

## The Psychodynamics of Theatrical Spectatorship

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Eric Bentley once asked why people were willing to fight their way through hail and snow as well as tangle with traffic in order to find their way to an uncomfortable and expensive seat in a Broadway theatre when they could remain in the comfort of their living rooms and watch television or go to their neighborhood movie house in search of dramatic entertainment.<sup>1</sup> Part of Bentley's answer to his own question highlights the special thrill that only live theatre provides for the spectator. The tense leaning forward in the seat and the sense of anticipation that comes when the houselights dim and the curtain rises are not to be found in the movie house or in front of the television set. Many people will brave obstacles in order to be present when the theatrical event begins.

There is a unique, but difficult to define, quality about the sense of expectancy preceding a live performance. This quality is often referred to as "magical." The miraculous is invoked because of the difficulties in accurately defining and labelling this quality. It is an anticipatory emotional reaction (i.e., the spectator is experiencing an emotional reaction prior to the presence of the stimuli that ordinarily elicit that emotion.<sup>2</sup>) It is akin to "drooling" in anticipation of eating or experiencing "eager arousal" prior to lovemaking. The anticipatory emotional reaction is a scaled down version of the later emotional reaction, but it is strong enough to motivate behaviors that will channel us towards pursuing those experiences capable of eliciting the full emotional response. The anticipatory emotional reaction is based on previous experiences which have taught us that food or love or theatre is emotionally gratifying.<sup>3</sup>

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Tales of the potency of anticipatory emotional reactions may be taken as testimony for the compelling power of the theatrical event itself. In fact, the emotional power of the theatrical event appears to be a given in most Western dramatic theory and criticism. Plato decried it and Brecht viewed it with suspicion. But no serious commentator has ever denied the emotional impact of live theatre.

In this paper, we argue that, from a psychodynamic point of view, the experience yielded by live performance is of potentially greater emotional power than that yielded by mediated performance such as television or film. In fact the "magic" of live performance is even acknowledged by television producers when they try to simulate it with pronouncements that the "following program is being brought to you live from the stage of the . . ." or ". . . recorded live before a studio audience." What we propose then is to demonstrate that the psychodynamic processes associated with spectatorship are more potent in a theatrical context than in other performance milieus. Of course, it is necessary first to understand these psychodynamic processes in order to appreciate the impact of live theatre. We hold--for purposes of argument--that these psychological experiences are not limited to live theatre, but are nonetheless exponentiated in the theatre to a greater degree than outside of it.

Some basic definitions are in order. We take theatre to be the typological term for several forms of live performance, including dance, opera, stand-up comedy, etc. By live performance we mean a situation where spectator and actor are aware of their physical proximity to each other. Physical proximity is a temporal-spatial arrangement in which the actors and the audience can see, hear, and although this last opportunity is seldom taken advantage of, touch each other. By way of contrast, a "recorded" performance is one in which the spectator and the actors are not in physical contact with each other, but are independent units, separated in time and/or place (movies, television, radio, and phonograph records.)

In order to understand the kinds of psychological transformations that occur in the spectator when engaged with the live performance it is necessary to make certain epistemological assumptions clear. It is useful to distinguish four realms of existence: The Physical World, the Neural World, the Perceptual World and the Fictive World.

The Physical World may be roughly defined as that which we believe to exist outside of our bodies and to function independently of ourselves. It is the world of the structures and activities of molecules, atoms, electrons, neutrons, etc. They impinge upon us as physical stimuli.

The Neural World is believed to be an interior realm of the mind. Its operations are stamped into the neuronal substrate excitation

patterns of the brain. It is the world of stored mental experiences (memory, engrams, deep grammar structures, etc.), and cognitive activities (general intelligence, remembering, associating, comparing, etc.) that code and organize all incoming physical stimuli. The Neural World makes sense out of the myriad inflow of sensory inputs and in so doing shapes the Perceptual World. Its operations are made manifest through Perceptual World experiences and in behaviors based on those experiences. Our Neural World is unknowable to another person and often unknown to ourselves since many of its operations are unconscious. Its prime task is to create and shape the Perceptual World which is itself the interpretation of physical stimuli. The Neural World operates constantly because there is a constant inflow from the Physical World. We are constantly interpreting the Physical World, through the mediations of the Neural World, and thus constantly creating the Perceptual World phenomena which are experienced as "thoughts." Malfunctioning of the Neural World in some individuals leads to the creation of Perceptual World experiences that have no link to interior or exterior stimuli. These are often referred to as psychotic hallucinations.

