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

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

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

Although I stated in the previous chapter that I consider television, not film, to be the dominant cultural medium of the second half of the twentieth century, the historical relationship of theatre to film provides a precedent for the pattern of development I am describing and is therefore worthy of some attention. Early film modeled itself directly on theatrical practice. As A. Nicholas Vardac shows in his classic study Stage to Screen (1949), the narrative structures and visual devices of cinema, including the close-up and the fade-in/fade-out, and parallel editing, had all been fully developed on stage before becoming the foundations of the new medium's language, at least in its narrative forms. Steele MacKaye, for example, embarked on a series of technical innovations, beginning in the late 1870s, that brought greater flexibility to the stage in ways that anticipated cinematic techniques. To cite but one example, his "proscenium adjuster," a device that instantly changed the shape and size of the proscenium opening, enabled smooth transitions between scenes and among different views of the same setting. In this way, MacKaye could control the type of stage picture offered, in the fashion of the motion picture with its long or
medium shot, its panoramic or tracking shot” (Vardac 1949: 143). In their more recent look at the relationship between early film and the stage, Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs disagree with Vardac’s characterization of nineteenth-century theatre as: “‘proto-cinematic,’ as attempting to be cinematic without the appropriate technology” (Brewster and Jacobs 1997: 214). But they agree with Vardac concerning the profound influence of theatrical practice on early cinema: “The development of cinematic staging and editing in the 1910s were not attempts to lay the basis for a specifically cinematic approach to narration, but the pursuit of goals well-established in nineteenth-century theatre with new means” (ibid.: 210). “[T]he approach to narration, but the pursuit of goals well-established in cinema: “The development of cinematic staging and editing in the cinema took over and reformed a theatrical vocabulary and also rapidly cinema,” they conclude, “strove to be theatrical” (ibid.: 214). Early cinema took over and reformed a theatrical vocabulary and also rapidly usurped the theatre's cultural position as the dominant form of entertainment. Indeed, film had so thoroughly routed the theatre by 1926 that there was little left to pillage when television arrived in force some twenty years later (Poggi 1968: 85-6). In these respects, the historical relationship between television and theatre, and the general situation of live performance in our mediatized culture, merely recapitulate this earlier history.

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

The fact that television can “go live” at any moment to convey sight and sound at a distance in a way no other medium can remains a crucial part of the telesvisual imaginary even though that way of using the medium is now the exception rather than the rule.

It is my contention that this ideologically engrained sense of television as a live medium makes its historical relationship to the theatre different from that of film, and enabled television to colonize liveness, the one aspect of theatrical presentation that film could not replicate. Vardac shows how film remediated theatre by adopting the narrative structures and visual strategies of nineteenth-century melodrama. Whereas film could only remediate the theatre at these structural levels, television could remediate theatre at the ontological level through its claim to immediacy. It is also significant in this context that television not only remediates live performance, it remediates film in a way that film has never remediates television. Although

1 Steve Wurtzler makes the point that: the textual practices of American television present themselves as, or are experienced in ways similar to, the fully present live...even the recorded programs of broadcast television are assigned a sense of spatial co-presence and temporal simultaneity in that, once a program has aired in its scheduled time slot, there is little or no chance of viewing it outside of its initial temporal and spatial (channel) context.

(Wurtzler 1992: 91) Wurtzler (ibid.: 259) implies in a note that time-shifting by means of VCRs has made this effect even more pronounced. The impulse to tape programs for later viewing only emphasizes the extent to which we think of them as fleeting, one-time, quasi-live events.

2 Margaret Morse observes that the imaginary developing around interactive computer technologies also entails an ideology of liveness whose source lies in our interaction with the machine itself rather than the interaction with the outside world permitted by the machine.

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

(Morse 1998:15) 3 There are very few cases in which television becomes film in the same way that film becomes television when it is broadcast or played on a video cassette. One such instance is the film The Groove Tube (1974), a counter-cultural parody of television shot originally on videotape then transferred to film. Clearly, there were stylistic reasons for doing this, as is often the case when film directors use video transfer as a
television was originally dependent on cinematic technology (the kinescope) for its own reproduction,4 the advent of videotape liberated television and gave it the means of transforming film into a televised discourse to the point that, by now, much of our experience of “film” is actually a televisual experience (of video). Television “does not simply ‘transport’ previous forms (theatre, film, radio) but rather translates them and recombines them,” thus turning them into something different: television itself (Dienst 1994: 142).

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

One of the central concerns of the discourse on television in the United States during its earliest phases was the relationship of television technique. The historical context of this particular remediation is also important. Since the ideology of the counter-cultural audience it hoped to reach rejected television as a necessarily co-opted medium but found film to be credible, The Groove Tube had to look like television, the object of its satire, but also had to establish its identity as a film and thus distinguish itself from its source medium. I return to the counter-cultural rejection of television in another context in Chapter 3. Although the question of authentic television form remained unresolved, early writers on television generally agreed that television’s essential properties as a medium are immediacy and intimacy. As Lenox Lohr, the president of NBC, put it, “the most utilitarian feature of television lies in broadcasting events exactly when and as they happen” (Lohr 1940: 52, original emphasis). Orrin E. Dunlap's later description is even more emphatic: “People now look upon scenes never before within their range; they see politics as practiced, sports as played, drama as enacted, news as it happens, history as it is made” (Dunlap 1947: 8). In an essay of 1937, Alfred N. Goldsmith, an industrial engineer, compares television, film, and human vision in these terms:

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

Here, film is represented as the realm of memory, repetition, and displacement in time. By contrast, television, like direct human vision (and also like theatre, as Goldsmith (1937: 56) observes later in his essay) occurs only in the now. Unlike film, but like theatre, a television broadcast is characterized as a performance in the present. This was literally the case in the early days of television when most material was broadcast live. Even now that most television programming is prerecorded, the television image remains a performance in the present in an important sense I shall discuss later in this chapter. Although the possibility of recording television broadcasts was available as part of

4 An early version of the kinescope was the Paramount Intermediate Film System, in which a television image was recorded on motion picture film, then processed and projected immediately (the delay from reception to projection was 66 seconds). Douglas Gomery (1985: 56–7) describes this process as an early form of projection television. Arguably, it can also be seen as a filmic remediation of television. Although the content shown derives from a television signal, the actual perceptual experience is of a filmed image, not a televisual one. By incorporating television technology, the Paramount system gave film nearly the same immediacy that was foregrounded as the essence of television in the early descriptions of that medium discussed here.
television technology from quite early in its development, the capacity for rebroadcasting was seen then as ancillary to television's essence as a live medium. In the 1930s and 1940s, television was envisioned primarily as a medium devoted to the transmission of ongoing live events, not to reproduction. Not surprisingly, early television displayed a voracious appetite for all types of live presentations. A survey of the activity of one pioneering television station (WRGB in Schenectady, New York) between 1939 and 1945 lists among its offerings: variety shows and revues; sports; drama, including amateur and college theatrics; light opera; various musical groups; dance; news; panel discussions; educational presentations; fashion shows; puppet shows; quizzes and games; vaudeville acts, monologists, and magicians; children's shows; religious shows; and commercials (Dupuy 1945).

