Investigating The 'audience' In Theatre For Young Audiences: The Call For Artistic Educators

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INVESTIGATING THE ‘AUDIENCE’ IN THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES: THE CALL FOR ARTISTIC EDUCATORS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Theatre in the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term
2008
ABSTRACT

Theatre history provides little information on theatre audiences and how the concept of an audience has changed over time. Through the investigation of theatre history texts, theatre theorists' manifestos, and interviews with workers in the field of theatre for young audiences, this thesis outlines the theatre audience from the first performance to the present and examines how the history of the concept of “child” and young audiences has developed in recent years. Opposing views exist on the subject of how a child is perceived as well as the purpose and role of a theatre audience. In this thesis, I investigate the classical, romantic, realist, modern, and current theatre movements and how scholars and theorists have perceived or written about their audiences in an effort to cultivate an understanding of what an audience is today and how the concept of theatre etiquette has or has not changed throughout history in order to relate these findings to experiences of audiences today. I began this thesis with a general knowledge of “audience,” from a personal perspective as a performer and audience member. However, through my collected data, I find that audiences are valued in distinctive ways throughout various movements in theatre history. With this understanding, I wrote a short book to help young audience members to understand what the present conventions are as a theatre audience member.
I discovered that audience expectations have not changed drastically since the first theatrical events. However, young people have not always had the opportunity to attend the theatre as easily as they can today with school field trips and the outreach of theatre for young audience companies. I question in this thesis whether or not the modes of understanding a young audience in America are outdated. It is my belief that young audiences have much to offer theatre practitioners and, though young in age, are able to comprehend difficult and complex topics, finding truth and meaning through the communication of theatre. This thesis seeks the roots of audience behavior and how the concept has shifted and changed throughout time and, ultimately, how young people fit into America’s audience ideals.
This thesis is dedicated to young audiences across the globe coming to the theatre to experience magic, to learn more about who they are and what inspires them so that they can be the inspiration for tomorrow’s audience.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Megan Alrutz, for her continual support, guidance, and inspiration. To Vandy Wood and Terry Thaxton, I would like to thank you both for input and support throughout this thesis process. To the MFA in TYA class of 2008, thank you for always being present for me and for each other. And, finally, to Nick...for your encouragement, I can never thank you enough.
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INTRODUCTION

“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.”
I Corinthians 13:11

“Think of this moment. All that has ever been is in this moment; all that will be is in this moment. Both are meeting in one living flame, in this unique instant of time. This is drama; this is theatre—to be aware of the Now.”
Robert Edmond Jones

What is an audience? Is it a sounding board for actors who have rehearsed for an immense amount of time to express themselves? Is it a group of living, breathing organisms that give energy to other humans, creating a symbiotic relationship that cannot be broken? How does a young person experience theatre and should they be given special consideration concerning content, theatre rules, or the audience/performer relationship?

Audiences have been perceived and valued in various ways, from the utmost of importance to, as theorist Castelvetro considered them, an “ignorant multitude” (Carlson 48) that needs instruction. How the audience is appreciated or devalued by those in the theatre community often speaks to the time in which the art is created and the tensions created by the art itself.

When I first entered the theatre for young audiences field, my inspiration came from the tangible excitement I felt as an actor from the
audience. When performing for adult versus young audiences, I find there to be a visceral response from young people who shuffle when bored, laugh when pleased, cry when sad, and even reach out to touch the actors on the stage or vocally clue them in to where an evil villain is hiding. I wondered many things about this rapt audience. Are children ultimately more engaged in what is happening on stage than adults? And, if they are engaged, does that negate the need for any formal guidelines for theatre etiquette during a performance? Some theatre practitioners, when interviewed, responded that if the performance is engaging enough, the audience behavior should not be an issue. However, there is a matter of respecting the space in which the performance is taking place that can be addressed through introducing young people to rules of theatre etiquette, which most theatre for young audience companies have in some form on their pre-show worksheets for students and on their websites. The use of theatre etiquette at a young age may benefit later adult audiences in their ability to actively participate in a theatrical event.

Theatre is a tangible experience and can be transformational, especially to a young person. When beginning this thesis, I felt that one way to address the topic of theatre etiquette, other than a pre-performance visit to the classroom, was to write a short book that addresses some theatre audience etiquette conventions based on expressed desires from several major theatre for young audience companies. The lists of “Dos and Don’ts” of the
theatre that appear on most theatre websites and teacher study guides are often dull and may not translate to a young audience in a meaningful or exciting way. Instructors telling their students to be “completely still and quiet,” for example, could be a distinguishing factor between the students having a positive or negative theatre experience.

To decide which aspects of theatre etiquette might be most important for a young audience book, I studied how audiences behaved in the past and if any advancement has been made in audience study and control in modern theatrical performances. Through the examination of historical documents regarding audiences and their behavior in classical, romantic, realist, and modern eras, this research investigates how theorists and those in the theatre community have perceived audiences and their relationship with performers and other theatrical elements. The distance between performer and audience has significantly changed, therefore creating a new theatre experience for the audience. With the knowledge of how audiences throughout history have been understood, I began to see how young audiences fit and do not fit into the norms provided by scholars and theorists regarding audience behavior and expectations. Young audiences find it increasingly difficult to separate theatre from movie theatres where audiences can freely eat in their seats and the actors are projected onto a screen. In addition, youth often do not understand the difference between live theatre and watching television in their own home where they can talk
and leave the room if they desire to do so. Through this thesis, I hope to communicate the difference to young audiences between a live performance and a recorded one in a way that respects the nature and benefits of each art form today.

Prior to attending a live theatrical performance, it may be necessary for those attending to realize they are active participants in an once-in-a-lifetime event: audiences are witnesses of a performance that will never be the same. The knowledge of audiences from past eras and the ideologies by theatre and child theorists and philosophers ultimately informed my theatre etiquette book in style, content, and structure. Colorful, short, and humorous, the book “This Guy Goes to the Theatre” intends to value the young audience and their theatre experience in a way that aims to encourage a positive theatre experience for both the attending young person and those in the audience. The value that theatres place on their young audiences and providing a strong sense of what is needed and expected from them as an audience will potentially inform adult theatre audiences in years to come, creating not a feeling of conformity, but one of respect and appreciation of theatre as an art form.
“When you produce the greatest effect upon the audience...are you in your right mind? Are you not carried out of yourself?”

Socrates

When the first recorded theatre began in 5th Century B.C., the audience had a history of storytelling and drama and strong sense of justice and duty. Communities were built upon oral tradition, sharing heroic tales of mystery, romance, and empowerment. As the earliest documented performances, Greek and Roman theatre became the western world’s precedent for subsequent theatrical performances, with roots in the religious rituals between the people and their gods. The core of this form of theatrical worship led to festivals, such as the Dionysian festival, which brought throngs of people to the theatre in the early morning to watch day—and even week-long—productions, creating a communal celebration and contest, as playwrights competed to be named the audiences’ favorite. Though I have found no written accounts of an audience member’s specific reaction or feelings about theatre during this time, the records of attendance and duration of the theatre festivals suggests that theatre was not for entertainment only, but rather a cultural necessity. Aristotle, a leading scholar of Greek theatre and creator of the notion that all plays should observe the three unities of time, place, and action, felt that the audience
should go through a cathartic experience while in a theatre. He theorized in his work, *The Art of Poetry*, that:

> On the one hand the desire to ‘imitate or represent’ is instinctive in man from childhood; in fact one of man’s distinguishing marks is that he is the most mimetic of all animals, and it is through his mimetic activity that he first begins to learn. [...] Tragedy, then, is a representation (*mimesis*) of an action (*praxis*) that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language pleoriously and variously embellished suitably to the different parts of the play; in the form of actions directly presented, not narrated; with incidents arousing pity and fear in such a way as to accomplish a purgation (*katharsis*) of such emotions. (293, 296)

Aristotle suggests in this quote that humankind seeks theatre that propels them into a cathartic state. The use of theatre as a means cultivate human empathy is still prevalent and may even function in a higher state with young people who, according to Aristotle, are instinctively mimetic. Oral tradition, that influenced stories, written and theatrical, are still carried to present-day audiences and thus, are a part of our culture and world. Could young people today experience this same passion, catharsis, and history included in the theatre of the classical era? Plays are currently written about these same issues: love, politics, and the nature of woman fighting herself,
hoping to ultimately be the victor of her own life, her own time. In a live performance of these issues, history moves and breathes. There is relevance to young audiences in the possible effectiveness of theatrical performance increasing the knowledge of a larger world and the audience member’s place in history. In addition to this sense of place, the experience of viewing the production itself, specifically the theatre construction and audience seating, once unique to the Greeks and Romans, has become more prevalent than ever in American theatre practices. How classical audiences viewed etiquette and valued theatre could lend clues to how the audience should currently be respected.

