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PRIVATE PARTS, PUBLIC BODIES:

CROSS-DRESSING IN THE WORK OF

DEBORAH WARNER AND ELIZABETH LECOMPTE

Aoife Monks B.A.

Submitted for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

University Of Dublin, Trinity College.

Samuel Beckett, School of Drama, Trinity College,

September, 2002.

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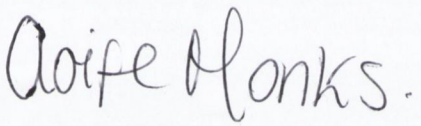

Aoife Monks

Summary

In this thesis I ask what cross-dressing can tell us about the formation of identity in performance. I argue that the use of cross-dressing in the work of Deborah Warner and Elizabeth LeCompte can be used to challenge and expand the field of theatre scholarship on cross-dressing. I examine how Warner's 1995 production of *Richard II,* and LeCompte's 1993 production of *The Emperor Jones* used cross-dressing in performance. I analyse these productions in five key ways: I investigate how gender was represented through the use of cross-dressing, I look at the relationship between the "real" and the "illusion" in the productions, I focus on the range of identities invoked through the use of cross-dressing, I examine the kinds of bodies produced in performance, and I discuss how spectators were imagined and invented by these productions.

My thesis is divided into three sections. In Section One, Part One, I review the scholarship on crossdressing and, in Part Two, I investigate the historical precedents for the use of cross-dressing in my chosen productions. Section Two is divided into three chapters and focuses on the work of Deborah Warner. Section Three is also divided into three chapters and focuses on the work of Elizabeth LeCompte. In my conclusion, I compare how these directors have used cross-dressing in their work.

In Section One, my research reviews the feminist scholarship on cross-dressing, and makes particular use of the philosophical investigations of drag performance by Judith Butler. I also access a range of scholarship on cultural, racial and colonial crossings, such as the work of Edward Said, Homi K Bhabha, Eric Lott, and Anne McClintock. Furthermore, I use the work of theatre scholars to aid me in my analyses of Warner and LeCompte's productions, most particularly in my applications of semiotics, phenomenology and reception theory to these performances. I refer to the work of Michael Quinn, Bert O States, Susan Bennett, Marvin Carlson, and Elin Diamond. In my analyses of the historical precedents to Warner and LeCompte's use of cross-dressing, I refer to the work of Laurence Senelick, Alisa Solomon, Marjorie Garber and Lesley Ferris.

In Chapter Three and Chapter Six, I provide contextual analyses of the work of these directors, concentrating on the historical and political contexts of their work, and briefly analysing some of their productions.

In Chapters Four and Seven, I analyse the use of cross-dressing in the work of Warner and LeCompte. I do so by analysing the playtexts of *Richard II* and *The Emperor Jones*. I look at the social contexts and reception of the productions and then examine how Warner and LeCompte used cross-dressing in performance, focusing in particular on the use of costume and make-up in the shows.

In Chapters Five and Eight, I analyse Warner's production of *Medea* (2000) and LeCompte's production of *The Hairy Ape* (1995) in order to further elucidate some of the themes and contradictions of their work. Again, I examine the playtexts used in performance, look at the contexts and reception of the performances, and analyse the representation of identity in performance.

When discussing these productions, I use a combination of historical and contextual material, theatre reviews and interviews, and I refer to the live performances, video recordings, and films of these productions.

The central argument of this thesis is that cross-dressing is a transformative rather than imitative act, reconfiguring the bodies of performers and spectators alike. My major findings in this thesis are that: cross-dressing in the theatre can be simultaneously conservative and subversive, that the "real" is contested and invented by the "illusion" in cross-dressed performance, that cross-dressing invokes and invents a range of interlinked identities in performance, that bodies are materialised through the act of cross-dressing, and that the meanings of cross-dressed performance are created by, and create, the context in which the spectator watches the performance.

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family: to my poor father, Eoin Monks; my beloved mother, (Prof) Kathy Monks; and my errant brother, Brian Monks. Their advice, support (IT and otherwise), proof reading, photo-scanning and patience have been fundamental to helping me complete this thesis and I want to thank them for their love and inspiration.

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Introduction

"That Woman Is A Woman:" Cross-Dressing In The Work Of Deborah Warner And Elizabeth LeCompte

Introduction

In Tom Stoppard and Marc Norman's 1999 film, *Shakespeare In Love*, the character of Queen Elizabeth I - played by a somewhat pantomime Dame Judi Dench - asks, "can a play show us the very truth and nature of love?" (Norman & Stoppard 1999, 95). The question is a good one for a film which uses cross-dressing as its central device. If, as Marjorie Garber argues, transvestism is "the norm not the aberration" of theatre practice (Garber 1997, 39), how can theatre show us the "truth" and "nature" of love on the stage? What's more, how can the theatre show us the truth and nature of gender, bodies and identity itself on the stage? When we watch the cross-dresser in performance, can we believe our eyes?

Shakespeare In Love is a romantic comedy which tells the story of Viola De Lesseps (Gwynneth Paltrow), who dresses as a man to get a role in William Shakespeare's new play. Stoppard and Norman's film ultimately constructs a world in which gender is stable and uncontaminated by the act of crossing: anxiously establishing the heterosexual virility of William Shakespeare in the process. The potentially subversive effects of public cross-dressing are undermined by the film's construction of bodily identity - private parts - as untouched by the act of crossing. The film's belief that there *is* a truth and nature to identity underneath the cross-dressed costume, undermines the potentially subversive effects of the cross-dressing that the film employs to tell its love story.

However, contemporary European and American theatre practitioners have used cross-dressing in their work in order to unsettle the "truth" and "nature" of various identities and bodies. On one hand, some directors have cast women in male roles. Ariane Mnouchkines" *Twelfth Night* (1982) cast women in three of the male roles, while Ann Bogart cast the actor Kelly Maurer as Andy Warhol in *The Culture Of Desire* (1997). Three productions cast women as King Lear: Ruth Maleczech played

the role in the 1987 Mabou Mines production, Robert Wilson cast Marianne Hoppe as Lear in 1990, and Kathryn Hunter played Lear at the Young Vic in 1997. The American company, Split Britches, have made a career from male impersonation and hyperbolic female impersonation, while Vanessa Redgrave recently played Prospero in *The Tempest* in the Globe theatre (2000).

On the other hand, male-to-female cross-dressing has also abounded with Cheek By Jowl's all male *As You Like It* (1990), Charles Ludlam's 1973 *Camille*, Matthew Bourne's male-swanned *Swan Lake,* and Mark Rylance's recent performances as Cleopatra (1999) and Viola (2002) in the Globe Theatre in London. Cinema has also done its transvestite work with *Tootsie*, *Pricilla Queen Of The Desert*, *Boys Don't Cry* and, of course, *Shakespeare In Love,* exploring cross-dressed, cross-gender and transsexual identities.

Furthermore, there has been an explosion of interest in cross-dressing in the field of theatre studies, with a particularly feminist emphasis on the gender implications of cross-dressing practices on and off the stage. Works such as Sue Ellen Case's *Classic Drag* (1985), Marjorie Garber's *Vested Interests* (1992), Lesley Ferris's *Crossing the Stage* (1993), Alisa Solomon's *Redressing The Canon* (1997), and Laurence Senelick's *The Changing Room* (2000) have all investigated the implications of cross-dressing for the gender identity of performers and audiences alike. Furthermore, Judith Butler's seminal works, *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), have offered scholars a philosophical approach to the "drag effects" of gender performance, which can be usefully applied to theatrical cross-dressing.

The relationship between the private parts and public bodies of cross-dressed performance has been explored, examined and contested in recent theatre and film practice and scholarship. While much of the scholarship on cross-dressing has focused on the images created by crossing, this thesis will propose that cross-dressing is a *transformative* rather than an *imitative* act, constructing and inventing identity rather than imitating it. The private parts of the cross-dressed performer are formed and reconfigured through the construction of public bodies in performance. Furthermore, the spectator is also reconfigured through the transformative experience of witnessing the cross-dressed performer onstage. Public bodies can invent, erase and reconfigure the private parts of performer and spectator alike. The binaries of "real and illusion" and "private parts and public bodies" are therefore deeply unstable, precarious and

political, requiring the policing of legal and representational structures to resist and contain the transvestic challenges of cross-dressing.

Deborah Warner And Elizabeth LeCompte

Two productions which revealed and revelled in the instability of these binaries are English director Deborah Warner's 1995 production of Shakespeare's *Richard II*, which starred the Irish actress Fiona Shaw in the title role, and American director Elizabeth LeCompte's 1993 production of Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, starring Kate Valk in the title role. Both productions used cross-dressing in inventive and problematic ways. While neither production has received much scholarly attention, this thesis will argue that the use of cross-dressing in Warner and LeCompte's work can challenge and extend the field of scholarship on cross-dressing.

While much of the recent theatre scholarship on cross-dressing has concentrated on the question of gender, these productions challenge that focus. Both of these productions featured female actors playing male characters. However, while the roles were cross-gender cast, gender was only one of many identities explored in these productions. Rather, the cross-gender casting produced a range of interlinked identities which frequently subsumed the question of gender in performance. This is not to say that gender disappeared, so much as to argue that gender was produced through these interlinked identities rather than being the most prominent identity on the stage. The Warner and LeCompte productions can be seen as important examples of the way in which gender can operate within a hierarchy of identities on the stage, *and* the way in which gender produces and is produced by that hierarchy. These cross-gender cast shows were not solely concerned with gender, and revealed that theatrical cross-dressing can produce multiple and contradictory relations of identity on the stage.

In Warner's *Richard II*, Fiona Shaw's gender was mediated through the questions of nationality, history and authority in performance, and her Irishness disappeared almost entirely. Kate Valk's cross-gendering in *The Emperor Jones* was overshadowed by her use of blackface and by the use of Orientalism in the production. While gender was not a prominent issue in the shows, it did inform and construct the ways in which nationality, sexuality, race and Orientalism could be read and understood in performance.

The use of cross-dressing in these productions also challenges a stable notion of the "real" of the actor's body in performance on which some theatre scholarship relies. These productions deployed the complex semiotic configurations of the performers within the construction of the illusion onstage. Fiona Shaw's already ambiguously gendered public persona played into the liminality and ambiguity of her portrayal of Richard. However, Kate Valk's performance was renegotiated by her accrual of a theatrical persona through her work with the Wooster Group which refracted and fragmented the operation of the "real" in her performance, while her companion performer (film star) Willem Dafoe, exerted a Brechtian effect on his roles with his celebrity presence onstage. The operations of the "real" therefore became ambiguous, contradictory, and mediated by these performances and presented a challenge to the notion of the actor's body as stable.

The use of cross-dressing produced unstable bodies in these shows, bodies that were ambiguous and produced through the contexts in which the performances took place and these productions revealed that the meanings of cross-dressed performance are always contextual. The fact that *Richard II* was performed in the National Theatre in London produced theatrical bodies within a different cultural and political context to *The Emperor Jones,* which took place in the Performing Garage, the Wooster Group's fringe theatre space in Soho, in New York. The state subsidised and "National" context for Warner's production meant that the reception of her work implicitly centred on the representation of nationality in the show, while the fringe positioning of the Wooster Group meant that reviewers focused on the formal innovations of their work, rather than analysing the politics of the cross-dressing in their production.

These contextual differences may explain why *Richard II* incurred the wrath of British theatre critics, even before the production opened, which formed a stark contrast to the rapturous critical reception of the seemingly more disturbing figure of Valk in blackface in New York. The reception of the productions can be analysed as much for what they excluded as for what they discussed. The critical response to *Richard II* shifted from a discussion of gender before the show opened, to a discussion of how the show represented the monarchy and English history after it opened. However, the impact of Shaw's Irishness on the "Englishness" of the play was ignored by the critics.

On the other hand, reviewers received Valk's blackface performance in *The Emperor Jones* with accolades for her prowess as a performer, glowingly testifying to

the anti-racist value of her performance. This reception worked in marked contrast to the controversy the company had created for using blackface in their work in 1981. However, the critics contained the problematic representation of race in the production by attributing it to authorial "intention," and barely mentioned the Orientalist and cross-gender crossings in the show. The reviews centred on a discussion of the use of blackface and its engagement with race in *The Emperor Jones*.

To place these productions side by side is useful, when considering the politics of cross-dressing in contemporary theatre practice. Their similarities and differences can work together to extend and challenge the scholarship on cross-dressing while also functioning to reveal the politics of performance in their own cultural and theatrical contexts. Furthermore, these performances offer a sense of how gender has been constructed by two productions which do not have an overtly feminist agenda. The fascinating figures of Shaw, Valk and Dafoe also offer the opportunity to examine how the actor's body operates in performance, and is constructed through the act of crossing.

In order to develop my consideration of the work of Warner and LeCompte, and of the politics of "crossing" on the stage, I am examining two further productions by these directors. I will discuss Euripides" *Medea*, which was directed by Warner in 2000 for the Abbey Theatre Dublin, with Shaw in the lead role, and which later toured to the Queens Theatre in the West End of London. I will also consider the instances of "crossing" in the Wooster Group's *The Hairy Ape*, another O'Neill play, which was developed as a companion piece to *Jones* in 1995, and was performed in the Selwyn Theatre on Broadway in 1998.

Neither of these productions included cross-gender casting. Nonetheless, I will argue that both productions *did* involve other kinds of crossings: of nationality and race in *Medea* and of nationality and class in the *Hairy Ape*. Furthermore, these productions produced a "cross-dressed effect" onstage. I will examine these productions in order to extend, develop and complicate the issues raised by *Richard* and *Jones*, and to develop a sense of the underlying artistic strategies of both directors, the accumulated semiotic configurations within the bodies of the actor's through their performances, and the institutional and cultural contexts of each artist's work.

Neither Warner's nor LeCompte's productions have received much scholarly attention. While Warner's *Richard II* was discussed widely in the popular press, the

production has only been examined in one full length article by Carol Chillington Rutter in *Shakespeare Quarterly* (1997). This is not unusual as Warner's work is rarely discussed by theatre scholars apart from occasional mentions in studies of contemporary Shakespeare productions. While LeCompte's work with her theatre company, the Wooster Group, has received extensive scholarly attention, the discussion of her work has tended to focus on her productions in the early 1980s, and does not usually deal with the question of gender in her work. Instead, her work tends to be analysed within the frame of "post-modern" theatre studies (see Auslander, 1992; Kershaw, 2000). *The Emperor Jones* has been analysed in one article by John Russell Brown in *New Theatre Quarterly* (1999), and in an article by Roger Bechtel in a forthcoming anthology on the Group's work edited by Johan Callens (2002).

That Warner and LeCompte have not received much attention from feminist scholars is puzzling considering that they are both groundbreaking female theatre directors. This lack of feminist attention may be explained, however, by the fact that neither director claims to be a feminist, and their work does not overtly engage with questions of gender. This is evident in the way that gender took a back seat in their cross-dressed productions. However, I want to argue that the work of these directors is worthy of feminist attention for the complex and contradictory ways in which gender operates in their shows. I will show that gender is produced by and produces an interrelated range of identities in their work.

By using gender and the politics of identity as a frame in which to study Warner and LeCompte's work, it is possible to extend how their work has been seen in theatre scholarship, by showing that they create challenging, subversive and problematic images of identity in their productions. Furthermore, studying the complex and contradictory ways in which cross-dressing operated in these productions can also extend and complicate the feminist scholarship on cross-dressing in theatre studies, by showing that gender is not the only identity performed and produced by the act of crossing on stage.

While scholarship on cross-dressing tends to brand performances as either "subversive" or "conservative," I want to challenge this binary by examining the complexity of the Warner and LeCompte productions. I will argue that cross-dressing can be subversive and simultaneously conservative in performance. Cross-dressing can create stereotypical and confining images on the stage while challenging those images

by performing them with inappropriate bodies. Likewise, cross-dressing can construct challenging and transgressive images whose impact is contained by the context in which they are performed. This dissertation will look at how the politics of the "real" and the "illusion" blur, configure and invent one another onstage, and how the private parts and public bodies of the actor can produce a range of meanings and identities in theatrical performance.

Cross-dressed Questions

My thesis is structured around five key issues raised by cross-dressed performance. Each issue focuses on how crossing operates onstage and what kind of identities and bodies it constructs (and invents) in performance. My first question looks at the question of gender and I ask, how is gender produced in cross-dressed performance? I argue that each historical instance of cross-dressing will produce different configurations of gender on the stage, and that multiple forms of gender identity can be constructed within one cross-dressed performance. I therefore work from the assumption that the "meaning" of cross-dressing is historically and contextually determined.

The representation of gender in cross-dressed performance can be a useful way to examine how gender has been configured and deployed and imagined in the public arena. The heightened coding and formalities of gender identity on the stage can provide an insight not only into the actual historical and social belief systems off the stage, but also into the fantasies, desires, and anxieties of that social moment, as Laurence Senelick argues: "theatrical gender is not only more perspicuously intelligible than the behavioural kind, it is also more variegated in its possibilities" (Senelick 1992, xi). Theatre stages the imaginative trajectory of a culture constructing possible and impossible gender identities.

The cross-dressed performance cannot be understood, therefore, as a mimetic rendering of what gender identity was "really like" in any one cultural moment, but should be seen as a formalised and aestheticised expression of the needs, desires and fantasies of that culture within the public realm of representation. The *absences* on this stage can therefore reveal these fantasies just as clearly as the presences: the bodies that *don't* appear on stage can point to a culture's specific fears and anxieties about the power of the body, sexuality and - frequently - femininity in performance.

An examination of the use of cross-dressing in the theatre is therefore a useful way to reveal the representational mechanics involved in representing, imagining and erasing gender on the stage. My second question concerns how crossing works on stage, and I ask: what is the relationship between the "real" and the "illusion" within the performance? As I will argue in Chapter One, some crossing practices rely on the authentication of the "real" (usually through the display of the "real" body) in order to stabilise the potentially subversive effects of crossing, whereas other crossing practices blur the lines between the "real" and the "illusion" in performance, creating a liminal and threatening cross-dressed figure on the stage. I define the real as an outside referent in performance, an element which operates as part of the performance but is not of the performance. Examples of the "real" are the presence of the "real actor" as well as the character onstage, or the presence of the actor's "real" body rather than the fictional body created by cross-dressing.

Performances and audiences often invoke the real as a stable referent in comparison to the unstable and untrustworthy illusion created on the stage. However, I approach the "real" as an illusion of its own kind, an effect which is created through the fiction of the performance. Furthermore, this illusion of the real is often discursively constructed by spectators, or by the theatre production itself, as a stable reference point "outside" of the performance, in order to counteract the transformative effects of theatre. When attending to the "real" in cross-dressing, I therefore examine how the illusion of a "real", "authentic" or "stable" self of the actor works with and against the illusion that actor creates on the stage. As I will show in Chapter One, the "real" operates (and is disrupted) continually in theatrical performance, but is particularly prominent in cross-dressed performance, where the tension between the real and the illusion, or fiction, is what produces the cross-dressed effect. I will examine how the productions I discuss in this thesis both invoke and deny the real, and how the real is used as a way to undermine or refuse the powerful effects of performance.

I will also use the notion of the "Real" (which I capitalise to differentiate from my previous usage) as Judith Butler does, as an ideal presented onstage to which the spectator is expected to aspire or conform, "a phantasmatic construction[..] - [an] illusion[..] of substance - that bodies are compelled to approximate, but never can" (Butler 1999, 186). By using Butler's concept of the "Real," I examine how theatre functions as a mechanism of the status quo and produces idealised and denigrated

bodies which the audience identify with or resist. It is through the act of representing bodies on the stage, that theatrical performance can form the bodies in the audience, through the ideological constructions of legitimate and illegitimate bodies. This effect of course varies, according to what identities are more generally marginalised or privileged within specific historical and cultural contexts. However, this thesis will argue that theatre not only reflects the hierarchies of identities of its social context, but contributes to, and invents, these hierarchies on the stage. Theatre is therefore a mechanism of the Real, a place in which legitimate and illegitimate bodies are invented, formed and produced.

Evidently my two uses of the "real" and the "Real" intertwine. The invocation of a stable real self beyond the illusion on the stage has potentially formative effects on the audience. It may be the stable body invoked, but not shown, by performance which is the legitimising body of the Real. It may be the actor's body, rather than the character's, which is held up as an ideal body to which the audience are encouraged to aspire. However, as I have shown, the two ideas of the "real" body in stage performance are as constructed and illusional as the "fictional" body of the character in the play. This is not to say, however, that the illusive nature of the body on the stage means that it is somehow less material, more contingent, than the stable body invoked by performance. Rather, the illusional real body in performance has material and transformative powers, as I will show in my discussion of blackface minstrelsy in Chapter One.

While Butler's notion of the Real is useful for examining the formative effects of representation, I will concentrate mainly on how performance can invent the illusion of stability beyond the illusion of the fictional world of the performance, while keeping in mind the ways that the real can become the Real in performance. I have been strongly influenced by the work of Michael Quinn (1990) and Bert O States (1985) in my engagement with the idea of the real, which I will discuss further in Chapter One.

My third question asks: how does the act of crossing produce a range of identities on the stage, and what hierarchy of identity is constructed in the cross-dressed performance? The interruption of the semiotics of dress can open up fissures in a whole range of bodily practices and hierarchies. I want to examine, in Anne McClintock's formulation, how these identities form: "intimate, reciprocal and contradictory relations" with one another on the stage (McClintock 1995, 5). I will

include a range of "crossing" practices within my use of the term "cross-dressing": practices such as blackface minstrelsy, stage Irishness and Orientalism which all involve the impersonation of an "Other.'

In my fourth question I ask: what kind of bodies are produced by the act of crossing? My discussion of the body will rely upon Judith Butler's concept of the body as a set of *emergent* practices, which works productively for a study of the actor's body on the stage. Countering a notion of the actor's body as a stable or static object, an emergent model of bodily identity allows me to attend to how the actor's body is formed by, and forms, the gender performance on the stage, and is furthermore "contaminated" by that gender performance off the stage.[1] The concept of the emergent body is necessarily engaged within an awareness of "the body"s" social, historical and cultural specificities. Furthermore, different kinds of crossing practices produce different kinds of bodies, some which are stable, Cartesian, and fit safely within the gender binary. Other kinds of crossings disrupt the binary of gender and the categories of other identity formations, and destablise a fixed notion of the body, revealing the body to be mediated, emergent and constructed through the act of performance itself.

My discussion of the body in performance[2] balances between a reception based and a performance based study. On the one hand, I engage with the actor's body from a spectator's perspective, considering how the actor's body is intertextually constructed by the viewer. On the other hand, I also consider how the actor's body in performance

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[1] Throughout this thesis I use the medical terms of "contamination" and "infection" to describe the transformative effects of performance on the body of the actor and spectator. However, I do not wish to give the impression that I see this process as negative or unhealthy. Rather, these terms help me to describe the way that the body is reconfigured by performance and incorporates the illusory "public" body created on the stage. I avoid situating the body as a passive receptacle of knowledge or meaning on the stage, and instead see identity as embodied, and the body as an actively social phenomenon. I have been strongly influenced by Judith Butler's work in this regard, and wish to resist the Cartesian dualism which posits the body as an object of knowledge, rather than being a subject of discourse. While the terms I use have negative connotations, they allow me acknowledge the embodied aspects of identity and performance. I will discuss this issue further in Chapter One.

[2] While I discuss "the body" in this section, the questions of who's body, what kind of body, where that body is are central to an understanding of how "the body" is produced in cross-dressed performance. I posit the body as an active, situational and emergent phenomenon which is materialised by and through the politics of identity.

constitutes the audience's body by performing for an idealised or "model" spectator in the audience, and by constructing an idealised and model body on the stage, to which the spectator is encouraged to aspire. My fifth question therefore asks: how is the audience constituted by the cross-dressed performance? Here I examine the kinds of identifications which are offered to the spectator through the body of the cross-dressed actor, while also investigating how the audience simultaneously constructs that actor's body through the intertextual process of theatre viewing and resistant readings. My engagement with the question of spectatorship argues that the meanings of a performance are constructed in the interrelationship between the spectator and the performer within specific cultural, historical and political contexts.

At the end of every chapter, I conclude by examining the question of "theatricality" in performance. I look at how these practitioners situate the idea of identity itself as theatrical, relating this concept to Judith Butler's notion of gender performance. Rather than seeing theatre as that which imitates already given identities, I argue throughout this thesis that theatre produces and invents identity on the stage, as part of a larger social and cultural context. However, I also show that theatre practitioners frequently reject the notion of theatrical identity in their own work. Warner and LeCompte's approach to theatricality is revealing of their attitude to identity more generally and I will end each chapter by looking at how the theatricality of cross-dressing is situated, mourned and rejected in their work.

Throughout my thesis, I argue that cross-dressing has a formative effect on the body of the actor and spectator. I attend to the paradoxical ability of cross-dressing to work subversively and simultaneously affirm the status quo in performance. I argue that cross-dressing involves a range of interlinked identities on the stage, and can make the issue of gender "disappear" in performance. I hope that this thesis will contribute to the scholarship on cross-dressing by focussing on the "intersectional" (Munoz 1998, 8) relations of identity in two cross-dressed performances which have received little scholarly attention: Deborah Warner's *Richard II* and Elizabeth LeCompte's *The Emperor Jones*. By doing this I hope to expand the field of cross-dressing studies to include the wide range of gendered, racial, class, national, geographical and sexual cross-dressing practices which employ the private parts of actors to create complex and frequently astonishing public bodies on the stage.

Structure Of The Thesis

The first section of the thesis, "Private Parts, Public Bodies," is split into two parts. In Part One, "Scholarly Crossings," I trace a history of the scholarship on cross-dressing and argue that it frequently positions cross-dressing as an imitative rather than a transformative form of performance. I critique Judith Butler's work for her anti-theatricalism, and argue that her concept of "emergent bodies" is useful for my analysis of Warner and LeCompte's work. I go on to survey a range of scholarship on other crossing practices, such as Said's study of Orientalism and Bhabha's work on colonial mimicry. I examine theatre scholarship on the actor's body and the politics of reception and spectatorship and, finally, I argue that Anne McClintock's "intersectional" approach to identity is crucial for my approach to cross-dressing.

In the second part of this chapter, "Theatrical Crossings," I investigate the historical legacies of cross-dressing in theatre practice. I examine a range of "crossings" which operated as the historical and political antecedents of Warner and LeCompte's cross-dressed productions. I look at cross-dressing practices such as blackface minstrelsy, Orientalism, pantomime, the Renaissance stage, the Ancient Greek stage, contemporary drag performance, Victorian female Hamlets and Romeos, and the avant-garde and classical treatment of cross-dressing in recent theatre productions. I examine these acts of crossing in the light of the five central questions in my thesis, and conclude that crossing invents, as well as imitates, identity.

My second section, "Inappropriate Bodies: Cross-dressing In The Work Of Deborah Warner And Fiona Shaw," is divided into three chapters. In Chapter Two, "Looking For Fiona," I contextualise Warner and Shaw's work within British theatre practice in the 1980s and 1990s. I examine the semiotic configuration of Warner and Shaw through the history of their productions, focusing on how the ambivalence of Shaw's semiotic configuration as liminally feminine and liminally Irish exerted a deconstructive effect on the representation of gender in her performances. I then examine their work for how they have constructed gender identity, how they intertwine the real and illusion on the stage, how Shaw's Irishness disappears in performance, and how the questions of the universal and the national operate in their work. I argue that their work produces Shaw's body as ambiguously gendered while creating fixed stereotypes of masculinity and femininity in the other characters in their productions. I

also argue that their work is marked and created by the tension between the authority of the actor/director and the authority of the writer in performance.

In Chapter Three, "It's All A Ghastly Travesty," I examine Warner's production of *Richard II* for its use of cross-dressing. I begin by looking at Shakespeare's text, and contextualise its images of gender, power and theatricality within Shakespeare's political moment. I go on to examine the critical responses to the production, looking at the outrage expressed by the British press at the use of cross-casting in the show, even before the production opened, and examining Warner and Shaw's contradictory response to this furore. I argue that the production produced a vision of English history which was unacceptable to critics, because it was made feminine by the inappropriate body of Shaw. I also argue that the national context of the production and the universalist impulses of the show worked against a full realisation of the theatrical possibilities of the cross-dressed figure of Shaw, producing an uneasy and contradictory cross-dressed effect onstage.

My analysis of *Medea* in Chapter Four, "The Souvenir From Foreign Parts," continues my discussion of the effects of the "universal" on the images of gender in Warner and Shaw's work. I look at the questions of gender, Irishness and race which the Dublin production raised, and which were re-configured by the show's relocation to the West End of London. I begin by looking at how Euripides" text both celebrates and contains the subversive power of Medea, and I then examine how Greek tragedy has been used in Irish theatre. I go on to argue that gender identity was constructed through nationality in the production and that the complex semiotics of Shaw as an outsider to Irish theatre, created a "cross-dressed effect" onstage. I point out that the production relied on a simplification of other kinds of identities in order to establish Medea's complexity onstage and that Shaw's performance was "flattened" by the change of national context when the production "crossed" from Dublin to London, reconstructing the hierarchy of identities on the stage.

My third section, "Appropriated Bodies: Cross-dressing In The Work Of The Wooster Group," is also divided into three chapters. In Chapter Five, "The Sensation Of Something New," I examine the tradition of "crossing" practices and controversy in the Wooster Group's work, contextualising their performance practice within the avant-garde theatre movement in New York from the 1980s to the present. I examine how the semiotics of LeCompte, Dafoe and Valk have been constructed in their work, and

how the Wooster Group have had a long tradition of consciously and ironically deploying those semiotic configurations within the work itself. I conclude by examining how gender stereotypes are critiqued through the use of costume and technology in their work, how the real is mediated and produced by the illusion on the stage, how gender is constructed through the use of blackface and Orientalism, and how the company produces mediated, fragmented and medicalised bodies in performance.

My analysis of *The Emperor Jones* in Chapter Six, "Genuine Negroes And Real Bloodhounds," attends to the complex interactions between gender, race and orientalism in the production. I look at how the use of costume, make-up, dance and technology fragmented and de-essentialised the bodies of the performers. I argue that the Group's production implicated theatre practice itself in the construction of identity and that *The Emperor Jones* demonstrated how bodily identity is materialised through performance. I analyse O'Neill's text for its constructions of race and gender and then look at the Wooster Group's historicisation of O'Neill's text through their use of blackface. I conclude by acknowledging the complexity of the Wooster Group's deconstruction of whiteness as identity, while at the same time critiquing their use of blackface as a perpetuation of some of the tropes and conditions of minstrelsy itself.

In Chapter Seven, "The Monster From The Black Lagoon", my analysis of *The Hairy Ape* continues and extends this debate by looking at Dafoe's exaggerated performance of the tropes of theatrical masculinity through his use of the blackface mask and by considering Valk's hyperbolic performance of femininity in the production. In this chapter I begin by interrogating O'Neill's text for its construction of class through the binary of black and white, and then go on to argue that the Wooster Group implicated the visual "training" of theatre in the construction of racial and gendered gazes in their production. Again, I interrogate the use of blackface in the performance and show it to be as significant of gender as of class in this production. Nonetheless, I continue my critique of the Wooster Group's use of blackface and problematise their engagement with questions of colour.

Throughout this dissertation, I argue that cross-dressing opens up fissures in a wide range of identities which form complex and contradictory interrelationships with one another. I look at how gender can "disappear" in performance, and how gender can produce other kinds of identities on the stage. I look at how crossing takes place in the interrelationship between the "real" of the actor's body and the "illusion" they

construct on the stage, a binary which is unsettled by the act of performance itself. I argue that the private parts of the actor are materialised through the public bodies they perform on the stage and that crossing takes place on many levels in theatre practice, not all of them related to gender.

By focusing on the range of identities invoked by cross-dressing, I intend to challenge the gender-centred approach of previous theatre scholarship on cross-dressing. My focus on the ambiguous politics of crossing, in its ability to simultaneously affirm and subvert the status quo, will provide a new angle on the interpretation of cross-dressing and highlights the extraordinary complexity of cross-dressed performance. My engagement with the intertextual nature of actor's bodies, and the formative effects of performance on the bodies of the audience, will also challenge a fixed notion of the body in performance. Finally, my focus on the cultural, institutional and theatrical conditions of crossing will allow me account for the remarkable diversity and danger of cross-dressed performance.

"That Woman Is A Woman."

In Norman and Stoppard's *Shakespeare in Love*, Simon Callow plays Tilney, the Master Of The Revels, who learns of Gwynneth Paltrow's transvestite disguise. He mistakenly accuses the boy player, and then later points the finger at Paltrow, bellowing: "that woman is a woman!" (Norman & Stoppard 1999, 146), a line designed to get a laugh from the audience. Laugh, of course, the audience do, safe in the knowledge that the boy player is evidently a boy, and at the line itself, which has a Wildean flavour. The audience laughs at the notion that a woman might be anything *but* a woman, taking delight in the stability of bodies and gender identity beneath the clothing. Furthermore, they laugh at the idea of the transvestite stage itself, the idea that actresses could be as dangerous as Callow's accusation evinces.

However if, as P.J O'Rourke argues, "humour is about things that terrify us" (O'Rourke, cited in Curtis Jr. 1997, xi) then perhaps the laughter at Callow's line belies the anxiety of the audience about the instability of gender identity. While the film has assured us through various means that bodies are stable and immutable (through the unwinding of the sheet binding Paltrow's breasts, and Callow's frustrated search for the "female" genitals of the boy player, for example), the cross-dressing in the film also shows that it is possible that those bodies might not be so stable, that clothes might

make the man or woman after all. We laugh at Callow's line from the safe perspective of a stable world, a stable world which the film anxiously asserts through the act of cross-dressing.

Perhaps, too, Callow's line is performative. Is it not the line we always utter when we sit in a theatre and watch a female actor play a woman onstage? Through our mutual consent as audience members, our acceptance that "that woman is a woman," we produce the gender of the actors in performance. When watching cross-dressed performance we say, "that man is a woman," or, "that woman is a man." And, as we sit in the darkened auditorium for the length of the production, we agree to believe this statement, while also seeing doubly and contradictorily the "man as a man" or the "woman as a woman." Perhaps, when we leave the theatre, we believe that those bodies change back to their rightful sexed identity. But perhaps we also leave with the slight suspicion that they have been altered by the act of crossing.

Imagine that the boy players" costume actually transforms the way in which his body is gendered, sexualised, ranked. Imagine that cross-dressing is not only performance, but performative, having a material effect on the body of the person cross-dressing. Imagine also, that the audience watching that performance are in some way themselves reconfigured by the act of mutual consent to suspend disbelief, and believe that the actor is in fact "a woman". By going to the theatre, we are all bellowing that "that woman is a woman," but not always with comic effect.

SECTION ONE

Private Parts, Public Bodies: Cross-dressing and Identity

Chapter One

Part One: Scholarly Crossings

Introduction

> "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment; for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God" (Deuteronomy, cited in Garber 1997, 28).

Throughout the history of Western culture, injunctions can be found against wearing the clothing of the opposite sex. The ruling in Deuteronomy is one of many examples, and the need to guard and police the system of clothing has frequently emerged at moments of social stress or disorder. This anxiety about clothing and appearance betrays the precariousness of the semiotic system of dress and, even more worryingly, exposes the instability of the identities that clothing is supposed to express.

The Renaissance, in particular, was a moment where the hierarchies of gender, class, religion and nationality were destabilised by the challenges to the hierarchies of dress, both on the streets and in the theatre. William Prynne claimed in 1633 that English women acted: "as yf they all intended to turn men outright, and weare the breeches, or to be Popish nunnes" (Garber 1997, 30) Prynne's association of female degeneracy with Catholicism, betrayed a fear of disorder similar to Philip Stubbes's famous attack on social climbing in 1583: "there is such a confused mingle mangle of apparel [...] So that it is verie hard to knowe, who is noble, who is worshipful, who is a gentleman, who is not" (Howard 1993, 23). Class status, as well as gender, was breached (or perhaps breeched) by cross-dressing.

The anonymous pamphlet of 1620, *Hic Mulier,* extended this fear of class disorder into the terrain of race and nationality when the author caustically wrote: "If this [cross-dressing] bee not barbarous, make the rude *Scithian*, the untamed *Moore*, the naked *Indian*, or the wilde *Irish*, Lords and Rulers of well goerned Cities" (Howard 1993, 26). *Hic Mulier* revealed that cross-dressing could destabilise more than the

hierarchies of gender, and that "crossing" can invoke and threaten a whole range of interrelated identities through its disruption of the magic talismans of clothing.

The need to police systems of dress, which can be found at various moments of social unrest or change, can be seen to reveal the precarious stability of the "real" and its relationship to appearance and clothing. Anti-cross-dressing protestors continually and violently assert the reality, stability and fixity of social identities, while simultaneously betraying, through their vitriolic protest, their anxieties about the inherent lack of stability of identity. As with Bhabha's analysis of the stereotype (1994), which I will explore further below, the anti cross-dressing lobby's need to anxiously police the stability of systems of clothing and assert their fixity, belies the instability of the "real" identities that clothing is supposed to express.

Of course, fears about dress and identity in everyday life have frequently intensified when it comes to theatre practice. The concern about cross-dressing on the streets tends to spill over into anti-theatrical tracts fulminating on the horrific effects of theatrical impersonation. Cross-dressing in the theatre has frequently been one reason for the stage's associations with (sexual) degeneracy and dissolution. In 1891, Clement Scott was using language akin to the Renaissance anti-theatricalists in his description of the audiences for Ibsen's plays. These audiences were:

> the sexless ...The unwomanly woman, the unsexed females, the whole army of unprepossessing cranks in petticoats ... Educated and muck-ferreting dogs... Effeminate men and male women ...They, all of them - men and women alike - know that they are doing not only a nasty thing but an illegal thing..." (cited in Solomon 1997, 54).

While the act of cross-dressing can be said to produce problematic and threatening bodies (although as I will argue below, the subversive potential of cross-dressing is historically variable), the discourse of anti-theatricalism itself also discursively constructs and produces bodies. Beginning with Plato's repudiation of theatre practice in *The Republic,* anti-theatrical discourse has constructed abstracted and idealised stable bodies which are praised for their fixity, and the condemned bodies of cross-dressers and performers which are grotesque in their instability. By condemning the practice of cross-dressing, anti-theatricalists betray their deep rooted anxieties about the formative effects of representation on the bodies of performers, and

extend this fear to the bodies of spectators, who themselves may become tainted through witnessing such spectacular bodies.

Jonas Barish[3] points out, that anti theatricalists have argued throughout the history of the theatre: "that the habit of imitating others must necessarily bring out the worst in the actor himself, or that plays lend themselves too reality to the mockery of those in authority, or that they present images of passion so vivid as to produce a fatal moral impact on the their audiences" (Barish 1981, 4). The spectre of the grotesque, immoral and excessive bodies constructed by anti-theatrical discourse haunts the practice of cross-dressing itself, and the fact that actors have almost always occupied a liminal, decadent and deviant position in Western culture is testament to how their own bodies have been formed and deformed by their acts of impersonation.

The virulence of anti-theatrical and anti-cross-dressing diatribes has its comical aspects, shown in the instance of Simon Callow's bellowing in *Shakespeare In Love*, which I discussed in my Introduction. In a post-Cartesian and post-Darwinian universe, the body is generally understood to be a stable material object, uncontaminated by clothing or impersonation. Anti-theatrical fears about dress become comical and naïve when audiences are assured of the stability of the bodies of performers in a world where identity is both internalised and transcendent, relying on what Alisa Solomon describes as: "the modern idea that there is an ultimate "authentic" or "natural" self that is bound to or contained within the body" (Solomon 1997, 40).

The laughter at the excesses of anti-theatricalism may also be laughter at the idea that theatre could possibly possess the power ascribed to it by these protesters. Surely theatre could not be capable of transforming the bodies of actors or audience, could not challenge the binary of male and female in any fundamental way, could not reconfigure gender, race, nationality, religion or sexuality for performer and spectator alike? In an era when anxiety about the transformative effects of representation has transferred from theatre to the media of television and film, anti-theatrical diatribes

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[3] Barish's *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* catalogues the history of anti-theatrical discourse in Western culture, looking at how commentators have ascribed moral and psychological dangers to theatre practice. Barish's observation that theatre practitioners themselves frequently display an anti-theatrical prejudice in their work (see Barish, 1981, 450) is particularly useful for my investigations of Warner and LeCompte's approach to cross-dressing later in this thesis.

really seem to be excessive in their ascription of such transformative powers to theatrical performance.

However, I want to side with the anti-theatricalists in their condemnation of threats to the semiotics of dress. I want to believe, along with them, that perhaps clothing *does* make the man (or woman), perhaps dress, make-up, hairstyle and body language are in fact constitutive of the identity of performers, not only of their gender identity, but also of the very configuration of their bodies. I want to argue that cross-dressing can transform the body of the actor through the act of performance, and that cross-dressing can also transform the body of the spectator. I want to celebrate the power of performance implied by Plato in his: "haunting acknowledgement of the potency of the theater leading to an all the more stinging repudtiation of it" (Barish 1981, 5). I want to believe, along with Plato, Stubbes and Scott, that theatre can and does have the threatening and productive power that they ascribe to it; that theatre can have a transformative effect on the bodies of the performer and the audience.

Of course, I side with the anti-theatrical protesters in a spirit of celebration rather than condemnation. As I will argue throughout this thesis, I believe that representation can have a formative effect on the identity of both performer and spectator. I am interested in how cross-dressing can reveal the contingency of identity even while it may also reaffirm, or even produce, the status quo. Throughout this thesis, my investigation of the use of cross-dressing in the work of Deborah Warner and Elizabeth LeCompte will examine how their work is positioned in relation to theatricality, both in reviews, and within the performances themselves for, as Jonas Barish points out, "the theater has certainly never lacked a streak of anti-theatricalism of its own" (Barish 1981, 450).

For the rest of this section, I will survey the literature on cross-dressing, first looking at the feminist scholarship on cross-gender performance and then going on to examine the literature on other kinds of crossings: primitivism, Orientalism, blackface minstrelsy, postcolonial mimicry and the phenomenological crossings between the "real" and the "illusion" onstage. I will conclude this section by arguing for the intersectional relations of identity in cross-dressed performance.

Feminist Crossings

Before I begin my discussion of the feminist scholarship on cross-dressing, I want to define how I will use the terms "transvestism," "drag," "cross-dressing," "passing," and "impersonation." While the terms are close in meaning, they do have slightly different connotations. As Marjorie Garber argues that the term "transvestite" has medical overtones, fitting into the - frequently confining - medical investigations of the psychology of cross-dressers and used as a term to differentiate between those who wear the clothes of the opposite sex (transvestites), and those who desire to become the opposite sex (transsexuals). However, as Garber points out, the language used to construct these distinctions is rarely used by the cross-dressing community themselves, who often refuse to use these terms (Garber 1997, 4). However, transvestism is useful in connoting the *gendered* act of crossing, as compared with other kinds of cross-dressing.

"Transvestism" should be distinguished from the term "drag," therefore, which emerged in the mid-nineteenth century when the term "the drag" - or brake on a coach - became: "homosexual slang, to connote the drag of a gown with a train. To go on the drag or flash the drag, i.e., to use female attire to solicit men, is dated [...] around 1850" (Senelick 1993, 85). "Drag" was a term associated with homosexual prostitution and made its way into theatrical parlance to describe specifically female impersonation by men in cabaret and music-hall revues. Its use to describe female impersonation in Ancient Greece and during the English Renaissance is not entirely appropriate, therefore, as it is more accurately applied to marginal and fringe theatrical performances usually associated with gay men. Drag acquired a political dimension in the 1980s and 1990s in gay cultures, and has been used by Judith Butler to envision a politically subversive resistance to hetero-normative culture.

Cross-dressing appears the most innocuous of the terms, since it most clearly and simply describes the mechanism of one gender playing another (or an Other.) However, the notion of crossing risks "re-inscrib[ing] the binary, the "truth" of masculinity and femininity" (Ferris 1993, 8), by assuming that the performer can "cross" from one stable point of gender to another. Cross-dressing can therefore be used as a conservative term to banish the ambiguity which cross-dressed performance potentially creates.

The term impersonation carries with it a similar charge, assuming that there is a "real" or stable identity to impersonate, and a real and stable identity behind the

impersonation. Impersonation's evocation of mimicry shows that it does not necessarily presume upon an act of gendered or racial crossing, but in fact points to the act of acting itself, describing the actor's "taking on" of another person onstage. The term impersonation is useful when describing the instances of performance when actors portray an identity similar to their own (i.e. a male actor playing a male character), but foreground the fiction, or theatricality of this persona.

Impersonation also carries with the connotation of deceit which links it to the act of "passing". Passing is to become unreadable as a cross-dresser, passing "unnoticed" as the opposite sex, or as another race. Unlike the majority of the theatrical traditions of cross-dressing, which rely on the incongruous display of contradictory identities and foreground the act of crossing, passing relies on the ability to deceive the viewer, not in fact constituting a performance in itself unless it is revealed *as* performance. Passing can apply to gendered crossings but also racial, national or sexual ones, the "tragic mulatto" being a prominent trope in literature on racial passing. I will use the term "passing" like "impersonation" - where actors play characters with similar characteristics to themselves - but this time to describe performances where the artificiality of an actor's performance is *not* foregrounded for the audience.

I will use the term "cross-dressing" throughout this thesis to describe the process of playing an Other on the stage. I see "crossing" as the moment in which there is a power shift between performer and character, and there is a power play in operation on the stage. I employ the term "crossing" throughout my thesis while acknowledging the problematic nature of its connotation of fixity and stability, and examine how the levels of fixity and stability in cross-dressing vary widely in different historical, cultural, economic and aesthetic contexts.

All of these terms are useful for my analysis of Warner and LeCompte's work. I use cross-dressing to describe generally the move from one identity to another which incorporates a power shift, such as Shaw's portrayal of a king, Valk's blackface and Dafoe's Orientalism. I use impersonation to describe the evident artificiality in Shaw's portrayal of Medea's femininity, and Valk and Dafoe's hyperbolic representations of gender in *The Hairy Ape*. I use the term "passing" to describe the effect of a black actor playing Jones in O'Neill's play, and the notion of transvestism for moments where there is an ambiguity or blurred effect constructed by the gendered crossings in

these productions, such as Shaw's cross-dressed kisses as Richard. I acknowledge drag as a form of cross-dressing which informs how these productions can be read, but I do not refer to the cross-gender casting as drag in performance, preferring to use it to refer to the political and marginal practices of crossing in gay culture.

The feminist debate around cross-dressing was kick-started in 1985 by Sue-Ellen Case's essay "Classic Drag: The Male Creation Of Female Parts," which pushed the question of cross-dressing into the scholarly limelight when she claimed that the Ancient Greek practice of female impersonation functioned to: "represent the patriarchal values attached to the gender while suppressing the experiences, stories, feelings and fantasies of actual women" (Case 1988, 7). Case contested the canonisation of Greek plays, arguing that they relied on the myth of "Woman" without accounting for the perspectives of real women. Cross-dressing therefore functioned to exclude women from the stage and replace them with: "masks of patriarchal production" (Case 1988, 7).

Case made the important rhetorical point that the dramatic canon was founded on implicit class and gender hierarchies which rely on the exclusion of women as part of their dramatic logic. Arguing that the use of cross-dressing in Greek and Renaissance theatre "infected" subsequent female roles, even when women were allowed back on the stage, Case traced a line from Greece to the present through the patriarchy of "drag" roles, using drag to mean both literal impersonation of "Woman" by men, or the performance of "Woman" by female actors. Case discredited the canon itself and suggested: "Female characters reflect the absence of real women from the stage and the reasons for their absence. Each culture that regards it as valuable to revive those classic plays actively participates in the same patriarchal subtext which created those female characters as "Woman'" (Case 1988, 12).

Case developed a vision of cross-dressing as a practice which has come to infect the construction of gender on the Western stage, seeing female impersonation as the paradigm upon which female roles have been constructed ever since. Jill Dolan also rejected traditional female impersonation, for the same reason, in her 1984 essay "Gender Impersonation Onstage: Destroying Or Maintaining The Mirror Of Gender Roles?', Dolan echoed Case, arguing that: "women are non-existent in drag performance, but woman-as-myth, as a cultural and ideological object is constructed in an agreed exchange between the male performer and the usually male spectator. Male

drag mirrors women's socially constructed roles" (Dolan 1992, 6). However, Dolan also argued that drag can function as a useful device for feminist theatre practitioners, who can use female-to-male impersonation to: "point to real-life gender costuming" (Dolan 1992, 7). Dolan was supported by Kate Davy in 1986, who argued that, while female impersonation by male performers subsumed female subjectivity, cross-dressing practices by feminist practitioners such as Split Britches in the WOW café were capable of subverting received notions of gender identity (Davy 1994).

Case, Davy and Dolan made important rhetorical interventions within the theatre academy with their rejection of the "classic" Western canon. This rejection was part of a strategy to critique the canon which has frequently excluded women as the makers of art. Their critique functioned to develop new critical strategies within feminist theatre scholarship and practice, in order to contest received notions around gender representation. In doing so, Case, Davy and Dolan relied on a notion of a mimetic relationship between representation and "reality", assuming that the vision of women on the stage should correlate with the experiences of "real" women off it. Alisa Solomon describes this approach as: "a faulty notion of theatrical mimesis, one that posits (like Plato) a Truth behind a representation, and then rejects this totalizing Truth as inherently misogynistic" (Solomon 1997, 12).

Case, Davy and Dolan assumed that the absence of women from the stage automatically meant that cross-dressed performance served the patriarchal system. As Solomon points out, this does not take account of the potentially deconstructive effects of cross-dressing, nor does it explain the virulent anti-theatrical attacks, which have greeted female impersonation since its inception, from the very patriarchs that Case, Davy and Dolan critique. Their notion that feminist theatre practice can make use of cross-dressing for its own ends furthermore suggests that it is the "doer" of cross-dressing who determines its meaning; it is the performer or director who establishes and controls the signification of drag, and therefore ensures that it carries with it the "right" message for the spectator who will consume this message in an uncomplicated fashion.

However, theories and histories of reception and spectatorship suggest, to the contrary, that the control of meaning cannot lie entirely in the hands of the "doer" or performer, but is produced through a complicated process of communication between

performer and spectator.[4] This casts into doubt Case's notion that the reproduction of plays which have relied on cross-dressing for the construction of female roles will automatically reproduce the patriarchal values of that moment. This view does not take account of historical and cultural differences in reception and performance, and does not allow for any leeway in the critical possibilities within the relationship between actor and the role. While Case, Davy and Dolan's rhetorical strategies functioned as important institutional interventions at the time, their scholarship relied on a static and universalist conception of the mechanics of representation, reception and patriarchy itself.

This scholarship is useful for my analysis of Warner and LeCompte's work, in particular Case's assertion that "drag roles" lie at the basis of the construction of female roles for female actors. This notion helps to articulate the idea that "same sex" casting is ghosted by cross-dressing and can have "cross-dressed" effects on the stage. Since Warner, in particular, has directed plays which were written for cross-dressed stages, such as the work of Shakespeare and Greek tragedy, the use of cross-dressing in her work can be argued to be "ghosted" by the implicit cross-dressing of the texts. Similarly, LeCompte's work with O'Neill's texts which explicitly rejected the cross-dressing of the minstrel stage, also informs her use of cross-dressing in *The Emperor Jones.*

It is clear that this scholarship on cross-dressing in the 1980s launched a vigorous debate on the mechanics of representation and reception in the figure of the transvestite. Marjorie Garber in *Vested Interests* (1992) argued that: "the tendency on the part of many critics has been to look *through* rather than *at* the cross-dresser, to turn away from a close encounter with the transvestite, and to want instead to subsume that figure within one or the two traditional genders" (Garber 1997, 9). In contrast to Case et al., Garber argued for the subversive potential of transvestism which, "offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of "female" and "male", whether they are considered essential, or constructed, biological or cultural" (Garber 1997, 10).

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[4] See Susan Bennett's *Theatre Audiences* (1997), Erica Fischer Lichte's *The Semiotics Of Theatre* (1992) and Marvin Carlson's *Theatre Semiotics* (1990).

Garber posited the cross-dresser as a utopian site of the breakdown of categories, whose performance can open up and dissect the confining binaries of male/female, sex/gender, nature/culture. In so doing, Garber removed cross-dressing from the historical specificities of spectatorship, performance traditions, and historical and cultural contexts. The transvestite, in her formulation, becomes a free-floating signifier of liberation and critique outside of the manifestations of drag in specific contexts. While Garber's scholarship certainly does explore the historical and cultural examples of cross-dressing, she also makes a utopian, idealist and somewhat universalist claim about the "innate" meaning of cross-dressing. Garber's move from the imitative to the inventive effects of cross-dressing is certainly useful for this thesis, but she does not adequately account for the historical and political contexts in which cross-dressing's effects operate.

The utopianism of Garber's scholarship in many ways reproduced the assumptions of Case, Dolan and Davy's scholarship: that the study of cross-dressing should aim to discover its fundamental "meaning", rather than examining its different meanings from historical moment to historical moment. Lesley Ferris's 1993 collection of essays, *Crossing The Stage, Controversies On Cross-dressing*, rectified this imbalance somewhat by offering a range of debates on theatrical cross-dressing and drag in theatrical performance. Ferris's introduction to the volume argued for a balanced view of crossing as: "a way of play, that while often reinforcing the social mores and status quo, carries with it the possibility of exposing that liminal moment, that threshold of questioning, that slippery sense of a mutable self. As spectators we are invited to read the transvestite body crossing the stage in more than one way" (Ferris 1993, 9).

Ferris focused on the complex process of reception required by the transvestite performance, arguing that cross-dressing forces the spectator to approach the performance as a Barthesian "writerly" text: "a work that forces the reader/spectator to see multiple meanings in the very act of reading itself, of listening, watching a performance" (Ferris 1993, 8). At the same time, Ferris was aware that cross-dressing may risk re-inscribing the binaries it appears to break down, by relying on a notion of stable gender points from which to cross. The essays in the volume maintained the tension between the potential deconstructive effects cross-dressing might have on

gender binaries, while simultaneously cautioning against the conservative potential of cross-dressing on the stage.

Notably, many of the essays in Ferris's collection focused on the question of spectatorship and the institutional contexts of cross-dressed performance, which relativised and contextualised the possible meanings of cross-dressing. From the cross-dressed heroines of the Renaissance stage, to the use of cross-dressing in contemporary feminist theatres and writing, the focus of the debate appeared to move from a discussion of the *content* of the cross-dressed performance to an acknowledgement of the specific conditions of spectatorship and performance which would constrict or enable the potentially subversive effects of cross-dressed performance. This change of emphasis in cross-dressing scholarship has informed the content of this thesis, and helps me to account for the effects produced by the cross-dressing in the productions I am discussing.

Alisa Solomon's introduction to *Redressing The Canon* in 1997 similarly argued for the need to take account of the specific mechanics of reception, and the institutional surroundings in which the transvestite performance takes place. She argued that: "a play's feminist meaning is to be found not in what happens to a character, but in what happens to the audience" (Solomon 1997, 14). Solomon followed Garber's utopian claims for cross-dressed theatre performances, but with a close eye on the dynamics of reception and historical context, arguing that: "the startling contradiction of the stated by the shown" (Solomon 1997, 3-4), is at the centre of cross-dressed performance and that this contradiction can reveal and deconstruct gendered identity on the stage and in the audience, even within seemingly conservative circumstances. Solomon's materialist analyses of cross-dressed performances have been hugely influential for the approach I have taken to performance analysis in this thesis.

Laurence Senelick added to cross-dressing scholarship with his book, *The Changing Room*, when he argued that: "the transvestite in the theatre does not confute or elude categories; it creates new ones" (Senelick 2000, 11). Senelick's book was something of a maverick revisioning of the feminist scholarship on cross-dressing and offered a detailed cross-cultural history of cross-dressing. In it, Senelick usefully pointed to the already dubious gender stability of actors themselves which played into the culture of cross-dressing, arguing that, "however much the theatre has been pressed

into service to endorse and advertise society's values, it is staffed by a suspect and marginal personnel" (Senelick 2000, 8-9). Senelick's point is a good one: actors themselves have been frequently tainted by their work of impersonation, especially when that impersonation is of the opposite sex. The lowly status of actors points to the transformative interrelationship between the body of the actor, the role that they play, and the gaze of the audience, a point that I will develop further below. Senelick has been useful for my research in providing detailed historical information for my work on the theatrical precedents to Warner and LeCompte's use of cross-dressing in performance.

The debate around cross-dressing moved from a feminist critique in the 1980s of the presences and absences - the content - of cross-dressed performance; to a celebration of cross-dressing for its subversive potential in the early 1990s; to a cautious examination of the historical and cultural contexts of drag and the mechanics of representation and reception within drag performance in the early 2000s.

In each attitude to cross-dressing, new ideas of the body and performance were developed: from a reliance on the "real" in the early critiques, which related authentic subjectivities to the sexed bodies they came in, through a celebration of the free-play of the trans-historical transvestite body, which removed the body from any material structures into a utopian space of deconstruction and subversion, to a strongly historicist and reception-based vision of the body which saw the body of the cross-dresser as constructed by, and constructing, the audience viewing that body. The ways in which these critics variously envisioned cross-dressing was predicated on how they imagined the body, identity and the "real", to operate within performance. I want to combine these approaches by attending to how the images created by cross-dressing produce identity effects within the spectator which are constructed within and by the historical and cultural contexts in which they take place.

Throughout the scholarship on cross-dressing, critics focused on the differences between male-to-female and female-to-male cross-dressing. Male-to-female cross-dressing was often condemned by feminist critics, to the extent that Erica Munk declared in 1985: "at the moment, most men in drag are no more subversive than whites in blackface" (Munk, cited in Ferris 1993, 9). Munk's claim went along with Case and Dolan's: that the bodies performing drag *mattered* when it came to the

meaning of drag.[5] Alisa Solomon argued similarly, that the primary focus on male-to-female cross-dressing: "simply reinstates the presumption of the male as universal; he remains the standard, the given, even when wearing feather boas and four inch stilettos" (Solomon 1993, 144). Solomon suggested, therefore, that there is a difference between female impersonation and male impersonation where: "men dressed as women often parody gender, women dressed as men, on the other hand, tend to perform gender - that is, they can reveal the extent to which gender, as Judith Butler suggests, is a "regulatory fiction"" (Solomon 1993, 145).

Solomon's claims for the power of the male impersonator were similar to many other feminist scholars" views: that female to male cross-dressing contains an inherent subversiveness which male to female cross-dressing lacks, male cross-dressers relying on ridicule, on the comedy of dressing "down", female cross-dressers critiquing and threatening the social system by dressing "up" in the clothes of the elite. This argument may well be true of the contemporary feminist practices of male impersonation, such as the work of Split Britches and Simone Benemussa. However, the history of female Hamlets and Romeos on the Victorian stage argues, to the contrary, that women in male roles just as easily re-affirm gender stereotypes as they subvert them.

We can see this in Samuel Pepys's comments in his diary after seeing a female cross-dresser: "to the theatre ... where a woman ... came afterwards on the stage in men's clothes, and had the best legs that ever I saw, and I was very well pleased by it" (cited in Senelick 1993, 81). While there are undoubtedly differences between male cross-dressing and female cross-dressing, differences which are centred on power, these differences are historically and contextually bound, and are frequently contradictory, as Laurence Senelick suggests: "women who change their gender are more problematic: on the one hand, they seem to threaten by usurping male prerogative but on the other, their transformations can be interrupted as yet one more adornment to an already available body" (Senelick 2000, 8). The claims made by these scholars for

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[5] This use of the term "mattering" is used here with the pun intended by Butler in her book *Bodies That Matter* (1993): the bodies performing cross-dressing matter and are mattered through the act of crossing. What body is cross-dressed matters in the sense that the semiotics of gender or race will necessarily alter how the act of crossing is understood and what the politics of that cross-dressing are for the spectator.

the differences between male and female drag, seem to rely again on finding the inherent and trans-historical significance of the cross-dresser.

These debates are highly relevant to my discussion of two productions which featured female-to-male cross-dressing. As I have already argued in my Introduction, neither Warner's or LeCompte's production was straightforwardly subversive or conservative in the use of cross-dressing, rather, the images they created and their effects on the audience were ambiguous and complex. The power dynamics of playing "male" on the stage were mediated and moderated by the dynamic of playing "Other" identities alongside the cross-gender casting and the effect of the cross-dressing was not clearly transgressive or conservative. Examining these productions can work to complicate the debate on the differences between male and female impersonation.

What emerges from a survey of the literature on cross-dressing is the need to examine the conditions of production and reception in cross-dressed performances in order to understand the nuances of the historical implications of the act of crossing. What also emerges is that scholars as well as performances necessarily construct hierarchies of identity within their work. For example, while Garber and Senelick both consider the instance of the minstrel wench on the blackface minstrels stage, they do so primarily from the perspective of how gender was represented on the stage, rather than engaging with the specifics of the interrelationship between race and gender in the minstrel theatre. While the construction of a hierarchy of identities is necessarily part of any scholarly project - including this one - nonetheless, the complex intertwinings of identity within cross-dressed performance is often overlooked in the literature on cross-gender theatre. While this thesis also focuses on gender, I will attend to the complex configurations of identity in the productions I am analysing and examine the ways in which gender is materialised through, and materialises, a range of interlinked identities on the stage.

In the next section, I turn to Judith Butler's scholarship. While her work has focused on the question of drag, it is in fact her engagement with the idea of the body which is most useful for my research on cross-dressing. I will discuss the implications of her work for how we might see the actor's body in performance.

Troubling Gender: Judith Butler And Drag

Judith Butler's scholarship on drag has been foundational to my approach to cross-dressing in theatre practice. While Butler does not work in theatre studies, and her work focuses on "social" drag rather than theatrical cross-dressing, her philosophical investigations into the relationship between gender, sexuality and performativity, have been hugely influential on feminist theatre scholarship. In this section, I will briefly explore and critique Butler's work, and examine her approach to gender performance and drag, the Real, and the emergent body, while arguing that the study of theatre practice can extend and complicate Butler's approach to performativity and performance.

In her seminal work, *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler investigated the sex/gender binary set up by feminism, in a bid to interrogate the fundamental terms of the debate: "the body", "sex", "gender", and "heterosexuality". Butler argued in *Gender Trouble* that the humanist reliance on a notion of gender "essence" was an illusion materialised through the repetitive act of gender performance. Rather than seeing sexed bodies as somehow "outside" cultural discourse, Butler proposed that bodies were materialised *through* discourse, through the conformity to, and repetitive performance of, social norms governing bodily appearance and identity. Butler argued that stable "sexed" bodies were an illusory effect of this performance. Unlike theatrical performance, however, Butler argued that the repetitive nature of gender performance rendered it invisible, giving gender and sex the appearance of the "natural" and immutable. Butler therefore used drag as a metaphor for the construction of gender identity and sexed bodies, arguing that examining the mimetic qualities of drag could reveal the mimetic qualities of all gender performance. Drag was therefore innately subversive of gendered and bodily identity.

In her later work, *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler renegotiated her approach to drag. Answering the critiques of her work by other feminist scholars, she modified her approach to drag performance, no longer seeing it as innately subversive, but arguing that it could still reveal the mechanisms by which gender identity and sexed bodies are invisibly materialised in dominant culture. Nonetheless, Butler reformulated her views on drag, admitting that the de-naturalisation of identity does not automatically lead to subversion, and that drag can serve the gender system it appeared to critique. Butler also usefully extended her scholarship to include the question of race, arguing that: "There are [...] quite pressing and significant historical reasons for

asking how and where we might read not only [gender and race's] convergence but the sites at which the one cannot be constituted save through the other" (Butler 1993, 168). While Butler's continued to deconstruct the sex/gender binary, she modified and complicated the use of drag in her later work.

Butler's project to counter the sex/gender binary on which much feminist scholarship has relied, worked to undermine what she saw as the Cartesian leanings of this binary. Descartes famous declaration in 1637, "cogito ergo sum" (cited in Cottingham 1997, 19), constructed a binary of body and soul, in which "the soul by which I am what I am - is entirely distinct from the body, [...] and would not cease to be even if the body did not exist" (Descartes cited in Cottingham 1997, 21-22). Descartes has had a formative effect on the ways in which identity and the body have been imagined ever since. Descartes rendered the body a passive object in which the subjectivity of the soul resided. The physical was therefore objectified and repressed in favour of the metaphysical. A Cartesian approach therefore sees the body as a passive, stable object which contains, but does not constitute, identity.[6] Judith Butler pointed

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[6] The Cartesian discourse of passive bodies was ostensibly countered by the Social Darwinist fixing of the categories of race, gender and class, constructing a set of psychological identities which derived from the appearance of race, gender, sexuality, etc in the body. Instead of bodies becoming the vessels for identity, bodies became the fixed signifiers of specific sets of social qualities (see McClintock 1995). However, while the discourse of Social Darwinism seemed to contradict Descartes, it similarly attempted to make the body fixed and stable in its objective significations, rather than positioning the body as a transforming and subjectivated being. The effects of both these discourses on the view of the body in Western culture must be argued to have had a discursive and formative effect on bodies themselves. Therefore, even while Butler, Foucault and Merleau-Ponty advocate a vision of the body as an active, subjectificated and emergent being, nonetheless, the Cartesian and Social Darwinist visions of the body must be acknowledged to be part of the social systems through which the body is materialised and disciplined into social intelligibility. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that people relate to the question of embodiment in inconsistent and frequently contradictory ways. Therefore, while Cartesian and Social Darwinist thinking have been influential and formative in how the body has been understood and situated, this is not to say that these views operated as meta-discourses, without the possibility of resistance or diversity in the social engagement with the body. Religious, class, ethnic, racial and gendered differences also determine the social response to, and formation of, bodily beliefs, practices and subjectivities. However, as I shall argue throughout, the differences between social identity formations are also constructed, in part, through the differences in how the body is imagined and performed in relation to these identities.

out that the sex/gender binary constructed by feminism - in a bid to escape the "biology is destiny" trap - reconstructs the Cartesian divide of a passive, stable, sexed body, "outside" of social discourse which exists as a vessel for the socially constructed subjectivity of gender identity.

Butler suggests that the body should be approached as an emergent set of social practices in order to counteract the Cartesian binary of sexed bodies and gendered identities. She argues that the body must be examined genealogically, as a material concept, inculcated and produced by specific Western belief systems, discourses of rationality, attitudes towards "nature" and so on. While Butler works in the legacies of Foucault's project to explore the genealogy of the body, she also argues that he renders the body passive in his work, seeing it as inscribed upon by regulatory and juridical systems, positioning the body as an unsignifying object upon which identity is imposed. As Butler argues: "this is a body, described through the language of surface and force, weakened through a "single drama" of domination, inscription and creation" (Butler 1999, 165).

Butler proposes an alternative vision of the body as a set of cultural practices operating within a field of cultural and historical possibilities, a conception of the body inspired by the work of Maurice Merleau Ponty. Butler's notion of emergent bodies is useful for my study of theatrical cross-dressing, as it allows me to examine the intertextual and fluctuating nature of the actor's body in performance. Rather than presuming upon the actor's body as a Cartesian a priori of performance, Butler's work demands an examination of the actor's body as a product *of* that performance, seeing the actor's body as a *process* which both materialises, and is materialised by, the act of acting. An examination of cross-dressing in these terms allows me to account for how the act of crossing can transform the body of the performer and how, through the act of identification, the spectator's emergent body can also "incorporate" the act of crossing.

