THE   ROLE   OF THE THEATRE AUDIENCE

THE ROLE OF THE THEATRE AUDIENCE:

A THEORY OF PRODUCTION AND RECEPTION

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Parial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

January 1988

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (1988) McMASTER UNIVERSITY
(English) Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Role of the Theatre Audience: A Theory of
Production and Reception

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NUMBER OF PAGES: viii, 389

ABSTRACT

Th ; thesis examines the reception of theatrical performanc ; by their audience. Its starting points are (i) Brech s dramatic theory and practice, and (ii) theories o reading. These indicate the main emphases of the th ;is--theoretical approaches and performance practices, rather than the more usual recourse to dramatic ixts. Beyond Brecht and reader-response criticism, other studies of viewing are explored. Both semiotics ind post-structuralism have stimulated an intensity of interest in theatrical communication and such inves .gations provide an important impetus for my work.

In suggesting a theory of reception in the theatre, examine theatre's cultural status and the assumption underlying what we recognize as the theatrical event. The selection of a particular performanc is explored and from this, it is suggested that there .s an inevitable, inextricable link between the produc ive and receptive processes. The theory then looks to iore immediate aspects of the performance, including ie theatre building (its geographic location, architectu il style, etc.), the performance itself, and the post-p :formance rituals of theatre-going.

The thesis shows how cultural systems, individual horizons of expectations and accepted theatrical conventions all activate the reception process and that all these are open to revision in the experience of performance. The description of an individual's experience of a particular performance is not, however, the object of this study. Instead the concern has been with an individual's culturally-constructed expectations which can be both met and/or challenged in a diverse range of contemporary theatrical performances.

PREFACE

This study of theatre audiences looks both to the strategies of reception available to the audience and to the productive role such strategies often assume. It is, in this way, a study of both production and reception. My interest in the theatre audience has been provoked by recent theoretical developments, both in drama and more generally. Semiotic and performance theory in the field of drama have drawn attention to the central role of the theatre audience, and reader-response theory has, of course, foregrounded the act of reading. Yet, despite this renewed attention to reception, a full exploration of the audience and the theatre has been neglected.

It is for this reason that there is, in this study, an imbalance between my critical survey of existing theory and my own theorizing. This is considered a necessary imbalance. The extensive survey of other theoretical positions is important both to familiarize the reader with that work and to foreground the lacunae in these theories. Much of my concern results from the obvious difference between the theatre audience and those receivers more commonly studied, the reader of the novel or poem and the audience of the cinema.

Beyond the lacunae of the theorists, my interest has been stimulated by the diverse practices of "alternative" theatre. The development in the last thirty years of a flourishing alternative sector, offering drama outside, and often in opposition to, the conventional product of the "mainstream", a pre-scripted play performed in a recognized theatre space, has expanded the nature of theatre, and thus audience, open to study. Much of this contemporary alternative theatre foregrounds what Naturalist drama occludes, the audience. While mainstream theatre still often relies on the practices of Naturalist drama and almost always maintains that stage-auditorium relationship, alternative practice has generally sought different relationships and a much more active participation from its audience.

In mainstream theatre, the audience's activity centres on the interpretation of a fixed and finished product displayed in front of them; in alternative theatre, their role is rarely so predetermined and often relies on a much more direct relationship with performance and performers. Furthermore, the diversity of the theatre which represents an alternative to the products of dominant culture demands a flexibility in our notions of play, theatre, actor, and, of course, audience.

It is the lack of homogeneity in alternative theatre practice which interests me both as a member of theatre audiences and as a theorist concerned with the potential roles of producer and receiver. It is this interest in a diversity of performances in a diversity of venues which conditions this study. From difference in stage-audience relationships we can learn much about the role of audience whether in a major theatrical institution or as observer of an impromptu scene on the street corner. Certainly to relegate, or even ignore, the extensive audiences drawn from many social backgrounds to alternative theatre performances, would be to offer an incomplete study of the receptive strategies of the theatre audience.

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I. INTRODUCTION

> As for the audience,
> You are mistaken
> If you think subtle points
> Will not be taken.
> Such fears are vain, I vow;
> They've all got textbooks now -
> However high your brow,
> They won't be shaken (Aristophanes 196).

> Can theatre exist without an audience? At least
> one spectator is needed to make it a
> performance (Grotowski 32).

The participation of the audience in the theatrical event has been foregrounded by recent theatre theorists such as Jerzy Grotowski, but examples of an awareness by the playwright of the spectator's central role can be located in the earliest drama. David Bain's _Actors_ _and_ _Audience_ studies asides and related conventions in Greek drama to demonstrate a "compact between playwright and audience" (1) and it is evident from the intervention of the Chorus in the parodic battle between Aeschylus and Euripides that takes place in _The_ _Frogs_ that Aristophanes took into account the education and familiarity with dramatic convention of his audiences.

Aristophanes' attention to the audience is hardly surprising when the theatre was so clearly tied to all aspects of Athenian life. Its advent as part of

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the main Athenian religious festivals establishes the
drama as inextricably tied to the religious experience
of the involved spectator:

> the chorus in the orchestra shows that no
> physical barrier separated performer from
> audience; the presence among the spectators of
> the cult statue of a god [Dionysus] who might
> also be active on the stage further reveals
> that the absence of a physical barrier was
> matched by the absence of any 'spiritual'
> barrier. Stage, orchestra and auditorium
> formed a single unit and so too did actors,
> chorus and spectators, all of whom were
> sharing in a common act of devotion (Walcot 4-
> 5).

Greek theatre was also clearly inseparable from the
social, economic, and political structures of Athens.
Its social importance is apparent simply from the size
of an auditorium. With an estimated 14,000 people
attending the City Dionysia, theatre audiences
represented the majority, rather than the "educated
minority" of more recent years, and this is, of course,
appropriate to a social art form of Athenian democracy.
Not only its sheer size, but its architectural form
illustrates the theatre's centrality in Athens. The
building is what Richard Schechner terms a sociometric
design: "The Greek amphitheatre is open, beyond and
around it the city can be seen during performances which
take place in daylight. It is the city, the polis, that
is tightly boundaried geographically and ideologically"

(Essays 115).   The importance accorded to theatre is
further   substantiated   by   the   economic   support   it
received,   with   production costs largely met   by State
funds.

The plays themselves acted as another medium   in
the   political   debate.   Aristophanes   was   called before
Council in 426 for material that evidently went too far
in its satirical attack,   but this only "added zest to
the   attack   he   made on Cleon in the   Knights   in   424"
(Andrewes 248).   Phrynichus was less fortunate with his
tragedy about the capture of Miletus;   he "so moved the
audience   that   he   was fined by   the   authorities   'for
reminding   the   city of the sorrows   of   its   brothers'"
(Arnott 58).   In   an   oral   culture,   the   potential
political   impact   of theatre,   playing to such a   large
(and   thus popular) audience,   is self-evident but   the
placing of the plays in a competitive situation   where
"the   judges   were not likely to be indifferent   to   the
reactions,   favourable or unfavourable, of the audience"
(Walcot   2) appears,   again appropriately for the demo-
cratic   Athens,   to   allow   the   receivers   of   any
politically-propagandist   message   to participate   in
determining its validity.

Greek   theatre,   then,   clearly shows   a   direct
relationship to the society it addresses and,   at every

level, includes the audience as active participant. While theatre has never again been so closely involved in the economic, political and social structures of a community, its existence remains dependent on those same structures. The survival of theatre is economically tied to a willing audience (not only those people paying to sit and watch a performance but often those who approve a government or corporate subsidy) and any new directions in the shape of both new playwrighting and new performance techniques depend precisely on that audience. As Alan Sinfield points out: "Any artistic form depends upon some readiness in the receiver to co-operate with its aims and conventions" (185). Even in his "Poor Theatre," "scientifically" stripped to its essentials, Grotowski recognizes the audience as a crucial part of the theatrical process. Yet dramatic theory has largely neglected the role of the receiver, the process of audience response.

While the community nature of Greek theatre might be expected to have fostered an interest in the spectator's contribution, the earliest, and most influential, theorists paid scant attention to this central aspect of their theatre. In Aristotle's Poetics, the audience is chiefly of interest in so far as they prove the power of good tragic texts/

performances. In Horace's _Ars Poetica_, the audience is marked as the recipient of the poets' work: "Poets intend to give either pleasure or instruction/or to combine the pleasing and instructive in one poem" (333-334). As Aristotle's _Poetics_ became a prescriptive text for the form of tragedy, so Horace's dictum of delight and instruct has been used to judge the merits or otherwise of subsequent drama.

It is not the intention of this study to offer a historical survey of the drama theorist's attention to audience, but the fact that interpretations of Aristotle and Horace have dominated much of our dramatic theory and their ideas became, in one form or another, rules for the dramatist to follow has confined audience to only a cursory importance and a passive role (what the drama _does_ to them). Most dramatic theory has been concerned with aesthetic formalism, rather than the spectators' demands and expectations, as a shaping element of both playscript and performance practice. It is the case that most theory concerns itself with the nature and form of the playwright's text rather than with modes of performance and reception. This neglect of the interactive process of theatre might well be a result of the continuing influence of Aristotle's _Poetics_ and his edict that spectacle is the least

germane part of poetry (29). Furthermore, Aristotle's Poetics ends with a defence of tragedy over epic, positing, among other reasons, the idea that tragedy can achieve the same effects when merely read.

With the emergence in the nineteenth century of the stage director, however, performance concerns emerge as central to dramatic theory. The new directors provided theories as well as productions, and with less academic and more pragmatic interests, the audience's role came increasingly into focus. A director's intervention in the conscious creation of a mise — en — scène drew attention to components of theatrical communication apart from language, chiefly the scenic continuum and the plasticity of the actor. This attention to what takes place on stage, however, refers back to the authority of the text and, perhaps not surprisingly, coincides with the theatre that epitomized closed performance and thus the theoretical complete passivity of the audience: the theatre of Naturalism. This passivity, indeed almost exclusion, of the audience is a crucial requirement as dramatist/theorist Jean Jullien makes clear in his text, Le théâtre vivant. Jullien demands his actors perform "as if at home, ignoring the emotions they arouse in the public" and that the audience "remain attentive and no longer dare to speak"

(cited in Carlson 280). Obviously, then, the intended role for the audience of Naturalist theatre was to be consumer of the picture of a fixed and finished world.

It is only in reaction to this closed world of Naturalism that theatre foregrounds the role of the audience. In the theatre practice that followed Naturalism, the audience is acknowledged as an important aspect of the dramatic process and the spectator was confronted, often co-opted, into a more direct role in the theatrical event. The reaction to Naturalism came in a number of forms, but the new attention paid to the audience can be clearly seen in the ideas of Futurist Filippo Marinetti who sought amazement and surprise as the effects of his new art. Michael Kirby describes how, according to Marinetti's Variety Theatre manifesto, the audience was constantly to be taken off guard by such devices as "the use of itching and sneezing pow-ders, coating some of the auditorium seats with glue, provoking fights and disturbances by selling the same seat to two or more people" (23). Marinetti sought to replace the sought-after passivity of fourth-wall-removed Naturalism with a theatre which resembled smoke-filled nightclubs in the creation of "a single undivided ambience for performers and spectators" (Kirby 22). The title of the 1913 manifesto came from Marinetti's

admiration for variety theatre "because its spectators actively responded during the performance with indications of approval or disdain, rather than waiting passively until the curtain went down to applaud" (Kirby 23).

Less extreme, but more important for his immediate influence on theatre practice and theory, is the work of Meyerhold. His earliest writings challenge the conventions and underlying assumptions of Naturalist theatre and pay direct attention to the participatory role of audience:

> How did medieval drama succeed without any stage equipment? Thanks to the lively imagination of the spectator.
>
> The naturalistic theatre denies not only the spectator's ability to imagine for himself, but even his ability to understand clever conversation. Hence, the painstaking analysis of Ibsen's dialogue which makes every production of the Norwegian dramatist tedious, drawn-out and doctrinaire (27).

The 1917 production of Lermontov's Masquerade by Meyerhold shows two important things: first how the creation of the mise-en-scène had taken over from the author's text as the crucial aspect in the signifying process -- the play "had been in preparation and intermittently rehearsed for five years"! (Braun in Meyerhold 79) and, second, Meyerhold's determination to exaggerate the trappings of Naturalist theatre in order to take the

theatrical experience beyond the fourth-wall removed and into the audience:

> As well as the many settings and costumes, Golovin designed all the furniture, china, glassware, candelabra, swords, walking-canes, fans -- everything down to the last playing-card. Not a single item was taken from stock and everything of significance was made slightly over life-size in order to produce the required impact on the spectator . . . . [T]he auditorium lighting was left on throughout the performance. Tall mirrors flanked the proscenium opening, in order to break down with their reflections the barrier between stage and audience (Braun in Meyerhold 79-80).

Meyerhold's theatre practice and theory were both in continual evolution and showed their awareness of the shifts in the ideological base of Russian society. He writes in 1920, concerning his production of Verhaeren's The Dawn: "We have a new public which will stand no nonsense -- each spectator represents, as it were, Soviet Russia in microcosm . . . . Now we have to protect the interests not of the author but of the spectator. The interests of the audience have assumed a vital significance" (170-171). And, once again, it is Naturalism which is blamed for suppressing the (rightful) participation of the audience:

> I am delighted that we have got our spectator who says to us: this is our theatre. I don't think there is much likelihood of the Red Army taking its banners along to Uncle Vanya when it can come to productions which it looks on as its own. More than anyone, the Moscow Art Theatre is to blame for the passivity of the

spectator whom it held in thrall for so long (174).

The overt politicization of theatre in this century is clearly a factor in this foregrounding of audience and the ideological implications of committed theatre for audience reception will be explored in following chapters.

Meyerhold's production of The Dawn took place in a virtually derelict theatre; no admission was charged, and "[t]he chorus was assisted in the task of guiding and stimulating audience reaction by a claque of actors concealed throughout the audience" (Braun in Meyerhold 163). The Dawn, and its companion in repertoire, Mayakovsky's Mystery-Bouffe, marked Meyerhold's success at demystifying the technical apparatus of theatre. All the trappings of commercial theatre were eschewed in favour of non-illusionistic staging and politically relevant scenic components (such as placards and leaflets). His final breaking of the traditional barrier of the proscenium provided, as Edward Braun points out, "an additional advantage . . . that this implied a polemic against the bourgeois theatre of escapism and illusion" (Director and the Stage 39). In the closing act of Mystery-Bouffe, "the action spilled into the boxes adjacent to the stage, and at the conclusion the audience was invited to mingle with the

actors onstage" (Braun in Meyerhold 166). This production achieved the (political) contract between script, actor, and audience that Meyerhold had been seeking for his theatre. The Dawn and Mystery-Bouffe were seen by 120,000 spectators in five months (Braun in Meyerhold 166) and this provided tangible evidence that his theatre without illusion, but with the co-operation (albeit manipulated at a certain level) of the audience, had achieved its aims.

The work of Meyerhold is described here at some length as, both in theory and practice, he attacked the hegemony of text-centered criticism as well as "denarrativizing" productions and drawing the audience from being passive addressees to co-creators. In 1930 he wrote:

> Nowadays, every production is designed to induce audience participation: modern dramatists and directors rely not only on the efforts of the actors and the facilities afforded by the stage machinery but on the efforts of the audience as well. We produce every play on the assumption that it will be still unfinished when it appears on the stage. We do this consciously because we realize that the crucial revision of a production is that which is made by the spectator.
>
> The author and the director regard all the work which they carry out on a production simply as preparation of the ground on which those two vital theatrical forces, the actor and the spectator, will work daily in the course of the performance. The author and the director provide no more than the framework,

and it must not cramp or hinder the actor and
the spectator, but encourage them to work
harmoniously together. We directors and
dramatists know that what we prescribe during
rehearsals is only an approximation: the final
realization and consolidation of the
production is carried out by the audience in
co-operation with the actor (256).

This new interest in audience sparked by the
rejection of Naturalist theatre practice has, in the
twentieth century, become an obsession. Both written
texts and performance techniques at the forefront of
theatre's development have shown a growing absorption
with the relationship of their art to those who view it
in an active relationship in the theatre. Yet this has
still not inspired much theoretical attention.
Criticism has remained, by and large, text-oriented and,
as a brief survey of some of the central analyses of the
theatrical event published in Britain and North America
in the last thirty years makes all too obvious,
discussions of audience reception have remained simple
and cursory.

In recent years, many discussions of what
constitutes drama have been published and, as their
titles often suggest (for example, J.L. Styan's Elements
of Drama (1960) and Martin Esslin's An Anatomy of Drama
(1976)), these books attempt to account for all the
components of the dramatic experience, from the author's
creation of a text to the critical reception of text-in-

performance. However, Eric Bentley's The Life of the Drama all but ignores the presence of audience, except to note that its "involvement is not an innocent one" (156) and that "if one took from theatre the element of voyeurism, the occasion would lose much of its appeal" (56). Generally, however, the audience constitutes one chapter of such an investigation and is identified as an important contributor to the social act. Esslin's summary is typical: "Drama is the most social of the art forms: it is, by its very nature, a collective creation: the playwright, the actors, the designer, the costume-maker, the provider of props, the lighting engineer all contribute, and so does the audience by its very presence" (33).

Discussions of audience tend to be contained within a communication model of script--actor--audience with the communication operating bi-directionally. Styan emphasizes: ". . . it is clearly as important to know what is being returned by the spectator to the actor, and by the actor to the script, as to know the intentions of the script in the first place. Arguably, intentions are of no consequence whatsover" (7). Even with an obviously tentative devaluing of the author's contribution, attention to the reception process is signalled. On the other hand, Bernard Beckermann

identifies "a three-way communication: between the play, the individual and collective audience. The play projects doubly, to each member of the audience as an individual, sparking his or her private memories, and to the audience as a whole, in that distinctive configuration that it has assumed for a particular occasion" (133).   Most common has been discussion of the feelings and perceptual processes that take place within a theatre audience.   As the collective nature of theatre is stressed, so its links in ritual are traced; for Esslin "in ritual as in drama the aim is an enhanced level of consciousness, a memorable insight into the nature of existence"(28).   Theodore Shank makes a similar claim: "[the dramatic work] articulates for the audience something vital about their own emotive lives that previously they had not been able to grasp" (Art 172).   The work of Susanne Langer (in particular, Feeling and Form) has certainly been influential in many of these studies in establishing "the essential product of all poetic art . . . [as] an illusion of the processes of human life" (Carlson 435), and these theorists thus explore the various states of receptiveness of an audience necessary for them to respond, if not contribute, to this dramatic aim. For Styan, there are, among other things, varieties of dramatic tension

which "challenge the decorum of an audience" (233) and thus awaken their receptive powers. Shank suggests that it is an intuitive process that the audience undertakes when watching a play, akin to (what he calls) the "intuition which causes the artist to know what choices to make during the creative process" (Art 190). These texts stress the audience's role as contributor rather than collaborator.

The expansion of performance art and theory (which has devalued language/texts in favour of the event), as well as the increase in politically-committed drama, has, however, changed the emphasis of dramatic theories in the last twenty years. Esslin's "anatomy" shows this well: "[theatre] in very practical terms teaches them [the audience], or reminds them of, its codes of conduct, its rules of social coexistence. All drama is therefore a political event: it either re-asserts or undermines the code of conduct of a given society" (29). Beckermann more generally observes: "The random audience, nourished by the mass media and universal education, may be evolving into a new communal type. If so, the theater artist will have to learn what its predispositions are and how to deal with them" (136). As in other areas, however, the implications of the relationship between theatre as cultural

institution, sharing or challenging the dominant ideology, and the audience's collaboration in the maintenance or attempt to overthrow that ideology are not explored in any detail. It is a relationship which, as the later discussions in this study of Brecht and other politically committed dramatists will show, has come increasingly into theatrical focus in recent years. The more generalized theories of dramatic components which dominated for some thirty years (to the mid-1970s), however, avoided any overt political statements. In their conservative humanism, they echo the earlier literary criticism of Arnold, Eliot, and Richards in directing the dramatic transmission to those in the right state of receptiveness (in other words to those with beliefs, levels of education and literary "sensitivity" which more or less match those of the writer and/or director) with the purpose of some general cultural and intellectual benefit.

Dramatic theory, in the last ten years, has seen the rise of two dominant "schools," and has finally given emphasis to the need for a more developed audience reception theory. The first of these "schools" to emerge was performance theory. Performance theorists responded to mainstream North American theatre theorists who berated the devaluation (or even total rejection) of

the text by performance artists as the final straw in the alienation of audiences, sending them to the (culturally-inferior) entertainments of cinema and television. As in much of performance work, performance theory was also an attempt to explore the long maintained, but little examined, theory of mimesis of real life in art.

Richard Schechner and Mady Schuman's collection of essays, Ritual, Play and Performance, reveals in its subtitle, Readings in the Social Sciences/Theater, the methodological base of performance theory. Richard Schechner describes the theory in his introduction as a web consisting of:

> (1) shamanism, and hunting rites and practices in their prehistoric phases, (2) shamanism and hunting rites and practices in their historic phases, (3) origins of theatre in Eurasia, (4) origins of modern European theatre in the middle ages, (5) contemporary experiments in environmental theatre, New Dance, and music, (6) psychotherapies that emphasize dialog, acting through, and body work, (7) ethological studies of play and ritual, especially in primates, (8) performance in everyday life, (9) play and crisis behavior in people, especially children and adolescents (xv).

Within this web, theory from non-literary studies--as diverse as Huizinga's writings on the significance of play, Victor Turner's work on social dramas and ritual, and Jane Goodall's research on the behavioural patterns of chimpanzees--is investigated in an attempt to replace

paradigms for dramatic theory that are seen as outmoded.
From such studies of the social sciences, new paradigms
are constructed and, among these, the audience emerges
as a tangibly active creator in the theatrical event:

> Along with the artist, the audience enters the
> performance arena as participant--or, ideally,
> the audience disappears as the distinction
> between doer and viewer . . . begins to blur.
> For this the tribal/oral is a particularly
> clear model, often referred to by the creators
> of 1960's [sic] happenings and the theatrical
> pieces that invited, even coerced, audience
> participation toward an ultimate democratizing
> of the arts (Rothenberg 14).

Characteristic of the emergent interests of the
1970s, democratization is seen as a desirable, indeed
crucial, aspect of new developments in performance and
theory. The sociological/psychological/anthropological
studies of Victor Turner and Erving Goffman using
theatrical paradigms to describe universal patterns
suggest to Schechner "a universal dramatic structure
parallel to social process: drama is that art whose
subject, structure and action is social process" (Essays
121). Elizabeth Burns' Theatricality provides a full-
length study of the social processes which both inform
and constitute drama. It is indicative of the
hermetical nature of dramatic theory in English that her
opening chapter includes some exposition of her use of
theory from the sociology of theatre which she remarks
is "even less known in Britain and America than the

rather tenuous thread of sociological writings on literature which are connected with the names of Georg Lukács, Ernst Auerbach, Lucien Goldmann, Robert Escarpit, Umberto Eco, and Eduardo Sanguineti" (5).

Schechner notes that any everyday process or any community ritual can be staged as theatrical event "because context, not fundamental structure, distinguishes ritual, entertainment, and ordinary life, from each other. The differences among them arise from the agreement (conscious or unexpressed) between performers and spectators" (in Schechner & Shuman 217-218). In order to bring theatre closer to efficacy (ritual), new ways of involving the audience in the creativity of the event are sought. Schechner's own company, TPG (The Performance Group), carried out many experiments to this end. One involved the establishment of real time and regular time audiences. The real time audiences were invited to the theatre at the same time as the performers arrived and thus were involved in all that constituted the theatrical event from the unlocking of the theatre through costuming and make-up to the arrival of the regular time audience, and on to the clearing-up process and the final shutting of the theatre. This, Schechner states, was "an attempt to make both performers and audiences aware of the over-

lapping but conceptually distinct realities of drama, script, theatre and performance" (Essays 44). He continues:

> Too little study has been made of the liminal approaches and leavings of performance--how the audience gets to, and into, the performance place, and how they go from that place; and in what ways this gathering/dispersing is related to the preparations/cooling-off aspects of the performers' work. The coming and going of both audience and performers guarantees (in Goffman's usage) the existence of the "theatrical frame" so that events can be experienced as actual realizations: in other words, the reality of performance is in the performing; a spectator need not intervene in the theatre to prevent murder as he might feel compelled to in ordinary life--this is because the violence on stage is actually a performance. That doesn't make it "less real" but "different" real (Essays, 122).

Thus performance theory brings into play aspects of audience reception hitherto ignored. The introduction of such "liminal aspects" to the process of reception complicates the more traditional concerns about the audience's perception of the play performance.

The other dominant school of current dramatic theory, that of semiology, also pays a new attention to the multivalent components of theatre (not simply what takes place on the stage, or even in the auditorium) and their interaction in the signifying process. The Prague School, working from both Russian Formalist and Saussurian linguistic theory, marks, in the 1930s and

40s, the first semiotic examination of theatre.
Mukařovský's essay, "On the Current State of the Theory
of the Theatre," written in 1941, is indicative of the
questions examined and the problems identified.
Mukarovsky discusses "individual components and their
relations in the total structure of a stage work" (209)
and, in an analysis that shows how these components
break down into secondary components which again can be
broken into other constituents (207) and in which one
component has the capability of substitution for
another, there is the implicit understanding that only
the audience is a primary given in establishing a
particular structure as a play. He groups the problems
for theatre theory in four categories--dramatic text,
dramatic space, actor, and audience.

Concerning audience Mukařovský writes:

[T]he roles of the actor and the spectator are
much less distinguished than it might seem at
first glance. Even the actor to a certain
extent is a spectator for his partner at the
moment when the partner is playing; in
particular, extras who do not intervene
actively in the play are distinctly perceived
as spectators. The inclusion of actors among
the audience becomes quite apparent, for
example, when a comedian makes a co-actor
laugh by his performance. Even if we are
aware that such laughter can be intentional
(in order to establish active contact between
the stage and the auditorium), we cannot but
realize that at such a moment the boundary
between the stage and the auditorium runs
across the stage itself: the laughing actors
are on the audience's side (218-219).

Mukařovský's essay provides a useful study of the contradictions and tensions that inform what appear to be quite individual components in a theatrical event and, as might be expected from a member of the Prague School, he finds that the organization of these theatrical components takes on the appearance of:

> a structure which freely hovers before the spectator's eyes and consciousness without being bound unequivocally to existential reality by any of its components but thereby figuratively signifying all of the reality which surrounds and creates man of a given period and society (219).

Despite this conclusion by Mukařovský, which certainly foregrounds the research potential for theatre semioticians, it was only in the late 1960s that semiotics emerged as an important theoretical base for theatre studies. Since that time, however, the work of semioticians has covered almost every aspect of the theatrical event. Some studies have concerned themselves with specific components of theatre--such as Anne Ubersfeld's <u>Lire</u> <u>Le</u> <u>Théâtre</u> (a semiotic analysis of the written dramatic text) and Mihai Dinu's mathematical analysis of character configurations in "The Algebra of Scenic Situations"--while others have attempted a more complete semiotic analysis of theatrical communication-- such as the work of Girard, Ouellet and Rigault in <u>L'Univers</u> <u>du</u> <u>Théâtre</u> and of Keir Elam in <u>The</u> <u>Semiotics</u>

of Theatre and Drama. The actual result of these diverse semiotic readings of theatre has not been the original target of these investigations: that is, they have not produced a model by which a complete analysis of performance can be constructed; they have instead recognized that this initial target was not necessarily desirable. The work, by virtue of its own plurality, has, however, provided a more thorough understanding of the plurality of signifying processes that take place in the theatre. Patrice Pavis writes:

> Semiology in no way resembles a machine or a technique meant to produce ready-made discourses about a text or the stage. It is necessary in fact to construct this analytical machine which is not preconceived and which has to be built up according to the theatrical subject studied. To analyze the codes and signifying systems of a performance is not to rediscover what the author and director had previously established secretly, once and for all. It is to organize the performance and the text as a possible circuit of meaning whose productivity and coherence are more or less great according to the theatre event in question, but also according to the analyst (Languages of the Stage 195).

Despite this breadth of semiotic interest, the audience has been as neglected as elsewhere in theoretical work. As Marvin Carlson (508) points out, Keir Elam's book devotes only 9 of 210 pages to an examination of audience. We might add that the more "traditional" study of J.L. Styan, Drama, Stage and Audience, devotes a similar percentage, 18 of 247 pages.

Elam, for his part, discusses the primary condition of audience as "the ability to recognize the performance as such" (87) and in this way it signals, or permits, the performance itself. Their part in a model of theatrical communication is two-fold:

> audience reaction . . . exerts a double influence, on the performance itself and on its reception. Spectator-performer communication will affect, if nothing else, the degree of the actor's commitment to his work. Spectator-spectator communication, meanwhile, usually ignored as a semiotic factor, has three main effects, important to an overall homogeneity of response: stimulation (laughter in one part of the auditorium provokes a similar reaction elsewhere), confirmation (spectators find their own responses reinforced by others) and integration (the single audience member is encouraged, in consequence, to surrender his individual function in favour of the larger unit of which he is part).

> It is with the spectator, in brief, that theatrical communication begins and ends (96-97).

Semioticians have undoubtedly subjected drama and performance to a more rigorous examination of all constitutive elements (and without the controlling bias towards performance aspects of the Schechner school) but, as Pavis realizes, "we are still at the stage of proclamations about the audience's activity and participation and have in no way arrived at the point of reflection on the cognitive and ideological processes of the spectator" (Languages of the Stage, 71). The

difficulty in moving from "the stage of proclamations" to the positing of theory is self-evident in those proclamations we have examined. The audience clearly plays a role in the theatre, but what kind of role? What constitutes the theatrical event in which they play that part? In what way do the liminalities of performance bear upon the communication model of the performance itself? In a self-conscious communication-orientated theatre (such as Schechner's TPG or The Living Theater of Beck and Malina), the audience's role is, at least in some ways, visible but in theatre demanding the (theoretically) more or less total passivity of the audience, how can their relationship to the self-contained dramatic world be described? Many of the problems stem from the ephemeral nature of performance. But these problems suggest that what a theory of audience reception needs is not the neglect it has historically received, but a systematic, if cautious, approach that would make clearer the relation-ship between the art form we acknowledge as drama and the audience, both locally and at large, that supports it. Elizabeth Burns writes:

> During the course of the history of the theatre first dramatists, then actors and, at the present time [1972], producers have been in ascendance. But the position of the audience, however much its social structure may have altered, has remained constant.

> Although at different periods it has been less
> or more articulate, either vocally or in
> writing, it has always held the power of
> making or breaking a play by attendance or
> abstention, and has always been ultimately
> responsible for sustaining the performance.
> In the larger society from which the audience
> is drawn, the theatre depends for its being on
> the preservation of a conception of drama that
> assigns it to some position central to
> contemporary culture (184-185).

In short, drama depends on its audience. Bernard Dort has written of the rise to power of the director as a historical phenomenon which brought about a shift in interest from text to production plan but which subordinated "all of the other workers in the theatre" (62). He suggests, however, that:

> the rise of the director and the acceptance of
> the performance as the actual site of meaning
> (not as the translation or decoration of a
> text) represent only the initial phase . . . .
> I shall call it the progressive emancipation
> of the elements of the theatrical performance:
> it implies a change of structure in the
> performance--the abandonment of an organic
> unity laid down in advance, and the choice of
> a meaningful polyphony open to the spectator
> (63-64).

The liberated performance which Dort identifies places yet another demand on an expanding dramatic theory to ask questions and to make proclamations about audience reception. The need for a methodology that takes account of the many disparate statements and investigations has become more acute. It is the intention of my study to offer such an assembly of

existing statements from theory and performance, and to look to a more comprehensive understanding of the audience's involvement in the theatrical event.

Dramatic practice, unlike theory, has always been concerned, for the reasons Burns suggests, with the involvement of the audience. The playwright invariably shapes a text and the director invariably shapes a production to provoke particular expectations and responses within an audience. The interactive nature of theatre is particularly evident from the rewriting a playwright often chooses (or is called) to do while a play is in rehearsal and from the cuts or changes a director makes after previews, try-outs or, indeed, during a run. Clearly, then, the audience affects not only the performance but the dramatic text itself. In this study, however, it is intended to concentrate on the audience's relationship with performance (or, at least, text-in-performance) rather than with specific dramatic texts. While the structure of dramatic texts represents an important field of study, it is important to consider theatre as more than the on-stage rendition of previously written texts.

Much contemporary theatre occurs without a text available for academic study and deliberately so. The last twenty-five years has seen an explosion of new

theatres, companies and performance methods. Alongside the mainstream (the buildings, plays and productions that the dominant cultural system recognizes as theatre), there exists a diverse and prolific alternative theatre. In order to discuss the receptive process of a theatre audience it is necessary to look beyond traditional relationships and to consider reception in light of the many disparate production methods existing today. Two theoretical positions provide an obvious starting-point. The first is the work of Brecht. As Dort and many others suggest, Brecht's theoretical explorations and dramatic practice have had a profound influence in showing us "the image of a non-unified performance, where the various elements collaborate, or even vie with one another, rather than losing themselves in the construction of a common meaning" (Dort 66). The second is the work of reader-response theorists whose research, while almost entirely neglecting the dramatic genre, surely lends itself to a study of reception not only in the private world of the individual but also in the community of the theatre audience.

II. STARTING-POINTS

1. Brecht

The work of Brecht, both as playwright and theoretician, is clearly important for any study of audience/play relations. His ideas for a theatre with the power to provoke social change, along with his attempts to reactivate stage-audience exchange, have had a widespread and profound effect not only on theatre practice, but also on critical responses to plays and performance.

Brecht's epic theatre looked, above all, to change the conventional modes of production and reception. All the technical developments to promote what Brecht terms, in The Messingkauf Dialogues, "a theatre of the scientific age" (105) were devised with the intention of provoking a critical, yet entertained, audience. Walter Benjamin describes the process:

> A double object is provided for the audience's interest. First, the events shown on stage; these must be of such a kind that they may, at certain decisive points, be checked by the audience against its own experience. Second, the production; this must be transparent as to its artistic armature. . . . Epic theatre addresses itself to interested parties "who do not think unless they have a reason to." Brecht is constantly aware of the masses, whose conditioned use of the faculty of thought is surely covered by this formula. His effort to make the audience interested in the theatre as experts--not at all for

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cultural reasons--is an expression of his
political purpose (15-16).

The idea of a theatre engaging an audience for other
than "cultural reasons" was one which not only made
clear theatre's diminishing importance and failure to
connect with the issues of the time, but further
revealed theatre as a social institution supported by
and reflecting the dominant ideology. In this way, epic
theatre reactivated stage-audience relations in an
overtly political context. Benjamin talks of it shaking
"the social validity of theatre-as-entertainment by
robbing it of its function within the capitalist system"
(9) and certainly Brecht's theory and practice raise the
issue of the ideological status of theatre and of the
political undertaking, either implicit or explicit, of
an audience.

A concern with the audience for epic theatre is
an intrinsic part of all Brecht's theoretical writings.
In A Short Organum for the Theatre, Brecht points out
how contemporary practice frustrated a direct relation-
ship between stage and audience: "[t]he theatre as we
know it shows the structure of society (represented on
the stage) as incapable of being influenced by society
(in the auditorium)" (Willett 189). To counteract this,
Brecht proposes a more immediate and interactive
theatre:

The bare wish, if nothing else, to evolve an art fit for the times must drive our theatre of the scientific age straight out into the suburbs, where it can stand as it were wide open, at the disposal of those who live hard and produce much, so that they can be fruitfully entertained there with their great problems. They may find it hard to pay for our art, and immediately to grasp the new method of entertainment, and we shall have to learn in many respects what they need and how they need it; but we can be sure of their interest. For these men who seem so far apart from natural science are only apart from it because they are being forcibly kept apart; and before they can get their hands on it they have first to develop and put into effect a new science of society; so that these are the true children of the scientific age, who alone can get the theatre moving if it is to move at all (Willett 186).

Brecht is always aware of the theatre's need to be "geared into reality" (Willett 186) in order for it to make contact with the widest audience. He makes it clear, however, that this demand is not met by simple representation of reality on the stage. Ibsen's Ghosts and Hauptmann's The Weavers (both of which evoked strong critical reaction at the time of their first performances) are cited by Brecht as plays which provide no more than a setting. In this way, Brecht argues, their usefulness is limited. An audience can only learn/ask questions about that particular situation and does not explore any relationship between this slice of life and their own social reality. The characters of these plays, Brecht suggests, do not interact with the

audience; their "feelings, insights and impulses . . . are forced on us" (Willett 190). Identification with the psychological experience of the characters is fostered, and the audience is concerned with issues of individual morality rather than an examination of larger social structures. Furthermore, the acting style of Naturalist theatre excludes audience intervention. As the Philosopher of The Messingkauf Dialogues remarks with typical cynicism: "Ah yes, then the audience is tacitly assuming that it's not in a theatre at all, since nobody seems to take any notice of it. It has an illusion of sitting in front of a keyhole. That being so it ought not to applaud till it starts queuing for its hats and coats" (51). Yet Brecht's comments constitute more than a critique of the aesthetic form of Naturalism. They question the ideology underlying the accepted codes of cultural production and reception.

In a published letter written more than twenty years before A Short Organum, Brecht declared his intention to counteract current theatre practice which privileged the beliefs of an elite. He writes:

> This generation doesn't want to capture the
> theatre, audience and all, and perform good or
> merely contemporary plays in the same theatre
> and to the same audience; nor has it any
> chance of doing so; it has a duty and a chance
> to capture the theatre for a different
> audience. The works now being written are

coming more and more to lead towards that
great epic theatre which corresponds to the
sociological situation; neither their content
nor their form can be understood except by the
minority that understands this. They are not
going to satisfy the old aesthetics; they are
going to destroy it (Willett 21-22).

"The old aesthetics" may not have been
destroyed, but Brecht's attack laid bare a previously
covert relationship between theatre and the dominant
ideology which supported it. As a Marxist, Brecht
clearly sought to establish an oppositional cultural
practice. Both theoretical and practical investigations
show his enthusiastic interest in making this work
accessible to the widest (mass) audience. Indeed the
search for a new audience from a different (larger)
social group was a crucial part of Brecht's theatre
practice. His political convictions influenced every
aspect of his dramaturgy, as Iring Fetscher notes:

even as a Marxist theoretician Brecht was a
practical writer, whose reflections on
theories and relationships were never divorced
from the possibilities of the theater (as his
basic reality) or political exigencies (of the
Soviet Union, of the Second World War, of the
danger of war during the period of the cold
war). . . . Brecht wanted to make practical
what he had heard. He was interested only in
the kind of thinking that converts into action
(15-16).

Brecht's investigations toward such theatre has
left a corpus of theoretical work at least as valuable
as the plays themselves. The chronological arrangement

of John Willett's <u>Brecht</u> <u>on</u> <u>Theatre</u> shows well how Brecht's ideas and assumptions were always in process rather than constituting a fixed theory against which performance might be judged. Indeed, Brecht argued against Lukács' preference for the model of nineteenth-century realism precisely on the grounds that a historically fixed system could not continue to make contact with its audience in the changing conditions of social reality.

Brecht's revolutionary theatre was not, of course, the first to oppose the codes and assumptions of cultural institutions. The declaration of the Philosopher in <u>The</u> <u>Messingkauf</u> <u>Dialogues</u>--"We want to demolish the fourth wall" (52)--clearly identifies Brecht's work as part of a growing challenge to Naturalism. The theatre of Meyerhold, discussed in the introduction to this study, marked the establishment of a new self-reflexive practice, structured specifically to disrupt the spectators' usual perceptive process. Other challenges came in the work of Eisenstein and Piscator, both of whom provided important models for Brecht's own work.

Piscator's theatre challenged not only Naturalist practice but also what he saw as "the pathetic emotionalism of the Expressionists" (Innes

192). Like Meyerhold, he sought to reconstitute the production-reception contract as a bidirectional discussion and, to provoke this exchange, he too had recourse to the strategy of positioning actors among the audience. Piscator's theatre was, however, predominantly a political instrument. With one production, §218 (referring to a civil law on abortion), his dramatic method both achieved performance dialogue and political change. The audience interposed comments, offered points of view, and finally voted to reject the law; riots in the streets followed and Piscator spent a month in prison . . . for tax evasion! (Braun 42, Innes 137-138)

Piscator, like Brecht, sought out a working-class audience for his plays, forming the Proletarisches Theater in 1920 which performed in venues in industrial districts. Influential in Piscator's development of a performance theory was Walter Gropius' design for "Total Theatre". Gropius' ideas concerned only the architectural component of theatre but were radical in creating the option of a stage area to encircle the audience. Piscator expanded the concept to involve all available media with the aim of "the absolute integration of the onlooker in the play" (Innes 150). While the anticipated presence of an audience is, by

virtue of the genre, always inscribed in a play, for Piscator, this was more than usually concrete. He could locate precisely the social and political background of a significant proportion of his audience and in this way write them into his mise-en-scène:

> In the 1920s Piscator was able to use at least the proletarian part of his audiences as a positive element in his productions because they were already politically committed, and therefore, although they were unrehearsed, he could allow accurately for their actions. A slogan, a symbolic gesture or a familiar tune was enough to provoke a known and invariable reaction from the seats alloted to the Sub-scribers' Club, which was composed of members of the General Workers' Union, the Syndicalists and the Communist Youth--at least at a simple level, as when the International was sung 'spontaneously' at performances of Hoppla! or Rasputin (Innes 145).

With audience reaction so definitely inscribed in the production text, both through the predicability of response from an identifiable social group and through actors as prompts to audience reaction, Piscator (and, indeed, Meyerhold) did not, it seems, liberate their audiences. Instead their input was carefully controlled, not to say manipulated, and the locus of authority left strictly within the text/mise-en-scène.

The work of both Meyerhold and Piscator is important, however, in a number of ways. The effect of their experiments, beyond any immediate political impact, was to demystify theatre practice and to make

available new performance components which might more readily address a popular audience. For the purposes of this study, the effect on the reception process of the virtually complete correlation of social, political and cultural codes between Piscator and audience is of particular interest. More recently, the alternative theatre practice of some groups (particularly those concerned with gay, feminist, or minority ethnic issues) have relied on a similar correlation of social, political and cultural codes. In much of this later theatre, authority has been self-consciously relinquished and traditional reception models unhesitatingly challenged. As an influence upon Brecht's work,[1] however, Piscator's system was important as a supplier of tools (the multimedia components of his productions) for low-budget, portable, working-class theatre. While Brecht would have argued against the political specificity of Piscator's theatre, he clearly identified the technical apparatus as potentially effective in a more rigorous examination of the larger social structures.

The film work and theory of Sergei Eisenstein was also important in the development of Brecht's epic theatre. Eisenstein, once an assistant to Meyerhold, eschewed theatre for cinema, a form he felt more

"appropriate for the materialist process argued for in a
dialectical aesthetics; images had a direct connection
to actuality, and their manipulation through montage
could reproduce the manipulation of objects by the logic
of history" (Polan 45). The montage structuring of
Eisenstein's work broke through the surface reality of
Naturalism to demonstrate the political circumstances
behind general patterns of social relations. This is
clearly influential upon Brecht's work. The single
frame Eisenstein saw as a multiple-meaning ideogram, to
be read only in juxtaposition (65-66). In this way
cinema could address the emotions through its
descriptive powers and the intellect by the abstract
relations between frames (62). Paradoxically, however,
Eisenstein's work exploits the production-reception
contract of Naturalist practice in order to promote a
politically appropriate decoding of the montage
structure. As Dana Polan points out:

> the very appeal of film as a 'natural' medium
> is an appeal that can be utilized by the
> dialectical artist to trick audiences
> virtually into believing that they are seeing
> the same old naturalistic art. By
> 'naturalizing' the montage structure, by not
> calling attention to its 'unnatural' status as
> a result of conscious intercession, and, most
> important, by using the mathematically
> calculated affective pull of the montage
> pattern, the filmmaker presents his or her
> audience with a film that has, or seems to
> have, the same perceptual attributes as the
> most 'unbiased' documentary (43).

Eisenstein acknowledged this filmic potential for conveying what he calls "ideologically pointed theses" (62) and saw film primarily as a structure demonstrating the relationship of the author to the content "compelling the spectator to relate himself to the content in the same way" (168). Nevertheless, Eisenstein's work is concerned more with the aesthetics of film than with the relationship between art form and audience. For Brecht, however, the ideogrammatic form of the frame provided the model for his own development of the social gest. Their montage assembly left for the audience a plurality of possible meanings. As Roland Barthes suggests, "nothing separates the scene in epic theatre from the Eisenstein shot (except that in Brecht the tableau is offered to the spectator for criticism, not for adherence)" (Image 71).

Barthes' distinction is an important one. The work of Meyerhold, Piscator and Eisenstein was a necessary prolusion to Brecht's epic theatre in breaking with technical conventions and establishing new audiences, but it did not, ultimately, change stage-audience relations. The performance was, as Barthes indicates, offered for "adherence." The shock value of their theatre practice, literally surrounding the audience with innovation, had the effect of inducing the

desired mass response. While Brecht's theatre employs many of the same techniques, it does so in a more interrogatory manner. As his critique of the American entertainment industry indicates, Brecht felt that innovation in itself did not necessarily challenge existing modes of production and reception. He writes:

> Hollywood's and Broadway's methods of manufacturing certain excitements and emotions may possibly be artistic, but their only use is to offset the fearful boredom induced in any audience by the endless repetition of falsehoods and stupidities. This technique was developed and is used in order to stimulate interest in things and ideas that are not in the interest of the audience (Willett 160).

Not unlike the Hollywood/Broadway practitioners, Meyerhold and Piscator relied on the complete emotional involvement of the audience, albeit with the intention of political action rather than the purely economic motivations of the former. The virtual mass hysteria sought by Meyerhold and Piscator (somewhat the opposite extreme to the passivity sought by Naturalist theatre) is, however, rejected by Brecht. His theatre sought an audience which was participatory, but thoughtful; to reiterate Barthes, "for criticism, not for adherence." This crucial difference between Brecht's theatre and that of the earlier "revolutionaries," Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Piscator, is marked by Brecht's concept of Verfremdung.

Of all the critical commentary on Brecht, it is
this central term of the <u>Verfremdungseffekt</u> which has
attracted the most attention and the most controversy.[2]
As other components of Brechtian dramaturgy can be
linked to an emerging oppositional culture which broke
with conventional practice, the <u>Verfremdungseffekt</u> can
also be linked to earlier work. Its theoretical pre-
cursor is clearly in the work of Russian Formalist,
Victor Shklovsky and, in particular, his explanations of
defamiliarization (<u>ostranenie</u>). Shklovsky discusses
defamiliarization as the device by which literature is
recognized as literature. It is a means by which the
perceptive processes of the reader (audience) are
challenged:

> The technique of art is to make objects
> 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to
> increase the difficulty and length of
> perception because the process of perception
> is an aesthetic end in itself and must be
> prolonged. <u>Art is a way of experiencing the
> artfulness of an object; the object is not
> important</u> (12).

But Brecht's <u>Verfremdung</u> is not simply a translation
into dramaturgical practice of Shklovsky's <u>ostranenie</u>.[3]
In Brecht's usage, the term is not merely part of an
aesthetic code, but positioned politically. Fredric
Jameson writes:

> The purpose of the Brechtian estrangement-
> effect is . . . a political one in the most
> thoroughgoing sense of the word; it is, as

> Brecht insisted over and over, to make you
> aware that the objects and institutions you
> thought to be natural were really only
> historical: the result of change, they them-
> selves henceforth become in their turn
> changeable. (The spirit of Marx, the
> influence of the Theses on Feuerbach, is
> clear.) At the same time, this genuinely
> historical vision returns even upon the meta-
> physical perceptions themselves, until then
> seemingly permanent, lending them also the
> value of an effect rather than a cause (58).