Classical Architecture and Young Audience Impact

The word “theatre” itself comes from the Greek word *theatron* meaning “the seeing place.” Theatre architects during the Greek and Roman time periods considered how the audience would experience the theatrical event and designed amphitheatres that allowed for excellent auditory and visual perception. This seeing place was only important if the audience could see and understand what was being performed for them from a great distance. Masks often used during religious ceremonies were one solution, as well as formalized costumes. Masks were constructed with exaggerated features and largely opened mouths, and along with projecting the emotions of the
characters, they also helped to carry an actor’s voice to the last row of the theatre. The arena stage, where actors were required to face multiple sides of the audience and entrances built among audience seating, allowed not only a close proximity to the actors to the audience, but also, perhaps, a tangible connection with the story as the Greek chorus often spoke to the audience as the symbolic voice of the community. The close and communal nature of classical theatre forges a powerful relationship between actor/audience. The impact of this relationship resurfaces in the work of Antonin Artaud who used theatre in the round in the theatre of cruelty. This use of space, according to Lee A, Jacobus, a Professor Emeritus at the University of Connecticut, “robbed the audience of the comfort of watching a distant stage and pressed his actors into the space of the viewers” (Jacobus 5). After the use of the stage in this manner, other arena stages developed and have since flourished, allowing intimacy with the actors and central ideas and emotions of the production unavailable in other theatre spaces.

The use of multiple entrances through the theatre house and addressing the audience directly, have, in my experience performing for young audiences in Georgia, Florida, and Colorado, seemed effective tools of dramatic communication in performances for young audiences, and arguably for adult audiences as well. However, these dramatic elements of a production draw a young audience into the play in such a way that, should a member of the audience desire to reach out and touch a character, they could
do so. This hands-on approach to theatre could potentially be a fearsome experience for a young person who would prefer aesthetic distance, but the possibilities of an imagination soaring onto the stage in the wake of an actor running down an aisle during a performance is worth consideration.

Classical Audience Expectations—Towards a Poor Theatre

Theatres during the classical era were built on slopes overlooking the landscape with seating made out of wood, and later, stone. The first stone auditorium sat 14,000 to 17,000 people (Brockett 31) and, due to its popularity, a ticketing system was in place as well as an organization in seating that allowed first the wealthiest and those considered most important in the community to sit close to the actors, then seats arranged by specific family or tribal groups, and finally to “travelers and strangers to the town” (Jacobus 4). Free tickets were made available to the less fortunate in the form of Pericles’ “theoric fund” so that not only affluent members of the population could attend a theatrical event. This generosity is experienced in some theatres today with “pay what you can” or free nights available to the public. If theatre became more accessible financially, would it become once more a cultural necessity, as it was to the Greek and Roman audiences?

In the 1930s, Jerzy Grotowski, a Polish director and theorist, developed the notion of a “poor theatre” that attempted to strip away the
artificial lights, costumes, and spectacle of later theatre practices, and hearken back to the classical period, creating, as Eugenio Barba, a student of Grotowski who introduced the theorist to America in the 1960s, referred to it, a “modern secular ritual” (154). Grotowski felt the main connection should be between the actor and the spectator. This concept later influenced the happenings of the 60s and theatre in found spaces. I feel there is much to learn from classical theatre practices and the modern version found in Grotowski’s *Towards a Poor Theatre* in regards to Theatre for Young Audiences today. If it were possible to make theatre available to all young people by way of free or, at least, inexpensive field trip tickets, theatre in public places, or going into the schools, libraries, etc., then perhaps there is a way to make theatre part of this and the next generation’s ritual. Theatre could be a norm instead of a luxury. Classical audiences came together during festivals and theatrical events as a community and to share the cathartic experience with their fellow human. Do theatre festivals today bring about the same communal accord? If so, the importance of offering festival events and performances for young people could spark a new resurgence of interest in theatre for young audiences today.
Notes on Classical Audience Etiquette

The community attending the amphitheatres in Greece and Rome presented issues that exist today concerning theatre audience behavior, such as disrupting others and leaving during a performance. Audience members, according to my research, were allowed to freely enter and exit the space as well as eat and drink during performances. Oscar Brockett in the ninth edition of *The History of the Theatre*, writes that the “audience expressed its opinions noisily and at times hissed actors off the stage; tradition has it that Aeschylus once had to take refuge on the altar to escape the wrath of the spectators” (32). The inclusion of a chorus served not only to inform audience members of character history and comment on the play’s action, but also to conduct the audience in their reactions to the performance.

I discovered no specifics of young people attending performances and, as a result, cannot comment on how theatre for young audiences has developed from this time period. However, in the knowledge of the community-building properties theatre can provide, the nature of communion among these classical audiences is a personal inspiration to me. I feel that theatre still remains a way to create a sense of fellowship among audience members and, if a person experiences this at a young age, the possibilities of communication, empathy, and even catharsis may more readily develop in their future.
THE ROMANTIC AUDIENCE

“Now when I have a comedy to write
Six keys I use the laws to lock away;
Plautus and Terence banish from my sight
For fear of what these injured souls might say...
Since after all, it is the crowd who pays,
Why not content them when you write your plays?”

Lope de Vega

After the fall of Rome, much of the culture associated with the classical era faded, as a multitude of texts went unread by the majority. Drama remained part of the medieval life; however, it was now in conjunction with the formalized church. Performances were held inside the church until the development of pageant wagons that consisted of a moving line of short plays or scenes. The audience members either traveled along with them or the wagons rode past the audience. Religious dramas were the primary form of theatre during this era, but towards the end of the sixteenth century classical texts were once again read and studied, lending inspiration to a culture that was potentially stifled by the serious nature of theatre in the Dark Ages. Explorations were made not only in theatre, but also in the fields of science, literature, and art. Considering the passionate plays produced during this time by such playwrights as Lope de Vega, William Shakespeare, and Ben Jonson, as well as the Commedia Dell’ Arte work in Italy, it is apparent to me that the world was in need of a breath of life, which theatre provided for many who filled the theatre, loudly and boisterously.
In England, London became the permanent home of traveling theatrical troupes. Theatres were constructed with open roofs, patterned after inn yards, with a stage jutting out into an open space for the groundlings, where “as much as a third of the audience in these theatres stood in the yard, around three sides of the stage” (Brockett 131). Balconies sat above those in the yard for the higher-paying patrons, and those with the most nobility sat, at times, on the stage itself (Allensworth 10). These open-air theatres required that the troupes perform during the daylight hours, and, with the population growing at an enormous rate during these years, troupes had to develop ways to draw the audience into their own theatre. Posters, handbills, musical processions, and flags waving over the theatre space were ways in which the troupes drew their audience. When they arrived they were a “scene of much coarseness, vulgarity and tumult” (Blackadder 8). This determination of the audience’s behavior could be derived from biased sources that prefer a quieter, more discrete audience or they could be derived from a comparison of the audience of the Middle Ages, watching the performances from their church pew. Mayo Simon, playwright and author of *The Audience and the Playwright* argues that “Shakespeare’s audience did not see theatre as part of their religion, but they were a community. He used their common beliefs to make them laugh, cry, and look on with awe, and he sent them home—not cleansed—but satisfied” (213). This satisfaction to which Simon alludes is reminiscent of the catharsis desired for the audience by Aristotle. The audience of the Renaissance may have felt their “satisfaction” from the camaraderie of the crowd, eating and drinking freely, talking
together when the production was not holding their attention, or speaking back to an actor who was speaking directly to them in an aside (Barton 147). Though the chorus speaks to the audience in classical scripts, Elizabethan theatre introduced soliloquies and moments on stage when a lone actor confides his or her deepest secrets and emotions to the audience, almost as a friend. But, in a way, an audience is the actor’s friend, there to join in the journey of the character throughout the duration of the play. I find a shift from the classical era and certainly the Dark Ages, in the intimacy found in the words of the plays and the physical closeness of the audience members in the theatre house. The nobility and the common person could come to the theatre and find various elements in speech patterns and characters that related to their place in society. The mixture of class was found during Greek and Roman audiences also, but it seems that playwrights during this era discovered a new way to communicate, as the common and noble person’s verbiage and customs were brought to light on the stage. Specific attention to the members of the audience may have brought a new appreciation by the viewers, resulting in large amounts of people attending theatrical productions. Do plays today still speak so directly to the audience and, if not, are there elements of the Elizabethan theatre that could be applied to works created today? Actors speaking directly to the audience can be found in today’s plays, especially in the theatre for young audience genre. This connection between performer and audience links elements of Elizabethan theatre to theatre for young audiences in a way that could prove beneficial to today’s young audience playwrights.
The Role of Language

Without the use of intricate props or scenery, Shakespeare and other writers of the time used language to transport their audience to another world. Carl Allensworth, writer and educator states:

Prose was not up to the task; it was much to close to the everyday language of the people and hence carried no illusion at all [...] Marlowe and Shakespeare finally solved the problem through the use of blank verse [...] the most powerful and most flexible means of dramatic expression ever devised. (12)

Not only did this new way of communicating in blank verse help to add ten thousand new words to the English language in less than a century (Barton 115), but the melodic and familiar rhythm of blank verse perhaps aided the audience in what Samuel Taylor Coleridge termed the willing suspension of disbelief. In his notes on *The Tempest*, Coleridge writes that “in an interesting play, read or represented, we are brought up to this point, as far as it is requisite or desirable, gradually, by the art of the poet and the actors; and with the consent and positive aidence of our will. We *choose* to be deceived” (qtd. in Carlson 221). Whether or not deception is an active part of the theatre experience is certainly debatable. However, in order to fully immerse themselves in the world of a play, an audience might need to suspend their disbelief, though this idea is later disputed in the works of theorists such as Brecht and Artaud. During this time period, this could
have been particularly true, since many plays were set in imaginary lands with fantastical characters.

