other words the *purpose* of music), rather than emancipating the creative potentials of music, constitute ‘a means of preventing music’ (ibid: 331). Yet, this ‘prevention’ of music is for Deleuze and Guattari an essential territorializing or reterritorializing force that generates the becoming of variations, the becoming of what escapes the intentionality of the refrain or the voice. In short, for Deleuze and Guattari, music pertains to a becoming-*minor* language through its capacity to constantly destabilise, to deterritorialize *major* meanings – meanings that become generalised by means of their normalisation. They focus on the capacity of music to become a minor language, suggesting that it is this becoming that gives musical potentials to language.

Now, in comparing these accounts to what Brook and Hughes attempted to achieve with the Orghast-language, there are some critical points to be made. Brook and Hughes wanted to design a theatrical performance that would function *as* music on stage by, somehow, having become pre-cultural and non-intentional in the rehearsal process. I argue that by constructing a language that unifies through its musicality, the biological justification of the Orghast-language, limited the *live* potential of the experiment; that is, the becoming of language-as-music during the event. Hughes’s insistence on a strictly biological perspective implied a ‘universalistic’ approach for the creation of a language ‘expressive to all people’ – a language based on a unified structure that could function in a rather ‘territorial’ manner. In other words, I argue that there is a certain clash between the aims of the project and its objectives: the theoretical model of ‘unearthing’ created the

conditions for what could be a ‘major metalanguage’ that potentially excludes, rather than produces pre-cultural possibilities in performance. In comparison to Brook’s insistence on immediacy and ephemerality, this theoretical approach was rather problematically inflexible. By employing this approach in devising the performance, I argue that the group did not endorse a productive interrelation between music and language – that could take place within and during the event – suggesting a negation of intentionality in favour of a musical, yet fixed, language. In so doing, the group’s aim was clear and coherent but at the same time, I argue that the possibility of experimenting on stage was significantly framed, and by extension, limited. Now, I suggest that it is crucial to look at the ways in which the group worked during the rehearsal period, which was, indeed, as important as the actual performance.

(d) Towards the performance

The group started working on the project in Paris on the 1st of November 1970, and continued the preparation in Persepolis as they arrived in Iran three months before the performance took place. Directed mainly by Brook and Reeves, the actors were focused on workshops that involved gestural practice as a way to develop ‘their level of physical consciousness’ (Smith, 1972: 33). The group experimented with a variety of exercises that intended to develop the ‘memory’ of the body. Particularly, the performance of the actors’ mnemonic capacity through gestures was an important objective of the workshops (Smith reminds us that in the field of music this is called ‘muscular memory’). Working alongside Ted Hughes’s phonemic research, the early rehearsals also involved experimentations with a wide range of glossological patterns³³. The aim of this process was to develop ways of experiencing the Orghast-language not merely intellectually, but also bodily, through appreciating its musical overtones and physiological potential. Insisting on the importance of music, Hughes argued in an interview with Tom Stoppard in 1971 that, ‘[t]he greatest satisfactions of conversation are probably musical ones’, before highlighting that, ‘[t]his animal music is very different [...]

³³ For example, the first improvisations were conducted according to the syllables BASH/TA/HON/DO, which were proposed by the actors for their musicality and intonations. The first invented vocabulary of the group was based on these four syllables and the language was called *Bashtahondo*.

from the conventionally ‘musical’ voice’ (as cited in Smith, 1972: 46). Interestingly, as the workshops continued, Hughes removed the English translation from the Orghast texts in order for the performers to approach them as ‘a coherent body of sounds, not semantic, or actable, meanings’ (Smith, 1972: 115).

All these experimentations with language, music and their relation to the body show that the pre-performance work – both in Paris and in Persepolis – was conducted more in laboratorial conditions, rather than as a typical rehearsal process. This was an important aspect of the group’s methodology, because it provided the conditions for a synthesis between the theoretical framework and ongoing practice. Furthermore, it promoted the ephemeral element of the performance, since there was neither straightforward rehearsals of a substantive script, nor a linear preparation for the actual performance. As Smith points out, Orghast had to become a play with ‘no reality except *now*’ (ibid: 35; original emphasis).

It is worth noting that the group’s pre-performance process was based on the decomposition of linguistic and gestural patterns (i.e. Anglo-Saxon glossological phonemes and syllables) in order to create the conditions for the emergence of direct expression on stage. This process of decomposition was the group’s means to achieve a pre-cultural performance that would operate by intensity and affect. As noted above, Brook’s philosophy of theatre was always one that focused on the construction of pre-defined forms as a challenge for their deconstruction. In *The Empty Space*, he notes that,

‘[i]n the theatre, every form once born is mortal; every form must be reconceived, and its new conception will bear the marks of all the influences that surround it’ (Brook, 1990 [1968]: 19)

This movement from form to anti-form, from intentionality to contingency was at the core of the Centre’s research of a new politics of theatre. It was by virtue of this mobility, of this movement of constant deterritorialization that the notion of a transient, ‘living’ theatre was explored in the Centre – as opposed to a ‘deadly’ theatre of abstract repetition. To this end, Brook attempted to create non-referential conditions of performing. He pushed the actors to concentrate on their psychic physiology, to try and clear their minds of anything rational, as a means to

produce instinctive vibrations with their body. Thus, it becomes evident that, as in Deleuze's account of Bene's theatre, Brook's understanding of concentration follows a process of subtraction: a removal of elements that potentially becomes prosthesis rather than negation. He argues that, '[i]t is not a process of building, but of destroying obstacles that stand in the way of the latent form' (as cited in Smith, 1972: 107). He goes on to argue that it may be difficult to locate such 'obstacles', because they belong to the art of making theatre as constants. For instance, in talking about props and costumes, Brook notes that,

'as soon as an actor is given what he will wear on stage, his interpretation of the part is dictated, or at least limited. You have to deny the scenic conditions entirely to begin with' (ibid).

Therefore, the creation of a space empty of theatrical constants and codified invariants – the creation of an 'empty space' – was central to the rehearsal process of *Orghast*, in so far as it allowed for a musical and corporeal experimentation with language. In a sense, I argue that the pre-performance period was pivotal in creating the conditions for a production of theatrical anti-narratives because it allowed for continuous shifts in perceiving the relation between theory and practice. It generated constant variations within a non-linear research, which turned out to become an autonomous rehearsal process freed from its essential connection to a coherent production. In other words, I argue that the group achieved a destabilisation of the relationship between rehearsing and performing on stage, by focusing on the rehearsal process as if it were the performance itself.

Now, I would argue that it is crucial to problematise the implications of the actual performance in relation to the aims of the group. I suggest that the staging of the *Orghast*-experiment shows the extent to which the performance maintained a sense of process, as the question of pre-cultural theatre is, I argue, a question of 'becoming', rather than a static condition that can be achieved. It is a question of 'how to use' affective interruptions of what codified representation implies. This is why I believe that the most important potential of the *Orghast*-language was to produce a *glossopoeia*, as Derrida understood it in his discussions of Artaudian theatre.

(e) Glossopoeia and affective performance

As examined in chapter 2, one of the most insightful philosophical challenges to the relation between theory and theatre is that developed by Derrida in his discussion of the Artaudian theatre of cruelty. In his essay *The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation* (2001 [1978]), Derrida offers a deconstructive analysis of Western theatre and examines its failure to problematise mimetic representation. Particularly, in discussing Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double* (1958), he suggests a departure from the dominance of speech by proposing the process of *glossopoeia*: that is, a language that operates prior to linguistic articulation. It is on this process that I intend to focus in the following paragraphs, as I suggest that it provides a useful approach to the critical analysis of *Orghast*.

I would argue that the experimentation of the group could be understood as an attempt to transform onomatopoeia into glossopoeia. Before proceeding to discuss this transformation though, it is important to examine the relation between these two notions. The difference between onomatopoeia and glossopoeia is decisive as Derrida claims. In fact, he argues that what Artaud meant by mentioning onomatopoeia – that is ‘a visual and plastic materialisation of speech’ – was rather a call to the possibility of glossopoeia (Artaud, 1958: 69). Glossopoeia, as Derrida explains, should be carefully distinguished from mere invention of names or neologisms, implying that what Artaud was looking for, was a theatre that could function rather glossopoeically than onomatopoeically. He notes that, ‘[g]lossopoeia, which is neither an imitative language nor a creation of names, takes us back to the borderline of the moment when the word has not yet been born, when articulation is no longer a shout but not yet discourse, when repetition is almost impossible, and along with it, language in general’ (Derrida, 2001 [1978]: 302-3; original emphasis). Is, therefore, glossopoeia a liminal process of performance that operates between the symbolic and the pre-symbolic – not a non-performative, but a pre-performative way of expression? Derrida describes glossopoeia as ‘the shout that the articulations of language and logic have not yet entirely frozen, that is, the aspect of oppressed gesture which remains in all speech, the unique and irreplaceable movement which the generalities of concept and repetition have never finished rejecting’ (ibid: 302). Thus, Derrida describes glossopoeia as an ‘escape’ from the stratified structure of normative expression –

an escape whose manifestation becomes possible in so far as normative linguistics fail to restrain it.

What then could be called a glossopoeic performance? Perhaps, some of the sounds that an infant makes in response to his/her direct environment, certain sounds of sudden fear or joy, or even the audible dialogue during erotic intercourse. Each one of these emotional responses that function mainly through intonation and resonance could probably be described as glossopoeic performances. They are instinctive responses, they do not essentially represent an encoded meaning, but at the same time they necessarily become within the linguistic and cultural context in which their subject performs them. Thus, I argue that they could be described as ‘mis-performances’ of language, in so far as they occur somehow ‘erroneously’ and incompletely – almost in a deviant manner – in relation to linguistic normativity and representation. For example, Artaud’s de-stratified voice – his notion of speech before words – is according to Derrida such a performance of language.

Thus, I suggest that the potential of the Orghast-experiment can radicalised through the Derridean notion of glossopoeia. I suggest that, in a sense, this ‘mis-performance’ of language was what Brook and Hughes attempted to trigger on stage through their onomatopoeic research both in Paris and Persepolis. Hence, the question is: To what extent did Brook create the conditions for the emergence of a glossopoeic performance through the use of Orghast-language? Given the complexity of the inquiry, my intention here is by no means to provide a straightforward answer. There is of course the intrinsic difficulty of examining a performance that took place nearly forty years ago, through limited documentation, that makes one’s arguments perhaps necessarily conjectural. However, Brook’s insistence on the possibility of a pre-cultural theatre, as well as the wide resonance of *Orghast* amongst theoretical works on intercultural and avant-garde performance validate the question and invite further discussion. For example, Patrice Pavis (1996) refers to *Orghast* as an experimentation with the capacity of performance to communicate ‘directly on an affective, pre-rational level, fusing form and content indissolubly’ (Pavis, 1996: 69). Also, in his review in *The Times* (1971), Irving Wardle talks of ‘a work intended to awaken the prelogical faculties and conjure buried music out of the earth’ (as cited in Smith, 1972: 237).

On a more critical vein, C. D. Innes (1993), questions the efficacy of Orghast arguing that it ‘was one-sided in its appeal’, pointing at the – significantly large – uneducated parts of the audience who, according to Innes, ‘found those dark primordial cries hilariously funny’ (Innes, 1993: 140).

The extent to which the group actually achieved a pre-cultural performance is highly debatable. Indeed, the experimental nature of the performance would make it so. On one hand, the aim of the group was to raise the importance of the problematics of linguistic normativity rather than providing a clearly alternative theatrical model. On the other hand, Brook and Hughes wanted to discover a ‘lost’ process of expression. In his interview with Smith, Brook asks accordingly:

‘Do these fragments from other cultures not only suggest a different form of dramatic utterance? Do they also imply a fuller emotional range, that has somehow been lost on the way?’ (Smith, 1972: 249).

It is then precisely this potential implication that I want to discuss here, by examining the interrelation between onomatopoeia and glossopoeia.

I argue that the extent to which the process of inventing sounds (that correspond to specific significations) could create the conditions for a glossopoeic performance depends on some considerations. To begin with, I suggest that we have to examine the speculations that Brook and Hughes made when referring to ‘direct communication of emotions’. It seems to me, that in order to reach this hypothetical state of ‘directness’ – that is, a mode of engaging that bypasses the logical faculties of the self – one has to somehow eradicate the normative function of *communication* itself, in as much as it implies subjective imposition and representation. Even so, how can communication occur directly – i.e as a non-referential operation? Isn’t this operation an equivalent to non-communication? Following Lyotard, to create non-cognitive conditions of engaging art is to remove the intentionality of *conceptual* communication together with its universalistic nature (Lyotard, 1984). Lyotard argues that the universality of the ‘concept’ and the function of conceptual communication should be rejected within every plateau of artistic engagement. As Shaviro observes, Lyotard finds an intersection between Kantian thought and Adorno’s approach to art in relation to this issue. He notes that, ‘[a]ccording to Lyotard, Kant and Adorno share ‘a thinking about art which is not a thinking of non-communication but of non-conceptual communication’

(Shaviro, 2002: 15). Considered as such, direct communication is not an act of negating communication, but rather a process of destabilising the transmission of a presumed concept that is manifested as transcendence. Is there a difference, therefore, between direct communication and non-conceptual communication? Whereas the former affirms the potential implications of a ‘fuller emotional range’ (as Brook argues), the latter challenges the function of a concept by negating its fixed value (as Lyotard believes). In a sense, they are ‘two sides of the same coin’ in so far as they aim for less representability in the discursive act. Direct communication of emotions can be considered, then, as the affirmative ‘alter ego’ of non-conceptual communication.

It seems to me however, that in the context of *Orghast*, the relation between the theoretical model of ‘unearthing’ and the group’s understanding of direct communication complicates the discussion a little more. In seeking to ‘unearth’ the musicality of language, Brook and Hughes were trying to generate the conditions of ‘direct communication’ by drawing theoretically on human nature; they implied a type of ‘unified being’ (i.e. the animal nature of humans) that could potentially frame the theoretical scope of the performance. As I discussed above, they were looking for a language that unifies, or as Hughes notes, ‘[for] a language belonging below the levels where differences appear’ (as cited in Smith, 1972: 45). I argue, then, that in *Orghast*, the group conceived a language that would negate the universality of concept, while simultaneously affirming the universality of an animal mode of expression. Considered as such, the *Orghast*-language can be understood as a language whose function was to normalise differences – a language that can be ‘expressive to all people’, as Hughes insists (*ibid*).

If what normalises this language, if what makes this language ‘expressive to all people’, is its mode (i.e. its narrativity and intonations) and not an encoded concept, then the question is how does this mode operate in the first place. In many parts of his book about the performance, Smith relates the theoretical framework of Brook and Hughes to Levi-Strauss’s discussion of myths and music. Smith explains that, the *Orghast*-language – being a hybridisation of music and mythology – was meant to function *unconsciously* through its mode; and that is because, as Levi-Strauss notes, ‘[myths and music] operate in men’s minds without their being aware of the fact’ (Levi-Strauss, 1969: 12). Following Levi-

Strauss, Smith claims that myths and music contain irrational narratives because they are inescapable continuums that exceed historical changes, cultural contradictions and differences, communicating meanings unconsciously through their mode. Smith states, accordingly, that, ‘myths [...] define our unfreedom, obliterate linear time and history and substitute cyclical time, allowing no change’ (Smith, 1972: 118).

In contrast to Smith’s analysis, I argue that the non-representational potentials of the Orghast-experiment can be found in theoretical discourses that challenge a trans-historical mode of engaging with art and language; suggesting non-transcendental practices of interaction and receptivity. Rather than understanding myths and music as continuums that exist and function unconsciously through their structures, I suggest that they *become consciously* through constant cultural negotiation and difference. In other words, I argue that myths and music are *conscious becomings* – both culturally and historically specific. Is, therefore, glossopoeia – or what Brook and Hughes termed as ‘direct communication of emotions’ – an unconscious discourse? Interestingly, Artaud compared this de-stratified function of language to the language of dreams, but not to the Freudian conception of dreams as surrogates of suppressed desires rooted in libido – in the unconscious id. Because, according to Artaud, ‘to believe that dreams themselves have only a substitute function, is to diminish the profound poetic bearing of dreams as well as of the theatre’ (Artaud, 1958: 92). Commenting on this, Derrida states that, ‘Artaud wants to return their dignity to dreams and to make of them something more original, more free, more affirmative than an activity of displacement’ (Derrida, 2001 [1978]: 306).

Thus, in contradistinction to Smith, I argue that the appearance of differences or changes does not imply a rational or normative way of engaging with art, in so far as difference and change are understood as productive relations and not as negative separations. In a sense, I would argue that being conscious is not essentially being rational. I suggest, therefore, that if communication is achieved through unconscious patterns of expression, then it becomes a representation of trans-temporal significations (or as Levi-Strauss would say, of floating significations) that are created outside of the event in question. By corresponding to unconscious codifications of meaning, communication becomes a

transcendental transmission of ‘messages’ to be conveyed. I suggest therefore that the pre-cultural potential of *Orghast* is not a question of unconscious communication, but a question of becoming-affective within the ‘here and now’ of the performance; that is, a question of affective creation.

Indeed, I believe that the Deleuzian notion of *affect* is a very useful theoretical tool for examining *Orghast*’s experimentation with theatrical communication. The difference between affect and conceptual (or even unconscious) communication is decisive. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari write:

‘*L*’ *affect* (Spinoza’s *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act. *L*’ *affection* (Spinoza’s *affectio*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body [...]’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 [1987]: xvii, original emphasis).

Importantly, this prepersonal state corresponds neither to a transpersonal (as Jung would argue), nor to an unconscious plane of the self. In a sense, I argue that the notion of affect is a tool that suggests a *conscious and non-conceptual communication*. In contrast to Hughes’s idea of ‘unearthing’ and Levi-Strauss’s account on myths and music – that rely on a subliminal understanding of physiological existence – the notion of affect proposes an interface of intensities and forces that operate not exclusively within a subject, but also in between subjects. Thus, following the *Orghast*-experiment, I suggest that the process of onomatopoeia can trigger a glossopoeic performance in so far as it becomes *affective*; that is, in so far as it actualises affective potentials, rather than becoming a medium of a direct communication that transmits subliminal or transcendental significations by separating them from the very process of their transmission. I argue that the notion of ‘unearthing’ and the discourse about the unconscious levels of communication do not push the critique of the transcendental aspect of conceptual communication far enough.

Thus, to sum up, I argue that the purpose of the group’s process-based work in decomposing glossological patterns was not partly materialised. While Brook wanted to present a live performance that could interrupt and challenge linguistic normativity and mimetic representation, the staging conditions and the biological

theorisation of *Orghast* seem to have subjected this potential to an one-directional pursuit of a pre-cultural event. In other words, I argue that the group's absolute and teleological focus on achieving a direct, pre-symbolic performance by provoking the 'death' of conceptual communication somehow limited the conditions of possibility for glossopoeia's emergence as a process (as a becoming) during the performance. I suggest that glossopoeia emerges in the form of an *interruption* of linguistic normativity rather than as a hegemonic and teleological mode of communication. This is indeed one of the most radical possibilities of theatre. As Ridout notes, 'theatre can be a way of interrupting communication, and re-conquering its function as a means of social gathering – a communal function even' (Ridout, 2008: 227). I argue that by moving towards this communal or 're-ligious' potential of theatre that Ridout identifies, glossopoeia should be considered as a movement, as a 'line of escape', as a constant 'turning away' from conceptual communication. Particularly in *Orghast*, I argue that glossopoeia could be understood as the emergent interrelation between musical expressivity and onomatopoeic neologisms. This is the reason why I argue that there should not be a clear distinction between the laboratorial process of the pre-performance period and the actual performance. In fact, I suggest that the actual performance could have been an extension of its rehearsal, since *Orghast's* aim was on one hand to experiment, and on the other hand to break down the barriers of linear rehearsing. Is this extension possible? If yes, then I suggest that we need to rethink the function of theatre as an incomplete process that *performs* research, and not as an aesthetically polished product of textual representations.

(f) The glossopoeic body: 'mis-performing' critique

As a way to conclude the discussion about the resonance of the Orghast-experiment, and while keeping with the arguments described in the previous sections, I would like to give a brief account of the way in which the glossopoeic body could perform critique. Before doing so, it is worth noting that the Orghast performance can be understood as an experimental harbinger of the postdramatic paradigm, as it attempted to actualise the subordination of the 'sign' in favour of a non-representational critical process.

I argue that the glossopoeic body can be described as an incomplete multiplicity (rather than a singularity) that functions through intensity and transgression. This incompleteness derives from the body's confrontation with normativity, to the extent that the latter endorses an idea of corporeal finitude and perfection. It is also precisely in its incomplete condition that the body's transgressive potentiality lies, since an incomplete body wields the power to be radically multiplied. The glossopoeic body is a body that affects the performance and is affected by the performance. As such, it functions as a multiplicity in so far as it negates on one hand any hierarchical condition of being, and on the other in as much as it resists the normative individualism of performing. Thus, the glossopoeic body embraces the Artaudian 'expression in space' by transgressing the boundaries that separate the space from the body. It embodies the space within it, and it is embodied in the space that demarcates the subjects that affect or become affected. Therefore, the glossopoeic bodies fade out the limits between corporeality and spatiality in as much as they intermingle with space and with one another. In other words, paraphrasing Artaud, the glossopoeic body '*expands in space*' in order to affect and to be affected. I argue that, understanding the body an incomplete and transgressive multiplicity, suggests understanding space as existent within the body, and of the body as immanent in space. In fact, the glossopoeic body is partly what Bakhtin terms as a *grotesque body*. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin notes that it,

'is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world [...] The unfinished and open body [...] is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects'(Bakhtin, 1984 [1968]: 26-7).

In Bakhtinian terms, the pre-cultural potential of *Orghast* would probably depend on its capacity to create a sensation of 'carnival'; that is, a space in which a body 'collides' with another through a 'loss' of subjectivity. Within a carnival, the importance of subjectivity is subordinated, and it is in a similar way that the glossopoeic body creates the conditions of possibility for a 'becoming of the

between’, and not for a becoming-complete subject. The glossopoeic body is a body that cannot be normalised either as a subject or an object.

Alongside this Bakhtinian understanding of corporeality I argue, therefore, that bodies that find interruptions within a performance, in which they interact glossopoeically, expand in space in order to reach other bodies. The subjection of normative speech and conceptual communication, the subordination of transcendental and absent meanings activates a transgressive body – a body that extends its outputs in order to affect and to be affected. The glossopoeic body is a body that strives to become meaningful, however never attains a final meaning; and it is this lack of finality in the entirety of the performative act, as well as its becoming that makes this body creatively ‘dysfunctional’ in standardised performance settings. Indeed, this negation of finality also suggests its imperfection not only in terms of the discursive act, but also in regards to the body’s movements in space. The glossopoeic body, like the grotesque body, performs outside of geometrical unities, beyond normative conceptualisations of spatiality, e.g. Aristotelian theatrical unities. It inevitably ‘mis-performs’, and it is by virtue of this ‘mis-performance’ that glossopoeia disrupts normativity and destabilises orthodox movement. It is a diminutive body, yet its potential augmentation transgresses the conventional models of perfectionist expression. It ‘mis-performs’, it ‘mis-behaves’ in relation to what conformist models of communication define as a perfect or final performative act. In this sense, it attains a constant incompleteness of its own possibility, and that is why it is a becoming body of presence: a body of living metaphysics, as Derrida would claim. Its incomplete condition allows the body to become multiple, to become other, to become animal, to become one with space. It is then by virtue of these liminal moments or interruptions that the glossopoeic body reaches its potential in performance.

Conclusion

The challenge of pre-cultural expression was one of Brook’s most revolutionary contributions to the increasingly politicised theatre of the 1970s. Many theatre scholars questioned the extent to which a pre-cultural theatre can be put into practice, let alone justified. Others, like Patrice Pavis, claim that Brook’s challenge

was an *ultracultural* one, since it ‘involves an often mythic quest for the origins and the supposed lost purity of the theatre’ (Pavis, 1996: 6). From whichever perspective one chooses to approach Brook’s theatre, one cannot fail to consider his theatrical project as a process of research on the problematic expansions of cultural normativity. This research, alongside with Grotowski’s ‘Theatre Laboratory’, influenced a large part of British directors: Peter Hall, Trevor Nunn, Deborah Warner, Simon McBurney amongst others.

