ABSTRACT

        The purpose of this paper is to examine the function
of memory as an underlying psychological process in human
communicative behavior by offering a theoretical framework derived
from communication literature. Divided into two sections, the paper
deals with "The Psychology of Memory: Some Basic Propositions," which
reviews the literature on the capacity and limitations of human
information processing abilities, and "A Functional Model of Memory
in Communication," which details a theoretical model of the role of
memory in human communication and includes a schematic drawing to
facilitate understanding. (RB)

A FUNCTIONAL MODEL OF MEMORY IN COMMUNICATION

by

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As the fourth of the traditional five canons of Classical Rhetoric, the concept of memory has been a part of communication literature for well over 2,000 years. A critical review of communication literature (e.g., King, 1968), however, reveals that its understanding has scarcely improved with age. Historically, it has been the product of memory in terms of (verbatim) memorization rather than the process in terms of remembering which has received the most attention from communication scholars, while attempts to examine the concept as anything much beyond an adjunct of speech presentation have been extremely rare. Few writers, it seems, have considered its role in the more fundamental act of creating or inventing discourse, although it would obviously seem to be important. If anything, in fact, it is often assumed to be important in communication because it is difficult to describe the process without it. Essentially, this reflects a behavioristic, "black box" approach to the matter, where one observes communicative effects (e.g., the results of invention) and then infers what must have caused them.

What appears to be missing in all of this is an explicit, viable psychology of memory in communication; a theory of what memory "is" and what it "does" for a communication and perhaps equally important of how and why it "does what it does." Phrased somewhat differently, the customary treatment of memory in communication literature leaves several questions partially or totally unanswered: how does a person use his memory in communication? what influence, if any, does it have upon his communicative effectiveness? what factors affect, or can be used to predict, its operation in the generation of discourse? In short, what is the function of memory as an underlying psychological process in human

communicative behavior? Put simply, it is the purpose of this paper to try
and shed light on these issues by offering what is hopefully a sound theo-
retical framework for their analysis.

The Psychology of Memory: Some Basic Propositions

A theory of memory's function in communication, of course, must lo-
gically rest upon a theory of memory's function per se. Ideally, such a
theory would result in a number of basic "conclusions" about the memory
process which could then be applied to the process of communication, pro-
viding an answer to the questions above. Unfortunately for the sake of
clarity, the psychological literature of memory is complex, multifaceted,
and often contradictory, and it is difficult to summarize without dis-
tortion. Yet drawing upon a considerable body of past and present re-
search findings (King, 1973), it seems possible to list the following
propositions as generally indicative of memory's function:

(1) As a System of Information Processing, the Capacity of Memory
is Limited. As a rule, the acquisition of information exceeds its (con-
scious) retention and its retention exceeds its (voluntary) recall. This
discrepancy is enhanced and perhaps even precipitated by the postulated
existence of two different "compartments" of memory storage: short-term
memory and long-term memory (Adams, 1967; Norman, 1969). The presumed
necessity for information to pass from one compartment to the other, and
the fact that the capacity of STM is considerably smaller than that of
LTM, is a basic reason for the loss of information, or forgetting.

(2) Forgetting Results Primarily from an Inability to Retrieve ra-
ther than to Retain Previously Learned Information. Viewed simply as an

ability to hold or contain information, it is possible that the capacity
of (long-term) memory is unlimited, or at least beyond measurement.
Viewed as an ability to contain information in a form available to vol-
untary recall, however, it appears that the capacity of memory is se-
verely limited. The customary explanation is that items in memory are
subject to interference from other items which can have the effect of ex-
tinguishing their response capabilities over time (Adams, 1967). Thus,
the process of remembering consists largely of finding ways to access
stored information, or to minimize the influence of interitem interference,
particularly as it relates to the transfer of items from STM to LTM.

(3) Retrieval is Improved through the General Processes of Organi-
zation and Association of Verbal Material. The principles of organization
and association are fundamental to the study of memory and include numer-
ous sub-principles of their own (Mandler, 1967). Central to the concept of
association, however, is the assumption that recollection involves a
"chaining together" of ideas (or items), so that the recall of one leads
naturally to the recall of another. In this way, a large number of ideas
can presumably be united, or organized, into a coherent whole.

(4) Organization and Association are Most Effective when They Pro-
ceed on a Hierarchical Basis. A critical point in the process of associa-
tion is that associated items tend to organize themselves into categories
on the basis of some common, generic property, and that items within a
category are hierarchically ordered from superordinate to subordinate.
This is of profound significance to the task of remembering, for it means
that a single, superordinate item can trigger the recall of all of the
other items in a category, and thus make it possible to recall a large

number of items by working through a relatively small number of categorical "headings" or labels (Nelson, 1969). In a sense, the labels seem to act as a stimulus for recall, supplying a "starting point" for the progressive association of items from superordinate to subordinate. As such, they also serve as a means of "tagging" or "indexing" items, providing a method of locating them in memory storage (Shepard, 1966).

