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## Looking and Being Looked At: Visualizing the Nineteenth-Century Spectator

Jim Davis

Studies of the relationship between visual culture and performance in British theatre history have generally focused on actors and scenography and what they signify on stage.<sup>1</sup> This is perfectly legitimate and, in the case of performers, can often provide implicit critique rather than neutral representation. Less attention has been paid to the representation of spectators in British theatre history and the ways in which such representations indicate modes of looking and the performance of spectatorship. This essay seeks to consider the representation of spectators between the late-eighteenth and late-nineteenth century and what it tells us about how audiences looked, perceived, and observed and how they were looked at. Commencing with a discussion of the installation of the looking-glass curtain at the Coburg Theatre, which raises fundamental questions about the spectator as spectacle, this essay acknowledges the ways in which visual perception changes over time, both in relation to the act of looking by spectators and the act of depicting them by artists. From the time of William Hogarth onwards there has been a tradition of depicting British audiences comically and satirically, a convention that will be discussed in relation to the depictions by Thomas Rowlandson and George Cruikshank in particular, as well as *Punch* cartoonists later in the nineteenth century. This convention carries over into some images of actors and their audiences, including Sarah Siddons, who serves as a useful case study not only in terms of visual satires of audience reaction to the powerful emotions she unleashed, but also of the satirical ways in which she was sometimes depicted. The sincerity of spectator response is called into question doubly, in terms of how artists perceive their response and perceive what they were responding to. Further, there is also a doubleness in the relationship between artists as spectators and their perception of what it means to look and be looked at in the theatre auditorium and also in other public spaces, such as art galleries for instance. This essay seeks

to situate the visual representation of the theatrical spectator, a relatively unexplored area of theatre history, within the broader context of the visual culture that generated such images. The increasing popularity of critical reaction to visuality and visual culture has also tended to overlook the range of image representation in theatre history, including the social and political satires in graphic form discussed below; failure to account for this satirical thread risks misrepresenting both the theatre of the past and its documentation.

### **The Looking Glass Curtain**

In 1818 the Royal Coburg Theatre (the theatre we now know as the Old Vic) opened in South London. Four years later, in 1822, G. Humphrey published a print entitled *Theatrical Reflection, or A Peep at the Looking Glass Curtain at the Royal Coburg Theatre* (see Figure 1), showing the Coburg audience reflected on stage in a giant plate glass mirror weighing five tons, the effect of which, according to the dramatist J. R. Planché, "was anything but agreeable."<sup>2</sup> Jane Moody, discussing the mirror curtain, considers it in largely performative and material terms, concentrating on the way in which it turns spectators into actors and consumers, and thus blurs the boundaries between both:

Though a handful of reviewers were quick to deride the vulgarity of this Coburg innovation, crowded audiences "testified their delight at seeing themselves in this immense mirror, and for the first time 'on the stage.'" Like plate-glass windows in contemporary arcades, the mirror curtain framed the Coburg's interior as a place of luxury and spectacular experience. At the same time, however, the mirror brilliantly dissolved the boundary between the consumer and the object of consumption, allowing the spectators to become the subject of their own spectacle. Indeed, the Coburg's innovation marks a significant step in the transformation of the dramatic spectator into the self-conscious purchaser of cultural goods and visual pleasure.<sup>3</sup>

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]<Caption><Figure 1. Anon, *Theatrical Reflection, or A Peep at the Looking Glass Curtain at the Royal Coburg Theatre*, etching, hand colored, 1822, Library of Congress, no.2005676992.>

Moody allows some notional agency to the spectator as consumer, but an agency that is still circumscribed and over which the spectator has little or no control. In discussing this phenomenon Isabel Armstrong also acknowledges a loss of control, but argues that the Looking-Glass Curtain creates a more complex and paradoxical interaction with the spectator: "reflection is now outside one's control. . . . The illusion of collective seeing enabled by the proscenium arch is fractured, splintered into individual acts of seeing. In or on this shadowy screen: who sees whom? who sees you? at what angle?"<sup>4</sup> The Looking-Glass Curtain demonstrates not just the possibility but the existence of multiple perspectives, revealing the solitariness as well as the unity of spectatorship. It reflects the audience en masse, but also reinforces the sense of each audience member as an individual, almost lost within the crowd. Reflections in mirrors, according to Armstrong, are "a kind of natural mimesis," but a "mimesis constantly in deformation."<sup>5</sup> The latter phrase could also be applied to the numerous satirical prints and caricatures of English audiences circulating in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, which provide an equally distorted mimetic reflection of spectators. Thus, the Looking-Glass Curtain functions as a useful metaphor for the process of looking and being looked at which is central to this essay and for the satirical potential embedded in the delineation of this process.

Although paintings, prints, and illustrations sometimes depicted audiences seriously, without caricature or satire, the predominant mode of recording theatre spectators in this period provided a satirical critique on their behavior, composition, comfort, visceral and emotional reactions, and modes of looking. This approach forms part of a wider social and cultural critique located within visual culture, changing over time, but invariably drawing us

back to a broader consideration of spectatorship. The evidential value of these images, mediated through the conventions of visual culture and the individual eye of the artist, raise interesting questions for the theatre historian both methodologically and contextually, particularly around the practices of looking and being looked at.

