

Crowds, Publics and Consumers: Representing English Theatre Audiences from the Globe to the OP Riots

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Abstract

This paper explores developments in the political representations of English theater audiences from the Elizabethan era to the 1809 OP riots, to demonstrate that audiences were long considered politically significant, not just 'mere entertainment.' Early commercial theater audiences were conceived by the Elizabethan state as crowds of subjects that threatened social order. Through the Civil War era, theaters became places of political discussion and dissent and of emerging publics of citizens. By the early nineteenth century theater owners began to reframe audiences as markets of consumers. Each representation continued to appear in later discursive fields, each was contested, and the disputes were couched in political terms.

Keywords: audiences, representation, discourse, theater, England, English Civil War, public, crowds, public sphere, Old Price riots, Restoration.

What comes to mind when we think of theater audiences today are customers seeking entertainment or, less often, cultured clientele to high-minded drama. But audiences have not always been imagined as such. Over the two-plus centuries from the Elizabethan era to the early nineteenth century, differing discursive regimes contended in describing theater audiences variously as crowds, publics and consumers. Historical figures seldom used these modern terms, but they discursively constructed audiences in ways that fit these modern terms. While these images co-existed, their relative strength and prominence varied. But each characterization - even that of consumers - was full of political significance. From the displacement of freeholders and rural laborers off the land, to conflicts between Catholic and Protestant and the Civil War, to the rise of the bourgeoisie and industrialization, social changes disrupted existing discursive regimes and theatrical practices, and changed representations of audiences.

Theater was not simply a neutral pastime during these changes, but caught up in the political and class conflicts central to this transformation from feudal society to industrial capitalism. The significance of these categories of crowds, publics and consumers and the characterizations of audiences in these terms arose directly from these changes. Official sensitivity to crowds was a reaction to the increased population of poor and rootless lower classes¹ that accumulated in cities, beginning with Henry VIII's dissolution of monasteries. In a measure of symbolic significance, vagabond laws enacted to deal with this population also included itinerant players, associating performance with this problem of displaced people.

In the seventeenth century the emerging bourgeoisie abrogated to themselves new rights and status of citizenship through their acting as a public in their political challenge to the crown and economic challenge to the old, landed aristocracy. Theater was recruited into this new public sphere, where playwrights, performers and audiences alike engaged in a politically heightened dialogue, reflected in official concerns to censor it.

By the dawn of the nineteenth century, a bourgeoisie were ascendant and adopted a new metaphor of society as market rather than community or forum. Instead of theater being a place of crowds or public, it was a commodity purchased and occupied by consumers who held property rights rather than traditional or citizenship rights. At the same time, however, the artisan and emerging working classes countered by asserting their own conception of theater audienceship as alternately crowds with traditional rights of moral economy, and publics with citizenship rights in the public sphere.

Each representation of audiences reflected its time, and each expressed strained political relations among classes: elites responding to lower sorts; the emerging bourgeoisie confronting the monarchy and landed aristocracy; and the ascendant bourgeoisie responding to the emerging working classes. As the seat of power and the arbiter of order, the state was integral to these discursive treatments of audiences.

My purpose here is to explore these representations, their changes and political significance, with the hope of stimulating new ways of thinking about and research on audiences. It thus is intended as a contribution to audience studies more than to theater history or general English history. My thesis presumes that the political treatment of audiences is long-standing, requiring a broad study over centuries. Consequently, the article is synthetic, using existing research, and suggestive, rather than definitive and based upon primary sources, which would require a much larger commitment of time and length of presentation. Studies of audiences are comparatively rare in theater history; but there are a few outstanding studies from which I draw evidence for this analysis.²

Elizabethan Crowds

While the term no longer carries the same allusions, 'crowd' was long linked to the lower orders and violence and in urban settings were the subject of official concern and even surveillance. Included in this category of crowds were theater audiences, particularly in the pit.³ From the time that permanent public theaters were first built in London in the late sixteenth century on to the early nineteenth century, government authorities considered English theater and theater audiences to be problems of law and order. At some times, the crown or parliament considered the performance and audiences as centers of serious criticism of the government, and through much of this period the crown maintained an office for censorship. But the continuing issue through these centuries, from the point of view of authorities, was that theaters created crowds of disorderly people. Municipal authorities characterized theaters as distracting workers from their duties and attracting thieves and prostitutes, creating a nuisance for gentle folk passing in the vicinity, and increasing the likelihood of violence and riot.

In the Elizabethan era, official concern about theater crowds was heightened by London's rapid growth and its lack of an established means to effectively control the population in public spaces. Authorities equated lower classes with disorder and thus called for direct control by the state, but municipal discursive regimes to control the lower orders in urban areas were still under construction.⁴

Meanwhile the previous regime of control based upon land and lords had been partly dismantled. Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries and the economic shifts to a market for wool displaced thousands of commoners and disrupted the feudal ties to land and lord that held them in place and assured social order. Many began to wander and migrate. Some congregated in cities which had no mechanisms to deal with the resultant crowds. Cities had no police forces and the crown had no standing army to deal with routine crowd control. Crowds were not as problematic in less populated rural areas and small towns. The traditional methods of social control that worked there were based on personal knowledge and recognition of people in the streets, which allowed people within a crowd to be readily identified.