In this chapter I attempted to trace and critically examine Brook’s pursuit of what he terms a ‘holy theatre’. In doing so, I considered the extent to which Brook created the conditions for this metaphysical notion of performance to be staged, rather than symbolised. Particularly, in the first section, I contextualised Brook’s teatrology by discussing the resonance of his work *The Empty Space* within theatre theory and practice. Focusing on Brook’s approach to both describing and devising theatre, I argued that his combination of a holy and a rough theatre should be understood as a search for experiencing magic not as a metaphor, but as a substantial encounter with metaphysics on stage. Further, in the second section of the chapter, I drew on Derrida’s critique of mimetic representation, on Adorno’s understanding of musicality and also on Deleuzian ‘affective’ ontology as a means to discuss the potentiality of the *Orghast* performance. It is, I suggest, by virtue of this theoretical fusion that the question of a non-representational, transient performance can be explored thoroughly. It is, furthermore, not a coincidence that this intellectual blending becomes much more effective when it runs alongside Artaudian thinking – since, indeed, *Orghast*’s potentiality lies in what Artaud calls ‘spectacle acting not as reflection but as force’ (Artaud, 1970: 297). I attempted to show that Brook’s proposal to devise a non-symbolic play that embodies meaning by creating it at the very moment of its performance was a very interesting, yet not an unproblematic one. I argued that the extent to which the *Orghast* language could produce a pre-cultural event is not a biological question of unconscious expression, but a question of affective interruptions and corporeal transgression. Problematizing ways of decomposing intentional expression and normative language in theatre remains explicitly important and complicated. However, despite their complex oscillation between theory and practice (and perhaps a certain utopianism) I believe that, Brook and Hughes managed to raise

the problematics of linguistic normativity and mimetic representation within Western theatre, especially at a time when the authority of the dramatic text and the apolitical conformism of linear performances were under serious scrutiny. My intention in this section was to examine and challenge the International Centre's theoretical frameworks, to capture the methods of their practice and raise some issues that, in my view, required further analysis. In the end, I argue that the experimental nature of *Orghast* can be found less in the performance itself, and more in Brook's 'need' to examine pre-cultural expression from a biological to a metaphysical perspective. As he highlights in *The Empty Space*, 'if the need for a true contact with a sacred invisibility through the theatre still exists, then all possible vehicles must be re-examined' (Brook, 1990 [1968]: 54).

Chapter 5

Promenading in fragments: the case of Punchdrunk

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I. Introduction: Lehmann and the postdramatic turn

‘Theatre is no longer a mass medium. To deny this becomes increasingly ridiculous, to reflect on it increasingly urgent’ (Lehmann, 2006 [1999]: 16).

What has theatre become in the turn of the 21st century? To speak about a general framework of contemporary theatre practices could be problematic since we lack the time and distance required for a comprehensive reflection. On the other hand, to disregard the need for critical responses to the ongoing development of theatre and performance is to ignore the importance of a distinctive level of art practices that operate for and within what we call ‘the

political'. In what follows, I want to shortly elaborate on the 'postdramatic paradigm' in theatre as conceptualised by Hans-Thies Lehmann in his 1999 (2006) work *Postdramatic Theatre*. In doing so, I want to offer a broad and critical prologue of my case study on the London-based theatre collective Punchdrunk and their immersive approach to performance.

To understand the turn to a 'postdramatic' approach to theatre making, one has to look at the changing conditions that made it possible. The most important of these shifts in theatre history is surely the gradual separation between theatre and drama. Indeed, this separation is one of the most crucial developments in the history of modern theatre; not only because it changed the ways of devising and practicing theatre, but also because it produced new possibilities of thinking about performance whilst relating it to ongoing theoretical discourses. Implicit in this separation is a departure from the interchangeable use of these two terms (drama and theatre) as abstract designations of performance. What is their difference though? If we have to theorise a 'postdramatic' notion of theatre, we already assume a distinction between drama and theatre that made this break possible. In short, for clarity's sake, I consider drama as an art form that can be defined by its focus and dependency on literary texts and their staging potentials. On the other hand, what I conceive as theatre is an act of performing which focuses on the spatio-temporal actuality of the 'here and now'. Probably this seemingly subtle difference is not enough to justify a clash between drama and theatre – in any case, their historical coexistence is in itself a verification of a valid and congruent relationship. However, I suggest that it is important to map out the conflictual dynamics of this relationship as a means not only to dissociate theatre from drama, but also to understand the new questions that performance has faced during the turn to 21st century.

To trace the signs of this historical shift we have to look back at least as far as at the beginning of the 20th century, as the decline of the elements that comprised the established forms of dramatic theatre became apparent. This period, or as Lehmann calls it, this 'crisis of drama' had begun in 1880 (Lehmann, 2006 [1999]). It was roughly around this time that the predominance of dramatic literature was modestly being questioned within theatrical environments. In *Postdramatic Theatre*, Lehmann writes:

‘What is being shaken during this crisis and subsequently declines is a series of previously unquestioned constituents of drama: the textual form of a dialogue charged with suspense and pregnant with decisions; the subject whose reality can essentially be expressed in interpersonal speech; the action that unfolds primarily in an absolute present’ (Lehmann, 2006 [1999]: 49).

For example, Edward Gordon Craig was among the first directors to challenge the compatibility of theatre and drama, proclaiming in the ‘First Dialogue’ of *The Art of Theatre* (2009 [1911]) that Shakespearean texts should not be staged at all. In fact, in an attempt to explain his own staging of *Hamlet* (which according to Craig was a failure), Craig claimed that it was the only way to prove his argument (namely that *Hamlet* cannot be performed). Later on in the 20th century, Pirandello’s breakthrough theatre (that can be considered as the harbinger of absurdist theatre), Gertrude Stein’s idea of ‘landscape plays’ and Artaud’s ‘theatre of cruelty’ can all be understood as radical attempts to deconstruct the ‘grand’ textual form and the temporal absoluteness of dramatic theatre. Theatre was in the midst of a groundbreaking transformation; the shifting conditions of performance began to profoundly renegotiate the dramatic narrative and the spatio-temporal linearity of theatrical representation.

Importantly, the critical objections to textual sovereignty within theatre were directed not only at the dramatic theatrical models per se, but were equally skeptical towards the repercussions that these models were promoting on stage. As Lehmann notes, “[d]rama’ is not just an aesthetic model but carries with it essential epistemological and social implications’ (Lehmann, 2006 [1999]: 48). I would also add that these implications became socio-ontological in so far as they suggested particular forms of existing socially, and provided specific cultural ‘tools’ that interpret the social and political reality. Two of the most notable associations of dramatic theatre are on the one hand the supremacy of the performative ‘hero’ – the sovereign subject of theatre; and, on the other hand, the representation of ‘grand narratives’ (of a world) through language. In other words, the sociocultural structure of dramatic theatre was driven first by a will to focus on representing an unchanging image of the ‘individual’, and secondly by a tendency to communicate sociopolitical concepts through abstracting and generalising the specificities of minimal action on stage. In a sense, then, dramatic theatre can be understood as a

medium that, even though operating at and for the present, was largely dependent upon a continuous non-present, upon a symbolic temporal dimension (or an ‘absolute present’ as Lehmann calls it) that constantly required a special decoding of meanings.

The postdramatic shift became possible due to certain changing conditions within artistic mediums and frameworks. One of the most important landmarks was the emergence of cinema, which produced new discourses and generated an immense experimentation within theatre. As Lehmann puts it, ‘[u]nder the impression of new media, the old ones become *self-reflexive*’ (ibid: 51; original emphasis). Theatre began to renegotiate its own conditions of becoming, and this process pushed it further away from the dramatic elements that used to confine it. The autonomisation of theatrical layers, which became possible as directors and theatre theorists stressed the importance of artistic decomposition, brought about a new theatrical ‘avant-gardism’ that shed light to the micro-cosmos of the *mise en scene* (audience, space, lights and so on). At the same time, the productively indeterminate concepts of theatricality and performativity were challenging the boundaries of pictorial representation within art contexts, blurring the boundaries between ‘art’ and ‘life’. In post-World War II Europe the plays of Beckett, Brecht, Ionesco and Sartre began to change the mode of perceiving theatre, redefining the role of dramatic texts in performance. At the same time, in the United States, John Cage, Merce Cunningham and Allan Kaprow were exploring alternatives to linear performance narratives. During the 1960s, the ‘theatre of the absurd’ became extremely popular within – mainly academic – discourses of performance and its links with *existentialism* promoted the articulation of a strong critical attitude towards the uniformity and immobility of meaning in dramatic theatre. New forms of theatre emerged, such as environmental theatre (Richard Schechner), documentary theatre and the Happenings, all of them highlighting the importance of space (site-specificity), as well as the possibilities of the ‘unexpected’ in audience participation.

Thus, the essential unity between text and stage began to fade. Theatre was moving away from the dramatic text not only in order to abandon the latter’s restrictions, but also in order to create the conditions for a freer fusion of all the available theatrical elements. The text was subordinated not in order to be

discarded, but to become, in a sense, ‘minorised’; that is, the text obtained the possibility to be used differently, beyond its linguistic and cognitive value. Hence, a more open-ended relation between what is written and what could be performed came into view. Lehmann offers a theorisation of this emerging theatre – a description of the ‘postdramatic paradigm’:

‘The aim is no longer the wholeness of an aesthetic theatre composition of words, meaning, sound, gesture, etc., which as a holistic construct offers itself to perception. Instead the theatre takes on a fragmentary and partial character. It renounces the long-incontestable criteria of unity and synthesis and abandons itself to the chance (and risk) of trusting individual impulses, fragments and microstructures of texts in order to become a new kind of practice. In the process it discovers a new continent of performance, a new kind of ‘presence’ of the ‘performers’ (into which the ‘actors’ have mutated) and establishes a multifarious theatre landscape beyond forms focused on drama’ (ibid: 56-7).

I argue that the ‘postdramatic paradigm’ is pivotal in the attempt to conceptualise a notion of political critique that operates beyond dialogical and narrative modes of theatricality. The process of abandoning unified forms of dialogue in performance – i.e. teleological dramatic discourses – while seeking to create a less stratified theatre is indeed a complicated one, and it could even be seen as a de-democratisation of theatre. To explore this point further, one can note that the structural function of theatre (from Greek tragedies to the present) has always been about producing an ‘embodied’ idea of democracy and political representation through the ‘art’ of dialogical exchange. The fixed linguistic model of questioning and answering, or even the rhetorical mode of inquiring into universal and particular social realities was considered to be the only egalitarian way of devising theatre, and by extension, of promoting the ‘democratic ideal’. Therefore, the question of what happens to theatrical critique when the dominance of dialogue and representation in performance is renounced is, vitally, a politically ‘unsafe’ question that can, however, potentially enrich our understanding of critical practice in general. This is one of the main reasons why the development of postdramatic theatre offers a very useful area of analysis for this thesis.

The proponents of the postdramatic shift in theatre attempted to deconstruct narrativity and dialogue to the extent that these forms of engagement with audiences were suggesting complete, unified and teleological outcomes – either ideological, moral, political and so on. Fragmentary and incomplete discourses, as well as the theatrical force of bodily affections became a more ‘adequate’ and radical medium to approach theatrical expression and political action. In dramatic terms, the unity of time, place and plot, as well as the transmission of self-identical meanings in the act of performing were under serious scrutiny in favour of a theatre that was affirming ‘less intentionality – a characteristic of the subject – than its failure, less conscious will than desire, less the ‘I’ than the ‘subject of the unconscious’” (ibid: 18). At the same time, these fragmentary forms of theatrical engagement were being conducted within a positive or productive plateau of thinking and doing; that is, they were seeking to create an inclusive spectrum of possibilities beyond the negativity and ‘impossibility’ of the modern avant-garde. In this sense, these postdramatic discourses gave new dimensions to the practice of critique since rather than being based exclusively on language, they were operating through affirming a wide range of intensities, i.e. the bodily responses of actors and spectators, the experiencing of plot discontinuity and absurdity, the articulation of the entire *mise en scène* (space, light, atmosphere, new media etc.) as a site-and time-specific event and so on. The postdramatic shift was, therefore, a change in the mode of devising and experiencing a performance that attempted to subtract the rigid elements of dramatic theatre, in order to release their full potentials – in order to connect them to the *mise en scène* of the *event*. I suggest that from a postdramatic perspective, the practice of critique in theatre can be understood not as a judgmental process that rests in representing sociopolitical conflicts or facts, but as a truly creative and positive operation that produces the *conditions* for dissident voices to emerge. In postdramatic theatre, critique ceases to be one of the principal aims of the performance, and whereas this seems to be a rather apolitical turn, I argue that by contrast it is a micropolitical one. A postdramatic performance attempts to actualise politics within a theatrical event by considering critique as the ‘fire’ that drives the play’s potential engagement with the audience.

In what follows, I will focus on the work of Punchdrunk – a theatre collective based in London that has created site-specific and promenade performances since 2000. Partly in keeping with the elements that comprise the postdramatic condition in theatre, I intend to discuss the philosophy and practice of Punchdrunk approaching them as a theatrical group that belongs to the wider postdramatic realm by means of what they propose, rather than by strictly following a postdramatic trend or movement.

Methodological points

The purpose of this chapter is to capture the possibilities of critique that have developed within the recent emergence of what has been called ‘immersive theatre’, by looking at the performance practice of the Punchdrunk collective. I will argue that contemporary/postdramatic theatre has been largely reshaped by the ‘plastic’ notion of immersion, and this chapter attempts to draw out both the conditions and the potentials of this reshaping. It is not my intention to provide a theorisation of ‘immersive theatre’, although I aim to frame this approach under a specific contextualisation and theoretical scholarship. Hoping that my argumentation will not be interpreted as an attempt to theorise a personally aspired notion of performance (as this is not my intention either), I offer a critical analysis of a theatre that cries out for theoretical articulation while simultaneously distancing itself from academic scholarship.

For the implementation of this chapter I have collected qualitative data that has complemented my archive research (newspaper articles, interviews and journal articles) on Punchdrunk to a significant extent. Maintaining the case-study approach of the thesis, I used two forms of qualitative methods to gather this data: that is, participant observation and in-depth interviews. Working as a volunteer in the construction of the site for the Punchdrunk show ‘The Duchess of Malfi’ (2010), I was able to observe and become involved in the complex process of designing the performance which took place in a huge vacant space in East London. Most importantly, through witnessing two of the rehearsals that took place on-site, and through experiencing the actual performance, I am able to articulate a richer idea of Punchdrunk’s work than the one I had in my first

encounter (as a spectator) with the group in ‘The Masque of the Red Death’ (2008). My intention in being involved in the designing process of the performance was neither to ‘solve’ the philosophical ‘puzzle’ of Punchdrunk, nor to discover a supposedly ‘magical secret’ of their immersive approach to theatre. Rather, I was interested in observing – while being an active part of it – the ‘becoming’ of a Punchdrunk performance, as a means of finding the appropriate ways in which I could critically discuss and thoroughly examine Punchdrunk theatre in relation to my thesis. Thus, in what follows, I offer an analysis of Punchdrunk theatre by placing my archive research, my observation notes and a – mostly Deleuzian – theoretical framework under discussion. This is complemented and enriched by the data collected from two extensive interviews with Maxine Doyle (associate director and choreographer), and Colin Marsh (strategic associate).

II. What do Punchdrunk do?

Punchdrunk was founded by Felix Barrett in 1999. Since then, the company has created numerous productions that range from radical adaptations of classic plays to contemporary performances and installations. From Shakespearean tales and Webster’s tragic elements to Chekhov’s seriocomic mystery and Poe’s gothic atmospheres, Punchdrunk has been focusing on staging ‘immersive’ – mostly neo-Victorian – performances, rather than devising ‘conventionally’ perceived theatre. As a Guardian 2009 editorial observes, ‘Punchdrunk is a theatre company that stages experiences, not plays’ (‘In praise of ... Punchdrunk’, 2009: para. 1). It is indeed this element of immersion that distinguishes Punchdrunk’s theatrical project more than anything else; but, at the same time, it is this element that often makes a spectator, a critic or a researcher obtain an ambiguous or obscure idea of what this group is actually offering to the British theatre world. For instance, Josephine Machon (2007) opens her paper on Punchdrunk by highlighting the apparent impossibility of articulating an analytical response to the company’s work through language. In a similar vein, Gareth White introduces his discussion of Punchdrunk’s ‘masked spectator’ arguing that, ‘Punchdrunk takes a *peculiar* approach to the problem of audience participation, and offers their audiences *strange* encounters with their work’ (White, 2009: 219; my emphasis). What is then so strange and ineffable about Punchdrunk theatre?

Punchdrunk occupy large industrial spaces such as warehouses, art centres and abandoned buildings to present their – fundamentally – site-specific work. In staging their performances, the group often uses the entire space of a building, which the spectators are invited to explore by wandering around its halls, rooms and corridors. With a certain traditionally perceived ‘theatrical irony’, Punchdrunk instruct their *audiences* – and not the performers – to wear masks while promenading the performance space. While the action evolves around them, the masked spectators are progressively left isolated and disoriented, becoming free to choose whether they will follow specific performers, explore rooms that have been transformed into performative spaces, ‘go with the flow’, or draw their personal mapping of the space and experience it at their own pace. In each case, what initially characterises the audience’s presence in a Punchdrunk performance is, firstly, an invitation to constant movement – that is encouraged by the performers and the set itself – and, secondly, a pursuit for an encounter with something or someone that will either enhance the spectators’ agential possibilities, their potential ‘specta(c)torship’, or reconfirm their comfort as distanced theatre-goers. What the audience foremost experiences in a Punchdrunk production is an interesting and mysterious theatrical promenade: a promenade performance.

Punchdrunk is an important part of contemporary ensemble theatre. The company shares many features and attributes with other theatre groups that have flourished during the first decade of the 21st century. The site-specific narratives, the advanced use of digital technologies (or, in the case of Punchdrunk, the influence of new media, cinema and video games in creating detailed immersive environments), the focus on empowering and enabling the audience’s agential possibilities with less and less instruction and the dream-like atmospheres are all elements that most contemporary ensemble theatres have in common. Most importantly, as Paige McGinley argues in her 2010 article ‘A New Generation of Ensemble Performance’, many of these companies have ‘similar approaches to storytelling and employ dramaturgical structures that hinge on networked spatiality, rather than on linear teleology’ (McGinley, 2010: 12). McGinley highlights the significance of the pre-performance periods for many ensemble works that, ‘[o]ften by necessity and often by design’ become long processes of test and experimentation (ibid). Indeed, Punchdrunk’s plays are designed, rehearsed

and prepared for quite a long time before the actual performances take place. But also in terms of organisation, Punchdrunk share a similar principle of structure with many other ensemble theatre companies. While one can easily observe a very collaborative process at work during the rehearsals, and an ‘emancipatory’ feeling of working with a ‘collective’ (rather than with a company), the management and leadership of the group are both structurally firm and very professional. This sense of hierarchy (that could partly be a result of a relatively insecure funding, as in the case of almost all ensemble companies), albeit in a non-traditional expression, and its frequent interchange with the radicalism and experimentation of a theatre collective was a very interesting experience that I encountered during my work with the group.

One of the most interesting achievements of Punchdrunk is their capacity to engage audiences that would not essentially choose to include theatre and performance art in their social activities. Punchdrunk, as well as other theatre companies similar in scope (e.g. Shunt, *Angels in the Architecture*) transform the spaces they inhabit into ‘bizarre’, though immensely inviting, sites for social interaction and discovery. There is something about this process that makes the theatrical experience more tangible and thus more accessible; especially for young audiences whose perception of the ‘theatrical’ has been shaped within a multiplicity of artistic representations that do not essentially stem from the traditional theatrical ‘stage’. As Andy Field wrote in the *Guardian*, ‘[t]here are echoes of the nightclub, the theme park, the house party, the festival – social environments more familiar to many than the traditional theatre’ (Field, 2009: para. 6).

Furthermore, this kind of avant-garde theatre groups seems to occupy an increasingly accepted position within British theatre. They blur the boundaries between artistic contexts and forms that were previously unfamiliar with each other: theatre and dance, cinema and performance, art installations and acting, are only some of the creative intersections that these groups embrace. Lyn Gardner argues in her review of Punchdrunk’s ‘Tunnel 228’ that,

‘[w]e are living through an extraordinary era in British theatre. The stage, the gallery, the dance floor and even social gaming are all edging closer to each other, creating meeting points where sparks fly’ (Gardner, 2009: para. 1).

Gardner captures an important momentum in British theatre; it is one that opens up the political scope of performance, while unavoidably yielding questions of theatrical proximity and interactivity. I argue that this creative intersection that Gardner observes played a significant role on one hand in questioning and challenging interactive theatre; and on the other hand, it redefined theatrical experience paving the way for what is called ‘immersive theatre’.

An ‘immersive’ theatre?

Punchdrunk’s theatrical project creates the conditions for the emergence of interactive experiences between performers and spectators. The group’s productions encourage proximity and direct contact as a means to achieve interactive performances. As a result, the promenade of the audience frequently affects, or is affected by the action that progresses within the space. The Punchdrunk performers invite contact, on a somatic, cognitive, spatial or psychological level, and in doing so, they challenge the spectators as much as the spectators challenge the performance itself. From this perspective, the *mise en scènes* of Punchdrunk can be understood as ephemeral landscapes that are produced by the co-existence of, and the interaction between performers and spectators within a performative space – that is, a space that functions as a huge installation, or as an assemblage of tiny ones.

Indeed, the resonance of the transformed space, as well as of the entire *mise en scene* that Punchdrunk create, is pivotal in conceiving the group’s performances beyond the reproduction of the performer-spectator binary in a merely ‘unmarked’ style. Gardner suggests that, ‘the fascinating thing about this immersive theatre experience is its duality – something in the way it works allows you to be both spectator and participant simultaneously’ (Gardner, 2007; para. 2). Without disagreeing with Gardner here, I argue that, at the same time, it is precisely this duality that Punchdrunk attempt to first destabilise, and secondly expose, by creating the conditions for a theatrical experience that becomes through immersion. In other words, in so far as the group’s performances become immersive, there is no clear identity position that a spectator (and even a performer) can occupy or perform. In this sense, the roles of ‘spectator’ and

‘performer’ become less important, precisely because everything (i.e. the set, the space, the smell, the sounds etc.) within the performative space becomes equally important. One of the most important memories of my experience, both in *The Masque of the Red Death* (2008) and in *The Duchess of Malfi* (2010), was a displacing sensation of feeling neither as a spectator nor as a performer; not even as a combination of the two. There was something in the way in which the performance was structured that made these roles seem less relevant, and thus less available to me. There was something creative and productive in my incapacity to understand and follow a specific way in which I could ‘be’ within the space. I was, in a sense, *immersed* in the play. I would argue then that to be immersed is to let one’s subjectivity be destabilised, and by extension transformed into new agential possibilities that are produced from ‘losing’ rather than ‘finding’ oneself. From this aspect, immersion can be understood as a ‘becoming-other’ potentiality. In a Guardian article, Matt Trueman manages to capture this potentiality:

‘Not content with watching, I wanted to feel [the performance’s] force, its warmth, its wetness. That desire to *experience more fully* is at the heart of immersive theatre, which can place us in situations that we are unlikely to encounter in our everyday lives, rather than merely placing them before us. It can treat us to the experiences of someone else’s lifetime’ (Trueman, 2010: para. 2; my emphasis).