Television's intimacy was seen as a function of its immediacy – the close proximity of viewer to event that it enables – and the fact that events from outside are transmitted into the viewer's home. As Lohr (1940: 3) put it, "the viewer of the television scene feels himself to be on the scene." The position of the television viewer relative to the image on the screen was often compared with that of a boxing fan sitting ringside or a theatre-goer with the best seat in the house. Television "make[s] all the world a stage and every home a front-row seat for sports, drama, and news" (Dunlap 1947: 8). Television was thought to make the home into a kind of theatre characterized, paradoxically, by both absolute intimacy and global reach.

Given the domestic context in which television was envisioned, it is important to sketch the social implications of the home theatre.6

Spiegel (1992: 110) argues persuasively that the new medium was associated with an existing cultural discourse, dating back to the mid-1800s, in which "electrical communications would defuse the threat of cultural difference by limiting experiences and placing social encounters into safe, familiar, and predictable contexts." By the early 1920s, "radio, like the telegraph and telephone before it, was seen as an instrument of social sanitation" that would make cultural objects more generally accessible, but in a way that would also keep "undesirables away from the middle-classes." In the postwar era, Spigel (1992: 111) goes on to say, "the fantasy of antiseptic, electrical space was transposed onto television." That the linkage between television and the discourse of antiseptic electrical space occurred in the context of the growing suburbanization of the postwar period is evident from the following quotation, from a 1958 book entitled, strikingly, A Primer for Playgoers, in which the author stresses:

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

(Wright 1958: 222-3)

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

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

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

Descriptions of drama on television from this period emphasize that television's immediacy and intimacy make the experience of televised

5 Lohr (1940) treats television as a domestic technology, thus implying that the uses of the technology had been decided definitively that early. In fact, the situation was somewhat more complicated. As Gomery (1985) has shown, Hollywood's major motion picture corporations hatched a scheme in the late 1940s to co-opt television by installing television projection equipment in movie theatres and offering programming, including live coverage of sports and newsworthy public events, to a paying public in those venues. This experiment, known as theatre television, proved not to be cost-effective and was abandoned in the early 1950s.

6 Lynn Spigel (1992: 99, 106-9) traces the phrase "home theatre" and the concept it embodies as far back as 1912 and discusses how, in the period after World War II, suburban homeowners were encouraged to construct their television viewing areas on the model of a theatre. It is significant that throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the home theatre was imagined as a domestic version of the dramatic stage. Now, in the waning years of the twentieth century, that phrase is used to describe equipment intended to transport the experience of the cinema, not that of live theatre, into the home.
drama entirely comparable to that of drama in the theatre. (By televised drama, I mean plays written or adapted for television, not direct broadcasts of theatre events. Although such broadcasts did occur, it was generally conceded that direct transmission of a play in the theatre yielded unsatisfactory television. 7) In an article in Theatre Arts, Mary Hunter (1949: 46) observes that the “audience experience in relation to the performer is similar in television to the performer–audience relationship in the theatre: the audience is in direct contact with the performer at the moment of his ‘performance.’ You see him when he does it.” Lohr (1940: 72), writing almost a decade earlier, actually makes the immediacy of televised drama the basis on which to distinguish television from film: “the instantaneous nature of the broadcast gives television drama a certain superiority over filmed drama. The spectator knows that he is seeing something actually taking place at the moment.” 8 (Lohr (1940: 80–1) advances the same argument to assert the superiority of televised news over the filmed newsreel.) Spigel summarizes this discourse:

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

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

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

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

(Lohr 1940: 56)

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

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

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

(Burger 1940: 209, original emphasis)

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

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

As television technology quickly became more sophisticated and television cameras more nimble, televisial discourse aspired less to the theatrical and more to the cinematic. To Murray Bolen, the author of a postwar book entitled Fundamentals of Television, immediacy was no longer clearly fundamental to the medium. Acknowledging that champions of televisial immediacy have a valid point, Bolen (1950: 190) nevertheless demurs that "we cannot be sure as yet that the instantaneous element of immediacy is really that much of television" and goes on to deduce from the success of prerecorded radio programs that "canned" television shows are quite likely to attract an audience. A television production textbook of 1953 makes the relationship between the changed capacity of television technology and the transition from a theatrical to a cinematic paradigm explicit:

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

(Bretz 1953: 3)
Once the cameras could enter the set and shoot from reverse angles, the syntax of televisival discourse became that of cinematic discourse, though it is probably not coincidental that these comments were made around the time (1951–2) when television production was beginning to switch over from live broadcasting to film production and, consequently, from New York City to Hollywood (Barnouw 1990: 133–4). For Bretz, who embraces the cinematic paradigm for television, to replicate theatrical discourse on television means to present a static television image. But, as we have seen, the more imaginative television conceptualists of the previous decades felt that replicating theatrical discourse on television meant replicating the discourse of the spectator's shifting eye, not that of the static proscenium.

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

An important theme emerges from this glimpse at history. For Raymond Williams (1992 [1974]: 19), "when the question of [early television's] content was raised, it was resolved, in the main, parasitically." Television was imagined as theatre, not just in the sense that it could convey theatrical events to the viewer, but also in that it offered to replicate the visual and experiential discourse of theatre in the antiseptic space of the suburban home theatre. Television, as parasite, strangled its host by offering itself not as an extension of the theatrical experience but as an equivalent replacement for that experience. As the passage from A Primer for Playgoers I quoted above suggests, the implication of the cultural discourse surrounding television was that one should watch television instead of going to the theatre. The televisival experience is implicitly equated with the live theatrical experience, but is represented as better suited to the postwar, suburban lifestyle: the message is that nothing is lost, and much is gained, by staying home.

This assumption translated into very concrete economic effects on the market for live performance. In their pioneering 1966 study of the economic situation of the performing arts, Baumol and Bowen (1966: 245) analyze live performance's competition with television by pointing out that between 1948 and 1952, the years in which television became widely available, consumer spending generally rose by 23 per cent, but admissions to live performances rose only by 5 per cent. "In sum," the authors conclude, "it seems clear that the mass media have made inroads into the audience for live performance." Television's usurpation of the cultural-economic position formerly enjoyed by live media such as theatre was not simply the result of the generalized mediatization of our society. Television's specific ability to position itself as theatre's replacement has its origins in the claims of immediacy made on behalf of television throughout its development, and in television's claim to replicate theatrical discourse. What is true of the relationship between television and theatre is true, by allegorical extension, of the general cultural relationship of the televisival and mediatized to the live: the ideology of liveness that the televisival (the cultural dominant) inherited from television (the medium) has enabled it to displace and replace live performance in a wide variety of cultural contexts.

Is it live, or...?

To move from a discussion of the early relationship between theatre and television to an examination of the current situation of live performance is to confront the irony that whereas television initially sought to replicate and, implicitly, to replace live theatre, live performance
While new technologies remediate older ones, as film and television both remediate theatre, "earlier technologies are struggling to maintain their legitimacy by remediating newer ones" (Bolter and Grusin 1996: 352). The multiple ways in which live performance now endeavors to replicate television, video, and film provide vivid examples.

