

ALAN SCHNEIDER: IN SEARCH OF AN AMERICAN TRADITION

A Thesis

Presented to

the Graduate Faculty of the Department of Drama

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by
George P. Parks, Jr.
August, 1978

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This study has attempted to establish the seminal influence Alan Schneider has had on the American theatre. Inherent in his significance have been his philosophies regarding the American theatre system. The study has sought to define those philosophies as well as Schneider's directorial practices. They have been affected by a number of factors such as his early tendencies toward theatricalism, his exposure to Lee Strasberg, his fascination for arena staging, and his respect for Beckett, Albee, and Pinter among others. Those elements, coupled with Schneider's experience as director and administrator, have led him to realize and advocate some kind of generative tradition in American theatre.

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I. AN INTRODUCTION

For three and a half decades Alan Schneider has been regarded as among the busiest and most talented directors in the American theatre. John Gassner, for example, has called his work "engrossing" while Harold Clurman has viewed him as "pointed," characterized by "determined straightforwardness." To critics William Goldman and John Booth, he has been "enormously articulate" and "among the most brilliant." Such weighty adjectives coming from such creditable sources certainly point to Schneider's merit. Indeed it will always be remembered that he was one of the earliest major American directors to exercise faith in the off-Broadway movement. It was Schneider who was unafraid of the offbeat, the unconventional and who continued to bring new dramatists to the American stage until they were recognized as legitimate. It has been this type of fearlessness and daring that has made Alan Schneider among the most reputable, respected, and accomplished directors the American theatre has to offer.

In over thirty years of theatre experience Schneider has left more than simply a trail of successful shows. His significance lies in the fact that he has tried to work with the entire tradition of American theatre, such as it is. His opinions and philosophies have not only reflected a dissatisfaction with the American way in theatre but a solution which lies within the European tradition. He has

demonstrated a concern not only for the production but for an even larger theatrical process.

The following investigation then is both a survey of Schneider's work and an assessment of how one director has tried to establish a kind of theatre in America which is different from the Broadway tradition. European influences have certainly been evident in his work. At Cornell as a graduate student, for instance, he was an admirer of Meyerhold, Tovstogonov, and Vakhtangov and in the ensuing years fell under the spell of Brecht and Beckett. He has also spent a great deal of time in Europe, either touring with an American production or directing a European production. He has both taught and studied in Europe, thus acquiring an understanding of the attitudes on which European theatre operates. Consequently, much of what he has written through the years has reflected a high regard for that theatre. This study will attempt to elucidate those European influences on Schneider's work as well as his concepts of theatre and the incorporation of those concepts into his work.

Three terms which will be pursued more effectually in the study itself perhaps require some clarification at this point. "Theatre" refers to the totality of the drama and is not restricted solely to the written drama, the production, or the administration. Rather it is an all-inclusive term, encompassing all facets of the theatre. The "American tradition" refers to the conventions, habits, and general practices of theatre in America, particularly the professional and university theatre. The term "European tradition" likewise will

be used to include primarily the professional theatre with its conventions, habits, and general practices as it appears in Europe. Although these definitions are somewhat flat and denotative in nature here, they do take on a richer and more subjective character in Schneider's philosophy.

If Schneider's significance lies in the fact that he has approached the American theatre as an entity larger than a series of singular productions, it is a significance which he has developed from a tremendous amount of experience in both professional and university theatre. He has evolved and implemented through this experience perhaps more than any other American director an extremely concrete concept of theatre. His work in the university alone, beginning with his first position as a director at the Catholic University in Washington, has been considerable. Since assuming that post in 1941, he has directed at such institutions as the University of Michigan, the University of Wisconsin, Stanford University, Hofstra College, the University of California, Boston University, and Brooklyn College. Professionally Schneider has worked all over America. Nor has he confined himself to activity in this country. Russia, Germany, England, France, Italy, Ireland, Canada, and Israel have all opened their theatres to him.

Schneider's professional career has furthermore afforded him experience in various capacities within the theatre. He has not only directed in many Broadway, off-Broadway, and resident theatres but has served as artistic director and associate artistic director at

the Arena Stage in Washington. He has worked as an instructor both in America and England and as a drama critic for The New Leader in the early sixties, served on the Office of Cultural Presentations of the State Department's Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs drama panel, the Evaluation Board of the New York State Council for the Arts, the Executive Board of the Theatre Communications Group, and the Board of Standards and Planning for the Living Theatre. Schneider has been on the Tulane Drama Review advisory board as well as the New Dramatists Committee, has acted as consultant for the Ford Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Rockefeller Foundation, and is a contributor to theatre and literary journals. Today Schneider is one of the Arena's directors and is University Professor of Theatre Arts at Boston University.

Schneider once wrote that "success in the theatre is not measured in column inches but in personal satisfaction, a rare bird of a commodity and not easily caught."¹ The awards and honors which he has received thus become somewhat more reflective of his worth in the opinion of the theatrical public than in his own terms of success. Besides having two of his productions selected as representative of American theatre for tours in France and Russia, he was awarded the Antoinette Perry (Tony) Award and the Outer Circle Award, both in 1962, for his direction of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. In

¹ Alan Schneider, "A Tale of Two Cities," Ten Talents in the American Theatre, David H. Stevens, editor (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), p. 62.

1962 he received the Village Voice Off-Broadway (Obie) Award for his staging of Pinter's The Dumbwaiter and The Collection. In June of 1965 he was awarded the Prix Special du Jury in Tours, France, and in Oberhausen, Germany that same year he was given the Preis der Kurzfilmtage. Later that year in Venice he received the Diploma di Merito.

Schneider's greatest significance perhaps lies in the means by which he has tried to establish a type of pattern for American theatre. His work resembles a search for what theatre ought to be. In this process of searching for an American tradition, he has gone to great lengths to secure new playwrights. He has been responsible for staging in this country the plays of John Osborne, Joe Orton, Edward Bond, and Harold Pinter, though it might be noted that none have had the impact in America comparable to his initial productions of Edward Albee and Samuel Beckett. If Schneider's contributions went no further than the works of those two men, they would remain significant. The theatre that they represent to him has led him to more pronounced attempts to realize the theatrical environment which he has sought since the late forties when he first visited Europe. More than the positions in which he has functioned, more than the plays he has directed, more than the reputations which he has acquired, Alan Schneider's endeavors to actualize his concept of theatre have made him the significant director he is and the subject of this study.

Subsumed in the purpose of this study are limitations which govern its application. The work is not to be taken *imprimis* as a biography

of Schneider. Furthermore, this inquiry will consider his directorial practices only as they serve to augment his comprehensive views of theatre. Subsequently, the specific plays and playwrights dealt with by this study will hopefully illustrate specific tendencies in his work.

This investigation, consisting of five chapters and an appendix, will be divided into three primary areas. Following this introduction will be a discussion of Schneider's philosophy of theatre. Inherent here will be his definition of theatre and the application of that definition. He has consistently voiced what he feels today's theatre is obligated to provide for its audiences. This chapter, "Views of the Modern Theatre," will look at those responsibilities as they apply to the various levels, including the Broadway, off-Broadway, resident, experimental, and university theatres. The remaining chapters will stem from that initial framework.

Schneider's methods of production are, logically enough, founded on his concepts of theatre. Having established what that foundation is, the study will pursue his approach to actual production. Edward Albee once commented that "plays have been known to get away from their authors, but that's no real problem here--not with Alan Schneider, our director."² Such a statement discloses the need for an effective relationship between director and playwright. This chapter, "The Director at Work," will corroborate such a relationship as it ought

² "Albee Revisited," The New Yorker, vol. 40 (December 19, 1974), p. 32.

to exist in Schneider's opinion. This and other concepts of production will then be handled in several areas, including selecting the play, preparing the script, casting, working with designers, staging and rehearsing the play.

The administration of theatre is also a paramount issue with Schneider. His experience in theatre management has convinced him of its importance. The next chapter will deal with the "Artist as Administrator." The first pursuit will be an aesthetic philosophy of theatre administration, followed by the methods of implementation. The chapter will examine how Schneider's concept of theatre administration is executed and will consider the administrative staff, the physical plant, the financial needs, and the responsibility of the resident theatre to its community.

There have been no extensive studies conducted in this specific area. Numerous articles have appeared since the late forties which have contained fragments of Schneider's philosophies. Interviews with him have periodically appeared. In 1961 John Booth interviewed him and Edward Albee.³ A year later Schneider was interviewed by Richard Schechner⁴ and then by Jean Claude van Itallie.⁵ A master's thesis at the University of Wisconsin has catalogued much of

³ John Booth, "Albee and Schneider Observe: Something Stirring," Theatre Arts, vol. 45 (March, 1961), p. 22.

⁴ Alan Schneider, "Reality is not Enough," Tulane Drama Review, vol. 9 (Spring, 1962), p. 118.

⁵ Jean Claude van Itallie, "An Interview with Alan Schneider," Transatlantic Review, no. 10 (Summer, 1962).

his work.⁶ And at the present time there is a doctoral dissertation in progress which will result in a biographical study of Schneider. Schneider has also been kind enough to grant the writer an interview which appears in the appendix to this investigation and which should serve to complement the already existing material. What this inquiry hopes to do is collect the information from these various sources and put it into one single study.

Several limitations do exist even with the resources which are presently on hand. A major problem exists in the shortage of recent data. Schneider no longer writes as prolifically as he once did. Nor does he direct as often. Furthermore, his work with both Edward Albee and Samuel Beckett seems to have lessened. The last original work by Albee which he directed was the 1968 production of Box-Mao-Box. In 1972 he directed Not I, a play by Samuel Beckett. Reviews of these and other plays are easily accessible, but articles of more weight and gravity appear with less frequency than before. An additional burden is the fact that the writer has not seen Schneider's work first hand. Actual exposure consists of one and a half days of rehearsal, including a complete run-through of Preston Jones' The Last Meeting of the Knights of the White Magnolia. Such limitations, of course, will qualify the scope of this study.

Alan Schneider was born Abram Leopoldvich Schneider in Kharkov, Russia, on December 12, 1917. His parents, Leo and Rebecka Schneider,

⁶ Jan C. Ricciarelli, "A Rationale of Organization for a Theatre Director's Manuscripts Collection" (Unpublished master's thesis, University of Wisconsin).

were medical students at the time. Shortly after Alan's birth, the Schneiders migrated to the United States. In America Schneider attended Baltimore's Forest Park High School and then the Maryland Institute of Arts. In 1935 he enrolled in John Hopkins University and spent a year studying advanced physics, but in 1936, discouraged by the difficulty of his major, he transferred to the University of Wisconsin and earned his bachelor's degree in political science in 1939. For a year Schneider worked as a broadcaster for WBAL radio in Baltimore, a ghostwriter for the Postmaster General of the United States, and a public relations director for the Washington Civic Theatre. He attended Cornell in 1940, working on a master's degree in drama, and having completed his graduate work, he joined the faculty at the Catholic University in Washington in 1941.

Schneider's exposure to theatre began in his junior year in high school when he attended a production of S. N. Behrman's Biography. While he was at the University of Wisconsin, he participated in student productions and developed an interest in theatre. But always the theatre represented nothing more than a pastime, even while he worked with the Washington Civic Theatre. Once he committed himself to the theatre by returning to college for his degree in drama, however, he never held back. He remained on the staff of the Catholic University until 1948 when he left for a year of study under Lee Strasberg. Schneider returned to Catholic University only to leave again, this time for Devonshire, England, for a period of lecturing and directing. In 1951, after returning to the United States, he

discovered the Arena Stage in Washington and Zelda Fichandler.

The years that followed his return from England were busy ones. He served a short term as the Arena's artistic director and also directed in resident and university theatres around the country. In 1955 his production of Thornton Wilder's The Skin of Our Teeth was selected for presentation at the Paris Theatre Festival, and the following year he began his long-lasting relationship with Samuel Beckett. His production of Beckett's Waiting for Godot in its American premiere came in 1956 in Miami, Florida. The play was not well received by the audience, and the effect was devastating on Schneider; yet despite the Miami incident, Beckett renewed Schneider's faith when the two of them met later in Europe, where Schneider had gone on a Guggenheim grant to study open staging. Two years later he directed Krapp's Last Tape. His work with Beckett continued into the sixties with the 1961 premiere of Happy Days. In 1964 he filmed a scenario by Beckett starring Buster Keaton and entitled Film. While Schneider has directed other Beckett plays, such as Act Without Words I and II, Play, Come and Go, and, most recently, Not I, these productions have not had the seminal impact of Waiting for Godot, Endgame, and Happy Days.

When Schneider's 1960 production of Krapp's Last Tape was billed with The Zoo Story at the Provincetown Playhouse in New York, Edward Albee became acquainted with Schneider's work. The next year Albee asked him to direct The American Dream. The friendship led to the highly successful but controversial Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

in 1962. Schneider later directed Albee's The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, Tiny Alice, Malcolm, and the Pulitzer Prize winning A Delicate Balance. The two men worked together for the last time in 1968 on Box and Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse-Tung. Since then they have not worked together. Though the active relationship has not lasted as long as that between Schneider and Beckett, mutual respect continues between the two men.

Edward Albee and Samuel Beckett have not taken up all of Schneider's time. His years have been filled with an awesome average of more than five plays per year, produced at various professional and university theatres around the country. Some of his productions have been taken on international tour. In 1956, for example, his production of A Trip to Bountiful toured Dublin and England while his The Deserters toured England in 1958. He went to Italy with Box-Mao-Box in 1968 and to Russia with Our Town in 1972. He has also directed a number of productions for television, including a 1957 production of Oedipus the King, a 1959 documentary, Secret of Freedom, for NBC, a 1960 production of Waiting for Godot, a 1964 staging of Act Without Words II, Eh Joe? in 1966, and a production of Krapp's Last Tape with Jack McGowan in 1971.⁷

Regardless of where he has been, Schneider has directed almost constantly until the past several years. The endless hours of touring,

⁷ More extensive biographical material can be found in Theatre Quarterly, vol. 3 (July-September, 1973), p. 23, and in The Biographical Encyclopedia & Who's Who of the American Theatre (New York: James H. Heineman, Inc., 1966).

lecturing, directing, writing, and interviewing have produced a man who has been called by Theatre Quarterly "America's foremost serious director." Jean-Claude van Itallie has called him "one of the most energetic and experienced directors in the American theatre." Today his productions are not so numerous as they once were, but his ideas are no less present than they ever were. He finds himself more in demand by young theatre students who are looking to him for a direction in today's theatre. The ideas which have taken these thirty years to shape and articulate are beginning to have their effects on a new generation.

II. VIEWS OF THE MODERN THEATRE

Thirty years of active participation in theatre have given Alan Schneider a rather firm idea of where he stands in relation to it. The dynamic force which he generates stems from having formed a definite concept of theatre. Perhaps while any number of directors have experienced the same frustrations and disappointments as he and have wished for the same tradition that he calls for, Schneider has been particularly articulate and definite in nailing down just exactly what that tradition should be.

The foundation of Schneider's concept is his definition of theatre as "a place that has a given artistic point of view--a group of people working together over a period of time with a common view and often dedicated to one playwright."¹ Theatre comes about through the efforts of a group of people who do more than merely converge at a given site at a particular time in history to stage a specific play. It is a group that remains together over a period of time, possibly years, in order to stage many plays, working with each other, discovering and improving with each other, caring for each other. There is a shift in emphasis from mere repertory, the simple staging of plays, to the substance that holds the group together, the common

¹ Alan Levy, "The A*B*B* of Alan Schneider," The New York Times, October 20, 1963.

bond. The earliest influence of this sort on Schneider was the Group Theatre in the thirties. Of this group's productions of Awake and Sing and Men in White the thing that most impressed him was the ensemble acting, which he called the best he had ever seen.² Twenty years later he was impressed with the work of Brecht's Berliner Ensemble. The common element in both of these groups was the unity of the companies, their cohesive nature: "To me the theatre's always been a family, a group of people. Sometimes they're in a show; sometimes they're not in the show...but they don't stop functioning."³ The strength of the group is that everyone works together. "In a theatre!" says Schneider, "in a theatre! We should all care. Even the janitor."⁴

If a group of people with common attitudes and goals is necessary to Schneider's concept of theatre, the point of view of a group is no less important. He best explains the idea of point of view with this reference to the Group Theatre:

They were all staunch adherents to the Stanislavski system. They all worked the same way, so they were artistically unified. From the point of view of content, they were unified because they were so left-wing. They were vaguely socialistic or group-oriented or left-wing or anti-fascist as far as I could tell at the time.⁵

² Jean-Claude van Itallie, "An Interview with Alan Schneider," Transatlantic Review, no. 10 (Summer, 1962), p. 14.

³ George Parks, "An Interview with Alan Schneider" (Unpublished interview conducted in Washington on March 7, 1974), see Appendix, p. 122.

⁴ Ibid., p. 140.

⁵ Ibid., p. 116.

Whether the Group was tied together by the content of its plays or by its method of implementation or production is, for the most part, beside the point. The fact remains that its members had a unifying idea. Any theatre, Schneider says, with a unifying idea--women, blacks, even left-handed people--has a point of view, a way of looking at life which characterizes it and makes it different from all others.

The two elements, the group and its viewpoint, go hand in hand and result in an organized direction. "I don't think we'll have a theatre until we have definite organizations with definite points of view," Schneider comments, "organizations that limit themselves to a certain kind of work done in a certain manner."⁶ A theatre, he explains, must identify the types of plays it can do best and then must do those plays. "I'm only valid," he says, "when I carry out my nature or organic self to the extent that I can carry it out."⁷ The point of view certainly narrows and limits the "nature or organic self" of a theatre. Having a viewpoint will possibly exclude all but a particular audience, but that is a natural tendency of a viewpoint. Such exclusions must naturally be of some concern for a theatre so that it must decide to whom it wishes to play. A larger and more established resident theatre will probably adapt its viewpoint to a larger number of people while a smaller theatre might cater to a small

⁶ van Itallie, op. cit., p. 19.

⁷ Parks, op. cit., p. 118.

group with a narrower approach. But no theatre can hope to please everybody, Schneider insists, nor should it try. "Most theatres that try to please everybody," he warns, "can't please anybody."⁸

While a point of view seemingly limits the scope of a theatre, Schneider hastens to point out that it need not be viewed as a restricting force. "Freedom," he says, "comes only from accepting limitations. Freedom comes from selecting what it is you want to do and sticking fervently to that, excluding all other possibilities."⁹ Freedom exists because there is no longer the obligation to please everyone, no longer a goal or a fixed product that must be designed for all audiences. The work of such groups as the Open Theatre and the Living Theatre were initially exercises in freely exploring new areas in theatre. The early off-Broadway productions of Albee and Beckett likewise were produced without catering to a particular group of critics or a Broadway audience. They were undertaken as explorations and were accepted as explorations. There was a process of discovery to see where the production would go and what the effect would be. Schneider's pioneer work off-Broadway displayed a kind of freedom which led to a more specific sense of probing, doing literally whatever seemed necessary. It has been the point of view which has allowed the freedom to discover. "It's not something where you know when you start where you're going," he says of the point of view. "I never know where I'm going. I know where I want to get to, but I don't know where I'm going."¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., p. 119.

⁹ Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 135.

So the viewpoint provides theatre with freedom rather than confinement.

Inherent in Schneider's concept of theatre is the recognition that a theatre's point of view must not be completely political, social, or economic. It may contain various overtones, but it remains a type of artistic expression. Consequently, a viewpoint must be innately artistic in nature before it can really be usable as a theatrical concept. For Schneider a general awareness of art of any kind came relatively late in his life. But in time he was fascinated by Picasso, Calder, Brancusi, Norman Bel Geddes, and Frank Lloyd Wright. Today he links his concern for modern art with his interest in arena staging. To him arena staging represents:

...the same search and some of tendencies that have taken place in the past half century in the arts or sculpture, painting, and architecture. Like other arts... the theatre is turning, or rather returning, to simplicity, to essentials, to the primitive.¹¹

While one may well question whether the other arts are indeed returning to simplicity, the essence of Schneider's remark, namely that theatre experiences a process of search and change just as other art forms do, is well taken. Today it may be too easy to become involved in theatre as a business venture or a social cause. But Schneider's definition, in fact his entire concept of theatre, is a constant reminder that theatre is still a form of artistic expression.

Theatre as an aesthetic concern, Schneider feels, is necessary

¹¹ Alan Schneider, "A Tale of Two Cities," Ten Talents in the American Theatre, David H. Stevens, editor (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), p. 98.

not only in terms of the production of the artistic expression but also in terms of the audience response to the experience. In other words there is a pronounced need for some type of impact on the audience. He has called the theatre, for instance, the art of living life, saying:

It illuminates life. It penetrates through human beings. But what do we need art for anyhow? What do we need with the representation of life in other forms? Because it somehow enriches, deepens.¹²

If theatre then does not provide an audience with that which, to use Schneider's words, illuminates, penetrates, and enriches, to some extent, its very need is thus questioned. To Schneider the Berlin audience's reaction to The Zoo Story exemplifies the experience audiences ought to have.

I think what happens in Zoo Story is that something in it touches the audience in a way they didn't expect or didn't want to admit...but they are disturbed by it...and I think that if you don't leave the theatre a different human being than when you entered, you've wasted your money.¹³

The particular reaction to which he refers was the Berlin production in which the audience sat in silence for forty-five seconds after the final curtain before they began to applaud. While Schneider does not suggest that this type of stunning effect should necessarily occur every time, he does think theatre can cause people to think more than it presently does.

¹² John Booth, "Albee and Schneider Observe: Something Stirring," Theatre Arts, vol. 45 (March, 1961), p. 24.

¹³ Ibid.

A fundamental problem then, as Schneider sees it, is the failure of the modern theatre, at least in America, to provide an aesthetic impact. People find themselves going to the theatre because culturally it is the thing to do. Or they may go for an evening of amusement or entertainment. While these reasons for theatre-going are not altogether bad, they do not change an audience or make an audience different for having been there. It does not stay with them or draw them back.