Thus, through the Verfremdungseffekt, the stage-audience relationship is politicized in a way quite unlike that in the theatre of Meyerhold and Piscator, or in the cinema of Eisenstein. The self-reflexive nature of text/performance is not simply a means of fore-grounding a specific political issue (as in the case of Piscator's §218) or eliciting a specific political response (as in Eisenstein's Strike). Neither is it, as Sylvia Harvey reminds us, simply an appeal to audiences jaded by stale Naturalism through "that particular sort of aesthetic pleasure which is offered to highly educated audiences on the basis of a recognition of the transgression of certain aesthetic codes and taboos" (52). Brecht's foregrounding of the theatrical process and establishment of Verfremdung in stage-audience communication operates in a context that questions not specific concerns, aesthetic or political, but instead questions the social relations that govern existence and which are generally accepted as universal or natural.

Once again it is evident how Brecht calls the audience's
attention to the position of theatre as cultural
institution, an apparatus of the society in which it
exists. He writes:

> We are free to discuss any innovation which
> doesn't threaten its [the theatre's] social
> function--that of providing an evening's
> entertainment. We are not free to discuss
> those which threaten to change its function,
> possibly by fusing it with the educational
> system or with the organs of mass
> communication. Society absorbs via the
> apparatus whatever it needs in order to re-
> produce itself. This means that an innovation
> will pass if it is calculated to rejuvenate
> existing society, but not if it is going to
> change it--irrespective whether the form of
> the society in question is good or bad
> (Willett 34).

Understanding of Brecht's <u>Verfremdungseffekt</u> (or
perhaps more accurately, the lack of understanding) has
not, however, illuminated strategies of audience
reception. The confusion arises in what seems to be a
paradox. On the one hand, <u>Verfremdung</u>, as distance,
seems virtually to exclude the audience and, on the
other, it is part of a process where the "episodes must
not succeed one another indistinguishably but must give
us a chance to interpose our judgment" (Willett 201).
Stephen Heath's consideration of <u>Verfremdung</u> as process
is helpful:

> [I]t is not that the spectator is held
> separate to the action of the play and, from
> there, effectively placed in a relation of
> identification to the hero as totalising

consciousness, but rather that the spectator
is himself included in the movement from ideo-
logy to real, from illusion to objective truth
(the political analysis of forms of
representation in their determinations, the
activity of the play); there are no heroes in
such a theatre, not even the spectator (as
judge, as unifying consciousness): as subject,
the spectator is taken up in the
representation - the play creates an effect of
recognition - but that representation, that
position taken up are pulled out of true (of
'Reality') and distanciation is exactly this
(critical) operation (116).

Verfremdung, then, displaces the audience's perception
of stage events and looks for an interactive relation-
ship. Brecht, in a dialogue with playwright Fredrich
Wolf, emphasizes this refusal of separation. While
empathy for a character (either by audience or actor) is
to be avoided in performance, emotion is not denied by
the Verfremdungseffekt:

It is not true, though it is sometimes
suggested, that epic theatre (which is not
simply undramatic theatre, as is also some-
times suggested) proclaims the slogan: 'Reason
this side, Emotion (feeling) that.' It by no
means renounces emotion, least of all the
sense of justice, the urge to freedom, and
righteous anger; it is so far from renouncing
these that it does not even assume their
presence, but tries to arouse or to reinforce
them. The 'attitude of criticism' which it
tries to awaken in its audience cannot be
passionate enough for it (Willett 227).

Despite the misunderstandings surrounding the
Verfremdungseffekt (and it seems likely that these are,
at least on occasion, wilful), Brecht's work sets up a
number of starting points for the study of audience

reception. His plays, along with his theoretical writing, consolidate a developing theatre practice self-consciously concerned with the audience. Performance, hitherto almost hermetically sealed, demanding of the audience only the role of receiver, became essentially a co-operative venture. A role of activity was established for the audience and their position as part of the dramatic process acknowledged. This not only encouraged what Althusser calls "the production of a new spectator, an actor who starts where the performance ends" (For Marx 151), but questioned the dominant (natural) model of stage-audience commmunication. Citing the parallel between Brecht's stress on audience involvement and radical models of the communication process, Carl Gardner explains:

> The 'receiver' of any 'message' is never passive - here we see the false analogy with the radio-receiver - but is an active producer of meanings. It is precisely one of the ideo-logical functions of the bourgeois media to obscure this - the relations of consumption of the cinema, for example, attempt to reduce the process of creation of meanings on the part of the audience to an absolute minimum (5-6).

Brecht's work has challenged the idea of an obvious and fixed perceptive process. Instead it has identified this process as one bound in the conventions and codes that form the discourse of a particular ideology. The ideological basis of the play will not necessarily

coincide with that of the audience (or indeed of the performers or of the producing company) but it is this interaction which will constitute performance.

Because of his stress on the theatrical experience as contract, ideologically situated, Brecht has, not surprisingly, become an important reference point for politically-committed cultural theorists. His ideas lie behind, and support, the parameters of their research. Janet Wolff, for example, challenges the concept of aesthetic autonomy precisely through the relationships Brecht has identified:

> [T]he nature of the audience is determined, amongst other things, by the nature and practice of culture in general in that society . . . by the general ideology of that society and of its sub-divisions, and by the general mode of production and relations of production of that society. In other words, the possibility for the reception of radical or 'negative' culture is itself determined by the economic base, and by the extent and type of autonomy accorded to general and aesthetic ideology by the stage of development of that society (Social Production 93-94).

As a complement to this theoretical influence, Brecht's plays have been important in the establishment of oppositional theatre. In the U.S., there were landmark productions of In the Jungle of the Cities and Man is Man by Beck and Malina's Living Theater. In Britain, by way of Joan Littlewood's work and the Berliner Ensemble's 1956 London performances, the plays have

provided the primary model. Certainly the reception history of Brecht in Britain substantiates Wolff's system of cultural relations. Immediately following the 1956 visit of Brecht's troupe, there was a general rush "to be Brechtian." First attempts (such as John Osborne's Luther) did little more than replicate the surface characteristics of epic theatre. Where playwrights more consciously tried to translate the political impetus of epic theatre into a British format (as in John Arden's Armstrong's Last Goodnight), their plays were generally poorly received and almost always misunderstood. Edward Bond bore the title of the British Brecht as criticism rather than praise. Reception difficulties were complicated by the radical nature of the production requirements of Brecht's theatre; Steve Gooch summarizes:

> So great was the confusion, it never seemed to occur to anyone that Brecht's arguments had been conducted largely within a proscenium-arch tradition, and that 'alienation' almost depended on its quality of 'separation.' Instead Brecht was embraced as ideal fodder for production in the proliferation of end-stage, in-the-round, octagonal, three-sided and 'environmental' auditoria which sprang up all over the country during the sixties' theatre boom. Consequently the rigour of Brecht's appeal to the conscious faculties of his audience was diluted and disappeared in a kind of osmosis between stage and auditorium (36).

Only with the establishment over a period of

time of an oppositional theatre practice was Brecht's theory understood and successful productions of his plays undertaken. Nevertheless, as Steve Gooch's description of the transfer of a successful production of Brecht's The Mother from the East End of London to the Round House at Chalk Farm (Hampstead) makes evident, this possibility was still precarious:

> [Al]though the production and personnel were
> identical, the particular experience the show
> offered was vastly altered by the move to a
> bigger building, with a different producing
> management and an NW3 audience rather than the
> usual pilgrims to E1. Where control over
> these relations is beyond one's power, how-
> ever, the show is most certainly the thing;
> and given that for companies in the seventies,
> questions of a show's audience and environment
> were as important as its content and style,
> the struggles to 'get it right' were
> considerable (50).

By the late seventies in Britain, Brecht's plays were "recuperated" as classics. In 1976, the National Theatre staged an exhibition of Brecht in Britain; in 1980, The Life of Galileo was produced there. More recently (1986), the Berliner Ensemble made its North American debut in Toronto. David Burgess comments that the Ensemble's production of The Threepenny Opera "would have done the D'Oyley Carte Company proud" (76) and that performances of The Caucasian Chalk Circle reinforced "accepted values and confirmed prejudices just as surely as a Sylvester Stallone movie or a Noel Coward play"

(77). Burgess notes:

> Ironically, it [the production of The
> Caucasian Chalk Circle] taught that official
> culture can co-opt a play of any political
> stripe, and make it serve its own static ends;
> it taught, as Brecht pointed out in his Short
> Organum and elsewhere, that a production which
> is only an aesthetic success, can be a
> disaster when considered in other ways (77).

The academic debate concerning Brecht's
Verfremdung has placed even more emphasis upon the
audience's participation in theatre. Dana Polan
suggests that distance can work as a demonstration that
usual modes of reception are ideologically determined
and that Brecht's theatre "break[s] down the socially
unquestioning way that people watch spectacle" (96).
His example of Bruce Conner's Report, a film made in the
early sixties, is well chosen. Conner was refused
footage of the Kennedy assassination by the CBS and, as
a result, made a film concerning all the events sur-
rounding the shooting with the exception of that central
incident. The screen images disappear at the point of
the assassination, leaving only the soundtrack (com-
posed, throughout the film, of radio news coverage).
Polan comments:

> Conner's film suggests that we can never know
> the event but only media presentations of it;
> as if to show how reality is constructed by
> media, several scenes are loop-printed and run
> over and over again to suggest that an event
> can be postponed, effaced, by the way it is
> presented. Report takes a typical moviegoing

desire and quotes it through a critical
stance. In one loop-printing, the car moves
toward its destination but is bounced back by
the editing. The next shots are from the
synchronic presentation; this, Report shows
us, is the real event, not the documentary
payoff our habits of viewing have led us to
want from films promising to be "about" the
Kennedy assassination (97).

Howard Brenton and David Hare's play, Pravda, tackles

the medium of newspaper reporting. They show that

"truth" (played upon in the title) is always mediated by

social, economic and political considerations and that

it is inevitable that ideals of "truth" (represented in

the character, Andrew May) are compromised to the

exigencies of the controlling ideology. Like Conner's

film, Brenton and Hare's play refuses the audience their

customary explanations. Hare, in an interview, makes

clear the propagandist element of so-called news-

reporting: "You could say all news is a matter of

opinion. Which is plainly Fleet Street's line of

defence. But the spin that's put on almost all the

stories you read? Are we supposed to believe it's all

one way by coincidence?" (37).

Brecht's work then has been central in two ways:

he has shown that the media institutions are always

contingent, and has foregrounded the audience as
4
already-always interpellated by ideology. What he has

laid bare becomes the core of radical theatre and film

theory. Claire Johnston's polemic for a Marxist film culture emphatically inscribes the relationship between film and audience, specified both historically and institutionally, as crucial to "the possibiility of working through strategies in relation to the ideological struggle" (86). Chris Rawlence looks to the practice of theatre companies such as his (Red Ladder) to "act as a catalyst in reminding this audience [from the working class] of its own cultural and political potential" (64). In any production-reception contract, therefore, the audience's response will be shaped by the general system of cultural relations as identified by Wolff. Within that system, their receptive process will be immediately directed by the conditions of production and the positioning of the world on stage vis-a-vis its extratheatrical referents.[5]

Above all, Brecht's work makes manifest the creative role of theatre audiences and positions this role ideologically. Any research of reception must then deal with issues which are cultural as well as individual. Sylvia Harvey emphasizes this requirement:

> [T]he ability to decipher certain codes or certain code-breaking operations is culturally and socially determined; and as there are institutions of cultural production and consumption so also there are institutions of reading; a reader approaches a text from within a particular 'apparatus of reading'. Any cultural producer who fails to investigate

the relationship between social class and
reading competence produces in a vacuum (55).

It is this question that reader-response theory might be

expected to address.

2. Reader-response theory

The term, "reader-response," has been coined, retroactively, to cover developments in theory concerned with the relationship between text and reader. The explosion of interest in the reading process started in the late 1960s and continued through the 1970s, and this umbrella term of reader-response now incorporates a diversity of approaches to textual reception. While reader-centered studies continue to be published,[6] reader-response no longer occupies a central place in theoretical investigations. It can be considered an historically-situated movement with events of the late '60s, both in academia and more generally, shaping its development. More recent post-structuralist theory has made evident the limitations of the reader-response approach, but the diversity of investigations undertaken does, however, offer some useful models for this present study of reception. There is, at least in part, a response to Harvey's concern with the "apparatus of reading." Indeed, without the existing corpus of reader-response theory, it is unlikely that there would be the current concern of drama theorists for the role of the audience.

In her introduction to The Reader in the Text, a 1980 anthology sub-titled Essays on Audience and Interpretation, Susan Suleiman describes the general trend in

the humanities "toward self-reflexiveness--questioning and making explicit the assumptions that ground the methods of the discipline, and concurrently the investigator's role in delimiting or even in constituting the object of study" (4). This "self-reflexiveness," she argues, "has its analogue in the principles of relativity and uncertainty as they emerged in physics early in this century" (4). Furthermore, self-reflexivity had surfaced as a central interest in the texts themselves. John Fowles' novel, The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969) and Peter Handke's play, Offending The Audience (1966), are well-known examples of works which address the assumptions of their art and the role of their audiences, and which anticipate a theory with the same concerns.

More specifically, the political milieu of the late 1960s shaped emergent reader-response theory. Challenges to dominant social and political practices had widespread repercussions for academic institutions. Pressures for change came in many forms and areas, with the events of 1968 in Paris an obvious example. Less visible but also indicative of challenges made is the publication of Ansichten einer kunftigen Germanistik (1969), a proposed action for "both the institutional and the methodological restructuring of literary studies

in West Germany" (Holub 9). In a period when the ideo-
logy and practices of academia were under attack, it is
not difficult to understand the appeal of a theory which
dissolved power from the traditional loci of authority
in favour of the more egalitarian reader.

In North America, reader-response emerged as an
attack on the hegemony of New Criticism and
particularly, as Jane Tompkins points out in her
introduction to Reader-Response Criticism, "in direct
opposition to the New Critical dictum issued by Wimsatt
and Beardsley in 'The Affective Fallacy'" (ix). For
Wimsatt and Beardsley, the affective fallacy is:

> a special case of epistemological skepticism,
> though usually advanced as if it had far
> stronger claims than the overall forms of
> skepticism. It begins by trying to derive the
> standard of criticism from the psychological
> effects of the poem and ends in impressionism
> and relativism (21).

The result of affective criticism, they argued, was the
disappearance of the object of study, the text itself.
Mary Louise Pratt's assessment of New Criticism and
reader-response in the U.S. makes some valid points
about their relationship:

> The rise of American New Criticism is often
> seen as part of a general shift in the academy
> from a stress on encyclopedic knowledge, to a
> stress on knowledge as technique or method.
> New Criticism is both an agent in this shift
> of values and a pedagogical reponse to it.
> With students who have technical knowledge and
> lack encyclopedic knowledge, what you have

>left to teach *from* is the text, and what you
>have left to teach are techniques. In ana-
>logous fashion, reader-response criticism and
>pedagogy clearly capitalize on the culture's
>intense focus on self- knowledge and self-
>observation, and on the validity now accorded
>to personal and intuitive knowledge. Students
>come to us trained, like ourselves, in
>observing their own responses, in talking
>about them, and in considering them important.
>. . . this is an improvement over formalism,
>if only because it is true, among other
>things, that readers make meaning (27).

The pedogogical desirability of a shift in critical
perspective is argued in an early study, Walter
Slatoff's *With Respect to Readers* (1970).

The radical nature of early investigations to-
ward a reader-centered criticism is evident from
Slatoff's opening statement: "One feels a little foolish
having to begin by insisting that works of literature
exist, in part, at least, in order to be read, that we
do in fact read them, and that it is worth thinking
about what happens when we do" (3). Slatoff argues that
even the most determined of formalist analyses cannot
escape the effects of the reading process. Furthermore
the fallacy of being able to apply scientific rigour to
"autonomous" texts is admirably illustrated:

>[E]ven if in some exquisitely misguided pur-
>suit of objectivity he [the critic] were
>deliberately to avoid prejudicing himself by
>reading it, to study works he has not read,
>his work would still be conditioned by his
>reading of other works. His very choice to
>study a literary work rather than a newspaper
>headline implies a belief in the importance of

certain kinds of responses (12).

Along with this disclosure of necessarily under-
lying assumptions, Slatoff provides other evidence to
support his interest in the reader. He discusses his
own differing experiences with successive readings of
Faulkner's The Sound and The Fury (19-20) and the
divergence of different readers' analyses of a single
text. As New Critics, Slatoff points out, "[w]e rarely
concern ourselves, for example, with the problem of
individual differences among readers or even with the
question of how much control and guidance of responses
is provided by any particularly literary work or by
literary works in general" (13-14). With Respect to
Readers deals with textual strategies in order to
demonstrate that works are far from autonomous, but
indeed rely on the intervention of the reader.

One chapter deals with the role of the narrator.
Slatoff writes: "When we begin to read a piece of
fiction I suspect our most significant initial response
is to the mind of the narrator" (98-99). The narrator,
of course, implies a narratee, and investigations of
shifting responses to a narrator's opinions (Slatoff's
focus is on Middlemarch) support his argument in favour
of the value of describing literary response. More

evidence of the reader's central role Slatoff finds in the fact that many (if not most) works refuse unity and coherence. They are open, rather than closed, texts. Drawing on the ideas of Robert M. Adams[7], Slatoff looks to the "strains and irresolutions inherent in the works themselves" (153) as the source of both reader interest and discomfort. The existence of such "strains and irresolutions" demands reading taking place as "an action" and not merely as a pseudo-scientific dissection of textual elements.

Pedagogical experience further supports these ideas. Slatoff writes:

> For large numbers of students, the literary work, far from providing welcome and satisfying order, is chiefly a threat and challenge to their customary ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling. It is their ordinary experience which seems to have form and pattern, which seems comprehensible, satisfying, and true. It is their literary experience which is disorderly and confusing, an experience not so much of illumination as of groping in unfamiliar lights and shadows. What they perceive or sense is not the form or coherence of the artist's vision but its foreignness to their own pre-conceived values and notions and its challenge to the adequacy of their habitual ways of ordering their experience (140-141).

With Respect to Readers is, above all, a work concerned with improving the classroom experience, with making the study of literature more accessible and more worthwhile to the students enrolled. To this end, Slatoff's book

includes an appendix of two students' essays, written for a Whitman and Dickinson course. These essays chart the reader's relationship to the texts under discussion and are intended to substantiate Slatoff's claim that such studies "can stimulate intellectual inquiry of the most interesting and demanding sort and, what is more, lead to formulations which are both more meaningful and more accurate than those which are presumably 'objective'" (179).

Slatoff does not look to establish alternative theoretical models with which to replace New Critical methods. He is, in fact, resolutely anti-theory: "The sorts of problems I have been raising cannot be resolved by theoretical systems or constructions, however logical and ingenious" (20-21). The polemic of his final chapter (despite its title, "Against Detachment") is directed toward a co-existence of reader-response and New Criticism:

> I wouldn't want to see this sort of criticism [response] supplant the impersonal; I really wouldn't; but there is no reason why it can't coexist with the other, even within, say, the pages of PMLA, which when it does admit the human voice admits it only in the clubby tones of its 'For Members Only' section (173).

This early study of the reader's role is, without doubt, open to Susan Suleiman's charge of "'old-fashioned' humanism" (28), but, as Suleiman admits, this has

virtues as well as limitations. Slatoff's work traces the issues which were to dominate theoretical investigations of later reader-response studies. The tentativeness with which he makes proposals only demonstrates the magnitude of the revolution needed to overthrow the supremacy of the text.

One omission from Slatoff's argument is a consideration of the responses of the unconscious mind as part of an individual's experience in the realization of a text. It is an omission which Slatoff acknowledges. He notes this absence as due in part to his wish to avoid the use of "specialized knowledges and terminologies" and in part to his own lack of knowledge of the subject (26). To rectify this omission, Slatoff directs his reader to Norman N. Holland's The Dynamics of Literary Response. Holland's work, starting with the 1968 publication of The Dynamics of Literary Response, has made a significant contribution to reader-response theory in establishing a subjective, or psychoanalytic, approach to the act of reading. Psychoanalytic theory, and particularly the work of Freud, has led to the considerable interest of some theatre practitioners in drama which seeks to express the workings of the inner mind.

Freud's interest in audience response is evident

from his discussions of Hamlet and Oedipus Rex. The success of Oedipus--and the failure of many modern tragedies--Freud accounts for in the presentation of a protagonist who falls in love with his mother and who is jealous of his father, "a universal event of early childhood" (V, 265). The effect of the play, then, is to evoke an Aristotelean catharsis in the audience. Freud writes: "While the poet, as he unravels the past, brings to light the guilt of Oedipus, he is at the same time compelling us to recognize our own inner minds, in which those same impulses, though suppressed, are still to be found" (V, 263). Through the double distancing of Sophocles' fiction and the actor's performance, the members of the audience experience wish-fulfilment and a purgation of their own Oedipus complex. Hamlet, according to Freud, works in much the same way, although in the case of this play's protagonist, the impulses remain repressed, as in life. For Freud:

> It appears as a necessary preconditon of this form of art that the impulse that is struggling into consciousness, however clearly it is recognizable, is never given a definite name; so that in the spectator too the process is carried through with his attention averted, and he is in the grip of his emotions instead of taking stock of what is happening (VII, 309).

Holland's theories of reading, with their funda-mental reliance on Freud's work are, for this reason,

helpful in approaching some aspects of audience reception. Holland initiates The Dynamics of Literary Response with a question: "What is the relation between the patterns he finds objectively in the text and a reader's subjective experience of the text?" (xiii). His book, as did Slatoff's, aims to provide some answer(s). "Clearly", Holland states, "meaning is not simply 'there' in the text; rather it is something we construct for the text within the limits of the text" (25) and of crucial importance is the psychoanalytic meaning which "underlies all the others" (27).

The first stage of Holland's psychoanalytic model in The Dynamics of Literary Response is to establish that all texts have "a central core of fantasy" (62) and that the fantasies are handled "by techniques that resemble familiar defensive or adaptive strategies" (58). Through an analysis of Arnold's "Dover Beach," Holland shows form (or structure) operating as defense to transform the "disturbing fantasy of a mother's withdrawal" (Dynamics 123) into an intellectual experience which is one of pleasure. Fantasy, however, generally provides anxiety as well as pleasure. But, through the agents of form and meaning, the fantasy will be "modified to reduce the anxiety" (Dynamics 182). Meaning is constructed by the reader

through a process of introjection "so that what happens 'in' it feels as though it were happening 'in' him. . . . When the reader takes the work in, it brings to him its potentialities for fantasy, for defensive transformations, and meaning. The reader in turn brings to it his capacity for fantasy and his defensive structures" (Dynamics 180).

With an analysis of Brecht's dramatic technique and of Ionesco's absurdist drama, theatre which denies preexistent textual meaning, Holland demonstrates how readers make, and need, meaning. In Holland's terms, the metatheatrical nature of Brechtian drama foregrounds for the audience their "willing suspension of disbelief." Ionesco provides nothing in which to believe and this creates a need in the audience which they endeavour to fulfill through their "own problem-solving faculties" (Dynamics 179). The evidence of this need for meaning suggests to Holland that meaning, like form, acts as "a defense to permit the partial gratification of fantasy" (Dynamics 183). In other words, meaning provides for the reader "a mastery of the fantasy content" (Dynamics 185). The pleasure derived from the reading process equates with "the feeling of having a fantasy of our own and our own associations to it managed and controlled but at the same time allowed a

limited expression and gratification" (<u>Dynamics</u> 311-12).

This early study by Holland shares with Slatoff's work the reluctance to dismiss completely the objectivity of the text and again, although for very different reasons, suggests a necessary coexistence. Both texts and readers, Holland argues, hold a central core of fantasy and it is the interaction of the two which produces meaning. As reader-response inquiry became a more familiar concept, the need to measure it against New Criticism lessened, and oppositions of objective and subjective were replaced by debates within the area. Holland's later work, at least in part for these reasons, shows a departure from his initial model. Later works, such as <u>Poems in Persons: An Introduction to the Psychoanalysis of Literature</u> and <u>5 Readers Reading</u>, abandon the notion of texts autonomously holding a central core of fantasy which the author has 'managed' through the defenses of form and structure. The fantasy Holland once located in the text he now identifies as a creation of the reader's own drives. The essay, "Unity Identity Text Self," encapsulates the theory detailed in these later works, and sets out the view that interpretation now is solely a function of the reader through what Holland describes as "an identity theme." Different interpretations of a text

result from the different identity themes of critics ("Unity" 122). Holland's governing principle is that:

> identity re-creates itself. . . . That is, all of us, as we read, use the literary work to symbolize and finally to replicate ourselves. We work out through the text our own characteristic patterns of desire and adaptation. We interact with the work, making it part of our own psychic economy and making ourselves part of the literary work--as we interpret it ("Unity" 124).

One problem with Holland's theory is, as Steven Mailloux points out [8], a difficulty in explaining how, if we all possess unique identity themes which we replicate in our readings of literary texts, views are often shared between critics. Jonathan Culler's criticisms in "A Prolegomena to a Theory of Reading" have more serious implications. As Culler points out, Holland has merely "transferred the concept of unity from text to person" (55). Culler further comments: "This is, of course, the way of American ego psychology, which can be shown to be a vulgarized and sentimentalized version of the New Criticism" (55).

I would agree with Susan Suleiman, however, that Holland's theory can provide useful insights into that aspect of reading which "involves daydreaming, private delusions and fantasies" (31). Indeed, while Holland's work may be considered marginal to some in terms of literary theory, his interest in the experience of the

unconscious mind is one which has occupied some of the
most important, and influential, theatre practitioners
in this century. Most obviously there is the work of
Antonin Artaud. In his first manifesto for "The Theatre
of Cruelty," Artaud states:

> Theatre will never be itself again, that is to
> say will never be able to form truly illusive
> means, unless it provides the audience with
> truthful distillations of dreams where its
> taste for crime, its erotic obsessions, its
> savageness, its fantasies, its utopian sense
> of life and objects, even its cannibalism, do
> not gush out on an illusory, make-believe
> [sic], but on an inner level (70-1).

Artaud also sought to abandon what he saw as a "foolish
adherence to texts" (59) in order to return theatre to
an immediate experience for both performers and
audience. To achieve this, he set out a theatre of
affect:

> To reforge the links, the chain of a rhythm
> when audiences saw their own real lives in a
> show. We must allow audiences to identify
> with the show breath by breath and beat by
> beat.
>
> It is not enough for the audience to be
> riveted by the show's magic and this will
> never happen unless we know where <u>to</u> <u>affect</u>
> <u>them</u> (95).

While Artaud never quite matched the intensity of his
vision in his own theatre practice, his ideas have been
pursued by other theatre practioners and the search for
a theatre which spoke on and to "an inner level" has
been continued. The theatre of Jerzy Grotowski is the

most notable example but the earlier work of Tadeusz Kantor, some projects of Judith Malina and Julian Beck and some Peter Brook productions have shown a similar foregrounding of "an inner level." Grotowski has written: "We are concerned with the spectator who has genuine spiritual needs and who really wishes, through confrontation with the performance, to analyse himself" (40). Allowing an interchangeability of performance and literary work, how close this aim lies to Holland's proposition that the reader interacts with a work, incorporating it as part of his psyche, and making himself part of the work ("Unity" 124).

The confused reception of those performances which indeed sought the activation of an audience's "identity theme(s)" suggests that this is a process which audiences have been trained to resist and repress. Peter Brook writes that the audience who attended the first public performance of his experimental programme came "with the usual mixture of condescension, playfulness and faint disapproval that the notion of the avant-garde arouses" (145). His production of Artaud's The Jet of Blood received mixed response: "Part of the audience was immediately fascinated, part giggled" (145). While Holland no doubt would explain the laughter as defense, it is nevertheless evident that

audiences do resist the immediate relationships sought by Artaudian theatre. A production, it seems, is more likely to reveal its director's "identity theme" than to call into play the "psychic economy" of the audience.

Perhaps surprisingly, Holland's theory appears to have been ignored by psychoanalytic critics of theatre texts. Roy Huss's The Mindscapes of Art, where Holland's work is acknowledged as a "milestone" and applauded for its emphasis on "the integrative function of art" (15), is typical in confining consideration to text and author. With Holland's work so praised, Huss might well have extended his criticism beyond an examination of fantasy within the dramatic texts, beyond psychobiographical analysis, to include the response of reader/audience.

A notable exception is Christian Metz's "The Fiction Film and its Spectator: A Metapsychological Study." Metz bases his investigations on Freud's theory of (day)dreams and his findings suggest that Holland's pursuit of the reader's private world might well find some application in a model of theatrical reception. Metz poses the question: "how does the spectator effect the mental leap which alone can lead him from the perceptual donnée, consisting of moving visual and sonic impressions, to the constitution of a fictional

universe, from an objectively real but denied signifier to an imaginary but psychologically real signified?" (85). For the theatre spectator, the signifiers are, of course, present, but otherwise the relationship holds. Metz provides his answers in the analysis of the "waking sleep" undertaken by the filmic spectator and it does indeed seem that psychoanalytic theory might well fill some of the otherwise unchartable gaps of the perceptive process.

While Holland's theory rests on the existence of an individual's identity theme, the theory of Stanley Fish has come to rely on a concept of "interpretive communities," one more easily applicable to theatre audiences. Published in 1980, Is There A Text in this Class? is a collection of essays covering ten years of Fish's work as a reader-response theorist and, as his introduction makes clear, this includes several shifts in position.

The early work of Fish, like that of Slatoff and Holland, makes only a cautious break with text-centered criticism. His "Affective Stylistics" turned attention away "from the spatial context of a page and its observable regularities to the temporal context of a mind and its experiences" (91). Questions to be raised, Fish argues, concern not what a text means, but what it

does.   With the reader placed in a central role, Fish attends to the problem that no two readers make exactly the same analysis of a text (though not, it must be noted, to the fact that a single reader can make quite different readings).   To address the question of divergent readings, he introduces the "informed reader." This informed reader is defined by his/her linguistic competence, a shared system of rules, which interacts with "the temporal left-to-right reception of the verbal string" (47) and thus enables analysis of the developing response. Other qualities that the informed reader will possess include competence with the language employed by the text, a mature semantic knowledge, and literary competence, which Fish explains as being "sufficiently experienced . . . to have internalized the properties of literary discourses, including everything from the most local of devices (figures of speech, and so on) to whole genres" (48). At this point in Fish's theory, the text remains important as an objective entity which, in particular ways, manipulates the reader, however informed.

The aim of his work, Fish insists, is not the creation of a method. The thrust of his study is away from evaluation toward description. For this reason, Fish is determined to separate his own work from that of

other stylisticians. In the essay, "What is Stylistics," studies by Louis Milic, Richard Ohmann, Michael Halliday, J.P. Thorne and Michael Riffaterre are discussed as Fish's proof that other stylisticians merely establish "an inventory of fixed significances" (84), without acknowledging the shape of the reader's experience as a constraint. In the case of Riffaterre, for example, Fish argues that "he cuts his data off from the source of value and is then free to confer any value he pleases" (87). In his own affective stylistics, Fish fuses "the descriptive and interpretive acts" (95). He makes it quite clear that this is not a return to impressionism (the charge of Wimsatt and Beardsley's "affective fallacy" again), but a high-precision skill for the description of an ever-changing reading process.

The starting point of Fish's reader-response theory shows, then, only a partial break with New Critical interests and the shortcomings of affective stylistics are readily confessed by Fish in his introduction to Is There A Text In This Class? He writes:

> In short, I was moving in two (incompatible) directions at once: in the one the hegemony of formalism was confirmed and even extended by making the text responsible for the activities of its reader; in the other those same activities were given a larger and larger role to the extent that at times the very existence of the text was called into question (8).

The next stage in Fish's theory, covered in the essay "How Ordinary Is Ordinary Language," was to face the historical opposition between linguists (who see literature as language) and critics (who say that linguistic analysis ignores the essential characteristic of literature, its formal properties)(98). Underlying these contradictory stances, Fish identifies a common ground. Both critics and linguists "are collaborating to perpetuate the same disastrous model" (101), the marking of difference between ordinary language and literary language. This distinction, Fish argues, is worse than useless, and criticism constituted from this model is simply a process of evaluation. Language is not ordinary, but constituted by the commitments and attitudes of those who produce it; literature does not employ a different language (since there is no such thing as ordinary language) but instead is language around which we have drawn a frame (107-9).[9] Aesthetics, Fish asserts, must be seen as "local and conventional rather than universal, reflecting a collective decision as to what will count as literature, a decision that will be in force only so long as a community of readers or believers . . . continues to abide by it" (109). In this way the question of what constitutes literature is addressed "not [as] a disinterested investigation but

the reflection of an ideology; not a progress toward a theory but the production of one; not a question but an answer" (111).

Fish's conclusions about language lead him into his next, and perhaps most influential, stage of reader-response theory, the idea of the interpretive community. In "Interpreting the Variorum," Fish reiterates his "new facts," that meaning is experiential, not positivist, and derives from the reader's activities and not from an autonomous text. With this established, Fish discusses types of reader (Holland's profiles without the psycho-analytic underpinning) whose readings are shaped by interpretive strategies. Agreement between readers, or habitual differences in "the career of a single reader" (171), can be explained by the existence of the inter-pretive community. These, Fish writes:

> are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the con-ventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way round (171).

"Principled" critical debates occur not because of any intrinsic textual stability, but "because of a stability in the makeup of interpretive communities and therefore in the opposing positions they make possible" (171). In

this way, criticism i a discourse determined by interpretive community: " nterpretive activities are not free, but what constr ins them are the understood practices and assumption of the institution and not the rules and fixed mean ngs of a language system (306). The ability of a cl ss studying seventeenth-century religious poetry to ake meaning from a selection of names written on the ard for a previous linguisitics and literary criticis class proves for Fish not "the stability of object" t "the power of an interpretive community to constitu e the objects upon which its members (also and simul aneously constituted) can then agree" (338).

Now that the r constitution can be explained, Fish shifts his focus a hierarchy of interpretations. Not all interpretation will be accepted. Indeed, some can be ruled out. Th se are the result of interpretive strategies which, at the time of their making, lie outside those authoriz d by literary institutions (342). These institutions (comprising of interpretive communities) are, how ver, subject to change. As Fish notes, "[t]he greate t rewards of our profession are reserved for those wh challenge the assumptions within which ordinary practic s go on, not so much in order to eliminate the categor of the ordinary but in order to

redefine it and reshape its configurations" (366).
Interpretive communities, therefore, are not stable,
holding privileged points of view, but represent
different interpretive strategies held by different
literary cultures at different times.

Diachronic analysis of play reception appears to
corroborate Fish's concept of the interpretive
community. The reception history of Harold Pinter's The
Birthday Party is exemplary. In 1958, the play
premiered in London at the Lyric, Hammersmith, and the
review on May 20th from the drama critic of The Times
was less than enthusiastic: "Mr. Pinter's effects are
neither comic nor terrifying: they are never more than
puzzling, and after a little while we tend to give up
the puzzle in despair" (3). His confusion and despair
clearly extended to the audience at large and the run
survived only a few performances. By contrast, pre-
London performances of The Birthday Party in Oxford and
Cambridge had been more enthusiastically received where
audiences were likely to be constituted, at least in
part, by the local academic community. Thus they would
be more aware of, and receptive to, the traditions of
European avant-garde underlying Pinter's play. Further-
more, when The Birthday Party was revived at the Aldwych
in London some six years later, it was heralded as a

success and enjoyed a much longer run. On 18th June 1964, a _Times_ review declared: "The _Birthday_ _Party_ is the Ur-text of modern British drama: if John Osborne fired new authors into writing, Pinter showed them how to write" (18). In Fish's terms, the experiences of 1958 show the contrasting responses to Pinter's play by different interpretive communities and those of 1964 demonstrate that the interpretive strategies of the London theatre-going public had been redefined and re-shaped by an increased exposure to "new" drama. Indeed, Fish's assertion that texts are accorded value not by any intrinsic properties but by interpretive communities can be extended to include even the existence of those texts. Historically there has been little or no record of drama by women playwrights in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet, recent research by Julie Holledge clearly demonstrates that women's theatre was not only in existence at this time, but in fact prolific. Mrs. Worthington's Daughters, a feminist theatre company with Holledge as one of its founders, revived hitherto "lost" plays and these productions have afforded further reevaluation.

The role of the drama critic is another area which might usefully be explored through Fish's idea of interpretive communities. Patrice Pavis, in his

analysis of the collected reviews of Peter Brook's production of <u>Measure</u> <u>for</u> <u>Measure</u> at the Bouffes du Nord in 1978, has emphasized the shared strategies within the genre of theatre criticism. Reviews, Pavis found, converged in discussion of the theatre space and type of mise-en-scène in order to distinguish Brook's work from more "ordinary" productions. They also largely dealt with problems in understanding the foreign accents (which Pavis attributes to "a very French impatience colored by xenophobia" [<u>Languages</u> 103]) and the general acting style. What Pavis finds most remarkable is the general inadequacy of critical discourse: "Saying that the <u>mise</u> <u>en</u> <u>scène</u> is 'cold,' 'dense,' 'self-effacing,' 'assured,' 'adroit,' 'of a refreshing lack of affectation' does not really help the reader to perceive it" (<u>Languages</u> 103). He concludes:

> Finally, the critical discourse--probably because Brook has the status of a public monument--does not take the risk of discouraging or encouraging the public to go and see the play.
>
> The unexpressed judgment seems to be: "obviously it is good because it is Shakespeare, directed by Brook, although it hasn't got that particular twist of the novel and the exceptional" (<u>Languages</u> 104).

Clearly, as Pavis points out (<u>Languages</u> 104-105), the discourse of the critics reflects shared assumptions of what constitutes theatre and its sub-categories, main-

stream and alternative.

Pavis sees the theatre critic's role as "voice for the arts" as at least having partial freedom from the political assumptions underlying the newspaper or journal represented, although it all reflects "what Barthes called the bourgeois sense of the quantitative and the visible" (Languages 105). In the "alternative" press, however, theatre criticism has been overtly linked to the political bias of the publication represented. The arrival in the 1970s of London's Time Out was without doubt instrumental in the establishment of emerging feminist and gay theatre. Their reviews were important not only for their radical political alignment, but for their information value, bringing to attention a wealth of theatre which was outside both traditional theatre spaces and traditional publicity mechanisms. It is a role which continues. Alisa Solomon, one of several theatre critics for Village Voice, stresses the interactive relationship between marginal theatre companies and those reviewers seen as sympathetic to their political and/or performance objectives. She notes, however, that any unfavourable reviews might be instrumental in the loss of financial grants for a company whose objectives she, in general, supports. The interpretive communities of theatre

critics are clearly influential but not necessarily helpful, either to the companies reviewed or to the public seeking their opinions. This highlights an aspect of the interpretive community which Fish explores only in passing, the inevitable political underpinning of an interpretive community and its relationship to the dominant ideology. The preceding examples of the repertory of a company such as Mrs. Worthington's Daughters and the concerns of critics such as Solomon underscore the link between power and knowledge made explicit in Foucault's work. Fish, on the other hand, ignores politics and, indeed, any notion of the role of class, race or gender in the constitution of the interpretive community.

The reluctance of Fish to deal with the political implications of the interpretive community has been identified in a number of analyses and critics generally concur that this is a deliberate strategy. William Cain writes:

> The thrust of Fish's theory is radical and liberating, for he subverts the myth that an authority is a natural fact, and that we are forever bound to the existing shape of our institutions. Yet even as Fish points toward the radical force of his theory, he weakens it, turning his theory's demystifying power into a restatement of authority's necessary dominion over us. As Fish's concern for "constraints" in his early work testifies, he is strongly committed to order, discipline, and control. And it is, I think, this belief in

>the need to preserve order, to conserve
>meaning within its proper bounds, that leads
>him to undercut his argument at its most
>radical point (87).

Frank Lentricchia's assessment is even more accusatory. To consider the interpretive community as "walled off from larger enclosures of social structure and historical process is," Lentricchia suggests, "a repetition of aestheticist isolationism" (147). He argues that Fish should have at least made it clear "that the consolidated interpretive community he is talking about is situated on the northeastern seaboard of the United States, and that most of its members are 'at home' in the English departments of Yale and Johns Hopkins" (147). Lentricchia also points out the narrowness of a theory which is concerned only with "one reality, the now of our interpretive community" (148) and condemns Fish's determination to rest all authority with the reader, as an elevation of "the critic to the status of romantic poet" (148).

The theory of Wolfgang Iser provides an interesting counterpart to Fish's work, particularly in light of their publicly expressed disagreements. Iser's theory develops out of the work of phenomenologists Edmund Husserl and Roman Ingarden.[10] He sets up a three-way approach to his analysis of reading: consideration of the text, of the reader, and, most

importantly, the conditions of interaction between the two. The Implied Reader, published in 1974, describes this interest as: "the succession of activities which the novel, from Bunyan to Beckett, has demanded of its readers" (xii). The work of the reader required by the novel genre is marked by the title of Iser's text. This concept of the implied reader, Iser writes, "offers a means of describing the process whereby textual structures are transmuted through ideational activities into personal experiences" (Act of Reading 38).

Iser's initial interest, however, is in defining what he calls the literary work. This, he argues, "has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the esthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the esthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader" (Implied Reader 274). In other words, the literary work is located between these two poles and undertaken by the reader who "uses the various per-spectives offered him by the text in order to relate the patterns and the 'schematised views' to one another, he sets the work in motion, and this very process results ultimately in the awakening of responses within himself" (Implied Reader 275). Indeed, in The Act of Reading, Iser addresses the question of whether a theory of aesthetic response need take account of psychology.

Shortcomings in the work of Holland and another psycho-
analytic theorist, Simon Lesser, provide Iser's reasons
to dispense fairly quickly with such psychoanalytic
elements. He sees Holland's theory, for example, in its
insistence that works of literature should provide the
reader with pleasure arising from a process of anxiety
and management of that anxiety, as a rewriting of the
emotive theory of I.A. Richards in the jargon of the
psychoanalyst (Act of Reading 43-4). He concludes:

> it is only when the reader is forced to pro-
> duce the meaning of the text under unfamiliar
> conditions, rather than under his own
> conditions (analogizing), that he can bring to
> light a layer of his personality that he had
> previously been unable to formulate in his
> conscious mind (Act of Reading 50).

Other theories of reading are described as further
evidence for Iser's preferred concept of the implied
reader. Michael Riffaterre's "superreader" "represents
a test concept which serves to ascertain the 'stylistic
fact', pointing to a density in the encoded message of
the text" (Act of Reading 34). Stanley Fish's "informed
reader" "represents a self-instructing concept that aims
at increasing the reader's 'informedness', and hence his
competence, through self-observation with regard to the
sequence of reactions set off by the text" (34). Erwin
Wolff's "intended reader" "represents a concept of
reconstruction, uncovering the historical dispositions

of the reading public at which the author was aiming"
(34). Riffaterre's superreader allows him to transcend
the boundaries of structural linguistics, Fish's
informed reader those of generative-transformative
grammar, and Wolff's those of literary sociology--no one
concept, however, is generally applicable. Iser's model
of the implied reader is intended to do just this:

> The concept of the implied reader is . . . a
> textual structure anticipating the presence of
> a recipient without necessarily defining him:
> this concept prestructures the role to be
> assumed by each recipient, and this holds true
> even when texts deliberately appear to ignore
> their possible recipient or actively exclude
> him. Thus the concept of the implied reader
> designates a network of response-inviting
> structures, which impel the reader to grasp
> the text (Act of Reading 34).

As Robert Holub points out, this concept is equally
problematic. The implied reader, it seems, is not
really a reader but a textual property. Holub
continues:

> The bifunctionality of this concept, as both
> "textual structure" and "structured act", is
> thus essential if the term is to escape a
> purely immanent meaning. Yet by introducing
> this dual definition Iser may not accomplish
> his intentions either. . . . For defining the
> term in this fashion allows him to move to and
> from text to reader without ever clarifying
> the composition and contribution of either
> half of this partnership. The implied reader
> may evidence a deficiency in rigor rather than
> an abundance of sophistication (85).

Iser's arrival at the concept of implied reader is also

evidence of his real interest, the text itself. Certainly The Implied Reader is largely a study of strategies in the novel genre, and the later, more theoretical text has frequent recourse to the same examples. After setting up the concept of implied reader, Iser abandons it. (Holub suggests self-consciously) to concentrate on literary text and process.

Working with Austin and Searle's speech-act theory, Iser concludes that "fictional language has the basic properties of the illocutionary act. It relates to conventions which it carries with it, and it also entails procedures which, in the form of strategies, help to guide the reader to an understanding of the selective processes underlying the text" (Act of Reading 61). The conventions in literature are, however, different from those in ordinary language, and Iser defines these literary conventions as the repertoire. This repertoire has a double function: "it reshapes familiar schemata to form a background for the process of communication, and it provides a general framework within which the message or meaning of the text can be organized" (Act of Reading 81).

The two basic elements of the repertoire are social norms, deriving from historical thought systems,

and literary allusions (<u>Act</u> <u>of</u> <u>Reading</u> 81). These give the text its referential context, and bring the reader to question or reshape his/her own reality. The organization of repertoire, as well as the conditions under which it is communicated, Iser identifies in terms of "strategies": "They encompass the immanent structure of the text and the acts of comprehension thereby triggered off in the reader" (<u>Act</u> <u>of</u> <u>Reading</u> 86). Their function "is to <u>defamiliarize</u> the familiar" (<u>Act</u> <u>of</u> <u>Reading</u> 87) and this is achieved by a background-foreground relationship created by the selection of norms and allusions. Iser writes: "The background-foreground relation is a basic structure by means of which the strategies of the text produce a tension that sets off a series of different actions and interactions, and that is ultimately resolved by the emergence of the aesthetic object" (<u>Act</u> <u>of</u> <u>Reading</u> 95). Selection of norms establishes the background, the author's view of society, and combination of different perpectives establishes "the nongiven reality of the aesthetic object" (<u>Act</u> <u>of</u> <u>Reading</u> 96). There are, Iser argues, four commonly used perspectives (of the narrator, the characters, the plot, and the one marked out for the reader) (<u>Act</u> <u>of</u> <u>Reading</u> 96). Meaning is produced by the interaction of these perspectives and as social norms

are deployed through a background-foreground structure, so this interaction of perspectives is regulated by a structure of theme and horizon. The perspective with which a reader is involved "at any one particular moment is what constitutes for him the "theme." This, however, always stands before the "horizon" of the other perspective segments in which he had previously been situated" (Act of Reading 97)--in other words, the other perspectives of the text itself and of texts already known to the reader. This structure of theme and horizon "constitutes the vital link between text and reader, because it actively involves the reader in the process of synthetizing an assembly of constantly shifting viewpoints" (Act of Reading 97).

In his phenomenology of reading, Iser moves to the interaction between text and reader. The textual repertoires and strategies "simply offer a frame within which the reader must construct for himself the aesthetic object" (Act of Reading 107). Here it is the concept of "wandering viewpoint" which is used "to des- cribe the intersubjective structure of the process through which a text is transferred and translated" (Act of Reading 108). This accounts for the reader's continual process of measuring what s/he reads against events of the past and expectations for the future, a

process which often entails the reviewing of events already consigned to memory. Iser suggests that this process leads to the formation of syntheses which "are neither manifested in the printed text, nor produced solely by the reader's imagination, and the projects of which they consist are themselves of a dual nature: they emerge from the reader, but they are also guided by signals which 'project' themselves into him" (Act of Reading 135).

The final stage of Iser's investigation concerns the communication between text and reader. There is, he suggests, an asymmetry between the two, a deviation from the normal pattern of social interaction between two people. The reader cannot test his views with the text--at least he cannot expect the text to endorse or reject those views. Furthermore, the reader-text relationship has no regulative context: "on the contrary, the codes which might regulate this inter-action are fragmented in the text and must first be reassembled or, in most cases, restructured before any frame of reference can be established" (Act of Reading 166). Iser concludes: "The imbalance between text and reader . . . is undefined, and it is this very indeterminacy that increases the variety of communication possible" (Act of Reading 167).