(5) Organization may Constitute a Method of Coding Material, and Material may be Recoded to Enhance Its Organizational Properties. Among the most significant extensions of the concept of organization is that it represents a means of "coding" material in memory, broadly defined as a process of "structuring" or "systematizing" items for aid in the task of recalling them. The importance of this is that given the value of organization, it is possible to recode material in ways which increase its organization -- and so its recall. The reason for the effectiveness of such procedures is likely to lie in the fact that they permit the same amount of information to be packaged into fewer items, and thus less must actually be remembered (Miller, 1956). This has special relevance to the problem of bridging the gap between STM and LTM, for it also permits more information to be packaged into a given number of items, thereby increasing the amount which can be remembered.

(6) Coding/Recoding Reflects and Attempt to Engender Meaning in Material. A basic proposition in the study of memory is that meaningful material is normally retained and recalled better than nonmeaningful material. The explanation for this is that meaningful material can draw upon past language learning, can benefit from positive transfer of training

from past "patterns of retaining," and so simplify a rememberer's task by providing a preestablished "format" for responding to the material (Hunter, 1964). The role of recoding in this process is apparent when we note that recoding increases the meaningfulness of material by allowing it to be characterized in ways which reflect one's past language learning. Underlying this principle is the fundamental assumption that the act of (verbal) mediation increases meaning, and indeed that mediation may even be responsible for the meaningfulness of material (Montague, Adams, and Kiess, 1966). In a subtler, more complex manner, the issues of mediation and meaning also relate to the transfer of items from STM to LTM, for it seems that material may pass directly into LTM (or at least pass more swiftly and surely through STM) if it can be associated in some meaningful way with material already well-learned.

(7) Coding/Recoding may be Facilitated by the Use of Imagery. Although not as well-understood as many other facets of memory, the concept of imagery -- particularly visual imagery -- is a staple element in the memory process. As Paivio (1971) has suggested, imagery serves as an alternate method of coding material in memory, providing, along with language, both a verbal and a nonverbal mode of organizing stored information. Its usefulness seems to run parallel to that of language, fulfilling many of the same tasks with many of the same results. For example, it seems that imagery enhances the meaningfulness of material, largely because it acts as a mediator for items (Bugelski, Kidd, and Segmen, 1968; Johnson, 1970). It seems further that imagery increases the efficiency of dealing with material, largely because it allows items to be formed into larger "chunks" (see Miller, 1956) which, like verbal code

words, can then be used to retrieve the items "within" them. When compared to language, there is reason to believe that imagery represents a rather primitive mode of coding information, but this does not preclude the possibility that it may serve as a powerful adjunct to verbal coding, supplying a rememberer with a valuable source of additional details on items in memory storage.

(8) <u>Retrieval is Improved through Rehearsal of Material</u>. This is a deceptively simple proposition, for it is not rehearsal <u>itself</u> which is important in remembering but what a person is doing <u>during</u> rehearsal (Hunter, 1964; Adams, 1967, Norman, 1969). And what he is doing, it appears, is forming associations between items (or perhaps more properly <u>searching</u> for associations from his past language learning)/which permit him to organize material in meaningful ways. Thus, rehearsal increases the tendency of items to forms into categories and also increases the meaningfulness of material. As a consequence, it is a primary factor in the reduction of interitem interference as well as in the transfer of items from STM to LTM. In short, then, rehearsal exerts a pervasive influence on the memory process, acting as a catalyst for a number of critical operations.

(9) <u>Both the Quality and Quantity of Retrieval are Affected by Motivational Factors</u>. As important as organization and association are to remembering, it seems that retrieval is also affected by certain <u>nonassociative</u> or motivational factors (Weiner, 1966). Regrettably, the subject of motivation occupies a vague position in the literature of memory, and too little is currently known about it. Under the guise of "interest," "concentration," etc., traditional views have held it responsible for

the presence of "individual differences" in remembering, and for the fact
that remembering is notoriously selective; people tend to remember best
what they "want" or "need" to remember. In this regard, it is commonly
acknowledged that motivation can reduce as well as increase remembering,
particularly in cases where the term forgetting is replaced by the term
repressing (Hunter, 1964; 231-249). In any event, however, the principle
of motivation is consistent. And as Weiner (1966) has suggested, perhaps
the best way to characterize its effect is to say that it may help or
hinder the processes of organization and association, determining how
well and to what extent these activities are carried out.

