

THEATRE—A TENTATIVE MODEL OF APPROACH

Theatre is an *art* and therefore a way of ordering, clarifying and understanding experience, of explaining outside reality by conveying an informative, instructive as well as entertaining cultural message; as art form, it is also a means of social integration, of communication with the social environment, with mankind's entire wealth of knowledge and civilisation; finally, it is a prolongation of one's inner self, an instrument of thinking, a source of dream and imagination, a filter which achieves a perfect osmosis between individual and social experience.

But theatre is, at the same time, a *socially meaningful activity*, because the need to participate in a performance characterizes man as a social being, and its inception as ritual might stand proof for it. In saying this, there is no intention to disregard the social function of all art forms, but just an attempt to emphasize the fact that the social aspect is perhaps more relevant with theatre than with the others, not only in point of the number of people involved at one end of the communication line — that of the multiple artist, for theatre is not the product of a single mind — but also in point of the experience offered to its audience, collective rather than individual.

This is the reason which encourages us to think that by studying and understanding it as social activity, one can perhaps better experience it as art.

For dramatic experience is one of man's primary, most enduring, complex and rewarding, one that has accompanied him all along his eventful history (in his attempt to give significance to his own place in the world by projecting an objectified image of himself), thus proving its indispensable and unique influence in shaping both its creator and undergoer.

From the latter's viewpoint, dramatic experience is neither pretending, nor quite being. It is an experience in which part of oneself surrenders so that one may take a new shape born of active imagination, a critical time, when the human faculty of sharing the mind and feelings of others is wholly alive.

The appeal it makes to this generous and typically human faculty is just another proof of the profound humanism characterizing this most complicated art form, which can offer an unparalleled

intellectual and emotional adventure, the greater for the more intense level of interest at which it is approached.



"I must create a system or be enslaved
by another man's"

(William Blake)

Hoping that the usefulness of the sociological perspective has become obvious, we shall try to devise a tentative model of approaching the theatrical phenomenon based on Goffman's theories, as they appear in his books *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956) and *Frame Analysis* (1974).

In this approach, which does not attempt to be more than one possible way of attaining a greater end, theatre is viewed as interaction (a game or a contract adopted for a limited time-span) in which each participant observes certain rules, mostly spoken of as conventions.

The participants in a theatrical interaction are more numerous than in any other art form: for there are first those *on the stage* — the players or actors, those *on the backstage* — the director, the scene-designer, the costumer, the lighting-designer, etc., then those *beyond the stage* — the audience, and last but not least, the one who can choose his position — the *playwright* or dramatist.

For methodological reasons, we shall only speak of those whose contribution is considered to be essential, especially in modern theatre, namely: the *player*, the

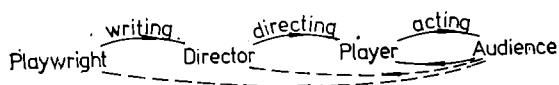
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playwright, the *director* and the *audience*.

Before proceeding with the presentation, a few definitions of the basic terms used are perhaps necessary :

INTERACTION = the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another's actions, feelings and ideas. The influence may be immediate (when in immediate physical presence, as that of player upon audience) or anterior to physical contact (here we may speak of the audience's powers of determining a certain attitude in the means of expression subsequently adopted by playwright, player or director, therefore of the feedback effect of the theatrical interaction).

In fact, the theatrical interaction is a *circular* one, in which one participant (playwright) proposes a new universe which is presented to another participant (audience) after having suffered a double transfiguration resulting from the director's and player's interpretation. The contribution which closes the circle comes under the form of audience response, which, though apparently addressed to the player, is nevertheless meaningful and relevant in the long run to all the other participants :



PERFORMANCE = a physical and four-dimensional realization of a theatrical interaction, which transforms an individual into a stage performer (player), who interprets a script by a playwright, under the guidance of a stage director, with the help of other people involved (costumer, prompter, scene-designer, etc.), and for the sake of a group of persons in an audience role.

A line is ordinarily maintained between the staging area, where the performance proper takes place, and an audience area — auditorium — where the spectators are located.

The central understanding is that the audience has neither the right nor the obligation to participate directly in the dramatic action occurring on the stage, although it may express appreciation throughout in a manner that can be treated as not occurring by the beings which the stage performers present onstage.

At certain junctures, the audience can openly applaud the performers, receiving bows or the equivalent in return.

A special condition regards the number of participants : the performance as such is very little dependent on either the size of the cast or the size of the audience, although there are certain maxima set by the physical facts of sight and sound transmission.