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

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

10 One amusing example of live theatre's replication of film (at least of a particular way of watching movies is the Wolfskill Theater in Los Angeles. The Wolfskill is a drive-in theatre that features live performance – audiences watch plays from the comfort of their cars and listen to the actors' voices over their car radios (Associated Press, "Car culture shapes live theater," Atlanta Constitution, 18 August 1998: C9).
draw a parallel between claques and the “Applause” signs used in television studios as mechanisms for cuing audience response, but it is likely that the more recent model is the proximate cause of contemporary audience behavior. Even in the absence of “Applause” signs, contemporary spectators respond in a programmed fashion, as if they were a television studio audience. Arguably, theatre audiences today respond spontaneously to the same sorts of cues that would be signaled by means of the “Applause” sign in a television studio because the studio audience has become the culturally engrained model for what gets applause and how audiences behave.

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

Stated very simply, representation in the system of commerce is that which arises from a singular act; repetition is that which is mass-produced. Thus, a concert is a representation, but also a meal à la carte in a restaurant; a phonograph record or a can of food is repetition.

(Attali 1985: 41)

In his historical analysis, Attali points out that although “representation emerged with capitalism” when the sponsorship of concerts became a profitable enterprise and not merely the prerogative of a feudal lord, capital ultimately “lo[s] interest in the economy of representation” (ibid.). Repetition, the mass-production of cultural objects, held greater promise for capital because whereas “in representation, a work is generally heard only once – it is a unique moment[,] in repetition, potential hearings are stockpiled” (ibid.). By being recorded and becoming mediatized, performance becomes an accumulable value. Live performance exists within the economy of repetition largely either to promote mass-produced cultural objects – the primary economic function of popular music concerts is to promote the sales of recordings, for examples – or to serve as raw material for mediatization, as when live theatre productions are staged in order to be reproduced on television.

I first became aware of the imbrication of theatre within the economy of repetition in the early 1980s when I noticed that a number of the Broadway productions I was seeing had been underwritten in part by cable television money with the understanding that taped versions of the productions would appear later on cable networks. Whether by conscious intention or not, the productions themselves (particularly their sets, but also their staging) were clearly “camera-ready” – pre-adjusted to the aspect ratio, intimate scale, and relative lack of detail of the television image – a suspicion borne out when I later saw the televised version of one of them. This is a particularly explicit example of the historical reversal I mentioned earlier. In a process driven by the economics of cultural production, television, which initially modeled itself on the theatre, especially in dramatic

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

12 To an even greater extent, live performances are economically tied to mediatization. In the case of professional sports, for instance, the live game can take place because of the income the teams receive from the companies that broadcast the game, who derive income, in tum, from advertising during the game. In many instances, the same capital interests are behind both live and mediated cultural objects. This is true of the Broadway productions underwritten by cable television companies that I discuss below. Disney’s Beauty and the Beast, also mentioned below, is another example: Disney has produced the same material as an animated film for theatres and video cassettes, live productions, sound recordings, toys, and so on. In these instances, the economic success or failure of any one cultural object is much less important than the profit derived from the whole package. This has always been the case for popular music concerts. In many instances, the concerts themselves do not turn a profit (which is one reason why they are now usually underwritten by sponsors from outside the music industry). They do, however, serve to advertise recordings that, if successful, will be enormously profitable and more than make up for losses incurred by the concert tour. The current trend, which will continue for the foreseeable future, is for highly capitalized cultural producers to envision “projects” that can be realized in many different forms (as films, television programs, video cassettes, live performances, sound recordings, toys, collectibles, etc.) rather than individual cultural objects. As long as the project as a whole is profitable, none of its particular manifestations need be.

13 For a useful overview of cable television’s involvement in the presentation of theatrical productions, see Rose (1986: 229-33). Although Rose does not discuss the involvement of cable networks in the financing of live theatre, he does take note of the fact that cable executives lost interest in theatre around 1982 when they realized that an original television movie can be produced for less than the cost of mounting a theatrical production for broadcast (ibid.: 231).
presentations, has become both model and telos for live theatre. In The Post-Modern Aura, Charles Newman (1985: 129) declares that “the adaptation...has become the primary literary convention of the age.” As compared with those of television’s Golden Age, the productions to which I refer here did not need to be adapted to make the journey from stage to television, because the live versions had been constructed to be seen as television – they were pre-adapted (so to say) to the demands of their new medium. Contrary to Newman’s suggestion that the adaptation is the essential postmodern form, I would argue that the very fact that these productions required no adaptation in making the transition from representation to repetition is what defines them as postmodern. While I would not want to assert unconditionally that the live event I saw while sitting in the theatre was no different from its television counterpart, its identity as theatre, rather than television, and its specificity as a live, rather than mediatized, event had been called into question long before it actually showed up on the screen.

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

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

Wooster Group performer Willem Dafoe suggested the parallel between avant-garde performing and film acting when I interviewed him in 1985. He told me that from his point of view as a performer, what he does when performing in a Wooster Group piece is virtually identical with that of acting in films – to him, both are primarily nonmatrixed, task-based performing (Auslander 1997: 44). Dafoe is one of a growing group of American performance artists whose experiences in the avant-garde have enabled them to make a smooth transition into acting on film or television; the careers of Laurie Anderson, Spalding Gray, the late Ron Vawter, Ann Magnuson, Eric Bogosian, Steve Buscemi, and many others are noteworthy in this regard. More important, their more experimental work itself has found its way into mass-cultural contexts in many cases: Anderson’s performances as rock concerts, films, and videos; Gray’s and Bogosian’s monologues as movies; Magnuson’s pop performance extravaganzas as cable television specials, and so forth. Daryl Chin (1991: 20) describes

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

15 I summarize these activities in Auslander (1993: 62). A number of performance artists have had “specials” on cable networks or have appeared on public television on the occasional network program, such as Saturday Night Live. Ann Magnuson has played characters from soap operas – one of her performances was entitled Christmas Special (1981); she has also appeared in films (Making Mr. Right (1987)) and on television (on Anything But Love), and toured with her satirical rock band, Bongwater. In 1990 she returned to solo performance, including an appearance at Lincoln Center in New York, in You Could Be Home Now. A number of these performers have achieved success in mass entertainment forms as a consequence of their notoriety as performance artists: Bogosian has acted in films and on television;
this trend disparagingly by saying that “much of what passes for performance art, experimental film, and ‘advanced’ visual art is more like an audition, a trial-run, a mock-up for work in television, commercial movies, or advertising.” While I disagree with Chin’s evaluation of this work, his point that it is now possible for a performer to move directly from the context of the avant-garde to that of mass culture is surely valid. I have proposed the expression “cross-over,” a venerable music business term referring to popular songs that appear on more than one hit parade, to characterize this phenomenon, with the understanding that what is being crossed over — the distinction between the avant-garde and mass culture — is a distinction between received cultural categories that is more profound even than that between, say, rock and disco (which is not inconsiderable). 16 Ironically, one of the factors that contributed to the performance avant-garde’s becoming ready for prime-time was its adoption of nonmatrixed performance, an approach originally meant to differentiate “performing” from conventional acting but that ultimately served as a training ground for the kinds of performance skills demanded by the mass media because, like film acting, it depends on mediation for its significance. In effect, the performance avant-garde had absorbed the phenomenology of mediated performance even before it took up a position within the economy of repetition.

