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Untitled, 2011:  
Hybridising Performance in Mashup Practice

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate  
in Fine Arts at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.

Daniel James (a.k.a. Dan Untitled)  
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## Abstract

This thesis investigates 'mashup' as a mode of creative practice, in relationship to the hybridised notion of 'performance'. Consisting of a suite of three new creative projects, that each variously encompass facets of mashup in performance practice, the research is presented as multimedia, incorporating video, sound and live performance.

The research investigates a number of key theoretical constructs across performance, as well as recent studies of mashups in popular culture and music. Special focus is placed on the work of the performance scholar Jon McKenzie, and his ideas about what constitutes performance in the twenty-first century. His theoretical principles are discussed in relation to performance practices in fine arts and music, and more specifically to my own mashup-derived practice. Studies that specifically investigate mashup practice in music are also prescient, and this research emphasises recent and seminal doctoral dissertations by the ethnomusicologist Liam McGranahan and the music theory scholar Christine Boone.

In this thesis, I argue for the uniqueness of my mashup-derived performance works (as distinct from other work that already exists in the field), and I argue that 'performance' itself needs to be understood in a manner that allows for a greater level of depth and nuance in order to adequately encompass hybridised, multi-mode, multi-context creative practice.

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I would like to acknowledge two uncles called David (both of whom sadly passed away this year - within a month of one another). My own uncle had achieved his doctorate years ago, and he was well known and loved by his students (many of whom were my friends while I did my own undergraduate study). I never got to meet Tessa's uncle in person, and he never got to complete his own doctorate, but I know that he showed a keen interest in my ongoing struggle to get credit for my work. This body of work, regardless of the academic outcome, is dedicated to you both.

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# Introduction

## Introduction

Imagine the synthesiser riff from Lady Gaga's 2008 hit *Just Dance*. You will probably have her catchy vocal melody stuck in your head before you even hear her deliver the first line: "I've had a little bit too much". Gaga's voice, however, is not heard (yet). Instead, David Bowie interrupts with the line "you remind me of the babe", and he launches into a rendition of *Magic Dance* (a mental image probably springs to mind: the character Jareth the Goblin King, from the cult classic children's film *Labyrinth*). Gaga's music remains clearly audible while Bowie sings. At the end of the first chorus, Saul Williams and George Michael both interject briefly with a phrase each (singing "dance dance" and "I'm never gonna dance again" respectively). When Lady Gaga finally gets to sing her part, the instrumental music from her song has been displaced by the instantly recognisable keyboard solo from Queen's *I Want to Break Free* (you can probably recall the music video – the band are dressed in dowdy drag, parodying characters from the soap opera *Coronation Street*). Whitney Houston steps in to harmonise with Lady Gaga's next chorus, inserting her own refrain: "Ooooh, I wanna dance with somebody". Bowie reprises his motif for a moment, and then Queen's iconic vocalist Freddie Mercury sings the final verse (to the accompaniment of Gaga's instrumental breakdown). In the final chorus, Houston interjects again, inserting one word that drastically alters the meaning of the closing refrain, so that the phrase "I want to breakdance" can be heard.

Those disparate artists obviously never shared a stage to perform that mixed-up song together. I just described a short excerpt of a live performance<sup>1</sup> in which I sampled and mixed *recordings* of their music. My creative practice focuses on deploying the strategies of mashup in the field of performance. In my performances, sections of audio and/or video created by others are displaced and recontextualised<sup>2</sup> - I combine and manipulate these various disparate sources in order to create new works that I call my own.

In this thesis, three new creative projects activate my core research question: what does 'performance' mean for a hybridised (multi-mode, multi-context) creative practice that is derived from the technologically mediated strategies of remix/mashup? I investigate how this body of audio, video and networked art practice might expand and shift how we understand the cultural currency, nuances, and multiplicities that are inherent in the term 'performance'. I also discuss the notions of change and 'becoming', as they pertain to such

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<sup>1</sup> This written description relates to an excerpt of a live performance (28 September 2011) recorded at Wellington's Terrace Bar, and subsequently broadcast on <<http://www.radioactive.fm>> (1 October 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis, I do not provide full reference details if I am referring to a source that has been sampled in order to create a new work (such as all of the pieces of music described in my opening paragraph). I only provide full references if I am discussing these sources as cultural products in their own right (as opposed to their presence in a new variant work). In instances where I do deem it noteworthy to specify the sources sampled, then these sources will generally already be well-known, iconic and easily sourced cultural artefacts. My primary interest is in researching the *new, variant works* that have been created, not in archiving the publication details for each and every one of the sources that were sampled.

hybridised and multiplicitous modes of practice. An interrogation of the imperative to produce documents that substantiate performance is fundamental to this research. This research asks how documentation (an activity that is inherently technologically mediated) might implicate performance (a field of creative practice that is inherently ephemeral).

## Research Overview: Documents of Performance

This thesis is best described as a cluster of documents, each addressing varying facets of performance. Chapter 1 outlines a body of supplementary research, examining a series of *written documents* that contextualise additional facets of my practice. These documents (three appendices to this thesis) remain deliberately unresolved at the time of writing - they are each, for varying reasons, frozen in time and incomplete. Chapter 2 discusses a performance that has already taken place, and which can now only be experienced through a *video document*. Chapter 3 also discusses a performance that has already taken place, but unlike the previous work, this performance took place without any live audience present at all. An *audio document* is required to mediate any experience of the performance. Chapter 4 offers an excerpt of audio as a teaser that pre-empts my discussion of an ongoing project. The audio document is thus provided in anticipation of a live performance which is another facet of this thesis.

This thesis is comprised of: three key creative projects that as a body of work form the thrust of my argument (all with some type of multimedia documentation), three supplementary documents that might augment my argument, a live performance for one of the key projects, and this written dissertation.

### Chapter 1

#### Snapshots of Performance: Review of Supplementary Research

Slightly more than a year ago (August 2010), I submitted my first doctoral thesis for examination. My earlier thesis submission, *Http Error 406: Not Acceptable - Bastardising Technology as a Critical Mode of Cultural Practice* (hereafter *Not Acceptable*), is included in Appendix 1. Earlier this year I wrote and submitted a paper that is pending editorial review for another publication. The content of this paper partially overlaps with Chapter 2 of this thesis and I present this draft version in Appendix 2. I have also drafted a paper discussing the open source film project *Stray Cinema*, and this work-in-progress is included in Appendix 3.

In Chapter 1 of this thesis, I offer an overview of these three (unresolved, incomplete) documents, each of which expand on my performance practice in some way. The main focus of this chapter is to offer an in-depth methodological comparison between this thesis

and my earlier submission. I highlight concepts and fields of inquiry that might be investigated further (thus demarcating the scope of what this thesis can attainably address), but more importantly, I highlight the key developments that this thesis makes to extend my earlier work.

## Chapter 2

### *Breakfast Party at my Studio: The Multiplicity of Performance*

Chapter 2 commences with a video recording of a performance entitled *Breakfast Party at My Studio*. The performance took place with audiences in two different geographical locations - Oxford, U.K. and Wellington, New Zealand. One audience experienced the piece live, onsite in real-time. The other audience experienced the piece as a video signal that was webcast live in real-time.

In this chapter, I frame my artwork as a hybrid of audiovisual mashup performance and networked performance. I discuss a mashup piece by Misshapen Features as a case study, alongside my own audiovisual work with The Axis of Weevils and Anaesthesia Associates. In the section about networked performance, I discuss pioneering projects by Avatar Body *Collision*,<sup>3</sup> along with my own work in networked performance as co-curator of the annual UpStage festivals of live online performance, and as a performer with Anaesthesia Associates. I highlight the different yet overlapping types of 'performances' that are at play in each of these case studies.

Critically investigating Jon McKenzie's work in the field of performance theory, I offer a broad framework for understanding the term 'performance' as complex and multiple, hybridised and everchanging, and highly contingent upon context. *Breakfast Party at my Studio* can be understood as a cluster of different performances that took place simultaneously. Whilst delivered by one person, the piece was an entirely different cultural product in each context that it was received. The work thus highlights the complexities, multiplicities and interrelationships surrounding Jon McKenzie's hybrid notion of performance. The artwork was a one-off piece, and it can now only be experienced as mediated by a video document.

## Chapter 3

### *Flight of the Alphabet: Documenting Performance*

Chapter 3 commences with an audio recording entitled *Flight of the Alphabet*. This recording documents a performance that took place without an audience, and the audio was captured live in one continuous take.

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<sup>3</sup> The italics on the word 'collision' are a typographical part of the name of the performance troupe.

This chapter focuses on extending the theoretical foundations that underpin this thesis by scrutinising the role of documentation. Because the dissertation focuses on theory, I do not provide case studies from the creative practices of others (beyond a brief discussion of the sources that were sampled/referenced in order to create my own work). In this chapter, I analyse the documentation of performance, discussing how notions about liveness and the authenticity of documentation might implicate the field. I argue that performance and documentation cannot be understood in isolation from one another, because documentation is performative in its own right. *Flight of the Alphabet*, a piece that cannot be experienced without the mediation of technology, emphasises the performativity of the document - it is framed as a performative interplay between audio and text.

#### Chapter 4

#### **Übermahlung und Frottage: Challenging and Becoming**

Chapter 4 starts with an audio recording in which I can be heard introducing myself on stage for a performance with my solo project Übermahlung und Frottage. The audio recording is a teaser - an introductory snippet that is offered in anticipation of live Übermahlung und Frottage performances (one performance will take place as part of this thesis).

Having already established and discussed the problematics, imperatives, complexities and multiplicities that are inherent in the overarching notion of performance in the previous chapters, Chapter 4 offers a philosophically-focused reflection. My philosophical work draws on the notion of challenge that underpins McKenzie's performance theory, but also on the thinking of his philosophical influences Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, with their notion of 'becoming'. Übermahlung und Frottage is a musical performance project (predominantly reaching audiences at bars and clubs, and via radio broadcast), and it could easily be interpreted at face value solely as musical entertainment. While this project may be received as such by some audiences, this chapter locates a suite of artistic imperatives that are central to the project. These critical modes are discussed in relation to the performances, which are extremely challenging on a number of levels simultaneously (musically, technically, physiologically and mentally).

#### **Experiencing Documents of Performance**

This thesis presents new creative works that variously deploy audio, video and networked art, and these pieces are integrated with written theoretical and historical research. There are three multimedia files that accompany this written document (paired with Chapters 2-4

of this dissertation respectively).<sup>4</sup> As already noted, the multimedia material (video and/or audio) that accompanies each chapter is a document of a performance.

Since you are experiencing documentation of performances (as opposed to live pieces), you can control your experience of my multimedia documents however you see fit - these documents might be experienced in any setting, played back on any technological platform that will read the data.<sup>5</sup> These files are indexed at the *start* of the relevant chapter - it is thus implied that each document should be watched and/or listened to *before* reading the chapter that discusses it.<sup>6</sup> Since the written text discusses the multimedia content it makes sense to experience the multimedia content first, but I cannot assert this as a firm proviso because I must ultimately allow for audience agency in the consumption of my creative work.

### Key Innovations in the Field

As a field of creative practice, the production and performance of mashups is well established (the musical field as we know it today, for example, began gaining cultural currency circa 2000). Despite the cultural currency of 'mashup' as a mode of practice, however, there has been very little scholarly work that adequately addresses the field. There have only been two doctoral theses to date that directly examine mashups in cultural practice:<sup>7</sup> Dr. Liam McGranahan's *Mashnography: Creativity, Consumption, and Copyright in the Mashup Community*,<sup>8</sup> and Dr. Christine Boone's *Mashups: History, Legality, and Aesthetics*.<sup>9</sup> While both bodies of work offer important new research in the field, McGranahan's focus is entirely ethnographic, and Boone writes from a music-theoretical perspective. My own research, conversely, is practice-based.

McGranahan investigates the history of 'mashup' as a musical genre (documenting the stories of producers and fans). He advances new arguments about how popular music is produced and received, and attempts to negotiate the troubled interrelationship between mashup culture and copyright. McGranahan notes that "[m]uch of the media reception of

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<sup>4</sup> As already noted, there are also three supplementary written documents (appendices 1-3).

<sup>5</sup> I indicate the duration of each piece at the start of the relevant chapter so the audience can plan for their experience however they see fit.

<sup>6</sup> The three appendices, conversely, are presented right at the back of this dissertation. It is thus implied that it is not necessary to access those documents before reading Chapter 1 (which pertains to the appendiced supplementary research).

<sup>7</sup> I make this distinction because some mashups, for example website mashups, are not primarily created as cultural outcomes. I discuss my terms of reference in more detail below.

<sup>8</sup> McGranahan, L. *Mashnography: Creativity, Consumption, and Copyright in the Mashup Community*. San Francisco, unpublished doctoral dissertation (Brown University), 2010. This document is available for download at <<http://mashupresearch.blogspot.com/2010/04/dissertation-finished.html>>.

<sup>9</sup> Boone, C. E. *Mashups: History, Legality, and Aesthetics*. Austin, unpublished doctoral dissertation (University of Texas), 2011. This document is available for download at <<http://www.google.co.nz/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CB0QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Frepositories.lib.utexas.edu%2Fbitstream%2Fhandle%2F2152%2FETD-UT-2011-05-3311%2FBOONE-DISSERTATION.pdf%3Fsequence%3D1&rct=j&q=christine%20boone%20phd%20mashups&ei=yomUTp3qA6rWiALY0uTuB&usq=AFOjCNGHHGocZjO0Zz342ahQqfs479sc8Q&cad=rja>>.

mashups, as well as some of the scholarly literature, has misrepresented the genre as simplistic and limited/limiting".<sup>10</sup> McGranahan's claim is highly prescient, and it illustrates the lack of consensus surrounding 'mashup' as a mode of production. Far from being an obsolete inquiry into a series of issues resolved by postmodernism in the 1980s, this thesis interrogates a cluster of issues that are yet to be critically located and understood.

McGranahan's work goes some way to correct the imbalance of scholarly research, charting this field of cultural practice (mashups as a musical mode/form), yet it does so in predominantly ethnographic terms. His historical work is astute, and it covers the field well, but historical survey is not the focus of this thesis.<sup>11</sup> McGranahan notes that, with the exception of work by three authors, the voices of mashup producers and other community members have been absent from the existing scholarly literature.<sup>12</sup> My own body of research is firmly rooted in new creative practice: I create and perform mashup-based artworks, and I integrate my creative projects with a cluster of theoretical perspectives about how these works might operate in the current intellectual and cultural climate.

While McGranahan writes from an ethnomusicological perspective, Boone focuses on music theory, arguing "that the mashup represents an important musical genre with distinguishing characteristics and its own historical development."<sup>13</sup> She analyses the musical form, classifying the genre based on two characteristics: the number of songs combined, and the mode of their combination - vertical (layers of distinctly audible pieces of music heard simultaneously) and horizontal (passages of music that occur after one another in time).

McGranahan's and Boone's dissertations are both written from a solely musical perspective.<sup>14</sup> There are musical elements present in all of my new projects too, but my research as a whole is not strictly limited to (and solely relevant to) mashup practice in music. A key focus of my research is how my own work challenges broader issues surrounding what *performance* means, and this is an unresolved issue that is pertinent to *most* hybridised modes of creative practice. My thesis is thus the first doctoral research addressing the mode of mashup in an interdisciplinary manner - produced from the perspective of an artist, and integrating creative practice with scholarly work to contextualise some of the prescient issues in the overlapping fields of fine arts and music.

While the research addresses unresolved and broader issues surrounding hybridised performance practice, there are also a number of important innovations in my artworks

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> See 'Methodology', below, for the rationale behind avoiding the academic approach of historical survey.

<sup>12</sup> McGranahan, 2010, p. 34. The three authors McGranahan notes are McLeod, 2005; Shiga, 2007 and Sinnreich, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> 2011, p. v.

<sup>14</sup> McGranahan and Boone both also offer insightful discussions on the key legal issues surrounding copyright as it pertains to mashup production in music. See McGranahan, 2010, pp. 178-216 and Boone, 2011, pp. 64-91. These legal issues are outside of the scope of this thesis.

themselves. All of the projects do indeed have musical elements, but in one artwork video and networked components are also present. The work *Breakfast Party at my Studio* is notable as an artwork that could be seen to pioneer the hybridisation of audiovisual mashup with networked art (webcasting in real-time to a remote audience as well as performing to a proximal audience). Mashup artists have certainly performed at webcast events and streamed their performances,<sup>15</sup> but in most cases broadcast technology operates simply as a vehicle with which to reach a wider audience. Part of the innovation of *Breakfast Party at my Studio* is that it integrates webcasting as a performative element that is *conceptually core to the artwork*.

In my work, I also blur the boundaries between the use of digital audio production/performance tools and the use of what might more traditionally be construed as 'musical instruments'. In Chapter 4, I discuss a solo project in which I play the bass guitar at the same time as mixing disparate audio recordings created by others. The project is innovative for the ways in which it re-integrates additional instrumentation in live solo performance, and for the ways in which it introduces new complexities in the interrelationship between mixer and maker.

## Methodology

This thesis is a practice-based submission. This written dissertation contextualises three new projects (together with a body of supplementary research). Chapters 2-4 all commence with a document of an artwork/project, and then proceed with a written contextual discussion. These practical projects are augmented by a discussion that analyses key issues in philosophy and critical theory, and also investigates existing contexts for creative practice (against which my own work can be either aligned or differentiated).

While each of the new practical projects presented for this thesis traverse multiple creative disciplines, there are certain key threads that run through my new work. The projects are performative - my own body/person is present (as performer) in each of the works.<sup>16</sup> The projects engage with mashup as a creative strategy - combining pre-existing cultural forms (music and/or video) to create new outcomes. The works variously engage with music/audio, film/video, and network/broadcast technologies. These projects have been devised to operate across multiple creative contexts - audiences might variously be at a gallery/museum, in more informal settings such as a bar/nightclub, in my studio (for one work), or (receiving a broadcast) in their home, vehicle, workplace and so forth.

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<sup>15</sup> One such example is the website <<http://www.mashuptowntv.com>>, which is devoted to webcasting the performances of mashup artists. My own performances on the weekly *Messed Up* radio shows (see footnote 143) are also available as real-time audio streams (and the audiences accessing these streams comprise the vast majority of our listenership).

<sup>16</sup> In *Breakfast Party at my Studio* I performed remotely for one of the audiences, but I was still performing in real-time.

Documents (audio and/or video recordings and textual analysis) are left behind to substantiate performances that took place, and some audiences might only experience my performances as mediated through these documents.

The focus of this dissertation is to reflect on some of the key critical issues I see, locating how my work develops and progresses these issues. I provide an initial overview of my supplementary work, highlighting strategies and theoretical issues that sit outside of the scope of this thesis, but which inform my practice as a whole. I offer a methodological comparison between *Not Acceptable* and this thesis, noting some key developments and points of difference. Proceeding to discuss my new core projects, my theoretical work initially focuses on the work of one key thinker, Jon McKenzie, and I discuss the practical implications of his theoretical framework for understanding performance. My own theoretical position draws heavily on McKenzie's work, but my discussion extends his ideas by explicating the nuances, specificities, multiplicities and complexities inherent to his paradigm that pertain to my own field of creative practice (mashup-derived performance). I analyse the role of liveness in technologically mediated performance (through a work with no live audience present at all). I specifically question the American performance scholar Philip Auslander's work in the field of live performance, and I proceed to discuss how the act of documentation is performative in its own right. Having established the multiplicities that are inherent to my performance practice, and having discussed the implications of documentation for my practice, my approach is more philosophical. I note Rose's ideas (offering an ethnomusicological perspective on early hip-hop music), and compare her terms of reference with Deleuze and Guattari's ideas (which predominantly analyse literary forms). I draw on the Deleuzo-Guattarian notion of 'becoming', applying their ideas to consolidate a philosophical frame of reference with which my mashup performance practice can be understood. I conclude with a reflection on the idea of 'challenge' as articulated by McKenzie.

Cultural practices can be organised together and contextualised in a number of ways, and as with the theoretical investigations, my approach to historicising my chosen field of creative practice is deliberately varied. In order to contextualise cultural practice, one might discuss the stylistic tropes of the work (what it is, and to which cultural movement(s) it can be associated), the media specificities (the techniques/strategies with which it was created), the chronology (what came into fruition and when) or locale (how this type of practice emerged in a particular place). Where I draw from the broader field of creative practice to offer case studies, my emphasis will vary on these matters from chapter to chapter, but *I will not attempt to survey the relevant fields from any of these perspectives*. Since my practical work traverses audio/musical mashup, video mashup, networked art and performance, it is not possible to adequately historicise all of these vast (and interrelated) fields and yet retain sufficient depth and rigour in how I proceed to

theorise my own creative practice. At times I will present relevant case studies, at times I will footnote my own supplementary work where some type of review of the field has already been attempted, and at times I will point to the research of others that already covers the field well. These historical notes should augment my work, but wherever I discuss the cultural practices of others in this thesis, I do so with a predominantly theoretical focus. Any of the practical case studies are presented, first and foremost, as examples that serve to raise and discuss the underpinning theoretical issues.

Chapters 2-4 do not attempt to exhaust the critical issues that could conceivably arise from the artwork under discussion. Whilst not exhaustive, these chapters will attempt to provide a theoretical framework (issues that may be activated) and a discussion of some key cultural contexts (precedents deriving from the broader field of creative practice). These theoretical and cultural contexts thus provide a set of critical tools with which to approach my new body of creative work.

