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Distance in the Performance of Literature.

Beverly Whitaker

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DISTANCE IN THE PERFORMANCE OF LITERATURE.

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, Ph.D., 1967
Speech-Theater

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DISTANCE IN THE PERFORMANCE OF LITERATURE

A Dissertation

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in partial fulfillment of the
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in

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Beverly Whitaker
B.A., Hendrix College, 1957
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1962
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ABSTRACT

The term distance, commonly prefaced by "aesthetic" or "psychical," has been in vogue with writers in oral interpretation for almost four decades. Yet recently the question arose as to what the concept actually signifies. The purpose of this study was to determine what the term signified to those who employed it. The investigation was a critical examination of more than two hundred descriptions, evaluations, and applications of distance in (1) oral interpretation publications, (2) the works of the originator of the term, Edward Bullough, and (3) literature of the allied disciplines of aesthetics, psychology, literary criticism, and theatre.

Writers in oral interpretation use the term in a variety of ways--to describe a quality in the literature students should choose for oral presentation, to define one of the standards of artistic performance, and to identify the relationships among the reader, the speaker in a text, and the listener. Considered collectively, these statements reflect a rather clearly defined aesthetic theory, most of which derives from Edward Bullough as interpreted by Herbert Sidney Langfeld and John Dolman.

Distance, to Bullough, meant that when a person appreciates or creates an aesthetic object, he is at least temporarily separated from his practical self, the removal permitting a more intense
object-centered experience. An aesthetic response, he insisted, lay somewhere between the undesirable extremes of over- and under-distanicing, the former characterized by apathy or incredulity, the latter by discomfort or embarrassment.

A number of aestheticians subscribe to Bullough's idea and attempt to amplify it. A smaller group disagree with his basic assumptions.

Early in this century, psychologists expressed interest in distance but later replaced such speculative inquiries with theories of gestalt, psychoanalysis, and behaviorism.

Many literary critics specify devices within particular selections whereby distance is achieved. Others use the term to describe the objectivity of an author or to identify a prescribed method of reading literature, and, most recently, still others have challenged the ideas that underlie both uses.

While most writers in theatre consider distance requisite in artistic production, contemporary developments in playwriting and production indicate deliberate attempts to underdistance, thus removing the sure boundary between the real and the imaginative, and to overdistance, evoking a critical stance that precludes emotional involvement.

Statements in the literature of related areas do furnish elaboration of the term distance. The chief value of these discussions, however, lies in their implications, most of which are hypotheses that could be tested.

Although this study does not suggest that critics of oral interpretation abandon the term distance, it does emphasize the
need for clearer explanations of exactly what distance is in question, more detailed descriptions of the assumptions on which the term's use is predicated, and explicit distinctions between its descriptive and normative use.
INTRODUCTION

This investigation could be called a work in "critical lexicography," to borrow Harry Levin's terminology. Such a procedure Levin explains as "the method of defining key terms by analyzing what they have signified to those who shaped their significance."\(^1\) The key term in this study is distance, commonly prefaced by the adjectives "aesthetic" or "psychical."

The term distance has been in vogue with writers in oral interpretation for almost four decades. Yet a year ago Mark Klyn asked, "What really is this thing we call esthetic or psychical distance?"\(^2\) The query suggests that currency has not been accompanied by precision or uniformity. The fact that writers in this field consistently incorporate the concept into the vocabulary of their articles, textbooks, and, most likely, in their appraisals of readers' performances suggests the need for a clear statement of the meanings assigned to the term and, when used in a normative context, an understanding of the assumptions on which use is predicated.


\(^2\) Mark Klyn, "Potentials for Research in Oral Interpretation," Western Speech, XXIX (Spring, 1965), 111.
Poet-critic T. S. Eliot and aesthetician Frank Sibley support the value of studies that attempt to clarify a discipline's terms. Eliot insists that in the past,

... when it was taken for granted that one knew well enough what literature was ... terms could be used more freely and carelessly without definition. Now there is an urgent need for experiment in criticism of a new kind which will consist largely in a logical and dialectical study of terms used.3

And encouraging a kind of study neglected in aesthetics, Sibley writes:

... aesthetic terms form no small segment of our discourse. ... It is over the application of aesthetic terms too that, notoriously, disputes and differences sometimes go helplessly unsettled. ... It is surprising therefore that aesthetic terms have been so largely neglected. They have received glancing treatment in the course of other aesthetic discussions; but as a broad category they have not received the direct attention they merit.4

Writers in oral interpretation did not coin the term distance; neither are they the only scholars who have employed it since its appearance fifty-five years ago. Edward Bullough, psychological aesthetician generally considered to be the originator of the concept, formulated his idea of distance in a 1912

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essay. Since that time, the term has been applied, refined, modified, and rejected by aestheticians, psychologists, literary theorists, and theatre critics. The fact that these fields are represented in the discussions of distance in oral interpretation publications establishes the value of an inter-disciplinary search for statements that would illuminate the concept of distance. Karl Wallace, discussing all the speech arts, and Wallace Bacon, commenting specifically on oral interpretation, recommend investigations in this direction.

II. The Problem

This study is a critical examination of the descriptions, evaluations, and applications of the term distance, a synthesis of these comments, and an evaluation of the term's usefulness to oral interpretation theory and practice. The investigation should answer these questions: (1) What do writers in oral interpretation mean by the term distance? (2) How is distance interpreted in the literature of aesthetics, psychology, literary criticism, and theatre? (3) What implications do the statements about distance in the publications of other disciplines have for both the literary study and the performance encompassed in oral interpretation?

III. Sources

Sources for the study include the discussions of distance by writers in oral interpretation and, in the other specified fields, all those comments that the investigator could locate through indexes, bibliographies, reference books, and serendipity. The data assembled consists of definitions, speculative accounts, critical commentaries, applications, and reports of experimental testing from approximately two hundred sources.

IV. Contributory Studies

Investigation has produced one study that contains an extended treatment of the relationship of distance to oral interpretation. In "The Concept of Aesthetic Distance in Oral Interpretation," Troy Caswell limits his study to nine selected writers in aesthetics and three in speech. No works published after 1950 are included, no material available in other fields other than aesthetics is considered, and his application of the term to interpretative reading is not exhaustive. Theses by

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6 The latter method is mentioned because on several occasions, references to and applications of distance were located in (1) books whose indexes did not list distance and (2) publications that were included on no bibliography consulted. Others surely exist.

Sheila Dawson and Mary Alice Heagarty are applications of distance to tragedy and contemporary novels, respectively. Both studies are considered in the chapter on literary criticism.

The bibliography contains a list of theses and dissertations that focus on other problems but contain brief discussions of distance.

V. Organization

This study's initial chapter considers distance in oral interpretation. Chapter two is an analysis of essays and lectures by the originator of the term, Edward Bullough. The four following chapters consider the use of the term distance in the literature of aesthetics, psychology, literary criticism, and theatre, each concluding with a section on implications for oral interpretation as suggested by the immediately preceding analysis. The conclusion consists of a summary of the findings and a reconsideration of distance in interpretative reading.

8Sheila Dawson, "'Distancing' as an Aesthetic Principle, with Special Regard to its Rôle in the Appreciation of Tragedy" (Unpublished M. A. thesis, University of London, 1958).

9Mary Alice Heagarty, Aesthetic Distance in the Techniques of the Novel (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1964.)
CHAPTER I

DISTANCE AND ORAL INTERPRETATION

At least since the last decade of the nineteenth century when S. S. Curry began publishing his works,¹ writers in oral interpretation have derived from aesthetic theory a number of principles that underlie classroom instruction. In the twentieth century, specifically in 1941, a lengthy application of aesthetics to interpretative reading appeared in C. C. Cunningham's Literature as a Fine Art.² Between the works of Curry and Cunningham, published comments on psychic or aesthetic distance as a concept basic to the art of oral reading began appearing.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze treatments of distance in oral interpretation books, articles, and unpublished studies. The two major divisions of the chapter are (1) a chronological survey of appearances of the term, and (2) a discussion of the manner in which it has been employed.


²Cornelius Carman Cunningham, Literature as a Fine Art (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1941).
I. A Chronology of Distance in Oral Interpretation

The earliest use of the term distance as applied to oral interpretation appeared in 1928 in John Dolman's *The Art of Play Production*.³ Dolman's application of the term to both theatre and interpretative reading arts was restated in his 1940 revision of this book and in his posthumous text, *The Art of Oral Reading*, published sixteen years later.⁴

In 1932, the term appeared in Wayland Maxfield Parrish's *Reading Aloud*,⁵ and in 1934, Charles Woolbert and Severina Nelson used it in the first revised edition of *The Art of Interpretative Speech*.⁶ Three years later, Clarence T. Simon included an account of distance in his article, "Appreciation in Reading,"⁷ and in 1939, Kathleen Miller devoted a section to the concept in her thesis, "The Application of Certain Esthetic Principles to the Art of Interpretation."⁸


The influence of Herbert Sidney Langfeld on this early group of studies is unmistakable. Parrish, Miller, and Dolman specifically mention Langfeld as their source while Woolbert and Nelson fail to explain their derivation of the term. Simon, who could have had either Langfeld or Edward Bullough in mind, vaguely credits "some aestheticians." 

Published during the forties, an article by Frank Rarig and books by Sara Lowrey and Gertrude Johnson and C. C. Cunningham contained discussions of distance. Bullough's essay is cited in Rarig's article, Langfeld's The Aesthetic Attitude in Cunningham's book, and Dolman's The Art of Play Production in the work by Lowrey and Johnson.

Descriptions of distance in four textbooks and one M.A. thesis were available in the following decade. Charlotte

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9 For a discussion of Langfeld's book, see Ch. III, pp.74, 82, 84, 90, 93.

10 See Ch. II for a discussion of Bullough's work.


Lee, Don Geiger, Gladys Lynch and Harold Crain, and Lionel Crocker and Louis Eich wrote books in which they added their interpretations of distance. Lee, Geiger, and Lynch and Crain do not specify sources; however, according to her prefatory remarks, Lee was possibly indebted to Cunningham for the idea. Crocker and Eich, unlike all their predecessors except one, designate Bullough's essay as the key document to the concept of distance, adding a reference to Troy Caswell's 1953 thesis, "The Application of Aesthetic Distance to Oral Interpretation," in which Bullough is noted as the originator of the term.

During the sixties, a number of textbooks in interpretative reading have appeared. In most cases, the author discusses distance:


in 1960, Joseph Smith and James Linn;\textsuperscript{19} in 1961, Wilma Grimes and Alethea Mattingly;\textsuperscript{20} in 1963, Chloe Armstrong and Paul Brandes\textsuperscript{21} and Otis Aggertt and Elbert Bowen;\textsuperscript{22} in 1964, David Thompson and Virginia Fredricks\textsuperscript{23} and Martin Cobin;\textsuperscript{24} in 1966, Wallace Bacon,\textsuperscript{25} Robert Beloof,\textsuperscript{26} and Chester Long;\textsuperscript{27} and in 1967, Keith Brooks,\textsuperscript{28}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{25}Wallace A. Bacon, \textit{The Art of Interpretation} (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1966), pp. 312, 368.
\end{itemize}
Jéré Veilleux, and Jean Bertram. Citing Bullough's 1912 essay, Grimes and Mattingly are the only authors from this group who footnote their comments on distance.

At least since 1928, the term distance has been in vogue with writers in oral interpretation. The frequency with which these writers fail to mention a source suggests that the concept quickly became commonly accepted theory and community property. The repeated early credit given Langfeld was probably due to the fact that his book, published in the United States in 1920, was readily accessible. And it was a source championed by Dolman. Bullough's expositions, on the other hand, appeared in a journal that writers in oral interpretation probably failed to consult regularly, and the essay did not begin its career of anthology appearances until Melvin Rader's collection of 1935.

II. Distance in Interpretative Reading

In a publication of 1941, C. C. Cunningham describes one of the extrinsic factors common to all artistic writing and oral reading as distance. In an oral interpretation textbook published in 1966, Robert Beloof enjoins the reader to note the distance between the

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visions of the narrator and the author in a poem by e. e. cummings. These comments seem to typify two broad categories of context in which interpretative reading critics generally use the term: (1) as an essential in artistic production and (2) as an identification of the relationships between author, speakers in the literature, reader, and audience.

Distance as an Aesthetic Principle

A majority of writers in oral interpretation subscribe to the theory that art objects should provide a unique experience, one distinguishable from experiences related to events and objects of the natural, immediate world, one properly labeled aesthetic. Art is distinct from reality, and its creation as well as its appreciation demands a corresponding separation. Predicated on these assumptions, distance is then defined as "suspension of self-centeredness,"32 "disinterestedness,"33 "artistic detachment,"34 "mental and psychological separation,"35 and "a necessary gap."36 If artistic, the author's creation of the literature and the reader's performance, both distanced, induce an aesthetic response on the part of the audience.

The Author's Distance

Pointing out that the author first distances or "objectifies" his experiences and ideas, Simon continues with the claim that

32Armstrong and Brandes, p. 171.
33Grimes and Mattingly, p. 317.
34Brooks, p. 304.
35Dolman, The Art of Reading Aloud, p. 28.
36Veilleux, p. 59.
authors who cannot divorce literature "from their own individualities . . . can never be great . . . writers." Cunningham also writes that an author's distance from his visions is requisite to preserving "a sense of unreality in his work, thereby attaining a result which will never be confused with actuality." Rarig similarly asserts that if the author properly distances, his text will "come within the experience" of listener and reader, yet not "come so much within his experience that it releases an impulse to practical action."

According to Cunningham, an author demonstrates his inability to distance if his work "can be drained at one gulp," if his intent is easily and immediately accomplished, or if he "wallows in emotion." Profundity of thought and control of emotional content, then, are evidence of an author's distancing of experience. Continuing further, Cunningham argues that distance, of necessity, depends on suggestion. An author achieves "a sense of unreality" by suggestion which takes "the place of full statement and disclosure." Illustrative of a failure in distance is the hymn writer's "Rock of Ages," contrasted with Francis Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven," a poem that deals with a similar subject, but one in which the author distances his feelings about divinity. Lew Sarett, "never losing his sense of detachment," also keeps distance intact in "Requiem for a Modern Croesus." Both Thompson

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37 Simon, p. 129.  
38 Cunningham, p. 36.  
39 Rarig, p. 538.  
40 Cunningham, p. 39.  
41 Ibid.  
42 Ibid., p. 15.
and Sarett, Cunningham asserts, exemplify the successful author who endows his work with that quality of unreality which enables both himself and those who contemplate his work to preserve aesthetic distance in the realization that here is art, not mere nature.  

The author, it seems, is responsible for distancing his own experiences through control, depth, and choice of details that suggest rather than fully disclose. He also makes a number of more obvious decisions that affect distance, i.e., subject, literary form, language, rhythm, and the role of the speaker within the selection. The choices he makes can aid in distinguishing the sphere of his fictive experiences from those of his own and his reader's tangible worlds.

Crocker and Eich maintain that more distance inheres in lyric poetry (particularly sonnets) than in stories, sermons, and speeches, and Bacon mentions the likelihood of greater distance in plays than in letters. Caswell makes the only reference to a selection's subject as a determinant of distance when he asserts that controversial and topical subjects generally lack distance. Crocker and Eich cite "elevated language" as a characteristic that sets artistic verbalizing apart from "colloquial or vernacular idiom." Parrish mentions poetic meter as a means of distancing, a point with which Caswell voices agreement and then elaborates:

43 Ibid., p. 258.

44 Crocker and Eich, p. 47.
"Such things as rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, and assonance help separate poetry from everyday conversation."\(^45\)

The role of the speaker within a selection may also be instrumental in achieving distance. Bacon, Lynch and Crain, and Crocker and Eich support the view that whereas distance is generally negligible in personal and direct statements by an author, such as letters and speeches, it increases when introspective expressions replace direct address and even more so when characterized speakers in a fictionalized environment are the "who?" of an utterance.

Collectively (particularly in statements by Cunningham, Rarig, and Simon), the foregoing comments, by implication, contain the recommendation that interpreters choose selections that evince an author's distancing. Such a selection is recognizable by selectivity of incidents recalled, not detailed reporting; suggestion, not full disclosure; and objectified accounts, not personal utterances. The reader should also be aware of certain devices within the text that could be placed on a continuum, distance increasing from left to right:

- conversation ................ rhythmical utterance
- prose ............................... verse
- colloquial speech ............ elevated diction
- vernacular
- direct address ............. dialogue between characters
- topical subjects ............. imaginative subjects

\(^45\)Caswell, p. 66.
Again, the recommendation is made that if the reader purposes the inducement of an aesthetic response, he should look for selections in which at least some distancing devices are present.

The Reader's Distance

Far more frequently than they define it or consider it in relation to the author and the script, writers in oral interpretation use the term distance in their criteria for excellence in performance. Just as the author is expected to distance his thoughts and feelings, the reader is encouraged to do likewise. Again, the rationale is that reading as an art induces listeners' interest and involvement in an imaginative world that is clearly set off from that of the practical and the real, providing a unique experience that is an end in itself. Presumably, the reader's distance in performance results in parallel distancing by the listeners. 46

Outside the limits of the distanced response, a common problem, according to Grimes and Mattingly, of novice readers who merely call words, is overdistancing, which exists when the reader holds the literary experience so far away that it fails to provide involvement, interest, or understanding. Conversely, underdistancing occurs when the reader engages in a practical representation of the fictional speaker's imaginative action thereby causing the listener to feel uneasiness or embarrassment.

46Veilleux, p. 117.
From 1928, when Dolman's first discussion of distance appeared, most interpretative reading critics have considered that the degree of the reader's distance is of primary importance in balancing empathy and that the nature of his distance is a key in distinguishing the arts of acting and interpretation.

Smith and Linn, Grimes and Mattingly, and Armstrong and Brandes concur that "a balance of empathy and aesthetic distance characterizes an artistic reading." Unless the reader sufficiently empathizes with the literature, Smith and Linn write, the audience will probably be apathetic; but if his empathy is not tempered by detachment, listeners are likely to become embarrassed, being no longer certain that the event is imaginative in nature.

Dolman, as well as most of the other writers mentioned, claims that any performing art, insofar as it induces an aesthetic response, possesses distance. However, they claim that the distinction between the experience proper to the performing arts of theatre and oral interpretation lies precisely in a difference in the nature of distance. Asserting that the distinction between acting and interpretation "is altogether a matter of aesthetic distance," Dolman, in his early text, The Art of Play Production, compares readers' and actors' distancing with the following illustration:


\[\text{Dolman, The Art of Play Production, p. 35.}\]
The drawing indicates (1) the reader's separation from and the actor's identification with the literature; (2) less distance between the reader and literature than between audience and literature during a reading performance; and (3) duplication of the audience's position when witnessing either acting or reading performances.

In Dolman's later textbook, devoted primarily to interpretative reading, his discussion of distance is essentially the same as in the earlier book, but he alters the diagram slightly by placing the reader within the audience, the same distance separating...
both from the literature. Again, there exists no difference in the distance between the literature and audiences for either reading or acting. The later drawing appears thus:

In both works, Dolman attaches considerable importance to the idea that the reader must be on the "right end of aesthetic distance," thereby keeping intact the artistry of the reading experience.

Agreeing that distance differs in acting and interpretation, Aggerett and Bowen and Geiger claim that the actor's usual physical setting at once psychically removes the play from the immediacy of an audience whereas the reader's usual setting is the same environment the audience occupies. Consequently, the latter situation requires more distance. Francine Merritt explains that the actor loses his own identity and assumes the role of a character who exists in an imaginary world, this world as a whole being distanced from the audience. The reader, however, maintains his own identity and exists in the audience's real world while audibly and visibly


\[51\] Ibid.
suggesting an imaginative world from which both performer and listener are distanced.  

Just as authors include distancing devices within a literary text, the reader has at his disposal specific means for achieving distance in performance. In fact, prior to the actual reading, a distanced attitude can be encouraged. Miller recommends the elimination of audience discomfitures, a practical distraction. She also urges the reader to "avoid mingling among his audience before a program . . . so that the audience does not carry over into his performance the feeling of intimacy that existed in their conversation with him."  

For the accomplishment of a similar goal, Caswell makes a suggestion that is easier for most readers to follow when he recommends the use of music or an introduction in order to bring the audience "out of their practical attitude."  

Not unlike the author, the interpretative artist distances the experience of a literary text when his performance possesses form. Parrish through positive comments and Crocker and Eich by negative directives explain how selectivity and arrangement, essential to form, are reflected in a reading. The reader, Parrish writes,  

... must eliminate what is trivial, accidental, and non-significant. Since every intonation and gesture becomes a part of his artistic product as perceived by the audience, he must exercise a rigorous censorship over them to see

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52 Francine Merritt, Lecture in Speech 216, Louisiana State University, Spring, 1966.
53 Miller, p. 39.
54 Caswell, p. 69.
that only those are permitted which have significance, which are meaningful and necessary in communicating character, feeling and incident. He must avoid the vague, watery movement characteristic of real life.\textsuperscript{55}

The reader "interferes with distance" according to Crocker and Eich, by

\begin{quote}
\ldots meaningless gesture, walking around the platform without purpose, playing with the clothes, standing near the edge of the platform, half stumbling off the platform. \ldots\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

Also in the interest of form, the reader is advised by Armstrong and Brandes to keep the reading unified, to avoid the abrupt changes in voice and bodily action that would focus attention on the parts rather than the whole, a tendency when there is dialogue in the selection.

In addition to selectivity, arrangement and unity of behavioristic detail, suggestion also aids in distancing. Lee advises the reader to aim for "controlled intensity,"\textsuperscript{57} rather than responding with literal movement and abrupt vocal changes. Cobin recommends "subdued responsiveness,"\textsuperscript{58} Caswell recommends the avoidance of "realistic gestures or facial expression,"\textsuperscript{59} and Armstrong and Brandes urge the elimination of "too noticeable changes in voice or bodily action."\textsuperscript{60} Suggestion in character

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{55} Parrish, third edition, p. 421.
\textsuperscript{56} Crocker and Eich, p. 154.
\textsuperscript{57} Lee, p. 381.
\textsuperscript{58} Cobin, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{59} Caswell, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{60} Armstrong and Brandes, p. 240.
\end{footnotes}
placement, Lowrey and Johnson write, is another means of distancing. Instead of assuming characters on stage, as the actor does, the reader places the character "off stage, perhaps on or beyond the back wall of the room." Bacon also recommends the "off-stage locus" as a distancing device and Bertram echoes the same advice.

The reader's use of a manuscript, according to Lee, Cobin, and Bacon, serves to distance. The script acts as a reminder to an audience that the reader is not a part of, but a transmitter of, the dramatic action in the imaginary world of the text.

In addition to introductory preparation, selectivity and suggestion in audible and visible techniques, and the use of a manuscript, the reader also may achieve distance by emphasizing certain features of the literature that, as pointed out earlier, assist in distancing. Smith and Linn's suggestion for maintaining distance, or recovering it when lost, is a "deliberate but subtle increase of emphasis on structural elements--contrast, balance, parallelism, metaphorical figures, rhyme, rhythm, etc. . . ." Caswell similarly encourages the reader who selects literature with little distance to emphasize the rhythm or "take on a certain tonal depth and austerity which separates the reading from conversation."

A final distancing device, mentioned by Smith and Linn and Miller, is the physical separation of reader and listeners, accomplished by a lectern and, if possible, a raised floor level on which to stand.

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61Lowrey and Johnson, p. 177.
62Bacon, p. 312.
63Bertram, p. 71.
64Smith and Linn, pp. 391-392.
65Caswell, p. 69.
The following summarizing comments should serve to answer the question of how the reader distances, what means he is advised to use in separating the imaginative experience of the literature from the practical motives, desires, and reactions of the listeners:

1. The reading performance possesses form. The reader's vocal and bodily activity is marked by selectivity, arrangement, suggestion, and unity.
2. The reader emphasizes the distancing devices within the script.
3. Prior to the performance of the literature, the reader encourages a distanced attitude by arranging for audience comfort, spatially setting himself off from the listeners, and preparing them for a non-practical response by the use of music or an introduction.

The Reader's Distance: Some Qualifications

In most statements considered in the preceding section, writers treat distance as a fixed standard of excellence. An essential characteristic of the reading that provides an aesthetic experience, distance seems always necessary to the artistic reading performance. Several writers, apparently in agreement with this goal, nevertheless treat distance as a variable affected by the nature of both audience and occasion, the author's tone, the reader's responsibilities and his understanding of a given selection. As a consequence, the reader's distance is desirably subject to variations in degree.

According to Lynch and Crain, large audiences are conducive to less intimacy and more distance than small groups. They also mention the influence of the occasion:

Whether you are reading to a class or a group assembled for a gala dinner, an afternoon study club or a group who has paid to hear you perform makes a difference in the directness
of your approach, the kinds of roles the audience can play with ease, and the degree of intimacy or personal involvement you can safely expect. Lynch and Crain do not elaborate on either the "kind of difference" or the "kind of role." The idea seems to be that the more serious the occasion, the greater the distance.

None of the writers previously cited fails to note the primacy of the literature in a reading performance. But in their discussions of distance, specific recommendations and injunctions ordinarily appear in the context of general aesthetic considerations. Other writers, all contributing works during the last decade, describe distance as a relationship between reader and literature that is discoverable only in a particular literary work.

Bacon claims that "a literary work creates its own distance, in part." He warns, "interpreters must be wary of increasing or decreasing distance too much, lest they destroy the perspective intended." The perspective, Bacon illustrates, may be one of detached objectivity, as in the case of Thornton Wilder's stage manager in Our Town, who steps out of the scene and converses with the audience; it may be close, intimate, and personal as in a letter by John Keats; or it may fall somewhere between as in most Shakespearean plays.

The kind of action in a selection, Thompson and Fredricks assert, determines the degree of distance desired. To be

66Lynch and Crain, p. 57.
67Bacon, p. 368.
68Ibid.
satisfactorily distanced, the reader's "speech action matches most closely the kind of action in the writing." The unsatisfactory extremes they label underdistancing and over-distancing, the former observable when "the reader seems to have too little empathy for the kind of action in the writing," and the latter when he has too little distance from the action.

The kinds of "action" to which they make reference include scene, role, and gesture, terms similar to those in the works of Kenneth Burke. Symbolic action, as they use the term, encompasses everything that exists, is felt, and is thought, as well as what happens, in the selection. The kinds of action they divide and sub-divide in the following outline:

- **Place**
  - **Time**
  - **Event**

- **Place in society,**
- **Time in life,**
- **Function in the event.**

In their discussion of distancing, Thompson and Fredricks illustrate techniques that inappropriately distance the action of

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69 Thompson and Fredricks, p. 35.
70 *ibid.*
the literature by considering three specific excerpts from fiction.

