

# LIVENESS

Performance in a mediatized culture

Second Edition

*Philip Auslander*

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

## INTRODUCTION

"An orchid in the land of technology"<sup>1</sup>

The prospectus for a conference entitled "Why Theatre: Choices for the New Century"<sup>2</sup> posed a question that goes straight to the heart of the matter that concerns me here: "Theatre and the media: rivals or partners?" My answer to this question is unequivocal: at the level of cultural economy,<sup>3</sup> theatre (and live performance generally) and the mass media are rivals, not partners. Neither are they equal rivals: it is absolutely clear that our current cultural formation is saturated with, and dominated by, mass media representations in general, and television in particular (though television is admittedly locked in combat for cultural and economic dominance with the Internet and telecommunications).

In an essay on theatre and cinema, Herbert Blau (1982:121) quotes Marx's *Grundrisse*:

In all forms of society, there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others. It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity. It is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it.

Although Marx is describing industrial production under bourgeois capitalism, for Blau, "he might as well be describing the cinema." I would

- 1 The title of this chapter is taken from Walter Benjamin's celebrated essay "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction" (1986 [1936]:40).
- 2 The conference, which took place in the fall of 1995 in Toronto, was sponsored by the University of Toronto and Humboldt University in Berlin.
- 3 I use the phrase "cultural economy" to describe a realm of inquiry that includes both the real economic relations among cultural forms, and the relative degrees of cultural prestige and power enjoyed by different forms.

argue, *pace* Marx and Blau, that Marx might as well be describing the television (or computer) screen: Marx's allusions to a general illumination and an ether (a word frequently used in early discussions of broadcasting to describe the medium through which electronic waves pass) are even more appropriate to that medium than to the cinema.

As for the cultural dominance of television and its productions, Cecilia Tichi (1991:3–8) has suggested that television can no longer be seen just as an element in our cultural environment, one discourse among many, but must be seen as an environment in itself. Television has transcended its identity as a particular medium and is suffused through the culture as “the televisual.”

What the televisual names . . . is the end of the medium, in a context, and the arrival of television as the context. What is clear is that television has to be recognised as an organic part of the social fabric; which means that its transmissions are no longer managed by the flick of a switch.

(Fry 1993:13)

In other words, if television once could be seen as ranking among a number of vehicles for conveying expression or information from which we could choose, we no longer have that choice: the televisual has become an intrinsic and determining element of our cultural formation. As Tony Fry indicates, it is indeed no longer a question of thinking about television in various cultural contexts but of seeing it as *the* cultural context. Clearly, this issue and the related question of the nature of television culture could be (and have been) the subjects of books in themselves. The project of describing the position of other cultural discourses within our mediatized environment is as pressing as the project of describing that environment itself. Because live performance is the category of cultural production most directly affected by the dominance of media, it is particularly urgent to address the situation of live performance in our mediatized culture.

Investigating live performance's cultural valence for the present volume, I quickly became impatient with what I consider to be traditional, unreflective assumptions that fail to get much further in their attempts to explicate the value of “liveness” than invoking clichés and mystifications like “the magic of live theatre,” the “energy” that supposedly exists between performers and spectators in a live event, and the “community” that live performance is often said to create among performers and spectators. In time, I came to see that concepts such as these do have value for performers and partisans of live performance.

Indeed, it may even be necessary for performers, especially, to believe in them. But where these concepts are used to describe the relationship between live performance and its present mediatized environment, they yield a reductive binary opposition of the live and the mediatized. Steve Wurtzler (1992:89)<sup>4</sup> summarizes this traditional view well:

As socially and historically produced, the categories of the live and the recorded are defined in a mutually exclusive relationship, in that the notion of the live is premised on the absence of recording and the defining fact of the recorded is the absence of the live.

In this tradition, “the live comes to stand for a category completely outside representation” (*ibid.*:88). In other words, the common assumption is that the live event is “real” and that mediatized events are secondary and somehow artificial reproductions of the real. In Chapter 2, I will argue that this kind of thinking persists not only in the culture at large but even in contemporary performance studies.<sup>5</sup> The arguments of this chapter are intended both to exploit and to challenge the traditional way of thinking about liveness and its cultural position by employing its terms (that is, taking the binary opposition for granted), then opening those terms themselves to critique. Chapters 3 and 4 depart from a different premise—that liveness must be examined not as a global, undifferentiated phenomenon but within specific cultural and social contexts.

Perhaps because of my impatience with the conventional wisdom, I have sometimes been mistaken for someone who does not value—who is even antagonistic toward—live performance. This is very far from being the case: my interest in the cultural status of live performance derives directly from my sense of living in a culture in which something

4 Wurtzler (1992:89–90) challenges this binary opposition by asserting that “the socially constructed categories live and recorded cannot account for all representational practices.” He offers a chart in which various kinds of events are positioned according to spatial and temporal vectors. Two categories of representations that are neither purely live nor purely recorded emerge: those in which performance and audience are spatially separate but temporally co-present (e.g., live television or radio) and those in which performance and audience are spatially co-present but elements of the performance are pre-recorded (e.g., lip-synched concerts, instant replays on stadium video displays). See also Table 1.1, p. 61 below.

5 I have found that scholars working in mass media studies, particularly those interested in television or popular music, have dealt more directly and fruitfully with the question of liveness than most scholars in theatre or performance studies.

I continue to value seems to have less and less presence and importance. Despite my own commitment to the theatre and other forms of live performance, I have tried here to take a fairly hard-headed, unsentimental approach. The resulting assessment of the situation of live performance in a culture dominated by mass media has not made me optimistic about its current and future cultural prestige, as understood in traditional terms. It has also enabled me to see, however, that those terms may no longer be the most useful ones.

Performance artist and actor Eric Bogosian, for example, describes live theatre as:

medicine for a toxic environment of electronic media mind-pollution . . . Theater clears my head because it takes the subtextual brainwashing of the media madness and SHOUTS that subtext out loud . . . Theater is ritual. It is something we make together every time it happens. Theater is holy. Instead of being bombarded by a cathode ray tube we are speaking to ourselves. Human language, not electronic noise.

(Bogosian 1994:xii)

Bogosian's perception of the value of live performance clearly derives from its existence only in the moment ("every time it happens"), and its putative ability to create community (if not communion) among its participants, including performers and spectators. These are both issues I address in the chapters to follow. Most important for the present discussion, he sets live performance in a relationship of antagonistic opposition to mediatization and imputes to live performance the social, perhaps even political, function of opposing the oppressive regime of "electronic noise" imposed upon us by the mass media. This opposition, and live performance's ostensible curative powers, presumably derive from significant ontological distinctions between live and mediatized cultural forms. This perception of an oppositional relationship between the live and the mediatized animates my own discussion, for I wish both to exploit and to deconstruct that opposition in my discussion of the ontology of live performance in Chapter 2.

Several important premises are implied by my use of the word "mediatized," which I have borrowed from Jean Baudrillard. I often employ this word, admittedly somewhat loosely, to indicate that a particular cultural object is a product of the mass media or of media technology. "Mediatized performance" is performance that is circulated on television, as audio or video recordings, and in other forms based in technologies of reproduction. Baudrillard's own definition is more

expansive: "What is mediatized is not what comes off the daily press, out of the tube, or on the radio: it is what is reinterpreted by the sign form, articulated into models, and administered by the code" (Baudrillard 1981:175-6). For Baudrillard, mediatization is not simply a neutral term describing products of the media. Rather, he sees the media as instrumental in a larger, socio-political process of bringing all discourses under the dominance of a single code. Although I ignore Baudrillard's admonishment that the word "mediatized" does not define modes of cultural production, I hope I have retained in my use of the term Baudrillard's characterization of the mass media as the cultural dominant of contemporary, western(ized) societies. (I believe my description here can be generalized to this extent, though my focus is admittedly on the United States.) I intend to describe both live performance's cultural-economic competition with other forms and the position of live performance in a culture for which mediatization is a vehicle of the general code in a way that live performance is not (or is no longer). Although this book is not generally in service to Baudrillardian politics, I do follow his line in my discussion of rock music in Chapter 3, both to extend his analysis into that cultural realm and to critique that analysis.

In the sense that I am treating live and mediatized performance as parallel forms that participate in the same cultural economy, my usage of "mediatization" follows Fredric Jameson's definition of the term as: "the process whereby the traditional fine arts . . . come to consciousness of themselves as various media within a mediatic system" (Jameson 1991:162). Susan Sontag (1966:25), in her essay on theatre and film, contrasts the two forms by saying that: "theatre is never a 'medium'" in the sense that "one can make a movie 'of' a play but not a play 'of' a movie." Part of my argument in Chapter 2 is intended to prove Sontag wrong: there have long been plays "of" movies and television programs, and live performance can even function as a kind of mass medium. Whereas the traditional view represented by Sontag's comment sees theatre and the live performance arts generally as belonging to a cultural system separate from that of the mass media, live forms have become mediatized in Jameson's sense: they have been forced by economic reality to acknowledge their status as media within a mediatic system that includes the mass media and information technologies. Implicitly acknowledging this situation, a number of theatres have displayed signs similar to the banner that flew outside the Alliance Theater in Atlanta declaring that its offerings are "Not Available on Video," demonstrating that the only way of imputing specificity to the experience of live performance in the current cultural climate is by reference to the dominant experience of mediatization.

There is no question that live performance and mediatized forms compete for audiences in the cultural marketplace, and that mediatized forms have gained the advantage in that competition. Broadway producer Margo Lion's observation about the position of theatre within this competitive cultural economy can be applied to live performance generally: "we have realized that we are all competing for the same entertainment dollars in a climate where theater isn't always first on the list" (quoted in Rick Lyman, "On stage and off," *New York Times*, December 19, 1997:B2). Blau (1992:76) elaborates:

[The theatre's] status has been continually threatened by what Adorno named the culture industry and . . . the escalating dominance of the media. "Do you go to the theater often?"

That many have never gone, and that those who have, even in countries with established theater traditions, are going elsewhere or, with cable and VCRs, staying home, is also a theatrical fact, a datum of practice.

As Blau recognizes, theatre and other forms of live performance compete directly with mediatized forms that are much more advantageously positioned in the marketplace. By calling the pressure of live performance's competition with the mediatized "a datum of practice" he suggests that performance practice inevitably reflects this pressure in the material conditions under which performance takes place, in the composition of the audience and the formation of its expectations, and in the forms and contents of performance itself.

An important consequence of thinking about live and mediatized performance as belonging to the same mediatic system is the inscription of live performance within the historical logic of media identified by Marshall McLuhan (1964:158): "A new medium is never an addition to an old one, nor does it leave the old one in peace. It never ceases to oppress the older media until it finds new shapes and positions for them." Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin (1996:339) have refined this analysis with their concept of "remediation"—"the representation of one medium in another." According to their analysis, "new technologies of representation proceed by reforming or remediating earlier ones" (*ibid.*:352).<sup>6</sup> My discussion in Chapter 2 of the relationship between theatre and early

6 Noël Carroll (1998:187–8) also discusses this process, with specific reference to the ways in which some popular art forms were incorporated into art forms based in technologies of mass reproduction.

television and the consequent displacement of live performance by television is an attempt to describe how this historical logic plays out in that instance. To put it bluntly, the general response of live performance to the oppression and economic superiority of mediatized forms has been to become as much like them as possible. From ball games that incorporate instant-replay screens, to rock concerts that recreate the images of music videos, to live stage versions of television shows and movies, to dance and performance art's incorporation of video, evidence of the incursion of mediatization into the live event is available across the entire spectrum of performance genres.

This situation has created an understandable anxiety for those who value live performance, and this anxiety may be at the root of their need to say that live performance has a worth that both transcends and resists market value. In this view, the value of live performance resides in its very resistance to the market and the media, the dominant culture they represent, and the regime of cultural production that supports them. This is the position Peggy Phelan (1993b) has elucidated in her influential *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. For many reasons (which will be elaborated in the following chapters), I find this view untenable. The progressive diminution of previous distinctions between the live and the mediatized, in which live events are becoming ever more like mediatized ones, raises for me the question of whether there really are clear-cut ontological distinctions between live forms and mediatized ones. Although my initial arguments may seem to rest on the assumption that there are, ultimately I find that not to be the case. If live performance cannot be shown to be economically independent of, immune from contamination by, and ontologically different from mediatized forms, in what sense can liveness function as a site of cultural and ideological resistance, as Bogosian, Phelan, and others claim?

Chapter 2 presents an overview of these issues and a general consideration of the status of live performance in a culture dominated by mass media. I begin with a discussion of the relationship between theatre and early television in the United States to show that television originally modeled itself on the live form. This historical narrative serves as an allegory for the general cultural tendency of mediatized forms to displace and replace live ones. I next examine the more recent phenomenon of live events modeling themselves on mediatized representations, in a reversal of the previous historical pattern. I then turn to the way in which the issue of live performance is treated in contemporary performance theory and challenge its grounding of the distinction between the live and the mediatized in ostensible ontological differences between live and mediatized forms. Against that formulation, I argue

that the relationship between live and mediatized forms and the meaning of liveness be understood as historical and contingent rather than determined by immutable differences. To conclude the chapter, I examine several of the conventional explanations for why people value live performance and offer a suggestion of how liveness is being redefined for the digital age.

Chapter 3 offers a case study of the meaning of liveness within one particular cultural formation—that surrounding rock music. Because rock exists primarily as recorded music and only secondarily as live performance (see Gracyk 1996), this cultural context is a particularly interesting one in which to examine the functions and values attributed to live performance. My task, then, is to offer an explanation of what functions live performance once served within rock culture, and to show how those functions changed following the expanded mediatization of rock represented by music video. Considering these issues leads me to discuss some of rock's institutional discourses, especially that of the Grammy awards, and the crisis precipitated by the Milli Vanilli scandal. The chapter concludes with a Baudrillardian analysis of Milli Vanilli in the context of the technological and legal changes affecting the music industry in the 1980s.

Chapter 4 resumes the critique of liveness as a site of cultural and ideological resistance begun in Chapter 2, this time by way of a discussion of the status of live performance in two fields of American jurisprudence. I begin with an examination of the effort in the early 1970s to instate prerecorded videotape trials and discuss the failure of that effort in terms of the law's preference for live courtroom proceedings, a preference that is deeply rooted in constitutional and procedural issues. My purpose there is to show that the legal arena has proved more resistant to the incursion of mediatization than the other cultural sites examined here. I then turn to copyright law. I discuss copyright in Chapter 2 in the context of the music industry; in Chapter 4, it is pivotal to a discussion of the legal status of live performance. While it is true that live performance cannot be copyrighted, other legal theories have been brought to bear to make performance "ownable" nevertheless. Whereas an influential strain of performance theory suggests that live performance's disappearance and persistence only in spectatorial memory make it a site of resistance to the authority of law, I argue that those very same qualities make performance available and useful to the law as both a policed site and a mechanism of regulation. Live performance and its putative ontology of disappearance (which I challenge on other grounds in Chapter 2) are in fact central to the theory and practice of American law. Indeed, the legal arena may be one

of the few remaining cultural contexts in which live performance is still considered essential.

I hope this study will be received in the speculative spirit in which it is offered. Drawing on a mixed bag of disciplines, including media theory, cultural theory, sociology, performance studies, and legal studies, it is the product of what Jacques Attali (1985:5) calls "theoretical indiscipline." Although I have made some effort to ground my arguments in material realities, I have not hesitated to invoke barely supported (or supportable) generalizations. I have also not tried to impose a strict consistency on the book's three main sections. Although certain issues recur, arguments that may be important in the context of the broad overview offered in Chapter 2 may not carry as much weight in the more specific contexts examined in the other two chapters, and vice versa. Above all, I am aware of a certain tendentiousness in my arguments, which leads, as Attali (*ibid.*:4) says of his own work, to "unusual and unacceptable conclusions." I trust, however, that there is a sense in which these unacceptable conclusions articulate some small truths of our cultural situation.

## LIVE PERFORMANCE IN A MEDIATIZED CULTURE

In his autobiography, John Densmore (1991), the drummer for the rock group the Doors, recounts an anecdote concerning an early television appearance by the group, probably in 1967. Having taped an appearance on a variety show, the Doors wanted to be able to watch themselves on television. They therefore requested that a set be placed in their backstage dressing room the night their performance was to be broadcast. Because their segment had not yet come on when they were ready to begin their concert, they took the television set onstage with them, perching it atop an amplifier with the volume turned off. When the Doors finally appeared on the television, they stopped playing mid-song, turned up the television volume, and sat on the floor of the stage watching themselves, their backs to the audience. When their segment was over, they resumed playing.

By staging their relationship to television in this way in 1967, the Doors revealed their prescience concerning what would happen in the relationship between live and mediated performance. There are several harbingers to be noted in this anecdote, particularly the presentation of a previously recorded event as live; the incorporation of video into the live event; and the precedence of the mediated over the live, even for the performers themselves. Now, forty years later, we are well into a period of cultural history defined by the domination of mediated representations. My concern here is with the situation of live performance within that mediated environment. I begin with a historical account of the early relationship between television and theatre in the United States, which I present as an allegory for the general relationship of live to mediated forms within our cultural economy. Initially, mediated events were modeled on live ones. The subsequent cultural dominance of mediation has had the ironic result that live events now frequently are modeled on the very mediated representations that once took the self-same live events as their models. After presenting this allegory, I will

turn to the present day to describe what I see as a pattern of increased incursion of mediation into live events themselves. I go on to discuss the way in which performance theory continues to characterize the relationship between the live and the mediated as one of opposition, despite the erosion of the differences between them.

Although I have stated that the relationship between the live and the mediated is one of competitive opposition at the level of cultural economy, I do not see that opposition as deriving from the intrinsic characteristics of live and mediated forms but, rather, as determined by cultural and historical contingencies. Through an examination of what may be called the ontological characteristics of live and mediated performances, an examination which begins with the discussion of early television and theatre that opens the chapter, I will argue against intrinsic opposition and in favor of a view that both emphasizes the mutual dependence of the live and the mediated and challenges the traditional assumption that the live precedes the mediated. Throughout this chapter, I emphasize large contextual and cultural issues in the hope of creating a theoretical and historical framework for understanding the current relationship of the live and the mediated.