Throughout this thesis, I do not attempt to locate fixed and codified interpretations of what my work actually means. I do not omit this type of analysis in order to imply an absence of meaning - *carefully formulated meanings are certainly embedded in my work, but interpretations will vary greatly depending on context*. It is crucial to my research that the work emphasises the centrality of audience agency - interpretations are multiple, and they are entirely contingent upon my audiences and the contexts in which the work is received (such as galleries, nightclubs, radio broadcasts and so forth). Instead of offering tightly codified interpretations of what my work might mean, my approach is to highlight a cluster of theoretical issues that are prescient to the creative work, and to thus reflect on a set of issues activated by my creative work. My creative practice itself is inherently hybridised and multiple, slippery and open-ended. It must be prefaced that this is a carefully considered critical strategy. The goal of this dissertation is not to limit understandings of my work to one cultural framework or set of interpretations. The goal of my research is to open new understandings of performance that are critically inflected, but yet fluid and open-ended.

## Terms of Reference

There are a number of terms that are used throughout this thesis that need to be defined at the outset of the discussion. It is outside of the scope of my project to offer a thorough onto-historical or etymological analysis of each of the terms in question - there are entire books, essays and other media devoted to the subject for each one of the terms I overview below. All that I want to achieve here is to indicate the specific implications of each of these terms for *this* body of work, and to offer an overview of the capacities in which I will use each term.

The question of what 'performance' means underpins this entire thesis. The term 'performance' can have a number of different meanings, and depending on the context it can refer to a number of these different meanings concurrently. 'Performance' can be used in a cultural sense (for example a musical performance), an organisational sense (for example the term 'Key Performance Indicators' is used in many employment settings), and in a technological sense (for example the performance specifications of a computer). The notion of performance will be addressed discursively, throughout this entire body of work.

In my discussion of the term 'performance', I draw heavily on the seminal scholarly work of Jon McKenzie. McKenzie's work offers an in-depth analysis of the fields of cultural performance, organisational performance and technological performance.<sup>17</sup> In Chapter 2, I formulate my own technologically mediated performance practice as multi-faceted - encompassing all three understandings of the term. The imperatives underpinning these performances may be interrelated, but at times these imperatives also operate in conflict with one another. In Chapter 4, I discuss the overarching claim of McKenzie's research - that performance displaces discipline as the fundamental organising principle of our time. I argue, with McKenzie, that the notion of discipline reiterates existing formations of power and knowledge, whereas performance challenges and extends them, and performance is thus better suited as a framework that equips us to understand and make sense of the current cultural climate.

The term 'hybrid' commonly denotes something that derives from more than one source. When referring to a hybrid vehicle, for example, the term denotes the use of more than one power source. When describing a living entity, the term hybrid denotes that the entity is the offspring of more than one breed, variety, species, or genera. Throughout this thesis, the term 'hybrid' is used (in both the nominal and the adjectival form) to denote heterogeneity of *artistic mode* - I use the term where more than one distinct mode of creative practice is at play in the work.<sup>18</sup> For example, in my artwork *Breakfast Party at my Studio*, the piece encompasses audiovisual mixing (an interplay between audio and video), mashup practice (the conflation of multiple pop-cultural sources), and networked performance (audiences experiencing the work live, whilst situated in more than one

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<sup>17</sup> McKenzie, J. *Perform Or Else: From Discipline to Performance*. London, Routledge, 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Note that in *Not Acceptable*, I used the terms 'bastard' and 'bastardised' as opposed to 'hybrid' and hybridised (I defined the term in *Not Acceptable*, p. 11, and discussed it throughout my first dissertation, with special focus in Chapter 1). My reason for returning to the less loaded term in this thesis is partly because this new research is not a critique of technology *per se*. I use the more benign term here to denote heterogeneity of *artistic mode*, whereas in my earlier work, I deployed the term 'bastard' to denote the subversion (to varying degrees) of established norms in the intended uses and/or production values applied to technology. My earlier work referred to bastardisation in my use of technological *media* (audio, video, sculptural form, and so forth), whereas this thesis addresses hybridity of creative mode. My shift in terminology is also partly for the sake of clarity. Since the term 'bastard' (or more specifically 'bastard pop') has been historically used in musical mashup practice to denote the 'illegitimate offspring' of divergent musical forms (see *Not Acceptable*, p. 58, and also McGranahan, 2010, p. 11), it would be confusing to use the term here to denote a broader heterogeneity of artistic mode.

geographical location). All artworks in this thesis are hybrid to varying degrees, and the specific modalities of practice that are at play in each work will be discussed in the relevant chapter.

An important undercurrent of this thesis is the issue of documentation as it relates to performance. Like 'performance' and 'hybrid', the term 'document' can take on a range of meanings depending on the context in which it is used. When used as a noun, 'document' can refer to a number of different things. A body of text, such as this written dissertation, is a document. A photo, such as any of the images that appear throughout this dissertation, is a document. An audio recording is a document. A video recording is a document. A website is a document. A file that stores data on a computer is a document. A certificate that confirms an achievement is a document.

The term 'document' is an empty container when used as a noun - simply identifying something as a document does not unveil anything about what that document actually carries. A document can contain (and disseminate) all sorts of things that are important to our society - information, knowledge, power, posterity, cultural significance, organisational significance, technological significance, political significance, socioeconomic significance, or the legal right to something (to name just a few). In an archaic use of the term as a noun, 'document' denoted evidence or proof. A document, however, can contain something inaccurate or misleading, and the document itself could potentially be forged.

When used as a verb, 'document' denotes the activity of creating a record of something. For example, one might document an art exhibition (by taking photographs, by videotaping the work, or by writing in response to the work). The activity of documentation frames something up, and in doing so it emphasises certain elements at the expense of others. As such, documentation can be misleading. In due course, a range of positions about the term 'documentation' will be discussed as they pertain more specifically to cultural instances of performance. Like the term 'performance' itself, the issue of the documentation of performance shall be addressed discursively throughout this dissertation (especially in Chapter 3).

The interrelationship between power and knowledge is central to contemporary critical thought, and this concept is usually framed by the notion of 'subjectivity'. The noun 'subject' can be defined in numerous ways - amongst these meanings we can think of a subject as referring to a topic/theme, a figure to be represented in art, but also to a person who is under another's sovereign rule (e.g. subject to the queen). In one adjectival form the term predominantly refers to this latter sense of being under the rule of another (i.e. 'it is subject to...'). Another adjectival form, 'subjective', pertains more specifically to the rule of one's own individuality ('my opinion is subjective'). When combined with the

suffix '-ity' (the state or condition of), the noun 'subjectivity' can encompass a sense of 'topic/theme' or 'represented figure', but it also encompasses a sense of domination or rule. Subjectivity, broadly speaking, is the condition of being subject.<sup>19</sup> There is a wealth of critical discussion about the notion of subjectivity - I will not revisit the onto-historical backdrop in any depth here,<sup>20</sup> but when I use 'subject' and 'subjectivity' in this dissertation I acknowledge the critical weight of these terms.

There are four additional key terms that are specific to my chosen field of cultural practice. These terms underpin the cultural strategies that I use to create my work, and they recur throughout this thesis, so I shall define them here at the outset. Like all of the terms already discussed, each of these terms can encompass a number of different things depending on the context(s) in which they are used.

The term 'musician' denotes someone who creates music. The term usually encompasses those who play acoustic musical instruments (such as the instruments played in an orchestra), those who play electronically amplified instruments (guitar, bass and so forth), and those who play entirely electronic instruments (such as a synthesiser). I use the term here to also encompass those who use tools to manipulate pre-existing audio recordings (such as samplers, D.J. equipment, audio software, and so forth) in order to create new music. In this thesis, *anyone* who creates music is a musician, *regardless of the tools/instruments or strategies they use.*<sup>21</sup>

Sampling is a practice that I deploy throughout my work. The history of sampling in creative practice is a field of research that has been extensively mined. It is far outside of the scope of this thesis to address that vast field - I simply want to clarify the capacities in which I use the term here. I concur with Boone that 'sampling' is ambiguous as a term (as it pertains to music).<sup>22</sup> According to her definition, "[t]echnically, a sample is a short digital recording of a sound, and the term has its origins in sampling keyboards from the 1980s,

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<sup>19</sup> For a more dedicated discussion of the notion of subjectivity, see Chapter 2 of *Not Acceptable*. This paragraph about subjectivity (up until the footnote number) is edited from an earlier articulation that can be found in *Not Acceptable*, p. 22.

<sup>20</sup> I did initiate such a discussion in Chapter 2 of *Not Acceptable*, but that discussion was focused on the interplay between humour and subjectivity.

<sup>21</sup> It is likely that this distinction will invite further questions about how I define 'music', but providing an exhaustive definition of music is outside of the scope of this research. For the purposes of this thesis, 'music' is any audible form that has been *created with some level of deliberation* over sonic qualities such as tone, melody, harmony (encompassing both consonance and dissonance) and rhythmic qualities. In some instances, it might be a deliberate gesture to simply select a particular sound and draw attention to it. In John Cage's seminal work *4'33"* (1952), for example, the ambient sound of the performance environment is selected, drawn attention to, and framed as a musical composition in its own right. In most instances (and in a more commonplace understanding of the term), however, 'music' pertains to sound that has not only been selected, but also deliberately manipulated with tone, melody, harmony and rhythm in mind. My own conception of 'music' encompasses the former in principle, but in practice all musical elements presented in this thesis also involve a level of manipulation.

<sup>22</sup> Boone, 2011, p. 22.

which operated by recording and digitally manipulating sounds.”<sup>23</sup> On a digital piano, for example, every discreet note across the 88 keys on the keyboard may be sampled from an acoustic piano.<sup>24</sup> These samples are played, note for note, just as they would be on an acoustic piano. Under a precise technical definition it is often difficult to differentiate sampled sounds from synthesised sounds (sounds created from inside a machine as opposed to sounds recorded from external sources<sup>25</sup>). In the broader sphere of cultural practice, however, this technical differentiation is not so relevant. If an audience watches someone performing on a digital piano, they will think that the performer is playing a piano-derived musical instrument. The fact that, technically speaking, the performer is actually triggering samples in quick succession is not prescient or relevant. A sample, in more common understandings of the term, denotes a note or snippet of music that *sounds like it has been reconfigured from a preexisting recorded source*. In other words, in hearing a sample, an audience will not suspect that the performer creating the music actually played that note on that instrument. I use the term ‘sample’ in this non-technical sense. The term does not solely pertain to music either - it might also denote an excerpt of video that has been lifted from a preexisting recorded source (as opposed to recorded on a camera), and it might also be used (albeit far less commonly) to denote the reconfiguration of written texts, still images or objects.

‘Remix’ is a broad umbrella term that denotes the process (when used as a verb) or the outcome (when used as a noun) of creating an alternate version of a cultural product that already exists. The act of remix thus entails the manipulation of samples (audio, video, or other media). A musical remix, for example, might involve modifying the melodies, chord structures, rhythms, timbres (tonal qualities) and so forth, of a composition that already exists. In video, a remix might entail re-editing the narrative structure, adding digital effects (such as animating over the footage), or any number of other treatments that alter the original piece. In any creative media, the defining principle is that a remix is a new outcome that is derived from a pre-existing work (or works).

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Boone’s definition pertains to a *technical* usage of the term ‘sampling’. Boone’s definition is correct in that ‘sampling’ (as a technical term) gained currency in the 1980s, and that the term predominantly refers to digital processes. As an *artistic* definition of the term, her claim might be contested, because sampling practices predated 1980s digital technologies (for example, the practice of manipulating tape loops was taking place in the 1960s). In the context of her dissertation, however, Boone defines ‘sampling’ in a narrow technical sense first, before attempting the more nuanced task of defining it for cultural practice in general. In Chapter 3 of her dissertation she traces the history of musical borrowing over more than a millenium.

<sup>24</sup> On higher end digital pianos, these notes are often sampled a number of times each, to accommodate how the note will sound different if it is struck hard or tapped softly - a different sampled note will be triggered depending on how hard the player hits the key.

<sup>25</sup> This differentiation is difficult, because in some instances, synthesised sounds can precisely *emulate* sounds made by external sources, such as a flute.

When used to denote a cultural product,<sup>26</sup> 'mashup' is generally considered to be a sub-category of 'remix'. In a mashup, *two or more* pre-existing cultural artefacts are combined to create a new product. The term is used to denote combinations *within* media, such as two or more different pieces of music mixed with one another, but the term can also denote combinations *across* different media, such as one piece of music combined with a different excerpt of video. Any media can be combined with any other media to produce a new mashup product.

In music, 'mashup' refers to a specific sub-practice of remix in which the emphasis is on the recognisability of the samples used - two or more recognisable tracks are mixed together (usually in humorous and unexpected combinations), such as combining the vocal melody (acapella) from one track with the instrumental music from another. In film/cinema/video, the term refers to editing and/or compositing together different pre-existing clips to create a new clip. The term 'mashup' is also in common use in web design, referring to data from two or more pre-existing websites combined to create a new site. The fundamental, defining principle that underpins 'mashup' in any field, discipline or cultural mode, is that *two or more sources are clearly recognisable in the new outcome*.

McGranahan defines 'mashup', in a musical sense, as works that are comprised of seven key aesthetic principles: "combination, reliance on samples, songcraft, recognizability, genre clash, humor and satire, and lyrical and thematic interplay of sources."<sup>27</sup> In my working definition of the term, I generally agree with all of these principles. 'Songcraft', however, pertains directly to the field of music. In this thesis, I replace this principle with the more general notion of 'narrative structure', because 'songcraft' does not apply to video content, to the interpersonal exchange that happens in a live performance environment (between performer and audiences), or to any other textual interchange that might take place (such as written text that informs the reception of a piece - encompassing this dissertation itself, publicity blurbs and promotional material, and so forth). The term 'lyrical' is also specific to musical songs, but this can be seen as a sub-principle that is easily encompassed by the broader notion of 'thematic interplay'. Because of the hybridised nature of my own work, there are certain nuances and implications of McGranahan's general (musical) definition that will be revisited in more depth (especially in Chapter 4 of this dissertation).

In Chapter 1 of her dissertation, Boone offers a thorough typology of mashup practices in music as a point of departure. She initiates her typology by distinguishing between vertical

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<sup>26</sup> I make this differentiation because the term 'mashup' can also apply to products that are not primarily intended as cultural outcomes. A key example is the widespread use of the term to denote websites which combine data from two different pre-existing sources to create a new site. In these cases, the primary purpose is organisational (finding new ways to organise, correlate and visualise information) as opposed to cultural.

<sup>27</sup> 2010, p. 3. Throughout this thesis, I use American spelling (such as 'recognizability' if I am directly quoting instances where an author uses that spelling, but I use British/New Zealand English in my own text.

superimposition (the layering of sources) and horizontal juxtaposition (interactions that take place where different sources are heard at different points in time), presenting a table with the number of songs used on one axis, and the type of interaction (none, vertical, horizontal, and both) on the other axis. Different types of music occupy various (and sometimes multiple) points within this table, and Boone thus differentiates between prevalent musical modalities. She identifies a range of distinct (but commonly confused/conflated) musical practices, delineating between changes in jazz music, sampling practice in hip-hop, the new harmonisation of an existing song, the basic mashup, the cover mashup, remixes and new arrangements, the paint palette mashup, collage, the megamix mashup, live D.J. performance, live rap battles, the megamix medley, glitch-pop, the medley, interpolated quotation, and new compositions.<sup>28</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, it will suffice to note that the musical modalities deployed in my own work are predominantly basic mashup,<sup>29</sup> cover mashup,<sup>30</sup> megamix mashup and live D.J. performance.

As I have noted, McGranahan and Boone both offer extensive histories of mashup practices in music. McGranahan limits the scope of his discussion to mashup as a pop-cultural form, excluding avant garde sound art practices (and any other prior influences) from his discussion.<sup>31</sup> He does this because his focus is *ethnomusicological* - he is primarily interested in investigating the currency of the term as a *pop-cultural* mode of practice. Boone's work, conversely, is written with a focus on music theory. Her work thus encompasses a far broader scope of musical borrowing - even in the preliminary delineation of the field, she discusses all of the different modes of practice listed above.<sup>32</sup> In Chapter 3 of her dissertation, she offers an even more extensive history of musical borrowing, agreeing with Mark Katz that "[a]s a form of musical borrowing, the roots of digital sampling reach back more than a millennium."<sup>33</sup> Boone's extensive history starts with an analysis of chanting in the Middle Ages, and she proceeds to encompass canonised composers such as Schumann, Chopin and Richard Wagner; the experimental (but also canonised) practices of John Cage, Pierre Schaeffer and Karlheinz Stockhausen (and their influence on popular musicians such as the Beatles and Pink Floyd); the practices of bands

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<sup>28</sup> Boone, 2011, p. 17. See Chapter 1 of her thesis for the nuances about how each of these terms are defined.

<sup>29</sup> This term encompasses musical mixes that use either two sources (compositions commonly known as A+B mashups) or three.

<sup>30</sup> 'Cover mashup' is a term that Boone coined. It denotes a live band (in a traditional sense of the term) playing music in which more than one pre-existing piece of music can be heard. The most well-known example of a cover mashup is a performance at the 2006 Grammy awards where Paul McCartney, Jay-Z and Linkin Park performed a combination of their music together on one stage (Boone, 2010, p. 164). A hybrid of basic mashup and cover mashup strategies can be found in the television series *Glee*, where on occasion a singer or cast of singers might perform one well known song over pre-recorded instrumental music of another well known song.

<sup>31</sup> McGranahan argues that "[a]lthough it may serve as a way of legitimizing the genre in the eyes of some scholars and community members, the connection between mashups and "art" music is problematic. A piece by Steve Reich or John Cage bears little resemblance to most contemporary mashups. The only clear connection between any of the "art" music examples and contemporary mashups is in the use of sampling. This connection is tenuous. In contrast to the works of minimalist composers and musique concrete, the vast majority of mashups sample popular music." 2010, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> 2011, pp. 15-63.

<sup>33</sup> Katz, M. *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 139. Cited in Boone, 2011, p. 92.

such as Negativland and Evolution Control Committee (considered to be the “grandfathers of mash-ups”<sup>34</sup>), the ‘plunderphonia’ of John Oswald, and the hip-hop D.J. practices of the likes of Afrika Bambaata, Grandmaster Flash and Kool Herc, to name but a few.<sup>35</sup>

McGranahan’s and Boone’s work both offer extensive delineations of ‘mashup’ as a musical modality. Since each of the new creative works in this thesis have musical components, the delineations that McGranahan and Boone make are important, but they do not entirely correspond to my use of the term (as applied to hybridised work in which musical components are indeed present, but other elements are also at play). In short, for the purposes of this thesis, a mashup has two defining principles: *it must include two or more recognisable sources (sampled cultural artefacts), and it may encompass more than one mode of cultural practice*. McGranahan claims that a musical mashup does not *typically* add new material,<sup>36</sup> whereas Boone argues that musical mashups “consist *exclusively* of previously recorded songs”.<sup>37</sup> My own work sometimes involves the introduction of new material alongside sampled material, so for the sake of clarity (because of the musical facets of my work) I describe all of my projects as mashup-derived. My pieces encompass mashup, but they are not limited to it as a cultural mode.

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<sup>34</sup> Cruger, R. [The Mash-Up Revolution](http://archive.salon.com/ent/music/feature/2003/08/09/mashups_cruger/). *Salon*, August 9, 2003.

<[http://archive.salon.com/ent/music/feature/2003/08/09/mashups\\_cruger/](http://archive.salon.com/ent/music/feature/2003/08/09/mashups_cruger/)>. Cited in Boone, 2011, p. 113.

<sup>35</sup> Boone, 2011, pp. 92-120.

<sup>36</sup> 2010, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> 2011, p. 4, the italics here are my own.

Chapter 1

## Snapshots of Performance: Review of Supplementary Research

## Supplementary Research

The remaining three chapters of this dissertation discuss the new creative projects that form the thrust of my argument. During the course of my doctoral candidature, however, I have produced a significant body of additional work that informs my thesis, and this chapter contextualises that supplementary work. In my supplementary work, I have examined the hybridisation of performance practice with installation art, I have made sustained investigations into the field of open source film, and I have produced works in the hybrid mode of performance/lecture. While each of those investigations are important in their own right, the scope of this thesis focuses on my mashup-based work (with an emphasis on audio, video and networked art presented through performance). Bearing in mind my core focus, this thesis has been devised to sit atop a number of other documents that examine these additional facets of performance in more detail,<sup>38</sup> and I supplement my thesis by presenting this additional work in three appendices.

The documents provided in these appendices are offered in their most current form at the time of thesis submission. They operate as a series of additional snapshots of my thinking - they are deliberately left incomplete and unresolved as stand-alone documents, but the core content will give additional insight into my work and thinking. The material in Appendix 1 is my first submission for doctoral examination, and it has not been revised since I submitted it in 2010. The draft paper in Appendix 2 is currently pending revisions from an editorial panel for an upcoming publication. Appendix 3 contains a paper that has been drafted but not yet revised or submitted anywhere for review or publication. While incomplete in their own right, each of these appendices are included because they contain ideas and contextual information that informed my current argument, and they will augment my thesis and open up the scope of my work for interested readers.