PARTICIPANTS

They may be differentiated in accordance with various criteria, out of which two will be applied here.

A) The first, and perhaps the more obvious, is the *manner of participation*, which distinguishes, on the one hand, the player, as unique direct participant, and, on the other hand, the playwright, director and audience, as participants with an indirect, though not similar, contribution.

1. *The Playwright* is the only participant whose physical presence is never actually needed in a theatrical performance. However, his contribution is highly important in his capacity of author of the written text ("script" or "play"). The playwright's communication with his audience appears to be the most indirect one, since his message must first be transformed into a highly efficient system of relevantly dramatic sights and sounds, which in its turn will suffer the director's and player's interpretation, only to be ultimately re-created in the spectators' minds.

2. *The Player* is the unique direct participant, in the sense that he is the only active one, who actually appears onstage to give life to the "character" or "personage" imagined by the dramatist and to receive the audience's immediate response. He can thus demonstrate at least a dual self, as stage actor and staged character. His contribution is considered to be essential by some critics such as Southern, who thinks that theatre can dispense with anything but player and audience, and that "the player is both the nucleus and the vehicle of theatre" ¹.

3. *The Director* is needed to mediate the differences of opinion which arise as to positions onstage, correct line readings or interpretations of meaning. He ensures the unity of the performance by giving a unique interpretation to the players' contributions. But the director is more

than a mediator; his responsibility is also to design and coordinate stage action with visual background, costumes, lights, music and all the other elements.

His participation, though indirect, became necessary as the theatrical performance gained in complexity, and tends nowadays to be overemphasized in certain contemporary trends which overlook the playwright's role.

4. *The Audience* has perhaps the most interesting and complicated way of participating in the theatrical interaction. Thus, one cannot speak of a direct participation, since during a performance, it is only fellow performers who respond to each other in the direct way, as inhabitants of the same realm. "The audience responds indirectly, glancingly, following alongside as it were, cheering on but not intercepting" ².

On the other hand, it is not a downright indirect participation either, or at any rate, less so than that of both playwright or director, since its physical presence is a prerequisite for any form of theatre, and since it does not need an intermediary to express its feelings.

In this approach, which views theatre as a social activity as well as an art form, the audience will always be thought of as a group, having therefore a specific psychical group reaction, although in fact it is a very heterogeneous one, formed of ever so many individual members — the spectators. Still, it might be relevant enough to distinguish between the roles one and the same spectator-participant plays in a theatrical interaction:

a. the *theatre-goer* is the one who makes reservations, and pays for tickets, who is responsive to the curtain fall after the performance, who takes the intermission, etc. He remains himself all along the interaction, having a direct, though *surface, participation*.

b. the *onlooker* is the one who surrenders himself, collaborating in the unreality onstage. He sympathetically and vicariously participates in the possible world generated by the dramatic interplay of the scripted characters. He is raised (or lowered) to the cultural level of the playwright's characters and themes. His participation may reach a very deep and complex quality in certain forms of theatre.

The difference between theatre-goer and onlooker is nicely demonstrated in regard to laughter by Susanne Langer in *Feeling*

and *Form* ³. Thus, the onlooker always laughs at the scripted bits, as a response to deliberately funny cues or situations, whereas the theatre-goer laughs at the unscripted, incidental events onstage. Interestingly enough, the effect of two kinds of laughter on the performer is different.

During a performance, the spectator is alternatively theatre-goer and onlooker, but it is in his capacity of onlooker that he accepts the make-believe characteristic of theatrical interactions. While the curtain is still up, he should normally not shift back to his theatre-goer role and applaud a player's skill. Yet this happens frequently enough and is just another convention, or "break of the frame", in Goffman's words, which has been institutionalized in opera and adopted in theatre.

It is the only "break of the frame" by the audience, and yet one which does not destroy the specific "illusion", maintained until the final applause. Only then is the make-believe wiped away, the projected characters cast aside, together with those parts of the spectators that had sympathetically entered into the unfolding drama, and persons in the capacity of players greet persons in the capacity of theatre-goers. On both sides of the theatre-line, the same admission is achieved as to what indeed had been going on. Whatever had been portrayed onstage is now seen as not the real thing at all, but only a representation made in order to provide vicarious involvement for the onlooker. Make-believe is abandoned.

If we were to further differentiate between the participants' various ways of contributing in the theatrical interaction, we might think of Southern's distinction between what he calls the Arts of Making, the creative ones, like literature, in which no direct contact needs ever occur between creator and recipient, and the Arts of Doing (executive or performing arts), like music or ballet, in which it is essential that the individual should come into direct personal contact with his public.