(10) Memory is Reconstructive rather than Reproductive in Nature.
The ultimate outcome of organization, association/ and coding is the
emergence of a generalized plan for remembering, defined by Miller, Gal-
anter, and Pribram (1960; 16) as ". . . any hierarchical process in the
organism that can control the order in which a sequence of operations is
to be performed." An important implication of this idea is that remember-
ing functions according to a set of "instructions" or "rules" stored in
memory which guide the individual to the location and retrieval of a des-
ignated item (Brown and McNeill, 1966; Pollio and Gerow, 1968). A second,
more important implication, however, is that except in the case of isola-
ted and obalphrdteerete bits of material these "instructions" are seldom
perfect; the item retrieved is rarely the same as the item originally per-
ceived, or acquired. The primary reason for this is that in the process of
coding material in meaningful ways new items are "modified" to conform
with one's past experience. Thus, as Bartlett's (1932) classic work

maintains, the plan one follows in remembering is more a procedure for re-
constructing than for reproducing material. Far from being an infallible
guide to the replication of a past event, it is actually a means of re-
creating -- or perhaps even creating ---it in the context of other events
in memory storage.

A Functional Model of Memory in Communication

In review, it would certainly be presumptuous to maintain that these
ten propositions identify all of the variables which may influence the
memory process, let alone the variety of causes, conditions, and conse-
quences which may underlie them. In a sense, any discussion of memory
which confines itself to retention and recall must be somewhat artificial,
for it ignores the critical interface between memory and a number of other
cognitive activities, most notably perception, attention, and learning.
Assuming, however, that these propositions are valid, that they identify
variables which must be considered if not all of the variables which
could be considered, it now seems possible to address the task of rela-
ting, as it were, the "psychology" of memory to the "psychology" of com-
munication.

Fortunately, a readily available context for such a task may be
found in the modern trend towards viewing communication as a series of
interdependent systems for information processing: intrapersonal, inter-
personal, and public/socio-cultural (e.g., Mortensen, 1972). Within this
framework, the activities of retention and recall would naturally seem to
be included among the basic cognitive elements in the process of

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communication within the individual. More specifically, in answer to the question of what memory "does" in communication, it appears possible to say that it serves at least three broad purposes: (1) it acts as a repository for the experiences, concepts, and words (the rhetorician's "available means of persuasion") which are the raw materials of speech invention; (2) it acts, in connection with thhe processes of thinking and reasoning, as a setting for linking experiences and concepts with words to produce oral expression, or the generation and transmission of a message; (3) perhaps most important, it acts as a vehicle for interpreting and evaluating messages, and for determining how one should respond to them. This last feature, of course, has significance for interpersonal and public as well as intrapersonal communication, for it suggests that memory is instrumental in determining one's response to the messages of another. To the extent, therefore, that memory is central to human information processing, it would seem to be a critical factor in both transmitting and receiving and in determining the effects of a message on the behaviors of speakers and listeners.

This being true, the key issue then becomes how memory functions in communication, or how it influences speaker-listener behavior. Here, it is possible to draw upon our ten propositions to construct a functional model of memory in communication as indicated in figure 1. The core of the model is Waugh and Norman's (1965) illustration of primary memory and secondary memory, but it may be noted that the model also incorporates concepts from several current models of (intrapersonal) communication (e.g., Ross, 1970; Wiseman and Barker, 1967), which can easily be fitted, in whole or in part, within it. Briefly, the major components of the

Inputs · Dispositional Filter · Primary Memory · Secondary Memory

Verbal/Nonverbal Coding

Experiential Association/Categorizing

Hierarchical Organization

Conceptualization

Development of Rules and Plans for Recall

Level of Integration

Outputs (Unconsciously Forgotten)