That mediatization is the experience to which live performance must refer and which it must seek to recreate is evident from examples drawn from a broad range of cultural contexts. The practice of staging live reenactments of television events began as early as the mid-1950s, when television plays like Twelve Angry Men and Visit to a Small Planet were presented on Broadway, and it has accelerated in recent times with the restaging of television programs as live performances (The Real Live Brady Bunch), animated films as stage musicals (Disney’s Beauty and the Beast), and of music videos as concerts. As the personnel involved in staging Madonna’s tours freely admit, the goal of

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

17 See Auslander (1992b) for a discussion of the comedy boom and television in a somewhat different context.
incursion of mediatization into a range of live performance events at some length to make the point that, within our mediatized culture, whatever distinction we may have supposed there to be between live and mediatized events is collapsing because live events are becoming more and more identical with mediatized ones. When I have presented this idea in public lectures, it has often been challenged by the claim that while what I say may be true of large-scale entertainment such as sporting events, Broadway shows, and rock concerts, it does not hold true for more intimate forms of theatre and performance art. However, I do not believe this distinction to be valid. I am not arguing that all instances of live performance reflect the incursion of mediatization in the same ways or to the same degree, and scale is certainly one differentiating factor. Some sectors of our cultural economy determine that if an event is to occur live at all, it must be mounted on a large scale. Connor (1989: 151–2) points out, for example, that the use of giant video screens at rock concerts provides a means of creating in a large-scale event the effect of “intimacy and immediacy” associated with smaller live events. In order to retain those characteristics, large-scale events must surrender a substantial measure of their liveness to mediatization. Ironically, intimacy and immediacy are precisely the qualities attributed to television that enabled it to displace live performance. In the case of such large-scale events, live performance survives as television.

More intimate live performances may not be mediatized in the same way or to the same effect. Inasmuch as mediatization is the cultural context in which live performances are now inevitably situated, however, its influence nevertheless pervades even these smaller-scaled events. I have already referred to the ubiquity of video in performance art, a phenomenon that speaks for itself. But mediatization is not just a question of the employment of media technology; it is also a matter of what might be called media epistemology. It "should not be understood as meaning simply that our world-view is being increasingly dominated by technical equipment. Even more important is the fact that we often perceive reality only through the mediation of machines (microscope, telescope, television). These frameworks...preform our perception of [the world]" (Bolz and van Reijen 1996: 71). Even small-scale, intimate live performances can be products of this preformed perception. In an earlier analysis (Auslander 1992b: 70–81), I pointed out that both Laurie Anderson's media-saturated performances and Spalding Gray's low-tech, intimate ones can be seen as televisual, even in live presentations. To those familiar with her performance work, Anderson's engagement of media technology is well-known (see Auslander 1992b: 105–24; I shall also have occasion to refer to one of her performances at the end of this chapter). Because Gray's relation to mediatization is less obvious, I will review that part of my argument briefly. I contend that Gray's monologue performances are televisual in two respects. First, their narrative structure, which follows the continuing adventures of a small group of central characters whose essential traits never change, is very close to that of the television serial. Second, and more important here, Gray has created a performance persona that:

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

(Auslander 1992b: 77–8)

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

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

I will begin by noting Benjamin's emphasis on the idea that "human sense perception... is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well" (ibid.: 31). Many aspects of our relation to performance suggest that mediatisation has had a powerful effect in shaping the sensory norm for the current historical moment. Roger Copeland (1990: 29) has explained the use of amplification in live theatrical performance in precisely these terms: "on Broadway these days even nonmusical plays are routinely miked, in part because the results sound more 'natural' to an audience whose ears have been conditioned by stereo television, high fidelity LPs, and compact disks." The use of relatively invisible microphones placed on the bodies of the actors only reinforces our perception of an amplified voice as "natural." Goodwin (1990: 266) has identified another intriguing case of the normalisation of mediatised sound: that of the handclap effect used on many pop and dance records. Recordings of the 1970s frequently used a particular percussion synthesizer, the TR-808, as the source for this sound. After a decade of synthesized handclaps, when musicians in the 1980s wanted to sample a handclap effect from existing recordings, "they sampled their own electronic simulation from the TR-808 machine, rather than 'real' handclaps" because "the electronic handclap sounded so 'natural' to pop musicians and audiences" (ibid.). The degree to which our eyes and ears have been conditioned by mediatisation was clearly well before the advent of compact discs, stereo television, and sampling: think of the people who have long brought portable radios or television sets to the ballpark, or consider Evan Eisenberg's anecdote of stumbling upon a portable radios or television sets to the ballpark, or consider Evan Eisenberg's anecdote of stumbling upon a free jazz concert in Central Park in New York City, only to notice that some spectators were listening to the radio broadcast of the very concert they were attending (Eisenberg 1987: 85). An even more developed version of the latter scenario occurred at an Atlanta performance of the rock group Yes. The group's set-up included a system that permitted those attending the concert to listen to it on headphones plugged directly into the group's mixing board.

Benjamin describes the mode of perception he saw in an emergent mass culture in terms of overcoming distance (and therefore banishing aura, which can be understood as a function of distance). He refers to: the desire of contemporary masses to bring things "closer" spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction.

(Benjamin 1986 [1936]: 31-2)
The ubiquity of reproductions of performances of all kinds in our culture has led to the depreciation of live presence, which can only be compensated for by making the perceptual experience of the live as much as possible like that of the mediated, even in cases where the live event provides its own brand of proximity.

I will conclude this section with a brief consideration of mixed-media performances, in the cultural/perceptual environment I have described. There has been a critical discourse surrounding the concept of mixed-media performance and the possibilities of incorporating film into theatre since at least the early 1920s. Robert Edmond Jones declared: “In the simultaneous use of the living actor and the talking picture in the theatre there lies a wholly new theatrical art, whose possibilities are as infinite as those of speech itself” (Jones 1941: 17, original emphasis).

Whereas film, for Jones, is “the perfect medium for expressing the Unconscious,” live actors express conscious reality. Therefore, the combination of the two media “will reveal simultaneously the two worlds of the Conscious and the Unconscious...the objective world of actuality and the subjective world of motive” (ibid.: 18). Implicit in Jones’s calling for this form of mixed-media performance is the assumption that live and filmed representations can be combined as complementary and equally compelling languages. He does not take cultural economy into consideration or raise the question of how live performance juxtaposed with film would be perceived by an audience that had been deserting theatres in favor of movie houses for over twenty years. Would such an audience perceive the live aspects of the kind of mixed-media production envisioned by Jones as equally compelling as its filmed components, or would they see the live as an uninteresting, degraded version of the filmed?

Twenty-five years later, the actor Roberts Blossom, who was combining live actors with film in a series of experiments he called Filmstage, explicated his activity in terms very similar to Jones’s. Whereas Jones saw film as representing the unconscious and live actors as representing consciousness, Blossom (1966: 70) saw film as representing consciousness and the live actors as representing corporeality, physical existence. Unlike Jones, who saw theatre and film as portraying complementary aspects of the psyche, Blossom saw the live and filmed elements of his productions as competing with one another. Blossom acknowledged that the competition between the actors’ live bodies and the filmed images in these mixed-media performances was intrinsically unfair because the filmed images were inevitably more compelling. By comparison with the films, the actors appeared as “fifty-watt bulbs waiting to be screwed into their source and to shine with the light that is perpetual (behind them, around them) but which they can only reflect at fifty watts” (ibid.). In terms of psychic economy, we might interpret Blossom as saying that physical existence is only ever a pale reflection of the consciousness underlying it. But Blossom’s statement can also be read in terms of the cultural economy. In those terms, the live actors are only pale reflections of the mediated representations that dominate the cultural landscape. Although Blossom (1966: 72) may be implying the possibility of existing as pure consciousness when he concludes that “our presence as bodies begins to be suspect,” that statement also summarizes the devaluation of live presence in mediated culture.