It is our belief that theatre does not belong to either of these two categories. Shall we call it a reactive art? In any case, as a most composite one, it combines in a unique product the means of expression as well as the charms of the others: the written word of the literary artist, the scenic background of the architect and painter, the music of the com-

poser, the dance patterns of the choreographer.

One can, therefore, speak only of several creative or performing theatre arts, which are in fact the specialized contributions of the various participants in a theatrical interaction. Thus, if the playwright's contribution is obviously an Art of Making, while the player's is a performing art, an Art of Doing, maybe we could also speak of an Art of Experiencing, the one displayed by the ideal spectator, therefore by the perfect audience.

B) Within a theatrical interaction, the participants also differ according to their various information states concerning the inner events of the play.

Information state = the knowledge an individual has of why events have happened as they have, what the current forces, the properties and intents of the relevant persons are, and what the outcome is likely to be.

This is the second criterion of distinction, which gives us an even better opportunity for classification; thus, it singularizes the audience-participant on the one hand, and the playwright, player and director, as professional-participants, on the other. We do not speak of the artist-participant because, as postulated above, even the audience may have some kind of artistic activity, which in certain contemporary trends, like the "Happening", tends to go beyond (or below?) mere imaginary experience, and become active physical involvement.

Speaking of contemporary drama, mention should be made of the fact that at the level of the performance (implying, therefore, more aspects than those involved in the script), the playwright's information state may be different, that is less complete than that of the player and director, since he may ignore the subsequently added contributions to his play (that of the director, player, costumer, etc.).

Still, again at the level of the play and its inner events, the information the professional-participants share, is much more appreciable than what real persons ordinarily share about their world, since the playwright has decided in advance how everything will work out. This is where his role becomes all-important, because it is he who grants the members of the audience, in their capacity of onlookers, of official eavesdroppers, a specific infor-

mation state relative to the inner events of the drama, and this state is necessarily different from his own and from that of various characters in the play (although one or more characters may be given the same information state as the audience, thus acquiring a bridging function).

Being part of an audience in a theatre obliges a spectator to act as if his own knowledge, as well as that of the characters, is partial. As onlooker, he acts as if he were ignorant of outcomes (even if he has read the play or seen it before). But this is not ordinary ignorance, since he does not make an ordinary effort to dispel it. On the contrary, he willingly seeks circumstances in which he can be temporarily deceived or at least kept in the dark (and thus transformed into collaborator in unreality). He therefore actively cooperates in sustaining this playful unknowingness.

Those who have already read or seen the play carry this cooperativeness one step further and put themselves as much as possible back into a state of ignorance. This is the ultimate triumph of onlooker over theatregoer.

Together, the participants in a theatrical interaction contribute to a single, overall *definition of the situation*, which involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists, but a real agreement as to whose claims will be temporarily honoured.

More often than not, the playwright's claims (formulated as script) are the ones to be obeyed in the first place, but let us not forget that in Southern's view of the *Seven Ages of the Theatre*, the script only appeared in the second one, therefore leaving the player as initiator of the theatrical performance all over the first stage (not necessarily a historical one), when the interaction only included two main participants: player and audience.

On the other hand, more recent experiments in the art of theatre, tend to over-emphasize the director's role, who is given wide powers of influence over both player and written text, the latter being sometimes even overlooked or considered a mere scenario starting from which improvisation is possible.

Ideally, real agreement will also exist concerning the desirability of avoiding an open conflict of definitions of the situation, which might destroy the unity of the artistic product or even break the

interaction. A “*working consensus*”, an interactional *modus vivendi* is usually reached by the numerous participants, including player and director, who have the task to translate the playwright’s definition into terms meaningful to the audience.

If it is generally true that the audience-participant is the one which adjusts to the playwright’s claims, it is not less true that the latter’s activity is dependent on the audience’s thoughts and feelings, not only as target of his play, but also as materials from which he has to fashion his drama (to the extent to which drama is basically concerned with people).

Hence, the playwright will have to take into account the changing interests and sensibilities of his audience and at least adjust his strategies and techniques to them, if not try to devise new ones.

In noting the tendency for a participant to accept the definitional claims made by the others present, we can appreciate the crucial importance of the information that the individual initially possesses or acquires concerning his fellow participants, for it is on the basis of this initial information that the individual starts to build up lines of responsive action.

