İSTANBUL BİLGİ UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE PROGRAMS

CULTURAL STUDIES MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM

INCLUSIVE STAGES: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT IN THEATRE AND CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES OF ACCESSIBLE PERFORMANCE

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İSTANBUL

2024

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KAPSAYICI SAHNELER: TİYATRODA SEYİRCİ KATILIMININ TARİHSEL ANALİZİ VE ERİŞİLEBİLİR PERFORMANSIN ÇAĞDAŞ UYGULAMALARI

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İstanbul Üniversitesi

Tezin Onaylandığı Tarih:03/07/2024

Toplam Sayfa Sayısı:93

Anahtar Kelimeler

1) Rahatlatılmış Performans
2) Sağlamcılık
3) Erişilebilirlik
4) Engellilik
5) Kapsayıcı Tiyatro

Keywords

1) Relaxed Performance
2) Ableism
3) Accessibility
4) Disability
5) Inclusive Theatre

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the "Theatre" itself—a place that continues to inspire me. I am fortunate to have pursued my education in the Department of Management of Performing Arts, and I extend my sincere gratitude to all the lecturers who guided my journey in theatre studies. I also want to thank the Department of Cultural Studies and all the lecturers for providing me with an interdisciplinary perspective that enriched my research. A special note of appreciation goes to my advisor, Dr. Mesrure Melis Bilgin Koen, whose unwavering support and encouragement from the inception of this research were invaluable. I am also grateful to my jury panel for their insightful feedback and support.

I would like to extend my thanks to the İstanbul Theatre Festival for giving me the chance to work with world-class theatre companies and providing me with professional knowledge, experience, and a broader vision. My sincere thanks also go to the Hrant Dink Foundation, which enabled me to research the Hagop Ayvaz Theatre archive and curate "*Coulisse*" the first comprehensive theatre history exhibition in Türkiye. My gratitude extends to Battersea Arts Centre in London, a home for extraordinary artists, where my London journey began. The inspiration and support I received there played a crucial role in shaping this research. A heartfelt thank you to all the theatre workers who bring the magic of theatre to life and keep its doors open to everyone.

I dedicate this research to my nephew, Utku, who is 17 years old and on the autism spectrum, and to his superhero parents, Ebru Köklü and Önder Köklü. Finally, a very special thank you to my partner, Umut Kurç, and my lovely daughter, Deniz Kurç, who have always believed in me, supported me, shown immense patience, and provided endless inspiration. Your love and encouragement have been my greatest strength throughout this journey.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses the transformation of theatre audience dynamics historically and examines the general scope of accessibility and inclusive practices in the United Kingdom's theatre spaces. In general terms, physical, mental, socio-economic, or identity-related barriers to accessing theatre performances are addressed, contingent upon various policies. Within these definitions, it is acknowledged that increased accessibility to theatre cannot solely be restricted to the needs of physically disabled individuals; also, there are invisible barriers faced by neurodiverse audiences and those intersecting with socio-economic or identity-related barriers. Consequently, the scope of Relaxed Performance, which emerged in the 1990s in the UK, is pointed out. Within this framework, particular attention is given to the tolerance and norms of audience etiquette under the influence of 17th-century to early 20th-century and Modernism. Subsequently, the methodology of current Relaxed Performance practices of the last 30 years in the UK is examined.

In the final section, the possibilities for the sustainability of access and inclusivity in theatre are examined through the integration of Critical Disability and Intersectionality Theories. Employing both qualitative and quantitative research methods, the thesis will evaluate relevant literature and research papers, academic theses, and results from audience surveys.

Keywords: Relaxed Performance, Accessibility, Inclusive Theatre, Disability, Ableism

ÖZET

Bu tez, tarihsel olarak tiyaro seyircisinin dönüşen dinamiklerini tartışırken, genel olarak tiyatro alanlarındaki erişilebilirlik ve kapsayıcı uygulamaların Birleşik Krallık'taki kapsamını incelemektedir. Genel anlamda, tiyatro performanslarına erişimin önündeki fiziksel, zihinsel, sosyo-ekonomik veya kimlikle ilgili engeller, çeşitli politikalara bağlı olarak ele alınmaktadır. Bu tanımlar dahilinde, tiyatroya erişimin yalnızca fiziksel engelli bireylerin ihtiyaçlarıyla sınırlandırılamayacağı; ayrıca nöro-çeşitli izleyicilerin karşılaştığı görünmez engeller ve sosyo-ekonomik veya kimlikle ilgili engellerle kesişen engeller olduğu kabul edilmektedir. Sonuç olarak, Birleşik Krallık'ta 1990'larda ortaya çıkan "Rahatlatılmış Performans" ın kapsamı genişletilmiştir. Bu çerçevede, 17. yüzyıldan 20. yüzyılın başlarına ve Modernizm'in etkisi altındaki seyirci görgü kurallarının hoşgörü ve normlarına özellikle dikkat çekilmektedir. Ardından, Birleşik Krallık'ta son 30 yılın "Rahatlatılmış Performans" uygulamalarının metodolojisi incelenmektedir.

Son bölümde, tiyatroda erişim ve kapsayıcılığın sürdürülebilirliği için olasılıklar, Eleştirel Engellilik ve Kesişimsellik Teorilerinin entegrasyonu yoluyla incelenmektedir. Hem nitel hem de nicel araştırma yöntemlerinin kullanıldığı tezde, ilgili literatür ve araştırma makaleleri, akademik tezler ve izleyici anketlerinden elde edilen sonuçlar değerlendirilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rahatlatılmış Performans, Erişilebilirlik, Kapsayıcı Tiyatro, Engellilik, Sağlamcılık

INTRODUCTION

Theatre has existed throughout the ages as a vibrant form of artistic expression, serving as a common space where stories are created through individuals' collaboration, collective effort and participation. (Swanson et la.,2007), It provides a forum for forming and colliding emotions and intellectual perspectives. In this way, theatre not only captivates and inspires audiences worldwide, but also creates a social impact by building a community in the area where it is produced and/or staged. The relationship between theatre and its audience has been dynamic throughout history, evolving in response to social changes and cultural movements. One of the most notable instances of this evolution can be observed in the history of theatre audience participation. (Wilson, 2004, pg.10) This transformative journey can be traced back to the interaction of historical communities. Additionally, this transformative effect can be traced and evidenced in contemporary manifestations of inclusivity in theatre that work to widen and reverse contemporary audience etiquette.

Since ancient times, theatre has been a cornerstone of social expression. It has served as a forum for collective storytelling and cultural interaction. In civilizations such as Ancient Greece, the theatre had a profound effect on the social fabric of the time; it served as a forum in which citizens could engage with moral and political discourse, as well as engage in philosophical questioning. The amphitheatres of Athens functioned as a collective space, wherein audiences could participate in the discourses and debates of their time, thereby fostering a sense of unity and shared experience. Audiences of Ancient Greek Theatre as described in Phyllis Hartnoll`s book *The Theatre, A Concise History*:

"The plots of all Greek plays were well known to the audience. They formed part of its cultural and religious heritage, many of them dated from Homeric times. The interest of the spectator lay, therefore, not in the novelty of the story, but in seeing how the dramatist had chosen to deal with it and in the quality of the acting and the work of the chorus." (Hartnoll, 2012 pg. 9).

This tradition continued in the Roman theatre, where all performances were free and open to the public, changing form with the war plays and the gladiatorial spectacle. In Medieval Europe, theatre performances in town squares and churchyards brought communities together for religious festivals and seasonal celebrations. These performances, often depicting religious narratives or moral stories, served not only as entertainment but also as a social tool, influenced by the political and moral values of the time. In the same period, there were also dancers, jugglers, acrobats and storytellers travelling around Europe, operating outside the influence of the church. Concerning the history of theatre and its audience, the Commedia dell'arte, which peaked in Italy in the 11th century, was popular throughout Europe, especially in Spain and France, until the 18th century. In this form of theatre, in which ordinary characters were performed without being bound to a specific text, the audience was not only physically close to the play but also socially connected to the performance.

The 17th century signifies a pivotal era in theatre, defined by the Renaissance's influence, the rise of private theatres, advancements in architecture, economic factors influencing access to performances, shifts in audience behaviour, and the effect of social hierarchies on the theatrical experience.

The advent of modernism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries marked a significant shift in theatrical aesthetics and audience dynamics. Several factors contributed to this separation, including the habits of the new urban class that emerged after the Industrial Revolution, the theatre movements that defined the proscenium arch or the fourth wall, modern lighting techniques, and the blackout of the audience, which determined the boundary between the stage and the audience. These factors created a barrier between the artists and the audience, further strengthening this separation.

The concept of the “quiet audience” which emerged in the context of modernism, emphasized aesthetic appreciation over passive spectatorship and social participation. At some point, the audience transitioned from a participatory

subject to a silent object of approval. The concept of audience etiquette became the most significant concept in determining the appropriate behaviour and courtesy expected from the theatre audience during this period. Silence, stillness, and attentiveness became virtues, and the audience was commanded to refrain from disrupting the performance through speech or movement. While this etiquette was intended to enhance the theatre experience, it also served to codify hierarchies of class and cultural capital, privileging certain forms of audience over others. In the present era, with increasing emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility, we are witnessing a resurgence of interest in redefining the relationship between theatre and its audience. A notable development in this context is the introduction in the early 1990s in the UK of relaxed performance, a format designed to accommodate individuals with sensory sensitivities, neurodiversity conditions or sensory disabilities. Relaxed performances aim to provide a more relaxed atmosphere in which audiences are free to move, sound or express themselves in ways that deviate from traditional audience norms. Theatres implementing relaxed performance initiatives have frequently provided sensory-friendly arrangements, such as dim lighting, quiet zones and altered sound levels, to create a welcoming environment for different audiences.

Currently, significant organisations within the cultural industry, particularly in the UK and European countries, recognise that there are numerous physical, mental, socio-economic and identity-related barriers to experiencing live performances for many individuals. Consequently, there is a growing consensus that cultural management and policy should be inclusive.

In light of the necessity to eradicate these obstacles, this thesis endeavours to provide a comprehensive examination of accessibility and inclusive practices in theatre and performance. The research scope extends beyond the realm of physical limitations, recognizing the multifaceted challenges faced by neurodiverse audiences, individuals confronting socio-economic inequalities, and those grappling with identity-related barriers. It is also worth underlining the complexity

inherent in fostering truly inclusive theatre environments and the need to adopt multi-faceted approaches to address these challenges.

As a result, the excitement and enthusiasm that has been evident for almost 2500 years since the Greeks honoured Dionysus with their “goat songs” seems to have been somewhat suppressed, and the theatre seems to have quieted down and become less accessible to all. At this juncture, performances that are less constrained indicate a reclamation of the theatre as a space for collective participation and belonging. The embrace of inclusivity and catering for different audience needs serves to reinforce the role of contemporary theatre as a vital nexus of community, creativity and cultural exchange.

In this thesis, the historical approach is limited to the context of Western theatre. Additionally, accessible theatre practices studied here are confined to the research field within the United Kingdom.

CHAPTER 1

FROM RITUAL TO REFLECTION: SOCIAL IMPACT OF THEATRE AND THEATRE SPECTATOR IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In this first chapter, the study examines the social impacts of theatre and its audiences from a historical perspective. This perspective has been limited to the history of Western theatre.The origins of theatre can be traced back to ancient civilisations and it has been suggested that theatre emerged from religious rituals and ceremonies. Early forms of theatre were often social events that brought people together to share stories, myths and cultural values. These performances served not only as entertainment but also as a means of education and social cohesion within the community. Over time, theatre evolved into a more structured art form with defined roles for actors, playwrights and audiences (Rozik, 2002). Throughout history, theatre has been used as a tool to represent individuals, communities and even nations. It has served as a mirror reflecting social norms, values and conflicts, allowing audiences to interact with and reflect on their own experiences. Theatre has the capacity to challenge existing power structures, provoke thought and inspire action within communities. It engages with communities, contributing to a community's collective identity and consciousness. Theatre's engagement with diverse communities is particularly important in amplifying the voices of marginalised groups.

In contemporary theatre theories, the performance space is also a space of collective experience shared by all individuals in the theatre, thereby building the community. This collective space reproduces and/or performs the participants' self and togetherness. It can be conceptualised in Raymond Williams' theory of “structure of feeling” in the 1970s, as outlined in his theory of media and culture. (Williams, 1963, p.314). In contrast to elitist definitions, Williams offers a new and inclusive definition of the idea of culture. According to this definition, the idea of solidarity is potentially the true building of society. Community is a shared culture

that emphasises diversity, complexity, solidarity, and constant redefinition as elements of stability (Hayes, 2006).

Despite the historical roots of theatre and post-structural theories of performance which underline the importance of community engagement and culture of participation with diverse spectator, this inclusive and social art form is nowadays often followed by passive audiences sitting in silence in a blacked-out auditorium. The majority of people believe that theatre is an art form that aligns with the economically segregated, culturally homogenized, bourgeois class. In other words, in common sense, theatre is produced and followed by an intellectual minority who are considered physically and mentally able. From the perspective of theatre history, from Ancient Greece to contemporary times, it is clear that there has been a significant transformation in the culture of theatre participation and audience behaviour. This transformation has undoubtedly been a long process, occurring structurally and historically in parallel with changes in social, political and economic systems (Bennett, 1997).

1.1. THE SOCIETAL REFLECTIONS AND SPECTATOR ENGAGEMENT IN ANCIENT GREEK THEATRE

Historically, the theatre of Dionysus clearly represented the social and political structure of Athens, where the majority of the society in Ancient Greece, approximately 15,000 participants, were present (Bennett, 1997).

In Ancient Greek theatre, performances represented an essential component of religious festivals dedicated to the god Dionysus. These performances evolved from social rituals and ceremonies into structured theatre productions that gradually involved the whole society (Pantazis, 2017). Greek theatre fulfilled a number of functions within society, including entertainment, education, and the exploration of moral and civic issues. It contributed to the cultural and social fabric of ancient Greek society by providing a platform for storytelling, reflection and dialogue on

issues of public concern (Glytzouris, 2014). The structure and design of Greek theatres, such as open-air amphitheatres, were planned to enhance the theatrical experience for both actors and spectators. The architectural features of Greek theatres, such as the “skene” (scene building) and “orchestra” (dance space), were designed to accommodate the performance of plays and facilitate audience participation (Barkas, 2019).