Trueman’s account is an endeavour to find articulation for these non-verbal qualities of contemporary British theatre that affirm experiences beyond the dialogical exchange between theatrical subjects. It is through the process of immersion in the entire *mise en scène* that Punchdrunk create possibilities for a new form of theatrical engagement. Interestingly, as Trueman seems to imply, this immersive experience becomes possible through a positive sense of displacement – a productive sensation of ‘losing oneself’ and experiencing the event through the eyes of another. In reviewing *The Masque of the Red Death* (2008), Judith Mackrell witnesses a very similar emotional response. She writes:

‘What I found thrilling was the feeling I’d been cast adrift in someone else’s dream, or even a film, and that I was gradually becoming a character in it’ (Mackrell, 2008: para. 2).

Thus, in looking at Punchdrunk's project, one can observe and justify a wide shift in framing and shaping the processes of interactive theatre during the 2000s. This challenging shift became possible in direct relation to past discourses of performance: If the 70s were a turning point from 'observing to communal participation', if the 80s were an era of live performance and shocking effects, and if the 90s reinforced the postdramatic stream within interactive performances, then the 00s were the period of *immersive theatrical experiences*. What is unique about this latter period, of which Punchdrunk is an integral part, is that never before had theatrical groups and directors experimented so widely with the concepts of interactivity, proximity and with what we might ambitiously call a 'total' experience. The 'fruits' of this experimentation led to a gradual dismissal of interactivity and dialogue as ends in themselves – as the ultimate aims of theatrical performance. The 'political' question of performance was no longer concerned only with the way that dialogical exchanges could be achieved; but also with the conditions under which these exchanges can emerge, with the ways in which they can be decomposed, and most importantly with the 'minor' experiences that every constituent element of a performance could offer. From this perspective, the obscure and vague concept of immersion offered new possibilities to the politics of performance – it paved the way for a new conception of performative presence that transgressed the boundaries of unified narrative and linear interactivity. It produced the conditions of a presence that is not a product of external impulses and subjectivities, but of intensities that become possible through the spectators' and performers' submergence into the performance. This quality of immersion is well portrayed by Vanhoutte and Wynants (2010) in *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*:

'Distinct from the two-dimensional linear perspective of the viewer looking at an image in drawing, painting, and photography, the immersive perspective enables the viewer to see from within the image' (Vanhoutte & Wynants, 2010: 47).

If we think of this point in relation to theatre, we could metaphorically argue that interactive theatre has moved from the point of discussing how to paint the image 'together', to the point of co-existing in the same image whilst painting it at the same time. Thus, viewed from this analogy, the 'immersive turn' was a turn to

experience as emancipated from transcendence. It destabilised the separation inherent within theatrical conditions that used to define a performance, by shifting the mode of perceiving from the exterior towards a mode of experiencing from within the event.

In the following sections I introduce some key points of Punchdrunk theatre that will provide useful insights for discussing its critical possibilities. In focusing on the ways in which Punchdrunk work, I want to describe the elements that compose their performances with a view to raising some critical points in relation to their practice.

III. Punchdrunk's theatrical elements

From the beginnings of Punchdrunk project, Barrett's initial aim has been to shake and transform the stratified and submissive mode of spectatorship in British theatre. As a theatregoer, he had identified a problematic repetition in the manner in which performances were structured and presented to audiences, that made him obtain a polemical attitude against many familiar theatrical conventions. Barrett observed that both the individual and shared preconceptions amongst the audiences were so many and so unchallenged that were diminishing the potential of the spectators to engage with, experience and respond to a performance. In a 2007 interview with Josephine Machon, Barrett notes:

‘It's too familiar, too structured. And because of this familiarity, it kind of stops you responding to it [...] you forget about it, as if it never really existed, because you compartmentalise it into ‘theatre’ (Barrett & Machon, 2007: n.pag.).

By looking at multiple ways to deconstruct the commonsensical implications that had been confining the force of theatrical experience, Barrett conceptualised a spatial dramaturgy that could ‘empower the audience, [and] make the audience the epicentre of the work’ (ibid). For Barrett, one of the most important processes that had to become possible was a shift from experiencing theatre only intellectually to the creation of a more instinctive and physical theatrical presence. In a 2009 interview with Machon he argues that, ‘by allowing the body to become empowered [...] [the spectators] are physically involved with the piece’ (Machon,

2009: 89). Barrett wanted to revolutionise the concept of spectatorship, transforming it from a subjugated condition into a presence 'loaded' with theatricality. Therefore, his aspiration was to instill agency in the audience by means of devising a performance in which the spectators would be able to move, to discover, and also to be shocked, to be exposed, to feel; in a word, to *experience* the performance directly. As Maxine Doyle notes, 'in Punchdrunk work you *feel* the dancing, you feel the breath and you have a visceral response to it' (Machon, 2009: 90; original emphasis). Both Barrett and Doyle argue that focusing on the audience as much as on the performance, the space, the text, the set, the lighting, is a vital prerequisite of stimulating such theatrical experiences. It is, then, the de-stratifying process of approaching every constituent element of a performance as a productive layer of a theatrical event, that, according to Barrett and Doyle, generates this immersive potentiality; it is a process that becomes possible through assimilating the multiplicity and complexity of theatrical layers.

Thus, far from being driven by their hypothetical importance or a supposed hierarchical order, I will now look at some of these layers more thoroughly, specifically for the distinctive quality they offer in the Punchdrunk theatrical project. These are: the performance space; the use of masks for the spectators; and the use of dancers in the performance. I argue that analysing these elements or processes, and putting them into context, is key to understand the uniqueness and specificity of Punchdrunk theatre.

(a) Creating a 'smooth' space: the spectator as a nomad

The transformation of empty spaces into dense and performance environments is an artistically meticulous process in Punchdrunk theatre. From the early stages of a production, the group looks for multiple ways to take advantage of each space's potentials (its history, its intensity, its smells etc.). Punchdrunk create spatial conditions that foster the play's intensity, whilst allowing for a performance to emerge from within these conditions. In short, they construct an assemblage of installations within which the performance evolves. In his 2007 discussion with Machon, Barrett explains:

‘I was very interested early on in installation, just as a word. I didn’t use it as an art-world definition but more to define space that is inherently theatrical and yet has no performance within it; meaning that it’s a space that you walk into and something hits you. There’s an impact, you feel something and it creates some sort of emotional response. I’m a firm believer that every space you go into is saying something; there are echoes in the walls. All we do as company is draw those out’ (Barrett & Machon, 2007: n.pag.).

Indeed, the early stages of a Punchdrunk production involve researching the possibilities and particularities of the chosen spaces. Each space has some very specific sensual qualities, which need to be ‘set free’ in order for the performance to work immersively. Barrett notes that one of the primary tasks of Punchdrunk is ‘harnessing the power of the space, making the building work to its potential’ (Machon, 2009: 92). Although they work together, Barrett and Doyle approach this process quite differently. Barrett develops an instinctive relation to space, from which he is able to articulate the direction of the play. He points out that,

‘The space is all-important and the way we build the work is about our instinctual response to it [...] you don’t have time to think about it, you let your body dictate to you what the show’s going to be’ (ibid).

On the contrary, Doyle takes on a much more intellectual – or perhaps more orchestrated – method of developing the performance according to space. She notes:

‘What the building gives me is framings, so I start to see things in relation to framings. When I’m in the studio with the performers we’re creating the language in a neutral space but I know where that language is going to be located within that world. During the rehearsal process quite often I’ll say, ‘don’t worry about that, the space will solve that problem’, it’s almost a cliché but it really does’ (ibid: 92-3).

When these two different approaches intermingle creatively on site, then the respective space becomes the appropriate place for what will not only host, but also *become* a Punchdrunk show; because it is the combination of assembling imaginative worlds and dreamlike atmospheres with a rigorous ‘anti-narrative’, it is the fusion of linear framings (according to which Doyle works) with the non-

linear spatial approach (according to which Barrett thinks of installation), that makes Punchdrunk able to contain the abstractness of the space and transform it into a theatrical installation. This synthesis of approaches became obvious to me not only in observing the conditions of the group's rehearsal and design process, but also in experiencing the performances as a spectator. While I could identify a sequential narrative that structured the plays, the creatively fragmentary action that I experienced kept instilling a deconstructive effect in my attempts to follow the plot of the performances.

Thus, the spaces in which the group devises and performs its plays become labyrinths loaded with theatricality; they become sites of mystery producing a goth-like spatiality that actively 'participates' in the general sensation of the performances. As Machon points out, '[w]ith a Punchdrunk event, the space invites you to interact with it, has its own quality and ambience, without the performers' (Machon, 2007: n.pag.). Barrett underlines that, '[the] space speaks to you, you create your own world within it – space becomes alive and charges the imagination' (as cited in Machon, 2007: n.pag.). Certainly, one can experience this quality of theatrical space in many different types of theatre, whether postdramatic or not. Despite their multiple differences, theatre directors and collectives pay significant attention to the 'affective' potentialities of space. Now, more often than not, this process is of a 'territorial' nature in the sense that space is measured and tailored in order to fit an anticipated effect. It becomes a striated platform on which subjects are invited to experience a theatrical play by sitting on a chair or by walking around. From this perspective, space does not really interact with the audience, but rather projects its intensity to them without allowing for the spectators' traces to be visible within the space. Thus, conventionally, space becomes a predefined place in which an event occurs.

However, in a Punchdrunk performance there is a distinctive process that suggests a new relation between space, theatrical power and the body that breaks this dichotomising line between space and event. The main reason for this is that the sense of performativity, embodied in the spaces that Punchdrunk create, is not only the product of a design process that takes place, either instinctively or structurally, before the event. It is also the becoming of a presence that affects both the spatiality of the space and the choreography in various ways; that is, the

presence of the audience and its relation to every constituent element of the *mise en scène*. As the audience's agential possibilities are significantly increased compared to traditionally performed theatre, the physical presence of the Punchdrunk-spectator becomes a vital 'part of a choreographic landscape', being, at the same time, a part of the architecture, a part of the building, a part of everything that we understand and experience as space (Doyle, personal interview, 2010). In my personal interview³⁴ with her, Maxine Doyle notes:

'The idea of the audience becoming part of a choreographic landscape is something that we discovered by accident [...] We discovered it by accident when Felix and I first worked together and we observed what was happening when you have a really highly physical language related to a performance' (ibid).

At the same time, this potentiality of the audience is made possible by means of experimenting with, and sometimes blurring, the boundaries between normality and irregularity; that is, between the safety of spectatorial distance and the unpredictability of proximity. In other words, what enriches the intensity of the performance is not only the spectators' capacity to be near the action, but also their 'felicitous' or 'infelicitous' attempts to avoid the performers, to avoid exposure to something which is theatrically unexpected, frightening or undesired. Doyle notes that,

'sometimes there's a way of preservation, the audience have to avoid a moment physically just to be safe. And also there's a sort of sense I think sometimes of the audience testing those boundaries and sometimes you see a shift between, I think, a desire to be near and then a kind of ... an agreement amongst the audience in terms of polite distances of watching' (ibid).

From this perspective, the agency of the audience can be understood as 'floating' between subjugation (to theatrical conditions of power, producing in them e.g. politeness) and a subversive sense of subjectivity that becomes possible through crossing the boundaries of theatrical normality. In other words, there takes place a process of interpellation (in Althusserian terms), as the ideological references that raise these ethical, normative and stratified boundaries always precede the

³⁴ Interview took place in October 19, 2010 at the Punchdrunk offices, Platform 6, Village Underground, 54 Holywell Lane, London EC2A 3PQ, England.

construction of the spectator-as-subject. However, at the same time, the uncanonical conditions of the performance itself give the audience the possibility not only to subvert the power that these boundaries imply, but also to convert their own (the spectators') passivity into a renewed theatrical force. Crucially, the spectators become a part of the choreographic landscape by means of what they do, by inviting, or being invited to contact and interact, but also by means of how they try to avoid this from happening. In my first experience as a member of the audience in a Punchdrunk show ('The Masque of the Red Death, 2008), I remember putting myself in a dilemma, regarding the extent to which I could be intimate with the performers (or the other spectators). What I found unique and interesting in 'battling' this dilemma was to observe other spectators problematising similar questions. In other words, I could sense a collective recognition of struggling to find the best way to walk around and experience the space and the performance; which turned out to be a creative, rather than a prohibitive, experience. This act of 'avoiding' the performance (or each other) at certain moments was, I suggest, quintessential in making interaction more possible. Because, although one could think of this 'avoidance' as a process that carries an essential negative connotation, a denial to participate, or even a complete disapproval of the performance, I would argue that it also paves the way for the construction of a theatrical subject that 'becomes' through the performance, one that is positively and productively mobile; or, following Deleuze, it allows for the creation of what could be called a '*nomadic spectator*'.

In *A Thousand Plateaus* (2004 [1987]), Deleuze and Guattari describe the nomadic-subject as a presence that acts in a constant movement *in-between* established coordinates or points of reference. They argue that, while the nomad acknowledges the existence, as well as the usefulness of these points, s/he subordinates their importance in favour of continuous movement within the 'intermezzo', the path, i.e. the space in-between them. For Deleuze and Guattari, the nomad crosses the boundaries of reference by means of movement – s/he is 'the Deterritorialized par excellence', as the only condition that reterritorializes him/her is movement in itself (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 [1987]: 421). Likewise, in a Punchdrunk performance, there is scarcely any sort of 'escape' from the sense of labyrinth into which the spectators move. The spectators are lost in a micro-

cosmos which cannot provide them with the reterritorialization of comfort zones, but rather invites them to create their own sense of safety within a deterritorializing space. For example, when an audience member avoids an encounter with a performer, s/he does so from within a deterritorialized position – that is, from within a condition that is neither static (in scenic terms, as s/he simultaneously alters the scene by this avoidance), nor safe (in terms of intensity, as the moment of avoidance is a moment of exposure at the same time). Thus, it is not a process of ‘stepping back’ (where ‘back’ would signify a safe point of decompression), but of stepping *elsewhere* as a means to perform a different choice of movement; a different kind of exposure.

I argue, therefore, that one cannot exclude the impact of the presence of both performers and spectators when discussing Punchdrunk’s production of spaces. Actually, what I am suggesting is that Punchdrunk-spaces allow for a nomadic conception of spectatorship precisely because they make possible a fusion between performers, spectators and space – or, in other words, space functions in such an immersive manner that what one visualises, perceives and experiences as spatial, affective and physical is significantly extended, with no specific distinguishing lines that could make someone assume that, e.g. ‘this is a quality of the space’ or that ‘that is a quality of the audience’s presence’ etc. Space functions as a plateau on which theatrical subjects are nomadic ‘becomings’ immersed in its intensity – and hence creating the conditions for this space to be perceived as being ‘in motion’, as a site that constantly changes character and dynamics, even though its primary structure appears to be solid and striated: to become what Deleuze and Guattari call a ‘smooth space’ that emerges within a ‘striated space’. Their difference, as described in *A Thousand Plateaus*, is a matter of the way in which presence (or ‘occupation’ of the space) is achieved. A ‘striated space’ is a ‘metric’ space – a space that is ‘counted in order to be occupied’, whereas a ‘smooth space’ is a ‘vectorial, projective, or topological’ one: a space that is ‘occupied without being counted’ (ibid: 399). Indeed, Punchdrunk spaces are designed and organised (counted) in order to be occupied by performers and spectators; yet, at the same time, this organising process ‘fails’ to hold back the ephemeral and nomadic potentials of a Punchdrunk event. On the contrary, it creates the conditions for a dis-organising and destratified spatial synthesis that emerges through the constant

movement of performers and spectators. As Tamsin Lorraine points out while discussing Deleuze's notion of 'smooth space', 'a subject who orients himself with respect to movements, rather than a retrospectively created construct of space, experiences space not in terms of a totality to which it is connected [...] but rather in terms of pure relations of speed and slowness [...] that evoke powers to affect and be affected, both actual and potential' (Lorraine, 2005: 254). Thus, I would argue that Punchdrunk theatrical sites become 'smooth spaces', acquiring a 'tactile' potential, because of the nomadic movement of spectators and performers.

It is, therefore, important to understand the spatial dramaturgy of Punchdrunk in direct relation to the presence of performers and audience. The qualities of the space and their merging with the intensity of the event-in-progress demand this type of analysis. Now, moving on, I want to introduce another important theatrical element that, while sustaining the notion of 'nomadic spectatorship', gives rise to several complex questions that require further examination: that is, the fact that the audience wear *masks*. The use of this simple theatrical prop is central to the Punchdrunk-project – especially to the way in which audiences and performers affect the *mise en scène*.

(b) The paradoxes of the mask: voyeurism revisited

In his review of *The Masque of the Red Death* (2008), Ralf Remshardt writes: 'The distancing and dreamlike effect of witnessing everything through the mask [...] led, in my case, to a pleasant sense of disembodied half-presence, a bold childlike curiosity, and a reckless disregard for personal space' (Remshardt, 2008: 641). Through this revealing observation, Remshardt captures the intensity that the masked spectators add to the performance. The condition of being masked is certainly a complicated one, as it opens up a wide spectrum of possibilities that alter the meaning and function of spectatorship. As in Remshardt's case, the masked spectator witnesses a loss of his/her habitual sensory perception, only to acquire an excitingly disbalancing and 'carnavalesque' way of experiencing an event. Since the spectators' spatial awareness is slightly destabilised, and since their responsiveness cannot be conveyed through facial expressivity, their physical language (their bodily expression) is augmented in parallel to the choreographic

movements of the performers. Being a masked spectator engenders a physical connection with the choreography, as well as with the space. As Machon puts it, 'the [masked] audience also adds an *architectural dimension* within the space' (Machon, 2007: n.pag; my emphasis). My personal experience as a masked spectator was very intriguing. Although, at the beginning of the performance I felt strangely 'trapped' when I was instructed to wear it almost at all times, the mask gradually became a part of my body's way to deal with what I was watching. It became a very active element in my attempt to experience and participate in the performance. I realised that while reducing my facial responsiveness, the mask simultaneously enhanced my capacity to focus, to follow and experience the action in a camera-like manner, as a voyeur. In his 2007 interview with Josephine Machon, Barrett notes that, '[t]he mask allows you to function as a voyeur, as a camera because you're more aware of where you're looking, what you choose to see and your peripheral vision is slightly affected' (Barrett & Machon, 2007: n.pag.). In my personal interview with her, Doyle takes this argument a bit further, by highlighting the collective recognition that the act of watching in a voyeuristic manner receives in Punchdrunk performances:

'It is also a really public acknowledgment that theatre in any form is voyeuristic, and we don't like to acknowledge that as a public when we go to the theatre and sit in chairs, and sit in a dark space and look. [In Punchdrunk performances] [y]ou are publicly being a voyeur, other people can see you being a voyeur, but they don't know who you are because they can't see you' (Doyle, personal interview, 2010)

Considered in this sense, the very process of watching others performing by wearing a mask becomes a shared and legitimate mode of *performing voyeurism* – especially because it takes place within the intensity of such intimate encounters (as those that are created between the Punchdrunk performers and spectators). In other words, the act of voyeurism is somehow freed from its 'deviant' manifestation as an ethically forbidden intrusion; on the contrary, it is *encouraged* acquiring the potentials of stimulating theatrical engagement. According to Doyle, what is interesting here is the tension that emerges amongst spectators and performers as a result of, not only watching the event as voyeurs, but also of watching each other *becoming* voyeurs:

‘If you are watching a scene which is violent, or has a really strong sexual drive [...] you can leave but you choose to stay. People know that you are choosing to stay and see’ (ibid).

Indeed, the feeling of sharing a sense of ‘guilt’ for insisting on watching e.g. a violent scene, or even for moving closer to the action in order to have a more detailed look, was interestingly new for me as a theatregoer. These were the moments when I felt the relation between an art gallery (in which I can stare at certain paintings or sculptures for hours with no specific worry) and a performance (in which I take into account the fact that I am watching human beings) more strongly. In a sense, at certain moments the performers were treated as objects or artworks moving in space.

Although it has not been extensively discussed in modern theatre scholarship, there are several analyses that address the question of voyeurism, mostly by drawing on the Freudian idea of voyeurism and *scopophilia* as a vicarious act rooted in the childhood desire to gaze. What seems evident in these accounts is a substantial change in approaching the act of spectatorial voyeurism in relation to the past. It is worth noting that the pre-Victorian and the Victorian eras are considered as important points of reference in analyses of voyeurism. For instance, Davis observes that during these periods ‘spectatorship could encompass not only decorum and propriety but also voyeurism and desire’ (Davis, 2007: 61). Considering the ways in which voyeurism was justified in the 18th century, West highlights that there took place ‘a kind of scrutiny of the body which could displace or confuse lustful voyeurism with cultivated admiration’ (as cited in Davis, 2007: 61). Also, Thomson underlines the ‘patriarchal conventions of the Victorian theatre’ in regards to voyeurism, that disallowed any ‘natural woman’ to gaze at a man in a sexual or ‘amoral’ way (Thompson, 2006: 250). It could be argued therefore that in the pre-Victorian and Victorian periods, the act of voyeurism was both a ‘taboo’ and a ‘raison d’être’ in theatrical performances. However, it was not until the achievements of modern avant-garde that the boundaries of theatrical voyeurism were extended, and gazing was liberated from its ‘amoral’ implications. In *The Life of The Drama* (1964), Eric Bentley highlights the ‘non-innocent’ agential possibilities that the spectators acquire while gazing at performers, concluding that ‘if one took from theatre the element of voyeurism,

the occasion would lose much of its appeal' (Bentley, 1969 [1964]: 56). Robert Leach reconceptualises the issue, arguing for the socially 'contractive' nature of voyeurism within theatre and performance contexts. He states that,

'watching the play is also importantly a *private* pleasure. The situation licences voyeurism: in the special circumstances of the theatre, in the privacy of the darkened auditorium, the individual may indulge in the 'gaze', which is impossible in most social situations. Here no guilt is attached – indeed, this is what the spectator has, in a sense, come for!' (Leach, 2008: 176; original emphasis)

From this perspective, the very process of 'licensing' voyeurism is crucial, and differs according to dissimilar cultural milieus. For instance, as Doyle points out in my personal interview with her, it is very interesting to observe 'English audiences wanting permission' and seeking for what delineates the borders between what is allowed and what is not (Doyle, personal interview, 2010). She notes that the performance 'gives you permission to make decisions as to how you want to read a show, how you want to place yourself within it [...] and to be really curious' (ibid).

Most accounts of theatrical voyeurism place the discussion within a feminist terrain, arguing for the de-traditionalisation of conventional watching and the de-objectification of the image of woman that used to be perceived as a passive 'spectacle', available exclusively for male gazing (Case, 1990; Carlson, 2004). Although discussing the complex gender implications produced within such theatrical contexts exceeds the scope of this chapter, it is, I suggest, of great significance to understand the influence of feminism (and post-feminism) in the production of these discourses that destabilised the conventional analogy of spectatorship (subject → object). As Carlson argues, 'the importance of at least calling attention to, if not successfully subverting, the power relationships involved in traditional spectatorship has led many performers in one way or another to 'turn the spotlight' on the (male) spectator and challenge his invisibility' (Carlson, 2004: 185). He cites the British performance artist Catherine Elwes, affirming her view that 'the establishment of the women performer as a speaking subject' (in the 1980s and early 1990s) produced a radical potentiality that challenged the traditional mode of representation in spectatorship (ibid):

‘The living performer, Elwes suggests, can expose the (male) spectator ‘to the fearful proximity of the performer and the dangerous consequences of his own desires. His cloak of invisibility has been stripped away and his spectatorship becomes an issue within the work’ (as cited in Carlson, 2004: 185).

Advocating the affective and intimate possibilities of theatre and live performance, Elwes clarifies that this potentiality is ‘impossible in representations offering permanently fixed and objectified images of women, such as the cinema, painting or sculpture’ (as cited in Carlson, 2004: 185). Barbara Freedman makes a similar claim, taking the argument one step further; she notes that, ‘[w]hereas film is obsessed with seeing one’s look, as in Hitchcock films which repeatedly distend and peer within the space of their own voyeurism, theatre is fascinated by the return of one’s look as a displacing gaze that redefines as it undermines identity’ (Freedman, 1990: 73-4).

