

2003

In the Wings without a Cue: How Industrialization Upstaged America's Actors and How They Can Re-take Center Stage

Jay H. Skriletz

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Acting Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), and the [Theatre History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Skriletz, Jay H., "In the Wings without a Cue: How Industrialization Upstaged America's Actors and How They Can Re-take Center Stage" (2003). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 684.
<http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/etd/684>

This Open-Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine.

**IN THE WINGS WITHOUT A CUE: HOW INDUSTRIALIZATION
UPSTAGED AMERICA'S ACTORS AND HOW
THEY CAN RE-TAKE CENTER STAGE**

By

Jay H. Skriletz

B.A. University of Maine, 1984

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

(in Theatre)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

May, 2003

Advisory Committee:

Jane Snider, Associate Professor of Theatre, Advisor

Dr. Sandra Hardy, Associate Professor of Theatre

Dr. Thomas Duchesneau, Professor of Economics

Dr. Nathan Godfried, Professor of History

**IN THE WINGS WITHOUT A CUE: HOW INDUSTRIALIZATION
UPSTAGED AMERICA'S ACTORS AND HOW
THEY CAN RE-TAKE CENTER STAGE**

By Jay H. Skriletz

Thesis Advisor: Associate Professor Jane Snider

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
(in Theatre)
May, 2003

The social, political, and economic forces of industrialization have transformed the actors' art, especially the relationship between the performer and the audience. When the consolidation of theatre ownership superceded the centuries old tradition of actor-management, the transmutation of actors into commodities commenced. With the ascendancy of film as the dominant mode of theatrical production this transformation has accelerated until the creative interaction of living performers and audience is not merely an anomalous curiosity: it is nearly extinct.

Industrialization has reduced the status of actors and their influence upon the workplace. Employment equilibrium has been distorted by the "star system" of production preferred by Hollywood: the rate of professional employment for actors is 15% on a weekly basis and 59% measured annually. Widely disparate rates of

compensation where the industry-wide average annual salary is less than \$10,000 while some individual performers with “clout” may earn more than \$20 million per film are acceptable. In search of the widest possible market, “industrialized” performing arts purposefully lower audiences’ expectations by relying upon formulaic dramatic texts and the over-use of spectacular effects.

In the twenty-first century, the consequence of industrialization to the performer will be doubly dangerous and pernicious. The capitalist system of economic organization is now global and seeks to minimize national differences and regional cultural individuality in an effort to create the broadest commodity markets. Technology is on the verge of digitally creating emotionally believable cinematic performances that threaten to widen the gulf between performers and audiences to a degree that challenges the very existence of live performing art. The financial rewards of the actors’ obsolescence may become too great for producers to ignore.

Many involved in the performing arts consider the situation dire, yet actors, whose ignorance of the labor history of the actors’ art in America has been deepened by the national prejudice against progressive unionism encouraged by the system, are generally not aware of how they came to suffer the status quo. The deteriorating economic situation of journeyman actors and moribund relationship with the audience is not accidental: it results from the business practiced by the owners of multi-national media conglomerates abetted by the stars who benefit so greatly from their dominance.

This cultural study shall reveal, through general research of American theatre history, that the Depression-era Works Progress Administration’s Federal Theatre Project presents an alternative production model that provides livelihood for actors and

inspiration for audiences. It shall reveal, by examining the economic scale and financial structures of the performing arts, especially movies, that there are adequate resources to fund such an alternative today. It shall examine how technology threatens the deep relationship between actors and their audiences, a relationship that, for now, continues to require actors. These resources, currently concentrated in movie distributors' fees, are traditionally negotiable as profit-participation for individual talent. This study shall propose that artists in the performing arts move beyond the business craft unionism encouraged by the conglomerate owners and embrace the unifying conceptions of progressive industrial unionism. Only then will performers gain the bargaining power to unlock these resources to build a new actors' theatre by negotiating industry-wide profit participation through a consortium of industry guilds and unions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....iv

Chapter

1. THEATRE ART OR ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS: AN OVERVIEW.....1

 Introduction.....1

 How the Business Model Shapes Audience Expectations.....4

 How the Business Model Limits Performers' Opportunity.....6

 Technology's Impact on the Art/Profit/Audience Matrix.....8

 Technology's Impact on Performance.....16

 What Is At Stake.....18

2. HISTORY PLAYS: THE INDUSTRIALIZATION OF ACTORS' LABOR.....20

 Acting In a Commodity Market: Stars and Widgets.....21

 When Actors Managed: The Origins of Mass Production and
 Markets in the Performing Arts.....25

 The Rule of the Syndicates: Market Consolidation.....28

 The Actors Respond: Union Organization.....31

 Strike and Settlement: The Basic Agreement and
 Standard Minimum Contract.....33

 Who's Left Out: What the Basic Agreement Doesn't Guarantee.....38

3.	WHEN THE FAT LADY SANG: THE FEDERAL THEATRE PROJECT.....	41
	The Federal Response to Economic Calamity.....	41
	The Real Issue: Distribution of Wealth	46
	Who's Left Out: What the Market Won't Provide.....	50
	Symbiosis Restored—Temporarily.....	55
4.	TRAGICOMIC ECONOMICS: FINANCIAL STRUCTURES IN THE	
	PERFORMING ARTS.....	59
	The Financial Portrait of Actors.....	60
	The Financial Structure of the Entertainment Business.....	62
	The Distribution of Profits and Performers' Compensation.....	64
	The Future: Promise or Peril.....	67
5.	THE PRODUCERS: ACTOR-MANAGEMENT REDUX.....	70
	Walking the Walk: Contemporary Union Militancy and Solidarity.....	70
	Talking the Talk: Redefining Union Along Progressive Models.....	74
	Finding Focus: Making a Future Requires a Past.....	78
	Taking Stage: An Actors' Theatre for Tomorrow—Today.....	80
	WORKS CITED.....	91
	BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR.....	97

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Film industry sources of revenue estimated, 1980 and 1995; major filmed entertainment companies in the U.S.; total not exact due to rounding.....	63
Table 2.2	Revenues and costs for a major theatrical release, circa 1992.....	66

Chapter 1

THEATRE ART OR ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS: AN OVERVIEW

Business, like theatre, is a creative endeavor in its own right. It, also like theatre, is a social construct, one that is motivated by human impulses. Those impulses that drive business, however they may differ from those that inspire the theatre, are ascendant in our time and not to be discounted. And while we may wish that the human impulses of theatrical art survive and even thrive, it is pointless to wish the business model away. It is equally pointless to hope for a return to the historical moment when the United States federal government financed a national theatre in the 1930's or pine for that somewhat less exciting effort in the 1960's when the federal and state governments together established, though hardly endowed, the National Endowment for the Arts and various state arts councils. Seeking to re-invent the relationships between artists and audiences, and between artists and business folk is, however, much to the point.

Introduction

In order to evaluate the performer/audience relationship in the twenty-first century, it is necessary to examine the economic structures of the acting profession today and gain an understanding of the truly gargantuan size of the entertainment industry. It is important to understand that the relationship between producers and artists has evolved from an entrepreneurial peer relationship among artists to a more hierarchical industrial model where capital dominates labor. A study of this evolving relationship through the Industrial Revolution into the present indicates that actors, like all creative artists in the

performing arts, e.g., the writers, directors, designers, musicians and craftspeople, are increasingly limited in their ability to influence the conditions under which they create. Examining the industry's transition from the prevalence of many actor-managed companies to the domination of a few multinational corporations will also lead to considerations of the distribution of profits within the industry. Such considerations beg the question of why the overwhelming majority of professionals who create the productions now receive such a paltry share of its annual earnings.

Of course, the means by which the workforce in the performing arts became organized must also be considered. Labor history is extremely convoluted, with many ideologies, many players and many struggles. Chaos might be the most distinguishing feature of labor organizing, while the inexorable consolidation of entertainment financing and a reliable, if at times shifty, solidarity among producers might be the most consistent hallmarks of the business. Within the entertainment industry, the rise of business unionism at the international level has led to the near demise of progressive social unionism at the local. Business unionists trade away members' political right to influence the conditions within their workplace in exchange for higher returns for their labor power. Social unionists see broader social issues of labor solidarity and industrial organization as underlying issues equally important as monetary compensation. Unfortunately, the producers' ability to exploit the tension between social altruism and individual aggrandizement has contributed as much to the current sad state of affairs as has producers' financial clout. This uneven distribution of compensation and employment opportunities, i.e. the star system, will also bear scrutiny, more for what opportunities it may afford the creative professions, acting among them, than towards furthering its

demise. No matter how unjust, the current system is not merely generally accepted but entrenched as a motivating force for those working within the industry.

It may instead prove more profitable to take a look at that moment in American theatre history when the Federal Theatre Project revealed a popular hunger for theatrical art in America and debunked the myth that Americans seek only entertainment and diversion. It will take this look not for nostalgia's sake, but in search of a model that affirms the best art is made when the artist commands, and can also provide examples of how it has been done. This evaluation of the place actors hold in our society and the relationship they share with an audience is multi-layered, complicated yet rich in possibility.

It is this paper's premise that live theatrical performance is threatened with real extinction. Live theatre is no longer the human interaction it has been through out history but has been reduced by the pressures of capitalist industrialization to a commodity of singular value. These pressures are increasing with each advance in digital technology, every media corporate merger and continuing political acquiescence to the concentration of economic power. Certainly, some form of live theatre will likely be preserved though more as tourist attraction and historical artifact than vital conversation. Moreover, the performers, together with the theatre's other artists, must shape, with their audience, the future of theatre in America.

It is the artists' responsibility and theirs alone. Until now, their voices have been unheard. They can acquiesce to the demands of the business model or they can seek an alternative. They can struggle for an equitable share of the resources that will allow theatre as an art to fully exist alongside the entertainment industry or they can continue to

acquiesce to the inequity of the “star system.” They can create and operate their own network of theatres as actors and theatre artists had done for centuries prior to the invention of producers or they can continue to hope for work while ignoring the dismal employment statistics of their profession. They can redevelop a relationship with audiences truly based upon their shared human interests or continue to perform the pulp fiction of Hollywood until such banal performance opportunities, and the ability to earn a livelihood from them, cease to exist altogether.

How the Business Model Shapes Audience Expectations

Elmer Rice, American playwright and one-time director of the New York Unit of The Federal Theatre Project, declared the American theatre “has always been primarily a business enterprise.” Writing in The Living Theatre, the published synthesis of his lecture course, “Contemporary Theatre,” which he taught at the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at New York University in 1958, he described the contributions the non-commercial theatres of his day had made to American drama and theatre as “important” but unsustainable. These institutions either “disband[ed] for lack of funds or have adopted the practices of the commercial theatre.” Indeed:

The persistent pattern, then, of the professional theatre in America is that of a privately financed institution whose investors and managers are preponderantly motivated by the hope of monetary profit. It is inevitable, therefore, that in the selection of plays for production in the professional theatre the producer’s estimate of the prospects of commercial success is the determining factor. (161)

In 1991 Robert Brustein, director, academic, and drama critic for The New Republic, published a collection of his critical articles written for that journal between 1978 and 1991 titled, Reimagining American Theatre. Writing about his own and subsequent artistic generations that followed Rice, Brustein observes that producers' concern for profit continue to exert much the same pressure upon production choices during our own as during Rice's lifetime: "a couple of seats to a Broadway show . . . cost as much as a couple of shares of IBM; and when the evening's over, you don't even have a dividend to show for it. At such prices, any theatergoer is going to stay home unless he's promised a blockbuster" (Brustein 5). Though the causes of high ticket prices and their consequent effect upon attendance are frequently argued, there is little reason to assume the fiscal conservatism that seeks to protect the producer's investment over other considerations, creating almost incidentally an artistic product that is "trite and banal," is any less prevalent today (6).

In Rice's generation, the tension inherent in the "relationship between commercialism and art" provided the impetus for new theatrical production models exemplified by the Neighborhood Playhouse, the Provincetown Players, the Group Theatre and the Theatre Guild (Rice 147). In the 1940's and 50's, the non-commercial theatre took the form of the resident regional theatre movement which began with the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis and Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., both striving to prove the ability of the American theatre to produce worthy dramas independent of New York (Brustein 8). Unfortunately, the same fiscal pressures to produce success began to be exerted upon the regional houses just as private foundation and government support for the arts failed to keep pace with the growing demands of regional arts endeavors. The

eventual solution to the fiscal dilemma of the regional theatre movement was to once again become “the try-out stations” that winnowed out the most popular productions for eventual Broadway presentations. “Certainly, the American resident theatre movement [. . .] in many cities of this country [. . .] is barely distinguishable from the commercial theatre in any way except its 501-C3 nonprofit designation” (Brustein 8,9). In this clash between artistic production and financial support, Rice doubts there always exists “a clear correlation between financial success and artistic merit,” arguing that “since no one can seriously contend that economic rewards are strictly consonant with artistic talents and achievements, it is obvious that there are serious handicaps for the artist and serious losses to the general cultural fund” (188).

How the Business Model Limits Performers’ Opportunity

The commercial pressures that limit opportunities for playwrights, i.e., the financially conservative tendency to favor established playwrights and revivals of past successes over risking new and untried plays and authors, similarly limit the opportunities available to actors. At mid-point of the last century, fully ninety percent of Dramatist Guild members depended “for their subsistence upon other forms of writing or on some employment unrelated to writing (Rice, 188-9). Over forty years ago, Rice estimated that any actor who worked more than fifteen weeks per year was more fortunate than most (189). In 2002, Actors’ Equity Association (AEA), the union of professional actors, determined that 17,256 of 39,507 members in good standing, less than 44%, worked in 2001-02; Equity determined the average weeks worked per working member was slightly more than 16 (Pace 2). Clearly, though in “business and in industry,

year-round employment is the norm, in the theatre it is the exception rather than the rule” (Rice 190). The result is that

Most American actors seem to have lost interest in the stage, and those that remain are riddled with uncertainty and self-doubt. All the pressures of our success-crazed society tell the actor he’s a fool to remain with a profession that promises little money and less fame when those enticements are continually beckoning from LaLa land. As a result, and with a great sense of sadness, the resident theatre movement has seen some of its most gifted performers end up in vapid TV series or, at best, a feature film while the great stage roles go begging. (Brustein 14)

One might venture to suggest that the theatre is no longer a viable art form, simply a vestigial expression of humanity’s need to imitate and examine its own behavior, a need that is now predominantly satisfied by the cinema and television together. If that’s the case, why worry about the state of the theatre? If, as President Calvin Coolidge once said, the business of America is business, then the fact that, according to Brustein, “stars have always been regarded as commodities [. . . and] everything is esteemed according to how well it sells” (224) should give neither artists nor society cause to worry. But if the true business of theatre is something other than financial profit, if the art of theatre still offers tangible if not material rewards, then it may be “truly alarming . . . when the demand for entertainment threatens to obliterate the conditions necessary for the process of art . . . where the barriers protecting the desire for quality from the need for profit are disintegrating . . . and the most common standard of

measurement becomes the balance sheet” (224). Brustein fears the bells of alarm are already sounding too late:

Newspapers will estimate their value by circulation; universities will evaluate their courses by enrollment; publishers will rate their books by sales; theatres will measure their plays by the box office; galleries will appraise their painters by commissions—and society will assess its citizenry according to income. The Neilson rating, designed to measure responses to mass entertainment, will soon become the technological determinant of every activity, no doubt producing the same level of culture one finds in network TV . . . a profoundly unnatural condition. It is the condition of the bottom line, and it is already exacting an unexpected price. (224)

Technology’s Impact On the Art/Profit/Audience Matrix

Certainly, the intersection of culture and technology affects artistic achievement. At least one consequence of the Renaissance and Age of Reason has been a steadily quickening pace of technological invention. This cultural development, eventually harnessed to the purposes of economic efficiency during the Industrial Revolution, accompanied the transition from feudal to mercantile to capitalist society. It encouraged theatre’s physical development from the churchyard to the courtyard to the marketplace. Technological invention has changed performance from an out-of-doors, weather-dependent activity to a plastic art whereby night and day obey command and the performance itself possesses infinite possibility of replication. Compared to the

technological leaps of the past century, the pace of progress over the course of the previous five hundred or so seems almost leisurely.