“The chorus in the orchestra shows that no physical barrier separated performer from audience; the presence among the spectators of the cult statue of a god [Dionysus] who might also be active on the stage further reveals that the absence of a physical barrier was matched by the absence of any 'spiritual' barrier. Stage, orchestra and auditorium formed a single unit and so too did actors, chorus and spectators, all of whom were sharing in a common act of devotion.” (Walcot 1976: 4-5)

Figure 1.1 The Theatre of Dionysos in Athens, Today

Source: Hartnoll, P., & Brater, E. (2012). The theatre: A concise history (4th ed.). Thames & Hudson., page 8

The acoustics of ancient Greek theatres were renowned for their clarity and projection, achieved through a combination of architectural design and the natural environment (Rindel, 2013). The placement of theatres in specific locations and their orientation played an important role in optimising sound quality and visibility for the audience (Ashby, 1991). Audience participation was encouraged through the role of the chorus, which provided commentary, reflection and interaction with the main characters (Ley, 2015). The chorus served as a conduit between the audience and the actors, engaging the audience in the themes and content of the plays and encouraging collective reflection on moral and civic issues (Ley, 2015). In the context of ancient Greek theatre, the practice of audience segregation was a highly intricate system that was largely shaped by social status, citizenship, and gender. The seating arrangements within the “theatron”, the semi-circular seating area surrounding the orchestra, were meticulously organised in accordance with the prevailing societal hierarchy. In particular, male citizens of the city-state, such as those of Athens, were afforded the privilege of occupying the most prominent seats in the front rows, designated as the “prohedria”. Such seating was allocated to dignitaries, officials and priests, thereby underscoring the pivotal role of social status in determining seating allocation. Non-citizens, including metics and slaves, were allocated seating in less desirable areas if they were permitted to attend at all. This exemplifies the exclusivity of the theatre space based on citizenship (Roselli, 2011, pg. 69-72). Furthermore, gender was a significant factor in the segregation of audiences in ancient Greek theatre. The extent of women's attendance at Greek theatre remains a topic of historical debate. However, it is generally agreed that theatre was predominantly a male domain. If women did attend performances, they were likely segregated to specific areas, possibly situated towards the back or in less favourable seats within the “theatron”. However, some exceptions existed for priestesses and women involved in religious activities, who might have been granted special seating arrangements due to their roles in religious ceremonies. (Roselli, 2011, pg. 160-165).

Themes and content in Greek theatre frequently revolved around civic and moral issues, exploring notions of justice, fate, truth (alethea) and the relationship between gods and mortals. These themes were employed to prompt reflection, foster empathy, and encourage the audience to engage in moral reasoning (Ley, 2015). Greek theatre had a significant impact on public opinion and civic engagement, as it provided a platform for the discussion and negotiation of social norms, values and conflicts. The portrayal of complex characters and moral dilemmas contributed to more engaged and critical citizenship by forcing audiences to reflect on their own beliefs and behaviour (Ley, 2015).

Rooted in ancient Greek mythology and society, Greek tragedy serves as a mirror that reflects not only the journey of the individual, but also the collective shadows and taboos of civilisation. This genre of literature and theatre, through its exploration of myths and tales of the past, encourages reflection on the progress of civilisation and how far humanity has come. By focusing on marginalised individuals and social outcasts, Greek tragedy sheds light on the darker aspects of society that often remain hidden (Wiles, 1997). The themes of love, loyalty, social hierarchy and the injustices faced by the lower classes are recurring motifs in Greek tragedy, highlighting the struggles and challenges faced by different segments of society (Tang, 2023).

Furthermore, the portrayal of marginalised characters in Greek tragedy serves as a strategic tool to highlight social subordination and power dynamics within the narratives. These marginalised characters often play a crucial role in shaping the outcomes of the tragedies, demonstrating how even those on the margins of society can influence the course of events. By giving voice to these socially subordinate characters, Greek tragedy not only highlights their struggles, but also underscores the complexities of power and influence within the social framework (Chike, 2023).

Comedy, as a contemporary counterpart to Greek tragedy, plays a different but equally important role in scrutinising everyday issues and transforming them

through catharsis. While tragedy delves into the darker aspects of human existence and society, comedy provides a lens through which to view and critique current societal norms and behaviours in a lighter, more satirical manner (Wiles, 1997). Through humour and wit, comedy addresses pressing issues and offers social commentary and criticism in a way that engages and entertains the audience (Wiles, 1997).

Characters in Greek tragedy are often involved in situations of deep sorrow and become central figures in exploring the complexity of human emotions and experiences (Wickramasinghe, 2021). Through the portrayal of grief-stricken characters, Greek tragedies provide a platform for examining the psychological impact of loss and tragedy on individuals and society as a whole (Wickramasinghe, 2021).

In the realm of literature and philosophy, classical Greek tragedies have been a rich source of inspiration and contemplation, with themes often drawn from the myths explored in epic poems such as the Iliad and the Odyssey (Adams, 2018). These enduring narratives have provided a foundation for the exploration of complex philosophical ideas and moral dilemmas that continue to fascinate readers and scholars (Adams, 2018). By delving into ancient Greek law and tradition, classical tragedies provide a window into the ethical and moral frameworks of the time, inviting reflection on timeless questions of justice, fate, and human agency (Adams, 2018).

Greek tragedy stands as a monumental literary genre that not only explores the depths of human experience and social dynamics, but also serves as a timeless reflection on the journey of civilisation (Wiles, 1997). Through the lens of tragedy, audiences are confronted with the complexities of the human condition, the nuances of power and social hierarchies, and the enduring themes of love, loss, and fate (Wiles, 1997).Comedy, as a contemporary counterpart, offers a different but equally insightful perspective on social issues, reframing them through humour and satire (Wiles, 1997). The interplay between tragedy and comedy, with their common roots

in the exploration of the human condition, highlights the enduring power of theatre to provoke thought, evoke emotion, and encourage reflection on the journey of civilisation.

1.2. ROMAN THEATRE

In ancient Rome, the theatre served as a central hub for public entertainment and social interaction, catering to a diverse audience that included both ordinary citizens and the elite strata of society. This amalgamation of spectators participating in theatrical events was not merely a passive act of observation, but rather an active engagement in which individuals became integral participants in the unfolding spectacle (Goncharova, 2019). The ludic nature of Roman entertainment was deeply ingrained in the fabric of society, with games playing a central role in various forms of public entertainment. These games often included mechanisms such as voting to determine outcomes, reflecting a semblance of public opinion and participation, thus providing a platform for individuals, particularly the common people, to express themselves in a controlled environment (Jackob, 2007).

In addition, Roman theatres occasionally staged re-enactments of naval battles, known as naumachiae, and other violent spectacles in which real deaths occurred on stage and served as grandiose displays of the power and prowess of the empire. These events were not merely for entertainment, but also served as a visual testament to the power of the Roman Empire, highlighting its ability to orchestrate such elaborate and deadly performances. The inclusion of such spectacles in the theatrical repertoire underscored the Empire's dominance and control not only over its territories, but also over the narratives and experiences presented to its citizens and subjects.

The notion of ludic engagement in Roman society extended beyond the theatre to encompass various forms of public gatherings and events, including

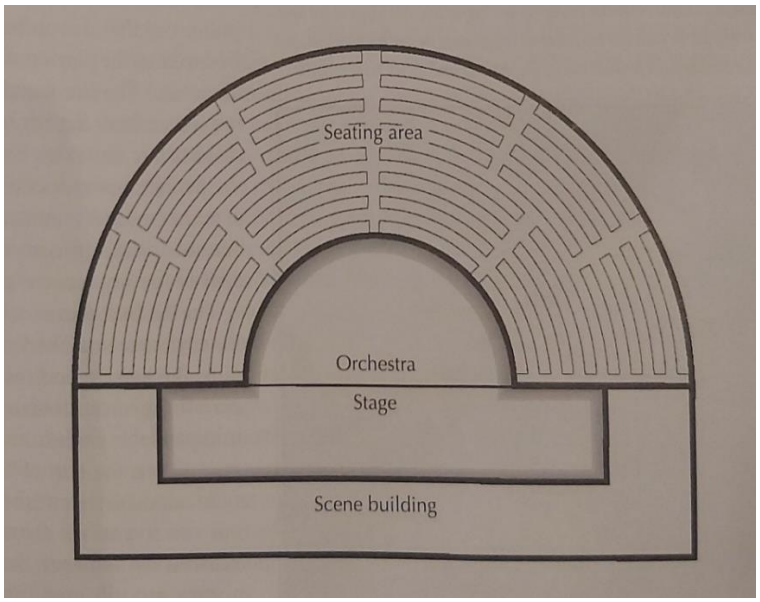
athletic competitions, religious ceremonies, poetry contests, and chariot races (Goncharova, 2019). These diverse spectacles were designed not only for entertainment, but also as a means of social cohesion, political messaging, and the display of imperial grandeur. The Roman populace, despite their limited political power within the empire, found avenues for expression and participation through these ludic events, allowing them to engage with broader societal narratives and power structures in a somewhat controlled environment (Jackob, 2007). By providing spaces for communal engagement and participation, the theatres and arenas of ancient Rome became arenas where individuals from different strata of society could interact, express themselves, and align themselves with the dominant narratives propagated by the ruling elite.

In essence, the theatres of ancient Rome were not only stages for entertainment, but also platforms for social reflection, political discourse and cultural expression. The ludic elements embedded in these theatrical performances and public spectacles served as conduits for engaging the populace, disseminating ideological messages, and reinforcing the power dynamics prevalent in Roman society. Through the careful staging of games, reenactments, and diverse performances, Roman theatres became spaces where the complexities of empire were not only presented, but also negotiated, contested, and sometimes subverted by active and participatory audiences (Goncharova, 2019).

Figure 1.2 The Roman Theatre of Old Aspendos

Source: Wilson, E., Goldfarb, A. (2006). Living Theatre: A History. United Kingdom: McGraw-Hill Companies, Incorporated., page: 146

Figure 1.3 Ground Plan of a Typical Roman Theatre



Source: Wilson, E., Goldfarb, A. (2006). Living Theatre: A History. United Kingdom: McGraw-Hill Companies, Incorporated., page: 77

1.3. TRANSFORMING THE SCENE: FROM MEDIEVAL SPECTACLES TO THE 17th CENTURY

From the Middle Ages to the 17th century, theatre continuously transform to represent social and political structures of the society and engaged with the audiences in various ways. This period saw the development of Medieval theatre, the flourishing of Renaissance and Spanish Golden Age theatre and the rise of Commedia dell'Arte.

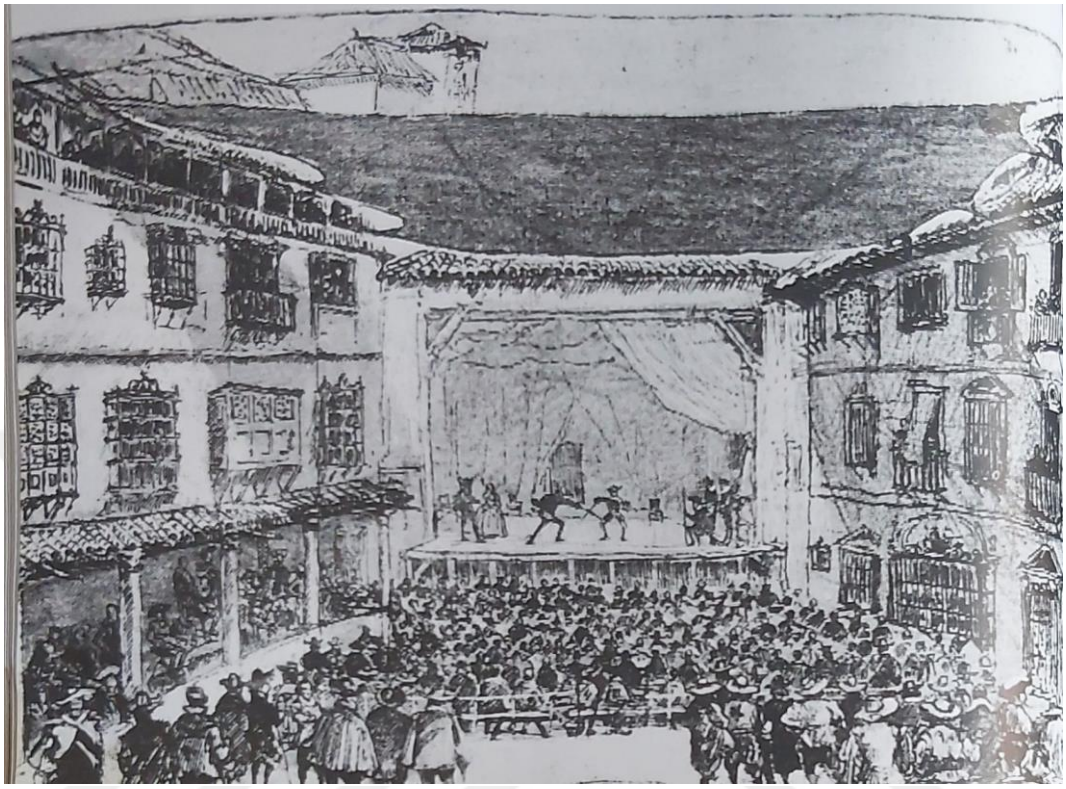
Medieval theatre, originating from the fifth to the 15th century, emerged primarily from liturgical ceremonies. The Church employed drama to educate the illiterate public, conveying biblical stories and Christian morality. This form of theatre played an essential role in representing and reinforcing social norms, with mystery plays, miracle plays, and morality plays performed during festivals. These plays aimed to educate the public on religious matters of morality, thereby influencing the ethical framework of society. Audience participation was a defining feature of medieval theatre, with performances held in public spaces like churchyards, town squares, and marketplaces, making them accessible to a wide audience. Spectators often reacted vocally and physically to the performance, also, there was ceremonial staging where plays were staged on floats moving through the streets (Brocket et al., 2014).

The Renaissance period, spanning from the 14th to the 17th centuries, marked a cultural rebirth, with theatre playing a central role. The rediscovery of classical texts and the growth of humanism influenced theatre, leading to the exploration of secular themes alongside religious ones. Around this time in England, playwrights like Shakespeare and Marlowe commented on social, political, and philosophical issues in their works. The rise of private theatre companies and the patronage system led to the construction of permanent theatres, contributing to the cultural and economic life of cities. Theatre became a significant form of public entertainment, attracting diverse audiences and facilitating cultural

exchange. Public playhouses, such as the Globe in London, made theatre-going a popular pastime for all social classes. These theatres have an interactive environment where audiences were known for their vocal reactions, such as cheering, booing, and even throwing objects, making theatre a dynamic and participatory experience. Theatres also served as social centres where people gathered to watch plays, socialize, trade, and discuss current events, reinforcing the theatre's role as a central part of urban life (Hartnoll, 2012).

The Spanish Golden Age (Siglo de Oro) was another remarkable period of cultural and artistic development spanning the 16th and 17th centuries. Theatre played a pivotal role during this period, with eminent playwrights such as Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca, and Tirso de Molina creating works that resonated profoundly with the Spanish public. These plays often addressed moral and religious themes, reflecting the profound influence of the Catholic Church, while also exploring secular themes indicative of social changes and the rise of humanist ideas. Theatre became a significant form of public entertainment, contributing to the cultural fabric of Spanish society and promoting the Spanish language and culture both domestically and internationally. Theatrical performances were typically held in public theatres known as “corrales de comedias”, situated in the courtyards of buildings. These venues appealed to a diverse range of social classes, ensuring that theatre was a communal activity enjoyed by all. The lively and interactive atmosphere of the Corrales saw audiences actively participating through vocal responses, applause, and even physical movement. The theatre was not only entertainment but also an important social event linked to festivals and public holidays, fostering a sense of shared cultural experience and strengthening social bonds (Brockett et al., 2014).