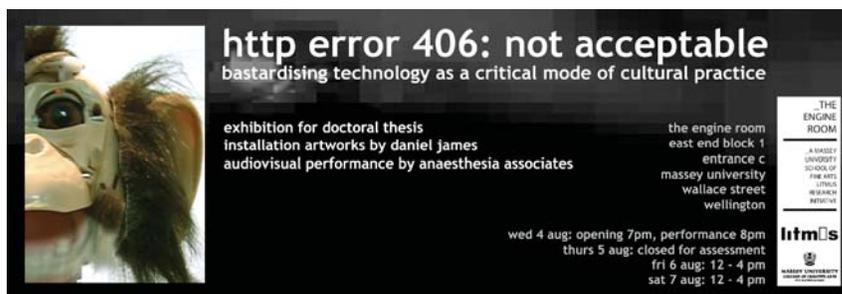


Fig. 1: Daniel James, *HTTP Error 406: Not Acceptable*, 2010. Flier.

<sup>38</sup> The documents archived in the appendices of this thesis submission obviously do not exhaust my creative and critical work during my doctoral candidature, but they are the most relevant documents to supplement and expand my argument in this thesis.

In August 2010 I submitted my first doctoral thesis, *Not Acceptable*, for examination (see fig. 1). *Not Acceptable* was also a 'practice-based' thesis - it included a body of artworks and a written dissertation. A public exhibition of the artworks for the submission took place in Wellington in August 2010. The dissertation that contextualised the artworks is included as Appendix 1. There are a number of places in my new thesis where I draw on ideas that were initially formulated in *Not Acceptable*. Wherever appropriate, I annotate my new thesis with references to my earlier articulation. If my thinking has shifted since I first penned these ideas, I articulate my current thinking in this new text (rather than making revisions to the old text).<sup>39</sup>

The piece *Breakfast Party in my Studio* (to be discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation) was presented for the *Remix Cinema* workshop, which was hosted by Oxford Internet Institute. The piece was part of an associated performance event entitled *Bonus Tracks*, which took place at the Museum of Modern Art Oxford. Since the *Remix Cinema* workshop took place, Oxford Internet Institute have begun working towards a publication of the research and projects presented at the workshop, and I was invited to submit a paper for that publication. A stand-alone paper to contextualise *Breakfast Party at my Studio* was subsequently written (drafted 2011), and the first draft submitted for editorial review is provided in Appendix 2. This paper is unpublished to date - revisions and corrections to this paper are likely to take place before it can be finalised for publication as a stand-alone document, but it is provided here as a reference point, exactly as it was submitted for editorial review. Chapter 2 of this thesis derives from research in that paper. Some of the examples and theoretical issues discussed in Chapter 2 overlap with that paper (the same artwork is discussed), but my focus differs. For the stand-alone paper, the discussion is focused according to locale - limiting the research to a lineage of key audio/video, remix, mashup and networked performance projects by New Zealand practitioners.

During most of my doctoral candidature, I have also been co-producer of the open source film project *Stray Cinema* (a role that continues on an ongoing basis). Shortly after I performed *Breakfast Party at my Studio*, I performed another networked audiovisual piece entitled *A Remixed Story of Stray Cinema* (April 2011) as part of a screening event in Barcelona for *Stray Cinema*. Like *Breakfast Party at my Studio*, *A Remixed Story of Stray Cinema* was a hybrid of audiovisual remix and networked performance, but the piece (and the *Stray Cinema* project as a whole) is peripheral to my core argument in this thesis.<sup>40</sup> Appendix 3, contains a draft of another paper (not reviewed or submitted for publication to

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<sup>39</sup> I have made every effort to make this new document understandable without needing to read my earlier dissertation at all. Where a concept, theoretical framework or art-historical precedent is drawn from *Not Acceptable*, I either note or footnote a quick definition or description again in this document, and I annotate where to find my initial formulation/discussion in *Not Acceptable*.

<sup>40</sup> *A Remixed Story of Stray Cinema* had multiple audiences (I webcast my performance from New Zealand for an audience at a venue in Barcelona and an online audience). In this piece, the audience experience was framed by multiple pre-existing contexts (they were participants in a creative project and attendees for a public programme put on at a university).

date) that discusses *A Remixed Story of Stray Cinema*, and the broader contexts in which it operates. In this paper, *A Remixed Story of Stray Cinema* is located by discussing the history of the open source film movement, and also my own background in hybrid performance/lectures. The paper expands on the nuances and implications of McKenzie's framework of performance in ways that extend beyond the scope of my core argument here (especially with regard to the complexities and imperatives of *organisational* performance as they intersect with cultural practice).

### **Key Developments beyond *Not Acceptable***

This thesis builds upon creative strategies and concepts that have been developed throughout my doctoral candidature. There are a number of key developments that have taken place in my work since *Not Acceptable*, and it is important to highlight how my current thesis expands on my earlier work.

A key development of this thesis is a narrowing of scope in the modalities of practice investigated. In *Not Acceptable*, I deployed audio/video mashup strategies, and I investigated performance, but I also explored the hybridisation of installation art with performance. In this thesis, the most significant narrowing of scope is that the mode of installation art has been abandoned entirely. All of my new works are hybrids of mashup and performance.

In Chapters 3 and 4 of *Not Acceptable*, I discussed my older mashup projects Anaesthesia Associates and Copycat Crime. Chapter 3 contextualised the live performance project Anaesthesia Associates. Chapter 4 contextualised an installation artwork derived from the dissolution of a performance persona, Copycat Crime, that I had established.

The mode of live audiovisual mashup mixing was a key element in Anaesthesia Associates' performances. My artwork *Breakfast Party at my Studio* (discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation) develops on the strategy of live audiovisual mashup mixing. Anaesthesia Associates was a duo (a collaborative project with Paul Bradley), whereas *Breakfast Party at my Studio* was a solo effort. This is important to note because I achieved a type of performance that, in my prior work, had required two people. This shift highlights an escalation of technical difficulty in the work, but more importantly, it expands on the multiplicities inherent to my role(s) as performer. Anaesthesia Associates had also made forays into networked performance, but this was not our primary focus. *Breakfast Party at my Studio* further scrutinises the notion of 'performance' by focusing on the hybridisation of audiovisual mashup with networked art.

Copycat Crime was (initially) an audio-only mashup performance project. Similarly, in Chapter 4 of this dissertation I discuss a new mashup-derived audio/musical project entitled *Übermahlung und Frottage*. As with *Breakfast Party at my Studio*, it is immediately apparent that *Übermahlung und Frottage* foregrounds developments in technical sophistication (beyond my earlier work), because in my performances I undertake a number of difficult tasks simultaneously (triggering and layering samples, scratching on a turntable, and playing bass guitar), and I sustain this cluster of activities for a significant duration.<sup>41</sup> This heightening of technical difficulty is not the point *per se*, but since this level of challenge is immediately apparent, it becomes a *vehicle* by which audiences might understand the multiplicities at play. In fact, in all of my works in this thesis, I undertake highly challenging performative processes in order that audiences might engage with the complex hybridities and multiplicities that underpin performance itself.

My theoretical approach here also differs from my previous thesis submission. In *Not Acceptable*, each chapter gave an overview of varying positions within a given subject of relevance, and I attempted to provide a socio-historical context for the key theoretical positions as well as offering new critical positions of my own. In this submission, I do not offer as much depth of socio-historical contextualisation (I footnote where interested readers might find such a discussion).

Rather than attempting a broader contextualisation of the practices under discussion, my work here is much more nuanced. My new theoretical focus is to investigate the implications of the multiple (and at times competing) imperatives that underpin my performance work, and in analysing the notion of change or 'becoming' with regard to my work. In *Not Acceptable*, I introduced McKenzie's hybridised notion of performance,<sup>42</sup> and this framework now informs my entire new body of work. I also introduced Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the machinic,<sup>43</sup> and I explore Deleuzo-Guattarian ideas further in Chapter 4 in this thesis.

In terms of the broader history of cultural practice, I also discussed a number of key projects and works that are of relevance to this thesis. I introduced the work of Avatar Body *Collision*, and I discuss their work further in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.<sup>44</sup> I also overviewed some key works and artists that were personally influential to me in my musical

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<sup>41</sup> Note that I had achieved this level of technical complexity for excerpts of later Anaesthesia Associates performances, but these performative excerpts were short in duration, and I layered samples to a lesser degree than I do now. In *Übermahlung und Frottage* I develop this mode by turning it into a sustained effort in its own right, pursuing a greater degree of layering, and for longer durations.

<sup>42</sup> In *Not Acceptable*, I explored the broader notion of performativity and introduced McKenzie's framework on pp. 38-39.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43. In chapter 2 of this thesis I discuss our collaborative endeavours in curating networked performance, in order to contextualise *Breakfast Party at my Studio*.

sampling practice.<sup>45</sup> As with my current work, my first thesis submission did not attempt to offer an exhaustive survey, but those case studies are still notable with regard to my current work too. More specifically, I also offered a discussion of mashup practice,<sup>46</sup> and I have already developed further on my delineation of this field in 'Terms of Reference' (offering a backdrop of cultural practice that underpins my new body of work).

It is the norm in academia to use tightly structured formal language and one voice or viewpoint. My creative work itself, however, is characterised by multiplicity, complexity and paradox, and in *Not Acceptable*, I attempted to reflect this creative tone in my writing. I predominantly used formal academic language in my earlier dissertation, but there were additional passages written in alternate voices. There were passages variously written in the style of a psychiatric analysis, a university assessment form, a newspaper article, and a press release, and at points I also made interjections in informal vernacular language (which appeared in bold, italicised type). My approach in this thesis differs. The vocabulary of this dissertation is consistent with academic norms (using one formal voice). I speak directly, but the decision to do so is underpinned by the knowledge that such an articulation is *performative in its own right*.<sup>47</sup> In this thesis I treat academic language as an additional mode of performance (I remain in character, playing the role of 'scholar' for the duration of this thesis). This academic voice offers another layer of modal hybridity to the multi-context nature of my practice.

While there are a number of clear developments directly expanding on my earlier work in *Not Acceptable*, there are a number of theoretical constructs, historical antecedents, and artistic strategies that I formulated in my older work, but that I do not develop further in this thesis.

Three of the creative outcomes presented in *Not Acceptable* were attempts to hybridise the mode of installation art with that of performance. As I have already noted, I do not explore installation art at all in my new research. Since I focus on the *performative* potentials inherent in my work - that is, the ways in which my artworks may activate the *contexts* in which they operate - I do not discuss any architectural or sculptural concerns in this thesis. I also explored robotics-derived works in *Not Acceptable*, but I do not develop on the creative potential of robotics any further in my new artworks.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 53-55.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 58-59.

<sup>47</sup> I focus on this notion in Chapter 3. In *A Remixed Story of Stray Cinema* (Appendix 3) I also expand on this notion, in my discussion of 'performative lectures' as a hybrid cultural mode. I review some of my own projects in which these issues were at the fore.

<sup>48</sup> I have reached the conclusion that in actuality I thought of my robots as *performers* (that is, I was more interested in their anthropomorphic potential than their potential as sculptural elements installed into architectural spaces). On further reflection it would have probably been more salient to frame and discuss these earlier works as performance as opposed to installation art, but I will not expand on my thoughts on this matter in this thesis.

Theoretically speaking, *Not Acceptable* was underpinned by a very broad notion - 'bastardising' technology in order to critically reflect on it. For *Not Acceptable*, I attempted to create a body of work devoted to technologically mediated complexity and paradox. My interest during that period of my research was to create cultural forms that facilitate complexities that cannot be simplified. In this thesis, I retain the overarching multiplicities and complexities that are inherent to my earlier work, but the written component of the thesis focuses on how my mashup-derived practice might reconfigure how we understand performance.

In my theoretical work, there are certain concepts analysed in *Not Acceptable* that I do not develop any further. Key philosophical concepts that underpin the interrelationship between art and technology were reviewed in an analysis of the word *techne*.<sup>49</sup> I reviewed Arthur Kroker's notion of 'reverse engineering' as a creative strategy.<sup>50</sup> The broader field of poststructuralist thought on subjectivity was overviewed (discussing the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault).<sup>51</sup> Marshall McLuhan's work in media theory was also reviewed.<sup>52</sup> The etymology of the term 'glitch' was discussed, and I posited my own working definition of the term.<sup>53</sup> Jean Baudrillard's notion of the simulacrum was discussed in detail (positing my own understanding and definition of the term).<sup>54</sup> The Foucauldian notion of the 'heterotopia' was discussed - noting (with McKenzie) the normative dimension that underpins liminal acts and spaces.<sup>55</sup> My theoretical position regarding each of these concepts has not shifted since my earlier work. In order to adequately expand any of those concepts further, however, a dedicated investigation would be necessary. While all of those concepts are still relevant to my current work, it is outside of the scope of this thesis to develop those ideas any further here.

In *Not Acceptable*, I did not attempt a rigorous survey of any specific fields of practice.<sup>56</sup> Instead, creative activity was discussed with regard to the underpinning strategies at play, selecting clusters of case studies that could either be aligned in interesting ways or contrasted with my own approach. Artworks that intersected art and technology were analysed (reviewing works by the likes of Marcel Duchamp, Jean Tinguely, Nam June Paik, Stelarc, Eduardo Kac and Tony Oursler).<sup>57</sup> The temporality of the conceptual art movement

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-10.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 23-24.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 24-25.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 37-38. The reason I do not continue to use my working definition of this term is that all works in my thesis have musical elements. The term 'glitch' in music is commonly understood as denoting a musical sub-genre that is distinct from 'mashup'. While I maintain my earlier working definition, I believe that it would be confusing to most readers to continue using that term as a theoretical construct in this body of work.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 50-51.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 51-53.

<sup>56</sup> There were, and indeed still are, too many artistic modes at play in my work for this approach to be feasible (whilst still retaining an appropriate level of rigour with regard to the key theoretical issues activated).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 12-17.

was also discussed (noting the work of Sol Lewitt, Dennis Oppenheim and Ian Burn).<sup>58</sup> The realm of interhuman connection in art practice was discussed via Nicholas Bourriaud's concept of relational aesthetics (noting the work of Rikrit Tiravanija), and contrasting Bourriaud's ideas with alternate approaches that might be construed as either sociopolitically antagonistic (noting the work of Santiago Sierra) or subtle and humourous (noting Maurizio Cattelan's work).<sup>59</sup> I outlined the recurring predicament in which art practices can be critical of power relations whilst operating inside those very same hegemonic structures, describing the predicament as 'the paradox of complicity'.<sup>60</sup> The concept of the glitch in art practice was discussed (via video/film works by David Hall and Len Lye, and the glitch music composers Kim Cascone and Oval).<sup>61</sup> The field of performance art was also overviewed (with emphasis on Robert Rauschenberg and Chris Burden, and revisiting Stelarc's work).<sup>62</sup> Appropriation practices in visual art were discussed (analysing Duchamp, Jeff Koons, Sherrie Levine, Douglas Gordon and Cattelan, and comparing and contrasting their varied approaches to the sampling practices in music that I had already discussed).<sup>63</sup> Finally, the use of pathos as a creative strategy was noted in the work of Ronnie Van Hout.<sup>64</sup> While it would be possible to revisit any of these issues (and any of these artists' work) with regard to my new work, all such discussions remain outside of the scope of my new thesis.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-28.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 28-32.

<sup>60</sup> This paradox underpinned the discussion throughout Chapter 2 of *Not Acceptable*, and it was explicitly noted on p. 22 and p. 32.

<sup>61</sup> *Not Acceptable*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 40-42.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 55-58.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

Chapter 2

*Breakfast Party at my Studio: The Multiplicity of Performance*



Video 1: Dan Untitled, *Breakfast Party at my Studio*, 2011.

Video recording.

Video file: `multimedia/1-vid1-breakfast_party_at_my_studio.mov`

*Breakfast Party at my Studio: The Multiplicity of Performance*



Fig. 2: Dan Untitled, *Breakfast Party at my Studio*, 2011. Performance photograph: artist's studio, Wellington.<sup>65</sup>

Just before 9 A.M. on the morning of 25 Mar 2011, a group of people gathered in my studio at Massey University in Wellington, New Zealand. At the same time, but on the other side of the world (just before 9 P.M. on 24 March in that timezone), another group of people gathered in the basement of the museum of Modern Art Oxford to attend a performance event entitled *Remix Cinema*. These two groups of people were the real-time audiences for my multimedia performance piece *Breakfast Party at my Studio* (fig. 2).

At the outset of this discussion it is important to note that *Breakfast Party at my Studio* was a hybrid artwork - two key modes of digital-media performance practice were at play simultaneously. It was a live audiovisual performance (more specifically it was a live audiovisual mashup piece), and it was also a networked performance (with audiences experiencing the artwork from two different locations, on opposite sides of the globe). It is important to examine each of these modes of cultural practice in turn, in order to provide the necessary context to critically discuss my hybridised artwork.

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<sup>65</sup> Photograph by Dominika Zielinska (<<http://www.dominikazielinska.com>>), used by permission.

## Mashup, remix, and live audiovisual performance practices

The marriage of moving image with live musical performance has a long and well-established history that dates back to the early days of cinema in the late 1800s. During this pioneering period in cinema history, film projections were almost always accompanied by live musicians performing soundtracks. Likewise, the appropriation and recontextualisation of pre-existing cultural artefacts has a long and well-established history, with roots that can be traced to the early 1900s with the collage and assemblage works of the dadaists, surrealists and futurists<sup>66</sup> - techniques that also soon found parallels in the manipulation of pre-recorded audio to create art.<sup>67</sup> With the advent of the enabling technology, sampling techniques began gaining momentum and pop-cultural currency in the hip-hop music of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Today, audiovisual performance (combining music with moving image in live performance) and mashup practices<sup>68</sup> are diverse and heavily interrelated fields.

The focus of this chapter is to investigate how my hybrid artwork interrogates and problematises the ways in which we understand the term 'performance'. The cultural theorist Jon McKenzie - a thinker with a history of both hacktivism<sup>69</sup> and performance scholarship - is well equipped to introduce the notion of performance as it intersects with technology in cultural practice. McKenzie discusses an unusual relationship between the term 'performance' as it is used in cultural, organisational, and technological contexts. The words 'perform' and 'performance' can variously be used to refer to the actions of an artist creating a live piece for an audience, to the ability of a business or organisation to achieve it's desired goals, or to the ability of a technological machine to behave in the way that it was designed to.<sup>70</sup> In any of these three senses of the word, 'performance' assesses the

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<sup>66</sup> Collage and assemblage gained momentum as modes of creative practice for the Dadaists, Surrealists and Futurists in the 1910s and 1920s.

<sup>67</sup> The composer John Cage's *Imaginary Landscape No. 1* (1935), for example, is a seminal musical work in which two phonographs contribute audio to the composition.

<sup>68</sup> I discussed 'mashup' as a musical mode in *Not Acceptable*, pp. 58-59. For a more detailed discussion of the history of 'mashup' as a musical genre, see also McGranahan, 2010, pp. 6-15, and Boone, 2011, pp. 15-63. Note that in *Not Acceptable*, I discussed some examples from the broader field of sound art, whilst in *Mashnography*, McGranahan delineates between 'mashup' in a contemporary understanding of the term and the broader historical influences on the field. He claims that "[a]lthough it may serve as a way of legitimizing the genre in the eyes of some scholars and community members, the connection between mashups and "art" music is problematic. A piece by Steve Reich or John Cage bears little resemblance to most contemporary mashups" McGranahan, 2010, p. 9. McGranahan goes on to note that "[e]arly "art" music sampling paved the way for some sampled music that followed, but more specificity is called for." Ibid. As I defined it in *Terms of Reference*, my own notion of 'mashup' is slightly broader than McGranahan's, but I join him in excluding the broader field of 'art' music from my definition. Whilst influential on some practitioners, for the sake of clarity, 'art' music practitioners such as Cage, John Oswald, Pierre Schaeffer, Reich, Glass and so forth sit outside of the scope of this thesis, as these artists do not create mashups in a contemporary understanding of the term. Boone, conversely, offers a far more extensive history of the varied practices of musical borrowing that became precursors to the current pop-cultural practice: 2011, pp. 92-120.

<sup>69</sup> A hactivist, or politically motivated hacker, is someone who gains unauthorised entry into computer systems that are owned by another person or organisation for political reasons.

<sup>70</sup> McKenzie, 2001.

extent that something or someone behaves in the way it is supposed to.<sup>71</sup>

Even aside from the networked component, *Breakfast Party at my Studio* is a hybrid artwork encompassing mashup production (preparing the samples) and performance (live mixing and audience interaction), and deploying both audio and video. In order to establish the scope of what 'performance' might entail for my own hybridised work, it will be useful to initiate the discussion with a case study that did not (at least initially) have a live component. One renowned audiovisual mashup is a short video produced by the collective Misshapen Features,<sup>72</sup> a clip entitled *Starlords* (2005).<sup>73</sup> *Starlords* samples footage from two immediately recognisable fantasy series: George Lucas' *Star Wars* saga and Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. In *Starlords*, shots from each fantasy series are edited together in quick succession. The edits juxtapose the films and thus invite critical comparisons - emphasising similarities in the composition and framing in general, the narrative content of the shots, and the gesture and facial expressions of characters.<sup>74</sup> As I will discuss shortly, the piece is especially notable for its criticality about the interplay between audio and video.