The technological revolution of the latter part of the Twentieth Century, the beginnings of what we've come to call the Information Age, seems likely to impact culture to an extent barely imaginable a generation ago. Writing in his 1978 work, Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television, Jerry Mander quotes Walter Benjamin (a German critic whose work preceded that of Marshall McLuhan by some thirty years). Benjamin realized that actors' work in the age of film was to portray their own as well as their characters' lives through machinery which is incapable of transmitting the "quickness" that distinguishes the living from the dead:

"This situation might be characterized as follows: for the first time—and this is the effect of the film—man [the actor] has to operate with his whole living person, yet foregoing [his] aura. For aura is tied to his presence; there can be no replica of it.

The feeling of strangeness that overcomes the actor before the camera [. . .] is basically the same kind of estrangement felt before one's image in the mirror. But now [with photography and film] the reflected image has become separable, transportable.[. . .] The film responds to the shriveling of the aura with an artificial build-up of the 'personality' outside the studio. The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the 'spell of the personality,' the phony spell of a commodity." (285-6)

Citing the adage that “seeing is believing” (246), Mander maintains that despite the human propensity to err or misinterpret, there still is a fundamental difference in the trustworthiness of images in the modern age compared to all the previous ages of mankind:

Mechanical reproduction of images is the great equalizer. When you reproduce any image of anything that formerly had aura (or life), the effect is to dislocate the image from the aura, leaving only the image. At this point the image is neutral, it has no greater inherent power than commodities [. . .]

By the simple process of removing images from immediate experience and passing them instead through a machine, human beings lose one of the attributes that differentiate us from objects. Products, meanwhile, suffer no such loss and effectively obtain a kind of equality with these aura-amputated living creatures shown on television. (285-87)

The phenomenal growth of the advertising industry in the latter half of the twentieth century, the post-modern age, is intimately connected to the advent of a new technology, television. (134). Its ubiquitous presence in American, indeed, industrialized culture, means that “television is the most important single source of images in the world today.” (240) It is no accident that television is “an inherently more efficient and effective medium for advertising than for conveying any information in which life force exists; human feeling, human interaction, natural environment, or ways of thinking and being” (287). The point is not entirely how mechanical images diminish the life, or aura, of human performances. Equally to the point is how the medium, and film as well:

[. . .] goes a step further by constructing drama around the product, investing it with *apparent* life. Since a product has no inherent drama, techniques are used to dramatize and enliven the product. Cuts, edits, zooms, cartoons and other effects . . . have the effect of adding an artificial life force to the product. These technical events make it possible for products to surpass in power the images of the creatures whose aura has been separated from them by the act of mechanical or electronic reproduction.

So television accomplishes something that in real life would be impossible: making products more “alive” than people. (287)

Mander published his book at the very beginning of the computer revolution in film animation and special effects, and it is not far-fetched to assume that digital technology will foster the transference of emotional content onto inanimate and completely manufactured objects rather better than it will improve its ability to capture and portray the emotional reality of living human characters. Mander, again quoting Benjamin, goes on to argue:

“[. . .] that in destroying the aura via the mechanical reproduction of art, all art as well as humans and nature lose their grounding, their inherent meaning in time and place. . . . The disconnection from inherent meaning, which would be visible if image, object and context were still merged, leads to a similarly disconnected aesthetics in which all uses for images are equal. All meaning in art and also human acts becomes only what is

invested into them. There is no inherent meaning in anything. Everything, even war, is capable of becoming art.” (288)

And if anything can be art, it is simply sound business judgment to create art with the least expensive inputs possible. And if the choice should ever arise between the performances of human actors or those by digitally created actors, it is clear that the only venue where the “aura” of the living actor holds any value is in live performance. It is also becoming increasingly clear that the entertainment industry is quickly and steadily moving in the direction of virtual actors.

According to Ross DeVol, director of regional and demographic studies at the Milken Institute, an economic research group in Santa Monica, Calif. “. . . there are early signs of a critical-mass happening that is helping to make Greater Los Angeles the center of two overlapping sections - entertainment and technology" (Marriot 1). These two industries are discovering synergy between their niches in the market as entertainment projects are often based entirely upon digital products like video games (such as the film Mortal Kombat) and video games are created in conjunction with the production and release of movies (for instance, Spiderman) (1). Technical advances, more than simply expanding the boundaries of theatrical content, are positioned to turn Aristotle’s ordering of the dramatic elements on its head.

The increasingly international financing and marketing of entertainment has developed sophisticated mass distribution models that overwhelmingly rely upon physical action (as opposed to Aristotle’s dramatic action) and spectacle to transcend language barriers and convey the story (Wasser 357). The transnationalization of the production process from beginning to end, from conception to financing to production to

distribution, is a “cultural/economic phenomenon” where the major Hollywood film companies have “ceased to be primarily American, ceased to be institutions of national culture. This rupture between audience and producers has reached the acceleration stage of an ongoing fifty-year transformation.” (345). The transformation began in the aftermath of WWII, when Hollywood moved to take the market share the war-devastated European film industry could not meet. It continues today in the pressure it exerts upon the European performance industry to behave more like Hollywood and produce more “stars” (Finney 24). Marketing that can transcend national differences has become a more important attribute of filmmaking than textual content that either reflects or appeals to specific national characteristics. In such light, it should not be surprising to realize “we have no national cultural policy—or [if] we do, [we] have a policy by default” (Brustein 260).

Actually, the national cultural policy by default is determined by the bottom line and is best served by conservative and protectionist measures. Innovation, while important, is secondary to proprietary rights as evidenced by the battle between the entertainment distributors in Hollywood and the technological innovators of Silicon Valley over intellectual property ownership and “fair use” of purchased copyrighted material (Plotkin 1). Talent has long considered a commodity by an industry that also equates the audience with consumers. In such an environment, the actors’ economic utility for producers easily outweighs their artistic value for audiences. Consequently, it is important to recognize that there are effects upon the audience and society as the actors’ relationship to a picture’s profitability is made paramount while the human value of the actor is diminished.

The attraction that the “physical and financial seductions of the West Coast” has for the American theatre artists may not, by itself, be enough to make the theatre increasingly unimportant and irrelevant. The seemingly limitless production resources and personal fortunes available only in Hollywood are only one pole of a magnet that pulls the best theatre artists “away from the stage.” Stage performers, writers, directors and technicians, despite declarations that “they find their greatest artistic rewards in the applause of live audiences,” might also be simultaneously and equally repelled by the other pole of societal disinterest:

The glittering prizes in our society don't go to stage actors. The best they can hope for is not a knighthood but a Tony, not an OBE but an Obie—or, in the case of movie stars, an Oscar, a percentage of the gross, and a house in Malibu. Unlike London, New York is not a film center where actors can easily alternate stage work with movies and TV. And in a country that discriminates against actors in housing, credit-card applications, and telephone installations, we still have no respect for the profession. (247-48)

And though film production facilities have become more geographically widespread in the past decade, theatrical training and stage work is still judged more favorably as a stepping stone towards Hollywood than as a viable career in its own right. Indeed, “Broadway is not an isolated business enterprise; rather, as a primary source for new dramatic talent and material, it operates in its present form and at its current level of activity largely because of the economic interaction which has developed between it and Hollywood since the early teens” (McLaughlin 265).

The successful translation of the 2001 Tony Award-winning stage revival of Bob Fosse's Chicago into an Oscar-winning feature film in 2002 continues the traditional cross-over business between Broadway and Hollywood. In the last decade, the number one media corporation in the world ranked by sales, Hollywood's Disney Corporation, (Zielinski 178) has also become a player on Broadway. Disney began staging live versions of children's films in 1994 with Beauty and the Beast. Then followed a theatrically exciting staging of The Lion King in 1997, and a new version of Verdi's classic opera, Aida, with music by Tim Rice and Elton John, in 2000. All three are still enjoying simultaneous and extended runs on Broadway. Both Lion King and Aida broke new ground with their spectacular staging and offered many more roles to their multi-racial casts than most Broadway offerings (though not so many as to make any significant impact upon the industry's generally dismal rate of employment).

Still, if theatre art is akin to conversation over time, audiences today may be more artistically underserved than audiences even a generation ago. Revivals have become more popular among producers and speculators than ever before, for the obvious reason of minimizing financial risk. This nostalgic emphasis and the reworking of familiar material to provide opportunity for increasingly spectacular effects tend to place the conversation outside the context of day-to-day life: as society seemingly evolves at a breakneck pace, the art we use to interpret and understand our own adaptation tends towards the conservative and hidebound. The point is not that the entertainment experience has no intrinsic validity. Rather, that the financial incentives that motivate the ways and means of its creation tends to quiet, if not silence, the artistic conversation

Technology's Impact On Performance

It might be said that actors' futures, never rosy, never looked so bleak. Technology's ever more spectacular special effects allow digitally enhanced human screen images to perform feats far beyond the humanly possible. Oddly, this rarely challenges our suspension of disbelief, but only dampens our emotional connection to the story and the other members of the audience sharing it with us. In a sense, however, this is only another level of difficulty added to the actor's always-difficult task of capturing the audience's imagination. Technology might figure more ominously in contractual negotiations between actors and producers, not least being the definition of "motion captures," a process where human models are used to create active computer images. Producers say the process is not "an area of contract coverage," or acting, while SAG maintains that several areas of the current contract, including "puppeteering" govern the practice (SAG). Illustrating the importance of the issue is the fact that the pivotal character of 'Gollum' in The Two Towers (the middle segment of the Hollywood blockbuster trilogy, The Lord of the Rings) is a computer animation developed from motion captures of a human actor and dubbed with the actor's voice.

At least one critic has argued that the performance of Gollum is the movie's most humanly dramatic element (Mondello). It remains to be seen if the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences will create a separate category of Oscar award before such a performance is nominated as Best Supporting Actor. Also, in May 2002, MIT Professor Tomaso Poggio announced the development of computer software that can manipulate video imagery of human mouths to enunciate any sequence of words. Thoroughly convincing when used with unfamiliar individual's images, this digital manipulation fails

when used with well-known individuals. Poggio is convinced this is a bug that will soon be eliminated (Siegal). Clearly, motion captures, digital imaging and voice production software threaten the future of human performers and makes the technological replacement of actors in movies at least conceivable, if not inevitable.

Nearly one hundred years after the advent of the movie industry, we find the theatre to be nearly wholly subservient to the cinema's needs. Nearly one hundred years after the birth of Actors' Equity, we find the economic measurement of the profession to be static at best, and under increasing assault from the usual efforts by producers to cut labor costs. The 2001 labor negotiations between the Screen Actors' Guild (SAG) and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP), acknowledged that:

With \$20 million paydays for major box office stars, the working men and women of the film and television industry, those actors not always in the spotlight, are being squeezed. Career actors, the ones who have carved out a living making \$30,000 to \$70,000 a year are a focal point of the current contract talks [while] over the years, the actors say, both their initial pay and their earnings from residuals, for reruns, have declined. [And though producers indicate that] profit margins have decreased, dropping from an average of 7 to 9 percent five years ago [1996] to 2 or 3 percent . . . At the same time, they say, the film industry has increasingly turned to bankable stars to draw audiences, and competition for their services has driven their paychecks skyward, leaving less money to divide among other actors.

(Whitaker)

What Is At Stake

Shakespeare and Moliere and the Greek poets have all bequeathed stories and characters that still stir the hearts of humanity centuries after their first telling. Such longevity offers hope that artists and audiences today can surmount the difficult circumstances of their time and share the stories that arise from and continue to deepen awareness of their shared humanity. Such longevity might also cause us to remember that “it is not surprising that some of the world’s greatest dramatists were themselves actors (Sophocles, Shakespeare, Moliere).” (Rice 246) That acting was as difficult a profession then as now is likely, as is the likelihood that the means by which the craft has been taught has remained much the same throughout the ages, i.e., by example and experience passed from one generation to the next. Left to the actors, the art will live forever and without thought of personal security. Take for example Gregg Binkley, a middle-class actor:

Who has been making about \$50,000 a year [. . .] landed a lead role in “Revenge of the Nerds III” [. . .] supplements his earnings [. . .] hiring himself out to conventions impersonating Barney Fife, the comic deputy sheriff on “The Andy Griffith Show” [. . .] and just concluded work on an unreleased film by the Coen brothers, in which [. . .] he happily worked for scale. “It was just a thrill and an education to work for them, “ he said of the producers Joel and Ethan Coen. “That’s why it’s so fortunate we have a union. Actors would work for free.” (Whitaker)

But if left to the bottom line, the livelihood of acting seems destined to return to the uncertain state of pre-unionized conditions. The evidence is in the growing use of non-

equity performers on the road and the increasing transfer of movie production “off shore” (McKinley 2001). Left to the bottom line, audiences will certainly have bigger and brighter entertainments to anticipate, but the opportunity to experience another generation’s Shakespeare, Moliere, or Sophocles will become even less frequent than history might predict. If left to the bottom line, and actors become just another special effect, it will matter little if the star of any show is human or not.

Chapter 2

HISTORY PLAYS: THE INDUSTRIALIZATION OF ACTORS' LABOR

Perhaps the most intriguing question to consider regarding the industrial organization of the performing arts is how and/or why have the creative talents themselves become so complicit in their own exploitation? Is it extreme to attribute some of the cause to the performers (among other artists) and their unions when the inequity of the “star system” would appear to be so apparent? Why haven't performers' unions done more to secure employment stability for their members? A look at the history of labor organization in the performing arts reveals that, more often than not, the producers' associations were able to successfully play one segment of the industry's labor force against another. Producers thus achieved, at the lowest possible cost, most of their goals while relinquishing little of their control. Given the difficult battles to establish union representation, it is perhaps not so surprising that labor solidarity among actors has always been a tenuous concept

When the historical trend of labor organization widened to include actors and other workers in the performing arts at the beginning of the twentieth century, the industry itself was undergoing radical shifts in its structure. The producers' syndicates struggled among themselves for industry-wide domination, and technologies emerged to create entirely new cinematic and broadcast mediums. The abuse of labor by increasingly powerful business combinations gave rise to the first collective bargaining organizations that represented actors, and these eventually led to the creation of the Actors' Equity Association, or Equity. The industry's technological innovation and expansion increased both opportunities for and abuses of actors, and subsequently, the motion picture segment

of the performing arts industry would also be successfully unionized, as would, eventually, the even newer media of radio and television. The Screen Actors' Guild, SAG, and the American Federation of Radio and Television Artists, or AFTRA, would eventually represent the performers in these media and, along with Equity, bargain for the collective interests of nearly one-third of all actors of every kind and nearly all actors of the professional kind in the United States (SAG 1). Winning the Basic Agreement and Standard Minimum Contract in 1919 (Harding 281) made Equity the undisputed bargaining agent for stage actors and became the model which SAG (Ross 25) and AFTRA (Harvey 20) built upon when organizing film, radio and television actors. Even though collective bargaining has accomplished much to increase compensation for actors and to improve physical conditions of their work, the unions have been mostly silent regarding job security issues (Harvey 10). The performers' unions seek to improve the "standard minimum contract," and to widen its application. They continue to fight on the edges of the economic structures that relegate most of their membership to a lifetime of professional under-employment.

Acting in a Commodity Market: Stars and Widgets

As the twentieth century progressed, the producers' syndicates and the studio system gave way to more independent production organizations. The number of plays and motion pictures produced each year declined, and the number of actors seeking employment increased (Cantor 210). Today, the "star system" continues to drive the industry, fulfilling the audience's desire for celebrities and the producers' need for powerful marketing tools. It also provides successful actors with wealth and fame and

journeyman performers with hope (Cantor 214). Meanwhile, non-union theatrical productions, particularly on the road (Souccar 1), and “off-shore” movie productions are becoming more common as producers seek to cut costs, maximize profits, and undercut union employment and solidarity (Vogel 75). Advances in computer technology are now gaining, as mentioned previously, serious consideration for Best Performance Oscars for digitally realized characters. Employment security in the performing arts may be more tenuous than ever.

Typically, technological developments enhance producers’ ability to market repeatedly an individual’s performance. These issues are usually resolved by expanding the application of previous contracts, as performers seek to match their residual income to the potential number of marketed performances. But labor issues that arise from technological innovation often have both economic and cultural consequence. They affect both the process of creating and marketing performances and the relationship between performer and audience. For instance, improvements in transportation dispersed the American population in the middle part of the nineteenth century and increased opportunities for regional performers. Subsequent development of road production companies then eliminated most of those employment opportunities. Also, the development of the motion picture industry, while contracting performance opportunities even further, simultaneously created a mass audience for mass marketed performances. This fundamentally changed the way audiences and actors relate to performances: audiences were no longer necessary co-participants but simply consumers, and the fragmentary, non-linear mode of movie production became piecework as much as performance.

