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Lost in translation : new media, performance, & identity in Quebec

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**LOST IN TRANSLATION:
NEW MEDIA, PERFORMANCE, & IDENTITY IN
QUEBEC**

by

Daniel Goldberg

BFA *cum laude*, Concordia University, Montreal, 2000

Graduate Diploma, Concordia University, Montreal, 2001

A thesis

presented to Ryerson University and York University

In partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts
in the Joint Graduate Program in
Communication and Culture

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ABSTRACT

Lost in Translation: New Media, Performance, & Identity in Quebec

Thesis for Master of Arts, Submitted 2003

By Daniel Goldberg, Joint Graduate Program in Communication and Culture, Ryerson University and York University

A descriptive exploration of the impact on contemporary Québécois performing arts by new media and communication technologies, this thesis provides a historical and critical evaluation of “multimedia theatre” in Quebec. Drawing on Turner’s theories of performative ritual and Armour & Trott’s writing on culture and the Canadian mind, as well as the work of Benjamin, Ellul, Grant, Heidegger, Innis, and McLuhan on technology and cultural production, and the issues of time and space raised by the work of Gilles Maheu, Josette Féral, Patrice Pavis, and Robert Lepage, among others, this thesis argues that while prior research has located Quebec’s arts culture in provincial drives for sovereignty and cultural recognition, it might better be understood as a narrative of a people in search of self-identification, offering new perspectives by which to understand an interlinked development of technology and artistic endeavour that has long been in need of critical examination.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are nothing without support; no project of this magnitude is completed alone. My thanks on this endeavour are therefore many:

Professor Donald Gillies, for his constant encouragement and faith, both in me and in the potential of the Communication and Culture program;

Dr. Christopher Innes and Dr. Ruth Panofsky, for joining my Examining Committee and immersing themselves so fully in my work;

My parents, Steven and Alana, and my brothers, Josh and Matt, for listening to the rants and coming to the rescue with emergency comfort food;

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And finally, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Trott, for her unwavering support and commitment to seeing this adventure through to its completion. Without her guidance, critical eye, and careful nudges in the right direction, this thesis would never have become all that it has.

PREFACE

The seeds of this project lie in my own work within the performing arts. I have always been interested in exploring in issues of space and time, of the realms of imagination placed in opposition to harsh physical realities. My writing for the stage reflects this fascination and led me here. Within Quebec's rich performance history, I found parallels between my growing curiosity with new and digital media and the experiments taking place throughout my lifetime with performances making use of those technologies.

Prior research into Quebec's performing arts has explored linguistic tensions, cultural differences, and translation theory. The increasingly large number of companies electing to integrate new media into their work has been largely ignored, certainly outside of Quebec. In profiling the kinds of performance being created, in revealing the way Quebec has been intimately connected with emerging communications technologies over the past twenty years, I want to begin filling in a gap in Canada's theatre history in order to make some sense of issues too long overlooked. If we can step away from seeing Quebec only as a bastion of separatist anxiety and linguistic tension and look instead at the tremendous potential for dramatic conflict created by those forces, we can understand the history and development of the performing arts in the province as driven and focused by the power of communication media.

This thesis examines the impact on the performing arts in Quebec over the past twenty years by new media and communication technologies. Tracing the development (social, artistic, and technical) of specific artists and groups, it presumes socio-political and economic connections between the art-makers and their practice, points of intersection that shift over time as new technologies, movements, and theories take hold. As such, the thesis considers the implications of artistic development over time, of historical moments of social change, and of the changing conditions of artistic funding (a source of major impact on the development of any artwork). I seek to identify the point at which the crossing of space and time becomes symbolic of the voicing of

national sentiment. Quebec's connection with media technologies, the implications of its interaction with them in terms of the performing arts, the political and ideological statement implicitly made by the very act of 'multimedia' performance, all remain zones of contention into which further explorations must be made. This thesis begins bridging that research gap.

In terms of theory, I am indebted to the foundational work of many brilliant minds: Douglas Verney offers a powerful model for conceiving of the Canadian state. Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott's conception of culture likewise serves as a basic assumption with my research. Victor Turner's explorations into the connections between social ritual, performance, and cultural identity proved invaluable and opened new doors in my own understanding of the theatre. Marvin Carlson, Jon McKenzie, Peggy Phelan, and Richard Schechner have exposed me to the thrilling existence of a field of research – Performance Studies – neatly combining elements of all my previous studies, interests, and hobbies. Within Quebec, I have read and been inspired by the work of Annie Brisset, Gilbert David, Robert Lepage, Marie-Christine Lesage, and Lucie Robert. All of the above writers, critics, and theorists helped me in laying out the groundwork for this project; their efforts are exceptional, both in variety and in scope.

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's. Original text appears in the Notes following the main body of the text. Formatting is according to Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6th edition, 1996, University of Chicago Press.

DEDICATION

For my family, my friends, and my love.

There are no chances here.

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INTRODUCTION

TWO TAKES ON THE SAME TRUTH: PERFORMANCE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

(That) Americans of both continents have managed to perceive their 'own identity' only at an ideological or mythical level does not mean that this 'identity' is in itself a fiction.

Andre Berman 1990, xiv

(Performance) serves as a forum for examining, challenging and transgressing the relationships, rites, and rituals of everyday life, with real changes in status, it is a place where identities may be created, shaped, contested and changed, where new agendas are set. Performance relies upon the shared competence of all the participants to identify and to mark off a strip of behaviour, this grouping of activities and objects, as being performative. Once they can do this, then they will expect, search for, and indeed generate meaning in everything they see.

Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks 2001, 28

Quebec is a province rich with political and artistic tensions. Debates over language, culture, and the freedom of communication create diverse and passionate divides among its populace. This kind of atmosphere – literally, a politicization of everything – has created a vibrant zone of contention in the performing arts. The Quebecois have found many ways of channelling their frustrations, their hopes, and their unique culture into innovative performances; the very tensions dividing the province provide a wealth of symbols, references, and tools from which to draw. Not least among these tools have been those of new communication technologies. The potential of multimedia performance – in installation, dance, theatre – has long given voice to the many politics of the province. While other provinces have pushed forward with works exploring the Canadian national identity, Quebec seems trapped in an artistic mission determining to which nation it owes its allegiance: a nation existing in law and on maps, or one living only in the hearts and minds of its populace.

Where Quebec's tradition of performing arts differs most from those of other provinces is in the influence and predominance of new media and communication technologies. Quebec has long maintained a strong association with technology in the arts, from early experiments with projected translations to the later multimedia-driven works of *auteurs* like Robert Lepage. There seem

to be deep connections between the socio-political situation in the province and the proliferation of technologies defying space, challenging time, and transforming the potential of the stage. What exactly are these connections, and how have they come to shape the current performing arts scene in Quebec? The situation is complex; the ties between granting agencies, the technological *chic* of the twenty-first century, and attraction of playing with space and time blend nearly seamlessly into the notion that a 'locationless' nation that has never existed outside the mind might find itself played out in the arena of the cyberspatial or multimediated.

Little has been written in either of Canada's two official languages about this state of affairs, despite the global acclaim of artists like Lepage. If new media and communication technologies are such an integral part of contemporary Quebecois performance practice, it is important to look specifically at what factors influence the prevalence and success of these performances in the province.

Intent

This thesis seeks to understand the links between new media technology and the performing arts. The connections drawn between the various forces supporting and limiting artists and the artists themselves offer a new way of articulating Quebec's performing arts history. At the same time, the thesis explores which processes guided Quebec performance's development, detailing a series of concepts and connections by which to understand the influence of communication technologies on the arts and on the provincial-national identity, including notions of the live, the mediated, and the telepresent. Offering new perspectives by which to understand the interlinked development of technology and artistic endeavour long in need of critical examination, the thesis initiates the study of performance in the province by assuming a particular definition of culture – one rooted in the

political and ideological origins of Canada – as well as a specific model of performativity, based on the idea of drama as ritual dialogue between a spectator-populace and an historically connected performer. Furthermore, it argues that while prior research has situated the narrative of Quebec's arts culture as one describing provincial drives for sovereignty, it might be better understood as a narrative of a people in search of self-identification. The performing arts in the rest of the Canada look to landscapes and physical features to articulate identity-angst; the argument presented here is that Quebec seeks its identity in non-space, non-time, its performances giving voice to an identity-anxiety over a nation that may not exist.

Culture Versus Civilisation

Douglas Verney's *Three Civilizations, Two Cultures, and One State* distinguishes between civilisation – the social order imported from the homeland to the immigrant nation – and culture – the unique, indigenous differences that develop between world-views. Civilisation can also be explained in terms of the spatial, as the set of social and political/geographic organizing principles a people uses to govern itself. The Civilised is the conquered Space, referring to the means of transfer, whether of ideas or goods, people or property (1986, 1-10). Verney's take on civilisation as a social order – either imported or evolved – requires an accompanying comment on culture, on the development of a world-view, in order for that social order to exist as something more than a colony of automatons.

While it is not in the scope of this thesis to explore the full dimensions and shades of cultural theory, it is important to find a workable definition by which to delineate the theoretical space 'culture' will occupy herein. Armour and Trott provide a useful model for understanding culture in *The Faces of Reason: An essay on Philosophy and Culture in Canada*, one to which this thesis will

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continually return. Culture is located in the individual meanings populations attribute to shared experience:

The critical feature of a culture in the intended sense is the manner in which it assigns meanings to human actions and public events. As a rule, one knows there are two cultures when there are two groups of people who... assign different meanings to the same act or event. (Armour and Trott 1981, xxiii – iv)

Given a working model of cultural definition we can begin looking at its *content*. In this sense, both anthropologist Victor Turner (1986) and Douglas Verney (1986) understand culture as composed of a set of ideas, stories, and mythologies about the workings of the world and the individual's place within it, shared by a people across generations. Although it may be bounded by physical boundaries, culture defies spatial locality; the cultural resides instead in the realm of the temporal as a particular set of interpretations of experience that has been passed along (Armour and Trott 1981; Verney 1986).

A culture doesn't exist in a vacuum, any more than does a civilization. But whereas a civilization deals with the body of laws and organizing principles of the social order, a culture deals with the accumulated stories and knowledge of generations. One deals with space and numbers, the other with time and ideas. Culture is not singular and static; rather, it is a multi-tiered and dynamic process of becoming/making. Cultures use theatrical moments and rituals as spaces/times where the ordinary relations between space/time/Other are suspended in order to reflect, alter, or affirm the structures of the status quo (Godard 1995). We study performance, then, because it embodies the 'living language' of a people – mounted on-stage, the experience of the audience is both reflected and refuted, revealing the hidden lines of cultural identity – the social-historical connections of a people to a shared set of past events (Schechner 1981; Turner 1986).

On Ritual, Theatre, and Culture

Anthropologist Victor Turner explored the connections between social culture and rituals in a long career devoted to the study of performance. In *The Anthropology of Performance*, he argued that there was a process both continuous and dynamic linking *ludos* and *sacra* – the ludic and the sacred. In doing so, he claimed that all performative behaviour was intrinsically connected with the dominant socio-ethical structure (1986). As Turner's colleague Richard Schechner contends in his *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, through a combination of ludic play and the sanctifying ritual of staging, the dramatic act reveals to the audience not only the way in which they arrange the elements of their lives, but also the boundaries by which they separate *Self* from *Other* (1981, 4-6). Turner says of the relationship between cultural performance and audience that it "... is not unidirectional... it is reciprocal and reflexive – in the sense that the performance is often a critique, direct or veiled, of the social life it grows out of, an evaluation of the way society handles history" (1986, 22). As we will see in the coming chapters, performance serves as a means to present in the sacred – set aside – space those relationships or events that go otherwise unnoticed in the realm of the everyday (Schechner 1981). In ritual, in performance, we sanctify the quotidian, thereby allowing us some degree of separation from it, and with that distance, the means to observe it and ourselves. Acts of performance challenge the existing social order, referring to the world in a way it never was, breaking down boundaries of the taboo, the unspoken (Turner 1986). Performance inversely reflects the status quo.

Cultural Identity, Technology, and Performance

Through our Canadian enshrining of two national languages and cultures, we privilege the idea of our nation's two 'founding peoples', ignoring the influence of earlier indigènes or the growing presence of the American empire (Verney 1986). Where, in this case, are the stories told of immigrants

not fitting into this paradigm of 'Canadian-ness' or 'Quebec-ness'? What cultures and stories, what identities are silenced through the performance of being part of bilingual Canada? Verney argues that a major part of Canada's identity is built on the foundation of our country's two major cultures – remnants of the lost British and French colonial empires. Where the nations of the Old World remain even to this day predominantly monological cultures, our model of national identity is a dialogic one; the social fabric of Canada is a dynamic conversation, generating a social and political zone of contention in which new ideas gestate (1986). Quebec is an ideal example of this tension: its struggle for internal identity, let alone for an identity within the larger Canadian and international contexts, has placed the Quebecois performing artist in a nutrient bath of cultural and ideological binaries, challenges and dialogues. Physical boundaries and political borders may no longer be sufficient to explain or identify the mosaic of the Quebec experience; indeed, it is possible that their relevance, particularly to the arts, will increasingly dwindle. Emerging technologies of 'telepresence' and recording (film, video, satellite transmission, the Internet, and others) seem to defy physical borders and cultural specificity, while at the same time remaining compelling choices for performing artists, particularly in *la belle province*.

In Turner's model, cultural performances are more than merely expressions of a moment in social history; rather, ritual and drama act as potential *agents of social change* (1986, 74-76). Technology, as an agent of tremendous social change, has seriously influenced the performing arts scene in the province: this thesis must call into question that impact. It is from this theoretical model that we will critically examine the intimate relationship between media technologies and the performing arts in Quebec.

Outline

Chapter I serves as a review of theories of mediation, simulation, and performance. Tracing those theories of technology and cultural production put forth by Benjamin, Ellul, Grant, Heidegger, Innis, and McLuhan, this chapter attempts to describe the models surrounding the Québécois artist's process, while at the same time providing an overview of new media technology and Performance Studies.

Chapter II offers an historical perspective on the development of the performing arts in Quebec. Drawing a broad line between colonial New France and contemporary Quebec, this chapter details those foundational elements a Quebec audience brings to a performance event, exploring issues of political, social, and linguistic identity, leaving off in the early 1980's, the beginning of this study's primary focus.

Chapter III is a critical examination of theories surrounding the interaction between performance and communication technologies, exploring not only the ideology implicit in new media technology's restructuring of space and time, but its influence on the practice of performance.

Chapter IV deals with the development over the past 20 years of performances using new media and communication technologies in Quebec. The conflicts and creative opportunities made available in these performances are discussed, highlighting some of the major groups emerging out of Quebec's contemporary experimental theatre scene in terms of Armour and Trott's idea of culture and Turner's notion of the ritual/ performative.

Chapter V looks at three of the most successful contemporary performance groups in the province. Detailing the work of Carbon 14, Robert Lepage's *Ex Machina*, and the Cirque du Soleil, this chapter investigates the critical issues of identity, language, nationalism, and political borders rooted in Québécois performance. The implications raised by the performing

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community's increasing reliance on new media technologies – technologies that seem to defy these issues – in the creation of stage works is also examined.

This thesis is an exploration, then, not only of the technologies influencing Quebecois performance over the last decades, but of the cultural themes emerging again and again from that discourse, and of the means by which technology has heightened, focused, and confused the riddle of Quebec's cultural identity.

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW: THEORIES OF CULTURE, TECHNOLOGY, AND PERFORMANCE

Introduction

This chapter considers the means by which the interpretations of technological experience have shaped the reality of Canadian – and Quebecois – cultures. We begin by reviewing some of the major influences on Canadian theorists; specifically, Jacques Ellul, Martin Heidegger, and Walter Benjamin. After a review of their major theories on technology and culture, the chapter examines the place of these theories in the development of Canadian thought and closes by reviewing Canadian explorations into technology, culture, and identity through the work of Harold Innis, George Grant, and Marshall McLuhan. Their work explores a mode of social order – that of the *technological civilisation* – where the course of Progress finds in the systemic logic of technology the means to reduce to its component parts all realms of experience. Its mechanised version of efficiency limits the possibility of attributing different meanings to the same experiences – the rise of the technical society was the rise of global culture. This was the future that Grant feared, in which McLuhan saw a redemptive potential, and that Innis understood as the inevitable basis for empire (Grant 1969; Innis 1951; Kroker 1984; McLuhan 1964).

Having explored the theoretical context within which technology, art, and the Quebec experience will be articulated throughout this thesis, we will then discuss two key concepts within the scope of our study: the nature of ‘new media’ communication technologies and the field of Performance Studies whose subject they influence. In providing a brief overview of the major themes and concepts integral to discussing new media and theatrical performance, we will complete the foundation upon which this thesis rests and set the stage for a detailed study of technology, identity, and the performing arts within Quebec.

Rise of the machines: Ellul, Heidegger, and the Technological Society

All-embracing technique is in fact the consciousness of the mechanized world.

Jacques Ellul 1964

Jacques Ellul, in *The Technological Society* (1964), and Martin Heidegger, in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (1977), both explored the means by which the modern age had been eclipsed by the shadow of a powerful species of Progress. They situated this in the mechanization of experience, the transformation of direct contact with natural life and work into specialised task-specific units of living. Rooted in the spirit of the technical, each articulated the anxiety of a world facing a total paradigm shift, a move from the 'inefficient' past into a mechanical, 'wasteless' future.

Ellul's work centred on the exploration of *technique*, that is, the organised ensemble of *all* individual protocols ever used to secure any end. Technique represents the set of formalized practices by which available resources are used to achieve results (1964, 5-7). Meanwhile, Heidegger's *techne*, an origin-point for technique itself, could be described as the bringing forth into a present *now* of an actuality, the calling out of a thing from the not-extant. Techne is derived from a combination of art and handicraft in which the human worker creates through the use of matter and form. Techne and technique bring forth the not-present into existence, revealing the human quest for control over Reality and, for Heidegger, of Being (Ellul 1964; Heidegger 1977, 13). Philosophy, as a path toward bringing the consideration of Reality into Being, is a form of techne. Art, as a means of representing or manipulating the stuff of Being, is a particular technique.

Technique delivers into our hands means without limit. It allows for a network of influence crossing the planet. It places within reach of a select few more material goods than have ever before been available, while providing the starving remainder of the world with just enough to cling to survival and push the planet further toward a totally insupportable population. In this sense,

technique is a pernicious and dedicated force in the modern age. How human society reached this point, and what are the implications of the ideology of technique, are major foci in the work of both Ellul and Heidegger, and influenced the work of Grant and others exploring technology in practice.

The Technological Society

Ellul's *The Technological Society* describes the gradual process by which technology and the infrastructure demanded by technological progress are subverting and absorbing the traditional values of human society. In such a civilisation, the human experience is reduced to a presence as mere components in a monolithic 'world-culture'. In this technocratic paradigm, all non-technological difference and separateness are mere appearance before mechanisation. The rise of technique is not the rise to dominance of the machine; rather, machinery is simply the end result, the physical realisation of certain techniques. Everything technique touches – literally, everywhere there exists a 'technical factor' – results in mechanization: "Today *technique has taken over the whole of civilisation*. Certainly, technique is no longer the simple machine substitute for human labor (*sic*).” (Ellul 1964, 128).

The 'goal' of this mechanisation, something neither Ellul nor Heidegger ever go so far as to deem a 'conscious' direction, is rather the push by a society embracing the efficiency of technique to create the infrastructure such technique requires. Ellul tells us that technique "... integrates the machine into society. It constructs the kind of world the machine needs and introduces order... it classifies, arranges, and rationalizes; it does in the domain of the abstract what the machine did in the realm of labour" (1964, 5). Technique serves in this capacity as a tool of social organisation. Where machinery sanctions social inefficiency by covering up defects in organisation via efficient processing, technique makes of all things machines, positioning them where they are most useful, subtle, unobtrusive (Ellul 1964, 21, 72; Heidegger 1977).

The anxiety caused by the prevalence of such machines is soothed by the promise of a unified, well-fed, productive society.

As a means of revealing Being, technique like ideology creates the impression that it is natural, the best-and-most-obvious course by which to live (Heidegger 1977). Consciousness – that is to say, the exploration of why and how a thing might best be achieved – combined with reason – the evaluation of the efficient – combine to drive forward technical development. This, in Ellul, is the doomed search for the “one best means” in every field (1964, 21). As efficiency increases and technique enfolds more and more of civilised existence, conscious evaluation of our ways of living and doing becomes increasingly important. Choice of how-to-accomplish specific tasks is diminished by the proliferation of technical solutions, replaced by a ‘one best means’ determined by numbers. More, in the mechanized world, is simply better.

Ellul cites four main divisions or categories of technique in modern life: mechanical, comprising the realm of all things machine; economical, that is, the techniques of production, from labour organisation to economic planning; techniques of organisation, encompassing our law-making bodies, our civilisations and social orders; and finally, human technique, from medicine to genetics to propaganda, which understands humanity itself as the object of technical practice, and represents the last of Ellul’s ‘species of technique’ (1964).¹

As we will see in the upcoming chapters, performance serves as a major means of revealing a certain type of ‘national Being’ to the Quebecois within the discourse of Quebec art-making, existing simultaneously as social institution, as economic force, as site of electronic and mechanical exploration, and as means of bringing about internal transformation.

Technique, Culture and the Social

For Heidegger, the birth of the modern age of technique emerges from the human desire for certainty of existence: by first conceiving Reality, then later, by gaining the means to represent it in a consensual experience of appearance, reality can be set up as an object of thought. The more certain we are of ourselves, the more we become the central determinant of the Real (1977). Our embrace of technique is a means to determine the shape by which the world will be experienced, how we will live that experience, and under what conditions.

Socially, this technique demands of people 'technical consciousness', a kind of social plasticity, while it renders taboos, religions, mystery, and morality irrelevant. As Grant lamented, the social collective must give way to the technically-empowered individual (Ellul 1964; Grant 1969, 138-139). Ellul argued that as such, the technical erodes the bonds of traditional social groups, communities, and human relationships without building new social structures in their place. As the human being is progressively transformed into the object of technique, technique itself becomes the central focus of society. The technical civilisation is a society created by technique, for technical ends, excluding or absorbing all non-technical elements (Ellul 1964).

Technique is specialization, utter focus on achieving the most efficient ends out of the least means. Doing so results in all productive members of society developing themselves to fit into a particular niche-duty, each with their own jargon, mode of thought, narrative. The technical gives isolated, inward-facing voice to a multiplicity of specialized individuals. Private cultures with private narratives overtake the domain of a collective social reality. In other words, every person arrives at their own culture by interpreting the events of a shared world according to their own hierarchy of meaning (Ellul 1964).

How could we even begin to understand each other in these conditions? If our life becomes our function, as the anti-technocrats argue,

how can we communicate a motivation that would have any meaning at all in the jargon of another specialist cog? How can two or more cultures, of which only one is grounded in technique, co-exist?

Answering for technique, Ellul argues that this is accomplished by a restructuring of social organisation. Cultures *cannot* co-exist when only one embraces the doctrine of the technical. In fact, even the multiplicity of personal cultures must give way to a larger collective *metaculture*, a set of certain interpretations of existence by which the technological society agrees to live. By accepting our personal roles and trusting in the continued functioning and obedience of others, we come to understand ourselves in the technical society through one of the few shared cross-disciplinary concepts in our specialized vocabularies: *performance* (1964).

The Insupportable Demands of Technique: The Human Made Meaningless

This dogma of performance has seen not simply the planet, but also the human entity stretched beyond their natural capacities. The ideology of technique has become necessary to our very survival. In fact, in pushing our population and our productive capacity beyond the limits of the natural world, Ellul argues that technique has literally made ‘supportable’ what was not previously so, not strictly through the application of technology to the environment, but through the radical – and gradual – modification of the human being and experience (322-323). Both war and life are now beyond human endurance, requiring technique simply to give us the means to continue.² Human morale, Ellul argues, must remain at its peak in order for us to give our utmost to life and performance – to the conquest of experience and existence by technique: “The only thing that matters technically is yield, production. This is the law of technique; this yield can only be obtained by the

total mobilization of human beings ... and this implies the exploitation of all human psychic forces.” (1964; 324).

As technique’s abstract conquest of space – and with space, of humanity – continues, we witness an ever-shrinking subjective space and sense of ‘instinctive time’. As transportation and communication technologies (not to mention the new media of the digital age) erode our awareness of a physical horizon, we gain a mediated boundary. This bordering of our consciousness is in turn made to seem natural, orderly and necessary, the progress of the technical. For Heidegger, the course of this technique progresses through human experience by framing Nature and Reality within the confines of cause-and-effect coherence. Nature thus becomes a conceivable, theory-mediated experience, the ‘technique’ of science imposing on this represented Nature a set of values and methodologies that fits its own internal logic (1977). Just as the human is severed from natural experience, mechanized to fit into a mechanized existence, so has the power of machinery so magnified our sensory experience of the world that the mediation built up around our perception of the real is nearly obscured (Ellul 1964). The natural is made to seem quantifiable, the technical human the quantifier.

In Heidegger’s writing, as with Ellul’s, the technical human seeks to impose order, processing the data of the mediated natural world to arrive at efficient solutions. At the same time, humans are driven to fix everything within an explicable conceptual space, our very Being insisting on this continual ‘unconcealing’. This ‘essence of technology’ *is* the means by which Being (and through it, existence itself) is revealed: from the centralized ontological position of the human being to the objectification of material reality, space, and time (Heidegger 1977, 4, 23-24). The movement of this mode of revealing is a state in which all experience, once objectified, becomes meaningful only in its usefulness. This is Enframing, where meaning lies in an objectified use-value, one determined somewhere along in the process of explaining, defining, quantifying all things in the most efficient means possible

(19). The articulation of Enframing is also the rise of Ellul's technical civilisation and an identification of the tools by which Benjamin will see the realm of the authentic challenged by the loss of aura to meaninglessness. While Enframing is a mode of revealing, it limits experience through its mediation: with humanity at the centre of existence, all things must appear as man-made (Benjamin 1969, Ellul 1964; Heidegger 1977).

The threat posed by Heidegger's Enframing and Ellul's technical society is that they will oust all other means of revealing existence, that they will, in fact, subordinate all other modes of information-transfer or functional purpose, such as language or social interaction (Ellul 1964; Heidegger 1977). Everything is under siege by the increasingly vocal movement to manufacture existence, including human beings themselves. When we finally become truly manufactured objects, how long until we join the ranks of Heidegger's 'standing-reserve', as instruments 'ready-for-us?' We are seemingly left, in the pessimistic writings of Ellul and Heidegger's calls for redemption, in an intellectual space where the human life is to be measured out in T.S. Eliot's "afternoons and coffeespoons." Ellul evokes Enrico Castelli, who argues that the technical human lives without past or future, depriving both law and language of their deeper meanings. Technique, in effect, has removed not only the natural flow of time, but the ability of the individual to think, consider, and reflect. We are an age of constant action, without time to consciously review our actions and purpose. Instead of living time, Castelli claims we are "...split up and parcelled out by it." (qtd in Ellul 1964, 329).