Furthermore, to apply Butler's theories of the body to theatrical performance, the actor must be seen as "doubly" performing on the stage. According to Butler's theories, when actors appears onstage they *invisibly* and repetitively perform the gender norms which make their bodies intelligibly "sexed." Furthermore, however, actors also *visibly* perform the heightened gender codes of theatre practice. Therefore, to examine how an actor performs gender on the stage, it is necessary to see a double performance taking place, to see the actor performing "themselves," and then performing the

character they are playing. However, the binary between "social" and "fictional" performance is not quite so clear cut. Just as the invisible gender performance of the actor will inform how their "fictional" performance of gender is read, the theatrical performance of the actor also inevitably reforms their social gender performance, reconfiguring how their body is materialised and performed. This explains the traditional association of actors with sexual degeneracy and social marginality: their job of performing the heightened versions of gender on the stage reconfigures their social performance of gender off it, and this changes how their body appears and operates socially.

However, Butler argues that the social performance of gender is doomed to failure. While sexed bodies are materialised through their performance of gender norms, these bodies never attain the gender status which these norms idealise. Butler argues, "to the extent that gender is an assignment, it is an assignment which is never quite carried out according to expectation, whose addressee never quite inhabits the ideal s/he is compelled to approximate. Moreover, this embodying is a repeated process" (1993, 231). The inevitable "failure" of bodies to attain the social ideals of gender, accounts for the anxious and repetitive cultural policing of gendered identity, an anxiety often expressed through the construction of stereotypes, which Homi K Bhabha also explores in relation to race and coloniality. As I will argue below, theatre has been one place in which these norms and stereotypes have been constructed and invented. Theatre can be seen as a disciplinary mechanism in the formation of social and bodily identities.

It is in the failure of bodies to attain these ideals, that Butler locates the possibility of gender subversion, asking "which possibilities of doing gender repeat and displace through hyperbole, dissonance, internal confusion, and proliferation the very constructs by which they are mobilized?" (1999, 42). Butler uses drag performance as exemplary of the potential subversive disruptions of natural gender roles, for her, drag becomes a metaphor for the performance of gender more generally, revealing how the seemingly natural edifice of sexed bodies is in fact constructed through performance. The evident artificiality of drag performance can work to reveal the artificiality of gender more generally, as Butler argues: "*in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself - as well as its contingency*" (1999, 175, italics original) While Butler admits that the performance of gender subversion does not

automatically lead to subversion, she argues that drag can reveal how gender and sex are formed, performed and perverted.

Butler therefore advocates a "subversive" rather than "rebellious" approach to the reforming of the gendered system. While rebellion would mean an attempt to construct entirely new gender identities and systems, Butler shows how the attempts at rebellion by feminist scholars have worked to reaffirm many of the binaries they attempted to overturn. Instead Butler argues for a subversive attitude towards identity, advocating the corruption, perversion or "queering" of the gender system already in existence, through the hyperbolic expressions of gender done "wrong." Therefore, rather than drag being seen as a form which opposes the gender system, drag can be seen to repeat many of the inequalities of that system, in its construction of stereotypical images of gender. However, drag can be simultaneously seen to challenge the gender system by performing these stereotypes "wrong," with inappropriate bodies, revealing gender codes to be arbitrary, and simultaneously formative.

However, as I argued above, while cross-dressed performance can operate to challenge the normative and static notions of gender, sex and the body, theatre can also operate in the service of the Real by producing idealised and denigrated bodies on the stage, bodies to which the spectator is expected to (attempt to) conform, or alternately reject and denigrate. Theatre can work to establish and construct norms, can operate to reinforce, and invent, formative stereotypes of identity. More generally, artistic representation can be argued to operate as a formative yardstick for the invisible performances of identity in the spectator. Butler defines the Real by pointing out that: ""realness" is not exactly a category in which one competes; it is a standard that is used to judge any given performance within the established categories" (Butler 1993, 129). Theatre can operate to challenge the Real by performing identities "wrong" on the stage (as in the case of drag performance), but it can also operate to invent and reinforce the standards by which the "realness" of the invisible gender performances of the spectator is measured and maintained.

By seeing identity itself as an invisible performance, Butler locates the possibility for the subversion of gender norms. As I will argue below, Butler opposes the idea of performance to the idea of the theatrical. However, when examining how identity is invented and produced in cross-dressed performance, I want to apply Butler's

ideas to the very idea of theatricality itself, to see theatre as a place in which identity has been formed and produced (within specific social and cultural contexts), rather than as simply aping already existent social identities. Inevitably representation and reality work within a reciprocal and complex interrelationship, but I want to focus on how theatre operates to create identities as well as to reflect them. Butler's idea of performativity is enormously useful for this project, the idea that an act or a statement can have performative effects, can enact what it describes, can be applied to theatre's ability to reconfigure not only the actor's body, but also the spectator's, through the performative act of performance. And, if as Butler argues, the possibility for the subversion of gender norms lies in performing them "wrongly," then it is in the mis-representations, the performances with inappropriate bodies, that the potential for subversion can operate in theatrical performance.

Butler's work has been criticised extensively by feminist scholars, and in *Bodies That Matter,* Butler worked to answer some of these criticisms. However, for the purposes of theatre studies, her work needs to be refined and problematised specifically from the perspective of live performance. Butler's work is inadequate for theatre studies with regard to the questions of the conditions of spectatorship, the non-literary aspects of theatrical performance, and particularly in relation to what I term Butler's "anti-theatrical" bias.

While Butler argues for an exploration of the subversive possibilities of performance, as Janelle Reinelt has pointed out, the question of the complex relations between spectator and performer are not engaged in sufficient detail in her work. Sue Ellen Case shows how, "Reinelt challenges Butler's arguments for their extraction of visibility and identity politics from theatrical production" (Case 1996, 17). I will discuss the need to explore the identificatory systems of spectatorship below, and will argue that the study of specific instances of cross-dressing and an acknowledgement of the range of cross-dressing practices can extend Butler's use of the term "drag," by studying the particular circumstances of performance. Specifying *who* is crossing, *who* is being impersonated, *how* they are being impersonated, what the fictional persona or *outcome* is of the impersonation, who is *watching* the performance and *where* they are watching it, can all help to ground and materialise Butler's notions of gendered performance and impersonation.

Furthermore, as Case herself points out, Butler's approach to performance and performativity has a tendency towards the literary. Butler tends to equate theatrical performance with text and script, arguing, "gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as the script survives the particular actors who make use of it" (Butler 1990, 277). While Butler sees gender and sexuality as discursively constituted, nonetheless, the discourse she emphasises is that of the literary and verbal, as Sue Ellen Case argues, "the critical discourses of speech act theory and deconstruction ultimately bring the notion of performativity back to their own mode of production: print" (Case 1996, 17). While the verbal and the literary are important discourses in theatre production, they are not the only ones, as my focus on the politics of costume and make-up in this thesis demonstrates.

Finally, in her emphasis on social performance, Butler tends towards an anti-theatrical bias. While Butler uses the concept of performance to describe identity formation, she nevertheless argues that theatre limits the subversive potential of cross-dressed performance through its formal qualities as designated performance:

> In the theatre, one can say "this is just an act," and de-realize the act, make acting into something quite distinct from what is real. Because of this distinction one can maintain one's sense of reality in the face of this temporary challenge to our existing ontological assumptions about gender arrangements; the various conventions which announce that "this is only a play" allows strict lines to be drawn between the performance and life. [...] On the street or in the bus, the act [of cross-dressing] becomes dangerous, if it does, precisely because there are no theatrical conventions to delimit the purely imaginary character of the act, indeed, on the street or in the bus, there is no presumption that the act is distinct from a reality; the disquieting effect of the act is that there are no conventions that facilitate making this separation (1990, 278).

Butler's anti-theatricalism works in complete opposition to the views of anti-theatrical protestors I mentioned above. Rather than seeing theatre practice as dangerously capable of transforming bodies, Butler sees within the dedicated performance conditions of theatre a containment of the subversive possibilities of cross-dressing. "Real-life" drag therefore poses a much greater threat to the status quo than the aesthetic machinations of the theatre performer.

Butler therefore constructs a distinction between the "fictional" cross-dresser and the "real" cross-dresser, arguing for the greater subversive potential of "real" life. While this distinction makes sense to a degree - it is true that we view performers on the stage differently to those on the street - nonetheless, a case can be made that Butler ignores the "dangers" specific to theatrical performance, and uses the notion of theatre in a limited sense. Furthermore, in Butler's bid to remove intentionality from gender performance, she simplifies the nature of theatrical performance. Seeing performance as the individual and de-historicised action of the individual, she fails to take account of the ways in which theatrical performance encodes, stylises and forms the actor's body on the stage. Butler therefore distinguishes between (theatrical) "performance" as the intentional action of an individual will and "performativity" as a repetitive system of power effects over time which render the performance of gender invisible *as* performance. Thus she argues:

> performance as a bounded "act" is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain and exceed the performer, and in that sense *cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's "will" or "choice"*. [...] The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake (1993, 234, italics mine).

However, in the repetitive performance of theatre texts and conventions, the individual will of the performer is only one element within the way that performer appears on stage, and the way that performer is perceived by the audience. The performer never has full control of the way that their body signifies to an audience, nor do they have absolute control over the way that they perform their role, rather they perform within a limited field of possible bodily practices. Just as with Butler's conception of gender, actors enter into a system of representation and impersonation, a system of disciplining and forming the body, which exists prior to the actor's entry and materialises the actor's body as a performing body. Furthermore, as I have already argued, the relationship between "real" life and theatre is not so clear cut, and the performative effects of theatre performance can renegotiate the ways we see identities in the street, or on a bus, as well as on the stage.

To make Butler useful for an analysis of theatre, therefore, her use of the term "theatre" must be complicated and extended. While this thesis will not focus on "elucidating" Butler's theories in relation to theatre, her approach to gender identity as

performance, and the body as an emergent process, are foundational to my theoretical framework and underlie my approach to the body in cross-dressed performance. Butler's work has been heavily influenced by Michel Foucault, who remains an unarticulated ghostly presence in this thesis, and, in my research into other scholarship on racial, national and ethnic crossings, I have gravitated towards writers who have also been inspired by his work. I want to briefly look at some of this scholarship now, examining the debates around other kinds of crossings, and surveying the ways in which identity is understood in relation to crossing. While not all of this scholarship is centred on performance, it has consequences for how we might debate the ethics, politics and products of crossing.

The Locations Of Crossings: Primitivism, Orientalism, Race, Class, Ethnicity And The Politics Of Performance.

Crossings of all kinds are inextricably bound up with relations of power. Playing the Other involves mechanisms of distancing, desire, fear, repulsion and appropriation. The problematic politics and ethics of crossing between cultures in representation and art was discussed by Edward Said in his seminal work *Orientalism* in 1978. Influenced by Foucault's proposition, which Reina Lewis defines as arguing "that all forms of knowledge are productive of power" (Lewis 1996, 16), Said argued that the Orient was a fiction, a Western representation of the Other which operated parasitically to construct Western identity: "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (Said 1978, 1-2). Through the West's reliance on the stasis of Eastern culture, Orientalism constructed the East: "as a kind of ideal and unchanging abstraction" (Said 1978, 8). Said argued that the Western representation of the Orient participated in the imperialism of Western colonial conquest and he showed how the aesthetics of artistic representation were implicated in the larger political domination by the West of the East.

Said's scholarship has been remarkably influential across a range of disciplines and has been inevitably and necessarily critiqued in subsequent scholarship. Scholars have challenged the hegemonic role Said attributes to the West, leaving whiteness and Occidentalism unquestioned and undifferentiated. Critics argued that Said maintained the binary of dominant West and passive East which Orientalism itself had constructed, and created an unquestioningly masculinist discourse in which: "gender occurs only as

a metaphor for the negative characterization of the Orientalised Other as "feminine"" (Lewis 1996, 17-18). While Said argued that Orientalism contained a gendered binary of masculine West self and feminine East, as Reina Lewis argues, he made no attempt to engage with the question of gendered identity within Eastern or Western cultures (see Lewis 1996). Revisions of Said's work have tended therefore to unsettle the East/West, Self/Other and Male/Female binaries in his work, and deconstruct: "the dominant imperial subject" (MacKenzie 1995, 12) which Said set up in his scholarship.

Said's work, and the criticisms of his work, are useful for my examination of the act of crossing on the stage. This is true for three reasons. First because theatre has had a long history of Orientalism in performance, especially in Victorian pantomime and the 20thCentury avant-garde theatre. Actors literally cross-dressed as Arab, Chinese and Japanese people in Victorian pantomime, and avant-garde artists appropriated Eastern theatre techniques to inspire jaded Western theatre practice, primitivising "Other" cultures for Western ends[7] during the Twentieth Century. Providing a formal language with which to explore and critique contemporary Western identity, and also providing a distancing language which could force audiences to re-assess texts and meaning on the stage, Eastern staging practices have had a huge impact on twentieth century Western theatre, becoming a kind of metaphorical racial cross-dressing. Since the Wooster Group have had a tradition of using Orientalism in their work, I will call on Said's scholarship when examining their use of Japanese theatre techniques.

Second, Said called attention to the fact that cultural crossings in art are not apolitical. Said's implication of art in the imperial project raises important questions around the ethics of cultural appropriation, a concern which has been continued by Rustom Bharucha's work, who asks the important question: "what are the alternative modalities of representing the Other with responsibility and engagement?" (Bharucha 2000, 2). The question of the ethics of crossing is raised in the Wooster Group's work through their use of blackface and Orientalism, and in Warner's *Medea* in which she appropriated the Irish language as an aesthetic trope.. Said and Bharucha's scholarship

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[7] Rustom Bharucha, amongst others, argues that Orientalism and primitivism still operate as the basis of the intercultural theatre practice of Peter Brook, Richard Schechner and Eugenio Barba. See Bharucha 2000.

will inform how I engage with the ethics of crossing, interrogating the problematic appropriations of identity in the work of Warner and the Wooster Group.

Finally, the emphasis that critics of Said have placed on the deconstruction of dominant as well as marginal identities is central to my thesis. While earlier critics of cross-dressing focused on the *images* that cross-dressing produced, I also want to attend to the question of the identity of the performer doing the crossing-dressing. Therefore, the question of masculinity as well as femininity should be raised and deconstructed in discussions of male-to-female cross-dressing, just as the question of whiteness needs to be examined when studying blackface minstrelsy. Furthermore, while feminism has tended to focus on the question of femininity in performance, and race studies have looked at blackness and minority ethnicities, the critiques of Said's work reveal the need to deconstruct the representation of dominant as well as minority identities rather than leaving majority identities unchallenged.

Homi K. Bhabha extended and developed Said's scholarship by investigating how representation works to construct colonial and post-colonial identities. Bhabha's work renegotiated Said's binary of dominant/passive in colonial relations and, as John MacKenzie shows, he emphasised that: "the colonial cultural experience had mutually modifying effects and that it is an oversimplification to divide the dominant and the subordinate to rigidly into active and passive" (MacKenzie 1995, 11) Two of Bhabha's most influential articles, "The Other Question," and "Of Mimicry And Men," which were published in his book, *The Location Of Culture* (1994), dealt specifically with the ways in which representing the Other both fixes colonial subjects in imperial culture, but also admits to the menace which those subjects present for the dominant culture.

In "The Other Question", Bhabha investigated how racial and ethnic stereotypes are based on the perceived stability and timelessness of native identity (similar to Said's argument that the Orient is fixed and ahistorical in Orientalist discourse.) However, Bhabha argued that the need to fix the native through stereotype belies the anxiety of the dominant power about the mutable and unknowable Otherness of the natives, "the stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive" (Bhabha 1994, 70). Bhabha saw cultural stereotypes as working to construct a subjectivity for coloniser and colonial alike, rather than seeing them simply as "misrepresentations.' On a similar vein to my arguments about cross-dressing, Bhabha made the claims that representation itself is (problematically)

formative rather than imitative, looking at how: "the processes of subjectification [are] made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse" (Bhabha 1994, 67).

In "Of Mimicry And Men," Bhabha focused on how colonial culture creates "mimic men," natives who were encouraged to conform to the dominant discourse by mimicking the behaviour, dress and manners of the coloniser. Bhabha analysed the ways in which mimicry constructs subjects through: "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite*" (Bhabha 1994, 86, italics original) - or "not white" (1994, 89). Colonial culture encourages a kind of colonial cross-dressing, or impersonation, a crossing that must be foregrounded *as* crossing, rather than becoming a more dangerous kind of "passing," which might threaten the supposed fixity of the coloniser/colonised binary on which imperial culture relies for its power.

This idea of mimicry will be important for two sections of this thesis: in my analysis of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* in which Brutus Jones can be seen as a failed mimic man, and in my examination of Warner's *Medea* in which Shaw's foreign Medea is forced to mimic the confining femininity of Corinth. In both instances, mimicry leads to violence and death, and works in tandem with Bhabha's assertion that: "the ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from mimicry - a difference that is almost nothing but not quite - to menace - a difference that is almost total but not quite" (Bhabha 1994, 91).

While Bhabha's analyses of colonial crossings are very useful for my research, his work is problematic in relation to gender. The unapologetically masculine title of his latter essay belies this fact. As Anne McClintock argues: "Bhabha effectively reinscribes mimicry as a male strategy without acknowledging its gendered specificity"(McClintock 1995, 64). Just as I critiqued the work of feminist scholars for collapsing other kinds of identities into the category of gender, so too is Bhabha's work problematic for his erasure of feminine identity within the colonial system, both within the colonising and colonised cultures. Nor does Bhabha fully clarify how the ambivalence of colonial discourse operates. As McClintock argues: "if all discourses are ambivalent, what distinguishes the discourse of the empowered from the discourse of the disempowered?" (McClintock 1995, 64) While Bhabha's notion of colonial cross-dressing is useful for my thesis, his elision of the asymmetry of power within colonial culture, and his erasure of the question of gender problematise his scholarship.

Eric Lott and David Roediger's work on the representations of race and class in blackface minstrelsy in America in the19th Century has also been influenced by Foucault and Said. Roediger in his 1991 book, *The Wages Of Whiteness*, argued that blackface minstrelsy operated to construct a class consciousness amongst working class men which was racially mediated: "blackface minstrels were the first self consciously white entertainers in the world" (Roediger 1991, 117). Roediger's materialist approach to the history of blackface focused on how race and class were intertwined in the construction of a white working class identity in America, the black mask erasing ethnic, national and class differences between the (white) workers, and he argued that whiteness operated as a "wage" to compensate working class men for their lowly class status, displacing class consciousness onto the terrain of race.

Eric Lott's 1993 *Love And Theft*, also included a materialist analysis on the construction of race in minstrelsy, but his focus lay more within a psycho-analytical approach to the transactions of repulsion and desire which underlay blackface performance. Like Bhabha, Lott focused on the ways in which representation was formative and reciprocal, the blackface mask's material and psychic effects producing whiteness in the performers bodies, and impacting on the bodies of black people, who were absent from minstrel shows. Similar to Bhabha, Lott concentrated on the ambivalence of the minstrel show, the ways in which the fixed representations of blackness operated through the white need to stabilise the menacing Otherness of black people, and the desire and envy felt by whites towards blacks. As Lott argues: "underwritten by envy as well as repulsion, sympathetic identification as well as fear, the minstrel show continually transgressed the colour line even as it made possible the formation of a self consciously white working class" (Lott 1993, 8).

Lott and Roediger's scholarship is useful for my analysis of the Wooster Group's use of blackface, and Eugene O'Neill's primitivisation of blackness in *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*. Furthermore, the idea that blackface produced whiteness in its performers is a provocative and productive notion for the study of cross-dressing. As Lott and Roediger point out, blackface minstrelsy was performed by immigrant workers in the early 19th century who were themselves understood to be liminally white in Victorian America. The action of blackening their faces, donning white gloves and whitening their lips meant that these immigrant workers could subsume their ethnic differences under the camouflage of blackness. The minstrel

show therefore simultaneously produced blackness and whiteness: blackness through the grotesque caricatures in the images created by the minstrel stage which subsequently mediated how black people themselves were seen, and whiteness through the homogenising effects of the burnt cork mask. Lott and Roediger argued that the performances also constructed and imprinted whiteness on the immigrant, working class, male bodies of spectators of minstrelsy.

Lott and Roediger's thesis is useful for my study of how the act of cross-dressing can have formative effects on the body of the performer and spectator. The "production" of whiteness through minstrelsy argues that race has been mediated and constructed through the lens of stage representation. This argument can be extended to identity more generally the notion that theatre can produce idealised and/or denigrated bodies which change how performers and spectators embody identity. The minstrel stage is a tragic example of how representation can have material as well as identificatory effects on bodies; not only through the mediation and construction of race in performance, but also through the lynching and race riots which frequently followed minstrel performances. The minstrel show reconstructed the "real" of the performers" bodies and had a directly material effect on the "real" of the bodies of African Americans.

However, the complexity of Lott and Roediger's discussion of the interrelationship between class and race was not applied as thoroughly to the question of gender, especially femininity. While they mention the cross-gender casting of minstrelsy, they focus on this as a symptom of homoeroticsm within the minstrel stage. However, the politics of newly emergent feminism were consistently lampooned by the minstrel stage, as Marjorie Garber argues: "They ridiculed bloomers in particular, and women's desire to wear pants in general: "When woman's rights is stirred a bit/ De first reform she bitches on/ Is how she can wid least delay/ Just draw a pair ob britches on'" (Garber 1993, 277).

Lott and Roediger give the question of femininity a cursory glance, collapsing it into a masculinist world of homoeroticsm and giving little attention to how the images constructed of women may have impacted on the bodies of women themselves, also absent from the minstrel stage and audience. The tradition of the minstrel wench is, according to Lott, an image confined to the relationship between performers and audience: "cross-dressing in the minstrel show intended to clear a space in which

homoeroticsm could find halting, humiliated, but nonetheless public expression" (Lott 1993, 165). While homoeroticsm may well have underlied the transvestite tradition of minstrelsy, the bodies of women, white women whom the minstrel polemics targeted, and black women whom the wench figure approximated, disappeared both from the stage itself, and from the scholarship of Lott and Roediger.

The elision of gender in discourse on blackface has been further maintained by Jack Gill, who argues that blackface and cross-gender performance are not equivalent, since: "borrowing the socially constructed meaning of clothing may illuminate and challenge the socially constructed meaning of gender; blackface in contrast borrows an essential aspect of another race, which cannot be changed at will" (Gill cited in Senelick 2000, 300)

Gill is right to point to the asymmetry of cross-race and cross-gender casting (although I would argue that the power differences between them are historically determined). However, Gill constructs a "realer than thou" equation, by arguing that clothing codes of gender are "social," whereas race is "natural." Clothing therefore constructs an illusion of gender whereas skin colour signifies the "real" of race. While racial categories and stereotypes were certainly "fixed" in the Victorian period by social Darwinism and by the minstrel stage itself, nonetheless, as Elizabeth Abel argues: "Rather than being a constant, colour [...] varies with positions in discursive exchanges" (Abel, Christian and Moglen 1997, 129)

Race may be more or less "real" at specific historical moments, but it is not innately realer than gender identity, as Gill argues. Proof of this can be seen in the minstrel stage itself, where the liminally coloured immigrant performers created their whiteness through the donning of the minstrel mask, creating an emergent racial identity, while simultaneously fixing black identity. They furthermore expressed their anxiety about the fixity of dress codes through their belittling of women who wore bloomers. While gender and race must not be assumed to be equivalent, nonetheless, the prioritisation of race as "realer" than gender is a problematic tendency in scholarship on blackface minstrelsy.

Lott and Roediger's work also contributes to the scholarship on the ethnicity of Irishness both in America and in England during the Victorian period. They both pointed out that Irish immigrants were prominent blackface performers, and that Irishness and blackness were closely aligned in American culture. This work joined a

body of scholarship which examines the racialisation of Irishness in Victorian British and American culture.

In Victorian culture, the imperialist discourse of Social Darwinism affirmed and naturalised already existent social hierarchies, but gave them a fixity through the scientific claims to objectivity and "truth'. As Eric Lott suggests, the new scientific theories on race: "straight-jacketed the relative fluctuations of earlier racial ideologies" (Lott 1993, 34), and the perceived hierarchies of the evolutionary scale were transferred to the hierarchies of the social system with black people aligned with apes and monkeys, while whites were positioned at the top of the evolutionary scale. The prominence of the Darwinian gaze was evident in the 19th and 20th centuries in the immense popularity of world fairs and TP Barnum's American Museum, in which monkeys, apes, and occasionally humans were displayed for the erudition and amusement of the public. As Donna Haraway has pointed out: "the display of monkeys and apes offer[ed] opportunities to teach lessons of race and hierarchy" (cited in Roediger 1997, 38). The gaze constructing race and class was not confined to scientific discourse: through these fairs, museums and zoos, the general public learnt to "look' race at the occupants of the exhibitions, and to see race on these terms in everyday life.

However, as Anne McClintock points out: "Ireland presented a telling dilemma for pseudo-Darwinian imperial discourse" (McClintock 1995, 52). Irish people proved a problematic challenge to the scientific categories of race by being Caucasians and yet colonial subjects and immigrants. The Darwinian hierarchy of race was applied through other means however. L. Perry Curtis Jr argues that in British caricature, that Irishness was represented with simian qualities based on the degree of political agitation in Ireland at the time, arguing that images of Irishness changed, "from a rather primitive, rustic , or simple minded peasant to a degenerate man and then an ape-like monster bent on murder or outrage" (Curtis Jr 1997, xiii). The growing social and political unrest of 19th Century Ireland transformed the Irish into monkeys in British representation.

Similarly in America, the Irish were aligned with the black community and both were portrayed with monkey or ape-like characteristics. This created the paradoxical effect that even while Irish immigrants constructed degrading images of blackness on the minstrel stage, they did so while "the drunken, belligerent, and foolish Pat and Bridget were stock characters," who were performed in theatres nearby (Ignatiev 1995,

2). The "greenface" of stage Irishness competed with the blackface of minstrelsy as two forms of racial cross-dressing on the American stage. Irish participation in minstrelsy therefore became a way of combating the caricatures of themselves also constructed through the act of crossing. As Noel Ignatiev points out: "In becoming white, the Irish ceased to be Green" (Ignatiev 1995, 3).

This historicist analysis of the racialisation of Irishness is useful for my examination of the figure of Eugene O'Neill, an Irish American who appropriated blackness to explore the conditions of post-colonial identity. It will also aid me in my exploration of the representation of Irishness in Warner and Shaw's work. Furthermore, the history of how Irishness was coloured through performance, demonstrates again how identity is mediated and embodied through representation. The cross-dressing of stage Irishness and minstrelsy contributed to the ethnic formation of Irishness in British and American culture. Cross-dressing invented ethnic and racialised bodies.[8]

Theatrical Performance And The Politics of Identity.

In all the instances of crossing I have mentioned above: Orientalism, colonial mimicry, blackface minstrelsy and stage Irishness, the relationship between the "real" and the "illusion" in the performance becomes blurred and challenged. The transformative effects of crossing challenge the stability of the real. The work of two theatre scholars Michael Quinn and Bert O States points to the continual destabilising effects on the "real" in performance. Michael Quinn points out in his essay "Celebrity and the Semiotics Of Acting" (1990) that the celebrity actor exerts a Brechtian alienation effect upon the illusion onstage, drawing the spectator's attention to the presence of their "real" selves alongside the character they are playing: "the personal qualities of the individual actor dominate the perception of the actor's references to the fictional events" (1990, 155). However, as Quinn shows, the "real" self of the actor is also a fiction, a composite of qualities based on the roles the actor has played

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[8] Of course, this is not to argue that cross-dressing invented identities out of context, but rather, that cross-dressing contributed to a more general social process of materialising racial identity and still does. However, my point remains, that theatre did not simply reflect racial stereotypes in the culture at large, but was also one of the places in which these stereotypes were invented and performed. Theatre therefore had a formative rather than imitative effect on racial identity.

previously, the gossip and publicity about the actor's private life, the reviews of their work, etc.

The illusion of the character therefore competes with the illusion of the real, but also interacts with it, as Quinn describes: " the celebrity figure is an alternative reference competing with and structuring the role of the stage figure as it promotes its own illusion" (1990, 160). The actor's "real" self, therefore, is not stable, but is a performance alongside the performance of the illusion. The "real" is an effect produced through the performance, and the presence of the celebrity actor has a disruptive effect on the illusion of the fiction by constructing an alternate and competing illusion of presence on the stage.

Bert O States" phenomenological approach to theater in his book *Great Reckonings In Little Rooms* (1985) also examines how the "real" is subsumed within and constructed by the fiction of the stage. States uses the example of the curtain call, when the actors accept applause from the audience. As States describes it: "the actor is, in a sense pretending that he is himself" (1985 203). The actor's bow is not a revelation of his/her "real" self but a further performance of "realness" which works within the frame of the illusion of the play, but is not part of it. As States suggests, however, the persona of the actor who takes the bow is not entirely distinct from the character either. Rather traces of the character stay within the actor's body, both during the curtain call, and again when we see the actor on the stage in another play. This affects the play and the actor as States describes it:

> The character remains in the actor, like a ghost. It is not at all a clean metamorphosis. [...] We do not think of an actor's portrayal of a role as being sealed off in the past tense, but as floating in a past absolute, as it were, like the role itself, outside time. Not only is it preserved in the communal memory, as part of the history of the play, leaving its imprint (for a time) on the text, but due to the repetitive element in all style, remnants keep popping up in the later work of the actor. (1985 200)

The actor's body could therefore be said to be configured *through* performance; the double playing of the character and the persona of the "real" self, is a performative act in relation to how the actor's body is produced during and subsequent to the performance. States" work points to the intertextual nature of the actor's body, the

sense that actors carry the accrued semiotics of previous roles within their bodies which become part of subsequent work, informing how that work can be read and understood.

States and Quinn offer an important frame for this thesis in attending to how the intertextual semiotics of the actor can contribute to an analysis of the potential meanings which their cross-dressed performance creates. As I have argued, cross-dressing relies on the tensions between the "real" and the "illusion," we must be able to identify that the actor is crossing, in order to appreciate the performance. As Anne McClintock points out: "cross-dressers seldom seek the security of a perfect imitation; rather they desire that delicious impersonation that belies complete disguise" (McClintock 1995, 175). Quinn and States show that this negotiation between the real and the illusion is an inevitable part of theatricality, and that the semiotics of the performer play, and compete, within the cross-dressed figure.

However, neither States nor Quinn attend to how the operation of the real in performance can construct and produce a particular politics of identity. Quinn, for example, does not examine how the gender of celebrity actors might affect the meaning of their performance, nor does States examine how race or ethnicity play into how the "real" operates as part of the illusion on the stage. I will argue throughout my thesis that the identity of the actor who cross-dresses is mediated and reconstructed by the act of crossing, just as minstrelsy produced a white Irishness, and as Orientalism constructed a Western persona. The semiotics of the actor are a vital part of interpreting the act of cross-dressing, but are deeply unstable and continually evolving through that cross-dressing.

Feminist scholars have critiqued the phenomenological approach to theatre for its lack of concern for the specificities of the historical and cultural contexts of performance. While States writes from the perspective of a spectator, he does not account for the politics of his viewing, therefore universalising and depoliticising his perspective as critic. As Elin Diamond argues, "phenomenological criticism [...] eliminate[s] historical contradiction" (Diamond 1992, 390). Diamond on the other hand argues that the process of identification through the act of spectating is an intrinsically political affair. Jean Laplanche and Jean Bertrand define identification as: "[A] psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other

provides. It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified" (cited in Munoz 1999, 7)

If the act of identification is formative of personality (and, I would argue, embodied identity), then the act of watching a performance must be said to be a transformative act for the spectator. The relationship between performer and spectator is therefore a complex negotiation in which the spectator constructs the performer's body through intertextual mediation, while the performer mediates the spectator's embodied self through the complex process of identification which is: "fraught with intensities of incorporation, diminishment, inflation, threat, loss, reparation and disavowal" (Munoz 1999, 8).

Elin Diamond therefore argues that the theatre scholar must examine: "what body is on view, what body is viewing" (1992, 390), when analysing the politics of performance. To this end, the work of Marvin Carlson and Susan Bennett is helpful when examining the conditions of spectatorship. Carlson argues that performances construct a "model spectator" (Carlson 1990, 12), to whom the production is imaginatively directed and that the director operates as a substitute for the audience in the process of rehearsal (1990, 12). Carlson's point is useful for my analysis of how productions constitute their audience, imagining and playing to a particular set of social qualities. As Diamond points out, this is an exclusionary tactic, constructing a set of "ideal" qualities to which audiences are expected to conform in order to participate in the world of the production.

Examining how a production imagines its model spectator is therefore a way to access the politics of that performance, by examining whom the production is including and excluding in the process of performance. The audience is not only included or excluded but also constructed, defined and remade through the process of spectating. However, audience members also read resistantly, reconstructing the production from their own ideological perspectives. This means that the relationship between performer and spectator is doubly transformational and diverse and the process of reception and identification is multiple, frequently resistant and ideologically conditioned.

Carlson also points to the role that theatre critics play in the reception of a performance, operating as: ""official" readers of productions," (1990, 12) which guide the ways in which audience members receive the production. As Susan Bennett points out however, critics also occupy political and ideological positions within the theatre

process: "theatre critics [...] act as representatives of mainstream cultural ideology and their shared assumptions of what constitutes theatre reflect their status" (Bennett 1997, 93). Reviews of a performance are therefore a very useful way to contextualise a production, providing an insight into how audiences are "instructed" to read the show, but also operating as an expression of the "official" cultural attitude towards theatre, identity and politics at that historical moment.

The emphasis that Diamond, Carlson and Bennett place on the ideological context in which theatre spectatorship takes place is an important aspect of this thesis. Cross-dressing can only be understood within the historical and political contexts in which it is performed and the politics of its meanings for performer and spectator is produced in the complex relationship of performance and reception. My analysis of the work of Warner and Shaw and the Wooster Group will attend to the social and historical contexts in which the productions took place, the ways in which the performances imagined a model spectator and the transformational nature of the cross-dresser's body in performance.

In this thesis, I will be examining the work of Deborah Warner and Elizabeth LeCompte through a variety of sources and materials. My analyses of *Richard II* and *The Emperor Jones* have been based on my viewing of video recordings of the live performances, and on the video films which both directors produced based on their productions. The problematic issue of recording live performance has been debated extensively in theatre studies, notably by Peggy Phelan (1993) and Phillip Auslander (1999). However, since my emphasis is on the use of costume and make-up in these performances which remained consistent from the stage productions to the video films, I feel qualified to discuss these productions through the media of video and film. My analyses of *Medea* and *The Hairy Ape* are based on my viewing of the live performances of these productions, and also through my viewing of video recordings.

I have also analysed a range of productions by Warner and LeCompte, to which I refer in this thesis, by viewing video recordings, live performances, films and photographs. Furthermore, I have made extensive use of reviews, interviews and profiles in the popular press, academic articles and books, personal interviews with these practitioners, and the theatre programmes for the shows, in my analysis of Warner and LeCompte's work. The work of Bennett (1997), Carlson (1990) and States (1985) have helped me to negotiate this material. I have analysed the productions for

what they tell us about the contexts in which the performances took place, and how these productions imagined their audiences. I have also analysed the productions" publicity material and interviews, for what they can tell us about the way in which these shows were framed by the social and theatrical context of their performance. In doing so, I will examine the complex and contradictory effects of the use of cross-dressing in the work of Warner and LeCompte in their respective social contexts.

Conclusion

Polymorphous Perversities: The Relations Of Identity In The Act Of Cross-dressing

I have argued throughout this chapter that cross-dressing invokes a range of identities, and constructs hierarchies of embodied subjectivity. It is clear that scholarship on cross-dressing operates in a similar vein. For example, Garber and Senelick collapse race and class into the category of gender in their analysis of blackface, while Lott and Roediger elide the question of femininity through their focus on race and class in minstrel performance. Said erases the question of gender in his study of Orientalism, Bhabha ignores gender in his examination of post-colonial identity, while Case, Garber, Solomon, Ferris and Senelick prioritise the question of gender over the other kinds of identities which cross-dressing evokes. The hierarchisation of identity is inevitable both in scholarly work on cross-dressing *and* in theatrical performances. Inevitably the scholar or practitioner will place an emphasis on a particular aspect of the act of crossing, and the context in which the crossing takes place will also foreground the importance of some identities over others, given the power differences in the various acts of crossing.

However, Anne McClintock's 1995 *Imperial Leather does* emphasise the interrelated nature of identities within colonial cultures, and she argues that the focus on gender in literature on cross-dressing means that other kinds of crossings become less visible:

> it is important to emphasise [...] that cross-dressing does not only involve gender ambiguity; a wealth of evidence exists of racial, class and ethnic cross-dressing. Reducing all [...] cross-dressers to a single genesis narrative founded in phallic

ambiguity prevents one from adequately accounting for racial, national and ethnic fetishes" (McClintock 1995, 68).

While McClintock's focus is on social rather than theatrical cross-dressing, her point is still relevant: the act of crossing is often multiple. While this thesis also prioritises the question of gender when examining cross-dressing, nonetheless, I want to argue that there is a need to attend to the multiplicities of crossings contained in the figure of the cross-dresser onstage.

McClintock's research shows that the imperial formulations of identity, particularly in the Social Darwinist Victorian period which I discussed above, constructed identities through a complex web of interrelated frames. Therefore:

> The rhetoric of race was used to invent distinctions between what we could now call *classes*. [...] The rhetoric of *gender* was used to make increasingly refined distinctions among the different *races*. The white race was figured as the male of the species and the black race as the female. [...] Similarly, the rhetoric of *class* was used to inscribe minute and subtle distinctions between other *races* (McClintock 1995, 54-55, italics original).

McClintock's research is specifically concerned with the imperial moment, and so her formulation cannot be said to apply to every historical or cultural context . However, I would argue that contemporary Western identity categories are still haunted by the inventions of imperialism, and that McClintock's point still applies more generally; identities are constructed in, by and through one another and cannot be understood entirely in isolation from each other.

While McClintock does not engage extensively with the question of theatrical performance, I want to argue that theatre has been one medium in which identities have been formed through and in each other. Instances such as Orientalist pantomime, blackface minstrelsy, stage Irishness and female Hamlets and Romeos. all produced a complex intermixing of national, racial, class and gendered representations. Cross-dressing has been one form of representation through which identities have been imagined, invented and incorporated.

However, McClintock also warns that these interrelated identities are not symmetrical or interchangeable. To assume, for example, that the parodies of women and blacks in blackface minstrelsy had the same effects on their absent targets, is to

erase the questions of class, economics, history and racial and gendered hierarchies between, and within, these groups. White women and black women might share the same gender but are not racially symmetrical, while black men and black women occupied different and unequal social positions. The question of power and hierarchy must always come under consideration when examining how multiple identities are constructed and formed on the stage. This is true not only of the relations of identity within a cross-dressing form, but also true between forms, as McClintock argues:

> Different forms of mimicry such as passing and cross-dressing deploy ambiguity in different ways; critical distinctions are lost if these historically variant cultural practices are collapsed under the ahistorical sign of the same. Racial passing is not the same as gender cross-dressing; black voguing is not the same as whites performing in blackface; blackface minstrelsy is not the same as lesbian drag (McClintock 1995, 65).

McClintock's notion that identity is relational and intersectional is a useful starting point for my examination of cross-dressing on the stage, and her view of identity as diverse and multiple is a provocative and productive approach to crossing, allowing room to analyse how gender interrelates with a range of other identities rather than being the point of origin for cross-dressing. As McClintock argues:

> History is not shaped around a single privileged social category. Race and class difference cannot [...] be understood as sequentially derivative of sexual difference, or visa versa. Rather, the formative categories of imperial modernity are articulated categories in the sense that they come into being in historical relation to each other and emerge only in dynamic, shifting and intimate interdependence (McClintock 1995, 61).

A focus on the multiple identities and hierarchies contained in crossing will help me to account for the complex interrelations and erasures of identity which took place in the cross-dressed productions of Warner and LeCompte. Furthermore, the notion of crossing can also be applied to their productions which did not feature cross-gender casting, but which did create other kinds of crossings, evoking a range of identities in the process.

Throughout this section, I have argued that the focus in cross-dressing scholarship needs to move from theatre's imitative function, to its inventive potential. I

have shown how scholarship on cross-dressing has been formed through various approaches to the body, identity, and theatrical representation. I argued that Judith Butler's theories of the body productively complicated the question of the actor's body in performance, and I went on to look at the scholarship on a range of ethnic and racial crossing practices: Orientalism, colonial mimicry, blackface and stage Irishness. I looked at how theatre studies has engaged with the relationship between performer, role, and spectator, and I concluded by arguing that cross-dressing invokes and invents a range of interrelated identities.

In the next section I will look at the historical precedents for the use of cross-dressing in the productions of Warner and LeCompte.

Part Two: Theatrical Crossings

Introduction

In the last section, we saw the ways in which scholarship has dealt with the question of crossing in philosophical, political and aesthetic terms. In this section I want to look at how cross-dressing practices have historically constructed and invented identity on the stage. I will look at various historical instances of cross-dressing which, I am arguing, inform the ways in which we can read Warner and LeCompte's use of cross-dressing in their work. I will also explore these instances in order to continue my discussion of the transformative effects of crossing.

I will begin contextualising cross-dressing practices by looking at how the history of social attitudes towards the body changed how cross-dressing was seen and operated in performance. I will show that the changes in cultural attitudes towards the body have resulted in changes in how cross-dressing operated and received, but I will further argue that cross-dressing has also contributed to how the body has been seen, imagined and materialised through time.

I will go on to specify the ways in which the history of cross-dressing relates to the work of Warner and LeCompte, using examples of cross-dressing which relate specifically to Warner and LeCompte's productions. I will begin by looking at the question of gender in relation to cross-dressing, and argue that the images of gender constructed by Greek, Victorian and blackface cross-dressing do not necessarily produce an equivalent gender identity in the spectator. I will look at how these examples of gendered cross-dressing can help us understand how Warner and LeCompte have used cross-dressing in their productions.

I will then examine how the idea of the real and the illusion operated in Renaissance and Victorian cross-dressing, and examine the ways in which different forms of cross-dressing either imagine and invoke a stable "real" identity outside of the illusion, or destabilise a sense of the real in performance, through the ambiguous body of the performer or spectator. I will use these instances to point to the ways in which the binary of real and illusion operated in Warner and LeCompte's work.

In the fourth part of this section, I will look at how Ancient Greek and Victorian traditions of cross-dressing interlinked a range of identities and I will use these

examples as a way to contextualise the interlinking and disappearing of identity in Warner and LeCompte's work. Finally, I will look at how cross-dressed performance imagines and constitutes audiences, and define what I mean by the terms "avant-garde" and "classical" theatre, which will help me situate Warner and LeCompte's work within the cultural and institutional contexts in which they work. I will examine how the context in which cross-dressing takes place determines its meanings and effects in performance.

Cross-dressed Bodies

If crossing produces and invents identities, it does so by producing and inventing bodies. As we have already seen, the act of crossing reconfigures the body of the performer. This can certainly be argued of Shaw and Valk's cross-dressed performances which mediated how their subsequent work was read and understood, and renegotiated the semiotic configurations of their bodies in relation to performance. Furthermore, these productions produced different bodies: the authority of the Shakespearean body in Shaw's case, and the historical and fragmented body of media culture in Valk and Dafoe's case. However, when examining what kinds of bodies cross-dressing produces, it must be acknowledged that "the body" has a history and has been configured and constructed through changing social and theatrical practices over time. Therefore, to understand how bodies operate in crossing it is important to contextualise those practices within the history of the body itself.

Seeing the actor's body as fundamental to theatrical performance tends to be the starting point for performance analysts who view "the body of the actor as an a priori: without the actor, without his physical presence, theatre as we defined it [...] is not possible. The actor's body is the condition as it were, which make theatre possible" (Lichte 1992, 67). However, cross-dressing calls into question the notion of the body as an a priori of performance by producing bodies *through* performance.

This is true for actors on the stage more generally, since fictional characters come with bodies attached. The character positions the actor within a set of bodily practices and styles. The character's body therefore remakes the actor's body in the light of the performance history of the play, indeed could be said to discursively constitute the actor's body on the stage. However, the actor's body also re-makes the character in a continuation of its performance history where: "the purely gratuitous mixture of facial

features, voice, manner, etc, gradually - in some cases suddenly - becomes inevitable, a synthesis of something ideal, irresistable" (States 1985, 121). The actor's body cannot therefore be said to be stable or a given, but is in continual flux in its materialisation by, and of, the illusion. Furthermore, this is an ongoing process: the construction of the actor's "real" self and of his or her "fictional" self does not confine itself to the performance, but continues after the performance is ended and extends into subsequent work both by actor and text.

Cross-dressed theatre also moulds and produces actors" bodies in political and historical ways, which is why crossing was considered such a threat in the Renaissance period. In the Medieval period, identity was derived from the position of the body within the social order. Bodily appearance therefore not only signified status, it constituted it (see Laqueur 1990) However "the body" itself was not a stable locus of identity, as Thomas Laqueur finds: "There are numerous accounts of men who were said to lactate and pictures of the boy Jesus with breasts. Girls could turn into boys and men who associated too extensively with women could [...] regress into effeminacy" (Laqueur 1990, 7). The stability of the body politic was therefore key to the stability of the body during the Medieval period.

The changes within the social order and the emergence of a pre-bourgeois mercantile class during the Renaissance placed enormous stress on the stability of identity, which directly effected how bodies operated on the stage. As a result, anti-theatrical protestors asserted that cross-dressing could literally transform the male actors into women (see Solomon 1997, 30). Bodies were deeply unstable, precarious and mutable on the Renaissance stage, and the act of crossing therefore threatened the fragile structures of the body politic.

The Renaissance was the period in which a new model of bodily identity began to emerge, however, and during the epistemic shifts of the Enlightenment, identity moved from being marked *through* the body, to being inscribed *within* it. As Jean E. Howard finds: "With the emergence of the bourgeois subject, whose essence is defined by her or his interiority, less emphasis was to fall on inscribing gender difference solely on the outside of the body through apparel; rather the marks of gender were to be worn inwardly and made manifest through a properly defined subjectivity" (Howard 1993, 33).

Bodies became "natural" objects which were understood to operate "outside" of social construction. This version of the body became particularly prominent during the Victorian period, and the popularity of Social Darwinism fixed bodies through scientific categories which policed categories of identity under the rubric of the "natural." Therefore, hierarchies of identity were not governed through the semiotics of clothing, but rather through the semiotics of the "real" body beneath the clothing.

Cross-dressing worked in tandem with this movement, maintaining and inventing the cultural and racial stereotypes of Social Darwinism in performance forms such as pantomime and minstrelsy. Cross-dressed performances constructed images of irrational femininity, simian Irishness and blackness, and feminine Orientals for the viewing public. These crossing practices operated to fix these identities through stereotypes and, as Bhabha argues, the need to fix the bodies of Others through stereotypes belied the fascination and menace which identities such as femininity, blackness, Irishness and Orientalism posed for English and American cultures in the 19th Century. These stereotypes also worked by default to produce idealised national bodies, and were matched by the stereotypes of the romantic hero and heroine who operated to construct fantastical images of perfection.

However, while the act of crossing maintained the status quo of the images of these stereotypes, it also subverted them by performing them with inappropriate bodies, thus unsettling the naturalisation of bodily identity. While bodies were now considered to be stable, and therefore less mutable then in the Renaissance period, the performance of identity with the "wrong" body also potentially displayed the contingency of the bodies being imitated *and* the bodies doing the imitation, and the continued association of actors with social and sexual degeneracy shows that actors" bodies were still tainted by the act of crossing.

Furthermore, the danger which the "real" bodies of blacks, Irish people and women created for the heightened arena of performance was revealed through the social need to find surrogate bodies to represent them on the stage. Seemingly innocuous identities, practices and bodies have the potential to take on a much greater significance on the stage, and the potential to exert a transformative effect on the spectator, through their display within the public arena. Just as what is not threatening on the stage may become dangerous on the streets (as Judith Butler argues), so, too, what is "normal" on the streets may be unacceptable or erased on the stage, due to its potentially

performative powers on the audience. While the body of the performer transforms through the act of performance, it can also threaten the stability of the bodies of the audience.

Contemporary drag performances construct stereotypical images of gender on the stage, while simultaneously contradicting those images by performing them with inappropriate bodies. Furthermore, the act of crossing produces a politicised gay body, which contravenes the gender binaries of hetero-normative culture. However, unlike the era of Social Darwinism in which bodies were presumed to be fixed and natural, contemporary drag and avant garde cross-dressed performance[9], takes place in a media saturated era, in which bodies are mediated through the fragmentary processes of technology, formed by a media culture which Phillip Auslander describes as "a culture of flow in which discourses overlap, intersect and interpenetrate. The spectator cannot stand apart from that flow of information and imagery but exists within it and is defined by it" (Auslander 1992, 51). Bodies have been reconfigured by the advent of technology and the stability of the "natural" is continually contested by the "virtual."

The multiple and layered effect of contemporary bodily identity can be seen in the mediated images used in drag culture, such as the diva figure or the Elvis impersonator. The gendered bodies constructed in drag are already obviously artificial. Drag imitates imitation, reconstructing already representational bodies. However, the lines between "representation" and "reality" are blurred and intertwined, and contemporary drag produces politicised bodies which critique and celebrate the constructed and artificial qualities of gender and sexuality.

Cross-dressing on the classical stage[10] works within the inheritance of the Victorian stage, in its celebration of actors" virtuosity and star qualities. However, the virtuosity of the actor tends to be positioned in the service of the author, frequently in the case of classical theatre, Shakespeare. Therefore, while the actor's name may sell shows, draw audiences to the theatre, and form the central point of critique and praise by critics, it is the validation of the actor's work by the authority of the author which tends govern the

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[9] I will define my use of the term "avant-garde" in the section on audiences and cross-dressing in this chapter.

[10] I will define my use of the term "classical" theatre in the section on audiences and cross-dressing in this chapter.

interpretation of the production, not least by actors themselves, as W.B.Worthen points out, "the author is frequently summoned [by actors] not only to substantiate a conception of character, but its bodily enactment as well"(Worthen 1997, 145).

As a result, alongside producing virtuoso bodies, cross-dressing on the Shakespearean stage could be said to also produce "Shakespearean" bodies, bodies which attempt to operate trans-historically within the "universal" truths of the Shakespeare text. Therefore, actors are expected to conform to the idealised bodies of the Shakespeare stage (created through training, convention and tradition), and also present idealised bodies to the audience in performance. Indeed, the prominent and successful Shakespeare actors become symbolic of Shakespeare himself. For example, Laurence Olivier's *Henry V*, "enlisted the cultural authority of Shakespeare in the Allied cause" (Howard & Rackin 1997, 7). and Olivier's person became imbued with an authority which combined Shakespeare with English nationalism. As Marjorie Garber wryly points out, when Olivier died, his funeral became a celebration of Shakespeare by proxy: "the death of Sir Laurence Olivier on July 11 1989, was mourned and commemorated as if it were the death of Shakespeare himself - only this time, much more satisfyingly, with a body" (Garber 1997, 32). While cross-dressed Shakespeare performances produce virtuoso and powerful actorly bodies, the power and authority of the actor is subsumed within the production of the powerful and authoritative body of Shakespeare.

To understand the bodies performing and produced by cross-dressing it is necessary to take the history of "the body" into account, and to acknowledge that what constitutes the body has changed over time. While the mutability of the body in the Renaissance played into the threatening effects of cross-dressing, the stabilisation of the body through scientific and medical discourse in the Victorian period meant that the transgressive effects of crossing could be contained. The mediatised and mediated bodies of contemporary culture have blurred the lines between representation and reality, showing that the act of performance can construct, produce and invent bodies on and off the stage. The social understanding of the body has therefore simultaneously informed and been produced by the act of cross-dressing on the stage.

Gendered Crossings.

While a general overview of the history of the body in performance is useful to contextualise and historicise the practice of cross-dressing, it is also important to look at whose body is doing the crossing and whose body is being represented by that crossing. I now want to look at how the question of gender operates in cross-dressed performance and to argue that crossing genders always involves a power shift in performance. The move from one gender to another on the stage can impact on how the spectator subsequently views the hierarchies of social power. As Marjorie Garber argues: "to change sex is to slide along a power differential. To change power is to change sex" (Garber 1997, 271). While scholarship on cross-dressing has frequently focused on the *images* which cross-dressing constructs, I also want to think about the gender identities which cross-dressing *invents* or *produces,* in order to contextualise the images creating by crossing in the productions of Warner and LeCompte. I will argue that the images created by cross-dressing do not necessarily correlate with the effects it produces in the performer or spectator.

For example, while many of the plays of Ancient Greece centred on transgressive and liminal female figures such as Medea, Electra, and Clytemnestra, and centred on the question of feminine identity, these roles were performed solely by male actors for male spectators in plays by male writers. It can be argued that Athenian drama ultimately produced and negotiated Athenian masculinity, using the feminine as a medium through which masculine identity could be explored and developed. As Froma L. Zeitlin argues: "[female characters'] demands for identity and self-esteem are still designed primarily for exploring the male project of selfhood in the larger world" (Zeitlin 1996, 347). Nonetheless, the images created by the Athenian stage must have also had an impact on how women were seen socially, and so femininity was also mediated and produced through the cross-dressed stage by default. As I will argue in my chapter on Warner's *Medea*, the masculinity created through the female role on the Athenian stage both problematises, and is problematised, by contemporary productions featuring female actors in the lead roles. The transvestite traditions of Athenian drama can exert a "cross-dressed" effect on the performances by contemporary female actors in Ancient Greek roles.

While the all male world of Greek theatre produced masculinity on the stage, the Victorian stage tradition of female Hamlets and Romeos operated to produce masculinity and femininity in the audience. As I argued above, cross-dressing of the

Victorian stage did not subvert the status quo of the gender binary, but rather served to allow the actresses to display their bodies in "breeches" roles, affirming the objectification of the female body in Victorian culture. However, by performing roles such as Hamlet and Romeo, which were deemed more suited to being played by women, the Sara Bernhardts and Charlotte Cushmans of this tradition also produced masculinity in the male spectator by default.

These women played roles which had the emotional, wistful and irrational characteristics of the Victorian stereotypes of femininity. By seeing these roles as more suited to actresses, the Victorian cross-dressed stage constituted masculinity as the opposite of those qualities; as rational, strong and unemotional. The images created by these male impersonators maintained and invented the stereotypes of both genders during the Victorian period. Fiona Shaw's role of Richard had something of a similar effect in Warner's production. As I will argue in Chapter Three, by playing a male role, Shaw ended up performing one of the most stereotypically feminine roles of her career. Despite feminist scholars arguing that female to male cross-dressing is innately more subversive than its opposite, the instance of the Victorian Hamlets and Romeos proves otherwise, and this effect can also be seen in a more complex form in Shaw's performance as Richard.

The female types on the 19th Century blackface minstrel stage in America were similar to those of English pantomime: the oppositional images of post-menopausal grotesque woman, and the romantic virginal "wench" were performed on the stage (See Garber 1997, 276). Unlike pantomime, however, men played both roles in a purely white male space with male performers and male audience members who were of roughly a similar class status, even as they varied widely in ethnic and national terms. As Lott argues, the wench figure created a safe space for the homoerotic identification between spectator and performer (1993, 54/165), and the minstrel cross-dressing tradition could be argued to have produced a working class form of masculinity on the stage and in the audience.

However, as I argued in Part One, the minstrel stage also targeted the women's movement, seeing bloomers as a kind of unacceptable social cross-dressing, even while this criticism was made from a transvestite stage. White women, black women and black men all formed the outside referent of blackface minstrelsy, but it can be argued that the form did not imitate these identities, it produced them and invented them

through denigrated black masks and female clothing, producing and inventing white masculinity by default. Minstrelsy had a formative effect on how gender and race were seen and intermingled in Victorian culture. As I will argue in Chapter Six, while Kate Valk's blackface performance was of a male character in *The Emperor Jones*, her figure onstage could be read through the minstrel transvestite tradition, and her femaleness reconfigured the effect of her blackface onstage. The performance of blackface has necessarily gendered connotations, which could be seen in the way that Valk's cross-gender and cross-raced performance in *The Emperor Jones* interacted and informed each other.

By surveying the range of cross-gender casting in theatre and performance practices, we can see that the gender portrayed on the stage is not necessarily the gender that is produced in the spectator. Furthermore, while the images of gender in cross-dressing may confirm and maintain stereotypical images of gender, the context in which that cross-dressing takes place can reconfigure the meanings and effects of those images on the performer and spectator. Cross-dressing can simultaneously subvert and affirm the status quo in performance, and I will argue that this effect was true, in different ways, of Warner and LeCompte's use of cross-dressing in their productions.

The Operation Of The Real In The Mechanics Of Crossing.

As I argued in Part One, some cross-dressed performance can invoke an "outside" referent of the real, which is frequently situated as a stable identity in comparison to the fluidity of the fictional identity being performed on the stage. Alternately, other forms of cross-dressing can destabilise the idea of the real in performance, foregrounding the fact that the real is constructed through performance, as Michael Quinn and Bert. O. States have argued. The ways in which the real and the illusion are situated in cross-dressed performance is central to how that performance can be interpreted, and to the effects of that performance on the spectator.

The Renaissance stage's use of cross-dressing had a complex effect on the real/illusion binary by featuring boys playing women on the stage. The transvestism of the Renaissance stage is most apparent in Shakespeare's comedies, in which the hardy female heroine frequently cross-dresses as a boy in order to survive in life and love, usually removing the cross-dressed disguise at the end of the play. Thus, boys dressed as girls who dressed as boys. These cross-dressed comedies contained and undercut the

subversiveness of female transgression with the hetero-normative closure of the plays: the female heroine is always returned to her rightful dress, and rightful place as love object for the male protagonist and the plays end in the ultimate heterosexual closure of marriage. The "real" and stable body of the female character was therefore asserted and anxiously shown to be "uncontaminated" by the effects of her cross-dressing. The message of these cross-dressed comedies was that the illusion of cross-dressing does not have an effect of the real bodies beneath the illusion. The stability of the real was invoked through the use of cross-dressing.

However, the undermining of the cross-dressing within the plays was undermined itself by the figure of the boy player who played the female role, and whose own indeterminacy on the stage challenged the heterosexual closure of the plays. The adolescent sexuality of the boy player was indeterminate in Renaissance society - boys being gendered in the half-way mark between women and men, simultaneously femininely young and male. The boy player's cross-dressing therefore constructed an erotics of liminality, teasingly foregrounding the combined maleness and femaleness of his theatrical body. While the real of the fictional body of the female character was asserted by the *plays*, the formative effects of cross-dressing on the body of the boy player was asserted in *performance*.

The ways in which cross-dressing destabilised the real body on the Renaissance stage had a formative effect on how gender was represented in the theatre, as I will show in my analysis of Shakespeare's *Richard II* where the ambiguous gendering of history in the play reflected and was formed by the ambiguity of gender on the Renaissance stage. However, I will argue that in fact the blurring effects of cross-dressing on the Renaissance stage are much closer to the destabilising of the real in LeCompte's work, than in Warner's. I will argue in Chapters Three, Four, and Five that Warner's work ultimately invokes a stable real body which is uncontaminated by performance. While Warner's work inherited the transvestite tradition of the Renaissance stage in her production of Shakespeare's play, LeCompte in fact reproduced the ambiguities of gender and sexuality of the Renaissance, in her use of cross-dressing in her productions of Eugene O'Neill's plays.

While LeCompte's use of the real in performance was like that of the Renaissance cross-dressing tradition, the use of the real in Warner's work came closer to the cross-dressing of the Victorian female Hamlets and Romeos. While I argued

earlier that this form of cross-dressing operated to create stereotypical images of gender on the stage, nonetheless the virtuosity and star status of these actresses contradicted the passivity of their representational positioning in performance. As Laurence Senelick argues: "[female cross-dressing] served the rise of the star system and the vogue for virtuosity. [...] A society so receptive to displays of virtuosity would also appreciate the craft of an actress who could successfully take over a role hitherto identified with a man"(Senelick 2000, 270). The powerlessness of the *images* created by these women was contradicted by the power of their cross-dressed *performances*. Their ability to draw audiences to the theatre and sell a production on the power of their name, lent them an economic and social power which the roles themselves did not necessarily reflect.

The interrupting effects of the real in this mode of cross-dressing invoked a stable real persona outside of the performance, creating the "real" Sara Bernhardt and the "real" Charlotte Cushman. I will argue in my section on Warner's work, that the gender images created in her productions come from the interrupting effects of the "real" Fiona Shaw on the fictional characters she plays on the stage. The virtuoso traditions of the Victorian theatre could be seen in Warner's work and the way that the semiotics of the "real" performer interrupt and conflict with the power of the illusion they create in cross-dressing, produces a contradictorily passive and powerful female body on the stage, an effect central to Fiona Shaw's performances of gender. However, as I will also argue, the "real" Fiona Shaw is also an illusion, a semiotic encoding produced through the performance, and Shaw's own gendered and national ambiguity furthermore destabilised the images she constructed on the stage.

By examining how the "real" and the "illusion operate and intermingle and are produced by cross-dressed performance, it is possible to see that the political effects of cross-dressing take place in the cross-dresser's production of the real in performance. The semiotics of the "real" performer can interrupt and displace the images they create in cross-dressing on the stage. The liminality and marginality of the boy player counteracted and subverted the stereotypical images they presented, an effect similar to the marginal figure of the drag king in contemporary culture. The ambiguity of the performer can disrupt the problematic images created by the performance. By contrast, the invocation of the "real" in performance can operate to stabilise the potentially transgressive effects of crossing. The display of the "real" man under the Pantomime

Dame costume, or the "real" whiteness under the black make-up of the minstrel performer, worked to reassure the audience that the actor remained "uncontaminated" by their performance of the degraded Other. The virtuosity and economic power of the Victorian star actresses could work to counter the powerless femininity they portrayed onstage. The invocation of a stable real body "outside" of the performance reconfigured how that performance could be read.

However, the semiotic configurations of the "real" of cross-dressed performers are always remapped by their act of performance, producing and reproducing identity for themselves and their audiences. The operations of the real and the illusion in the work of Warner and LeCompte were central to how their use of cross-dressing could be read, and for how the effects of that cross-dressing operated on the spectator.

Crossing Interrelated Identities

As I argued in Part One of this chapter, cross-dressing tends to cross more than one boundary of identity and can produce identities by crossing others. This was particularly true of the use of cross-dressing in Warner and LeCompte's productions, which consciously interlinked a range of identities on the stage, but which also "inherited" the interlinking of identity through the historical practices of cross-dressing.

In Ancient Greece, the male crossing over to femininity on the stage was closely aligned with the Athenian crossing over to foreignness, or "the Oriental." As Laurence Senelick argues: "men could figuratively let down their hair and for a brief space become feminine and/or Oriental (much the same thing to a Greek male)" (Senelick 2000, 44). Foreignness and femaleness were combined in figures such as Medea, whose outside status on both counts leant her a terrifying theatrical power, as I will argue in my chapter on Warner and Shaw's *Medea*. The performance of Medea's femaleness therefore involves a performance of foreignness and, as I will argue in Chapter Four, it was the question of nationality as well as gender which produced a cross-dressed effect in Shaw's performance.

English pantomime and melodrama in the Victorian period are instances of performance which invoked (and invented) a wide range of identities. While pantomime crossed the gender line in the figures of the Dame and the Principal Boy, the cross-gender casting of these forms extended to cross-racial, cross-class and cross-

national impersonations, as can be seen in John Ruskin's description of a performance of *Ali Baba* in 1867:

> The Forty Thieves were girls. The Forty Thieves and their forty companions were in some way mixed up with about forty hundred and forty fairies, who were girls. There was an Oxford and Cambridge boat-race in which the Oxford and Cambridge men were girls....The forty Thief-Girls proceeded to light forty cigars. Whereupon the British public gave them a round of applause (Ruskin cited in Senelick 2000, 263).

Ruskin's description of this performance includes crossings of rank (in the Oxford and Cambridge boat race) and crossings of nationality and race (in the cross-dressed Orientalist Arab thieves on the stage), and as John MacKenzie notes, the Orientalist cross-dressing of pantomime and melodrama was accompanied by a variety of "Other" impersonations, such as stage Irish, Scots and Yorkshire men who operated as the butt of humour in performance. (MacKenzie 1995 200) If we follow Said's argument that Orientalist discourse served to construct Western identity, then pantomime's performances of Others, at a time of English imperial expansion, can be argued to have "invented" and produced English national identity on the stage. However, the staging of gender, class and "celtic-ness" on the pantomime stage also asserted the hierarchies of identity *within* Englishness, creating acceptable and unacceptable Englishnesses through the lens of class, race and gender. Pantomime and melodrama not only invoked a range of identities: they invented them.

As I have already discussed, the blackface minstrel stage constructed and erased a range of identities, crossing doubly from black to white, and male to female, and erasing the ethnic differences between performers through the homogeneity of the black mask. The study of blackface reveals that: "the central issues of race always appear historically in articulation, in a formation, with other categories and divisions" (Stuart Hall cited in Lott 1993, 7). Just as the working class status of immigrant workers marked them as "coloured" in American society, their donning of blackface to produce their whiteness also produced and constructed class relations, as Lott argues, "it was through "blackness" that class was staged"(1993, 64). Furthermore, the blackface stage constructed gender stereotypes and images of menacing and romantic femininity, and produced a homoerotic masculinity in the homosocial world of the stage. Finally, the minstrel stage produced blackness itself, imprinting the grotesque

images of the stage onto the bodies of black people, whose own identities were mediated in dominant culture through the white performer's blackened faces. Minstrelsy therefore performed: "a kind of disappearing act in which blackface made "blackness" flicker on and off so as simultaneously to produce and disintegrate the [black] body" (Lott 1993, 117).

Unlike the Orientalism of avant-garde artists, who I discussed in Part One, which sought to construct an "authentic" version of Eastern theatre and performance styles, Victorian Pantomime, melodrama, and blackface minstrelsy did not seek to create authentic representations of race, nationality or gender on the stage. The bodies which these forms purported to represent, were too "real" for the stage. Instead these forms of cross-dressing revelled in the artificiality of the crossing, and used this crossing to construct new forms of identity. I will argue in Chapter Six, that the Orientalist styling of LeCompte's *The Emperor Jones* was closer to the Orientalism of pantomime than it was to the formal experimentation of early twentieth Century artists. The "Japanese" whiteface of Willem Dafoe highlighted its own artificiality and ensured that the audience recognised it as inauthentic and "false." The evident artificiality of Dafoe's Japanese costume aligned Orientalism with blackface, as a theatrical form which has problematically appropriated and reconfigured racial identity. The Wooster Group production not only intertwined identities in the act of cross-dressing, they also intertwined forms of cross-dressing and showed how their operations on identity have been similar.

Cross-dressing can be argued to not only invoke a range of identities but also to invent them. Power shifts are always fundamental to crossing, and therefore the crossing of one kind of identity can lead to the crossing of another. Furthermore, the case of British pantomime and melodrama has shown that various forms of cross-dressing have also intertwined in performance, which was reflected in the Wooster Group's production of *The Emperor Jones*. Furthermore, the transvestite traditions of Athenian theatre have meant that female characters have carried with them not only the cross-dressing of femininity but also that of nationality, as could be seen in Warner's production of *Medea*. Cross-dressing invokes and invents a range of identities in performance.

Crossing Audiences

As I argued in Part One, cross-dressed performances imagine and constitute a "model spectator," who is positioned as the ideal consumer of the production. Spectators also bring meaning and significance to the cross-dressing on the stage, often contrary to the "intentions" of the performer. The historical, cultural and economic contexts in which cross-dressing takes place, therefore determine the range of interpretations and meanings available for the reception of the performance on the stage. Since, I will argue, LeCompte's work is situated in the context of American avant-garde theatre practice, while Warner works in the classical theatre tradition in the UK, the ways in which their performances constitute and imagine the spectator will necessarily inform how their use of cross-dressing can be read and understood.

