The Audience: Subjectivity, Community and the Ethics of Listening

Alice Rayner

　　In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, the Player King accosts the uncertain duo "joyously," with the words, "an audience! Don't move" (21-22). In his monumental book on the audience, Herbert Blau begins with a quotation from Virginia Woolf, "No audience. No echo. That's part of one's death" (1). In his play, *Offending the Audience*, Peter Handke announces, "You are the topic. . . . You are the center. You are the occasion. You are the reasons why" (21). And in certain historical accounts, audiences are identified by dominant cultural ideas by such statements as Tillyard's: "orthodox doctrines of rebellion and of the monarch were shared by every section of the community" (64). If these uses of the word are at all indicative of the range of how "audience" is conventionally understood, they suggest how an audience is projected as a fixed point ("Don't move"), a dimension of self-reflection ("No echo. That's part of one's death"), a teleology ("the reasons why") and an orthodoxy. In semiotic terms, the audience is a sign for purpose (telos), a point of reception, an echo, an orthodoxy.

　　One of the first problems in trying to understand the word "audience" comes with the assumption that it signifies a collective version of a single consciousness rather than just the desire for such unity. The word "audience" often appears to function as an image of unity created out of diversity, as a kind of *e pluribus unum*: an aggregate of individuals that together constitute a larger yet still singular individuality, as though "the" audience has a collective consciousness that is analogous to a unified individual subject. Such an assumption disintegrates rather quickly under the pressure of both historical and deconstructive questions. The sign obviously, perhaps necessarily, conceals the differences that make each individual member unique not only by various classifications of race, nation, class or gender, familial, social, educational, linguistic and experiential histories but also by the particular position (literally and figuratively where one sits) in the configuration of an event. Neither can the word account for the temporal aspects of history: that audiences change over

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time, from moment to moment, night to night, epoch to epoch. And even when the word does not refer to a group of individuals, but to either another person or to the divided consciousness in which a self is "audience" to itself, similar differences are concealed or ignored. The sign "audience," in other words, does not necessarily or wholly conform to the practice of "audience."

In addition to the uses of the sign, one may consider "audience" as a word that implicitly locates the division between speaking and hearing, a division that applies as much to a supposedly singular subject as to a collective one.

> As soon as I speak, the words I have found (as soon as they are words) no longer belong to me, are originally *repeated* (Artaud desires a theater in which repetition is impossible. . . .) I must first hear myself. In soliloquy as in dialogue, to speak is to hear oneself. As soon as I am heard, as soon as I hear myself, the I who hears *itself*, who hears *me*, becomes the I who speaks and takes speech from the I who thinks that he speaks and is heard in his own name; . . . (177)

The "I" who speaks, in Derrida's formulation, is already an audience to itself, an audience that is comprised by division and difference. But understanding of what is said or written or seen is also, in Barbara Herrnstein Smith's view, radically contingent upon time, context and interest (as opposed to merely "subjectivity" or the divisions of signifier and signified) (11). That is, the division occurs within a context not only of history and circumstances but of intentions. The individual hears with varying capacities, from varying positions, from differing interests, from one moment to the next. Sometimes I hear you from my position as a woman, sometimes as a professor, sometimes as a mother, sometimes as bourgeois. My hearing depends on detailed differences or similarities: have I read the same books; have I heard this before; do I have an earache; do I see you or listen on the telephone; do I presume we are alike or different.[1] And sometimes and in varying degrees, I can choose the mode of my conscious listening.

From the pressure of such questions of differences and particularities, not to mention intentionalities, the very reality of an audience might seem to disintegrate. As a paradigm of community, moreover, the audience is already in the process of such disintegration. Whether explained through the deconstructive turn (Derrida), the logic of late capitalism, multinational economy, and the postmodern aesthetic (Jameson), the end of master narratives (Lyotard), the skepticism toward history by historiography (White), the era of mechanical reproduction (Benjamin), the displacement of the Real (Lacan), power coming from below (Foucault), or simply the Age of Aquarius, the audience and

community are dispersing. If there is a crisis in understanding "audience" it may well be only one more instance of the contemporary crisis arising from the critique of fixed points, self-reflexivity, teleology and ideology, a critique that seems to dismantle communities as it dismantles metaphysics. For the taxonomy of differences yields eventually to the radical particularity and plurality of every individual and thus dissolves the force of communal or collective reality as well as of intentions. Excessive emphasis on individual differences suggests the impossibility of using the term "audience" in any meaningful way as an instance of a community. While there are certainly modest uses of the word, "audience," uses that seem to make no assertions about an ontological status, the word's status as a noun gives it aspects of a substantive that, as Wittgenstein pointed out, "makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it" (1). To account for what an audience "is," to ask for the point of reference, is a difficult if not suspect project, since the referent does not operate, as Wittgenstein would have it, apart from the uses of the term. If it is impossible to make any assumptions about the status of either community or audience outside usage, however, we are left with either a pessimistic view that community and audience do not exist and that there is therefore no reality for individuals in a group, no force in social action, or the optimistic view that they can be endlessly created and recreated in an infinite play of language games, as Lyotard describes it in *The Postmodern Condition.*