In *Visuality in the Theatre*, Maaïke Bleeker focuses on the relationship of the spectator to the staged event, but her comments are also relevant to this discussion:

A new or renewed focus on questions of vision in a wide variety of fields has begun to open our eyes to the complexity of what easily, but mistakenly, is taken for granted as "just looking." Growing awareness of the inevitable entanglement of vision with what is called *visuality*--the distinct historical manifestation of visual experience--draws attention to the necessity of locating vision within a specific historical and cultural situation. This is a situation in which what we think we see is the product of vision "taking place" according to the tacit rules of a specific scopic regime and within a relationship between the one seeing and what is seen. What seems to be just "there to be seen" is, in fact, rerouted through memory and fantasy, caught up in threads of unconscious and entangled with the passions.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, says Bleeker, "the object of visual analysis is the way things become visible as a result of the practices of looking invested in them."<sup>7</sup> This is certainly a factor in any delineation of spectators, whose reactions and behavior during performances are endlessly changing.

Practices of looking and observing inevitably change over time. Notions of the spectator and of perception itself have already been problematized by Jonathan Crary, who (writing about the early nineteenth century) suggests that rather than focus on changes in the practice of representation, we should focus on the observer:

For the problem of the observer is the field on which vision in history can be said to materialize, to become itself visible. Vision and its effects are always inseparable from the possibilities of an observing subject who is both the historical product *and* the site of certain practices, techniques, institutions and procedures of subjectification.<sup>8</sup>

Crary privileges "observer" as a term over that of "spectator" because he believes "spectator" in the nineteenth-century context implies "one who is a passive onlooker at a spectacle, as at an art gallery or theatre."<sup>9</sup>

Crary's misplaced emphasis on "passivity," even though it might appear to chime with the "lack of control" noted amongst spectators viewing the Looking-Glass Curtain, is countered by Tiffany Watt Smith, who claims that her aim is to interrogate

the equation between theatrical audiences and passivity by arguing that embodied and affective audience performances may be understood as a form of interactivity and participation in the live event. . . . [T]he theatre auditorium was a space around which questions about looking--and particularly, about the collective, affective, and visceral aspects of spectatorship--were raised and contested.<sup>10</sup>

Watt Smith's theatregoers are self-aware, self-conscious participants in performance, not the passive audiences of tradition. Visceral and emotional responses to the excitement, for instance, of sensation scenes in spectacular melodramas need not imply passivity.

Spectatorship involves choices and multiple forms of engagement with stage, auditorium, what is being performed, and how it is being received. This is explicit in many of the extant images discussed in this essay and is particularly apparent in the work of Thomas Rowlandson who not only depicts spectatorship but also interrogates it, complicating our understanding of affect, attention, and response.

## **Thomas Rowlandson and the Representation of Spectators Through Satire and Caricature**

A useful starting point for this discussion of spectatorship is the English artist and caricaturist Thomas Rowlandson (1756-1827) whose representations of spectators in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century raise questions around their evidential status in depicting and defining audiences. Rowlandson was one of the outstanding caricaturists of his day, at a time when political and social satires in graphic form were a significant aspect of everyday life. Although his portfolio was wide-ranging, Rowlandson chose a number of theatrical subjects to depict, some of which are discussed below. Sometimes the location of the theatre is immaterial, but often the setting is one of the two London patent theatres, Covent Garden or Drury Lane. The genres to which spectators are reacting are not always specific, but tragedy (Shakespearian or eighteenth-century) and comedy seem the most favored. Rowlandson follows a tradition of depicting theatrical spectators satirically initiated by Hogarth's *The Laughing Audience* in 1733. In 1737 the poet Alexander Pope had thus described English audiences:

With laughter sure Democritus had dy'd

Had he beheld an audience gape so wide.

Let Bear or Elephant be e'er so white.

The people, sure, the people are the sight!<sup>11</sup>

In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Rowlandson follows in both Pope's and Hogarth's footsteps. Ronald Paulson suggests that as an artist Rowlandson creates a world in which everyone is looking or being looked at.<sup>12</sup> This is certainly true of *Comedy*

*Spectators* (1789) (see Figure 2) in which most of the audience members depicted are clearly enjoying what is happening on stage, although a possible flirtation is distracting two of the spectators. Similarly, most of the audience in *Comedy in the Country* (1807) (Figure 3) are enjoying themselves, although two women are possibly engaged in a private conversation. In *English Curiosity or the Foreigner Stared out of Countenance* (Figure 4) Rowlandson depicts a German soldier in the front row of the theatre boxes, in a hussar-style uniform, being stared at by all around him, presumably on account of his unusual appearance. He appears to be oblivious of all this attention, although the caption suggests that he is being stared at out of countenance. Whatever is taking place in this and other Rowlandson prints of spectators, Rowlandson's spectators are invariably depicted comically, whether looking or being looked at. They direct their gazes in different directions, often at each other, and not always at the stage. In *An Audience Watching a Play at Drury Lane Theatre* (c. 1785) (see Figure 3), the preoccupation of so many of the spectators in the first gallery with each other rather than with the performance renders the title quite ironical. Playhouses, like exhibitions, according to John Brewer, provided an occasion for "display, fashion and intrigue"<sup>13</sup> and this is exactly what is shown in this watercolor.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE] <Caption><Figure 2. Thomas Rowlandson, *Comedy Spectators, Tragedy Spectators*, etching, hand-colored, 1789, Theatre Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, no. S1804-2009.>

[INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE] <Caption><Figure 3. Thomas Rowlandson, *An Audience Watching a Play at Drury Lane Theatre*, watercolor with pen and black ink, c. 1785, Yale Centre for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, no. B1977.14.149.]