The most prominent form of contemporary cross-dressing culture is male to female drag performance, which moved from a strongly repressed sub-cultural form of performance, to a politicised expression of gay identity during the Stonewall Riots in 1969, to becoming commodified in mainstream entertainment at the end of the 1990's as the "acceptable" face of male gay culture (see Senelick 2000, 503) - although, as Butler points out, while drag is now often acceptable in performance it may not be as accepted on the street or in a bus. Since drag (especially male to female drag) has become commonplace in popular culture, contemporary audiences will inevitably read the use of cross-dressing in theatre performance through its lens. The political aspects of drag performance have politicised the use of cross-dressing in theatre practice, and the complexities of drag performance have been taken up by "avant-garde," and "classical" theatre companies in America and Europe.

While avant-garde collectives such as the theatre companies Split Britches and Mabou Mines have used cross-dressing to foreground the politics of gender in their cross-cast productions, other classical work in institutional spaces like the Young Vic and the Globe in Britain, have frequently elided the political implications specific to the use of cross-dressing, and insisted instead on a "gender-blind" (like race-blind) interpretations of their work. These instances of cross-dressing constitute their audiences according to their institutional contexts. "Avant-garde" companies can be defined as such by the conditions of performance, and by how they imagine their spectator, while "classical" theatres can similarly be understood by the way in which they imagine their audiences.

The "avant-garde" companies I have mentioned can be defined by the inner processes of making performance. They are frequently structured as collectives and do not run based on conventional hierarchies of power. Their non-linear approach to theatre management is reflected in their fragmented, rather than linear, approach to narrative, which, as I have argued, works to resist the normative politics of the texts they perform. The term "avant-garde" has been problematised in scholarship recently, as a term which has been used to describe the high modernist experimentation of artists who aimed to counter the dominant culture with art centred on novelty and shock tactics. In the past twenty years, however, the lines between dominant and fringe culture have been blurred and eroded within post-modern and global culture, as I will argue in my chapter on the Wooster Group's work. Therefore, a notion of the avant-garde theatre occupying the "fringes" of mainstream culture has been made redundant by the blurring of these borders.

By labeling the Wooster Group "avant-garde," I have taken my cue from Arnold Aronson, who claims that, "in many respects, the Wooster Group was the last major exponent of the postwar American avant-garde movement." (Aronson 2000, 185). Aronson argues that the Wooster Group typified the formalist impulse to: "eliminate boundaries between genres or forms [...] and the related attempt to eliminate boundaries between art and life" (Aronson 2000, 20). This impulse could be seen in the Group's combination of canonical theatre texts, popular culture references, intercultural performance styles and multi-media technologies in performance; and in the Group's deconstruction of the divide between actor and character and reality and illusion on the stage, which I will discuss further in Chapter Six.

Furthermore, Aronson argues that the Wooster Group extended American avant garde theatre practice through their use of collaborative creation, their "semiotic approach" to acting, their ambiguous political positioning of the spectator, and their extensive use of technology on the stage, with Aronson arguing that, "the Wooster Group's use of technology was one of it's most significant contributions to the avant-garde (Aronson 2000, 192).

However, Aronson argues at the end of his book, that the American avant-garde has become part of the cultural establishment, thus denying the possibility of true social critique, and that the avant-garde's utopian focus on the future has been lost as a result (see Aronson 2000, 206). Aronson here echoes the more general debate on the (im)possibilty of the avant-garde in postmodern culture. Peter Burger argues that the

avant-garde has always been riven by contradiction. The avant-garde's impulse to integrate art with life, Burger argues, "is itself a profoundly contradictory endeavor. [...] An art no longer distinct from the praxis of life but wholly absorbed in it will lose the capacity to criticize it, along with its distance" (Burger 1984, 50). However, Burger argues that the avant-garde's dream of art's social integration has come true, but in highly problematic and non-revolutionary ways, through the culture industry, where: "commodity aesthetics [...] treat form as mere enticement, designed to prompt purchasers to buy what they do not need. [..] Art becomes practical, but it is an art that[1] enthralls" (Burger 1984, 54). As Burger argues, the revolutionary impulse of avant-garde artists to protest against the bourgeois commodification and individualisation of art work, has now become viewed as art in its own right and so, "the gesture of protest of the neo avant-garde becomes inauthentic" (Burger 1984, 52). In current commodity culture, the tradition of novelty, shock and protest in avant-garde practice have become expected and established in artistic practice.

As I will argue in Chapter Six, this has been true of the Wooster Group's work whose reputation for controversy has contained the shock value of their later work and has institutionalised them as classical "avant-garde" artists in New York. As Thomas Docherty argues, there is: "an inbuilt crisis of obsolescence" (Docherty 1993, 217) in avant-garde art, as the impulse towards revolution and shock quickly become repeated tropes and therefore form an artistic tradition and institution of their own, and this "obsolescence" can be seen in the Group's work.

In many ways, by dubbing the Wooster Group's work "avant-garde," we can see a rehearsal of these arguments: through how the Group's origins in controversy and shock later became part of the trendy and consumable Wooster Group "product" in the down-town theatre scene of New York. As a result, while I describe the Wooster Group as "avant-garde", it is with an inbuilt sense of the inherent contradictions and impossibilities of the avant-garde project, and I discuss these issues further in Chapter Six.

The term avant garde therefore helps me to identify a particular kind of theatre company whose geographical location is frequently on the fringe of mainstream theatre practice (like Split Britches" location in the WOW Café, which is situated in the East Village of Manhattan, a distance away from the commercial lights of Broadway theatre), and whose work aims to question and critique the politics of mainstream theatre by revising canonical texts, and by substituting the authority of the director and

actor for the authority of the writer, while at the same time acknowledging the inherent contradictions and impossibilities contained within this aim. This definition works to describe the work of the Wooster Group, and helps me to delineate the position they take in the theatre world of New York, and the kind of audience they attract and imagine with their work.

The experimentation of avant-garde theatre has challenged the exclusionary politics of "high art" theatre, but paradoxically presumes upon a spectator who is literate and sophisticated, who is familiar with the texts and conventions being dismantled on the stage, and who has a political sympathies with the identity formations being espoused on the stage. Avant-garde theatre practice imagines an expert audience member. These companies work to challenge the politics of canonical theatre, but frequently confirm these already-held views in their audience. Their model spectator imagined to be like the people who perform onstage: highly educated and well versed in the history and theory of theatre practice. However, avant-garde companies, or techniques, can occasionally work to cause controversy, when their politics of representation works on a different register to that of the audience, or when their work is performed in a geographical or cultural context which is not au courant with the theatre language used to stage the show.

An example of the expertise required by avant garde uses of cross-dressing, can be seen in the collaboration between the all-male drag company, Bloolips and the all-female lesbian company, Split Britches who performed their production of *Belle Reprive,* a reworking of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1990. The programme for the production listed,

> Mitch.....a fairy disguised as man
>
> Stella.....a woman disguised as a woman
>
> Stanley.....a butch lesbian
>
> Blanche.....a man in a dress. (Solomon,1997, 158).

This production used cross-dressing to destabilise and undermine the heterosexual imperatives of Tennessee William's narrative, and operated to deconstruct conventional images of gender and sexuality onstage. Drag operated as a style with which to perform the play, and to simultaneously critique the play's heterosexist narrative and images. The "natural" of naturalism was rejected by the use of cross-dressing in this production and naturalism was shown to be a theatre form with

ideological implications for how identity can be seen, understood and performed. However, the production also required an expert audience member who was already familiar with the language of drag, the Williams play (and 1951 film) and who was au fait with the politics of theatricality, as shown when one of the actresses used the "gaze" theory from film studies to confront the audience's objectification of her body (see Solomon 1997, 158).

The use of cross-dressing in avant-garde work therefore operates to critique canonical texts, and to deconstruct the underlying ideological biases of the plays. Cross-dressing has also been used by formalist experimenters to exert a Brechtian effect on the illusion of the performance, foregrounding the artificiality of the staging and acting styles in the production. The avant-garde use of "non-matrixed" acting styles, which "value [...] the concrete as opposed to the pretended or simulated and [...] do not require plots or stories" (Kirby in Zarrilli 1995, 57), positions the spectator in a non-illusory capacity, and demands an analytical engagement with the work on the spectator's part. Cross-gender casting is so frequently used in avant garde practice, that it is now commonplace, and its "shock" value is diminished due to its familiarity.

When discussing "classical" theatres, I refer to the institutional and national theatre spaces in which canonical work is performed. While "classical" theatre usually refers to the playtexts of Ancient Greece, I want to refer to classical theatre as theatre which centres on the performance of canonical theatre texts[11]. For the purposes of discussing Deborah Warner's work, I am thinking most specifically of the national and state-subsidised spaces in British theatre, such as the Royal National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company (and also the Young Vic and the Globe theatres mentioned above.) These companies are immediately ideologically positioned by their titles, the words "royal", "national" and "Shakespeare" all have the political connotations of nationalism, monarchy and Englishness. Classical audiences are therefore constituted within an arena focused on creating national truths and communities.

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[11] While avant-garde work also frequently performs canonical texts, as I have argued, they tend to critique these texts in performance. The classical theatre's relationship with the canon is in fact more fraught than that of avant-garde work, being constituted by the struggle over cultural authority and legitimacy, as I discuss in this chapter, and in Chapter Two.

The ideology of these spaces can be seen geographical terms. The RSC's location in Stratford upon Avon, Shakespeare's birthplace, bestows a historical and cultural authenticity on the Shakespeare performances playing there, while also economically commodifying the theatre's geography for tourists. Similarly, the National theatre is positioned on the South Bank of London in order to: "draw attention to their surrounding environment (the River Thames, The Houses of Parliament, and so on) as a means of enhancing not only the experience of visiting the Royal National Theatre, but also the sense of cultural activity"(Bennett 1997, 125). The national and historical geography of these theatres has a necessary impact on the philosophies underpinning the performances created there, and on how audiences are imagined and constituted by these spaces.

The companies are run based on the conventional hierarchies of theatre making, in which artistic directors govern the overall vision of associate directors, who hire in actors and designers to do service to the work of famous writers, such as Shakespeare. The political leanings of this work tend to be hidden within the positioning of the work as "cultural," as Peter Holland shows of the RSC: "the RSC sees itself as a cultural institution. [...] Its politics submerged" (Holland 1997, 9). These theatres focus on distilling and conveying the "timeless truths" of canonical work, a vision which has been fully endorsed in the work of Deborah Warner. Terms such as "truth," "the universal" and "authenticity" abound in discussions of this work by practitioners and critics alike.

The term "universal" has been critiqued by feminist scholars for its exclusionary effects. After all, if a performance or play claims to be "universal," then the term constitutes audiences through the presumption that they all share the same emotions, responses, identities as those of the production. If the spectator does not share in the perspective of the production, or is not represented by it, then the "universal truths" created by the production marginalise and erase their identity, constructing a universe with underlying ideological biases. The notion of the universal is necessarily ideological, but hides its political and cultural specificities within its claims to a relevance for "humanity" rather than for a specific geographical, cultural or political context.

However, if we see the term "universal" as an ideological tool which is performative, then the use of the term must be analysed for its effects on an audience.

The meaning of the term "universal" is *not* universal, it varies according to historical and political context. Therefore, performances which claim to be universal (as Warner and Shaw's do), must be examined for what universe they produce in performance, and for what effects it has on the construction of an ideal spectator. Moreover, the concept of the universal must be examined in relation to the use of cross-dressing in classical theatre. How can a performer claim to be "truthful" or "authentic" in performance when playing a cross-dressed role?

The answer to this question may lie in the fact that most instances of recent classical cross-dressing have tended to erase the question of gender from the mix. This can be seen in the recent prevalence of performances of the role of *King Lear* by women, which is often explained away by the idea that *Lear* has more to do with age than gender. For example, Helena Kaut-Howson, the director of the Theatre de Complicite production of *Lear*, starring Kathryn Hunter in the lead role, argued: "we cast Kathryn Hunter because I believe the part is about old age and not about gender. It should be available to women and men" (Dan Glaister 1997). Kaut-Howson's defence of her cross-gender casting was echoed in Mark Rylance's comment on his performance as Cleopatra in the Globe Theatre in 1999, saying, "I'm playing a role which happens to be a female one, not impersonating a women. I want the audience to focus on the character, not the person playing it" (John Whitely 1999).

While male to female cross-dressing can be justified on the basis of historical authenticity, as it was with Mark Rylance's cross-dressed performances in the Globe Theatre, female to male cross-dressing has a more recent history and is therefore less "Shakespearean" and less "authentic" in its claims to the universal. Female cross-dressing is frequently seen (and often dismissed) as "gender blind casting," akin to the colour blind casting practices commonly used on the classical stage. Both of these angles on female cross-dressing leave the gender meanings within the plays themselves unchallenged, and position cross-dressing as a means for female actors to attain the greatness of male actors on the stage. Cross-dressing becomes an equal rights issue which erases the question of gender. However, while Warner's *Richard II* was embroiled within this debate, her casting of Fiona Shaw as Richard had a much more complex and ambiguous effect. Despite Warner and Shaw's claims to universality, the universe they constructed was distinctly feminine and subversive.

On the "classical" stage, the denaturalising impact of cross-gender casting tends to be managed and contained by invoking the name of Shakespeare or the power of the canon, which act as external referents for the production, governing the interpretation of the performance. Commentary on "classical" cross-dressing tends to slip from actor to character, from director to writer, from the concepts brought to the play by the contemporary cast and crew to the trans-historical meanings of the play itself. The potential politics of the act of crossing are therefore subsumed by the authority of the absent but powerful figure of the writer, who: "becomes a naturalizing metaphor on the order of the body itself, representing the universal, transcendent, and natural, in ways that both legitimate and render unquestionable the dominant discourse of the stage" (Worthen 1997, 99). The use of cross-dressing then moves from the *Belle Reprive critique* of the playtext, to the classical stage's focus on the ways in which the cross-dressed actor can *serve* the playtext through the virtuosity of their playing, working to *overcome* their cross-dressing in the service of the text. The illusion created by the cross-dressing is subsumed by the illusion of authenticity which the name of Shakespeare invokes.

I have argued throughout this chapter that the range of meanings which cross-dressing produces, take place in the interim between viewing and performing, and can only be understood within the political and social contexts in which the performance takes place. The context of viewing will necessarily determine how cross-dressing can be understood. Cross-dressing, however, can also invent and constitute identity in the viewer by positioning them within a range of ideological and political discourses. How the cross-dresser imagines their viewer, and how the viewer imagines the cross-dresser, is key to the interpretation of cross-dressing on the stage. Furthermore, the ways in which the body is understood, the relationship between the real and the illusion, the belief systems around gender, the gender, class and racial constitution of the audience, the operation of virtuosity in performance all contribute to the power and pleasure of the cross-dressed performer.

In the following chapters I will examine how cross-dressing has operated in the work of Deborah Warner and Elizabeth LeCompte. This means that I will examine the social and political contexts in which they work, the semiotic encoding of their actors, their approach to the body, ideology and the authority of the text, and how they imagine their audience in their performances. Warner and LeCompte can be seen as the

inheritors of the cross-dressed traditions of the stage, but their work takes place in very different social, national and theatrical spaces and these differences inform the ways in which they have used cross-dressing in their work. Throughout my analyses of these productions I will argue for the transformative power of the cross-dressed figure, the conservative *and* subversive effects of crossing, the range of identities which crossing creates, and the dangers of challenging the social systems of clothing and appearance on, and off, the stage.

SECTION TWO

Inappropriate Bodies: Cross-dressing In The Work Of Deborah Warner And Fiona Shaw

Chapter Three

"Looking For Fiona": Interruptions and Contradictions In The Work Of Deborah Warner And Fiona Shaw

Introduction

If, as I argued in the last chapter, the meanings of cross-dressing are contextual, then it is imperative that any investigation of the use of cross-dressing looks at its social context, and historical positioning. In this chapter, I will put the work of Deborah Warner and Fiona Shaw in context, before going on to discuss their productions of *Richard II* and *Medea*. While this chapter does not focus directly on the question of cross-dressing, by placing Warner and Shaw in their social context and by examining the underlying themes and values of their work, I hope to situate their use of cross-dressing in *Richard II* within the wider scope of their body of work, and their social and theatrical context.

I will begin by looking at the political and cultural changes in theatre production in Britain during the 1980s, in order to examine how Warner and Shaw fit more generally into the cultural trends of theatre making in the UK. I will go on to look at how Warner and Shaw have been semiotically encoded by the press and by how they talk about their work. This will allow me access the ways in which they approach the question of gender and nationality in performance. Furthermore, studying their semiotic encoding can help me attend to how this encoding plays into the interpretation of their representation of identity in performance. I will concentrate on three of their productions which preceded *Richard II* and *Medea*: *Electra* (1988), *The Good Person Of Sichuan* (1989) and *Hedda Gabler* (1990), and examine how the questions of gender, the body, nationality and the universal operated in these shows. Throughout this chapter I will argue that Fiona Shaw has been semiotically encoded as ambiguously feminine and Irish and that her liminality plays into how she constructs gender on the stage. I will also argue that Warner and Shaw both challenge and confirm the authority

of the canon in their work, and that their contradictory use of the idea of the "universal" in performance informs their representation of identity on the stage. This chapter looks at the contradictions and interruptions in the work of Deborah Warner and Fiona Shaw.

Politics And Performance

Deborah Warner was born in Oxfordshire, England, and began her theatre career in 1977 when she trained for three years at the Central School of Drama as a stage manager, thus bypassing the more conventional route of Oxbridge for budding theatre directors in Britain. In 1980, at the age of twenty one, Warner founded Kick theatre company, which she ran for six years. Her productions of *The Tempest*, *Measure For Measure*, *King Lear* and *Coriolanus* were noted for their uncompromising vision and raw emotional impact. In 1987, the Royal Shakespeare Company invited her to direct *Titus Andronicus,* starring Brian Cox, and her reputation as a major directorial force was sealed. 1988 was the year in which she was appointed resident director at the RSC and the year in which she first directed Fiona Shaw, in Sophocles" *Electra.*

Fiona Shaw, born in Cork, Ireland, took a philosophy degree in University College Cork, after which she emigrated to England and graduated from RADA in 1982 with a gold medal. Immediately after her training, she was snapped up by the Royal National Theatre, and the RSC, and played lead roles in a range of Renaissance and Restoration comedies. Shaw was then cast in Warner's *Electra* in the RSC in 1988, and began a collaborative relationship with the director which had a major impact on both their careers. Their creative duo was frequently joined by another woman, Hildegard Bechtler, whose stage and costume designs contributed to the power of their work.

Shaw and Warner went on to stage Brecht's *The Good Person Of Sichuan* (1989) at the RNT, London; Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin (1990) (which toured to The Playhouse Theatre in London); Beckett's *Footfalls* (1994) at the Garrick Theatre, London; Shakespeare's *Richard II* (1995) at the RNT; Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1995-7) which toured internationally to countries including Belgium, Ireland, America and England; Euripides" *Medea* (2000) in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin (which transferred to the Queens Theatre in London in 2001), and most recently,

Jeanette Winterson's *The Powerbook* which was staged in the RNT in 2002. Shaw also starred in Warner's feature film, *The Last September*, which was released in 2000.

While Shaw and Warner established their reputation as the "Terrible Twins" of British theatre, they also developed work separately: Warner in opera and site specific performance, and Shaw on the British classical stage and in film and television. However, Warner and Shaw's ongoing collaborative work has cemented their status as major players in the contemporary British theatre scene and their work has played a central role within British theatre practice of the 1980s and 1990s.

Warner and Shaw's careers developed during the 1980s which was a period of enormous change in British society. The Conservative government of the 1980s and early 1990s emphasised the individual over class, finance over primary industry and were ruled by a formidable female leader, Margaret Thatcher, who attempted to reassert the traditional gender status quo, while contradicting it with her presence in parliament. Abroad, communist governments fell, and the free-market economy was embraced as the ideal social model. The development of the European Community brought a new internationalism to British culture and re-negotiated the country's economic alliances with America (see Shank 1996, 6-17).

These cultural and political changes had an impact on theatrical production in Britain: on the levels of government subsidy for theatre which dropped, on the costs of theatrical production which grew, on the aesthetic trends within British theatre which became more European, and on the political positioning of theatre practice, which moved away from its 1960s/'70s leftist leanings, towards a more individualised exploration of the world through art (See Shank 1996, 6-17). These political and economic changes also led to a change in the gender dynamics of theatre making.

These changes could be seen when, in 1986, Fiona Shaw, and fellow actors Juliet Stevenson and Harriet Walters protested at the complete absence of female directors at the Royal Shakespeare Company. They argued that: "until there were more women in controlling positions [...] the theatre would continue to follow a male agenda, which - consciously or unconsciously - discriminated against women" (Armistead 1994,185). Two years later, fifty percent of the RSC directors of that year were women and they staged six of that season's twelve plays (Wolf 1990, 60).

While a number of female theatre directors had emerged in the 1970s, they tended to work in the fringe sector: "where traditional working relationships would be challenged and structures and politics pushed and prodded without restraint from the (male) establishment" (Armistead 1994, 186). When the Conservative government radically cut the funding for fringe theatre, most of these companies died out, and so the late 1980s heralded a new breed of female directors who invaded the mainstream theatres of Britain and began to do work which was no longer consciously feminist and was more focused on the "human" and "universal'. Warner is exemplary of this trend by moving from a small scale fringe theatre to the large institutional spaces of the RSC and the RNT, and by doing work which focused on the universal rather than the political meanings of theatre.[12]

This move away from committed feminist politics towards a more universalist stance in the work of female directors such as Warner, coincided with a backlash against the separatist feminist movement of the 1970s. Margaret Thatcher exemplified the new bourgeois feminism when she: "used her femininity to maintain power, yet rarely made reference to other women" (Leung 1997, 34). Bourgeois feminism which sought for economic parity between men and women did not examine how gender was constructed or socially produced. Instead, it relied on the principles of individualism and choice which were at the roots of free market philosophy and promoted the success of women within previously male-dominated environments (such as theatre) as the ultimate feminist aim.

The eschewing of specifically feminist or "female" issues within theatre practice was also symptomatic of the more general move away from politically committed theatre towards a more individualised approach to identity in performance during the 1980s and 1990s in classical British theatre. While the presence of women directors in the theatre broke new ground institutionally, their work did not necessarily challenge the artistic status quo, and many denied the significance of their gender within their work. This paradox can be seen in the work of Warner which I will explore further below.

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[12] As I pointed out in Chapter One, the idea of the universal necessarily has ideological implications in theatre practice, but is frequently situated as politically neutral in classical theatre. Therefore, while I do

The changes in political and theatrical attitudes towards gender also affected the kinds of plays performed in classical theatre spaces. The loss of arts funding meant that theatres placed a greater emphasis on producing classic texts with which the public were familiar. Theodore Shank argues that: "There was a kind of trickle down conservative attitude which dampened the enthusiasm of artistic directors for risk taking; and government support did not keep up with the rapidly rising costs of production and recession" (Shank 1996, 13). The result of this new conservatism was that: "the larger subsidised theatres [became] increasingly inclined to produce revivals of old plays at the expense of new ones" (Shank 1996, ix).

Fewer new plays were produced on the British main stages, and younger directors such as Warner, cut their teeth on the plays of Ancient Greece, Shakespeare, Restoration comedy, Chekhov and Ibsen. As a result, the position of the director became more prominent in theatre making, as directors could now make a visible mark on their productions by revising familiar texts. The authority of the director began to substitute for the authority of the playwright within the theatre hierarchy. This became apparent when productions began to be marketed on the strength of the name of the director rather than the writer or the lead actor. The figure of the director became a competing centre of meaning-making in the theatre (see Shank 1996, 13).

However, there was a tension within the positioning of actors and directors at the centre of the production of classical texts, especially of Shakespeare, in British theatre. While the production of canonical texts in the theatre had led to the power of the director, paradoxically, the power of the director began to compete with, and challenge, the power of the text. While directors, and actors, could sell shows based on the currency of their name, nonetheless, the ideal staging and acting style required by the canon was a kind of "transparent" approach which would serve the meanings and truths of the text, without clouding them with the staging of new and competing kinds of truths or meanings on the stage. The tension between the power of the writer and the power of the performer or director can be seen in Warner and Shaw's work together and was part of a greater tension around the "national" position which canonical texts occupied in British culture.

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not assume that the universal is apolitical, I want to investigate the underlying politics of theatre practice, such as that of Warner's, which sees itself as constructing apolitical universal truths.

The national implications of the canon were especially true of Shakespeare's work, and the centrality of Shakespeare to the English educational system, the deployment of Shakespeare in the British tourism industry as a marker of Englishness and, in particular, the association of Shakespearean actors with national patriotism which was heightened by Conservative rule in the 1980s, invested Shakespeare and the production of the classics with a nostalgia for a golden age of empire and Englishness. The Shakespearean took on nationalist connotations and the performance of the dramatic canon was fraught with a cultural struggle over legitimacy and authority. While the currency of the "Englishness" of Shakespeare does not apply quite as readily to other theatre texts in the canon, the criticism of the changes Warner made to the ending of *Medea* by reviewers in 2000, shows that there is a sense of cultural ownership invested in the performance of classical theatre more generally on the British stage, which invests an ideological and national significance in the representations of identity on the classical stage.

The cultural status of classical theatre has an inevitable impact on how the actor's body has operated on the stage. Moving from a Victorian theatre of virtuosity, where the "person" of the actor was at the centre of the theatre event, Twentieth Century actor training began to deploy: "an 'instrumental' rhetoric, understanding the actor mainly as an instrument of expression, rather than as an agent of signification" (Worthen 1997, 102). Furthermore, the influence of Stanislavsky on actor-training led to a greater emphasis on the naturalism of the illusion constructed by actors on the stage, rather than on the theatrical relationship between actor and audience. This change in emphasis particularly intensified within the performance of classic texts, where the actor's body was expected to carry the authority of the author's words, rather than producing meaning of its own accord.

While the acting style for the classics was not necessarily naturalistic, being guided by the technical rigours of verse speaking etc, the principles by which actors and directors approached a sense of character were undergirded by the principles of naturalism, which were mixed in with an acknowledgement of the "theatrical" conditions of performance. W.B. Worthen sums up the conventions of Shakespearean performance as: "a concentration on psychological motivation complicated by a degree of openness to the theatre audience, the post-Brechtian compromise between "realistic" and "theatrical" characterization typical of the RSC since the mid-1960s" (Worthen

2000, 68-69). Classical performance emphasises transparency over virtuosity, rejecting the "self expressive mode" in favour of the "representational mode" which relies on, as Bert O States suggests, "the shared sense that we come to the theater primarily to see a play, not a performance" (States 1985, 181)

However, on the other hand, the virtuosity of the actor can become synonymous with the power of the text. As I argued in Chapter One actors who are considered "star" classical actors are seen to have "Shakespearean bodies." The power of the actor becomes a signifier for the universal truths that the playtext expresses. The star system therefore co-exists and overlaps with the system of transparent classical acting, where star actors can sell shows based on the currency of their Shakespearean status. However, there is a tension between the two models of the actor's body, one seeing the actor's body as the bearer of meaning and authority of the text, and the other seeing the actor's body as the producer of its own meanings and authority in performance. As I will argue in relation to *Richard II* and *Medea*, Fiona Shaw's body is caught and formed by the tension between these two models, and her power as an actor both informs and disrupts her "classical" celebrity status in British theatre.

Deborah Warner's work from the mid 1980s on, is typical of many of the cultural and social trends mentioned above. Her work with Fiona Shaw exemplifies the trend for the productions of canonical texts, the eschewing of the feminist cause, and the focus on the "human" and the "universal.' Rather than overtly trying to develop a new interpretation of familiar texts, Warner has positioned her staging innovations as operating in the service of the universal human relevance of the playtext, arguing that plays have to be saved from the cumulative effects of historical interpretation. As Paul Taylor points out: "Unlike most directors who "interpret" a classic by slapping another layer of personalised wallpaper over similar layers already stuck on it by their predecessors, Warner strips away the dead accretions of received opinion and hearsay so that the play's true emotional contours are thrillingly rediscovered" (Taylor 1989).

However, while Warner and Shaw claim to be portraying the universal truths of the text on the stage, nonetheless they have had a paradoxical relationship with the canon. While they stage canonical texts, their power as director and actor sells the shows they produce. While Shaw claims that her role is to find the core truths of the text, her performances are often criticised for distracting audiences from the text with her virtuosity and display as an actor. While Warner and Shaw maintain the power of

the canon, producing plays written by male writers within a male tradition, they also contradict this power with their presence as a powerful female team on the British stage. These contradictions inform how they construct identity in the theatre, and informed how their use of cross-dressing in *Richard II* created such a contradictory and blurred figure in Shaw's portrait of Richard on the stage.

I now want to consider how they position themselves in relation to gender, virtuosity, nationality and the universal, and to examine how their bodies have been configured and encoded by the press. This will help me to account for Warner and Shaw's disruptive effects on the plays they produce, and to investigate the configurations of identity they produce on the stage.

The Semiotics Of Warner And Shaw.

Michael Quinn argues that: "celebrities [bring] an overdetermined quality [to performance] that exceeds the needs of the fiction and keeps them from disappearing entirely into the acting figure or the drama. Rather, their contribution to the performance is often a kind of collision with the role" (Quinn 1990, 155). Fiona Shaw's presence in performance enacts an effect similar to that which Quinn describes. The "celebrity" presence of Shaw, interrupts and contradicts the character she plays and the illusion of the drama. Similarly, although less immediately, Warner's celebrity presence behind the scenes also exerts a Brechtian effect on her productions. For an audience familiar with Warner and Shaw as public figures in the theatre, their semiotic "celebrity" encoding exerts an effect on how their work can be read.[13] In this section, I want to examine how Warner and Shaw both encode themselves in pre-publicity and interviews, and how they are encoded by reviews and in the press. In so doing, I want to argue that their bodies and their gender identities are reconfigured by the work that they do on the stage, and by the ways in which they talk about that work off it. In the

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[13] By using the term "celebrity" to describe Warner and Shaw, I do not mean that they are world-famous equivalents to Hollywood movie stars. However, for regular theatre-going audience members, Warner and Shaw have a very prominent profile in the British press, as the masses of reviews, interviews and profiles on the duo testify. As Quinn argues, "there is something about dramatic performance that causes spectators to seek information about the personal life of the performer, to cast that life in the mould of celebrity (Quinn 1990, 154). The widespread coverage of Warner and Shaw's work can therefore be argued to constitute them as theatre celebrities in the context of British theatre practice.

next section, I will look at how their semiotic profiles affect the way that their work can be interpreted in performance.

The fact that Warner and Shaw do not acknowledge their gender to be of consequence to their work reconfigures how their work can be read. Warner's protest that: "her gender is less significant than the fact that she doesn't have a university background" (Armistead 1996, 190), is accompanied by Hildegard Bechtler's view that "What is interesting is not that we are women, but that we are a director, actor and designer" (Daneff 1995), and Shaw's argument that: "The fact that Hildegard, Deborah and myself are women doesn't matter. We're not concerned with the sex of the writer, we're making the play" (French 1991) (This marks a change in Shaw's views from her 1986 protest at the RSC). Warner and Shaw's stated aims are to find the essential "human" resonances and truths within theatre texts, and this means that they view the question of gender to be irrelevant to their approach to making theatre.

However, Warner and Shaw unite in their emphasis on the qualities of mastery, rigour and control in their working process which has gendered implications for how their work can be understood, and configures how Shaw's body is seen in performance. Shaw sees working hard in terms of a rigorous approach to acting stating: "If conservative means old fashioned in using the old rules - the rules of discipline - we use them. [...] The work is incredibly disciplined and very absolute and polished; there is nothing random" (Coen 1997). While Shaw extols the virtues of this process of rigour and discipline, both she and Warner equally emphasise the risk taking aspects of acting, claiming that: "The theatre needs to try to aim into the area that's unknown" (Rutter 1997, 315).

The discussion by Warner and Shaw of their work as rigorous, risky and bravura establishes their work as virtuoso. As Bert O States suggests: "virtuosity, in theater as in athletics is not simply skill, but skill displayed against [the] odds" (States 1985, 119). If the actor onstage blends seamlessly with the character, or if the director is entirely successful in constructing the illusion of the action, then the audience have no means to gauge the odds against this happening. By establishing the difficulty of what they do, Warner and Shaw ensure that the audience can admire their skill in doing it.

Warner and Shaw's need to frame their work as virtuoso may have been a response to the cultural climate in which they were working, where arts funding was

massively diminished, theatre was competing badly with film and television for audiences and appeal, and the performing arts were generally viewed as elitist and highbrow. Their description of their work as difficult, rigorous, masterful and controlled, attempts to retrieve theatre as a valid form of public expression and to give it credence in a culture dominated by commercial values. However, their focus on these qualities has a gendered dynamic and renders Shaw ambivalently feminine in performance. Shaw's body is configured and gendered through her focus on skill and risk.

In interviews and reviews, critics equate Shaw's skill onstage with her intellect off it, mentioning her degree in philosophy and commenting on her articulateness, with one critic observing that: "interviewing Shaw is like having the top of your head taken off and your cranium scoured out with a brillo pad" (Rutter 1997, 314). Critics make continuous descriptive connections made between Shaw's character traits and her body, with the following description typical: "Shaw's talent is prodigious, her onstage presence imposing: rail-thin with close-cropped hair, she is angular and intense, exuding sharpness, exactitude, precision" (Stephanie Coen 1997) And another interviewer finds proof of Shaw's temperament in her physiognomy: "She is not exactly forbidding in person, but she has an undeniable imperiousness. This extends even to her bone structure (French 1991).

The semiotic encoding of Shaw's body constructs and mediates her femininity. Shaw's status as a powerful, successful and single woman is imbued with mental and bodily characteristics: "beneath the jolly hockey sticks bounciness is a drive and intensity common among professional women who live alone, rejecting the comforts and confinements of domesticity in order to dedicate themselves to their work" (Brown 1995). And she and Warner are compared in terms of gender and physique: "they look similar in type: tall, lean, purposeful, single women in their thirties, striding one would suppose towards their prime" (John Peter 1991). According the critics, the status and physique of Shaw and Warner not only signal power, but also self-denial. Shaw's thinness is interpreted as the rejection of domesticity, her height is a sign of ambition, and she and Warner are described as "striding" rather than "strolling" or "ambling" through their careers, as if their movement through space was a symptom of their single status. Even while they are applauded for their success and skill, that success also signals a lack or denial which marks their bodies.

Shaw and Warner's success and power encodes them as liminally feminine. This liminality can also be found in the language they use to discuss their work. Warner's description of her approach to *Hedda Gabler,* for example, uses a vocabulary which is based on action, violence and will power:

> it was encrusted with the junk of previous productions in all our minds [...] and we had to hack it off fast. Its extraordinary what happens to the plays we call classics, they get buried beneath the history of their previous productions. As a director I was having trouble chipping away my own preconceptions. Every actor also had a preconceived notion about their part. I had to smash in fast and challenge that and pull away from easy choices (Woodworth 1991).

While the language Warner uses is not necessarily innately masculine, the terms "hacking", "smashing" and "challenging" certainly differ from the stereotyping of the female director as indecisive, gentle and collaborative. Equally, Shaw's descriptive approach to her work emphasises the qualities of technical achievement, high physical and emotional stakes, and risk taking, none of which are traditionally associated with femininity. While Warner and Shaw deny the significance of gender in their work, they construct a public image which relies on values traditionally associated with masculinity, and they establish a complex gendered encoding which reconfigures their bodies in the process. The ambiguity of Warner's and Shaw's semiotic gendering has a disruptive effect on the images of gender in their work, as I will describe further below. Furthermore, Shaw's ambiguous femininity had a striking effect on her gendering of the figure of Richard which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Shaw and Warner are not only ambiguously gendered, they are also positioned in relation to nationality in complex and contradictory ways. They are repeatedly positioned as opposites by interviewers through the frame of their nationality, with Warner's Englishness and Shaw's Irishness working to define their psyches and bodies. Warner is described as:

> English, wry and self-possessed. Beside her, Fiona Shaw appears a fiery, unfettered Irish spirit, rangy, nimble and mercurial. She laughs a lot, particularly at herself, the cadences of her Cork accent artfully intertwining exotic imagery and literary references; a Celtic discourse from a philosophy graduate of Cork university. Warner, more grounded, bypassed university for a stage management course at Central and remains belligerently anti-academic (Ann McFerran 1994).

Shaw has maintained the binary of English and Irish in psychological terms, saying: "She has a cool eye, I have a hot temperament" (McFerran 1994). However, Shaw has also dismissed the question of nationality entirely, saying: "I'm not interested in nationhood at all, I'm interested in the world of the emotional imagination" (Shaw, in interview with the author 2001, 2). While Warner and Shaw are defined, and define themselves, by the oppositional psychology of nationality, they also eschew its significance in their work. The impact of Shaw's Irishness on her work therefore flickers on and off, sometimes operating contextually, such as when she performs in Ireland, but usually being subsumed by the emphasis Warner and Shaw place on the universal truths of the text.

The ambiguity of Shaw's national encoding could be seen most recently when she was awarded an honorary CBE in England, which she then dedicated to "Ireland and the Irish people" (BBC News 2002, 1). Shaw's act of bequeathing an honour from the British government to the Irish nation, saying: "politically, I feel it's a wonderful sign of the best fusion of both our countries - it's fantastic for Ireland and an honour for Irish people" (BBC News 2002, 1), points to Shaw's own ambiguous positioning somewhere between England and Ireland in terms of her own identifications and semiotic encoding. As I will argue in Chapter Five, Shaw's ambiguous national encoding was particularly prominent in her performance as Medea in the Abbey production in 2000.

However, Shaw's attitude towards the "universal" is revealing in relation to her views on nationality. Shaw argued that, "the great thing about the play and the word "universal" is that it is profoundly individual to each person watching it and each person playing it" (Shaw, interview with the author 2001, 3). Somehow, what is universally human is also individual. The free-market principles of individualism are at the basis of the idea of the universal in the work of Warner and Shaw, and they frequently situate a sympathetic individual in opposition to a monolithic and confining nationalism or patriarchy in their productions. The principles of individualism are therefore the "truths" which Warner and Shaw unearth in the canonical plays they produce, and the question of nationality is inevitably positioned in opposition to these truths. This effect was particularly prominent in their production of *Medea*, in which the forces of nationalism and patriarchy were intertwined in opposition to the individualised figure of Medea. The emphasis on the universal individual in Warner

and Shaw's work means that Shaw's Irishness is made ambiguous, liminal and frequently irrelevant, which has a complex effect on how the nationality of the characters she plays can be interpreted.

Warner and Shaw's ongoing collaborations have been radical in their impact on the male-dominated environment of British classical theatre. By projecting an image of intelligence, rigour, mastery and power, the "Terrible Twins" have re-negotiated gender stereotypes both on the stage and off it. Their engagement with major female roles within the classical tradition has constructed alternative visions of femininity for a contemporary audience. Their search for the human "truths" in these texts, however, also maintains the status of these texts even as they subvert them.

Even while Warner and Shaw have unsettled the theatre hierarchy and system of representation with their presence as female creators of bravura and controversial productions, they have nonetheless simultaneously reaffirmed the power of that hierarchy by doing productions which underline the "greatness" of the texts they perform, texts on which the theatre hierarchy relies for its own validation. Warner and Shaw's denial of the significance of their gender in their work and their employment of a vocabulary which emphasises more traditionally masculine qualities, and the values of the individual, erodes the question of gender and nationality in their productions. I want to argue however, that the public personae that they have developed, the way in which Shaw has framed her body, and the approach Warner takes to her work, operate to disrupt, subvert and also maintain the gender representations within their productions, and have a similarly complicating effect on the representations of nationality in their work.

Looking For Fiona

I want to turn now to three productions by Warner and Shaw: *Electra*, *The Good Person Of Sichuan* and *Hedda Gabler*, in order to examine how gender, nationality and the body have been positioned in their work, to examine some of the themes and issues raised by their work which were continued in their productions of *Richard II* and *Medea*, and to conclude by looking at how their work imagines and constitutes the spectator.

Gender

The way in which Warner and Shaw's work approaches the representation of gender is rife with contradiction. While Shaw presents ambiguous portraits of femininity on the stage, she tends to be positioned in opposition to more static and naturalistic portraits of gender (particularly masculinity). Furthermore, as I argued above, Shaw's powerful and charismatic portraits of women have countered the power of the canon, and Warner's staging has frequently worked to critique of the limiting representations of women in the plays she directs. At the same time, however, their work also serves to reassert the power of the plays they produce.

These contradictions could be seen in their first collaboration, *Electra*[14], which took place in the RSC in 1988. The play centres on the character of Electra who is in mourning for her dead father whom her mother Clytemnestra (and her mother's lover) has murdered. Electra's one hope is for her brother Orestes, whom she sent into hiding as a child after her father's death. The play focuses on Electra's suffering both through her grief, and in her exile from her former life, as her mother has removed her royal privileges as a result of her persistent rebellion and complaint. Orestes does return and murders Clytemnestra with the help of Electra (see Sophocles 1953).

Electra is rendered inactive and ineffective in her grief for her dead father, her longing for her exiled brother, and her hate for her sexualised and powerful mother. In her support for patriarchal values, Electra is a character who sees herself as utterly dispossessed. However, while Electra is disempowered in a social sense, she nonetheless dominates the theatrical event, so that her political powerlessness produces her theatrical empowerment. Even while her body is confined by her social circumstances, her continual verbal complaint lends her a theatrical power. While Electra is imprisoned, her articulateness renders her powerful and allows her dominate the stage. The disjunction between Electra's social and theatrical power makes her a fascinating and contradictory figure on the stage, an effect which was central to Shaw's performance.

The paradoxical effect of Electra's theatricality was heightened by Hildegard Bechtler's costume designs for the production. Shaw was naked under a ripped black

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[14] My analysis of this production is based on a film shot of the production in Bobigny, Paris, 1992, and reviews and photographs from the RSC archives.

tunic which exposed her legs, the side of her torso, her arms and occasionally her breasts. The blackness of the costume emphasised the pallor of her body and also connected Shaw with the chorus, who were swathed in long black robes and scarves which covered their heads and faces. The concealment of the chorus" bodies acted as a stark contrast to the exposure of Shaw's, and established a convention of the "normal" female body of the chorus in comparison to the "abnormally" exposed body of Shaw. While female nudity would often operate as a site of desire for the audience, the exposure of Shaw's body had the opposite effect of constructing a disturbing and ambiguous femininity on the stage.

The complexity of Shaw's femininity can by explained by the fact that in Warner's production, Electra was grief personified, in all its visceral and vocal intensities. Kate Kellaway said of Fiona Shaw's performance: "As Electra, Fiona Shaw shows that grief is stronger than character: it is a character in itself'(Kellaway 1989). Shaw, grazed and bruised, emaciated, and with her head partly shaven, performed Electra as a character literally doubled over with grief. Shaw's body was wracked with muscular and vocal spasms, she wept constantly throughout the performance, she beat and tore at her body, plucking at her skin and her costume, and collapsed a number of times on the stage. Her body was continually off balance, she gasped for breath and spoke through tears, her voice ranging from whispers to screams, and the impact of her vocal work registered in the muscles, veins and sinews of her neck and shoulders. Electra's psychological and political powerlessness was presented by Shaw in an embodied state, where her body was so marked and contorted by grief that she was rendered physically ineffective. Shaw's body was simultaneously disabled by her performance and powerfully theatrical on the stage.

By contrast, the costume of Clytemnestra constructed an oppositional model of femininity. Clytemnestra, played by a curvaceous blonde actress (Sheila Gish), wore a figure hugging red dress which revealed her bosom and accentuated her curves. Furthermore, her face was heavily made up, and contrasted with Shaw's pallid, emaciated and bruised complexion. Clytemnestra's costuming operated almost as a parody of sexualised femininity, and the fact that the actress had a deep voice added to the sense that Clytemnestra was a drag queen. The production did nothing to renegotiate Electra's view of her mother as an over-sexualised murderer, but instead faithfully constructed Electra's descriptions of her onstage. While Shaw's femininity

was critical, fluid and ambiguous onstage, her complexity contrasted starkly with the static quality of the other representations of femininity on the stage.

The critics" responded to Shaw's performance by seeing her Electra as asexual, ungendered and androgynous. Irving Wardle in *The Times* described Shaw's Electra as: "A ragged, half naked spectre whose very gender is obliterated by grief" (Wardle 1988). Jane Edwards in *Time Out* added: "Her body naked under a black shift, she presents an uninhibited portrait of a woman - unsexed , unhinged and uncompromising - clawing at her flesh" (Edwards 1989), and Michael Billington described how Shaw was: "Wild, strange, driven, a somewhat asexual creature" (Billington 1989).

The spectacle of Shaw's body semi naked onstage without that nudity expressing conventionally desirable femininity, became unreadable *as* feminine to the critics, leading them to view her figure through the blurred category of androgyny. Their response reveals how the readings of femininity are founded in the appearance of the body, and how costume, makeup and gestural codes are central to the construction of femininity on the stage. Shaw's Electra did not dress in a feminine way, take care of her body in a feminine way and move in a feminine way and therefore not only was she not feminine, she became fundamentally no longer female.

Shaw, by not performing femininity "correctly," became a drag queen in reverse. Rather than constructing her body to appear feminine, she revealed her female body in such a way as to eradicate its femaleness and femininity. Shaw's embodiment of Electra was just as constructed by costume and make up as Clytemnestra's but operated as a deconstruction of the traditional performance of femininity. Even while Shaw played a woman who was physically, politically and emotionally powerless, the power of her disempowerment opened up a gap in the traditional registers of gender to offer something less definable and categorical in its place. Shaw's ambiguous femininity and theatrical power contrasted with the static quality of the other characterisations on the stage.

Following their success with *Electra*, Warner and Shaw worked together again on *The Good Person of Sichuan* by Berthold Brecht in the Royal National Theatre in London[15], continuing their precedent of staging - and revising - canonical texts in classical theatre spaces. The production opened in1989 in the Olivier Theatre, and was

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[15] My analysis of this production is based on photographs and reviews from the RNT archives.

acclaimed by critics primarily for Shaw's performance as the cross-dressing Shen Teh. *Good Person* was another example of how Shaw's complex femininity contrasted with another simplified gendered representation, except this time the binary took place within Shaw's own body in the contrast between her complex portrait of Shen Teh and her simplified cross-dressed performance as Shui Ta.

The Good Person Of Sichuan is a parable about the impossibility of being good without money. Set in an impressionistic China, Brecht attempted to examine the economic conditions of virtue through the figure of a prostitute with a heart of gold, Shen Teh. The play begins with the quest of three gods to find one good person in human society. Despairing of their task, they are delighted to find Shen Teh, who gives them shelter for the night. The gods give Shen Teh enough money to buy a tabbacco shop and leave, bidding her to do good with their money. However, Shen Teh quickly realises that she needs to protect herself from the scavengers who alight on the shop once they hear of her fortune and threaten to bankrupt her almost straight away. She therefore invents a male cousin, Shui Ta, who has the necessary cruelty and cynicism to protect her interests. Shen Teh splits herself between a female (good) side and a male (bad) side, Shui Ta, and the play shows the problems and conflicts which Shen Teh "s cross-dressing creates.

Feminist responses to this play have been mixed. The text has been criticised by some scholars for essentialising Shen Teh's femininity as passive, virtuous and romantic in comparison to an active, cynical and calculating masculinity in the guise of Shui Ta. As Elizabeth Wright points out: "Shen Teh is split into the good exploited female and bad exploiting male" (Wright 1994, 118). However, Alisa Solomon argues to the contrary that the Brechtian techniques of gestus and alienation can serve a feminist approach to gender. Solomon argues that while the portraits of masculinity and femininity might be simplistic in the play, the fact that Shen Teh embodies both characters, complicates this simplicity. As Solomon points out: "Shen Teh's gender is as provisional as it is providential" (Solomon 1997, 81).

However, the potential complexity of Shen Teh "s cross-dressing was limited by Warner's production. The critics were full of praise for Fiona Shaw's performance due to the absence of a didactic approach in her performance, having deplored the overtly political stance of Brecht, with one critic arguing that, "It is hard, but let us try for a moment [...] to overlook Berthold Brecht's politics" (John Gross 1989). Shaw's

performance as Shen Teh was therefore appealing precisely for its lack of political fervour: "When beaming widely or suddenly serious, she confides in the audience [...] she is no conventional moraliser [..]. She is shy and gauche, but firm, and she is almost apologetic about the force of her own insights into a terrible world" (Brady 1989, 1363).

Like Shaw's Electra, her portrayal of Shen Teh's femininity was complex and unconventional, working against the Hollywood "good woman" associations of docile femininity and prettiness, as one critic pointed out: "With her ungainly movements and her cheap flowery frock Fiona Shaw's Shen Teh is neither conventionally pretty nor a painted tart" (Brady 1989, 1363). Shaw's performance reworked the clichés around "good women" and prostitutes and created a more subtle complex portrait in its place. Indeed she insisted that: "For Shen Teh I made sure she was the plainest woman in the village" (Woddis 1991).

However, while Shaw's physical portrait of Shen Teh ensured that the character's gender was not easily objectified, her Shui Ta on the other hand was a cartoon-like caricature, and imitation of the images of Hollywood gangsters: "Her Shui Ta with white half mask, pencil moustache and black trilby is a louche sinister figure with the rasping accent of a Chicago hood" (Billington 1989). The figure of Shen Teh was much more naturalistic and complex than the figure of Shui Ta in this production. The stasis of Shui Ta undermined the potential complexity of Shen Teh's cross-dressing.

By making Shen Teh far more real and naturalistic than Shui Ta, Shaw foregrounded the "performance" of Shui Ta's masculinity without allowing for the possibility that Shen The "really is" Shui Ta. Shen Teh's gender remained discreet and untouched by her experience of playing a man. Shaw's performance stabilised the binary of gender, positioning cross-dressing as an act of deceitful mimicry rather than as a formative act. The "real" Shen The retained her complex femininity despite her performance of the "artificial" Shui Ta. Again, Shaw's complex femininity worked in opposition to a static and simplistic masculinity, this time with both figures embodied by Shaw.

In 1991, Garry Hynes, the (female) artistic director of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, invited Fiona Shaw to perform in *Hedda Gabler* on the Abbey stage and, after some persuasion, Warner and Hildegard Bechtler agreed to join Shaw in staging the

play, thus reuniting the original *Electra* team and creating a female quartet at the helm of the creative process[16]. This production revealed another characteristic of the approach Warner and Shaw take to gender, in their critical use of costume and spatial relations to construct representations of gender on the stage, an approach which I will explore in their productions of *Richard II* and *Medea* in the next two chapters.

Hedda Gabler was written by Henrik Ibsen in 1890, and caused an uproar when it was first performed. The story concerns Hedda, a Norwegian aristocrat, and Jurgen Tesman, a bourgeois academic, who have just returned from their honeymoon. It soon emerges that Hedda is unhappy in her marriage, partly due to her pregnancy which is hinted at but never overtly acknowledged in the text. The play takes place over two days in which Hedda receives a series of visitors: Judge Brack who has his eye on Hedda as a potential mistress, Thea Elvsted who shocks Hedda by leaving her husband for the love of Eljiart Lovberg - Hedda's old flame - and Juliane Tesman, Jurgen's spinster aunt and surrogate mother. The play centres around Lovberg's newly written manuscript which Thea and he have worked on together and which Hedda destroys by throwing it in the fire. Lovberg then commits suicide with one of Hedda's pistols and the play ends with Hedda killing herself (see Ibsen 1961).

The character of Hedda posed a threat not only to the security of feminine identity but also to the stability of masculinity. By possessing masculine traits: an interest in horses, owning pistols, a close relationship with her father, and by also conforming to strongly feminine traits such as the fear of scandal and the shock at Thea leaving her husband, Hedda challenged the easy binary of male versus female and therefore threatened the entire framework of gender identity. Ibsen's play caused a scandal when it was first performed for his revolutionary use of naturalism on the stage which challenged how gender could be represented in theatrical terms and, by doing so, challenged how gender roles were performed and understood. As Alisa Solomon argues: "Ibsen's innovative dramaturgy reveals the artificiality of the well-made play, and, as a consequence, the artificiality of the era's well made woman" (Solomon 1997, 53).

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[16] My analysis of this production is based on a still camera video of the performance in the Abbey Theatre, and photographs and reviews from the Abbey theatre archives.

Ibsen's challenge to the conventions of staging gender was echoed in Warner's production, through her use of furniture and spatial relations on the stage. Warner used the furniture within the play as a way to investigate and highlight Hedda's psychology. Shaw as Hedda intervened in the vast space of her living room, designed by Bechtler, by using the furniture as a form of control over her environment. She incessantly rearranged the room, moving chairs, tidying the space. John Peter felt that this use of furniture was a way of showing Hedda's social entrapment, using the material objects on the stage as symbols of her mental and physical confinement (in all senses of the word): "Obligations, like furniture, are a form of imprisonment. Shaw keeps rearranging the furniture as strategic observation posts for herself, turning the large drawing room into an arena for complete freedom of movement. This creates an emptiness which vibrates with a sense of futile, misused power" (Peter 1991). As the play progressed the stage space became progressively emptier, as if Hedda's life was becoming more and more barren.

Warner used the set to comment on the relationship between the naturalistic and the domestic, and foregrounded the naturalistic conventions for which Ibsen is famous, in order to unmask the representational strategies used to construct gender in the play. The feminine associations with the domestic were shown, by Shaw's use of furniture, to be theatrically as well as socially confining. Hedda's mental imprisonment was displayed through Shaw's physical confinement on the stage, in the spatial restrictions created by the furniture on the cluttered stage, and in the rigidity of her corseted costume, which Shaw's characteristic athleticism struggled against. The use of costume and space operated to elucidate the main theme of the play, of Hedda's mental struggle with the narrowness of her world, but also revealed the gendered implications of the way Ibsen's story is told, through the confining naturalistic associations of the feminine with the domestic. The use of costume and set played a critical and simultaneously supportive role for the meanings of the text.

Warner and Shaw's productions have had a number of contradictory approaches to gender in performance. While, on the one hand, Shaw's body was made androgynous and was reconfigured by her costume in *Electra*, on the other hand, when cross-dressing was actively used in *The Good Person Of Sichuan*, the "male" costume of Shui Ta was shown to be a kind of deceit, a cover-up for the "real" femininity of Shen Teh beneath the costume. While on the one hand, Shaw has created powerful and

ambiguous feminine figures on the stage, on the other hand she has frequently played against much more simplistic and one-dimensional gendered figures in performance. Finally, while Warner has used costume and set design to counter and critique the politics of gender in canonical texts, she has simultaneously used these designs to elucidate and support the main themes of those texts. The contradictions in Warner and Shaw's approach to gender could be seen in their production of *Richard II*, in their contradictory approach to the act of cross-dressing, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

The Real Fiona Shaw

As I have already argued, the semiotics of Warner and Shaw have been encoded and configured through their work and their power as a female creative team. However, I also want to argue that their complex and ambiguous semiotics have had a disruptive effect on how their work can be read in performance and I will examine how this effect operated in their production of *Electra* and *Hedda Gabler*.

In *Electra*, Shaw's performance of disempowerment paradoxically established her as the most theatrically powerful figure in the production. Watching Shaw on the stage combined the suffering figure of Electra with the damaged body in pain of Shaw-as-character and the powerful, skilful and controlling figure of Shaw-the-actor who enabled the performance. This had an effect on the gender identity of Electra on the stage. While we were presented with the character of a disempowered and disenfranchised woman, we were also presented with the figure of a powerful, intelligent and successful actress playing that woman on the stage.

Shaw's power as an actress disrupted Electra's disempowerment to offer a multiple and intertextual vision of femininity in performance. As Susan Melrose points out: "Fiona Shaw's Electra represents, through Shaw's work, contemporary women as well as Warner's enunciation of the male writer's fantasy of Woman" (Melrose 1994, 138). Shaw's description of the experience of playing Electra complicated this dynamic even further. In a public talk in Trinity College Dublin in 1993 she described how she continually beat against her legs onstage which had lamed her for the following six months, and she further recounted how her crying onstage had wrinkled the skin around her eyes. In another interview, she mused of her experience that: "I

think tragedy is expensive. After the Electra run, I was in a terrible state for many months, utterly worn out" (Woddis 1991).

Shaw's description of the physical effects of performing Electra affects the interpretation of her work. Her description of the physical and psychological pain involved in her performance established the stakes involved in her acting, and pointed to her virtuosity on the stage. Her description of her experience also added a layer of "the real" to how her body could be read in performance. The knowledge that her limp was "real" onstage for example, blurred the line between the "real Fiona Shaw" and the fictional Electra.

Shaw's pain in performance raises Susan Melrose question of what it is that motivates: "the contemporary British spectator's pleasure in fictional pain and real actorly physical pain" (Melrose 1994, 155). The pleasure in the authenticity of Shaw's pain onstage centres on the operation of the "real" in classical theatre. The idea that the actor, as well as the character, suffers in performance, authenticates that performance as a true experience. The spectator can take pleasure in the knowledge that the imitation is simultaneous with the "real", that not only Electra but also Shaw suffers on the stage. In doing this the spectator admires the realism of the illusion, but also feels that "the real Fiona Shaw" is somehow accessible or knowable apart from the illusion and through it.

However, the "real" is also an illusion, a performance based on Shaw's narrativisation of her work. By publicly verbalising her experiences, Shaw performed "the real Fiona Shaw", a presence which interrupts the illusions and fictions of gender she created on the stage, a presence which itself is an illusion of a stable, authoritative, and controlling body. Shaw's description of her work onstage not only reconfigured her body, but also reconfigured the memory of her body onstage, reconstructing our potential response to her performance. As a result, Electra's gender was disrupted, reconfigured and critiqued through Shaw's ambiguously feminine semiotic encoding, and through her reputation for virtuosity in performance.

In Warner and Shaw's production of *Hedda Gabler*, the play's message about the legitimacy of female creativity was subverted by the semiotics of the female quartet creating the production (Hynes, Warner, Shaw and Bechtler) which gave a new reading to the play. Gail Finney argues of *Hedda Gabler* that: "The metaphor of literary paternity establishes a clear cut division of labor which assigns biological creation to

women, artistic creation to men and dictates that female appropriation of art can only interfere with women's proper role as mothers" (Finney 1989, 154). Within the frame of the fiction of the play, women must operate as muses or as mothers, but when Hedda attempts to become the author of her own story, both she and the story are destroyed. Maurice Valency spells it out when he argues, "Hedda cannot help a man create either biologically or intellectually because ... she desires to arrogate the masculine role to herself" (Valency cited in Templeton 1997 209-10).

This dynamic within the play has been reproduced by the traditional hierarchies of theatrical production, where an all powerful male director, in homage to the powerful male writer, creates a production in which the female actor works. Traditionally, actresses who played Hedda were lauded for their performances, but it was the combined authority of male writer and male director which "wrote" the meaning on the stage. Warner's female team subverted this dynamic and, by challenging and foregrounding the representational strategies the play deploys to construct femininity, offered a new configuration of female creativity both on and off the stage. The consciousness that this production was commissioned, directed, designed and acted by women necessarily had a deconstructive effect on the gender images of the production, and reconfigured the power dynamics inherent both in the text and in the creative processes involved in staging that text.

By looking at how the "real" Fiona Shaw exerts a critical and interrupting effect on the characters she plays, we can see how the real and illusion intermingle and blur one another on the stage. While the contemporary and powerful persona of Shaw exerted a deconstructive effect on the disempowerment of Electra, paradoxically, Shaw could establish her prowess and virtuosity only by embodying that powerlessness on the stage. Similarly, while the female team creating *Hedda Gabler* reconfigured the play's gendered dynamic of creativity, this team were constituted as powerful in part by working on a canonical text. While the semiotics of Warner and Shaw had an effect on how their work could be read, that work also reconfigured how their personae, and bodies, could be read and configured in subsequent work.

Nationality

As I have already argued in this chapter, Warner and Shaw's unearthing of universal truths in the texts they perform tends to place a sympathetic individual, with

whom the audience identify, in opposition to a homogenous and oppressive group who are constituted through various significations as patriarchal, conservative, or nationalistic. Therefore, the complex femininity which Shaw creates on the stage tends to be opposed by fixed and static representations of masculinity, conservative and repressed femininity, and oppressive nationality. The universal therefore becomes significant of a individualism which operates "outside" of cultural or gendered boundaries and, as I have shown, this complicates and renders ambiguous Shaw's gender and nationality in performance.

However, Shaw's Irishness does emerge contextually, such as when the production of *Electra* toured to Derry in 1988 at the height of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Initially resisted by the local community for being a "Royal" Shakespeare production, when the play was performed its story of familial revenge became a parable of sectarian violence. At the end of the performance, the cast and crew discussed the play at length with the audience, and Shaw's Irish accent, neutralised within an English theatrical context, became a central motif to the production as did the actor playing Orestes, John Lynch, who was from Northern Ireland.

More intentionally, the production of *Hedda Gabler* played on its Irish context in the Abbey theatre, using a translation by an Anglo Irish woman, Una Ellis-Fermor, and evoking the culture of the "big house" and the parochialism of small town Ireland. Critics picked up on this, finding that: "the looming grey walls and mahogany furniture of Hildegard Bechtler's set suggest a genteel mansion in some crampingly respectable town in the island's cut-off core" (Benedict Nightingale 1991). Again, however, Shaw was positioned as an individual confined and restricted by the patriarchal and confining nationality of her environment, and the fact that she was an "outsider" to Irish theatre, having made her name on the English classical stage, contributed to this effect.

The template of a woman driven to madness by the confining and repressive operations of a national and patriarchal culture was echoed and exaggerated by Warner and Shaw's next Abbey production, *Medea*, which I will discuss in Chapter Four. The question of nationality and gender have intertwined and informed each other in their work, and this was true for *Richard II* and *Medea*. As I will show in the next two chapters, the ambiguous national encoding of Shaw has perpetuated the gendered construction of nationality in their work and has blurred the representation of Irishness in performance.

Virtuoso Bodies

While I have already discussed the impact of Shaw's virtuosity on her portrayal of Electra, the playtexts she and Warner have chosen to perform have had implications for how Shaw's body was viewed by the critical establishment. For example, critics viewed *Hedda Gabler* as a test of the classical actress's ability. A number of critics saw it as the female equivalent of the role of Hamlet, a kind of initiation rite into the "great actor" stakes. As Charles Spencer put it: "The title role has become the female equivalent of Hamlet, the hoop through which most ambitious actresses feel obliged to jump" (Spencer 1991, 4). In terms of the public image of both Warner and Shaw, *Hedda Gabler* operated as an initiation rite into "greatness" on the Classical stage, and established a "coming of age" performance for Shaw, imbuing her with the authority and legitimacy of the role.

By choosing to perform canonical texts, Warner and Shaw's bodies are moulded through the history of canonical theatre. This effect is extended by the fact that critics frequently compare Shaw with other famous star actors: Vanessa Redgrave, Sara Bernhardt, and even Laurence Olivier. Shaw's body is situated within an accumulated history of other actor's performances, imbuing her with their authority and power. While Shaw's focus on rigour and hard work establishes her control over the process of meaning making on the stage, its resultant construction of her virtuosity also moulds her body within the legacies of other actors and other roles, positioning her body within what Joseph Roach might call a genealogy of classical performance (Roach 1996). The sense that Shaw's body carries the memories of other bodies and performance imbues her work with a legitimacy which reconfigures her gender and her body as an appropriate bearer of the authority of the classical stage. Warner and Shaw's bodies are reconfigured through their choice of playtexts.

Imagining Audiences.

As W.B. Worthen argues, the production of Shakespeare on the British stage is inflected by a debate, "that usually centers on issues of legitimacy, power, tradition and cultural hegemony" (Worthen 1997, 38). I would argue that, in the case of Deborah Warner and Fiona Shaw's work onstage, these issues apply more generally to the production of canonical texts on the stage. Warner's staging interventions and Shaw's virtuoso and ambivalent portraits of femininity have both disrupted and confirmed the

power of the canon and are situated within and against the question of tradition and legitimacy. However, the fact that critics almost universally praised their work before their production of *Richard II*, argues for the fact that they did not overstep their position of authority within the theatre system, and that their critical approach to femininity still operated to serve the power of the classical stage. While Shaw's virtuosity created a critique of the confining image of women in the plays they performed, her power as an actor also served to display the power of the play and of the theatre itself.

Furthermore, the individualism of Warner and Shaw's approach to identity created a contradictory effect in their construction of nationality. While they positioned a fluid and ambiguous sympathetic female figure in contrast to a static and oppressive national society in their productions, they did so in theatres with nationalist connotations. Their portrayal of the individualist Electra in the Royal Shakespeare Company, or the confined and repressed Hedda in the National Theatre in Ireland, constructed images of individuality in spaces which situate audiences as part of a national community, and art as a function of the nation. Similarly, Warner and Shaw's denial of the significance of gender in their work, and their focus on the truths of the individual, meant that while they constructed ambiguous and critical portraits of femininity, they also erased the significance of gender for the identity of the individual more generally, preferring to focus on figures who somehow transcend their gender and nationality in the search for more general "human" truths.

In this chapter, I have argued that audiences are constituted in contradictory and uneasy ways by the work of Warner and Shaw. They are asked to empathise with an individualist figure and condemn the notion of nationality as an oppressive form of identity, in theatres with a nationalist agenda. Spectators are therefore imagined as simultaneously individualist and nationalist. Audiences are asked to engage with a critical, contemporary and ambiguous femininity while also being asked to erase gender as significant for human identity. Spectators are therefore positioned to become both sympathetic with the confinement of complex femininity, and also dismissive of their own gender as a significant form of identity. Audiences are asked to admire the power of Shaw on the stage while at the same time attributing her virtuosity to the power of the playtext. They are asked to participate in the "universal truths" of plays written by men, in productions created by women. The contradictions

of Warner and Shaw's work, and their interruptions of that work, have been central to the force and power of their productions in performance.

The contradictions in Warner and Shaw's work created complex images and effects of femininity on the stage, which contributed to their success in classical British theatre. However, when Warner cast Shaw as Richard in *Richard II* in the Royal National Theatre in 1995, the critics were up in arms even before the production opened. The ambiguous Shaw playing ambiguous women was perfectly acceptable, even expected, on the classical stage but the ambiguous Shaw playing an ambiguous man, and even worse, an ambiguous king on the national stage was an affront to the power of monarchy, Shakespeare, and tradition. "Its all a ghastly travesty," thundered John Gross in *The Sunday Telegraph* (1995, 5) and in the next chapter I want to investigate what was so ghastly about the travestied figure of Fiona Shaw as Richard II.

Chapter Four

"Its All A Ghastly Travesty:" Fiona Shaw's Illegitimate Body In Deborah Warner's *Richard II*

Introduction

As we have seen in the last chapter, the work of Deborah Warner and Fiona Shaw has been underscored by the tensions between the politics of identity and the claims of the universal and the "human." These tensions became very clear in Warner and Shaw's *Richard II* at the Royal National Theatre in June 1995[17]. Even before the production opened, the critics were in uproar at the prospect of Fiona Shaw playing the title role. Whether the response to a cross-gendered Richard as "gimmick casting" (Andrew Temple 1995, 23) was motivated by genuine disgust, or by the media thirst for scandal during the silly season, the critics" reception of the production, and Warner and Shaw's responses to their critics, demonstrated that cross-dressed productions can have a transformative effect on the representation of the past, and its attendant implications for the politics of gender in the present.