The mystery of coherence, whose disintegration is either deplored or celebrated in postmodern politics and aesthetics, is a mystery of the collective noun. The focus of the collective noun upon the unified status of an audience tends to obscure both diversity and temporality, suggesting an ideal conformity between speaking and hearing, an ideal of simultaneity imagined by Heidegger.[2] On the other hand, the detailed specification of any single audience disintegrates the collective idea to infinite particularity. If the audience is accurately a collective noun, however, it is best understood as a multiple subject. The questions about audience, I think, need to turn away from ontology—what an audience or a community is—toward the listening function that would constitute the action of audience, an action that has historical and unconscious contexts as well as intentions. For it is that function, I might suggest, that comprises a means for bridging the deconstructed sign "audience" and ethical acts that produce social meanings in social encounters. The contradiction between the audience that is constructed linguistically, ideologically or ideally as a sign and the audience that actively listens may be irreconcilable. But that contradiction may itself be productive insofar as it identifies the differences that comprise the social world. The very division between speaking and hearing that Derrida has described above, that is, can be an ethically productive one precisely because it demands the recognition of difference and asks, at some point, for face-to-face

encounters. I want to suggest that the elements that constitute the constructed or reified subject of "audience"—its projection as a fixed point, or self-reflection, teleology and even orthodoxy—might also be resources for the ethical act of listening, even though the reification and the act of listening are as incompatible as an object and subjectivity: they are non-parallel events, contradictory conventions. Such a project is far beyond the scope of an essay, so what follows is really an exploratory gesture toward the problem. Audience is an instance of intersubjective relations with specific reference to the act of listening, and it is that act that is fundamentally ethical.

In this essay, I want to discuss the term audience as a model for intersubjective relations as opposed to a model for a unified community; to view the audience, that is, as a "boundary condition" in the act of understanding another and, as a result, of understanding the constitution and contradictions of its own differences. Audience is an occasion for asking the ethical question what to do at the boundaries of comprehension? How does the audience/listener operate in order to recognize an implicit context and historical past *and* to resist simply taking in received meanings that are already formulated? What can be done when hearing or seeing is not automatic, does not come out of common culture, language, race or gender, does not arise from a shared catastrophe? The model of multiple subject positions may allow that such multiplicity operates simultaneously, not in sequence, and it may suggest a way to discuss how the complex relations between subjects involves the engagement of history, desire and an intentional re-framing of meanings.

Let me look first at some possibilities in various constructions of an audience position. This part of the essay offers a hypothesis for how dramatic forms could be said to construct a position for an audience, whether by a mode of address, by aesthetic practices (such as darkening the theater), or by discursive practices. For convenience, I make these positions analogous to pronominal forms of a subject. In this section the point is not to describe audiences but to offer a system of differentials for noticing how an audience is constructed and to imply that it can occupy multiple positions in the same way that a pronominal subject can occupy various positions.

The break-up of the singular subject in contemporary critical and philosophical work, has created an ethical dilemma not only about how differences can be accommodated in social groups and communities, but about how to act in the context of such differences. The audience is an instance of such a dilemma. The second part of the essay is a proposal about what an audience might be said to need to do in order to account for and act upon its own multiplicity. Such needs appear most crucially at what I am calling the "boundaries" of comprehension, where what is seen or heard is not simply a

matter of self-recognition. The dissolution of the unitary subject does not eliminate ethical obligations: it puts them in the foreground. In terms of the audience, multiplicity furthermore points at meaning, understanding and community not as entities to recover and hold but as processes through which to create and develop values. The second part of the essay views the audience from a hypothetical position of an open subject where it incurs the obligations of listening. These are obligations that come from a capacity for listening and that require the exercise of intentionality. From this view, the audience appears as an intentional opening for a speaker or performer and, thus, as a receptive space for which and from which social meanings emerge and circulate.

Like the syntax of the pronoun, the "audience" is a shifter, changing both in what body it designates and in what position: variously operating as an "I," a "you," an "it," "we" or "they." From the vantage point of the performer, Bert States has described these "pronominal modes" as the "self-expressive" (I); the "collaborative" (you); and the "representational" (he/it that constitutes character) (160). The audience might also be said to operate in these modes. It functions as an "I" (and an eye and an ear) with a view toward the object, maintaining a subject/object relation; a "you" as a collaborator with performer and in recognition of the differences of the other; an "it" or "they" as the "telos" or "reason why;" and as "we" in a rhetorical but temporary assertion of a community identity. Hugh Duncan details further pronominal modes of address in terms of the specific publics: the "they" of the general public; the "we" of community guardians; "thou" of friends and confidants; the "me" of self-address; and the "it" of an ideal audience (81). I am limiting my discussion to the "we, I, you, and it" largely to emphasize not the identity of the audience but the function of its positions.

The first person singular identifies the unity of an audience in a spatial rather than auditory mode, as though grammar might reflect the development of single-point perspective in stage design. The convenient, if spurious, pun correlates, in English, ego and identity with vision, the "eye," and the position of the voyeur. In the first person, the audience could be said to operate in the mode of a desiring subject. For the "I," it is the subject's desire and experience that matters. The "I" subject takes in, feels, experiences, responds and sees and hears the performer as an extension of herself and as existing *for* herself, as a mirror that constitutes an imaginary unity. In many ways, it is in the position of a source of desire and demand for the other as articulated in psychoanalytic theory. As Jean Laplanche and J-B. Pontalis put it:

> Desire appears in the rift which separates need and demand . . . it
> seeks to impose itself without taking into account the language and the
> unconscious of the other. . . . (483)

The other is an *image* which serves the self-constitution of the "I" as a subject
and turns the performer and performance into a kind of mirror. The "I"
recognizes the speaker only as an image, without acknowledging that the speaker
has an independent language, consciousness and unconscious. It is the aspect that
harbors the belief that the performance is indeed a "mirror up to nature," which
is a mirror of the self, both individual and collective. The "I" identifies with the
performer (or object) as in Lacan's mirror stage (1-7). It is a consuming position
that takes in the performer as though inseparable from the personal and
individualized desiring demands of the audience-subject. The "I" is possessive,
concerned for the other primarily as an occasion for its own singular stimulation
and self-recognition. It is a position that demands self-similarity or identification
with the other for its expressive possibilities and its mirroring capacities. The "I"
sees itself reflected in the image of the other with all the attachments of desire
and fear, with needs for self-similarity, with fear of difference.