For successful communication, the reading process has to be controlled by the text and this, Iser argues, is achieved through blanks and negations. Blanks represent what is concealed in a text, the drawing-in of the reader where he is "made to supply what is meant from what is not said" (Act of Reading 168)--in other words, the reader makes connections between the various perspectives. Negations "invoke familiar or determinate elements only to cancel them out. What is cancelled, however, remains in view, and thus brings about modifications in the reader's attitude toward what is familiar or determinate--in other words, he is guided to adopt a position in relation to the text" (Act of Reading 169).

It is the blanks which allow the reader to bring a story to life, to give it meaning, and "[b]y making his decision he implicitly acknowledges the inexhaustibility of the text; at the same time it is this very inexhaustibility that forces him to make his decision" (Implied Reader 280). In traditional works this is an unconscious process, but modern texts (his examples are invariably Joyce and Beckett) transform it into a deliberate act. In The Act of Reading, Iser discusses how "a controlled proliferation of blanks" (191) can bring commercial success. His examples are Dickens'

serialized novels and the preview "short" for a movie. Both, he suggests, "use the technique of strategic interruption in order to activate the basic structure of the ideational process for purely commercial purposes" (Act of Reading 192). The strategic breaks in Dickens' serials and their effect on the reading audience bring to mind similar strategic breaks in the theatrical performance. Curtains or blackouts to denote act breaks or scene changes clearly work in a similar fashion as Iser's blanks. They generally herald a change in perspective and permit the audience some time for the juggling of expectations and memories that Iser defines. The intermission is, of course, the most pronounced form of strategic break and, with the generally traditional rush to the bar, it might well be considered a strategic interruption for commercial purposes! The comments of the theatre reviewers in Stoppard's The Real Inspector Hound provide, in parodic form, further evidence of an audience's creative exercising in any intermission. The 'action' breaks with Inspector Hound's dramatic question, "And now--who killed Simon Gascoyne? And why?" (34-5). This leads the drama critics, Moon and Birdboot, first to a naive response (the play as reality--Simon Gascoyne got what he deserved), and then to their personal preoccupations that they brought to

the play. Finally, they respond as paid drama critics. Clearly Stoppard agrees with Pavis that newspaper reviews tell prospective spectators little or nothing about a play:

> BIRDBOOT (clears throat): It is at this point that the play for me comes alive. The groundwork has been well and truly laid, and the author has taken the trouble to learn from the masters of the genre. He has created a real situation, and few will doubt his ability to resolve it with a startling denouement. . .
>
> MOON: If we examine this more closely, and I think close examination is the least tribute that this play deserves, I think we will find that within the austere framework of what is seen to be on one level a country-house week-end, and what a useful symbol that is, the author has given us--yes, I will go so far--he has given us the human condition--(35-6).

Certainly, in the terms of theatre performance, where the "reading time" is controlled by the performer and not the audience, any opportunities for review (as in scene changes or intermission) have the potential at least to provoke the process Iser identifies in an exaggerated form. The rarity of opportunity can lead to an intensity of activity when those few opportunities arise.

The other concept central to Iser's interaction between text and reader is that of negation. For this Iser returns to the social norms held in a text's repertoire. If social norms are depragmatized, the reader "has the chance to perceive consciously a system

in which he had hitherto been unconsciously caught up, and his awareness will be all the greater if the validity of these norms is negated" (Act of Reading 212). Thus the negations suggest to the reader a need to reassess. In analysizing negations in Beckett's fiction, Iser suggests that "his fictional texts enable us to understand what fiction is, and herein lies the subtle appeal of his achievement" (Act of Reading 225).

The final aspect of Iser's communication model is negativity. He writes: "Blanks and negations increase the density of fictional texts, for the omissions and cancellations indicate that practically all the formulations of the text refer to an unformulated background, and so the formulated text has a kind of unformulated double" (Act of Reading 225-226). Negativity has three important features. The first is formal, its abstract manifestations: the blanks and negations. The second is concerned with content: "Negativity brings about the deformations which are the basic question posed by the text--a question that sets the text in the context of reality" (Act of Reading 228). The third feature is structural: "As far as the reception of the text is concerned, negativity is that which has not yet been comprehended" (Act of Reading 229). Negativity, in these ways, is crucial for what

Iser sees as the appropriate effect of the reading process:

> As the nonformulation of the not-yet-comprehended, it does no more than mark out a relationship to that which it disputes, and so it provides a basic link between the reader and the text. If the reader is made to formulate the cause underlying the questioning of the world, it implies that he must transcend that world, in order to be able to observe it from outside. And herein lies the true communicatory function of literature (Act of Reading 229-230).

While, for Fish and Holland, the reader was all important, for Iser the necessarily interactive process of reading is predominant. In light of this, Iser's attention to the experience of the theatre audience is particularly interesting. He examines the quality of laughter peculiar to Beckett's drama. With evidence to suggest that laughter tends to be individual, accompanied by an "unprecedented degree of discomfort" ("Art of Failure" 140), and then stifled, he sets up the following thesis:

> The mutual influence [of literary work and human behaviour] is at its most effective when the work releases modes of conduct that are not required or are suppressed by our everyday needs, but which--when they are released--clearly bring out the aesthetic function of the work: namely, to make present those elements of life which were lost or buried and to merge them with that which is already present, thus changing the actual makeup of our present ("Art of Failure" 141).

Comedy, Iser argues, derives from situations of

opposition which instead of resolving in the arrival at a winner and loser, generally provokes a domino effect of losses. In this way, instability is created, an effect which extends to the spectator: "His loss of all points of reference gives him a momentary feeling of overstrain, which leads to bewilderment and finally to laughter ("Art of Failure" 143). Based on Helmuth Plessner's work in Laughing and Crying, Iser proposes that laughter results not only from the instability of the stage world, but also from the upsetting of the spectator's cognitive and emotive capabilities. In psychoanalytic terms, it is a defense mechanism. But what, Iser continues, happens if this declaration of nonseriousness "is also nudged and toppled? Supposing that, at the very moment when we have recognized the nonseriousness as a means of self-liberation, it suddenly turns into seriousness again? In such cases, we can no longer escape from the tension, and instead, our laughter dies on our lips" ("Art of Failure" 145). This, he suggests, is the effect of Beckett's drama.

Adopting Jurij Lotman's term, Iser describes Waiting for Godot as a series of minus-functions. In other words, all its components thwart our conventional expectations. For instance, Estragon's line opening the play, "Nothing to be done" (9), suggests an ending

rather than a beginning. But it instead reveals itself as a thesis tested by the continual, endless actions of the play. Laughter, and Iser notes that this is frequent, arises from our superiority but it is, he suggests, a laughter which is shortcircuited by the play. Meanings we construct out of the failed actions are inevitably undercut by the play itself. In this way, "our reaction is, in the last analysis, not to the clowning of the play but to our own interpretation of it as clowning which manifests itself in the flaring up and the dying down of our laughter" ("Art of Failure" 153). The audience of the Beckett play does not, then, watch a comic situation; "instead, the comedy happens to him, because he experiences his own interpretations as that which is to be excluded" ("Art of Failure" 158). The moment of laughter, Iser decides, depends "on the disposition of the individual spectator so that laughter as a reaction to and a relief from his entanglement is deprived of a collective confirmation at the very moment when it is most needed" ("Art of Failure" 160). Not only, then, does the recognition of the defective interpretation stifle the laughter, but also the embarrassing realization that the laughter has not been shared.

In Iser's analysis, Beckett's plays are ultimately dissatisfying. This is not because they deny

the audience the usual routes to meaning, but because of

what Iser terms an insoluble paradox:

> we always long to be free from constraints,
> repressions, and prefabricated solutions
> imposed upon us--and yet we are bewildered and
> shocked when such solutions are withheld from
> us in the theater. Could it be that the
> ultimate source of laughter at Beckett's plays
> is the fact that they confront us with this
> unpalatable contradiction within ourselves?
> And could it be that this very same fact is
> also the source of irritation? If we were
> able to laugh in spite of it all, then
> laughter might--at least momentarily--indicate
> our readiness to accept our buried life, thus
> liberating it from the displacement caused by
> social and cultural repression. But are we
> really able to free ourselves from unhappiness
> by facing up to it? ("Art of Failure" 163-
> 164).

Where Waiting for Godot has as its thesis the

impossibility of doing anything, Endgame demonstrates

the impossibility of saying anything. Language is only

a game and the possibility of meaning is destroyed.

Iser writes: "The constant obliteration of linguistic

referents results in structured blanks, which would

remain empty if the spectator did not feel the

compulsion to fill them in" ("Art of Failure" 176). As

audiences construct meaning for the actions in Godot, so

they perform for the words of Endgame with the result,

for Iser, that they become the actors, undertaking the

roles which Estragon and Vladimir carried out in the

earlier play. The result of this is to place the

spectator in a "position of detachment by giving him the

chance to see himself in the role of a comic figure--a role he is compelled to play because of his own basic experiences" ("Art of Failure" 181). The conclusion of this is that:

> the spectator himself is, at one and the same time, the producer and the addressee of what is represented. This process makes it possible for a decentered subjectivity to be communicated as an experience of self in the form of projects continually created and rejected by the spectator ("Art of Failure" 181).

Iser ends his essay with the statement that it is the "traceable response pattern inscribed in Endgame" (182) which evokes this experience of the decentered self. Undoubtedly Beckett's theatre attacks the macrocosmic interpretive community of audiences. Cultural training produces an inescapable desire to make meaning. But Iser's interpretation of the dramatic structures as systems of non-fulfilment (Lotman's minus-functions) seems naive. Perhaps, with the earlier plays, audiences were unaccustomed to Beckettian theatre practice and responses were, as we saw in the earlier example of Pinter's The Birthday Party, at best confused. But certainly after Martin Esslin's publication of The Theatre of the Absurd (1961) and, more importantly, the opportunity to see more such plays, this theatre practice became familiar and thus generally expected from playwrights like Beckett and Pinter.

Iser suggests that gaps are a common strategy in the modern text, used to provoke the reader into seeking closure, only to find that task impossible (The Implied Reader 280). It might well be argued, however, that gaps in fact merely provoke us into accepting gaps. In any event, the gap is obviously a strategy in Beckett's work. With Iser's own acknowledgement of this general practice, why then does he expect audiences to be unsettled by this procedure? Audience laughter can, and does, come from the realization of defective inter-pretation, but it is also stimulated by more obvious theatrical techniques--body movements which undercut or replace language, aspects of staging, vaudeville routines, stock comic jokes. In other words, Beckett works with material that we conventionally find comic. It provides another indication of the importance of ritual when everything else is lost. The laughter is stifled not so much by self-recognition, but by the performance framework. In Endgame, for example, the metacriticism of Nagg telling his perennial trouser joke or of Hamm in his closing speech denies the audience its usual responsibility for qualitative analysis, its ability to act as a group and provide a consensus. Nevertheless Beckett's theatre captures audience attention, not the least by the brilliance with which he

exploits the mechanics of theatre. While Iser made the point that Beckett's fiction appeals to readers as it enables them to understand the nature of fiction (Act of Reading 225), he does not seem to recognize that Beckett's theatrical appeal is similarly created.

. Indeed, a number of possible responses are always available to the theatre audience. They can, as Iser points out, refuse to play the game ("Art of Failure" 182). They can take up the challenge Iser presents. Or they can apply their revised cultural training--one which acknowledges Beckett's refusal to make meaning and which shares his worldview. In this case, laughter becomes a statement of concord with Beckett's despair. Ultimately, Iser appears guilty of reading Beckett and not taking full account of the plays in performance. In The Act of Reading Iser notes that reading is different from all other forms of social interaction because there is no face-to-face situation (166). With the face-to-face encounter of performers and spectators, complicated by the on-stage presence of real (albeit, here, minimal) signifiers, the system of response is necessarily different. If Beckett's plays are dissatisfying to audiences in their refusal to mean, then they are surely satisfying as theatrical art, as witnessed by their frequent production by major and

local companies, and, more generally, their absorption
into the canon.

Beyond this, several other problems with Iser's
theory have been identified. In the earlier description
of Iser's concept of implied reader, the problem of the
reader's role has already been discussed. Lentricchia
attacks Iser's continual reference to the reader "as an
autonomous and private individual . . . . He ignores
both author and reader as cultural constructions" (149).
"What we end up with," Holub decides, "is, on the one
hand, a model premised on textual qualities . . . and,
on the other hand, the response of a reader who, since
Iser shuns the historical reader, is the product of an
abstracted performance" (100). Holub suggests that th s
leaves two possible areas of study, either the blanks
and negations of the text or the effects of textual
strategies on an ideal reader. These approaches are,
therefore, in "the best traditions of Anglo-American
New Criticism. . . . And that his American reception
has thus far exceeded that of his colleague Jauss is due
in no small part to his compatibility with this familiar
critical heritage" (Holub 100).

It is, however, the exchange between Iser and
Stanley Fish in _Diacritics_ [11] that raises, as Holub
points out, the most important questions about Iser's

theory of reading. With Iser's insistence on the textual control of possible interpretive strategies, he clearly undercuts the role of the reader in favour of preexistent textual meaning. Fish's challenge was to insist that positions of either indeterminacy or determinacy are always mediated by the reader's interpretive community:

> every component . . . --the determinacies or textual segments, the indeterminacies or gaps, and the adventures of the reader's "wandering viewpoint"--will be the products of an interpretive strategy that demands them, and therefore no one of those components can constitute the independent given which serves to ground the interpretive process ("Why no one's afraid" 7).

Iser's response, while at least in part accepting Fish's point, insists that there is always "something" "prior to interpretation, [which] acts as a constraint on interpretation, has repercussions on the anticipations operative in interpretation, and thus contributes to a hermeneutical process" ("Talk like whales" 84). As Holub concludes, Iser either ignores or misses the central implication of Fish's attack, that the "something" only has meaning--indeed is only identifiable--when we, as readers, so attribute (104).

The work of Hans Robert Jauss is generally considered a counterpart to that of Iser. While Iser concentrated his investigations upon the individual

reader, Jauss has been concerned with the reader in history. His essay, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," first published in 1969, charts the reasons for the then prevalent disregard for literary history. He enumerates the shortcomings of past practices which had described themselves as literary history, as well as the problems inherent in Marxist and Formalist criticism. Jauss sets out to take up the problem of literary history which, he argues, remained unresolved in the dispute between Marxist and Formalist critics precisely because of the limited attention they pay to reader or audience (Reception 18). To position the reader at the centre of critical investigation, Jauss redefines the project of literary history:

> The historicity of literature as well as its communicative character presupposes a dialogical and at once processlike relationship between work, audience, and new work that can be conceived in the relations between message and receiver as well as between question and answer, problem and solution. The closed circle of production and of representation within which the methodology of literary studies has mainly moved in the past must therefore be opened to an aesthetics of reception and influence if the problem of comprehending the historical sequence of literary works as the coherence of literary history is to find a new solution (Reception 19).

Jauss finds aesthetic, as well as historical, implications in the relationship between literary work and audience, thus providing the title of his project.

The aesthetic implications arise from the fact that an initial reading of a text necessarily includes measuring it against other works read in the past as a test of its aesthetic value. This leads to the historical importance:

> The obvious historical implication of this is that the understanding of the first reader will be sustained and enriched in a chain of receptions from generation to generation; in this way the historical significance of a work will be decided and its aesthetic value made evident (Reception 20).

The methodology for this aesthetics of reception Jauss organizes in seven theses:

1. Literary history is to be based "on the preceding experience of the literary work by its readers" (Reception 20). The so-called facts of other literary histories are exposed by Jauss as pseudo-history; they are merely the constructs of readers. Unlike political events, literary texts do not have inevitable repercussions. Texts have an effect only if readers continue to read and respond to them. In other words, texts are inevitably mediated by the reader's horizon of expectations,[12] and the establishment of literary history depends on an objectification of the horizon of expectations.

2. The description of an individual's reception of a work does not have to be a psychological analysis "if

it describes the reception and the influence of a work within the objectifiable system of expectations that arises for each work in the historical moment of its appearance" (Reception 22). This involves knowledge of the genre, form and themes from works already read, and an awareness of poetic language (as opposed to everyday language [13]). The initial reception of a text is not, Jauss suggests, arbitrary, subjective or impressionistic. It is instead "the carrying out of specific instructions in a process of directed perception, which can be comprehended according to its constitutive motivations and triggering signals" (Reception 23). Avant-garde texts are never completely "new"--if they were, they would be incomprehensible--but merely contain instructions to the reader which demand revision of the horizon of expectations of earlier texts.

3. A text's immanent horizon of expectations permits the determination of "artistic character by the kind and the degree of its influence on a pre-supposed audience" (Reception 25). The aesthetic distance between a given horizon of expectations and a new work "can be objectified historically along the spectrum of the audience's reactions and criticism judgment (spontaneous success, rejection or shock, scattered approval, gradual or belated understanding)" (Reception 25). At the time

of its first publication/performance, a work is measured against the dominant horizon of expectations. The closer it comes to complete identification with this horizon, the more likely it is to be low, pulp or "culinary" art. Although there can be a marked distance in contemporary reception, this can, of course, change in later readings. Works initially successful can in this way either become outmoded (and thus "culinary") or, in the case of "classics," require to be read "'against the grain' of the accustomed experience to catch sight of their artistic character once again" (Reception 26). Jauss provides the example of the publication histories of Flaubert's Madame Bovary and Feydeau's Fanny. While the former brought Flaubert to trial for the offensive material contained in his novel, the latter ran to thirteen editions in its first year. As the horizon of expectations changed--interestingly Jauss accounts for this as the result of "connoisseurs" sanctioning a new horizon--Fanny became clearly "culinary" and Madame Bovary became a significant contributor to the development of the novel.

4. By recovering the horizon of expectations of a given period, we can understand the hermeneutic difference between the understanding of a work then and now. This brings to light the history of a text's reception and

dispels the notion of objective and timeless meaning contained independently within a text. In this way, we can learn about an unknown work by measuring it against its intertexts (implicitly or explicitly cited).

5. This thesis adapts the Formalist model of literary evolution. In Formalist theory, new art was seen not as the antithesis of the old, but as a regrouping and parodic surpasssing. To this Jauss adds the experience of the interpreter "since the past horizon of old and new forms, problems and solutions, is only recognizable in its further mediation, within the present horizon of the received work" (Reception 34). In Jauss' theory, the new is more than the aesthetic category described by the Formalists. It is also a historical category:

> when the diachronic analysis of literature is pushed further to ask which historical moments are really the ones that first make new that which is new in a literary phenomenon; to what degree this new element is already perceptible in the historical instant of its emergence; which distance, path, or detour of under-standing were required for its realization in content; and whether the moment of its full actualization was so influential that it could alter the perspective on the old, and thereby the canonization of the literary past (Reception 35).

6. Following from the synchronic/diachronic models of Saussure's linguistic theory, a synchronic analysis could be developed for literary history which has previously only concerned itself with the diachronic

perspective. A synchronic analysis could show "the heterogeneous multiplicity of comtemporaneous works in equivalent, opposing, and hierarchical structures, and thereby . . . discover an overarching system of relationships in the literature of a historical moment" (Reception 36). By a diachronic comparison of synchronic analyses, it would be possible, Jauss argues, to determine whether a work was current or otherwise (and, in this case, whether it was old-fashioned or ahead of its time). Texts selected for the new canon in literary history would be selected through a history of influence rather than through the more traditional routes of statistics or "the subjective willfulness of the literary historian" (Reception 39)! The history of influence Jauss describes as that "which from the per-spective of the present constitutes the coherence of literature as the prehistory of its present manifest-ation" (Reception 39).

7. As well as synchronic and diachronic analysis, literary history has to be viewed in its relationship to the more general category of history. Jauss writes:

> The social function of literature manifests itself in its genuine possibility only where the literary experience of the reader enters into the horizon of expectations of his lived praxis, preforms his understanding of the world, and thereby also has an effect on his social behavior (Reception 39).

Literary works are measured not only against other works, but against the reader's social experience. This, for example, explains the hostility towards Madame Bovary expressed by its first reading public. As Jauss points out, it was the new way of seeing, provoked by the technique of impersonal narration, which "turned a predecided question of public morals back into an open problem" (Reception 44). In this relationship between literature and history, Jauss identifies the critic's most important task. By studying literary evolution, it is possible to discover "that properly socially formative function that belongs to literature as it competes with other arts and social forces in the emancipation of mankind from its natural, religious, and social bonds" (Reception 45). A number of difficulties are evident in Jauss' theory. The "reading against the grain" required to recognize the special qualities of a classic "great" text surely raises the possibility of this kind of reading for "culinary" works. As Holub points out, this is a result of a general inadequacy in marking distance between the horizon of expectations and the work itself as the "criterion for determining literary value" (62). Beyond this, Suleiman is right in remarking that Jauss ignores the likelihood of "different horizons of expectations

co-existing among different publics in any one society.
. . . Jauss's notion of the public and its expectations
does not allow for enough diversity in the publics of
literary works at a given time" (37). To answer this,
we are back with the interpretive communities of Stanley
Fish though in a broader sense than Fish uses the term.
The criticism by Lentricchia that Fish dealt only with
"an isolated contemporary moment" (148) might, however,
be addressed by a melding of the communities with Jauss'
diachronic analysis. Readings then would be
identifiable as socially and historically mediated and
open to investigation in this light. As we saw in the
reception history of Pinter's The Birthday Party, both
the interpretive community and shifts in 'horizon of
expectations' determined the nature of response. Jauss
has clearly realized the problem. In a later essay, he
makes what he describes as "an overdue clarification"
and redefines the reader's role as arising from two
horizons. The first recalls Iser's theory and is the
literary horizon of expectations suggested by the text
read; the second is the social horizon of expectations
of the reader himself. Jauss explains the process
further:

> The reader can make the text 'speak to him',
> that is, he can concretize the potential
> meaning of a text in the direction of
> contemporary significance only to the extent

that he introduces his own pre-understanding
of the lived world into the framework of
textual expectations and those of the implied
reader. His pre-understanding includes his
concrete expectations arising from the horizon
of his interests, desires, needs, and
experiences. The social horizon of
expectations is thereby conditioned by the
reader's biography, social group or class,
education, generation, etc. It goes without
saying that literary experiences have their
role, through the creation of models such as
the hero, in the formation of the social
horizon of expectations ("Theses" 141).

Nevertheless, as Holub notes, the horizon of
expectations holds an altogether diminished role in
Jauss' later work and his new centre of attention is the
aesthetic experience. He writes:

The productive and receptive aspects of the
aesthetic experience are dialectically
related. The work does not exist without its
effect; its effect presupposes reception, and
in turn the audience's judgment conditions the
author's production ("Theses" 138).

In Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics, Jauss
explores the dialectic relationship of production and
reception as an attack on what he calls the purism of
Theodor Adorno's aesthetics of negativity. Instead he
proposes: "that attitude of enjoyment which art creates
and makes possible is the aesthetic experience par
excellence which underlies both preautonomous and
autonomous art. It must again become the object of
theoretical reflection where renewed meaning is to be
given to the aesthetic practice of a productive,

receptive, and communicative attitude for our time" (_Aesthetic Experience_ 21). The primary aesthetic experience is characterized by understanding, while secondary aesthetic reflection provides cognition and interpretation.

Central to this new thesis is the concept of aesthetic pleasure. Working from Freud's description of aesthetic pleasure as the possibility of experiencing normally repressed feelings through the safety of distance, Jauss introduces three components of aesthetic enjoyment: _poesis_, _aisthesis_, and _catharsis_. These components are, Jauss suggests, independent, but linked. _Poesis_, through an analysis of the term's evolution, is illustrated as the productive component of aesthetic experience. In twentieth-century developments (such as pop art and photo realism), the productive pleasure is not simply an aspect of the artist's creative process but is equally a part of audience response. One example Jauss provides is one of Jasper Johns' paintings of the American flag; with the apparent identity of the work and the object, the _poesis_ is repositioned with the viewer (_Aesthetic Experience_ 58-59).

Aisthesis represents the receptive component of aesthetic pleasure. This Jauss defines as "the seizing of the possibility of renewing one's perception of outer

and inner reality" (<u>Aesthetic Experience</u> 35). Once
again the historical understanding of the term is traced
with Jauss' conclusion that <u>aisthesis</u> has, against a
background of man's alienation in this century, taken on
a responsibility never before accorded it. Its role is
to:

> counter the shrunk experience and subservient
> language of the culture industry by the
> language-critical and creative function of
> aesthetic perception. In view of the
> pluralism of social roles and scientific per-
> spectives, such perception was also to
> preserve the experience of world others have
> and thus to safeguard a common horizon which,
> the cosmological whole being gone, art can
> most readily sustain (<u>Aesthetic Experience</u>
> 92).

<u>Catharsis</u> represents the communicative function of the
aesthetic experience. It is "the enjoyment of affects
as stirred by speech or poetry which can bring about
both a change in belief and the liberation of his mind
in the listener or spectator" (<u>Aesthetic Experience</u> 92).

This theory of aesthetic experience is tested in
a series of what Jauss terms interaction patterns of
identification with a hero. His work with the paradigm
of the hero figure provides a detailed model of possible
primary levels of aesthetic identification. The levels
are "astonishment, admiration, being shaken or touched,
sympathetic tears and laughter, or estrangement"
(<u>Aesthetic Experience</u> 153). Jauss continues:

The spectator or reader may enter into these
states but also disengage himself at any
moment, take up the attitude of aesthetic
reflection, and start in on his own
interpretation which presupposes a further,
retrospective or prospective, distancing. The
relation between primary aesthetic experience
and secondary aesthetic reflection thus takes
us back again to the fundamental distinction
between understanding and cognition, reception
and interpretation (153).

Jauss' levels of aesthetic reflection are
patterned upon Northrop Frye's five classifications of
fiction. These Frye arrived at "by the hero's power of
action, which may be greater than ours, less, or roughly
the same" (Anatomy of Criticism 33). Power of action
is, of course, a textual construct and replaced in
Jauss' study by modes of reception. Jauss states that
his model is not a hierarchy, but "a functional circle
of possible primary attitudes of the aesthetic
experience where the momentarily dominant identification
can be described both in the phases of the reception
process and in its result" (Aesthetic Experience 155).
The model is presented with the acknowledgement of its
provisionality and in the awareness of its "lacking the
foundation that a theory of the emotions would give it"
(Aesthetic Experience 158). While the five levels were
drawn up as a result of historical examples, leading to
a diachronic progression, Jauss insists that each level
can be found in every society and that some may coexist

in a single work:

Interaction Patterns of Identification with the Hero

Modality of Identification	Reference	Receptive Disposition	Norms of Behavior or Attitude (+ = progressive) (- = regressive)
associative	game/competition (celebration)	placing oneself into roles of all other participants	+ pleasure of free existence (pure sociability) − permitted excess (regression into archaic rituals)
admiring	the perfect hero (saint, sage)	admiration	+ *aemulatio* (emulation) − *imitatio* (imitation) + exemplariness − edification/entertainment by the extraordinary (need for escape)
sympathetic	the imperfect hero	compassion	+ moral interest (readiness to act) − sentimentality (enjoyment of pain) + solidarity for specific action − self-confirmation (tranquilization)
cathartic	the suffering hero	tragic emotion/liberation of heart and mind	+ disinterested interest/free reflection)
	the beset hero	sympathetic laughter/comic relief for heart and mind	− fascination (bewitchment) + free moral judgment − mocking laughter (ritual of laughter)
ironic	the vanished or anti-hero	alienation (provocation)	+ responding creativity − solipsism + refinement of perception − cultivated boredom + critical reflection − indifference

(<u>Aesthetic</u> <u>Experience</u> 159)

As a co-ordinate to his own model, Jauss suggests that Holland's work on the management of fantasy in the reception process might well be useful. As Metz's article on the film spectator makes clear, and

particularly in relation to a hero figure, the daydream
element of reception is active at the primary level of
aesthetic experience. Thus, in the description of the
audience's receptive process, merger of understanding
and fantasy at a primary level would appear appropriate.
While Jauss' theory of the aesthetic experience is
undoubtedly useful, it nevertheless fails to deal in any
depth with the sociological underpinning. Janet Wolff
rightly describes Jauss' theory as a partial acccount:

> For the existence of a 'great tradition' is
> still made to appear relatively unproblematic,
> as long as we fail to see the specific
> material and ideological practices in which
> works are produced in the first place (the
> sociology of literary production), those
> conditions and practices which locate certain
> people or groups as audiences and,
> particularly, those key members of audiences
> whose task it is to formulate and conserve the
> literary heritage (the sociology of reception
> and of criticism)(Aesthetics 35-36).

Wolff is, of course, arguing from a Marxist position
that production and reception stand in a dialectical
relationship. In part for the reasons Wolff suggests
and in part for his reliance on the perceptions of the
individual as constitutive of history, East German
theorists have found much to criticize in Jauss' work.

The work of Manfred Naumann illustrates the
alternative approach(es) of East German theorists. In
his discussion of the realization of the text, Naumann
sets up an interactive relationship. Like Iser, he

identifies "that readers can realize a work only within the limits of the possibilities which it marks out for this purpose on the basis of its availability. The reader's freedom in dealing with a work has its limits in the objective properties of the work itself" (116). Like Jauss, he sees reception as a bidirectional relationship: "In making themselves subjects of the receptive relationship, the readers simultaneously makes themselves objects of an effect relation, and conversely: in that the work exerts a power upon the readers, the latter simultaneously take power over it" (117). The point of departure from the "bourgeois" theorists (such as Iser and Jauss) is the importance granted to social mediation. Naumann explains the factors involved:

> Before they reach the reader, the works produced always have forms of social appropriation already behind them; they have been selected for reception through social institutions, made available by the latter, and in most cases also have already been evaluated thereby (119).

Naumann looks to the interpretive community as mediator but, unlike Fish, sees this as obviously and always political:

> Examples of this mediating function are to be found in publishing houses, bookstores, and libraries, as well as in literary criticism and propaganda, literary instruction in schools, the study of literature, and all other institutions which mediate, materially

> or ideally, between the work produced and the reader. It is not therefore literature or works "in themselves" to which the reader establishes a relation in reading them [my emphasis]. It is works, rather, which out of the potential stock of produced works have been selected, propagated, and evaluated by social institutions, according to ideological, aesthetic, economic, or other viewpoints, and whose road to reader has additionally been cleared by measures of the most varied sort (advertising, book production, reviews, commentary, discussions of the work, public readings, literary prizes, popularization of the author, and so on). By his individual decision to choose a particular work from among those selected, the reader at the same time constitutes a social relationship (119).

Mainstream drama, particularly in light of increasing production costs and what is perceived as a shrinking audience, is more than usually subject to these processes of evaluation prior to availability for reception. Theatres (especially those with state subsidy) have a selection policy, which may or may not be declared. National theatres aim to produce "classics." Broadway aims to produce "hits."

The illustration of a London production of Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire renders unmistakable the mediating function of production. The programme announces that, by arrangement with Donald Albery, Bernard Delfont and Richard M. Mills (For Bernard Delfont Organisation Ltd.) present Hillard Elkins' production (1974, Piccadilly Theatre). The coalition of one of London's most influential theatre

owners, a powerful media organization, and the husband of the leading lady suggests the complexity of production process. Between the ideological, aesthetic and economic choices of the production strata and the availability of Streetcar for reception lies, as Naumann suggests in his general model, advertising, popularity of the author, Marlon Brando and Vivien Leigh's "definitive" movie performance, reviews, the presence of a star (Claire Bloom) in the lead role, the recent television work of Bloom and other cast members, and so on. As Naumann points out:

> Through the mediating organs operative in the interval between the produced work and the beginning of the individual reception process, there is always an indication given, along with its availability for reception, of what processes of reception and effect have been going on in and after its realization (120).

And, of course, the spectator's choice of this particular production of Streetcar among a broad and numerous selection of plays available concurrently within the same geographic area constitutes, as Naumann suggests, another social relationship. Naumann describes it as the "before" of reception and as determined by a viewer's:

> world view and ideology; by his membership of a class, stratum, or group, by his material situation (income, leisure, living and working conditions, and general way of life); by his education, knowledge, and level of culture, his aesthetic needs; by his age, and even by

his sex, and not least by his attitude to the other arts, and especially to the very literature that he has already given a reception to (121).

While the audience's experience of the text-in-performance represents the core of the receptive process, it clearly requires the contextualizing which Naumann suggests and which our earlier discussion of Brecht foregrounded. The social appropriation of literature, Naumann argues, exists "in the context of production, transmission, and function of literature, within socially conditioned and class-conditioned literary relationships, which are part of the overall social and historical nexus" (123). It is this nexus, he concludes, which makes possible the concretization of "the relations entered into by the 'active subjects,' when by means of their receptive activity they realize and make productive the values contained in literature and its works" (123).

As the conclusion of his study of reception theory, Holub remarks upon the isolationism of the German theorists and their apparent reluctance to respond to other critical discourses, particularly that of French post-structuralism (163). Jauss, in his later discussions of aesthetic pleasure, does briefly refer to the work of Roland Barthes, but only as another tactic in refuting Adorno's aesthetics of negativity

(<u>Aesthetics</u> <u>of</u> <u>Experience</u> 29).

In all the varieties of reader-response criticism surveyed here we have seen not only an isolationism from other advances in critical theory (such as semiotics and deconstruction), but also in most cases, as the cited criticisms made evident, a failure to consider the social, economic, and political relations involved in such criticism. It is only in the Marxist criticism of Manfred Naumann that these factors have been involved. As Mailloux puts it, the reader response critics simply do not "examine the status of their own discourse" (192). Jane Tompkins concludes her survey of the reader in history with the observation that "virtually nothing has changed as a result of what seems, from close up, the cataclysmic shift in the locus of meaning from the text to the reader. Professors and students alike practice criticism as usual; only the vocabulary with which they perform their analyses has altered" (225). The reason for this, she suggests, is the control of the North American academic institution where interpretation is all. Pratt, however, argues that this is insufficient: "The weakness of this explanation is that it requires us to separate the institution of criticism from the critics who participate in it, thus mystifying the former and

atomizing the latter. Clearly, the institution of criticism is a power structure constituted by and through critics" (29).[15]

2. Other Approaches to the Reader

In her critique of reader-response criticism, Pratt presents a convincing argument which suggests that the failure of much of such theory to break with formalism results from the maintenance of the former's ideological commitments. That break, she proposes, will only be achieved with the transformation of "commitments to the autonomy of art, to the mystification of art's relationship with history and with social and material life. Such a transformation will require, among other things, exploring the specifics of reception as a socially and ideologically determined process, and coming to grips with the questions of artistic production" (30). In Pratt's view, it is not only the affective fallacy which must be dismantled, but the intentional fallacy too. As a counterbalance to Fish's interpretive communities, Pratt suggests there are productive communities. Certainly the economic strictures that theatre companies almost always face underscore the necessary counterpointing of production and reception. Without an audience willing to attend, a play cannot survive many performances. Indeed, the very public nature of theatre arts stresses the necessity to consider both production and reception as socially and ideologically determined.

Furthermore, Pratt notes: "[d]espite all the

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cries that readers make meaning, it is still easy to lose sight of the fact that reception of art is production--the production of meaning according to socially constitutive signifying practices, which is what, in a different mode, artistic production is as well" (31). Theories which take account of the social construction of meaning might well be expected to prove more helpful in assessing the processes involved in watching a play. In her survey, Pratt finds only one positive model. This is Jacques Leenhardt's "Toward a Sociology of Reading."

The project of Leenhardt, director of the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, was to devise a methodology for a sociological study of reading. His research was empirical. In collaboration with The Institute of Popular Culture in Budapest, five hundred readers with different social backgrounds(in France and Hungary) were surveyed about their reading of two novels. One text was French and the other Hungarian. Each reader responded to thirty-five open questions on each novel. A significant discovery was that:

> the reader's attitude toward the events, characters, or any sign of the author's inter-vention actually formed a system. Value judgments, reading attitudes, and expectations in the sphere of pleasure appeared to be organically interrelated to such an extent

that we were able, for each national sample,
to ascertain four large systems, four
tendencies, that expressed the ideological
specificity of the reader's relationship to
the text (214).

Their study was important, Leenhardt suggests, in
proving not only the existence of systems of reading but
also in undermining any concept of a unified reading
public. He says, "we only met readers, who form publics
according to their sociodemographical characteristics"
(214). Nevertheless Leenhardt's research did reveal
general patterns of reading in France which were
different from those for Hungary (although both,
interestingly, applied stereotypic responses to the work
from the other's country). These general patterns
("predominant unifying cultural schemes") are utilized
"according to the place of the individual in the systems
of hierarchization and of the division of labor in
society" (223). Levels of education, not surprisingly,
emerge as a decisive factor. Leenhardt concludes:

The sociology of knowledge must not be a mere
rewriting of the illusions of the theory of
communication; it must take into account the
specific hierarchization of the processes of
meaning, at every point of social reality.
Such an approach would not overlook the fact
that cultural objects are produced and
received according to schemes elaborated by
collective rather than by individual entities,
and that accordingly the "code" in no way
transcends the text but, on the contrary, is
produced by the "message" at the moment when
the latter manifests itself in social reality
(223-224).

Leenhardt's broader objective is for a sociology of culture and, as such, his interests coincide with the work of British cultural theorists discussed earlier. The conclusions of his empirical research support the theoretical position of Naumann.

Reader-response and institutional literary criticism generally, Pratt argues, suffers from a lack of clearly defined objectives. In feminist literary criticism, however, as an already politicized venture and where objectives have formed a crucial part of the discussion, Pratt finds reception-oriented studies more useful. Certainly the explosion of feminist theory and criticism has been instrumental in spotlighting the sociological and ideological processes involved in our choice and evaluation of works. Kate Millet's Sexual Politics, published in 1969, was clearly a watershed text. As Toril Moi reminds us, Millett not only broke with dominant New Critical practice but made an analysis which:

> openly posits another perspective from the author's and shows how precisely such conflict between reader and author/text can expose the underlying premises of a work. Millet's importance as a literary critic lies in her relentless defence of the reader's right to posit her own viewpoint, rejecting the received hierarchy of text and reader (24-25).

This idea of reading against the ideology of the

text is developed in Judith Fetterley's The Resisting
Reader. Fetterley states in her Preface that the book
is:

> a self-defense survival manual for the woman
> reader lost in 'the masculine wilderness of
> the American novel.' At its best, feminist
> criticism is a political act whose aim is not
> simply to interpret the world but to change it
> by changing the consciousness of those who
> read and their relation to what they read
> (viii).

The female reader, Fetterley argues, is powerless in a
system where the "universal" view of reality is male,
where the experience of being an American is male, and
where the canon of American literature is resoundingly
male. To overturn this state of powerlessness,
Fetterley proposes that "the first act of the feminist
critic must be to become a resisting rather than an
assenting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to
begin the process of exorcizing the male mind that has
been implanted in us" (xxii).

The Resisting Reader deals with central texts of
American literature, working from "Rip Van Winkle" to
Norman Mailer's An American Dream, a text Fetterley
suggests is "Rip Van Winkle one hundred and fifty years
later" (157). The woman reader's position, she argues,
is one of exclusion from the experience conveyed by the
text (10). Fetterley provides a survey of the criticism
(male) of Henry James' The Bostonians and comments:

> The Bostonians is of particular interest to
> the feminist critic because the critical
> commentary on it provides irrefutable
> documentation of the fact that literary
> criticism is a political act--that it derives
> from and depends on a set of values, usually
> unarticulated and unexamined, in the mind of
> the critic and that it functions to propagate
> those values. To demonstrate this point I
> have chosen . . . extended "extracts" from the
> body of critical commentary. . . . I have
> tried to arrange the selections so as to
> define most sharply the values, the
> necessities, and the "logic" of that
> collective creature whose existence and whose
> purpose they reveal: the phallic critic (101).

Fetterley, perhaps ironically, foregrounds the process

of her selection and arrangement of James criticism and

uses this "phallic" criticism to suggest that these

critics are scared by The Bostonians. As support for

her argument, Fetterley uses James' notebooks to

indicate the gap between James' view of the story and

the value system of those male critics.

Ultimately Fetterley's analysis of feminist

(re)reading has, as Annette Kolodny describes it, an

"actively self-protective coloration" ("Dancing" 148).

Furthermore, like Millet, Fetterley has been concerned

with the works of male authors. Revising responses to

the canon can only represent part of a feminist theories

of reading and it can be argued that analyses

(recoveries) of women authors provide a more useful

model. Kolodny's "A Map for Rereading" provides, in her

examples of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow

Wallpaper" and Susan Keating Glaspell's "A Jury of Her Peers," a juxtaposition of the politics of production with those of reception. Kolodny argues that these texts "examine the difficulty inherent in deciphering other highly specialized realms of meaning--in this case, women's conceptual and symbolic worlds" (58). It is, she suggests, "the survival of the woman as text-- Gilman's narrator and Glaspell's Minnie Foster--that is at stake; and the competence of her reading audience alone determines the outcome" (58). The outcome, how- ever, is not necessarily the rejection of these texts by male readers. Unlike the "male" classics of Fetterley's study, they do not exclude "the other": "[I]ndeed, both in a way are directed specifically at educating him to become a better reader--they do nonetheless insist that, however inadvertently, he is a different kind of reader and that, where women are concerned, he is often an inadequate reader" (57).

What Fetterley and Kolodny's studies show is that gender, and particularly as it is socially and ideologically constituted, must be considered in analyses of both production and reception processes. Their work, however, might well be criticized for not pursuing political implications further. In this sense, they are, like the majority of reader response critics,

no more than participants in the academic institutions. Indeed, their situation is exacerbated by their marginality (as feminist critics) within those institutions. Elaine Showalter describes the "split" that feminist critics inevitably face:

> We are both the daughters of the male tradition, of our teachers, our professors, our dissertation advisers, and our publishers--a tradition which asks us to be rational, marginal, and grateful; and sisters in a new women's movement which engenders another kind of awareness and commitment, which demands that we renounce the pseudo-success of token womanhood and the ironic masks of academic debate ("Towards" 141).

While feminist criticism has provided new ways of reading texts, it has not supplied a new theory of reading. Comments such as Showalter's suggest that this may not be possible within existing academic structures. Certainly the problems encountered by feminists in the description of reading and their relationship to texts in general have been repeated in the creation of a feminist theatre. Feminists working in the theatre have, like their academic counterparts, sought to recover "lost" women's texts (such as Susanna Cibber's The Oracle and Githa Sowerby's Rutherford & Son) and to re-read classic works, particularly Shakespeare (Melissa Murray's Ophelia, Elaine Feinstein's Lear's Daughters, Avon Touring's version of Measure for Measure changing

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Claudio to Claudia). Beyond this, however, they have

challenged the assumptions of theatre as a cultural institution and, in this way, have radically re-structured the audience/performance dialogue. Theatre groups such as Le Théâtre Parminou (based in Quebec) and Women's Theatre Group (touring in England) have involved audiences in the creation of texts for performance. As we shall see in later discussion of performance theatre, they not only rely on audiences in pre-production stages, but in their mise-en-scènes include audience involvement, either in the form of "open" scenes or post-production discussion.

As Michelene Wandor's Understudies made all too apparent, women have long been marginalized in theatre practice. In fact, Susan Bassnett-McGuire argues that theatre, as we understand it, is a male entity (462). Not only was the work of women playwrights "lost," but women have had only the most limited access to directing and technical work. This has even been true of amateur theatre where membership is predominantly female. Roles for actresses in most plays are remarkably limited. This has led to feminist theatre workers seeking out new ways of writing and performing, new theatre spaces, and, above all, new audiences. As Wandor's study suggests, emerging feminist theatre was treated at best with suspicion by existing theatre institutions and

practitioners. Largely for this reason, alternative performance models were sought. Initially this strategy meant, as it did for similarly emergent gay theatre, "constituency" audiences (made up of feminists and gays). But, as Wandor points out:

> those groups tour, continually reaching out
> with their work to people whose perceptions
> will be challenged, and whose lives and minds
> may be ever so slightly altered by plays
> influenced by sexual politics. More
> importantly, 'constituency' is also a
> reference to the source from which the groups
> take their ideas which they then combine with
> their own theatrical interests--that source
> being feminist and gay activism which fights
> in social and political institutions to
> improve and change society (47).

In many cases, the opportunity to work directly with the audiences whose interests the companies share has led to a complete rejection of the mainstream. Cynthia Grant has made it clear that her decision to leave the successful Nightwood Theatre in Toronto (where she was Artistic Director) was the result of a growing dis-satisfaction in working within an established institution. Her present participation in a cooperative venture, The Company of Sirens, permits, she feels a more direct and important contact between actors and audience without the constraints of the conventional theatre system. Nevertheless, the incorporation of such feminist playwrights as Caryl Churchill and Franca Rame

in general studies of modern drama strongly suggests
that the impact of feminist theatre practice extends
beyond constituency interest.

Feminist reader-response criticism is, in this
way, useful not only for its discussions of <u>how</u> we read
but for identifying alternative audiences, existing
outside the dominant cultural environment. More
generally, however, the varieties of reader-response
criticism discussed in the previous section[17] have
suggested what an audience does or does not do in
response to texts. The reading process is clearly
complex--it is social, political and psychological.
The discussion of Brecht's dramatic theory and practice,
as well as Naumann's reception theory, clearly high-
lighted the failure of most reader-response critics
explicitly to situate reading as a social and political
action.[18] In the sphere of psychological response, we
have looked only at the theories of Holland. While
Holland too neglected social and political implications,
Wendy Deutelbaum suggests that the defects of his theory
go beyond this. She refutes Holland's notion of
identity theme, implying that the self is a fixed and
uniform entity, and suggests instead:

> [i]f identity there be, the reader's
> "identity" is constituted in the act of
> imaging other identities through the inter-
> actions with social and verbal fictions of

that plural self. If these heterogeneous and
motive selves frighten us in everyday life
because they menace the coherent self
conception of the ego, their play gives rise
to pleasure in the protected, ecstatic space
of reading (99).

Deutelbaum's interest in the participation of
the plural self in a pleasure of reading is developed in
the work of Roland Barthes. While strategies of reading
represent only part of Barthes' interests, he has been
an important figure in the development of new concerns
for dramatic theory. Barthes' writings clearly resist
simple categorization, but, in their plurality of
approaches, have been immensely influential. To a less
obvious extent, but nevertheless significantly, his work
has contributed to the recent challenges made upon
traditionally-held perspectives on theatre. Probably,
however, Barthes is best known for his proclamation:
"we know that to give writing its future, it is
necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader
must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Image
148).

The label of reader response certainly cannot
represent the breadth of Barthes' theory. His writings
have been structuralist, ideological, semiotic,
Freudian, and more. [19] When he does turn his attention
to the work of the reader, it is an inventive--Barthes
would have argued at this early stage scientific--

examination. This is S/Z. As a close reading of Balzac's Sarrasine, S/Z suggests a multiplicity of codes open to readers in their construction of the text. Five main codes (hermeneutic, proairetic, reference, seme, and symbol) are complemented by a plethora of additional ones (such as rhetorical, denotative, novelistic, Machiavellian). Texts are either readerly (closed) or writerly (open), with the latter, of course, preferred by Barthes. In The Pleasure of the Text, Barthes approaches reading not from the semiotic perspective of S/Z, but in a hedonistic mode. The readerly/writerly opposition is replaced by bliss (orgasmic jouissance) and pleasure. Here he explores the reading relationship Deutelbaum proposed in her criticism of Holland. Barthes writes:

> Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a comfortable practice of reading. Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language (Pleasure 14).