Rehearsal

Preliminary Organization/Association

Preliminary (Acoustic) Coding

Connotative/Denotative Decision-Making

Consciously Forgotten

Evoked Set

Stimuli

Unevoked Remainder

Unnoticed Remainder
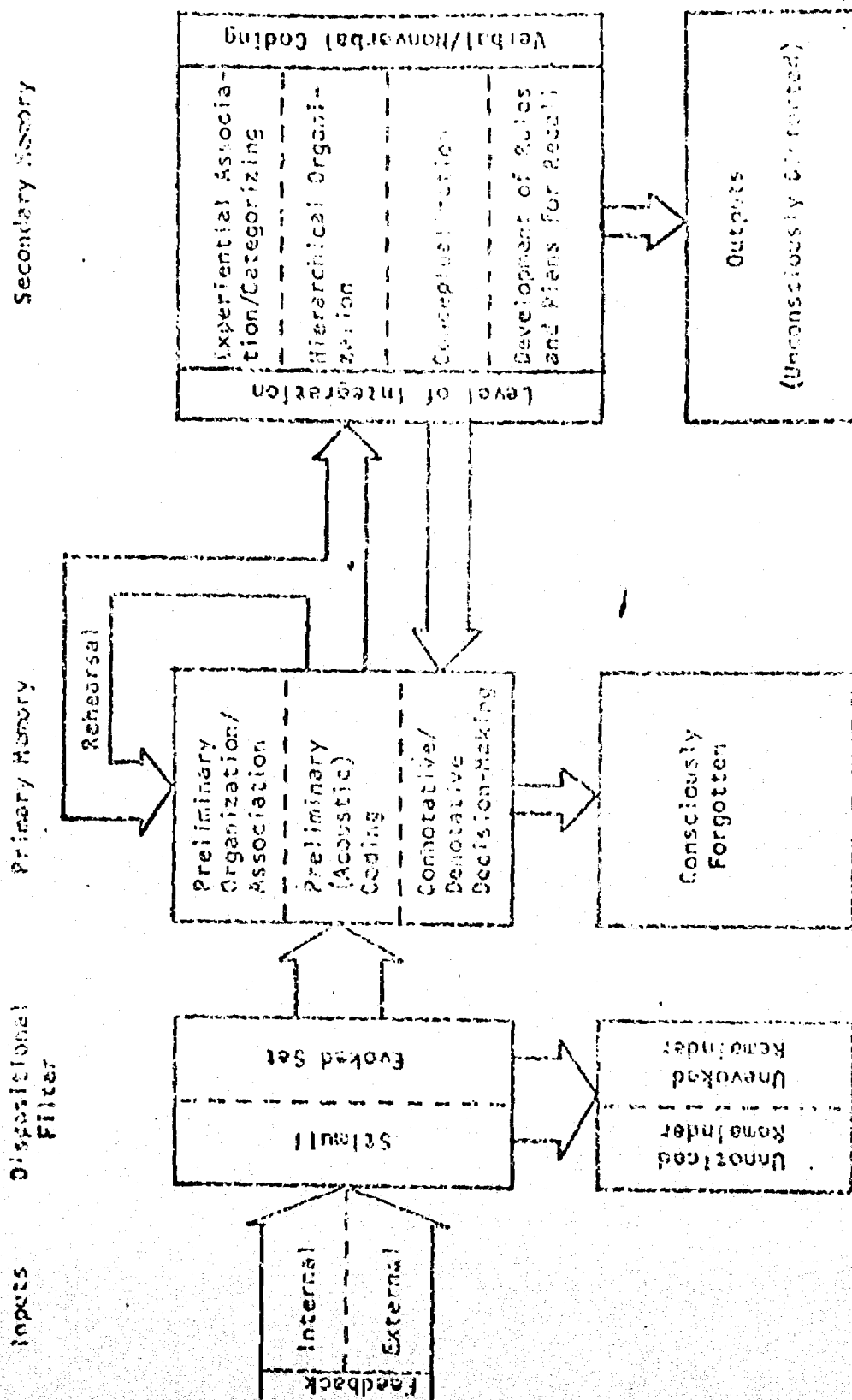
Internal · External

Feedback

Figure 1. A Functional Model of Memory in Communication.

model are as follows, with a short explanation/elaboration of each of them:

(1) <u>Inputs</u>. Divided into "internal" and "external" sources, these represent all of the information <u>potentially</u> available to a communicator, whether as a sender or as a receiver, at any given moment. They include environmental stimuli available through the mechanisms of sensation and perception as well as the attitudes, values, feelings, etc. which make up what March and Simon (1958) have termed the "internal state" of an individual at a given point in time. As both of these sources affect the response of a communicator in any particular situation, they are generally classified as forms of <u>feedback</u>, or "internal and external indicators and signs" which guide one's subsequent behavior (Ross, 1970). Presumably, the existence of various communicative channel factors could also be classified as feedback-inputs, along with the possibility of physical and/or psychological noise in communication.

(2) <u>Dispositional Filter</u>. As feedback is received by an individual it passes through a "dispositional filter," the primary function of which is to discriminate among incoming stimuli, helping to select from the information potentially available that which is <u>actually</u> available to a communicator. Operant here is the general mechanism of <u>attention</u> in information processing, and the idea that only a fraction of all incoming information can be apprehended by an individual at any one time. Borrowing a concept from March and Simon (1958), information which is apprehended reflects a combination of environmental stimuli plus an "evoked psychological set" for an individual at the moment the stimuli are perceived. This psychological set, composed of knowledge, emotions, and expectations derived from previous learning, determines which of the available stimuli

will be perceived and which will be essentially ignored as the "unnoticed remainder." Additionally, it helps to determine which of the possible responses (or interpretations) to stimuli will be employed and which will be ignored as the "unevoked remainder." In the case of typical communicative exchange between two persons, therefore, it is likely that only a portion of the information transmitted by one will really be apprehended by the other, and vice versa. Significantly, for both individuals the information which is apprehended is likely to be that which conforms with one's psychological set, or which fits one's pattern of expectations and prior knowledge.