The Perceptual World is our interpretation of the Physical World and is constructed by us from sensory inputs from the Physical World through the mediations of the Neural World. The Perceptual World is not actually "real" but is our interpretation of the Physical World and is what we think of as being reality. Our contact with the Physical World is accomplished through the activities of the sensory apparatus (eyes, ears, nose, skin and mouth). This is as close as one will ever get to the Physical World. After that, we are in the world of interpretation.

Some assume naively that these interpretations are direct mirror images of the Physical World, but the true correspondence between the Perceptual World and the Physical World has yet to be established. However, our Perceptual World mental hypotheses about the Physical World serve us well in the sense that we are able to operate adequately in the physical world. The Perceptual World constructions that we make probably help us to survive better than if we had to rely on the Physical World directly.

Two examples will suffice. The first deals with "Size Constancy." If we were sitting at one end of a room and glanced at a door at the opposite end of the room, in our psychological Perceptual World the door is perceived as being of ordinary size. However, in terms of physical reality, the door size stimuli impinging on the visual retina is about a millimeter high. Yet we "know" that the door is not tiny and that if we get up and leave the room, we will be able to exit through a normal size door. The Physical World retinal size of the door is

itself a hinderance to adequate physical activity.<sup>4</sup> However, our Perceptual World interpretation of the door size is "correct" in that it diminishes confusion about the nature of reality.

A second example of the survival-value superiority of the Perceptual World over the Physical World concerns turning our head slowly from side-to-side. The number of physical stimuli changes occurring during this simple procedure may be in the tens of thousands. We are bombarded by these different physical stimuli, but yet the Perceptual World is not registered as chaotic. The Perceptual World remains stable to us even though the Physical World stimuli changes are legion. In most ways, the Perceptual World is a better guide to "reality" than the Physical World because it allows us to manage our affairs better than if we had to deal with the Physical World directly. It must be remembered, however, that the Perceptual World is a psychological interpretation of the Physical World. We often feel that we can "safely" assume that the Perceptual World is a fairly accurate reflection of the Physical World. This safe but erroneous assumption works well for us, and for all intents and purposes we are probably smart in making this assumption.

Even though the Perceptual World is somewhat of a psychological fiction, it is much closer to the Physical World than is the Fictive World. The Fictive World is another psychological construction, but it is based on the Perceptual World and has only a very distant and indirect relationship (through the Neural World) to the Physical World. The Fictive World is the world of imagination and fantasy.<sup>5</sup> Human beings construct the Fictive World out of the materials of the Perceptual World, making them emblems of the feelings, thoughts, and mental states of psychological life. The mind creates the Fictive World from the sights, sounds, smells, feels, and tastes of the Perceptual World. The words on a page, the sounds and sights of the performers, the smells of flowers, internal kinesthetic activities, the external pressures on our bodies, etc., are the starting points for transporting ourselves out of the Perceptual World and into the Fictive World. The Fictive World of the theatre may be ancient Athens, Elizabethan England, the North Pole, a drawing room, or any place in the history or imagination of mankind. The Perceptual World is the theatre building, seats, voices, and actions of the players existing at that moment in time.