Barthes' descriptions for texts of bliss recall Artaud's desires for a theatre that abolished "masterpieces" and sought an immediate physicality. The text of pleasure coincides with Peter Brook's concept of "deadly"

theatre, the text of bliss with the envelopment possible in his "immediate" theatre. In both Artaud and Brook's aspirations for theatre, there is an emphasis on contact with the individual member of the audience, a desire to break through the comfortable, reassuring, complacency of the audience as group. In a medium clearly more social than the private act of reading, they strive for the asocial character Barthes assigns to bliss: "it is the abrupt loss of sociality, and yet there follows no recurrence to the subject (subjectivity), the person, solitude: everything is lost, integrally. Extremity of the clandestine, darkness of the motion-picture theater" (Pleasure 39).

Barthes' argument in The Pleasure of the Text, as so often in his work, is against the orthodoxies of traditional criticism. He writes:

> Imagine an aesthetic (if the word has not become too depreciated) based entirely (completely, radically, in every sense of the word) on the pleasure of the consumer, whoever he may be, to whatever class, whatever group he may belong, without respect to cultures or languages: the consequences would be huge, perhaps even harrowing (Brecht has sketched such an aesthetic of pleasure; of all his proposals, this is the one most frequently forgotten) (Pleasure 59).

It is typical to find the work of Brecht cited. Barthes remembers his discovery of Brecht at the Berliner Ensemble's production of Mother Courage in Paris "where

I was literally inflamed with enthusiasm for that production, but, let me add right away, inflamed also by the twenty or so lines of Brecht printed in the theater program. I had never read a language like that on theater and art" (Grain of the Voice 225). Indeed, Brecht's theories repeatedly provide exemplary models in Barthes' writings, and one of the few Barthes' articles directly concerned with theatre practice concerns "The Tasks of Brechtian Criticism." It is pertinent to this study that Barthes' interest in dramatic theory stems not from a knowledge of Brecht's texts, but from the impact of the Berliner Ensemble's performance.

Barthes' definition of Brechtian criticism conveys clearly the central importance he accords to Brecht's work. It is, he argues:

> thorough criticism by spectators, readers, and consumers and not by the learned scholar. And if I myself had to write the sort of criticism I am outlining here I would not fail to mention, despite the risk of appearing improper, the way in which his works affect me personally as a man. But in order to confine myself to the basic elements of a design for a Brechtian criticism, I will only give the analytical categories within which such a criticism might subsequently be located ("Tasks" 27).

The categories are sociological, ideological, semiological, and moral. Importantly (in terms of this study), Barthes opens his discussion of sociological criticism with the statement: "we have not yet estab-

lished adequate modes of questioning for the definition of different theatre audiences" ("Tasks" 27), and because of this, looks to contemporary reactions from the press, categorized by their political commitment.

Ideologically Brecht's work is important for what Barthes describes as its ceaseless invention of Marxism ("Tasks" 28). Certainly Brecht's intention to provoke audiences to see anew (and ideologically) the commonplaces of everyday life was understood by Barthes. In Mythologies, a collection of columns written between 1954 and 1956 for Les Lettres nouvelles, Barthes relentlessly exposes the "myths" of the time. Toys, cars, soap-powders and detergents represents just some of commodities stripped of their "naturalness" and described in terms of their ideological status. In "The Photographic Message," Barthes examines the seeming reality of the photographic image as critically as Brecht uncovered the practices of Naturalist theatre. These articles are applications of critical distance and, as Barthes states, it is the audience's reception that is crucial. Of Mother Courage, Barthes comments:

> you may be certain of a misunderstanding if
> you think that its 'subject' is the Thirty
> Years War, or even the denunciation of war in
> general; its gest is not there, but in the
> blindness of the tradeswoman who believes
> herself to live off war only, in fact, to die
> of it; even more, the gest lies in the view
> that I, spectator, have of this blindness

(_Image_ 76).

Critical distance becomes the focus of the third of Barthes' analytic categories, semiology. The gap in Brechtian theatre between signifier and signified draws attention to the complexities of codes activated in theatrical performance. In his essay "Theatre and Signification", Barthes develops this "polyphonic system of information":

> At every point in a performance you are receiving (_at the same second_) six or seven items of information (from the scenery, the costuming, the lighting, the position of the actors, their gestures, their mode of playing, their language), but some of these items _remain_ _fixed_ (this is true of the scenery) _while_ _others_ _change_ (speech, gestures) ("Theatre" 29).

The relationship between these different sign systems, how they work together and separately upon an audience in the creation of meaning, is, Barthes suggests, an important area of investigation. Brecht's theatre is significant because it reveals that the theatrical sign is not "natural" but tied to political conceptions ("Theatre" 29). More importantly, it is a theatre of signifiers, not signifieds ("Theatre" 30). The fourth category of Brechtian criticism is Morality. Barthes sees a single problem underpinning all of Brecht's theatre: how to be good in a society which is intrinsically bad ("Tasks" 28). Brecht's morality is

interrogative not didactic and, Barthes concludes, it "consists essentially in a correct reading of history and the plasticity of this morality (change, when necessary, Dominant Custom) keeps to the very plasticity of history" ("Tasks" 29).

Perhaps the most influential aspect of Barthes' work on theatre was his study of Racine. This text is important not so much for Barthes' discussion of Racine's works but for his attack on traditional (academic) approaches to literary criticism. Leenhardt, in 1980, still speaks of "the sacred awe we feel in France toward the text--an awe cultivated by our educational system" (210). Barthes concludes his study with proposals that radically undermine "standard" approaches to Racine:

> The first objective rule here is to declare one's system of reading, it being understood that no neutral one exists. Of all the works I have cited, I contest none; I can even say that in various respects I admire them all. I regret only that so much care should be put in the service of a confused cause: for if one wants to write literary history, one must renounce the individual Racine and deliberately undertake the study of techniques, rules, rites, and collective mentalities; and if one wants to install one-self inside Racine, with whatever qualification--if one wants to speak, even if only a word, about the Racinian self--one must expect to see the humblest scholarship suddenly become systematic, and the most prudent critic reveal himself as an utterly subjective, utterly historical being (On Racine 172).

The ire with which Raymond Picard (who had written his doctoral thesis on Racine) responded to Barthes' work indicates its impact. Picard's book Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle imposture? [new criticism or new fraud] was not so much a dismantling of Barthes' views on Racine, but, as Jonathan Culler suggests, a "spirited defence of the cultural patrimony against irreverent ideologies and their jargon" (Roland Barthes 65). Picard refused the entry of the social (human) sciences into literary realms.

Barthes' challenge was nonetheless a relevant one. The emergence of oppositional theoretical positions have been decisive in reshaping dramatic analysis. As we have seen, from the time that Naturalism had assumed its dominant position, radical theatre practice had been attempting such a counter-action but, as Carlson points out, it is not until the more widespread theoretical and social shift in the sixties that traditional methods are seriously questioned:

> Western Europe in the first part of the twentieth century had experienced very little of the sort of radical interpretive freedom represented by Meyerhold, for example. The iconoclasm of the futurists and dadaists made little impact on the text-centered approach of Copeau and his followers in France and did not affect the English-language theatre at all. By 1960, however, the widely held assumption that each play calls for a certain more or

less predictable production interpretation began to be seriously challenged, primarily (as in Barthes) in the name of historical relativism (444).

Despite a protracted and often hesitant response to his work, Brecht has played a crucial role in the establishment of new areas for theatrical research. Barthes' enthusiasm for Brecht's interest both in the possibilities of pleasure and of critical analysis has shown this. More generally, new critical practice, particularly in France (not only that of Barthes, but of Derrida, Lacan and Foucault), has brought about radically different ways of reading theatre. This we shall see later in the initial investigations into audience by drama theorists such as Anne Ubersfeld, Patrice Pavis and Josette Féral. Before discussing their work, however, it is important to consider the third analytic brought into play by Barthes, the discipline of semiotics, and its exploration in the work of Umberto Eco.

Eco's research has been into a theory of semiotics generally and his interest in the reading process represents only one aspect of that work. The Role of Reader, published in 1979, collects papers written over twenty years and reveals Eco's ongoing interest in this project. The motivation, as he explains in the introduction, was Charles Sanders

Peirce's "idea of unlimited semiosis" (Reader 3) and this is used as a starting point for Eco's examination of the reader's role in producing texts. Eco notes that this interest in the productive possibilities of reading, first introduced in 1965 in his Opera aperta, represented a challenge to the dominant analytic mode of structuralism.

Eco contends that "the standard communication model proposed by information theorists (Sender, Message, Addressee—in which the message is decoded on the basis of a code shared by the virtual poles of the chain) does not describe the actual functioning of communicative intercourses" (Reader 5). This model neglects the codes and subcodes (sociocultural system) of the time of emission—in other words, the addressee (reader) might not share codes with the sender. In Jauss' terms, he might have a different horizon of expectations. Furthermore, Eco suggests, consideration must be given to the initiative of the reader in turning the message into content. To incorporate these basic possibilities of reading, Eco devises a new model for the "semantico-pragmatic process" (Reader 5):

Presuppositional effort				'Aberrant' presuppositions		

Private codes and ideological biases of the sender — Expression ambiguities — Content ambiguites

ADDRESSEE

Private codes and ideological biases of the addressee — Aleatory connotations — Interpretive failures

MESSAGE-EXPRESSION as source of information ⟷ MESSAGE-CONTENT as an interpreted text

Subcode A — Subcode B — Subcode C — Subcode D — Subcode E — Subcode F

Knowledge that the addressee should supposedly share with the sender

Real patrimony of addressee's knowledge

Circumstances orienting the presuppositions — Actual circumstances deviating the presuppositions

(<u>Reader</u> 6)

Authors write with a model reader in mind. In this way, they construct texts which are communicative. "Many texts", Eco states, "make evident their Model Readers by implicitly presupposing a specific encyclopedic competence" (<u>Reader</u> 7). His example is the opening of Scott's <u>Waverley</u>:
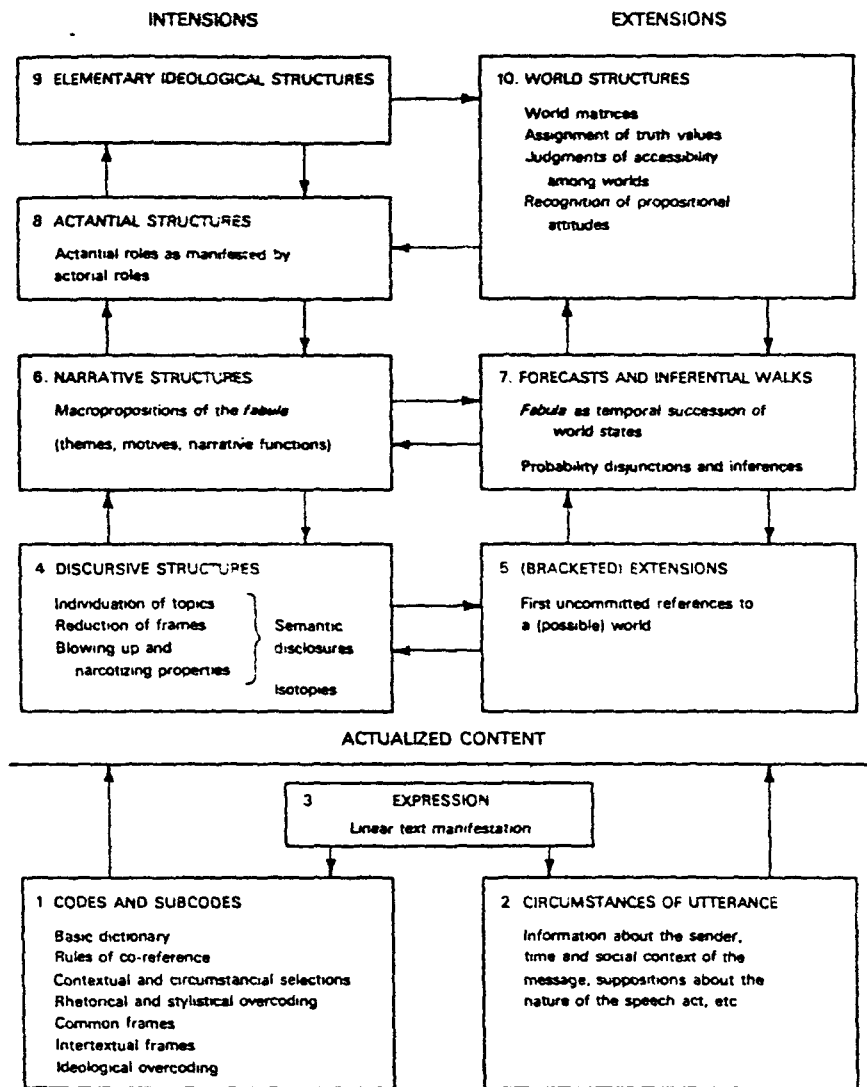
What could my readers have expected from the chivalrous epithets of Howard, Mordaunt,

> Mortimer or Stanley, or from the softer and
> more sentimental sounds of Belmore, Belville,
> Belfield and Belgrave, but pages of inanity,
> similar to those which have been so christened
> for half a century past?

Eco points out that, on the one hand, this opening addresses a very specialized knowledge but, on the other, "creates the competence of its Model Reader. After having read this passage, whoever approaches Waverley . . . is asked to assume that certain epithets are meaning 'chivalry' and that there is a whole tradition of chivalric romances displaying certain deprecatory stylistic and narrative properties" (Reader 7). The latter will hold true for historically remote readings (such as when we read Waverley today) and for different literary competences (when Waverley is read in translation). Like Barthes, Eco uses an opposition of open or closed texts. The closed text is directed at a particular Model Reader but is nevertheless 'open' to aberrant readings. Eco provides the example of Superman stories. While it is possible to deduce the Model Reader their authors proposed, he, as a "smart semiotician," makes an ideological reading which works with the codes of a capitalist dream industry!

With the establishment of the Model Reader as textual strategy, Eco turns his attention to textual levels. Barthes' S/Z is offered as a successful example

of the systems available in a text which demand or seek

out the cooperation of the Model Reader. Eco posits his

own hierarchy for the interpretive process:

INTENSIONS	EXTENSIONS

9 ELEMENTARY IDEOLOGICAL STRUCTURES

10. WORLD STRUCTURES

World matrices
Assignment of truth values
Judgments of accessibility
   among worlds
Recognition of propositional
   attitudes

8 ACTANTIAL STRUCTURES

Actantial roles as manifested by
actorial roles

6. NARRATIVE STRUCTURES

Macropropositions of the *fabula*

(themes, motives, narrative functions)

7. FORECASTS AND INFERENTIAL WALKS

Fabula as temporal succession of
   world states

Probability disjunctions and inferences

4 DISCURSIVE STRUCTURES

Individuation of topics ⎫
Reduction of frames ⎬ Semantic
Blowing up and   ⎪ disclosures
   narcotizing properties ⎭

Isotopies

5 (BRACKETED) EXTENSIONS

First uncommitted references to
a (possible) world

ACTUALIZED CONTENT

3   EXPRESSION

Linear text manifestation

1 CODES AND SUBCODES

Basic dictionary
Rules of co-reference
Contextual and circumstancial selections
Rhetorical and stylistical overcoding
Common frames
Intertextual frames
Ideological overcoding

2 CIRCUMSTANCES OF UTTERANCE

Information about the sender,
time and social context of the
message, suppositions about the
nature of the speech act, etc

(Reader 14)

Box 3 represents the necessary starting point (the text

itself) and any move from this box to any of the others

must be made via box 1. Arrows indicate interdependence rather than direction.

The reading process, Eco proposes, proceeds from activation of a basic dictionary (possible meanings for words read) to the establishing of co-textual relations. Ambiguities are effectively put on hold until further textual clues clarify the relationship. This progression will always be mediated by the reader's selection of "frames." These frames can be taken from the text (meaning of word established because of the circumstances in which it is uttered), from genre rules (literary conventions), and from intertextual competence (measuring the text against other texts read previously). The text can be overcoded through the use of metaphors and tropes (the effect, for example, of beginning a story, "Once upon a time") and will always be ideologically overcoded:

> Sometimes a text asks for ideological co-operation on the part of the reader (Brecht); at other times the text seems to refuse any ideological commitment, although its ideological message consists just in this refusal. Such is the case of Finnegans Wake, where the vanishing of everything into the mist of a linguistic dream does not represent an escape from ideology but, rather, the reiteration of a Weltanschauung transparently expressed by the whole linguistic strategy of the book (Reader 22-23).

The ideological bias of a reader will come into play and can, as Eco points out, help to uncover or ignore the

ideological structure of the text. It also acts as a code-switcher, "leading one to read a given text in the light of 'aberrant' codes (where 'aberrant' means only different from the ones envisaged by the sender)" (<u>Reader</u> 22). Here Eco offers the example of medieval interpretations of Virgil.

We do not, in the course of reading, take into account all the properties our encylopedic frame can offer for a given word: "Semantic disclosures have a double role: they <u>blow up</u> certain properties (making them textually relevant or pertinent) and <u>narcotize</u> some others" (<u>Reader</u> 23). The foregrounding (or otherwise) of these properties is regulated by the textual topic(s). These act to limit a potentially infinite semantic encyclopedia and to reduce the risk of failure in the reading operation. In other words, topics represent how a text "can generate only those inter- pretations it can foresee" (<u>Reader</u> 24). Topics can be marked by titles or key words, or may be hidden and require the reader's deductive analysis. However managed, they are the means of directing "the right amalgamations and the organization of a single level of sense, or isotopy" (<u>Reader</u> 26). The establishment of an isotopy enables the actualization of a text's discursive structure (<u>Reader</u> 27).

Eco then examines the hierarchy of isotopies. To do this, he utilizes the Russian Formalist distinction between _fabula_ (story) and _sjuzet_ (plot). "What is certain," Eco writes, "is that, through an imprecise series of mediatory abstractions, the reader comes to elaborate a more precise series of macropropositions that constitute a _possible fabula_" (_Reader_ 28). The _fabula_ is not, however, produced at the end of the reading process but "is the result of a continuous series of abductions made during the course of reading" (_Reader_ 31). Each step, even within a single sentence, involves the reader in predicting possible outcomes. These forecasts, constructed from the reader's holding of intertextual frames, are then held or dismantled by later steps in the linear progression. The recourse to intertextual frames Eco describes as "_inferential walks_: they are not mere whimsical initiatives on the part of the reader, but are elicited by discursive structures and foreseen by the whole textual strategy as indispensable components of the construction of the _fabula_" (_Reader_ 32).

The reader, through this analysis, can be seen as making numerous and selective decisions, even at the level of a naive reading. Eco sums up all the tasks the reader must undertake:

> He must verify his forecasts apropos of the
> <u>fabula</u>, so facing the world structures of the
> text. He must recognize what the text accepts
> and mentions as 'actual' and what has to be
> recognized as a mere matter of propositional
> attitudes on the parts both of the reader and
> of the characters of the story (a character
> believes p while p is false; the reader
> believes that q is the case, while the next
> state of the <u>fabula</u> disproves his
> expectation). Thus the reader must compare
> these world structures with each other and
> must, so to speak, accept the textual truth.
>
> But at the same time the reader has to
> compare (if he has not yet done so) the world
> such as is presented by the text with his own
> 'real' world, that is, the world of his
> (presumed) concrete experience, at least such
> as it is framed by his own encyclopedia. In
> other words, should the reader have put into
> brackets the problems aroused by box 5, now he
> has to deparenthesize his suspension of dis-
> belief. Even if the text is a fictional one,
> the comparison with the 'real' world is
> indispensable in order to acknowledge the
> 'verisimilitude' of the <u>fabula</u> (<u>Reader</u> 37).

While a closed text (Superman, James Bond) may be open
at the interpretive level, "the text linear
manifestation and the discursive structures remain what
they are: a museum of <u>déjà vu</u>, a recital of overcoded
literary commonplaces" (<u>Reader</u> 39). In an open text
(Kafka's novels), the openness will be sustained at all
levels. For Eco it seems, as we saw in Barthes, open
equates with "better," or at least preferable.

Eco's model of the reading process is
impressively tested in his reading of Alphonse Allais'
<u>Un drame bien parisien</u>. This metatext, Eco argues,

"tells at least three stories: (i) the story of what happens to its _dramatis_ _personae_; (ii) the story of what happpens to its naive reader; (iii) the story of what happens to itself as a text (this third story being potential the same as the story of what happens to the critical reader)" (_Reader_ 205). His analysis is "the story of the adventures of _Drame_'s Model Readers" (_Reader_ 205) and results from seminars taught in Italy and the U.S.. Eco works through, in remarkable detail, each process of his reading model. A metatext, Eco admits, is self-consciously chosen for it has its "deep theme . . . the functioning of that basic cultural machinery which, through the manipulation of our beliefs (which sublimate our wishes), produces ideologies, contradictory world visions, self-delusion" (_Reader_ 256). The lesson supplied is that every text is constructed out of two components, the author's information and "that added by the Model Reader, the latter being determined by the former--with various rates of freedom and necessity" (_Reader_ 206). An interesting addition to this detailed analysis is the experiment of empirical testing of the same text. Eco found from two separate tests of readers that the theoretical hypotheses were validated. Results of readings by undergraduate and graduate students (all trained in semiotics) showed a

typically naive response to a first reading of Allais'
story (Reader 262).

In the staging of a dramatic text, Eco
acknowledges that the response process is necessarily
more complicated (!). In his essay, "The Semiotics of
Theatrical Performance," Eco looks at the implications
of one of Pierce's examples for theatrical analysis.
Pierce posed the question of what sign was suggested by
a drunkard displayed in a public situation by the
Salvation Army in order to promote the advantages of
temperance (109). Eco attempts to answer this question.
A naive attitude represents the best starting point for
an analysis, but we cannot, Eco suggests, dismantle our
background knowledge:

> We have read not only Aristotle but also
> Francis Ferguson, Etienne Souriau, Peter
> Szondi, Umberto Eco and Woody Allen. We know
> Sophocles, Gilbert and Sullivan, and King
> Lear, I Love Lucy and En attendant Godot and A
> Chorus Line, Phèdre and No, No Nanette, Murder
> in the Cathedral and Let My People Come and
> The Jew of Malta and Oh Calcutta!. Therefore
> we immediately suspect that in that sudden
> epiphany of intoxication lies the basic
> mystery of (theatrical) performance
> ("Theatrical Performance" 109-110).

The act of placing the drunkard on the stage
incurs a shift from man to sign. By ostension, he now
represents the class to which he belongs. What we see
are some of the essential characteristics of drunkards
(red nose, frayed clothes, etc.) which have been

established by social codes making what Eco calls an
"iconographic convention" ("Theatrical Performance"
111). He points out that the choice of this man by the
Salvation Army was a semiotic one; they have found the
right man as the writer chooses the right word. The
difference is only that words are transparently signs,
whereas the drunkard appears not to be:

> The drunkard is playing a double game: In
> order to be accepted as a sign, he has to be
> recognized as a "real" spatio-temporal event,
> a real human body. In theatre, there is a
> "square semiosis." With words, a phonic
> object stands for other objects made with
> different stuff. In the mise-en-scène an
> object, first recognized as a real object, is
> then assumed as a sign in order to refer back
> to another object (or to a class of objects)
> whose constitutive stuff is the same as that
> of the representing object ("Theatrical
> Performance" 111).

Eco also points that, in theatrical performance,
non-essential characteristics of the sign "also acquire
a sort of vicarious representative importance. The very
moment the audience accepts the convention of the mise-
en-scène, every element of that portion of the world
that has been framed (put upon the platform) becomes
significant" ("Theatrical Performance" 112).[20] The
concept of framing Eco derives from Erving Goffman's
Frame Analysis which shows how meaning is derived the
mode of framing, or context. The example given from
Goffman is of a woman and a mirror. In one instance she

is in a beauty parlour and is seen examining the nature
of the mirror's frame. In the other, she is in an
antique shop and is seen adjusting her hair in the
mirror. Both are, by nature of the framing situation,
considered unusual acts. With a reversal of context,
however, the acts (unchanged) would be considered quite
normal (cited in "Theatrical Performance" 112).

Within the framework of the mise-en-scène, of
course, the audience deals not simply with the linear
text manifestation (reading model) but with a
multiplicity of sign systems. Eco cites the thirteen
isolated by Tadeusz Kowzan in Littérature et Spectacle.
These are "words, voice inflection, facial mimicry,
gesture, body movement, makeup, headdress, costume,
accessory, stage design, lighting, music, and noise"
("Theatrical Performance" 108). The status of words is,
in the theatrical situation, particularly complicated.
They are not simply signifiers; they do not refer to a
signified and through it to a referent. Instead, Eco
argues, they refer back to other signifiers:

> The statement "I love liquor" [from the on-
> stage drunkard] does not mean that the subject
> of the utterance loves liquor--it means that
> there is somewhere somebody who loves liquor
> and who says that. In theatre and cinema,
> verbal performances refer back to verbal
> performances about which the mise-en-scène is
> speaking ("Theatrical Performance" 115).

Furthermore, the drunkard represents, through the act of

framing (the background of the Salvation Army), the advantages of abstaining from liquor. In other words, he has an ironic representation. Eco describes the ideological level of the performance:

> Our drunken man is no longer a bare presence. He is not even a mere figure of speech. He has become an ideological abstraction: temperance vs. intemperance, virtue vs. vice. Who has said that to drink is bad? Who has said that the spectacle of intoxication has to be interpreted as an ironical warning and not as an invitation to the most orgiastic freedom? Obviously, the social context. The fact that the drunk has been exposed under the standards of the Savlation Army obliges the audience to associate his presence to a whole system of values ("Theatrical Performance" 117).

In this way, a semiotic analysis of the mise-en-scène will provide a semiotic analysis of the production of ideology ("Theatrical Performance" 117).

Eco has isolated two distinct features of the theatrical performance which affect the nature of audience response. There is primarily the constitution of the on-stage sign, represented not by language as in a written text, but by a real object or person. The audience's awareness of actor as actor acts to a greater or lesser extent in marking at all times the fictiveness of the world presented. Furthermore, there is, as Eco notes in the conclusion to his essay, the existence of feedback: "the audience looking at the drunk can laugh, can insult him and he can react to people's reaction.

Theatrical messages are shaped also by the feedback produced from their destination point" ("Theatrical Performance" 117).

Semiotics has, as Carlson points out (512), provided the main thrust of recent dramatic theory. While this field of dramatic study has, like its predecessors, somewhat neglected the presence of the audience, there clearly lies within a model such as Eco's a concern with the multilayering inevitable in any performance. Only when the interrelationship of performance elements are investigated in such detail can the audience's role within that structure be fully understood.

All the varieties of reader-response criticism discussed in these two sections have, above all, stimulated a concern with the theatre audience and how they engage with a dramatic production. In part, the relationship resembles that between a reader and a printed work, and in these aspects the investigations of reader-response criticism are evidently helpful. Reader-response is also useful in providing a core of reception theory which can be adopted, adapted or expanded to deal with the specific experience of audiences watching theatre performances. The detailed examinations of texts and their addressees undoubtedly

lend themselves to studies of how playwrights shape their writing to present a particular effect which meets, surprises or thwarts the expectations of the intended and/or actual audiences. We have seen, however, the paucity of criticism concerned with the social and political nature of reading and it is perhaps because of this deficit that reader-response criticism has obvious limitations in its application to the dramatic genre.

A fitting conclusion would be a return to Barthes. His attack on academic approaches to Racine provides in microcosm the omissions of traditional criticism:

> On Racine's public . . . there are many incidental remarks, valuable figures, as we might expect . . . but no recent synthesis; the heart of the matter remains quite mysterious. Who went to the performances? According to Racinian criticism, Corneille (crouching in a loge) and Mme. de Sevigné. But who else? The court, the town--exactly who? And still more than the social configuration of this public, it is the very function of the theatre in the public's eyes that would interest us: diversion? dream? identification? distance? snobbery? What was the proportion of all these elements? (On Racine 157).

Notes

1

The influence of Piscator is acknowledged by Brecht. A discussion of their relationship can be found in Innes (189-200). The influence of Meyerhold is, however, more controversial. Innes suggests there is no direct link (x) while Etkind suggests there is (84). In any event, Brecht's meetings with Tretiakov would have introduced him to the ideas of Russian formalists and futurists.

2

The Verfremdungseffekt remains controversial. For an idea of the differences in interpretation see Screen 15, special issue on Brecht (1974). Of particular interest is Stanley Mitchell's article on the relationship between Brecht's Verfremdung and Shklovsky's ostranenie (74-80).

3

Etkind offers an interesting aside--while ostranenie translated for Brecht into Verfremdung, its re-translation was forbidden. In order to recover Brecht and not be accused of a return to formalism, the acceptable Russian translation of Verfremdung had to be a synonym of ostranenie, ochuzhdenie!

4

The idea of interpellation by ideology comes from Althusser (Lenin and Philosophy 172-183). He argues that the structure of ideology ensures four simultaneous conditions:

> 1. the interpellation of "individuals" as subjects;

2.   their subjection to the Subject;
3.   the mutual recognition of subjects and
Subject, the subjects' recognition of each
other, and finally the subject's recognition
of himself;
4.   the absolute guarantee that everything
really is so, and that on condition that the
subjects recognize what they are and behave
accordingly, everything will be all right:
Amen - "So be it" (181).

5
   This relationship is expressed by Polan (96).

For a detailed discussion of this, see Austin E.

Quigley's The Modern Stage and Other Worlds (London:

Methuen, 1985).

   6 A recent example is Ellen Schauber and Ellen

Spolsky's The Bounds of Interpretation: Linguistic

Theory and Literary Text (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986).

7
   Specifically those found in Strains of Discord

(Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1958).

8
   Mailloux presents a useful critique of

Holland's work in Interpretive Conventions (24-30).

9
   Fish does not deal at any length with the act

of framing. Goffman's work, not surprisingly, has been

particularly influential with drama theorists. These

ideas will be taken up in a later section concerning the

theory of Umberto Eco.

10
   Ingarden forms an important background

influence. Discussion of this can be found in chapter

two of Holub's study.

11
   Their argument can be found in Diacritics 11.

See Stanley Fish, "Why no one's afraid of Wolfgang Iser", 11.1 (1981) 2-13, and Wolfgang Iser, "Talk like whales: A reply to Stanley Fish", 11.3 (1981) 82-7.

12
Horizon, as Holub points out, was a familiar term for German theorists. He notes precedents in the work of Gadamer, Husserl and Heidegger. "Horizon of expectations" had been used by Popper, Mannheim and Gombrich (see 58 ff).

13
For the opposition of everyday and literary language, see Jan Mukařovský's Standard Language and Poetic Language translated by Paul L. Garvin in A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure, and Style (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1964) 17-30. Mukařovský's opposition is, as we have seen, challenged by Stanley Fish (see Is There A Text In This Class?, 101 ff).

14
See Holub 121-134 on the debate between East and West German theorists.

15
Manfred Naumann, of course, works within a different kind of institution. His location in East German academia marks his reader-response criticism as equally constituted by the milieu of which he is a part.

16
Julie Holledge's work has been particularly influential. See also Wandor 46-47.

17
The survey of theories of reading here and in

the previous section is not comprehensive. Generally the figures discussed posit theories that have some application to theatre audiences. Important reader-response theorists not included are Jonathan Culler and David Bleich (both of whom have written interestingly on the pedagogical implications of this theory) as well as Gerard Genette, Gerald Prince, and Tzvetan Todorov (who might be grouped as narratologists). The Suleiman and Crosman and Tompkins anthologies provide quite full bibliographies of reader-response criticism.

[18] Pratt, considering Culler's notion of literary competence, writes wittily of the assumptions generally underlying reader-response critics: "we apparently means certain literature professors (not Norman Holland) plus other educated people who think as they do" (42). Their neglect of the social and political aspects of reading suggests to Pratt "less a reorientation of the discipline of literary studies than an elaborate shoring up of the dominant status quo, and of the interpretive authority of the academy" (42).

[19] For further discussion of the breadth of Barthes' interests, see Annette Lavers, Roland Barthes: Structuralism and After (London: Methuen, 1982) and Jonathan Culler's short survey, Roland Barthes (New York: Oxford UP, 1983).

[20]
See also Keir Elam's discussion of semiotization in _The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama_ 7-10.

III. THEORIES OF VIEWING:
1.   Semiotics and post-structuralism

Beyond theories of reading, there has, in the
last twenty years, been a development of critical
interest in the act and nature of viewing.   The process
of viewing has, as we saw in Eco's analysis of the
theatrical event, been a concern of semiotic studies and
this work has further developed interest in audience
reception.   The multilayering of scenic components
described by Eco creates an on-stage "text" which is far
more complicated than its printed equivalent, and the
question   of how these multivalent components   are
received by spectators has not been entirely ignored.
While reader-response criticism, concerned primarily
with the novel or poem, can provide a core of concerns
central to any study of reception, it is self-evident
that theatre demands a more complex communication model.
Unlike the printed text, a theatrical performance is
available for reception only in a fixed time period.
Furthermore, the event is not a finished product in the
same way as a novel or poem.   It is an interactive
process, which relies on the presence of an audience to
achieve its effects.   A performance is, of course,
unlike a printed work, always open to public acceptance,

modification or rejection by those people it addresses. This inevitably complex relationship between performance and audienc has indeed been illustrated in the recent attention which the semiotician has given to establishing a model of theatrical communication.

The interest in a semiotic approach to theatre studies emerged in the 1970s as an attack on the text-centred criticism of traditional dramatic writing, and the predominant concern of early work was the relation-ship between the dramatic text and the <u>mise-en-scène</u>.[1] Initially, as in more orthodox dramatic criticism, the spectator was neglected. More recently, however, as the objectives of semiotic study have been redefined, the spectator has increasingly become an important focus. The starting points for their investigations repeat concerns of the reader-response theorists. Levels of cultural competence are taken into account (Elam 55-62; Pavis 72), as are Jaussian horizons of expectations. Elam, for example, explores the codes/systems of expectations which provide the necessary markers for what is (or is not) included in a production:

> During the performance, not only may various kinds of extra-textual 'noise' arise, having to be ignored or tolerated (late arrivals, malfunctioning of equipment and, within limits, the forgetting of lines by the actors), but certain licensed activities not contributory to the representation proper may

take place on stage and will be duly dis-
counted by the spectator (the entry and exit
of stagehands, for example, in set changes).
It is not that the excluded events--such as
audience activity--have no semiotic value (it
does make a difference if one is allowed to
see the stage hands or if the entire audience
is noisily eating popcorn), but that they are
understood as belonging to a different level
of action (88-89).

The conventions of particular cultural codes
determine an audience's ability to tolerate
"disattendance factors." This, as Elam points out,
creates some of the difficulties Westerners encounter in
watching performances of Oriental theatre (89). Within
the Western tradition, it is worth noting the brilliant
exploitation of disattendance by John Arden. In
Waters of Babylon, a play written specifically for the
Royal Court Theatre in London where audiences have to
"disattend" the frequent, rather noisy interruptions of
subway trains passing directly below, Arden opens his
play: ". . . there is heard a crescendo then diminuendo
of noise, as of an Underground train passing" (19).
During the opening address by central character, Krank,
presented directly to the audience, the sound of a train
is repeated and direct reference to its nuisance made.
Audiences of the time (1957) were baffled by Arden's use
of non-naturalistic methods yet Arden exploits this very
simple device, an incorporation of the real world into
the fictional stage world, both to undermine the

conventions of naturalist practice and to illustrate that audiences have been quite capable of certain, expected, breaks in illusion. Peripheral noise is, in this way, utilized to foreground the acceptability of familiar codes and to suggest that the Brechtian production style of Arden's play is only confusing because of this lack of familiarity.

The main thrust of theatre semiotics has, however, been in those areas identified in Eco's theorization of theatrical performance. Primarily, semioticians have explored the density of signs evident in any performance, the interrelationship of those signs and, in particular, the Western tradition of concentration on the signs that emanate from the actor. In L'univers du théâtre, Girard, Ouellet and Rigault stress that signs provided for the spectator are seldom detached, removed from context; words are usually accompanied by facial expressions and so on. In an almost infinite number of possible combinations, signs reinforce, repeat, make more precise, cancel, correct, contradict and constitute other concurrently present signs (21-22). This clustering of signs clearly challenges the centrality of the word. As Pavis suggests, "[w]hat is fundamental to the stage, much more so than the signifieds of the text, is the iconization

(mise en vue) of the word: the text is revealed in all its fragility, constantly menaced as it is by the gestuality which might at any time interrupt its emission, and which always guides the spectator in the rhythm of his reception" (Languages 80). Indeed, the word has lost the indispensability it has for the written text: "After all, mime and silent film are possible, but verbal theater without facial and body expression is unconceivable, and the decoding process at the spectator's end leans heavily on the kinetic-visual channel, at times the only one through which messages are being coded" (Poyatos, 89-90). Words might provide useful guides for reception but, as Manfred Wekwerth indicated in a drama school experiment where a student stood on stage motionless and with a blank expression, their absence by no means inhibits the production of meaning. The audience of Wekwerth's "non-performance" came up with an imaginative range of interpretations (cited in Passow, 241).

Interpretation of the stage sign usually goes beyond its immediate signified, often utilizing several connotative possibilities. Indeed, the flexibility of the theatrical performance allows a rapid switching between denotation and connotation. In, for example, the opening sequence of Max Frisch's The Fire Raisers,

the first visual picture is of Biedermann lighting a
cigar. The cigar is in this first frame denotative. As
the lights come up, and the audience becomes aware that
Biedermann is surrounded by Firemen, it seems as if the
cigar might represent a fire hazard. The opening line--
Biedermann says "One can't even light a cigar nowadays
without thinking of fire! . . . It's revolting" (3)--
links verbal sign to stage object correcting the first
interpretation. The cigar is not per se a fire hazard
but a reminder of an apparently ever-present danger of
fire. Following that opening speech, "Biedermann hides
the smoking cigar and withdraws" (3). In this picture,
the connotative meaning of the cigar is made more
precise. Its hidden, but known presence both implicates
Biedermann and reminds the audience of the truism
"there's no smoke without fire." In the next sequence
(opening scene I), the audience is presented with a
picture of Biedermann "sitting in his room reading the
newspaper and smoking a cigar. Anna, the maid, in a
white apron, brings a bottle of wine" (4). The
previous connotative impact of the cigar is reinforced
and, furthermore, the cigar operates as part of a sign-
cluster connoting a comfortable, bourgeois lifestyle.[2]
Elam points out that this semantic versatility can also
take place at a denotative level: "What appears in one

scene as the handle of a sword may be converted, in the next, into a cross by a simple change of position, just as the set which stands in one context for a palisade is immediately transformed, without structural modification, into a wall or garden fence" (12).

The rapid transformability of objects through shifting denotative and connotative signs is, as the above example suggests, only one level of the complex process open for reception. Signs must also be received in what Erika Fischer-Lichte defines as "combinatorial possibilities" (57). In Scene I of The Fire Raisers, the object "cigar" combines with others (the leisure pursuit of Biedermann, the bottle of wine, the physical presence of a maid) to signify a bourgeois setting, which at once advances the narrative and provides an ideological framework for that narrative. The relationship of that sign-cluster to the social composition of the audience (middle class or not, Western or Eastern Europe, and so on) further shapes the range of interpretations available.

The audience as a social phenomenon has also received some attention from semiotic researchers. As in the case of the on-stage sign, it is difficult to consider the individual spectator (an off-stage sign of the theatrical event) in isolation. Anne Ubersfeld

notes how an individual is unlikely to swim against the current of his/her neighbours' reception, how difficult it is to adopt the role of sole admirer or critic within an audience (L'école 306). As Elam describes, there is a tendency towards integration, the surrendering of the individual to the group for the duration of the performance (96). While their research has dealt with the presence/influence of audience as simply one of many elements of theatrical communication, semioticians have marked the spectator's role as both crucial and central. Pavis argues that production and reception form a hermeneutic circle, each presupposing the other ("La réception du texte" 93). Marco De Marinis discusses "two dramaturgies of the spectator" (101), one where the spectator is passive, the "mark or target for the actions/operations of the director, the performers, and, if there is one, the writer" (101) and the other where s/he is active, carrying out the operations of reception: "perception, interpretation, aesthetic appreciation, memorization, emotive and intellectual response, etc." (101). Elam states that "the spectator, by virtue of his very patronage of the performance, can be said to initiate the communicative circuit" (34). Certainly an important thrust of the research in theatre semiotics has been toward the construction of a model of

theatrica   communication   and   Elam   provides   a

"simplifi d" version:

A SIMPLIFIED THEATRICAL COMMUNICATION MODEL
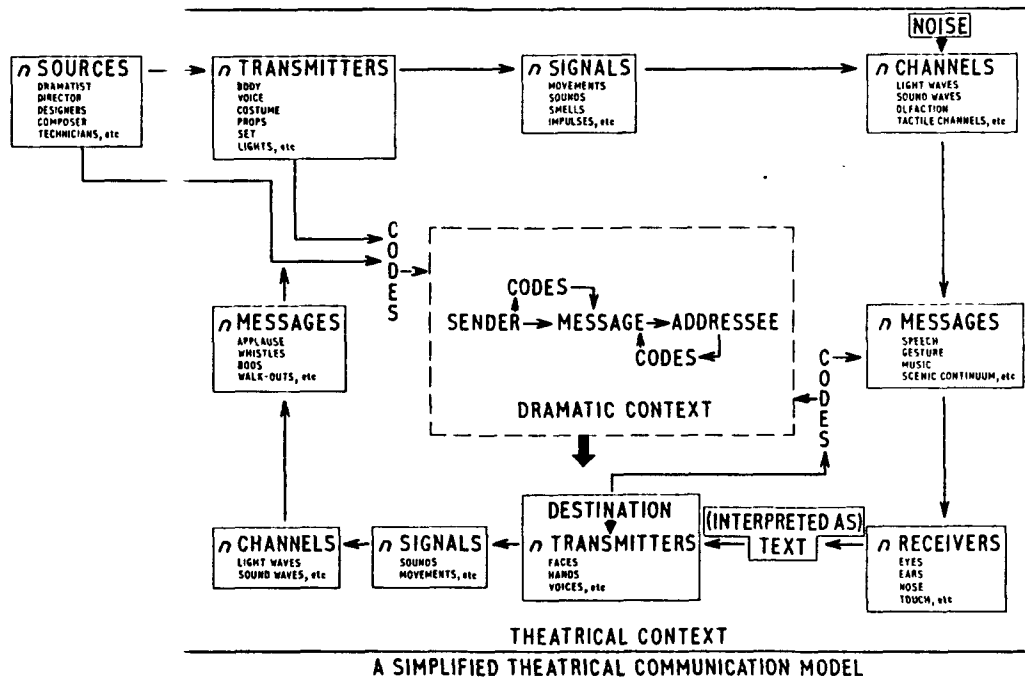
(Elam 39)

I teraction is described more simply but perhaps

more effe tively by Wilfried Passow:

> [O]f constitutive importance for theater is
> the theatrical interaction which divides into
> (A) scenic interaction within the "make-
> beli ve world" (fictitious scenic interaction)
> and (B) the interaction of the audience with
> this "make-believe world" (audience-stage
> inte action in the field of fiction). However
> ther exists further (C) the interaction of
> the members of the theater company amongst
> each other (real interaction on stage), (D)
> the interaction of the audience with the
> actc s (real audience-stage interaction) and
> (E) he interaction within the audience (240).

F r   the   purposes   of   this   study,   categories

(B),(D) and (E) represent important fields of interest. The relationship between the actors and the audience (D) has, historically, been the focus of Western interest. The work of semioticians has brought fields (B) and (E) to our attention and their exploration of the meaning-generating operations of on-stage signs has illuminated the audience's relationship with the "make-believe world." Spectator-spectator interaction, Ubersfeld asserts, takes in the four other forms, while taking the spectator as subject (L'école 311).

Ubersfeld's research, however, moves beyond models of theatrical communication to consider the pleasure of the spectator. Her interest in this pleasure has obviously been stimulated by French post-structuralist theory (remembering, for example, Barthes' The Pleasure of the Text) but may well in part be an attempt to address what is often seen as a weakness of Brecht's theory. Much of his writing is devoted to the production of a critical spectator, but there is an evasively scant attention to the pleasure produced by the entertainment Brecht considered such an important part of any drama. Accounting for pleasure is, Ubersfeld suggests, at once easy and difficult:

> One can say almost anything about the
> spectator's pleasure, and the most
> contradictory formulas can appear valid: the
> pleasure of liking and of disliking; the

> pleasure of understanding and of not under-
> standing; the pleasure of maintaining an
> intellectual distance and of being carried
> away by one's emotions; the pleasure of
> following a story ("and what happens next?"
> the childs asks) and of looking at a tableau;
> the pleasure of laughing and of crying; the
> pleasure of dreaming and of knowing; the
> pleasure of enjoying oneself and of suffering;
> the pleasure of desiring and of being
> protected from passions.   . . . One can con-
> tinue forever this little game of oppositions
> ("Pleasure" 127).

Ubersfeld starts by designating some preliminary sources of theatrical pleasure. It is social, multiform and active. Theatre audiences derive pleasure from those who accompany them to a performance (patrons rarely visit the theatre alone) and from the emission of "barely perceptible signs of pleasure as well as loud laughter and secret tears--their contagiousness is necessary for everyone's pleasure" ("Pleasure" 128). As the "game of oppositions" showed, pleasure is multiform and, at the least, twofold: "it is the pleasure of an absence being summoned up (the narrative, the fiction, elsewhere); and it is the pleasure of contemplating a stage reality experienced as concrete activity in which the spectator takes part" ("Pleasure" 128). Above all, the pleasure derives from activity, the necessary involvement of the audience in the interpretation of the multiplicity of signs, both transparent and opaque:

> Theatrical pleasure, properly speaking, is the
> pleasure of the sign; it is the most semiotic

of all pleasures. What is a sign, if not what
replaces an object for someone under certain
circumstances? Surrogate sign, a presence
which stands for an absence: the sign for a
god, the spool of thread for the mother, the
stage for an absent "reality." Theatre as
sign of a gap-being-filled. It would not be
going too far to say that the act of filling
the gap is the very source of theatrical
pleasure. Memory and utopia, desire and
remembrance, everything that summons up an
absence is, in fact, fertile ground for
theatrical pleasure ("Pleasure" 129).

Theatrical pleasure emanates from the sign-clustering

identified by semiotic research. Like the spectator of

an artwork, the theatre audience cannot take in every-

thing with a single look but, unlike the artwork, the

theatrical performance is ephemeral. Pleasure results

from that ephemerality, from the necessity of making a

selection of the elements offered.

Beyond the immediacy of the sign, Ubersfeld

identifies pleasure in memory, a "Proustian sensual

pleasure . . . the mental thrill that comes from "recog-

nizing the past" ("Pleasure" 132). As Brecht purported,

theatrical pleasure also derives from understanding.

Ubersfeld continues, and as this study has continually

stressed, "theatrical pleasures are rarely passive;

'doing' plays a larger role than 'receiving'"

("Pleasure" 132):

It is up to him [the spectator] to manufacture
the relationship between the sign and its
intelligibility, or its relationship to the
world, even to the point where the spectator

has too many demands made on him and withdraws his participation. Clearly, the possibilities of the spectator's semantic invention are not unlimited: they depend on the nature of the public and its theatre-going habits. The same is true of aleatory occurrences: they are the results of the chance happenings of the performance, of the materiality of the stage, and, as such, are a source of pleasure. The spectator takes delight in what is chance encounter, in what he alone has chanced to see ("Pleasure" 133).

Like Jauss' study in Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics, Ubersfeld locates receptive pleasure in identification with the hero. From Freud, Ubersfeld points to the pleasure in transgression (the voyeurism or catharsis of the audience) and "[t]he high peak of theatrical pleasure is perhaps that it allows us to participate in a concrete event which is a representation of the impossible, of what cannot have any concrete existence in the course of our own lives" ("Pleasure" 137). Drawing on Sanskrit theatre, Ubersfeld concludes:

> Theatrical pleasure . . . is the union of all affective elements plus the distancing we need to achieve peace. Perhaps I am close to making mine the final definition of this ancient Indian theorist [Bharata].[3] Even Brecht might subscribe to it. But one must not forget that the theatre spectator is surrounded and pressed on by a sort of urgency, and that this pleasure is countered by its own limits ("Pleasure" 137).

