Strategies of Temporal-Spatial Appropriation in Postmodern Aesthetic Performance: Part I

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(This is the first of a two-part article. Part II will appear in the Fall 1989 issue of Theater Three.*)*

The definition of postmodernism is deliberately, even self-consciously vague, in order to signify either a "new" pose of freedom in Western culture or an unashamed mood of uncertainty or both, although conditions of freedom and uncertainty are not necessarily equivalent. Detractors of postmodernism, such as Habermas, Jameson, and Baudrillard, claim that its enterprises lack a critical or historical attitude toward the production and consumption of aesthetic artifacts and that whatever we call postmodern signifies a powerlessness of art to resist the seductions and pressures of capitalist or Western ideological constraints upon consciousness.[1] Yet postmodernism, by its self-conscious reference to previous "moments" in cultural development, by its compulsion to "quote" earlier art, perhaps cultivates a greater critical and historical detachment from what it represents than modernism ever attempted. Indeed, it is this calculated pose of detachment which detractors of postmodernism believe discloses a lack of *commitment* to anything in "life" itself, a lack of confidence in any system or doctrine to resolve the various "crises" of contemporary reality. Yet attitudes toward postmodernism and definitions of it seem bound up with ambivalent or disillusioned feelings about modernity. Postmodernism refers, not to something which challenges notions of modernity, but to what happens after the notion of modernity has expired. A *belief* in modernity, as an open or "unfinished" project (as Habermas defines it), and a *belief* in an "end" to modernity, in the closure of an "illusion" of openness, result from different perceptions of time which in turn structure different relations between representation and history.

For modernism, the relation between representation and history seems controlled by the function of *discontinuity* ascribed to aesthetic experience. Considered as art which *consciously* differentiates itself from the past and claims for itself the task of testing the "rules" or conventions governing aesthetic communication, modernism advanced an idea of freedom based on specialization, self-sufficiency, and autonomy within the arts. Romanticism established the assumption that each *artist* was different, not only from the rest of society, but from every other artist, because of an intense, unrepeatable commitment to an art. Each *art* differed from the others because the specialization required to achieve distinction in it left no room for the "dabbling" in other arts which separates the dilettante from the committed artist. Each *ism* within modernism—and modernism comprises a plethora of isms which emerged between romanticism and absurdism (ca. 1800-1960)—differed irreconcilably from the other because of its exclusive power, as a mode of truth, to

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inspire the undivided commitment of the artists who identified with the ism.[2] And though an artist's commitment might change, shift from one ism to another, the modernist sensibility generally assumes that an artist affiliated with more than one ism *at a time* has become entangled in opportunistic contradictions which result from a fundamental lack of "conviction" about the nature of truth or reality.[3] For modernism, freedom is synonymous with a power to treat history as a mighty narrative which art, by being conscious of itself as a player in the story, can rewrite in terms of "new" motives for action in the world.

For postmodernism, the relation between representation and history seems controlled by the function of *appropriation* ascribed to aesthetic experience. Whereas modernism stresses a condition of freedom based on notions of specialization and difference between arts, artists, and artistic movements, postmodernism pursues a condition of freedom based on notions of synthesis and integration of arts and art histories. In proposing that postmodern "knowledge" or consciousness in an information-saturated world strives toward a dissolution of the border between art and science, Jean-François Lyotard suggests that the basic source of "crisis" in highly technologized society is a fundamental lack of confidence in "master narratives" to give a convincing representation of reality.[4] With the withering of confidence in the authority of "master narrative"organizations of time and space comes the collapse of emphatic distinctions between self and Other, past and present, presence and absence, art and life: "new" forms of art imply art without boundaries between modes of representation. Postmodernism does not perceive history as a narrative at all. It perceives history as a kind of unbounded, amorphous databank, from which one can only retrieve fragments of information and compile them into forms that equate freedom with a power to absorb, rather than construct, difference.

The postmodern attitude toward freedom has traumatic consequences for the practice of drama and performance. With the waning of "master narrative" consciousness, new perceptions of the relation between time, space, and the body emerge, and these new perceptions encode themselves in actions which follow a logic that does not originate in the concepts of "character" or "author" (a highly individuated body), but from more abstract or amorphous "places," such as language, ideology, the unconscious. In postmodern performance, dramatic con-

flict resides not only *within* the representation but *between* the representation and its immediate context. But to achieve this level of conflict, the postmodern performance constructs relations between *time* and action which follow another logic than that which attempts to contain time within "master narratives." This logic can operate at four levels of performance: 1) the occurrence of the performance; 2) the duration of the performance; 3) the segmentation of performance time; and 4) the interaction of different times during performance.(Levels 3 and 4 will be discussed in Part II of this article.)

Strategies of Occurrence

Postmodern performances sometimes *begin* at a time which conflicts with the time when the social order allocates (or "narrates") time in the day for "entertainment" or "pleasure." Thus, postmodern performance may occur at midday or in the early morning rather than at the "normal" evening time which the social order establishes as "convenient" for the public. It is difficult to accept the idea that it is more "natural" for people to view live performances in the late afternoon or evening than at other times during the day. Histories of film, television, and videocassette viewing indicate that appetites for dramatic entertainment can emerge, and find accommodation, any time the spectator is conscious. Electronically-mediated representations can accommodate these appetites without producing disruptive conflicts between the times the social order allocates for "work" and "play." But it is just such conflicts which disclose the power of live performance to expose the authority of the social order to narrate daily life. The professional theater operates almost completely according to the rules governing the narrative of daily life: rehearsals are in the morning or afternoon; performances in the evening. It does so, not because those times are optimum for satisfying appetites for dramatic entertainment, nor because performances are somehow stronger just after dinner, but because the economic vitality of the theater depends on accommodating a "given" organization of time. Actors in television soap operas are not less competent in their roles because studios start taping their performances at six in the morning. Yet the idea of a Broadway show starting at six in the morning is virtually inconceivable. Only a vast upheaval in the scheduling of daily life would allow live performance to claim an audience at that hour.