The restraints of familiarity helped to contain crowds gathered for long-standing traditions such as carnival, market days, and fairs. These events carried both a 'street' tradition for audience practices and an elite tradition for conceiving those audiences as crowds. Carnival across early modern Europe was integral to the liturgical calendar from Christmas, through the winter, to the week before Lent. In England, carnival encompassed a wide range of rituals and ceremonies that punctuated the year. The ruling principle of carnival was disorder.

Commoners dressed as kings, men as women. Drunkenness and sexual promiscuity were more tolerated. Inferiors were allowed to mimic and show disrespect of their superiors that was normally not acceptable. Commoners might use this opportunity to chastise their superiors who they believed had violated custom or morals over the past year.⁵ At the same time, these crowds were constrained by familiarity and by the hierarchy of ranks that would return to govern the day after carnival. In small and rooted communities, everyone knew who was behind the mask and who did what during carnival. People could be held accountable because others knew them. Disorder was more likely to be contained within bounds, even if that boundary allowed a good deal more than usual.⁶

In large cities the constraints of familiarity did not work. By the late sixteenth century, London especially was anonymous and mobile, a rapidly growing urban place doubling its population during the life of Elizabeth I. Authorities were dealing increasingly with strangers rather than familiar faces, and hierarchical relations were less direct and personal.⁷ It was in this urban complex that commercial theaters like the Globe began and attracted 'crowds.'⁸ Their audiences were large and heterogeneous. The customary hierarchy of rank that disciplined audiences in court and private household performances were weak or absent, contributing to the problem of audience control.⁹

The commoners in the pit of early public theater drew their habits from street entertainments that combined unruly crowds with theater. Commercial theater began as performances at markets and fairs and at carnival time.¹⁰ Part of carnival had been the dramatic performances of traditional and religious narratives, first amateur productions by local citizens but gradually in the seventeenth century by professional performers, when entertainment began to displace ritual.¹¹ These professional open-air performances sometimes were called *commedia dell'arte*, for their Italian origin, although the practice spread through much of Europe. The performers had to attract and retain audiences who could pass them by or leave at any time, and who were not obligated to pay. They drew and held attention by directly addressing audiences, engaging them in repartee, and even descending from the stage to mingle with them.¹² Performers were necessarily at the mercy of their audiences. Crowds controlled the public spaces where the performance took place. Crowds could chase the performers rather than pay them. By virtue of the circumstances, audiences ruled street theater.

As performances moved to enclosed accommodations for the commercial purpose of charging admission, audiences and performers brought street traditions with them. In England the first such public theaters were established in the late sixteenth century just outside the City of London and beyond its prohibitions. Theaters of the time were competing with a range of rowdy entertainments, such as bear-baiting, inns and taverns, and could expect the same behavior exhibited there. Theater historian M. C. Bradbrook still accurately summarizes

research on the Elizabethan theater pit audience: 'they had no duty to attend to the performers, being involved in the give and take which was their part of the show,' much like an open air audience.¹³

Elizabethan theaters affirmed such audience practices. Theater architecture, acting style and management effectively constructed the situation as an enclosed version of the rowdy crowd attending to a street performance. The stage thrust out into the pit with audiences on three sides. The pit was without fixed seats, with the audience standing and able to mill about. It was a dirt floor encircled by the wall of the stage and the walls of the boxes, with people packed together and pressed against the stage, literally crowded in. Performances were scheduled during daylight, so that audience members were visibly reminded that they were part of a crowd. Acting included speaking directly to this multitude and actors gained fame for clever repartee with the audience. Playwrights incorporated the tradition through scripted inductions, prologues, epilogues and asides addressed directly or indirectly to the audience. Richard III, for example, would approach the edge of the stage to inform the audience, 'Now is the winter of our discontent...' and draw them into his confidence.¹⁴

But such dramatic conventions had a double edge. Even while they acknowledged and incorporated the tradition of talking 'across the lights,' at the same time they incorporated the audience into the script, orchestrated audience participation and pre-empted audience initiatives. Knowingness, sometimes scripted, other times improvised, had this double edge. In these cases, comments by performers suggested to the audience 'you know what I mean.' But this presumes audiences take a certain pride in their knowingness, and accept the performer's authority to conduct this exclusionary club of knowing audience members.¹⁵

Audiences asserted and theaters acknowledged what has been called audience sovereignty over performances that permitted rowdy audience participation and response. But while audiences saw their rowdiness as within their traditional rights, contemporary political authorities expressed a different discourse, labeling the audience as unruly crowds and seeking means to control them. London magistrates complained of the 'tumults and outrages' at the theaters. They accused manual workers of being the source of the 'tumults', despite the fact that the pit of public theaters included all sorts, including the literati of the time. Theater historian Andrew Gurr notes that mayors of London presumed, without evidence, that many playgoers were unemployed or absent-from-work artisans, apprentices and servants who resided outside the City, and that large numbers of prostitutes attended plays. These prejudices furthered the authorities' image of playhouses as disorderly places and of theater audiences (at least in the pit) as lower-class crowds. Apprentices and servants and, even at times, journeymen were prohibited from attending plays by magistrates who urged their

masters to lock them up. Similarly magistrates prohibited jigs and other performances that they believed stirred up the common audience.¹⁶

Elizabethan pit audiences were seen as problematic for public order as well as morality.¹⁷ The disorderly behavior believed to be characteristic of pit audiences included idleness (servants and apprentices neglecting their work), as well as lewdness, drunkenness and violence. City magistrates were uneasy about theaters principally because they believed that they gathered large numbers of lower-class people together in a situation not supervised by authorities. Critics of theater often cited the transgressive nature of the plays and performance, encouraging immorality, disorder and even subversion.