The limits of pleasure are marked by desire, "desire as lack" ("Pleasure" 138). The spectator cannot arrest or

touch the object of desire. Indeed, desire moves from object to object and should it stop and fix on a particular object, then the role of spectator is relinquished, the theatrical experience denied ("Pleasure" 138, L'école 342). Pleasure is thus limited by the essential situation of spectator's dissatisfaction; not only because he is not able to possess the object of desire but because, if he did, he would possess something other than that which was desired ("Pleasure" 138, L'école 343). The spectator cannot experience pleasure without experiencing its limits.

Desire, Josette Féral suggests, is at the centre of performance art. Féral takes as her starting-point this art-form which takes place "at the juncture of other signifying practices as varied as dance, music, painting, architecture, and sculpture" (170) in order to explore theatricality. Her endeavour is both to identify the essential characteristics of performance art particularly as they mark the limits of theatre. A fundamental characteristic Féral identifies is "the manipulation to which performance subjects the performer's body" (171). Through this manipulation, "[t]he body is made conspicuous: a body in pieces, fragmented and yet one, a body perceived and rendered as a place of desire, displacement, and fluctuation, a body

the performance conceives of as repressed and tries to free--even at the cost of greater violence" (171). In Féral's analysis, the emergence of an art-form self-consciously concerned with the act of performance corresponds to Artaud's search for a theatre of cruelty. Unlike conventional theatre, performance does not rely upon narrative and representation and, more importantly, it refuses meaning (171, 173):

> Performance does not aim at _a_ meaning, but rather _makes_ meaning insofar as it works right in those extremely blurred junctures out of which the subject eventually emerges. And performance conscripts this subject both as a constituted subject and as a social subject in order to dislocate and demystify it.
>
> Performance is the death of the subject (173).

While performance stands in opposition to theatre, it is, at the same time, a complement. Féral suggests that "in its very stripped-down workings, its exploration of the body, and its joining of time and space, performance gives us a kind of theatricality in slow motion: the kind we find at work in today's theatre" (176). Theatricality is split by Féral into two different components based on Lacan's distinction between the imaginary and symbolic orders:

> one highlights performance and is made up of the _realities of the imaginary_; and the other highlights the theatrical and is made up of _specific symbolic structures_. The former

> originates within the subject and allows his
> flows of desire to speak; the latter inscribes
> the subject in the law and in theatrical
> codes, which is to say, in the symbolic.
> Theatricality arises from the play between
> these two realities. From then on it is
> necessarily a theatricality tied to a desiring
> subject, a fact which no doubt accounts for
> our difficulty in defining it. Theatricality
> cannot be, it must be for someone. In other
> words, it is for the Other (178).

Performance, Féral concludes, removes the spectator from

the experience of theatricality. The lack of narrativity

and failure of representation creates a frustration and,

furthermore, the audience's competencies--on which

theatre relies--are destroyed:

> Performance readjusts these competencies and
> redistributes them in a desystematized
> arrangement. We cannot avoid speaking of
> "deconstruction" here. We are not, however,
> dealing with a "linguistico-theoretical"
> gesture, but rather with a real gesture, a
> kind of deterritorialized gesturality. As
> such, performance poses a challenge to the
> theatre and to any reflection that theatre
> might make upon itself. Performance reorients
> such reflections by forcing them to open up
> and by compelling them to explore the margins
> of theatre (179).

These studies by Ubersfeld and Féral herald a

theatre research which takes the theoretical impetus of

Freud, Lacan, Derrida and other post-structuralists to

go beyond the dramatic text and beyond the text in

performance. Bernard Dort writes:

> It is no longer necessary to decide which of
> these two elements [text and performance] will
> triumph over the other. In fact their
> relationship does not even need to be seen in

> terms of union or subordination . . .. It is
> instead a context which is being held before
> and for the benefit of us, the spectators.
> Theatricality, then, is not merely that
> "density of signs" that Roland Barthes spoke
> of. It is also the drifting of these signs,
> the impossibility of their union, and finally
> their confrontation before the spectator of
> this emancipated performance (67).

Yet pleasure, desire, confrontation, and the nature of

viewing have not attracted the full attention of theatre

theorists. Viewing has, however, become a central issue

for film theorists and, since Laura Mulvey's seminal

article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975),

there has emerged a corpus of theory which is without

doubt relevant to this study of the theatre audience.

Particularly pertinent in the film theorists'

exploration of viewing is the attention paid to the

apparatus of traditional filmic pleasure which maintains

an economically successful mainstream cinema. Cinema

is, like theatre, a public event which generally takes

place in a building specifically designed for that pur-

pose and, like the theatre audience, the cinema audience

reacts as a group. John Ellis describes them as co-

voyeurs. Invariably both cinema and theatre audiences

watch in a darkened auditorium. Beyond these

similarities between cinema and theatre, the work of

film theorists (and particularly feminist film

theorists) is of interest in the attempt to identify

strategies which disrupt the homogeneity of the classic realist movie. Such challenges to the traditional apparatus clearly have their counterpart in alternative theatre practice and both endeavour to reposition the spectator in the production-reception contract.

Despite the usefulness of such film theory, it is, of course, necessary to remember the finished nature of the cinema production. It is not modifiable in the same way as theatre. Where the theatre audience can always affect the nature of performance, this cannot take place in the cinema. Indeed, even when filmmakers endeavour to take account of the experience for the audience, the distribution network appears reluctant to disrupt the normal production-reception hierarchy. The American handling of the Taviani brothers' Kaos, a film version of four short stories by Pirandello, is a case in point. Stephen Harvey writes:

> The brothers worry that the 3-hour-plus running time of "Kaos" might prove a bit much for movie audiences to endure. Therefore, the Tavianis made the heretical suggestions that in each country where "Kaos" is released, the film's distributor should excise one story according to the perceived tastes of the local public. In an ironic switch, M-G-M/UA, which bought "Kaos" for the United States, was aghast at the prospect--how could they presume to tamper with the work of artists like the Tavianis? (40)

Even more significantly, film action is always interpreted by the camera and the spectator's view of

the signifying system(s) guided in a way that cannot be guaranteed by on-stage, live performance.

With these significances and limitations in mind, we can return to "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Mulvey's influential discussion of how the spectator's unconscious structures viewing. In this article, she categorized the pleasure created by looking at mainstream films (the Hollywood product) from a theoretical stance typical of the Screen critic in the 1970s, influenced strongly by psychoanalysis and Marxism.[4] The spectator's unconscious (which, according to the Lacanian model, structures responses) is, she argues, formed by the dominant order. Mainstream film, "as an advanced representation system" (7) within the dominant order, encodes the erotic into the language of that order. For this reason (the dominant order being, of course, inter alia, patriarchal), woman is presented in a passive role. The on-screen female functions as icon; she is an erotic object both for the characters within the filmic narrative and for the spectator in the cinema.

According to Mulvey, mainstream film, as a result of the conventions in which it has developed,

> portray[s] a hermetically sealed world which
> unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence
> of the audience, producing for them a sense of
> separation and playing on their voyeuristic

> phantasy. Moreover, the extreme contrast
> between the darkness in the auditorium (which
> also isolates the spectators from one another)
> and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of
> light and shade on the screen helps to promote
> the illusion of voyeuristic separation.
> Although the film is really being shown, is
> there to be seen, conditions of screening and
> narrative conventions give the spectator an
> illusion of looking in on a private world.
> Among other things, the position of the
> spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of
> repression of their exhibitionism and
> projection of the repressed desire on to the
> performer (9).

The pleasure of looking satisfies a primordial human
wish, but that pleasure is split between active/male and
passive/female (9, 11). The active/passive heterosexual
division of labour maintained by the dominant order has,
Mulvey argues, controlled the structure of narrative.
In this way, "the split between spectacle and narrative
supports the man's role as the active one of forwarding
the story, making things happen" (12). He controls
phantasy and acts as the bearer of the spectator's look.
The male film actor is not an erotic object like his
female counterpart, but a powerful ideal ego.

Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalytic theory,
Mulvey suggests that woman presents a problem, despite
her objectification:

> She also connotes something that the look
> continually circles around but disavows: her
> lack of a penis, implying a threat of
> castration and hence unpleasure. . . . the
> woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and
> enjoyment of men, the active controllers of

the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified (13).

For the male, there are two possible escapes from this castration anxiety. He is either preoccupied with "the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object (an avenue typified by the concerns of the film noir)" (13) or he turns the threatening object into a fetish object. This latter route, Mulvey indicates, accounts for the cult of the female movie star.

As Colin MacCabe points out, in classical fictional cinema the spectator is in a position where the image is primary, where it guarantees the truth (11) and central to this is "the look" that Mulvey describes. The look, the apparatus of traditional filmic pleasure, Mulvey concludes, can be broken into three different components. There is the look of the camera, the look of the spectator, and the look between the characters of the screen illusion. "The conventions of narrative film," she writes, "deny the first two and subordinate them to the third, the conscious aim being always to eliminate intrusive camera presence and prevent a distancing awareness in the audience" (17). By subordinating those looks which are materially present, mainstream cinema dispels the threat of castration and

serves the needs of the male ego:

> [T]he camera's look is disavowed in order to create a convincing world in which the spectator's surrogate can perform with verisimilitude. Simultaneously, the look of the audience is denied an intrinsic force: as soon as fetishistic representation of the female image threatens to break the spell of illusion, and the erotic image on the screen appears directly (without mediation) to the spectator, the fact of fetishisation, concealing as it does castration fear, freezes the look, fixates the spectator and prevents him from achieving any distance from the image in front of him (18).

Mulvey's concentration on the male spectator, very much in evidence in that last quotation, generated a wealth of critical interest in his opposite. As part of an emerging corpus of feminist film criticism, the role of the female spectator has been an important focus, particularly measured against what Kaja Silverman describes as the now axiomatic description of the female subject in dominant cinema as object rather than subject of the gaze (131). Mary Ann Doane takes as her starting point Freud's lecture, "Femininity," where, as she puts it, "Freud forcefully inscribes the absence of the female spectator of theory in his notorious statement, '. . . to those of you who are women this will not apply--you are yourselves the problem . . . .'"⁵ Similarly, Doane suggests, woman is the subject of the cinema's images but these images are "not _for_ her. For she _is_ the problem" ("Film" 75). With the male

seemingly inscribed in mainstream cinema as <u>the</u>
audience, Annette Kuhn draws the following conclusion:

> [P]erhaps . . . socio-biological gender and
> gendered subjectivity are not necessarily
> coterminous, so that the specificity of the
> 'masculine' becomes in some way culturally
> universalised. If this is indeed the case, it
> certainly speaks to the hegemony of the
> masculine in culture that dominant cinema
> offers an address that, as a condition of
> being meaningful, must in effect de-feminise
> the female spectator (<u>Women's</u> <u>Pictures</u> 64).

B. Ruby Rich decides that cinematic codes have so
structured the absence of the female spectator that only
two choices remain for her: "to identify either with
Marilyn Monroe or with the man behind me hitting the
back of my seat with his knees" (in Williams, "When the
Woman Looks" 87). Doane develops these possible
choices. Beyond the adoption of a masculine response,
Doane agrees with Rich that identification is another
possibility, although she splits this into "the
masochism of over-identification or the narcissism
entailed in becoming one's own object of desire" ("Film"
87). Her third alternative is for the female spectator
to read the image against the grain, to take her
pleasure in a radical way. Based on Foucault's analysis
of repressive structures, Doane's polemic for a theory
of the woman's gaze concludes with a challenge to
received definitions, the problematizing of what was so
authoritatively set up by Freud: "Femininity is produced

very precisely as a position within a network of power relations. And the growing insistence upon the elaboration of a theory of female spectatorship is indicative of the crucial necessity of understanding that position in order to dislocate it" (87).

Reading against the grain is an obvious strategy for the female spectator. As we saw in the analysis of feminist reader-response critics, it is useful tool for re-reading canonized works in order to expose "universally held" (in other words, patriarchal) assumptions. Gillian Swanson notes that readings occur at the intersection of the positions offered by the text and the spectator's own social/cultural identity and that when this identity leads to a "quite different point of entry than that 'assumed' by the text . . . a double level of 'mismatches' and competing discourses may be possible" (22). Swanson is surely right in drawing our attention to the determining factors of race and class, as well as gender, in creating readings in tension with those assumed by the text. This inevitable tension in the spectator's position in one that is not only crucial in issues of film reception, but is also clearly pertinent, as we have seen in previous discussions of theatrical performance, to this study. It nevertheless remains little investigated, as Andrew

Higson points out: "There is little attempt to deal with the question of the relation between the productivity of the text and the metapsychology of the spectator, and the way in which the spectator is positioned in the enunciative address of the text, and the critical discourses which circumscribe the meaning of the text" (85).

While Mulvey's 1975 article has been so influential, it has been so through stimulating questions about her central active/passive split and by extending these once rigid categories. Mulvey herself has gone beyond her original structure and, in "After-thoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' . . . Inspired by 'Duel in the Sun'", tries to dislodge her own earlier isolation of the masculine role of spectatorship with a possible role for the female of oscillation between masculine and feminine identifications (see Stacey 52). Alongside the considerable attention of feminist film theorists toward the female in the audience, there have been other challenges to Mulvey's bipartition of the gaze by gender. Richard Dyer and Steve Neale have written articles exploring the male movie-star as erotic object.[6] Nevertheless, despite this searching out of alternative strategies of viewing, film theorists have

generally agreed that the practices of mainstream cinema, the realist movies of Hollywood, works towards "the homogeneisation of different discourses by their relation to one dominant discourse--assured of its domination by the security and transparency of the image" (MacCabe 12). This is shown well in Kuhn's discussion of Norma Rae, a comparatively rare excursion by Hollywood into the domain of the working class. As she points out, the victory of the female protagonist is "marked by individualisation rather than typification, so that the identifications they pose do not move readily into the terrain of either the social or the historical. Its address consequently operates largely within the limits of dominant cinematic discourse" (Women's Pictures 146).

Mulvey ended her 1975 article with a plea for counter-cinema, works that would both challenge and displace the control of dominant cinema practice. She and other film theorists have made films that attempt such an alternative and their work is an important contribution to a counter-cinema which adopts Brechtian theatre practice, in particular the techniques of disrupting the narrative flow and of discouraging character identification. Both Kuhn and Teresa de Lauretis point out, however, that deconstructive or

counter practice does not necessarily displace the hege-
mony of mainstream cinema. They suggest that breaking
down or indicating the limits of the apparatus of the
look is not enough (Kuhn Women's Pictures 168, de
Lauretis 75). Indeed, as de Lauretis illustrates in a
discussion of Michael Snow's Presents, the challenge may
simply offer the spectator the same perspective:

> [I]n this film, the nexus of look and
> identification is produced and broken in
> relation to "cinema" ("It's all pretty self-
> referential--referential both to itself and to
> film in general," says Snow), hence to its
> spectator as traditionally construed, as
> sexually undifferentiated; and women
> spectators are placed, as they are by
> classical cinema, in a zero position, a space
> of non-meaning. Because the epistemological
> paradigm which guarantees the subject-object,
> man-woman dichotomy is still operative here,
> as it is in classical cinema, Presents
> addresses its disruption of look and
> identification to a masculine spectator-
> subject, whose division, like that of the
> Lacanian subject, takes place in the
> enunciation, in the sliding of the signifier,
> in the impossible effort to satisfy the
> demand, to "touch" the image (woman), to hold
> the object of desire and to secure meaning.
> Spectator identification, here, is with this
> subject, with this division, with the
> masculine subject of enunciation, of the look;
> finally, with the filmmaker (75-76).

More effective are films which work outside the
epistemological paradigm de Lauretis describes. She
suggests Nicholas Roeg's Bad Timing as successful
counter-cinema with its play "on two concurrent tellings
of the story, several temporal registers, and a voice

somewhere, nowhere, that asks a question without answer" (100). Many more examples of films which deny the closure so typical of mainstream cinema can be found in feminist film practice. It is, of course, not surprising that feminist cinema has rejected the active/passive look, the male-centered source of pleasure. Kuhn describes feminist texts as setting up "radically 'other' forms of pleasure" based on the Barthesian concept of _jouissance_ available in reading (_Women's Pictures_ 168) and as having "an openness of address in combination with matters of expression in relation to which spectators may situate themselves as women and/or as feminists" (_Women's Pictures_ 177).[7]

In her discussion of desire in filmic narrative, de Lauretis writes:

> To succeed, for a film, is to fulfill its contract, to please its audiences or at least induce them to buy the ticket, the popcorn, the magazines, and the various paraphernalia of movie promotion. But for a film to work, to be effective, it _has_ to please. All films must offer their spectators some kind of pleasure, something of interest, be it a technical, artistic, critical interest, or the kind of pleasure that goes by the names of entertainment and escape; preferably both (136).

Theorists since Mulvey have been concerned with the female spectator who buys her ticket, but there have, as well, been more general investigations of the terms of cinema-going contract. One such study is Edward

Branigan's "The Spectator and Film Space: Two Theories."

Branigan defines "film narration as a positioning of the viewer with respect to a production of space, and subjectivity as a production of space attributed to a character" (55). Through an analysis of the camera (as a construct which enables the spectator to understand the spaces of a film) and of diegesis, and by way of Chomsky's theory of linguistic competence, Branigan concludes that it should be possible in contemporary film theory to establish a description of the reading competence required for a single class of film. His aim is to codify the judgments a spectator undertakes in order to make meaning of a film narration. There is, he suggests, a flow of hypotheses, the end result of which is an ability to deal with changes in space, new scenes, and so on (70). Branigan examines a short sequence from Fellini's I Vitelloni and, in the same manner of my earlier analysis of the opening of The Fire Raisers, looks at the denotative and connotative possibilities of each frame and suggests the hypotheses an audience arrives at. "The text to spectator relation," he concludes, "is more than stimulus/response -- it is a mutual working through of the rules and conventions of a generative system" (77). The idea of reading competence has, of course, been widely explored

in reader-response criticism and Branigan's desire to codify is precisely the one now being rejected in semiotic theatre research as neither attainable nor particularly useful. His article does, however, indicate that the on-going attempt at understanding those systems of relations which enable audiences to receive (and generally make meaning of) cultural products.

Like Branigan, John Ellis is concerned with the cinema-going contract. In his analysis of cinema as cultural product, he deals both with the public nature of the event and the role accorded to those who attend. Ellis takes as the starting point for his discussion the two distinct mechanisms which characterize cinema marketing: "[they are] the single film in its uniqueness and its similarity to other films; and the experience of cinema itself. Cinema and film are both sold at the same point, at the point of sale of an admission ticket" (25). Ellis argues, and I believe this equally valid in the case of theatre, that the spectator does not buy "the film," but the possibility of watching a film; the spectator does not buy the cinema but "the anticipated experience" (26). In this sense, it is an unusual consumer product. There are no tangible goods (except the paper ticket, again only a promise of the experience

to come). As in theatre, the spectator parts with his money in anticipation of receiving pleasure from the product (the film) he has contracted to receive and the conditions in which he is to receive it (the cinema). Ellis comments further: "If the anticipated pleasure is not experienced money is not usually returned except in the case of a mechanical fault in the projection: even then, a refund is difficult to come by" (26). His analysis of cinema's function as a cultural event then distinguishes the two performances which the spectator "purchases" with his admission ticket:

> Cinema is enjoyed whether the film is or not (hence no refund on a dissatisfying film), and often people 'go to the cinema' regardless of what film is showing, and sometimes even with little intention of watching the film at all. Cinema, in this sense, is the relative privacy and anonymity of a darkened public space in which various kinds of activities can take place (26).

The experience of cinema, Ellis argues, is these days a quintessentially urban one, "that of the crowd with its sense of belonging and of loneliness" (26). At one time, community cinemas, where most of the audience members knew each other, created a different experience but today the majority of cinemas provide that urban experience Ellis describes. Indeed, even the sense of belonging created, say, from the large crowd lining up for admission is fragmented by the departmentalizing of audiences into small auditoria within a cinema complex.

In looking at the role of the cinema spectator,
Ellis proposes that "[t]he institution of the narrative
entertainment film itself proposes a definite kind of
spectator" (79). The Hollywood product specifies an
audience which "is curious or expectant about a
particular enigma, and demands that this curiosity
should be satisfied in a particular way" (79).
Narrative cinema, Ellis contends, confines itself to
conservative, familiar ideological trends in society in
order to appeal to the widest possible audience. This
search for the mass audience is, of course, often
necessary simply to reclaim the vast sums expended on
shooting the Hollywood "blockbuster," but the
implications of this conservatism were clearly apparent
in the discussions of Mulvey and others.

Ellis, like the other Screen critics, describes
the fundamental satisfaction of cinematic narration as
voyeurism:

> Entertainment cinema offers the possibility of
> seeing events and comprehending them from a
> position of separation and of mastery. The
> film is offered to the spectator, but the
> spectator does not have anything to offer to
> the film apart from the desire to see and
> hear. Hence the spectator's position is one
> of power, specifically the power to understand
> events rather than to change them. This is
> the position of mastery that the voyeuristic
> process gives to the cinema spectator (81).

This position of mastery and knowledge is, however, "an

extended game with the spectator, offering the promise of such a position, but witholding fulfilment of that promise until the end of the film" (84). Like Branigan, Ellis sees the spectator's reading of the film as a constant juggling of hypotheses, of apparent knowledge and loss of that knowledge. This, Ellis concludes, leaves the spectator in a state of anxiety. This anxiety, however, is "provoked in safety, because its resolution is guaranteed by the institution of cinema itself, which is not in the habit of presenting incomplete films" (85). Anxiety then arises out of the contradictory desires fostered by the mechanics of dominant cinema: the desire for the film to continue and the desire for closure, a resolution of the narration. When a film fails to please, Ellis suggests that this is usually because it has not provided "the necessary play with phantasies, and final closing accomplishment of a position of mastery and knowledge. The anxiety produced in the expectation of its satisfaction is not dissipated; it returns as a kind of aggression" (87).

Central to the voyeuristic activity of the individual spectator is his/her membership of the audience at large. Ellis comments on how audiences will tend to relate to a film as individuals when the film narration is intelligible to the consensus. When that

intelligibility is denied, the individual will resort to his/her group in one of two ways: questions will be asked in coversations between spectators after the conclusion of the film or the film will be refused and the audience as a group will mock and criticize as the film plays (87). Furthermore, Ellis notes:

> The presence of the crowd in the cinema is vital to the operation of the regime of cinematic representation. It enables a voyeuristic activity to take place that is necessary to produce the individual spectator as the point of intelligibility of the film. Perhaps it is to ensure the presence of co-voyeurs that people seek company to go to the cinema. The audience of an entertainment film is very seldom composed of isolated individuals, but rather of couples, groups of friends and sometimes even family groups. Many people feel a profound sense of shame at watching a film alone, not principally during the projection, . . . [but at those] moments when the house lights are up: it is possible to be seen clearly by other members of the audience, and to see them clearly. It is no longer a crowd, but a gathering of individuals, mutually suspicious rather than mutually affirming (88).

Ellis' study of the apparatus of mainstream cinema is made largely in comparison to broadcast television.[8] It is not, however, the intention of this study to deal with investigations of the role of the television audience for a number of reasons. Television, above all, lacks the sense of public event that attaches to both theatre and cinema. It denies the audience the sense of contact with the performers that

is integral to any theatrical performance and it further denies the spectator-to-spectator communication (in both its positive and negative aspects) within the larger framework of audience as community.

This excursion into film theory has provided, above all else, a broader examination of the concepts of spectatorial pleasure and desire introduced in recent theatre research in the work of Ubersfeld and Féral. Both theatre and film theorists are clearly relying on psychoanalytic (and specifically Lacanian) models through which to explore the audience's experiences. Feral turns to the actor's body in performance theatre as the film theorists turn to the practices of counter-cinema as examples that refuse the usual, ideologically implicated, sources of pleasure. All these investigations add to our understanding of the complex processes through which an audience is able to receive a film or play.

2. Empirical research

The psychoanalytic, and specifically feminist, studies of viewing reflect a generally increased awareness of the interdependent relationship of production and reception. While post-structuralist theory has undoubtedly stimulated such concern with the process of viewing, traditional research has been concentrated on the sociological. Rather than look to the process of viewing, surveys have been made of the audience in order to determine social composition and to provide the cultural institutions with profiles of the "typical viewer."

Two studies are examined here to indicate, in general terms, the methodology involved and the implications of data received. One study, published in 1966, by William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen surveyed audiences in the U.S. and U.K. Their data were collected from surveys inserted into programmes at 160 performances, yielding over 30,000 usable replies. Baumol and Bowen's research established two fundamental characteristics of the arts audience. They noted a "remarkable consistency of the composition of audiences from art form to art form, from city to city and from one performance to another" (469) as well as identifying that the audience came from a very narrow segment of

national population: "In the main, it consists of persons who are extraordinarily well educated, whose incomes are very high, who are predominantly in the professions, and who are in their late youth or early middle age" (469). In the States, the median age for attendance was 38 and the predominant characteristic was a high-level of education. Less than 3% of the audience surveyed had failed to graduate from high school (compared to more than 50% of the U.S. urban population) and more than 55% of males surveyed had a college education (compared to only 5% of the U.S. urban population). Income was approximately twice as high as the median for the U.S. urban population. In Britain, results, albeit from a much smaller research sample, were remarkably similar. Half of the males surveyed had post-secondary education, compared to 3.7% of the national population. The audience was a little younger and a generally broader segment of the population.

More recently (1979), C.D. Throsby and G.A. Withers have published The Economics of the Performing Arts. Their discussion of the economic issues facing this industry contains a survey of the "empirical characteristics of those who provided market support for the performing arts--the consumers--and [looks] at trends in their level of demand for arts services" (95).

Audience data was primarily Australian and American, but they also used data available from Canada, New Zealand and the U.K. Like Baumol and Bowen's earlier study, they found that the proportion of the population exposed to performance was substantially higher for middle-aged, high income, high education, professional, managerial and white-collar groups (96). Audiences for the arts, they found, are "significantly influenced by a dedicated . . . sub-group who attend very frequently" (99) and their conclusion was that "when attending a concert or play in New York, London or Sydney you are likely to be sitting among a group of people whose financial status, education and occupation are strikingly similar" (100-101).

Their research of U.S. audiences showed that while a higher income facilitates greater participation in leisure pursuits such as the arts (103), the pre-dominant determining factor was level of education. This is further substantiated by the high percentage of teachers found in the audiences of the Baumol and Bowen research. This suggests then that the assumptions of the academic institutions might well play a significant part in determining the cultural product available in mainstream theatre as well as the horizon(s) of expectations brought to bear by those choosing to

attend. The national idea of culture is certainly an important, if not overriding, factor.

Baumol and Bowen found a general parallelism in socio-economic position between the audiences of Broadway and off-Broadway. Outside of New York City, students emerged as a significant sub-group (Broadway 8%, off-Broadway 11%, elsewhere 21%). Andrzej Wirth, in an article comparing German, Polish and American audiences, suggests that American audiences are very different to the "European visitor, raised in the atmosphere of an institutionalized state theater" (8). In Germany, those theatres which receive state support are in the majority and Wirth notes that "[t]he dominant tendency of the German theater culture still remains the rationalistic fixation on the message" (15). State support works not only in terms of economic support for the performing arts, but also in terms of their validation in a State-controlled education system. In Britain, as Baumol and Bowen's research showed, as well as in Germany, this leads to a more broadly based audience, trained in a particular cultural tradition, and also to a certain homogenity of product. While state support might make cultural products available to more people, the range available for consumption will be limited by the State's conception of what constitutes

(suitable) art. In countries where control is even more tightly exercised, an audience homogenity may be assumed and desired, even when this is not necessarily true. Wirth writes of Poland: "Generous state support constitutes also a form of control, and the theater in Poland has developed refined forms of 'slave talk' (Sklavensprache), to articulate the view of the intended audience of the national literature" (12).[9] Wirth's discussion suggests a counterpart to our findings in reader-response theory. The issues that emerged as central to reader-response criticism had an obvious and inextricable link to the institutions that produced them. Similarly mainstream art is produced and consumed by people with well above-average education--both are then products of the same institutional matrix.

It is evident that analyses of the receptive process must take account of conditions of production in order to understand an audience's assumptions, expectations, and, indeed, willingness to involve themselves in a cultural event. The assumptions of production undoubtedly condition the process undertaken by the viewer. For this reason, an awareness of the economic factors underlying production is helpful in a number of ways. It indicates why particular products are available and constitute culture, and, more

importantly, it highlights once again the inextricable link between production and reception. Economic decisions at the level of production selection inevitably shape the audience's viewing of a particular work.

The relationship between those who produce and those who consume art is, however, not only tied to a state-supported performing arts industry but is as prevalent when box-office economics are crucial to the existence of a particular theatre or company. Rosanne Martorella's article, "The Relationship Between Box Office and Repertoire: a Case Study of Opera," demonstrates that operas produced are generally contingent upon the audience's prior knowledge and reception of those works. She writes:

> Companies which have come to rely on subscribers and the more casual on-going opera audience simply cannot afford to risk producing works that are not insured of immediate popular response. . . . Powerful board members who share similar tastes with the majority of the opera audience aggravate such a situation and have acted to constrain repertory selection and inhibit innovation further (356).

Martorella's article explores the relationship between the high production costs of opera and the need for high box office sales. Repertory selection must be made in response to the broad range of opera-goers and where a company is relying on very high box office

returns, the repertory tends towards more conservative choices. Martorella offers two interesting examples. In the case of New York City's Metropolitan Opera, each percentage point of box office capacity is worth around $100,000 in terms of income. In the sixties, attendance averaged 95%. By 1975, attendance had dropped to 86% thereby reducing box office income by almost a million dollars. The second example provided is the policy of the Lyric Opera of Chicago's General Manager, Carol Fox: "Our audience might take a lot of hearing to comprehend and enjoy them [less traditional operas]. And I don't know that it's our purpose to do all these things" (in Martorella 357). Richard Schechner, discussing the relationship between theatre and the major foundations which contribute financial support, suggests that the foundations have made certain that box office returns control resident theatre through a policy of demanding at least the promise of a budget which avoids a deficit position. This sets up a controlling strategy, "one which allies the foundations with the audience and then insures a special kind of audience" (Public Domain 33).

Where large amounts of government support are available, it becomes much easier to adopt an ambitious but risky repertory. Martorella cites Covent Garden as free of many of the restrictions the Metropolitan faces.

One long-time affiliate of the Metropolitan, Francis
Robinson, responded to Martorella's question of who
controlled the development of artistic standards: "The
public.   We put it as ABC. 'Aida,' 'Bohème' and
'Carmen'" (358). The increased reliance on subscription
monies in the U.S. has led, it seems, to this extreme
conservatism in repertory.   While historically theatres
have not relied as heavily as opera companies on pre-
paid subscriptions, [10] Schechner has noted a relationship
between audience and support from other sources:

> When the combined income (either real or
> promised) from subscriptions and community
> support is large enough, foundation aid is
> easy to get. . . . Community support itself
> depends upon the subscription audience--a
> theatre must achieve a certain (though
> variable) level of "popularity" and
> "stability" before it becomes the darling of
> philanthropists and chambers of commerce
> (Public Domain 34).

Martorella's study reveals a standardization of
repertory which strongly indicates a reciprocal
relationship between production and reception.
Schechner similarly posits a standardization and
conservatism as a result of economic constrictions: "The
first aesthetic consequence . . . is a program of
classic plays, the favorites being Shakespeare, Molière,
Chekhov, Shaw, Miller and Williams. Little truly
adventurous drama has been done by resident theatres--
even within the scope of the writers they have chosen"

(Public Domain 35).   Schechner gloomily concludes that
it is   the well-known plays of the acknowledged greats
which most please the targeted audience.

Standardization of repertory by major opera
companies, Martorella explains, is best understood "in
light of the goal of opera companies as   service
organizations which have been influenced dramatically by
their economic structure" (363).   One outcome of this,
she suggests, is the emergence of particular production
methods: "The way operas are produced has become most
important in attracting audiences and in establishing
aesthetic norms which prevail today.   All energy seems
to go toward incorporating new developments in lighting
and stage-craft and developing an experience for the
audience" (364).   This consequence is not, I think,
limited   to   opera   companies   relying   on   public
subscription.   The two major theatre institutions in
London, the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare
Company's Barbican venue, both recently constructed,
have demonstrated an equally strong reliance on lighting
and stage effects to heighten the theatrical experience
for the audience.   The intention in part seems to con-
firm the government's large financial contribution
towards "excellence" in theatre and in part to justify
the highly technical apparatus which that funding has

provided for those stages. Whether in fact this increased reliance on technical apparatus has made the plays any more enjoyable for the audiences would make an interesting topic for empirical research. The influence of theatre size, technical ability and level of funding has also clearly shaped the new drama commissioned for these institutions. Work written specifically for these theatres by playwrights such as Hare and Brenton have tended to be "epic" structures with large casts and many scenes. Outside the major institutions for opera and theatre, there has been another consequence for production methods, equally the result of economic structure. Schechner writes: "The second aesthetic consequence [of the audience-foundation relationship], hand in hand with the first [the repertory of classic plays], is that productions have a museum quality. One is pleased but not excited, kept awake but not stimulated" (Public Domain 35).

Martorella concludes that standardization of repertory has a long term effect on what is available for reception: "Given the time in which repertoire becomes firmly established and the complex institutional matrix to support it (including publishers, the recording industry, educational institutions, mass media, unions etc.), repertoire is highly resistant to

change" (364). In this way, whether control is exercised by the narrow social band who choose and can afford to attend mainstream cultural productions, or by governments or corporations, the end result is apparently the same. Both Martorella's study of opera and Manfred Naumann's reception theory surveyed earlier suggest that the standardization of production methods and repertory is inevitable. In this instance, the likelihood diminishes of experimental or oppositional works or production methods even being tested in the major institutions. Schechner comments: "The theatre follows the path of least resistance to its audience and even programs its campaigns to reinforce old patterns of theatre attendance" (Public Domain 35).

The resistance to change we have already seen in the reception history of Brecht in Britain. Brechtian theatre, beyond a simple imitation of epic structure, has, some thirty years after the Berliner Ensemble's productions in London, emerged in two distinct forms. Most evidently it has been taken up by oppositional theatre writers and performers who choose to work outside the mainstream organizations. Secondly it has been recuperated by the mainstream as classic theatre and added, with rather the museum quality Schechner suggests, as a "risk" about as daring as the

Metropolitan's recent productions of Handel's operas.

In Britain, however, the national theatre institutions have adopted a policy of encouraging new works from contemporary playwrights and overtly socialist writers such as Edward Bond, Howard Brenton and David Hare seemingly have their work willingly produced by the major theatre companies. Despite the "risk" quality of such productions, the oppositional thrust of these playwrights' works is undoubtedly diluted by the failure of the mainstream to attract a multi-class audience. Furthermore, production methodologies tend to distract the audience from the content toward the quality of performance. The framing of the institution itself, as well as the technical apparatus and highly-skilled actors utilized, encourages the audience toward spectatorial pleasure through the mechanics of the production, an effective strategy for the accommodation of oppositional works by the cultural institutions. Whether supported by government, foundation or corporation, the institution exists, as Althusser suggests, to maintain the dominant ideology, and production choices are made accordingly.

Even when concerted efforts have been made, as histories of the Royal Court and Theatre Workshop have shown, such attempts to cultivate broader audiences for

conventional theatre have been largely unsuccessful.

Clearly, to a large section of the public, the theatre

is alien in both its aims and practices. It is for this

reason that much oppositional theatre exists outside the

recognized theatre institutions.   John McGrath explains

that, in 7:84,

> we try not to use the inherited theatre forms
> that come to us from the middle-class theatre
> . . . we try, through a creative theatrical
> language, beginning with the posters, through
> the box office, to the actual work onstage, to
> speak directly to the working-class audience
> in ways which they already know, and don't
> have to learn (cited in Burgess, 77).

Generally, then, empirical research has been of

limited value beyond confirming the nature of mainstream

audiences.   The use of such research by cultural

institutions assures, it seems, the maintenance of the

existing relationship between mainstream production and

the small percentage of the population who attend.

Schechner, for example, describes the Guthrie Theater's

use of a computerized audience analysis to determine

whose patronage to solicit and how. He comments: "Every

theatre wants to pinpoint that '2 per cent' of the

population who will pay to go to the theatre. The

inescapable result is a middle-class audience--and a not

very representative one at that" (Public Domain 34).

More general research studies, such as that of Baumol

and Bowen, merely confirm that "inescapable result."

Empirical research on a smaller scale has been used to help existing theatre institutuions stay in the "black" by locating potential subscribers or to test readings of specific plays.[12] A more interesting and useful approach might be to survey outside the major institutions. Analyses of audiences who attend other venues, from community theatres to outdoor performance events, might provide a more accurate picture of who experiences contemporary theatre, something much more broadly based than a survey of mainstream institutions would suggest. It would also demand of the researchers a different methodology, and the process of discovering an appropriate means of analysis might again expand the somewhat restrictive definition of theatre resulting from a concentration on the mainstream.

Frank Coppieters has, in his research, endeavoured to find empirical methods which would be appropriate for theatre of all types and which would be suitable for examining the nature of audiences' reactions. His work has adopted the ethnogenic method developed by Rom Harré.[13] Ethnogenic research is based on the premise that the group is more than a number of individuals, but is instead "a supra-individual, having a distinctive range of properties" (Coppieters, 36). For this reason, such research is qualitative, rather

than quantitive, preferring detailed investigation of "typical" members of the group and of "typical" of social events.

Coppieters decided to research performances of The People Show (a fringe company from London) at his own university (Antwerp, Belgium). To establish a framework, he analysed 29 articles from the four most recent issues of The Drama Review as the most important journal surveying fringe or performance theatre. From these, Coppieters drew up an analysis of the performance in terms of social event: "The event was divided into episodes, e.g., 'gathering,' 'dispersing,' and further subdivided into 'haptodes,' the fine structures of the set of interpenetrating 'episodes,' within which the playing of the piece before the audience is contained" (37). His general findings are not surprising: audiences attending non-traditional theatre take more of a risk! He writes:

> The traditional theater frame is in itself
> safely framed in a programmed life. It is a
> cultural and/or entertainment packet or
> commodity the contours of which are relatively
> clear and predictable. In contrast, the new
> theater tends to be more like a real-life
> event with more elements of unexpectedness
> about it (38).

In May 1976, Coppieters set up his project based on two performances by The People Show. His data consisted of approximately one thousand pages of interview

transcripts with the main (university) audience; written impressions of, and interviews with two school classes (chosen to provide group differentiation); and collected newspaper reviews of The People Show from various places where they had performed. From this, Coppieters presents some general results:

1. Audience members made "categorical" remarks about the performance structure, often describing it in terms of its difference from what was presented at a local playhouse (40).

2. Many of the accounts contained reference to embarrassment. Usually this could be accounted for in terms of frame breaking (no defined stage-auditorium barrier). Those attending the second performance which took place in daylight were disturbed by the gaze-patterns of the actors and other members of the audience. Some felt uncomfortable because their visibility implied a role in the play's action (40-41).

3. Many audience members had to deal with the urge to laugh, behaviour they felt was inappropriate and therefore had to be suppressed (41).

4. Audiences felt frustration because they were denied the usual channels to making meaning. This started from the point of "gathering" where the usual clues to type of play or performance were unavailable

and members of the audience often felt disadvantaged from the outset (43-44).

5.   Memorial experience of the performance (video fragments were shown to interviewees) was generally confused and varied considerably (45).

Coppieters also formed four general conclusions about aspects of audience perception:

(i) One's attitude toward/perception of/relationship with the rest of the public is an important factor in one's theatrical experience.

(ii) Perceptual processes in the theater are, among other things, a form of social interaction.

(iii) Inanimate objects can become personified and/or receive such strongly symbolic loadings that any anxiety about their fate becomes a crux in people's emotional experience.

(iv) "Environmental" theater goes against people experiencing homogenous group reactions (47).

Finally, Coppieters states his awareness of the rudimentary approach of this initial research. One important development would be diachronic research. This would mean collecting different sets of accounts (separated by time and space) as well as surveying a performance over an extended period: "Some theater groups have the 'same' production in their repertoire for several years, some productions travel all over the world, and may be performed in 'environmental' or

'traditional' theater circumstances" (47).   Coppieters'
research clearly goes beyond the simple socio-economic
analysis of other empirical researchers and identifies
many aspects of the audience's experience held important
in this study.   The application of theory from the
social sciences (seen also, for example,   in the work   .
of Richard Schechner and Victor Turner) is evidently
helpful in the interpretation of the very detailed data
that can now be obtained from semiotic analysis as well
as empirical research.   Increased sophistication in
analytic methods will clearly assist in a more detailed
understanding of perception processes.

3. Two studies of the theatre audience

Beyond this work by semioticians and empirical researchers, little attention has been given to audiences in recent theatre studies. There is a lone book-length study. Daphna Ben Chaim's _Distance in the Theatre: The Aesthetics of Audience Response_ deals with distance, one aspect of the receptive process fore-grounded by Barthes in his challenge to orthodox dramatic criticism. The study is, by her own admission, necessarily limited, but marks a useful starting point from which to examine what drama theorists have said about how distance works upon the spectator. It covers what the author sees as a growing twentieth-century interest in the concept of distance both in aesthetic and dramatic theory. The watershed, in Ben Chaim's view, has been the work of Edward Bullough. His 1912 essay on the concept of psychical distance, she argues, was an unconscious monitor of the competition among aesthetic points of view in European drama (80). Since first publication, Bullough's ideas have proven immensely influential.

Ben Chaim challenges the contradictions of Bullough's theory, as well as pointing up his failure to explain _how_ distance affects audience perception. She

looks at Bullough's analysis of <u>Othello</u> where he examines the response of the jealous spectator. This spectator, he asserts, will get more out of the play because it mirrors his own experience <u>but</u> this will only be the case if "he succeeds in keeping the distance between the action of the play and his personal feelings: a very difficult performance in the circumstances" (93). Ben Chaim comments on Bullough's statement: "It is not clear, however, what Bullough means when he refers to a required degree of distance between the action of the play and the viewer's personal feelings, a required distance without which there can be no aesthetic experience" (6).

The detailed discussion includes the misconceptions about Bullough's ideas generally held as well as contradictions intrinsic to his study. At times, for example, Bullough discusses distance in terms of a psychological force which alters perception (renders it "objective") but, at others, describes it as an intrinsic property, apparent to a greater or lesser extent, according to the nature of the art work. It is these two contradictory views of distance which Ben Chaim sees as characteristic of later twentieth-century theory.

The aesthetic theory of Jean-Paul Sartre

develops, she argues, the psychological side of
Bullough's argument. In Sartre's discussions of
perceiving and imaging, he posits the necessity of
holding reality at a distance (negation) in order that
consciousness can experience the image. This movement
from perception to image constitutes the aesthetic
experience. Ben Chaim suggests this accounts for
Sartre's dislike of happenings and docu-theatre. Such
species "deny the 'absolute distance' fundamental to
theatre because they rely too heavily on reality" (19).
Clearly the processes of perceiving and imaging are, as
Ben Chaim points out, not independent, but interrelated
activities. With this interdependency in mind, she
raises some important questions: "what role does our
awareness of the objects in the theatre as 'real' play
in our psychological distance from the event? And how
does this awareness interact with our imaginative
experience of the unreal?" (21). Sartre's most
important contribution, in Ben Chaim's view, is "his
insistence on the freedom of the imagination" (23)
demonstrating distance to be:

> a voluntary act of consciousness . . . . In
> this case then distancing techniques are not
> merely intensifications of our awareness of
> artistic conventions, or of the fictionality
> of the object, but reminders of our original
> contract with the object: that its existence
> as an aesthetic object rests on our complicity
> (23-24).

Bullough's notion of distance as an intrinsic property of art Ben Chaim finds in its most developed state in the work of Brecht. Her discussion of Brecht covers his exploitation of distance to achieve political theatre and examines the evolution of his ideas on Verfremdung. She challenges what she sees as Brecht's assumption that, without his distancing effects, audiences are mesmerized in the theatre. With the self-consciousness of Elizabethan drama as counterargument, Ben Chaim wonders if metatheatrical practice necessarily stimulates a critical attitude in the spectator. Furthermore, she suggests that the techniques of Epic theatre do not in themselves provoke the audience's intellectual response. The political impact of his theatre, she concludes, comes from "the fusion of techniques and content: a political consciousness, on the simplest level, is raised by the subject matter, to which attention is drawn by the distancing devices" (35). Certainly this is true but it seems that Ben Chaim fails to credit the radical nature of Brecht's theatre practice. We saw in the earlier discussion of Brecht's work how he adapted the techniques of propagandist art (Meyerhold, Piscator, Eisenstein) to speak to audiences trained in the conventions of proscenium arch framed "rooms" and accustomed to the

explanations of psychologically-motivated characters. Distance acts to radically reposition the institution of theatre and, by extension, to question the ideological structure of society at large.

Almost diametrically opposed to Brecht's theory is the work of Artaud and Grotowski which sought to break down any physical and mental barriers between performers and audience. In Artaud's work, however, Ben Chaim sees that there is, in fact, a reliance on the continued existence of distance: "it seems clear that Artaud's concept of illusion requires that the spectator hold a certain distance from the work, even an awareness of fiction: a stage crime is more dangerous than a real one, illusion is accepted on condition that it not be a pretended reality" (44). This indeed appears fundamental. Even in the immediacy of Artaudian theatre, the audience is bound to the social contract of the theatrical experience. Its participation (or otherwise) depends on the horizon(s) of expectations brought to performance, and its willingness to accept Artaud's work as theatre, but in every case the audience is aware that it is watching a performance and that the stage world is something other than reality. Ben Chaim points out that Grotowski has, in his later work, had to move beyond theatre in an endeavour to eliminate this fundamental

distance: "he is no longer content with the traditional actor-audience division but is attempting to create a new type of communal experience where human beings 'meet' together" (47). She continues:

> Having eliminated the element of unreality in his work, Grotowski has also, of course, done away with aesthetic distance. Grotowski's actors have taken on the role of priests or social psychologists. . . . Without the element of pretense, of unreality, the "audience" is left with nothing but the real world and each other. Though they are free to respond with "active or passive reactions," they are no longer invited to imagine--to do so would be inappropriate (49).

Féral saw performance art, like Artaud's theatre of cruelty, as marking the limits of theatre and, similarly, Ben Chaim suggests that Grotowski's attempts to abolish distance illustrate such limits. When distance disappears then art does too. While theoretically this vanishing point seems possible, it is questionable whether it can in fact be reached. Even the abandonment of traditional auditoria, traditional stage-audience relationships, and other visible theatrical conventions does not mean that the concept of theatre will necessarily disappear as well. With the name of Grotowski attached to any project, the audience is provided with a particular set of theatrical expectations. Grotowski has since discontinued the paratheatrics Ben Chaim describes and has looked instead

to a Theatre of Sources and Objective Drama.[14] Now a professor at the University of California (Irvine), Grotowski appears to have returned to experimentation which exploits precisely that flexibility of theatre to test an audience's balancing of stage and other worlds. He writes that spectators of the traditional ritual and dramatic forms presented "would then be encouraged to test it at their own level, within the framework of their capacity, without violating their limitations" (cited in Fowler 178).

In the absence of drama theorists who discuss the audience's involvement with fictional worlds, Ben Chaim looks to film theorists Christian Metz and André Bazin. In this study, we have already looked briefly at Metz's work as counterpart to Holland's theory of the reading process, and both have been influential in the evolution of the theory of "looking." Metz and Bazin both contend that the real signifiers of theatrical performance restrict the imaginative involvement of the audience with the stage world (Ben Chaim 55). Film, in Bazin's view, is much closer to reality and the lessening of distance leads to a fuller engagement with the spectator. Distance, of course, remains a necessary element in the screen-auditorium relationship, in order to place the spectator precisely in the role of voyeur.