Thus, the *initial information state* should be shared by all the participants, including the audience, for a performance to obtain an adequate response. J. L. Styan, in *The Elements of Drama*, gives an example of failure to provoke complete participation, when speaking of the existentialist drama, which sometimes solicits a view of the issue based on a thesis outside the audience’s own experience⁴. Paradoxically, a play like Sartre’s *Les Mains Sales* seems to have succeeded for the wrong reasons.

As the interaction among the participants progresses, additions and modifications in this initial information state will of course occur, but it is essential that these later developments be related without contradiction to, and even build up from the initial positions taken by the several participants.

Given the fact that the individual effectively projects a definition of the situation when he enters the presence of others, we can assume that events may occur within the interaction which contradict or otherwise throw doubt on this projection. We do not refer here to that element of the unexpected which creates a ten-

sion or “suspense” (of external events or inner states of mind) all great drama has welcomed, but to those new, unfamiliar rules of the contract, which are introduced by one of the professional-participants, but which are not always obeyed or taken into account by the audience.

An audience usually resists what it does not understand. It does wish to encounter novel experiences, but it wants the new to be presented in recognizable terms.

If not readily understood, the new rules are likely to be replaced, the audience tends to apply the older ones. Hence, phenomena of rejection and refusal to participate. The participants find themselves lodged in an interaction for which the situation has been wrongly defined and is now no longer defined.

At such moments, as in any other interaction, the individual whose presentation has been discredited, may feel ashamed, while the others feel hostile, and all participants may feel ill at ease, non-plussed, embarrassed, out of countenance. As, for instance, when a spectator goes to see Ionesco’s *The Bald Soprano*, and expects to be introduced into a familiar, domestic universe (like the one in Chekhov’s *Three Sisters*) and to be able to identify with understandable, life-like characters.

Definitional disruptions are avoided by what Goffman calls “preventive practices” and “corrective practices”.

When the individual employs these strategies to protect his own projections, we refer to them as “*defensive practices*”. They are characteristic of the playwright.

When they are employed by the individual to save the definition of the situation projected by another, we speak of “*projective practices*” which are characteristic of the other professional participants (director, player, scene and lighting designer, costumer, etc.).

Both type of practices comprise techniques employed to safeguard the impression made on the individual during his presence (in person-player, or by intermediary-playwright and director) before the others, notwithstanding the fact that few impressions could survive, if those who received the impression did not exert tact in their reception of it.

In addition to the fact that precautions are taken to prevent disruption of projected definitions, an intense interest in these disruptions comes to play a sig-

nificant role in maintaining the interaction alive. Sometimes, a reaction of uneasiness and uncertainty in the spectator is deliberately sought for and provoked by one of the other participants (as, for instance, in Absurd Drama) but then it becomes part of the contract.

Thus, we may conclude that when a theatrical interaction takes place, one group of participants (professionals) will have many motives for trying to control the impression they convey of the situation.

This paper is concerned with some of the common techniques or conventions (defensive as well as protective practices) employed by the professional participant (especially the playwright) to create and sustain such impressions, since, as has been repeatedly shown in dramatic criticism, failure of communication in theatre affects primary dramatic value.

While enlarging upon the various defensive and protective practices (also spoken of as "signals", "ingredients", "conventions" or "techniques") used by the professional participant to approach his audience, therefore, to obtain an active associate in the interaction initiated, we should bear in mind the fact that this is by no means a unilateral effort; on the contrary, the audience usually meets the artist half-way in his endeavour, thus assuming, if not a creative role, at least one of perfect *experiencer* (for which purpose, in its turn it makes use of various methods, besides trying to observe those suggested by the other participants). As he sits in the auditorium, the spectator willingly adjusts his eyes and ears to receive the multiple impressions, each having been carefully prepared and transmitted at the right moment. Thus, the spectator has to re-experience the situation in order to respond, and the response in turn is an experience. His own intelligence and quality of feeling lend meaning to the action onstage, while in the good performance, the action leads his intelligence and develops the quality of his feeling.

The fact should also be taken into account that these signs for movement and speech, stillness and silence, mood and tone, have a *twofold function*: they are not only the professional participant's *means of reaching the spectator*, but at the same time *means of realizing his dra-*

matic idea (meaning). He must decide how he may transform his ideas into relevantly dramatic sights and sounds, which will communicate his point to the spectator as efficiently as possible.

But one of the characteristic features of the art of theatre is that it unites imaginary and physical presence. It cannot, therefore, be reduced to either physical contact or to concept. That is why the audience must simultaneously receive sensorial and spiritual stimuli for genuine participation, hence true dramatic experience, to be achieved.