The excerpts and the writers' comments follow:

It was a shotgun house, two rooms and an open passage between, perched on the hill. The whole cabin slanted a little under the heavy heaped-up vine that covered the roof, light and green, as though forgotten from summer.72

The face of Prince Andrey was very dreamy and tender. Clasping his hands behind him, he walked rapidly up and down the room from corner to corner, looking straight before him and dreamily shaking his head. Whether he felt dread at going to the war, or grief at forsaking his wife--or possibly something of both--he evidently did not care to be seen in that mood.73

The child was fully dressed and sitting on her father's lap near the kitchen table. He tried to get up, but I motioned for him not to bother, took off my overcoat and started to look things over. I could see that they were all very nervous, eyeing me up and down distrustfully.74

In terms of the kind of action in the writing, there is the most "camera" distance in the Scenic description of the "shotgun house" and the least distance in the close focus upon Andrey's outer and inner gestures. . . . The reader can under-distance the quotation about the house by such intense focusing on its being "perched" and "slanted" that the perspective of it as a scene would be lost. He can over-distance Andrey's responses by reading them as something remote or scenically expansive. This reversal of the distancing is not, of course the only possible error in under- and over-distancing these two quotations. The more scenic one could also be over-distanced. It could be read in an indifferent,
factual manner—one similar to the all-too-common pattern used by the beginning reader who fails to see description as action. Similarly the second quotation could be under-distanced by over-intense emphasis upon isolated details of Andrey's dreaminess, dread, or grief. The same . . . over- or under-distancing could be used in reading the other quotation of the trio. Losing sight of the scenic event would under-distance it; ignoring the nervous tensions between the people "eyeing" each other would over-distance it.75

Geiger, doubting the validity of a mysterious, omnipresent detachment as desirable in all confrontations with literature, proposes the idea that distance is influenced by (1) the speaker's attitudes and involvement in the literature, (2) the particular reader's understanding of the selection, and (3) the attention a reader is forced to give his varied responsibilities.76 The reader takes his cue from the specific speaker in the specific selection:

Say the speaker is in a particular kind of rage about something, it will hardly be precisely represented by a show of petty irritation. Whether or not we attribute the difference to aesthetic distance or something else, it still must be said that rage has not been expressed or suggested.77

The audience, Geiger writes, "has the right to expect . . . the interpreter's having a high degree of empathic response to the attitudes of the speaker within a piece of literature."78 However, it is not only the audience that markedly benefits from the reader's expression of the speaker's attitudes but also the reader himself.


76This last point is echoed in Brooks, pp. 307-310.

77Geiger, p. 38.

78Ibid.
Such an expression enables him to explore, discover, and understand the text. 79

Of the second influence, the reader's own interpretation of the literature, Geiger notes that passages performed by various readers admit of "variety of quality and degree" of detachment. 80 Of the reader's varied responsibilities, Geiger maintains that a reader of necessity, is part performer, part sharer, and part critic. As one of the roles takes precedence over the other, distance is affected. He explains:

. . . recognition of the interpreter's multiple activities permits us to note more accurately the causes and nature of limitations on the interpreter's empathic response to the attitudes of speakers within a literary piece. We need not fall prey to the hint that for some more or less mystic reason, each line must be read with a certain detachment. Instead, long passages or even whole poems may be read as if there were no distance at all between the attitudes of the interpreter and those of characters within the selection. Again, as the interpreter finds it necessary or appropriate to attend to his role as public speaker, critic, or sympathetic sharer, the distance between interpreter and literary speaker may widen slightly, or grow very great. 81

Geiger's concluding argument concerning distance is both a criticism of the term as a fixed requisite and a restatement of his own view of its flexibility:


80 Ibid., p. 43.

81 Ibid., p. 86.
We may, if we wish, continue to speak of "aesthetic
distance," but we will now understand it more clearly
as a necessity of the interpreter's total situation,
having different causes, and, as a result, ordinarily
obtaining to the reading of various passages in a variety
of quality and degree.\textsuperscript{82}

Distance as a Description of Relationships

In two recent publications, oral interpretation critics
apply the term distance in their analyses of a literary text.
Neither writer uses distance in an evaluative context; both use
it descriptively to define relationships, relationships that a
reader should clarify in his performance of a selection.

Chester Long writes of the changing distance as a source
of the power in Eugene O'Neill's \textit{Long Day's Journey into Night}. As
the play unfolds, Long writes, the distances between characters,
within characters, and between the drama and reader or spectator
steadily change. Of the relationship between audience and
characters, Long notes:

The overwhelming effect in the play exists in the
comparative lack of dramatic irony (wherein the audience
knows more than the characters speaking). As the
characters reveal more about themselves, the audience,
moving exactly parallel with the characters' reve-
lations, discovers more, too. This has the effect of
erasing the distance between the audience and the
characters. . . .\textsuperscript{83}

However, as the play progresses, the characters, particularly
Mary, become more detached from their own tragic mistakes, while

\textsuperscript{82}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{83}Long, p. 85.
simultaneously, the distance of the audience from the characters lessens. Long explains:

But oddly enough, it is Mary, at this point, through the aid of the drug, who has something comparable to an aesthetic distance from the revelation about herself. We, the audience, are the ones who have little or no protection from the poignancy of the revelation, and it is just this that makes Mary's final speech so overwhelmingly powerful in its effect upon us.

When the final tragic fact (that Mary's unqualified love for Tyrone has destroyed her moral integrity) is revealed, the conventional roles of the audience and of the characters have essentially been reversed; for the characters, through the aid of alcohol and morphine, have established an even greater distance from the poignancy of the tragic fact than that distance which is conventionally the sole prerogative of the audience.84

Long makes no specific statements on how the changes in distance are realized in performance. Perhaps one could reason that as the distance between characters and audience increased, the reader's distance from the characters would lessen while his distance from the audience grew.

Robert Beloof's use of the term distance appears in his comparison of the narrator's voice, which he insists is not the same as the author's voice. Of the narrator's voice Beloof writes that the interpreter's task is "to discover to what degree he is a spokesman for the author's values."85 The term distance appears in Beloof's comparison of narrators' voices in Josephine Miles' "Oedipus" and e. e. cummings' "it must be Nice."

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84Long, pp. 85-86, 87.

85Beloof, p. 327.
In Miles' poem, the interpreter would discover a difference in values. The narrator in "Oedipus," an office worker, mistakenly believes the title character to "have everything." However, the poet ironically implies a different estimate. The discrepancy between author and narrator is suggested by the conflict between the narrator's words and his situation. Beloof discusses the voices of poet and speaker and how they might be communicated in the reading of the poem:

. . . the phrase "he had everything" (though the speaker in the poem is unconscious of it) carries a great weight of irony to the reader consciously from the author, hence, if the oral reader does his job, to the audience.

. . . To the speaker, the phrase is a cliché. When somebody is rich, in good health, powerful, we say, "He has everything." But in Oedipus's case, this "everything" was too much. . . . The oral reader, through innocence of expression and rather clichéd tonal pattern, might convey the speaker's ignorance of the irony. But he must also (by perhaps a subtle, exaggerated slowness, perhaps a pause before "everything," perhaps by a slightly opaque, not-too-bright look on the face) convey that the author, hence the oral reader, hence the audience, is aware of the ironic levels. 86

Whereas the Miles poem contains a difference in values between author and narrator, Cummings' features a difference in distance. Beloof explains the distance between the visions of author and speaker:

Here, though the speaker is another average "Joe," the language less "educated" than the speaker's in "Oedipus," yet the oral reader has no such satiric discrepancy between the author's attitude and the speaker's to convey. How does the oral reader know this? Again, by the language which the author has given to the speaker. . . . His language is direct, it is the language he knows and he uses

86Ibid., p. 328.
honestly. He does not speak of experiences he cannot understand. In this poem the difference between the speaker and author is one not of value, but of distance.87

The reader, Beloof advises, could clarify the congruence of sympathies and the differences of insight by

. . . something very close to full characterization of the speaker . . . in order to emphasize the distance between the speaker and the informing intelligence of the author. But this characterization should be straightforward and sympathetic. Cummings' poem differs from Miles' in its author's lack of satiric treatment of the speaker.88

Beloof's use of the term distance is, in this example, largely an intellectual distinction between author and narrator. Although he does not employ the term in his comments on "Oedipus," he seems to be discussing in Miles' poem a difference that literary critic Wayne Booth describes as moral distance between narrator and author.89

Both Long and Beloof use the term distance much the way writers use "rhyme" or "syntax" and other identifying words. Distance, narrow or great, exists within the text, and it exists, right or wrong, when the dynamics of a reading performance converge—between author, narrator, reader and audience. An understanding of

87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., pp. 328-329.
89 Although Beloof does not cite Wayne C. Booth's work in a footnote and the text includes no bibliography, Booth's influence seems striking here and in the ensuing comments on "reliable" and "non reliable" narrators. See Ch. V, pp. 155-162.
its nature in a specific text may (1) at least partially explain
the effectiveness of a work and (2) suggest the reader's relationships to narrator, author, and audience when performing the
literature.

III. Summary

Klyn's question, "What really is this thing we call esthetic or psychical distance?" apparently yields no single answer from oral interpretation sources. Encouraging students to choose selections of literary merit, writers use distance to describe such material; attempting to define standards of excellence in artistic performances, other writers insist that lack of distance precludes aesthetic responses. A minority group of authors use distance to identify relationships between author, speaker, reader, and audience within specific selections.

Reading from a single source in oral interpretation, one who wished an explanation of distance would probably find the matter nebulous and highly abstract. However, available statements, considered collectively, reflect a rather clearly defined aesthetic theory. The premium on interpreter restraint, for example, unequivocally encouraged by writers of a few years back, emerges not as a plea for wooden reading, but as one conclusion growing out of an attempt to evolve principles appropriate to this specific performing art. And distance, essential to any art, could be achieved by the reader through preparation prior to the reading, form within the reading, and spatial separation of reader and listener.

Although later writers do not disagree with the basic assumption that art and reality differ and that the reading should
lead to an aesthetic response, they make the standard more flexible and more precise by explaining how the desirable degree of distance is determined by audience, occasion, the reader's varied responsibilities, and his own understanding of a selection.

Most recently, the term has appeared in an even more specific context. At least part of the rationale for a particular reading performance is said to lie with the discovery of the relationships within a selection. Such a discovery entails an analysis of the proximity or divergence between those parties that converge in the performance--author, speaker, reader, and listener.

The hypothesis that additional clarity and amplification of the term distance is to be found in publications of allied areas prompts the following chapters on aesthetics, psychology, literary criticism, and theatre. However, because interpreters have paid little attention to Bullough's classic essay and have ignored his other comments on the term altogether, a consideration of his works precedes the remaining discussions.
CHAPTER II

EDWARD BULLOUGH AND DISTANCE

Investigation has produced no verbalized doubt concerning the origin of the term distance. Although scholars discussed related ideas long before the term was coined, the first specific formulation of the concept appeared in the 1912 issue of The British Journal of Psychology.¹ Edward Bullough's "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle" provided the elucidation of a principle that numerous writers in oral interpretation, aesthetics, psychology, literary criticism, and theatre applied to their own studies.

Comments about Bullough's essay by writers in these disciplines are typically brief and complimentary. Lionel Crocker and Louis Eich direct oral interpretation students to Bullough's essay as "one of the most illuminating articles on aesthetic distance."² In the most recent history of aesthetics, Monroe Beardsley attests

¹Edward Bullough, "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle," The British Journal of Psychology, V (June, 1912), 87-118.

to the influence of the essay, pointing out the prominence of the
term distance in the aesthetician's vocabulary: "Because of the
illumination of Bullough's examples and analysis, this term is
felt to be almost indispensable to many contemporary aestheticians."³
Philosopher Alexander Sesonske also praises the essay, calling it
"a landmark in modern aesthetic theory."⁴ More specifically,
Sesonske adds, "This paper reformulated and clarified a concept
which had remained obscure though its importance had long been
recognized and contributed a new and useful term to the vocabulary
of aesthetics."⁵ Literary critic Oscar Büdel calls Bullough's work
a "searching article" and an "impartial inquiry;"⁶ psychologist
Ernst Kris labels it a "brilliant essay;"⁷ and Eddie Haynes,
researching theatre problems, calls it a "deservedly famous contri-
bution to modern aesthetics."⁸

³Monroe C. Beardsley, Aesthetics From Classical Greece to
the Present: A Short History (New York: The Macmillan Company,
1966), p. 381.

⁴Alexander Sesonske, Book Review of Edward Bullough's
Aesthetics: Lectures and Essays, The Journal of Aesthetics and
Art Criticism, XVII (September, 1958), 132.

⁵Ibid., p. 132.

⁶Oscar Büdel, "Aesthetic Distance and Contemporary Theatre,"
PMLA, LCVI (June, 1961), 277.

⁷Ernst Kris, Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art (New York:

⁸Eddie Bart Haynes, "The Duality of Response to Theatrical
An analysis of Bullough's essay and a consideration of his works that anticipated and followed it comprise the major portion of this chapter. A brief account of the sources that probably influenced his idea of distance and a discussion of the implications of this idea for oral interpretation follow.

I. Bullough on Distance

A scholar of Classical, Romance, Slavic, and Oriental languages and literature, philosophy, visual design, architecture, and psychology, Edward Bullough was well prepared to articulate aesthetic concepts. He called aesthetics and art criticism an "intellectual hobby," a description Elizabeth Wilkinson dismisses as modesty and understatement. Of Bullough's twenty-five publications, Wilkinson categorizes ten as works on aesthetics and the remaining fifteen as translations, cultural or literary studies. Also indicative of a serious interest in aesthetics was Bullough's 1907 initiation of an annual course of lectures on the subject at Cambridge, an activity he continued most of his life.

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10Wilkinson, p. v.

11Ibid., pp. xiii-xv.

12Bennett, p. 25; Evennett, p. 136.
Relevant to this study are his 1907 lectures in which the germ of his concept of distance is clearly discernible.

1907 Lectures

The first course of lectures, entitled "A Modern Conception of Aesthetics," contains Bullough's defense of the strange new science to which he introduced Cambridge undergraduates. He assumes from the beginning that art is an essential factor in human life and that art and reality are two distinct spheres. Making another distinction, he asserts that a general theoretical understanding of art experience--aesthetics--is different from a particularity of comment about an art--criticism. Bullough does not assume the role of a practical critic who describes and evaluates specific art objects. Instead, his inquiry is from the standpoint of an aesthetician interested in the principles basic to an individual's appreciation of art. Bullough claims that a general understanding appropriate to aesthetics is best secured by examining the effects art objects have on percipients, not by concentrating on the "Beauty" of these objects. Searching for basic principles, he finds that "in the psychical processes constituting the aesthetic impression the various arts and particular works of art may find a common meeting ground."13 Experiences with art, unlike those of reality, involve a unique psychical process.

This psychical process is a complex mental state by which individuals experience "a kind of separation within themselves, a

doubling of consciousness, as if they were two individuals, of which one acts while the other looks on, criticises and enjoys, with the free and impartial interest. . . ."14 The result, Bullough writes, is a "devotion and detachment impossible in acts performed for the sake of further ends or ulterior reasons."15 The duality of involvement and separation and the characteristic of terminality identify the aesthetic attitude and contrast with the practical, scientific, or ethical attitudes appropriate to reality. Unlike the ethical, the aesthetic is not dictated by possible moral consequences; unlike the scientific, the aesthetic is individual, human, and concrete; and unlike the practical, the aesthetic is paradoxically impersonal. His explanation of this latter distinction clearly anticipates the principle he later designates as distance:

The essential feature of this is that the aesthetic object, in so far as it is aesthetic, is temporarily severed from its relation to and its bearing upon, our practical self. The centre of gravity is, so to speak, shifted from the personal ego to the thing contemplated. The personality is not forcibly suppressed in the way that the surgeon may force his personal sentiments into the background in the interest of scientific objectivity. But it is lost in, and spontaneously surrendered to, the object, only to live with twofold vigour and intensity in its contemplation. This is the meaning of 'aesthetic objectivity,' which is quite different from either scientific objectivity or the egotistical subjectivity of practical consciousness.16

Bullough concludes his first course of lectures with the assertion that aesthetics is properly "the systematic study of

14Ibid., p. 66.
15Ibid., p. 67.
16Ibid., p. 78.
aesthetic consciousness and the production and contemplation it renders possible. Five years later, he concludes an essay with the claim that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the aesthetic consciousness is psychical distance.

1912 Essay

For the concept he evolved, one he thought to be a fundamental principle of aesthetic experience, Bullough chose the term "distance." Emphasizing its metaphorical nature and distinguishing it from temporal or spatial distance, he affixes the adjective "psychical." Early in the essay, he describes the dual view that psychical distance embraces:

It has a negative, inhibitory aspect—the cutting-out of the practical sides of things and of our practical attitude to them—and a positive side—the elaboration of the experience on the new basis created by the inhibitory action of Distance.18

Interpreted as an aesthetic principle, distance becomes "that special mental attitude towards, and outlook upon, experience, which finds its more pregnant expression in the various forms of art."19 Essential to appreciation, the special mental attitude, which could be adopted toward other objects, e.g., the sea, is neither practical nor normal; it is produced by

... putting the phenomenon, so to speak, out of gear with our practical, actual self; by allowing it to stand outside the context of our personal needs and ends ...

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17 Ibid., p. 82.
18 Bullough, "'Psychical Distance','" p. 89.
19 Ibid., p. 90.
by permitting only such reactions on our part as emphasize the 'objective' feature of the experience, and by interpreting even our 'subjective' affections not as modes of our being but rather as characteristics of the phenomenon.

Distance therefore "makes the aesthetic object 'an end in itself.""

By so detaching his practical needs and motives, an individual is free to adopt an attitude that is not impersonal, but personal, "often highly emotionally coloured, but of a peculiar character" because it is "so to speak, filtered." Comprised of (1) practical detachment and (2) imaginative involvement, distance serves metaphorically to describe a complex psychical process that is essential to the aesthetic attitude.

Aesthetic experiences, according to Bullough, occur within the limits of distance. No fixed point exists, but there does exist a range within which the experience is possible. Achieving a place within this range hinges on both the background and inclinations of the percipient and the elements intrinsic to the art object and its form of presentation. Failing to achieve or losing distance similarly may stem from causes in the individual or in the art object.

**Achievement of Distance**

Bullough reiterates the argument that without "some degree of predisposition on our part," the experience with art will be

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"incomprehensible" and "unappreciated." Thus, lack of theatre-going experience might lead an audience member at a production of *Othello* to a restricted view of only the elaborate costumes and changing scenery. He could be impressed by the mechanics while failing to comprehend, much less become involved in, the dramatic action. His response, according to Bullough's line of reasoning, would be no more aesthetic than the playgoer who, jealous of his own wife, saw in *Othello* an uncomfortable and disquieting dramatization of his own domestic problem. The first instance illustrates a lack of both imaginative involvement and practical detachment, for the percipient's attention is focused only on certain practical aspects of the total work. The second instance illustrates a lack of practical detachment, leading to real, not imaginative, involvement that is centered on the self, not the object.

Bullough repeatedly implies that a percipient can cultivate distance through frequent encounters with art and through preparation. He claims more explicitly that the percipient can deliberately distance a work of art. The first playgoer in the preceding example could perhaps be led to a more meaningful experience by prior instruction in the Elizabethan drama, poetry, and stage conventions. The second might profit from the example set by what Bullough calls the best kind of critic. Ordinarily "bad audiences," good critics willfully move from a practical view of the technicalities of theatre. They constantly "interchange from the practical to the distanced attitude and vice versa."24

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23Ibid., p. 92.
24Ibid., p. 93.
Bullough places primary responsibility for the achievement of distance on the art object. In the first place, the successful artist achieves distance in the creative process. Bullough asserts that the artist must objectify his practical, immediate experience, refraining from the self-expression of an orator or personal correspondent. The artist's "artistic production is the indirect formulation of a distanced mental content." 25

Secondly, several factors in the various arts contribute to the achievement of distance as they set the object apart from reality: in the theatre, artificial lighting, costumes, make-up, verse in poetic drama, and a proscenium that frames stage events; in dance, rhythmical movements and high degree of technical skill; in sculpture, lack of color and the use of pedestals; and in painting, reduction in size and use of a frame.

Bullough explains in some detail the distancing necessary in tragedy. The exceptional, Bullough reasons, is the quality that separates artistic tragedy from pathetic and sad incidents reported in newspapers. Tragedy, he writes is

... in so far different from the merely sad as it is distanced; and it is largely the exceptional which produces the Distance of tragedy: exceptional situations, exceptional characters, exceptional destinies and conduct. ... The exceptional element in tragic figures—that which makes them so utterly different from characters we meet with in ordinary experience—is a consistency of direction, a fervour of ideality, a persistence and driving-force which is far above the capacities of average men. 26

25 Ibid., p. 115.
26 Ibid., p. 103.
In several arts both spatial and temporal separation is contributory to psychical distancing. Separating the worlds of imagination and reality, the dancer and the actor generally occupy a raised platform, distinctly removed from the audience. Also spatially setting the art object apart is the reduction in size in most painting and much sculpture. Temporal distance, which may also aid in setting the art object apart, is exemplified in art objects created in remote periods and in contemporary objects whose subject, setting, or style is that of a remote period.

Commenting on productions of plays by Racine and the Greek tragedians, Bullough claims:

Provided the Distance is not too wide, the result of its intervention has everywhere been to enhance the art-character of such works and to lower their original ethical and social force of appeal.27

Similarly, "mythical subjects once closely connected with personal life, acquire distance for us today."28

Most important in the achievement of distance are an art object's formal qualities, which to Bullough include

... symmetry, opposition, proportion, balance rhythmical distribution of parts, light-arrangements, in fact all the so-called 'formal' features, 'composition' in the widest sense.29

Composition, Bullough continues, in addition to lending clarity and intelligibility to art, unquestionably distances:

27Ibid., p. 103.
28Ibid., p. 102.
29Ibid., p. 105.
For, every kind of visibly intentional arrangement of unification must, by the mere fact of its presence, enforce Distance, by distinguishing the object from the confused, disjointed and scattered forms of actual experience.\textsuperscript{30}

Selectivity and arrangement, so interpreted, create a discernible form that distinguishes a work of art from disorganized immediate surroundings and events.

Although Bullough claims that individuals differ in distancing powers, that a single individual's distancing capacity varies from one art form to another and even from one experience to another with the same art object, he stoutly maintains that an ideal distance exists. Located within the total range of aesthetic experience is the most desirable point, "the utmost decrease of Distance without its disappearance."\textsuperscript{31} The most intense experience is a concomitant of the closest possible concordance of individual and art object. Bullough never states, as a few of his critics suggest, that this is a single fixed relation for aesthetic pleasure. Rather he finds the point of closest possible relationship between object and percipient a psychical proximity that yields the most intense experience while retaining the aesthetic character of that experience. By using terminology to be explained in the following section, the ideal distance may be said to exist on the very brink of underdistancing. While he makes his own personal preference clear, Bullough notes several times that the range between underdistancing and overdistancing is wide enough to encompass a diverse

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., pp. 105-106.

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., p. 94.
group of individuals engaged in a variety of experiences with an assortment of objects.

The Loss of Distance

The range, which to Bullough is considerable, may be overstepped or unattained. Loss of distance, through either underdistancing or overdistancing, corresponds to a loss of aesthetic appreciation.

The consequence of a loss of Distance through one or other cause is familiar: the verdict in the case of underdistancing is that the work is 'crudely naturalistic,' 'harrowing,' 'repulsive in its realism.' An excess of Distance produces the impression of improbability, artificiality, emptiness or absurdity.  

Underdistanced, the percipient does not distinguish between art and reality; his engagement is of a practical, ethical, or moral kind, appropriate to reality. Overdistanced, he does not make contact with the art object as such; he is removed, but so much so that any kind of involvement with the art is out of reach. In the first situation, his response is likely to be discomfort, fear, uneasiness, embarrassment, etc.; in the second, apathy or incredulity.

According to Bullough, most instances of loss of distance through underdistancing are faults of the percipient. A majority of individuals, he writes, are unable to distance several of the subjects on which artists frequently draw:

... in art practice, explicit reference to organic affections, to the material existence of the body, especially to sexual matters, lie normally below the Distance-limit, and can be touched upon by Art only with special precautions. Allusions to social institutions

32 Ibid., p. 94.
of any degree of personal importance--in particular, the questioning of some generally recognised ethical sanctions, references to topical subjects occupying public attention at the moment, and such like, are all dangerously near the average limit and may at any time fall below it, arousing, instead of aesthetic appreciation, concrete hostility or mere amusement.\footnote{Ibid., p. 95.}

Because the low distance limit for the artist is considerably lower than that of average individuals, the artist may be able to distance for himself and his colleagues a number of subjects that would elicit unaesthetic responses from the general public. The difference often results in unjust censure of the artist, whose . . . power of distancing, nay, the necessity of distancing feelings, sensations, situations which for the average person are too intimately bound up with his concrete existence to be regarded in that light, have often quite unjustly earned for him accusations of cynicism, sensualism, morbidness for frivolity. The same misconception has arisen over many 'problem plays' and 'problem novels' in which the public have persisted in seeing nothing but a supposed 'problem' of the moment, whereas the author may have been able to distance the subject-matter sufficiently to rise above its practical problematic import and to regard it simply as a dramatically and humanly interesting situation.\footnote{Ibid., p. 95.}

Bullough devotes most of his discussion of the art object to means by which distance is achieved, not lost. He implies, however, that distance would be ineffectual without those characteristics by which it is accomplished (e.g., formal properties). Loss of distance due to the object, Bullough asserts, generally occurs through overdistancing. However, in the examples he discusses, underdistancing receives as much attention.

\footnote{Ibid., p. 95.}
According to Bullough, tendencies toward both under- and overdistancing accompany melodrama, idealistic art, and music. Melodrama, he writes, tends to effect overdistancing in a cultivated audience and either over- or underdistancing in the less sophisticated. To the former group, the play's

... overcharged realism, the crude opposition of vice and virtue, the exaggeration of its underlined moral, its innocence of nuance, and its sentimentality with violin-accompaniment are sufficient cause to stamp it as inferior art.35

The melodrama devotee is usually a member of one of two groups, neither engaged in an aesthetic experience.

His attitude is rather either that of a matter-of-fact adult or of a child: i.e. he is either in a frankly personal relation to the events of the play and would like to cudgel the villain who illtreats the innocent heroine, and rejoices loudly in his final defeat—just as he would in real life—or, he is completely lost in the excessive distance imposed by the work and watches naively the wonders he sees, as a child listens enchantedly to a fairy-tale. In neither case is his attitude aesthetic; in the one the object is under-, in the other over- distanced ... 36

Idealistic art, which to Bullough seems to include allegorical literature as well as Egyptian and early Christian painting, also leads to both over- and underdistancing. The problem arises when art is used "to subserve commemorative, hieratic, generally religious, royal, or patriotic functions."37 In differentiating the object from the ordinary and in making its appeal wide,

35 Ibid., p. 112.
36 Ibid., p. 112.
37 Ibid., p. 100.
generalizations, abstractions, and exaggerations are customarily employed. Because responses to such art are usually below or beyond the limits of distance, Bullough considers the effect unaesthetic:

Generalisations and abstractions suffer under this disadvantage that they have too much general applicability to invite a personal interest in them, and too little individual concreteness to prevent them applying to us in all their force. . . . general conceptions like Patriotism, Friendship, Love, Hope, Life, Death, concern as much Dick, Tom and Harry as myself, and I, therefore, either feel unable to get into any kind of personal relation to them, or, if I do so, they become at once, emphatically and concretely, my Patriotism, my Friendship, my Love, my Hope, my Life and Death. By mere force of generalisation, a general truth or a universal ideal is so far distanced from myself that I fail to realise it concretely at all, or when I do so, I can realise it only as part of my practical actual being, i.e., it falls below the Distance-limit altogether.38

Music, similarly, can produce unaesthetic responses. For many listeners, popular, light tunes . . . easily reach that degree of decreasing Distance below which they cease to be Art and become pure amusement. . . . To this might be added its strong tendency, especially in unmusical people, to stimulate trains to thought quite disconnected with itself, following channels of subjective inclinations,--day-dreams of a more or less directly personal character.39

Conversely, the more complex selections are for a large number of listeners overdistanced. In either case, according to Bullough, . . . music possesses a sensuous, frequently sensual, character: the undoubted physiological and muscular stimulus of its melodies and harmonies, no less than its


39Ibid., p. 98.
rhythmic aspects, would seem to account for the occasional disappearance of Distance.40

Architecture, strongly associated with the utilitarian function of a building, generally requires considerable spatial and psychic distance for aesthetic contemplation and enjoyment.

