

A case study in the pragmatics of American theatrical programs

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Theatre is a very fertile field for the study of pragmatics. Not only are there numerous persons communicating through any given performance text, there are also assorted paratexts—posters, programs, advertising, reviews—associated with most shows.. It is hardly surprising that there have long been debates over whose expression a play properly is, what purposes its communicative acts are to serve, and similar issues. The multiplicity of theatre forms and the variety of communicative acts involved in each production effectively prohibit making any wide-ranging prescriptions or even descriptions in this regard. What *can* be done is to focus on specific cases of communication in the theatre, contextualizing them with some general observations about the history and contemporary state of the form, and taking them as examples of what is and may be involved pragmatically. Such is the aim of this paper: to focus on one particularly interesting aspect of the theatrical communication, and in particular to examine four similar yet divergent examples.

The aspect of the theatrical communication which is central to this study is the program. Among the paratexts that are in orbit around a modern American theatrical production, only the program is designed to enter the time and space of the event itself. Its ostensible function there is to provide the audience with supplementary information about what and whom they are seeing. Its other functions include promoting the advertisers who buy space in it, promoting the theatre as an institution, and even promoting itself. In pragmatic terms, it is the multivalent defining tool deluxe, shaping a variety of disparate conceptions, serving multiple ends for multiple persons. The instances I will be focusing on have been chosen from a single time and place, Boston in 1993-94, an average season in a reasonably average American theatre center. Two of the programs are in-house programs from a not-for-profit regional

theatre, and two are programs produced by *Playbill* for commercial touring Broadway productions. They all adhere to the general format expected of American professional theatre programs; the theatres and productions using them differ somewhat from each other. In specific, the programs are from the December 9, 1993 performance of *The Who's Tommy* at the Colonial Theatre in Boston, the January 25, 1994 performance of *The Sisters Rosensweig* at the Shubert Theatre in Boston, the November 30, 1993 performance of *Henry IV, Part 1* at the American Repertory Theatre (ART) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the January 29, 1994 performance of *What the Butler Saw* at the ART. Taken together, they show some interesting things about pragmatics in one spot on the modern American cultural landscape. They also point to some broader insights about the program medium. The scope of the study is admittedly limited; other theatres in other cities will certainly differ in various ways from the cases in question. But what a local focus loses in breadth it makes up in depth. Thus, rather than confronting the reader with a welter of statistics or a book-length resumé, I offer a more detailed account of four closely related, yet different, individual examples, exploring them with relation to pertinent facts and issues from other contemporary and historical instances of the program form.

Pedigree

Multivalence is intrinsic to theatrical programs in their modern form. They began to assume this form in the middle of the 19th century. Until that time, playbills served dual purposes, posted as announcements and sold in the theatres by orange girls and others. In New York in 1856, however, an innovation appeared under the rubric of *The Programme*, a small four-page paper which gave information about a play (cast list, scene list, and so forth), brief theatrical news items and columns, and plenty of advertising (see Carlson 1993: 102). It came out daily, free of charge, and soon had a good circulation. It naturally spawned numerous imitators; ultimately, one publisher gained a monopoly, and from that is descended the ubiquitous modern *Playbill*. Marvin Carlson's take on the *raison d'être* of *The Programme* is certainly equally applicable to today's *Playbill*: '. . . to offer information on the play being presented, to gain some income from advertising, and to provide enough interesting

“filler” to encourage reading of the advertising as well. The wedding of commercial advertising and entertainment so central to American culture in general was clearly indicated’ (1993: 105).

On the other hand, the case is naturally slightly different with some of the modern descendants of *The Programme*, for example those put out by theatres such as the ART. The commercial aspects are acknowledgedly subservient to the production. (If there is an outside advertising broker involved who fills the ad space to pay for the program, then that becomes a secondary level, but it remains in an order of subordination, as opposed to creating parallel ends.) The form has been put into the service of additional ends, as can happen with an effective existing tool such as the program. The directorial notes which appeared in the theatrical newsletters for such late 19th century director-centered groups as the Théâtre Libre and the Freie Volksbühne found a natural place in the programs of those theatres which wished to include them. To this extent, the modern theatrical program, at least in such cases as that of the ART, has two progenitors, playbills and newsletters.

Cast biographies and credits

The primary function of programs remains the provision of information about the performance and the people involved in it. *Playbill’s* Boston Editor Joyce Sirota, interviewed by the author in 1994, takes a businesslike perspective on this fact: ‘I still think that the most important part is the program information, because if you don’t provide a book which provides that service to your reader then the advertiser is not going to get the benefit of the customer contact. So you’ve got to keep in mind the reason for the magazine’s existence, and the key to the whole thing is that the person in the theatre reads, uses and keeps that publication. If they don’t do that, we can all go home’ (Sirota 1994). An existing end of primary importance—gaining information—is served for the audience in such a way as also to serve the commercial ends of the publisher and advertisers; the commercial ends thus form what could be called a paraprismatic. The important thing about this paraprismatic, as with all para-entities, is that it is parasitical (by which I do not mean to give a necessarily negative connotation): it cannot take on a primary role; it cannot exist in the circumstances on

its own strength. A commercial transaction will always have to fill an end for the person paying the money; through parapragsmatics, the business becomes, like diplomacy, the art of letting someone else have your way.