Human beings have the capacity to move between the Perceptual World and the Fictive World easily. Fictive World experiences occur early in life.<sup>6</sup> We enter the Fictive World whenever we rise out of the Perceptual World and imagine anything that is not veridical with it (i.e., not physically present). Fictive World experiences occur in daydreams, nightdreams, while absorbed in a novel, while playing games, acting, and while encountering the drama. In a sense, we leave the

Perceptual World and enter into a new world of mental experience. However, the Fictive World could not exist without the Perceptual World constantly feeding it with stimuli. The structure and conditions of the drama probably evoke entry into the Fictive World more easily than other situations since the drama demands concentration and narrowing of focus of attention. Fictive world phenomena such as daydreaming are relatively unstructured in comparison to drama-evoked fantasies. The words and actions of the players guide and direct the imagery of the Fictive World. Daydreaming is almost pure free-association.

The Fictive World is generally ephemeral and evaporates easily while the Perceptual World persists. Most human beings alternate between these two worlds fairly regularly. The Ego reminds us constantly that the Fictive World is not real. That is why we are able to tolerate dramatic behaviors and events that we would shun in everyday life. Watching a staged murder is permissible in the Fictive World because the Ego reminds us that it is not a Perceptual World event. Outside of the drama, on the street, we react quite differently if we encounter a murder.

The Fictive World and the Perceptual World are not independent of each other. They operate simultaneously, each feeding and enriching the other. They alternate in assuming the positions at the center and periphery of Consciousness. When one is in the Fictive World mode (center stage), the Perceptual World is in the wings feeding it the stimuli necessary for its continuing existence. The temporal duration of Fictive World experiences rarely lasts beyond a few moments; however, these few moments occur often. When the turnabout is made, the adventures in the Fictive World will also alter how you define the Perceptual World. Fantasy and imagination would be a colossal waste of human effort if they did not help us to live better in the Perceptual World and in fact the Fictive World does have important survival value. The Fictive World provides us respite from the Perceptual World as well as allowing us to devise alternate ways of defining and operating in it.

One powerful motivation for entering the Fictive World is to experience a kind of vacation from the rigors of the Perceptual World. Often the Perceptual World is a harsh realm of existence demanding everlasting vigilance and self-protective postures. It is a dangerous and tiring place in which to live. The mind needs a leave-of-absence from all this. Just as the body needs sleep and rest in order to refresh itself, the mind needs relaxation from the psychological rigors of the Perceptual World. The Fictive World affords relaxation, refreshment, and escape.<sup>7</sup> The Fictive World, too, is a healer that "knits up the ravel'd sleeve of care." This is one reason we need access to a

Fictive World to survive.

However, Fictive World experiences which heal merely by providing respite from the arduous Perceptual World through rest or distraction are somewhat passive. There is also an active and positive recuperative principle at work in the Fictive World which can be identified. For example, Aristotle, when writing about the utility of the drama, spoke of something called "Catharsis." Scholarly controversy surrounds what he exactly meant by this process or who was to experience its effects. Most readers interpret Aristotle to mean that the function of the drama is to excite pity and fear and thus bring about a healing catharsis of the emotions in the audience.

Another example of the healing power of theatre comes from Psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud felt that the emotional discharge (or catharsis) occurring in the spectator was the *prime* reason for the existence of the drama.<sup>8</sup> Freud pointed out that the drama also gives us a chance to confront our innermost repressed fears and desires (as embodied in the characters), examine them in a safe manner, and, through identification with the dramatic characters, experience the emotions associated with the now liberated desires. Through identification with the character, we allow the repressed fears and yearnings to return and discharge the affects associated with the forbidden desires.

This discharge is a relief to the psychological economy. We can accept these repressed desires in the Fictive World and can get some relief from them. Freud felt that in the theatre, the spectator is made to feel a hero because he triumphs over the forces of a repressive family and society. The spectator still "knows" that since the dramatic event is not real, there will be no social censure for his emotional discharge. There may even be therapeutic consequences for the spectator in that he may use his experiences to reorganize his life. On the other hand, the discharge may be temporary in that the forces of repression may once more gather strength after the audience member leaves the theatre. But the spectators have had their moment of relief and ecstasy.<sup>9</sup>

