FRAME ANALYSIS
An Essay on the Organization of Experience

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With a foreword by Bennett M. Berger

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Because the language of the theater has become deeply embedded in the sociology from which this study derives, there is value in attempting from the start to address the matter of the stage. There is value, too, because all kinds of embarrassments are to be found. All the word is like a stage, we do strut and fret our hour on it, and that is all the time we have. But what's the stage like, and what are those figures that people it?

I

A performance, in the restricted sense in which I shall now use the term, is that arrangement which transforms an individual into a stage performer, the latter, in turn, being an object that can be looked at in the round and at length without offense, and looked to for engaging behavior, by persons in an “audience” role.¹ (It is contrariwise the obligation to show visual respect which characterizes the frame of ordinary face-to-face interaction.) A line is ordinarily maintained between a staging area where the performance proper occurs and an audience region

¹. A different definition of performance is recommended in Dell Hymes, “Toward Linguistic Competence” (unpublished paper, 1973): “And there is a sense in which performance is an attribute of any behavior, if the doer accepts or has imputed to him responsibility for being evaluated in regard to it.”
where the watchers are located. The central understanding is that the audience has neither the right nor the obligation to participate directly in the dramatic action occurring on the stage, although it may express appreciation throughout in a manner that can be treated as not occurring by the beings which the stage performers present onstage. At certain junctures the audience can openly give applause to the performers, receiving bows or the equivalent in return. And a special condition obtains in regard to number of participants: the performance as such is very little dependent on either the size of the cast or the size of the audience, although there are maxima set by the physical facts of sight and sound transmission.

Performances can be distinguished according to their purity, that is, according to the exclusiveness of the claim of the watchers on the activity they watch.

Dramatic scriptings, nightclub acts, personal appearances of various sorts, the ballet, and much of orchestral music are pure. No audience, no performance. The limiting cases here are ad hoc performances, those that occur within a domestic circle when a party guest does a turn at the piano or guitar for the optional beguilement of other guests who happen to be close by, or a raconteur tells a longish story to friends, or a parent reads at bedtime to his children. The term "personal" is used here because the performer typically supplies his own scenery and props, and no prior agenda need be present to obligate the individual to perform.

Contests or matches when presented for viewing come next. Although the social occasion in which the set-to occurs is crucial, and behind this the gate that is collected at the door, the whole affair depends upon the contestants’ acting as if the score outcome itself is what drives them. The players, then, must convincingly act as though something were at stake beyond the entertainment of those who are watching them. League rankings, personal performance records, and prize money all help to stabilize these nonperformance features, pointing to something that is significant in its own right which could not be resolved without actually playing the match through. (Thus it is thinkable that a series match might be played for the record in the absence of any audience.) And, of course, the action will take place in a ring or grounds, not on a stage. As might be expected, there seems to be
no type of sport or game that does not provide a full continuum from matches that no one is expected to bother to watch, through those that acquire a few temporary watchers, to championship matches whose audiences can achieve a respectable Nielsen rating.

A little less pure are personal ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. These occasions typically contain watchers, but the latter function as witnesses and as guests and usually come by invitation, not fee. I might add that whereas the wider significance of a contest outcome is often seen as part of recreational life and in one sense unserious, ceremonials tend to provide a ritual ratification of something that is itself defined as part of the serious world.

Lectures and talks provide a very mixed class in regard to performance purity, in brief, a variable mixture of instruction (for which the listener may well be held responsible) and entertainment. At one extreme are the briefing sessions which staff officers hold for pilots before a raid or the demonstrations that visiting specialists provide medical students in a surgical theater; at the other, the political analysis provided by stand-up comics of the educated school. (The interesting mix is somewhere between, namely, the capacity of "gifted" speakers to conceal from those whom they amuse that that is almost all that is occurring.)

Most impure of all, I suppose, are work performances, those that occur, for example, at construction sites or rehearsals, where viewers openly watch persons at work who openly show no regard or concern for the dramatic elements of their labor.\footnote{Commercial recordings of orchestral rehearsals are now available, presumably to allow audiences an intimate glimpse of the conductor at work. One wonders how these strips differ from the real thing.} On-the-spot TV news coverage now offers up the world, including its battles, as work performances, this, incidentally, inclining the citizenry to accept the role of audience in connection with any and all events.

These distinctions among performances refer to the official face of activity, not to its underlying character and intent. A political trial may be presented as a straight contest when, in fact, it is a scripted dramatic fabrication, a more domestic version being the transformation that television and its timing have brought to some boxing matches and practically all professional
wrestling. Similarly, when we say pejoratively of a person that he has given a "real performance," we can mean that he has taken more than usual care and employed more than usual design and continuity in the presentation of what is ostensibly not a performance at all. In any case, some terminological help is required here to relieve the burden carried by the word "performance," especially in discussions about contests. In order to be particularly clear about frame, one might say that a bridge game that is televised or otherwise placed before an audience is a presented match; as part of a scripted movie, a dramatized match; as something a cheater arranges, a rigged match. And presumably a play about cheating at bridge would provide viewers with a dramatized rigged match; and a news clip of a roller derby, a re-presented rigged match.

One point bears repeating. In considering legitimate stage performances it is all too common to speak of interaction between performer and audience. That easy conclusion conceals the analysis that would be required to make sense out of this interaction, conceals the fact that participants in a conversation can be said to interact, too, conceals, indeed, the fact that the term "interaction" equally applies to everything one might want to distinguish. The first issue is not interaction but frame. In a conversation, the content of one speaker's statement can call forth a direct replying response from another participant, both responses being part of the same plane of being. During a performance it is only fellow performers who respond to each other in this direct way as inhabitants of the same realm; the audience responds indirectly, glancingly, following alongside, as it were, cheering on but not intercepting. But more of that presently.

II

Consider now one subspecies of performance, the kind that presents a dramatic scripting live onstage. Reserve the term "play" for the author's written text, the term "playing" for one go-through from beginning to end of the play before a particular audience. The term "production" can refer to the effort of a particular cast on the occasion of any one run of the play, here defining "run" as the full series of playings presented by one cast
on the basis of one continuous period of preparation. A run may involve but one playing, but the economics of production dictate otherwise.³ For the iron laws of stagecraft apply: the audience can only be asked for their attention, considerateness, and a fee, and the actors have a right to stage the whole thing again before a next night’s audience.

The theater seems to provide—at least for Western society—an ideal version of a basic conceptual distinction, that between a performer or individual actor who appears on stage and the part or character he assumes whilst employed thereon. Nothing could be more natural and clear than to speak of an actor like John Gielgud taking a part like Hamlet.

In thinking about unstaged, actual social life, theatrical imagery seems to guide us toward a distinction between an individual or person and a capacity, namely, a specialized function which the person may perform during a given series of occasions. A simple matter. We say that John Smith is a good plumber, bad father, loyal friend, and so forth.