### Teevee's playhouse

Although I stated in the previous chapter that I consider television, not film, to be the dominant cultural medium, the historical relationship of theatre to film provides a precedent for the pattern of development I am describing and is therefore worthy of some attention. Early film modeled itself directly on theatrical practice. As A. Nicholas Vardac shows in his classic study *Stage to Screen* (1949), the narrative structures and visual devices of cinema, including the close-up and the fade-in/fade-out, and parallel editing, had all been fully developed on stage before becoming the foundations of the new medium's language, at least in its narrative forms. Steele MacKaye, for example, embarked on a series of technical innovations, beginning in the late 1870s, that brought greater flexibility to the stage in ways that anticipated cinematic techniques. To cite but one example, his "proscenium adjuster," a device that instantly changed the shape and size of the proscenium opening, enabled smooth transitions between scenes and among different views of the same setting. "In this way, MacKaye could control the type of stage picture offered, in the fashion of the motion picture with its long or medium shot, its panoramic or tracking shot" (Vardac 1949:143). In their more recent look at the relationship between early film and the stage, Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs (1997:214) disagree with Vardac's characterization of

nineteenth-century theatre as: "protocinematic,' as attempting to be cinematic without the appropriate technology." But they agree with him concerning the profound influence of theatrical practice on early cinema: "The development of cinematic staging and editing in the 1910s were not attempts to lay the basis for a specifically cinematic approach to narration, but the pursuit of goals well-established in nineteenth-century theatre with new means" (*ibid.*:210). "[T]he cinema," they conclude, "strove to be theatrical" (*ibid.*:214). Early cinema took over and reformed a theatrical vocabulary and also rapidly usurped the theatre's cultural position as the dominant form of entertainment. Indeed, film had thoroughly routed the theatre by 1926, so there was little left to pillage when television arrived in force some twenty years later (Poggi 1968:85-6). In these respects, the historical relationship between television and theatre, and the general situation of live performance in our mediatized culture, recapitulates this earlier history.

There can be no question that the advent of film had a devastating cultural-economic impact on the theatre, but that fact, taken by itself, leaves an important question unanswered. If the theatre as a popular form had been so thoroughly usurped by film in the 1920s that it was hardly even a force to be reckoned with when television came around, why did television embrace "the theatre as a model for representation" (Spigel 1992:142) as the cinema itself had done in its earliest days, rather than model itself on film? As a camera-bound medium, television might well have striven to be cinematic; but instead it strove to be theatrical. The answer to this question lies in the way in which the essence of the televisual was understood, from television's earliest appearances, as an ontology of liveness more akin to the ontology of theatre than to that of film. Television's essence was seen in its ability to transmit events as they occur, not in a filmic capacity to record events for later viewing. Originally, of course, all television broadcasts were live transmissions. Jane Feuer (1983) argues that the definition of television as an ontologically live medium remains part of our fundamental conception of the medium—even though television ceased long ago to be live in an ontological sense, it remains so in an ideological sense. Rick Altman (1986: 45) has made a similar observation: "whether the events transmitted by television are live or not, the television experience itself is . . . sensed as live by the home viewing audience."<sup>1</sup> The fact that television can "go

1 Steve Wurtzler (1992:91) makes the point that:

the textual practices of American television present themselves as, or are experienced in ways similar to, the fully present live . . . even the recorded

live" at any moment to convey sight and sound at a distance in a way no other medium can remains a crucial part of the televisual imaginary even though that way of using the medium is now the exception rather than the rule.

I contend that this ideologically engrained sense of television as a live medium makes its historical relationship to the theatre different from that of film, and enabled television to colonize liveness, the one aspect of theatrical presentation that film could not replicate. Vardac shows how film remediated theatre by adopting the narrative structures and visual strategies of nineteenth-century melodrama. Whereas film could only remediate the theatre at these structural levels, television could remediate theatre at the ontological level through its claim to immediacy. It is also significant in this context that television remediates not only live performance but film, in a way that film has never remediated television.<sup>2</sup> Although television was originally dependent on cinematic technology (the kinescope) for its own reproduction,<sup>3</sup> the advent of videotape liberated television and gave it the means of transforming film into a televisual discourse to the point that, by now, much of our experience of "film" is actually a televisual experience (of video).

programs of broadcast television are assigned a sense of spatial co-presence and temporal simultaneity in that, once a program has aired in its scheduled time slot, there is little or no chance of viewing it outside of its initial temporal and spatial (channel) context.

Wurtzler (*ibid.*:259) implies in a note that time-shifting by means of VCRs has made this effect even more pronounced. The impulse to tape programs for later viewing only emphasizes the extent to which we think of them as fleeting, onetime, quasi-live events.

- 2 There are cases in which television becomes film in the same way that film becomes television when it is broadcast or played on a DVD. An early instance is the film *The Groove Tube* (1974), a counter-cultural parody of television shot originally on videotape then transferred to film. Clearly, there were stylistic reasons for doing this, as is often the case when film directors use video transfer as a technique. The historical context of this particular remediation is also important. Since the ideology of the counter-cultural audience it hoped to reach rejected television as a necessarily co-opted medium but found film to be credible, *The Groove Tube* had to look like television, the object of its satire, but also had to establish its identity as a *film* and thus distinguish itself from its source medium. (I return to the counter-cultural rejection of television in another context in Chapter 3.) Now, of course, it is quite common for films to be shot on digital video, for stylistic or economic reasons, then transferred.
- 3 An early version of the kinescope was the Paramount Intermediate Film System, in which a television image was recorded on motion picture film, then processed and projected immediately (the delay from reception to projection was sixty-six seconds).

Television "does not simply 'transport' previous forms (theatre, film, radio) but rather translates them and recombines them" (Dienst 1994: 142), thus turning them into something different: television itself.

Television broadcasting was inaugurated in the United States in 1939, when the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), and Dumont all began broadcasting diverse programming in New York City. By 1940, there were twenty-three television stations actively broadcasting in the country (Ritchie 1994:92). Along with the manufacture of radio receivers and sound recordings, television programming was curtailed in 1942 with the entry of the United States into World War II. Television experienced a resurgence after the war, beginning in 1946 when sets became widely available to the public. The first television era in the United States, then, occurred between 1939 and 1945, for although programming and the industrial development of television were truncated by the war effort, the discourse on television remained lively during those years. This first phase of television was characterized by experimentation, speculation, and debate. From 1947 onward, television broadcasting coalesced into the industry we know today.

One of the central concerns of the discourse on television in the United States during its earliest phases was the relationship of television to other forms of entertainment and communication, particularly radio, film, and theatre. Television was often described as a hybrid of existing forms. One analyst characterized it as a "new and synthetic medium . . . radio with sight, movies with the zest of immediacy, theatre (intimate or spectacular) with all seats about six rows back and in the centre, tabloid opera and circus without peanut vendors" (Wade 1944:728). The question, in the words of Hans Burger (1940:209), was "whether or not television is . . . a new complex of existing arts, or an art in its own right. And if it is an art, what are its essential techniques and possibilities?" In the opinion of Kay Reynolds (1942:121), "an authentically [sic] television form" had not yet been discovered.

Although the question of authentic television form remained unresolved, early writers on television generally agreed that television's essential properties as a medium are *immediacy* and *intimacy*. As Lenox

Douglas Gomery (1985:56-7) describes this process as an early form of projection television. Arguably, it can also be seen as a filmic remediation of television. Although the content shown derives from a television signal, the actual perceptual experience is of a filmed image, not a televisual one. By incorporating television technology, the Paramount system gave film nearly the same immediacy that was foregrounded as the essence of television in the early descriptions of that medium discussed here.

Lohr, the president of NBC, put it, "the most utilitarian feature of television lies in broadcasting events *exactly when and as they happen*" (Lohr 1940:52, original emphasis). Orrin E. Dunlap's later description is even more emphatic: "People now look upon scenes never before within their range; they see politics as practiced, sports as played, drama as enacted, news as it happens, history as it is made" (Dunlap 1947:8). In an essay of 1937, Alfred N. Goldsmith, an industrial engineer, compares television, film, and human vision in these terms:

As far as ocular vision is concerned, a real event can be seen only at the instant of occurrence . . . Accordingly all the historical past is lost so far as direct vision by human beings is concerned. The motion picture suffers from no such limitation . . . the motion picture may be made at any time and shown at any later time . . . Television with direct pick-up of an actual event is as dependent on its time of occurrence as is the eye.

(Goldsmith 1937:55)

Here, film is represented as the realm of memory, repetition, and displacement in time. By contrast, television, like direct human vision (and also like theatre, as Goldsmith (*ibid.*:56) observes later in his essay) occurs only in the now. Unlike film, but like theatre, a television broadcast is characterized as a performance in the present. This was literally the case in the early days of television when most material was broadcast live. Even now that most television programming is pre-recorded, the television image remains a performance in the present in an important sense I shall discuss later in this chapter. Although the possibility of recording television broadcasts was available as part of television technology from quite early in its development, the capacity for rebroadcasting was seen then as ancillary to television's essence as a live medium. In the 1930s and 1940s, television was envisioned primarily as a medium devoted to the transmission of ongoing live events, not to reproduction. Not surprisingly, early television displayed a voracious appetite for all types of live presentation. A survey of the activity of one pioneering television station (WRGB in Schenectady, New York) between 1939 and 1945 lists among its offerings: variety shows and revues; sports; drama, including amateur and college theatricals; light opera; various musical groups; dance; news; panel discussions; educational presentations; fashion shows; puppet shows; quizzes and games; vaudeville acts, monologists, and magicians; children's shows; religious shows; and commercials (Dupuy 1945).

Television's intimacy was seen as a function of its immediacy—the close proximity of viewer to event that it enables—and the fact that events from outside are transmitted into the viewer's home. As Lohr (1940:3) put it, "the viewer of the television scene feels himself to be on the scene." The position of the television viewer relative to the image on the screen was often compared with that of a boxing fan sitting ringside or a theatre-goer with the best seat in the house. Television "make[s] all the world a stage and every home a front-row seat for sports, drama, and news" (Dunlap 1947:8). It was thought to make the home into a kind of theatre characterized, paradoxically, by both absolute intimacy and global reach. Given the domestic context in which television was envisioned,<sup>4</sup> it is important to sketch the social implications of the home theatre.<sup>5</sup> Spigel (1992:110) argues persuasively that the new medium was associated with an existing cultural discourse, dating back to the mid-1800s, in which "electrical communications would defuse the threat of cultural difference by limiting experiences and placing social encounters into safe, familiar, and predictable contexts." By the early 1920s, "radio, like the telegraph and telephone before it, was seen as an instrument of social sanitation" that would make cultural objects more generally accessible, but in a way that would also keep "undesirables away from the middle-classes." In the postwar era, Spigel (*ibid.*:111) goes on to say, "the fantasy of antiseptic, electrical space was transposed onto television." That the linkage between television and the discourse of antiseptic electrical space occurred in the context of the growing suburbanization of the postwar period is evident from the following quotation, from a 1958 book entitled, strikingly, *A Primer for Playgoers*, in which the author stresses:

- 4 Lohr (1940) treats television as a domestic technology, thus implying that the uses of the technology had been decided definitively that early. In fact, the situation was somewhat more complicated. As Gomery (1985) has shown, Hollywood's major motion picture corporations hatched a scheme in the late 1940s to co-opt television by installing television projection equipment in movie theatres and offering programming, including live coverage of sports and newsworthy public events, to a paying public in those venues. This experiment, known as "theatre television," proved not to be cost-effective and was abandoned in the early 1950s.
- 5 Lynn Spigel (1992:99, 106–9) traces the phrase "home theatre" and the concept it embodies as far back as 1912 and discusses how, in the period after World War II, suburban homeowners were encouraged to construct their television viewing areas on the model of a theatre. It is significant that throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the home theatre was imagined as a domestic version of the dramatic stage. Now, that phrase is used to describe equipment intended to transport the experience of the cinema, not that of live theatre, into the home.

the tremendous personal comfort of relaxing at home in an easy chair and seeing some of the top names in the theatre world perform in a variety of three or four programs in a single evening. This involves a greater degree of physical comfort than to come home weary from the day's work, wash, dress, hurry, drive through heavy traffic, find a place to park, walk to the theatre, pay an ever-increasing admission, sit on the same seat for two hours, then fight traffic and arrive home very late.

(Wright 1958:222–3)

Here, the benefit of television-as-theatre over live performance is defined explicitly in terms of the suburban experience. Tichi notes that this understanding of television was frequently reiterated in advertisements for television sets:

Numerous advertisements . . . showed couples in evening attire gathered in their living rooms as if in a private box at the theatre, and gazing in rapt attention at on-screen ballet, opera, or drama from the legitimate stage. Television in the living room was thus offered . . . as an excursion out of the household and into an expensive private box for an experience of high culture.

(Tichi 1991:94; see also Spigel 1992:126)

Descriptions of drama on television from this period emphasize that television's immediacy and intimacy make the experience of televised drama entirely comparable to that of drama in the theatre. (By televised drama, I mean plays written or adapted for television, not direct broadcasts of theatre events. Although such broadcasts did occur, it was generally conceded that direct transmission of a play in the theatre yielded unsatisfactory television.<sup>6</sup>) In an article in *Theatre Arts*, Mary Hunter (1949:46) observes that "the audience experience in relation to the performer is similar in television to the performer–audience relationship in the theatre: the audience is in direct contact with the performer at the moment of his 'performance.' You see him when he does it." Likewise, Lohr (1940:72), writing almost a decade earlier, makes the immediacy of televised drama the basis on which to distinguish television from film: "the instantaneous nature of the broadcast gives television drama a certain superiority over filmed drama. The spectator

6 For a useful overview of theatrical presentations on television from the 1940s through the 1980s, see Rose (1986).

knows that he is seeing something actually taking place at the moment."<sup>7</sup> (Lohr (*ibid.*:80–1) advances the same argument to assert the superiority of televised news over the filmed newsreel.) Spigel summarizes this discourse:

Television, it was constantly argued, would be a better approximation of live entertainment than any previous form of technological reproduction. Its ability to broadcast direct to the home would allow people to feel as if they really were at the theatre . . . Whereas film allowed spectators imaginatively to project themselves *into a scene*, television would give people the sense of being *on the scene* of presentation—it would simulate the entire experience of being at the theatre.

(Spigel 1992:138–9, original emphasis)

I want to emphasize the implications of this last statement, as I shall go on to argue that the goal of televised drama was not merely to convey a theatrical event to the viewer, but to recreate the theatrical experience for the home viewer through televisual discourse and, thus, to *replace* live performance.

As significant as this habitual representation of television as theatre and the notion that televised drama partakes of the immediacy of drama in the theatre is the suggestion that emerges from the early commentary that television production techniques themselves evolved in a conscious effort to reproduce the theatrical image. In commenting on the television actor, Lohr observes:

In a theatre, each actor assumes that the audience has as wide-angle vision as he possesses, but he must be taught that a television camera does not see at such wide angles . . . For this reason, television producers have found it helpful to use more than one camera for studio productions. This enables a televiewer to see a continuous action.

(Lohr 1940:56)

7 The immediacy of televised drama was harrowing for actors. Even as seasoned a trouper as Jose Ferrer (1949:47), writing of his first television appearance (as Cyrano de Bergerac on the *Philco Television Playhouse* in 1949), described the “this-is-it” feeling” of performing on television as “a bad psychological handicap.” This insecurity was apparently brought on by television’s characteristically brief rehearsal period and the absence of a prompter. Television production manuals of the 1940s monotonously repeat the assertion that a basic requirement for television actors is the ability to memorize lines, leading one to speculate about the exact state of the art of acting in the United States at the time.

The multiple-camera set-up enables the television image to recreate the perceptual continuity of the theatre. Switching from camera to camera allows the television director to replicate the effect of the theatre spectator’s wandering eye: “the eye, while observing a stage set . . . makes its own changes to various parts of the scene to maintain interest, whereas in television the camera must take the eye to various points of interest in the scene” (*ibid.*:55). One way of objecting to Lohr’s characterization of television editing would be to say that televisual discourse fails to replicate the perceptual discourse of the spectator’s eye because whereas in the theatre spectators direct their own vision, the television camera does not permit them to choose their own perspectives. In her article explaining why stage directors might make good television directors, however, Hunter implicitly responds to such an objection by suggesting that the spectator’s gaze is always directed in the theatre by means of focal points in the staging that are equivalent to camera views. She compares the stage director’s manipulation of audience attention with the television director’s use of the camera, saying that: “the [stage] director’s approach to movement on the stage is to apply something of a ‘psychological’ camera eye. He must direct the audience’s attention about the stage precisely as the camera moves from one point of interest to the next” (Hunter 1949:47).

These observations are striking because they suggest that the multiple-camera set-up deploying three to five cameras simultaneously (still the standard way in which television studio productions are shot) evolved specifically out of a desire to replicate the visual discourse of the spectator’s experience of theatre. In a provocative comparison of television and film editing, Burger explains in detail why the image produced by the multiple-camera set-up is theatrical rather than cinematic:

This shifting between cameras has a purpose similar to cutting in the movies. It divides the scene into different views of the same object, thus affording a greater variety. Actually, however, the effect of television cutting is quite different. Since the cameras are placed almost in one line, and since the settings resemble bas-reliefs more than the three-dimensional sets of the films, the possibility for variety among the shots is strictly limited. If the angles of the cameras are changed they run the danger of catching each other or the low-hanging mike in their line of vision; and counter-shots are, as yet, almost impossible because there is no background for them. Therefore, although the television camera shifts, it does not show a *new* angle of the scene or tell *more* about the actors. What happens is essentially

the same as in the occasional use of opera glasses in the theatre; the *frame* of the picture is changed, but the angle is the same.  
(Burger 1940:209, original emphasis)

Susan Sontag (1966:29, original emphasis) contrasts theatre and film by asserting that whereas "theatre is confined to a logical or *continuous* use of space[,] cinema . . . has access to an alogical or *discontinuous* use of space." Burger suggests that the limited camera work possible in early television created an effect of spatial continuity more comparable to the theatre than to cinema. That television editing appears as a reframing of a single, continuous image from a fixed point of view, rather than a suturing of image to image or a shift in point of view, also asserts the immediacy, the sense of a continuous perceptual experience unfolding in real time, that television shares with theatre.