Other positive views of the drama are similar in tone to those already noted. Jean-Louis Barrault<sup>10</sup> speaks of another kind of desire to participate in Theatre; namely the desire to act. For Barrault, the desire to act comes "from the urge to get a full grasp on real life and its problems through an artificial recreation of life, something which is really 'filtered' life, or life at one remove." As he points out, this re-creation is easier to deal with because "attitudes and behavior are more clearly outlined and lucidity is not blinded by the *urgency* of decision." He calls it a "training ground for virtual actions." Antonin Artaud<sup>11</sup> saw the theatre as the quintessential instrument for healing

the ills of mankind. It was theatre as "an independent and autonomous art" that could reconcile audiences "philosophically with Becoming", thus bringing about the highest level of therapeutic cure wherein humans faced their own ephemeral mortality and consequently the output of their own earthly actions.

In manifesto after manifesto, theory after theory, theatre is depicted as a liberating mechanism that affords mankind a clearer perspective on both the conditions of humans and the human condition. Whatever disagreements exist as to the preferred means of accomplishing this clarification, agreement is widespread as to theatre's power to promote a potent perception of what it means to be alive.

When we are confronted by the elements of performance, be they live actors, movie, or television images, we are invited into the Fictive World. Since, as we shall soon see, we have a ready and eager desire to enter, the transformation is easily made. We are psychologically inside the world of the drama. We have left our seats and have been projected into the action. The effectiveness of the drama may be measured by (1) the number of Fictive World occurrences, (2) their duration at the time of the theatrical event, (3) their persistence in memory after the physical elements of the performance have ceased to exist, and (4) their effects on the Perceptual World (i.e., has the drama changed how we interpret "reality"?).

What psychological process mediates the efficiency of entry into the Fictive World of the drama? We think that the main psychodynamic that makes any dramatic experience effective is that of "identification". By identification, we mean that the spectator must, at some level, surrender his personal identity, abandon himself or forget himself to some degree, and become the character that the actor or actors are portraying. The spectator temporarily abandons his critical evaluative hold on reality and enters into a communal fantasy with the actors. The spectator and character become one and the same person. The audience member virtually believes, for a moment, that "I am He" and that "He is I". In fact, it may be as Michael Goldman<sup>12</sup> suggests: that identification in a dramatic milieu is easier to accomplish than outside of it because there are fewer distractions. The human need for Fictive World identifications has been commented upon in disciplines as diverse as Psychoanalysis and Actor-Training theory. Otto Fenichel, the noted psychoanalyst, suggests that people crave identification (i.e., entry into the Fictive World) and that spectators go to the theatre with the *intention* of identifying with the actor's portrayals.<sup>13</sup> The audience's need for identification was also implicitly recognized by Stanislavski when he reminded his readers that "...an audience wishes, above all, to believe everything that happens on the stage".<sup>14</sup>

This spectator-character identification is neither total nor continuous. We tend to move in and out of the Fictive World. We retain some sense of Self concurrently with abandoning our identities. There is a dual existence, one part alternating with the other. We have the capacity to withdraw from the Fictive World and notice our surroundings or evaluate the technical aspects of the performance. It appears that there is some holding back from total identification. This is probably an indication of health since total identification with the Fictive World would be psychotic and certainly would rob us of our critical abilities. During a performance we move back and forth between Fictive World identification and "reality". It is interesting to note that Brecht claims that he is trying to deliberately force the audience to make these movements between the Perceptual and Fictive World thus coercing the audience to be aware of the differences between these two states of existence.

Human beings have the capacity to identify with many characters both simultaneously and successively.<sup>15</sup> If they cannot do this, then the spectator is merely watching an artificial situation in which other people, no different from himself, are just saying words. Fortunately for mankind, Identifications are easily made both in daily life and in a dramatic milieu. In daily life such identifications allow us to empathize (i.e., to understand how others feel or to take other people's viewpoints). Such identifications are the basis of sympathy, affection, and love. In the theatre, it is the basis of the "magic" which Coleridge called the "willing suspension of disbelief". Identification is the basis of "involvement", "commitment", "loss of distance", etc.