Although art objects presuppose various distance limits, some, like theatre, generally invite a closer relationship than architecture, for example. Still, if distance is to be maintained, these limits, individually set, must be maintained. If altered within the work, the lack of consistency shatters probability. Bullough insists that a percipient gauges a work's probability not by its correspondence to nature but by its consistency of distance. Thus, the degree of realism . . . set by a work as a whole, determines intrinsically the greater or smaller degree of fancy which it permits; and consequently we feel the loss of Peter Pan's shadow to be infinitely more probable than some trifling improbability which shocks our sense of proportion in a naturalistic work.41

Other Applications of Distance

Toward the close of his essay, almost as if an afterthought, Bullough briefly associates two additional subjects with distance. First, he mentions the art of acting as a potentially rich source of information about distance in artistic production. Implying but never elaborating on the point, Bullough suggests that the actor's distancing is of a peculiar sort, because unlike the

40 Ibid., p. 98.
41 Ibid., p. 102.
painter, writer, and architect, his medium necessitates "the overlapping—at least in part—of the process of producing with the finished production, which elsewhere are separated in point of time."  

Bullough seems to think, on the basis of actors' comments, that marked differences exist among actors as to the degree of objectification and transformation between their own lives and those of the characters they portray. He speculates that successful acting is not restricted to any single degree of distance, only that some kind of "cleavage between the concrete, normal personality and the distanced personality" occurs.

The second connection Bullough makes is between empathy and distance. He rejects the aesthetic character of much that Einfühlung theorists describe and asserts that empathy does not always occur in aesthetic experience. However, he does state, somewhat cryptically, that the difference in sympathy and empathy is a matter of distance. He probably means that sympathy is tied to a person's practical affections while empathy is a kind of concern that has its "centre of gravity" in the object itself.

Later Publications

In publications of 1920 and 1921, Bullough reaffirms his belief in the concept of distance. "Mind and Medium in Art,"

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42 Ibid., p. 116. When Bullough's essay is reprinted in various anthologies, the concluding section is omitted.

43 Ibid., p. 116. For a discussion of Bertolt Brecht's ideas on distance in acting, see Ch. VI, pp. 186-187.
an exposition of the creative process, contains a description of the artist's experience imaginatively transformed by distance. The medium of the artist's work, the mastery it requires and the limitations it imposes aid the artist in distancing his ideas and experiences.

The novelty and originality of the artistic imagination lies far less in its eccentricity to normal life than in its being the reflection of an intensely and intimately individual experience, transferred to the sphere of imagination, thereby removed from its personal reference and rendered accessible to and effective for the sympathy, understanding and appreciation of others. This curiously dualistic, yet unified psychosis I have attempted to render intelligible as 'distancing.' And the medium, its treatment, its very limitations and the fusion with the artist's vision in Technique, is one of the chief factors of artistic creation, forcing the distancing process upon the artist while at the same time it facilitates the maintenance of distance.44

In the following year, 1921, Bullough published a plea for experimental studies that would clarify aesthetic adaptation. Prior to both apperception and experience, an individual, Bullough writes, adapts to the aesthetic object. The chief features of the adaptation, all of which warrant intensive research, include (1) expectancy, (2) open-mindedness to surprise, (3) a pleasant "feeling tone"45 focused on the forthcoming experience, and most important, (4) a non-personal character. Explaining the fourth feature, Bullough summarizes the principle he first suggested fourteen years earlier in the Cambridge lectures:

45Edward Bullough, "Recent Work in Experimental Aesthetics," The British Journal of Psychology, XII (June, 1921), 95.
Its main feature is a divorce from all directly practical needs and functions and from the personal relevance of the object. . . . At the same time, our adaptation is not impersonal, in the sense of scientific impartiality of mere intellectual curiosity. It is rather a non-personal relation to the object; its significance does not affect me in my everyday experience, yet it does not lose touch with either the emotional sphere or a generally human interest; and though the experience has a certain unreality . . . , it yet does not fail to obtain a full response of the personality to which it appeals. This curious dualism of attitude, a paradoxical combination of impersonal and intensely personal reaction, I have tried elsewhere to describe as 'Distance.'46

In this essay, Bullough does not swerve from a belief he stated earlier, that individuals come to adaptation by diverse routes. For some, it appears habitual and spontaneous, for others, a voluntary action. Bullough urges the collection of additional data that might explain both the manner in which aesthetic adaptation occurs and its stability or maintenance over a period of time.

In reference to both these questions it must be borne in mind that adaptation may be secured or assisted by the object, by its power to compel aesthetic adaptation. . . . The temporal arts in particular dispose of special means to initiate an adaptation, by 'introductions,' opening chapters, the 'exposition' of a play, an overture, etc. This advantage over the spatial arts which cannot prepare the spectator is, however, balanced by the disadvantage of requiring maintenance of an adequate adaptation for a considerable length of time. It is here that the adaptation is exposed to fluctuations, deviations and apparently especially to oscillations between the object and the subject's self and his reactive feelings. 47

46 Ibid., pp. 95-96.
47 Ibid., p. 98.
Particularly when encountering temporal arts, then, a percipient may be appropriately distanced a majority of the time but still undergo periods of underdistancing or overdistancing.

Conclusion

Bullough's discussion of distance is difficult to summarize because within the framework of a simple idea he elaborates and illustrates profusely. The ramifications of his principle seem almost endless.

Convinced that art and reality differ, that aesthetic experiences are distinguishable from those of the workaday world, and that such experiences are of intrinsic worth, Bullough sets out to isolate those features that characterize the unique occurrences. Introspection and study lead him to the conclusion that one of the requisites is distance, a peculiar psychical process, a dual adjustment necessary to an individual's aesthetic creation, interpretation, and appreciation of an object. The adjustment consists of setting aside practical concerns and motivations, investing all affection and attention in the object's features, thereby enjoying an intense object-centered, not self-centered, experience. Although the possibility of viewing objects other than works of art in such a detached, intense manner exists, it is toward art objects that the psychical process designated as distance finds its fullest expression.

Factors contributing to the attainment of this complex mental state arise from the artist, the percipient, from art in general, and from the nature of particular art forms. The creative
artist initiates the process by distancing his own visions, ideas and experiences during production. The limitations of his medium and the technical mastery it requires are of primary importance as a distancing device. The percipient, through habit or deliberate effort, may choose a distanced relationship. Selectivity and arrangement of compositional aspects clearly dissociate the imaginative world of art from chaotic, disorganized reality. This formal feature that registers a detachment from reality is an aid to distancing any art. Additionally, in all arts, spatial and temporal distance may contribute to psychical distancing. Moreover, each of the particular arts, by virtue of their media, possesses distancing devices, e.g., framed stages on which actors appear in costume and make-up, rhythmical dance movements, sculpture lacking in color and mounted on pedestals, and paintings framed.

Failure to distance is, according to Bullough, synonymous with failure to appreciate. Individuals, art objects and purposes of art vary, and each may impose certain conditions that preclude a distanced aesthetic attitude. The percipient may not possess the spontaneous, habitual ability of aesthetic engagement; the object may lack those devices that serve to distance; and art may be relegated to the service of practical, moral, or ethical ends toward which a peculiar aesthetic experience is neither encouraged nor expected. If as a consequence of any of these conditions the percipient becomes practically involved in the object, under-distancing results; if concordance between him and the object does not materialize, overdistancing occurs.
Although Bullough considers distance essential to a peculiarly aesthetic experience, he repeatedly notes its variability. Between the limits of the excessive (overdistancing) and the inadequate (underdistancing), an entire range of experiences is possible. As Wilkinson points out, Bullough's principle "allows for a maximum diversity within a formula of elegant simplicity." Bullough's own personal preference is for a minimally distanced relation between art and percipients. The closest concordance achievable nets the most intense and meaningful results. "The utmost decrease in distance, without its disappearance" is to Bullough an ideal in both artistic production and contemplation.

While emphasizing the percipient's response as a key to understanding aesthetic experience, Bullough is careful to note that the aesthetic attitude may be spontaneous, deliberately employed, or cultivated. Presumably, at least one of the goals in such training is the recognition of those features that distance.

Bullough's account of distance seems most useful as a tool in explaining (1) unsatisfying, disturbing, or meaningless responses sometimes evoked by objects that aim to aesthetically engage and (2) the curious power of art to transform subjects so as to elicit a unique and intense interest, subjects that in reality give rise to pain, anxiety, fear, apathy, or incredulity.

Illuminating as Bullough's essays are, they leave unanswered questions. For example, he never clearly defines the relationship

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48 Wilkinson, p. xxvi.
between distance and empathy, noting only that the aesthetic response is possible without empathy but impossible without distance. Yet, his description of the positive aspect of distance, which he fails to describe with the abundant detail he uses on the negative, bears a close resemblance to descriptions of *Einfühlung*.49

Another question that Bullough quickly dismisses after raising it only once is that of the interpretative artist's role in distancing. He comments that actors are variously distanced from the roles they assume, but he does not consider the distancing power of an actor's performance. Likewise, he writes of music but not of singers', instrumentalists', and conductors' performances of the music as a factor.

A psychological aesthetician, Bullough firmly declares that when men raise questions concerning principles basic to works of art, the answers are chiefly to be found in individuals' responses to those works. Admitting that his concept of distance is speculative and evolved from personal experience, Bullough voices the hope that additional studies follow. He encourages the collection of data consisting of experiments and introspective evidence from a variety of individuals, providing a clearer and more explicit account of aesthetic experience. The experience, he asserts, is an end in itself. He attempts to learn more precisely what that

experience is and how artist, object, and percipient determine it, and he interprets distance as one of the major conditions to which each is contributory.

II. Bullough's Sources

Bullough's writing reflects an education of encyclopedic proportion. His allusions and references are numerous, including scores of treatises from aesthetics, psychology, philosophy, and applied arts in addition to specific works of art from painting, sculpture, drama, and music. An exhaustive account of his inventione, perhaps warranted, is outside the purview of this study. This section is limited to a consideration of four sources that probably exerted an influence on a specific aspect of the concept of distance.

Friedrich Schiller

The one discussion of works influencing Bullough's concept of distance is that of Elizabeth Wilkinson. In her introduction to a collection of Bullough's essays reprinted in 1957, she notes Schiller's publications as being a major influential force:

From Schiller, in particular, he must have got the idea of shifting the notion of éloignement from poetics to aesthetics, from the physical to the psychical plane. For it was he who transformed it from a rule for poets (to distance their theme either in space or time) into a psychological statement about the quality of remoteness which all objects assume in the aesthetic relation.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{50}Wilkinson, p. xxxv.
The passage to which Wilkinson refers appears in Schiller's twenty-fifth letter, where he states:

Contemplation (reflection) is Man's first free relation to the universe which surrounds him. If desire directly apprehends its object, contemplation thrusts its object into the distance, thereby turning it into its true and inalienable possession and thus securing it from passion.51

Wilkinson also asserts that Schiller "seems to have coined the verb, at any rate in this psychical sense, when he enjoined upon the poet to write, not in the grip of immediate emotion, but 'in the tranquility of distancing recollection.'"52

Bullough does evince familiarity with Schiller's works in the 1907 lecture, not in the 1912 essay. From this German writer he may have gleaned the ideas of (1) using a term that ordinarily referred to actual space or time in a metaphorical description of a psychical relationship and (2) ascribing this process to creative artists as well as percipients.

Immanuel Kant

Kant's classic definition of the aesthetic attitude, which Bullough mentions in the 1907 lectures, might be considered the negative, impersonal aspect of distance in its embryonic form.


52 Wilkinson, p. xxv. Her quotation is drawn from Schiller's review of Burger's Gedichte, 1791. The verb, she adds "does not seem to have been assimilated into the German language."
Although Bullough expresses disagreement with much of Kant's exposition (chiefly, that judgment precedes appreciation), he turns to the German philosopher in that section of the lectures that clearly anticipates the idea of distance:

Kant used the term 'disinterested pleasure' to denote this impersonal character, and in spite, or rather because, of its apparent contradiction in terms, it remains one of the best short descriptive formulas of the aesthetic attitude. The essential feature of this is that the aesthetic object, in so far as it is aesthetic, is temporarily severed from its relation to, and its bearing upon, our practical self. 53

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Walter Pater

In several sections of the 1907 lectures, Bullough cites the work of Walter Pater. The English philosopher appears to have been influential in Bullough's insistence that distance necessarily attends a terminal experience, and terminality he regards as primary to the aesthetic. That part of Pater's work to which Bullough makes reference is contained in the concluding paragraphs of Studies in the History of the Renaissance. "Not the fruit of experience," writes Pater, "but the experience itself is the end." 54 And such moments come with most frequency through encounters with art:

. . . the poetic passion, the desire for beauty, the love of art for art's sake has most; for art comes to you

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professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for these moments' sake. 55

The Great Debate in Acting

In the preceding section of this chapter, Bullough's interest in documents on acting was noted. In the essay on distance, Bullough notes his acquaintance with the comments of Denis Diderot, Constant Coquelin, Tommasco Salvini, and William Archer. 56 Collectively, these remarks may have prompted Bullough's analysis of the variability of distance. Diderot argues that great actors are detached from the roles they play, 57 a point that Coquelin echoes in his distinction between the first self of the actor and the second self, actor as instrument. 58 Salvini, on the other hand, asserts that the actor must feel deeply the emotions he portrays. 59 Archer attempts a synthesis of the conflicting opinions by asking leading actors how grief and similar emotions are rendered on the stage. The mixed reactions to his question lead Archer to the conclusion that both genuine emotion and control over the emotion are necessary to the

55Ibid., p. 421.

56Bullough, "'Psychical' Distance," p. 128.


art of acting, but that the degree of an actor's identification with a character is not reducible to a fixed formula. 60

Summary

Widely read in a variety of fields, Bullough was probably influenced by numerous works in his evaluation of the concept of distance. Schiller, Kant, Pater, and the literature growing out of the acting debate, likely contributed to his (1) choice of the term distance to describe a psychical relationship, (2) idea of the negative aspect of distance, (3) insistence that the distanced experience is an end in itself, and (4) belief in the variability of distance among various individuals and between individuals and various art objects.

III. Implications for Oral Interpretation

For the oral performance of literature, Bullough's statements suggest a number of possibilities. Applied to oral reading, his principle yields implications that give rise to questions:

(1) If the performance of literature is to provide an aesthetic experience, distance is essential in both reading and listening.

Does the oral reader sometimes strive for an unaesthetic response?

If the purpose of the reading is to provide moral edification or to strengthen religious

beliefs (as the reading of Biblical verse in church services) or to alter political thought (as in the recent readings that voiced protest of the Vietnam conflict), is not distance intentionally decreased or absent?

Hence, do changes in purpose alter techniques of delivery?

(2) The reader is aided in distancing by the limitations of his script and the technical mastery of voice and body required for oral performance.

Are there other aids: e.g., the reader's close analysis of a script prior to performance?

Does the reader's attempt to understand the meaning of highly complex literature reduce his overdistanced initial response?

(3) Listeners need assistance in adapting to aesthetic objects. Readers may invite such adaptation by introductions or other devices prior to the reading performance that focus attention on the imaginative nature of the literature.

Is adaptation not hindered when the reader, in his introduction, makes personal references or includes an abundance of factual material about the author's life?

(4) Some literature (myth, verse, tragedy) is more easily distanced than others (allegory, melodrama, topical material).
Should the reader's preference in choosing materials be for the former rather than the latter?

(5) Form appears to be a major contributing factor in establishing a distanced relationship.

Should not the reader's techniques of delivery (audible and visible characteristics) show evidence of form through control, selectivity, and arrangement?

(6) Distance should remain consistent throughout a performance.

Does lack of consistency explain why listeners are generally troubled when a reader resorts to the use of a few hand props or when he employs occasional bits of literal movement?

(7) Percipients may appreciate an art object at various points within a range of aesthetic response but lose the aesthetic character of the experience if over- or underdistanced. The artist's range of aesthetic response is thought to be greater than that of the average percipient.

If an interpreter finds the achievement of distance difficult in reading a particular selection, is not his audience even more likely to have this problem?

(8) Length of time needed for the perception of an art object directly influences the stability of the aesthetic attitude.
Do long selections pose a problem in the maintenance of distance?

Are programs of short poems more likely to elicit aesthetic responses than the performance of a lengthy selection?

(9) The presence of the human figure in art works increases the difficulty of achieving distance.

Hence, are recordings or taped readings more easily distanced than live performances?

Like Bullough's recommendations of 1921, these implications suggest the desirability of further investigation.
CHAPTER III

DISTANCE AND AESTHETICS

When writers in interpretation consider the philosophical basis of reading as an art, they generally turn to the works of theorists who specialize in studies in the philosophy of art, aestheticians. From studies in which attempts are made to isolate features of art objects, the artist's creative process, and the aesthetic response, critics of interpretation derive many of the ideas that constitute the theoretical basis of the art of reading aloud.

In current oral reading textbooks, writers incorporate the ideas of such aestheticians as Monroe Beardsley, Edward Bullough, Benedetto Croce, John Dewey, Herbert Langfeld, DeWitt Parker, Stephen Pepper, Harold Osborne, and Eliseo Vivas. However, in the discussion of distance in these textbooks, only two aestheticians' names appear—Bullough and Langfeld. Other commentaries are available. In addition to examining the ideas of Langfeld, this chapter presents an investigation of other scholars who, since the appearance of Bullough's essay which introduced the term into the vocabulary of aesthetics, have modified or refuted the idea.
I. Distance Defined and Applied

Histories of aesthetics are few in number. Charting the development of this branch of philosophy, Katherine Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn, in a work published in the thirties, mentioned Bullough's experiments in color perception, but completely ignored his idea of distance. In the same decade, the Earl of Listowel devoted several pages to a restatement of Bullough's 1912 essay but makes no critical or analytical comments. In the most recent history of the subject by Monroe Beardsley, the author attaches considerable importance to Bullough's concept, calls his essay "illuminating," and claims that it introduced a term that numerous aestheticians consistently use. The inconsistency in the historians' accounts suggests that the term has received more attention in the last three decades than it did prior to 1940.

Jerome Stolnitz and Jerome Schiller also claim that the idea is a significant one. In fact, they agree that it is one of the few concepts to which twentieth century aestheticians of widely divergent philosophic bents pay notice.

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As a common denominator of many theories of the twentieth century, distance generally signifies the separation of art from other spheres of human activity. An artist is commonly said to be distanced when he creates an aesthetic object, as is the percipient, whose response is influenced both by his own surroundings and background and by those features intrinsic to the work of art.

The Artist's Distance

The artist's mental distance, Rosamond Harding asserts, is aided by temporal removal from the source of inspiration, and according to P. A. Michelis, both temporal and spatial distancing are important. Harding and Michelis agree that unless some lapse of time passes between the inception of an idea or feeling and the creation of an art object, the finished work will contain irrelevancies and probably lack a certain unity of effort. As Harding claims, "If this pause is not allowed there will always be the danger of too much detail; or worse: a block may arise from irrelevant details obscuring the main issue." 5

Michelis asserts that there is a favorable position and a favorable time for the artist's work. 6 Without spatial distance, the artist fails to grasp the whole, and without temporal distance, he incorporates extraneous detail. As far as the artist is concerned, the remarks on spatial distance seem geared to the problems of the painter, sculptor, or architect, but the idea of


6 P. A. Michelis "Aesthetic Distance and the Charm of Contemporary Art," The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XVIII (September, 1959), 6, 9.
being separated by time from that which prompts an art work seems equally applicable to both spatial and temporal arts.

The chief difference in the accounts by Harding and Michelis of distancing through time is that while Harding specifically calls the temporal separation a kind of psychical distance, Michelis writes that both spatial and temporal distance are instrumental in the creation of psychical, or as he prefaces it, aesthetic, distance. Michelis' discussion lacks lucidity, and his distinctions are ambiguous. He claims that for the artist the best position in actual space and time will lead to a super-sensible awareness of ideal space and time, from which vantage his distance is aesthetic. The artist's mainstays are his imagination, which destroys the distance of the future, and his memory, which keeps alive the visions of all pasts. Equipped with both imagination and memory, the artist may achieve aesthetic distance. Or, like most artists of the present century, he may only reach a pre-aesthetic distance, in which case, instead of penetrating the essence of the ideal sphere of art, and becoming a vessel of "divine origin," he has "unassimilated revelations." He delivers, but he does not interpret. His is a creation of some individual, though not collective, import. While various eras of art establish their own aesthetic distances, the present era has not yet done so. Interesting though the products are, they remain individual and do not reflect a collective vision. The necessary

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7Ibid., p. 37.
"paroxysm of frenzy" is in evidence, but the oracular insight is not exemplified by Kandinsky's painting and Eliot's poetry.

At least, this seems to be what Michelis is suggesting. Perhaps if he had been able to express his thoughts in his native language, his ideas would be more easily grasped. Clearly, he subscribes to some doctrine of correspondences. Just as he repeatedly contrasts the worlds of the real and the ideal, so too he contrasts mind and spirit, body and soul, finite and infinite. The artist, when distanced, partakes of the ideal, and is both inspired and purged. The chief examples Michelis cites of such creations are ancient Greek sculpture and architecture and the poetry of Constantine Cavafy, a twentieth-century Greek. In both instances, the artists were transported, their vision became spiritual, and their work invites a similar flight for the percipient.

Another different but related explanation of the artist's distance appears in John Thorburn's *Art and the Unconscious*. Also attesting to the importance of spatial distance, Thorborn writes that the mental state of an artist, if distanced, can be likened to that of the view one holds when looking into the wrong end of a telescope. By removing the scene (or feeling, or experience), other new "reactions are brought into play." These reactions, Thorburn claims, are projections from the unconscious. The feat is made possible largely because of a medium outside the

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8Ibid., p. 39.

artist in which he works. As Thorburn summarizes,

Projection . . . is correlated to distance. It is important to emphasize this, because it is only on a more or less distant object that one can 'throw out' things. Possibility of the projection of unconscious contents involves the separation of the thrower from the object upon which he throws. It is an aspect of separation; and this aspect has, it seems to me, been splendidly elucidated by Mr. Bullough.  

A more common interpretation of distance than that of its spatial and temporal features, its relation to oracles or to the unconscious appears in Theodore Greene's exposition. Complimenting Bullough, after whom he patterns much of his discussion, Greene states that distance, necessary to all the arts, is "applicable to the artist's apprehension of reality." The artist's task, no less than the percipients, is to distinguish art and reality, while remembering that either too much or too little separation destroys the aesthetic experience. Encouraging a "mean between these extremes," Greene asserts that the artist "is under prime obligation to evoke and direct" an experience that invites imaginative participation, not the kind of identification aroused by "actual objects and events." With little elaboration on the particular point, Greene says the artist accomplishes this goal

10 Ibid., p. 107.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., p. 190.
by controlling his imagination within "the total artistic frame of reference." At least part of the control stems from the artist's achieving a mastery over the medium in which he works.

In relation to the artist, distance--spatial, temporal, and psychic--is deemed desirable. Aestheticians consider it necessary to selectivity and contributory to a view of the whole work, the attainment of infinite truths, the projection of unconscious images, and the creation of an imaginative art object that bears a semblance to, but is distinct from, reality.

The Interpretative Artist's Distance

Aestheticians have made few comments on the role of interpretative artists. Michelis does mention the possibility of an actor's performance destroying the spectator's distance, but neither he nor other writers cited, except one, entertain the possibility of a distancing process on the part of a performing artist that parallels that of the creative artist. If readers, instrumentalists, vocalists, actors, and dancers are artists, it would seem to follow that in their performances, they too must achieve distance. Sheila Dawson makes such an assertion. Convinced that distance is basic to all arts, Dawson claims that it is conditioned by artist, percipient, and any interpretative artist who may be involved. The interpreter's distance, she writes, is not so free as that of the creative artist, for the former's performance is governed, in large part, by the demands inherent in the original art object. Dawson's

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14 Ibid.
explanation is brief and suggests only that an understanding of and concentration on the object as a whole will induce the interpretative artist's distance.

The actor 'is' his role as nearly as may be without losing sight of the play as a conceptual whole. The instrumentalist or singer performs with the whole work in mind, so far as his individual technical and creative preoccupation permits. The translator maintains the distance of the original as nearly as is possible in a different language.15

In addition to being distanced by the necessity of keeping the whole of the work intact, the interpretative artist could also be distanced by those features in the art object, features that, according to numerous aestheticians, evoke a distanced response from percipients. By underscoring those features in performance, should not the performing artist be distancing his own reactions while inviting a similar response from his audience?

The Aesthetic Response

By far the most frequent use of the term distance appears in aestheticians' varied answers to a question Morris Weitz asked: "Given that there are works of art in the world, what sort of response do we, as spectators, readers or listeners, have to them?"16

The real question, as Weitz points out, is "How ought we to respond


to works of art?"17 The context of the term distance, in answer to the first question, is ordinarily normative, not descriptive. The reasoning generally follows this line: The "spectator, reader or listener" should appreciate an art object, and his experience, if it is aesthetic, will be marked by the presence of distance. As a requisite to the necessary aesthetic attitude, distance is understood by some writers to be effected by the percipient, who is said to elect this attitude which will produce an aesthetic experience. But, according to most aestheticians, his distanced attitude is elicited or evoked by elements within the work itself. Without it, according to those aestheticians considered in the following section, the percipient cannot appreciate the object; he cannot engage in an aesthetic experience.

Percipient

Several writers account for the presence or absence of distance in experiences with art objects as influenced, if not caused, by the percipient's state of readiness. Herbert Langfeld, for example, writes that the distanced attitude is not the normal outlook; in fact, it is "diametrically opposed to one's usual attitude toward one's environment." It is an attitude "one learns to assume."18

James Jarrett similarly places much of the responsibility of distancing on the viewer or listener. He insists that individuals

17Ibid.

are often either over- or underdistanced because they do not remind themselves that the art object, an artifact, must be held at arm's length, that the agony of the play occurs in the world of the play, not the percipient's. And just as he may cause underdistancing by a failure to separate the two worlds, so too he may be overdistanced if he finds nothing with which to identify, looking only for replicas of his own landscapes in paintings and his own language and politics in literature.

Jarrett's advice in the case of potential underdistancing is to "somehow pull it or even wrench it out of its more ordinary context in order to contemplate it." 19 And if overdistancing be the problem, he recommends study and experience with those forms toward which any kind of identification of interest is difficult. For the uninitiated, a Brahms symphony and abstract art may require such preparation.

Dawson agrees that lack of experience and instruction may cause a non-distanced attitude. She adds, moreover, other explanations of the percipient's failure such as prejudice toward certain labels attached to art, hostility or admiration for an artist's politics or personal life, moral beliefs in conflict with those expressed in the art object, fear of a group's censure, fear of being affiliated with the crowd, or the pressure of immediate concerns. 20 Thus, without preparation or deliberate

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20 Dawson, pp. 159-160.
distancing, an individual might well respond unaesthetically to music labeled "classical," to plays in which members of his family starred, to poetry by Robert Lowell if he favored the Administration's Vietnam policies or by Countee Cullen if he were an N.A.A.C.P. sympathizer, to *The Investigation* if he were Jewish and *The Deputy* if he were Roman Catholic, to Calder's mobiles if he visited a gallery with members of the old-guard, to James Dickey's poetry after being told he should like it since it recently won a major award, and to the ballet if there were a party of twenty to entertain after the performance.

Aram Torossian suggests that a percipient may be too fatigued to achieve a distanced attitude toward some art media, yet responsive to others that require less effort and concentration.  