Figure 1.4 The Corral del Principe Madrid

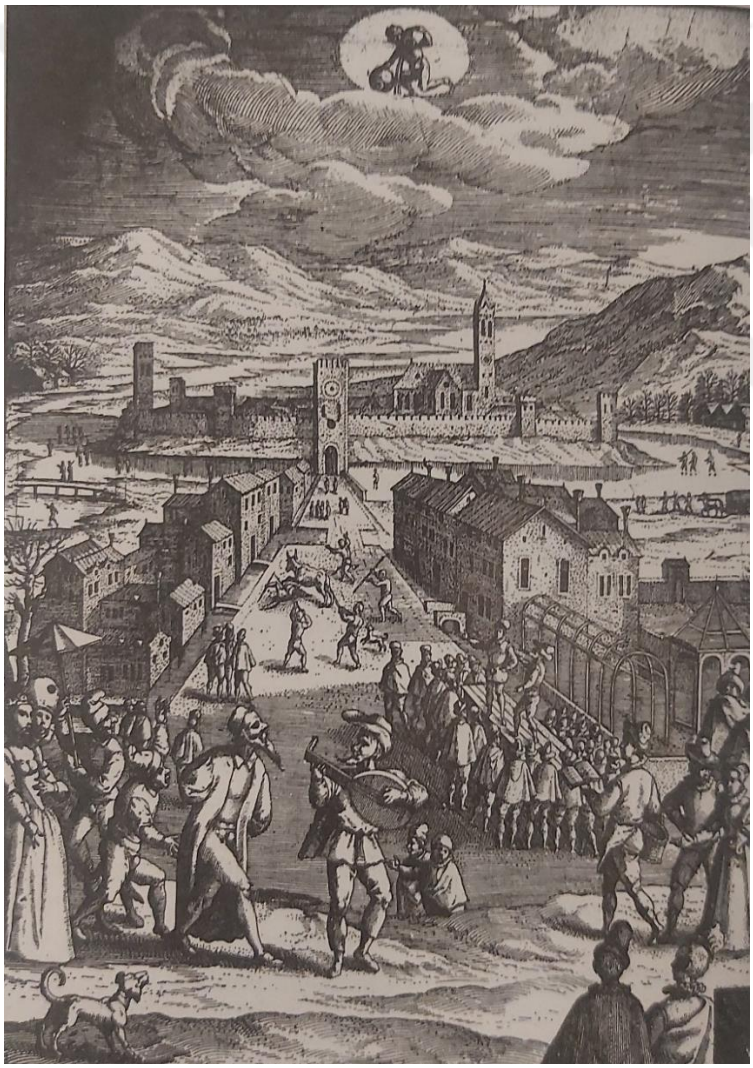


Source: Hartnoll, P., & Brater, E. (2012). The theatre: A concise history (4th ed.). Thames & Hudson., page 92.

The Commedia dell'arte, originating before the 16th century, was a theatre form of popular theatre that flourished from the 16th to the 18th century, known in Italy for its improvised performances and stock characters. This theatre tradition democratized entertainment by appealing to both commoners and the aristocracy. Commedia dell'Arte was instrumental in disseminating cultural practices throughout Europe and influenced various theatre traditions. It employed humour and satire to make social commentary, addressing contemporary social, political, and economic issues. Professional troupes travelled widely, sharing and developing theatre styles, contributing to a more interconnected European cultural landscape. Commedia dell'Arte performances were highly interactive, with actors frequently

engaging directly with the audience. The improvisational nature of the performances allowed for spontaneous and dynamic exchanges, ensuring accessibility to a broad demographic. Open-air venues like public squares and marketplaces fostered a vibrant and participatory atmosphere where audiences felt free to express their reactions. Familiar characters such as Harlequin, Pantalone, and Columbina created an immediate connection with the audience (Brockett et al., 2014).

Figure 1.5 Commedia Dell'arte



Source: Wilson, E., Goldfarb, A. (2006). Living Theatre: A History. United Kingdom: McGraw-Hill Companies, Incorporated., page: 160.

Medieval and sixteenth-century audiences did not enjoy the same level of influence as their Greek counterparts, yet they still played an active role. There was a flexibility in the relationship between the stage and audience worlds which afforded, in different ways, the participation of those audiences as actors in the drama (Bennett, 1997).

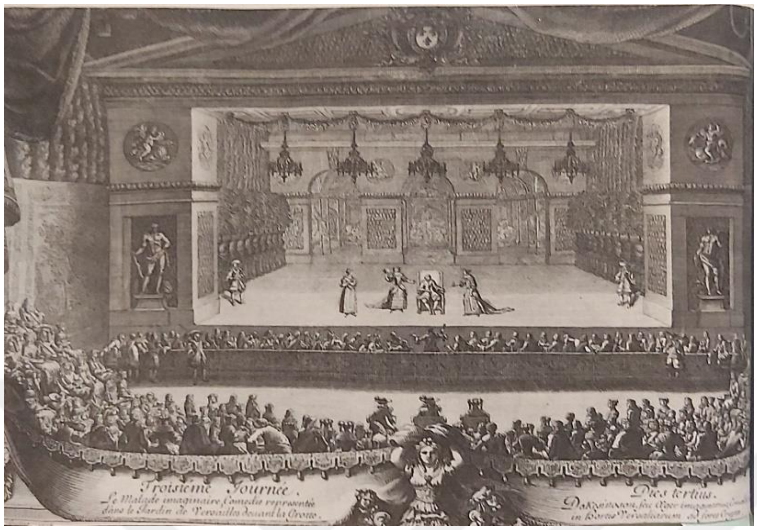
1.4. THE 17th CENTURY THEATRE: FROM RENAISSANCE REVIVAL TO ELITE ENTERTAINMENT

The 17th century saw an important historical transition in theatre, marked by a shift towards more professional and commercialised productions. The Renaissance period had a profound impact on theatre, with a revival of classical texts and a renewed interest in drama and performance. This period saw the emergence of professional theatre companies and the establishment of permanent indoor theatres that allowed for controlled performances (Sturmberg et al. 2014). Architectural evolution played an important role in shaping 17th-century theatres, with a shift towards enclosed spaces that provided a more controlled environment for performances. The design of indoor theatres in this period was primarily concerned with improving acoustics, sightlines and audience comfort. The introduction of private boxes and tiered seating reflects the increasing emphasis on social hierarchies and economic privilege in theatre spaces (D'Orazio & Nannini, 2019). Economic factors also influenced 17th-century theatre, with ticket costs often limiting access to performances to the wealthy elite. The patronage of the aristocracy and wealthy members of society played an important role in sustaining theatre productions and shaping the content and style of performances (Harbor, 2020). The patronage of theatres by wealthy elites in the 17th century not only influenced the content and style of productions, but also had a direct impact on the financial aspects of theatre operations (Shin & Meals, 2005). The support of aristocratic and royal patrons enabled theatres to stage elaborate and expensive

productions, often catering to the tastes of the upper class (O'Riordan, 2006). This patronage system contributed to the economic divide in theatre spaces, as the cost of participation was often prohibitive for those lower in the social hierarchy (Schmelzing, 2020). The economic barriers present in 17th century theatres were a reflection of the broader social stratification of the period, where access to cultural events such as theatre performances was largely determined by one's wealth and social position.

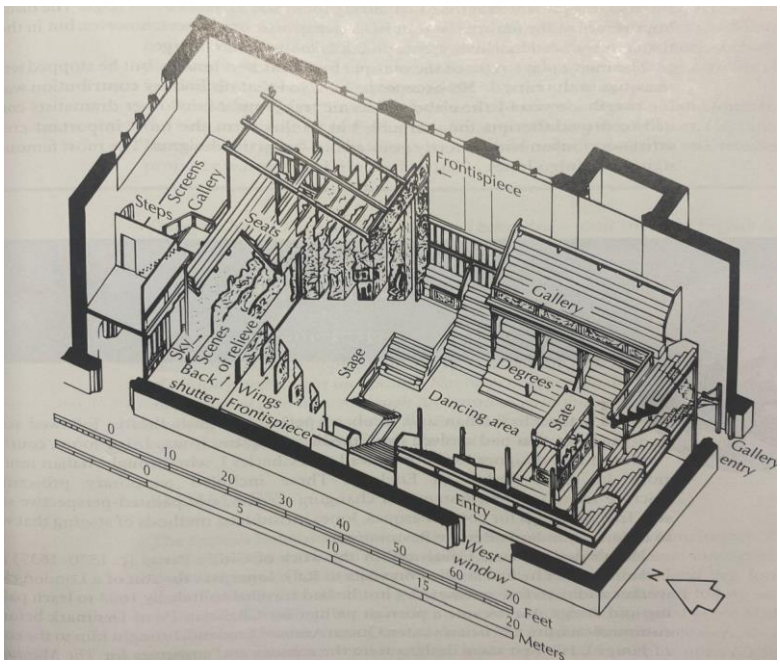
With the establishment of private theatres in the 16th and 17th century, however, there was a move towards the separation of the fictional stage world and the audience. In the 17th and 18th centuries, there was a shift in audience behaviour towards passive spectatorship, influenced by the social hierarchies present in the theatre spaces. The introduction of private boxes and tiered seating reinforced distinctions between different audience members based on their social status (Wasmuth et al., 2020). Higher admission prices limited the social composition of the audience. With the beginnings of passivity and more elitist audiences came codes and conventions of behaviour. During the English Restoration theatre, 18th century theatre in Germany and French theatre before the revolution, with the impact of aristocracy, audiences became increasingly passive and increasingly bourgeois. With the exception of the first forty years of the nineteenth century, when the working-class audience created noisy disturbances and occasional riots in the pits, this is a steady progression to a peak in the second half of the nineteenth century (Bennett, 1997).

Figure 1.6 French Renaissance, Molières « The Imaginary Invalid » Play, Versailles Palace



Source: Wilson, E., Goldfarb, A. (2006). Living Theatre: A History.
United Kingdom: McGraw-Hill Companies, Incorporated., page: 248

Figure 1.7 English Playhouse- Whitehall Palace Arranged for a Court Masque



Source: Wilson, E., Goldfarb, A. (2006). Living Theatre: A History.
United Kingdom: McGraw-Hill Companies, Incorporated., page: 160

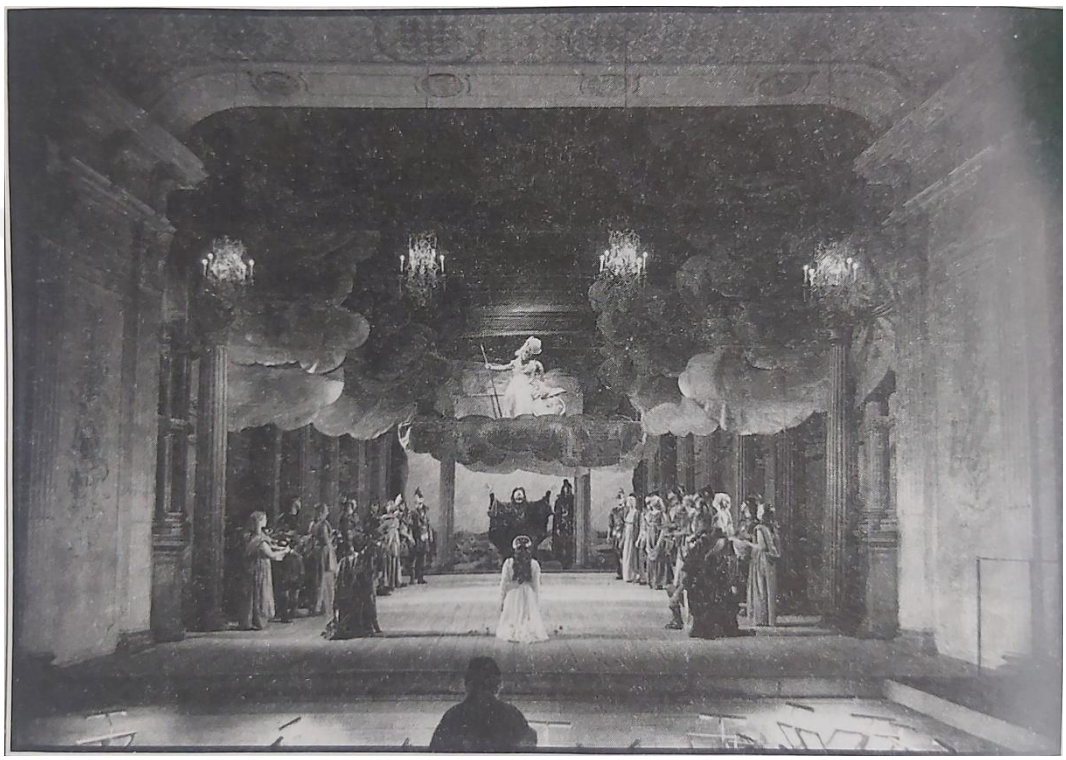
In conclusion, the 17th century marks a period of significant change in theatre, characterised by the influence of the Renaissance, the emergence of private theatres, architectural developments, economic factors shaping access to performances, changes in audience behaviour and the impact of social hierarchies on the theatrical experience.

1.5. THE FOURTH WALL: DIDEROT'S LEGACY AND EFFECT OF THEATRICAL REALISM

In his 18th-century Le Théâtre, the French philosopher Denis Diderot, who also had a special interest in the theatre, instructed stage actors: “Do not think of the audience anymore, pretend that it does not exist. Imagine that there is a big wall at the edge of the stage separating you from the parterre. Act as if the curtain has never opened.” (Wilson, 2004). In all subsequent theatre theories, this imaginary wall was designated the “fourth wall”. In theatre, the fourth wall refers to an imaginary barrier between the actors on stage and the audience, creating a sense of separation and realism within the performance (Peng, 2024). The fourth wall is a theatrical convention where an invisible, imaginary barrier separates the actors from the audience. The audience can see through “this wall”, but the actors perform as if they cannot. From the sixteenth century onwards, the rise of illusionism in staging, culminating in the realism and naturalism of nineteenth-century theatre, led to the development of the fourth wall concept (Bell, 2008). This metaphorical wall is related to the mise-en-scène behind a proscenium arch. In a scene set indoors with three walls presented onstage (known as a box set), the fourth wall would run along the proscenium line dividing the stage from the audience. However, it should be noted that the fourth wall is a performance convention rather than a physical element of set design. Actors ignore the audience, focusing exclusively on the dramatic world and remaining absorbed in its fiction, a state that theatre practitioner Konstantin Stanislavski called "public solitude" – the ability to behave naturally in private while being watched (Mackova, 2023).

Figure 1.8 The Theatre at Drottningholm

This Theatre in Sweden Still Has The Same Sets and Stage Machinery That Were Used When It Was Built as a Court Playhouse in The Eighteenth Century. It is an Excellent Example of an Italianate Proscenium Theatre With The Pole and Chariot System For Changing Scenery.