The interrelated modes of audiovisual performance and mashup remix raise a cluster of interesting critical issues surrounding McKenzie's expanded conception of the term 'performance'. Broadly speaking, these interrelated cultural fields emphasise the complex hybridity of 'performance' as a field of inquiry. As McKenzie highlights, the term can denote a cultural construct, an organisational construct, and a technical construct. In the field of audiovisual/mashup performance practice these three conceptions of the term play out all at the same time. We can consider the act of an artist performing a mix (cultural performance), the logistics of getting creative work out to a public audience (organisational performance), and the performance of the technologies that enable artists to create their work (technological performance).

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<sup>71</sup> Performance, in McKenzie's expanded sense of the term, is about success and failure, dominance and subjugation. As such, McKenzie describes performance as a stratum of the French thinker Michel Foucault's notion of power-knowledge, and he makes the bold claim that, in an expanded sense, 'performance' will displace the Foucauldian notion of 'discipline'. Ibid, p. 18. I will discuss the broader implications of McKenzie's position in Chapter 4.

<sup>72</sup> While members of the group are known to me personally, Misshapen Features retain anonymity in their online presence.

<sup>73</sup> The video was first posted on their own site (<[www.misshapenfeatures.com](http://www.misshapenfeatures.com)>, a site which is now defunct), and also on YouTube. The first uploaded copy was taken offline due to a copyright complaint for their use of the audio track *It's Just Begun*, but it was more recently re-uploaded at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiD6zdgKFlc>> and <<http://vimeo.com/13004005>>. Note that *Starlords* was initially posted as an online video and not performed as a live mix. At a later point, however, the audiovisual band The Supervisors did mix the material live in some of their performances. In all likelihood other performers will have done so too. Liveness, while important to my own practice, is not a crucial element to all mashup practices. I chose a mashup that was not initially performed live as a preliminary case study for the sake of clarity - it simplifies the issues at play if there are no live, real-time elements to the mashup.

<sup>74</sup> The video is entertaining, but unlike a lot of mashup production, the critical reflection of this piece is also readily apparent. For example, it is interesting to note the selection of musical track in the second section of *Starlords*. The creators identify that *It's Just Begun* is "one of the most sampled musical tracks of all time". (Initially noted on their own (now defunct) website, now also noted in the online description for their YouTube upload: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiD6zdgKFlc>>). In *Starlords*, this musical track is not remixed - it is presented in its full length as accompaniment to all of the other (heavily remixed) visual material.

When an artist creates a mashup, they take pre-existing cultural forms, and they combine these forms to create something new, and the meanings vary according to shifts in context. For example, when Han Solo turns his head to look at something during a shot in one of the original *Star Wars* films, it conveys very specific narrative information inside that film. When this same clip is sampled and recontextualised in *Starlords* (seen in quick succession alongside numerous other characters performing the same gesture), the meaning of the clip changes significantly. In the first context, we might consider the performance of the actor (a young Harrison Ford). In the latter context, mashup artists 'perform' as manipulators of meaning.<sup>75</sup> They perform a gesture of criticality towards the media that they are appropriating,<sup>76</sup> because they call into question certain presumptions about the media as it appeared *in situ* (for example, by juxtaposing and comparing shots with similar formal qualities). The audience, in turn, becomes critical of how meaning is mediated (in the case of *Starlords*, the viewer becomes implicitly aware of the construction of fantasy fiction narratives).

'Performance' is a complex and mutable construct when the term is deployed in a cultural context. In a discussion of cultural performance, it is important to establish what type (or types) of culture might be at play. The dominant focus of *Starlords* is *film* as a cultural mode (two well-known film series are edited together).<sup>77</sup> Mashups are also a mode of creative practice in the field of *music* - a particular audiovisual sample may be seen as a musical note and/or a rhythm (to be played musically in conjunction with other notes and/or rhythms). When mashup mixes are created in real-time for an audience, the outcome is *theatrical* in nature. Because of the presence of the performer's body, the outcome may also thus be considered in relation to the cultural traditions of *performance art* and/or *live art*. In audiovisual performance, all of these modes of cultural practice are hybridised. As a result, such hybridised works can be received on a number of levels simultaneously - the audience might respond to any combination of these different modes

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<sup>75</sup> This illustrates the concept of 'narrative structure' (as opposed to McGranahan's concept of 'songcraft') at play in a mashup.

<sup>76</sup> As well as being either implicitly or explicitly critical, mashup artists also commonly create their work with a degree of homage to the sources sampled. While it is an interesting facet of mashup practices in its own right, this interplay between criticality and homage is outside of the scope of this discussion.

<sup>77</sup> It is also interesting to note the selection of musical track in the second section of *Starlords*. The creators identify that the soundtrack to the second half of the video - *It's Just Begun* by Jimmy Castor Bunch - is "one of the most sampled musical tracks of all time" (first noted on their official website, which is now offline, but also noted in the description of the *Starlords* video on <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiD6zdgKFIc>>). In *Starlords*, this musical track is not remixed - it is presented in its full length as accompaniment to all of the other (heavily remixed) visual material. This comment indicates that film is not the sole subject of their critical reflection. Further, it is also plausible to argue (taking my lead from Marshall McLuhan, see *Not Acceptable*, p. 24-26) that the dominant focus of *Starlords* is not film *per se* (that is, a conflation of two different film sagas), or on the interplay between film and music, but on the internet's capability (as a newer medium) to reflect on film and recorded music (which are both older mediums). While this may offer an interesting theoretical angle to discuss, I cannot adequately address the issues here. In my earlier work I asserted that "the medium is only part of the message; emergent media evolve inseparably from the varying manifestations of societal power" (*Not Acceptable*, p. 27). For the purposes of this discussion, it will suffice to note that the potential of one medium (internet) to critically reflect on others (film, music) would not be a readily apparent (and retrievable) factor for most viewers of the video. I thus maintain that the interplay between film sagas and the unadulterated use of a (commonly sampled) piece of music are the most prescient and dominant aspects of *Starlords*.

at any one time, so even within 'cultural' performance, such hybridised artforms can never be adequately understood according to one single frame of reference.

'Performance' can also be understood as an organisational construct. When artists put their work in public, there are administrative goals inherent to such endeavours. An organisational performance goal (such as not getting caught illegally sampling copyrighted material) may not *necessarily* align with a cultural performance goal (such as the goal of creating engaging art experiences and having one's work reach an audience). I raise this point in order to highlight the fact that in McKenzie's framework, high performance in one sense (such as an elite or rarefied notion of 'performance' in art) does not necessarily equate to high performance in another (such as the ability to achieve one's organisational goals). Performance, as a hybridised notion, is a complex matter, underpinned by imperatives (performance goals) that may operate in conflict with one another.<sup>78</sup>

As a technological construct, 'performance' assesses the degree to which an item or cluster of technology<sup>79</sup> can do something that it is supposed to be able to do. I might, for example, discuss the 'performance' of a video editing suite in technical terms (such as how quickly it processes data, at what resolution, using what compression, and so forth). While it might be fairly simple to establish and objectively measure the technical performance of such a suite, 'performance' is far more difficult to evaluate as a hybrid notion. Just because a loop performs well in a technical sense (it plays back smoothly) does not automatically mean that it performs well culturally.<sup>80</sup> Conversely, even if a loop does not perform well technically (it glitches and stutters), this slippage could create a desired and deliberate aesthetic outcome (an instance of high cultural performance) as is the case with glitch electronic music.<sup>81</sup>

*Breakfast Party at my Studio* expands on aspects of my creative work that I have been pursuing for a number of years. I commenced my work in audiovisual performance with two projects concurrently - the bands The Axis of Weevils and Anaesthesia Associates. The Axis of Weevils (Fig. 4) was a relatively short-lived project<sup>82</sup> comprised of seven members - five

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<sup>78</sup> I expand on my ideas about the intersection between cultural and organisational performance in the draft paper provided in Appendix 3, where I discuss Stray Cinema, the hybridised mode of 'performative lecture', and McKenzie's concept of the lecture machine.

<sup>79</sup> A video editing suite, for example, might be comprised of a computer running a particular operating system and software, and connected to specific external hardware. Each of these constituent elements can be considered to be an item of technology in their own right, or the entire suite can be considered as a cluster of technology.

<sup>80</sup> A loop of media may, of course, perform well in both senses of the word, but that is beside the point here. The key issue is that the goals in each of the two senses do not necessarily align with one another.

<sup>81</sup> I discussed the field of glitch music in *Not Acceptable*, p 40.

<sup>82</sup> While the project was in existence between 2005-2008, I joined in late 2006.

musicians and two V.J.s.<sup>83</sup> I did not touch the digital technology in this band, I played the bass guitar. In the band as a whole, however, there were digitally produced elements (rhythms, melodic elements and textures) triggered live, digital synthesisers, and digital video projections (live mixes of animations and other video loops, projected onto two adjacent screens).



Fig. 3: The Axis of Weevils, 2008. Performance photograph: Taranaki Festival of Lights, Taranaki.<sup>84</sup>

The performances of *The Axis of Weevils* (fig. 3) emphasised the interplay between audio and video. Our work was both musical and filmic in nature, but there are two key distinctions between this project and my current creative research. Firstly, this project never involved networked audiences - we always performed in person in front of an audience. Secondly, the aesthetic of this band was not dominantly sample based. Electronic elements were clearly evident in the music, but none of the samples could be easily identifiable as lifted from other sources. Our music was infused with dub and world music influences as well as down-tempo electronic music. Visually, the projections were mostly comprised of hand-drawn animations mixed with colourful abstract video textures. Since there were no recognisable samples, the project cannot be considered as a mashup act.

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<sup>83</sup> The musical members of the Axis of Weevils were Tui Mamaki and Monsieur Escargot (who performed vocals and keyboards respectively, and also from the band the Mamaku Project: <<http://www.mamakuproject.com>>); Jeremy Cloake (who played live percussion, and who also performs with Resonance: <<http://www.resonance.co.nz>>); Mic Watts (who played electronic beats and live effects, and who also produced electronic music and visual art under a number of other pseudonyms: <<http://www.nommoantenna.net>>); and myself (playing fretless bass guitar). The visual members were Paul Bradley (who also V.J.s with a number of other acts, is a painter, animator and commercial illustrator: <<http://www.lupavision.net>>), and Kim Newell (who has been V.J.ing since the late 1990s). The dancer/choreographer and electronic musician Joshua Rutter was also a past member (but we only played one gig together in that group before he left due to other commitments). *The Axis of Weevils* was a side project for all members - each of us were working on a number of other projects at that point too.

<sup>84</sup> Photograph by Jacqui Freeman, used by permission.

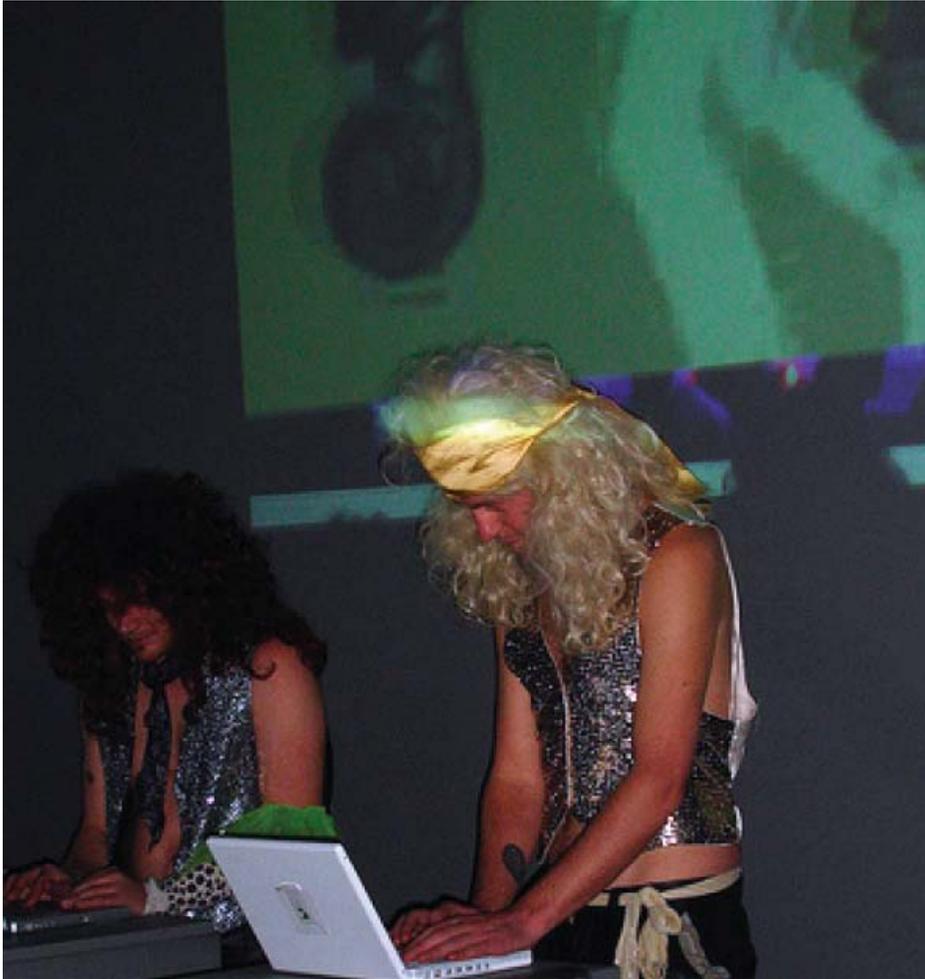


Fig. 4: Anaesthesia Associates, *The Best Air Guitar Album in the World, Ever, Vol. II*, 2007. Performance photograph: N.Z. Film Archive, Wellington.<sup>85</sup>

Concurrently to the Axis of Weevils, but performing on a more regular basis, I collaborated with Paul Bradley<sup>86</sup> in an audiovisual duo called Anaesthesia Associates.<sup>87</sup> At the outset, Anaesthesia Associates was a solo glitch/ambient music act that I had been performing since 2004. While I had used sampling all along, my music production gradually became more up-tempo and recognisably sample-based. Bradley joined me in early 2006, and Anaesthesia Associates became an integrated audiovisual act. The samples in our audiovisual production became more easily recognisable, and in 2007 we did our first full-blown mashup performance - an artwork entitled *The Best Air Guitar Album in the World, Ever, Vol. II* (fig. 4). In this piece we performed a live remix of audio samples lifted from various iconic glam rock anthems, mixing this audio with video clips of air guitarists strutting their stuff. *The Best Air Guitar Album...* was also our first foray into networked performance. The piece was presented at the New Zealand Film Archive gallery (Wellington), simultaneously for an audience onsite, and also a live online audience.

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<sup>85</sup> Photograph by Helen Varley Jamieson, used by permission.

<sup>86</sup> Bradley was also a member of the Axis of Weevils, see above.

<sup>87</sup> I discussed this project in depth in Chapter 3 of *Not Acceptable*.

Thematically, the piece initiated a broad field of interest that has evolved in my work ever since - ostentatious, overtly theatrical performance work that directly addresses performance and performativity as subject matter. In *The Best Air Guitar Album...*, we dressed up as glam rock stars, wearing tight leather pants with big-hair wigs, and we developed an orchestrated language of posturing to match. At one point during the performance, I triggered samples from my laptop whilst holding it behind my head. My avatar<sup>88</sup> repeatedly exclaimed "MAKE SOME FUCKIN' NOISE!" during our piece. Embedded in the playfully ostentatious hype, *The Best Air Guitar Album...* presented audiences with a thematic interplay between virtual and real (the interrelationship between online and onsite audiences; the visual motif of an air guitarist pretending to play as opposed to an actual musician).

Speaking more broadly, Anaesthesia Associates' performances were heavily self-referential, presenting images of performance itself.<sup>89</sup> The aspiration to perform - the desire for attention and adoration - was encapsulated/exaggerated in samples of air guitarists, which were juxtaposed with 'real' musicians, samples of mainstream hit music, samples of dancers, dancing and dance lessons, and samples of film and television actors playing their roles.

The aesthetic of the audiovisual mix in *Breakfast Party at my Studio* was in some ways similar to the performances of Anaesthesia Associates, but it is important to make some key distinctions, in order to emphasise the developments that have taken place. Firstly, while Anaesthesia Associates was a collaborative project, my later piece was a *solo* endeavour. This distinction is important to note, because as a solo performer I handled a task that was previously a two-person job - the piece was very technically difficult to perform. I will discuss the notion of 'challenge' in performance in Chapter 4, but it is important to note that the same concepts discussed in that chapter also underpin this piece. Another important distinction was that the *theatrics* in Anaesthesia Associates' performances were made explicit through costume changes, whereas I performed in everyday clothing for *Breakfast Party at my Studio*.<sup>90</sup> Finally, Anaesthesia Associates was less focused on the potentialities of networked performance. Since our first networked piece (*The Best Air Guitar Album...*), we predominantly played at bars, clubs, galleries and festivals for *onsite*

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<sup>88</sup> An avatar is a graphical representation in cyberspace. My avatar for this performance was a figure with my face crudely photoshopped onto an image of the Guns 'n' Roses lead vocalist Axl Rose's body.

<sup>89</sup> Since *The Best Air Guitar Album...*, Anaesthesia Associates became my first mashup project, and the thematic interest in 'performance about performance' recurred throughout our collaborative work right up until we disbanded the project in 2011. There have been two other mashup projects founded after Anaesthesia Associates. I developed a D.J. pseudonym Copycat Crime, which remained relatively low-key and mostly existed as a persona that I used for performances at private parties - I only ever did a handful of public gigs under that name. I discussed Copycat Crime in Chapter 4 of *Not Acceptable*. After Anaesthesia Associates disbanded late in 2010, I started a new solo mashup project called Übermahlung und Frottage, in which I manipulate samples, scratch on a turntable and play the bass guitar all at the same time. I will discuss this project in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

<sup>90</sup> Costumes make it immediately apparent to an audience that a performer is occupying a character and playing a theatrical role. Since I performed in plain clothes, the fact that I occupied the theatrical role of host to the event was subdued, my audiovisual performance (the act of mixing audio and video sources together) was much more readily apparent.

*local audiences*. As a duo we did present one other series of networked performances<sup>91</sup> (which I will discuss in the next section), but it was not our dominant mode of operation.

## Networked Performance

Sending artifacts of visual art, music, sound art, poetry and so forth through a network is well established as a creative strategy. In the 1960's, artists used the international postal system as their network of choice, firmly establishing mail art as a cultural movement.<sup>92</sup> Artists have also variously used shortwave radio, telephones, facsimile machines and satellite technologies as modes of creative practice.<sup>93</sup>

The focus of this thesis is to integrate my practical work with a number of key theoretical contexts - it is outside of the scope of this chapter to discuss historical contexts in any depth.<sup>94</sup> In my discussion of networked performance, I want to establish what the principal implications are for performance, focusing on McKenzie's *theoretical* model. In order to raise the key critical issues that are pertinent to *Breakfast Party at my Studio*, however, I need to make some preliminary distinctions, and also to offer some contextual information about my own prior practice in the field of networked art.

In my own work in the field, I operate in multiple capacities. I have presented artworks as performer,<sup>95</sup> I have presented projects as curator/co-curator,<sup>96</sup> and I have been involved in a number of networked performance/lectures.<sup>97</sup> I will overview some of these various projects so that I can discuss the nuances and implications of McKenzie's theoretical model.

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<sup>91</sup> *I Miss You, Great to See You Again* (2007) and *I Miss You, Great to See You Again 2.0* (2008).

<sup>92</sup> Artists such as Ray Johnson, On Kawara, Ben Vautier were at the forefront of this movement.

<sup>93</sup> Jamieson, H.V. *Real Time, Virtual Space, Live Theatre*. In Brennan, S. and Ballard, S. (Eds.), *The Aotearoa Digital Arts Reader*. Auckland, The Aotearoa Digital Arts Trust; Clouds, 2008, p. 48.

<sup>94</sup> Jamieson's work, for example gives a good overview of the history of such practices in New Zealand (Ibid.). She provides a timeline of cyberperformance practices internationally on her website: <<http://www.creative-catalyst.com/cyberperformance/timeline.html>>.

<sup>95</sup> Prior to *Breakfast Party at my Studio*, my work with the duo Anaesthesia Associates has resulted in the mashup pieces *The Best Air Guitar Album in the World, Ever, Vol. II* (2007), *I Miss You, Great to See You Again* (2007), *I Miss You, Great to See You Again 2.0* (2008).

<sup>96</sup> I curated the events *Indeterminacy and Interface* (2005) *Intimacy and In.yer.face* (2006), *Séance for Nam June Paik* (2007), and I co-curated the *080808 UpStage Festival* and the *090909 UpStage Festival*. All of these projects had live online components.

<sup>97</sup> For example, I was part of the panel discussion *Shareware: The Online Subject* (2008) in which avatars for online participants were projected behind me as I spoke. The piece was presented to an audience at the Adam Art Gallery in Wellington. The online participants (Jamieson and Smith) were akin to misbehaving students at the back of a classroom - Jamieson and Smith's characters playfully challenged and undermined whatever I said. In a later piece with a group of collaborators (based respectively in Harihari, Brisbane, Georgia and Mexico City), I performed online for the hybrid performance/lecture *Enacting Collective Intelligence: A Hybrid Mashup of Theatre and Theory* (2009), which was presented to an onsite audience at the Govett Brewster Gallery in New Plymouth. In this Dadaesque parody of academia, a number of people gave simultaneous lectures on different subjects - all at the same time. An onsite performer (Jamieson) attempted to channel the content that was being delivered - she spoke with the tone and demeanour of a normal lecturer, attempting to make sense out of content that became increasingly fragmented and nonsensical. I discuss these projects in more depth in the draft paper in Appendix 3.