There is almost an anti-absorption tendency when depicting audiences in this period: audience attention is acknowledged, but it is rarely directed entirely at the performance. Yet,

in their different ways, the audiences are performing spectatorship: theatrical in their own right, they are present as the object of our gaze and our absorption, reflecting back at us our own status as spectators, while fracturing the more conventional distinctions and comparisons made between absorption and theatricality. The trope of inattention to the performance that characterizes many satirical depictions of audiences in the eighteenth and nineteenth century can very easily be misread from a modern-day perspective. In the large lit auditoria of the period, spaces in which spectators are mingling socially and even moving about during performance, expectations of concentration and focus are far less rigid than in the darkened theatre spaces of today. Refreshments, discussion of the performance in progress, casual conversation, a little ogling and flirting, are all part of the experience of theatregoing. Thus the satires of Rowlandson and his contemporaries both depict and critique conventional modes of behavior in public spaces.

Paulson is the only critic who has attempted a serious analysis of Rowlandson's approach to the depiction of spectating. He writes that

Rowlandson's pictures . . . are to a very large extent about people looking at things. . . . [His] early prints . . . show little but faces, and their expression or response is the subject. In the 1780s these took the form of small prints of various boxes at the opera or theatre in which the spectators look at each other or at unseen members of the audience, or inward, or occasionally at the play. . . . By 1786 Rowlandson is portraying both crowded audience and actors, juxtaposed laterally, with the interest balanced between response and stimulus.<sup>14</sup>

Despite this development, Rowlandson still continued to focus specifically on audiences in a number of subsequent prints. However, Paulson develops a further argument around Rowlandson's depiction of spectators in relation to performers:

Although *l'expression des passions* and the juxtaposing of responding faces is part of Rowlandson's original intention, the part he develops is the contrast between the faces of the spectators and the performers. The actors . . . are, of course, intermediate states of being in which Rowlandson showed much interest. But within the juxtaposed audience they become a kind of knowledge or experience for spectators who are themselves, in the act of expressing their responses to such extreme situations, borderline states of being.<sup>15</sup>

The notion of spectators as "borderline states of being" suggests that they are in a liminal place between illusion and actuality, between one response and the next one, and that we are watching their performance just as they are watching (in some cases) the performers they have come to see. Significantly, Paulson is also drawing attention to the constant malleability of spectator response. For Paulson, Rowlandson's characters reflect his compositional style, for they "are virtually deteriorating or changing before our eyes,"<sup>16</sup> indicating in temporal terms a state of flux that is also an inevitable aspect of theatre spectatorship. We are invariably caught between the "before" and "after."

Although, as Paulson says, Rowlandson focuses on the contrast between spectators and doers (performers): everyone is watching and being watched. Spectators, he suggests, look, respond, examine, and ogle, but are themselves under our observation and that of their peers. Vic Gattrell claims that Rowlandson's art is "neither judgmental nor satirical, but simply enlarged the viewer's sense of life's comic possibilities."<sup>17</sup> Certainly, many of Rowlandson's prints provide a representation of people taking pleasure in various forms of recreation, but there is arguably a critical edge to his depictions, implicit in his two companion pieces to the comedy spectators discussed previously. In *Tragedy Spectators* (1789) (Figure 2) and *Tragedy in London* (1807), many of the spectators are weeping; in *Tragedy Spectators* a male spectator is attempting to revive a woman who has fainted by

offering her smelling salts.<sup>18</sup> In Rowlandson's opinion, it would seem, such emotional displays are grotesque, implying that the performance of emotion by theatrical spectators is just as artificial as the performances they have come to see. Just as no performance is as authentic as the event it represents, so its reception also lacks the authenticity of lived experience. There seems to be a rhetoric of affect embedded in the spectators' reaction to tragedy, a tendency we find in other contemporary illustrations such as *At a Tragedy* (Figure 6), depicting a tearful male audience witnessing Sarah Siddons in *Isabella; or, The Fatal Marriage* (Southerne) c. 1797 for example. Images of spectators' reaction to Siddons imply the power of tragedy and of Siddons over audiences in this period, but also contain an implicit critique of genre and performer. What is it that audiences are seeing when they look at Siddons, what is it that we are seeing when we look at representations of these audiences?

### **Sarah Siddons: Affect, Spectatorship and Visual Representation**

Sarah Siddons's ability to draw highly emotional responses from her spectators elicited a number of satirical responses from caricaturists, in some of which the process of looking and being looked at is tantamount. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, Siddons had become the premier British tragic actress. Audiences were enthralled not only by her interpretation of a role but also by the visceral and emotionally charged responses she engendered. According to Shearer West "[c]ontemporary accounts give us a picture of audiences not only suffering to the point of illness also but taking a masochistic pleasure in that suffering. . . . [They] sobbed, fainted, hyperventilated, developed headaches--and loved every minute of it."<sup>19</sup> In his biography of Siddons, James Boaden claims:

I well remember, (how is it possible I should ever forget?) the *sobs*, the *shrieks*, among the tenderer part of her audiences; or those tears, which manhood, at first, struggled to suppress, but at length grew proud of indulging. We then indeed, knew

all the *luxury* of grief; but the nerves of many a gentle being gave way before the intensity of such appeals; and fainting fits long and frequently alarmed the decorum of the house, filled almost to suffocation.<sup>20</sup>