The negative response to the cross-dressed casting of Shaw raises the question of why it was that the highly praised ambiguity she brought to the performance of femininity was now deemed unacceptable for her portrait of a male king. This question links directly to how history and the past are gendered in history plays. If, as Jean E Howard and Phyllis Rackin argue, Shakespeare's history plays have: "done more to shape popular conceptions of English history than the work of any professional historian" (Howard & Rackin 1997, 10), then what kinds of Englishness and history were produced by Shaw's cross-dressed performance as king? This question is particularly pertinent for a production which took place in the Royal National Theatre, whose audiences are by its nature constituted through the discourse of nationalism. If, as I will argue, the past is usually gendered as masculine in Shakespeare's history

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[17] My analysis of this production is based on a still camera video of the performance in the National theatre, the film made for the BBC based on the production, directed by Warner in 1996 with Illuminations Productions and reviews and photographs from the RNT archives.

plays, what then were the effects on the representation of nationality of a woman playing a king?

In this chapter, I want to look at the transformative effects of cross-dressing in Warner's Richard II. I will focus on the interrelated construction of gender and history on the stage, and argue that by casting the "illegitimate" body of Shaw in the lead role of a history play, Warner's production challenged the gendering of Englishness in the representations of history on the national stage. I will look at how the production's use of cross-dressing blurred the binary of real and illusion on the stage: the real of Shaw's body, the king's body and the historical figure of King Richard II himself. Throughout this chapter, I will argue that Warner's production revealed the implicit gendering of the representation of history.

However, while *Richard II's* cross-gender casting caused controversy and scandal, Warner's production had a contradictory attitude towards gender, theatricality and the body. Even as gender troubled monarchy in Warner's production, gender was also troubled *by* monarchy, by the claims of naturalism and transparency of the classical stage, and by the contradictory attitudes of Warner and Shaw themselves towards the issue of gender. While the cross-gender casting had a subversive effect on the gendering of the history in the play, the production also attempted to erase the question of Shaw's femaleness on the stage, and created an uneasy and contradictory cross-dressed effect in their production. The production was characterised by the continual "disappearing" acts of gender, sexuality, Irishness, and theatricality on the stage, through their foregrounding and denial in performance. The "flickering" effects of these identities in performance led to a destabilisation of the binary of real and illusion on the stage, and a undermining of the stability of a sense of history in Warner's production of *Richard II*.

These contradictions could be seen visually in Warner's show, in the uneasy half-light between an overall naturalism in its approach to design and acting style, and the stylised, abstracted figure of Shaw's Richard. While the corridor-like space (with the audience sitting on either side of the long narrow playing area, as if in the Houses of Parliament, or at a jousting match), was lit by candles and created a sense of historical distance and design, and the actors" costumes resembled the Medieval garb of the period in which *Richard II* is set, Fiona Shaw's Richard interrupted and contradicted the representative medieval world of the production.

Shaw was wrapped in bandages from her shoulders to her ankles which were displayed beneath her medieval style costume. Her body was abstracted and stylised in comparison to the naturalism of the costuming of the other actors on the stage. Furthermore, while most of the actors performed in the mode of psychological realism tempered by the technical demands of Shakespeare's verse, Shaw's performance was visceral, hyperactive, virtuoso and non-naturalistic. Moreover, these contrasts between Shaw and the other actors were exacerbated by the fact that Shaw was the only cross-dressed figure on the stage, and her presence disrupted the consistency of the naturalistic field of the show. Warner's cross-dressed production was characterised by the tensions within what W.B. Worthen describes as "the contradictory imperatives of modernist theatre aesthetics: to preserve the authority of the text, and yet to make it new" (Worthen 1997, 69), and Shaw's cross-dressed Richard unsettled the consistency of Warner's psychological and faithful approach to the text.

The stylisation of Shaw contributed to how the production blurred the figure of the actor and the character of the king on the stage, and continually undermined a stable recourse to a "real" body, either of Shaw or of the historical body of Richard II. This, as I have argued already, unsettled the gendering of English history in the play and produced a nostalgia in the audience for an ambiguous and feminised past. Furthermore, the use of kissing on the stage highlighted the complexities of Shaw's cross-dressed figure and destabilised sexual categories, offering a "queer" cross-dressed effect on the stage. While the categories of gender, sexuality and history were unsettled by Shaw's cross-dressed performance, her Irishness was semi-erased by the production, thus creating a complex "flickering" effect of nationality in the show. While Warner's production celebrated and deployed the theatricality of Shaw's cross-dressing to remarkable effects, ultimately she rejected theatricality as a viable form of identity, which echoed the play's own complicated approach to performance.

The critical resistance to Shaw's performance can be understood in relation to the "legitimacy" or "illegitimacy" of actors" bodies in the performance of Shakespeare. W.B. Worthen argues: "the body becomes the vehicle for the transmission of Shakespeare" (Worthen 1997, 99). While Worthen does not acknowledge in this statement that it is the *gendered* body that becomes the vehicle for the transmission of Shakespeare, in the case of Shakespeare's history plays, that body has tended to be male. The legitimacy of Shakespearean historical bodies is gender defined.

The impact Shakespeare's plays have had on the representation of English history has been produced through the male actor's body. Examples of this gendered effect can be seen in Laurence Olivier and Kenneth Branagh's highly successful film versions of *Henry V*. In both films, a sense of a masculine historical past was constructed by the actor's bodies, who, as I argued in Chapter One, became emblems for the figure of Shakespeare himself. These films fed the "public longing for narratives of strong male heroes who embody national prowess" (Howard & Rackin 1997, 9). The English past has been gendered masculine through the legitimising masculinity of male actors" bodies who produce a sense of the past through their prowess on the battlefield of the stage.

In startling contrast, by casting Shaw as Richard in Shakespeare's history play, Warner constructed a history which was produced through the female body of Shaw, a body which was deemed by critics as illegitimate to represent the monarchy and to produce English history on the national stage. Warner's production of *Richard II* in 1995, took place against a backdrop of cultural challenges to the traditional institutions of Englishness. The role of the monarchy in English society was being contested and questioned, due to the scandals surrounding the sex-lives of the young royals and the separation of Charles and Diana in 1992. Furthermore, England was embroiled in a debate about its sovereignty in relation to the European Union, particularly focusing on the question of the changeover of currency from Sterling to the Euro (see BBC News 2002). Finally, England was recovering and revising its experiences of life under the rule of its first female prime minister, and the question of gender in relation to national leadership was part of the cultural consciousness at the time (see Leung 1997).

Casting Shaw as Richard tapped into these debates and anxieties, and revealed the implicit gendering of representations of Englishness and history in the theatre. The negative reaction to Warner's casting choice may have stemmed from a cultural need to represent monarchy in a positive light, and express and form Englishness through a strong *male* body in performance. Shaw was deemed an illegitimate actor to carry the mantle of king on the national stage at a time when the institutions of monarchy and nationality were being contested and debated.

Ironically, however, by casting Shaw in the role, the production also maintained and reasserted many of the stereotypes around gender, essentialising both Richard's "femininity" and Shaw's "femaleness" onstage. Warner's production became a

complex and contradictory matrix of struggle over nationality, history, gender, authority and tradition which both subverted and maintained the stereotypes of gendered behaviour. Shaw's cross-dressed performance moulded her own body and reconfigured the Englishness of the spectators, creating both subversive and simultaneously conservative meanings within the performance of *Richard II*.

The production's contradictory approach to nationality and gender was echoed in one of Warner and Shaw's subsequent productions, *Medea*, which they performed on another national stage, the Abbey Theatre, in Dublin 2000. As I will argue in the next chapter, Shaw's performance as Richard reconfigured her body and fed into the cross-dressed "effect" which she produced in her portrait of Medea in this production. While *Richard II* centred on the cross-dressed figure of Shaw, the crossing between productions fed into how Shaw's Medea could be read and understood and I will investigate the links between these two productions in the next chapter.

For the rest of this chapter, I will analyse Shakespeare's play for its approach to gender, Irishness and theatricality, and acknowledge its position within the political and cultural context of its time. I will argue that Shakespeare's play genders history in complex and contradictory ways. I will then examine the press response to the idea of cross-dressing in *Richard II*, and look at how Warner and Shaw responded to this debate, arguing that the debate did not question the assumption that Shakespeare's text and "truths" should be served by the production. I also argue that the critics response to Shaw's cross-dressing betrayed an anti-theatrical fear of the formative effects of cross-dressing, and a static notion of the operations of mimesis in performance. I will then examine the production itself for how it blurred the figure of the king and the cross-dresser, for what kind of history it produced on the stage, for how kissing operated as a transvestic device in performance, for the erasure of Shaw's Irishness, for the production's approach to theatricality and, finally, for the way in which the audience was imagined by the show. I will argue throughout, that Shaw's cross-dressing produced and invented history on the stage, while at the same time erasing and denying the significance of gender and nationality in performance.

Richard II

Richard II is a play intimately concerned with the relationship between the body of the king and the body politic and has a complex and contradictory approach to the

relationship between history and gender. One of Shakespeare's later plays, it begins the second tetralogy, and is the history play set in the earliest period of Medieval politics. The play is written more formally than most of Shakespeare's other works, using verse in rigorous and lyrical ways, which may reflect the distance felt by the Elizabethans from their time to Richard's. Questions of power, kingship and identity run through the play and are centred on the relationship between Richard and Henry Bolingbroke. While there is a limited field of feminist scholarship on the play, Jean E Howard and Phyllis Rackin's *Engendering A Nation* (1997) has provided a useful and stimulating analysis of the gender implications of the text and context, and I will draw upon their scholarship extensively in my discussion below.

At the beginning of the play, we see Richard presiding over a dispute between Bolingbroke and Thomas Mowbray. The contest comes to a duel which Richard prevents and, displaying his weakness as a ruler, he banishes the men. Bolingbroke's father, John of Gaunt, dies soon after, and Richard robs Bolingbroke's inheritance in order to fund his invasion of Ireland. Bolingbroke returns to England with the support of the majority of the nobles, and claims his rightful inheritance. Richard returns from his Irish wars, sees that his power has been fundamentally challenged, consents to be deposed, and hands his crown over to Bolingbroke. Richard is imprisoned, and then murdered by one of Bolingbroke's cohorts.

The relationship between the monarchy, power, gender and Englishness is central to *Richard II.* The deposition of Richard and the instatement of Henry Bolingbroke, who has no inherited right to the throne, signals a shift in the models of leadership and power in the Renaissance. The move from a ritualised, Catholic and divine monarchy embodied by Richard to Bolingbroke's pragmatic, proto-Protestant and politically astute form of rule is encapsulated in *Richard II* and is played out through the differences between these men's gendered and theatrical identities. At first glance, the binary between a sympathetic contemporary masculinity in the figure of Bolingbroke and a distanced Medieval femininity in the figure of Richard seems to be set in place. However, the fixity of this binary is unsettled within the play, and by the cultural context in which the play was written.

From the first, Richard and Bolingbroke are differentiated by their oppositional approaches to the world. While Richard's interest in luxury and riches, concerning himself with: "report of fashion in proud Italy/ whose manners still our tardy-apish

nation/ Limps after in base imitation" (Shakespeare 1997, II.1, 79), demonstrates his belief in the divine right of kings, and his elevation from humanity. In contrast, Bolingbroke is a much more pragmatic leader, threatening Richard's rule, who observes : "his courtship to the common people/ how he did seem to dive into their hearts/ with humble and familiar courtesy" (Shakespeare 1997, I.4, 77). Richard's misrule and decadent lifestyle contrasts with that of the pragmatic and democratic Bolingbroke. The relationship between leadership, image, and performance are established early on in the play. As Howard and Rackin argue:

> The conflict between Richard and Bullingbrook (sic) is framed as a conflict between two models of royal authority, Richard associated with a nostalgic image of Medieval royalty, grounded in heredity and expressed in ceremonial ritual, Bullingbrook with the emergence of an authority achieved by personal performance and expressed in the politically motivated theatrical self-presentation of a modern ruler (1997, 142).

The distinction between Richard and Bolingbroke has an implicitly gendered dynamic. Richard is established early on as a theatrical figure through his association with elaborate clothing, display and Catholic ritual. His theatricality feminise him, and, like the Queen and the other female characters in the play, Richard displays those qualities stereotypically associated with femininity during the Renaissance: he prevaricates, is indecisive, plays with words and is passionate and irrational. His characterisation renders him effeminate - not in the sense of homosexual which was a concept foreign to the Renaissance - but in the sense of "womanish" or feminine. His overt Catholicism extends this effeminacy further and plays into the Elizabethan associations of Catholicism with sexual degeneracy: "the polemical attacks on effeminate Catholic priests [..saw their] vestments [...] as a kind of female clothing" (Howard 1993, 25).

By contrast, Bolingbroke is a man of few words but a lot of action. He is decisive, aggressive and unconcerned with his appearance and he maintains a transparent relationship between his words and deeds. Bolingbroke's interiorised masculinity contrasts with Richard's exteriorised and embodied femininity. This is maintained in the men's relationship with England. While Bolingbroke sees himself as the son of England: "Then, England's ground, farewell! Sweet soil adieu,/ My mother and my nurse that bears me yet!" (Shakespeare 1997, I.3, 76). Richard sees himself as

the mother of England: "Dear earth, I do salute thee with my hand/ [...] as a long parted mother with her child/ plays fondly with her tears and smiles in meeting, / so weeping, smiling, greet I thee, my earth/ and do thee favours with my royal hands" (Shakespeare 1997, III.2, 105). Bolingbroke feminises England, but masculinises himself by proxy, while Richard feminises himself, *and* England, through his metaphor of mother and child.

Bolingbroke's masculine power deposes Richard's feminine monarch and he becomes king in the play. It might seem safe to assume, therefore, that the play maintains the status quo by favouring a modern masculine presence on the throne over the distanced feminised figure of Richard. However, as Howard and Rackin point out, *Richard II* is a complex and subversive play in relation to gender, history and Englishness. Unlike Shakespeare's previous tetralogy which had nostalgically imagined the past as a masculine world full of heroic deeds, "projected in idealised opposition to the present realities of female power and authority" (Howard & Rackin, ibid, 148), *Richard II* genders history in much more complex ways. While Richard is shown to be an ineffectual king, Bolingbroke is also acknowledged to be a traitor to the rightful heir to the throne. The play positions the Renaissance spectator in an uneasy position of allegiance to the two characters, neither of whom are straightforwardly sympathetic or correct in their actions, and the complexity of the play's identificatory "map" was echoed in Warner's production.

Richard II stages the crisis and indeterminacy of identity by showing in the figure of Richard: "the polluting forces of effeminate modernity [... which] are embodied in the same person who represents the patrilineal royal authority they threaten to subvert" (Howard & Rackin 1997, 147). While Richard is figured as the model of an effeminate, Medieval past which is underscored by the play's use of formal verse and elaborate language, he also bears a striking resemblance to the representations of Elizabeth I. His similarity to the queen positions him simultaneously as a shockingly contemporary figure in the feminised present of an England ruled by a woman.

This connection was made startlingly clear when, in 1601, Robert Devereaux, the Earl of Essex, hired the Lord Chamberlain's men to perform *Richard II* the night before attempting to depose Elizabeth I (see Hadfield in Burnett & Wray 1997, 49). The attempt was unsuccessful and Essex was executed, but the deposition scene in the

play was made illegal and the representation of the deposition of a monarch proved too great a threat to the status quo at the time of Elizabeth, and later again in the era of Charles I. The relationship between Elizabeth and Richard was further cemented when Elizabeth declared: "I am Richard II, know ye not that?" (Hadfield 1997, 49). By staging the play, Essex metaphorically cross-dressed the actor playing Richard as Elizabeth, and Essex himself assumed the ghostly mantle of Bolingbroke, by attempting to depose Elizabeth..

The parallel between Richard and Elizabeth is also visible in their painted portraits (see Appendix One, Figures 1 and 2). In contrast to the weighty and active figures of kings such as Henry VIII and Richard III, Richard II and Elizabeth are surprisingly similar in their representation: red haired and diminutive, stylistically and passively posed. Elizabeth's body was ghosted by Richard's, imprinted upon by his associations with effeminacy, and, to Elizabeth's detractors, his ineffectual rule. Shakespeare's theatricalisation of Richard must also have been haunted by Elizabeth's body, and so the performance of the role of Richard was a double production of Richard's body through the figure of Elizabeth, and Elizabeth's body through the ghostly figure of Richard. The contested authority and dubious gender of the body of the actor paralleled the contested body of Elizabeth I herself, and rendered Richard an ambiguous, feminine and strikingly contemporary figure on the Elizabethan stage. By playing Richard, therefore, Shaw was cross-dressed as a male king who himself was mediated through the body of a female queen.

The contemporary significance of *Richard II* also struck a sensitive note in its mention of Richard's war against Ireland. The fact that the Earl of Essex had just returned from Ireland when attempting to depose Elizabeth maintained the notion that: "Ireland [was] not simply a difficult kingdom to control, but [was ...] the locus from which rebellion spread" (Hadfield 1997, 48). Richard II's foray into Ireland during Shakespeare's play shows him coming back victorious, but he is, as a result of his absence from England, undermined by Bolingbroke's rebellion. The fact that Essex had plotted Elizabeth's deposition from Ireland paralleled the results of Shakespeare's Richard's Irish conquests which "leads to his deposition and murder and places a curse upon the crown which works itself out in a series of bloody civil wars" (Hadfield 1997, 49). In Shakespeare's play, Ireland operates as the "Other" to England: wild, untameable and threatening. Richard is tainted, ironically through his military

successes, by association with Ireland, and his absence from England leads to his downfall. Ironically his Irish wars work in direct contrast to the banished Bolingbroke who unlawfully *returns* to England and therefore gains control of the throne.

While Richard invades Ireland and succeeds in his military endeavours, he is tainted by association with the Irish, while Bolingbroke becomes associated with Englishness through his unlawful return to the country. Ireland therefore plays an important role in the play of defining Englishness, working in opposition to the "sceptred isle" of England that John of Gaunt evokes, and establishing the degrees of "Englishness" of Richard and Bolingbroke. The invention of Ireland leads to the invention of Englishness in the play. To cast Shaw, an Irish actor, in the role of Richard, therefore had potential significance for the reading of Richard's ambiguous femininity and nationality in the play.

The questions of gendered and English identity in the play are meditated further by the fact that Shakespeare's constructions of history were staged in the theatre. The play's contradictory approach to history can also be found in its treatment of theatricality. In the Medieval period it was believed that the King had a divine right to rule, and was split or doubled between the mortal body of the man and the God given body of the king. As Michel Foucault argues, the king's body was: "a double body according to the juridical body of the Middle Ages, since it involves not only the transitory element that is born and dies, but another that remains unchanged by time and is maintained as the physical yet intangible support of the kingdom" (Foucault 1977, 28). The doubling of the monarch's body was similar to the doubling of the actor's body, especially on a transvestite stage, and this may partly explain why monarchy, and the performance of leadership, is a reoccurring theme of Renaissance theatre.

Formations of nationality and Englishness were played out in the history plays, within the contested arena of the theatre. The ambiguous and suspect bodies of actors were the locus of social contestations over nationality and power. Shakespeare's history plays engaged with not only the question of how the monarchy should best perform, but also how best to perform the monarchy on the stage. Richard's theatricality, his doubleness, and his concern for display therefore not only genders him as feminine, but also likens him to a theatre performer. The figure of the king becomes

parallel with the figure of the actor in *Richard II*, a theme endorsed and extended by the cross-dressed figure of Shaw in Warner's production.

The connection between gender and performance can be seen in how Richard and Bolingbroke deploy theatricality in the play. Both characters use theatricality centrally within their public personae, but the way that they employ performance defines them as masculine or feminine, modern or medieval. Richard's theatricality is born of his self expressiveness: he is a master of words and action, and his theatricality is performative, it constructs and constitutes his body through his words and deeds in true Butlerian style. As Richard says of himself at the end of the play: "thus play I in one person many people, /And none contented" (1997 V.5, 153). Richard's rhetoric constructs his body, and he constantly plays to an audience. Richard is shown to be a consummate performer in the play, but his performances also control and constitute his self, his body and his kingly person. Richard's extravagance with words are central to his reckless extravagance as king, and his innate theatricality leads to his downfall and deposition.

By contrast, Bolingbroke plays out his power in a kingly way, his actions are literally performative. As Howard and Rackin point out: "[by] publicly acting like a king, Bullingbrook finally becomes one" (1997, 152). However, Bolingbroke does not express himself theatrically, his performance is a wilely political one rather than a self inventing one. In fact, at the beginning of the play he rejects the imagination and its power, thus asserting a strongly Platonic divide between the real and the illusory: "O, who can hold a fire in his hand / By thinking on the frosty Caucasus / Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite, / By bare imagination of a feast,/ Or wallow naked in December snow, / By thinking on fantastic summer's heat?" (Shakespeare 1997, I.4, 75-6).

While Bolingbroke employs theatricality and performance to his own political ends, he distinguishes himself from the performance, whereas Richard is defined by his theatricality, his variability, his femininity. Bolingbroke's intentionality when it comes to performance is reliant on the notion of a stable body and self which can choose to play a role, whereas Richard is constituted through performance and is therefore in a constant state of flux. The way in which theatricality is used by these characters has parallels with their gender status, the stable persona of Bolingbroke correlating with his stable masculinity while the unstable theatricality of Richard echoes his unstable

femininity. Theatricality therefore becomes associated with femininity in *Richard II* whereas self-willed performance is seen as masculine. It would appear, then, that the play itself rejects theatricality in favour of a more masculinised pragmatic performing self, by having Bolingbroke succeed Richard on the throne.

This dynamic is extended by Richard's burgeoning self awareness when he is finally alone and imprisoned. There he learns that: "nor I, nor any man that but man is/with nothing shall be pleased till he be eased with being nothing" (Shakespeare 1997, V.5, 153). Richard finally discovers his true self when he is alone, having lost the doubleness of kingship. By losing his divine body, Richard discovers what it means to be a man, by no longer "acting" king, and by losing his courtly audience, Richard finally becomes enlightened and self aware. Theatricality is eschewed by the play in favour of a interiorised, anti-performative model of subjectivity, and the play again seems to lean towards Bolingbroke's masculine anti-theatrical pragmatism.

However, as Howard and Rackin point out, while the fictional dynamics of the play eschew theatricality as a viable form of political rule, Shakespeare's play is titled *The Tragedy of King Richard II,* not "*The History of Henry IV*". While Bolingbroke achieves the crown, the character of Richard has the most theatrical power on the stage. While Bolingbroke's theatricality is described, it is never shown, while Richard's facility with language, his wit and punning on words, his movement between a whole range of emotional registers, make him more attractive theatrically on the stage. Paradoxically, a play which problematises femininity, rejects theatricality, and promotes a pragmatic and self-willed masculinity as ideal, relies on the theatrical attractions of the very qualities it denies for suitable political leadership. As Howard and Rackin suggest:

> Although Richard's feminine self-indulgence and narcissism disqualify him for political action, Richard and not Bolingbroke was the "well graced actor" in Shakespeare's theater: non acting company would give the smaller and less demanding role of Bolingbroke to its best actor and deny him the chance to play the leading role of Richard" (Howard & Rackin 1997, p154).

While Fiona Shaw "cross-dressed" as Richard in Warner's 1995 production, an analysis of the play shows that Richard is already ambiguously gendered in the text. The play also belies a complex approach to history, attempting to distance a feminised *present* by expressing it through the distant events of the past. Warner's production

had an equally complex approach to the past, and reversed the play's approach to history by constructing a feminised, theatrical and deeply unstable past world which was idealised by the production as a alternative mode to the present. The British theatre critics" resistance to Warner's show was inherently anti-theatrical and came from a resistance to the transformative effects of cross-dressed performance on the spectator's sense of past and present on the stage.

The Actor's Body .

When Fiona Shaw played the role of Richard II, her body was positioned within the cultural struggle over the representation of national identity, monarchy and history on the classical stage. Her body was also positioned within the historical legacies of theatrical cross-dressing and she was ghosted by the history of Renaissance cross-dressing, the ambiguity and rhetorical transvestism of Elizabeth I, and the star acting of the Victorian female Hamlets and Romeos. Shaw's cross-dressing as Richard therefore positioned her within various historical legacies: the history of Warner and Shaw's previous work together, the theatre history of cross-dressing, the Renaissance history of the play's context, the Medieval history of the play's setting, the vision of history produced by the play, and the history of the figure of King Richard II himself, which has been mediated and formed through Shakespeare's play.

Warner's production of the play was caught within three competing modes of theatrical representation available for the performance of history on the stage. On one hand, there was Warner's loyalty to the text, and ambition to create: "a very thorough production, a rather well researched piece of verse speaking" (Warner, in interview with the author 1999, 1). On the other hand, there was Warner and Shaw's emphasis on experimentation and risk in performance, which was underscored by an apolitical approach to identity. This approach could be seen in Shaw's claim that: "I'm not interested in cross-gender plays, I'm interested in experiment" (Shaw, in Armistead 1995). While the focus on the text and the focus on experimentation were not intrinsically contradictory, the transparency required by the authority of the text clashed somewhat with the disruption of that transparency which Shaw's cross-dressing experiment created. Warner and Shaw's lack of interest in the politics of gender resulted in a cross-dressed experiment with an unidentified aesthetic or political aim.

The performance mode of the production was complicated further by the fact that the character of Richard II is one of the theatre roles which Bert O States describes as: "encouraging the self-expressive tendency [...] either because they are so demanding or because they have been deliberately designed as vehicles for the release of the actor's power" (States 1985, 161) . As States points out, the role of Richard, like other great classical roles, is a star vehicle, a part in which actors can excel, can display their virtuosity, can: "bet [...] the audience that he is actor enough to fill the character's shoes" (States 1985, 162). Like the Victorian female Hamlets and Romeos, Shaw could prove her power as an actor by playing a male role. Similar to her rite of passage in the role of Hedda Gabler, Shaw's performance as Richard acted as a test of her power and skill as an actor on the classical stage.

The casting of Shaw in the role of Richard therefore served three competing and slightly contradictory aims: to serve the authority of the text, to disrupt the authority of the text with experimentation on the stage, and to disrupt the authority of the text with the authority of the actor. Furthermore, the fact that Warner and Shaw denied that the "experiment" of casting Shaw as Richard on the stage had anything to do with gender had a contradictory effect on how her performance could be read, by producing an ambiguous gender effect in a play already ambivalent towards the question of gender. The contradictions in the production's approach to cross-dressing resulted in a strange mix of styles and effects which had a subversive effect on the representation of history in the production.

The critical response to the production was mixed, and many reviewers responded to the prospect of Shaw as Richard with alarm. When the production opened, the critical emphasis moved from the question of Shaw's gender, to her characterisation of Richard as an inadequate monarch. However, neither the critics nor Warner and Shaw questioned the notion that the production should serve the "truths" of Shakespeare's text. The idea that Warner's authority as director might justifiably substitute for Shakespeare's authority as writer was not considered within the debate. The authority of Shakespeare was at the centre of the anti-theatrical response by critics to the cross-dressing in Warner's show. Their reference to the power of the text demanded that the production conform to the "reality" of the text's world, and their rejection of cross-dressing belied a limited sense of the operation of mimesis on the stage.

Many critics saw Shaw's casting in the same light as the Victorian female Hamlets and Romeos, presuming that an actress would only play a male character who was already feminine, thus reconfirming the stereotypes of gender behaviour Benedict Nightingale's statement was typical: "It would, I think still be difficult to swallow a woman as Henry VIII, Lear, or one of those princes who fizz with testosterone and facial hair. But it is another matter with characters who have what Jungians would call a strong feminine side to their psyches: a Hamlet, a Henry VI, a *Richard II*" (Nightingale 1995). Nightingale's support for the act of crossing presumes that actors should share the same characteristics as the characters they play. Sexed bodies therefore become less important than gendered characteristics, but a mimetic sense of similarity between actor and character determines the acceptability of the cross-dressed casting.

Other critics used Shaw's casting to challenge all forms of casting practices and, in doing so, invoked the notion that great Shakespearean actors can somehow transcend the petty concerns of identity politics. John Peter defended Shaw's cross-dressing with his (somewhat plaintive) questions: "why should white actors not be allowed to black up and play black characters? Did black Englishmen or Africans feel insulted when Olivier played Othello? Did Jews feel insulted when he played Shylock? Did women feel outraged when Adrian Lester played Rosalind?" (John Peter 1995). Of course, the answer to many of these questions is "yes," but Peter rhetorically presumed that the performance of Shakespeare transcends the politics of representation. Unlike Nightingale, Peter argued that anybody could "cross" in performance, but only because of the licence which the transcendental truths of the playtext bestow on the actor. The "real" of Shakespeare therefore governed and stabilised the illusion constructed onstage.

On the other hand, Andrew Temple in the *Independent On Sunday* wrote before the show opened: "much as I believe in the power of great acting to suspend disbelief, there are limits" (1995) Temple's statement was almost a summary of the criticisms of the production, and reveals the anti-theatricalism at the root of the resistance to Shaw's cross-casting. By arguing that there are limits to disbelief, Temple constructs a limited notion of mimesis, in which imitation is only permissible if the actor resembles the character they are playing. Shaw's gender difference from the role of Richard therefore disqualified her from playing the role. While the critics" response varied, they all made

recourse to the notion of the real, and bestowed on the actor an imitative rather than transformative role onstage.

Warner and Shaw's response to the debate was equally contradictory. Warner rejected the notion that she cast Shaw as Richard for radical or feminist purposes, but by doing so, she erased the question of sexuality and gender by saying: "the point with Richard is that the one thing it isn't about is active physical sexual relationships. It just struck me that on a very simple plane he is somewhat feminine" (Armistead 1995). Warner, like Nightingale, defused the power of the cross-dressing by making out that Shaw was playing a role which was almost female: that she was playing a feminine man.

Similarly, Shaw viewed the role as allowing her to represent a state of universality which female roles did not give her in the theatre: "what is fantastic, as a woman, is being allowed to play with the existential contradictions of the universe. [...] To be playing with the theatre of mankind rather than just with joy or grief; with the idea that salvation is one's relationship to death rather than to marriage. There's nothing in the theatre for women that addresses that so directly" (Armistead 1995). Rather than Shaw and Warner trying to address the problematic notion of Shakespeare's universality, they saw the casting of Shaw as a means to access that universality not usually available to women. Gender did play into their decision to cast Shaw in the role, but a critique of the gender imbalance within the authority of Shakespeare, did not, at least in how they described their intentions before the production opened. The approach of Warner and Shaw to the gender question reflects the more general approach to gender in the 1980s and 1990s, seeing it as an "equal opportunities" question rather than necessarily questioning the system in which the "equality" took place.

However, after the production opened, and was stormily received by critics, Warner and Shaw had revised their views. Warner now said: "this is Shakespeare's play. Whoever plays the role, everybody will readily accept them as Richard" (Geraldine Cousin 1996, 233). Similarly, Shaw referred to the text for her justification of her performance: "Shaw is unrepentant. She had plenty of textual prompting to authorise her license" (Rutter 1997, 322). The defence of Warner and Shaw moved from the declaration of their right to experiment with gender and Shakespeare, to a validation of their motives within the Shakespearean text itself. This is significant of a

more general trend in the debate around Shakespeare productions, as Worthen points out: "the author is frequently summoned not only to substantiate a conception of character, but its bodily enactment as well" (Worthen 1997, 145).

While the debate around Shaw's cross-dressing ranged from approval to condemnation and, in Warner and Shaw's defence of their work, from a focus on experiment to a focus on serving the text, there were no dissenting voices questioning the very terms of the debate, of the right of director and actor to create meanings of their own onstage. Instead, the notion that a production operates to serve the truths of the text formed the parameters within which the debate took place and contributed to the contradictions created by Shaw's cross-dressed Richard on the stage.

The use of cross-dressing in Warner's *Richard II* took place against the backdrop of struggles over the authority of the text versus the authority of directors and actors. In the next section I will examine how Warner's show destabilised the binary of real and illusion, blurring the lines between the body of Shaw and the role of Richard, the figure of Richard and the figure of the actor, and the fictional Richard constructed by Shakespeare's play, and the "real" Richard of English history. This blurring effect came from the cross-casting of Shaw in the role, and also from the production's contradictory attitude towards that cross-casting. This blurring effect brought to light the ambiguities in the play itself towards gender, history and theatricality, and furthermore had a contradictory flickering effect on identity: on the body of Shaw, on the construction of gender in the production, on the representations of sexuality, on Shaw's Irishness, and on the production's approach to theatricality. Overall, the destabilisation of the real/illusion binary in the production had a destabilising effect on the representation of history in performance. I will conclude by arguing that the inconsistent disappearing acts of gender in Warner's production created a nostalgia for a blurred and feminised past in the audience. I will examine how the use of cross-dressing imagined and invented audiences in Deborah Warner's *Richard II*.

The Cross-dressed King

The parallels between the figure of the actor and the figure of the king drawn by Shakespeare's play were key to understanding the use of cross-dressing in Warner's production. *Richard II* opened with a Brechtian moment onstage: the actors appeared

behind a gauze curtain and began to warm up. They were positioned at the top of the corridor-like space and the playing area was lit by candles, and so while the actors appeared to be operating in the Brechtian mode of actor-as-actor onstage[18], the set and lighting suggested that they were doing this in a different space and time to their modern day audience. When they took down the coronation robes which were hanging at the back wall and dressed Shaw as Richard, the lines between fiction, reality and stage reality became even more blurred, as they were: "themselves transformed by the act of this transformation, they genuflected deeply to the body-made-king" (Rutter 1997, 319).

However, as Carol Chillington Rutter argues, this stage moment was thrown even more off kilter by the fact that Shaw, when invested as the king, did not walk onto the stage, but walked off it, re-appearing moments later wearing a much simpler royal costume. As Chillington Rutter argues: "this moment was designed quite deliberately to resist registering any [...] move between actor and role: instead it stubbornly, even insolently, insisted on their separateness. In this production the (female) actor would in no sense "become" the (male) king" (1997, 319).

While Chillington Rutter argues that this sequence established a clear cut division between actor and role, it seems to me that this moment was far more ambiguous, blurring the lines between illusion and "reality" through the use of candles as lighting, the contrast between the actors warming up and the actors genuflecting, and finally between Shaw dressed as "Richard" behind the gauze and then re-dressed as Richard on the stage. The ambiguity of this moment seemed to play teasingly with the dynamics of cross-dressed performance, highlighting the gaps between actor and role, but also blurring the lines between them, creating an awareness of the distinction

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[18] The opening of the BBC film reproduced this Brechtian effect in a different way, by showing the clapperboard for the film, images of the actors in rehearsal, a fleeting glimpse of Warner bending over Shaw and Shaw-as-Richard at prayer. This was accompanied by the choral music which was played throughout the production and the film, and a voice over of Shaw speaking the first speeches of the play. The blurring between "actors-as-actors" and "actor-as-character" was maintained by the contrast between Shaw in character and the other actors rehearsing, especially at the end of this sequence, when Shaw opened her eyes to show herself crying. This had a similar effect to the opening of the stage production: we were shown, not only the Brechtian act of "acting," which is common to many contemporary productions of Shakespeare, but also the ambiguity of the division between "real" and "illusion" which played into the other "doubling" effects of the production and the play itself.

between Shaw and her role, while simultaneously disallowing the audience from separating them completely. Butler's notion that identity is a kind of cross-dressing was echoed in the figure of Shaw's transvestite king.

The dressing and then redressing of Richard also seemed to spell out the doubleness of kingship: the ornamental and divine body of the king was shown before introducing the all-too human body of Richard. The king's two bodies blurred into the two bodies of the stage transvestite: Shaw's "stage figure" interrupting and intertwining with the fictional body of Shakespeare's Richard. Kingship was shown to be a kind of transvestism in this moment onstage. While the divinity of monarchy was evoked by Shaw's costume, the theatricality of that divinity was also exposed, showing the king's two bodies to be akin to the multiplicity of the actor's body, with the performance of monarchy becoming the "transcendental hypocrisy" of acting (States 1985 205).

Shaw's costuming was made even more ambiguous by the bandages she wore underneath her fairly representative Medieval garb. The male characters onstage were dressed in naturalistic costumes which were designed based on portraits of Medieval royalty.[19] As Carol Chillington Rutter points out, however, the men were differentiated by their allegiance to Shaw's Richard or David Threlfall's Bolingbroke[20], and the differences between the two men's world views were immediately made clear by the differences between the fabrics used to construct their costumes, and the way their clothing drew attention to their bodies. As Chillington Rutter describes it: "behind Richard lounged a gaggle of pretty youths dressed in Florentine taffetas. [...] Behind Bolingbroke stood men in leather, rivets, coarse wool" (1997, 320) (see Appendix One, figure 4).

However, by contrast to this Medieval world, Shaw was wrapped in bandages from her chest down to her ankles and her body was de-naturalised in comparison with the other characters" costumes onstage who were dressed in straightforwardly "historical" Medieval clothing (see Appendix One, Figure 3). Shaw's bandaging took her body into another theatrical realm. The bandages seemed to be a comment on the

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[19] The Royal National Theatre archive has extensive records of Hildegaard Bechtler's photocopies of portraits of medieval clothing, hats, fabrics, etc. The costumes were obviously inspired by her research and conformed in a slightly stylised way, to the shapes and designs of Medieval clothing.

[20] Bolingbroke was played by David Threlfall in the stage production, and Richard Bremmer in the BBC film production.

ritualised and sacrificial body of the king, with Richard resembling a mummy. The bandages became a way of immortalising Richard's body, but also acted as a portent of his death: "as if Richard's body were already swaddled in a winding sheet" (Chillington Rutter, ibid, 319-20). The bandages moved Shaw's body into a symbolic realm onstage, removing her person from the naturalism of the other actors" costumes, and thereby elevating the figure of Richard onto the plane of the "non-human" or divine.

However, the bandages could also be read as way of foregrounding Shaw's cross-dressed status, making the bandaging of her breasts a feature of her performance, and extending these bandages to her whole body apart from her face.[21] This foregrounding of the act of concealment, or of the actor preparing her body for cross-dressing, drew a distinction between Shaw and her role, asserting her stage figure in performance. However, the fact that the bandages could be read as either symbolic of Richard's sacrificial and divine body, or as foregrounding Shaw's acting body, again blurred the relationship between the two figures, allowing the costume to operate both on the representative and expressive levels of performance. The divine body of the king was made comparable to the fictionalised and doubled body of the actor, and so theatricality and monarchy were integrally linked within Shaw's costuming.

By and large, critics viewed Shaw's costume negatively, seeing it as a disruption of the otherwise "historical" visual field of the production. One critic saw her costume as too stylised and modern: "Shaw's costume is a bit too suggestive of a Comme des Garcons outfit" (Rhoda Koenig 1995), while others felt it referred back to Shaw's previously self-immolating performances: "She wears a preposterous costume in which Richard is swathed in bandages like an Egyptian mummy. The nightmarish thought occurs that this is because the actress had been drawing so much blood with the self mutilation that was a harrowing feature of her Electra" (Charles Spencer 1995).

Overall, the critics raised concerns that the costume was out of kilter with the other actor's bodies on the stage, and furthermore detracted from the "reality" of the historical figure of King Richard II. This criticism betrayed the confusion, widespread in the critical commentary on the production, between the fictional figure of Richard in Shakespeare's play, and the "real" Richard of English history. The fact that

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[21] I want to acknowledge Karen Fricker for this idea, as she suggested it at one of the Postgraduate Seminars in Trinity College, Dublin.

Shakespeare's history plays have done so much to construct a vision of English history was clear in the reception of Shaw's costume. Critics felt Shaw should be dressed as a "real" king onstage, to match up with the "realness" of the historical Richard as king, or even perhaps with the realness of the monarchy more generally. Shaw's abstract and symbolic costuming became a challenge to the "reality" of monarchy itself.

Disappearing Gender

However, while the stylisation of Shaw's costume worked to destabilise the "reality" of monarchy, the use of bandages in her costume also highlighted the production's contradictory approach to gender identity, both that of Shaw and of Richard. If we read Shaw's bandaging as a reference to erasing the signs of femininity, then the bandages operated to make Shaw/Richard's body disappear. The bandages ostensibly referred to the divine element of the king's body, the fact that Richard did not consider himself to be human. As Shaw put it: "The way I look at it is that I am a non man playing somebody who perceived himself to be a non-man" (Shaw in Richard Covington 1999, 1/6). However, the notion that Richard does not have a mortal body also enabled Warner and Shaw to get around the sticky issue of gender. Warner dealt with Shaw and Richard's gender by attempting to erase the body altogether, with Shaw recounting that playing Richard involved: "allowing bits of yourself to disappear, you're also battening down your breasts and wearing not really male clothing" (Shaw in interview with the author 2001, 10). Shaw's bandages operated as a denial of Richard's mortality and Shaw's gender simultaneously.

Shaw's statement that she was a "non man playing someone who perceives himself to be a non-man" (Covington 1999, 1/6) further elucidates the way in which the production attempted to deny or erase Shaw's gender (and body) in performance. The defence of Warner and Shaw of their casting decision frequently centred on a "negative" defence, based on what Richard was "not", what Shaw was "not", or what they were "not" doing. Warner therefore argued that: "the one thing it isn't about is active physical sexual relationships" (Armistead 1995), and argued that Shaw's gender as Richard was of little consequence to the production: "I'm not sure she ever was male nor female, I mean I'm not sure that it particularly interests me" (in interview with the author 1999, 6). Shaw argued that the play was: "not about the nature of gender, it's about the nature of *being*" (Rutter 1997, 315, italics original) and went on to described

Richard's world as: "a world where the king *wasn't* masculine" (Rutter 1997, 320, italics original). And Warner again defined Richard's sexuality in negative terms: "This is not Edward II, it's *Richard II*: it's not about homosexuality" (Armistead 1995).

The negative approach of Shaw and Warner to the question of identity showed in their attempt to erase Shaw's body (and Richard's body) through their use of bandages. However, the fact that Shaw's performance was the most visceral, active and physically displayed onstage, contradicts the supposed erasure of Shaw's body. Shaw's bandages both denied her gender, and foregrounded it; erased her body and positioned it at the centre of the theatrical action onstage. The disappearing act of the "real" onstage, the real of the historical figure of Richard and the real of Shaw's body onstage, had a disappearing act on Shaw and Richard's gender which came in and out of focus during the performance. Shaw's bandaged costume elucidated the contradictory approach of this production to gendered identity and the body.

The contradictory approach in the production to the question of Richard's gender identity reconfigured Shaw's body, which occupied an uneasy half-light in performance. As discussed in Chapter Two, Shaw herself is ambiguously gendered, and her critical performances of femininity have been positively received by critics. However, while Shaw's Richard had the same kind of critical ambiguity, the fact that she was playing a man, and a man considered to be feminine, or even effeminate, problematised Shaw's usual critical engagement with gender. As Irving Wardle pointed out: "much of her performance [of Richard] conforms to the womanish stereotype: irrationally obstinate, unable to make up her mind, forever retreating from public issues into personal relationships" (Wardle 1995).

Shaw's usually critical portraits of feminine *women* contrasted with her much more conventional portrait of femininity when playing a *man*. Warner's notion that Richard was feminine, was to define femininity with the qualities which Richard embodies: ineffectualness, indecision, irrationality. In a strange and contradictory sense, casting Shaw as Richard both essentialised Richard's qualities as feminine, and Shaw as female, by endorsing, rather than critiquing, the stereotypes associated with women. While Shaw claimed that playing a man gave her access to universal human truths, she in fact performed the most stereotypically feminine role of her career.

The strange paradox of Shaw's femininity as Richard was extended even further in the critics" reception of her performance. While they attacked her ability to play

"male," with one critic arguing that: "Shaw doesn't have enough maleness to play Peter Pan" (Koenig 1995), the critics simultaneously criticised her for being inadequately feminine, with one critic describing her as: "a lean, angular woman with a sharp jutting jaw [who] is not particularly attractive" (Richard Hornby 1996). In contrast to her positive reviews for portraying women, in which her ambiguity and complexity was praised, Shaw as Richard was criticised for her inadequate femininity as an actor - or as a woman - and at the same time denounced for being "a stereotypical girlie" (Koenig 1995) as Richard.

The reality of Shaw's gender - which had been so unstable in her performances of women was asserted and essentialised by critics, who refused to allow that her interpretation of monarchy as weak, ineffectual and feminine, could be "real". As Shaw herself said of the role: "if a man had been doing what I was doing in the part, reviewers would have been thrilled. But a woman playing that sort of thing was more than a little sacrilegious. You can't have a girl playing a king and then acting like being a king isn't serious" (Rutter 1997, 323). The criticism of Shaw's performance of a male role revealed how casting practices and acting styles within the classical tradition rely on a notion of the "real" of the actor's body, a real body which is determined by gender and must be authoritative enough to play a king. While Shaw was praised for performing critical and deconstructive visions of femininity, her critical engagement with the role of Richard was less acceptable to critics and audience members, who essentialised her body as "female" and therefore unable to carry the weight of monarchy and the authority of Shakespearean tragic roles.

While Shaw and Warner claimed that their concerns were with the larger questions of mortality, power and monarchy rather than gender, their focus on the universality of Shakespeare's poetry revealed how notions of the universal are gender inflected. By presuming that gender needed to be transcended in order for Richard to become universal, Warner and Shaw ignored that fact that our notions of universality have been predicated upon a canon of literature and theatre which has been male dominated, both in the writers and directors who constructed it, and in the roles for the male actors who enacted it. The idea that Shaw could attain universality, presumed that universality was not gendered, and the way in which Shaw's gender ended up becoming essentialised and stereotyped, revealed how the casting of Shaw could not escape the specific masculinity of the universal.

Cross-dressed Kisses

The contradictory approach of the performance to Shaw's cross-casting could be seen in the construction of sexuality in Warner's production. The use of kissing in the production was arguably one of the most interesting aspects of Shaw's cross-dressed status onstage. However the way in which the use of kissing was gender-divided displayed again the contradictory approach the production took to cross-dressing.

While the production played on the distinction between Richard and Bolingbroke's worlds, it also constructed their relationship as that of: "a love story [...] Its tragedy is that one of them gives his crown away to one who ultimately may not even want it" (Shaw in interview with Rutter 1997, 318). Even while the text, and the production design focused on the differences between Shaw's Richard and Threlfall's Bolingbroke, Warner's production positioned them as: "male and female sides of what once had been a single self, now violently ruptured" (Rutter 1997, 318). Of course, this notion of Bolingbroke and Richard as twins is not new, John Barton directed a *Richard II* for the RSC in the 1960s in which Ian Richardson and Richard Pasco swapped the lead roles each night and Barton viewed the characters as "fatal twins" (Rutter 1997, 316). However, Warner's production figured their relationship in a new and even more complex way through the use of cross-dressed kissing on the stage.

The ambiguity of the use of kissing in this production was extended by Shaw's own complex semiotics as an actress. Described as androgynous when playing female roles, and having a history of constructing unconventional portraits of femininity, as I argued above, Shaw's portrait of Richard was deemed both stereotypically feminine and inadequately feminine by critics. Furthermore, the way that the production blurred the stage figure of Shaw with the fictional character of Richard made it difficult to distinguish between the "actor's" kiss and the "character's" kiss onstage. The ability to distinguish between "real" actor and "fictional" character had been problematised from the first within the production, and so relying on stable notion of Shaw as unproblematically female was made more difficult by the production's blurring of her fictional and real bodies.

Displaying intense physical affection for Bolingbroke from the start, Shaw's kisses and caresses were central to the complex relationship between the characters. During the duel scene, when Bolingbroke asks to kiss Richard's hand, Shaw-as-Richard stepped down and formally kissed him on the cheek. When Bolingbroke said: "my

loving lord I take my leave of you" (1997, I.3, 67), Shaw-as-Richard turned, took off her crown, and kissed Threlfall-as-Bolingbroke passionately on the mouth. This form of affection for Bolingbroke continued right to the end of the production and was pushed further with moments, such as when Shaw played with the crown during the deposition scene, as if repeating a childhood game with Threlfall's Bolingbroke.

Peter Holland argues that Shaw's gender made these moments safe onstage: "the depth of emotion was effectively naturalised by Shaw's gender so that the embraces, stroking, kisses and other gestures of affection were between two male characters and between a male and female actor, the latter removing the *frisson* that displays of homosexual emotion produce for a mostly heterosexual audience" (Holland 1997, 251) While Holland is right to assert that the effect of these kisses were different to that of two male actors kissing, I don't agree that the power of the kiss was neutralised as a result of Shaw's femaleness. The blurring of gender which took place during these moments of affection was one of the most interesting results of Shaw's cross-gender casting.

The two characters kissing onstage blurred the distinction between their stage figures (i.e., male and female) and fictional characters (i.e., two men), which meant that no clear category of "sexuality" could be relied upon within that moment. Instead, the kisses created an historical sense of distance, in a world in which friendship between men was preferred to that of mixed sex friendships, a world in which men could become effeminate from lusting after women or spending too much time in their company, a world in which the terms "heterosexual" and "homosexual" had not yet been invented. The presumption that Shaw's femaleness automatically rendered the kiss "heterosexual" is reductive, when the fictional character she played was male. This assumption operates on a reliance on the stability of bodies as guarantors of gender identity, and constructs a rigid binary system of sexuality and gender. Instead, I want to argue that these moments offer a "queer" dynamic of ambiguous and playful sexuality which combines a variety of sexual and gendered possibilities within the act of kissing.

The kiss between Richard and Bolingbroke was complicated, then, by the liminality of Richard's gender, the blurring between the idea of the actor and the idea of the king, and the continual negotiation between the stage figure and fictional figure of Shaw. These moments of physical affection may not have caused the frisson created

by two men kissing onstage, but they did create a fascinating dynamic of "transvestic thinking", or Brechtian "complex seeing", in which the audience were forced to negotiate more than one world (fictional or "real") and more than one sexuality ('heterosexual", "homosexual" or something more ambiguous again) simultaneously on the stage.

The affection evident in the kisses and embraces between Richard and Bolingbroke was mirrored and undermined by two other relations onstage: between Richard and Gaunt, and between Richard and Queen Isabel. In Gaunt's deathbed scene, Graham Crowden playing Gaunt reconstructed and countered the relationship between Bolingbroke and Richard through physical aggression. Pressing Shaw-as-Richard to the bed, he spoke his last lines close to her face and then grabbed her by the head and kissed her hard. Shaw retched after the kiss and spat on the ground while Gaunt was led away to die and she then responded to this injury with fury, hurling pillows at Gaunt as he exited. The violence of this kiss was a negative mirror of the affection between Richard and Bolingbroke, and Gaunt's kiss became an accusation of effeminacy and a form of homophobic protest at Richard's ineffectual reign. Kissing, then, became more than a denotation of affection, it became a gesture of power; Richard's power over Bolingbroke or Richard's lack of power in Gaunt's eyes. The structures of the male court were explored in the production through the physical gestures of affection and Shaw's cross-dressed status lent this theme a sexual and political ambiguity.

However, the absence of kisses in Shaw-as-Richard's relationship with the Queen meant that the dramatic consequences of Shaw's cross-dressing were not fully realised. There were no gestures of affection or sexuality between the two characters, and Shaw's Richard treated the French Queen, played by Brana Bajic, with a barely concealed contempt, mouthing broken English loudly at her accompanied by exaggerated sign language in the scene after Gaunt's death. The treatment of the queen underscored the homosocial environment of Richard's court. Warner's production made no effort to re-negotiate the gender constructions within the play, fully maintaining a stereotypical portrait of femininity in the figure of the Queen, by having Bajic play her as over-emotional, melodramatic and irrational. The Queen's isolation as a foreigner and a woman *was* underscored by Richard's treatment of her, and so the

production did not fully endorse her treatment in the play, but the traditions of the performance of "femininity" were kept fully in place by Bajic's performance.

The lack of kisses between Shaw and Brana Bajic as Queen Isabel furthermore constructed an asymmetrical relation between Shaw's cross-dressed status and the sexuality of Richard. While the production toyed with the blurring of sexual categories in the kisses between Bolingbroke and Richard, the same effect did not apply to Richard's relationship with the Queen. While this contributed to the construction of a homosocial world, and established the complex and ambiguous relationship between Richard and Bolingbroke, the fact that the production did not risk an erotic dynamic between the two female performers may in fact argue in support of Peter Holland's suggestion that Shaw's gender neutralised the sexual dynamic between Richard and Bolingbroke. The playing out of the consequences of Shaw's cross-dressed status only applied to its effects on the constructions of male relations, male power and male sexuality on stage; the possibilities of blurring female relations was not made possible.

While the cross-dressed kisses onstage were arguably the most interesting effects created by Shaw's cross-dressing, the production's approach to female and male sexuality was again inconsistent and blurred. While Shaw was both man and woman when kissing Bolingbroke, the production made her entirely female by not kissing the Queen.

Disappearing Irishness

The production's inconsistent engagement with sexuality was found too in the treatment of Shaw's Irishness which exerted an ironic effect on the play's references to Richard's invasion of Ireland in the production. While Warner cast an Irish actress to play an English king in a play intimately concerned with the invention and imagining of Englishness, Shaw's Irishness barely functioned as part of her performance. While the gender and sexual implications of Shaw's cross-dressed status were employed on the stage, her Irishness was semi-erased by the production.

Shaw hammed up her accent during her two "Irish" speeches, referring to: "those rough-headed kerns/ Which live like venom where no venom else/ But only they have privilege to live" (II.1, 84) with a stage "oirish" accent, and a winking self-referentiality. However, her Irishness was not asserted consistently throughout, but was only privileged by Shaw for comic effect. As Peter Holland describes it: "the

jokes could be light-hearted, as, for instance, the idea of leading the army into Ireland, produced a fake "Oirish" brogue (doubly funny, given that Shaw's natural voice has an Irish accent) and had Richard leading his followers in a mocking Irish jig" (Holland 1997, 250) By seeing Shaw's accent as a joke, Holland minimises its possible impact on the reading of the play.

Shaw's defence of her cross-gendered playing of Richard highlighted her Irishness, stating: "a hundred years ago [...] people might be less concerned about a woman playing a man than about an Irish person playing an English king" (Armistead 1995, 10) However, Shaw's defence presumed that her Irishness was as inconsequential to her performance of Richard as her gender should also be. Shaw minimised the possible significance her Irishness might have on the performance of English monarchy. This was a monarchy that was not only instrumental to the colonisation of Ireland from the time of Richard, and in Shakespeare's Elizabethan moment, but a monarchy and country that was still dealing with the effects of that colonisation in Northern Ireland in the mid 1990s. The relationship between Irishness and the English monarchy was still fraught at the time of Shaw's portrait of Richard, and so while Shaw may have assumed that her Irishness was inconsequential to the production, it is less likely that it would have remained so had the production toured to Belfast, Derry or Dublin.

Shaw assumed that her nationality was somehow invisible or inconsequential, but the production nonetheless highlighted it in a similar fashion to the assertions of Shaw and Warner that Shaw's gender was irrelevant to her portrayal of Richard while at the same time relying on her cross-dressed status for the complexity of Richard's relationship with Bolingbroke. The ironical effect of Shaw's Irishness on the Englishness of Richard's monarchy, and the Englishness of Shakespeare's history plays, was hinted at, occasionally displayed, and then denied by the focus on the universal within the production. The production's nostalgia for a feminised England erased the female Richard's Irishness on the stage.

The Player King: Monarchy as Theatricality

The reasons for the inconsistent disappearing act of cross-dressing in this production may be explained by the production's uneasy approach to the question of theatricality and performance itself, which echoed the play's own contradictory views

on theatricality as identity. The question of performance itself flickered on and off in Warner's production.

While Shaw-as-Richard and his men's costumes drew the audiences" eye to their legs and torso, through their colourful and tightly fitting costumes, the darkness, shapelessness and heaviness of the costumes of Threlfall-as-Bolingbroke and his allies meant that much greater attention was paid to the faces of the actors playing these roles. There was a different level of psychologisation at work therefore between these two worlds. Bollingbroke's world's design functioned to draw attention to the face whereas Richard's world's costumes were designed to display the body rather than the face. As I argued in Chapter One, the relationship between identity and the body moved from the Medieval system of embodied identity to the Enlightenment one of an interiorised model of subjectivity contained within the body. Therefore, based on 20th Century relations between subjectivity and the body, the focus on Bolingbroke's face focused on his interiorised self, while Richard's world was distanced by the focus on the body. The production's costume designs conformed here to the play's set-up of the oppositional forms of identity defining Richard and Bolingbroke and extended them to the other characters" onstage, according to their allegiance to Richard or Bolingbroke.

The costuming and blocking of the production differentiated between the worlds of Richard and Bolingbroke through gender and psychology. While Shaw was undoubtedly at the centre of the production, the design of her costume and her blocking distanced her from the other characters, and potentially from the audience. She was positioned within a different theatrical register to the other actors through the stylisation of her costume, her excessive movement and the display of her body which feminised her portrait of the king. By comparison, the other actors were positioned within a naturalistic and historical world which was probably closer to what the audience were familiar with in a Shakespeare production, and their blocking and costumes psychologised their performances. This distinction, of course, operated on the difference between the "star" player, i.e. Shaw, and the rest of the cast, but it had an effect on how Shaw's king was positioned and gendered on the stage. Shaw's viscerality on the stage created a sense that Richard's identity was fluid and continually materialised through performance and display.

However, when Richard was called to account in the deposition scene, Shaw entered wearing a shapeless, floor length tunic which masked her body. She was

barefoot and still wore her bandages beneath the tunic. Having lost the divine aspect of rule, Shaw's body was no longer displayed, and no longer ritualised. The eye was now drawn to her face, and this focus on her face coincided with a greater stillness in her body, especially in the prison scene where she remained seated while speaking her monologue. The new focus on Shaw's face constructed a greater interior psychology for her characterisation and underscored the lines: "an if my word be sterling yet in England/Let it command a mirror hither straight/ That it may show me what a face I have/ Since it is bankrupt of his majesty" (1997, IV.1, 133-4). The use of bandages and the costume change reconfigured Shaw's body as one which had moved from the dimension of divinity to that of mortality, the arena of the body to the arena of the "inner" self.

This development, from the physical and visual sphere to the interior and intellectual sphere, spelt out a contradiction within the production's conceptualisation of divinity and monarchy, which was also exemplified by the contradictions in Shaw's costuming. When Richard had a divine self, a double body of monarchy in the play, Shaw was associated with her full body, with a distancing and visceral acting style and a lack of self-awareness. Once Richard was deposed, and lost his transcendental self, Shaw became less "physical," or rather, less physically animated, with the audience's gaze trained on her face, and on her voice, both arenas of the body that are associated with a post-Cartesian metaphysics of self.

Richard's new-found self-awareness in Warner's production was a move towards interiority, towards a split between voice and body, or self and body. Richard's Medieval form of monarchy was imagined to be a spectacularly embodied one, whereas his burgeoning insights became a retreat from the body into the more abstract realm of the soul. Metaphysics was associated with the physical, whereas individualism became about transcending the body in Warner's production which echoed the text's contradictory approach to theatricality and identity. The production was contradictory in its use of Shaw's theatricality onstage. Even while the production established Shaw's virtuosity on the stage as a contrast to the naturalism of the other characters, it simultaneously eschewed and denied her theatricality during Richard's moments of self-discovery at the end of the play.

The contradictory attitude of the production towards Shaw's theatricality mirrored the inherent contradictions in the playtext itself, in its struggle to distance

Richard's femininity and theatricality while at the same time placing Richard centre stage. Warner's production also reflected her contemporary context in her confused approach to theatricality through the conflicting pull between the naturalistic approach to character, the virtuoso star system used to sell shows, and modernist legacy of interest in experiment and novelty in production. It is notable that critics who condemned Shaw's performance for its viscerality, praised her moments of stillness at the end of the production, seeing them as saving the reality of the character. As John Gross put it:

> Richard is meant to be an inadequate king - that is his tragedy - but his one is such a hopeless flibbertigibbet that there is no possibility of tragedy at all. [...] By the last act Shaw has calmed down and she gives a decent enough rendering of Richard's prison house meditations. But they aren't as moving as they should be - it is hard to get her previous caperings out of one's mind (Gross 1995, 5).

While Warner's work challenged the stability of monarchy and history by showing their representation through the figure of the cross-dressed king, her production ultimately rejected and repressed the idea of theatricality as a viable identity for Shaw's Richard. While theatricality was the means through which the character was established, ultimately - and contradictorily - Warner's production rejected the theatrical in favour of the individualised and interiorised self-awareness of Richard, after he was imprisoned. In so doing, the production invoked a stable sense of a "real" self beyond performance, positioning performance as a kind of (self) deceit which leads to Richard's deposition, and, ultimately his death. Even as cross-dressing was used as a central trope in the production's casting choice and in Shaw's portrayal of a king, ultimately it was rejected in favour of the non-theatrical self-awareness of the "real" Richard when he stopped performing.

While the production was anti-theatrical in its equation of self-awareness with a de-theatricalised persona, nonetheless, as with Shakespeare's play, Warner's production placed Shaw centre-stage, and demanded that the audience identify with her character in performance. This led to a nostalgia for the production's evocation of Richard's world as unstable, blurred, contradictory, feminine and theatrical. While Shaw's performance constructed a stereotypical vision of femininity, Shaw's illegitimate body challenged how English history is conventionally gendered and represented on the classical stage.

Re-membering History

The sense of history and England which Warner created in *Richard II* were at the root of why the production was received so negatively. Warner displayed a nostalgia for the Medieval moment which was shown through the reverence for ritual, the choral laments sung by female singers and the evident loss even Bolingbroke felt for the destruction of Richard's world. As Peter Holland argues: "from first to last Warner's *Richard II* was an elegy for the loss of Richard and with Richard his entire world, a medieval world of ordered ceremony and religious mystery, now irrevocably lost, replaced by the banal *realpolitik* of Henry IV" (Holland 1997, 247). While Holland sees Warner's nostalgia as: "a reactionary mood that teetered on the edge of but never crossed over into sentimentalism" (1997, 247), I would argue that Warner's nostalgia for this Medieval moment was the most radical component of her production and was what caused the critical furore in its reception.

Warner constructed a Medieval past which was ambiguously gendered and which was ruled by a figure who combined masculine, feminine, and childlike traits. This world operated along a blurred system of sexuality unconfined by the binaries of gender - amongst men at least - which did not conform to contemporary received notions of fixed sexual categories and gendered oppositions. Warner's world made the more modern world of Bolingbroke more familiar, naturalistic and psychologised, but at the same time she placed the star actor Fiona Shaw in opposition to this world, and evoked: "an unexpected nostalgia for a different lost way" (Holland 1997, 247), by demanding sympathy for Richard's world and Richard's downfall.

In doing so, Warner challenged an English sense of history and monarchy, evoking a feminised, ambiguous past as ideal, over the masculine and powerful world of Bolingbroke which is more typical of the representations of English history on the stage. By placing the "inappropriate" body of Shaw in the role of a king, Warner challenged the intertwined relationship of Englishness, history and gender, offering a different sense of historical possibility in its place. As Carol Chillington Rutter argues: "perhaps gender did matter after all. Perhaps only a woman playing the king could estrange the role sufficiently for this demystification to happen and to permit a British audience to consider what a very odd idea a "king" is" (Rutter 1997, 323). The cross-dressing of the fictional figure of the king challenged the reality of the monarchy more generally.

Warner's nostalgia for Richard's feminine, theatrical and Catholic moment is particularly powerful if we take into account Susan Bennett's definition of nostalgia as: "the inflicted territory where claims for authenticity [...] are staged" (Bennett 1996, 7). Warner's production took place in the Royal National Theatre, which, by definition, constitutes its audience as a community through the discourse of nationalism. Performing a history play with a nostalgia for the past has implications for how the present is also seen and constructed. The nostalgia for a past golden age necessarily constructs a sense of identity in the present by default.

Warner's production exhibited a nostalgia for Richard's past moment. By doing so, her production offered the values of his moment as ideal qualities for the present. As Bennett argues, "often what is perceived as "lost" is reasserted by its cultural representation" (Bennett 1996, 3). By expressing a nostalgia for Richard's historical moment, and by casting the ambiguously gendered Shaw in the role, Warner asked audiences to share in a longing for an English *present* which was ambiguous, feminine and theatrical. The contradictory and inconsistent qualities of the production transformed how the past and present could be seen by the audience. Furthermore, the fact that, unlike the Olivier and Branagh *Henry Vs,* Warner evoked a past which was feminised had a direct bearing on how the audience were asked to imagine their present. Even while Shaw's cross-dressed performance constructed confining images of femininity on the stage, the nostalgia the production expressed for Richard's moment was deeply subversive of masculine constructions of history and the gendering of a sense of the present in the audience.

The critical resistance to Warner's production can be seen as a resistance to this vision of Englishness and history, and Shaw's cross-dressing was seen as a threat to the "reality" of monarchy, and Shakespeare himself. The cultural investment in history plays was highlighted by Warner's production and her use of cross-dressing revealed how the representation of monarchy and history is a volatile and political affair. As Shaw acknowledged: "the English do need Shakespeare history plays to reflect history [...] it has a sort of temple like status in the establishment. [...] This country still has difficulty believing that kings are just the same as everybody else" (Shaw, in interview with the author 2001, 10).

The cultural specificity of the reception of Warner's production can also be seen in the fact that, when the production toured to France, it was very positively received.

As Deborah Warner recounted: "[the French] found it much funnier, [...] the bad behaviour of Richard, Fiona's playing of the young king in the early scenes as just a bad king, the French adored, they just adored, [...] they had no problem with the fact that she was a woman" (Warner, in interview with the author 1999, 2). The change of cultural context, and a change in the cultural investment in the performance of monarchy and history, meant that the portrait of an ineffectual female king was fully acceptable to the French and Austrian audiences who saw the production.

I have argued throughout this chapter that the cultural investment in history, and in the gender of that history, was central to the meanings and controversy created by Warner's cross-dressed *Richard II*. Her use of cross-dressing constructed conservative and stereotypical images of gender which had a subversive effect on spectators by positioning them as sympathetic to the representation of feminised and contradictory past. The production's use of cross-dressing invoked and invented a range of interlinked identities, constructing images of history, monarchy and gender, blurring sexual boundaries, and semi-erasing Irishness in the production. The transformative effects of cross-dressing on the spectator's body could be seen in the panicked anti-theatrical resistance in reviews to the theatricality of Shaw's monarch on the stage, and in the reconfiguration of Shaw's body as both overly and inadequately feminine by critics.

Furthermore, Shaw's own body was reconfigured by her performance as Richard, further blurring her already ambiguous gendering onstage. As one American critic said of Shaw when reviewing their production of *The Wasteland*, "seeing [Shaw] onstage for the first time, I can well imagine her as Richard. I have a little more difficulty visualising her in female roles" (John Simon 1996, 9)

The subsequent work of Warner and Shaw was informed and mediated through their cross-dressed experimentation in *Richard II*. This had an impact on how their production of *Medea* could be read in the Abbey Theatre in 2000. While this production was not cross-dressed it worked on many similar principles and contained similar contradictions in performance. The ambiguity of Shaw's gender and nationality was central to the show. In the next chapter, I will explore how Warner and Shaw's production of *Medea* continued some of the themes, strategies and approaches of *Richard II* in performance.

Chapter Five

"The Souvenir From Foreign Parts," Foreign Femininity in Deborah Warner's *Medea*

Introduction

As we saw in the last chapter, the gender politics in the work of Warner and Shaw have been complicated by their engagement both with the politics of identity, and with the questions of the universal and the human. Shaw's body has been configured and reconfigured accordingly. Her performance as Richard marked her out as a renegade on the classical stage, but also changed her body again in the eyes of the spectator, imbuing her already complicated gendering with a further ambiguity. However, as we have seen, *Richard II* also "disappeared" Shaw's gender and nationality, both foregrounding and refusing her complex semiotics onstage.

In this chapter, I want to look at Warner and Shaw's production of Euripides" *Medea* at the National (Abbey) Theatre in Dublin in June 2000[22]. Medea's status as female and foreign was central to the performance. Warner stated her intention to make the production: "entirely Irish" (Helen Meany 2000), and she cast Shaw in the lead role. She directed the chorus to speak in a combination of English and Gaelic and a Sean Nos singer sang traditional Irish laments from the audience. The entire cast was made up of Irish actors apart from Aegeus, played by the Jamaican actor Leo Wringer, and the nurse played by Scottish actor, Fiona Bell. The production moved to the Queen's Theatre in the West End of London in November 2000, where Warner recast the show almost entirely, apart from Shaw as Medea, and replaced the Irish cast with English actors.