The crown feared the potential of theater for sedition and subversion. At Norfolk, after a play allegedly precipitated a rebellion in 1549, authorities banned all plays on the ground that they 'contain matter tending to sedition and condempnyng of sundry orders and lawes.' In 1597 Elizabeth ordered all theaters closed because of the 'verie greate disorders.'¹⁸ Theater also was more of a threat because it was newly institutionalized, creating permanent houses for performance for the first time since ancient Rome.¹⁹ The London city council published an act in 1574 prohibiting plays, with a preamble listing the many alleged problems caused by theater, which indicates that authorities did not much distinguish disorderly from seditious audiences:

Whereas heretofore sundry great disorders and inconveniences have been found to ensue to this City by the inordinate haunting of great multitudes of people, especially youth, to plays, interludes and shows, namely occasion of frays and quarrels, evil practices of incontinence in great inns, having chambers and secret places adjoining to their open stages and galleries, inveighing and alluring of maids, especially orphans and good citizen's children under age, to private and unmete contracts, the publishing of unchaste, uncomely and unshamefast speeches and doings, withdrawing of the Queen's subjects from divine service on Sundays and holidays, at which times such plays were used, unthrifty waste of the moneys of the poor and fond persons, sundry robberies by picking and cutting of purses, uttering of popular busy and seditious matters, and many other corruptions of youth and other enormities, besides also sundry slaughters and mayhems...²⁰

Renaissance drama scholar Steven Mullaney demonstrates the degree to which theater also was bound up with political matters during the Elizabethan era, a pawn in the battles between the queen and the City of London.²¹ Theaters were located in the legal netherworld called the Liberties at the edges of the City. The Liberties were part of, but outside the full authority of

the city, nor under the authority of any domain of the feudal manorial system, nor under the church's earthly authority. This anomaly was created by the dissolution of monasteries that disrupted rule of this land and attracted displaced persons from other former monastery lands. The Liberties were a place of outcasts as well as others on the fringes of society. Leper houses were located there; others were shackled and exiled there.

Theater was there as an outcast too, banned from the city. The public theaters – in contrast to court and private theaters - were located here in the late sixteenth century because they were seen as problematic to civic order, being characterized as licentious and seditious. Actors were 'doble-dealing ambodexters' and audiences also a threat. The theaters also employed craftsmen who built and worked in the theaters and were radical religious separatists, a view that was highly political in that era of state suppression of religious difference.²²

At the same time theaters were there by virtue of royal licenses, which protected them from City magistrates. A license exempted a troupe from the Vagabond Acts that otherwise equated strolling players with vagabonds. Licensing required that they find a noble who in effect would adopt the players as his servants, sometimes even dressing them in his livery. The royal license itself made theater political in yet another sense, since it thus became a pawn in the game of power between Crown and City.²³

But licensing also was a regime used by the crown to control theater and prevent seditious performances. An office of the king's household, the Master of the King's Revels, was in charge of theater regulation and censorship. Censorship included matters of religion as well as state, since the monarch was also head of the Church of England. Besides censorship, this system of regulation restricted the numbers of theaters and controlled who could legally perform.

These extensive efforts by the City and by the crown indicate the degree to which both considered theater politically significant, the City primarily in terms of maintaining order, the crown in terms of suppressing criticism and using it for propaganda. But it was the concern about the disorderly lower classes in the audiences that was the most consistent theme of London theater regulation. Even issues of censorship were based on concerns about stirring up the lower orders and causing riots.²⁴

Publics and Civil War

Under the Stuarts between Elizabeth and the Civil War (1603-1642), several public theaters closed, leaving the more expensive theaters predominant and dissolving much of the problem of lower-order audiences.²⁵ But that did not eliminate the problem of seditious audiences.

Historians Margot Heinemann and Martin Butler each argue that, contrary to previous assumptions, these privileged theaters were not an extension of, nor subservient to court theater.²⁶ Rather, their success in the era leading up to the Civil War lay in the rise of a social and political circle of new capitalist wealth, resident in London,²⁷ who patronized these theaters and were not always supporters of the crown. This evolving capitalist class was a product of the long transition from feudalism to capitalism that also transformed the state.²⁸ They created a nascent public sphere, at theaters, coffee houses, salons and other public places, as well as through publications,²⁹ that promoted a new relationship to the state as citizens and not simply subjects.

Participation in this public sphere required physical proximity and thus a community. Butler provides detailed evidence of the social networks that composed this community and the degree to which it utilized theater as one of its most significant gathering places. They not only went to theater; they read plays and followed theater news. They discussed and debated its virtues and shortcomings. Their discourse among themselves formed what Jurgen Habermas called a literary public sphere. Moreover, Butler contends that there was significant political commentary in the plays themselves, adding political substance to these literary circles. Here was a rising capitalist elite, more influential than crowds of lower sorts, in regular contact and discussion with each other over issues that touched on politics. Margot Heinemann similarly infers a politically conscious audience from the plays of Thomas Middleton in this same era that included a significant radical Puritan presence at Middleton performances there specifically for the political edge of the plays.