(3) Primary Memory. The tendency for an individual to receive information selectively is enhanced by the operation of primary, or short-term memory. The central purpose of primary memory is to act as a "buffer" between sensation/perception and secondary (or long-term) memory, holding new items of information in temporary storage for later processing into more permanent storage. As the capacity of primary memory is relatively small rehearsal is necessary to preserve new items there, and items which are not rehearsed are quickly forgotten -- at least consciously. The result of rehearsal is to build associations between new items and items already well-learned, permitting new items to remain in primary memory as well as to be transferred into secondary memory. Thus, it appears that primary memory is responsible for the preliminary organization of new information and for its preliminary coding/recoding. Important but not indicated in the model is the possibility that some information may be recalled directly from primary memory and that some information, if easily associated with information already well-learned, may seem to pass directly into secondary

memory. Like the process of dispositional filtering (to which it is func-
tionally related), therefore, the movement of information through primary
memory is a critical element in communication, for essentially primary
memory serves as a decision-making unit, determining what information is
available for further processing by a communicator, what is recalled im-
meddately, and what is effectively eliminated from further consideration.

(4) Secondary Memory. As the logical end-product of information
storage, secondary memory is the ultimate determiner of what information
is available to a communicator in the generation/reception/interpretation
of discourse. In the context of thinking and reasoning, it contributes to
what Wiseman and Barker (1967) have labeled the "ideation and incubation"
stage of communication, as well as to the encoddng and decoding of ideas
in the form of messages (Mysak, 1970). It does this through the complica-
ted process of associating and categorizing experiential data, of forming
this data into organizational hierarchies and concepts, and of developing
systems of rules and plans for accessing the data in the way of recall.
Fundamental to these activities is the role of verbal and nonverbal co-
ding, for the basis of organization and association is actually symbolic,
between words or images which represent experiences and can therefore be
used to express them. Of significance is the fact that coding engenders
meaning to information, and that meaningfulness depends upon the integra-
tion of new information into the structure of information already acquired.
This feature explains the dynamicsinterplay between primary memory and
secondary memory, i.e., the fact that new information is retained faster
and better when it can be worked easily into a matrix of past language
habits and experiences, yet it also explains why the "outputs" from

secondary memory are often (unconsciously) distorted. As a result of various motivational factors combined with the seemingly inescapable need to "alter" information to conform with one's past experiences, the information retrieved, to use an earlier phrase, is rarely the same as the information perceived.

Regrettably, this model suffers from the same drawback of all two-dimensional models of process, namely the inability to express the concept of simultaneity. It is likely that the flow of information through a communicating individual does not proceed in the orderly, linear fashion the model implies, but rather that the phases we have discussed are operating concurrently. It is also likely that in practice these phases are not nearly as distinct as the model implies, but that/there is considerable overlap among them. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that in some form and to some extent these phases are operant in every communicative act. By now, therefore, the value of the model for trying to establish memory's function "as an underlying psychological process in human communicative behavior" is hopefully apparent. By tracing the flow of information through a communicating individual, it attempts to touch upon a number of essential cognitive operations in communication, operations which affect both the process and the product of communicative interaction.

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ABSTRACT
              An analysis of the works of black playwrights since
1821 (the date of the earliest recorded play) reflects the
Afro-American's concern with social revolution and his commitment to
revolt. Early forms of protest in black drama revealed the desire to
become active members of American society. Following a void in black
playwrighting during the reconstruction period of the late nineteenth
century, black intellectual rebellion was expressed in the 1930s,
experienced a hiatus during the 1940s, and revived seriously in the
late 1950s with Lorraine Hansberry's "Raisin in the Sun." Black drama
during the 1960s exploded with plays of social protest aimed at the
many characteristics of a sick society, then gave way by the end of
the decade to concern with blacks themselves--self-determinism. Black
revolutionary theater has progressed from disruption by white rowdies
to the possibility that revolution in black theater may soon be
out-dated. (JM)

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UNBANDAGED EYES, UNMANACLED HANDS:
REFLECTIONS OF REVOLT THROUGH THE
PEN OF THE BLACK PLAYWRIGHT

Winona L. Fletcher

"When you removed the gag that was keeping these black mouths shut, what were you hoping for? That they would sing your praises? Did you think when they raised themselves up again, you would read adoration in the eyes of these heads that our fathers had forced to bend down to the very ground? . . ."

Jean Paul Sartre - BLACK ORPHEUS

In the course of all the reading which it takes to maketh Bacon's "full man" many ideas which we confront barely touch us, but a few have such an impact on our minds that they stay forever to haunt us. The opening quotation from Jean Paul Sartre's Black Orpheus belongs, for me, in this latter category, for it has haunted me for a number of years and the conditions of my birth bar me from even qualifying as the "addressee" of Sartre's message.