If we sense a difference between what a Gielgud does onstage and what a Smith does in his shop (or with his family, or at a political rally), we can express it by saying that Hamlet’s jabbing away is not real, is make-believe, but that a repaired pipe (or a vote cast) is. We use the same word, “role,” to cover both onstage and offstage activity and apparently find no difficulty in understanding whether a real role is in question or the mere stage presentation of one.

But, of course, none of these formulations is adequate, and especially inadequate is the term “role.” What Smith possesses as a person or individual is a personal identity: he is a concrete organism with distinctively identifying marks, a niche in life. He is a selfsame object perduring over time and possessing an accumulating memory of the voyage.⁴ He has a biography. As

³. Kabuki theater, for example, sometimes has a one-night run, but apparently not for the reasons we occasionally do.

part of this personal identity, he claims a multitude of capacities or functions—occupational, domestic, and so forth. When Gielgud does Hamlet he is presenting a fictive or scripted identity exhibited through Hamlet's fictive capacities as son, lover, prince, friend, and so forth, all of which capacities are tied together by a single biographical thread—albeit a fictive one. But what Gielgud is literally doing, of course, is making an appearance in the capacity of stage actor, this being merely one of his capacities—albeit his best-known one. It is the same capacity he employs when he arrives in time for rehearsal or attends a meeting of Equity.

And the problem is that we tend to use the term "role" to refer to Gielgud's professional occupation, to the character Hamlet (being a part available to Gielgud), and even to the special capacity of Hamlet as son or as Prince. The difference between actual and scripted becomes confused with the difference between personal identity and specialized function, or (on the stage) the difference between part and capacity. I shall use the term "role" as an equivalent to specialized capacity or function, understanding this to occur both in offstage, real life and in its staged version; the term "person" will refer to the subject of a biography, the term "part" or "character" to a staged version thereof. Interestingly, in everyday affairs, one is not always aware of a particular individual's part in life, that is, his biography, awareness often focusing more on the role he performs in some particular connection—political, domestic, or whatever. Contrariwise, part is the common concern in drama, much less attention being given to a character's special roles.

There is further trouble. As suggested, it is quite clear that an individual employed in stage acting will demonstrate at least a dual self, a stage actor (who seeks help from the prompter, cooperation from other members of the cast, response from the audience) and a staged character. But what about the individual who is part of the "theatrical audience"? What elements does he possess?

One is the role of theatergoer. He is the one who makes the reservations and pays for the tickets, comes late or on time, and is responsive to the curtain call after the performance. He, too, is the person who takes the intermission break. He has untheatrical activity to sustain; it is real money he must spend and real time
he must use up—just as the performer earns real money and adds or detracts from his reputation through each performance. The theatergoer may have little "real" reason for having come, his motives being ones he would not like to see exposed. The theatergoer is the stage actor's opposite number.

Each person who is a theatergoer is something else, too. He collaborates in the unreality onstage. He sympathetically and vicariously participates in the unreal world generated by the dramatic interplay of the scripted characters. He gives himself over. He is raised (or lowered) to the cultural level of the playwright's characters and themes, appreciating allusions for which he doesn't quite have the background, marital adjustments for which he doesn't quite have the stomach, varieties in style of life for which he is not quite ready, and repartee which gives to speaking a role he could not quite accept for it were he to find such finery in the real world. One might speak here of the onlooker role, keeping in mind that that term seems also and better to cover brief, open, yet unratiﬁed vicarious participation in offstage, real activities. It is important to see that the onlooking aspect of the audience activity is not something that is a staged or simulated replica of a real thing, as is the action onstage. The offstage version of onlooking is not a model for the theatrical kind; if anything the reverse is true. Onlooking belongs from the start to the theatrical frame.

The difference between theatergoer and onlooker is nicely illustrated in regard to laughter, demonstrating again the need to be very clear about the syntax of response. Laughter by members of the audience in sympathetic response to an effective bit of buffoonery by a staged character is clearly distinguished on both sides of the stage line from audience laughter that can greet an actor who flubs, trips, or breaks up in some unscripted way. In the first case the individual laughs as onlooker, in the second as theatergoer. Moreover, although both kinds of laughter are officially unheard by the characters projected on the stage—these creatures being ostensibly in another plane of being—the effect of the two kinds of responsive laughter on the performer is presumably quite different; the sympathetic kind may cause him

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to pause in his performance so as to accommodate the response, whereas the other kind of laughter may cause him to move forward with his lines as fast as is practicable. And, of course, both kinds of laughter are radically different from the kind enacted by a character; that kind of laughter is heard officially by the other characters. Note, there is no embarrassment when the sympathetic laughter of one member of the audience contagiously causes other members to take up the response, but should a character’s laugh cause the onlookers to take up the same response, something deeply ungrammatical would have occurred.

One might argue, then, that theatrical audiences incorporate two elements: theatergoer and onlooker. If one shifts to other audiences, say, the kind which attends to a written text, the kind that could equally well be called a readership, the same twofold distinction is found, and moreover some additional reason provided for drawing it. The onlooking side of matters remains somewhat the same; viewing a play and reading its text involve something of the same experience. The other element of the audience role, however, differs sharply according to type of audience. Not much is common between going to the theater and taking up a book.

III

It is an obvious feature of stage productions that the final applause wipes the make-believe away.6 The characters that were

6. On just coming onstage, a well-known actor may be applauded, the applause being addressed not to the character he will project but to himself qua actor. He responds in that role by a show of pleasure or by holding up the action for a moment while freezing in his part, the latter tack providing an exquisite illustration of the conventional nature of theatrical strips. During the production a particularly deft piece of work may also be applauded, the theatergoers addressing themselves not to the unfolding inner drama but to the skill of the actors. Opera institutionalizes much more of this “breaking” of frame by audiences. Interestingly, here, too, there have been marked changes in conventions through time, as suggested by Kenneth Macgowan and William Melnitz in Golden Ages of the Theater (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1959):

Until the triumph of realism in the last decade of the nineteenth century, acting was essentially and almost everywhere a bravura display of individual talent. Today we still clap a player when he has made an exit after a particularly fine effort, but audiences used to interrupt an actor
projected are cast aside, as are those aspects of the viewers that entered sympathetically into the unfolding drama, and persons in the capacity of players or performers greet persons in the capacity of theatergoers. And on both sides of the stage line the same admission is achieved as to what indeed had been going on, this being especially marked in the case of a puppet performance when the appearance out front of the puppeteers totally undermines the illusion that had been carefully fostered until then. Whatever had been portrayed onstage is now seen as not the real thing at all but only a representation, one made benignly to provide vicarious involvement for the onlooker. (Indeed, at curtain calls actors routinely maintain the costume they wore when the curtain came down, but now the costumes are worn by individuals who do not fill them characterologically but slackly serve as mere hangers, a hat off or a scarf missing, as though to make a point that nothing real is to be attributed to the guise.) In brief, make-believe is abandoned.