The audience, whether or not they were engaged in the production, had the reputation of “humming, hawking, whistling, hissing, stamping, knocking and clapping hands” that disturbed surrounding audience members. Actors were affected by the audiences’ noise as well, according to scholars studying the opening monologue from *Cleomenes*. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White say the speech “endeavors to coax and shame the unruly audience of aristocratic Beaux and vulgar groundlings into *keeping still* and *keeping quiet*, transforming them, precisely, into a deferential and receptive bourgeois audience” (84). Many performers might be thrilled to have an audience responsive enough to whistle and stomp their feet. However, the theatre etiquette during this time prescribed that the audience quietly watch the performance. In private theatre houses that catered to a more aristocratic audience, those attending were known for their polite and reserved manners.

As in the classical era, theatre architecture may have affected the target audience of the private theatres, and certainly informed later theatre construction. The private theatre spaces had seating for all audience members and, according to Iain Mackintosh in *Architecture, Actor, and Audience*, as developments in machinery and special effects occurred, architects, strove to “force the actor back behind the proscenium arch to create a picture frame of illusion appropriate to Romantic sensibilities and to the staging of spectacle” (26). This new aesthetic of
the actor within a “picture frame” and a focus on spectacle shifted theatre away from actors and playwrights drawing spectators in with their language to a theatre of devises, designers, and a new appreciation for theatre architecture, physically changing the shape of the audience and actor relationship. George Saunders in *Treatise on Theatres* states that during this time the “actors, instead of being so brought forwards, ought to be thrown back at a certain distance from the spectator’s eye and stand within the scenery of the stage, in order to be made a part of that pleasing illusion for which all dramatic exhibitions are calculated” (37). Theatre became a place geared for the audience’s visual and aural stimulation, not the emotional catharsis of Aristotle’s day, but a safer, more distanced experience. This shift begins a new era of theatre introducing distance and the “fourth wall.”

**Connections to Young Audience Performance**

While each theatre movement affects the next, there is a stark comparison to Elizabethan theatre and theatre for young audiences. The loud and large world captured in the theatrical work of this time is mirrored in many ways in the farcical nature of some theatre for young audience scripts and performances. The public theatres of the Romantic era encouraged a repartee with the theatre audience. By inviting the audience to communicate during the performance, actors hoped to connect to their viewer’s position in life and society. In much the same way, some performances for theatre for young audiences attempt to communicate not only to
the young people in their various stages of life and experience, but also to the adults in the audience on some level.

While the boisterous reactions from the audience might be exciting for some performers, the reactions encouraged from the groundlings strikes a difficult balance in comparison to a rowdy young audience. There is so much energy and excitement from a young audience when they find something funny or interesting that, at times, it is difficult to even speak over the group. Actively listening to the audience in this situation and writing scripts that include lines that are not vital to the story after a situation that may ensue a large reaction are two attempts to control the reactions of a young audience, methods that can be found in many of Shakespeare’s scripts as well. However, there is a struggle that exists in the idea of ‘controlling the audience’ since any reaction given by a young audience may be considered important and their enthusiasm and excitement from simply experiencing the theatrical event may be a viable reason for attending a performance at all. So, how can theatre both encourage reactions from a young audience and simultaneously ask them to “please listen” and “be polite to other audience members?” This question does not have an easy answer, but relates to the give and take found in Elizabethan theatre between actor/audience, and also well-written scripts that guide the audience through their reactions, providing clues in the script of when to let the audience enjoy the moment on stage and when to push through to get to the next important scene or event. It is exciting to think that all reactions from the audience give clues to the performers about where the audience
is connecting to the story. This changes with each performance and is one more reason why the ephemeral nature of theatre creates such a unique connection with each specific audience.
THE REALIST AUDIENCE

“It is a melancholy but undoubted fact that an ordinary, every-day theatrical audience is chiefly composed of a very dull set of people, stupid, yet captious, who only ask to be amused, and object to being emotionally excited.”

Clement Scott in Theatre (1883)

After an audience who “[came] to chatter, toy, play, hear, hear not” (Barton 198) and the actor was pushed back behind the proscenium arch, there seemed a need by either the audience or playwrights for theatre “as nearly as possible to preserve the illusion of reality” (Allensworth 13). With the development of photography in the late 1800s, the evolutionary theories of Darwin and Comte reaching popularity, and the works of such artists as Thomas Eakins who created accurate medical paintings, there was a new investigation among scholars and theorists of topics that may have previously been thought of by most citizens as vulgar, coarse, and taboo. These topics include, but are not limited to, the inner workings of the body and how people truly look—reality in a raw form, referred to by Robert Barton, head of the acting program at the University of Oregon, as a “warts and all” look at life (288). The audiences during this time were comprised of not only socialites, but also of middle class workers who looked for entertainment that was applicable to their lives. During this era, truth was found in science and investigative data.
After the French Revolution, the work and theories of novelist Emile Zola, who coins the phrase “slice of life” that later describes the Realist theatre movement, were prevalent among Europeans. In “Naturalism in the Theatre,” Zola writes, “Everything is interdependent in the theatre. Truth in costuming requires truth in setting, in diction, in the plays themselves” (qtd. in Gerould 365). Truth is a concept that is not shared by all, but theatrical customs may have developed from this need for theatrical truth such as darkening the theatre space, abandoning previously used footlights for more naturalistic lighting, using real props rather than those painted on the scenery, and for the actors to wear character-appropriate costumes. Even today, these customs are still in use in many theatre houses. However, the relationship to truth is not completely clear. How are false lights that lend colors to simulate an evening sky as “truthful” as actually having the play take place under an evening sky? It is curious how audiences find truth in elements that are predominately not truthful in nature, such as lighting or costumes, which, though accurate to the time period, are still created for a fictional character. Playwright Jean Jullien, influenced heavily by Emile Zola, felt that the spectator “must lose for an instant the feeling of his presence in a theatre” and that, while watching a performance, should “remain attentive and no longer dare to speak” (10). This suggests that the ideal situation is an audience quietly involved in the theatrical performance, very much in line with the ideals of the private theatres during the Elizabethan era.
During the Realist movement, some, in the truthfulness of what they experienced, found beauty. The German writer and director, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe “attempted to achieve a harmonious and graceful picture which, in combination with intelligent and euphonious line readings, would attune the spectator to ideal beauty” in an effort to take from the Greeks the idea of distancing the audience so that they might “perceive the ideal patterns behind everyday reality” (Brockett 283-284). Realism sought to create a definition of “ideal beauty” for the members of the audience. Watching a performance from a darkened theatre with a newly constructed “fourth wall,” created a distinct distance for the audience. They now watched a story unfold from an almost voyeuristic stance, the audience now looking into a scene rather than taking an active part in the performance. Neil Blackadder, in the introduction to Performing Opposition: Modern Theatre and the Scandalized Audience, draws the conclusion that the audience of the Realist era was now strictly passive when he writes:

The single most important historical change in spectators’ experience of theatre, the change most intimately connected with and influential for norms of audience behavior, has been the shift from theatergoing as participation to theatergoing as observation—from active involvement in the event to passive witnessing of a spectacle. (13)

The audience, though quietly watching a performance, may have had involvement with the script in a new way. Plays such as Henrik Ibsen’s A Doll’s House and Anton Chekhov’s The Cherry Orchard may not stimulate the audience into vocal
reactions, though it could, but still call the audience into action. Scripts during this movement portrayed people dealing with problems of ordinary existence, creating a new dichotomy with the audience by asking them to question their own lives and their place within it.

Audience Expectations and Etiquette

Prior to the 1890s in America, house lights would remain on throughout a performance and it was common for audience members to talk to each other, come and go as they pleased, and applaud at any moment (Blackadder 23). With the development of electric lighting for the stage and a darkened theatre house, a need cultivated to instruct audiences on what was considered proper behavior during a performance. Actors, due to new developments in actor training by Stanislavski, now spoke in a natural way on stage, intimately communicating their thoughts to the audience. This realistic communication and the darkened theatre house created a different form of audience/actor relationship that warranted a new set of rules of propriety.

