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Communication Theory and Interpreters Theatre: Toward a Model for the Form

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COMMUNICATION THEORY AND INTERPRETERS THEATRE:

/ TOWARD A MODEL FOR THE FORM

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

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Submitted for consideration to
The Department of Speech
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INTRODUCTION

For too long and for too many people the field of speech has been characterized by fragmentation of rather than unity between its various areas of concentration. These areas, Interpretation, Speech and Hearing Pathology, Rhetoric and Public Address, Communication Theory, Radio and Television, and Theatre have developed almost into singular disciplines in their own rights. However, we cannot deny the vital interaction which can and does take place within the field of speech. The Speech Association of America has added the word Communication to its official name to acknowledge the growing importance of this interaction of all the disciplines. Certainly anyone schooled in interpretation would be hard pressed to discount the values of a well-trained voice or the persuasiveness of human discourse. The debater is well aware that his effectiveness is increased if he makes his argument come alive through the dynamics of his diction. In each of these areas there is a process of communication between the speaker and audience.

At first glance, the fields of Oral Interpretation and Communication Theory would seem to be incongruous. Interpretation is generally considered an art, Communication Theory is labeled a science. The connection seems easier to make, however, when it is realized that every individual communicates and every discipline is made up of individuals

who communicate to study the discipline. It is the purpose of this paper to draw a correlation between Oral Interpretation and Communication. One specific form of interpretation, that of Interpreters Theatre, including both Readers Theatre and Chamber Theatre, will be used. The reasons for this choice are two-fold: Interpreters Theatre is a newly revitalized form of interpretation and as such lends itself well to further study, and as a group event it involves more factors for study than does an individual interpretative performance.

The question may be raised that the attempt to correlate an art with a science reduces the art. We do not accept that belief. If in fact any art may be taught or explained to any degree, that explanation is based on a more or less scientific examination of the elements involved and on an organization of the results of the examination. In explaining the art the results of the examination are the messages which are conveyed in a communicative situation. The correlation is, we think, a clear one and one not intended to lessen the importance or the value of either the art or the science. There are, of course, certain elements in any communicative situation which are difficult to identify and to analyze. The exclusion of these elements does not in any way intend to minimize their importance in the communicative process or to cast doubt upon their existence. However, of necessity, this paper deals with the elements which may be readily observed or whose presence and importance may be substantially

argued through examination of the process.

It should be understood that there is currently a question of the traditional versus the experimental in the field of Interpretation. There are those who maintain that violation of certain guidelines removes a presentation from the realm of Interpretation. This paper will not attempt to impose any such limits. An attempt has been made to encompass the current experimental methods. There has also been some question as to the essential purpose of Interpretation, and as such, some controversy as to which of the elements of the art should be of primary importance. This paper also attempts to deal with the role of the interpreter, director, and audience, the place of the text, and the method of performance. These considerations shall, we hope, adequately present both sides of the controversy, for to attempt to reconcile the differences logically within the bounds of this study would be impossible.

A SURVEY OF COMMUNICATION THEORY

The ability to symbolize is at the heart of the communicative process. Symbols are the tools for communicating and man's distinct ability to interpret, manipulate, and make new symbols is the product of the process of communication. It is this product which gives man his uniqueness. Animals convey messages by using sounds and gestures, but never by using meaningful words. Man alone is capable of refining his message and passing it along. This process of refining and sharing is what we call communicating.¹

Communicating is the primary means of socialization of the individual. It is the means by which human beings interact. Communicating may be said to be on a parallel with personality, for communication shapes personality, and personality determines the pattern of communication. Because this process which is common to all human beings is also a process shaped by the individual, it has been defined by many different people in a variety of ways. There are some terms which appear in many of the definitions. Perhaps looking at these terms will help us to form a working definition of communication as a process. Some of these terms are interaction, relationship, integration, process, and influence. The concept of "interaction" implies that more than one element is involved and that the elements are not at rest or static, but are changing and affecting each other. The term implies, then, a dynamic process. "Integration" as a concept suggests

a unification of the common elements toward a single goal or objective, a definition which indicates the unity rather than the fragmentation of the communicative process.

"Integration" also indicates the purposive nature of communication. The concept "relationship" suggests that there is a sorting of elements to find some type of commonality or likeness. The "process" concept implies growth, development, and changes which move toward a central objective. This definition of "process" also implies a dynamic entity, one which is in a state of purposive flux. Thus communication is a process which involves a series of relationships which are discovered through interactions between the communicants. These relationships are integrated toward a specific objective, which is mutual influence.²

Communication Theory may be categorized in a variety of ways which might involve several subdivisions. The generally accepted nature of relationships in communication include intrapersonal, interpersonal, mass, and cultural. Though each of these sets of relationships should be evaluated in themselves, they are not entirely unrelated. There are elements which are common to all established levels of communication. Certainly the most easily seen of those common elements is intrapersonal communication. Intrapersonal communication occurs at all levels of communication.

Intrapersonal communication is that communication which takes place within an individual and thus forms the basis for evaluative ability and handles reactions to events, ideas, and experiences. It is also in the stage of intrapersonal

communication that we form the basis for the patterns of interpersonal communication.

Interpersonal communication is the interaction which occurs between two or more persons. This is the most common type of communication, the level at which relationships are formed and maintained. It is also interpersonal communication which forms the most important basis for the individual in his socialization process. Successful communication at this level is at the root of effective socialization.