These stimuli make up a highly complicated *system* of shifting relationships and interdependent elements, resulting from the combined contributions of the various professional participants at the level of each and every theatrical performance. It is, therefore, extremely difficult and hazardous, even if tempting, to try and tackle them apart, out of the system which confers their meaning, especially since many are characteristic of some specific period in the history of theatre. That is why the following brief considerations are a mere attempt to detect some of those conventions and techniques that have perhaps best resisted the "whips and scorns of time", and which, even if given up in contemporary theatre, have left their mark on its development as an art. It is just a birds'-eye-view of the matter, which leaves wide space for further research and merely endeavours to round up the model adopted.

A few general remarks are probably needed before proceeding with the presentation.

Mention should be made, in the first place, of the fact that, as shown above, most of these techniques are subject to change in time, which, in our opinion, makes the diachronic approach necessary and perhaps more relevant.

Beside change, another frequent phenomenon with theatrical conventions is that of adaptation, in the sense that many of them are re-activated under another guise and adapted to the requirements of the epoch. (As we can see, theatre most directly responds to social change: one more reason to believe it is the most social of the arts).

In the third place, some of these means, which can be at work at the same time during a performance, are characteristic

of theatre, but most of them seem to belong to painting and sculpture, dance and music, poetry and the novel. Thus, J. L. Styan even distinguishes between what he calls the *visual elements* (such as costume and mask, décor, setting, colour, light and shade, gesture, grouping, mime and movement) — borrowed from painting, sculpture and dance, and the so-called *aural elements* (such as tempo, sounds, tones, song, speech, character and narrative) — borrowed from music, poetry and the novel.

This is not to say that theatre is an art less pure than the others: for in its very complexity lies much of the theatre's strength. Its varied appeals combine in one art product the charms of all the other arts, but in a new and distinctive form.

1) *Defensive Practices*. They were previously defined as strategies or techniques employed mostly by the playwright to protect his own projections. Still, we should be aware of the fact that many of the protective practices which will be tackled later may also be spoken of as defensive practices (and the other way round) when one or the other professional participants undertakes to give a personal definition of the situation or to modify the one projected by the playwright in the stage directions or otherwise as script, instead of trying to convey it as efficiently as possible. (This is what happens with certain contemporary stage directors who tend to become the initiators of the interaction).

The good playwright has to make an ideal choice and arrangement of signals imaginatively conceived in terms of particular space and time. He exactly controls the kind and intensity of the spectator's interest in the details of character and event on the stage.

The development of *character* and the pattern of *plot* and *action* appear, therefore, to be two of the playwright's chief means of working on the spectator's mind and feelings. Because both belong to the most well-known conventions of the dramatic genre, we shall not enlarge upon them.

Still, as far as *character* is concerned, it is important to note that there is always a tacit agreement between dramatist and audience about how much make-believe is allowable, since no character can possibly be wholly real, but drama is essen-

tially about human beings. For, if the poet can speak in his own voice, the playwright must always split his mind into two or more minds, those of his characters. The transformation of character from the Greek heroic archetypes, to Beckett's disintegrating "puppets", passing through the complex Elizabethan personages and the life-like, ordinary people in modern naturalistic drama, offers perhaps the best example of changing dramatic convention, but it is, at the same time, a perfect illustration of the way in which the playwright can differently use this device according to his needs: to achieve the public's reverence for his subject (Greek superhuman figures), to teach them a lesson (mediaeval morality symbols), to satirize their morals (frivolous figures of the Restoration and 18th century comedy of manners) or to make them feel at home (modern realistic characters).

In regard to *plot*, a distinction might be operated between the "well-made play" of the 19th century, interested only in the surface succession of events, which makes it necessary for the playwright to follow a set of rules to capture, sustain and satisfy the spectator's interest at this level only, and great drama of all times on the other, for which plot is but a means for achieving a greater end: dramatic meaning and idea. In the former case, the spectator's response is a simple one, for he remains an eavesdropper and does not undergo the experience himself. The plot, therefore, should not become an obsession in itself.

On the contrary, the playwright should control the spectator's response at all levels, by a precise orchestration of effects such as development and symbolism of character, pattern of action, words and voices, balance of moods and tones, juxtaposition of scenes.

The element which unites all these opposing means is, as Styan puts it, "*contrast*, the essence of good drama"⁵. This is a device which may really be most useful for the playwright when he wants to help the spectator measure one character, feeling or idea against another, or when he wants to catch his attention by asking him to judge each ironic effect or impression in relation to others.