(Both Bazin and Metz, not surprisingly, argue for film's superiority over theatre.) By means of a critical analysis of these film theories, Ben Chaim establishes the parameters for distance:

> The combination . . . of unreality with recognizable human characteristics seems to be the minimum requirement for identification, and both of these conditions are variable and provide the borders within which distance operates. Those qualities that make the object seem like ourselves (humanization) pull the object toward us; those aspects which distinguish the object from ourselves and our real world (an awareness of fictionality) push the object away from us. The aesthetic tension between these two opposing tendencies constitutes distance and provides the conditions for the variability of distance . . . .

> The most intense personal relationship with a minimum awareness of fictionality is "low" distance and the combination that the realist film and realistic play aspire to. An increased awareness of fiction combined with the lowest humanization is largely the province of farce in the theatre, of Punch and Judy, and stylized theatre of extreme abstraction. The combination of a high (but varying) perception of unreality and a high (but varying) humanization is the corner occupied by Brecht in such plays as <u>Mother Courage</u> (67).

Distance, then, is intrinsic to art and the question this poses, Ben Chaim suggests, is how it "affects the perception of theatrical art" (71). She suggests that the emotions of audiences are "objectified" "because they are placed in an object outside ourselves, hence removed from a practical response" (71). Resulting from these "pseudo-vicarious

emotions" is a more powerful sensation precisely because we are not required to acknowledge them as our own. As "the deliberate manipulation of distance is, to a great extent, the underlying factor that determines theatrical style in this century" (79), the various levels of engagement with the audience are, in this way, central to any analysis of the audience's experience.

Ben Chaim's discussions are important in establishing distance as a central aspect of aesthetic experience. Her study is particularly useful in marking the limits of operation for distance. It is nevertheless—as Ben Chaim readily points out—only a partial study and the real importance of distance can only be measured in relation to all the other aspects (social, cultural, political, aesthetic) which constitute the theatrical experience. A more general, but perhaps more useful, examination of the theatrical experience can be found in Una Chaudhuri's article, "The Spectator in Drama/Drama in the Spectator."

Chaudhuri's work, like this study, takes the advent of reader-response criticism as a starting point. She too notes that reader-response theorists have neglected to address the situation of drama despite frequent recourse to its terminology (event, participation, happenings, performance, activity,

process) (282).^{15} The reason she suggests for the reticence of these theorists in approaching theatre is its plurality of addressees. Where the addressees of fiction or poetry can be divided into contemporary and later readers, for drama this is necessarily multiplied. Contemporary readers must be sub-divided into contemporary performers, contemporary spectators and contemporary readers. The later addressees similarly become later performers, later spectators and later readers. She notes that both performers and readers, in both time slots, perform the same physical act (reading), but for quite different reasons. The former does so in order to produce an aesthetic experience, where, for the latter, reading is the aesthetic experience (283). Furthermore, the multiple addressees are complicated in that none of the categories are homogeneous:

> For example, the group "contemporary spectators" will include subgroups and individuals having greatly varying degrees of "dramatic competence," not to mention very different cultural orientations. In the case of most dramatic types, spectators will be present who occupy a number of different positions on such social and intellectual continua as rich-poor, educated-illiterate, sophisticated-naive, refined-vulgar, etc., and such psychological continua as attentive-inattentive, serious-casual, sensitive-insensitive etc. This sort of variation within groups is bound to be far greater in the case of drama's addressees than in that of other literature, the former's reception

> occurring in the context of a social event in which one engages for many (nonaesthetic) reasons, including self-display, status seeking and tourism, whereas the latter's is the result of an activity usually pursued for its own sake (284).

Chaudhuri is surely right in identifying the heterogeneity of the theatre audience, although the oppositions she sets up are, indeed, questionable. The theatre audience can, of course, theoretically contain such varied positions but, as other studies cited have shown, the tendency is toward group reception of a performance. Furthermore, it seems somewhat oversimplified to describe the consumption of other literature as "an activity usually pursued for its own sake." Status seeking can be as active in reading as theatre-going. Barthes has shown us the pleasure of the reader's engagement with the text. Literature can be pursued for other reasons, such as course-work, too.

From this opposition, nevertheless, Chaudhuri returns to a central concern of reader-response theory, "the question as to whether the responses a work of art can elicit are implicit, implied, inscribed--whatever, and to whatever degree--within the work itself" (286). In dramatic terms, "[t]o what extent can a play direct-- or at least restrict--the spectator's (potentially limitless) responses to it?" (286). Apart from Aristotle's catharsis and Brecht's Verfremdung, there

has been, she notes, little attention paid to this problem. In the second half of her article, Chaudhuri takes as model Peter Shaffer's _Equus_ to discuss the problem of dramatic affect. _Equus_ is chosen because "[w]ritings on the play, especially early journalistic ones but also more scholarly treatments, exhibit a curious schizophrenia typical of much contemporary response to theatre" (287). This schizophrenia is characterized by the scholar's criticism of content (lack of intellectual depth) but praise of form (brilliant staging) to supply justification for enormous box-office success.

Equus, Chaudhuri points out, takes as its subject the age-old concern of whether an individual can be allowed creative freedom in face of possible anarchistic repercussions for society at large. This conventional idea, she suggests, forms the backbone of the play. The audience, however, enjoys a refashioning of such a conventional issue by virtue of the staging. _Equus_ is a Brechtian structure in so far as it asks the audience to supply meaning, although, as Chaudhuri points out, Shaffer is guiding their construction of meaning in a number of ways. First, the staging (audience in front and behind of the set in tiers suggesting a dissecting theatre) "manages to shift the

audience's experience away from that of usual play watching and toward one of assisting at a lecture-demonstration" (288). More importantly, Shaffer guides the audience's responses to the play by careful deployment of a "living myth," that of psychoanalysis. Dysart is a psychiatrist and Alan is seen, at least in part, as the product of an authoritarian father and an overbearing mother.

Despite these physical and intellectual "clues" (an obviously Freudian contextualizing) which seem to provide the audience with meaning(s) for Equus, Chaudhuri argues that audience response is guided by "a structure masked by the rationalistic, analytical terms of the surface structure. In short, there is an archetypal paradigm at work in Equus, not merely as a theme or an explanatory mechanism, but as something directing the spectator's experience" (292). This archetypal paradigm is supplied by the Equus-god, the curious horses of Shaffer's play. In Chaudhuri's analysis, the playwright has drawn upon Jung's survey of horse myths which frequently describe horses as a symbol of the animal component in man.[16] She further explains:

> The compelling power of the horse archetype is perhaps primarily a function of its universal associations with man's animal nature. The most graphic representation of this aspect of the archetype is the mythic centaur, half man, half horse. In Equus, this archetype is

realized theatrically--the horses are
represented by masked actors--and is
ubiquitous. The spectator's analytical
activity is frequently interrupted by the
eruption on stage of Equus, an image of man's
participation in prerational, preverbal forces
(292-293).

It is these Jungian archetypes, not the Freudian

analysis, which audiences are left with at the end of

the play and, for this reason, Chaudhuri sees the

Brechtian presentation as "set within an experience much

closer to the kind envisioned by Artaud" (294). The

presentational mode is merely a device for activating

the audience's intellectual responses so that they

"participate in what is--experientially--a secular

ritual" (294). Chaudhuri's conclusion is that:

Equus has two response-structures, layered one
above the other and corresponding to the two
kinds of reality Artaud mentions ("direct,
everyday" and "archetypal . . . dangerous").
The spectator is carried into the drama by the
former, the mechanism of his involvement being
the galvanizing of popular myths and clichés;
the drama is carried into the spectator by the
latter, the mechanism being the horse arche-
type as realized and defined in the play. . .
. In the ritual of Equus, the spectator will
participate at several levels, observing,
thinking, interpreting and, finally,
experiencing. While ritualistic chants, made
up of the clichés and catch phrases of our
culture, keep the spectator's mind occupied,
the archetype conspires with the theatrical
moment and rears its head before the
collective. Thus, what seems an intellectual
inquiry is in effect an encounter with myth
(295).

Chaudhuri's reading of Equus is both innovative

and useful. While she does provide an analysis which perhaps accounts for the gap between the box-office and critical reception, the reading does herald the possibility of "a spectator-oriented criticism. The description of how a play works on a spectator--rather than of what it means--can supply the terms our criticism needs in order to erase the gap between theory and its object" (296). Indeed, the refusal in much contemporary drama to take up either issues or forms that are familiar to audiences "trained" in the conventional experience of theatre begs that dramatic criticism adopts new methods of questioning how a play works on a spectator. Richard Webb, discussing the approaches to theatre adopted by many contemporary French companies, concludes:

> Experiments which involve the spectator in the performance or which extend to him a creative role in the dramatic process must call into question our conventional understanding of theatre and artistic creation. They require that the dramatic critic should look again at his assumptions and vocabulary. . . . The creative acts of the experimentalists invite equally creative responses from the critics (215-216).

Notes

1

Elam's book, Pavis' _Problèmes de sémiologie théâtrale_ (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1976) and Anne Ubersfeld's _Lire le Théâtre_ (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1977) represent important full-length studies. There is in Elam a detailed bibliography of theatre/drama semiotics to 1980.

2

For further discussion of the flexibility of signs emanating from stage objects see Petr Bogatyrev, "Les Signes du théâtre." _Poetique_ 8 (1971): 517-30. Also Elam, 10-16.

3

"[T]he spectator's total experience of this combination [of feelings, including physical reactions] . . . is pure, unique and completely peaceful. Such an experience is called _rasa_ and it is nothing short of beatitude" in K.M. Varma. "La Base du théâtre classique indien." _Les Théâtres d'Asie_ (Paris: C.R.N.S., 1961): 32-33.

4

The work of Christian Metz and Stephen Heath has been most influential. Articles in volumes 14, 16 and 19 of _Screen_ provide important examples of their work.

5

Freud, Sigmund, "Femininity," _The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud_, ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and

The Institute of Psycho-analysis 1964): 113.

[6] Richard Dyer, "Don't Look Now--The Male Pin-Up," Screen 23.3/4 (Sept.-Oct. 1982): 61-73. Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle," Screen 24.6 (Nov.-Dec. 1983): 2-17.

[7] Kuhn offers detailed discussions of four examples of feminist film practice: Thriller, Lives of Performers, Daughter Rite and Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles. See her chapter "Textual Politics," Women's Pictures 156-177.

[8] As well as the comparison with television, the final chapters of Ellis' book deal with British independent cinema and the future impact of technology on the media.

[9] The demanding of audience homogenity in a country such as Poland can be evidenced by the treatment of Teatr Osmego Dnia [Theatre of the Eighth Day]. Politically aligned to Solidarity, they had played audiences of 600,000. Following Martial Law in 1982, they realised that they would be denied access to playing spaces because their material ran counter to government policy. They performed first in the streets and then, after losing funding and property in 1984 as well as being "officially disbanded," they began to play in churches. Endeavours to take their plays outside of

Poland were counteracted with only half the group being given passports. See Tony Howard's account of their twenty-two year history in "'A Piece of Our Life': The Theatre of the Eighth Day," New Theatre Quarterly, 2.8 (Nov. 1986): 291-305.

[10] A National Council of the Arts survey in the mid-70s showed more than 50% of total opera box office sales were to subscription buyers, but less than 15% of theatre ticket sales were accounted for in this way (cited in Martorella 360).

[11] The Royal Court is the subject of Terry Browne's Playwrights' Theatre (London: Pitman, 1975) and Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop is discussed in Michael Corne's Theatre Royal: 100 Years of Stratford East (London: Quartet Books, 1984).

[12] See Colin Duckworth, Angels of Darkness (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972) for consideration of questionnaires he gave audiences of Beckett's Waiting for Godot and Endgame at the Young Vic and the Nottingham Playhouse.

[13] Coppieters' bibliography cites a number of ethnogenic studies. These include Rom Harré's "Blueprint for a New Science" in Reconstructing Social Psychology, ed. N. Armistead (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).

14
See Richard Fowler, "The Four Theatres of
Jerzy Grotowski: An Introductory Assessment", <u>New</u>
<u>Theatre</u> <u>Quarterly</u> 1.2 (1985): 173-178. Theatre of
Sources (1976-82):

> One goal of this experiment was to discover to
> what extent the techniques in question [non-
> Occidental ritual performances] were valid
> when transferred transculturally. Another was
> the attempt to reach the state of the 'art of
> the beginner': the state of being completely
> in the present, seeing as a child sees, as if
> for the first time; yet another was the
> attempt to discover in what ways the ritual
> and ceremonial practices of different cultures
> might be realted, what elements and effects
> were possibly common to different cultures
> (176).

Objective Drama (from 1983) is, according to Fowler, the

Theatre of Sources project developed in a much larger

and more comprehensive way: "It is as if the 'sources'

observed and studied in the years of Theatre of Sources

are now to be compiled and studied <u>ex vitro</u>" (177).
15
Parallel to Chaudhuri's argument, film

theorist Carole Berger has suggested in an examination

of Fish and Iser's work that reader-response criticism

is strikingly cinematic and that the methodologies often

rely on film analogy (144). See "Viewing as Action:

Film and Reader Response Criticism", <u>Literature-Film</u>

<u>Quarterly</u> 6.1 (Winter 1978): 144-151.
16
See C.G. Jung, <u>Symbols</u> <u>of</u> <u>Transformation</u>

(Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967), 277.

IV. THE AUDIENCE AND THEATRE
1. Culture and the idea of the theatrical event

Despite the widespread influence of Brecht on contemporary theatre practice, and despite the extensive debate on the ideological gaze of the cinema audience, we lack any detailed picture of the theatre audience and, in particular, their role(s) in the production-reception relationship. The extensive criticism of reader-response theorists has not achieved a codification of reading practice, but it has made us more aware of the complexity of a process once considered "natural." Similarly the recent energies of theatre semiotics have not resulted in a codification of the elements of theatrical practice, but have established the multiplicity of signifying systems involved and the audience's role of decoding these systems in combination and simultaneously. Neither reader-response criticism nor theatre semiotics, however, goes far beyond the issues facing the individual subjectivity. The relationship between production and reception, positioned within and against cultural values, remains largely uninvestigated. Yet art forms rely on those cultural values for their existence and among them, theatre is an obviously social phenomenon. It is an event which relies on the presence of an

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audience to confirm its cultural status.

The difficulty of examining readers through social coordinates was evident in Jacques Leendhardt's sociological research, but, as a public event, theatre demands that its audiences be examined in this way. And it is perhaps because of this difficulty that theatre audiences have been more or less neglected. Typical of the generalizations used to characterize the theatre audience is Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz's description of their apparently limited role:

> What there is to see is very clearly exhibited: spectacle implies a distinction betwen the roles of performers and audience. Performers are set apart and audiences asked to respond cognitively and emotionally in predefined categories of approval, disapproval, arousal or passivity. Audience interaction with the performance may enhance it, but it is not meant nor allowed to become part of its definition. (In the case of cinema, such an interaction becomes so irrelevant that audience responses are almost entirely internalized) (16-17).

Dayan and Katz's analysis is an accurate, if skeletal, model of the immediate reception process for a certain type of theatre, but theatre is not monolithic. These critics do not take account, for example, of the shifting role of the audience in many forms of theatre. As we have seen, non-traditional forms of theatre practice have involved audiences in all stages of production and have sought (rather than allowed) a

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central role for the spectator. More than this, such
definitions of the audience's role skate past the ideo-
logical and social mediation of the cultural
institution. The audience, by its physical presence as
group, is bound to the institution which produces
theatre and, while Dayan and Katz suggest a generic
audience for spectacle, the situation is really more
complex. Clifford Williams' Theatres and Audiences, an
introductory, historical approach, at least introduces
two species of theatre audience, the popular, "people
whose qualification for admittance is the possession of
the entrance money" (5) and the particular, "present by
invitation or by virtue of their social, political
and/or financial position" (5). His identification of
general characteristics for these two kinds of audiences
suggests a socio-cultural diversity which Dayan and Katz
ignore and which goes beyond the narrow segment
indicated in empirical research:

Characteristics of popular audiences are:

1. complaints about the entrance price;
2. enthusiastic approval and derisive
rejection;
3. delight in jokes at the expense of their
betters and of foreigners;
4. patriotism;
5. a willingness to be swept off their feet;
6. eating and drinking.

Characteristics of particular audiences are:

1.   satisfaction at being a member of such an audience;
2.   a desire to be seen;
3.   concern for their own appearance and curiosity about the appearance of others;
4.   well mannered approval or indifference;
5.   finding pleasure in the exotic and in exclusive humour;
6.   a wish to be diverted.

Both popular and particular audiences

1.   tend to arrive late;
2.   enjoy a sense of their own power over the reputations of actors and playwrights;
3.   worship success but have short memories;
4.   overlook faults in their heroes and heroines;
5.   enjoy applauding whenever possible;
6.   can be easily manipulated by actors and playwrights who know their business (6).

Williams' assertions, and particularly those concerning the popular audience,[1] are oversimplifications of actual practice and certainly open to challenge but we are, nevertheless, at least encouraged by his model to think of a relationship between social systems and theatre audiences.

As Janet Wolff points out, contemporary societies give recognition to the discourses of art and of aesthetics (_Social Production_ 141) and in this way theatre can never be divorced from the culture which produces it and which it, in turn, serves. She provides a useful description of the relationship between culture and artistic production, the artist and his materials:

The forms of artistic production available to the artist play an active part in constructing

the work of art. In this sense, the ideas and
values of the artist, themselves socially
formed, are mediated by literary and cultural
conventions of style, language, genre and
aesthetic vocabulary. Just as the artist
works with the technical materials of artistic
production, so he or she also works with the
available materials of aesthetic convention.
This means that in reading cultural products,
we need to understand their logic of
construction and the particular aesthetic
codes involved in their formation (<u>Social
Production</u> 65).

Focussing Wolff's analysis on the receptive process, it
is evident that the audience has, like the artist, ideas
and values which are socially formed and which are
similarly mediated. As the artist works within the
technical means available and within the scope of
aesthetic convention, the audience reads according to
the scope and means of culturally and aesthetically
constituted receptive processes. The ideological under-
pinning of the accepted codes of cultural production and
reception has been foregrounded at least since Brecht's
critique of Naturalist theatre practice. We have been
encouraged to see the cultural markers of any artistic
product.

In order to identify and understand the cultural
markers which designate and endorse the existence of
theatre in a particular society, it is helpful to look
at some general investigations of culture. Raymond
Williams establishes that "the social organization of

culture, as a realized signifying system, is embedded in
a whole range of activities, relations and institutions,
of which only some are manifestly 'cultural'" (209).
Certainly we should not talk of theatre as an art form
in isolation from cultural practice generally and, while
the sociology of culture remains a controversial
discipline,[2] it is surely necessary that drama theorists
maintain an interest in, and a dialogue with, that
particular research. Western industrial societies, for
example, assign a particular role for leisure and this
supports an economically important entertainment
industry. In this way, there is a predetermined need to
seek out and maintain audiences for the arts. If we
consider theatre's role in any given cultural system,
and then the audience's relationship both to the
generally held concept of theatre and to specific
theatre products, we are more likely to obtain a fuller
comprehension of the reception process.

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have discussed
the interrelationship and dependency between high and
low culture and have noted that "because the higher
discourses are normally associated with the most power-
ful socio-economic groups existing at the centre of
cultural power, it is they which generally gain the
authority to designate what is to be taken as high and

low in society" (4). These "higher discourses" have, in many ways, restricted our understanding of theatre by limiting the codes which are used to recognize and interpret the theatrical event. Pavis' discussion of the critical reception of Brook's <u>Measure for Measure</u> in Paris provided an admirable demonstration of the widespread recourse to a particular discourse of criticism. Theatre critics from the major newspapers may no longer wield immense power--the ability to close a show overnight--but they still act as representatives of mainstream cultural ideology and their shared assumptions of what constitutes theatre reflect this status. But, as Suleiman pointed out in her criticism of Jauss' narrow definition of a horizon of expectations, there is always a diversity of publics. Indeed, even within the community of theatre critics, there is such a diversity. Critics writing for specialist or alternative journals may well hold assumptions and expectations quite different from those identified by Pavis in his analysis of the Parisian reviewers. Each public will clearly have a different horizon of expectations and these can co-exist among different publics in any given society. It should not, therefore, be the case that the assumptions of the middle-class mainstream audience (typified in the discourse of Pavis' theatre critics and

the focus of empirical research) are held as an uncontested norm. We might recall Leenhardt's investigation of readers and his conclusion that predominant unifying cultural systems are utilized "according to the place of the individual in the systems of hierarchization" (223). Within cultural boundaries, there are obviously different viewing publics.

While challenges to reader-response criticism have assured that such differences be brought into play when analyzing the receptive process, it would seem then that both an audience's reception of a text (or performance) and the text (performance) itself are bound within cultural limits. Yet, as diachronic analysis makes apparent, those limits are continually tested and invariably broken. Culture cannot be held as a fixed entity, a set of constant rules, but instead it must be seen as in a position of inevitable flux. Similarly, methods of production and reception are redefined and we need a better understanding of the changes which take place. Of particular interest is how theatre and theatre audiences create as well as accommodate such changes. To this end, it is useful to examine some of the challenges to those received assumptions we saw in the theatre critics' analyses of _Measure for Measure_. The testing, breaking and/or rejecting of the theatre

product that these critics recognize indicates the diversity of performance practices that today constitute theatre and, in this way, underscores the necessity of a more creative approach to dramatic criticism.

We might start with the fascination of the West in this century with theatre from alien cultures. Both Brecht and Artaud looked to the East for models with which to challenge the hegemony of Western theatrical practice and the use of ritual in non-Western theatre has had an enormous impact on Western experimental theatre practice. Such ritualistic performances developed outside the boundaries of Western culture nevertheless present an evident attraction for theatre audiences of that culture. Roland Barthes writes: "I am fascinated by the Bunraku, the otherness of peoples interests me and only because these puppets come from elsewhere does my curiosity remain aroused" and comments on the performance of ritual songs and dances of the Hopi: "Can we Westerners really consume a fragment of civilization totally isolated from its context?" ("How to Spend" 120-121). The interest in this theatre is precisely this otherness, its seeming inability to be understood by conventional receptive processes. Eugenio Barba remarks that audiences behave "as if there was a favoured element in the theatrical performance

particularly suited to establishing the meaning of the play (the words, the adventures of the protagonist, etc)" ("The Nature" 77). Western audiences have traditionally depended on the word and this, according to Barba, "explains why a 'normal' theatre audience member . . . often believes that he doesn't fully understand performances based on the simultaneous weaving together of actions, and why he finds himself in difficulty when faced with the logic of many oriental theatres" ("The Nature" 77). Audiences cannot understand non-Western theatre by the same processes as they would apply to a performance of a Shakespeare play, but in its Western contextualizing (presentation in a building designated as a theatre space, the spatial boundaries of audience-stage, conventions of lighting and so on), it is recognizable as theatre. This in itself testifies the importance of the institution in the audience's recognition and reception of theatre and further reinforces the importance of kinetic-visual elements of performance. Together these implications point to a need to redress the imbalance of interest in the dramatic text.

Indeed, when Western theatre companies attempt to assimilate, or even present, these performances of an alien culture--in other words, to give them Western

cultural signifiers--they inevitably create a <u>different</u> product which might provide a more recognizable type of theatre for the Western audience but which will provoke meanings which would be unavailable and incomprehensible to the audience of the original culture. Victor Turner talks about the challenges of converting ethnographic data about the rituals of Ndembu village life into theatre with Richard Schechner's TPG. Central to any portrayal of the rituals of Ndembu culture was an understanding of the matrilineal social context. To convey this, the actors "began a rehearsal with a ballet, in which women created a kind of frame with their bodies, positioning themselves to form a circle, in which the subsequent male political action could take place. Their idea was to show that action went on within a matrilineal sociocultural space" (<u>From Ritual</u> 97). Turner comments: "Somehow this device didn't work--there was a covert contemporary political tinge in it which denatured the Ndembu sociocultural process. The feminist mode of staging ethnography assumed and enacted modern ideological notions in a situation in which those ideas are simply irrelevant" (97). More than the Turner/Schechner collaborations, the experimental theatre of Peter Brook has demonstrated many of the problems with cross-cultural productions.[3] It is

particularly interesting that the most recent theatre
work of Grotowski, his Theatre of Sources and Objective
Drama, has sought the collaboration of anthropologists,
sociologists, behaviourists and others to "objectify"
ritual practices and that his workshops at Irvine are to
involve the training of the "visitor-participants"
alongside the actors (Fowler 177-178).

Audiences are at best "fascinated" with
performances that do not fall into their cultural
experience, performances that resist or deny the usual
channels of decoding. Yet it is not an easy task, as
semiotic research has shown, to locate a set pattern of
responses even for theatre which represents a recog-
nizable cultural product, the play produced by a main-
stream organization. Even the mainstream cultural arte-
fact presents a complexity of codes and possible
responses which militate against the establishment of
fixed rules and conventions for even a single generative
system. A description of the receptive competence
necessary appears similarly problematic. For example,
at the centre of Western theatre culture are the plays
of Shakespeare yet neither the production nor reception
conditions for these plays are predictable.

Hamlet is surely one of the most frequently
produced of Shakespeare's plays, but how useful would

it be to question potential audiences on what they
expect from the play? Today's productions rarely take
up received interpretations of the play. We do not, in
other words, get many productions which take as their
impetus academic views on Hamlet, or even Hamlet. In
contemporary theatre, there are few guarantees that a
performance available for reception would bear much
relation to institutionally received cultural readings
of the play or would be intelligible on that basis.
Baṇuta Rubess writes of "Hamlet, a new Canadian play"
after a 1986 production by Vancouver's Tamahnous Theatre
where "the audience is allowed to roam about the three
floors of [a] house at will, flitting in and out of
scenes, everyone creates and re-creates the play for
themselves. . . . The beginning of the production, the
Players' scene, and the end are the only sections shared
by the entire audience. Tired of Hamlet's complaints?
Fine. Check up on Gertrude" (131). Unconventional use
of space and re-ordering is not, of course, innovatory
but it does challenge accepted notions of high culture.
London's Acme Acting took that challenge one step
further. They were prepared to bring performances of
Hamlet (or other "classics" such as The Birthday Party
or A Streetcar Named Desire) to the comfort of your own
home. But perhaps one of the most provocative

challenges to our cultural reception of Shakespeare, precisely because it was made within the foremost Shakespearean institution, was Michael Bogdanov's re-written prologue to his production of Beaumont's Knight of the Burning Pestle for the Royal Shakespeare Company. The citizen and his wife, George and Nell, emerged from the audience as contemporary (1981), if caricatured, middle-class suburbans who had paid "good money" to see some culture from the Royal Shakespeare Company who turned out, of course, not to be doing Shakespeare but some "unknown" called Beaumont. Their assault on the "actors," both verbal and physical, facilitated for the modern audience an understanding of the romance genre Beaumont was satirizing. But, more importantly and beyond this, Bogdanov let his citizens vocalize the impatience (if not anger) of the "average taxpayer" who has for the last twenty five years been financially supporting a Royal Shakespeare Company which was seemingly as likely to perform contemporary "rubbish" as Shakespeare.[4] Even when the Bard was staged, there was no Elizabethan costume or regard for poetry, but, as George and Nell complained, actors dressed in leather and chains!

Ndembu rituals and Shakespeare's plays might be seen to represent the cultural limits for theatre but,

over the last 30 years, acceptance of what constitutes theatre, or at least performance, has, of course, been considerably stretched. Cultural markers have, again and again, been repositioned. Not only has the innovative, if controversial, work of Peter Brook and later directors at the RSC transgressed received assumptions about Shakespeare, but more generally there has been a determined attack on the expectations and tolerance of the mainstream, middle-class theatre audience. As Stallybrass and White note, however:

> It would be wrong to associate the exhilarating sense of freedom which transgression affords with any necessary or automatic political progressiveness. Often it is a powerful ritual or symbolic practice whereby the dominant squanders its symbolic capital so as to get in touch with the fields of desire which it denied itself as the price paid for its political power (201).

We have seen how the works of Pinter and Beckett initially tested the tolerance and expectations of audiences but became accepted as "modern classics" as those audiences became familiar with the necessary receptive strategies. Mainstream audiences have, indeed, faced continual challenges in the post-war period to their expectations and strategies for reception. An even more concerted attack than the works of Pinter and Beckett can be seen in a work such as John Cage's 4'33". This relies, apart from the presence of a

pianist poised to play, on the audience's noise and movement for the four minute and thirty-three second duration to create the work of art--an obviously demanding role for the audience. As well as stretching musical boundaries, Cage is clearly challenging the concepts (although not the politics) of theatre and performance. The effect of such works, however, as Marco De Marinis points out in a comment about avant-garde theatre in general, is to create and then rely on "a select band of 'supercompetent' theatregoers" (104). Not all challenges to the mainstream are, of course, accepted. Brecht suggested that innovations which require a repositioning of cultural markers will only be accepted if they rejuvenate rather than undermine existing society.

Perhaps for the reason Brecht suggests, there has, for many workers in alternative theatre, been neither the opportunity nor the desire to participate in mainstream theatre. Not all writers and performers have been content to challenge from within the mainstream cultural definition and location of theatre. In the political and/or performance aims of alternative theatres, the idea of theatre is repositioned and inevitably expanded. Some practitioners have started in the mainstream but have left to pursue alternative

projects.

The careers of Dario Fo and Franca Rame are indicative of this process of refusing the implications of mainstream participation. In 1968 they abandoned the traditional Italian theatre and sought instead alternative playing spaces and audiences. They worked in festivals, tents, workers' clubs and occupied factories. Fo says, "When we reached the top and had this huge audience, we decided it was impossible to go on that way. We realized the middle-class audience was coming to see us and leaving the theater relieved, feeling proud, saying, 'I feel democratic.' We had become the Alka-Seltzer of the Italian bourgeoisie" (cited in Rosenberg 4). In the move to non-traditional spaces, Fo declares, "[t]he very first political act was to demonstrate to the people that they have a culture, a language of their own" (cited in Rosenberg 4). Fo and Rame's relinquishing of "success" in favour of broadening the concept of theatre, indeed of culture, to include a broader social group has been an important part of a widespread dissatisfaction with the available channels of production. Since 1968, those emergent forms of political drama--oppositional theatre--have increased in number and have, without doubt, radically altered received concepts of theatre.

Such oppositional theatre, in its seeking out of non-traditional spaces and popular audiences, has brought about the devolution of performance from urban centres to a much broader geographic representation. Even in established theatre centres such as London and New York, alternative theatre work has led to fragment- ation (Broadway, Off-Broadway, Off-Off-Broadway) and to the attraction of different theatre audiences. Schechner notes the explosive growth between 1960 and 1982 in Off and Off-Off Broadway shows "from 19 to 132 during an average week" (End of Humanism 66). There appears to be only limited crossover between audiences of the mainstream and audiences of alternative theatre products. Where mainstream theatres cater for their target middle-class audience who can afford the admission prices necessary to support big productions, many low-budget alternatives have had to target their product just as carefully. We saw in the work of Piscator a very specific tailoring to the "Subscribers' Club" (made up of union workers, communist youth party members, etc.) which brought about an almost complete correlation of social, political and cultural codes. Such theatre then relies as much as the mainstream on meeting and exploiting the cultural formation of its audience--only the target sector differs. The same

close correlation between production and reception ideology was evident in the emergence of gay and feminist theatre.

What these examples unquestionably establish is that theatre audiences bring to any performance a horizon of cultural and ideological expectations. That horizon of expectations is never fixed and always tested by, among other things, the range of theatre available, the play and the particular performance. R.G. Davis, in his article "Seven Anarchists I Have Known: American Approaches to Dario Fo," discusses the failure of Accidental Death of an Anarchist in North American production. He comments:

> So far, most US productions of Anarchist have tried to downplay or ignore the politics. Producers, directors, and players have aimed for a slapstick hit. Their thinking seems to be that the more the play is de-politicized, the better will be its reception from the public and the critics. The rub is that when you ignore the political content of Anarchist you swamp both the politics and the comedy (318).

It is not that Fo's play cannot be performed for main-stream audiences--both Anarchist and Can't Pay, Won't Pay enjoyed long runs in London's West End. It is, as Davis' analysis makes clear, that the politics are central both to production and reception. Gavin Richards, playing the central role in the London production, incorporated satirical attacks on the

British government within the original setting of
Italian political corruption and, as Davis points out,
"English audiences assumed that Richards meant what he
said and that the satirical condemnation of official
government behaviour presented by the play was indeed
its content. They got the political point of view on
two levels" (315). Those audiences were encouraged to
take a Brechtian critical stance, but, as the long run
probably in itself substantiates, the play was not per-
ceived as a threatening attack on the parliamentary
system. In North America, the de-politicizing at the
production stage destroyed the play. As Anarchist is
structured politically and relies on involving the
political sense of audiences, it is hardly surprising
that North American audiences were merely confused. Any
expectations of a Marxist play were thwarted and thus
the pleasure of endorsement, speculation or rejection
denied.

The horizon(s) of expectations brought by an
audience to the theatre are bound to interact with every
aspect of the theatrical event and, for this reason, it
seems useful to examine the idea of the event and its
general implications for the act of reception. Raymond
Williams has described the importance of occasion in the
social perception of art. It is, with place, he

suggests, the most common signal of art (131) and this claim is substantiated by a dramatic example:

> There is . . . the interesting case of the experimental company which 'staged' 'dramatic situations', such as a fierce marital row, in restaurants, while appearing to be ordinary customers. Here the total absence of signals led to every kind of confusion, but its point was a testing of the function of such signals: did the normal 'framing' of such situations, which at the restaurant table might follow word by word and action by action the scene of a play, inhibit or qualify the responses of 'others'/'an audience'? (133).

Williams' example indicates the frame that is usually in place for the audience's recognition of the theatrical event. It is also apparent, however, that the occasion for which an audience prepares is linked to its availability. An audience's idea of the event will vary according to their contact with theatre and other art forms. Audiences in urban situations where a range of cultural products, including mainstream and alternative theatre, is available in greater or lesser quantities will likely attach less importance to the event. Audiences might consist of avid theatregoers, those who attend regularly (perhaps a Friday night ritual), the subscription holder, the infrequent or special occasion attendee, the visitor for whom this is a rare or "only" opportunity and so on. The investment in the idea of event returns even for the most avid theatregoer, however, under certain conditions. First-

night or gala performances, especially on Broadway,
offer a distinct experience to their audience. The
appearance of actors or directors with "star"
recognition can also enhance the idea of event. The
name of Sir Laurence Olivier brings a prestige to any
production and in the recent production of Eugene
O'Neill's A Long Day's Journey Into Night, with Jonathan
Miller directing Jack Lemmon, box-office success in both
London and New York was virtually assured. Audiences
are prepared to pay and expect a special kind of event
when icons of the theatre world are involved. A similar
enhancement results from the unique opportunity to see a
foreign company. Non-Western theatre has, as we saw,
had generally exotic appeal. Performance by Eastern
bloc companies has also, paradoxically, provided a
commodity particularly desirable through its scarcity.
Visits by the Berliner Ensemble to Paris in 1954, to
London in 1956, and to North America (Toronto) for the
first time in 1986, generated both intellectual response
and the sense that these performances were important to
anyone interested in the theatre.

In the major urban centres, the attraction of
tourists to mainstream theatre has become increasingly
important. Compared to the person who encounters
theatre as part of his day-to-day cultural experience,

the tourist likely sees the theatrical event as much more glamorous although, conversely, s/he may not attach as much value to its importance. Many of the best-known theatres in London, New York and Paris rely heavily on ticket sales to visitors. Some productions, often those eschewed even by mainstream theatregoers, rely entirely on the sporadic, usually tourist, theatregoer. The London production of Agatha Christie's The Mousetrap is probably the definitive example. Other shows have managed to appeal to both regular theatregoers and the more sporadic visitor, creating a waiting-list and black market for tickets which both enhances the appeal and experience of the event. In this category, we can look to shows such as Evita, Cats, and Starlight Express, as well as the RSC "blockbusters" Nicholas Nickleby and Les Misérables.

Outside the larger urban centres, limited access to theatre will undoubtedly change an audience's sense of the theatrical event. In some instances, where there is generally no access to the theatre, potential audiences may have little conception of the theatrical event. This distance would inevitably create problems in reception and the event itself might be as difficult to decode as for the trained Western audience watching oriental theatre. At best, it might become as

fascinating. For the audiences of regional and community theatre, the idea of the theatrical event is clearly different from that available in the urban experience. It is neither as commonplace nor as glamorous. Again, however, no single concept pertains and the idea of event will vary on similar criteria.

In areas where there is little available theatre, the event may be seen as a comfortable ritual (the pleasure rather than excitement, satisfaction rather than stimulation, that Schechner attached to economically and intellectually safe repertoire). John Ellis noted that "cinema in smaller communities tends to perform a different function [from that of the urban centre] when most of the audience are acquainted with each other. Here the entertainment is related to particular characteristics of individuals or of the place itself. The film comes from outside, the cinema belongs to the particular place" (27). In theatre, the product may come from outside (a touring company) but it is just as likely to involve members of that community and, therefore, unlike its urban theatrical counterpart and more than its cinematic equivalent, the event of community theatre is able to act as social affirmation of a particular group of people. Many alternative theatre groups working in less affluent urban or rural

areas have sought precisely such an involvement at the community level.

The enormous growth in alternative theatres over the last twenty years has emphasized in its practice the different signals attaching to the theatrical event. Above all, the event has been decentered both as occasion and place. Performances are no longer tied to traditional spaces with a fixed audience-stage relationship. Alternative theatre has looked to festivals in non-traditional theatre centres--Webb describes the importance of the Festival des Nuits de Bourgogne in the 1960s (209-210), Schechner describes the Gathering of August 1981 in St. Peter, Minnesota as a "movement that may spell the end of formalist isolation" (End of Humanism 18), Robert Wallace describes Edmonton's fifth Fringe Theatre Event (1986) selling more than 130,000 tickets for 130 shows in 9 days (117). More importantly, theatre has been introduced (or reintroduced) to regional cities and towns and many companies have established a presence in rural communities where theatre was previously a little known entity.

With alternative theatre, the event is often relocated in non-traditional playing spaces and often takes place at non-traditional times (not necessarily

evening performances with the occasional matinee). The 7:84 (Scotland) Theatre Company is typical of British alternative groups who have played in major centres and festivals worldwide, but who have brought theatre to remote rural communities on a regular basis. Many others have worked directly with unions, often creating theatrical events in response to, and support of, strike action. In France, Ariane Mnouchkine has developed performances in rural areas "to work on the clarity of their improvisations in front of peasants, a non-theatre-going group. . . . Through this practice the creators (author or acting company) learn from direct experience what is wanted by the audience rather than impose what they think the audience needs or enjoys" (Webb 213). (In this last example, of course, the audience is different in cultural and ideological formation). In the Americas, Teatro Campesino has performed not only at farm workers' strikes but at the pyramids of Teotihuacan; the San Francisco Mime Troupe plays regularly in city parks; and the Mulgrave Road Co-op offers a number of different shows each year in the cities and rural communities of Nova Scotia.[5]

All these different theatres create different kinds of events for the audience and, in their diversity, maintain occasion and place as signals for

art which are heterogeneous and flexible. As Coppetiers discovered in his research of The People Show, many of the audience's receptive processes are pre-activated by their anticipation of a particular kind of event. The nature of that anticipation, we have seen, is inevitably variable. Furthermore, the horizon of expectations drawn up by the idea of the forthcoming event may or may not prove useful in the decoding of the event itself. A crucial aspect of audience reception, then, is the degree to which a performance is accessible through the codes audiences are accustomed to utilizing, the conventions they are used to recognizing, at a theatrical event. Intelligibility and/or success of a particular performance will undoubtedly be determined on this basis.

Before concluding this discussion of the theatrical event, it is important to note that the work of theatre anthropologists and of anthropologists/social psychologists interested in theatre as their research, often in tandem with alternative theatres, has done much to expand our ideas. The International School of Theatre Anthropology run by Eugenio Barba at Holstebro in Denmark has been a crucial centre for non-textual research. Susan Bassnett in reviewing the <u>Anatomia del Teatro. Un dizionario de antropologia teatrale</u>, a

collection resulting from ISTA's 1981 summer school in
Italy, comments that this work "invite[s] us to
transcend culturally determined expectations of theatre
and . . . direct[s] us towards a reconsideration, from a
trans-cultural perspective, of the nature of acting and
of theatre itself" (189). While I would argue the
impossibility of transcending culturally determined
expectations, such investigations inevitably contribute
to the repositioning of cultural markers, to a broad-
ening of our understanding of the theatrical process.

Anthropologists such as Victor Turner argue for
the indispensability of the theatrical event. He
writes: "To look at itself a society must cut out a
piece of itself for inspection. To do this it must set
up a frame within which images and symbols of what has
been sectioned off can be scrutinized, assessed, and, if
need be, remodeled and rearranged" ("Frame" 35). Turner
describes how "public reflexiviity takes the form of a
performance" ("Frame" 33) where communication is
achieved not merely through the code of language but
through a multivalence of others--gesture, dance, art,
symbolic objects and so on. Social life, Turner notes,
"is characteristically 'pregnant' with social dramas.
It is as though each of us has a 'peace' face and a
'war' face, that we are programmed for co-operation, but

prepared for conflict. The primordial and perennial agonistic mode is the social drama" (<u>Ritual</u> 11). In the developed societies of the West, cultural systems such as theatre provide access to processes inaccessible in everyday life. Theatrical performances are, according to Turner, deliberately structured experiences "which probe a community's weaknesses, call its leaders to account, desacralize its most cherished values and beliefs, portray its characteristic conflicts and suggest remedies for them, and generally take stock of its current situation in the known 'world'" (<u>Ritual</u> 11). Herbert Blau is surely right in identifying the sixties as the time when Western society became particularly concerned with theatricalization in everyday life[6] and this has had an effect on theatre practitioners and audiences alike. Blau writes:

> I tried to show . . . how thinking, in my own work, recycles itself between the illusions of theater and the realities of the world, the realities of the world and the illusions of theater, arriving at a kind of theater whose express subject is the <u>dis</u>appearance of theater; that is, the appearances from which theater is made and upon which it reflects are conceptually elaborated and in turn reflected upon until there is a denial, or refusal, by means of theater of the distressing and maybe crippling notion that in life there is nothing but theater ("Letting Be" 62).

Experimental theatre in the U.S. (particularly Schechner's work with TPG), as well as the work of

Barba, Brook, Grotowski and many others, has explored the connections between social life and ritual and the theatrical performance. The fascination with non-Western theatrical modes we identified earlier is surely part of this same interest. Specifically for the audiences of this kind of theatre, but also more generally in light of the popularity of work such as Goffman's, audiences have become aware of the event of theatre as in some way important in sociocultural processes. Schechner has noted how theatre has been developed to serve many other leisure attractions-- discos, punk clubs, gay baths, sex theatres, theme parks, restored villages, wild animal parks and zoos: "I think audiences stream into these apparently different kinds of experiences because in all of them a person is absorbed into a 'total space' where fantasies can be safely experienced and even, in some places, acted out" (End of Humanism 28-29).

Whatever the nature of the "performance," it is clear that established cultural markers are important in pre-activating a certain anticipation, a horizon of expectations, in the audience drawn to any particular event.

2. Selection: The Relationship Between Production and
Reception

Against this background of theatre as a culturally-constructed product, signalled to its audiences by the idea of the event, we can explore the audience's experience of the event itself. But before looking at the specific processes involved in the audience's reception of a play/performance, it is pertinent to recall Manfred Naumann's statement that "works produced always have forms of social appropriation already behind them; they have been selected for reception through social institutions, made available by the latter, and in most cases also have already been evaluated thereby" (119). The selection or creation of a dramatic work for public performance obviously makes that work available for selection by potential audiences. Theatre as a cultural commodity is probably best understood as the result of its conditions of production and reception. The two elements of production and reception cannot be separated and an important area for further research is the relationship between the two for specific cultural environments, for specific types of theatre, and so on.

While the focus of this study is the receptive

processes of the theatre audience, it is nevertheless of fundamental importance to underscore at least some of the intervening aspects of production which necessarily mediate an audience's experience. Audiences are rarely involved in the selection of specific works for performance and thus the questions arise of how easy it is to produce a script, where to stage that script and for whom. Those in a position of economic (and thus cultural) power control what is available through mainstream channels. The hierarchy of production personnel can be complex (as we saw in the case of a London production of Streetcar) and is usually restricted to a few powerful individuals or companies. While a Shakespeare play is generally available for performance (anywhere from Stratford to your own home), certain types of performance--experimental and/or overtly political--are largely available only in and by the fringe.

Despite the determined testing of cultural limits in recent years, censorship, both overt and covert, remains a decisive factor in the availability of theatrical performances. Censorship as a historical phenomenon evidences the control of those in social and economic power. The representatives of what Stallybrass and White define as the "high discourses--

literature, philosophy, statecraft, the languages of the Church and the University" (4) have again and again taken the decision as to what is appropriate for the public at large (even when that public simply equates with the educated middle-classes). This is well illustrated by recent events in British theatre. Until abolition in 1968, the Lord Chamberlain exercised the power of censorship and, as Sinfield comments, "⌊a⌋s long as the makers and audiences of theatre were broadly at one with the dominant values in society, this caused little problem . . . . But the new movement perceived at once that censorship tended to privilege and legitimate traditional ideology and to suppress its own" (180). Plays such as Bond's Saved and Early Morning challenged the governance of the Lord Chamberlain and "club" performances (such as those of the Royal Court's Theatre Upstairs) were used to circumvent his control.

But the abolition of the Lord Chamberlain has not meant that any play can be produced anywhere. The mainstream has accommodated playwrights whose works challenge the dominant ideology but the cultural product is only acceptable if the challenge is contained within certain limits. The reactions to the presentation of Howard Brenton's The Romans in Britain at the National Theatre clearly show this. Ostensibly the outrage was

caused by the portrayal of homosexual rape on stage. Schechner has discussed the sensitivity of theatre audiences to overt sexuality because of their awareness of the real presence of the actors, but whether the rape scenes were in fact the problem is highly contentious. Brenton's attack on the British presence in Northern Ireland was powerfully drawn and perhaps perceived by those in power as taking the challenge too far. The protests against Brenton's play did not succeed in preventing audiences from seeing the play. Conversely they assured, through the status of notoriety, that tickets for all performances were immediately sold out. What the protests did achieve, however, was the focus of audiences on the play's overt sexuality and, in this way, defused the political potency of Brenton's script. The problems of The Romans in Britain are not an isolated example of difficulty with political scripts in "liberal Western democracies." Other now infamous examples include Gatti's La Passion du général Franco which took over 10 years to achieve performance and Fassbinder's Garbage, The City and Death which still has not had a public production.

   In less liberal climates, problems with availability of works are clearly exacerbated. The restrictions imposed on Poland's Theatre of the Eighth

Day under martial law (loss of funding and property, "official" disbandment, arrest) are indicative of attempts to curtail counter-government activity. The determination of the Theatre of the Eighth Day to persist (playing in churches, gyms, at open air venues and, when possible, outside Poland), on the other hand, exemplifies the political motivation of many fringe companies to produce material despite their lack of access to (or, at worst, prohibition by) traditional cultural sponsors. In other situations, theatre directed at exploited or underprivileged groups (gays, women, workers, unemployed) has necessarily developed outside the conventional routes of production and it is in this area that the correlation between production and reception has been most consciously developed.

Less visible and certainly less threatening than the exercising of censorship is the inevitable process of evaluation that takes place in the selection of work for performance. Selections may be made on the basis of the success of other plays by the same author, company, director, actor or genre. The play chosen for production may have already been evaluated as a "hit" through previous box-office success, and it is thus transferred, re-produced in a different location or revived. In these instances, the production company

relies on a play's previous ability to secure audiences and looks to reactivate the successful correlation of production and reception frames.