Reproductions and Technique: Benjamin and Ellul

Walter Benjamin discusses the state of art in an era that has seen the rise of technology capable of replicating or reproducing works in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1969). Classically, we see that a work of art has never really been irreproducible; there have always been techniques for

recreating material works. These forms of manual and mechanical reproduction, in the form of etchings, the exacting craft of replicas, and later on, printmaking, may have changed the character of the plastic arts, but have typically encountered trouble with works of performance. A manuscript or a performance review is not, obviously, a production of *Hamlet*, while the printed score to a sonata is not the raw experience of the orchestra. The performing arts, so rooted in the ephemeral and transitory, have found themselves most recreated in the only fashion possible: as remountings, as second showings, as ‘new’ performances of ‘old’ productions (217-218). What the development of photography and film allows for is the reproduction of the instant, the passing moment of the living stage (219).³

Authenticity

‘Authenticity’ is a key notion for Benjamin in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. He argues that a manual reproduction is often regarded as an act of forgery, a fake double of the original masterpiece; conversely, technical reproductions, works built out of the impersonal action of the machine, maintain some connection to authenticity. He defines this authenticity as “...the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced...” (1968, 220). The authentic is the connection to an unbroken line of history, to the ‘story’ behind an original work. Benjamin attributes the greater authenticity of mechanical reproductions to two primary sources: detail and malleability.

In terms of detail, Benjamin understands process – or technical – reproduction as more ‘independent’ of the original than is manual reproduction: photography and film can replicate minute details invisible to the unaided human hand or eye. This allows a technical reproduction to offer

an 'objective version', or unbiased copy of the work, one separate from the physical errors and deviances of the human reproduction (219-221).

At the same time, both photography and film, by capturing an instantaneous moment, are malleable: they offer us the possibility of manipulating the temporal qualities of the work. Reproductions can be slowed down, sped up, frozen, viewed from multiple angles and vantage points. In this sense, the performing arts can be reproduced more legitimately or 'authentically' in a film than ever possible in a remounting. A taped live production can be manipulated and is both portable and accurate: the performers offer the same motions, speak at the same times, reach the same peaks, in the video as they did in the 'original' performance (237-238).

Authenticity, is not, however, reproducible. Rather, the quantitative or mimetic potential for reproduction/replication of a given technology determines the degree to which an audience questions the 'authenticity' of the works it recreates. As an example, a natural landscape is never questioned in terms of its authenticity; in looking at a photograph or filmed pan of that landscape, however, the authenticity is subject to review, to scepticism, to doubt. 'It can't be *that* nice,' we say. Reproduction then jeopardizes the Authenticity of the Object, in other words, its *aura*. It separates the reproduced object from Benjamin's 'domain of tradition.' Thus divorced from any connection to the past, a plurality of copies substitutes for the unique existence of an original (222-224).

Experience

Benjamin argues that humanity's mode of sense perception, its organisational hierarchy of 'sensate priority' and the manner in which this is expressed in human culture and society changes according to natural, genetic, and historical/cultural circumstances (219-222). This begs the question as to what social transformations are expressed by these changes in perception,

whether they lie in a loss of time/space conception or in interpersonal connections. If we assume that the technical society is re-ordering our sense of priority and that these changes in our mode of perception are related to a decay of the 'aura' – the authority of originals – then we can begin to explore that decay's social roots and causes.

Benjamin writes that the contemporary masses want to render more immediate all experience, both spatially and temporally. Individual experience and narrative then becomes more important and valid than group experience, or the traditions and history of a socio-cultural group. To paraphrase Benjamin, the uniqueness of every reality is overcome by the acceptance of its reproduction in every individual (238). In this way we see how objects themselves are brought closer by examining their likenesses, their copies. These reproductions are never the same experience, however: while the photograph, the film, and likely, the dedicated and comprehensive web archive, may offer an endless sequence of perspectives and exact detailing impossible to realise in a restaging outside of a truly 'virtual' environment, elements will always be missing.

The Ritual and the Mechanical Confronting Art

The artist is in fact a seismograph that records the fluctuations of man and society.
Jacques Ellul, 1964, 404.

Ellul says of art that it must adapt to technique's efficient processing of its social location and capacity. Where technique once belonged to the society – as the set of 'how-to' competencies in a larger non-technical whole – it now dominates all realms of the civilised. By means of mechanical (and digital) reproduction, technique's efficiency and relentless logic calls into question the *necessity* of the live performer (1964, 128-129, 404). If a copy or reproduction is more accurate at capturing the impression of a performance, why bother

restaging, except as part of a fetishized conception of the 'live'? Benjamin introduces the idea of 'aura' as a means of dealing with this issue of our attraction to proximity to a work of art.

Echoing Ellul's thinking, Benjamin sees cultures as organised by the valuated perception of tangible space and time; sacred objects are those out of reach or conception by the common masses. Attachment to aura is a form of fetishizing the unapproachable, the out-of-space/out-of-time; aura is the sense of distance or untouchable quality imposed on a work (222-223). There is a certain valuation placed, in the ritual-centred mode of artistic production, on the ceremonial value and the uniqueness, either in time or in space, of the work: only certain people at certain times are privileged to experience it, and, presumably, to translate its potential meaning to those who were not present. A portable or reproducible work is less sacred because it is de-ritualized, its aura diminished (Benjamin 1969; Ellul 1964). In a culture valuing the conquest of space, then, the distant object is essentially unapproachable, the unapproachable is ritualised, the ritualised sacred. As anthropologist Victor Turner argues in *The Anthropology of Performance*, the ritual sacred space is the site of the performed (1986).

In terms of such performances, whose initial quality is their unapproachable, ritual status, reproduction brings the work closer, allowing us to review it, analyze it, render it familiar and no longer so mysterious. To reproduce mechanically – or, it must be assumed, digitally – is to destabilize the 'sacred art' of performance, de-ritualizing it. The sacred/unique is rendered profane/reproducible.

In Benjamin, this de-ritualizing is a form of liberation, as the techniques of art-making alter to incorporate the technological capacity to replicate and manipulate: "For the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever-greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art

designed for reproducibility” (222) – to ask for the ‘authentic’ print from a roll of negatives is meaningless.

All public performances – political as well as artistic – have been affected by technologies of reproduction. Anyone can access, alter, create, or bend the reproduction. As a non-authoritative and therefore, non-sacred object, the reproduction can be freely manipulated without fear. In presenting performance on video or film, we encounter those same factors facing the recording of film: a separation of filmic elements into discrete chunks. Angles, lenses, cuts, and other film techniques all represent ‘optic tests’ fooling the eye into believing that a series of separate moments are in fact a contiguous whole. We are essentially separated from the presence of aura, from the *sacra* of an unapproachable original work of art (Benjamin 1969; Turner 1986).

Those formerly sacred objects of ‘high culture’, once removed from aura, become accessible to all levels of society, often leading to serious opposition from defenders of the traditional role of art. The outcry against mass participation, in art or in the realm of social life, is the same as always: the masses, it is claimed, seek only digression, distraction, or spectacle, while ‘true art’ demands concentration and ritual respect. Benjamin sees the argument as such: the concentrating, contemplative individual *is absorbed by* the work, while the masses *absorb* the work (224-225). When the value of the original is compromised, when a night out at the theatre is no longer a space removed from the everyday because a movie or a television show is better at manipulating the emotions or capturing Oscar-worthy celebrity expressions, art finds new ways to motivate itself. When authenticity is no longer applicable as a focus of cultural or artistic production, the act of art-making ceases to be driven by ritual and becomes, appropriately, moved by the impetus of politics (239-241).

For Ellul, if not for Benjamin, the contemporary artist is caught up in the politicization of art, limited in vocabulary by the discourse of the technical and bound either to work within an art of pure technique or to choose

‘madness’. This ‘madness’ is the only viable decision, as Ellul calls on art to respond to notions of collapsing space and time, of the erosion of means of experiencing the real through severance from the natural world (Ellul 1964, 404). Just as never before have so many humans had to do so much work – work so technically mediated and governed by necessary processes that we are utterly divorced from any meaningful connection to our actions – so is the artist bound up in the requisites of technologically-demanded technique (Benjamin 1969). The realms of the spontaneous and the personally-achieved are severed from the process of creation and artistic/cultural production.

It is into this discursive space – bound up in the realities of a technological society with all its attendant marvels, negotiating the space of personal and collective identity in the face of an impending global monoculture, and trying to locate the site of cultural production in the midst of it all – that the major Canadian contributions to North American technological thought emerge.

The Canadian Impact

All descriptions or definitions of technique which place it outside ourselves hide from what is.

George Grant, 1969, 137

Canadian society teeters in a balancing act: Caught between connections to Old World powers never separated through rebellion and the North American ‘immaculate conception’ into the industrial age, Canada has long been a living focal point for technological and cultural theory. In *Technology and the Canadian Mind*, Arthur Kroker argues that the nation’s contribution to North American thought in particular has been a long, original, and well-articulated discourse on technology and society. Combined with our sharp and politicized cultural divide in Canada, he tells us, we are well-positioned to investigate the juncture of cultural identity with technology (1984, 1-8). Through the work of such luminaries as Harold Innis, George Grant, Marshall

McLuhan, Canada has made significant strides in the development of a body of thought on the technology-identity-culture discourse. Through these developments, we have likewise been able to explore the issues around our own Canadian crises of identity.

The central precept of the Canadian discourse on technology, from Innis through Grant and McLuhan, is this: the Canadian struggle in the ‘age of the silicon chip’ is to deal with the loss of marginal spaces, indeed, with the absence of a coherent sense of the spatial or temporal at all. Where McLuhan celebrated the potential of an intermediated global space and Grant lamented the loss of all connection to personal value and the pursuit of the Good, Innis sought a means of re-integrating time into lived experience (Kroker 1984; Peddle and Robertson 2002). Regardless of their approach, these three pioneers of Canadian thought found undeniable (or anticipated, in the case of Innis) the sociological impact of Ellul’s technological society (1964).

Theories on Canada and the Technological Society

The Canadian journey toward developing a robust body of writings on technology and culture has come a long way, winding from colonial and Loyalist roots to the establishment of a sovereign nation through to the spread of an American ideology of technical progress. The works of Harold Innis, George Grant, and Marshall McLuhan are shaped by a perspective situated halfway between the American religion of immaculate-birth-from-Progress and Old World values with a history of slow technical evolution. As Arthur Kroker argues in *Technology and the Canadian mind*, “...For Canadian thinkers, technical society jeopardizes at a fundamental level the received traditions of Western culture and makes our fate as North American a journey, almost a skywalk into an unknown future.” (1984, 12).

Many of the major Canadian theoretical writings on technology address the concerns of Europeans tackling their own technological crisis. Grant’s

fears of the dangers posed by a technical society are certainly inspired by Ellul's spectres: an eradication of local culture through the elimination of difference, a drive toward efficiency and specialisation at the expense of collective humanism, and the loss of language capable of properly critiquing this ideology (Ellul 1964; Grant 1969). At the same time, in both Innis and McLuhan (as in Heidegger), there was always an attempt to reappropriate or seek emancipation from technical domination. The divisions between their approaches, which Kroker argues characterise the basis for all Canadian thinking on technology and society, are best described as 'technological humanism', 'technological dependency', and 'technological realism' (1984, 14-15).

McLuhan and Technological Humanism

Technological humanism seeks "...to renew technique from within by releasing the creative possibilities inherent in the technological experience, focussing on the relationship between technology and freedom." (Kroker, 40). This is McLuhan's embrace of technology, both as an artist and as a media theorist, exploring the possibility of technique-as-tool, rather than man-as-component. McLuhan argues that "[a]utomation is information" (1964, 346), that our tremendous advantage in the mechanical and electronic age is a freedom technology gives us to simultaneously access all of our cognitive abilities, discovering "...that we are most at leisure when we are most intensely involved, very much as with the artists in all ages" (347). In technological humanism, technique possesses, if only potentially, the "poetry of consciousness" (Kroker 1984, 84). McLuhan tried to show us the potential for a human reclamation of spirit, connecting to our global siblings via the mediation of vast spaces into coherent and tangible localities.

Grant and Technological Dependency

The perspective of technological dependency, best exemplified in Grant's laments for the loss of human collective conservatism, sees technique

as ‘the locus of human domination’ in terms of a dependent political economy, the loss of cultural heritage or memory, and the spread of a the technical society’s moral and ethical void. Grant feared the loss of the very human awareness of absence; that is, the technical society forces us to view every absence as a raw deprivation, every desire or whim not immediately satisfied as an insufferable lack. The meaning of modern life in technological dependency is the mastery of technique, from machines to modes of organisation, ideology, and public morality – in other words, as the rapid spread of the technocratic bureaucracies, liberalism, and instrumental activism that Grant loathed (Grant 1969; Kroker 1984).

The age of the technical embraces ‘potentiality’ and freedom above all other things. In *Technology & Empire*, Grant describes our perceived state of liberty as the sense of “...an unlimited freedom to make the world as we want in a universe indifferent to what purpose we choose” (1969, 138). Evoking both Ellul and Heidegger, Grant sees technique as so buried in our collective self-conception as creatively free, self-made individuals imposing our vision on an uncaring world that we have lost our sense of what consists of deprival instead of simple absence (George Grant 1969). So dependent have we become on technique that our taboos, our systems of meaning and value, our sense of ‘sacred restraint’ have all been replaced in favour of a supposedly egalitarian society rooted in the ‘overcoming of chance.’ All languages, terms, and concepts expressing meaning outside the movement toward ever-more-ubiquitous technique have been fragmented, pushed into inarticulate nonsense (Ellul 1964; Grant 1969; Kroker 1984). “[T]he very substance of our existing which has made us the leaders in technique, stands as a barrier to any thinking which might be able to comprehend technique beyond its own dynamism” (Grant 1969, 40).

Innis and Technological Realism

Technological realism, embodied in the work of Harold Innis, sought to balance the needs of empire (that is, of power) with the needs of culture (or history). Where Grant called for a recovery of time against the limitless space of electronic media, and McLuhan revelled in the possibilities of a global village, Innis, who wrote before both men, looked for the means to reintegrate time and space into Western thinking, a theoretical perspective that would be echoed in the contentious and vigorous writings of the Digital Age. Central to Innis' thinking is the notion that in Western civilisation, the stability of a civilisation lies in its ability to adequately balance the relative importance of spatial concerns – territory, borders, natural resources, of population – with those of temporal concerns – duration, history, cultural identity, mythology. The tensions between centre and margin, between the focal points of a society and those elements forced to the fringes, were integral to Innis' ideas, and therefore integral to his conception of the Canadian identity.

Innis' theories describe technologies as either time-biased or space-biased. He argues that “[c]oncentration on a medium of communication implies a bias in the cultural development of the civilisation concerned either towards an emphasis on space and political organisation or towards an emphasis on time and religious organisation” (1972, 170). Bringing a second medium into the society tends to create an overemphasis on either space or time at any given moment. This imbalance led not only to the largest social disturbances in history, as cultural groups clashed, but also led to the progression of social change and the development of civilisations, as these biases shifted position constantly, *reversing* each other (166-170). In modern society, in the *technical* society as articulated by Ellul and Grant, efficiency demands a total control over the spatial and the elimination of relative time's imprecision. It therefore ‘carves’ up time into discrete fragments, binding us to the clock in an objective, superficially-static model of time (Ellul 1964; Grant 1969, Kroker 1984). When time and space are *both* fragmented, both rendered

divisible, malleable, and subject to 'de-' and 're-construction' at will, as in the Digital Age, Innis' 'centrifugal and centripetal forces' face obstacles in the reversing of one medium into another. What emerges is a situation in which digital media dominates and explains away all prior media. The 'monopolies of knowledge' formed around communication media of a particular spatial or temporal bent are thrown into disarray – a state possibly facing the contemporary Canadian socio-political landscape. With that in mind, we now turn to review the qualities of emerging communication technologies, those 'new media' possessed of a unique relationship with space and time.

Theories of New Media

[T]he content of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph...

Marshall McLuhan in Understanding Media, 1964, 23-24

As media interact, there are moments of conflict; still, as McLuhan reminds us, one medium will always be dominant (1964). This action of interference forces the dominated medium into a kind of adaptive phase as it seeks out a new niche and aesthetic: "the dominated medium is not only obliged to redefine its social and economic role with respect to the new medium that dominates it, but is equally required to reposition itself aesthetically." (Busson 1985; 103). Still, if McLuhan is right and the content of a medium always lies in the seeds of prior media (1964, 23-24), then new media must be rooted in photography, in sound recording, in the printed word itself. This digital revolution is the revolution of numerous stimuli reduced to individual 'streams' of data, threaded and twined together, manipulated on a discrete level; what is problematic is that as part of this process, digital media does not acknowledge that there was ever any other state than 'multimedia-waiting-to-be-possible, begging the question as to whether this was a case of a technical anticipation of the need for a technology, or else a careful rewriting of technical history (Bolter 2000, 68; Manovich 2001, 45-48). Digital media is

aggressive in its attempts at Bolter's notion of 'remediation', seeking to "refashion the older medium or media entirely, while still marking the presence of the older media and therefore maintaining a sense of multiplicity or hypermediacy..." (2000, 65).

But what constitutes new or digital media? We have been inundated with these buzzwords for years now, our quotidian existence mediated by an at least passive acknowledgement that we are increasingly confronted by an evolving, changing 'mediascape'. The oldest 'screen media' of the past century are cinema and television, both of which have thoroughly entered into our daily lives and experience. Contemporary new media include video, satellite television and transmission, and computers and console game systems. Finally, among the truly 'new' media technologies beginning to engage us on a societal level are multimedia computing, the Internet, and digital broadband and High Definition television (Livingstone 1999, 59-60). Ronald Rice succinctly summarises the nature of new media, locating them as:

...new to the extent that they combine (1) computing (which allows processing of content, such as retrieval through associations of words or other indices and structuring of communications such as conversational threads in newsgroups), (2) telecommunication networks (which allow access and connectivity to diverse and otherwise distant other people and content), and (3) digitization of content (which allows transference across distribution networks, reproducibility of the content as data, and integration and presentation of multiple modes such as text, audio, and video. (Rice 1999, 24-25)

New media, in this sense, could be thought of as 'multiple media', or 'multimedia': the technical capacity to combine in a single interface sound, text and image. Indeed, the windows of the standard Graphical User Interface (GUI) emphasize the multiplicity of media pulled out-of-context: text might appear in one box, music in another, photos and videos playing out of the last (Bolter 2000, 67). None are interconnected until that digital link is made as one icon is dragged over to another icon. The new media are digital; in the realm of the digital, all other media are simply information and all information, simply

data. As the technological society has taught us, all data are bits and bits are interchangeable.⁴

This notion of ‘newness’, however, is not necessarily accurate; by the time a product is finally released, most of the developmental work on it has already been done. The technology’s social impact, however, is only really felt by the population when it is released into the actual market, only reaching its ‘career’ phase in the move away from the cutting-edge and into the home (Haddon & Silverstone 1995; Rogers 1995). Part of what draws so many artists to work with new media is its connection to the cutting-edge, however. Particularly in the case of the latest breed of media technologies, although many ‘specifications’ have been explored prior to release by engineers, there is still a tremendous capacity inherent in the technology to manipulate images, sounds, and sequences into an array of configurations limited only by creativity and technical aptitude (Manovich 2001). These media technologies are, in a sense, interactive, and therefore subject to being reworked, reverse-engineered, ‘tweaked’.

According to drama critic and performance theorist Patrice Pavis in *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, any attempt to discuss either considerations of the specific techniques by which art could be created using new media (or of the place held by newer forms or uses of media) is only useful within a conceptual space “...linked to aesthetic or metaphysical reflection on the passage from quantity (reproduction) to quality (interpretation)...” (1992, 100). Doubting the ‘perfect’ replication of the digital and the mindset it engenders, Pavis holds that in order to discuss media technique, we must first consider what that infinite mutability and capacity of all content to be data represents. Rice disagrees with this stance, however, claiming that when new media are so critiqued, they are often judged on the basis of an “artifactual”, idealised conception of interpersonal communications, one where speech and human interaction are prized above all elements (1999, 26). This approach limits new media to being positioned as a sterile, impersonal laboratory environment,

devoid of meaning or context, in contrast to a utopian vision of pure live communication. To ignore this critique would be foolish; certainly, no technology is entirely 'neutral', and multimedia in particular comes with particularly strong tendencies to define, redefine, and manipulate the terms in which it is understood (Manovich 2001).

Theories of Performance

Types of sociation, symbolic action, the carnivalesque, social dramas, occasionalism, heterotopic spaces, the creation of identity, and identification with others have one thing in common: Theatricality. All of these issues associated with identity are in some way linked with ideas of performance...

Keith Hetherington 1998, 150

Performance must be understood as an emergent stratum of power and knowledge... It will be to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries what discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth, that is, an onto-historical formation of power and knowledge.

Jon McKenzie 1998, 18

In *The Anthropology of Performance*, Victor Turner established a particular and highly-useful model of thinking about the nature of performances of all kinds; he links sacred ritual, childhood play, and social drama as means populations use to explore and to challenge their own identity and self-conception (1986, 22, 74-76). Theatrical performances explore with the audience the experience of being human, in spite of, or perhaps invoking, cultural differences and disparity. Turner tells us that, "...man is a self-performing animal – his performances are, in a way, *reflexive*, in performing he reveals himself to himself..." (1986, 81). We achieve this feat of self-revelation as a reaction action against the experience of the performance, either as performer or as audience. This can manifest in the performer's act of putting-on-a-role revealing depths of personal being, or else in the audience's observation and participation uncovering new layers of their own identity. As Richard Schechner, a Performance Studies specialist and long-time colleague of Turner's, explains in his foreword to *The Anthropology of Performance*, this

reflexivity, either personal or collective, forces us to confront the different meanings we assign to experiences. In drama, we are made to face a multiplicity of cultures (Schechner 1986, 10, 13). The mirror held up to ourselves brings about an understanding of our own experience of culture.

The role of the performing art-work, then, becomes the presentation of a people's living history: the set of narratives, stories, myths, *ideas* that together constitute the shared culture of a social group, their agreed-upon baseline for discussing and evaluating the experience of being human. Many issues are raised when performance confronts the technical society: what are the terms by which we judge the human condition through performance when those performances are mediated by, or as Walter Benjamin and Marshall McLuhan point out, predicated on, the ideology of technique? In the following pages, we will look closely at the key points of performance theory, building up an understanding of the major themes and ideas in the field before moving into the later chapters' close study of performance and technology in Quebec.

Studying Performance

Both Schechner and Turner agree that human behaviour exhibits a persistent theatricality, a masking or 'playing-at' that resonates throughout cultures across the globe. Performance, in their seminal work in the field, takes on a major importance as an "expression of human signification", as their colleague and fellow performance researcher Peggy Phelan writes (1998, 3). Whatever our personal or cultural narrative, by 'playing-at' a role, we take on characteristics of that role to better situate ourselves in the world. Ritualised performances – those taking place in more 'formal' settings – become, for Turner, the study of those 'unreachable' sites where cultural groups hold up the mirror to themselves (1986, 81).

Performance rejects textual sovereignty, authorial or directorial authority. It emphasizes the potential to make and unmake meaning, to exist as

a culture and to critique it simultaneously (Reinelt 2002). This isn't so much a rejecting of 'theatre' as it is an embracing of the means by which we 'put on', in an artistic arena, displays of identity, cultural difference, and creation. The performed is the place to don the masks and costumes by means of which we defy and invert those roles we act out in everyday life. The field therefore studies the exchange between sacred spaces and the sly challenges and bitter inversions of performance.

Play and Ritual: Turner, Schechner, Performance Theory

The connections Turner found between social groups and rituals in cross-cultural human behaviour identified for him a process both continuous and dynamic, one linking notions of *ludos* and *sacra* – the ludic and the sacred. Through creative 'playing-at', cultural performance serves as a means to present in a sacred – set aside – space those relationships or events otherwise invisible in the realm of the everyday. In ritual and in performance, we sanctify the quotidian, thereby allowing us some degree of separation from it. That distance offers us the means to consider both the nature of the everyday world and our place within it. In their acts of 'sacred play', performers take part in an active social event, provoking a clash of cultures. Drama and ritual are thus means of creating serious works; the sacred space of the stage sets up a site for dealing with critical social issues in a ritual fashion (Schechner 1981; Turner 1986). Through their 'aura', drama and ritual are a community's most useful tool for social discourse, for tackling visions of the possible by:

...making worlds that never were on land or sea but that may be, and bringing in all the tropes, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, etc., to endow these alternative worlds with magical, festive, or sacred power, suspending disbelief and remodelling the terms of belief... (Turner 1986, 27)

Furthermore, a drama is never really 'complete' until performed, until it raises "problems about the ordering principles deemed acceptable in 'real life'..." (*ibid.*). Acts of performance challenge the existing social order,

referring to the world in a way it never was, breaking down boundaries of the taboo, the unspoken (24-27).

If performances inversely reflect the state of the lifeworld, then they do so by being, as Schechner and Turner claim, dialectical events. The act of performance is a conversation engaging two 'cultural groups', in this case, actor and audience (Schechner 1981; Turner 1986). Through play given the position of ritual – removed enough to remain authoritative and untouchable in Benjamin's sense but still immersive – cultural performance and audience find an intimate connection. Turner describes this relationship as "...not unidirectional... it is reciprocal and reflexive – in the sense that the performance is often a critique, direct or veiled, of the social life it grows out of, an evaluation of the way society handles history." (1986, 22). This connection between spaces of play and ritual led Turner and others to claim that performative behaviour is intrinsically connected with dominant socio-ethical structures (1986, 94-95). The performance of the dramatic stage act reveals to the audience not only the way in which they arrange the elements of their lives, but also the definitions by which they separate *Self* from *Other*.

Turner identifies four stages to the enacting of drama or social ritual: the 'breach' of standard social norms and ordering, where that which is forbidden or unspoken first erupts into the waking world; the 'crisis' evoked by the widening of this initial breach as its influence spreads and taboos are rejected; the 'redressive actions' of social bodies, either those of an official 'judicial' nature or in rituals meant to deal, metaphorically or symbolically, with the rupture of the status quo; and finally the period of 'reintegration', where the community is given the opportunity to regain its composure and come to grips with the new state of affairs (1986, 34-35). Essentially, in the lifecycle of the dramatic work, there must first arise an issue or point of hypocrisy within the culture, one whose cracks begin to spread across the societal foundation. This is followed by the need to address the issue, to target the social crisis and put it 'on-trial'; in the case of cultural performance, this takes place in the arena of a

staged work. The performance cycle only concludes once the performing of the work has allowed the cultural group to face the crisis and come to terms with it – either through acceptance and integration, or through a redefinition of social boundaries. No drama is complete until this process is complete.

As the study of an ongoing process, a continual re-evaluation of the conditions of everyday life, any academic consideration of performance must take into account issues of time and space. Traditional drama presents its audience with an actor's performance, which, although ritualized and removed from the realm of the everyday, nonetheless appears *in a place, of a time*; the actor's work in presenting a persona becomes that of an individual-presented-as-community, as a representation of an entire social group (Carlson 1996; Phelan 1998). When a character takes on a social issue or condition, a *people* are being forced into confrontation, unable to progress socially until the crisis is resolved within the social order. Performances therefore exist in the period-between-resolutions, in what Turner calls the *liminal* space. The act of performance is therefore an act of 'between-ness', always engaged in a working-through of some point of cultural change (Turner 1986, 34-35).