But the playwright's main means of conveying an impression remains dramatic *dialogue*. Much of the appeal rests upon the feeling he wants the spectator to

hear in the voices of his players, as distinct from the meaning of their words. The playwright knows that he has, in the human voice, a most musical and flexible instrument. (Shaw, for instance, used to work his production script with musical terms, as a personal reminder of the contrast and variety he wanted from his performers). He carefully creates the speech of his characters and indeed whole scenes, with a musical ear, since the *musical variety* of dramatic dialogue is an essential part of its interest.

A prose dramatist ensures that character and situation are so precisely established that even a colloquial phrase has particularity.

A verse dramatist has the easier task, in that he can accurately reproduce in the movement of the verse the shifting of a mind. (Thus, the convention of poetic drama permits far more emotion on the surface and therefore more vocal music, than is possible in naturalistic drama).

Words put on the stage assume a complexity of their own, because they are words written to be acted, seen and heard. They must meet first in the playwright's mind, then in the player's person and voice, and finally in the minds of the audience.

Sometimes, a playwright may decide to influence his audience by directly addressing it. Interestingly enough, if the older forms of direct address, like the *chorus* (used in Greek drama), the *soliloqui* (which reached perfection in the Shakespearean plays) and the *aside* (strongest theatrical trick during the Restoration) are almost completely abandoned in 20th century drama (with all Eliot's chorus of the women in *Murder in the Cathedral*), other new such forms have been invented, even if they have not gained wide recognition as yet.

Some other old conventions on the other hand, like the mediaeval *symbols* and *allegories*, or even the *rhythms* and *imagery* of other forms of drama, have been replaced in modern drama by a vocabulary of perceptual speech (even if exceptions are still available). The playwright had to adjust to the modified patterns of thinking of his audience.

But the careful dramatist also determines the *sequence* of the signals to the audience and insists upon a precise *speed* at which they are to be transmitted and received.

In order to judge *tempo*, verse provides a strong guide, since the verse dramatist is free to use a striking vocal music to stress his intentions. The violent variation in tempo expresses the action on the stage, reveals the characters' feelings and controls the spectator's response.

It should be noted that pace and tempo may sometimes be transformed by director or player, in which case they become defensive practices of another kind (if completely altered) or modified protective practices (if only slightly altered).

Another of the playwright's defensive practices is his control of awareness of both characters and audience. As Bertrand Evans shows, he has three courses at choice⁶: to cause the audience to be less informed about the relevant facts (within the realm of the play) than the characters, to have it equally informed, and to give it more information. The first case is true for detective plays, the third about any kind of comedy. But even when the audience is given more information than is one (or more) of the characters, this knowledge must still be incomplete; for in the very degree that the focus shifts from what the audience is to discover, to what a character is to discover, the audience must be kept in ignorance of the response of the characters to eventual discovery.

2) *Protective Practices*. So far, we have maintained our discussion at the level of the script (or its realization within a performance as play) and we got a glimpse of how the playwright mixes all those different ingredients to build a unitary and self-reliant work of art, belonging as yet to the dramatic genre, but not to theatre as performing art.

His defensive practices appear to be quite a heterogeneous group until we notice that they are used to transform his ideas into relevantly dramatic signals, to organize his material into a significant pattern, his specific contribution to the interaction initiated.

For this system to become a real component of a theatrical interaction, it must suffer a second transformation and be rendered into four-dimensional signs in front of an audience, a performance must emerge.

Here, the professional participants other than playwright (stage director, scene and lighting designer, costumer, player, etc.)

are called into action. While performing their specific roles, they make use of protective practices, earlier defined as techniques employed to safeguard and help convey the definition of the situation projected by somebody else.

Under this category all visual and aural means of expression which help transmit an impression to the spectator may be included: the elements of *mime*, *movement* and *grouping* of players onstage; those added under the form of *mask*, *costume* or *make-up*; the player's *voices* as well as other sound and music effects, notwithstanding the highly suggestive quality of certain moments of *silence*; the *lights* and *colours* used, together with elements of *décor*; all presented in what we consider to be extremely relevant *physical surroundings*, which range from the mediaeval market-places to the Italian picture-frame stage.

It is certain that not all these means (and the techniques of using them) have appeared at a time. If we accept Southern's outlook of the theatrical act centered on player and audience, we may say that only those inherent to the player (like *mime* and *movement*) are indispensable for the interaction to take place, the others being probably added and integrated in it in the course of time.