Perhaps the most basic problem which may render a percipient unreceptive is a lack of understanding as to the function of art. The attitude is not distanced, according to Pepita Haezrahi, Lester Longman, Jane Harrison, and Allison Lewis if the percipient directs his attention to the object as something to be either consumed or subsumed by, or as a means rather than an end in itself.

Haezrahi's discussion is, in effect, an elaboration of what Bullough designates as the positive side of distance, the involvement that is intense but object-centered, not self-centered. While an individual should try "to overcome the distance between the object and himself by attending to it with the utmost concentration," the

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instant he "tries to absorb the object or to be absorbed in it, the aesthetic experience as such has ceased." According to Haezrahi, it is of signal importance that the percipient know the object is a thing apart while simultaneously desiring proximity to it.

Not only the knowledge that the art object is a thing apart but also the awareness that it is an end in itself is necessary to distancing. After stating this opinion, Longman continues that a non-instrumental viewing can be adopted toward any object but for the full appreciation of an art object, necessary. He adds that while moral and ethical beliefs are thereby temporarily sublimated, they can slip in any moment and make the experience something other than aesthetic. Individuals, he asserts, elect to treat art objects with a distanced attitude while not completely ignoring their relations to the immediate world and actual beliefs held.

Only as the object is "cut loose from immediate action," Harrison asserts, is it aesthetic. When an object serves a physical need (food) or a religious (ritual), it is not being treated as art. Echoing this view, Allison Lewis interprets contemporary

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philosophers as considering the aesthetic experience a "consummatory activity--not anticipatory."\textsuperscript{25}

Virgil Aldrich also treats distance as a problem of the percipient. His theory of "categorial aspection" may be, as one reviewer noted, "an original contribution to aesthetics."\textsuperscript{26} It is also one of the most complex. Because his idea of distance is placed within the framework of categorial aspection, it is necessary to review the basic theory first.

Aldrich begins his explanation of the theory with a diagram:

The diagram, he notes, may be perceived as "(1) square suspended in a frame, (2) lampshade seen from above, (3) lampshade seen from below, (4) looking into a tunnel, and (5) aerial view of a truncated pyramid."\textsuperscript{27} These points he calls "subject matters" and asserts that "the space values of the figure are fixed according to which subject matter is seen."\textsuperscript{28} This constitutes a change of "'aspects,'


\textsuperscript{26}C. D.\textsuperscript{2} Douglas McGee, Book Review of Virgil Aldrich's \textit{Philosophy of Art}, \textit{Bibliographie de la Philosophie}, XII, 1965, 296.


\textsuperscript{28}Ibid.
and the phenomenon of the change itself 'aspection'." The figure does not change its material, but it does accommodate the various aspects. The figure he calls a "material thing," so called to suggest a potential formulation. The categories under which the material thing is realized are "physical object" or "aesthetic object." The same material may be realized as either; two modes of perception are different in category. This phenomenon of categorical aspection

. . . involves a change of categorical aspects; the same material thing is perceived now as physical object, now as aesthetic object, neither of which involves seeing it as another thing. The difference between categorical aspects has to do with modes of perception and the kinds of space in which their objects are realized.

Aldrich next defines "observation" as the mode of realizing material things in physical space and "prehension" as the mode of realizing material in aesthetic space, space that is "determined by such characteristics as intensities or values of colors and sounds, which . . . comprise the medium presented by the material things in question." Prehension, therefore, is "a mode of perception with the impressions objectively animating the material things--there to beprehended." When observed, "the characteristics of the material thing are realized as 'qualities' that 'qualify' it;" when prehended, "its characteristics are realized as 'aspects' . . . that 'animate' it." The entire theory of

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., p. 21.
31 Ibid., p. 22.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
categorial aspection is illustrated by the following diagram:

Observing subject \[\rightarrow\] observation \[\rightarrow\] Physical object

Mental thing \[\leftarrow\] holophrastic perception \[\rightarrow\] Material thing

Mind \[\leftarrow\] Matter

Prehending subject \[\leftarrow\] prehension \[\rightarrow\] Aesthetic object

Aldrich summarizes the import of the theory and also explains what is meant by "holophrastic perception":

The message of this is simple enough, and is of tremendous importance for art. It means that the mind, as a potential for this or that sort of experience of material things, does not necessarily become subjective when it gives up observing them. The notion that it does become subjective was the unfortunate result of the traditional unilinear model [the division into physical and mental, observables and sensations]. There is another access to material things--as objective in its own way as the observational is in its way--that the mind may take as prehending subject. In such a rapport, the things will be realized as aesthetic objects, in the prehensive mode of perception. But since perception in either of these two determinate modes is an exclusive achievement--one excludes the other--a basic simple perception of things is presupposed, in the swim of which both material things and mental things are determinables, not realized as definitely this or that sort of objects and subjects. "Mind" and "matter" are therefore limiting concepts in the direction of polar opposites beyond categories. The nonspecial field of their fundamental rapport I call "holophrastic," a word that suggests something in which much is compacted both in that non-special kind of perception and in its non-special mode of expression in "ordinary language."\(^{34}\)

Within this framework, Aldrich finally explains that "to put oneself at a psychic distance from anything is simply to prehend it."\(^{35}\)

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\(^{34}\)Ibid., pp. 23-24. Reprinted with permission of Prentice-Hall, Inc.

\(^{35}\)Ibid., p. 25.
Distance removes the percipient from the thing as "physical object" and permits "a special sort of intimacy with it in as much as its aspects are then revealed to him. It is then the thing as aesthetic object, animated by aspects instead of qualified by observable characteristics." Aldrich does not explain what makes the change of aspect occur.

If these writers are correct in their assumption that "we may not aesthetically appreciate without distance," or even if their claim is tempered to "we may not appreciate as fully without distance," it is desirable to be aware of the possibility that "failure to achieve distance may be our own fault."

Legitimate occasions for percipients' overdistancing, Dawson writes, are those of criticism. In order to be aware of each element and to locate technical flaws, a critic removes himself considerably more than others responding to the object. This necessary removal is, according to Georg Mehlis, the reason many experts, such as art historians, though intimately acquainted with art, have through the process of forced intimacy rather than pleasurable familiarity, ceased to truly enjoy aesthetic objects.

[^Jarrett, p. 118.]

[^Ibid.]

[^Ibid.]

Similarly, Langfeld earlier noted that a conscious concentration on separable elements, perhaps necessary for criticism, is not conducive to aesthetic enjoyment.  

Encountering an art object, people bring varieties of prejudices, concerns, backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs with them. Instruction, repeated experiences, a willingness to consider the object as an end in itself, and a concentrated effort to remember that the work is an artifact may erase, or at least decrease, those tendencies in percipients that preclude an aesthetic response or make it less satisfying than it might be.

The Art Object

A host of aestheticians believe in "the ability of a work of art to condition the response of its percipient." A majority of writers express agreement with Susanne Langer, who writes that "it is part of the artist's business to make his work elicit this attitude /distance/ instead of requiring the percipient to bring an ideal frame of mind with him." Unsurprisingly, much discussion centers around the topic of what it is in an art object that appropriately distances. Or, to put the matter negatively, if one agrees with Louis Reid that "aesthetic experience ceases when distance is either too great or too small," what are those elements that may produce under- or overdistancing?

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40Langfeld, p. 79.


By far the most frequent answers as to what sets the work of art apart from reality are selectivity and form. Discussing their distancing power, Jarrett reminds his reader that ordinary experience goes on and on, its separate incidents sliding over into each other, with many false starts and anticlimaxes and redundancies and irrelevancies and few clearly demarcated events. But contrast a good work of art, with its regular rhythms, its well arranged sequences, its balances, its interconnections, its impressive coherence. Now, this essential orderliness, this unification of art, is a constant, if often unconscious, reminder to us its beholders that it is art with which we are dealing, and that therefore a certain attitude on our part is appropriate.\textsuperscript{44}

To Morris Weitz, a complexity of patterns induces distance. His idea seems to approximate variety within unity, an element of form. Following Weitz's assertions, the reason an individual does not react practically to \textit{Othello} is that there are so many cross-currents of emotion, so many complex patterns of identification, that firm attention to any one plight is precluded and a distanced response to the work as a whole is possible.\textsuperscript{45}

Form theoretically can be employed to render any subject aesthetic, even those toward which underdistancing is likely. Langfeld, in a statement not unlike those presently opposing censorship, insists that an individual can

\textsuperscript{44}Jarrett, p. 115.

\textsuperscript{45}Morris Weitz, \textit{Philosophy of the Arts} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 186. Admittedly an organicist when he wrote this book, Weitz modified his theory of aesthetics. Weitz later expressed the doubt that art can be defined by listing its "necessary and sufficient properties." Any set of defining characteristics--and Weitz does not specify though he most likely includes distance--is made "logically impossible" by the "expansive, adventurous character of art, its ever-present changes and novel creations." A definition of art that embraces such characteristics is incomplete and generally a "crucial recommendation," not a description. "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," \textit{The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism}, XV (September, 1956), 27-35.
. . . perceive and appreciate all the deep subtleties of the formal elements which, through their abstract nature, touch off only general tendencies and modes of action. . . . So long as the formal elements, the modes of presentation, are fully appreciated, the story or content can be as close to one's every interest as is consistent with the purpose of the artist.46

However, in practice, Langfeld concurs with Jarrett that subjects which awaken strong practical or moral interests, such as violence, death, sexual passion, political and social institutions, are likely to induce unaesthetic responses.47

Susanne Langer also subscribes to a belief in form's distancing power. Art, she writes, is "not self-expression but formulation and representation of emotions, moods, mental tensions and resolutions--. . . a source of insight, not a plea for sympathy."48 The subject matter of music may be the same as that of self-expression, but the "elements are formalized, and the subject matter "distanced" in an artistic perspective."49 Psychical distance, she continues, is "the hall-mark of every artistic 'projection' of experience" and makes the emotive contents of the work "conceivable."50 If the artists' emotions are not so formalized, a loss of distance occurs, "a confusion between a symbol, which lets us conceive its object and a sign, which causes us to deal with

46 Langfeld, pp. 78-79.
47 Jarrett, p. 115.
48 Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key (New York: The New American Library, 1942), p. 188.
49 Ibid., p. 189.
50 Ibid.
what it means."51 Psychical distance enables the artist to "convey to our understanding" the symbolic forms of experience. What the viewer gains "is not emotional response, but insight."52

In a later book, Langer is even more precise in her insistence that distancing, an essential factor in aesthetic appreciation, is the responsibility of the artist.

What the artist establishes by deliberate stylistic devices is not really the beholder's attitude--that is a by-product--but a relation between the work and its public (including himself). Bullough terms this relationship "Distance."53

Milton Nahm also writes that symbolic forms serve to distance. In a discussion that demonstrates a traditional view of the concept he suggests at least one variation on its implications: a work of art elicits a percipient's "productive recreation" of an object that "introduces requirements and restrictions of its own."54

The object's requirements and restrictions are both internal and external, the latter commonly called, according to Nahm, "aesthetic distance." The external controls include frames, sites for buildings, "as well as many other facile means of unification, for the most part external to the work of art."55 The internal

51Ibid.
52Ibid., p. 190.
55Ibid., p. 491.
controls include selectivity, unity, and clarity of the images presented for productive re-creation. The artist is aware of the danger of excessive intensity and may temper the idea or situation by repetition. Also, the potentially too intense moments (i.e., the final scene in Othello between Desdemona and Othello) that lead to "dis-ease" are circumvented by the "variety of symbols for feeling" in the scene; similar hazards are avoided by the alteration of the tragic and the comic or by the extended metaphor.  

One of the more interesting sections of Nahm's discussion of the spectator's imaginative productivity is his description of the role of overt behavior in such an experience. As the work of art is distanced, he seems to argue, the tendency toward visible movement decreases:

This increase in productivity is also a decrease in overt behavior. Therefore, the technical efforts to maintain and strengthen contemplation by augmenting the 'images' available in the work of art tend likewise to diminish feelings originally unrestricted identification with overt behavior. Conversely, the artist's intention to diminish the possibilities for inducing overt behavior by means of the work of art are identical with his efforts to augment the activity of productive imagination in the aesthetic mood.  

José Ortega y Gasset not only concurs that form distances but stoutly maintains that the more the art object is invested with form--"pure" form--the finer it is. Ortega has little patience with insufficiently distanced art or with the "masses" who demand it. His patently undemocratic cries do serve to pinpoint some means by which art may be distanced.

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56Ibid., p. 494.

57Ibid., p. 491.
According to Ortega, the masses' pleasure in art is "a state of mind which is essentially undistinguishable from their ordinary behavior," directed only to people and passions. This failure to separate the practical and the aesthetic is metaphorically described as an optical problem:

To see a thing we must adjust our visual apparatus in a certain way. If the adjustment is inadequate the thing is seen indistinctly or not at all. . . . In order to enjoy Titian's portrait of Charles the Fifth on horseback we must forget that this is Charles the Fifth in person and see instead a portrait—that is, an image, a fiction. The portrayed person and his portrait are two entirely different things; we are interested in either one or the other. In the first case we "live" with Charles the Fifth, in the second we look at an object of art. Modern art offers a unique experience to that elite group equipped with an aesthetic sensibility, the few that can "let go of this prey [human reality] and direct their attention to the work itself."

The experience exists for the observer who, like the modern artist, does not exercise emotion but rather distances it. Ortega illustrates this emotional detachment with a description of a death-bed scene description. The dying man's relationship to the grieved wife, the interested doctor, the observant reporter, and the detached painter of the scene varies. The painter's view and relationship with the scene is analogous to that of the modern artist and the illustrious elite that comprise his audience.

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59Ibid., pp. 10-11.

60Ibid., p. 11.
Devices that the artist uses in distancing his work from crass reality include stylization or avoidance of the human form, metaphor, alteration of society's pattern of values, irony, and "ideas or pure pattern."\(^{61}\)

To Ortega there is no possibility of excessive distance. The concept to him is normative, distinguishing the artistic from the inartistic. While his view is extreme, Ortega's position is more easily understood with Wimsatt and Brooks' reminder that Ortega witnessed "the modern artist in search of a fresh vision" that was stifled by "a vast increase in the number and confidence of uneducated readers."\(^{62}\)

In addition to form, selectivity, and stylization, "de-individuation" also brings about distance, P. J. Chadhury asserts. Applying the aesthetics of a tenth century Indian philosopher, Abhinavagupta, Chadhury writes that an object sufficiently de-individuated leads to "the recognition that the emotion depicted is neither mine nor yours; that it belongs to no real person but is a universal ideal content."\(^{63}\) Instead of modes of our being, emotions are characteristics of a culture, and the de-individuated sharing,

\(^{61}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 39.\)


\(^{63}\text{P. J. Chadhury, "Psychical Distance in Indian Aesthetics," The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, VII (December, 1948), 139.}\)
the communal nature of the aesthetic experience, stifles a tendency
to underdistance. Chadhury illustrates none of his nor Abhinavagupta's
theory with specific examples. The idea seems close to that of
F. E. Sparshott, who maintains that distance, essential to an
appreciation of tragedy, is achieved by a hero who undergoes a
struggle of universal significance, making the reader responsive
to all mankind. "By this generalization the effect of 'psychical
distance' is maintained, and emotion remains contemplated." The
view is also similar to that of Maud Bodkin and other "depth"
critics who claim that symbols of archetypal significance effectively
distance.

A final and less abstract distancing device that can be
incorporated in most arts is that of temporal remoteness. The
dramas of the Greeks, the Medieval period, or the Elizabethans are,
according to Langfeld, more easily distanced for the contemporary
audience than are modern plays. Furthermore, the older works
induce greater distance for audiences of the present century than
they did for the original spectators.

Aestheticians do not restrict themselves to commenting on
art objects in general. They frequently turn their attention, at
least for illustrative purposes, to specific arts. In statements
about distancing, several of them indicate means for its achieve­
ment peculiar to the various arts.

64F. E. Sparshott, The Structure of Aesthetics (Toronto:

65See Ch. V, pp. 129-130.
Langfeld, perhaps in more detail than most of his colleagues, goes so far as to suggest a ladder of distance problems in the various arts: ordinarily distance increases from forms in which humans appear, such as drama, to "the most formal of the arts," music. His "tentative arrangement . . . ranking from most to least distance" is "music, literature, fine arts, sculpture, architecture, drama, including dancing."  

Langfeld qualifies his ranking with the observation that . . . so much depends upon the various factors within the art itself. For example, highly idealized drama may have much more distance-producing effect under certain conditions than certain musical compositions. . . .

Ordinarily the most easily distanced art, music of the "program" variety may induce non-aesthetic attitudes as it suggests environmental sounds or seeks to tell a story through melodies. Greater distance in live musical presentations may be achieved . . . when an orchestra is enclosed in the frame of the stage and raised slightly from the floor, thus separating it somewhat from the audience. The difference is slight, but nevertheless real and can be readily realized by comparing the effect of a drawing-room recital with that of the concert hall. . . . there is . . . a subtle difference in the quality of our attitude.

According to Langfeld, distance in viewing architecture increases as the individual's awareness of the building's utilitarian purpose decreases.

The problem in distancing sculpture is generally curbed by the presence of neutral color, stylization, placement on a pedestal,

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66Langfeld, p. 84.  
67Ibid.  
68Ibid., p. 86.
railings, distortion of size, a single figure, and "the statue's conventional or artificial attitudes."69

Dance, faced with problems similar to those of sculpture and theatre, invites an appropriately distanced attitude when the movements are stylized.

Because observers know its surface to be flat, painting, Langfeld writes, "permits the safe employment of many more realistic touches than the sculptor would care to risk."70 When a painter leaves the framed canvas for the large frameless panorama, sometimes fronted by actual objects, his work is inimical to an aesthetic response.

Potentially unaesthetic responses toward human figures moving about on stage are curbed by the formal unity of the play, the separation of spectator and dramatized event, and the use of suggestive rather than realistic scenery. Langfeld also mentions the probable loss of distance that occurs when the play's cast includes persons with whom the spectators are acquainted.

In dealing with distance in the theatre, Langer expresses agreement with Bullough's statement concerning the "peculiar character" of the personal factor and the "lack of practicality in a distanced experience," adding that "it is for the sake of this

69Ibid., p. 89.

70Ibid. Langfeld made this judgment shortly before the work of Diego Rivera, the Latin American painter whose admitted purpose was more than, or different from, the creation of art for its own sake.
remove that art deals entirely in illusions, which . . . are readily distanced as symbolic forms."\(^7\) She distinguishes illusion and delusion:

. . . delusion--even the quasi-delusion of 'make believe'--aims at the opposite effect, the greatest possible nearness. To seek delusion, belief, and 'audience participation' in the theatre is to deny that drama is art.\(^2\)

Eastern audiences, such as the Japanese playgoers, understand readily that theatre is a world of the imagination and appearances. This public, accustomed to the entrance of stagehands onto the stage and the direct address of actors as well as the use of symbolic properties and actions, "gives itself up to the dramatic illusion without any need for sensuous delusion."\(^3\) What they do require is something quite different:

But sensuous satisfaction it does want: gorgeous robes and curtains, a rich display of colors, and always music. . . . These elements make the play dramatically convincing precisely by holding it aloof from actuality; they assure the spectator's "psychical Distance" instead of asking him to consider the action as a piece of natural behavior.\(^4\)

Langer finds a special need for distance in comedy, toward which the source of delight should be "something created for our perception, not a direct stimulus to our own feelings."\(^5\) When the spectator leaves the world of reality for the world of the imagination, his smiles and laughter have "only one legitimate source: his appreciation of humor in the piece."\(^6\)

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\(^7\) Langer, *Feeling and Form*, p. 319.  \(^4\) Ibid.

\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 324.  \(^5\) Ibid., p. 342.

\(^6\) Ibid., p. 341.
the characters is incompatible with aesthetic appreciation for it assumes a comparison of "worlds":

To compare them, even subconsciously, to himself he must give up his Psychical Distance and feel himself co-present with them, as one reads an anecdotal news item as something apart from one's own life but still in the actual world.77

Langfeld's opinion concerning distance in literature is briefly stated. The referential nature of language is said to distance to some extent. In poetry, particularly in regular verse, distance is increased by rhythmical elements. Langfeld thinks it difficult to sustain a distanced attitude in reading fiction because the "enjoyment is likely to be derived by the general reader more from the factors of suspense and release than from any other intrinsic merits of the literary form as such."78

As to the motion picture, Langfeld only mentions the ease with which it is distanced as greater than that of the stage play. His reason is that a "two dimensional representation of three dimensional form"79 is always more easily distanced for its unreality is always in view.80

77Ibid.
78Langfeld, p. 95.
79Ibid., p. 91.
80Langfeld's book does not, of course, consider the problems of distancing the televised film of a wartime drama juxtaposed to a filmed report of an actual war. Race riots, juvenile crimes, etc., in the dramas are similarly scheduled near documentaries dealing with the same subjects.
Torossian agrees that movies are inherently distanced more than staged dramas, but he adds the opinion that pleasure in the theatre is derived largely from plays that are distanced, but minimally so. Movies, he asserts, are more often unaesthetic, for the emphasis on accessories, such as background music and panoramic scenery, invites daydreaming.

If an object is to evoke a unique response, one that may be called aesthetic, qualities of the object must make the necessary inducements. When the object announces, subtly or blatantly, its unreal character, it is said to invite a distanced attitude. It is no longer regarded as a practical object if its parts reflect selectivity, if it possesses discernible form, if it carries universal significance. The work is more easily distanced when it relies on symbols, is stylized, and its subject is removed in time from the percipient's environment.

Although the presence or absence of distance is best illustrated by reference to a specific art object, there are devices generally found in the various arts: lack of color, distortion of size, and pedestals in sculpture; stylized movement in dance; framed paintings, framed proscenium stage; and in literature, the referential nature of language and the rhythm of verse. Monroe Beardsley summarizes both the traditional viewpoint of distancing in aesthetic experience and some of the means unique to various arts in his discussion of one of the elements of an

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81 Torossian, pp. 188-189.
aesthetic experience about which he says most aestheticians agree.

He writes that all aesthetic objects are, in a sense,

... objects manqués. There is something lacking in them that keeps them from being quite real... that prevents the question of reality from arising. They are complexes of qualities, surfaces. The characters of the novel or lyric have truncated histories.... The music is movement without anything solid that moves; the object in the painting is not a material object, but only the appearance of one. Even the lifelike statue, though it gives us the shape and gesture and life of a living thing, is clearly not one itself. And the dancer gives us the abstraction of human action... but not the actions (killing or dying) themselves. This is one sense of "make-believe" in which aesthetic objects are make-believe objects; and upon this depends their capacity to call forth from us the kind of admiring contemplation, without any necessary commitment to practical action, that is characteristic of aesthetic experience.82

II. Distance: Modifications and Denials

The comments considered in the first division of this chapter suggest a variety of approaches and interpretations while reflecting no marked disagreements. At this point, it is significant to note the fact that the value one attaches to the idea of distance depends upon one's prior aesthetic commitments. Distance is apparently a fruitful concept to the modern theorist who believes that art should provide a singular aesthetic experience. But for numerous ancients and for those moderns who subscribe to other theories of art, the importance of the concept diminishes or disappears. It is the purpose of this section to discuss divergent opinions about distance as expressed by a group of modern theorists.

82 Monroe C. Beardsley, Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1958), p. 529. Although Beardsley does not use the term distance, he includes notes on the concept at the close of the chapter in which the quoted portion appears. Moreover, for the discussion quoted here, he specifically notes his indebtedness to Bullough. See Ch. V, p. 121 for Beardsley's earlier opinion concerning distance.
Jerome Schiller asserts that distance is only a partial explanation of what goes on when individuals appreciate art. In one sense, he believes distance requisite. If a percipient approaches an art object in a particularly personal way, clad in his own beliefs and prejudices, the result of his encounter with a complex work in which diverse judgments and emotions are invested, he must be forced into a more neutral, distanced attitude. Thus, a spectator may disapprove of Lear's vanity and selfishness, but as the action of the drama unfolds and the causes and explanations are exhibited, he will generally assume a distanced view of the entire drama.

But, Schiller continues, there are works whose intensity derives precisely from an individual's beliefs, so much so that to expect distance is "an unachievable ideal." A reader's beliefs and attitudes, Schiller asserts, are necessary in a confrontation with The Brothers Karamazov in which moral standards are indeed a major part of the work's texture. However, if one's values are opposed to those in the work and yet the experience is to afford maximal pleasure, some adjustment must be made. The adjustment he suggests is that the reader (or spectator) imagine the action as the author or someone else might envision it. In other words, if the percipient himself is unable to distance the moral, ethical, or practical features of the object, he might attempt to assume the role of one who could—if he desired an aesthetic experience from the object.

83 Schiller, p. 296.
Curt Ducasse dismisses distance, as Bullough described it, explaining that he had, prior to mentioning the term, already discussed its significance under another heading. He adds that the concept does nothing more than indicate that the attitude toward objects as art is, or should be, non-practical.84

Marvin Levich's indictment of those who believe in the existence and distinctiveness of an aesthetic attitude appears in the editorial commentary preceding the section of his anthology in which Bullough's essay is included. The question Levich raises is

... whether the 'aesthetic attitude' explains what goes on when we value and evaluate works of art or whether it simply reminds us that when we do this sort of thing, we are considering something in an object other than erotic appeal, commercial value, utility, or some other practical value.85

While Levich's idea might be considered a distorted oversimplification, it can also be interpreted as a sign that the basic premise of such an attitude (i.e., the non-practical aspect of art) has become commonplace. But, as Stolnitz points out, such has not always been the case.86

To John Dewey, distance may be what customarily happens, but it, disinterestedness, and detachment "all express ideas that ... are irrelevant to the matter of experience artistically


86 Stolnitz, p. 132.
organized." A theory of distance ignores, or unsatisfactorily de-emphasizes, the fundamental interaction of observer and object, an act of cooperation that, according to Dewey, constitutes art as an experience.

Dewey rejected the idea of a "merely contemplative character of the aesthetic" and refuses to relegate art to "a region inhabited by no other creature." The problem, as Dewey interpreted it in 1934, is quite the opposite; it is "that of recovering the continuity of esthetic experience with normal processes of living." Such an adjustment would mean fully integrated, unified experiences characterized by active participation, not distance.

Dewey's distinction between works of art and products of art clearly indicates the importance he attached to the participative nature of art as experience.

The product of art--temple, painting, statue, poem--is not the work of art. The work takes place when a human being cooperates with the product so that the outcome is an experience that is enjoyed because of its liberating and ordered properties.

In a sense, then, when Dewey isolates "order" as a distinguishing feature of the "product" which becomes a "work" with the individual's contribution, he is requiring what a number of other writers call

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88 Ibid., p. 10.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid., p. 214.
distance. Still, the assumption underlying Dewey's discussion is a departure from the commonly held belief that art and reality sharply differ and that responses toward art are unique ones.

Joseph Margolis dismisses distance along with a number of other ideas central to a general theory of aesthetic perception. He argues that any "special theory of perception is bound to fail simply because of the variety of the arts and of our characteristic ways of attending to their properties." No general set of properties concerning perception of art--distance, empathy, or whatever--will explain the object or enable a percipient to engage in it, describe it, or evaluate it.

The reasons writers offer for a qualification or refutation of the term distance are not marked by sameness. One may dismiss distance as a term lacking in usefulness, having found a better one; think the concept only partially true; find it one of those inappropriate descriptions that attempt to account for groups of experiences that do not lend themselves to any common mode of perception; insist that in the most meaningful encounters with art it does not exist; and find it an overblown statement of what happens when art is approached.