I want to examine how the representations of gender and nationality produced one another in this production. As with Warner and Shaw's *Richard II*, nationality was

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[22] My analysis of this production is based on a still camera video of the production at the Abbey Theatre, two viewings of the live performance at the Abbey Theatre in June 2000, two viewings of the live performance at the Queen's Theatre in February 2001, and photographs and reviews in the Abbey Theatre archives.

intertwined with gender, but *Medea* worked from the opposite starting point to *Richard II*. Rather than the cross-gender casting of Shaw as Richard creating a gendered vision of history and Englishness, here, the styling of the production through nationality had gendered effects on the stage. Medea was strongly reminiscent of Warner and Shaw's last production in the Abbey Theatre, Hedda Gabler, in how they posited the individualist Medea in opposition to the homogeneity of (patriarchal) Irishness. In this chapter I want to argue that the complex national semiotics of Shaw created a cross-dressed effect onstage which changed how her portrait of gender could be interpreted.

Warner's intention to make the production "Irish" might lead the viewer to expect an engagement with questions of nationality, and a tracing through of Shaw's own ambiguous "Irishness" in the production. However, like *Richard II*, this production foregrounded and simultaneously "disappeared" the central trope of the production. Warner's *Medea* attempted to engage with contemporary Ireland while at the same time eschewing the notion of nationality in favour of the individual. This resulted in an aestheticisation of nationality which had a complex effect on the representation of gender in the production. While I will focus mainly on how the representation of gender and Irishness had a subversive effect on the Abbey stage, I will also briefly explore how the production's recasting and move to the West End changed Shaw's national and gendered semiotics on the stage.

I want to begin by looking at the play itself to discover how nationality and gender interrelate in Euripides" text, and how they are both positioned in relation to the theatrical. I will go on to look to contextualise the performance of Greek tragedy in Ireland, examine the reception of the production and investigate how Fiona Shaw's semiotics operated in Ireland and England. Finally, I will look at the Abbey production, and examine how gender, nationality and theatricality were produced and performed in Deborah Warner's *Medea* and then briefly examine the effects of the production's move to London.

Euripides" *Medea*

The figure of Medea, immortalised by Euripides in the fifth century BC, has haunted theatre ever since. The child murderer and barbarian, the witch and the seductress, Medea has loomed large in drama, opera, art and literature. Much of Medea's attraction lies in her status as the foreigner, the outsider and the woman.

Placed in a liminal cultural position, at the borderline between the domestic sphere and the public space, Medea appears to transgress the boundaries of multiple forms of identity. This lends her a disturbing power as she inhabits the borderline between masculinity and femininity, insider and outsider, and public and private.

Euripides" *Medea* is the story of Medea who is settled in Corinth, after helping her husband Jason on his quest to win the golden fleece. Medea has borne Jason's children, two sons. The play opens with the nurse telling the audience of Medea's madness due to the fact that Jason has betrayed her and because of his plans to marry King Kreon's daughter. Kreon banishes Medea and her children from Corinth, but grants her one day's leave to arrange her departure. Medea manages to extract a promise from Aegeus, King of Athens, of safe passage to Athens. She then begins to plot her revenge. She tricks Jason into pleading for her sons to be pardoned from their banishment, and then, pretending that she has accepted her fate, sends Jason's wife-to-be gifts of a crown and robe which are poisoned. These kill the princess and King Kreon, and Medea then murders her children to protect them from her enemies and to avenge herself for Jason's wrongs. The play ends with Medea escaping to Athens on a chariot pulled by dragons (see Euripides, 1996)

At first sight, the play is written from and for the perspective of women. Medea asks: "of all Earth's creatures that live and breathe, are we women not the wretchedest?" (Euripides 1996, 8). The chorus" sympathy with Medea means that the audience are positioned to see the world through Medea's eyes. This means that the use of irony in the play is created by the audience's empathy with Medea. The duping of Jason causes comedy through his unknowing and patronising acceptance of Medea's false apology, and Medea's bald statements about the "nature" of women to Jason become inflected with irony through the audience's sympathy for her, when she says, "we women! We are what we are - our natures, how can we help them?" (Euripides 1996, 30). The play positions Medea as the sympathetic protagonist, and constitutes the audience as female in their empathy for her plight.

However, as we have seen in Chapter One, Athenian drama was written for and performed by men. Medea's female perspective is actually a male one, and her character gave both actor and audience the opportunity to vicariously experience the transgression of gender boundaries and the critique of patriarchy in the safe space of the theatre. While the character of Medea makes ironical statements about the "nature

of women", saying "I'm a woman - I have to cry" (Euripides 1996, 32), that irony is paradoxical, both challenging the stereotypes of women, and at the same time functioning to construct and fix women's" "nature" onstage, through the representation of women in their absence, as Sue Ellen Case argues, "classical plays and theatrical conventions can now be regarded as allies in the project of suppressing real women and replacing them with masks of patriarchal production" (Case 1988, 7).

However, a contemporary production of the play will necessarily challenge the male-oriented dynamic of the play. While the play may have been written to fix the representation of women, - and ultimately, as I will argue below, to reject Medea's transgressive power - nonetheless, the presence of a female actor in the role, and female spectators in the audience, will contest the assumptions of the text about women, or reconfigure them according to the social mores of the day. As Alisa Solomon argues: "on stage [...] "woman" may be *re*presented, but at the same time a living, breathing woman can be *pre*sented. And most important, it's possible for her to comment on the character or image she represents, that is, to make those quotation marks around "woman" visible" (Solomon 1997, 11).

While contemporary female actors ultimately cross-dress by playing a Greek role written for a male actor and male audience, nonetheless, that act of crossing can reconfigure the meanings of the text and the gender images within the text. Warner and Shaw's production of *Medea* challenged the limited images of femininity in the play while at the same time also reinforcing some of the gender assumptions of the text. Therefore, to understand Medea's transgressive power it is important to acknowledge both the meanings in the play created by the context of Athenian performance, and the potential to reconfigure those meanings in contemporary performance.

Much of Medea's transgressive power comes from her status as an outsider to Corinth, and foreignness and femininity are aligned in the play. Medea is herself a refugee in Corinth, having fled her father's land, and she equates the experience of marriage with that of foreignness, "set down with strangers, with ways and laws, she never knew at home, a wife must learn every trick she can to please the man whose bed she shares" (Euripides 1996, 8). The status of being a woman is made equivalent to being a foreigner, and so Medea is triply dispossessed when she is banished from Corinth by Kreon, as she laments: "I'm alone, no state, despised by my husband, a souvenir from foreign parts" (Euripides 1996, 9).

While femaleness is equated with foreignness, masculinity is made equivalent to nationality in Euripides" play. Jason's justifications for his new marriage are based less on sexual desire or love, and more on status and social place, and he justifies his betrayal with his duty to the greater good, "must you take personally what helps us all?" (Euripides 1996 20). While Medea, and woman more generally, are positioned as "Others" in Greek society, men are associated with community and nationality in the play. Medea is doubly distanced by being foreign *and* female.

While Medea's Othering may be socially confining for the life of the character, in dramatic terms it proved liberating for Greek playwrights. The foreignness of Medea meant that writers could suspend the conventions of gender identity in Greek society when imagining her character. Because Medea was considered to be "outside" of conventional gender codes, they were able to explore a transgressive femininity which subverted the binaries of masculinity and femininity. Medea then became a powerfully theatrical figure, granting a freedom to her behaviour onstage which was not limited by the norms of Athenian society. While she laments her powerlessness in the face of male betrayal, she also contests masculine power by making her complaints in a public place, and by making her suffering equivalent to men's, arguing: "I'd three times sooner go to war than suffer childbirth once" (Euripides 1996, 9).

However, the subversive power of Medea is also finally contained by her foreignness, by the extremity of her actions, and by the fact that she transcends her deeds supernaturally at the end of the play. As Zeitlin argues, "her spectacular departure from the city on the dragon chariot [...] suggests that there can be no place for her in the social structure down on earth" (Zeitlin 1996, 348) Medea's liminal gender status is both permitted and contained by her status as an outsider.

Staging practices in the Greek theatre also employed strategies to keep Medea's unsettling powers at a distance. The mythical figure of Medea had been portrayed in traditional Athenian dress on vase paintings until Euripides wrote *Medea.* After his play, vase paintings portrayed Medea in foreign "Oriental" dress when murdering her sons. Sarah Iles Johnson suggests that the effect of the paintings was to: "signal [...] her utter abandonment of Greek mores and her complete alignment with the world of the foreign, the abnormal" (Johnson 1997, 9). The changes in vase paintings would suggest that the costuming of Medea on the stage changed as well, and the use of

costume has a central role to play in how Medea's power is communicated and potentially diminished, an effect which could be seen in Warner's production.

However, through the potential subversiveness of the modern actress's presence on the stage, contemporary productions have the potential to unsettle some of the containment of Medea's transgressions, to bring to light the disturbing powers of the character. I want to look at whether this subversive effect was achieved in Warner's production of *Medea*, and I will briefly examine the contexts in which the production took place, arguing that the national and commercial positioning of the show determined the gender meanings on the stage. I will then go on to discuss Warner and Shaw's production of Medea and look at how it constructed gender through nationality, foreignness through the ambiguous semiotics of Shaw, and subversive and conservative meanings on the stage.

Irish *Medeas*

Adaptations of Greek tragedy have had a lengthy performance tradition in Ireland. These Greek revisions have frequently come from Irish writers rather than directors, and they have re-translated the plays in order to reflect on the changes within contemporary Irish society. The historical and cultural distance provided by the plays has offered writers a way to examine "the "tragedy" of political violence in [...] North[ern Ireland] (Paulin and Heaney) [and] the tension between residual and emergent social values in the South (Kennelly)" (Des O'Rawe 1999, 1). Irish adaptations have therefore put the transgressive femininity of Medea and other Greek heroines into the service of explorations of Irish identity.[23]

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[23] Brendan Kennelly's version of *Medea* (1991) explored what he saw as the rage in women in contemporary Irish culture. Kennelly used the play as a way to talk about the concerns of gender and sexuality in Irish culture, raising issues such as abortion, with the chorus arguing when Medea kills her children that: "It would have been merciful to kill them in the womb. Abortion can be a kind of mercy" (cited in O'Rawe 1999, 6) In a climate where abortion was not only illegal but also the focus for acrimonious debate in Ireland, Kennelly used *Medea* to make a dramatic intervention into concerns specific to contemporary culture in Ireland. Furthermore he drew parallels between the unjust treatment of women by men and the relationship between England and Ireland, continuing a long dramatic tradition of positing Irish politics within a gendered matrix of feminine victim (Ireland) and masculine perpetrator (England). Thus Kennelly reworked Medea within the spheres of the politics of gender and sexuality and simultaneously: "equate[d] women's liberation with Ireland's liberation" (Wilmer 1996 , 4)

Similarly, Warner and Shaw's approach to *Medea* came from their response to an Ireland very different to the one where they had staged *Hedda Gabler* in 1990. As Shaw said: " I don't think we are mapping Medea on to Dublin, but it is about a shifting world and I think we're in one" (Shaw, in McCarthy 2000). Unlike the writers of the 1980s and early 90's, Warner's directorial approach constructed an individualist vision of a modern and changing Irish culture without overt reference to the political relations within Northern Ireland or between Ireland and England, and without making the text specifically refer to Ireland or Irishness. While Warner's production did not engage with the nationalist politics of Northern Ireland, her focus on the domestic concerns of family had a particularly political dimension in Irish culture at the time.[24]

The production focused on the concerns around family, the abuse of children, the conflict between men and women, and between tradition and modernity in a changing Ireland. Warner's politics were those of the domestic sphere, and the production encapsulated many of the anxieties and fears about the relations between the sexes, and the politics of the family in Ireland, at a time when divorce and homosexuality had just been legalised and awareness was growing of child abuse within the church, other state institutions, and the family home itself. The concept of "family," which was traditionally central to the self-image of the Irish state, was contested by these revelations of abuse, alongside a destabilising of Catholic-biased legislation on sexual and marital practice. These changes were causing anxiety and debate within Ireland at the time of Warner's production. Warner's exploration of the question of gender identity on the Abbey stage therefore had implications for how Irishness was seen and understood in her production.

The Abbey theatre is the national theatre in Ireland, which, as I argued in Chapter One, means that it constitutes its audiences through the discourse of nationalism. Furthermore, the Abbey theatre is also a "literary" theatre, which: "centres on the promotion of new Irish writing, [and] the revitalisation and presentation of plays from the Irish repertoire" (Ben Barnes 2000, 1). The institutional context of the Abbey theatre therefore framed Warner's show with an emphasis on the meanings of the playtext which was given central authority in the marketing of the show. By

contrast, the West End context of the Queen's theatre placed a much greater emphasis on the star presences of Warner and Shaw, using their name to sell the show. [25]

Fiona Shaw's public persona was also reconfigured by the Irish and then English contexts in which the production took place. As discussed above, Shaw's complicated Irishness has been produced, in part, through her stage roles, positioning her within the British acting tradition of the classical stage. This has meant that her Irishness has frequently disappeared in the reception of her work, notably in the case of *Richard II*. Shaw is not generally seen as Irish in British theatre. However, when Shaw works in Ireland, she is both encoded as an "outsider" to Irish theatre, *and* is seen as *more* Irish than in Britain, by virtue of her accent and birthplace. The ambiguity of Shaw's Irishness is complicated further by her disavowal of the importance of nationhood, and her focus on the "human" in her acting work. The "Irishness" of Warner's production of *Medea* was problematised and contested by Shaw's complex semiotics and by the changes in the cultural context and economic context in which the production took place, which I will discuss briefly below.

The Irishness of Warner's *Medea* was received in a complex way by Irish critics. While they generally rejected the "Irish" styling of chorus, music and language, with Emer O'Kelly suggesting of the use of Irish music that: "the device [...] is not merely pointless, but detracts from the otherwise admirable coherence of Deborah Warner's imaginative direction" (O'Kelly 2000), it was Warner's gender politics which drew the most attention. The debate which ensued over the representation of gender on the stage showed that it was through masculinity and femininity that the question of nationality was being challenged and formed on the National stage. As a result, while David Nowlan saw the production as: "a legitimate feminist polemic" (2000), Patrick Brennan suggested that, "Warner seems more concerned [...] with [...] poking fun at what she misguidingly [*sic*] perceives as stereotypes of the male and the female" (2000), and John Waters accused the production of, "function[ing] like a Christmas

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[25] The literary emphasis of the Abbey could be seen on the cover of the *Medea* programme, which stated simply, "*Medea*, by Euripides, translated by Kenneth McLeish and Volatic LTD" (*Medea Programme 2000*) However, in the Queen's Theatre, Warner and Shaw's names were put in headlines above Euripides" text in the programme, and the poster for the show was a photograph of Shaw. The celebrity presence of actor and director were given precedence over the meanings created by the text and this may explain the difference in emphasis in the critics" responses to the show.

panto: the men being pompous tyrants and the women free spirits seeking to deflate this pomposity" (2000).[26] It was the representations of gender rather than Irishness which had national significance in the reception of the production.

The critics in London, however, focused more on the ways in which Warner and Shaw had reinterpreted the text, refocusing the attention on the virtuosity of Shaw's acting style and Warner's directorial vision. All of the critics, however, commented on the power of the murder scene and felt that Warner's production had tapped into current social fears and anxieties about children. John Nathan described the murder as: "one of the most harrowing moments I've seen on stage" (2001), Michael Coveny argued that the production: "hit all sorts of contemporary nerves about children as pawns in marriages that have gone horribly wrong" (2001), and described how: "one of my more difficult-to-please female colleagues fainted clean away in the row in front of me" (2001).

The questions of foreignness, femininity and nationality intertwined in the critical response to *Medea* in Ireland. I want to argue that the Abbey production produced a cross-dressed effect in Shaw's performance as Medea, which was created by her complex semiotic encoding on the Irish stage, and that this effect was "flattened" by the production's move to London. I will examine how Shaw's performance of Medea's femininity was shown to be an act of cross-dressing in the production and then go on to look at how Shaw's Medea offered an individualist model of Irishness in contrast to the patriarchal construction of nationality in Warner's production. I will briefly examine the changes in the production when it moved to London and conclude by examining the way in which *Medea* continued some of the themes and meanings created by *Richard II.*

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[26] Waters who is part of the "new men's movement" in Ireland, used the play *Medea* as a forum from which to discuss the fraught question of child abuse and custody for fathers in his *Irish Times* column (2000). This was based on a pre-show talk he gave at the Abbey before a performance of Warner's *Medea*. The columnist Terry Keane replied to his talk in *The Sunday Times* (2000) arguing that Waters daughter - for whom he had fought for custody from his ex partner Sinead O'Connor - would be denied her father's sympathy, based on the principles he espoused in his talk in the Abbey. Waters sued Keane for libel and won damages from *The Sunday Times* in 2002. This debate between columnists belies the larger struggle taking place in Ireland on legislative and discursive levels around the questions of gender equality and representation.

The Foreignness of Femininity

Medea's foreignness and femininity were established initially by the division of public and private space in Warner's production. Below the stage was the private and unseen space of Medea, from which the audience first heard her weeping raging against Jason's injustices. However, when Shaw first entered the public playing space, she was unexpectedly muted and embarrassed. The contrast between her private wailing self - reminiscent of her portrayal of Electra in 1989 - and her public understated persona dressed in a black cocktail dress, matching cardigan and high heeled shoes (see Appendix One, Figure 5), resembling an Irish middle class suburban housewife, created: "at once the unsettling sense of a woman constructing a public self" (Fintan O'Toole 2000, 59).

Shaw's portrait of Medea was consciously theatrical. Tottering slightly in her high heels, and giving the impression that her athletic body was constricted by her clothing, Shaw's Medea was a woman who was *playing* at the role of wife and mother, attempting to conform to the social mores of the culture she had adopted, but who was ill at ease and uncomfortable with the part she was playing. While Shaw's body conflicted with her costume, she also showed Medea's clothing to *be* a costume, revealing Medea's "foreignness" to the clothing she wore. Furthermore, Medea's feminine behaviour was very evidently a performance, and Shaw's embodiment of Medea's contradictions, moments of self consciousness and wit, sudden reversals in emotional and physical behaviour and the parodying of feminine roles, revealed the theatricality of Medea's femininity.

Shaw's high heels and short dress became a metaphor for the constricting social role which Medea was forced to play in Corinth. The stark contrast between the public and private Medeas, and the conflict between Medea's body and her constricting social costume and role, constructed a theatrical sense of femininity in Shaw's performance. The theatricality in Medea's persona was integral to her position as a foreigner as well as a woman. As Fiona Macintosh suggests: "like any other outsider, the rootless Medea has learned that the assumption of new roles is a way of life. But in Medea's case, she comes to see that an ability to perform is really her only guarantee of survival" (2000, 1). The performance of Medea's gender intertwined foreignness and femininity.

Shaw's Medea was a "mimic" woman both in terms of nationality and gender. Medea's need to conform to Corinthian society, to become Bhabha's "almost the same but not quite" (1994, 86), had a gendered dynamic in Warner's production. The conscious performance of gender in Shaw's performance as Medea, foregrounding the disciplining of her body through the confining strictures of her clothing, created a cross-dressed effect onstage. Shaw's performance, "dramatiz[ed] the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established" (Butler 1999, xxviii), and the distinct gap between Shaw's body and her performance as Medea, and the gap between Medea's body and her performance of Corinthian femininity, opened up a cross-dressed effect onstage.

This effect was further emphasised by Shaw's public persona as a thoroughly "modern" ambitious and talented woman, which created a critical distance not only between the "real" Shaw and her role, but also between the "fictional" Medea and the social role expected of her. In doing so, Shaw's performance operated as a critique of the socially confining role given to women like Medea (and Shaw) within the traditions of Western drama. Furthermore, the fact that Shaw had previously played Richard further complicated her gendered persona onstage, oddly bringing the role of Medea closer to its transvestic roots. Shaw's Medea was doubly critical: simultaneously performing the fictional character's lament at her situation, and Shaw's critical approach to the representation of women on the stage. Shaw's protest, when playing Richard, at the limited emotional range in the characters available to female actors became a part of Medea's character on the stage.

However, Shaw's performance offered a sense that there was a "real" body beneath Medea's artificial feminine façade. Like their previous production of *Hedda Gabler*, Warner and Shaw created the image of a woman who is driven to insanity by the confinements of the culture in which she lives, confinements which were expressed through the use of costume and set on the stage. Shaw's instability in her high heels worked to express the instability of her mind. The menace of mimicry, which Bhabha outlines in his essay, became horribly apparent in the enactment of the murder on the stage, transforming Shaw's Medea from a sympathetic witty and theatrical heroine into a demonic, raging, and unrecognisable figure. While Warner's production showed Medea's femininity to be theatrical, she also maintained the strategies of Greek drama

to contain the impact of Medea's gender performance, by distancing the audience from her murderous incarnation on the stage.

After stating her intention to kill her sons, Shaw as Medea disappeared offstage, and returned with a white plastic butcher's overall. Stripping down to her underwear, Shaw put on the apron and armed with a kitchen knife she made her way below the stage to enact the murder. Once Shaw changed into her butcher's overall and doused herself with water on the stage, all semblance of middle class respectability and decorum were banished from Shaw's appearance (see Appendix One, figure 6). Instantly, the production signalled a complete transformation in Medea which allowed the audience distance themselves from her actions, just as the costume change had operated in Ancient Greece. The explicit violence of the murder maintained this alienation effect even further. Paul Taylor described the murder:

> Blood splashes on a translucent screen. One of the sons escapes from the blurred side room and runs into plain view, trying to flee the fate of his slaughtered sibling. His mother hauls him back. After the unbearable tension of the impending atrocity, the pressure suddenly drops and insult is added to injury by the sound of a country and western song that continues with calm insensitivity on a radio somewhere in the building (Taylor 2000).

Shaw's costume change distanced the audience from their previous empathy with Medea's actions. The change of Shaw's costume, moving from familiar middle class naturalism to a brutal abstraction, constructed a new Medea, "foreign" to the figure with whom the audience had identified, and so the production distanced the audience from Medea's subsequent actions. This distancing removed the culpability the audience might have felt - through their prior identification with Medea - for the killing of the two boys. As a result, the production relied on an "inside/outside" mechanism, where the viewer could identify with Medea and yet reject the possibility that they might be capable of the same crimes. Sarah Iles Johnson suggests that the figure of Medea: "raise[s] the disturbing possibility of *otherness lurking within self* - the possibility that the "normal" carry within themselves the potential for abnormal behaviour, that the boundaries that keep our world safe are not impermeable" (Johnson 1997, 8).

In this production, the use of costume ensured a process of identification with, and then refusal of, Medea's disturbing power. This strategy contained the impact of

the murder and allowed the audience see it as an act of "madness" or of "passion" rather than as the logical consequence of Medea's situation. Furthermore, the act of "crossing" was implicated in Medea's insanity. The formative effects of cross-dressing as feminine on Medea were shown by Warner and Shaw to have driven her to madness. Therefore, the production approached the act of crossing as a deceptive and destructive act, limiting and constricting the identity of the "real" Medea beneath the masquerade.

Unlike Butler's vision of cross-dressing as a metaphor for all gender performance, Warner and Shaw posited crossing as an act of deception which will ultimately destroy the identity of the "real" person beneath the masquerade. As with their production of *Richard II*, theatricality was employed and then rejected as a valid form of identity in *Medea*, showing it to lead to a political or moral downfall and, ultimately, to death. In Warner's production, clothes did not make the woman; they destroyed her.

However, the ending of the play once again reconfigured the audience's relationship with Medea. After the murder scene, the ending was anti-climactic. The production ended with Medea flirtatiously flicking water at Jason, vainly trying to get his attention once more. Gone was the chariot pulled by dragons, allowing Medea to transcend her crimes. Instead, Warner's finale was a Beckettian endgame, as Mary Trotter describes: "This [ending] made the play a parable about both the need for justice and the universally terrible consequences of violent revenge. Warner offered no clear moral winner or loser" (Trotter 2001, 560)

The anti-climactic ending returned the first incarnation of Medea to the stage, showing her grapple with the consequences of her actions and the futility of the murder. The production recognised that the murders had solved nothing. By changing the ending of the play, Warner challenged Euripides" text, in which the horrors which Medea invokes are contained by her transcendence of her crime. Warner's production created an anti-climactic ending in which no resolution was found, and offered a strangely feminist conclusion to the play, demanding that the spectator recognised Medea once more as human and made room for her in their world. The production made a plea for a world which could encompass the complexities and horrors of Medea's acts, not necessarily to forgive them, but to understand their origins.

Performing Gender And The Nation.

Fiona Shaw's Medea was positioned as a complex, theatrical and sympathetic individual whose conformity to the confining social codes of Corinth ultimately destroys her. Again, like their previous production in the Abbey, *Hedda Gabler*, Warner and Shaw's *Medea* positioned a sympathetic heroine in opposition to the repressive and intertwined forces of patriarchy and nationality. However, Shaw's foreignness as Medea was complex, liminal, and reconfigured by the production's move to London.

In contrast to Shaw's modern dress, the chorus in the Irish production were dressed in long flowing robes and scarves and their costumes had an impressionistic similarity to the traditional clothing of Irish women during the famine. The chorus's historical distancing and homogeneity was heightened by the fact that they spoke much of the text in Irish which worked to exclude Medea from their world. The production set up an opposition between the chorus's monolithic, traditional, homogenising national identity and Medea's critical, fluid, individualised "foreign" identity.

However, the foreignness of Shaw's Medea was not constructed through nationality, since Shaw herself is Irish. Instead, it was established through the modernity of her costume (which aligned her with the male characters who were also costumed in contemporary clothes), and through Shaw's semiotics as a powerful actress of the British classical stage. Shaw herself is "almost English but not quite" on the British stage and simultaneously "almost Irish but not quite" on the Irish stage, and her encoding as an outsider to Irish theatre worked to establish her foreignness as Medea on the stage. Shaw became "foreign" by being an Irish emigrant who had become a successful actor in British theatre. Shaw was "cross-dressed" as both foreign *and* as Irish on the Abbey stage, occupying a semiotically liminal space between insider and outsider in performance.

Shaw's modernity as Medea was placed in opposition to the conservative, restrictive, and oppressive culture of Corinthian Ireland. Fiona Shaw explained this contrast, saying:

> I'm just an outsider to a group much more prescribed by design, so that its very obviously a rather restrictive community, it was almost Islamic wasn't it? [...] In

> Dublin [the chorus] were heightened versions of local people (Shaw in interview with the author 2001, 1).

The constricting culture of the chorus and the male characters who were characterised by their violence, aggression and sexuality, were therefore supposed to represent the audience watching the production in Dublin. Warner's production simplified Irishness and masculinity, representing them as undifferentiated conservative identities, in order to render Shaw's Medea complex and intelligent by contrast. Paradoxically, Warner's production employed the surface tropes of nationality in order to reject national identity in her production.

This effect was further maintained by the use of the Irish language on the stage, as Fiona Shaw explained,

> the use of Irish is really an extraction [...] its not that its Irish, its that its a local old language which people use to communicate, it just happens to be a useful tool, and in Dublin what it did is that if the chorus did speak Irish, the audience understood the local view (Shaw in interview with the author 2001, 1)

However, Shaw's assumption was somewhat inaccurate, as Dublin audiences are unlikely to speak or understand the Irish language fluently. The use of Gaelic therefore functioned as a distancing mechanism for the spectator, as well as for Medea.

The power and attractiveness of Shaw's performance meant that the audience identified with Medea, not the chorus. The form of Irishness which was sympathetic on the stage was found in the figure of the liminal, emigrant, and fully contemporary figure of Shaw. While the change of costume during the murder scene distanced the audience from the figure of Medea, the production implicated nationalism and patriarchy in Medea's madness. It was because of the repression of Kreon's patriarchal Ireland and the betrayal of the macho Jason that Shaw's sympathetic Medea went mad. The message of the production; that individuals are destroyed by the repressive effects of patriarchy and nationality, meant that the audience were represented as part of that patriarchy and community, and were simultaneously asked to reject those qualities through their sympathy for Medea. As with their production of *Richard II*, Warner and Shaw's *Medea* asked the audience to identify with a liminal, complex and feminine figure on the stage. While Warner's production relied on the simplification of Irishness in order to render Medea's foreignness complex on the stage, nonetheless the

identificatory map of the production had a subversive effect on the spectator in the Abbey theatre.

Warner's show rejected the concept of nationality in the Irish national theatre. While *Richard II* reconfigured the gendering of nationalism in the English National Theatre, Warner and Shaw's *Medea* rejected nationalism entirely in favour of the (female) individual in the Irish National Theatre. Performed in an institution founded to explore and invent Irishness, *Medea* undermined the founding principles of the Abbey Theatre by rejecting Irishness and nationality on the stage. While Warner's production set out to explore contemporary Ireland in her production, the central trope of nationalism in her production was rejected in favour of the liminal, individual, and female figure of Shaw's Medea.

However, while the production rejected nationality as a valid expression of identity, nonetheless, it also offered and invented another kind of Irishness through the liminal figure of Shaw. The "outsider," the "foreigner" and the "emigrant" became the idealised form of Irishness in Warner's *Medea.* It was not only Medea's foreignness, but Shaw's "foreignness" which became the preferred model of Irishness for the audience. Diasporic identity as modern, intelligent, critical, and *female,* was offered in opposition to the fixed forms of Irish national identity seen in the chorus and the male characters. Warner's production did not only reject a (simplistic) model of Irishness, it invented a new one.

However, when the production moved to the West End of London, the recasting of the production and the change in commercial and cultural context reduced the subversive impact of Warner's *Medea.* The styling of the chorus was radically altered in the London production. Played by English actors, they were now dressed in contemporary clothing and resembled housewives, students and business women. The London production presented an English chorus who were styled to appear contemporary, diverse and individuated, very much like Shaw's incarnation as Medea in the Abbey.

By contrast, it was Fiona Shaw's Medea who became associated with Irishness, restriction, and repressed femininity. In London, the nurse was played by an Irish actor, and Fiona Shaw addressed her in Gaelic. While the production retained the use of the Irish language, the intention behind its use was transformed, as Shaw explained:

> Here [in London] I am just using a tiny fragment, [because] she might revert to a language that the chorus wouldn't understand, that the audience wouldn't understand, which is fundamentally not so sympathetic, because people don't like not understanding things (in interview with the author 2001, 1).

The intention behind the use of the Irish language reversed in function: moving from being (supposedly) inclusive of the Irish audience, but excluding Medea in Dublin; to becoming an effect which excluded everybody *but* Medea and the nurse in London. Irishness now became part of a menacing foreignness, figured as strange, exclusive and unreadable, gaining what Warner described as: "that threatening quality" (John Whitley 2000).

Shaw's "mimic-woman" status became more fixed on the London stage, her foreignness becoming determined by her birthplace and accent, rather than by her liminal "outside" status. Rather than Shaw being made foreign through her semiotic encoding and her liminality as on the Abbey stage, she now became foreign as fixedly "Irish," and the fact that her performance had become more overstated and less subtle on the London stage heightened this effect further. The cross-dressed effect of Shaw's performance as Medea was flattened by the changes in cultural context in the London production, when her national and gendered encoding became more straightforwardly legible onstage.

However, Shaw's Irishness was barely mentioned by the English theatre critics in their reviews of the show. While Shaw's accent and birthplace were essentialised in performance, her nationality was not noted by reviewers, who concentrated instead on the formal innovations of Shaw's performance. The politics of nationality of Warner's production were ignored. While the individualism of Shaw's Medea ran counter to the national positioning of audiences at the Abbey Theatre, it seemed that this individualism was fully in line with the commercial and cultural context of the Queen's Theatre in London's West End - despite the theatre's monarchical title. As with Warner's *Richard II*, Shaw's Irishness disappeared in the West End production of *Medea*.

While the contexts of the productions changed its approach to nationality, the murder scene and its aftermath visibly shook audience members in both venues. Audiences were forced to acknowledge their complex and problematic social attitudes towards children and family. In its unwavering gaze at the extreme results of betrayal,

and by creating a critical, ambiguous, funny and sympathetic Medea, this production forced its audience to confront the terrible politics of home.

Crossing Productions

Warner's productions of *Richard II* and *Medea* had a number of similar themes and approaches to identity. While Shaw's cross-dressing as Richard had a contradictory and inconsistent gender effect on the stage, her complex portrait of Medea created a cross-dressed effect in performance. The ambiguous and blurred semiotics of Shaw's gender and nationality worked in both her performances to construct complex and frequently uncomfortable images of gender on the stage. While *Richard II* was cross-gender cast, it was *Medea* which focused more on the question of gender. In both productions, the representation of gender had a transformative effect on the representation of nationality both on the stage, and in the audience, while at the same time the questions of gender and nationality frequently blurred and disappeared in performance.

While many of Warner productions have created fascinating incarnations of gender and nationality through Shaw's performances on the stage, Shaw's complexity has tended to contrast with the simplistic portraits of other gender identities in their productions. This is partly due to the thematic tendency in their work to posit a sympathetic heroine - or in the case of Richard, hero - against the repressive forces of a homogenous and repressive patriarchal nationalism. As a result, their productions have tended to construct confining images of masculinity, femininity and Irishness alongside the ambiguity of Shaw's characters in performance. Nonetheless, while the images constructed on the stage are often conservative, the national contexts in which Warner and Shaw work, mean that their productions also have subversive effects on the spectator, who is forced to read against the grain of the cultural context in which they watch the performance.

In all of their work, Warner and Shaw have paradoxically employed theatrical and cross-dressed identity while ultimately rejecting it as a destructive form of deception. In *Richard II*, Shaw's performance as Richard showed his theatricality to lead to his downfall, and his burgeoning self-awareness was performed as a shedding of the artifice of performance, in favour of a "true," non-theatrical identity. Similarly, Shaw's Medea was constructed as a mimic-woman, a figure who evidently performs an

artificial and constricting femininity and nationality. However, Medea's masquerade ultimately leads to her insanity and to the pointless murder of her children. In both productions, theatricality is a formative act of deceit which leads to death. As Jonas Barish describes of Ibsen's plays, underlying Warner and Shaw's work is a view of theatre :"as a standard of narrowness and artificiality, and the rejection of it as a sign of inner substance and power. The search for authenticity involves a denial of theater because the theater itself is a denial of reality" (Barish, 1981, 451)

Crossing has been a trope of Warner and Shaw's work in both cross-gender and "same-sex" cast productions. Ultimately, however, they have rejected this trope in favour of the real identities "beneath" the masquerade of cross-dressing. While theatre practice employs performance to tell stories on the stage, it frequently rejects its own mode of representation in its approach to identity. However, as Shaw's ambiguous semiotic encoding shows, those "real" identities are not necessarily stable, knowable or non-theatrical themselves. The inappropriate bodies created by Warner and Shaw's work, haunt and contradict their anti-theatrical approach to identity.

SECTION THREE

Appropriated Bodies: Cross-dressing In The Work Of Elizabeth LeCompte And The Wooster Group

Chapter Six

"The Sensation Of Something New:" Reluctant Theatricality In The Work Of The Wooster Group

Introduction

In the last section, I explored the work of Deborah Warner and Fiona Shaw, examining how they used cross-dressing in their work and focusing on how the tensions and conflicts underlying their productions have resulted from the social context in which their work has been performed. In this section, I turn to the director Elizabeth LeCompte's work with the Wooster Group, a collaborative theatre company who have been working together for over thirty years. Like Warner and Shaw, the Wooster Group have used a variety of "crossing" practices in their work. However, the results of their use of cross-dressing have been very different.

Unlike the critical and contemporary figure of Shaw who counters and critiques the restrictive images of femininity in performance, the Wooster Group have used stereotypical images of both genders on the stage, but have undermined these images through their use of hyperbolic performance styles, and through the fragmenting and mediating effects of technology on the stage. Furthermore, Warner and Shaw's evocation of the "real" on the stage (the real of Shaw's presence, the real of identity beneath the cross-dressing and the real of the writer's authority which governs the meanings of their work), contrasts with the Wooster Group's ongoing strategy of undermining the notion of the real in performance. They have shown the real to be a product of the illusion, a product of representation. Theatre is implicated in the formation of identity in their productions.

Similar to Warner and Shaw's interlinking of the questions of nationality and gender, the Wooster Group have had a long tradition of producing gender identity through the crossing practices of blackface, Orientalism and the mediating effects of technology. However, unlike Warner and Shaw, the bodies that they imagine onstage through these crossing practices are not individualist and non-theatrical, but are

distorted, fragmented, and denied presence, and are shown to be the products of theatre itself. Both sets of practitioners have encountered controversy and resistance in their work, Warner and Shaw for *Richard II*, and the Wooster Group for their early work: *Route 1&9 (The Last Act)* in 1981, and *LSD (... Just The High Points ...)* in 1984. The reasons for this controversy have been closely bound up with the contexts in which both practitioners have worked, and the purpose of this chapter is to account for the political, theatrical and social context in which the Wooster Group have worked since the early 1980s.

Just as I examined some of the contradictions underlying Warner's work in the last section, so too will I explore the clashes and conflicts which characterise the Wooster Group's work. The meanings of the Wooster Group's performances have been formed and problematised by the avant-garde environment in which they work. In this chapter, I will argue that the company's explorations of racial and gendered identity is problematised by its predominantly white audience and company. I will focus on four of the company's productions, *Route 1&9* (1981), *LSD (... Just The High Points ...)* (1984), *Brace Up!* (1991) and *To You, The Birdie* (2001), in order to explore the representation of gender, race, the body, and theatricality in their work, before going on to discuss the use of cross-dressing in *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape* in the next two chapters.

Performing Politics

The Wooster Group began life as the Performance Group in 1967 which was established by Richard Schechner to explore new forms of theatrical practice that: "would break down barriers: between art and life, between performance space and audience space, and between production elements" (Savran 1988, 2-3). The Performance Group was joined by the actors Spalding Gray, Ron Vawter, Willem Dafoe, Kate Valk, and Peyton Smith. Elizabeth LeCompte joined Schechner as an assistant director in 1975 and later took over the company as artistic director in 1980. In 1968, The Performance Group purchased a disused garage in Soho in downtown New York and renamed it The Performing Garage, which has been their home ever since. In 1980, after a break with Schechner, the Group renamed themselves The

Wooster Group[27] and have remained so, developing work which: "speaks to an age "where we can talk on the phone, look out the window, watch T.V and be typing a letter at the same time..." (Dafoe 2002, 1).

In 1981, The Wooster Group performed their first production under their new name, *Route 1&9 (The Last Act)* which was hugely controversial for its juxtaposing of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* with blackface minstrel routines and a porn film. Their 1984 production of *LSD (... Just The High Points ...)* also attracted media attention, when Arthur Miller threatened to sue over their use of extracts of his play *The Crucible,* in combination with the life and times of Timothy Leary the LSD guru. That same year, their production of Jim Strahs's *North Atlantic* incurred further criticism for being sexist. Their trilogy, *The Road To Immortality,* which included *Route 1&9* and *LSD* was completed by *Frank Dell's The Temptation Of St Antony* in 1987.

In 1991, the Group performed *Brace Up!,* which was a production of Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters,* using Japanese performance styles from theatre and film. Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* was performed in 1993, featuring Kate Valk in the lead male role in blackface and using the performance styles and costume of Kabuki drama. *Fish Story* was a performance of the last act of *Three Sisters* in 1994, and *The Hairy Ape,* another O'Neill play, was performed in 1995, using music hall, vaudeville, melodrama and blackface as its theatrical frames. *House/Lights* in 1999 was a combination of Gertrude Stein's *Dr Faustus Lights The Lights* and a 1960s sado-masochistic B movie called *Olga's House Of Shame.* Finally, in 2001, the Group launched their new production of Racine's *Phaedre, To You, The Birdie,* which was structured around a badminton match.

The Wooster Group's first production, *Route 1 & 9,* was performed against a backdrop of political and cultural change in America. 1981 heralded the inauguration of Ronald Reagan, a Hollywood actor whose performance *of* President superseded his performance *as* president (see Tim Raphael 1999). In the same year, the music station MTV was born, and the soap opera *Dynasty* went on air, both of which became hugely

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[27] While the Group produced four productions known as the *Rhode Island Trilogy* in the mid to late 1970s which centred on the life of Spalding Gray, and were directed by LeCompte, I am discussing their work from 1980 when they were first named The Wooster Group and had broken fully with Richard Schechner, and so I am treating *Route 1& 9* as the debut production of The Wooster Group.

influential icons of the 1980s: Dynasty for its celebration of commodity capitalism, and MTV for its revolutionary construction of popular culture icons through the surfaces of image and style (see Jane Fever 1995). Furthermore, the events of the Vietnam war and the Watergate scandal had led to a loss of idealism and a public distrust of performance (see Auslander 1992, 43).

Funding for the arts was decimated and the optimism of previous avant-garde experimentation in theatre during the 1960s and "70s was replaced by a more cynical and dystopian approach to performance. The political commitment to "civil rights" theatre in America was replaced by a retreat to formalism exemplified in the work of Robert Wilson and Richard Foreman. The change in the work of theatre practitioners, from constructing new, politically committed work, to formal experimentation with familiar and canonical texts, heralded the emergence of the theatre director who became central to the creative process in the theatre (see Bigsby, 1992). Many of the people who developed as directors at this time were from fine art or architecture backgrounds (such as Robert Wilson and Elizabeth LeCompte) and, consequently, experimentation with space, design, form and technology became an inevitable part of the new theatre practice of the 1980s[28].

Furthermore, the advent of AIDS in the 1980s transformed attitudes towards the body, particularly within the arts community many of whose members died as a result of the disease. This meant that the aesthetic approach to the body in performance also changed, as Bonnie Marranca points out: "the body, once celebrated as the site of pleasure and freedom, was now analysed as a repository of disease, pain, death and contested being" (Marranca, 1999, xi).

The Wooster Group is typical of many of these trends. Their work moved from the "religious" theatre experiments of Richard Schechner in the 1960s and 1970s, where the live presence of the actor's body on the stage was optimistically imagined to create a spiritual connection between spectator and performer, to Elizabeth LeCompte's work as artistic director in the 1980s, which became a dystopian approach to texts and bodies on the stage. Actors' bodies were distorted and fragmented by the use of

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[28] For further discussion of the evolution of American Avant-Garde theatre practice, see also Arnold Aronson's *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History* (2000) and Richard Schechner's *The Death of Humanism*

technology on the stage and the spectator's sense of access to the actor's presence was continually undermined. Furthermore, while the company retained its collaborative structure, it was LeCompte who became a central figure in the creation of meaning and performance on the stage. While the Group became famed for its formal experimentation with performance styles, technology and dramaturgy on the stage, it also attracted controversy for how those styles were used to interrogate the politics of canonical playtexts in America. The company's use of pornography, blackface and unauthorised excerpts from private phone calls and plays associated them with a radically political agenda.

However, while the avant garde theatre of the 1960s and 1970s positioned itself as counter-cultural, working to critique and rebel against mainstream culture from the margins of society, the social changes of the 1980s meant that avant garde artists, such as the Wooster Group, were positioned differently in relation to the political interventions of their work. The avant-garde's marginality and "outside" status became commodified as the next alternative movement, in consumerist culture's endless search for novelty. As Bruce King suggests: "the avant garde has become popular, more an up-to-date fashion in taste, like this year's hemline and colours, than a radical rejection of bourgeois culture" (King 1991, 8). As a result, the politics of "avant-garde" practice necessarily changed. Rather than critiquing mainstream culture from the margins, and creating polemical theatre designed to intervene in the mainstream, fringe artists began to acknowledge that an "outside" perspective was impossible, and began to work instead to deconstruct the politics of contemporary culture from within, using the tools of commodity culture (such as technology, pop culture etc) in order to dismantle that culture.

This strategy, of course, always runs the risk of becoming complicit with that which it dismantles, and contemporary avant garde theatre practice is often critiqued for its endorsement of mainstream culture, its seeming apolitical stance, and its disengagement from social issues. The Wooster Group's performances exemplify this trend. Their politics have not been overt or oppositional, but have worked from within the texts and performance styles of mainstream culture and the theatrical canon. This has been frequently seen by their critics as an endorsement of mainstream ideology - as in the case of The Wooster Group's use of blackface, which could be read either as a deconstruction of race, or as an affirmation of racism - but supporters of the Group

claim that this work has operated: "deconstructively, resistantly, from within" (Auslander 1992, 51). As Auslander neatly puts it, the Wooster Group is: "a "theatre with a politic" rather than a "political theatre'" (Auslander 1992, 104).

Certainly, David Savran, who had previously lauded the company for their artistic and political daring, critiqued their later work for its apolitical stance, arguing that the National Endowment for the Arts funding policies of the late 1980s, which: "insisted that [the] agency [would] only fund work whose political message [was] subordinated to its "artistic content"" (Savran 1991, 49), contributed to a de-politicisation of the Group's theatre practice. Savran argued that the Wooster Group's work was: "a chilling statement about success during the 1980s in America, where the road to immortality is the erasure of revolutionary politics" (Savran 1991, 53).

It is certainly true that the Wooster Group have attracted less controversy in recent years, as the reverent critical response to their productions of *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape* testifies. However, while the radicalism of their politics has become less overt, this is not to say that their work has become entirely apolitical *or* entirely unproblematic. I will argue below, that the company fit into the ultimate avant garde paradox, that their reputation for controversy has made their work less controversial. Nonetheless, I will also argue that their more recent work has been politically committed and problematic in performance, and possibly should attract more controversy than it does.

One of the targets which the Wooster Group's work has consistently investigated has been the representation of gender in canonical theatre texts. The company was founded at a time in the mid 1960s when there was great feminist optimism that the unequal balance of men and women directing and writing plays would be rectified. However, in a recent survey by New York State Council On The Arts into the status of women in theatre, it was found that while women: "tripled their participation rate from 6-7% in the late Sixties through early Seventies to roughly 20-25%, this past year saw a decline of women playwrights to roughly 16%" (NYSCA 2002, 2). The report also found that women worked in greater numbers in inverse proportion to budget and funding: "Women, for a variety of reasons, fare better in the non-commercial arena, where resources, compensation and status are lower" (N.Y.S.C.A. 2002, 3). As Sydne Mahone argues: "Women and artists of colour have greater access to the mainstream but true entitlement is limited" (Mahone, 1994, xix).

The Wooster Group can be situated in relation to these statistics. Elizabeth LeCompte is typical of these figures, as a female theatre director working in the non-commercial theatre environment. Kate Valk has also become a central figure within the dramaturgical and performance choices made by the Group. However, as I will argue below, the public faces of the company tend to be male and the company has a masculine image in its public profile. This may be partly due to the fact that feminists have critiqued the company for its construction of "sexist" images on the stage, particularly in their use of pornography in *Route 1&9*, and their stereotypes of femininity in *North Atlantic* (see Elinor Fuchs 1996, 113/184). Furthermore, LeCompte does not usually discuss the gender politics of her work, saying, when discussing *The Emperor Jones*, "I don't think of it as cross-dressing and I don't think of it as gender" (LeCompte, in interview with the author 2000, 2).

Gender is not an issue that is prominently raised in the reception of the Wooster Group's work. The company's reluctance to explain their artistic choices onstage plays into this effect. While the question of gender frequently disappears in their discussion of their work, as I will argue in this chapter, the company's investigations of gender have been complex and innovative, using stereotypes of gender identity as a way to counter the problematic assumptions about masculinity and femininity in canonical playtexts. The investigations of gender in their work have focused on a deconstruction of masculinity as well as femininity, as I will discuss in my analyses *of The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*.

The Wooster Group have also attracted controversy for their investigations of race on the stage through their use of blackface (but not Orientalism, as I will argue below). However, the reception of their use of blackface has changed over time and this may be partially due to the changes in African American representations of race on the stage. African American theatre moved from the polemical thrust of Lorraine Hansberry's *Raisin In The Sun* in the 1950s and civil rights theatre in the 1960s and 1970s, to the psychologically oriented work of August Wilson in the 1980s, whose characters: "seldom make a connection between their individual sufferings and the necessity for social change" (C.W.E. Bigsby 1992, 291). African American practitioners developed an interest in psychology and, while still concerned with questions of gender, sexuality and race, examined these issues in the context of

individual identity and notions of self, rather than positioning them as ideological concerns.

Towards the end of the 1990s and throughout the 2000s, African American playwrights began to employ radically deconstructive techniques in their treatment of race, notably in the work of female writers, such as Susan Lori Parks. These artists began to question the stability of the categories of race and gender, and their writing deconstructed and historicised fixed categories of race. However, despite the presence of writers such as Parks, social and representational parity has not been achieved by African American theatre artists. For example, in the 1991-92 American theatre season, only five percent of plays produced in the States were written or directed by African Americans. (See Sydne Mahone, 1994)

It is important to trace the changes in how race was positioned by African Americans artists in order to understand the changing attitudes to the Wooster Group's use of blackface. I will explore how their engagement with race has changed and developed below, but it is also important to recognise that attitudes towards race within the African American artistic community have also changed, and this may have been one reason why The Wooster Group no longer attract controversy for their use of blackface[29]. However, it is also important to note that African American artists are still under-represented in American theatre, and this inequality also has implications for how The Wooster Group's treatment of race in their work can be understood.

Furthermore, the Group's use of blackface has taken place against a backdrop of controversy over the representations of race by Caucasian actors. In 1993, the white actor Ted Danson was widely criticised for making a speech at the Friars Club while wearing blackface. The effect of this was complicated further by the fact that he was accompanied by Whoopi Goldberg, an African American actress, who was his partner at the time. Similarly, the white English actor, Jonathan Pryce was at the centre of a scandal around representations of Asian identity when he wore prosthetic eye pieces to simulate an "Oriental" look in his performance in Miss Saigon which toured to

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[29] I want to acknowledge David Savran who made this suggestion at the 2002 "The Wooster Group and Their Tradition" conference in Brussels. Savran suggested that the changes in the way that African American artists were engaging with colour on the stage in the 1990s, including staging "black" "blackface" performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, necessarily changed the way in which the Wooster Group's use of blackface was received by critics and audiences alike.

Broadway in New York in 1991. Asian actors in the American actors" unions protested at the implications of Pryce's Orientalism for the employment of Asians on the American stage. Pryce's performance raised the question voiced by Susan Bennett: "should an audience see - and therefore believe (in the name of artistic freedom) - that Jonathan Pryce *is*, or even appears as, an Asian man?" (Bennett 1997, 175).

These controversies form a backdrop to the Wooster Group's work with blackface, Orientalism and hyperbolic stereotypes of gender identity. The question of who has the right to represent an "Other" in performance is a question which underlies many of the criticisms of their work. Crossing practices in these cases are overtly concerned with the question of power in relation to the "authenticity" of the actor's body on the stage. Therefore, there is an underlying tension between the anti-racist gesture of having the images of race or gender represented by those who share those same characteristics, and the anti-racist gesture of de-essentialising race and challenging the fixity of bodily categories of race and gender. As Susan Bennett argues: "As the very ground on which belief is founded, the visuality of identity is, then, all important and the notion of authenticity produces an apparently always contested site" (Bennett 1997, 175). While the question of authenticity is fragmented and deconstructed in the Wooster Group's work, nonetheless I will argue that their use of blackface and Orientalism on the stage creates both problematic and subversive meanings in performance.

While Warner and Shaw have used inappropriate bodies to interrupt and critique the power of the texts they perform on the stage, the Wooster Group have employed consciously appropriated bodies in their work, bodies which are knowingly fictional representations of races and cultures outside of the make-up of the Wooster Group's company and audience profile. While Patrice Pavis describes appropriation as that which: "reduces everything to the perspective of the target culture, which is in the dominant position and turns the alien culture to its own end" (cited in Bennett 1997 202), the Wooster Group appropriate bodies while acknowledging that act of appropriation in their performances, foregrounding the inauthenticity of the bodies on their stage. As I will show, this deliberately artificial approach also applies to the "dominant bodies" on the stage, to the representations of whiteness and masculinity in their work. As a result, the Wooster Group produce subversive and interrogative forms of identity in performance which challenge the normative approach to gender, race and

the Orient. However, the ethical problems of appropriation still remain, and I will investigate this tension in their work further.

The Semiotics Of The Wooster Group

Unlike Warner and Shaw, who are reviewed and interviewed extensively by the popular press, The Wooster Group have a far less public profile and, after the controversy created by their early work, they closed their shows to reviews, only reopening them in 1997 when *The Hairy Ape* played on Broadway. However, again unlike Warner and Shaw, the Group have attracted extensive academic interest, starting with publications of their plays in *Performing Arts Journal* in the late 1970s, and becoming well known through David Savran's book, *Breaking The Rules,* in 1984. Interest in their work has continued, with writings on their work from prominent scholars such as Eleanor Fuchs (1996), Phillip Auslander (1992), and Baz Kershaw (2000), and their status in the academic community was fully confirmed by a conference in their name held at the Free University of Brussels in May 2002. The scholarly focus on their work has also attracted a scholarly audience to their performances and so the context in which the Wooster Group work has become - reluctantly - academic. As a result, my discussion of the semiotic encoding of the company cannot rely to the same degree on popular critical response - which frequently focuses on the visual encoding of performers - and must deal with the descriptions of the process and politics of their work that academic interviews and articles tend to employ.

The semiotic encoding of the gender identity of LeCompte, Dafoe and Valk differs through their various positions in the company. LeCompte's description of her political approach to representation belies a gendered dynamic to how she makes theatre: "That's one of my things about male writers of the "50's", says LeCompte, "their ability to pinpoint right and wrong. Miller is so clear about it. I can't be clear. As a woman of the "60s, "70s, "80s, I can't be clear. I don't know who the enemies are. I don't know if there are enemies" (LeCompte in Aronson 1985, 75). It is clear that, rather than working with the notions of truth or the universal, LeCompte's politics are relativist and uncertain. However, LeCompte frames these politics in gendered terms, and her relationship with the authority of texts is key to her gendered semiotics in the company's profile.

LeCompte does not usually read playtexts before directing them: "I don't like to read the story beforehand [...] I guess almost every piece we've done I might have read once, or not read - had somebody read it to me once" (LeCompte 2000). The authority of the text is fragmented, and dispersed in her productions, competing with the meanings produced through technology, acting and dance, rather than being a central source of meaning as with Warner's productions. LeCompte therefore challenges the authority of (male) writers and reconfigures the semiotic encoding of her own gender identity in her work. By defining these writers as both male and absolutist, she attributes her relativist politics to both her femaleness and to her political and historical context. By pitting her authority against that of these writers, LeCompte challenges the gendered status quo of the canon, using the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity within the texts as a means to subvert their cultural power and currency. LeCompte's femaleness works as a counterpoint to the masculine power of playwrights such as Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller and Thornton Wilder.

However, the Wooster Group are not semiotically encoded as "feminine" in the academic and public press. It has been Dafoe, Spalding Gray, and the late Ron Vawter who have had public profiles outside of the company, and have alternated between the commercial sector and the Wooster Group. While LeCompte and Valk are powerful within the company, they are "invisible" in terms of the semiotics of celebrity, whereas the male actors in the company have become prominent and public figures. This inevitably effects how the gender representations in their work have been constructed and can be received. Unlike Warner and Shaw who are publicly positioned as a "female" creative team, the Wooster Group is not generally discussed in terms of gender, and the figure of LeCompte as a female artistic director is frequently subsumed by the more prominent male figures in the company. While the company is populated by influential women, the public image of the company is male dominated and this image potentially contains and subsumes some of the critiques of gender in their work.

However, the masculinity of the male actors in the company is not simplistic or unproblematic itself. The complexity of the Group's treatment of masculinity is clear in the multi-layered encoding of Willem Dafoe. Dafoe is familiar to audiences through his film persona, where he is usually cast in the roles of thugs, villains and aggressors. Dafoe confirms that this is how people react to him in the street: "The way people treat me in life is they treat me like I'm gonna slug "em, you know..." (Auslander 1988, 95).

The brutish physiognomy of Dafoe that has been constructed through his cinematic roles is undercut in the Wooster Group's work, especially in the Group's first four productions in which he was positioned in opposition to Ron Vawter. He described their relationship as: "Ron [...] is tense, kind of officious; [...] I serve the function of sometimes being the emotional thing. The man, a man" (Auslander 1988, 95).

As Philip Auslander points out, the role that Dafoe has played in the Wooster Group work, of the vulnerable and emotional man, contradicts the semiotics of Dafoe's cinematic body and the personae he embodies onstage: "Dafoe's stereotypically tough physiognomy plays against his emotional performance personae to create a blur" (Auslander 1988, 95). Dafoe's masculine encoding has been reconfigured through a knowing juxtaposing of his accumulated cinematic semiotics and the roles he plays in Wooster Group performances.

However, since Vawter's death in 1992, Dafoe has been positioned in opposition to Kate Valk, and their roles of protagonist/antagonist have developed through their past five productions. Kate Valk cannot be encoded like Dafoe through her public profile, as she rarely gives interviews. Instead, her gender encoding onstage can only be understood intertextually through her previous roles and performances. Valk has developed a tradition of parodying stereotypical femininity, opening up a critique of the representational norms of theatrical femininity which could be seen *in House/Lights*, *The Hairy Ape* and *To You The Birdie*. However, Valk's hyperbolically feminine roles have been offset by her tradition of playing a narrator figure on the stage, and assuming control of the action in performance, such as her narrator role in *Brace Up!* Valk's parodic femininity clashes with and contradicts her power on the stage, thus undermining the potentially objectifying effects of stereotypes she embodies on the stage. Valk's semiotics operates in a similar fashion to the effect Fiona Shaw has on the gender identity of her characters, except that this mechanism can only apply to Valk's performances when an audience member has an ongoing familiarity with her work.

Valk's "intertextual" gender encoding is revealing of the more general approach the Wooster Group takes to acting. The company have developed performance personae which are carried from production to production and are based upon the performers" interests and personalities in the company rather than on the characters in the playtexts. Rather than attempting to subsume the stage presence of the performer

within the illusion of the character, the anti-psychological stance of the Group means that the stage presence of the actor is what is primarily being performed on the stage. Implicit within this performance is the awareness of the illusion of presence, the fiction that is that the actor's "reality" is accessible and knowable, "acknowledging that the performer's personae are produced by the process as much as the process is produced by the performers" (Auslander 1988, 97).

The company do not offer the phenomenological sense of the "real" on the stage. As a result, when the actors take their bows at the end of the show, there is no sense that their personae have changed, or that the illusion of the performance has been broken. Unlike Fiona Shaw, whose stage practice attempts to construct an illusion, and whose "real" persona breaks that illusion and operates deconstructively upon it, the Wooster Group deny even the illusion of the "real" by constantly playing with their performance of the "real" and revealing it real to be an illusion. As a result, the presence of the actors on the stage is continually undermined, and refused, and is further fragmented by the effects of the use of video monitors, microphones and live cameras which work to destabilise the "real" of the actors" bodies through the virtual fragmentation of their image on the stage. Identity is framed, mediated and distorted and ultimately shown to be the product of representation itself. Life definitely imitates art in the Wooster Group's performances.

However, the Group's work shows the mediated nature of identity to be a tragic inevitability. While they show theatre practice as being formative of identity, the identities formed by theatre in the Group's work are frequently negative ones. Theatre is implicated in producing the grotesque masks of minstrelsy, the repressive and confining images of gender, the medicalised bodies of the post-AIDS era and the distorted bodies of the celebrity age. Just as one critic described the company's famous use of multi-media effects on the stage as "reluctantly technocentric" (Kalb, 1998), so too might the company be seen as "reluctantly theatre-centric." While the Group show identity to be inevitably constructed and mediated through representation, the dystopian effects of their work come from the sense that they mourn and decry this fact, implicating theatre practice in the formation of oppressive regimes of normative identity.

LeCompte's admission that she sees theatre as: "a free space where everything is mutable" (LeCompte & Valk, in interview with the author 2000, 2), belies a certain

primitivist utopianism lurking beneath her anti-essentialist deconstructive vision of identity. While LeCompte "announced performance itself as the field of raw material" (Fuchs 1996, 174), this announcement came as something of an elegy to the lost hopes of the 1960s avant-garde and her work can be seen as infused by this nostalgia for sincerity while at the same time refusing its existence on the stage.

The destabilising effects of the mediation of identity in the Wooster Group's work can be seen in their representation of race. Valk's tradition of blackface roles, for example, mediates her "whiteness" onstage so that, for a spectator familiar with her work, her performance of white roles is mediated by the Group's tradition of her blackface performances. Furthermore, the use of technology on the stage has mediated and fragmented the racial positioning of the actors in performance and has unsettled the sense of "authentic" racial bodies on the stage, as I will show in my discussion of The Emperor Jones in Chapter Six.

However, while the semiotics of the actors have certainly destabilised any notion of a stable or "real" racialised body onstage, a tension still exists between the metaphorical and material conditions of blackness and whiteness in their work. The company do not have any African American actors in their company, or many black spectators in their audience. The clash between the destabilised racial bodies of the Group's theatre performances, and the material and economic conditions of race is summed up by a quote from Willem Dafoe describing what happened when a company delivered fried chicken to the door of the Performing Garage as the result of a prank call made during their performance of *Route 1&9*,

"Well I'm standing near the door, getting ready to go out and dance or something. And I hear a knock on the door. And there I am in blackface. And I open up the door and there's the biggest fucking black guy you've ever seen in your life with, dig this, one of those accident collars on [laughter] This guy was mammoth, I'm not kidding" (in Savran 1988, 26).

Dafoe's blackface encounter with a "real" black person is telling. The gap between Dafoe's metaphorical engagement with the questions of race, and the presence of a black delivery man is simultaneously comic and disturbing. While the Group experiment formally with the destabilisation of bodily identities, they still do so in the white elite environs of avant garde theatre. The mediated qualities of the bodies they

produce on the stage are problematised by the appropriated qualities of those same bodies, and this proves an embattled context for the Wooster Group's work.

The problematic context of the Group's work can be seen in the critics" configurations of the *audience's* bodies rather than the performers" in reviews. The marginal and yet elite nature of the company's context can be found in the description of how "along the way, the troupe has consistently drawn the sort of exotic looking audiences who seem destined to drift on to cool clubs with unlisted phone numbers after the show" (Brantley 1998). Critics also point to the economic and educational homogeneity of the audience: "audiences were crowded and varied in age if not in class or education" (John Russell Brown 1999, 196).

The marginal and yet elite status of the Wooster Group's audiences forms a problematic context for the politics of their work. After all, if the audiences are predominantly white, middle class and well educated, the Group's interrogations of race, gender and the body are likely to be familiar already to this audience as intellectual, rather than socially material (or politically necessary) concepts. As Auslander points out: "while the blackface may become a sign for the different and contradictory social positions in the Wooster Group's idiosyncratic semiotics, it is difficult to see how that would enable the Wooster Group's mostly white, middle class downtown art patron audiences to occupy the position of the oppressed" (1992, 88).

Furthermore, as I argued earlier, the fact that Afro-American artists are underrepresented in American theatre further problematises the deconstruction of race which the Group perform. The absence of black performers in their company, black audience members watching their shows, or many black artists offering competing images in theatres elsewhere, was one of the reasons for the controversy created by their use of blackface. The elite nature of the Group's audiences potentially contains the politics of their work, and problematises their explorations of class and colour in the absence of people who materially experience the concerns of those identities day to day[30]. While the dominant forms of these identities - masculinity, and whiteness - are

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[30] Obviously white people also experience their colour and racial positioning materially, but I would argue that they are not necessarily politically or economically disenfranchised as a result (although of course questions of class must also come into play in relation to colour). While I don't want to essentialise the race of the performers working with The Wooster Group, the racial homogeneity of the company has contributed to the criticisms levelled at their use of blackface. Notably, however, their

also explored and contested alongside minority identities, there is a sense that the Group are "preaching to the converted," and this exemplifies the problematic nature of The Wooster Group's politics which I will discuss in relation to their use of blackface more generally, and in particular, in their production of *The Emperor Jones.*

The Sensation Of Something New

Gender

The contradictory approach of the Wooster Group to the representation of identity could be seen in their production of *LSD (... Just The High Points ...)* in 1984[31]. By juxtaposing Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* with the life and times of Timothy Leary the LSD guru, LeCompte deployed the stereotypes of gender in Miller's play order to subvert his constructions of masculinity and femininity. LeCompte used the stereotypes created by Miller's representation of gender in order to dismantle his representations from within the performance.

The Crucible is set in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692, during the time of the witch trials, and was written by Miller in 1953. A number of adolescent girls claim to have been possessed by the devil and accuse the other women in the town of being witches. The play centres on the figure of John Proctor who realises that the ringleader, Abigail, began the witch hunt in revenge on his wife, who had discovered that Abigail was having an affair with Proctor. Proctor ends up being imprisoned, comes close to "confessing" that he has seen the devil in order to escape hanging, realises that he would have to betray the others in the town to do so, and is executed. In the printed version of the play, Miller intersperses the dialogue with written asides about the philosophical nature of the play: the social reliance on Good and Evil, the lack of ability to recognise relative values, the danger of religious or dogmatic thinking and, finally, making clear the allegorical nature of the play he discusses the relationship between America and Russia (see Miller, 1982).

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appropriations of Eastern performance techniques, such as Kabuki theatre, or their use of other cultural theatre practices, such as Hawaiian folk dance, have not incurred the same level of criticism, which may be a comment on the specific connotations of blackface for an American audience, or may also reflect how The Group have used these techniques in performance.

[31] My analysis of this production is based on the academic sources cited.

Miller's text showed the consequences of social hysteria based on the morality of extremes of good and evil. However, while his play dramatises the relative nature of virtue in the figure of John Proctor, whose moral struggle is shown throughout the play, Miller nonetheless relies on a vilification of the female characters in the play, especially Abigail. Miller describes Abigail as: "*seventeen [...] a strikingly beautiful girl, an orphan with an endless capacity for dissembling*" (Miller 1982, 18), while Mercy, her cohort is described as: "*a fat, sly, merciless girl of eighteen*" (Miller, 1982, 24). The dissembling nature of the girls who "cry witch" is offset by the moral strength of Proctor. By juxtaposing the figure of Timothy Leary, the LSD guru, with Miller's *The Crucible*, The Wooster Group questioned the "black and white" signification of Abigail as a: "mad ...murderous bitch" (Savran 1984, 206), and told Abigail's story in the context of Leary's, also a subversive, whose attempts to challenge the social status quo were carried out through dubious means (see Savran, 1988).

The Group showed how Miller distances femininity and makes masculinity "universal" in his play, through their use of costumes and microphones onstage. When the Group performed excerpts of *The Crucible,* the female performers were dressed in 17th Century costume, whereas the male actors were costumed in clothes from the 1950s, "60s and "80s. The male characters were dressed in clothes from the period when Miller wrote his play, and from the contemporary moment of the audience, whereas the women were distanced by wearing the clothes of the time the play is set. This use of costume became an interrogation of the gender dynamics in Miller's play, which distanced and historicised the female characters while rendering John Proctor a universal every-man. That universality, however, was shown by the Wooster Group's use of costumes to have been a product of Miller's time and place, historicising his use of the "universal" and revealing it to be inflected by the question of gender.

This interrogation of the gendered dynamics of Miller's play was extended to an interrogation of the gendered dynamics of theatrical performance through the use of microphones on the stage. The men spoke through microphones but the women did not. The authority of the spoken word was gendered by amplifying the male voices but leaving the female voices unmediated on the stage. LeCompte noted that: "the live performer has to shout very loud and give an immense emotional output to equal a whisper on a microphone. So a lot of the performance played off huge emotional vocal

outputs against very tiny verbal outputs into the mic. [...] The women got the costumes, the men got the mics" (LeCompte, in Aronson 1985, 72).