Source: Wilson, E., Goldfarb, A. (2006). Living Theatre: A History.
United Kingdom: McGraw-Hill Companies, Incorporated., page: 328.

1.6. MODERNISM IN THEATRE: TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

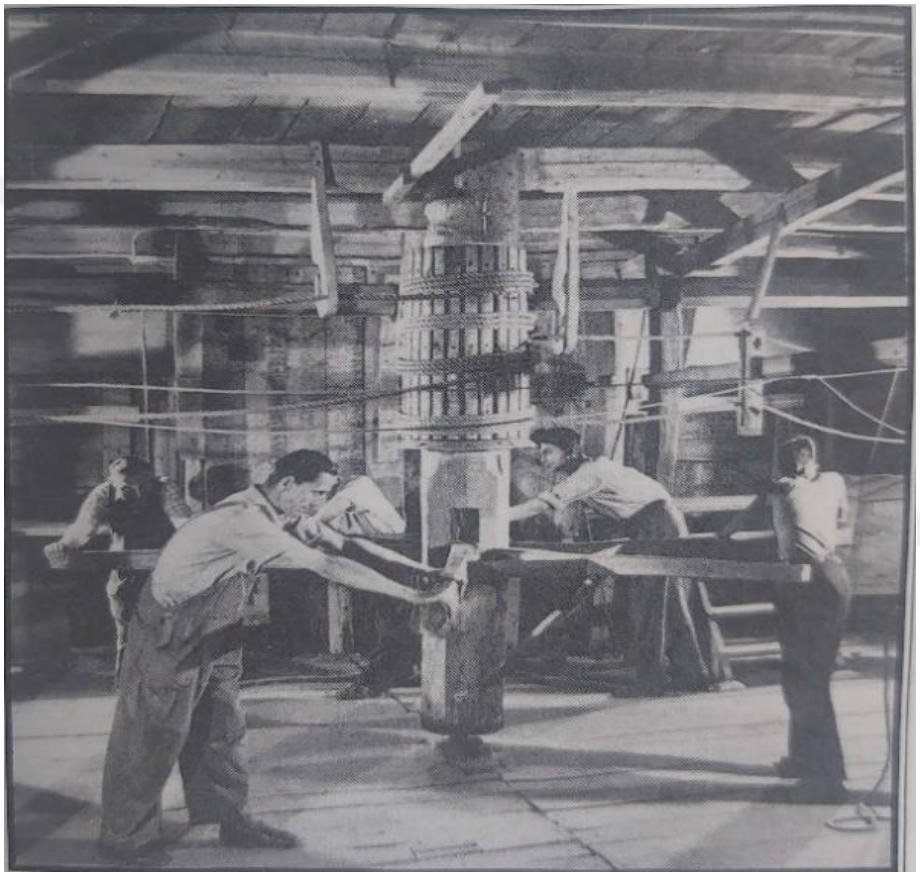
The historical context of modernism in theatre was influenced by the social, political and technological changes of the period, such as the post-World War I era, the rise of industrialisation and the questioning of traditional techniques in staging (Hansen, 2009).

One of the distinctive aspects of modern theatre, in contrast to the actor-dominant Italian folk theatre tradition, was its text-based form. Also, the illusion of reality helped the adaptation of the box set in staging, with a black teaser and black legs on both sides. As a spatial transformation, the realism movement in staging created a sharp separation between the stage and the audience with the complete blackout of the audience auditorium. Also, the effect of the fourth wall was enhanced by the prominence of the proscenium arch (Hartnoll, 2012). After 1850, with the pits replaced by stalls, theatre design ensured the more sedate behaviour of audiences. As Michael Booth notes, "After 1850, behaviour improved, and complaints were eventually made not of uproar in the pit and gallery, but of stolid indifference in the stalls" (Booth, Michael R.,1975).

The consequence of technological developments in theatre during the modernist period revolutionised set design, lighting and sound, changing the overall theatre experience for audiences. The evolution of lighting techniques, such as the introduction of electric lighting, has enabled dramatic effects, bringing a new level of control and creativity to stage productions (Weinzierl et al., 2015). The footlights, first installed in the seventeenth-century private playhouses, had become a literal barrier which separated the audience and the stage. Similarly, advances in sound technology have improved the quality and clarity of sound in theatres, enhancing the auditory experience of audiences (Iannace & Trematerra, 2018). These technological advances have affected the aesthetics of theatre as well as the practices of participation.

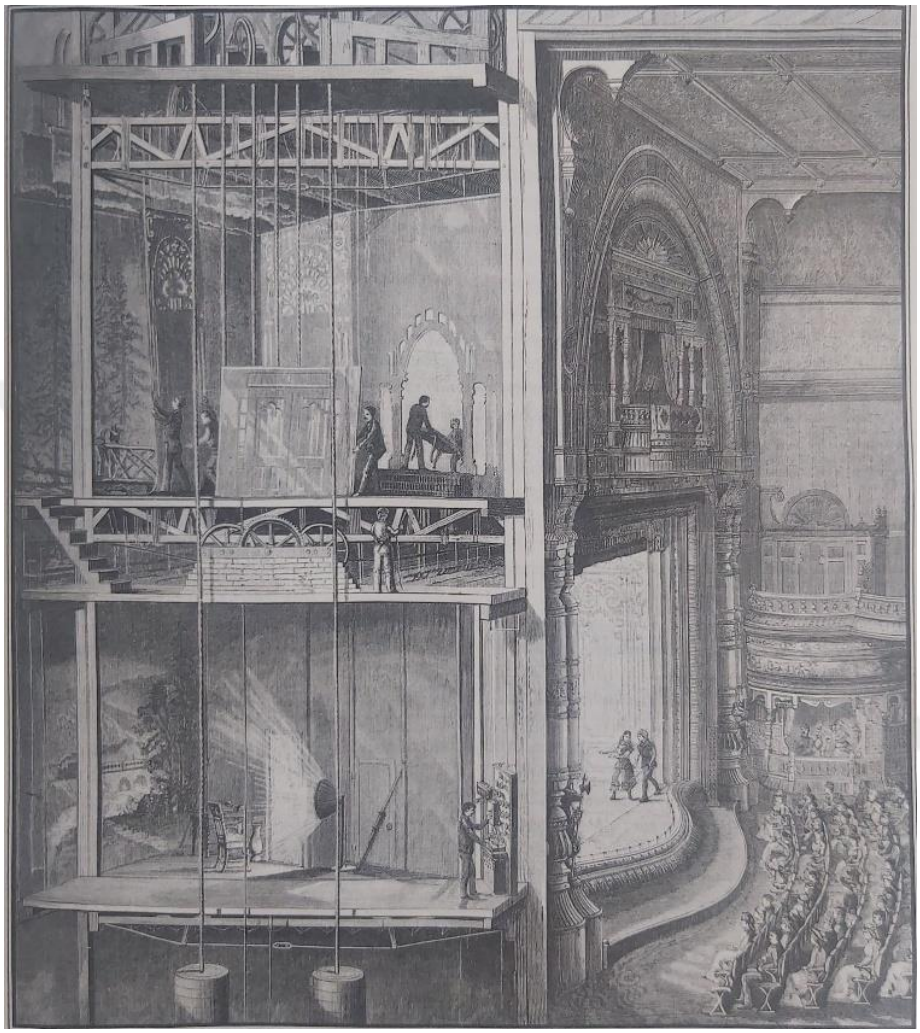
Figure 1.9 Stage Machinery at Drottningholm

Drottningholm still has the machinery of an eighteenth-century Italianate proscenium theatre, and productions there today continue to use the same technology. Here, stagehands are using its pole-and-chariot system to execute a scene change.



Source: Wilson, E., Goldfarb, A. (2006). Living Theatre: A History.
United Kingdom: McGraw-Hill Companies, Incorporated., page: 329

Figure 1.10 New Theatre Technology in 1880 with Two Stages Invisible to the Audience



Source: Wilson, E., Goldfarb, A. (2006). Living Theatre: A History. United Kingdom: McGraw-Hill Companies, Incorporated., page: 391.

On the other hand, in terms of social aspects, the growth of the urban middle class in the 19th century was influenced by the significant sociopolitical changes that accompanied the Industrial Revolution and urbanisation (Clark & Mangham, 2003). These changes led to the emergence of a new social stratum with distinct cultural consumption patterns, including a growing interest in theatre as a form of

entertainment and social interaction (Clark & Mangham, 2003). The influence of the urban middle class on cultural consumption was profound, as this demographic group sought to distinguish itself through refined tastes and participation in cultural activities such as attending theatre performances (Clark & Mangham, 2003).

As a result, the transition to a quiet and passive audience in the theatre can be understood within the broader context of the social, cultural and technological changes that occurred during the Industrial Revolution and urbanisation (Warde et al. 2007). As urban centres grew and industrialisation transformed societies, theatre was seen as a leisure activity and there were significant changes in patterns of cultural consumption (Katz-Gerro, 1999). For the working class, middle class, urban intellectuals and bourgeoisie who emerged after the Industrial Revolution, social norms underwent a transformation, the new urban identity was reconstructed, and the components of the cultural sphere were redefined. The rise of urban life and the transition to industrial economies led to the emergence of new forms of entertainment and cultural experiences, which affected the way people engaged with the arts, including theatre (Karababa and Ger, 2011).

Figure 1.11 Audiences Flock to the Theatre

Source: Wilson, E., Goldfarb, A. (2006). Living Theatre: A History. United Kingdom: McGraw-Hill Companies, Incorporated., page:352

1.7. THE QUIET AUDIENCE: EVOLUTION OF THEATRE ETIQUETTE AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS

1.7.1. The Emergence of the "Quiet Audience"

The concept of the "quiet audience" is a distinctly modern phenomenon, although the precise historical emergence of this phenomenon is subject to debate. Records from the United Kingdom demonstrate that audience etiquette was evident in arts organisations' management and audience education policies in the 1950s. To comprehend the dynamics of audience education and control in the 1950s theatre institutions, it is essential to consider the post-war context, which witnessed an

expansion of state and institutional support for cultural endeavour (Lamont and Lareau, 1988). The conservative norms that dominated the long post-war period in Britain reinforced a form of suppressed self-discipline and/or 'policing' of audience etiquette. Theatre venues, practitioners, and media critics were instrumental in promoting the norm of the “quiet audience”. In 1963, the Royal Festival Hall's programme included “The Plain Man's Guide to Coughing”, which warned that a single uncontrolled cough could ruin the entertainment of three thousand audience members (VA Archives, 1963). This emphasis on respectful silence as correct theatre etiquette has continued from the 1950s to the present day in the UK. However, in contrast to the explicit instructions of theatre authorities in the 1950s, contemporary audience behaviour is primarily self-regulated. Modern audiences self-regulate through social cues such as disapproving glances or, as The Times theatre critic Benedict Nightingale suggested, "the teacher's stare and the English sniff". This self-control reflects Michel Foucault's notion of docile bodies controlled under their own control. Burkeman humorously suggests that the enthusiasm for the enforcement of authoritarian etiquette may reflect the dynamics of a totalitarian regime (Simpson, 2018).

The emergence of the quiet, passive audience in theatre is shaped by various cultural and social factors. One significant contributor is the transformation of the cultural sphere into a more passive and consumptive form, alongside the increasing commercialization and specialization of theatre as a leisure activity (Bertacchini et al., 2021). Audiences have become accustomed to consuming entertainment in a structured and controlled manner, leading to the expectation of passive spectatorship (Lee & Cho, 2017). Modern societal norms and changes in cultural preferences have further influenced audience behaviour, promoting a more subdued and observant approach to theatre attendance.

This shift towards a silent and passive audience kept in the dark and indoors marks a notable departure from the interactive and participatory dynamics of the origins of Western theatre in antiquity, particularly in Ancient Greece. In the past,

audiences were often vocal and expressive during performances, reacting in real-time to events on stage and interacting with performers through verbal and physical responses (Katz-Gerro, 2004). This interactive dynamic blurred the lines between the stage and the seating area, creating a sense of intimacy and shared experience between performers and the audience (Šimić & Pap, 2020).

1.7.2. The Theatre as a Site of Social Regulation

As David Wiles points out in his book "*Theatre and Citizenship*" the interaction between theatre and the concept of citizenship is deeper, inspiring both policymakers and radical activists. By examining theatre and citizenship as performative practices, Wiles traces the ideal of citizenship to the roots of theatre. He explores how people act collectively rather than individually, exemplified by choruses or crowd behaviour in the auditorium. Wiles also considers the interplay between political theory and theatre practices designed for active citizens. His analysis highlights the historic tensions between the passivity of the spectator and the active engagement of a citizen. This tension underscores the shift in audience dynamics over time—from the active, vocal participants of ancient theatre to the silent, passive audiences of modern times (Wiles, 2005).

Theatre etiquette norms reflected broader societal expectations of decorum, respect, and social order. The cultural and social implications of theatre etiquette extended beyond the boundaries of the theatre space, positioning the theatre as a site of social regulation that influenced public behaviour and citizenship (Steenbergen-Hu et al., 2020). These norms not only governed audience behavior within the performance space but also related to the development of civic virtues and social norms necessary for a well-ordered society (Steenbergen-Hu et al., 2020).

1.7.3. Breaking the Silence: Rethinking Audience Etiquette for Neurodiverse Inclusivity in Theatre

For contemporary audiences, the phenomena of the “quiet'”spectator creates significant barriers for neurodiverse individuals, whose cognitive or physical functioning may prevent them from remaining silent throughout a performance. In the intellectual area, some critics and authors, identify a number of behaviours that they deem to be disrespectful, including sobbing, the use of mobile phones, and the rustling of crisp packets. However, other noises, such as verbal tics or motor contractions from those with Tourette's syndrome, the repetitive tapping of someone with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), or the self-soothing rocking of a child with autism, are also condemned. This strict enforcement of the “quiet audience” etiquette contributes to lower participation rates in the arts among individuals with disabilities or chronic illnesses. The norm of a “quiet audience” severely limits the accessibility of theatres. However, the inclusion of neurodiverse audiences can create the theatre experience as an embodied community. Prioritising silence hinders people with neuro disabilities from enjoying theatre, but rethinking this etiquette could foster a more inclusive and diverse community. The intolerance for anything other than quiet compliance marginalises those already disadvantaged, excluding them from both the theatre and the broader cultural sphere (Simpson, 2018).

Jess Thom, co-founder of the British theatre group “Touretteshero”, has faced significant challenges due to the expectations of a 'quiet audience'. Thom, who has Tourette's syndrome and experiences motor and verbal tics, turned to the performing area because of the restrictions of theatre for neurodivergent people. Jess Thom, a 41-year-old artist, performer, comedian, and disability activist, was diagnosed with Tourette’s syndrome in her early twenties. Her condition includes various verbal and motor tics.

Jess Thom and Matthew Pountney co-founded Touretteshero in 2010, an alter-ego and creative platform designed to raise awareness about Tourette's syndrome. Through this project, Jess shares her experiences online and hosts events and performances that invite participation from disabled and neurodivergent individuals. One of her notable works is "Backstage in Biscuit Land," a production that explores her life with Tourette's and its inherent unpredictability. (https://www.theguardian.com) This show was featured at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and toured both nationally and internationally (https://www.touretteshero.com/).