III. Implications for Oral Interpretation

Much of what aestheticians write about distance is contained in the literature of oral interpretation. A basic assumption in

most oral reading textbooks is that art and reality differ, and
distance, necessary for imaginative participation in art, is not
ordinarily present. This position is supported by a majority of
aestheticians. Sharper distinctions are drawn, however, by
writers in aesthetics when they discuss with specificity the
function of art as autonomous, non-practical, and terminal.
Similarly, in publications on aesthetics, discussions of the
importance of form in distancing are duplicated by oral inter-
pretation critics, though with less elaboration.

However, writers in oral interpretation do not treat
several of the points raised by aestheticians in regard to distance.
The following implications grow out of these discussions:

(1) Creative artists are said to distance their experiences
by temporal and spatial as well as psychic removal.

To the distancing effect of spatial
separation, already noted, can a temporal
factor in the reading performance be applied:
a longer interval of time between selection
of material and performance? a time lapse
between the reader's appearance and performance
or between the introduction and the reading?

(2) An understanding of the function of art assists a
person in putting aside his customary outlook and
distancing the content of art.

Should a larger portion of time in interpre-
tation courses be given to instruction in
listening to literature, specifically noting frames of mind, attitudes, etc., that are obstacles in distancing?

When reading materials likely to over- or underdistance his audience, should not the reader remind his listeners of the attitude they may need to assume temporarily if the selection is to be meaningful?

Should he call to their attention the de-individuated or generalized significance of the material?

(3) Some media are inherently more easily distanced than others.

What are the probable differences of distance in reading for a live audience and for recorded programs?

If movies are more easily distanced than stage plays, what generalizations can be made concerning the televised reading?

(4) An art era is said to set its own limits of distance.

Did not the self-display of the elocutionists, like some of the earlier exaggerated styles of
acting, reflect eras marked by considerably less distance than the present?\textsuperscript{92}

If the mid-twentieth century audience's preference is for restraint and understatement, is not the time wisely spent in instructing classes about the dangers of underdistancing?

(5) In current aesthetics literature, there are objections to the idea of distance that need to be considered.

If the critics of the term distance are correct in the belief that such a general attitude is inappropriate, it would seem wise either to discontinue use of the term or to apply it only with reference to specific selections before specific audiences.

If the idea of distance is so commonplace that the presence of an art object automatically causes a percipient to put aside his practical reactions, the discussion of distance in textbooks should be unnecessary.

If the emphasis in instruction for interpretative reading is fixed on the student's engagement with the selection he reads, he might be

\textsuperscript{92} Jeré Veilleux supports this idea in his remark that "the fact that impersonation is currently out of vogue, while suggestion is in, is due . . . to our own tastes of performance . . . ." "The Interpreter: His Role, Language, and Audience," The Speech Teacher, XVI (March, 1967), 128.
more likely to have "an experience" if he were assisted in involvement and steered away from detachment.
CHAPTER IV

DISTANCE AND PSYCHOLOGY

While men in periods as remote as the fifth century B.C. in Greece pondered the mysteries of both artistic creation and perception, the relationship between art and psychology is less than a century old. With the advent of Fechner's experiments of 1876, designed to lend exactness to the measurement of choices of art, experimental aesthetics was initiated and subsequently either welcomed or grudgingly accepted under the aegis of both philosophy and psychology.

If "aesthetics is both a branch of psychology and a branch of philosophy," the interrelationship is nowhere more striking than in investigations concerning the nature of the aesthetic experience. Study of the psychology of art, generally called experimental aesthetics, has motivated writing in both psychological and aesthetics journals and the formation of specialized interest groups devoted to psychology in philosophical societies and to aesthetics in psychological associations. Consequently, the

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information in this chapter has been drawn from publications of both "psychological aestheticians" and "aesthetic psychologists."

The organization of the chapter follows a historical plan. A description of the major trends in the study of the psychology of art during the early decades of this century will be followed by a discussion of more contemporary developments. The use of the term distance by the writers within each section will be described.

I. Early Interest in Distance

According to both an aestheteician and a psychologist, onlookers in the twentieth century have witnessed evolution, or at least change of focus, in approaches to the psychology of art. Douglas Morgan and H. G. Schrickel agree that during the first three or four decades of this century, there appeared many "writings which sought to explain artistic and appreciative activities in terms of play, empathy, or psychical distance."²

Confirming the era's interest in psychical distance in his historical account of British psychology, L. S. Hearnshaw credits Bullough with the concept's development and popularization, labeling it one of the "ideas of importance" that emerged in psychological aesthetics early in the century.³ Thomas Munro also mentions


Bullough's idea as a notable contribution to the early interest in experimental aesthetics.\(^4\)

No one seems to doubt the originality of Bullough's essay nor its significance. In fact, following Bullough's enunciation of the concept in 1912 and his reiteration of it through 1921, later writers who use the term admittedly or obviously paraphrase or restate his ideas.

In 1932, Milton Bird, educational psychologist, published a study of aesthetics and art education. Describing distance as a key concept in "modern" aesthetic theory, Bird relied on Bullough:

The pleasurable activities of pure contemplation . . . require a certain degree of calmness and moderation of feeling. They must be free from excitement, craving, fatigue, conflict, or disappointment. The proper 'distance' is the only place where one is able to attain this state.\(^5\)

Bird's comments on the likelihood of both under- and overdistancing also reflect Bullough's influence. He wrote that temporal remoteness serves to distance and that shocking or repulsive incidents are practically certain to destroy distance.

In an essay written in 1937 and reprinted in a 1950 collection of papers in psychology, Kate Hevner mentioned distance twice, first somewhat vaguely as one of many possible explanations available for the analysis of aesthetic experience. She wrote:


Different schools and creeds variously describe this occurrence as detachment, or disinterestedness, or repose in the object of beauty, or objectified pleasure; they may center the process around catharsis or significant form or empathy or distance or even intuition or social expression. Each of these theories emphasizes certain aspects of the experience of beauty . . . .6

Later in her discussion of form as requisite to art objects, she more specifically dealt with distance: "Form will also help to create the illusion of 'distance' in the aesthetic experience, by emphasizing the pattern, by conventionalizing materials that might otherwise seem too personal or realistic or trivial."7

In a dictionary of psychology published in 1940, the explanation of "psychical distance" again suggests a writer familiar with Bullough's work. Psychical distance, the entry reads, is "the degree of detachment assumed by an individual towards the practical appeal of an object, especially a work of art."8

Contributing to the 1946 Encyclopedia of Psychology, Paul Farnsworth revealed less interest in the psychic phenomenon of distance. He appeared to favor other psychological approaches which, by then, were rapidly making headway. After commenting that aesthetic behavior is commonly "described as nonutilitarian of a playful behavior and as displaying psychical distance," he continued:


7Ibid., p. 717.

The psychologist, however, is not satisfied with these and the multitude of other criteria of the aesthetic. . . . Men differ in the degree of psychical distance with which they view artistic creations. Yet is a man behaving more aesthetically because he views Ruben's "The Descent from the Cross" with more than average detachment?

Farnsworth's comment is perhaps typical of the decline of interest in distance, a decline that Morgan seeks to explain. The latter writes that while the concept "materially conditioned our present interpretations of art," it does not receive "active attention from a significant number of psychologists now at work." He adds that the ideas of distance, play, and empathy "appear to have performed their service and been set aside, at least for the time being; they are not in the mainstream of the three approaches now being vigorously explored. . . ." While in the mainstream and performing its service, the idea of distance, as used in psychological aesthetics, apparently underwent no discernible change in interpretation. Bullough's concept was repeated, then set aside. However, even in the three approaches that are in the mainstream, the Gestalt, the psychoanalytic, and the behavioristic, the term crops up occasionally.

II. Contemporary Neglect of Distance

Investigation has produced no discussion of distance in the textbooks or articles that comprehensively treat the theories of Gestalt psychology. However, in one book devoted to the psychology


Morgan, p. 82.
of the visual arts, Rudolf Arnheim, a leading Gestaltist, casually mentions distance and then in a single sentence, dismisses it as an attitude that may be elicited by objects other than works of art.11

The core idea of the Gestalt approach seems inherently incompatible with the idea of distance. According to Warren, the Gestalt theory "denies that psychic processes are (or can advantageously be regarded as if) composed of elements found in them by analysis . . . ."12

The psychoanalytic approach, as articulated by one critic, does accommodate the idea of distance. Ernst Kris, a recently deceased disciple of Freud, incorporates distance in his Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art. Kris attempts to show how an understanding of ego psychology "offers at present the best chances for understanding and predicting human behavior,"13 particularly behavior associated with creating and appreciating works of art.

An understanding of several of Kris' psychoanalytic terms is necessary in order to follow his application and enlargement of Bullough's idea, the source he credits. Id, libido, and ego, terms frequently used by Kris, are obviously of Freudian origin. Id refers to the unconscious part of the mind which houses

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12Warren, p. 115.
instinctual desires or impulses, libido denotes sexual energy, and ego is that part of the id which is imbued with consciousness and modified by external reality. Another key term that Kris uses in his discussion of distance is neutralization. Distinguishing neutralization and sublimation, Kris writes that in the latter, energy is only transferred to a socially acceptable goal, whereas neutralization features a transformation of the energy. Various types of activity, he asserts, offer opportunities for discharge of energy and/or "degrees of neutralization of libidinal and aggressive energies."  

According to Kris, with either artist or spectator underdistanced,

... not enough energy was neutralized or, alternatively that neutralization was not complete enough; too much of libidinal and aggressive energy was at work: the function of the ego was too closely in the service of the id.

Overdistancing, Kris writes, occurs when a spectator finds no "point of identification" or "no, or not sufficient, incentive for an energy discharge." He suggests that possibly the initial motor power for a "discharge of neutralized energy presupposes some id incentive, some admixture of libido and aggression." Otherwise, he believes that a lack of interest would exist. It would seem that the energy emanating from the aggressive id is transformed in a successful aesthetic experience. With no motivation for an initial energy discharge, the percipient is over-

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14 Ibid., p. 27.  
15 Ibid., p. 46.  
16 Ibid., p. 47.  
17 Ibid.
distanced, and if the energy is discharged, but not neutralized, he is underdistanced.

In a final section of his book, Kris returns to the problems of distancing in his discussion of responses to literature. If distance is diminished, he writes, "the reaction to works of art is pragmatic rather than aesthetic. Art is transformed to pin-up and propaganda, magic and ritual."18 On the other hand, if "psychic distance is maximal, the response is philistine or intellectualistic. At best, the experience is one of passive receptivity rather than active participation of the self."19

The purposive and controlled relaxation of "ego controls," which Kris finds essential to appropriate distancing for aesthetic experiences, may be facilitated by instruction. Energies used in concentrating on "how the story will turn out" (one of his examples of underdistancing) may, by instruction and familiarity, be expended more advantageously. The function of the critic is "that of contributing to such instructed familiarity, so as to induce the requisite shifts of psychic distance . . . ."20

Not surprisingly, the literature produced by those writers who subscribe to the third approach, the behavioristic, contains few comments on distance. To the individuals committed to investigations of quantitatively observable behavior, this psychic state must

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18 Ibid., p. 256.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., p. 257.
either seem unimportant, nonexistent, or unmeasurable with scientific exactness. Writing for The Psychological Record, one of the behavioral psychologists' publications, Robert Lundin claims that psychological aesthetics has been "bothered by mentalistic interpretations." He contends that aesthetic responses, comprised of attentional, perceptual, and affective aspects, are observable and measurable with the aid of blood pressure kits, reflex instruments, electrocardiograms, etc.

From experimentalists whose thinking approximates Lundin's, a vast array of data is available concerning the quantification of aptitudes, preferences, and behavior. Statistical evidence may now convince the reader that women prefer pastels more often than do men, that men prefer bolder imagery than women do, that blood pressure tends to rise during the exciting moments of a drama, that normal individuals tend to respond more actively to humorous material than do psychiatric patients, etc. Perhaps Morgan was not unjustly cynical when he remarked that "we have come out with fairly suggestive evidence quite strongly indicating that several things which we believed all along to be true are really true." 22

The testing that grows out of the behaviorist's position and its results seem neither directly nor by implication related


22Morgan, p. 93.
to distance. Unlike the extreme behaviorists, C. W. Valentine and Albert R. Chandler presuppose the existence of distance as Bullough described it, 23 but in interpreting their numerous experiments, they fail to note any relation between the results and distance.

Two recent articles, one in *The British Journal of Psychology* and one in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, contain the suggestion that psychological investigations of the future may once again accommodate such speculative or theoretical concepts as that of distance. Alan Richardson, in "The Place of Subjective Experience in Contemporary Psychology," defends the thesis that a return to the earlier but discarded division of experience and behavior is both necessary and desirable if psychologists are to understand and predict human responses, particularly those responses relating to the aesthetic. Richardson insists that both self-observation and self-reporting can lead to valid constructs and that such channels provide the only means of securing information about highly personal and complex experiences. 24

"Some kinds of human behavior toward art," Munro writes, "can be easily observed from the outside. Some can be experimentally

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produced, controlled, and measured in a laboratory.\textsuperscript{25} Some kinds, however, cannot be treated with quantitative methods. In light of these facts, his proposal

\textldots includes, in the first place, the cautious but extensive use of introspective data, such as reports by individuals on their own artistic and aesthetic experience. These are not to be taken at their face value, of course, for their unreliability is obvious. But systematic efforts can be made to check and interpret them significantly, somewhat as a psychiatrist interprets the introspective reports of his patients.\textsuperscript{26}

If Munro's and Richardson's recommendations become part of the future mainstream, possibly psychologists of art may consider those concepts put aside earlier--empathy, play and psychic distance--worthy of more intensive investigation.

\textbf{III. Implications for Oral Interpretation}

Psychologists' discussions of distance have, for the most part, been incorporated in oral interpretation publications. In both sources, one reads of the risks attached to certain subjects that may arouse non-distanced responses, of the apathy that accompanies overdistancing and the embarrassment of discomfort typical of underdistancing, and of the important role of form in achieving distance.

Psychologists suggest two new, or at least less discussed, implications for the oral reader:

\textsuperscript{25}Munro, p. 264.

\textsuperscript{26}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 265.
(1) Kris' psychoanalytic interpretation of art suggests the unhealthy results of underdistanced literature.

Would the reader be wise to follow Kris' advice and assist his listeners in "ego-relaxation" and "psychic shifts" by instruction which could be incorporated in an introduction?

Should he consciously express a preference for reading material that would be a healthy outlet for himself and the audience?

(2) The belief that there is value in introspective as opposed to wholly quantitative studies suggests the possibility of research designs that would gather more data about distance from the standpoints of both reader and audiences, particularly those in the classroom. Such investigation might test the following hypotheses:

Some literary genres, such as prose fiction, in which there is a considerable amount of dialogue, are more likely to be underdistanced.

If the reading is restrained, selections that treat questionable subjects may be performed without loss of distance.

Classroom readers possess useful information about their own distance in both performance and listening.

Specific means of distancing, which critics of interpretative reading employ, could aid other listeners in distancing deliberately.
CHAPTER V

DISTANCE AND LITERARY CRITICISM

That a relationship between oral reading and literary criticism exists is axiomatic in current interpretation theory. The nature of this relationship, however, is variously defined. In their publications, teachers of interpretation take one or more of the following approaches: they (1) encourage students to consult literary criticism for assistance in understanding selections they are preparing to read aloud; (2) suggest the annals of literary criticism as the source of a useful methods for studying a selection; (3) consider the oral performance of literature as a demonstration of the student's critical awareness of the text; and (4) assert that the oral performance itself is a critical method of discovering a text. While these statements differ in perspective, and probably in the pedagogy that proceeds from them, the viewpoints are not incompatible. An oral reading generally reflects a reader's awareness of a text and, in and of itself, the reading may constitute another dimension in the exploration and discovery of a text. Still, the interpreter, in his search for critical methodology and in his study of selections prior to performance, customarily makes extensive use of literary scholars' theoretical and practical criticism.
When literary critics treat distance as a factor in the relationships between author, text, speaker in a text, and reader, they are dealing with matters that unquestionably touch the interpreter's interest. An analysis of these statements is the purpose of this chapter.

I. The Reader's Distance

When instructing readers as to their proper relationship to the fictive world of literature, literary critics often use the term distance. They remind readers that literature, while grounded in reality, invites a kind of reading and offers an attendant experience that differs from the reading and response appropriate to philosophical treatises, persuasive documents, reports of scientific investigation, or personal correspondence. Unlike his relationship to these materials, the reader's approach to literature should be characterized by detachment. When the reader assumes a mental posture that enables him to read the literature as literature, when he divorces the work from practical reality, he is said to be appropriately distanced.

This line of reasoning appears in three dictionaries and glossaries of literary terms, presumably reflecting one widely accepted usage of the term distance. Barnet, Berman, and Butro write of a necessary gap between the reader's personal needs and the literary work;¹ Barry and Wright note that objectivity, born of

detachment, "precludes a personal involvement";\(^2\) and they, as well as Beckson and Ganz, insist that this detachment prevents the reader's confusion of literature with reality.\(^3\)

Samuel Hazo, contributor to the *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, reports one usage of the term distance that closely approximates that of the preceding writers in its emphasis on the psychology of the reader. Distance, he writes, "is meant to describe the attitude or perspective of a person toward an object when he contemplates it as separated from any personal or practical interest to himself."\(^4\)

The implication in Berman, Barnet and Butro's explanation is that the reader voluntarily achieves distance. If he dissociates his personal concerns from the literature of tragedy, for example, he will feel "'rapturous awe' at what in life would be depressing. . . . the feelings it evokes in him are not at all the feelings evoked by a roughly similar event in real life."\(^5\) Wright and Barry similarly suggest that the responsibility for a distanced relationship lies with the reader who consciously elects distance: "A Roman Catholic, for instance, would need to maintain esthetic


\(^5\)Barnet, Berman, and Butro, p. 72.
distance in order to view objectively Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy*, a play strongly critical of the Pope."^6 A Roman Catholic could take personal offense and be subject to real discomfort while reading Hochhuth's drama if he responds to it as a condemnation of the papacy which he, in reality, respects; but if he detaches himself and the catechism he reveres in actuality, if he inserts distance between himself and the play, his experience might be favorably altered.

Sheila Dawson agrees that the reader should distance the literature; otherwise *The Merchant of Venice* might be banned for anti-semitism and *Othello* for racial conflicts. However, Dawson does point out that a reader's capacity for distancing increases with age, maturity, and experiences with literature. For example, a highly distanced work, she claims, "usually demands a certain intellectual effort, and often a considerable background of knowledge . . . ."^7 She also notes the fluctuating nature of even the sophisticated individual's distancing powers. Personal, and very real, distractions such as toothache or bad temper make distancing difficult, if not impossible, for the reader.

Reasonable as these claims may sound, they give rise to the question, "Why the premium on objectivity and detachment?"

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^6 Wright and Barry, p. 3.

Various answers and their echoes are offered: "for a work of art to make its effect as such,"⁸ "in order to appreciate the work's aesthetic qualities,"⁹ and "in order to truly appreciate it,"¹⁰ in order to respond to it as a whole. Such answers are perhaps more meaningful when placed in an historical perspective of literary criticism. In this sense, the association by William Elton,¹¹ Beckson and Ganz, and Wright and Barry of distance with the New Criticism is not without significance.

The questions that critics ask about literature vary, and early in the twentieth century more critics seemed to be asking the kinds of questions that have come to be categorized as the New Criticism. According to Meyer Abrams' classification, these objectivist critics' common assumption, that the literary text is autonomous, that its prime obligation is "not to mean, but to be," automatically eliminates, or at least subordinates, a consideration of the text as it relates to author, universe, or reader. A close analysis of the text is the general procedure of study.¹² If the most meaningful approach to the text is that of the objectivist who focuses on the selection's tensions, ironies, paradoxes, ambiguities,

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⁸Beckson and Ganz, p. 5.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Barry and Wright, p. 3.


organicity, complexity, etc., if, in short, a microscopic examination of the text is the best way to this verbal construct, this object, then a reader will perforce detach himself from the universe after which the construct was patterned, the author who expressed it, and himself as he reacted to it.

Early advocates of such an approach, W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley elaborately refute the stand of critics who commit the "affective fallacy" (mistaking the literature for its effects), observing that principles such as that of distance have enabled readers to take "important steps toward objectivity." 13

Distance, then, is the chief characteristic of a prescribed method of reading, a method that John Gerber recently challenged. In an address to the National Council of Teachers of English, Gerber asserted that such an approach, widely used in both college and high school classrooms, includes benefits and hazards. Voicing reservations about detachment, or distance, in reading literature, Gerber traced two trends in the teaching of literature during the past 150 years:

The mark of the first trend was its emphasis upon engagement, especially moral and emotional engagement. Students were taught to take the literary work to heart, as though it were written for them personally. . . . The mark of the second trend was—and is—its emphasis upon detachment. Students are taught to hold the work at arm's length, to understand it and to appreciate its artistry but not to identify its world too closely with their own world.¹⁴

The emphasis on detachment, Gerber said, was articulated in what may anachronistically be called the New Criticism.

Proponents of the New Criticism have gloried in the fact that they put the literary work itself back in the student's hands and to a great extent this is true. Yet while they eliminated detachment of a physical kind they created one of a psycho-metaphysical kind. For paradoxically, while formal analysis presumably requires the reader to concentrate upon the literary text to the virtual exclusion of other considerations, it at the same time sets up a cordon sanitaire between the reader and the work that distances the work almost as successfully as the historical approach. In fact, it is the basic theory of the New Criticism that literature should be kept separate from life. As formal critics, we are supposed not only to follow Coleridge in achieving a willing suspension of disbelief, but go beyond Coleridge and throw the whole problem of belief and disbelief out the window.¹⁵

Finding neither the instruction and pleasure that served as aims during the early period nor the detailed understanding of the latter sufficient, Gerber proposed a deliberate eclecticism that he thought would make literature more meaningful to students. Both distance and involvement, he said, seem desirable for richer reading. Reflecting on his own experience, Gerber suggested that


¹⁵Ibid., p. 8.
... we seem to be able without too much difficulty to distance the work at one moment and annihilate the distance the next. The fact that "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" raises for me crucial questions about my personal stance before the face of death does not lower my admiration for its values as a self-sufficient work of art. If anything, it strengthens that admiration.16

Participants in the English Institute Conference of 1957, which Gerber noted as the beginning of the new eclecticism, concluded

... that we must be more balanced in our study and teaching of literature: we must view the literary work as something apart from experience, requiring a due amount of aesthetic distance for understanding and enjoyment; and we must view the work as grounded in experience requiring our total engagement for understanding and enjoyment.17

In both Gerber's plea and in the explanations of Beckson, Ganz, etc., one concept of distance, then, is that of detached perspective on the part of the reader. According to those writers quoted first in this section, the reader's dispassion leads to rich rewards of an illuminated aesthetic object. According to Gerber, it is one of two essentials in the meaningful literary experience.

II. The Author's Distance

Like the implicit intention of comments concerning reader's distancing, the statements literary critics make about the author's distancing are generally prescriptive. Their usual commendation is based on the assumption that distance is a determining factor

16Ibid., p. 11.
17Ibid., pp. 11-12.
in making the literary experience an aesthetic one. Unless the author achieves distance, he creates something other than art or, more precisely, he creates something other than what critics think art should be. Somewhat surprisingly, the term appears in a normative context in theories of literature whether as object, as communication, as expression, or as imitation.

Literature as Object

One of the qualities of artistic production generally prized in this century is objectivity, a term often used with reference to distance. If the author distances, the literature is "independent of the immediate personal experience of its maker," achieving objectivity, "a highly desirable quality in art."20

If objectivity evinces distancing, then subjectivity in writing must reflect a non-distanced author. Preceding his assertion that all literature, by definition, possesses objectivity to some degree, Abrams reviews what critics have meant by objective authorship:

Most critics . . . agree in saying that Shakespeare is an objective dramatist, who presents his imagined characters in action without expressing his own inclinations or

18 Although the objectivist critic usually prizes objectivity, the terms "objectivist" and "objectivity" should not be confused. The former refers to the critic or reader who focuses attention on the literary "object" while the latter commonly refers to an attitude of detachment.


20 Ibid., p. 326.
judgments. This objectivity is what Keats meant by speaking of Shakespeare's negative capability, and what more recent critics often mean by aesthetic distance.21

Challenging the validity of a subjective versus objective classification, Abrams claims that poets speak in their "public" or "ceremonial" voices, even those who write in first person, those who, like Milton, include accounts of their "personal circumstances," and those who, like Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey" or Shelley in "Ode to the West Wind," admittedly base their poems on personal experiences. Abrams concludes:

The poet may ground a poem on his private experiences and feelings, but as a poet he is free--in fact he is obliged--to invest, alter, and organize his material according to purely poetic rather than autobiographical criteria.22

George T. Wright agrees, in terms of Abrams' analysis, that in seemingly subjective literature, distance does--or should--exist between author and work, even between the poet and the "I" of a lyric. He writes:

The deliberate placing of a distance between the poet and his lyric persona effectively dramatizes the substance of the poem. But however accustomed we may be to the more direct lyric in which the thoughts or feeling of the poet, or of the characters he represents, are stated with unambiguous explicitness, art is formal, and there must always be a distance, minimized or emphasized, between the maker of the poem and the persons in the poem.23

In spite of the biographical and autobiographical data that confirms the sentiments in the literature as those actually


22Ibid., p. 63.

held by the author, Wright and Abrams seem convinced that there still exists a distance between the two by virtue of the fact that the literature contains the author's formalized experience.

John Crowe Ransom, "who once attacked 'Lycidas' for being imperfectly 'anonymous'," also interprets distance as a desirable demarcation between the poet's experience and the poetic experience. His definition of "the doctrine of psychic distance" is as follows:

A "whole" or textured poem is always an evidence that the film has been pierced; that the author has got out of the obsessive dominion which the practicable aspects of the objects had over him at the practical stage; that he now can invite them to reveal their own depths of meaning; that having survived the practical issue he now wants poetic experience; that the present experience is possible because the practical impulses are disposed of.

As a self-contained object, literature is distanced by an author when he selects, arranges, and orders experience into a meaningful whole. His product is a formal artifact, not a confessional, a diary entry.

Literature as Communication

Also supporting the necessity of author distancing, Sheila Dawson views it as a necessary step in making the end product "shareable." She writes:

The artist must distance the experience that fires his imagination or the theme of which he treats. The nature of the initial impulse combined with the individuality of the poet dictates the distance for each piece of creative work.

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His task is to make shareable his personal experiences and ideas in so far as he deems them to have significance and value for other people. He must distance so that their significance for human beings in general—not for himself in particular—is revealed.\textsuperscript{26}

Unlike the preceding commentators, Dawson suggests the variability of necessary distance. Some experiences, such as those the poet-as-soldier witnesses amid the brutality of war, require considerable distance if they are to be more than horrific cries. Many war time poets, she asserts, pen such verse, precluding aesthetic responses. However, in the poem "Futility," Wilfred Owen "presents us with a horrible experience, but he has seen it as a whole and distanced it."\textsuperscript{27}

If an intensely personal experience is to be shared, then, more than a modicum of distancing is necessary. The author's task, Dawson asserts, will be more difficult "if he is treating current social, political and religious problems, for few things are harder than to write well at white-heat, to immortalize the ephemeral . . ."\textsuperscript{28}

Greater distance is similarly necessary, according to Dawson, if the poet elects potentially frightening or offensive objects, "terror more than awe, sexual passion more than affection, and so on."\textsuperscript{29}

British critic and teacher of literature, David Daiches interprets distance similarly to Dawson in that he too considers literature as communication and also in that he views distance as

\textsuperscript{26} Dawson, pp. 276-277.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 187.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 36.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 272.
variable. The communication of which he writes is not that of philosophy, journalism, history, or rhetoric; it is composed of recognition and insight peculiar to imaginative literature.