Of course, if one watches curtain calls closely, one can easily see that they are patterned almost as much as any stage character performance, but different orders of patterning are involved; we are slightly embarrassed by knowledge of the first but not of the second. (Similarly, the informal chatter a popular singer may offer between songs is likely to be scripted, yet is clearly received to applaud the delivery of an emotional speech. Like an operatic aria, the scene was sometimes repeated if the applause was loud enough. Consequently, there was a lack of ensemble in most theaters, and of both an inner and an outer resemblance to life. [p. 119]

Obviously, then, even apart from the suspension of the staged realm that we readily accept for the moments between scenes and acts, it is impossible to break the illusion before the play is over and still maintain it. And the "we" here probably includes most of the world. Thus, one can read of a Kabuki play:

After this monologue he [the hero] struts onto the stage and, wielding a long sword, kills the ruffians who attempt to strike at him. In this pompous manner he rescues the worthy but helpless man. The fighting over, the hero approaches the hanamichi, and the curtain falls on the stage behind him. On a narrow ledge in front of the curtain he speaks to the audience by way of salutation, as an actor and not as the hero of the play. After this, he resumes his role in the play and goes off the stage, sword on shoulder, along the hanamichi. [Shūtarō Miyake, Kabuki Drama (Tokyo: Japan Travel Bureau, 1964), p. 88.]

as outside the song frame, thus unofficial, informal, directly communicated.) Furthermore, in accordance with the fundamental principle that anything mentionable can be retransformed, one should expect that quite convincing curtain calls can be scripted and acted in a movie about the legitimate stage—of which there are surely as many as we need. And one should note the frame sophistication involved in the Kabuki takeoff on Shibaraku, a traditional Kabuki play, the satire being designed as a female version of the original. A female impersonator (an onnagata) of course takes the part using a male costume, but in the finale, when greeting the audience, he reverts to delicate female response.  

None of the above requires particularly careful thinking. But when one tries to get some picture of the character of events during and within a performance, when the inner realm of the drama is being sustained, conventional understandings are less helpful. A painstaking approach is required.

IV

To understand the organization of the inner world of a stage play (or any other dramatic scripting), one must try to get a clear view of the relation an individual can have to other kinds of doings. In the world of real, everyday activity, the individual can predict some natural events with a fair amount of certainty, but interpersonal outcomes are necessarily more problematic. In any case, in matters affecting himself he must await fate, await something that will unfold but hasn’t yet. In the case of make-believe the individual can arrange to script what is to come, unwinding his own reel. With fabrications it is apparent that the fabricators have some opportunity to “play the world backwards,” that is, to arrange now for some things to work out later that ordinarily would be out of anyone’s control and a matter of fate or chance.

Corresponding to these various arrangements will be various information states. By an “information state” I mean the knowledge an individual has of why events have happened as they

8. Miyake, Kabuki Drama, pp. 88–89.
9. See the chapter on “Normal Appearances” in R.P.
have, what the current forces are, what the properties and intents of the relevant persons are, and what the outcome is likely to be. In brief, each character at each moment is accorded an orientation, a temporal perspective, a “horizon.” In the con operation, for example, the dupe does not know that he is going to happen upon someone who will become his confederate and that they both will happen upon someone who seems to be a dupe. The con men, however, are somewhat more God-like; they know about their “real” personal and social identity and, barring some quite unforeseen event, know what it is that is going to seem to happen to them and the prospective mark. Of course, the dupe is likely to know some things about his own situation which he does not divulge to his newly acquired associates.

Turn back now to the inner realm of a stage play in progress. Obviously the playwright, the producer, the prompter, and the players all share a single information state concerning the inner events of the play; they all know what will prove to be involved in the happenings and how the happenings will turn out. Rehearsals make this all too clear. Further, this knowing is much more appreciable than real persons ordinarily share about their world, since the playwright has decided in advance just how everything will work out. Just as obviously, during a performance the characters projected by the performers act as if they possess different information states, different from one another and, of course, less complete than the one the actors and the production crew possess. Note, the make-believe acceptance of different information states, different from one’s fellow characters and different from the production staff, is an absolute essential if any sense is to be made out of the inner drama on the stage. Any utterance offered in character on the stage makes sense only if the maker is ignorant of the outcome of the drama and ignorant about some features of the situation “known” to the other characters.

If one is willing to restrict oneself to a consideration of the players themselves in their scripted and performed duties, one


11. In von Neumann’s language, in plays, as in poker, “anteriority” does not imply “preliminarity.”
could speak of the play as a keying and the acting as a form of make-believe. In brief, during the play, the person playing the hero acts as if he doesn't know what the villain is going to do, and the person playing the villain acts as if he can hide his intent from the hero, although both these individuals have a common and full knowledge of the play and of the distribution of this knowledge. This means that at least some of the characters will be hoodwinking the other characters, that all will be "ignorant" of certain problematic outcomes, and that the play will therefore be, given only the actors and their real information states, a keying of a fabrication.

So, taken by themselves, the performers can be seen to be playing at containing each other. But when one adds the audience to the picture, matters become somewhat more complicated. It is, of course, perfectly possible and not at all rare for a theater-goer to know how the play he is watching comes out, because he either has read it or has seen it on another occasion. But that is not the first fact to look at. The first thing to see is that members of the audience in their capacity as onlookers, as official eavesdroppers, are accorded by the playwright a specific information state relative to the inner events of the drama, and this state necessarily is different from the playwright's and in all likelihood different from that of various characters in the play—although one or more play characters may be accorded the same information state as the audience, a bridging function which may pass from one set of characters to another. 12

Being part of the audience in a theater obliges us to act as if our own knowledge, as well as that of some of the characters, is partial. As onlookers we are good sports and act as if we are ignorant of outcomes—which we may be. But this is not ordinary ignorance, since we do not make an ordinary effort to dispel it.

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12. Indeed, whenever a producer provides a strip of represented material for consumers, a moving point of development is likely to be maintained for the consumer, the point moving along from one instance of consumption to the next, this requiring that the producer tactfully set aside his current view of the material. As Charles Fillmore argues in a useful paper on point of view in narrative ("Pragmatics and the Description of Discourse" [unpublished paper]), the practice even in nonfiction book writing is to say: "This subject will be treated at length in a later chapter," even "though the person writing that statement actually stands to his book so as to warrant him saying 'This subject was treated. . . .'"
We willingly sought out the circumstances in which we could be temporarily deceived or at least kept in the dark, in brief, transformed into collaborators in unreality. And we actively collaborate in sustaining this playful unknowingness. Those who have already read or seen the play carry this cooperativeness one step further; they put themselves as much as possible back into a state of ignorance, the ultimate triumph of onlooker over theatergoer. (Note the journalistic convention obliging reviewers to stop short of giving the ending away.) After the curtain comes down, of course, the joke is over, and everyone knows the same what-has-been-happening.