It is important to acknowledge that the resemblance of televisual discourse to theatrical discourse was strongest at this early stage in the development of broadcast television, when live presentation of drama and other televised events was the norm, and the technology itself was sufficiently clumsy that it could not easily replicate cinematic discourse. Because of their relative immobility, the cameras were arranged along a single axis parallel to the width of the playing area, and their movements were highly restricted. In an article on directing ballet for television, Paul Belanger (1946:8–9), a director of dance programs for CBS, catalogs the types of shot available to television cameras: all are either pans, "tongues" (i.e., vertical pans), or trucking shots. In the diagrams that accompany the article, the two cameras are always placed outside and in front of the performance space. This set-up illustrates the fact that in this earliest phase of American broadcast television, all shows were shot "in proscenium" (see D. Barker 1987 [1985]); the cameras never entered the playing space to produce reverse angles (Burger's "counter-shots"). As a result, the television image was frontal and oriented toward the viewer in much the same way as a performance on a proscenium stage would be. This was reflected in the actors' playing, which Burger (1940:209) describes as "aimed . . . at the fourth wall" in front of the cameras "much as it is on stage."

As television technology quickly became more sophisticated and television cameras more nimble, televisual discourse aspired less to the theatrical and more to the cinematic. To Murray Bolen, the author of a postwar book entitled *Fundamentals of Television*, immediacy was no longer clearly fundamental to the medium. Acknowledging that champions of televisual immediacy have a valid point, Bolen (1950:190) nevertheless demurs that "we cannot be sure as yet that the instan-

taneous element of immediacy is really that much of television" and goes on to deduce from the success of prerecorded radio programs that "canned" television shows are quite likely to attract an audience. A television production textbook of 1953 makes the relationship between the changed capacity of television technology and the transition from a theatrical to a cinematic paradigm explicit:

The question has been commonly asked: Why cannot the television medium transmit a stage play to the home audience, capturing the immediacy of the performance instead of attempting to simulate the motion picture? Perhaps if a play were televised in one continuous long shot with the proscenium arch of the stage constantly visible, the effect of a stage play would be retained. As soon as the cameras are brought onto the stage, however, and proceed to break the action down into close-ups, two-shots, reverse angles, and so forth, the show no longer resembles a play but has become a motion picture. The television medium is a medium of the camera and as such has departed almost as far from the live theatre as has the medium of film.

(Bretz 1953:3)

Once the cameras could enter the set and shoot from reverse angles, the syntax of televisual discourse became that of cinematic discourse, though it is probably not coincidental that these comments were made around the time (1951–2) when television production was beginning to switch from live broadcasting to film production and, consequently, from New York City to Hollywood (Barnouw 1990:133–4).<sup>8</sup> For Bretz, who embraces the cinematic paradigm for television, to replicate theatrical discourse on television means to present a static television image. But, as we have seen, the more imaginative television conceptualists of the previous decades felt that replicating theatrical discourse on television meant replicating the discourse of the spectator's shifting eye, not that of the static proscenium.

As television production practice moved away from honoring the ontology of televisual immediacy and its links with theatrical discourse,

8 Andrew Lavender (2003) argues that we have seen a re-theatricalization of television in reality programs like *Big Brother* through their emphasis on liveness, frontality, evocations of theatrical space and temporality, and the manner in which contestants perform their identities.

televisual appropriations of theatrical discourse ironically became simultaneously more overt and more vestigial. Fictional shows shot cinematically still represented themselves as theatre, but through the use of dramatic convention rather than by using the camera to replicate the perceptual experience of the theatre spectator. The so-called "Golden Age" of television, which began after World War II and lasted through the 1950s, saw a spate of drama anthology shows with theatrical names, including *The Kraft Television Theatre*, *Ford Theatre*, *Playhouse 90*, *The Philco TV Playhouse*, and *Goodyear TV Playhouse* (see Barnouw 1990:154–67). In the early 1960s, the practice of making episodes of such hour-long dramatic series as *The Fugitive* and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* into "plays" by giving each episode a title and dividing it into "acts" became prominent. Even as the American theatre moved closer to making the streamlined two-act play its normal product, television drama remained wedded to an Ibsenian four-act structure because of the segmentation imposed upon it by the requirements of advertisers. The laughtrack and the practice of announcing that programs are "filmed before a live studio audience" are more recent techniques of theatricalizing television. It is ironic that in the 1930s and 1940s, when television practice was most faithful to the medium's ontological immediacy, television studios could not accommodate audiences; the programs were directed exclusively to the home audience. The current practice of taping before "a live studio audience" is a simulation, rather than a replication, of the conditions of live theatrical production. The presence of the studio audience on the television screen and soundtrack implies that the program is a record of a real event. Because the programs are edited, however, the home audience does not see the same performance as the studio audience, but rather a performance that never took place.

An important theme emerges from this glimpse at history. For Raymond Williams (1992 [1974]:19), "when the question of [early television's] content was raised, it was resolved, in the main, parasitically." Television was imagined as *theatre*, not just in the sense that it could convey theatrical events to the viewer, but in that it offered to replicate the visual and experiential discourse of theatre in the antiseptic space of the suburban home theatre. Television, as parasite, strangled its host by offering itself not as an extension of the theatrical experience but as an equivalent *replacement* for that experience. As the passage from *A Primer for Playgoers* quoted above suggests, the implication of the cultural discourse surrounding television was that one should watch it *instead* of going to the theatre. The televisual experience is implicitly equated with the live theatrical experience, but is represented as better

suited to the postwar, suburban lifestyle: the message is that nothing is lost, and much is gained, by staying home.

This assumption translated into very concrete economic effects on the market for live performance. In their pioneering 1966 study of the economic situation of the performing arts, Baumol and Bowen (1966: 245) analyze live performance's competition with television by pointing out that between 1948 and 1952, the years in which television became widely available, consumer spending generally rose by 23 percent, but admissions to live performances rose only by 5 percent. "In sum," the authors conclude, "it seems clear that the mass media have made inroads into the audience for live performance."

A much more recent study, the 2004 *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA)*,<sup>9</sup> produced every five years by the US government's National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), strongly suggests that live forms remain in direct competition with mediatized ones. The broad facts will come as no surprise: 60 percent of American adults go to the movies versus the 22.3 percent who go to the theatre and the 4 percent who attend the opera or ballet; the average adult watches 2.9 hours of television per day (NEA 2004:45). While a question such as "Do people go to the movies or watch television *instead* of attending live performances?" is difficult to answer with empirical certainty, the SPPA provides a useful perspective through comparisons of adults' consumption of specific kinds of performance in both live and mediatized forms that allow us to get a glimpse of how people interested in a particular form pursue that interest. It is self-evident that far more people listen to recorded music than attend concerts, but the discrepancy may be larger than expected, especially considering that the SPPA tracks classical music and jazz but not popular music: 47.9 percent of adult Americans listen to recorded music, while only 18.8 percent attend concerts; 8.7 percent attend dance recitals, but 13.7 percent view dance in mediatized forms (*ibid.*:6). Irrespective of whether it is literally the case that the people who consume these arts in mediatized forms do so instead of attending live events, it is very clear that the mediatized version of these arts defines the normative experience of them.

The theatre audience seems to prefer the live event, though not by a huge margin: 22.3 percent of adults attended the theatre while 21 percent watched theatre in mediatized forms (*ibid.*:6). But there is

9 The SPPA reports the results of surveys conducted in 2002. For a more detailed discussion of this document, its implications concerning the cultural status of the performing arts, and questions it raises for performance studies, see Auslander (2005).

a wrinkle. Audiences for both musical and non-musical theatre typically attended 2.3 productions in 2002. The number of mediatized viewings on TV, VCR, or DVD was exactly twice that figure for musical theatre (4.6 viewings) and three times it for non-musical theatre (6.9 viewings) (*ibid.*:28). So, even though the percentage of adults who attended live theatre at least once in 2002 is higher than the percentage that viewed theatre in mediatized forms, the theatre is being consumed in mediatized forms two to three times more often than it is attended live. There are good reasons why people might choose to watch or listen to mediatized theatre, music, and dance which do not necessarily reflect the value they place on live performance, including cost, access, convenience, the unavailability of live performances by particular artists or of specific works at a given moment, and many others. But the fact that the audiences for these performing arts are participating in mediatized versions of them far more often than in live forms probably means that live performances are in direct competition with recorded performances.

Television's usurpation of the cultural-economic position formerly enjoyed by live media such as theatre was not simply the result of the generalized mediatization of our society. Its specific ability to position itself as theatre's replacement originates in the claims of immediacy made on behalf of television throughout its development, and in its claim to replicate theatrical discourse. What is true of the relationship between television and theatre is equally true, by allegorical extension, of the general cultural relationship of the televisual and mediatized to the live: the ideology of liveness that the televisual (the cultural dominant that is now expressed through a variety of media) inherited from television (the medium) has enabled it to displace and replace live performance in a wide variety of cultural contexts.

### Is it live, or . . . ?

To move from a discussion of the early relationship between theatre and television to an examination of the current situation of live performance is to confront the irony that whereas television initially sought to replicate and, implicitly, to replace live theatre, live performance itself has developed since that time toward the replication of the discourse of mediatization. This phenomenon is understandable in terms of the historical logic of remediation discussed in Chapter 1. While new technologies remediate older ones, as film and television both remediated theatre, "earlier technologies are struggling to maintain their legitimacy by remediating newer ones" (Bolter and Grusin 1996:352).

The multiple ways in which live performance now endeavors to replicate television, video, and film, and to incorporate digital media, provide vivid examples.<sup>10</sup>

Live performance now often incorporates mediatization to the degree that the live event itself is a product of media technologies. This has been the case to some degree for a long time, of course: as soon as electric amplification is used, one might say that an event is mediatized. What we actually hear is the vibration of a speaker, a reproduction by technological means of a sound picked up by a microphone, not the original (live) acoustic event. Recently, however, this effect has been intensified across a very wide range of performance genres and cultural contexts, from the giant television screens at sports arenas to the video apparatus used in much performance art. The spectator sitting in the back rows of a Rolling Stones or Bruce Springsteen concert, or even a Bill Cosby stand-up comedy performance, is present at a live performance, but hardly participates in it as such since his/her main experience of the performance is to read it off a video monitor.

Spectators at many sporting events now watch significant portions of the games they are attending on giant video screens. The rhetoric of mediatization embedded in such devices as the instant replay, the "simulcast," and the close-up, at one time understood to be secondary elaborations of what was originally a live event, are now constitutive of the live event itself. The games—their scheduling, the distribution of time within them, their rules, and so forth—have themselves been molded by their entry into the economy of repetition, which demands that the form of the games as live events be determined by the requirements of mediatization. For example, "media time-outs" periodically

10 Vsevolod Meyerhold, the Soviet theatre director, actively promoted this phenomenon. Noting in an essay of 1929–30 (Meyerhold 1969 [1930]:254–6) that "the cinema is attracting far greater audiences than any other type of theatre," he called for the "cinematization" of the theatre: "Give us the chance to work in a theatre incorporating modern techniques and capable of meeting the demands which our conception of the theatrical spectacle will create, and we shall stage productions which will attract just as many spectators as the cinema." Meyerhold's analysis was based, however, in a faulty perception of film's position in cultural economy. He saw sound film as an attempt by the cinema "to compete with the theatre, with live actors [. . . by] furnishing the screen with dialogue." This attempt was doomed to failure, in his view, because film's strength—and its international appeal—was as a visual, not a verbal, medium. When film acquired language, Meyerhold believed, it lost its universality. He felt that once the theatre could offer visual spectacle comparable to the cinema, an audience craving both that spectacle and words would flock back to the theatre.

bring professional and collegiate basketball games to a halt to allow television stations to show commercials. Given these conditions, "attending a live performance . . . these days is often roughly the experience of watching a small, noisy TV set in a large, crowded field" (Goodwin 1990:269).

Many of the most interesting recent examples of the incursion of media technology into live performance have taken place in the realm of symphonic music, traditionally a "high cultural" form in which the appearance of video projections and the like is much more surprising than in popular music concerts, which have always emphasized spectacle. It has taken place nevertheless: in 2004, the New York Philharmonic, in a bid to attract a younger audience, began to experiment with using live-feed video in its concerts so that audiences could experience close-up views of the musicians and conductor, a practice that met with resistance from some of the musicians (Robin Pogrebin, "For symphony fans, the touch of MTV," *New York Times*, February 23, 2004:E1). Other orchestras that have employed similar technologies include Vancouver and Atlanta; in some cases, video screens display not only live feed from the ongoing performance but such contextual material as interviews with composers. The experience of the live concert thus becomes somewhat like that of watching a DVD in which one can access extra features as well as the concert itself. This idea has taken on an even more remarkable form in an experiment by the Nashville Opera in which recorded commentary by the director and cast was made available via iPod during performances of Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*, in the manner of commentary tracks on DVDs (Pierre Ruhe, "Nashville opera works iPod insights into *Roméo*," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 2, 2007:F1).

The theatre, too, has experienced this attenuated incursion of media technology. The set for the 1995 Broadway revival of *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, for example, was "a wall composed of thirty-two projection cubes showing a video of computer-generated three-dimensional images" (von Hoffman 1995:132). In the theatre, as at the stadium, you are often watching television even when attending the live event, and audiences now expect live performances to resemble mediatized ones. The celebrated helicopter effect in *Miss Saigon*, to choose but one small example, represents a direct importation of cinematic or televisual realism into the theatre. As theatre designer Wendall K. Harrington has said, "theatre-goers today have been raised on television. They have a cinematic vocabulary that one must deal with" (quoted in *ibid.*:132). This development lends credence to Patrice Pavis's claim that "the formation . . . of audience taste by television

necessarily rebounds on the future audience for theatre, particularly in the demand for realism" (Pavis 1992:121).

Theatre audiences are not only seeing live performances that resemble mediatized ones as closely as possible, but are apparently modeling their responses to the live event on those expected of them by television. Ethan Mordden, quoted in an article analyzing the ubiquity of standing ovations on Broadway, offers the opinion that "audience reactions at live performances are so programmed as to seem canned, and . . . theatre audiences, emulating those in television studios, appear to applaud on cue" (Peter Marks, "Standing room only (and that's not good)," *New York Times*, December 8, 1995:H5). Of course, audience response has been the object of manipulation throughout the history of theatre: the organized clques employed from the ancient Roman theatre at least through the dawn of the twentieth century were a central mechanism of such manipulation (see Esslin 1977:64 for a useful summary of this phenomenon). It is tempting to draw a parallel between clques and the "Applause" signs used in television studios as mechanisms for cuing audience response, but it is likely that the more recent model is the proximate cause of contemporary audience behavior. Even in the absence of "Applause" signs, contemporary spectators respond in a programmed fashion, as if they were a television studio audience. Arguably, theatre audiences today respond spontaneously to the same sorts of cues that would be signaled by means of the "Applause" sign in a television studio because the studio audience has become the culturally engrained model for what gets applause and how audiences behave.<sup>11</sup>

Just as mediatization is reflected in the presence of the apparatus of reproduction in the live setting, so too is it reflected in the forms and cultural positions of performance. In his book on the political economy of music, Jacques Attali offers a useful description of the cultural economy in which performance currently takes place. He distinguishes an economy based on *representation* from one based on *repetition*:

Stated very simply, representation in the system of commerce is that which arises from a singular act; repetition is that which is mass-produced. Thus, a concert is a representation, but

11 Altman (1986:47) describes what he calls television's "internal audiences," which can be studio audiences, newscasters, announcers, commentators, or even characters in fictional programs. The reactions of the internal audiences focus viewer attention and response by functioning as a "sign that someone else thinks an important phenomenon is taking place on the screen," thus manipulating viewer attention.

also a meal à la carte in a restaurant; a phonograph record or a can of food is repetition.

(Attali 1985:41)

In his historical analysis, Attali points out that although “representation emerged with capitalism” when the sponsorship of concerts became a profitable enterprise and not merely the prerogative of a feudal lord, capital ultimately “los[t] interest in the economy of representation” (*ibid.*). Repetition, the mass-production of cultural objects, held greater promise for capital because whereas “in representation, a work is generally heard only once—it is a unique moment[,] in repetition, potential hearings are stockpiled” (*ibid.*). By being recorded and becoming mediatized, performance becomes an accumulable value. Live performance exists within the economy of repetition largely either to promote mass-produced cultural objects—such as the CDs and DVDs always available at performances by Cirque du Soleil or Blue Man Group—or to serve as raw material for mediatization, as when live theatre productions are staged in order to be reproduced on television.

To an ever-greater extent, live performances are economically tied to mediatization. In the case of professional sports, for instance, the live game can take place because of the income the teams receive from the companies that broadcast the game, who derive income, in turn, from advertising during the game. In many instances, the same capital interests are behind both live and mediatized cultural objects. This is true of the Broadway productions underwritten by cable television companies that I discuss below. Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, also mentioned below, is another example: Disney has established a division specifically to repurpose their film properties as live performances alongside the home videos, sound recordings, toys, and so on produced from the same materials.<sup>12</sup> In a particularly elaborate scenario, the casting of the lead players in a Broadway revival of the musical *Grease* that opened in the summer of 2007 was determined by the NBC reality television show *Grease: You’re the One that I Want*. In this *American Idol*-style competition, viewers’ votes ultimately determined which of the finalists were cast. In what could be seen as a test of the relationship between televisual liveness and theatrical liveness, viewers are placed in the distinctive position of having to assess the stageworthiness of performers they see live on the screen. The fact of the eventual live performance makes the

12 For a close analysis of the articulation of live performance to consumer culture, see Wickstrom (2006).

television program more compelling, independent of the theatrical production’s quality or reception. The success of this symbiotic economic relationship between television and theatre is clear: more than six months before opening, the Broadway show had garnered ticket receipts of over one million dollars on the strength of just one episode of the television program.