If theatre can succeed in providing today's audiences with experiences which are worth the trip to the theatre, Schneider sees such success as a result of change. In 1961 he commented to John Booth that theatre at that time offered more than ever before because it was in a state of flux.¹⁴ At that time off-Broadway had become increasingly stabilized, and resident theatres were coming into vogue while the long-standing tradition of Broadway was being questioned. And Schneider heartily voiced his favor for such a movement. The American Dream represented to him this willingness to eliminate the stale and the cliché from theatre. He viewed the play as an attempt by means of theatrical experiments to break through the barriers that separate play from audience.¹⁵ While he remained rather cautious, mindful of the fact that any new movement would soon become the old, he expressed optimism about the future: "I don't think we

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 78.

have even begun to glimpse what is going to happen in the next ten or fifteen years in terms of theatre."¹⁶ Today, ten or fifteen years later, his views remain much the same. His chief complaint where regional theatres are concerned is the fear of not having a hit, the reluctance to take chances on new plays and new production styles even at the risk of financial failure. The successful theatre, he says, is never satisfied but is constantly responsive to new and unexplored territory.

Even with a group of people who are united by a common view, Schneider notes, significant experiences do not spring forth as irrepresible and natural forces. They must be produced through hard work. Art is not a spontaneous commodity which capriciously leaps from the hearts of the inspired; it comes as a result of concentrated effort. "One of the greatest crimes in American art," he has said, "is that spontaneity has become worshipped as god. Art takes work."¹⁷ More than inspiration, he cites work and luck as the essential ingredients of success in today's theatre. His own career testifies to his belief in work. "The main thing was that I kept working," he recalls about his own experiences. "Instead of suffering in silence, I worked in silence."¹⁸ And as one talks to Schneider today and listens to him, he hears the voice of a man who has earned success, endured failures, and reached conclusions about the modern theatre

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁷ Parks, op. cit., p. 134.

¹⁸ Schneider, op.cit., p. 64.

not through any kind of vicarious and intellectual process but through experience and work.

The fulcrum of Schneider's concept is the playwright, and he has often cited his function as a director as one of serving the playwright. Not only must the playwright be the head of the theatre, he says, but there will never be a theatre until he is the head of it.¹⁹ Not too surprisingly, a source of misgiving on Schneider's part is that today's theatre here in America is not a playwright's theatre. There are problems which prevent our theatre from being such.

One major difficulty, Schneider feels, is that the playwright's function is neither understood nor respected. Public opinion, for instance, often tends to blame the playwright for any unsightly reflections which may appear on stage. One example was Joe Orton's Entertaining Mr. Sloane. In 1965 Schneider directed this play, which was criticized as, in Howard Taubman's words, "too perverse in depicting the junk heap of society."²⁰ John McCarten of The New Yorker wrote, "I don't think an author is well advised to employ what are essentially sub-human species to describe a melancholy phase of the human conditions."²¹ Naturally Schneider came to the defense not of the production but of the playwright and the play. In The New York

¹⁹ Levy, op. cit.

²⁰ Howard Taubman, "Play From London Has Premiere at Lyceum," The New York Times, October 13, 1965.

²¹ John McCarten, "Down, Way Down, By the Seaside," The New York Times, October 14, 1967.

Times he protested;

Presumably corruption and scandal, including various specialized species of fornication, are more palatable in Victorian costumes than amid the junk heap of contemporary society.²²

Nine years later he was to reminisce, commenting that the critics had missed the point of the play:

I thought that Sloane was a perfect exposure of the values of a bourgeois society that would sell anything to anybody for a profit. That's all it was. And Joe Orton was having a little fun with it. And they were accusing us of every crime under the sun.²³

Because an audience was not familiar with the terms that the playwright employed, it subsequently rejected what the playwright was attempting to say.

A similar example of Schneider's defending a playwright had occurred two years earlier with Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. John McCarten had dismissed the work as "expressions designed, presumably, to show us that this is really modern stuff."²⁴ Richard Schechner also had unsympathetic remarks scolding the playwright for the rather unhealthy condition which had characterized the play. The playwright cannot be blamed, Schneider answered, for the sickness which may be reflected in his work. Albee, he felt, was simply "dedicated to smashing that rosy view, shocking us with the truth of our

²² Alan Schneider, "Mr. Sloane's Director Talks Back," The New York Times, October 31, 1965.

²³ Parks, op. cit., p. 140.

²⁴ John McCarten, "Long Night's Journey into Daze," The New Yorker, vol. 38 (October 29, 1962), p. 85.

present day behavior and thought, striving to purge us into an actual confrontation with reality."²⁵ While it may be unusual for a director to go to battle on behalf of a playwright, it was not so unusual for Schneider to do so because of the pivotal position which the playwright represents to him.

If the European tradition of theatre is attractive to Schneider, the European playwright is no less attractive. Many of the plays which he has directed, especially within the past ten years, have been the works of Europeans. But he claims that this is no indication that he necessarily prefers the European playwright. "I'll go to China for playwrights," he says, "because I believe the playwright is the fundamental starting point...I didn't like Samuel Beckett because he was Irish or French. I liked him because I liked Godot."²⁶ The reason for his going to Europe for playwrights, he maintains, is that Europe simply has more of them than America. Consequently, many plays which would not be performed here would be done immediately in Europe.

Schneider sees a problem in America's reluctance to do the unestablished playwrights. The problem, as he sees it, is not so much one of locating new plays and writers worth doing but one of getting them produced. "I think we have more playwrights in America than we've ever had," he contends.²⁷ But he complains that he is no

²⁵ Alan Schneider, "Why So Afraid?" Tulane Drama Review, vol. 7 (Spring, 1963), p. 11.

²⁶ Parks, op. cit., p. 121.

²⁷ Ibid.

salesman and cannot get new plays performed unless he directs them himself. The availability of good material is one thing; getting it produced is quite another.

Schneider has been heavily influenced not only in terms of playwrights but also in terms of the entire tradition of European theatres, particularly in England. "The most important theatre in the world," he openly declares, "is the English theatre. It is a respectable non-crisis operation. You don't make a fortune, but you work and you grow."²⁸ In England, he has observed, the theatre is cared for by everyone. It is a respectable business with an organization. Furthermore it touches the lives of most of the citizens, not simply an affluent few who care to or can afford to go to the theatre. English theatre plays as integral a part in the cultural aspect of the average European's life as the Los Angeles Dodgers play in the average American's life and functions "as a nationwide habit, not as a local luxury...an institution and not a free-for-all ...It is important rather than incidental to the nation's daily life and outlook."²⁹

The magnitude of the European theatre has made a tremendous impression on Schneider. "The amount and variety of English theatre activity has always seemed positively staggering to me," he has said.³⁰

²⁸ Murray Schumach, "Man From Out-Of-Town," The New York Times, March 21, 1954.

²⁹ Schneider, "A Tale of Two Cities," op. cit., p. 91.

³⁰ Ibid.

The sheer volume alone has represented to him a willingness to explore new ground, to change new ideas, and has led him to the conclusion that vitality in theatre can exist only when many new plays are attempted. The fact is that the "British aren't superior to us in their genes," he observes. "They do more playwrights."³¹ This attitude has been mirrored in the fact that Schneider has directed probably more new plays than any active major director today.

The magnitude of the European theatre has affected Schneider also in that it emphasizes all aspects of production. This is particularly important where the director is concerned. The European director is more involved with the total production, Schneider feels, than the American director is. As he told Richard Schechner,

In the European theatre when you talk about directing they think you mean how to handle all the elements of production: what is the production style, what does the director want to do with the play?³²

Dealing with the actor, he points out, is only one of many aspects of production. The actor may be the chief element; but if he is trained and responsive, then the director is free to consider other areas of production. The result of this type of comprehensive approach to theatre is that costumes, lights, and sets all grow as an organic whole, not as disjointed and separate parts. And to Schneider European theatre possesses that type of unity. He has ranked productions of such Europeans as Peter Brook, Anthony Quayle, and Tyrone

³¹ Parks, op. cit., p. 121.

³² Alan Schneider, "Reality is Not Enough," Tulane Drama Review, vol. 9 (Spring, 1962), p. 124.

Guthrie as the finest he has ever seen. And the Art Council, he feels, has far surpassed anything developed here in America.³³ As he once told Jean-Claude van Itallie, "When I go abroad and see... some work...in London, I'm overwhelmed with the possibilities of being affected in so many ways by what's going on on the stage."³⁴

The European tradition commands Schneider's respect further in that it involves the permanent company. In fact the Europeans have come to think of theatre in terms of groups, companies, and ensembles. "While we were presenting The Skin of Our Teeth at the International Theatre Festival in Paris," Schneider relates, "our most difficult job was not to explain the play but to explain that the players were not members of any permanent company."³⁵ The permanent company represents far more than just a repertory group to him. It is through the company system that functioning never ceases, that connections are never broken. The picture is not, of course, to be taken as a type of Utopia, and he has gone on to point out that a company tends to breed its own kind of problems. Actors may be jealous of each other because of the parts they receive. "Nevertheless," he says, "after the fight they go on living together."³⁶ Schneider's close association with the company-type atmosphere in recent years bears out his preference for this kind of environment.

³³ Schneider, "A Tale of Two Cities," op. cit.

³⁴ van Itallie, op. cit., p. 17.

³⁵ Schneider, "A Tale of Two Cities," op. cit., p. 95.

³⁶ Parks, op. cit., p. 122.

The Europeans have, in short, impressed Schneider through their general attitudes toward the theatre. Their system is characterized by, as he puts it, "comfort and convenience...courtesy and cleanliness."³⁷ Theatre attracts not simply a small group that is willing to tolerate impossible conditions but instead accommodates many people and responds to their needs. Moreover, the pace is a lot less hectic. One comment that Schneider had following his return from Russia was that there "theatre people are a lot less neurotic than we are here."³⁸ Theirs is a theatre of casualness and informality. It is not as fashionable as it is here in America but instead represents an integral part of the lives of the people. It is not the twice-a-year event that causes people to begin preparation weeks in advance for the trip to the theatre followed by dinner and dancing but is an evening in itself. Theatre there is a whole attitude, one which Schneider has come to respect as a necessary one.

If Europe represents what theatre ought to be to Schneider, America represents what it ought not to be. Quite unlike its European counterpart, the American tradition has not really existed for him. Instead of an organization called theatre, there have been producing firms at whose fortunes our system has existed. "It depends," says Schneider, "on the whims and tastes of various producers what plays are going to be done or imported."³⁹ Theatre has become a

³⁷ Schneider, "A Tale of Two Cities," op. cit., p. 96.

³⁸ Arthur Cantor and Stuart W. Little, The Playmakers (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1971), p. 135.

³⁹ van Itallie, op. cit., p. 19.

monetary venture, a capital investment, anything but an artistic undertaking. Such a situation has resulted in what Schneider has called not theatre but a series of shows, a series of accidents.

The most immediate result of the New York commercial system of theatre in which the producer is often a profit-motivated investor instead of a generating force of creativity, in Schneider's opinion, has been simply the lack of any real organization. There has been no theatre with its own staff of directors, designers, actors, and administrators. People have been hired on a one-show basis, after which time they are independent agents who will most likely work with different people on their next production. Such a system prevents greater results from occurring because greater results require time. This type of theatre, Schneider points out, has consequently led many directors to seek out people they know and trust. By doing this they create at least some type of continuity. The cast from The American Dream, for example, practically became an Edward Albee company once five actors had worked for him and had established some type of relationship. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? demonstrated the same practice by Schneider. He had known Uta Hagen from his days at the University of Wisconsin and had already developed a respect for her work. He and George Grizzard had been friends since high school and had worked together at the Arena in Washington. He had also worked with Melinda Dillon at the Arena and had directed her in several productions. Only Arthur Hill, who played the role of George, was not a close associate of his.

This way of working has allowed Schneider and other directors some degree of continuity in a system that inherently works against continuity. But such practices have only fought symptoms, not causes. "What we lack most," he has said, "is that which might be called a sense of being involved."⁴⁰ Working together on a continued basis has not been possible. "In America," he says, "we get together for one show. If it's a hit, we play it as long as we can, and then we separate, rarely to see each other."⁴¹ It is sad, he laments, to work with a group of people for four to six weeks only to separate after the production and never meet again. "I am for continuity of work rather than stop-and-go," he asserts, "performances instead of production-in-transit, a theatre that could be a home and not a motel."⁴²

The criteria by which America judges the theatre have led Schneider to question seriously how much theatre the American people actually want. The most common means of determining a theatre's quality is its success, but he questions the value of American success, saying that "any resemblance between success in this system and quality is generally purely coincidental."⁴³ A giant contributor to this

⁴⁰ Alan Schneider, "I Can't Go On; I'll Go On," The American Theatre, 1970-1971, International Theatre Institute of the United States, editor (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 111.

⁴¹ Parks, op. cit.

⁴² Schneider, "A Tale of Two Cities," op. cit., p. 92.

⁴³ Schneider, "I Can't Go On; I'll Go On," op. cit., p. 109.

incongruity, he feels, is the sense of competition in America. "We know how to compete," he says, "not how to cooperate."⁴⁴ The success of a show depends on its length and financial intake. "In America the theatre is the Barrymore Theatre doing Hume Cronin and Jessica Tandy in The Fourposter, and if they run two years, that's twice as good as one year."⁴⁵ The problem seems to lie with the American definition of success.

With the rise of the off-Broadway theatre and, more recently, the resident theatre, many of the symptomatic ills of the American theatre have been treated. But even the removal of the symptoms does not always cure the ailments. The fundamental philosophy which lies at the foundation of the American system is not particularly compatible with Schneider's concept. "Even...in those situations which try to deal with theatre in what I call its organic fundamental needs," he still contends, "we tend to get in our American things: bigger and better."⁴⁶ There remains the feeling in too many theatres that success is the measure of legitimate theatre. Everybody expects it. "Our problem is that every time you do a show," he maintains, "you're laid bare in front of a thousand people. Everybody's naked. You're either a son-of-a-bitch or you're a great genius. There's no in-between."⁴⁷ The director, Schneider says, is especially aware of

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 111.

⁴⁵ Parks, op. cit.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 123.

⁴⁷ Cantor and Little, op. cit.

success and failure, "afraid that if a show fails he will be finished."⁴⁸

The role of critic as it exists in America, Schneider feels, merely reinforces the prevailing values in American theatre. George Jessel once commented to Schneider at an English theatre, "Every show has a chance here because they like the theatre. We have to wait for the reviews."⁴⁹ The critics, in effect, measure and determine the success of a production. But the actual result of such a system is the removal of the decision-making process from those who most count, the audience. The American people seem to have developed a dependency upon the critics. "I have always wanted to be a part of a theatre...where we did not have 'to wait for the reviews,'" Schneider later replied regarding Jessel's comment.⁵⁰ It is that "wait for the reviews" which re-emphasizes the need for success in the American theatre.

If the fundamental task of the American critic is to provide a useful and constructive evaluation of a play's direction, Schneider views the task as next to impossible. He observes,

The trouble lies in their...desire to say something pertinent about an element of theatre art that usually is at its best when it conceals itself, an element that relates to everything in the production, yet has no definite resting place.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Schumach, op. cit.

⁴⁹ Schneider, "A Tale of Two Cities," op. cit.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Alan Schneider, "The Director's Role," The New York Times, August 8, 1948.

Furthermore, he believes, unless rehearsals have been attended, other work by the director has been seen before, the actors have been seen in several other productions, or several other versions of the same play are available for comparison, critical estimates of a play's worth are anything but accurate. But given the difficulty of the task, Schneider feels that critics do little toward accomplishing anything constructive. "I want to learn from them," he says, "I want them to tell me what I did right or wrong."⁵² Perhaps what he has in mind is the European dramaturg, also employed by a few American resident companies, who provides valuable constructive criticism. But the actual function of the critic, Schneider says, may instead be compared to the front page of The New York Times: "to tell me what's going on."⁵³ Their work is meaningless because, as he puts it, "they've no connection with the work...they're simply selling soap."⁵⁴ What they say is irrelevant and has no effect on his rehearsals. In the case of Tiny Alice, for example, Schneider felt that critics missed the point. "I think the play is absolutely simple," he said. "As a director my job was mainly to see that it was performed truthfully."⁵⁵ The same type of critical blindness also characterized many reviews of Beckett's Happy Days. "We were

⁵² Parks, op. cit.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Henry Hewes, "The Tiny Alice Caper," Saturday Review, vol. 48 (January 30, 1965), p. 39.

clobbered," Schneider recalls, "and the play wasn't even faintly recognized as the major, marvelous work of art that it is."⁵⁶ The critics, it seems are not only out of touch with what Schneider considers their proper function, but they are not particularly successful at the task they have undertaken. Consequently, he replies, "I've never learned anything from a drama critic."⁵⁷

The basic problems with American theatre, as Schneider views them, only serve to stifle what possibilities there are. "We're loaded with talent," he says.⁵⁸ But the nature of the system itself misuses the talent and prohibits a greater realization of the potential because of the lack of definite organization in the past. And even where traces of the organic process of theatre have begun to develop, they are distorted by an American sense of competition and success, thus negating some of the best efforts. Perhaps the best realization of Schneider's type of theatre is the resident theatre, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Yet even with the progress of the resident theatre, there is the ever present danger of stagnation and the deterioration of the development of a healthy American tradition of theatre.

The Broadway establishment, in Schneider's view, is another disruptive factor in having produced a feeling of division. He feels

⁵⁶ Howard Greenberger, The Off-Broadway Experience (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 74.

⁵⁷ Parks, op. cit.

⁵⁸ van Itallie, op. cit.

there has been the attitude on Broadway that all other theatre is without value, that the only legitimate theatre is in New York. Subsequently, he points out, two camps have developed, the Broadway camp and the non-Broadway camp. The continuity and cohesiveness of American theatre have been broken by the distinction.⁵⁹

Broadway itself, Schneider feels, has been an unhealthy condition. Once asked if Broadway had "had" it, he replied that it was only a matter of time.⁶⁰ While New York has served as a valuable training ground for actors and directors, theatre as a whole has suffered. Finding causes for such a condition has not been particularly difficult for Schneider. 'Maybe it's just that the New York theatre, like the city itself, is just too big and sprawling," he says, "too individualistic and selfish."⁶¹ Because of its tremendous size, talented people have little time to communicate with each other. Selfishness has become a way of life because the system itself breeds it. There is no other way, so the condition is naturally unhealthy.

Schneider views the "big business" approach to theatre as a contributing factor to the decline of Broadway. Such an approach, he feels, has produced a system "concerned with prices, but not with values; with profits not benefits."⁶² Broadway has become a stock

⁵⁹ Schumach, op. cit.

⁶⁰ Alan Schneider, "Has Broadway Had It?" The New York Times, November 23, 1969.

⁶¹ Alan Schneider, "Director as Dogsboddy," Theatre Quarterly, vol. 3 (April-June, 1973), p. 29.

⁶² Schneider, "Has Broadway Had It?" op. cit.

market where, because of the emphasis on profit, ticket costs have risen to offset the rising costs. Producers, concerned more with keeping the profit margin stable than with maintaining a high level of quality at reasonable prices, have become entrepreneurs exclusively. Though he did not elaborate on the details, Schneider once expressed to the writer his displeasure with the manner in which his production of Michael Wellers' Moonchildren was handled after David Merrick assumed control and took the play to Broadway. Although the show had been acclaimed as a success, Schneider called the Broadway venture a "disastrous mistake" because Merrick "had no respect for the show."⁶³ Whatever the specific reasons for his disenchantment with Merrick were, his remark reveals his belief that a producer has to be as much a part of a production as anyone else, that he has to be interested in something more than just money.

The profit has furthermore had an undesirable effect on the quality of Broadway productions in Schneider's opinion. The seasons all seem to be rather equal, though some, he says, tend to be less equal than others.⁶⁴ A fear of losing money has led Broadway to "low standards and bad tastes and boredom."⁶⁵ Few theatres are willing to take the chance which, in Schneider's opinion, keeps theatres alive. The increased awareness of costs has made technical experimentation

⁶³ Parks, op. cit., p. 126.

⁶⁴ Alan Schneider, "The New York Season," International Theatre Annual no. 2, Harold Hobson, Editor (New York: Doubleday, 1957), p. 11.

⁶⁵ Schneider, "Has Broadway Had It?" op. cit.

prohibitive.⁶⁶ Thus, the profit motive has had a diminishing effect on the quality of the Broadway theatre.

When Schneider came to the Broadway scene, regional or resident theatres had barely begun to operate. The relief from the pressures of Broadway were then provided by the blossoming off-Broadway movement. The essence of off-Broadway to Schneider was that it represented a new way of thinking. "Off-Broadway," he pointed out, "is not a matter of geography but of psychology...it is not a place but an idea."⁶⁷ Because it was an idea and a spirit, the need for it transcended the need for money. Schneider has since recalled that the budget for Endgame at the Cherry Lane Theatre was limited, but it was a limitation the people could live with. The financial load was assumed by those who worked on the show. They toiled for almost nothing and virtually subsidized the production.⁶⁸ And as long as that particular philosophy remained intact, Schneider remained with off-Broadway.

Schneider gladly welcomed the original idea behind off-Broadway. "Off-Broadway has grown," he declared, "as a symptom of the dissatisfaction."⁶⁹ It was that dissatisfaction with Broadway that led him

⁶⁶ Greenberger, op. cit., p. 66.

⁶⁷ Alan Schneider, "Off-Broadway: An Infinite Capacity for Almost Anything," International Theatre Annual, no. 3, Harold Hobson, editor (London: John Calder Ltd., 1968), p. 98.

⁶⁸ Greenberger, op. cit., p. 75.