It might be said, then, that a stage production was some sort of voluntarily supported benign fabrication, for the audience treats disclosure somewhat as they would that which terminates a leg-pull executed in good taste and all in fun. But leg-pulls involve the faking of real activity, whereas the stage uses materials that are frankly keyings—open mock-ups of dramatic human actions—and at no time is the audience convinced that real life is going on up there. It also might be claimed that plays are like card games in the matter of suspense. In games the players voluntarily place themselves in circumstances of ignorance concerning each other’s holdings and then wait in suspense as the facts gradually come to light. In the theater, if the cast, the critics, and the audience all play according to the rules, real suspense and real disclosure can result. But there is a difference. The materials in the realm of card play are not mock-ups of life but events in their own right, albeit trivial in certain ways. More important, unless cheating is occurring, each player not only can be ignorant of the holdings of the opponents and the final outcome of the game but must be. The player cannot say, “I enjoyed that hand so much that I’m going to come back tomorrow night and play it again.” And something similar can be said of sports contests. Here the whole design, including handicapping techniques, assures that outcomes will not be known in advance, in fact, will be unknowable in advance. Through very careful manipulation of a model-like environment, suspensefulness is given a real basis.

To repeat, it is perfectly obvious to everyone on and off the stage that the characters and their actions are unreal, but it is also true that the audience holds this understanding to one side and in the capacity of onlookers allows its interest and sympathy
to respect the apparent ignorance of the characters as to what will come of them and to wait in felt suspense to see how matters will unfold.\textsuperscript{13}

I do not mean to argue here that every play is merely a

\begin{footnote}{13. Ionesco, in a play, makes the point:}

\textbf{CHOUBERT:} You're right. Yes, you're right. All the plays that have ever been written, from Ancient Greece to the present day, have never really been anything but thrillers. Drama's always been realistic and there's always been a detective about. Every play's an investigation brought to a successful conclusion. There's a riddle, and it's solved in the final scene. Sometimes earlier. You seek, and then you find. Might as well give the game away at the start.

\textbf{MADELEINE:} You ought to quote examples, you know.

\textbf{CHOUBERT:} I was thinking of the Miracle Play about the woman Our Lady saved from being burned alive. If you forget that bit of divine intervention, which really has nothing to do with it, what's left is a newspaper story about a woman who has her son-in-law murdered by a couple of stray killers for reasons that are unmentioned . . .

\textbf{MADELEINE:} And unmentionable . . .

\textbf{CHOUBERT:} The police arrive, there's an investigation and the criminal is unmasked. It's a thriller. A naturalistic drama, fit for the theatre of Antoine.

. . .

\textbf{MADELEINE:} What about the classics?

\textbf{CHOUBERT:} Refined detective drama. Just like naturalism.


A more serious version is to be found in Bertrand Evans' detailed information-state analysis in \textit{Shakespeare's Comedies} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960). He takes as central the playwright's control of awareness—of the characters' and of the audience's. He argues that a dramatist has three courses: to cause the audience to be less informed about the relevant facts than the characters, equally informed, or more informed. And that detective story writers take the first course, Shakespeare in his comedies the third. He states:

. . . if a comedy requires two hours and a half to perform, attention is centered for nearly two hours on persons whose vision is less complete than ours, whose sense of the facts of situations most pertinent to themselves is either quite mistaken or quite lacking, and whose words and actions would be very different if the truth known to us were known to them. [p. viii]

It should be added that when the audience is given more information than is one (or more) of the characters, this knowing must still be incomplete; for in the very degree that the focus shifts from what the audience is to discover to what a character is to discover, the audience must be kept in ignorance of the \textit{response} of the character to eventual discovery.
whodunit. Even whodunits have to be more than that. For temporary concealment of eventual outcome itself serves a purpose, that of showing that fate or destiny will work itself out and visit meaningful if not just deserts upon the play's characters. As Langer suggests:

Dramatic action is a semblance of action so constructed that a whole, indivisible piece of virtual history is implicit in it, as a yet unrealized form, long before the presentation is completed. The constant illusion of an imminent future, this vivid appearance of a growing situation before anything startling has occurred, is "form in suspense." It is a human destiny that unfolds before us, its unity is apparent from the opening words or even silent action, because on the stage we see acts in their entirety, as we do not see them in the real world except in retrospect, that is, by constructive reflection. In the theatre they occur in simplified and completed form, with visible motives, directions, and ends. Since stage action is not, like genuine action, embedded in a welter of irrelevant doings and divided interests, and characters on the stage have no unknown complexities (however complex they may be), it is possible there to see a person's feelings grow into passions, and those passions issue in words and deeds.¹⁴

V

The argument, then, is that the theatrical frame is something less than a benign construction and something more than a simple keying. In any case, a corpus of transcription practices must be involved for transforming a strip of offstage, real activity into a strip of staged being. Now I want to consider in some detail one bundle of these conventions, those which mark the difference between actual face-to-face interaction and that kind of interaction when staged as part of a play.


Even news stories can be written to maintain narrative suspense until the last paragraph, although readers surely understand that the event reported on has already finished occurring. And even news stories often manage, with the unfolding of the punch ending, to illustrate a theme of morality or fate. More to the point, when the lead neatly encapsulates the story line, giving the show away, as it were, the story can still be written in the gradual disclosure form, as though the reader could be counted on to dissociate his capacity for suspenseful involvement from disclosive information he has been given a moment ago.
1. The spatial boundaries of the stage sharply and arbitrarily cut off the depicted world from what lies beyond the stage line. (Many other social activities are, of course, restricted to a particular roped-off or elevated space, but with the possible exception of ritual, these activities are conducted as though events outside the boundary were of the same general order of being as those within. Not so in theatrical staging.) Further, the endings of a drama can follow somewhat the possible endings in real life; the beginnings of a play don’t seem to have much of a parallel in unstaged activity. For typically the curtains open on an episode in progress, with no attention given by the characters to the fact that they have suddenly come into view. Movies, incidentally, can effect a more gradual introduction of the realm the onlookers will enter.

2. As a means of injecting the audience into the staged activity we employ the convention of opening up rooms so that they have no ceiling and one wall missing—an incredible arrangement if examined naïvely. The point here is not that the doings of the characters are exposed—after all, there are lots of doings that

15. And not, of course, a necessity:

The modern convention which enables our theatre-going audience to see into the interior of a house would have startled the Greeks and Romans. Their basic convention was quite different. The stage represented for them an open street, or some other open place; they were the general public assembled on the other side of the street or in the open country, and looking at the buildings which fronted on the street or open space. Every scene, in order to be shown on the stage, had to be thought of as taking place in the open air. In Mediterranean countries much does take place in the open which in our latitude would occur indoors; but the real and sufficient reason for staging a banquet, a toilet-scene or a confidential conversation on the street was that otherwise such a scene could not be staged at all. [W. Beare, The Roman Stage (London: Methuen & Co., 1964), p. 178.]