Fig. 5: *Avatar Body Collision, Come and Go*, 2007. Performance photograph: onsite audience at N.Z. Film Archive, Wellington.<sup>98</sup>

I was first introduced to networked performance by the New Zealander Helen Varley Jamieson (who is now currently based in Munich). Jamieson is a key figure at the forefront of what she terms 'cyberformance'. She uses the term to describe emergent cultural practices where live performers come together in real-time over the internet to create performance works.<sup>99</sup> The globally dispersed cyberformance troupe she founded, *Avatar Body Collision* (fig. 5), use the internet as a platform to approach the challenge that this dispersed simultaneity poses for contemporary live theatre. *Avatar Body Collision* are four women based in different cities from one another.<sup>100</sup> Without ever all being in the same place at the same time (some members have never even met each other face to face), the troupe have collaborated to produce ten shows over a number of years - presenting their work at festivals, galleries and conferences all around the world.<sup>101</sup> Their practice thematically explores the relationship of the body to the machine, and what it means to be human in a world of intelligent machines.

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<sup>98</sup> Photograph by Jamie Lean, used by permission. Image source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/upstage/691350784/in/set-72157600722959985/>. According to the publicity blurb for this artwork, the piece was "an exercise in reproducing as faithfully as possible Samuel Beckett's precise stage directions and script, in the online environment." [http://upstage.org.nz/blog/?page\\_id=51#comeandgo](http://upstage.org.nz/blog/?page_id=51#comeandgo).

<sup>99</sup> See <http://www.cyberformance.org> for more information.

<sup>100</sup> The four members of *Avatar Body Collision* are Helen Varley Jamieson (Munich), Vicki Smith (Harihari), Leena Saarinen (Helsinki), and Karla Ptacek (London). The performance troupe are now on hiatus, but their official website is <http://www.avatarbodycollision.org>.

<sup>101</sup> Jamieson, 2008, p. 50.



Fig. 6: Audience interaction during *080808 UpStage Festival*: Norsk Telemuseum, Oslo.<sup>102</sup>

UpStage is a purpose-built platform for online performance which members of Avatar Body *Collision* developed (in collaboration with others).<sup>103</sup> In 2007, Jamieson and (fellow Collider) Vicki Smith curated a festival of live online performance entitled the *070707 UpStage Festival* (7 July 2007), the first of a number of annual festivals in which all performances were presented in the UpStage platform. As mentioned earlier, Anaesthesia Associates presented *The Best Air Guitar Album...* in the *070707 UpStage Festival*, and this piece was my first foray into live online performance in the capacity of performer.<sup>104</sup> Jamieson, Smith and I went on to co-curate two subsequent festivals of cyberperformance - the *080808 UpStage Festival* (8 August 2008, fig. 6) and the *090909 UpStage Festival* (9 September 2009).<sup>105</sup> Each of these festivals featured numerous performers working together in real-time across different timezones. There were physical venues that audiences could attend in a number of different cities, and the festivals had a live online audience who could be accessing the performances from anywhere at any given point.<sup>106</sup>

In December 2007, Anaesthesia Associates presented our next networked performance piece. In this artwork, entitled *I Miss You, Great to See You Again*, I performed onsite to an

<sup>102</sup> Photograph by Cato Normann, used by permission. Image source: <[http://upstage.org.nz/blog/?page\\_id=138](http://upstage.org.nz/blog/?page_id=138)>.

<sup>103</sup> UpStage was initially developed by Helen Varley Jamieson and Vicki Smith in collaboration with the artist and programmer Douglas Bagnall. (Later updates to the platform have been developed with additional input from a team of students at Auckland University of Technology.) The platform enables text chat in real time with the audience, as well as graphics, moving image (animations, video), audio, and real-time drawing tools. The text typed into a chat pane by performers is converted into audible voices by text-to-speech software. The official website for the project is <<http://www.upstage.org.nz>>.

<sup>104</sup> I had completed earlier projects in this field as curator.

<sup>105</sup> Jamieson and Smith also curated the *101010 UpStage Festival* in October 2010 (I could not collaborate in this capacity due to other commitments, but I was a host for the Wellington node).

<sup>106</sup> Details about the artworks presented at each of these four festivals can be found on <<http://www.upstage.org.nz>>.

audience in London,<sup>107</sup> and Bradley performed live over the internet from New Zealand.<sup>108</sup> In *I Miss You...*, we thematically focused our attention on samples from well known love songs and popular romantic comedies. The performance mashed up and juxtaposed numerous different clichéd pop-cultural representations of sexuality and gender with a view to confusing such conventional representations - further extending our interest in performance about performance itself.<sup>109</sup>

My role in the *080808 UpStage Festival* was hybrid - I was co-curator of the festival as a whole, I was in the Engine Room gallery in Wellington as a host (looking after the onsite audience), and I was also a performer in the Anaesthesia Associates sequel piece *I Miss You, Great to See You Again 2.0* (2008). In this sequel version the thematic focus was the same, but in this piece we were both performing in the same room as each other again (in Wellington, to both an onsite audience and an online audience).

One crucial facet of live online performance is the simultaneous interconnection that occurs between people in multiple times and places. On occasion, the effect of being simultaneously interconnected with people in other places can be highly dramatic. During the *101010 UpStage Festival*, for example, one of the physical node venues was the Museum of Science and Technology in Belgrade - we had audience members there, and artists performing from onsite at that venue. Right in the middle of the festival (approximately 2 P.M. local time in Belgrade, violent rioting broke out in the street outside the venue.<sup>110</sup> Fearing for their lives, the performers, audience and museum staff locked themselves inside the venue, whilst rioters outside in the streets threw bottles and Molotov cocktails. These frightened performers and audience members found solace in the inter-human connection with people in other places, and conversely, the turn of events influenced the tone of the cyberperformances that took place for the remaining duration of the festival too.

As with audiovisual/mashup performance, in networked art the implications of the term 'performance' are complex and multiple. In a cultural sense, the traditional notion of a 'performer' on stage in front of an audience collapses - audiences are physically situated in more than one location, and as such the performer cannot engage with them using the traditional strategies of a stage performer (body language, eye contact and so forth). The relationship between performer and audience is further complicated by the fact that in

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<sup>107</sup> The piece was presented in London for a conference at Goldsmiths College entitled *Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance*.

<sup>108</sup> Bradley performed early in the morning in New Zealand, with no audience present at his end, for an early evening performance in U.K. time.

<sup>109</sup> Space does not permit me to expand on the interrelationship between performance and gender here. It will suffice to say here that gender was a major subject of investigation for Foucault (from whom McKenzie took his point of departure). McKenzie accordingly discusses gender theory in depth in numerous places throughout his 2001 book. I overviewed this issue in *Not Acceptable*, p. 39.

<sup>110</sup> The rioting was a Neo-Nazi attack upon a gay pride march, and the violence made international news at the time.

some instances audience members themselves perform. In *Avatar Body Collision's* performances and other UpStage performances, audience members chat in real-time with the performers. In some instances (taking advantage of the anonymity of the online space), audience members assume imagined personae of their own creation, and thus the line between audience and performer is blurred - the audience become characters in their own right who improvise and perform in the live theatre that is taking place.<sup>111</sup>

Organisationally speaking, the term 'performance' is also complex and multiple. To curate and manage the UpStage festivals of live online performance, the team must manage and co-ordinate artists in multiple timezones, venues in multiple cities, publicity material (and also performances themselves) in multiple languages. Working from within these logistical complexities, contributors also commonly occupy numerous roles simultaneously.<sup>112</sup> Further, as I demonstrated with the tragic and disturbing example of the Belgrade riots, real life events (and the logistical complications that they cause) are taken into account and assimilated into the performances themselves as fast as the events themselves take place. The 'performance' that takes place, in an organisational sense of the word, is thus deeply intertwined with the cultural construct of 'performance'.

In a technological sense, as with the aforementioned senses, the notion of 'performance' again becomes complex and multiple. The UpStage festivals can be understood as a hybridisation of cultural, organisational and technological performance. The cultural implications are clear (artists create artworks to present to the public), and the organisational implications are also apparent (there are a number of people involved, and they work across multiple timezones to accommodate audiences in multiple venues), but the UpStage platform itself can also be discussed solely in terms of its technological performance (a discussion of how the platform functions, and what can it do). This technological performance, however is directly interrelated with the organisational imperatives of a public festival (the technological functionality impacts the organisational issues), and the cultural imperatives of creating engaging work in the platform (the behaviour of the technology impacts the artworks and their reception).

In own work the most obvious hybridisation is between cultural and technological performance. In networked performance, there are a number of technical factors at play: the speed of the internet connection (for the performer broadcasting multimedia content, and for the audiences receiving it), and also the file-size, compression and other nuances

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<sup>111</sup> This is actually the case with all work presented online using the platform UpStage. In almost every performance I have ever seen in UpStage, at least one audience member will assume a persona and talk to the performers whilst 'in character' as that constructed persona.

<sup>112</sup> In the UpStage festivals, Jamieson, Smith and I all occupy multiple roles that are embedded into our roles as co-curators. During the festivals themselves we are curators, hosts to both online and onsite audiences, and also live performers in our own artworks; leading up to and after the festivals we occupy additional roles such as publicity agents, technical advisors and mentors to the artists, and we manage other tasks such as graphics and animation production for the festival as a whole, web maintenance, video editing and so forth.

specific to the data transfer. Bearing these issues in mind, internet connections invariably lag and glitch from time to time, servers crash and connections drop. These instances of low performance in a technical sense can become instances of high performance in a cultural sense. When such mishaps occur, the artists improvise, which makes each iteration of an artwork different from prior and subsequent versions.<sup>113</sup>

### *Breakfast Party at my Studio*

*Breakfast Party at my Studio* was a multiple and hybrid artwork, encompassing both audiovisual mashup performance and networked performance. I will initially reflect on the piece as a mashup, before examining the ways in which it extends the possibilities of networked practice.

The promotional blurb (and my spoken introduction to the live audiences) framed the piece as addressing themes surrounding waking up, the dawning of a new day and consuming breakfast. While the multimedia material was sampled from a number of disparate pop-cultural sources, there were a number of discernable shifts in content and tone, which can be described as distinct movements within the piece. The interpretation of the sequences of images and the music is entirely up to my audience, but the piece can be approximately described as adhering to the following narrative structure:

Movement 1: In this movement, the musical tone was melancholy and reflective. The video clips predominantly showed night skies, sunrises, and people stirring from bed.

Movement 2: In this scene, a prankster tucked a fake head into a bed where his female companion slept, and the clip was accompanied by a soulful musical motif of "it's time to rise and shine". As the young man prodded his companion with a stick, she had a rude awakening - upon seeing the fake head she screamed, leapt out of the bed and fell over (and the music abruptly cut to silence). Her anger and confusion promptly turned to amusement at the practical joke.

Movement 3: In this movement, a cooking show was remixed (through video jumpcuts to other material, and suggestive hip-hop music), to create a scene of building sexual innuendo.

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<sup>113</sup> I discussed this issue in depth in *Not Acceptable*, and I framed it by re-defining the term 'glitch' to encompass any slippage, including slippages in technological functionality and slippages in meaning in the cultural outcome. See pp. 37-38 and 39-40. While I maintain the re-definition articulated in my earlier work, I do not continue to deploy the notion in this thesis for the sake of clarity. Since I focus so heavily on musical outcomes in this body of work, the term may become confusing for those familiar with its existing use in glitch music.

Movement 4: This scene was characterised by hyperactive and happy 'morning people' dancing about, to the tune of a mix between *Good Morning* (from the musical *Singing in the Rain*), *Get Out of Your Lazy Bed*, *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go*, and *Three Little Birds*.

There were more distinct movements in the piece, but it will not expand my argument to spell each of these out. It oversimplifies *Breakfast Party at my Studio* to discuss and analyse my work solely by categorising and interpreting the narrative content. The overarching thematic focus of my piece (awakenings; the dawning of a new day; breakfast) was made explicit, and some of facets of these themes deliberately verged on pop-cultural cliché. It could easily be argued that my artwork deconstructed such clichés in order to critically reflect on them, but this is a fairly superficial interpretation. Audiences might be able to understand and interpret key themes, but they may also respond directly to samples simply by recognition (the chef was Jamie Oliver, a snippet of a tune by U2 was clearly heard, a dancing scene from *Singing in the Rain* was recognisable, and so forth). Such glimmers of recognition take place with any mashup artwork, this observation is not unique to my own work. Audiences might also reflect on the formal treatment (the abstract video textures, percussive scratches in the audio, a recognisable tune by Radiohead that was lowered in pitch, and so forth). Responding to an artwork on a formal level is possible regardless of the cultural form under discussion - my ability to evoke this type of response does not lend any critical weight to the focus of this thesis either.

In the video documentation that I provide for this thesis, I do not include shots of either the audience, or of myself creating the mix live. I had two live camera feeds operating at the time, and both of these elements were present in the live mix - but they are each excluded from the copy that I have recorded and used for this thesis. It might thus be tempting to interpret this piece solely according to the audiovisual content that was documented, but doing so would overlook a number of key critical issues. Aside from being a mashup of pop-cultural *content* (that is, the source material sampled), the piece was also a networked performance, and as such the piece was also a mashup of *context* (the sites of reception) - characterised by real-time juxtapositions and dislocations of time, place and setting. The live experience was different for different audiences. Some audience members experienced the piece in the morning (fig. 6), and others experienced the artwork in the evening. As such, the reception would undoubtedly have been different for each of these two parties. The time of day that an artwork is experienced affects the audience, and as such it clearly has a pronounced effect upon performance. Additional audiences will only experience the piece as a video document. The video that I provide is different from the live experience, and the absence of audience in my video documentation is deliberate (in order to render the documented outcome conceptually distinct from the live performance).



Fig. 7: Dan Untitled, *Breakfast Party at my Studio*, 2011. Performance photograph: artist's studio, Wellington.<sup>114</sup>

Differences in place (New Zealand and U.K.) also implicate the reception of the piece. One facet of this disjuncture is how readily the audiences recognise and draw associations from the samples used. For example, at one point in the audiovisual mix, I played a track called *Get Out of Your Lazy Bed*. Audiences in Oxford would experience this snippet of music as a thematically relevant selection, but not much beyond that. For almost all audience members who grew up in New Zealand, however, this piece of music would be instantly recognisable as the theme song to the highly popular Saturday morning children's television programme *What Now?*<sup>115</sup> Hearing a snippet of the tune would in all likelihood bring childhood memories flooding back. Towards the end of the piece, I mixed together a sequence of appropriated images from newscasts of current events. In amongst the sequence, there were images of the city of Christchurch, devastated by recent earthquakes and aftershocks.<sup>116</sup> Again, these samples would have had a far more poignant effect upon New Zealanders than they would have for U.K. audience members (who are unlikely to have such a strong personal connection to the city). Place, like time, has an integral effect upon performance.

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<sup>114</sup> Photograph by Dominika Zielinska (<<http://www.dominikazielinska.com>>), used by permission.

<sup>115</sup> *What Now?* premiered in 1981, and the show was cancelled in 2004. *Get Out of Your Lazy Bed* was the theme song for much of this period.

<sup>116</sup> A number of major earthquakes had struck the city of Christchurch during the months prior to my performance, and there were numerous aftershocks still taking place on an ongoing basis at the time of the piece.

There were also variations in the settings in which the piece was presented. Audience members in New Zealand experienced this piece in a relatively informal setting - they were invited into my studio (a semi-private space that became public for the piece).<sup>117</sup> Audience members in the U.K., conversely, experienced this piece in a more formal setting. The venue in Oxford was an established and high-profile art gallery (the museum of Modern Art Oxford), and the piece was presented in conjunction with a workshop through a well-respected university (Oxford Internet Institute). Audiences experiencing the work in one context would undoubtedly have had different experiences from audiences situated in the other context. The value in this disjuncture is that it reinforces the antihierarchical nature of my work - the reception of my work in one setting does not predicate the reception of my work in other contexts.<sup>118</sup> In fact, slippages occur between divergent samples that are mixed together, but slippages also occur between divergent *contexts that are instantaneously networked together*.

There was no singular and 'authentic' experience possible for *Breakfast Party at my Studio*. Variations in time, place and context change the passage of experience that this piece offers for each different audience member. What this piece means, then, will have been different in each and every case: meaning is *performatively mediated*. Performance, in *Breakfast Party at my Studio*, is thus reconfigured as a cluster of imperatives that all operate simultaneously. Variations in audience experience emphasise the fact that while certain imperatives might seem to be higher in the mix in certain contexts, all of these imperatives (whether retrievable or not) underpin performance practice.

In terms of 'performance' in a cultural sense, my artwork can be clearly located as a hybridised piece that draws on the traditions of audiovisual mashup performance and networked performance. I performed as D.J., V.J. and networked performance artist all at the same time. There was also a pronounced theatricality to the piece. I performed as host to the event, but the boundaries between artist and audience become blurred, because the audience in Wellington were on camera for the audience in Oxford. People behave differently when a camera is pointed at them, so the Wellington audience also became theatrical 'performers' to a degree.

In terms of organisational performance, I negotiated multiple time-zones, the creation and dissemination of publicity material (with different requirements at each end), the logistics of booking, installing and testing the technical rig (including the administrative requirements associated with getting the necessary firewalls lifted to enable a webcast on

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<sup>117</sup> Due to the time of day of the event, there were also very few audience members attending in Wellington who were complete strangers to me personally. My audience onsite was largely comprised of friends, colleagues, and some of my students.

<sup>118</sup> While 'place' (as used above) denotes geographical location, 'setting' implies more specifically that the nature of the venue/environment itself is also important. The term 'context' encompasses both place and setting.

location), the logistics of catering for the Wellington audience (croissants and coffee), and so forth. Each of these facets directly impact either the cultural reception of my piece or the technological functionality in some way - they cannot be seen as organisational imperatives pure and simple.

Technological performance was a vital issue in bringing *Breakfast Party in my Studio* into fruition in the first place, but also in determining the aesthetic of the piece itself. On one hand, I used an array of recent and complex technology (fairly high-performance equipment) to perform the piece.<sup>119</sup> On the other hand, webcast signals need to be lower resolution than other forms of broadcast because of bandwidth issues, so compression artifacts in the webcast audiovisual signal were a natural and inescapable part of the piece. These compression artifacts are instances of low technological performance, but they were deliberately integrated into the glitchy aesthetic of my piece and became a desired outcome in terms of cultural performance.<sup>120</sup> The piece created a deliberate tension between low and high technological performance, and this tension contributed to the performance outcome as a hybridised whole.

*Breakfast Party at my Studio* is a mashup of numerous modes - audiovisual mashup (encompassing but not limited to music), networked performance (encompassing an interplay between different times, places, and contexts), and in the documented iteration I present here, the performativity of documentation (any interplay between the live event and the documents<sup>121</sup> that substantiate my artwork).

This complex cluster of performance imperatives informed the creation of *Breakfast Party at my Studio*. My work thus cannot be seen as a single integrated whole. It is a cluster of performances that all took place simultaneously, and different people received different iterations. Information (and interchanges of meaning) flowed back and forth in numerous permutations and combinations: flows took place between pop-cultural samples; between times, places and contexts; between my audiences and I. *Breakfast Party at my Studio* is a cluster of performances in which heterogeneity of cultural mode is celebrated.

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<sup>119</sup> Technically speaking, my performance rig was comprised of the following equipment: two computers, two D.V.J.s, an audio mixer, a video mixer, a turntable, a large flatscreen television set and four digital cameras.

<sup>120</sup> This deliberate embrace of technological shortcomings is a strategy that has existed for a number of years in my practice, and that I discussed in my earlier work on the glitch. See *Not Acceptable*, p. 37-38 and 39-40.

<sup>121</sup> I use the plural here because there are multiple documents. There is the video recording provided here (capturing some facets of the work), the writing in this dissertation (capturing other facets), any records of the event online (such as <<http://remixcinema.org/bonus-tracks/>>), any photographs taken by either of the live audiences, and at some point in the future, any subsequent publications that might come into fruition. I will expand on my ideas about the performativity of documentation in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3

*Flight of the Alphabet*: Documenting Performance



Audio 1: Dan Untitled, *Flight of the Alphabet*, 2011.  
Audio recording.

Audio file: `multimedia/2-aud1-flight_of_the_alphabet.wav`

## Documenting Performance

The performance *Flight of the Alphabet* took place without an audience - all that remains is the audio recording that you have just heard. I recorded the piece live, in one continuous take. The recording, taken directly from the output of my mixer, is a mix of piano and hip-hop music. The outcome is presented as my own new artwork - documented as a performance.

As McGranahan defines 'mashup',<sup>122</sup> one key aesthetic principle is the recognisability of the sources used. *Flight of the Alphabet* combines two different pieces of music that are each recognisable in their own right. One of the pieces, *Flight of the Bumblebee*, is an orchestral interlude by the Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakoff. The interlude comes from the opera *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*, which was composed between 1899-1900. The other piece, *Alphabet Aerobics*, is a hip-hop track by the California-based duo Blackalicious (fig. 8), comprised of the M.C. Gift of Gab and the D.J./producer Chief Xcel.<sup>123</sup> One preliminary way to approach *Flight of the Alphabet* is to consider the meaning(s) of each of these two pieces of music (cultural texts), and thus interpret what this new combination might mean.