Thus, it can be argued that the capacity of theatre to constantly problematise and always reinvent the function of spectatorship passed through a feminist agenda that claimed for the de-objectification of the ‘other’, challenged the theatrical politics of identity and radicalised the emergent power relations of performance. Within this shift, there emerged a ‘post-Freudian’ notion of voyeurism that destabilised the model which is described by Wells as ‘a world divided into the active ‘lookers’ and the passive ‘looked at’ (Wells, 2004: 171). It is this notion of voyeurism that live performance endorsed, especially during the 80s and the 90s, and it is on the basis of this endorsement that Punchdrunk speak of and invite a voyeuristic style of spectatorship in their shows. In Punchdrunk performances, the objects of the watching, the ones that are gazed at, are theatrical subjects whose construction, or ‘becoming’, is made possible within an experience which is not only intersubjectively voyeuristic, but also anti-authoritarian; that is, voyeurism is achieved without any implications of control or exercise of power over an objectified body, while, at the same time, the masked voyeur can also become a spectacle to be watched. In my personal interview³⁵ with him, Colin Marsh, the producer of Punchdrunk, notes accordingly that,

³⁵ Interview took place in October 13, 2010 at the Punchdrunk offices, Platform 6, Village Underground, 54 Holywell Lane, London EC2A 3PQ, England.

‘the performers can appear to see right through you as if you weren’t there and then they can choose to absolutely see you. So you are always in this kind of slightly destabilised situation whereas you are not really sure whether you are being noticed or not’ (Marsh, personal interview, 2010).

Thus, the Punchdrunk spectators can become ‘ghosts’, they can become a spectacle, or even observers – they can feel greatly noticed or unnoticed, visible or invisible. In short, the mask gives them the opportunity to become ‘other’. In *Postdramatic Theatre*, Lehmann gives an account of mask’s potential which is very relevant to Punchdrunk theatre:

‘The pleasure in dissimulating oneself under the mask is paired with another, no less uncanny pleasure: how the world changes under one’s gaze looking out of the mask, how it suddenly becomes strange when seen from ‘elsewhere’. Whoever looks through the eyes of a mask changes his gaze into that of an animal, a camera, a being unknown to itself and the world. Theatre is transformation at all levels, *metamorphosis* [...]’ (Lehmann, 2006 [1999]: 77; original emphasis).

Now, considering the condition of being masked and yet exposed, the tension of being a voyeur but also a ‘spectacle’ for watching, and the experience of wearing a mask as a ‘becoming other’ potentiality, I suggest that there are some questions that require examination. I argue that these questions take the form of paradoxes with regards to the subjectivity and agency of a masked audience. The first point I would like to consider is the extent to which the use of mask creates a strictly homogeneous audience; an audience that cannot escape sameness. In his discussion with Josephine Machon, Barrett notes:

‘We’ve had a number of criticisms in the past, saying that theatre is about building a community, the audience as a group who are there to experience something together. And we’ve been criticised for alienating audiences by using the mask as a device. The mask allows you to work for yourself if you want to, but equally, they encourage you to feel all the more a unity because you’re all made the same’ (Barrett & Machon, 2007: n.pag.).

Indeed, it is possible to look at the use of mask from both perspectives: While a masked spectator may appear to be an isolated agent, whose relation to other

spectators-agents is significantly repressed, s/he also participates in a shared experience of 'being masked' that unifies the members of the audience and strengthens their engaging conditions. Without abandoning the problematisation of this contradiction, I would like to ask something different that specifies the issue a bit more: i.e. is there space for difference to emerge within the generation of this theatrical homogeneity (whether produced by means of alienation or through a community spirit)?³⁶ In reformulating the issue as such, I consider the mask-question as one that should be examined beyond the 'alienation-or-sameness' binary. In other words, rather than attempting to resolve a hypothetical dilemma between isolation and unity, I suggest that it is crucial to examine the engaging possibilities that are created within an – initially at least – homogeneous masked-audience.

It is evident that the mask as a theatrical device offers to the spectator, to a significant extent, the sense of anonymity. The spectator-subject obtains the capacity to step outside of him/herself and thus perform a different self, or even many different selves, since the mask hides his/her face – one of the most significant sources of human expressivity. In my personal interview with him, Colin Marsh depicts the instant shock of the Punchdrunk-spectator with regards to this emotion: 'Suddenly it's like, well nobody knows who I am, I can do anything, I'm not used to being able to do anything' (Marsh, personal interview, 2010). At the same time though, it seems to me that while the performance evolves it becomes evident that the mask cannot eliminate the ability to connect and engage with others. The presence of each one of the audience members is felt differently, precisely because every one of them behaves and responds differently. While at the beginning of their theatrical promenade all the spectators overtly share something (a white mask), something that produces a sense of sameness, the process of attempting to understand one another is not blocked; it is, nevertheless, altered. It certainly becomes more problematic, but also more challenging. The process of engaging with each other acquires a divergence from, and a de-coding of the signs produced by facial expression and language: it becomes *affective*, not

³⁶ During my spectatorial experience, both in *The Masque of the Red Death* (2008) and in *The Duchess of Malfi* (2010), this question kept revolving in my mind for two reasons: First, I observed the interrelation between the movements of the audience members in space; and secondly, I gradually became aware that the audience was not behaving in a uniform way.

only in the sense of bodies' proximity, but also in terms of destabilising the act of understanding itself. In other words, the desire to engage with one another is freed from the essential precondition of understanding one another. The latter is subordinated in favour of an affective exchange that maintains a sense of mystery, a sense of doubt as far as identities are concerned. The question 'who is?' is replaced with the question 'what one does?' or 'what one becomes?'

I argue, therefore, that to think of the mask explicitly as a device that creates the conditions for the emergence of a collective whole that acts identically, is to make a biased and totalising postulation. Considering the masked audience as a unified entity that behaves in standardised patterns is failing to see multiplicity within a whole, difference within 'one'. I argue that the use of mask is, crucially, a radical process that should not be examined in relation to totalising effects and static conditions of theatricality (e.g. complete alienation or complete unity); on the contrary, I suggest that the mask should be understood as a mobile medium which, while challenging the power relations and the unification of identity, creates fertile conditions for a perpetual possibility to 'become other'. Instead of considering the use of mask as a neutralising process – as producing a theatrical state that compresses differences – I suggest that we should understand it as a possibility that generates movement, reinforcing what I have already called a 'nomadic spectatorship'. In other words, I argue that the capacity to become other, the potentiality that actualises this metamorphosis, is made possible not by means of neutralisation or uniformity, but by means of movement (i.e. becoming) and multiplicity. Paradoxically, the mask (this traditional theatrical prop) creates the conditions for this kind of movement because it exposes the way in which identities are constructed in traditional theatre. It diminishes a specific faculty of human expressivity in order to activate and set in motion a becoming-spectator – that is, a becoming other. Following Deleuze's discussion of Bene's theatre (as seen in chapter 2), I argue that the mask operates as a medium that subtracts elements of power, only to augment the intensities and the 'speed' that drive the desire for theatrical engagement. Thus, from this perspective, the Punchdrunk-mask is rather an active than a neutralising theatrical element; an element that introduces 'speed' and movement to the performance rather than creating immobile and totalising conditions of spectatorship.

(c) Separation and proximity: Punchdrunk's dancers

On the other hand, and despite this non-totalising potential of the mask, I argue that to avoid accounting for the separation that the mask produces would be to approach the mask-experience partially. The masked ones are always the spectators; the unmasked ones are always the performers. If in traditional theatre the separation between performers and audience is achieved spatially (auditorium – stage), in Punchdrunk performances it is achieved *performatively*, through the mask. To be more precise, it is the visual contact between subjects that perform their character (masked or not) within the space that distinguishes the audience from the performers, and not the specific part of the space that they inhabit. Thus, as Barrett highlights in his discussion with Machon, ‘a clear division is established between audience and performers yet you’re allowed to get as close as you want’ (Barrett & Machon, 2007: n.pag.). Considered in this sense, the effect that the mask produces complicates the power relations in Punchdrunk performances. One would expect that a theatre group that attempts to ‘empower’ the audience and enable its responsive outputs would try to eradicate the lines that divide the theatrical subjects (performers) from the theatrical objects (spectators). On the contrary, these lines continue to exist and, even though they are not spatially structured, they are absolutely visible. Indeed, at least initially, one can feel the distance between spectators and performers in Punchdrunk plays. Especially in the beginning of the performances, there emerges a sense of mystery and a ‘chase and catch’ game between the play and the audience that introduces this distance.

What is important here, however, is that while the conventional division between performers and spectators remains intact, there are two factors that destabilise and destratify the power relations that such a division traditionally implies. In other words, I want to argue that there are two crucial elements in Punchdrunk theatre that prevent the emergence of domination of one part of the performers-spectators binary (if we can conceptualise it as such) over the other. The first one is evidently the emergent *proximity* between these two parts that increases intensively while the performance evolves. The spectators can be as close to the performers as they choose and, at the same time, the performers do not encounter the audience only as a group (or groups) of watchers, but also as autonomous agents of theatricality within the event. Interestingly, it seems that the

extent to which spectators become autonomous agents in the performance depends on the level of proximity and immediacy they develop in relation to the performers; that is, the closer they get, the more independent they become. Thus, the spectators' involvement in the show is not only a question of aesthetic choice, but also an action that positions them 'politically' within the performance. Crucially, the audience is able not only to create their own sense of perspective, but also to be actively involved in the production of what is perceived and experienced through the play. In my interview with him, Colin Marsh notes: 'I think what makes the company's work unique is definitely more about the sense of ownership of their own experience that the shows give the audience' (Marsh, personal interview, 2010). Considered as such, the audience is not subject to any external power or control that would impose a specific sense of *being* in the performance. On the contrary, it is the absence of such a regulation that 'allows' the spectators to initially feel lost and disoriented, and then to begin acquiring an interesting sense of co-authorship over the development of the play. I argue that this potential of the audience decomposes any sense of hierarchy that could emerge due to the obvious separation between the performers and the spectators. Moreover, this potential is largely reinforced in the performances, since Punchdrunk do not construct their plays based on a specific 'model' of interactive theatre. As Marsh highlights, 'it's a funny dichotomy because of course it's interactive but it's not structured as interaction' (ibid). This means that the spectators can feel relatively free in the space in terms of rules and regulations. This also means that the spectators obtain the capacity of 'becoming-others'; precisely because there is nothing and no one in the performances that forces them to become something specific, i.e. to perform a particular identity. When discussing about the role of interaction in Punchdrunk shows, Marsh clarifies that,

'it's not consciously built in and it's not encouraged; we are not saying to the audience 'you have to join in, you have to participate'. We are saying actually, 'you could float through this like a ghost if you feel like it [...]' (ibid).

Indeed, becoming 'ghosts' within the space is in a sense the possibility that Punchdrunk encourage for both the performers and the spectators. The way that the space is designed gives them this opportunity, because everyone can easily appear and disappear; everyone can transform him/herself into something else

according to what part of the space s/he is in, or according to whom s/he encounters. It is worth noting here that some of the most interesting experiences as a spectator of Punchdrunk performances were precisely the moments when I could feel emancipated from having and performing a definite role (either self-imposed or not); the moments when I felt strangely ‘connected’ to a communal sense of self-transformation or self-exploration during the plays. In other words, the collective feeling of becoming-*ambiguous* was to me an interestingly new way of engaging with a performance.

Thus, the way that the spectators experience the performance and make their presence felt in the space is pivotal in understanding how a Punchdrunk play operates anti-hierarchically in terms of the relation between audience and performers. At the same time, the role and the contribution of the performers in this de-stratifying experience is vital. The performers are mainly *dancers* and not actors. For Punchdrunk, this is an utterly deliberate choice rather than a random aesthetic practice. As Marsh notes in my personal interview with him, ‘[Felix Barrett] made a conscious decision in 2002 to effectively stop working with actors, because he felt constrained by the conventions and also the expectations of how an audience receives a story verbally as opposed to any other way’ (Marsh, personal interview, 2010). Punchdrunk performers do not tell a story; they embody the physically expressive possibilities of a story. Doyle explains:

‘The main thrust of the work [...] is choreographic, and it is about creating, it is about writing with the body [...] It is about working with bodies that have a sort of ability to develop the subtle syntaxes that you need in language. So we do work with language but it is a language of the body, it is a writing of the body [...] (Doyle, personal interview, 2010).

From this perspective, Punchdrunk do not abandon the linguistic and intellectual possibilities of human expression, but rather reposition the ‘channels’ through which these possibilities manifest themselves. When I asked Doyle in what ways do Punchdrunk approach a potential intellectual reception of their work by the audience, she replied that, ‘it’s not that it’s an unintellectual or non-intellectual way, it’s just that intellect, we feel, is not just located in the brain; it is located in lots of different places, physically, and that’s what we want to [...] encourage’ (ibid).

Surely, dancers are able to perform in a much more immediate and physical manner than traditionally trained actors. In particular, since the work is mainly presented in a non-verbal way, it makes absolute sense to have dancers (speaking bodies) performing and not actors. However, it is not only this practicality that produces the need for dance in Punchdrunk performances; the motives that ‘demand’ dancing in the shows extend well beyond the absence of spoken language and structured dialogue. Dancers can perform in such a direct way that, in a sense, they ‘prevent’ the audience to sit back and methodically reflect on what they see and experience. In other words, with their movement and performance in space, the dancers do not allow the spectators to step out of the ‘here and now’ of the event; they do not allow an escape from movement and immersion in the play. In his interview with Machon, Barrett notes that,

‘actors tend to work with their head and dancers just ‘do’; their response is immediate and from their bodies. Whereas with actors, there’s always a beat before they respond. As a result it doesn’t tune at the same level. It takes ten times the amount of work to coax an actor into that world. Dancers, physical performers, build from the floor up; they are living, breathing, one and the same with the space from day one’ (Machon, 2009: 97).

Indeed, the question of space is crucial. When I was informally discussing with Hector Harkness (assistant director for *The Duchess of Malfi*), he was convinced that no one could fill these large spaces in a more expressive, as well as immersive, manner than dancers can. I argue that dancers are able to expand their bodies in space, they can actualise the Artaudian ‘expression in space’ precisely because they can become one with space. They are the physical extensions of space and space is the extension of their movement. Moreover, dancers are the main source of one of the most cinematic effects that Punchdrunk produce: i.e. the constant and immediate change of scale in their performance. They can use an entire room to perform an act that is so intimate in terms of space (e.g. sharing a secret, or praying), that the eye of the spectator is continuously deterritorialized. The swiftness of sudden and large movements in space, the immediacy of spatial – as well as temporal – variations produce a strange, dream-like terrain that deterritorializes both spectators and performers. For example, in *The Duchess of Malfi* (2010), there was a gigantic bed in the space that was used as the Duchess’s

bedroom. This bed was so domineering in the room that I was uncertain as to how the performers could make their presence felt in that space. Gradually, I was surprised to see that the swift and spatial ways in which the dancers used their bodies, and their experimentation with this difference in scale, made me have flashing impressions that they were bigger and that the bed was smaller.

Thus, returning to my previous discussion about separation and distance, I argue that the choice of dancers is a very crucial one in the dehierarchisation of the performer-spectator relation in Punchdrunk performances. The ways in which dancers perform, as well as the ways in which they ‘negotiate’ their presence in space, generate de-stratified and spontaneous immersive experiences; and, by extension, they produce renewed possibilities for a genuinely *critical* practice of spectatorship. If, hypothetically, the performers were traditionally trained actors, it is highly probable that the distance between them and the audience would be much more visible and hierarchically structured. As the expressive outputs that actors use are based mostly on their linguistic and vocal faculties, their encounters with the spectators would take very specific and closed-up formations – e.g. large or small circles of spectators attending a scene. Thus, the play would be transformed from a promenade performance (with movement and speed) into a static event with ‘snapshots’ of theatre.³⁷ I argue that the actors’ presence in space would be much more heightened in relation to the spectators, exactly because of this immobility and the absence of variations. The more static one performer is, the more time there is for a spectator to reflect on his/her presence and subsequently admire his/her performance as a subjected and passive viewer. On the contrary, dancers do not ‘allow’ the audience to admire them, because their performance and movement in space is so fast and immediate that their identity as performers becomes fluid and mobile. The spectators do not even have the time to observe and appreciate movement, as they are ‘living’ and embodying this movement – they are immersed in this constant change and variation that the dancers produce. The dancers can disappear, they can become a genuine part of the space, and most importantly they can physically ‘play’ with their identity: they

³⁷ The risk of this transformation was evident in specific scenes with extensive dialogical exchanges between the performers. In such scenes the spectators were more static and the event was becoming less participatory.

can become elves, ghosts, pixies, i.e. ambivalent creatures that destabilise the typical notion of a unified identity – in short, they can become ‘multiplicities’.

Thus, the extent to which a Punchdrunk performance becomes destratified – acquiring potentials of critique-as-process – relies firstly on the arrangement of theatrical elements, as well as on the way in which power relations are constructed and negotiated within the event. Spectatorship becomes active and critical because performance occurs through variations, movement and speed. At the same time, the performers are able to operate as ‘becomings’ or as ‘multiplicities’ precisely because the agency of the audience increases progressively. It is, therefore, this bidirectional process that creates the conditions for what I would call a ‘disunified synthesis’ between performers and spectators; that is, a creative contradiction that drives the performance’s intensity and establishes its political disposition.

III. Punchdrunk and the political: The question of fragmentation

Following on from my discussion about the way in which power relations are constructed and become destratified within the events that Punchdrunk create, it is, I suggest, crucial to examine the political dimension of the company’s theatre on a more explicit basis. Focusing on Punchdrunk’s insistence on assembling fragmented dramatic narratives, and hence creating a terrain on which disintegrated experiences become possible, I want to inquire into the political implications of theatrical incompleteness with view to encapsulating the group’s contribution to the practice of performing critique with a non-representational approach.

Punchdrunk do not devise their performances based on a concrete ideological framework or a specific political agenda. Perhaps one would argue that they do not belong to the type of theatre that could claim to be ‘political’ or ‘politicised’ in the long-established sense of the term; that is, the scope of their performances could be considered as incompatible with representations or enactments of sociopolitical conflicts, and many theatre critics have several objections towards

their allegedly obscure aestheticism and discontinued theatrical methods. Without disregarding the problematisation of this argumentation, I will suggest that Punchdrunk reinvent both the concept and the practice of politics in theatre; they do so by challenging the limits of narrative uniformity, while proposing a notion of critique as an immersive and fragmentary experience.

According to Lehmann,

‘[t]he theatre of sense and synthesis has largely disappeared – and with it the possibility of synthesising interpretation. Recommendations, let alone prescriptions, are no longer possible, merely partial perspectives and shuttering answers that remain ‘works in progress’ (Lehmann, 2006 [1999]: 25).

Lehmann makes a good point in contending that the notion of theatrical teleology, together with its limiting implications in theatre practice, is a part of drama that has been challenged and subverted by the postdramatic turn. Indeed, final causes and ideological – or even aesthetic – conclusions have been replaced by unfinished and open-ended problematisations that become enacted in performances and installations. In keeping with this postdramatic shift, the theatre of Punchdrunk is a theatre that neither provides ‘answers’, nor even straightforward ‘questions’. It is a theatre that reinstates the notion of *experience* in the politics of performance art – it is also a theatre that, in a way, ‘depoliticises’ performance without, however, promoting an apolitical project; that is, Punchdrunk contribute actively in the undoing of *major* political outcomes in theatre art, favouring a *minor* or micropolitical approach in their work. I argue that Punchdrunk suggest a theatrical operation that does not extend beyond its incomplete and fragmentary character, while maintaining a sense of a ‘total’ (i.e. immersive) event. It is, I suggest, on the basis of this paradox that their contribution to the politics of performance manifests itself.

In discussing the political possibilities of Punchdrunk with both Doyle and Marsh, I was astonished by the particular interest and excitement that they genuinely showed in their responses. They both seemed to enjoy the complexity of the political potential they believe Punchdrunk has, and they both agree on the utterly *political form* of theatre that Punchdrunk creates. Interestingly, they do not consider the company’s way of presenting plays only as a stimulus for making

choices, but also as an engaging process that *forces* the audience to position themselves politically within the performances. Doyle notes that, ‘the form pushes you as an individual to question your place within the world that [Punchdrunk] create’ (Doyle, personal interview, 2010). In a similar vein, Marsh highlights that,

‘[Punchdrunk’s theatre] can’t escape being political [...] Because of the deal that it’s offering the audience [...] it’s empowering people individually, if you like, to examine themselves in a deeply political way [...] You cannot avoid engaging [...] and that of course is a totally political facet’ (Marsh, personal interview, 2010).

In this sense, I suggest that the way in which Punchdrunk approach the notion of politics in performance differs significantly from directors and collectives of the past. For instance, both Littlewood and Brook – although being immensely critical of it – did not manage to entirely break with the Brechtian politics of theatre; i.e. the effect of distance and ‘alienation’, the choice of participating in a shared theatrical experience and so on. On the contrary, Punchdrunk do not offer choices according to which one can politically reflect on what one experiences, but they rather create theatrical events within which one cannot ‘escape’ political engagement. It is the *force* of this immersive effect that distinguishes Punchdrunk from the ‘mechanics’ of political theatre as being conceived and practiced in the past. As Doyle points out when discussing the spectatorial experience in the performances,

‘you are in a constant state of interrogation about the decisions that you make as an individual and sometimes I think that takes away from the political or the thematic grand narrative clout of the work because [...] you can be lost as a viewer in the work’ (Doyle, personal interview, 2010).

Indeed, the critical possibilities of being lost within a theatrical event compose the political terrain on which Punchdrunk engage with audiences. According to Doyle, it is the emotional destabilisation of feeling lost, worried and disoriented that enables the spectator to experience the performances as political events – as events in which critique is being staged and performed. Recalling the discussion she had with a spectator of Punchdrunk’s adaptation of *Faust* (2006-7), Doyle notes:

‘In order for him to go forwards in the evening and have any sort of experience, he had to work out where he was, work out the structure of the building and the organisation. And that shocked him as a person because he realised actually, there was a fear there about being lost and there was a fear about not being in control [...] So I think that’s quite political, I think to put an audience into a place to try, constantly be putting an audience into a place where they are unsure, curious, maybe fearful, maybe excited, maybe aroused in a sensual way, and none of things being specific intentions but just emotions that we play with’ (ibid).

Thus, the spectators are initially invited to participate in a shared experience in which, interestingly, participation is not negotiable. Although nobody dictates to anybody what to do or how to behave and ‘be’ in the performances, the conditions under which these performances take place generate the deconstruction of dialogical narrative, produce audience animation and variations of experiencing a theatrical event, and enable the critical potentials of performers and spectators.

I argue that one of the most important reasons why these immersive conditions engender new possibilities of critique is their fragmentary and incomplete character. With their disconnected theatrical sequences Punchdrunk challenge the audience’s dependency on complete and finite performances. This dependency on, or the need of receiving a finished artistic product – or, at least, a product that has clear and teleological outcomes (either intellectual, moral, political and so on) – is seriously questioned in the theatre of Punchdrunk. When discussing the options that the Punchdrunk-spectator has, while promenading the performance space, Ralf Remshardt points out that,

‘[a]t any of these mostly disconnected though often startling points of encounter with one of the several narratives, the viewer’s alternative was to follow the actors to other venues in the hopes of completing the story, or to continue on with his exploration in an aleatory manner (my choice)’ (Remshardt, 2008: 642).

But is there a story to be completed by the spectators? According to Doyle, this is in fact a realistic possibility as, in comparing a Punchdrunk performance to a ‘jigsaw’ that can be eventually put together by the audience, she makes clear that

during the performance ‘there is a real shift and real drive towards one place’ (Doyle, personal interview, 2010). Indeed, the grand finales of the shows, in which performers and spectators come together to witness and participate in a spectacular ‘catharsis’, could be considered as the resolutions or the completions of the events. At the same time, however, I argue that these finales function more as ‘explosions’ of theatre, than as linear dramatic conclusions. Doyle notes that, ideally, Punchdrunk would want the audience to

‘complete the work themselves a year later. It absolutely is about something that’s just cooking and things are never finished, life never stops, things are never resolute, it’s never final, there are always questions. And I think a really important thing for us in this world is spontaneity, it’s really essential that the audience feel like this moment they are witnessing is happening for the first time and now, in the moment, and it’s just for them. That sense of presence – yes, and liveness’ (ibid).