The cultural relationship that presupposed communication through dramatic art and was supported by the commercial activity of production had been the foundation of the actor/audience relationship since the Renaissance. After the industrial revolution, the balance shifted largely towards the commercial, and employment opportunities for performers began to contract. Eventually, the perennial problem of performer underemployment reached crisis when the Great Depression led to a decline in play and movie production. This decline was followed by the demise of the studio system in the wake of the Federal anti-trust action depriving the studios of the legal right to own their exhibition venues after World War II (Caves 94). These declines were not offset by population growth or the advent of the regional theatre movement. On the contrary, underemployment that followed these declines was exacerbated further by the growth of educational opportunities after World War II. That growth eventually led to an explosion of actor training programs intended to meet the needs of the regional theatres (Schechner 15). The postwar era was also marked by growth in the broadcast media as well as the development of cable and satellite distribution networks. These new outlets together however, have not been able to absorb the growth in the talent pool. The supply of performers seemingly has no limit. It is an employer's market, and union organization has historically been labor's only means of enhancing its bargaining power.

Severe anti-union pressure persists, however, in the growth of both off-shore movie-making and non-union theatrical productions (primarily tours), and by the studio-distributors' growing investment in both the technological and legal supports for internet-distributed performances (Graves 4-6). If the performers' unions wish to remain viable in the future, they may need to re-evaluate their position regarding underemployment as a

casting issue rightfully determined by producers (Prindle 11). The performers, through their unions, might better serve themselves if they seek to re-examine the entire gamut of industrial relations in the performing arts. Labor solidarity, so difficult to achieve and tenuous to hold, might be the most important locus of industrial relations to evaluate. Indeed, as SAG president Melissa Gilbert states in her monthly message to the union's membership:

During the last twelve months, I have [. . .] seen a substantial increase in the consolidation and evolution to digital technology that have marked our industry for the last several years. Our employers are becoming ever more powerful. As both AFTRA and SAG spend valuable resources to maintain or expand their jurisdictions, I have seen employers play the unions against each other, driving our wages ever lower.

I have concluded, as have many others who have witnessed these changes, that the entertainment unions cannot afford to continue contesting with one another. Our health and pension funds have suffered, eligibility has become harder to achieve for many, and benefits are decreasing. Divided bargaining power has marginalized our leverage in contract negotiations. The end result has been less money in members' pockets.

The status quo may seem comfortable and safe, but it is the most dangerous place of all given the conditions in this industry. If we do not act [to consolidate organizational efforts], we must be left behind by a business that is relentlessly moving forward. (Gilbert 1)

It is encouraging that the performers' unions still strive to overcome the divisions of the past. But to focus on the current forward-looking efforts to forge solidarity among the performers' unions here, however, would be to minimize the historical and defining competition between two very different ideologies of unionism, i.e., organization along craft versus industrial lines. Exemplified by the American Federation of Labor on the one hand and by the Congress of Industrial Organizations on the other well, this divide was not necessarily bridged by their eventual combination into the AFL-CIO. It may be that ending the competitive pressure to better represent labor's interests contributed more to the rise of business unionism over progressive social unionism. Accommodation with rather than the restructuring of the present system of industrial relations has been the rule since these organizations combined. Even so, several questions remain. How adversarial is the relationship between producers and creative laborers and how deep is the divide between the various performers' unions? Why is there such disharmony, even distrust, between the actors' unions, which should logically share common interests? And how did the situation arise? To understand why Ms. Gilbert portrays these inter-union relationships as historically discouraging and producer-performer relations as eternally antagonistic, it is helpful to understand the events of the past.

When Actors Managed:

The Origins of Mass Production and Markets in the Performing Arts

Before the nineteenth century, plays were produced in the United States mostly along the eastern seaboard, but as the country expanded west, so did the performing arts. By the 1830's, actors, primarily foreign stars, had performed as far west as New Orleans;

by the 1840's, there had been notable performances in St. Louis; by the 1850's, improvements in transportation and the discovery of gold in California pulled Americans and actors all the way to the Pacific coast (Bricker 104-105). Prior to this expansion, the American theatre had begun evolving from "cooperative repertory organizations" of actors into managed companies of salaried performers (Bricker 102-3). By the time western expansion was in full swing, it had become customary for "star" performers to travel alone and perform with the salaried actors hired by resident stock companies in each of the cities on the tour itinerary (Bricker 106). The "star system" clearly evolved step by step with the American theatre.

Financially, rewards of presenting popular stars were offset by the higher cost of hiring them, and the managers adjusted by lowering the salaries of the members of the resident companies. This drove some talents from the field and lowered the quality of performance as well (Bricker 107). By the middle decades of the nineteenth century it became apparent that the quality of the remaining players in many of the frontier stock companies was no longer high enough to meet either the audiences' or the touring stars' expectations. Even so, neither managers nor stars possessed enough "selfless intelligence in the welfare of local [performers]" to seek the situation's improvement through improving the training and/or compensation of the local performer. Instead, the touring stars first hired small numbers of supporting players (whose numbers were supplemented by the few remaining local artists) then very quickly began creating full-fledged touring stock companies to support their performances (Bricker 108). As American industrialization progressed, this system of "traveling combination [companies]" led to the consolidation of the performing arts industry along industrial business models,

incurring many of the abuses associated with that process such as low wages, capricious treatment of individual performers by producers, precipitous layoffs and show closings, and other forms of capitalist or producer-ordered contracting. Eventually, those abuses led, as they had in other industries, to the organization of theatre worker's unions, but it wasn't until the producers' power consolidated that the endemic abuses become acutely unbearable.

As these more or less self-contained production companies became dominant in the second half of the nineteenth century, the owners of theatre facilities across the country ceased being theatre managers and became theatre landlords instead (Bricker 109). Often, traveling companies would cancel one engagement at the last moment to pursue another, seeking the most profitable opportunity. Theatre operators responded by double booking their facilities to insure occupancy (Bricker 112-113). Gradually, to eliminate confusion created by such unreliable behavior, theatre producers began to organize booking offices, to better control the offerings in their venues (Bricker 114). Finally, in 1896, a trust known as the Theatrical Syndicate was formed through combining three existing partnerships: Klaw and Erlanger in the South, Nixon and Zimmerman in Philadelphia and the Midwest, and Hayman and Frohman west of the Mississippi. It was formed explicitly to control "the legitimate theatre of the entire country through the control of its bookings" (Bricker 114).

At its height, the Syndicate controlled over seven hundred theatres, and though this was by no means every theatre in the country, it did represent the very best. Consequently, every production that hoped to play the best houses and every house that hoped to present the best productions had to make arrangements with the Syndicate to do

so (Bricker 115). This system did improve the efficiency of matching productions and theatres, but it primarily served the interests of the three combined partnerships through a fee structure that ranged as high as one-half of net profits, often on top of other fees, or “tribute,” charged to producers, writers and stars merely for the privilege of doing business (Bricker 116).

The Rule of the Syndicates: Market Consolidation

The first organized opposition to the Syndicates’ self-serving production system was from a group called the Actors’ Society of America, formed a scant three months before the Syndicate to “discriminate between responsible and irresponsible managers and to assist its members in securing contracts with responsible managers only” (Harding 10). Unfortunately, its efforts to secure better treatment for performers were largely and successfully ignored and it wasn’t until a group of actor-managers began to feel the pressure of unfair competition that any real resistance was presented to the Syndicate. Since this opposition was focused on the uneven distribution of power over theatrical bookings, it was easy for the Syndicate to simply offer better deals to individual actor-managers and fracture their alliance. At no time did either these actor-managers or the Actors’ Society seek to coordinate their efforts against the Syndicate (Harding 10-11).

In 1902, another coalition of actor-managers called the Independent Booking Office, in concert with an independent chain of popularly priced theatres, challenged the increasingly powerful Syndicate. By the beginning of the 1904-1905 season, the owners of these theatres, Stair and Havlin, were simply bought off with offers of more venues in

their popular market (Bricker 117). Though the actors never successfully challenged the monopoly power of the Syndicate, another group of theatre managers did.

Sam Shubert, along with his brothers Lee and J.J., began with a small circuit of theatres in upstate New York and purchased their first New York City venue in 1900. By 1905 they were building new and better-equipped houses across the country and luring star performers to perform exclusively in them. This competition did not go unnoticed, and the Syndicate attempted to limit those actors' professional opportunities by locking them out of the theatres under Syndicate control. The Shuberts responded by building more state of the art theatres and successfully increased the number of performers willing to stand with them against the Syndicate. The main allies in the Shuberts' fight, however, were not actors, but financiers. By persuading the banking community that reliable profit potential did in fact exist in the "gamble" of the theatre, the Shuberts were able to build their circuit from the ground up (Bricker 118-121).

By 1916, the Shuberts had successfully achieved dominance among American theatrical producers and bookers (Bricker 126), completing the process that effectively divorced actors from theatre management. From Colonial times to the latter half of the nineteenth century, senior actors had assumed the business responsibility in a craft-like industry marked by close personal relationships between all members of any given acting company (Harding 5). Now, the performing arts were thoroughly organized along capitalistic and industrial lines with financiers and businessmen at the top of the pyramid and with all others, including actors, at the bottom. And it was, indeed, the bottom. The Actor's Society had chosen to remain on the sidelines during the clash between the Shuberts and the Syndicate, and failed in several attempts to enter the American

Federation of Labor (AFL). By the end of 1912, it decided to end its existence as a social and business organization, establishing instead a committee to explore the formation of an actors' organization that focused solely on economic grievances (Harding 12).

These grievances were many. Contracts between performers and presenters were drawn entirely by the theatre owners and/or producers. Actors without clout could take or leave them. There was no limit to rehearsal time, and rehearsal time was unpaid. Actors were known to rehearse for months then suddenly find themselves unemployed when the production closed after one or two performances. If the production continued to run, management was allowed to adjust salaries downward to protect profits. The traditional two weeks notice to actors of the impending close of a production was largely abandoned. Actors were required to pay their own transportation costs from the point of organization to the point of opening and from the point of closing home. Stranding of performers at points between was common. Performers provided their own costumes. The "satisfaction clause" allowed managers to terminate any contract simply by declaring the performer's work unsatisfactory without regard for positive press notices. It was simply a business device that allowed managers to control costs. Though many of these abuses were challenged in court, many like the "satisfaction clause" were held to be entirely legal, and when judgments were rendered in favor of the performers, corporation laws effectively shielded the wealth of the managers. The lack of collective bargaining power placed actors behind other unionized creditors such as musicians and stagehands (Harding 7-10).

The Actors Respond: Union Organization

As hard as it might be to find stability in professional relationships set under a one-sided interpretation of the “satisfaction clause,” the fact that the industry itself was undergoing profound shifts only made matters worse. The number of road companies began a slow contraction, falling from three hundred and thirty-seven in 1908 to twenty-seven by 1934. Production costs rose as many of the crafts associated with theatrical production were unionized. Materials for technical production and transportation were becoming more expensive as well. Also, audiences were declining. Managers would sometimes promote productions with recognizable stars only to present other, inferior productions to the advance ticket holders. Vaudeville was becoming a more family oriented popular entertainment and, at far lower prices, successfully lured many away from the legitimate theatre audience. Vaudeville promoters began to purchase the increasingly idle theatre venues. And though its effect would not be fully felt until decades later, the nascent motion picture industry began presenting shorts in the vaudeville houses. In 1901, managers used these short films to fully substitute for live performers during a strike by the White Rats, the vaudevillians’ union. By 1905, feature length motion pictures were being shown in theatres opened expressly for that use (Bricker 126-132). By the time the Actors’ Society was giving way to the organizational committee of the Actors’ Equity Association in May 1913 (Harding 13), the motion picture industry was already shifting to the west coast, to Hollywood and away from the more unionized east (Ross 6).

Actors, at least according to the New York Review, the public voice of the Shuberts, faced great obstacles to unionization in their very natures: “The minute one of

them found a backer and had a chance to go starring the adopted form of contract would be consigned to limbo” (Harding 16). Actors themselves had reason to share such opinion. Little more than a decade had passed since the Syndicate had successfully employed the tactics of division to conquer the opposition the actor managers had presented them at the turn of the century. Long accustomed to working together, at least when it was profitable to do so, producing managers, including the Shuberts, were now organized in either the National Association of Theatrical Producing Managers (NATPM) or, with theatre owners and bookers like Klaw and Erlanger, in the United Managers’ Protective Association (UMPA) (Harding 19). These organizations expected that history, given time and encouragement, would simply repeat itself.

When Equity approached NATPM in November 1913 to begin negotiations towards an industry-wide standard contract, the producers took this as an opportunity to stall the issue until Equity’s inevitable self-destruction would occur. After six months of unfruitful meetings, Equity opened discussions with UMPA to similar results. By the fall of 1914, discussions were so mired that managers suggested the union drop the campaign for an industry-wide agreement and simply make suggestions that they “feel to be necessary for an equitable arrangement” (Harding 21). Concurrent with these fruitless negotiations, theatre business practices continued as usual, at the whim of management. Individual performers would take their grievances to the law courts, with mixed results, but in June 1915 Equity won a legal judgment that actors were “wage earners under the industrial laws of New York, and were to be considered preferred creditors” of bankrupt producing companies (Harding 24). This decision did provide actors a better position to

demand at least some of their contracted compensation from failing companies but did nothing to prod the contract negotiations forward.

Equity had recognized since its inception that the key to the “strength of the mechanical Associations [i.e., stage-hands, etc.,] lies in the fact that their members will not work with non-union men and if their members are idle because of their refusal to so work their wages are paid” (Harding 25). By 1915 the Equity leadership realized that convincing management of the justness of their position through discussion was insufficient, and that making Equity a third party in the Standard Contract was essential. Though membership was open to anyone who could prove three years’ employment as an actor (Harding 18), Equity now determined to make every theatre an Equity shop (Harding 25). This endeavor would not likely be received, as the contract issue had, with the managers’ relatively benign willingness to negotiate. It would be a fight. To enlist the support of the growing and dispersed rank and file membership, Equity’s leadership needed an official voice. To give its negotiating positions more clout, they needed support from other, larger labor organizations. In December 1915, Equity Magazine appeared and a delegation to the American Federation of Labor was soon dispatched (Harding 26-27).

Strike and Settlement: The Basic Agreement and Standard Minimum Contract

What followed was exemplary of the divisions that can arise in a single organization, or between organizations that share common goals. Also exemplified are the several ways opposing organizations can use such splits to their advantage. These dynamics found expression at the national level in the competition between craft and

industrial oriented labor unionists. Craft unionists (led by the American Federation of Labor, or AFL) strive to organize skilled workers along narrow lines of each individual craft or job. Industrial unionists (first led by the Industrial Workers of the World and ultimately by the Congress of Industrial Organizations, or CIO) seek to organize workers in entire industries regardless of skill level or job. Though the AFL had included some industrial unions for many years, the economic boom of the 1920's created more jobs in mass production than in individual crafts. The labor unrest spurred by the Depression of the 1930's encouraged some in the AFL to reexamine their aversion to organizing unskilled labor. The CIO originated as a committee within the AFL in 1935, but disagreements between the two core constituencies, craft and industrial unionists, were not overcome, and they split acrimoniously in 1938. These two giant labor organizations continued to be plagued by these divisions, often working at cross-purposes until they finally merged as the AFL-CIO in 1955 (Davey 20-31).

This macrocosmic wrangling over who was to represent whose interests was duplicated at the microcosmic level as well. When Equity approached the AFL in early 1916, they discovered the federation had already granted a charter covering the amusement field to the White Rats Actors' Union of America. The AFL frowned upon duplication of union representation, and encouraged Equity join this existing union. The White Rats at that time were in a bitter struggle with the Vaudeville Managers' Protective Association. Locked out by the managers who had organized a "company union," the National Vaudeville Artists, Inc., they sought to protect their affiliation with the AFL, and effectively blocked Equity's attempts to obtain the AFL charter governing the theatre industry. Though this standoff between these two unions was to last for several years, the

mere possibility of Equity securing the support of the AFL convinced United Managers' Protective Association (UMPA) to agree to a Standard Contract in 1917 (Harding 27-38).

Unfortunately, the agreement proved meaningless. Managers simply refused to issue the standard contract and UMPA was unable to force its adoption. Within weeks of signing the agreement with Equity, UMPA had effectively dissolved as a representative trade organization when the Shuberts and Klaw and Erlanger returned to the active pursuit of their rivalry (Harding 41).