Interpersonal communication systems differ from intrapersonal communication systems in three major respects: participation of communicator, location and destination of message, and possibilities for correcting errors. In an act of intrapersonal communication one person acts as both sender and receiver of the message, while in interpersonal communication sender and receiver are two different persons.³ The intrapersonal situation places the communicant in a dual role simultaneously. In an interpersonal situation however, the duality is provided through the potential reversal of roles between the two communicants. Feedback, which allows for effective evaluation and correction of errors, is more readily perceived in intrapersonal communication.

Intrapersonal and interpersonal communication are basic to all levels of communication. From these two points, we may gain insight into human nature which will enable us to be successful in group, mass, or cultural levels of communication. Mass communication involves one speaker attempting to communicate with many audience members. This may or may not be done

through an agent. The transmission of events in an instantaneous manner through such media as radio and television provides many interesting areas of study at this level of communication. Cultural communication deals with elements of culture. It may involve one culture communicating with another or the culture communicating with one individual on the intrapersonal or interpersonal level. Culture here is not taken to mean refinement, nor is it in reference to the fine arts, but it is referred to in the anthropological sense that culture is the way of life of a given people, the sum of their learned behavior patterns, attitudes and material things. Edward T. Hall has spoken of culture as communication, which perhaps makes it easier to see why many have called it a special subdivision of the study of communication. We should not lose sight of the fact, however, that our culture underlies all of our communicative efforts.⁴

Channels used for communication may be classified as verbal or non-verbal. We form our understandings of other people from our perception of the type of behavioral cues which they emit, or project. These behavioral cues are shaped and interpreted by our biases and self interests. These cues are constantly changing within and as emitted from an individual, and the changes help to constitute the dynamic nature of the process which the individual uses to communicate.⁵

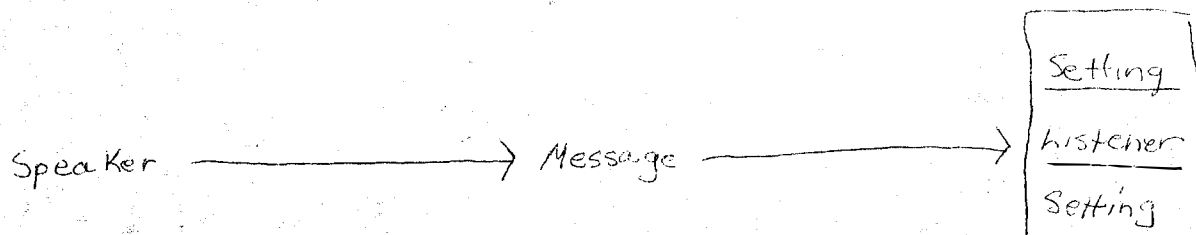
We must accept the dynamic communicative process as fundamental to the human being. Kenneth Anderson states that communication is the key instrumentality of man.⁶ This key instrumentality is often diagrammed in models. Let us

examine contemporary models of the communicative process. It is wise to remember in looking at these models that they should not be taken as all-encompassing, but rather as aids to an understanding of a complex and dynamic process.

Dean C. Barnlund describes the nature of models as follows: "A model is an attempt to recreate in physical or symbolic form the relationships alleged to exist among the objects or forces being investigated."⁷ Models seem to make concepts more clear than a purely verbal explanation can. This is easy to understand when we realize that a model coupled with a verbal explanation provides the observer with two sets of sensory stimuli rather than one. These stimuli can reinforce one another and thus assure a more complete understanding than only one set of stimuli might provide.

There are several sets of relationships which are explored in contemporary models. The types of models which will be presented are one-way linear, describing interpersonal communication, two-way linear, defining interpersonal communication, transactional, defining both intrapersonal and interpersonal, and a model for mass communication.

One-Way Interpersonal Model. Aristotle's view of the communication process involves three key elements: The speaker, the speech, and the listener. His treatment virtually discounts any interaction between the speaker and his audience. The representation of the process is given to us in an essay by Kenneth Anderson. His drawing of Aristotle's concepts follows.

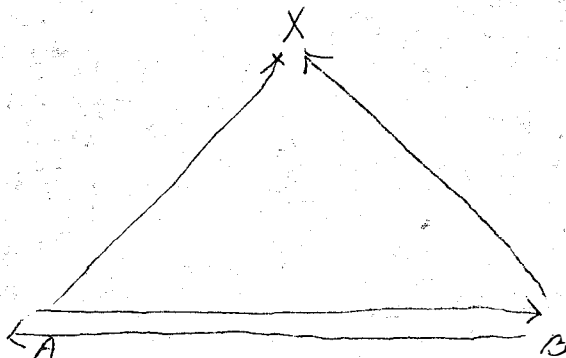


The process, according to Anderson's interpretation of Aristotle, is a dynamic one in which the speaker attempts to alter the reactions, perceptions, and attitudes of his receivers through the medium of a speech.⁸

Though certainly the elements are correctly identified, the dynamic nature of the process seems denied in a model which ignores interaction between speaker and audience. We ask why are no provisions made for the factors, both internal and external, which affect the speaker and his audience members? In not accounting for these factors, this model assumes that the message reaches the receiver unchanged from the time it left the speaker. Since the model does not account for interaction between the two human elements, we have missed the potential for evaluation of the ratio of success or failure of this communicative attempt, nor do we see any room for the combination of verbal and non-verbal behavior cues which are emitted by the communicants.