I suppose it has plagued me for two main reasons: (1) because of the explosive truth so inherent in its expression and (2) because its re-discovery in the 1960's and the subsequent widespread attention granted it gave some people the false notion that the black man had accepted his "place" in America and never lifted his voice in protest against his condition until the last decade.

Contrary to popular belief, the Afro-American has neither been content with his status in society nor has he just begun to voice his protest. In the theatre, which claims to be a reflection of society, from the beginning, black playwrights

have projected revolutionary ideas and actions through their
dramas.

Facts to support this position scream out of the mouths
of characters which black playwrights have been creating
since 1821, the date of the earliest extant record. Listen
to the evidence:

> "I've said 'master' for the last time. What is death
> compared to slavery?"
>
> > Glen - ESCAPE - Brown

> "Some of us always carried on out fight and kept
> alive the seeds of revolt."
> > Young Man -- DON'T YOU WANT
> > > TO BE FREE-Hughes

> " I intend to fight my way out of it' I AM A BLACK MAN!
> I'm going to stay black if it kills me!
> > Son - FAMILY POTRAIT-Caldwell

> " This here's a white man's war
> What the hell I got to be fighting for?"
> > EL HAJJ MALIK - Davidson

> " Liberty! Liberty! . . .hurrah for the people."
> > Briquet - BLACK DOCTOR - Aldridge

> " If Bessie Smith had killed some white people she
> wouldn't have needed that music."
> > Clay - DUTCHMAN - Jones

> "I was crying out against 300 years of oppression; not
> against individuals."
> > Walker - THE SLAVE - Jones

> *Do you think we will gain equality here? Not one Black
> man will be equal as long as the whites keep us
> in fragments --at least in Africa we have a future
> together."
> > Marcus -- THE RISE - Fuller,Charles

> "You middle-class black bastard. Forget your social-
>   working mother . . ."
>
>> Lula - DUTCHMAN - Jones
>
> "We are absolute revolutionaries . . . and our commitment
>   is based upon death."
>
>> WE RIGHTEOUS BOMBERS -Bass

If you recognized cries for freedom, liberty, equality,
remember that all effective revolutions have been for equality,
justice and dignity.

If your first impulse is to dismiss the words as just
some more writers using the stage for race propaganda, re-
member that all blacks are committed by birth to express
the anger, frustration, and violence of a life lived in a
basically hostile society. The drama which develops from
the black experience must of necessity concern itself at
one time or another with the stresses and implications of
the racial situation.

If you find the militant language ominous, alarming,
repulsive (and all the other adjectives thrust at the current
revolutionists) remember that much of this reaction is
expected--perhaps even provoked - since rejection of "white
standards" is the base upon which many black revolutionaries
say they must rebuild the black man's damaged psyche and move toward
self-determinism. As Walker says in THE SLAVE: "The point is
that you had your chance, darling, now these other folks have
theirs."

Perchance you may fall again into the trap of believing
that all these quotations came from the plays of the 1960's;
I must, therefore, chart chronologically, a course for you
to follow of the development of black revolutionary drama,
pausing here and there to point out its historical signifi-
cance and to mention how it reflects the black man's history,
his position in society, and his (and others) changing atti-
tudes. If the plays selected sound unfamiliar to you, write
that off to one of society's "sins of omission." If you
consider this a "bonus" to hear about them now, chalk that
up to changing attitudes and to forward-thinking leaders of
SSCA. And now to history.

Nothing remains to be examined from the first recorded
script written and performed by Afro-Americans except
scattered records in diaries and notations collected from
playbills etc. This was a script entitled KING SHOTAWAY,
written by a Mr. Brown and performed by the players of the
African Grove Theatre in 1821. That such a theatre existed
in New York for a brief period is a revolutionary act in
itself, but of primary interest to this discussion is a
surviving description of KING SHOTAWAY as "a drama based
on the insurrection of the Caravs on the Island of St. Vin-
cent." Our key word, of course, is "insurrection"--suggesting
that the black man from the beginning sought to express
rebellion on the stage and though it was another kind of

rebellion (disordiliness by a bunch of white rowdies) which closed the African Grove shortly thereafter, at least a statement for reform had been made.

Black playwrights who tried to express revolution for the next 30 odd years found it wiser to leave the country to write--and so they did until the chorus of rebellion in America had grown bold and loud enough to permit black voices to join it again. The decade was the 1850's; this time the revolt was against slavery, an institution which single-handedly committed more blacks to revolt than any other institution in history. From this period, one script survives--ESCAPE, or A LEAP FOR FREEDOM, a piece contemporary with UNCLE TOM'S CABIN. William Wells Brown, a black man who experienced first nand the humiliations of slavery, recorded in ESCAPE his own revolt against the corruptions it imposed on the slaves and society as a whole. When the hero leaps from the window of his captor's shack, revolt is physicalized and Brown makes it perfectly clear that Glen's leap is a leap for freedom. He becomes a liberated human being for the first time in his life and nothing can make him another man's pro-perty again. Like Liza crossing the ice, there was no turning back.