It is this position of the subject that has been most fully examined by the
convergence of narrative, Marxist, feminist and psychoanalytic theory, particularly
in relation to film.[3] The particular constitution of filmic narrative, not unlike the
literary narrative, almost requires a notion of audience as a singular Subject,
operating both in isolation from a community and as an object of cultural
production or psychoanalytic "abjection"—a subject divided against itself by
language and the domain of the Symbolic. And certain forms of theatre no
doubt elicit such complications in the determination of an audience as an
"I"/Subject. As theorists from Althusser to Adorno have asserted, the form of
representation itself tends to presume and establish the criteria for "who" can hear
and for "how" the subjectivity of the audience is constituted. The theaters that
designed their stage pictures for the single perspective of the monarch are
evidence that such subject positions can have concrete, institutional occurrences.

But even the more democratic forms of realism on the stage, which allow
for multiple perspectives, reiterate the unity of a viewing public/subject. The
naturalistic or realistic stage picture, for example, like the realistic actor who
attempts to disappear into a role, asks the audience both to sit outside the stage
picture and to identify with the world and characters of the play. The realistic
stage pretends to ignore the fact that it has invited an audience to see and hear.
Yet realism tends to presume the psychological, if not monarchic, "I" or ego of
an audience and to turn that "I" into an "it," that views the stage from outside its
self-imposed "fourth wall." It asks, in Michael Fried's terms, for absorption

without attention to theatricality[4] and offers itself as an object of desire, an object for the "gaze," not wholly unlike a cinematic representation or realism in painting. Where single-point perspective brought the monarch into the center of the theatrical picture and made it part of the whole spectacle, realism ejected the audience from the scene yet allowed it to dominate from the dark. Through the processes of identification or absorption, the "subject" was at once on stage, in the light, and in the "consciousness" of the darkened house. Cast into the darkened space, the audience becomes the voyeur that is bound erotically to the image.

The constitution of a single, desiring subject in the theatrical event is in turn reflected in narrative form. The dominant historical form of realism in the well-made play of the nineteenth century, like the realistic novel of the same period, projects a structure that, in Peter Brooks's view, incites a certain excitation, plays with delay, and aims at the "quiescence" that shapes a sense of meaning. Through its formal characteristics, it plays with the desire of the audience as a means of involving, again in Brooks's view, the contradictions and dynamics of Freud's pleasure principle and beyond (97). The historical forms of realism thus tend both to assume and determine the position of the "I" or ego[5] as the model for social identity, and the audience as a collective version of such identity, created out of the gap between need and demand, forever unsatisfied by symbolic displacements, ever generating new desires and demands to be fulfilled. Apart from evidence of that narrative desire, however, the ideas of naturalism inherited from Zola perpetuate the combination of desire for and master over the visible and the invisible. The "slice of life" image of the realistic stage is offered as a datum of knowledge whose validity is confirmed by a cooperative pretense between the audience and performers who act as though they are not being observed.

But the realist stage picture and narrative in the theatre are fundamentally different from film and the subjectivity they engage. As Christian Metz and Kaja Silverman have indicated, film is constituted by a "particular absence." Because the spectator and the actor are never in the same place at the same time, cinema is the story of missed encounters, of the "'failure to meet of the voyeur and the exhibitionist whose approaches no longer coincide'" (3). The theatre, as is obvious, is a site for the meeting of individuals and persons within whatever imaginary constitution of the Subject there may be. For even in the dark, individuals are meeting as a collective and are taking part in a social ritual. The ritual dimension, that is, cannot be entirely eliminated. The meeting place thus allows for other "pronominal" encounters: the we, the it and the you.

The first person plural is the position of the collective community, the position of community ritual. It situates the commonality of the speaking/hearing

enterprise. In certain kinds of theatre, however, the "we" might also serve to identify the experiential *sensation* of community in a fusion of identities. Antonin Artaud, for example asked for theatre to absorb differences. He wants to:

> . . . abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind. . . . a direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it. (96)

For Artaud, the distinction between first and second person is dissolved into an unrepeatable, virtually unutterable "we." He asks for fusion within the matrix of the catastrophe of human existence itself, in a space like "certain churches" where the performative gesture is unique and unmediated and the gap between representation and apprehension is non-existent. The performer and audience are one, with differences dissolved, jointly participating in the ritual form. Ritual participation subsumes subjects and distinctive subjectivity in a sensation of community that presents itself as beyond articulation. Meaning is imagined to occur not in representation as an object and not deferred to a later time or place but in a simultaneity of a temporal and spatial present. And meaning is neither a referent nor a *vouloir dire* but *dire* itself, a total gesture, a hieroglyph, a facticity.