Movies had been stealing American audiences from theatre both in New York and on the road since the early 1920s. By 1930, about twenty Broadway theatres “were alternating motion pictures with plays,” many of these theatres soon became movie houses (Poggi 1968: 83). Poggi comments: “the motion pictures could not have crushed the legitimate theatre if there had been a real preference for live drama. Theatre managers would never have turned their buildings over to the movies if they could have made more money by booking plays” (ibid.: 43). I assume that Jones was aware of these developments. It is possible, therefore, that his proposal for mixed-media performance was a covert way of recuperating theatre’s enemy.

Filmstage was but one of many intermedia experiments undertaken in the mid-1960s by theatre, film, and performance artists. Carolee Schneeman and Robert Whitman, for instance, both staged “Happenings” that juxtaposed live performers with filmed images. For a useful contemporary survey of these activities and other experimental uses of film, video, and live performance, see Youngblood (1972).
If the value of live presence has depreciated in our mediatized culture, it would seem that audiences would be more likely to perceive the live elements of mixed-media performances as the fifty-watt bulbs described by Blossom than as the equal partners of mediatized representations envisioned by Jones. This question is difficult to address in any other than anecdotal terms: when we go to a concert employing a large video screen, for instance, what do we look at? Do we concentrate our attention on the live bodies or are our eyes drawn to the screen, as Benjamin's postulate of our desire for proximity would predict? At an industrial party I attended recently, I found the latter to be the case. There was a live band, dancing, and a video simulcast of the dancers on two screens adjacent to the dance floor. My eye was drawn to the screen, compared to which the live dancers indeed had all the brilliance of fifty-watt bulbs.

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

**Against ontology**

Live performance thus has become the means by which mediatized representations are naturalized, according to a simple logic that appeals to our nostalgia for what we assumed was the immediate: if the mediatized image can be recreated in a live setting, it must have been "real" to begin with. This schema resolves (or rather, fails to resolve) into an impossible oscillation between the two poles of what once seemed a clear opposition: whereas mediatized performance derives its authority from its reference to the live or the real, the live now derives its authority from its reference to the mediatized, which derives its authority from its reference to the live, etc. The paradigm that best describes the current relationship between the live and the mediatized is the Baudrillardian paradigm of simulation: "nothing separates one pole from the other, the initial from the terminal: there is just a sort of contraction into each other, a fantastic telescoping, a collapsing of the two traditional poles into one another: an IMPLSION." Baudrillard states, with typical insistence, about such implosions: "this is where simulation begins" (Baudrillard 1983: 57, original emphasis). In the previous sections of this chapter, I indicated the twin vectors of implosion in the case of live and mediatized performance. As the mediatized replaces the live within cultural economy, the live itself incorporates the mediatized, both technologically and epistemologically. The result of this implosion is that a seemingly secure opposition is now a site of anxiety, the anxiety that underlies many performance theorists' desire to reassert the integrity of the live and the corrupt, co-opted nature of the mediatized. One of the most articulate versions of this position is Peggy Phelan's account of what she understands to be the ontology of performance. For Phelan, the basic ontological fact of performance is that its only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction, it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology.

(Phelan 1993a: 146)

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

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22 I am not yet convinced that digitality represents a cultural dominant different from the televisual.

23 I realize that I am considering only a portion of Phelan's argument, which ultimately has to do with issues of presence and visibility for a political performance practice. I am concerned here only with her fundamental ontological premises.
Although it may seem that live performance cannot be mass-reproduced, I shall argue otherwise later in this section. I have already suggested that live performance is becoming progressively less independent of media technology. Phelan's claim that performance is linguistically independent from mass reproduction is based on a tautological argument. Phelan posits performance as nonreproductive and writing as a form of reproduction, allowing her to conclude that writing (language) cannot capture performance. To the extent, however, that mediatization, the technology of reproduction, is embedded within the language of live performance itself, performance cannot claim linguistic independence from mass reproduction, either. It interests me that although Phelan discusses performance artist Angelika Festa's Untitled Dance (with fish and others) (1987) in the context of her argument concerning the ontology of performance, she does not specifically address the encroachment of technologies of reproduction on this piece, in which Festa made extensive use of video technology to construct the images Phelan analyzes. It is ironic that the video camera, perhaps the sine qua non of the pressures that Phelan sees as compromising the ontological integrity of performance, is itself integral to the performance in question.

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

Despite the recognition by critics such as Pavis (1992: 134) of what he calls the inevitable "technological and aesthetic contamination" of live performance in the economy of repetition, there remains a strong tendency in performance theory to place live performance and mediatized or technologized forms in direct opposition to one another. The terms of this opposition focus around two primary issues: reproduction and distribution. Herbert Molderings defines the question of reproduction (or recording) by saying that:

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

(Molderings 1984: 172–3)

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

Overtly or covertly, the writers I have just cited valorize the live over the mediatized, as is evident in Molderings' contrast between "lively" performance and "petrified" video. Even Pavis, who argues that theatre needs to be seen in relation to other media, nevertheless refers to the influence of other media on theatre as a contamination. All too often, such analyses take on the air of a melodrama in which virtuous live performance is threatened, encroached upon, dominated, and...

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

25 This position is central to my Presence and Resistance (Auslander 1992b), where I argue it in detail.
contaminated by its insidious Other, with which it is locked in a life-and-death struggle. From this point of view, once live performance succumbs to mediatization, it loses its ontological integrity.

At one level, the anxiety of critics who champion live performance is understandable, given the way our cultural economy privileges the mediatized and marginalizes the live. In the economy of repetition, live performance is little more than a vestigial remnant of the previous historical order of representation, a hold-over that can claim little in the way of cultural presence or power. Perhaps making a virtue of necessity, Phelan (1993a: 148) claims that live performance's inability to participate in the economy of repetition "gives performance art its distinctive oppositional edge."27

These formulations of the relationship between live performance and mediatization as oppositional are not neutrally descriptive; rather, they reflect an ideology central to contemporary performance studies. Molderings (1984: 178–9) describes performance art as a direct counter-response to television's banalization and objectification of the visual image. Phelan picks up this theme in a discussion of Anna Deveare Smith's Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992, suggesting that Smith's performance, which incorporates, alludes to, and reinterprets the widely disseminated media images of the 1992 Los Angeles riots, "seeks to preserve and contain the chaotic flood of images the cameras 'mechanically' reproduced" (Phelan 1993b: 6). Phelan observes that this way of seeing the relationship between the live and the mediatized is based on "an old boast – television cameras give you only 'images,' and theatre gives you living truth" and emphasizes the degree to which Smith's performance is indebted to "the camera that precedes and frames and invites" it. She goes on to suggest that Smith's performance also offers another way to interpret the relation between film and