Furthermore, what is important, I suggest, is the extent to which the audiences are able to make the intellectual and narrative connections that would lead them to this ‘one place’. In other words, I argue that the non-linear and fragmented form of Punchdrunk performances does not essentially show the way to specific ideological outcomes or endings of the story. If the performances can be considered as ‘jigsaws’, then they are extremely complicated ones with no obvious or easily understandable sequences of meaning – with no essential causal explanations that lead to a determinate finale. Doyle insists, however, that,

‘in order for the nonlinear nature of it to be, and the fragmentation of it to work in this dream-like, chaotic, Lynchian, Mulholland Drive-esque kind of way, the linear nature of the narrative is rigorous. Otherwise it would just be a mess; if we had no structure then what you would encounter as an audience is a complete mess. But what actually makes the work I think slightly disarming and unusual and pervasive and why it kind of lives and haunts itself with you is because these strands of narrative come together’ (ibid).

Thus, what Doyle argues is that the fragmentary and incomplete narratives of the shows become interesting and potentially radical because, on one level, they are actually parts of an assemblage; and on a second level, because Punchdrunk provides the audiences with the opportunity to see the connections of this

theatrical assemblage coming together in the finale of the shows. In this sense, I suggest that Punchdrunk's fragmented theatre achieves in setting the audience's presence in a constant motion – a deterritorialized state in which they do not have the necessary time or information to reflect on what they experience – while offering them instances of sense that operate in a rather spooky and shocking manner. In other words, Punchdrunk manage to 'play' with the audience's desire to complete a respective story, and embrace the force of this desire transforming it into a an active part of their performance. As Marsh points out, 'people want to complete it, but the can't quite' (Marsh, personal interview, 2010). In clarifying the issue, Marsh continues:

'I think any artist or any work that is trying to just remind you that [...] there's a myriad of possibilities, is work that I am certainly more interested in personally. And I can enjoy going to see or hear or look at something that feels very finite and final and definitive [...] but it is not as satisfying as something that leaves you wandering, carrying on wandering [...] Punchdrunk does manage to sort of trick the audience out of their normal comfort zone, 'oh I know what this is about. Oh, I've seen this before. Oh yes, I know what they're doing' (ibid).

Considered in this sense, I argue that there is a critical question to be asked in relation to Punchdrunk's understanding of the 'political' in their performances. As raised in the introduction of the thesis, it is the question of the opposition between knowledge and ignorance as examined by Ranciere in *The Emancipated Spectator* (2011 [2009]). Although the Punchdrunk spectator is not the calm and rational observer that Ranciere criticises – since the immersive form of the performances transforms him/her into an active participant of a shared experience – this 'jigsaw-like' narrative, that both Doyle and Marsh refer to, could be seen as a limit that separates a performer and a spectator on the basis of the former's knowledge and the latter's ignorance. This positioning is visible not only during a spectator's encounter with a performer, but also in the finale of the shows, when apparently some of the narrative clues of the play come together. In this sense, following Ranciere, the Punchdrunk performer is always 'one step ahead' from the spectator, introducing 'a new form of ignorance' between the latter and him/herself (Ranciere, 2011 [2009]: 8). Hence the question is: How could

Punchdrunk challenge this opposition between knowledge and ignorance, without abandoning a sense of structure in their plays? How could they work with a narrative that destabilises this problematic positioning with regard to performers and spectators? In line with Doyle and Marsh, I agree that Punchdrunk performances are political because they endorse a political *form* of theatre – a form that invites and produces immersive, incomplete and non-representational experiences. Having said that, I argue that Ranciere’s question of the opposition between knowledge and ignorance is directly relevant to the political framework that Punchdrunk performances could endorse and follow.

Chapter 6

The becoming of critique in performance: (Non)-representation and the politics of incompleteness

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I. Introduction

In the case studies my main concern was to articulate some important theoretical claims in relation to critique as practiced in performances, to focus on ‘openings’ of sociopolitical and philosophical inquiries within theatrical spaces and to provide a historical-critical analysis of some of the practices in 20th century performance that rethought the critical function of theatre beyond mimetic representation and teleological ‘products’ of ideology. My task in conducting these critical case studies was not only to offer specific theatrical instances that challenged the normative methods of engaging with audiences and destabilised the theatrical politics of representation, but also to trace the becoming of new processes in theatre art that endorsed the potentials of non-representational theatre and the always ‘incomplete’ and productively transient emergence of the ‘political’ in postdramatic performances.

My intention was not to account for theatre practices that function within, claim to belong to, or even respond to an ‘extreme’ avant-garde scene of performance. There is no doubt that the contribution of revolutionary possibilities and the unique experimentation of avant-garde theatre groups that have received limited credits from mainstream media have played a very significant role in the development of critical practices within performance. My principal aim, however, was to critically examine some theatre projects that attempted to address a broad public and achieved a wide recognition at the time of their existence. At the same time, I want to make clear that the choice of these specific artists that constituted the objects of my research was not made on the basis of a supposedly hierarchical antithesis to ‘less mainstream’ practices in terms of significance. In other words, I do not claim that the importance of Joan Littlewood’s, Peter Brook’s and Punchdrunk’s theatrical projects can be somehow ‘calculated’ on the basis of their wide acknowledgment, just as it would be unjustifiable to overlook the contribution of less acknowledged artists because they received less recognition from critics and audiences. As I have argued in chapter 3, I am interested in *popular* forms of theatre that radicalised the problem of representation and explored the presence of the ‘political’ in different ways. From this perspective, the objects of my research were chosen on the basis of their capacity to ‘negotiate’, but also to challenge the limits of what is considered to be mainstream in theatrical

settings. In other words, rather than degrading the contribution of the less favoured theatre groups (which have, however, frequently enjoyed the affirmation of many academic theorists), one of my intentions was to offer a new ‘reading’ of the work of directors and collectives whose practice was often (retrospectively or not) framed as too ‘ordinary’, in an attempt to emancipate their projects from being associated to conventional and typicalised practices.

In keeping with the problematisations raised in the case studies, this last chapter is an attempt to theorise and explore the specificities of these ‘lines of thought’ that I consider to be pivotal in the ‘becoming’ of critique in performance - the proper conceptualisation of which has not been given the necessary attention throughout the thesis due to archive analysis. As I have highlighted in many parts of the thesis, my purpose is neither to propose a specific form of theatre, nor to offer a spectrum of theorems that would somehow shape and frame an ideal conception of performing critique. Rather I want to further elaborate on these processes of theatricality that have not only conditioned and affirmed, but have also produced and radicalised the potential for critique in theatre as a non-representational and incomplete process. In doing so, my aim is to push the boundaries of theoretical preconceptions – on the basis of which theatre and performance practices are often structured and framed – in directions that destabilise the canonical conditions of enacting and staging critique, while generating possibilities of destratification of performance and denormalisation of political discourses. Thus, although I am not suggesting an explicit mode of theatre-making, the objects of my critical analysis are both specific and clear.

There are two concepts that will make this task possible, and that I will elaborate upon here: the first one is the notion of non-representational performance, which I consider to constitute a direction (a line of thought), rather than a static condition that can be permanently attained; and the second one is the idea of ‘incompleteness’ as a tool of theatrical practice that introduces creative variations and indeterminate acts of critique in performance. I suggest that the thorough analysis of these two concepts, along with justifications and clarifications of their necessity in performance contexts, can offer a greater understanding of ‘what critique could become’ in plateaus that subvert political normativity and ideological determinacy.

II. What is a non-representational performance?

As I have tried to clarify in many parts of the thesis, the problem of representation in theatre and performance is more than just a theoretical or meta-theoretical obstacle to be overcome by academic scholarship. It is a part of the continuum that Deleuze identifies as being the source of ‘true problems’ when analysing Kant’s thought on Ideas. Deleuze notes that, ‘true problems are Ideas, and [...] these Ideas do not disappear with ‘their’ solutions, since they are the indispensable condition without which no solution would ever exist’ (Deleuze, 2004 [1968]: 215). I would suggest, then, that the problem of theatrical representation is an idea; that is, the problematisation that makes this problem possible is composed by productive conditions of change, rather than only limitations and negation. Having said that, I would argue that the politics of representation in performance is the ‘becoming’ of the problem of representation, as well as its metamorphosis into a critical discourse. Now, the extent to which this discourse becomes ‘unforceful’ and static – and hence incapable of producing change – depends on whether it is subjected to normalisation, neutralisation, stereotypical treatment and ‘major’ political languages. Considering as given my constant will to theoretically break with all of the aforementioned implications, in what follows I want to offer a contribution to the politics of representation in theatre by analysing the potential of non-representational performing in the politics of theatre and performance. More specifically, I am interested in examining some particular ‘areas’ of thought that challenge the normative ways of representation in performance, while raising questions of interpretation, bodily expression, communication, theory and reality. What are the aspects of a non-representational approach to theatre and performance?

(a) The question of the ‘of’ and postdramatic approach

Commenting on the central elements of Occidental theatre, John Rouse notes:

‘Most productions here continue to be productions ‘of’ a preexisting play text. Exactly what the word *of* means in terms of theories and practices is, however, far from clear. On the one hand, the ‘of’ of theatrical activity is subject to a fair degree of oscillation; on the other, this oscillation takes place only within

the authority of cultural norms that condition both theatrical production and audience perception. The relationship between text and performance is, in other words, a question both of the possible and the allowable' (Rouse, 1992: 146; original emphasis).

Although Rouse refers explicitly to dramatic and 'performance texts'³⁸ as adapted from theatre groups, his observation makes a crucial point regarding the entire domain of representation and its function in Western theatre: It highlights the incapacity of the latter to surpass the spheres of authority and normative significations, even in attempts to interpret or reinterpret and restage preexisting texts, political discourses, social conflicts and historical memories. I would add that this 'struggle' of Western theatre applies equally in its attempts to create meaning *within* performances, since the deconstruction of normative ways of enacting and representing meaning becomes an extremely complex task for the regular processes and conditions of theatre on the basis of which 'theatrical sense' is produced. Thus, from this perspective, the question of the 'of' in theatre and performance is, to a great extent, a question of challenging the normative associations made in the processes of interpretation and representation – associations that function as 'exterior' abstractions to theatrical presence and transcend the 'here and now' of live performance. Of course, this is not to suggest that memory, signs, historical links and other means of communicating meaning should be essentially held 'responsible' for the limitations that cultural norms promote and maintain. Rather, it is their given importance in the context of theatre and performance, as well as the subsequent stratification of a theatrical process, that creates the conditions for the production of static, self-identical meanings and the normalisation of political discourses.

At the same time, as I have shown in the case studies of the thesis, there have been many theatrical projects in British theatre that have challenged the authority of abstract signification and mimetic representation. Working with different means and in dissimilar historical contexts, these directors and groups shared a political 'desire' to thoroughly address and subsequently respond to the question of

³⁸ Rouse uses the notion of 'performance text' 'conceived of as a complex network of different types of signs, expressive means, or actions, coming back to the etymology of the word 'text' which implies the idea of texture, of something woven together' as theorized by Marco De Marinis in *Dramaturgy of the Spectator* (De Marinis, 1987: 100).

representation in British theatre. Although one can observe a wide range of dissimilarities between the theatologies of Joan Littlewood, Peter Brook and Punchdrunk, I argue, however, that they all share a crucial element of critique that affirms a non-representational approach to political theatre and, by extension, introduces *postdramatic* elements to the act of performing. It is worth noting that even though ‘postdramatic theatre’ is a relatively recent conception of performance, one that could possibly exclude Littlewood and Brook, I suggest that it is important to understand the postdramatic shift neither as a historical period, nor as a condition in theatre, but rather as a possibility of performance to challenge the normative power, as well as the dogmatism, of Texts (i.e. of dramatic texts, of Discourses, of Ideologies, of Culture and History) and their representation on stage. In this sense, I argue that the possibilities that accompany a postdramatic approach coincide with the political ‘desire’ to actualise a non-representational way of performing.

(b) The problem of representation and the destratified body

But how can we understand a non-representational approach, especially in a context that traditionally privileges representation as the most powerful and adequate medium of communication and political exchange? In other words, how viable and concrete could a non-representational approach to theatre be? My analysis so far demonstrates the longevity of this discussion in theatre, and justifies the extent to which normative representation has been rendered problematic in diverse performance directions. As discussed throughout the thesis, several theatre practitioners and theoreticians have thoroughly addressed the question of a non-representational approach to performance in similar or different ways. Eugene Ionesco and Antonin Artaud are two notable directors whose theoretical views not only address specific aspects of challenging the mimetic nature of representation in theatre, but also map out a non-representational politics of communicating through performance. Romanian-French playwright Eugene Ionesco, who was the first proponent of the *theatre of the absurd*, and one of the first directors of existentialist plays, was interested in subverting the conformist manner of theatrical performance and its reception, arguing for a break with over-

generalising meaning through representation. In his 1953 essay *Notes on the Theatre*, he asks:

‘But how does one manage to represent the non-representable? How do you represent the non-representational and *not* represent the representational? It is all very difficult. Let us try at least to “particularise” as little as possible, to dematerialise as much as we can, or else do something different: invent a unique event, unlike and unconnected with any other event; create an inimitable universe, foreign to all the others, a new cosmos within the cosmos with its own laws and consistencies, an idiom that could belong to nothing else (Ionesco, 1995 [1953]: 53-4; original emphasis).

Indeed, Ionesco’s idealism offers a very useful and comprehensive description of how the problem of representation in theatre can actually become a creative possibility. He argues that theatre should emancipate itself from the representational conditions that maintain the production of self-identical meanings, suggesting the autonomisation of a theatrical process and the affirmation of the performance-event. Evident in Ionesco’s account is the complexity, as well as the imprecision, that follow on from attempting to theorise a process that rejects the power of representation. Yet, it is on the basis of this imprecision or obscurity that many cultural and theatre critics speak of creative challenges to normative systems of signification. In a sense, the process of understanding a way of engaging with audiences that differs radically from normative and mimetic representation cannot be possible by using either the theoretical tools or the same level of linguistic clarity required in analyses of signs and conventional communication. In other words, since a challenge to representation is simultaneously a destabilisation of communication itself, then the analysis of such a challenge would entail different, and frequently imprecise, communicative means.

In *The Theatre and its Double* (1958), Artaud somehow manages to merge the above questions in one. He writes:

‘How does it happen that in the theatre, at least in the theatre as we know it in Europe, or better in the Occident, everything specifically theatrical, i.e., everything that cannot be expressed in speech, in words, or, if you prefer, everything that is not contained in the dialogue (and the dialogue itself

considered as a function of its possibilities for “sound” on the stage, as a function of the *exigencies* of this sonorisation) is left in the background? [...] how does it happen that the Occidental theatre does not see theatre under any other aspect than as a theatre of dialogue’ (Artaud, 1958: 37; original emphasis).

As discussed in chapter 2, Artaud’s critique of representation has been both polemical and inspiring. By identifying the limitations of spoken language and linear dialogue, Artaud looked at the possibility of creating a *mise en scène* that would embrace a ‘physically poetic’ way of performing. He argued for the creation of a ‘concrete physical language’ in theatre; a language ‘intended for the senses and independent of speech’ (ibid). In a similar way to Artaud’s longing for this unique theatrical language, Ionesco argued for the creation of ‘a world that could be nothing but *[one’s] own*, irresolvable but still in the end able to be communicated, substituted for that other world with which other people could identify themselves’ (ibid: 54; original emphasis).

Thus, taking these arguments into account, we can map out one of the aspects of a non-representational approach to theatre as a *response* to the incapacity of sign-based or logocentric communication to convey and actualise affective and emotional experiences. In a sense, this response highlights the limits of speech as a representational means of expression, shifting the discussion towards more physical and corporeal ways of engaging with theatrical performances that favour a non-representational approach.

In his 2008 essay *Like a poor player: audience emotional response, non-representational performance, and the staging of suffering in Macbeth*, Michael David Fox suggests that a challenge to representation is in effect a privileging of the affective qualities of the performing body. He notes that, ‘[n]onrepresentational performance heightens audience emotion because it foregrounds, and therefore heightens the audience’s somatic experience of, the reality of the actor’s physical and emotional presence’ (Fox, 2008: 209). Fox’s notion of the ‘non-representational’ stresses the emotional ‘vibrations’ that a performance can activate through the development of a corporeal interaction between audience and performers. He makes an interesting point arguing that embodied experience is an important feature of theatrical challenges to representation and signification (ibid). Following the theory of

anthropologist Thomas J. Csordas, Fox goes on to underline the critical possibilities of becoming ‘attentive to and with’ our bodies, understanding them as subjects (and not objects) that interact in space (Csordas, 2002). Brook’s *Orghast*, with its invented language and the subsequent decomposition of normative communication, can be thought as a good example of this kind of performance. Also, Punchdrunk’s immersive theatrical approach could be partly understood through this description of the ‘somatic experience’ that becomes possible in promenade theatres that challenge the traditional modes of contact between performance and audience.

Now, thinking about this idea of the ‘somatic’, I want to elaborate on a concern about corporeal theatre that has been raised by several theorists of performance. I suggest that the example of Fox’s and Csordas’s accounts on how the body functions in performance is characteristic of the seemingly absolute way in which many theories of embodiment have celebrated the ‘triumph’ of physical theatre over linguistically-based narratives. Spackman observes in her 2000 article *Minding the Matter of Representation: Staging the Body (Politic)* that, ‘[the] foregrounding of the body as an artistic means of expression that is deemed capable of exceeding the bounds of established (and specifically, linguistically dominated) discourse and its consequent politicisation as a site of cultural disruption, has marked avant-garde theatre practice throughout [the 20th] century’ (Spackman, 2000: 8). At the same time, I argue that while focusing on the critical possibilities of embodied experience (which Csordas terms ‘somatic modes of attention’), this foregrounding has frequently failed to take into account the authoritarian or politically instructive qualities of the performing body. As Auslander notes, ‘to posit the body as an absolute, originary presence beyond signification is neither accurate nor theoretically defensible’ (Auslander, 1997: 8). By favouring the qualities of the body almost as ‘unmistakeably’ non-representational and essentially pre-cognitive, several theorists have proposed an attention to inter-bodily sensations as an alternative to representation and textuality, without however taking into account the capacity of the body to act and perform in representational or textually dogmatic ways. For instance, Ness raises an interesting objection to an understanding of the performing body as essentially transient and ephemeral. She notes that, ‘[the] recuperability [of the body] – and the remembering it entails –

call into question the claims of radical ephemerality that typically have been attributed to corporeal performance phenomena, both in post-structural theory as well as in theoretical discourses that preceded it' (Ness, 2007: 26). In other words therefore, I argue that it is highly questionable to consider the body-in-performance as an unconditional solution to the problem of representation.

Following the Deleuzian analysis of the BwO (as discussed in chapter 4), I suggest that we cannot think of a non-representational function of the body without dis-organising the body-organism itself. From this perspective, non-representational and non-textual relations are only possible between bodies that are in the process of destratification (thinking of BwO as a human body). Thus, I argue that we should not think in terms of oppositions such as 'human body Vs representation' – since human bodies can also function and perform in codified ways that directly or not respond to significations – but we should rather address the problem of stratification as existent within every organised (i.e. hierarchical) entity that participates in the act of performance. I suggest that elevating the body to a level of 'pure' expression, to a level on which mimetic significations are in a process of being excluded, involves a decomposition of the body's capacity to act and perform as a unified and organised substance. In short, one of my responses to the problem of mimetic representation is not 'something' (i.e. the performing body and its multiple expressivity), but a 'process' (i.e. the destratification of the performing body and its 'becoming-non-representational').

To sum up, I want to suggest that embodied theatrical experience can be understood as a process that destabilises the abstract codifications of representation *in so far as* the performance disorganises the bodies' capacity to function as unified and hierarchical entities; and, in doing so, it creates the conditions for bodies to also interrelate affectively (as well as to come into contact with other non-human bodies in space), rather than only through signs and codes.

(c) Becoming a non-representational element in performance

In keeping with this discussion, it is important to emphasise the notion of 'becoming' in our understanding of the 'non-representational' and the 'non-mimetic' in theatre and performance; not only because it underlines the mobile

mode of breaking with theatrical systems of signification, but also because it redefines the engaging possibilities of theatrical elements that have been considered as supplementary to performances.

In *Only Entertainment* (2002), Richard Dyer argues for a reaffirmation of what he terms ‘non-representational signs’ in the affective level of experiencing music (and more specifically musicals). He notes that, apart from the representational signs used in performances, ‘we also recognise qualities in non-representational signs – colour, texture, movement, rhythm, melody, camerawork – although we are much less used to talking about them’ (Dyer, 2002: 20). Although Dyer’s formulation of ‘non-representational signs’ is questionable – since to label these elements as affective qualities that become possible through the process of signifier-signified-signification (i.e. the process that defines a sign) is a rather paradoxical postulation – his observation is important in discussing the difference between what *is* (non)-representational and what can *become* (non)-representational in theatre and performance. For example, I would argue that the extent to which e.g. a combination of colours, or a movement can be considered as representational (or non-representational) elements of performance depends on their potential association to references that are essentially external to the ‘here and now’ of the event. Thus, what we should ask is: What makes a theatrical element non-representational? After suggesting that both representational and non-representational elements are ‘largely iconic’, Dyer points out that, ‘whereas the relationship between signifier and signified in a representational icon is one of resemblance between their appearance, their look, the relationship in the case of the non-representational icon is one of resemblance at the level of basic structuration’ (ibid: 20-1). While Dyer identifies a similar function in the way we perceive something through representation or not, he differentiates the representational from the non-representational on the basis of ‘being’ rather than on ‘becoming’. I argue that there are no elements that can be considered as being *a priori* representational or not. Rather, any theatrical element can obtain the capacity to function in a representational or non-representational *way*. In this sense, I argue that there is no such thing as ‘being (non)-representational’, but only ‘becoming-(non)-representational’.

Now, more particularly, I would suggest that an element of performance becomes non-representational in as much as it destabilises the normative systems of resemblance and the level of associability to what is conceptually absent (that is, not present within the event). Furthermore, and from this perspective, I argue that the differentiating line between a representational and a non-representational quality, element or process should not be drawn on the basis of the relation between signifier and signified. Rather, it is by virtue of reducing the level of resemblance that the possibility of becoming non-representational is actualised. In this sense, what matters is not only the acknowledgment of the signified as a singular and independent entity, but most importantly it is the decomposition of the closed system of signification and its transformation to a 'becoming' (or to the Deleuzian rhizome) that introduces a non-representational approach to performance. In short, I argue that labelling a theatrical element as non-representational is problematical because it excludes the mobile, fragmentary and the productively incomplete character of that which becomes non-representational. Hence, colour can be a non-representational becoming; movement can be a non-representational becoming; melody can be a non-representational becoming, and so on. At the same time, it is crucial to suggest that in theorising a non-representational approach to theatre and performance we should not draw a demarcating line between the affective and the sign as such; but we should rather disconnect the non-representational experience from the hierarchical structuration and the power implications of systems of signification that are intrinsic in our understanding, as well as in our use, of signs. It is by virtue of this disconnection that a non-representational approach to theatre and performance can become possible.

(d) Non-representational theories

My use of the term 'non-representational *approach*' is, in a sense, a way of insisting on the mobile, non-static and 'nomadic' character of radical challenges to mimetic representation in theatre and performance. While the complexity of framing this approach and transforming it into a substantial theory or discourse is evident, there are several theoretical projects in contemporary social theory and human geography that have attempted to implement this task.