Liminal Spaces and Transgressive Acts: Toward Identity and Technique

To indulge the killing possessiveness too often bred in admiration and love. The lessons we most need to learn are lessons in mourning without killing, loving without taking. This is the end toward which performance aims.

Peggy Phelan 1998, 11

The issue of *liminality* in the sense intended by Turner (1986) has been explored by a number of individuals. In *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, Schechner describes Performance Studies as the locus for dealing with the 'in-between', with the liminal space separating two dominant discourses, be they beginning/ending, was/will be, time/space, or others (1981). Marvin Carlson

closes his *Performance: A Critical Introduction* with a meditation on the dramatic and the liminal, citing performance as:

...a specific event with its liminoid nature foregrounded, almost invariably clearly separated from the rest of life, presented by performers and attended by audiences both of whom regard the experience as made up of material to be interpreted, to be reflected upon, to be engaged in – emotionally, mentally, and perhaps even physically. This particular sense of occasion and focus as well as the overarching social envelope combine with the physicality of theatrical performance to make it one of the most powerful and efficacious procedures that human society has developed for the endlessly fascinating process of cultural and personal self-reflection and experimentation. (Carlson 1996, 198-199)

The study of performance-as-social process, as exploration of the in-between, is central to a conception of the field, and to an eventual understanding of its impact on dramatic Quebec. Existing in the same liminal spaces that Turner describes as being home to the act of ritual, performance crosses the interdisciplinary boundaries between domains. Tackling the collision and hybridization of cultures, Performance Studies encompasses the consideration of the total realm the performed within cultures: what Jon McKenzie, in *Perform or Else* – his comprehensive study of the performance’s conceptual evolution in Western thought – calls “the living reactualization of socially symbolic systems.” (McKenzie 1998, 8). The place of performance within a society is progressive, forcing it in new directions and emphasizing novel possibilities. Schechner contends:

...performances mark identities, bend and remake time, adorn and reshape the body, tell stories, and allow people to play with behaviour that is ‘twice-behaved,’ not-for-the-first-time, rehearsed, cooked prepared... at the same time, we must not lose sight of each specific performance’s particularities of experience, structure, history, and process. (Schechner 1998, 361)

Performativity and Power

In *How to Do Things with Words*, the starting point for much of Western Performance Studies, J.L. Austin claimed that in terms of ‘performative utterances’ – claims like I do, I swear, I bequeath – some statements *are* the

action, rather than representative of action: "...it seems clear that to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to describe my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to *do* it." (1975, 6). The performative are those acts, ideas, or utterances that constitute, rather than represent, social action: in saying or thinking these utterances, the action is performed. Working within Austin's concept of 'performative utterances', social critic and theorist Judith Butler articulates a theory of performance opposed to the model of theatre-as-transgressor, claiming that:

... performative acts are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance, are statements which, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power... The power of discourse to produce what it names is linked with the question of performativity. The performative is thus one domain in which power acts as discourse. (Butler 1993, 17)

Butler's work allows for the possibility that by using certain performative utterances, such as the working-class dialect (explored in Quebecois drama most successfully following Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles Soeurs* in 1968), performance can evoke a certain authoritative 'theatricality', firmly establishing, rather than subverting, the place of a marginalised social group in the larger order. When we speak of 'theatrical' works, we refer to texts or performances that "gesture to their own conditions of production or to metatheatrical effects" (Reinelt 2002, 206), a self-referential quality common in the works of Quebec dramatists from Michel Tremblay (whose works inhabit a single shared theatrical universe) to Robert Lepage (who often plays with issues of time, space, and his own hybrid identity within his performances). Theatricality explores *processes* rather than *contents*, the "...indeterminate possibilities rather than their fixed cultural meanings" (Reinelt 2002, 208).

The process of embodying an identity in this kind of theatre is to present a self that is both carnivalesque and defiant, existing in the liminal space between the socially acceptable and the taboo. Identities so created are political, taking on lives of their own, and:

...come to be associated with new modes of ordering their social world...(conveying) social messages about the position of this person within a terrain of contestation: notably that between rejected centrality and affirmed marginality... (Hetherington 1998, 153)

The social order is challenged by the onstage presence of the extreme, by the physical embodiment – through modes of character, speech, movement, or staging – of social resistance (Godard 2000; Hetherington 1998). On the one hand, we see performance used in the language of technique – in the call to improve organisational efficiency and ‘performance’; on the other hand, we find that the cultural imperative, the work almost *demand*ed by the performing arts, is to defy the norm, to provoke Turner’s crises and redressive action. As a liminal process, for those using performance as an act of subversion, of resistance, the inherent challenge is to perform or else be socially normalized. Performance, for many such artists, is a form of defiance against norms of social control (McKenzie 1998, 14-16).⁵

Conclusion

Canadian art and society has long been exposed to the tensions between landscape and technology – in many ways technologies made possible the very nation, connecting through rail, telephone, and the camera two disparate cultures and two far-removed continental coastlines (McLuhan 1964). The building of Canada was really the conquest of space through technology. In following the model of Ellul’s technological society, the Canadian experience has been shaped by physical boundaries meeting technologies defying space and time (Kroker 1984). Our performing arts have likewise been heavily influenced by Benjamin’s technologies of reproduction, in which, as McLuhan reminds us, the medium *is* the message. The long tradition of Canadian scholarship on the issues of communications and culture is rooted in our connection to these pervasive technologies, our national spirit born out of pulling together a geographically-disparate nation.

For his part, George Grant pinpointed the demise of Canadian nationalism not just in the 1957 election of Diefenbaker, but in a philosophical-political ‘spirit of modernity’ and in the subsequent technological domination it asserted. Grant longed for a stable, conservative Canadian society – one able to remain independent from the technical society of the U.S. – but saw little hope in our capacity to remain independent in light of such unstoppable progress (Peddle and Robertson 2002). Grant understood the founding ideas of Canada as a connection, through Britain and France, to pre-modern culture, to Old World identities built based on purpose, on goodness, on the proper place of religion in society, rather than on the pursuit of the ‘humanistic individualism’ that dominated American thinking (Grant 1969). The Canadian identity is thus ambiguous for Grant, consisting of an allegiance to a state ‘neither fully self-governing nor fully understood’; at the same time, the cultural particularity of that nation-state is essential to the maintenance of its connection to classical notions of virtue and tradition (Peddle and Robertson 2002, p.25).⁶

The issue of French Canada upset Grant. Quebec’s claim to a distinct culture and its recent embrace of “...‘enlightened humanism’ and universalism” (1995, 98) in opposition to its divisive Catholic roots, he argued, would lead the Quebecois to “...build a society in which the right of the common good restrains the freedom of the individual” (1995, 87). He argues that no distinct culture could be maintained within a society seeking both to uphold its separateness and to enjoy “the advantages of the age of progress” (88). The social order that protects itself by quashing all other cultural voices is itself threatened by the cultural whitewashing brought about by the technological: for Grant, nationalism “...can only be asserted successfully by an identification with technological advance; but technological advance entails the disappearance of those indigenous differences that give substance to nationalism” (*ibid.*).

As social institutions become composed of and by communications technologies, their ideas of place and identity reconstructed, so must

performative acts respond to this by trying to define a location, even if the result of this is a clearly laid out ‘non-location.’ The historical objects of the past remain as signs in an ‘unrepresentable now,’ while identities built on the clear borders of now and here, there and then, face dissolution into the digital ‘correspondence point’ (Rayner 1999). Thinking about performance in an era of electronic and digital media requires a reconsideration of how we must perform once the establishment of identity through language no longer resonates (as is the case in contemporary Quebecois drama). The new techniques of communication urge us to ‘act as if’ cultural boundaries no longer apply (Phelan 1998, 8). Without cultural specificity, there is no difference, no Other, and therefore, no conversation. If we meet each other *as Each Other* through bringing to the table all our personal and social history, there is drama; by contrast, if we seek to speak to all people in all times, almost denying cultural specificity by saying that *all* narratives are equal, there is only white noise.

As McKenzie reminds us, the issue with regards to performance is not what constitutes performance (*what* performance?), but rather, into what category to place the all-performance of our very Being (*which* performance?) (1998). Quebec faces this very issue in its performances as it embraces new means of integrating technology with performance: not only the quality of these works that gives them their cultural specificity, but the very uniqueness of theatrical production, seems obscured as Quebec’s artists bring their work to the global stage. In our further examination of Quebec’s search for identity through performances created within the technological society, we now look to the development of the performing arts in the province – to their origins and historical evolution – before fully evaluating Grant’s claims that the embrace of the technological erodes cultural and national specificity.

CHAPTER II

ADAPTATION AND IDEOLOGY: PERFORMANCE IN QUEBEC 1867 – 1982

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to briefly explore the evolution of Quebec performance from its colonial roots into the early 1980s, where the nationalist direction taken by Quebecois dramas began shifting in favour of technological fascination. This is not meant to be an exhaustive history of the province nor of its early drama or literature, but serves rather to situate the reader in the context into which contemporary Quebecois performances will emerge. It therefore begins with a short review of Quebec history before moving on to explore the issues of language, culture, and identity rooted in Quebec performance.

Quebec's social and cultural evolution – with its contentious politics, linguistic debates, and passionate search for identity – makes the development of its performing arts a fascinating issue of study. Even so, exploring the history of theatre in Quebec, however briefly, is not the explicit purpose of this text; rather, this chapter is an attempt to synthesize the historical elements driving Quebecois theatre up to 1982. Where to start then, in figuring out the origin of these discrete elements? Where else, when discussing historical/cultural issues in *la belle province* but with language, and its cousin in the province, *politics*?

The province's nationalist issues are familiar to many Canadians. These issues are no less a part of Quebec performance. To a certain extent, the status of Quebec as an 'emerging nation', one of the final former colonies still under the yoke of some oppressive federal system, has been romanticized. As an American, for example, Jonathan Weiss refers to Quebec theatre as complex, elusive. This ambiguity comes, he claims, from Quebec's being a French-speaking society inside an English-speaking country that has, on numerous occasions, "attempted to snuff out the language" (1995, 2). Meanwhile, Antoine Berman describes the evolution of the province's performing arts in

terms of adaptation and absorption in his foreword to Annie Brisset's *A Sociocritique of Translation: Theatre and Alterity in Quebec, 1968-1988*. We are, he says, caught up in a world of pure 'secondariness', where the Quebecois reliance on translated dramatic works heightens the peril of a culture "lost in a sea of Anglo-American influence" (1996, xv).

Former colony, Canadian province, North American refuge of *la francophonie*, *pays distincte*, however Quebec's story is played out, it is nevertheless an ambivalent saga. The issues in Quebec connecting language, author, community, drama, and social structure are so interwoven that a history of Quebecois drama must also be an overview of those issues driving it from the early days of New France's delivery into the hands of the British Empire to the repatriation of the Canadian Constitution in 1982 (and the rise of a different species of performance in Quebec). Douglas Verney's *Three Civilizations, Two Cultures, and One State: Canada's Political Traditions* (1986) proved an invaluable resource in this regard, clearly articulating both a model for approaching the Canadian social landscape and a means of positioning Quebec within that civilisation.

Origin-texts and Colonial Roots

One function of theatre is to respond to the real world.

Chantal Hébert 1995, 27

Any text, dramatic or otherwise, is written in a language, of a culture. It arrives from a point of origin, always-already bound up in a given social history and culture. As prominent Quebecois literary and dramatic critic Lucie Robert argues, dialects speak of locality and context, carrying with them the baggage of a people's personal mythology, fixed in time and place (1995). In this manner performance and national identity are intimately connected. The revelation of a living theatrical language is the spoken history of a people put on stage – analysing the performed becomes a means to analyse the evolution of a social world. (Turner 1986). What, then, does drama say that cannot be expressed

better through other means? How can this idea apply to the context of Quebec-in-Canada, former colony turned federal province?

The threads of the Quebec experience, adopted (willingly or not) by any citizen of the province are the same: a colonial origin traded off in a peace treaty between Old World powers, dominated for centuries by an oppressive religious structure and unequal power relations predicated on linguistic differences continuing to this day (Robert 1995). The fact remains for any Quebecer, immigrant or *pure laine* native or simply long-time resident, that in 1763, the British took control of New France from the departing French forces. Having left the former New France's legal and social structure largely intact in the transfer of power, by 1774, with the Quebec Act, the British Empire left the colony fully in charge of its own language, laws, and religion, making Quebec unique among all the colonies, particularly in terms of the power the Act gave the Catholic Church (Brisset 1996; Nardaccio 1986).

Following Confederation in 1867,¹ the Church was revived as a system of cultural control and social dominance, laying out the directives for French Canadians across the province to follow for almost a century to come. For its part, Confederation was quickly accepted by the Church as a better means for each member-state to control and maintain its own institutions, Quebec's future as a distinct-state within a larger governmental body seemed certain; the subsequent two-century struggle between provincial and federal governments proved the unfeasibility of this power-sharing model (Marchak 1981; Robert 1995). The Church would continue to promote the identity of the province's citizens *as* French colonials, the term 'Quebecois' only realising prominent and recognised use by the mid-1960's (Verney 1986).

These pivotal events – the action on the colonies of political manoeuvrings hundreds of miles across the Atlantic, the swift rise to dominance of a powerful Church-State alliance – nonetheless remain embedded in the Quebecois consciousness (David 1995; Robert 1995). They are remembered by proxy through language, culture, and motto: *je me souviens*.

The Idea of Canada

Lord Durham, first Governor General of Canada, called it “Two nations warring within the bosom of a single state.” This would seemingly situate the nascent Dominion as an unending feud between two cultures fused together; in many ways, this was and continues to be so. At the same time, however, these ‘warring nations’ repeatedly resisted the British pressure to simply assimilate French Canada, while also defying the growing efforts of the American nation to annex the country (Verney 1986).

Verney’s central thesis holds that Upper and Lower Canada understood Confederation in radically different ways. For the English Upper Canada, the political union of the two halves was a necessary coming-together of two states sharing mutual interests, whose combined resources would enrich the whole. While it would be a bilingual nation, the division of that bilingualism - Upper Canada speaking English and Lower Canada, French - would be distinct. Lower Canada saw the Union as a means to create the first truly bicultural, bilingual state, shared across the country by all citizens (Verney 1986).²

The century separating Confederation from the 1960’s radicalisation and mobilisation of the province’s socio-political resources saw Quebec nationalism working to raise French consciousness, to evoke in the province’s people a sense of identity and social cohesion, to impel them toward the ideal of dualism their forefathers enshrined. This ‘Pan-Canadian’ vision was pushed by Quebecois intellectuals, who saw it as a means of defining a new national paradigm, building a civilisation out of the combined cultural identity of two peoples; it was opposed, often vigorously, by the loyalist Rest of Canada, which still understood its allegiance as belonging to Queen and (distant) country (Verney 1986).

In many ways, it was from Quebec that the loudest voices for the Pan-Canadian ideal were heard. Consider that from 1896 to 2002, over half of all

the individuals who holding the title of Prime Minister of Canada have been Quebecers, emerging out of the French Canadian ideal of a bicultural state crossing from ocean-to-ocean, comprising two peoples and multiple identities. For much of Quebec's short history, the goal has been to forward the intent expressed in the documents of Confederation: the creation of a new kind of federal system, a new kind of social identity built out of the combined cultures of two nations, co-existing and supporting each other in a single state (Marchak 1981; Verney 1986). The ideal of 'Canada' as a state exists in the very same intellectual space as does the movement to dissolve it.

Pan-Canadianism's historical failure to take decisive hold of the Quebec consciousness emerges in the way the state chose to formalize its ideals: we see a Canada develop that is officially bilingual, but never officially 'bicultural'. To French Canadians, the idea of two cultures occupying the same geographic space was always the goal. English Canada disagreed, seeing in the French language and culture a significant minority, but never more than that, until their hand was forced and the federal government promulgated what would be criticized in-province as a half-measure: the recognition of Quebec as 'distinct society' (Brisset 1996; Verney 1986). Quebec's federalist-intellectual core had always held to the idea of *Canada* as distinct society, one composed of two cultures. What they got was a country equating cultural cooperation/coexistence with linguistic regionalism, and an unsatisfactory playing-out of the federal project. Essentially, as Brisset reminds us, while the federal government could name French Canada's second official language, outside of Ottawa it was up to the provincial powers to interpret how this would play out (1996).

Neither could the federal system really affect the social distribution of wealth, which would, in Quebec, see a pre-1970s dominance of English Canadians in positions of wealth and power, further disenfranchising French Canada. In fact, by the early years of the seventies, concern over the future of

the French language and the paralysis of a minority-led Federal government would replace Quebecois chafing under and criticism of the Church's spiritual hegemony (Verney 1986). All these elements led to the rise of the *Parti Quebecois* – an abandonment of Quebecois Federalist ideals in favour of a socialist-nationalist hybrid party, composed of the non-violent Quebecois radicals and intellectuals seeking direct social change (Marchak 1981).

Despite changes through the 1980s – including efforts toward constitutional repatriation and the Meech Lake Accord – toward a return to the dialogic ideals of the early Confederation, power continues to pool in Cabinet and in the House of Commons, a division based on majority rule and not on the cooperative efforts of discrete members of a mutual federation working together (Marchak 1981; Verney 1986). Godard (2000) and Verney (1986) rightly point out that following the renewed '*deux nations*' proposal of the Union Nationale in the 1960's and the failed sovereignty-association referendum bid of 1980, the next attempt by Quebecois nationalists would be for outright independence – an attempt made in 1995, which not only failed, but brought into the Canadian political lexicon the entire 'fifty-plus-one' debate: by how much support would a majority need to declare its independence from the whole?

Instead of 1867's balanced Constitution of imperial federalism, Canada – and Quebec with it – finds itself caught up in an unbalanced monological statehood: one voice is heard, one predominant identity, with numerous sub-identities and sub-cultures scattered into the mix. Quebec has reacted against this, and in so doing, has only evolved into its own monological nation, *frequently denying the legitimacy of the different cultures existing within its own borders.*

Into this context Quebec performance emerges.

Colony to Province: The Performing Arts in Quebec

In drawing together the very loose threads of the Quebec performance tapestry, a few elements emerge immediately in the existing scholarship. Firstly, for over 300 years, Quebec theatre was dominated by the Church/State apparatus. The Catholic Church in Quebec served for most of that period in both social-support and censoring capacities. Organised religion pushed a rural-pastoral agenda, driving community action and identity, which the developing Lower Canadian government system fully supported. Religion and politics, therefore, are the unsurprising major thematic elements in most of early Quebecois theatre (Brisset 1996; Robert 1995). These issues remained largely unchanged for most of Quebec's early history, from the establishment of Upper and Lower Canadas through to the close of the First World War.

From the eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth, much of Quebec's locally French-written plays were popular, but concerned mainly historical events, such as the 1837 Revolt. These were pieces treating on circumstance and local politics, not on the issues of human nature and the exploration of the dramatic erupting out of modernism in Europe (Weiss 1995). For much of this period the biggest obstacles to the development of Quebecois 'cultural independence' were the French Catholic Church, the English-speaking power structure in Upper Canada, and the urban centres of Lower Canada (Brisset 1996).

Essentially, Quebec theatre spent most of the 19th century serving as an act of resistance to Catholic hegemony. Since the earliest days of colonial New France, the role of state religion in Quebec had been to operate as a comprehensive socio-moral structure emphasizing pastoral existence, large, close-knit families, the importance of a closely-scrutinised community funnelled through the Church itself, and obedience. From the closing years of the 1800s through to the mid-1950s, theatregoers in Quebec witnessed the concerns of realism, naturalism, and avant-garde take hold, emphasizing a period in which the focus of performances on linguistic and political issues

would reach a peak before diminishing in favour of more internal explorations of identity (Brisset 1996; Hamelin 1968; Robert 1995).

If the history of Quebecois drama were discussed in terms of stages, the 'first stage' would be placed somewhere around the early 1940's and be associated with the "naturalization" or "Quebec-ization" of foreign plays through processes of translation and adaptation (Brisset 1996; David 1995). This translation of foreign plays in Quebec validated the concerns of an emerging nationalist Quebecois theatre instead of bringing the larger-than-life, the unique, and the unusual to an outside stage. Those foreign plays chosen for translation carried themes coinciding with the ruling French-Canadian socio-political tropes of the day: colonization, alienation, marginalization, independence (Defraeye 2000; Steen & Werry 1998). Thus the scholarship shows the 'voiceless oppressed' of Quebec adopting and adapting the words of the vast foreign Other. Québécois drama's 'second stage' would then be charted as emerging in the early 1960's where the act of translation itself became the subject of dramatic writing, jump-starting a kind of native theatre, a Quebec canon. This 'second stage' would deal with issues important to the province's political and intellectual elite, as well as to the specific tensions among its working-class population (David 1995).

Often-cited as a work of pivotal importance is Jean-Claude Germain's foundational piece, *A Canadian Play/Une plaie canadienne* (Godard 2000). Here, the act of translation becomes a metaphor for the deformation occurring when there is contact with the politics of Otherness - in this case, in the 'infectious' or mutating properties of cultural association with English Canada. 'Plaie' means 'wound' in French, a titular double-entendre privileging the bilingual, and Brisset argues that the piece is "...paradigmatic by virtue of its very title, which parodies translation and ridicules the perverse effects of institutional bilingualism" (1996, 60). Québécois dramatists like Germain, Michel Tremblay and others would go on to use and parody the earlier translated material of the forties and fifties as rearticulated material in the construction of a national

Québécois drama in an attempt to force the larger Canadian society to recognise the different culture at work within the province (Brisset 1996; Defraeye 2000). The province's perceived political and cultural status – integral to Canada, distinct within it, but sovereign to it nonetheless – remains an ongoing subject of debate through the seventies and into eighties. It is at this moment, exactly as the nationalist movement is rising with the articulation of Hugh MacLennan's 'Two Solitudes', that the focus in Quebecois performing arts begins moving away from Quebec-as-distinct-society to Quebec-in-search-of-itself: identity politics replacing/co-opting language.

What emerges into this context is the work of visionary artists like Robert Lepage, who will find a voice not only for Quebec, but for an international community of performing artists, in the possibilities of new technology (Harvie and Hurley 1999; Hunt 1989; Knowles 1998). In Chapter 5, we will examine how Lepage goes on to use these communication technologies as a means of articulating many levels of the contemporary human condition, as well as to defy the politics of the day in his native province.

Post-War Performances and the National Theatre

French Canadians have always interpreted Canadian history through a lens focussing on their own involvement in it. The bulk of Quebec's historical writing and theatrical performances before the Great War consisted of reiterations of life in pre-1760 New France at the height of the French Colonial regime in North America (Verney 1986). The end of this era led to a period of profound self-doubt and introspection (Brisset 1996; Robert 1995). Quebec's position within the developing Canadian community was questionable – the bicultural/bilingual federation promised was not really developing. Much as in 19th century Germany and for Yeats' & Synge's Ireland, post-war Quebec experienced a movement within the performing community to establish a 'national theatre' (Brisset 1996). For Quebec to *be* Quebec, it was necessary

that it find a means to make clear the distinction between the French Canadian interpretation of the world and that of the Rest of Canada.

In considering this quest to establish a performing arts canon for Quebec, it is important to consider that prior to 1955, virtually no public arts funding was available in Canada; a theatre's box-office revenue alone determined its future stability (Hamelin 1968). For many performers in Quebec at this time, the effort to establish a national theatre was an intellectual pursuit, at best. Depression-era Quebec saw many of the province's working actors doubling as stars of the popular radio dramas of the day. The work was simply not there to sustain them as theatrical professionals.³ What professional companies there were found themselves isolated without a community, while many more remained amateur, meeting in church basements presenting classical French works and miracle plays (David 1995). It is here that one of the 'founding fathers' of contemporary Quebec theatre begins drawing together some of the artists who will shape the future of performance in Quebec.

Reverend Émile Legault is regarded as the pioneer of the modern Quebecois theatre renaissance. In 1938, the Catholic priest founded *Les Compagnons de Saint-Laurent* as an amateur company, producing sharper, starker, more stylized classics and rejecting the 'decadent realism' of the period. This early company would produce such luminaries of Quebec theatre as Jean Gascon (who would establish the National Theatre School of Canada), Jean-Louis Roux (who, with Gascon, would found the *Théâtre du Nouveau Monde*), and Georges Groulx. The *Compagnons* would eventually move into their own theatre, where their repertoire's focus would shift from French and Italian classics to more contemporary translated works, such as Williams' *La Ménagerie de Verre*, Wilder's *Notre Petite Ville*, Eliot's *Meurtre dans la Cathédrale*, and Pirandello's *Henry IV* (Brisset 1996; Hamelin 1968).

What differentiated the *Compagnons* from the other amateur and semi-professional companies working at the time was that while these other groups produced some local original works during this period, the bulk of these were

France-inspired light bourgeois farce, the ‘théâtre de boulevard’ (Féral 1990; Hamelin 1968). By bringing the national works of the world to the Quebec stage, the *Compagnons* instilled in its original members the drive to create their own serious dramatic pieces, to bring the Quebec experience into the ongoing conversation of international theatre. The *Compagnons* offered dramas staged with little in the way of extensive staging or special effects, relying instead on a renewed theatricality and commitment to performance. Speaking to the people of Quebec not as a group of farcical clowns but as ‘serious’ actors, they helped build up provincial pride in its ability to produce quality performances (Hamelin 1968).⁴

Essentially, in opposing infiltration by the Foreign Other, Quebec sought ways to absorb, to naturalize, to remove the alterity from select works. In an act not so much of translation, but of translocation/relocation, the Foreign was made Native – a play from Elsewhere could be made to fit within the histories and mythologies of a locality. Thus, Quebecers could build on their own identity and culture through the appropriation of the Other in dramatic works (Brisset 1996). Works from other cultures, nationalities, and histories were made to fit, sometimes imperfectly, into the mould of the Quebec experience. Quebecois ‘sacreds’ and rituals were embedded into Shakespeare, Ibsen, Wilder in an attempt to create a body of works whose culture could reflect/ridicule/ respond to the quotidian experience of French Canadian culture (Brisset 1996; Godard 2000; Turner 1986). What was becoming necessary was a means of communicating to the people of Quebec directly in their own language.

Social Change and Native Words

Following the postwar boom, Quebec theatre entered a relatively static phase; the great call to resist the Church’s 300-year social governance had died down, the federal project was nearing its centennial anniversary, and although

more original works were being produced in the province, the bulk of performances were the usual adaptations from the world stage (Brisset 1996). While massive social, political, and ideological changes were all on the horizon, it would not be until 1968 that the performing arts in Quebec would cross a true threshold into fresh territory, ushering in a new era of art-making and cultural reflection.