Nevertheless, several postmodernists have experimented with the time at which performance occurs. In the late 1950s and early 60s, a group of performers associated with Andy Warhol produced "sexual plays" in lofts of Lower Manhattan at very early hours of the morning.[5] In 1970, Wolf Vostell staged a 72-hour Fluxus-type performance, *Vietnam Symphony,* in the Cologne train station. The performance included actions which began and ended within every hour of the entire day. In 1981, Vostell pursued the concept of "the journey as artwork" by traveling throughout Germany in a specially-designed train and performing the role of a traveler in a highly complex and aesthetic manner without consistently conceding to the "appropriate" time for any particular gesture.[6] But efforts such as these to redefine "when" aesthetic performance is appropriate are quite isolated phenomena. They call attention to the authority of the social order to determine what actions are appropriate at what times, but they do not constitute a serious alternative to that sense of appropriateness. Such an alter-

Yukio Mishima addressing soldiers from the balcony of Army headquarters.

native depends entirely upon establishing a *regular* time of occurrence for aesthetic performance which severely conflicts with the "appropriate" time. Indeed, even *Vietnam Symphony* timed its actions to coincide with the arrival and departure of trains, with, in other words, a "given" schedule. Even the idea of "unscheduled" performances only discloses the almost immutable stability of what is scheduled. In Berlin, the Swiss artist, Luciano Castelli, has staged and documented strange performances which co-exist, rather than conflict, with the times scheduled for other activities. For example, nearly nude, he crawled around like a panther or jaguar through a department store during late morning hours of business. He was on a leash controlled by his partner, who wore a flamboyant traditional Japanese costume.[7]

More recently (summer 1988), I witnessed on a street in New York City a very complicated performance by an actor-comedian who never identified himself. His performance apparently had begun well before I encountered it around one in the morning. He had attracted a substantial audience of perhaps 300 persons, including several police officers concerned about the power of the performance to interfere with the traffic. Indeed, the performer remarked that he determined when his performances began; the police determined when they would end. He sang, danced, climbed a tree, improvised humorous dialogues with spectators, described in obscenely graphic detail homosexual and heterosexual actions performed by spectators as well as himself, commented satirically on political, economic, and criminal events reported in the newspaper he carried, confessed to several absurd "sins," drifted into a raw, hilarious description of the sordid poverty in which he claimed to live, and collected money from the audience by presenting himself as a "New York form of tax on being where you are now." It was clear to everyone that the performer did not follow a script, that he showed an amazing capacity to convert the slightest utterance or suggestion into a subject for extreme comic treatment. It was also clear that the power of the performance to resist the pressure of normative or "appropriate" temporal structures depended entirely upon speech. More than any other variable of the performance, speech was responsible for "killing" time constraints

on the performance and for *indefinitely* sustaining the interest of the performer and the audience (if not the police) in the performance.[8]

Of course, one should acknowledge that this bizarre performance occurred at a time which is much more appropriate in Greenwich Village than perhaps anywhere else. But even in this context, the performance was, for both the audience and the police, *obviously* a more radical perception of when aesthetic performance will occur than the multitude of nonverbal or speech-depressed performances occurring in galleries and museums, which allow more or at least different hours of the day for performance.[9] To transfer the context for live performance from one institution, such as the theater, to another, such as the museum, may indeed alter public perception of the appropriate relation between time and aesthetic action, but such a transfer does not structure the relation very dramatically, in terms of a *conflict* between times. The same can be said of parades, demonstrations, and festivals, which, regardless of their inherent aesthetic interest, have received permits to perform from the proper authorities and have announced themselves well in advance of their occurrence. Similarly, many performances given by the Amsterdam Werkteater, which, during the 1970s, took place at various times of the day in hospitals, factories, schools, and prisons, accommodated, rather than challenged, the schedules of audiences and institutions.[10] Indeed, it is because large-scale institutions, such as schools, *regularly* schedule live performances (such as acting scenes for drama classes) at otherwise "inappropriate" times that one supposes that any serious challenge to the "normal" allocation of time to aesthetic performance within the social order will have to come from institutions seeking to appropriate the function and authority of traditional entertainment institutions.

It is clear, however, that the regular scheduling of *live* performance at times which strongly conflict with those that are "appropriate" or "convenient" for intended audiences represents the most radical effort to question the power of the social order to organize time and the rhythm of history. Although many postmodern performers seek to appropriate electronic media in order to accommodate an apparently constant appetite for aesthetic performance within the social order, this questioning of the "appropriate" time for such performance is basically outside the power of technology. As the performance by the nameless street comedian indicates, the question of an "appropriate" time for aesthetic performance looms largest when *speech* achieves an aesthetic magnitude sufficient to disrupt the flow of traffic, the flow of movement defining social reality *at the moment*. This potential for disruption produced by the scheduling of a speech event involves a heightened sense of risk, not only for the performer, but for the audience as well, risk which does not exist at more "appropriate" times.