In these and all such instances, the economic success or failure of any one cultural object is much less important than the profit derived from the whole package. Until recently, this had long been the case for popular music concerts. Traditionally, they were staged to advertise recordings and were not always profitable in themselves. The recordings thus promoted, however, had the potential to be enormously profitable and more than make up for losses incurred by the concert tour. This relationship changed in 1999, when digital file sharing of musical recordings began to undermine the sale of recordings. As economists Julie Holland Mortimer and Alan Sorensen (2005) have shown, when it became clear that recordings were newly problematic as a source of revenue, the music industry as a whole began to emphasize live performance.<sup>13</sup> Between 1993 and 2002, the number of bands on tour more than doubled, as did the number of concerts on offer, while the revenue derived from these events more than tripled (Mortimer and Sorensen 2005:15). “For artists, the decline in revenues from recorded music after 1998 is striking, but appears to have been more than offset by a concomitant increase in concert revenues” (*ibid.*:32). The industry as a whole has not fully recovered, however, leading to the prediction that whereas in the past record labels generally did not participate extensively in concert promotion, “it seems likely a new equilibrium will emerge in which those labels play a larger role in concert promotion and claim a larger share of concert profits” (*ibid.*:33). The current trend, which will continue for the foreseeable future, is for highly capitalized cultural producers to envision “projects” that can be realized in many different

13 In a curious inversion of the traditional relationship, some rock artists and even jazz musicians are engaging in live performances of older albums, playing them in their entirety. Since the recordings in question are well established as back-catalog sellers, the concerts do not serve to promote them (though obviously they can revive interest and sales). Rather, the album is invoked as a beloved artifact in order to sell the concert. In at least one case in which a group’s best-known album is a live album (Cheap Trick’s *Live at Budokan*), the result was a live recreation of a live recording. And, needless to say, some of these concerts have themselves been released as live recordings. See Elisabeth Vincentelli, “If you won’t buy the album, they’ll sing it, from the top,” *New York Times*, December 31, 2006:2:28.

forms (as films, television programs, DVDs, live performances, sound recordings, toys, collectibles, etc.) rather than individual cultural objects.<sup>14</sup> Even if changing circumstances necessitate shifts of emphasis, none of the particular manifestations of the project need be profitable as long as the project as a whole is.

I first became aware of the imbrication of theatre within the economy of repetition in the early 1980s when I noticed that a number of the Broadway productions I was seeing had been underwritten in part by cable television money with the understanding that taped versions of the productions would appear later on cable networks.<sup>15</sup> Whether by conscious intention or not, the productions themselves (particularly their sets, but also their staging) were clearly “camera-ready”—pre-adjusted to the aspect ratio, intimate scale, and relative lack of detail of the television image—a suspicion borne out when I later saw the televised version of one of them. This is a particularly explicit example of the historical reversal I mentioned earlier. In a process driven by the economics of cultural production, television, which initially modeled itself on the theatre, especially in dramatic presentations, has become both model and *telos* for live theatre. In *The Post-Modern Aura*, Charles Newman (1985:129) declares that “the adaptation . . . has become the primary literary convention of the age.” As compared with those of television’s Golden Age, the productions to which I refer here did not need to be adapted to make the journey from stage to television, because the live versions had been constructed to be seen as *television*—they were pre-adapted (so to say) to the demands of their new medium. Contrary to Newman’s suggestion that the adaptation is the essential postmodern form, I would argue that the very fact that these productions required no adaptation in making the transition from representation to repetition is what defines them as postmodern. While I would not want to assert

- 14 The publishing industry is moving in a comparable direction. Whereas the historically conventional progression was from hardcover book to paperback, then perhaps to an audiobook (the possibility of film or television adaptation is also part of the sequence), today a “book” can begin at any point on this continuum. Ana Maria Alessi of HarperMedia describes the new approach: “We’re pursuing a number of authors where we are going to work with them on what we are calling ‘born digital’ products, where we will say it will start its life as a digital download audio book, and may then go to e-book and with that success, we may then go to paper” (quoted in Neary 2007).
- 15 For a useful overview of cable television’s involvement in the presentation of theatrical productions, see Rose (1986:229–33). Although Rose does not discuss the involvement of cable networks in the financing of live theatre, he does take note of the fact that cable executives lost interest in theatre around 1982 when they realized that an original television movie can be produced for less than the cost of mounting a theatrical production for broadcast (*ibid.*:231).

unconditionally that the live event I saw while sitting in the theatre was no different from its television counterpart, its identity as *theatre*, rather than television, and its specificity as a *live*, rather than mediatised, event had been called into question long before it showed up on the screen.

Instances in which the live event exists at least as much to serve as the basis for a mediatised representation as to be an end in itself are not confined to the world of commercial entertainment. Although some of the early documentation of the performance and body art of the early 1970s was not carefully planned or conceived as such, artists who were interested in preserving their work quickly became fully conscious of the need to stage it for the camera as much as for an immediately present audience, if not more so. Chris Burden, for example, “carefully staged each performance and had it photographed and sometimes also filmed; he selected usually one or two photographs of each event for display in exhibitions and catalogs . . . In this way, Burden produced himself for posterity through meticulously orchestrated textual and visual representations” (Jones 1994:568). As another example, the European body artist Gina Pane describes the role of photography in her work in the following terms: “It creates the work the audience will be seeing afterwards. So the photographer is not an external factor, he is positioned inside the action space with me, just a few centimeters away. There were times when he obstructed the [audience’s] view!” (quoted in O’Dell 1997:76–7).

It is clear, then, that such archetypal works of body and endurance art as Burden’s and Pane’s were not autonomous performances whose documentation supplements and provides access to an originary event.<sup>16</sup> Rather, the events were staged to be documented at least as much as to be seen by an audience; as Pane observes, sometimes the process of documentation even interfered with the initial audience’s ability to perceive the performance. In this respect, no documented work of performance art is performed solely as an end in itself: the performance is always at one level raw material for documentation, the final product through which it will be circulated and with which it will inevitably become identified, or, as Kathy O’Dell (*ibid.*:77) puts it, “performance art is the virtual equivalent of its representations.” These developments illustrate Walter Benjamin’s (1986 [1936]:33) claim in “The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction” that “To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility.”

- 16 For a fuller discussion of the relationship between performance art and its documentation, see Auslander (2006d).

Just as body art reflects the degree to which live performance is made to be reproduced as much as the commercial theatre, a more subtle incursion of mediatization into the live setting probably began earlier in avant-garde performance than in the commercial theatre and is currently manifest not only in the presence of video in much performance art, but in the kind of performing characteristic of the avant-garde. Thirty-five years ago, Michael Kirby (1984 [1972]:100) characterized the kind of performance taking place in much experimental theatre and performance art as “nonmatrixed representation,” in which the performer does not embody a fictional character but “merely carries out certain actions” that nevertheless can have referential or representational significance. As Kirby observes, the decade from the early 1960s through the early 1970s saw a trend away from conventional acting and toward nonmatrixed performance in American avant-garde theatre (*ibid.*:110). Although “character” did make something of a comeback in the performance art of the later 1970s and 1980s, the concept of nonmatrixed representation remains useful (and under-employed) for describing the performing evident in much performance art from the 1960s to the present. It also serves as a conceptual bridge from the experimental theatre of the 1960s, which was frequently ideologically opposed to the mass media, to subsequent mediatized performance.

The sense in which nonmatrixed representation provided a beach-head for mediatization within artistic practices that resisted it may best be seen in Kirby’s statement that “in nonmatrixed representation the referential elements are applied to the performer and are not acted by him” (*ibid.*:100). In other words, the performance requires some form of mediation of the performer’s actions to create meaning. Although that mediation was not usually technological in the performances Kirby discusses, film acting seems to be a good example of nonmatrixed representation. There are, after all, many times when a film actor, like the avant-garde performers Kirby mentions, is called upon merely to carry out certain actions that acquire representational and characterological significance only in the editing room.<sup>17</sup> Clint Eastwood’s squint, for

17 Kirby (1984 [1972]:107) acknowledges that “the film actor may do very little, while the camera and the physical/informational context do the ‘acting’ for him,” and he characterizes film acting as “simple acting,” which, for him, is at the “matrixed” end of the spectrum between completely nonmatrixed and fully matrixed performing. Although I employ Kirby’s vocabulary, my own characterization of film acting is somewhat different in emphasis, since I wish to position it toward the “nonmatrixed” side of Kirby’s performance continuum.

example, becomes meaningful only through the mediation of the camera in close-up and editing. Prior to this mediation, it is just Clint squinting.

Wooster Group performer Willem Dafoe suggested the parallel between avant-garde performing and film acting when I interviewed him in 1985. He told me that, from his point of view as a performer, what he does when performing in a Wooster Group piece is virtually identical to his acting in films—to him, both are primarily nonmatrixed, task-based performing (Auslander 1997:44). Dafoe is one of a growing group of American performance artists whose experiences in the avant-garde enabled them to make a smooth transition into acting on film or television; the careers of Laurie Anderson, Spalding Gray, Ron Vawter, Ann Magnuson, Eric Bogosian, Steve Buscemi, and many others are noteworthy in this regard. More important, their more experimental work itself has found its way into mass-cultural contexts in many cases: Anderson’s performances as rock concerts, films, and videos; Gray’s and Bogosian’s monologues as movies; Magnuson’s pop performance extravaganzas as cable television specials, and so forth.<sup>18</sup> Daryl Chin (1991:20) describes this trend disparagingly by saying that “much of what passes for performance art, experimental film, and ‘advanced’ visual art is more like an audition, a trial-run, a mock-up for work in television, commercial movies, or advertising.” While I disagree with Chin’s evaluation of this work, his point that it is now possible for a performer to move directly from the context of the avant-garde to that of mass culture is surely valid. I have proposed the expression “cross-over,” a venerable music business term referring to popular songs that appear on more than one hit parade, to characterize this phenomenon, with the understanding that what is being crossed over—the distinction between

18 I summarize these activities in Auslander (1993:62). A number of performance artists have had “specials” on cable networks or have appeared on public television and on the occasional network program, such as *Saturday Night Live*. Ann Magnuson has played characters from soap operas—one of her performances was entitled *Christmas Special* (1981); she has also appeared in films (*Making Mr. Right* (1987)) and on television (on *Anything but Love*), and toured with her satirical rock band, Bongwater. In 1990 she returned to solo performance, including an appearance at Lincoln Center in New York, in *You Could Be Home Now*. A number of these performers have achieved success in mass entertainment forms as a consequence of their fame as performance artists: Bogosian has acted in films and on television; his play *Talk Radio* was made into a film released in 1988. Anderson records for a major label and has appeared in a film of *United States*, which she has also produced as a sound recording and a colorful book. Spalding Gray also acted in films and on television, including in *The Nanny*; he appeared in film versions of several of his monologues and published them in book form.

the avant-garde and mass culture—is a distinction between received cultural categories that is more profound even than that between, say, rock and disco (which itself is considerable).<sup>19</sup> Ironically, one of the factors that contributed to the performance avant-garde's becoming ready for prime-time was its adoption of nonmatrixed performance, an approach originally meant to differentiate "performing" from conventional acting but that ultimately served as a training ground for the kinds of performance skills demanded by the mass media because, like film acting, it depends on mediation for its significance. In effect, the performance avant-garde had absorbed the phenomenology of mediatized performance even before it took up a position within the economy of repetition.

That mediatization is the experience to which live performance must refer and which it must seek to recreate is evident from examples drawn from a broad range of cultural contexts. The practice of staging live reenactments of televisual events began as early as the mid-1950s, when television plays like *Twelve Angry Men* and *Visit to a Small Planet* were presented on Broadway, and it has accelerated in recent times with the restaging of television programs as live performances (*The Real Live Brady Bunch*), animated films as stage musicals (Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*), and music videos as concerts. As the personnel involved in staging Madonna's tours freely admit, the goal of their productions, like that of many rock and pop concerts, is to reproduce the artist's music videos as closely as possible in a live setting on the assumption that the audience comes to the show expecting to see what it has already seen on television. One could say that because the music video sets the standard for what is "real" in this realm, only a recreation of its imagery can count as "realistic." Reciprocally, the fact that images from Madonna's videos can be recreated in a live setting enhances the realism of the original videos.

Another performance genre in which that assumption operates is stand-up comedy. From the advent of television until the 1980s, the conventional wisdom was always that television used up in a few minutes of broadcast time material it might have taken the comic years to hone. With the stand-up comedy boom of the 1980s, however, comics and comedy club owners discovered that audiences were only too happy to

19 For a more detailed discussion of cross-over performance artists, see Auslander (1992b). The issue of distinctions between genres of popular music, to which I refer here merely in passing, is central to my discussion in Chapter 3 of the present volume.

come to a club to hear the same jokes they had already heard on a comic's cable television special. (Indeed, they may have been disappointed not to hear them.<sup>20</sup>) In these cases, the traditional privileging of the "original," live performance over its elaborations and adaptations is undermined and reversed: in an "inversion of the structural dependence of copies upon originals" (Connor 1989:153) the mediatized performance has become the referent of the live one. "What irony: people originally intended to use the record to preserve the performance, and today the performance is only successful as a simulacrum of the record" (Attali 1985:85). Vincent Canby ("Look who's talking on Broadway: microphones," *New York Times*, January 22, 1995:2:1, 4-5) has argued that the use of sound systems and mixing techniques that produce digital-quality sound at live performances of Broadway musicals encourages audiences to assess live performances in terms of their resemblance to mediatized ones: "the theatre is fast approaching the day when a Broadway show will be a nearly perfect, if artificial, representation of a live performance." In all of these contexts, live performance is now a recreation of itself at one remove, filtered through its own mediatized reproductions. (I shall make a similar argument regarding live performance of rock and music video in Chapter 3.)

All of these instances, and a great many more that I could mention, exemplify the way mediatization is now explicitly and implicitly embedded within the live experience. I have described examples of the incursion of mediatization into a range of live performance events at some length to make the point that, within our mediatized culture, whatever distinction we may have supposed there to be between live and mediatized events is collapsing because live events are increasingly either made to be reproduced or are becoming ever more identical with mediatized ones. When I have presented this idea in public lectures, it has often been challenged by the claim that, while what I say may be true of large-scale entertainment such as sporting events, Broadway shows, and rock concerts, it does not hold true for more intimate forms of theatre and performance art. However, I do not believe this distinction to be valid. I am not arguing that all instances of live performance reflect the incursion of mediatization in the same ways or to the same degree, and scale is certainly one differentiating factor. Some sectors of our cultural economy determine that if an event is to occur live at all, it must be mounted on a large scale. Connor (1989:151-2) points out, for

20 See Auslander (1992b) for a discussion of the comedy boom and television in a somewhat different context.

example, that the use of giant video screens at rock concerts provides a means of creating in a large-scale event the effect of "intimacy and immediacy" associated with smaller live events. In order to retain those characteristics, large-scale events must surrender a substantial measure of their liveness to mediatization. Ironically, intimacy and immediacy are precisely the qualities attributed to television that enabled it to displace live performance. In the case of such large-scale events, live performance survives as television.

More intimate live performances may not be mediatized in the same way or to the same effect. Inasmuch as mediatization is the cultural context in which live performances are now inevitably situated, however, its influence nevertheless pervades even these smaller-scale events. I have already discussed this relation to the documentation of performance art. But mediatization is not just a question of the employment of media technology; it is also a matter of what might be called "media epistemology."

[It] should not be understood as meaning simply that our world-view is being increasingly dominated by technical equipment. Even more important is the fact that we often perceive reality only through the mediation of machines (microscope, telescope, television). These frame works . . . preform our perception of [the world].

(Bolz and van Reijen 1996:71)

Even small-scale, intimate live performances can be products of this preformed perception. In an earlier analysis (Auslander 1992b:70–81), I pointed out that both Laurie Anderson's media-saturated performances and Spalding Gray's low-tech, intimate ones can be seen as *televsual*, even in live presentations. To those familiar with her performance work, Anderson's engagement of media technology is well known (see *ibid.*:105–24; I shall also have occasion to refer to one of her performances at the end of this chapter). Because Gray's relation to mediatization is less obvious, I will review that part of my argument briefly. I contend that his monologue performances were televisual in two respects. First, their narrative structure, which followed the continuing adventures of a small group of central characters whose essential traits never changed, was very close to that of the television serial. Second, and more important here, Gray created a performance persona that:

can crop up anywhere—as character and narrator in [his] monologues, whether live or recorded; as a television or film

actor (I would insist here that when we see Gray acting on television, in film or on the . . . stage . . . what we are seeing is the "Spalding" persona as actor); as a character in, and the author of a book . . . the "Spalding" persona, which began as a fictional conceit of his performances, has become "real" by virtue of its continual reappearance in the cultural arena . . . The blending of real and fabricated personae and situations that occurs when performance personae assume the same functions as "real" people in the media has the same disorienting effect as the flowing together of various levels and types of meanings on television [itself].

(*ibid.*:77–8)

That Gray's performance persona itself can be seen as a televisual entity, that the commercial theatre now frequently presents live versions of films and television and camera-ready productions of plays, that live concerts often recreate the imagery of music videos, that the non-matrixed performing characteristic of avant-garde theatre proved a suitable training ground for television and film acting all suggest that the incursion of mediatization into live performance is not simply a question of the use of certain equipment in that context. It also has to do with approaches to performance and characterization, and the mobility and meanings of those within a particular cultural context. What we are seeing in many cases is not so much the incursion of media-derived "technics" and techniques into the context of live performance but, rather, live performance's absorption of a media-derived epistemology.