Intertextual reference is clearly important in this process of evaluating possible selections. Some selections exploit other productions that audiences may be familiar with (Howard Brenton's The Genius draws on the National Theatre production of his own translation of Brecht's Life of Galileo). Others may play with a well-known canonized text (Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) or with received assumptions about a particular text or type of theatre (Howard Barker's Women Beware Women retains the first three and a half Acts of Middleton's play and then provides the original characters with plot and language of his own composition). Other productions deliberately contradict authorial intentions which then permanently change an audience's interpretive strategies and which ask the audience to measure this production against other more conventional presentations (JoAnne Akalitis' 1985 production of Beckett's Endgame which challenged the playwright's strict control of his scripts). In each of these instances, the production company seeks to produce an internal horizon of expectations which will attract audiences through challenging their own already-

formed expectations/assumptions about a particular play or theatrical style.

The processes of evaluation entailed in the above production selections indicate the inevitability of choices being made in light of others already made. Material selected for production is always evaluated as potentially successful in meeting criteria for that company or theatre. Those criteria, while necessarily a part of the production, may not be immediately available for an audience, but may shape the way an audience decodes a particular performance. Many of these oppositional theatre groups have grown out of the social sector whose interests they seek to represent and, for this reason, many have at least sought the input of their audiences to influence both performance scripts and production methods.

El Teatro Campesino was established during, and to serve, a strike against grape ranches in California. The actors performed scenes to explore the problems of the workers, but were also involved as boycott organizers and pickets. As founder Luis Valdez makes clear, the availability of the play was contingent on how the political struggle was evolving: "After about the first month, the boycott against Schenley Industries started and my two best actors were sent away as boycott

organizers. There was a lot of work to be done, and sometimes we were too tired after picketing to rehearse so there was a lull for a month" (in Bagby 133). There are many other examples of companies which may be less politically practical, but equally concerned with the involvement of audiences at the stage of production, as well as reception. Le Théâtre du Soleil has invited factory groups to rehearsal in order that they can improve the dramatic work before it goes into performance. Le Théâtre Parminou specializes in collective creations often with the co-operation of local interest groups and always leaves open scenes or encourages post-production discussion with theatre audiences. Augusto Boal sought in his experiments with the People's Theater of Peru to train and transform the spectator into actor (126). Indeed, the creation of open production scripts--scenes where the audience make choices or are free to try out possible solutions--have become a wide-spread feature of fringe productions.

Unlike the dramatic device of Pirandello's theatre where in Each in his Own Way audiences are apparently given the choice of two or three acts, these [9] productions are constructed precisely on the principle of audience co-creation both in the interests of democratization and problem-solving. In Monstrous

Regiment's production of Dacia Maraini's play <u>Dialogo</u>
<u>d'una</u> <u>prostituta</u> <u>col</u> <u>suo</u> <u>cliente</u>, the input of the
audience was integral to the play. This, of course, led
to variations in performance but also, in Monstrous
Regiment's view, to an experience which more closely
resembled the fragmentary nature of women's lives
(Bassnett-McGuire 464). At the WOW Cafe in New York
City, a theatre constituted to present anything written
by, directed by, or in the interests of women, a policy
was implemented whereby "anyone who showed up to an open
staff meeting automatically joined the staff" (Solomon,
"The WOW Cafe" 309). This resulted in a policy of open-
booking for the Cafe; anyone who wanted to put on a show
which reflected the theatre's constitution could do so.
Its present goal is to put on "work from within its own
community--a priority not as cliqueish as it may sound
since anyone who hangs around is absorbed into that
community. . . . [T]his new commitment generated
creative work and pushed WOW women toward inventing and
finishing new projects" (Solomon 311).

These indications of the range of production
objectives and ideologies at work in dominant and alter-
native theatres present some understanding of the
relationship between production and reception. Whatever
takes place at the production stage is bound not only to

mediate the work available for reception but also to determine, at least in part, the characteristics of the audience which will likely attend. Inevitably, and as was particularly evident in Martorella's discussion of opera repertoire, economic decisions occupy a controlling position.

In that research, it was evident how economic priorities in the mainstream have led to a standardization of, and conservatism in, repertoires, and this, it can be assumed, extends generally to material selected for mainstream theatre production. Few risks are taken because the potential for fiscal loss is too great. With "safe" production selections, theatres must rely on dazzling productions and/or the casting of stars to attract audiences. Paradoxically, both are expensive and overall costs inevitably rise. Stanley Kauffmann attributes the lack of serious material on Broadway to "rising expense, not decline in audience quality" (360). He continues:

> The cultivation of the average American is demonstrably higher than it was when the Broadway range was wider. Broadway has priced itself out of seriousness, out of limited appeal, even though those limitations are broader than they would have been forty years ago. Most of what happens on Broadway hopes to reach the biggest audience, not the best, and must hope so (360).

Unlike mainstream cinema, theatre cannot necessarily

rely on long runs to recoup costs. Stars and/or theatres may only be available for limited periods and, in any event, continue to cost money on a week-by-week basis. Transfer to another medium (television or video) generally requires a new production and taking a production on tour is an almost prohibitively expensive option. Ultimately, in the face of such high economic costs, more and more mainstream theatres remain dark, thereby limiting the performances available for audience reception. Perhaps the only safe venues are those which are heavily dependent on subsidy from corporation, foundation or government and which offer productions that will not endanger that level of funding.

In Britain, the Arts Council, as the major distributor of government subsidy for the theatre and other arts, has had a decisive role. More than half the costs for London's National Theatre are met through government subsidy yet the theatre has still run into a problem with deficits. Seat sales have averaged 90% capacity and prices have risen steadily, but the enormous operating costs maintain economic pressure. Higher seat prices have assured the predominance of middle-class Londoners or tourists as the theatre audience, and have virtually obliterated risk-taking in the repertories of the Olivier and Lyttleton Theatres.

The third playing space, The Cottesloe Theatre, intended for new drama and more adventurous selections, has been dark for extended periods. Attendance figures confirm that there is an audience for the National but it is the economic restrictions on production which work to restrict both availability and selection.

The Arts Council has also played a crucial role in the establishment of alternative theatre in Britain and its subsidy has led to the increased availability of theatre outside the London area. While the Arts Council can claim much responsibility for the emergence of a prolific, alternative (and generally oppositional) theatre in the sixties and seventies, in more recent times, funding for such companies has become less and less available (Arts Council money being re-concentrated on the major producers, The National Theatre, The Royal Opera House, The Royal Shakespeare Company and so on). Arts Council money has also become less attractive to some alternative groups because of the political compromise it might represent. Other sources of funding, such as local councils, have also become more problematic. Graham Murdock observes: "The Greater Manchester Council . . . recently cut their grant to the North West Arts Association by the amount earmarked for the radical theatre group, North West Spanner, as a

protest against their Marxist orientation" (162). In this situation, increased demands have been made on less Conservative councils, trades unions and other community organizations. In the successful campaign to disband the Greater London Council, much media attention was centered on the amount of ratepayers' money which went to support oppositional theatre. The attack (like the one on Brenton's The Romans in Britain) was usually, however, made in terms of sexual, rather than political orientation--why should your money be spent on theatre by and for gays when it might be better employed in more traditional social services?

Rather than decimate oppositional theatre, cutbacks in national and regional subsidy have led to a strengthening of ties on a community or constituency level. In other words, the theatre producers are brought into closer contact with the audiences they seek and, however frugal these sources of funding, this may in fact lead to a more sympathetic fostering of alternative theatre. Steve Gooch marks one success of political fringe theatre as the establishment of a new relationship with audiences: "Based on a broadly common political understanding as well as common aesthetic expectations, the division between product and consumer was replaced by the bond of interest between

practitioners and spectators" (56).

Whether fringe or mainstream, much of European theatre relies on subsidy and the attending audience thus sits in a seat inevitably at least part paid for by someone else. It is often the case, as with the National Theatre, that the price paid for the ticket represents only a small part of the actual cost. In this sense, then, the audience member is always buying another's ideology, which is not necessarily coincident with his/her own.

Clearly the price of admission is an important ritual in the cultural event of theatre. Performances which are free are, in most cultures, renowned for attracting a small audience. Nominal charges or a pay-what-you-can system have had better results. At the other end of the economic scale, the high price of a seat at a hit Broadway show is part of the attraction of attending that kind of theatrical event. When the high price is coupled with scarcity, this creates a heightened sense of the anticipation John Ellis identified as central to the ticket purchase. The theatrical experience the audience enjoys can in this way be shaped by the economic transaction that signals the availability of performance.

Theatre is an economic commodity. Money is

exchanged for a paper ticket which, as Ellis pointed out (in the experience of cinema), promises the audience two performances: one is the show itself and the other is the experience of being in a theatre. To both performances is attached the anticipation of pleasure. Although the specific pleasures of being in the theatre and of watching a dramatic action will be discussed later, at this point it is relevant to identify the stimulation of that pleasure in the act of selection of a particular theatrical offering. Stanley Kauffmann, in discussing the high price of Broadway theatre tickets, comments that this is an integral part of the experience:

> To charge Broadway prices in a regional theatre would not provide the same thrill, even for a good show. It would be like charging Lutèce prices for a good local restaurant. Broadway prices for touring shows are the closest that one can come to the Broadway thrill away from Manhattan.
>
> The matter of price connects with the paramount reason that Broadway is needed. The ticket price does for the audience what Broadway does for theatre people themselves. It is the only locus in the American theatre where American success is possible (359-360).

While Kauffmann celebrates the congregation of Broadway's theatres into a vibrant theatre district, Peter Brook attacks the institution of theatre critics for shortcircuiting the excitement of the theatre event and for discouraging audiences from risk-taking. He

identifies the New York audience as potentially one of the best in the world and comments:

> It seldom goes to the theatre because the prices are too high. Certainly it can afford these prices, but it has been let down too often. It is not for nothing that New York is the place where the critics are the most powerful and the toughest in the world. . . . [T]he circle is closed; not only the artists, but also the audience, have to have their protection men--and most of the curious, intelligent, nonconforming individuals stay away (23-24).

New York audiences are not the only victims. Brook goes on to describe his production of Arden's Sergeant Musgrave's Dance at the Athenée in Paris. The reviews had been terrible and the company was playing to virtually empty houses. As a desperate measure, they announced three free performances: "Such was the lure of complimentary tickets that they became like wild premières. Crowds fought to get in, the police had to draw iron grilles across the foyer, and the play itself went magnificently, as the actors, cheered by the warmth of the house, gave their best performance, which in turn earned them an ovation" (24). This evidence suggests the power of economics to alter the production-reception contract. By changing the idea of the event, but not the production itself, Brook drew in enthusiastic audiences. They did not need to rely on critical opinion as a gauge of value for money but instead

responded to an unusual opportunity and altered their expectations accordingly. Furthermore, the interactive relationship between stage world and audience is evidenced by Brook's comments on the quality of performances given at these free shows.

From Kauffmann and Brook's quite distinct arguments, attention is also drawn to the importance of geographic location in the process of selection, both for production and reception. A theatre district such as Broadway obviously carries its own attractions and Kauffmann describes the crowd that is drawn there each night to the various theatres as being "as close to a sense of community as the New York theatre comes at present. Dingier than it used to be, going to Broadway is still a unique experience because of Broadway excitement" (363). But is this really the case? Alternative theatres have established alternative communities and one example, the East Village in New York, illustrates a theatre district certainly different from Broadway but with its own excitement and its own particular appeal to certain theatre audiences.

In an article entitled "An Evening in the East Village," The Drama Review documented eight performances taking place on Friday evening, November 30, 1984. Many of the reports comment on the difficulty of finding

the various locations and, clearly unlike their Broadway relatives, these theatres make little or no attempt to advertize themselves as theatres. Jill Dolan comments on the pre-show atmosphere at the Club Chandalier: "The crowd is mostly women, many of whom are recognizable from the 8:30 show at the WOW Cafe. The spectators mingle freely; many seem to know each other and are comfortable in the space. Performers are difficult to distinguish from spectators" (316). It is unlikely that Broadway and East Village audiences would find much in common with their experiences of theatre, but both rely on a geographic framework within which to select their entertainment.

Geographic location is always important. A play must be produced in a location that attracts a particular audience. Audiences who never attend the mainstream theatres of urban centres, either by choice or by lack of access, may be regular theatregoers at community theatres, clubs or even through their place of work. Companies such as El Teatro Campesino have built theatre around the location of the audience rather than the more conventional route of looking for audiences to attend a particular playing space. When the boundaries between work and leisure are clouded in this way, the receptive process is once again altered.

Related to this is the question of performance
time. The traditional evening performance is in many
ways a central aspect of the mainstream theatrical
event. This, unlike the practice of groups such as El
Teatro Campesino, emphasizes the work/leisure split and
in this way promotes a sense of necessary passivity in
audiences. It also allows and encourages the arrange-
ment of pre- and post-theatre eating. This enhances the
sense of occasion, the pleasurable experience of an
evening's entertainment. It also contributes to the
economic viability of a leisure industry. Alternative
theatres have not necessarily pursued the same time
scheme. More daytime performances have taken place,
often in the outdoors (parks, streets, festivals) in the
hope of involving those who do not, for whatever reason,
seek evening entertainment outside of the home. In many
venues of popular theatre (clubs, union halls, bars),
while the evening show is preserved, it is reframed by
eating and drinking along with the performance.
Audience activity is in this sense encouraged and
although this may detract from concentration, it also,
groups would argue, works against a soporofic passivity
in response.

One further element which mediates the selection
process should be examined here. This is the influence

of marketing or advertising on the audience's relation-
ship to a particular performance. Peter Uwe Hohendahl
has described the development of literary commodities
for mass consumption and the role in this of marketing:

> In consumer culture, in a logical extension of
> the capitalist system, the reception of art
> was drawn into the realm of marketing, with
> its system of controlled production and
> consumption. . . . The sophisticated
> adaptation of calculated and manufactured
> needs to mass production compromised the
> bourgeois concept of autonomous culture (74).

In discussions of reader-response criticism, Manfred
Naumann's elaboration of the varied mediations between
text and reader demonstrated some of the strategies for
effective marketing of a book. Advertising, reviews,
commentary, discussions or extracts (particularly those
presented on television or radio), prizes and
popularization of the author clearly work equally well
on the theatregoer. Scholarship, the teacher and the
professional critic all further serve to market the
theatre product. It is often observed that while a
critic may not these days make or break a production,
s/he still has the effect of creating a very specific
set of expectations in the audience and thus determines
how they will receive the play.

In Hohendahl's analysis of the reception of the
best-seller, it is clear that the success of a
particular title among its many competitors is dependent

upon a powerful and effective marketing strategy rather than on the intrinsic attractions of the book itself. Hohendahl comments:

> Since large amounts of capital are at stake, which must be amortized rapidly, the reception of a novel cannot be left to the usual needs of the audience. The public must be conditioned, even though it has already been largely disoriented by a flood of advertising stimuli. This conditioning begins with such seemingly innocuous matters as the design of the jacket and its blurb. It includes an intensive and extensive advertising campaign in newspapers and magazines carefully chosen for their particular readership, and also involves a planned release of information to the mass media, so that even before the book appears, public interest is aroused by provocative statements (189).

While most theatrical productions neither need nor receive such techniques of mass marketing, this approach is nevertheless closely followed in the case of the "blockbuster" production designed primarily for popular audiences. The recent transfer of <u>Starlight Express</u> to New York provides a good example. With vast pre-production costs in preparing the theatre, advance ticket sales had to be sought rather than relying on positive public response after the usual marketing channels of reviews and word-of-mouth. Clearly the success of the London production provided a starting point for the creation of audience anticipation, but the mass media were effectively used to increase public awareness of and interest in the show's opening.

As in most of the categories of selection, alternative theatre practice adopts other methods of reaching audiences. Often there is the similar aim of reaching a popular audience but, with a minimal advertising budget and quite different ideological motivation, strategies are obviously very different. Kate Davy's account of getting to a performance at the WOW Cafe provides a useful illustration:

> To find the theatre it is helpful to know the address, since the storefront that houses it does not call attention to itself--there is no sign on the building indicating that it is a theatre, only some flyers and photographs taped to the inside of the picture window and the window of the door. Although a performance was scheduled for the coming weekend, there was no way to know about it short of walking by the theatre at 33 E. 11th Street to read the unadorned, handwritten poster in the window that announced it.
>
> The poster stated that a play entitled The Heart of the Scorpion by Alice M. Forrester would be playing at 8:00 p.m. The performance was neither advertised nor listed in the newspapers, and because the theatre has a pay telephone, there is no way to look up the phone number or get it from directory assistance. Clearly, word of mouth was the primary vehicle for attracting an audience to this particular performance, presumably an audience already familiar with the theatre ("An Evening in the East Village" 339).

Davy points to the two most common "advertising" techniques: word of mouth and a habit of attending a particular theatre. These two forms of advertisement worked to disconcerting effect in one experience of 7:84

in Scotland.   McGrath describes their tour of the Orkney

Islands:

> Small audiences in Stromness and Kirkwall, the
> two main towns. On our third, and last night,
> in Orphir,   a small   village   in   between,
> suddenly   hundreds.   Apparently   nobody   in
> Orkney goes to anything until someone else has
> gone and reported on it.   A curious sensation
> at the box-office, waiting for a whole island
> full of people who are all waiting for each
> other ("Introduction" xxi).

Flyers provide another important advertising device for

the   low-budget   production.   These   are   particularly

important   for   touring   companies   and   for   those   who

perform in non-traditional spaces such as public parks.

These   are   obviously   simple   approaches   to

advertising   the   theatrical   event but   potentially   as

effective   as more sophisticated and costly   devices   in

drawing in a specific audience with particular attitudes

towards the event to be presented. The audience at WOW,

for   example,   is   clearly a constituency one   and   pre-

disposed   to   receive the feminist,   generally   lesbian,

orientations of the dramas. The playwrights, actresses,
10
and   even characters of the plays   become well-known to

the   audience   and   knowledge of   their   presence   in   a

forthcoming production becomes sufficient advertising.

The   elements   of selection discussed   so   far--

availability,   economics,   geography and   marketing--

clearly apply,   albeit in different ways,   both to those

producing and those consuming theatre. To this can be added one non-production element: the theatregoer's commitment to planning, a process which can affect receptive mood. Many possibilities exist. Theatregoing may be habitual and the spectator is willing to attend virtually anything with tickets available on any particular night or the decision to attend a performance might be spontaneous. In either of these cases, little time will be available to construct a horizon of expectations specific to the performance selected. Conversely, the holder of a subscription ticket or the theatregoer who has booked tickets some time ahead will have had at least the opportunity to prepare himself for that particular production. Reviews may have been consulted, the text may have been read, or other experiences of theatre drawn upon to construct ideas about the forthcoming event.

The topics approached by means of culture, event and selection provide a sense of the complexity that necessarily attaches to the receptive process. All these aspects provide a frame for the direct experience of attending a performance. While always culturally contingent, decisions at this level have generally been taken by individuals or small groups. It is at the next stage that the spectator becomes more aware of his role

as part of a collective group, the audience.

3. On the Threshold of Theatre

The specific encounter of the spectator with the theatrical event forms the nucleus of this study. Above all, audience reception concerns the spectator's involvement with performance in his social (audience member) and private (individual) roles. But these roles do not begin as the curtain rises. We have already seen the importance of issues such as cultural background and selection in getting audiences to the theatre. In the circumstance of the theatre visit, the spectator takes on his role(s) before the performance per se begins.

As planning (or the lack of it) plays a part in shaping receptive mood, so the ease or difficulty of attendance has its effect. How did the spectator travel to the theatre? Did s/he already have tickets? The amount of leisure time generally available will affect the time committed to this particular excursion. Is the performance part of an extended leisure activity (combined with, say, food and drink) or a celebration? Did travelling to the theatre involve adverse weather conditions? All such elements of the gathering process are bound to influence the spectator's preparation for the theatrical event, and Schechner suggests that the process undertaken by the audience resembles the actors'

preparation (<u>Essays</u> 122). Both, he argues, set in place the theatrical frame.

The milieu in which the theatre is located will also have a bearing on reception. Stanley Kauffmann's endorsement of the excitement of Broadway has already been described. The theatres of London's South Bank are designed to draw attention to their surrounding environment (the River Thames, the Houses of Parliament and so on) as a means of enhancing not only the experience of visiting the National Theatre, but also the sense of cultural activity. By contrast, the ABC streets of New York's East Village are drab and threatening to those unfamiliar with that area. Certainly audiences who attend mainstream theatres, usually in urban centres or attractive locations (the Stratfords of England and Ontario), largely enjoy a sense of visiting a district where culture is privileged and an important part of established social activity. One of the concerns expressed in the choice of the Barbican for the building of a new London home for the Royal Shakespeare Company was that audiences would not be attracted to an area with no theatregoing tradition. Indeed, the Barbican was a district with a small resident population and where social activity ended in the early evening when business people left their offices and returned to their

suburban residences. Despite these fears, audiences at the Barbican have in fact generated residual business. Restaurants already in the area have found evening clientele and new restaurant and other businesses have been established. In other words, a tradition of integrated social activity has quickly come into place in support of an internationally recognized cultural institution. Audiences outside the mainstream, whether urban or rural, do not have the same experience of theatre attendance. But these audiences tend to be drawn from the local community and thus they find the playing space an environment which is familiar and in that way comfortable.

The milieu which surrounds a theatre is always ideologically encoded and the presence of a theatre can be measured as typical or incongruous within it. That relationship further shapes a spectator's experience. Patronage is clearly an evaluative act and those who made the journey to Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop in the East End of London evaluated that theatre in the act of travelling. Not only were they travelling to an alternative theatre site, in itself unusual, but there was a sense of the theatre's merits in drawing crowds to a non-traditional theatre district. Many of Theatre Workshop's patrons would not otherwise have risked the

venture into that part of London.

The site of performance is patently important. Along with occasion, Raymond Williams suggests place as the most common signal of art (131-132). The example he provides, though not by name, is an infamous one. It is that of Carl Andre's _Equivalence VIII_, the bricks that constitute art in their context of the Tate Gallery. Traditionally (although not always) the playing space has been contained in an area or building designated as theatre. That designation, as was evident in the example of otherwise unintelligible non-Western drama, acts to signal the event staged within as theatrical performance. Where the names of the actors playing are displayed outside in neon, this acts not only to lure a certain type of audience, but to promise a certain type of theatrical experience. In recent years, it has become increasingly common for multipurpose buildings (community centres, schools, union halls, cafes etc.) to serve as performance venues. Outdoor spaces (parks, historic sites, the street, etc.) have also become more popular. This has happened partly because these were the only spaces available to alternative theatre groups and partly, as Elam points out, "in order to escape the tyranny of architectonic grandeur and its aesthetic and ideological implications" (63). This has the effect,

Elam suggests, of looking back to earlier, non-institutional performances such as those of Medieval theatre. Undoubtedly each particular variety of playing space provides the audience with specific expectations and interpretive possibilities. Hamlet performed to an audience sitting on the grass in a park cannot be the same experience as the Hamlet performed in a modern theatre technologically equipped for the presentation of plays.

The study of theatre buldings is not, of course, new. Historical developments in theatre architecture have been rigorously surveyed and researched. Theatre historians have, however, concentrated their studies on the shape and dimensions of the theatre and the relationship of building to plays produced. The audience has only been of limited interest in these studies. Their social composition and their numbers are used to explain architectural features, but generally research has not looked to the reciprocal effects of architecture on the audience and their reception of the plays. Peter Thomson has commented on the long time it has taken to interest architects in researching and documenting the English theatre (10) and their contribution would surely be decisive in a better under-standing of how architecture works on the audience's

interpretation of theatrical event.

The theatre building is a landmark as cultural institution. It is a physical representative of the art which dominant ideologies have both created and promoted. Yet, as Michael Hays observes in the introduction to his study of late nineteenth-century French and German theatre:

> [u]ntil recently, the social value and function of the buildings, the architectural forms which enclose the theater event, have remained largely unexplored territory. Critical investigation has instead focused attention on the smaller space of the stage or on the actor and the director. However rewarding such inquiries may be, they inevitably tend to slight or even deny the existence of a larger area of action which contains these elements of the performance. This large theatrical space exists, however, and is first signaled by the willingness of actors and audience to converge in a specific place at a specific time. It is, in fact, the choice of location which first announces the conceptual as well as the spatial structure of the theater event, since the position, size, and shape of the place determine the physical and perceptual relationships between the participants as well as their number. Temporally, visually, and conceptually, the theater itself provides us with an initial glimpse of the way in which the lived experience of the performance is organized as a structural whole. And it is also this theater space which first allows us to propose a connection between the ordering principles of the theater event and those of society at large (3).

While some of the more recent designs for cultural institutions (such as the Pompidou Centre in Paris) have attempted "democratization," architectural

styles of theatres are generally recognizable as representing high culture. Some theatres which came into existence as centres for working-class entertainment have been recuperated through time by high culture by virtue of their historic importance. London's Old Vic Theatre is a good example. Its architecture was easily recuperable as it was originally designed with the purpose of "morally uplifting" its working-class audiences. Postmodern architects insist that the "tyranny of architectonic grandeur" that Elam identified as part of the cultural institution is by no means inevitable. Paolo Portoghesi demands that:

> new building types must find a place that can interpret in institutional terms the new demand for culture and happiness, and the new needs of communication and recreation. Bourgeois society in ascent was able to give a stable form to its own needs through the creation of buildings like the theater, the public gallery, the museum and the library. Our present society . . . is still waiting for someone to creatively interpret these differences that mark the passage between an industrial civilization, homologated on the model of mechanical production, and a post-industrial civilization, which tries to put man back at the center of his vision of the world (77)

The last phase of theatre building, both in Europe and North America, was largely modernist in design and intention, and as such ideologically encoded to approve and welcome the bourgeois society which financed the institutions. It will be interesting to

see what changes can be achieved by postmodern architecture in creating institutions which are more available to the public at large. In the meantime, alternative theatre has been produced in non-traditional, less institutional venues and, in these instances, the architecture is unlikely to play such an important role. It does not foreground the building as a cultural institution and does not overcode the performance in this way. Nevertheless the architectural elements of a union hall (or, indeed, of the factory gates <u>outside</u> of which a performance is taking place) will impose ideologically on performances and the audience's reception.

Where alternative theatre has been undertaken in traditional theatre buildings, efforts have been made to undercut the imposition of architectural features by whatever means possible. Gooch cites the insistence of Peter Cheeseman at the Victoria Theatre in Stoke on the creation of a friendly and familiar atmosphere around the foyer and box-office (16). As the exterior architectural elements frame the theatrical event, so theatre interiors continue that framing process. Cheeseman sought to counteract the institutional message of his theatre's exterior by a community atmosphere in the interior entrance area. Of course, the very

existence of the foyer emphatically points to the social construction of theatre. The small groups of people who come to the theatrical event are deliberately assembled as a collective in a space which has, in its historical development, increasingly been designed to permit social display.

Hays observes that, unlike theatres from a century earlier where the stage took up a large proportion of total available space, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, "the rooms, foyers and halls for the audience (often separated according to economic distinctions) began to take up more and more space and finally as much as the stage and house together. This is perhaps the most striking aspect of the new bourgeois theater of the period" (5). He cites Charles Garnier's proposals for the theatre (1871) which include foyers where the spectator is at leisure to study the characteristics of other members of the audience, to note dress and jewelry but, above all, to observe and sense being observed. This aspect of social display remains a primary function in even the more recently constructed theatres. While dress codes in English-speaking countries are undoubtedly more informal than those of French and German nineteenth-century theatres, the foyers of institutions such as the National Theatre

and Lincoln Center are clearly designed with the purpose of promoting the pleasures of watching and being watched that Garnier salutes.

Foyers also contain other facilities which are important in the creation of an integrated social occasion for the audience and which often provide additional sources of revenue for the theatre. Cloakrooms, restaurants and bars are the most usual services but increasingly stores selling theatre-related goods have been incorporated. Clearly both mainstream institutions and small alternative theatres welcome and need the extra revenue this can raise and, for the audience, it provides material evidence of both their support and cultural taste. The sense of cultural event can be boosted by a number of other foyer activities. In an endeavour to attract larger, and presumably appreciative, audiences, foyers become the site of additional cultural attractions such as exhibitions and musical preludes. The foyer also functions as the site of receptions in celebration of first-night or gala performances, often an occasion when theatre personnel are available "to meet the public." In the mainstream institution, this can provide tangible evidence of the elitism the ticket price represents. In alternative theatres, the opportunity to mix

practitioners and audience is more likely to foster a club-like atmosphere and can be an effective tool to increase the audience's familiarity with the political and/or artistic aims of the company.

In the playing space itself, the area designated for the accommodation of the audience is obviously of central importance. As Hays suggested, it determines not only the physical and perceptual relationship of the audience to the stage, but the actual number of individuals which will compose the audience as group. While Grotowski has stated that it takes one spectator to make a performance (32), theatre productions generally seek a much larger audience. The percentage capacity of seats available will inevitably affect reception both through its effect on the quality of actors' performances and through inter-spectator relations. The experience of the spectator in a packed auditorium is quite different from one in a half-empty theatre. When a theatre has very few spectators, the sense of audience as group can be destroyed, which may have the side effect of psychological discomfort for the individual which inhibits or revises reception.

To examine the relationship between seating area, audience and stage, Elam draws upon the theory of proxemic relations established by anthropologist Edward

Hall.[10]   This theory works to prove that use of space is

governed by rules which generate a range of connotative

cultural units.   Hall divides proxemic relations into

three main syntactic systems (fixed-feature, semi-fixed-

feature and informal space):

> Fixed-feature space involves, broadly, static
> architectural configurations.   In the theatre
> it will relate chiefly to the playhouse itself
> and,   in   formal   theatres   (opera   houses,
> proscenium-arch theatres, etc.) to the shapes
> and dimensions of stage and auditorium.   Semi-
> fixed-feature space concerns such movable but
> non-dynamic objects as furniture, and so in
> theatrical terms involves the set, auxiliary
> factors like the lighting and, in informal
> theatrical   spaces,   stage   and   auditorium
> arrangements.   The   third   proxemic   mode,
> informal space, has as its units the ever-
> shifting relations of proximity and distance
> between individuals, thus applying, in the
> theatre, to actor-actor, actor-spectator and
> spectator-spectator interplay (Elam 62-63).

As Elam notes, all three modes are usually

simultaneously effective, but particular theatres will

valorize one system over the remaining two.   Theatre

history provides examples of every kind of proxemic

relationships ranging from the consciously structured

(the proscenium-arch or its opposite, Gropius' Total

Theater) to the consciously flexible (Medieval theatre).

Dominant theatre practice generally maintains

the fixed-feature mode and because of this, seating

arrangements become important.   They extend the social

display initiated by the foyer.   In the most extreme

form of display, spectators were seated on the stage. The nearest contemporary equivalent is the box. In these seats, sight of the stage is notoriously bad but the patrons accommodated are a focal point for the rest of the audience, the majority. With this exception, proximity to and visibility of the stage is usually proportionate to the price paid for the seat. The cheapest seats are farthest away, often with restricted view, and distance their occupants not only from the stage action but from the rest of the paying audience. The social implications are self-evident. Theatres built in the boom of the sixties and seventies, while generally retaining a fixed stage-auditorium relation, were often designed to accommodate open seating policies and reflect, of course, the "democratization" of those times.

Contemporary audiences are, therefore, most used to fixed stage-auditorium relationships and the predominance of this convention has led to its necessity for a comfortable theatrical experience. It will be recalled that Coppetiers' research revealed a repeated reaction of embarrassment to The People Show precisely because of the lack of a fixed relationship. Barthes writes: "I do not like openings, or private screenings, or theatre premières. I need the anonymity of the

commercial theatre, like that of an unknown group of museum-goers" ("How to Spend" 120). The predominant architectural design of theatres--a foyer which encourages observing and observation in the small, familiar groups in which we attend the theatre and an auditorium which assures anonymity (and thus reassurance) in the larger collective--has thus been received and translated by theatre audiences into psychological need. Elam notes that, while the spectator surrenders his individual status upon entering the auditorium, he "has his own well-marked private space, individual seat, and relative immunity from physical contact with his fellows (and even from seeing them). The result is to emphasize personal rather than social perception and response, to introduce a form of 'privacy' within an experience which is collective in origin" (64-65). Such an effect is hardly surprising in light of the value accorded to the individual and his privacy in bourgeois culture. Neither is it surprising that oppositional theatre has determinedly sought to break up notions of space and to reinforce the social perception and response.

Elements of semi-fixed-feature relations are also part of the audience's experience at this pre-performance level. The condition of the stage set at

the point of the audience's entry can provide an
important first stimulus for the audience's perception
of the play. Where it is available for consumption, it
acts as the initiator of the decoding process and this
inevitability has been exploited by many playwrights and
directors. The pre-performance set can be the device
which brings an audience's horizion of expectations into
conflict with the performance's internal horizon of
expectations established · by a playwright and/or
director. Arthur Holmberg's review of JoAnne Akalaitis'
production of Genet's The Balcony shows both a
director's exploitation of pre-performance and the
audience's necessary adjustment of expectations:

> Whereas Genet's play takes place nowhere and
> everywhere, Akalaitis locates the action in a
> Central American Republic in the grips of a
> revolutionary convulsion. As spectators
> trickle into the auditorium, peons salsa to
> the rhythms of Ruben Blades in a tumble-down,
> shell-shocked barrio that spills off the stage
> into the audience. . . . before the play
> proper begins [my emphasis] Akalaitis has
> given us a visual image of the revolutionary
> as carnival (43).

In Six Characters in Search of An Author, Pirandello
uses the pre-performance set to launch his attack on
audience assumptions: "The spectators will find the
curtain raised and the stage as it usually is during the
day time. It will be half dark, and empty, so that from
the beginning the public may have the impression of an

impromptu performance" (211-212). In Stoppard's The
Real Inspector Hound, the pre-production set not only
provides the metatheatrical attack of Pirandello's play
but complicates the challenge with the inclusion of a
very familiar setting, the drawing-room:

> The first thing is that the audience appear to
> be confronted by their own reflection in a
> huge mirror. Impossible. However, back there
> in the gloom--not at the footlights--a bank of
> plush seats and pale smudges of faces. (The
> total effect having been established, it can
> be progressively faded out as the play goes
> on, until the front row remains to remind us
> of the rest and then, finally, merely two
> seats in that row--one of which is now
> occupied by MOON. Between MOON and the
> auditorium is an acting area which represents,
> in as realistic an idiom as possible, the
> drawing-room of Muldoon Manor. French windows
> at one side. A telephone fairly well upstage
> (i.e. towards MOON). The BODY of a man lies
> sprawled face down on the floor in front of a
> large settee (9).

In a play which remorselessly parodies the genre of the
dramatic thriller, the presence of a dead body on the
stage acts as an irresistable lure for the audience.
They are drawn to speculate as to whether the body is
real or not (an actor or a dummy) and to construct
elements of plot to explain this opening frame. In
other plays or performances, more simply, audiences
might be faced with stagehands preparing the set for the
opening moment. In this instance, the theatricality is
emphasized and, like the more determined examples of
Stoppard and Pirandello, the device attempts to prevent

the establishment of perfect illusion. It may, of course, be the case that audiences accept the convention (and necessity) of stagehands and thus agree to ignore them.

Diametrically opposed to this practice is the set concealed behind the theatre curtain. In this case the audience is unable to begin the decoding process based on literal evidence of the set, but is nevertheless reminded by the curtain (as well as by its likely counterpart, the proscenium arch) of the theatrical frame. The curtain can also function to provoke the audience into speculation about the kind of set that will be revealed for the play they are about to watch. In British theatre of the inter-war years, much of the attraction and splendour of performance centered on the lavish and unique sets. In such instances, the curtain's role was to increase audience anticipation and enhance the pleasure of the opening moment when the curtain rose to reveal a magnificent set design.

The light set of the auditorium is a less obvious, but nevertheless possible pre-production tool. An audience admitted, as it often is, into an auditorium where the lights are subdued is reminded of its purpose in being at the theatre. The subdued lights encourage a subdued atmosphere and prepare the audience for

reception. Conversely, a well-lit auditorium continues the element of social display encouraged by the theatre foyer. The moment when the lights are dimmed then becomes a significant instruction to the audience as well as a means to heighten anticipation quickly and effectively. At the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, the dimming is accompanied by a mechanical withdrawal to the ceiling of the chandeliers which dominate the auditorium, a grand gesture which guarantees a quiet and receptive audience for the opening moments of performance.

The informal proxemic mode can also be available prior to performance. In fringe theatre it is not unusual for the actors to fulfil non-performing roles such as collecting tickets, ushering, or even serving behind the bar. Actors may welcome the audience into the auditorium. This can be done as "actor," then reminding the audience of actor/character split inevitable in theatrical production, or as character, thereby activating performance and reception on point of entry rather than a more formal opening scene. A production of The Canterbury Tales by The Young Vic Company used this to particular effect. By greeting and talking with the audience members as they arrived, they prevented audiences in formal auditorium arrange-

ments from establishing their personal and private spaces in individual seats. Instead a collective atmosphere was established and the stage-auditorium barrier broken before it was actively in place. Other instances of informal proxemics include the already on-stage presence of the actors. This presence can provide a stimulus for decoding (as in the case of the body in The Real Inspector Hound) or act as a possible interpretive strategy (actors conducting warm-up exercises publicly might, for example, signal a Brechtian production style).

One further element of pre-production should be mentioned. This is the theatre programme. While this may be a simple sheet of paper listing the names of those involved with the particular production about to be staged, it can also be an elaborate publication which provides the audience with several points of entry into the receptive act. Programmes can provide a history of a particular play, or of that theatre company. They can provide photographs of the actors or, more significantly, of the production to be seen. They sometimes supply biographies of the personnel involved--this might foreground, or at least remind the audience, of the presence of a star. Programmes can also carry director's notes which may well be intended to promote a

particular interpretation. Edward Bond, for example, has become notorious for the provision of long prefaces (such as his discussion of violence for the programme of <u>Lear</u>) which are certainly polemical and are intended to provide an interpetive framework for the plays. Bond would appear to consider the programme an important device for establishing contact with his audiences, but it is, of course, the case that programmes may not always be supplied, they may be left unread or read and then ignored.

All these elements of pre-production will be emphasized or "naturalized" according to the ideology of the production itself. Nevertheless, whether in the foreground or not, these elements do serve to prepare further the audience for the reality of the theatrical event. The physical arrangement of a theatre as well as the degree of contact between performers and spectators at this stage may well limit, or even determine, the receptive processes adopted by the collective audience.

4. Performance

However important the cultural overcoding of production and reception, the concentration of the audience's "work" takes place, obviously, at the time of performance. Karen Gaylord describes the role adopted by the spectator confronted with the actuality of the theatrical event:

> [T]he spectator serves as a psychological participant and empathetic collaborator in the maintenance and "truth" of the fictive world onstage, is "taken out of himself" and becomes for the time part of an ad hoc collective consciousness, ready to find meaning and significance in the events taking place on stage.
>
> Thus the theatrical occasion involves a double consciousness for all concerned. The performance takes place on at least two levels of "reality" simultaneously and within at least two frames. The outer frame always embraces both audience and performers. The inner frame demarcates the playing space (136).

The model of audience reception this study intends to use is of two frames. The outer frame contains all those cultural elements which create and inform the theatrical event. The inner frame contains the dramatic production in a particular playing space. Audience reception takes place within these two frames and, per- haps most importantly, at their points of intersection. It is the interactive relations between audience and stage, spectator and spectator which constitute reception and which cause the inner and outer frames to

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converge for the creation of a particular experience.

The spectator comes to the theatre as a member of an already-constituted interpretive community and also brings a horizon of expectations shaped by the pre-performance elements discussed above--or, as Herbert Blau describes it: "An audience without a history is not an audience" ("Odd, Anonymous Needs" 34). This "history" constructs the outer frame and is confirmed by the existence of commonly acknowledged theatrical conventions. At the centre of the inner frame is the combination and succession of visual and aural signs which the audience receives and interprets, some fixed but the majority in flux, and which, as we saw earlier, signify on a number of possible levels (e.g. denotative/connotative). It is the combination of these signs which permits the audience to posit the existence of a particular fictional world on stage with its own dynamic and governing rules.

The signs can be considered in two groups, those that are part of the actor and his craft and those external to the actor's performance. These external signs derive from the set, props, lighting, sound and music. The actor's performance involves language, voice, movement, and physical appearance including costume, make-up and facial expression. Linking the two

is the utilization of the external signs by the actors either singly or in interrelationships. The audience is likely at the outset of a performance to read the stage as macrocosm. All elements may be taken as of more or less equal importance in establishing a hypothesis of the nature of the on-stage world. As the performance continues, elements such as set tend to be assumed by the audience unless they are in some way drawn back into the spectator's focus (as in the case of a set change). As the world, and the characters within that world, become known, the audience's concentration tends to move to the smaller details--facial expressions, gesture, costume changes and so on.

Like the individual reader, the audience inevitably proceeds through the construction of hypotheses about the fictional world which are sub-sequently substantiated, revised or negated. The horizon of expectations constructed in the period leading up to the opening frame of the performance is also subject to similar substantiation, revision or negation. Unlike the reader, however, the theatre audience experiences the "text" within specific time constraints which deny the chance to repeat readings (except by attending a second, different performance of the same production) and which restrict what Eco

described as "inferential walks" (<u>Reader</u> 32). Some intertextuality might be deliberately summoned by elements of production, but the "walks" afforded the audience are necessarily limited. The spectator's mind is, of course, free to wander and be inattentive to what is <u>on</u> stage, and this is probably inevitable in the course of any performance. Indeed, the practice seems to be actively encouraged (and thus controlled) by dramatists who insert <u>longueurs</u> between passages which compel close attention. Nevertheless, the only particular times available for reflection and review are in the breaks determined by the producers, not the receivers. The curtain may be dropped or the lights faded to indicate an act or scene division, a change in time or location. This represents usually only the briefest of pauses. Scene changes might provide more time and an intermission offers at least the possibility of ten to twenty minutes uninterrupted reflection, although this opportunity tends to be experienced socially and any evaluation might well be made in terms of the small social group attending the performance together, rather than in terms of the private experience of the reader. Occasionally the audience is asked to reflect on and review the action by means of an on-stage device. This might be achieved through a flashback, a

scene which in many of the scenic elements mirrors an earlier scene, or through a device such as chorus or narrator. In the latter instance, the review process is necessarily complicated by the demand on the audience to hypothesize about (and invariably judge the accuracy/usefulness of) the character(s) presenting the commentary.

The hypotheses which constitute an audience's immediate reception are inevitably influenced by, as well as measured against, the internal horizon of expectations of a performance. Where the text of the performance is known to some or all of the spectators, the mise-en-scène will likely be read against that knowledge. In that way, the audience can judge the presentation of the fictional world as more or less meeting their expectations, as unusual (Richard Eyre's production of Hamlet where a single actor played both the lead role and the ghost of Hamlet's father) or as aberrant (Peter Eliot Weiss' Hamlet for Tamahnous in Vancouver). Where a written (rather than improvised) dramatic text is produced, that text, whether familiar to the audience or not, will inevitably hold inscribed points of entry, strategies for interpretation. Beyond this, a director's intervention will inevitably create another horizon of expectations internal to the

performance.

In twentieth-century theatre the director has, as Dort reminds us, become the most powerful figure, not only in terms of specific productions, but in the control of theatres and cultural centres (62-63). Textual strategies may well bear the ideological overcoding of the director. A director's production plan will inevitably, like the dramatic text, contain receptive strategies. How far the audience accepts the proposed receptive strategies will generally depend, as we have seen, on some shared socio-cultural background between text and audience, director and audience, production company and audience. Many contemporary playwrights who continued to write naturalistically (usually retaining the Naturalist character) have nevertheless worked against audience empathy by other strategies of Brechtian distancing which encourage a different focalization. Toby Silverman Zinman describes how Sam Shepard "had the walls of the set of Fool for Love wired for reverberation and four speakers installed under the seats so that every slam of the door physically involved the audience. Thus the spectator moves closer to participant, and passivity becomes exciting dis-ease" (424).

Overcoding will also result from other pre-production elements which are are put into place by the

production team rather than potential audiences. Marketing is one obvious example. If a play is publicized as serious drama, then the on-stage signs will tend to be interpreted in light of this and comic elements devalued in the receptive process. Another important source of overcoding is the playing space. The imposition of architectural elements has already been discussed and, indeed, the relationship of the audience to the architectural features can be exploited to establish who recognizes the performance as theatre. In the 23rd Street storefront, the New York home of Squat Theatre,[11] those who pay the $4 admission are seated facing the a curtain which opens to reveal the busy street in lower Manhattan. Schechner comments: "The actions onstage . . . are balanced/contrasted by actions in the street; and the actors of Squat are counterpointed by passersby who react to what they see through the window. The playing area is a limen linking two worlds" (End of Humanism 88). The spectators sitting on risers (who are doing so as a result of a financial exchange) and witnessing the drawing of the curtain have been given signals which establish the theatrical frame. For the person walking by, the action is merely bizarre.

The audience's understanding of the stage world

is then subject to their perception of an extensive code system. While it is recognized that textual analysis can only represent part of a complex network presented to the audience in live performance, the opening sequences from two plays--Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House and Caryl Churchill's Cloud Nine--have been selected to illustrate possible strategies of reading/constructing the on-stage world. The sections of text discussed are reprinted as Appendix A.

The opening of Ibsen's play is signalled by the revelation of a detailed set. It is the typical room of the Naturalist play, framed by the proscenium arch, and filled with furniture and other trappings which serve both to reflect the bourgeois audience for whom the play was intended and to create a sense of the homeliness of the Helmers' lifestyle. The stove is lit to provide two connotative effects: on a simple level, it signals a cold day (in other words, winter) and, beyond this, it indicates the presence of family life (it is a room in general use). Lighting might be expected to complement this homely atmosphere and create an overall effect of softness. The audience's initial experience of the play is one of enjoyment, a privileged look into a fixed and finished world.

The audience's absorption of the wealth of set

and prop detail, however, is interrupted by sound. The doorbell is heard. Beyond its purpose of interruption, the bell indicates the presence of an outside world and heightens the audience's anticipation of meeting the first character(s). If the play is familiar, the primary effect will be of anticipation. Nora is about to be introduced--expectations for the character can be measured and a first judgment of the actress' suitability made. For the more skeptical audience, the reminder of an outside world might herald the possibility of threat, the promise of disruption of this seemingly secure environment. Later in the play, of course, it is the mailbox which functions in this role and the audience, like Nora, is directed to listen for its interruption of the otherwise festive action. In this opening scene, stage directions indicate a moment's wait until the door is opened. It is a reasonable hypothesis that such a comfortable household would rely on a maid to screen arrivals and this moment's delay builds further the significance of the first entry.

When Nora comes into the room, the audience is confronted with many new signs--her costume, her props (parcels), her humming and the backdrop, framed by the hall door, of the Porter bearing a Christmas tree and a

hamper and a Maid by the front door. Some of these
signs add extra information. The winter hypothesis is
reformed to a more specific time--just before Christmas.
The Porter and Maid in their costume, their background
positioning, and distance behind the new focal point of
the scene, Nora, indicate her status as well as their
own. Nora's humming, reinforced by costume, props,
make-up, lighting, gesture and movement, provides
initial signals about her nature and her happiness. The
obvious hypothesis of a woman who is content and secure
in her home life (initiated by the opening stage
picture) is one which, of course, undergoes considerable
revision in the course of the play.