Two-Way Interpersonal Model. Theodore Newcomb in his model focuses on "the essential function of enabling two or more

individuals to maintain simultaneous orientation toward one another as communicators working toward the objects of communication."⁹ Newcomb is concerned with the potential for two-way interaction--the two-way relationship between a speaker (A individual perceptions of the matters dealt with in the communication. Newcomb's model also allows for the alternation of rules between speaker and listener. Aristotle ignored this factor. The message is not included as an element in the model. Newcomb perceives the message as the totality of the relationships picture in the model. This is Newcomb's model:



In explaining the model by verbal channels we label the speaker A, the listener B, and the matters treated in communication X. The arrows indicate perception of an element with the pointed end indicating that element which is perceived. The speaker perceives the matters under consideration, and the listener perceives these same matters: A has a perception of B, and B perceives A. All of these perceptions form the triangle which represents the message--the sum total of all the relationships in the communicative art.¹⁰

While we see that this model comes closer to embodying the dynamic nature of the communicative process, we still are missing the environmental and personal facets which make this communicative situation unique.

Transactional Model. The third commonly accepted type of model is the transactional. Dean C. Barnlund has developed a transactional model. In doing so, he presents several "communication postulates." Since the transactional approach is one which differs greatly from those previously discussed, Barnlund's postulates will be briefly presented before explaining his model.

Communication describes the evolution of meaning. It is not a reaction to something, nor an interaction with something, but a transaction in which man invents and attributes meaning to realize his purposes.

Communication is dynamic. Walter Coutu says, "Since meaning is not an entity, it has no locus; it is something that occurs rather than individually exists nothing in the universe 'has' meaning, but anything may become a stimulus to evoke meaning by way of inducing the percipient to give self-instructions in how to behave in relation to it."¹¹

Communication is continuous, says Barnlund. We would find it difficult to identify the beginning or the end of the process as Barnlund defines it. We can clearly identify, however, the beginning or the end of a particular communicative act.

Communication is circular. When signals must be treated in a simultaneous fashion, as both causes and effects, each of these variables becomes a function of the other variables. Thus, the contention that communication is circular.

Communication is unrepeatable. Barnlund draws a distinction between systems which are deterministic and mechanical and those which are spontaneous and directionary. In a spontaneous system, the system is governed by principles of internal organization which are themselves subject to change.

Communication is irreversible. This process is not one which can be clearly the same if taken in reverse. Since the process is circular, the point of reversal would be nearly impossible to determine. Barnlund reminds us that this is what makes a process spontaneous and directionary.

Communication is complex. Certainly this postulate has been evidenced through the examination of the other postulates. Let us review the explanation which Barnlund gives for his model.

A person decodes (D) the stimuli which are available in his perceptual field, responds to them, and encodes (E) them for transmission to a recipient or recipients in the form of behavioral cues. The spiral line which connects the encoding and decoding processes indicates the continuous, unrepeatable, and irreversible nature of the communicative process. The

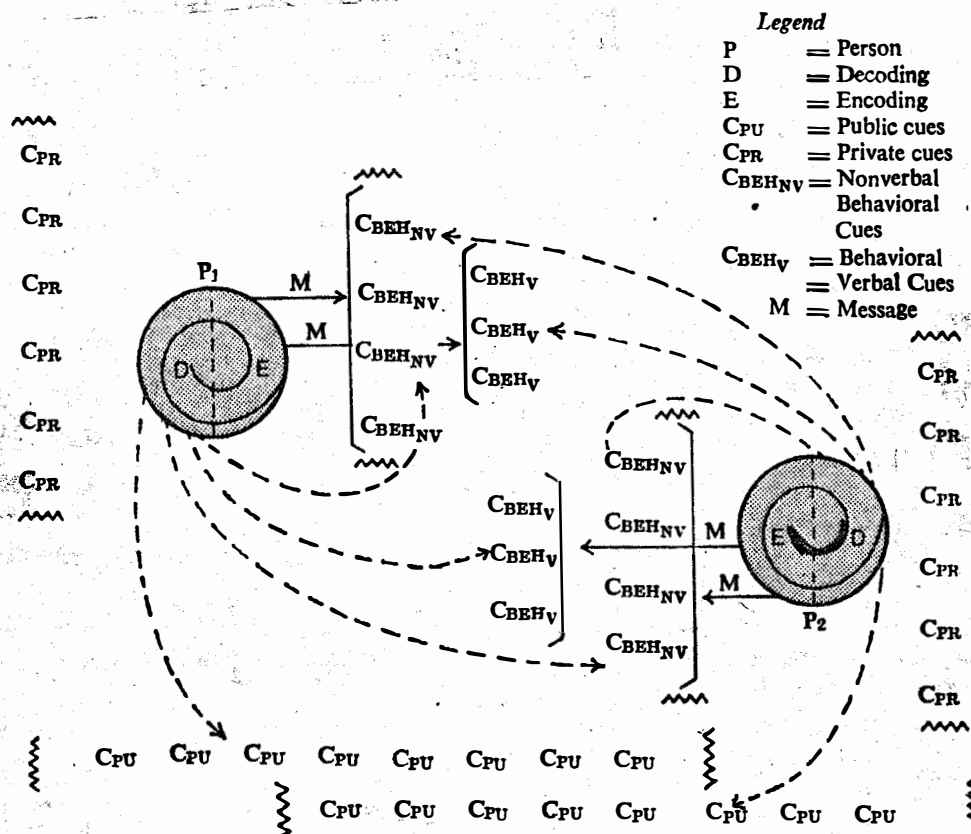
direction of the arrows illustrates the theory that meaning will be assigned to rather than received from stimuli.

In the model each communicant deals with public and private cues. These cues exist within the communicants and within the environment itself. The behavior emitted by each communicant, either by verbal or non-verbal channels, may become cues for the other communicant. Each cue, symbolized in the model, will carry a value which is dependent upon its capacity to assist or defeat the communicant in his pursuit of adequate meanings. These values are called valences.