Consistent with our psychodynamic assumptions about theatrical spectatorship is the proposition that live theatre is more effective than recorded performance because the conditions surrounding the live theatrical event are more effective in supporting identification, and therefore increasing the richness of Fictive World experiences, than those conditions surrounding "artificial" presentations of drama.

The first and probably most important support for increased identification is enhanced feedback loops. The audience is psychologically closer to the live actor than the spectator is to an image on the screen. A real person is present and is thus a much more powerful stimulus than a flat, two-dimensional image. The physical presence of the performer allows the audience members to feel that they can influence the performers. Audiences do affect performers through a complex feedback loop mechanism. Their responses are communicated to the actor, who in turn, responds in such a way as to affect the audience. This, in turn, leads to more mutual-behavior-affecting-responses which then act to further affect the players. The cycle will continue certainly until the performance is over and probably in the

mind of the spectator and actor for longer periods of time. The audience response does affect the actor, influencing him in obvious and subtle ways to modify and enhance his performance. Applause, laughter, jeers, silence, disdain, indifference, etc. are the feedback modalities that reach and influence the actor. Many actors claim to feel this input very keenly.<sup>16</sup>

There is an interaction effect in the theatre that is missing from the movie house or the living room. Just as personal contact is more satisfying than talking to a photograph, so is personal contact between audience and actor more satisfying than between an observer and the inanimate film or television image. The spectator at a recorded performance has no power to direct the performance, and he knows this. The spectator's emotional commitment and effort to influence the performer are not brought into being because they are futile. Another way of saying this is that the conditions of recorded performance are not those supporting audience involvement with the makers of the artifact. What emotional responses occur in relation to recorded performance are probably due to personal associations to the material being presented, rather than such associations working in tandem with emotional identification.

Sheer physical proximity between player and spectator helps to enhance the arousal interactive experience. It is truly a shame that not every seat in a theatre is front row center. If it could be so arranged, the chances of a live production's success would be vastly enhanced.<sup>17</sup>

Another factor supporting the ease of identification is "stimulus richness". The sights, sounds, smells, etc. of the live stage are not reduced and dulled as they are in films, television, and tapes.<sup>18</sup> Obviously the stimulus complexity and richness of nuance are greater on the spot than they are when transported over time and space via mechanical or electronic means to the audience sitting at home or at the movie house. The stimulus richness to be found in the theatre is one of the factors that makes identification easy and enjoyable because it makes the performance situation more life-like. Identification with the unreal is not impossible but difficult, not only because it limits interaction, but because stimulus richness is too low to affect us in any profound manner.

A third factor that makes for increased identification in the presence of live performance as opposed to recorded performance is the peculiar variable of "uncertainty" or unpredictability. The filmed, taped, or recorded performance is finished and unalterable. The recorded performance will go to its unchangeable conclusion regardless of the efforts of the spectator. The performance is set in concrete. It can never change, be different, or be affected. It has been

determined in the past. It will go on, even if spectators are indifferent or absent. The live performance, in both its Perceptual World and Fictive World experience modes, is "now" and has a sense of immediacy and danger. Hence the recorded performance belongs to the past.

A live performer may change something, give a new interpretation or reading that will be a revelation in meaning. On a more pedestrian level a performer may literally fall on his face, forget his lines, or his clothes may become undone. The spectator really does not know what is going to happen. The element of uncertainty is often exploited in improvisational theatre. Uncertainty plays a smaller role in live theatre than it does in sporting events, but even in minute doses, it is a powerful stimulus to identification because it mimics real life. Uncertainty adds a flavor to a live performance that is obviously missing from a recorded one.