By positioning the women in relation to the "image" of history through costume, and the men in relation to the textual authority of the play through vocal amplification, the production fully maintained the gender dynamics of Miller's text and of theatrical performance more generally. As Phillip Auslander points out: "The male is aligned with the text, the traditional locus of authority in theater, associated here with the phallic microphone, and the female with the image, traditionally the "secondary" elaboration of text in production" (Auslander 1992, 93). The Wooster Group maintained the status quo of theatre practice, re-affirming the gendered economy of representation which positions woman as the visual objects of desire onstage.

However, as Auslander points out, within the Wooster Group's own work the "image is far more central [...] than the verbal text [...] their images frequently undermine, ironize or overwhelm texts" (Auslander 1992, 93). The affirmation of the gender status quo of theatre practice in *LSD* was undermined by the visual economy of Wooster Group productions in which the spoken word tends to be undermined, contradicted or placed in tension with the visual encoding onstage. Rather than reconstructing the theatrical relations of gender in *LSD,* the Wooster Group maintained them fully, and therefore subverted them by foregrounding the conventions of gender through their use of costume and technology.

LSD (... Just The High Points ...) is a good example of the way in which the Wooster Group have engaged the question of gender identity in their work. Rather than trying to find an alternative "new" way to create gender images on the stage, the Wooster Group employ the stereotypical images and strategies of the conventional representations of gender, but perform them to such an extreme that they become denaturalised and are shown to be historically specific. Audiences are therefore given enough distance from the images to recognise their artificiality. Added to this, the Group's use of technology, dance, and their pastiche approach to playtexts, work to undercut and undermine any definitive sense of gender identity, so that their performances of these stereotypes are fragmented and denied presence on the stage.

However, while the Wooster Group critique the stereotyping of gender roles, they do not necessarily offer anything alternative in its place, and are always mindful of their own complicity in the problematic representation of identity on the stage. As a

result, while the spectator is distanced from these gender images, this is not to say that the Wooster Group offers any sense that these images can be contested or changed. Rather, these images are shown to be formative in how we see and act gender identity outside the theatre. Representation becomes a trap in their work, and the Wooster Group do not pretend to be able to move beyond or outside the trap which these images form. However, by performing these images to such extremes, the company do offer the sense of subversive possibilities of performance, as Judith Butler advocates. The hyperbolic nature of the Group's performances mean that there is a possibility of doing gender "wrong" and denaturalising its seeming hegemonic inevitability. Gender stereotyping is resisted through its wholesale endorsement in the Wooster Group's work, a strategy which always runs the risk of maintaining what it seeks to undermine.

Inauthentic Identities

The Wooster Group's destabilisation of identity stereotypes can be seen in their consciously inauthentic deployment of crossing practices such as Orientalism and blackface. Their use of these styles is knowingly appropriative, and they foreground the artificiality of their use of these styles and the images these styles create. The artificiality of these styles was particularly prominent in two of their productions, *Brace Up!* and *LSD (... Just The High Points ...)*. In both productions, the "real" of racial identity was shown to be a product of representation and performance.

Brace Up! (1991)[32] was a revisioning of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* through the lens of Japanese performance styles. Chekhov's play is set in a provincial town in Russia and concerns the lives of the Prozorov family: Andrei and his three sisters Olga, Masha and Irina. The play deals with the boredom at the centre of their lives and their longing to return to Moscow, which they position as the repository of their hopes and dreams (see Chekhov, 1994). As Stephen Mulrine points out, the sisters are modelled on stereotypes of feminine identity: "in abstract terms, there is an element of folk tale symmetry about the play, and it is perhaps not too fanciful to extend this to a rude typology of the sisters themselves - the solidly domestic Olga, the sensual Masha, the

[32] My analysis of this production is based on a still camera video of the 1991 production at the Performing Garage in the Lincoln Centre library, and from the academic sources cited.

virginal Irina - like facets of some idealised Woman" (Mulrine 1994, xv). The indirectness of the emotion and action in the play suited the sensibilities of Stanislavsky, who directed its debut production in St Petersburg with the Moscow Art Theatre in 1901. As Susie Mee points out, "Method inspired clichés [...] have stuck to this play like barnacles [ever since]" (Mee 1992, 143).

The Wooster Group's production of *Three Sisters* combated the accrued naturalistic associations of the play by juxtaposing them with the formalism of the Japanese stage, and by casting the roles of the sisters with elderly actresses, thus undermining the limited representations of women in the play. *Brace Up!* originated with LeCompte imagining: "that there is a Japanese troupe that performs Chekhov. There is this travelling troupe in this burned-out hotel in the middle of New York and they are performing this Western classic that may or may not be *Three Sisters*" (Marianne Weems, cited in Arratia 1992, 139). Chekhov's play was used as a vehicle for the Group's experimentation with Japanese theatre and performance styles.

In their use of Eastern performance practices, The Group followed in the footsteps of the early practitioners of the avant-garde, who admired and emulated Eastern theatre practice in their work. However, the Wooster Group's artistic project differed from theirs in a number of key ways. While practitioners such as Yeats and Jarry used Eastern techniques in order to construct a formal artistic unity on the stage, the Wooster Group used Japanese references in order to dislocate and disintegrate Chekhov's world. They emphasised the contrast between the Japanese elements and the Russian world of the play in *Brace Up!,* rather than using Japanese performance as a way of framing, unifying and "explaining" Chekhov. Equally, unlike the "authentic" renditions of Asian coding and practice in the work of practitioners such as Brook, The Wooster Group made no claims to authenticity in their use of the Japanese elements in the production and made it very clear that they were being intentionally artificial in their approach to these elements. As Kate Valk put it:

> When we review the Noh texts and the Kyogen texts, when we watch Japanese theatre and Japanese movies, we are not going to try to reproduce their technique, we are not going to try and walk as they walk in the Noh theatre. We make our own Japan, our own Japanese style because it's culturally removed, it's existing in our heads [...]. So it is our Japan (Valk cited in Arratia 1992, 138).

The Wooster Group's use of Japanese elements was a self-consciously artificial device, one which acknowledged the Western fantasy inherent within intercultural "borrowings" from the East and, in fact, within Western attitudes towards the East and towards Japan itself. The Wooster Group's Orientalism was closer to British pantomime than the formalist innovations of the European avant garde. Their use of popular culture forms, such as the *Godzilla* film, alongside the stately form of Kabuki, equally undercut the more usual "high art" leanings of European practitioners, and countered Said's argument about the static quality of the "Orient" which Westerners evoke.

The Wooster Group's emphasis on the Westernised forms of Japanese culture revelled in the globality of consumerism, the intermingling of East and West through popular culture forms, and the shifting rather than static qualities of Japanese culture. The Wooster Group incorporated an admission of the artificial nature of their borrowing into their use of Japanese elements on the stage, an effect which was repeated in their 1993 production of *The Emperor Jones*.

A similarly "inauthentic" performance strategy applied to Kate Valk's performance as the character of Tituba from Miller's The Crucible in *LSD (... Just The High Points ...)*. Valk played Tituba - who is a black slave from Barbados in the play - in blackface with an "Aunt Jemima" accent taken from the stereotypes of black women from 1950s American advertisements. Valk's performance as Tituba became a way for the Group to foreground the "white" and 1950s sensibilities underpinning Miller's construction of a black character in his play, in order to critique the notion of a white construction of blackness, and to answer the critical response to *Route 1&9 (The Last Act)*.

Valk's blackface was complicated further, however, when Valk also played Mary Warren, one of the white girls in *The Crucible*. Rather than remove her make-up, Valk simply switched the "name tags" in front of her from "Tituba" to "Mary" and spoke Mary's lines without her Aunt Jemima dialect. This changeover unsettled the reading of colour on the stage. By playing Mary in blackface, Valk made the make-up colour arbitrary, but showed how the performance of "blackness" involved not only colour, but also vocal registers, accents and body language (See Aronson 1985, 76). Valk's move between a white character and a black character confused the signification of the black make-up, refusing the audience a stable interpretation of its meaning, but

nonetheless commenting on the racial politics of Millers play. This complication was extended even further at the end of the scene, when Valk applied white makeup to her face, covering, but only partially concealing, the blackface beneath.

By applying "white face", Valk not only showed blackness to be an arbitrary sign by playing Tituba and Mary Warren simultaneously, she furthermore showed whiteness to be similarly arbitrary. As Phillip Auslander argued: "Her later activity of covering her blackface makeup with whiteface served to deprivilege whiteness with respect to blackness. Rather than functioning as the assumed norm, as a neutral ground supporting an ideological representation of blackness, whiteness itself became a second-order representation, a mask over a mask"(Auslander 1992, 91). Typically of the Wooster Group's work, the presence of the "original" actor beneath the mask was characteristically disrupted and undermined by the construction of the illusion onstage, an illusion which disturbed the possibility of a "real" body in performance. Valk undermined the "reality" of both racial identities, refracting and distorting her own "original" colour beneath her make-up. This made her use of blackface more acceptable to critics than that of *Route 1&9* previously. Valk's performance questioned the stability of racial identity through her multi-layered masking on the stage.

The Wooster Group's use of blackface and Orientalism involved impersonating a performance style in order to serve their aesthetic, while at the same time acknowledging the dubious inauthenticity of their use of that style. Unlike the use of blackface in *Route 1&9*, which served a very specific purpose in their work as a critique of racial representations in the American canon, the use of Japanese elements in *Brace Up!* served a purely aesthetic purpose. This was to critique not the representations of identity within Chekhov's text, but the representation of Chekhov's text on the American stage. While Valk's performance of stereotype in *LSD* in 1984 operated to undermine the stereotypical discourse of Miller's play, the Group's aesthetic engagement with Japanese theatre when performing Chekhov marked a de-politicised turn in their work, away from the provocative and confrontational methods used in the early 1980s, towards a greater affiliation with the image-based formalist work of Foreman, Wilson, and the earlier European Orientalists.

Interlinked Identities

While gender, race and the Orient have been investigated through the use of stereotypes in the work of the Wooster Group, their work has also been characterised by the production of these identities *in* and *through* one another. This effect could be seen in their first production, *Route 1&9,* which investigated the repression of racial and sexual identities by interlinking them in performance[33]. *Route 1&9 (The Last Act)* was a radical revisioning of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* and was a mish-mash of popular and past performance styles, including blackface minstrelsy and pornography, the combination of which incurred controversy, protest and the rescindication of 40 percent of the Group's funding from the New York State Council On The Arts (see Savran, 1988)

Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* was first produced in 1939 and is set in Grover's Corner, a small town in America. The story centres on the relationship between George Gibbs and Emily Webb. The first act is called "Daily Life" and shows the Gibbs and Webb family-life in action, setting the scene of the town's society, interviewing key members of the community and showing George and Emily as sixteen year olds. The second act is called Love And Marriage, and shows the wedding day of George and Emily, flashing back to the moment they became engaged. The "Last Act" of the play is set in the town's graveyard and we see Emily join the dead after dying in childbirth. While she attempts to relive her life, she finds it too painful, discovering: "how troubled and how... how in the dark live persons are" (Wilder 2000, 88).

The message of the play is contained in one of the last lines of the play when the character of the Stage Manager suggests: "there's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being"(Wilder 2000, 89). *Our Town* is undoubtedly marked throughout by Wilder's universalising tendencies and Wilder's text has been criticised for its claims to be universally human while excluding and repressing difference from its world (See Michael Vanden Heuvel 1995, 65-66).

While the Wooster Group's use of blackface and pornography in their production of Wilder's play has been seen by some critics as a necessary critique, even destruction, of its politics, I want to argue that The Wooster Group did not so much destroy the play as work within the gaps and discontinuities - the differences - already implicitly supplied by the playtext itself. Their use of the exploitative performance

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[33] My analysis of this production is based on the academic sources cited.

styles of blackface and pornography exposed what is absent in the world of Wilder's play. The homogeneity of racial identity and the sexual repression of his puritanical world were highlighted by The Wooster Group's inclusion of these elements.

However, the blackface and pornography did not offer idealised "multicultural" or tolerant alternatives to the constrictions of Wilder's world. Rather, *Route 1&9 (The Last Act)* presented the alternatives which Wilder's repressive world itself had created, the "others" of Wilder's culture. Even while the blackface and porn offered an energetic vision in contrast to the puritan restraint of *Our Town*, they were also confining and demeaning portraits of race and sexuality (See Nick Kaye 1994, 124). Rather than providing an alternative utopia to Wilder's utopia, The Wooster Group explored what was repressed within the work itself, and performed the results of such repression, showing race and sexuality to be demeaned, commodified, and simplified, through the discourse of universalism. As David Savran points out: "what is most disturbing about the black face sequence is less the quotation of racist stereotypes, than their use to reveal what has been repressed in the culture that created them" (Savran 1988, 39).

Like the representations of gender in *LSD*, the portraits of race and sexuality in canonical American theatre texts were critiqued in *Route 1&9* by using the grotesque images which these texts had produced by default, through their repression of diversity and their claims to universalist truths. However, *Route 1&9* was heavily criticised for what audiences saw as the demeaning portrayal of black people and women. I will discuss the causes of this controversy further, but it is important to acknowledge here that the representations of sexuality and race were produced through and by one another and were shown to originate in the repressive representation of American life in classic American plays.

Fragmented Bodies

Racial, gendered, Orientalist and virtual identities have been explored and investigated in the Wooster Group's work. The result of their explorations has been the

envisioning of fragmented and mediated bodies, which could be seen in their most recent production, *To You, The Birdie* (2001)[34].

To You, The Birdie was first staged in The Performing Garage as a work in progress in September 2001 and was based on Racine's *Phaedre*. Racine's play is an exploration of the conflict between reason and emotion. Phaedre has fallen in love with her step-son, Hippolytus, and hearing that her husband Theseus the great warrior and slayer of monsters has died, she confesses her love to him, urged on by her servant Oenone. Hippolytus is horrified, and when Theseus returns, having escaped from Hades, Phaedre accuses Hippolytus of rape. Theseus banishes his son, and condemns him to a gory death from the god Neptune, then discovers that Oneone has drowned herself, and Phaedre has been lying. Hippolytus is killed by Neptune, Phaedre commits suicide, and Theseus is left to confront his own lack of judgement (see Racine, 1970).

The Wooster Group's *To You, The Birdie* was an exploration of the mediated qualities of the body and celebrity in contemporary culture, layering Racine's text with technological "masks", disjointed voice-overs, bodies "made strange" and contemporary dance, to provide a meditation on the role of the body in performance and culture. Video images worked to dislocate the body from the voice, and to comment on the contemporary fascination for image, body and celebrity in Western culture. *To You, The Birdie* was a meditation on the body as public spectacle.

The meditation on celebrity had a gendered dimension in performance. Both Valk as Phaedre, and Oenone, played by Francis McDormand, wore distressed 17th Century style corsets, but their elbows were tied to their corsets, giving them limited movement in their upper body (see Appendix One, Figure 7). Valk's corset had two metal hoops on its back which her servants used to move her onstage, place her in various positions and sit her into a bath chair, whereupon they attended to her with enemas and cholostemy bags, helping her to defecate and urinate. Valk's own body became a spectacle to herself, as she mimed to video footage of her own feet, and she

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[34] My analysis of this production is based on two viewings of the live performance at the Georges Pompidou Centre as part of the Fesitival d'Automne in November 2001, one viewing of the live performance at the Riverside Studios in London as part of the LIFT festival in May 2002, and photographs and reviews from the Performing Garage archive.

played Phaedre as a spectacle of tragedy, femininity, and celebrity, incapable of any greater physical action than being looked upon.

The distorting effect of celebrity on the body was also shown through Willem Dafoe's hyperbolic performance of masculine power and strength in his role as Theseus. Dafoe placed his head behind a video monitor - which then played a pre-recorded image of his face - and contorted his ribcage to become so large that it looked inhuman (see Appendix One, Figure 8). Dafoe's body-builder-like poses and the mutation of his body created a sense of the formative and distorting effects of mediation and celebrity, using his body to become, "as memorable a physical metaphor for arrogance as you are likely to see" (Feldman 2001).

Bodies in this production were tortured, mediated and medicalised. The effects of representation was shown to have gendered and physical effects as shown, again, through the hyperbolic performances of masculinity and femininity in Valk and Dafoe's performances. Racine's neo-classical tragedy of illegitimate love transformed into the Wooster Group's contemporary tragedy of the mediatised age, and the bodies on the stage were fragmented and distorted beyond repair by the formative effects of celebrity and performance. To You, The Birdie demonstrated a more general trend in the Wooster Group's work of refusing the "real" of actor's bodies, by disrupting and fragmenting their presence onstage through the use of technology and costume. The fragmentation of bodies in their productions has had an important influence on how they have engaged questions of race and gender in their work, which I will investigate further in relation to their use of cross-dressing in The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape in Chapters Six and Seven.

Fragmented Audiences

The Wooster Group have made their name from their explorations of identity on the stage. Throughout their work they have employed stereotypes in order to subvert the discourses which produced those stereotypes in the first place. This effect could be seen in the hyperbolic performances of gender and race by Dafoe and Valk throughout the history of the company. The result of this subversive approach to identity has been the undermining and fragmenting of the actor's presence on the stage, the construction of consciously inauthentic bodies and performance styles, and the fragmentation of the body in performance. The Wooster Group have consistently appropriated performance

styles and "bodies" in their work which have been problematised by the context of their performances. However, the company have also consistently undermined the positioning of the spectator's relationship with their work.

Rather than offering the audience a safe space from which to judge their performances the Wooster Group have consistently undermined the vantage point of the spectator, implicating their presence in the formation of the identities the Group perform on the stage. *Route 1 & 9,* for example, gave audiences no stance from which to judge the use of blackface or pornography, and this was at the centre of the controversy surrounding the production. Much of the criticism levelled at the company was that their unmediated (and uncondemning) use of blackface minstrelsy had constructed a racist portrait of black people on the stage (see Savran, 1988). The fact that the Wooster Group had provided no "distance" on the subject meant that spectators felt that they had failed to position the audience in a way which would make clear that they condemned the practice. The controversy over *Route 1&9* spelled out the paradox within the strategies of contemporary avant-garde practice. While the Wooster Group dismantled the representational strategies of Wilder's text, they simultaneously ran the risk of affirming the racism and sexism which they critiqued.

Part of the problem with their subversive approach to identity in performance is the context in which they work. In *Route 1&9*, for example, while The Wooster Group production was undoubtedly more complex and intelligent than its detractors made it out to be, nonetheless, their use of blackface was undeniably problematic due to the context in which the performance took place. As LeCompte herself pointed out, the Wooster Group's audience is almost entirely white: "maybe once every two or three performances we have a black person in the audience" (cited in Savran 1988, 40). While blackface minstrelsy excluded black people from its performances and used blackness as a metaphor to understand whiteness, and Wilder excluded blackness from the frame of his play in order to celebrate whiteness as universally "human", so too did the Wooster Group's production take place in an almost exclusively white context, both in terms of the actors on the stage and in terms of the people in the audience. The Group's critique of racism bordered on an affirmation of racist stereotypes. However, the Group's use of blackface also changed and became more sophisticated over time. This has been partly due to the more integrated textual critique within their use of

blackface, and also due to the inclusion of "whiteness" within the exploration of race (see Auslander 1992, 91).

While the company's early performances attracted controversy, later discussions of their work have centred on the Group as formalist innovators, focussing in particular on their use of technology on the stage. The Wooster Group have accumulated not only performance traditions but also interpretative traditions in their work, and there now appears to be a critical consensus amongst academics and critics in the popular press on the "greatness" of their productions. A number of the Group's performance traditions, such as blackface minstrelsy and pornography, have become accepted and even expected, in a way which contains the provocative impulses of their use.

The tensions in the positioning of the Group's work within their social and theatrical context is mirrored by the tensions within the work itself, between a mediated and fragmented vision of identity and a yearning for a utopian (fictional) moment in which bodies and identities were whole and free. Representation is shown by the Wooster Group to be an inescapably formative social mechanism, producing the Real identities to which spectators conform. The Wooster Group continually undermine their own ability to offer new identities in the place of old, repressive ones, and instead show that the only way to contest these stereotypes is through the subversive, and hyperbolic conformity to them. However, while the company uses theatricality as a central foundation to identity, nonetheless, there is also a sense of regret in their work that bodies are inevitably mediated through representation. The Wooster Group are reluctantly theatre-centric.

In their deconstructions of canonical theatre texts, their complex juxtapositions of multiple texts, their references to foreign and historical theatre styles, their foregrounding of the artificiality of identity, their deployment of stereotypes to critique stereotypical discourse, and their use of personae from production to production, the Wooster Group imagine and constitute their spectators as expert audience members. Their ideal spectator is familiar with the body of their work, is educated in contemporary theatre, film, dance and music, is knowledgeable about theatre history and popular culture, and is au fait with the technological techniques of the mass media and the formalist avant garde.

While the context of their work problematises their approach to identity in performance, the Wooster Group have produced complex, innovative and intelligent explorations of gender and race on the stage, and in the next chapter I will explore their multiple uses of cross-dressing in their 1993 production, *The Emperor Jones*.

Chapter Seven

"Genuine Negroes And Real Bloodhounds,"[35] Cross-dressing, The Wooster Group, O'Neill, and *The Emperor Jones*

Introduction

As I argued in the last chapter, the Wooster Group have established a reputation for controversial representations of identity on the stage, particularly in relation to race. While their deconstructive approach to playtexts has had productive and complex effects on how identity is positioned in their work, the context in which their productions take place problematises their engagement with identity.

In this chapter, I will investigate LeCompte's use of blackface, Orientalism and cross-gender casting in the Wooster Group's 1993 production of Eugene O'Neill's play, *The Emperor Jones*[36]. I will focus on how the interlinked relations of racial and Oriental cross-dressing produced a gendered dynamic on the stage, and how the hierarchy of identities in performance semi-erased the question of gender in the production. I will concentrate on the ways in which racial and gendered bodies were fragmented and destabilised in the production, and how theatre was implicated in the construction and materialisation of racial hierarchies.

Unlike Warner's production of *Richard II*, where the use of cross-dressing was used to destabilise a masculine view of history and nationality, but was ultimately refused by the production as a viable form of identity, cross-dressing in the Wooster Group's *The Emperor Jones* was shown to be central to the formation of identity, but negatively so in its construction of unequal and repressive social hierarchies. As I argued in the last chapter, the Wooster Group position theatricality as central in the construction of identity in their work, while at the same time yearning for a non-

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[35] Advertisement for the 1852 production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (cited in Edward G Smith 1983, 40).

[36] My analysis of this production is based on a still camera video of the production at the Belfast Theatre Festival in 1998, the Wooster Group film based on the show directed by LeCompte in 2001, and photographs and reviews from the Performing Garage archive.

mediated form of identity. I will argue in this chapter that the Wooster Group are both the rewriters and inheritors of Eugene O'Neill's primitivist legacy.

A discussion of cross-dressing in the Wooster Group's *The Emperor Jones* must necessarily take into account the complex matrix of relations between race, gender and Orientalism in their work, and how these relations intermingle and produce one another. The fact that Kate Valk played a black male character in blackface in the production poses the question of how gender was constructed through race in her performance, and what kind of bodies were materialised and imagined on the stage. This also raises the question of how performance and theatricality were seen in the production, how impersonation itself was understood in relation to the formation of identity. Furthermore, the ways in which the complex web of crossings in the show positioned the audience must also be taken into account in order to understand the implications of the cross-racial, gendered and national impersonations in the Wooster Group's *The Emperor Jones*.

As I argued in the last chapter, unlike the work of Warner and Shaw, the authority of the writer is not positioned centrally in The Wooster Group's work, but is deconstructed through various competing theatrical practices on the stage. The company's work has focused on the politics of performance itself, and this necessarily changes the ways in which cross-dressing operated in their show. Similar to *Richard II*, however, the cross-gender casting of Valk was subsumed by the question of race, "disappearing" in the reception of the production. LeCompte's *Jones* constructed a hierarchy of identities of which race was the most prominent, and the question of gender was overshadowed by the use of blackface in the production. However, I want to examine the ways in which the use of blackface minstrelsy and orientalism operated to produce a gendered dynamic on the stage in *The Emperor Jones* and I will go on, in the next chapter, to examine the gendering of colour in the Group's production of O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*.

Notably, the two productions were developed as companion pieces, operating as "positive" and "negative" images of each other through the oppositional colour coding and gendering of the Valk and Dafoe. This was consistent with O'Neill's own view of the plays, seeing *The Hairy Ape*: "as a direct descendent from *The Emperor Jones*" (O'Neill, cited in Wainscott 1988, 109). My discussion of *The Emperor Jones* will operate in a similar vein, providing a companion piece to my analysis of *The Hairy*

Ape, analysing the plays" networks of interrelating and competing modes of identity, which not only produce each other from within the performances, but also merge and form each other across the two productions.

Over seventy years after Eugene O'Neill wrote *The Emperor Jones* in 1920, The Wooster Group performed his play and simultaneously deconstructed the historical legacy of the text. While the play was a landmark in American theatre history for having cast a black actor in the lead role, in The Wooster Group's production, the black male lead role, Brutus Jones, was played by Kate Valk in blackface, while Smithers, the white Cockney trader, was played by Willem Dafoe in a cosmetic approximation of a white Kabuki mask. Both actors were dressed in costumes akin to Kabuki robes and performed three Kabuki style dances during the course of the production. The set was a bare white box and the only objects used were three T.V. monitors which were placed upstage, two microphones on stands through which the actors spoke, and a large chair on wheels which was covered with brown fake fur. Michael Feingold summed up the production as: "[a] parade of dislocations and seeming irrelevancies [which] not only animate [...] O'Neill's play but enrich [...] it" (Feingold 1998).

Critics received the production rapturously, favourably comparing the Wooster Group's interpretation of the text with O'Neill's original play, saying: "Elizabeth LeCompte's staging of The Emperor Jones is both great and outrageous" (Feingold, 1998). Writing in the *New York Press*, Jonathan Kalb's reaction was typical, "here is a classic play that is virtually unperformable in 1990s America in the manner the author envisioned in 1920. [...] Unfortunately, performed today as written (that is with earnest and realistic emotion by a black actor), the cunning yet superstitious and uneducated Jones too easily comes off as a racist stereotype" (Kalb 1998). In *The New York Times*, Ben Brantley suggested that, "America has long passed the point where a straightforward production of *The Emperor Jones* with a black man delivering O'Neill's dialectical speeches as written, could be other than embarrassing. Yet the drama remains fascinating and it would be a shame to consign it to the shelves of unplayable plays" (Brantley 1998).

It would appear, according to the critics, that a performance of O'Neill's play at the end of the 20th century demands a revisionist approach to save it from the unacceptably racist implications of the text. At the *beginning* of the 20th century

however, when O'Neill's play was written and first performed, *The Emperor Jones* was hailed as an important landmark for the representation of race on the American stage. By featuring a central black character, and by actually casting a black actor to play the role, O'Neill and his work were seen to be radically progressive in relation to race. However, by the end of the century, the Wooster Group were only able to relieve the racist implications of the text by using blackface in their production, a performance practice for which they themselves had been roundly criticised for using twelve years previously in *Route 1&9.* These historical contradictions were manifold in the Wooster Group's *The Emperor Jones*, and not only formed a backdrop to the production, but also played a central role in the representation of race, gender and the Orient in performance.

The reception of the Wooster Group's production of *Jones* prompts the question of why it had become not only acceptable, but *preferable,* to use blackface in their production, and why O'Neill's representation of race, which once had been seen as radically progressive was now deemed unacceptably racist.[37] This links into the question of gender, and why the critics praised the use of blackface but paid little attention to the cross-gender casting of Valk's Jones (and, as I will argue later, paid more attention to the gendering of Dafoe's Smithers). Why, in other words, did gender "disappear" in the production? The question of gender also relates to the role Orientalism played in the production and why it was that the Oriental styling of costumes, make-up and dance styles were less remarked upon in the response to the show than the blackface. This chapter will investigate how the merging of blackface and Orientalism in the production produced a gendered dynamic on the stage, and how

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[37] Roger Bechtel in his essay "Brutus Jones "N" The Hood: The Wooster Group, The Provincetown Players, And *The Emperor Jones"* (2002), outlines the historical contradictions and relations between O'Neill's moment and The Wooster Group, citing the fact that O'Neill's play *All God's Chillun Got Wings* had been censored by the mayor of New York for not using black actors in the performance, while The Wooster Group had lost funding for their use of blackface in *Route 1&9.* Similarly, recently critics have condemned O'Neill's play for being racist, while the Wooster Group's use of blackface in their work is now greeted rapturously by critics as a deconstruction of racism. While I have already debated this change in the reception of the Group's work in chapter four, the historical contradictions and relations between their work and O'Neill's played a central role within the production, as Bechtel outlines in his essay (See Bechtel 2002, 2).

crossing operated in the company's theatrical universe in which race and gender were produced through the act of cross-dressing onstage.

Many of these questions can be investigated by looking at the historicity in the Wooster Group's approach to *Jones*. As Roger Bechtel notes, this was the first production of a playtext which the Wooster Group had performed under its original title - which was also true for *The Hairy Ape* (Bechtel 2002, 2). Furthermore, the programme for the Group's *The Emperor Jones*, included an essay by W.E.B. DuBois, "The Negro And Our Stage," which had been included in the original Provincetown Playhouse Season programme of 1923-24, and which defended O'Neill's portrait of blackness in his plays (see *Wooster Group Programme* 1998). The Group also printed an excerpt from the playtext itself in the programme. Unlike their previous productions, which had combined up to eight different texts, *The Emperor Jones* marked a departure in the company's work of a "straight" performance of the play (straight for the Wooster Group, at least).

The historicising effects of the programme were reflected by the strategies of the production itself, and the use of blackface in Valk's performance was not only a performance of the role of Jones, but also a commentary on the historical legacies of the play. The cultural iconicity of the play which came from the casting of a black actor - Charles Gilpin - in the lead role, together with the fact that the role was played by the famous African American actor, Paul Robeson, in the 1930 film, acted as a secondary text for the Wooster Group's performance, informing the construction of racial and gendered identity on the stage, and relying on the intertextual knowledge of the audience and the iconicity of the text itself for the interpretation of the theatrical strategies at work in the production.

The production therefore crossed historical lines, doubly performing the play, and the context of that play. The play itself concerns the crossing of racial lines, with the doomed Jones attempting to mimic "whiteness." However, as Shannon Steen points out, the play is also more subtly encoded with metaphorical and textual crossings in the figure of O'Neill himself, an Irish American, who used the black body of Jones (and the black body of the actor playing Jones) as a means to examine the liminality of his own racial positioning in American culture (see Steen 2000, 354-6). Furthermore, the figure of Charles Gilpin, the original Brutus Jones, also crossed more subtly, by

playing a black character constructed by O'Neill, a character whose hyperbolic blackness reconfigured and constructed Gilpin's blackness onstage.

These various metaphorical and textual crossings were foregrounded by the Wooster Group's production of O'Neill's text, and I want to examine how they manifest themselves first in the playtext, then in O'Neill's own historical context, and, finally, in the Wooster Group's production of O'Neill's play. As I will show, the question of crossing is central to O'Neill's play and the context in which O'Neill worked, and The Wooster Group inherited these crossings and reconfigured them in their 1993 production. Throughout this chapter, I will examine how the Wooster Group used cross-dressing to perform history, to historicise O'Neill's engagement with race, through the irresistable force of theatrical representation.

Playing White: *The Emperor Jones*

Michael Feingold outlines the story of O'Neill's play:

> A black American escaping racism and some outstanding arrest warrants, Brutus Jones has talked his way onto the throne of a Caribbean island, planning to bail out as soon as he either loots all its resources or hears the first rumbles of revolt. The rumbles catch him by surprise, while the drumming of the natives (whom he dismisses as "ignorant bush niggers") affects him despite his pretensions to rationality, inflicting visions of his painful past on him till he loses his way and runs in a circle, becoming an easy target for the rebels. He has fled with only six bullets; he fires one, to wipe out a vision in each scene. At the end a native chief tells Smithers [a cockney trader who speaks with Jones in the first scene] of his death (Feingold 1998).

The Emperor Jones is a play intimately concerned with the complexities of colour. This can be seen in the relationship between Jones and Smithers. While Brutus Jones is a black man, and Smithers a white man, their relationship is an uneasy negotiation of power, with Jones's superior political power operating in conflict with Smithers" presumption of power through his whiteness. The complexity of their relationship is revealed in the liminality of their racial positioning and their visual encoding onstage. By placing these men in an antagonistic relationship, O'Neill explored how racial relations are historically constructed and how race is materialised through status and power.

The effects of O'Neill's historicisation of race can be seen in Smithers" liminal whiteness in the play, through his clown-like appearance which reveals his disempowered positioning in relation to Jones: "*The tropics have tanned his naturally pasty face with its small, sharp features to a sickly yellow and native rum has painted his pointed nose to a startling red*" (O'Neill 1998, 114). Smithers" discolouration reveals the complexity of his social positioning as "white" in the play and this complexity is extended by his national and class identity. As a Cockney, Smithers is ethnically distanced from the play's American audience, and so his whiteness is further complicated by his class positioning and his nationality. Smithers" whiteness is as tainted as his outfit of: "*a worn riding suit of dirty white drill*" (O'Neill 1998, 114), and O'Neill's visual treatment of the character suggests that race and colour are established through discourses of power and domination rather than through stable corporeal signs.

This destabilisation of colour can also be seen in the figure of Brutus Jones, an African American who mimics "whiteness." O'Neill shows this in his differentiation of Jones from the "typical Negro" appearance. Jones is described in the first scene as, "*a tall, powerfully built, full-blooded Negro of middle age. His features are typically Negroid, yet there is something decidedly distinctive about his face*" (O'Neill 1998, 116). Notably, O'Neill takes the homogeneity of African Americans for granted and makes Jones's physiognomy exceptional because of his complex positioning within the economic and political hierarchies of his West Indies empire. The fact that Jones is cross-dressed as white is revealed initially through his costume, which is a kind of parody of white clothing. Jones wears:

> *a light blue uniform coat, sprayed with brass buttons, [...] his pants are bright red with a light blue stripe down the side. Patent leather laced boots with brass spurs, and a belt with a long-barrelled, pearl-handled revolver in a holster complete his make-up (O'Neill 1998, 116).*

This is an outfit which O'Neill describes as: "not altogether ridiculous" (1998, 116), which reveals the combined comedy and menace of a black man dressing "up" in the garb of whiteness, an effect opposite to that of blackface minstrelsy, which relied on the comedy of white performers dressing "down" as black for the entertainment of its white audiences.

However, not only does Jones approximate whiteness visually, he also describes how he has internalised "white" behaviour through his observations of white people while working as porter on a Pullman carriage. As Jones tells Smithers,

> For de little stealin' dey gits you in jail soon or late. For de big stealin" dey makes you Emperor and puts you in de Hall O' Fame when you croaks. (Reminiscently) If dey's one thing I learns in ten years on de Pullman ca's listenin' to de white quality talk, it's dat same fact. And when I gits a chance to use it I winds up Emperor in two years (O'Neill 1998, 119).

By emulating and imitating the "white quality", Jones has become as brutal a coloniser as he was once colonised, and this is another kind of masquerade. To act brutally and to construct an empire is to cross-dress as a white person, and Jones has learnt to mask himself as white through the economic exploitation of others, and therefore achieves power and domination over the natives, whom he contemptuously describes as "ignorant bush niggers," (O'Neill 1998, 118)

Jones's relationship with the natives on the island further complicates the hierarchies of colour in the play. Jones places himself in opposition to the natives, not because of his colour - as Smithers does - but because of his nationality. Being American, and having been raised a Baptist, Jones considers himself to be superior to the natives, asking himself: "Is you civilised, or is you like dese ign'rent black niggers heah?" (O'Neill 1998, 138). However, he also reveals his willingness to mimic the native culture in order to achieve economic domination on the island, notably expressing this through the medium of colour, "If I finds out dem niggers believes dat black is white, den I yells it out louder 'n' der loudest" (O'Neill, 1998, 127).

Brutus Jones then, is a complex layer of impersonations, crossings and masquerades. Having been born an African American serving white Americans, he mimics whiteness, and then layers a mimicry of West Indian blackness on top of that masquerade. This constructs a complex hierarchy of colour in the play, which can be seen in the subtle negotiations of power between Jones and Smithers, both liminally coloured by the complexity of that hierarchy. As Jonathan Kalb describes it:

> Both [men] have platforms from which to express arrogance (political position and skin colour), and both are determined to press their non-advantages. Condescension and insincerity therefore amount to sources of camaraderie

between them - a sort of mutual backhanded acknowledgement of the void beneath the social "face" (Kalb 1988).

O'Neill foregrounds the constructed nature of race, and the implication of power within the social hierarchies of colour through the relationship between Jones and Smithers. Resisting a static, or Social Darwinist perspective on race, the opening scenes of O'Neill's play offer a deconstruction of the semiotics of colour in the cross-raced figure of Jones.

While the relationship between Jones and Smithers is predicated on race and power, it also has an implicitly gendered dynamic. Jones, in the first scene, asserts a stereotypical form of masculinity, emphasising his physical strength, his rationality, his cruelty and his courage. Smithers, by comparison, is weak-willed and malevolent, playing a feminised role to the masculine butchness of Jones. However, as Steen points out, Jones is the model Bhabhian hybrid, being "almost the same but not white", in his faulty mastery of English and his superficial grasp of rational, Western ways (see Steen 2000, 347). The instability of mimicry also applies to Jones's hyperbolic masculinity which is eroded during his journey into the forest, as I will argue further below.

While Jones and Smithers are positioned in a liminal, oppositional relationship, the play marginalises and renders static the "native" characters entirely, positioning them as uncomplicatedly "black," both physically and psychologically. This primitivism can be seen in O'Neill's description of Lem the native chief, "*Lem is a heavy-set, ape-faced old savage of the extreme African type, dressed only in a loin-cloth*" (O'Neill 1998, 151). While Jones and Smithers are liminally coloured in their complex power struggle, it is the non-American blacks who are statically positioned in the play. Americanness, even black Americans, operates in opposition to the romanticised and demeaning portrait of the non-West in *The Emperor Jones*.

The play's reliance on a static opposition between Western and non-Western identities can also be found in the contrast between the scenery in the first and second scenes of the play. The descriptions of Jones's palace in the first scene are: "*bare, white-washed walls. The floor is of white tiles. In the rear, to the left of centre, a wide archway giving out on a portico with white pillars*" (O'Neill 1998, 113). The whiteness of the palace contrasts with the forest in the second scene, "*a wall of darkness dividing the world. Only when the eye becomes accustomed to the gloom can the outlines of separate trunks of the nearest trees be made out, enormous pillars of*

deeper blackness" (O'Neill 1998, 130). The visual tropes of the play are clear from the outset: civilisation is coloured white and nature is associated with blackness.

Jones's retreat from his white palace to the darkness of the forest therefore becomes an act of unmasking, removing his signs of whiteness and revealing his black body beneath the masquerade of civilisation. Jones's journey is a journey through history, marking moments of his personal past: on a chain gang, meeting the man he murdered, as a Pullman porter, and then we move even further back into the history of Jones's race. We see the slave auctions, the slave ships and finally Jones's "primordial" roots in Africa with the vision of a crocodile and a masked witch doctor.

Jones not only experiences these visions, he himself begins to revert to what O'Neill saw as a "primordial" state. He loses items of clothing as he goes, and his body becomes progressively more visible throughout his journey. By the end: "*His pants have been so torn away that what is left of them is not better than a breech cloth*" (O'Neill 1998, 145). As Jones's body is asserted, his Westernised rejection of superstition and his claims to rationality are destroyed by the visions in the forest. Moving from the white space of civilisation, to the black space of the forest, Jones's "white" mask is stripped away to reveal the "authentic" identity beneath: embodied, superstitious, irrational and black.

Jones's journey from whiteness to blackness, civilisation to the jungle, is also a journey from masculinity to feminisation which can be seen in the coyly erotic striptease which he undergoes from scene to scene. While O'Neill used the loss of clothing to assert Jones's "authentic" body, he also established, for the white audience, an erotic specular relationship with Jones's black body; not only the body of the character, but also, and more powerfully, with the "authentic" black body of the actor playing Jones. Just as Jones's body is asserted, becoming a visual object of desire for the audience, he is also feminised, losing the stereotypical trappings of masculinity, becoming irrational, fearful, and servile. Jones's parodic whiteness also contained a parodic masculinity, and by stripping away his masquerade of colour, O'Neill also reconfigures Jones's gendered status.

"That Irishman, He Just Wrote The Play."

The play's journey into the history of Jones's race spells out a central contradiction in the O'Neill's approach to colour. Even while O'Neill deconstructs

racial hierarchies, both through the liminality of Jones and Smithers, and through the historicisation of black identity in Jones's journey, he nonetheless also renders race a stable, inescapable, corporeal fact. Jones's denial of his race leads to his death, and his body is asserted as the guarantor of the authenticity of his race. The play both deconstructs the static hierarchies of race which were prevalent at the time that O'Neill wrote his play, and simultaneously reaffirms them by showing Jones's racial cross-dressing to be unperformative: no matter how much Jones *acts* like a white man, he will never quite *be* a white man, and his black body is defenceless against the superstition of the "ignorant bush niggers" (O'Neill 1998, 118).

As Shannon Steen argues, this contradictory approach to colour in O'Neill's play is partly a product of the double role of Jones, as both a sympathetic protagonist and as an exoticised and distanced object: "the play produces a complex process of affinity and distance for white audience members, the ability to see Jones as both like and unlike, self and other, at the same time" (Steen 2000, 344). This complex positioning of Jones for a white audience meant that he was both endowed with sympathetic qualities while at the same time becoming static and exotic through the need to establish "his ostensible corporeal difference" (Steen 2000, 344).

The decision to cast a black actor as Jones in the Provincetown Playhouse production played a part in the play's contradictory attitude to race. The decision not to cast a blackface white actor in the role was haunted by blackface. On one hand, O'Neill made an important intervention into the racist orthodoxy of play production in America at his time. On the other hand, the substitution of a black actor for a white one leant heavily on primitivist notions of authenticity and "the real." Even while the casting of Gilpin, and later Robeson, undermined the hegemony of whiteness in the blackface system, O'Neill's play simultaneously offered the black body as an object of desire, spectacle and revulsion which still operated within the economy of representation constructed by white artists for white audiences. As Steen suggests: "O'Neill's play can be seen in a replacement tradition [for blackface], of black actors performing in roles written by white authors, devised in order to express white anxieties" (Steen 2000, 354).

The black actors playing Jones were therefore also crossing, or "in blackface" by playing the role. Black actors assumed a hyperbolic blackness in the role of Jones (who himself masquerades as parodically white), before revealing their "authentic"

black body on the stage. These actors were "passing" as black on the stage. By entering into a representational economy of race in which they had no authorial position, the actors playing Jones both imitated a blackness constructed by O'Neill and furthermore produced and materialised their own black corporeality as a sign of their authenticity as black actors.

The contradictions in O'Neill's portrait of blackness can also be seen in Charles Gilpin's remark about playing the role: "I created the role of The Emperor. That role belongs to me. That Irishman, he just wrote the play" (Gilpin, cited in Bogard 1972, 139). This remark is telling, revealing the tensions backstage in which Gilpin accused O'Neill of being racist, refused to use the term "nigger" in the script, and began to rewrite O'Neill's words, much to the playwright's disgust who threatened to beat him up. This struggle over authorship and authenticity is extended by Gilpin's description of O'Neill as an "Irishman", an ethnicity which was only tentatively considered to be white in the 1920's. As I argued in Chapter One, Irishness and blackness were aligned in the Victorian period and the Irish were prominent performers on the blackface stage who frequently sang Irish rebel songs, and laments, under the cover of black make-up, simultaneously aligning and distancing themselves from blackness.

Eugene O'Neill can be seen as an inheritor of this legacy and took an important step in rejecting the use of blackface in the productions of his play. Nonetheless, his primitivist approach to the black body still explored whiteness through the medium of blackness, and O'Neill's deployment of blackness in his play constituted him as a liminally white author engaging with the anxiety of colour through a liminally/absolutely black figure. In this way, O'Neill himself was cross-dressing as black, through the identificatory process of writing and stage representation. As Steen suggests, "the black Brutus Jones is a projection of the white O'Neill in racial drag, a fantasy of both his own blackness and his own whiteness" (2000, 353).

Through the identificatory structures of the play, it was not only O'Neill but his white audiences who were crossing by sympathising with the black Brutus Jones. However, the audience, even while crossing as black, could ultimately refuse the blackness of Jones and reaffirm their whiteness through the experience of crossing. Even while the play was revolutionary for requiring a white audience familiar with minstrelsy to empathise with a black figure, the spectator's ability to distance themselves from that figure simultaneously through the primitivised journey of Jones,

meant that audiences could retain a stable notion of their own whiteness during their experience of watching the play.

The struggle between O'Neill and Gilpin over authorship can therefore be seen as a struggle over the power to represent colour on the stage, a struggle which Gilpin ostensibly lost[38]. This clash can also be seen in the contrast between the white critics" reception of the Provincetown production in 1920 and a Harlem audience's response to a revival of the play in 1930. O.W. Firkins glowingly reported of Gilpin's 1920 performance that "we watched him lazily and gloatingly uncoil his sinuosities in the first scene with the stupefied recoil with which we might have watched the same process in the nodes of a boa constrictor" (cited in Wainscott, 1988, 56). Firkins" response reveals that white critics were still putting the jungle into blackness, a response created in some way by the play itself. This contrasted strongly with the heckling from the African American audience at the Harlem revival who bade Jones to: "come on out o' that jungle - back to Harlem where you belong!" (cited in Steen 2000, 345).

The response of the African American community to the play was complex and conflicted. On one hand, the play was welcomed as an opportunity for African American actors to take a lead role on the stage; on the other hand the play was suspected for "its insistence upon atavism and primitivism" (Wikander 1998, 225). W.E.B. DuBois published a defence of O'Neill's play for the Provincetown Playhouse arguing: "the Negro today fears any attempt of the artist to paint Negroes. He is not satisfied unless everything is perfect and proper and beautiful and joyful. He is afraid to be painted *as he is*, lest his human foibles and shortcomings be seized by his enemies for the purposes of the ancient and hateful propaganda" (DuBois in The Wooster Group programme 1998, italics mine).

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[38] Gilpin seemed to lose this battle by the fact that O'Neill's text became canonised and the "meaning" of the play is attributed to O'Neill. Furthermore, Gilpin sank into poverty and alcoholism after playing Jones and was not hired again as an actor. He died in poverty and anonymity, a fate which a similarly successful white actor may not have suffered. Nonetheless, as I shall argue later in this chapter, the current condemnation of O'Neill's play for its racism, and the resurgence of interest in Gilpin and Robeson's role in the production of the play would seem to vindicate Gilpin's contestation of O'Neill's authorial right to represent blackness on the stage.

The Wooster Group printed DuBois's defence of O'Neill's use of black actors in their 1998 programme for their production of *The Emperor Jones*. However, there were no black actors in their production. Instead, Kate Valk wore blackface to play Jones, and mimicked the vocal and physical conventions of blackface minstrelsy in her performance. DuBois's defence of the representation of "the Negro as he is" in O'Neill's work framed the Wooster Group performance in which a white woman played a black character, written by an Irish American, in blackface.

Playing White: The Wooster Group's *The Emperor Jones*

The Wooster Group's production of O'Neill's text took place over seventy years after the play was first performed, and their social and cultural context changed the way in which the play was seen and positioned in American culture. The advent of the civil rights movement in the 1960s had created an awareness of the politics of representation, inculcating performance practices, such as blackface minstrelsy, in the formation of unequal hierarchies of race in American culture. However, as I argued in Chapter Five, even by the 1990s, African American artists were still under-represented in theatre practice.

The 1990s heralded new approaches to the questions of race, however, and as I showed in Chapter Five, the work of African American artists began to unsettle the questions of race and interlink them with issues of gender and class. These interconnections were also made clear in 1991, in the scandal caused when Anita Hill accused the African American judge, Clarence Thomas, of sexually harassing her, during his appointment to the Supreme Court. The fact that Hill was also an African American complicated the case, and Hill argued that "the female voice was missing in the discussion about race" (cited in Tarricone 1996, 1). Hill's statement: "the dynamics of race are powerful. Gender is powerful. Class is powerful. I'm still trying to figure it out" (cited in Tarricone 1996), could be the motto of the Wooster Group's productions of *The Emperor Jones* (1993) and *The Hairy Ape* (1995).

The interlinking of race, class and gender in the Wooster Group's work can also be found in a wave of academic scholarship that investigated the connections between these identities during the 1990s, as I showed in Chapter One, Part One. Eric Lott's seminal *Love and Theft* (1993) was typical of this trend, and his investigations of

blackface minstrelsy argued for complex investigation (rather than straight-out condemnation) of the operations of blackface, not to condone its images, but to fully understand it, in order to fully understand its effects. As Lott argued:

> so officially repugnant now are the attitudes responsible for blackface joking that the tendency has been simply to condemn the attitudes themselves - a suspiciously respectable move, and an easy one at that - rather than to investigate the ways in which racist entertainment was once fun, and still is to much of the Caucasian population of the United States" (Lott 1993, 141).

While the Wooster Group were not necessarily directly influenced by these shifts in cultural attitudes to race and gender, their own use of blackface on the stage was similar in its interlinking of race, gender and Orientalism in The Emperor Jones, and race, class and gender in The Hairy Ape. The changes in how their use of blackface was received by critics in their work may be partially explained through the changes in social and cultural attitudes towards race and gender.

When the Wooster Group production of *The Emperor Jones* was opened to critics in 1998, the reception was rapturous. In marked contrast to the critics" response to the company's use of blackface in their early work, Kate Valk's Jones was seen as a virtuoso and intelligent performance that underscored the historicity of the role, with one critic even arguing that: "that is fundamentally what O'Neill intended" (Kalb 1998). Kalb's response was not unusual: critics saw the company's combination of cross-gender, cross-race and cross-Oriental casting as loyal to the spirit of O'Neill's play, "restoring theatrical life to what was occluded by antiquated style and language" (Kalb 1998). Despite the obvious irony of seeing Valk's blackface performance as loyal to O'Neill's revolutionary casting of Gilpin, the critics subtly authorised the Group's formal experimentation with the intentions of O'Neill himself.

This reception, while praising the production, also elided many of the potentially controversial elements of the performances. The reception was almost like a restaging of the conflict between O'Neill and Gilpin in 1920. In reviews, the role of the Wooster Group as the authors of meaning within the performance was subsumed within the figure of O'Neill, whose language and style may have become obsolescent, but whose core intentions overwhelmed the autonomous authorship of the company. As I shall argue below, the figure of O'Neill certainly haunted the production and its companion piece, *The Hairy Ape*, but his authority was deconstructed rather than

maintained by the performances. Nonetheless, the blackface of Valk appeared to be acceptable to critics only under the rubric of authorial "consent".

The critics" focus, then, appeared to be on how the Group's formal innovations could best serve the staging of the text, and the renewal of the play for contemporary audiences. This meant that the problematic use of blackface, Orientalism and cross-gender casting was elided or side-lined in the discussion of the production. The critics dealt most specifically with the use of blackface and minimised the impact of the Orientalism and cross-gender casting, arguing that Valk's blackface performance positively re-negotiated the implicit racism of the play: "here, Jones's self-created identity as emperor is given yet another layer, that of the grotesque perception of blacks by whites in the early part of this century" (Brantley 1998). Michael Feingold argued that: "Valk's whiteness [...] gives an extra twist to the racism that O'Neill's play both rebukes and exploits" (1998). However, the potentially racist implications of Valk's performance were ignored, as was the problematically Orientalist use of Japanese costumes and dance styles.

The cross-gender casting was only barely mentioned in the reviews, and was considered to be a statement on the casting policies of mainstream plays: "[Valk's] presence [was] an ultimate distancing gesture toward a work with no female roles" (Feingold 1998).[39] While the cross-dressing of Valk "disappeared" in the reception, the feminised role Dafoe played in the production as Smithers was highlighted by the critics, with one describing him as: "a white man whose face is famously menacing" (Kalb 1998), and seeing the contrast between Dafoe's physiognomy and his costuming as ultimately comical: "the humour of the thug-like Dafoe presented as a nimble Oriental add[ed] pivotal lightness to the heavy brooding action" (Kalb 1998). While Valk was more conventionally "cross-dressed" and "cross-raced" by playing a black male role, it was Dafoe who drew the attention of critics for the contrast between his

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[39] Notably, this response mirrors that of the British critics to Shaw's casting as Richard, presuming that the cross-casting had more to do with hiring policies and the economics of theatre practice in relation to gender, than it had to do with the representation of gender within the play itself, and the ways in which a woman could bring new meanings to a male role. This response would appear to be motivated by a bourgeois feminist sensibility which focuses on egalitarian employment policies rather than with the politics of representation itself. It is interesting that this response applied both to Shaw and to Valk despite the very different artistic and cultural contexts in which they were working.

"real" persona and the feminised role he played, which may have partly been due to Dafoe's celebrity status and the operation of the "real" in his performance, unlike that of Valk's.

The cross-gendered casting of Valk therefore drew less attention than the cross-gendering of Dafoe, even though Dafoe was playing a male character. As I have argued, Valk's persona is "invisible" on the stage, and this may have meant that the contrast between the "real" Valk and the fictional Jones was less apparent than the gap between Dafoe's "real" celebrity persona and the feminised Smithers. Furthermore, the comedy pointed to in Dafoe's performance relied on the humour of "dressing-down" in relation to gender. Dafoe's Hollywood masculinity was challenged by the stylised femininity of his Orientalism, whereas Valk's "dressing-up" as male did not have the same comic effect.

The "disappearance" of Valk's cross-gender casting may also be attributed to the common-place use of cross-dressing in fringe theatre in New York, as discussed in Chapter One. However, it may also be due to the hierarchy of identity that the production itself constructed, with the use of blackface most prominent within the performance choices and within the cultural context in which the production took place. The Orientalism of the costumes and dance styles was also overshadowed by the blackface. While the cross-gender casting was not prominent in the production, the production's context, or in the reception of the performance, I want to argue that the use of blackface and Orientalism *did* produce a gendered dynamic onstage. This positioned and materialised gender through the binary of "black" and "white", and suggests that the "meaning" of the blackface and Orientalism can be discovered through an analysis of the gendered implications of the performances.

Elizabeth LeCompte admitted to having been "very attracted" to O'Neill's plays, which was unusual for a director who frequently doesn't like the texts she directs (see LeCompte, EMERGENCY12 2000), and her attraction to the plays may explain their relatively "straight" (for the Wooster Group) rendition in performance. However, in interview, LeCompte and Valk described the play as a means for them to develop their interest in Japanese theatre and the vocal registers of blackface minstrelsy (LeCompte and Valk, in interview with the author 2000,1). While the play, for them, was vehicle for formal experiment, unlike O'Neill they made no attempt to achieve authenticity through the blackface or the Asian influences which can be seen in

LeCompte's remark: "We only really worked with Asian stuff through video tapes [...] so we don't really *know* it [... I'm...] looking for things that key me off visually or structurally that work in *my* world" (interview with the author 2000, 3). As I have discussed in the last chapter, the Wooster Group's approach to the Asian theatre styles is resolutely artificial, where the *inauthenticity* of their intercultural borrowing is foregrounded in their work.

Notably, Valk and LeCompte located the gendering of Jones in the physical actions of Valk onstage, rather than at a political or interpretative level. Valk said that the use of the Japanese form helped her to establish the masculinity of Jones: "the posture of the Noh and the Kabuki made a male stance for me that wasn't natural but was very powerful, it changed where my centre was and made it more powerful" (Valk, interview with the author 2000, 4). This remark is useful for my analysis of the gendered dynamics of her performance later in this chapter, as I will argue that it was the power-play between the blackface and the orientalism on the stage which constructed the gender relations between Smithers and Jones. While the cross-gendered casting of Valk played into the reading of gender in this relationship, it did not primarily constitute how gender could be read in the performance. That reading was located instead in the matrix of blackface and Orientalist performance on the stage.

In contrast to my chapters on Warner and Shaw, I will begin my investigation of the Wooster Group's use of cross-dressing with an examination of their constructions of race rather than gender. I will begin by looking at the way in which the Group critiqued and historicised O'Neill's play with their use of blackface and then examine how they destabilised the materiality of race through technological mediation and their use of costume and make-up on the stage. I will go on to argue that the intertwining of blackface and Orientalism constructed the gender relations on the stage, and that the cross-casting of Valk neutralised her blackface performance. I will show that the Wooster Group's production established O'Neill's body as a product of his play, and then go on to examine the problematic effects of the context in which the Wooster Group's production took place, arguing that their investigation of race was simultaneously conservative and subversive. I will also argue that the Wooster Group reluctantly showed performance to be at the origin of identity, implicating theatre in the construction of oppressive social hierarchies of race and gender.

Valk As Minstrel Wench: Gendering Blackface[40].

Historicising O'Neill

Jonathan Kalb argued of the Wooster Group's production that:

> Anyone who has ever wondered what Brecht meant by "alienation" ought to see this production with its cross-gender casting, blackface, interculturalism and physical movement all working to encourage clear thought by making familiar questions seem unfamiliar, imposing carefully chosen sources of strangeness on the dialogue and action (Kalb 1998).

The use of blackface and whiteface in the Wooster Group's production of *The Emperor Jones* might at first glance be read as a straightforward critique of O'Neill's construction of colour in the play. With Valk's performance registering as an "obscene cartoon" (Brantley, 1998) and Dafoe's Smithers a stylised and feminised ghostly figure, the production's hyperbolic use of colour foregrounded the artificiality of O'Neill's use of the "authentic" black body on the stage. Furthermore, the use of blackface implicated O'Neill's constructions of race within the traditions of blackface minstrelsy, showing his vision of blackness -despite his rejection of minstrelsy - to have been formed via the blackface mask, exposing how O'Neill's vision of race was mediated through the grotesque stereotypes of the blackface stage. Theatrical performance itself was therefore implicated in how audiences see and understand race in the Wooster Group's production, showing minstrelsy to have been formative in the construction of race in American society, leaving an imprint on the bodies of black people themselves.

However, while the use of blackface in Valk's performance can be read straightforwardly as an indictment of O'Neill's construction of race, in fact the use of blackface was far more complicated in the production. As Roger Bechtel points out, the use of colour on Valk's body subverted the possibility of a straightforward blackface reading: "Valk may be in blackface, but her neck is shaded red, her hands remain white, and she is wearing pre-modern Japanese clothes" (Bechtel 2002, 4).

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[40] My analysis of this production relies on the video of the production in the Belfast Theatre Festival (1998), and the Wooster Group's video film based on their stage production (2001). While the video film varied considerably from the stage production, the use of costumes and make-up remained consistent in both, which will be the main focus of my thesis. I will concentrate mainly on the stage production, and will footnote where the video film differed from the theatre performance.

While Valk's blackface was destabilised by the various colours included in her make-up, it was also reconfigured by its contrast with the whiteface of Dafoe. While both Dafoe and Valk wore mask-like make-up in the production, the rest of their body was left unpainted apart from Valk's red neck and Dafoe's feet, which were also painted red.

While Valk's blackface first appeared to be a representation of the vision of blackness in the play, next to Dafoe's whiteface it also became a theatrical referent, calling to mind the masks of various theatre traditions: blackface and the white masks of Japanese drama. This theatricalised the construction of race in the production. Even while Valk's blackface recalled the original social conditions of *The Emperor Jones,* evoking the racism of the minstrel stage, Dafoe's Japanese whiteness undermined the sociological implications of the blackface, by positioning whiteness as a theatrical device. Because Dafoe's white Japanese mask did not evoke a racial whiteness but a theatrical one, blackface also became a theatrical mask, positioning minstrelsy as an equivalent theatre form to Japanese Kabuki. The fact that the performers" bodies were left unpainted maintained this effect by constantly reminding the audience that the actors" coloured faces were a theatrical rather than a biological construct.

This would appear to be a formalist convention, removing blackface from its political context, and denying its racist implications. However, by dislocating colour from race, showing it to be constructed from a series of gestural and vocal signs rather than being innate to the coloured body, The Wooster Group foregrounded the performative nature of theatrical representation. Theatre itself was implicated in the construction of racial identity, moving the debate about O'Neill's play's racial "accuracy" or authenticity to the more complex discussion about the ways in which theatre can materialise bodily identities for performers and audience alike. O'Neill's Brutus Jones was shown to be a purely theatrical construction, a construction mediated through minstrelsy, with material effects on the way that audiences and performers could understand race after the performance ended. The use of the analogous but asymmetrical theatrical masks of minstrelsy and Japanese theatre in *The Emperor Jones,* showed how theatre itself can operate as a disciplinary mechanism in culture, producing bodies through its theatrical masks and contributing to the way that people can see and live race.

Unlike the politics of Eugene O'Neill's piece, where the masking of the self as a colour other than its "true" colour is punished by history, and the colour of the body is the guarantor of the "authentic" self, The Wooster Group showed the body to be produced *through* masks. Like Butler's notion of bodies being materialised through the repetitive performance of gender norms, The Wooster Group's treatment of race-as-mask, revealed that theatre itself can function to construct and impose norms through the use of masks, which have a disciplinary and materialising effect on raced bodies. This vision of identity echoes Eric Lott's observation of the formative effects of blackface minstrelsy: "It was hard to see the real thing without being reminded, even unfavourably of the copy, the "cover version" that effectively did its work of cultural coverage. Nor, just as surely, could the copy be seen without reminding one of the real thing" (Lott 1993, 115). The theatrical blackface and whiteface of the Wooster Group's production unearthed the ways in which O'Neill's text - and potentially their own performance work - could operate to materialise race for the spectator.

Destabilising The Real Of Race

However, while the Group's use of make-up constructed a blackface/whiteface binary which implicated theatre in the materialisation of race, their use of technology in the T.V. monitors on the stage, re-negotiated this duality even further. Representing the character of the old black woman at the beginning of the play, an image of a ghastly white face with black lips was shown on the T.V. screen[41]. This was Valk's blacked-up face made white through negative imaging on the screen. As Roger Bechtel points out, this image had a deconstructive effect on the black/white binary onstage, fragmenting the stability of that duality by adding a further technological mask to Valk's face. As Bechtel argues, Valk's face did not simply appear as white, minus the black make-up,

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[41] This effect was not used in the Wooster Group film. However, while the image of the old woman was not used, the Group used the technology of the video itself to destabilise the images within the film. The film itself was "historicised" by keeping the dust and fluff in the lens in the image, reminiscent of the film style of the 1930s, when the Paul Robeson *Emperor Jones* film was made. Furthermore, the blue screen, against which Valk and Dafoe performed, was continually brought into focus, and the camera frequently pointed at the lighting rig and set, undermining the illusion of Dafoe and Valk's performances. While the film did not use the multi-layered image of Valk's face, it denaturalised her performance of race through foregrounding the mechanisms by which the film was made.

but instead was imprinted upon by an added layer of colour through the negative imaging on the screen, "the negative image does not serve simply to erase the black make-up on Valk's face, but instead creates a hybrid that neither melds the two races nor privileges one over the other" (Bechtel 2002, 4).

Here, the use of technology worked like the white make-up Valk applied over her blackface while playing Tituba in *LSD (... Just The High Points ...)* in 1984, re-negotiating both her blackface, and the added whiteness within the image. This de-stabilised the operation of the "real" in performance, calling into question the "original" colour of Valk's skin. Unlike the blackface minstrel performers, who took care to reveal their white skin under their black make-up to assure the audience of the stability of their whiteness, the use of technological masking in the Wooster Group's *The Emperor Jones* questioned the stability of racial origins, infinitely layering Valk with racial masks. In this way, race became a mask without an origin, materialising the body beneath the mask rather than the other way round.

This effect was further achieved with Dafoe's image at the end of the performance.[42] In the last scene, in which Smithers speaks with Lem the native chief, Dafoe played both parts on the T.V. screen, using a negative image for Lem (black with a white mouth) and a positive image for Smithers (white faced with a black mouth). Here, the technological masking worked to break down the opposition set up in the play between the black Lem and white Smithers by containing both figures in the body of Dafoe. Furthermore, as with the mediated image of Valk, the use of the T.V. screens foregrounded the ways in which theatre can be implicated within the creation of racial identity. The interplay between mediated images undermined the stability of racial binaries, while at the same time showing how those binaries are the product of technological and theatrical mediation in the first place. Representation itself was shown to be at the origin of race in The Wooster Group's *The Emperor Jones*.

Gendering Race/Racialising Gender

The use of costume also worked to undermine the stability of the performer's bodies beneath the Japanese robes, and an analysis of the operation of costume in the performances reveals the implicit gendered dynamic within the production. Both Valk

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[42] The image of Dafoe's face was used both in the stage production, and in the video film.

and Dafoe were swathed in large inauthentically Japanese-style robes at the beginning of the production. As with the playtext, Valk's performance as Jones was more stereotypically masculine than Dafoe's Orientalist Smithers (see Appendix One, Figures 9 and 10).

While Valk claimed that her masculinity came from her powerful stance, the gendered associations of minstrelsy and Orientalism also played into how the characters could be read as masculine and feminine. In her stylised robes, blackened face, and deep masculinised voice, Valk not only resembled a blackface minstrel, but furthermore, a minstrel wench - part of the transvestite tradition of the minstrel stage. Blackface minstrelsy was a homo-social theatre practice with an all male cast, and usually, all male audience, and the figure of the minstrel has automatically masculine connotations. Blackface can be read not only as an expression of whiteness, but also as an expression of male desires, fantasies and anxieties, which can be seen in the transvestite dimensions of the minstrel tradition. As Karen Cronacher argues: "[blackface] reveal[s] nothing whatsoever about African Americans; [it does] however reveal something about that dark continent of white male phobias and desires" (Chronacher 1992, 178).

Rather than appearing as a woman dressed as a man, Valk more closely resembled a white man impersonating a black woman. In this way, like the multi-layering of her blackface mask, Valk's gendered persona was layered with the various incarnations of a white woman playing a black character, resembling a white man playing a black woman. Valk's gender was refracted and distorted, problematising an analysis of her performance as a stable crossing from one sex to another. Instead, her racial crossing problematised her gendered cross-dressing, layering her male impersonation with the added significance of the minstrel transvestite tradition. However, Valk's femaleness may have also neutralised the significance of her blackface.

It is possible that if a man had played the role of Jones in blackface, the critics and audiences may have found the portrait more disturbing. With a woman playing the role, the Group's production introduced a Brechtian distancing effect to the representation of masculine blackness on the stage. Rather than the blackface being seen as a mimetic statement on "real" black people, Valk's cross-gender casting meant that the blackface could be seen in more abstract terms, as a comment on O'Neill's

treatment of race, rather than as a comment on the Wooster Group's views of black people. Furthermore, it has been the black male who has posed such a threat to white American culture, comprising a fantasy combining menace and desire (see Eric Lott, 1993), which produced the grotesque parodies of black masculinity in minstrel performance. Valk's femaleness therefore worked to neutralise the parody of black masculinity implicit in her blackface onstage.

On the other hand, Dafoe's Smithers conformed to the Orientalist stereotypes of femininity and delicacy, and while he played a male role, it can be argued that he was also cross-gender cast within the gendered dynamic between Jones and Smithers onstage. This could be seen, in particular, in the first dance the actors performed, in which Dafoe could be seen "rehearsing" coyly half way through, while Valk moved off stage. Dafoe was positioned passively for much of the production, sitting still and side-on onstage, never looking at Valk. Dafoe's Orientalism was evidently artificial, constituting an impression, or a Western stereotype, of Japan, rather than attempting to reproduce exactly the costume and performance style of Japanese theatre. As a result, Dafoe's Orientalism resembled the feminised cultural crossing of British Victorian pantomime, rather than actual Japanese theatre practice or the efforts of Western practitioners such as Peter Brook to faithfully reproduce non-Western theatre styles.