Thinking about these phenomena has led me back to Walter Benjamin's crucially important essay "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction" (1986 [1936]). The focus of Benjamin's analysis in that essay is on the historical progression from unique, "auratic" cultural forms to mass-reproduced ones. Except in his brief discussion of Dada, Benjamin does not take note there of the kind of doubling back that I have described, in which older forms emulate and incorporate newer ones. He was remarkably prescient, however, and many of the terms of his analysis still shed light on the current situation.

I will begin by noting Benjamin's emphasis on the idea that "human sense perception . . . is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well" (*ibid.*:31). Many aspects of our relation to performance suggest that mediatization has had a powerful effect in shaping the sensory norm for the current historical moment. Roger Copeland (1990:29) has explained the use of amplification in live

theatrical performance in precisely these terms: "on Broadway these days even nonmusical plays are routinely miked, in part because the results sound more 'natural' to an audience whose ears have been conditioned by stereo television, high fidelity LPs, and compact disks." The use of almost invisible microphones placed on the bodies of the actors only reinforces our perception of an amplified voice as "natural." Andrew Goodwin (1990:266) has identified another intriguing case of the normalization of mediatized sound: that of the handclap effect used on many pop and dance records. Recordings of the 1970s frequently used a particular percussion synthesizer, the TR-808, as the source for this sound. After a decade of synthesized handclaps, when musicians in the 1980s wanted to sample a handclap effect from existing recordings, "they sampled their own electronic simulation from the TR-808 machine, rather than 'real' handclaps" because "the electronic handclap sounded so 'natural' to pop musicians and audiences" (*ibid.*). Linda Dusman (1994:140), a composer, has suggested that the dominance of recording as the normative experience of music has made it almost impossible for audiences to hear a live musical performance as something actually occurring in the moment rather than a reproduction of a recording.

The degree to which our eyes and ears have been conditioned by mediatization was clear well before the advent of compact discs, stereo television, and sampling: think of the people who have long brought portable radios or television sets to the baseball park, or consider Evan Eisenberg's anecdote of stumbling upon a free jazz concert in Central Park in New York City, only to notice that some spectators were listening to the radio broadcast of the very concert they were attending (Eisenberg 1987:85). An even more developed version of the latter scenario occurred at an Atlanta performance of the rock group Yes. The group's set-up included a system that permitted those attending the concert to listen to it on headphones plugged directly into the group's mixing board.

Benjamin describes the mode of perception he saw in an emergent mass culture in terms of overcoming distance (and therefore banishing aura, which can be understood as a function of distance). He refers to:

the desire of contemporary masses to bring things "closer" spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction.

(Benjamin 1986 [1936]:31-2)

Benjamin's notion of a mass desire for proximity, and its alliance with a desire for reproduced objects, provides a useful matrix for understanding the interrelation of live and mediatized forms that I have described. The people listening to the Central Park concert on the radio and those watching Yes with headphones clapped on their ears are trying to achieve a kind of aural intimacy that can be obtained only from the reproduction of sound. The use of giant video screens at sporting events, music and dance concerts, and other performances is another direct illustration of Benjamin's concept: the kind of proximity and intimacy we can experience with television, which has become our model for close-up perception, but that is traditionally absent from these performances, can be reintroduced only by means of their "videation." When a live performance recreates a mass-reproduced one, as in the case of the replication of music video imagery in concerts or cartoon images in theatre, an inverted version of the same effect takes place. Because we are already intimately familiar with the images from our televisual and filmic experience of them, we see them as proximate, irrespective of how far away they may be in physical distance. If you know what Madonna's videos look like from MTV, you can read the images in her concerts as if you were in intimate relation to them, even from the last row. Whether the effect of intimacy results from the videation of the live event or from acquaintance with the live images from their prior reproductions, it makes live performances seem more like television, and thus enables live events to fulfill the desire for reproduction that Benjamin notes. Even in the most intimate of performance art projects, in which we may be only a few feet away from the performers, we are still frequently offered the opportunity for the even greater intimacy of watching the performers in close-up on video monitors, as if we can experience true proximity only in televisual terms.

This points to another of Benjamin's (*ibid.*:30) postulates: that "the quality of [the original's] presence is always depreciated" by reproduction. Steve Wurtzler's analysis of this effect in the context of sports may be generalized to many other cultural contexts:

Over time, as the conventions of the televisually posited live come to constitute the way we think of the live, attending the game . . . becomes a degraded version of the event's televisual representation. This degradation of the live is itself compensated for by the use of Diamondvision and instant replays on elaborate stadium score boards . . . In other words, the degradation of the live is compensated for by the inscription into the "real" of its representation.

(Wurtzler 1992:92)

The ubiquity of reproductions of performances of all kinds in our culture has led to the depreciation of live presence, which can only be compensated for by making the perceptual experience of the live as much as possible like that of the mediatized, even in cases where the live event provides its own brand of proximity.

I will conclude this section with a brief consideration of mixed-media performances,<sup>21</sup> in the cultural/perceptual environment I have described. There has been a critical discourse surrounding the concept of mixed-media performance and the possibilities of incorporating film into theatre since at least the early 1920s.<sup>22</sup> Robert Edmond Jones (1941:17) declared: "In the simultaneous use of the living actor and the talking picture in the theatre there lies a wholly new theatrical art, whose possibilities are as infinite as those of speech itself." Whereas film, for Jones, is "the perfect medium for expressing the Unconscious," live actors express conscious reality. Therefore, the combination of the two media "will reveal simultaneously the two worlds of the Conscious and the Unconscious . . . the objective world of actuality and the subjective world of motive" (*ibid.*:18). Implicit in Jones's call for this form of mixed-media performance is the assumption that live and filmed representations can be combined as complementary and equally compelling languages.

The notion that, working together, stage and screen can convey a fuller sense of what it is to be human than either can alone is premised on the assumption of their working together as complementary equals, an assumption that still underlies much performance work that incorporates both live and screened bodies (see, e.g., Dixon 2006). The possibility that audience perception may inevitably be drawn to a screen even when there are human beings also present, for instance, is not usually considered as part of the equation. Jones, for one, does not take cultural economy into consideration or raise the question of how live performance juxtaposed with film would be perceived by an audience that had been deserting theatres in favor of movie houses for over twenty years.<sup>23</sup> Would such an audience perceive the live aspects of the kind of

21 By "mixed-media performances" I mean events combining live and mediatized representations: live actors with film, video, or digital projections, for instance.

22 In 1923, Sergei M. Eisenstein directed a stage production that incorporated filmed sequences. He discussed the possibilities of combining film with theatre, and of making the theatre more cinematic, in "The montage of attractions" (Eisenstein 1988 [1923]).

23 Movies had been stealing American audiences from theatre both in New York and on the road since the early 1920s. By 1930, about twenty Broadway theatres

mixed-media production envisioned by Jones as equally compelling as its filmed components, or might they see the live as an uninteresting, degraded version of the filmic?

I am skeptical of discussions of work based on the interaction of live and mediatized performance that do not factor in such considerations. As Robert Wechsler (2006) points out, one reason why technical media compel attention is quite simply the "how'd-they-do-it?" factor. The audience's inevitable curiosity about how technical effects are achieved makes them centers of attention, an effect compounded by the ways such devices may reiterate the audience's experience of dominant media forms and appeal to the dominant mode of perception. Although some performance makers seek transparency in their uses of technology or to demystify the apparatus, it is not at all clear that such tactics derail an audience's fascination with technological spectacle and novelty.

Twenty-five years after Robert Edmond Jones called for the unification of theatre and cinema, the actor Roberts Blossom, who was combining live actors with film in a series of experiments he called *Filmstage*,<sup>24</sup> explicated his activity in terms very similar to Jones's. Whereas Jones saw film as representing the unconscious and live actors as representing consciousness, Blossom (1966:70) saw film as representing consciousness and the live actors as representing corporeality, physical existence. Unlike Jones, who saw theatre and film as portraying complementary aspects of the psyche, Blossom saw the live and filmed elements of his productions as competing with one another. He acknowledged that the competition between the actors' live bodies and the filmed images in these mixed-media performances was intrinsically unfair because the filmed images were inevitably more compelling. By comparison with the films, the actors appeared as "fifty-watt bulbs waiting to be screwed into their source and to shine with the light that is perpetual (behind them,

"were alternating motion pictures with plays"; many of these theatres soon became movie houses (Poggi 1968:83). Poggi comments: "the motion pictures could not have crushed the legitimate theatre if there had been a real preference for live drama. Theatre managers would never have turned their buildings over to the movies if they could have made more money by booking plays" (*ibid.*:43). I assume that Jones was aware of these developments. It is possible, therefore, that his proposal for mixed-media performance was a covert way of recuperating theatre's enemy.

24 *Filmstage* was but one of many intermedia experiments undertaken in the mid-1960s by theatre, film, and performance artists. Carolee Schneeman and Robert Whitman, for instance, both staged "Happenings" that juxtaposed live performers with filmed images. For a useful contemporary survey of these activities and other experimental uses of film, video, and live performance, see Youngblood (1970).

around them) but which they can only reflect at fifty watts" (*ibid.*). In terms of psychic economy, we might interpret Blossom as saying that physical existence is only ever a pale reflection of the consciousness underlying it. But his statement can also be read in terms of cultural economy. In those terms, the live actors are only pale reflections of the mediatized representations that dominate the cultural landscape. Although Blossom (*ibid.*:72) may be implying the possibility of existing as pure consciousness when he concludes that "our presence as bodies begins to be suspect," that statement also summarizes the devaluation of live presence in mediatized culture.

If the value of live presence has depreciated in our mediatized culture, it would seem that audiences would be more likely to perceive the live elements of mixed-media performances as the fifty-watt bulbs described by Blossom than as the equal partners of mediatized representations envisioned by Jones. This question is difficult to address in any other than anecdotal terms: when we go to a concert employing a large video screen, for instance, what do we look at? Do we concentrate our attention on the live bodies or are our eyes drawn to the screen, as Benjamin's postulate of our desire for proximity would predict? At a party I once attended, I found the latter to be the case. There was a live band, dancing, and a video simulcast of the dancers on two screens adjacent to the dance floor. My eye was drawn to the screen, compared to which the live dancers indeed had all the brilliance of fifty-watt bulbs.

Another example, one that carries this discussion into the digital domain, is *Pôles*, by Pps Danse of Montreal, a performance described by its makers as "Dance+Virtual." The piece combines two live dancers with holographic projections of themselves deployed against a shifting background of digital projections. The best moments of *Pôles* are those in which it is difficult to distinguish the living dancers from their holographic counterparts. In one sequence, four figures chase each other through a grotto-like projection; the three-dimensional dancers seem as able to enter into the two-dimensional projected space as the wraith-like holograms. On other occasions, the holograms are projected on to the dancers to produce the effect of dematerializing bodies. The question that such a performance raises for me is: do we see a piece like *Pôles* as a juxtaposition of the live and the digital, a shifting among realms? My feeling is that the answer is no, that we now experience such work as a fusion, not a con-fusion, of realms, a fusion that we see as taking place within a digital environment that incorporates the live elements as part of its raw material. Rather than a conversation among distinct media, the production presents the assimilation of varied materials to the cultural dominant. In this sense, Dance+Virtual=Virtual.

I do not wish to oversimplify, however. While I consider it crucial to keep in mind that different media or modes of expression do not interact on a level cultural playing field, I am not suggesting that the relationships among different elements at different moments of a performance are simply fixed at a cultural-economic level. Surveying performance work that combines live and screened images from Erwin Piscator's Epic Theatre through the work of the Wooster Group, the Builders' Association, Cyurbia Productions, and many others, it is clear there are ways of asserting the presence of a human body over that of a projection, for instance, or vice versa, and that screened images may integrate seamlessly with live ones, or one may be used to comment on the other, and so on. However, none of this changes the fact that such performances occur now in a cultural context in which the projection is more closely related to the dominant media than is the live body, a fact that undoubtedly has implications for how the audience perceives the whole performance.<sup>25</sup>

### Against ontology

Live performance thus has become the means by which mediatized representations are naturalized, according to a simple logic that appeals to our nostalgia for what we assumed was the im-mediate: if the mediatized image can be recreated in a live setting, it must have been "real" to begin with. This schema resolves (or rather, fails to resolve) into an impossible oscillation between the two poles of what once seemed a clear opposition: whereas mediatized performance derives its authority from its reference to the live or the real, the live now derives its authority from its reference to the mediatized, which derives its authority from its reference to the live, etc. The paradigm that best describes the current relationship between the live and the mediatized is the Baudrillardian paradigm of *simulation*: "nothing separates one pole from the other, the initial from the terminal: there is just a sort of

25 The cultural terrain is uneven in other ways, too. Turning from the question of dominance to that of prestige, for instance, one may find a somewhat different story. As Martin Barker (2003) suggests, even though the theatre has, in my terms, much lower cultural presence and power than, say, cinema or the Internet, it may enjoy greater prestige because it continues to be perceived as a high art form requiring specific educational and cultural capital to appreciate. Even though most people now would prefer to watch television or play a computer game than go to the theatre, they may still accord the theatre greater prestige. Video on stage or in an installation may thus become "art," while video on your television set remains "entertainment."

contraction into each other, a fantastic telescoping, a collapsing of the two traditional poles into one another: an IMPLOSION." Baudrillard states, with typical insistence, about such implosions: "this is where simulation begins" (Baudrillard 1983:57, original emphasis). In the previous sections of this chapter, I indicated the twin vectors of implosion in the case of live and mediatized performance. As the mediatized replaces the live within cultural economy, the live itself incorporates the mediatized, both technologically and epistemologically. The result of this implosion is that a seemingly secure opposition is now a site of anxiety, the anxiety that underlies many performance theorists' desire to reassert the integrity of the live and the corrupt, co-opted nature of the mediatized. One of the most articulate versions of this position is Peggy Phelan's account of what she understands to be the ontology of performance. For Phelan, the basic ontological fact of performance is that its

only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction, it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology.

(Phelan 1993b:146)

For Phelan, performance's devotion to the "now" and the fact that its only continued existence is in the spectator's memory enable it to sidestep the economy of repetition. "Performance's independence from mass reproduction, technologically, economically, and linguistically, is its greatest strength" (*ibid.*:149).<sup>26</sup>

Although it may seem that live performance cannot be mass-reproduced, I shall argue otherwise later in this section. I have already suggested that live performance is becoming progressively less independent of media technology. Phelan's claim that performance is linguistically independent from mass reproduction is based on a tautological argument. She posits performance as nonreproductive and writing as a form of reproduction, allowing her to conclude that writing (language)

26 I realize that I am considering only a portion of Phelan's argument, which ultimately has to do with issues of presence and visibility for a political performance practice. I am concerned here only with her fundamental ontological premises.

cannot capture performance. To the extent, however, that mediatization, the technology of reproduction, is embedded within the language of live performance itself, performance cannot claim linguistic independence from mass reproduction, either. It interests me that although Phelan discusses performance artist Angelika Festa's *Untitled Dance (with fish and others)* (1987) in the context of her argument concerning the ontology of performance, she does not specifically address the encroachment of technologies of reproduction on this piece, in which Festa made extensive use of video technology to construct the images Phelan analyzes. It is ironic that the video camera, perhaps the *sine qua non* of the pressures that Phelan sees as compromising the ontological integrity of performance, is itself integral to the performance in question.<sup>27</sup>

Much as I admire Phelan's commitment to a rigorous conception of an ontology of liveness, I doubt very strongly that any cultural discourse can stand outside the ideologies of capital and reproduction that define a mediatized culture or should be expected to do so, even to assume an oppositional stance.<sup>28</sup> I agree with Sean Cubitt (1994:283-4) when he says that "in our period of history, and in our Western societies, there is no performance that is not always already a commodity." Furthermore, as Pavis (1992:134) observes, "the work of art in the era of technical reproduction' cannot escape the socioeconomic-technological domination which determines its aesthetic dimension." It is not realistic to propose that live performance can remain ontologically pristine or that it operates in a cultural economy separate from that of the mass media.

Despite the recognition by critics such as Pavis (*ibid.*) of what he calls the inevitable "technological and aesthetic contamination" of live performance in the economy of repetition, there remains a strong tendency in performance theory to place live performance and mediatized or technologized forms in direct opposition to one another. The terms of this opposition focus on two primary issues: *reproduction* and *distribution*.<sup>29</sup> Herbert Molderings (1984:172-3) defines the question of reproduction (or recording) by saying:

27 I am not suggesting that Phelan presents Festa's performance as an ontologically pure example. Phelan expresses significant doubts about several aspects of the performance.

28 This position is central to my *Presence and Resistance* (Auslander 1992b), where I argue it in detail.

29 I have borrowed these categories from Pavis (1992:104-7). They are two of fifteen vectors identified by Pavis along which live performance and media may be

in contrast to traditional art[,] performances do not contain a reproduction element . . . Whatever survives of a performance in the form of a photograph or videotape is no more than a fragmentary, petrified vestige of a lively process that took place at a different time in a different place.

Or, in Phelan's (1993b:3, 146) succinct formulations, performance "can be defined as representation without reproduction"; "Performance's being becomes itself through disappearance." In terms of distribution, Pavis (1992:101) contrasts the one-to-many model of broadcasting with the "limited range" of theatre: "media easily multiply the number of their spectators, becoming accessible to a potentially infinite audience. If theatre relationships are to take place, however, the performance cannot tolerate more than a limited number of spectators." In these formulations, live performance is identified with intimacy and disappearance, media with a mass audience, reproduction, and repetition. Phelan (1993b:149) offers an apt summary of this view: "Performance honors the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward."