The amount of space devoted to cast biographies shows a clear, though not overriding, awareness of the importance of being informative. In the 40-page program for *Tommy*, 5_ pages actual space is devoted to bios of cast and production personnel; in the 32-page program for *The Sisters Rosensweig*, four pages; in the 36-page (plus cover) program for *What the Butler Saw*, 3_ pages actual space are cast and production personnel bios; in the same size program for *Henry IV*, 5_ pages. This comes out to an average of about 12% of program space. These bios consist mainly of listings of the several shows each performer has been in. Is this information necessary to the appreciation of the play? The answer, of course, is that not even the very names of the performers are *necessary*, but the presence of this information gives an audience member additional reason to think a given actor is good and to appreciate his or her performance (and also to appreciate the paratext). It may add a dimension to the experience of *The Sisters Rosensweig* to know, for example, that the actress playing talk-show host Gorgeous Teitelbaum was the voice of Dr. Marsha in the movie *Sleepless in Seattle*. Since this information pertains to specific stage features (the actors), it is in a position to directly influence the appreciation of the performance, which is arguably a primary reason for its inclusion. Sirota sees it in this light in defining the overall purpose of *Playbill*:

I think it's probably to guide the audience member in their enjoyment of, and appreciation of, what's going on onstage. That's certainly rather general, but it helps to delineate what the event is, who is involved creatively in the event, both onstage and backstage, it helps to prepare them for what they are going to see, what they are seeing and what they have seen, gives them background on the people that they see onstage—perhaps they might recognize someone and say, haven't I seen that actor before, where, and they go to the bio to find out. So from an

audience member's point of view, that's the sort of guidepost it provides. (Sirota 1994)

The audience may clap a little harder if they have been led to the belief that a performer is a major and accomplished talent, or if, for instance, they admire *Sisters Rosensweig* lead actress Mariette Hartley for being involved with M.A.D.D., Handgun Control and the American Suicide Foundation. As well, they may at the very least be influenced to pay actual attention to the sound design in *Henry IV* by reading that the sound designer 'finds music in unexpected places' and 'has become known for creating large-scale sound installations with Austrian composer Sam Auinger in historical public monuments' (*The American Repertory Theatre Program* 1993). Informational purposes external to the production at hand can also be served; for example, Sirota tells us, 'My husband and I are Sondheim freaks. And one of the first things that, as a theatregoer, he looks for in the program is, has any of these people been in a Sondheim show?' (Sirota 1994)

Naturally, it is possible to be inventive with this material. Once a given party—in this case an actor—is given input into an established form, it is likely that the party will make at least occasional efforts to turn it to his or her distinctive ends. There are usually such bits as these (from the *Tommy* program): 'Special thanks to David Swan and Angela . . . thanks, Churl!' (leaving the reader to speculate on who 'Churl' might be) and 'This show and every show is dedicated to the memory of my Grandfather Noble . . . I miss you!' (*Playbill* 1993) But also, as Sirota says, 'once in a while, you get something strange in the bio information. You get somebody who, instead of having a standard bio, does something like a poem, you know, or they do something in code, or something . . . I mean, I've had all of these things. And what has to be the rule of thumb is, is it going to confuse the reader, or is it going to add to their enjoyment of the show?' (Sirota 1994) Which brings us back to the primary end of virtually all definitional tactics served by paratexts: that the show be enjoyed. The main issue in this particular case is whether that enjoyment is best as a unified experience which reflects well on advertisers, or whether it should be focused in, at least for a moment, on the individual identity and effort of a specific, ostensibly very interesting,

artist. Is the artist arrogating excessive importance with such tactics? Worse, will it irritate the consumers? An even more interesting case is cited by Sirota: ‘The first time Lily Tomlin came to Boston, she provided us with program copy complete with dummy ads, and each ad had a different Lily Tomlin character photographed in it, you know, like there was Edith Ann selling one thing, and Ernestine selling something else . . . And we worked it out so that it fell within the parameters of the amount of space that they were allowed, and we made sure that they were placed in the book in such a way that it didn’t look as if they were real ads’ (1994). In this case, the co-optation has exceeded its usual boundaries, and, while it is clearly not in a position to unbalance the show’s hermeneutic (since there is only one performer), it *is* in a position to disrupt the ends of the ads by promoting confusion. And so a compromise is necessary—in this case, one which seems to favor the advertisers’ ends more than those of the artist.

Biographies have not always been present in programs (as they still are not in many, especially those of smaller and less commercial ventures). Changes manifest in programs for the Colonial Theatre illustrate this point. In a 1929 program for *Show Girl*, there are no biographies at all. A program later that year for *Whoopee* has half a page on its star, Eddie Cantor; the information is genuinely biographical, speaking about his childhood, upbringing and start in show business. Cantor, as a star, was having his role as theatrical icon and role model fortified; most modern actors, with few exceptions less well-known, appear through their resumé-like lists of experience to be more concerned with advertising themselves. There is no biographical material on any of the other performers in the *Whoopee* program. The same half-page is given to three of the stars of *Sweet Adeline* a year later; the information is, again, as much biography as listings of plays. By 1959, the program for *Silent Night, Lonely Night* includes fully six pages actual space of biographies for everyone in the cast plus the director, author, designers, and producing company. There are also photographs of the two stars, Henry Fonda and Barbara Bel Geddes. The material is about halfway between the 1930 material and the 1994 material in nature of contents. A similar progression is reflected in New York programs. It is also worth mentioning that in the earlier programs the cast lists, orders of scenes and such information are spread over

several pages, using up about a quarter of each page on which they are to be found, often in widely spaced type. The progression towards the more packed look of modern programs has hardly even started by 1964. The change is primarily attributable to an increase in the number of pragmatics being served; the space that was empty is now filled by the resumé-like bios as well as such things as acknowledgments of donors and articles on advertisers.

In the commercial pragmatics of individual actors, billing—size and placement of name on the primary cast list as well as on the posters—is a particular point of focus. Commercial contracts often go into great detail on this matter. Difficult situations can develop from spatial exigencies or conflicting contractual promises. Sirota recalls one instance of this:

There's a very famous story about, I believe it was Mary Martin and Ethel Merman in a show together . . . and they both had top billing, supposedly. That was their contractual arrangement. And the only way that, I mean, they went back and forth and back and forth, and both women threatened to pull out of the show, and you know, it was just insane, and the way they finally did it was to essentially criss-cross the names, so that what you had was each of them got part of their name on the top line. . . . (Sirota 1994)

Such sensitivity can extend to small details; Boston theatre advertiser Charles Stevens (Stevens 1994) recalls Edward Albee's having discerned, with the aid of a ruler, that his name had been cheated by a sixteenth of an inch on a poster. This led to Albee's confronting Stevens very angrily at the opening night party.