Daiches explains:

The kind of insights provided by imaginative literature are unique, because they are not communicated directly but through the symbolization of events, characters, and all the other elements in a story. That symbolization is achieved by the means of expression, and the insights it produces are accompanied by recognition. We both recognize what we know to be true and see what we did not know before. Only imaginative literature communicates both simultaneously.

Whereas the direct communication of rhetoric relies on example, the indirect communication appropriate to literature relies on symbols. Daiches illustrates the unsatisfactory results of an author's confusing the two in his discussion of a novel by John Steinbeck:

In *The Moon is Down* . . . the author, in his capacity as an interpreter of a universal theme . . . employs a type of symbolic incident which requires a comparatively remote aesthetic distance for its proper appreciation. But Steinbeck as a rhetorician intent on persuading his readers that all was not lost even though countries like Norway were for a time under Nazi occupation required a much less aesthetic distance; he needed incidents that were less symbols in the aesthetic sense than examples of what was happening in Europe.31

Daiches admits that the reader might distance himself from the examples of this novel—which Steinbeck did not do—but that given this reading, the novel is nevertheless inadequate as imaginative literature because the rhetorical aims are central to the text while insight and recognition, proper goals of imaginative literature, are lacking. He explains:

31 Ibid., pp. 63-64.
It is possible to read *The Moon is Down* at the aesthetic distance required by the work as a work of art purely, and as such it has a certain quiet dignity and effectiveness, but it is too thin to be an adequate theme. It is too thin because so many of the incidents can barely stand the strain of expansion from example of contemporary events into symbol of a universal situation . . . in confusing symbol with example, fiction with history, aesthetic probability with contemporary actuality, Steinbeck makes it difficult if not impossible for his readers to see in what sense he was treating his theme.32

Steinbeck's work is weakened because he failed in clarifying and sustaining the distance he sets for reading the novel as literature. As an author, Steinbeck failed to supply "an implicit set of directions concerning the distance from the object at which the reader must stand if he is to see it for what it is."33 Distance, set by the author, and subject to variation among works, must not be so slight as to create confusion in the separation of imaginative literature from rhetoric and other types of direct communication.

**Literature as Archetypal Expression**

In addition to views that distance isolates the object and that distance makes the object shareable, another idea in contemporary critical theory is that the author's distance results in a vision of the collective subconscious. Maud Bodkin, critic and student of Jungian psychology, claims that the distanced writer is no longer tied to his own conscious, his own private ego; his is a

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32 Ibid., p. 64.

33 Ibid., p. 31.
"union with a larger whole," with those recurring patterns of archetypal significance. Bodkin writes:

Those archetypal images or patterns that . . . pertain to the collective Unconscious and find expression in poetry, are neither to be confused . . . with concrete objects nor with characters of the individual psyche, but should be consolidated, outside the individual as psychological realities--realities, because in human life actual and effective . . . .

The poet relieves his own psychic pressures through the selection of images that symbolize archetypal patterns, "themes having a particular form or pattern which persists amid variation from age to age, and which corresponds to a pattern or configuration of emotional tendencies in the minds of those who are stirred by them." The images which to the author are "at once intimately known and felt" are also "distanced" or separated from his personal ego. Thus, his perspective encompasses a whole configuration of similar experiences in his own and his ancestors' past.

**Literature as Mimesis**

In his explanation of art as "heightened imitation," William Grace declares the need of distance in an author's treatment of evil and ugliness. Both, he says, abound in *The Divine Comedy,*

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yet they do not elicit repulsion for "they are presented under conditions of aesthetic distance . . . so they are not exactly the same forces as in real life."\(^{38}\) Art, Grace insists, is a representation of life aesthetically transformed. The successful author does not "create a source of temptation for the beholder. . . . Aesthetic distance or the selective process in the mimesis evaluates the true nature of evil at the same time that it presents evil."\(^{39}\) The author's criticism or judgment would seem to be a necessary essential in distancin such "sources of temptation."

The preceding discussion does not exhaust the modern uses of the term distance as a standard for literature. It does, however, suggest the widespread usage of a term within a variety of critical approaches. The artist is said to distance by formalizing his experience and avoiding personal intrusion when art is considered as object; as communication, by making his experiences universal and the incidents symbolic; as archetypal expression, by his reliance on images that are symbolic of ancient patterns; as mimesis, by both his selectivity and his combination of judgment and presentation. These means of distancing, in addition to others, may be considered as techniques within the text, techniques that reflect an author's distancing and invite a similar perspective on the part of the reader.

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\(^{39}\)Ibid., p. 26.
Techniques for Distancing

According to most writers, certain subjects in literature are especially problematical in distancing. "Some moods and events, the devotion of a mother, the consummation of passion," Joseph Shipley writes, "are more difficult than others to set at a psychic distance, to remove from insistent personal tuggings." When treating such subjects, the author, Shipley implies, exercises even greater care to infuse his work with formal qualities that will distance.

The problem of distancing the potentially obscene is briefly mentioned by Shipley and developed in some detail by Bernard Waldrop. Commenting that a cold atmosphere or remoteness may distance a story, Shipley adds: "... there is other ground than its divine inspiration for accepting in the Bible incidents elsewhere by some deemed pornographic or obscene." Distinguishing between these last two words, pornography and obscenity, and suggesting that the latter may serve aesthetic functions while the former cannot, Waldrop insists that techniques of distancing are of prime concern to the author who wishes to provide an aesthetic experience but chooses subjects that may offend the reader.

According to Waldrop, references to sexual matters, common in both obscenity and pornography, produce empathy without


41Ibid.
hesitation," but in pornography, the empathy is sustained, not mitigated. Aesthetic uses of the same subjects require measures that pornography excludes:

Usually the artist wants to avoid the pornographic possibilities of empathy; he may give his work its necessary distance simply by arrangement, by subordinating the recalcitrant part in a less stubborn whole, or by stylizing it until its formal properties predominate.43

Waldrop readily admits that the aesthetic use of obscenity is rare, but that when the formal qualities are dominant, thus distancing the work, the author's skill is commendable: "That is why when the work is successful, when the form holds in spite of everything, the technical accomplishment is so astounding . . . ."44

Waldrop mentions another technique that generally achieves distance. The author, he writes, "may also present the material obscenely, making the reader who has come too close recoil. In this sense, obscenity precludes pornography."45 Obscenity, Waldrop explains, produces a fascination composed of "desire plus repulsion,"46 and while desire is heightened in pornography, repulsion may effectively distance the work. In literature, this feat is accomplished by details of corporeality:

43 Ibid., pp. 77-78.
44 Ibid., p. 85.
45 Ibid., pp. 77-78.
Descriptions of sexually charged scenes in literature tend more than representations in visual art, to be pornographic, because words are more abstract than pictures and the spectator has more leeway to allow his private wishes fulfillment. And symbolic gratifications in general have one important advantage over the real thing: they are less troublesome because they are weightless. Suggestions of weight, of corporeality, far from increasing pornographic effect, hinder it.47

"The point," Waldrop adds, "is not the number of details or even how closely they approximate reality--it is giving the details one way or another, the sense of weight or physicality."48 Waldrop cites the description of the protagonist's love affair in Samuel Beckett's Molloy as an example of this method of distancing.

Waldrop closes his discussion of distance with the observation that description of sea surfaces may be easy to distance but that descriptions of death, as well as love,

... invite immediate non-aesthetic reactions. Sea surfaces are less dangerous to the stasis of a poem. But distance is not enough; a work of art needs some motive force, and where is there to go for energy but to the heat and weight of the body? This is the problem of the expressive in art. The most expressive is not necessarily the best, but without something of the expressive, the psychic distance is too great--we glance, and cannot care less.49

Thus, while some matters are more recalcitrant for aesthetic purposes than others, obscenity may be used aesthetically. If the work is distanced by the author's use of repulsion or stylization or most importantly, his control of the form, the chance of a reader's aesthetic response is greater.

47ibid., pp. 78-79.
48ibid., p. 79.
49ibid., p. 84.
Discussing setting in literature, Shipley suggests that remoteness of time and place serves to distance. Illustrating the importance of setting, Shipley recalls: "Many writers have found their land dwelling readers properly distanced by the sea."\(^{50}\)

Hazard Adams agrees that remoteness of setting provides distance; he adds the observation that remoteness of form does likewise. Poets often achieve distance, Adams writes, through the use of subject, setting, and form normally found in the old popular ballads. By turning to the legendary past for topic and environment and to ancient poetic tradition for form, early nineteenth century poets like Coleridge and Keats achieved distance.

The ballad \(\text{Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci"}\) quality here is part of the attempt to recall a past age and through it achieve a sort of aesthetic distance. This is true to a certain extent also of Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner." Through several revisions Coleridge purged his poem of much archaic language and gave it a sophistication of diction that separates it from the popular ballad. Nevertheless, its balladic qualities are clear.\(^{51}\)

Dawson finds a similar technique in T. S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral, a verse play with a medieval setting, a chorus patterned after the ancient Greek tragedies, and the tone of an old English morality play.

Both formal diction and the use of classical mythology, according to Daiches, add distance to any kind of selection. Illustrating, he writes that in "Lycidas,"

\(^{50}\)Shipley, p. 125.

the continuous linking of the theme with classical mythology . . . helps provide the proper "aesthetic distance" between the reader and the poem, maintaining a deliberate artificiality in the light of the whole allegorical tone . . .

Applicable to any genre or type of literature, the distancing means available to a writer include recognizable form; universal themes and speakers; symbolic events and images; objectivity in treatment of subjects; stylization; and remoteness of subject, of literary form or setting; and elevated diction. Additional techniques are often mentioned in specific relation to poetry, drama, or prose fiction.

**Poetry**

Shipley insists that the verse of poetry keeps the reader more distanced than highly idiomatic prose dialogue, an opinion with which most critics tend to agree.

Specific features of versification as distancing devices are subjects of discussion by Adams and by Harvey Gross. Both comment briefly on John Crowe Ransom's "Captain Carpenter," a ballad about dismemberment, potentially disconcerting and gruesome. Gross writes that "Ransom succeeds in distancing the poem by the use of contrived metrics." With ideas reminiscent of the earlier comments on remoteness as distancing, Gross specifies "archaic diction and syntax" and Adams the balladic form itself

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52 Daiches, p. 177.

as providing detachment in Ransom's poem. "A narrative poem in quatrains which observes a certain degree of detachment," Adams writes, "inevitably suggests the ballad and calls for a traditional response on the reader's part."54

Adams, in his discussions of both the sonnet and the traditional ballad, describes other elements of distancing in versification. Comparing Wyatt's translation of one of Petrarch's sonnets with that of Surrey, Adams judges Wyatt's versification to have less distancing power than Surrey's.

Wyatt's poem is clearly much "rougher" in its rhythms and...a more "natural" statement...Surrey's poem keeps its distance, is more aloof from the reader than Wyatt's.55

Amplifying his initial appraisal of Wyatt's translation, invested with less distance, Adams later writes:

Tremendous rhythmic variations, the feminine endings of the enclosing rimes, and the use of inner off-rimes (face-presseth, presseth-campeth) all contribute (I am unprepared to say quite how) to breaking down the distance between the speaker and the reader. The continuation of feminine

54 Adams, p. 40.

55 Ibid., p. 58. The translations that Adams considers are as follows:

The long love that in my thought I harbor,
And in my heart doth keep his residence,
Into my face presseth with bold pretense
And there campeth, displaying his banner.
She that me learns to love and to suffer
And wills that my trust and lust's negligence
Be reigned with reason, shame, and reverence,
With his hardness takes displeasure.
Wherewith love to the heart's forest he fleeth,
Leaving his enterprise with pain and cry,
And him hideth, and not appeareth:
endings in the second quatrain gives an abruptness to each line; and this, in conflict with the run-on nature of the lines, makes the mistress' actions seem hard and cold, the speaker's situation painful.\textsuperscript{56}

Both Adams and Gross seem to believe that versification which lends a semblance of "rouglier" or "more natural" speech tends to decrease distance while regular rhythmic patterns tend to increase it.

In his discussion of the development of the ballad, Adams writes that the chief characteristic of the anonymous poet's traditional ballad (e.g., "Sir Patrick Spens") is its objectivity or detachment, achieved by a narrator who "does not intrude upon his story but maintains a discreet distance."\textsuperscript{57} Contrastive are Wordsworth's ballads, such as "The Fountain," in that "Wordsworth did something very rare in popular ballads. His speaker intrudes himself openly into the poem, not merely as a narrator but as the

\begin{verse}
What may I do when my master feareth
But in the field with him to live and die?
For good is the life ending faithfully. (Wyatt)

Love that liveth and reigneth in my thought,
That built his seat within my captive breast,
Clad in the arms wherein with me he fought,
Oft in my face he doth his banner rest.
She that me taught to love and suffer pain,
My doubtful hope and eke my hot desire
With shamefast cloak to shadow and refrain,
Her smiling grace converteth straight to ire;
And coward love then to the heart apace
Taketh his flight, whereas he lurks and plains
His purpose lost, and dare not show his face.
For my lord's guilt thus faultless bide I pains;
Yet from my lord shall not my foot remove,--
Sweet is his death that takes his end by love. (Surrey)
\end{verse}

\textsuperscript{56}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 58-59.

\textsuperscript{57}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 25.
main actor in the drama." Adams suggests that the objectivity of the traditional balladeer's narration provides more distancing than the personal involvement of the Wordsworthian speaker, an idea with which May Sarton seems to agree in her statement that detachment is increased when poets write in third person.  

An interesting side note, the implications of which will be discussed in more detail in section III, appears in Stephen Stepanchev's comments on mid-twentieth century poetry. Stepanchev insists that in one of the mainstreams of contemporary poetry, distance is deliberately shunned by poets who

... render the loneliness and terror of contemporary life with the terseness and immediacy of a diary record.  
... they distrust the "aesthetic distance" and "anonymity" that were once prized by poets and critics.

Stepanchev reasons that a number of contemporary poets concentrate not on generic man, a dramatized speaker or personae, but on their own reactions to the world. Such a poet

... places himself with such particularity that he avoids all obvious universality. When he turns to family history, he floods his poem with unique, identifying details, as Robert Lowell does in his Life Studies. Similar autobiographical material can be found in the work of W. D. Snodgrass, Robert Creeley, and Anne Sexton, to name only three. Disregarding "aesthetic distance," the new poet tells us his readers about his operation, his psychoanalysis and his difficulties with his wife, parents, children, and employers.

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58 Ibid., p. 32.  
60 Stepanchev, p. 4.  
61 Ibid.
Stepanchev withholds judgment; he only describes what he sees as a current trend.

**Drama**

Three writers, Elias Schwartz, Dawson, and Kent Gallagher write of the necessity of distance to the enjoyment of tragedy. Detachment, according to Schwartz, is the key to the pleasure derived paradoxically from a catharsis of pity and fear, emotions not generally considered pleasurable. Fear, the expectation of pain or disaster, is aroused in the reader or spectator not because of his own personal expectancies but by his identification with the protagonist. However, if he is to pity, he must "stand apart" from the protagonist's misfortune. Schwartz explains:

To account for this /pit\, we must assume that the spectator only partially identifies himself with the protagonist. Part of his soul becomes one with the protagonist; part of it remains detached. To the degree that he identifies himself with the protagonist the spectator fears the evil that threatens them both; to the degree that he remains detached, the spectator observes ruin come upon the protagonist and pities him. Only thus can the spectator pity and fear simultaneously.

Detachment, thus enabling the reader to feel pity as well as identify with the protagonist, also illuminates the peculiar resultant pleasure. The pleasure, says Schwartz, derives from a "highly-ordered and intense action." The experience is similar

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62 *Elias Schwartz, "Detachment and Tragic Effect,* College English, XVIII (December, 1956), 154. While Schwartz uses the term spectator consistently to denote percipient, the term reader is equally applicable for none of his discussion relates more to theatrical presentation than study of dramatic literature.

to that of the individual who recalls a painful event and, unlike his perspective at the time of the actual incident, later views it as a whole, in all its relations and full significance. When one recalls such an experience, he patterns the events, attributes motivation, fixes causal and temporal relations. The recaller, moreover, "becomes" simultaneously both actor and observer. He relives his experience and at the same time stands apart from himself viewing his experience as a complete and meaningful whole.64

The process is similar in the response to tragedy, except that the meaning and order of the action are pre-determined by the dramatist. Having engaged in the action of the play, the spectator can, at the close of the play, see that action as a meaningful whole because of his partial detachment.65

Only by detachment, then does the reader or spectator "see a formative rational principle--a logos--in action of the play."66

Schwartz mentions several specific techniques whereby a playwright assists the reader in detaching himself. First, the chorus of the Greek drama frequently removes the reader not only from the actuality of the play but also from the plight of the protagonist. In the tragedies of Shakespeare, choric characters, such as Friar Laurence or Lear's fool, and choric scenes, such as the willow scene in Othello or the porter scene in Macbeth, diminish the reader's identification with the protagonist. These characters and scenes "throw the main action and the protagonist into different

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64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., p. 156.
66 Ibid.
perspectives and 'place' the spectator at key moments 'on the outside,' enabling him to view the action as a meaningful whole."

Schwartz asserts that in Shakespearean tragedies the protagonists' own experiences of seeing themselves in a moment of detached evaluation also distance the reader. Such a moment occurs at the close of Othello and Coriolanus. A "self-dramatizing speech by the protagonist throws his character into a final brilliant light and illuminates the whole tragic action."  

By his failure to incorporate distancing devices, the modern playwright, according to Schwartz, . . . fails to provide any formal means in his play to prevent the spectator from completely identifying himself with the protagonist. As a result, the spectator cannot detach himself sufficiently to perceive whatever total meaning the play may possess.

Like Schwartz, Dawson also believes distance necessary for the enjoyment of tragedy, an enjoyment she labels "fruror," meaning "to have the benefit of," not "gaudeo," which means "to be made happy by." Within a tragedy, she says, "distance may be skillfully altered as in Murder in the Cathedral but it must never be lost."

According to Dawson, it is an individual's knowledge of pattern in the play that creates the necessary distance. This knowledge of pattern, she writes, is like knowledge of salt in

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67Ibid.  
68Ibid.  
69Ibid.  
70Dawson, p. 4.  
71Ibid., p. 173.
bread: one is unmindful of its presence but jarred by its absence. The pattern, as she describes it, seems extremely close to what Bodkin terms archetype. The reader contemplates incidents "with an awareness of broad moral principles--and these are part and parcel of myself and of what I have called 'pattern.'" Pattern, she continues, is clearly discernible in tragedies that possess "conceptual form." In her explanation of the distancing in Walter Macken's "Rain on the Wind," conceptual form seems to mean universal applicability of some incident of "human significance":

... the statement is particular and universal. We are not merely given information, we are taken behind the scenes and in the appropriate idiom shown what leaving the sea means to this one old man--but not just that. The point of view he takes, his feeling of uselessness, the sense of waste because his body can no longer utilise his skill, is not confined to the fisherman; it is shared by the surgeon whose hand has begun to shake, the painter whose eyesight has begun to fail, by anyone who has to give up a job he loves because he has fallen below his own standard of work. The human significance of the passage is clear not only to those actually in the same sort of position, but to anyone who can imagine himself to be so.73

When she turns to a discussion of more specific distancing techniques, Dawson expresses agreement with Schwartz that the Greek chorus is instrumental. She writes that a chorus enlightens the reader as to the play's pattern. "When the under-distanced Athenian began to feel outraged by the unjust suffering, the chorus was at hand to point out the wider context of personal misfortune ... ."74 Less direct, but nevertheless remindful

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72 Ibid., p. ii.  
73 Ibid., p. 184.  
74 Ibid., p. 191.
that the incidents are different from the pain of the practical, immediate world are the "strangeness of the speech" in Riders to the Sea and the stature and magnitude of character in Prometheus Unbound and Murder in the Cathedral. And already noted is Dawson's belief that temporal remoteness may effectively distance literature, particularly tragedy.

Dawson summarizes the importance of distancing tragedy by indicating the result of the non-distanced work:

Unless we have this intuition of pattern . . . we shall remain unsuitably distanced. We shall watch Prometheus, Oedipus and the rest and see only crucifixion, cruelty and injustice, 'slimy things' we shall apprehend a story without comprehending its significance.75

Also believing distance essential to tragedy, Kent Gallagher expresses agreement with Dawson and Schwartz. In fact, according to Gallagher it is the presence of distance, achieved chiefly through the protagonists' deliberations, that distinguishes tragedy from melodrama, in which such cognitions, on the part of either character or reader, are rare. 76

Two critics of the drama, Rudolf Schmerl and Robert Brustein, use the term distance in a manner that anticipates part of the following division of this chapter on prose fiction. Both Brustein and Schmerl use distance not as a central aesthetic concept, like Dawson; they treat it as a description of the relationships that

75Ibid., p. 401.

converge in literature, relationships that may be well or poorly managed for a variety of effects. Schmerl writes of the moral distance that may exist between characters and readers and Brustein of the ambivalent nature of the playwright's distance from his characters.

A comment by a literary critic specifically concerning distance in comedy appears in Rudolf Schmerl's essay on moral distance in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and *Henry IV*. Schmerl's contention is that while the vices of Falstaff and the vengeful nature of Shylock both alienate readers, the tendency to overdistance in *Henry IV* is circumvented by the other characters' initial approval of the knight and Prince Hal's final dismissal of him when the affairs of state become serious. Because the other characters never condone Shylock, the audience remains detached from him. It is possible to laugh at Falstaff's low morals because the playwright manipulates the distance between reader and character by shifting the distance between him and the other characters. No such manipulation serves to encourage a reader to view Shylock as a comic figure.  

Brustein, in *The Theatre of Revolt*, casts Henrik Ibsen in a leading role in two of the developments of twentieth century dramatic literature, the plays of messianic revolt ("the dramatist

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77 Rudolf B. Schmerl, "Comedy and the Manipulation of Moral Distance: Falstaff and Shylock," *Bucknell Review*, X (December, 1961), 128-137.
rebels against God and tries to take His place—the priest examines his image in the mirror."\(^{78}\) and plays of social revolt ("the dramatist rebels against the conventions, morals, and values of the social organism—the priest turns the mirror on the audience."\(^{79}\)).

Discussing Ibsen's plays of the two categories, Brustein first comments on plays of the messianic revolt such as \textit{Brand}. Here Ibsen "preserves his distance" from the action of the play while simultaneously identifying closely with its protagonist. Although the "playwright's strong affinities with his protagonist"\(^{80}\) are obvious, the "hero's messianic doctrine is almost invariably rejected, and . . . he is usually abandoned by the playwright by the end of the play."\(^{81}\) Both Brand and Emperor Julian suffer such fates.

In Ibsen's drama of social revolt, protagonists are still "precariously balanced between author's involvement and detachment."\(^{82}\) Brustein explains this dual nature of the playwright's relationship to his characters as an "ambivalence" that leads to a dual level, . . . in which a drama of ideas coexists with a drama of action, so that Ibsen's characters, functioning both in thought and deed, have a rich intellectual life in addition to their dramatic existence. The drama of ideas is generally the expression of Ibsen's personal rebellion,


\(^{79}\)Ibid.

\(^{80}\)Ibid., p. 20.

\(^{81}\)Ibid.

\(^{82}\)Ibid., p. 48.
while the drama of action puts this rebellion into some kind of objective perspective. For while Ibsen will often use a character to advance some rebellious doctrine which he probably holds himself, he is almost never satisfied with mere ventriloquism. At the same time that he advances an abstract idea, he examines the consequences of this idea in the arena of human action, . . . .

The shifting distance between Ibsen and characters like Gregers Werle, Dr. Sockmann, Hedda Gabler, Mrs. Alving and many others sometimes results, at its best, in brilliances, and, at its least effective, in lack of consistency.

At his best, then, Ibsen will treat the drama of ideas and the drama of action as two contiguous developments which touch and enrich each other throughout the play, deriving his energy, drive, and excitement from the one, and his detachment, complexity, and thickness from the other. At his worst, Ibsen's manipulation of the strings is unsure or clumsy, so that his endings sometimes seem equivocal or his characters inconsistent: In A Doll's House, for example, Nora's abrupt conversion from a protected, almost infantile dependent into an articulate and determined spokesman for individual freedom may serve the drama of ideas but it is totally unconvincing in the drama of action.

Brustein's concluding remark suggests that he believes Ibsen's juggling of the distances made a distinct contribution to contemporary theatre:

. . . when Ibsen perfects this method, it becomes one of his most original contributions to the modern theatre, endowing his work with a double-leveled perspective which cannot be matched by any other modern playwright.

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83Ibid.
84Ibid., pp. 48-49.
85Ibid., p. 49.
Prose Fiction

Critics' discussion of distance in short stories and novels is largely concerned with the relationship between reader, narrator, author, and characters within the story. Some kind of distance in prose fiction is always present, i.e., narrator, reader, author, and characters are, of necessity, either close, separated, or at some point between the extremes of identification and estrangement.

B. F. Bart and Henri Peyre write in this tradition. However, both of these critics, in their analyses of Flaubert's Madame Bovary, account in part for the artistry of the novel by the author's manipulation of a balance between the reader's engagement and detachment.

Bart asserts that the shifting distance in the novel produces a mixture of pity and irony, the former when the reader is close to Emma and the latter when he realizes her true nature. When Flaubert's own views harmonize with Emma's, or when he allows Emma to articulate her agony and her recognitions, especially when she does so in imperfect or present tense, the distance is diminished and pity follows.

... Flaubert will report indirectly thoughts which represent direct discourse in her mind. His use of the imperfect tense for such passages of "mental discourse" is familiar; its importance for aesthetic distance lies in the feeling of immediacy and close personal contact which it imparts. It suggests to the reader that he is, as it were, present while the thought is in the very act of becoming. This technique alternates with the direct statement of the thought itself, an even closer and more immediate device.86

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86 B. F. Bart, "Aesthetic Distance in Madame Bovary," PMLA, LXIX (December, 1954), 1118.
However, when the reader's attention is focused on Emma's visions as distinct from reality with no authorial attempt to explain or excuse them, causing the reader to judge Emma's shoddy excitement, or when the author's tone is one of contempt, distance is increased and irony results. "When the distance remains considerable, irony is usually present and bitter. The distance sometimes narrows, however, and the irony becomes gentler or even disappears." 87

Dealing with the same novel, Henri Peyre suggests that "aesthetic distance from Emma," 88 essential to the novel, is achieved by scenes, or dramatized events, which bring the reader close to her, while the summary, or narrator evaluation, checks the involvement.

The use of scene, as contrasted with summary, may then bring the reader closer to the character. According to Alice Benson the same proximity may be achieved through "soliloquy, stream-of-consciousness monologue, and expressionistic monologue," 89 devices that increase the distance between author and narrator and between author and reader.

Concentrating on the former relationship, author and narrator, Patrick Cruttwell explores the difference in authors as

87Ibid., p. 1117.


makers and as persons. The author, he writes, is a "person" who exhibits or "makes," and of the many ways he may choose "to perform his exhibitions, . . . some . . . will not seem to be exhibitions at all--or so he may hope. These ways differ in the distances or apparent distances, which they set between person and maker." Cruttwell discusses four possibilities. The first method, which he calls direct, purports to be a "undisguised . . . simple transcript from person to maker." Second, the maker may be masked, "a self which pretends not to be, but which encourages the reader to think it is, the person of the writer." The third possibility is the mythologised person, a "transposition of the person into symbolic figures, references, etc., which may be taken from events private in the person's experiences . . . or may be taken from external sources--from books, other men's experiences, and so forth." The final method Cruttwell explores is the dramatized person, a fictional entity obviously divorced from the author as person. In this last category, "the distance is greatest between maker and person."

Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, who define distance as "the degree of detachment with which the characters in a story

91 Ibid.
92 Ibid., p. 489.
93 Ibid., p. 493.
94 Ibid., p. 495.
are viewed," use the term in their discussion of the focus of narration. The focus, they write, is determined by the view of the story's narrator, who may be the main character, a minor character, an omniscient figure, or an observer. Distance describes the closeness of the chosen narrator to the characters of the story; furthermore, it is the narrator's distance that determines the reader's.

Commenting on the effect that first-person narration by a main character tends to produce, Brooks and Warren suggest that it

... tends to shorten the distance between the reader and the fictional character; the character narrating his own story tends to give us the world strictly in his own terms, in his own feelings and attitudes, and he can scarcely see himself in a large context.96

A minor character brings the reader into the character's world (as in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily"), but he generally is somewhat more removed as he "makes comment and passes judgment upon the main character."97 The third-person observer, however, who is usually restricted to reporting

... dialogue, setting, and action without ever going into the consciousness of characters, tends to imply a greater distance than either type which uses the first-person observer.98

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96Ibid., p. 664.

97Ibid.

98Ibid., p. 664.
The omniscient narrator who is able to give any kind of information, according to Brooks and Warren, may be close to the character as in Caroline Gordon's "Old Red" or quite detached as in de Maupassant's "The Necklace," in which "the whole story is written from a considerable distance, a distance which permits the compact summaries, the sharp commentaries, the rigorous selection of incident."  

Instead of the first person narrator who apparently brings the reader closer to the story, the omniscient detached narrator is sometimes an asset.

For instance, if the old man in "The Lament" by Anton Chekhov should tell his own story, it would be almost impossible to avoid extreme sentimentality; the omniscient author can adopt an attitude of detachment, he can give us an account without overtly appealing to our feelings, he can summarize and analyze, he can keep his distance from the events, but if the old man himself were to tell the story, the mere fact of his telling it might imply a sort of self-pity, or at least an excessive self-consciousness which is not in keeping with the character.

Brooks and Warren take the pluralistic view that the choice of narrator leads to varied effects and that the desired effects determine the choice of narrator. Norman Friedman's opinion is similar although his cataloging of focus of narration, or point-of-view, is more detailed than that of Brooks and Warren. Answering questions about narration, including "at what distance does he (narrator) place the reader from the story?," Friedman lists

99Ibid., p. 665.
100Ibid., p. 664.
eight possibilities. From the first to the last, the author's presence decreases, though the reader's proximity is still subject to variation. Friedman's divisions are as follows:

(1) Editorial omniscience. The author's view is unrestricted. The reader is nearer to him than to the characters, as in *Tom Jones*.

(2) Neutral omniscience. The author's view is unrestricted but he narrates with more detachment in third person, as in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Because the narrator uses both scene and summary, the "distance between story and reader may be near or far and it may shift at will."102

(3) "I" as a witness. The author and narrator are sharply distinguished, and the narrator's view is restricted to a witness' observation, as in *The Great Gatsby*. Again, the distance varies as the narrator chooses scene or summary.

(4) "I" as Protagonist. The narrator is the chief character, as in *Great Expectations*. As in the two preceding categories, the distance may be great or slight because the "I" can narrate scenes or he can summarize and evaluate.

(5) Multiple Selective Omniscience. The narrator's role is diminished for the story is communicated

102 Ibid., pp. 1173-1174.
through the "internal states . . . as they occur," as in *To the Lighthouse*. The distance between reader and character is thereby slight.

(6) Selective Omniscience. The story comes through the "internal states" of one character, as in *Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man*. The reader is brought close to the one character.

(7) The Dramatic Mode. The story is related only through the characters' action and speech, as in Hemingway's *Hills Like White*. Because "the presentation is wholly scenic," there is practically no distance between the story and the reader.

(8) The Camera. The story is a slice of life without selectivity. The author is completely excluded as in Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*. The reader is even less distanced than in category seven.

The effects to be gained from the modes are, according to Friedman, various. Implicit in his summary is the belief that praiseworthy fiction is not restricted to any single one. Hypothetically, he reasons that if

... it is essential to an author's purpose that the minds of many be revealed freely and at will . . . then Neutral Omniscience is the logical choice. If the element of suspense is to be foremost . . . then the witness-narrator seems more likely than any other. If the problem is one

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of tracing the growth of a personality as it reacts to experience, the protagonist-narrator will prove most useful. . . . If the author is concerned with the way in which personality and experience emerge as a mosaic from their impingement upon the sensibilities of several individuals, the Multiple Selective Omniscience provides a way . . . . If the intent is to catch a mind in a moment of discovery . . . Selective Omniscience is the means. And finally, if the author's purpose is to produce in the reader's mind a moment of revelation . . . then the Dramatic Mode . . . provides the logical approach.105

Wayne Booth proposes an even more elaborate classification, one in which distance is more clearly defined and then used as an approach to identifying strengths and weaknesses in novels.

Discussing the numerous possibilities of variation in narration, Booth calls attention to differences produced by first or third person, dramatized or undramatized, observer or agent, scene or summary, use of commentary, self-consciousness, reliability, and privilege of information. In addition to these items which figure in an understanding of point-of-view, Booth notes variation of distance as another.

Applying the term distance to the relationship between the novel's narrator, characters, reader, and implied author, Booth explains the implied author:

Even the novel in which no narrator is dramatised creates an implicit picture of an author who stands behind the scenes whether as stage manager, as puppeteer, or as an indifferent God, silently paring his fingernails. This implied author is always distinct from the 'real man'--whatever we may take him to be--who creates a superior version of himself as he creates his work; any successful

105Ibid., pp. 1181-1182.
novel makes us believe in an 'author' who amounts to a kind of 'second self'. This second self is usually a highly refined and selected version, wiser, more sensitive, more perspective than any real man could be.  

Implied author, reader, narrator, and character, Booth asserts, "can range, in relation to each of the others, from identification to complete opposition, on any axis of value or judgment: moral, intellectual, aesthetic, and even physical (does the reader who stammers react to the stammering of H. C. Earwicker as I do? Surely not)."  

Booth, in both *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and in an essay that is an expanded version of one chapter of the book, "Distance and Point of View: An Essay in Classification," describes five of the possible variations in distance. First, "the narrator may be more or less distant from the implied author" in terms of morals (Jason and Faulkner in *The Sound and the Fury*) or intellectual level (Huck and Twain in *Huckleberry Finn*).  

Second, the narrator's relation to the story's characters admit of variation in distance:  

He may differ, for example, morally, intellectually and temporally (the mature narrator and his younger self in *Great Expectations* or *Redburn*), morally and intellectually (Fowler the narrator and Pyle the American in Greene's *The Quiet American*, both departing radically from the author's norms but in different directions), morally and

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107 Ibid., p. 69.  

emotionally (Maupassant's "The Necklace," and Huxley's "Nuns at Luncheon," in which the narrators affect less emotional involvement than Maupassant and Huxley clearly expect from the reader."

Third, "the narrator may be more or less distant from the reader's own norms." The separation may be physical as in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* or moral and emotional as with Pinkie in *Brighton Rock*. In the fourth place, there exist greater or lesser degrees of distance between implied author and reader.

The distance may be intellectual (the implied author of *Tristram Shandy*, not of course to be identified with *Tristam*, is more interested in and knows more about recondite classical lore than any of his readers), moral (the works of Sade), and so on. From the author's viewpoint, a successful reading of his book will reduce to zero the distance between the essential norms of his implied author and the norms of the postulated reader. Often enough there is very little distance to begin with; Jane Austen does not have to convince us that pride and prejudice are undesirable. A bad book, on the other hand, is often a book whose implied author clearly asks that we judge according to norms we cannot accept.

Finally, Booth notes the possible range of distance between the implied author (who carries the reader with him) and characters in the novel. For example, in *Emma*, both Jane Austen's implied author and the reader approve of Jane Fairfax while the narrator largely disapproves.

Booth finds distance a complicated concept, but like Friedman, he believes it a matter about which an author must make decisions according to his goals. Convinced that the novel should interest

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its readers, Booth asserts that it may do so intellectually (we desire to know the facts), aesthetically (we desire a completed pattern or form), or emotionally (we desire good or ill fortune for the characters). Satisfaction of these interests derives, at least in part, from the convergence--or divergence--of distances between implied author, characters, narrator, and reader. Booth hypothetically reasons in his exploration of the results of variations in distance:

. . . the novelist will find himself in difficulties if he tries to discover some ideal distance that all works ought to seek. "Aesthetic distance" is in fact many different effects, some of them quite inappropriate to some kinds of works. More important, distance is never an end in itself; distance along one axis is sought for the sake of increasing the reader's involvement on some other axis. When Chikamatsu, for example, urges that poets avoid all emotional epithets, he does so in order to increase the emotional effect in the reader. . . . When Brecht, on the other hand, asks for a "pervading coolness", he may seem at first to desire an increase in distance of all kinds. But what he really wants is to increase the emotional distance in order to involve the reader's social judgment more deeply.

The closer we look at the concept of distance the more complicated it appears. Of course, if we were content to see all literature as aspiring to one kind of involvement and one kind only--a sense of realism, and ecstatic contemplation of pure form, or whatever--we could feel comfortable about seeking one kind of distance as well. Each critic could then offer his formula and try to convert readers to it: As much realism as possible, but enough distance from reality to preserve a sense of form; As close to pure form as possible, with only so much of impurities like plot as cannot be done without; and so on. But is our experience with actual works ever as simple as this approach suggests? Every literary work of any power--whether or not its author composed it with his audience in mind--is in fact an elaborate system of
controls over the reader's involvement and detachment along various lines of interest. The author is limited only by the range of human interests.112

III. Summary and Conclusion

Summarizing literary critics on techniques of distancing is made more difficult by the fact that the term appears (1) as a desirable quality that separates literature from reality, (2) as a description of relationships, and (3) as a distinction between the author's subjective experiences from those experiences objectified in a text.

Aids in achieving distance, or the necessary separation, are said to include such general qualities as universality; form; incidents of symbolic significance; symbols of archetypal patterns; and stylization. More specific aids include regular verse; remoteness of subject, setting, or form; choric interludes, scenes, or characters; and a narrator's summary-evaluation.

When distance is used as a descriptive term, the author is said to be more or less separated from his characters, characters from one another, narrator from author, and narrator from reader. But this second usage of the term is not as simple as it appears. For lodged in the descriptions are approaches to literature that embrace a definite and particular viewpoint as to what relationships should occur in literature. The issue, briefly touched upon in Stepanchev's observation about modern poetry, has been more fully explored with reference to prose fiction.

Neither Wayne Booth, Charles Walcutt, nor Mary Alice Haegarty considers distance a necessary virtue of prose fiction, at least not the kind of distance warmly applauded in most twentieth-century criticism of the novel—the author distanced to the point of withdrawal. Booth acknowledges that most critics of this century have praised those works in which the author is unobtrusive, or better still silent. The twentieth-century trend of "exit author," explained as the logical result of a belief that aesthetic values accrue in "pure" or non-moral works, an "ever-increasing differentiation of the reading public, which renders it almost impossible for a novelist to identify himself with any audience" and the lack of an "established moral code" in public or author, have been favored in the interest of more realism, more objectivity, or of complete character freedom. Booth cites numerous examples of such judgments, and even more recently, Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg have argued that the certainty which characterized novels of the past in which the author's presence is strongly felt "has become less and less tenable in modern times."


114See Friedman's summary, pp. 1160-1168.


A narrator's "limited understanding" is "real," while the absolute truth of an omnipresent author is "suspect."\textsuperscript{117}

Booth's position is that the disappearance of the author is both undesirable and impossible. It is undesirable because many of the elements that interest readers are thereby relinquished, and more important, because authors are not only obliged to make moral judgments, they in fact always do through the implied author, though without the clarity of earlier novelists. According to Booth--and Walcutt echoes the same opinion--distance between implied author and reader yields confusion and fails to satisfy the interests of readers.

A legitimate concern of the novel, according to Booth and Haegarty, is its specifically human content, which, as Haegarty describes it, is

\textquote{. . . content that is human in its physical, publicly recognizable, appearance, content that demands a dramatic depiction of relations between human individuals, content that is frequently involved with the human economy, culture, and politics, content that in any of its forms will demand the illusion of the unformed chaos of the private, daily experiences of men and women.}\textsuperscript{119}

Haegarty insists that "some works actually intend to arouse reactions which are extremely close to the distance limit."\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{117}Ibid., p. 277.

\textsuperscript{118}Charles Child Walcutt, \textit{Man's Changing Mask: Modes and Methods of Characterization} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), pp. 176-177, 348-349.

\textsuperscript{119}Mary Alice Haegarty, \textit{Aesthetic Distance in the Techniques of the Novel} (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1964), p. 10.

\textsuperscript{120}Ibid., p. 69.
Theories of pure distance, or distance as a fixed aesthetic principle, derive, according to Haegarty, from a commitment to art as form and are "geared to the poem with its private audience rather than to the narrative with its more public audience."¹²¹

What Booth, Haegarty and Walcutt seem to favor in fiction is similar to what Gerber favored in reading literature: the recognition that form is only part of literature's power and that analysis of that form will engage only part of the interest and sensibility a reader brings to a work, and further, than an author, even one who disguises his voice through a mask, is nevertheless some part of the finished work.

IV. Implications for Oral Interpretation

Four implications for the oral reader seem to emerge from literary critics' discussion of distance:

(1) Literary critics chart an elaborate scheme of distances among the literature's author, narrator, characters, and reader.

Should not the reader be keenly aware of each?

(2) Divergence may occur between narrator and implied author.

Does not the reader, because he must clarify all the identifications or divergencies, need to employ visible or audible clues to alert listeners

¹²¹Ibid., p. 267.
to differences between narrator and implied author?\textsuperscript{122}

(3) Divergence may occur between implied author and reader or listeners.

If the reader finds himself distant from the implied author or if he believes a divergence between audience and implied author likely, should he not reject the idea of performing the selection for an audience?

(4) Literary critics cite specific devices within the text as instrumental in the achievement of distance.

Should not the reader then emphasize in his oral presentation devices such as form, stylization, formal diction, rhythm, choric scenes, self-dramatizing speeches, and author commentary?

\textsuperscript{122} See Robert Beloof's suggestions in Ch. I, pp. 31, 32.
CHAPTER VI

DISTANCE AND THEATRE

When dramatic theorists speculate on the nature of the response of an audience to the produced play, when they comment, prescriptively or descriptively, on the spectator's relationship to the theatrical event, they frequently use the term distance. This study includes a consideration of such discussions as part of a study in oral interpretation because (1) both theatre and interpretation are performing arts and both commonly aim to provide aesthetic experiences; (2) some of the principles evolved for theatre arts may apply to interpretation; and (3) writers in interpretation frequently make reference to distance in theatre for contrastive purposes.

This chapter contains an analysis of the term's explicit use by writers in dramatic theory, theatre criticism, and play production. Those comments referring primarily or exclusively to dramatic literature have been considered in Chapter Five. This chapter's organization follows two broad trends in twentieth century theatre practice: (1) the achievement of distance and (2) the destruction of distance.
I. The Achievement of Distance

A majority of writers in the theatre agree with the assumptions and reasoning of John Dolman, whose *The Art of Play Production*, published in 1928, contains what appears to be the first specific application of the concept of distance to theatre practice. Writers in aesthetics had previously drawn examples from theatre for illustrative purposes, but Dolman proposed a systematic description of aesthetic principles applied to dramatic production. His premises were drawn chiefly from H. S. Langfeld, who, acquainted with Bullough's pioneer work, dealt with distance at some length in *The Aesthetic Attitude*. Dolman followed suit in both his early publication and in *The Art of Acting*, published twenty-one years later. In the interim, numerous writers in dramatic criticism and play production incorporated the term in their works.

**Major Assumptions of Traditional Theorists**

Fundamental to Dolman's and several others' application of distance to theatre practice was the belief that art and reality significantly differ and that distance is a major distinguishing characteristic between the two. Ulric Moore wrote that when the

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theatre fails to distinguish clearly between stage events and those of reality, the spectator is led to decidedly unaesthetic responses:

... the producer's purpose is to carry his audience from an everyday world into an imaginary or fictitious one. The nature of this imaginary world and the spectator's relation to it are matters of widely varying opinion and it is this relationship which determines whether or not the spectator is to experience the drama as a work of art, i.e., whether he is to experience the aesthetic emotion. 4

The aesthetic response that artistic theatre elicits is said to consist of a balance of empathy and distance. The spectator is invited to respond not with total involvement which leads to practical action, but with detached, imaginative participation.

Davis and Watkins' brief explanation is a typical one:

The concepts of empathy and aesthetic distance usually enter any discussion of the spectator's experience with an art form. For our purposes, empathy may be considered synonymous with identification, and aesthetic distance with the spectator's awareness of the non-actual nature of the art form. 5

Empathy, it seems, should be balanced by distance, or a "gap between full identification with a stage event and full realization that it is merely a stage event," 6 leading the spectator to a response that is non-practical and terminal, an end in itself.

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This feature of the aesthetic response is possible when the spectator does not confuse illusion with reality. He may respond as if the stage events are real precisely because he has the full guarantee that they are not. He is able to become empathically involved because his involvement is simultaneously removed from the practical, personal, and utilitarian world in which he physically remains.

Writers generally agree that naivété or ignorance may render indistinguishable the stage world and the playgoer's world of reality. This would explain the uncontrolled fear and excitement that frequently characterize children's initial theatre experiences. The adult spectator, however, can also be duped. Distance permits illusion while insuring the audience against the kind of deception that could encourage practical responses. As Albright, Halstead,  

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7Apparenty distant relations of Fielding's Partridge still exist in theatre audiences. Classic examples that are perhaps fictional include the goldminer who dashed onstage to save the heroine from the villain's clutches and the jealous man who found the Othello-Desdemona-Iago triangle unbearable. In the present decade, fans of television's Perry Mason and Ben Casey reportedly have treated character and actor as one: Raymond Burr was invited to plead a real defendant's case and Vincent Edwards was called to diagnose an ailment. An amusing anecdote, recorded as an actual incident, that points up similar confusion appears in Walter Kerr's The Theatre in Spite of Itself (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), pp. 316-317: "A Shakespeare buff of our acquaintance reports that when he attended a performance of King Lear in Central Park, on a clear, starry night, he was distracted by a fidgety lady beside him. At the beginning of Lear's mad scene, which was accompanied by flashes of man-made lightning and stentorian claps of backstage thunder, the woman stared querulously at the sky, dug into her purse, extracted one of those collapsible plastic rain hats, and wore it through the remainder of the scene."
and Mitchell note, the spectator's "enjoyment depends not only on the presence of the strengths of an illusion but on the influence of various elements working against actual deception." Basic elements, extrinsic to the play itself, that prevent deception include

... the nature of the architecture, the seating arrangement, and the decorations that proclaim the fictional quality of the coming performance. The theatre programs, the gongs calling the audience to attention, the dimming lights, the curtain—all prepare for an illusion that is controlled. But when the play begins, the spectator is confronted with the sight of human forms, generally moving in patterns he can reduplicate in life, often voicing comments in language he might use, subject to conflicts he has or could encounter, in surroundings not ostensibly unlike his own. If the mirror is held so closely up to nature and the audience is yet expected to remain detached, thereby gaining aesthetic pleasure, some additional measures must be employed. The solution generally lies in formal properties and conventions, both of which contribute significantly to a detached viewing of the play.

According to John Dietrich, the most important distancing factor in a theatre production and one that is not bound to a particular style of presentation is the director's "concern for the

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9 Ibid., p. 135.
imaginative whole."¹⁰ Even in the most realistic play, the spectator encounters a kind of selectivity and arrangement that results in an ordered, formal design which reality lacks. This concern for the imaginative whole sends to the spectator silent messages about careful planning and control. The parts are integrated and nothing is haphazard. The control can, of course, be lost and distance thereby destroyed. Such an incident occurred in a production of *Seventh Heaven*:

... two sisters are called upon to tussle at the head of some steps. Diane is the heroine; Nana, her sister, is a villainess. During the struggle, Nana pushes Diane so that she falls down the flight of stairs. In the production in mind, the fall was rehearsed with great care... . . . The impression of a bad fall was perfectly maintained, yet the fall was so gracefully accomplished that the audience was subconsciously aware that it belonged as a part of the play. The spectator was able to maintain his contemplative attitude. . . . He saw . . . Diane, the character in the play, fall; and he hated Nana, also a character, for her cruelty. At one performance the actress who was playing Nana pushed too hard and Diane missed the first handhold on the banister. The actress playing Diane took a terrific tumble down the stairs, hitting her head sharply on the bottom step. Instantaneously, the illusion of the fall was broken. The spectators were no longer able to contemplate the action of the play. They lost their subjective attitude and became objectively analytical. They saw the actress rather than the character tumble down the stairs. They turned to their neighbors with concern as to whether the actress had been hurt. The aesthetic distance usually present during the scene was gone.¹¹

Selectivity and arrangement are also reflected in an ordered, structured plot, in the actor's elimination of irrelevant and distracting details from the performance, in the director's


¹¹Ibid., p. 52. Reprinted with permission of Prentice-Hall, Inc.
carefully planned composition of stage pictures and in obvious color combinations in sets and costumes.

Theatrical conventions include other means by which the production achieves distance. While conventions are subject to various interpretations, they are commonly used to signify the acceptable absence of a one-to-one ratio between the real and the dramatized. Masks in the Greek theatre were conventional; so too was the audience seated on the eighteenth century stage. So viewed, conventions constitute distancing devices. Within the drama, poetic dialogue, asides, familiar plots, the heroic mood, and remoteness of the fictional environment are labeled conventions; formalism, theatricalism, or stylization in the setting and costumes styled after dress of an historical period are conventional; and "the impersonative, non-communicative attitude of the actor" conventionalizes actuality. These so-called conventions are (1) deviations from reality to which the audience assents and (2) devices which keep them from confusing the theatre illusion with actuality.


13Dolman, The Art of Acting, p. 29.

Conventions act to provide distance even in arena productions in which spectators are drawn into marked intimacy with the performers. Other members of the audience seated directly across the acting area, the unmasked lighting apparatus, and the actors’ aisle exits and entrances remind the spectator that he is in the theatre.\textsuperscript{15}

Some theatre practices that Dolman believes unfortunately destroy distance, include applause at the end of scenes, curtain calls, chatter between acts and certain casting practices. Of the latter, he asserts that the star system makes detachment difficult because the spectator watches a personality, not a character. Similarly, the repertory company invites the regular playgoer to compare the actor’s current role with those he played in the past. In the amateur production, the spectator sees his personal acquaintance, and such knowledge may preclude his responding to the character of a fictional world.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Albright, Halstead, and Mitchell, p. 266.

\textsuperscript{16} Dolman, \textit{The Art of Play Production}, pp. 57-62. A letter printed in the "Dear Abby" column indicates that Dolman may be correct. "Withhold My Name" wrote: "What do you think of a minister who would direct a play and take a leading part in this play in which he portrayed a drunk who cursed and took the name of our Lord in vain? . . . If he hadn't been our clergyman I wouldn't have minded so much. How can he justify breaking the Third Commandment?" Abby answers that the minister, not the woman, erred: "Your clergyman should have realized that first and foremost he is a minister—not an actor. If he wanted to act in a play, he should have selected one in which his role would have been in keeping with the dignity of the office." Baton Rouge \textit{State-Times}, December 5, 1960.
Dolman, like several of his colleagues, follows an "either-or" line of reasoning. He seems to believe that anything which calls attention to the realistic details of the imaginary situation is destructive of the aesthetic experience. The non-practical aesthetic experience is possible only if the aesthetic object, the play, curbs practical thoughts, emotions, and actions. Furthermore, if the members of an audience are enjoying an aesthetic experience, they are in a non-fluctuating distanced position. In short, a spectator is either distanced and appropriately responsive or he is not.

John Gassner, on the other hand, asserts that members of the audience "shuttle" and furthermore, that many of the occurrences to which Dolman and others take objection in no way damage an aesthetic experience. While he does not suggest that the occurrences are artistic, he insists that they are pleasurable and perhaps not inartistic. Commenting on the duality of theatre, Gassner writes:

As spectators in the theatre, we make use of a built-in mechanism comparable to a shuttle, which enables us to move back and forth between the planes of reality and theatre. . . . We can focus on 'real life' (that is, succumb to the illusion of reality), at one point in the performance, and soon thereafter respond to a thoroughly theatrical effect which we know to be 'theatre' rather than 'real life.' Also, we can have the experience of feeling an action to be 'real' and 'theatrical' at the same time. . . . When esthetic distance has been established at a performance of Hamlet, I may feel the death of Hamlet deeply, tragically; but I do not feel it with the immediacy . . .
that would make me want to run up onto the stage and administer first aid.\textsuperscript{17}

Distance, Gassner continues, may owe as much to the spectator's deliberate intent as to the mechanics of the production. He explains:

One may go somewhat further and maintain that the esthetic distance was there from the moment the curtain rose because the mechanism that established the distance already existed in my sensorium. I came to the theatre prepared to detach myself from the experience lest it engross me to the point where my capacity for criticism, my physical safety, or my sense of personal dignity might suffer. . . . The spectator can turn his empathy on and off, so to speak. He can derive gratification both from identification with the actor as a momentarily real person in real-life action, and from observation of the actor as the performer of a feat of acting.\textsuperscript{18}


\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 211.
Dolman's desire to eliminate in the theatre those very features which Gassner finds pleasurable is understandable if one recalls theatre trends these writers were in a position to observe. When Dolman formulated his ideas on play production, educational theatre was just beginning to establish itself across the country. Professional theatre in the United States in 1928 finally showed signs of catching up with the art theatres of Europe, and in both playwriting and staging the most meritorious work was serious, realistic drama. Sincerity and consistency, pleas that run throughout Dolman's book, established themselves in a theatre that had previously banked on spectacles, star displays, and echoes of the well-made play.

Important to note is the fact that Dolman's book defends theatre as an art by attaching to it aesthetic principles held in esteem at the time he was writing. It was important that aesthetic experiences, including those theatre offered, be clearly distinguished from other kinds of human activity. There was no room, in large part or small, for features in the art object or in the perception of it that were unaesthetic.

Gassner, after more than three decades of playgoing, accounts for its pleasures in an age when frank theatricalism is as much a part of the playgoer's frame of reference as realism. Instead of instructing, he describes, admitting that some of these pleasures are not, strictly speaking, aesthetic, but neither are they destructive of such experiences, largely because the playgoer, like the theatre itself, enjoys a kind of dual existence.
In a theatre in which he is invited to respond with both empathy and detachment, the spectator is ordinarily assisted in the latter by some of the following features: architectural arrangement that separates him from the stage action; overtures, programs, curtains, and a darkened auditorium that announce a theatre environment; a script that may include metrical dialogue, asides, remote environment; and on the stage, unrealistic settings and period costumes. And regardless of style of presentation or form of the drama, the spectator is distanced by formal means. Unlike reality and the practical responses it encourages, the composition and arrangement of sounds and sights on the stage communicate a selectivity, order, and control that enable members of an audience to respond to a fictional, imaginative world.