Likewise, as with the defensive practices, the protective ones are also subject to change, in point of form as well as of emphasis laid on one or another of the possible ways of tackling an audience.

There will be times when elements of *mime*, purely visual notions provided by the player, are doing all the work; a gesture or a sudden cessation of gesture, the movement of one actor away from or towards another, a pace upstage or a pace downstage will hold the spectator's complete attention and tell him what he has to know.

But in all plays, one character set against another, or two set against three, the single figure downstage or the significant separation of a group of characters upstage (grouping) — such planning and composing of the stage picture (by director usually) must continuously change the image the active spectator is creating within his mind.

There will be times when the actor's *mask* or even his *make-up*, which after all is sometimes a form of mask, will illuminate the character the actor stands for.

His mask especially (one of the most, powerful elements of theatrical technique, accepted throughout the world as a symbol of theatre) will paradoxically disclose some very important aspect of the person's identity as a human being, or even invest the wearer with some supernatural quality, by hiding the player's face.

Perhaps his *costume*, the extension of his mask, its colour and its shape, will serve as a reminder of what he symbolizes, especially when it is set against, or is in harmony with other costumes on the stage or the general *décor* of the scene.

Perhaps the degree of brightness or shadow surrounding the actor will also assist in forming or intensifying an impression. This is true of the overall colour-tone of a scene (the colour of the lighting in conjunction with the colour of the *décor* and costuming).

For the most part, however, the voice of the actor, with all the delicate range of tone which the delicate human instrument can express, will be speaking to the audience in ways which range from the casual grunt and conversational idiom to the heightened artificiality of rhetorical poetry and lyrical song.

A rush of speech or a moment of complete silence can make its point just as can the introduction of *music* or other *sound effects*.

And when there are two or more voices to be heard, we may expect a *harmony* or a *counterpoint of tone* and meaning to contribute to the play's richness.

The functions of *settings* are manifold: firstly, they may be an aid in characterization, by pointing to social and psychological aspects (needed for individualization of character in naturalistic drama for instance) even if the psychological factors are also revealed through the spatial relationships among characters; secondly, they may help establish the level of probability, according to their realistic or abstract quality; and thirdly, they establish the mood and atmosphere of the performance, by giving clues about the relative seriousness of the action, and by providing the proper environment for tragedy or comedy, fantasy or realism.

The tentative model proposed is based mainly on 20th century theatre, attempting to be a useful working instrument

for a study of this century's theatrical realities. But while it does take into account the entire historical evolution of the idea of theatre as offspring of the European cultural background, it cannot apply to other nonetheless interesting forms (the Oriental ones, for example, the one-man show, etc.).

Going back to our previous statement that the physical surroundings play an important part in shaping the audience-performance relationship, we can say that, like any other social establishment, a "theatrical environment" might be any place surrounded by fixed barriers to perception, in which a particular kind of activity regularly takes place. (Notwithstanding the fact that the architectural outlook may vary from the huge open-air amphitheatre, to the indoor picture-frame stage or theatre-in-the-round).

Sociologists have suggested that any social establishment, therefore the theatrical one, too, may be studied profitably from the point of view of *impression management*.

We noticed that the "performers" (hitherto called professional participants), usually devise a whole system of intricately combined techniques and practices aimed to create and sustain a certain impression in the spectators' minds.

But the team of performers working together within the geographical boundaries of a "theatrical environment", also cooperate to present to an audience a given *definition of the situation*. This will include :

- the conception of the team (in terms of number of components ; specific contribution ; importance of specific contribution, for as we saw, the role of one of the participants may be enhanced at a certain time-period, like the playwright's during the 19th century, or the director's during this century).

- the conception of audience (though not our special concern here, the idea a performer has of the public to whom his artistic message is addressed, the restricted group sometimes selected as addressee as well as the audience's class membership, may have a great impact on the final outcome) ;

- the conception of "theatrical environment" (unlike in usual social intercourse, the stage-audience relationship is

all-important in the theatrical interaction, and a special concern with the professional participant).

As in social encounters, the key factor in the structure proposed by this paper, is the maintenance of a single definition of the situation, and this expression sustained in the face of a multitude of potential disruptions.

A tacit agreement is maintained between performers and audience to act as if a given degree of opposition and of accord existed between them. Typically, but not always, agreement is stressed and opposition is underplayed (not in "The Living Theatre" though, where the spectator is victim of verbal and even physical aggressions).