A good example of how conflict embedded into the scheduling of an aesthetic performance can heighten the sense of risk for performers and spectators alike is the spectacular way in which the Japanese writer Yukio Mishima staged his death on November 25, 1970. Mishima and four officers of his "private army," The Shield Society, entered the Eastern Headquarters of the Japanese Security Services *by appointment* at 11:00 AM. There Mishima engaged in conversation about his beautiful sword with a general, then suddenly, at 11:30, he ordered his

officers to seize the general as a hostage. He submitted a set of demands for particular actions to occur at precise times, the most important of which was the opportunity to address the soldiers of the garrison. The Headquarters staff attempted to comply with the demands, but they also did something which Mishima had not requested or even considered: they called the police, who, in turn, brought with them, in a matter of minutes, a horde of reporters and media people, helicopters, armored vehicles, and tactical units. A very confused crowd and tremendous noise confronted Mishima when he attempted to speak to the soldiers from the balcony of the Headquarters, even though he had demanded complete silence for ten minutes. Some who understood what he was saying heckled him. In spite of this unforeseen deviation from his plan, Mishima stuck rigidly to his original schedule. After urging the troops to become the embodiment of a lost, warrior spirit in Japanese culture, he returned to the general's office and performed several ceremonial actions related to the performance of hara-kiri and seppuku. With the assistance of one of his lieutenants, Morita, he then ended his life in a gruesomely spectacular manner. With the assistance of another officer, Morita ended his own life in the same manner. Always following Mishima's instructions, the remaining conspirators then released the general and surrendered to police. The whole event, as Mishima had anticipated in his instructions, was over in an hour, at 12:23.[11] Mishima spent many months planning the event, and the conspirators held lengthy rehearsals in order to perfect the aesthetic effect of particular actions. He expected to be in total control of the moment, to have complete command over an hour of Army time, during which he supposed he could define and revise the direction, the structure of Japanese history. He planned to appropriate the time, the schedule, of a very specific audience, members of the Japanese Army, but wound up disrupting the schedule of the entire Japanese nation, which, through the media, treated the event as a terrorist attack upon the "peaceful" rhythm of life that constituted the "proper" history of Japan. The midday occurrence time for the performance had a symbolic-mystical significance for Mishima and not any special publicity value. In other words, the performance appropriated three different schedules or at least brought these schedules into violent conflict: Mishima's schedule, the institutional schedule of the Army, and a kind of public schedule defined by the media, which Mishima did not realize was a coordinate of the Army schedule. An extraordinary paradox is at the heart of this conflict: an elaborately calculated attempt to appropriate a schedule and seize complete control over a moment of other people's time, through aesthetic performance, awakens such alarm throughout the social order that many things happen which the artist is powerless to control and which subvert the objective of the performance. Mishima completed his schedule on time, but he hardly fulfilled his objective. Yet the performance remains profoundly memorable, imbued with a mysterious meaning which the artist did not intend. By the time of the performance, Mishima apparently believed that aesthetic writing, literature, had no power to change reality and that only transgressive physical action, in which the *voice* played a significant role, could have any "authenticity" in a world contaminated with illusions about the co-existence of tradition and

progress.[12] More importantly, the performance suggests how a strategy of occurrence which seriously and self-consciously conflicts with the "appropriate" time for aesthetic performance, involves not only a shocking collapse of distinctions between art and life, but the heightened risk of dissolving distinctions between art and death.

Strategies of Duration

Postmodernism consistently questions the "norms" governing the *duration* of performance. It questions the belief that a performance takes *only* 2-3 hours to produce a meaning which is aesthetically and economically satisfying for the spectator. Thus, postmodern performance constructs actions whose meaning is "complete" within durations which range from 15 minutes to many, many hours.

Examples of productions which *extend* the duration of performance time well beyond conventional limits are now fairly numerous. For museums, Vostell has constructed large-scale kinetic installations which do not end, even when the museum closes. Some performances of Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* (1988) consumed nine hours in one day. Since the 1960s, Ariane Mnouchkine has produced shows with very long running times; her 1986 production about the history of Cambodia demanded ten hours of the spectator's time. Throughout the 1980s, Karlheinz Stockhausen has worked on a gigantic, seven-part cycle of operas whose complete performance time will far exceed that for *The Ring of the Niebelungs;* each part of the cycle consists of an operatic meditation on a day of the week. In the 1970s, Robert Wilson experimented with music theater pieces which lasted twelve hours or more; with these works, Wilson linked the protracted duration of the performance as a whole to the protracted, "slow-motion" performance of ostensibly simple individual actions, such as entering, sitting, or saying banal phrases, like "happy birthday." By protracting the time required to complete an otherwise "normal" action, the spectator "sees" the labor, the struggle, the complexity of exertion involved in producing a sign. Because one does not have "enough" time to produce or decipher even a "normal" sign, miscommunication results, and with it, alienation, a deep feeling of being "slow" to understand life in its basic manifestations.[13]

The Wuppertal Tanztheater of Pina Bausch has also given performances, which, considered as dances, are unusually long, sometimes over three hours. But even though Bausch occasionally uses