In the programs at hand, the billing for *Tommy* leaves one in no doubt as to who the stars are: the author and director, Pete Townshend and Des McAnuff. The actors, without exception, have their names listed alphabetically in closely packed smaller type. Interestingly, the choreographer, Wayne Cilento, receives type in the same size (if less prominent placement) as Townshend and McAnuff. *The Sisters Rosensweig* features the three leads equally prominently, in spite of the fact that one of

them—Mariette Hartley—is considerably better-known than the other two, so much so that, at least on the night of the program in question, she received an ovation when she first stepped onstage. This gives an idea of the degree to which billing is a matter of contractual niceties rather than an index of, or influence on, audience reception. The American Repertory Theatre, which operates on a different basis from that of touring Broadway productions, has a billing page of sorts in its programs, but it is really more of a title page, listing the play, author, director and major technical staff; the actors receive their recognition in the cast list. The billing page has not been imbued with significance as a relative status displayer at the ART as it has in the Broadway sphere.

Lists of *characters* can also have influence beyond simple information when they affect or even provoke projections to which the performance will then be subject to comparison. In an elaborate character listing, for instance, as Susan Bennett says, ‘[m]ore attentive readers might perhaps take some time to decode the complexities of relationships and to posit characters and plot’ (Bennett 1990: 146-7). In the ART’s program for *Henry IV, Part 1*, for instance, the characters are divided into three groups: ‘The Court,’ ‘The Rebels,’ and ‘The City.’ This serves as an aid to character tracking as well as furthering the anachronistic division between spheres present in the staging. (It is interesting to note that Prince Hal, who is for most of *Henry IV, Part 1* in the City sphere, is listed with the Court.) In contrast, if the program were to contain only the names of the actors, ‘the *absence* of information might provoke audience activity’ (Bennett 1990: 147), such as trying to guess why there is so little information and forming expectations based on that. This in general relates to the pragmatics of individual audience members, something which is a rather heterogeneous field, but the audience’s reading of the information may be taken into account in the tactics of information utterance and withholding. As an example, in a play such as Marowitz’s *Sherlock’s Last Case*, where one character comes in posing as another, nonexistent character, the director may, in order to avoid giving away the trick, invent a false actor name for the cast list. A false name also means a false biography; if not handled correctly, this can confuse the audience and distract from the play. Use of a real actor’s name could compound the confusion. There is also the danger of spurious archival information. The errors may not be limited to the record of the play at hand, either:

the biography will almost certainly have to list other productions the fictitious actor has been in; if these productions are real, the misinformation is compounded, and if they are false then a researcher can be led to inaccurate supposition. There are safeguards, however. Theatre scholars should be familiar with the text of the play. American Actors' Equity is informed in advance when fictitious names will be used so that contracts and bonds will not be required for the actors in question. For its records, Equity relies on weekly reports from the producer in addition to programs; 'The information contained in those reports is checked against the program and discrepancies are noted and the Producer contacted' (Bruyr 1996).

Provision in advance of information which can give away crucial plot details would seem to be a particularly Brechtian effect, and not to the purposes of every director or audience member. The practice in musicals of printing a list of all the songs, as is to be seen in the *Tommy* program, for instance, will aid in the recall of the event in later perusals of the program, but it can give away the entire plot of the play, or at least significant parts of it. In this case, we have something which fills neatly the ends of some people, and militates strongly against those of others; most likely, both sorts of people will be on the receiving end of any given case. But therein lies the value of optionality: those who don't want the information can simply avoid looking at it. The program for *Henry IV, Part 1* has an insert which gives a synopsis of the plot action. This is helpful for people who may find the events difficult to follow at times; for those who like surprises, their satisfaction will depend on their avoiding glancing at it. Even for the latter cases, however, it remains after, so that it can be perused *post facto* by those who got their surprises but didn't quite catch how everything fit together.

We also mustn't forget that the most important audience for many of the credits (in particular the small-print ones) is often the people named in them. The simple act of recognition is important to many people; even if very few audience members take the time to read the names, the acknowledgement of importance is a significant psychological factor for those recognized. This can also have commercial use as a sort of *quid pro quo*, as Sirota explains. 'All that tiny little six point in the back, you know, "Anchor Hocking glasses used," . . . that's a lot easier than paying Anchor Hocking for the use of their glassware' (Sirota 1994). The ART programs are without

such credits, but the ones for *Tommy* and *The Sisters Rosensweig* each have a section of them (titled ‘Credits’) buried in the back where almost no one will see them except for those looking for them. For those who do read them, they provide such fascinating facts as ‘Cologne Sprays and Face Powder courtesy of Coty, Perfumes and Bath Powder courtesy of Dana Perfumes Corp.’ (in the *Tommy* program, *Playbill* 1993) and (in the *Sisters Rosensweig* program, *Playbill* 1994) ‘The Macallan Single Highland Malt Scotch Whiskey used.’ (The reader can then think, ‘By whom and when?!’) Certainly such mentions are of negligible value as advertising, but that would seem not to be the point. As the number of plaques on college buildings illustrates, people who do favors often do them simply in exchange for the acknowledgement that they have done a favor (and that they are therefore the sort of good people who do favors).

Director’s notes

Director’s notes are good indices of the different definitional ends of both individual shows and institutions, inasmuch as their presence or absence is often expected in a given situation—their presence in the ART’s program, for instance, and their usual absence in *Playbill*. Naturally, they also serve informational ends. In this latter role, they illustrate the effectiveness of optional information, for they are in a position to make a genuine difference in the reception of a show for those who read them. Witness Roland Barthes’ recollection of seeing *Mother Courage* at the Berliner Ensemble: ‘I was literally inflamed with enthusiasm for that production, but, let me add right away, inflamed also by the twenty or so lines of Brecht printed in the theater program. I had never read a language like that on theater and art’ (quoted in Bennett 1990: 64-65). Mariana Net (1993) sees programs as tools for interfictionality, parts of a collage of texts emitted by those producing a show with the aim of stimulating the audience not only to receive in a more ‘active’ manner the artistic communication but also to project their own fiction with which the fiction presented by the performance interacts. (Net writes of increasing audience awareness and intellectual involvement through construction of expectations and interaction of them with the actual product; however, it may be more pertinent to the producers’ ends, for instance, that the fiction

of the show be perceived in conformity with the preset expectation than that the two come into confrontation or comparison.)