Uncertainty may also play an indirect role in adding to the impact of live performance by demanding a level of concentration not necessary for recorded performance. Since the live performance exists only once, it is necessary for the spectators to attend carefully to it. In order to do this, they must censor extraneous stimuli and narrow their focus down to the stage action. Since recorded performances are intransient and can be reproduced, the need for directed concentration is less. One can assume that the intense concentration necessary for live performance increases the level of involvement and therefore increases the level of identification. This need for concentration may explain spectator irritation with distracting extraneous stimuli in the theatre such as whispering, crackling of candy wrappers, etc. A theatre audience can sit rapt in a performance for long periods of time, but television audiences can only tolerate up to twenty minutes of concentrated effort before they become restless and yearn for a commercial break. A higher level of concentration may be achieved in the movie house when compared to the living room, but even there the level when compared to the theatre is quite low. The power of the live performance to elicit audience identification is so great that it even overrides the mode of presentation. Presentational (non-illusionistic) staging seems to be just as effective as representational (illusionistic) productions in summoning the spectator to enter the Fictive World of the stage.

There are some factors mitigating against the readiness to enter the Fictive World in the theatre (noisy neighbors, rude ushers, the temperature within the theatre, the comfort of the seat, the ease of viewing and hearing the players, and very "bad" acting and staging).<sup>19</sup> One may also bring certain inhibitors to the theatre. Personal prejudices, problems, or anxieties may be so cogent and demanding that

they are uppermost in consciousness and thus block the access to the Fictive World. Previous experiences with a play may also set up a series of expectations that are hard to overcome. Memories of other performances intrude, and the spectator may find himself matching the current performance to those memories. What he is doing is expending intellectual effort in technical comparisons rather than surrendering himself to immediate identification.

There are also socio-economic factors mitigating against theatre going. Cost of theatre tickets is certainly an inhibitor when compared to the cost of movie tickets and of home television. More movie houses are available to the potential consumer of drama than are theatres. Many moderate sized communities may have several movie houses but only one theatre (which may or may not feature plays on a regular basis). In large cities, several neighborhood movie houses may be easily reached, whereas a long trip is necessary to reach a theatre.

But most important of all, movie houses also have a casual "drop-in" phenomenological character. In our society, the theatre has come to be seen as cloaked with formal ritual (i.e., a special event, dressing up, dinner before or after, etc.). These ritual demands are discouraging, especially when compared with the ease of movie house entry.

There is one other inhibiting factor that needs to be considered and that is the question of comparative "danger". The immediacy of identification in the theatrical milieu may lead to powerful emotional experiences which are difficult for some people to incorporate and control. The theatre's immediacy is both its special virtue and also its greatest drawback. Many people may be frightened about surrendering their emotional control because they are at that moment defenseless and vulnerable. They may therefore, prefer the safer distancing and less demanding dramatic media or even the traditionally less demanding theatrical forms (musical comedy or bedroom farce). Even though the Fictive World entries may be only episodic, they are powerful experiences, which may repel some individuals. Theatre lovers embrace that experience because it arouses them and makes them alive (in a safe way), but it may drive others, who do not feel safe, to shun live theatre.

This is not to say that the danger does not exist in the movie house or in front of the television set, but there the intensity of the experience is low because of the distancing factor. The potential level of emotional discomfort is greater in the theatre than in other dramatic contexts because the spectator is face-to-face with the source of his perturbation. In addition, you cannot escape the danger as easily in the theatre as you can at the movies or while watching television. In the living room, the spectator, when confronting something unpalatable may change channels or turn off the set. At the movies,

the spectator can get up from his seat and leave. Comings and goings in a movie house are considered as somewhat annoying but still as acceptable social behavior because of the cinema's casual character. But in the theatre, convention dictates that you remain in your seat. Not wanting to offend other people, embarrassment, not wanting to draw attention to yourself, maintaining your self image, etc. all conspire to trap the reluctant and frightened theatregoer. Modern courtesies inhibit escape from the emotional danger. Part of the theatre's negative ambience, for some people, is that it makes flight from emotion both psychologically and physically difficult.

Both socio-economic conditions and fear of emotional release conspire to make theatre a potentially punitive experience in that a great deal of physical and psychological effort must be expended in order for the individual to initiate theatre going activities. In order to overcome these barriers, the motivational levels for the unique live theatre experience must be higher than for mediated performances. The peculiar sensations surrounding live performance are so powerful and rewarding that they often overcome the aforementioned inhibitors.