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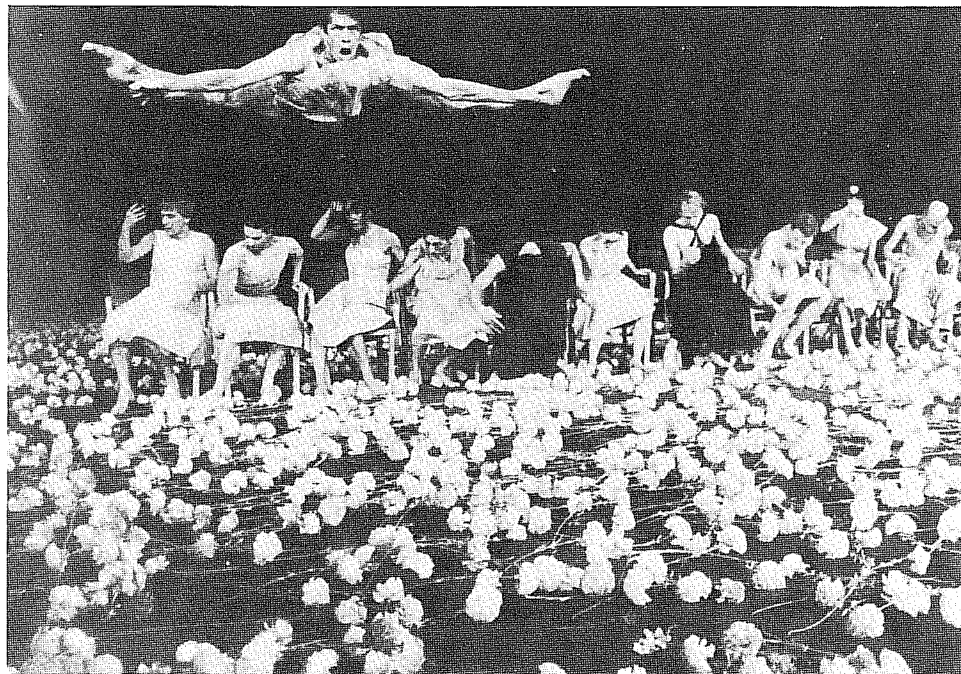

Image from Pina Bausch's dance *Carnations,* showing littered stage, dangerous leap, and complicated visual organization of action.

slow-motion effects, her basic device for calling attention to a relation between time and action is repetition. However, her perception of repetition is quite complex. She does not repeat an action without changing something within the performance space. Moreover, the actions which she repeats, sometimes as many as forty times within three or four minutes, are usually very difficult to perform, require considerable training and physical stamina on the part of the performer, and carry with them a heightened sense of danger or risk.[14] The dance ensemble functions as a metaphor for social reality: through dance, the spectator sees how the construction of social roles, gender identities, "beautiful" gestures, results from the complicated, destructive, power-signifying repetition of *demands and expectations* imposed upon the body. These demands not do emanate from the body, from the "will," but from external forces: the choreographer, the audience, the social context. Wilson perceives time as having a therapeutic effect: if people can just slow down, time will "heal" communication pathologies. Bausch, however, perceives time as a punitive or oppressive phenomenon. She exposes the pain, the exhaustion, suffered by the body in producing an aesthetic sign, in constructing a social role, in signifying an attitude which meets with the approval of others. This aesthetic of exhaustion, this determination to "fill," saturate, and pro-

tract a moment with "difficult" action and monumental repetition, signifies a profound anxiety toward the transitoriness of aesthetic gestures, of "desirable" movements. This anxiety stimulates the inference that enhanced consciousness of relations between time and action, of history itself, connotes an obsession with death, with looking at something, a desire, an ideal, a demand, that ought to be over, "enough," exhausted, but goes on anyway.[15]

Finally, in the early 1970s, Grotowski experimented with performances which lasted two weeks without interruption. In these projects, the totality of life itself, including eating, sleeping, and bathing, became theater—or "paratheater," as Grotowski called it. When time becomes totally theatricalized, theater ceases to be a moment, ceases to be "different" from reality. Every action one "naturally," "normally," or *routinely* performs in daily life becomes, over a two-week period, a dramatic element in a text someone else has written. The difference between spectator and performer disappears as text production becomes synonymous with the scheduling of life. Power achieves "total" embodiment as theater, as a capacity to schedule, not those extraordinarily aesthetic or "heroic" actions which set one apart from everyone else, but all those "necessary" actions which everyone performs, which make one like everyone else, and which therefore constitute the basis for collective action. Yet any notion of scheduling remains embedded in a notion of predictability. In a culture which makes distinctions between art and life, theater functions as a moment of unpredictability in an otherwise predictable life or as a moment of predictability in a life dominated by a mood of uncertainty. But when theater and life become "totally" predictable by virtue of their concurrent scheduling, it is due to the hunger of a society for certainty of meaning in every action; every action must have at least an aesthetic (theatrical) value in order to have meaning.[16] And when the value of every action becomes stabilized and equalized by the power of a schedule to treat life itself as a play written, directed, and performed by an anonymous, collective intelligence,[17] one easily understands the "inevitability" of history, one finds comforting confirmation of Marxist teleology, one "knows," finally, how everything ends in the utopia signified by "paratheater." In the paratheatrical reality, power does not center on capacities for surprise, uncertainty, or difference.[18] Perhaps for this reason, Grotowski abandoned paratheatrics in the mid-70s and has since devoted himself to an obscure, hermetic kind of theorization about the anthropology of acting.

Apparently, when it comes to experimenting with the duration of performance, postmodernists favor protracting, rather than contracting, the performance time: unusually long performances loom in consciousness more significantly than unusually short performances. And this preference for protraction further asserts itself in either the slowed-down or extensively, "hynotically" repeated performance of individual actions. Protracted duration signifies an effort to *appropriate* time. It signifies that one needs "more time" to understand or appreciate an aesthetic action or actions in relation to each other. But economic realities structure these semantics. The cost of producing a very brief performance is quite often equivalent to producing a performance of normal or expected duration. If the cost of production remains relatively constant in relation to the duration of