The usual contents of the ART programs in this respect are described by Katalin Mitchell, Director of Press and Public Relations, as ‘five pages of program notes, usually one page or a maximum of two pages from the literary department, some kind of a descriptive, then either quotes or production history or something of that sort’ (Mitchell 1994). Since the programs are produced two weeks before the production opens, some influence from the actual production is possible, but production photos are of course out of the question. This is not to say that there are never any photographs or other graphics. For instance, the program for *What the Butler Saw* includes two photos of Joe Orton, a photo from the original West End production, and a photo of Sir Winston Churchill. The program for *Henry IV*, on the other hand, has no artwork of the sort, most likely because of a lack of space (or it could be said that the former program had photos precisely because it had extra space to fill).

It is taken for granted that there will be notes in an ART program; it is unquestionably *pro forma*. *Pro* what *forma*? The *forma* of the intellectually oriented theatre, naturally, which is the institutional definition that the ART is aiming for. But let me not be too facile here: it’s an intellectually oriented theatre precisely because there are intellectually oriented people determining its course, and intellectually oriented people are likely to have thoughts and information which they genuinely desire to include as part of the optional informationscape of a show. It serves as a reliable index of a given orientation because there *is* that orientation, not simply a desire to be perceived as having that orientation.

The information contained in the notes, however, will vary in nature, as Mitchell explains:

In the case of *Henry the Fourth*, we’re talking about a classical play that has been given a contemporary production, and you don’t need to give that much [information]—also, in the newsletter we gave a lot of information, all kinds of information, so the program notes basically

complement what the newsletter already has written. It always has to be something different. And depending, like in the case of Orton, who's not produced that often in this area, we want to familiarize the audience with who Orton was, what this play is, and why is it important. So [those] usually are the criteria, it's whatever is most relevant and that has not been covered in the newsletter . . . that gets covered in the program. (Mitchell 1994)

The notes for *Henry IV* are two pages' worth of solid text, written by Robert Scanlan, the literary director, explaining the different worlds within the play, the opposing ends of the various characters and the philosophical significance thereof, and the bases of the specific directorial approach for the ART's production. Such parallels are drawn as 'Hal, like his country, is inventing himself as he goes along,' and the major directorial 'concept' of the play is summarized thusly:

The great Falstaff scenes, for example, were Elizabethan in the extreme, while the contrasting court scenes were deliberately archaized into mediaeval austerity and epic grandeur. We follow Shakespeare's example in this production in borrowing freely from similarly displaced periods—both of them American [i.e., Civil War and modern]. (*The American Repertory Theatre Program* 1993)

Such notes can be very helpful for audience members seeking explanation of the potentially confusing anachronisms in a production of this kind. Scanlan's notes overall provide a useful lens and background for the audience member, couching the play in background and some exegesis of its contents. The approach in the notes is relatively straightforward; compare the potential effect to be had if the notes focused on modern guerrilla warfare or the youthful indiscretions of, say, Bill Clinton. The notes as they are as much open up possibilities of interpretation (through provision of some straightforward information) as narrow the interpretation down to a specific angle (of course, Scanlan's own perspective predominates).

The program notes for *What the Butler Saw* (*The American Repertory Theatre Program* 1994) were written by Christopher Tiffany, a dramaturgy student at the ART Institute. They explain the cultural position of the play at the time of its first production and give some of its early production history. One of the central points appears to be to let the audience know how offensive the play originally was and, by implication, how titillating they should find it. This is perfectly consonant with the prurient image which the other paratexts (posters, ads, newsletter) establish. This sort of thing is helpful for the show to succeed in the here and now, for two reasons: a) a major part of the audience are not likely to find the play particularly shocking by their current standards, and so the explanation that it was originally considered to be so will cultivate greater interest; b) some of the potential audience members *may* find it shocking, and should be forewarned (and also told that today's audiences are not so likely to be shocked, implying that they shouldn't be, either). Another central point is that it should still resonate with us today, as we find things that are still worth challenging. Just as the *Henry IV* notes provided a means of understanding and liking the production, these notes provide a means of 'getting into' and liking the play. As with *Henry IV*, too, the notes essentially proceed in the directions already initiated by the newsletter articles (thus helping to fulfill intellectually the promises made by the promotional material). There are also some quotations from various Orton sources (such as 'Much more fucking, and they'll be screaming hysterics in next to no time,' from Orton's diary, about *What the Butler Saw*), as well as a brief glossary of British references in the play which might otherwise prove opaque to American audiences—the former may be said to be reasons for enjoying the play, the latter, means by which better to understand it.

With *Playbill*, the presence of director's notes is generally an indication that the director has something specific which he feels must be explained. Sirota cites the example of the Huntington Theatre's production of *Dancing at Lughnasa*, where it was felt necessary to explain what Lughnasa was and what significance it had for the Irish community at the time of the play. Cases also arise where the hermeneutic of the show hinges less directly on the information: 'Sometimes, as in *Forever Plaid*, you get the director's notes that go on quite extensively explaining the impetus for the show. Why

did we write this show, why did we put this together. And he explains that it came out of his fondness for the fifties and all of that.' Sirota concludes that 'you get director's notes for a variety of reasons, but you don't see them so much' (Sirota 1994). For instance, you don't see them in the programs for *The Who's Tommy* or *The Sisters Rosensweig*. What you do see, however, that is not so much in evidence in the ART's programs, is light 'filler' material. Some of the material is of the order of theatre quizzes and trivia, all about Broadway shows (thus reinforcing the mythos of Broadway and its touring productions). Other of the material reinforces the economic status definition of the event: shopping and dining guides and reviews. Sirota says that the filler is 'more likely theatrical in nature than relating to the advertisers,' which, particularly if one does not count the dining guide, seems to be the case. The *Playbill* for *Shear Madness*, contemporaneous with that for *The Sisters Rosensweig*, includes four pages of theatrical anecdotes, quotations and a trivia quiz in the back. A survey of the various incarnations (infoliations?) of a given month's *Playbill*, however, indicates that the restaurant reviews and shopping guide have higher priority for inclusion than the light theatrical filler.