Repeated restrictions, censorship and closings of theaters in the Stuarts reign suggest that the monarchy perceived these theater audiences as a political threat. The influential audiences of these theaters, some of them members of Parliament, were seen by the court as political opponents. Under such circumstances, audiences might have been seen as more than just a threat to order.³⁰ Butler lists royal closings, in 1603, 1612, and in the 1620s and 1630s, out of fear that their audiences could too easily become the nucleus for broader civil disturbances due to the king's uncertain hold on power and the people's allegiance.³¹

Precisely to prevent such disturbances, the parliament of the Commonwealth (1642-1660) closed all theaters and banned performances. Although Puritans in the seventeenth century had railed against the immorality of theater, Butler argues that the closing of theaters during the Commonwealth was motivated by the same concerns as the Stuarts, that theaters were a place of potential political resistance.³² The closings were not justified on moral grounds. Rather, they cited specific secular reasons for the closing, primarily for security of the Commonwealth government against sedition. The act of suppression passed by the Puritan Long Parliament in 1642 stopped public but not private performances, and only temporarily,

on the ground of the times of conflict. Sterner measures followed in 1648, to put an end to illegal performances. Actors could no longer escape vagabondage by becoming liveried servants, theater licensing was abolished and theater buildings dismantled or demolished. Through the 1650s the government was more lenient and allowed drama as spoken and musical performances but not as acted drama.³³

Butler distinguishes the theater audiences before the Civil War from audiences after the Restoration (1660-1688), when they were far more narrow and restricted in their class and politics. The restored Stuarts ostentatiously reinstated and supported theater as a royal institution, maintaining control by licensing only two theaters to loyal courtiers. Again, theater was charged with political significance, but as a tool of the crown. However, during the Restoration, the royal control of plays, players and theaters gradually unraveled. Susan Owen's research confirms again that Restoration theater was treated as a public sphere by the monarchy, dramatists, performers and audiences alike. While focusing on the Exclusion crisis (1678-1682) she also references theater before then as precursor. In summarizing her work she states that 'The drama was involved in the debates [of the crisis] which engaged the political nation. It entered a new phase of profound political engagement' the specifics of which she elaborates in succeeding chapters, compared to the earlier Restoration when theater was treated as a representative public sphere, showcasing the monarchy. Owen notes that theater audience before the crisis was predominantly (but not entirely) Tory, and during the crisis the king and his circle withdrew from theater, leaving more room for criticism, according to Owen. Before and during the crisis, theater was treated as a public sphere. The 'crowd' of the earlier pit was absent, excluded. Accused of provoking 'the rabble,' Dryden retorted, 'But what Rabble was it to provoke? Are the Audience of a Play-house (which are generally persons of honour, Noblemen and Ladies, or at worst, as one of your Authors calls his Gallants, Men of Wit and Pleasure about the Town) are these the Rabble.'³⁴

Problems continued into the Hanoverian reign. By the 1730s, theaters produced plays that openly criticized and made fun of the king and the prime minister, and became a significant vehicle for opposition to both crown and the minister. In response to this threat and with the support by those who consider theaters immoral and a public nuisance, Parliament passed the Licensing Act of 1737. The Act reaffirmed the definition of players as vagabonds, clarified the Lord Chamberlain's authority to censor and prohibit performances of plays, and effectively required theaters to hold a royal license, with such licenses allowed only in Westminster, thereby closing all independent theaters throughout the nation. Licensees had a monopoly on legal performances that would shape government control over theater for over a century.³⁵

Bourgeois Consumers and Lower Class Crowds

Through the ebb and flow of the seventeenth century, the principal struggle in the theater was between the monarchy and a newly-formed capitalist class rising in power.³⁶ The problems of disorderly lower-class audiences had become secondary by virtue of the fact that they were less able to attend than in Elizabeth's reign. However, by the eighteenth century, as the bourgeoisie's concerns began to take precedent as customers in a commercial marketplace, and as a proletarian audience began to emerge along with it, working-class people began again to be noticed in theaters. Complaints now came from this bourgeois market rather than from ruling authorities.³⁷

One complaint was that theaters fostered lower-class immorality and irresponsibility. Some voiced the traditional concern that a theater would distract artisans, apprentices and servants from their duties. A complaint opposed to opening a new theater in 1729 neatly expressed these views about lower class audiences, that the theater 'will draw away tradesmen, servants and others from their lawful callings, and corrupt their manners.'³⁸ Another complaint revealed bourgeois distaste at contact with the working class. Tradesmen and other businesses near theaters complained that the lower-class elements attracted by theater, including pickpockets and prostitutes, were harming their trade. From 1750 on, the upper bourgeoisie's wish to avoid rubbing shoulders with the lower classes would be reflected in London's increasingly segregated residential geography, with elites migrating to the west of London leaving the working classes in the east. This was part of a general withdrawal of elites, local and otherwise, from traditional urban recreation and festivals.³⁹

This is not to say that there wasn't a reality to their concerns about safety in and around theaters. A good number of violent incidents were recorded in these times, including a series of theater riots in 1737 by footmen, on one occasion with the Prince and Princess of Wales in the house and one of the Prince's advisers in a fight with one of the rioters.⁴⁰ As the working class audience grew in numbers, these tensions would increase and press the two licensed theaters to serve the demands of the bourgeoisie while restricting those of the working class.