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individual performances, the cost to the spectator will likely remain constant, too. Thus, a spectator who expects to pay $30.00 to see a live performance lasting two to three hours may well feel cheated by having to pay the same amount to see a performance lasting less than an hour or only twenty minutes, may well feel that the performers are holding much in reserve and not giving "all" that one might expect for the money. If the "normal" duration of performance refers to a conventional, institutionalized time needed to justify the performance of particular actions, to accommodate the limits of the performer's strengths, and to identify a limit to the spectator's capacity for concentrated attention, then a protracted duration of performance can imply an "epic," even heroic, proof of strength on the part of the performers and an equally heroic challenge to the spectator's capacity for concentrated attention. For both the performer and the spectator, protracted performance time becomes a test of endurance. At the same time, however, protracted duration implies that it takes more time to justify the performance of the actions, to construct the motives for the actions, and to provide all the information needed to understand the actions and "complete" a meaning for them. This implication may be in tension with an apparent objective of postmodernism: to challenge the authority of "master narrative" constructions of reality. If performance needs more time to justify, "explain," or contextualize actions, it is not necessarily because narrative conventions in themselves filter out insightful relations between time and action; protracted duration may also function as a sign of desire for the story to go on and on, beyond the time allotted by the social order for telling stories and in synchrony with the time allotted for "other" things. Protracted duration then merely signifies, rather than challenges, the perception of action as an element in a story, a master narrative, which, by being "about" a "master" or dominate identity, unifies the meaning of life itself. In other words, duration should refer not only to the time needed for the physical performance of actions, but also to the time needed for justifying the actions.[19]

But if it takes less rather than more time to justify an aesthetic action, a problem emerges: two kinds of economy are in tension. The economy of production costs does not justify the economy which justifies the aesthetic action. The dollar value of time conflicts with its aesthetic value. This problem is especially pronounced in

live performance. With other modes of aesthetic experience, such as television or VCR watching, listening to the radio, reading, playing recorded music, going for a walk, or visiting a museum, one can control time according to its aesthetic value, by switching to another channel, tuning off, turning to another book, replaying the same passage, or moving on to another object of interest. These media involve modes of production which allow the aesthetic value of the performance to determine the time needed to justify either the performance or the encounter with the performance. The expanding, indeed stupefying, success of these modes in the 20th century, as modes clearly *desired* by the world public, suggests that it takes less, rather than more, time to justify an aesthetic event.[20] To accommodate this perception of aesthetic time, while disclosing skepticism toward master narrative organizations of time, some postmodernists have constructed performances which have a "normal" duration of around two hours, but which consist of discrete, self-contained moments, lasting from less than a minute up to forty minutes, a strategy, almost a narrative mode, already long in use for dance concerts. The performers may change the order of the discrete moments to produce different moods and meanings, whereas to change the order of events in a master narrative quite often serves only to burden the spectator with the task of trying to figure out what the order of events should be rather than is.

Laurie Anderson and George Coates (most recently in *Actual Sho,* 1987) have mounted popular productions consisting of self-contained moments which do not depend on each other for their aesthetic interest or "justification." But in these productions, the emotional contrasts between the moments are not at all powerful; they tend to have the same emotional range as an enjoyable program of songs and dances. In this respect, these productions are not much different from a cheerful variety show which, through music, movement, and a sprinkling of low-intensity commentary, creates an accessible, undemanding blend of friendliness, exoticism, and anxiety over the mildest sign of loneliness, marginality, or exclusivity. Either the constant presence of a relaxed, poised personality (Anderson) or the repeated use of choral movement to absorb any isolated figure in the performance space (Coates) functions to unify, homogenize the discrete moments. In other words, these productions lack strong *dramatic* values; they celebrate a cultural pluralism which appropriates all difference between people, between moments, by avoiding stark contrasts between tragedy and comedy, between desire and power, and by avoiding extremes of emotions, high intensities of feeling which "normally" require "more time" and much more (complex) language to justify and explain the actions they produce. Some of the radical, startling miniature dramas conceived in the early decades of this century by proponents of naturalism, symbolism, expressionism, or futurism seem much more ambitious than postmodern performance in their efforts to redefine the minimum time needed to justify the live, aesthetic performance of actions driven by intense tragic or comic emotions.[21]

The East German dramatist Heiner Mueller, who self-consciously situates his work in relation to the history of modernism through his dialectical attitude toward Brecht, has written emotionally intense plays—such as *Hamletmaschine* and *Medea*—which are only one to six

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pages long, but in performance, actors and directors tend to protract the duration of the enactment far beyond the time "normally" needed to perform the given inscription.[22] The text functions as a *provocation* for a mass of actions which the author did not write down or prescribe; the performance functions as an elaborate commentary or counter-text, disclosing what the text does *not* say as well as what it does. But in supplementing or commenting on Mueller's mini-texts, the performance rarely, if ever, includes any *speech* which Mueller did not write: the performers seem very timid about *speaking* anything which the author has not inscribed. The text provokes all sorts of uninscribed action but not any uninscribed speech. What the text doesn't "say" becomes synonymous with what can't be spoken at all; thus, protracted duration of performance signifies a limit to the power of language (inscribed or spoken) to represent aspects of reality "outside" the text. But this signification is false if it actually results from a fear of speaking what the text doesn't tell one to speak: the counter-text, the protracted duration of performance, signifies more this fear than anything the text leaves unsaid.