In his description of what he terms ‘non-representational theory’, Nigel Thrift identifies affects and sensations as ‘concept-percepts’ alternative to signs and significations (Thrift, 2008: 12-3). Thrift’s thesis emphasises that social theory needs to pay attention to practices – which he mostly understands as ‘performances’ (e.g. he is particularly interested in dance) – in order to come into contact with experiences of human geography that become possible through affective relations, rather than through representation. In making this argument, Thrift proposes that if theory wants to follow its own potential as a developing and always-current platform of observation, critique and understanding, it should embrace and affirm the ‘pre-cognitive’ and ‘playful’ becomings (which he identifies as non-representational) that occur in performances and everyday practices. He goes on to argue for a ‘radical empiricism (the lived immediacy of actual experience, before any reflection on it)’ which in being different ‘from a sense-perception or observation-based empiricism’ (ibid: 5), creates the appropriate conditions for exploring ‘modes of perception that are not subject-based’ (ibid: 7). Also, in keeping with Thrift’s theoretical agenda, John-David Dewsbury (2003) elaborates on non-representational theory suggesting that acts and practices of ‘witnessing’ map out spaces prior to reflection and thinking; and in so doing they generate ‘knowledge without contemplation’.

Although Thrift’s and Dewsbury’s theoretical projects have been confronted by several critiques that challenge their conceptualisation of a non-representational theory, it is worth noting that such critiques are mostly conducted on a formalist basis. For instance, Smith (2003) suggests that Thrift should not exclude Baudrillard’s thought on the non-representational, arguing that the latter provides us with a theoretical framework through which we can develop multiple non-representational *theories*, rather than an all-encompassing non-representational *theory* (Smith, 2003). According to Smith, while Baudrillard’s theories of simulacra can become adequate critiques of representation, providing us with non-representational tools, Thrift’s project is rather *anti-representational*. Similarly, Lorimer (2005) attempts to depart from certain terminologies and linguistic constructions of non-representational theory, suggesting the term ‘more-than-representational’ as a more appropriate and realistic one.

What all these discourses on non-, anti- or more-than-representational theory(ies) have achieved is not essentially to mark a specific turning point in social theory, human geography and performance – since their theoretical trajectories are not only directly informed, but are also strongly bound to poststructuralist debates on the politics of representation as well as to many questions that have already been posed by performance studies; they have, however, managed to reinforce the challenges to theoretical plateaus that still inquire into impersonal and affective phenomena by using representational tools of observation and critique. In a sense, they re-pronounced the ‘end of theory’ as a closed-up platform that is essentially bound to representation and textuality, by proposing more practiced-based approaches to the ways of engaging with sociopolitical reality; approaches which in destabilising the canonical conditions (i.e. cognitive, reflective, mimetic, representational etc.) of exploring human and non-human experience and interaction, produce a politics of presence – ‘a politics of opening the event to [...] more action, more imagination, more light, more fun, even’ (Thrift, 2008: 20). As Thrift points out, ‘[non-representational work] has tried to enhance ‘performance consciousness’ [...] by turning to examples of the intensification of presence provided by the performing arts – art, sculpture, theatre, dance, poetry, music’ (ibid: 148).

(e) The question of the ‘real’ in performance: Beyond enactment towards a post-Freudian theatre?

Considering the questions addressed by ‘non-representational theory’ as a part of a wider context of examining challenges to normative representation, what interests me the most in this thesis is the political potentiality of the ‘real’, the ‘present’ and the ‘actual’ – within theatre and performance – as radical alternatives to the ‘absent’, the ‘external’ and the ‘phantasy’. I want to argue that the political potential of critique in performance is actualised when the latter becomes a real event of theatrical presence that unfolds beyond representation (as a becoming-non-representational), but also beyond *enactment*. Following Eli Rozik’s (2008) critique of Schechner’s theory of performance (1977; 2002; 2003), acts of enactment should be clearly distinguished from performances:

‘In contrast to Schechner’s notions, a fundamental distinction should be made between ‘performing an action’ and ‘enacting an action’ [...]. While ‘performing an action’ reflects the intention of changing a state of affairs in the real world [...], ‘enacting an action’ reflects the intention of describing and evoking such an action in a fictional world [...] (Rozik, 2008: 213).

Rozik makes a crucial point in relation to the way in which we can think of the process of enactment in theatre and performance contexts. He separates two notions (enactment and performance) that the wide scholarship of performance studies has thus far considered as one; namely that enactment is a performance in as much as performance can be an enactment (Schechner, 2002; Taylor, 2003). Rozik reminds us that the act of enactment becomes possible as a descriptive and evoking process that bears little relation to the reality and the presence of a performance. In so doing, I suggest that his argument becomes an indirect critique of the opposition between enactment and normative representation as conceptualised by performance studies.

According to Diana Taylor, ‘[performance studies] sought to bridge the disciplinary divide between anthropology and theatre by looking at social dramas, liminality, and enactment as a way out of structuralist notions of normativity’ (Taylor, 2003: 6). In parallel to Rozik’s critique, I argue that understanding practices of enactment as a radical and structurally subversive response to the problem of normative representation is at least questionable; because, to a certain extent, the process of enactment is based on a transcendental relation of the human subject of performance with itself. It seems to me that to enact something is to act out a fictional image of thought, by evoking and interpreting this image through the representational capacities of the individual. In this sense, to enact is to represent, in so far as the process of enactment follows an individualistic code of recalling images of thought that function as external elements to the spatiotemporal reality of an event. In other words, to enact something is to act out an ‘absence’; it is to ‘touch upon’ the actualisation of creating something new (an experience, a sensation, an emotion and so on) while maintaining the structuration of normative representation intact. Hamilton’s (2007) understanding of enactment in theatrical contexts is insightful on this matter. He notes that,

‘[t]heatrical enactment is the social practice in which audiences attend to the physical and verbal expressions and behaviour as well as the ‘non-expressive’ movements and sounds of performers (human or mechanical) who, by those means, occasion audience responses to whatever the performers arrange for the audience to observe about human life (for example, stories and characters, or sequences of images and/or symbolic acts’ (Hamilton, 2007: 59).

Indeed, this account is quite descriptive of the reason why enactment cannot be thought outside normative systems of representation and signification. Interestingly, whereas Hamilton’s aim is to consider the process of enactment as an engaging relation between performers and spectators, I argue that his definition does the opposite; that is, he makes clear that enactment becomes possible on the basis of absent elements, according to prearranged exteriorities, rather than as a productive relation or difference that is born within a performance. Even if we can consider enactment as a relation between performers and spectators, I suggest that it is a relation that occurs according to, and because of, the existence of a common understanding of or a common emotional response to something external to the ‘here and now’ of the event.

At this point, I want to make clear that it is not my intention to negate or to diminish the function of enacting, or that of memory and imagination (although I am not implying that these notions coincide) within theatre and performance contexts. On the contrary, I think that these processes can play a very crucial role in the critical possibilities of a theatrical performance. What I am examining here though, is the extent to which we can think of theatrical performances as political events that function as ‘becomings of the real’, bearing a minimum relation to external, transcendental or fictional elements (discourses, ideologies, commonsensical codifications, significations and so on). Furthermore, my understanding of the ‘real’ in performance settings is not one that stands in contrast to something ‘unreal’ in terms of pureness, truth or value – since ‘unreal’ or illusionary experiences can function as extraordinary deterritorializations of normative patterns of reality that become possible within the presence of a performance (e.g. the composition of myths by Hughes in Brook’s *Orghast*). Rather, it stands in contrast to abstract notions of reality that manifest themselves as imitations of meaning and/or as phantasies that precede or surpass the

performance itself. From this perspective, the need for ‘real’ performances is one that stresses the importance of the destabilisation of mimetic representation as a way out of instructive politics and normalised critiques. For instance, as Ridout writes

‘[t]he audience-performer reciprocity [...] is not ‘merely’ imaginary. It is real, it is constitutive of the performance and its reception (Ridout, 2008: 223).

From this perspective, it makes sense to argue that a non-representational approach to theatre would simultaneously entail a break with psychoanalysis to the extent that the latter – as an ontological framework and a theoretical discourse – favours an always-representational image of the self – one that is essentially constituted as a result of abstract exteriorities and repressed desires. Elizabeth Wright (1996) discusses this issue in relation to the theatre of Artaud and Brecht, considering their theatrical projects as post-Aristotelian, but also as post-Freudian. She writes:

‘Post-Freudian theatre, which must, of course, include the avant-garde theatre of Artaud and Brecht, dispenses with any notion of the arts as a safety valve for repressed wishes [...] In particular the post-Freudian theatre in its postmodernist form makes a radical break with the old idea of sublimation. Far from the arts being regarded as a safe channel for the redirection and the consequent taming of destructive and aggressive drives, artistic texts are suspected of being a medium of seducing the spectator/reader into a given pre-ideological structure’ (Wright, 1996: 177).

Wright makes an interesting point in identifying what she terms ‘post-Freudian’ theatre as a critique of textual dogmatism which, in turn, suggests a break with a transcendental ‘beautification’ of emotions, desires and subjectless drives; a break which not only challenges, but also subverts the codified normalisation of affective experiences in theatre and performance. At the same time, her account is to some extent an explanation of the connectives between the ‘non-representational’ and the postdramatic paradigm. She notes that,

‘[t]his theatre is radically anti-individualist, challenging the privileging of an intending individual as origin of meaning. In this, it has absorbed the performance tradition, a dramatic form based on a semiotic understanding of

theatrical practice, a non-narrative, non-representational theatre in which the traditional forms, genres and practices are abandoned and the professional distinctions of actor, playwright, director, stage-manager, scene-shifter, spectator are eroded. The fictitious unity between voice and world is shown up by making speech compete with other elements on stage, such as music, sound effects, gestures, sets, props, lighting, mime, mask' (ibid).

Thus, in line with Wright's argument, I suggest that it is through destabilising the hierarchical structure of a theatrical process that we can understand 'what is 'real' outside representation' in performance settings (ibid: 175). In other words, I argue that it is by virtue of their decomposition that the power relations of performance are transformed into 'real' affects as opposed to transcendental relations.

Considered as such, the question of creating a non-representational theatrical space is also about thinking how to emancipate the performance stage from being associated to what Lyotard calls as a 'disreal space'. In his 1974 essay *Beyond Representation*, Lyotard suggests that places such as 'temple, theatre, the chambers of politics and doctors' surgeries' are 'disreal spaces' (Lyotard, 1989 [1974]: 156). He goes on to clarify that such places can be conceived as 'autonomous spaces no longer subject to the laws of so-called reality, regions where desire can play in all its ambivalence, spaces where for the 'proper objects' of desire are substituted accepted *images*, which are assumed to be not fictions but authentic libidinal products that have simply been exempted from the censorship imposed by the reality principle' (ibid: 156-7). Although Lyotard identifies an almost revolutionary potential in the 'disreality' of these places, I argue that it is a potential that is entirely based on fantasy; that is, it is possible to set up such a distinction on the basis of a transcendental relation between what happens e.g. during a theatrical performance, and a 'real' world that is forever outside.

A theatrical stage is not a 'disreal space' when liberated from an abstract, codified and stratified relation to an external reality. It can be a 'real space' provided that it functions as a destratified body that becomes non-representational within the performance-event. Therefore, the question of emancipating the theatrical stage from a certain 'disreality' is fundamentally a question of undoing the stratified structure of representation, along with the capacity to interpret theatrical experiences as the products of phantasies or as the responses to external

ensorships. Once again, Deleuze's conception of BwO is very relevant at this point:

'The BwO is what remains when you take everything away. What you take away is precisely the phantasy, and significances and subjectifications as a whole. Psychoanalysis does the opposite: it translates everything into phantasies, it converts everything into phantasy, it retains the phantasy. It royally botches the real, because it botches the BwO' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 [1987]: 168).

Deleuze suggests disorganised assemblages as the alternative to the hierarchy and the power relations that normative representation puts into practice. He proposes a 'real' theatre of presence; a theatre in which the spectators relate to the performance and the performance relates to the spectators with no mediations or interpositions. In a sense, Deleuze argues for an end to relating to anything 'unreal', i.e. either external, abstract or transcendental. As Laura Cull puts it, 'Deleuze's concept of *theatrical* presence, as a non-representational relation between audience and event, suggests one context in which we might apprehend *ontological* presence as becoming – the perpetual variation or difference-in-itself that, for Deleuze, constitutes the real' (Cull, 2009: 5).

To sum up therefore, I argue that the question of a non-representational approach to theatre and performance is crucially a question of a 'real' theatre of presence. As discussed in this subchapter, the possibility of such an approach to theatre and performance is actualised when the *mise en scène* functions as a non-representational becoming, i.e. with variations and interruptions that destabilise the normative structure of representing meaning as a transcendental and self-identical truth. This means that the performance 'loses' its capacity to be a complete or finished product, becoming a fragmentary and, frequently, indeterminate event. It is on the politics of this 'incompleteness' that I want to focus in what follows, with view to examining some important aspects of critique conceived as a non-teleological practice.

III. Incompleteness and indeterminacy as tools of critique

The political potentials of ‘incompleteness’ were discussed in many parts of the thesis emphasising theatrical practices that challenged, for similar or different reasons, any notion of teleology in their production of performances. Such practices were often framed as ‘works in progress’ (e.g. in the case of Peter Brook), fragmented plays (e.g. in collectives like Punchdrunk, Shunt or Forced Entertainment) or even unexpected and impromptu happenings with no specific resolution, ‘telos’ or any sense of Aristotelian catharsis. Throughout the thesis however, the notion of incompleteness has been treated as a ‘cathartic’ answer, or, to be more precise, it was presented paradoxically as a final resolution of the problem of representation in theatre and performance. My intention in what follows is to give the question of incompleteness a more specific theoretical treatment, with a view to argue for its critical potential in performance contexts. At the same time, I am not interested in drawing an exclusive theoretical space in which we can conceive the notion of incompleteness. Rather, in properly contextualising this ambivalent notion, I want to discuss its political possibilities by examining it not as an end-in-itself, but as a radical beginning of understanding the becoming of critique in performance.

I suggest that the notion of incompleteness in theatre and performance can be addressed in a twofold manner: both as a movement towards the becoming of a non-representational performance and as a ‘tool’ of critical practice. In a sense, there is no significant difference between these two ways of examining the concept (in fact they interrelate), except that the latter is perhaps a more general and the former a more particular one. What I want to argue is that the question of incomplete performance is a radical question that reinvents the politics of performing critique, introducing insightful ways of understanding theatrical experience beyond subjectification, ideological dogmatism and representation. In doing so, I want to emphasise that the potential vagueness, as well as the obscurity, that may surround the concept of incompleteness constitute, in a sense, both its productive possibilities and its problematic implications. It is for this reason that theorising incompleteness is such a complicated and demanding task. At the same time though, it is a task that can shed more light on the critical

possibilities of performances through considering their lack of ideological and political integrity as a creative force rather than as a pointless confusion.

Incomplete practices are not new to theatre and performance. We could trace the desire for a theatrical ‘unfinishedness’ back to *commedia dell’arte* in the 16th century, the Restoration comedies of 17th and 18th century, the public and street theatre of 19th century and so on. However, it is during the 20th century that performances began to be intentionally less conclusive, with fewer determinate processes and didactics, and more engaging ways of presenting plays. From the ‘biomechanic’ experiments of Meyerhold, to Grotowski’s poor theatre, and from the reinvention of Marxist radicalism in the theatre of Brecht and Boal, to Artaud’s deconstructive poetics, theatrical narratives began to acquire (to a lesser or greater degree, according to each group or director) a sense of questioning that destabilised the classical model of catharsis or that of finite outcomes. Although some of these directors (such as Brecht and Boal) promoted a theatre that always followed specific ideological and political lines, it is worth mentioning that the focus shifted from providing fixed answers to raising more open-ended questions – or at least, issues that needed to be discussed ‘with’ the audience. Moreover, the shift to performance and postmodern art in the late 1960s and early 1970s was pivotal to further emancipating theatrical plays from teleology and determinacy, introducing elements of surprise, deconstructions of texts, fragmentation of narratives, happenings and what Elinor Fuchs calls the ‘desubstantiation’ of cultural practices; that is, a ‘material and ontological’ ‘theme’ of the postmodern condition that replaced the idea of the ‘subject’ as a fixed essence with a discussion about becomings, imageries and incomplete subjectivities³⁹ (Fuchs, 1996: 3). It was therefore the rapid development of applied theatre and the advance of site-specific performances that somehow transformed the relation between the on-stage action and the audience, establishing new ways of experiencing theatre; introducing ‘openings’ that embraced and affirmed doubt rather than certainty, interruptions rather than continuity, disunification rather than consistency and so on.

Thus, ‘incomplete’ and ‘indeterminate’ practices began to be increasingly considered as renewed ways of engaging with audiences on a much more intimate,

³⁹ In 1985, ‘desubstantiation’ (*Les immatériaux*) was the subject matter of an exhibition that was partly curated by Jean-Francois Lyotard at the Pompidou Centre in Paris (Fuchs, 1996).

as well as politically relevant, level. As Anthony Jackson observes, ‘this ‘incompleteness’ is likely to be at once a dramaturgical strategy, a philosophical belief and a recognition of the way ‘reception’ and ‘engagement’ work in practice’ (Jackson, 2007: 271). Indeed, the discussion of incompleteness is resonant with questions of ‘spaces-in-between’ in cultural and art practices. Following Wolfgang Iser’s concept of ‘indeterminacy’ in literature, Jackson argues that an incomplete approach to theatre and performance reveals ‘the ‘creative gaps’ [...] that draw the reader or audience in to an active, collaborative relationship with the text’ (ibid). In his 1971 essay *Indeterminacy and the reader’s response to prose fiction*, Iser challenged the way in which the process of interpretation is attained with regards to literary texts. He argued against the abstract subtextual meanings that manifest themselves ‘behind’ the texts as fixed and self-identical truths, suggesting that the readers have an active contribution in the making of these indeterminate and open-ended experiences that are created between them and the texts (Iser, 1989 [1971]). We could perhaps understand Iser’s notion of indeterminacy alongside what Derrida theorised as the becoming of the between – the ‘subjectile’ (a term conceived by Artaud) – in the relation of the painter with the canvas (Derrida & Thevenin, 1998). While criticising his own drawings, Artaud used this hybrid term (composed by the words ‘subjective’ and ‘projectile’) to describe the liminal space that gives support, sustains or even ‘betrays’ artistic creation. In *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, Derrida elaborated on this concept further, emphasising the ontological possibilities of an inexact field, understood beyond the subject-object binary that ‘has no consistency apart from that of the between’ (ibid: 71).

(a) From incompleteness as transcendence to incompleteness as presence

I suggest that this broad discussion on what happens in-between art practices is fundamental in our understanding of these ‘invisible’, incomplete and indeterminate relations that become possible not as absent abstractions or transcendental generalisations, but rather as present experiences that are created within an event. The ways in which a performance is related to its spectators – and vice versa – construct a liminal space which needs to be rendered a becoming of presence; that is, it needs to be acknowledged as a creative, expressive and

mobile space. Because, it is worth noting that in conceptualising the possibilities of spaces in-between, the boundaries that divide a politics of presence from a politics of transcendence can potentially be fine and fragile. For example, it is interesting to examine Merleau-Ponty's argument on the incomplete 'blanks' of art and language. He notes that,

'language is expressive as much as through what is between the words as through the words themselves, and through what it does not say as much as what it says; just as the painter paints as much by what he traces, by the blanks he leaves, or by the brush marks that he does not make' (Merleau-Ponty, 1973: 43; original emphasis).

Merleau-Ponty's account highlights the contribution of gaps, interruptions, pauses, of unfinished and blank spaces, in the production of meaning as a shared experience; as an element that injects agency to the reader, the spectator, or user. As Helen Nicholson comments, following from this argument, 'those gaps are 'expressive', they invite 'multiple interpretations' and offer 'an aesthetic space in which meanings are made'" (as cited in Jackson, 2007: 271). What is important here though is the way in which we understand the function of such incomplete spaces. I argue that if we understand these 'gaps' as spaces in which meaning is produced, then these 'gaps' are not a sign of a 'lack' to be filled; these incomplete spaces are not completed, occupied or territorialised through representation. The very incompleteness of such spaces not only conditions, but also *becomes* the creation of meaning in itself, as an experience of presence. I would argue that this is the difference between creating meaning and discovering meaning; because the former, as an act of presence, is not a completion of a gap. In his research on the theatre of Beckett, Les Essif makes a relevant point; his interest is 'to examine ways in which emptiness is meaningful as emptiness, and ways in which the stage is essentially emptiable (depletable) instead of essentially fillable' (Esiff, 2001: 66). Esiff suggests that the awareness of this emptiness as such transforms the theatrical stage into a 'supra-representational' space; that is, a space which endorses 'the meta-physical, sur-real essence of emptiness, and its effect on the consciousness of the spectator' (ibid).

While I agree with Esiff's focus on breaking with any lust for completeness, I argue that, in a sense, these incomplete or 'empty' spaces are not gaps at all. They

are not really empty and they are not voids. They hold no negative connotation, nor do they become neutral conditions of performing. Incomplete spaces (such as the points of contact between performance and audience, between users and installations, between readers and books etc.) function as open-ending variations, as creative encounters, as becomings of meanings that are only possible as relations, as productive differences between an event (with both its human and non-human constituents) and its participants. In other words, in suggesting that these incomplete spaces are becomings of meaning, I argue that they are not ‘invitations’ for a potential completion of a story, a narrative, an artwork or an idea that become possible in relation to external significations, transcendental codifications and representation. They are instead non-representational becomings in as much as their function is not to unify or territorialise the multiplicity of experiencing a performance; in so far as they do not normalise the political potential of what actually takes place in the ‘here and now’ of a performance, but in as much as they produce experiences that enhance the critical engagement of the audience with the event.

Therefore, one of the most important points that needs to be made, in relation to incompleteness in theatre and performance, is the extent to which we can conceive an incompleteness of presence, rather than an incompleteness of transcendence. I argue that incomplete practices become politically forceful and radically subversive in as much as they are not abstractly defined as transcendental ‘invisibilities’ that operate as absent representations of self-identical meanings, discourses, conflicts or truths. We need to rethink the notion of incompleteness in political theatre as a movement towards a non-representational approach to critique; in other words, to dissociate incomplete processes from static conditions and abstractions – i.e. states that engender transcendental and normative significations to critical thinking and critical practice – and to conceive them as mobile and ephemeral variations that function as the critical ‘force’ of performances.

We could further understand the meaning of this dissociation through Husserl’s distinction between ‘[the] *imperfection* pertaining to immanent perception’ and ‘the *incompleteness* associated with transcendent perception’ as explained by Lillian Alweiss (Alweiss, 2003: 31). Husserl argues that, ‘this incompleteness or

‘imperfection’ pertaining to the essence of the perception of a lived experience, is radically different from the incompleteness or ‘imperfection’ pertaining to the essence of the perception of something ‘transcendent’” (as cited in Alweiss, 2003: 31). Following this account, Alweiss goes on to argue that transcendent incompleteness is ‘not fully given’, i.e. it is an absent abstraction, whereas immanent incompleteness is ‘absolutely given’, i.e. it is present and actual (ibid).

For example, in Peter Brook’s *Orghast*, the feeling of ‘unfinishedness’ due to the audience’s incapacity to make immediate sense of Hughes’s invented language was politically forceful precisely because it was not expected from the audience to discover any missing links to a supposedly ‘hidden story’; the point was rather to transform the way of experiencing language, sounds and music *before* representation and signification come into play. Hughes’s language was not a linguistic jigsaw that had to be solved in an abstract or metaphysical sense, but rather an opportunity to alter the way of perceiving and experiencing a performance in a more physical, direct and actual manner. Also, the point of Punchdrunk’s fragmented narratives is never to become one single and unified narrative on the basis of external references and mimetic representations. Rather, it is the swift undoing of the audience’s capacity to connect and codify meanings that gives way to a ‘Lynchian’⁴⁰, immersive and dream-like perception of their plays.

Thus, to sum up, I argue that the political potentials of these incomplete and fragmentary ‘spaces’ that function in-between the human or non-human agents of a theatrical performance enhance the critical perception of the spectators and produce possibilities of performing critique on a non-representational level in as much as: (1) they are not normatively completed or territorialised on the basis of external symbolisations; (2) their incompleteness is understood, perceived and experienced as a movement, as a variation, as a becoming, i.e. as a mobilising *rupture* that creates the conditions of performing critique, without however being a static condition or a fixed quality in itself; (3) they are understood, perceived and experienced as *actual* and *real* elements of the ‘here and now’ of the event, endorsing at the same time a politics of presence in theatre and performance.