Overtly or covertly, the writers I have just cited valorize the live over the mediatized, as is evident in Molderings's contrast between "lively" performance and "petrified" video. Even Pavis, who argues that theatre needs to be seen in relation to other media, nevertheless refers to the influence of other media on theatre as a *contamination*. All too often, such analyses take on the air of a melodrama in which virtuous live performance is threatened, encroached upon, dominated, and contaminated by its insidious Other, with which it is locked in a life-and-death struggle. From this point of view, once live performance succumbs to mediatization, it loses its ontological integrity.

At one level, the anxiety of critics who champion live performance is understandable, given the way our cultural economy privileges the mediatized and marginalizes the live. In the economy of repetition, live performance is little more than a vestigial remnant of the previous historical order of representation, a hold-over that can claim little in the way of cultural presence or power. Perhaps making a virtue of necessity, Phelan (*ibid.*:148) claims that live performance's inability to

compared. The others are: relationship between production and reception, voice, audience, nature of signifiers, mode of representation, conditions of production, dramaturgy, specificity, framing, norms and codes, repertoire, fictional status, and indices of fictional status.

participate in the economy of repetition "gives performance art its distinctive oppositional edge."<sup>30</sup>

These formulations of the relationship between live performance and mediatization as oppositional are not neutrally descriptive; rather, they reflect an ideology central to contemporary performance studies. Molderings (1984:178-9) describes performance art as a direct counterresponse to television's banalization and objectification of the visual image. Phelan picks up this theme in a discussion of Anna Deveare Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles* (1992), suggesting that Smith's performance, which incorporates, alludes to, and reinterprets the widely disseminated media images of the 1992 Los Angeles riots, "seeks to preserve and contain the chaotic flood of images the cameras 'mechanically' reproduced" (Phelan 1993a:6). Phelan observes that this way of seeing the relationship between the live and the mediatized is based on "an old boast—television cameras give you only 'images,' and theatre gives you living truth" and emphasizes the degree to which Smith's performance is indebted to "the camera that precedes and frames and invites" it. She goes on to suggest that Smith's performance "also offers another way to interpret the relation between film and theatrical performance: the camera's own performativity needs to be read as theatre" (*ibid.*:7).<sup>31</sup> Even though Phelan describes a subtle interaction between live and mediatized forms that goes beyond simple opposition, her suggestion that the action of the camera be seen as theatre tends to reinscribe the traditional privileging

30 I would like to suggest in passing that in the context of a mediatized, repetitive economy, using the technology of reproduction in ways that defy that economy may be a more significantly oppositional gesture than asserting the value of the live. I am thinking, for instance, of Christine Kozlov's installation, *Information: No Theory* (1970), which consisted of a tape-recorder equipped with a tape loop, whose control was fixed in the "record" mode. Therefore, as the artist herself noted, new information continuously replaced existing information on the tape, and "proof of the existence of the information [did] not in fact exist" (quoted in Meyer 1972:172). The functions of reproduction, storage, and distribution that animate the network of repetition were thus undermined by this way of using the very technology that brought that network into being (see Attali 1985:32). In this context, reproduction without representation may be more radical than representation without reproduction.

31 Phelan (1993a:6) describes Smith's *Twilight* as signaling a shift in the relationship between television and theatre: "formerly, live theatre hoped to find itself preserved on television, while Smith's performance transforms the 'raw' televised story into stylized, well-rehearsed drama." I tend to see Smith's work as belonging to a general cultural trend in which mediatized events are reconfigured as live ones. In considering the relationship between theatre and television, does Smith's derivation of her performance from televisual documentary sources constitute a new development or the extension of an established cultural trend into a new area?

of the live over the mediatized: for her, it is by entering the space of theatre, or being seen as theatre, that media images become subject to critique. I believe that this privileging of live performance as a site of critique is an article of faith for most who analyze performance in political terms. If I were to insist that Smith's performance works in the opposite way to that which Phelan suggests—that Smith's incorporation of mediatized images does not transform them into theatre but, rather, turns her performances metaphorically into television—many commentators would feel I was denying that her performance could function critically.

My purpose here is to destabilize these theoretical oppositions of the live and the mediatized somewhat, first by reference to what might be called the "electronic ontology" of media (these initial observations will not pertain to film, of course, whose ontology is photographic rather than electronic):

the broadcast flow is . . . a vanishing, a constant disappearing of what has just been shown. The electron scan builds up two images of each frame shown, the lines interlacing to form a "complete" picture. Yet not only is the sensation of movement on screen an optical illusion brought about by the rapid succession of frames: each frame is itself radically incomplete, the line before always fading away, the first scan of the frame all but gone, even from the retina, before the second interlacing scan is complete . . . TV's presence to the viewer is subject to constant flux: it is only intermittently "present," as a kind of writing on the glass . . . caught in a dialectic of constant becoming and constant fading.

(Cubitt 1991:30-1)

As this quotation from Cubitt suggests, disappearance may be even more fundamental to television than it is to live performance—the televisual image is always simultaneously coming into being and vanishing; there is no point at which it is fully present.<sup>32</sup> At the electronic level, the televisual image is hardly a petrified remnant of some other event, as Molderings would have it, but exists rather as a lively, and forever

32 Kozlov's tape-recorder installation replicates this process of the continuous replacement of electronic information. The difference is that whereas in the normal usage of video this process is the necessary condition for the creation of a perceivable image, it becomes, when applied by Kozlov to sound recording, a way of making an imperceptible sound image that exists only theoretically.

unresolved, process. For some theorists, the televisual image's existence only in the present also obviates the notion that television (and video) is a form of reproduction. Contrasting television with film in this regard, Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow (1977:54-6) point out that:

where film sides towards instantaneous memory ("everything is absent, everything is *recorded*—as a memory trace which is so at once, without having been something else before"<sup>33</sup>) television operates much more as an absence of memory, the recorded material it uses—including material recorded on film—instituted as actual in the production of the television image.

Regardless of whether the image conveyed by television is live or recorded (and, as Stanley Cavell (1982:86) reminds us, on television there is "no sensuous distinction between the live and the repeat or replay") its production as a televisual image occurs only in the present moment. "Hence the possibility of *performing* the television image—electronic, it can be modified, altered, transformed in the moment of its transmission, is a production in the present" (Heath and Skirrow 1977:53). Although Heath and Skirrow are referring here to broadcast television, what they say is as true for video as it is for broadcast: the televisual image is not only a reproduction or repetition of a performance, but a performance in itself.

If we shift our gaze from the electronic writing on the glass to consider, for a moment, the nature of the magnetic writing on a videotape, another issue comes to the fore. Cubitt (1991:169) posits as a crucial feature of the medium "the phenomena [*sic*] of lost generations" resulting from the various stages of life a video image is likely to pass through, "from master to submaster, to broadcast, to timeshift, where it begins to degenerate with every play." Video shares this characteristic with other means of technical reproduction, including photographic and sound-recording media. Since tapes, films, and other recording media deteriorate over time and with each use, they are physically different objects at each playing, even though this process may become perceptible only when it reaches critical mass (e.g., when the film or video develops visible flaws). Each time I watch a videotape is the only time I can watch that tape in that state of being because the very process of playing it alters it. The tape that I initially placed in my VCR or audio player started disappearing the moment I began watching it or listening

33 This quotation is from Christian Metz.

to it. (This has not changed with the shift to digital media. As a research team on the preservation of television archives reports, "discrete digital media suffers [sic] from many of the same problems of discrete analogue media" (Addis *et al.* 2005:3). They therefore recommend not only that analogue archives be digitized but that digital archives be transferred to fresh media every three to five years.) Disappearance, existence only in the present moment, is not, then, an ontological quality of live performance that distinguishes it from modes of technical reproduction. Both live performance and the performance of mediatization are predicated on disappearance: the televisual image is produced by an ongoing process in which scan lines replace one another, and it is always as absent as it is present; the use of recordings causes them to degenerate. In a very literal, material sense, televisual and other technical reproductions, like live performances, become themselves through disappearance.

I want to worry this question of reproduction in one last context, by considering the related issue of repetition. Writing on the experience of film, Cavell (1982:78) observes that:

movies . . . at least some movies, maybe most, used to exist in something that resembles [a] condition of evanescence, viewable only in certain places at certain times, discussable solely as occasions for sociable exchange, and never seen more than once, and then more or less forgotten.

It is remarkable how closely Cavell's description of the film experience parallels descriptions of the experience of live performance. The fact that Cavell is talking about the past, probably about the heyday of the American film industry in the 1930s and 1940s, and about a way of experiencing film that we no longer believe to be typical, is critical. Film is no longer an unrepeatable experience confined to particular places and times: people frequently see their favorite films multiple times, and have opportunities to do so afforded them by the appearances of these movies on cable and broadcast television, and on DVDs and the Internet. If we want to, we can own copies of movies and watch them whenever, and as often, as we wish. Whereas film was once experienced as evanescence, it is now experienced as repetition. The crucial point is that this transition was not caused by any substantive change in the film medium itself.<sup>34</sup> As a medium, film can be used to provide an evanescent experience that leaves little behind, in the manner of a live performance, or it can

34 One change that deserves mention is the replacement of highly volatile nitrate film stocks with safety stocks, a transition that was not complete until the 1950s. The

provide an experience based in repetition and the stockpiling of film commodities.<sup>35</sup> Cubitt (1991:92–3) makes much the same point with respect to video, arguing that repetition is not "an essence in the medium." Rather, "the possibility of repetition is only a possibility"; the actual use of the medium is determined by "the imaginary relation of viewer and tape." Repetition is not an ontological characteristic of either film or video that determines the experiences these media can provide, but a historically contingent effect of their culturally determined uses.

Just as recording media like film and video can provide an experience of evanescence, so, too, live forms such as theatre have been used in ways that do not respect, or even recognize, the ostensible spatial and temporal characteristics of live performance. I would go so far as to argue that live performances can be mass-produced. One example would be the WPA Federal Theater's 1936 production of *It Can't Happen Here*, which opened simultaneously in eighteen different American cities. The intention of this experiment is clearly suggested by a contemporary account, which observes that the Federal Theater produced the play "after a motion picture corporation decided not to do it" (Whitman 1937:6). To take a more recent example, producers of the genre known as "interactive plays" envision live performances as franchisable commodities. Interactive plays are environmental performances that incorporate varying degrees of spectator participation.<sup>36</sup> In *Tamara*, for instance, spectators follow the character of their choice through a series

early nitrate stocks would frequently ignite in the projector; nitrate prints were often discarded after only a few showings because of the stock's dangerous instability. Following Raymond Williams's critique of technological determinism, I would insist that how technologies are used should be understood as *effect* rather than *cause* (Williams 1992 [1974]:3–8). In this case, I would argue that the transition from the evanescent experience of film to the experience of film as repetition was not caused by such technological changes as the development of safety stocks and the advent of video. Rather, the development of those technologies was the intentional result of a social need for cultural forms offering an experience of repetition, a need perhaps related to the desire for reproductions cited by Benjamin and discussed earlier.

35 Sontag (1966:31, original emphasis) makes two points that challenge the distinction between film as repeatable and live performance as nonrepeatable:

With respect to any *single* experience, it hardly matters that a film is usually identical from one projection of it to another while theatre performances are highly mutable . . . a movie may be altered from one projection to the next. Harry Smith, when he runs off his own films, makes each projection an unrepeatable performance.

36 For a discussion of the interactive theatre phenomenon, see Peter Marks, "When the audience joins the cast," *New York Times*, April 22, 1997:B1:7).

of rooms, witnessing various scenes of a narrative. In *Tony 'n' Tina's Wedding* and similar performances, spectators interact with the performers by eating with them, dancing with them, gossiping with them, etc. Barrie Wexler, the California producer of *Tamara*, "franchises . . . *Tamara* worldwide, replicating the product in exact and dependable detail. 'It's like staying in the Hilton,' he explains, 'everything is exactly the same no matter where you are'" (Fuchs 1996:142). In these cases, live performance takes on the defining characteristics of a mass medium: it makes the same text available simultaneously to a large number of participants distributed widely in space. In fact, Hollywood saw the Federal Theater as a competitor, and opposed it (Whitman 1937:130-2).

It is crucial to observe that the intentions underlying these two examples of this use of the live medium are very different, and each is arguably reflective of its historical moment. The ideological positioning of these productions is determined not by their shared use of live performance as a mass medium, but by the different intentions and contexts of those uses. The Federal Theater's practices may be said to have grown out of a generally left-populist attitude, while interactive plays are the creatures of postmodern consumer capitalism (see Fuchs 1996:129). Ironically, interactive plays like *Tamara* commodify the very aspects of live performance that are said to resist commodification. Because they are designed to offer a different experience at each visit, they can be merchandised as events that must be purchased over and over again: the ostensible evanescence and nonrepeatability of the live experience ironically become selling points to promote a product that must be fundamentally the same in each of its instantiations. The promise of having a different experience at each attendance at an interactive play is meaningful only if each is clearly recognizable as a different experience of the same, essentially static, object. One of those selling points is, of course, the intimacy of witnessing the narrative from a particular character's perspective or physically interacting with the characters. Again, the alliance of the desire for proximity with that for reproduction suggested by Benjamin is apparent.

My contention that theatre can function as a mass medium leads me to disagree with Noël Carroll, who defines "mass art" in a way that excludes theatre and all live performance from that category. Carroll (1998:196) asserts that:

X is a mass artwork if and only if 1. x is a multiple instance or type artwork, 2. produced and distributed by a mass technology, 3. which artwork is intentionally designed to gravitate in its

structural choices (for example, its narrative forms, symbolism, intended affect, and even its content) toward those choices that promise accessibility with minimum effort, virtually on first contact, for the largest number of untutored (or relatively untutored) audiences.

Although there clearly is much theatre and live performance that meets the third condition, Carroll would place such work into the category of "popular art" rather than mass art because he believes it cannot meet his first two criteria. But it seems to me that live performance events like *Tamara* pose difficulties for those parts of Carroll's theory. If all productions are functionally identical, as Wexler describes, then we have a case of theatre as a multiple instance or type artwork. If multiple productions of the play are staged simultaneously all over the world, then theatre fulfills Carroll's definition of a mass technology as "capable of delivering multiple instances . . . of mass artworks to widely disparate reception points" (*ibid.*:188).

Carroll argues that performances of live theatre differ from those of films by saying that whereas the performance of a film is generated directly from a template (a print of the film), a theatrical performance is generated from an interpretation of the play text. He goes on to generalize from this basis that the generation of performances from templates, rather than interpretations, is a crucial ontological characteristic of mass art forms. While it takes no particular artistic or interpretive skill to be a projectionist, "it takes artistry and imagination to embody an interpretation" (*ibid.*:213-14). It is for this reason that we recognize theatrical performances as works of art in themselves but do not accord that status to film showings.

The distinction Carroll draws between template and interpretation is provocative. I am not persuaded, however, that they are mutually exclusive categories. If we take the producer of *Tamara* at his word and assume that he does succeed in mounting numerous productions of the play that are functionally identical, would it not be fair to say that the interpretation used in all cases functions as a template? (When I refer to the various productions as functionally identical, I am not suggesting that there would not be differences among them, only that such differences would be trivial—differences, but not distinctions that would differentiate one production of *Tamara* from any other in aesthetically significant ways.<sup>37</sup>) While the actors would have to possess a certain

37 Carroll (1998:201) describes the different reception instances of the same mass artwork as "identical in the same sense that two dimes of the same minting are

amount of craft and skill to replicate the performances established in the template (just as it takes a certain amount of craft and skill to be a good projectionist), individual artistry and imagination would be negative qualities in such a performance, since they would tend to work against the success of *Tamara* as a standardized product. (Similarly, we would not want a projectionist to be “creative” in showing a conventional film.)<sup>38</sup>

If this argument seems a bit far-fetched in the context of theatre (though I do not believe it is), we can switch for a moment to another kind of franchised performance. Consider the various live performances of actors portraying trademark cartoon characters and superheroes who interact with visitors at theme parks all over the world. It is precisely the point of these performances that they all represent the same, standardized characters. All such performances of Batman, for instance, are generated from a single interpretation of the character, which functions as a template. I have chosen this example in part to make the point that a template is not the same as a script: improvisational performances, like “Batman’s” unscripted interaction with a young admirer, can be generated from a template. (It is significant in the context of this chapter that our familiarity with this template derives mostly from seeing Batman, Bugs Bunny, and similar characters on screen. The live presentations of these characters are further instances of live performance’s recreation of mediatized representations.) If a child were led to make judgments concerning the interpretive quality of the various Batmans or Cinderellas he or she had seen—such as: “I liked the Cinderella at Eurodisney better” or “This guy did Batman better when we were last at Six Flags”—then the performances would have been dismal failures precisely because they, like *Tamara*, are instances where live performance aspires to the condition of mass art. These instances also suggest

identical.” If Carroll means this analogy to indicate a strong criterion for identity, that criterion problematizes another area of his own analysis. In discussing broadcast media, Carroll (*ibid.*:216) identifies the broadcast signal as the template that generates distinct reception instances. Because the perceptual and affective character and qualities of each reception instance depend so much on the particular equipment used to receive the signal, there can be very sharp variations among them. Arguably, a television program seen on a small, old, black-and-white set is not identical in perceptual and affective terms to the same program seen on a brand-new, big-screen, high-definition set. It may well be that the producer of *Tamara* could create standardized productions of the play that would be more similar to each other than the same television program seen on radically different sets.

38 For further discussion of the theatrical production as template, see Saltz (2001: 304–5).

how live performance may participate in the economy of repetition, not just by being recorded and replicated, but through the mass production of the live event itself.