Brown's drama was never performed, but he read it to much applause at abolitionists gatherings. Unfortunately, after the Civil War it was neglected--oddly enough Uncle Tom's Cabin was not. The black playwright's voice of revolt was

again silenced--or more accurately coerced into song by the hey-dey of black-face minstrelsy which was sweeping the nation during the time. Minstrelsy needed no playwrights and it would scarcely have attracted black writers of protest into its fold even if the need had existed. The voices of protest against minstrelsy came--later--but not in the form of dramatic literature.

The era of reconstruction begged for black playwrights who could articulate the freedman's hope and aspirations-- hopes which turned into disillusionment and despair and finally into bitterness and fear. If such a playwright came forth records of him have been lost from the annals of history. But a playwright did step forward in the 20th century who, sensing the void that had existed in the late 19th century, wrote a play of protest inspired by the early freedman's struggle. The playwright was Theodore Ward; the play, OUR LAN'; the setting, Savannah, Ga.; the time, 1865. The plot related the simple story of the Negroes who were given land in Georgia after the Civil War and the subsequent decision by the government to take it from them, of their revolt against this action leading to their final defeat. The play was produced off-Broadway in 1947 and received attention from leading American critics--including Brooks Atkinson and George Jean Nathan. The drama deserved the praise it received for it is "compelling" and "honest" etc. as the critics acclaimed it, but in their efforts to grant a black playwright the ability to "transcend race," the critics somehow over-

looked the fact that the play is bristling with social rebellion and protest. From the very first plaintive refrain . . . "Oh, Lawd save me . . ." heard in the semi-darkness of the opening curtain, to Joshuah's final pronouncement to Burkhardt who comes to put him off the land "neither yuh nor all de rest of de planters put together goin ever kill de things we's after", there is group resistance to the surrounding social forces.

Historically, the Reconstruction period--an era of light and hope, digressed into one of the really dark ages in race relations in America. Black men hung from tall, lonely pines in the South and were slaughtered in the race riots which took place in the streets of the cities. It was a painful era of open revolution which did not inspire dramaturgy of rebellion. Black men chose instead to keep the theatrical doors open to them by sticking their best dancing toe into the crack which the musical theatre forced open.

With the arrival of the 1920's and the so-called "New Negro," the forerunner of the revolutionists of the 60's, the black intellectual with his pen dipped in rebellion, came to the forefront. Most prolific and defiant of these was Langston Hughes whose intense concern for social problems of the Negro in the South led him to write MULATTO in the early 1930's. Perhaps, this era, dominated by socio-political plays, gave Hughes the stimulus he needed to tackle

the very explosive problem of racial intermixture. At any
rate MULATTO, as the title suggests, deals with the plight
of a rebellious son born of a white plantation owner and
his Negro housekeeper. As in Bouccicault's OCTOROON, the
Negro blood stands in the way of the protagonist's aspira-
tions and achievements (society has decreed this so from the
beginning). The only way out for a stubborn, proud, arro-
gant mulatto, who ironically inherited all of these traits
from his white father, is to rebel--a rebellion which leads
to his downfall and death. The germ idea of inner conflict
and rebellion which inspired the drama is expressed in Hughes'
poem "Cross." The poem also suggest, the dilemma and inner
conflicts frequently experienced by many blacks.

My old man's a white old man

*material deleted due to
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Being neither white nor black.

Hatch and Shine in their new anthology of black drama
(Black Theatre U.S.A.) bemoan the fact that "the socially
relevant theatre of the 1930's went, like Lucky Strike green,
off to war" in the 40's, leaving the theatre and the nation
to flounder in continued discrimination, racial intolerance,
and warnings from the government that internal rebellion would

only defeat our efforts to bring peace to a troubled world.
But black leaders in society and in the theatre began to
see through this screen and mobilized. The stage was set
and waiting for the appearance of the tru rebellious NATIVE
SON. Richard Wright's novel of that name, later dramatized
by Wright and Paul Green, exploded on the scene and became a
classic in black American literature.

NATIVE SON is social protest of the 40's personified.
It is pre-integration in concept and in this sense must re-
main in the 40's, but the injustices which made Bigger
Thomas the suffering, rebellious out-cast that he is are
so contemporary that one can walk outside and encounter
numerous Biggers on the street. If the story of NATIVE SON
is not so familiar to you that it needs no recounting here,
then I can only urge you to make it so--and warn that delay
may be more tragic than you know. Bigger is a key to
understanding much of the rebellion that society is experien-
cing from the black man in the theatre and in the streets
today.