The assorted light filler material is more in evidence in New York programs, both from our own times and from earlier parts of the century. The New York program is larger in part because it is *Playbill's* representative in the national advertising marketplace; this also means that it has more 'filler' material, for, as Sirota explains, 'we have very strict guidelines as to how much space you're allowed to provide for the production itself. There's a contractual number of pages, so that, as their book expands [due to advertising] . . . , they don't automatically offer the production more space. They have to fill those pages editorially' (1994). It's also larger simply because there's a larger audience base in New York, which accounts for the larger sizes of the programs even before the advent of the national *Playbill*. But whereas today's *Playbill* mainly has pieces on actors and Broadway shows, as well as a few on fashion, 1930s programs included such stuff as short fiction not related to theatre along with the fashion tips columns, and 1960s *Playbills* such things as an article on the post-trial life of Lizzie Borden. Publication of such pieces indicates a desire for establishment of a separate identity as a magazine, a pragmatic at a remove from those

of the shows themselves. The fact that current filler is much more universally focused on theater and shopping would seem to indicate an increased sense of the program's being a satellite of the theatrical event, as opposed to a twin force; nonetheless, it is possible to buy a subscription to the New York *Playbill*. At the very least, the more recent focus evinces greater attention paid to burnishing the Broadway mythos.

Other institutional definers

Other elements can also contribute to the constructed definition of the institution represented. The latter pages of the ART's programs contain a number of different things which define the institution and aid its broader ends. First and foremost is the one-page 'A History of the American Repertory Theatre,' which is essentially a listing of their most famous and influential productions and artists. If the government or private donors should choose to encourage the arts selectively, this summary is of the sort to make it clear that the ART is worth selecting. There are pages listing the personnel of the theatre and of its associated Institute, giving credit where credit is due and also reminding the reader of the existence of the Institute. There are several pages on the endowment campaign and the annual fund, including lengthy lists of donors (separated by level of donation, alphabetized within level) and listings of the various perquisites accruing to donors at different levels. Some of these perks are of the order of newsletters, tickets, invitations to exclusive cocktail parties, and free parking on show nights, but others—and in particular those making the difference at the higher levels of contribution—are of the order of acknowledgement of the donor's role through plaques and through naming the donors as sponsors of specific programs or artists. This is logical: the main motivating factor for such magnificent magnanimity is likely simply *being* magnanimous, for there certainly isn't much in the way of affordable blandishments that could draw four- and five-figure sums from patrons; thus, the rewards are of the nature of emphasis of that magnanimity, public definition of the donors as magnanimous persons. The donations are treated, in a way, as performances worthy of a sort of billing. As it happens, this includes having the donor's name printed in the program. And so the program is both the beginning and the end of the process. And what is served? The donors' ends, as stated, and the

ongoing existence of the theatre (and its definition as a theatre worthy of ongoing support).

The various different institutions involved in a given commercial show such as *Tommy* or *The Sisters Rosensweig* could be said to form an ad hoc commonwealth of independent businesses. Rather than there being one institution to be looked to, there are several. First of all, there is the definition of the institution of *Playbill* itself. It is also important for the purposes of *Playbill* that it be connected with the right sort of theatre. In the Boston market, this means that the theatre has to be centrally located, either in downtown Boston or in Cambridge; suburbs are out of the question. As well, as Sirota explains, ‘we try to pick situations that are going to be stable from year to year, because we really don’t like to bounce around. Because you have to keep in mind that what you’re providing to your advertisers is an upscale theatregoing market. So you want to choose theatre spaces that are going to contribute to that projection. We also have to be very conscious of the fact that it is the *Playbill* name we represent in Boston, and . . . they have a reputation over the years for almost being a stamp of legitimacy’ (Sirota 1994). The institutional identity of *Playbill* is reinforced by its page four masthead; as well, one of the filler items to be found in the *Sisters Rosensweig* program is a one-column piece headed ‘Jerome Press Enters Second Century.’ This lets the reader know that the publisher of *Playbill* began as a family business in 1893 and now puts out three publications: *Playbill*, ‘Boston’s legitimate theatre magazine,’ *Theatrebill* (a version of *Playbill* done for the Wang Center), and *Panorama*, ‘Boston’s official visitor guide magazine as well as its oldest,’ essentially a large ‘program’ for the city, provided free of charge at hotels. As well, we are told that it has a producing unit which has produced 55 shows, that it used to be lessor of the Colonial Theatre, and that it is now a partner in The Wilbur Theatre and in The Panorama Television Network; and its Show of the Month Club, which is also advertised in all of the programs, is described.

As for the producing companies, their information is included at the end of the biographies in *Playbill*: in the *Tommy* program, three quarters of a page of actual space is filled by information about the nature of the producing groups and the La Jolla Playhouse, where the production originated, and the shows they’ve been involved

with; in the *Sisters Rosensweig* program, about half of a page is given to the Lincoln Center Theater, which is the producer and originating theatre. This gives the producers and originating institutions somewhat less influence on the definition of the show, and vice-versa, than they would have with an in-house institutional program such as the ART's; but, then, they are not the ones producing the program, and *Playbill* has its own identity to look out for. (For the Wang Center, Boston's biggest, highest-profile theatre, the program includes a page given to a message from the president and general manager of the theatre and features the name of the theatre and a photograph of its lobby on the front cover; the publication is titled—much less prominently—*Theatrebill*.) Other contributing institutions, such as the advertising agency and the press representatives, simply get name credits in the mass of credits at the back of *Playbill*. This is all that one can find, too, for the Colonial Theatre in the *Tommy* program and for the Shubert Theatre in the *Sisters Rosensweig* program. However, the theatres sometimes get more, as Sirota explains:

An awful lot of times, the particular theatre where the show is playing [doesn't] always have any stake in the production itself, so when it's a rental situation, there many times is no reason, no contractual reason, as far as the production is concerned, to include any information about the theatre. We in *Playbill* . . . , when the occasion arises, when we can, try to put more information in the *Playbill* as editorial copy that explains the theatre. In New York they do it as a matter of course. Every time a show runs at a particular theatre in New York, you have a one-page feature called 'At This Theatre' that tells the history of what played at that theatre. . . . One of our New Year's resolutions is to do more of that up here in Boston, quite honestly. (Sirota 1994)

This does not imply any artistic continuity, but it does provide extra framing information when present. The image of the broader institution of Broadway and commercial theatre is also fortified, as mentioned above; this enhances by extension the

image of the show at hand as well as hopefully inclining consumers towards future commercial ventures with which *Playbill* will be involved.