⁶⁹ Booth, op. cit., p. 24.

to direct almost all of Edward Albee's and Samuel Beckett's plays off-Broadway. There was the feeling that the nature of their plays would benefit from the more imaginative atmosphere of the off-Broadway environment. Schneider took Endgame off-Broadway because he knew the play had a limited audience. He had already directed Krapp's Last Tape off-Broadway because, he said, it "just had to be done off-Broadway."⁷⁰ Even Virginia Woolf, which eventually opened on Broadway, was actually intended for off-Broadway. "I thought," Schneider said later, "Broadway was not ready for it."⁷¹ He recollects from his experience with producer Richard Barr and Edward Albee that it was actually rehearsed under off-Broadway conditions. "They never impressed us," he says of the production, "with the feeling that the play had to be a hit."⁷² Off-Broadway represented a place where he could work with a sense of creativity that could simply not be realized in the more commercial theatres. Success was certainly not assured, but then success was never Schneider's purpose for going there. "I never went to off-Broadway to be discovered," he later said. "I had been discovered. I went there in order to work with better material under more creative conditions."⁷³ The fact that traditional barriers could be torn down provided such opportunities. In 1961 he told John Booth,

⁷⁰ Greenberger, op. cit., p. 69.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 74.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 75.

I think that anything that breaks down cliches, or the kind of bounds that the theatre always puts itself in, is good. And that, to me, is what is happening. We are dissatisfied with the institution of theatre--the form of theatre, the boundaries of theatres, the features of Broadway.⁷⁴

Virginia Woolf was a success not only because it was well received but also because there was the chance to try out ideas. "What was most satisfying to me," Schneider recalls, "was that the production was an actual application of the off-Broadway atmosphere and process we had learned."⁷⁵

As early as 1958, Schneider began to sense a trend in off-Broadway which was to later cause him to seek refuge elsewhere. The quality that had once separated it from Broadway was beginning to fade. He wrote,

There can be no question that the character of off-Broadway operation had changed, not always for the better. Some of the very daring which led to its creation has now been stifled by its very expansion.⁷⁶

The prosperity of off-Broadway eventually fostered the same type of value system characteristic of Broadway. Suddenly it was no longer the source of creativity where Schneider could work. It had become simply a small Broadway showcase. In 1961 he had been optimistic about the future of the theatre, but the optimism he expressed apparently failed to materialize because ten years later he was to revise

⁷⁴ Booth, op. cit.

⁷⁵ Greenberger, op. cit.

⁷⁶ Schneider, "An Infinite Capacity for Almost Anything," op. cit.

his thinking somewhat: "I hope that in the next decade the term 'off-Broadway' will simply mean non-profit theatre regardless of size."⁷⁷ Whatever the future motives of off-Broadway are, one fact remains clear: the idea which gave rise to off-Broadway, the tearing down of barriers, must exist before theatre can be a place where Schneider can work.

Just as off-Broadway once offered an escape from the pressures of Broadway, so has the regional or resident theatre come to occupy a similar position. For that reason Schneider views the resident theatre as perhaps the closest thing to a significant form of American theatre. In fact he once referred to the resident theatres as "national equivalents" of the off-Broadway concept in the sense that they provided the same feeling of creative development and continuity that off-Broadway theatres did at the time the statement was made.⁷⁸ Of course the same pitfalls which have since beset the off-Broadway movement are just as threatening to resident theatres, but the capacity to grow into a traditional American theatre definitely exists.

If off-Broadway was basically a good idea, then the resident theatre, as Schneider sees it, is a better one. Referring to his place at the Arena Stage in Washington, he quite honestly says,

Here I have an office. I come in at ten in the morning.
It's a theatre. It's an organization....I feel respectable.

⁷⁷ Greenberger, op. cit., p. 76.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 77.

I really enjoy that. I like to have a desk. I like to have a telephone. I think the resident theatre has a sense of a place with a little dignity.⁷⁹

By contrast the theatres off-Broadway were rather cramped and inadequate. More importantly they lacked money and organization. Consequently, Schneider readily admits, Endgame, originally performed at the Cherry Lane Theatre, would have been a better production at the Arena.⁸⁰ The resident theatre, with its increased structure and stability, can better perform the kind of work that off-Broadway gave rise to.

A major advantage of the resident theatre which Schneider is quick to point out is increased possibilities of employment. "When I first started," he recollects, "I had the choice of coming to New York or of directing amateurs...Today I have at least the professional opportunity of directing not only in New York but also in Washington, San Francisco, Houston, Stratford," and the list goes on and on.⁸¹ There are simply more organizations in which to work. A major advantage of the resident theatre, therefore, is to provide professional work outside New York.

Although the general idea behind the resident theatre is strongly consistent with Schneider's concept of theatre, there are particular qualities which, he feels, must exist if a resident theatre is to

⁷⁹ Parks, op. cit., p. 124.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Alan Schneider, "Theatre, Not Shows," The New York Times, October 28, 1962.

provide a healthy environment. The basis of any good theatre, for example, is a strong and dynamic, home-based artistic director who has a definite point of view. His attitudes and philosophies will shape the direction of the theatre. Schneider also believes the audience must have some degree of intelligence and affluency so that theatre-going becomes a social amenity. First-class acting and directing must be present. With those qualities Schneider feels that a number of companies have furnished their geographic locations with outstanding theatre.

The advantages of the resident theatre are particularly attractive to Schneider. Theatre becomes a local experience because such theatre has its own point of view based, to a great degree, on its locale. It thus becomes a source of pride within the community and thereby involves a larger group of people. Increased convenience in purchasing tickets becomes a reality. The subscription has emerged as a product of the resident system and has provided lower costs to the public, thus making theatre more available to the community. The resident theatres are generally more convenient than New York theatres in terms of capacity, parking, and general comfort of the theatre-goer.

Another source of compatibility between Schneider's concept and the resident theatre is stability. The pressure of struggling for the long run is gone, and tension is thereby eased within the company. An actor's employment is also much more secure in the resident theatre. While an actor cannot expect to be in every single show, he can be assured that he is still a part of the company. Because of this sense

of permanence he can spend the time between productions training instead of looking for another job. While high pay may not necessarily characterize an actor's association with a resident theatre, job security does.

About eight years ago Schneider began to feel about the resident theatre a few of those misgivings which have been typical of his attitude. Inasmuch as off-Broadway has since followed the path of Broadway and lost its identity, the capacity for such a direction also exists in resident theatres. With few exceptions, Schneider said in 1967, "they're just putting on shows. The whole idea of an individual experience had disappeared."⁸² Thus, he has pinpointed the same difficulty in the resident theatres that has characterized the whole of American theatre, the tendency to be too easily satisfied. The impetus which gave rise to them has now diminished because they are overly cautious. New playwrights are not being introduced, and new production styles are not being developed. Progressive theatre, he feels, must not settle for answers; it can only search for new ones.

Although Schneider has worked primarily in the more formal structure of theatre, he has been receptive to the work of the purely experimental groups. "I take from everybody whether I'm aware of it or not," he says. "I've been influenced by many experiences."⁸³ The chief contribution of experimental groups to Schneider's work has been

⁸² Lewis Funke, "Broadway-Regional Theatre Link Cited by Arts Chief," The New York Times, April 17, 1967.

⁸³ Parks, op. cit., p. 132.

the wildness, the daring, and the theatricality. The Living Theatre attracted him especially with The Connection: "I thought it was just terrific except I got tired of being yelled at."⁸⁴ Joe Chaikin's Open Theatre has also elicited a favorable response, primarily because of the down-to-earth nature of the experimentation. When experimental groups have offered something with which Schneider could identify, he has responded positively.

The removal of humanity, so to speak, the removal of identity with what goes on on the stage, has been one of Schneider's chief objections to experimental groups. The theatre should be, he feels, human, and the people in the theatre should be human. A theatre can get people angry, happy, upset, or interested. But they should not be removed.⁸⁵ While he attended many shows of the Living Theatre, he reached a point, especially with Frankenstein, where he no longer knew "what the hell they were doing."⁸⁶ Likewise with Grotowsky, Schneider watched with increased disenchantment. "I just got a little nervous at all the high art," he commented and went on to say that because of the "high art" he felt as if he were watching an abstract, non-human show. "He's taken it away from me," Schneider complained. "I can't get involved."⁸⁷ While the ritualism of many experimental

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

groups represents a movement back to the simple and the primitive, it also possesses a kind of exclusion. "Ritual means I have to belong to religion," he has objected. "If I'm not religious then the ritual doesn't mean a thing."⁸⁸ In some instances, Schneider has noted, the ritual has declined into simple form without content, and he cites Richard Schechner's group as an example of this.⁸⁹ To Schneider even experimental groups have a responsibility to their audiences to be a thing shared and understood by all.

Schneider's concept does not include only the professional theatre but demands the same qualities and standards of excellence from the university level as well. The list of colleges and universities where he has worked indicates, if nothing else, more than merely a passing interest in university theatre. His knowledge of the university theatre is founded on a considerable amount of experience. From that experience he has not only maintained a sympathetic view toward university theatre but has realized the potential of it. "I used to have great faith in the university theatre," he says. "To some extent, I still do."⁹⁰ His faith is based on the belief that it can function as any theatre ought to.

Schneider has developed very definite attitudes toward the functions and capabilities of the university theatre. Each university

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 133.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 126.

theatre should develop its own viewpoint and establish its own function, which may be to train actors, directors, scholars, or playwrights. It can even be instrumental in teaching audiences. It can prepare its young people to go on to academies and conservatories for more extensive training. But within its function, Schneider insists, the university must deal with theatre organically, with theatre at that particular time and place. It must not isolate theatre and leave it "stuck off in some ivory tower doing Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay. It's got to do Sam Shepard."⁹¹ As long as it remains a part of the present, it can be valuable.

In spite of its potential, Schneider is quick to point out the limitations of the university theatre program. It cannot prepare young actors as effectively as professional schools can. He says,

I don't see how an actor can be trained if he spends a thirty semester hour year--sixteen hours in liberal arts, eight hours in social sciences, and six to eight hours training to be an actor. That's not enough.⁹²

But he quickly adds that he does not expect such a program to be enough. In fact, a major improvement in the attitudes of the universities has been, he thinks, an acknowledgement of the fact that university training is just that and no more. It can provide a valuable period of growing, maturing, and coming of age, but to expect the university to be able to prepare young actors for the professional stage is unrealistic. Universities simply cannot compete with the Julliard School or the Goodman. "But I don't consider that a

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 127.

⁹² Ibid., p. 128.

deficiency," he says. "I consider only a lack of realization a deficiency."⁹³

A problem with university theatre which, in Schneider's opinion, is quite unnecessary is excessive caution and commercialism. In fact, he thinks university theatres are becoming more cautious than professional theatres. The reason lies in an over-awareness of budget. What universities should do, he says, is to take advantage of the fact that they are subsidized to a great degree. Because they are more independent of the box office than professional theatres, they can more easily afford to experiment. But the university cannot provide leadership if it patterns its program after last season on Broadway or if it becomes too sensitive to the plays that tend to pay for themselves.

While he tends to sympathize with the university theatre, Schneider's demands on the university are no less stringent than they are on the professional level. He is well aware of its limitations and accepts them so long as the university realizes them as well. Within these limitations he sees a potential: "I think the opportunity or potentialities of the university are only beginning to be glimpsed."⁹⁴ In order for these potentialities to materialize, the university must be willing to seek new experiences as the professional theatre. Like any other American theatre, the university theatre has its place and

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 127.

its responsibilities.

If Schneider's philosophy of theatre were to be capsulized into one objective, it would be to find an acceptable American tradition. His search has spanned three decades, several continents, and various levels of American theatre. The philosophy which has come about as a result of that search has been taken from many sources, but the chief significance has been that Schneider has used his work as a means of applying and putting into effect his concepts. This chapter has dealt with those general philosophies, attitudes, and ideas which serve as a basis for his work. This overview has been necessary before any examination of his production and administrative practices could be given. The force of Alan Schneider as a director stems directly from the stability of his concept, the conviction that he knows where he is in relation to the modern theatre.

III. AN APPLICATION OF IDEAS

If Alan Schneider's concept of theatre provides an insight to his significance as a director, it supplies only a partial picture. Equally important has been the implementation of his concept. Schneider's entire approach to production has reflected his ideas about theatre and the experience upon which those ideas are based. The following chapter will examine several of his practices and will relate them to the ideas which have already been discussed.

Schneider's approach to production today is partially the result of influential forces early in his career. When he studied at Cornell in 1940, he was, of course, influenced by the practices there. He has since recounted his experiences there, saying,

The faculty was at that time primarily concerned with the non-realistic theatre, as well as with certain decorative and stylistic aspects of speech and movement...I followed their lead. The design of my early productions tended to consist of scenic elements, music and dance, patterns of movement, arrangements of levels and platforms. I planned each movement and position carefully in advance and marked it exactly in my production script.¹

This visual and theatrical approach to theatre remained with him for the first six or seven years of his career. A mathematical precision characterized his productions in which actors "were little

¹ Alan Schneider, "A Tale of Two Cities," Ten Talents in the American Theatre, David H. Stevens, editor (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), p. 80.

better than puppets."² Schneider recalls from those early productions:

I would take note during dress rehearsals about an actor's being a foot too far right, instead of concerning myself about the meaning of what the actor was doing in the scene. In other words, at the time, Meyerhold seemed more important than Stanislavski.³

His extremism in this direction would soon lessen to a moderate degree as other influences affected him, but theatricality would always remain a significant factor in his work.

Schneider's exposure to Lee Strasberg in 1948 represented a milestone in his career in that it modified his entire approach to direction. Today Schneider says of Strasberg, "He has taught me more about acting and, therefore, about directing than anyone else has, before or after."⁴ The change was produced by new directorial awarenesses: "Drummond [A. M. Drummond of Cornell] made me generally aware of certain aspects of the theatre; Lee made me aware of certain specific problems of the actor and the director."⁵ These ideas concerned the actor and the actor's needs because that was the essence of Lee Strasberg and the Actor's Studio. "The whole emphasis was on the actor as the fundamental creative stimulus," Schneider explains. "The director's work was to make an actor do what was necessary."⁶

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 84.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Jean-Claude van Itallie, "An Interview with Alan Schneider," Transatlantic Review, no. 10 (Summer, 1962), p. 15.

Not too surprisingly, considering what Schneider's directorial background was at that time, Strasberg was very critical of Schneider's work. "He made me consider not just the lines of a play," he recalls, "but the life of a play out of which the lines spring."⁷ Strasberg's approach was a sharp contrast to Schneider's early theatricalist tendencies and proved to be instrumental in helping him establish his present position.

Today Schneider's stand, directorially speaking, ranges somewhere between theatricalism and realism. As he told Richard Schechner, "To the theatricalist guys, I tend to be a realistic director, a Stanislavski-oriented director; to the Stanislavski guys, I'm a theatricalist director."⁸ He considers himself to occupy a middle ground, his strongest influence coming from both sides, the realistic style of Stanislavski and the more theatrical styles of Brecht and Beckett. A result of this occupation of the middle ground is the lack of a dogma. "To me a production is an exploration," he says. "And increasingly over the years, I know less and less of how I'm going to achieve what I vaguely sense or feel."⁹ Because he rests between two different poles, he resists confinement by any doctrine.

Schneider's own experiences in becoming a director have affected his views toward the training of new directors. "I think a director

⁷ Schneider, op. cit., p. 85.

⁸ Alan Schneider, "Reality is not Enough," Tulane Drama Review, vol. 9 (Spring, 1962), p. 120.

⁹ Ibid.

should be an actor," he says. "He should be trained as an actor in a conservatory. He should be experienced as an actor, working with other directors as an actor."¹⁰ Directing is a craft, he has said on another occasion, to be passed on from one generation to another. The task is a difficult one in that it cannot be taught in a classroom with a text. It requires instead a long period of apprenticeship, of observation, of growing into an understanding of what a director is. Such a process mirrors Schneider's desire for a theatre where young actors work continuously under the guidance of a number of different directors for long periods of time.

Schneider's interpretation of the role of director is organic in that it grows naturally out of his concept of theatre as a whole. The director gives life to a play by serving as a vital link between playwright and actor. The success of his function depends upon his realization that the focus of the theatre must be not on him or upon the actor but upon the play itself. Such is the essence of the director as Schneider envisions him.

The director actually represents a paradox in the modern theatre to Schneider. He has referred to the director's role as a necessary evil. "Normally speaking," he explains, "an actor can't watch himself from the outside. He hasn't got a sense of perspective."¹¹ The director's task of objectively observing for the purpose of constructive

¹⁰ George Parks, "An Interview with Alan Schneider" (Unpublished interview conducted in Washington on March 7, 1974), see Appendix, p. 146.

¹¹ van Itallie, op. cit., p. 13.

criticism is a necessary one. At the same time the role is subordinate to the role of the playwright in that a director does not provide a text but only supervises the execution of it. Too often, Schneider concludes, a director strays beyond the limits of this function.

Schneider's premise regarding the director's position is that he has "to mediate between producer and playwright about cuts, to spar for status with the stars, to soothe the ruffled egos for almost everyone."¹² Among these volatile elements he must make things happen even though he does not have the responsibility for doing them himself. Instead he is a catalyst, taking what is in the text and making it alive. Or he pictures himself another way:

The director is a kind of editor. As a matter of fact, I think there's a real analogy between the editor and a director, and I certainly don't figure an editor as important as the guy who wrote the original sentence.¹³

His position is precarious because while he is essential to the development of a production, he has no place in it. The play is not his; it belongs to the playwright. The performance is not his; it belongs to the actors. Yet without him, the playwright cannot see the full potential of his work, and the actors cannot see themselves objectively enough to improve their performances.

However essential a director may be to a production, Schneider

¹² Alan Schneider, "I Can't Go On; I'll Go On," The American Theatre, 1970-1971, International Theatre Institute of the United States, editor (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 107.

¹³ van Itallie, op. cit.

looks upon his plight in the theatre as an unfair one. He takes it in stride, declaring, "Despair is normal in our work; it's the nature of the beastliness."¹⁴ And yet, he admits, the director receives more than his share of despair. He cannot try out as the actor can. Even the playwright's work exists in print and can be evaluated by prospective producers. But the director's work, like that of so many other creative artists, must be seen before it can be evaluated. Moreover, once a director does manage to direct a play, he is in danger of being stereotyped. Schneider states,

Because I've done so many small cast, elliptical plays lately, most producers assume I would be terror-stricken with more than four people in the cast. Actually I would be delighted for a change.¹⁵

Schneider furthermore sees the American director as a victim of a success-oriented culture. And while he is skeptical of the use of success--success in the commercial sense--as a valid criterion by which directors should be evaluated, he acknowledges it as a very definite factor in the life of a director:

Very few persons with power in the theatre are qualified to differentiate between talent and success. So the director knows that he can succeed only by being successful, not just by doing good work. Therefore, he is doomed to be nervous about not being successful.¹⁶

In short, the director's position is turbulent and not for the weak-willed.

¹⁴ Schneider, "I Can't Go On; I'll Go On," op. cit., p. 105.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 107.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Beyond the confines of the theatre, Schneider observes, are the theatre-goers whose idea of a director is, at best, vague. He is seen as a combination of stage manager and traffic policeman, one who tells actors where to go and what to do on stage.¹⁷ The public may find a "good" or "bad" in evaluating a director's work, Schneider says, or people may use "uneven" to describe his work, rarely stopping to explain what they mean by such vague terms. The director's role, insofar as the theatrical public is concerned, is generally shadowy.

The director, Schneider feels, must be aware of what the playwright means to the theatre and must strive to make the playwright heard. He once compared the director to a midwife who assists at the birth of babies.¹⁸ If he is to be assured of healthy babies, he must respect them and the one who gave them life. Edward Albee has noted and appreciated this attitude in Schneider, saying, "Alan's great virtue is this: His main concern is getting the playwright's work on the stage the way the playwright intended it. Too many directors are interested only in doing the splashy thing."¹⁹ Schneider's reaction to his own production of Endgame illustrates rather well this attitude toward the director's task. "Certainly this one

¹⁷ Alan Schneider, "The Director's Role," The New York Times, August 8, 1948.

¹⁸ van Itallie, op. cit., p. 22.

¹⁹ Alan Levy, "The A*B*B* of Alan Schneider," The New York Times, October 20, 1963.

came very near to what I wanted to do," he said, "which was to carry out Beckett's specific ideas."²⁰ The director, he maintains, does not attempt to "put something over on the playwright or to take credit from the playwright or to do something apart from the playwright."²¹ It is instead a process of determining what it is the playwright wants said and the best way of saying it, taking from the text that which comprises dramatic action. A director will take "what's in the text, some of which the author knows, some of which the author doesn't know, and bring it out on stage."²²

Essential in serving the playwright, Schneider feels, is the need to define the relationships which the playwright has created. "To me," he told Jean-Claude van Itallie, "a play is a series of relationships. A dramatic action, to me, means a change in relationship."²³ It is that change which constitutes the director's prime concern. Stated another way, he says,

The playwright proposes. The actor disposes. The director defines. He defines psychological relationships created by the author, defines them clearly and exactly and consistently and repeatedly.²⁴

These changes thus become his center of attention.

²⁰ Howard Greenberger, The Off-Broadway Experience, (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 67.

²¹ Arthur Cantor and Stuart W. Little, The Playmakers (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1971), p. 153.

²² Parks, op. cit., p. 130.

²³ van Itallie, op. cit., p. 13.

²⁴ Schneider, "The Director's Role," op. cit.