If Artaud supplies an extreme example of the first person plural as the pronoun of community, he illustrates also the idealization of community as a total identity in a total co-presence. There is a certain objective reality to that co-presence in any theatre event that joins many people in the same space at the same time. Artaud's premise for the Theatre of Cruelty is that the theatre can create a "we" as a fusion of identities in communion with elemental forces. In practice, however, Artaud's theatre is found to be impossible, and one often finds a sense of despair in those who attempt and fail to implement it. Levinas makes an important point about the problem:

> But if communication bears the mark of failure or inauthenticity in this way, it is because it is sought as a fusion. One begins with the idea that duality must be transformed into unity, and that social relations must culminate in communion. . . . It is the last vestige of idealism. The breakdown of communication is the breakdown of knowledge. One does not see that the success of knowledge would precisely

> abolish the proximity of the Other. A proximity that, far from
> meaning less than identification, precisely opens up the horizons of
> social existence, making the whole surplus of our experience of
> friendship and love burst forth, and introducing the definitive quality
> of our identical existence to all the non-definitive possibilities. (164)

If the "we" is supposed to refer to an already existing community, the meaning
that "we" apprehend is already closed to possibilities for further meaning. The
proximity of the Other as opposed to identification with it opens up to "non-
definitive possibilities" that releases a future for meanings that are yet to be
known.

In contrast to an experiential sensation of the fusion of identities, "we" can
also be considered rhetorically, such that if offers an invitation to join in a
collective enterprise directed toward a community that is yet-to-be. The "we"
may of course designate a specific group, the "we" that are in the same room at
the same time; it may likewise be a defining term, marking off an "us" versus
"them" boundary for community and serving obvious ideological purposes. But
it does not necessarily insist on prior self-similarity between members of a group,
however much a presumption of identity inhabits the word. Rather, as a
rhetorical invitation, it recognizes the joining together of multiple individuals as
another possible dimension for human action in which the group has more force
than the individual. If this requires a suspension of myriad individual differences,
it does not eliminate them.

"We" can be articulated not by a presumption of *a priori* similarity but by
a perception of what could be called common "catastrophe." Such catastrophe—a
notion coming from the ancient Greek sense of a "turning" of events that
underlies the idea of drama—could equally be a dramatic performance, a disaster
like earthquake, flood or fire, or even the catastrophe of a common gender or
ethnic group that "turns" or is turned from the mainstream or dominant culture.
The assertion of a "we" arises from some sense of occasion and is thus a
temporal idea of group. It combines, that is, the participatory with the discursive.
If Artaud's "we" is unutterable it is because he sought to eliminate the discursive
dimension that offers an invitation and replaced it with a kind of coercive demand
for total participation instead. The rhetorical use allows for already existing
differences between members of a common enterprise.

Catastrophe creates the space for a shared if not identical experience. "We"
does not necessarily imply a collective consciousness or universality as a prior
reality insofar as it is a rhetorical invitation that may be refused. For groups
themselves are continuously constituted and reconstituted according to interest or
catastrophe. Individuals join with "identity" groups to a great extent because such

identities have an interest in new or future social order. That interest may well be in the attempt to "recover" some idea of social, ethnic, or religious identity in the face of the more dominant culture. But in the most general sense, a statement of "we" is a statement of interest and an invitation to join in that interest.

> An individual will say that "we experienced certain events, suffered this or that humiliation or outrage, even though he or she as an individual had no such experience directly. Furthermore, and significantly for our purposes, the *we* with whose experience the individual identifies can both pre-date and survive the individuals that make it up. . . . And the individual may join in a group united by a project already underway, as in Husserl's example of the continuity of science. In this case, the *we* survives and succeeds the individual as well; indeed in one sense the accomplishment of its common objective ("the full truth") lies in the indefinite or even infinitely distant future. (133-134)

The point is that "we" is perhaps the most radical "shifter" of English grammar because, as in set theory, groups themselves are so variable, the parameters so changeable. In this sense, "we" is the emptiest grammatical form because it is so emphatically rhetorical and available to so many redescriptions and so many temporalities. It takes into account the fact of multiple individuals, but that fact must continually be defined and redefined, formed and reformed over time: it cannot unequivocally refer to a stable identity.

In the third person, both singular and plural, the audience is seen from the vantage point that is imagined outside relations, seeing the audience as an object. It is the point at which the "I" of the audience is converted into a thing. The "it" position presupposes that the audience is a stable entity that has discrete and identifiable beliefs and responses, like an object with attributes and qualities. This person is most commonly used by statisticians or historians to designate a fixed point for the reception of a performance work. It is both abstract and to some extent idealized precisely because it assumes stability and turns a complex relation into a simple one. As an object, the audience becomes available to any ideological, historical or interpretive description. It is also susceptible to a transference by the historian, critic, or statistician from the "I" person, as though the personal, individual experience could become authorized or validated by being described as a stable object.

The designation of the audience in the third person alone, as in "it thinks, it feels, or it believes," (or even, "every member of the community," as Tillyard says above) excludes both the first and second person: the desiring "I," the

communal "we," and the relational "you." By referring to an audience as an historical "it" or "they" (and by not separating orthodoxy (it) from those individuals who may or may not hold to it) the historian turns an actual group of individuals into an orthodoxy that stands between a performance (which would include a text) and a contemporaneous reception, as though that orthodox intermediary were the whole source of true meanings for a performance, and as though the historian too were not part of an audience of different people that extended through time in an on-going reception of the performance, accumulating further contexts and meanings. Such a statement reflects the desire for, if not the belief in, the single, univocal moment at which "an" audience receives the kind of stable meaning the historian may long for, but which is not available to the instability of history.

Yet, the "it" also identifies a cultural memory: the non-human residue of beliefs, orthodoxy, and values that go into creating an historical identity. The identifiably "inhuman" or impersonal "it" may usefully account for the dimensions of a cultural moment that are not of any individual's own making (what is already operating in culture). "It" can also account for the "impersonal" or abjected forces of desire that operate as though they are inhuman, contrary to consciousness, will, or intention. The audience can be designated as an "it" in the sense that "it" identifies that which exceeds the personal, the individual. In some sense, the "it" positions the audience as a product of the stories of history, whether it knows those stories or not. The audience "is" the "it" that might be called the historical unconscious. At the same time, "real" audiences (like the body-unconscious) will also continually "exceed" the status of "it" because "it" conceals not only constitutional differences within real audiences and the shifting contexts of their occurrences but the openness of subjectivity and intentionality.