In 1835, a man by the name of Trollope published descriptions of audience “indecencies” in *Domestic Manners in America*. This publication reflected the trend of some theatre-goers to join in of songs or speeches or even finish jokes begun by actors on stage. After this publication, audience members would call out “Trollope” whenever they spotted anyone “misbehaving” in the theatre. The notion of misbehavior in a theatre is a relatively new idea created during this era. Audience
members talking to actors, expressing their likes/dislikes were permitted, and even encouraged, in prior theatre movements. The audience was accustomed to follow prescribed rules found in documents such as *Domestic Manners in America* and James Smiley’s *Modern Manners and Social Forms*. Written in 1889, the latter document includes thoughts on theatre audience behavior:

> Perfect quiet should be maintained during the performance, and the attention should be fixed on the stage. To whisper or do anything during the entertainment to disturb or distract the attention of others is rude in the extreme. It is proper to applaud, when pleased, as that encourages and gratifies the performer, but do not stamp with the feet—to clap the hand is much better. During the intermissions it is in order to converse in a low tone, but loud talk or laughter, or displays of affection or anything to arrest the attention of others, is always in bad taste in any public place. Chewing gum, eating peanuts or anything of that kind, is very vulgar. (283)

These ideas, more than one hundred years later, are still the predominant cultural norms in theatre etiquette today. Just as audience members experienced performances of actors portraying characters with real-life problems and situations, they now had rules by which to observe each other as fellow audience members. Even as the lights darkened in the theatre house, it seems that the behavior of the audience sitting in it were illuminated and questioned by theatre practitioners concerning propriety in the theatre.
Connections to Theatre for Young Audiences

Due to the movement of specified theatre etiquette during this time, performers today may struggle to overcome the precedent of what is considered proper behavior in the theatre. Breaking the “fourth wall” still remains a difficult concept for some audience members and a source of discussion by those in production. This term, “breaking the ‘fourth wall,’” refers to a performer leaving the realistic nature of their world on stage and communing with the audience, previously nonexistent to the world of the play. So, how does a performer break the “fourth wall” without alienating the audience? For theorists and practitioners such as Bertolt Brecht among others involved in following theatre movements, this alienation was precisely what they desired to create. Benefits of the “fourth wall” and a realist approach to theatre for young audiences could be the distance and potential safety felt by members of the audience who can reflect on the performance without being asked to participate. Valery Bryusov, credited with starting the Russian movement away from realism, suggests in his article “Unnecessary Truth,” that the theatre should turn away from the reproduction of reality and the stage should “supply only that which is needed to help the spectator to picture as easily as possible in his imagination the scene demanded by the plot of the play” (qtd. in Carlson 314). Both types of theatre, that which imitates reality and that which allows for the audience to use their imagination, are viable theatre practices for the young audience. However, it would be fascinating to know if the style of theatre
dictates the behavior of the audience in regards to the measure of reality reflected on stage.

In the book *Distance in the Theatre: The Aesthetics of Audience Response*, analyzing the distance between actor and spectator throughout history, author Daphna Ben Chaim writes, “The actual effects of theatrical devices must always be understood within the context of the particular play and production: style, subject matter, and audience assumptions are inseparably interrelated” (72). Based on this idea, the audience’s knowledge prior to attending a performance could determine their reactions/behavior during the show and the acceptance of theatrical devices used. However, does an audience member have assumptions before attending their first production? For young audiences, many of whom have never been to a performance before, there may be benefits of pre-show visitations by performers or theatre educators informing audiences about what they are going to experience. If guidance leads to greater understanding of theatrical devices and context of the play, then the inherent risk of spoiling the magic of the unknown for a first time visitor to the theatre may be of less concern.
“The theatre’s sole obligation is to assist the actor to reveal his soul to the audience.”

Vsevolod Meyerhold

“We are deeply disgusted with the contemporary theatre (verse, prose, and musical) because it vacillates stupidly between historical reconstruction (pastiche or plagiarism) and photographic reproduction of our daily life; a finicking, slow, analytic, and diluted theatre worthy, all in all, of the age of the oil lamp.”

Filippo Marinetti

Theatre changes with the people of its time and, following a period of theatre where characters on stage faced real-life circumstances, with natural dialogue and settings, many theatre artists desired a new form of theatre—one that would shake the audience into action. The audiences of the next several movements of theatre: Symbolism, Expressionism, Futurism, and Didacticism are treated in a distinctly new way. In a reaction against realism, Maurice Maeterlinck and Edward Gordon Craig began the movement of Symbolism—a movement that sought to reach the audience on an unconscious, and therefore symbolic, level. Using “music, dialogue, color, light, shape, and texture,” Wagner found that joining all elements together in a performance led to an almost hypnotic state for the audience (Barton 291). Expressionism soon followed in the early 1900s with the work of Vsevolod Meyerhold’s “biomechanics” theory, combining gymnastics, ballet, and acrobatics into the actor’s repertoire, to create choreographed movement on stage. The
audience now found a merging of the arts on stage that intended to lead them into
t heir own minds, reflecting the feelings and thoughts found in dreams. In *My Life in
Art*, Constantin Stanislavski wrote, “Realism and local color had lived their life and
no longer interested the public. The time for the unreal on the stage had arrived”
(434). With the beginning of World War II, the threat of a depression, and the
world becoming more industrial, audiences desired to see something unrealistic on
stage, taking their minds off of the world right outside the theatre doors.

While World War II raged in the background, the Futurism movement of
theatre celebrated the industrial age. In his Futurism Manifesto, Filippo Marinetti
“called for a new art suited to the new century, dedicated to speed and to struggle,
to the mob, the factory, and the machine” (Carlson 339). Futurists desired to tear
down the walls between actor/audience, for the purpose of inciting change, whether
positive or negative. According to Marinetti, actors should “reject the applause
that rewards mediocrity and learn to enjoy the pleasure of being booed” (340). This
dynamic change in actor/audience relationship, where the message of the play
overrides the importance of a positive audience reception, is a strikingly different
view from the consideration of the realist audience.

Symbolism, Expressionism, and Futurism were followed by the closely
related movements of Dadaism and Surrealism, where the dream world and the
real world were questioned through theatre and art. Bertolt Brecht, a playwright
and director, is the father of Didacticism, also known as Epic or Brechtian Theatre,
in an effort to move the audience to think and take action. He developed a theatre
using the concept of Verfremdung, which translates, “to see things in a new light, to step back and look again at what has become familiar” (Barton 301). This distancing effect, with lights exposed and the audience made aware of theatrical techniques used throughout the production allowed the audience to reconsider and define the meaning of theatre. After writing three plays, none of which were yet produced, Brecht wrote in his diary, “I hope [...] I’ve avoided a great mistake of much other art: its effort to carry people away. [...] The splendid isolation of the spectators isn’t touched...they’re not reassured by being invited to feel with the characters” (qtd. in Blackadder 133). Brecht’s concept of isolation for the audience appears at first to drastically contrast with the classical and Elizabethan ideals of camaraderie for the audience, packed together for a shared cathartic experience. However, the Didactic audience shared a communal experience with the lights on in the theatre, allowing the members of the audience to see each other’s reactions to the production. Theatre can, with young or old audiences, provide a bridge of communication and, even the sharing of a negative theatre experience can bring those who witnessed it together. In this way, Brecht’s theatre crossed the boundaries of how theatre had been presented and still found a means of communication to his audience.

This tension of spectator/actor was a consideration of other theorists in Germany, such as Lorenz Kjerbüll-Peterson, the director of the Mannheim theatre. In his book *Psychology of Acting* he writes:
All art is characterized by “aesthetic illusion” of “conscious self-deception”—Coleridge’s “willing suspension of disbelief.” For any work to stimulate this paradoxical response, it must contain both illusion-fostering and illusion-hindering elements, encouraging the receiver’s consciousness to vacillate constantly between the two. The theatre audience presents a particular problem, since it is essentially a psychological mob: as such, it has a tendency to abandon itself to emotion and lose the balance essential to art. The theatre must employ many elements to prevent this loss—the curtain, the proscenium frame, the use of programs, and so on—but the most important devise for audience control is the living actor, who must be constantly aware or and adjusting the shifting balance. (76)

In this particular line of thinking, the actor fills the role of audience controller as well as the theatre space itself. The balance of an audience exists in the imaginative and the tangible in a theatre setting. If this theory is true, it suggests that performances outside of a theatre space could incite a mob, as well as cause an emotional pandemonium for the audience. However, the actor being the main connection for the audience and the performance is a theme found in past movements of theatre, yet there is a new sense of importance that attributes to the new developments in acting by Meyerhold and Stanislavski, who felt that the actor should commune with the audience.
A Middle-Class Audience