Schneider's career as a director has been characterized by close relationships with a number of playwrights. Carrying out a writer's intention, for Schneider, begins with a respect for the writer and, in turn, for his work. Of Pinter, for example, he has said,

I think he's terrific to direct...extraordinarily difficult. Also rewarding and strange and impossible and crystal clear. I've always loved Pinter. I loved him when no one else would do him. He's a theatre man. He's demanding but understanding, flexible but rigid, complimentary but severe.²⁵

Once asked how difficult Pinter was to direct, he replied, "On a scale of one to ten? Eleven."²⁶

Schneider's relationship with Edward Albee has also reflected a tremendous amount of admiration. When Albee was writing prolifically in the mid-sixties, Schneider was keenly aware of his potential in terms of "emotional wallop and his use of language."²⁷ And to Alan Levy he described Albee as:

Seething. Smoldering. You always feel lava ready to erupt. An intelligent, aware individual today has to recognize somewhere in Albee the stirring of his own viscera, the shadow of his own self-knowledge.²⁸

Albee represented to Schneider a mystique which possessed a kind of magnetic and mysterious quality, distant but very present. As he was later to recollect his early experiences with Albee, Schneider said,

²⁵ Parks, op. cit., p. 145.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Schneider, "Reality is not Enough," op. cit., p. 150.

²⁸ Levy, op. cit.

He was not as easy to talk to then as he is now. I hardly got to know him at all during rehearsals, yet watching him I sensed there was below his surface calm a tremendous intensity, like molten lava.²⁹

Today Schneider still maintains his admiration for Albee even though it has been almost ten years since he last directed for him. And after Albee's play Seascape Schneider commented, "I think he's only begun to write."³⁰ Within two months after that statement, Albee won a Pulitzer Prize for the play.

Schneider's respect for Samuel Beckett knows almost no bounds. "I have rarely been moved by a modern playwright to the extent that I've been moved when I read the plays of Beckett," he has said in summing up quite succinctly the reason for such admiration.³¹ After meeting with Beckett in London in the mid-fifties prior to the Miami production of Godot, Schneider came away "wanting to do nothing more than please him. I came with respect; I left with a greater measure of devotion than I have ever felt for a writer whose work I was engaged in translating to the stage."³² Schneider's respect for Beckett spurred him on time after time to direct Beckett in faithful fashion.

Faithfulness to the playwright has produced some rather uncomfortable situations for Schneider. He has on occasion explained what

²⁹ Greenberger, op. cit., p. 70.

³⁰ Parks, op. cit., p. 129.

³¹ van Itallie, op. cit., p. 17.

³² Alan Schneider, "Waiting for Beckett," Chelsea Review, no. 2 (Autumn, 1958), p. 8.

he means by the term:

Faithfulness doesn't mean doing just what's in the script. It's that I bring forth onto the stage what the script suggests. That's my function. And I bring forth always more than is in the script, always less than the script makes possible.³³

It is not a passive, inert state in which the director is void of his own thoughts and ideas. "Of course I make my comment," he says, "But it's always from the text. I'm not a neutral jelly through which this great viscous liquid passes. But I don't try to distort it."³⁴

Schneider does not regard fidelity to the playwright as being a kind of variable, dependent on the reactions to a production. A director must be prepared in advance for whatever reactions may come. "In all the Beckett plays I get credit and blame for following Beckett's intentions," he explains. "Rightly or wrongly, I consider that to be my responsibility."³⁵ Obviously, it is a responsibility which others have recognized in him. Clurman, for instance, called him Beckett's "obedient servant" in Play,³⁶ and Brooks Atkinson commented that "under Mr. Schneider's bustling and perceptive direction...Mr. Beckett is getting an intelligent hearing."³⁷ Albee has frequently referred to Schneider's adherence to the playwright's

³³ Parks, op. cit., p. 130.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Schneider, "Reality is not Enough," op. cit., p. 129.

³⁶ Harold Clurman, "Theatre," Nation, vol. 198 (January 27, 1964), p. 106.

³⁷ Brooks Atkinson, "Endgame," The New York Times, January 29, 1958.

intent. Richard Barr, the producer with whom Schneider worked for a number of years, relates that it was such a quality that attracted him and Clinton Wilder in the first place.

We had known of Alan's work but we had not met him, nor had we known how faithful he was to a playwright's intention, as opposed to the many directors who superimpose their own personality, distort, and actually change texts without the playwright's permission even though he is present. Alan will have none of them, and we were impressed with the way he worked.³⁸

Brooks Atkinson on another occasion reacted to Endgame by perceiving Schneider's adherence to Beckett's wishes: "Whether or not his (Beckett's) theme is acceptable or rational, his director, Alan Schneider, has had the grace to take him at his own evaluation and stage his play seriously."³⁹

But Schneider has also been criticized because of his faithfulness to the text. Tiny Alice is perhaps the most vivid example. Critic Martin Gottfried saw in Schneider's production a lack of initiative, claiming that "a more independent director would have demanded revisions and cuts, and while Schneider managed to have the endless speeches trimmed, it was only a start."⁴⁰ He continued with a higher opinion of William Ball's production of the same play. Albee had previously complained of Ball's departure from what the play was

³⁸ Richard Barr, "The Problems of the Producer," The American Theatre Today, Alan S. Downer, editor (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1967), p. 105.

³⁹ Atkinson, op. cit.

⁴⁰ Martin Gottfried, A Theatre Divided (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), p. 269.

trying to say, but Gottfried questioned Albee's right to be unhappy with it. Art, he insisted, inspires different reactions within different people. Robert Brustein had similarly criticized Schneider's production of Happy Days, saying that while the production was based on strict fidelity to the author's intention, it simply never transcended "the basic requirement of the text to achieve an imaginative creativity of its own."⁴¹ To these criticisms Schneider angrily answered,

I have every interpretation, but I don't necessarily have to send colored balls up into the air! I thought Bill Ball's interpretation was just nuts, nothing to do with the play whatever. Fascinating as it was, it had nothing to do with the play.⁴²

Schneider is not immune to negative remarks by any means, and his strong convictions regarding the playwright's authority have led perhaps to much of the criticism he has experienced. "Most decisions about whether direction is good or bad," he says, "generally mean that the script itself is good or bad."⁴³ Schneider once commented to this writer, for example, that Entertaining Mr. Sloane was not an outstanding production. Nevertheless, he directed the show because he felt that both it and its playwright, Joe Orton, had merit. And he stood behind the play in spite of the negative criticism it received. Fidelity to the playwright is not a thing to be adjusted, he

⁴¹ Robert Brustein, "An Evening of Deja Vu," New Republic, vol. 147 (November 3, 1961), p. 45.

⁴² Parks, op. cit., p. 131.

⁴³ Schneider, "The Director's Role," op. cit.

he feels, to the greatest advantage of the director.

An integral part of Schneider's work in production is casting. Casting is easiest, he implies, when it operates under a company situation. "The fundamental problem," he has said of the situation at the Arena Stage, "remains the strength of the acting company."⁴⁴ The acting company presents a problem when it fails to maintain continuity. A group, he feels, works best if each member knows how to work with the rest. For the director this quality is important. "To start off," he says of Beckett's Play, "I chose actors whom I knew, who had worked with me at Arena, because I felt that specific demands...would require very cooperative actors."⁴⁵ Consequently, Schneider favors the company-type situation because he has a greater knowledge of each actor's capabilities.

Conversely, casting problems are worsened by the absence of a company situation. Schneider has cited distrust as well as a lack of knowledge and sensitivity among a cast that has been thrown together. "In a one-shot show," he suggests, "a great deal of your effort and energy goes into simply making things comfortable, seeing that it is possible for the actor who is talented to function at his best."⁴⁶ An unfortunate experience with Mary Martin in The Skin of Our Teeth demonstrated a lack of communication as well as a lack

⁴⁴ Alan Schneider, "Four in the Round," Theatre Arts, vol. 41 (April, 1957), p. 93.

⁴⁵ Schneider, "Reality is not Enough," op. cit.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 124.

of confidence between actor and director. The result was that she brought in her own director for the run of the show. Schneider blames much of the problem on his own insecurity with the actress and, moreover, feels that such incidents would be less likely to happen in a company situation, if they happened at all, because company members work together continuously and thereby come to trust each other. Then too a director usually finds himself in a more powerful position by the very nature of the repertory company and is generally in control.

Casting, Schneider contends, is not a task apart from the other areas of design in a production but demands as much attention as costumes, lighting, and sets. "Proper casting is a matter of interpretation," he says, "...almost half the battle."⁴⁷ Indeed finding Lester Rawlins for Endgame, Arthur Hill for Virginia Woolf, and Bert Lahr for Godot all presented steps toward the final product. Ruth White's performance in Happy Days was especially noted by the critics as one of Schneider's best casting jobs. Edith Oliver of The New Yorker credited the casting as being a chief factor in the play's success⁴⁸ while Harold Clurman likewise praised the casting of the same play.⁴⁹ Even the more negative remarks serve to illustrate the importance of

⁴⁷ Schneider, "The Director's Role," op. cit.

⁴⁸ Edith Oliver, "Off-Broadway," The New Yorker, vol. 37 (September 20, 1961), p. 119.

⁴⁹ Harold Clurman, "Theatre," Nation, vol. 193 (October 7, 1961), p. 235.

casting. For example, Clurman expressed concern with the casting of A Delicate Balance, commenting that while some of the parts were well cast others, notably those of Tobias and Edna, were not.⁵⁰

Schneider's experience with Buster Keaton in Film also serves as a significant casting problem. "One of the things I worried about in casting him," he relates, "was whether it would be possible to take this personality and make it fit into Beckett's purpose."⁵¹ Keaton's tremendous trademark personality, as it turned out, was right for the part, but casting him was by no means an easy decision. Nor has it ever been because it represents such a vital part of production.

Casting has become an even bigger issue with Schneider in later years because he has made greater demands on actors. "I'm not interested in being a teacher of actors while I'm directing," he insists. "As a matter of fact, I'm bloody annoyed at it."⁵² But his requirements have had their effects. "A lot of actors hate my guts because I make too many demands on them," he admits. "I can't just sit there and watch somebody who can do something not do it."⁵³ Such a definite and firm stand has dictated that he find actors who work well under such pressure. "I prefer to work with actors who are talented and willing," he says.⁵⁴ Casting the actor with whom a

⁵⁰ Harold Clurman, "Theatre," Nation, vol. 203 (October 10, 1966), p. 363.

⁵¹ Schneider, "Reality is not Enough," op. cit., p. 133.

⁵² Ibid., p. 126.

⁵³ Parks, op. cit., p. 146.

⁵⁴ Schneider, "Reality is not Enough," op. cit., p. 151.

director can best communicate thus becomes almost as important as fitting the actor to the part.

Another way in which Schneider has tried to establish some type of continuity in American theatre involves the manner in which he prepares the script. The rigidity with which a director prepares his script determines to a degree the freedom with which a cast can explore possibilities in rehearsal. It is during this period of script preparation that Schneider clarifies the ideas which he will take into rehearsal, but he takes care not to limit or confine the means by which he intends to take the cast to the final product.

The essence of Schneider's script preparation is finding out what the play is all about. "I always like to think I know something of what the play's about," he says. "Sometimes what I know is very analytical; sometimes it's very general; sometimes it doesn't mean anything to anybody but me."⁵⁵ Going further, he explains that he seeks not necessarily the play's theme but the play's attitude and point of view, the statement of the play. He tries to verbalize its meaning by writing it down in the script. "It's this old business that the Group used to call the 'spine,'" he points out. "I try to avoid terminology; that is, I don't care whether I express it in terms of a verb or one word or ten words or whatever."⁵⁶ Thus he seeks what lies beyond simple plot and theme; he seeks what he has referred

⁵⁵ van Itallie, op. cit., p. 14.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

to as the "organic self" of the play.

Having decided or discovered what a play is about, Schneider phrases a concept; that is, he no longer allows a play's meaning to lie beneath the surface unspoken. "What he needs most," he says of the director, "is an idea, an approach, a concept of what the play is about."⁵⁷ The director's idea is not arbitrary and based upon what he wishes to express but grows from what the play is all about. Schneider's concepts tend to be short and concise, sometimes meaningless to others. He explains, "I sit down and say, 'this is a ping-pong game,' or I say, 'this is like dinosaurs on a cliff,' as in Virginia Woolf."⁵⁸ Waiting for Godot, in Schneider's concept, is about an arrival that never takes place while Endgame is about a departure that never takes place. He has described Pinter's The Birthday Party as a play in which "somebody is after somebody else and gets 'em."⁵⁹ Of Beckett's Film he says, "It's a movie about the perceiving eye, about the perceived and the perceiver--two aspects of the same man."⁶⁰ Some of these spines or statements regarding the gist of a play may tend to be difficult to understand while others are obvious. For the most part concepts serve as a conceptualized

⁵⁷ Schneider, "The Director's Role," op. cit.

⁵⁸ Parks, op. cit., p. 136.

⁵⁹ William Goldman, The Season (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1969), p. 45.

⁶⁰ Calvin Kentfield, "Beckett," The New Yorker, vol. 40 (August 8, 1964), p. 22.

guideline for the director, but always they represent more than simply the whims of the director. They should be accurate reflections of what the playwright had in mind, even if they are stated in terms understood only the director.

Having established his concept, Schneider plots the route by which the play travels to its final destination. "The second thing I do," he explains, "is make little lines on the paper. These are the beats."⁶¹ He labels some of the beats; some he does not. The significance of this practice, he continues, is to make the director aware of the changes of relationship among the characters of the play. "A play consists of changing relationships," he elaborates as he has done before. "The playwright expresses these relationships implicitly through the script's structural patterns, its dialogue, and whatever stage directions there are."⁶² A change in relationship, whatever the cause, brings about a new beat and provides the dramatic action.

The nature of Schneider's preparatory work is more of an outline than of a specific plan. Rather than detail the specifics of a rehearsal--specific moves of an actor, specific inflections of the voice, specific reactions of a character--he leaves such matters to be ironed out in rehearsal. But he adds,

This does not mean that preparation is less intensive or that I will necessarily accept the first thing that happens in rehearsal. On the contrary, I must now be much more

⁶¹ Parks, op. cit.

⁶² Schneider, "The Director's Role," op. cit.

acquainted with the script's needs and requirements.⁶³

The important thing is to have an idea before entering a rehearsal.

"I have some idea," he says, "but I try not to let anybody know I have the idea."⁶⁴ That idea, he contends, must come from a concept based on the text. The director provides the idea, and the development of that idea is left for the rehearsals.

Schneider's approach to production design and production style represents a process which is the result of a collective effort by members of a stable production staff. Schneider has been fortunate in that the producing team of Richard Barr and Clinton Wilder, for whom he directed for many years, shared his views. Barr saw the production staff--directors, producers, designers--as a team in which "the playwright, of course, emerged as the boss."⁶⁵

Schneider's view of production design today depends quite heavily on theatricality. "My basic interest--the thing that unites Brecht and Beckett and Albee," he says, "is their intense theatricality."⁶⁶ He has also commented,

I like not something that simply reflects the surface of life but that deals with an intensification or an enlargement or an extension of life. Theatricality means dealing with reality by contrasting it to the specific realism of the thing that is everyday.⁶⁷

⁶³ Schneider, "A Tale of Two Cities," op. cit., p. 86.

⁶⁴ Schneider, "Reality is not Enough," op. cit., p. 147.

⁶⁵ Barr, op. cit.

⁶⁶ Levy, op. cit.

⁶⁷ Parks, op. cit., p. 131.

No play is ultimately realistic to Schneider. It is always a play, and that means being theatrical. It is not simply life; it is bigger. "I have always felt," he says, "that if a play simply said, 'this is exactly like life,' it wasn't nearly as interesting as another play that said, 'this is exactly like life, but I've twisted it around.'"⁶⁸ Theatricality does not serve as an opposing force to life and realism; it complements and accents it. Schneider has explained it still another way, saying,

There's no such thing as saying, "this is really life." But every play, no matter how realistic it is, has got to be theatrical. It's theatrical because the music plays at a certain time...On the other hand, no matter how theatrical a certain play is, it has to have a certain relationship to life or it has no truth. The two are always connected, but they are connected in different proportions. I mean, The Glass Menagerie is a very realistic play. Simultaneously, it's a very theatrical distortion.⁶⁹

Schneider sees a problem in the present attitude toward realism in the theatre in that there is too great a reluctance to openly acknowledge that a play is theatrical. He sums things up this way:

If we use "presentational" and "representational" in their theatrical sense, I think...much of our theatre is too representational. Some of our most exciting theatre comes from an understanding that a play is presentational, that we are seeing a play.⁷⁰

As a result of this attitude he feels that The Glass Menagerie is a superior piece of work to A View From the Bridge because it

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 132.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Kenneth M. Cameron and Theodore J. Hoffman, The Theatrical Response (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1969), p. 12.

acknowledges the theatrical.⁷¹

Theatricality has been a chief factor in the influence that Beckett, Brecht, Pinter, and Albee have had on Schneider. Beckett's means of intensifying, according to Schneider, has consisted in removing all that is unnecessary and leaving only the essential. "He is searching for the ultimate stripping down of his medium," he says. "He is trying to reduce the whole theatrical spectrum to a toneless voice in a disembodied head."⁷² Schneider justifies what Beckett does --much of which has gone misunderstood--because it is theatrical. Brecht's theatricality is "going in all directions in some kaleidoscopic manner...in a sense of sprawling, seeming disorder, but very rigidly controlled by his thematic material."⁷³ Pinter's theatricality, he says, lies in "a rhythmical, contrapuntal use of language, and repetition of words, playing on words...making some mystical thing out of the absolutely ordinary."⁷⁴ And Albee's theatricality is seen in words and emotions and sensationalism. While Schneider's career has been marked by a movement from theatricalism toward realism, he has remained heavily influenced by the theatricality of these men. He rests just left of center: "I've always been more theatrical than realistic."⁷⁵

⁷¹ Parks, op. cit.

⁷² Schneider, "Reality is not Enough," op. cit., p. 142.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 143.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Parks, op. cit., p. 131.

While the problems of designing the play rest with many people, Schneider insists that the director should have complete authority and control over the various aspects of design. In fact he chose the Cherry Lane Theatre, an off-Broadway house, for Endgame where he felt he could more likely have complete control of the production than he would have had on Broadway. The costume designer, for example, has the function of designing the costumes, but Schneider says, "I want to control my costume designer. That is, I want a costume designer with whom I can work. I don't want to be a dictator, but I want to be able to control."⁷⁶ The result of this type of work is a unified style, one edited by a single man even though it is the product of many. Instead of different concepts as seen by the costume, lighting, and set designers, it is a single concept. Schneider feels that a unified production style is possible only when the production staff works collectively under the control of the director.

The director's primary goal in design, Schneider feels, is coming up with the proper production style. "When you see a play," he says, "you should almost be able to tell the 'style' of the writer by the way in which the play is directed."⁷⁷ This idea directly reflects his concept of a playwright's theatre in which the style of the playwright instead of the director's style dominates. Of the style, he says,

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 125.

⁷⁷ van Itallie, op. cit., p. 16.

It's always from the text, some of which the author knows and some of which the author doesn't know, and I bring it out on stage...I do that by casting. I do it by the set. I do it by the lighting. I work from the events of the play...But I don't create them. I discover them.⁷⁸

The need for Schneider to find a proper production style has been particularly evident in the works of men such as Beckett and Albee. Events with which he has to work have not been logical and coherent by ordinary standards. His problem in designing such productions has been to make such happenings reasonably normal within the context of the play. Henry Hewes' criticism of The American Dream, for instance, stemmed from that idea:

One suspects that neither director Alan Schneider nor the playwright has quite found a style in which the action might not seem--as it now too frequently does--capricious and unrelated to the central dramatic event.⁷⁹

The same critic later said of Tiny Alice that he saw a much more effective production style which made full use of the play's content.⁸⁰

A key to establishing the production style of a play is defining the theatrical reality of the play. The director, Schneider feels, has to pinpoint only the realities that concern the playwright and subsequently the play: "I don't worry about other realities--where the electricity comes from, whether the toilet flushes--which are irrelevant to what is going on."⁸¹ This attitude is essential in

⁷⁸ Parks, op. cit., p. 130.

⁷⁹ Henry Hewes, "On Our Bad Behavior," Saturday Review, vol. 44 (February 11, 1961), p. 54.

⁸⁰ Henry Hewes, "Through the Looking Glass, Darkly," Saturday Review, vol. 48 (January 16, 1965), p. 40.

⁸¹ Cameron and Hoffman, op. cit., p. 262.

working with men such as Pinter, Albee, and Beckett, all of whom have a tendency to strip away everything that is not absolutely necessary. The result is a starkness which is difficult to work with. Rather than fill up a production with many unnecessary elements, Schneider feels that the director should be content to simply work with what he has. An example of this is the opening pantomime by Clov in Endgame: "We don't know for certain why Clov...performs the pantomime. But we know what he does. That's given us. We can find valid reasons for the 'why' that won't invalidate the 'what.'"⁸² If a playwright wishes to provide more than Beckett, then a director has more to work with. If a director has less to work with, he has to worry only about what he has been given.

Because Schneider has worked with writers who have tended to write economically and give only the essential, he has been able to use theatrical elements to great advantage without taking away from what the playwright wished to say. Where it was suggested that Beckett's works were so spare as to be cramping to the director, Schneider replied, "No, [Beckett's staging] isn't cramping, at least not in any really important sense...You can follow the stage directions scrupulously and still have tremendous [creative] areas in which to work."⁸³ Endgame serves as a good illustration of what he means. Here he took the liberty of bringing in properties that were not

⁸² Cameron and Hoffman, op. cit., p. 262.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 307.

specifically called for in the script. He supplied Clov with skis, paddles, rope, and miscellaneous gear designed for travel as a kind of theatrical device which, he felt, was in keeping with what Beckett had in mind. He later said, "I wanted to use snowshoes, too. As a kind of gag."⁸⁴ Another theatrical device he was able to use in the play was the combination of painted windows against real bricks. The use of such theatricalities, of course, depends on what the play allows. But once a play's production style has been defined, a director can then decide what he can use and what he cannot use.