⁴⁰ See Maxie Szaalwinska’s interesting comparison between Punchdrunk and David Lynch’s films in her 2007 Guardian article *Punchdrunk are theatre’s most accomplished poets*.

(b) Critique: The art of not being ‘complete’ quite so much

Let us now focus more explicitly on understanding what incomplete and non-teleological practices can offer to the experience of critique. Without discarding my discussion on theatre and performance, I want to emphasise the contribution of ‘unfinished’ elements to our general conceptualisation of critical practice. In other words, in keeping my focus on the potential of performing critique as a non-representational process, I want in particular to examine the ways in which critique can be thought outside teleology, determinacy and finitude.

Assuming a notion of ‘completeness’

An important point that has to be made if one wants to look at what is interesting about incomplete processes of critique, is the extent to which we are able to disconnect the incompleteness of practices from a sense, or a concept of completeness. In other words, the first question we should address is whether we can understand incomplete or indeterminate ways of producing critique as entirely autonomous elements, detached from an idea of totality or finitude. Indeed, how can we think of a process as an unfinished one if we do not simultaneously define what is, or what could be, finite or total in an actual or metaphysical sense? For example, leaving free space and adding ‘openings’ that affirm and invite a critical engagement with a critical process, is in itself an acknowledgment, or an awareness of a ‘route’ that leads to determinate and complete critical outcomes. In his essay *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism*, Walter Benjamin compares the process of criticism to works of art, arguing that, ‘[e]very work is, in relation to the absolute of art, necessarily incomplete, or – what amounts to the same thing – it is incomplete in relation to its own absolute idea’ (Benjamin et al, 1996: 154). Benjamin suggests that in order to contribute to actual change, acts of criticism should always render their subject matter incomplete (in relation to the whole idea of their subject matter), in the same way that works of art become possible as unfinished elements in relation to a finite idea of art. Talking more specifically about theatre and especially about the ways in which scholars usually deal with the fragmented and indeterminate elements of Beckett’s theatre, Les Essif notes that, ‘[t]heir perception of the fragmented occurs with respect to the perception of the whole, the whole body

and the whole narrative story, the whole subject' (Essif, 2001: 66). Benjamin's and Essif's accounts are important here, not merely because of their observations as such but mostly because of the different implications that accompany them. Whereas Benjamin identifies a radically interruptive potential in the very incompleteness of works of art or criticism – despite the fact that these exist in relation to complete or absolute ideas – Essif 'territorialises' the question, focusing on the incapacity of incomplete or fragmentary practices to be thought outside a sense of finitude and totality. He argues that the Artaudian, fragmented sense of Beckett's plays 'cannot free itself from the aesthetics of story or merit some degree of primacy with respect to it (ibid); and he continues: 'Beckett's unorthodox theatrical fiction still coalesces around the idea of story even as it elaborates a story 'untold'' (ibid).

In any case, one of the answers to the question that I posed above is that we could *not* conceptualise incompleteness outside or beyond an assumption of completeness. At the same time, however, what is made clear through this answer, as well as through the difference that I briefly identified between Benjamin's and Essif's accounts, is that incomplete performances and acts of critique are in fact radical *responses* to a wider problem of critical practice. It is true that they exist only in relation to a perception of a 'whole' so that it makes absolute sense to contend that they always assume a conception of the subject as unified and total. But, in a sense, this is the purpose of critique in the first place: to destabilise the teleology and the determinacy of hegemonic practices and discourses, injecting change and movement into our ways of thinking and doing. To put it differently, the point here is that while acknowledging the relation between incompleteness and completeness, we should think of the former not as a mere consequence of the latter; incomplete critical practices are not hierarchically bound to a normative function that is dictated by an idea of finitude. Rather, they are active and mobile interventions in or interruptions of a politics that is instructive, normative and static. What is important, therefore, is not to claim a fictional or imaginary level of totality or completeness for unfinished practices – not even to render them autonomous and singular elements or conditions of critique; but to recognise them as *becoming*-autonomous and *becoming*-singular events of critique and, by extension, to render them politically 'justifiable', emancipating them from the essentialism of

representation and signification. They are not autonomous because they assume the existence of teleology within discourses; however, they are becoming-autonomous by virtue of destabilising the power implications of this relation, breaking with the possibility of being subjectified to them. In short, I argue that the point is to acknowledge incomplete practices of critique for what they do, (which is to continuously become-different), without subjectifying their radical potential and their capacity to affirm a politics of presence within critical practice to a hierarchical and centralised system of relations.

From this perspective, I argue that the recognition of incomplete practices as politically forceful ‘events’ of critique is driven by the need to respond to the fact that critique is a *practice*, i.e. a becoming of fragments, of interruptions, of questions and interventions whose aim is to undo the normative ‘patternisation’ through which politics are embedded and normalised in discourses (whether artistic, academic, political and so on). The very nature of critique as a mode of questioning is what institutes its incomplete and mobile character in the first place. Having said that, I want to close this subchapter by reinforcing this argument following Foucault’s idea of critique. I will argue that critique becomes politically forceful as an always-incomplete practice, whose purpose is to decentralise and de-stratify the relations between the subjects that constitute it and engage with it. I suggest that Foucault’s description of critique can offer an insightful way towards a further conceptualisation of the relation between incompleteness and critique.

Foucault’s notion of critique

In his 1978 lecture *What is Critique?*, Foucault examines the function of critique-as-a-practice. He argues that the emergence of what he calls a ‘critical attitude’ became possible as a response to the problematic question of *governmentality* (Foucault, 1997). He suggests that the formulation of this perpetual question, that emerged in Western Europe in the 16th century, can be summarised as: ‘how not to be governed *like that*, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them’ (ibid: 44; original emphasis). In this ‘bold’ question, Foucault identifies the conditions of possibility for what we came to understand as critical

thinking or critical practice. He understands critique to be a response to hegemonic systems of power whose function was to promote and maintain a self-identical and determinate notion of truth-as-dogma. Thus, in attempting to give a general description of critique, he states that it is ‘the art of not being governed quite so much’ (ibid: 45). I suggest that, although vague, this characterisation of critique is important and revealing. Even though, at first sight, it seems to explain little, I argue that, on the contrary, it tells us a lot about the function of critique.

Firstly, it is evident that Foucault does not seek a rigorous definition of critique; rather, he wants to map out the conditions, as well as the potentialities of critical attitude, in the sense of allowing ‘space’ for important points to be made. As Judith Butler comments in her 2002 essay *What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault’s Virtue*, ‘[Foucault] seeks to understand the kind of question that critique institutes, offering some tentative ways of circumscribing its activity’ (Butler, 2002: 213). According to Butler, the very nature of Foucault’s inquiry ‘enacts a certain mode of questioning which will prove central to the activity of critique itself’ (ibid). From this perspective, the very process of questioning the way in which critique becomes possible is an important part of the latter’s function and projection. At the same time, this also means that the capacity to critique involves a reflexive process of exposing the politics of critique itself.

Secondly, it is interesting to observe that ‘the art of not being governed quite so much’ can be understood as a proposal for an almost deviant attitude towards governmentalisation. In discussing the lecture, Foucault clarifies:

‘I was not referring to something that would be a fundamental anarchism, that would be like an originary freedom, absolutely and wholeheartedly resistant to any governmentalisation. I did not say it, but this does not mean that I absolutely exclude it’ (Foucault, 1997: 75).

Foucault wants to make clear that what he suggests should not be interpreted as a construction of a static framework of critique – he does not propose a political manifesto of how critique should function; rather, he wants to highlight the fluctuating quality, the variation and the movement, immanent to the very practice of critique.

In other words, Foucault's description of critique emphasises the fact that critique is indeed a *practice* and not a product of discourses. Butler underlines this argument by contextualising it through the differentiation between criticism and judgment as proposed by Raymond Williams and Theodor Adorno. Williams notes that, 'what always needs to be understood is the specificity of the response, which is not a judgement, but a practice' (as cited in Butler, 2002). He suggests an anti-deductive, non-teleological way of approaching our very capacity to respond to normative systems of social order. He wants to expose the normative ways of arriving at fixed and determinate judgements. Likewise, Adorno attacks the notion of judgement arguing that it constitutes a 'withdrawal from praxis', through separating 'the idea from its object' (as cited in Butler, 2002). For Adorno, critique should function as a dialogical process through which political subjects emerge. In a sense, both accounts are complementary to Foucault's description of critique; they advocate a similar way of breaking with the teleology and determinacy of critique's 'productisation', suggesting a more mobile, and in effect, incomplete function of critical practice.

Indeed, I argue that 'the art of not being governed quite so much' is a call for a mobile approach to critical practice, in as much as it affirms the becoming of 'critical spaces' (conceived as fragments or interruptions of normativity) that cannot be defined, territorialised and therefore controlled by the same hegemonic mechanisms that they resist to. Although Foucault, in parallel to his theory of power, makes clear that critique becomes possible *through* the nexus of power-knowledge, *through* any governmentalisation (and not as an external element to them), he argues, however, that the practice of critique is that of 'desubjugation'. In his second, more thorough, attempt to describe critique he says:

'And if governmentalisation is indeed this movement through which individuals are subjugated in the reality of a social practice through mechanisms of power that adhere to a truth, well, then! I will say that critique is the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth. Well, then!: critique will be the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability. Critique would essentially insure the desubjugation of the

subject in the context of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth' (Foucault, 1997: 47).

It is evident that this description of critique is more framed and detailed from the first one. What we can take from it is Foucault's insistence on the mobile character of critical attitude as a tool of desubjectifying and destabilising the static notions of truth that are produced by the normative relation between power and knowledge.

With Foucault's argument in mind, I suggest that it is by virtue of conceiving critique as a movement that we can understand the notion of incompleteness in this context. I argue that critique produces, and is produced by, an essentially *incomplete* (i.e. non-hegemonic, indeterminate and non-teleological) sense of governmentality. Considered as such, the practice of critique (and its non-representational potential) is itself incomplete and indeterminate, since its aim is not shape, to form or to unify, but rather to productively disaggregate the power relations and the hierarchical implications that are produced within normative politics. Hence, I argue that critique is a productively incomplete practice, experienced not as a motionless condition, but as a process of becoming-destratified; understood as the Deleuzian *rupture*, or the *subtraction* that functions as a productive multiplication (as we have seen in chapter 2) in Deleuze's *One less Manifesto* (1999 [1979]).

IV. Conclusion: from de-objectification to destratification

As I pointed out in the introduction, this chapter's intention was to theorise the concepts that, in my view, enrich the analysis of critique in theatre and provide a mapping of the possibility of a politics of performance that is actual and non-instructive. In the subchapters I discussed first the idea of a non-representational approach to performance and secondly the notion of incompleteness as a politically forceful element of becoming-critical. In so doing, I contextualised the political *raison d' être* of these concepts, inquiring into the complexity of their potentials, and I enclosed their political resonances and ontological implications in a specific theoretical framework. Most importantly, in connecting the questions raised in my discussion, I made some critical points that I consider to be pivotal in understanding the conditions of possibility for a political theatre beyond

normative representation and ideological dogmatism. In short, these points can be encapsulated as follows: Theatre can be a political space within which critique emerges as a non-representational *interruption* (i.e. movement) of the normalisation of discourses and the teleology of normative politics. Having contextualised this argument as a possibility of a politics that can potentially exceed the context of theatre and performance, it is crucial to note that what I have considered to be the substantiation of such a politics is the process of dehierarchisation or destratification with regards to power as it emerges within spaces of critique. It is precisely this process that I want to briefly discuss by way of concluding this chapter, reinforcing the argument that interactive and political theatre needs to go beyond static ideas of de-objectifying audiences, endorsing a politics of continuous destratification.

As discussed in many parts of this thesis, the challenge of introducing agency to theatre audiences has been frequently thought in conjunction with a process of de-objectifying the spectators' presence in performance spaces. In many cases, the way out of audience passivity and the creation of engaging conditions of performance have been thought alongside certain 'ground rules' that produce agential possibilities for the spectators, transforming them into active participants of a shared theatrical experience. Community art practice and interactive theatres that follow Boal's theatrical techniques is a good example of this kind of approach to the problem of audience inaction. The grand aim of democratising theatrical production and reception has been widely sought by establishing a systematisation of methods that promote participatory ways of engaging audiences and dialogical narratives. For some, this is a very broad framework through which we can define the 'postmodern spectator'. For example, in an auto-biographical tone, the actor dancer and writer Katherine Adamenko notes:

'I ask the postmodern spectator to enter a new kind of contract with the makers of new performance. I ask this new postmodern spectator for three things: investment, to engage in an interaction the performer is asking you to do; complicity, to act without self-consciousness in that activity; and discipline, to commit to opening yourself to new forms of audience interaction' (Adamenko, 2003: 15).

For others, this is an approach that foregrounds a more localised way of producing a politicised theatre, or a community theatre with ‘its emphasis on local and/or personal stories (rather than pre-written scripts) that are first processed through improvisation and then collectively shaped into theatre under the guidance either of outside professional artists [...] or of local amateur artists’ (Van Erven, 2001: 2). In any case, what seems to be the main concern of these theatre projects is finding the most effective way to *de-objectify* the spectators, enabling them to become agents of the performance, i.e. the subjects of theatrical production. Furthermore, this process of de-objectification depends upon certain sets of rules and regulations (either ethical, political, ideological, cultural, practical etc.) that operate as the facilitative means to achieve and maintain the democratic character of this process. On one hand, this makes sense, considering that failure to address certain important issues while creating conditions of interaction and participation in a theatrical event could lead to chaotic, repressive and even practically dangerous situations.

At the same time however, what I identify as problematic in these techniques of de-objectification is the extent to which they are considered as ‘ends in themselves’, i.e. as egalitarian conditions that take the form of static ‘theorems’ with regards to the problems of representation and agency in theatre and performance. I argue that what is at stake in systematising the de-objectification of audiences is the very nature of revolutionary practice being penetrated by a certain kind of political ‘professionalism’ that functions through totalising concepts, unified systems of power and moral imperatives. It is the same problem that, in the preface of *Anti-Oedipus*, Foucault identifies as being the one that gives rise to ‘[b]ureaucrats of the revolution and civil servants of Truth’ (Foucault, 2004 [1972]: xiv): that is, the problem of hierarchy or stratification as *existent within* certain systematised acts of resistance to hegemonic systems of power. I argue that the systematisation and the typification of the conditions that de-objectify and introduce agency to the spectator need to be rendered problematic, and by extension, incapable of revolutionising the theatrical process. While the participatory models of performance and the conventions of community-based theatre address and frequently challenge the problem of representation and

political dogmatism, they however maintain the problem of hierarchy intact by ‘transferring’ it to a different, more dialogical level of engaging.

What I suggest is essential in tackling this specific problem is the decomposition of the classic model according to which, even in contemporary performances, spectators are considered to be agents (or not) of a theatrical play. This model is thoroughly described by Marco de Marinis in his 1987 essay *The Dramaturgy of the Spectator*. Marinis argues that there are two conditions of spectatorship: a passive or objective one and an active or subjective one. In making this claim, Marinis clarifies two points which, I believe, are interesting here. The first one is that the relationship between the performance and the spectator is essentially ‘assymetrical and unbalanced’ (Marinis, 1987: 102). The second one is that ‘the balance between determination (constraint) and freedom [...] is the essence of the aesthetic experience and the source of its vitality’ (ibid: 101). In a sense, this account captures, on one level, the complexity of audience de-objectification, emphasising that a total freedom of the spectator is impossible; and, on a second level, it describes a potentiality, which lies in the dialectic relationship between restriction and agency.

Indeed, this perspective is useful and my aim is hardly to counter it. It echoes Foucault’s idea of resistance as an act that develops through power, and Deleuze’s insistence on the process of territorialisation and deterritorialisation (even though both theorists do not describe these processes as dialectic ones). At the same time though, what I think is problematic in this analogy (that has been prevailing in discourses of theatre and performance) is the assumption that establishes the active spectator as a free subject, by contrasting it with the condition of a passive spectator conceived as a restricted object. Again, Ranciere’s (2011 [2009]) critique (as discussed in the introduction) of this oppositional model between spectatorship and performance is very useful here. Following from Ranciere’s argument, I suggest that it is *not* the introduction of subjectivity to the spectator that emancipates a performance from ideological didactics and political determinacy; rather, it is by virtue of destabilising the entire system of power and authority, the hierarchical structure of theatre that we can speak of a radical challenge to these problems of representation. This destabilisation entails an understanding of the spectator-subject not as an end-in-itself, but as the *beginning* in the production of a

destratified theatre. From this perspective, I suggest that the constraints that Marinis identifies, the territorial limitations or the ‘ground rules’ of a performance need to be redefined *within* the subjective or active condition of the spectator; not in order to apply constraints per se (not even sure if constraints is the right word), but in order to understand and experience what is totalising, what is tyrannical or fascist, what is hierarchical, what is hegemonic and teleological in the very processes of de-objectifying the spectator. In so doing, theatre and performance can focus more on affirming a notion of spectator that is not becoming-subjective, but rather a becoming-destratified one within a becoming-destratified performance.

In other words, I argue that the ‘audience-problem’ needs to be radically displaced; it needs to be transformed from a problem of subjectivity to a problem of (de)stratification. The benefits of such a transformation are two: (1) In rendering the subjective condition of the spectator problematic, and even restrictive, the notion of passive or objective spectatorship shrinks and progressively fades out. The conditions that introduce agency to the spectator become an object of critique, reinforcing more actual ways of radicalising a theatrical process. (2) The processes of de-objectification stop functioning as ends-in-themselves, as completed theorems, becoming the ‘strata’, the territorialities that enable a continuous destratification. The question of the spectator being free is transformed into the question of the performance (the event) as *freed* from the hierarchical ways of relating and engaging with the elements that comprise it; i.e. the performers, the audience, the space, the light, the sound and so on.

Of course, the process of destratification in performance cannot be thought either as static condition, or as an idea of finitude. This would turn the performance into a chaotic non-space, a void, an absence. The disarticulation that destratification produces needs to stay creative and mobile by means of responding to territorial conditions; by observing what Deleuze and Guattari call ‘concrete rules of extreme caution’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 [1987]: 554). In concluding *A Thousand Plateaus*, they write:

‘a too-sudden destratification may be suicidal, or turn cancerous. In other words, it will sometimes end in chaos, the void and destruction, and

sometimes lock us back into the strata, which become more rigid still, losing their degrees of diversity, differentiation, and mobility' (ibid).

Thus, following this point, I suggest that a politics of destratification in theatre and performance is a creative challenge to the problem of representation in so far as it becomes possible as a continuous response, as a positive destabilisation of any hierarchical or politically instructive conditions that emerge in theatrical events. In this sense, the 'concrete rules' that will animate and sustain such a politics need to be reinvented in the spaces between de-objectification and destratification; or else, between the territorialisation, the deterritorialisation and the reterritorialisation of the power relations in a theatrical performance.

Conclusion

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My primary objective in the thesis has been to assert that theatre has the capacity to challenge and destabilise the problematic function of representation. Considering the relation of that which is 'representational' to what is 'mimetic', 'self-identical', 'hierarchical' and 'teleological' as both direct and problematic, I understood theatre and performance as a radical space of confronting prescriptive and dogmatic ways of engaging politics. While the thesis examined the extent to which we can theorise, practice and experience a non-representational approach to theatre and performance, its task was not to attack or negate the act of representation as such. Rather, I suggested, it is the importance given to it in the context of political theatre that has to be questioned and challenged. In doing so, I argued that the act of representing politics in theatre and performance cannot be understood as an autonomous process. On the contrary, I suggested that it has to be analysed as a system or a domain of power that needs to be rendered problematic. Theatre, as a political site, is particularly exposed to the implications of this system. It is a political and artistic space that is often subjected to what Deleuze calls 'the elements that constitute or represent a system of power' (Deleuze, 1997 [1979]: 241). It can be 'occupied', territorialised and hierarchised through or according to a system of representation. For example, the production

of self-identical, fixed and teleological meanings in theatrical performances results from maintaining the function of representation intact. It is also largely on the basis of the mimetic and totalising function of representation that human relations in theatre become hierarchical; that is, they are organised in binaries (subject-object, i.e. performer-spectator, director-performer), they maintain a fixed positioning (as a subject or an object), and, as a result, they become authoritative (the subject dominates the object).

At the same time, I suggested that political theatre has the capacity to confront this system of power, by endorsing non-representational ways of expressing and engaging politics. I suggested that theatre and performance constitute a cultural and political space in which this capacity can be radicalised in so far as: (1) it is initiated as a substantial critique in Western theatre's function, which is traditionally representational, mimetic and teleological; (2) it helps the shaping of a radical political opening in which critique and theatrical practice intertwine and coexist as non-representational processes; (3) it places the question of spectatorship at the heart of a rethinking of critical practice in social and cultural theory.

Reflections on the thesis's questions and its findings

In making these arguments, I examined certain questions and made some hypotheses (both in the case studies and in the chapters of the thesis that were more theoretical) that I consider to be very important in discussing a non-representational approach to theatre and performance. In what follows, I offer a concluding analysis of my general findings, focusing both on the theoretical validity of my questions and the justification, as well as the expansion, of my arguments. My purpose is therefore to reflect on the critical analysis of the thesis in a summative and descriptive way; not only in order to substantiate my discussion, but also to create theoretical 'invitations' for future questions that will potentially contribute to and elaborate on the research task that this thesis undertakes.

(a) Theory as theatre

One of the first questions that the thesis considered (mainly in the second chapter) was the extent to which theory can relate to theatre and performance in a more actual and direct way than the one that notions of dramaturgy, theatricality and performativity have employed. In assessing the use of these ‘theatrical’ concepts in theoretical claims, as well as in criticising the way in which performance studies and the postdramatic paradigm have addressed the role of theory in theatre practice, I asked whether theory could *become theatre* in a non-representational way. This was a rather bold initial hypothesis that, with hindsight, I consider it as difficult to be addressed. My intention was to inquire into the function of theory-as-performance and to underline the potential of political theatre to become a space of actualising, rather than representing, theoretical discourses. Through my research it became clear to me that this question was somewhat problematic for two reasons: First, in the second chapter I posed this question in an obscure way. The meaning of ‘becoming theatre’, which was given central importance in the formulation of the question, was not sufficiently explained. In other words, the clarification of what it means ‘to perform theory’ was very important for the pursuit of this question. Second, this clarification was almost impossible to make. The question implied another set of questions that could not be adequately addressed in the thesis: E.g. what are the criteria that define whether and how theory becomes theatre? How could we experience theory as a practice? Why should theory become theatre and not the other way around? Is this ‘becoming’ understood as another form of theoretical embodiment? I would argue that, although very interesting and significant, all these questions would lead the thesis to a theoretical inquiry, which I did not intend to address. My objective was not to focus on whether theory can become theatre directly, but to argue that the relation between theory and theatre could *become itself more direct*. Thus, during my research, and while reflecting on my initial question, I reformulated it as follows: Could we think of the relation between the ‘theoretical’ and the ‘theatrical’ in a more direct way? As one that potentially endorses a challenge to the representational function of critical practice? The second chapter was, therefore, to a large extent, a very important space for

research. It was a space of experimenting with this question. It was a very important theoretical ‘fieldwork’ for the thesis.

Thus, to sum up the way in which I addressed and examined the question of theory and theatre throughout the thesis, my argument is as follows: I suggest that social and cultural theory should pay more attention to theatrical performances, approaching them as ‘actual’ spaces of encounter with discourses on the politics of representation; rather than as fictional or methodological tools of cultural analysis that either serve as ideological metaphors or justificatory examples. In other words, I argue that social and cultural theory should acknowledge the potential of theatre and performance practice to directly inform theoretical discourses, and to critically intervene in their subject matter. Social and cultural theory should, therefore, endorse the possibility of theatre to produce theoretical interventions or ‘lines of thought’ that function in mobile and productively incomplete ways; that is, in ways that ‘invite’ political engagement with the spectators while enhancing their critical perception.