Jess also advocates for more relaxed performances in theatres to better accommodate neurodivergent audiences. In 2017, she played the role of Mouth in a production of Samuel Beckett's play "Not I." Additionally, she was featured in the BBC Two documentary "Me, My Mouth and I" which provided a behind-the-scenes look at her involvement in the "Not I" production. Touretteshero has also put on creative events, like "We Forgot The Lot!" - a collaboration with Tate for children and young people with and without Tourette's. Lastly, Touretteshero worked with the Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) to help them become the world's first "relaxed venue" in February 2020. The Relaxed Venue method, as implemented at Battersea Arts Centre, is designed to remove the barriers faced by disabled people, in accordance with the "social model of disability". The social model of disability views disability as a result of societal barriers and attitudes that prevent full participation, rather than as a problem within the individual, emphasizing the need to change the environment and social structures to accommodate all people. The principles of Relaxed Performances which will be examined in the following pages, originally devised to enhance the accessibility of theatre, are now being extended across the entire organisation. This approach ensures that accessibility is considered in six key areas: the physical layout of buildings and spaces, the creative and artistic programme, governance and staffing structures, digital platforms such as websites and social media, emotional connections with audiences, staff, and volunteers, and

community engagement and social action initiatives. As part of the Arts Council England's Change Makers programme, BAC collaborated with Touretteshero with the objective of enhancing the overall "Relaxed Venue" experience of visiting BAC (https://www.bac.org.uk).

This collaboration between BAC and Tourretteshero has advanced the concepts of inclusion and accessibility in theatre, offering a significant and inspiring practical case of the "social model of disability" in theatre space. However, the norm of the "quiet audience" remains a significant barrier to access for the audience, which is legally protected by Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This article asserts the right of disabled individuals to enjoy cultural performances, including theatre (https://www.un.org).

The following chapter will provide an overview of the academic research and perspectives on the relationship between disability and theatre. It will begin with an analysis of the historical context that has shaped these discussions. It will then examine architectural and spatial practices that enhance accessibility in performance spaces, including wheelchair access routes, audio description, captioning, and British Sign Language (BSL). Finally, the chapter will conclude with an examination of the concept and practice of relaxed performances.

CHAPTER 2

ACCESSIBILITY IN THEATRE

2.1. ACADEMIC RESEARCH AND PERSPECTIVES

There is a substantial amount of academic research conducted in the field of disability and theatre since 1995. One of the first academic studies on accessibility and the engagement of people with disabilities in the arts was conducted by Rubin (1999), which focused on the therapeutic benefits of the arts for people with disabilities. Scholars such as Cohen (1989), Taylor (1995, 1999) and Richardson (2017, 2018) have conducted analyses of deaf theatre, while others such as Snyder (2005) and Udo and Fels (2010) have examined audio description. Research on relaxed theatre has been conducted even more recently by Fletcher-Watson (2015), Simpson (2018) and Kepler (2015). Furthermore, the Relaxed Performance report was published in France under the direction of Cine-ma Différence, where Dupagne (2018-2020) conducted research. Lamarre, Rice and Besse (2021) published a study examining the effects of Relaxed Performance training conducted in Canada.

Kuppers (2003, 2014), Johnson (2012, 2016) and Hadley (2014) have researched the representation of disability, identity and disabled artists. Hargrave (2015) and McCaffrey (2018) have extended Rubin's work in the social dimension. Diaz Cintas and Aline Remael (2021) have done some media research regarding translations and audio-visual and subtitle systems in theatre. They emphasized the impact of cultural references, humour and ideology that can be involved when translating an audiovisual production, as elements of the culture in which they have been produced. They also addressed the limitations of focusing on the infrastructure and technology of access systems without considering the cultural implications of adaptation and translation for people with access needs.

Further research in accessible theatre practicals is available from Hadley (2015) and Reason (2019). This research has investigated the views and mutual

interaction of non-disabled and disabled audiences in terms of content and spatial practices in accessible theatre. More recently, Hadley (2022) has discussed the concept of "universal design", which aims to integrate accessibility features into the creative process rather than adding them as an afterthought. It will embed inclusive practices into the aesthetics of the work and create a shared experience that appeals to both disabled and non-disabled audiences. Besides, they look at the possibilities of "universal design" as a new and creative comprehensive aesthetic approach. Also, they mention some drawbacks to this intention, such as being unappreciated by the disabled society due to the potential patronizing of non-disabled researchers (Hadley, 2022).

Considering both the recent academic research and practicals in the field, the challenges of creating a fully inclusive theatre must be addressed regarding spatial practices, inclusive production and social politics. The spatial practices frequently discussed in traditional accessibility research primarily facilitate access to the space for individuals with visible disabilities. It is also appreciated by non-disabled people who have access needs, for instance, parents with prams or migrants or tourists who must follow the play in a language other than their native one. On the other hand, the assumption that the physical and sensory adaptations are sufficient for accessibility is predicated on the notion that equalising and adapting the conditions to those of the normative audience represents the optimal solution. This approach can be problematic in some ways. It is apparently challenging to build a comprehensive theatre community, as it has adapted historically to the ableist and normative audience atmosphere which requires access rather than cultural interaction. In this way, it perpetuates social barriers and power relations. On the other hand, it has limited allyship in terms of accessible artistic production and inclusion of disabled artists in the field. In the end, inclusive artistic production areas and comprehensive social policies should be improved as well as spatial practices and sensory adaptations of accessibility features.

2.2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF DISABILITY AND THEATRE

Historically, people with disabilities have been marginalised within mainstream theatre, facing exclusion as both performers and audiences. The marginalisation of people with disabilities in mainstream theatre has deep roots. As noted by Bree Hadley in her article "Participation, Politics and Provocations" the significant exclusion of people with disabilities from theatre spaces and practices can be traced back to the 19th and 20th centuries. "Disability has consistently been a prominent theme in theatrical productions. Throughout the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, disabled characters have been used to signify corruption, innocence or suffering, and, of course, as a salutary example of how to overcome such suffering." (Hadley, 2014). The disability rights movement, which gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s, began to challenge these exclusions. For almost 50 years, disabled people have argued that discrimination, inequality and lack of access to institutions, systems and services stem from the way these systems are designed. This model of social disability first articulated in the founding statement of the Union of Physically Disabled People Against Discrimination (UPIAS) in the UK in the 1970s, has been critical to the development of the disability rights movement. This led to the enactment of improved legislation and greater access to educational institutions, workplaces, and other institutions (Hadley, 2022). However, it is challenging to argue that there was any significant progress in accessibility in theatre practices and venues until the 1990s. The end of the 90s marks a significant shift in the way people with disabilities participate in the cultural and artistic environment, as well as in the actions of policymakers. With the UK`s New Labour Government, the year 1997 marked a significant moment in the history of welfare policy in the United Kingdom, as well as in the field of intellectual disabilities (Hall, 2010). The main focus of the Act was on employment, affecting people with intellectual disabilities through the promotion of work opportunities and support services, with the aim of combating social exclusion and promoting the social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities, bringing them into line with other marginalised groups.

2.3. ARCHITECTURAL AND SPATIAL PRACTICES IN ACCESSIBLE PERFORMANCE

The objective of accessible performance is to guarantee that individuals with disabilities are able to participate fully in cultural events, regardless of any physical, sensory, or communication barriers that may exist. In light of universal design, architectural and spatial practices play a pivotal role in this endeavour. Venues and performance spaces are designed with inclusivity as a priority, ensuring equitable access for all patrons, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities.

It is of the utmost importance that accessible performances are made available to individuals with disabilities in order to ensure equal opportunities for them to engage in various cultural events. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) mandates that venues and event organisers make reasonable adjustments to accommodate the needs of disabled patrons, including the provision of wheelchair-accessible seating, captioning, sign language interpretation, and assistive listening devices (Woodhams & Corby, 2003). The implementation of these measures serves to enhance the inclusivity of the cultural landscape, thereby enabling individuals of all abilities to engage fully in artistic experiences without encountering barriers (Darcy & Taylor, 2009).

From the perspective of disability citizenship, the DDA is analysed as a human rights instrument that impacts the cultural life of people with disabilities, underscoring the significance of ensuring their full participation and access to cultural industries (Darcy & Taylor, 2009).

For individuals who are wheelchair users, deaf, blind, or partially sighted, traditional forms of performance can create spatial barriers. This section examines the integration of access routes, captioning, audio description and British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation into performance spaces to enhance accessibility and promote inclusion. For this study, the focus was maintained on British theatres, where the research was conducted on-site.

2.3.1. Wheelchair Access Routes and Lifts

Accessible pathways and lifts are key features of performance venues, enabling wheelchair users to navigate the space and participate in cultural events independently. This sub-section examines design principles and technological innovations that aim to provide barrier-free access for people with mobility impairments. In the United Kingdom, efforts have been made to enhance the accessibility of theatres for wheelchair users, aiming to provide barrier-free access to cultural events. These measures are designed to improve physical access for wheelchair users, enabling them to navigate performance venues independently and participate in cultural events with ease (Mitchell & Flin, 2008). Various types of lifts are utilized, including vertical platform lifts, inclined platform lifts, and stair glides, each serving distinct purposes in transporting wheelchair users between different levels within theatre spaces. Initiatives like the Participatory Action Design initiative have involved consultation from different user groups in the design phase of new public buildings, including theatres, to ensure that accessibility considerations are integrated from the outset (Flemer, 2022).

2.3.2. Audio Description

One of the most common applications of accessible performance is audio description for blind and partially sighted audiences. People who need this service receive audio commentary, including dialogue and action, provided by an audio describer through a headset. Audio description provides visual details to help the audience understand what is happening during the performance and who the actors on stage are. It identifies elements such as character appearance, costume, set and prop details, body language, expressions and the quality of action and movement. An effective audio descriptor ensures that the description does not interrupt dialogue or sound effects, that information is conveyed clearly and that important

details are not overlooked. Audio-described performances are designed for visually impaired audiences, including those who are blind, partially sighted or suffer from various conditions that cause vision loss.

As Snyder notes, audio description in the theatre was first introduced in the United States in the 1980s. It has been extended to film, television and other visual arts for blind and partially sighted audiences (Synder, 2005). However, traditional methods of providing audio descriptions, which are prepared separately and independently of the theatre company, did not convey the play sufficiently to the audience. In the 1980s, several protocols were developed for audio description in the theatre, as its use in the theatre is influenced by the musical and spoken symbols and icons in the work. According to this protocol, live and/or improvised performances were required to provide a clear description of different aspects of the work (Matamala and Orero, 2007). In addition to the live description of the action on stage, the provision of a script synopsis, plot synopsis, character descriptions, and descriptions of space, costumes and scenery can improve audience access through audio description. All these descriptions are made available to the audience through closed-system headphones.

According to Hadley, citing research from Diaz Cintas, Snyder and Cavallo, there are two approaches to audio description. The first is the 'what you see is what you say' approach, which is widespread among American practitioners and is in line with the traditional philosophy of translation. This approach involves an objective and unbiased description and verbalisation of images and actions without interpretation. The 'what you see is what you say' approach relies on good observation skills and the ability to filter information from the general to the specific and to use specific but evocative language (Snyder 2005).

In the second approach, the objectivity of audio description has been challenged by researchers such as Hutchinson and Eardley, Cavallo, Kleege and Wallin, who argue that audio description is a separate performance by the practitioner and involves subjective interpretations. In Europe, these debates are

based on the idea of providing the audience with extended descriptions and a multisensory experience as an alternative approach. Explicit descriptions can be integrated into the work according to aesthetics and context. This approach is called “transcreation” by Neeves, Hutchinson and Eardley (Hadley, 2022).

Figure 2.1 Roisin Dermody Listening to Audio Description of The Abbey Theatre Production of The Playboy of The Western World 2007

Source: https://adiarts.ie/audiences/access-the-arts/audio-description/

The main limitations of traditional audio description are, firstly, that the practitioner's narration distances the work from itself, and that this narration generates its own meaning. Secondly, the closed headphone system isolates the hearing impaired from the audience and makes the experience discriminatory. As Hadley argues, the use of open integrated systems with an expanded experience of accessibility, the use of music to mark events and people, and the use of olfactory and tactile symbols can significantly enhance the experience for this audience (Whitfield and Fels 2013, 235; Cavallo 2015).

2.3.3. Captioning

Another spatial access application in the theatre and the visual arts is subtitling. At a captioned performance, the words are displayed on a screen (or screens), placed near the stage or in the set, and can be seen at the same time as they are spoken or sung. The provision of captions enables access for individuals with hearing impairments, as well as for audiences who speak a language other than the language in which the performance is being delivered or who may experience difficulty following the performance due to language barriers (https://aboutaccess.co.uk).

In the 2021 report published by the charity, Stagetext indicates that demand for captioned performances is increasing and that an increase in the use of captioned live performances has given hope to individuals who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.

In the same report, it is stated that nearly half of the people surveyed indicated that the number of captioned performances and events was insufficient. Furthermore, 77% expressed support for venues offering more captioned performances. Almost a quarter of respondents felt that it should be a legal requirement for venues to provide captions or subtitles. Among those who are not deaf, deafened or hard of hearing, just one in five found the captions distracting. The introduction of additional captioning at live venues would result in a third of the general public being more likely to attend live shows. The number includes individuals who would be more likely to take friends or relatives who are deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing to an event (%16), more likely to attend events themselves (%15), or more likely to arrange a visit. The public indicated that they were also more likely to support venues that offer captioned performances. Nearly half of respondents described such a service as valuable, and almost a third suggested that these venues deserve more funding from grant-giving organisations and the government (https://www.stagetext.org).