The decades of the 50's and 60's have been characterized
in many way--they are still so fresh a memory for most of
us that we need little assistance in recalling the startling
events which set them apart. Beginning with hopes at seeing
the institution of segregation crumble with the passage of
new civil rights acts (the first since 1857) passing through
the stages of frustration and ambivalence, and finally erupting

into open antagonism and rejection, the socially committed
black writer stripped away the veils of disillusionments and
gave birth to a theatre which was openly proclaimed "Black
Revolutionary Theatre."

In the late Lorraine Hansberry's name entered the conver-
sation of every serious theatre-goer. Somehow in her RAISIN
IN THE SUN she had made protest palatable--or in Strindberg's
words had "let the middle class audience grasp the gist of the
matter without troubling their brains too much." While
whites in general hailed it as the arrival of "great black
drama," blacks were divided in their attitudes toward it.
In the furor that resulted much of its revolutionary nature
was lost or glossed over. But it is revolutionary, be assured
of that. Mama (if no one else) recognizes the explosive
potential of her new generation children very early in the
drama with "they frightens me, Ruth--my children." There are
statements of protest against old spirituality, segregated
neighborhoods, economic conditions, woman's place, castra-
tion of black manhood, suppression of black identity and
many more. So many themes, in fact, that the playwrights
of the 60's needed to go no further than it for protest ideas
to blow up into the scores of revolutionary plays which hit
society in the 60's.

And then came the alienated, angry young playwrights led
by Leroi Jones, who proclaimed a desire to be as bitter as
his great, great, great, great, grandfather was when he was
taken off the slave boat. These writers were dedicated to

exposing evils which America has forced upon their race.
Their first act was to cast aside aspirations for integrating
into the mainstream of American cultural life. The main-
stream was found to be polluted--the American dream only a
myth. Revolutionary theatre devised alternate routes--
routes which led through black power, black consciousness,
black determinism. Negro rebellion became total black
revolution--in concept, in form, in style, and in audience
sought.

Clay in Jones' DUTCHMAN (who is the middle-class Bigger,
who in turn is the Reconstruction Joshuah embittered by
years of unkept promises) is finally forced by the persistent
white antagonist to drop his "innocence" and boldly face
the real world; he talks wildly of murder but he does not act.
When the murder comes it is through the knife-wielding hand
of the white woman. But there is a premonitory message in
his talk picked up later by playwright Charles Fuller: "I
think there may come a day when we will have to burn down
his cities, to show him our oneness of aim." Unity has
become one of the black revolutionary's major themes. It
is perhaps time now to go on with Sartre's quotation:

> Here are black men standing, looking
> at us, and I hope that you--like men--
> will feel the shock of being seen.

Negro rebellion became total black revolution in the eyes
of Baraka and the young playwrights whom he inspired: Ed
Bullins, Ben Caldwell, Ron Miller, Richard Wesley. Even
those who revolted through humor and satire (Ted Shine,

Douglas Turner Ward, Ossie Davis) thrust a sharper rapier
at existing conditions than society had been acustomed to
feeling from the black man. White critics have frequently
criticized these revolutionaries for advocating violence
through their "fantasies of revenge;" the playwrights have
responded that "violence is as American as apple pie" and
gone right on writing. As the 1970's are being ushered in
there seems to be less concern with correcting the evils
of society than with having the black man take a look at
himself. Does this suggest an end to social revolution
in the black theatre? It is, perhaps, too soon to draw this
conclusion, but there are others which can be drawn.

1. The black man by the nature of his birth and
   position in America has been forced into a commitment
   to revolt; in most instances, his drama reflects
   his concern with social revolution.

2. The black playwright's early forms of protest
   clearly indicated a desire to "get in"--were, in-
   deed appeals to America to let the black man be a
   part of the so-called democratic society. Then
   in the words of Toni Cade:

3. "Revolution was talked to death on the stages of the
   30's. The residue hung in the air till the 60's.
   But at least revolutionary upheaval is taking place
   in a realer sense in our time . . ."

4. By the end of the 60's there was an obvious shift
   in the revolutionary commitment of most black play-
   wrights. Social protest aimed at a sick society gave
   way to concern with black determinism. Perhaps
   this in itself is a form of rebellion--like silence
   after one has grown weary of persuasive rhetoric
   falling on deaf ears.

All in all, black revolutionary theatre has come a
long way since the white rowdies seated behind the partition
in the African Grove Theatre disrupted the performance and

sent the actors off to jail. In June of last year (1973)
during the D.C. Black Repertory Company's production of
THE BLACKS at the Kennedy Center, the entry doors were
chained during the revolution scene. Apparently no one
panicked and the actors were not hauled away to jail.
More encouraging than this, however, was the designation
of time given in this production as "THEN, NOW, AND
HOPEFULLY, NOT TOMORROW!!. Perhaps revolution in black theatre
may be soon out-dated!

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