With the support of organized labor still entangled with the fate of the White Rats, Equity now began to seek pledges from its membership to accept "only the Standard U.M.P.A.-A.E.A. contracts intact" (Harding 45). Equity also created an entry level, non-voting membership class to prevent the managers hiring all-amateur casts as strikebreakers. Equity's membership was now near 3,000 strong, representing between forty and fifty percent of the performers in the legitimate theatre. Equity was preparing its membership to vote for a closed shop (Harding 52-53). Equity was also continuing its negotiations with the White Rats and the AFL. Negotiations finally yielded the fruit of the four A's, the Associated Actors' and Artistes of America, a new union that would hold the charter to be relinquished by the vaudevillians. Each performers' union would be encompassed within it and represented proportionally on its governing board. This arrangement insured Equity a dominant position in the new union (Harding 66).

Equity's efforts to strengthen its position were not lost on the managers. UMPA had been rendered useless by internal strife and a new organization, the Producing Managers' Association (PMA), was formed in 1919. Though it contained many of the same players, its new focus solely upon the interests of producers gave it enough

cohesion to effectively oppose Equity (Harding 54). The PMA offered its own contract to the actors, identical in almost all respects save it refused to recognize the Association as a party to any contract between management and performer (Harding 67). It imposed a bond of \$10,000 on every manager not to issue any Equity contracts (Harding 63). It followed the lead of the Vaudeville managers and determined to offer individual actors lucrative contracts for renouncing Equity and accepting membership in a company union to be organized by PMA. Finally, the PMA sought to lock out Equity by affiliating with producers of every kind of performance, including motion pictures, and refusing to even speak to the union's representatives (Harding 76). Equity had no choice but to declare a strike barring its members from performing "any service for any manager who is a member of the Producing Managers' Association" (Harding 80).

On August 7, 1919, the actors in thirteen productions walked out. Aided by supporting walkouts by the stagehands' and musicians' unions, as well as refusals by teamsters and other workers to contribute labor to productions labeled unfair, Equity prevailed. Equity had won the Basic Agreement and Standard Contract it had been striving for since 1913. The strike "lasted thirty days, spread to eight cities, closed thirty-seven plays, and prevented the opening of sixteen others, and cost everybody concerned in the neighborhood of three million dollars" (Bricker 136).

The fight was not, however, over. Managers began luring actors away from Equity by offering non-Equity performers contract terms superior to the Standard Contract. Equity finally declared a closed shop prior to the 1921-1922 season and the managers challenged the practice before a federal judge. The arbitration judgment handed down on August 17, 1921 affirmed Equity's right to a closed shop both contractually and

legally. By the time the Basic Agreement was due for renewal in 1924, the PMA, including the Shuberts, had agreed to continue the agreement (Bricker 136-138).

Equity's struggle proved to be the archetype for the unionization of performers in the other media as well. The unionization of Hollywood was initiated by the efforts of the AFL to organize the production crafts in 1916, prompting the formation of the Motion Picture Producers' Association (MMPA) in response (Ross 6). What followed was a replay of the infighting amongst several performers' unions, the consolidation of producers' organizations, and the usual business tactics of coercion and co-optation. The issue of representation was temporarily settled in 1927 when the producers, now organized in the Association of Motion Picture Producers (AMPP), created the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. This unique body was created to insure labor harmony on an industry-wide basis, though it came to function more like a "company union" than a workers bargaining organization (Ross 21-41).

The motion picture industry is based upon the repeated marketing of single performances. With the resulting economies of scale, movie performances earn far greater profits than can legitimate theatrical productions, which incur new costs with each repetition. By paying higher salaries than legitimate theatre producers could afford, movie producers used these higher profits to temporarily purchase labor peace. Movie actors may have rebuffed early attempts at organization, but the conflicting interests of performers and producers inevitably forced real collective bargaining arrangements into being. While industry wealth, along with the Academy, allowed the producers to forestall performers' real efforts to bargain collectively, the economic collapse of the Great Depression prompted producers to announce industry-wide pay cuts of fifty percent. This

announcement in 1933 provided actors the impetus to form the Screen Actors' Guild (Prindle 17).

SAG won its battle for a Basic Agreement and closed shop in 1937 after a long process of building solidarity among widely divergent individual performers (Ross 162). These agreements were forced upon producers only when performers achieved near total solidarity within their ranks. By realizing the common interest shared by extra and star, SAG, like Equity, managed to secure the basis for wage and workplace justice. This effort to meet the needs of lowly paid extras in the same basic contract that applies to highly paid stars represents the most valuable guide for addressing the continuing under-employment of actors. The old theatre adage that "there are no small parts" carries even greater weight in an age when technical innovation suggests there may be little need for any parts at all.

Who's Left Out: What the Basic Agreement Doesn't Guarantee

The Basic Agreements and Standard Minimum Contracts that Equity and SAG achieved raised the economic status of working performers to a level shared by the American middle class, but did not address the issue of job security in the work place. Many unions have sought to insure stable employment through seniority and other rules, but the Standard Minimum Contracts did not address the opportunity to work. The agreements acknowledged that actor-managers had lost control of the industry to businessmen. In return, the businessmen acknowledged the unionized actors' right to negotiate minimum compensation and workplace standards for those members fortunate enough to be employed. The entertainment industry's management saw that trading a

modicum of decision-making power for guaranteed periods of labor stability made some investment decisions less risky than before and encouraged union leadership to organize in a parallel fashion to the corporate industries with which they negotiate. SAG and Equity became what are called business unions, “organized on craft lines and run on the strict idea of protection of the members of a particular craft [and] . . . concerned with the day-to-day problems on the job, pay scales and working conditions” (Nielson ix). Business unions leave the determination of who should work and how often to management. Consequently, “union management attempts to channel workers’ demands into economic contract issues concerning wages and benefits” runs counter to the larger interests of the “rank-and-file, [who], by virtue of their daily involvement in the labor process, tend to advance more political demands which directly affect work conditions,” in particular (Jeter 81-82). In fact, business unionism tends to develop institutional self-interest that can occasionally take precedence over the needs of the membership, in particular, the casual nature of entertainment industry employment. “By contrast, ‘social unionists’ had a broader social goal in mind; they felt the need of basic changes in the entire social system” (Nielson ix). Rather than simply negotiating for a larger slice of pie from management, social unionists strive to balance the power that economic concentration gives management. Social unionists question the practicality of shaking a hand that is always prepared to withdraw; they refuse to assume management’s rights over an individual’s ability to earn a livelihood. All the benefits offered by the Basic Agreement come to naught if the required minimum number of qualifying weeks is beyond the majority of working members’ expectations of annual employment. And now, despite the value and viability of the Basic Agreements and Standard Minimum Contracts

to the fortunate few who manage to eke out a living as performers, recent changes in the industry are undermining the health of the performers' unions and raising doubts about the industry's commitment to honoring these hard won gains.

In every challenging time, it may be worthwhile to reconsider alternatives, or better, recall our own history. There was a time when live American actors and audiences met in large numbers to mutually consider their lives and times. It occurred, in fact, just as actors in Hollywood were approaching the victory of the SAG closed shop and basic agreement. The Federal Government had addressed the calamity of the Great Depression through the agency of the newly created Works Progress Administration and, as a result, brought about the greatest production experiment in American theatre history. It began when society, through the Federal government, attempted the re-employment of tens of thousands of idled theatre artists in the Federal Theatre Project. And its effects were to be far more reaching than anyone had imagined.

Chapter 3

WHEN THE FAT LADY SANG: THE FEDERAL THEATRE PROJECT

Historical and economic analysis offers more than theory; they are among the basic tools by which we organize our thinking about society. In the 1930's, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was a practical response to the crisis of the Great Depression. Using the tools of Keynesian macroeconomics to address cyclic financial phenomena, the federal government engaged in social projects encompassing both huge infrastructure developments and individual employment. And though the moment when such governmental activity is apparently long past, the Federal Theatre Project, a WPA relief effort that employed the idle and fed the hungry, may yet be a model for providing sustenance for the spirit. That is the hope that lives at the heart of this paper. The "message of history is that only a participatory democracy can challenge a predatory plutocracy" (Newfield 17); the performing arts industry is, if not dominated by, then at least driven by a handful of multi-national conglomerates predatory for profit. The practical response to this crisis is revealed in the grass-roots structure of the largest single theatrical endeavor ever undertaken in the United States: the Federal Theatre Project.

The Federal Response to Economic Calamity

Writing in his contemporaneous account of the Federal Theatre Project, Bread and Circuses, Willson Whitman is quite clear about the humanitarian, not aesthetic, intentions that brought the project into being:

The Federal Theatre was not founded because the government felt that the time had come to start a national theatre, to provide cultural opportunities for people unable to afford a Theatre Guild subscription, or to set up a yardstick for commercial entertainment. It owes its existence to the assumption that actors must eat. (9)

In her book about the American worker's theatre and labor movements, Staging Strikes, Colette Hyman found it ironic that while the "FTP . . . was intended first and foremost to put Americans back to work. . . . Participants in workers' theatre groups in the early 1930's point to the FTP as responsible, in part, for the decline of their movement" (127). Though these small theatres could not compete with the government subsidy enjoyed by the FTP, the artists and workers attached to them found the steady employment opportunities afforded by the project welcome. Using techniques employed earlier by the workers' theatre movement, these artists' contributions to several of the Federal Theatre's separate units, particularly the One-Act Play Unit and the Living Newspaper, transformed their steady employment with the Federal Theatre into a social aesthetic that drew larger audiences and more positive critical acclaim than many had thought possible (127-8).

The audience development and aesthetic exploration that the workers' theatres had begun in the first decades of the twentieth century was continued and further developed by the FTP to a degree that both surprised and emboldened theatre artists during the catastrophe of the Great Depression. Speaking to the staff of One Third of a Nation, the most renowned of all the Living Newspapers, the Federal Theatre Project's National Director, Hallie Flanagan "emphasized the potency of theatre and of the FTP in

particular: ‘By a stroke unprecedented in dramatic history, we have been given a chance to help change America at a time when twenty million unemployed Americans proved it needed changing. And the theatre, when it is any good, can change things’” (128). That the chronic under-employment of theatre artists numbers less than twenty million today is not a rationale for continuing business as usual. Nor is the fact that the Federal Theatre was precipitously closed when Congress cut off the Project’s funding in 1937. Rather, the dire situation of today’s theatre artists demands we revisit the legacy of America’s greatest theatrical experiment and reconsider the means by which such a theatre of artists might again perform.

In her memoir of the Federal Theatre Project, Arena, Flanagan points out that the theatre profession had endured the ravages of a technologically induced economic depression for decades prior to the Crash of 1929 (13). Still, the effect of the Great Depression upon Broadway, the nexus of the American theatre, was devastating. Citing a report from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Flanagan writes “in 1932, more than 22,000 actors registered with the casting bureaus at Hollywood,” many for the first time after relocating from the east (14); by “one estimate 40,000 show folk were destitute during the depression. That is too many,” according to Whitman, “but divided by half it’s still impressive” (10). The economic catastrophe of the 1930’s created a social and political climate unlike that of any era before or since, begetting some institutions such as Social Security that persist today. Others, like the Works Progress Administration and the Federal Theatre, were rather short-lived. The Federal Theatre was made politically possible by economic depression even as the movies’ technological innovation and industrial organization was already adversely affecting the structural

economics of the acting profession. Then as now, the impact of industrialization is harsh and few actors are able to make a living through the sole practice of their profession. Many of the reasons that justified the creation of the Federal Theatre Project remain. Gainful employment, health care and retirement are still hit or miss propositions for the majority of performers. The Federal Theatre was eventually made politically impossible by ideological conditions and arguments that, at bottom, are matters of economic distribution, fairness and justice. And though the Ice Capades will probably play in Hades before Congress reconsiders funding the Federal Theatre, the value of the model remains. For the performers and their families, the Project's social benefits far surpassed their cost:

As a work project, the Federal Theatre was undeniably more expensive than direct relief; as a professional project, it was also more expensive than other work programs. For example, the WPA paid \$1,250 to support a Federal Theatre employee for an entire year; \$732 to support a construction worker—a further supplement was paid to the latter by the local sponsoring agency . . . Throughout its four-year history, the Project had employed an average of ten thousand workers yearly, each of whom supported an average of four dependents at a total cost of \$46 million.

(Mathews 304)

Ten thousand theatre workers in 1939 represented perhaps a fifth of the combined pre-Depression Actor's Equity Association, Screen Actors' Guild, the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers memberships. The technicians' labor market is far more stable than that of the creative professions and, in 1929, the two sectors,

technicians and performers, had roughly equal memberships. Today, the combined labor force in Hollywood and the professional theatre is probably closer to 500,000 workers; to support a fifth of that number, 100,000, with an annual salary of \$75,000 would require a subsidy of \$7.5 billion. Such a subsidy would represent roughly four percent of the entertainment industry's \$180 billion annual gross income. Such a workforce is roughly two and a half times larger than that employed by the 262 theatres responding to the Theatre Communications Group's annual survey, Theatre Facts 2000 (TCG 2).

Though these survey theatres are not by any means all the live theatre companies in the United States, they represent the bulk of organizations with annual budgets over \$250,000.00. And though the year 2000 survey is not the most recent, it was chosen to reflect the condition of the live theatre segment of the performing arts industry during the most recent era of prosperity. What is most interesting here is that a two point profit participation on the industry's total revenues could duplicate the entire not-for-profit sector. Or possibly even more. During the 1930's, the administrative overhead of the Federal Theatre Project was limited by WPA mandate to 10% of the overall budget rather than the Survey theatre's 16% average. Production planning was also organized from the grass roots up, utilizing civic facilities for rehearsal and performing venues whenever possible. First and foremost, the goal was the employment of idled artists. If such financial participation as described above were to be configured along similar lines the impact would likely be significantly larger.

The Real Issue: Distribution of Wealth

All discussion of the distribution of the wealth created from the union of capital and labor is both ideological and political. From the beginning, the WPA and its programs were based upon the ideology of economic justice and were beset by an opposing ideology favoring capital and enterprise. The whole of American society was caught in the upheaval of the Great Depression and the WPA was engaged in constant political battles for operational funding and ultimately, survival. Arguments regarding social needs and public relief fueled the strife of that era, and the same ideological and partisan political battles play a continuing role in this nation's efforts to simultaneously achieve economic prosperity and social justice.

Given the persistence and virulence of this debate, it might now seem inevitable that under the scrutiny of the anti-Communist investigations of the House Committee on Un-American Activities the Federal Theatre would eventually be sacrificed on the altar of political ambition (Mathews 198-99). And though it may be laughable today that when questioning Hallie Flanagan, Congressman Joseph Starnes asked, with a straight face and more than once, "Who is this Marlowe [Christopher Marlowe, 16th century English playwright] . . . Is he a communist?" (220), it must be recognized that repeating the canard of the Communist threat for political advantage has done much to limit the depth and breadth of the economic debate in America. It remains useful, however, to remember what, beyond simple charitable relief, the Federal Theatre Project's founders, if not its governmental sponsors, had hoped to achieve.

Though the WPA sought to provide work so that people could live, that is not the same as saying people should live only to work. Elmer Rice, the first director of the New York unit of the Federal Theatre recognized that perhaps only:

Incorrigible optimists [. . .] believe that, given an enlightened administration and a sufficient amount of influential pressure, both from theatre workers and theatergoers, it might be possible to devise a plan that would provide governmental support for the theatre and at the same time keep political interference at a minimum. Admittedly it is a faint hope; but it will persist as long as there are people who cherish the theatre as an instrument of enlightenment and for emotional and spiritual satisfaction.

(Rice 160)

The hope that theatre will remain “an instrument of enlightenment” is threatened by more than the government’s failure to fiscally support it; it is equally threatened by society’s failure to redress the imbalance of power between capital and labor, itself a political condition. It may shrivel or thrive by artists’ choices to address this imbalance or ignore it. Enlightenment is more than finding answers; it is equally a process of posing questions. Enlightenment is a process of discovery that is unpredictable, which explains, in large part, why it is in neither government’s nor business’ interest to promote the theatre of enlightenment. The mere possibility of stumbling into a more enlightened state is and always has been the hope of the artist. The artists’ purpose lies in the possibility that they may pull others along with them.