As business and industry rose in America, the amount of working class theatre patrons also increased. Studying the theatre as a sociological phenomenon, Georges Gurvitch in “Sociologie du théâtre,” calls attention to the theatrical element in all social ceremonies saying that, “each individual plays several roles, those of class, profession, political orientation, and so on. As for the theatre itself, it is composed of a set group of performers, portraying a social action, encased in another social dynamic made up of performance and public” (197). As the audience came out for theatre productions, those in powerful positions at many theatres specifically addressed the etiquette guidelines for their attending crowd. John F. Casson notes in *Rudeness and Civility*, how etiquette changed in America during the 1900s:

> The dynamic character of social relationships in the rapidly industrializing economy led to a more specialized and segmented civic order. [...] Rising demands upon audience behavior, far from trivial, were intimately connected to fundamental transformations in the character of America’s cultural life and the definition of the public realm. (215-216)

Theatres now faced an audience who worked and talked together in closer proximity than the past. These new connections by people in working class society led to an increased need to enforce rules about how to behave inside the theatre, due, in part, by members of elite society who had their own negative perceptions about classes...
lower than theirs. Edward Albee and Franklin Keith worked together as early vaudeville managers and their theatres became known as “the Sunday-school Circuit” that demanded “a high plane of respectability and moral cleanliness” (Casson 249). These theatres had attendants to correct audience members, should they get out of hand. Those attending a production were handed a card upon arrival that read, “Gentleman will kindly avoid the stamping of feet and pounding of canes on the floor, and greatly oblige the Management. All applause is best shown by clapping of hands. Please don’t talk during acts, as it annoys those about you, and prevents a perfect hearing of entertainment. The Management” (Royle 488). These etiquette guidelines, similar to those found across America today, stifled some members of the crowd who attended the theatre for the camaraderie only. During this time, amusement parks and movie theatres gained increasing popularity with citizens of the middle class. Connections exist to the decline of the theatre audience in relation to these forms of entertainment that did not require any strict guidelines.

The relaxed atmosphere of the “nickelodeons,” small movie houses that cost a nickel to attend, offered inexpensive ticket prices and open seating that allowed members from the working class to get up and cheer during the show, gossip with one another, eat and drink freely in the theater and even “use the intimate darkness for lovemaking” (Casson 253). These lax rules certainly appealed to many in the population and, as time went on, the nickelodeons soon transformed, with the development of full-length dramatic pictures, into lavish movie houses and captured
the attention of wealthier patrons, drawing them from live performance theatre. Of course, motion pictures still have their place in American culture today, but, in their beginnings, many live theatres were forced to shut their doors or transform themselves from live theatre venues to movie theaters. There was a developing necessity to ensure that live theatre had a special purpose and place in the lives of American citizens.

Recapturing the Audience: Modern Theatre and TYA

The draw of entertainment other than live theatre still entices members of society today. However, it is the tangible chemistry of the performer/audience relationship that creates a quality unique to the theatre. British dramatist Arnold Wesker’s writes that modern theatre should “be sought among the working classes, who have traditionally considered the theatre the domain of bourgeois intellectuals and irrelevant to their own experience” (Wesker 23). He felt that art was “a battle field, where ideas are fought and values affirmed” (ibid 19). These thoughts are pertinent because in this time when more affordable entertainment was sought and is still sought, there must be new innovations in the way theatre is approached that, perhaps, will draw in new audience.

In many ways, art is indeed a battlefield and, for the theatre educator, one must continually wrestle with the decision of art as a leisure activity or a moving, living way to communicate what Wesker refers to as the “marvelous nature and
complexity of human lives” (19). To address the issue of other entertainments slowly taking members away from the theatre audience, educators and practitioners in the theatre for young audience field have attempted to develop techniques and structures unique to young people to capture their imaginations and fill theatre houses, such as connecting plays to pieces of literature read in schools, hoping to draw in school groups or creating a theatre space that is designed to stimulate the visual and tactile senses of a young person. There is a need by theatre practitioners to consider how to communicate to a new audience accustomed to seeing recorded performances on television and movie screens. The balance of entertainment and education, thrilling audiences and retaining a sense of respectful behavior in the theatre are challenges faced by both educators and artists. To find this balance, an adequate understanding of what a young person needs in theatre is necessary to achieve the most positive experience possible, or at least memorable enough to attend the theatre again. In the movements of Symbolism, Expressionism, Futurism, and Didacticism, those in the theatre field sought to capture their audience on a new, subconscious level that would expand the knowledge of themselves and the world. Today, a new level of understanding is required to expand the field of theatre for young audiences.
THE YOUNG AUDIENCE

“Children’s theatre must start as good theatre. Tell your audience the story in the best way possible. Respect your audience, don’t play down to them. Write first; a good play will find its audience. Children are the most honest of all audiences. I thought and thought, ‘What is the essential difference between Theatre for Young Audiences and theatre for adult audiences?’ Then suddenly it hit me like a bad campaign slogan, ‘It’s the audience, stupid.’”

Larry Snipes

A Personal Look at “Child”

In the introduction of this paper, there is a quote from I Corinthians 13:11 that reads, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.” I use this quote as a call to theatre for young audience directors, producers, and educators to do just the opposite—I call for those in the field of TYA to retain what I feel is the magnificence of childhood, the sense of wonder and delight that can exist for a young person in life in general and, more specifically, when attending a theatrical performance. I discovered in my study of the “child” as a concept, my own position on the meaning of “child.” Based on my own childhood where the deep Georgia forest was my playground and my imagination kept me company as my siblings were nine and twelve years my senior, I pretended many times that the world was my theatre, and the trees and woodland creatures were my audience. I
was not a child of privilege, my father a minister and my mother a teacher, but I understood that beauty and wonder were free in the world. I read voraciously, and did have the opportunity, when money allowed, to attend the spectacle of the circus or the local ballet and, church, which can be considered a spectacle in its own right. I became involved in the theatre at a young age, but never attended an actual theatre for young audience performance until I had the opportunity to be a performer in a play for a young audience. The knowledge that I was performing for young people who might never have seen a play before thrilled me. I realized that I could bring the art of theatre to young audiences as my career, and, as a result, a life in this field began. I seek a field that is committed to inspiring the imagination of young people and developing the inner spirit of each person in the audience, young or old. The examination of how a young person develops mentally and emotionally, as explored in the following section, can aide the theatre professional to make more informed choices about what is offered to young people today in terms of theatre etiquette and training. This study also contributed a more complete understanding of how a young person might comprehend a book written for their specific age group.

Child Development Theory

In the 1900s, Jean Piaget, a Swiss biologist and psychologist, developed an influential model of child development. I study this particular model not on the
principal that I agree with it most, but rather, find it to be one of the most readily available to the person untrained in psychology. This model is broken down into four separate categories that determine the mental and emotional stages a young person goes through before reaching adulthood. In these stages, “Sensorimotor” (birth to two years old), “Preoperational” (two to seven years old), “Concreate operational” (seven to eleven years old), and “Formal operational” (eleven to fifteen years old), Piaget proposes that a child is able to think abstractly after the age of seven. Piaget’s theory argues that as a child has experiences, if it is a repeated one, “it fits easily—or is assimilated—into the child's cognitive structure so that he or she maintains mental "equilibrium." If the experience is different or new, the child loses equilibrium, and alters his or her cognitive structure to accommodate the new conditions” (Funderstanding 1). The experiences a child has while in the theatre, either in viewing the presented play or the social aspect of attending a production might have the effect of a young person relating to a character in a play, thus relating the fictional experience with their own, or it could promote a change in the way the young person views the world. In the book Children’s Theatre: Play Production for the Child Audience, Jed H. Davis and Mary Jane Larson Watkins speculate on the development of children in relation to theatre reasoning that:

The youngsters who fill the seats at the children’s theatre already have experienced a certain amount of living, and each one of them brings his experiences with him in his conscious or subconscious mind where
dwells his every experience ready to interpret, reject, or qualify what takes place before him on the stage. (24)

The amount or specific experiences of each audience member does not weigh as much as the importance of giving young audiences something about which to relate their own lives. Davis and Watkins go further in their investigation and come to the conclusion that there is a general pattern, though they understand there are deviations, for young people as they grow and their relative interests in the fantastic, heroic, and ideal at various stages of age. Some, myself included, may argue that young people are developing at a faster rate than they once were, due to the increased amount of information given to them every day. In “Respecting the Child Spectator,” Zenovi Korogodsky, the artistic director of the Leningrad Theatre for Young Spectators writes:

Today, children’s awareness of the social environment evidences itself at a much earlier age, and this is to be expected. Our children live in a time when an enormous amount of new information is transforming the world. They react more vitally than we do, respond to all the exciting and threatening discoveries of our epoch, and being free from established points of view and false preconceptions, they are more searching than we adults. If it fails to acknowledge this characteristic of young beings, the children’s theatre will not be essential to today’s young audiences and consequently will not be able to fulfill its civic
mission—to guide the development of the young citizen of our society.