Conflict between bourgeois and proletarian views about audiences would culminate in 1809 in the 'last great theater riot' of English history, in which opposed discourses presented contrasting representations of audiences and audience rights from different class perspectives.⁴¹ Covent Garden, one of the royal licensed theaters, burned down in 1808. It was immediately rebuilt and reopened in 1809 with fewer lower price seats and increased prices generally, excluding working-class people who had been patrons at the old prices. A large throng arrived at the rebuilt theater on opening night. When the performance began, many hissed and shouted, drowning the sound of the performance. Even after the performance the crowd refused to leave, and did so only in the early hours of morning. The

protest was a demand to reinstate the old prices, and the ensuing events became known as the Old Prices (OP) riots. This appeared in many respects to continue the traditional repertoire of ephemeral, casual crowd actions to restore customs. But it lasted for 67 days, as protests continued to disrupt performances until finally prices were restored.

Such sustained protest was something more than a crowd action. The OP riots added a modern repertoire of collective action to achieve the moral economy goal of returning to old prices. The rioters' mix of old and new repertoire marked a turning point in commoners' political behavior and created a sustained, organized social movement that was less manageable by authorities than the traditional crowd. Over the two months of riot, actions shifted from spontaneous to pre-meditated, from ritualized to de-ritualized actions; and from traditional leadership to more bureaucratized forms; and traditional rituals of rough music and of broadsides shifted to incorporate new rhetorical styles.⁴²

It also created something that was not simply a traditional crowd, nor a public as in the eighteenth century coffee house and theater, but a modern social movement.⁴³ The rioters' discourse reveals a mixed self-representation as the traditional crowd defending a moral economy and as something new, more institutionalized and more political in its goals. Bourgeois elites on the other hand saw only a crowd, but one more incorrigible than in the past.

Elites reacted more negatively than usual to what they perceived as traditional crowd action. Although this had been recognized in law as the 'right of resistance,' the wars with France and the French Revolution, made British authorities less tolerant of crowds and protests, and unwilling to support the old tradition of the moral economy and the right to riot.⁴⁴

Part of the reason for difficulty in resolving differences between protestors and proprietors was that the rioters and the proprietors were talking past each other, speaking different discourses with different assumptions, as the new political economy structurally and ideologically pressed the older moral economy.⁴⁵ The rioters voiced the discourse of the lower classes, the proprietors voiced that of the bourgeoisie. The rioters intended to sustain the principal of a traditional moral economy that insisted that prices be based upon what working people could afford, i.e. on need and the moral obligation to meet that need. The proprietors, on the other hand, presumed a new capitalist economy in which ticket prices were rightfully determined by what the market would bear, i.e. on economic demand alone with no moral obligation attached.⁴⁶

Seemingly unrelated issues can be understood within this framework. Baer elaborates many diverse arguments made by OPs (old price supporters) against the theater's new policies.

Underlying all of them is resistance to a fundamental change in the social rules governing theater audiences, from moral economy to political economy.

Baer noted several previous instances of protest against foreign performers. This was part of a larger aspect of theater contributing to framing the English national identity in the late eighteenth century, during the war with France. For example, the OPs objected to employing an Italian singer as unpatriotic. Important figures, including Edmund Burke and William Hazlitt, far from condemning theater's immorality, as had been the case for a long time, saw it as having a didactic role in shaping the nation's people. Theater was one of few places of the time where diverse classes might gather together to jointly witness the representation of the 'national virtues', as plays often did, helping to construct a national 'imagined community' that bridged classes and might submerge lower class resistance.⁴⁷

But if theater was to help create this imagined community of Englishmen, all sectors of the population must have access to theater in order to participate and affirm that identity. It must operate as a public space rather than as a private venue, just as the OPs conceived of theater. A poem quoted by the OPs went, 'The stage I choose – a subject fair and free, 'Tis yours – 'tis mine – 'tis public property.'⁴⁸ The new higher prices excluded the lower classes from this public space and this community.

From the point of view of the new economic framework, however, actor/director John Kemble and his co-owners at Covent Garden were proprietors of private property, and the audience had no rights in its management. They believed that the market should determine prices and protestors had only the right to refuse to purchase admission. This view threatened to transform theater from a public forum 'owned' by the audience as much as by proprietors, into a private commodity for sale to those who could afford it, from a political institution, a public sphere, into an economic one, a market. OPs saw themselves not as rioters, but as defenders of rights against a tyrant, often using terms such as liberty and freedom, rather than prices, as their goals.⁴⁹

One side defended a conception of theater as a public institution; the other planned a commercial institution for profit, no different than a shop selling goods. This was a struggle over the political definition of an important urban institution and, more broadly, a protest against the intrusion of a new political economic order.⁵⁰ The OPs won this battle but they would lose the war, ideas of political economy gradually made headway across society and became the dominant discourse for understanding and organizing social relations. Audiences would lose their traditional rights, they would be disciplined and riots would be suppressed.⁵¹

Conclusion

Throughout this history, theater was far more than 'mere entertainment.' Discourses on theater and audiences voiced the social, cultural and political history of these times, and expressed the changes of class and power that were at the core of political and economic history. Even while in the Elizabethan era, the authorities conceived theater and audiences as sources of disorder, the crowds conceived themselves as exercising legitimate rights and playwrights and performers cooperated through their scripts and performances, through asides and repartee. In the seventeenth century, the Stuarts struggled to control and use theatre in defense against a bourgeois public found inside public theaters and debating dramatic art and politics outside them. The power of the bourgeoisie grew in the eighteenth century and was ascendant by the dawn of the nineteenth. They were now the elite resisting the tide of an emerging proletariat who saw theater as a public sphere where they could rightfully demand a voice.

