

SITE-SPECIFIC THEATRE: A PLATFORM FOR COMMUNAL DISCUSSION AND REINVIGORATION

With arts funding being decreased and even eliminated throughout the United States, my research aimed to see if theatre in small town Minnesota would create an impact. By performing *The Visit* by Friedrich Dürrenmatt, a play dealing with issues of foreclosures and lack of funding, would hit home with these small towns dealing with the same issues as the play.

Survey Questions:

Number of surveys completed: 187

*Surveys were completely voluntary and audience members were not required to fill them out

1. Has this production changed the way you think about theater?

Yes: 123

No: 31

Somewhat/Kind of: 33

"Sense of community and audience is alive and beautiful here [in the village]"

2. After attending *The Visit*, will you consider attending another theater event in the future?

Yes: 185

No: 1

NA/ Maybe: 1

"I appreciated how profound a story can be when told as theater."

3. Has this play inspired you to think about personal or political issues (personal vs. public responsibility) related to you?

Yes: 150

No: 20

Somewhat: 17

"Especially how complicit I am in the earn/spend/consume materialism encouraged in our society. And my acceptance of a system that perpetuates gross inequalities."

"This provoked an emotional response. What is the difference between sacrifice and necessary compromise? How are we all complicit in the injustice around us?"

4. After experiencing the play in the Historical Village do you think you are more likely to visit this village or another historical site in the future?

Yes: 163

No: 10

Possibly: 14

"I'd love to see more happening here and in other historical villages."

5. Where is your home? Where are you from?

Inside Minnesota: 130

Outside of Minnesota: 57

Kaawa, HI
Buenos Aires, Argentina



The Process:

Myself as well as 9 other performers from the Twin Cities rehearsed and thought through our production and the text of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's play *The Visit* for three weeks and then took our research into the text to three smaller communities throughout Minnesota: Albert Lea, Blue Earth, and East Grand Forks.

Once in each of the locations a group of local actors joined us and were inserted into the story as the other characters in the production. Once we had rehearsed with these community members for a couple of days we then performed.

After each of the performances survey's were distributed to the audience members consisting of my five research questions



Findings:

By taking a play dealing with issues of a struggling town and how far it will go to save itself and placing it inside of the historical villages of Albert Lea, Blue Earth, and East Grand Forks, it is clear to see that performing theatre in site-specific areas allows for a new unique view on performance and how theatre can imitate life.

By seeing a performance take place in the heart of a town instead of inside a theater, issues and responses that may not have been generated before, percolate into the minds of the audience.

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*All photos by Elise Langer