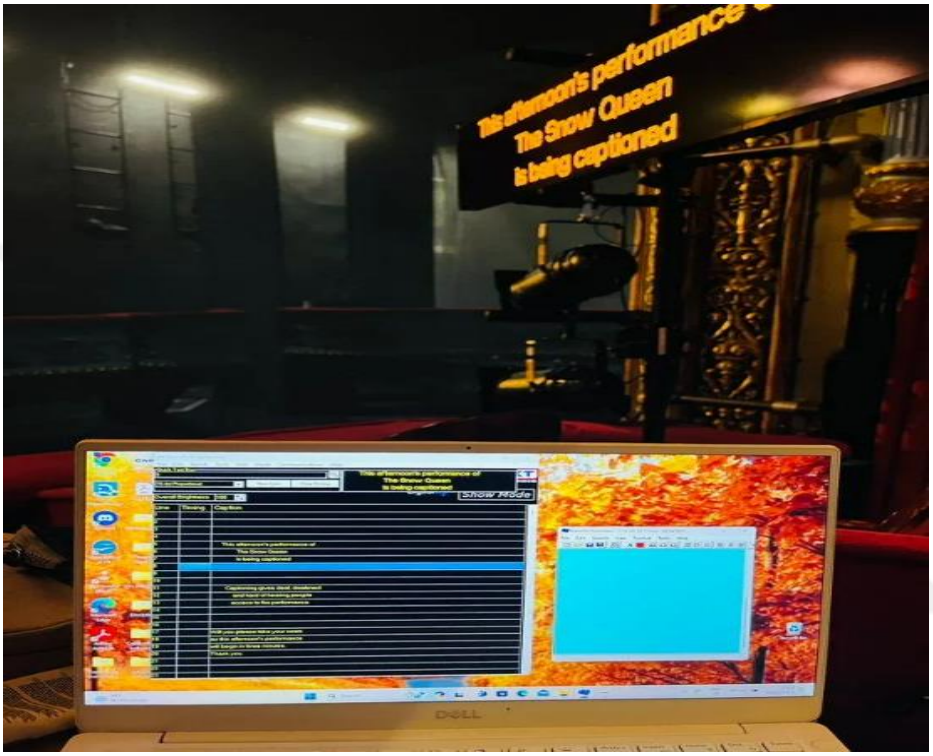
Conversely, Gambier, a researcher in Translation Studies, emphasizes that the complexities of captioning are technological, aesthetic and social. Firstly, captioning in the theatre is logistically demanding and quite different from the way subtitles are applied in television or film. The 21st century has brought with it a sophisticated array of digital possibilities, allowing the aesthetically pleasing integration of subtitles into film and theatre productions. Nevertheless, the practicalities of implementing subtitling in theatres and opera houses remain a challenge. The necessity for external curtains to be hung on the top of the stage frame, integrated into the decor or on the right and left wings as visible to the audience, and projection devices on the opposite sides, is a testament to this. Additionally, special software is required to ensure that the subtitle text is synchronised with the action on stage. New technology facilitates the incorporation of projected captions into the performance and their live adjustment, but the implementation of such technology is still challenging (Gambier, 2003).

On the other hand, the process of subtitling and captioning is multifaceted, involving both pre-performance translations and the flow of the live performance. In the process of preparing and launching the subtitles, the interpreter and/or captioner are required to be involved in rehearsals in order to follow up on the dramaturgy of the playwright and director's approach. In addition to this, they must also consider a number of other factors, including the acts of the actors, improvisations, the cultural symbols and timings of the scene. In order to ensure that subtitles remain legible and convey meaning to audiences with different linguistic, cultural and theatrical literacy backgrounds, they are often condensed to align with the temporal flow of the performance (Gambier 2003, 177, 179; Griesel 2009, 121-124).

Finally, the aesthetic implications of subtitling have been a subject of debate, particularly in relation to the integration of the practice into the overall design of the performance. Directors, designers and transcribers may be concerned about the aesthetic impact of subtitles and may be reluctant to apply them after a

single performance. Some non-disabled audiences still find open captions distracting and prefer covert approaches such as individual handheld devices (Hadley, 2014).

Figure 2.2 The Snow Queen, Lyceum Theatre, Captioning, 2024



Source: https://www.stagecaptions.com/theatre

Figure 2.3 Take Me Somewhere Festival, Captioning, 2019

Source: https://www.stagecaptions.com/theatre

As a result, however, it is evident that the provision of subtitling or captioning for performance texts requires additional resources and time for many theatre and cultural institutions, it is apparent that captioned performances are significantly beneficial and practical for deaf audiences as well as audiences who speak a language other than the language of the performance. Furthermore, it has been observed that many international festivals and cultural organisations invested in subtitled performances to improve inclusivity in audience attendance. In November 2000, the Royal Shakespeare Company agreed to allow Stagetext to caption a performance. Stagetext's first captioned show was a Royal Shakespeare Company production of "The Duchess of Malfi" held at the Barbican Theatre in London on 15th November 2000. In 2003, Stagetext captioned its first West End musical, "Les Misérables" at the Palace Theatre in London. In 2006, Stagetext and VocalEyes won a joint award of over £1million to extend access to the theatre for deaf, deafened, hard of hearing, blind and partially sighted people through the 3 year

“See a Voice” project (SAV). The project increased captioning and audio descriptions around England. Groups of theatres and venues joined the project to share equipment and local captioners. Today, Stagetext captions between 320 and 350 shows annually across the UK (https://www.bristol.ac.uk/theatre). Nevertheless, until more effective integration methods are identified, this traditional approach remains a satisfactory solution for audiences requiring physical and cultural access.

2.3.4. British Sign Language (BSL)

The practice of British Sign Language (BSL) interpreted performances in theatre can be traced back to the early 1980s. Both traditional and innovative approaches to sign language interpreting are currently being explored in the context)of both disability studies and theatre accessibility. This includes the evaluation of their effectiveness for deaf audiences.

A BSL-interpreted performance is defined as a theatrical production in which a BSL interpreter is present on stage to provide both the interpretation of the performance and the performance itself. It is essential that a BSL-interpreted performance is presented by an experienced and professional interpreter who has sufficient time to read the script and watch the performance in order to prepare and deliver a competent and effective performance. It is also recommended that venues ensure that interpreters are positioned on stage in such a way that they have the best possible view of both the interpreter and the performance. Furthermore, it is advised that they ensure that they are always well lit so that the interpreter's movements and facial expressions can be seen and interpreted (www.access-theatre.co.uk).

In the past, BSL interpreted performances have typically employed a single interpreter positioned at the side of the stage. These interpreters, often hired by theatre venues or producers, receive minimal rehearsal time and are required to interpret the script and stage movement simultaneously. While this method is

functional, it is not without its difficulties. The position of the interpreter can cause the audience's focus to be split and reduce the audience's ability to fully participate in the performance. Furthermore, interpreting is often more literal, and deaf people adhere strictly to the script without capturing the dynamic nuances of cultural expression (Turner & Pollitt, 2002) (Richardson, 2018).

Recent developments in BSL interpreting involve integrating interpreters into the creative process and the action on stage. These shows are announced before staging as “BSL interpreted” and scheduled only on certain days. This includes techniques such as shadow interpreting, where interpreters follow the actors on stage, mimicking their movements and expressions to provide a more cohesive and engaging experience. Other methods include zonal interpreting, where interpreters are positioned around the stage, and fixed interpreting, where interpreters cue for specific actors in low-light areas (Turner & Pollitt, 2002). These integrated approaches allow for a more dynamic interpretation, enabling the audience to understand and enjoy the performance. The integration of BSL interpreters into theatre performances is a crucial measure to make theatre experiences accessible to deaf people who use BSL. Since its inception, this practice has evolved significantly, with various approaches developed to enhance the experience of deaf audiences (Brewer, 2002). In July 2020, Deafinitely Theatre collaborated with Equity, Alim Jayda (actor, interpreter and Equity member) and members of Equity's D/deaf and Disability Committee on an Equality Guide to BSL and Good Practice in the Arts. This guide is intended for anyone interested in creative work and practitioners in the sector.

The guide's objective is to ensure that British Sign Language (BSL) is represented to the highest standards in the creative industry. It emphasises the need for the integration of BSL at the start of the creative process and recommends the inclusion of a deaf individual with industry experience as a “BSL Monitor”.

Firstly, in terms of selecting deaf actors, it emphasises the importance of

recognising the diversity within the Deaf community. The guide states that uniformity in communication preferences should not be assumed and that not all Deaf players use BSL. This is crucial for an inclusive player selection process. It recommends that the preferred interpreters of each actor be identified and that the costs of interpreting be included in the production budget. Regarding the selection of hearing actors, the guide recommends that hearing actors without sign language knowledge should not be cast in roles that require sign language. This recommendation is based on the realities of language acquisition and promotes the authenticity of representation. The establishment of criteria for BSL proficiency, such as level 6 and above or native language proficiency, ensures that hearing actors in roles requiring sign language have the necessary skills. Furthermore, it emphasises the importance of open communication and thorough preparation when working with deaf actors and interpreters. In addition, it suggests creating a more relaxed and effective working environment by allowing interpreters and Deaf actors to meet each other. This practical approach improves the audition and rehearsal experience for Deaf actors. The suggestion to involve a deaf individual experienced in translating written English into BSL in the audition process is particularly appreciated. This practice not only ensures linguistic accuracy but also integrates Deaf cultural knowledge into the creative process. The fact that the manual strongly recommends the use of registered and experienced interpreters ensures the quality of the interpretation. The manual also provides an extensive list of links to organisations and resources that support Deaf people and BSL interpreters. The Guide provides valuable resources for theatre professionals seeking to implement its recommendations. Organisations such as Deaf Talent Collective, Deafinitely Theatre and the National Register of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD) offer critical support and guidance. The Equality Guidance on the integration of BSL in theatre performances is designed to provide a comprehensive and well-thought-out framework for increasing the representation and inclusion of Deaf people in the creative industry. It also offers a perspective for industry professionals. The importance of including BSL early in

the creative process, the importance of authentic casting and the need for detailed preparation and communication when working with interpreters are vital recommendations (https://www.deafinitelytheatre.co.uk/bsl-in-the-arts-good-practice-guide).

Figure 2.4 A Watermill BSL Signed Performance

Source:https://www.newburytoday.co.uk/news/watermill-theatre-hosts-4-deaf-actors-sharing-monologues-in-bsl-9194278/

Figure 2.5 A Watermill BSL Signed Performance

Source: https://youtu.be/n-bmTOpEUX8

Furthermore, theatre of the D/deaf community represents a form of intercultural theatre that transcends mere interpretation and incorporates Deaf culture and forms of performance. Companies such as the US-based National Theatre of the Deaf founded in 1967, UK-based Graeae Theatre Company founded in 1980 and Deafinitely Theatre founded in 2002 exemplify this approach by employing sign languages such as ASL, and BSL. These performances offer a unique cultural experience that bridges deaf and hearing audiences by utilising the visual and communicative strategies inherent in sign languages (Cohen, 1989; Kochar-Lindgren, 2006).

BSL-interpreted performances have progressed from one-to-one, stage-side interpretation to integrated, dynamic interpretations that better serve deaf audiences. These developments emphasise the importance of cultural sensitivity and inclusion in the arts. Future research should continue to explore innovative approaches to sign language interpreting and their impact on audience participation and cultural understanding. The development of BSL interpreting in theatre reflects a broader shift towards inclusion and cultural sensitivity. Traditional methods, no matter how basic, have fallen short of providing a fully engaging experience for deaf audiences. The integration of interpreters into the creative process and onstage action marks a significant development that fosters a more immersive and culturally resonant experience. The ongoing work of deaf theatres builds upon these efforts, creating a shared cultural space that enriches both deaf and hearing audiences.

2.4. RELAXED PERFORMANCE

The preceding sections have examined accessible performances, with a particular focus on the access needs of audiences with physical disabilities. However, there is a need to consider the distinct approaches required for audiences with neurodiverse conditions, as well as those facing social and economic barriers,

concerning accessibility and performance practices. This chapter will examine these alternative approaches.

The term “relaxed performances in theatre” refers to specialized presentations designed to create a more inclusive and accommodating environment for individuals with specific needs, such as autism or sensory sensitivities. These performances aim to reduce potential barriers to participation by making adjustments that cater to diverse audience requirements. For example, it is acceptable for audience members to move around, make noise, and behave in ways that deviate from the norm, allowing for a more comfortable and inclusive experience (Fletcher-Watson & May, 2018). This approach acknowledges and respects the varied needs of audience members, providing them with the freedom to engage with the performance in a manner that suits their individual preferences and requirements.

The concept of relaxed performances has gained traction in recent years, with many theatres in the UK and USA now offering such shows to cater to a broader audience base (Fletcher-Watson, 2015). These performances have been particularly beneficial for individuals with conditions like autism, dementia, or other sensory sensitivities, allowing them to enjoy and engage with theatrical productions in a supportive and understanding environment. The implementation of special arrangements that reduce tensions associated with public spaces allows for the unique opportunity for individuals with specific needs to access and participate in theatre through relaxed performances (Kempe, 2014).

The modern concept of relaxed performances originated from sensory-friendly film screenings for autistic audiences in the 1990s and was introduced to British theatre through a nationwide pilot programme in 2012 (Simpson, 2018). This initiative was initiated in response to an incident that occurred in 2011 involving a 12-year-old boy with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at a performance in London's West End. The incident was first reported on 2 August 2011 in the Evening Standard and subsequently gained national attention in the

press. The Ambassador Theatre Group promptly expressed their regret to the family involved and asserted their conviction that all individuals should have the opportunity to attend live theatre. In collaboration with the National Autistic Society, a theatre industry day was organised, which led to the establishment of the "Relaxed Performance Project" (Kempe, 2015).

The project concluded with a conference held on 2 September 2013 at London's Lyceum Theatre, which aimed to share best practices. The outcomes of this conference were compiled in the "Relaxed Performance Project Conference Evaluation" (2013). The project outcome included the development of a 10-point best practice model for relaxed performances and an ambition to extend the initiative to all UK theatres and the wider arts sector. All eight theatres involved in the pilot project are continuing with relaxed performances, and they have incorporated relaxed performances into their ongoing programming. These include the National Theatre, Grimsby Auditorium, Lyceum Theatre in London, Oxford Playhouse, Royal Shakespeare Company, Shakespeare's Globe, Theatre by the Lake in Keswick and Unicorn Theatre in London (https://www.britishtheatreguide.info). Sonali Shah notes that the participation rates of disabled individuals in the arts are significantly lower than those of non-disabled individuals and that families of disabled children and young people are also less likely to engage in arts and cultural activities (Kempe, 2015). If all families feel excluded from attending the theatre, this indicates a significant issue in terms of social inclusion. One of the primary objectives of a relaxed performance is to implement as few alterations to the original production as possible. Instead, adjustments are made to the front-of-house arrangements with the intention of reducing the anxiety and stress experienced by both the children and young people attending the performance and their families (Kempe, 2015).

During a relaxed performance, the audience may become aware of a Tourette's tic sound or stimming movements in the auditorium. Alternatively, they may need to move their knees to allow an audience member with chronic pain to sit

up and down again. Alternatively, they may not encounter any of these situations. In a broader sense, this relaxed performance aims to liberate the theatre auditorium from the prevailing "quiet reverence, you must be quiet, you must be still" that currently dominates modern Western theatre, as described by British Council Arts Director Salette Gressett. (Simpson, 2018) In this way, relaxed performances facilitate mainstream theatre and provide a new model for theatres and their programmes to address critical social issues such as access, inclusion, tolerance, and diversity (Simpson, 2018).

Figure 2.6 Relaxed Performance, Photo by Alex Mumford

Source:https://www.autismeye.com/announcement/official-london-theatre-relaxed-performances/

In practice, the Relaxed Performance Project ran from November 2012 to June 2013 and engaged a total of 4,983 audience members. Of the total number of attendees, 42% were families with autism, 33% were groups such as specific community organisations and special schools, and 25% were other individuals, couples, and families. Among those surveyed as part of the project, 60% reported that they had never attended the theatre as a family before, while 30% had never been to the theatre at all (Kempe, 2015). As reported in the Conference Evaluation,

feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Parents in particular noted that the promotion and participation in these performances indicated a shift in public awareness. They suggested that an increased understanding of autism and other learning difficulties among the public, including theatre staff and volunteers, had led to greater engagement with local support networks. This also boosted confidence in attending not just relaxed performances but other theatre shows in the future (Kempe, 2015).