In the second person, you, the audience might be understood as the object of address from the perspective of the performer. In this position it is also part of the constitution of a *relation* of subjects, in a relation of direct address. In the "you" position, the audience acknowledges the separate, distinct subjectivity of the performer not as a mirror but an alternative version of a subject: one that has its own language and unconscious. It recognizes what, in communicative ethics, is called the "intersubjectivity" of social beings and the possibility of face-to-face relations. When the audience is a "you" the performer is also a "you" and this relation recognizes a simultaneous subjectivity in which each subject is also an other. It is the ground of the dialogic relation between performer and audience. In some sense it is the rarest form because it demands a high degree of both self and other-directed consciousness that presumes both performer and audience are partners in dialogue.

The convention of the aside or direct address is one means for the performer to be explicit about its own relation and to engage the audience in an interplay of relations, not unlike what Gadamer in *Truth and Method* called the "to-and-fro" that constitutes play (94). The relationship of "yous" could be said to be the dimension of play in which two parties are joined but distinct, functioning separately, even antagonistically, but cooperatively.

As a theatrical form that encourages this relation, Brecht's epic theatre is crucial. His political aesthetic refuses to enlist the identification with character and situation by the audience. Attempting to develop and articulate an acting technique that created a gap between actor and role, Brecht describes the attitude that, on the part of the actor, supposedly makes identification with character/actor impossible.[6] In that aesthetic, which is determinedly ethical, performance is seen as a set of choices among possible choices. The actor/character is not an object for desire and the gaze but is a "you" that is engaged in choice and invites rational, or at least conscious, apprehension, not unconscious identification. Narrative is not a mechanism of desire but an intervention in the representation that posits, as Paul Hernadi noticed, "the author's mask as the actor's face." (133) The interventions and disruptions that constitute the "epic" form furthermore ask for a recognition of historical specificity instead of universal notions of the "human condition." The form serves as a critique of totalizing or universal narrative and identity and makes narrative an occasion for debate. It insists on a relation of "you" in which each you—in the co-presence of audience individuals (not Subjects) and actors—is distinctly other, engaged in the politics of otherness as a negotiation between needs (not desires) and limitations (of both resources and understanding). It points to what Iris Marion Young calls "the limits of one's understanding of others from their point of view."[7] The unknown is thus not an irretrievable absence or gap which symbols replace and displace, as in the Lacanian formula. It is more simply and more radically a limit to understanding, which as Levinas suggests, gives the other *proximity*. Yet at that limit is a suspension of the desire to fuse with the other.

With Brecht's insistence on making the theatrical apparatus visible, he asks not just that an audience refuse absorption into the representation or that, like other modernists, the medium be made apparent, but that the audience see the ruptures in identification or fusion of subject with object. He asks that choices be made apparent. In the theatre, particularly with the fundamental materiality of the visible and auditory, of bodies and speech, externality is the site for political negotiations, which are less a matter of knowledge than of choice and judgement. As Lyotard puts it in *The Postmodern Condition*:

> . . . The executory, what should be done, is not within the purview of
> positive knowledge. It is one thing for an undertaking to be possible
> and another for it to be just. Knowledge is no longer the subject, but
> in the service of the subject: its only legitimacy (though it is
> formidable) is the fact that it allows morality to become reality. (36)

The relation of "second persons," in short, is not only a site for differences but
a mechanism for the dynamics of political and ethical activity. In his essay, "The
Other in Proust," Levinas says that

> The story of Albertine is the account of the way the inner life looms
> forth from an insatiable curiosity about the alterity of the Other that is
> both empty and inexhaustible. To know what Albertine does, what
> Albertine is, is of no interest in itself as a form of knowledge, but is
> infinitely exciting because of its fundamental strangeness in Albertine,
> this strangeness which mocks knowledge. (163)

Levinas is interested in pointing at the engagement that occurs because of the
strangeness of externality, of strangeness and difference, and the attraction toward
the "alterity of the Other." The otherness of the Other is not itself a datum for
knowledge but a condition for interest and for dialogue. And this is furthermore
the condition of social being as distinct from some idea of essential Being. In
this formulation the desire of the subject "I" transforms into "curiosity" toward
the "you."

In each of the pronominal positions discussed above, audience is conceived
as a form of address, in which the form of a representation determines in part the
position of the audience. But to leave the issue there presumes first that there is
no overlap in positions—that an audience and its individual members are either
in one position or another—and second that the audience is helpless in the face
of the representation—that it has no autonomy and no choice and is doomed to
the "ideology of the aesthetic," in Terry Eagleton's phrase. It further presumes
that the audience is still a "thing" that is determined by the
speaker/playwright/performer. Even Brecht, who claimed to ask the audience for
an ethical distance from the representation, who wanted to give it the autonomy
to judge, assumed it was his task to "create" a new kind of audience. This is
what Marxist critics have been saying for some time: that the form and history
of a particular kind of representation not only assumes a kind of audience—who
can hear—it goes a long way toward instituting or determining who can hear or
see a given representational form. Along with psychoanalytic views, these critics
have contributed to understanding the ways in which the subject is constituted by