A Mrs Crespigny went to see Siddons determined to find fault, but as the performance progressed began to doubt her own judgment and was actually in hysterics by the end of the play.<sup>21</sup> Mrs Piozzi hardly slept one night in April 1789 because of the violent agitation into which Siddons's performance as Isabella had thrown her, while her husband had cried throughout the entire play.<sup>22</sup> When Siddons played Isabella for the first time in Edinburgh the future mother of Lord Byron was carried from the theatre in hysterics.<sup>23</sup> A satirical account of Siddons's first performance of Isabella in Dublin refers to the sobs and sighs of the groaning audience, the noise of corks drawn from the smelling bottles and adds that "[o]ne hundred and nine ladies fainted! Forty-six went into fits! And ninety-five had strong hysterics!"<sup>24</sup> The account then becomes even more extreme:

The world will scarcely credit the truth when they are told that fourteen children, five old women, a one-handed sailor, and six common council men, were actually drowned in the inundation of tears; that flowed from the galleries, lattices, and boxes, to increase the briny pond in the pit. The water was three feet deep, and the people that were obliged to stand upon the benches, were in that position up to their ankles in tears!<sup>25</sup>

David Worrall attributes the swooning and hysteria aroused by Siddons to "a widespread affective disposition among Georgian theatregoers,"<sup>26</sup> but such responses were also common among theatregoers in other countries and in other periods.

We might wonder whether spectator response to Siddons was entirely genuine or whether it also drew on the rhetoric of affect mentioned above, on a public performance of

sensibility. Siddons is well represented in the visual culture of her times, although much of this fails to convey her power as a performer and there is little evidence, according to Gill Perry, that portraits of Siddons drew an affective reaction when exhibited at Royal Academy exhibitions.<sup>27</sup> However, *Siddonian Recollections* (c. 1785-90) attributed to George Romney indicates her ability to express strong emotions, particularly through her eyes, which seemed to "burn with a fire beyond the human" according to a source printed by James Ballantyne.<sup>28</sup> "She seemed," said John Genest, "in a manner to turn them in her head--the effect was exquisite, but almost painful."<sup>29</sup> Fuseli's portrait of Siddons as Lady Macbeth seizing the daggers (exhibited 1812) also conveys a sense of intense emotional energy. On the other hand, caricatures of Siddons suggest that her performances are contrived and exaggerated. Annabel Scratch, whose caricatures of actors and actresses in the *Attic Miscellany* do them few favors, implies this is the case in *How to harrow up the Soul—Oh—h—h!* (1790) (Figure 7), as does Thomas Rowlandson's caricature of Siddons rehearsing in the Green Room with her father (1789) (see Figure 4). This suggestion of artifice and excess inevitably calls into question the integrity of her audience's responses. Around the time these caricatures were published a print appeared entitled *For the Benefit of Mrs Siddons*, showing a group of weeping spectators. West suggests that what the print "seem[s] to indicate is that she expressed herself in extreme ways, and her audiences empathized to a degree that--while it challenged the limitations of Enlightenment rationality--permitted a safe public enactment of violent emotions."<sup>30</sup> A print entitled *The Pit Door* (1784, after Robert Dighton) (Figure 9) shows spectators seeking admission to see Sarah Siddons as Euphrasia in *The Grecian Daughter* by Arthur Murphy. Even prior to admission one woman has fainted and a male spectator is vomiting.<sup>31</sup> Caricatures of Siddons and of her audiences provide a satirically discursive commentary on (and perception of) the spectators who flocked to see her performances and of the actress herself.

[INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE] <Caption><Figure 4. Thomas Rowlandson, *Rehearsing in the Green Room*, engraving, 1789, Theatre Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, no. S2434-2013.>

Sarah Siddons was a highly accomplished actress, drawing praise from many quarters for her intense emotional performances. According to William Hazlitt, "[p]ower was seated on her brow, passion emanated from her breast as from a shrine. She was tragedy personified. . . . To have seen Mrs Siddons, was an event in every one's life."<sup>32</sup> Joshua Reynolds, who used Siddons as his model for *The Tragic Muse* (1784), was one of many artists who celebrated the power and passion of her performances. Yet the caricatures of spectator response to Siddons and of Siddons herself imply an alternative response, a different way of looking, which both contradicts and undermines what might be called the "official" version. Caricatures of performers reframe our perception of what is being looked at through their use of satire and critique, implicitly questioning spectator response and its basis as well.

### **Looking at Spectators from Hogarth to Cruikshank and Beyond**

In the work of Rowlandson and his contemporaries, as well as many of their successors, theatrical spectators become a comic spectacle, comic actors in their own right. As indicated above, this tradition arguably commences with Hogarth's *The Laughing Audience* (see Figure 5), which he designed in 1733 as the subscription ticket for his forthcoming set of prints of *The Rake's Progress*. The audience here is metaphorical, by implication the subscribers to the set of prints, which in themselves present a surrogate theatrical progress, as if they are fulfilling Hogarth's wider claim that "[m]y picture was my stage and men and women my actors."<sup>33</sup> Despite its provenance the print suggests various aspects of audience reaction or lack of it within the theatre. The members of the upper classes in the boxes are totally inattentive, more interested in flirting with the orange sellers than in

the performance. In the pit, on the other hand, all but one of the spectators are laughing at what is happening on stage; one spectator is so amused that he is wiping tears from his eyes.

[INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE]<Caption><Figure 5. After William Hogarth, *The Laughing Audience* (1733), etching, undated, Author's Collection.>

While emotional and visceral reactions are sometimes the object of the artist's commentary or satire, spectator behavior and conditions within the auditorium are increasingly the primary themes of visual satire, especially in the work of Theodore Lane (1800-1828) and George Cruikshank (1792-1878).<sup>34</sup> A tendency to satirize social discomfort can be found in much of Rowlandson's work, but the publication of James Beresford's *The Miseries of Human Life* (1806) gave added impetus to this tendency in the graphic satires not only of Rowlandson but also of many other nineteenth-century caricaturists.<sup>35</sup> Lane's depictions of audiences have none of the subtlety of Rowlandson's. The three illustrations in *The Life of an Actor* which show audiences reveal an almost empty provincial theatre where Egan's protagonist Proteus is performing Romeo for his benefit, a performance by Proteus (now down on his luck) in Richardson's Theatre at Bartholomew Fair, and the collapse of a gallery in an overcrowded theatre, thronged to excess on account of Proteus's resurgent popularity (Figure 11). All three are slightly humorous illustrations, effectively representing the text, but they describe rather than comment on these events. A good-humored woodcut of spectators queuing for entry to a provincial theatre gallery to see Edmund Kean as Othello was posthumously published in Egan's *The Show Folks* in 1831.

However, in 1821 Lane hand produced a much more dynamic set of prints entitled *Theatrical Pleasures* depicting the vicissitudes of theatre audiences extending from arrival at the theatre until their departure. In several of these prints, based on Drury Lane audiences, Lane's focus is on discomfort, overcrowding, even fisticuffs. In *Contending for a Seat in the*

*Pit*, two men fight for a seat in the pit, while the more affluent occupants of the boxes look down with a mixture of contempt and amusement. *Snug in the Gallery* (see Figure 6) depicts a space in which everyone is snug, but this perhaps refers ironically to the way in which the spectators are jammed so closely together. In *Crowding for the Pit* and *Turning out Half Satisfied* spectators jostle each other for admission and crowd together as they leave, while falling prey to thieves and pickpockets. *Taken Places Occupied* reveals that gaining access to pre-booked seats in the boxes can be equally fraught. Twelve years earlier Rowlandson's primary focus in *Pigeon Hole* and *The Boxes* (Figure 13) is on discomfort, offering a critique of the accommodation provided in the newly built Covent Garden Theatre for its less wealthy patrons.

[INSERT FIGURE 6 HERE]<Caption><Figure 6. Theodore Lane, *Theatrical Pleasures Snug in the Gallery*, hand-colored etching, 1821 Author's Collection.>

Both Rowlandson's and Lane's satires convey mixed messages. On the one hand they seem to be sympathetic to these long-suffering members of the audience; on the other they caricature audience members in a way that relegates them to comic spectacle, a tendency continued by George Cruikshank in a number of prints and illustrations including *Pit, Boxes and Gallery* (see Figure 7), an illustration completed in 1836 not long before he became the first illustrator of *Oliver Twist*--in fact a prototype for Bill Sikes seems to be seated in the front row of the gallery. This illustration highlights the social segregation of the audience. Not all of the spectators are attentive to the performance and to the left of the middle box Cruikshank provides a self-portrait of himself possibly ogling and chatting up the young woman in the row in front of him. Yet this print is not only about theatre spectators. This is the first plate in the last part of Cruikshank's short-lived periodical *My Sketch Book* and is referencing Hogarth's *Laughing Audience* and, by implication, the varied audience for

Cruikshank's own sketches and illustrations, as much as it is referencing a theatrical audience. In his magisterial study of Cruikshank, Robert Patten suggests that, as with Hogarth,

Cruikshank's etching implies that his audience too is enjoying the performance of his prints, though all three classes of customer are engaged in a range of activities, from watching the stage through flirting or conversing or arguing. The middle classes in the pit are on the whole the most attentive; in the boxes there is a fair amount of decorous courting--nothing like what was alleged to take place in the boxes at Covent Garden during the Regency, but tending to the same end; and in the gallery, vociferous responses and a good deal of drinking and eating afford alternative pleasures for persons lower in the social scale than anyone in Hogarth's plate.<sup>36</sup>

Compared with Hogarth, says Patten, Cruikshank's print "amplifies the range and kind of spectator and activity," referencing Frederick Antal who believes that Cruikshank elaborates Hogarth's original "into a real genre scene."<sup>37</sup> Rowlandson, too, in his prints of comedy spectators, is paying homage to Hogarth just as much as he is representing an audience at a theatrical comedy.

[INSERT FIGURE 7 HERE]<Caption><Figure 7. George Cruikshank, *Pit, Boxes and Gallery*, etching, 1836, Author's Collection.>

Once we move into the mid- and late-Victorian periods satirical representations of audiences often caricature working class spectators or focus on very specific inconveniences faced by middle- and upper-class audiences. The dialogic theme of looking and being looked at, as exemplified in Rowlandson's prints, and the critique of emotional excess implicit in Rowlandson's satires, is replaced by more mundane targets, especially in satirical publications such as *Punch*. Boredom is satirized in a number of *Punch* illustrations, while others mock the discomfort caused in the stalls and elsewhere by crinolines, fans, and hats

rather than by the accommodation itself. (Figure 15) Talking is now forbidden. In one example, a mother rebukes her child for talking during a performance, only to be asked why she can't talk when all the people on the stage are talking. Insofar as emotions are in play during a theatrical performance, they appear to be confined to lower-class suburban (and by implication provincial) audiences (see Figure 8). There is a sort of snobbery at work here, as there is also in an illustration showing an unwashed artisan (in *Punch's* words) visiting the theatre and claiming that at least the entry fee for the gallery keeps out the riff-raff.<sup>38</sup> The satire is often in the captions rather than in the illustrations, closing off the possibility of more open interpretations by the viewer.