Moreover, inclusive, relaxed performances frequently incorporate assistive technologies, adapted texts, and scripts to facilitate interaction and social inclusion within the theatre environment (Hammouni et al., 2020). These adaptations facilitate the creation of a more welcoming and accommodating setting, enabling individuals with diverse needs to fully participate and enjoy the theatrical experience. By embracing the principles of accessibility and inclusivity, relaxed performances contribute to making theatre more welcoming and engaging for a wider range of audience members.

In conclusion, relaxed performances represent a significant step towards creating a more inclusive and diverse theatrical landscape. They provide tailored experiences that cater to the specific needs of individuals with conditions such as autism or sensory sensitivities.

CHAPTER 3

COLLABORATIVE PERSPECTIVES: INTEGRATING CRITICAL DISABILITY THEORY AND INTERSECTIONALISM IN INCLUSIVE THEATRE

Critical Disability Theory and Intersectionality are two significant theoretical frameworks that have greatly influenced the understanding of marginalised individuals in society. This chapter presents the theoretical framework that informs this study, including examples of accessible theatre practices and insights into future inclusive cultural policies in the UK. The framework provides a structured approach to analyzing accessible performance and inclusive practices by integrating the concepts of Critical Disability Theory (CDT) and Intersectionality. This theoretical foundation not only shapes the research design and methodology but also situates the findings within the broader academic discourse on interdisciplinary studies. It is important to note that the examples of accessible theatre practices in this chapter are limited to the theatre companies in the UK.

3.1. CRITICAL DISABILITY THEORY

The interdisciplinary field of critical disability theory combines critical theory with disability studies to examine power dynamics, societal inequalities and the marginalisation experienced by individuals with disabilities within broader socio-political frameworks (Obah, 2003). Rooted in a social model of disability, this theoretical framework aims to critique and dismantle disabling structures to instigate social, political and economic transformations (Sitter, 2015). It recognizes disability as a naturally occurring aspect of humanity across societies and advocates for the re-conceptualization of disability as an equally valuable element within this spectrum (Brown et al., 2019).

A central tenet of critical disability theory is the notion that disability does not originate from an individual's inherent physical, cognitive or perceptual traits but rather arises from an inaccessible or "disabling" environment (Muster, 2020). This perspective shifts the focus to societal responses to impairments, illustrating how these responses shape the experience of disability (Prendergast, 2016). By situating disability external to the individual and underscoring the impact of environmental factors on disability experiences, critical disability theory challenges traditional views of disability as solely a medical or individual concern. This is partly due to its roots in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, particularly the influence of critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (Burghardt, 2011; Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). In essence, critical theory identifies, explains and analyses the underlying or hidden origins of social and political culture, discourses and institutions. It reveals the contingency of ideas or conditions that are often assumed to be natural or immutable. Consequently, CDT is compatible with Continental European philosophical methods, including phenomenology, Freudian psychoanalysis and neo-Marxist approaches (Kearney & Rainwater, 1996). CDT examine practice and inquiry involving "in-depth analyses of the structural and as yet poorly understood psychic underpinnings of oppression" (Burghardt, 2011). The critical theory of the Frankfurt School is fundamental to Madeline Burghardt's work. Burghardt writes,

"Critical theory challenges the cultural discursive institutions underlying prevailing practices of exclusion and misrepresentation and thus provides a map towards greater understanding and informed challenge. In essence, critical theory posits that we must attend to the "human bottom of non-human things" (Horkheimer, 1972) and advocates for an ongoing engagement with the lives involved in cultural and political practices" (Burghardt, 2011).

Helen Meekosha and Russell Shuttleworth argue that CDT necessarily involves four core principles (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). Firstly, critical social theory is not reducible to facts. Its methods extend beyond quantitative

analysis and reject reduction to the quantitative, opposing non-theoretical, context-free science (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009; Samuels, 2014). Secondly, critical social theory links theory to practice in the struggle for an autonomous and participatory society. It views autonomy as "liberation from hegemonic and hierarchical ideologies" rather than mere independence (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). Thirdly, critical social theory is aware of its historicity and is conscious of the fact that its work is embedded in a particular time and space. Furthermore, it aims to be reflexive in its historical analysis applied to social structures and institutions (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). Fourthly, critical social theory engages in cross-cultural dialogue and calls for an open exchange of human rights and emancipatory thought from different cultures, while avoiding the imposition of a Western ideal onto non-Western cultures (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009).

The integration of critical theory within CDT sets its agenda and opens it up to new methodologies. For instance, critical theory serves as a fulcrum between CDT and feminist theory, resulting in an integrated feminist-disability analysis (Garland-Thomson, 2002). Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's feminist-disability analysis engages with "a number of the fundamental tenets of critical theory", including the notion that representation structures reality, edges delineate the centre, and gender and disability articulate power relations. This suggests that human identity is multiple and unstable and that all analyses and evaluations have political implications (Garland-Thomson, 2002). Garland-Thomson writes:

"Disability, like gender, is a concept that permeates all aspects of culture: structuring institutions, social identities, cultural practices, political positions, historical communities and the common human experience of embodiment" (Garland-Thomson, 2002).

In this way, disability and ability are fundamentally 'produced' rather than discovered; this production occurs through a "disability/ability system" that is used to "denaturalise" disability (Garland-Thomson, 2002).

The concept of CDT extends beyond disability studies. CDT offers important resources for other analyses, including feminist philosophy and broader philosophical debates. Garland-Thomson posits that feminist theory requires disability analysis to address issues such as infanticide, selective abortion, eugenic programmes, coercive rehabilitation, genocide and the normalisation of surgical procedures (Garland-Thomson, 2002). Shelley Tremain demonstrates that feminist philosophy's work on essentialism, constructionism, identity, race, sexuality, agency, experience and oppression is advanced through feminist disability philosophy (Tremain, 2015).

Furthermore, critical disability theory extends beyond the examination of individual experiences to encompass the examination of broader societal norms and power structures that perpetuate the oppression and marginalisation of people with disabilities (Grenier, 2021). It expands the scope of disability studies by redirecting attention from disability as a research subject to a critical analysis of the normative assumptions ingrained in systems of power and oppression (Grenier, 2021). This shift aligns with the broader trajectory of critical studies in the late 20th century, such as critical legal studies, critical feminist studies, critical race theory, and queer theory, which aim to uncover and challenge underlying power dynamics in various contexts (Grenier, 2021). The integration of these perspectives allows critical disability theory to provide a nuanced examination of how systems of oppression based on race, gender, and disability intersect and compound to marginalise specific groups within society (Chapple, 2019). This intersectional approach is crucial for addressing the diverse and overlapping forms of discrimination and disadvantage experienced by individuals with disabilities.

3.1.1. Ableism

At its core, ableism is discrimination based on actual or perceived ability (Campbell, 2009). This prejudicial attitude prioritises the traits of what Garland-

Thomson refers to as the “normate”, thereby excluding those with non-normative embodied minds (Garland-Thomson, 1996). However, CDT situates ableism not merely as an attitude, but as a set of primary social and political structures that marginalise, organise and rank individuals and objects, shape discourse and underpin institutions. Ableism is defined as follows:

> “a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human.” Campbell (2001) posits that disability is constructed as a diminished state of being human.

Ableism interacts with other power structures, including those involving race, gender, and sex, to stigmatise and produce various identities, including disability. It shapes our world and generates disability by embedding the notion that disability is inherently negative. This perception can be understood as a 'naturalised' reaction to an aberration (Campbell, 2009).

Ableism, a pervasive form of discrimination and exclusion, refers to the network of beliefs, processes, and practices that establish a particular standard of perfection, projecting it as the ideal human form and marginalising those who do not conform to this standard (Kwon, 2020). This concept is deeply intertwined with power structures and societal norms that privilege able-bodied individuals while disadvantaging and devaluing people with disabilities (Christakis, 2023). Ableism manifests in the form of prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviours directed at disabled individuals by those without disabilities, perpetuating inequalities and reinforcing oppressive systems (Dunn, 2019). Ableism, which is rooted in the ideology of normalcy, perpetuates the belief that being "normal" or able-bodied is superior to being disabled (Reid & Knight, 2006). This assumption, which underpins ableism, is in alignment with the principles of eugenics, a movement advocating for the improvement of the human population through selective breeding and sterilisation (Robertson et al., 2019).

Critical disability theory, as a theoretical framework, challenges ableism by rejecting the notion of disability as a personal deficit and instead positing it as a social and political construct (Timberlake, 2020). This perspective posits that disability is not a personal impairment but rather arises from inaccessible environments and societal responses to differences (Timberlake, 2020). By shifting the focus from the individual to the disabling structures within society, critical disability theory aims to dismantle ableist beliefs and practices that perpetuate discrimination against individuals with disabilities (Timberlake, 2020).

In the context of organisational settings, the lens of ableism has been applied to analyse the marginalisation experiences of employees with disabilities, with a particular focus on issues such as invisibility, epistemic violence, stigma, and commodification within the workplace (Kwon & Archer, 2022). This critical perspective emphasises the necessity of addressing ableism within organisational cultures in order to create inclusive environments that value the contributions of all individuals, regardless of their abilities (Kwon & Archer, 2022). By examining the phenomenon of ableism within organisational contexts, researchers seek to challenge the prevailing norms and promote equity and diversity in the workplace (Kwon & Archer, 2022).

Moreover, critical disability studies intersect with critical race theory to explore the intertwined nature of social constructions of disability and race, thereby revealing the complex intersections of oppression experienced by individuals with multiple marginalised identities (Mueller & Beneke, 2022). This intersectional approach acknowledges that ableism and racism are interconnected systems of discrimination that operate in tandem to marginalise certain groups within society (Mueller & Beneke, 2022).

In conclusion, ableism represents a form of discrimination that is rooted in societal beliefs and practices that privilege individuals without disabilities while marginalising those with disabilities. The critical disability theory framework challenges ableism by reframing disability as a social construct and advocating for

inclusive practices that promote equity and justice for individuals with disabilities. Theatre initiatives such as Touretteshero, All Acces Areas Production, and Back to Back Theatre Company interrogate ableism in various contexts, aiming to dismantle oppressive structures, promote inclusivity, and advance the rights of individuals with disabilities within society and cultural areas.

3.1.2 Crip Theory

Crip Theory is a branch of critical disability theory. This field particularly underscores the impact of Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality and its integration into various theoretical frameworks. Specifically, Crip Theory merges elements of queer theory and disability theory. This theoretical framework emerged from activist and artist disability communities and draws on queer theories in conceptualising disability as a cultural construct (Reeves et al., 2022). Crip Theory centres disability as a locus of resistance to "enforced able-bodiedness" and “disabilityism”, critiquing liberal practices of assimilation and inclusion by marking disability as a creative and productive relational practice (Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019).

Robert McRuer's “Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability” examines the intersection of Disability and Queer Studies, queer and crip activism and social movements. McRuer defines the theory of compulsory able-bodiedness as a system inherent to the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces disability and queerness. He also defines compulsory able-bodiedness as a tool of capitalism. Crip theory argues that neoliberal capitalism, the dominant economic and cultural system driven by market priorities, constructs sexual and bodily identities. According to McRuer, neoliberalism not only stigmatises bodily or sexual differences but also celebrates these differences under the guise of freely circulating ideas. However, this celebration captures and controls the energies

generated by social movements and their eventual channelling into corporate capital (McRuer, 2006).

A critique of normality has similarly been central to the disability rights movement and disability theory. For example, Lennard Davis' work examining and critiquing the historical emergence of normality (Enforcing Normalcy, pp. 23-49) and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's introduction of the concept of “normate” (Extraordinary Bodies, pp. 8-9). Such academic and activist work enables us to identify the problems of able-bodied identity and to see the question of the meaning of able-bodiedness in relation to the problems for which it is being discussed. At present, it could be argued that able-bodied identity is more naturalised than heterosexual identity (McRuer, Robert. Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability, p. 91).

Combining queer theory and critical disability theory, Crip theory advances understanding in both fields (McRuer 2003, 2004, 2006a; Mollow 2017; Schalk 2013). Both theories challenge medical intervention and the AIDS crisis has been an important catalyst linking these two theories (Mollow 2017). Robert McRuer argues that crip theory should have a conflicted relationship with disability studies, similar to queer theory's relationship with LGBT studies (2006b). Furthermore, just as the term "queer" was reclaimed by queer movements, the term “crip” emerged in disability movements as an adaptation and reworking of the pejorative term “cripple”. As McRuer notes, the term has several positive values. Crip theory and practice require sustainable forms of openness and a recognition that a more accessible world is possible, where disability is no longer just a raw material from which imagined and sometimes liberating worlds are constructed (Mc Ruer, 2006).

The activist approach of crip theory encourages coalitions between pathologised people, following in the tradition of CDT (Schalk 2017). While it explores various dimensions and intersects of sexuality, race and future politics (McRuer & Mollow 2012; Clare 1999, 2001, 2013; Mollow 2012; Brown 2013), the theory also addresses the complex politics of reproduction and challenges the

assumption that disability does not mean a life worth living (Fritsch 2016; Kafer 2013).

3.1.3. Disability Critical Race Theory

The argument put forth by critical disability theorists is that racism and ableism operate in a joint manner, intensifying and borrowing from each other. These phenomena, in conjunction with other forms of oppression, thus necessitate an intersectional analysis. This necessitates the concurrent examination of the multifaceted, intertwined power dynamics that impact individuals holistically through pathologisation, stigma, and marginalisation. Previously, Nirmala Erevelles and Fiona Kumari Campbell's analysis of internalised ableism (2009) employed and supplemented the strategies of critical race theory. Disability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit) is deeply engaged in this work. The substructure of DisCrit in Critical Race feminist scholarship and activism includes Anna Julia Cooper, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, Bell Hooks, Audre Lorde, and Sojourner Truth (Annamma, Ferri, and Connor 2018: 47), have been instrumental in shaping the field. Even though disability was not a significant focus of these primary and contemporary Black feminists, the "intersectional nature" of this "pioneering work" has been foundational to the development of DisCrit (Annamma, Ferri, and Connor 2018: 47-48). In consideration of foundational claims in disability studies, including the prioritisation of knowledge based on the lived experiences of disabled people (2018: 49), and the combination of this insight with other insights from disability studies with work in critical race theory, DisCrit challenges the concept of "special education" and allows theorists to better "frame and analyse the lives of disabled youth of colour" (2018: 49).