Apparently, artists must choose to either affirm or challenge the status quo, and always contend with competing perceptions of the past and conceptions of the future,

struggling for the hearts and mind of the present audience. It is in this arena that artists must secure resources for their work and sustenance for their livelihood. Remembering “the obstacles it [the Federal Theatre] encountered and the nature and swiftness of its demise,” Elmer Rice wondered if “worth-while theatre can flourish under governmental auspices, particularly when its existence depends upon the political calculations of partisan and semiliterate legislators” (160). The contemporary government subsidy provided by the National Endowment of the Arts has also proven dependent upon the political climate. Even though the establishing legislation of the NEA was designed to keep the government out of arts management, its policy of professional peer review, “the panel system which traditionally insulated the arts from government intervention,” was severely tested and nearly destroyed by the political controversy aroused by the NEA’s funding of exhibits by Robert Mapplethorpe and Andreas Serrano in the 1980’s (Brustein 257-60). It seems any public money for the arts, even if initially dedicated without conditions, will eventually fall under political scrutiny.

Still, from 1935 into 1938, the Federal government financed and managed a national theatre; then and truly, the fat lady sang. But as Federal support stopped, then began again with the NEA and has all but stopped once more, it’s important to understand that when the fat lady sang, it might not have been with the voice of the Treasury’s largesse. It might have been—in fact, likely was—the voice of the public clamoring for a truly recognizable and relevant theatre:

In a short time Hollywood with its weekly average audience of eighty millions, and Broadway with its annual average audience of two million, realized the Federal Theatre was discovering and initiating an additional

audience entirely new to the theatre . . . Federal Theatre . . . in the last few years has settled down to a definite weekly average audience of 6,500,000.

(Lord 1)

In 1935, it is estimated that “the total volume of business done by the [the movie] industry” was \$400 million (Izod 93); by mid-1933, the nadir of the Depression, the total number of movie theatres had decreased nationally by some five thousand—leaving nine thousand as the basis for the industry’s recovery (96); in 1939, the eight major studios released 388 films with a one screening per day potential of more than 3,250,000 annual screenings (119). In contrast, the Federal Theatre Project’s total expenditures from May 1936 to December 31, 1939 was just over \$46 million; the Federal Theatre presented a total of 63,728 performances in a wide variety of venues in thirty-three states (Flanagan 435), and mounted “approximately 1200, exclusive of radio,” productions (432).

That the Federal Theatre on a weekly and sustained basis attracted an audience just over a twelfth of the size of Hollywood’s with a miniscule fraction of the budget, personnel and performance venues is truly remarkable. According to Tony Buttitta, a reporter for the Federal Theatre Magazine and press agent for several Project shows, talk among theatre folk had it that the Federal Theatre’s growing ability to attract audiences was much the cause of the “red-baiting” that was its ultimate downfall. He quotes Mayer Portner, another staff writer at the magazine: “Shits in high places [referring to, among other bureaucratic overseers, New York City head of the WPA, Colonel Brehon Somervell] are ransacking that theatre book Hallie [Flanagan] wrote a few years ago to see if she’s a No. 1 Stalin agent. They’re being egged on by Hollywood and Broadway

ghouls to get rid of her before the project takes away a few customers from their lousy shows” (Buttitta 31).

Who’s Left Out: What the Market Won’t Provide

The book Portner referred to, Shifting Scenes of the Modern European Theatre, published in 1928, was as much an account of Flanagan’s artistic awakening as it was an inventory of national theatrical styles. In her interviews with the famous designer, Gordon Craig, she heard his opinion that “failure to believe characterizes the contemporary theatre [and] . . . Not until actors and spectators are united in common belief . . . would plays again become a revelation of the inner life and values as they had been with the Greeks” (Mathews 18). When she arrived in the Soviet Union in 1926, during the brief period between the tumult of the revolution and the crushing iron fist of Stalin’s brutal regime, she found a “theatre transforming actors and audience into one . . . a theatre of great artistry and tremendous vitality, a theatre which seemed to serve a force beyond itself—one which dared to respond to a changing world” (19).

While her later day detractors would scour her words for evidence of Communist sympathies, she had merely described the differences that shape national theatres and the relationship between performers and audiences within them. In her academic explorations at Harvard, with George Pierce Baker’s 47 Workshop, on her own at Vassar College and later during her tour of Europe her goals were to “search out the best in contemporary theatre.” Ultimately, however, she came to realize “that truly creative theatre was theatre which responded artistically and socially” to the world actors and audience share alike (17). Flanagan would likely have recognized many of the same shortcomings in the

commercial theatre and Hollywood production-line as have Rice and Brustein, even without the occurrence of the Great Depression to put the economic structures in stark relief. But if there is even a portion of truth to the rumor Battista mentions, it might be worthwhile to take a more detailed look at the Federal Theatre Project. What was it that created such demand from audiences that the major players in the entertainment industry may have felt so threatened to actually engage in sabotage, as Portner alleged, to protect market share? What was it about this new audience that gave artists more than more jobs, and that encouraged artists to challenge themselves with new works, new approaches and new styles? Just what untapped potential did the Federal Theatre discover in the relationship between artists and an audience that no other modern theatrical organization, before or since, has been able to match in scale or scope?

While Hallie Flanagan's dream that a true "federation of theatres" would become "a permanent part of American life" has yet to be realized, from the point of view shared by the artists and audience, the Federal Theatre was more than "a temporary measure to help unemployed workers in show-business" (Kazacoff 7): "it gave an enormous, expanding number of venues for the production of new plays that the commercial theatre would never have produced or encouraged" (4). Indeed, the Federal Theatre intentionally assisted every region of the country to develop "its own 'indigenous drama' and 'native expression' [. . .] portray[ing] 'regional materials' and 'landscape.'" The Federal Theatre insisted "that 'socially relevant' plays about contemporary issues replace stock productions performed in the hinterlands of mainstream America" (8). In short, Hallie Flanagan envisioned a theatre based upon a relationship far deeper than a simple commodity exchange—cash for entertainment. As Harry Hopkins, administrator of the

WPA, explained his reasoning behind choosing her, an academic—not a professional, to develop and direct the Project:

This is a non-commercial theatre . . . the profits won't be money profits.

It's got to be run by a person who isn't interested just in the commercial type of show. . . . This is an American job, not just a New York job. I want someone who knows and cares about other parts of the country.

(Flanagan 20).

The Federal Theatre consciously offered to a variety of audiences individualized, regional offerings that “differed genuinely from the private, cosmopolitan character of the arts produced under the rubric of free enterprise” (Sporn 40). The cosmopolitanism of high art and culture and the private investigations of psychology are more exclusive than inclusive experiences; they are shaped by an individual's consciousness, observed and filtered through another individual's perception and remain a relationship between individuals regardless of the relative public-ness of the performance event. “The worldly cultivations of the cosmopolitan city and the private landscape of the self may seem” to cultivate “the social atomization closely connected to the way marketplace economy and marketplace culture are organized and manipulated on the grounds of competition, individualism, and theories of free trade”. Equally insidious, from a civic point of view, and “is the prodigious increase in the population presumed to have no individual personality or culture. (33) Thus, the individual experience of an artist or the aesthetic forms of high art and culture are works of “private imagination” not “public expectations and values” and, as such, “transforms the aesthetic product into what all products of human labor have become, a commodity for exchange” (33).

The independent economic structure of cultural enterprise in the United States, i.e., the near total freedom of expression and the relative freedom from censorship governed only by market forces of producer/consumer choice, is the evolutionary result of modern capitalism's rise in the wake of feudalism and mercantilism. The principle of laissez-faire, by definition, might seem neutral as far as an artist's expression might be concerned, and that being encouraged "to create whatever he wants to create, to achieve whatever his talents enable him to achieve" (37) would be a source of profound artistic freedom. But divorced from the sources of independent patronage that once existed, the artist's value as a useful social voice or natural resource has been compromised. Both church and state, as political institutions, argue social dogma across a landscape that shifts left or right over time. Left to swim in "the shark-infested waters where exchange value rules," the artist is less a partner in an ongoing social conversation than a hawker of wares; reduced to commodity status, both art and artist are valued only by the degree of demand for them. "Rather than lessening the breach between artist and public, it [laissez-faire capitalism] intensifies that alienation and drives the artist more relentlessly toward self-concern and cosmopolitanism" (37). Arising from this artistic alienation is the presumption that most people are incapable of culture and the critical judgment required to appreciate it. Cosmopolitanism is at the root of the "the conventional belief that popular theatre must be close to circus, whether as text or performance" (Boal 72), something that the majority of the population can only consume. To the contrary, Boal asserts "the most important characteristic of the theatre which addresses itself to the people must be its permanent clarity, its ability to reach the spectator—appealing to his intelligence and sensitivity—without circumlocution or mystification" (72).

The adage that all politics is local might be advantageously applied here. Indeed, the Federal Theatre Project operated on the principle that art should also be local, and actively promoted the concept of regionalized theatre long before regional producing theatres became commonplace. Inherent in all the FTP activity to promote regional playwrights, subsidizing performers to return, with their art, to their rural roots, touring productions, and other development programs was an assumption that theatre can be a social conversation as well as an individual's psychological exploration.

Most likely neither the bureaucrats who insistently aimed to limit the Federal Theatre to a relief role nor the politicians who would eventually eliminate its subsidy thought of the Project in positive terms of populist social relations between artists and audiences. Importantly, the "art professionals called on to administer the program and many of the artists who worked in it" did (Sporn 44). Indeed, many of those within the project didn't consider their work to be competitive with the professional theatre, but supplementary; and since they sought to venture into uncharted cultural waters and establish a unique relationship with their audience, the Federal Theatre considered itself as an alternative. This was especially true regarding "the kind of content deemed worthy for dramatic treatment and . . . [the] *modus operandi* [italics original] of creative collaboration, a method of work diametrically opposite to the way the arts have developed" in American society:

The theatre, by its nature, is always a form of collaboration. Yet its history under capitalism reflects a continual surrender of company character to the star system, whether the star be a dominating playwright, director as *auteur* [italics original], or performer. The company loses whatever

standing it might have had as a significant creative force and becomes a frame or backdrop for one or more stellar individuals. The FTP deliberately turned its back on the star system to experiment with ensemble creativity. (44-45)

The Federal Theatre set itself even further apart from the mainstream by its inclusion of the public as participants in the Project's search for alternatives. Through such devices as "canvassing audience opinion after each performance," and by soliciting pre-production views and suggestions "from labor and community leaders thought to represent the common man and woman," the Federal Theatre built a truly populist theatre. By choosing to "produce plays by local writers immersed in the life and problems of farm-worker or immigrant, working-class communities" while also calling "for local companies to stage pageant dramas based on local and regional lore . . . The FTP was able to establish a close and reciprocal relationship with its publics." (45-46).

Symbiosis Restored—Temporarily

When considering what created this bond between the audience and artist it is important to understand that many of the Federal Theatre's audience were attending live theatre for the first time in their lives. Philip Barber, Director of the Federal Theatre Project for New York City, writing at the end of the 1936-37 theatrical season in Federal Theatre (the Project's in-house monthly publication), first quoted Hallie Flanagan's directive that "'our potential audience, the audience we are out to get, is an audience that has not been going to the theatre,'" then asserted "there can be no question that we are reaching this audience: the millions on WPA jobs and relief, the thousands of school

children who have heretofore been entertained exclusively on movies, the almost unbelievable thousands of adults who had never seen a play” (Barber 7).

A staff writer for Federal Theatre quoted Richard Lockridge, the theatre critic for The New York Sun, describing this audience:

The WPA, if it has done nothing else, has brought into the legitimate playhouse a new, vociferous and rather engaging audience. (The WPA theatre, as a matter of fact, has done a good bit more than the commercial theatre during recent weeks). It is an audience which is not, I suspect, over familiar with the stage of flesh and blood and it has moments of rather startling naiveté. But it is an engaging audience. Its face is not frozen, it is not sitting on its hands, when it hisses it is not self-conscious and when it cheers it means it. It is young, lively, and I suspect, hard up. Probably the low admission fees charged at the WPA plays have had a large part in bringing it out of the neighborhood movie house [. . .]. It is an eager audience. It goes to the theatre only partly to pass the time. It goes, evidently, expecting to hear something said. (“People’s” 6).

Continuing in the same article, the writer draws an interesting analogy with the automobile industry. Realizing that the market for cars costing \$2000 was limited, Henry Ford proved the market for \$500 cars was not four times but twenty times larger. Thus “the audience which can spend 55 cents for a theatre ticket is not four times, but twenty times as large as the audience which can spend \$2.00 and more. And the audience which can spend 25 cents is still larger in geometrical proportion” (6).

What is perhaps the most important legacy of the Federal Theatre Project is revealed in the confluence of three separate threads of human cultural activity. First is the artists' need to work before an active and engaged audience such as that described by Richard Lockridge above and longed for by artists like Elmer Rice, Robert Brustein and Hallie Flanagan; second is the audience's need for "something of value, something it feels is beautiful or important to its own life," something other than "the road show and the local stock company—both inferior replicas of that peculiarly local and circumscribed theatre produced on Broadway" (6); third, it is not, as Henry Ford discovered, the building of a thing that makes them come but its affordability. The Federal Theatre Project affirmed that there are many theatre artists the market is not able to employ that remain ready, willing and able to please and astound an audience. The Federal Theatre Project discovered, perhaps not for the first time, that there is an audience eager to hear and see stories that come from and speak to their own regional experience and patient enough to return even if every production is not an instant classic. The Federal Theatre Project showed that live theatre can more than exist alongside the cinema, it can draw a large and loyal audience and thrive alongside an equally thriving movie business. The Federal Theatre Project ceased being an active theatre producing organization nearly sixty-five years ago. In its brief existence it forever changed the latent possibility of the American theatre:

Twenty-five to fifty-five cents is the now established price scale of dramatic entertainment in America. Federal Theatre is bringing back the stage on the only basis that is today economically sound. It is broadening the base of the American theatre twenty times over, and by that token is

making it so much the more American [emphasis added]. (6)

The Federal Theatre's activities ranged from assigning Project workers to assisting the development of community theatres in rural America to providing venues, staff and funding for works like Eliot's verse drama, Murder in the Cathedral, and Orson Welles' "all-Negro Macbeth" in New York. At the time, it "would be unreasonable to expect anyone on Broadway to produce" either production, yet both are still regarded as artistic masterworks (Barber 8). It is not unreasonable to assume the aversion to risk in Broadway producers remains at least as high now as then. It is also not unreasonable to believe that the impetus towards producing groundbreaking work that the Federal Theatre became known for is encouraged today by the non-profit theatre, that sector's eye on Broadway success notwithstanding. It is however, unreasonable to assume that the audience pulled to the legitimate stage by the Federal Theatre was an aberration. The fat lady sang. And if it isn't "over till the fat lady sings," and every theatre artist harbors some hope she won't become totally "virtual," it is important we first understand exactly what institutions and organizations have arisen to dominate the performing arts and to comprehend how much human and financial capital is at stake.

Chapter 4

TRAGICOMIC ECONOMICS:

FINANCIAL STRUCTURES IN THE PERFORMING ARTS

Standard and Poor's Industry Survey for the Movie and Entertainment sector of the American economy estimates:

[. . .] that in 2002, U.S. consumers will spend a total of \$88 billion—about \$810 per household—on entertainment products. This includes \$44 billion for TV programming (delivered via basic cable, pay cable, and satellite programming), \$9 billion for theatrical movies, \$22 billion for rental and purchase of prerecorded videocassettes and digital videodiscs (DVDs) and \$13 billion for recorded music. (Graves 7)

The Survey further estimates that the television industry will also earn \$61 billion more in advertising income, and another \$40 billion in international sales of theatre tickets and home video purchase and rental of American-made movies. Additionally, The Theatre Communications Group (the major industry association for not-for-profit theatres) states in its most recent survey of American nonprofit theatres, Theatre Facts 2001, that this niche of the performing arts industry contributed \$923 million to the U.S. economy (TCG 1). The 1997 Economic Census of the U. S. Census Bureau reports that 1,600 taxable theatre companies (including dinner theatres) received over \$2.3 billion (United States, Bridge, 1). Disregarding the \$13 billion share earned by the recording industry, this adds up to nearly a \$180 billion entertainment industry largely derived from, if not entirely based upon, dramatic story-telling traditions and intimate performer/audience

relationships. In other words, it is a sizable house that the actors, along with their audiences, have built.