Beare goes on to make the following comment in regard to disclosive practices:

The expedients to which the dramatists are forced to resort by this convention are evidence of the validity of the convention itself. If it is necessary to disclose what is supposed to be taking place within the house, a character on the stage may be asked to peep inside the door and report what he sees. [pp. 178–179]

In Western drama, in contrast, it is events happening outside the room which must be disclosed by this heraldic device.
are—but that no apparent protective and compensative adjustment is made by the characters for this exposure.

3. Spoken interaction is opened up ecologically; the participants do not face each other directly or (when more than two) through the best available circle, but rather stand at an open angle to the front so that the audience can literally see into the encounter.

4. One person at a time tends to be given the focus of the stage, front and center. (He will often rise from a chair to take it.) The others onstage, especially those not engaged in talk with the current central person, tend to be arranged out of focus, their actions muted, the result being that the attention of the audience is led to the speaker.

5. Turns at talking tend to be respected to the end, and audience response is awaited before a replying turn is taken. A version by a member of the trade illustrates:

**Interviewer:** What sort of regimen do you put yourself through? Well, let us say in *Dear Liar*, which I'm sure was a very taxing part.

**Cornell:** One of the most taxing ones I've ever done. You were listening, if you were not speaking. I would say that the person who does a solo performance, such as, perhaps, John Gielgud does in his *Ages of Man*, would be less tired than the person who did Brian's and mine—Brian Aherne's and mine—because, if you're talking yourself, as I am talking at the present moment, I can make pauses. I can take my time. I can think it over. If I want to walk across the stage and back after a particular scene, I can do it. With dialogue, or two people, shall I say, on the stage—not a dialogue, but with two people working together—there wasn't a moment when I had not to listen to Brian, and vice versa, and always be aware that we must not respond before the audience responded. It's so easy for you to go off in your timing—for him to say something funny, and I would feel like smiling or laughing, and yet I knew that if I did smile or laugh, somehow the focus of the audience would move for a second past him to me and, consequently, I might break up a laugh that was coming. I had to wait till
they began to respond, before I could. So it took constant effort. And if you were tired, you might naturally smile at something, or laugh at something, or take your handkerchief—I had to because I had a cold—but you knew all the time that you might do something that would distract just that second. And so you never could be at ease, at all.\textsuperscript{16}

It is thus that the audience response is systematically built into the interaction on stage.\textsuperscript{17}


\textsuperscript{17} Of course, given this interposition convention, the way is clear for a pair of actors to make dramaturgical news:

\textbf{INTERVIEWER:} What is the secret of your teamwork?
\textbf{LUNT:} I don't know. I guess each of us is interested in the other. That's one thing. And, of course, there is our way of speaking together. We started it in \textit{The Guardsman}. We would speak to each other as people do in real life. I would, for instance, start a speech, and in the middle, on our own cue, which we would agree on in advance, Lynn would cut in and start talking. I would continue on a bit, you see. You can't do it in Shakespeare, of course. But in drawing-room comedies, in realistic plays, it is most effective. How can I make that clear? We what is known as overlapped . . .

\textbf{INTERVIEWER:} Without waiting . . .
\textbf{LUNT:} Yes, in the middle of a sentence. That is exactly what I mean, what we are doing right now. We are talking together, aren't we? You heard what I said, and I heard what you said. Well, to do that on the stage, you see, you have to work it very, very carefully, because you overlap lines. So that once I say the line, "Come into the next room and I will get ready," your cue really is "the next room," and you say, "All right," and I continue and say, "and I will get ready," underneath, as it were. Of course, I must lower my voice so that she is still heard. Is that clear?

\textbf{INTERVIEWER:} This interaction is presumably what every actor dreams of.
\textbf{LUNT:} They thought it couldn't be done. They said you will never do it. And when we first played \textit{Caprice} in London, they were outraged because we talked together. Really outraged, the press was. But it was a great success. And I think it was the first time it was ever done. I don't know. It just happened because we knew each other so well and trusted each other. Although sometimes I have been accused, and I accuse her, of stepping
6. A fundamental transcription practice of "disclosive compensation" is sustained throughout the interaction. The assumption is that in unstaged, actual interaction the speaker achieves a joint spontaneity of involvement between himself and all his hearers. This apparently is done by his omitting from the conversation topics that would be grossly unsuitable for any of his hearers to share with him, or topics that are shared in widely different degrees by his hearers, as well, of course, as topics of "no interest." He then commonly proceeds by means of a maximum of laconicity, that is, by truncating his explication as much as is consistent with providing hearers adequate cognitive orientation. In the case of newcomers or persons who can well be somewhat left out of the talk, he may provide initial, pointed, orienting comments, but perhaps more as a courtesy than anything else—a courtesy that allows the outsider to act as though he isn't. Eavesdroppers are thus destined to hear fragments of meaningful talk, not streams of it. (Indeed, when participants sense they are being audited, they may employ a self-conscious hyperlaconicity approaching a secret code.) The theater, however, stages interaction systematically designed to be exposed to large audiences that can only be expected to have very general knowledge in common with the play characters performing this interaction. Were the persons onstage to orient to the audience as persons to adjust the conversation to—by filling in, censoring, and so forth—the dramatic illusion would be entirely lost. One character could say to another character only what could be said to a roomful of strangers. The audience would be "in" nothing. On the other hand, if the audience were not filled in somehow, it would soon become entirely lost. What is done, and done systematically, is that the audience is given the information it needs covertly, so the fiction can be sustained that it has indeed entered into a world not its own. (In fact, special devices are available,

on a line or a laugh or a bit of business. "Why do you come in so quickly?" "Why don't you . . ."

[Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt, ibid., pp. 45-46.]

The rule of one-at-a-time is especially marked in radio drama, where almost everything depends on verbally imparted information, and therefore no interference therewith is tolerable. (See the unpublished paper by John Carey, "Framing Mechanisms in Radio Drama" [University of Pennsylvania, 1970].)
such as asides, soliloquies, a more than normal amount of interrogation, self-confession, and confidence giving—all to ease the task of incidentally providing information needed by the onlookers.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, staged interaction must be systematically managed in this incidentally informing manner.

7. Utterances tend to be much longer and more grandiloquent than in ordinary conversation; there is an elevation of tone and elocutionary manner, owing, perhaps, in part to the actor's obligation to project to the audience and be heard. Also, of course, playwrights presumably have more than average competence with expression, more than average literary education, and they certainly have more time to contrive apt, pithy, colorful, and rounded statements than do individuals engaged in natural, unstaged talk. And while ordinary interactants can attempt to set up an utterance that they have already prepared, playwrights achieve this control constantly as a matter of course.

