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I really liked your last audience

Let us begin by calling into question the term “audience”. During a recent event organised in Marseille, I played a game of Happy Audience Families, observing 7 types of behaviour at any given time T:

- the spectators: they know the programme by heart, they know the troupes and actors, they are well-equipped (shoes, hats, seats, water, etc.);
- the onlookers: they pass by and are overjoyed that some is finally happening, they are quickly absorbed by the performance, they phone their friends to tell them to come and join them;
- the observers: these people are more interested in the urban stage than by the show itself, they stand to one side with one eye on the spectators and the other on the artists (professionals generally belong to the family of observers);
- the inhabitants: they are at home, the hosts, they are generally quite proud but don’t really have any point of view about the work (KompleXXKapharnaüm invites the inhabitants they have filmed to the dress rehearsal as they have noticed that they don’t come to the shows).
- the participants: they want to participate, they are ultra-interactive, they help to clear away the equipment, but desert traditional offerings and pay little attention to the show itself;
- the accomplices: they are more interested in the event than the shows, they “channel hop”. When questioned at the end, it is clear that they have seen “the festival”, but they confuse the different shows;
- the protestors: they complain, protesting at the excessive cost, the use of their taxes (even if they don’t pay any), but remain there and even wait until the end to share their discontent with the artists, even offering them a drink.

To these 7 categories can be added a series of parameters, such as the fact that there are always either too many or too few people, that a large majority of spectators arrive after the show has started and leave before it ends, that some of them follow the procession and others don’t. And then there is the eternal question of children and parents, of parents who are no longer really adult spectators but parent spectators who follow the artistic offering according to the reactions of their children.

Nor should we forget the means of encountering the said audiences: invitation or chance meeting, as part of a festival or an isolated performance, practical joke, rumour, fiction, myth, ritual, festivity or invisible art. The question of the audience is thus consubstantial to the work, it is part of the writing and as the key to maintaining the very essence of street arts, it is first and foremost the responsibility of the artists before that of the organisers.

At present, a necessary institutional recognition is taking shape. If by misfortune, lassitude or a desire for recognition we lose sight of the artistic answer to the question of audiences, we will relinquish our desire

for a greater role of art in people's lives to replace it with a form of cultivated outdoor art.

“I really liked your last audience” – that is the best compliment you can pay an artist as it reflects the absolute relevance of the invitation extended to the public, the pertinence of the dramatic and scenographic work which enables the spectators to immediately recognise their place, their very role, in the work presented.

Pierre Sauvageot, November 2005