On the matter of crowds, there are three observations from crowd history that seem pertinent: The first is the significance of familiarity among and stable relations between participants that underlay the crowds of the earlier period described by Davis and Bristol and the case for community made by John Bohstedt in the later period. Second, there is the significance of the breakdown of such community for treatment of crowds suggested by Steven Mullaney in London of the early period, and the disruption of rapid changes in London and elsewhere argued by Bohstedt for the later period. Third, there is the similarities between disciplining during Carnival described by Davis in the earlier period, and the exercise of moral economy described by Thompson for the later period. These processes seem to exhibit remarkably consistent elite attitudes and treatment toward lower class audiences over time, even though we are talking about pre-industrial classes in the early period and emerging industrial classes in the later period.

On the matter of publics, the habits of the rising bourgeoisie as theater-goers were part of their larger development of a public sphere. The first coffee house in London was established in the mid-seventeenth century. The first periodical press appeared as an extension of coffee-house conversation. According to Habermas, such a public sphere arose necessarily from this mercantile bourgeoisie, at first to exchange information about trade.⁵² This information inevitably included political information that bore on trade. Second, a literary public sphere based in cultural debate arose; and from this a more overtly political public sphere in which the bourgeoisie envisioned political institutions suited to their class needs. Diehl and Heinemann make the case that drama of this era was part of political, Protestant discourse, adding the stage to this public sphere. Butler demonstrates the changes in geography that contributed to the social habits of a literary and political public sphere of conversation in

London that included theater. For this new bourgeoisie all social intercourse constituted a public sphere and was political in its nature.

Classic political economy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought with it yet another framing of audiences, as consumers in a market. The premises of classic liberal thought defined life in market terms. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the market metaphor was widely applied to all aspect of life. It is no surprise that in the OP riots it was at the center of the redefinition of English theater audiences.

These three images of audiences remain with us still, although under different historical contexts and therefore with different significance. Audiences at live performances, such as rock concerts and soccer games, are still characterized as disorderly and violent crowds and treated by the media and the state accordingly.⁵³ Political theater, which has had a renaissance since the turn of the millennium, as well as news and other media still frame audiences as publics.⁵⁴ And, of course, commercial entertainment has become universal in our culture, framing audiences as consumers, while advertising-supported entertainments frame audiences as commodities.

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¹ I use the term 'class' broadly to include both feudal and capitalist classes, since this paper spans the change from the one to the other. By lower classes I mean to be inclusive of pre-industrial classes of manual laborers, including agricultural workers, artisans, wage-workers and other assorted categories below the aristocracy and bourgeoisie and across changing class structures. For some discussions of class formation see e.g., T. H. Ashton and C. H. E. Philpin, eds., *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian class structure and economic development in pre-industrial Europe*, Cambridge University Press 1987; Margaret R. Somers, 'Narrativity, Narrative Identity, and Social Action: Rethinking English Working-Class Formation', *Social Science History*, 16:4, Winter, 1992, 591-630; Patrick Joyce, ed., *Class*, Oxford University Press, 1995.

² For a more extended demonstration of this thesis and approach to audiences applied to an American setting, see my *The Citizen Audience* Routledge 2008.

³ John S. McClelland, *The Crowd and The Mob: From Plato to Canetti*, Unwin Hyman, 1989, 1-7; on surveillance of audiences see Jeffrey Ravel, *The Contested Parterre: Public Theater and French Political Culture 1680-1791*, Cornell University Press, 1999.

⁴ On the London crowd see Ian Munro, *The Figure of the Crowd in Early Modern London: The City and its Double*, Palgrave, 2005

⁵Michael Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England*, Methuen 1985; Peter Borsay, 'All the town's a stage': urban ritual and ceremony, 1600-1800' in Peter Clark, ed., *The Transformation of the English Provincial Towns, 1600-1800*, London: Hutchinson, 1984, 228-258; Natalie Davis, 'The reasons of misrule: youth groups and charivaris in sixteenth century France' *Past & Present*, 1971 50(1):41-75. Davis' description of carnival crowds has similarities to the moral economy in Edward P. Thompson 'The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century,' *Past & Present*, 1971 50:176-136.

⁶ On familiarity and self regulation of the crowd and restraint by authorities, and the absence of these in larger or rapidly changing cities, see John Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales, 1790-1810*, Harvard University Press 1983; Andrew Charlesworth, 'From the moral economy to the political economy of Manchester, 1790-1812', *Social History* 18:2 May 1993, 205-217.

⁷ Paul Griffiths, *Lost Londons: Change, Crime and Control in the Capital City, 1550-1660*, Cambridge University Press, 2008; Ian Munro, *The Figure of the Crowd in Early Modern London*, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005; Roger Finlay, *Population and Metropolis: Demography of London 1580-1650* Cambridge 1981.

⁸ Raymond Williams, *Sociology of Culture*, Fontana 1981; Steve Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage*, University of Chicago, 1988; Muriel C. Bradbrook, *The Rise of the Common Player*, Harvard University Press, 1962, Chapter 4.

⁹ Jane Milling 'The development of a professional theatre, 1540-1660', in Jane Milling and Peter Thomson eds., *Cambridge History of British Theatre, Origins to 1660*, Cambridge University Press, 171; Suzanne Westfall, *Patrons and Performance: Early Tudor Household Revels*, Clarendon Press, 1990, 133.