I return now to Benjamin’s observation on what he called “contemporary perception” and its hunger for reproductions. “To pry an object from its shell,” he writes, “to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose ‘sense of the universal equality of all things’ has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction” (Benjamin 1986 [1936]:32). I have tried to suggest here that this is exactly the state in which live performance now finds itself: its traditional status as auratic and unique has been wrested from it by an ever-accelerating incursion of reproduction into the live event. Following Benjamin, I might argue that live performance has indeed been pruned from its shell and that all performance modes, live or mediatized, are now equal: none is perceived as auratic or authentic; the live performance is just one more reproduction of a given text or one more reproducible text. (To say that no performance in any medium can be perceived as auratic is not to say that all such performances are experienced in the same way—just that no one of them is experienced as the auratic, authentic original.) Live performance could now be said to partake of the ontology that Benjamin ascribes to photography: “From a photographic negative . . . one can make any number of prints; to ask for the ‘authentic’ print makes no sense” (*ibid.*:33). Similarly, it makes little sense to ask which of the many identical productions of *Tamara* or Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* is the “authentic” one. It does not even make much sense to ask which of the many iterations of that *Beauty and the Beast*—as animated film, DVD, CD, book, or theatrical performance—is the “authentic” iteration. This situation represents the historical triumph of mechanical (and electronic) reproduction (what I am calling mediatization) that Benjamin implies: aura, authenticity, and cult value have been definitively routed, even in live performance, the site that once seemed the last refuge of the auratic.

I am suggesting further that thinking about the relationship between live and mediatized forms in terms of ontological oppositions is not especially productive, because there are few grounds on which to make significant ontological distinctions. Like live performance, electronic and photographic media can be described meaningfully as partaking of the ontology of disappearance ascribed to live performance, and they can also be used to provide an experience of evanescence. Like film and television, theatre can be used as a mass medium. Half jokingly, I might cite Pavis’s observation that “theatre repeated too often deteriorates” (Pavis 1992:101) as evidence that the theatrical object degenerates with

repeated use in a manner akin to a recorded object! I am not proposing, however, that live performance and mediatization partake of a shared ontology. As the historical allegory I presented in the first section of this chapter suggests, that claim is the basis for mediatization's displacement of the live within cultural economy. I am suggesting, rather, that how live and mediatized forms are used is determined not by their ostensibly intrinsic characteristics but by their positions within cultural economy. To understand the relationship between live and mediatized forms, it is necessary to investigate that relationship as historical and contingent, not as ontologically given or technologically determined.

As a starting point for this exploration, I propose that, historically, the live is actually an effect of mediatization, not the other way around. It was the development of recording technologies that made it possible to perceive existing representations as "live." Prior to the advent of those technologies (e.g., sound recording and motion pictures), there was no such thing as "live" performance, for that category has meaning only in relation to an opposing possibility. The ancient Greek theatre, for example, was not live because there was no possibility of recording it. In a special case of Baudrillard's well-known dictum that "the very definition of the real is *that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction*" (Baudrillard 1983:146, original emphasis), the "live" can be defined only as "*that which can be recorded.*" Most dictionary definitions of this usage of the word "live" reflect the necessity of defining it in terms of its opposite: "Of a performance, heard or watched at the time of its occurrence, as distinguished from one recorded on film, tape, etc." (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn).

On this basis, the historical relationship of liveness and mediatization must be seen as a relation of dependence and imbrication rather than opposition. That the mediated is engrained in the live is apparent in the structure of the English word "immediate." The root form is the word *mediate*, of which *immediate* is, of course, the negation. Mediation is thus embedded within the *im-mediate*; the relation of mediation and the *im-mediate* is one of mutual dependence, not precession. Far from being encroached upon, contaminated, or threatened by mediation, live performance is always already inscribed with traces of the possibility of technical mediation (i.e., mediatization) that defines it as live. Although the anxiety of critics who champion live performance is understandable, theorizations that privilege liveness as a pristine state uncontaminated by mediatization misconstrue the relation between the two terms.

Connor (1989:153) summarizes the relationship between the live and the mediatized in related terms:

In the case of "live" performance, the desire for originality is a secondary effect of various forms of reproduction. The intense "reality" of the performance is not something that lies behind the particulars of the setting, the technology and the audience; its reality consists in all of that apparatus of representation.

Connor's frame of reference is the performance of popular music, my subject in the next chapter. A good example of the inscription of the apparatus of representation within live performance in that realm is the status of the microphone in popular music performance: consider its central role in Elvis Presley's performance style, the microphonic acrobatics of James Brown, or the way the Supremes' and Temptations' choreography revolved around the positioning of their microphones. As Connor implies, the very presence of the microphone and the performers' manipulation of it are paradoxical markers of the performance's status as live and *im-mediate*. Far from suppressing the apparatus of reproduction, as a performer such as Madonna may be said to be attempting when she uses a headset mike not clearly visible to the audience (with the effect of naturalizing mediatized representations, as I discussed earlier in this chapter), these performers emphasize that the apparatus of reproduction is a constitutive element of their liveness. In short, they *perform* the inscription of mediatization within the *im-mediate*.

The *im-mediate* is not prior to mediation but derives precisely from the mutually defining relationship between the *im-mediate* and the mediated. Similarly, live performance cannot be said to have ontological or historical priority over mediatization, since liveness was made visible only by the possibility of technical reproduction. This problematizes Phelan's claim that "to the degree that live performance attempts to enter into the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology" (Phelan 1993b:146), not just because it is not at all clear that live performance has a distinctive ontology, but because it is not a question of live performance's *entering into* the economy of reproduction, since it has always been there. My argument is that the very concept of live performance presupposes that of reproduction—that the live can exist only *within* an economy of reproduction.

I want to emphasize that *reproduction* (recording) is the key issue. The Greek theatre may have been technologically mediated, if one subscribes to the theory that the masks acted as megaphones. What concerns me here, however, is technological reproduction, not just technological mediation. Greek theatrical masks may have amplified the actors' voices, but they did not reproduce them, in the manner of electric amplification.

Throughout history, performance has employed available technologies and has been mediated in one sense or another. It is only since the advent of mechanical and electric technologies of recording and reproduction, however, that performance has been mediatized.

Although I realize this is a contentious point, I will stipulate that I do not consider writing to be a form of recording in this context, for several reasons. Scripts are blueprints for performances, not recordings of them, even though they may contain some information based on performance practice. Written descriptions and drawings or paintings of performances are not direct transcriptions through which we can access the performance itself, as aural and visual recording media are. I would draw the same distinction here that Roland Barthes (1977:44) makes between drawing and photography: whereas drawing, like writing, transforms performance, audio-visual technologies, like photography, record it.<sup>39</sup> In everyday usage, we refer to "live" or "recorded" performances but not to "written" performances or "painted" performances, perhaps for this reason. This means that the history of live performance is bound up with the history of recording media; it extends over no more than the past 100 to 150 years. To declare retroactively that all performance before, say, the mid-nineteenth century was "live" would be an anachronistic imposition of a modern concept on a pre-modern phenomenon. In fact, the *Oxford English Dictionary's* earliest examples of the use of the word "live" in reference to performance come from 1934, well after the advent of sound-recording technologies in the 1890s and the development of broadcasting systems in the 1920s. If this word history is complete (and I assume that if the word "live" had been applied to performances in, say, the Middle Ages, the editors of the *OED* would have found the references!), then the concept of live performance came into being not at the appearance of the basic recording technologies that made the concept possible but only with the maturation of mediatized society itself.

The reason why the appearance of recording technologies was not enough in itself to bring the concept of liveness into being has to do,

39 I am not suggesting that recording media do not transform live performance in the process of capturing it, only that they can provide a kind of access to the live event that writing and static visual media do not. This is in part because recording media may be used to capture performance in real time: the duration of the recording can be identical with that of the performance itself. The question of temporality places still photography in an ambiguous position, since photography does record performance but only as a series of individual moments divorced from their temporal procession. The question of whether a static visual medium can be said to reproduce the temporality of performance will return in a legal context in Chapter 4.

I think, with the fact that with the first recording technology, sound recording, the distinction between live performances and recordings remained experientially unproblematic. If you put a record on your gramophone and listened to it, you knew exactly what you were doing and there was no possibility of mistaking the activity of listening to a record for that of attending a live performance. As Attali (1985:90–6) points out, the earliest forms of sound recording, such as Edison's cylinder, were intended to serve as secondary adjuncts to live performance by preserving it. As recording technology brought the live into being, it also respected and reinforced the primacy of existing modes of performance. Live and recorded performances thus coexisted clearly as discrete, complementary experiences, necessitating no particular effort to distinguish them.

It is significant that the earliest use of the word "live" in relation to performance listed in the *OED* has to do with the distinction between live and recorded sound, but not with the gramophone. The technology necessitating this usage was radio. This first citation of the word "live" comes from the *BBC Yearbook* for 1934 and iterates the complaint "that recorded material was too liberally used" on the radio. Here, we can glimpse the beginnings of the historical process by which recorded performances came to replace live ones. But radio represented a challenge to the complementary relationship of live and recorded performances that went beyond its role in enabling recordings to replace live performances. Unlike the gramophone, radio does not allow you to see the sources of the sounds you are hearing; therefore, you can never be sure if they are live or recorded. Radio's characteristic form of sensory deprivation crucially undermined the clear-cut distinction between recorded and live sound. It appears, then, that the concept of the live was brought into being not just when it became possible to think in those terms—that is, when recording technologies such as the gramophone were in place to serve as a ground against which the figure of the live could be perceived—but only when it became urgent to do so. The need to make that identification arose as an affective response specifically to radio, a communications technology that put the clear opposition of the live and the recorded into a state of crisis. The response to this crisis was a terminological distinction that attempted to preserve the formerly clear dichotomy between two modes of performance—the live and the recorded—a dichotomy that had been so self-evident up to that point that it did not even need to be named.

Recording technology brought the live into being, but under conditions that permitted a clear distinction between the existing mode of performance and the new one. The development of broadcast

technology, however, obscured that distinction, and thus subverted the formerly complementary relationship between live and recorded modes of performance. The word “live” was pressed into service as part of a vocabulary designed to contain this crisis by describing it and reinstating the former distinction discursively even if it could no longer be sustained experientially. As a consequence of the circumstances under which this vocabulary was instated, the distinction between the live and the recorded was reconceived as one of binary opposition rather than complementarity. This way of conceptualizing the live and the distinction between the live and recorded or mediatized originated in the era of analog technologies and persists to the present day; it forms the basis of our current assumptions about liveness.

It is clear from this history that the word “live” is not used to define intrinsic, ontological properties of performance that set it apart from mediatized forms, but rather is a historically contingent term. The default definition of live performance is that it is the kind of performance in which the performers and the audience are both physically and temporally co-present to one another. But over time, we have come to use “live” to describe performance situations that do not meet those basic conditions. With the advent of broadcast technologies—first radio, then television—we began to speak of “live broadcasts.” This phrase is not considered an oxymoron, even though live broadcasts meet only one of the basic conditions: performers and audience are temporally co-present in that the audience witnesses the performance as it happens, but they are not spatially co-present. Another use of the term worth considering is in the phrase “recorded live.” This expression is an oxymoron (how can something be both recorded and live?) but is another concept we now accept without question. In the case of live recordings, the audience shares neither a temporal frame nor a physical location with the performers, but experiences the performance later and usually in a different place than it first occurred. The liveness of the experience of listening to or watching the recording is primarily affective: live recordings allow the listener a sense of participating in a specific performance and a vicarious relationship to the audience for that performance not accessible through studio productions.

The phrases “live broadcast” and “live recording” suggest that the definition of liveness has expanded well beyond its initial scope as the concept of liveness has been articulated to emergent technologies. And the process continues, still in relation to technological development (I have summarized the developments discussed here in Table 1.1). Along these lines, Nick Couldry (2004:356–7) proposes “two new forms of liveness,” which he calls “online liveness” and “group liveness”:

Table 1.1 Historical development of the concept of liveness

Type of liveness	Significant characteristics	Cultural forms
“Classic” liveness	Physical co-presence of performers and audience; temporal simultaneity of production and reception; experience in the moment	Theatre, concerts, dance, sports, etc.
Live broadcast	Temporal simultaneity of production and reception; experience of event as it occurs	Radio, television, Internet, etc.
Live recording	Temporal gap between production and reception; possibility of infinite repetition	LP, CD, film, DVD, etc.
Internet liveness (Couldry 2004)	Sense of co-presence among users	Internet-based media
Social liveness (Couldry 2004)	Sense of connection to others	Mobile phones, instant messaging, etc.
Website “goes live”	Feedback between technology and user	Websites, interactive media, chatterbots, etc.

[O]nline liveness: social co-presence on a variety of scales from very small groups in chat rooms to huge international audiences for breaking news on major Web sites, all made possible by the Internet as an underlying infrastructure . . . [G]roup liveness[:] . . . the “liveness” of a mobile group of friends who are in continuous contact via their mobile phones through calls and texting.

Understood in this way, the experience of liveness is not limited to specific performer–audience interactions but to a sense of always being connected to other people, of continuous, technologically mediated co-presence with others known and unknown (*ibid.*:357).

Although the decentered experiences of liveness to which Couldry points are not easily assimilable to a performer–audience model, they nevertheless posit liveness as a technologically mediated relationship among human beings. However, the word “live” has also come to refer to connections and interactions with non-human agents. Margaret

Morse (1998:15) observes that the imaginary developing around interactive computer technologies also entails an ideology of liveness whose source lies in our interaction with the machine itself rather than the connections to the outside world permitted by it.

Feedback in the broadest sense . . . is a capacity of a machine to signal or seem to respond to input instantaneously. A machine that thus “interacts” with the user even at this minimal level can produce a feeling of “liveness” and a sense of the machine’s agency and—because it exchanges symbols—even of a subjective encounter with a persona.

Liveness is attributed not only to the entities we access with the machine but also to the machine itself. When a website is first made available to users, it is said to “go live.” As is true of the computer, the liveness of a website resides in the feedback loop we initiate with it: the website responds to our input. It may be that we are at a point at which liveness can no longer be defined in terms of either the presence of living human beings before each other or physical and temporal relationships. The emerging definition of liveness may be built primarily around the audience’s affective experience. To the extent that websites and other virtual entities respond to us in real time, they *feel* live to us, and this may be the kind of liveness we now value. (I discuss this development further in the final section of this chapter.)

In challenging the traditional opposition of the live and the mediated, I am not suggesting that we cannot make phenomenological distinctions between the respective experiences of live and mediated representations, distinctions concerning their respective positions within cultural economy, and ideological distinctions among performed representations in all media. What I am suggesting is that any distinctions need to derive from careful consideration of how the relationship between the live and the mediated is articulated in particular cases, not from a set of assumptions that constructs liveness as an ontological condition rather than a historically mutable concept and the relation between live and mediated representations *a priori* as a relation of essential opposition. I attempted to do something of the kind in the first section of this chapter by examining the way that television came to be positioned discursively first as a replication of theatrical discourse, then as a replacement for live theatre. That theatre and television came to be competitors within cultural economy resulted from this particular discursive history, not from some intrinsic opposition between them. In Chapter 3, I will analyze the changing status of live performance within

rock music culture to make a related point: that the relation of live performance to mediated forms needs to be understood historically and locally, in particular cultural contexts.

### Got live if you want it

In addition to being a historically contingent concept, liveness is clearly a relational concept used to distinguish among cultural forms and experiences. It is not, however, a neutrally descriptive term; as I have already shown, those who speak for the value of liveness frequently do so in oppositional terms by implying that the characteristics that make live performance distinctive also make it superior to mediated forms. This makes it important to focus critically on the values often attributed to live performance. Needless to say, any attempt to address this question at a general level is bound to be flawed. Ultimately, the values attributed to live performance must be discussed from the perspective of particular cultural contexts: what does live performance mean, and why is it demanded, within particular groups defined by shared cultural identity and/or tastes? Before undertaking that kind of contextual analysis in the next chapter, I will address some of the positive qualities often associated with live performances, including: spontaneity, community, presence, and feedback between performers and audience.

Obviously, some mediated performances, such as live broadcasts, can be just as spontaneous as live performances in which performers and audience share the same space. It is also obviously true that whereas recorded performances are fixed, live performances can be spontaneously different each time. Although much is made of the way each instantiation of a live performance is potentially different from every other one, how different do we, as the audience, want them to be? In the case of traditional theatre, any given performance of a particular production of a play has to be virtually identical to any other performance of that same production. If a particular performance deviates radically, it is arguably no longer a performance of that production. As Martin Barker (2003:28, original emphasis) indicates,

a committed company of players will surely be working towards minimizing random changes between performances. They will seek a plateau where everything in a production is controlled, where characterization is organic and consistent, movements are choreographed, timed and effective, where dialogue is delivered with the patina of appropriate emotion, and so on. In addition, although in principle they *could*, most audiences rarely

go back for a second viewing. But even when they do, it is hardly to search for and pay attention to the small elements of difference. They go in most cases, I suspect, in order perhaps to be able to scrutinize the *same* performance more closely.

Barker goes on to suggest that the valorization of the spontaneous variability of live theatre is more ideological than based on real experience: audiences seek to experience theatrical performances "as if they had elements of uniqueness" (*ibid.*) even though the actual variations are probably minimal and insignificant.

There are, of course, kinds of performance that have spontaneity as part of their makeup, such as improv comedy or jazz. While such spontaneity can make every performance different in important ways from every other, it is also hedged in by conventions. Although a jazz musician is expected to improvise, her improvisation is supposed to remain recognizable within the particular conventions of the type of jazz she plays. She cannot, for example, spontaneously decide to play classical music that night instead of jazz. It is also the case that there must be a high degree of continuity across improvised performances by the same artist. If I choose to attend a performance by a comedy improv troupe or a jazz musician whose work I have enjoyed in the past, I expect the newly improvised performance to be somehow consistent with my earlier experience. Paradoxically, the most successfully spontaneous forms of performance may be those in which spontaneity is relatively planned and predictable.