Before 1968, foreign plays produced in Montreal always appeared in their European French translations; quite a few directors and actors of that period were mentored by classically-trained French performers, whose familiarity with the European canon was unmatched, but whose connection to the socio-political realities of life in Quebec was questionable, at best (Lavoie 2000). For many productions, the standard of artistic success was measured by a particular species of audience-appreciation: the more the viewing public felt they were experiencing a work ‘as good as a Parisian translation’, the greater their satisfaction (Brisset 1996). Despite the language having almost nothing to do with the present-day experience of most Quebecers, either in reflection or in refutation, the theatre-going elite insisted on nothing less. However, as the histories, mythologies, and ideologies of Quebec – both Francophone and Anglophone - embodied in the Two Solitudes began demanding representation, this practice changed.

Beginning with Jean Lesage’s sixties cry of “C’est le temps que ça change,” as his Liberal Party came into power in the province, the period known as the Quiet Revolution began. Marked by a crossover from French Canada’s attachment to its past to the revolutionary spirit of an emerging colonial consciousness (Robert 1995), this is the period in which Quebec finds itself founding, not a French Canadian theatre institution, but a *Québécois Centre d’Essai des auteurs dramatiques*. In a 1968 Department of Cultural Affairs study, Jean Hamelin concludes: “The theatre in French Canada may evolve new forms better suited to its needs, but certainly it will never again become stagnant, for it is one of the most dynamic and original elements in French

Canadian culture” (109). With that, Hamelin explores the fact that “only in the past 25 years has Quebec theatre acquired the means to foster indigenous work” (*ibid.*). Between Expo '67 and 1980, in Montreal – at that time one of the largest centres for French-language theatre in the world – over 15 theatres were constructed or renovated (Brisset 1996; Hébert 1995).

The renaissance emerging in the performing arts scene paralleled the emerging politicization of its people. Through the works of writers like Marcel Dubé, Françoise Loranger, and Michel Tremblay, the 1960's would bring critiques for the first time of the spiritual and social wasteland left by the Catholic Church's opposition to social progress, urbanisation, and gender equality in the province (Brisset 1996; David 1995).

Little distinction is made between individual and the community in traditional Quebecois culture. Even in the act of purging the socio-structural baggage of the past, that point is vitally important. While Tremblay's 1968 production of *Les Belles Soeurs* in the working-class Quebecois dialect of *joual* was a seminal theatrical event in the province, Tremblay's intent was not to create an Other out of the women in *Les Belles Soeurs*, but instead to provide a language for all Quebecers, a 'We, the People' for his own contemporaries (Nardaccio 1986).

The dramatic characters emerging from this era were not the war-heroes and religious rebels of an earlier, perhaps more innocent period; rather, they stumbled out from the ranks of the dispossessed, the anti-heroic remnants of a society searching for its place: consider the broken urbanites of Tremblay's own extended theatrical universe. This was nationalistic, self-critical, introspective theatre, carrying through from the late 1960s to the 1980 Referendum. In this period, playwrights like Jean-Claude Germain, with *A Canadian Play/ Une plaie canadienne*, personified the drive toward defining a unique Quebecois cultural identity, seeking to rewrite Quebec's cultural history by giving voice to figures from the past (Hamelin 1968; Hébert 1995; Robert 1995; Weiss 1995).

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, it became clear that translators in Quebec were sacrificing certain elements of the original work in the interest of creating local relevance. While claiming that they were remaining true to the *spirit*, if not the word, of the original text, the translated foreign works produced – from versions of Macbeth referring to the thane's homeland as “*not*’ *pauv’pays*” (our poor country), to the works of Neil Simon transposed to Mauricie or Montreal – were more accurately described as ‘adaptations’ (Brisset 1996; Robert 1991). Where translations can literally ‘shift’ such elements as locality, references to past events, and even times, there remain certain incommensurable differences in ideology and cultural history embedded in the very dramatic structure. In order for a people to know themselves in the act of performance, Turner argues that they must be confronted with their own stories, histories, tragedies (1995). In the ‘living languages’ of Gélinas, Gurik, Loranger, Tremblay, and later on, David Fennario and Vittorio Rossi, not to mention Robert Lepage, the tracery of the Quebec mosaic would be revealed: defiant, vibrant, blasphemous, multicultural, and boldly political (Lavoie 2000; Nardaccio 1986).

Revolution and Reflection

A sharp rise in political and national concerns spread across both the province and the country in the 1970s, reaching its zenith with the election of the *Parti Québécois* in 1976 (Weiss 1995). A major event in the history of the province, the PQ’s election changed the face of the Quebec. By 1977, Bill 101 was law, making French the official language of Quebec and establishing the much-publicised institution of the *Office de la langue française*. Following its election into the National Assembly, the PQ left behind much of its left-leaning economic policies; the period that followed saw a series of economic crises in the 1970s and 1980s that hurt the working class, the party’s main bastion of provincial support. A great deal of the populist themes that had dominated

Quebecois theatre for the past decades faded out of theatrical discourse in favour of more individualistic, self-reflexive explorations that continue to today (Robert 1995; Verney 1986).

The October Crisis of 1970 perhaps foreshadowed the militancy that would dominate Quebec theatre for much of that decade, epitomized by Francoise Loranger's *Médium saignant* (1970). Much of the work in this era took the form of political theatre, collective creation, improvisation, a kind of Quebecois agit-prop caught up in the pop-cultural space somewhere between John Lennon's bed-in, Mordecai Richler, and René Levesque (Hébert 1995). The seventies, for Quebecois playwrights, was a period for targeting the conflict between the traditional past and the post-modern present, a binary opposition of Catholic, rural, French family past against secular, urban, bilingual-*juval* present. The plays of this era deal with the purging of social and moral traditions with particular emphasis on the often large and extended structure of the traditional Quebecois family. This act of purging was necessary to the establishment of true personal or collective independence and represented an adolescence for a province trying to come into its own (Brisset 1996; Robert 1995; Weiss 1995).

The close of the 1970s saw the first failed referendum on separation. At this point, many of the Quebec playwrights previously exploring issues of nationalism and identity stopped pushing Quebec's socio-cultural, mythological 'separateness' from the rest of Canada (Weiss 1995). As we will see in Chapters IV and V, traditional Quebecois society was gradually realising that there would never be a homogenous Quebec culture, that contained within the province were instead multitudes of distinct cultures, each attributing different meanings to shared events. Faced with the sudden realisation of their own increasingly heterogeneous society, playwrights of this period began exploring intra-Quebec issues, playing with the province's in-house cultural groups and divisions. With so many 'separate experiences of the same event' defining the cultural divide (Armour and Trott 1981, 4) Quebecois dramatists needed new

tools and new techniques to explore the issues facing the new generation of Quebecers (Féral 1990; Hébert 1995). Collective and collaborative performances were embraced, creating works strongly characterized by experimentation with stage conventions as much as with the use of language itself (David 1995; Godard 2000). New elements for the expression of stage works developed, such as photographic projections and film, employing Benjamin's technologies of reproduction toward an attempt to re-appropriate the use of performance for the people (Benjamin 1969; Robert 1991).

Language, Identity, and the Performative - Locating Quebec

Quebec translator and drama historian Lucie Robert argues, "...Drama is language in a social and political setting: it portrays character speaking, whether to other characters or to an audience is of a secondary importance..." (1995, 126). Whether this 'speech' is vocal or silent and embodied, whether it takes the form of dialogue or soliloquy, is of less importance than the act of 'dramatic speech.' Annie Brisset's award-winning study *A Sociocritique of Translation: Theatre and Alterity in Quebec* serves as a comprehensive evaluation of the language issue within the province's performing arts. For Brisset, the vocalising of French in the Quebec context served as a very public recognition of a *local* French language, within the province and *of* the province (1996). France has traditionally held to the idea that there exists a 'true' French language, native to the land itself. This is 'real French,' as opposed to any 'Quebecois' version of the language. Quebecois French, meanwhile, draws on an historical-oral, rather than an historical-literary, origin. This leads the Quebec theatre-maker to have more in common with a Caribbean or Brazilian performer than with an artist from one of the colonial powers (Berman 1996, xiv). The use by the province's dramatists of local dialects distinguishes Quebecois French from that of the mythical French homeland; this is essentially the same struggle undergone by North American playwrights to

forge their own linguistic-dramatic identity separate from that of Great Britain (Brisset 1996; Robert 1995).

Language has always been at the roots of Quebec plays, serving as its hero, its antagonist, the main character around whom the action revolves, as well as the enabler of that action (Godard 1995, 341). As ‘language in action’, a play differs from a novel. Where the story is related directly through a narrator in a book, the dramatic action in a performance is instead expressed through the language evoked onstage. In Quebec, Robert notes:

...form reflects content, and most plays can be read in part as metaphors of the playwright’s struggle with his own language... for most of Quebec’s history, nationalism channelled the language issue. As of the 1970s, however, other political issues have tended to inform the use of linguistic devices. (Robert 1995, 127)

Robert claims that language links to action, to staging conventions. To translate a work is to create a thing divorced from the original (1995). In Quebec, where theatre is the genre most translated, this would seem to be the source of considerable creative crisis. This may not necessarily be so. What the work of Annie Brisset and others have accomplished was to “clear the way in which an economy of translation is bound within the political economy of cultural exchanges, informed by specific social and historical constraints...” (Godard 2000, 333). Language, in fact, “...comes to represent the uncertain spaces of cultural difference, the issues of geopolitical power and dominance” (*ibid.*). Rather than restrict the act of translation to a simple repetition in the local tongue of a foreign work translation is understood in the postcolonial Quebec/Canadian context not as a form of copying removed from the source work, but rather, as an original and creative act.

As cultural theorist and translator Barbara Godard posits, the translator not only (re)appropriates the language of the original-foreign into that of the adapted-local, but also draws on the ‘external prestige’ of the original to legitimate the socio-institutional authority of the local culture: “...Performance as translation, translation as performative – translation is the third term linking performative and performance” (2000, 328). Even Robert concedes that

“...speaking, on a Quebec theatrical stage, was an interlocutory act: it did play (and still plays) an important role in the public recognition of the French language, and of the particular form of the French language spoken in Quebec” (Robert 1995, 126). In the case of Quebec theatre, that public recognition, that local authority of voice, was won through the use in translation of *joual*.

Coined in 1960 by Jean-Paul Desbiens from a mispronunciation of the word ‘cheval’, *joual* was the term used to encompass the set of slang, Anglicisms and pejoratives commonly used by the urban working-class of Quebec. Prior to this ‘official categorisation’ which was, in effect, an act of politicization, *joual* was understood as a popular language spoken in certain lower-class areas. Less a language than a literary style, *joual* came into its own in defining itself as a language *of* the people *by* the people beginning in 1968 with Michel Tremblay’s *Les Belles Soeurs* (in which his entirely-female cast spoke to each other in the familiar Montreal working-class dialect), followed later that year by Éloi de Grandmont, whose adaptation of Shaw’s *Pygmalion* for the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde used *joual* instead of a Cockney dialect for Eliza Doolittle’s character; in earlier French translations, Doolittle spoke in a species of “Parisian argot” (Robert 1995, 117). On the living stage, *joual* had come into its own, both as a rejection of the social norm dictated by ‘legitimate’ continental French and rest-of-Canada English, and in Butler’s mode as an authoritative speech identifying the performance as unequivocally Quebecois.

Joual itself is violent, harsh, and fast. It is characterized by idiosyncratic truncations, the use of slang from both the English and French languages, as well as word-play and a surfeit of vulgarity. Its use in theatre practice legitimized the form and encouraged its shock-value. Initially, the harsh speech patterns of *joual* was shocking to the audience, but as the public grew accustomed to the patterns and rhythms of ‘the common tongue’ spoken on-stage, playwrights grew increasingly bold in their use of the dialect (Brisset 1996). The 1971 edition of *Les Belles Soeurs* sees a marked change in Germaine

Lauzon's opening speeches, and all the women are much more at home in the language in the later publication (Weiss 1995).

The language of performance, not solely in Quebec, has become a metaphor for struggles of all kinds; it replaces class differences as the main obstacle to communication, friendship and love. If we cannot communicate with each other, if we refuse to see the private narratives and creation myths of different peoples and cultures, performance is rendered voiceless, its capacity for social change effectively neutered (Robert 1995). In the context of Quebec, this means that the issue of language encompasses – *translates* – all other struggles. Joul then becomes the language not solely of a particular class in a particular time, but of an entire population, disenfranchised and unable (or unwilling) to communicate with the outside world.

At the end of the joul-as-transgressive-revolution era, the most marked change in the loss of dramatic populism appears in the printed records of plays. Montreal-based publisher Les Herbes Rouges, in an editor's note prefacing local dramatic works written in the dialect, mentions that the language therein has been 'normalized for readability' (Robert 1995). By this point, the process of challenging the social order and affirming the French identity's status in Quebec through staged language alone may be complete. Other means become necessary, other tools by which Quebec's performing community can continue the redressive action necessary to resolve their identity crisis. The seeds of this new revolution appear in the 1970's as groups like the *Nouveau Theatre Expérimental*, working with director Jean-Luc Denis, sought to liberate theatre praxis from the so-called 'omnipotence of the text'. Denis' goal, recalling the emerging theories of Richard Schechner and Victor Turner, was to establish the practice of using a *texte représentationnel*, a performance text separate from the *mise en scène*. This text would be a multidisciplinary "theatre of images", defying the conventions of time, space, or traditional narrative continuity (Hébert 1995, 34-35).⁵

What is required, in other words, is a performance text based as much on stage picture as on language, on the building of symbolic scenes and action, on a multidisciplinary and ongoing challenge to codification and easy categorization. These performance texts call into question the necessity of traditional dramatic text as the vital point-of-origin of a play. As Hébert suggests, this approach toward the dramatic indicates that “... the will exists to take the reader into the very heart of theatre as a living art” (1995, 42). By creating a Quebecois text as flexible and organic as the realm of lived experience, artists can more closely offer an audience a reflection of provincial culture.

Conclusion

John MacAloon defines cultural performances in *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle* as “occasions in which as a culture or a society we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatise collective myths and history, while remaining the same in others.” (1984, 1). In a post-colonial Quebec still perceiving itself as integral to Canada, distinct within it, but nonetheless sovereign to the nation, these cultural performances would seem to take on the character of the subversive, the rebellious, the transgressive. What this review revealed, however, is a theatrical tradition first attempting to raise cultural awareness, then seeking in the development of an apparently transgressive local language a defiant and distinct cultural identity.

‘We do not see things as you do,’ Quebec said to the rest of Canada, ‘and in taking your words and making them ours, we establish this unconditionally.’ The question that arises, then, is whether the act of performance, in articulating Turner’s redressive action, must necessarily be a subverting force, or whether it can be a declarative, authoritative implement for assertions of social status. Personal realities begin appearing in Quebec performance as the groups of the late seventies move away from the

social/political to the author/dramatist. By removing the work of theatre from its status as object of 'high culture', its emphasis placed on national politics in favour of performance removed from some of its authenticity, these artists explore issues of identity in Ellul and Grant. That exploration is characterised by the model of a world experiencing the collapse of space, time, and cultural specificity by technology. The contemporary Quebec dramatist leaves the door open to explorations of gender, technocratic power-relations, and the on-going struggle for cultural identity by leaving the bulk of national self-realization and political re-structuring behind (Robert, 1995). It is these struggles of culture, technology, and theatrical identity that will dominate the province's performing arts for the next two decades.

Where this will take the performing artists of Quebec remains the subject of Chapters IV and V. For now, we turn to an examination of the nature of performance in the age of multimedia, looking at the technical conditions and predispositions that directly influence the current state of Quebec's performing arts.

CHAPTER III

THEATRICALITY IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE: NEW MEDIA AND PERFORMANCE

The pleasure of theatre is linked to the fact...

- indestructibly linked –

- indissolubly -

... to the fact that it does not last.

It is funny to think

of the efforts of notation

the efforts of archives

of videos, in canning plays:

'We must notate, gather up, store'.

Antoine Vitez in Copfermann & Vitez 1981, 138

Introduction

In *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich argues that just as those living through the rise of cinema as a new medium did not grasp its significance and so kept no real records of its evolution, neither will those of us living through the multimedia revolution maintain any clear evidence about computer and digital culture, so concerned are we about speculating on the possibilities of a technological future (2001; 7-9). Indeed, what records are maintained about digital culture end up by virtue of their very electronic nature being ultimately impossible to certifiably preserve. At the same time, the influence these media have on our daily existence is increasingly tangible, changing the way we relate to ourselves, to each other, and to our experiences. The study of performance is only one field in which the dissolution of the temporal, the spatial, and the geographical are being affected by the increasingly-ubiquitous presence of 'multimediation'.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the issue of the new media technologies that have entered into a pervasive, persistent relationship with Quebec's performing arts. Considering the incredible spread of multimedia across all domains of Western life, including its having apparently subsumed so many other media, how can it not but have profoundly altered the relationship

between audience and performance work? Having come to terms with a definition of new media in Chapter I, we will now look to the ideology implicit in that technology and to the influence media technologies have had on performance before turning in Chapter IV to the study of Quebec and its relationship with media technology and performance in the pursuit of a national identity.

Ideologies of New Media

A Western artist sees the Internet as a perfect tool to break down all hierarchies and bring art to the people. In contrast, as a post-communist subject, I cannot but see the Internet as a communal apartment of the Stalin era: no privacy, everybody spies on everybody else, always present are lines for common areas such as the toilet or the kitchen.

Lev Manovich, October 20 1996, from Rhizome.org

Whose vision is it? It is the vision of a computer, a cyborg, an automatic missile. It is a realistic representation of human vision in the future, when it will be augmented by computer graphics and cleansed from noise. It is the vision of a digital grid. Synthetic computer-generated imagery is not an inferior representation of our reality, but a realistic representation of a different reality.

Lev Manovich 2001, 202

The foundation of the new media worldview is a particular breaking-down of the experience of everyday life. “One general effect of the digital revolution,” Lev Manovich writes in *The Language of New Media*:

is that avant-garde aesthetic strategies came to be embedded in the commands and interface metaphors of computer software... (d)igital cinema technology is a case in point. The avant-garde strategy of collage re-emerged as the ‘cut-and-paste’ command, the most basic operation one can perform on digital data. (Manovich 2001; 306-307)

Following the intellectual and philosophical developments of the twentieth century (not to mention the total sensory bombardment of this past hundred years), if our perception of the world seems more like an “...endless and unstructured collection of images, texts, and other data records...” isn’t it only appropriate that we begin to categorize life itself as a sort of meta-database (219)? If all experience is data, then certainly our very experiences can be made to fit into this mode of collage, issues such as time, space, and the borders

between real and dreamt, all be easily crossed via a single seamless interface, a simple action of 'cut-and-paste'. The rise of the Internet predicated the establishment of the computer as universal cultural messenger, as transmitter of the interpretations of experience.

The ideology of new media is the explanation of all lived experience into a form and type subject to manipulation, alteration, filtering. It is the rendering of the spatial and temporal into discrete 'data packets'. Michel Foucault writes in the text of his lecture *Of Other Spaces*:

We are now in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed... our experience of the world is less of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein... (qtd in Manovich 2001; 325)

For performance, rooted in the action of living beings in living time, and for Quebec, intimately concerned with the importance of physical borders and with a culture grounded in history and experience, this ideology has paradoxically proved intoxicating rather than troubling.

Perhaps it is telling of new media's popularity within Quebec that proponents of the digital revolution attest to technology's power to create new spaces as often as it relieves us of those gone obsolete. Digital compositing, the 'cut-and-paste' filtering action of so much recent multimedia work, while often used to create the impression of a seamless virtual space, a locality emptied of original context, need not to be its only result. Manovich writes:

Borders between different worlds do not have to be erased; different spaces do not have to be matched in perspective, scale, and lighting; individual layers can retain their separate identities rather than being merged into a single space; different worlds can clash semantically rather than form a single universe. (Manovich 2001; 158)

In this light, it becomes possible within the ideology of the multimediated to create a new spatial universe, a pastiche dimension with its own connections and contexts. What influence this media-approach might have is important to the future of performance and will be further explored.

The Space of Performance in New Media

As the technical (and technological) society described by Benjamin, Ellul, Grant, Heidegger, Innis, and others spreads across the planet, we are confronted with a question of increasing importance: how do we reconcile the ‘performance’ of the technical society – demanding that we play our roles better and work toward increasing efficiency – and the demands of a performance dedicated to resisting totalitarian influence through transgressive action? The split Jon McKenzie outlines in *Perform or Else* is between organisational (technological) performance and cultural (social, ritual) performance. In discussing these two, he goes on to introduce a new performative paradigm, one wrestling with the issues raised by both: the notion of ‘Techno-Performance’, the performance of the machine (McKenzie 1998, 9-12). Here is a dual challenge: the product of technology must perform or be considered obsolete, while the user must perform or be consigned to the class of the undereducated, the uncultured. Outside the technical class of useful members of society, such former users are denied the means to access the only platform for social life (and therefore, for social redress) available. Ellul’s technological society railroads us into using its tools for our own subversive acts, using its jargon and narrative to put forth a challenge.

Peggy Phelan argues in *The Ends of Performance* that we find ourselves studying the field now because the technique of live performance is leaving human agency and passing into the silicon digits of the machine (1998, 7-9). If this is the case, it may also be possible that the direction taken by the technological society makes this an inevitable end result. Phelan and McKenzie both argue that new media and communications technologies carry their own discourse, denying or repressing the existence of prior technologies: rather than acknowledge the complex and sophisticated ‘technologies of performance’ always at work onstage, they describe everything in terms of their own jargon of technique and mediation (McKenzie 1998, 10-12). As they become more

pervasive in the performing arts, these new technologies bring with them certain demands; specifically, the transmission of information in the language of the mechanical: "...knowledge in the electronic age is post-able and preservable information" (Phelan 1998, 8). McKenzie's 'Techno-Performance' demands that all knowledge be evaluated in terms of its 'operational efficiency,' that it be translatable by the digital-binary matrix. Performance must therefore conform to the exigencies of the medium transmitting and storing it, whether it be digital video, a web page, a sound bite, or the flesh-and-chemical memory of the human brain itself (McKenzie 1998). Here the postmodern worldview expresses itself in the language and aesthetics of multimedia: all experience is narrative; all narratives are data; all data are equal. 'What can be sent and what can be stored' serves not only as the new paradigm for both knowledge and experience, but becomes the determinant of performance as well.

The threat underlying this push to conform to technique's requirements of performance's subversive, anti-authoritarian elements are clear: in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Jean-François Lyotard articulates how the technique of performing and transmitting experience, of 'performativity,' is associated with "a certain level of terror, whether soft or hard: be operational (that is, commensurable) or disappear" (1979, xxiv). For Lyotard, "knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question: who decided what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided" (1979, 8-9). In the age of the technological society, technique, knowledge, experience, and power co-exist, separating the real/acceptable from the immaterial/inefficient/disapproved of. Once reinterpreted into the language of technique, all things socially efficient – whether 'real' or 'true' or not – are 'veiled', made to seem natural and undistinguishable from the experience of living.

Narrative and Social Reality in New Media

What producers of new media are selling us, whether openly or by implication, is the notion of the immediate, of immediacy. As an audience of consumers, we seek instantaneous-but-authentic experience, finding its delivery in downloading hundreds of popular songs in an hour or watching early bootleg releases of films. Producers of the multimedia age:

engage in an ongoing struggle to define or redefine immediacy or authenticity of experience in a way that particularly enhances their own products. Often the immediacy of the product is expressed as transparency: you can see through the product to the ostensible reality behind it. (Bolter 2000, 69-70)

Increasingly, however, the product offered up for consumption is the experience of the media itself, the capacity to download music, to combine sound and text with imagery, to move between ideas and concepts with a fluid click of the mouse, to exist *hypertextually* (Bolter 2000, 69-70). The era of new media seems to be redefining our relationships not just in the way we relate to experience, but in our relations to the ways we express that experience and to each other.

In his *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Mieke Bal discusses how the standard theoretical premise of narrative theory positions narrative in opposition to description: "...[D]escriptions interrupt the line of fibula" (1985, 130), that is, the "...series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by the actors..." (5). As opposed to the modernist embrace of inner life, psychology, or other 19th century inventions, the narratives of new media works follow from the original Greek sense of narration. Michel de Certeau describes how "...in Greek, narration is called 'diagnosis': it establishes an itinerary (it 'guides') and it passes through (it 'transgresses')" (1989, 129). This approach privileges certain kinds of highly structured narratives (myths, fairy tales, detective stories), forms relying on events rather than on descriptive elements; those forms in which character-

driven action do not dominate the work are abandoned or dismissed (Manovich 2001).¹

Rather than presenting us with what has occurred, the narratives of new media instead offer the audience the opportunity to explore a realm bounded only by the limits of a global capacity to produce content, guided by thematic connections between images, words, and ideas. Our stories are clearly being influenced by the presence of new media – while ‘real’ physical space is compressed or rendered nearly meaningless, there is a consequent expansion of the importance of ‘virtual’ space, of the realm of ideas – themes that resonate in the work of Quebecois performance artists from Robert Lepage to the Cirque du Soleil.

Within our social universe, these new media technologies seem poised to restructure and reshape our awareness of place and identity: our social institutions are inundated with communication technologies, rendering our unconscious perception of the surrounding environment simultaneously disembodied, functional, and imaginary (Rayner 1999, 296-297). In trying to decipher what this glut of new media technologies means on a social or societal level, Sonia Livingstone cites three main possibilities:

- 1) That there is nothing new occurring here; just as with prior ‘new media’, these technologies, too, will slowly diffuse through our civilisations, bringing new changes in perspective, artistic endeavour, and cultural exchange, but bringing no new ‘essential’ change.
- 2) That there are different consequences for different technologies to different social groups. Cultures will be affected by different technologies in varying ways, depending on their specific social, political, and industrial context.
- 3) That the question itself is misleading; rather than ask what is new about new media, Livingstone argues that we should instead question the assumption that media are a cause, rather than a consequence of, social change. She argues that processes of social change are not isolated, that

they rely instead on an interconnection of social, political, and economic processes:

The history of technological failures in this century alone demonstrates that which media succeed in domination of the market... depends more on their social shaping and contexts of use than on their technological capacities per se. (Livingstone 1999, 60)

In their rapid development over the past thirty years, new media technologies with potentially a global reach and a global audience – the Internet, multimedia computing, and polychannel digital broadcasting, among others – challenge certain assumptions behind any easy notion of the passive, televisual audience-public. As a viewing and computing public, everyone is plugged in and made complicit in an evolving process of social-change-through-technology:

By transforming... marginalized tendencies into the mainstream of media use. Audiences – as users – are increasingly to be understood as plural (i.e. multiple, diverse, fragmented), as active – (i.e. selective, self-directed, producers as well as consumers of texts), and as both embedded in and distanced from specific contexts of use. (Livingstone 1999, 64)

This represents a shift from the ‘what’s happening?’ of the 20th century television viewer to the active ‘where am I?’ of that 21st century buzzword-laden trailblazer, the interactive participant (Skirrow 1986). New media has captured public attention, supposedly transforming audiences from passive, singular, undiscerning dupes into active listeners, individuals engaged with an action far removed from their own persons.