In interpersonal communication, public cues are found in the fields of perception of both communicants. The cues will not be the same for the two communicants, nor will they carry the same valences. Some of the same elements will be involved, however. At some point, the behavioral cues become the message (M). The deliberate choice of cues and projection of interpretations make up what is criterial for the identification of interpersonal messages. We need to examine the environmental and behavioral contexts in order to determine a suitable response in any communicative situation.

Meanings are assigned to verbal cues according to the same principles which govern all other cues. They are simply distinctive in that they are a special form of behavior, they are finite in number, and they may be presented in a linear rather than a circular sequence. A public cue may be transformed into a private cue by manipulating it so that it is no longer available to all communicants. Private

cues may also be converted into public ones. Having the explanation, let us now look at Barnlund's model, keeping in mind that he defines the process as a transaction, rather than a reaction or an interaction.¹²



Mass Model. Westley and MacLean have developed a model which can be applied very well to mass communication. In explaining Westley and MacLean's model we are dealing with some new values and factors. The following definitions of terms will help to clarify the model.

A is advocacy roles--"the communicator" engaged in the purpose of selection and transmission of messages.

B represents behavioral system roles--"the receiver"--a personality or social system which requires and uses communications about the condition of the environment for need satisfaction and problem solution.

C is channel roles--agents of B in selecting and transmitting non-purposively the needed information to B.

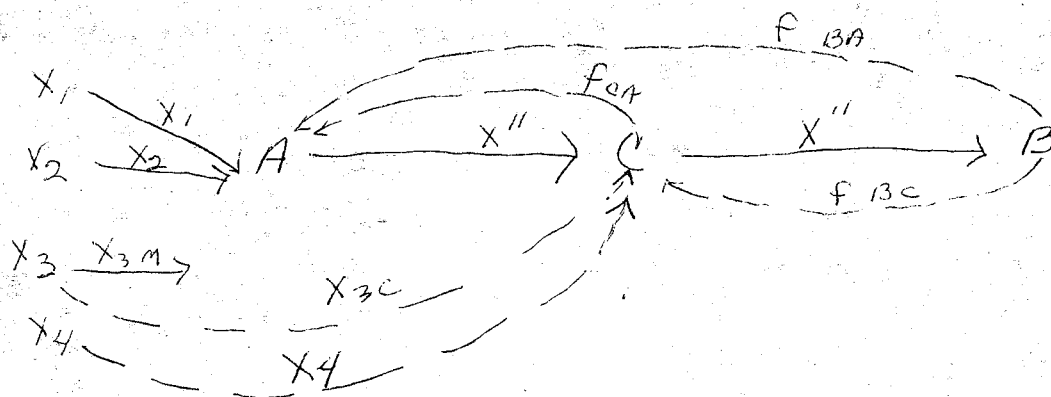
X represents the totality of environment. X' is objects and events as abstracted into transmissible form, messages about X and relationships between A and X. X'' is the message C transmits to B.

Channels are the means by which Xs are moved through As and/or Cs to Bs. Cs alter messages.

Encoding is the process by which As and Cs transform Xs into X's. Decoding is the process by which Bs interiorize X's.

Feedback is the process by which As and Cs obtain information about the effect of X's on Bs.

In this process, then, the messages C transmits to B (X'') represent his selections from both As, (X'), and abstractions from Xs in his own sensory field, which may or may not be Xs in A's field. Feedback not only moves from B to C, but also from B to A and from C to A. In the situation of mass communication, a large number of Cs receive from a great many As and transmit to a great number of Bs who also receive from other Cs. This is Westley and MacLean's model.¹³



Though models help to increase our understanding of the communicative process, there are many problems which must be evaluated. These problems are particularly well defined in Lee Thayer's essay.^{13a} Thayer tells us that we regard communication as a noun rather than as a verb, as a thing done, rather than a thing occurring, as a problematic situation to be remedied rather than a neutral event to be understood. If we label communication a process, then we must accept the fact that something is indeed occurring. Our problem lies in the fact that we are looking at ends rather than means, at results rather than causes. We need to shift our emphasis to what is happening rather than to what has happened. Communication by nature must be a present tense study. To make it anything else denies the dynamic nature of the process which is so vital a part of its definition. Also in this area, we must first strive to understand what is happening rather than how to make it happen.

Thayer further states that we are using over-simplified notions of causality, that we cast for explanations rather than for understandings. The question of the consciousness or unconsciousness of the communicative behavior is also brought into focus by Thayer. It is his contention that communication behavior is essentially unwilling or unconscious. This is defensible when we look at other theories of behavior and see that they, too, advocate an unconscious emission.

One of the strongest points that Thayer makes is for the seeming neglect of expectations or intent, with the focus being primarily on language. This neglect seems to ignore the question of purposive behavior, which is one of the points made earlier in the definition of communication. One might easily solve this problem by realizing that language is important merely as a manifestation of intent or expectations rather than making it a focal point for its own sake. Surely when we are studying rhetoric we have all come across the notion that verbal elements and their manner of use are embellishments for the purpose of the speaker. We are told that certain types of language are appropriate in certain situations. This too supports the theory that language is the tool, the device, rather than the cause or the originator, of a certain type of communicative behavior.

Thayer tells us that one of our largest problems is our "physical sciences thinking" which pervades our intellectual world. He criticizes the idea that communication may be situationally replicable, saying that it is time and space specific. We can see the validity of this comment when we look at the intangible nature of so many of the elements of a communicative process and the number of factors which affect each of these elements at any given time or place. It may be possible to construct only a general replica of a situation in which communication occurs. Thayer contends that to be useful, theories must accommodate the self-organizing aspects of the organism, interpersonal encounters and organizations. Most modern communication theory

concentrates on the elements which are considered "countable." Some of these elements are senders, receivers, messages, words, noise, and feedback. Thayer argues that we should more correctly be concerned with intention, mutuality, naming, knowing, and competence. These emphases have a definite value in our consideration, but it must be remembered that these are the very areas which Thayer reminds us are not replicable and so are difficult to deal with. We build into each other more or less appropriate reactions to message study to determine how it is that they cause or do not cause appropriate reactions.