Advertisements

The commercial purposes of programs have always been of clear importance. *The Programme* often printed a notice on its second page for potential advertisers: ‘As you glance over the contents of this sheet, look around you and observe that almost every person in the house is reading it. During the intermissions every line is read and each advertisement is scanned. Business men can at once perceive its value as an advertising medium’ (Carlson 1993: 104). More sophisticated means of drawing in potential advertisers (who are by our time well aware of the possibilities of program advertising) have since taken over. Various tacks have been taken towards the other side of the deal as well. In 1890, the *Metropolis Entertainment Programme* printed such requests to the audience as “ONE GOOD TURN DESERVES ANOTHER.” The advertisers furnish programmes for this entertainment free (as per my limit) and are entitled to patronage. Free supply can be continued only by the same, as may readily be seen. Yours respectfully, S. G. Bellows’ (*Metropolis Entertainment Programme* 1890). It also asked that the audience take the program home with them. Later programs evince greater subtlety, providing the audience with a more attractive reason for taking the program home, and so presenting them with one end which neatly filled the ulterior end of the publisher. A 1912 *Strauss Magazine Theatre Program* has on the first page a little section headed ‘Memories of a Pleasant Evening.’ It proceeds, ‘A great many people like to keep their programs as a souvenir or reminder of a particularly enjoyable evening. Here is space to jot down a few little aids to pleasant memories of Day_____ Date_____ 1912.’ It then gives spaces for ‘Dinner at’, ‘Saw the Play with’ (4 lines for names), and ‘Supper at’ (*Strauss Magazine Theatre Program* 1912). Even such soft-sell as this ultimately disappeared from programs, most likely because it was found to be unnecessary. As late as the later ’20s, however, the Rogers Peet Company (tailors) would include in some of their program ads spaces for the same sort of data to be recorded. Their ads were also tailored—pardon the pun—to the individual show, so that each program would have a cartoon involving men’s clothes which would

somehow play off the title of the play. Their main concern was naturally that their ads in specific be preserved, which is made explicit by the offer which they printed of providing an album for clippings of their cartoons.

The role of conveying advertising remains important, though those producing the programs will readily make it plain that it is a means, not an end, for them. 'When I'm sitting down and editing program copy, I really am thinking about the person whose butt is in the theatre seat,' Sirota explains. 'Perhaps I should be thinking more about the advertiser, but I'm not' (Sirota 1994). This is fair enough: only if the audience's desires are well served can the advertisers' be so. The effectiveness of advertisements (as with other printed materials) will naturally be affected by the amount of attention they're given; the program has to be interesting. Of course, as Sirota points out, the program readership defines the phrase 'captive audience'. 'They're there, and they're in the audience, and they have no other distractions except the other people in the audience, at least for the few moments before the curtain goes up.' The *Playbill* readership studies have found that the average playgoer spends 18 minutes reading *Playbill* in the theatre and 8.3 minutes at home (Alexander and Tucci 1992: 12).

The acquisition of advertising for programs serves as an excellent example of heterogeneity of input. The ART has a broker who deals with the printer of the programs, figures out how much the costs will be, and then procures the advertising to pay for the programs. He gets the money, the ads pay for the cost of the program, and the entire arrangement costs the ART nothing. Given that the equivalent of 19 full pages of the 36-page program for *What the Butler Saw* are advertising, more than half of the program's contents were selected by an 'outsider.' And no matter who selected them, or for what purpose, the ads are there.

Obviously, the ads are not directly pertinent to the production at hand, and so their influence on specific points of its reception is prone to being adventitious and rather slight (such as may be produced, for example, in the audience member at a Shakespeare play who notices the ad for The Floor Sanders, Inc., which says, 'All the world's a stage, and all the stage needs refinishing.' *The American Repertory Theatre Program* 1993). The pragmatics are more likely focused on what effect can be had on

the advertisers (why should an advertiser or his agent care much what difference the ad makes to the play?). There is some question of whether the program ads are factors in a circular process of definition of the sociocultural status of the event, however. Luxury items, including restaurants, have from the first been staples of program advertising. This seems to be the normal status definition of the theatre; although people with a lot of money use basic necessary goods, basic goods are not to be found in program advertising for any of the four shows which I am drawing on for examples. To what extent is this natural; to what extent is it self-reinforcing?

Marvin Carlson notes that '[w]hat has most clearly disappeared from [program] advertising, and indeed had essentially disappeared before the end of the nineteenth century, were notices of less elegant goods and services, such as bedding, patent medicines, dress and dry goods, and insurance' (Carlson 1993: 106-8). In fact, Carlson's dating is a bit off: not only are such things as insurance, brassieres and bug spray in evidence in 1930s programs, toiletry items such as hair coloring, razors and stockings were still being advertised in the 1960s. Nor is it reasonable to speculate that advertising cost may have had something to do with their disappearance: large companies which purvey basic goods can afford to advertise on national television, and local stores can afford to print massive quantities of fliers and buy newspaper advertising. The main factor seems to have been the development of market segmentation starting in the 1960s, a sort of efficiency-maximization strategy of narrowing focus and target audience which has been called by Sut Jhally 'one of the most important and influential marketing concepts of the twentieth century' (Jhally 1987: 123). As Jhally explains,

The basis of the new market segmentation is the development in the last twenty-five years of statistical data capable of measuring and segmenting the audience along demographic and psychological characteristics. This segmentation can be achieved in many ways, although by far the most important dimension is *economic*—the income of the target audience. Further descriptive definitions can be introduced by adding categories

concerning geographical location, socio-economic status, personality, usage patterns and brand loyalty. (1987: 124)