The Financial Portrait of Actors

Unfortunately, the distinguishing characteristic of contemporary live theatre, motion picture, and television production is the under-utilization of its unique creative resources, especially actors. The industrial organization of the performing arts has developed a financial structure that insures the greatest portion of revenues do not go to the creators of performances but are retained as profits for distributors (see Table 2.2, p. 26). This great disparity in artists' compensation is coupled with chronic under-employment of professional performers that is far greater than the current national unemployment rate of approximately 5.8%. The Actor's Equity Association (hereafter Equity) reported in its 2002 Annual Report that only 43.7% of its 39,507 members in good standing worked professionally during the 2001-02 season, and only 14.5% were professionally employed, on average, during any given week. Median annual earnings averaged only \$6,277 per member (Pace 2). The Screen Actor's Guild (hereafter SAG) warned in its web page for beginning actors that more than 85% of its members earned less than \$5,000 in 1996 ("So You Wanna Be An Actor" 1), while Prindle reports the official rate of unemployment within SAG "at any given moment" is also 85% (11). SAG, in its 2002 update of "So You Wanna Be An Actor," estimates 90% of its "membership must rely on income outside the acting profession for food and shelter" ("Beginning Actors" 1).

There is considerable cross membership within the performers' unions. Equity estimates over 60% of its members also belong to SAG and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, or AFTRA (Hoffer 1). Consequently, there could easily be some duplication in these statistics. Some have also argued that many in the performers' unions are not career-oriented professionals, but individuals who earn the right to obtain a union card for a single appearance in "real people" type commercials or in a film as a speaking extra, thus shrinking the rate of unemployed career actors in SAG closer to, perhaps, 20%. This figure is "still horrendous from the perspective of almost any other profession," and while this issue might conceivably be addressed through collective bargaining, performer's unions have traditionally been loath to negotiate job security—a primary function of most labor unions (Prindle 11). What may be even more striking than this union tolerance of high levels of unemployment and low annual earnings is that they exist in an industry where "seven-digit movie deals make headlines" (SAG 1) and films, such as John Cameron's recent *Titanic*, can gross over \$1.8 billion worldwide (Picard 8)

This contrast between average actor salaries and gross earnings is a reflection of both the glamour that attracts many so-called actor "wannabes" (SAG 1), and the industry's domination by a small handful of companies. The periodic resurgence of the "star search" entertainment format attests to the eternal hope of "making it" that holds some performers. Economic dominance of the performing arts industry by movie producers is long established and may be considered as an attribute of the industrial revolution and subsequent mass marketing. Poggi notes that the timing of the movie industry's commercial ascendance and the decline of live theatre attendance is not a coincidence (39). It results from the confluence of two factors: the rising costs of live

theatrical production and distribution and the increasingly efficient economies of scale enjoyed by the movie industry (Poggi, 78). Indeed, in 1929, prior to the Great Depression, Americans spent \$720 million to attend movie screenings (Prindle 16). In the same year, Americans spent \$127 million to attend live theatrical, musical, and operatic performances combined (Baumol, 44). As indicated by the U.S. Census Bureau economic census previously cited, audience attendance is tilted even more favorably towards the movie industry today. Consequently, it is the financial structure of the dominant sector of the performing arts market, i.e., movie production, which must bear scrutiny as the institutional cause of the high rate of performing artists' unemployment.

The Financial Structure of the Entertainment Business

The giant conglomerates that dominate the industry are integrated both horizontally across industry sectors (Vogel 57) and vertically in financing, producing, and distributing (McConnell 3). The horizontal integration of the movie industry is marked by such corporate interrelationships as telephone companies (Bell Atlantic, for instance) having interest in cable companies (Showtime) which are merged with studios (Paramount—owned by Viacom) that own a subsidiary video distributor (Blockbuster); other major studios also own television and cable networks (Vogel 58).

Six film distributors (the Walt Disney Co., Viacom Inc., Sony Corp., Fox Entertainment Group, AOL Time-Warner Inc., and Universal Studios, Inc.) “typically account for at least 70% of box office revenues” (Graves 7). Also, of these six conglomerates, only Sony Corp. is not affiliated with a major domestic cable or broadcast television network: Disney’s ABC was third in the primetime Nielson ratings for the first

week of the 2002-03 television season with 9.9 million viewers, Viacom's CBS was first with 13.9, followed by "Fox Entertainment's FOX with 7.1 million, AOL Time Warner's WB at 4.5 million, and Viacom's UPN at 4.2 million" (Graves 3). Still, Sony Corp. does produce and distribute both local and national television programming domestically and internationally and does own some 40 cable channels through its international subsidiary, Sony Pictures Television International (Sony 1).

Such control over distribution in the secondary markets increases the ability of the studios to maximize profit from any given motion picture by controlling, or "cascading," the release of the various forms that film may take. Basically, these conglomerates are "selling the same product at different prices to different buyers" at different times (Vogel 75-6). This horizontal integration of studios and secondary distribution networks has become especially important considering recent changes in the film industry's sources of revenue:

Table 2.1: Film industry sources of revenue estimated, 1980 and 1995; major filmed entertainment companies in the U.S.; total not exact due to rounding.

	1980		1995	
	\$ millions	%	\$ millions	%
Theatrical:				
Domestic	1,183	29.6	2,600	14.4
Foreign	911	22.8	2,300	12.8
Home video	280	7.0	7,300	40.6
Pay cable	240	6.0	1,400	7.8
Network TV	430	10.8	250	1.4
Syndication	150	3.8	750	4.2
Foreign TV	100	2.5	1,200	6.7
Made for TV films	700	17.5	2,200	12.2
Total	3,994	100.0	18,000	100.0

(Vogel 55).

Especially noteworthy is the relationship between theatrical releases, domestic and foreign, and video releases. Though the percentage of revenue from all theatrical releases has shrunk from 52.4% to 27.2% of total revenue, the revenue earned from the home video market has grown from 7.0% to 40.6%. Taken in aggregate, these markets have grown as a source of revenue for the movie industry. They accounted for 59.4% of the total amount Americans spent for entertainment in 1980 and 67.8% in 1985. As factors of distribution, they have no bearing on the compensation guaranteed by the Standard Minimum Contracts negotiated by performers' unions.

It is this aggregate that best expresses the dominance over distribution that horizontal integration maintains for the major studios. In 1944, the Department of Justice moved to curtail studio control over distribution through vertical integration. Prior to the final settlement of this action by the U.S. Supreme court in 1948, the studios also controlled most of the movie screens in the country. Though the studios lost their immediate control over their product's exhibition, this judgment roughly coincided with the emergence of television (Vogel 33). Since then, the control of exhibition has been reasserted horizontally in the secondary market.

The Distribution of Profits and Performers' Compensation

The primary market, i.e., a film's production and initial theatrical release, is where a film's value is first established, however, and it is in the vertical integration of this market that studios are able to both minimize risk and maximize profit:

The existence of profitable studio enterprises in the face of apparent losses for the "average" picture can be reconciled only when it is realized that the

heart of a studio's business is distribution and financing and that, therefore, the brunt of marketing and production-cost risk is often deflected and/or transferred to (sometimes tax-sheltered) outside investors and producers [while] studio profits are highly dependent on distribution and other fee income. (Vogel 86-87)

Indeed, while the industry relies upon many small production service companies, independent producers, and the like to create their products, "the majors...still consistently generate the bulk of industry revenues (an estimated 90% of gross domestic film rentals)" (Vogel 52). Using Leedy's table below (Table 2.2, page 66), Vogel "illustrates the concepts that operate in a typical production-financing-distribution agreement, particularly deferred payments to the writer and director, profit participations by the leading actors, and contingent compensations to the financier and producer". Leedy's table "further shows how a \$14 million (negative cost) picture earning \$100 million in distributor's rentals might generate \$16 million of profit for financier and producer before participations and \$8.1 million after adjustment for participations and deferrals" (103-4).

It is important to note that a distributor's fees come off the top of all film grosses. In Leedy's example, that equals approximately one third of earnings before expenses are accounted for and the profits to be shared are calculated. Moreover, this table "correctly portrays typical domestic theatrical-distribution fees [which . . .] are, by long standing industry practice, largely non-negotiable. But because the charges are unrelated to actual costs, they will, on relatively rare occasions, be adjusted in order to retain the services of important producers" (Vogel 103-105).

Table 2.2: Revenues and costs for a major theatrical release, circa 1992.

Gross revenue	
Subject to a 30% distribution fee:	
Theatrical film rental (U.S. and Canada)	\$50,000,000
Nontheatrical film rental	1,000,000
Royalty on home video	5,000,000
U.S. network television	<u>4,000,000</u>
Total	60,000,000
Subject to a 40% distribution fee:	
Foreign film rental	\$20,000,000
Foreign television license fees	5,000,000
Royalty on foreign home video	5,000,000
Television, pay & syndication	<u>9,000,000</u>
Total	39,000,000
Subject to a 15% distribution fee:	
Merchandise royalties	\$ 950,000
Advertising sales	<u>50,000</u>
Total	<u>1,000,000</u>
Total gross revenue	\$100,000,000
Distribution fee	
30% X \$60,000,000	\$18,000,000
40% X \$39,000,000	15,600,000
15% X \$1,000,000	<u>150,000</u>
Total distribution fee	\$33,750,000
Balance	\$66,250,000
Distribution expenses:	
Cooperative advertising	\$20,000,000
Other advertising and publicity	5,000,000
Release prints, etc.	3,000,000
Taxes	2,000,000
Trade association fees and other	1,500,000
Bad debts	1,000,000
All other expenses	<u>1,750,000</u>
Total distribution expenses	\$34,250,000
Balance	\$32,000,000
Production cost	\$14,000,000
Interest thereon	2,000,000
Total Production cost	\$16,000,000
Net profit before participation	\$16,000,000
Deferments paid	125,000
Participations in gross and net	<u>7,775,000</u>
Total	\$ 7,900,000
Net profit to be split 50:50	\$ 8,100,000

Source: Leedy, D.J. Motion Picture Distribution: An Accountant's Perspective. 1-3 and unpublished updates. Los Angeles: David Leedy, C.P.A., P.O. Box 27845, 1980. (Vogel, 104)

Vogel identifies the industry as “contract driven,” reporting that some would say movies aren’t Hollywood’s major product, deals are (65). Indeed, many decisions regarding possible productions are subjective, and studios and producers often rely upon talent packages to lower risk (Vogel 66-67). Between 1990 and 2000, 32% of the movies releases earning over \$100 million at the box office starred one or more of only seven performers: Tom Hanks, Julia Roberts, Robin Williams, Jim Carrey, Tom Cruise, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Bruce Willis. Additionally, these stars have each appeared in at least five \$100 million dollar pictures since 1990 (Standard and Poor’s 14). Vogel argues, somewhat obviously perhaps, that bargaining power, i.e., “clout,” is the only thing that matters in negotiating either financing or contracts (92).

Individual clout, or “star power,” has made some actors extremely wealthy in an extremely bountiful industry. The irony is that most actors can’t make a living practicing the acting profession. Since all profit terms in Hollywood are “defined” and even the non-negotiable is “adjustable,” it would appear no concrete reason stands between the bounty of the industry and the penury of the profession. The challenge is to reenergize collective clout and focus it toward the goal of professional autonomy and employment.

The Future: Promise or Peril

Traditionally, salaries are negotiated as performer compensation via the performers’ unions, usually in terms of salary minimums established for various types of productions. Indeed, Equity was born out of the abysmal working conditions, especially poor compensation, of actors at the turn of the century (Rogers 2,3). SAG’s origins can be directly traced to the studios’ attempt to slash wages in half to protect profits during

the Great Depression (Prindle 17). The performers' unions' historical focus on establishing minimum levels of actor compensation is based upon an awareness of the inherently subjective nature of casting, the profession's hiring processes. This coupled with the impact of the studios' blacklists of the 1950's have made these unions careful not to overly or overtly challenge producers (Prindle 10-11). It is left to the actors' agents to then secure further financial participation, usually a percentage of a specific gross and known as 'gross points,' as additional compensation for their clients. These participation deals are entirely dependent upon clout and are "limited only by the imagination and bargaining abilities of those who negotiate them" (Vogel 105). By seeking percentages on a number of different grosses, most importantly the distributor's gross, agents seek to negotiate compensation for their clients that is more commensurate with their contribution to productivity—their "star power" (Vogel 107).

Studios typically try to limit compensation for performers while preserving their claim to unlimited compensation for themselves (Prindle 25). And though the studios have not created the 85% unemployment rate among professional actors, they have relied upon the glamour of the profession to maintain an overly abundant talent pool. As important as "star power" is to the studios' marketing departments, however, unknown actors of professional caliber have also proven themselves to be a non-substitutable resource (Prindle 14). The producers recognized the artistic leverage of the membership's rank and file after attempting to use amateur performers during a TV commercials strike in 1979—eventually withdrawing the replacements and meeting the unionized performers' demands (Prindle 13). However, this leverage may someday be eclipsed by technology. James Cameron, director of *Titanic* "predicts continued breakthroughs in

computer-generated characters that interact with live actors and [the] development of photo-realistic humanoids capable of believable emotional performances” (Picard 1999 xxii). Again, the impact of new technology is amplified by the economic incentives to replace expensive human labor with comparatively cheap mechanical, or in this case, digital facsimile.

Cameron has recognized two essential and intertwined financial considerations here: the importance of live actors, “stars,” is essential to the marketing and risk management strategies of the studio/distributor, and the reduction of other labor costs (supporting players and extras) through technology is essential to financing the stars’ compensation. Given that all players in this market, studios, performers, and audience all derive some benefit from the “star system,” it is unlikely to be dismantled or replaced. The system generates studio profits, encourages actors’ dreams, and provides celebrities for the audience. The system, however, does not compensate all players equally or fairly. The studios guarantee themselves profits that are unrelated to costs (Vogel 103). The audience is increasingly offered products where 50% of a picture’s production budget is for marketing (Vogel 85), indicating that either the product lacks genuine demand or that the individual products are largely uniform. Either way, it reflects a market structured to satisfy the interests of the financier/distributors much more than the audience. It is the performers, however, who pay the highest price and receive the least return from this system: dreams may feed the soul, but they can’t pay the rent, and for most actors, practicing their profession does not pay the rent.

Chapter 5

THE PRODUCERS: ACTOR-MANAGEMENT REDUX

To think that the days of human actors are numbered may seem ridiculous on its face, but it's not unimaginable. According to the SAG/AFTRA Coordinating Merger Committee meeting minutes for the August 24, 1989 meeting, SAG representative and Committee Vice-Chair, Mr. Yale Summers, "felt the merger is so important that without it the unions would be doomed within ten to fifteen years" ("SAG/AFTRA"). Though both unions still exist, despite the passage of time and the failure to merge, the technological and political threats against them have only increased and the reasonable expectation is that the trend will continue. In fact, the recent strike by the Broadway musicians, Local 802 of the American Federation of Musicians, is highly instructive of both the current condition of union power and the present danger posed by technology.

Walking the Walk: Contemporary Union Militancy and Solidarity

The issue of Broadway pit orchestras' minimum size is not new, nor is the pressure technology places upon musicians:

Over the decades, the musicians' union has lost its fight to preserve jobs in the face of new technologies. In the silent-film era, many movie theaters hired unionized musicians to perform to accompany the films, but after talking movies were introduced, theaters fought for and won the right to show films without live musicians. As phonograph technology grew more sophisticated, radio stations started replacing live unionized

musicians with records, and many nightclubs replaced musicians with tapes and records.

More recently, the development of synthesizers and other computerized sources of music that function as virtual electronic orchestras has led producers to say the orchestra minimums are needless and shameful featherbedding. (Greenhouse)

Though the contract negotiations were protracted, once the strike was called, settlement came very quickly, though not easily or without compromise. Producers had been fairly certain both the stagehands' and actors' unions would cross the musicians' picket lines. Prior to the strike deadline, in fact, it was the stagehands that loaded the necessary electronic equipment, the virtual orchestras, for the actors' rehearsals. It was the expectation of the producers' that using this same equipment, stagehands and actors would then continue performances after the musicians walked out (McKinley). Given the producers' confidence in their ability to negate the collective bargaining ability of the musicians' union, it might not be wholly surprising that their initial offer was the complete elimination of the minimums. "In a sense, the producers," according to one City University labor expert, Stanely Aronowitz, were "trying to industrialize the artistic process," while "for the unions," according to Cornell University professor of labor relations, Richard Hurd, "the future of their profession is at stake" (Greenhouse).

When the dust settled after a weekend without musicals on Broadway and a marathon negotiating session urged by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the new minimum set for the largest theatres was 18 chairs, a 25% decrease. According to Lisa Pike, a French horn player for 42nd Street, "I'm very disappointed. In the last

negotiations, we lost eight chairs over all of Broadway. Now in some cases we're losing eight chairs a show." Despite the success in saving the Broadway orchestras for now, there remain strong misgivings:

"Some music professionals say that orchestras will be forever diminished.