Designing the play in terms of lighting, set, costumes, and the various other areas of production, Schneider believes, must come about through a process. One of the first things he tries to secure is the floor plan because it has the greatest bearing on his rehearsals. He has to get the design as concrete as he can as early as he can. "Once I have a floor plan," he says, "I've already blocked the details."⁸⁵ But the designer must be influenced by the director while drawing up the floor plan rather than be independent of him. Schneider recalls,

When I did my first consultation with a designer in the New York theatre, I had no contact with Jo Mielziner at all. He was too busy to talk to me. He had seventeen other shows. He just threw mine into the hopper. And when I arrived he handed me a floor plan. So there was no process.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 321.

⁸⁵ Parks, op. cit., p. 138.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 134.

So the process of design, as Schneider sees it, involves moving pieces of the technical puzzle about, so to speak, until the best combination is achieved without knowing beforehand what the final result will be. "The question of process," he insists, "is the one which you discover what the alternatives are...I mean, in a normal, civilized theatre you try it, you look at it; you say, 'no, it doesn't work.'"⁸⁷ The decision that something does not work should automatically bring about new alternatives. "One of my biggest contributions to Endgame," he remembers, "was to convince the set designer, David Hays (who is very talented), to reject his original sketch and wind up with the bare walls of the Cherry Lane Theatre."⁸⁸ In that case the process worked, producing a set which came closer to pleasing Schneider.

But Schneider complains that process does not exist, for the most part, in American theatre. He dislikes being asked to approve a set design before having a chance to look at it and examine it or even try it out to some extent. A stage manager working under Schneider once commented to the writer that props always had to undergo this same painstaking ordeal of finding, trying, and rejecting. And Schneider himself recalls,

I remember in Virginia Woolf the sofa was too small or too big, and we got a different sofa because the producer gave us his sofa. We'd already spent the money on the sofa.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Schneider, "Reality is not Enough," op. cit., p. 132.

But I had to pick up the sofa without looking at the set. I went to some department and picked the sofa. I went to another department and picked the chair.⁸⁹

At the Arena, he feels, there is a greater sense of continuity with designers trying to meet the director's desires, providing photographs of sets, material samples, and various alternatives from which he can choose. Process, he says, is the difference between theatre and show business.

Having problems of design well in hand, though not necessarily complete, staging comes to mind. While he once placed a tremendous amount of energy on the actual staging of the play, Schneider now regards it only as a tool which a director has at his disposal. Even so, factors involved in staging can be significant, and he refuses to dismiss them.

Schneider's early directorial practices completely revolved around staging the play. Directing was only a matter of plotting movements on stage.

In my first directing job, at Catholic University, I was concerned with what we now call "staging" a play. I staged it and then put in the production elements--music, scenery, lights, and so on--that way the play went on.⁹⁰

The process of staging would begin the first or second day of rehearsal for him. There was less emphasis on communicating the play's meaning to the actors than on putting the play up on the stage. The task of staging was "a kind of hit or miss method of moving actors

. 89 Parks, op. cit.

90 van Itallie, op. cit., p. 15.

around on stage to find interesting groupings that would have some meaning and rhythmical importance."⁹¹ The actor was a manipulated tool at the disposal of the director.

Schneider's contact with Lee Strasberg so altered his approach to staging that the pendulum swung too far in the opposite direction. So concerned with the actor was he that he tended to forget other aspects of production almost altogether. He became extremely concerned over how realistic the staging of the actor appeared.

I remember I did an Othello in which I was so concerned with the problem of the soliloquy, which seemed to me an artificial form, that I hit upon the great device of giving Othello a deaf-mute confidant who followed him like a dog, and to whom Othello could speak. I thought it was a great idea because it allowed the actor to speak realistically.⁹²

After five or six years he found a blend of the theatrical and the realistic means of staging. He moved away from specific and ordered blocking to character motivations and relationships, but he also stopped relating the reality of the play to the reality of the real outside world and began to accept the play on the playwright's terms.

Schneider's later years have reflected staging practices balanced between the theatrical and the realistic, but he has definitely maintained a firm grip on the theatrical. The Glass Menagerie provides an idea of his tendencies. He directed the play at the Arena in 1951. "I tried to make it real, detailed, and atmospheric in a

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

small arena theatre," he recalls of that production.⁹³ The influences of Strasberg were still fresh in his memory. Thirteen years later at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, however, his second production was "larger, more theatrical, bolder, more vigorous, accessible to a large audience."⁹⁴ His willingness to try new and more theatrical experiments was clearly evident. He introduced the father, who, of course, does not appear in the play, by having an actor followed by a pin spot enter from the aisle holding a picture frame in front of him. Schneider justified it by saying, "Theatrically, it was bold enough, and yet authentic enough, to achieve the result. I think anything, within the author's intention, that works--that the audience will accept--is all you're after."⁹⁵

Schneider's system of staging has become less structured because of less emphasis on the visual impact of a show and increased emphasis on character relationships. He says quite frankly, "I do not work with staging any more."⁹⁶ He no longer seeks or plans out particular groupings or pictures.

I'm going to balance it. There is such a thing as a picture. But pictures come out of dynamic representations of truth. If it's truthful, you'll find a way. But I don't sit down and make pictures.⁹⁷

⁹³ Schneider, "Reality is not Enough," op. cit., p. 121.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 126.

⁹⁶ Parks, op. cit., p. 137.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

What Schneider does, in terms of advanced staging work, is to become familiar with the key scenes of a play in order to develop some kind of idea. He then takes the staging idea into rehearsal and tries to lead his actors to it, but the idea is never spelled out. Consequently, a cast may change it or alter it in some way. The process then becomes a cooperative effort between director and actors in which the director subtly conveys the idea to the actors. The result is the staging. Problems sometimes occur, as they did in Virginia Woolf. "I normally want to stage things fairly rapidly," Schneider says, but the script was a difficult one, and "there were too many imponderables."⁹⁸ Time was short, so attention was given to staging. The work, he recalls, was fast, so he had to have that basic idea in mind when he began rehearsals in order to work quickly. Due to the nature of the play there could really be little more than an idea.

Schneider views the rehearsal as a process of going somewhere without really knowing where the destination is. He has referred to the rehearsal with the term that the French use: an attempt. The rehearsal is an attempt to reveal things to both the director and the actor. Knowing the final result is not always possible, he says, and a rehearsal is a means of finding out what the result is. "But I'm supposed to have some ultimate result," he complains, "and I don't know what the hell the result is."⁹⁹ So he does not enter

⁹⁸ Schneider, "Reality is not Enough," op. cit., p. 147.

⁹⁹ Parks, op. cit., p. 135.

a rehearsal with preconceived notions but goes in only with an idea.

As he puts it,

I tend to consider what each character wants and what he is doing, thinking, sensing at the moment, not what he happens to be saying or where he has to move; that is, I consider what is really happening in terms of the circumstances surrounding the scene rather than the lines. Naturally I still plan basic essentials of position and movement, but I allow the actors to fill in and change things as we go along.¹⁰⁰

Rehearsals can thus be regarded as attempting to do whatever is necessary instead of regimenting the actors into a picture already drawn.

Actual rehearsal for Schneider follows loose schedule which often means no schedule at all. For example, he does not demand that an actor have lines memorized by a given date. Nor does he have a formal period of reading rehearsals followed by a formal series of blocking rehearsals followed by working and polishing rehearsals. "The schedule is to serve me," he says. "If I'm supposed to do Act II but Act I needs more work, then I'll do Act I."¹⁰¹ Rehearsals thus remain loose and flexible and subject to change.

A lot of time is given to initial readings. This period of up to a week or more tends to create an atmosphere of communication and exploration. "In the case of The Cherry Orchard," Schneider relates, "I took more than a week on this stage of rehearsal, including a day or two in trying various improvisations with various floor plans."¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Schneider, "A Tale of Two Cities," op. cit.

¹⁰¹ Parks, op. cit., p. 139.

¹⁰² Schneider, "A Tale of Two Cities," op. cit., p. 88.

With Virginia Woolf and a limited rehearsal period, only three days were spent reading and questioning: "We tried to get a basic tempo, a basic texture, just vocally, so that the lines would be easier."¹⁰³ Different circumstances demand different approaches.

While staging the play is normally a rapid process for Schneider, blocking it is not. He has indicated his desire to get a play up quickly, yet blocking takes him up to two weeks. "I never just block a show," he says.¹⁰⁴ And watching a Schneider rehearsal can explain why blocking takes as long as it does. He will not tell an actor to stand here or to cross there unless there is a technical reason for it or unless the script demands it. In The Last Meeting of the Knights of the White Magnolia several actors had to be in particular spots on stage so that a wheelchair could be properly manipulated. For this and similar technicalities Schneider would tell them to stand farther to the left or right. Otherwise he simply provided an actor with a reason for moving or staying without actually having to tell him to move or stay. One almost got the feeling that he was not directing at all but that the actors were really blocking the show by themselves. The movement that results, therefore, is more than a mechanical mapping out. It is instead an organic growth of the text.

After watching the actors run a particular scene a number of times during a Schneider rehearsal, one becomes aware that things do not always proceed exactly the same way every time. Experiencing a

¹⁰³ Schneider, "Reality is not Enough," op. cit.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

scene each time is different, and reactions are not always the same. There seems to remain a sense of exploration; that is, blocking is never so fixed that actors are hemmed in. In response to this observation, Schneider comments,

I let them explore until we close the show. I don't want them to suddenly stand on the table or cross to the sofa any old time they want. I don't believe in that. But if they decide they want to change something, if they're uncomfortable--I change things all the time.¹⁰⁵

This type of freedom characterized the alternate production of Virginia Woolf which followed the premiere production. One actor, Sheperd Strudwick, commented, "The general stage positions are the same, but Alan Schneider, our director, gave us tremendous freedom."¹⁰⁶ Schneider's method of blocking obviously takes longer and requires a greater knowledge of the script and its characters, but it is no longer an arbitrary matter of placing bodies on a stage. Once it is established, it is a part of the very lives of the characters.

The director in rehearsal, Schneider says, should be a kind of editor. He recalls Helen Hayes' request to him: "Edit me, Alan. Don't direct me."¹⁰⁷ Seeing the value in her comment, Schneider has adjusted his function to one of guiding: "I don't tell an actor what to do. I stimulate him to his highest creativity...I edit the actor. I say, give me a comma here instead of a period."¹⁰⁸ The

¹⁰⁵ Parks, op. cit., p. 138.

¹⁰⁶ Paul Gardner, "Matinee Troup Gives Albee Play," The New York Times, November 1, 1962.

¹⁰⁷ Levy, op. cit.

¹⁰⁸ Cantor and Little, op. cit., p. 155.

director as editor, then does only what is necessary. Ideally the text is clear enough for the actor to comprehend, and the director's work is minimal. But even under less than ideal circumstances, Schneider implies, the director would do well to refrain from forcing interpretations, movements, and other elements onto the actor and to use what the actor contributes to its best advantage.

Working as economically as he does, Schneider has to pay attention to what he tells his actors. Today he prefers not to tell them a great deal at the outset. Telling an actor too much can have an adverse effect. He recalls the first rehearsal of The American Dream. He had to go to San Francisco to the Actor's Workshop for the opening of a play which he had directed and left Edward Albee in charge of the rehearsal, telling him not to discuss anything with the cast. But he returned to find that when the "Mommy" had asked Albee what her character was, Albee had given an all-too-honest description of the part which so disturbed the actress that she quit.

Obviously such bluntness does not always have such sharp repercussions, but Schneider has found that great explanations are often unnecessary and that giving an actor only what he needs to play an action with is all that is required. His work with Buster Keaton on Film illustrates this. Keaton had difficulty comprehending what everything was about. "And I didn't spend a lot of time trying to explain it to him," Schneider recalls. "I tried it once in Hollywood, and he looked at me as though I were a little bit nuts."¹⁰⁹ He went on to say that simply telling Keaton to perform a given piece of action,

¹⁰⁹ Schneider, "Reality is not Enough," op. cit., p. 135.

however, produced amazing results. John Gielgud, who played Brother Julian in Tiny Alice, likewise felt he did not have to understand everything Albee was saying with the play in order to play the role.

Helen Hayes is also a performer with whom Schneider has worked and who feels the need for a minimal amount of information where the actor is concerned. She recollects an earlier time when Schneider attempted to give actors more than they wished to have:

We sometimes do what we shouldn't have to do, because we should just have a free mind to do our acting. There's a lot of that in the theatre today. George Abbott was so startled when we were working with Alan Schneider, a good director--modern school, you know. We'd go through the whole day's rehearsal when we were doing The Skin of Our Teeth, and then Alan would come and take each one of us aside and have these long talks about the meaning and the feel and everything else. We all thought we knew what Thornton Wilder was about and everything--what we really wanted to know was where to go on the stage and how to best make the thing come off.¹¹⁰

Today Schneider agrees. "I always talk a little to the actors," he says now. "I always like to tell actors a little bit about the play in the beginning." But he quickly adds, "I feel that if I talk too much in rehearsal something's wrong."¹¹¹

Part of a director's work in rehearsal is adapting to the needs and styles of the actors. Actors from different schools, Schneider feels, can be united to produce a desired effect. He has cited Eugenie Leontovich and Viveca Lindfors in his production of Anastasia

¹¹⁰ Lewis Funke and John E. Booth, Actors Talk About Acting (New York: Random House, Inc., 1961), p. 111.

¹¹¹ Parks, op. cit., p. 137.

as an example. One actress was trained in rigid mechanics and technique while the other relied more on emotion and impulse. "Yet both actresses," he relates, "because of their talent and respect for each other and, to a much lesser extent, because of my ability to make them get along, achieved 'reality' in a very startling fashion."¹¹² He managed the problem, he says, by making both feel comfortable with each other and with him. He did not object to the way either actress worked, saying, "I don't care how the actor achieves his goal."¹¹³ Thus, by respecting the way an actor works instead of exacting another system on him, Schneider more easily adjusts to the actor and expedites his job. The following account of how he has worked with various actors provides an interesting insight:

Many of the best scenes and moments in that production [Anastasia] came directly from the actor's finding things for themselves. On the other hand, Burgess Meredith in The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker wanted me to give him an exact pattern of movement, which he adapted to himself, as well as the reasons for each move. George Abbott... liked me to tell him when and even how to stand or move, but he rarely wanted to know why; he preferred working that out for himself. Mary Martin constantly sought out specific suggestions for gestures, moves, bits of humorous business. She took those she liked and made them...her own. Florence Reed always asked me to rehearse the exact moves...until they became comfortable and part of herself. But Helen Hayes, once she knew the general plan of a scene, liked to feel her way toward the 'how.'¹¹⁴

Such an account illustrates Schneider's flexibility in adjusting to

¹¹² Schneider, "Reality is not Enough," op. cit., p. 122.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Schneider, "A Tale of Two Cities," op. cit., p. 87.

each actor.

If working effectively with an actor is significant, it still remains only a means to an end. To Schneider, getting the actor to produce the desired result is what direction is all about. Process, he says, is good only to the extent that it produces the result.¹¹⁵ A director has to concern himself with pulling from the actor in any way he can what the play must have. "I'll do anything that gets the result I want," he says. "I don't always know what to do, and that's why I work with the same actors all the time."¹¹⁶ Different things are tried as particulars are sought, and the process is certainly not easy. "Frankly," he admits, "I may not know what I want until I see or hear a number of alternate possibilities."¹¹⁷ There may be a suggestion regarding a gesture, a movement or a bit of interpretation, anything that produces the effect. While Schneider's early tendencies made that final product a very real and concrete image in the director's mind, a product which demanded that the actors simply be manipulated into position at the whims of the director, he presently carries only an idea of what that product should be and tends to rely more on a process involving both himself and his actors to find the exact nature of the final product.

The means by which Schneider draws things from his actors are

¹¹⁵ Parks, op. cit., p. 134.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 137.

¹¹⁷ Schneider, "A Tale of Two Cities," op. cit., p. 86.

varied. He has suggested using improvisations; but even though he has used them on occasions, he has not resorted to them frequently. He has used music to stimulate actors to go further than they were able to do otherwise. He has implemented a variety of experiments. "Sometimes," he says, "I have had actors playing a scene at a distance from each other or with their backs turned to produce a greater urgency in communicating."¹¹⁸ He once injected vitality into a scene by having the cast run up and down the aisles and play the scene in full volume. He has leaned heavily toward working with small groups of two or three. "This removes any shyness or inhibitions that may exist, even subconsciously, and helps the actor work freely and spontaneously."¹¹⁹ He got Carol Baker to cry by practically beating her on the head. "I've done love scenes where people were too familiar, and I'd play the love scenes by staging it so they'd play it across the stage, so they wouldn't have to sit next to each other."¹²⁰

A number of other devices have helped Schneider in rehearsal. He relies on the early use of costumes and props because they impose certain restrictions on actors. An example Schneider cites are the soldiers in The Caucasian Chalk Circle. Heavy costumes forced them to walk a certain way, and the sooner that walk was achieved, the sooner character developed. "When we had chases," he continues, "we'd

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 88.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Parks, op. cit.

try to do pantomimic walking--the kind of thing Marceau does--because we didn't have a turntable."¹²¹ In Threepenny Opera he instructed his actors to play as if they hated the whole audience with a total contempt. "It got me a great deal of what I wanted," he recalls. "In the case of Chalk Circle I didn't do anything of that kind."¹²² Whatever the occasion has demanded, Schneider has found an appropriate device. And when no problem existed, such tactics have been unnecessary. But, he insists, when a director tells an actor to do something that the actor thought he was doing already, the director has not helped him very much. He must find a way to show the actor what is being called for.

Because Schneider has had to work so closely and intensely with actors and because he has had to be very familiar with the ways actors work, he has obviously developed ideas concerning actor training. He feels that the system by which American actors are presently trained has faltered in that it has tended to lean too much toward the internal aspects of Stanislavski's system and the Method. This poses a problem, he suggests, because

...our actors have been trained for a certain basic play-writing which we have gone away from--that is, playwrights have stopped writing realistic plays and theatre is now concerned with more formal and intensified material, whereas the actor has, for thirty years, been concentrating on the creation of simple reality.¹²³

¹²¹ Schneider, "Reality is not Enough," op. cit., p. 128.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 151.

Schneider certainly sees the value of Stanislavski's emphasis on the internal, but there is another half to acting. "Stanislavski is a means to an end, not an end," he declares. "I've never been able to find him the entire answer."¹²⁴ While Stanislavski dealt with much more than just the internal, Schneider suggests that American actors have missed the point. There are more technical demands made on the actor than just internal ones. He insists that there is no such thing as an emotional demand apart from a technical demand and cites Lee Grant's portrayal of Electra several years ago as an example: "You wind up with her emotional demands met, but according to all reports she wasn't able to play Electra."¹²⁵ The actor, Schneider believes, must be acquainted with internal aspects of the Method and must also concern himself with the external problems of the Method as well.

Related to the problem of actor training is the actual task of leading actors to a fuller discovery of the parts they play. In other words, how effectively does the present means of training actors help actors reach a final goal on stage where the director is concerned? This chapter has already shown that Schneider tries to adjust his direction to the needs of the individual actor. He thinks, however, that actors do have a responsibility in playing an action, a responsibility which perhaps has been overlooked by our present

¹²⁴"Producers of Today Assess Stanislavski," World Theatre, vol. 12 (Summer, 1963), p. 109.

¹²⁵ Schneider, "Reality is not Enough," op. cit., p. 152.

means of actor training. Schneider's position is illustrated by his own account of Gerry Hiken, a talented actor who played Clov in Endgame. Inserted as a replacement five days prior to opening, Hiken wanted to begin by exploring Clov's behavior. As Schneider told Richard Schechner,

He didn't think Clov would go up that ladder, but here's Beckett, who says Clov "gets up on it [the ladder], draws back curtain..." and so on, almost a page of very specific stage directions...so I gave him twenty minutes to explore the behavior of Clov, then I said, "look, I think what you have to explore is why he goes up the ladder, not why he doesn't go up."¹²⁶

While exploring a part does have its limitations or, as Schneider would put it, its technical demands, the director, he feels, must see that the actor, either on his own or with the help of the director, must equip himself with a valid "why" in order to play an action. He observes that the motivation required to get an actor to play an action may not be the idea that the audience will ultimately perceive. It is the playwright's responsibility and not the actor's to see that the text puts across a particular message or point. Thus, an actor, Schneider suggests, may play that he is cold because he is in a cold, wet basement while the audience may see it as the absence of human warmth.

The same principle holds true regarding the meaning of individual and specific lines. "I don't believe for a minute...that knowing what each line means is critical," Schneider says.¹²⁷ Spending an excessive

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 126.

¹²⁷ van Itallie, op. cit., p. 16.

amount of time on a single line can detract from the meaning of the whole scene. The actor must work within a scene's intention. One result of this approach is that various and very valid new interpretations arise. Provided the interpretation does not run contrary to what the scene means, Schneider does not always attempt to change the new interpretations.

Schneider's method of work is pragmatic: if it works, do it. He prefers to maintain only an idea, a thought, a concept. He works with the essences, not the detailed outlines. Always he is ready to alter his course, to resist dogmatic systems of directing. Never certain of the means by which he will achieve his goal, however, he is ever aware of what that goal is. While his philosophy or concept of theatre is a definite goal for him, his method of directing is flexible, subject to change. And in that way Schneider's work is an accurate application of his ideas.

IV. THE ARTIST AS ADMINISTRATOR

Schneider's experience as an administrator in the theatre has reinforced his view of the theatre as one of interdependence, one in which all parts are interrelated to form a massive whole. Theatre administration then cannot be separated from production entirely. Quite the contrary, its whole reason for being is the production. However unartistic a comptroller, public relations director, or executive producer may appear, the success of his task depends heavily on his concern for the work of the artists. This chapter will define Schneider's concept of theatre administration in today's professional theatre, using the Arena's administration as an example of his views. A number of problem areas within a theatre's administration will be dealt with to illustrate his position regarding theatre management.