It is often suggested that the experience of live performance builds community. It is surely the case that a sense of community may emanate from being part of an audience that clearly values something you value, though the reality of our cultural economy is that the communal bond unifying such an audience is most likely to be little more than the common consumption of a particular performance commodity. Leaving that issue aside, I would argue against the idea that live performance itself somehow generates whatever sense of community one may experience. For one thing, mediatized performance makes just as effective a focal point for the gathering of a social group as live performance. Theodore Gracyk (1997:147), who discusses this issue as it pertains to popular music, observes that:

One does not need a live performance to create such a [social] space or its attendant sense of being part of a community engaged with the music: discos, Jamaican "sound system" trucks, bars and pubs and pool halls with juke boxes, and the

British rave scene have created diverse public sites for recorded music.

Gracyk's point can be generalized across performance genres. A parallel example from a different cultural realm would be that of the crowd that gathered in the town square of a small city adjacent to Atlanta to watch a big-screen simulcast of the opening ceremonies of the 1996 Olympic Games. The people gathered around the giant television screen constituted a community in all the same senses as the audience attending the live event a few miles away. Since most of the people gathered in the town square were neighbors, not merely people drawn together to attend an event, their experience was arguably more genuinely communal than that of the audience attending the live performance. Another example would be that of the crowds that gather for midnight screenings of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* or other cult films; such audiences probably experience a stronger sense of community, of shared interest and purpose, than the typical audience for live performance. My point is simply that communality is not a function of liveness. The sense of community arises from being part of an audience, and the quality of the experience of community derives from the specific audience situation, not from the spectacle for which that audience has gathered.

Another version of this account of the appeal of live performance proposes that live performance brings performers and spectators together in a community. This view misunderstands the dynamic of performance, which is predicated on the distinction between performers and spectators. Indeed, the effort to eliminate that distinction destroys the very possibility of performance: "The more you approach a performer, the more you inhibit the very performance you are there to see. No matter how much a performer gives, no matter how intensively you attend to her, the gap remains between" (Cubitt 1994:283). Those like Jerzy Grotowski and Augusto Boal, for whom bridging this gap became the primary purpose of their work, albeit for very different reasons, found themselves constrained to abandon performance as such altogether (see Auslander 1997:26-7, 99-101). Blau (1990:10, original emphasis) addresses these issues of performance and communality in his discussion of the theatre audience:

Desire has always been . . . for the audience as community, similarly enlightened, unified in belief, all the disparities in some way healed by the experience of theater. The very nature of theater reminds us somehow of the original unity even as it implicates us in the common experience of fracture, which produces both what is time-serving and divisive in theater and

what is self-serving and subversive in desire . . . as there is no theater without *separation*, there is no appeasing of desire.

As Blau suggests in this extraordinary passage, the experience of theatre (of live performance generally, I would say) provokes our desire for community but cannot satisfy that desire because performance is founded on difference, on separation and fragmentation, not unity. Live performance places us in the living presence of the performers, other human beings with whom we desire unity and can imagine achieving it, because they are there, in front of us. Yet live performance also inevitably frustrates that desire since its very occurrence presupposes a gap between performer and spectator. Whereas mediatised performance can provide the occasion for a satisfactory experience of community *within* the audience, live performance inevitably yields a sense of the failure to achieve community *between* the audience and the performer. By reasserting the unbridgeable distinction between audience and performance, live performance foregrounds its own fractious nature and the unlikelihood of community in a way that mediatised representations, which never hold out the promise of unity, do not.

Partly because of the promise of community, we go to live performances to be in the presence of the performers, but we must acknowledge that such presence can take on a wide variety of forms. Seeing a singer in a cabaret setting is quite different from going to a stadium rock concert where for most in attendance the singer is a tiny speck in the distance seen clearly only on the jumbo video screen above. Since both situations are equally regarded as live performances, live presence cannot be equated with any particular relationship between audience and performers. For an audience to share space with performers does not in itself guarantee any sort of intimacy, connection, or communication between performers and spectators.

Furthermore, one can ask: what, exactly, is the value of presence? It certainly is not an absolute value. Some actors are far better on screen than on stage, and it may well be that I can see and follow a football game much better on television than at the stadium (and I can even enjoy the experience of community, albeit on a smaller scale than at the stadium, if I invite some friends over to watch and cheer with me). There is no sense in which it is somehow "better," across the board, to be present at a live event than to witness it by other means. There is, however, a socio-cultural value attached to live presence: being able to say that you saw a particular musician or actor live or that you were present at a particularly legendary performance enables you to gain social prestige. Attendance at a particular event can constitute valuable symbolic

capital—certainly, it is possible to dine out on the cachet of having been at Woodstock, for example.<sup>40</sup> One remarkable aspect of performance's position within cultural economy is that our ability to convert attendance at a live event into symbolic capital is completely independent of the experiential quality of the event itself. Attending Woodstock might have meant spending three days hungry, sick, covered with mud, and unable to hear any music whatsoever. Seeing the Beatles at New York's Shea Stadium in 1965 almost undoubtedly did mean hearing no music and might have meant suffering temporary deafness as a result of screaming fans. None of this matters, however; merely being able to say you were there, live, translates into symbolic capital in the appropriate cultural contexts.

This aspect of liveness has a complex relation to cultural economy. Despite the claim, discussed earlier, that performance's evanescence allows it to escape commodification, it is that very evanescence that gives performance value in terms of cultural prestige.<sup>41</sup> The less an event leaves behind in the way of artifacts and documentation, the more symbolic capital accrues to those who were in attendance, at least in some cases

40 I agree with Simon Frith (1996:9) that Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and symbolic capital can and should be extended beyond his original usage. Bourdieu's "interest . . . is in the creation of a taste hierarchy in terms of high and low: the possession of cultural capital, he suggests, is what defines high culture in the first place." Frith's rejoinder "is that a similar use of accumulated knowledge and discriminatory skill is apparent in low cultural forms, and has the same hierarchical effect" of differentiating those who are truly adept in a particular cultural arena from those who are not (see also Shuker 1994:247–50). Cultural capital and symbolic capital, in this extended sense, must be understood as determined contextually. Particular subcultural and taste groups attribute symbolic capital to experiences that other groups do not recognize as valuable. That kind of discrimination is at the heart of my analysis of rock music culture in the next chapter: to an adept of "rock," "pop" music carries no symbolic capital. (More accurately, an enthusiasm for pop carries negative symbolic capital within the context of rock culture!)

41 Considering the concept of symbolic capital in the context of taste or fan cultures, as I am implicitly doing here, makes certain aspects of the nature of symbolic capital visible. Randal Johnson argues that Bourdieu's various "capitals" (e.g., cultural capital, symbolic capital, linguistic capital, economic capital) "are not reducible to each other" (Johnson 1993:7). Within fan cultures, however, cultural capital does translate into symbolic capital: the more you know about a particular rock group, for example, the more prestige you will have among fans of that group. Among collectors, the symbolic value of an object is generally a function of its rarity and inaccessibility, which also determine its economic value. It is roughly true, then, that the greater the economic value of a collectible, the greater its symbolic value. (One class of exceptions would be those in which an object that is worth very little economically carries great symbolic value because it attests to the rarefaction of the

(see Cubitt 1994:289). In other cases, however, the symbolic value of having attended an event may be a function of that event's notoriety, which, in turn, may result from the extent to which the event has been circulated as reproductions. Having been at Woodstock may carry a great deal of symbolic capital precisely because it has been so widely reproduced as multiple sound recordings, books, and a film, and thus has become culturally iconic in a way that many other rock festivals have not.

The issue of feedback between performers and audience raises similar questions as the concept of presence. It is often claimed that live performance of all kinds entails a process of communication in which the performers influence the audience and the audience influences the performers. Certainly, this is different from recorded performances in which the performers may influence the audience but not vice versa. At the very least, however, we should qualify this belief by saying that not all forms of performance take advantage of this possibility. As happy as performers and spectators generally are to be in one another's presence, it is not necessarily the case that the performance itself is open to being influenced by the audience or that the audience wishes to assume that responsibility. It does not seem likely that a symphony concert, for example, will be greatly affected by signals sent by the listeners in the way that the performance of athletes may be affected by the presence of cheering (or booing) fans.<sup>42</sup> For reasons I have already mentioned,

owner's taste. There are, for instance, rare but not particularly valuable psychedelic rock albums. Owning these records is a sign of expert knowledge and an indication that your taste for the music extends well beyond what is known to most fans, even though the records have little actual economic value.) Even taking into consideration Johnson's admonishment that "Bourdieu's use of economic terminology does not imply any sort of economism" (*ibid.*:8), it becomes apparent that symbolic capital can be quantified, relatively even if not absolutely. In considering the symbolic value of attendance at live performances, rarity, distance in time, and proximity to an imagined originary moment are determining factors. It is clear, for example, that having seen a Rolling Stones concert in 1964 is worth more symbolic capital within rock culture than having seen them in 2004, for all the reasons I just mentioned. It may even be that having seen the Beatles live is worth more than having seen the Stones, even in 1964, precisely because the Beatles' performing career was relatively short. Whereas one may still see the Stones, one will never again be able to see the Beatles. Although such comparisons probably can be made, it is unlikely that symbolic capital can be quantified to the point of determining the exchange values that would justify a statement such as: having seen the Rolling Stones ten times between 1964 and 1997 is of equivalent symbolic value to having seen the Beatles live once.

42 There is a substantial literature on the "home field advantage" in social psychology and other fields. For a good overview, see Nevill and Holder (1999), who conclude

traditional theatrical productions cannot vary much in response to different audiences. In other kinds of performance, such as improv comedy, performers may actually solicit input directly from the audience. But even in such cases, we have to be cautious in assessing just how much real impact the audience's responses have on the performance, since the performers may use the audience's suggestions as pretexts for doing something they wish to do anyway.

Another thing to consider is whether we need to be present at the live performance in order to enjoy the interaction between audience and performers. Watching recorded improv comedy on television, for instance, do we not experience the pleasure of seeing performers engaging with audience suggestions? Is it necessary that those suggestions emanate from an audience of which we are members to enjoy that experience?

The most significant challenge to traditional concepts of presence and interaction between performer and audience now come from digital entities able to perform live and respond both to other performers and to audience input; although these entities cover a broad range, I will limit my discussion here to those known as "chatterbots" and take up other issues raised by virtual performers in Chapter 4. In digital culture, the word "bot," a shortened form of the word "robot," refers to computer software that can respond to input and autonomously execute commands. The most familiar type of bot is probably the search engine—you tell it what to look for, and it goes forth into cyberspace, seeks, and finds (you hope) what you wanted. It can do this not because it has access to existing lists of websites that have already been indexed by key word but because it is programmed to conduct searches itself. In other words, if you tell a search engine to find websites about "liveness," say, it does not simply spit out an existing list of sites that have been indexed by that term. Rather, the bot itself searches the web electronically, locates sites containing that key word, and reports back to you.

Chatterbots, sometimes called chatbots, are software programs designed to engage in conversation. The first and still most famous chatterbot is Eliza, a program that interrogates the user in the manner of a Rogerian psychotherapist, developed at MIT in 1966. Chatterbots typically operate in text-based digital environments, in which the user types messages to the bot and the bot responds in "typed" words that appear on the computer screen or are spoken by a synthesized voice.

that it is not primarily the audience's influence on the players that produces the home field advantage but, rather, the audience's ability to influence the officials to favor the home team in their decisions.

They are based on research in natural language processing and are generally programmed to recognize words and word patterns and to respond with statements that make sense in the context of what is said to them, though some are also capable of initiating conversations. The more sophisticated the programming, the more similar to human discourse the bot's conversation will be. Since Eliza, many other chatterbots have been created, including the well-known Julia, developed around 1990. Elaborate chatbots possessing faces and voices as well as the ability to converse and interact have been used in theatre and performance art: examples include Jeremiah, developed by Susan Broadhurst, who first appeared onstage in 2001 (Broadhurst 2006), and Stelarc's *Prosthetic Head*, a digital replica of his own head, first exhibited in 2003 (Stelarc 2005). Andrew Leonard's description of Julia in *Bots: The Origin of New Species* gives a sense of the capabilities of chatterbots:

Dubbed "a hockey-loving ex-librarian with an attitude" by *Wired* magazine, Julia has bedazzled would-be suitors . . . Her sense of humor is well developed. She can keep track . . . of both her own statements and the responses of the human she might be talking to. Her database of conversational statements is grouped into nodes that concentrate on specific topics, such as pets. A clever system of weighting insures that her tendency to speak about pets automatically increases or decreases depending on the answers she gets to certain questions. If the response to her question "Do you have pets?" is no, the weights on all of the sentence patterns having to do with pets are automatically lowered. She can purposefully send conversations off in new directions by randomly injecting statements such as "people don't own cats" . . . She even simulates human typing by including delays between the characters she types and by spelling words incorrectly.

(Leonard 1997:41-2)

Chatterbots are ubiquitous online, though they are not always identified as such. In an Internet chatroom or on an e-mail list, you do not necessarily choose to talk with bots and it can be impossible to know whether you are conversing with a human being or a piece of software. One of the questions addressed in an online document entitled "I Chat, Therefore I Am?? An Introduction to Bots on IRC [Internet Relay Chat]" is "How come people [in chatrooms] ask me if I'm a bot?" The author, Heather Peel, advises that if you type too fast, lurk in the chatroom without participating actively in the conversation, or use too

many automated functions in your chat responses, you may be mistaken for a bot.

The existence of chatterbots reframes the question of liveness at a fundamental level. The ambiguity created by chatterbots online parallels the ambiguity of radio sound I discussed earlier, but with a crucial difference: while it is true that you cannot know whether sounds you hear on the radio are produced live or not, you generally can have confidence in the ultimate source of the performance you hear. That is, even if you are listening to a recording, there is usually little doubt that it is a recording of a performance by a human being. The ambiguity created by radio has to do with the ontology of the performance (live or recorded), not with the ontological status of the performer (human or non-human). The chatterbot forces the discussion of liveness to be reframed as a discussion of the ontology of the performer rather than that of the performance.

If we return once more to the *OED*'s definition of "live," it becomes evident that chatterbots are live performers. "Of a performance, heard or watched at the time of its occurrence, as distinguished from one recorded on film, tape, etc." Chatterbot performances are certainly live according to this definition. It is important in this context to stress that chatterbots are not playback devices. Whereas audio and video players allow us to access performances carried out by other entities (i.e., the human beings on the recordings) at an earlier time, chatterbots are themselves performing entities that construct their performances at the same time as we witness them.

The magnitude of the challenge chatterbots pose to traditional conceptions of liveness becomes evident when we consider how both the ontology and the value of live performance have been construed in performance theory, which often invokes the performer's materiality and mortality to describe liveness in existential terms. In *Blooded Thought*, Blau (1982:34) declares dramatically, "In a very strict sense, it is the actor's mortality which is the actual subject [of any performance], for he is right there dying in front of your eyes." Phelan (1997:3) echoes some of the same themes in *Mourning Sex*: "Live performance and theatre ('art with real bodies') persist despite an economy of reproduction that makes them seem illogical and certainly a poor investment . . . it may well be that theatre and performance respond to a psychic need to rehearse for loss, and especially for death."

Clearly, performances by bots cannot address these ideas in the same way as those by human performers. Since bots are virtual entities, they have no physical presence, no corporeality; they are not dying in front of our eyes—they are, in fact, immortal. Bots can be destroyed or taken out of service,

but while they may degrade, they do not age or die in any biological sense. They perform live, but they are not alive, at least not in the same way that organic entities are alive. Performances by bots therefore do not engage existential issues simply by virtue of the performers' presence in the way Blau and Phelan describe human performances. Both emphasize the failing organicism of live human bodies to counterpoint the way those same bodies are represented through technologies of cultural reproduction and to emphasize that basic aspect of live performance stated in the *OED* definition: live performance is not recorded. Bots are technological entities, but they constitute a technology of production, not reproduction. Although chatterbots are programmed and draw their conversational material from databases, their individual performances are responsive to the actions of other performers, autonomous, unpredictable, and improvisational. That is, they perform in the moment. The chatterbot undermines the idea that live performance is a specifically human activity; it subverts the centrality of the live, organic presence of human beings to the experience of live performance; and it casts into doubt the existential significance attributed to live performance.<sup>43</sup>

43 For further discussion of machine performers, see Auslander (2006a).

## TRYIN' TO MAKE IT REAL

### Live performance, simulation, and the discourse of authenticity in rock culture

In the spring of 1990, the Franco-German pop singing and dancing duo Milli Vanilli was awarded the Best New Artist Grammy for 1989. The award prompted a spate of newspaper articles with titles like "That Syncing<sup>1</sup> Feeling" (*Detroit News*, July 31, 1990) and other media commentary concerning various performers, including Milli Vanilli, who allegedly lip-synched to pre-recorded vocals in concert (Madonna, Michael Jackson, Paula Abdul, and many others were similarly accused).<sup>2</sup> Most of the commentary was adamantly opposed to the practice, though virtually all of it also admitted that the main audiences for the performers in question, mostly young teenagers, did not seem to care whether their idols sang or not.<sup>3</sup> In November, Milli Vanilli's producer created fresh controversy when he admitted that not only had the duo lip-synched during their concerts; they had not even sung on the recording for which they were awarded the Grammy, which was then rescinded, much to the embarrassment of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS), the Grammys' institutional sponsor. In response to these waves of scandal, legislators in many American states followed the lead of those in New York and New Jersey

- 1 There is no consensus as to whether "lip-synch" or "lip-sync" is the proper spelling. I prefer the former but retain the latter in quoted materials.
- 2 I have been asked whether race was a factor in the singling out of Milli Vanilli. My feeling is that their status as Europeans is probably more significant than their African heritage. The fact of their being German places them outside the American music establishment in a way that their being Black does not, and may account for why they, rather than, say, Michael Jackson, were challenged. Christopher Martin (1993:71, 73) implies that since the two members of Milli Vanilli were rumored to be gay, homophobia may have played a role in their stigmatization. Ted Friedman (1993) makes a similar point.
- 3 My younger students, polled in the fall of 1990, felt precisely that way.