language, ideology and otherness, by internalized self-division, by an inaccessible, unrecoverable origin, by an always already existing system of language and cultural institutions. But the exclusive focus on the subject, and by extension on the identity of audiences in terms of "who" can hear or see, reiterates the problems involved in assuming an audience is a "thing" with a specific set of identity criteria and determinate linguistic practice. In much of the analysis of the relationship between forms of representation and the subject is an implicit hypostasis of the relationship: the subject is bound and determined, in fetters to forms. That is, it would seem that the subject is so fully determined by its viewing, reading, or hearing of the forms of representation and the objects of its gaze, that only the liberation of forms will allow the liberation of the subject and subjectivity. This would appear to lie behind the articulated efforts of both Brecht and Artaud to change their audiences by changing the forms of representation and of Adorno to find in Beckett the means of breaking the hold of bourgeois morality over art (194). Those efforts have been crucial in responding to the Enlightenment doctrines of "free will," independent of history, culture and forms of representation.

While the analysis is crucial in understanding how representational forms do foster a specific constitution of a subject, the distinction and separation of subject and the action of subjectivity ignores the possibility of thinking and acting in opposition to the forms that would define and position the subject: as though a bourgeois could not be skeptical of bourgeois theatre; as though a Marxist could not get "absorbed" by *Mother Courage*; as though a participant in ritualized theatre ceased to think and ask questions of the ritual; as though a determinant form solved the indeterminacy of individual lives; or as though indeterminacy and multiplicity could negate the wish for coherence and certitude. I do not mean to restate some intentionalist doctrine of free will and absolute autonomy of the individual but to ask after the sources of opposition in the individual's capacity to oppose and criticize even the forms, culture and historical moment in which it is implicated.

In the gap between speaking and hearing, that is, there is not simply an absence but a context that includes history (the past) as well as desire to be heard and the desire to see and hear. "We, I, you, and it" are always within the context of both history and desire. In this context, what is heard is not the "person" or "subject" as much as the memory, desire and hope that emerge through the person. Perhaps the function of the audience is to hear both history and desire in the silence. The idea of audience suggests specific capacities to hear meaning in both the spoken and the unspoken: to hear the *vouloir dire* as much as the utterance. Those capacities, furthermore, may derive from the resources of desire, community, the relation of differences, and even the impersonal "it" of

objectification and orthodoxy, all of which may be put into play through intention. Such intention may not comprise the interplay itself because the player submits to the "to-and-fro" of the relational "game." Although a player *chooses* the game, as Gadamer indicates, it "cannot enjoy the freedom of playing himself out except by transforming the aims of his behaviour into mere tasks of the game" (96).

"I speak to those who understand," says the Watchman in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*. "But if they fail, I have forgotten everything" (36-37). He will not articulate the duplicity of Clytemnestra, but the audience must know the situation in order to understand. One performs, speaks and writes for those who can hear, listen, read, or those who have the capacity. If I do not know that the Watchman is not saying that Clytemnestra has taken a lover in the absence of her husband Agamemnon, he remains silent. If I do know that, his silence is eloquent. In another context, the capacity to hear is a condition of the ability to speak. As Hélène Cixous says for her Dora, "I'm not the one who is dumb. I am silenced by your inability to hear" (547). If I cannot hear Dora's desire, she remains silent, as she did to Freud. Speaking, Cixous says, is not possible without others who have such capacity to hear. With such capacity, even silence speaks. The readiness to hear difference, in this case, might be understood as an acceptance of the invitation to join, however temporarily, in a simultaneity of speaking and hearing, which is a game of community.

A similar problem occurs in the need to "hear" the meaning in an image. How is it possible to hear what an image "says"? An imaginary dialogue called "Speech Snapshot" by Lyotard, presumably asking about Charcot's photographs of hysterical women, begins: "Do these women have souls? What do they want?" "Ask them," says the interlocutor (129). In a parody of both Freud and Plato, Lyotard indicates the issues raised by a collision of image and dialectic, "speech and snapshot." Lyotard never mentions what photographs he is writing about, but I presume that they are the famous clinical images that portrayed patients in the bodily contortions symptomatic of hysteria. I infer a history as I read for possible meanings.

All of these examples concern the sources of the ability and willingness to hear meaning (or hear its deconstruction) as opposed to noise or empty silence. On what ground is the reciprocity and relationship between speaking and hearing established; is it a "ground" at all? What should the audience who does not know the story of Agamemnon do; what should Freud have done for Dora; what should the verbal and dialectic do with the image: it is a combined question of capacity and obligation in the relationship of subjects as persons. What, in other words, is the obligation toward those I cannot immediately hear or see, with whom I do not share common language, a common medium or a common catastrophe? From

Gadamer's suggestion, it would seem that the answer is to enter the game of intersubjectivity whose "rules" would include multiple subject positions and would engage desires, memory (history), and differences.

Given the multiplicity of the audience as subject, might it not be appropriate to ask not *who* can hear, but *how* to hear, how to play? By what means is it possible to understand or hear the woman, the artist, the hysteric, or our own cultural schizophrenia? The Watchman implies that some prior knowledge is necessary; Cixous implies a simultaneity of speaking and hearing—that meaningful speech occurs simultaneously with the capacity of another to understand the language of desire. And Lyotard's dialogue suggests that meaning is developed by an opening to a "what else" or "what next." The incommensurable difference between image and speech is such a space. To hear the Watchman requires memory and history: a recollection of the story that has gone before. To hear Dora requires a recognition of the nature of *her* desire, not the desire imagined by Freud, as well as a recognition of his own desire. Such suspension would have involved an inversion of his assertive desire for mastery to a receptive one: a self-consciousness toward receiving; letting her own desire work within him and granting her a space to fill. And making such a space, Lyotard suggests, requires a reframing of one's own conceptual spaces not in the direction of a recovery of meanings but toward a creation of them.