The first spoken section of the play comes,
then, after quite detailed hypotheses have been drawn up
by the audience from a wealth of non-verbal signs. As
might be expected for an opening sequence, the sign-
clusters start at their most dense (the whole stage set)
and, as the opportunity for hypothesis has been
presented, the focus is narrowed and immediate interest
is drawn to fewer signs more locally concentrated. By
the time Nora speaks, the audience has absorbed the
stage picture, has posited its relation to the outside
world, has assumed Nora's position within it, and thus
can concentrate on the language spoken and the

character's specific gestures and movement. Nora's
opening lines provide supplementary information and
indicate activity. It becomes clear that Nora is a
mother and the initial hypothesis of winter, revised to
some time pre-Christmas, is now established, by means of
the audience's interpretation of Nora's instructions to
the maid, as Christmas Eve. Activity is expressed
through her instructions to the maid and question to the
porter. Clearly Nora is moving around and across stage
which the audience can perceive as another sign of her
control and contentment. For those with some knowledge
of the text, however, the continual movement of Nora,
accompanied by that initial humming, indicates perhaps
her nervous energy, the first cracks in the surface
picture of bourgeois respectability and security.

As readers of A Doll's House, we learn, from a
later conversation between Nora and Mrs. Linde, that
Nora has spent less than half the money Torvald gave her
for her wardrobe on her clothes so that she could apply
the rest to her debt (162). In performance, her
costume should reflect the simplicity and cheapness that
Nora describes. Where the men in the audience may well
see her, as Torvald does, as a beautiful woman
complemented by her beautiful clothes, women in the
audience might well read the costume sign quite

differently, wondering why the woman of this comfortable home does not have a more expensive wardrobe. For the knowledgeable audience, this reading is available to either sex. Furthermore, it does not take the form of a question but provides evidence of the kind of sacrifices Nora has made.

This outline of the opening of A Doll's House indicates the intensity of activity required of an audience confronted with performance. While the outer frame (cultural background, audience and production horizons of expectations, social occasion) will always mediate and control receptive strategies available, an audience's conscious attention is to their perception of the physical presence of a fictional world. The production history of A Doll's House indicates the importance to audience reception of both outer and inner frames. After the play's première, at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen in 1879, the critical reception emphasized, of course, the social and political challenge of the content. But its original use of theatrical conventions did not escape attention either. Erik Bøgh wrote in his review for Folkets Avis:

> it is beyond memory since a play so
> simple in its action and so everyday in its
> dress made such an impression of artistic
> mastery. . . . Not a single declamatory
> phrase, no high dramatics, no drop of blood,
> not even a tear; never for a moment was the

> dagger of tragedy raised. . . . Every need-
> less line is cut, every exchange carries the
> action a step forward, there is not a super-
> fluous effect in the whole play . . . the mere
> fact that the author succeeded with the help
> only of these five characters to keep our
> interest sustained throughout a whole evening
> is sufficient proof of Ibsen's technical
> mastery (cited in Meyer Biography 455-456).

A Doll's House became internationally known and produced, however, as a result of its challenge to cultural conventions of what was accepted as suitable material for theatrical production. It was because of the perceived scandal of this challenge that the first performance of A Doll's House in London was ten years later than the Copenhagen première. But the experience for the audience was undoubtedly different. Firstly, the furore surrounding Ibsen's play was well-known and no longer new. London had also seen some five years earlier Henry Arthur Jones' adaptation, The Breaking of A Butterfly. And perhaps most importantly, the British première of A Doll's House was staged at the Novelty Theatre with Janet Achurch playing Nora. Achurch and her husband, Charles Charrington, were famous for their staging of new drama at the Novelty, and thus the audiences attracted to their theatre were likely sympathetic to, rather than enraged by, the material presented. With all the publicity surrounding the play, London audiences would certainly have been curious to

see the play.   Harley Granville Barker commented: "The play was talked of and written about--mainly abusively, it is true--as no play had been for years.   Charrington lost only £70.   This was not bad for an epoch-making venture in the higher drama" (cited in Meyer File 35-36).

Obviously, then, diachronic analysis shows changes in cultural limits and different horizons of expectations shaping the audience's reception of specific stage signs.   More recently, with Ibsen's play now an established classic, two movie versions of the play were released in the same year (1978).   In one, Nora was played by Claire Bloom, an established and highly-regarded stage actress; in the other, Nora was played by Jane Fonda, a movie star and politcal/feminist activist.   These casting choices undoubtedly reflected quite different internal horizons of expectations which, in turn, established different external horizons of expectations.   As in the case of familiarity with a particular dramatic text, familiarity with actors in other roles is also often a part of a horizon of expectations which has to be revised or confirmed. Except for those few interested in the possibility of comparison, the two movies of A Doll's House attracted quite different audiences, and offered experiences quite

remote from that of the 1879 audiences in Copenhagen.

In both movies, the Naturalism is heightened as the technical apparatus of cinema provides the maximum possible surface realism. But, the audience's experience of either movie or proscenium arch stage version is likely little different. A Doll's House offers the kind of experience identified for audiences of the classic realist film. Nora is the object of their gaze. On stage or on film, she is the subject of the signs, and she is the problem. Mulvey accounts for an audience's separation, their voyeuristic role, by the opposition of the dark auditorium and brilliance of the on-screen light. It is an opposition which applies equally to the conventional staging of Ibsen's play.

It is this separation which Brechtian theatre seeks to avoid. Even in the conventional auditorium-stage, dark-light, arrangement, this theatre refuses the audience a neatly-packaged fixed "reality." Conventional processes of decoding are continually challenged and the narrative continually interrupted. The opening of Churchill's Cloud Nine is clearly quite unlike that of A Doll's House and, in this play, the audience's reception relies far more on reading signs in contradiction than in combination.

The opening stage picture of Cloud Nine has none

of the elaborate detail that was revealed to audiences of _A_ _Doll's_ _House_. Only three scenic components are involved. In their paucity, they may well be assumed to be of particular significance and importance. The low bright sun (signified by light and/or scenery) in combination with the verandah signal the setting of Africa. The flagpole with Union Jack establishes the British colonization, British power and the time period. The scenic components are outnumbered by the actors representing "the family."

Unlike the opening of _A_ _Doll's_ _House_ where the audience was afforded the opportunity to consume the set detail and familiarize itself with the world of the play, the action of _Cloud_ _Nine_ begins immediately. All the on-stage characters join in song, a rally of "sons of England" to the flag. This draws the audience's attention to the flag, and to its signification and to the family group. Grouped as if in a family portrait, they represent quite obviously the first challenge to audience assumptions and decoding processes. The audience can decode relationships through costume signs and discover a husband and wife with son, daughter, grandmother, manservant and governess. But these straightforward readings are contradicted by the gender, race and physicality of the actors. The wife is played

by a man, the son by a woman, the black servant by a white and the daughter is not an actor but a dummy. The usual recourse to hypothesis is foregrounded and problematized.

The audience's problems in dealing with the opening sequence are made explicit when Clive, the central male figure, steps forward to address the audience directly. His stage position, between the family group and the audience, suggests that he will provide a bridge to understanding. This is compounded by his status, as head of the household, which denotes authority not only over the other characters but in providing much needed information for the audience. His opening lines confirm that status and his relationship to the other characters, but their structure as a pair of rhyming couplets again acts to make audiences aware of their hypothesis building and to cast doubt on a straightforward informational reading. When Clive brings forward his wife (played by a man) and introduces her, the audience is faced with Clive's unreliability. He sees her as a "natural" wife and does not share the audience's confusion. The cumulative effect of the on-stage signs of the opening sequence is to throw the audience off-balance. In the absence of understanding, they may well react with laughter. Such a reaction is,

at this point, a defence mechanism which protects their privileged position as audience. By interpreting the on-stage signs as ridiculous, the audience is not threatened by its own inability to make meaning.

In the course of Cloud Nine Churchill uses these distancing techniques to question society's assumptions of certain relationships as "natural." Churchill exploits the audience's inability to construct conventional hypotheses to promote an examination of the issues beyond the images presented. Their interest is held not by the surface reality focussed on and through specific characters (the technique of A Doll's House) but by the necessity to read beyond that reality. The overt theatricality of Churchill's presentation works against a conventional reliance on plot and character and instead asks that audiences question their assumptions not only about theatre but about the more general operation of cultural values.

As in the case of A Doll's House, however, diachronic analysis of particular productions reveals a shifting audience response to the play based, as might be expected, on the cultural values and expectations carried by different productions and the different audiences which see them. The opening production was staged by Joint Stock Theatre Company at the Dartington

College of Arts. The theatre company had commissioned and collaborated with Churchill to create this play and thus their contribution to the ideological internal horizon of expectations was self-consciously inscribed. The questions raised about sexual repression and its relationship to the economic oppression of capitalist cultures reflected their own views as well as Churchill's. They had worked with the playwright to find dramatic techniques which would be effective for them as actors in the portrayal of these issues. Dartington, as a popular venue for fringe political theatre, would guarantee an audience familiar with the work of Joint Stock and most likely sympathetic to the left-wing politics of company, playwright and play. Their decoding of the opening sequence, then, may not have been as problematic as my analysis suggests. Some familiarity with a Brechtian approach may well have made the audience content to suspend judgment or even immediately aware of the cross-gender dressing as a technique to foreground sexual stereotyping.

Cloud Nine was revived at the Royal Court in London during the following year (1980) where audiences were likely similar to those who had attended the production at Dartington. They would not have had such a close and familiar relationship with Joint Stock as

the Dartington audiences (who may well, for example, have been aware of the sexual preference of company members which would have heightened both the experience and understanding of Churchill's play), but they would generally share the political sympathies and the aware- ness of theatrical strategies in oppositional theatre. In 1981, Cloud Nine was staged at the Lucille Lortel Theatre in New York City. Unlike the two British productions, the American production was an undoubtedly risky venture. Churchill provided a revised edition and the director selected (Tommy Tune) was in some ways an unusual one, although his reputation as a succesful director of musical theatre probably helped to get the play into New York production.

Tune has described how various actors would not audition after seeing the script and clearly the actors of the New York production did not have the initial confidence Joint Stock had through their past history with Churchill (their joint creation of Light Shining in Buckinghamshire), their history as a collective and their familiarity with Brechtian techniques. The production was nevertheless a critical and audience success, although it is interesting to note Churchill's own comments on her central revision for New York audiences: "There is a lot that is attractive about the

New York ending, and it provides more of an emotional climax, which is why we did it. But on the whole I prefer the play not to end with Betty's self-discovery but with her moving beyond that to a first attempt to make a new relationship with someone else" (ix). This suggests that the adoption of a discourse of American feminism (self discovery) realigned Churchill's drama to address a targeted audience in terms that would meet an American, rather than British, horizon of expectations.

These analyses of A Dolls' House and Cloud Nine are intended to illustrate likely processes of reception for audiences familiar with different experiences of theatre. Beyond this, the audience's freedom to select quite different processes of reading or even to ignore the play entirely must not be discounted. Similarly, members of an audience may resist focal points. Instead of accepting the sign-cluster which represents the centre of the action, concentration may be diverted to signs other than those foregrounded by the performance or may even move to read unintentional signs against them. With these caveats, it is nevertheless recognized that a mise-en-scène is inevitably structured so as to give emphasis to a sign or sign-cluster intended to locate audience focalization on that aspect of the drama. In some cases, this focalization is foregrounded

by specific dramatic techniques. Beckett's instructions

for Play provide a good example:

> Front centre, touching one another, three
> identical grey urns about one yard high. From
> each a head protrudes, the neck held fast in
> the urn's mouth. The heads are those, from
> left to right as seen from auditorium, of w2,
> M, and w1.[*] They face undeviatingly front
> throughout the play. Faces so lost to age and
> aspect as to seem almost part of urns. But no
> masks.
>
> Their speech is provoked by a spotlight
> projected on faces alone.
>
> The transfer of light from one face to
> another is immediate. No blackout, i.e.,
> return to almost complete darkness of opening,
> except where indicated.
>
> The response to light is not quite
> immediate. At every solicitation a pause of
> about one second before utterance is achieved,
> except where a longer delay is indicated.
>
> Faces impassive throughout. Voices toneless
> except where an expression is indicated.
>
> Rapid tempo throughout.
>
> The curtain rises on a stage in almost
> complete darkness. Urns just discernible.
> Five seconds.
>
> Faint spots simultaneously on three faces.
> Three seconds. Voices faint, largely
> unintelligible (in Cascando 45). [* w1 =
> First Woman, w2 = Second Woman and M = Man]

The stage world of Beckett's Play--three faces, three

voices, three urns and a spotlight--is already minimal.

His instructions indicate an endeavour to control the

production as if it were a musical score with the effect

of rarely offering more than three on-stage signs (the

facial expression, the voice and the language) for the audience to read. The possibility of interest straying to non-foregrounded or unintentional signs is virtually removed and the minimal fictive world is thus likely to result in a concentration of intense decoding activity around the few signs available. Audiences in this way are encouraged to decode blackouts and silence or the three voices and faces simultaneously displayed as moments of particular significance.

Textual analyses can provide interesting and useful explications of strategies available for audience reception. But however detailed, these analyses can only represent a small part of the interactive relations that constitute the nexus of the two receptive frames. It is the actuality, rather than the possibility, of an audience balancing stage and other worlds that fosters theatrical experimentation such as Grotowski's Theatre of Sources and Objective Drama. It is also this flexibility which makes yet another production of Hamlet possible.

With a focus on the audience, three aspects of interactive relations are important. They are audience-stage interaction in the field of fiction, audience-actor interaction and interaction in the audience (Passow 240). The first level of interaction has been

considered above. The audience also interacts with the on-stage presence of actors and the contribution of feedback is acknowledged by all actors. It is well known that an appreciative, knowledgeable audience can foster a "better" performance from the actors and that a restless audience can disrupt the on-stage action, creating mistakes, lack of pace and poor individual performances. Indeed, when actors make improvised attempts to control a restless audience, the result can be an imbalance of the total production-effect.

Certainly theatrical performance encourages audiences to appreciate the actors' skill. Brecht stressed in his <u>Verfremdungseffekt</u> that the actor should <u>show</u> a character with the effect that the audience would appreciate the tools of acting used in this demonstration. Conversely Method actors are admired for their skill in <u>becoming</u> the characters they portray. Audience members might be attracted to the voice of a certain actor or to specific physical abilities. The acrobatics of Peter Brook's production of <u>Midsummer's Night's Dream</u> made new demands on the actors, but also on the audience to appreciate specific skills in bringing a script to performance. More particularly certain actors acquire a public persona and this, as we saw, can affect an audience's horizon of expectations.

With the presence of a "star" on stage, the audience is inevitably aware of a double presence (for example, Nora/Jane Fonda) and it is generally the case, to a greater or lesser degree, that the audience is reading the actors' performance alongside the work being performed. Karen Gaylord's attention to a convention of Broadway theatre audiences exemplifies this practice:

> [W]hen a Broadway audience follows the custom
> of applauding the first appearance of the star
> onstage, they are, as attendants, applauding
> the skilled performer qua performer. In the
> process they break the frame of the specific
> dramatic event and, momentarily, "bracket" the
> illusion of the constructed reality on the
> stage (137).

This double recognition is not, of course, unique to theatre. Cinema also makes its audience aware of the double presence of actor/character but, in this medium, the supremacy of the image, the control of the camera's eye, serves to reduce the effect of double reading. In a film, audiences may always be aware of the presence of Meryl Streep or Robert Redford, but accept the other characters on a single level. With the physical presence of the actor in the theatre and the ever-present possibility of mistakes, forgotten lines or even accidents, the actor is always less likely to be subsumed by the character portrayed.

The very real presence of the actor accounts, Schechner suggests, for the theatre audience's general

resistence to on-stage nudity. He writes that the "hierarchy of tolerance seems related to both the degree and the kind of involvement expected of the reader and viewer" (<u>Public Domain</u> 139). Reading is the most private of pleasures. In the cinema, the product for consumption remains at a distance, but the spectator has an awareness of the rest of the audience. In the theatre, because of the actor/character presence, "[l]ittle overt sexuality is permitted onstage because the audience knows that what happens to the character also happens to the actor" (<u>Public Domain</u> 141). Certainly much contemporary theatre exploited the proxemic relations between spectator and actor. Not all audiences can accept the frame-breaking this involves. The stage-auditorium barrier can provide the secure position which permits reception. Coppieters, it will be remembered, found that environmental theatre worked against a homogenized group reaction (47). Certain audiences, however, are attracted by the frame-breaking practice and actively seek a participative role in performance.

As we saw in Coppieters' example of environmental theatre and, indeed, in theatre practice generally, inter-audience relations also play an important role in the reception of performance. As

semiotic analysis has stressed, the communication between spectators usually determines a "homogeneity of response" (Elam 96) despite variations in horizons of expectations and/or cultural values brought to the theatre by the individual spectator. In almost all cases laughter, derision, and applause is infectious. The audience, through homogeneity of reaction, receives confirmation of their decoding on an individual and private basis and is encouraged to suppress counter-readings in favour of the reception generally shared (Elam 96-97, Ubersfeld L'école du spectateur 306). In Coppieters' analysis of audiences of The People Show, the lack of aesthetic as well as real distance prevented the establishment of a homogeneous response. As individual spectators felt threatened by the light playing conditions and the gazes of the actors, the audience remained fragmented and alienated. Feedback and distance at some level are therefore of paramount importance in the formation of the collective conscious-ness of the theatre audience.

Yet, as Jurij Lotman points out, the individual does not lose integrality in the act of combination into larger groups. He concludes that it is the richness of the conflict between psychological personality and the collective intelligence which ensures the exceptional

flexibility and dynamism of culture (cited in Shukman, 327). It is surely the case that while the theatre audience is a collective consciousness composed of the small groups in which spectators attend theatrical events, it is also a specific number of individuals. As the analyses of cinema audiences indicated, many of the pleasures of the event, although shared by the audience at large, are enjoyed privately and individually. The pleasures derived from anticipation of a theatrical event generally and a particular performance specifically are, for example, commonly shared but will vary according to the individual's circumstances and attitudes. The pleasure of looking is as primary to theatre as to cinema. It is also as problematic. While a look may be inscribed by the performance text, without the controlling eye of the camera, the possibility of aberrant or against-the-grain reception by the individual or the collective is always more likely. Furthermore, individuals can always refuse the collective contract by walking out of a production or, less dramatically, by falling asleep.

While the collective response is nevertheless generally homogenous, the individual's response to performance undoubtedly constitutes the core of the spectator's pleasure. Theorists with quite diverse

interests have begun to explore the possible roles of such individual reactions as identification, desire and fantasy, and their continued research will add more to our understanding of the receptive processes behind the publicly expressed reception. Metz's analysis of the filmic spectator's "waking daydream" suggests a parallel, if different, role for the theatre spectator. Metz comments: "the impression of reality can be studied not only by comparison with perception but also by relation to the various kinds of fictional perceptions, the chief of which, apart from the representational arts, are the dream and the phantasy" (101). For the audience faced with the cultural object, he argues:

> the impression of reality, the impression of the dream, and the impression of the daydream cease to be contradictory and mutually exclusive, as they are ordinarily, in order to enter into new relations wherein their usual distinctness, while not exactly annulled, admits an unprecedented configuration leaving room at once for straddling, alternating balance, partial overlapping, recalibration, and ongoing circulation among the three (101-102).

Metz acknowledges that his analysis does not include all types of spectator. The scholar or critic will likely repress fantasizing and daydream in the interests of his professional status (99) and the interplay of reality, fantasy and daydream Metz describes applies to a single social group. Analyses of other social groups may find

the Freudian models he employs less helpful "since they
were established, despite their pretension to
universality, in an observational field with cultural
limits" (100). While performance and reception clearly
result from interaction between individual and group
responses, the cultural limits of, say, China would make
much of this study, like Metz's cinematic one,
inappropriate and would demand other areas for detailed
exploration.

In the Western theatre audience that this study
assumes, however, it is the tension between the inner
frame of the fictional stage world, the audience's
moment by moment perception of that in the experience of
a social group, and the outer frame of community
(cultural constitution and horizons of expectation)
which determines the nature and satisfaction of the
receptive process. John McGrath's hopes for the best
political theatre articulate this well:

> The theatre can never <u>cause</u> a social change.
> It can articulate the pressures towards one,
> help people to celebrate their strengths and
> maybe build their self-confidence. It can be
> a public emblem of inner, and outer, events,
> and occasionally a reminder, an elbow-jogger,
> a perspective-bringer. Above all, it can be
> the way people can find their voice, their
> solidarity and their collective determination
> ("Introduction" xxvii).

The performance can activate a diversity of responses,
but it is the audience which finally ascribes meaning

and usefulness to any cultural product.

Before looking to the implications of this study of reception, however, one further aspect of the receptive process remains. This is the contribution of what occurs after the performance since the audience's immediate as well as later reactions to performance play an important role in the maintenance of an active theatre.

5. Post-Performance

As the very first theatrical performances hinged on their public post-performance reception--the plays of Greek theatre were judged and the "best" awarded prizes--we are reminded that the receptive process does not end with the last action within the fictional stage world. The feedback of the audience through applause and the appearance of the actors as actors to receive their judgment represent an important theatrical convention.

In the maintenance of this convention, receptive decisions are made immediately. A performance is judged good or bad, satisfactory or unsatisfactory, by the collective group and applause is measured accordingly. This act confirms the audience's position as collective and confirms, both for audience and performers, their ability to make meaning of the production. Nevertheless the ritual of the curtain call is not simply a sign of conclusion. It does in itself require the decoding of the audience and may be offered as a coda to the entertainment already presented or a bridge into another form of the event.

The number of curtain calls will generally relate to the applause generated and a balance between the two will provide the most satisfactory conclusion.

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Where curtain calls are overdone, the audience can feel impatient and the pleasure of the theatrical event may be diminished by the virtual imprisonment of the audience in their seats. Where curtain calls are felt to be too few, the audience may feel that their role has not been fulfilled or that it has been undervalued by the performers. Again the pleasure of the theatrical event is precariously balanced.

Alternative theatre practice tends to stress the importance of the immediate post-production period. A common strategy is to invite discussion between the audience and cast. This can, of course, be shunned by the audience who feel such direct contact is an evasion of their guaranteed privacy. It also has a tendency towards didacticism. In an attempt to counteract this, many alternative groups have contextualized both performance and discussion by a programme of festivity. 7:84 Scotland, for example, always include a _ceilidh_ at the end of their performances in Scotland. As a traditional form of entertainment in the Gaelic culture, it serves both to break down barriers between performers and audience as well as celebrate the issues discussed/presented in the preceding performance (McGrath "Introduction" xiv-xix). El Teatro Campesino follows an _acto_ (short dramatic performance) with songs,

all of which takes place within a three to four hour
farm workers union meeting (Bagby 139). After-
performance activity, however, is not always
politically-motivated. Much experimental theatre has
been interested in the role of ritual and uses the post-
production period to make a conscious break in the
theatrical frame. Allan Kaprow's production of
Iphigenia Transformed concluded with the marriage
ceremony and a celebration for the entire audience,
courtesy of four cases of beer delivered by Euripides'
dea ex machina (cited in Schechner Public Domain 158).

Even in more conventional performances, the act
of leaving the theatre is always important. It may
provide a welcome release and the end of receptive
activity. On the other hand, the buzz of an excited
audience, slow to leave the theatre, continues the
receptive process and is likely to enhance the
experience of that production in the individual's
memory. As with pre-production, the after-performance
time may well include other social events which serve,
among other things, to increase the pleasure of the
event.

In a publicly experienced cultural event, the
opportunity to talk about the event afterwards is
important socially. Theatre audiences, as has been

noted, tend to consist of small groups of friends, family and so on. Reception of a performance can be prolonged by group discussion of all aspects from general appreciation to specific questions to other group members about small details of the production. Beyond the ability to talk over the production either immediately or some time after the production, audiences may follow up a performance by reading the text (if available) or by reading reviews. Both acts have the potential to reshape initial decoding of the production.

All these elements of post-production are potentially significant in the receptive process and all promote, if not ensure, the continuance of a culture industry attracting audiences to the theatrical event. It is the reciprocal nature of production and reception which characterizes the formation and reformation of cultural markers for theatre.

Notes

[1]

A more recent comparison of the demands of popular and particular (middle-class) audiences is made by John McGrath in A Good Night Out (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981) 54-59. He acknowledges the schematism of his comparison but it provides a useful background to the production methods of McGrath's work with the 7:84 Theatre Company and to that company's success in establishing new audiences for theatre and new relationships between performer and viewer.

[2]

Outlines of the various theoretical stances can be found in "Representation and Cultural Production" by Michèle Barrett, Philip Corrigan, Annette Kuhn and Janet Wolff and in "Histories of Culture/Theories of Ideology: Notes on an Impasse" by Richard Johnson, both in Michèle Barrett, Philip Corrigan, Annette Kuhn and Janet Wolff, eds. Ideology and Cultural Production (London: Croon Helm, 1979).

[3]

Brook, for example, converted ethnographic data about the Ik of Uganda for Western audiences and also travelled to Africa with 11 actors. A chronicle of his experiences in Africa, which outline most clearly the problematics of performing for audiences experiencing extracultural "entertainment," can be found in John Heilpern's Conference of the Birds (London: Faber & Faber, 1977).

4

Peter Brook's period at The Royal Shakespeare Company established its reputation for controversy. His "experimental" productions, such as Weiss' Marat/Sade and Artaud's Jet of Blood, created a furore which is detailed in Sinfield (186-187).

5

It is impossible to do justice to the diversity and number of alternative theatres which have come into existence over the last twenty or so years. Theodore Shank's "Political Theater, Actors and Audiences: Some Principles and Techniques" (Yale Theater Review 10.2 (Spring 1979): 94-103) provides a helpful starting point. Richard Schechner's work has been central in the U.S. and The End of Humanism is a good overview. There are several full-length texts on British and French fringe theatre. Comprehensive analyses are offered in Catherine Itzin's Stages in the Revolution (London: Methuen, 1980) and Leonora Champagne's French Theatre Experiment since 1968 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984). Canadian Theatre Review provides a forum both for critics of, and workers in, alternative theatres in Canada.

6

The work of Erving Goffman has been particularly influential. See, for example, his The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1959).

7

For the controversy around Gatti's _La Passion du général Franco_ see Dorothy Knowles, "To be banned or not to be banned," _Drama_ 93 (Summer 1969): 53-58. Also Webb (212). For the continuing controversy surrounding _Garbage, The City and Death_, see Denis Calandra's introduction to Rainer Werner Fassbinder's _Plays_ (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986).

8

See Peter Davison. _Contemporary Drama and the Popular Dramatic Tradition in England_. (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982): 136-137. _Each in his Own Way_ appears to have two or three acts. The number played, according to Pirandello, depends on the attitude of the audience. It has, in fact, only two acts. Davison recounts an occasion when the audience made concerted efforts to demand a third act.

9

On November 30, 1984, the performance at the Club Chandalier was _Carmelita Tropicana Chats_. Tropicana's first guest was Tammy Whynot. Jill Dolan explains: "The context for _Carmelita Tropicana Chats_ is clearly a mix of invention and a kind of twisted reality that might not be easily distinguished by the uninitiated. Tammy Whynot . . . is a character Lois Weaver plays in Split Britches' _Upwardly Mobile Home_ at the WOW Cafe. Weaver arrived at Club Chandalier in full costume and remained in character before and after the

performance" ("An Evening in the East Village" 319).
This illustrates these theatres' reliance on a con-
stituency audience and the effectiveness of word of
mouth as an advertising network.

       10

       Proxemics are defined by Hall as "the inter-
related observations and theories of man's use of space
as a specialized elaboration of culture" (1).

       11

       Squat Theatre originated in Budapest. They
were banned from performing there because their work was
viewed as obscene and politically open to misinterpret-
ation. They have since continued work in exile. Their
name derives from their status in New York City as
squatters (see Schechner, End of Humanism 86).

V. CONCLUSION

The reception process of the theatrical event by an audience is undoubtedly a complex one. In all the stages of reception from pre-production to post-production, and especially for the duration of the performance itself, the traditional role for the spectator, as individual and as member of the collective gathering, is, as Webb establishes, reactive: "In general he takes as understood that the actors express and that he receives (spatially underscored by the conventional theatre architecture: scène/salle, light/dark, moving/sitting). The spectator agrees to give himself up to the performance" (206-207). With this social contract put into place, generally by the exchange of money for a ticket which promises a seat in which to watch an action unfold, the spectator accepts his passive role and awaits the activity which he will interpret as performance. Many experimental theatre events, however, retain the general terms of that contract in order to question them. Activity which falls within the theatrical frame employed by the production company will be received by the spectators as dramatic action. The same activity "performed" for an onlooker who has not entered into the same contract will

347

be read quite differently. It is an opposition which creates the experiment of Squat Theatre's show, Pig. The audience is seated behind the 23rd Street storefront with a view both of the interior playing space and of the street at the other side of the glass window:

> For much of the performance the street is a backdrop offering some gags: passersby doing double takes as they see something bizarre going on behind the window: like a goat eating vegetable scraps as a family sits at table, or a little girl parading around in falsies; and the audience laughs at passersby, like Candid Camera live. . . . Often a few knowing persons, having seen Pig from inside, return to watch it from the street. Thus there are three audiences: insiders, outsiders, insiders-who-are-outside. From the perspective of theatre the insiders are natural; from the perspective of street life the outsiders are natural. The insiders-who-are-outside are artificials posing as naturals (to other passersby) or they are double artificials (to insiders). Sometimes the street is used to stage coups de théâtre as when a man strolls by, his arm ablaze (Schechner End of Humanism 88-89).

As Schechner comments, the actions in Pig are not significant as drama, a story or as social critique but serve to indicate the durability of the social contract for the theatrical event. The effectiveness of the theatrical frame and the willingness of the audience to accept events within it as dramatic illusion are convincingly displayed in two of Schechner's examples from Pig:

> A taxicab drives up outside the theatre. A man gets out and draws a gun. Across the

street another man stops and draws a gun.
Between them traffic flows. Actually a few
drivers, seeing the situation, duck as they
cruise between the two drawn gunners. Then
inside the theatre a woman performer draws a
gun and takes aim at the gunman who had
arrived by taxi. She shoots, he falls, but
the glass between them is not shattered.
Again a system is discernible. Taxi = natural
= belongs on 23rd Street. Gunmen in the
street = ambivalent situation: we in the
theatre know this is part of the performance
(or at least hope so); those in the street,
this is New York remember, take precautions
but go on their way. Then the woman drawing a
pistol inside certainly makes clear that this
part of the play and that all the gunmen are
artificial. The blank shot that drops a
person but doesn't shatter glass proves a
point. . . .

   At the end of the shoot-out . . . four
police cars scream to a halt in front of the
theatre. The performers are checked. They
have a permit. But didn't the police know
this? Do they arrive every night? Are they
part of the script? I [Schechner] ask after
the performance: No, they rarely arrive these
days, but our permit is running out, they are
warning us. To spectators inside, the arrival
of the police looks like a TV drama. It's not
natural because we know this is a performance.
Yet to passersby perhaps scared by drawn guns
the arrival of the police is natural, and
welcome. To the police themselves it is a
little game: Let's get the theatre people
tonight! (End of Humanism 89, 90).

When the theatrical frame is extended, as Schechner

points out, to the far side of 23rd Street (the presence

there of one of the gunmen), the audience stretches the

limits within which they will decode everything as

fictional sign. The police arrive, a non-theatrical

event, but they are interpreted as yet another action in

the assembly of <u>Pig</u>.

Spectators are then trained to be passive during a theatrical performance in their demonstrated behaviour, but to be active in their decoding of the sign systems made available. The performers rely on the active decoding, but passive behaviour of the audience in order that they can unfold the planned on-stage activity. The experimental theatre which concertedly challenges the traditionally reactive role of spectator does not restrict itself to the event itself. The early work of the French troupe, Le Grand Magic Circus, is indicative of the endeavour. They divided performance into three distinct aspects: pre-spectacle, the spectacle itself, and post-spectacle. Each was designed to work with the participation of the audience:

> The first period prepares the audience and actors. Actors are seen before making up, as they make-up; they sell sandwiches, give out <u>sangria</u>; they perform turns (e.g. conjuring, acrobatics) for small groups as they arrive; perhaps they talk to them and make them up or sometimes dance with them. For their part the spectators may initiate play among themselves. The atmosphere is relaxed; the spectators' presence is acknowledged; the actors are catalysts and do not block audience responses. The spectacle itself is an open structure, a series of entertaining <u>tableaux</u> loosely connected by a central story-teller. Consequently, the spectacle can be adapted, lengthened or shortened according to the demands of the situation. . . . The scenic space encourages this type of informality. The action flows through, around and above the spectators who are free to

change places. Even if they unwittingly
'colonize' an area used for acting, they are
not expelled but are given parts to play in
the scene. It is clear that the spectacle
continues the atmosphere of free exchange of
the pre-spectacle.

At the end of the performance the company
strikes up a fast Latin American rhythm; the
audience is invited to dance. Gradually the
actors withdraw from both the instruments and
the dancing. What was the audience is left to
create its own entertainment (Webb 211-212).

Where audiences are consulted and involved in
the structuring of the theatrical event and are
encouraged, at least in the immediate post-production
period, to translate their reception of the theatrical
event into action, then their role no longer maintains
the fixity that dominant cultural practice assumes. In
this way, the reception process can act bidirectionally
in broader cultural perspectives. Cultural systems,
individual horizons of expectation and accepted
theatrical conventions all activate the reception
process for a specific production, but, in turn, the
direct experience of that production feeds back to
revise a spectator's expectations, to establish or
challenge those conventions and, occasionally, to reform
the boundaries of culture.

In this study, many diverse theatrical forms
have been cited and these indicate the explosion of
alternative theatrical practice which has occurred in

the last thirty years. Within mainstream theatre, the minimalist experiments of writers such as Beckett and Cage have been accepted and conventionalized. Some oppositional culture has been recuperated and defused. Brecht is now considered a major figure in the twentieth-century canon and the works of his successors produced at major cultural institutions. The audience these oppositional works then attracts is "generally split between its wish for a radical posture and its actual privileged position" (Sinfield 187). Yet the sheer volume of theatre outside the mainstream institutions gives testament to the challenging of cultural boundaries. No longer can audiences for theatrical events be identified by profiles of the typical ticket holder at an established institution. The audience is as likely to be found in a public park or a union hall as at the nearest conventional theatre space. Alternative theatre may be at its most intense in London, New York or Paris, but is equally to be found in the Orkney Islands, Delano (California) or the Cevennes. Armand Gatti has argued that "in order to create theatre, it is necessary to leave it behind; and so the first thing to do is to find another place where the theatre can express itself" (71).

Those alternative theatre practices which

share little with mainstream practice and which cannot
be absorbed into institutional playing spaces are
generally ignored.[1] These companies are hard to find
because they do not play in the "usual" spaces, their
texts are not published and their concerns are rarely
those of the establishment. But the expansion of alter-
native theatre into many different communities brings
theatre to audiences which may never before have had the
experience of the theatrical event and who therefore
assign theatre a place in their cultural boundaries
which is little restricted with traditional definitions
and expectations. The changed opportunity for theatre
audiences and the revolution this has brought about in
their receptive processes can be demonstrated by con-
trast to Hays' description of the debilitated condition
of French and German theatre audiences immediately prior
to World War I:

> At the moment one entered the theater, one was
> engulfed by the bureaucratic structure which
> the place and the event represented. This was
> a theater that had institutionalized the
> executive function. The dynamic kinesthesis
> which can be evoked by <u>participation</u> in an
> event was overwhelmed by complacency through
> the knowedge that everything was under the
> control of someone else (116).

More recent theatrical events have sought the centrality
of the spectator as the subject of the drama, but as a
subject who can both think and act. Such a subject was

the concern of Augusto Boal in his work with the People's Theater of Peru and, as a result of this work, he has drawn up a poetics of the oppressed. The spectator for his theatre is liberated from the restrictions of Aristotelean and Brechtian theatre. Aristotlean theatre, he argues, imposes a fixed and knowable world upon the audience. That audience is held passive, delegating "power to the characters to act and think in their place. In so doing the spectators purge themselves of their tragic flaw -- that is, of something capable of changing society" (155). Brechtian theatre, according to Boal, is only marginally better. The audience is brought to consciousness, but the power to act remains with the characters. Boal concludes:

> The poetics of the oppressed is essentially the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theater is action!
>
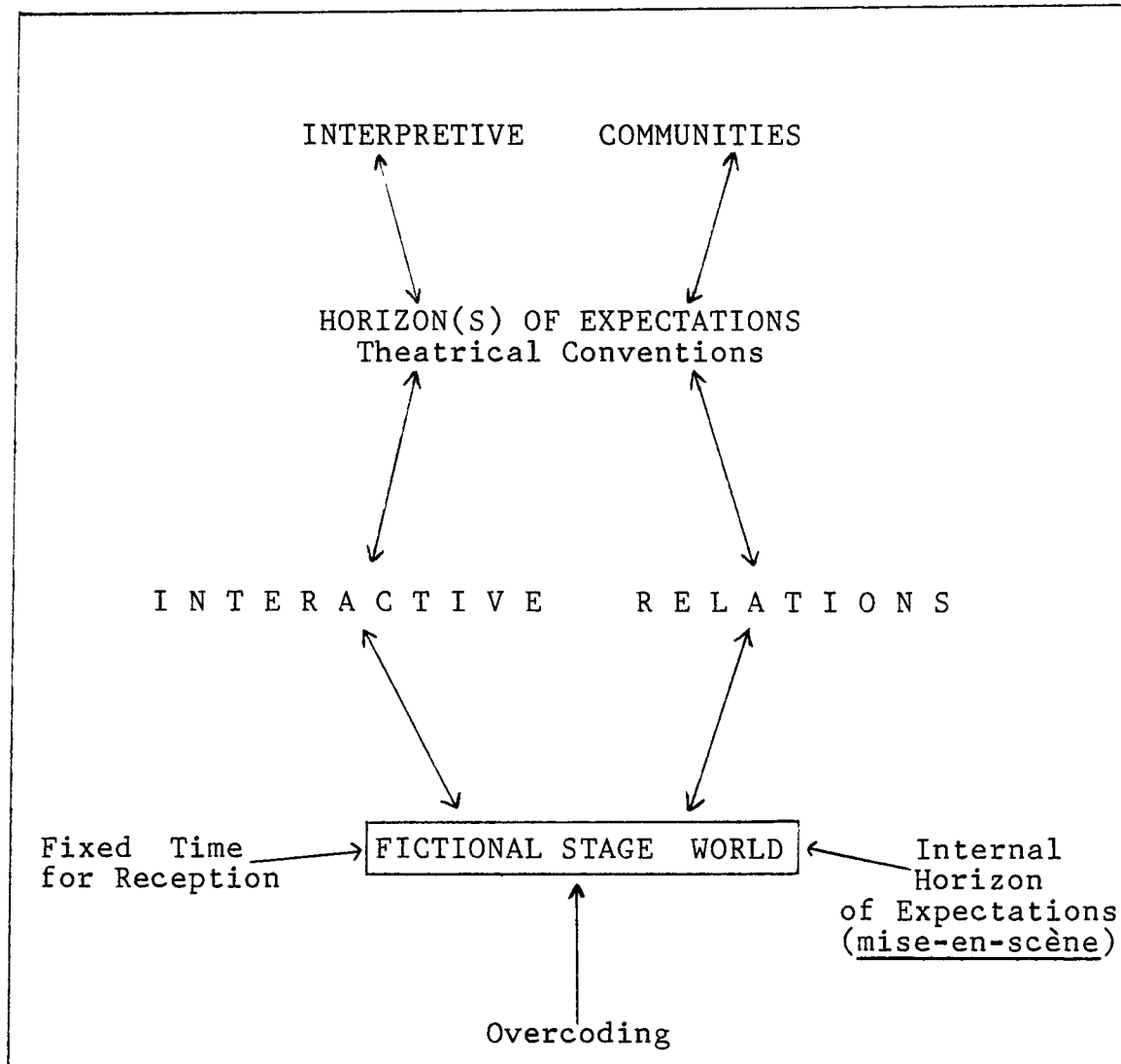> Perhaps the theater is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution! (155).

Boal's challenge to the dominant culture may be expressed in an emotional rhetoric reminiscent of the charged theatre of Piscator, but his theatre practice shares with the work of many other marginalized practitioners the devolution of power into the hands of the worker audience. With so much theatre activity

operating outside recognized cultural institutions, the boundaries of culture are undoubtedly challenged and the feedback of the audiences of alternative theatres has changed, above all else, the product which we recognize as theatre. As Stallybrass and White conclude, "[o]nly a challenge to the hierarchy of sites of discourse, which usually comes from groups and classes 'situated' by the dominant in low or marginal positions, carries the promise of politically transformative power" (201).

The diagram represented below, like the research from which it is drawn, is not intended to provide a prescriptive model of receptive processes. It is instead intended to demarcate the systems which are involved and which will vary, at every stage, according to the status of event and audience.

C U L T U R E

INTERPRETIVE   COMMUNITIES

HORIZON(S) OF EXPECTATIONS
Theatrical Conventions

I N T E R A C T I V E   R E L A T I O N S

Fixed Time
for Reception ⟶ FICTIONAL STAGE WORLD ⟵ Internal
Horizon
of Expectations
(mise-en-scène)

Overcoding

The model is a summary of the issues considered
here and suggests, in its relationships and in their
bidirectional influence, important areas of future study

for the dramatic theorist. Certainly attention to the strategies of viewing demands re-readings of dramatic texts. Chaudhuri's consideration of Equus indicates what this might achieve. More importantly, it is hoped that there will be a development towards the interrogation of dramatic texts within a model which takes account of both production and reception strategies. Because so much alternative theatre is unavailable in printed form and because there remains, in many areas, a very limited access to theatrical events, the efforts of publications such as The Drama Review are to be encouraged as they make available readings of dramatic productions rather than texts. In that way, anyone interested in the study of drama might apply his/her reading of a text (when available) against accounts of that text in production. As Pavis' assessment of traditional reviewing biases made clear, that particular avenue is of only limited interest and help.

What has emerged from this study of reception is the necessity to view the theatrical event beyond its immediate conditions and to foreground its social constitution. The description of an individual response to a particular production may not be possible or, indeed, even desirable but, because of that individual's participation in a given culture and the importance of

his culturally-constituted horizon of expectations and selection of a particular <u>social</u> event, it is important to reposition the study of drama to reflect this. Recent developments in theatre studies have at least marked an encouraging emancipation from previous devotion to the dramatic text.

While theatre semioticians began with the segmentation of the dramatic text, more recent developments have challenged the dominance of text-centered study and have accommodated the flexibility of theatrical art. Féral's juxtaposition of performance and theatre is indicative of this new research. But these projects are as yet only in a nascent stage. Fischer-Lichte indicates the extensive task remaining for the theatre semiotician:

> [T]he investigation of the meanings of theatrical signs is possible only if it is based on the investigation of the meanings created by the respective cultural systems. Theatrical semiotic presupposes at this point a developed semiotic of cultural systems. Only if it can rely on linguistics, kinesics and proxemics, on the semiotics of clothing, architecture and music, will it succeed in providing adequate answers as regards the possible meanings of theatrical signs. Here its crucial point lies and also the reason why it has been only insufficiently tackled so far. Theatrical semiotics should therefore include in its further research--and to a greater extent--the findings of each individual branch of semiotics (52).

It is perhaps the case that the concentration on the

dramatic text has led dramatic theorists to align their discipline with the study of other printed fictional texts--the novel, the poem, etc.--where in fact the social nature of theatrical practice demands reference to at least the more social art forms--music, dance, film, architecture, etc. The interactivity that necessarily takes place between spectators as well as between spectators and actors suggests that the inquiries into drama's correlation with the social sciences are important and potentially fruitful. The collaborations of Victor Turner and Richard Schechner have, for example, identified some of the cultural markers surrounding performance. Barba's International School of Theatre Anthropology will undoubtedly continue to produce research which will increase our understanding of the actor's performance.

An obvious limitation of this study is its lack of attention to theatre produced outside Western industrial societies. Anthropology-related theatre studies have indicated that the performances and rituals of non-Western societies have much to contribute to our general understanding of the theatrical dynamic. It would be interesting, for example, to explore the modifications required to this model of receptive processes in order to accommodate different varieties of

non-Western theatre. Such a study might provide insight into the essential conditions required of performance in order that <u>any</u> audience can construct meaning.

In some ways a more simple but equally important task is an increased knowledge of the alternative theatre methodologies and performances which are being staged worldwide. Even in North America where publications about the media are prolific, there is a paucity of information available on the diverse and numerous alternative productions being staged. The emergence of information concerning production/reception of theatre in North America, but outside New York City or university environments, seems at best haphazard. Clearly the study of alternative theatre groups on a worldwide basis is an enormous task. Yet when available work is compared, the existence of so much common ground encourages efforts towards a fuller knowledge of the companies in existence. In this study of reception, theatre practioners working in many different national cultures have been cited and what has emerged from these different sources is a common determination to increase the spectator's activity to their mutual benefit. John McGrath in Scotland, Luis Valdez in California, Theatre-Action in France, Augusto Boal in Lima and Sao Paulo,

Theatre of the Eighth Day in Poland, Dario Fo and Franca Rame in Italy, and Le Théâtre Parminou in Canada represent only a few of the "marginalized" who have established new audiences and who have achieved what Bernard Dort describes as "the liberated performance."

The aim of this study, therefore, is neither to prescribe a role for the theatre audience nor simply to provide new strategies for interpreting the dramatic text. It is a testimony to the contemporary emancipation of the spectator. Further, it is hoped that this study of reception in the theatre serves to foreground the diversity of dramatic art and theatre practice in contemporary cultures. Theatre studies which concern themselves primarily and, occasionally, only with the mainstream theatre and its printed representatives describe theatre in the most limited sense.

Notes

1

A notable exception has been The Drama Review which has, as the recently published "The Drama Review": Thirty Years of Commentary on the Avant Garde patently reveals, concentrated on the emergence of alternative theatre practices. Canadian Theatre Review is also encouraging in its interest in alternative theatre practice and the recent revival, New Theatre Quarterly, has in its early issues shown an interest in information about alternatives as well as the involvement of the theatre practitioners themselves.

APPENDIX A

1. Opening section, Ibsen's <u>A</u> <u>Doll's</u> <u>House</u>

A comfortable room furnished inexpensively, but with taste. In the back wall, there are two doors; that to the right leads out to a hall, the other, to the left, leads to Helmer's study. Between them stands a piano.

In the middle of the left-hand wall is a door, with a window on its nearer side. Near the window is a round table with armchairs and a small sofa.

In the wall on the right-hand side, rather to the back, is a door, and farther forward on this wall there is a tiled stove with a couple of easy chairs and a rocking-chair in front of it. Between the door and the stove stands a little table.

There are etchings on the walls, and there is a cabinet with china ornaments and other bric-a-brac, and a small bookcase with handsomely bound books. There is a carpet on the floor, and the stove is lit. It is a winter day.

[A bell rings in the hall outside, and a moment later the door is heard to open. NORA comes into the room, humming happily. She is in outdoor clothes, and

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is carrying an armful of parcels which she puts down on the table to the right. Through the hall door, which she has left open, can be seen a PORTER; he is holding a Christmas tree and a hamper, and he gives them to the MAID who has opened the front door.]

NORA: Hide the Christmas tree properly, Helena. The children mustn't see it till this evening, when it's been decorated (147).

2. Opening section, Churchill's <u>Cloud</u> <u>Nine</u>

Low bright sun. Verandah, Flagpole with Union Jack. The Family--CLIVE, BETTY, EDWARD, VICTORIA, MAUD, ELLEN, JOSHUA.

ALL: (sung)
Come gather, sons of England, come gather in your pride,
Now meet the world united, not face it side by side;
Ye who the earth's wide corners, from veldt to prairie roam,
From bush and jungle muster all who call old England 'home'.
Then gather round for England,
Rally to the flag,
From North and South and East and West
Come one and all for England!

CLIVE:

This is my family. Though far from home

We serve the Queen wherever we may roam.

I am a father to the natives here,

And father to my family so dear.

He presents BETTY. She is played by a man.

My wife is all I dreamt a wife should be,

And everything she is she owes to me (3-4).

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