However, not all people find the motivational balance in favor of theatrical spectatorship. The socio-economic, ritual, and emotional inhibitors are very powerful. This may explain the potency of theatre critics. Peter Brook<sup>20</sup> has pointed out that such a large investment is necessary for theatre going today that people try and hedge their financial, social, and emotional bets by getting "expert advise" about plays. Thus the critic's reviews "make or break" a play because the potential theatregoer treats them as definitive. Movie and television critics are treated more blithely in the sense that potential customers of these dramatic forms can financially and emotionally afford to "see for themselves" or "make up their own minds".

Genuine high powered emotional experiences are hard to find today. It may be the theatre's unique contribution to our lives is that it allows us to have a deeply emotional experience in a manner that is relatively safe. These experiences are safe only up to a point. Film and television emotional arousals are no doubt safer than those experienced in the Theatre because the emotions aroused in those contexts are less intense. We may allow ourselves to be moved by the plight of a Fictive World character because we know that it is not "real" and further commitment is not necessary. We can endure it in the theatre, whereas we would avoid such people in the real world because we could not deal with the emotional demands. In a sense we can allow ourselves to be more human, sympathetic and open in the theatre because we lay aside the burden of defending our Egos from the assaults of life.

It has been said that live performance serves as a modality for

welding together the community.<sup>21</sup> In classical Greece, the theatre was a community religious service in which the players, the dramatist and the audience united in the worship of the god Dionysus. The performance of the Mass may serve the same function today. The communal effect, if it exists in our times, *may* be present in the movie house but is minimal in the living room. The massive outdoor Evangelical meeting elicits a far greater response than does the same sermon preached on Sunday morning television.

Whether live performance is indeed a communion may be debatable, but what is certain is that it is an occasion for the stirring of the soul. It is an occasion for something we have very rarely in life—an intense emotional experience. That is why live theatre can be exciting.

Unfortunately much of the current commercial theatrical offerings are either trivial, soporific or vehicles for passing time pleasantly. Part of the theatre's glory is that it has, because of its immediacy, a powerful potential for affecting our lives by either affirming or disconfirming our belief systems. It is incumbent on the theatre to also maintain its historical role of being a humane, rational and subversive critic of our society (i.e., giving us the sacred opportunity to re-examine ourselves and our relationships to our fellow human beings).

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## Notes

1. E. Bentley, *The Theatre of Commitment* (New York: Atheneum, 1967) 59.

2. Technically known as fractional antedating goal responses. C. L. Hull, *A Behavior System* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1952).

3. It is the past emotional experiences in the theatre which lead us to anticipate similar gratification during the present performance. The darkening lights, musical overture, rising curtain, and the reinforcing presence of other audience members (which confirms to the spectator that this is a good place to be), cue the emergence of the anticipatory emotional reactions. Producers may be doing themselves and their audiences a disservice by eliminating some of the cue stimuli for the anticipatory emotional reactions, since these experiences start up the whole emotional association chain. Once the anticipatory emotional responses are initiated, other emotional responses are more readily evoked than if the "priming" experiences are absent.

4. F. H. Allport, *Theories of Perception and the Concept of Structure* (New York: Wiley, 1955).

5. For a critical definition and discussion of the term "Fictive World", see Roger Gross' *Understanding Playscripts: Theory and Method* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green UP, 1974).

6. J. Piaget, *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood* (New York: Norton 1951).

7. There are, of course, some dangers associated with the Fictive World. Ordinarily we move easily between the Fictive World and the Perceptual World. Generally we only live in the Fictive World for periods of a few moments. We

also can distinguish between these two realms of mental existence and we can, by an act of will, alternate between them. When conditions in the Perceptual World are extremely harsh, we may find that the Fictive World is so attractive that it serves as an escape rather than a restitution. The contours between the Perceptual World and the Fictive World may become blurred, and the individual's grasp on the Perceptual World may slip. The two realms of existence may merge and the Perceptual World may be abandoned. In that direction lies madness. However, for most of us, the Ego is constantly reminding us that the Fictive World is not the Perceptual World. The ability to distinguish between the two realms is not inborn but has to be learned. For small children, the parents often have to play the role of the Ego and remind the child that the story is not real.