'The reality is, if you say, "We could really use two more for the brass section," it's going to be, "Too bad, 18 is the number, figure it out,"' said Paul Gemignani, a prominent music director. 'You won't be able to bring all the color,' he added. 'It's like saying to Van Gogh, 'Sorry, no orange.'"

(Pogrebin 2)

Dissatisfaction with the half-loaf nature of this settlement has not, however, dampened a growing reaffirmation of the solidarity among the artists in the New York theatre. And though the refusal of the stagehands and actors to break the musicians' strike was as much an expression of self-interest as solidarity, its occurrence is nevertheless still encouraging. Affirming this tactical necessity after the settlement, Alan Eisenberg, executive director of Actors' Equity, said "The [producers'] league never seemed to understand us when we said the actors would never cross because they didn't like to perform before virtual orchestras. Their strategy went awry." Still, the united front that led to the success, albeit limited, of the musicians' strike "grew out of the unusually close cooperation among the unions in reopening shows after the 9/11 attack closed Broadway for two days" (2) In response to the attacks on that date, "every union and guild took unprecedented, across-the-board pay cuts in order to keep a number of long-running Broadway shows from closing," not only saving (according to Eisenberg and Anthony

DePaulo, Business Manager for Local 1 of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees) “New York’s most important industry,” but building a:

[. . .] coalition that represents 13 organizations, with 75,000 members and all aspects of the Broadway Theatre, from actors, musicians, playwrights, directors and choreographers, to set, costume and lighting designers, stagehands, ushers and ticket-takers, box office personnel, wardrobe, hairstylists, porters, press agents and company managers. (3)

Even more encouraging for the performers’ unions, perhaps, is the ongoing efforts to bridge the divide between the three actors’ organizations; although their failure to merge into one all-encompassing organization is a decades old issue, it is an issue that will probably remain on the table for some time to come. Mr. Eisenberg, after a “summit meeting” in January 2003 with the leadership of SAG and AFTRA, remarked to Equity News, the union’s own newspaper, that “he felt a ‘real spirit of cooperation’ among the unions and anticipates further contact in the future” (“Eisenberg” 1).

Recalling SAG president Gilbert’s letter to the membership (page 36), it seems apparent that the cries of alarm are virtually industry-wide:

Eisenberg, noting an Equity Council resolution from November 2002, “expressed growing concern about a variety of issues, including organizing, loss of jobs, affordable housing, rising health costs and legislative matters on the state and national level” and urged “encouraging increased communication among SAG, AFTRA and AEA, leading to joint action on matters of mutual concern.” (1)

Patrick Quinn, president of AEA adds “with global corporate entities now controlling the media and live entertainment, there’s a lot of work that needs to be done on behalf of performing artists” (9). Underlying all the differences between the three unions, however, is a single issue that has never been resolved in their entire history. That issue of course, is whether it is best to organize as crafts, with all the conflicts of interest that that implies, or as an industry, with all the emphasis of labor solidarity that that requires.

Talking the Talk: Redefining Union Along Progressive Models

This issue continues to arise even with single organizations. In discussing the Special Agreements recently negotiated for several national tours, two Equity members suggested very different responses to the concessions producers’ demand to keep their road show casts unionized. In a letter to the editor of Equity News, Tom Judson writes:

If the biggest threat is that producers say they will send out non-union tours if they don’t receive the concessions they ask for, why not make it impossible for them to do so? . . . open up Actors’ Equity to any actor who is willing to pay the \$1,000 initiation fee. . . . such a move would decimate the non-union talent pool, thereby forcing producers to deal with Equity on terms that would be advantageous to us. (“Letters” 2)

In another letter to the editor of Equity News, Russell Leib writes:

Producers claim that the cost of mounting and maintaining a national tour with AEA members is too high and that their only option is to use non-union performers or negotiate lower salaries and per diems. Does this refrain sound familiar?

. . . ÁEA is a business union that does not act like one when it allows that this producers' argument is valid. We cannot compromise ourselves when a tour rolls on union wheels, is moved by union muscle, is managed by union managers, plays in union houses, is designed by union designers, is built in union shops, is dressed by union dressers or calls on the services of any other theatrical union. ("Letters" 2)

Labeling Equity as a "business union," the writer's delineation of all the separate crafts involved in a road production (or most others, for that matter) reinforces the notion that if concessions are to be made, there are other laborers, rather than actors, who could as easily be called to give them. It is this narrow definition of self-interest that the producers' organizations have historically found so lucrative to exploit. And it is the inclusiveness of Tom Judson's suggestion that generates the labor solidarity producers' have always found easiest to defeat through tactics of divide and conquer, tactics designed to work best with the craft organized business unions.

The struggle to unionize Hollywood, indeed most labor history, reveals the efficacy of these tactics. It is also important to realize the ensuing arrangements sometimes served the institutional interests of both the producers and some unions' leaders more than they served the needs of the rank-and-file. This was uncovered by one high-ranking churchman and Los Angeles community leader, Father Dunne, who:

Wrote a well-researched report for the Archbishop of Los Angeles in the late 1940s that examined the causes of the famous Hollywood studio strikes of 1945-7. His final report, eventually published by the strikers themselves, was a scathing indictment of both the union leaders and the

managers of the studios. In short, Dunne argues that the studio bosses paid off crime syndicate representatives to hold down wages; union leaders stole from the members through special assessments; and union leaders and studio bosses colluded to undermine democratic unionism in Hollywood.

The rancor of those events continues to haunt the industry. More importantly, as the chips fell in 1945-7, so they lie today. The winners of that time dynastically picked their successors and today's labor structure in the US film industry is based largely on the deals worked out at that time. (Nielson viii-ix)

The point here is not to condemn specific unions or labor organization in general for the occasional corruption of its leadership or to suggest that such corruption is endemic, but to realize that historical events, such as the labor movement, can extend over many generations and when certain conditions seem to persist over decades, as suggested above, it only seems like a permanent condition. It is also important to understand that:

Although not as highly professionalized as corporate management, 'the union leader is a business executive. His accountability is not limited to the membership—it is extended to government agencies, arbitrators, courts of law, and other institutions which play a large role in regulating the union's operations' and to the corporation with whom they share the responsibility for the administration of the contract. (Jeter 81)

Granted, leadership of the two largest actors' unions, SAG and AFTRA, is moving toward an industrial model of organization. It is again asking the membership of

both organizations to agree to merge (Schiller). This issue of combining the different “crafts” of acting, i.e., stage, movie and television performers first arose in the squabbles between the vaudevillian White Rats and stage actors at the turn of the last century. In the case of SAG/AFTRA, merger had been studied since 1948, actively negotiated since 1979 and ultimately rejected in a dual membership referendum in early 1999. Both unions’ memberships were 50% dual, or “crossover” members, i.e., holding cards for both organizations. (“Loose”). It is being considered again now in direct response to the worsening economic realities of union-busting “runaway” production in countries beyond union jurisdiction and increasing concentration of media industry power. While it is probably necessary that a professional leadership staff exist to counter the level of legal and financial expertise the media conglomerates bring to the fray, it is apparent that a century of business unionism has only slowed the juggernaut of industrialization in the performing arts. Necessary as the institution of the business union is to the working actor, a business union approach cannot be the entire answer.

In other words, it is imperative to consider the professional lives of those unnoticed actors in every stratum of the profession, working and idled, extras and journeymen as well as super-stars. It is impossible to examine the effects industrialization has had upon the performing arts without facing the anti-labor bias of American society. A thorough understanding of current production practice must consider the dominance asserted over performing artists by business people. Finally, the global nature of the post-modern economy must be considered if the dilemma of scale is to be solved. Economies of scale required by business tend to counter the scale of human intimacy required of performance., and the gulf between is growing. This last stage of industrialization, the

globalization process, is by no means complete—the technical evolution of the performing arts continues apace—but its thrust, should those previously unnoticed participants re-emerge, may be redirected.

Such redirection would require the most difficult social effort. If the true human dimension of the performing arts is to remain anything other than an artifact suitable for museum mounting, it must be funded. And that requires a decision to redistribute wealth. Current political and economic realities, as well as history, would seem to eliminate government subsidy, at least for the moment, as impractical. That leaves the marketplace as the only other source of funding. Most theatres already depend on the marketplace for both the direct support of the audience and charitable donations, but this is an incomplete understanding of an artist's relationship to the marketplace. It tends to deny the artist's identity as a worker, and especially neglects to empower the artist in the face of the cultural dominance exercised by multi-national mega-corporations. And it permits the dominance of business unionism that has and continues to divide performers against themselves.

Finding Focus: Making a Future Requires a Past

To mourn the Federal Theatre Project's demise as an early casualty of the anti-Communism that found its most vicious expression in the McCarthy era is to rue but a portion of the loss. Much of the progressive labor movement was also shattered by the anti-Communist fervor of the 1930's, 40's and 50's. As Nielson and Maille recount in their history of the struggle between the progressive and business unionists in Hollywood, Hollywood's Other Blacklist:

What was really lost was the idea of working people educating each other toward building better lives. The labor progressives were acutely aware of the link between education and progress for working people—not just training for jobs but training for life. The labor progressives wanted US citizens, regardless of their class and status, to take an active role in the economy and government. (ix)

Indeed, the loss of the progressive ideal has been much to industry's gain:

In the post-Reagan era such an ideal seems woefully idealist and impractical. We are so very far from that sort of world today. Workers in many strata of the US economy see themselves more as consumers and less as producers. They see their jobs as a means to achieve a certain level of purchasing power and comfort. Through division of labor power, they are terribly abstracted from the production process. Business owners, for their part, view much of their labor force as just so many widgets that they can do with as they please to make their profits. (xi).

Given that the relationship between performers and audience has developed over several millennia, that it has also managed to overcome the occasional ban by church or state and even survived the recent attempt to replace the Broadway musicians with virtual orchestras, it isn't likely to ever completely disappear. The comfort in that lies, however, in a foolish sort of paradise, as the gains won by the theatrical and movie unions in the twentieth century suffer increasing assault in the twenty-first. It is equally unlikely that capitalism, a political/economic system developed over the last half millennia, will disappear. Considering the fate of the alternative political movements of the last century,

it is a system that, so far at least, is quite resistant to direct assault. And it is adaptable. Therein lies both the hope and despair that actors and other theatrical workers will ever escape the “grotesque, double-natured” bind of being both “an artisan—who in some respects resembles the artisans of old but who differs from them in now being a maker of prototypes to be mass produced [. . .]—and an entrepreneur, an owner of a commodity which he must sell . . . [though] what he owns is a very small part of each reproduced item that makes up the mass going to market” (Sporn 34). As every performer knows, without “clout” that small part has little value; without the strength of numbers a union provides, that small part has practically none.

Taking Stage: An Actors’ Theatre for Tomorrow—Today

Being adaptable, the current system of production is responsive to pressure and influence exerted from within and without and has managed to grow and prosper by many means including, but not limited to, coercion and co-option. With that in mind, it is time to seek alternatives that, like the Federal Theatre, can co-exist with the current modes of production and economic organization and supplement the present mass-marketing trends of cultural expression with the human bonds represented by a regional and collaborative, including audience, approach to theatre.

John Russell Brown, an English director and drama professor, has found that traditional live theatre is striving, on both sides of the Atlantic, to adapt to shrinking audiences. In Britain, trying “New theatre spaces, industrial working practices, industrious fringe activities, expensive productions, and short-termed seasons have all been tried and have failed to answer theatre’s acknowledged crisis. Even bigger subsidies

have had little effect.” We should not be surprised, he continues, since “theatre history and theatre theory tell us that more basic solutions are needed, that practice of the art will have to change, reforming theatre’s organization, production methods, performances, and audiences” (338).

What is happening in mainstream American theatre, in Brown’s view, does approach the basic level of solution history might suggest is necessary. It is potentially groundbreaking and yet, unfortunately, still less than effective. Brown cites American Canvas, a four year “consultation about the state of all the arts—theatre was not considered on its own—,” published by the National Endowment for the Arts. He found that despite the call “for nothing less than ‘the redefinition of American culture’: [where] all the arts should work together; community needs should be met by amateurs as well as professionals; young persons and children should be educated in the arts and the ‘Information Age’ entered on all fronts. . . .” the conclusions NEA reached were decidedly old hat: “seek permanent funding [and . . .] identify new revenue streams.” Brown argues more money, “bureaucracy and consultation have not, or could not, address the truly basic problems: the quality of what happens on stage and the responses of audiences” (338). Throwing more money at new institutions is pointless; the institutions must be reconfigured if not reinvented.

The recent rebuilding and financially successful opening of the Globe Theatre in London has offered a glimpse of the potential in rediscovering the value of “an unusual and free relationship between audiences standing in its open yard and actors performing on its open platform stage. This has proved a major attraction of seeing a play at this theatre, a new experience that has won such a large and varied audience that its

popularity tomorrow seems to be assured” (340). Brown feels the living performance traditions of popular theatre from cultures other than our own are a source of lessons and inspiration for reinvigorating the relationship between audiences and actors. He is not suggesting that these techniques be copied or transplanted but studied for “principles and practices that enable audiences to be held in rapt attention, ignoring the more readily available pleasures of film or television.” Even more important are the “small groups of actors, often with a writer, designer, technician, or director amongst them. They . . . always have to discover and build their own audiences. They take risks, because they have little to lose, and so are able to attempt what more experienced theatres would not even consider” (341). There is a special importance to this because:

Theatre is in special danger of getting out of step with its public because to change would mean re-inventing itself, devising new wheels within the wheels of a complicated mechanism. Theatre is biased towards traditional ways of operating because they seem to offer security—new plays produced in old ways, young actors absorbed into old companies—but today’s theatre will have to be bolder and more imaginative if it is to survive for tomorrow. Only by making very basic changes will it be able to hold a mirror up to our lives and, once more, draw crowded audiences to share the fierce intensities and enjoy the pleasures of its illusions. (339)

Brown is clear about what we need to do, where we might look for ideas and inspiration, and who is best suited to do the job. He remains unconvinced that money alone offers any real solution to theatre’s problems. Funding increases tend to go where funding has been and/or already is, so simply securing increasing dollar amounts isn’t the whole answer. A

more fundamental response is required. There is an undeniable potential that exists when actors are placed in close proximity to an audience. The problem today, given the gross underemployment of actors and the artistic narrowness of most commercial art, is how to put large numbers of actors in close proximity to large numbers of audiences. When mixed together in the spirit of discovery, artists and audience can face together the risks and dangers they commonly confront. Individual actualization and social affirmation for the audience is best realized when some sense of security is permitted the artists. If the actors can eat regularly, if the price of admission need not cover the cost of their livelihood, if resources could be allocated to fully employ large numbers of actors, then large numbers of audiences would be able to reap the large potential that exists within themselves to successfully wrestle with their world.

Such a vision of the artist/audience relationship preceded civilization. The shamanist roots of the performing arts assume an intermediary role between worlds real and potential that places the shaman/actor outside commerce. Commerce, however, may be said to be the defining characteristic of our world today. How, then, can the artist/audience relationship sought by Rice, Brustein, Flanagan, Boal and Brown, among so many others, ever flourish under such circumstances? Michael Denning, in his study of the Popular Front milieu that produced and supported the Federal Theatre Project, The Cultural Front, considers commerce the hallmark of modernity.

It is Denning's contention that the modern age is distinguished by a sort of mass consumption supported by the increasing wages pioneered by Henry Ford's notions of mass production. This led to changes in working-class response giving rise to the progressive unionism of the CIO as more representative of industrial labor than the older

craft unions of the AFL. Denning also argues the modernist movements in art can also be seen as responsive to changes in “the corporate economy” prompting further changes in nearly every social relation (28). And though some of these distinguishing features may represent the current age as well as they reflect the era 1890-1940, Denning suggests:

That the moment of the Popular front—the age of the CIO—is usually only visible as an interregnum, a dead end, the “thirties,” [as] a result [. . .] seeming to fall outside of those larger stories of modernism and postmodernism [. . .]. However, the Popular Front, the age of the CIO, stands, not as another epoch, but as the promise of a different road beyond modernism, a road not taken, a vanishing mediator. It was a moment of transition between the Fordist modernism that reigned before the [stock market] crash [of 1929], and the postmodernism of the American Century that emerged from the ruins of Hiroshima. (27)

Obviously, the “moment of the Popular Front—the age of the CIO” is irreproducible. That it should be is not the argument. Rather, the Federal Theatre was the result of an era in flux and transition, dynamic attributes that also distinguish our own era, and such transitional periods demand response—and offer opportunity.