¹⁰ Early modern fairs or open-air markets, where town locals exchanged their produce and products, were a milder, warm weather complement to carnival. These were not markets in the modern sense, but based on communal relations, as was carnival. See Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: the Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1998. Such markets attracted itinerant performers such as commedia dell'arte, a precursor to commercial theater. See Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750*, Cambridge University Press 1986; Dan Slater, 'Going shopping: markets, crowds and consumption', in Chris Jenks (ed.), *Cultural Reproduction*, Routledge 1993, 188-209.

¹¹ Douglas Bruster, 'The birth of an industry', in Milling and Thomson, *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, 230.

¹² John Trethewey, 'Stage and audience in the *commedia dell'arte* and in Moliere's plays' in David George and Christopher Cossip, *Studies in the Commedia dell'Arte*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press 1993; Kenneth and Laura Richards, *The Commedia dell'Arte: A Documentary History*, Basil Blackwell, 1990.

¹³ Kenneth and Laura Richards, *Commedia dell'Arte: A documentary History*, Basil Blackwell, 1990; M. C. Bradbrook, *The Rise of the Common Player*, Chatto & Windus, 1962, 96-99, quote on 99. On Elizabethan audiences see Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, Cambridge University Press 1987; Ann Cook *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London*, Princeton University Press 1981.

¹⁴ Alexandra Halasz, "'So Beloved that Men Use His Picture for Their Signs": Richard Tarlton and the Uses of Sixteenth-Century Celebrity', *Shakespeare Studies*, 23, 1995, 19-38; Peter Thomson, 'Rogues and rhetoricians: acting styles in early English drama', in John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan, eds., *A New History of Early English Drama* Columbia University Press, 1997, 321-336; R. A. Foakes, 'Playhouses and players' in A. R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, second edition, Cambridge University Press, 2003, 23.

¹⁵ Jane Milling, 'The development of a professional theatre, 1540-1660', in Milling and Thomson, eds., *The Cambridge History of British Theatre, Origins to 1660*, 171-176. On knowingness see Peter Bailey, 'Conspiracies of meaning: music-hall and the knowingness of popular culture', *Past & Present*, 144:1, 1994, 138-170; Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, 58-61.

¹⁶ Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis, 1632-1642*, Cambridge, 1984; Bradbrook, 100-116; Andrew Gurr 53-4, 63.

¹⁷ Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage*, University of Chicago Press 1993; Richard Dutton, *Mastering the Revels: The Regulation and Censorship of English Renaissance Drama*, Macmillan 1991. Jonas Barish *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice*, University of California Press 1981, Barish (66, 83) claims that criticism of theater was greatest when theater was flourishing and notes this specifically for the Elizabethan era.

¹⁸ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Cornell University Press, 1986, 61

¹⁹ Mullaney, *Place of the Stage* 47

²⁰ Chambers, vol 4, p273-4, (spelling modernized)

²¹ Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage*, 44. Bruster, 226-29, suggest an alternative explanation that theaters were not necessarily transgressive but merely located in disorderly surroundings for reason of costs and freedom of expression. But even if for reasons of cost, such theaters could not be wholly immune to their neighborhood, to some degree discouraging more reputable clientele and attracting the less reputable.

²² Mullaney, 53, 27, 8; Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750*, Cambridge University Press 1986 54-55. Private theaters were significantly more expensive, tended to be on the northern and western borders of London, and served a more prosperous and less problematic clientele, from the point of view of the city magistrates, while public, open-air theaters like the Globe were situated on the south bank of the Thames.

²³ Mullaney, 53-4; Richard Dutton, *Mastering the Revels*.

²⁴ A contemporary, Thomas Nashe wrote that patriotic plays such as *Henry V*, also 'hath power to new mould the hearts of the spectators', i.e. to arouse their emotions.

²⁵ Price was not entirely exclusive: see Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and opposition drama under the early Stuarts*, Cambridge University Press, 1982, 64 fn2.

²⁶ Martin Butler, *Theater and Crisis, 1632-1642* Cambridge University Press, 1984. Margot Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre*, describes audiences at the 'select' theaters as MPs, lawyers and law students and Puritan sympathizers (77 fn 11), but also argues that some audiences included the more radical sects and constituted what we may call lower-class publics as well. Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England*, Cornell University Press, 1997, 5-6, also argues that protestants of the era sometimes used theater to their own purposes.

²⁷ Butler and Robert Brenner in *Merchants and Revolution*, Cambridge University Press, 1993 both argue that capitalist landowners prospered in this era. Butler finds them spending more time in and taking up residence in London. Heinemann notes that, for some financially stretched aristocrats, living in London was less expensive than maintaining a country estate.

²⁸ Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, pp. 649ff. For debates about class structure in the era of the Civil War, also see James Holstun, *Ehud's Dagger: Class Struggle in the English Revolution*, Verso, 2000, Mike Haynes and Jim Wolfreys, eds., *History and Revolution: Refuting Revisionism*, Verso, 2007.

²⁹ Jurgen Habermas traced a long process of development of the public sphere in his first three chapters of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Polity Press, 1992. On early English publics see David Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early-Modern England*, Princeton University Press, 2000.

³⁰ On the conceptual distinctions between publics and collective actions such as social movements and revolutions, see Mustafa Emirbayer and Mimi Sheller, 'Publics in history', *Theory and Society*, 28:1 Feb 1999; Charles Tilly and R. A. Schweitzer, 'How London and its conflicts changed shape: 1758-1834', *Historical Methods* 15:2 Spring, 1982, 67-77; Geoff Eley, 'Nations, publics and political cultures'. in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*,

MIT Press 1992, 289-339; Jeffrey Ravel, *The Contested Parterre: Public Theater and French Political Culture, 1680-1791*, Cornell University Press 1999.