An important aspect of the ongoing debate in the cultural field that addresses both ability and inclusion is Disability Race Theory (DisCrit). The DisCrit framework, as outlined in the book "*DisCrit: Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory in Education*" by Connor, Annamma and Ferri, offers insights into terms of

“accessibility” in the cultural area. The book introduces the principles of DisCrit and specifically focuses on black girls with disabilities who are struggling in the field of education. DisCrip seven principles are briefly as follows:

“1) DisCrit challenges the concept of normality by examining the interrelated nature of racism and ableism and their role in perpetuating hegemonic notions of normalcy

2) DisCrit endorses a multidimensional identities approach

3) DisCrit acknowledges the social construction of identity categories but highlights the material and psychological consequences that can result from the labelling of these categories

4) DisCrit emphasises the voices of marginalised groups in society are given consideration in research;

5) DisCrit analyses disability and racism in terms of historical and legal dimensions;

6) DisCrit views Whiteness and Ability as traits, and recognises that these traits can make people labelled as disabled White, Middle-class

7) DisCrit supports resistance” (p. 19).

3.2. INTERSECTIONALITY AND EXCLUSION IN CULTURAL SPACES

Intersectionality theory, originating from the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, is a critical framework that examines the ways in which various social identities, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality, intersect and interact to shape individuals’ experiences of privilege and oppression (Harrison, 2015). Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality emerged within the context of critical race theory (CRT) and encompasses structural, political, and representational dimensions (Anders, 2023). This theory postulates that social identities are interrelated and cannot be understood in isolation. It emphasises the importance of considering the complexities of individuals’ experiences and how power dynamics operate at the

intersections of various identity markers (Haenfler, 2020).

Theories of intersectionality emphasise the complex and intersecting relationships among various forms of domination, including (but not limited to) sexism, racism, class oppression, and heterosexism. Intersectional feminism, a project that emerged from Black feminism, has a long-standing tradition of examining the interplay between racism and sexism. This tradition can be traced back to the writings and activism of late 19th and early 20th-century Black feminists, including Maria W. Stewart, Ida B. Wells, Anna Julia Cooper, and Sojourner Truth (Gines 2014; Cooper 2016).

"Identifying and combating racism and sexism – through activist organising and campaigning – not only as separate categories impacting identity and oppression but also as systems of oppression that work together and mutually reinforce one another, presenting unique problems for Black women who experience both simultaneously and differently than white women and/or Black men." (Gines 2014, 14).

Other significant pioneers of contemporary intersectionality theory include the Combahee River Collective's concept of "interlocking systems of oppression" (CRC 1977), Deborah King's analysis of multiple jeopardy and multiple consciousness (King 1988), and the works of Black feminists from the 1980s, such as Audre Lorde (1984), Angela Davis (1984), and Bell Kooks (1981).

In other words, the concept of intersectionality has a long and complex lineage. Nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged that the contemporary discussion and use of the term intersectionality were initiated by the work of legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw 1991a; 1991b), specifically through her critique of single-axis frameworks for understanding domination in the context of legal discrimination. A single-axis framework treats race and gender as mutually

exclusive categories of experience, implying that the perspectives of the most privileged members of oppressed groups are of greater importance. This is exemplified by instances of racial discrimination, where Black individuals who benefit from sex-based privilege receive greater consideration than Black women who benefit from racial privilege, and instances of sexual discrimination, where Black women who benefit from racial privilege are prioritised over Black men who benefit from racial privilege. Consequently, a single-axis framework distorts the experiences of Black women, who are simultaneously subjected to multiple and intersecting forms of subordination. As Crenshaw (1991b, 1244) explains, the intersection of racism and sexism affects the lives of Black women in ways that cannot be fully understood by examining the race or gender dimensions separately.

In the thirty years since Crenshaw's essays on intersectionality were published, this framework has become a highly influential approach in women's, gender, and sexuality studies. It has even been described as "the most important contribution that women's studies, in conjunction with other fields, has made so far" (McCall 2005, 1771). However, feminist philosophers have observed that this influence has yet to permeate the mainstream of philosophy, where "intersectionality is largely ignored as a philosophical theme or framework" (Goswami, O'Donovan, and Yount 2014, 6).

This part tends that the examination of accessibility in the theatre, as informed by the intersectionality theory developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, offers a powerful framework for the understanding of the complexities of privilege and oppression that individuals face due to the intersections of various social identities and consequences of exposure of the bodies from the cultural area.

3.2.1. Exclusion of Women and LGBTQ+ Audiences

Women and the LGBTIQ+ community face significant challenges in accessing and participating in cultural spaces due to systemic biases and discriminatory practices. Gender norms and stereotypes in cultural spaces perpetuate inequality and limit women's participation in artistic endeavours and leadership roles (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Furthermore, the lack of inclusive programming in cultural spaces further marginalises the voices and experiences of women and the LGBTIQ+ community, preventing their meaningful inclusion (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Safety concerns related to harassment and discrimination also act as a deterrent for women and LGBTIQ+ people, affecting their full participation in cultural activities (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

Efforts to address these barriers and to promote diversity and inclusivity in cultural spaces are crucial to breaking down exclusionary dynamics. Creating welcoming environments that challenge norms and encourage diverse representation is essential to promoting greater equity and access for women and the LGBTIQ community in the cultural sphere (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

3.2.2. Race and Class Barriers in Theatre

Access to theatre can be affected by a range of audience barriers related to race and class. Research suggests that inequalities in the distribution of resources intersect with race and gender to create barriers for cultural workers and audiences (Beswick, 2020). In addition, the intersection of gender, race, heritage cultures and language use can affect participation in arts-based activities (Hill, 2023). Theatre can serve as a platform to address such barriers. For example, research-based theatre has been effective in promoting change and advocating for marginalised populations (Brown et al., 2018). Furthermore, the concept of co-creation in theatre reflects a shift towards democratising the arts by involving audiences in the creative

process (Walmsley, 2013). By engaging with diverse audiences and addressing issues of inequality and discrimination, theatre can play a crucial role in raising awareness and promoting social change.

By integrating Critical Disability Theory and Intersectionality, scholars and activists gain valuable insights into the experiences of marginalised groups, including disabled individuals, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those from low-income backgrounds (Annamma et al., 2013). These frameworks centre the voices and experiences of these communities, leading to a deeper understanding of social inequalities and informing efforts to foster inclusive and equitable societies.

3.3. EXAMPLES OF ACCESSIBLE THEATRE PRACTICALS AND FUTURE INSIGHT INTO INCLUSIVE CULTURAL POLICY

To establish a theatre space that is inclusive and accessible to all, a sustained, theoretical and practical endeavour has been undertaken over the past three decades. The initial area of focus is disability rights activism, which has been a prominent effort since the 1960s. This movement has identified the obstacles to participation in cultural and artistic activities as a fundamental human rights issue and has sought to address it as a matter of rights. This approach has provided inspiration for the establishment of theatre companies by individuals with disabilities. Notable companies include the “National Theatre of the Deaf” (1967, US), which provides a platform for Deaf actors to showcase their talents through sign language and spoken word performances, and the “Graeae Theatre Company” (1980, UK), which champions the inclusion of Deaf and disabled actors. The company is renowned for its audacious and pioneering productions. Another one is “Mind the Gap” (1988, UK) a prominent learning disability theatre company in the UK, renowned for its high-quality productions and commitment to ensuring equal opportunities for learning-disabled artists. The “Blue Teapot Theatre Company”

(1996, Ireland) is dedicated to facilitating opportunities for actors with intellectual disabilities and promoting their work in mainstream theatre. Other significant companies are such as “Back to Back” (1995, Australia), an Australian company that has gained a reputation for its productions featuring actors with intellectual disabilities, which challenge societal perceptions. “Deafinitely Theatre” (2002, UK) is a theatre company that specialises in the production of bilingual performances in British Sign Language (BSL) and spoken English. The objective is to provide a platform for the talents of deaf actors and to offer accessible performances for both deaf and hearing audiences. “Access All Areas Production” (2012, UK) is a theatre company that works with actors who have learning disabilities. The company engages in close collaboration with its performers, facilitating the development of original work that reflects their experiences and talents. Finally, previously examined in a subchapter as a milestone, “Touretteshero” (2010 UK), is a performing arts organisation founded by Jess Thom, who has Tourette Syndrome. The company's objective is to create performances that celebrate the creativity and humour of people with Tourette Syndrome, while simultaneously challenging societal perceptions of disability.

Furthermore, these efforts have encouraged those with neurodiverse and disabled audiences, whose access needs are often overlooked, to assert their own rights, as exemplified by the event known as the "incident" which refers to the exclusion of a 12-year-old boy with autism spectrum in West End which has brought about a notable transformation. Conversely, academic research, theoretical debates, articles and books have drawn attention to the issue and provided a platform for the disabled community to express their views. These collective actions ultimately compelled cultural institutions to implement inclusive arts and culture policies. As a consequence of these developments, the concept of a "relaxed performance" is now a standard practice in theatres across the Western world. As previously discussed, the inaugural concept of "Relaxed Venue," was created in 2020 at Battersea Art Centre (BAC) with the objective of establishing a consistently

welcoming environment for disabled and neurodiverse audiences and artists. During the process, BAC collaborates with academics, researchers, and theatre companies, as well as disabled artists/activists such as Jess Thom, to develop an efficient and sustainable method for providing a relaxed venue for disabled and neurodiverse audiences and artists. The "Relaxed Venue" method, as implemented at BAC, is designed to remove the barriers faced by disabled people in accordance with the "Social Model of Disability". The "Social Model of Disability" posits that disability is a consequence of societal barriers and attitudes that impede full participation, rather than an inherent characteristic of the individual. This perspective underscores the necessity to transform the environment and social structures to ensure the inclusion of all individuals. The BAC`s ongoing cultural policy process of becoming an inclusive art space demonstrates an approach to the integration of "Critical Disability Theory" (CDT) which is rooted "Social Model of Disability", with an intersectional framework into accessible theatre and inclusive practices, representing a significant advancement. This approach challenges traditional perceptions of disability and addresses the complex layers of discrimination faced by marginalised groups in cultural spaces.

In the context of inclusive theatre, these insights underscore the necessity for inclusive environments that challenge systemic biases and promote diverse representation. The integration of CDT and intersectionality into cultural policies and theatre practicals enhances the comprehension of social inequalities, directing efforts to enhance the accessibility and equity of cultural spaces. By prioritising the voices of marginalised communities, these frameworks facilitate a more comprehensive approach to inclusivity in the arts, ensuring that theatre serves as a platform for awareness, social change, and justice.

CONCLUSION

The historical evolution of theatre from ancient rituals to modern times reveals its profound social impact and the transformation of audience engagement over time. Initially, theatre emerged from communal rituals, serving as a vital means of storytelling, education, and social cohesion. In Ancient Greek theatre, the performances were inclusive, interactive, and integral to civic life, involving diverse audiences in moral and civic discourse. The architecture and design of Greek theatres facilitated this engagement, creating a shared experience between performers and spectators.

As theatre evolved through the medieval period, the Renaissance, and the 17th century, its role and accessibility underwent significant changes. Medieval theatre, rooted in religious ceremonies, aimed to educate and engage the public in religious and moral values through interactive performances in communal spaces. In contrast, the Renaissance saw a shift towards more secular themes and the rise of professional theatre companies, making theatre a central cultural activity for audiences. However, the 17th century saw a transition towards more commercialized and elitist theatre, with the establishment of private theatres, new playhouses, and the emergence of a new patronage system and its effect on social and economic factors, which deepened a divide between performers and audiences.

The introduction of the “fourth wall” in the 18th century and the concept of realism further solidified this separation and passive audience experience. Technological advances in lighting, sound, and set design during the modernist period enhanced the theatrical experience, yet also reinforced the divide between the stage and the audience. The rise of the urban middle class and changes in social norms during the Industrial Revolution contributed to audience etiquette and the expectation of a “quiet audience” a trend that continues in contemporary theatre.

However, the norm of the “quiet audience” presents significant barriers to

neurodiverse and disabled individuals, and furthermore, it transforms into a social oppression of all unconventional social groups or socially disadvantaged individuals. This highlights the necessity for more inclusive and accessible theatre practices. Initiatives such as those of Jess Thom and Touretteshero advocate for relaxed performances in theatre, emphasising the importance of creating spaces that accommodate diverse audiences and promote active engagement. Academic research demonstrates the social benefit of engagement that accessible theatre can offer. The exploration of accessibility in theatre highlights the significant strides made towards inclusive cultural participation for individuals with disabilities. The historical context reveals a longstanding marginalisation of disabled individuals, but it also traces the evolution of the disability rights movement and its impact on accessibility in cultural spaces.

Architectural and spatial practices are central to ensuring equitable access to theatre spaces. The implementation of wheelchair-accessible pathways and the provision of audio description and captioning services serve to enhance the inclusivity of performance venues. Furthermore, the development of integrated approaches, such as the inclusion of sign language interpreters within the creative process, exemplifies progressive practices.

In terms of the concept of accessible theatre, relaxed performances represent a pioneering approach to accessibility, accommodating the needs of individuals with autism, dementia, and other sensory sensitivities. The success of initiatives such as the Relaxed Performance Project in the UK demonstrates the potential for these adaptations to broaden audience engagement and foster a more inclusive theatrical environment. The positive feedback from participants underscores the importance of continued efforts to raise public awareness and improve accessibility in the arts.

Overall, advancements in accessible theatre practices reflect a growing recognition of the importance of inclusivity in cultural life. By prioritising critical

theoretical frameworks and activist practices embracing comprehensive approaches to accessibility, the theatre industry can ensure that all individuals can fully participate in and enjoy the cultural and communal experiences it offers. While the journey towards complete inclusivity is ongoing, the progress made thus far is a testament to the transformative power of accessible performance.

Conversely, integrating critical disability theory and intersectionality into the framework of inclusive theatre provides a comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing the diverse and multifaceted barriers faced by marginalised communities. Critical disability theory challenges traditional perceptions of disability, emphasising societal structures and attitudes as obstacles for disabled individuals. By acknowledging disability as a form of social oppression, this framework advocates for the dismantling of ableist systems and the promotion of a more equitable society.

Intersectionality offers a nuanced understanding of how various social identities intersect to shape individuals' experiences of privilege and oppression. This theoretical lens reveals the complex layers of discrimination faced by marginalised groups in cultural spaces like theatre. By examining how intersecting identities influence access to and participation in theatre, scholars and activists can better address the unique challenges faced by women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those from low-income backgrounds.

In the context of theatre, these theoretical insights underscore the importance of creating inclusive environments that challenge systemic biases and encourage diverse representation. Efforts to promote diversity and inclusivity in cultural spaces are crucial to breaking down exclusionary dynamics and fostering greater equity and access. This includes addressing specific barriers preventing marginalised groups from fully participating in cultural activities. This approach not only enhances accessibility but also promotes a more inclusive and equitable cultural environment.

Ultimately, the integration of Critical Disability Theory and framework of Intersectionality, into the practice of inclusive theatre enriches our understanding of social inequalities and informs efforts to create more accessible and equitable cultural spaces. By centring the voices and experiences of marginalised communities, these frameworks contribute to a deeper and more comprehensive approach to fostering inclusivity in the arts. Through such interdisciplinary collaboration, theatre can serve as a powerful platform for raising awareness, advocating for social change, and promoting a more just and inclusive society.

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