(These are in fact the same factors as guide the promotion of the shows themselves.) As Sirota says, ‘one of the keys to putting out any successful publication is to match up the readership, i.e., the market segment, and those advertisers who want to reach that market segment’ (Sirota 1994). This could result in the circular process posited. The question remaining is: to what real extent has the disappearance of the ‘less elegant’ items from program advertising changed the socioeconomic place of commercial theatre? The answer seems to be: not much at all, given the reasonable consistency of the audiences documented in the demographics of theatre audiences over the past half-century (see, for example, Baumol and Bowen 1966, Mann 1967, Throsby and Withers 1979, and Alexander and Tucci 1992). It must be remembered, of course, that even from the first, programs have also had plenty of luxury advertising; but one has to be realistic about all of this: such things as advertising are only part of a very large and well-established complex of definition. To be precise, they are part of the definition of the program itself as an entity with its own interests. *Playbill* has a separate identity which transcends specific productions at specific theatres, and the look of the layout and the graphics and the assortment of advertising contribute more specifically to that identity. It is that identity as a whole which comes to bear on shows which claim its association—and, likewise, their nature comes to bear on its identity. Even with the ART programs, the program as a whole, and its director’s notes in specific, may serve the ends of the production, but the look of the program, including its advertising, is directly pertinent to the program and thus at a remove from the play. Would the absence of *Playbill* or a similar program change the status definition of the event? There is no reason to think so; but there is also no reason to assume that such is the only potential effect of the absence or presence of a program. Events with the same status may have vastly divergent informationscapes, and the material in a program remains a part of that. As an additional point, I would like to note that while the absence of *Playbill* (or a similar publication) in one of its usual milieux could be disappointing but would likely not change the event definition much, its presence in

an unexpected milieu—for example, a community or high-school performance—would.

The advertisers in the four programs which are the cases at hand tend, as I have said, to be purveyors of luxury/high-ticket items, especially restaurants but also car manufacturers and jewellers, as well as financial interests—banks, credit cards, and charities. Educational institutions and other arts institutions such as the Boston Ballet also advertise, especially in the ART programs. The nature of the restaurants advertising may be of some interest—for one thing, you won't find an ad for McDonald's. Checking the *Sisters Rosensweig* and *What the Butler Saw* programs, I found that the number of restaurants advertising was similar: 20 in *The Sisters Rosensweig*, 16 in *What the Butler Saw*. Of these, I was able to find price guides ('estimated price of a dinner with one drink and tip') in the *Zagat Boston Restaurant Survey* (Kummer and Lavine 1993) for 17 and 10, respectively. The restaurants advertising in the *Sisters Rosensweig* program produced a high of \$48 and a low of \$17, with a mean of \$29; those in the *What the Butler Saw* program produced a high of \$46 and a low of \$15, with a mean of \$29. Remember that these are per person prices. For the sake of comparison, note that for the 398 Boston restaurants listed in *Zagat*, the high is \$56 (second highest \$49), the low is \$7, and the mean \$21. The audience aimed at seems fairly clear. Quite unequivocal are some of the ads for financial services, of which there are 7 in the *Tommy* program (6 full-page, one double-page), 4 in the *Sisters Rosensweig* program (all full-page), 4 in the *What the Butler Saw* program (two half-page, two full-page), and 3 in the *Henry IV* program (one full-page and two half-page). In the *Tommy* program, Fleet Bank offers its services to 'affluent individuals'; The Boston Company is '[f]or effective wealth management of your portfolio of \$1 million or more' (*Playbill* 1993). Interestingly, the *What the Butler Saw* program's ads sport slogans such as 'there's safety in numbers' and 'banking on values'—less focused on the money and more on ideals. This may pertain to the specific inclinations expected of Cambridge audiences, as Cambridge has a well-earned reputation as left-leaning.

The advertisers can also have their interests furthered by 'filler' material about them. Nothing about the advertisers beyond their advertisements is to be found in the

ART programs, which is not especially surprising, given that the advertising content is produced quite independently of the editorial content, and the program is produced directly for the purposes of the show without also being an instrument for an intermediary. *Playbill*, on the other hand, handles its own advertising procurement, and both exists partially as a vehicle for advertising and has extra space in the program which it wishes to fill with interesting information for the audience to read while waiting for the curtain. The program for *The Sisters Rosensweig* has a full page article with color photograph on the Union Oyster House, a shopping guide, and a dining guide with restaurant reviews. The *Tommy* program, which has somewhat more production information, has only the dining guide, with no shopping guide or reviews. Hardly surprisingly, only two of the advertisers in each program are not represented in the dining guide; more unexpectedly, there is one restaurant in the *Sisters Rosensweig* dining guide which is not an advertiser in that issue. Naturally, the reviews are of restaurants which are advertisers. What this means is that a scathing criticism of a restaurant will not be found; while the reviewers will not be dishonest, they will focus on the positive aspects of a restaurant. A *Playbill* restaurant review is partially impartial: 'it is promotional in nature, but we do not allow the advertiser to see it before it goes into print,' Sirota explains (Sirota 1994). The two reviews in the *Sisters Rosensweig* program were encomiastic, to be sure; however, a careful reader might take note, for instance, of a phrase such as 'After resting awhile, we finally chose our entrees' (*Playbill* 1994). The shopping guide, 'In Perspective' by Lynn Kortenhaus, does not focus on advertisers, but certainly does revolve in the same orbit. The focus in the *Sisters Rosensweig* issue is on jeans, surveying eight stores, and naming prices from \$24.99 to \$128. Average price: about \$72.

A more particular issue as regards advertising is the match between an advertiser and an individual show. In general, this will be a matter of little concern; however, if a play which were, say, vehemently anti-fur-trade were to be produced, it is unlikely that one would see ads for furriers in the program (although if one did, that would be quite interesting in itself). One possible result of this factor is influence being brought to bear by advertisers on the sorts of shows being produced: a very anti-

capitalist play could cause some friction with the banks which buy space in *Playbill*, for instance.