³¹ Butler, 136. Lower orders continued to predominate in a theater of a different sort, the drama of public executions. See Thomas Laqueur, 'Crowds, carnival and the state in English executions, 1604-1868', in A. L. Beier, David Cannadine and James Rosenheim, eds., *The First Modern Society Essays in English History in Honour of Lawrence Stone*, Cambridge University Press, 305-56.

³² Barish, *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice*, ch 4; Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage*.

³³ Virginia Gildersleeve, *Government Regulation of the Elizabethan Drama*, NY: Burt Franklin, 1961(orig. 1908), 222-30. On Gildersleeve as part of an old consensus, now overturned, see Richard Dutton, *Mastering the Revels*, 4-9.

³⁴ Susan Owen, *Restoration Theatre and Crisis*, Oxford University Press 1996, 2-3, 11-12, 13-14.

³⁵ Vincent Liesenfeld, *the Licensing Act of 1737*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1984, chapter 1 for a succinct summary of the deregulation, Appendix A-2 for the history of laws designating players as vagabonds.

³⁶ The tenuousness of the restored monarch's control of the London crowds is demonstrated by Tim Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis*, Cambridge University Press, 1987

³⁷ This is not to suggest that the market and consumer culture were new. Origins of consumer culture has been variously set in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England, depending on the criteria used. But by the eighteenth century, the bourgeoisie and markets were well established and a culture valuing individualism and exchange was gaining over ideas favoring community and a moral economy as justifications for actions. It was a confrontation of these values in the theater that is the focus here. On origins see, e.g., Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, WritersPrintShop, 2005; John H. Plumb, Neil McKendrick and John Brewer, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, Indiana University Press, 1985; Jean-Christophe Agnew *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750*, Cambridge University Press 1986; Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*, Indiana University Press, 1990; Craig Muldrew, 'Interpreting the market: the ethics of credit and community relations in early modern England', *Social History*, 18:2 May 1993, 163-83. On the shift from moral to market economy see the numerous articles responding to Edward P. Thompson 'The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century,' *Past & Present*, 1971, 50:1, 76-136

³⁸ Liesenfeld, 16. The fact that this was a broader complaint is indicated by another comment of the time, that 'Nothing can scarce be more troublesome than the custom that prentices, journeymen etc have here of going about to beg offerings the day after Christmas,' a remnant of carnival. See Nicholas Rogers, 'Crowds and political festival in Georgian England' in Tim Harris *The Politics of the Excluded* p 236.

³⁹ George Rudé, *Paris and London in the Eighteenth Century: Studies in Popular Protest*, Viking, 1971, 10; Peter Borsay, "'All the town's a stage": urban ritual and ceremony, 160-1800', in Peter Clark, ed., *The Transformation of English Provincial Towns, 1600-1800*, Hutchinson, 1984.

⁴⁰ Liesenfeld, 79-86. For more on eighteenth century theater audiences see James Lynch, *Box Pit and Gallery: Stage and Society in Johnson's London*, NY: Russell and Russell, 1953; Harry Pedicord, *The Theatrical Public in the Time of Garrick*, Columbia University Press, 1954; Jerry Roland Bailor, 'The Late eighteenth century theatrical public of London', PhD University of Southern California, 1974

⁴¹ Marc Baer, *Theatre and Disorder in Late Georgian London*, Oxford University Press, 1992.

⁴² Baer *Theatre and Disorder*, 235

⁴³ Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768-2004*, London: Paradigm, 2004, Chapter 1 on the origins and characteristics of modern social movements.

⁴⁴ Elie Halevy, E. Watkins and D. Barker, tr., *England in 1815*, Barnes and Noble, 1961, p 148.

⁴⁵ On moral economy versus political economy see Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth, eds., *Moral Economy and Popular Protest: Crowds, Conflict and Authority*, St. Martin's Press 2000, 12-19.

⁴⁶ Baer, 22

⁴⁷ Baer, 192-96. For other examples of theater used to foster national identity, see James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History*, University of California Press 1995; and Jeffrey Ravel, *The Contested Parterre*, ch.6.

⁴⁸ Baer, 76

⁴⁹ Baer, 79-81

⁵⁰ Representations of crowds in English literature from 1800 to 1850 were central to defining the public sphere. See John Plotz, *The Crowd: British Literature and Public Politics*, University of California Press, 2000, 7

⁵¹ The same change would occur in New York, growing out of the Astor Place riot of 1849. See Butsch, *Citizen Audience*, 29-32.

⁵² Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger MIT Press, 1989, 14-17.

⁵³ Roger Ingham, Stuart Hall, John Clarke, Peter Marsh and Jim Donovan, *'Football Hooliganism': The Wider Context*, London: Inter-Action Inprint, 1978; Adam Brown, ed., *Fanatics!: Power, Identity and Fandom in Football*, London: Routledge, 1998. See also the literature on moral panics, Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, third edition, Routledge 2002; Chas Critcher, *Moral Panics and the Media*, Open University Press 2003; Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, J. Clarke and B. Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* London: Macmillan, 1978.

⁵⁴ 'The state of the GWB joke', *New York Times*, August 22, 2004; Michael Billington, 'Hello cruel world,' *The Guardian* December 17, 2003.