[INSERT FIGURE 8 HERE]<Caption><Figure 8. *Melodrama in the Suburbs*, from *Mr Punch at the Play*, n. d., Author's Collection.>

### **Spectators at Print Shop Windows and Art Galleries**

In considering the ways in which spectators in the theatre looked and were looked at, parallels may also be drawn with the representation of other types of spectator. In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century the spectators gathered at print shop windows also become comic spectacles as in James Gillray's *Very Slippy Weather* (1808), in which the spectators contemplating the caricatures in the shop window fail to notice the absurdity of the figure who has slipped over behind them.<sup>39</sup> (Figure 17), or Joseph Lisle's *The Spectator* (1828). In *The Art of Caricature*, Diana Donald states that

Like Hogarth's famous *Laughing Audience* (1733) the printshop window scenes shift the focus of attention from comic spectacle to spectators; the latter become a comic spectacle celebrating the intimate relationship between satire and social reality, between performance and audience reaction. In such images one can recapture

something of the original mutuality and exchanges which the prints provoked, but which the dearth of contemporary records . . . has tended to obscure.<sup>40</sup>

Spectators at art galleries were not immune from satirical representations either. David Solkin claims that "eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century Englishmen and women went to galleries and exhibitions to look at the pictures on the walls but for much else besides; to see other people, to be seen by them and to talk with one another."<sup>41</sup> They were not particularly profound spectators, in Solkin's view, and certainly not spectators competent to make judgments: rather, they were there to be entertained and to seek out novelties rather than exercise discrimination. Rowlandson makes it clear in his 1808 depiction of the Exhibition Room at Somerset House that visitors to the Royal Academy exhibition are not only looking, but in some instances being looked at by each other, as does Robert Cruikshank (brother to George) in an illustration to Pierce Egan's *Life in London* entitled *A Shilling Well Laid Out. Tom and Jerry at the Exhibition of Pictures at the Royal Academy*, 1821 (see Figure 9). Art gallery spectators converse, ogle, and flirt, dividing their attention between the pictures and each other: there are multiple points of focus. In Rowlandson's notorious *The Exhibition Stare Case* (c. 1800) (Figure 19) spectators are tumbling down the spiral staircase at Somerset House, where

The splayed limbs and sprawling bodies of visitors form a spectacle that is bound to upstage the artistic displays in the rooms above. It is typical of Rowlandson that the comic charge of this image derives largely from the sight of male connoisseurs leering at the cascade of semi-nude female bodies strewn along the staircase in revealing and provocative poses.<sup>42</sup>

[INSERT FIGURE 9 HERE]<Caption>< *A Shilling Well Laid Out. Tom and Jerry at the Exhibition of Pictures at the Royal Academy*, aquatint/etching, 1821, Department of Prints and Drawings, British Museum, no. 1864, 0611, 407.>

Here Rowlandson seems to be satirizing the artistic pretensions of the Royal Academy, while also subverting the norms of looking and being looked at associated with the annual Royal Academy exhibitions. Yet this need not imply that decorum and high seriousness were always fundamental to exhibition behavior. Interestingly art gallery spectators sometimes responded to paintings with laughter, just like theatre spectators. This was certainly the case with David Wilkie's genre paintings, which led to art critic P. G. Patmore's disapproving comment that, "[w]hen they [the public] are standing before his pictures, they seem to feel themselves bound to be moved to laughter by them, as they would by a comedy or farce; and without this, they think they do not shew their taste."<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, laughter was clearly an aspect of spectatorship, even in art galleries, while spectators themselves were exploited by artists as a means of causing laughter. And, just as tragedies could induce tears in spectators, so could paintings: William Hazlitt admitted that he cried on seeing Ludovico Carracchi's *Susannah and the Elders* in the early-nineteenth century.<sup>44</sup>

### **Visualizing the Spectator**

The representation of theatre audiences in some visual satires merely uses the theatrical spectator as metaphor for the spectator of the artwork produced by the illustrator. Thus the tradition of representing theatre audiences in the comic vein initiated by Hogarth and continued by Cruikshank in *Pit, Boxes, and Gallery* sometimes tells us less about such audiences than we might have assumed. Yet, in the case of Rowlandson particularly, the focus on looking and on observation suggests that we need to place theatrical spectatorship in

this wider culture, asking not so much what the visual evidence tells us about theatre but what it tells us about looking and being looked at, observing and being observed, and (as Paulson indicates) the continual mutability of spectator response. In discussing spectatorship, we cannot separate off the theatre as a distinct category lacking any connection with the way people look or are looked at in other spheres. Equally, when we consider the more parochial cartoons published in *Punch*, we need to analyze them within a broader context of looking and observing within Victorian culture and wider debates around class and behavior. Paradoxically, visual satires may not provide overwhelming evidence about spectators' behavior and responses to performance within the theatre, but they do push us towards a greater focus on the nature of looking and observing and of being observed.

