Audience Engagement in Theatre for Social Change

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Abstract

This report from the field describes some of the author’s methods of audience engagement as a means of social engagement, discussing the implications for practice. The report invites dialogue with the reader about the usefulness of audience engagement and ways it can be manifested before, during and after performance. Theatre is a vibrant and valuable tool for sparking dialogue and inspiring action around challenging social topics. Audiences who are engaged in the process of the performance beyond the standard role of passive spectator are more likely to be motivated to deliverable endeavors post performance. This report from the field offers four brief case studies as examples of audience engagement and includes pragmatic techniques for using theatre as a vehicle for personal and social change through audience engagement. It explores how artists can galvanize and empower audiences by creating experiential communities pre, during, and post-show. Drawing upon examples from high-quality international theatre projects written and directed by the author, the essay investigates and describes the work of The H.E.A.T. Collective including My Heart is in the East (U.S., U.K. and Europe), The FEAR Project (produced in the US, India and Czech Republic), Emma Goldman Day (U.S.).
How to improve audience engagement? Turn your event attendees into event participants. Try these six audience engagement techniques. When people are engaged in an event they will most likely visit also your social media accounts. A marked increase in social media followers is a surefire sign your event was a success. But don’t forget about your new followers – keep that engagement living by regular interactions to maintain relationships with existing attendees. This is an amazing way how to turn them into your brand ambassadors who’ll promote your next event. The audience gained extreme importance in viewing a performance. The purpose of a play transcended entertaining and escaping from mundane life to providing a function for the audience. Worthen observed that “stage technology and acting practice in the late nineteenth century enabled the realistic theater to place the audience before an integrated, freestanding tableau, “leaving the spectator free to draw his own moral from the picture”” (Worthen 21). This makes the audience a crucial part of not only the performance but the writing of the plays. Though Worthen does have valid evidence regarding the audience’s participation in viewing The Wild Duck I have found another way to view drama and stories in general. Performing arts, it declares, “are inherently social arts and provide a necessary opportunity to develop the skills of socialisation and communication required by a healthy democracy”. It emphasises: “Cultural activities and the performing arts specifically, can uniquely serve as a meeting place, a site for the formation of a shared communal identity as ‘the public’.” On the other hand, perhaps the basic assumption does a disservice to many theatre audiences. Theatre that isn’t interested in such engagement might as well not be live. Look at questions of participation from another angle, the perspective of performers and theatre-makers themselves, and another set of issues emerges: the effect that ethnicity, disability and gender have on access to opportunities. Testing New Waters of Audience Engagement at the Goodman - Neena Arndt. The article discusses ways in which the Goodman Theatre is creating activities and materials to increase the audience appetite for new work. It is interesting to think about the activities in the context of the spectrum of engagement outlined by Wolf Brown (New Play Affinity Score). Engagement. A discussion about the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre’s Act II program. Act II is an audience dialogue initiative which aims to create positive social change through curated post performance discussions which then move a play’s themes beyond the theater into the wider community. The article provides a lens for understanding how to build on audience members’ appetite for engaging with issues. An engaged audience and good facilitation go hand in hand. Like professors in their fields, event moderators can have a major impact on the engagement in the room, and therefore, the attendees’ learning. Surprisingly, only 19% of event professionals involve moderators in their pre-event planning. This can be a serious hurdle to achieving meaningful engagement. As Kristin Arnold, an expert facilitator, notes, “The earlier you bring in the moderators, the better they can help influence the flow and format.” To make their contribution count, make sure that you brief your moderators well in advanc