Thayer points out that there is a dichotomy in our approaches which he calls "unjustifiably mentalistic, unrealistically consciousnessistic, unnecessarily symbolic and awkwardly teleological," and human behavior which is "non-conscious not necessarily symbolic." Often, he says, we confuse the word with the thing.¹⁴

Thayer's comments are valuable for reminding us that any model is merely a symbolic representation of a general type of communicative situation, rather than any specific communicative act. With this difference in mind, let us move on to the analysis of oral interpretation as a specific type of communicative act.

INTERPRETATION AS COMMUNICATION

John W. Gray provides an analysis of oral interpretation as communication. He states that the emphasis on Interpretation as a discipline concerned with oral skills indicates a "process view." Gray reminds us that much of the material dealing with oral interpretation which was published before 1960 deals with material which is quite similar to that found in many public speaking textbooks. In both areas there are studies of audience analysis, bodily action, empathy, and voice and diction. The influence of early literary texts may also be seen in material dealing with imagery, tone color, literary structure, aesthetics, and author's intent. If we keep in mind the fact that the speech arts grew together as inter-related, it is easy to see how these influences have crossed. We have, however, become separatists in the last few years, says Gray.¹⁵

All aspects of oral interpretation may not lend themselves to scientific examination. However, such scientific study may be a great asset in a thorough analysis of the art. This, then, is the purpose of applying scientific principles to an art form: not to equate art with science, nor to reduce the art to a mere scientific formula, but rather to evaluate and analyze the art so that it may continue to grow.

Gray argues that any student of oral interpretation is a process oriented individual since any explanation of the

development of oral skills in reading is based on a process.¹⁶ David Berlo, discussing the human communicative process states that once we accept a phenomenon as a process, we must accept its events and relationships as "dynamic, ongoing, everchanging, and continuous."¹⁷ His theses is that when we label something a process we also mean that it does not have a beginning and an end, a fixed sequence of events. It is not static, at rest. It is moving. The elements within a process interact; each affects the others. Gray contends that this definition is certainly applicable to interpretation. Neither the action (the reading or presentation) nor the response is the same in any two situations. We find it impossible to isolate the beginning or the end and it is difficult to list all of the active elements which come into play during the process. Looking at Berlo's comments and Gray's application, we are reminded of the postulates for communication which Barnlund presented. Let us take each of these postulates now and discuss its application in the oral interpretation situation.

The first postulate deals with communication as descriptive of the evolution of meaning and the transactional nature of the process. Certainly we can see that in oral interpretation the audience ascribes meaning to what it hears (auditory stimuli) and what it sees (visual stimuli) based on its own particular frame of reference. An example to illustrate this might be a situation of a death scene with one member of the audience who had recently experienced a death in the family. It is certain that this audience

member's perceived meaning of the scene will differ from that of someone who has never experienced such a thing. We can see too that an oral interpretation situation is one in which both reader and audience simultaneously emit and internalize behavioral cues. This agrees with Barnlund's analysis of communication as transaction.

The theory that communication is dynamic is readily applied to oral interpretation. Anyone who has seen literature come alive through a fine interpretative performance has witnessed this dynamic nature. The continuous quality of communication is a concept which we might find a bit more difficult to apply to the interpretative milieu. Yet, it may be argued that we certainly must be arbitrary if we choose beginnings and define endings of an interpretative situation. Does it begin with performance? With the writing? With the audience internalization of cues? With the stimulus which motivated the author? Likewise we would find it difficult to ascertain that the end of the performance and the end of the process were synonymous. If an audience member has ascribed meaning to what has transpired that meaning will become part of his perceptual field and thus yield an influence over some future internalization of meaning.

Barnlund also speaks of communication as circular and we may quickly deem this true of the interpretative situation. Linear causality has little credence here. The simultaneous which may be seen as reader and audience experience the literature being presented and the behavior they emit

as a result of such experience may be said to be an argument for interpretation as transaction.

Defining interpretation as an art assumes its uniqueness, that each interpretative situation is a one-of-a-kind phenomenon. No other interpretation situation will have exactly the same elements under exactly the same circumstances. This makes the interpretation situation spontaneous and directionary, in Barnlund's terms, and underlies the thesis that communication is unrepeatable.

The irreversible nature of communication may be equally applied here. Certainly the result would not be the same if the interpretative process were reversed, for reversal is difficult in a circular rather than a linear process. Barnlund's final postulate, that interpretation or communication is complex, is easily seen.

Looking back, we see that each of Barnlund's postulates may be applied to interpretation as well as to communication. Interpretation, indeed, is a specialized form of communication. Let us look further at the analysis of interpretation as communication.

Gray also deals with the possibility of communicating experience. There are those who argue that meaning which is discovered in a situation is the meaning which we ascribe to it. This argument, says Gray, implies that these meanings cannot be communicated, which is a theory he does not accept. He does acknowledge, however, that when an event is verbalized it becomes an imitation of the event rather than the event itself. This is closer to the case. What may be

argued is that it is interpretations of meanings which are emitted as cues and ascriptions of meaning to these cues which occurs.