Schneider sees the administration of a theatre as an element which exists in order to facilitate the work of those in production. The jobs of finding sufficient funds for operation, organizing ticket sales, and publicizing the productions are taken out of the hands of designers, directors, and actors. "Administration exists to make the artist more possible and more productive and rich," he maintains. "Administration exists to allow the theatre to function as an organism."¹

¹ George Parks, "An Interview with Alan Schneider" (Unpublished interview conducted in Washington on March 7, 1974), see Appendix, p. 139.

The director can direct; the designer can design, and the actor can act under circumstances which promote inspiration rather than hamper it. Administration, Schneider feels, should see to it that conditions under which productions grow are at a peak of efficiency. So long as theatre management serves as a means to that end, it is useful.

Conversely, poor management sees itself as a separate entity in the theatre. When staying within a budget becomes the motivating force behind a production--and one cannot discount the need for proper budgeting--emphasis is misplaced. When policies become stumbling blocks and hindrances rather than helping devices, administration is poor. As Schneider views administration,

It doesn't function to hem in. I resent the fact that I am bound by my technical director as to when my set gets on stage. I think an administration would say, "Mr. Schneider needs the set x number of days before the preview. If you guys can't finish it by then, then you work till midnight." I don't want my technical director telling me when I can have the set. That's bad administration.²

Poor administration works for itself, losing sight of the fact that it is there because of and for the production that is in progress.

When theatre management does not serve to expedite production, Schneider observes, it creates excessive technicalities, red tape, and general hardships. He has occasionally referred to such bottlenecks in the New York theatre where administration is less effective than it is in the Arena and in other outstanding resident theatres. Producers can impede production by failing to listen and respond to

² Ibid.

the wishes and desires of directors. David Merrick is one producer he recalls from his own experiences, saying, "I never won anything from David Merrick."³ Such a total refusal indicates to him a sign of bad administration. Union regulations also seem unreasonable in that they run contrary to wise management. They simply get in the way. Schneider goes on to say,

What is even more frustrating is the stupidity of not being able to rehearse with either the set or the properties without incurring exorbitant stagehand expenses, which means you don't get to use the props...So you wind up using a real telephone as the frying pan...Or, if you are in Baltimore and trying to rehearse in the second setting of a three-set play, you will wind up rehearsing in the lobby while that second-act setting remains tantalizingly within reach but light years away from use.⁴

These administrative practices create more havoc than convenience and serve to stifle creativity rather than preserve it.

The best place to look at Schneider's administrative ideas and practices would have to be the Arena Stage in Washington. His love for this theatre has been evident by what he has said of it:

I liked the idea of working for a permanent resident professional theatre in Washington. I liked the idea of its being an arena theatre as well, with an excellent staff and a high level of imagination in its productions.⁵

He has also stated that the Arena has perhaps come closer to achieving

³ Ibid., p. 126.

⁴ Alan Schneider, "I Can't Go On; I'll Go On," The American Theatre, 1970-1971, International Theatre Institute of the United States, editor (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 108.

⁵ Alan Schneider, "A Tale of Two Cities," Ten Talents in the American Theatre, David H. Stevens, editor (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), p. 69.

the goals of theatre, as he sees them, than most others. Reasons for success of the Arena and for his concern for the Arena, reasons which he himself has cited, are direct attributes of a successful administration under Zelda Fichandler.

An earlier chapter dealt with what Schneider called point of view. At the Arena the point of view is applied specifically and consistently by the administration of Zelda Fichandler, and the viewpoint, Schneider says, is the starting point of any theatre administration.

The Arena's point of view is partly the result of the geographic accident of their stage. The point of view is that we are realistic Americans, social, capitalist, realist, theatre in the round. At the beginning we had a certain way of acting, and even now we are proficient at what you might call American type plays....It does what I call realistic Americana very well.⁶

That viewpoint, Schneider feels, is an extension of the administration of Fichandler. "Arena," he says, "is formed by the personality of Zelda Fichandler....Her basic personality is what must be in the Arena. She's structured."⁷ Administration as it appears in a theatre's viewpoint is what provides the momentum for creativity. Later it must not serve as a hindrance to the work it has inspired but must work to facilitate it.

Schneider and Fichandler have worked together for twenty-five years, and he shares many of her administrative ideas. She views

⁶ Parks, op. cit., p. 117.

⁷ Ibid., p. 119.

administration as one of the chief virtues of the resident theatre. "Regional theatres sprang from an organization revolution," she observes, "a better way of doing things."⁸ A major difference between the regional or resident theatres and the New York theatres which has been prompted by that organization revolution has been an increased sensitivity in administration. Greater importance placed on the administrative staff has led to better work. "Organization," Fichandler says, "is creation."⁹ That attitude and its manifestations at the Arena have shown that proper administration can be both efficient and sensitive to the aesthetic intentions of the artist. In fact, she maintains, any theatre group needs a formal structure, a definite and concrete system of administration. Schneider has likewise come to view administration with the same kind of respect.

Theatre management must not only be aware of its directions and its point of view, Schneider feels, but has to constantly re-evaluate and re-examine them. Once asked how often the Arena's approach was re-evaluated, he quickly replied,

Everyday. I just sat there at the lunch hour with our associate director developer--he's our p.r. guy--we're sitting there saying, "Where are we going? What's the season like? What are our chances?" I do that all the time....I evaluate constantly. I can never meet with Zelda without evaluating in some way or another.¹⁰

⁸ Zelda Fichandler, "Theatres or Institutions," The American Theatre, 1969-1970, International Theatre Institute of the United States, editor (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), p. 106.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Parks, op. cit., p. 142.

A particular production of Julius Caesar at the Arena, one which Schneider did not direct, was not the success that everyone had wished for. That was enough to cause the group to sit back and take another look at the whole direction. A sensitive administration has to be aware of all the gauges that it has at its disposal in determining how reflective a viewpoint is of its personnel and the community it serves and how successful it is implementing that viewpoint.

Schneider views administration as a balance between what a single person would like to have and what a group of people decides. Casting, for example, is the concern of everyone, but it is usually the ultimate responsibility of one man, the director. Ninety percent of the casting of a show may be done by Schneider himself, but he still gets help from the associate producer. "If I didn't want to cast them," he says, "I wouldn't cast them. Oh, I consulted with him, but that was my choice."¹¹ Of course, casting tends to be a very personal thing where a director is concerned, and outside assistance is generally limited to advice. Other matters, those that concern what the program will look like, who the stage manager is, or how much the tickets will cost, are not left up to one man. Schneider quite honestly has said that he would like to decide those things, yet he adds, "I don't think it's possible to control everything, but it's essential in the theatre to want to control everything."¹² The

¹¹ Ibid., p. 125.

¹² Ibid.

desire to control leads to valuable contributions to the group effort. And a wise administration will at least listen to the contributions of everyone. It does not always mean yielding to what the costume designer or the set designer has in mind. Nor is the whole process of give and take an easy one. "You always have to convince, persuade, cajole," he admits. "Nobody ever gives you anything in the theatre. You have to fight for it."¹³ But fighting with the right people, he goes on, is quite different from fighting with the wrong people. In a properly balanced administration, he says, compromises can be reached; a director can more likely achieve what he wants if he argues with sensitive producers. While one man cannot hope to control all of production, under the right administration he can do very well. As Schneider puts it, "There's no such thing as one person making all the decisions. But there's every necessity for one person surrounded by other people he respects and knows and has worked with being shaped to make his decisions through them."¹⁴ That type of administration has existed for Schneider at the Arena under Zelda Fichandler in a way that did not exist for him in New York.

Though he has spent little time talking about other administrative functionaries such as accountants, outreach directors, and audience developers, Schneider regards them as completely essential with one fundamental responsibility: to have their tasks contribute to the

¹³ Ibid., p. 126.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 125.

production. He says,

In other words, the end that we're going for is what ultimately happens when that play gets on the stage. That's what everything around that building is supposed to be doing. Administration to me means--and this is an abstract kind of ideal I've always had--is that everything is geared around the fact that we're doing this play.¹⁵

He has rarely referred to the artistic aspects of bookkeepers, ushers, and janitors in a theatre, but he has most definitely stated that they are as much a part of a theatre's "group of people" as the actors are. All members of an administrative staff do indeed affect the final outcome of a theatre program. While it would be difficult to locate Schneider's responses to every specific phase of theatre management and to record those responses here, he has voiced particular concern over a number of major administrative worries which reflect his administrative philosophy.

If a theatre's viewpoint represents the place of departure, then play selection represents the first leg of the journey. It directly reflects the image, the picture of the entire theatre. Conversely, a theatre can create unnecessary hardships if it chooses plays which do not contribute to its over-all outlook. The Arena Stage has its direction, its approach, yet, Schneider observes, it is still very easy for the Arena to stray too far from its normal range. "Arena picks many plays that don't fit into that category," he readily admits. "And then it runs into trouble when it does that kind of play."¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 140.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 117.

Julius Caesar would be an example of a play which did not completely fit into the Arena's immediate viewpoint, although Schneider felt a definite need to do the play. Selecting the right plays thus becomes a very special kind of administrative problem.

Having served intermittently as artistic director of the Arena during the past twenty-five years, Schneider has had at times the responsibility of play selection. During the years he served in the absence of Zelda Fischandler, he says, "I picked the plays...all of them...Not for me to direct, but I picked them all."¹⁷ One can immediately see what Schneider meant then when he said that the Arena was formed by the personality of its chief administrator. When one person has the responsibility of choosing an entire season, however well advised he may be, he faces a monumental task of selecting the kinds of plays that the actors can handle, that an audience can accept, that make that theatre a place of creativity and more than just a production company. Once again one is reminded of Schneider's words which call for a single, dynamic personality surrounded by people he trusts and respects. The success of a season depends on it.

Schneider has described the process by which he selected a season of plays at the Arena as one of contemplating and reflecting, adding and rejecting. Part of it involves the personal desires of the artistic director. "I looked at the season," he recalls, "and I wanted to do this kind of play and that kind of play."¹⁸ Zelda

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 144.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Fichandler has worked much the same way. She wanted him to direct Godot one year, and Schneider responded, "I'm not sure I want to do Godot." In short, he continues, "it's sort of like 'what about?'"¹⁹ There is a lot of exploration which is based on what those in command would simply like to see done. It begins with a list of about three hundred plays which is then reduced to forty and then to twelve, then to five, and on it goes, adding and taking away. "We were going to do Three Sisters, and then we decided, 'Well, that's too conventional.'"²⁰ Schneider also likes new plays and directed five new plays in 1973 alone. Naturally he has tried to persuade Fichandler to include several new plays in each season's program. So the process of play selection basically begins with what the directors want to do.

Other factors must also enter into play selection. Since, according to Schneider, the Arena is best at realistic Americana, Fichandler tends to stay primarily with American plays. Schneider furthermore cites the size of the cast as a factor, saying, "I also have to cast it for the actors. I have plays that give parts to the actors. It's hard to do a small cast show."²¹ The capability of the actors must likewise be considered. Schneider explains,

For example, we've never done a Greek tragedy. Whenever we think about it, we say, "Wait a minute. We can't act that. Our actors don't fall into that category very

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 144.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

well. We have difficulty with it."²²

There is also the variety factor involved. In spite of its tendency to do modern American plays, the Arena--and Fichandler--also wants to do an occasional classic. Current events also affect play selection. In the case of Julius Caesar, for example, Schneider pointed out the tie to contemporary politics: "Julius Caesar's a play about political power. Political power's related to Watergate."²³ Regardless of what factors ultimately lead to a season of plays, an administration has to consider what it can and cannot do. It can get its theatre into trouble if it does not consider fully the theatre's abilities and limitations. "Those theatres that try to do all plays," Schneider warns, "and try to do all plays equally, so to speak, on all styles, fail."²⁴ Once the plays are finally decided upon, it may be for different reasons. And if an entire season is to have any type of continuity amidst the complexity of factors which finally lead to the selection of specific plays, the process must be approached cautiously and well in advance.

Money is always a concern to theatre in America and represents to Schneider a major administrative problem. Inherent in his concept of theatre is a general dislike for theatre programs that attempt to meet their budget by producing only the shows tending to draw large

²² Ibid., p. 117.

²³ Ibid., p. 144.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 117.

audiences and subsequently more money. While drawing large audiences is not a bad goal at all, sacrificing one's point of view for the sake of larger crowds is practically unforgiveable to Schneider. But if a theatre chooses to abandon the popular show in favor of its own kind, it has to be prepared to look elsewhere for the monetary difference. The answer to this administrative headache, Schneider contends, is the subsidy. He favors subsidies from all levels of government, particularly from the local level. A theatre retains a greater degree of control, he feels, with local assistance. The federal grants are cumbersome and unwisely distributed. Schneider sums it up by saying, "Federal...well, you get one-fiftieth. They want to give the same amount to North Dakota they give to New York, and that's nutty. And also it's too far away, and nobody knows what the hell is going on."²⁵ Local sources of revenue--city, county, or state--are better. But whatever the source, Schneider favors subsidies--the more, the better. He once remarked that the Arena lost a considerable amount of money each month, even with all the revenue sources--ticket sales, grants, subsidies--combined. A good administration will not abandon if at all possible a design because of lack of money. Instead it will try to carry out that design by solving the monetary problem as best it can. Within reason it will not try to limit what a theatre staff can do because of money. "It's only when the theatres stop worrying about breaking even," he says, "that we have any chance at all."²⁶

²⁵ Ibid., p. 141.

²⁶ Ibid.

Schneider also recognizes another administrative value attached to local financial support of theatre: a strong connection to the community. He has looked favorably at the English communities which, he says, take a penny from each tax pound for theatre. The result, he feels, has been a strengthened relationship between theatre and community. "Nothing will guarantee anything, but it will make it more possible. And it will give the community a sense that they connect with the theatre," he says.²⁷ The Arena, as many other theatres do, work through a community outreach program. It not only brings students in for matinee performances but takes theatre into the community. In short, theatre administration has to be aware of its community, both in terms of the money it receives and the services it renders. A theatre cannot cut itself off but must play an integral part in the life of its location.

An area of administrative concern which has touched very close to Schneider has been the theatre plant and stage designs. What annoys him most in this area, which in part explains his attachment to the Arena, is a general lack of flexibility. He once stated, "Unfortunately, a theatre building happens to last longer than an ashtray or an armchair. That is why we are so far behind."²⁸ He was to later explain that when a bad theatre is built, it cannot simply be knocked down and rebuilt. Theatre management has to consider the most flexible

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Schneider, "A Tale of Two Cities," op. cit., p. 98.

means of staging the kind of work it likes to do when it either builds or moves into another plant. And a truly progressive theatre group will even consider changes in an already existing plant whenever possible.

Schneider generally regards European theatres as better plants than American theatres because, as he says, "most of them were built at a better time in history."²⁹ While he acknowledges that there are both good and bad theatre houses in Europe, most of them tend to be better to work in because they are smaller and more intimate.

In England part of the great involvement with what's going on onstage is due to the intimacy of their playhouses, even their regular commercial West End theatres. It's exciting being close--hearing, sharing, and relating. When you do a play in a larger house, you're stuck with a completely different kind of experience. And now, with our usual blindness to what's real...we're headed more and more for building larger and larger theatres simply because we have to make enough money each week to support all those people behind the scenes as well as onstage.³⁰

Many of the financial woes which necessitate larger houses in America, he observes, have been averted by houses with capacities between the small off-Broadway theatres and the large Broadway houses.

Those in-between 500-seat theatres, uninvolved as they are with Broadway production costs, allow us to make a decent return on a product that wouldn't have to run a year or bring in 800 people a week. The people involved don't have to lower their economic sights as much as they would if they worked in a 199-seat off-Broadway house. I'd

²⁹ Parks, op. cit., p. 145.

³⁰ Howard Greenberger, The Off-Broadway Experience (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 76.

be satisfied with attracting 2500 people a week.³¹

And even where size is not objectionable, new theatres, Schneider complains, are built as if they were to be seen and not used. While he praises Boston University's 900-seat theatre, built in the twenties, he withholds his praise from the Kennedy Center's Eisenhower Theatre, "a sort of half-assed imitation of the Belasco, built by a Broadway producer, even though it seats the same number of people."³²

The type of stage that a theatre chooses perplexes the modern administrator more than ever before because of the new designs in stages and the growing discontent with the proscenium arch. Although he has called for variety in staging practices, that is, open versus proscenium, Schneider has definitely leaned toward open staging. "Certainly the most exciting productions that I have seen in recent years," he claims, "have in one way or another resented the separation that the proscenium arch forces between actors and audience."³³ The Broadway playhouses, with their reliance on the proscenium, represent to him a convention which limits. All of them look alike to him. "I think one of the reasons for the success of off-Broadway," he told Jean-Claude van Itallie several years ago, "is that each of the smaller theatres provides a slightly different experience." The relation of the audience to the stage is different."³⁴ The proscenium, he

³¹ Ibid.

³² Parks, op. cit., p. 145.

³³ Schneider, "A Tale of Two Cities," op. cit., p. 101.

³⁴ Jean-Claude van Itallie, "An Interview with Alan Schneider." Transatlantic Review, no. 10 (Summer, 1962), p. 19.

feels today, has seen its better days.

It remains, but perhaps a little less sure of itself. So recently a liberal, it has in the normal course of events become a conservative. Once so obviously the normal relation between actor and audience, it has become one of many norms, many relationships.³⁵

Both as a director and as an administrator, Schneider has been aware of the lack of flexibility of the proscenium arch and the advantages of the open stage.

The administrator's responsibility of play selection is very closely related to the type of theatre he has to work with. Schneider has said at times that any play can be done on an arena stage or, for that matter, on a proscenium, although some plays suffer on the latter.³⁶ But he has also said that no stage is ideal for every kind of play.³⁷ While any play can conceivably be done anywhere, there is a stage type which is best for the kind of work any given theatre does. What Schneider has had to do is identify the type of stage which best suits the kind of work he does best. "I think plays of extreme theatricality or extreme mood work well in arena," he says.³⁸ He includes Shakespeare, Moliere, and Wilde as well as writers of strong illusion, Ibsen, Chekhov, and Williams. Those writers represent in part the type of work Schneider does best, and that has led

³⁵ Alan Schneider, "Shrinking Arch," The New York Times, July 25, 1954.

³⁶ van Itallie, op. cit., p. 23.

³⁷ Schneider, "A Tale of Two Cities," op. cit., p. 100.

³⁸ van Itallie, op. cit., p. 22.

him to the arena type of stage

Selecting the right kind of stage, Schneider has demonstrated, is more than simply scanning the market to see what is available. It often means customizing, modifying, and changing a more standard form in order to meet specific needs. Schneider's work with the open stage is an example of this. He has favored the open stage but not without some reservations. He spent part of 1956 studying open staging in Europe and has since concluded that some types of open stages are not so good. Stephen Joseph, in his book Theatre in the Round, cited such a reservation:

The American director, Alan Schneider, after much experience on the centre stage, came to the conclusion that a circular acting area provided no opportunity to make focal points (other than in the centre), that the shape was amorphous, undynamic, and that an audience would suffer from the kind of listless disorientations that is reputed to make lighthouse men, confined too long in their circular rooms, go mad.³⁹

An administrative body has to do more than simply choose from the available stage designs--proscenium, thrust, or arena. It has to be inventive and creative with the design of the plant just as it is with costumes and sets. Companies that have gone to great lengths to change conventional and standard stage shapes to fit their work have greatly impressed Schneider. He took notice when the Old Vic and Stratford-on-Avon changed and enlarged their forestage area and was equally influenced by the transformation of the Assembly Hall

³⁹ Stephen Joseph, Theatre in the Round (London: Barrie and Rockcliff, 1967), p. 115.

at the Edinburgh Festival into "a rare combination of Henry V and the Marx Brothers."⁴⁰ He took note of four productions by Jean Vilar's Theatre National Populaire on a broad platform in the medieval courtyard of the Palace of the Popes:

The combination of architectural power and theatrical pageantry made possible remarkable results. I remember especially the main entrances, made over a long steep center ramp. Those actors didn't just enter; they were catapulted.⁴¹

He feels that any group of innovative administrators must search for the best kind of stage plant for their kind of work, even if it means building it specifically for their needs. They must be prepared for change because even open staging is not the final word in plant design. Productions in open air, outside the theatre, offer us a whole new frontier, Schneider feels. "To me," he says, "this movement [from inside a picture frame to the open air] represents the ultimate in theatricality and the most significant development in the theatre since the invention of the electric light."⁴² Whatever will be needed is what has to be done.

The problems that confront Schneider the administrator have also confronted Schneider the director. That is as it should be if the administrator is to be sensitive to the problems that face the director and other artists. And an awareness of the artists' problems

⁴⁰ Schneider, "Shrinking Arch," op. cit.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

is necessary if an administrator is to expedite their work. He must view his own work as a means to an end, a service to the directors, designers, actors. In order to provide such service he has to study the nature of the community in which the theatre is located to know how much to charge for tickets, what plays to present, what services to render, what financial aid to seek. He must know the nature of his own theatre group, the type of training the actors have, the tendencies of the directors, the skills of the designers, and the type of work that the group can do best. An administrator must also be aware of current trends in social, political, and economic areas of American life to know what comments have to be made in contemporary theatre. He has to share the sensitivity of everyone else in the theatre, and he has to see that all the administrative staff are in tune with the work of the theatre. Inasmuch as Schneider has worked as administrator as well as actor and director in the modern professional theatre, he is aware of what a successful administration is capable of doing and what it has to do if it is to insure the continued success of the theatre it serves.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study has attempted to establish the seminal influence Alan Schneider has had on the American theatre. Inherent in his significance have been his philosophies regarding the American theatre system. The study has sought to define those philosophies as well as Schneider's directorial and administrative practices. They have been affected by a number of factors such as his early tendencies toward theatricalism, his exposure to Lee Strasberg, his fascination for arena staging, and his respect for Beckett, Albee, and Pinter, among others. Those elements, coupled with Schneider's experience as director and administrator, have led him to realize and advocate some kind of generative tradition in American theatre.