Considered positively rather than negatively, the play as an aesthetic object results in a terminal experience. As Jessup explains, such an experience is not a means to a social or an ethical end, but an end in itself:

To say that the play is essentially an aesthetic object implies that it is to be understood and enjoyed as something of intrinsic rather instrumental value. It is to hold that a play is more like a cigar, a highball, or a piece of music than like an aspirin, a lawnmower, a scientific generalization, or a sermon. It is a thing to be experienced rather than a tool to be used, an analgesic to be resorted to for relief of pain, an explanation to be understood, or an exhortation to be heeded. . . . The principle here in mind is a general aesthetic principle applying to all art in which there is a human content. It is the principle— or strictly, one side of the principle—of 'psychical distance,' first formulated by Edward Bullough in 1913 ['sic']. It is roughly that a work of art fails as a work of art
when it engages the spectator's real-life interests, practical or theoretical, so intimately that he gets worked up about them.19

By those writers who claim that theatre should provide a non-practical, terminal aesthetic experience, an appropriate degree of distance is regarded as essential. Dramatic theorist Oscar Brockett summarizes the traditional viewpoint of both positive and negative sides of distancing in theatre.

Another distinguishing characteristic of art is its manipulation of imagination. Although it may present human experience, an art experience is clearly not the same as a life experience. . . . we view a play with what Coleridge called a "willing suspension of disbelief." . . . One important qualification must be added, however: we are not moved to action by what we see on the stage as we would be by a life action. We sit absorbed in watching one man kill another, but we make no attempt to rescue the victim or to call the police. This is a vicarious experience, one we can enter into without the demand for either decision or action. We watch in a kind of suspended animation, a quality sometimes called 'esthetic distance,' since we seem to be far enough away from the event to enter a state of detached contemplation, which removes us from the events.20

II. The Destruction of Distance

The basic goals of theatre are subject to a different interpretation by a number of playwrights and critics in mid-twentieth century theatre. Instead of detached involvement, the attitude previously encouraged, the newer relationship is one of


either total detachment or immediate participation. Interpreted by those writers considered in the previous section, either, carried to an extreme, results in the destruction of distance.

One of the trends in contemporary theatre, writes Oscar Büdel,

... appears to point toward a destruction of aesthetic distance with reference to the spectators, thereby reducing or eliminating the tension between actor and spectator, between stage and audience, which seems to be a *conditio sine qua non* for the theatre.\(^{21}\)

Büdel asserts that the expressionists' revolt against realism and naturalism did the theatre a service by eliminating deception; yet their departures eventually led to a spectator-stage relationship more inartistic than deception. The result in a number of plays, Büdel writes, is the destruction of distance, achieved by either underdistancing or overdistancing. Both, he claims are incompatible with aesthetic experiences:

> It seems ironic that Expressionist practices as they were applied to theatre should have brought about a loss of distance, for the first steps of the movement went in the right direction of no longer tricking the spectator with the deception that it is 'reality' which he sees; on another plane, however, it moved beyond its original emphasis of the play-character of theatre and engulfed a much larger realm than it perhaps set out to do. Thus, contemporary dramatic practice has striven more and more to decrease aesthetic distance to the point of almost eliminating it; and the propagators of phrases such as 'activating the audience,' 'restoring the unity of audience and stage,' even those among them who pretend to arrive at their conclusions by means of historical considerations, misconceive the nature of theatre. On the other hand, we observe to a lesser degree, a

\(^{21}\)Oscar Büdel, "Contemporary Theatre and Aesthetic Distance," *PMLA*, LCVI (June, 1961), 277.
tendency to overdistance as in Brecht's theatre; but this in the end achieves the same results as does its counterpart: loss, destruction of aesthetic distance.22

In practice, playwrights such as Jean Paul Sartre, Luigi Pirandello, Bertolt Brecht, Jack Gelber, Jean Genêt, and Harold Pinter confirm Büdel's analysis of specific methods by which distance is considerably increased or reduced, methods generally absent in the traditional drama. In published criticism, theorists such as Brecht, Sartre, Ursula Jarvis, Henry Goodman, Herbert Blau, John Gassner, and Stanley Eskin also agree with Büdel's description of the results of these methods. However, on a major point, the evaluation of the results, many of these writers strongly disagree with Büdel's judgment. A consideration of the specific devices that lead to the destruction of distance and a description of the assumptions and justifications for their use constitute the remainder of this chapter.

Underdistancing

Underdistancing in the theatre generally occurs when the gulf between the spectator in his world of reality and the actor in his world of imagination diminishes or disappears. The underdistanced spectator does not hold the drama at arm's length; he participates. In short, his experience is no longer non-practical. Such participation may be encouraged by the structure of the play itself, by production techniques explicit in the script, and by the architectural arrangement of the theatre in which the production is presented.

22Ibid., p. 278. Reprinted with permission of PMLA.
In a majority of dramas of the past, selectivity and arrangement that result in a formal ordering of the whole play, reflected in the causal relationship of events, effect distance. By contrast, dramatists of several more recent plays shun such order. In Priestley's *Time and the Conways*, the normal order of acts one, two, and three can be reversed at will, and in Harold Pinter's short plays, as well as *The Birthday Party*, the spectator's initial impression is one of having missed the beginning, and at the close, one of incompleted action. Thus, the unified plot, normally anticipated, never materializes. The cohesive beginning-middle-end is non-existent.

Realized fully only in production, the play-within-a-play technique, frequently employed, is said to diminish distance by creating doubt in the spectator's mind as to the relative reality of his own world when compared to the worlds of the external play and the internal play, particularly if either of the dramatizations gives the appearance of spontaneity. The classical example, Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, raises doubts in the spectator's mind about any sure dividing line between the reality of his own world, the world in which the six characters search for a playwright while actors assemble for a rehearsal, and the world which the "actors" of the play-within-the-play create. Pirandello carries the device a step further and encourages even more emotional participation in *Tonight We Improvise*. Büdel comments on what he considers the disturbing effect of the play:

When the 'spectator-actors,' distributed throughout the real audience, begin their play in discussing the goings-on behind the curtain, they simulate and insinuate to the real audience that they are indeed part of it. Then Dr.
Hinkfuss, who has just entered the theatre, rushes down the aisle to address the 'audience (the simulated and the real one). In bickering with the simulated audience (seated among the real one), he insinuates again the whole atmosphere upon the real audience. This is heightened to full irony in the scene where Dr. Hinkfuss tries to quiet the simulated audience by saying that he could not possibly answer all the questions asked of him while the play was going on, and then asserts to one of the 'spectator-actors' who objects that the play really has not begun yet that it indeed has. This might seem to be the non plus ultra in reaching a state of almost complete identification of audience and actors, thereby reducing aesthetic distance to a level where any critical sense is eclipsed.\(^{23}\)

Therefore, while Dr. Hinkfuss is identifying himself with the real audience, he is "elevating the audience to his level as actors in the external play. All this . . . makes active participants of us, and we are no longer watching so much as we are emotionally participating."\(^{24}\)

Jean Genêt's *The Maids* also contains an internal play technique, blurring the line between imaginative events and reality. Gassner finds that it "plunges into the depths of human anguish, and the theatrical game having been carried far enough ceases to be, in its effect upon both the characters and ourselves, a game. It becomes reality. . . ."\(^{25}\) Similar effects are achieved in Jack Gelber's *The Connection* in which actors portraying dope addicts leave their places among the real audience to become actors in an improvisation. The result, Eskin claims, is a complete shattering of illusion:

\(^{23}\)Ibid., p. 282. Reprinted with permission of PMLA.

\(^{24}\)Ibid., p. 281.

The whole play is presented as an improvisation by real junkies; a delicate ambiguity is established in the minds of the audience as to how much of this is 'real.' While attention is constantly drawn to the theatricality of the medium, the result is not to make the action seem less real but more real. Theatre expands into real life: the audience seems to participate in the play; characters speak from the back of the auditorium and walk down the aisles; a man gets up from the audience insisting that he paid one of the junkies five dollars to tell a story; another man faints when Leach gives himself a 'fix;' and Sam even walks about during intermission taking up a collection for his heroin fund. The illusion created—very successfully—is that there is not theatre but real life, in short that there is no illusion.26

Hence, by bringing the audience into its pretense, the very theatricality that freely admits the theatre as theatre, encompasses the audience and invites them to become fellow actor-spectators, eliminating distance.

Contemporary theatre architecture with its thrust, wrap around, and arena stages also plays a role in decreasing distance. The proscenium arch that formerly served to frame the fictive event is often eliminated, and another barrier that earlier contributed to the psychical separation of stage and audience is removed.27

How do writers justify practices that reject the fundamental separation of art and reality? Chiefly with two answers. Such theatre is said to provide (1) an accurate reflection of a chaotic world in which reality is often frighteningly unreal and (2) an intense emotional experience for the audience.


Overdistancing

For quite different reasons, playwrights Bertolt Brecht and Jean-Paul Sartre champion the cause of an extremely distanced theatre experience. To Sartre—and he insists that other French playwrights share his viewpoint—theatre should be "a great collective, religious phenomenon."28 Facing a heterogeneous group of spectators, the playwright's responsibility is to "fuse all the disparate elements in the auditorium into a single unity by awakening in the recesses of their spirits the things which all men of a given epoch and community care about."29 The theatre as rite addresses itself to "terms of their most general preoccupations, dispelling their anxieties in the form of myths which anyone can understand and feel deeply."30 Forging myths, Sartre continues, involves more distancing than what the traditional theatre or the highly theatrical productions of his own day contain, as it aims to

... project for the audience an enlarged and enhanced image of its own sufferings, our playwrights turn their backs on the constant preoccupation of the realists, which is to reduce as far as possible the distance which separates the spectator from the spectacle. In ... The Taming of the Shrew, there were steps going from the stage to the auditorium so that certain characters could go down among the orchestra seats. We are very far away


29 Ibid., p. 140.

30 Ibid., p. 139.
from such concepts and methods. To us a play should not seem too familiar. Its greatness derives from its social and, in a sense, religious functions: it must remain a rite; even as it speaks to the spectators of themselves, it must do so in a tone and with a constant reserve of manner which, far from breeding familiarity, will increase the distance between play and audience.31

Sartre adds that distance is achieved in these plays by characters who are deliberately stripped of all but their moral choices and dialogue that is not conversational, but "sparse and extremely tense."32 For production, Sartre advocates a strict division between stage and audience and a restraint in delivery that additionally removes spectator from actor. Distancing, he concludes, is essential to the rite of drama.

Examining this existentialist philosopher's essay and plays, Richard Vowles asks, "But is anything like 'distancing' actually accomplished in Sartre's plays?"33 Vowles answers affirmatively but suggests that the source of the distance is unlike that which Sartre described. The Flies, No Exit, The Victors, and Dirty Hands, Vowles writes, contain a distancing device that is ethical and derived from the hero, a "forlorn and callous exile, not the exile whose isolation awakens sympathy,"34 a figure who alienates spectators by his "definite antipathy toward the community."35 Identification with such a protagonist Vowles thinks unlikely.

31Ibid., p. 141.
32Ibid., p. 142.
34Ibid.
35Ibid.
Vowles' concluding judgment is unfavorable. Sartre, he asserts, distances his audience greatly by his choice of leading figures. While hoping spectators will heed the archetypal significance of the drama, the playwright leaves them "to construct a private ritual against a backdrop of nausea and despair." According to Vowles, distance is a function of existentialist theatre, but one that is highly unsatisfying and incompatible with Sartre's ultimate objective.

Compared to Sartre's concept of distance, Brecht's ideas are both more fully formulated and include more specific directions for application in the theatre.

Brecht, a prolific writer of both dramatic theory and literature, was an avowed Communist, who strongly believed in the "productivity and malleability" of the masses. The purpose of theatre, he thought, was to enlighten and activate the masses to social

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36 Ibid., p. 219.


revolt. A theatre audience cannot be enlightened and thereby realize the need for social change if they sit in the auditorium hypnotized by the regular rhythm of events and speeches, closely identifying with the characters' travail, following with eager anticipation the unfolding of the action, or momentarily disbelieving the unreal illusion before them. Instead, they must critically evaluate; they must be distanced. The task touches techniques of playwrighting and production, inextricably connected in Brecht's scheme.

Both writing and staging contribute to Verfremdungseffekt, translated as alienation, separation, estrangement, or in French, distanciation.39 The spectator is separated from those elements that might distract him from critical judgment and action. He is not reminded of his own environment, for both event and locale are "historified." The suspenseful plot does not occupy him, for he is informed of its resolution in advance by a narrator, character, or news flashed on a screen. The characters do not elicit his full sympathy or identification for no character is hero or heroine. Any tendency the spectator might have toward immersing himself in either plot or character is quickly thwarted by interruptions of song, film, or direct commentary by the actor as actor.

Production techniques designed to distance the spectator include music, its source visible and its harmonic mood in sharp contrast to its lyrics; filmstrips or slides depicting events in

39Esslin, 125.
sharp contrast to a character's empty generalizations; strong lighting that startles the audience; and costumes unmistakably theatrical, unlike any garb a viewer could have seen on the streets.

Brecht's most famous distancing technique is a style of acting that alienates the actor from his character and consequently, the spectator from a figure with whom he might empathize. The actor, according to Brecht, "demonstrates" or "quotes." He does not represent or imitate to an extent any greater than that of a bystander recalling the behavior of someone he saw in a traffic accident. Like the audience, he is critically aware of contradictions and weaknesses in the character. Such a "style of acting . . . makes a circumstance recognizable and at the same time makes it seem strange." Parallel to the episodic plot with its constant interruptions, the actor interrupts the character with his own critical reactions. He presents "events of considerable passionateness, but his delivery remains unimpassioned," he "places himself at a distance from the role he plays." To the actors in his plays, he recommends a rehearsal period in which they exchange roles, getting a clearer view of the drama's conflicts, and read their lines in third rather than first person.

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43 Brecht, "Chinese Acting," p. 70.

44 Ibid.
Finally, the lack of apparent unity in the production as a whole, Brecht argues, will provide distance. The play is "interpreted, produced, and exhibited" by each element in production—acting, scenery, make-up, costume, music and dance. The goal of each element is the same, but they function "without actually giving up their independence." Making their independent contributions, they "oppose being merged with the rest;" their combination results in "reciprocal alienation."

Henry Goodman and Herbert Blau attest to Brecht's success in distancing the spectator. Goodman asserts that distance in Brechtian productions enables an audience to view the play ironically, and Blau comments that the play "puts us at a distance from what comes easily or is too familiar; as an emotional corrective, it will not let us be comfortable by forgetting ourselves and where we are." Blau commends the resultant rhetorical quality. Büdel disagrees, maintaining that Brecht achieves . . . a loss of distance through over-distancing. What we get . . . is a theatre from which all tension and antinomy has been removed, and which is demonstrating situations of a

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46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., p. 40.
mere factual nature and relationship. . . . What is left of the art value of such an institution is questionable . . . .51

Although his plays are frequently performed, no evidence exists that his "methods ever roused the audience to a militantly Marxist point of view."52 Ironically, his plays are infrequently presented in the Communist countries where the usual fare is that same theatre of illusion that Brecht repeatedly condemned.

Brecht's ideas on distance were, according to Ursula Jarvis, anticipated by the nineteenth century German dramatist, Otto Ludwig. "Distance," he wrote, "begets distance, as passionate treatment begets passionate response."53 Ludwig, who also believed in theatre's serving a didactic function, cited a number of distancing techniques, most of which Brecht later employed: parody, mixture of comedy and tragedy, long speeches in verse, expository scenes, characters in a variety of moods, ideas interpreted from a variety of viewpoints, a "disinterested critique"54 from some character and a display of the actors' versatile techniques. The latter means is not endorsed by Brecht, but, Jarvis writes, it does serve to keep the spectator from being mesmerized by the characters' problems.

51 Budel, pp. 286-287.
52 Esslin, p. 143.
54 Ibid., p. 319.
The spectator, properly distanced according to Sartre and Brecht, and overdistanted according to Büdel, does not mistake the theatre for reality. He stands apart from the drama because the characters are distasteful or partial, the acting is restrained to the point of "looking in" on the roles and clearly evincing the real self, or the combination of production elements is shockingly unexpected. Sartre claims for the distanced viewer an awareness of the ritual significance of drama, and Brecht envisions him productively and critically engaged.

III. Summary

The theatre-going public is currently invited to assume distinctly different relationships to the produced play. In describing these relationships, or advocating one to the exclusion of others, writers in theatre frequently use the term distance. The spectator is supposedly able to enjoy a terminal, non-practical aesthetic experience if his distance is balanced by empathy; he engages in an intensely emotional experience if his distance is diminished and empathy increased to the point of participation; and his awareness, conscious or subconscious, is increased and his experience cognitive if his distance is increased to the point of excluding empathy.

IV. Implications for Oral Interpretation

Discussions of distance by theatre critics are related to interpretative reading in at least five respects:

(1) In the conventional theatre experience of this century, the aim of production has been a response characterized
by a balance between empathy and distance, the latter achieved by both subtle and obvious devices that announce the "unreality" of the play. These devices of dramatic production are not ordinarily present in a reading situation.

When readers seek to entertain large theatre audiences in a theatrical environment replete with raised stage, decor, and darkened auditorium, does the distancing built into the situation make it necessary for the reader to make broader inducements to empathy?

(2) When the art of the play merges with reality, distance disappears and the spectator tends to become confused. Such confusion is deliberate in some plays.

Does not the reader who visibly remains a member of the audience's real environment but makes the imaginative real by the use of literal movement and detailed characterization produce confusion that is no part of the text he interprets?

(3) The devices Brecht calls "alienating" may be useful techniques in interpreters' staged readings.

Do not many readers' theatre productions suggest that the devices admittedly invite detachment, but that this very detachment induces from the audience imaginative participation that is both cognitive and affective, an involvement that is not checked but of a different kind?
(4) Brecht's whole explanation of the detachment of the actor from the role might be used to clarify the role of reader as narrator, particularly if the narrator is undramatized.

Would Brecht's idea of the "third-person" (i.e., the narrator), rehearsal technique aid the reader who tends to underdistance?

(5) The reader's involvement with any one character is tempered by his obligation to vivify the entire selection.

Is not the Brechtian device of having actors switch roles to gain distance precisely what the reader does when interpreting much prose fiction?
Two ideas prompted this study: (1) the suggestion that a useful method for studying a term is "to analyze what it has signified to those who shaped its significance" and (2) the implication that the term distance, widely used in oral interpretation, is not employed with precision or uniformity.

The first question the study sought to answer was, "What do writers in oral interpretation mean by the term distance?" The answer is that they use it in a variety of related ways--to describe a quality in the literature students should choose for classroom reading, to define one of the standards of artistic performance, and to identify the relationships among reader, the speaker in a text, and listener.

A basic assumption in a majority of discussions about distance in oral interpretation publications is the belief that art and reality significantly differ and if the performance of literature is to be artistic, or even revelatory of literary art, a clear separation of the worlds of imagination and reality must be made. The reader does not present an imaginative world. He clearly retains his own identity in the same world of reality as that of the listener, but he invites an audience to participate imaginatively in the fictive world of the text, a participation for which he provides clues and symbols through clear and vivid
reading. The kind of participation which he hopes to induce is perhaps explained most clearly in J. R. R. Tolkien's "Tree and Leaf." Comparing literature to pictorial arts, Tolkien writes:

Literature works from mind to mind and is thus more progenitive. It is at once more universal and more poignantly particular. If it speaks of bread or wine or stone or tree, it appeals to the whole of these things, to their ideas; yet each hearer will give to them a peculiar personal embodiment in his imagination. . . . If a story says "he climbed a hill and saw a river in the valley below," the illustrator may catch, or nearly catch, his own vision of such a scene; but every hearer of the words will have his own picture, and it will be made out of all the hills and rivers and dales he has ever seen, but specially out of The Hill, The River, The Valley which were for him the first embodiment of the word.¹

Because the reader operates in the same real environment as that of the listeners, desiring to focus attention on the imaginative literature, he ordinarily refrains from behavior that would create confusion as to which plane he occupies. Most important, he gives close attention to form in his performance. His audible and visible behavior are marked by selectivity, arrangement, and control, and these features subtly but sharply distinguish his behavior from the haphazard and the natural. The reader's techniques for distancing are not limited to his performance of the selection. By means of an introduction he encourages listeners to detach themselves from the practical, and by his choice of selection he requests their engagement in a work that can be productively imaginative. His spatial separation from the listeners and his use of a manuscript are also regarded as aids in distancing.

A minority of writers on interpretation treat distance as a term for identifying relationships between the reader and speakers within the text. The fact that these writers do not consider distance a standard of performance and the fact that some of the most recent writers of textbooks do not treat distance at all suggest a possible change in primary goals. When interpretation is regarded first of all as a performing art, the pedagogical techniques designed to achieve that goal generally emphasize the idea of distance as a standard in performance. When the audience's response takes second place to the student's performance of a text as literary study, the student's full engagement with the literature becomes foremost and concern with distance and other fixed standards assume secondary interest, if any. A related factor that may explain the absence of discussions of distance in some of the more recent textbooks is a belief that the student reader's problem in performing literature is more often an inability to become engaged than one of insufficient distance. Hence, in either communication of or realization of a selection, the elusive limits suggested by the term distance may serve undesirably to inhibit the reader.

The second question raised at the beginning of this study was, "How is distance interpreted by writers in the related areas of aesthetics, psychology, literary criticism, and theatre?" Evidence supports the assertion that most of these writers' use of the term is not dissimilar to those statements in the literature of oral interpretation. A vast majority of the comments about
distance approximate those ideas expressed by Edward Bullough in his now celebrated essay.

Bullough joined the ranks of those who viewed art as occupying an important and a unique place in man's life, a place different from his moral, practical, or scientific pursuits. Art, he said, is autonomous and an end in itself. Bullough wanted to discover the features that desirably characterize those experiences men have with art objects. His parallel inquiry was to identify the means by which an artist transforms materials so that they elicit aesthetic responses. The answer to both questions lay for Bullough in the idea of distance. By this term, he meant that when a person appreciates or creates an aesthetic object, he is at least temporarily separated from his practical self, the removal permitting a more intense object-centered experience. An aesthetic response, he insisted, lay somewhere between the undesirable extremes of over- and underdistancing, the former characterized by apathy or incredulity, the latter by discomfort or embarrassment.

A number of aestheticians subscribe to Bullough's idea and attempt to amplify it. For example, Dawson emphasizes the importance of the percipient's attitude while Langer focuses on the artist's responsibility to infuse the object with distance. Michelis elaborates on the temporal and spatial separation that contribute to distance, Langfeld categorizes the means of achieving distance unique to each of the arts, and Chadhury considers distance as achieved through de-individuation.
A smaller group of writers in aesthetics disagree with Bullough's assumptions and reasoning. Margolis questions the validity of any special mode of perception applicable to all types of art, Dewey writes that distance is mistakenly ascribed to the most meaningful experiences of art, and Levich doubts that the term actually identifies anything significant.

Earlier in this century, following Bullough's exposition closely, a number of psychologists used the term distance. However, current theories of gestalt, psychoanalysis, and behaviorism replaced speculative inquiries into principles such as distance. Kris' incorporation of distance into his psychoanalytic approach to art appears to be the only major exception.

Many literary critics state or imply agreement with Bullough, proceeding to point out devices within particular selections whereby distance is achieved. Other literary critics use the term to describe the objectivity of an author or to identify a prescribed method of reading literature. The assumptions on which the former use is predicated are challenged by Booth, Haegarty, and Walcutt, and the latter by Gerber. In the criticism of prose fiction, critics frequently apply the term distance in distinctions between narrator, characters, author, and reader.

Most writers in theatre criticism follow the ideas of Bullough (via Langfeld and Dolman) closely, expressing the belief that distance is requisite to aesthetic responses in the theatre. Contemporary developments in playwriting and production, however, indicate deliberate attempts to underdistance, thus removing the sure boundary between the real and the imaginative, and to overdistance,
evoking a critical stance that precludes emotional involvement. Budel is among the writers who interpret these current practices as patently inartistic and Gassner among those who endorse them as vitalizing to the theatre and pleasurable to the spectator.

This study's final question, "What implications do the statements about distance in the publications of other disciplines have for both the literary study and the performance encompassed in oral interpretation?" yields some answers and raises more questions. First, the statements in the literature of related areas do furnish elaboration of the idea and the theoretical assumptions on which it is based. With the exceptions of Crocker and Eich, Dolman, and Geiger, writers in oral interpretation tend to apply rather than explain the term and the theory on which it is based must be gleaned largely through inference.

The chief contribution of the comments on distance by writers in related areas is incentive for additional study. Some aestheticians argue that distance is an attitude elected by a percipient. If this observation is true, could listeners in interpretative reading classes be taught to distance the performances they observe?

In works in literary criticism interpreters find discussions of a text's distancing devices, which, if emphasized in performance, should aid the audience in achieving distance. The recognized techniques include archaic syntax, formal diction, regular rhythm, past tense, commentary by the author, choric scenes and characters, and remote subjects. Very likely there are others. Also, the distinctions the literary critics make, particularly Booth,
concerning narrators in literary texts should be of particular value to the reader who uses distance as an identifying term.

Psychologists remind the interpretation critic rather forcibly of the untested conclusions to which he most often resorts. While an electrocardiogram is unlikely to tell one much about the complexities of aesthetic response, the behaviorists' doubts about the value of purely speculative remarks may at least prompt the design of structured introspective studies, the results of which could be of some value. For example, a study might be designed to discover if responses to potentially under- or over-distanced selections were significantly altered by specific kinds of introductions. Other studies might seek to test the hypotheses that distance is influenced by length of selection, acquaintance with the reader, size of room, size of audience, or the medium by which the reading is transmitted.

Theatre criticism yields a reminder of the flexibility of conventions and the possibility of assimilating new ones. When the purposes of theatre change, so do its methods, but these methods too in time are absorbed into conventions. If the contemporary theatre is abolishing its old conventions by the frank admission of theatricality and the rejection of the fourth wall, audiences will come to accept the theatricality not as a threat to their safety, but as a part of the pleasure of playgoing and the proper means of vivifying a script with unusual demands. The director of readers' theatre may similarly employ techniques that demand a reader's relationship with an audience unlike that with the traditional play or the classroom reading. As he increases the number
of readers, utilizes the stage's raised platform, and separates the audience from the readers by illuminating the stage and darkening the auditorium, he may need to encourage less subtle techniques of delivery.

The discussions of distance in allied areas do not provide, any more than those in oral interpretation do, any clear distinction as to exactly what is distanced in the performance of literature. Perhaps it would be clearer to speak of a reader's distance from the literature, which admits of considerable variety and is largely dependent on his understanding of the literary text and his analysis of a particular audience's attitude toward a particular text. The listener's distance could be described as distance not from the literature, but from the literature as performed. So the author's distance, or the distance with which he infuses a given work, affects the listener through the reader's performance. And regardless of the qualities within the work, an inept oral performance can evoke under- or overdistancing in an audience. Conversely, examples exist of performances of undistanced literature by skillful readers, performances that elicited responses characterized by neither apathy nor discomfort.

Are there in oral reading legitimate occasions for response marked by over- or underdistancing? Perhaps the typically restrained poet-reading represents an attempt to overdistance the listener, making him critically aware of certain formal features of the text. And perhaps the public speaker who incorporates a literary text to support his ideas would be well advised to strive for underdistancing if his goals are immediate, practical responses.
This investigation does not suggest that oral interpretation critics abandon the term distance. Rather, it emphasizes the need for clearer explanations of exactly whose distance is in question, more detailed descriptions of the assumptions on which the term's use is based, and explicit distinctions between the term's descriptive and normative application. Then the term can possibly be useful in accounting, in part, for the dynamics of the oral performance of literature when the text, interpretative artist, and audience converge.
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