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

28 Phelan (1999b: 6) describes Smith's Twilight as signaling a shift in the relationship between television and theatre: "formerly, live theatre hoped to find itself preserved on television, while Smith's performance transforms the 'raw' televised story into stylized, well-rehearsed drama." I tend to see Smith's work as belonging to a general cultural trend in which mediatized events are reconfigured as live ones. In considering the relationship between theatre and television, does Smith's derivation of her performance from televised documentary sources constitute a new development or the extension of an established cultural trend into a new area?
As this quotation from Cubitt suggests, disappearance may be even more fundamental to television than it is to live performance – the televisual image is always simultaneously coming into being and vanishing; there is no point at which it is fully present. At the electronic level, the televisual image is hardly a petrified remnant of some other event, as Molderings would have it, but exists rather as a lively, and forever unresolved, process. For some theorists, the televisual image's existence only in the present also obviates the notion that television (and video) is a form of reproduction. Contrasting television with film in this regard, Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow point out that:

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

(Heath and Skirrow 1977: 54–6)

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

If we shift our gaze from the electronic writing on the glass to consider, for a moment, the nature of the magnetic writing on a videotape, another issue comes to the fore. Cubitt (1991: 169) posits as a crucial feature of the medium "the phenomena [sic] of lost generations" resulting from the various stages of life a video image is likely to pass through, "from master to submaster, to broadcast, to timeshift, where it begins to degenerate with every play." Video shares this characteristic with other means of technical reproduction, including photographic and sound-recording media. Since tapes, films, and other recording media deteriorate over time and with each use, they are, in fact, physically different objects at each playing, even though this process may only become perceptible when it reaches critical mass (e.g., when the film or video develops visible flaws). Each time I watch a videotape is the only time I can watch that tape in that state of being because the very process of playing it alters it. The tape that I initially placed in my VCR or audio player started disappearing the moment I began watching it or listening to it. Disappearance, existence only in the present moment, is not, then, an ontological quality of live performance that distinguishes it from modes of technical reproduction. Both live performance and the performance of mediatization are predicated on disappearance: the televisual image is produced by an ongoing process in which scan lines replace one another, and it is always as absent as it is present; the use of recordings causes them to degenerate. In a very literal, material sense, televisual and other technical reproductions, like live performances, become themselves through disappearance.

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

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

(Cavell 1982: 78)

It is remarkable how closely Cavell's description of the film experience parallels descriptions of the experience of live performance. The fact that Cavell is talking about the past, probably about the heyday of the
American film industry in the 1930s and 1940s, and about a way of experiencing film that we no longer believe to be typical, is critical. Film is no longer an unrepeated experience confined to particular places and times; people frequently see their favorite films multiple times, and have opportunities to do so afforded them by the appearances of these movies on cable and broadcast television, and on video cassettes. If we want to, we can own copies of movies and watch them whenever, and as often, as we wish. Whereas film was once experienced as evanescence, it is now experienced as repetition. The crucial point is that this transition was not caused by any substantive change in the film medium itself. As a medium, film can be used to provide an evanescent experience that leaves little behind, in the manner of a live performance, or it can provide an experience based in repetition and the stockpiling of film commodities. Cubitt (1991: 92-3) makes much the same point with respect to video, arguing that repetition is not "an essence in the medium." Rather, "the possibility of repetition is only a possibility"; the actual use of the medium is determined by "the imaginary relation of viewer and tape." Repetition is not an ontological characteristic of either film or video that determines the experiences these media can provide, but an historically contingent effect of their culturally determined uses.

One change that deserves mention is the replacement of highly volatile nitrate film stocks with safety stocks, a transition that was not complete until the 1950s. The early nitrate stocks would frequently ignite in the projector, nitrate prints were often discarded after only a few showings because of the stock's dangerous instability. Following William's critique of technological determinism, I would insist that how technologies are used should be understood as effect rather than cause (Williams 1992 [1974]: 3-8). In this case, I would argue that the transition from the evanescent experience of film to the experience of film as repetition was not caused by such technological changes as the development of safety stocks and the advent of video. Rather, the development of those technologies was the intentional result of a social need for cultural forms offering an experience of repetition, a need perhaps related to the desire for reproductions cited by Benjamin and discussed earlier.

Sontag makes two points that challenge the distinction between film as repeatable and live performance as nonrepeatable:

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

(Sontag 1966: 31, original emphasis)

Just as recording media like film and video can provide an experience of evanescence, so, too, live forms such as theatre have been used in ways that do not respect, or even recognize, the ostensible spatial and temporal characteristics of live performance. I would go so far as to argue that live performances can be mass-produced. One such example would be the WPA Federal Theater's 1936 production of It Can't Happen Here, which opened simultaneously in eighteen different American cities. The intention of this experiment is clearly suggested by a contemporary account, which observes that the Federal Theater produced the play "after a motion picture corporation decided not to do it" (Whitman 1937: 6). To take a more current example, producers of the genre known as "interactive plays" envision live performances as franchisable commodities. Interactive plays are environmental performances that incorporate varying degrees of spectator participation. In Tamara, for instance, spectators follow the character of their choice through a series of rooms, witnessing various scenes of a narrative. In Tony 'n' Tina's Wedding and similar performances, spectators actually interact with the performers by eating with them, dancing with them, gossiping with them, etc. Barrie Wexler, the California producer of Tamara, "franchises...Tamara worldwide, replicating the product in exact and dependable detail. It's like staying in the Hilton," he explains, 'everything is exactly the same no matter where you are' (Fuchs 1996: 142). In these cases, live performance takes on the defining characteristics of a mass medium: it makes the same text available simultaneously to a large number of participants distributed widely in space. In fact, Hollywood saw the Federal Theater as a competitor, and opposed it (Whitman 1937: 130-2). It is crucial to observe that the intentions underlying these two examples of this use of the live medium are very different, and each is arguably reflective of its historical moment. The ideological positioning of these productions is determined not by their shared use of live performance as a mass medium, but by the different intentions and contexts of those uses. The Federal Theater's practices may be said to have grown out of a generally left-populist attitude, while interactive plays are the creatures of postmodern consumer capitalism (see Fuchs 1996: 129). Ironically, interactive plays like Tamara commodify the very aspects of live performance that are said to resist commodification. Because they are designed to offer a different experience at each visit, they can be
merchandised as events that must be purchased over and over again: the ostensible evanescence and nonrepeatability of the live experience ironically become selling points to promote a product that must be fundamentally the same in each of its instantiations. The promise of having a different experience at each attendance at an interactive play is meaningful only if each is clearly recognizable as a different experience of the same, essentially static, object. One of those selling points is, of course, the intimacy of witnessing the narrative from a particular character's perspective or physically interacting with the characters. Again, the alliance of the desire for proximity with that for reproduction suggested by Benjamin is apparent.