Many of the visual examples discussed in this essay question spectator response, implying that it is as artificial as the theatrical performance engendering the response. As in many journalistic accounts of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century audiences (which can often be quite formulaic in their construction of theatrical spectators) there is also an element of ridicule in the way in which they are transformed into rather foolish comic performers, suggesting that even if their laughter or tears are genuine, this is largely due to their gullibility. In many instances, as with Rowlandson and many of his contemporaries, caricature functions as degradation. Yet we should not eschew the notion that spectator response could be genuine. Spectators were arguably seeking experiences that drove them to tears or laughter, that thrilled and shocked them, that triggered physical sensations. Some of these reactions were initiated by acting and staging that had been carefully designed to deliver an affective response from the spectator, a response that was no less genuine, as Denis Diderot realized,<sup>45</sup> because it was contrived for. That sensibility could be shallow, as implied by some of the images discussed in this paper, is certainly true, but it is not the whole story. The rendering of audiences as comic spectacle or the ridiculing of affective responses should

not allow us to diminish the active status of the spectator in relationship to the theatrical event.

As the examples discussed in this essay demonstrate, Bleeker's sense that we have to move beyond "just looking" is intrinsically linked to the fact that, on a primary level, it is the artist who is doing the looking, in turn directing the gaze of those looking at prints and illustrations onto the way spectators themselves are looking and being looked at. According to Paulson,

Rowlandson is portraying subjectivity in the two ways open to a visual artist, through different faces responding in different ways to one or more common, objective stimuli; and through exaggerations of the forms themselves to suggest the emotions of the viewer. They are subjective not only in the sense that they are showing subjective responses, but also that they are seen subjectively. The study of ontology Rowlandson seems to be conducting, exploring to its limits, is based on the assumption (or realization) that the reality out there is dependent on the perceiver and his sensibility or imagination. At one extreme, looking is a fashionable pastime that has replaced acting or living; at another, it is the only reality there is for the artist.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, by implication, graphic representations of spectators are inevitably idiosyncratic and personalized because mediated through the eye of a specific artist; as Bleeker asserted in the comment quoted above, "[w]hat seems to be just 'there to be seen' is, in fact, rerouted through memory and fantasy."<sup>47</sup> What is observed is never entirely freed from the subjectivity of looking.

If we accept Paulson's notion of "borderline states of being" and Bleeker's definition of "visuality," the representation of the theatrical spectator in visual culture enables a much more fluid response to an activity that, in relation to space and time, is forever in a state of

flux. Whatever deductions we draw from the transient moments represented in prints and paintings, they are inevitably circumscribed by the before and after, part of a far more complex network of looking and being looked at than any one image (or even a Looking-Glass Curtain) can ever capture. Historically, such moments are represented as cultural and social performance, retrieved in relation to what is happening both on and off the stage. Until the 1880s the auditoria in most western theatres were fully or partially lit, creating a social space that functioned very differently from the darkened auditoria that replaced them. Visual evidence, however subjective its point of view, is crucial in helping us understand how spectators related to each other and both perceived and were perceived in the context of a more sociable, open and illuminated theatrical milieu.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial and Theatre Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), Shearer West, *The Image of the Actor: Verbal and Visual Representations in the Age of Garrick and Kemble* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), and Gillian Perry, *Spectacular Flirtations: Viewing the Actress in British Art and Theatre, 1768-1820* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> James Robinson Planché, *The Recollections and Reflections of J. R. Planché, (Somerset Herald): A Professional Autoiography*, 2 vols (London: Sampson Low, 1872), vol. 1, 128.

<sup>3</sup> Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 152-54.

<sup>4</sup> Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 99.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

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<sup>6</sup> Maaïke Bleeker, *Visuality in the Theatre: The Locus of Looking* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1-2; original emphasis.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 5; original emphasis.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* The notion of audience passivity is an ongoing problem in discourses around spectatorship, for both theatre and art gallery audiences arguably possessed agency, making choices as to where, at what, and at whom they gazed. The presence of the spectator/observer in the lit auditorium of the theatre or in the exhibition gallery, often illuminated by natural light, need not be passive, whatever the limitations imposed by the space enclosing or constricting them. Chris Otter, in *The Victorian Eye, A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800-1910* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 74, implies that the only escape from the gaze of fellow spectators, in order to avoid being the passive object of surveillance, is to leave the auditorium. Yet theatres are not necessarily panoptical spaces entrapping spectators who can only achieve a sense of freedom on departing from them. Bleeker argues that "[t]he disadvantage of the word 'spectator,' however, is that it has come to be associated with passivity, the onlooker at a spectacle gaping at the given to be seen." She proposes "seer" as a more appropriate term. Bleeker, *Visuality in the Theatre*, 18.

<sup>10</sup> Tiffany Watt Smith, *On Flinching: Theatricality and Scientific Looking from Darwin to Shell Shock* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 36.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander Pope, "The First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace Imitated," in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt (London: Methuen, 1963), 634-50, quote on 646.

<sup>12</sup> Ronald Paulson, *Rowlandson: A New Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

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<sup>13</sup> John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1997), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Paulson, *Rowlandson: A New Interpretation*, 80.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>17</sup> Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006), 45.

<sup>18</sup> In *Effects of Tragedy*, an anonymous print of 1789, the spectators also appear highly agitated--a woman has fainted and the gentleman beside her is also attempting to revive her with smelling salts.

<sup>19</sup> Shearer West, "The Public and Private Roles of Sarah Siddons," in *A Passion for Performance: Sarah Siddons and her Portraitists*, ed. Robyn Asleson (Los Angeles, CA: Paul Getty Museum, 1999), 1-40, quote on 18.

<sup>20</sup> James Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs Siddons Interspersed with Anecdotes of Authors and Actors*, 2 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1827), vol. 1, 327; original emphasis.