*Flight of the Bumblebee* is a well known composition that has a canonical place in both classical music history and in popular culture. In its original context, the piece marked the close of Act III, Tableau 1 in the opera *The Tale of Tsar Sultan*. In that scene, the magical Swan-bird turns the Tsar's son into a bumblebee so that he can fly off to visit his father. Aside from the piece's initial narrative meaning in the context of the opera, *Flight of the Bumblebee* is also memorable because it is very fast and difficult to play. Beyond the initial narrative symbolism in *The Tale of Tsar Sultan*, the piece has become iconic because it is synonymous with virtuosity. In short, musicians play this piece in order to show off.

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<sup>122</sup> Aside from attempting to delineate what characterises 'mashup' as a mode of musical practice, McGranahan also offers a survey of the history of the field as we know it in popular music (2010, pp. 6-15) and a survey of the existing scholarly literature on the field (pp. 29-34).

<sup>123</sup> Gift of Gab's birth name is Timothy Parker; Chief Xcel's birth name is Xavier Mosley. *Alphabet Aerobics* was produced in 1999, in collaboration with D.J. Cut Chemist (whose birth name is Lucas MacFadden). Cut Chemist is most well-known as a member of the hip-hop group Jurassic 5, but he parted company from that group in 2006.



Fig. 8: Blackalicious (publicity image)<sup>125</sup>

*Alphabet Aerobics* is well known to fans of independent hip-hop music.<sup>124</sup> In *Alphabet Aerobics*, M.C. Gift of Gab raps his way through words that begin with each of the letters of the alphabet. Gift of Gab's rapping gets faster and faster as the beat increases in tempo - by the end of the track he is enunciating coherent, amusing, evocative and poetic rhymes at a breathtaking speed.

Based on the two sources sampled, one possible interpretation of *Flight of the Alphabet* is that it is a conflation of divergent forms of virtuosity or musical skill (virtuosity in classical piano, and virtuosity in rapping). By juxtaposing two pieces which are, in part, iconic for their virtuosity, the piece invites critical comparisons between the two musical forms. Another possible interpretation is that the piece is a three-way juxtaposition between different forms of musicality - piano, rapping, and mashup creation/performance.

Either of these interpretations are plausible, but they each in different ways oversimplify my artwork. As I have already noted with regard to *Breakfast Party at my Studio*, it oversimplifies any mashup work to discuss and analyse it solely by categorising and interpreting the narrative content. As a mode of cultural practice, mashups conflate multiple themes, and the artists themselves tend to remain silent on the meanings that may be evoked by mixing these different sources together. The artists do not tend to explicitly make comment themselves, because mashups as a critical mode do not aim to lead an audience to a singular and conclusive interpretation. Some musical mashups, for example, might highlight similarities (such as lyrical similarities, or scenarios where one artist has stolen a riff, motif or melody from another artist). Other mashups might highlight difference (such as divergent lyrical thematics, divergent or conflicting genres, or divergent approaches to the commercial facets of the music industry). The vast majority of mashups,

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<sup>124</sup> The group have been described as "one of the most popular groups in the independent hip-hop scene." Edwards, P. *How to Rap: The Art and Science of the Hip Hop M.C.* Chicago Review Press, 2009, p. 322.

<sup>125</sup> Gift of Gab appears in the foreground. Image source: <<http://loudvine.com/blog/2011/10/blackalicious-make-you-feel-that-way/>>.

however, do not have a recoverable logic behind the combination, *but a complex set of potential logics*.<sup>126</sup>

Musical mashups are created if an artist discovers that the melodies, rhythms and chord structures of the tunes match closely enough, and if the new combination presents an interesting outcome. McGranahan claims that there are seven key aesthetic principles underpinning the creation of a musical mashup: “combination, reliance on samples, songcraft, recognizability, genre clash, humor and satire, and lyrical and thematic interplay of sources”.<sup>127</sup> These overarching principles might not all apply to any one mix, but for any mix a number of these aesthetic factors are likely to be at play. Beyond these overarching principles, the creation of a mashup might also be informed by any number of additional guiding attitudes. Some artists might believe that ‘less is more’, while others might take the approach of ‘the more the merrier’; some artists might gravitate towards combinations that sound like they are seamless and natural pop songs in their own right, while others might take the approach of ‘the weirder the better’; some artists might aim to subvert the artistic intentions inherent to the sources sampled, while others might aim to reinforce and build on the aesthetics of the sources; and so forth. The approaches deployed are as varied as the artists that create these mixes.

As an artist working in modalities derived from mashup practice, my work commonly involves manipulating pre-existing cultural products (such as audio recordings) that were initially created by other people. There are actually, however, at least three different processes that I might have followed in order to create *Flight of the Alphabet*. After I devised the idea for the piece, I might plausibly have followed any of these processes:

Process 1: I might have sat down and practiced hard, until I eventually attained the level of speed and accuracy required to be able to play *Flight of the Bumblebee* on a piano. I might have sat down and played this piano part live, as an accompaniment to *Alphabet Aerobics*, and made an audio recording of the mix that captured my performance in one continuous take.

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<sup>126</sup> This paragraph contains edited excerpts of a paragraph in *Not Acceptable*, p. 59. Writing on the subject of punk rock, Dick Hebdige claimed that even with regard to ‘sympathetic interpretations of the stylistic tropes of the movement, “to get the point is, in a way, to miss the point”’. Hebdige, D. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London, Routledge, 1979, p. 139. Today’s mashup culture is commonly compared to punk culture. McGranahan, for example, cites two leading mashup producers that make the comparison between punk and mashup music (especially with regard to the ‘do-it-yourself’ ethos): DJ Adrian of the duo AplusD (2010, p. 170) and Party Ben (2010, p. 193). Some might thus concur with Hebdige’s assertion (that even sympathetic interpretations attempting to ‘get the point’ will miss the point) and argue that it equally applies to mashup culture.

<sup>127</sup> 2010, p. 3. As I noted in ‘Terms of Reference’, if the term ‘mashup’ is applied to something other than a musical mashup (for example an audiovisual mashup), then ‘songcraft’ must be displaced by the broader notion of narrative structure. ‘Lyrical’ is also less apt a term in such instances, but the principle can still be encompassed by the notion of ‘thematic interplay’.

Process 2: I might have found an existing audio recording of someone playing *Flight of the Bumblebee* on a piano, and I might have executed a performance in which I blended the piece live with *Alphabet Aerobics*.

Process 3: The audio document I present might not be a live recording at all. *Flight of the Alphabet* might have been entirely constructed using audio editing software.

In order to produce *Flight of the Alphabet*, any of these processes could plausibly have been followed. If you play close attention, however, you might note that the piano is not perfectly played in some places.<sup>128</sup> That level of imperfection indicates that at least some facets of the audio recording were indeed performed live. Assuming that I am competent in studio-based audio production, and that I am indeed capable of producing seamless outcomes, the presence of errors in my audio recording renders Process 3 improbable (unless these errors were deliberate). Since this thesis is focused on mashups, you are likely to suspect that I used pre-existing audio recordings rather than playing the piano myself in order to create this piece. You might have good reason to suspect that I followed one process over another, but the documented outcome (my audio recording) cannot actually prove or disprove what took place. Since the performance took place behind closed doors, then based on the evidence presented, audiences have no firm and conclusive way of discerning the processes followed.

This is, of course, an entirely hypothetical form of analysis. It is plausible (but rather unlikely) that my audiences would consider the possibility that I had actually played the piano in order to create this piece.<sup>129</sup> Since there was no audience present for this performance, that possibility, whilst hypothetically plausible, only becomes prescient *because I mention it in writing*. That possibility is unlikely to be retrieved directly from the audio recording. My analysis of plausible scenarios, however, indicates that knowledge about my creative processes is essential for conclusively determining the nature and extent of the hybridity in *Flight of the Alphabet*. If I followed Process 1, the work is a hybrid of mashup music (the combination of more than one pre-existing musical source), piano performance, and D.J. performance more broadly (there was a quick cut between audio sources at the start).<sup>130</sup> If I followed Process 2, the piece might be construed as a hybrid of

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<sup>128</sup> For example, the timing slips out by a margin at 0:24, and a note is missed at 0:43.

<sup>129</sup> Some audience members might be aware that I do indeed have a level of ability on the piano. For example, I play live piano in all tracks on a recent E.P. I produced for my project Echolalic Phase (a project I do not discuss in this thesis, but interested readers can access that material at [http://soundcloud.com/dan\\_untitled/sets/echolalic\\_phase/](http://soundcloud.com/dan_untitled/sets/echolalic_phase/)). Because of the emphasis of this thesis on mashup practice, however, I do not discuss Echolalic Phase (that project is not 'mashup' because no sampled sources are clearly recognisable). Knowledge about my ability on the piano is thus *unlikely* to inform the interpretation of this artwork for most audiences.

<sup>130</sup> Under Boone's typology of the mashup (2011), if I did indeed play the piano part myself, the piece would thus be a hybrid of 'basic' and 'cover' mashup. The piece could thus also be potentially construed as having elements of endurance performance, because I set myself a difficult task and followed it through.

mashup pre-production and performance. I have already noted that Process 3 is improbable, due to the presence of errors in my recording (even if these errors are not discernible and retrievable to all audiences). As a hypothetical scenario, however, under Process 3 the work does not seem to be hybrid at all - the only creative mode I deployed in that scenario is studio-based mashup production. As it stands, the extent and nature of the hybridity of my artwork is not disclosed.

*Flight of the Alphabet* documents a performative process which took place in private. There is thus a gesture of denial at play - audiences are denied the opportunity to experience my performance live. All that remains is documentation, so my performance can only be experienced in a manner that is mediated by technology. *Flight of the Alphabet* thus scrutinises what the absence of a live audience might be able to tell us about the nature of performance.

Philip Auslander's book *Liveness* investigates the notion that media technology has encroached on live events such as theatre, rock music, sport, and courtroom testimony, reaching a point where the 'live' elements to these events are hardly present. Auslander describes a pattern where the mediated form was historically modelled on the live form, but goes on to outline how the mediated form eventually displaces the live form's position in the cultural economy.<sup>131</sup> The term 'mediation' was first used in a legal sense - two parties that cannot communicate directly with one another require a mediator. The term 'mediation', and increasingly the term 'mediatised', are used to describe the ways that technology can be used to shift context, and therefore to shift meaning. Auslander's framework pivots upon a binary opposition between 'live' and 'mediated'. According to Auslander an act is either live - taking place in the flesh and thus authentic - or it is mediated through technology.

It is conceivable to interpret that I created *Flight of the Alphabet* in order to challenge the nature and the authority of documentation in a digital age. The document does not conclusively determine the nature of the performance. In that interpretation, the audio recording is either real (I authentically played the piano - a so-called 'real' musical instrument), or it has been faked (I performed a mix of audio sources created by others). As with Auslander's framework itself, this interpretation is highly didactic. Processes 1 and 2 *both* imply that *some* type of live performance took place. All plausible processes involving liveness are to varying degrees mediated by technology. The mediated form can, and does, coexist with the live form - the two concepts cannot be considered as mutually exclusive, and this piece seeks to firmly preface such a position. Interpreting *Flight of the Alphabet* as a simple illustration of the real/fake dichotomy misses key elements of the work entirely.

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<sup>131</sup> Auslander, P. *Liveness*. London, Continuum, 1999.

Another issue at play is whether one form of discipline is privileged over another. Assuming that I did indeed play the piano live in order to create the piece, then the piece documents a certain level of musical skill and precision – I have applied myself to the discipline of playing the piano. Assuming that I did not play the piano myself, the audio recording offers a document of my skill and precision in the discipline of manipulating audio (since both pieces fluctuate in tempo significantly, it is a fair assumption that they would be highly difficult pieces to mix together). In *Flight of the Alphabet*, these divergent disciplines are treated as equally valid.<sup>132</sup>

Probing deeper still, one might consider the *authenticity of the cultural experience*. Hearing my audio recording is an ‘authentic’ cultural experience regardless of the process(es) I might have undertaken in order to create it. *Flight of the Alphabet* is ambivalent about all levels of authenticity – authenticity with regard to the nature of the liveness of the event (this information is not conclusively disclosed), authenticity with regard to the nature of the document (the question of whether this recording is in fact live is not directly disclosed, but it might be deduced from the presence of errors in my recording), and authenticity with regard to the cultural experience (one type of experience is not prioritised over another).

*Flight of the Alphabet* initially presents itself as an ‘A+B’ musical mashup (a combination of two distinct, recognisable and preexisting pieces of music). I created a piece that, whilst complex to achieve (irrespective of which process I followed), seems to be fairly conceptually straightforward. Since there are only two cultural texts at play, it should be possible to interpret the meanings that might arise from mixing them together. It is also possible to question the notion of authenticity more broadly (with regard to the processes undertaken, which determine the nature of the liveness of the piece). I remain ambivalent on all counts. It might be possible to try and deduce meanings based on the sources used, and it might also be possible to question the work’s authenticity as a cultural product, but neither of these approaches activate interesting or important issues. Following either of these lines of inquiry creates a didactic argument.

It is thus possible to claim, based on the analysis presented so far in this chapter, that I have not yet argued for any substantial innovation in my artwork *Flight of the Alphabet*. There are countless mashup artists creating new mixes of divergent sources, so why might this particular musical combination be any more or less innovative than the next mashup? Further, if my audio recording itself offers no conclusive evidence about the processes

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<sup>132</sup> These skillsets are actually intertwined anyway. In order to create a live piece in which I do indeed play the piano without anyone else there, I would also need a level of technical skill to capture it properly on tape and produce the video. Conversely, in order to conceive and create a fake recording of this nature, I would also need a level of musicality to be able to devise the combination of sources.

followed - if the issues surrounding authenticity cannot be directly retrieved directly from the artwork itself - then these issues could be *vis a vis* seen to be irrelevant to the analysis of my cultural product.

I have not claimed that my audio recording is any more innovative than any other mashup that has been recorded. (At the time of writing, D.J. Schmolli is widely considered to be the best mashup producer,<sup>133</sup> and it would be absurd and irrelevant to try and claim that title for myself here.) Conversely, this chapter draws attention to my artwork's flaws and imperfections - and one must presume that I did so deliberately.<sup>134</sup>

The reason I do not describe my piece as an innovative mashup *per se* is twofold. Firstly, mashups, by their very nature, challenge the cultural importance of 'originality' as a cultural construct. In *Not Acceptable*, I attempted to theorise the normative dimension to mashup practice - the fact that what was once a transgressive act has become assimilated into the mainstream.<sup>135</sup> The cultural currency of mashups, as a creative mode that affronts the very notion of originality, is widely accepted.<sup>136</sup>

My second reason, however, is more important. When I present the piece in this context (my doctoral thesis), *Flight of the Alphabet* cannot be understood solely as an audio mashup. This thesis does not theorise mashup practice *per se*, this thesis investigates *performance*. During one of my recent radio shows, I played exactly the same audio recording that I have presented here in this chapter. When I performed as radio host/D.J., I addressed a different audience from those addressed here. That shift in performative context made that version of *Flight of the Alphabet* an entirely different cultural product from the version that you have experienced here in this thesis. In the performative context of this thesis, my work is subjected to *types* of scrutiny that it would not receive in other contexts. I perform the roles of artist and critic simultaneously, and those roles operate in tension with one another. *Flight of the Alphabet* is thus not solely an audio artwork. The audio document is paired here with a written document, and in *this* iteration - as part of my doctoral thesis - *both facets are performative*. The audio recording *is not* an illustration of the written theory - the audio came into existence well before this text did. When I pair

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<sup>133</sup> This is of course a highly subjective claim, but the Austrian D.J./producer has been critically acclaimed numerous times, and his tracks consistently rank highly in compilations, popular opinion polls, download statistics and so forth. See, for example, 2010's *Mash-Up Your Bootz* compilation (in this case, Schmolli's number 1 ranking was based on statistics from previous *Mash-Up Your Bootz* compilation releases): <http://mashupyourbootz.blogspot.com/2010/05/mash-up-your-bootz-party-top-15.html>.

<sup>134</sup> Any given mix will have its imperfections, but the evidence of human touch is part of the very nature - and the charm - of performance.

<sup>135</sup> I discussed the normative dimension to liminal acts in general on pp. 52-53, coining the term 'Informational delirium' to describe the cultural climate, and I noted the normative dimension of mashup practice in particular on p. 59 and pp. 61-62. Boone also notes the normative dimension to mashup practice. Boone, 2011, p. 165. She cites Hilary Crosley's article on mashups in *Billboard* magazine as identifying a precise historical moment (the 2006 Grammy awards) in which mashups became accepted as mainstream. Crosley, 2006, in Boone, 2011, p. 165. See also footnote 28.

<sup>136</sup> McGranahan, for example, notes that mashups "challenge the romantic notions of unique artistic production and the position of the author": 2010, p. 6. He argues this point further in Chapter 6 of his dissertation.

the two, however, the text shifts the context of the audio and makes it a different creative outcome (version). This written document undermines the audio recording with ambiguity and paradoxes that are unlikely to be directly retrievable from the audio recording itself. In doing so, this written document sways the reception of the audio. Because this audio recording is paired with text, the piece is hybrid irrespective of the processes I followed to create it. Aside from the other potential modes, the piece is a hybrid of audio mashup performance and *performative document*.

Further, since my analysis focuses on performance (as opposed to a more specific discussion of musical production/distribution), then it verges on absurdity to discuss and analyse my mashup in isolation (as I have done so far here in this chapter). Taken *in situ*, a track would usually appear as part of a larger body of work (such as a set performed at a gig or on the radio). When I structure a performance (such as a D.J. set), there are noticeable peaks and there are also lower momentum transitions between them. Any given section needs to be considered in relation to the overarching flows<sup>137</sup> that take shape throughout the performance.

Likewise, this chapter does not stand in isolation. When taken *in situ* here in the context of this thesis, *Flight of the Alphabet* functions as a transitional sequence in a broader body of work. This piece, which took place without a live audience, is a passage of transit between two *public* performance projects (discussed in Chapters 2 and 4 of this dissertation respectively). The merits of my piece thus cannot be considered in isolation - this piece is part of a broader performative trajectory.

While *Breakfast Party at my Studio* and *Übermahlung und Frottage* (to be discussed in Chapter 4) are both major projects for me, *Flight of the Alphabet* is relatively minor - it is a one-off piece, it is a simpler mix that utilises less source material, and it was not presented in any public contexts at the time of its creation. It may be tempting to dismiss the piece as offering an insubstantial contribution to research at this level, but I maintain that this piece activates important and unresolved issues. While my project began as a relatively humble test piece, once I began to analyse and interrogate the issues at play, the need to highlight the role of audience in performance became prescient. Without a live audience present, a creation can still be performative by nature, but performativity operates differently. The subjectivity of the piece is thus not solely derived from the documented *outcome* in its own right (in this case an audio recording), but from the interplay that takes place between what has been captured (audio) and the *nature, tone, and framing of the documentation itself*. Any documentation that pertains to the performance will influence the reception of the work. Any documentation of that performance thus becomes performative in its own right.

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<sup>137</sup> I will discuss the notion of flow in more depth in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

These issues are certainly at play when documenting performances where a live audience is present, but they are heightened and become more prescient without a live audience. Reflecting further on the three types of performance that McKenzies identifies (cultural, organisational, and technological), *all documents are in fact performative*. All documents exist because they have certain roles to play in either a cultural sense, an organisational sense, a technological sense, or in some combination of all three. The document in question, an excerpt of this thesis, is attempting to contribute to discourse about performance itself as a cultural mode, and even in this seemingly humble piece there are multiple performance imperatives at play. Musical performance is a cultural construct. Scholarly writing about cultural practice is a hybrid of cultural and organisational performance. The nature, qualities and so forth of the audio recording itself can be understood as a hybrid of cultural and technological performance. It is thus crucial to be aware of the multi-faceted performativity of a document presented in this setting.

The most immediately apparent option is to see the piece as a mashup of two pieces of music (*Flight of the Bumblebee* and *Alphabet Aerobics*), but it can also be seen as offering a mashup-like interplay between two distinct and recognisable cultural modes (musical mashup performance, and scholarly performance in critically investigating cultural practice). *Flight of the Alphabet* is a mashup of audio, but it is also a mashup of context. As with all of my performance practice, multiple versions are possible. The audio recording that I present here in this thesis is in fact my first iteration of *Flight of the Alphabet* as a piece of music - it is the first recording that I made, and it is a test piece that I created in private. I present this version (errors and flaws notwithstanding) in order to demonstrate certain facets of performance as a hybrid construct. Performance is not necessarily tight and seamless (in fact there is a certain charm inherent to the fallible human touch of live performance). The types of performance at play are not always immediately apparent (putting forward an imperfect cultural outcome, for example, is a performative scholarly gesture). Performance is not always an immediately public mode of cultural practice either. Performance takes place constantly, at all levels of existence. A live event is one type of performance. The production of a document is an entirely different type of performance. What critical issues might performance raise? It depends entirely on which contexts are at play.

Chapter 4

## Übermahlung und Frottage: Challenging and Becoming



Audio 2: Dan Untitled, *Übermahlung und Frottage Teaser*, 2011.  
Audio recording.