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

\[ \text{X is a mass artwork if and only if 1. x is a multiple instance or type artwork, 2. produced and distributed by a mass technology, 3. which artwork is intentionally designed to gravitate in its structural choices (for example, its narrative forms, symbolism, intended affect, and even its content) toward those choices that promise accessibility with minimum effort, virtually on first contact, for the largest number of untutored (or relatively untutored) audiences.} \] (Carroll 1998: 196)

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

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

The distinction Carroll draws between template and interpretation is provocative. I am not persuaded, however, that they are mutually exclusive categories. If we take the producer of Tamara at his word and assume that he does succeed in mounting numerous productions of the play that are functionally identical, would it not be fair to say that the interpretation used in all cases functions as a template? (When I refer to the various productions as functionally identical, I am not suggesting that there would not be differences among them, only that such differences would be trivial – differences, but not distinctions that would differentiate one production of Tamara from any other in aesthetically significant ways.) While the actors would have to possess a certain amount of craft and skill to replicate the performances established in the template (just as it takes a certain amount of craft and skill to be a good projectionist), individual artistry and imagination would be negative qualities in such a performance, since they would tend to work against the success of Tamara as a standardized product. (Similarly, we would not want a projectionist to be "creative" in showing a conventional film.)

If this argument seems a bit far-fetched in the context of theatre (though I do not believe it is), we can switch for a moment to another kind of franchised performance. Consider the various live performances of the trademark clown character Ronald McDonald that may
be undertaken simultaneously at McDonald's restaurants all over the world. It is precisely the point of these performances that they all represent a single, standardized Ronald. All performances of Ronald McDonald are generated from a single interpretation of the character, which functions as a template. I have chosen this example in part to make the point that a template is not the same as a script: improvisational performances, too, can be generated from a template. (It is significant in the context of this chapter that our familiarity with this template derives mostly from seeing Ronald on television commercials. The live presentations of Ronald McDonald are further instances of live performance’s recreation of the televisual.) If a child were led to make judgments concerning the interpretive quality of the various Ronald McDonalds he/she had seen – such as: “I liked the Ronald at that restaurant in Cleveland better” or “This guy did Ronald better when we were here yesterday” – then the performances would have been dismal failures precisely because they, like Tamara, are instances where live performance aspires to the condition of mass art. These instances also suggest how live performance may participate in the economy of repetition, not just by being recorded and replicated, but through the mass production of the live event itself.

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

I am suggesting further that thinking about the relationship between live and mediated forms in terms of ontological oppositions is not especially productive, because there are few grounds on which to make significant ontological distinctions. Like live performance, electronic and photographic media can be described meaningfully as partaking of the ontology of disappearance ascribed to live performance, and they can also be used to provide an experience of evanescence. Like film and television, theatre can be used as a mass medium. Half jokingly, I might cite Pavis’s observation that “theatre repeated too often deteriorates” (Pavis 1992: 101) as evidence that the theatrical object degenerates with repeated use in a manner akin to a recorded object! I am not proposing, however, that live performance and mediatisation partake of a shared ontology. As the historical allegory I presented in the first section of this chapter suggests, that claim is the basis for mediatisation’s displacement of the live within cultural economy. I am suggesting, rather, that how live and mediated forms are used is determined not by their ostensibly intrinsic characteristics but by their positions within cultural economy. To understand the relationship between live and mediated forms, it is necessary to investigate that relationship as historical and contingent, not as ontologically given or technologically determined.

As a starting point for this exploration, I propose that, historically, the live is actually an effect of mediatisation, not the other way around. It was the development of recording technologies that made it possible to perceive existing representations as “live.” Prior to the advent of those technologies (e.g., sound recording and motion pictures), there was no such thing as “live” performance, for that category has meaning only in relation to an opposing possibility. The ancient Greek theatre, for example, was not live because there was no possibility of recording it. In a special case of Baudrillard’s well-known dictum that “the very definition of the real is that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction” (Baudrillard 1983: 146), the “live” can only be defined as “that which can be recorded.” Most dictionary definitions of this usage of the word “live” reflect the necessity of defining it in terms of its opposite: “Of a performance, heard or watched at the time of its occurrence,
The Greek theatre may have been technologically mediated, if one subscribes to the theory that the masks acted as megaphones. What concerns me here, however, is technological reproduction, not just technological mediation. Greek theatrical masks may have amplified the actors’ voices, but they did not reproduce them, in the manner of electric amplification. Throughout history, performance has employed available technologies and has been mediated in one sense or another. It is only since the advent of mechanical and electric technologies of recording and reproduction, however, that performance has been medi- atized.

Although I realize this is a contentious point, I will stipulate that I do not consider writing to be a form of recording in this context, for several reasons. Scripts are blueprints for performances, not recordings of them, even though they may contain some information based on performance practice. Written descriptions and drawings or paintings of performances are not direct transcriptions through which we can access the performance itself, as aural and visual recording media are. I would draw the same distinction here that Roland Barthes (1977: 44) makes between drawing and photography: whereas drawings, like writing, transforms performance, audio-visual technologies, like photography, record it. In everyday usage, we refer to “live” or “recorded” performances but not to “written” performances or “painted” performances, perhaps for this reason. This means that the history of live performance is bound up with the history of recording media; it extends over no more than the past 100 to 150 years. To declare retroactively that all performance before, say, the mid-19th century was “live” would be an anachronistic imposition of a modern concept on a pre-modern phenomenon. In fact, the Oxford English Dictionary’s earliest examples of the use of the word “live” in reference to performance come from the mid-1930s, well after the advent of recording technologies and the development of broadcasting systems. If this word history is complete, then the concept of live performance came into being not at the appearance of the basic recording technologies that made the concept possible but only with the maturation of mediatized society itself.

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

Connor summarizes the relationship between the live and the medi- atized in related terms:

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

(Connor 1989: 153)

Connor’s frame of reference is the performance of popular music, my subject in the next chapter. A good example of the inscription of the apparatus of representation within live performance in that realm is the status of the microphone in popular music performance: consider its central role in Elvis Presley’s performance style, the microphonic acrobatics of James Brown, or the way the Supremes’ and Temptations’ choreography is centered around the positioning of their microphones. As Connor implies, the very presence of the microphone and the performers’ manipulation of it are paradoxical markers of the performance’s status as live and immediate. Far from suppressing the apparatus of reproduction, as a performer such as Madonna may be said to be attempting when she uses a headset mike not clearly visible to the

36 I am not suggesting that recording media do not transform live performance in the process of capturing it, only that they provide a kind of access to the live event that writing and static visual media do not. This is in part because recording media may be used to capture performance in real time; the duration of the recording can be identical with that of the performance itself. The question of temporality places still photography in an ambiguous position, since photography does record performance but only as a series of individual moments divorced from their temporal procession. The question of whether or not a static visual medium can be said to reproduce the temporality of performance will return in a legal context in Chapter 4.
audience (with the effect of naturalizing mediatized representations, as I discussed earlier in this chapter), these performers emphasize that the apparatus of reproduction is a constitutive element of their liveness. In short, they perform the inscription of mediatization within the immediate.

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

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

Got live if you want it

My claim that live performance recapitulates mediatized representa-

Live performance in a mediatized culture has sometimes been challenged by the demand to know why people still want to see live performances if that is the case. This is an important question usually addressed by recourse to clichés and mystifications concerning aura, presence, the “magic of live theatre,” etc. Although any attempt at a general response is bound to be flawed, the single most important point to make with respect to the continued attractiveness of live performance in a mediatized culture is that, like liveness itself, the desire for live experiences is a product of mediatization. “[I]t is possible to see how the proliferation of reproductions actually intensifies the desire for origin, even if that origin is increasingly sensed as an erotic lack rather than a tangible and satisfying presence” (Connor 1989: 151). Ultimately, however, a question like this is best answered from the perspective of particular cultural contexts: what does live performance mean, and why is it demanded, within particular groups defined by shared cultural identity and/or tastes? Before undertaking that kind of contextual analysis in the next chapter, I will address two of the conventional explanations for the continued interest in live performance – that it appeals broadly to the senses and that it creates community – then comment on the value of live performance as symbolic capital.