As Kalb pointed out, Dafoe's Orientalist femininity was heightened by the contrast between his physiognomy (which of course can only be read as a product of the type-casting of his celebrity status) and his delicate performance. In fact, Dafoe's emotional performance conformed to his usual Wooster Group persona, re-establishing his antagonistic relationship with the late Ron Vawter, with Valk, and conforming to his role as "emotional" man in their work. However, the aggressive Samurai-like dance Dafoe later performed, and his supernatural Witch Doctor movements at the end of the production, meant that Dafoe's famous celebrity menace still operated within the show, even as he preserved his Orientalist femininity.

The gendered dynamic between the characters was therefore established through the gendered associations of the two performance traditions onstage: blackface minstrelsy and Western Orientalism. This also applies to the Western gendering of race itself, with the "Orient" traditionally feminised, and blackness associated with a threatening masculine sexuality in colonialist discourse. Rather than the gendering of

the characters originating in the gender of the actors, it was derived from the interplay between the two theatrical masks onstage.

However, as Valk performed Jones's journey through the forest, she became progressively more feminine, again conforming to the trajectory of the playtext. For an audience familiar with the play, her journey created the anticipation of Jones's exotic striptease. However, rather than her loss of clothing revealing the "authentic" African body as in O'Neill's version, Valk revealed more and more of her whiteness. As her arms and legs were not blacked up, she progressively undermined the stability of her blackface. Furthermore, as the costume began to unravel, it also lost its Japanese qualities and revealed an American style plaid shirt and an African print skirt underneath the Kabuki style robes. The bulky qualities of the costume began to disappear, and, by comparison with her earlier statuesque presence onstage, Valk became a diminutive feminised body in contrast to her masculine powerful stance in the first scene.

In O'Neill's play, the peeling away of the layers of Jones's clothing acted as a means for O'Neill to reveal the authenticity of the black body beneath the clothes. In the Wooster Group's staging of this striptease, the layers of clothing were themselves significant of different kinds of bodies: racial, cultural, gendered and historical. From Japanese to (literally) African/American clothing, from blackened features, to white arms and feet (a whiteness which could not be fully trusted due to the destabilising effects of the video imaging), from bulky masculinity to a smaller, feminised figure, Valk's Jones did not unearth an authentic body beneath the costume, but revealed another set of representations beneath the superficial layer of aristocratic, Orientalist, blackface masculinity.

Unlike Jones's body in the text, Valk's body was never fully revealed on the stage. Instead of revealing a "real" body in contrast to a falsely "masked" body, as O'Neill did, The Wooster Group suggested that the "real" body was a construction *through* its masking, that in fact, the mask *constituted* the real. This effect is similar to how Alisa Solomon describes theatrical cross-dressing more generally: "The theatrical presence displays the absence of any prior cap-T truth. There is no thing that theatre copies. In a play, there is no doer behind the deed" (Solomon 1997, 4) The Wooster Group's use of costume, make-up, technology and performance styles revealed that the doer is in fact constituted *by* the deed, that the body is formed through its costuming,

and that the racialised body is invariably mediated and materialised through and by the representation of race.

Crossing in this production did not presume upon the stable points of "original" identity from which to cross such as female-to-male, or white-to-black, but showed, instead, that identity operates as an act of crossing, that it is the act of impersonation itself which materialises both the bodies and identities being impersonated, and the phantasmatic "original" body which is doing the impersonation. The use of crossing also revealed the operation of a matrix of interrelated identities, where blackface and Orientalism were positioned in an asymmetrical relationship with one another and produced a gendered dynamic through the implicit gendering of racial performance. Cross-dressing in this production did not, in fact could not, rely on the stability of the sexed bodies of the performers.

To sum up my argument so far, the Wooster Group's production constructed a hierarchy of identity in which the question of race was most prominent. However, the use of colour-coding in the production also reconfigured the gender of the performers, relying not on the "stability" of their sexed bodies, but on the gendered connotations of the acting styles and colour-codes in which they operated. In doing so the company implicated theatricality itself in the construction of identity, and destabilised the operation of the "real" in performance as a product of that performance. Impersonation was therefore revealed to be a key factor in the construction of identity and, in this, The Wooster Group's approach to identity was similar to Judith Butler's exploration of the imitative structures of gendered and sexual subjectivities. This production produced mediated and multiple bodies, bodies without an origin, bodies which were the product of representation itself.

Performing O'Neill's Body

The Wooster Group's presentation of the racial and gendered body as a product of mediation worked in useful counterpoint to the complex primitivism of O'Neill's text. Their production of *The Emperor Jones* was not a riposte to O'Neill's "racism" but rather worked within the legacies of his formalism, placing his historicisation of

race within the play into the context of his own theatrical moment.[43] In their production, the Group teased out the contradictions and tensions in O'Neill's text while paying homage to his own political and aesthetic innovations.

However, while they treated the play more straightforwardly than in previous work, the Wooster Group did not attribute the "meanings" of their production to O'Neill, but rather foregrounded O'Neill as a product *of* his play. As Roger Bechtel points out, O'Neill was physically present in their production through Dafoe who was made-up to resemble him: "when Smithers does step into the light, we see that he is sporting, a la Eugene O'Neill, a pencilled in pencil moustache" (Bechtel, 2002, 3). If we are to read Dafoe as a substitute O'Neill, then the Orientalism in the production takes on a greater significance, as if the Group were exposing O'Neill's primitivist cross-dressing. The ghostly, antagonistic relationship which Dafoe's Smithers had with Valk's Jones, could be read as O'Neill's conflicted relationship with his own racial identity. To make O'Neill a visible part of the production was to renegotiate the power relations of performance in which the Wooster Group positioned themselves as the playwrights of the fictional O'Neill, who became a character in one of his own plays, an effect which was extended in the company's production of *The Hairy Ape*.

Furthermore, the fact that the Orientalism of Dafoe-as-O'Neill was put into performance alongside the use of blackface minstrelsy, created a kind of equivalence between these masks. Rather than the blackface becoming a formalist mask equivalent to the Japanese Kabuki mask as I argued above, the blackface politicised the Orientalism of O'Neill. The "whiteness" of Dafoe's make-up became a sign of how Westerners have constructed whiteness not only through the black make-up of blackface minstrelsy, but also the white make-up (metaphorical or actual) of Western Orientalism. Rather than the whiteface of Dafoe depoliticising Valk's blackface, instead, Valk's blackface politicised Dafoe's whiteface, showing Orientalism to be an appropriative and racialised discourse.

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[43] This is a strategy which the company also used in their production of *The Hairy Ape,* which I will discuss in the next chapter, focusing particularly on the relationship between gendered identity and the specular authority of the viewer. In both productions there was a sense that the company were placing O'Neill's work within its theatrical context, and deconstructing his vision of identity through the theatrical strategies he used (and rejected) in his work.

However, while the Group renegotiated the power dynamics of authorship, the absence of black actors in their production, while providing an ironical contrast to the "authentic" black actors in O'Neill's performances, did preserve a status quo in relation to race similar to O'Neill's original productions, raising again, the conflict between Gilpin and O'Neill. I want to examine these issues in relation to the absence of critique in the critical reception, and the audience profile for the company's work, in order to understand what kind of bodies the Wooster Group produced in their production of *The Emperor Jones.*

The Performance Of Whiteness In *The Emperor Jones.*

As I argued in the last chapter, the artistic climate has changed in the past twenty years in approaches to the representation of race in America - or at least in New York. The recent predilection amongst African American writers and theatre companies to deconstruct race in their work, has meant that the Wooster Group's use of blackface has become more acceptable to critics and audiences alike. Furthermore, the reputation of the company *for* its use of blackface, and controversy, and their increasingly powerful position in the arts arena in New York has given them a kind of exemption from the scandal which other companies would cause by using blackface. As Roger Bechtel argues: "The Wooster Group as author functions differently now than it did in the early "80's - its name serves as a kind of totem which affords it special privileges" (Bechtel 2002, 11).

It may be these factors which meant that the critics barely raised an eyebrow at the use of minstrelsy and Orientalism in the production. Furthermore, the authority of O'Neill himself seemed to subsume any problematic elements in the Group's representation of race within the "intentions" of the playwright, as I argued above. However, I want to argue that it was the very privileged context of the production which problematised the company's envisioning of race - an envisioning which was provocative, intelligent and reflective. The nature of the performers and the audience watching the performers made the use of blackface and Orientalism in this production deeply problematic.

Even while the notion of racial and gendered identity as the product of mediation and representation is useful and provocative, this should not rule out the materiality of race within its social context. Even if, in theory, identity is constituted

through a kind of freeplay of performance, this is not to say that the lived experience of these identities is unconstricted and unlimited; in fact it could be argued that the opposite is the case.

The Wooster Group deconstructed and performed colour with white performers for a white audience. They imported and reconstructed the formal qualities of two expressions of colour, blackface and whiteface, in order to play with the concept of race for their white audience, just as O'Neill used the blackness of his lead actors as a means for him to present his vision of race for *his* white audience. In The Wooster Group's production of *The Emperor Jones,* with two white actors presenting race onstage, the control of racial representation still remained in the hands of white artists.

Similar to the primitivist artists of the early 20th Century, The Wooster Group appropriated historical and cultural styles for their own purposes without much concern as to the effect of their appropriations on those being represented, who were absent from the process of making of that representation. By making black and white faces interchangeable in *The Emperor Jones*, the company attempted to subvert and challenge the distinct categories of race and gender. However blackness and whiteness are not symmetrical racial categories, just as blackface minstrelsy and Kabuki drama are not symmetrical theatrical forms. Unlike O'Neill who was contested over his representation of race by Gilpin, who renegotiated the racial meanings of the play by refusing to say some of the lines, The Wooster Group did not have black performers or artists involved in the process of making the art, nor did they have a Harlem audience who might have contested the racial images onstage.

The Wooster Group might be accused of playing with race to serve the interests of an audience who are the least affected by the material confines of racial identity. It could be argued, in the production's defence, that *The Emperor Jones* ultimately has nothing to do with blackness, consisting of a white man's envisioning of blackness for a white audience. Nonetheless if, as The Wooster Group's production argues, racial representations can have a material effect on the construction of lived racial categories and bodies, then a white vision of black identity does have consequences for how blackness can be understood and configured. The presence of black performers or audience members could have troubled the equilibrium of the Wooster Group's exploration of race. The absence of black performers and, by and large, black audience members, troubled the context in which the Wooster Group did that exploration.

I raise these concerns without wanting to essentialise the racial positioning of the performers and the audience. After all, a black Smithers in whiteface, for example, would not have been symmetrical to the white Valk in blackface on the stage, and would doubtless have produced its own problems in performance. Furthermore, the destabilisation of whiteness which the Group performed through the white mask of Dafoe and the technological masks on the video screens did the invaluable work of making whiteness, as well as blackness, strange onstage. Unsettling the stability of whiteness, a racial positioning frequently elided *as* race, did important work in the context of the Group's performers and audiences, revising the essentialisation of whiteness which blackface minstrelsy performed. Nonetheless, the elite and marginal positioning of the company's work called into question the validity of preaching deconstruction to the white converted.

As Shannon Steen argues, O'Neill's play expressed the anxieties of whiteness for a white audience through the medium of the authentic black bodies of his actors: "the construction of blackness in the play actively constitutes qualities of white subjectivity in the spectator" (Steen 2000, 340). The Wooster Group also negotiated questions of whiteness for their white audience, this time through the consciously inauthentic and destabilised bodies of its blackfaced and whitefaced performers. In doing so, the company relied on the spectator's intertextual knowledge: of O'Neill's play, of the history of the play in production, of the theatrical legacies in which the Group worked, of the history of the Group itself and of the company's previous use of blackface on the stage.

The Wooster Group's critique of whiteness in *The Emperor Jones* was simultaneously subversive and conservative. Their destabilisation of the dominance of whiteness goes against the grain of American mainstream representation, in which whiteness tends to be positioned as a normative identity. Nonetheless, the Wooster Group used blackness as a means to produce a (problematised) whiteness in the absence of black performers and (by and large) in the absence of black spectators in their production. While race was destabilised in their production, this destabilisation took place in a white context, and the focus of the production was therefore concerned with the identity of whiteness rather than blackness. The audience were constituted as problematically white by the Wooster Group's production, and the question of blackness became a metaphorical trope, rather than a material concern of the

production. While the Wooster Group challenged race, they did so in a privileged, racially homogenous environment. As Shannon Steen argues: "the freedom to take on the expressive, plaintive quality of the dispossessed and to drop it at will [is] surely a privilege of the self-possessed, white and wealthy" (Steen 2000, 355).

Nonetheless, the production's implication of theatre in the construction of identity also undermined the positioning of the spectators watching the production. The fact that theatre itself was shown to have a hand in the materialisation of identity meant that the Wooster Group's production also presented its own images of race and gender as inevitably complicit with the construction of unequal hierarchies of identity. The production refused to allow the spectator to take a high moral ground in watching the show, and showed that not only performance, but the act of watching a performance, could materialise bodily identity for the performer and spectator alike. The production demanded that the spectator politicised the act of spectating, and acknowledged the formative effects of the images created on the stage.

In the Wooster Group's production, cross-dressing happened at textual, historical and performance levels and was shown to be a transformative act, forming and materialising bodily identity in performers and spectators alike. However, the cross-gender casting in the show disappeared within the hierarchy of identities constructed through the use of blackface and Orientalism in the production. However, gender reappeared once more through these other cross-dressing practices, and worked to make the use of blackface "safe" on the stage.

The act of crossing and impersonation were shown to be central to the formation of identity in the Wooster Group's production. Bodies on their stage were destabilised, mediated and produced through representation. The destabilisation of bodies applied not only to the performers but also to the spectators, who were required to politicise their presence as audience members at the production.

While Eugene O'Neill, like Deborah Warner, posited the act of crossing as a form of deception which ultimately leads to death, the Wooster Group framed crossing as an inevitable mode of materialising identity. Theatricality was shown to be central to the formation of racial and gendered bodies. The Wooster Group once again displayed their reluctant theatre-centrism in their foregrounding, and wistful condemnation, of the repressive and formative effects of theatrical representation.

In the next chapter, I will explore how the Group's companion piece, *The Hairy Ape*, continued and developed these themes, specifically implicating the act of "looking" in the formation of identity on the stage.

Chapter Eight

'The Monster From The Black Lagoon," The Wooster Group's *The Hairy Ape*

Introduction

In the last chapter, I examined how the Wooster Group implicated theatre and performance practice within the construction of racial and gendered identities. The Wooster Group's 1995 production, *The Hairy Ape*, another Eugene O'Neill play, was developed as a companion piece to the *Emperor Jones*, and operated as a kind of "negative" image of the production.[44] In *The Hairy Ape*, Dafoe now wore blackface as the protagonist Yank, and Valk was dressed in a kind of white face as Yank's antagonist, Mildred Douglas. Furthermore, the actors swapped their gendered positioning, with Dafoe now performing a hyperbolic masculinity onstage, and Valk's Mildred performed as a parodically feminine figure. However, while the colour coding of the two productions was reasonably consistent, the identities investigated by *The Hairy Ape* were not those of race and Orientalism, but were rather concerned with questions of Irishness, class, and gender.

In this chapter I want to examine the ways in which the same colour coding used onstage could be applied to different identities, and the ways in which these identities - Irishness, class and gender - were haunted, not only by the spectre of race, but also by the ghostly presence of blackface minstrelsy, both in O'Neill's text and in the Wooster Group's production. I also want to look at the ways in which crossing and impersonation operated in the performances, despite the fact that the lead actors were this time playing characters of the same, rather than the opposite, sex. In this way, I want to look at the "cross-dressed effect" which I examined in my discussion of Warner's *Medea*, and to argue that the question of gender was far more prominent in

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[44] My analysis of the production is based on a still camera video of the performance in the Selwyn Theatre in 1996 in the Lincoln Centre Library, two viewings of the live performance in the Georges Pompidou Centre, Paris, as part of the Festival d'Automne in November 2001, and photographs and reviews from the Performing Garage archive.

The Hairy Ape than it was in *The Emperor Jones*, despite the absence of (conventional) cross-gender casting in the production. I will look at the issue of gender, class, race and Irishness in O'Neill's text, examine the reception of the production for what it reveals about these issues, and then analyse the performance for its conception of identity.

I will argue throughout that the Wooster Group implicated the specularity of theatre within the construction of identity, taking O'Neill's social indictment of the Darwinian gaze into the realm of theatre practice, and showing that the act of looking is a performative act, materialising bodily identity for performer and audience alike.

Colouring Class: *The Hairy Ape*

Eugene O'Neill's 1922 play *The Hairy Ape* is the story of Yank, a befittingly named American every-man, who works as a stoker on a transatlantic liner. The blackened and ape-like Yank constructs his masculinity and class status through the relationship between his body and the ship, giving him the unshakeable belief that "he belongs". That is, until he is confronted by the ghost like figure of Mildred Douglas, a wealthy heiress who, dressed all in white, pays a slumming visit to the stoke-hole. Mildred, aghast at the simian, blackened and truculent figure of Yank, faints dead away at the sight of him, and Yank's world is turned upside down. Yank sees himself through Mildred's eyes as a "hairy ape" and his sense of his place in the world is destroyed. In a reverse love story, Yank "falls in hate" with Mildred and sets out on a quest to get revenge. Rejected by all and sundry, Yank finally makes his way to the zoo, where he releases the apes from their cage. He's hugged to death by one of the gorillas and the play ends with O'Neill's epitaph for Yank: "And perhaps, the Hairy Ape at last belongs" (O'Neill 1998, 308).

O'Neill, in his play, constructed an expressionistic mechanised universe in which a Darwinist notion of human evolution has been reversed. The machines of cultural "progress" have reverted working class men to the state of apes (see Zapf, 1988). The mechanisation of the human spirit extends to the gendered identities of the characters, and O'Neill shows how Yank has internalised the structures of his world by turning them into an expression of his masculinity. Yank sees himself as a machine, his physical strength becomes a form of masculine virility and the hardship of his world is a proof of his manhood: "Hell in the stoke hole? Sure! It takes a man to work in

hell!" (O'Neill 1998, 260). Yank maintains the homosocial environment of the ship by feminising the ship itself, which then becomes the standard against which he can prove his masculinity and virility. As C.W.E Bigsby argues, masculinity in this mechanistic world "now goes into the service of the machine which becomes a substitute for a life giving feminine principle" (Bigsby 1982, 61).

The mechanisation and brutality of Yank's world also imprints itself on his body and his blackened and simian features are simultaneously a corporeal expression of his degraded status, and a material marking of his body by the oil and dirt of the ship. Yank's "blackness" contrasts markedly with the whiteness of his antagonist, the upper class Mildred Douglas, who lives above-board on the ship. Dressed all in white, with a "pale pretty face," Mildred is as mechanised and artificial as the men in the stoke-hole.

Mildred's class status is defined by a kind of translucence, she is semiotically encoded as "pale", "white" and "delicate", and her power as an upper-class woman is theatricalised visually as "white'. While Mildred's whiteness is a sign of her class status and her emptiness, she is also semiotically encoded as feminine, the traits of which has traditionally been associated with "whiteness," particularly within performance traditions such as melodrama and ballet. The play constructs a vision of whiteness which is an empty form of identity, formed only through its opposition to blackness and working-classness, and formed by the absent figures of fathers and grandfathers who are the real source of Mildred's wealth, and are perhaps so "white" that they are entirely invisible.

Class, gender and race are intertwined in Yank and Mildred's colour coding and this is shown most clearly in the moment when they see each other in the stoke hole:

> "He whirls defensively with a snarling, murderous growl, crouching to spring, his lips drawn back over his teeth, his small eyes gleaming ferociously. He sees Mildred, like a white apparition in the full light from the open furnace doors. He glares into her eyes, turned to stone. [...] As she looks at his gorilla face, as his eyes bore into hers, she utters a low choking cry and shrinks away from him, putting both hands up before her eyes to shut out the sight of his face, to protect her own" (O'Neill 1998, 272-3).

While this scene sets up the antagonism of these two characters, with a little adjustment it could easily constitute a romantic love scene. Her glowing presence, his sudden

vision of her, their held gaze; the action in this scene is built along conventional heterosexual romantic lines. Mildred's appearance in the stoke-hole introduces difference and a hegemonic gaze which throw's Yank's world into disarray. Announcing "I've fallen in hate, get me?" (O'Neill 1998, 275), Mildred's presence forces Yank to go on a quest for self-discovery, functioning as a muse for his burgeoning self-awareness. However, unlike the life-affirming principles of the love story in which heterosexual narrative closure is achieved, this quest results in the absurdity of Yank's death, the destruction of his masculinity, and the collapse of his world.

In the aftermath of Mildred Douglas's devastating visit to the stokehole, the Irish character Paddy tells Yank:

> "Sure 'twas as if she'd seen a great hairy ape escaped from the zoo!
>
> Yank: [...] Say is dat what she called me - a hairy ape?
>
> Paddy: She looked it at you if she didn't say the word itself.
>
> Yank: Hairy ape huh? Sure! Dat's de way she looked at me, aw right. Hairy Ape!" (O'Neill,1998, 277).

As David Roediger points out, this moment in the play offers the notion that: "whiteness and non-whiteness can be "looked at" others" (Roediger 1997, 37). Yank's body is reconfigured by Mildred's look, a look which Eric Lott would describe as the "pale gaze" (Lott 1993, 153). Receiving Mildred's objectifying gaze colours and reconfigures Yank's body. Her whiteness forces him to become aware of his "blackness" - the way in which his body is marked by work and class. Her female presence in the stokehole also undermines the gendered binary between man and machine and forces Yank to confront the gulf between the power of his body and the power he has in the world. While Yank sees himself as white and masculine, the power of Mildred's look forces him to confront the way in which he is marked by his social positioning and so he begins the journey towards his death.

O'Neill encoded Mildred as "white" and Yank as "black" in order to colour-code the class hierarchy through a Social Darwinian lens in his play. However, in his portrait of Mildred, O'Neill also maintained many of the gendered stereotypes of his day. Mildred's emptiness essentialises her femininity just as Yank's inarticulate brawn fixes him within his gendered and class status. Even as O'Neill presented a social hierarchy which is evidently constructed through economic and scientific discourses, he

simultaneously relied on a primitivist notion of working class male identity and upper class female identity both of which have been alienated and brutalised by industrial culture, but which are nonetheless essentially static. As with *The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape* contains a central contradiction in its attitudes towards identity. Just as with race in Jones, class and gender are both deconstructed and universalised, historicised and then essentialised in the bodies of Yank and Mildred.

This contradiction of simultaneous historicisation and essentialisation can also be seen in O'Neill's positioning of the Irish character, Paddy, in the play. Yank rejects Paddy, saying: "he's old and don't belong no more" (O'Neill 1998, 260). But Paddy's yearning for the time before mechanisation, when men could work with dignity on ships, when: "men belonged to ships [...] [when] a ship was part of the sea, and a man was part of a ship and the sea joined all together and made it one" (O'Neill 1998, 259), is closest to O'Neill's own romantic primitivism. Through his indictment of the technological progress of modernism, O'Neill yearns for a utopian moment where men's minds and bodies could be free and he uses an Irish character as the mouthpiece for this utopianism. While Paddy conforms to the stage Irish stereotypes of maudlin drunkenness and romanticism, he also operates as the character whose yearnings coincide most strongly with O'Neill's. As the romantic Paddy puts it:

> "Oh, to be back in the fine days of my youth, ochone! Oh there was fine beautiful ships themdays - clippers wid tall masts touching the sky - fine strong men in them, [...] Oh the clean skins of them, and the clear eyes, the straight backs and full chests of them! Brave men they was, and bold men surely!" (O'Neill, 1998, 258).

The visual environment of O'Neill's play is also channelled through the theatrical gaze of blackface minstrelsy with the actors" bodies marked by an indelible mask of soot and dirt, materialising their economic disenfranchisement for the gaze of the theatre audience. Unlike blackface however, the coal dust on the men's bodies can never be fully removed. Even after the men have washed in preparation to go ashore, "*around their eyes, where a hasty dousing does not touch, the coal dust sticks like black make up, giving them a queer, sinister expression*" (O'Neill 1998, 274). The dust, "like black make-up," is unremovable, because these men are indelibly marked by their class positioning. As David Roediger argues: "O'Neill fashioned tragedy out of a proletarian

blackface in which "rivulets" of sooty sweat" could hardly be scrubbed out and ultimately helped kill Yank" (Roediger 1997, 39).

O'Neill's play therefore evokes an eerie and ghostly presence of blackness while simultaneously configuring it through the lens of the white body. While power is figured and made material through colour in Yank's world, through degrees of whiteness and blackness, there are no black characters in the play. This has a similar effect to minstrelsy itself: the half-presence of blackness operating in a world which excluded blacks, the evocation of the black body and its subsequent erasure. Eric Lott describes this as: "A kind of disappearing act in which blackface made "blackness" flicker on and off so as simultaneously to produce and disintegrate the [black] body" (Lott 1993, 117). Unlike *The Emperor Jones* which did deal with questions of race, albeit (unknowingly) mediated through the minstrel tradition, in *The Hairy Ape*, O'Neill constructs a hierarchical world which is colour coded in the absence of black characters, who form an invisible and ghostly absent referent in the play.

"I would like to be sincere....but I'm afraid have neither the vitality nor the integrity."[45]

As with *The Emperor Jones,* the reviewers of the Wooster Group's production of *The Hairy Ape* were pessimistic about the play's relevance for a contemporary audience. As Robert Brustein put it: "This ham-handed anecdote, an early study of alienation plunked inside a clumsy effort to dramatize Darwin's evolution of the species, would challenge and daunt even the most fearless performers" (Brustein 1997). Reviewers felt that the lack of psychological content and the overt politicisation of the text would alienate a contemporary audience. However, as in *The Emperor Jones*, the Wooster Group's multimedia treatment of the play was received rapturously by the critics who claimed that the company had revitalised a tired classic with their deconstructive approach to the text.

Michael Feingold argued that the Wooster Group's approach to O'Neill "allow[ed] them to create new prisms of imagery through which his sensibility can shine that much more lucidly" (1996). Robert Brustein claimed that: "creative companies such as the Wooster Group, manage to show us how the spirit of a work can sometimes best be realized by ignoring the letter - or in the case of *The Hairy Ape*, the

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[45] Mildred, in O'Neill (1998, 265).

unletter - of the text" (Brustein 1997). Again, the authorial function of the Wooster Group was subsumed into the "intentions" of O'Neill in reviews, and this may go some way to explain why, as with *Jones*, the use of blackface was fully accepted by critics as a means to rejuvenate O'Neill's tired classics.

The critics responded in particular to the theatrical framing that The Wooster Group gave to O'Neill's play. The company contextualised his text within the popular performance styles of his day, using the theatrical techniques of burlesque, vaudeville, melodrama and blackface minstrelsy. By using popular theatre styles in order to stage O'Neill's play, the Group constructed their own version of a Darwinian evolutionary system of theatre practice, tracing their inheritance of theatrical and performance traditions from O'Neill's time to their own. Examining how O'Neill's theatrical context moulded and shaped his artistic practice, the Wooster Group "ghosted" O'Neill's "high art" play with popular theatre forms, which O'Neill had rejected within his own practice. The use of melodramatic and vaudeville styles in the production demonstrated how strongly influenced O'Neill actually was by these forms, and the company's use of blackface foregrounded the link between the workers" sooty faces and the blackened faces of minstrelsy.

By framing O'Neill's play within the theatrical codes of his day and by making reference to vaudeville, music hall, ballet, strip tease, melodrama and blackface minstrelsy, the Wooster Group production implicated the representational strategies of theatre within the pale gaze of O'Neill's society, showing the specular relationship between the audience and the performer to be one fraught by the struggle over the politics of identity. The Group's use of blackface, therefore, was not simply a theatrical style, it also operated as a commentary on how the visual economy of representation can construct identity both and off the stage.

The production's use of colour had a similar flickering effect to O'Neill's play. While the company used blackface extensively in the production, there were no African American actors on the stage. However, this flickering of colour was extended, deconstructed, and to some degree acknowledged, by the Group's multi-layered encoding of the blackface itself. The production constructed a destabilised vision of blackness as a material, political and theatrical sign and furthermore implicated the construction of white identity itself within the representations and degradations of black identity on the stage.

The theatre critic, Michael Feingold, commented on the use of blackface at length:

> "White gloves, the combination of the black paint and the out-front vaudeville delivery links Yank's self pity with the flamboyantly assertive pathos of the era's other theatrical set of working class heroes - the star entertainers who had fought their way up from poverty, either actual African Americans like Bert Williams (who wore blackface onstage) or immigrants" sons who used the minstrel show conventions as a medium for transmitting a sense of underclass experience in general, like Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor" (Feingold 1996).

While Feingold rightly pointed to the class struggles at the basis of minstrel practice, he did not however distinguish between African American actors in blackface, who subverted the minstrel show for their own ends, or else maintained the power of the black mask by donning it themselves, and the white working class actors who performed a denigrated vision of blackness for a white audience. Feingold elided the asymmetry of power between the two kinds of blackface actors by conflating them under the rubric of class, and completely erased the racist implications of minstrel practice. Feingold collapsed race into the category of class.

Feingold's reception of the Wooster Group's use of the blackface is significant in contrast to the furore which greeted their blackface minstrel routine in *Route 1&9* in 1980. Feingold's response reversed this reaction. Rather than seeing racism as implicit in the blackface form and wishing to censor it, Feingold appeared to forget about the racism entirely, and see blackface as an equivalent popular theatre form to melodrama or vaudeville. This is an interesting response and is telling in relation to the Wooster Group's use of blackface on the stage which, while referring to the visual codes of minstrelsy, did not employ the vocal and physical styles of minstrelsy. The Group constantly destabilised the use of blackface, moving between theatrical, material and social lexicons, and this may explain why Feingold took such a depoliticized approach to its use onstage.

While the critics commented on the use of blackface in the show, usually seeing it as a way to "uncover [the] secret heart" of O'Neill's show (Brustein 1997), they did not generally pick up on the questions of gender, or Irishness, in the production. Valk's performance as Mildred was seen as an amusing burlesque turn - which it undoubtedly was - but the greater significance of the intertwined gendering of Valk and Dafoe was

not investigated by the critics. One critic even argued that LeCompte "offers no commentary" on the gender stereotypes of the play, "beyond casting the same performer (Kate Valk) as both the naïve female upper class intruder and the ape to whose deadly embrace Yank finally surrenders himself" (Jonathan Marshall 2002, 2). However, I want to argue that gender was far more central to the production of *The Hairy Ape* than it was to *The Emperor Jones*, and that the colour coding of black and white in the performances were central to how gender and Irishness were constructed and positioned onstage.

As in *The Emperor Jones*, Dafoe and Valk both "cross-dressed" in a variety of ways. Their portrayal of masculinity and femininity was parodic and theatrical, accessing the performance traditions of gender on the stage, and producing a "cross-dressed effect" which I will discuss below. The two actors also crossed in terms of colour, with Dafoe's blackface and Valk's "whiteface" operating to hyperbolise the colour coding of O'Neill's play. Furthermore, the actors crossed between the two O'Neill shows; their oppositional gender and colour coded roles creating an intertextual cross-dressed effect and automatically mediating the roles they played in *The Hairy Ape* through the lens of their work in *The Emperor Jones*. Their previous Wooster Group personae also played into this cross-dressed effect by mediating Dafoe's hyper-masculinity onstage with the dual personae of menacing film actor and emotional theatre actor. Valk's tradition of blackface roles with the Wooster Group also mediated and complicated her whiteness as Mildred, offering a sense of critique within her role for audience members familiar with the Wooster Group's work.

Finally, the company itself also "cross-dressed" by moving the show to the Selwyn theatre in Broadway, renegotiating the opposition between fringe and mainstream theatre work, and inevitably reconfiguring their audience profile which had an automatic effect on how their work was received. Dafoe's celebrity status was used as a draw for audiences, and this further mediated his performance in the contrast between his cinematic acting persona and the brutish Yank he played onstage. Yank's masculinity was therefore put into tension with Dafoe's sex-symbol iconicity and this had an (occasionally drastic) effect on the reception of his work onstage. As Robert Brustein described: "Dafoe's acting never deviates from a grotesque intensity. No wonder so many women walked out. They had come to see a matinee idol and found the monster from the black lagoon" (Brustein 1997, 29).

The company also continued and extended their performance of the figure of O'Neill himself, this time through the figure of Paddy, the Irish character in *The Hairy Ape*. Irishness was also configured through the colour coding of black and white and the figures of the Irish Paddy and the female Mildred operated as Yank's two antagonists in the show. Colour became resonant of many identities and produced various bodies, none of which were African American, in the Wooster Group *The Hairy Ape*. I want to look at how the blackface operated in the Group's production and then go onto consider how the binary of black and white constructed Irishness and gender in the show, all the while implicating the visual economy of the theatre practice in the construction of social hierarchies of identity.

"It'll Stick To You, It'll Get Under Your Skin."[46]

Blackface

Apart from the character of Paddy, all the male actors had fully blackened faces in the ship scenes of the play. Their faces were painted a featureless black which evoked the minstrel mask without quite reproducing it. The production's references to the popular traditions of O'Neill's day: vaudeville, burlesque and blackface, insinuated that the men were marked in black not as a sociological statement on class or race, but as a theatrical statement on the context and roots of O'Neill's text. The blackface in the Wooster Group show acknowledged O'Neill's borrowing of minstrel conventions for his "high art" play and therefore contextualised O'Neill's vision of class in the play as mediated through the practice of minstrelsy.

However, in a shower scene staged in view of the audience, rather than off stage as in O'Neill's text, the actors washed off their blackface, leaving only the traces of soot in their eye sockets, while Dafoe remained in blackface as directed by the text (see Appendix One, Figure 11). The function of the blackface was reconfigured by this moment. It was possible now to re-read the use of blackface as simply a reproduction of O'Neill's device of the dirtied faces of the men to function as a contrast to the "whiteness" of Mildred. The production switched theatrical lexicons as the blackface became more prosaic and less theatrical, functioning to mark the working bodies of these men without necessarily deconstructing them.

However, the removal of Dafoe's make-up subverted and re-negotiated this effect again, by having a make-up artist remove his blackface in full view of the audience. The phenomenological status of the actor-as-actor was asserted at this moment. Suddenly the blackface became a theatrical mask and reference once more, but also became a commentary on the relationship between performance and race, foregrounding the mechanics of minstrelsy itself where: "minstrels claimed the right to turn black for as long as they desired and to reappear as white" (Roediger 1991, 125).

LeCompte therefore playfully combined several masks in her use of blackface: first blackface as a material mask of dirt from the ship, which could be washed off; secondly blackface as a mark of white working class identity, which could not be removed, hence the coal dust left in the men's eye-sockets; and finally blackface as a theatrical mask which could be removed as make-up at the end of a show, giving white performers the opportunity to "play black' and then resume their whiteness as they wished. The reassertion of the white skin of the actors therefore became a poignant reminder of how much blackness has functioned to construct white identity in the United States, exerting a ghostly presence as a degraded mask which conceals, marks and ultimately displays white skin.

However, the use of blackface also worked to establish the oppositional figures of Paddy in relation to Yank. The actor playing Paddy was not blacked up in the role (although his face was dirtied, which was closer to the original stage directions of the text). The actor played the character with an "authentic" Irish accent, which contrasted with the evidently artificial rap and jazz style rhythms with which the other actors spoke their lines.[47] Authenticity is not a usual trope of a Wooster Group production, but the notion of naturalising the Irish character, in comparison to the evident artificiality of the other characters in the play, has a resonance for the "staging of O'Neill" which I am arguing, took place in both of the Wooster Group's O'Neill shows.

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[46] A quote from Scene 4, while the men wash the black dust off their faces (O'Neill 1998, 274).

[47] The actor spoke in an Irish accent which I understood as intentionally "stage Irish" due to its evident artificiality to my ears. However, an American colleague who saw the show with me suggested that the accent would have sounded "authentic" to an American audience. I want to acknowledge David Cregan for his help with this issue.

The fact that the actor playing Paddy was less stylised than the other characters humanised him onstage. This may have been a way to stage of the character's romanticisation of a pre-mechanised past, but also functioned as a representative figure for O'Neill himself, a stage-Irish and simultaneously "authentic" Irish figure, whose modernist primitivism operated in opposition to the industrial age which Yank so clearly endorses. Paddy's lack of blackface became a way to stage O'Neill's body as a product of his play.

Colouring Gender

However, the use of blackface also needs to be considered from the perspective of gender as well as class and race, and was further destabilised by Kate Valk's performance as Mildred in the production. Kate Valk was first seen wearing blankets as a skirt and top. She wore over-large white ballet shoes on her feet, and moved through a variety of melodramatic poses as she spoke. As with all the other performers, she spoke only through a microphone, and her voice was distorted to become "Minnie Mouse-like" feminine.

The voice distortion and Valk's stylised posing had a hugely comic effect and brought to mind the burlesque renditions of femininity on the stage or in silent film. When Mildred demanded to see the stoke-hole, the men pulled off her blankets to reveal a diaphanous white ballet dress, offering a coy strip tease which also evoked the popular theatre of O'Neill's day. Valk was made-up to seem extra pale, and her face resembled the Hollywood stars of silent film. As Ben Brantley described her: "Ms Valk [...] brings an appetizing splash of burlesque intensity to the show's monochromatic canvas. Her face made up to suggest a silent movie siren [...] she minces (and on those giant feet) into Yank's world like a debutante from hell" (Brantley 1996).

Valk's ballet costume and artificially posed body language, along with the distortion of her voice, offered a parody of the theatrical conventions of femininity (see Appendix One, Figure 12). Mildred's femininity was as oversized as her ballet shoes, and Valk's performance offered a sense of gender itself as a construct, an artifice, a distortion which is performed and naturalised. The *over*-mimetic performance by Valk took the theatrical conventions of gender to a hyperbolic extreme, connecting Mildred's upper class artificiality with the artificiality of femininity and with the cult of purity, or

whiteness, and revealing the semiotics of class to be intimately bound up within questions of gender and colour. The use of ballet as a trope of Mildred's whiteness, class, and femininity seemed particularly appropriate, since ballet relies on the denial and erasure of the dancer's body in order to construct a transcendental aesthetic of femininity. The hyperbolic nature of Valk's performance framed O'Neill's vision of femininity within the performance codes of his day, showing the "pale gaze" to be intricately bound up with the "male gaze."

Valk's performance and semiotic encoding performed the function of what Judith Butler calls drag, where: "[drag] reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality" (Butler 1993, 125). While Valk was a female actor playing a female role, nonetheless the hyperbolic nature of her performance called into question the stability of the performance of femininity and demonstrated that the codes and norms of gender are constructed by, and through, representation. Theatre, as in *The Emperor Jones*, was exposed as producing disciplinary norms, manifesting an idealised "Real" which bodies are expected to attain. While this may not have been drag in a classic sense, like Shaw's performance as Medea, Valk's parody of the performance conventions of femininity formed a critique of the gender stereotypes contained in O'Neill's play and created a "cross-dressed effect" on the stage, undermining a naturalised notion of gender identity.

The production colour-coded the interlinked masculinity and femininity of Mildred and Yank throughout the show. Dafoe's performance of masculinity was as artificial and parodied as Valk's Mildred. Just as Valk used the performance trope of ballet to exaggerate her femininity, Dafoe used boxing to stylise his masculinity and class status. As Ben Brantley puts it: "'*Ape*" has here been conceived as a sort of boxing match between one man, the animalistic Yank, and the universe"(Brantley 1996). Dafoe's blackness was used to establish Yank's maleness, showing how his masculine power visibly imprinted itself on his body. Boxing and blackface became a means for LeCompte to underline the performative nature of Yank's masculinity and class, showing how Yank's work formed his masculinity and materialised his bodily identity. Both Valk and Dafoe destabilised gender through the performance disciplines of ballet and boxing, and their colour coding as white and black was therefore linked just as much with the gender of the characters as with their class status.

Through this interlinked relationship, LeCompte offered a critique of O'Neill's essentialisation of Mildred. Even while Mildred objectifies Yank with her Darwinian gaze, in O'Neill's play she also covers *her* eyes, warding off *his* gaze when they meet. The idea that Yank might look back, might objectify Mildred through *his* fetishisation of *her* femininity, was a theme explored throughout the show. While in the text, Mildred does not feature again after fainting at the sight of Yank, in the Wooster Group production Valk fulfilled Yank's description of Mildred as a ghost, haunting Yank throughout his journey towards his death. Valk's uncanny laughter resonated via the microphones as Dafoe-as-Yank remembered the injuries she had caused him and the production extended her ghostly presence even further in the scene where Yank visits New York to attack the upper classes on 42nd street. Seeing the wealth in the shop windows around him, Yank ruminates on Mildred: "she didn't belong. She belonged in de window of a toy store, or on de top of a garbage can, see!" (O'Neill, 1998, 292).

In this scene, Valk sat behind a transparent screen, wearing furs and jewels. Mildred became a mannequin, reconfigured by the way that Yank sees her, sitting in the window of a toy shop for the rich. As Johan Callens points out, by positioning Mildred as an object, a mannequin, LeCompte examined the relationship between Mildred's class and gender, showing her artificiality to be a sign of the subjectivity denied to her by the social system in terms of her gender as well as her class (see Callens 1999, 158). Mildred *is* a mannequin, an object which displays the wealth earned by her grandfather and father without any purpose of its own; a female body which is designed to be looked *at*, as well as to look. The production showed how the gaze between Mildred and Yank is reciprocal, just as Mildred objectifies Yank, her body is equally reconfigured through Yank's male gaze.

As critics pointed out, in the Wooster Group's production, Mildred also functioned as Yank's murderer, with Valk dressing as the gorilla who kills Yank at the end of the play. However, this was not clear until the curtain call, when Valk took her bows in the gorilla costume. The actors" bows then became an extension of the production, performing "Mildred-as-gorilla" after the play ended. Again, the "real" persona of Valk was hidden from view, as her bow, usually the moment where the audience feel able to access the actor "beneath" the character, became a bow where the character of Mildred was revealed beneath the costume. Valk's own persona remained hidden from view.

While Valk and Dafoe were of the same sex as the roles they played, the gender identity they constructed, which was evidently artificial and theatrical, created a sense of crossing in their performances. There was an obvious critical "gap" between actor and role which was maintained by the intertextual personae of the actors themselves, particularly in relation to the companion piece, *The Emperor Jones*. By constructing a sense of gendered artificiality, the performers created a "cross-dressed effect." The actors destabilised the gendering of their own bodies through their hyperbolic performance of gender, and through their crossing between the two productions. Furthermore, the antagonistic relationship between Valk and Yank implicated the specular economy of theatre practice itself within the disciplinary regimes of gender identity, revealing how theatre can teach audiences to "look" race, gender and class, materialising bodies through the pale and male gazes of theatrical representation.

Whiteness was made strange in the Group's production of *The Hairy Ape*, and again this was achieved in the absence of African American performers on the stage. The bodies of the actors were ghosted not only by the white spectre of Mildred, but also by the white spectre of blackface minstrelsy, the performance tradition which informed O'Neill's play which had done so much to form and materialise raced bodies in O'Neill's historical moment. Like O'Neill, the Wooster Group colour-coded class through the binary of black and white, and furthermore exposed how O'Neill had also colour-coded and essentialised masculinity and femininity through the same tropes. Race was erased in both play and production, but still worked as the uneasy metaphor through which other identities could be examined and explored. As with much of their work, the Group's engagement with class, colour and gender teetered precariously on a line between subverting and maintaining some of the racist dynamics of blackface minstrelsy.

The Wooster Group production deconstructed the representational politics of O'Neill's play; not only his text, but also his theatrical context of the 1920s. In doing so, the Group revealed how the gaze of the audience itself, can, like Mildred, reconfigure bodies. The production foregrounded the fact that theatre can teach audiences to "look' race, gender and class at performers on the stage, and to carry this gaze with them back into the streets. While the use of blackface in the production was problematic in the absence of black bodies on the stage, nonetheless the Group's

interrogation of the specular authority of the viewer, both on the stage and in the audience, subverted the racial and gendered assumptions of the play.

Just as Mildred's aunt tells her: "be as artificial as you are I advise. There's a sort of sincerity in that you know" (O'Neill, ibid, 265), the Wooster Group created a sincerity through their artificiality on the stage, raising important questions around the right to look, the experience of being looked at, and how vision can contain complex and contradictory relations of race, gender and class in unexpected and frequently astonishing ways.

Crossing Productions

The Wooster Group's productions of O'Neill's plays shared a number of themes and approaches. While *The Emperor Jones* showed gender to be produced by the gendered associations of blackface and Orientalism, *The Hairy Ape* showed gender to come from the colour coding of black and white which O'Neill had attributed to class. Both productions showed how gender was formed through and by a series of interlinked identities, and that the binary of black and white has significance for a wide range of identities. Both productions destabilised the "real" of the actors" bodies, showing bodily identity to be mediated and formed through representation. The intertextual relationship between the productions manipulated and reconfigured the semiotic encoding of the two performers and relied on the expert knowledge of the spectator to acknowledge the crossing effect between the two shows. Both productions engaged with the question of colour in the absence of African American performers and, generally, spectators in the performance. The Wooster Group produces resistant and subversive identities, through the heightened use of stereotypical images on the stage, in a context which partially problematised their work.

The use of cross-dressing is a theme which runs throughout the work of the Wooster Group. In *The Emperor Jones*, cross-dressing was used to historicise O'Neill's play, to reveal the way in which his encoding of "authentic" black actors was influenced by the crossing practices of minstrelsy, and to show how O'Neill's contradictory attitudes towards race in his play were a form of Orientalist cross-dressing for O'Neill. In *The Hairy Ape*, O'Neill's coding of the class structure through the binary of black and white was foregrounded as a minstrel technique by the Wooster Group. Furthermore, they showed that O'Neill's construction of class had gendered

implications. On the one hand, *The Emperor Jones* "disappeared" the question of gender within the hierarchy of identities constructed by the use of blackface and Orientalism in performance. On the other hand, despite the use of "same-sex" casting, *The Hairy Ape* foregrounded the question of gender through O'Neill's investigation of class, and created a "cross-dressed effect" onstage.

Both productions implicated theatre practice itself in the construction of unequal and repressive hierarchies of identity. The Wooster Group showed that theatre can train audiences to "look" identity at others through their experiences of performance. Furthermore, through the fact that O'Neill evidently could not escape the effects of the minstrel tradition, the Wooster Group foregrounded the indelible effects of representation on the way in which we see identity, in ourselves and others. Even when we try to resist the formative effects of representation, or try to envision a "new" way to represent identity, we inevitably fail. The formative effects of representation were shown to be inescapable in the Wooster Group's productions.

Unlike Warner and Shaw's work, which positions the act of crossing as a form of deceit, that ultimately destroys the "real" identity beneath the masquerade, the Wooster Group's work shows that the act of crossing produces the illusion of the Real, that identity is constructed through performance, and that there is no original or real body beneath the costume. While Warner and Shaw reject theatricality as a viable mode of identity, the Wooster Group show theatricality to be the *only* available mode of identity in a mediated and post-industrial universe. Nonetheless, there is an ever-present sense of loss in their theatrical worlds, a sense of despair at the irresistable effects of representation. While Warner and Shaw reject theatricality, the Wooster Group show it to be an inescapable tragedy. Cross-dressing is a kind of imprisonment in the work of the Wooster Group.

Conclusion:

"That Woman Might Be A Woman," Cross-dressing And Theatricality

Introduction

Throughout this thesis I have argued that the private parts and public bodies of performers and spectators are reconfigured by the act of cross-dressing. Cross-dressing is not an imitative act, rather it transforms and invents identities on the stage. The private parts of the actor's body are reconfigured and re-invented by the impersonation of public bodies on the stage.

In my conclusion, I want to put the work of Deborah Warner and Elizabeth LeCompte side by side, in order to examine the ways in which their cultural context has created the meanings and interpretations of the cross-dressing in their work. I want to look at how their use of cross-dressing has produced gender images and effects, how it has negotiated the binary between the real and illusion onstage, how crossing has taken place within a range of identities in their work, how cross-dressing has invented and denied bodies in their productions and, finally, how their audiences have been imagined and configured through their work. By finding the points of similarity and difference in Warner and LeCompte's use of cross-dressing on the stage, I will draw conclusions on how cross-dressing has operated in their productions, and how their work can help us to envision and re-envision cross-dressing more generally in theatre practice. I will begin by summarising my arguments, then go on to compare their work, and finally look at how these directors have approached theatricality in performance. In doing so I will suggest how these productions offer a complex sense of crossing which expands the field of scholarship on cross-dressing.

Crossing The Thesis

In Chapter One, I argued that clothing *does* make the man and woman, that appearance constitutes as well as expresses identity, and that the identities which clothing is supposed to express are deeply unstable. The real and illusion blur and construct one another in cross-dressing. This can be seen in the fact that the semiotics of the actor and director operate as part of the crossing to interrupt and critique the

images they have created on the stage. However, performance can also be performative, and as I have shown throughout this thesis, cross-dressing is productive as well as imitative of identity. Cross-dressing transforms the bodies of actors through the act of crossing, and also invents idealised and denigrated bodies on the stage which have a formative effect on the bodies of spectators. Cross-dressing not only invokes identity: it invents it. I have therefore shown that theatre can operate in the service of the status quo by producing the Real, creating idealised images to which spectators are been expected to aspire. However, in the case of Warner and LeCompte's work, I have also shown how theatre can reject or reconfigure the Real in ways that are controversial and subversive. The real and the illusion are intertwined in the act of cross-dressing.

Cross-dressing involves, invokes, and invents a range of interrelated identities on the stage, as I showed in Chapter One. The effect that cross-dressing has on the audience does not necessarily coincide with the image it creates on the stage. Images of women can construct masculinity, images of masculinity can construct nationality; images of race can construct gender. Crossing takes place in more ways than one, and to approach crossing as multiple is to see identity itself as intersectional and interrelational. Cross-dressing can also erase identities on the stage by constructing hierarchies of identity in which certain kind of crossings overshadow others. These hierarchies are inevitable not only because practitioners and scholars will place an emphasis on certain identities over others, but also because the power dynamic of each combination of crossing will assert the importance of some forms over others. Identities are erased and interlinked in cross-dressed performance.

In Chapter One, I examined cross-dressing based on the assumption that bodies are emergent rather than fixed. I asserted that cross-dressing produces bodies: the ambiguous body of the actor, the reconfigured body of the spectator, and the fictional bodies constructed through the act of crossing. I argued that bodies are produced, performed and invented in the act of crossing. I also argued that cross-dressing can only be understood historically and contextually and that the "meaning" of crossing takes place in the interrelationship between spectator and performer within particular social, political and historical contexts. In other words, the context creates the crossing. While the spectator's intertextual eye can construct the actor's body on the stage, I asserted that the act of cross-dressing can also constitute, invent, and imagine audiences, and can have an effect on the bodies of spectators. I argued that spectators

are reconfigured, imagined, and resistant in their reception of cross-dressed performance.

In Chapter Two I examined how the historical, cultural and economic conditions of Britain in the 1980s and 1990s contributed to how Warner and Shaw created theatre. I looked at the way in which they have denied the significance of gender in their work, while at the same time destabilising the gender images in the texts they produce on the stage through their complex semiotic encoding, which produces subversive images of femininity in performance. I argued that their work is underscored by the tension between the authority of actor and director and the authority of the writer, and that the questions of the universal, the individual and the national are central to the way that they create theatre. I therefore argued that gender images they create in their work both subvert and maintain the power of the canon in performance.

In Chapter Three, I examined the use of cross-dressing in Warner and Shaw's *Richard II*. I argued that the production created stereotypical images of gender, but that the production's nostalgia for a feminised and sexually ambiguous English past subverted the masculine constructions of Englishness usually found in the production of history plays. Crossing reconfigured the gender of nationality and feminised how the universal operated in their production. The production made monarchy theatrical and both maintained and conflicted with the authority of Shakespeare by casting the illegitimate body of Shaw in the role of a king. I argued that the production finally refused cross-dressing and ambiguity as a valid form of identity, and that the production "disappeared" Irishness as a significant form of identity on the stage.

In Chapter Four, I examined how the Shaw's critical and complex portrait of femininity in the role of Medea contrasted with the fixed representation of nationality and masculinity on the stage. Warner's production of *Medea* was critical of nationality for the ways in which it restricted Shaw's/Medea's foreign femininity. The production constructed Irishness through a vision of patriarchy. Shaw's foreign Medea "crossed" by visibly playing at the confining role of femininity in Corinth/Ireland and produced a "cross-dressed effect" in the critical distance between Shaw and her role and Shaw's Irishness and the Irishness of the other actors in the Abbey. Furthermore, the entire production "crossed" by transferring to the West End in London. Again, the act of crossing was ultimately refused as a valid form of identity, and theatricality was positioned in the production as an act of deception which ultimately leads to death.

In Chapter Five, I examined the context of the Wooster Group's work in American theatre of the 1980s, and I showed that they explored identity through the hyperbolic performance of stereotypes on the stage, which operated to deconstruct the images of identity in the canonical texts they performed. However, I also argued that the subversiveness of their work has been problematised by the elite context of their performances. Like Warner and Shaw, I explored how the semiotics of the actors disrupted the illusion of performance in the Wooster Group's work and I concluded that the Group's self conscious manipulation of the actors" semiotic encodings meant that the "real" disappeared from the performances entirely, meaning that the audience could not access a sense of the actor's presence on the stage. While the Wooster Group have shown theatre to be complicit in the construction of hierarchies of race and gender, and performance to be an inevitable element of bodily identity, I showed that the Wooster Group approached theatre and theatricality as an inescapable tragedy.

In Chapter Six, I argued that the representations of race produced gender identities in the Wooster Group's production of *The Emperor Jones*. The production continually destabilised bodies - the bodies of the actors, the characters and the author - by showing them to be the effects of representation and mediation. The Wooster Group implicated theatre in the construction of hierarchies of race and gender. Crossing operated in the company's historicisation of the text, by having the actors take on the cultural and artistic crossings implicit in O'Neill's play. Crossing was shown to be formative of identity, and identity was shown to be the product of mediation in the Wooster Group's *The Emperor Jones*. I argued that the Wooster Group were reluctantly theatre-centric in their implication of performance in the construction of unequal and repressive hierarchies of identity.

In Chapter Seven, I argued that *The Hairy Ape* showed how theatre can train audiences how to "look" race, class and gender at others, and how the act of looking can materialise bodies. The Wooster Group implicated theatre in the construction of the social hierarchies of identity. The actors" performances of hyperbolic and artificial representations of gender, colour and class on the stage created a cross-dressed effect onstage, and this effect was also created by the intertextual crossings between *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*.

Throughout my thesis, I argued that the images of gender created by cross-dressing can be contradicted by the effects of the crossing on the spectator. On the one

hand, cross-dressing can affirm and construct stereotypical images of gender, while also challenging these images by enacting them with inappropriate bodies. On the other hand, the subversiveness of the images on the stage may be contained and made safe by the context in which the performance takes place. Cross-dressing can be simultaneously subversive and conservative in its images and effects. For the rest of this chapter I want to look at the comparisons, contrasts and points of contact in the work of Warner and LeCompte, and I will conclude by examining how the issues their work raises can be applied more generally to the questions of crossing in theatre practice.

Comparing Crossings

The political and economic contexts in which Warner and LeCompte worked during the 1980s and 1990s were reasonably similar, in that they moved from the social optimism of the 1970s to the conservatism and political cynicism of the 1980s, which had an effect on theatre practice both in the U.S. and in the U.K.. However, the respective theatrical contexts of Warner and LeCompte responded to these social changes in different ways. The institutionalised national spaces in which Warner worked moved away from a focus on committed political theatre practice and new writing towards a more conservative emphasis on the production of "classic" or "canonical" texts. The figure of the director became more prominent as a result, but the power of director and actor operated in tension with the authority of the writer. Warner's work is consistent with these changes in her move from the fringe to the mainstream spaces of British theatre and in her emphasis on finding the truths in the classical texts. But as I have argued, her explorations of gender on the stage have both conformed to, and contested, the authority of the text in classical British theatre.

Similarly, the New York avant-garde theatre scene responded to the social pessimism of the 1980s with focus on the revisioning of canonical playtexts, this time with a focus on formal experimentation. LeCompte's work moved away from Richard Schechner's utopian humanist theatre practice towards a subversive formalist experimentation. However, the visual, performance and technological experimentation of the Wooster Group operated to work subversively and resistantly, deconstructing the politics of identity created by the playtexts, from within the texts themselves. LeCompte's authority as director therefore competed with, and challenged, the

authority of the writer in her work, while Warner both served and challenged the power of the writer in performance. The contextual and cultural differences between these directors have contributed to the differences in how they have used cross-dressing in their work.

Gender

The representation of gender in Warner's work has been produced through the complex interactions of the semiotics of the "real" Fiona Shaw and the illusion of femininity she constructs in performance. Shaw's public persona is ambiguously gendered, and this ambiguity is brought to bear on the roles she performs. Furthermore, her virtuosity frequently conflicts with, and contradicts, the disempowerment of the female figures she plays onstage. As with Warner's work, the images of gender constructed in the Wooster Group's productions have also resulted from the interplay between the actor's semiotics and the illusion they construct onstage. However, LeCompte consciously manipulates those semiotics and continually fragments and undercuts the construction of illusion in performance. As a result, the "real" of the actors" personae is denied by their performance, and the gender they construct on the stage is shown to be mediated and illusory. Gender is shown to be a product of performance in the Wooster Group's work whereas the illusion of gender is created by the "reality" of Shaw's persona in Warner's work.

Similarly, Warner's productions use costume and set to critique the social situation of the women in the plays she directs, whereas the use of set, costumes and technology work to affirm the stereotypes of gender in the plays which LeCompte directs, while simultaneously fragmenting and critiquing those images. While gender is interpreted within the authority of the canon in Warner's work, LeCompte uses gender to critique the canon and her authority competes with the authority of the writer (although this has changed over time). Gender is produced through the contradictions between the real and the illusion in Warner's work, whereas the illusion of gender on the stage is shown to produce the real in LeCompte's work.

By choosing to cross-gender cast the title roles of *Richard II* and *The Emperor Jones*, these directors brought cross-dressing to plays which were already riven by historical, cultural and gendered ambiguities. *Richard II's* production of ambiguous gender categories, and the ghosting of Richard by Elizabeth I, meant that the figure of

Richard II in the play was already dubiously male. Furthermore, the fact that the play was originally written for a transvestite stage and was ghosted by the Victorian tradition of female Hamlets and Romeos, meant that Shaw's body was immediately marked by historical and theatrical crossings when cast in the role. Similarly, *The Emperor Jones* was also marked by its cultural and theatrical history, by the figure of Charles Gilpin "passing" as black in the role, and by the Irish American figure of O'Neill who crossed by constructing blackness in his play. Furthermore, the techniques which the Wooster Group used to perform the play - of blackface minstrelsy and Orientalism - also carried gendered connotations and their own theatrical histories with them into performance. The casting of Valk and Dafoe's in the roles immediately situated them within historical, cultural and theatrical legacies of crossing. The *Richard II* text already came from a cross-dressed context, while O'Neill's rejection of blackface was shown to be a kind of crossing by the Wooster Group in *The Emperor Jones*.

However, Warner and Shaw semi-erased gender in Shaw's performance in order to explore the politics of power in their production. By doing so, they paradoxically constructed stereotypical images of femininity which had a subversive effect on the gendering of history in the play. While they semi-erased Richard's gender, they feminised his world. Similarly, LeCompte's production produced gender through race, by using the gendered connotations of blackface minstrelsy and Orientalism to establish Valk's masculinity and Dafoe's femininity on the stage. However, the cross-gender casting of Valk semi-disappeared in performance. Valk and Dafoe's own gender identities were also destabilised during the production and gender was shown to be a product of power and of performance. However, while the images of race the production created were challenging and subversive, the context in which the production took place potentially contained the radical impact of these deconstructive images. Both Warner and LeCompte's productions semi-erased the question of gender in performance and produced complex and ambiguous gender effects on the stage.

Warner's productions of *Medea* and LeCompte's production *The Hairy Ape*, were more concerned with gender than *Richard* and *Jones*, despite the fact that they were same-sex cast. While *Medea* critiqued nationality for its repression of individualised femininity, the Beckettian ending of the production, in which nothing

had changed after the murders, created a strangely feminist plea for the inclusion of murderous women in our world. Shaw's critical presence onstage created a cross-dressed effect in her Irish performance, which disappeared in the London production due to the "flattening" effects of her national positioning. *The Hairy Ape* critiqued theatre practice for its construction of gender roles and showed how the act of looking can form gender identity. Valk and Dafoe parodied the conventions of gender through colour and performance technique, and the hyperbolic nature of their performances constructed a cross-dressed effect onstage. *Medea* and *The Hairy Ape* showed that same-sex casting can still produce a cross-dressed effect through the actor's relationship with their role, and through the contexts in which the productions took place. These shows, despite being "same-sex" cast, were in fact more focused on the question of gender than in the cross-gender cast productions of *Richard II* and *The Emperor Jones*.

The work of Warner and LeCompte makes it clear that the representation of gender created by cross-dressing depends on the approach the production takes towards the real and the illusion, and is determined by how much authority the writer, director and actor each have in the construction of images of gender on the stage. Furthermore, these productions showed that cross-gender cast performances do not necessarily engage directly with the question of gender, and that the performances which were not cross-cast were actually more directly centred on the representation of gender on the stage. Gender is invented, erased and ambiguous in cross-gender performance, and performances which centre on gender can also have cross-dressed effects. The use of cross-dressing in *Richard* and *Jones* constructed gendered images and effects which were ambiguous and simultaneously subversive and conservative.

My contextual analysis of cross-dressing in Warner and Shaw's work complicates the question of subversion within Judith Butler's engagement with drag. She herself asks: "what kind of gender performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilises the naturalised categories of identity and desire?" (1999, 177). As Butler acknowledges in *Bodies That Matter*, subversion can only be discovered in the context rather than content of cross-dressed performance. As we have seen with the work of Warner, the problematically simplistic gender images constructed in her work have had a subversive and controversial effect in reception due to the context in which she has worked. Furthermore, as we have seen

with the Wooster Group, the repetition of subversive performance strategies can render them unthreatening or, indeed, they may come to serve the system it critiques. As Bert O States says: "in the theater, as in any art, there is always the need to defamiliarize all of the old familiar defamiliarizations" (1985, 43). The use of cross-dressing in the work of Warner and LeCompte shows that the meanings and effects of the gender images produced by cross-dressed performance can only be analysed within the context in which the performance takes place, and that cross-dressing has the potential to simultaneously subvert and affirm the status quo in performance.

The Illusion Of The Real

The differences in how the "real" and the "illusion" operated in the productions of Warner and LeCompte were fundamental to the differences in their use of cross-dressing. As I argued above, Warner's work focuses on staging the "truths" of the playtext, which are interrupted by the semiotics of Shaw, whereas LeCompte refracts and fragments both the real and the illusion in her work. Both *Richard II* and *The Emperor Jones* used cross-dressing to contest the stability of the identities being performed. *Richard II* blurred and intertwined the figure of the king and the figure of the theatrical cross-dresser, while *Jones* positioned race and gender as forms of impersonation. Shaw's ambiguously gendered and national semiotics played into her ambiguous portrait of Richard, while Dafoe's contradictory masculinity, and Valk's intertextually mediated femininity and whiteness operated to construct their racial and gendered portraits of Jones and Smithers on the stage. Crossing from one stable point to another was shown to be impossible by the ambiguity of Shaw in *Richard II* and of Dafoe and Valk in *The Emperor Jones*.

Both productions positioned identity itself as a kind of cross-dressing, but Warner's production eventually rejected this view by showing Richard to gain in self-awareness when he stopped "performing." By contrast, the Wooster Group's production asserted the performative effects of performance, to such an extent that they showed Eugene O'Neill's body to be a product of his own play. However, the subsequent work of Shaw and the Wooster Group showed that the formative effects of cross-dressed performance had reconfigured the bodies of the performers and informed how their later work could be interpreted.

In the productions of *Medea* and *The Hairy Ape*, the semiotics of the performers contributed to the cross-dressed effects of their performances. The ambiguity of Shaw's gendered and national semiotics played into the liminality of her portrait of Medea, and her "outside" status as an actor in Irish theatre worked to construct Medea's foreignness. Furthermore, the fact that Shaw had previously played Richard brought a further gendered liminality to her performance as Medea. Similarly, the fact that *The Hairy Ape* was performed as a companion piece to *Jones* had a cross-dressed effect on Dafoe and Valk's colour coding and gendering on the stage. The images of colour, class and race they constructed on the stage were intertextually mediated by their performances in *Jones*.

While the "real" interrupted the illusion in these performances, the binary of real and illusion was in fact intertwined in both productions, due to the transformative effects of cross-dressing. While Warner's production made reference to real bodies and identities which were stable and existed outside of the illusion of the stage, the complex and ever-changing semiotics of Shaw showed that the real had been discursively constructed through the illusion, and through the production's yearning for a truth beyond the fiction. The production's reliance on the real led to a rejection of cross-dressing in performance. On the other hand, the Wooster Group showed that identity was constructed by and through theatrical performance, but posited this fact as a tragic inevitability. Both performances expressed a yearning for a truth beyond the medium in which they worked, but both productions also showed that the real and the illusion are interactive and inter-transformative in performance.

Interlinking Identities

In Warner's work, gender is constructed within the competing identities of the universal, the individual, and the national. However, Shaw's Irishness tends to disappear from the interpretation of her performances, unless it is created by the context of performing in Ireland. The Wooster Group work with the interlinked racial, gendered, class, Orientalist, historical, theatrical and virtual identities on the stage, but do so in the absence of black performers or spectators.

These interlinked configurations of identity could be seen in *Richard II* and *The Emperor Jones*. Shaw's female Richard disrupted the gendering of history, while her Irishness was erased as meaningful element of Richard's English identity. Similarly,

gender identity was constructed through the racial performances of Valk and Dafoe, which meant that Valk's cross-raced casting led to the masculinity of her performance, while her cross-gender casting made her blackface "safe" by minimising its imitative elements. While blackness was engaged metaphorically in the production, the materiality of blackness was erased from the Wooster Group's production through the absence of black performers and audience members. Both productions constructed hierarchies of identity in which gender was semi-present, and Irishness and blackness were problematically erased.

In *Medea*, gender identity was constructed through the foreignness of Medea and the Irishness of Corinth. Nationality produced gender identity in the production and the gendering of Medea was therefore reconfigured when the production moved from Dublin to London. *The Hairy Ape* created gender identity through the lens of class and colour and showed all three to be theatrical constructions. Blackness was, however, semi-erased by critics and performers alike. In the Dublin production of *Medea*, identity was constructed through the tropes of "authenticity" which were surface tropes while, on the other hand, identity was constructed through evident inauthenticity in *The Hairy Ape*.

In all of the productions by Warner and LeCompte, identities were interlinked and produced through and despite one other on the stage. However, they were also constructed through hierarchies of power which were determined by the staging choices of the productions and the cultural contexts in which the productions took place. Just as Anne McClintock points out that categories of identity: "converge, merge and overdetermine each other in intricate and often contradictory ways" (McClintock 1995, 61-2), so too do the identities invoked, invented and performed in cross-dressing intermingle and erase one another in performance.