Audio file: `multimedia/3-aud2-uuf_teaser.wav`

## Flow, Layering and Rupture in Übermahlung und Frottage

The audio recording *Übermahlung und Frottage Teaser* was taken straight out of the mixing desk at one of my first live appearances as Übermahlung und Frottage. I have performed numerous times with this project since, and I will do another live performance as part of this thesis. In the audio recording, I introduce myself to an audience, and then give a quick-fire audio snippet of what I will do.<sup>138</sup> I was addressing my audience at the venue at the time, but my introduction should suffice to set the scene for this discussion too.

Übermahlung und Frottage is a live mashup-derived project. During the audio preview provided, I mixed together appropriated snippets of music by The Beatles, Dire Straits, Missy Elliott, Public Enemy, George Thorogood, Arrested Development and Pink Floyd. I mixed the music live, cutting between the different samples in the space of under a minute. After my snippet of quick-fire mixing, I claimed that I would shortly pick up a bass guitar and play live basslines over the top too.

In McGranahan's delineation of what constitutes a mashup, he makes three claims that, while pertinent to the field in general, need to be addressed here. Firstly, he claims that "one defining quality of a mashup is the adherence to popular song form (some combination of verse, chorus, and bridge) [... and that ...] their popular song structure sets mashups apart from other types of sample-based music and related performance genres like turntablism."<sup>139</sup> He also notes that "[a] mashup creator does not typically add any new material. Instead, s/he uses only the samples taken from previously recorded, commercially released material by other artists."<sup>140</sup> While both of these claims are *typically* true for mashup producers/performers, neither principle applies to Übermahlung und Frottage. The music does not necessarily adhere to popular song form (verse/chorus/bridge). The mixes are created live,<sup>141</sup> but I also use turntablist techniques (scratching on vinyl). I also play the bass guitar, adding in my own new material. According to McGranahan's definition of 'mashup' in music (established by surveying numerous leading producers/performers), my approaches are not excluded entirely,<sup>142</sup> but they are highly rare in the field. Extensive research into the field has not uncovered any artists working internationally who create performances of this specific nature.

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<sup>138</sup> It is not usual for me to explain what I do before I start a performance. This particular performance took place as part of an eclectic evening of music and sound art performances, and most of the performers at the time introduced themselves and explained what they would be doing. Performing in this context, I deemed it appropriate to follow suit.

<sup>139</sup> McGranahan, 2010, p. 2. Note that elsewhere in his research, he notes that "[t]he use of a laptop and CD turntables are generally preferred by DJs who are less concerned with scratching or other turntablist performance techniques": *Ibid.*, p. 22. He does not absolutely exclude turntablist techniques from his description of mashup performance, but he simply indicates that these techniques are not the norm for mashup performers.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>141</sup> I use a combination of hardware and software to achieve my mixes. Live mashup creation is still relatively rare in the field - most artists produce and then pre-render mixed tracks, D.J.ing to create an overarching flow. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>142</sup> Some will undoubtedly be resistant to even calling my project 'mashup' at all. For the sake of clarity I refer to it as 'mashup-derived'.

Since I do a number of things all at the same time for *Übermahlung und Frottage*, it is a highly challenging activity for me as performer, and the notion of challenge will frame my discussion later in the chapter. Up until this point, I have discussed my practice according to the underlying question 'what is performance?' In chapters 2 and 3, I formulated the complexities and multiplicities inherent to hybridised performance - the multiple contexts it can occupy concurrently, and the problematics associated with documenting it. This entire thesis frames performance in order to contextualise artworks that deploy the mashup as a strategy. In this chapter, I turn to a philosophical reflection - how might the strategy of mashing up and intertextually layering pre-existing cultural content be framed and understood in philosophical terms. A number of key concepts that pertain to mashup practice in general will be investigated, basing my analysis on the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. These philosophical concepts are applied to my own hybrid project, and I will go on to analyse my own practice according to McKenzie's notion of 'the challenge to perform'. I will discuss how broader philosophical frameworks might frame mashup practice in general, and then reflect on what happens when I become a multiple/hybrid performer. Before outlining the investigation, however, I need to demarcate facets of the project that fall outside of the scope of my analysis.

Firstly, as with all performance, the issue of context is important to note because it affects how the artform will be received. *Übermahlung und Frottage* is a project that is geared towards bars, clubs, radio broadcast and so forth.<sup>143</sup> As such, it is likely to be understood as musical performance first and foremost (as opposed to sound art, live art or performance art).<sup>144</sup> Some audiences will undoubtedly interpret the project as musical entertainment, and I am perfectly happy for my work to be understood on that level. I do not wish to challenge the reception of my project as music, but rather, I want to reiterate that a key

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<sup>143</sup> I commonly perform as part of a group of D.J.s/producers/performers known as either the *Bootie N.Z.* crew or the *Messed Up* crew. This group was founded by Felix Five, and now includes D.J. Forge, Tone-E, and myself. Internationally, *Bootie* is well known as the largest franchise of mashup (bootleg) events in the world - hosting regular parties in a number of different cities across four different continents. It is also one of the longest running club nights devoted to mashups (founded in San Francisco in 2003). McGranahan gives an extensive history of the international circuit of *Bootie* events in *Mashnography*. 2011, p. 72 - 87. After gaining the rights to bring the franchise to New Zealand shores, Five launched the first *Bootie N.Z.* event (July 2011, Sandwiches club, Wellington). (Note that McGranahan submitted his dissertation in May 2010, and he thus does not include *Bootie N.Z.* in his survey). I was invited to join the *Bootie N.Z.* crew shortly prior to this inaugural event, and Felix Five, D.J. Forge, Tone-E and I have performed together regularly ever since. Some years prior to the premier of *Bootie N.Z.*, Five had launched the *Messed Up* mashup show on Wellington's Radio Active (88.6 F.M., also streamed to <<http://www.radioactive.co.nz>>), and it is New Zealand's longest running mashup radio show. Alongside our live appearances at venues, the *Bootie N.Z.* crew perform weekly on *Messed Up* (on an ongoing basis, from 4-7 P.M. every Saturday - reaching an approximate weekly listenership of more than 100000 people, including those who stream the show online from elsewhere in the world). (Note that in an earlier draft paper (Appendix 2: *Breakfast Party at my Studio: The Multiplicity of Performance*, 2011, pp. 5-6), I noted that Felix Five founded the *Messed Up* radio show, but I did not note my own involvement. That information was correct at the time of writing - I have become involved in the radio show more recently.) On air I usually D.J. as Dan Untitled. For my D.J. sets I mix my own mashups together with those created with others - I do not trigger all samples live, and I do not usually use additional live instrumentation (bass guitar). I have recorded two full *Übermahlung und Frottage* live sets to date, which were broadcast for the *10 past 5 Tequilas* slot on *Messed Up* on 6 August 2011 and 20 August 2011 respectively.

<sup>144</sup> I debuted this project in an art gallery setting - my first performance with *Übermahlung und Frottage* was at the Exposure 2010 exhibition at Massey University. I have not performed this project in a gallery setting since, having reached the conclusion that a gallery is too formal a context for the nature of these performances.

thread of this thesis is the assertion that art and music can exist in a complex alignment with one another.

With the musical material I perform, an eclectic range of music forms, genres, and sub-genres are mixed with one another: pop, rock, heavy metal, jazz, funk, disco, R 'n' B, hip-hop, techno, breaks, electro and numerous sub-genres of electronic dance music rub up against one another to create new, unexpected and constantly shifting musical 'feels'. This eclecticism is part and parcel of mashup performance as I have defined it. The blended forms that take shape are accentuated (painted over) by my live basslines.<sup>145</sup>

Although there are numerous ways that I could discuss the project in solely musical terms, I do not wish to address Übermahlung und Frottage musicologically in any depth here,<sup>146</sup> however I would like to make some preliminary notes on the matter in order to lead into my philosophical reflections. Musically speaking, Übermahlung und Frottage is characterised by establishing musical flows, layering up additional material in each flow, and also intervening into each flow with rupture. The notion of establishing a flow, layering it and rupturing it was first articulated as a stylistic trope of hip-hop. In *Black Noise*, an excellent ethnomusicological study of the early days of hip-hop, Tricia Rose expands on Arthur Jafa's notion that the music (and other elements of the culture such as breakdancing and graffiti) centres around three concepts: "flow, layering and ruptures in line".<sup>147</sup> Rose notes that these concepts apply to both lyrical flow (thematic content) and musical flow (tonality), arguing that they "create and sustain rhythmic motion, continuity and circularity via flow; accumulate, reinforce and embellish this continuity through

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<sup>145</sup> In the name of this project, I appropriate terms that usually denote techniques in visual art. 'Übermahlung' is a technique pioneered by the surrealist painter Max Ernst for painting/drawing over the top of collage (and thus operates as a metaphor for the live instrumentation over the top of my mixes). 'Frottage' refers to rubbings (and is thus a metaphor for musical tracks rubbing up against one another).

<sup>146</sup> In order to offer some insight into what a musicological analysis of an Übermahlung und Frottage performance might entail, I would like to overview the musical changes that took place during the very brief section of mixed music (under a minute) that can be heard on the preview audio recording that I provided. In this mix, I started with an excerpt of the Beatles' *A Hard Days' Night*, which I had digitally transposed into the key of B minor. At the Beatles lyric 'working', I looped the note (a D) into a new rhythmic pulse for 8 beats at a faster tempo than the Beatles song, while also introducing a guitar swell from Dire Straits' *Money For Nothing* (also on the note of D), which becomes a transitional note - D is the minor third of the initial key (B minor), but it is also the seventh note for the new key of G minor that emerges. At that point, the Dire Straits guitar riff resolves to the new key, and Missy Elliott raps *Work It* to accompany the new musical form for three bars (time-stretched to match the tempo of the Dire Straits guitar riff). Her flow is interrupted by a one-bar phrase of rapping from Public Enemy's *Brothers Gonna Work It Out* (also cutting out the Dire Straits riff). Elliott's rapping resumes for another two bars, before she is interrupted for two bars by the closing vocal line from the chorus of George Thorogood's *Get a Haircut*. After another two bars of the Missy Elliott/Dire Straits combination, the next two bars are the opening lines of Arrested Development's *Mr. Wendal*, which segues into another piece of music again, Pink Floyd's *Money*, which is a transposition into a new key (B minor), new tempo, and new time signature (all of the preceding music was in 4/4, whereas *Money* is in 7/8). In under a minute of mixing I combined seven different source tracks, cutting in new material every few bars, using transitional notes and rhythms to change key and tempo twice. I usually perform for 30 minutes or more. A dedicated analysis of the shifts in musical theory at play during an entire performance would be a near impossible (and boring) undertaking, so I have reduced the level of analysis to the three broad concepts outlined: flow, layering and ruptures in line. During Übermahlung und Frottage performances, these concepts play out musicologically (flows, layers and ruptures in the musical elements) and also sometimes lyrically (flows, layers and ruptures in the thematic content, such as the work/money theme that is readily apparent during this excerpt).

<sup>147</sup> Jafa's ideas were expressed in personal conversation with Rose. Cited in Rose, T. *Black Noise*. Middletown, Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press, 1994, p. 38.

layering; and manage threats to these narratives by building in ruptures that highlight the continuity as it momentarily challenges it".<sup>148</sup>

Hip-hop has had a substantial influence on my own creative practice (via the strategies of sampling and turntablism), so the three concepts that Rose cites - flow, layering and ruptures in line - offer a good place from which my mashup performance practice can be discussed.<sup>149</sup> Unlike Rose's discussion of early hip-hop music, in my own work layering does not necessarily serve to embellish a pre-existing continuity.<sup>150</sup> With *Übermahlung und Frottage*, there are two different types of layering that take place - layering through additional samples and layering by augmenting the music with live basslines. In some instances of the former, the layering creates a level of rupture (a change in key, tempo, or some other juxtaposition between divergent stylistic tropes), but in the latter it embellishes and augments the musical continuity that is present in the mix of different samples playing that I have created at any one point. I will not dwell further on the musicological implications *per se* here, but it will suffice to say that numerous musical flows, layers and ruptures take place in quick succession during each *Übermahlung und Frottage* performance.

*Übermahlung und Frottage* performances are underpinned by the use of the mashup as a creative strategy. Since the focus of this chapter is philosophical, I will not offer any additional historical analysis of how mashup came into being as a mode of cultural practice. As I have already noted, there are existing scholarly sources which trace the history of the practice,<sup>151</sup> and my analysis will not be enhanced by reiterating those historical contexts here. Mashup strategies are ubiquitous in cultural practice nowadays, and I will thus treat them as well-established strategies, instead focusing on analysing terms of reference for how to understand the operation of the mashup as a mode of practice.

Popular culture, like music, is deeply embedded in my research, but a dedicated discussion of popular culture as it pertains to my work is outside of the scope of this chapter. Because *Übermahlung und Frottage* is partially geared towards entertainment contexts (bars, clubs, radio broadcast), but yet discussed critically here in an art context, it raises the question of whether the project aims to blur the boundaries between high art performance practices and entertainment. The project is certainly laden with pop-cultural references, and as such, there are numerous issues that could be potentially discussed with regard to the cultural contexts behind the material variously sampled. The question of whether

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<sup>148</sup> Rose, 1994, p. 39.

<sup>149</sup> In *Not Acceptable*, I discussed some of the similarities and differences between visual art and music in sampling practices/appropriation. It is outside of the scope of this chapter to develop this argument further, but my preliminary thoughts can be found in *Not Acceptable*, pp. 55-58.

<sup>150</sup> Some may question whether layering actually does serve to embellish in hip-hop music itself. In some instances it may indeed do so, but it may not always be the case. It is outside of the scope of this discussion to address that issue here.

<sup>151</sup> I have already noted two key examples: McGranahan, 2010 and Boone, 2011.

Übermalung und Frottage tests the boundary between so-called 'high art' and popular entertainment is certainly a valid one, but it is too dense a subject in its own right to be able to respond with an appropriate level of depth or rigour here.<sup>152</sup>

I will not offer a purely musical analysis, I will not historicise the mashup as a cultural strategy, and nor will I offer a discussion of the boundaries between so-called high art and pop-cultural entertainment. Instead, my focus is to discuss philosophical concepts that might frame mashup strategies in general, and to then formulate a discussion of the challenges underpinning my own activities as performer. The concepts of flow, layering and rupture that Rose discusses are not a perfect fit for mashup music (as I will discuss in due course), but they do serve well as a starting point from which to launch the discussion. For example (as I have already noted), in my own work layering is not necessarily clear-cut as a solely musical embellishment - musical layering can *create* musical ruptures. Further, and perhaps more interestingly, musical layering can create ruptures in the sociocultural themes at play. In mashup practice in general, the discussion must thus extend beyond an analysis that isolates the musical shifts that take place - the layering of samples can also create ruptures in thematic content (such as lyrical content, the time, place and sociopolitical implications of the sources sampled). In contrast to Rose's analysis of early hip-hop which demarcates flow, layering and rupture as distinct concepts, wherever parallel concepts can be found in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical work, these concepts are all deeply intertwined.

The French philosopher Deleuze's work falls into two categories, he writes to interpret the works of others,<sup>153</sup> and he also develops philosophical ideas and organises them around a specific concept (such as difference, sense, schizophrenia, cinema and the concept of 'philosophy' itself). His regular collaborator Felix Guattari was a rebellious student of the psychiatrist Jacques Lacan.<sup>154</sup> Guattari took a broad-minded approach to psychiatric practice in France, utilising disciplines such as philosophy, ethnology, linguistics and architecture. Centrally, his concerns lay with the question of subjectivity: how to produce, collect, enrich and reinvent subjectivity in order to make it compatible with universes of value. Writing together, Deleuze and Guattari described desire as linked to processing, not to repression as the seminal psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud believed. Their widely influential

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<sup>152</sup> This issue was heavily mined by scholarly research about creative practice in the 1980's, and it is probably no longer such a salient subject to discuss here.

<sup>153</sup> Deleuze has written monographs on Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, and Foucault to name but a few.

<sup>154</sup> While Lacan believed that language creates the subject, Guattari is very critical of the Lacanian 'signifier', believing that it is impossible to establish terms of reference that allow ordering. Guattari, F. Machinic Heterogenesis. 1993. In Trend, D. (ed.). *Reading Digital Culture*. Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2001, p. 47.

collaborative work centres around desire and its relationship to capitalist society, and together they formulate ideas about what it means to produce new worlds of knowledge.<sup>155</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari directly discuss the notion of flow. In the format of a book, for example, they describe lines of articulation (establishing 'strata' and 'territories', demarcating the thrust of whatever the book is communicating), but also lines of flight that map movements *between* these articulations (movements of 'destratification' and 'deterritorialisation'). In Deleuze and Guattari's thought, they describe 'flows' as occurring along the articulations themselves, but also taking place along lines of flight *between* such articulations.<sup>156</sup> A flow along a line of articulation is a close concept to 'flow' as Rose analyses it, and the way that Rose frames the concept of flow is consistent with the term's idiomatic usage in hip-hop culture.<sup>157</sup> This idiomatic usage, however, differs from how Deleuze and Guattari use the term. In their work, flows take place along a line of articulation but also along a line of flight. The interplay *between* such articulations would not be idiomatically understood to constitute a flow, and as such, this latter sense is more closely related to the concept of rupture.<sup>158</sup>

Interpreted literally, Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'stratification' offers the closest parallel to the concept of layering. The notion of stratification, however, is a highly dense and complex matter in Deleuzo-Guattarian thinking. "Stratification is like the creation of the world from chaos, a continual, renewed creation... Classical artists are like God, they make the world by organising forms and substances, codes and milieus, and rhythms."<sup>159</sup> Stratification is thus closely tied to articulation itself – stratification is the process of adding layers onto each discrete articulation, in order to create forms that have coherent structures. As such, stratification does indeed seem to be a parallel concept to layering. As I noted above however, in mashup practices in general, the concept of layering is not clear-

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<sup>155</sup> This paragraph contains edited excerpts from *Not Acceptable*, p. 26. Deleuze and Guattari's two-volume *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, consisting of *Anti Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) is widely considered to be their magnum opus, but they also wrote other books together. Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (trans. Hurley, R., Seem, M. and Lane, H.R.). *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983. English translation of *L'Anti-Oedipe*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1972. Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (trans. Massumi, B.). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987. English translation of *Mille Plateaux*. Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1980.

<sup>156</sup> See, for example, Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, p. 3.

<sup>157</sup> In hip-hop, musically speaking, a flow encompasses the rhythmic motion, continuity and circularity. Lyrically speaking, a flow also encompasses the thematic focus and sociopolitical implications of what is being said.

<sup>158</sup> It is important to delineate the contexts in which these writers formulated their ideas. Rose's conception of 'flow' pertains to early (old-school) hip-hop. When a musical 'flow' in hip-hop music is ruptured, it typically needs to still retain a strong emphasis on the first beat of the next bar, in order to retain the overall forward momentum of the rhythm. Deleuze and Guattari's concepts, conversely, were devised to discuss literary 'flows'. While there are structural limitations inherent to musical flows (the imperative to retain an overarching and dance-able rhythm), literary forms are not subject to such limitations. Rose wrote about hip-hop at an early point in the genre's history – a point at which technologies and techniques were still in their formative stages. Sampling technologies are much more sophisticated now, enabling much more complex polyrhythmic structures. The stylistic tropes of the genre *per se* have moved on too, some hip-hop turntablists nowadays do not adhere so closely to the solid and consistent rhythms that characterised the stylistic tropes of early hip-hop. Entire passages of such music might have an abstract, polyrhythmic or even arrhythmic nature. In more contemporary music, then, the concept of flow could be more closely aligned to the complex intertextual flows that Deleuze and Guattari describe with regard to literary forms. My own work is influenced by hip-hop, but not strictly part of the genre as we currently know it. I will discuss the how 'flow' might be understood with regard to my own work in due course.

<sup>159</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, p. 502.

cut. Adding an additional *musical* layer, for example, frequently creates a *thematic* rupture. Each new layer might simultaneously reinforce one formation and subvert another. Stratification does not create constant and unchanging structures - as Deleuze and Guattari clearly state, the process is "a continual, renewed creation".<sup>160</sup>

While Deleuze and Guattari do not specifically address the notion of rupture *per se*, this notion also has parallels to be found in their philosophical work. An established articulation will inevitably reach a functional equilibrium once it has been voiced. In Deleuze and Guattari's work, where such a functional equilibrium gives way to change, there is a decoding or 'deterritorialisation'.<sup>161</sup> As I noted above, the movement of information between established articulations is what they call a 'line of flight'.<sup>162</sup> 'Decoding', 'deterritorialisation' and 'line of flight' thus all operate in parallel to the idea of a rupture taking place when pre-existing cultural material is cited and recontextualised (such as when musical sources are sampled and mixed together). The primary cluster of cultural meanings and associations that are inherent to any given cultural text (its functional equilibrium) gives way to change once it is recontextualised, and then it finds its new territory in a new flow (a new cultural articulation).

In a mashup, flow, layering and rupture take place constantly at a musical level,<sup>163</sup> but they also take place more broadly at a cultural level in the constant and shifting interplay between cultural texts. In Deleuzo-Guattarian thought, parallel concepts to flow, layering and rupture are not so clearly demarcated - they are deeply interrelated, they all occur concurrently, and they all shift constantly. Flow can occur either along an articulation or between articulations. Stratification adds layers to each articulation to create order out of chaos, but each new layer can either reinforce or subvert the existing formations. Lines of flight constantly take place between articulations - movements of deterritorialisation, destratification, decoding, that eventually reach new equilibriums. Each time a functional equilibrium is disrupted, there is change or 'becoming'. The concepts of flow, layering and rupture are inseparably interrelated, they can each be seen as facets of becoming.