One of the main conventional explanations advanced for the continued appeal of live performance is that it offers a fuller sensory experience than mediatized performances. Whereas mediatized representations appeal primarily to the visual and auditory senses, live performances engage all the senses, including the olfactory, tactile, somatic, and kinesthetic. I would argue that this is not the case, that these other senses are engaged by mediatized performances. It certainly can be the case that live performance engages the senses differently than mediatized representations, but a difference in kind is not the same thing as a difference in magnitude of sensory experience.

Another conventional argument is that the experience of live performance builds community. It is surely the case that a sense of community may emanate from being part of an audience that clearly values something you value, though the reality of our cultural economy is that the communal bond unifying such an audience is most likely to be little more than the common consumption of a particular performance commodity. Leaving that issue aside, I would argue against the idea that live performance itself somehow generates whatever sense of community one may experience. For one thing, mediatized performance makes just as effective a focal point for the gathering of a social group as live performance. Theodore Gracyk, who discusses this issue as it pertains to popular music, observes that:
Gracyk's point can be generalized across performance genres. A parallel example from a different cultural realm would be that of the crowd that gathered in the town square of a small city adjacent to Atlanta to watch a big-screen simulcast of the opening ceremonies of the 1996 Olympic Games. The people gathered around the giant television screen constituted a community in all the same senses as the audience attending the live event a few miles away. Since most of the people gathered in the town square were neighbors, not merely people drawn together to attend an event, their experience was arguably more genuinely communal than that of the audience attending the live performance. My point is simply that communality is not a function of liveness. The sense of community arises from being part of an audience, and the quality of the experience of community derives from the specific audience situation, not from the spectacle for which that audience has gathered.

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

Desire has always been...for the audience as community, similarly enlightened, unified in belief, all the disparities in some way healed by the experience of theater. The very nature of theater reminds us somehow of the original unity even as it implicates us in the common experience of fracture, which produces both what is time-serving and divisive in theater and what is self-serving and subversive in desire...as there is no theater without separation, there is no appeasing of desire.

(Blau 1990: 10)

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

Another dimension to the question of why people continue to attend live events in our mediatized culture is that live events have cultural value: being able to say that you were physically present at a particular event constitutes valuable symbolic capital – certainly, it is possible to dine out on the cachet of having been at Woodstock, for example.37 One remarkable aspect of performance's position within cultural economy is that our ability to convert attendance at a live event into symbolic capital is completely independent of the experi-

37 I agree with Simon Frith (1996: 9) that Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and symbolic capital can and should be extended beyond his original usage. Bourdieu's "interest...is in the creation of a taste hierarchy in terms of high and low: the possession of cultural capital, he suggests, is what defines high culture in the first place...[But] the relationship between accumulated knowledge and discriminatory skill is apparent in low cultural terms, and has the same hierarchical effect" of differentiating those who are truly adept in a particular cultural arena from those who are not (see also Shuker 1994: 247–50). Cultural capital and symbolic capital, in this extended sense, must be understood as determined contextually. Particular subcultural and taste groups attribute symbolic capital to experiences that other groups do not recognize as valuable. That kind of discrimination is at the heart of my analysis of rock music culture in the next chapter: to an adept of "rock," "pop" music carries no symbolic capital. (More accurately, an enthusiasm for pop carries negative symbolic capital within the context of rock culture!)
tial quality of the event itself. Attending Woodstock might have meant spending three days hungry, sick, covered with mud, and unable to hear any music whatsoever. Seeing the Beatles at New York’s Shea Stadium in 1965 almost undoubtedly did mean hearing no music and might have meant suffering hearing loss as a result of screaming fans. None of this matters, however; merely being able to say you were there, live, translates into symbolic capital in the appropriate cultural contexts.

This aspect of liveness has a complex relation to cultural economy. Despite the claim, discussed earlier, that performance’s evanescence allows it to escape commodification, it is performance’s very evanescence that gives it value in terms of cultural prestige. The less an event leaves behind in the way of artifacts and documentation, the more symbolic capital accrues to those who were in attendance, at least in some cases (see Cubitt 1994: 289). In other cases, however, the symbolic value of having attended an event may be a function of that event’s notoriety, which, in turn, may result from the extent to which the event has been circulated as reproductions. Arguably, having been at the Isle of Wight Festival carries less symbolic capital than having been at Woodstock precisely because Woodstock has been so widely reproduced as multiple sound recordings, books, and a film, and thus has become culturally iconic in a way the other festival has not (at least in the American context).

However one may assess the relative symbolic values of live events, it is important to observe that even within our hyper-mediatized culture, far more symbolic capital is attached to live events than to mediatized ones, at least for the moment. In the cultural contexts in which Laurie Anderson matters, for example, I bank far more symbolic capital from having seen her perform The Nerve Bible live than I would from being able to say that I had heard it on CD or that I had read the book. The irony of the fact that live performances are still worth more symbolic capital within our culture than mediatized performances, even as live performance becomes more and more like mediatized performance, is clearly illustrated by The Nerve Bible, almost all of which was prerecorded and run by computers. During the second half, Anderson wandered on- and off-stage, as if to suggest that the computerized, audiovisual machine she had set into motion could run itself, that it was the show, with her or without her. Even though Anderson’s performance is barely live at all, it still commands greater symbolic capital than fully mediatized forms.

I suspect that this is a very temporary condition, however, and that we can begin to imagine a culture in which more prestige would accrue to someone who said she had seen Anderson on videotape or listened to her on CD than to the person who had seen her live. It is actually not at all difficult to imagine cases in which owning the mediatized version of a performance is worth the same, if not more, symbolic capital as having attended the live event. I would derive substantially symbolic capital from having seen the Beatles at the Cavern Club in Liverpool in 1960, for instance. But it is open to question whether I would garner more cultural capital than someone who owns a bootleg recording of the same performance. The bootleg would surely be worth at least as much symbolic capital as attendance at the live event; as a tangible artifact of the performance that would make it accessible to others, it might even be worth more.

The question of whether mediatized performance will come to be valued over live performance in the culture at large will be answered
by the next few generations. In an essay on internet romance, Meghan Daum offers the following confession: “[I] have a constant low-grade fear of the telephone, and I often call people with the intention of getting their answering machines. There is something about the live voice that I have come to find unnervingly organic, as volatile as live television” (Daum 1997: 80). Many of us have made calls hoping to get an answering machine, but it is important to take note of the terms in which Daum describes her anxiety. Daum represents a generation already come of age, brought up in a world dominated by communications technologies, for whom television represents immediate, live experience (notice that she cites television rather than, say, theatre as her model for the live), and live experience of any kind is undesirable and actually distressing. In thinking about the generation after Daum’s, I wonder whether having seen the live stage presentation of Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast,* for instance, counts for more among children today than owning a copy of the movie on video cassette. What value will be attached to live performance when these generations attain cultural power?

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