Cross-dressed Bodies

Warner's work produces classical bodies which are caught between the traditions of the virtuoso star-system of the theatre, and the transparent legitimate bodies required by the author-centred theatre of the classical stage. The power of Shaw's acting body therefore conflicts with, and confirms, the power of the author's body in Warner's work. In the work of the Wooster Group, bodies are mediated and fragmented within a de-psychologised theatre practice which interrupts and critiques

the authority of the playtext. While the pain of Shaw's body in Electra constructed an authentic "real" body on the stage, the Wooster Group's work produces bodies which are the dystopian products of the AIDS era, are medicalised, damaged and denied "presence" or authenticity on the stage. In Warner's work, the real of Shaw's body creates the illusion onstage but also interrupts it, whereas in LeCompte's work the illusion creates the real onstage but also interrupts it.

In *Richard II*, Warner maintained the text's contradictory approach to the body and theatricality. While the play eschews theatricality as a meaningful form of subjectivity, it places Richard, the actor-king, at the centre of the theatrical action. Similarly, Warner's production heightened the theatricality and virtuosity of Shaw's body while ultimately denying it, with Shaw's performance becoming less physical onstage as Richard gained in self-awareness in the play. In *The Emperor Jones*, the bodies produced were fragmented and destabilised through the use of costume, make up and technology. The bodies of Valk and Dafoe were historicised bodies which commented on the history and iconicity of O'Neill's text, alongside their performance of the play. While Shaw's body was contradictorily positioned as both transcendent and visceral, the Wooster Group deconstructed O'Neill's play and performed the contradictory bodies which O'Neill himself produced and erased.

In *Medea,* Shaw's "real" or stable body was shown to be in conflict with the costume she wore as Medea. Medea's clothing was shown to limit and constrict her body rather than constitute it. As a result, Medea's foreign and individualised body worked in contrast to the collective and homogenous bodies of patriarchal (Irish) Corinth. In *The Hairy Ape*, on the other hand, bodies themselves were shown to be shaped and moulded by the act of performing and the act of watching a performance. The acts of looking, writing and performing were shown to materialise bodies in *The Hairy Ape.*

Cross-dressing, and cross-dressed "effects" produced historical bodies, contradictory bodies and bodies that were the product - and invention - of performance. Judith Butler argues that bodies are the product, rather than producers, of social gender performances (1993), and this thesis makes the claim that actors" bodies are deeply unstable and are reconfigured through the act of cross-dressing onstage. Furthermore, the theatre's production and invention of idealised and denigrated bodies in performance means that the spectator's body is also reconfigured by watching the

production, through the formative effects of identification. Bodies are produced, formed and invented in cross-dressed performance.

Cross-dressed Audiences

I have already pointed to the contrast between the performance contexts of Warner and LeCompte and the differences in their approaches to gender, the real, hierarchies of identity and the body. Their productions therefore imagined and constituted their audiences differently. While Warner's work created universal truths for a "national" audience, LeCompte's work relied on the intertextual knowledge of the expert audience member, whose knowledge of theatre, theatre styles, popular culture and the previous work of the company enabled them to interpret the work.

While Warner's *Richard II* created controversy by overstepping the bounds of the director and actor's authority in the act of making theatre, the debate provoked by the controversy tend not to question the fundamental terms of that debate, i.e. the duty of directors to serve the truths of the text and the authority of the writer. On the other hand, the shock potentially created by the Wooster Group's work was reduced and contained by the expectation of controversy created by their work. Furthermore, their elite and educated audience tend to be au fait with the shock tactics used by the company. The context of these performances therefore created and contained the impact of cross-dressing.

In *Richard II,* the production asked the audience to share in vision of the universal which feminised their nationality. In *The Emperor Jones*, the production asked the audience to politicise the history of the play they were watching and to look at the representational strategies used to construct identity as well as the image of identity itself. The production disrupted the presence of the audience as well as of the performers. While *Richard II* imagined its audience as problematically English, *The Emperor Jones* imagined its audiences as problematically white. In the reception of the productions, Shaw's body was criticised for its lack of reality, and was seen by critics as an illegitimate body for the performance of monarchy. The production's cross-dressed challenge to the "reality" of monarchy and history was at the root of the controversy it created. On the other hand, LeCompte's employment of crossing was praised by critics, but was contained through the authorial intention of O'Neill. The

illusory and unstable bodies created by crossing in the production were made "real" by the evocation of O'Neill's authority in the reception of the show.

Medea imagined its audience as female, and problematised the Irishness of its Abbey audience by constructing an individualised female figure who rejected nationalism. *The Hairy Ape* distanced its audience in order to politicise their complicity in the construction of identity on the stage. In *Medea*, the frame of reference and the ability to read the performance changed when it moved from Ireland to England, while with *The Hairy Ape*, the frame of reference changed when the production moved from the Performing Garage to the Selwyn theatre in Broadway. The intelligibility of the identities constructed on the stage was made possible by the context of those performances, but their audiences were also constituted and reconfigured by the act of watching the performances.

The way in which these spectators were configured by the contexts in which these productions took place argues for the need to examine cross-dressing for its effects on the spectator, and for the spectator's effects on the performer. As Elin Diamond argues: "to identify is apparently not only to incorporate, but to be incorporated. To be radically destabilised" (Diamond 1992, 391). The meanings of cross-dressing are necessarily context-bound, but also have the ability to contest and reconfigure that context. Spectators are imagined, resisted, resistant and reconfigured in cross-dressed performance.

Conclusion: That Woman Might Be A Woman.

To conclude, it is evident that the different cultural and theatrical contexts in which these directors work, have produced the different ways in which cross-dressing was used in their productions. However, their productions also had some similarities. In *Richard II* and *The Emperor Jones*, the cross-gender casting focused less on gender than their "same-sex" cast shows. Both shows produced images of identity which were simultaneously subversive and conservative. Both productions undermined the binary between real and illusion, reconfiguring the semiotic encoding of their performers" bodies. A range of identities were configured and formed through each other and were positioned in hierarchies within each production, which had the effect of erasing other identities on the stage. The performances produced a variety of bodies, reconfiguring the performers" bodies, reconstituting the spectators" bodies and producing fantastical

and political bodies on the stage. While the audience created the performances within their own social and historical contexts, the performers also created, recreated and invented the audience, due to the transformative effects of cross-dressing.

Both productions had a complex relationship with the question of theatrical identity. Warner posited a real identity beneath the masquerade of cross-dressing, and cross-dressing as a deceptive act which ultimately leads to death. By contrast, the Wooster Group saw performance as an inevitable part of identity, and cross-dressing as a formative practice that constructed repressive hierarchies of race and gender on the stage and in the audience. In the work of both sets of practitioners, there was a yearning for a space beyond the mediated, the cross-dressed and the theatrical. This was a yearning which in Warner's work discursively produced a stable sense of the real This was a yearning which in the Wooster Group's work was shown to be a primitivist fiction, and the formative effects of representation were seen to be an inescapable tragedy. While Warner rejected theatricality in her work, the Wooster Group foregrounded and politicised the formative effects of theatrical performance.

While cross-dressing may be employed as a performance style in theatre productions, this is not to say that those productions ultimately celebrate or accept the effects of cross-dressing. Even as anti-theatrical protestors (or contemporary British theatre critics) decry the horrific effects of crossing, so too do theatre practitioners sometimes reject the medium in which they work in favour of a utopian sense of the real. The theatricality of cross-dressing can be simultaneously utilised and rejected in theatre performance.

Scholarship on cross-dressed performance has tended to focus on its imitative function by looking at the images crossing creates on the stage, and at how those images correlate with the "real" bodies being imitated. In this thesis, I have argued that cross-dressing is not imitative; it is transformative. The work of Deborah Warner and Elizabeth LeCompte has shown that cross-dressing has the ability to invent, imagine, and erase identity on the stage and in the audience. The anti-theatrical and anti-cross-dressing protestors were right all along, cross-dressing *does* endanger the stability of bodies and identity. But Simon Callow's Tilney was right too, sometimes the fact that "that woman is a woman" is just as shocking and threatening in performance. By focusing on the transformative impact of cross-dressing we can take greater account of the complex, conservative and transgressive effects of crossing.

I will end this thesis as I began, with the question asked by the Judi Dench Queen Elizabeth: "can a play show us the very truth and nature of love?" (Norman & Stoppard 1999, 95). Warner and LeCompte's work has shown that, while theatre does not necessarily reveal the truth and nature of love, it can question the very concepts of "truth" and "nature" through the transformative act of cross-dressing. Theatre invokes and invents bodies through the act of crossing, and changing clothes means changing bodies on the stage and in the audience. To tamper with the categories of clothing and make-up is to remake bodies and identities in performance. As Restif de la Bretonne forcefully argued during the first years of the French Revolution: "a woman in a man's hat and trousers has a hard, imperious, unlovable, antisocial personality. A man in pointed shoes is a fop, an effeminate, a trifler, a pederastomaniac, or, at least, one of those nonentities who slavishly imitate whatever they behold." (cited in Senelick, 2000, 1)

The work of Deborah Warner and Elizabeth LeCompte shows that act of cross-dressing is a fascinating, disturbing and multi-layered act, an act which reconfigures the private parts and public bodies of spectator and performer alike, an act which creates ambiguous, magical and threatening bodies on the stage and in the audience.

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Appendix One: Illustrations

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FIGURE 1.

Richard II, 1367-1400.

Portrait: J. Randall, after a painting by an unknown artist in Westminster Abbey

Permission: V&A Picture Library

FIGURE 2.

Elizabeth I, 1533-1603

Portrait: unknown artist, c. 1600

Permission: National Portrait Gallery Picture Library

FIGURE 3.

Richard II

Fiona Shaw as Richard II

Photograph: Neil Libbert

Permission: National Theatre Archives

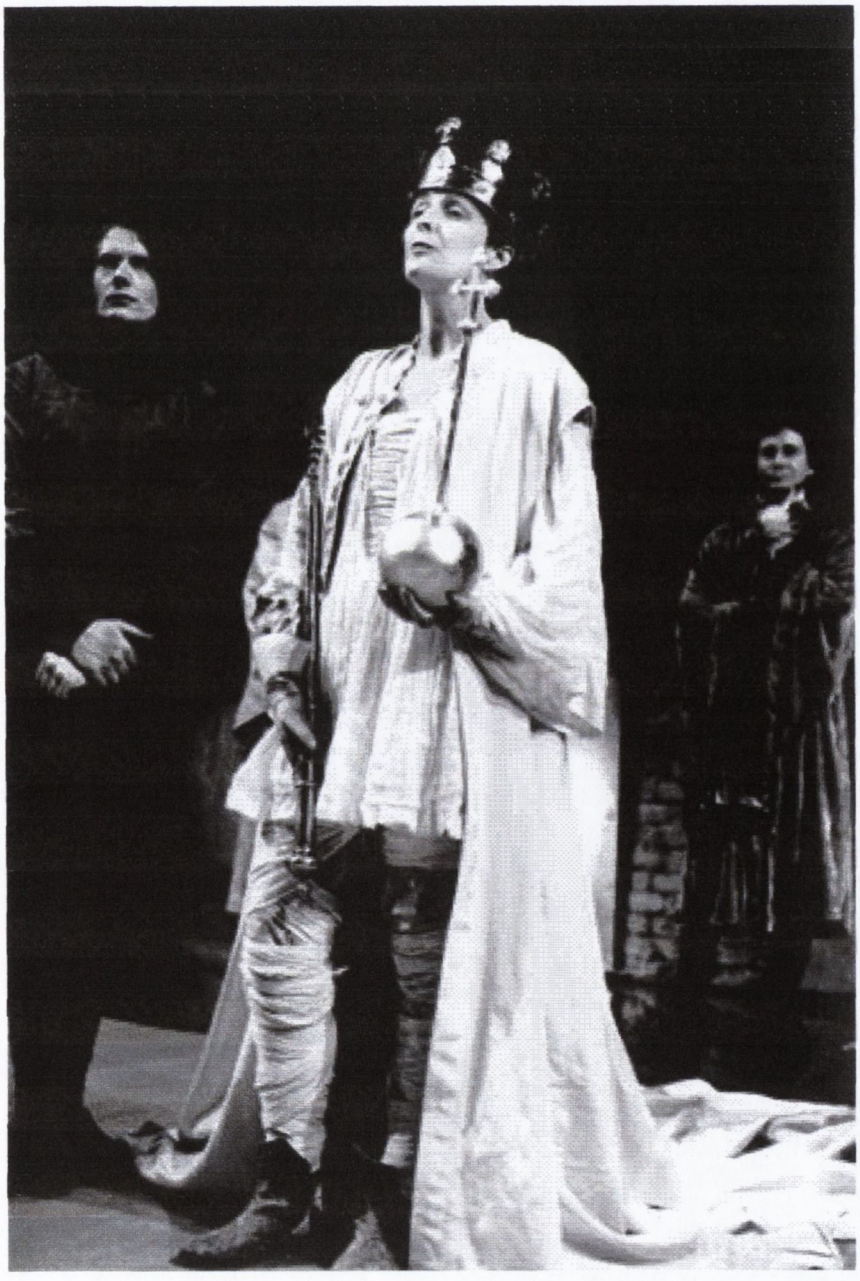

FIGURE 4.

Richard II

David Threlfall as Bolingbroke

Photograph: Neil Libbert

Permission: National Theatre Archives

FIGURE 5.

Medea

Fiona Shaw as Medea

Photograph: Hugo Glendenning

Permission: Brooklyn Academy Of Music

FIGURE 6.

Medea

Fiona Shaw as Medea

Photograph: Neil Libbert

Permission: Brooklyn Academy Of Music

FIGURE 7.

To You, The Birdie

Kate Valk as Phaedre

Photograph: Mary Gearhart

Permission: The Wooster Group

FIGURE 8.

To You, The Birdie

Left to right: Willem Dafoe as Theseus, Kossil-ja Hwang as Line Judge 7, Ari Fliakios as Hippolytus, Dominique Bousquet as Line Judge 4.

Photograph: Mary Gearhart

Permission: The Wooster Group

FIGURE 9.

The Emperor Jones

Left to right: Willem Dafoe as Smithers, Kate Valk as Brutus Jones

Photograph: Mary Gearhart

Permission: The Wooster Group

FIGURE 10.

The Emperor Jones

Left to right: Dave Shelley as Stage Hand, Kate Valk as Brutus Jones

Photograph: Mary Gearhart

Permission: The Wooster Group

FIGURE 11.

The Hairy Ape

Left to right: Willem Dafoe as Yank, Roy Faudree as Ship Worker, Dave Shelley as Long, Paul Lazar as Shipworker.

Photograph: Mary Gearhart

Permission: The Wooster Group

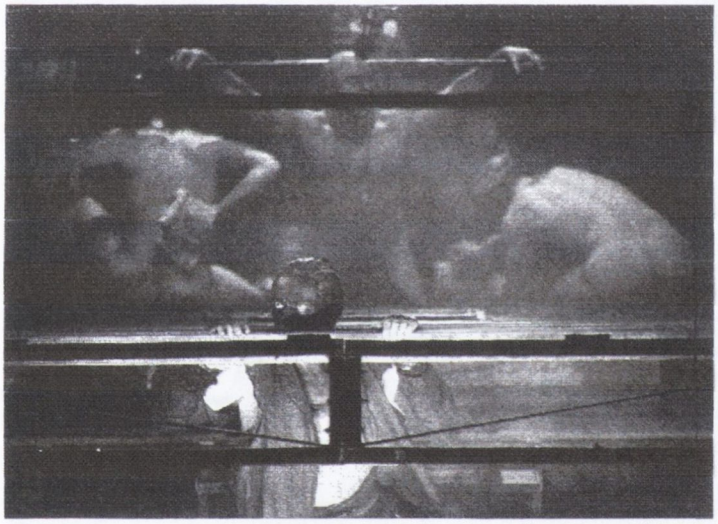

FIGURE 12.

The Hairy Ape

Left to right: Roy Faudree as Ship Worker, Kate Valk as Mildred

Photograph: Mary Gearhart

Permission: The Wooster Group

Appendix Two: Interview with Deborah Warner

Interview with Deborah Warner

10 November, 1999

Abbreviations:

DW: Deborah Warner

AM: Aoife Monks

DW: (about the BBC version of *Richard II*): There's some nice work in it, its not so bad for the telly actually, made too quickly, it was ten days filming, I mean what can you do? At least we have a record of it I must say it will be very nice to look at it when we're all eighty, very interesting to look back. I'd love to see Sarah Bernhart's Hamlet on video, I wish that had been on video

AM: Its becoming an interesting way of documenting theatre

DW: Its tricky because of course it never gives you anything of what you did, of what the live event was, I'm very reluctant, often I say no, in that instance I think it was genuinely worth it actually.

AM: I got to see the stage performance on video (...) and it was interesting to compare it. I thought it was a lot more toned down, more muted in the BBC version.

DW: Yes of course, well it was made for a camera really rather than an audience

AM: I've just read masses of reviews, and I think it was very interesting that the critics responded the way they did.

DW: Have you seen the French reviews? Because that would be genuinely, genuinely an interesting thing to do, you should do that: After a very long run in the National we took it to the theatre in Paris where we've just been with this ('The Diary of One Who Vanished') Its a theatre a Bobigny MC 93 Maison de la culture, 1 boulevard Lenine, Bobigny 93000 Paris, tel 00331 41607260 and ask for Dorothea and say why you're ringing and say that I've asked you should be able to get all the reviews.

But the *Richard II* reviews in Paris are the direct opposite really of the English reviews, because you may have observed a degree of resistance from them ..to put it mildly!

And I think there's lots of things to say about *Richard*, and one of the things to say is that it was a victim of its own hype, because the preview press were so over excited and so spiraling out of orbit in its delight at presenting major event, and there is always a

backlash really that occurs, and I think that the press are peculiarly , well for example you may have noticed there's a rewriting of the Independent review, that we caused a scandal within the paper including an apology, because they were so embarrassed that they sent their second stringer to it who took against it and made so light of it that they then sent their proper critic again later, so I think there was a feeling that this was a mistake...understandably, it was a spectacular target, but in fact the work that we made was not in anyway worthy of being reviewed as a slight event, it was a very thorough production, a rather well researched piece of verse speaking across the board, some very very good verse speaking which there often isn't. I mean it actually wasn't a scandalous event which they all wanted it to be.

AM: Yes I sensed an anti-climax in the reviews

DW: Yes they all wanted it to be a sort of drag show or something whereas of course what we were doing was putting on the play. But when we went to Paris which was about 105 performances later, so it was at the end of the run in England, it suddenly took wings and took flight in a way that made one realise that there had been a sort of depression strangely surrounding, not the cast, but surrounding the London event which was a kind of repression in the audience I think, because I think in some way the English are profoundly and deeply unconscious, but I think somehow they didn't like the fact that an English king was being pestered, because in some way the English think that they are related, someway they do think that somebody's great great grandfather knew Richard. Whereas the French like the Irish being a republic have an incredibly free and a healthy disrespect actually and they found it much funnier, they found the bad behaviour of Richard, Fiona's playing of the young king in the early scenes as just a bad king, the French adored, just adored, they were hysterical very early on, they had no problem with the fact that she was a woman. The English of course were terribly funny because they had problems with the fact that she was a woman, but not problems that it was an Irish person.

AM: Well that was what I noticed, and I was surprised by that I have to say

DW: It just goes to show our silly prejudices it goes into whichever corner that's available. It was very funny

AM: Do you think they didn't comment on it because it was not politically correct?

DW: No ! They forgot!

AM: I noticed Fiona Shaw kept saying it in interviews "I'm an Irish woman who's playing a king who invaded Ireland.' It came across very strongly when I saw it. It would have been very interesting actually had it come to Ireland.

DW: It would have done very well in Ireland. They would have liked the fact that he was a bad king. They would have loved the bit about going to Ireland!

And also of course in Bobigny we ... its a traditional proscenium straight on and they can remove the whole auditorium, about 800 seats and they took everything out and they built us a traverse but with very very steep seating units each side, so we got the capacity suddenly went from 360 in the Cottesloe to 620 which was much healthier, ..it needed something that was a bit more energy through numbers really, and then we went to Salzburg, you should get the reviews from Salzburg, we revived it 6 months later for the Salzburg festival.

AM: And how did the Austrians respond?

DW: Very very very well indeed. It was a most extraordinary collection of reviews. Because they're not very well written, they're not particularly careful, and what do you say with regard to people's desire for it to be scandalous which it wasn't?

Now having said all of that I think that the experiment which it genuinely was, I was surprised by where it took us, because I thought that casting a woman in that role was going to be explosive in that it would combust in such a way that things extraordinary would occur to the play. Of course it doesn't make any difference, it was exactly the same play, whoever's playing the part, the moment the actor takes the Shakespeare verse into their mouth and says " I am Richard II", they are, and the fact that they are a woman is eclipsed. I don't think the experiment backfired because I think she was a wonderful Richard so I mean, after all the reason I did it was because I thought she'd be a fantastic Richard, that's why I did it. But I had a notion that it would do something very extraordinary to the court, to take the notion of effeminacy to the nth degree, is as worthy an experiment as the other way to cast Richard II to go to the other extreme and to cast a bull in the part: Albert Finney, Brian Cox, would be very interesting.

Because this culture of Richard being cast as an effeminate, interestingly there's not that much support for that in the text, there's about two references to him being a weakish king, there are not references to him being an effeminate king. Ineffectual yeah, but not effeminate, of course it is the portraiture in the National Gallery, where he is wonderfully slight and light and to a degree female, that has given birth to the

tradition. I think there's more to it and this is very contentious, and I suspect and no academic will share this, but I began to wonder whether the actor who played Richard originally might not have been one of the boy actors, because if for example Shakespeare did himself want to explore the notion of effeminacy, and how such a thing enters the theatrical tradition and maintains over decades is only because somewhere along the line someone was doing something and the tradition carried on, it would be a fantastic notion to think that one of the boy actors who normally would have been playing Desdemona or Cordelia or whatever, very very interesting to cast one of them as Richard, so you cast one of your girls to play the boy, given that they're boys, it would have been a very dynamic thing for Shakespeare to have done, sure as anything I bet he did it, when he thought, I want a really female boy its a very obvious thing to do to cast one of your female cast , so I've wondered sometimes, its a sentimental wishful thought, but I just sometimes wonder whether what we were doing wasn't in fact returning to him which I like really, there's no question that it worked very well, but nor was it meteoric and explosive in the context of the whole, ..the fact of that piece of casting did not necessarily reveal that play anew, the fact that it was an excellent actor playing the part of course reveals the play anew, but the gender became a non-issue. Partly because Richard is above gender, which is why there are certain plays that I might be reluctant to do cross-gender casting because I wouldn't see why and what the point was I think in that particular instance, he's above gender, he's like Tutankamuun, he's really believes in the divine right of kings and he doesn't think of himself in gendered terms, he thinks of himself as a god, and therefore the casting of the gender is entirely irrelevant, as is his possession of gender irrelevant, I don't think Richard for one moment has thought about his gender nor has done much with it because he's busy being bandaged and holily anointed in anointed rags and doesn't need to think about it

AM: I found that there was this anti-cross dressing diatribe going on in the Renaissance and one of the things held against effeminate men was that they began to look like effeminate priests in robes.

DW: Those subtleties of those moments are very hard to grab at. Did you *see Anthony and Cleopatra* at The Globe? It was pretty wonderful. I'm not a fan of the Globe particularly, but for the first time I arrived late, and I was on top gallery and I walked in and there was a full house as it has been in the Globe since the day it opened and looking down on the stage and seeing Mark Rylance ..it was immediately fantastic,

You thought "wow, look at those creatures!' and Mark's a wonderful actor, and his Cleopatra, for me it made sense of the Globe, I mean I'm against all of this I don't see the point of this recreation of a moment which is irrelevant because the moment is now and it makes no sense, but actually I thought, "fair enough" and its a very interesting place to look at this cross dressing and then one thought even this audience who are familiar with the practice, it still must have been very exciting because its very very charged, its intensely theatrical and it immediately lifts the banal to the charged to the coloured highly centred flamboyancy of what true theatrical stuff is. It will have delighted the audience, it will have made the female roles so much more interesting, so much more it doesn't bear thinking, because in this particular production, Mark's Cleopatra certainly eclipsed the Anthony just as you longed for her to come back on stage, because the moment she came back on the place just lit up, and it was it was very very fascinating, very fascinating, so I mean it puts mega volts into something that may otherwise be light and its a way to cheer up the drab, I'm sure Shakespeare would have had his problems down there and it will have meant that the female roles will have been much more noticeable, much more admired, and it will have interested the audience. Even if the conventions were accepted, it would have been a reason to go to the theatre.

AM: The thing that Fiona Shaw did was to heighten this idea of king as performer, because the theatricality really came across, because you were aware that the actress was playing the part and therefore the king was playing a part. And the second thing that I thought it really highlighted was the relationship between Richard and Bollingbroke.

DW: For sure, it did something quite extraordinary. That is exactly where it happened. But it did it in exactly the same way as the production I saw in the 70's which was the RSC one with Richard Pascoe and Ian Richardson where they shared the roles so they swapped every other night and so the intimacy of that relationship because we were able to play it as it were sexually but with there being no sexual agenda, so it was very interesting what permission it gave us, so they were lovers really, it was clear that they were lovers and yet clear that they were not in a homosexual way, so we could never have played what we played if they had both been boys because we would have been doing *Edward VII*, within an instance it would have only been about a male homosexual affair, but because of that distance we were able to play very provocatively, very softly, very gently, very physically connected, and of course the Pascoe and Richardson thing, because they were literally viscerally connected because

they were swapping each other's roles and they became very similarly intimate and I think that's very interesting, it certainly proves that these aspects of a big casting decision can open invisible doors or allow things that you otherwise could just not be playing with, and give you permissions and not give you the wrong agenda or the wrong references because it would be a very dull *Richard II* that was telling you all the time that Richard and Bollingbroke were lovers because they're not, but because they have the intimacy of siblings, they're pretty deeply involved, the intimacy of incest in a way, but not with the neurotic undertones, they were brought up in a nursery together, they played together from the age of two, so I mean one has to reflect that. So the rewards there were very great and it made the separation, it made the handing over of the crown seem unbearable and terribly beautiful. Of course we had another actor playing Bollingbroke

AM: Richard Bremmer who was in the film

DW: David because he did the rehearsal and the whole production kicked off that, and also they looked rather similar, and we tried to make Richard and Fiona look similar and in a funny way strangely Richard rather managed to, but I mean, David and Fiona actually looked like siblings. It was interesting.

AM: I felt that, as you were saying, when she handed the crown over that the tragedy took place in the personal relationship which was really poignant, and that personal and public really came across. I'm really interested in this idea of the body of the king and the body of the man and that also was really highlighted by Fiona Shaw playing it because you were always aware of this body that was slightly out of synch with the body that she was playing. So do you think she became female or male, in the prison scene, had she become gendered at that point?

DW: I think we, in the Parliament, the best part of our work was that scene, the centre of her performance was that scene, I don't know that I'm interested, I'm not sure she ever was male nor female, I mean I'm not sure that it particularly interests me, I mean she played from who she is, as all good actors must, and she is female, so I guess its a female Richard, but I guess Richard re-categorises these things, Richard, the culture of him being effete comes from him being more interested in poetry than he was in wars so whether these crass definitions of gender mean anything, I sometimes thing they don't. He veers more towards the poetic sensibility rather than the warring sensibility, he was a very bad runner of wars, but on the other hand you could cast a bull of a man

who was also a bad runner of wars which would also be very fascinating. But I think to me casting is about going to an extreme, because there is something new, when you think about casting you must think about going towards those edges, because real extraordinary things start to happen. Female I suppose is the answer, but I mean, we never thought about it because we didn't need to because it was done, it was an absolute, we had a girl playing the king, playing Richard.

AM: There was a certain sense in the press, when they went to *Richard* that there was a terrible disappointment that they couldn't be more outraged, that there was a certain sense that they were ascribing an agenda to you and Fiona Shaw, that you were claiming male roles for female actors and this was gender blind in the way that the National tends to be colour blind, do you feel that that was an agenda?

DW: No I think we started something happening, Where Kathryn Hunter played King Lear two years ago? No I think it was necessary that it was done and it will spawn a million productions, some of which will be wonderful, some of which will be absolutely terrible! I think there's a lot of work to be done there still, I must say I'm more interested in some of it than I was then: I wanted to do *Richard II* and I wanted to cast someone who I thought would be a very interesting Richard. I think now, to do it in a more naturalistic play would be certainly more provocative, if you were looking at Tennessee Williams, there's certainly something to be done there...its only a tool, its not a ..its a good tool, all parts should be open to all people so the most interesting piece of casting can be done and in a way that's all I would have to say about it, and as a tool to provoke it is interesting , there is enormous provocation, it is interesting for the sake of it, you know the door must be open on any sort of casting, it gets one potent mixtures, that's what one wants, but no I think there was more fuss, and we were notorious.. I wasn't unaware of what I was doing, I knew I would shake things up a bit

AM: What that what you were trying to do? Shake things up a bit?

DW: No I was trying to shake myself up a bit, because I need to ..learn and I think my job and responsibility is to try not to go back over old tracks, I need to.. theatre dies very quickly when people get what they expect when they go in through the door, its as simple as that, the job of creating a theatrical even is that it should be something that is quite quite heroic so I don't think that's above provocation, that's quite seriously a fundamental requirement of what it is to be a theatre practitioner or a director of live opera, spectacle or whatever it may be, it must never ever repeat, because otherwise

people will go to sleep in their chairs because they feel comfortable and they feel they know it and its not a place to come for a snooze, the theatre, although God knows we've some of greatest snoozes.. I think we've snoozed a bit too long. I think there are special requirements, you know *The Wasteland* it was very necessary indeed that the audience were asked to go on a journey which because of something slightly surprising which might be something as simple as the way they entered the theatre or what the theatre looked like when they got inside, meant that they were very alert and ready to hear 620 lines of the greatest poem written in the century but nonetheless 620 lines. A series of recognisable things slightly dulls the senses, makes us feel at home, that's not what we should be doing, Its pretty important.

AM: Was *Footfalls* the first time you began to venture off the stage?

DW: Yes there were some good reviews there. ....The Bobigny never got it in France because it was banned before it got there

AM: Nearly as good as a riot!

DW: Its very interesting isn't it, you're theatre had marvelous riots in Ireland, its fantastic when theatre can have riots.

AM: I don't think the Abbey has had riots in a long time.

DW: No it would be very easy to have one of course, it would be very easy to have one in Ireland, I think Ireland's one of the places where it could happen.

AM: I teach first year students in Trinity and we were wondering how to create a riot in the Abbey and we weren't sure, I suspect the audience would accept what you gave them, up to a point

DW: I think pro anglo Ireland would be in with a chance, I think you'd be somewhere pretty good, somewhere pretty shocking, I can think of some people from Northern Ireland who could do a play in there that might make people think

AM: I think we've come to expect politics in theatre in Ireland

DW: Not the unacceptable face of politics though...I've thought about it here and the irony is that we're so soggy and soft centred here, the only thing that would do it would be something in bad taste, something about Lady Diana shortly after she died, an unkind portrait of her would have shut down the National for sure.

[... tape change...]

DW: But I don't think in Shakespeare the girls playing the men are as explosive as the men playing the girls, I think out of Shakespeare, it really it would work, say one was to do *Private Lives* and cast it with girls, the Eliot and Amanda relationship would be

very explosive, and not just because its an affair and a sexual relationship, but actually a girl playing Eliot, it would really inject mega mega volts, whereas the Richard, well, we didn't try and kid the audience, maybe if we had, we had put our energy there, maybe we should have worked harder there, had a little beard but I think I'd be bored by that, it doesn't particularly interest me.

AM: But she's less boyish then too I think that's important

DW: Well that's true too, its also arguable if the character needs to go on a journey, and that really is a journey, then you're in trouble too. [...] Richard really aged, I think he goes from eight to thirty eight, So what else could one do? *Hamlet*, I never wanted to do *Hamlet* with a girl, but you know I probably will end up doing it, and think the reason I want to do it is that I want to so deconstruct the play that that's quite a good start. But I mean I won't do a linear driven narrative, I'll do something quite strange [...] I would be more interested in Fiona playing it than any eligible boys, because I'm a bit bored of seeing *Hamlet* really, but I would like to explode that, I'd like Sarah Bernhardt to come on at the beginning...so my desire would be to play with it.

AM: Do you think after your St Pancreas project that you are going to come back into the theatre?

DW: I don't feel I'm away of course, but I can see what you mean. I'm not in a terrible rush to that no, I haven't done a real round full play for a long time actually, I've had a very good time where I've been and I'm more excited about where I've been than going and doing a Chekhov or a Strindburg ... I think for me I have a little bit of a crisis at the moment about how to reveal those newly, which is why I'm not doing them, I don't know how to lead the audience on an extraordinary unless it is merely ... I don't mean merely, I mean importantly.. to present the best actors that could possibly be in a cast, and in a way although this will sound ridiculous to you, the film I made, by Elizabeth Bowen, in a way this is a silly thing because this is a film, actually its a very very straight play, that's what I felt, so I do feel I've done Chekhov in the past two years, with some unbelievably wonderful performances from Maggie Smith and Fiona Shaw and Michael Gambon and others, that is actually my straight theatre work.. its a funny thing to say its most closer to ..I wouldn't say it to a film person because they'd wack it as a piece of theatre which they long to do, but its been real properly researched

AM: Why have you branched out into film?

DW: Because I wanted to do something I absolutely didn't know how to do and the challenge of that was.. I was searching really...everything is easy after that... you're

fighting on every front, the culture of the industry was deeply unattractive, the thing that counts in the middle was wonderful, the joy of filming was fantastic but the weeks on either end were not.

Appendix Three: Interview with Elizabeth LeCompte and Kate Valk

Interview with Elizabeth LeCompte and Kate Valk

29 March. 2000

Abbreviations:

ELC: Elizabeth LeCompte

KV: Kate Valk

AM: Aoife Monks

AM: I got to see the film of *The Emperor Jones* which I loved. It was great and its lovely to have something like that to look at because you get to watch close-ups. Why did you decide to make a film of it?

ELC: I don't know. I really like the colours very much and it just seemed a good video piece...visually...and the other thing was that its easy to do because its one character. The difficulty with our other pieces is that there's usually three things going on at once and its really about scanning, taking in a general picture and then focusing, scanning, periphery vision. With this piece I didn't, I really centred in on a hierarchical persona, so that's much easier

AM: It really worked too

ELC: Yeah, and also we had a lot of imagery, Chris and I had a lot of imagery which we didn't actually use in the piece, so...

AM: And do you feel it worked, the film, are you pleased with the result?

ELC: Yeah.. its not quite finished...we're putting the last touches in with Chris...yeah, I do think it works

AM: And about the actual stage production...did it do what you hoped it would do, were you happy with the show?

ELC: Yeah.. but I didn't know what it was supposed to do, so it just happened

AM: I'm doing work on crossdressing, and so I'm really interested in Kate Valk crossdressing as a man in blackface. Did you work... was she working as a man.. was she playing a man?

ELC: You know you should really talk to her, about this because she has a lot of great things to say.. but I don't know.. I just know that we've been developing that voice, that voice to me is not man or woman...its something else, its something in between. I was

working from a lot of Japanese stuff about ghosts and spirits, Kango spirits, so I always thought of her as half man and half woman, ghost and spirit, evil and good...so I wasn't thinking of sex at all.

AM: It was really ambiguous in the production but again it was not something I felt like I needed to know either, she was Emperor Jones rather than being man or woman. And I was wondering if you do think about the sex of your characters when you're directing.. obviously it depends on the production but does gender happen in your shows, I mean do you consider it when you're directing?

ELC: You know, I don't know... I don't think intellectually, I don't write about what motivates me to make...so I don't really know... I could make up a bunch of stuff.. I don't think there's anyway you can work without gender if you're working with people, right? But can you give me more of a lead-in, sometimes this is a language problem because I don't speak..

AM: Academe-ese?

ELC: Right, and I also don't have much to do with theatre, so...

AM: I think in a sense, just from seeing some of the work....that the Emperor Jones managed to be both genders, or more than both in a sense, that there was something really complex going on with "are you looking at a woman or a man?' A lot of the time you pretty much know, its pretty straightforward, particularly with women, usually when women are on the stage, you're looking at a woman on the stage and it just seems your work escapes that in someway which is exciting, and that the crossdressing had a complicating effect.

ELC: I don't think of it as crossdressing and I don't think of it as gender: I couldn't come up with that as something I work from... I think of the stage as a free space where everything is mutable and part of that comes from being a visual artist so you don't have to reference much about psychology, at first, of course that comes in after the fact, so I really work from essences: colours, sizes, vocal qualities and a lot of times it doesn't tend to have anything to do with age or sex, though some things are sex related, for example, I don't think I would have had a female playing the Hairy Ape

AM; Right! Why?

ELC: Because that's psychologically male whereas Emperor Jones wasn't psychologically male.

AM: What was the difference?

ELC: That's interesting.... I guess that there's no relationship with a woman in *The Emperor Jones* and there is a really important relationship in *The Hairy Ape* which to me is a political one.

AM: There's a real sense of opposition between those two shows, playing black and white. Was that a conscious choice?

ELC: When we made *Emperor Jones*, Willem played a more female nature, based on female Kango ghosts and I wanted to refer to that and then Kate was more mythic.. and then *Hairy Ape* came after that, but it comes from the same... we have an O'Neill collection paperback and there's *Emperor Jones* and then *The Hairy Ape*, so I had gone on and read a little into it and I said oh this is just a continuation of some of the same ideas, so they were meant to be seen together.

[Kate Valk enters]

AM: Tell me about the Japanese influence: I know there was some Japanese influence in *Brace Up!* using Japanese dance work: was this a continuation?

ELC: I think its a thread that goes through all the work and probably will continue, I'm still interested in it and Kate is still going with it structurally [...] I think its something that continues throughout the work, it started really early. I worked with a Kyogen master, here and I'd never seen anything like it and it started an interest and then, I dunno we... really only worked with Asian stuff through video tapes so we have these video tapes about Asian theatre so we don't really *know* it...I don't really know it very well, every time we go into a piece I have to go back in and reread all this stuff about it as if its the first time I've seen it...we're only looking for things not really needing to know about it , looking for things that key me off visually or structurally that work in *my* world, so I never quite....

AM: So you're not trying to *do* Japanese. The visuals of the costumes were gorgeous, really lavish.

KV: I just happened to find that red robe and the other things are from other pieces.

ELC: Just layers from other pieces with that beautiful robe.

AM: Because it looked almost authentic, it was very identifiably Japanese.

KV: That's funny because the red robe is a costume from a Masonic lodge, but then Liz made other design changes with the sleeves and where the rest of the layers were coming from the other pieces.

ELC: the top part comes from *Point Judith* it was the apron. Its amazing how these things track through the same way the Japanese stuff tracks through the work.

AM: The effect I felt it has for you was that it gave you a really interesting shape and then that began to change as you lost your clothes. What was going on there for you?

KV: I don't know, I just recall Liz coming up with a clever way to follow the stage directions.

AM: Do you feel like you were playing a man?

KV: Oh yeah, definitely.

AM: For me there was an ambiguity

KV: Its not naturalism. I didn't study men and decide on.. its just not naturalism, so the voice came first and then for me the posture of the Noh and the Kabuki made a male stance for me that wasn't natural but was very powerful, it changed where my centre was and made it more powerful.

AM: So you started physically?

KV: Vocally, with the text, vocally.

AM: Were you manipulating you're own body to make that voice happen?

KV: Yeah.

AM: Did the stance change your voice?

KV: No not really. Its a pretty solid and powerful position to come from. I wasn't doing anything...I don't know.

Appendix Four: Interview with Fiona Shaw

Interview with Fiona Shaw

15 February, 2001

Abbreviations:
FS: Fiona Shaw
AM: Aoife Monks

AM: How did Medea as a foreigner exist in the two productions? Because I think her nationality changed from Dublin to London: but I wasn't quite sure what her nationality was in Dublin.

FS: Well I don't think that being literal about these things is helpful. I don't know in Dublin: I'm just an outsider to a group much more prescribed by design so that its very obviously a rather restrictive community, it was almost Islamic wasn't it? That this insular people, it wasn't saying anything about the nation as we experience it, it was a heightening and somebody who was not of that. Here, because I *am* Irish, there is not as much of a prescription around the chorus, they just are, the local people of here, but in Dublin that wasn't the case, in Dublin they were heightened versions of local people.

AM: And the use of Irish changed between the two as well.

FS: The use of Irish is really an extraction which I think is quite good, its not that it is Irish, its that it is a local old language which people use to communicate, it just happens to be a useful tool, and in Dublin what it did is that if the chorus did speak Irish, the audience understood the local view and I thought that was quite interesting that Corinthians, Greeks as it were, that the play was taking place in a Corinth that is Greek where the audience understood the values of that place rather than Medea the outsider and here (London) it is I am just using a tiny fragment that it is that she might revert to a language that the chorus wouldn't understand, that the audience wouldn't understand, which is fundamentally not so sympathetic, because people don't like not understanding things.

AM: So it reversed the use of Irish

FS: Yeah yeah. I think of it very much as a sort of grace note, I don't think its .... (tea making ensued)

AM: One of things that I was thinking about with this was Richard II, and one of the things I thought was missed, that was missed in the reviews, which maybe you don't think was missed, was the fact that Richard was this English king who invades Ireland and was played by an Irish actress. And I thought that would have been very evident if it had come to Ireland, it would have been very prominent, but no one noticed.

FS: Those Irish curs or something, I noticed, I used to love doing that. How I had to put down the Irish and all that....sorry this is my old gripe, but I think the Irish both on and off the stage are very conscious of their identity. There is a terrible self-consciousness of it.. it's not really such a big deal. Irish are merely just not English people, they're foreign people. In this country people aren't able to be so aware, there's no point, its so diverse, Englishness is something weird about some values to do with wearing tweed or something, the English are never necessarily exploring Englishness in their plays, or they're doing it so implicitly that they don't need to look at it, its not the purpose of it, and they certainly don't see themselves as English as opposed to Irish, they're not in reaction to Ireland.

AM: Did you feel that you were exploring Englishness in Richard?

FS: No, I'm not interested in nationhood at all, I'm interested in the world of the emotional imagination. Which is merely, the logo of it, or the language of it of course is as diverse, but I just don't believe that the essence of myself lies in my nation, I think it lies in my humanness, and I'm much more interested in plays whose emotional or imaginative relevance is international, I don't think you can solve yourself by looking in the mirror all the time.

AM: I am interested by the fact that, with Medea, in an interview with you, you said that, in the Dublin version that this had something to do with modern Ireland, engaging with a different place to what you had left and that somehow Medea was engaging with that difference in some sense.

FS: I felt very out of contemporary Ireland, but actors use whatever the grab bag is in front of them, I mean if you feel out of something, if you notice the colour of the walls being different then that helps you feel slightly alienated, its not saying anything intrinsic about the thing but seeing it as an imaginative inspiration, but I don't know, I might feel an outsider in Liverpool, in Dublin of course it is slightly more complicated, but only more complicated if you have a desire to belong, its not complicated if you

don't mind. I don't need the affirmation of Dublin to be from Ireland, nor am I noticing it an a particularly touchy way about it.

There are funny things that he (Jason) says: "You come from the sky's backyard" and that is terribly funny if I think of that as Cork.

AM: That was quite strong actually, and there were people laughing at that in the audience, and I wasn't sure about what they were laughing at, but I thought that was funny.

FS: I'm sure they were laughing at the fact that they were from Bolton or something, I don't think that would be again particularly about Ireland, people relate those things to themselves, but its amazing for me. The sky's backyard could be Cork or it could be Ireland, but I don't think people would have any notion of that here particularly.

AM: And then Greece became London in some sense as well, some very complex sophisticated place.

FS: I think the Greece he's talking about didn't really exist, so he's writing about the world as he knew it, Euripides, so their Greece was probably making a million political points that are long since lost and we don't need to know them, to find the play for us, and for us long since have writers, thousands of years after Euripides, I mean think of Shakespeare, also taking nominal names of places that holds within them a meaning that allows a frame to actually form a platform from which a debate can be imaginatively explored, that's all it is, all Medea and Jason are are very microbes in a way of the human consciousness that are made flesh and in order to make them flesh it helps if you give them a context, it is better if that context is local, so for the Greeks it was Greece, and for us it is better if it is something to do with who we are. And yet we are often helped by the word Greece because if we are too literal about the place we are sucked into all the provincialism of that place and its not trying to deal with its own provincialism, its trying to be a platform in which we can be imaginative.

AM: So almost the detail gives you freedom.. the specificity gives you freedom to expand from that.

FS: Yes that is how the imagination works and children of course are very good at this and if you say I'll pretend to be the captain and you pretend to be the sailor and we'll go on a ship, well it does need you to be one removed from the thing you're actually doing in order to be free to explore it and if this was set in London now people might be worried about who we really were talking about, who was that person really...and the great thing about the play and the word universal is that it is profoundly individual

to each person watching it and presumably each person playing it, the person playing it must bring as much of themselves, I feel that more and more, that acting is not the con trick that it has slightly been seen as, but if anything more revealing about the person playing it than maybe they are in their lives, its easier to act in your life than it is to act on the stage...I'm not saying there's any virtue, you just try to get as near as you can because you can hear your own false note, because you're one removed from who you are, you can hear the false note, its the false note of kidding the audience, you don't want to kid them, you want to steal truly through it and be at the centre of the thought of it so that you are yielding yourself up to the centre of the thought of it in order to be accurate with it because the accuracy is where the value morally lies with the audience.

AM: And how does the director work with that? You've worked with Deborah (Warner) lots of times obviously, and I'm interested by why: why do you work with her, why do you enjoy working with her, what does she give to that process?

FS: I think its that I trust her. I'm very good at coming out with a lot of ideas, 99% are dreadful, she's very good at picking the good ones. So I need
that, she's a very good editor. And she absolutely has the opposite gifts to my gifts, she's good at editing, she's calm, and if you're having to explore these big things you have to be very uncalm, you have to be very uncalm at the moment of it, so you need someone with a very calm eye. I've grown to understand her aesthetic more, I didn't understand it particularly at the beginning, and her aesthetic has grown anyway, but I can understand it much more now.

AM: And what is it?

FS: Its what you see, that's her aesthetic, I don't know how to describe it, its very clear, its very clean, its very untrammeled but it's very distilled, it's distilled clarity, so when the clarity is about something very hot, it's got a white heat to it, because she just gets rid of everything else that is.... she has a fantastic belief that the thing can be better, that the thing can reach an optimum, so where you hit the optimum she names it and its a very gratifying feeling because she has named it. If you fail, she tells you why you failed from the optimum, a lot of directors don't believe that there is an optimum, that you just try your best and you hope for the best, that is absolutely not Deborah's rule as it were. She's rigorous, which I just admire, because my mind works quite quickly, and I do find the theatre generally is too slow for me what I watch, and people think too slowly and underline things and things are hammered home and none of these things need to be the case, they need to be all played at an enormously high, its like

Mozart really, she's very fast, high notes and yet all of them are played so its not great swathes of gush, and she believes in the purity of great writing, she believes it carries profoundly universal truth rather than her need to stamp some of bit of herself on it.

AM: But she does in a sense, not that she imposes herself, but its very obviously a Deborah Warner production at the same time, without the text being lost, which is a wonderful balance, there is a sense that this couldn't have been directed by anyone, it is directed by her.

FS: Its all her in the end, its like Ghandi, its very powerful when you end up having all power by pretending you want none of it. She relinquishes all power of the event to the actor, and then cleans away the bit that she needs and then of course its all down to her, of course it is.

AM: It makes sense that you worked together on Beckett, it seems like his aesthetic would be quite similar in terms of taking things away

FS: Obviously not!

AM: Despite the fascism of the Beckett estate.

FS: She was made for Beckett. And they are crazy, they are crazy to have....she would have been an enormous enhancement to the next generation of Beckett, a whole lot of alter worshippers who just get caught in another time. Theatre has to move forward, there's a time comes when no matter how much we do, like what you say about the Wooster Group, we'll all be outdated because our aesthetic will of course inevitably get frozen, our task is to not keep it frozen but how long that lasts is up to oneself...I suppose if we saw Electra now it might seem very dated, for all we know, it seemed very modern at the time, but of course it wouldn't be.

AM: Well I saw a video of Electra recently and I didn't feel it was dated, it still had a lot of power...I wanted to ask you what the comparison was between working on Medea and Electra.

FS: Its too long...a lifetime! Well I suppose we didn't know each other, I think I threw myself off the edge of a cliff for that and she sort of helped me land perfectly well and I think that was certainly the greatest thing I had done for myself, but I mean these things become very self-aggrandising. I needed to move my acting forward from, I had done a lot of comedies and people are very creative in their thirties, in late twenties, early thirties, people are either making enormous leaps or getting stuck and I think we made a leap at that time.

AM: What was wonderful for me was the moment at the beginning of Medea where we hear you and it sounded like Electra, so there was a sense of "okay is this going to happen again?' and then you come out and its not Electra, but there's this lovely continuity, there's this sense that this is almost a history that's being plotted, and you go "we could do this but we're not!' , so I loved that.

FS: Of course Greek plays do have doors as well and you open them, doing that, or you don't open them at all, I mean there's only a few things to do. Yes and water appears and blood, yeah.

AM: And the set had a certain similarity as well, water and concrete.

FS: Yes Tom Pye had been an assistant to Hildegaard (Bechtler) as well, not on Electra but on Richard, so

AM: So he's carrying on the work

FS: In some way yeah.

AM: How did they compare as characters? Between Electra and Medea? What were the differences as people?

FS: I don't think I can answer that at all! Because they're... character is merely situation enacted by the choices of the actor, they're not....

AM: Essentially different?

FS: They are but the differences are the unselfconscious differences of my character to yours, if I start naming my character and your character, I wouldn't be able to play it, you have to render up the already mapped personality, the defects and facts of your life to the character so the character is, the character of Electra was me ten years ago, and that text and that situation, as much as my ability could free myself from myself, that's the great thing that you do get rid of a lot of yourself because there's no need to have yourself, because you're just a vessel for it, but of course having said that, every beat of it is yourself, but you can't make whimsical choices saying "I think this", you have to do the thing that it says you must do, and that's always very hard.

But with Medea, I suppose there's a remarkable difference in the playing of it, because Electra was obsessed with one thing, and there's no humour in Electra at all, she had no irony. She's a very very interesting and very very moving aspect of the human soul, Electra, somebody so worn out that if she had a personality once, Deborah used to talk a lot about that, that she was probably very gentle and probably rather lovely, but by the time you meet her everything has gone except this aspect of herself, this dreadful woman waiting for her brother's return and that's very very sad, it makes me sad about

humans: they can get to that and they do and it makes them very unattractive at that moment. Beggars can have that sometimes, you have no idea of what that person used to be before they were a beggar, they have ceased to be who they once were. And I think Electra was that, I remember thinking at the very end when I had to walk around this thing, thinking, she could have had a husband, she could have had a baby, all of these things she had long since shed for this one truth and one need, and that's a very interesting corner of the human experience to explore and maybe for an audience to look at, its very self immunising, I think I was very willing to do that then, I'm not sure if its very good for you to do it, but I was very thin, I don't think it did me any good, as a person, it just wore me out, but god knows why I was doing it.

But Medea is a much more, her grief is much more recent, so she's much nearer sanity.

AM: She has more of a context too, doesn't she, she has more things...

FS: She has children in her life. And a husband who she could recover quite quickly from if he returned though I'm sure there's an interesting aspect which that she hasn't written in the play, but is there a moment that if Jason did return that she would be unable to, you know she really is trapped, she's caught, she wouldn't take him back either...the breaking of oath is much nearer and of course she does get comfort, in Electra there's no comfort, there are comforts for Medea, one being that the chorus agree with her, that she should do something, and then the comfort that she needs, because she doesn't seem to function on her own at all, whereas Electra is completely on her own, that Aegeus turns up, that is quite extraordinary, that she knows the entire system, the entire fate is on her side, for good or ill, that for good is marvelous, you've no idea if any good will come of it, and in fact pure ill comes.

AM: Well there is that wonderful sense that... I never expected there to be dragons to be honest, ... but there is that wonderful sense right at the end that this really was for nothing, that nothing has changed.

FS: That is hell, that is hell...

AM: And you know that she probably will never go to Athens, that there's nothing left.

FS: I do think there may have been something Euripides may have been saying about transcendence, or death, I'm not sure which, with dragons, and the idea that she dies, which is much nearer people's experience of killing the children in the play, but reality mustn't serve the play, the play must serve our reality and we now live in a very post-theistic society and so our hell is much more on earth than in the life beyond.

AM: And there's a sense in not really believing in that release.

FS: Yes. There are people who say there's a great belief in killing somebody, that once you've killed them you feel better, you've done something for that moment, and then you pay for the rest of your life, but maybe if she had done the transcendent thing, she had done the thing that went against all morality but was the bravest thing to do, but maybe we are being more moral by discovering that there is nothing brave, that there is bravery in action but there is no glory in it at all, of any kind, none..

AM: Its a remarkable thing that, unusually that audience were very sympathetic to Medea, because usually they're not sympathetic, and they were very much on Medea's side, and that's not really turned against the audience but a sense of "perhaps we could end up doing that too, there's almost a feeling of maybe if we really do feel sympathetic then we almost do go along with the murders and then we see the consequences.

FS: I think that is not an interpretation, I think those things are very simply set up, we see her, we hear she's got worse things coming, we know her husband's left her, we hear that's very bad but, and then we hear she's going to be banished, and then we hear the chorus saying "goodness you're worse off than we thought", so that information is being given to the audience, so... the structure's very basic, Aegeus turns up and she says "right, I've had enough of being down, up I go", and up we go with her, we thing yeah we agree that is down isn't good and up you go and then we think oh my god how far is she going and up she goes, and it all happens.

And I think that is very much our experience of the pre-Christian world, pre-sin really, that actions do need encouragement, and once we've encouraged them, we've no idea what we've encouraged, we all live like that, I mean whenever you've done a bad thing, its very rare you've planned it, this perfect knowledge, grievous matter of full consent of Irish Catholicism is not how people experience their sins. They have an affair and then regret it. They don't think "its a bad thing to have an affair but I will have one", they find themselves agreeing. I mean we all do that, we say "its a good thing to have a Labour government" and so we vote for a Labour government and then we regret it, but that's just our action, we can't be responsible at the moment of choice all the time, but we do become more and more responsible as we go nearer and nearer to the....that's what's so interesting about the chorus, they think "you're right you should kill him" and then as she goes nearer to that they think "uh oh", they can't say at the moment when she says "what can I do?' and they say "nothing", they've agreed,

and the chorus are absolutely the sort of ushers at the side of the audience going "Are we all for this? Yeah yeah, I think so, intellectually we are yeah, we can see that, yeah", you see the emotional consequence of it, and its a brilliant play for showing how the intellect or law or logic or morality are worryingly different to the messy things in our life.

AM: I found it interesting, the visual images of Electra reminded me of a medieval saint, there was something almost Christian, but in that incredible lack of body, that trying to get rid of your body but asserting it at the same time.

FS: Of course there's a masochistic element, though masochistic implies pleasure and Electra has no pleasure.

AM: And there's that singularity of purpose

FS: And obsession which is a comfort to her to ward off chaos. That's where Deborah's very good, once you get pure with the logic of the thing you're doing, you bump into other logics, in Electra there's a bit of Saint Joan in there, because all these people in our histories are expressions of themes of our human potential, they're thought made flesh that's all they are, so they're bound to be cousin's of each other, they're human weakness overcome by human will, the will is a very hard master, it usually eats up everything...people retreat to a place in their minds and won't come out, they won't speak.

AM: Its interesting that Deborah's from a Quaker background which believes in silence as well, and there is a lot of silence in her work, even if there's a lot of speaking, there's an underlying silence...

FS: She's got a very silent clear empty room in her mind, very uncluttered, and very sure, terribly confident, and incredibly un-neurotic, she's not a catholic

AM: And not Irish!

FS: And not Irish. The English have a lot of neuroses, but of course she has not guilt about the Empire because of course the non-conformers have nothing to do with empire, they didn't make wars. She has no guilt about the second world war because they were pacifists, her Father didn't fight in it, yeah she's got no inherited guilt in that way, and her family are all like that too, they have a kind of air in their head. They're not ambitious for wealth, they seem to have their values quiet, obsessive workers, slightly dry, actually Deborah is very like Milton, in that she's a Protestant who does like eating and drinking, it absolutely give a calm cold space, yeah.

AM: completely off the subject, I wondered about the gender difference between Medea and Richard, and I wanted to ask you about what you said at the time, and I know there was an awful lot of hype about Richard, which seemed to be horrendous at the time, about this idea of being a "non-man" and being beyond gender in some way, and I wondered how you played that, what happened to you when you played that role? Was that a conscious intention to set out and remove gender or was that something you simply discovered?

FS: Well what do you think, just put me on track about what you think.

AM: What I thought was really interesting in comparison to Medea was that Medea was very much a woman, not necessarily because of any essence, but because of her power, what kind of power she had and the things she could do and the things she couldn't do and so almost she responded by murdering her children because she was a woman in those particular circumstances.

Richard, did achieve gender when he was deposed..

FS: And I think your conclusion would be as interesting or more interesting than mine, I guess I think "oh god was I trying to be a man?' and I get into much more vulnerable state about what I thought I was exploring and what I might have been exploring. So I can't know that...

AM: Well you can just tell me and I can just disagree with you anyway!

FS: Yes of course, you're looking at it, I'm not looking at it, I just decided it was a good idea and did it, why I thought it was a good idea, or why did I subsequently not think it was a good idea, or why was I in it, why did I agree to it? Are questions that I'm still probably not able to answer, only because I still don't know the answer....I don't think one experiences fundamental truths about oneself, that's a negative answer, I don't mean that at all, I mean, I don't know what it is to be a man, I know what it is to think like Richard II, on those lines, and once I follow the track of those lines of course you are allowing bits of yourself to disappear, you're also battening down your breasts and wearing not really male clothing, it wasn't that you were wearing some sort of male costume, partially as we discovered, I'm sure Deborah spoke to you about that, but women wear male costume all the time, so it no longer is male, its very hard to find the bit that made you boyish because trousers and jackets is what women wear.

So I think the non-man was my way in, and also there are men on the planet, think if you try to be a man, what are you trying to do, there are many men who play a man better....you know the worst man would play a better man than I could so that really

wasn't the target, the entrance hole as it were, the way in wasn't to try to be a man. But of course there were, yeah I suppose, the menu that was open to Richard which was the menu of power and kingship and a rather moving attachment to a crown is exactly opposite to what Medea has in relation to her husband, they're absolutely opposite ownerships, one is very male, the ownership of power and the fact in a way that is a thing for which Richard...Richard's essence lies in the notion of being not just king but therefore beyond human beings. Its great fun to play that, and you're absolutely right that Medea's much nearer home, much nearer the domestic reality enflamed to a kind of poetical dimension, Richard is absolutely out of it, Richard is as far away from anybody as you could get, but perhaps that's what was being highlighted, that it would be nearly as far away for a man to play it because it reaches to a kind of god like state, where someone's language is either rhyme or perfect verse..

John Wood is very interesting about that, he said, in a way Shakespeare is writing a slightly ye olde Englande play because Shakespeare was writing a play set some centuries before then and slightly reducing their world to a baby world of calendars and hours of days and all that was in my mind, the film set in my mind was all that, was people going to Wales with funny high hats, you had a clearer world, but beyond the world there is a coastline with dolphins and dragons, its not a world that has a America or New York, or its not a world that has a few little places. I recently went to stay with my friend Mark Thompson's barn, and Richard II stayed there, that barn was built before his life. And I was very moved at how close it all it, living in London, standing in the National Theatre and looking at Westminster across the river and seeing that he used to parade down on his horse down to the city all of the mile, to stop in pubs down there and of course the population was only 12,000 so anyone who wanted to see him could see him, its an incredibly baby world.

AM: And Shakespeare did simplify it didn't he. There's this idea of Bolingbroke being this Renaissance world, the more cynical world that takes over from this very lavish ritual, and almost a Protestant world taking over from a Catholic world, not that Bolingbroke was Protestant but that his values were more pragmatic.

FS: Yes yes, the seeds of the New England were being found and Richard was a much more....yeah this country was a much more Catholic in the best sense and still is than it likes to let on, the spirit of Mary Queen of Scott is everywhere underneath the war with

Elizabeth, that before that the pragmatic values of war that have so made this country strong, Richard just wasn't for, he was for writing cookery books

AM: And blowing his nose on handkerchiefs. What was very exciting, after talking to Deborah about Richard, I went to the National Portrait Gallery just afterwards and I was looking for a portrait of Richard and I got the very famous one of him on the throne with curly red hair, and I looked for other portraits of kings and queens just to compare them, so I got these very pragmatic men who were standing around eating beef, and then a portrait of Elizabeth who almost looked identical.

FS: That's a very good point, you should write about that

AM: And she did compare herself to Richard obviously, but they did paint her almost identically, so you move from these very virile men to another Richard, and I thought that was very exciting..

FS: Very exciting. I'd love to play her. She's really one of the great of all time, a just phenomenal person. I'd like to play an investigation of her, she's fantastic, I was recently at a dinner at the National Portrait Gallery, a trustee's dinner, and I was allowed in to the room on my own with her portrait in the white dress ...she's a phenomenal character because she lived many lives, she reigned for so long, and she was beyond gender wasn't she, played with her gender so brilliantly.

AM: And other people played with her gender too, and so many different versions of her too

FS: She had a dwarf that used to wear her clothes, identical costumes to her, never put in a film about her or a play about her. She played into being the icon of herself at the same time as being something quite humble, her vulnerabilities and her passions and her ability to feel the passion and yet overcome the passions is fantastic.

AM: And the fact that she did compare herself to Richard was interesting and the deposition scene was played out before the uprising against her and it was made illegal, so its wonderful how politicised that play became.

FS: Yes, though you know in her heart, Elizabeth would have known that the divine right of kings was an absolutely dubious notion, she would have thought yes, but its wiser that it keeps, that we believe in it. But the divine rights of kings and all these things go on existing in various ways don't they? In Ireland De Valera absolutely believed in the divine right to rule, absolutely. The honesty of monarchy is that you know it is a monarch, the other things are much more worrying

AM: They're insidious..

FS: Certainly in Ireland we were ruled by a much sterner dictator, in DeValera, than any king would have been. These things go on...they're all the same.

AM: Why do you think...I wonder just thinking about you saying Richard was able to walk around London and people being able to see him....do you think that was one of the reasons the press got so upset about a woman playing Richard , why do you think there was such a bizarre reaction to it? And there was a funny reaction to Vanessa Redgrave playing Prospero..

FS: Sometimes its because someone plays it badly. I think in our case it was already hostile press before it opened so it couldn't have been just that. I don't think we were ready when we opened altogether, I don't think it was our best piece of work at all. But the attempt is what you are talking about, why was the attempt so [badly received]. I think it was that the English do need Shakespeare history plays to reflect history and actually the theatre had the same set of criticisms as Medea. They need the Greek world to reflect some notion of Greekness and the moment you don't fulfil that obligation, when you say "this Richard II is a piece of theatre, its a piece of verse written by a writer 400 years ago, we can do anything we like with it", they get nervous because it has a sort of temple like status in the common community. I don't think Ariane Mnouchkine had to worry about it with her Richard II, and of course in Salzburg and Paris it was an enormous hit, because they laughed, they found it very funny, that a king, that all kings, I mean this country still has difficulty believing that kings are just the same as everybody else because they have a vested interest in not thinking that, even now, and Diana was an enormous fascinating breaking down of that notion and even now people will curtsey because they endow them with a reality slightly beyond, and she's still head of the church, so its a very tricky thing to be seeming to be sacrilegious with, when in fact in Shakespeare profoundly believed that these people are human and therefore any human should play them, but that is not their status in the community and that is perhaps the difficulty, and maybe part of our job is to unearth the difficulties that the community doesn't know it feels so protective of until someone twists them and they go "waah...oh goodness we didn't know we felt that" so maybe it was a benefit for them to go "goodness we're very protective about our kings'.

AM: That's really interesting, its almost as if their sense of history is coming out of Shakespeare rather than the history books, self image is coming out of the

plays. ... What I'm interested in why there was a protectiveness over Medea and why there was some sense of ownership over Medea. I did notice there was more resistance here to the change in the ending than there was in Ireland, possibly because Medea is never played in Ireland usually so there's less familiarity with the text. But I'm just wondering why that became more important..

FS: I think a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, I mean it was responding to an end where someone says "My father's father...' that's the only key that we believe that there's a stage direction that equal's "chariot'. That is really an assumption, but the theatre has to break its own assumptions, particularly if its done rigorously, that's my argument. What's the point of somebody bringing an irrelevant thing into it, or they don't do the play because they say "the play's irrelevant to me because I don't know what the chariot is", the chariot is just the language of the scene....I'm very defensive about this thing about...I think we remarkably don't take liberties with things, we move to the next phase of the next bit with immense rigour, we don't swash in there and say "well Euripides brought in a chariot there and so will we", it has no meaning , I mean it has no meaning for us", so I think yes, maybe that people who have academic knowledge, I think there's a big battle in this country isn't there between academia owning the plays and the theatre owning the plays, the theatre can do anything it likes, people should just buzz off, if you don't like it, don't come to it. But the theatre has no rules, you could do it with dwarves, that's theatre, you could do it with babies if you like, that's theatre, its extraordinary that people think, "well that should be done in blue", which is really the same issue that was in the Beckett Estate, it should be done like Beckett did it, that is death to the theatre, and that point is made so roundly then that some people have heard that. "This should be done like what? Like the way Irena Papis did it? Why?' It can't be, it has to respond to us now, and I do think this production is responding to us now if only because we live now, I'm of the same age as Medea, I'm of the same type of person who might be in that situation now. So my life and my world that I'm in is the thing that I'm bringing to the text of Medea, that is completely valid. Whether it is badly done or...but it is not in anyway misconstruing our at the moment heightened experience of children's deaths...

AM: What do you think you've been trying to do with your work, both of you, by the plays you've chosen to do together? And its very evident that you're very much involved in the process, its not just Deborah being the autocrat, I'm just

wondering what you're trying to do for an audience or whether its just an individual thing for each play?

FS: I don't think there's a plan, because there isn't a plan, we don't have a clue what we might do next, or we might not do anything again with her, we get sick to death of working in that way, at the end of each one we think "never again'.

I think we're trying to do...Deborah would never speak of it, I don't know what she's trying to do, but I'm trying to be alive, I'm trying to surprise myself. I know what I should think about things, and through plays I find out what I really think about them. I think reality is a mystery and I get excited when we hit the mystery rather than the expected reality. I want to wrongfoot the audience in the most pleasant way, I have no wish to upset them, I want to turn their heads around. That's what I feel when I see paintings that I had no idea could exist, be knocked for six by the potential of what I'm looking at, I want the thing to be worthy of spending so much time doing it, so I want it to be very rigorous, I like when its hard, I don't enjoy it necessarily. I would love it to have some meaning for others, but I can only say it has meaning for me, when it is hard and when I end up somewhere unexpected, that seems to be to me like travelling, journeying and I love sharing that journey and I'm delighted if it delights an audience or appeals to their sense of wanting to journey, they want to go somewhere they didn't know they were going, not to, I don't want to confirm their biases and their prejudices, I want to humbly go with them and say "I didn't know it was going to be like this either", so that we place ourselves in a very vulnerable position because I can't defend where we get to, I can only say this is where we got to, after all these months of working on it. We got here, we didn't decide to get here, we didn't necessarily choose to get her, and we'll take it away if its the wrong place to have gone, if it is the untrue place we won't go there, so we'll go off and do, there's these wonderful endings but they're not the true endings so we don't do them, the true ones for us anyway.

I think the theatre, its quite a selfish thing, I need it to be an incredibly rigorous, extremely difficult place to be, its probably the same thing that motivates Ranulph Feinnes to go to the south pole, it may be a complete folly, but its only interesting if its hard.