While the audience is no doubt an instance of a process of the constitution of a subject, with its scopic drives, its relation to Other and others, its voyeuristic impulses, "odd, anonymous needs," as Herbert Blau discusses it, (1-49) the notion of "audience" also designates the act of listening. That act is invoked not by the framework of drive or desire but by the obligation of listening to another: by trying to hear the *vouloir dire* within the stated, not as a referential intention but as a desire to be heard as meaningful or as meaningfully breaking the conventional frames. The emphasis here is on the attempt and effort, not success or failure. Those obligations stand at the boundary between the instinctual drives within subject-constitution, described by psychoanalysis, and the cultural sphere in which the frameworks of meaning are negotiated: a boundary that is never clearly delineated.

It is perhaps a borderland more than a boundary between the capacity to hear and the obligation to listen to what one cannot immediately understand or comprehend.   And it leads to the *learning* of community—the story of Clytemnestra, the desires of Dora, the voice in the image—in the exchange of signs. In the idea of audience is the presumption of choice which involves an effort to recognize the otherness that occurs because people are exterior to each other, *in addition* to how they are also constituted by language, modes of production, ideology or the state apparatus. At the very least, such choice

involves a decision to recognize and become self-conscious toward the limitations of the subject's own "imaginary" version of self and other—a limitation that does not acquiesce to an unrecoverable past or an acquiescence to an unknowable, but takes that unknowable as a pre-condition within which action is still necessary and a confrontation with another inevitable.

Lyotard demonstrates the complications in the question of the dialogue mentioned earlier. In an effort to *read* the images of the hysterics, to hear what they are "saying," one interlocutor describes the images as a syntax: " . . . these bodily states were semantic elements and . . . they could be linked together by a syntax. One would then obtain sentences, regulated sequences, and, along with them, meaning" (129). The other interlocutor has already pointed out that to ask the initial questions of the images ("Do these women have souls? What do they want?") in the mode of the Platonic dialogue, "is only possible if the body has a soul." The question, in other words, presumes an idea of soul, a relation of difference between body and soul, and it seems to limit the possible answer to yes or no. But the dialogic investigation later shows a language in the images, a language that has "a relation to the bodily syntax (of traditional theatre or dance) like that of little elements of sound to composed music. John Cage says that he wants to let sounds be. These photos show what it is to let body-states be" (133).

The initial question that asks the images to enter the dialogue, in other words, is already coercive; it already presumes the form and content of a meaningful answer. The answer, perhaps, is "no; they do not have souls." But what then? Further in the brief dialogue, Lyotard also implies that one might simply let the images "be," outside the language or dialogue (don't even *ask* if they have souls). To just "let them be," however, seems to me to enforce the continued silence of the women in the hysterical image. The point is to ask what else there is to understand after the answer demanded by the question. The "let be" alternative is also another way of keeping the hysteric "meaningless." The ethical act for the audience or interlocutor, on the other hand, is to listen to the hysterical discourse or view the hysterical image with the hypotheses that it is not meaningless; the answer, "no, they do not have souls," is not a final answer.

The difficulty in dialectic, then, is to recognize the coercive force of questions and to remain open to an "impossible" answer that would constitute not-yet-determined possibilities, rather than only to reconstruct an already completed meaning. The obligation is to allow that the frames—or frequencies, in acoustical terms—of one's own questions may need adjustment in order to hear. Such adjustment allows for the possibility of learning something genuinely new, not just what one already knows. It allows for the possibility that the hysterical

postures are *both* a summation of prior meanings (history) and a communicative effort to open up *toward* meaning in a space of desire.

Imagine, for example, the implications in the idea, now largely archaic, "giving an audience." Certainly, contained in the phrase is the presumption that the giver has some kind of authority to grant or deny the request of the other. Contained in the phrase is also the idea of acting as an arbiter of the petition, and therefore as a kind of judge. But that judgement does not necessarily rely on the law or even cultural orthodoxy as the sole, mediating instrument: there is a difference between a court trial and giving an audience and the difference is precisely at the boundaries of order where cultural laws fail to apply.

To give audience implies a position from which to hear the meaning of the speaker by filtering the petitioner's intentions through the framework of the position as an "other." Listening is not simply auditory; it is a framing of the speech. That framing may certainly be partially determined by desire and capacities as well as by the form of the petitioner's representation. And while issues of law or custom may also inform that frame, the difference between serving as judge and giving an audience rests upon a fundamental premise that the audience is a "gift." Part of that gift is the hypothesis that the petitioner means something, even if it is to conceal forms of meaning. The auditor is in the position of both *being* an audience and *granting* an audience to. Audience, in this example, is something that is given, so that the "being" of the audience, what the audience *is*, is constituted by an act of giving: audience, in this perspective is not a thing or a person but an act.

To "hear" is an act of giving reception with the doubled awareness that the subjective person is also an object position. The apparent passivity of hearing or listening is thus altered to a positive act of "kindness" that already has a double consciousness. A singular consciousness only hears the petition as it affects a personal subjectivity, assimilating words into a grandiose or narcissistic identification of self and other. The sense of decision and obligation distinguishes my sense of audience function further by its implications for moral and ethical judgement as opposed to determinations of truth.[8]

The "giving" of audience sustains further meanings, in the sense of the commodification of meanings in the speaker/audience relation and in the "flow" of meanings between them. And this action implies an exchange not only of meaning but of the authority to grant the audience, as the speaker presents to an audience and the audience gives itself to speaker.[9] From these implications, the "audience" might simply identify a *turn* in the circulation of social meanings. The sense of the turn allows for the positionality (the *telos* or reason why) of audience. It also serves the sense in which the audience returns the speaker's language, in which it acts as a boundary for that language (like the far turn on

a race course), and at the same time it sets out the sense of play in the exchanges of speaking and listening, as each takes its turn.