Gray contends that any attempt at communication must be judged in terms of response. When an interpreter reads the likeness he makes to experience is a syntheses of sensory and intellectual elements having both connotative and denotative meanings. Both the sensory and intellectual elements, having been learned through experience, may be used to create an imitation of experience. The context of this message communicated by the oral interpreter is another concept which Gray considers. Most definitions of oral interpretation tell us that we communicate the intellectual, emotional and aesthetic content of the literature.¹⁸ When speaking of the intellectual we are referring to the fact that the author uses his work to present ideas of intellectual and social significance. It is the task of the interpreter to seek the author's original intent and to present his views as vividly and as honestly as possible.¹⁹

The emotional context of the literature is defined as the psychological appeals used by the author to heighten the effect and vivify the experience for the reader. Paul Hunsinger finds more parallels than does Gray between Communication and interpretation. His book Communicative Interpretation examines this concept in depth. Hunsinger theorizes a triadic process with a source (the literature) a sender (the communicative interpreter) and a receiver

(the audience). Some of the first points he makes are to support the theory that communicative interpretation is a dynamic process. He states that audiences are by nature unique and ephemeral, that the interpreter's perception, appreciation, and understanding of the literature and of audiences are ever-changing, and finally, that the communicative interpreter's performance is constantly adapting.²⁰

Hunsinger then goes on to present various philosophies of interpretation and communication. In so doing he states that the only major difference in theories of interpretation and those of communication is that the interpreter is the transmitter or translator of the message, not the originator, in an interpretation, while in the case of communication, the communicator usually originates the message.²¹ In describing the literature-centered philosophy, Hunsinger gives us three basic assumptions. The creative artist had certain definite intentions. It is possible to know what these intentions were. The intentions of the author must be communicated to the audience. Hunsinger notes that in the literature-centered philosophy, the interpreter must face the problem that it may be impossible to determine the intention of the author. If the interpreter takes the philosophical point that he must follow the intention of the literature rather than the intention of the author, he may be more able to complete his task. With this philosophy all presentation must be done on the basis of literary intent.

The audience-centered philosophy places emphasis on the expected response of the audience to the literature. Meaning is judged solely on the basis of the response of the audience to the literature as presented in the communicative act. Selection of literature and mode of presentation are here determined by the desired effect on the audience.

A third of these philosophies is the presentational or discipline centered philosophy. This approach maintains that through the use of literature, the interpreter gains a deeper understanding of the techniques of communication. If this philosophy is followed, the literature is used as an exercise for perfection of vocal technique.

Hunsinger cites several principles for communicative interpretation. The interpreter should be honest with himself, the literature and the audience, and should seek to communicate the thought emotion and attitude of the author. The act of communicative interpretation is described as a situation where the literature, the audience situation, and the interpreter should determine the best manner and techniques for presentation. Restraint should be used says Hunsinger in communicating the thoughts, feelings and attitudes of the author and overt techniques of presentation should be avoided.²²

Since we can see by the analyses of Gray and Hunsinger that interpretation certainly can be called communication, we are ready to look at Interpreters Theatre as a specialized form of Oral Interpretation.

INTERPRETERS THEATRE
AN ANALYSIS AND A MODEL

Interpreters Theatre as a separate form of oral interpretation is fairly new. Though certainly many experts in interpretation have cited the origins in the rhapsodies of fifth century Greece or in the medieval religious tropes, the professional production of Don Juan In Hell in 1951 is cited as the modern premiere for the genre. Though not a great deal has been written about the form, both Joanna Hawkins Maclay and Leslie Irene Coger have been instrumental in establishing written theory for Interpreters Theatre.

Maclay defines theatre as a medium characterized by the two features of a text and a performance. Interpreters Theatre is a theatre which features literary texts. Maclay defines the text as the total experience; realistic and imaginative, explicit and implicit, detailed and suggested.²³ In speaking of traditional techniques of Interpreters Theatre performance, Maclay cites use of manuscripts, reading stands, and a presentational style of delivery. When speaking of limitations she tells us that physical action, costumes, scenery and properties are traditionally minimized. She points out that Interpreters Theatre can be a tool for critical evaluation which can clarify or illuminate point of view, plot, structure or character relationships. This experience is provided for directors, audience and actors.

The fourth chapter of Maclay's book deals almost exclusively with the role of the director. The director's primary responsibility is to arrive at some interpretation of the text. After this interpretation is discussed with the actors and they have arrived at a mutual understanding with the director, the director moves on to consider how to present this interpretation most effectively to the audience. If the listener is to be spoken to directly, as is sometimes the case in interpretation, the focus is out front. If, however, the audience is to gain its information through over-hearing the actors, the case in most traditional theatre, the focus remains on stage.

Marvin and Marion Kleinau in their essay, "Scene Location in Readers Theatre: Static or Dynamic?" have made some interesting comments on the problem of focus. They define Readers Theatre as "two or more readers each assigned to an individual role and each engaged in the task of presenting to the audience a literary work through the medium of oral interpretation."²⁴

In speaking about cue relationships in Interpreters Theatre, the Kleinaus state that two or more readers become focal points in an action charged space. That space is located in the visual field of the audience. The aural stimuli and the visual stimuli interact, in such a way as to create for the audience a constantly shifting orientation, thus reinforcing the theory that scene location should be dynamic. This placement of more than one stimulus giving

focal point in a scene or visual field increases the duality and inter-relationships of auditory and visual cues.²⁵

In her chapter concerning performance, Maclay first deals with the relationship between performer and text. This relationship is a secondary one, for the interpreter's relationship is to the director's interpretation of the text. She still cites this as an active rather than a passive relationship, however.