The resulting working consensus tends to be contradicted by the carefully controlled communication out of character conveyed by the performers while the audience is present (this is especially obvious in the trends towards "anti-illusion", which aim to keep the spectator detached from and aware of his own position).

Sometimes disruption occur through unmeant gestures (of players or spectators), thus discrediting or contradicting the definition of the situation that is being maintained.

We find that performers and audience, though for different reasons, will utilize techniques for saving the performance (and maintain the interaction alive) whether by :

- avoiding likely disruptions (the spectators' perfectly controlled attitude, their knowledge as to appropriate behaviour within a theatrical interaction, etc.) ;
- correcting for unavoided ones ;
- making it possible for others to do so.

These features and elements comprise the framework we claim to be characteristic of much theatrical interaction (seen as social intercourse), as it occurs in most typical theatres.

This framework is formal and abstract in the sense that it can be applied to any theatrical interaction ; it is not, however, a mere static pattern, for it bears upon dynamic issues created by the motivation to sustain a definition of the situation that has been projected before others.

Performers have two main ways of tackling their audience :

A. To give little conscious heed to the fact that impressions are being formed about them, but rather act without contrivance, enabling the spectator to receive valid impressions about their efforts to convey a message of ideas and feelings. And if they happen to give thought to the fact that they are being observed, they will not allow this to influence them unduly, content in the belief that the audience will obtain a correct impression and give them their due because of it.

Such performers use the proper means (defensive and protective practices) of influencing the way in which the spectator treats them.

B. The shorter and more efficient (from a certain viewpoint) way of influencing the spectator. Instead of letting an impression of their activity to arise as an incidental by-product (of their overall activity designed to convey meaning), they can reorient their frame of reference and devote all their efforts to the creation of desired impressions. Instead of attempting to achieve certain ends by acceptable means, they can attempt to render the impression that they are achieving certain ends by acceptable means.

This happens in certain trends in contemporary theatre, which tend to make of the spectator an active participant in the physical sense ; the difference in status between player and spectator is wiped away and theatre is thus a social activity altogether, losing much of its artistic qualities. Such performers make use of tricky techniques for want of more elaborate means of drawing the spectator into the interaction (like those used by great drama of all times, from Shakespeare, to Ibsen or Chekhov, to Beckett and Ionesco, or those employed by great stage directors like Meyerhold, Piscator, Grotowski, etc.). They feel the interaction initiated by them is in danger if they limit themselves to the "gentlemanly" means of influencing the spectator. They feel it necessary to band together (in the "Living Theatre", several contributors make the script) and directly manipulate the impression they

give (they provoke the spectator, they address him directly as theatregoer).

The observers become a performing team themselves and mix with the other (subject to subject relationship, like in the "Happening"). The whole of the interaction becomes *dramatized*, not just the staged action. Techniques (practices) do not have a twofold function, like in great drama : they are only intended to shock. This is a situation very similar to some social interactions occurring in everyday encounters.

In the above-mentioned example, theatre has really become a form of social activity — since all professional participants are solely intent on creating impressions and obtaining gains — and we are back where we started from.

But, in fact, our very first preliminary assumption was about theatre as an art form, as "a way of ordering, clarifying and understanding experience, of explaining outside reality by conveying a cultural message".

This message is missing in an extreme form of theatrical interaction like the "Happening" and this explains its ambiguous status (an art beyond the theatre — say some ; a strange phenomenon — maintain others).

This is, however, not very important in itself.

It only becomes interesting insofar as it helps us conclude that it is solely when these techniques are perfectly balanced in their aims that theatre achieves its true greatness.

Therefore, for theatre to deserve its name, defensive and protective practices must be both vehicles of meaning and effective stimuli for impressions to be created.

In this paper we only tackled the latter aspect of the problem. But it has hopefully led us to the right conclusion : that theatre cannot survive unless it encompasses both artistic and social activity patterns.

And another conclusion, less far-reaching but all the more useful : that the sociological perspective offers wide and rewarding area for research in the field of theatre.

¹ RICHARD SOUTHERN, *The Seven Ages of the Theatre*, London, 1962.

² ERVING GOFFMAN, *Frame Analysis*, Harmondsworth, 1971.

³ SUSANNE LANGER, *Feeling and Form, A Theory of Art*, 1953.

⁴ J. L. STYAN, *The Elements of Drama*, Cambridge, 1963.

⁵ J. L. STYAN, *The Dramatic Experience*, Cambridge, 1971.

⁶ BERTRAND EVANS, *Shakespeare's Comedies*, Oxford, 1963.