What this study has tried to do most fundamentally is define Schneider's concept of theatre. An earlier chapter, for example, outlined that definition and its applications. From there the study closely examined the key factors which constituted Schneider's philosophy, including those elements he regards as unhealthy and in need of reform. This task was actually an easy one because Schneider has clearly articulated what he feels the American theatre's greatest needs are and has quite explicitly cited what he considers to be desirable examples from the European tradition. These areas of concern included general attitudes toward the specific roles of directors,

playwrights, actors, critics, as well as the various kinds of theatre--professional, university, experimental--and toward the functions of theatre.

The inquiry also proceeded to show how Schneider's practices in rehearsal and in administrative capacities have demonstrated his concept of theatre. It attempted to illustrate how his ideas are manifested in such tasks as casting, staging, work with designers, selection of a season of plays, and overall communication with theatre staffs.

A number of significant conclusions regarding the state of the American theatre have resulted from this study. One of these deals with a rather curious reluctance of established theatre to do unestablished plays and playwrights. Schneider says the problem stems from the ease with which American theatres become satisfied with the kind of work they are doing. New theatres spring up constantly to expose new playwrights; but once that new generation of writers becomes entrenched, these theatres seemingly lose interest in the next generation. Instead new trends require new theatres which will in turn die out and give way to others. For that very reason Schneider has jubilantly welcomed new movements--the off-Broadway era, the resident theatres--only to experience an eventual disappointment with them. To him the theatre that produced Clifford Odets should give way to Brecht, then to Beckett, and to Shepard, then to Jones, and so on. The Arena Stage in Washington has been one of the few theatres in America interested in plays that are truly new and different,

staging drama from South Africa, Russia, and other countries. Too many other theatres, however, are too content with what seems to be working.

The reluctance of today's theatre to probe into tomorrow's drama is related in part to finance. So long as free enterprise and money provide impetus in America, Schneider maintains, how can we really hope for a theatre which is unafraid of financial risk? Consequently, this study has pointed out, the issue of subsidy has to be investigated more fully. He has been careful not to insist on a theatre totally supported by the state, but he has called for subsidies from all sources, all levels of government as well as private sources.

At the same time Schneider implies that we play it safe in America not so much because of success in terms of monetary gain but because of the American idea of success. He has accused, for example, university theatre, subsidized to a degree, of becoming as commercial as professional theatre. The question then becomes whether subsidy alone can change the attitudes which have been instilled within us. Can, in fact, the tradition which has so impressed Schneider ever be realized in American society?

The conclusion from this study is that, with qualification, it can exist. Schneider has commented that he has been able to find professional employment in companies all over America, and the number of regional theatres is increasing. And while money is always a scarce commodity, subsidies are available today. As Fichandler pointed out, American theatre cannot and should not be the same as

European theatre. But Schneider's work, especially at the Arena, has shown that the essential elements which constitute the spirit of European theatre also exist in America.

Regardless of how transient actors and directors may be, Schneider concludes, a stabilized theatre with a structured organization is definitely a step in the right direction. While he feels that some resident theatres are stagnating, the progress exhibited by many companies illustrates what the potential is. Organization has been a key to this growth, and creativity in theatre management is a major need which is presently being recognized on the resident level. Even in the somewhat unsettled nature of American theatre, stable organization is a necessity.

This study has also produced the rather definite conclusion that the director should be aware of the total production. Previous chapters have referred to Schneider's early extremism toward theatricality and subsequently a swing in the other direction. His present stand between the two schools of thought perhaps represents not a reluctance to accept either one or the other but instead a desire to utilize both whenever he wishes. He refuses to see the purely artificial forms of theatricality as the essence of direction, and he has been unable to find the complete answer in Stanislavski. If the American theatre is to remain prepared for new movements, it has to think in terms of the entire production, notably on the director's part.

The need for today's director to view the total production is

perhaps prompted most by the lack of one predominant style which characterizes the whole of modern drama. This investigation has noted Schneider's stand that the director serve as the unifying agent, the one through whom all factors pass to become a singular concept. At a time when all designers may well think in different stylistic terms, there is a tremendous need for a director who is concerned not just about actor relationships but about line and color as well. Without such a director today's theatre stands a great chance of becoming a melting pot of unrelated styles combined in chaotic fashion.

A final question remains. Is Alan Schneider so unique in his views and practices as to command the attention given him in this investigation? No doubt other directors have shared and voiced similar sentiments about the American theatre. Nor can one believe that Schneider's directorial and administrative practices stand totally alone. Yet Schneider's willingness to reach into the reservoir of unestablished contemporary playwrights and to produce their plays in unheralded off-Broadway theatres truly does separate him. In his peak years he directed Pinter, Beckett, and Albee when others would not. He deliberately chose a route which, at the expense of a Broadway reputation, produced a genuine essence of American theatre. The new and fresh plays he brought to the American stage most highly speaks of the uniqueness of Alan Schneider.

By virtue of the role Schneider has chosen to play, the ultimate impact he has had on the American theatre may well be inconspicuous.

That role has been, above all, a realistic one, based on the idea that the playwright has shaped the theatre. In turn he has put the director into what he considers a proper perspective. He has taken us back to periods where theatre flourished because the poet and performer were foremost. The director, however instrumental, becomes a means to an end. For Schneider it will probably mean considerably less fame than Meyerhold, Craig, and Reinhardt. Theatre today can greatly enhance the work of both poet and performer, Schneider believes, with all the modern forms of technology, but through the maze of lights, sets, music, and make-up Schneider refuses to let us forget what has made great theatre great. Such a refusal may well cost him a bit of tomorrow's fame.

APPENDIX

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALAN SCHNEIDER

PARKS: In your definition of theatre several years ago, you defined theatre as a group of people with an aesthetic point of view, working together over a period of time. Would you give an example of what a point of view is?

SCHNEIDER: The Group Theatre had a point of view. The Group Theatre was the first American theatre that I became acquainted with that had an aesthetic point of view. That is, they were all staunch adherents to the Stanislavski system. They all worked the same way, so they were artistically unified. From the point of view of content, they were unified because they were so left-wing. They were vaguely socialistic or group-oriented or left-wing or anti-fascist as far as I could tell at the time. That's a point of view. I think it's important. I used to say that even left-handed people could get together--women's theatre, black theatre. The strength of that comes from point of view. It's a unifying force that people feel the same way about life or some aspect of life or some particular facet of their work. I think that's what theatres are: united by some philosophical or aesthetic or political or metaphysical point of view.

PARKS: What would be the Arena's point of view?

SCHNEIDER: The Arena's point of view is partly the result of the

geographic accident of their stage. Their point of view is that we are realistic Americans, social, capitalist, realist, theatre-in-the-round. At the beginning we had a certain way of acting, and even now we are proficient at what you might call American type plays. Arena does Death of a Salesman very well. It does Our Town very well. It does Front Page very well. It doesn't do Julius Caesar very well or Restoration comedy very well or tragedy very well. That's a limitation, but it's also a strength. It does what I call "realistic Americana" very well.

PARKS: So that's what determines the play selection?

SCHNEIDER: Well, I'm not going to speak for Arena; I'm going to speak for myself. Arena picks many plays that don't fit into that category, and then it runs into trouble when it does that kind of play. For example, we've never done a Greek tragedy. Whenever we think about it, we say, "Wait a minute. We can't act that. Our actors don't fall into that category very well. We have difficulty with it." But I don't think we should limit the discussion to the Arena. I'm talking about every theatre. It cannot do all plays, and those theatres that try to do all plays and try to do all plays equally, so to speak, in all styles, fail. A theatre survives or a theatre establishes itself because of a strength or an attitude. Just like the human being does. What human being carries the experience of all human beings? Yet within every human being there is every other human being. But only by being specific can we be general, and that's the same with theatre. To me a theatre

is not just an outfit for producing shows. Theatre is a point of view about the way it wants to produce a certain kind of play.

PARKS: Does this mean that "well-rounded programs"--

SCHNEIDER: There's no such thing as a well-rounded program. That's like trying to please everybody. It's like trying to be bigger on the inside and smaller on the outside. It's just words. You should have an ill-rounded program! And you might make it--if you're good at what you want to do. You might not make it anyhow. Nobody makes it because of their intention. You make it by your talent, but your talent is affected by your intention. You don't set out just to do good plays. You don't set out to do good theatre. You set out to do a certain kind of play in a certain kind of way.

PARKS: To what extent can you vary from that? I mean, is every single play going to be in this particular view?

SCHNEIDER: No. I mean, I am a certain person, and you are a certain person. We're different. I'm only valid when I carry out my nature or organic self to the extent that I can carry that out. I can't be you, and you can't be me. But in theatre! We never think of theatre as having a personality because we try to please all people. That doesn't mean that a theatre has to do only Gorky or Chekhov. I mean, the Brecht Ensemble, the Berliner Ensemble, did Brecht and other playwrights. The Moscow Art Theatre did Chekhov and Gorky and other playwrights. You see, I think this is a long time in coming. You think of that as a limitation, and I think of that as the only possible freedom. Freedom comes only from selecting

what it is you want to do and then sticking fervently to that, excluding all other possibilities. And one of America's problems is that we always want to be bigger and better than, other than, everything else than. We can't do that. Most theatres that try to please everybody can't please anybody.

PARKS: Is this then something that transcends play selection?

SCHNEIDER: It goes beyond play selection. It goes with the selection of the cast; it goes with the philosophy of production; it goes into the shape of the theatre. It goes into how you sell your subscription tickets. It goes into everything. Arena is formed by the personality of Zelda Fichandler. It's not just that she selects every play. I mean, I've had greater choice in the last few years than a long time ago. Her basic personality is what must be in the Arena. She's structured. I couldn't structure. It comes about as a result of attitudes. It's a point of view. You can't say, "We're going to do everything well." I cannot do Restoration comedy, partly because I don't believe in artificiality. It doesn't mean I don't enjoy Restoration comedy. Indeed I do, but I cannot do it because of my concern for reality, not realism, but reality. I have difficulty with artificiality. The Arena has difficulty with high comedy, high style. That doesn't mean we don't do Oscar Wilde or George Bernard Shaw. We just have more difficulty. It's an American tradition. Americans tend to be oriented toward realistic theatre. I tend to be oriented toward realistic theatre. Actually I fought against the realistic theatre all my life.

PARKS: Going from the theatrical to the realistic?

SCHNEIDER: Yes.

PARKS: Then I gather from what you're doing now, Magnolia (The Last Meeting of the Knights of the White Magnolia), that--

SCHNEIDER: Well, it's a very small, little slice of life play which is trying to make a metaphor of American life.

PARKS: Considering the playwright [Preston Jones], is the playwright an indication that you think that we do have playwrights here in America who are capable of providing momentum? I ask that because you seem to have gone to Europe for playwrights for so many years.

SCHNEIDER: I'll go to China for playwrights because I believe the playwright is the fundamental starting point from which I have to work. I mean, I'm not an originator artist. I need a playwright. And I happen to like off-beat, unusual, or whatever the word is, material. But I think we have more playwrights in America than we've ever had. And I don't really accept the fact that I've avoided American playwrights, so to speak. I just happen to like playwrights. I don't care if they're American or not American. Actually it doesn't interest me that much. I don't really care if a play's Greek or French or American. I just want it to be interesting. I want it to be human. In fact, when I read a play, I don't want to know who the playwright is because it affects my judgment. I can't always do that, but I try. I'd really like to read a play without anything on the cover and see if my judgment is capable of being achieved without knowing. I like English playwrights because the English have

playwrights. I mean, I didn't like Samuel Beckett because he was Irish or French. I liked him because I liked Godot. I liked Michael Weller. I thought he was British when I read his play. I don't ask for the nationality. I ask for the quality of the playwright. I think we have more potentially interesting plays today not being performed than ever in my experience. They're not being performed because they cost more, and the stakes are greater. People tend to be more frightened. I think one of the tasks of any theatre that considers itself alive is to do new plays. That's a narrow definition, but new plays depend on two facets: on establishing the past and on exploring the future. I hate the word "revival" because it sounds like bringing back from the dead. We need to stop thinking in terms of revival, like Candide, Death of a Salesman, or Julius Caesar. We're just doing the plays. We don't revive the Fifth Symphony. When we are familiar with history of the past, the literature, the dramatic past, only then will we be able to create a living dramatic present. The British aren't superior to us in their genes or their social organization. They do more playwrights, partly because it costs less and partly because there are theatres all over the country that need to do plays. And they ran out of classics and have to do new plays. I don't think it has anything to do with my feeling that the British playwrights are superior. It's like I've said, that many, many plays that are not done in America will be done in Britain immediately--immediately because it's easier to get a play on.

PARKS: What is the relationship between the concept of a theatre

and the success or failure of a show?

SCHNEIDER: In America a theatre is the Barrymore Theatre doing Hume Cronin and Jessica Tandy in The Fourposter, and if they run two years, that's twice as good as one year. And if it runs four years, that's four times as good as one year. In Europe where they have--forgive me for being so elementary--where they have subsidized theatre or what we call repertory theatre, a continuous theatre, organized continuity in the theatre, where they're subsidized by the state or private sources or a combination of both, they don't think in terms of a four year run; they think in terms of an organized group of people, an ensemble. The essential thing is not that they are repertory. The essential thing is that they don't stop functioning when the show stops. They maintain their connection with each other. To me the theatre's always been a family, a group of people. Sometimes they're in a show; sometimes they're not in the show. Sometimes they play a small part; sometimes they play a large part. Sometimes they're good; sometimes they're bad. But they don't stop functioning together. Sometimes they fight together, too. I don't want to get too romantic about the fact that theatre is some kind of idyllic pastoral happy hunting ground. Sometimes they're unhappy about the parts they get. Nevertheless, after the fight they go on living together. But in America we get together for one show. If it's a hit, we play it for as long as we can, and then we separate, rarely to see each other. One of the saddest things of my life, the thing I most regret, is getting together very closely over a period of four to six weeks or

longer with a lot of people, very friendly, and then I never see them again! But that isn't true with them. And it prevents greater results. But even in America, in those situations which try to deal with theatre in what I call its organic, fundamental needs, we find the actors don't get along. Even when we try to deal with the theatre as an organic process, we tend to get in our American things: bigger and better.

PARKS: What should be the role of the critic in the theatre?

SCHNEIDER: I don't want my life depending on the reviews. They're meaningless. They've no connection with the work. I've never learned anything from a drama critic. It would be like the function of the front page of The New York Times: to tell me what's going on. But it doesn't determine my fate or my philosophy of life. And when I say the front page of The New York Times, it doesn't affect how I rehearse. My opinion is that the critics are simply selling soap, like everyone else in America. And that's what's wrong. I don't want to pay any attention to the critic as salesman. I want to learn from them. I want them to tell me what I did right or what I did wrong. I would love to learn from them.

PARKS: Several years ago you said that resident theatres represented extensions of off-Broadway in that the conditions under which you worked in off-Broadway were carried over into the resident theatres. But today what would be the line of distinction between off-Broadway or maybe even off-off-Broadway and the resident theatre?

SCHNEIDER: Well, I don't remember making the statement quite that

way, but I'll try to use that as a premise. This is a big area, and I don't know how to cover it. You're always hoping, if you're doing it off-off-Broadway and it's good, it'll get done off-Broadway. And if that's good, it's going to go to Broadway. If you're doing a regional theatre play, it means you're away from all that. Too, you're working in a company. I don't know any place that has a company in New York. I could be wrong. Certainly I've not worked with a company. Mainly I'm away from the pressure of the marketplace. Here I have an office. I come in at ten in the morning. It's a theatre. It's an organization. It's an organism. I feel respectable. I really enjoy that. To me a theatre should be something important. It has to do with the attitude of people. I like to have a desk. I like to have a telephone. I think the resident theatre has a sense of a place with a little dignity.

PARKS: Do you think the lack of this at, say, the Cherry Lane Theatre when you did Endgame really negated--

SCHNEIDER: Yes. I mean, it would have been a better production at the Arena Stage. But it would have been away from the New York stage, and it wouldn't have had the evaluation of the critics.

PARKS: Does the lack of organization there--

SCHNEIDER: Well, there was no money. And no organization.

PARKS: Is that what led you to want to control as many aspects of production as possible?

SCHNEIDER: Everybody wants to control everything.

PARKS: You mean, in addition to direction, ticket sales, costumes,

set design--

SCHNEIDER: Everything.

PARKS: But how wise is that if we're talking about a group of people? I mean, what's the role of the costume designer and set designer and others?

SCHNEIDER: But I want to control the costume designer. That is, I want a costume designer with whom I can work. I don't want to be a dictator, but I want to be able to control. I'd like to be able to decide who my stage manager is. I would like to decide how much the tickets are going to cost. I don't think it's possible in the theatre to control everything, but I think it's essential in the theatre to want to control everything.

PARKS: Are there any decisions in the Arena that are the decisions of one person?

SCHNEIDER: Well, that's an abstract question, George, that you're asking. The casting of this play is ninety percent mine, plus help from the associate producer. On the other hand, if I didn't want to cast them, I wouldn't cast them. Oh, I consulted him, but that was my choice. I should decide it. There's no such thing as one person making all the decisions, but there's every necessity for one person surrounded by other people he respects and knows and has worked with being shaped to make his decisions through them. I feel a cooperative venture in the Arena, and I rarely feel that in New York.

PARKS: What prompted the question was the fact that once upon a time you had had to talk to Zelda Fichandler into taking on a particular

person for a particular part in a play.

SCHNEIDER: Well, you always have to do that. You always have to convince, persuade, cajole. Nobody ever gives you anything in the theatre. You have to fight for it. But you're more likely to achieve what you want by fighting with the right people than with the wrong people. I never won anything with David Merrick. Doing Moonchildren with David Merrick was a disastrous mistake from the beginning. It was ridiculous. He had no respect for Moonchildren. He was no more interested in Moonchildren than he was in Pakistan. Whereas here, if you work with somebody, that somebody--props, costumes, scene designer, whoever it is--you may disagree with them. I mean, I may disagree. I'm very difficult because if I want something, I'll fight tooth and nail to get it if I think I'm right. But I fight differently with the people whom I respect than with those I don't respect.

PARKS: Is there any reason to believe that the university theatre is a whole world away from the professional theatre?

SCHNEIDER: Oh, I used to have great faith in the university theatre. To some extent I still do. I started out in the university. I was lucky in that my formative years were spent at Catholic University. Catholic University was a very poor school in terms of budget and in terms of years of experience. But they had a guy at the head of it who felt a certain way about what the university should be doing. And he felt the university should lead, not follow. He felt it should direct experimental plays, classical plays, and new

plays. And I grew up with that. I think the university tends to be more cautious than the professional theatre, partly because they themselves are indeed commercial. I think a university that has to pay off its budget is a commercial theatre. I think it's wrong. A university theatre should offer a different kind of experience from the commercial theatre. It should not practice the values of commercial theatre; it should practice the values of art, whatever the hell they are. It should lead, experiment, explore. But I'm not so saddened by the conservatism of the university theatres, and I understand the reason for it. It's very hard for a playwright to give his work to young actors, to understand that the university can often do a better job on his show than the commercial theatre can. I think the opportunities or potentialities of the university are only beginning to be glimpsed. It should follow the trends of the avant garde. Every university should have a different function, whether it's to train actors or train directors or train scholars or train teachers. I'm not going to get into that. Whatever the function is of that particular university, within that function I think it has the responsibility for dealing organically as it exists at that time in that place. It cannot be stuck off in some ivory tower doing Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay. It's got to do Sam Shepard.

PARKS: How effective are our universities in preparing young actors and actresses for professional theatre?

SCHNEIDER: Well, very ineffective on the whole, and I don't see any reason why they should be any more effective. And I wouldn't

criticize them for being that ineffective. You cannot train actors two hours a week for three years. I mean, an actor needs eight hours a day for four years or five years or twenty years. But I think the university can prepare actors to realize their lack of preparedness so they can go to academies or conservatories. They can also train audiences to understand theatre. They can train playwrights. They can train directors. I don't see how an actor can be trained if he spends a thirty-hour year--semester hour year--sixteen hours in liberal arts, eight hours in social sciences, six to eight hours training to be an actor. That's not enough. I don't expect it to be enough. Acting is difficult. It takes a long time. But I think the universities recognize more now than they did thirty years ago their inefficiencies, that a class of acting shouldn't take an hour or fifty minutes. It might take two hours. That it takes time. And they're realizing that when they graduate their actors at the end of four years, that they're not really doing the same as the Julliard School or the Royal Academy. But I don't consider that a deficiency. I consider only a lack of realization a deficiency.

PARKS: In view of the fact that Mr. Albee has directed his own play Seascape, what do you think about playwrights directing their own plays?

SCHNEIDER: In theory there's nothing wrong with it. Well, in theory maybe there is something wrong with it. But the fact is that George Kaufman directed his own plays. George Bernard Shaw directed his own plays. I'm of the opinion, however, that the profession of the

playwright and the profession of stage director involve two separate but equal talents. And I'm extremely dubious if most playwrights benefit from the process of having directed their own plays. And I would be very categorical about stating that as much as I respect Edward Albee as a playwright and as much as I resent any criticism related to the fact that he is out-moded; I think he's only begun to write. I happen to like Seascape. I don't think he helped himself by directing Seascape. I think a playwright who directs his own play limits that play automatically. In the case of most contemporary playwrights--Arthur Miller did the same--I think they're nuts. I think they're making the play smaller. I think they're not helping the play, and I'm against it. Whether Edward chose to have a different director, I urged him to get a director, myself or somebody else. He wanted to direct it himself. He thought he could do a better job than anybody alive. And I think that someday when he sees a production done by another director, he might accept the fact because I think there'll be a better production done. I respected certain things about the casting; the setting was excellent, and the whole first act did not exist because Edward was directing his lines, not the situation. And I'm sad that he's done that.

PARKS: You've been noted--and even Albee has commented on--your faithfulness to the script.