If young people respond, as Korogodsky says, “more vitally” than adults, then theatre practitioners should be ever aware that their choices might reach a young audience in a powerful way. Though this passage may imply that adults lessen in sensitivity to “our epoch” with age, it is exciting to think that young people are more open than adults to new sensory environments. John Locke felt that the human mind begins as a “white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas” (121). A young mind is ready for experiences and providing young audiences with shows of vivid imagination and depth while still relating to the context of their own lives is a challenge, but one with great rewards. If a young person is given the experience of attending a theatrical production at a young age or repeatedly, I feel that it becomes a part of her history, her story. Since Piaget believes that an experience, if familiar, is easily assimilated, perhaps attending a production as a school-age person might help to create a larger adult theatre audience when they grow up.

According to studies of young audiences, older children cue younger attendees on when to react during a show. Since developmental stages may vary with each young person and the fact that many theatre for young audience shows include all age groups, it may be necessary for playwrights to account for such a mixture when writing scripts. The current repertoire of TYA plays, for the most part, are written with “the rather universal concepts of suspense and humor [...] interwoven with the subject matter in a way that makes the play reasonably interesting for those below
or above the ‘recommended’ age” (Davis 33). Some subjects such as humor, romantic love, fear, and boredom, no matter how “interwoven” they are in a script, may draw a noticeable response from young audience members. These patterns of response are noteworthy and useful in understanding how a young audience may be experiencing the matters on stage. Davis and Watkins speculate that young people react individually, not as a group as many adults do, when in a crowd. They strongly urge teachers not to quell a student’s laughter even when it seems to the adult mind as “inappropriate.” Children, especially those under twelve years old, “find humor in simple incongruities, feelings of superiority, funny-sounding words and names, and farcical situations” (Davis 41). In regards to fear, the same patterns may emerge for fear as well as excitement, and can be caused among other things, by “a flash of light, a loud explosion, a quick transformation, a sudden entrance” (43). If what a young person sees is directly connected to their own personal experience, they may strongly react otherwise, if things go back to normal quickly, most children are able to push through the shock of the fearful event. As for boredom, children are more likely to show boredom than adults. Davis and Watkins speculate that a young audience will show the same signs of boredom as they will with a need to “release” after a scene of high tension. “The signs are unmistakable: shifting in seats, talking to neighbors, standing up and looking around, and even an occasional trip up the aisle for water” (45). This data suggests that there is much more to learn about how young people process and experience a theatrical event. Prior to this study, I assumed that the imaginative ability of a
young person is what makes a young audience so receptive to the world of a play. There seems to be a genuine desire for many young people to live out their fantasies on stage and that can be aided by performers, designers, and directors who are eager to go beyond the realistic and enter world of fantasy. Robin Wagner, a Broadway set designer and teacher says, “The imagination of the audience fills in everything. If you are able to suggest the scenery, the audience’s imagination takes over from there and does much more than you could ever afford to do with wood and canvas” (qtd. in Viagas 200). Audience members can use their imagination to carry the world of the play to a new level, but what can be said of performing groups who feel that, since a performance is for a young audience, they can consistently have low production values?

Through speaking to theatre for young audience professionals and reading articles and books pertaining to what a young audience deserves in terms of set design and artistry in performance, there is a new respect found for the a young audience. Jeff Revels, the artistic director at the Orlando Repertory Company states:

Young people, like all people, want a story well told on stage. Young people see through phoniness and by “phoniness,” I do not mean anything theatrical, but rather, actors or direction. I feel young people know if they are being spoken down to, rather than to them, and tune those who are doing so, out. (Revels)
While Revels speaks mainly to the tone of the actors or the ideas of the directors, this could also apply to the designers and general conception of the play being produced. Unless specifically designed to do so, anything that takes the audience out of the performance will possibly cause them to become restless or lose focus on the meaning or intent of the play. This data propels the question of location and whether a young audience can overcome the banality of a venue such as a gymnasium or cafeteria and, using their imagination, have a positive or influential theatre experience. I still struggle with the idea that a young person should experience a performance in a theatre space with all theatrical elements such as lighting, costumes, set, etc. created as professionally as possible as opposed to a low-budget or low-production value show performed for young people in a found space within the school. However, I might redefine what I consider low-production value or standards in production as I consider that theatre can be “poor theatre” and be as powerful, or more powerful, than any large-budget production. What the performers and audiences bring to the performance to share with each other is may be the most important element of a theatrical show.

Performance Location

As manager of the 2003-2004 Gainesville Theatre Alliance Repertory Company, I had the privilege of going into approximately seventy-five different schools in the North Georgia/Atlanta Metro area. Our performance group
performed for thousands of children in various locations, including libraries, cafeterias, and gyms. We performed for young audiences, one show specifically for elementary and middle schools age children, and another show for high school students. Both sets were light and conformed well to the spaces we were asked to perform in. However, I experienced a radical difference in the audiences where students sat on the floor in a semi-circle around the “stage space,” which was designated by a floor cloth, than those in a formal, seated, situation. In the gyms and cafeterias, the actors fought to project their voices to the back row. They were required to enter through a throng of young people and performed inches away from the front row. However, it was in these spaces where an electric connection happened. Students felt that they could speak directly to the actors and did so freely. After performances that were less “theatrically formal,” our touring group had hundreds of young people waiting to speak to the performers, to touch their costumes, and, often, to give them a hug. When a school was large or privileged enough to have a formal theatre or auditorium, students quietly filed out of the seating and went back to their classrooms, excited, perhaps, but more reserved about their feelings. These experiences may have been specific to the particular region, selected shows, or expectations of school staff however, the difference between a stiff, behaved crowd in the formal theatre seats compared to the tangible excitement of young people sitting in a circle around the performance was dynamic and enlightening.
Drawing from research of past audiences, a young audience in an arena setting may be more like a classical or Elizabethan audience that feels comfortable reacting audibly to the performance, communing with others. Richard Schechner feels that there needs to be a “broader anthropological view of the interrelationship of all of man’s public performance activities [...] one that considers play, games, sports, theatre, and ritual.” He goes on to say in his work, “6 Axioms for Environmental Theatre” that the future theatre “will probably not be traditional but totally transformed, or even ‘found.’ The same space is shared by audience and performance, and the focus is variable and flexible” (qtd. in Carlson 478-479). This concept, a popular one in the time of The Living Theatre and other groups that used found spaces for their performances, could apply to the future of performing for young people as well, and, if one considers a found space to be the classroom, drama across the curriculum warrants a place of ritual and potential importance to theatre for young audiences.

There is also a magic that happens when students are able to attend a formal theatre production, housed in a theatre space, and designed specifically for a young audience. Davis and Watkins state:

Children sitting in the darkened house sigh with rapture at the unworldly splendor before them. They are sensing something beyond, something deeper than momentary delight in the trappings on the stage. From their seats in the auditorium they are reaching out for a
fuller life. The theatre, for the brief span of the play and, we hope, for long afterward, is touching the innermost being with its magic. (35)

There is little debate among those in the field of theatre that the audience is the main collaborator in a theatrical production and, the main question may not be where a theatrical experience is staged, but that young people attend the experience at all. Herbert Blau in “Universals of Performance; or, Amortizing Play,” states, “There is nothing more illusory in performance than the illusion of the unmediated. It is a very powerful illusion in the theatre, but it is theatre, and it is theatre, the truth of illusion, which haunts all performance, whether or not it occurs in a theatre” (143). This seems to be a tribute to the illusory quality of theatre despite locale, which gives young people a means of escape, desired, according to many theatre theorists, by both young and old audience members. Wherever the performance takes place, how can young audience practitioners help to fully engage the audience? Through the knowledge of modes past theatre practitioners used to engage their audiences, meshing life as it is today with the plays produced for young people may be an important step for engaging the young audience. Multi-media tools such as video, projections, and surround sound are only a few of many ways that media takes an active role in the education of young people today and finding ways to tune into these modes of technology may provide exciting avenues to further engage young audiences.
The Media and Young Audiences

In interviews with directors at the Orlando Repertory Theatre, The Children’s Theatre Company, Oregon Children’s Theatre Company, and Seattle Children’s Theatre, I asked the question, “What element(s) do you feel is (are) most important for a young audience to know before experiencing a theatrical event?” Across the board, my interviewees responded that young people need to know that they are going to see a live performance rather than a filmed event. The predominate exposure to television and movies in American culture has often led to surprise for young audiences that there are live people on stage. In her work, “Playing Attention’: Contemporary Aesthetics and Performing Arts Audience Education,” Monica Prendergast writes:

In a First World culture that is currently oversaturated with mediatized performance, the future health and vitality of live performance is endangered if educators neglect to address the challenges and processes involved in being an audience for the performing arts in arts education curricula. (36)

As educators, there is indeed a necessity for addressing the difference between a live performance and one on film prior to attending a theatrical event. Prendergast feels that there is a “call for audience education to highlight the ‘positivity’ of attention on the part of the spectator, as well as to develop the growing ability of the spectator to give him or herself, through the process of self-forgetfulness, to the
‘play of art’” (39). There is a difference inferred here and throughout this article on the role of the “high audience” who participates fully as a spectator in a live performance and the “low audience” who “merely gapes out of curiosity” (39). Another side to the argument of the “high” versus “low” audience is found in an interview with Harold Prince, a well-known theatre director and producer. He discusses the production of *West Side Story* and says that “[w]hen it first opened we had to struggle for audiences. But gradually, people began to appreciate it. But it wasn’t until the film came out that they finally ‘got it’” (qtd. in Viagas 88). I do not attempt here to dispute the place of media in our society. Some wonderful films have been produced that illuminate literature and scripts in ways only a large-budget film can achieve. However, when educators feel that a film replaces the need for theatre and literature, there may be difficulty in suggesting that theatre is a unique experience that is almost impossible to reproduce.