The audience, in Lyotard's terms, "legitimates" the performance not through knowledge of fact and law but through the ability to donate to the performer both presence and judgement: this donation is an ethics of relation not simply of power over, for it returns the speaker to itself with a difference. The relation is perhaps clearest when the circumstances of speaking and listening are outside the normative frameworks of a performance, when the obligation to listen is obvious and the demand on the audience is greatest because meaning is not within a familiar frame. That this relation is "ethical" rather than "legalistic" or "metaphysical" has to do with being aware, along with the performer, of the joint venture in opening toward meaning, not recovering it.

Audiences can undoubtedly function only as consumers, but as such they are not fulfilling their obligation to the speakers or performers. The receptivity of the auditor is an obligation that demands a recognition of the simultaneous position of being both a "self" and an "other" in a relation, joined by the catastrophe of worldliness. This dual position gives a performance its status *as* a performance which is to be in relation to its "other" and to exist *for* an other, with multiple subject positions that provide an echo. This means that the performance is not a solipsistic event of self-expression but an event that has the characteristics of the very worldliness that comprises the fact of the world in which subjects are formed cooperatively and meaning is not closed on a pre-established referent but open to the "not-yet" and "non-definitive possibilities" allowed by what Levinas calls "proximity," which presumes a gap of differences and the possibilities of resistances.

When Virginia Woolf says, "No audience. No echo. That is part of one's death," she is indicating the need for a return (echo) of speech and gesture, a return that occurs in time as openness, not in a static image or closed meaning. The echo is life-giving because while it is rooted in a past, it is not fixed by the past. It returns the voice to the speaker, the same but different. Lyotard quotes Richard Foreman toward the end of "Speech Snapshot:"

> Most art is
> created by
> people trying to
> make their idea,
> emotion, thing-
> imagined, *be there*
> *more*. They re-
> inforce. I want

my imagined to be an
occasion wherein the not-imagined-by-me can be
there[10]

The echo of the not-yet-imagined by me enables the speaker/audience to be a productive pair that might usefully describe a paradigm for social relations. That relation has a past, like Clytemnestra's history, a presence of face-to-face relations, like the simultaneous hearing and speaking that Cixous's Dora needs, and a future of Foreman's "not yet," each giving force in the exchange. The folding, overlapping and disjunctions of these relations make "alterity" both "empty and inexhaustible." In fusion of identities, meaning is exhaustible, if not exhausted. The more complex relations between the "we, I, you and it," form the social dynamic in which the space of audience serves as a chamber for an echo that is also a conversation. The audience gives itself to the social game within the rules of improvisation, which is to say it intentionally submits to play with the known and unknown, in spaces of subjectivity and desire, with the productive differences between I, you, we and it.

Notes

1. The range of such social knowledge has been described by Berger and Luckmann as dependent upon not only "pragmatic competence" or "recipe knowledge," (42) but also on the "degrees of familiarity" on "structured relevances" as to interest and concern (45).

2. "The path of his [Heidegger's] thought starts from the juncture in which what is spoken is one and the same as what is heard; the juncture, in other words, is the coming-together in time and Being—the historical unity—of conversation itself, which sustains our Being-there (E 39)." Halliburton 82.

3. See especially the now "classical" works: Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: 1989); Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire* (Bloomington: 1987); Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: 1984); essays by Mary Ann Doane and Stephen Heath in *Explorations in Film Theory* ed. Ron Burnett (Bloomington: 1991); Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: 1988).

4. For a summation of the possible positions of a viewer, not auditor, see Michael Ann Holly, "Past Looking," *Critical Inquiry* 16 (Winter, 1990) 371-396.

5. Stephen Heath points out that in discussions of the Subject, the I is not identical to the ego, but my purpose in equating them is to indicate here that they are similarly positioned to "master" a situation. Stephen Heath, "The Turn of the Subject," in *Explorations in Film Theory* 31. A discussion of the tensions between the Lacanian subject and the "social subject" can be found in Fiske's *Television Culture*.

6. See especially, "A Dialogue about Acting," "The Question of Criteria for Judging Acting," "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," "The Street Scene," etc., in Willett, *Brecht on Theatre*.

7. The idealization of audience and community is coming into more question recently. Iris Marion Young points out, "The ideal of community . . . privileges unity over difference, immediacy over mediation, sympathy over recognition of the limits of one's understanding of others from their point of view" (Young 300). Lyotard also criticizes the idea of community as a fusion and a nostalgic ideal as "haunted by the paradisaic representation of a lost 'organic' society" (Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition* 15) with his description of the uses of language games.

8. " . . . reminiscent of the split introduced . . . between knowing and willing: it is a conflict between a language game made of denotations answerable only to the criterion of truth, and a language game governing ethical, social, and political practice that necessarily involves decisions and obligations, in other words, utterances expected to be just rather than true and which in the final analysis lie outside the realm of scientific knowledge. . . ." (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* 32-33)

9. I am grateful to a *JDTC* reader for suggesting these further implications in the idea of "granting" an audience.

10. Lyotard, "Speech Snapshot" 133, quoting from Richard Foreman, "Ontological-hysteric Manifesto 1" in *Plays and Manifestos* ed. Kate Davy (New York, 1976) 77.

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