During *Übermahlung und Frottage* performances, everything happens at once. I trigger samples from my computer, I scratch on vinyl and I play a bass guitar. This makes for an incredibly taxing performance. Physically speaking, in order to hold down a bassline whilst

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> In their own work, Deleuze and Guattari highlight the mouth, tongue and teeth as an illustrative example; the mouth, tongue and teeth find their primitive territoriality (their primary purpose) in the consumption of food, but they are deterritorialised in the articulation of sound (a function that is unrelated to the consumption of food), and they then find reterritorialisation (their new purpose) in the articulation of meaning. Deleuze and Guattari, 1975. The text of this footnote appears in *Not Acceptable*, p. 38.

<sup>162</sup> As I noted above, a line of flight actually has its own 'flow' in Deleuzo-Guattarian thought, but it is clearer for this discussion to differentiate these flights between articulations as 'ruptures in a flow' rather than the more precise (but confusing) 'flows between flows'.

<sup>163</sup> They also take place on a visual level, as seen in my audiovisual mashup *Breakfast Party at my Studio*, but the visual effect is outside of the scope of this chapter.

at the same time dropping in new samples and percussive scratches, my hands have to move very quickly and precisely. The 'taxing' qualities of my performances are important. I do not solely create new music that did not previously exist, I also introduce new identifications in the nature of my role as performer (the multi-faceted nature of my performance is readily apparent at a glance), and I thus introduce new complexities in the interrelationship between mixer and maker.

It may be less immediately apparent, but *Übermahlung und Frottage* also poses a significant mental challenge too. In any piece of music, there is a set of notes that will sound good with the chord progression (and other notes that will clash). Once two or more different pieces of music are combined, the set of musical options narrows significantly. Even if two pieces of music can be coherently mixed together, there are notes that might go with one of the chord progressions but not the other. The musical goalposts move every time I drop in a new sample, and I often have three or four different tracks mixed together at any one time. In order to play a bassline that fits, then, I need to remember not to hit certain notes that I would usually gravitate towards in a given key. *Übermahlung und Frottage* is thus a highly complex performance, because all of the musical parameters (melodic structures, rhythm and tempo) keep shifting. Sustaining this combination of activities for around 30 minutes is a difficult task both physically and mentally. In my own role as performer, I thus enter a state of constant change and becoming.

In *Übermahlung und Frottage*, becoming applies directly to the musical outcome (the sounds that are heard) and to the cultural outcome more broadly (the associations and meanings that are evoked), but it can be taken even further and applied to my *process* as a performer. Each of the constituent performative activities (triggering and mixing samples from my computer, scratching on a turntable, and playing the bass guitar) can also be seen as *physiological* and *mental* becomings. I establish patterns of hand movement (physiological flows) and musical patterns (mental flows for me as performer) in each of these activities. Each time I add in an additional sample into the mix, my physiological flow is retained but my mental flow is layered with additional complexity. My live basslines might either emphasise and retain an existing mental flow (replicating and accentuating a bassline that can already be heard in the sampled music) or layer it (playing a different line that deviates from what can already be heard in the sampled audio). Performatively speaking, ruptures occur both physiologically and mentally when my hands and mind jump between the different constituent activities.

Taken as a hybridised whole, then, *Übermahlung und Frottage* presents a constant and fluid state of change and 'becoming'. An audience might experience flow, layering and rupture musically, and they might also experience these in the thematic interplay between divergent cultural articulations. As the performer enacting these processes, becoming also

operates at additional levels. My mind and body are deterritorialised every few seconds by new ruptures to the performative flows that form.

It is an understatement to note that *Übermahlung und Frottage* is a challenging performance project. It challenges the boundaries between pre-existing musical forms, and between divergent lyrical/thematic articulations. It challenges the demarcation of musical disciplines, traversing D.J.ing and turntablism, mashup practice and the broader field of sample-based practice, and other forms of instrumentation. It is challenging for me mentally and physiologically as performer.

'Challenge' is a key concept in McKenzie's theoretical work on performance. In order to tie together the various yet intertwined concepts of performance (cultural, organisational and technological), McKenzie posits performance as issuing a challenge to existing formations of power and knowledge. The French thinker Michel Foucault formulated discipline as the fundamental organising principle of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>164</sup> The notion of 'discipline', however, reiterates existing formations, whereas the notion of 'performance' challenges and extends them.

While some may simply disregard the notion of discipline as inadequate, taking my cue from Deleuze (who offered an extensive study of Foucault's work), I need to reiterate the claim that "what Foucault recognised as well was the transience of the model".<sup>165</sup> The challenge of performance, then is to operate in the knowledge of established paradigms, but to constantly create lines of flight that might lead to new formations taking shape. In *Übermahlung und Frottage* performances, the complex alignment that exists between art and music demonstrates the need to depart from paradigms in which these modes might be considered to be distinct from one another.

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<sup>164</sup> Throughout his oeuvre, Foucault's primary interest is in subjectivity - that, for each formation of power and control in society, there are those who are marginalised by this formation (subjugated). In his major work *Discipline and Punish* (1977), for example, Foucault describes the prison system as a key outworking discipline to assert power, but he also finds evidence of discipline in schools, hospitals, military barracks and other places. Foucault frames the notion of discipline as underpinning power. For further discussion of Foucault's work on subjectivity, see *Not Acceptable*, p. 24.

<sup>165</sup> Deleuze, G. Postscript on the Societies of Control. *October*, 59, 1992, p. 3.

## The Challenge to Perform

In order to introduce his concept of the challenge to perform, McKenzie offers an in-depth analysis of a case study in which all three performance paradigms (cultural, organisational and technological) were at play concurrently - the launch (and subsequent tragic explosion of) the aptly named space shuttle Challenger in 1986. This 'line of flight' ultimately failed



in the high-performance mission that it was supposed to undertake. Picking up the fragments from the explosion (fig. 9), McKenzie analyses how the divergent imperatives that underpinned each of the different performance paradigms led to the tragic sequence of events that took place.

Fig. 9: The explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger, 1986.<sup>166</sup>

From a cultural perspective, the Challenger mission was to present a team that "looked like America", with a crew consisting of three American men of European descent, a Jewish-American woman, an African-American man, a Japanese-Hawaiian American man, and a Euro-American man.<sup>167</sup> From an organisational perspective, N.A.S.A.'s reputation had been established by responding to President J. F. Kennedy's 1961 imperative to land a man on the moon and bring him safely home again before the decade's end.<sup>168</sup> Technologically speaking, the mission was naturally a high-performance endeavour as well, the shuttle was the "world's first fully operational, reusable space craft, and its construction required the testing and evaluation of millions of individual components."<sup>169</sup> According to McKenzie's analysis, the failure of the mission boiled down to conflicts of interest between the cultural, organisational, and technological imperatives at play - a rubber O-Ring failed to seal and caused the explosion, but in the final decision making, that risk of technological failure was deemed to be outweighed by the risks of cultural and organisational failure. McKenzie's analysis indicates that in any given instance in which multiple performances are at play, certain imperatives will naturally take precedence over others, sometimes to dire consequence.

Alongside his factual analysis of the factors at play in the Challenger launch, McKenzie also rehearses Deleuze and Guattari's work and notes the words of a fictive character named

<sup>166</sup> Image source: <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/media/images/38748000/jpg/\\_38748433\\_challenger300.jpg](http://news.bbc.co.uk/media/images/38748000/jpg/_38748433_challenger300.jpg)>.

<sup>167</sup> McKenzie, 2002, p. 140.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

Professor Challenger,<sup>170</sup> who delivers a lecture on the subject of stratification. Professor Challenger offers a lecture which is on one hand “a discussion of stratification in rocks and organs and subjects”, but on the other hand a “demonstration of destratification, the creative breakdown and erosion of systems and forms.”<sup>171</sup> Later, McKenzie goes on to say that “[w]ords and acts are not joined in a harmonious ring, but are sealed together through ongoing contexts and struggles.”<sup>172</sup>

It is unlikely that anything would explode if I missed a note or misplaced a cultural reference during an Übermahlung und Frottage performance - I might clear a dancefloor, but no lives would be lost! Like the Challenger mission, however, there are multiple imperatives at play in this project (as with all of the other projects presented in this thesis). As with the Challenger mission, my project seeks to establish a line of flight that leaves solid ground and traverses between established territories and strata (traversing between art and music; traversing between so-called ‘high art’ and pop-culture; traversing between mashup practice, turntablism and other instrumentation).

Any line of flight encompasses the risk of failure. The themes of risk, difficulty, challenge and failure are common in performance practice, and they have existed as an undercurrent to my own work for a number of years. Übermahlung und Frottage is not about technical and mental difficulty *per se*, but since this level of challenge is immediately apparent to an audience, it becomes the *vehicle* by which they can connect with and understand the multiple factors that are at play. In my performances, I thus *embody* multiplicity and simultaneity. Übermahlung und Frottage iterates a complex, hybridised, multiple, and ever-changing process of becoming performer.

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<sup>170</sup> Professor Challenger is a character that Deleuze and Guattari recast from the science-fiction stories of Conan Doyle. Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, p. 40; McKenzie, 2002, p. 173.

<sup>171</sup> McKenzie, 2002, p. 173.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

**This is Not a Conclusion**

## This is Not a Conclusion

Performance, in all facets and understandings of the term, embodies the risk of its opposite: the failure to perform. My creative practice in this body of work, however, revolves around performances that mash up and recontextualise meanings, and that hybridise creative disciplines and contexts. In order to understand how performance operates in my creative work, we need to understand what types of performance are at play, how these performances might be documented and substantiated, and what are the imperatives that underpin these performances.

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated how all three types of performance (cultural, organisational and technological) are at play for each artwork. For all creative works in this thesis there are documented outcomes (my work is variously documented by multimedia material and passages of writing), but as I have noted, these documents are not interchangeable with the live experience of the performances that took place. I have noted the problematic nature of documenting these performances (audience experiences will differ because these projects traverse multiple contexts). The notions of 'performance' and 'document' are intertwined, but it is not possible to produce a resolved document that encompasses and captures all facets of my performance work. I can produce documents that offer snapshots of performance, but my live performances themselves are moving targets.

As I have demonstrated discursively throughout this body of work, the imperatives faced by my performance practice are irreducibly complex and multiple, and my work is underpinned by performance imperatives that commonly compete with one another. A document might reinforce and privilege some facets of performance, but at the same time it might undermine others.

In Chapter 1 of this thesis I discussed and reviewed a body of supplementary work: my first thesis submission *Not Acceptable* (which did not perform well in certain contexts); a draft of an academic paper that is pending editorial review (the performance of which is yet to be ascertained); and a draft paper (not yet reviewed) that is one of many documents that pertain to the open source film project *Stray Cinema*. These supplementary documents, whilst unresolved and incomplete in their own right, indicate the scope and complexity of the field - that performance is multi-faceted and in perpetual motion.

In Chapter 2, I presented the artwork *Breakfast Party at my Studio*, which was a hybrid of audiovisual mashup performance and networked performance. In this piece I mixed different pre-existing cultural texts together to create a new outcome (an audiovisual mix). Because of its networked nature, *Breakfast Party at my Studio* did not offer a singular,

definitive and authentic audience experience. One audience experienced the piece live, onsite, as I performed in front of them. Another audience experienced the piece in real-time, but at a remote location. A third audience (readers of this dissertation) experienced the piece as a new video document (a recording of remixed audiovisual content that excluded the audience interplay that took place at the time of the performance). For the audience attending onsite in my studio in Wellington, the experience was relatively informal. For the audience in Oxford, the piece was presented in a formal setting (an established art museum, as part of a workshop hosted by a renowned university). Readers of this thesis experience a different artwork again - an audiovisual mix, devoid of real-time audience presence, but framed by a performative written document. None of these experiences are prioritised over any other - all are equally valid and authentic experiences of my work. This piece demonstrates how performance is entirely contingent on context.

In Chapter 3 of this thesis I discussed the artwork *Flight of the Alphabet*. The piece is a mashup-derived outcome in its own right, conflating and juxtaposing two different pre-existing cultural products in order to activate multiple meanings. While the audio recording can, and does, operate as a stand-alone piece in other contexts, in this context my writing renders the nature of the work more ambiguous. Since the purported performance took place without an audience, the nature of the document (the audio recording) remains ambiguous. This project is not, however, a simple and didactic expose of the problematics of documentation *per se*. In the context of this thesis, the piece offers a mashup-like interplay between contexts (musical mashup performance and academic writing). My writing is thus performative, and it is an integral part of this version of the artwork. In order to undermine any hierarchies that might arise, this document (my thesis - encompassing both text and multimedia material), must be understood as performative in its own right too.

Chapter 4 commences with an audio recording captured from an early performance with my project *Übermahlung und Frottage*, and my writing framed that recording to act as a teaser for my live performances. In *Übermahlung und Frottage* I attempt to do a number of musical activities all at the same time (mixing samples, scratching on a turntable, and playing bass guitar). While *Übermahlung und Frottage* is a musical project at face value, I did not discuss it in musical terms *per se* in this dissertation, because the focus of this thesis is the hybridity of cultural modalities within my performance practice. Instead, I discussed the philosophical implications of mashup practice more broadly, highlighting how concepts which could be considered discrete (flow, layering and rupture) are actually inseparably intertwined. Applying Deleuzo-Guattarian thought, these concepts interrelate as 'becoming'. The process of becoming can be seen on a musical level, a broader cultural level, and also on a physiological and mental level for me as performer. I concluded this chapter by highlighting McKenzie's notion of the challenge to perform that underpins an

integrated understanding of my creative practice, describing my performative process as a continuous series of challenges and 'becomings'. This project demonstrates how performance is a field that is riddled with constant change and challenge.

This thesis, when taken as a whole, is a document of my sustained investigation into technologically mediated performance. My creative projects are performance-based, remix/mashup-derived and multi-context in nature. I traverse disciplines in order to create performance.

At the outset of his astute research, McKenzie makes the bold declaration that:

*"[p]erformance will be to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries what discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth, that is, an onto-historical formation of power and knowledge."*<sup>173</sup>

Performance is what happens when power and knowledge are iterated into a given situation in a given moment. While (in the eighteenth and nineteenth century) power and knowledge were framed according to discipline, which is a singular notion, performance (in our own time) is multiple.

In a cultural sense of the term, performance is traditionally construed as ephemeral. A person might either see a performance live, or they might miss it. Cultural performance exists to test the limits in a given moment, place and sociopolitical context. In my own technologically mediated cultural practice, performance tests these limits by hybridising cultural products, moments, places and sociopolitical contexts. As such, the assumed authenticity of the live (and unmediated) experience in performance is called into question. An iteration of performance can activate multiple meanings (which may operate in conflict with one another), it can occur in multiple times, places and contexts at the same time. Any iteration can also produce documentation which may resonate further into new times, places and contexts.

Deploying 'performance' in an organisational sense, the term also encompasses the testing of limits. In an organisational sense, however, performance is substantially less ephemeral than when the term is deployed in a cultural sense. Organisational performance encompasses generating tangible results, and there is a frequent need to leave a document behind to substantiate your achievements.

In a technological sense of 'performance', we think of how well a machine performs the task that it was designed for. In technologically mediated performance practice,

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<sup>173</sup> McKenzie, 2003, p. 18. Italics author's own.

connotations of the ephemeral return again. A machine might be the best performer available at a given moment, but then in the next moment it is outmoded and committed to landfill. An outmoded or glitchy performer in a technological sense may still facilitate high performance in a cultural sense.

The paradigm of discipline is not sufficient. By reducing the discussion to discipline-specificity, key facets of my project as a whole are overlooked, and it tends to create a rather dry, nit-picking form of analysis. This body of work is thus resistant to the very notion of discipline, and it cannot be adequately framed in that way. The paradigm of performance, however, is far more vibrant and colourful, because it enables numerous creative forms to be considered concurrently, and these forms can be enacted simultaneously for numerous and divergent contexts. Performance calls into question the very possibility of reaching a singular and conclusively integrated whole, because performance is *by definition* multiple and hybrid. As I noted in Chapter 4, the process of stratification is not constant, it is fluid and shifting - it entails simultaneously building upon certain formations and questioning others. Certain formations of new knowledge must surely raise more questions than they can possibly be expected to answer in any single articulation. It may be impossible to describe a new cultural formation using old frames of reference, but that does not undermine the cultural validity of these new forms. Artworks that are slippery and difficult to pin down are usually the most innovative cultural forms.

In all three senses of the term 'performance', formations of power and knowledge take place. When all three senses of performance are at play at once (as is the case with all of my works in this thesis), there is a lot for performer and audience to juggle, and the complexity escalates. The higher the level of challenge, the higher the risk of failure. The fact that the parameters are difficult to conclusively define, however, does not necessarily imply that a performance is a failure - if existing formations of power and knowledge are challenged, and we launch on a trajectory towards something new, then the performance has initiated a process of change and becoming. This means that, at least in a cultural sense, the performance has succeeded. It is the goal of most artists to expand and shift culture - to create new formations.

Performance is a cluster of moving fragments. I cannot exhaustively define what performance might entail and hit all of these targets. The interplay between liveness, mashup-derived works and their documentation offers new insights into the complexities of performance as a fluid, hybrid modality of cultural practice. In creating a document of my own performances, mapping some of the trajectories taken in my own creative practice, I challenge restrictive and narrow definitions of this cultural form. Despite more than five years of investigation into the subject, I definitively conclude that I *cannot* conclude with a simple and concise, singular and closed definition of what performance is.

*I can only conclude with three recurring questions: 'which performances are at play?', 'in which directions did the pieces fly?', and 'in which territories or strata might the pieces land?'*

This is not a conclusion, it is simply the end of a document.

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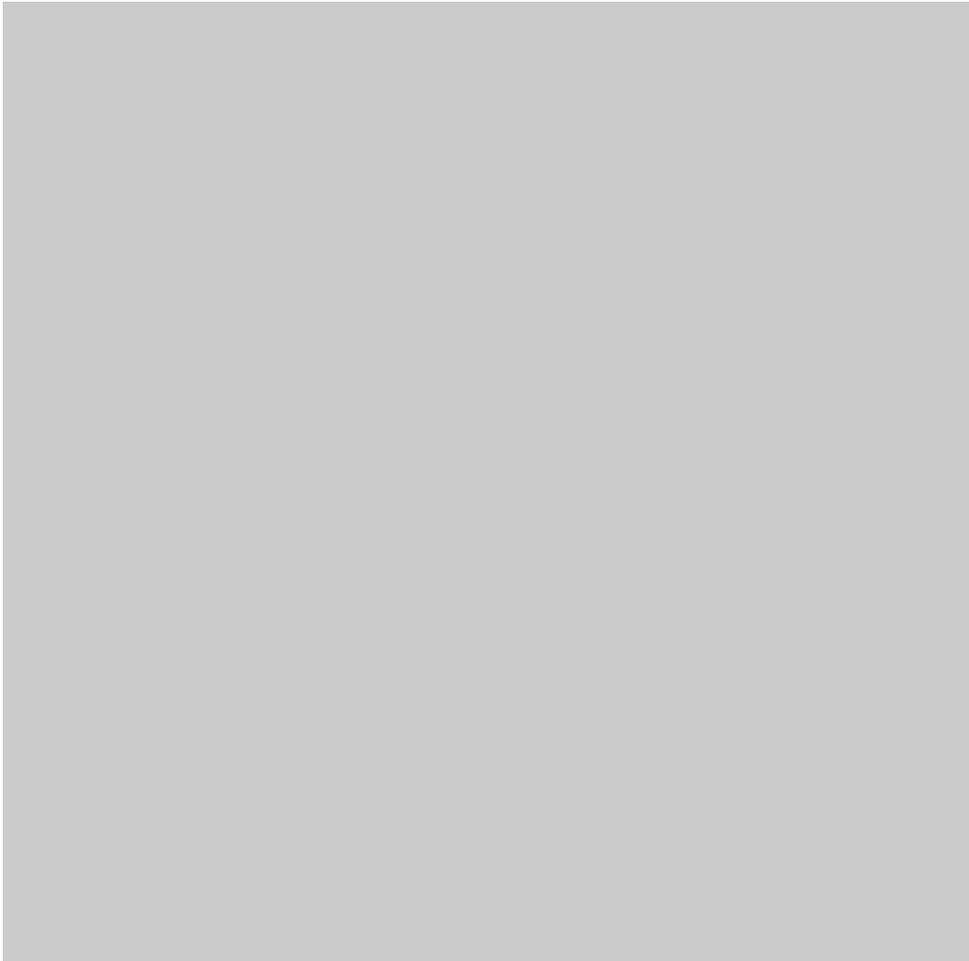
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## Image Sources

Fig.

- 1: My own image.
- 2: Photograph by Dominika Zielinska (<<http://www.dominikazielinska.com>>), used by permission.
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## Supplementary Research



Appendix 1: Dan Untitled, *Not Acceptable*, 2010 dissertation submission (not revised).

File: [appendicies/1-app1-not\\_acceptable.pdf](#)

Appendix 2: Dan Untitled, *Breakfast Party at my Studio*, 2011 paper submission (pending revisions).

File: [appendicies/2-app2-breakfast\\_party.pdf](#)

Appendix 3: Dan Untitled, *A Remixed Story of Stray Cinema*, 2011 draft of paper (not revised).

File: [appendicies/3-app3-stray\\_cinema.pdf](#)