In an article by Roger L. Bedard, “TYA: Questions of Identity,” Carol North of Metro Theatre in St. Louis, Missouri, states, “If technology is changing our world and perhaps dismantling childhood as it was defined in the 20th century, I contend that technology cannot and will not replace our desire for the essential intimacy of human connection” (13). The feeling, shared by the audiences of the classical and Elizabethan time, that theatre provides not only a cathartic outlet, but also a ritualistic, community-building event for those experiencing the event together, allowing “profound questions such as What is love? What is fate? and Who are we?” to resonate with the audience and possibly “[o]ffer audiences philosophical tools for
further investigations of human nature” (Prendergast 47). Young people and people in general, may need multiple outlets of communication and theatre provides one of these “philosophical tools” for engaging with other people. Understanding how a young person relates to others in his or her community could be useful in providing a better way to communicate to those young people from the stage and a talk-back or pre-show visit may be one of those forms of communication.

**Talk-backs and Community Enrichment for Young Audiences**

Often in a theatre for young audiences setting, there is an opportunity for a “talk-back” when members from the audience are allowed a chance to ask questions to the actors, directors, or designers after a performance. Without diving into the debate on whether this destroys the illusion of the world of the play or whether or not actors should speak to the audience as their character versus as a themselves, I feel that an audience can find comfort in a discussion with other members of the community and deeper meaning of the performance itself by participating in a talk-back following a performance. In Anne Ellis’ essay, “The Art of Community Conversation,” she states:

A growing number of community-based theatre artists are formalizing their attempts to elicit audience response in order to shape a community’s relationship to the theatre in a more direct and democratic way. From storytelling performances that end with
informal opportunities to respond to the artists, to formal audience
discussions integrated within the performances themselves, artists are
purposefully challenging the passivity of audiences by providing
structured opportunities for immediate feedback. [...] These
cconversations allow audiences to give feedback that does more than
provide evaluation of the work: when carefully organized and
facilitated, these dialogues can contribute to the process of forming
community self-awareness. (92)

This community building experience that exists when an audience goes through a
performance together may be what distinguishes a live performance from a
mediatized one. Even without a talk-back, audience members may leave feeling a
sense of communion in the shared event, but communication first by the actors to
the audience and then, the audience to the performers and each other creates a
larger web of connections and possible meaning. Communicating with other
members of the audience, according to Augusto Boal’s formative work, “Theatre of
the Oppressed,” the theatre began as a means of human communion with “free
people singing in the open air. The carnival. The feast.,” but has since been
captured by the “ruling class” and the “fourth wall” went up, “separating actors
from spectators: people who act and people who watch—the party is over!” (471).
Boal urges the theatre to liberate themselves and tear the walls down, finding new
ways to communicate with each other. Laurie Brooks puts Boal’s form of
communication to practice in her article, “Put a Little Boal in Your Talk-Back,”
when she discovered that a talk-back following her controversial play, *The Wrestling Season*, “built a bridge between the performance and the audience, offering a fresh, alternative form of entertainment for audience members of all ages that transported them beyond the role of spectator” (60). If we in the theatre for young audience field want the youth of today to talk to one another more and come to the theatre for a unique experience, we must find ways to draw the audience into a dialogue and encourage young people to truly communicate with one another.

Harry Newman once wrote, “Theatre [is] the most democratic of art forms. It is predicated on the acknowledgement of the necessity of others for mutual existence” (18). Young people attend a performance and are transported to a new world. This mutual transportation and the ability to communicate, in dialoging with others or often in writing a letter to the performers, the theatre becomes a positive ritual. Art and ritual, according to Victor Turner who inspired the aforementioned Richard Schechner’s theories, “are generated in areas of ‘liminality,’ where normally fixed conditions are open to flux and change, and societies may undertake periodic mental reorganization” (qtd. in Carlson 508). I agree with this statement and feel that with theatre, and perhaps theatre alone, can an audience of people who thought they knew how they felt about a particular subject or issue, be radically transformed and communication about the matter opened. Young people are no less deserving of this communication. Issues that were once considered “taboo” for a young audience such as sexual relationships, racism, disease, and discrimination, are being brought to light, and life, by theatrical performances of
innovative new works. If television and other forms of media can address heavy issues that many try to shelter young people from, the theatre should take the opportunity to conduct a meaningful conversation about them. Providing a safe outlet of communication could open avenues for a young person to discuss issues brought to light by what they saw onstage, or what their imagination or personal experience illuminated.

Pre-show Instruction for Young Audiences

Many theatres today send out guidelines to parents and teachers to inform them of what is expected at their particular theatre. These “guidelines” tend to be a standard set of “do’s and don’ts” such as “Don’t crack gum, rattle candy wrappers, or whisper. [...] Arrive on time, [...] stay until the end of the performance, [...] and pick up your trash” (Baldrige 175). In *The Amy Vanderbilt Complete Book of Etiquette*, there is a passage on theatre etiquette that reads, “During any theater performance be conscious of the need for quiet and concentration. Do not rattle your program or fidget in your seat. And no whispering, please!” (qtd. in Tuckerman 93). For many theatre for young audience companies, the pre-show instructions for their audience do not vary greatly, yet, most young people have different learning styles and, thus, need instruction given in various ways.
When asked for any comments regarding theatre etiquette or audience behavior in the theatre for young audiences field, Deborah Vaughn, former education director at the Oregon Children’s Theatre Company, shared:

It’s a tough subject because every show and every age group has a different set of rules. How do you explain to a six year old the difference between a play designed for participation and one designed to be watched passively? And how do you help a middle school student understand the fine line between interaction with the performers and disruptive behavior? These are things I struggle with as I try to envision an educational piece that addresses theatre etiquette.

(Vaughn)

Several conducted interviews led me to understand that some practitioners in the theatre for young audience community feel that theatre etiquette rules make theatre seem elitist. How can you place rules on an art form, and what do the rules mean for the experience of the audience? It becomes a question of nature vs. nurture in the theatre in regards to how a young person was raised in or exposed to theatre early in their life.

In my theatre work in Colorado, I experienced a youth theatre company whose students ran freely through the theatre space, hanging on banisters, and, even during a performance, would walk around and lounge wherever they desired. I began to wonder if the comfort level that these students felt in their theatre “home” actually negatively affected their respect of the theatre as a place where art is created. Conversely, I wondered if they appreciated the theatre for providing a place of happiness for them, and if they would continue to work in the theatre field
as adults. Ground rules for how to behave in a theatre could be addressed at a young age, although, to some practitioners, the enjoyment of the theatre experience is the highest goal. According to the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel, knowledge develops over time. Robert C. Solomon in *A Short History of Philosophy*, writes on Hegel and discusses his theory that all that is learned is filtered through concepts already known by the individual and that all concepts are contextual (Solomon 218-220). For a young person attending the theatre, rules may be necessary according to their previous knowledge of “good behavior.” If a young person is likely to sit still and not talk in other public settings, there is a likely chance that they will do the same in a theatre. However, if there is no previous experience of etiquette for a young person, or, as Piaget defines it “cognitive structure,” then there needs to be a greater effort by educators to inform that young person of what is considered “polite” in a public setting. However, what is considered “polite” becomes a personal opinion based on years of instruction by other people’s context for “polite.” In this tension, some common courtesies remain, many of which are synthesized into a list of rules by theatres today. No matter how much I would like to say that no rules are needed for attending a theatrical event, some young people may have no previous context of what inhibits others from enjoying a production. Therefore, rules become a necessity and yet how these rules are conveyed could make all the difference.

Making the Most of the Theatre Experience

Robert Edmond Jones writes in *The Dramatic Imagination*, “I know that there are young people in this country who will really create for the theatre of their time, who will bring something into existence there that has never existed before”
(40). I believe this is true and that young people, given the opportunity to express themselves freely and experience theatre fully, can achieve great things and redefine the confines many have placed around the concept of “childhood.” A young person is an independent thinker and, according to educator Robert Sternberg, he “argues that children (and all of us) need to learn to plan, monitor, reflect, and transfer in developmental thinking. They also need opportunities to use these skills and strategies through problem-solving, making choices and decisions” (Dowling 53). Attending a theatrical performance is a chance for a young person to sit with her school group, but have an ultimately personal experience as she connects or does not connect to the presented story. Regardless of how the story impacts the young person’s life, the attendance alone is now in their cognitive structure—theatre is a real experience they have had. Making it one of the best experiences the young person has ever had is dependent on the theatre practitioners and the educators prior to, during, after the performance, allowing theatre to provide multiple means of learning.