On the other hand, during the 1950s and 60s, Gerhard Rühm, a figure within the Viennese Group of language poets, wrote numerous mini-dramas whose duration in performance rarely exceeded limits established by the text; indeed, Rühm occasionally inscribes the exact length of time he wants an action to consume.[23] Rühm intends the performance to "concretize," not the text or textuality, but the phenomenon which signifies a text: language. Or one might say that the text, whether performed or inscribed, is the "concretization" of language, and that "concretization" means detaching language from a *con*text which justifies the action. Thus, in the three-page *the alphabet of ladies* (1956), "26 lesbian ladies identified as a through z" conduct dialogues by speaking sentences dominated by words that begin with the letter which "names" the speaker. In the one-page *discourse on fashion* (1955), *both* (1955), and the two-page *becoming and being* (1955), dramatic interest arises when different speakers pronounce different words which nevertheless contain a phonetic similarity. The five-page, two-speaker play, *the road to bern* (1961), dramatizes the operation of sameness/difference within syntactic structures to show how the "context" for meaning is language itself and not any referents of language:

> how far is it from here?
> a mile or so. about a mile. it could well be a mile. it's no more than a mile. it's hardly a mile. it's a good mile from here.[24]

Rühm has also devised mini-plays which employ tape-recorded voices, loudspeak-

ers, and projected inscriptions to detach the power of language to produce action from the motives of individual speakers.[25] In the half-page *scenic epitaph* (1954), no words at all are spoken, except when a feather "sings" as it falls to the floor, but the actions, such as a naked woman eating bread, and even the non-actions, are of sufficient strangeness to indicate that only language, a text, can "justify" them: "the curtain rises. the stage and a naked woman. a table and a melancholy minute. [...]"[26] In the half-page "attempt at a play in three acts," *juliette's silence* (1955), a huge portrait of Juliette Greco fills the stage. In each "act," a spectator comes out of the audience and makes statements about the portrait to which, of course, the portrait is incapable of responding. Yet speech changes the portrait anyway and makes even its silence "speak" (the entire third act consists of the lines: "she knows it. and yet she says nothing.") It does seem, however, that if one strings a bunch of these little plays together into a substantial program, the emotional contrast between them is not significant and any recombination of their order will not effect their reception in any important way. Rühm has succeeded in developing a highly compressed economy for justifying the performance of aesthetic actions, but the success of this economy depends on maintaining a sameness or constancy of emotional value, a detached "coolness," from moment to moment. He has shown that complex relations between language and action do not disclose themselves through the construction of a context, which is synonymous with protracted duration of representation. The problem still remaining is to show how the emotional value of actions and moments does not depend on contextualization of language, but on peculiar, rhetorical relations between words and actions built into language itself. Obviously poems can achieve this compressed emotional intensity. Emotional *intensity* depends on the weighting of relations between words, not on "more words" or "more time." But the multi-voiced, *dramatic* weighting of relations between words to achieve a new, compressed economy for justifying the live performance of aesthetic actions has so far been a strategy of duration which postmodernism is reluctant to explore. This reluctance signifies a limit to the power of postmodernism to challenge the authority of master narrative definitions of reality: it signifies a fear of being unable to justify the live action independent of a "context" grounded, fundamentally, in the concept of "characterization," of a highly individuated personality which needs plenty of time (narrative logic) to establish its believability "outside" of the language that constructs it.

Notes

[1]Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture,* contains major polemics against postmodernism by Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity—An Incomplete Project," 3-15; Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," 111-125; and Jean Baudrillard, "The Ecstasy of Communication," 126-133. But see also Jean Baudrillard, *Les*

Strategies fatales, Paris: Grasset, 1983 and Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* translated by Frederick G. Lawrence, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987.

[2]Habermas contends that modernism, at least in Germany, begins with the Enlightenment, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, as embodied by the figure of Lessing. But American and French thinkers tend to see modernism as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution. Baudelaire, Dostoevsky, Ibsen, and Nietzsche are prototypical modernists. My own feeling is that modernism was a consequence of the Enlightenment (and the French Revolution) and contemporary with the Industrial Revolution: modernism begins with romanticism, with an impulse to suffuse representation with a heightened historical consciousness of time and space.

[3]An artist such as Ibsen could move from romanticism (in the early verse and historical plays, to 1874) to realism (*Ghosts*, 1881) to symbolism and proto-expressionism (*When We Dead Awaken*, 1899), but even though motifs and preoccupations may remain constant in all phases of his work, he never attempts a project in which he self-consciously puts one ism in tension within another. He *moves* from one phase to the next, with the linear, progressive spirit of the modernist. To be a modernist, one cannot absorb or "appropriate" an ism without considering deeply what one must sacrifice or abandon to accommodate the new aesthetic. The modernist treats "new" ideas "seriously," insofar as they are worth appropriating only to the extent that they inspire "passion" and "commitment." But for the postmodernist, the demand for newness assumes the identity of a norm in Western society. Newness is no longer a test of passion, risk, seriousness, commitment; for the postmodernist, seriousness and passion do not entail "crises" in which one sacrifices traditions to adapt to "new realities;" they entail the sacrifice of this narrative logic for explaining cultural "evolution" from one "phase" to the "next."

[4]See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984 (originally published in French in 1979). A limitation of Lyotard's theory is that he does not sufficiently differentiate narratives from language games. Sometimes he seems to suggest that narrative is a type of language game, but at other times, it appears that all language games are manifestations of narrative. I accept that postmodernism seeks to resist the containing pressures of "master narrative" organizations of perception, but that does not mean that postmodernism operates outside of narrative (or representation) altogether. However, Lyotard makes clear (47-60) that postmodernism involves modes of performance which are entirely instrumental and have only incidental aesthetic significance. My focus here is on *aesthetic* performance, on modes of performance which have as their objective the pleasure of being seen.