8. S. Freud, "Psychopathic Characters on the Stage," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 13 (1942): 459-464.

9. Others have also noted that the theatrical experience is in some way a health-giving phenomenon. Aristotle implied that the theatre helps man to cope with dangerous emotions by arousing and releasing them in a controlled safe way. St. Thomas Aquinas, one of the few early Church Fathers who did not condemn the theatre, argued that it gave solace to men. Michael Goldman described this therapeutic function of the theatre as one in which the audience members join the characters in facing their fears and in repeating the steps towards growth and self-knowledge. Thus, through identification, the audience is healed along with the characters. M. Goldman, *The Actor's Freedom* (New York: Viking, 1975).

10. J. Louis-Barrault, "How Drama Is Born Within Us," eds. R. W. Corrigan and J. L. Rosenberg, *The Context and Craft of Drama* (New York: Chandler, 1964) 42.

11. A. Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double* (New York: Grove Press, 1958) 106-109.

12. M. Goldman, *The Actor's Freedom* (New York: Viking, 1975) 154-155.

13. O. Fenichel, "On Acting," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 15 (1946): 144-160.

14. C. Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1947) 126.

15. Concurrent multiple identifications can exist even with characters as antagonistic as Hamlet and Claudius. In addition, people can identify with animals (e.g., nature films or the rabbits in *Watership Down*), and with inanimate objects (e.g., the robots in *Star Wars*). Fritz Heider and Marriana Simmel have found that individuals can even identify with abstract geometrical shapes. (F. Heider, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* [New York: Wiley, 1958] 31-32.) These latter identifications are supported by the process of "Projection", which is the vehicle for attributing human characteristics to environmental objects. Projection is the basis for the common disposition to anthropomorphize the world.

16. Two people in normal discourse affect each other's performance through feedback loops. The same can happen between a performer and his audience. Regardless of the specific mechanisms, the audience at a live performance has the power to influence the performance. The spectator's sense of power elates him and is one of the contributing factors making live performance a joyous occasion. However, this sense of power may also cause disruptive behavior in the theatre. There are many instances of audiences voicing their disapproval by hurling objects at the stage, jeering, heckling, and effectively stopping the dramatic action. This kind of energetic response is very rare in the movie house and probably nonexistent in the living room. The best that the television viewer can do is grumble and turn off the set. This latter action is more of a venting or "letting-off-steam" behavior, than an attempt to influence the course of any action.

17. Many producers have tried to further maximize the proximity between audience and performers by minimizing the physical distance between them by use of theatre-in-the-round or the apron stage in preference to the proscenium stage. J. E. Deitrich and R. W. Duckwall, *Play Direction* [Second Edition] (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1983.) However, it should also be noted that for some spectators closeness to the stage may give rise to feelings of discomfort. Fear of flying debris or the sense of uneasiness that comes with having a stage

prop gun pointed at them will force them to choose a seat further back in the auditorium. For these audience members other less potent interactive-arousing forces such as darkening of the auditorium and attention-focusing stage lighting have to serve the same function as physical proximity as the mode of arousing the interactive experience.

18. The truth of this proposition is most obvious in the concert hall. A live orchestra is different from a recorded orchestra. In fact, this one variable may be so powerful that it often overrides other factors supporting identification in luring people to a live musical performance.

19. Even though the threshold of entry into the Fictive World is very low (i.e., the audience member is eager for the dramatic experience) there are limits to believability. In such instances the actors, by their actions, are constantly reminding the audience that the Fictive World does not exist and that they are both in the Perceptual World. There are some theories of stage presentation that seem to purposely discourage entry into the Fictive World (e.g., Brecht). It may be that such views are antithetical to the unique qualities of the theatrical experience and would thus discourage theatre going.

20. P. Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Atheneum Press, 1982) 20.

21. B. Beckerman, *Dynamics of Drama* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1979).