Coger is considerably more performance oriented than Maclay. She begins with the goal of the director "to present a literary script with oral readers using their voices and bodies to suggest the intellectual, emotional, and sensory experiences inherent in the literature."²⁶ Coger cites four definitions by other oral interpretation experts to help clarify her position on what the form is. Akin defines Readers Theatre as "a form of oral interpretation in which all types of literature may be projected by means of characterized readings enhanced by theatrical effects."²⁷ Keith Brooks calls it "a group activity in which the best of literature is communicated through the oral interpretation approach of vocal and physical suggestion."²⁸ Wallace Bacon says, "Interpreters Theatre embraces the group reading of material with or without the presence of a narrator in such a manner as to establish the focus of the piece not onstage with the readers, but in the imagination of the audience."²⁹ Don Geiger speaks more generally, saying, "oral interpretation then is an unformulable amalgam of

acting, public speaking, critical reaction and sympathetic sharing it presumes to be, like other kinds of literary interpretation, a cultural illumination publicly offered in behalf of literature."³⁰

Coger lists some key characteristics of Interpreters Theatre. Scenery and costumes are not used or are selectively implied. A narrator who speaks directly to the audience is present. This narrator is used to tie things together. Movement is only suggested. A physical script is always present forcing attention upon the literature. An attempt is made to establish a direct relationship between performer and audience. Emphasis in Interpreters Theatre is on the aural appeal, says Coger. These guidelines or characteristics provide an adequate picture of Coger's ideas and emphases of performance.

In summarizing the approaches of both Coger and Maclay we find that the primary difference is in the role of the interpreter. Maclay sees him as the vehicle through which the director's interpretation of the text will be presented. Coger's interpreter synthesizes the perceptions he receives from the text and the director and attempts to present this synthesis to the audience. While Maclay speaks of featuring a text, which dictates the mode of performance, Coger uses a fixed set of guidelines presentation. Though the performance of Interpreters Theatre as a finished product may look the same to the audience whether done with Maclay's or Coger's approach, we

must illustrate this difference in intent in our model.

In attempting to establish a model for the form of Interpreters Theatre, we must first look at the models already presented and evaluate which elements there included might be useful to our study. Surely each of the four models cited has elements which may be compared to the Interpreters Theatre situation. We must look, then, to the actual nature of the process described in the models. We have already seen that some theorists regard the strictly linear models (such as Aristotle's) as static, while models which imply a mutual interchange are regarded as more dynamic. It is a model which takes this dynamic nature into consideration which is more applicable to the form of Interpreters Theatre which both Maclay and Coger label as dynamic. situation where both aural and visual stimuli are so important, a model which takes into account both verbal and non-verbal behavior cues is particularly appropriate. In light of this, we see that the nature of the transactional model, with its dynamic quality and combination of types of cues comes closest to fitting the needs of a model for Interpreters Theatre. Barnlund's model, however, deals only with communication between two individuals. While Westley and MacLean's model allows for more than two communicants to be involved, it is less specific in terms of types of behavior. Let us examine, then a proposed model for Interpreters Theatre which combines the nature of the transactional and the mass communication models.

In establishing a model, our first consideration should be the choice of elements involved in the process. Certainly we need to include interpreters and audience but there are other elements which must be involved. With the emphasis given to featuring the text in so many definitions, it becomes an important element in the process. In addition, we must include the director, for he is the person who determines what type of message will be relayed by the interpreters. With this choice of elements comes the problem of which of these elements have relationships to each other which must be depicted in the model. The problem is compounded when we realize that the different approaches to Interpreters Theatre might involve different sets of relationships. For the most part, however, there are four sets of relationships which must be studied. The first of these relationships is that of director to text. It is the meaning which the director assigns to the written text that becomes the text to be communicated. Involved in this relationship are the perceptual field of the director as well as the printed page, for the perceptual field shapes the meaning that the director perceives.

The second relationship is that of director to interpreter or interpreters. While Coger's approach indicates that the relationship between interpreters and text would be an appropriate inclusion, this is not the case for Maclay. In solo interpretation this is a more viable relationship. It does not exist in a pure form in Interpreters Theatre, if

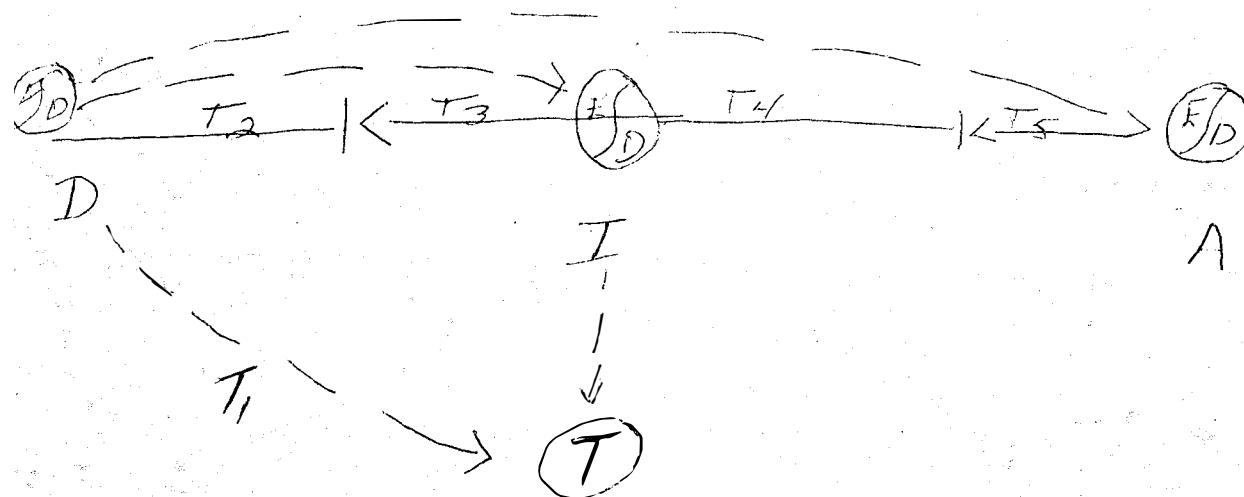
we are speaking of the text here as the original printed word. The interpreter also has a relationship to the text as perceived and communicated and defined by the director. And it is these two relationships which must be presented in the model. This is one part of the relationship between the director and the interpreters. The second part concerns their instruction as to manner of performance and the rehearsal situation. In view of this fact, we term the director-interpreter relationship as the second.