To suggest that a “road not taken” be re-examined is not to suggest that any historical relic, including the Federal Theatre, be restored to function. It is more to the point to understand that the simple goal of the Project, to put unemployed actors to work, also produced a plethora of positive artistic outcomes, not the least being the discovery of a new mass audience for live performance. Neither does looking to the “Age of the CIO” for guidance suggest there is any hope that those times should or could return. Recreating

the exact conditions of a historical moment isn't a requisite to redirecting social forces along lines such a moment might suggest. Any human value may find deeper expression in one era rather than another. It is more to the point to understand that those who lived and worked in the "Age of the CIO" were only attempting what is being attempted here: to understand the forces shaping the world, then and now, so a course of human action may be devised to respond to the demands those forces make upon us as individuals and as a society.

Artists must accept the challenges society presents to human values in the historical moment in which they are encountered. It is clear that the world's economic structures, patterns of human migration and habitation, and national organization and ethnic allegiance are undergoing profound shifts. The system of national manufacture has been displaced by multi-national globalization. Agriculture is agribusiness, even in the undeveloped nations, and humanity is overwhelmingly an urban species. Technological changes now proceed so quickly that the world can be apparently reinvented within a generation's lifespan. Post-modernism is losing its place to the next historical phase, as yet undefined and unnamed. It is in these moments of transition that the future is determined. It is in transition when creative human responses reveal unforeseen opportunity. That is the parallel between the experiments of the Popular Front and the dormant possibilities awaiting artists today.

Robert H. Frank and Philip J Cook, in their economic study, The Winner-Take-All Society, suggest the contemporary prevalence of winner-take-all markets is "closely tied to the growth of competitive forces" (6). The difference in rewards to Olympic medal winners illustrates this sort of market's reward allocation process. Mere fractions of a

second may be all that determines the outcome of a particular race yet the rewards offered to the winner in terms of product endorsement are rarely extended to the silver medallist and even less so to the bronze medallist. They both are unlikely to receive anything other than a historical footnote (29). The employment opportunities described for the majority of professional actors illustrate well the wastefulness of this market's utilization of talent. Stardom and its rewards are not new phenomena, according to Frank and Cook, but "the rapid erosion of the barriers that once prevented the top performers from serving broader markets" is (45). Mass markets make possible and encourage the growth of winner-take-all markets despite the inefficient use of human resources. Consequently, the overwhelming competitive market force of media-corporation consolidation and the rapid growth of mass markets spurred on by technological developments are combining to define the post post-modern world as a winner-take-all society..

Winner-take-all markets continue by ignoring the inherent social costs. Frank and Cook liken the situation to environmental markets where the connection between, say the benefits of air conditioner usage and the resulting power consumption and pollution increases is often distant enough to ignore. Likewise, the social costs resulting from the "financial imperatives of achieving *quick* market success that have shaped popular culture" are easily ignored in the short run. In the long run, however, the "winner-take-all reward structure is especially troubling in light of evidence that, beginning in infancy and continuing throughout life, the things we see and read profoundly alter the kinds of people we become" (19). Frank and Cook argue:

Winner-take-all markets attract too many contestants, result in inefficient patterns of investment and often degrade our culture. If these costs are to be avoided, firms and individuals must somehow be restrained from taking advantage of readily available profit opportunities.

This does not mean, however, that detailed, prescriptive government regulation is the cure for all social ills. As conservatives have ably demonstrated, such regulations entail pitfalls all their own, often doing more harm than the problems they were designed to overcome. (19)

How to restrain the media conglomerates and stars from their increasing relative share of the entertainment industry's profits in an age of decreasing taxes, increasing deregulation and growing corporate power is the difficult question facing performers today. The challenge of "translat[ing] self-interested behavior in to socially effective outcomes" may be answered by "the same logic that justifies community intervention to curb environmental pollution [which] also supports the community's right to restructure the winner-take-all-reward system for the common good" (20).

There is great opportunity in the commitment to build a new "name loyalty" one audience at a time. If the present era, like "the age of the CIO," is a period of transition where alternatives become the possible, it is then imperative actors begin to use the organizational clout they've invested in their unions to build a new sort of loyalty encompassing the entire profession, where actors matter not merely as individuals or "star" commodities, but as an important human social resource. Many more actors can earn the livelihood currently denied nearly 85% of them if Hollywood's system of

industrial organization can be supplemented with a new actors' theatre devoted to the relationship between themselves and their audience.

The performer's unions should seek to address the issue of job security for actors of every caliber by negotiating with the studios for industry-wide participation in all distributors' gross profits, as an "actors' rental fee." Such negotiations would require all the solidarity and fortitude necessary to bring labor's only real weapon to bear: the threat of strike. Once settled, this percentage of the distributors' gross could then create job opportunities for performers by endowing an artists' theatre along the lines of the Federal Theater Project. Such an artist-administered theater would make it possible for actors to work in their profession even when "between" professional engagements. It could also increase access to other benefits such as health and retirement that, being tied to the number of weeks worked by individual performers, are often, like professional employment, simply unrealized by the majority of the unions' membership.

More importantly, this artists' theatre would more fully utilize the unique artistic resources of the performing arts industry. An industry-wide coalition of all the artistic guilds would encourage the artistic collaboration of actors, writers, directors, designers, and technicians free from commercial considerations that, together with an audience capable of so much more than simple consumption—of sharing creativity and result in marvelously unforeseen artistic consequences. It could insure that the bond between performer and audience is never completely severed by the industry's increasing technological wizardry. And by insuring that bond, this artists' theatre could also insure that the imaginative reality shared between artists and audiences is not replaced by the virtual realities already being generated by computers.

It is the responsibility of the performers, through their unions, to wrest the financial resources from the dominant corporate interests to secure their own working future. These corporate interests currently skim over 30% of gross profits as distribution fees before movie production profit is calculated (Vogel 104). It is clear that producers are not in the business of creating jobs for actors, nor should they be necessarily. Actors, however, have always been the basic input for the performing arts, though they have not always had to beg, hat in hand, for the opportunity to perform.

The economic distress and humiliation that actors endured when locked out by producers during the organizational struggles of the past century has virtually become a way of life for the great majority of actors today. Whether an actor lives in forced idleness because of a producer's decision or the industry's structure, the result is the same. The performers' unions must reconsider their organization as craft unions and explore the possibilities of industrial trade unionism. They need to continue the cooperative trends most recently evidenced in the Broadway musicians' strike in 2003 and continue strengthening relationships with the other creative and technical unions that support live theatre and movie production. Then together, they must demand, as do the industry's corporate owners, participation in the industry's gross profits.

Through solidarity and the right to strike, actors, writers, directors, designers, and all the other human co-creators in the performing arts may secure the financial support to create their own performance opportunities. It is not a question of replacing the system as it has evolved, but of creating a new venue in a new relationship with the audience. Entirely subsidized by the gross participation points, artists could create new

opportunities to work and explore their art. They could afford to seek new audiences wherever they may be found and re-establish a new relationship beyond the marketplace.

So what, or who, is stopping them? It is easy to blame the “system,” but participation in America’s system of political economy is, ostensibly at least, entered into willingly by free individuals. Consequently, every individual bears some responsibility for the social conditions around us:

Theatre people are still so much in the grip of an ideology that stresses the private and cosmopolitan that they feel threatened as individuals and creative persons by the thought of working in a collective setting. [. . .] But has creativity ever been an individual matter or is that a blindness imposed by the history of the arts under capitalist modes of production, a blindness to tracks laid out by modern civil society toward privacy and cosmopolitanism? Is there a greater freedom to be creative in running along that alienating pathway where the marketplace gods have overwhelming power than in the bosom of unpretentious welcoming cultures? (Sporn 237)

These questions go to the heart of art’s relationship to society and the artists’ relationship to their work. Capital’s supremacy in our age encourages most artists and society to ignore these questions’ ramifications. It may be quixotic to even consider that the artists of the performing arts industry might attempt to overcome the dividing strategy of the star system and re-invent the business unions that arose to bargain within it. Failing to try, however, will be to continue the deepening degradation of actors, the audience, and ultimately, society.

WORKS CITED

- Barber, Philip W. "The Old Year and the New." Federal Theatre May 1937: 7-11.
- Baumol, William J., and William G. Bowen. Performing Arts—The Economic Dilemma: A Study of Problems Common to Theater, Opera, Music and Dance. New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1966.
- Boal, Augusto. Theatre of the Oppressed. Trans. Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985.
- Bricker, Herschel, ed. Our Theatre Today: A Composite Handbook on the Art, Craft, and Management of the Contemporary Theatre. New York: Samuel French, 1953.
- "Broadway Unions and Guilds Form Industry-Wide Coalition." Equity News. January/February 2003: 3.
- Cantor, Muriel G., and Anne K. Peters. "The Employment and Unemployment of Screen Actors in the United States." Economic Policy for the Arts. Hendon, William S., James L. Shanahan and Alice J. McDonald, eds. Cambridge: Abt Books, 1980.
- Caves, Richard E. Creative Industries: Contracts between Art and Commerce. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000.
- Davey, Harold W., Mario F. Bognanno and David L. Estenson, eds. Contemporary Collective Bargaining. 4th ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982.
- Denning, Michael. The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century. London: Verso, 1996.
- "Eisenberg Meets With AFTRA, SAG Leaders: Summit Meetings to Continue." Equity News. January/February 2003: 1+.

- Finney, Angus. "Falling Stars." Sight and Sound. May 1994: 23+.
- Flanagan, Hallie. Arena. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1940.
- Frank, Robert H. and Philip J. Cook. The Winner-Take-All Society: Why the Few at the Top Get So Much More Than The Rest of Us. New York: Penguin Books, 1995.
- Gilbert, Melissa. "Message From the President." Screen Actors' Guild Homepage.
March 2003. Screen Actors' Guild. 22 March 2003
<http://www.sag.org/message_president/>.
- Graves, Tom. Movies and Home Entertainment. Spec. issue of Standard and Poor's Industry Surveys. 168.19. (2000): 9-34.
- Greenhouse, Steven. "Big Audience Guaranteed For This Labor Dispute." New York Times 09 Mar. 2003: A31.
- Harding, Alfred. The Revolt of the Actors. New York: William Morrow, 1929.
- Harvey, Rita Morely. Those Wonderful, Terrible Years: George Heller and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1993.
- Hofler, Robert. "Actors' Equity Backs SAG, AFTRA." Daily Variety 24 April 2000: 3.
- Hyman, Colette A. Staging Strikes: Workers' Theatre and the American Labor Movement. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1997.
- Izod, John. Hollywood and the Box Office, 1895-1986. New York: Columbia UP, 1988.
- Jeter, Ida. "The Collapse of the Federated Motion Picture Crafts: A Case Study of Class Collaboration in the Motion Picture Industry." The Hollywood Film Industry: A Reader. Ed. Paul Kerr. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986. 78-96.

- Kazacoff, George. Dangerous Theatre: The Federal Theatre Project as a Forum for New Plays. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1989.
- Lord, Ann. Federal Theatre Accounts For Its Audience: Report of an Analysis Made By the Research Department, National Service Bureau, Federal Theatre Project, WPA. Federal Theatre Project Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Box 9, Loose File.
- Mander, Jerry. Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television. New York: Quill, 1978.
- McConnell, Stacy A., ed. Dun and Bradstreet Industry Reference Books: Entertainment. Detroit: The Gale Group, 1999.
- McKinley, Jesse. "Actors' Equity Urges Boycott of Nonunion Road Show." New York Times 22 August 2001: E1+.
- - - . "Theaters to Remain Closed as Strike Continues." New York Times 09 March 2003: E1+.
- McLaughlin, Robert. Broadway and Hollywood: A History of Economic Interaction. New York: Arno Press, 1974.
- "Movies Eclipse Films." The Economist. 5 February 1994: 89+.
- Newfield, Jack. "How the Other Half Still Lives: In the Shadow of Wealth, New York's Poor Increase." The Nation. 17 March 2003: 11-17.
- Nielson, Mike and Gene Mailes. Hollywood's Other Blacklist: Union Struggles in the Studio System. London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1995.

- Pace, Guy. "2002 ANNUAL REPORT: Theatre Survives the Long Shadow of September 11th." Actors' Equity Association Homepage. 21 March 2003
<http://www.actorsequity.org/Library/Misc/AEA_annual_2002.pdf>.
- "People's Theatre Grows Stronger." Federal Theatre. May 1936: 5-6.
- Picard, Angela. Foreword. "Entertainment Today: The Choices Are Endless." Dun and Bradstreet/Gale Industry Reference Handbooks: Entertainment. Ed. Stacy A. McConnel. Detroit: The Gale Group, 1999.
- Picard, Angela. Foreword. "Entertainment Today: The Choices Are Endless." Dun and Bradstreet/Gale Industry Reference Handbooks: Entertainment. Ed. Jennifer Zielinski. Detroit: The Gale Group, 2000.
- Poggi, Jack. Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces 1870-1967. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1968.
- Pogrebin, Robin and Steven Greenhouse. "Broadway Lights Go Back On As Musicians Reach Accord." New York Times 12 March 2003: A1+.
- Prindle, David F. The Politics of Glamour: Ideology and Democracy in the Screen Actors Guild. Madison: The UP of Wisconsin, 1988.
- Rice, Elmer. The Living Theatre. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959.
- Ross, Murray. Stars and Strikes: Unionization of Hollywood. New York: AMS Press, 1967.
- Screen Actors Guild. "Beginning Actors." Screen Actors' Guild Homepage. 22 March 2003. Screen Actors' Guild. 22 March 2003
<<http://www.sag.org/wannabe.html>>.

- . "SAG/AFTRA Coordinating Merger Committee Meeting Minutes."
SAG/AFTRA Merger Committee Records. 24 August 1989. Tamiment Library
and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives. Bobst Library, New York University.
Box 1.
- . "Loose Records." SAG/AFTRA Merger Committee Records. Tamiment Library
and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives. Bobst Library, New York University.
Box 1.
- . "So You Wannabe An Actor." Screen Actors Guild Home Page.
14 Sept. 2001 Screen Actors Guild . 14 Sept. 2001
<<http://www.sag.org/wannabe.html>>.
- Schechner, Richard. "Performance Studies: The Broad Spectrum Approach." National
Forum 70.3 (1990): 15-6.
- Schickel, Richard. "Cinema Paradiso." Wilson Quarterly 23.3 (1999): 56-71.
- Schiller, Gail, Associated Press. "2 actors unions to vote on merger OK'd boards."
Bangor Daily News 16 April 2003: C4.
- Sony Corporation. Sony Pictures Homepage. 23 March 2003. Sony Corporation.
23 March 2003 <<http://www.sonypictures.com/corp/corporatefact.html>>.
- Souccar, Miriam Kreinin. "Actors Mind the Union Gap." Crain's New York Business.
04/16/2001, vol. 17, iss. 16, p1.
- Sporn, Paul. Against Itself: The Federal Theatre and Writers' Projects in the Midwest.
Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1995.

- United States. Census Bureau. 1997 Economic Census: Bridge Between NAICS and SIC Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation. 19 July 2000. U.S. Government. 12 Sept. 2001. <<http://www.census.gov/epcd/ec97brdg/E97B1711.HTM>>.
- Vogel, Harold L. Entertainment Industry Economics: A Guide for Financial Analysis. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1998.
- Wasser, Frederick. "Is Hollywood America? The Transnationalization of the American Film Industry." Movies and American Society. Ed. Steven J Ross. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2002.
- Whitaker, Barbara. "Actors' Talks Center on Journeymen Shortchanged by Pay of Stars." The New York Times 18 June 2001, New England final ed.: C7.
- Whitman, Willson. Bread and Circuses: A Study of Federal Theatre. New York: Oxford UP, 1937.
- Zielinski, Jennifer, ed. Dun and Bradstreet/Gale Group Industry Handbook: Entertainment and Hospitality. Detroit: Gale Group, 2000.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Jay Skriletz was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota on October 20, 1952. He was raised in Los Angeles, California, graduated from Verdugo Hills High School in 1970. He attended the University of Maine and graduated in 1984 with a Bachelor's degree in Theatre. In 2001, he entered the Theatre/Dance graduate program at The University of Maine.

After receiving his degree, Jay will continue to encourage the progressive reinvention of the performing arts' business practice. Jay is a candidate for the Master of Arts degree in Theatre from The University of Maine in May, 2003.