SCHNEIDER: But faithfulness doesn't mean doing just what's in the script. It's that I bring forth onto the stage what the script suggests. That's my function. And I bring forth--forgive me,

Edward--always more than there is in the script, always less than the script makes possible.

PARKS: In other words, you don't make your own comment?

SCHNEIDER: Of course, I make my comment. But it's always from the text. Of course, I make my comment. I'm not a neutral jelly through which this great viscous liquid passes. But I don't try to distort it. What I do as a director is to function as the catalyst. Like an enlarging process, taking what's in the text, some of which the author knows, some of which the author doesn't know, and bring it out on stage. I do that by casting. I do it by the set. I do it by the lighting. I work from the events in a play. Some of those events the author doesn't know even exist. But I don't create them. I discover them. What are the changes of relationship that make that scene? I don't work with a text. I work with dramatic action.

PARKS: The reason that I asked that was that one of our critics had taken Tiny Alice and had compared your production with Ball's production and had said that Ball's production had done something theatrical. He interpreted it. Gottfried, I think, said that true art inspires different interpretations. And I was beginning to think that Mr. Schneider--

SCHNEIDER: Has no interpretation.

PARKS: Right.

SCHNEIDER: I have every interpretation, but I don't necessarily have to send colored balls up into the air. I thought Bill Ball's interpretation was just nuts, nothing to do with the play whatsoever.

Fascinating as it was, it had nothing to do with the play.

PARKS: This may be very elementary, but what is theatricality to you? What is the source? Does it come from you or the playwright?

SCHNEIDER: I like not something that simply reflects the surface of life but that deals with an intensification or an enlargement or an extension of life. Theatricality means dealing with reality by contrasting it to the specific realism of the thing that is everyday. I've always been more theatrical than realistic.

PARKS: With that established, what then is your opinion of the naturalistic productions?

SCHNEIDER: I think that Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie is a superior piece of work to A View From the Bridge for precisely the reason that it is theatrical.

PARKS: Something that says, "This is a play"?

SCHNEIDER: Well, there's no such thing as saying, "This is really life." But every play, no matter how realistic it is, has got to be theatrical. It's theatrical because the music plays at a certain time, because a certain person enters at a certain time, and another person exits at a certain time. On the other hand, no matter how theatrical a certain play is, it has to have a certain relationship to life, or it has no truth. The two are always connected, but they're connected in different proportions. I mean, The Glass Menagerie is a very realistic play. Simultaneously it's a very theatrical distortion, like a glass that has been put up, a prism has been put between it and reality. I don't think any play is ultimately realistic.

It's realistic, and at the same time it's theatrical. And we learn to accept that. I have always felt, however, that if a play simply said, "This is just exactly like life," it wasn't nearly as interesting as another play that said, "This is exactly like life, but I've twisted it around." There's no such thing as a theatrical play that's not realistic. But it's a matter of emphasis.

PARKS: Concerning the experimental groups such as Joe Chaikin's Open Theatre--the one that was--the Living Theatre and Grotowsky's theatre, what do they have that you can use?

SCHNEIDER: Every group is experimental. I take from everybody, whether I'm aware of it or not. I've been influenced by many experiences. I went to the Living Theatre in the early years to nearly every show. And most of them were lousy. But I just liked them because they were crazy and daring and wild and theatrical. I remember seeing The Connection, and I thought it was just terrific except I got tired of being yelled at. I finally got up and walked out. I couldn't take the yelling. But when they came back with Frankenstein, I thought ...well, I didn't know what the hell they were doing. It seemed they had stopped being theatre and they started showing off. Grotowsky, I've seen from the beginning, and I've gotten progressively disenchanted. I just get a little nervous at all the high art. I just think he's shown how discipline and how form and how ritual can be used in the theatre.

PARKS: Has he taken too much away from the public?

SCHNEIDER: Oh, I don't care about that. But he's taken it away

from me.

PARKS: That's what I mean.

SCHNEIDER: Well, I can't get involved. I sit there, and I'm watching some abstract, non-human show. I've liked him in the past. Joe Chaikin I've always liked. I watched Joe at work. I just like Joe because he's human. I think the theatre should be human and the people in the theatre should be human. They can get them happy, or they can get them upset, or they can get them interested. But they shouldn't be removed. I don't like it to be some esoteric cult. I don't like it to be too familiar, but I think Joe Chaikin has explored what can be done on a small scale. I didn't like his later stuff.

PARKS: Was it too political?

SCHNEIDER: No, it wasn't political. It was just that abstract again. I think the Living Theatre just decided they had the right message. No matter what they did, it would work. Well, I think that's nonsense. Grotowsky started very well. But ritual means I have to belong to the religion. So I have to be religious to have ritual. If I'm not religious, the ritual doesn't mean a thing. That's the way I feel about Schechner. I just think Schechner is using all form without any of the content. Joe Chaikin I just happen to like.

PARKS: According to what I read in Theatre Quarterly, they stopped because they were afraid that the next project wasn't going to be as spontaneous as the last one. And rather than work under that pressure, they stopped.

SCHNEIDER: One of the greatest crimes in American art is that

spontaneity has become worshipped as a god. Art takes work. You have to struggle. I don't think spontaneity itself is good or bad. Spontaneity to me is no great virtue. The problem is to do it the second time or the ninety-eighth time.

PARKS: The word "process" versus "product" has given me some problems in particular areas. For example, I can see process when it comes to directing and process when it comes to acting, working for the process rather than aiming at the final product.

SCHNEIDER: Wait a minute. That's not the point, George. Process is valuable insofar as it aims at a final product.

PARKS: How does this work for designers? Does this apply to designers and other people in the theatre?

SCHNEIDER: Sure. When I did my first consultation with a designer in the New York theatre, I had no contact with Jo Mielziner at all. He was too busy to talk to me. He had seventeen other shows. He just threw mine into the hopper. And when I arrived, he handed me a floor plan. So there was no process. For example, the Berliner Ensemble rehearses for a year, and then decides it doesn't want to use those masks. It then makes another set of masks because those masks aren't any good. But in our theatre we can't ever do that. I'm constantly called up--I resent this very much--to decide things scenically or costume-wise before I've had any chance to look at them, examine them, think about them constantly. So the question of process is one in which you discover what the alternatives are, weigh them, choose, try something out. You can't do that here. I mean, in a

normal, civilized theatre you try it, you look at it, you say, "No, it doesn't work. Let's try that." I've never had that luxury. I remember in Virginia Woolf the sofa was too small or too big, and we got a different sofa because the producer gave us his sofa. We'd already spent the money on the sofa. But I had to pick the sofa without looking at the set. I went to some department and picked the sofa. I went to another department and picked the chair. So I didn't get a sense of a process. At least here at the Arena they bring me a Polaroid photograph. Or if they bring me a chair or a table, I look at it and say, "It's too small," or "It's too big," or "It's too green." But that's a process. To me the theatre's a process of discovery. It's not something where you know when you start where you're going to go. I never know where I'm going to go. I know where I want to get to, but I don't know where I'm going to get to. You know, the French have this terrific word for rehearsal: attempt. A rehearsal is an attempt. That's a process. The fact that I cast a certain actor affects the process. The fact that I have a certain costume designer affects the process. But I'm supposed to have some ultimate result, and I don't know what the hell the result is or how anything fits into this. Or I'm supposed to decide yes or no. I don't know what I want. Let me rehearse for a week. Then I'll tell you what I want. But that's the difference between a theatre and show business.

PARKS: When you prepare your script, do you prepare it with a point of view in mind?

SCHNEIDER: Well, I don't say, "This is my point of view." I sit

down and say, "This play is a ping-pong game." Or I say, "This play is like dinosaurs on a cliff," as in Virginia Woolf. I do two things with a play. I try to say what the play's about. And then I try to relate every character to it. That's the first thing I do. I always ask the playwright what it's about. The second thing I do is make little lines on the paper. And those are the beats. Now it's nothing to do with cross left or cross right or sit on the sofa. Sometimes I label them.

PARKS: I recently read in Theatre Quarterly that Peter Hall, when he was directing The Homecoming, said that when he had to stop and ask, "What would this character do," he was directing badly.

SCHNEIDER: But he has good actors. It depends on the actors. I don't have any rules. Sometimes you tell the actors. Sometimes you leave them alone. But the fundamental work I do with a text is divide it up into events. What is happening between you and me? And as that changes, that's what I'm doing. That's my function.

PARKS: You don't consciously work with images, do you?

SCHNEIDER: Well, of course, I do.

PARKS: I noticed that in rehearsal you said, "I like this grouping over here."

SCHNEIDER: But I didn't sit down and say, "That's the grouping." I mean, I'm looking for relationships. But it's not enough to have a picture. I mean, I don't believe for a minute that picturization is the essence of directing. I mean, I'm going to balance it. There is such a thing as a picture. But pictures come out of dynamic

representation of truth. If it's truthful, you'll find a way. But I don't sit down and make pictures. There's no one way, but for me I do not work with staging any more.

PARKS: Helen Hayes once commented that--I think the incident was with you and George Abbott--you took him aside and told him what the play was about and what this moment was about. "We thought we knew what the play was about," she said. "I think sometimes directors load us down with more than we need to know."

SCHNEIDER: Well, I think that's true. I always talk a little to the actors. I always try to tell the actors a little bit about the play in the beginning. I talk less than most directors. I hate to talk. I feel that if I talk too much in rehearsal, something's wrong. But I'll do anything I can, whatever the hell it is. I don't know what. I'll do anything. It's all about a means to an end. What's the end? To get him to play the scene the way I want him to play it. I'll do anything that gets the result I want. I don't always know what to do, and that's why I work with the same actors all the time. I got Carol Baker to cry when she wouldn't cry by practically beating her over the head. Kazan got her to play the scene in Baby Doll by telling her he was going to fire her if she didn't play the scene. I mean, I've done love scenes where people were too familiar, and I'd play the love scene by staging it so they'd play it across the stage, so they wouldn't have to sit next to each other. I'd play music...whatever I can think of. But usually the problem is ...it's like with Hank. I'll say, "Look, when that moment comes, you're

really concerned that he doesn't respond. And I mean some concern." He looks at me blankly and says, "That's what I'm doing." So I said, "Well, if you were doing it, I wouldn't be telling you to do it." So he gets very confused because he thinks he's doing it. He doesn't understand. So by telling him to do it, I haven't helped him. So I have to find a way of saying it to him other than, "I want you to do this."

PARKS: Do you block very quickly?

SCHNEIDER: I'm still blocking. We've been on this about two weeks now. It takes me about two weeks to block a show. I don't come in with any preconceived conception.

PARKS: Just to get it up?

SCHNEIDER: I have a floor plan. When I get the floor plan, I work it out very carefully with the designer over a period of many meetings. Once I have a floor plan, I've already blocked the details.

PARKS: Then if you're still blocking, at what point in rehearsal will you say--not only with blocking but with other character explorations--"Let's stop it."

SCHNEIDER: Never. I let them explore until we close the show. I mean, I don't want them to suddenly decide to stand on the table and cross to the sofa any old time they want. I don't believe in that. If they decide they want to change something, if they're uncomfortable ...I change things all the time. There's no formal period called blocking, another formal period called polishing.

PARKS: That's another question. How do you break them up? You don't?

SCHNEIDER: No. I'll give you my schedule. The schedule is a means to an end. I'm a pragmatist. The schedule is to serve me. If I'm supposed to do Act II but Act I needs more work, then I'll do Act I. That's another problem with academic theatre. They give me lists and lists and lists, and they never do anything that's on the list. They think the list is reality. People say to me, "When do you want the actors to learn their lines?" I have never said to an actor, "I want you to learn the lines by Tuesday" and "I'm blocking now." Basically you see blocking now. At the same time though I'm not just saying cross there. I'm working it out organically. I'm developing the relationships.

PARKS: Do you have an aesthetic philosophy of administration?

SCHNEIDER: Administration exists to make the work of the artist more possible and more productive and rich. Administration exists to allow the theatre to function as an organism. It doesn't function to hem in. I resent the fact that I am bound by my technical director as to when the set gets on the stage. I think an administration would say, "Mr. Schneider needs the set x number of days before the preview. If you guys can't finish it by then, then you work till midnight." I don't want the technical director telling me when I can have the set. That's a bad administration.

PARKS: Could you relate that then to public relations? How could that possibly be--

SCHNEIDER: Aesthetic?

PARKS: When we talk about the accountant, the comptroller, are we

getting out of--

SCHNEIDER: No, they're all essential. And we have very good people here. To me the real problem in the theatre is that means and ends get all mixed up. In other words, the end that we're all going for is what ultimately happens when that play gets on the stage. That's what everything around that building is supposed to be doing. Administration to me means--and this is an abstract kind of ideal I've always had--that everything is geared around the fact that we're doing this play. Well, not this play. We might be doing six plays or three plays.

PARKS: On a couple of occasions you've gone to the defense not so much of the production as you did of the play. I'm thinking of Entertaining Mr. Sloane. You answered Mr. Taubman. And also Virginia Woolf. Perhaps this is redundant, but do you feel that everyone should feel so responsible for a production that, in theory at least, everyone should--

SCHNEIDER: In a theatre! In a theatre! We should all care. Even the janitor. But the thing that annoyed me about Sloane was--and I've done several plays that got similar reactions--I'm pretty square, not the radical type. I'm bourgeois as hell. I have one wife. I'm relatively heterosexual. I thought that Sloane was a perfect exposure of the values of a bourgeois society that would sell anything to anybody for profit. That's all it was. And Joe Orton was having a little fun with it. And they were accusing us of every crime under the sun.

PARKS: You've already talked about federal subsidies and you feel--

SCHNEIDER: I'm in favor of subsidies from all sources. I'm

particularly in favor of local subsidies because I think you have more control. Federal, well, you get one-fiftieth. They want to give the same amount to North Dakota they give to New York, and that's nutty. And also it's too far away, and nobody knows what the hell's going on. It's much better locally, if the state does it or the county does it or the city does it. But I'm all in favor of subsidies--the more, the better. It's only when the theatres stop worrying about breaking even that we have any chance at all. The English did it very well when they took a penny out of the tax pound.

PARKS: This would give the theatres a responsibility to the communities?

SCHNEIDER: Well, it might. It might. Nothing will guarantee anything. But it will make it more possible, and also it will give the communities a sense that they connect with the theatre.

PARKS: Does the Arena have any type of outreach program?

SCHNEIDER: Yes. Something called...uh, a group of young people who go out to the schools and do programs for the young people. It's a separate program, but it's a part of the Arena. Yes. And we bring in students to matinees, but that's very conventional. But Bob Alexander's program is completely devoted and dedicated to going out into the community.

PARKS: Does the Playwright Unit of the early sixties exist in any form?

SCHNEIDER: No...except in Edward's workshop in New Hampton. The Playwright's Unit was simply a way in which the Albee-Barr-Wilder

producing firm subsidized a series of showcase or workshop productions of a lot of young playwrights, some of which developed and some didn't. The Boys in the Band came from there. It doesn't exist because, I think, the Barr-Wilder organization doesn't exist. It's unfortunate, but on the other hand, there are lots of other showcases where playwrights have more of a chance to be seen, not to make money. Everything's better than it's ever been. It's also worse than it's ever been.

PARKS: How often can a concept of a theatre be re-evaluated? How often do you stop at the Arena and say, "Are we still on the right track?"

SCHNEIDER: Every day. I just sat there at the lunch hour with our associate director developer--he's our p.r. guy--we're sitting there saying, "Where are we going? What's the season like? What are our chances?" I do that all the time. I don't like to associate myself totally with the Arena. Last year I was totally here. This year I'm only peripherally here. I mean, I do other things. But I feel very close to Arena. It's the closest to a home I've ever had. And I evaluate constantly. I can never meet with Zelda without evaluating in some way or another. And when I have dinner with her next week, Tuesday or Wednesday, I'll be evaluating it. She evaluates. On the whole, Caesar was not a success, and everyone is wondering why. I wanted to do Caesar. I was a little disappointed that I didn't get to do Caesar, but she wanted me to do this play, and I could only do a certain number of plays. But I would like to do Caesar. Caesar

didn't turn out as well as everyone thought it might. So now, what about Caesar? I was a little disappointed in it, but I think it was important for our actors to have attempted this, even though it wasn't successful. But the worst criticism doesn't come within one-tenth of the way any of us in the theatre criticize ourselves.

PARKS: How frank are you? You just mentioned telling Mrs. Fichandler you were disappointed in the production. Are all of you pretty frank about the production?

SCHNEIDER: Well, it depends. Sometimes I try to be diplomatic. I can't really answer that. I try to be honest...helpful. Zelda is very good to me in rehearsal. That is, when she comes to see a run-through. Like she'll come probably tomorrow; she'll give me her honest opinion. And I find it very helpful. She doesn't ask me to agree with her, but she'll give me her opinion. She'll say, "Yes, but--" or "How about--" or "I like that, but--." She's very good at that. And if I'm seeing her show, I'll try to give her my honest opinion. That's a good thing here. Our egos don't get in the way of that. But that takes a long time. Don't forget we've been together twenty-five years.

PARKS: How do you select your plays?

SCHNEIDER: Well, Zelda can answer that better than I can. You mean, the plays that this theatre does?

PARKS: Say, in this one season. Do you sit down and say, "Here are the plays I want to do this year"?

SCHNEIDER: Well, no. Last year Zelda went off for a year, and I

functioned as a producer. I picked the plays.

PARKS: All of them?

SCHNEIDER: All of them. Not for me to direct. But I picked them all. I looked at the season, and I wanted to do this kind of play and that kind play. I wanted to do a classic. I also have to cast it for the actors. I have plays that will give parts to the actors. It's hard to do a small cast show. But I don't know. This year she wanted to do some American shows. She wanted to do a classic. She's always wanted to do Julius Caesar. Julius Caesar's a play about political power. Political power's related to Watergate. I mean, I found the Texas play, and I found Fujiyama, the two plays I'm doing. Next year, I'll talk to her about Catch 22, which I'd like to direct. She wants me to do Godot, and I'm not sure I want to do Godot. But it's sort of like "what about." We make lists. Last year I made a list of three hundred plays; then it got down to forty. Then it got down to twelve; we kept adding a couple. We were going to do Heartbreak House last year. We were going to do Three Sisters, and then we decided, well, that's too conventional. I talked her into Fujiyama and Magnolia. She's already planning next season.

PARKS: As far as the physical plant is concerned, I think you said it's too bad theatres last as long as they do, considering the lack of flexibility.

SCHNEIDER: Did I say that?

PARKS: Something to that effect.

SCHNEIDER: Unfortunately, when you build a bad theatre, it sits

there for 500 years. I mean, you can't knock it down every twenty minutes.

PARKS: When we compare European with American, how are their theatres?

SCHNEIDER: They're lousy, and they're good. But they were built at a much better time in the history of the world. Those opera houses were built in the nineteenth century and were smaller. The theatre which was built at Boston University in the twenties which seats 900 people is a fantastically marvelous theatre. But the Eisenhower Theatre in the Kennedy Center, which is sort of a half-assed imitation of the Belasco, built by a Broadway producer, is not such a marvelous theatre, even though it seats the same number of people.

PARKS: Did you ever work with Pinter on a play?

SCHNEIDER: Yes. On The Birthday Party and The Collection.

PARKS: How difficult is Pinter to direct?

SCHNEIDER: On a scale of one to ten? Eleven. I think he's terrific to direct. Extraordinarily difficult. Also rewarding and strange and impossible and crystal clear. I've always loved Pinter. I loved him when no one else would do him. He's a theatre man. He's demanding but understanding. Flexible but rigid. Complimentary but severe. But I've never done a play that was easy. I don't know a play that's easy.

PARKS: What's your weakest point as director?

SCHNEIDER: I get angry too fast. I'm impatient. I demand too much too soon.

PARKS: Has this hurt you?

SCHNEIDER: Well, a lot of actors hate my guts because I make too many demands on them. I can't just sit there and watch somebody who can do something not do it.

PARKS: Are the goals of theatre as you see them being realized at the Arena?

SCHNEIDER: Yes. It's the closest I've found. Is it ideal? No. I don't get an annual salary. I don't have eight to ten weeks to rehearse. But more than any other theatre, it accomplishes the goals of theatre insofar as those goals can be accomplished in the United State of America in my lifetime.

PARKS: Inasmuch as we don't have a conservatory type of director's training where we send young men off and they come out directors, how do we get directors? Now I know what we have, but what makes the director?

SCHNEIDER: Well, that's a tough one because no one knows how to train directors. We do have ideas about this. I think a director should be an actor. He should be trained as an actor in a conservatory. He should be experienced as an actor, working with other directors as an actor, and then eventually decide and work his way into being a director. I'm not sure how you train directors without going through that process. I know of very few directors who haven't been actors. Peter Brook's the only one I know actually. I was an actor. I wasn't very good, but I was an actor. I mean, I acted. Why? In order to work with directors. There's no short course to direction. I don't

think you can get it out of a book. I don't think you can get it out of a course, out of just doing. I think it's essential that you have some concern for actors. I don't know any simple way to train directors except by working with other directors, being involved with other directors. Sitting in a room isn't enough. You've got to work. On the other hand, I've never worried about the fact that we don't have directors. We're loaded with directors. The problem is to give them opportunities and to trust them because we don't really know how to audition directors.

PARKS: What then is a bad director?

SCHNEIDER: I can tell sometimes. And sometimes I can't. If I see Edward Albee and the first act of Seascape with Barry Nelson and Deborah Kerr sitting there on stage, nicely grouped, marvelous set, terrific costumes, sitting down and talking and nothing happening-- in quotes, "nothing happening"--for forty minutes, I'm sorry, that's a bad director. Now the choice of what happens will be different from Milt Katselas to Jose Quintero to Alan Schneider. But every director will make something happen. There's a difference between a man who directs a play and a man who is a director. I'm a director. I can do a lousy job on a certain show, but I'm still a director. Somebody else can do a terrific job on a show and still not be a director.

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