The director also has a relationship with the audience which must be considered. This relationship, however, is somewhat one-way. The director perceives his audience as having a certain nature. This perception may influence choice of text, interpretation of text and mode of performance and as such holds a valuable position in the model.

There is a relationship between interpreter and audience which must be studied. We would be within reason if we defended this relationship as the performance. In this relationship, the audience receives and assigns meaning to cues emitted by the interpreters. These cues are determined by the interpreters' perception of the director's interpretation of the text. The audience emits behavioral responses which may or may not become direct stimuli for the interpreters, depending upon the type of presentation and the extent of audience involvement.

We must not overlook the fact that both the interpreters and the audience are aggregate elements, they are viewed collectively. The perceptual fields of each individual in

these groups are determining factors both in the type of behavior emitted and in the perception and assigning of meaning to observed behavior. Here is the model for the form:



The large circled T is the written text. T_1 is the director's interpretation of the text. T_2 is the director's communication of his interpretation, with T_3 being the interpreters' perception of T_2 . T_4 is the interpretation of the text which is communicated by the readers, with T_5 representing the audience perception of that communication. As we see the three elements of the director (D), the interpreters collectively (I), and the audience collectively (A) exist in the same plane while the written text is outside that plane, or on a different level. The circles above each of the three major elements indicate that there are processes both encoding and decoding which are taking place. The lines which originate from the

portions of those circles labeled E (encoding) represent emitted behavioral cues, both verbal and non-verbal. The broken lines which come from the sections of the circles labeled D (decoding) indicate perceptions of emitted behavior and these

line of emitted behavior in the diagram. The solid line which goes through the interpreters indicates their intermediary nature as the medium used by the director to convey his message, according to Maclay. The broken line between interpreters and text takes Coger's approach into consideration. The interpreters in this situation have their own interpretations

the total communicative process taking place in Interpreters Theatre.

We can see through the model and its explanation that the interpreter in Interpreters Theatre considered a channel or a creator. He serves as the medium for the director's interpretation of the text, or as a communicant in his own right, depending upon which approach is used. His is the task of effectively reproducing the director's interpretations so that the audience perceptions are as close to that interpretation as possible. The variables in the perceptual fields of each of these three elements, director, audience, and interpreter prevent this from happening completely. This is the element which defies any art to be reduced to a science--the human element of creation and communication of experience.

In retrospect then, Interpreters Theatre as a dynamic form of communication may be described in a model that is transactional in nature. This model allows for any approach to the form and does not intend to prescribe any particular style of analysis or presentation. We may see through this analysis that communication does indeed cross this field of speech and that the study of communication theory may appropriately be used to increase our understanding of this particular division of speech.

NOTES

¹ Kenneth C. Anderson, "Variant Views of the Communicative Act," in Speech Communication: Analysis and Readings (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1968) p. 7.

² Gordon Wiseman and Larry Barker. Speech--Interpersonal Communication (Scranton: Chandler, 1967) p. 90.

³ Ibid. p. 107.

⁴ Edward T. Hall. The Silent Language (Greenwich: Fawcett, 1959) p. 56.

⁵ Wiseman and Barker, p. 110.

⁶ Anderson, p. 15.

⁷ Dean C. Barnlund. "A transactional Model of Communication", in Foundations of Communication Theory, ed. Kenneth Sereno and C. David Mortenson. (New York: Harper and Row, 1970) p. 83.

⁸ Anderson, p. 10.

⁹ Ibid. p. 13.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 13.

¹¹ Barnlund, p. 94.

¹² Barnlund, p. 100.

¹³ Anderson, p. 14.

¹⁴ Lee Thayer. "On Theory Building in Communication" in Language Behavior: A Book of Readings in Communication, ed., Johnnye Akin et al, (New York: Appleton, 1970) pp. 30-36.

¹⁵ John W. Gray. Perspectives of Oral Interpretation: Essays and Readings, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1967) p. 17.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 19.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 22.

¹⁸ Charlotte Lee. Oral Interpretation fourth edition, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1971) p. 2.

¹⁹ Gray, p. 24.

²⁰ Paul Hunsinger. Communicative Interpretation (Dubuque: Brown, 1967) p. 104.

- 21 Ibid. p. 96.
- 22 Ibid. p. 57.
- 23 Joanna Hawkins MacLay. Readers Theatre: Toward a Grammar of Practice (New York: Random House, 1971) p. 4.
- 24 Marvin and Marion Kleinau. "Scene Location in Readers Theatre: Static or Dynamic?", in The Speech Teacher XIV, (September, 1965) p. 194.
- 25 Ibid. p. 196
- 26 Leslie Irene Coger and Melvin R. White. Readers Theatre Handbook (Glenview: Scott, Foresman, 1967) p. 19.
- 27 Ibid. p. 27.
- 28 Ibid. p. 29.
- 29 Ibid. p. 30.
- 30 Ibid. p. 36.

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