[5]Information about Warhol's early work in the theater is difficult to obtain. But Warhol himself seems to have documented the type of theater he was doing, in the late 50s and early 60s, with some of the films he made in the mid-60s, such as *Chelsea Girls* (1966), in which the camera indifferently, even "scientifically," observes bizarre, protracted "scenes" occurring at strange times of day. Of course, Warhol became notorious, in the latter half of the 60s, for his brilliant "staging" of perverse, early-morning parties at his 47th Street studio, The Factory. He not only disclosed a superior understanding of the party as a category of aesthetic performance; he understood that the notoriety, the "success," gained from aesthetic performance depended on pursuing a peculiar, a perverse, strategy of occurrence. See Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *Andy Warhol's Party Book* New York: Crown, 1988.

[6]For documentation of the *Vietnam Symphony*, see Georg F. Schwarzbauer, "Anmerkungen zum transitorischen Element der Reise im Oeuvre von Wolf Vostell," in Wolf Vostell, *Fluxus Zug. Das mobile Museum Vostell,* Berlin: Fröhlich und Kaufmann, 1981, 84-116.

[7]Documentation of Castelli's performance appears in a videotape which circulated with an exhibit, "Poignant Sources: Painting, Photography, and Video from Germany," at Artspace in San Francisco, 10 March to 18 April 1987. Castelli has also treated the act of making paintings as a spectacular mode of performance, which occasionally involves other artists, such as Rainer Fetting and Salome (he was also a model for the transsexual photographer Pierre Molinier). See Erika Billeter, *Luciano Castelli,* Bern: Benteli, 1986.

[8]Indeed, speech, or more specifically, dialogue between performer and spectator, is perhaps the only variable of performance which can produce an indefinite duration for the performance; and once the duration of performance becomes indefinite, it becomes very difficult to fix or regularize the occurrence of the performance.

[9]Performances in museums rarely, if ever, challenge the scheduling norms of museums; moreover, museums tend to regard live performances as a type of "kinetic art," which means that they are like other items on display: works which "say" what cannot be spoken. Museums, including *theatre* museums, connect aesthetic experience to silence or at least to severe constraints on live voices. The Netherlands Theatre Museum offers the spectator recorded excerpts of memorialized performances, but one must put on earphones to hear these performances so that even a recorded voice will not intrude upon the "speechless" essence of historical artifacts.

[10]One should point out, however, that it was not the aesthetic but the therapeutic objective of these Werkteater performances which allowed them to command the time of the institutions that invited them.

[11]A detailed description in English of Mishima's performance appears in Henry Scott-Stokes, *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima,* New York: Dell, 1974, 27-54. Scott-Stokes witnessed the event.

[12]John Gillespie, "Beyond Byzantium. Aesthetic Pessimism in Mishima's Modern Noh Plays," *Monumenta Nipponica* 37/1 (Spring 1982), 29-39, proposes that even in his earliest work for the theater, Mishima introduced considerable doubt about the value of literary and aesthetic experience to enhance the value of "real life." "Mishima appears to have lived his life in accordance with the salient perception of these plays: art was inadequate to sustain him"(39). In other words, for Mishima, postmodern aesthetic performance does not collapse distinctions between art and life but between art and death.

[13]For discussion of Wilson's productions, see Bonnie Marranca, *The Theatre of Images,* New York: Drama Books, 1977 (2nd edition 1984); Franco Quadri, "Een architect van tijd," in *Museum Journal,* No 6 (1983), 342-348; Helga Finter, "Experimental Theatre and Semioiogy of Theatre: The Theatricalization of the Voice," *Modern Drama*, 26/4 (December 1983), 501-517.

[14]*Carnations* (1983), for example, contains a scene in which a line of female dancers, each moving a chair, advances downstage, while dancing with and on the chairs. Another line of dancers, all men, emerge behind them and dive over them onto the floor. After completing their dives, they rush to either side of the stage to assist in the construction of monumental scaffolds of cardboard boxes which "grow" beside two diving board towers. The actions of diving over, advancing, and assembling repeat over and over again, but the scene keeps changing with each repetition, as the scaffold begins to consume the stage and close off the line of women/chairs. Finally, a

man atop each of the towers dives into the box-structure. Visually, it is a complicated scene, and constant repetition of the action does not make it simpler to absorb. But it is also extremely complicated for the performers, who must not only execute difficult movements; they must display considerable physical strength and fearlessness, since the action as a whole is emotionally intense *because* it is dangerous, like a high-wire stunt, made even more complex by Bausch's habit of littering the stage with treacherous objects. In *Carnations*, the entire stage is covered with thousands of artificial carnations; in other works, dirt, sand, and water cover the stage, as well as all sorts of props and furniture.

[15]A comprehensive survey of Pina Bausch's career to 1983 appears in Norbert Servos, *Pina Bausch—Wuppertal Dance Theater; or The Art of Goldfish Training: Excursions into Dance,* Köln: Ballett-Bühnen, 1984; see also Pam Otto, *The Tanztheater Aesthetic of Pina Bausch,* unpublished Master's Thesis, San Jose State University, 1988.