The theatre must find ways to engage young people today and, in a world where events and recreation are increasingly mediatized, the means of human-to-human communication may be the reason that theatre is so vitally important. Though modern practices through the use of multi-media in performance, availability online, or in visual aides the lobbies of the theatre can create more accessibility to families attending the theatre, the stories told on stage by live actors creates the ultimate connection with the audience. The structures of the theatre
houses, importance placed on the reception by the audience, and modes of understanding theatre etiquette have been questioned since the beginning of theatre history. I still question who controls the etiquette of society and the freedoms found within guidelines. I wonder if young people should be instructed before a theatrical production to increase their frame of reference or should seeing a captivating performance be enough to improve audience behavior? Also, since pre and post show activities are relatively new in the theatre for young audience field, are they an exciting component of the theatre experience or do these events hinder the personalization of performance art? Peter C. Brosius, the artistic director at the Children’s Theatre Company said, “We make theater to help our audience see that the world is knowable, malleable, and demands critical thinking. We make theater so that young people will realize that there is tremendous power in their imagination. If they embrace that power, they can change the world” (62). I agree that young people can change the world and, as knowledgeable theatre audience members, they have the potential to change the world of theatre.
CONCLUSION

The history of the theatre in collision with the history of the child creates a dynamic that has yet to be completely explored. Understanding that the concept of an audience continues to shift even today is exciting as it is filled with possibilities for the next generation of theatre audience members. Young people are continually defining and redefining themselves and their ability to understand, love, think, philosophize, and create. Through the research of theatre etiquette, the multiple meanings behind that idea, and how it has evolved, I considered how to create a book that would speak to the wonder of the theatre, as well as educate young readers on their behavior when attending a theatrical performance. I researched books that are available to young people on the subject of theatre etiquette and found small passages in etiquette books that addressed the concerns that began during the realist era of theatre—don’t talk, don’t chew gum, don’t interrupt the performers, etc. Though these are valid points to address, I grew eager to create a piece of literature different from any book on the market to be used as an educational tool for young readers prior to attending a performance. This book, included in the APPENDIX: THIS GUY GOES TO THE THEATRE, went through many stages of development in an effort to create the most user-friendly, informational, yet fun, book for young audiences.

I decided that the target age of the book would be seven-years-old. Piaget defines this age as a “concrete operational” stage when young people can begin to
think abstractly. The book is approaching abstract, with pictures suggesting the location and emotions of the character “This Guy” and colorful, in line with images they may see on television or on a computer, but is created on a canvas using acrylic and spray paints. The book is square, hard-back, and easy to hold. I found the shape of the book, as well as the weight and texture of the pages, to be aesthetically pleasing and potentially motivating for a young person to want to read it.

Personally, I enjoy holding a book that is square. Many of the current books for young readers are rectangular in shape, though, of course, they come in all shapes and sizes. However, a square book might stand out to a young reader, piquing their curiosity and encouraging them to give *This Guy Goes to the Theatre* a second look.

The character in the book, referred to as “this guy” is a round, amorphous being in black and white—a child-like drawing. This character could be enticing for a young reader since “this guy” does not attempt to mirror any real person, only to serve as a teachable character who has never previously been to a theatre.

In early drafts of the book, I worked to define the magic of the theatre through the illustrations. The book contained “this guy” having a “magical” experience while watching the theatrical performance that could not be seen by the reader. I returned to the book and included the theatre set as a photograph to symbolize real life shining through for this painted creature, much like my most memorable theatre experiences have done for me—they were life changing. I considered that an acrylic paint character would see the world in acrylic paint. However, if that same character were to see a photograph of something humanly
real, it would be “other-worldly” and almost “magical.” I decided that this would be an effective way to communicate the “other-worldly” quality of a theatrical event.

Theatre etiquette has not always been handled in a positive way by theatre practitioners who fail to give a reason behind theatre rules. *This Guy Goes to the Theatre* is an effort to change the theatre etiquette approach and, instead of providing a list of rules, we see a character living out the reasons behind, for instance, not taking any drinks into the theatre. In this particular circumstance, “this guy” imagines what it would be like if the theatre was flooded with drinks and, later, he has to go to the restroom but must wait for the intermission. In my attempt to avoid listing rules, I consider that some events in the book may be conveyed as rules—“Wait for the intermission,” “Don’t take in drinks.” I argue that rules are ever present, but at least there is a character in this book living through the rules instead of simply reading them on a list.

Rules that were enforced throughout the course of theatre history as discussed in this thesis may have stifled the participation of its audience, such as the audience being told to not join in songs or speeches with actors on the stage during the realist era. I have made a conscious decision in *This Guy Goes to the Theatre* to avoid the topic of speaking to the actors or reacting in a verbal way to the performance. Though I can see the concerns of an audience speaking at all times during a show, I reference the ideals of Davis and Watkins who state that people should not silence a young audience whose definition of “inappropriate” may be different from their own. This is a difficult balance, yet young people are
independent thinkers who deserve the same respect as adult audiences, if not more so. As it is my field, I felt this was true before researching theatre etiquette throughout history. However, with a new understanding of how theatre audiences were educated in the past, I find inspiration in the knowledge that preparing an audience and hearing their voice after a performance through talk-backs or merely conversation, is an important element of the theatre experience. Claudia Mills, a children’s writer and a critic of children’s literature, argues that critics of children’s literature “are more willing than many other critics to concede that one aim of a children’s book is to shape the evolving character of its readers” (181). The book *This Guy Goes to the Theatre* is a culmination of my knowledge of young people and theatre, hoping to spark a dialogue for people who have not attended a performance and those who have.

Though challenging at times to find specific information on audiences throughout theatre history, the theories and practices by those in the field of theatre create an understanding of each period’s audience and their subsequent behavior. I remain unsure about which rules are more important than others, but have come to the knowledge that any etiquette structure should emphasize the importance of the stage and the story that is presented. Any book, including *This Guy Goes to the Theatre*, cannot fully express how theatre can change and affect a person and, thus, remains the reason I feel theatre is so necessary to attend, especially by young people—so they can experience the real magic of theatre firsthand. I now understand that young people are viewing theatre and learning not
only how to comprehend and appreciate the play, but also independently understanding how to relate to others in the audience. For this reason, I find it important that young people have some structure before attending a performance that will help them to have a positive viewing experience, which, by my definition, is a person affected by what they see on stage and cultivating the desire to attend another play, or at least understand the value of a theatrical event.

Zenovi Korogodsky in “Respecting the Child Spectator” writes, “What sets apart the artist of the children’s theatre is his feeling for contemporary childhood. The artistic level of his work depends on the depth and fullness of this feeling” (13). I feel for the young audience today with a “depth and fullness” that I can only begin to articulate. My hope is that others will begin to see the importance of listening to young people, not to usher them quickly into adulthood, but to learn from their idealistic and imaginative minds, to grasp the delight and wonder of having the entirety of life before you and the fresh experience of a theatrical performance in front of you. The book responds to this only on one level—it approaches the topic of theatre etiquette in a manner I find fun and exciting. I, unfortunately, did not have a young person with whom to discuss this book during the creation process. However, I consider myself to have a young spirit and delight in the joys of reading a fun, colorful book. In regards to what is important to know about theatre before attending a production, there are many places where this book falls short and I fail to fully articulate what theatre can mean to the audience. In this shortcoming, I urge educators to communicate with young audiences, learn what intrigues them,
causes them to question, to explore, so that theatre practitioners can further the artistry and impact of theatre in today’s quickly changing society.
APPENDIX: THIS GUY GOES TO THE THEATRE
THIS GUY GOES TO
THE THEATRE
Hello. I'd like you to meet this guy. He has never, EVER been to the theatre before and he has no idea what is about to happen.
And how magical it can be...

So, come on in!
He is so thirsty when he comes in, and drinks the because there are drinks no food or drinks allowed inside.

He buys a drink whole thing.
Imagine if everyone brought a drink inside the theatre!
He finds his seat.

Time for the show...

The lights go down.
He thought it would be like TV or a movie, but it's not! Those are real people on the stage.
It seems like the actors are speaking right to him... he believes in the world of the play until...
He hears someone beside him eating candy.
He laughs!

He cries!

<He has to go to the restroom!>
Don’t be alarmed... intermission when you can go to the lobby...

but be sure to hurry back to your seat!
He watches the rest of the show and, at the end, claps for the actors. He goes to the lobby where he talks to other people about the show!
He went on a journey with the actors to another time, another place.
He decides to come back so the magic happens again.
Nick and Amanda Morris
live with their dog Frito!
They hope you like this book.
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