The ideological implications of new media must surely benefit Quebec, a nation seeking a populace both active and political, one that embraces their cultural diversity and that actively seeks to emancipate itself from old borders no longer relevant. Whether we accept that experience-as-data is a mode of self-veiling or not, we must continue to hold in mind the techniques of resistance still available to us. Particularly within the space of Quebec, could not the performative utterances of some new technically-literate stage language serve as a means of defiance against both the directives of the technological society and the introverted identity politics of the province, rooted in the

spoken word? What dramatic productions will confront this population, what performances will reveal these people to themselves, transgressing boundaries and taboos in an on-going process of social change? We move now to examine the specific influences of media technologies on performance before looking at the specific case of Quebec in Chapter IV.

New Media & Performance – Species of Theatricality

In a particular way, our passionate response to VR mirrors the nature of medium itself: By inviting the body and the senses into our dance with our tools, it has extended the landscape of interaction to new topologies of pleasure, emotion, and passion. A similar transformation occurred in the Middle Ages, when theatre exploded out of the textual universe...

Brenda Laurel 1993, 213

Technology could serve as an extension of the performers and reflect their thoughts and emotions: it could concretize abstract emotional states, allowing the essential – what remains unseen in the limits of conventional stage physicality – to come through [...] The audience won't watch simply the performers, but also their thought processes, their minds, their spirits.

Cheryl Faver, Artistic Director of the Gertrude Stein Repertory Theatre, 1995, 141-142

Walter Benjamin argues that art has traditionally created a demand only satiable later on. Tracing the lines of evolution and increasing sophistication upon which artistic development has intersected, he finds three main junctures: technology working toward certain forms of art; traditional arts developing movements involving great energy and skill to generate effects that will be reproduced effortlessly later; and finally, social change promoting new levels of audience receptivity (1969, 230-231). All of these have proven to be true of multimedia's development and influence on performance. In the first case, it can be argued that the technologies of new media have always been 'working toward' interdisciplinarity: as an interdisciplinary art-form, theatre incorporates elements of movement, image, temporality, the word; within the species of performance lie the seeds of a technological revolution only now being realised. At the same time, in Benjamin's second juncture, the stage effects used by theatre have anticipated the eventual creation of a technical means of

duplicating them, in many ways inspiring those technologies.² Finally, the drive of a society towards the technical seems to have promoted a need for performances and media more in tune, for good or ill, with the requirements of this new social order; multimedia provides information faster, of greater apparent variety, and in quantities sufficient to satisfy a people with no time to waste but an infinite capacity for diversion.

Brenda Laurel's contention in *Computers as Theatre* is important, not only for the way it challenged perceptions of the theatrical in the Information Age, but in its implication that the computer itself represents a kind of performance, one into which artists would be welcomed. Artists represent an integral point in the diffusion process of any technology; in bending, twisting, and 'tweaking' their functionality, artists find ways of expanding the possibilities of technologies thought already 'figured out' (Rogers 1995). They are performers acting out a new kind of ritual theatre, one in which technological possibility has expanded the realm of ideas available for exploration.

Influences & Intersections: Media and Performance

In her critique of the American school of Performance Studies, Janette Reinelt contends that North Americans are merely continuing the postmodern push to break down the 'hierarchy of elites', playing the tension as one between 'traditional' text-and-character based dramas against other forms of performance and social drama. Europeans and Canadians, meanwhile, maintain a wider range of theatrical possibilities that nonetheless clearly defines what constitutes a legitimate theatrical event and what does not (2002); in Quebec especially, there has traditionally been a great interest in exploring the convergence of various media, including cinema and video, radio, television, and performance. The performing arts in the province are tightly integrated with media influence, and are therefore representative of the notion of performance-as-media.³

The interferences occurring between media and theatre can be summarised as occurring in two forms: technological influence and aesthetic influence (Pavis 1992, 113-114). The former is revealed by the action of one medium to deliver unto another medium new technical possibilities. Such would be the case in Benjamin's technologies arriving that anticipate a future need (Benjamin 1969). Aesthetic influence is the modification of meaning, of context, and specifically for theatre, of its potential impact on audiences. The point of aesthetic interference is really the revealed moment of a sea-change in the manner by which an artist approaches and makes use of the work.

In terms of theatre and radio, we encounter a variety of influences: technically, for example, radio broadcasts of live performance represent the capacity to cross space in its most basic expression, while the aesthetic influence of the dramatic gives structure to early radio plays, leaving out only the *mise-en-scène* itself. The early dominance of this structure in radio plays built up their popularity; as this popularity grew, the needs of radio urged in the theatrical text a movement toward further simplicity, ellipsis, epic elements, rapid montage of sequence, and a collage of auditory elements. The body is gradually separated from the work, "no longer the natural conveyer of the theatrical event..." (Pavis 1992, 115). Particularly in early Quebec theatre, this dematerialization of the stage further pushed the actor toward a more vocal, aural presence, rather than a physical one (David 1995, 133; Weiss 1995).⁴ In the rest of Canada, we see this manifest as a passion for dramatic dialogue, isolated in the preponderance of 'kitchen-sink' family dramas; this is resisted in the latter half of Quebec's theatrical development by a highly visual culture and commitment to theatrical specificity (Féral 1988; Plant 1992).

Meanwhile, television's rise pacified the active audience; rather than engaging in Turner or Schechner's dialogues with the performance work, television urged audiences to watch, to react, to be "one who looks without speaking" (Pavis 1992, 120). Furthermore, television moulds the appetites of its audience, necessarily affecting their relationship with theatre, especially in

“... the demand for realism, verisimilitude and the desire to be soothed, rather than disturbed, by the performance.” (121). Prior to this, however, theatre strongly influenced the early teleplays, its conventions of staging initially translated directly onto the small screen in the use of static locations, the lack of different depths of field or focal ranges. Meanwhile, the inverse reaction to avoid being too ‘theatrical’ led to an artificial breaking up of locations, scenes, and dialogue in effort to recast the teleplay for broadcast (120-123).

Theatre has influenced film tremendously, as much as has been the reverse. As with television, the early cinema was built on the language of theatre and the rules of the stage, leading it to develop its own ‘cinematic specificity’ and repertoire of signs and techniques (Pavis 1992). Cinema, like video, creates in the audience the impossible urge to record performances ‘as-is’; at the same time, it forces an audience to switch attentions between the live stage and the recording, between the ‘real’ and the ‘represented’ (Pavis 1992, 124-129). Both the video and the film image seem alive, moving and progressing in local space, in real time, while depicting events and images occurring elsewhere, ‘elsewhen’. “The real difference between theatre and cinema,” Vitez tells us, “is that theatre is made to be destroyed by the rising tide, whereas cinema is made to be preserved and reproduced.” (1980; 64-65). Confronted with this paradox, the audience must re-examine its relationship to the local, questioning their own physical position.

Theories of performance in such an environment run the range from the optimistic to the dystopic. For Cheryl Faver, former Artistic Director of the Gertrude Stein Repertory Theatre in New York, “theatre in a utopian future will be able to give visual dimension to thought processes” (1995, 139). New media technologies also possess the potential to stage the inner life of a character; leaving aside notions of acting, Faver’s theatre-of-the-future would use media and technology to “concretize abstract emotional states” (141), being able to “...refract time: they will rehearse and perform in a virtual present, characterised by synchronous and asynchronous performance elements, multi-

site events, and non-linear action sequences” (146). In other words, such a theatre would liberate us from the domain of the particular, rehearsable in a global anywhere, its base of knowledge residing in a hypertextual culture moving through the thought-space of interconnected ideas and shared experience, all of it accessible and none of it localised. By presenting simultaneous, physically-disparate events in a single space, multimedia can serve to liberate the passive audience and force their engagement, creating an artistic movement within performance, the rise of ‘telepresence’.

Telepresence, ‘Chronopresence’, and the Live

The power to cross space is a powerful one. Brought to bear with regards to performance, the idea becomes extremely compelling. Maybe this is why works of theatrical telepresence have become the most common type of ‘new media theatre’ being created, talked about, theorized on (Donati & Prado 2001; Goldberg 1998; Worcester Polytechnic University 2002). At its simplest form – seeing something happening somewhere else – *telepresence* allows for three main ‘transformations’ for both audience and actor: possibilities of participation, opportunities for interference, and means of self-expression (Donati & Prado 2001, 437-438). Echoing the process toward hypermediation taking place across all media, this kind of interconnectivity and space-crossing puts the audience in a position of dealing with the ever-shrinking distance between two places (Bolter 2000; Causey 1999). Video conferencing, live webstreams, even speaker phones are all appropriated in the theatrical drive to blur the distinction between *here* and *there* (WPI 2002). What comes across as most compelling, however, is the ways in which this kind of technology, out of all the possible elements of new media, represents some of the least expensive possibilities for performance. If anyone can appear anywhere, actors can cross borders, audiences can enter ‘stages’ with an ease that many promoters of traditional regional theatres can only envy (Ackerman 2001; Popovitch 1999).

“The radical shift in theatre is not its incorporation of telepresence technologies,” Alice Rayner points out, “but through the linguistic theft of theatrical ‘presence’ and simultaneous distribution of ‘presence’ over distances” (Rayner 1999, 282). Telepresence doesn’t really call into question all notions of the immediate and local or of the body’s authority, as film and television have already long since begun the process of disassociation. Rather, telepresence forces us to consider the notion of substance (284), of the subject-performer’s site within a non-material identity predicated on the existence of a physical self.

To cross time, meanwhile, is to defy death. It is to move past the human condition, past linear ideas of cause/effect, of transition, of the Western temporal paradigm. For performance artists working within a form so traditionally fixed in time, the notion transcending time by their craft is often counter-intuitive to both their training and their very understanding of what it is they do (Merritt 2001; Popovitch 1999). As a corollary to the notion of telepresence, this thesis offers ‘chronopresence’, a means of asking if we can cross space, why can we not cross time? Unlike performance pieces which have a tendency to deteriorate and mutate if performed too often, media works are easily replicable. This quality of the dramatic work, to Pavis, is theatre’s “limited range” (1992). By recording productions, playing them back simultaneously with live performance, time is effectively stifled and theatre’s ‘ephemeral quality’ becomes less a question of the piece’s ‘when’ than of its means and site of recording. Still, the idea that an actor or a performance could be recorded, preserved, and ‘reinterpreted’ into a later work is the stuff of inspiration for many new media artists, who see the freedom of escaping performances traditional, stuffy ‘liveness’ as among the greatest of their technological victories (Donati & Prado 2001; Le Collectif Arbo Cyber, théâtre (?) 1989; Merritt 2001; Thacker 2001). The lure here seems to be the drive to ‘sample’ the past, to take elements of prior work, art, experience, and rejuvenate it through mediation.

Post-Renaissance Western artistic traditions value the product: look to the hanging of works in museums, at their taping/videoing/filming. As Schechner suggests, we seek to “rescue them from time.” (1986, 11). In other cultures and even in different periods of our own artistic history, the ephemera of the performing arts has been better accepted, a higher value placed on the lived experience of the event than on any embodied representation of it (Benjamin 1969; Schechner 1986). Have we come to value too greatly the value of the moment? Arguments in favour of chronopresence pieces claim that the idea of liveness, of specific temporality, are rooted in outdated models of human experience, that the manipulation and negation of time and locality is only one part of a larger move toward a non-linear, more immersive narrative theatre (Faver 1995; McBeath and Webb 2000).

The Live

In the traditional theatre, the line between what is real and what is staged is distinct. Film, on the other hand, requires a certain amount of veiling, and as such, does not allow for such a clear border between the fiction and the frame. For actors, this condition finds them unable to perform for a specific audience with an uninterrupted performance subtly altered by the presence of the crowd. Rather, they are separated, their motions and reactions dissected into particles. This separation allows the audience a certain measure of critical distance, leaving them analytic and evaluating instead of caught up in the moment of experience (Benjamin 1969, 232). The ‘sacred distance’ is lost, replaced by a kind of ‘mediated proximity.’ Performative subjects – cultural identities, digital selves, mediated actors – are fragmented rather than unified, virtual not actual. Digital media allow for a ‘patchworking’ or hybridization of disparate geographic and historical narratives. So archived, morphed, and replayed, these traditions are rendered down into the raw material of data for new productions, new performances (McKenzie 1998). Indeed, as Phelan asserts:

Performance and performativity are braided together by virtue of iteration; the copy renders performance authentic and allows the spectator to find in the performer 'presence.' Presence can be had only through the citation of authenticity, through reference to something (we have heard) called 'live'." (Phelan 1998, 10)

The original gains value because a copy exists, because only the live and thereby ephemeral subject can supposedly remain unmediated and untransformed. Despite the act of performance itself being what Schechner calls 'twice-behaved behaviour,' (1981) we see the rearing of Benjamin's 'authenticity': what cannot be copied (but already is) has aura, presence, authority, value. The live becomes the privileged art form of the elite, rather than an ongoing instrument of social change.

Phillip Auslander's *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* centers around the idea that "historically, the live is actually an effect of mediatization, not the other way around." (1999, 51). He declares that as there was no concept of 'live' prior to the development of media technology "...the desire for live experience is a product of mediatization" (55). What Auslander fails to account for, however, is the sense of risk inherent in live performance, a connection for an audience never as tangible through the mediation of a television screen or computer monitor. When I as audience realize that you as performer could fail, fall, or take the event in an entirely different direction, my attention is caught, I am forced to realize that I am watching an event, and I must now cope with the world you are presenting me: a world full of risk, of ritualized choice. As Schechner argues: "...where there is no contingency, there can be no lying, only deceit: the difference being precisely the player's consciousness concerning his/her range of choice..." (1986, 10) When both audience and performer find their options and means of experience pre-determined by the needs of technological mediation, the ludic *play* that performance has ritualized, that Turner argued was *necessary* for a people to see themselves reflected/deflected on-stage, is missing (1986).

The Ontology of Performance

Faced with trying to locate the nature of performance in a technological arena, other subject positions emerge: we see Phelan representative of one camp – that of theatrical purist – arguing that performance finds its specificity through being irreproducible, deteriorating, as Pavis also claims, as it is absorbed by technological reproduction (Pavis 1992; Phelan 1998, 7-9). Auslander, on the other hand, claims that liveness is no prior condition of an event, but is instead a *result* of mediatization (1999). Causey enters the debate in his essay *The Screen Test of the Double: The Uncanny Performer in the Space of Technology* by claiming that theatrical liveness has not been lost, but rather, that it has been ‘extended, reconfigured, challenged’, that performance has taken on ‘the ontology of technology’ (1999, 386-390). Both positions, Causey contends, are problematic: Phelan both for dismissing technology’s effect on performance and for creating an ‘essentialist border’ between the live and the recorded, and Auslander for remaining rooted in a dynamic species of realism that “overlooks the most material manner of marking the live, namely death” (1999, 384). Causey claims that this notion of liveness, this ‘ontology of performance’, does indeed exist both prior to and following mediatization, but that it has been irrevocably changed by the technological society (384-385). As with McKenzie’s ‘technological performance’, any ontology of technologically-mediated performance measures the degree to which an actual work ‘performs’: the amount, that is, of emotional or psychic resonance it provokes or evokes in its audience relative to the amount of artistic/technical effort put into its creation (1994, 94).

Operating with a full, living persona, but lacking the authority of original ‘liveness’, the mediated actor is never fully subsumed by the part: the aura of actual ‘presence’ is lost. Where a stage actor identifies with the experience of seamlessly performing a role throughout a performance, the actor on film or video has had the work fragmented (Benjamin 1969, 232); furthermore, the actor’s embodied work, the actual existence on a stage or

performance space of a human being *must* be seen as a prior condition to the live, rather than as an attitude foisted on the audience by the mediated mindset. Causey's case seems correct in this – liveness has been privileged by the rise of mediation and reproduction, but performance does exist as a live event. Whether the inclusion in a performance work of Saltz' reactive media could ever provide them with 'weight' is the subject of further research, but what seems clear is the notion that whatever the case, the strongest arguments for new media's use in the theatrical event is as a framework, as a technological and ideological backdrop against which to explore issues of identity and the place of the human within the technical society.

Crises

In 1968, Jerzy Grotowski, facing the same crisis of technology and culture as confronted Ellul, Benjamin, and Grant, came to the defence of what he saw as a theatre under siege. Asking of his colleagues what were the specific, defining traits of performance, what made the dramatic work qualitatively different from film or television, he found his answer in clarity, simplicity, and a species of asceticism:

By gradually eliminating whatever proved superfluous, we found that theatre can exist without make-up, without autonomic costume and scenography, without a separate performance area (stage), without lighting and sound effects, etc. It cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, 'live' communion. (Grotowski 1968, 19)

Grotowski had no sympathy for those trying to dilute the 'raw power' of performance through layers of mediation, refuting the idea that performance was simply an art of technical fusion; his 'poor theatre' challenged:

The notion of theatre as a synthesis of disparate creative disciplines – literature, sculpture, painting, architecture, lighting, acting... This 'synthetic theatre' is the contemporary theatre, which we readily call the 'Rich Theatre' – rich in flaws. (*ibid.*)

Perhaps Grotowski anticipated the rise of a near-total mediation of lived experience; certainly his ideas of what constituted a genuine theatrical event seem dated by contemporary performance's position. Indeed ideas of

presence, of 'anti-illusionism', of the instantaneous, have all fallen out of fashion theatrically; the contemporary movement is to juxtapose verbal and visual, spatial and temporal, linear and winding, branching and dynamic (Copeland 1990, 39). When imagining this immersive zone of intersection, we must consider the much-vaunted 'ritual' status and quality of performance. As Schechner inquires, does a performer aspire to 'play at' a ritual moment or to enter it fully, to 're-live' it or simply to impersonate it (Copeland 1990, 41; Schechner 1981, 125-127)? In embodying a performance, there is an implied primal connection to the work, a ritual notion of taking on another identity, superimposing it over the original performer's own.

Conclusion

In this chapter we examined the juncture of performance and media technologies, exploring issues surrounding the dissolution of the live, as well as of the spatial and the temporal within the multimediated performance space. For Lev Manovich, 'computer culture' spatializes all representations and experiences. The library is ousted by a 'navigable' cyberspace. Narrative is equated with movement through space, with travelling: this 'database logic' and conception of 'navigable narrative space' are vital elements of the new media paradigm (2001, 251-253). The artist seeking to create a performance work within this interpretation of experience faces a serious challenge. Matthew Causey cites three basic arguments surrounding the construction of the subject identity in a mediatized culture that shape the aesthetics of contemporary, technologically-aware performance:

- 1) The material body and its subjectivity is extended, challenged, and reconfigured through technology.
- 2) The televisual is the primary modality of contemporary technological representation dominating manners of thought and communication, cultural and subject construction.
- 3) There exists an unavoidable convergence of the human and the machine wherein the 'slave machine dominates the 'master' human subject. (Causey 1999, 384)

Performance has indeed “taken on the ontology of the technological” (394).

In that light, Manovich’s question as to whose vision is new media’s leaves us with several possibilities. The ideological future encompassed by the spread of new technologies appears in the form of apocalyptic disaster movies, in advancing mechanisation and specialisation in the workforce, telegraphed in the entire rise of the Technological Society. “Whose vision is it?” It is the vision, in this sense, of a particular world-view, one in which space and time are made relative, referred to in the language of the digital. Within the space of Quebec, these ideas of mediation, technology, and the dissolution of borders both temporal and spatial have come to dominate the realm of the performing arts, representing the single most significant artistic revolution in the province’s history.

CHAPTER IV MEDIATED IDENTITIES: PERFORMANCE & TECHNOLOGY IN QUEBEC

Introduction

I never use the Web, but I believe its spread is part of the reason why Quebecers are so abruptly questioning their identity and coming to such new conclusions. New technology leaves no room for xenophobia. How can Quebec sell its Internet products if it continues to have an isolationist image?

Robert LePage, as Commissioner-General for Printemps du Quebec 1999, in Time, August 9 1999

Quebec presents a particular picture of its nationalism abroad. In a July 2000 article released to Quebec's London delegation by the Ministère des relations internationales, Rémy Charest describes how the province's creative energies have recently sought to "...both respect the past and stand free from its more restrictive aspects" (par 9). This play of identities in postmodern Quebec emerges from three "public arenas where collective identity is played out": the "stages" of the national, which is the domain of the street as "showcase for the state" identity; of the local, where the threads of language, collective history, and blood ties intertwine as ethnicity; and that of the global, mediated by technology, where the international's infinite gaze reveals morphic and unstable hybrid identities in both local and national (Mac Dougall 1997, ix, 5-6).

The central thrust of this chapter will be an examination of what conflicts and what creative opportunities arose from the intersection of media technologies with the performance works of Quebec over the past twenty years. We will examine the type of experimental theatre being produced in the province following the Quiet Revolution, looking in detail at several major performance groups that led the province into a new species of technologically-mediated performances, prefacing the arrival of later Quebec luminaries. As we will see, these trailblazers used new media

to redefine the Quebec theatrical identity, opening up new possibilities for the creation of all manner of performances in a dynamic *visual* language.

After the Revolution: Experimental Theatre in Quebec

In the two decades between the beginning of the Quiet Revolution and the first referendum on Quebec independence, in 1980, it seemed that virtually all the energy in music, theatre, literature and even the visual arts, went into creating a modern Quebec identity that would both respect the past and stand free from its more restrictive aspects.

Rémy Charest, 2000, in an article for the London office of the Ministère des relations internationales, par. 9

Est-ce du théâtre, le fait d'exploiter les effets perceptuels des technologies du son et de l'image?

Le collectif Arbo Cyber, théâtre(?) 1989, 142

Vera Pistotnik might as well have been discussing the trend in contemporary Quebec drama when she proposed a new approach to the dramatic text in her essay *Towards a Redefinition of Dramatic Genre and Stage History*. Her theatre analysis was less concerned with the 'translation' of a given text into performed work than with issues she considered more pressing for the stage: " 'patronage', the choice of repertoire, audiences, advertising, rehearsals, as well as the influence of other discursive practices" (1985; 684). At the same time, given these different points of focus for the actual performance liberates her theory to consider the dual nature of the performance text, which then "...can be simultaneously regarded as literature and drama, depending on the relations within which it operates" (680). The influence of visual culture and media affect the performed work, leaving the literary object of study behind. In this manner the Quebecois theatre of the early eighties become multimediated, interdisciplinary, its audiences forced to become more alert:

In the midst of this new configuration of signs, the spectator targets his attention or allows it to wander, makes connections, decodes meaning... (adding) the role of maker of meaning. His activity

is to discover meaning, construct it or to become lost... to allow his imagination to be impregnated with images and associate them freely, and to participate in the creative process. (Girard 1995, 162)

The new mutability of signs directly affects the dramatic text: Roland Barthes' 'polyphonie informationelle' or 'épaisseur de signes', used to define the levels of semiology within performance, are no longer useful in situating the text either as monopolizer of meaning or as point of convergence for all other signs (Barthes 1964, 258; Girard 1995). Instead, each work must determine its own hierarchy of signs – movement, audio-visual elements, image alteration – leaving text to become just another 'malleable material' (Girard 1995, 157), subject to the alterations, contractions, and reframing inherent to the multimedia experience (Manovich 2001; McKenzie 1998).

Of this dissolution of time and space in the narrative fable or performance work, Gilles Girard writes in his essay *Experimental Theatre in Quebec* that the traditional fable moves according to a temporal order (the story) through the focus of a logical order (the plot). Following an exposition, certain obstacles are overcome and there is some resolution or at least a sense of denouement. Quebec's experimental theatre, Girard claims, breaks down this logic and temporal unity (1995, 151-152), finding that its 'cultural space' – that territory for defining a group's collective evaluation of experience – collapses in on itself, leaving myth free for constant re-evaluation and change, adaptable to individual cultures and private attributions of meaning (153). Such culture is not singular, static; rather, it is a multi-tiered and dynamic process of becoming/making. Cultures use theatrical moments and rituals as spaces/times where the ordinary relations between space/time/Other are suspended in order to reflect, alter, or affirm the structures of the status quo (Godard 1995). Following the October Crisis, the Constitutional debates, and the crises over the first failed Referendum, there was a great deal of performative and cultural change in Quebec.

Contentious decades for the progress of Francophone Quebecois, the seventies and eighties saw a sharp reversal in attitudes surrounding *joual*, translations, and the adapted performance work in the province. In the case of *joual*, the language and its theatrical adherents sought to defy their critics and their own people, many of whom felt that its colloquialisms, expressions, and even syntax were too limited in scope, too bound in historical-political context, to tackle issues outside the realm of the immediate nationalist experience. Faced with an increasingly-vocal, increasingly heterogeneous culture, Quebec began to experience the weight of the enormous change this realization involved (Hébert 1995). The dramatic works leading up to the early eighties would therefore be an attempt by artists in the province to realise the full range of socio-economic, philosophical, and cultural complexities necessary in a modern language of the theatre. Some common creative space had to be found between a working-class dialect best used as a scathing political statement and the elevated literary French alienating so many Quebecers (Lavoie 2000). That space would be in largely rejecting the primacy of spoken language in favour of visual language and the universal communicative potential of the emerging new media.

Performance & Language in Contemporary Quebec Culture

Despite having begun developing in the 1960s, the arts funding environments in Quebec and in Canada have remained largely the domain of the Ministries of Culture, both provincial and federal. With the lack of a unanimous or sufficiently delineated Canadian cultural policy, the funding priorities or particulars of such granting agencies has remained vague, their discretionary funds well under the national budgets of the arts' organisations in Germany, France, or other members of the European Union (David

1995).¹ Critiquing what he sees as an arbitrary, divided cultural bureaucracy in Quebec, one without distinct rules or consistent funding practices, Gilbert David calls the performance environment in the province “...eminently tribal, the last vestige of a socio-cultural tradition at one and the same time ultra-nationalist, overly sensitive, and conservative, if not frankly anti-intellectual” (1995, 140). In many ways, this lack of funding and internal support is the root cause for the rise in the province of author-directors avoiding issues of political-linguistic tensions; the linguistic context of Quebec is so particular that in order to reach other audiences – and to access the support they offer – requires other languages, other signs, ‘universal’ symbols. Thus, for David, “‘text’, formerly central, has had to give way to staging insofar as the latter harbours new visual and performance potential” (141).

While English Canadian theatre has paralleled the development of dramatic practice across North America, favouring the psychological approach to performance and staging, language has always been at the root of Quebec plays, serving as its hero and as its antagonist, the main character around whom the action revolves, as well as the enabler of that action (Godard 1995, 341). It is in the evolution of theatre in Quebec that we see a greater comfort with the poetic, the lyrical, and the rhetorical (Brisset 1996, 198-199). The aftermath of what might be called the failed separation movement becomes an artistic reality in which Quebecois art-makers of any language must strive to define their own aesthetic style, their own ‘language of making’. This language must somehow speak for all of the province’s communities, giving voice to those without a clear sense of where a colonial past meets a globalized future.