[16]The idea of theater as a total condition (rather than representation) of life seems to have peculiar appeal in some Eastern European cultures. Stanislavsky not only directed plays; he could not resist the temptation to direct the off-stage lives of his collaborators. For a while, Meyerhold attempted to apply the principles of Taylorism (American labor efficiency studies) to his program of "biomechanics" for the actor (see Eric Braun, *The Theatre of Meyerhold,* London: Methuen, 1969, 198), a project pursued much more rigorously by the great Hungarian-born theorist of bodily movement, Rudolf Laban, whose thinking about the aestheticizing of movement migrated from the exclusive domain of the theater to the workplace and to the daily motions of entire cultures (see especially Rudolf Laban and F.C. Lawrence, *Effort*, London: Macdonald and Evans, 1974, originally published in 1947). Indeed, in Eastern Europe, the role of the director functions largely to embody the perception that a powerful authority, such as God or the Party, "directs" life itself as if it were a play in which every action can be predicted, not necessarily by those performing or watching it, but by an external, "invisible" authority which "directs" it. The most overt statement of this attitude appears in Nikolas Evreinoff [Nicolai Evreinov], *The Theatre in Life,* translated by Alexander I. Nazaroff, New York, Brentano's, 1927, originally published in Russian in 1913. For discussion of Evreinov's application of his ideas in the context of Soviet efforts to transform daily life in the 1920s, see Claudine Amiard-Chevrel, "Evreinov et le theatre politique des années vingt," *Revue des etudes slaves*, 53/1 (1981), 59-70. In Eastern Europe, the legacy of modernism implies that the dissolution of distinctions between life and theater results from the perception of theater as a totalizing metaphor for life; theater reaches science, modernity, the "laboratory" status that Grotowski ascribed to his own work, when it predicts all action according to "laws" or principles formulated by an external authority, the Director. In the West, however, postmodernism tends to perceive the collapse of distinctions between art and life as the result of seeing theater as a source of unpredictability which undermines the authority of institutions (the text, theater, the director, the Party, etc.) to predict, according to "laws," when and how actions occur in particular contexts.

[17]See Robert Findlay, "Grotowki's 'Cultural Explorations Bordering on Art, Especially Theatre,"' *Theatre Journal*, 32/3 (October 1980), 349-356. On the question of time in the paratheatrical environment, Findlay remarks: "At the point that we were first introduced to the four floors of the Laboratorium, we were urged not to wear watches. Thus for seven days, we had no truly precise sense of time or even linear sequence to our activities. In addition, the windows were painted over, serving to increase our separation from the

outside world and its more rigid time sense"(351). See also Daniel E. Cashman, "Grotowski: His Twentieth Anniversary," *Theatre Journal* 31/4 (December 1979), 460-466; Richard Mennen, "Grotowski's Paratheatrical Projects," *The Drama Review,* 19 (1975), 58-69.

[18]Findlay consistently stresses the theme of "agreement" between participants in the paratheatrical environment. Paratheater maintains "agreement" between its participants by rigidly excluding the differences which occur when people start speaking: "There were few precisely stated rules. What rules developed among all sixty-five of us were never really verbalized. They came about seemingly by a kind of intuitional agreement among us. One non-verbalized agreement, for example, was that we not use language [...] No one ever said *not* to use language [...] Probably the most significant non-verbal agreement, however, was that we not evaluate or even discuss the activities occurring in the performance space [...](351)" But it is very difficult to ignore the suggestion that unpredictability of action depends on unforeseen *differences* between agents of action.

[19]For several years, Grotowski has been Professor of Objective Drama at the University of California, Irvine. But none of his work there is open to the public or even to the administrators who fund it. Apparently, the "objectivity" and "totality" of theater are now for him synonymous with complete secrecy of performance.

[20]The time needed to justify an aesthetic event also includes the time needed by the spectator to become aware of the event and to attend it. The public's reluctance to *attend* rather than *consume* (in the home) aesthetic experience suggests that the public feels it doesn't have "enough time" for experiences which require elaborate contextualization before they are appreciated. A great many people apparently believe that the longer an aesthetic event lasts, the more complete the context and motive for action becomes. But television has presented productions which "continue" for nights, weeks, and even years without any intensification of context or motive for the actions it broadcasts. What I am suggesting is that very complex contexts and motives can be represented and decoded quickly, within minutes, while very simple, "familiar" contexts and motives *sustain* representations over long, normalized, scheduled periods of time merely because the spectator does not want to feel *any* sense of time, wants instead to feel that everything is always now, that basic ("universal") contexts and motives are "eternal," easily repeatable, immediate (especially through electronic media technology), and not "live:" to sustain aesthetic experience it is necessary to limit the intensity of the experience, for intensity is a consequence of a heightened sense of time (urgency). An example of a play which unfolds, like a television series, over a period of four evenings is Lodewijk de Boer, *The Family,* Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1974. But unlike a television series, the play "needs time" to justify its representation of a group of fringe people living in an abandoned building who function as a "family."

[21]Examples of mini-plays by modernists appear in Mel Gordon (ed.), *Expressionist Texts,* New York: PAJ Publications, 1986; Mel Gordon (ed.), *Dada Performance,* New York: PAJ Publications, 1987; Michael Kirby (ed.), *Futurist Performance,* New York: PAJ Publications, 1986 (originally published in 1971); Michael Benedikt, *Modern French Theatre,* New York: Dutton, 1966; August Stramm, *Das Werk,* Wiesbaden: Limes, 1963; Heinar Schilling, *Studien,* Leipzig: Bruno Volger, 1917; Paul Scheerbart, *Gesammelte Arbeiten für das Theater,* 2 vols., München: edition text + kritik, 1977; Alfred Brust, *Dramen 1917-1921,* München: Fink, 1971.

[22]For discussion of *Hamletmaschine,* see

Theo von Girshausen (ed.), *Die Hamletmaschine. Heiner Müller's Endspiel*, Köln: Prometh, 1978.

[23]Blackouts, for example, in *the road to bern* should last about fifteen seconds, but twenty seconds in *ophelia and the words* (1968). The entire performance of *mirror* (1955) should last between five and ten minutes.

[24]Gerhard Rühm, *ophelia und die wörter. gesammelte theaterstücke 1954-1971*, Neuwied und Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1972, 135.

[25]See especially Rühm's *ophelia und die wörter*, in Rühm 1972, 199-233, which places spoken text on one page and performed inscriptions on the facing page.

[26]Rühm 1972, 28.