Furthermore, the thesis suggests that the role of theory in relation to theatre should not rest on framing and describing performance practices as meaningful *objects* of research. I argue that the task of theory is not only to find terminologies and new vocabularies that explain or embody the cultural significance of theatrical performances. It is also to endorse a constant rethinking of theatre’s political potentials in the latter’s capacity to *produce*, rather than transmit, critique. It is to acknowledge theatre as a political space of *presence*, rather than as a podium of a political speech that is forever authored before or beyond the event.

(b) A non-representational approach to theatre: from (complete) products to (incomplete) processes

The question of the possibility of a non-representational theatre received particular attention throughout the thesis. Rather than providing a theorisation or a definition of a theatre that could be labelled non-representational, I addressed this question in a way that focuses on the non-representational *potential* of theatre and performance. I argue that the difference is both radical and decisive: As I frequently underlined throughout the thesis, what my research does not aim to

achieve is the production of a non-representational framework for theatre and performance practices. This would not only be an unattainable undertaking – considering that representation is a process that cannot be entirely eliminated or negated in theatre – but it would also stand in opposition to my critique of complete and determinate frameworks and models of critical practice as discussed throughout the chapters. Rather, the thesis examines *non-representational approaches* to understanding and experiencing theatre, considering the latter as a political space in which critique can be performed as ‘presence’. I argue for a political theatre that *produces* critique with its audience, within the event. Following from Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical challenges to representation, Maaïke Bleeker describes this non-representational potential of theatre in a useful way:

‘the theatre as a cultural practice may illuminate what it means, or could mean, to ‘find one’s bearing in thought’. [...] Deleuze and Guattari’s account of thinking suggests the possibility of conceiving theatre in terms of thinking, where the theatre is not understood as a representation of thoughts, or processes of thinking, originating from subjects expressing their ideas through theatrical representations, but rather as a practice of thinking in which we, as audience, participate’ (Bleeker, 2009: 148).

Thus, acknowledging a theatrical event as a shared experience of a politics that is produced in the ‘here and now’, as an experience of a politics that does not essentially correspond to external significations and absent meanings, is I suggest, a very important rethinking of what political theatre can potentially contribute to social change.

In this sense, the thesis argues that the critical challenges to the mimetic function of representation, as initiated by different theatre directors and groups, produced and radicalised non-representational approaches to theatre practice. These challenges were not made on the basis of a utopian definition of theatre. Rather, they were instrumental in a revolutionary rethinking of representation in political theatre, by introducing non-representational *processes* to theatrical plays. It is by virtue of this focus on processes (which destabilised an understanding of ‘critique-as-product’), that experimental performance practices were able to suggest new ways of experiencing political theatre.

This is the main reason why my analysis drew many theoretical elements from Deleuzian ontology. I understand these non-representational processes as ‘lines of escape’ from the organising and stratifying principles of representation in theatre and performance. Following Deleuze, I suggested (in chapters 3, 4 and 5) that we could think of Littlewood’s, Brook’s and Punchdrunk’s challenges to representation as ‘maps’ of a political theatre that interrupts the reproduction of ideological invariants and transcendental meanings; that is, I examined the non-representational processes of these theatre projects as positive and productive ‘openings’ in theatre’s political potential, rather than as negative elements (what Deleuze and Guattari call ‘tracings’) that imitate a reality that is forever external to the event. In their discussion of the ‘rhizome’, Deleuze and Guattari differentiate between ‘maps’ and ‘tracings’ in a very useful way:

‘What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields, the removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency. It is itself a part of the rhizome. The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 [1987]: 13-4).

My analysis of non-representational processes in theatre was directly informed by this positive and radical potential of maps, as opposed to tracings. We can conceive of ‘tracings’ in theatre as the elements of power that represent a fixed or static structure of relations (whether spatially, textually, ideologically, historically or politically). A tracing is something that precedes the event by surpassing the ‘here and now’ of the latter; it is ‘something that comes ready-made’ (ibid: 13). Thus, the argument of the thesis was largely based on mapping a political theatre of the real, while challenging what imitates reality and what operates as invariant in theatrical performances.

Thus, I examined the potential of a non-representational approach to theatre as a process or a ‘becoming’, distinguishing its function (and its relation to the

experience of ‘reality’ in theatre) from that of a static formula or a fixed positioning. It is this distinguishing line that led me to emphasise and examine ‘incompleteness’ as a tool of critical practice in theatre and performance. As discussed in chapter 6, I understood incomplete practices as pivotal in making the spectators active in the shaping of critique within political theatre. I thereby considered the *mobile* and *productive* potential of incomplete practices that allows for critical interventions in theatrical events, suggesting that aesthetic unfinishedness and ideological indeterminacy play a crucial role in conceptualising a non-representational approach to theatre and performance. At the same time, in contextualising and specifying my discussion on incompleteness I highlighted three important points: First, incomplete practices are politically radical and forceful in so far as they do not signify a lack, an absence or a transcendental completion of a story or ideology. On the contrary, I argued for the capacity of incomplete processes to endorse a ‘politics of presence’ in performance; that is, to act as inviting processes that activate a critical engagement with the ‘here and now’ of a theatrical event. Secondly, incomplete practice should be emancipated from a fictional idea of completeness, hence destabilising the power relations that subject the former to the latter. Considering the radical potential of incomplete practices to critique teleological and determinate concepts, I suggested that such practices need to be acknowledged as becoming-autonomous processes, released from an hierarchical relation to their object of critique (i.e. complete and finite outcomes as represented in theatre). Thirdly, understanding critique as a *political practice* (as what Foucault calls the movement that questions truth and power), is, in effect, a recognition of critique’s incomplete disposition. I suggested that one of the most radical ‘tasks’ of critical practice is to productively disaggregate and decompose the hierarchical relations of power that result from hegemonic and determinate politics. This is precisely, I argue, the non-representational potential of critique-as-practice.

(c) A popular-political theatre: decomposing ‘the people’

The thesis addressed the question of ‘popular theatre’ mainly in the case study of Joan Littlewood. As I have made clear in that particular chapter, as well as in the introduction of chapter 6, the thesis does not consider popular theatre as an

art form that becomes political by simultaneously becoming exclusive and elitist. Rather, I argue, popular theatre becomes politically forceful and radical when acquiring non-representational potentials and less unifying principles with regard to its audience. Littlewood's work with ensembles provided a very useful context through which the thesis discussed the extent to which we can understand popular theatre as a political process. By examining the different approaches through which Littlewood and MacColl conceptualised and practiced a 'people's theatre', I was able to simultaneously argue for and criticise the political disposition of popular theatre.

Bradby and McCormick note that, '[w]hen grouping together those who have worked for a people's theatre, it is easier to identify their common enemy than their common aims' (Bradby & McCormick, 1978: 11). Indeed, this is one of the most usual problems of popular-political theatre practices, i.e. a certain 'nervousness' in relation to the question: 'how to be political and popular at the same time'? In considering Littlewood's theatre – especially the shifts in her experimentation with diverse forms and techniques – I argued for a popular theatre that becomes politically engaging by critically 'standing' in between:

- i) The agit-prop polemics of political theatre (i.e. the clear sociopolitical agenda of plays, with specific issues being addressed), and a non-didactic approach to the ways of engaging with audiences (i.e. the destabilisation of the opposition between active 'performers-as-teachers' and inactive 'spectators-as-students')
- ii) The rigorousness and rationality of political commentary, and the radical potentials of *emotional* responses (by audience and performers) to and interventions in a performance event.
- iii) The coherence of a strong theoretical and political framework, and its creative decomposition by 'unexpected' and impromptu happenings.

It is by virtue of these productive contradictions that I argued for the importance of Littlewood's contribution to a popular and political theatre that challenged mimetic representation and ideological dogmatism; a theatre that – following Lehmann – is interested in Brecht's questions, but is not satisfied with his answers: i.e. a post-Brechtian conception of popular theatre.

Apart from making these three broad points, I went on to examine what I consider to be a very important area of debate in regards to a popular-political theatre. By focusing on Littlewood's practice, I criticised the problematic way that popular theatre tends to address its audience as a unified and self-identical subject. Patrice Pavis's incorporates this critique in his account of popular theatre in an interesting way:

'The notion of popular theatre, so often invoked today, is more a sociological than an aesthetic category. This is how the sociology of culture defines an art that is addressed to and/or proceeds from the popular classes, an ambiguous approach in that it does not specify whether this is theatre made by the people or for the people. In any case, how are we to define people; and as Brecht asked, are the people still popular?' (Pavis, 1998: 278).

Following Deleuze's critique of popular theatre, I argued against the implicit consideration of audiences as cohesive units of individuals that can be addressed as 'the people'. Although this argument was made in the case study about Littlewood, its 'line of thought' was visible throughout the whole thesis. I argued that categorising and representing an audience as a collective that share an identical consciousness (whether this is defined by class, culture, ethnicity, status or politics), is by definition a problematic limitation of political theatre's engaging potentials. Addressing 'the people' as a unified representation of a social group (e.g. working-class people) engenders a *positioning* that shapes the power relations of a theatrical event in a hierarchical and oppositional way. It produces a binary opposition between a performance and its audience that puts boundaries to the engaging possibilities of political theatre. Thus, 'the people' is an abstract signification that results in compressing difference and multiplicity amongst the spectators, in order to classify them in a specific, and often ambiguous, category of consciousness. As Deleuze argues, this 'major' classification of an audience is a totalising representation that normalises, and thus renders 'the people' slaves of a political demagogy (Deleuze, 1997 [1979]).

At the same time, I argued that this should not be understood as an inherent characteristic of popular theatre in general, but rather as a problematic element that manifests itself frequently in popular theatre practice. In this sense, the thesis considers the possibility of a theatre in which the 'popular' becomes 'political' not

by signifying totalising representations of audiences, but by creating an inclusive and engaging politico-theatrical space. I suggest that such a popular aspect of theatre is fundamental in the making of a political theatre that obtains non-representational potentials. As Peter Brook states in *The Empty Space*, ‘every attempt to revitalise the theatre has gone back to the popular source’ (Brook, 1990 [1968]: 76).

(d) Actualising metaphysics in theatre

The question of metaphysics in theatre was another complex issue that I mostly addressed in chapter 2, as well as in the case study of Peter Brook. Through my research, I discussed and examined certain concepts or processes whose relation to real practices can be considered as limited. This is not to say that these concepts or processes are essentially idealist or utopian. My analysis of notions such as ‘sacred stage’, ‘glossopoeia’, ‘magic-as-presence’, or even ‘immersion’ was largely based on their potential to endorse a rethinking of metaphysics in theatrical performances, rather than providing specific ‘techniques’ of theatre that can be directly applied in theatrical plays. My purpose, therefore, was not to claim a definite level of reality for such concepts, or a detailed method of ‘applying’ them to theatrical practice. Rather, I wanted to highlight the need to acknowledge the ‘real’ elements – in terms of impact, engagement and critical perception – that such metaphysical processes can contribute to political theatre. In other words, my intention was to affirm the non-representational potential of these processes to function in a level which is as real as the one attributed to qualities such as imagination, fear, affection, intimacy etc. In doing so, I suggested that we address a ‘politics of the real’ which bears less relation to mimesis as absence, than to experience as presence; we become more attentive to the *ways* in which a theatrical event is perceived, that is, to the conditions of its possibility, rather than to its object, its ‘hidden meaning’ or its mimetic realism. As Murray notes,

‘the understanding of reality and realism depends on the frame, window, or perspective of its *mise-en-scène*. Reality must be categorised, that is, by reflecting not merely on *what* is represented but also, and most significantly, on *how* it is shown or re-presented and *how* it is seen, read, or received. What

is theorised or understood as ‘real’ or ‘material’ or even ‘historical’ remains contingent on its *mise-en-scène* [...]’ (Murray, 1997:7; original emphasis).

Following this argument, I suggest that acknowledging the actual impact of theatrical processes that function in a sacred and ritualistic – but not transcendental – manner is giving importance to *how* something becomes possible in, rather than to *what* could be signified through, a theatrical play. It is paying more attention to what takes place in the present of a theatrical event (how it is actualised and realised), than to what mimics an external reality or symbolises a fixed meaning.

As seen in chapter 2, Derrida finds this potential of theatre in Artaud’s theatre of cruelty. The construction of a sacred, yet non-theological, space that Derrida observes in Artaud’s theatre is indeed a proposal of actualising metaphysics on stage. Derrida argues for a *mise en scène* that is emancipated from transcendental impositions (Author, Text, Speech) while maintaining its capacity to produce ‘magical’ experiences; that is, experiences that cannot be articulated in words or described in cognitive ways. He contends that the theatre of cruelty is a theatre that reconstitutes the *mise en scène* as a space in which metaphysics are incarnated in the present; as acts of re-presenting life without imitating an image of life. It is in a very similar way that Peter Brook suggests a holy theatre. Giving emphasis to the pre-cultural possibilities of performance, Brook proposes a ‘living theatre’ in which performers and spectators engage in a communal experience of ‘magic’. For Brook, it is by virtue of immediacy and directness that one is able to experience theatre in a pre-cultural, affective and magical level. His distinction between a holy theatre and a deadly theatre is drawn on the basis of the former to endorse a metaphysics of presence, rather than imitating images of metaphysical processes on stage.

More specifically, I considered the *Orghast* performance to be a very useful exploration of this approach to theatre’s metaphysical potentials. By taking into account the theoretical framework on which the performance was based, I made a critical distinction between pre-cultural expression and unconscious communication of meaning. I argued that the notion of ‘unearthing’, as conceptualised by Hughes, as well as the way that Smith elaborated on the concept (based on Levi-Strauss’s ideas on myth and music), were insufficient in

capturing and radicalising the non-representational potential of the performance. Following Deleuze and Guattari's notion of *affect*, I claimed that the mythopoeic and musical ways in which Orghast was presented and experienced suggests a pre-cultural mode of theatrical engagement that is neither normatively cognitive, nor structurally transhistorical. In other words, I suggested that the pre-cultural and the pre-symbolic modes of expression that myths and music can activate do not essentially function in a universal, culturally neutral or transhistorical manner – let alone in a biologically determined one – just because they are non-semantic or non-cognitive. On the contrary, my reading of Orghast was based on its capacity to acknowledge and embrace the affective potential of myths and music to operate as *conscious becomings* that are subject to constant change and reinterpretation. As Brook claims in a 1972 interview with Smith, the group was not interested in working with a 'universal language' that could somehow touch on a certain 'brotherhood of man' (Smith, 1972: 256). It is precisely this idea of 'brotherhood' or 'universality' that my analysis attempted to challenge, by highlighting the non-transcendental, non-representational possibilities of myths and music in Orghast.

Following from these ideas, it is evident that the question of metaphysics in theatre is not only complicated and demanding, but also forms an open-ended field of analysis in theatre and cultural studies. I argue that considering the importance of unexplainable, inarticulate and even obscure experiences in performance is fundamental in discussions of the non-representational, non-didactic potential of political theatre. I suggest that the decisive step in such an undertaking is a destabilisation of the normative opposition between what is considered as real and what is perceived as unreal in theatre practice. In other words, I argue that considering experiences that escape a definite linguistic articulation as a priori unreal and essentially artificial restricts our capacity to examine the non-representational possibilities of political theatre to a great extent.

(e) Performance space: Empty, incomplete, immersive

The question of performance space was also given particular focus in the thesis. I understood the spatial qualities of a theatrical event to be fundamental in challenging mimetic representation and hierarchical relations of power. Rather

than approaching theatrical spaces as passive sites-objects that are filled in with dramatic representations, I examined them as ‘entities’ active in the shaping of performances. I considered them as affective and tactile places in which performances become possible. From this perspective, my analysis was a critique of any understanding of theatre spaces as distant from, or external to, the performance itself. As David Wiles argues, the point is not

‘finding the right play for the space, or the right space for the play, but [...] to refuse altogether the dichotomy of ‘play’ and ‘space’, of ‘content’ and ‘form’. The play-as-text can be performed *in* a space, but the play-as-event belongs to the space, and makes the space perform as much as it makes actors perform’ (Wiles, 2003: 1; original emphasis).

Indeed, this differentiating line that Wiles draws between play-as-text and play-as-event is essential to rethinking space as a lively and productive element of a theatrical performance. It follows the postdramatic idea that space is equally important in experiencing a performance, as are the performers, the audience, the text, the sounds, the lights and the visuals. Thus, rather than understanding theatre as a mere representation of a dramatic text, this idea pays attention to the entire *mise en scène*, considering space itself ‘as performance’.

In the case studies of the thesis I addressed this performative function of space in different contexts. For example, Littlewood and Price’s conception of the Fun Palace was a very interesting and revolutionary idea of space – especially in the 1970s – to which I gave particular attention. In designing this ambitious project, Littlewood and Price reconceived the function of space as a mobile and incomplete site that would invite the participants to alter it while occupying and using it. This interactive ‘anti-building’, as Price called it, would actively ‘participate’ in the artistic and educational experiences that its users would engage with. Thus, the Fun Palace was not designed to function merely as a receptive place, but also as a productive assemblage that would be involved in the activities of the users. Also, Peter Brook’s notion of ‘empty space’ was important in discussing a very influential way of relating to space in theatre. For a space to become theatrical, Brook suggested, one should treat it as if it were ‘empty’ of preconceptions and fixed qualities (whether architectural, structural, historical, personal or cultural). ‘Empty-ing’ the space of elements that may potentially

dictate and impose specific theatrical narratives is for Brook a crucial prerequisite of a theatre production. I argued that this idea of the 'empty space' resonates with Brook's way of approaching theatrical forms and structures as motivations for creative decompositions, rather than as static and eternal modes of theatre. The question of space was also thoroughly addressed in the case study of Punchdrunk. I argued that Punchdrunk's immersive theatre creates mobile (nomadic) and fragmentary spatial conditions that make the space active in their performances. I suggested that Punchdrunk redefine the relation between the space, the audience and the performers: the audience and the performers become a part of the space and the choreographies as much as the space becomes a part of the performance. The narrative fragments that Punchdrunk create destabilise hierarchical spatial conditions, generating 'fluid' spaces; that is, following Deleuze, they produce non-metric, nomadic and 'smooth' spaces. I argued that the constant movement of spectators, and their disorientation in space, produce an immersive space, a space without exact mappings or points of reference.

I suggest that, although different in many ways, these approaches to the question of theatrical space have something important in common: They all share a desire to take away elements of (hierarchical) power and representation. They all suggest processes of *deducting* elements that stratify a space, that organise a space into units in which, and from which, power is exercised as subjection; they propose processes of taking away referential points in space that signify a Master and Slave dialectic or indicate an eventual catharsis. In the Fun Palace project this process refers to taking away the static structuration of a building while transforming it into an always incomplete and open space. In Brook's theatre it is an attempt to deduct any prescriptive spatial conditions as a means to experiment with a decomposition of rigid forms and models of theatre. Finally, in Punchdrunk's theatre there is a process of taking away:

- i) the traditional form of watching a performance, by negating the conventional relation between a stage and an auditorium.
- ii) the linear continuity of plot and narrative by introducing spatial fragments and interruptions in their performances.

I argue that what is politically interesting amongst these ways of approaching the question of theatrical space is, most importantly, a desire to transform a space

from an object into a *process*; to deduct what confines and territorializes a space in order to activate its potential to ‘perform’ and to participate in the ‘here and now’ of the event.

(f) Emancipating the audience: the spectator as nomad

The question of spectatorship was an area of inquiry that was implicit in, and central to, all of the questions that my research elaborated upon. In a sense, my discussion of the non-representational potential of theatre and performance was made in conjunction with a critique of conventional modes of spectating in Western theatre. Throughout the chapters I argued that interactive and participatory techniques of theatre cannot be thought as ends in themselves. Rather, I suggested, they need to be understood as starting points of a more radical process that de-stratifies the power relations of theatre and destabilises the fixed positioning of audience and performers. It is by virtue of considering techniques of de-objectification and introducing agency to an audience as *incomplete processes* that political theatre acquires non-representational and non-hegemonic potentials. I thereby argued that the problem of spectatorship in theatre and performance is more than a problem of subjectivity: it is a problem of positioning and hierarchy.

Following from Ranciere’s argument about knowledge and ignorance – as discussed in *The Emancipated Spectator* (2011 [2009]) – I suggested that the opposition between an objective and a subjective notion of spectatorship should be abolished in favour of challenging the entire domain of representation and hierarchy in theatre contexts. Through my research, it became clear to me that a truly emancipated spectator is a spectator that is able to continuously *move* and *change* his/her own conditions of watching, experiencing and participating in a theatrical event. I proposed a spectator-as-nomad; that is a spectator that is creatively lost, disoriented and immersed in experiencing the event at the very moment it occurs. I understand this nomadic potential of the spectator as a radically engaging process that enables a *political experience* (in the sense of actual participation), by challenging the representation of politics as a grand narrative that is external to the performance. In this sense, I argued for the potential of

theatre and performance to create an actual and present *political space* (a political *mise en scène* to which spectators would relate directly), while breaking with the construction of theatrical podiums that impose fixed images of an abstract politics or dictate a ready-made dialogue between the performance and the audience. It was with view to the ‘becoming’ of such a political space that my critical analysis of theatre directors and collectives was implemented.

For instance, in her work with the Theatre Workshop, Littlewood produced theatrical events in which dialogue and audience participation were not predefined or directed, but were rather emerging within and during performances – as a result of a process that was inviting the audience to intervene, interrupt and even alter the performances in unexpected ways. I would argue that Littlewood’s theatrical performances could be considered more as ephemeral political happenings, rather than as political dramas that were *a priori* interactive or participatory. Furthermore, in his work with The International Centre for Theatre Research, Brook created performances that were focused on engaging with spectators in non-linguistic (and by extension non-representational) ways. I would suggest that his experimentation with the pre-cultural possibilities of theatre was not only a critique of the logocentric function of Western theatre, but also a proposal for a political theatre in which the relation of performers and spectators becomes something more than merely dialogical: it becomes ‘sacred’ and ‘magical’ in the Artaudian sense (as discussed in chapters 2 and 4). Finally, in the case of Punchdrunk, I identified the potential of immersive and promenade theatre to experiment with spectatorship in ways that endorse *experience*, rather than rational understanding. Punchdrunk explore the diverse political possibilities of spectatorship by inviting the audience to ‘become other’ (masked), to become voyeurs, to feel actual fear or joy and to constantly move within a theatrical space (without being directed) by becoming parts of it, or parts of the performance. I argue that Punchdrunk’s theatre is political not because of its content, but because of this approach to spectatorship. In a sense, the form of Punchdrunk’s theatre is utterly political.

Of course, the question of ignorance that Ranciere poses is an important point that could be addressed to each one of the cases I analysed. The extent to which, in suggesting different approaches to the problem of spectatorship, Littlewood,

Brook and Punchdrunk maintain(ed) a problematic distance (with regard to knowledge vs ignorance) between the performance and the audience is open to discussion. Certainly, to assert that their theatrical projects managed to eradicate the boundaries that separate a spectator and a performer would be an indefensible claim. In a sense, one could argue that they all ‘intend[ed] to *teach* their spectators ways of ceasing to be spectators and becoming agents of a collective practice’ (Ranciere, 2011 [2009]; my emphasis). At the same time, I argue that what Littlewood, Brook and Punchdrunk have achieved through their theatre is, on one level, to challenge this distance and interrupt its coherency, by experimenting with different ways of engaging with audiences; and, on a second level, they managed to radically question the use of theatre as a tool of knowledge, by exploring the non-representational potential of theatrical experience – as a political happening, as a sacred event and as an immersive performance. In other words, I suggest that Littlewood, Brook and Punchdrunk did not want to create *ignorant spectators*. They wanted to create the conditions that would make spectators look for something different than knowledge in political theatre: an *actual experience of a politics* that they can actively shape and perceive – not as students or teachers, not as masters or slaves, not as subjects or objects, but as political ‘becomings’ of performance.

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