In Quebec, as Godard reminds us, theatrical translation (and language) “...is bound within the political economy of cultural exchanges, informed by specific social and historical constraints... language comes to

represent the uncertain spaces of cultural difference, the issues of geopolitical power and dominance” (2000, 333). Its purpose is to evoke in an audience an entire social and political history in every colloquialism. The history that emerged, however, may not have been one in which the original French Canadian idealists (those seeking a bilingual, bicultural federal union) would have felt comfortable. In many ways, rather than defining their own narrative and culture, Quebecois socio-cultural history has been a battle to define itself as existing *in opposition to* a larger national Other. In Rémy Charest’s *Robert Lepage: Connecting Flights*, Lepage comments:

It’s difficult to make Quebecers see the faces of the province that aren’t the face of the majority, to make clear to them the image the rest of the world has of us. Quebec defines itself in relation to English Canada, to the United States, to France, and, much more than we like to admit, in relation to England. But beyond those countries, it’s utter darkness. (qtd. in Charest 1998, 47)

For her part, Caroline Bayard cites the prominent critic Gilles Marcotte, who noted the paradox at work within Quebecois writing between the last years of the 1970’s into the early 1980’s: even though “Quebec writers were calling for an independent Quebec, the very structure of their works was undermining this possibility because they could not shape history; history had shaped them” (qtd. in Bayard 1991, 128-129). Quebec represents a nation whose identity has been formed out of opposition and refusal of assimilation, whose performance work at first recounted its military and religious history, then moved to embrace the distinct language of its people before coming to realise the sheer scope of the global context in which the modern state exists. The performances of the past twenty years reflect a growing awareness of the theatre’s increasingly mutable signs, of both time and space’s relative, ephemeral qualities in the global age.

By the beginning years of the eighties, works are being produced that no longer depend on the existence of prior texts, nor on ideas meant for realization in an empty space. This period sees the evolution of a new kind

of aesthetic, neither realist nor stylized, within which the period of contemporary Quebec theatre can be said to begin with the emerging works of such groups as Théâtre Zoopsie, Opéra Fête, Carbon 14 and later, Robert Lepage's *E∞ Machina* (Hébert 1995; Lesage 2001). The critical movement within Quebecois drama of this period shifts focus, setting aside traditional academic criticism in favour of a subjective, playful, transformable subject position, an anti-institutional interaction between audience and work (Bayard 1991). The language of this out-of-space, out-of-time performance, in seeking universality, finds Quebec performance artists caught between paradigms: negotiating the difficult borders between the anxious deconstruction of bourgeois drama and its inclusion of the ecstatic body of Pirandello and Artaud on the one side and the "disintegrating traditional values and fascination with the devices and myths of mass culture" (David 1995, 142) on the other.

New Media & Performance in Quebec

Of 134 theatres operating in Quebec in 1989, forty-six of these listed 'experimental theatre' as their main area of artistic achievement or exploration, according to a count made by the Conseil québécois du théâtre (Répertoire théâtral du Québec, 1989-1990). This begs the question as to what was considered experimental in the day. As increasing numbers of companies began incorporating multimedia elements into their work, the idea of new media as experimental or anti-theatrical began changing. Indeed, much of the development of the performing arts in the province has followed designer Renée Noiseux-Gurik's three axes of theatrical evolution in Quebecois scenographers: abstraction, realism, and multimedia design elements (2001, 281). As the early days of abstract staging – itself a reaction against the historical-mythological stage-work of colonial-era Quebec – gave

way to a realism charged with the grit of street slang and the working-class balcony, so did this political kitchen give way to the sensory phantasmagorias of multimedia.

The unique concerns and focus of Quebecois designers are a function of their origins. The developing workshops and sound stages of La Société Radio-Canada in the 1950s and sixties served as both organising point and boot camp for designers of all kinds. Other centres, such as the National Theatre School of Canada, emerged as sites of further professional training. In its focus on practical application, technical ingenuity, and virtuosity with an emphasis on order and sense, this mode of study had a particular effect on young designers: “This orientation gave to Quebec scenography its particularities: a great technical competence with, however, an absence of political or social discourse or positioning in its expression”² (Noiseux-Gurik 2001, 282). Moved to work beyond the limitations of local politics or ideologies, Quebecois designers were free to explore the boundaries of the form, playing with new tools, technologies, and visions of the world in their work.

With scenography and design elements growing to become an increasingly prominent part of the performing arts in the province toward the early eighties, a different emphasis, one based less on *mise-en-scène* than on manipulations of space and time, began being replacing the textual-political dimensions of the earlier period. Robert Lévesque, in *La Liberté de blamer*, affirms that “scenography has become the main strength of Québécois theatre, possibly even more so than direction”³ (1997, 88). In short, the visual had replaced the textual as the basis for performance, an influence not hard to pinpoint, as Pavis does, in emerging media.

The impact of media on live performance in Quebec is both undeniable and pervasive. Marie-Christine Lesage says of the rise of the new media aesthetic in Quebec performances that it will reveal wonders:

“The real, on-stage, will be mediatized, diverted and perforated in order to reveal the very porosity of life, of beings, of memory, of the imaginary; in short, to reveal an interior space of uncertain and dubious contours”⁴ (2001, 335). Lesage confronts us with the image of multimedia, brought into live performance, serving in a revelatory function – in her “uncertain contours” we see the shifting dimensions of a space connected abstractly, thematically, or emotionally, rather than bound by concrete, linear, logical rules of content. For Lesage, this multimedia theatre is better thought of as *multidisciplinary*, as potentially but not necessarily making use of media technologies so much as their *techniques*. On the Quebec stage, multimedia served to superimpose on performance a kind of ‘televisual virtuality’ (“virtualité télévisuelle”), distancing audience from object and bringing in a new technical lexicon from the discipline of television (2001, 337).

We are warned to be wary of this influence, however. Serge Ouaknine, in 1987, argued that Quebec’s “overabundance of media effects (video, cinema, slides, electronic music, etc.) in the theatrical space relegates the presence of the actor to the level of ephemeral object”⁵ (94-95). Ouaknine sees in the province’s fascination with emerging media the rise of a new theatrical paradigm, one in which the dramatic spectacle threatens to become technical spectacular. At the same time, this mediated theatre is rife with problems of translation; Alexandre Lazaridès argues that it is impossible to truly imitate cinema on-stage, that attempting to do so only forces the director to find vague equivalents of framing, focus, camera movements. The process, he argues, is “...in the manner of a poetic translation between languages belonging to completely different families”⁶ (2002, 148). In order to evaluate these doubts, however, it is important to first examine the work giving rise to it, the early experiments with video, telepresence, and mediation in Quebec performance.

Early Video Guerrillas & Eighties Works in Quebec

When Quebec's artists – both visual and performing – began regularly collaborating together on joint works, Quebecois performance had finally moved beyond the imaginative limits of earlier periods. Visual artists revelled in their freedom to explore the boundaries of dramatic expression coming from non-performance backgrounds, while the latter enjoyed the fruits of a new toolkit – styles, concepts, technologies - being offered through the visual and plastic arts (Durand 1981, 48). The 1980s saw this multimedia theatre come into its own, allowing young performers to distance themselves from the political, representational texts of the sixties and seventies. In early experimental works like Françoise Loranger's *Double Jeu* (André Brassard, Comédie Canadienne, 1969), Robert Gurik's *Jean Baptiste M.* (Roland Laroche, Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, 1972), *Le Neveu de Rameau* by Diderot (Jean-Louis Roux, TNM, 1973) we see the early seeds of what lead to the video revolution of 1980's Quebec performance. Other works, including *Le Facteur réalité* by René Gingras (Daniel Roussel, CTA, 1984), *Faust Performance* by Alain Fournier (Cinéma Le Milieu/Bar Lux, 1986), and Alice Ronfard's productions of both Shakespeare's *La Tempête* (Espace Go, 1988) and Paul Claudel's *L'Annonce faite à Marie* (Chapelle du Grand Séminaire de Montreal/Espace Go /Festival de Théâtre des Amériques, 1989) used the destabilizing potential of video to variously connect disparate physical sets, bend audience perceptions of time, and explore the 'plasticity' of space in the contemporary Quebec theatre.

Pre-taped video and live projections, blended together with stage work, blurred the lines between real and imagined, between present, past, and an unknown future (Noiseux-Gurik 2001, 302). Seen as a means of bending the perceptions of the audience, forcing them to confront the theatricality of the performance event, these kinds of projections were an increasingly common element of theatrical conception (303). The

performances of this era proved to the Quebecois theatre-going public that time and space were relative, that the techniques of the cinema could be integrated into live performance, and that linear dramas, fixed in a single time and location, no longer spoke a language with which they could necessarily identify their collective interpretations of experience. In Marco Micone's famous trilogy – encompassing *Gens du silence* (1982), *Addolorata* (1984), and *Déjà l'agonie* (1988) – for example, the author seeks to give voice to Italian immigrants trying to establish their own identity within the Quebec landscape. Also highly concerned with memory, with time, with locality, with the fracturing of that locality, the action of Micone's pieces each spans multiple time-frames, shuttling across the loom of an ever-expanding history (Moss 1997, 80-83).

Contemporaries of Micone's, companies like Opéra-Fête, Théâtre Zoopsie, Agent Orange, and Arbo Cyber, Théâtre(?) were representative of a new species of 1980's experimentation, playing with media elements to create new perceptual realities. Their explorations would preface the groundbreaking interdisciplinary work of Carbon 14, le Théâtre Ubu, Recto Verso, and Robert Lepage and *Ex Machina* (Lesage 2001). This was theatre exploring and challenging perceptions, forcing its Quebecois audience to redefine its relation to the visual, the auditory, and the tactile; their focus was centred around the performance, their common link being a fascination with sensory perception in the performative space; their goal, as Lesage puts it, was part of a desire “to explore in new ways different facets of the real” (2001, 336).

In 1979, Opéra Fête was formed in an effort to create a ‘multisensory’ theatrical experience, a performance both baroque and interdisciplinary, what founding member Pierre-André Larocque called “a theatre caught between dance and performance, mime, the visual arts, and cinema” (1985, 56). They sought to subvert from within theatrical code, to

extend the realm of performance into the realm of the dreamt, to explore “the possibilities of a theatre no longer rooted in the word but in the body, in images, the unconscious, the senses...”⁸ (*ibid.*).

Meanwhile, Le Théâtre Zoopsie, founded in 1983, used video and the plastic arts to explore issues of space and locality. By using video – live and pre-recorded – within the theatrical space, Zoopsie forced the audience to question their privileged position ‘outside’ the work, placing on them the onus of deciphering a new relationship with a performance both immediate and distant (Lesage 2001, 343-344). Zoopsie’s *L’objet Rêvé* (1987) featured an entirely dynamic, constantly metamorphosing background, a telepresent landscape that literally became a separate character, commenting on the stage action through its visible transformations (Wallace 1988, 188). This would, for painter/sculptor/designer Claude-Paul Gauthier, combine random scenes and localities together in a chaotic landscape whose colours, materials, patterns, and discontinuities represented “un effet hallucinatoire” (a “hallucinatory effect”) (*ibid.*). Zoopsie used such destabilizing effects to remove space from its function as reference-point, allowing for theatre work separate from traditions of narrative logic or linear development (Lesage 2001, 345). In the words of founder Denis O’Sullivan, Zoopsie’s goal was to engage the audience in a conversation between mediation and the mediated:

We look to organically integrate into spectacle as a whole in an effort to create a dialectic rapport between real presence and audiovisual image. There is a specific effect produced by the juxtaposition of a video image with that of the “organic presence.”⁹ (O’Sullivan 1985, 210)

Founded in 1986, Arbo Cyber, théâtre(?) burst onto the Quebec performance scene asking: “Is theatre simply the act of exploiting the perceptual effects of technologies of sound and image?”¹⁰ (Le collectif Arbo Cyber, théâtre(?) 1989, 142)? Exploring and exposing the perceptual tricks of multimedia performance, their goal was to shake Quebec audiences out

of what they saw as an overmediated complacency. As always seems to be the case, what begins as avant-garde ended up spiralling into the commonplace, and for Arbo Cyber, théâtre(?), the political apathy of a public increasingly separated from reality by layers of mediation, even in the performance space, was an issue demanding address. Distinguishing between 'political theatre' and 'engaging theatre', they argued that it is not always necessary for theatre to relate to the audience in an overtly-political way for it to deal with political subject matter; their videography and guerrilla tactics challenge audiences because they ignore traditional text-based hierarchy and prior codes of communication (Plourde 2002, 104-105). Founding member Lucie Fradette said of her work with Arbo Cyber, théâtre(?) in an interview with Quebec's performing arts journal, *Jeu*: "We want to integrate new technologies, but always with the optic of communication and mediatization instead of in the sole goal of manipulating machinery or seducing"¹¹ (qtd in Plourde 2002, 104).

This video and film revolution the mediated performance artists of the eighties embodied served to open up the borders of Quebecois theatrical frontiers (Lesage 147), while at the same time calling into question traditional conceptions of the real, of the spatial, and of identity within the porous borders of this 'Quebec' removed from time and space. At the same time, there is an unfinished quality to much of the nascent multimedia work from this period, an incompleteness commented on by Paul Lefebvre in an issue of *Jeu* from 1985. Calling this new theatre both rich and poor in potential and staging, it was nonetheless problematic:

If the ideas and intuitive actions bring with them a typically fresh theatricality, we still find ourselves faced with works not yet fully thought out, where works, form, and subject are connect poorly, contradict each other, and go so far as to almost mutually cancel each other out.¹² (Lefebvre 1985, 93)

Although pushing the boundaries of theatrical possibility, the work being done was still in its early stages, not yet fully comfortable with the range of aesthetic and creative choices available.

The Later Works – Multimedia and Beyond

The early era of new media performance in Quebec was marked by the watershed year of 1984, the year *La Presse* referred to the past theatrical year as “the year Quebec opened itself to the world” (Bernatchez 1984, D3). *Le Soleil* said in December of that year “... in theatre as in many other domains, 1984 will have been a transitory year, a season rich in unachieved potential, in promises for the future, in possibilities for evolution and mutation”¹³ (Corrivault 1984, C4). This was the year the multimedia dance/performance group Carbon 14 entered the scene with *Le Rail* and Théâtre Répère, with their *Circulations* (Lesage 2001, 348). These works redefined the stage language in Quebec, joul and the adaptations giving way to the language of visual imagery.

Not simply a conjunction of many different arts reacting against established theatre practice, as Chantal Hébert argues, but a “... dynamic writing based in icons, in diagrams, in semantic networks... functioning according to figurative representation and animated by mental models”¹⁴ (Hébert & Perelli-Contos 1997, 26), this was multimedia expressing itself in the language of performance. The growing “surprésence” (omnipresence) of multimedia in Quebecois performance throughout the 1990’s signified simultaneous processes: a theatre being augmented in terms of its expressive capabilities by the amount and type of visual signs made possible with new technologies on the one hand, and on the other, a movement growing among the population to integrate these new media artistically and by extension, socially. (Lesage 2001, 337). For Lesage, the notion of

multimedia's visual language brings to mind the near-ubiquitous use within contemporary Quebec performances of slides, film projections, video cameras, monitors, and all manner of nascent holographic play and virtual reality technologies (2001, 336-340).

Two works in particular stand out from this period: Jean-Pierre Ronfard's *Le Titanic* (1986), written by Carbon 14 founder Gilles Maheu, and Denis Marleau's production *Les Aveugles, Fantasmagorie Technologique* (Musée d'art contemporain de Montreal, February 2002).

In Ronfard's *Le Titanic*, time, space, and cultural context are blended together, an effect emphasized by video projections, screens, and staging effects. *Le Titanic* sees a list of guests from across the 20th century come together aboard the Titanic, the great vessel of civilized progress (1986). Sarah Bernhardt, Adolf Hitler, Charlie Chaplin, Mother Theresa, and others collide in a series of discrete moments. The linear framework of the gradually-sinking ship is broken down into fragmented instants, what Girard suggests is a kind of digital time, allowing the audience to create their own associations:

This disarticulated epic made up of brief tableaux reminds us that the apocalyptic night of 14 April 1912 is renewed at each individual's death... (and that) all destinies are absurd. (Girard 1995, 152)

Once the barriers dividing the temporal and spatial are dissolved, dialogue between minds becomes possible, conversations across any time or space-based points (150-153).

What Marleau – who conceived and directed the piece – and Théâtre Ubu bring to *Les Aveugles, Fantasmagorie Technologique*, a multimedia performance work based on Maurice Maeterlinck's hundred year-old text, is a virtuoso display of their characteristically-rebellious spirit (Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montreal, February 29 2002). In a text that refuses to accept the limitations of realism, dramatic action, or elements of the spectacular, Marleau offered a nightmare realm of disembodied shades, lost

souls, and shifting boundaries. His production had no live actors present on-stage; rather, their faces were projected onto masks to create Maeterlinck's lost travellers wandering a 'senseless' island without their guide. Two actors are used throughout to portray the six men and six women, their presence shifting in and out of phase as though in a dream.

Conclusion

We are confronted in Quebec's multimediated theatre with a transformed dramatic context:

No longer predetermined and framed as in a 'classical' play, the spatial-temporal setting explodes and plays with space, which has been compressed or dilated in all directions, or with time, which is condensed or enlarged... time that accelerates, bogs down, vanishes in an ellipse, or simply ceases. (Girard 1995, 153)

In this light, Jindrich Honzl's notion of the mobility of the theatrical sign allows for different dramatic elements to 'stand-in' for others: lighting or screens can replace stage sets for example, or gestures, speech (Honzi 1971, 7). Within Quebec, rather than attempting to hide the elements of new media entering the stage, performing artists embrace its theatricality, making obvious technological elements; instead, Quebec's new media performances seem to point to the divisions between the real and the illusory, between the 'playing at' or 'playing in' and the false replication of presence and reality. For Girard, as perhaps for Théâtre Zoopsie and Opéra Fête, or for Ronfard, Marleau, and Théâtre Ubu later on, the presence of experimental technology challenges the realm of a local simulation in favour of some kind of timeless global 'allspace' (1995, 153). Thus Girard's 'cultural space', once collapsed, reveals Armour and Trott's notion of 'different meanings for the same event' as so particularized that it no longer attaches to a group (Armour and Trott 1981; Girard 1995, 153).

CHAPTER IV
MEDIATED IDENTITIES: PERFORMANCE & TECHNOLOGY IN QUEBEC

Of the contemporary Quebecois performance artists who inherit a stage in which the technological and the theatrical are so intimately linked, it is Robert Lepage – writer, director, actor, multimedia theatre artist – who displays a particular mastery of this principle in his notion of the “reciprocal substitution of the languages of the stage” (Girard 1995, 155). For Robert Lepage, the word, like the ‘local culture’, becomes simply another element, a raw construction material by which to build worlds. Lepage is at once Quebecois and global citizen, speaking all languages and none simultaneously. For other international successes of post-modern Quebec, the word and performance mean different things and the place of their Quebecois origins in their work hold different resonances. This will be the subject of Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

ICONS OF GLOBAL SUCCESS: CARBON 14, ROBERT LEPAGE, & CIRQUE DU SOLEIL

Introduction

This final chapter analyses the work of three major artistic forces within the Quebecois performance environment: the dance/performance troupe *Carbon 14*, the new media performance guru *Robert Lepage* and his company, *Ex Machina*, and the popular acrobatic spectacular *Cirque du Soleil*. By examining their style, methods, and international popularity, we will explore the position which the contemporary Quebec performer must occupy in order to succeed beyond the borders of the province. Finally, we look to the relationship these three groups share with their home province, with the technological society, and with the international performance community.

The icons of globality - Important figures and works in Quebec's New Media Performance

[Quebec is] reluctant to admit just how diverse it really is [...] It's difficult to make Quebecers see the faces of the province that aren't the face of the majority, to make clear to them the image the rest of the world has of us. Quebec defines itself in relation to English Canada, to the United States, to France, and, much more than we like to admit, in relation to England. But beyond those countries, it's utter darkness.

Robert Lepage, quoted in Charest 1998, 47

In a press release to Quebec's Ministry of Culture and Communication in November 1997, then-Minister of International Relations Louise Beaudoin was quoted as saying: "We ought to be proud of the successes Quebec has known, like those that the Céline Dions, the Cirques du Soleil, and the Robert Lepages win on a global scale" (qtd. in Harvie & Hurley 1999, 302). It is significant in Beaudoin's point that the performers enjoying the greatest success outside Quebec are those who have most left behind socio-political frames of reference in order to embrace Féral's theatricality, engaging their

audiences in active, associative ‘hypertextual’ performances that, despite their apparent mediation, may in fact be redirecting attention to the work itself (Féral 1988; Girard 1995; McKenzie 1998). To succeed beyond the borders of Quebec requires a tremendous amount of charisma, drive, openness to change, and cultural transparency.

The great icons of Quebec’s new theatre, the international success stories, the masters who meld audiovisual virtuosity with stunning creative impulses, are also expert at playing with the mutable theatrical signs we explored in Chapter IV; having moved beyond the politics of joul, they speak a species of international dialect. The dynamic visual works of Robert Lepage and the multimedia dance company Carbon 14 are two examples of this. Carbon 14 produces plays without words, while Lepage creates words-as-basis-for-raw-imagery. In both the creation of their work – capturing moments of time, bending and refracting the instant, the reaction, the dynamic play between the past and present – and in that work’s preservation – via performance recordings and full multimedia logs – media technologies of reproduction are essential to their ability to endure.

Of the companies who have demonstrated the qualities necessary to build up inertia sufficient to break free of the dense Quebec orbit, the three most striking and successful examples – *Carbon 14*, *Robert Lepage* and *Ex Machina*, and *Cirque du Soleil* – also display a great interest within their work with the potentials of multimedia and technology. All three find their official homes in Quebec: in February 1997, the Cirque du Soleil inaugurated *Le Studio* – what was to be its centre of creation and artistic production – in Montreal. *Ex Machina*, led by Lepage, opened *La Caserne Dalhousie* in Quebec City June of that same year (Harvie & Hurley 1999, 299); Carbon 14 maintains its residency in Usine C, a converted jam factory in Montreal’s east end. Despite the presence of their ‘nerve centres’ in Quebec, the relationship of these groups to the province is ambiguous. Their use of technology is certainly supported by the increasing presence of the new media industry in the Quebec economy. At

the same time, however, both the subjects of their work and their international touring schedules render problematic their place as emblems of Quebec-culture-within Quebec.

Quebec, in this context, seems to be experiencing the tensions of globalisation, as an introverted society is forced into the realisation that in order to exist as any kind of nation in the postmodern, post-industrial era, one must first establish a presence on the global stage; the irony there is that once upon the global stage, as Lepage will repeatedly explore, there is no space for private nations and local borders, only global conglomerations and trans-national ideologies. Perhaps in the mediated performances these innovators create, seamlessly blending elements of the real and the electronically or mechanically-enhanced, changing our perceptions of the spatial and the temporal, we see the face of the new Quebec: a province-nation of diminishing borders, hybrid identities, a morphic landscape capable of negotiating a global reality in which the nation-state so long desired by the separatist movement becomes increasingly less relevant before the imperative of international community.

Carbon 14

Biographic Details

The 'new dance' taking shape in the latter half of 1980's Quebec was as heavily influenced by the mediated performances as those works were by video and film. Theatrical elements brought to the new dance elements of stylistic gesture, means of bringing together group choreography, a greater awareness of the body's corporeal presence in space, and the impetus of narrative cohesion (Lesage 2001, 349). One of the most important of those companies was Gilles Maheu's Carbon 14.

Founded by Maheu in 1980, many of Carbon 14's productions have been seen by audiences all over the world. Since it was first produced, *Le Dortoir* (1988) has drawn over than 110,000 people and visited 18 countries on four continents. The company's work owes much of its explorations of space and the body through dance to the explicit choreographies of physical theatre Maheu studied in the corporeal mime work of Étienne Decroux, Yves Lebreton, and Eugenio Barba (Pavlovic 1997). Among their repertoire have been such locally and internationally-acclaimed pieces as *Paix Blanc* (1981), *Le Rail* (1983-1984), *Hamlet-Machine* (1987), *Le Dortoir* (1988), *Peau, Chair, et Os* (1991), and *Le Forêt* (1994), *Les Âmes Mortes* (1996), and *Silences et Cris* (2001), all directed by Maheu (Hurley 2002; Vigeant 2001, 246). Their themes vary, but remain connected to issues of the dreamt, the remembered, the post-industrial, and the allegorical. They have explored solitude and the loneliness of contemporary existence in *L'Homme Rouge*, the role of the individual in the post-industrial bureaucracy in *Opium* (1987), the mythic notion of global travel and the interplay of cultures in *Rivage à l'Abandon* (1990), and the duality of Canada itself in *L'Hiver/Winterland* (1998).

Approach and Process

Carbon 14 mingles dance, music, architecture, and electronic media into a sensory overload of movement and stimulus. Their use of videography and projections transforms works like *Marat-Sade* (1984) or *Le Rail* (1983-1984) into free-associative explorations of the imagined (Girard 1995, 157). The logical and cerebral is abandoned in favour of the dynamic identities possible in the oneiric realm. Under founder-director-concepteur Gilles Maheu's driving vision, Carbon 14's builds its productions out of images emerging from abstract themes such as 'soul', 'duality', 'urges', 'childhood fears'. The company and its designers then improvise around this, building their performances not out of some preset notion of what constitutes the work within a space, but rather, out of what becomes possible, given such a theme, *within* the space (Hurley 2002).

Maheu says of his company's creative process: "The actors improvise from images, born of these [pre-selected] themes; they are confronted with discrete objects, and afterward... keep what is most meaningful" (qtd. in Lévesque 1984, "*Le rail*") and that "Contrary to traditional *écriture (scénique)*, the show unfolds little by little, without text and without a firm plan" (qtd. in St. Hillaire 1996).

One of the elements most interesting in the work of Carbon 14 is the place within their work occupied by the ideology of the multimediated. Their dance choreography, their 'gestural narrativity', as Pavis might describe the style, connects moments in time, organizing events "syntactically rather than semantically – for example, by systems of thematic or meaningful oppositions" (1982, 58). Scenes become organised hypertextually, moments linked by stream-of-consciousness flow over single-thread narrative. The style that emerges in this, this gestural narrativity, can be summarised according to three 'rubrics of analysis' (Hurley 2002, 29):

- 1) The quality with which the movement is performed, encompassing Maheu's abbreviated 'dance phrases', which gain force not through an extension through time so much as through a presence or extension across space. Technical mastery of movement and the body is emphasised.
- 2) Characteristic uses of certain parts of the body, certainly evident in the Carbon 14 dancers' movements being generated from any or all parts of the body. Like the digital technologies that inspire it, this style of movement can begin and end from any point.
- 3) The dancer's orientation in the performance space, seen in Maheu's very clear choice of employing group choreography, using many figures and spaces simultaneously (Hurley 2002, 29-32).

Maheu calls this 'parataxis', or movement organised by theme-and-variation. Driving Carbon 14 to shift laterally among movement styles, his choreography is eclectic, consisting of composites of First Nations, Javanese, Indian English

‘mod’, and other styles, creating, as Hurley terms it, “a pastiche of unreconciled movement vocabularies” (2002, 29).