<sup>21</sup> Leo Hughes, *The Drama's Patrons: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century London Audience* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1971), 138.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Moore, *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron with Notices of his Life*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1873), vol. 1, 5. This may have been a family trait, for Lord Byron later claimed he was thrown into a "convulsive fit" after seeing Edmund Kean as Sir Giles Overreach in Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*. See Frederick William Hawkins, *The Life of Edmund Kean*, 2 vols. (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1869), vol. 1, 346.

<sup>24</sup> *Edwin's Pills to Purge Melancholy: Containing all the Songs Sung by Mr Edwin of Covent Garden Theatre, since his First Appearance in London; And many Duets that Mr Edwin has*

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*a Part in with an Humorous Account of Mrs Siddons's first Reception in Dublin* (London: William Holland, 1788), vi.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., vi-vii.

<sup>26</sup> David Worrall, *Celebrity, Performance, Reception: British Georgian Theatre as Social Assemblage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 106.

<sup>27</sup> Gill Perry, "The Spectacle of the Muse: Exhibiting the Actress in the Royal Academy," in *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780-1836*, ed. David H. Solkin (New Haven, CT: Paul Mellon Centre and Yale University Press, 2001), 111-25, quote on 120.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Thomas Campbell, *Life of Mrs Siddons* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1834), 170.

<sup>29</sup> John Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage: from the Restoration in 1660-1830*, 10 vols (Bath: H. E. Carrington, 1832), vol. 8, 306.

<sup>30</sup> West, "The Public and Private Roles of Sarah Siddons," 15.

<sup>31</sup> In the nineteenth century audiences continued to respond emotionally to such genres as tragedy and melodrama, not only in Britain, but also in France. Daumier's 1860 painting *Le Drame* shows how rapt and engaged an audience could be, capturing the tension in their bodies and their absorption in the drama unfolding before them, even if the underlying intent is satirical. Daumier's 1848 portrayal of an audience watching the fifth act of a play at the Théâtre de la Gaîté depicts an emotionally responsive audience, two of whom are wiping away their tears with handkerchiefs. *L'effet du mélodrame*, painted in the 1820s by Jean Leopold Bouilly, focuses on a woman who has fainted, overcome by the effect of a melodrama performance, surrounded by fellow spectators (possibly family members). The implicit artifice of the way in which this is depicted seems to throw doubt on the genuineness

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of the woman's response, implying once again a performance of sensibility rather than an intuitive reaction.

<sup>32</sup> "Theatrical Examiner," *The Examiner*, June 16, 1816.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth Volume 1 The "Modern Moral Subject" 1697-1732*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1991), vol. 1, 46.

<sup>34</sup> Lane might have been better known today if he had not met a premature death at the age of twenty-eight when, while waiting for a friend at the horse repository in Gray's Inn Road, London, he struck his head on a skylight and suffered a fatal fall. Pierce Egan, whose *The Life of An Actor* (1825) was illustrated by Lane, says Lane actually fell through the skylight, "his head coming into contact with the flagging beneath, . . . his head was smashed to atoms." Pierce Egan, "Biographical Sketch of the Life of the Late Mr Theodore Lane," in *The Show Folks!* (London: M. Arnold and Simpkin and Marshall, 1831), 33-59, quote on 55-56.

<sup>35</sup> Brian Maidment, *Comedy, Caricature and the Social Order, 1820-50* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 50-52.

<sup>36</sup> Robert L. Patten, *George Cruikshank's Life, Times and Art: Volume 1 1792-1835*, 2 vols (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), vol. 1, 383.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> For a fuller discussion of caricature in relation to the Victorian theatre see Jim Davis, "'Auntie, can you do that?' or 'Ibsen in Brixton': Representing the Victorian Stage through Cartoon and Caricature," in *Ruskin, the Theatre and Victorian Visual Culture*, ed. Anselm Heinrich, Katherine Newey, and Jeffrey Richards (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 216-38.

<sup>39</sup> See Maidment, *Comedy, Caricature and the Social Order*, 122-23 for a fuller discussion of this image.

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<sup>40</sup> Diana Donald, *The Art of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 7.

<sup>41</sup> David H. Solkin, "Introduction 'This Great Mart of Genius': The Royal Academy Exhibition at Somerset House, 1780-1836," *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780-1836*, ed. David H. Solkin (New Haven, CT: Paul Mellon Centre and Yale University Press, 2001), 1-8, quote on 4.

<sup>42</sup> K. Dian Kriz, "'Stare Cases': Engendering the Public's Two Bodies at the Royal Academy of Arts," in *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780-1836*, ed. David H. Solkin (New Haven, CT: Paul Mellon Centre and Yale University Press, 2001), 55-63, quote on 55. Leering male spectators also feature in several of Rowlandson's theatrical sketches including *Female Dancer with a Tambourine*, c. 1790-95.

<sup>43</sup> [Peter George Patmore], *Letters on England by Victoire, Count de Soligny* (London: Henry Colburn, 1823), vol. 1, 171.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Trimble, *Why Humans Like to Cry: Tragedy, Evolution and the Brain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 39.

<sup>45</sup> Denis Diderot, *The Paradox of Acting*, trans. Walter Herries Pollock (New York: Hill and Wang, [1830] 1957).

<sup>46</sup> Paulson, *Rowlandson: A New Interpretation*, 91-92.

<sup>47</sup> Bleeker, *Visuality in the Theatre*, 2.