8. In actual face-to-face talk between persons who have a settled relation to each other, there will often be occasions when the relationship is not in jeopardy and little new information bearing on the relationship is being conveyed. What is problematic between the two will currently not be at issue. Further, it is possible and even likely that nothing else of import or weight will be occurring. So, too, if a conversation between the two is occurring in the immediate presence of others who are not participants, then these others are likely to be disattending much of what is occurring between the pair, providing only that the two are "behaving natural," that is, unfurtively and in accordance with the setting. Thus, from the point of view of matters external to the particular conversation, nothing much will be getting done through the conversation. In dramatic interaction this style is adhered to more or less but as a cover for high significance, on the assumption that nothing that occurs will be unportentous or insignificant. Which implies, incidentally, that the audience need not select what to attend to: whatever is made available can be taken as present for a good reason. As Langer suggests:

We know, in fact, so little about the personalities before us at the opening of a play that their every move and word, even their dress and walk, are distinct items for our perception. Because we are not involved with them as with real people, we can view each smallest act in its context, as a symptom of character and condition. We do not have to find what is significant; the selection has been made—whatever is there is significant, and it is not too much to be surveyed in toto. A character stands before us as a coherent whole. It is with characters as with their situations: both become visible on the stage, transparent and complete, as their analogues in the world are not.\(^{19}\)

It is assumed, then, that the audience will take in the whole stage and not disattend any action occurring onstage. (After all, it takes something as large as a three-ring circus to be a three-ring circus.) Yet while the audience is reading the whole stage, characters onstage will act at times as though they themselves are disattending one another.

Here, incidentally, is an interesting contrast between stage and screen. Stage design allows one individual to take the center and claim the audience's prime attention; but all of him more or less will thus be put before the viewers. In movies, the spatial frame boundaries are much more flexible; there are long shots, mid-shots, and close-ups. By varying the angle and the closeness of the camera, a small gesture involving a small part of the actor's body can be blown up to fill momentarily the whole of the visual field, thereby assuring that the expressive implications of the gesture are not missed.

VI

I have described some eight transcription practices which render stage interaction systematically different from its real-life model.

\(^{19}\) Langer, *Feeling and Form*, p. 310. Burns provides another statement:

Moreover the audience is supposed to attend to everything that happens on the stage. In ordinary life the spectator selects the characters and events to which he will pay attention. But for the theatre audience the selection is of course made by dramatist, producer and performers. The spectator responds to their sign language and accepts their version of reality. [*Theatricality*, p. 228.]
Still other such conventions will be considered later. In any case, here is the first illustration of what will be stressed throughout: the very remarkable capacity of viewers to engross themselves in a transcription that departs radically and systematically from an imaginable original. An automatic and systematic correction is involved, and it seems to be made without its makers’ consciously appreciating the transformation conventions they have employed.

As a further illustration of our ability to employ transformations, look for a moment at the dramatic scriptings presented on the radio stage—the radio drama frame. Obviously, there are media restrictions that must be accepted: for example, in the early days, soprano high notes could blow out transmitter tubes, so crooning came into vogue; and since a sharp increase in volume when volume was already high could not be handled, many sound effects (for example, gunshots) could not be employed.

A basic feature of radio as the source of a strip of dramatic interaction is that transmitted sounds cannot be selectively disattended. For example, at a real cocktail party, an intimate conversation can be sustained completely surrounded by a babble of extraneous sound. A radio listener, however, cannot carve out his own area of attention. What the participant does in real life, the director has to do in radio and (to almost the same degree) on the stage. Therefore the following convention has arisen:

In radio drama, spatial information is characteristically introduced at the beginning of a scene, then faded down or eliminated entirely. Unlike the everyday experience of reverberation in a kitchen, we cannot disattend reverberation running under the dialogue on radio. It is therefore introduced in the first few lines and faded out. The same rule operates for spatial transitions. Moving the scene from the city out to the country might be signaled by:

**MAN**: I’ll bet Joe and Doris aren’t so hot out there in the country.

(Music fades in, SFX [sound effects] birds chirping, fade out music, birds chirping runs under dialogue)

**JOE**: Well, Doris, this country weather sure is pleasant.

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Within three lines, the birds will be faded out, though they might return just before the transition back to the city.\textsuperscript{23}

Similarly, there is the convention of allowing one or two low sounds to stand for what would ordinarily be the stream of accompanying sound. Again in both these examples the power of automatic correction is evident: the audience is not upset by listening in on a world in which many sounds are not sounded and a few are made to stand out momentarily; yet if these conditions suddenly appeared in the offstage world, consternation would abound.

Behind the need for these conventions is something worth examining in more detail, something that might be called the "multiple-channel effect." When an individual is an immediate witness to an actual scene, events tend to present themselves through multiple channels, the focus of the participant shifting from moment to moment from one channel to another. Further, these channels can function as they do because of the special role of sight. What is heard, felt, or smelled attracts the eye, and it is the seeing of the source of these stimuli that allows for a quick identification and definition—a quick framing—of what has occurred. The \textit{staging} of someone's situation as an immediate participant therefore requires some replication of this multiplicity, yet very often replication cannot be fully managed. A protagonist in a radio drama will be in a realm in which things are presumably seen, and in which things that are heard, felt, and smelled can be located by sight; yet obviously the audience can only hear.

As might be expected, conventions became established in radio to provide functional equivalents of what could not otherwise be transmitted. Sound substitutes become conventionalized for what would ordinarily be conveyed visually. For example, the impression of distance from the center of the stage is attained by a combination of volume control and angle and distance of speaker to microphone. Also:

By establishing a near sound, distant sounds, and intermediate sounds within a given scene, the production director can fairly accurately tell an audience the size of the scene they are hearing. If in a dramatic scene you hear a door open and a man's footsteps

\textsuperscript{23. Ibid.}
on a hollow wood porch, and then you hear him "Hellooo" a loud call which comes echoing back after a few seconds, the routine says that the scene is taking place in a large space.24

A second solution has been to anchor by verbal accompaniment such sounds as are employed, this assuring that what might otherwise be an isolated sound is identified as to character and source. ("Well, Pete [sound of key turning], let them try to open that lock.") However, ordinarily, natural talk does not proceed in this manner. During broadcasts, then, comments that have been chosen, or at least tailored, to lock a sound into a context must therefore be dissembled as "mere" talk; and again, this dissembling is systematically overlooked by the audience.

In addition to the "multiple channel effect," another element in the organization of experience can be nicely seen in the radio frame: syntactically different functions are accorded to phenomenally similar events. The question is that of the realm status of an event; and some sort of frame-analytical perspective is required in order for this question to be put. Two examples.