There is one interesting question which is brought up by the advertising for luxury items. The basis for the issue is stated by C.D. Throsby and G.A. Withers:

In general, the consumer's problem may be seen as the allocation of available time and wealth resources in a way that best meets his or her preferences or tastes. In this regard performing arts are competing with all other wants for the consumer's time and money. Of course, some goods and services are closer substitutes and therefore more competitive than others. But there is no clear gap in the chain of substitutes for the performing arts, enabling us to cordon off an area of demand and label it as 'the demand for the performing arts'. (Throsby and Withers 1979: 5)

Given this as the case, it would seem that the theatres' programs are in fact advertising their competitors. The question is: are they thus acting against their own self-interests, or is program advertising in fact a means of anchoring the status of the performing arts by consistently including them in the sphere of other luxury items—as part of a whole group of quasi-necessary luxuries—, and thus preempting displacement by competition? The apparently satisfactory nature of the arrangement for the parties involved leads to the conclusion that the formation of something approximating a 'finer things in life club', intentional or otherwise, works to the tactical advantage of all involved by precluding exclusion of a specific member: it is less that it is necessary to have either status item A or status item B than that it is most preferable to have them both. This is analogous to the promotion of the image of Broadway as a whole which is to be found in *Playbill*. And so theatre profits, at least from one perspective. (There are many who would express great distaste for the idea of theatre as a luxury item. The question then becomes: are luxury theatre and non-luxury—socialist, working-class, what have you—theatre really the same item, any more than a Bic ballpoint and a Mont Blanc fountain pen are?)

Long-term role

The long-term role of programs is very much like that of posters, to wit, as a memento, keepsake, and perhaps historical document. Joyce Sirota elucidates this clearly:

Playbill is thought of as a keepsake rather than as a disposable item. We like to think of it that way, obviously. We share that belief with our advertisers, and I think . . . a large proportion of our audience also feels that way. Of course, there are always people who are going to put their gum in it and stick it under their seat, but we've discovered that people really do save them. I used to get a call regularly from a guy up in New Hampshire who was doing his entire den wall in *Playbill* covers. Seriously, seriously. And he'd call me and he'd say, 'I have only five more that I need,' you know, and they were specific shows that he was looking for, which made it a little more interesting and difficult. But also, *Playbill* in New York just celebrated its hundredth anniversary, and . . . they did some preparation for the celebration, and made a sincere effort to seek out the oldest *Playbills* in various people's possessions, and it was astonishing, the *Playbills* that were saved over the years. So it has a bit more of a life than a daily newspaper. (Sirota 1994)

Its usefulness as a historical record is also pointed up by archival uses, as cited above, including the fact that programs can provide records of the various changes occurring in shows on pre-Broadway tryouts. As I have mentioned above, retention of programs also serves the purposes of publishers and advertisers alike. For the ART, programs play a part in its ongoing institutional definition and image reinforcement. They have long been retained as synecdoches (or metonymies, depending on one's perspective on their role) for the evanescent events to which they pertain; it is only natural that other purposes should hitch rides on them if they can.

One form of program which shows particular awareness of the memento function is the souvenir program. This is an item which is only prone to being found at events where the audience is likely to be willing to pay extra for a large, glossy souvenir which both shows that they were at the event and aids recollection of the event more fully through photographs. *Tommy* had souvenir programs for sale at \$10 each (*The Who's Tommy* 1993). These are full-color sixteen-page (plus cover) 9' by 14' works. They justify their own existence, and help to define the show as a major event, on every page. Ten of the pages are filled with photographs of scenes from the Broadway production with memorable lines from the songs, highlighting all of the big moments in the show. The center two pages have photographs of the show with twenty-four block quotations from critics superimposed on them, every quotation virtually drooling over the production, laden with astounding quantities and combinations of superlatives. There is a page each on Pete Townshend (the composer and the big name of the show) and Des McAnuff (the director and co-author). The main substance of both pieces is a focus on the coming into existence of *Tommy*, the process leading up to the magnificent experience of the show. The last page and the inside back cover are photographs of rehearsals, backstage personae, awards being received, promotional windows at Saks Fifth Avenue, and so forth. The first page is the 'billing' page, whereon all those who have it in their contracts to receive billing receive it in the manner stipulated. There is also a separate insert giving the biographies (as in the regular program) of all persons associated with the particular touring production company. The entire effect of the book is such that if a person who had never heard of the show were to chance upon it, the first and dominant reaction would be, 'Wow, this must have been an extremely important and spectacular event!' And, of course, those who are in the audience will have positive impressions reinforced by the book (those who do not have positive impressions are less likely to buy it in the first place), so it will help them to feel good about the show. For the producers, it helps to define the show in a commercially productive way, and it also makes extra money (at ten dollars apiece for four dozen photographs and fewer than five thousand words of text on sixteen pages plus cover).

One danger of such a work is that it may misfire. The focus on big moments can strike one as very intellectually shallow, the review quotations as fulsome and cloying. More than that, however, is the fact that all of the photographs are of the original Broadway company (and are credited as such). For audiences in such places as Boston, where an entirely different company is performing the show, this may signify that the company seen is not as worthy, and in so doing also underline the fact that the audience member has not in fact seen *the* Broadway cast. Adding to this is the fact that the cast bios are on a separate loose sheet. Naturally, it would hardly be economically sound to produce a different book for each company, but the current situation runs the risk of producing long-term dissatisfaction. The producer of the show in question has the person's money already, of course, but the long-term effects of dissatisfaction can come back on the commercial interests through reduced subsequent attendance. To what extent this effect actually takes place has not been documented; its possibility, however, serves as an illustration of how it is necessary for the ends of producer and consumer to be carefully matched—one must make ends meet in order to make ends meet.

Conclusion

The definitional effects of the programs on the institutions using them may be said to be exerted simply by their presence and nature. There is some difference in this respect between the *Playbills* and the in-house programs of the ART. This difference results primarily from *Playbill's* possession of a significant separate institutional identity; the differing levels of commercialism in the two species of theatre is also an influence. In either case, the primary end, as far as the audience is concerned, is the provision of reasons and means to appreciate a performance. This appreciation, however, is also subject to enhancement by enhancement of framing definitives such as the theatre institution and even the institution of the program itself. The pragmatics of the producers and *a fortiori* of the advertisers are essentially commercial, and the actors and even perhaps the donors may be seen as advertising themselves. Carlson's 'wedding of commercial advertising and entertainment' (Carlson 1993: 105) is indeed clearly manifested. In all directions there is a sort of mutual impact of ends, although

the impact is not necessarily even in all directions. Pragmatically, these programs are undeniably multifarious. In this, they are perhaps a microcosm of the theatre event as a whole: a festival of ends and means rather than a single unified effort.

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