Iro Tembeck’s ‘Effet vidéoclip’, discussed in *Montreal: Seeds of a Choreographic History*, is apparent in the choreography and staging of Carbon 14’s work, as dancers exert themselves completely in a short span of time, all the while moving in and among the trappings of technology: projections, satellite feeds, multimedia screens, and other elements (1997). Their bodies become a kind of primal stuff from which movement and gesture are refined. Using the body as raw material and media elements as scenography, as backdrop to that primal theatrical stuff (Lesage 2001, 361), Carbon 14 finds in the use of film, video, image, and sound a means of access into the realm of the epic, of the majestic and fragmented. Within the performance space, media technologies allow them to break free of the boundaries of space and time through the genius of a body released from the strictures of the *real*. The physical is emphasised by this use of technology. In creating specific domains of rhythm and light, the personal rhythms of dancers are made specific, appearing in sharp relief against the acoustic background. As audience, our point of view can be multiplied and expanded in order that we miss no stray movement, no casual gesture in a complex physical language (Vigeant 2001, 248-249).

Major Works

Maheu and his company explore the spaces of the imagination and the dreamt, of memory and childhood, often in violent, morbid imagery in works like *Le Dortoir* (1988) (Lesage 2001, 350). Their use of technology creates a sense of displacement, emphasizing the freedom of the physical body within space. Dance critic Aline Gélinas describes Carbon 14’s popularity in terms of the balance the company strikes between theatre and new media, noting how the theatre-going public is drawn to the physical play of bodies displayed by the performers, while dance audiences are captivated by the theatrical elements to

their pieces (1989, 19). The parataxis, the movement organised through space and variation, is given dramatic weight by its thematic connection and physical dynamism through its malleable choreography.

Maheu's sense of parataxis is revealed in such pieces as *La Forêt*, where time and sequence are vague, broken down and 'remixed' according to the dictates of some internally-consistent but private clock, a personal digital universe in which, as in a funhouse, the instant is infinitely repeatable. As dance critic Brigitte Purkhardt noticed, the piece is organised like "a game of mirrors": "Sometimes the action is repeated. What is performed stage right seems to be the perfect reply to what is transpiring stage left. Or, it is upstage and downstage which are projected in each other" (1994, 164). Within this space of play and replay, this internal logic of gestural narrativity, there is no stray movement or moment left to chance; indeed, as Pavlovic points out:

The pace and motifs of certain scenes of *Pain blanc* ... had to be as carefully orchestrated as the confusion and apparent anarchy of other scenes... similarly, the characters in *Le Rail* who throw themselves against walls and roll on the ground do so at exactly the right moment. (Pavlovic 1987, 28-29)

Instead, we see the precise, digital interaction between bodies and space in Maheu's staging, a complex technological marvel working just beyond our capacity to understand it. Carbon 14's dream-like performances transcend the mechanical 'feel' of so much new media performance; as often as a projected video screen image works to distance the audience's involvement, a seemingly random gesture, a movement both expected and completely surprising, suddenly engages the audience.

Carbon 14 and Quebec Identity

Blurring the boundaries between genres, Maheu explores the 'globality' of performance through the stage's capacity to draw together diverse artistic media without becoming simply a hybrid art form (Pavlovic 1992, 28). In their internationally-reputed work, Carbon 14 represents one of the first major performance groups to succeed on the global stage. Bringing with them a

unique movement aesthetic and theatrical language, they have become ambassadors of the province. At the same time, whatever its physical and financial origins within Quebec, their work remains nonetheless decidedly non-partisan. They are certainly *of* the province, *from* the province, but the abstract themes from which Maheu parataxically builds his choreographed dreamscapes has more to do with fragmented issues of memory and childhood than it does with establishing national identity. Carbon 14 can best be categorised as a group representative of Quebec's performers turning inward, leaving behind the politically-charged verbal languages of the past in favour of the imagistic, visual dialogue Maheu's provokes through his combination of multimedia and the corporeal body's movement through space.

Lepage

There's the live version. I could be on stage, as an actor, telling you this story, and this happens in a spontaneous, interactive, three-dimensional way, and it's called theatre [...] Then you have the other way... where it's canned, it's on film, or it's on tape. It will not move. It will not interact with you. If I'm a character on the screen right now, I'm just light. I'm not real.

Robert Lepage on the two possible directions for the telling of stories, in Lepage & Bienen 2000, 306-307

Biographic Details

Within the performing arts community, Robert Lepage is known as a driving force in contemporary experimental performance. A one-man theatrical movement, a paean to the fading division between art and technology, he has explored the performative in theatre, dance, music, and opera. It has been said of him that, “[j]uggling half-a-dozen projects at once, Lepage is a multimedia, multitask talent – a one-man Windows 95” (Johnson 1995, 56). That comparison may be apt: Lepage's positions himself in his work as an overseer, coordinating the diverse technical strands like a master puppeteer. His performances – including *Vinci* (1985) (which won the Prix Coup de Pouce at the Avignon Festival), *La Trilogie des Dragons* (*The Dragon*

Trilogy) (1985), *Le Polygraphe* (*The Polygraph*) (1987), *Les Plaques tectoniques* (*Tectonic Plates*) (1988), and *Elseneur* (*Elsinor*) (1995) – have proved vastly influential, displaying a unique visual style, a passionate concern over issues of language, culture, and identity, and a fascination with the technological in its relation to time and space.

Born in Quebec City, Robert Lepage graduated from the Conservatoire d'art dramatique de Quebec in 1978, going on to train in Paris under Alain Knapp. A Swiss director, Knapp emphasized the notion of 'acteur-createur', urging his students to write, act in, and direct their projects, a process Lepage himself terms 'global'. Lepage enjoyed considerable success performing with the Quebec Ligue Nationale d'Improvisation, and joined Jacques Lessard's Le Théâtre Repère in 1981 (Hunt 1989). *Ex Machina* was founded in 1993, an attempt by Lepage to bring together a diverse group of multidisciplinary collaborators - from actors, writers, set designers, and technicians to opera singers, puppeteers, computer graphic designers, video artists, film producers, contortionists and musicians. Rooted in a desire to create performance works from the mechanical, the electronic, the technological, the goal of the nascent company was to explore the frontiers of theatrical possibility within the technological space. For Lepage, this meant that he and his collaborators had to "...believe in the machine, that we believe that we can extract miracles out of technology, or extract miracles out of the machine" (qtd. in Lepage & Bienen 2000, 322-323).¹

Approach

The style Lepage developed in his time with Repère was one in which the text, rather than existing prior to production, instead evolved *with* the production, gathering focus and momentum simultaneously with the performers (Hunt 1989). At the same time, this text represented more than just the word; here again we see the presence of Honzl's mobile theatrical sign in contemporary experimental theatre. Lepage presents the audience with stage

elements ‘standing-in’ for others. In his use of projections, screens, and environmental technologies, Lepage proved his mastery of Girard’s “reciprocal substitution of the languages of the stage” (Honzl 1971, 7; Girard 1995, 155), in which the word becomes only one of many ‘signs’ within a larger palette of performative communication.

In his two possible directions for the telling of stories, Lepage reveals an intimate desire to locate the moment of interactivity, of shared process, in performance. He seeks out a theatre that “...happens in a spontaneous, interactive, three-dimensional way...” (qtd. in Lepage & Bienen 2000, 306), contrasting it against a filmed, screened, *mediated* style of performance emptied of its performative resonance. A theatre that is spontaneous is one that is dynamic, able to accept new elements and reject ones no longer useful as needed, becoming a kind of theatre of mutable collage. This manifests in Lepage’s frequent last-minute interventions to change some important element of pacing, order, or staging, rendering his shows perpetual works-in-progress (Girard 1995; Lepage & Bienen 2000). As Heather Elton writes in reviewing *The Far Side of the Moon* (2000), in which the door into a laundry machine becomes everything from the porthole in a spaceship to a flickering CAT scan:

Transformation is key to Lepage’s theatrical language. Like other journeys down rabbit holes or through mirrors, this washing machine door is a passage into another reality. (Elton 2001, 78)

In perpetually reworking his performances, Lepage infuses his work with a sense of travelling, of journeying. Combined with his love of the ‘restrictions’ of technology and his nomadic, international touring schedule, this mode of restless performance is at once intimately connected with and utterly removed from a home-territory. As James Bunzli points out, Lepage uses the sense of displacement this creates, calling it “*décalage*” (1999, 84). This *décalage* seems to first manifest in *Vinci*, one of Lepage’s most technically ambitious efforts, where our blind narrator informs his audience that:

Leonardo da Vinci wrote from ze right hand to ze left, like in a mirror. Zis leaves the reader reeling with a strange feeling of décalage, a feeling of décalage. [...] Leonardo da Vinci could not bear ze human suffering, and yet he invented war machines. Zis leaves the reader reeling with a strange feeling of décalage, a feeling of décalage. (Lepage qtd. in Bunzli 1999, 84)

Décalage, this “feeling of disassociation”, is central to Lepage’s work. Nothing is ever completely finished, revisions and evolutions, new iterations are always possible. It manifests in Lepage’s signature concerns: travel, the place of language and art, notions of identity and home, the purpose and direction of the contemporary theatre. This mode of performance “thrives on manipulations of time/space, images, and actors. The outcome is necessarily fragmented, resonating with juxtaposed symbols, icons, and metaphors, peppered with disarming technological intrusions...” (Bunzli 1999, 89-90). It is a theatre that subverts subversion; commonly referring to global time differences and the ensuing ‘jet lag’ of worldwide travel, Lepage expands the definition to refer to a larger ‘spiritual’ nausea, the discomfort and psychic distress of being an individual facing the sheer size of the global community (Bunzli 1999, 90; Charest 1998).

For Lepage, the world is a global one; his language is often banal, refusing to create dramatic conflict or tension through words, in effect serving more as sign of cultural plurality than as source of plot (Godard 2000, 347). His works simultaneously emphasize multilingual dramatic voices, without translation, seemingly at odds with his actual Quebecois origins. Despite his use of multiple languages, the verbal is de-emphasized within his performances (the script for *La trilogie des dragons* is only six pages long for a performance with a running time of over six hours in three languages), opening up the realm of stage potential for an imagistic mise en scène. (Godard 2000, 347; Hunt 1989). Perhaps these are individual speech units serving as digitized, *globalized* markers of selfhood: *because I speak, I am of a place; because I speak of many places, I am of the world.*

Process Toward Technology

Lepage says of his work that in the same way the potential of photography freed more traditional visual arts, so have television and cinema come to emancipate the possibilities inherent in theatre, arguing it:

...Should no longer be realistic or naturalistic. It has reached the stage where it should be free to be cubist or impressionist or surrealist, or all of that. It should be an experimental form to change our perspective, to see how we can view things in a different way, to make us wonder. (Lepage qtd. in Come 1993, 19)

To paraphrase Chantale Hébert and Irène Perelli-Contos in *Théâtre, Multidisciplinarité et Multiculturalisme*, the stage culture he reveals to us is one marked by the ‘impurity’ of complex intersections among sign systems and particular cultures (38-39). This clash between incomplete ideological signs (the flag, the anthem, the border, the currency) and cultural identities (Canadian, Quebecois, *pure laine*, Anglophone, Francophone, allophone) resonates strongly with the daily experience of citizens in Quebec’s digital/technological society. It becomes interesting that so much of Lepage’s work, intimately connected with the socio-political environment of his home, is focused so intensely outward. Although he and *Ex Machina* connect on an ideological level with the ‘nation of Quebec’, his work is decidedly internationalist and deals more with the realm of the human identity within the technological-global space than with concerns over social class or local language politics.

Paul Lefebvre points out that for Lepage, the technological aesthetic must perform exactly as did the 17th century rules of tragedy, serving as filter, as a set of restraints and tools. Lepage limits himself with the trappings of technology to focus in on a particular vision, one that has made him a world-class icon (1987, 30). Lepage understands his is a technical society, that the tools and means of the technological surround him. In this he finds artistic inspiration, comparing the use of technology to Chinese poetry: “[t]he electronic gadgets are exciting for me to use if they impose rigid bounds: they constitute, as the rules of poetry, a filter. When one creates through a filter, what comes out is very pure... [t]his precision is obliges me to play

poetically... this is why I work with technology” (qtd. In Lefebvre 1987, 35). Asked whether he felt these new technologies would serve to liberate or to bind actors in needless complexities, Lepage responded: “Technologies are never a problem for the actor, the problem being what the actor does with them... fire, that’s a technology... theatre is fire and darkness.”²² (qtd in St-Hillaire 2000).

Robert Lepage’s theatre represents a compelling means of linking the virtual stage with elements of live performance. His work is consistently emphatic in its support of the material body, finding his tension, his theatricality, in the immediacy of confronting live actors with filmic images and montages (Defraye 2000). While incorporating numerous technologies – projections, videos, lighting effects – these performances still manage to define a concrete spatial and temporal context within the work – their own. At the same time, technology is put to use as a means of subverting ideas of agency, of actor. Performers and audiences alike are thrust into a space that might react to them, possibly against them (Gharavi 1999). They must join forces in order to navigate it together. Each performance, then, exists in a dynamic context: the digital allows for a “new relationship among the theatrical sign systems... (t)he performance’s illocutionary force is not translated so much as continually displaced and defamiliarized under the contingencies of new social relations of address” (Godard 2000, 348). This hybridity, emphasizing the aural, the visual, the tactile, avoids being locked into cultural specificity (*ibid.*).

Major Works

A sense of duality pervades the work of Robert Lepage, his “metaphor for Canada” (artificially divided, set into opposition, antagonistic) appearing in *Trilogie* (1985), *Les Plaques Tectoniques* (*Tectonic Plates*) (1988), and *The Far Side of the Moon* (2000) (Gray 2002). Having decidedly based himself and his work within the Quebec province, Lepage then proceeded to move beyond what he saw as the petty politics of Canada. Although decidedly in support of Quebec

as a distinct society, in his mind there are larger dualities confronting us, sharper dichotomies needing exploration.³ *Tectonic Plates*, for example, represented a huge challenge to identity politics in Quebec. Rather than promulgate the paradigm within Quebec of a collection of identities both discrete and stable governing the ideological landscape, *Tectonic Plates* presents, through a technologically-mediated performance, a shifting, ephemeral world where "...cultures and individual subjects are poetically represented as drifting fragments floating in a postmodern sea" (McDougall 1997, 202).⁴

Many of Lepage's productions are characterised by this technical focus, commonly layering many levels of reality on top of each other. In *Elsinore*, his one-man Hamlet, not only presents all the characters "contained" within one actor – Lepage himself – but the entire set was, as Richard Knowles puts it, "one immense and complex multimedia stage machine" (1998, 203), from its video and slide projection-ready flats to set to the hidden hydraulic lifts governing the set's dance-like movements. For *The Far Side of the Moon* (2000), the audience is initially presented with a slowly-revolving giant rectangular mirror stretching across the width of the stage. When the lights rise, the audience is confronted with the image of Lepage looking up at them as though staring up from the cockpit of a space shuttle. Later on, the central image of the work comes to dominate the stage action: a 'portal-space' at once a washing-machine door, the porthole of a space ship, and a CAT scanner. The piece closes with Lepage writhing in agony on the floor; the audience is able to view the actor both on the stage and reflected in the mirror, in which he appears instead to be moon-walking, weightless and free.

In *Vinci*, one of Lepage's most technologically-complex works, he deals with issues of creation and identity, of selfhood and artistry. Opening with a blind man entering against a silver screen which will display, variously, translations, projections, and video images, the play only gradually reveals to its audience the layers of reality underlying its apparent transparency. The blind narrator, played by Lepage, informs us that he will be our guide, speaking in

Italian with the translation immediately appearing on the screen behind him. The major theme of *Vinci* is that art is a vehicle, we are informed (Manguel 1989). In this case, it is a vehicle of misdirection and confusion, heightened by a pervasive technological element perpetually playing with our awareness of the situation on-stage. The journey made by Phillipe, *Vinci*'s protagonist, is one echoed by Quebec's own odyssey toward self-conception: from the sixties through to the close of the seventies, the insular social reality within the province sought its own internal nationalism; by the eighties, however, Quebec had largely secured its identity in North America and could now look to the global stage. Similarly, Phillipe goes from being a man perpetually in fear of himself and unable to connect with the outside world to a man complete. In the play's closing scene, finally able to accept his own complicity in his unhappiness, he runs free through Leonardo da Vinci's home village, ultimately leaping off a cliff and soaring into blinding light, his silhouette revealing da Vinci's famous sketched wings (Hunt 1989, 107-108).⁵

Don Shewey, commenting on Lepage's recent collaboration with Peter Gabriel, the temporally-distorting performance-cabaret *Zulu Time* (1998), explores the idea that for Lepage, air travel's psychic and physiological disassociation is the purest form of décalage. It erodes both time and space, compressing both into one space, all time. With *Zulu Time*, Lepage and Gabriel present the audience with the multiple languages – spoken, silent, visual – comprising the West's capacity to articulate the world (Shewey 2002). Screen images drift past or bombard the audience in their seats, a bewildering array of conceptual and concrete montages mediating the experience of live music and pre-recorded, densely orchestrated technology. There is no room in *Zulu* for the local; everything is always local, every time is now, Lepage seems to be telling us.⁴

Ex Machina, La Caserne, and Quebec Identity

Founded in 1993, *Ex Machina* centers on the work of Lepage, building its theatre of images and technology on the basis of his vision; it is therefore frequently based within the Quebec City laboratory-theatre *La Caserne*. Robert Lepage is intimately connected to the renovated firehouse, referring to it variously as “the mother ship,” “an editing room,” and “not only a physical space, but also a symbolic or imaginary space where we can develop performance arts” (qtd. in McAlpine 1996, 153). He speaks of its history, of the cultural heritage to which it lays claim, existing as it does “...at the heart of the most ancient square kilometre of North America” (G.G. Lamontagne, “Robert Lepage, le voyageur dans sa caserne,” *Topo Magazine* (September 1997), qtd. in Harvie & Hurley 1999, 305). For its part, the Quebec government calls it “a multimedia creative centre whose central purpose is research into new forms of representation” (qtd. in Harvie & Hurley 1999, 306).⁵

The people of Quebec are, for Lepage, too trapped within the context of borders and identity, too limited by the discourse of nationalism, by identity rooted in language, and by a selective view of world history. Admitting the difficulties of working within the nationalist ‘xenophobia’ of his home province, Lepage argues that Quebec is “reluctant to admit just how diverse it really is [...] It’s difficult to make Quebecers see the faces of the province that aren’t the face of the majority...” (qtd. in Charest 1998, 47). Beyond the physical borders of the province, a new identity is required, a new performance of ‘Quebecois’. Lepage and *Ex Machina* present works for the global stage; although they may situate some of their work within Quebec and Canada, although they may claim cultural connection with Quebec itself, they do not create works for a local audience, nor do they argue abroad the case for Quebec identity. Instead, Lepage sees Quebec as the home base, the point of departure in a global voyage and a place to return armed with the lessons made available by contact with the world stage: “For me,” he says, “it was impossible to come home to Quebec to found a company without having learned things

abroad, without having accumulated a certain amount of baggage” (qtd. in Charest 1998, 45), that “...[t]he meetings and exchanges I have abroad enrich my work and the work of my company, work that remains profoundly Quebecois [...] It’s from Quebec that I want to make contact with the rest of the world” (46).

Cirque du Soleil

Cirque du Soleil and its clowns tell the stories of in-betweens – artistic, geographic and metaphysical. Its shows examine the exchange between East and West, the African Savannah and the New World, reality and myth.

Pamela Renner 1999, 87

Biographic Details

The roots of Cirque du Soleil are found in 1982 in a small Quebec arts community. A rural village attracting a wide variety of artists, performers, collectors and tourists, Baie-Saint-Paul also drew a group of young street performers, including fire-eater Guy Laliberté, the Club des Talons Hauts (the High Heels Club). Achieving success as a performance troupe, over the next two years they would draw together the additional artists, funds, and connections required to become the Cirque du Soleil in 1984 (Vial and Dufresne 1993). Their goal was to create a new kind of performance venue, a circus without animals, based in the artistry of the body and the creation in front of an audience of virtuoso displays of sound, light, music, and body play.

Today they are the most successful circus troupe in the world, having performed for close to 37 million people in over 240 performance pieces in ninety cities around the world.⁶ They have won a variety of honours and awards, particularly for artistic and business achievements, including several Emmy, Drama Desk, Ace, Félix, and Gémeaux awards, as well as a Rose d'Or de Montreux (Vial 1999; Cirque du Soleil homepage, accessed August 1, 2003: <http://www.cirquedusoleil.com>). Cirque’s Montreal headquarters, *Le Studio*,

also represents a major show of faith by the Quebec government in the enduring value of the troupe, whose international success is a form of brand-name, as much of the province itself as of an entertainment commodity. Cirque's relationship with this Quebecois origin, however, is interesting, existing as they do in a kind of trans-national space, affiliated with neither provincial nor federal interests: Cirque ceased to receive any kind of government grants in 1992 (Groumbos 2001).

Approach, Process, and Performances

If both Lepage and Maheu are inspired in their work by the 'theatre of images', then this mode of performance creation is gradually contrasted in the nineties by a new kind of mediation – an embrace of the mechanical, the physical technologies of the stage – bringing with it density, mass, presence, artisanship (Lesage 2001, 354-355). The visual and auditory spaces built in this kind of atmosphere trigger the conceptual landscapes of the dreamt, the universal imagination sought-after by the Cirque. As Jennifer Harvie and Erin Hurley contend, the Cirque's desire to challenge the conventional stage's (and circus's) limitations appears throughout their work, involving their use of "fantastical costumes, masked or heavily made-up performers, acts of technical virtuosity, world-beat music written in an Esperanto-like language" and other vital elements (1999, 311). Seeking to create a form of performance mingling the concrete with the merely possible, Cirque's is a process intending to captivate and engage, joining its audience together into a collective experience.

The creation of a Cirque performance is rooted in a complex interplay between the technological and the aesthetic: every aspect of Cirque's performance spaces is meticulously calculated, from the 10-month-research period invested in the devising of an appropriately-resilient and non-slippery pool-floor covering for *O* (1998-ongoing) to the red curtains that in the same show must simultaneously appear both solid and immovable, capable of "vanishing" in an instant and pulled onto a hidden roller in the auditorium's

ceiling at 14 feet per second (Lampert-Greaux & Clark 1999, 37-39). A \$70 million “system of hydraulic lifts” collectively “powered by three 100,000-pound-capacity hydraulic rams” were needed to “change the shape of the pool” in a recent Las Vegas performance (Wilson 1999, 20). At the same time, the illusion of water-breathing performers in *O* was created through the use of a hidden ‘air station’, while stage managers maintained communications with swimmers and divers via a system of powerful specialised speakers conducting sound waves through the water and into their skulls (*ibid.*). François Bergeron, one of Cirque du Soleil’s two sound designers, describes the complexity of generating the unique auditory environment for which the circus is famous as being

an acoustic paradox or balance... [t]he audience members must hear each other applaud; it heightens their involvement. But at the same time, the room can’t be too live, because we need it to be fairly tight to produce the type of music and sounds as they need to be heard. (qtd in Lampert-Greaux & Clark 1999, 45)

All of Cirque’s performances share the same high-energy, dynamic visual style and embrace of the technological. They are productions strongly influenced by media, notably in their use of movement routines and acrobatics echoing the ‘special effects’ of major blockbuster cinema. In many ways, the visual aesthetic of the Cirque is one primed for film already: one need only look to the film versions of their *Alegria*, *Saltimbanco*, or their IMAX debut, *Journey of Man* (Rubin 2000). All are remarkably similar to their staged original, even to the degree of focus placed on individual moments. If Cirque exists as a bridge between the artistic, and the entrepreneurial via the technical, then its productions are marvellous constructions of entertainment technology.

Cirque du Soleil, the Global, and Quebec Identity

Cirque’s artistic director Gilles Ste-Croix understands the unique impetus given to performance works in the province: “In Quebec,” he explains, “the artistic community is obliged to try something new because the market is small.” Indeed, he identifies the Cirque as possessing a “Quebecois

spirit” rooted in “its audacity and ability to change, to call into question” (Qtd. in Labreque 1994). So encouraged to explore the frontiers of the possible within the confines of the term ‘circus’, Guy Laliberté and his collaborators pushed their small company into the international arena, using their time within Quebec as a period of experimentation and growth. They eventually outgrew this launching pad, finding no need for either public or private grants after 1992; rather, Cirque was able to fund itself almost entirely through massive ticket sales and major corporate sponsorship (Groumbos 2001). Even this national-level sponsorship gradually became insufficient as the Cirque du Soleil expanded into the realm of the world-wide.

In April 1998, AT&T Corporation ended their six-year title sponsoring of the Cirque du Soleil, “citing a desire to put its money behind struggling new artists and cultural efforts” (Fitzgerald 1998, 28). In the search for sponsorship beyond this, Jean David, Cirque’s Vice President of Marketing, described 1998 as the first year the circus would offer a global “package of entertainment properties” (*ibid.*). Especially telling of Cirque’s attitude is David’s statement that the Cirque was “now truly global, because we [the Cirque] offer entertainment that is universal to all cultures, on all major continents around the world” (Fitzgerald 1998, 29). No longer conceiving of itself as a small circus troupe from Quebec that had made it on the international stage, by 1998 the Cirque had become a global phenomenon, an entertainment franchise capable of maintaining multiple productions, each managed from a separate production team on-site, bound together by a singular artistic vision, financial directive, and a brand name bringing with it an exotic origin for the world-stage – one only nominally Quebecois. March 2003 found the now-global Cirque with new worldwide support from IBM. At the time, the computer giant’s director of worldwide sponsorship marketing praised the Cirque for “using information technology in creative new ways to manage its operations more effectively” (Business Wire March 17 2003). Cirque du Soleil could no longer truly be described as a Quebecois troupe: Cirque had gone global.

Rather than serving the interests of a national Quebec or even an international *Ex Machina*-globality, Cirque's allegiance is to the non-territorial "nation" that is their "realm of the imagination" (Vial & Dufresne 1993, 24). Cirque negotiates a peculiar territory of non-origin, its clowns and acrobats telling "...the stories of in-betweens – artistic, geographic and metaphysical" (Renner 1999, 87), its productions exploring "...the exchange between East and West, the African Savannah and the New World, reality and myth" (*ibid.*). In contrast to *Ex Machina*'s connection to Quebec as a cultural point of reference in a global performance, the work of the Cirque du Soleil seems rooted in a kind of non-space. Rather than speak any particular dialect, its clowns speak a multilingual gibberish, its performers communicate only through the silent language of their bodies, and the domains created in the Cirque's design are a collation of cross-cultural themes and motifs suggestive of everything from Middle Egyptian tombs to the Ming Dynasty courts (Harvie & Hurley 1999; Vial 1999).

Conclusion

The Cirque du Soleil is the ultimate iteration of a technological entertainment machine, in which each component is tested for maximum efficacy, revealing again McKenzie's 'technological performance'. Within the space of their performances, where points of cultural origin or difference are inconvenient at best, inefficient at worst, the Cirque acts not so much to reject Quebec's support and claims to its work, but rather to exist beyond them. Lepage and *Ex Machina*'s approach differs from that of the Cirque, revealing the varieties of nationalist sentiment in internationally-reputed Quebec artists: "Whereas *Ex Machina*'s operations presume a relationship between production and a Quebec location (albeit one biased in favour of Lepage), the Cirque du Soleil seems to presume that link's demise" (Harvie and Hurley 1999, 299). While Lepage prepares his works at least with the thematic of

Canadian/Quebécois duality in mind and Carbon 14 builds into its productions a complex visual language of the technical to establish communication between individuals in a mediated future, Cirque bears no allegiance but to a global community of fans and sponsors. They cross all boundaries by establishing a trans-national zone where cultural difference is less important than collective experience.

