

## AUDIENCE IN THE ARTS

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**Keywords:** audience research, visual audience, auditory audience, new media audience, technology audience, world wide web, multimedia, readership, production, processing, dissemination, reception, pornographic literary text, gender differentiation, feminist criticism, gender and reading

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### 1. Introduction

The production, processing and dissemination, reception, and the study of culture and cultural products are activities and processes that exist in all societies and cultures. Culture is understood here as a system of communicative action(s) with several sub-systems of such communicative actions. Following the theoretical and applied framework of comparative cultural studies (see Totosy 1999 <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss3/2>>, "From Comparative," *Comparative Literature*) art and the production of art are understood as a sub-system consisting of 1) the process of production, including the producer (the artist) and his/her product, that is, the "text" (here understood as any type of such artistic production in any media); 2) the processing of the product, including its distribution and dissemination; 3) the audience and reception of the product(s); and 4) the post-processing of the product (e.g., the criticism and the study of the product and the system itself and in its parts).

Within the system and sub-systems of culture, audience in the arts refers to an individual's or group's viewing, hearing, reading, and/or listening of an artistic product or products. From among the many definitions of audience in the arts, here is a selection: "An audience ... can be thought of as a number of people who are exposed to a particular text. They can be in the same place (as in a theater or at a football game) or widely scattered, in their homes, as in the case of audiences for radio programs and television programs" (Berger 157) and "*audience* [is understood as] overarching all the reception processes of message sending. Thus there is the audience for theatre, television, and cinema; there is the radio listener. There is the audience for a pop concert or at a public meeting. Communicators shape their messages to fit the perceived needs of their audience: they calculate the level of receptiveness, the degree of readiness to accept the message and the mode of delivery. Audience is readership too and the success in meeting audience/readership needs relies extensively on feedback. ... Sometimes there is an extra factor in the communicator-

audience situation. This might be the *client*. An advertising agency, for example, is employed by a client (a company wishing to have its product advertised) to create a commercial whose audience is the television-watching public " (Watson and Hill 8-9).

My own definition is as follows: "Audience in the arts may be defined as any individual's or groups of persons' cerebral and/or sensory (in some cases also tactile) intake/reception and/or perception of an artistic product or products. The field of scholarship where audience is studied is commonly designated as 'audience research,' usually aimed at the observation and analysis of a group of individuals and their behaviour with regard to his/her or their intake of a particular artistic product presented in a medium. While for instance the readership of literature can be understood as audience, audience in most instances is understood with reference to media such as film, television, radio, performance in music, the various types of theatre and dance, and museum. In this definition Audience is understood as an umbrella designation with regard to all types and ways of exclusive or mixed sensory (visual, auditory, tactile, etc.) and/or cerebral perception(s) and reception of cultural products. Audience research is about the what, when, where, who, why, and how of an artistic product or products."

## **2. Types of Audience and Fields of Audience Studies**

Although a comprehensive history of audience is yet to be written, an attempt is made here to present a working categorization of types of audience in the arts within the system of culture (the implicit hierarchy in the categories listed is historical and not value oriented) and in relation to fields of audience studies:

**2.1 Readership** (e.g., printed media: book, newspaper, magazine, etc.).

Approaches: 2.1.1 Reader-response Studies (the study of "response" to a literary text or texts by its or their reader or readers). Representative scholarship: Norman N. Holland, David Bleich, Umberto Eco, Wolfgang Iser, Jane P. Tompkins, Judith Fetterley.

2.1.2 Reception Studies (the study of one or more readers' actualization of the text. Representative scholarship: Jürgen Habermas, Peter Szondi, Hans Robert Jauss).

2.2.3 Empirical Study of Literature (the study of readership in the systemic and empirical mode). Representative scholarship: Siegfried J. Schmidt, Hugo Verdaasdonk, Norbert Groeben, David Miall.

**2.2 Auditory and/or Visual Audience** (e.g., theater, musical, opera, concert, music, dance, etc.). Approaches: Audience Development (opera: a combination of comprehensive strategies towards and including studies of relationships between audience, the art form, and the opera company).

**2.3 Visual Audience** (e.g., museum, gallery, exhibition, photography, display, etc.)

Approaches: Visitor Studies (the study of perspectives and aspects of visitors to the various types of museums and spaces of exhibition of cultural products). Representative scholarship: Edward S. Robinson, Paul DiMaggio, Hugo Verdaasdonk.

**2.4 Auditory Audience** (e.g., radio, record, tape, CD, etc.)

Approaches: Auditorium Studies (the study of larger groups of radio audience by survey sampling and analysis). Representative scholarship: E. Suchman, Joseph Turow, Reinhold

Viehoff, Hugh Malcolm Beville Jr.

**2.5 Mixed Auditory and Visual Audience** (e.g., television, film, video, music video, etc.).  
Approaches: Gratifications Research (the study of audience members' motivations for attending to mass media and its products). Representative scholarship: H. Herzog, K.E. Rosengren, D.L. Swanson, John Fiske, Keith Tester, James Lull.

**2.6 New Media and Technology Audience** (e.g., world wide web, multimedia)  
Approaches: New Media Studies (the study of the world wide web, the internet, multimedia, etc., in all of its implications social, technological, cultural, audience, economic, etc.). Representative scholarship: David Gauntlett, Wilson Dizard, Jr.

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