First. Music in actual, everyday life can function as part of the background, as when an individual works while records play or suffers Muzak in its ever increasing locations. Music can be accorded this in-frame background role in radio transcriptions of social activity—staged Muzak. (As might be expected, because in-frame music can also serve to set the scene for listeners, its first occurrence is likely to have foreground loudness; as the scene proceeds, however, the music will have to be progressively muted so that conversation can be heard.) But music can also be used as part of the radio drama frame to serve as a "bridge," a signal that the scene is changing, music being to radio drama in part what curtain drops are to staged drama. Such music does not fit into a scene but fits between scenes, connecting one whole episode with another—part of the punctuation symbolism for managing material in this frame—and therefore at an entirely different level of application than music within a context. Furthermore, still another kind of music will be recognized: the kind that serves to foretell, then mark, the dramatic action, a sort of aural version of subtitles. This music pertains to particular events that are devel-

oping in a scene, and even though it may terminate at the same
time as the kind serving to link scenes or close the stage, its
reference is much less holistic. Unlike background music, how-
ever, the protagonists "cannot," of course, hear it.25 So syntacti-
cally there are at least three radically different kinds of music in
radio drama; and yet, in fact, the same musical composition could
be used in all three cases.26 It would be correct to say here that
the same piece of music is heard differently or defined differently
or has different "motivational relevancies," but this would be an
unnecessarily vague answer. A specification in terms of frame
function says more.27

The second example involves consideration of sound volume.
The attenuation of sound is used in the radio frame as a means of
signaling the termination of a scene or episode, leading to the
reestablishment of the drama at what is taken to be a different

25. Eileen Hsu, "Conflicting Frames in Soap Opera" (unpublished paper,
Drama," provides a comment on the mechanics of this multiple level of
use:

The board fade also told the listener if music was a vehicle for transi-
tion; if it was to act as mood lighting; or if it was part of the action on
stage. For example, by establishing a perspective between music and a
microphone, the director suggests that the music is on stage; by keeping
mike distance constant and board fading, in the context of a cross fade
between two characters, the director suggests that music is helping to
make the transition; and by keeping mike distance constant while board
fading in and out of a scene, the director suggests that the music indi-
cates how the people in the scene feel or how you should feel about them.

26. The form of scripted drama called a musical provides a fourth role
for music. A character may not only enact a performance of song or music
(this having the same realm status as background music, merely a more
prominent place), but may also "break into" musical expression as though
this could be interposed in the flow of action without requiring a formal shift
into the performer role. The lyrics and especially the mood of these songs
will have something to do with the drama in progress, but how much is an
awesomeely open question. What the remaining characters do during these
musical flights is itself complex and no less a departure from dramatic
action than the offering itself. Here, then, is the Nelson Eddy syndrome.
That we can suffer it (or almost) attests again to the immense flexibility
of framing practices. Observe that the same suspension-of-action arrange-
ment allows for the interposition of other delights—a dance turn, an in-
strumental rendition—accompanied or unaccompanied by voice.

27. There is an instructive parallel here in the organization of cartoons.
As already suggested, the space enclosed in a response balloon is taken to
be radically different from the space employed in depicting a scene, and the
former can be enclosed in the latter without taking up any scenically real
space.
time or place, or an "installment" termination—again, something handled on the stage by means of a curtain drop. This is done by a "board fade," that is, a reduction of transmission power. But reduction in sound level can also be achieved by having an actor or other sound source move away from the microphone. Attenuation of sound created by moving away from the microphone can be aurally distinguished from a board fade and is used within a scene to indicate that an actor is leaving the scene.

Note, in both the fading out of background music (to eliminate interference with the speakers) and the attenuation of sound owing to someone's going off-mike (to express leave-taking), the auditor is meant to assume that the frame is still operative, still generating a stream of hopefully engrossing events—events that are part of the unfolding story. Music bridges and board fades, however, are not meant to be heard as part of the "province of meaning" generated within a scene but rather as the beginning of what will be heard as between-scenes and out of frame.

VII

There are, then, systematic differences between the theatrical and the radio frame. Each is only one lamination away from an imaginably real model, but the transformations involve somewhat different conventions. As a second contrast to theater, look for a moment at the version of events provided in a novel.

First, novels and plays share important properties, indeed, do so along with other types of dramatic scripting. Whereas in real life each participant brings to an activity a unique store of relevant personal knowledge, attends to a slightly different range of detail, and presumably remains unaware of much that could be available to his perception, this is not so in the realm of dramatic scriptings. As already suggested, that which appears is pre-selected as what the audience must select out. In effect, then, all members of the audience are given the same amount of information.

Further, in plays and fiction, the audience assumes that what the writer chooses to inform them about up to any one point is all that they need in order to place themselves properly in regard to the unfolding events. It is assumed that nothing that ought to be known has been skipped; a full portrayal of the scene has been
of course, during any scene but the last, the audience may not be seeing what one or more of the characters are presumably seeing, but this ignorance is proper to the perspective the audience is meant to have at the moment. At the end the audience will be shown all it needs in order to arrive at a full understanding that the story intends. And as with unfolding events, so with unfolding characterization:

When we read a novel, whatever we need to know about a character is revealed to us in the work. By the end of the work our awareness of the character has come to some kind of resting point. We know by then all that we wish to know. All the questions or problems that are raised by the character are resolved. If they are not, if the novel deliberately leaves the character ambiguous, the very ambiguity is a resting point. This is where we are meant to be left, the point of what we have read. It is ambiguity to be taken as ultimate, not one such as in actual life we seek to get beyond. In that sense one can say that characters exist for the sake of novels rather than novels for the sake of character.

Along with this assumption of sufficiency goes another. It has already been suggested that lines uttered in plays provide required background information in the guise of otherwise determined talk. A similar conspiracy in the text of plays and novels allows for events to occur incidentally now that will be crucial later. Thus, a character who exhibits a capacity to draw resourcefully on such means as are at hand in order to solve a problem is drawing on what was earlier provided surreptitiously just so that this resourcefulness would be demonstrable now. The same

28. Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 52–53. I have drawn considerably from Booth’s very useful study and have much profited from sources that he cites.


30. One example from a spy story, Michael Gilbert’s Game without Rules (New York: Harper & Row, 1967). The heavies (Cotter et al.) have dismembered the heroine’s (Paula’s) dog so that they can remind her father of their blackmail hold on him. Then the following “background” on Paula and her friend Richard, who have been sent to the country to induce an attack by Cotter:

One of the pleasantest features of their stay, thought Richard Redmayne, had been the efforts they had made to bring the place back to
can be said about other personal qualities, such as bravery, decisiveness, and so forth. Here in order to simulate what (it is taken) can be expressed about personal qualities in real life, a very central feature of real life must be completely abrogated, namely, that the individual will have to meet a developing situation with materials that were not assembled with the meeting of that situation in mind, since he could not possibly know at the time of assembly what would later prove to have been useful to assemble.