CONCLUSION

LOST IN TRANSLATION? THE FUTURE OF SPACE, TIME, & IDENTITY IN QUEBEC

While it [the pursuit of a non-national allegiance] may resolve the gap between geographical and ideological spaces experienced by Quebec, its resolution requires at least one central sacrifice: the aggressive and virtually wholesale sacrifice of cultural difference – both social and geographical – to... [a] united production aesthetic.

Harvie & Hurley 1999, 314, on the Cirque du Soleil's determination to remain truly 'international'

Ex Machina's creative team believes that theatre needs new blood. That the performing arts - dance, opera, music - should be mixed with recorded arts - filmmaking, video art and multimedia. That there must be meetings between scientists and playwrights, between set painters and architects, and between artists from Quebec and the rest of the world.

From the Ex Machina homepage:

<http://www.exmachina.qc.ca/english/ex.asp?page=Machina>

Accessed August 1, 2003

The actual 'time of the theatre' is imperilled, Gilbert David tells us in his essay *Quebec Theatre in the Postmodern Period*. The demands of easy reproducibility, he warns, will remove from performance its sense of craft to become, like television, "an immense and soulless cabaret" (1995, 142). In the rise of new media technologies the relationship established between the theatrical moment and the reproduced past is blurred. Rather than existing within an "ontology of performance," the dramatic arts, in this regard, begin taking on aspects of an "ontology of technology" (Causey 1999), a state wherein time and space both become relative. Performances created in this environment, reacting against the insular Quebecois theatrical environment – the culture of translations and adaptations (Brisset 1996) – in favour of more universal themes, turn from the linguistic attribution of cultural meaning traditional in the province. Instead, they embrace a theatre of images, visual, non-textual, and highly mediated. How can cultural specificity be understood in such an environment? Where is there room within the Quebec discourse for distinct nationhood? Where is there room for 'Quebec' at all?

In Verney's model, we understand culture as the set of concepts shared by a people that encompass their understanding of the world's workings (1986). Like Armour and Trott, he identifies the cultural with the attribution of meaning between social groups (1981). Defying spatial locality, the cultural resides in the realm of the temporal, as a set of 'ideas about' that has been passed along between generations (Verney 1986). In terms of the theatrical, Godard reminds us that culture is not singular, static; that it is, instead, a multi-tiered and dynamic process whereby performance and ritual can be used to suspend the ordinary relations between space, time, and the Other in order to reflect, alter, or affirm the structures of the status quo (Godard 1995). Within Quebec, the position of theatre has traditionally been to question issues of linguistic and cultural domination, to instead promote the distinct society present within all Quebecois, based in the understanding of a particular model of the Canadian federal system.

Over the past thirty years, it has become clear that the Quebec of the future will not be an ethnically-homogenous sanctuary; rather, as Brisset notes it will share in a multiplicity of cultures and identities colliding within certain geographic boundaries (1996, 182) within which "confinement to regionalism is now seen as a trap" (199).

Féral writes that "[o]fficial discourses tend to identify geographical space with ideological space, claiming title to all theatre created in their territories, which becomes a source of national pride" (1996, 53). The questions posed by Carbon 14, the Cirque du Soleil, and Ex Machina target this contiguity of geographical and ideological space, not only through their international, intercultural performances, but through the very nature of their work itself. So where is Quebec in these works? Lepage's pieces portray multiple spaces, times, cultures – often stacked on top of each other. At the same time, his is an intensely Western aesthetic, his tour locations mainly in larger European and American cities, mostly those with their own major 'international' festivals

(Harvie & Hurley 1999, 307). The primary context of production becomes, for Lepage as for others, the international commercial festival network.

Writing in a 1999 issue of *Time* while he was serving as commissioner general for *Printemps du Québec* (an art festival held in France that year), Lepage claimed not to use the Internet, but identified its powerful effect on Quebecois culture: “[the Internet’s] spread is part of the reason why Quebecers [*sic*] are so abruptly questioning their identity and coming to such new conclusions. New technology leaves no room for xenophobia” (par 4). The people of Quebec cannot present themselves to the world as a fractious collection of ideological and social positions, nor as a culture-in decline, nor as an imperilled linguistic group. Instead, they must show a ‘unified front’ and prove themselves to be citizens of the world rather than a society closed for its own cultural protection. “How can Quebec sell its Internet products if it continues to have an isolationist image” (*ibid.*), Lepage asks in the same article? What results is a resistance to the language-and-politics based productions of the past, an embrace of a universal language of image and media, a renewed technical-aesthetic focus that leaves artists like Maheu, Laliberté, and Lepage buried in international critical praise for crossing thresholds of language and culture (Brisset 1996; Hurley 2002).

Harvie & Hurley identify the particular tension for these artists inherent in success outside Quebec: by establishing their own institutional status in Quebec, they have been given the means to travel beyond its borders; at the same time, however, they do not go forth to spread awareness of Québécois nationalist sentiment abroad. Their ambivalence toward a political stance or affiliation reveals the conflict of interest at work. (1999). They are ‘Quebecois’ in the sense that their origins are located in Quebec and in the case of Lepage, many of their thematic structures emerge from the Quebec/Canada context, but their works are not productions of the local. Despite this disassociation, the governments of Quebec have long been proud to claim their ownership over the valuable cultural properties *Ex Machina*, the *Cirque*, and *Carbon 14*

represent, tapping into their international reputations as a source for their own nationalist claims on 'international Quebec' (Harvie & Hurley 1999, 300-302).

Summary

This thesis has traced the history and development the impact on contemporary Quebecois performing arts by new media and communication technologies, including the species of experimental works produced in the province using these technologies. With particular emphasis placed on the works of Robert Lepage, the multimedia dance company Carbon 14, and the spectacular performances of the Cirque du Soleil, it looked to not provide an historical evaluation of so-called 'multimedia theatre' in Quebec, but to connect it with theories of culture, communication, and performance. Drawing on Turner and Schechner's theories of performance and performativity in considering the nature of Quebec's 'struggle for culture', it followed the course of the province's history and language as the shared domain of the Audience. Armour and Trott's writing on culture and the Canadian mind supported an investigation into coming to terms with cultural specificity. The theories of technology and cultural production put forth by Benjamin, Ellul, Grant, Heidigger, Innis, and McLuhan provided a framework for describing the Quebecois artist's specific context and process of approaching the work. This thesis also examined issues of time and space put forth by performance groups of the 'new media generation', specifically those working in Quebec over the last 20 years – including Arbo Cyber, théâtre (?), Opéra Fête, and Théâtre Zoopsie – in the process drawing on the work of Laurel, Manovich, Féral, and Robert Lepage, among others. Finally, it dealt with the critical problems of identity, language, and nationalism rooted in Quebecois performance, and the implications raised by the performing community's increasing reliance on new media technologies in the creation of stage works. The door remains open for further research, not only into the precise forces –

economic, technical, political – guiding the diffusion of media technologies within the province’s performing arts, but also into the potential creative applications for such technology in crossing the threshold of the local.

Final Thoughts

In closing, there may be room for an issue raised by the apparent requisite for international performance success in Quebec, that is, the abandonment of cultural specificity, of dramatic precision, in creating a performance that seeks to speak to all audiences in all contexts. Just as the province prominently mentions the successes and achievements of its greatest international celebrities (Céline Dion, Cirque du Soleil, Robert Lepage) on the Ministry of Culture’s homepage, so do those celebrities draw on their Quebec connection for an element of exoticism in the international market. That tenuous link often seems nothing more than an effort to prove that they are situated *somewhere*, that they belong *to some place*, rather than that they transcend locality as part of an international – in a *transnational* – existence?

For Quebecois performance artists, as perhaps for all those working within the new media or living in a society in which it is increasingly ubiquitous, this may be a point of growing concern. If we seek to speak to all people, across all frames of reference, then there can be no cultural specificity, then we must put the same meaning to the same events in the same sequence. We must, in effect, turn into a variation of the mechanised products Ellul and Grant predicted we would become. The technological society has become the *digital* society – infinitely replicable, infinitely transformable, present in no single location, no contiguous time. Much like the nation of Quebec, we perform our lives in *Zulu* time: nowhere, nowhen, an imaginary construct in the global context.

Alternatively, perhaps we might find a different interpretation of the navigable trans-national space offered by new media performance, a renewed

sense of community within the global environment. Lepage, Carbon 14, and the Cirque appear utterly removed from the parochial dramatic recounting of military and historical records of early French Canadian drama, or even from the nation-state language-based political theatres of later Quebec performance. At the same time, however, they are representative of a new species of Quebecois identity – that of the global citizen, recognising personal selfhood in the presence of a distinct home within a larger collective environment.

Manovich urges us to remember that

borders between different worlds do not have to be erased; different spaces do not have to be matched in perspective, scale, and lighting; individual layers can retain their separate identities rather than being merged into a single space; different worlds can clash semantically rather than form a single universe. (Manovich 2001, 158)

In this light, we must also recognise the shift in Verney's trilogy of civilisation/nation/state to one of nation/state/global civilisation. At the same time, we see Armour and Trott's theory of 'different meanings attributed to the same events' theory of culture now potentially readable as 'same meanings, same events' for different cultures, a transition demonstrated in the Cirque du Soleil's capacity to create a sense of ownership in people all over the world. So drawn in by their evoking within us a sense of renewed wonder and community, we are all a part of Cirque's 'realm of the imagination'. If we invert McLuhan's "the medium is the message" in this new paradigm, the message becomes the medium; that is, a technological performance language 'readable' by a global citizenry.

This is surely a sign of hope that communication is possible across divisional borders. Quebec artists serve as ambassadors before a world stage without shame in their cultural expansion and reinforce the survivalist roots from which their inspiration springs. While it is possible to worry that such artistic transformations erode the cultural identity of 'home', it is also possible to embrace home as the Other against which one differentiates oneself; to do so is not necessarily hurtful, or to be full of indifference. Home, too, requires separation and differentiation. In such a model, the notion of global home is

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not only our greatest hope, but a means to defy the dictates of the technological society's cultural whitewashing. Perhaps in such a transgressive move we may create new breeds of stories, new species of performance. Such speculation is the subject of further investigation.

NOTES

Notes for Chapter I

1. Two major characteristics of these species of technique are rationality and artificiality. Rationality is best exemplified in systemization, in the creation of standards and regulatory norms, in a "...reduction of facts, phenomena, means, and instruments to the schema of logic." (1964, 79) Artificiality, meanwhile is the quality of technique that is opposed to the natural, the instinctive. Ellul frames the distinction between natural and artificial as follows: "Art, artifice, artificial: technique as art is the creation of an artificial system... the world is an artificial world and hence radically different from the natural world." (1964, 79). Technique destroys or subordinates the natural world, refusing to allow its restoration or even an entry into symbiosis with the technical. The natural state of the world is too inefficient, too chaotic. Too many go hungry on our planet of billions and thus the Earth becomes a beast to be captured, tamed, and forced to our patterning. Out of chaos comes the bounty of technique.
2. "War," writes Ellul, "is now beyond human means of endurance in noise, movement, enormity of means, and precision of machines; and man himself has become merely an object, an object to be killed, and prey to a permanent panic that he is unable to translate into personal action.... [h]e is stretched to the limit of his resistance, like a steel cable which may break at any moment." (1964, 320).
3. In discussing the reproduction of physical arts – of paintings, sculptures, and other material works, Benjamin argues: "...even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence." (1969, 219).
4. Three primary features separate 'interactive' media from 'linear' media: random access, an arbitrary link between trigger and output, and media manipulation. As with musical instruments, digital technologies can move instantaneously between any given point within a potentially enormous range of materials, while, by way of contrast, video or audio tape technicians must scroll sequentially through reams of content; this 'random access' is one of the cornerstones of interactivity. Meanwhile, the 'connection' between trigger and output in computers and digital technologies is completely selective – there is no innate mechanical link between media content and the specific input required to activate it. Any stimulus is content, all content is data. Finally, specifically with reference to computing and digital work, interactive media allows the user to create programs able to manipulate content in an incredible range (Saltz 2001; 108-110).
5. At work within all performances is a balancing act between efficacy and entertainment. This 'efficacy' appears in two modes of cultural production: firstly, in the form of 'embodied transgressions', caught between theatre and ritual, site-specific, face-to-face, residing in the transformative power of the dramatic act; and secondly, in the form of efficacy-as-resistance, where bodies and identities are composed through conscious construction, mediated through and by theory. McKenzie argues that the movement between the two, the balancing act, the challenge of efficacy "turning itself outside in" is a movement "...from transgressing a totalitarian power from an outside site to resisting a hegemonic power from within that very power arrangement..." (1998, 49). This notion of struggle for power, of control-over-social change, is echoed in the work of Marvin Carlson, who stresses that the "growing interest in the cultural dynamics embedded in performance and theatrical representation itself was primarily stimulated by a materialist concern for exposing the power and oppression in society" (1996, 168).

6. That the Canada emerging from its founding in 1867 implemented technical innovations and was partially independent from Crown rule was less important to him than was the existence of a connection to an unbroken line of European history and philosophical evolution. Viewing modernity as fundamentally corruptive of virtue and the human ability to create a just state, Grant rejects, in *Technology & Empire*, the Hegelian notion of synthesis, calling the divides between ancient and modern, Christian and secular, irreconcilable: the preservation of the boundary between the necessary and the Good could not survive such synthesis (Grant 1969; Peddle and Robertson 2002).

Notes for Chapter II

1. Prior to Confederation, three main motifs characterised Quebec's political identity. Firstly, a culturally-conservative, clerical nationalism governed, evidenced in the Catholic Church's predominance in the rural-pastoral colony of New France; this is the era of 'conquest-nationalism'. Secondly, subsequent to the British takeover, Quebec witnessed the rise of a radical political nationalism, climaxing in the 1837-38 rebellions; here we see the era of 'revolutionary-separatism'. Finally, we see a domination of French Canada's ideological landscape by the evolution of a moderate-liberal nationalism leading to the Union of Upper and Lower Canada, from 1840 to the proclamation of the Dominion in 1867; this marks the era of 'dualist-collaboration' (Marchak 1981; Verney 1986). This cycle of conquest, revolution, and dualism would repeat again and again in the province's socio-political history, finding serious resonance in the development of its performing arts.
2. As Verney (1986) and Marchak (1981) both point out, a major point of contention and cultural difference in the country has been the divide between English and French Canada's conception of the Union's origins. Founded on a principle of 'two nations, one state', this dualism has been historically interpreted in radically different ways by the two 'nations' involved. To English Canada, whose historical descendants include British Loyalists fleeing the independent American States as well as the Protestant colonials of Upper Canada, the Dominion simply adopted the Empire's system of rule, one based on principles of majority rule. In this system, where French Canadians gradually became an increasing minority, their position in the social order was simply that of subsidiary people. The idea of Confederation spoke to them of a dualist Canada founded on English-Protestant and French-Catholic roots, geographically and socially separate but politically united. Meanwhile, for the French Canadians of what was Lower Canada (and before that, New France), the dualism of the federal project expressed itself in the notion that the federal system remained that of the original Act of Union – two distinct communities sharing the responsibilities of an entire state. Confederation was a socio-cultural, not a political, project: this was to have been a joint association of two cultures laying out the foundation for a new national paradigm, one of dualism. The French Canadians distinguished between the state – a political entity – and the nation – a formalized expression of cultural differences (Verney 1986). Meanwhile, the French Canadians felt that they had pioneered the West while English Canada maintained the higher population. They hoped that Union would permit a dualism despite population differences or wide geographic dispersion. Canada was an immense territory with plenty of space for the two cultures to grow and thrive. This was not an impossible ideal; following the conquest of 1760, New France retained much of French culture, but adopted, willingly, what they saw as a superior British parliamentary institution – evidence of an independent culture existing within the organisational model of an opposing civilisation (*ibid.*).

3. With the founding of Quebec's Union des artistes dramatique (UDA) in the 1930s, actors in the province began to finally organize themselves in a serious way (David 1995).
4. Established in 1951 after the *Compagnons* finally disbanded, the *Théâtre du Nouveau Monde* – founded by alumni Gascon and Roux – sought out the best trained actors, directors, and designers to work toward the establishment of professional-caliber work *chez nous*. While their repertoire consisted mainly of classical French works, many of these were presented in a transposed Canadian/Quebec setting (Brisset 1996; Hamelin 1968; Robert 1995). This adaptation/absorption would be a tactic practiced in Quebec for the next few decades.
5. "Par 'texte représentationnel' (performance text) Schechner entend un produit indissociable de sa mise en scène et de ses condition de création: un théâtre d'image, multidisciplinaire et en scène, façonné en cours de répétition, qui ne se codifie pas (donc, ne se perpétue pas) aussi facilement que le texte dramatique conventionnel" (Denis, qtd. in Hébert 1995, 34-35).

Notes for Chapter III

1. Manovich's particular interest here is in the example of the computer game, in which: "...narrative and time itself are equated with movement through 3-D space, progression through rooms, levels, or words, in contrast to modern literature, theatre, and cinema, which are built around psychological tensions between characters and movement in psychological space." (2001; 245-246).
2. Consider the work of Japanese Kabuki theatre, where the traditional use of trapdoors, 'cut-aways', and other special effects predicated the development of the advanced effects industry in film.
3. In *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, Patrice Pavis warns against too hastily inscribing the performing arts within a theory of media, as there is inherent in this notion the presupposition that the dramatic event can be readily compared with the practices of film, television, radio, video, and other mass media against which performance is often placed in opposition: "[w]e would do theatre a disservice by measuring it against media grounded in a technological infrastructure that it has done without; we would also endanger its specificity" (1992; 99). According to Pavis, theatre moves toward simplicity, minimalism, a "fundamental reduction to a direct exchange between actor and spectator" (101). Media, meanwhile, tends toward increasing complexity and sophistication, being "by nature open to maximal multiplication..." (*ibid.*). Where the mass media presents itself sometimes as fictitious and sometimes as 'real', theatre and performance are hyperreal and overtly fictional. The theatrical employs 'reality devices' – languages, movements, roles, backdrops, familiar scenarios – to remind us that the work is linked to the lifeworld by that tenuous connection to real things and events, but it never denies its fiction. Mass media like television often plays itself *as* the real, or as the unmediated window onto real events (McKenzie 1998; Pavis 1999).
4. Radio kept Quebec actors in employment since the mid-1920s, and radio drama continues to be an important form of performance in the province (David 1995, 133).

Notes for Chapter IV

1. In *La Culture Contre L'art*, Josette Féral situates the Quebec theatre funding environment circa 1990: from 1987-88, the Canada Council awarded \$4.6 million to theatre companies

in Quebec, the provincial government provided \$5 million, and the Conseil des Arts de la Communauté urbaine de Montréal offered \$1.2 million – a total of \$10.8 million divided between roughly one hundred beneficiaries. This level of assistance has not since risen significantly, and in fact, remains roughly the same, despite the Quebec government's near doubling of aid from 1989 to 1990 (In David 1995, 144).

2. « Cette orientation donne à la scénographie québécoise ses particularités: une grande compétence technique avec cependant une absence de discours ou de positionnement politique ou social dans l'expression » (Noiseux-Gurik 2001, 282).
3. « La scénographie est devenue la force première du théâtre québécois, peut-être plus que la mise en scène » (Lévesque 1997, 88).
4. « Le réel, sur scène, sera médiatisé, détourné et troué de façon à faire apparaître toute la porosité de la vie, des êtres, de la mémoire, de l'imaginaire, bref, à révéler un espace intérieur aux contours incertains et flous » (Lesage 2001, 335).
5. « ...surprésence d'effets médiatiques (vidéo, cinéma, diapos, musique électronique, etc.) sur le lieu théâtral relègue au rang d'objet éphémère la présence de l'acteur » (Ouaknine 1987, 94-95).
6. « ...à la manière d'une traduction poétique entre des langues qui appartiennent à des familles tout à fait différentes » (Lazaridès 2002, 148).
7. « ...d'explorer autrement différentes facettes du réel » (Lesage 2001, 336).
8. « ...un théâtre limite entre la danse et la performance, le mime, les arts visuels et le cinéma » & « ...les possibilités d'un théâtre non plus basé sur le mot mais sur le corps, les images, l'inconscient, les sens... » (Larocque 1985, 56).
9. « Nous cherchons à l'intégrer organiquement dans l'ensemble spectaculaire afin de créer un rapport dialectique entre la présence réelle et l'image audiovisuelle. Il y a un sens spécifique produit par la juxtaposition de l'image vidéo à celle de la « présence organique », que ni l'un ni l'autre à elle seule ne pourrait produire » (O'Sullivan 1985, 210).
10. « Est-ce du théâtre, le fait d'exploiter les effets perceptuels des technologies du son et de l'image? » (Le collectif Arbo Cyber, théâtre(?) 1989, 142).
11. « Nous voulions intégrer les nouvelles technologies, mais toujours dans une optique de communication et de médiatisation plutôt que dans l'unique but de manipuler de la machinerie ou de séduire » (Lucie Fradette qtd in Plourde 2002, 104).
12. « Si les idées et les intuitions apportent habituellement une théâtralité neuve, on se retrouve face à des oeuvres incomplètement pensées, où projets, formes et propos se joignent mal, se contredisent, vont jusqu'à s'annuler mutuellement » (Lefebvre 1985, 193).
13. « ...[a]u théâtre comme en bien d'autres domaines, 1984 aura été une année transitoire, une saison riche en proposition inachevée, en promesses d'avenir, en possibilités d'évolution et de mutation » (Corrivault 1984, C4).

14. « ...écriture dynamique à base d'icônes, de schémas, de réseaux sémantique... fonctionnant selon le principe d'une représentation figure et animée des modèles mentaux » (Hébert & Perelli-Contos 1997, 26).

Notes for Chapter V

1. Lepage's one condition in finding a name for this new group was that the word 'theatre' could appear nowhere (from *Ex Machina* homepage, accessed August 1, 2003, <http://www.exmachina.qc.ca/english/ex.asp?page=Machina>).
2. « [l]es technologies ne sont jamais un problème pour l'acteur, le problème, c'est ce que l'acteur en fait [...] Le feu, c'est de la technologie... Le théâtre, c'est du feu et de la noirceur » (qtd in St-Hillaire 2000).
3. Lepage's affinity for tapping into the cultural metaphor of Quebec without adopting its cause is used again in *La trilogie des dragons*, which follows an Quebec-Asian family across Canada from Quebec City westward through the Chinatowns of Toronto and Vancouver. As they move further and further 'west' they are, of course, moving closer to the true 'East' itself, but experience the difficulty of settling into a Chinese culture and community in Canada (Godard 2000). The dramatic conflict here is between the Western four-fold model of breach, crisis, redressment, and reintegration and the Asian patterns of climax, slow phase, and new slow phase implied by the use of the three cities and three acts (Godard 2000, 348; Schechner 1981, 14-15).
4. This theatre of spectacle is hypertextual, referencing multiple points and places simultaneously: *Les Plaques Tectoniques*, for example, is simultaneously symbolic of the drifting layers of Earth's crust separating the continents ideologically, culturally, as well as physically; a meditation on their former unity in those elements; a consideration of notions of sexual drift as gender must be distinguished from sex; and an argument on the gulf of space between continents, cultures, worldviews that is belied by the seeming trans-cultural signs of globalization (Girard 1995, 160). In one sequence of *Les plaques tectoniques*, a couple meeting on a park bench are oblivious to the stacks of books by a nearby pond slowly metamorphosing into the skyscrapers of Manhattan, Gershwin's music completing the sly echo of the famous scene from the Woody Allen film (*ibid.*).
5. *Needles and Opium* (1991), as John Bremrose wrote in *Maclean's* of its English-language premiere, plays with another favourite Lepage theme: "the loneliness and anguish of the individual set against the great cultural achievements of the West" (1994, 61). Suspended from wires, Lepage seems to precariously float in front of what initially appears to be a series of projected images; he ultimately bends this misperception, another visual-technologic sleight-of-mind, actually manipulating the white screen with his feet and body until it stretches to an apparent breaking point (Bremrose 1994).
6. In the early summer of 2001, Lepage maintained *Crossings*, a performative exhibit, at the Musée de la civilisation. Part installation, part participatory/interactive multimedia performance, two particular structures stood out as indicative of major themes in his work: the Tower of Babble and the Anatomy Theatre. The Tower appeared as a series of eleven alcoves, each filled with projected images, from celestial conflagrations to human interactions. Climbing the Tower's winding spiral stair led to a "nuptial room", symbolic of the coming together of sex, gender, identity. The Anatomy Theatre at first glance appeared to be a massive operating room gleaming with technological apparatuses. A ghostly projected Lepage conducts the audience through the theatre, subjecting them to interactive imagery supposedly exploring the nature of body, the seat of soul. In these two

works we see Lepage's connection with issues of the globalisation of cultures and of the soul or spirit's location within the material body.

7. Despite its closeness to the provincial capital, *Le Caserne*'s work is mainly prepared for international export; it is a closed space, a lab for playing with media. Its contact with audiences in Quebec is quite minimal (Harvie & Hurley 1999). In that light, Quebec's support of *Le Caserne* seems an effort by provincial parties to situate his work in Quebec City, the provincial capital, in the same way that his appointment to the Artistic Directorship of the National Arts Centre's French Theatre division in 1989 sought to locate his work as *Canadian*.
8. At present, Cirque du Soleil maintains eight separate fully-autonomous productions: *Varekai* (North American Tour), *Dralion* (North American Tour), *Quidam* (Japanese Tour), *Alegría* (North American Tour), *Salimbanco* (European Tour), "O" (Bellagio, Las Vegas, Nevada), *Mystère* (Treasure Island, Las Vegas, Nevada), and *La Nouba* (Walt Disney World Resort, Orlando, Florida), with a ninth just opened – the controversial *Zumanity*.

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Born in Montreal, Daniel Goldberg studied playwriting and dramaturgy before entering an intensive one-year Communications and Multimedia Graduate Diploma program at Concordia University. He served a three-year term as Artistic Director of Farthingale Productions, a Montreal-based performance group dedicated to mounting challenging original works for young adults: their first production was Goldberg's *Tut* at the Saidye Bronfman Centre for the Arts in 1998, a multimedia piece involving a cast of 18 dancers, 6 actors, and 9 technicians. Other multimedia projects of his include *The Garden/Machine Project* (2000) with Kulsum Merchant, and a hypertext narrative, *The House of Broken Gears* (2002). As a performer Goldberg has appeared in a variety of roles. Highlights include: Stephen in Farthingale Productions' *Godspell*, playing at Montreal's Centaur Theatre in 2000, Puck in Douglas Campbell's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (D.B. Clarke Theatre, 2000), and Frodo Baggins in Elysian River Theatre's 'multimedia epilogue' to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings; Towards Valinor* (Geordie Space 2001). His writing has also appeared in the magazines *Doctor's Review* and *The New Canadian Reporter*.