Consider now some differences between the novelistic and theatrical frames. It might seem theoretically possible to transform a play into a novel by the application of one rule: everything heard or seen by the audience could be simply rendered in printed words in an impersonal, authorial voice. Differently put, it would seem theoretically possible to write a novel, all of which

life. For a fortnight he and Paula and the dour Mrs. Mason had washed and scrubbed and scoured and sandpapered and painted. Paula had revealed several unexpected skills. First she had dismantled and cleaned the engine and dynamo which supplied them with electricity. Then, with the aid of a carload of technical stores from Norwich, she had stepped up the output, so that bulbs which had previously shone dimly now glowed as brightly as though they were on mains.

"My father taught me not to be afraid of electricity," she said. "It's just like water. You see water coming out of a tap. A nice steady flow. Halve the outlet, and you double the power. Like this." She was holding a length of hosepipe in her hand, swilling down the choked gutters in the yard. As she pinched the end of the hose, a thin jet of water hissed out.

"All right," said Richard ducking. "You needn't demonstrate it. I understand the principle. I didn't know it applied to electricity, that's all."

"Tomorrow," said Paula, "I'm going to get Mrs. Mason to stoke up the boiler, and I'm going to run a hose into the big barn. I'll use a proper stopcock, and we'll build up the pressure. Then you'll see what steam can do. Did you know that if you get a fine enough jet and sufficient pressure you could cut metal with steam?" [pp. 74–75]

required, of course, to set up the climax of the story:

Paula saw the danger out of the corner of her eye. She swung round and fired both barrels. The first missed altogether. The second hit the driver full in the chest. As she fired, she dropped the gun, put out a hand without hurry, laid hold of the steam hosepipe and flicked open the faucet.

A jet of scalding steam, thin and sharp as a needle, hissed from the nozzle and seemed to hang in the air for a moment, then hit Cotter full in the face as he stooped for his gun. He went forward onto his knees. The hose followed him down, searing and stripping. [Ibid., p. 79.]
could be staged by causing the characters to speak lines and to bear witness with the audience to audible effects offstage and audible and/or visible effects onstage. (Of course, there would be a complication: onlookers can directly see an actor's expressive behavior and do their own interpreting; readers must be told about this expressive behavior, and the describing of it cannot really be done without stating what the interpretation is to be.) Apparently, however, no novelist has thus restricted himself, although short-story writers have made an attempt. For the fiction frame presents the writer with fundamental privileges not available to the playwright; and at best these have been selectively forsworn.

Onstage, one character's interpretive response to another character's deeds, that is, one character's reading of another character, is presented to the audience and taken by them to be no less partial and fallible than a real individual's reading of another's conduct in ordinary offstage interaction would be. But authors of novels and short stories assume and are granted definitiveness; what they say about the meaning of a protagonist's action is accepted as fully adequate and true. That is a ground rule for the game of reading. Interestingly, a reader can spend his adult years writing about the imputational or constructive nature of personal characterizations and yet, when reading fiction, never once give pause to what he is letting the author get away with.

Furthermore, playwrights are obliged to tell their story through the words and bodily actions of all of their characters, these occurring currently, moment to moment, as the play progresses. Fiction writers enjoy two basic privileges in that connection. First, they can choose a "point of view," telling their story as someone outside of the characters or through the eyes of one of them, sometimes constructing a special character for this purpose.31 Moreover, they can change this point of view from one


If the character knew his own story entirely, if he had no objection to telling it, to others or to himself, the first person would be obligatory: he would be giving his evidence. But as a general rule, it is a question of forcing it from him, either because he is lying, because he is hiding
chapter or section to another or even employ multiple points of view in the same strip of action. Point of view itself can have, for example, spatial aspects, as when the narrator describes the physical scene from the perspective of a particular character, following the character as he moves along; a “temporal” aspect, whereby the author limits what he says to what a particular character could know at the time concerning what is then going on and what is going to happen—as suggested, a horizon or information state that the author can change, even to the point of “stepping into” the future of the character in question and alluding to what he is going to have to see as having been happening; and a “cultural” aspect, as when the writer casts his comments in the style and tone a particular character would presumably employ.32

Second, fiction writers, unlike playwrights, have the privilege of access to sources of information not derived from the perceivable scene in progress. Relevant past events and foretellings of future events can be introduced without going through the spoken words or current physical deeds of a character. A character’s unexpressed thoughts and feelings can be directly told without makeshift devices such as the soliloquy. By the simple process of scripting a character to think about the part of his past that is contextually relevant for the current situation, and by surreptitiously taking over from him at that point and extending the job, fiction writers can add vast amounts to a story. In fact, anyone can:

It looked like the dockworker was going to reach for his knife. John knew what to do. As a boy he had always been fascinated by knives and had managed to gather a large collection of them. He used to practice making passes and throwing them and had learned all about all the best holding positions. Six blocks from where he had

something from us or from himself or does not possess all its elements, or because, even if he does possess them, he is incapable of putting them together in the right way. The words spoken by the witness will take the form of islands in the first person within a story told in the second person which provokes them. [p. 64]

lived was Spanish Harlem and a gang on the border had adopted him, taught him what they knew when they saw how good he was. And he had come to be able to tell just by watching another's first move how much experience he was going to be up against. So now he felt no concern for himself. And he thought wryly that Mary must know something was wrong but not know what.

Think what a dramatist must do to get that in—assuming, of course, he wanted to. It might be added that novelists are in a position to refer explicitly to someone else's real or fictive text while writing it into their own (like reading someone's speech into the Congressional Record), thus providing readers a sense that they are in knowledgeable hands:

Major Smythe remembered the rising flight of the scorpionfish, and he said aloud, with awe in his voice, but without animosity, "You got me, you bastard! By God, you got me!"

He sat very still, looking down at his body and remembering what it said about scorpionfish stings in the book he had borrowed from the Institute and had never returned—Dangerous Marine Animals, an American publication. He delicately touched and then prodded the white area around the punctures. Yes, the skin had gone totally numb, and now a pulse of pain began to throb beneath it. Very soon this would become a shooting pain. Then the pain would begin to lance all over his body and become so intense that he would throw himself on the sand, screaming and thrashing about, to rid himself of it. He would vomit and foam at the mouth, and then delirium and convulsions would take over until he lost consciousness. Then, inevitably in his case, there would ensue cardiac failure and death. According to the book the whole cycle would be complete in about a quarter of an hour—that was all he had left—fifteen minutes of hideous agony! There were cures, of course—procaine, antibiotics and antihistamines—if his weak heart would stand them. But they had to be near at hand. Even if he could climb the steps up to the house, and supposing Dr. Cahusac had these modern drugs, the doctor couldn't possibly get to Wavelets in under an hour.33

So, too, a writer can editorialize by open authorial comment on what his characters are doing, or, more subtly and quite inevitably, by the "tone" he conveys in providing narrative continuity.

I have suggested how staged interaction differs from what it copies and how, in turn, radio and the novel differ from the stage. Observe that this argument is compatible with the folk notion that everyday life is to be placed on one side and the fanciful realms on the other. However, terms were introduced which begin to provide what will be needed in order to question this division.