

STEAL THIS PLAY

v0.2 (alpha test)

V. Scratch Interact @ Soho Theatre, Apr 12th 2010 Performance Report

(Following our performances, Open Source Theatre compiles short reports on what happened, relevant statistics, successes, failures and plans, as well as linking to footage. This is part of our ongoing efforts to communicate with audiences and have interesting conversations.)

Basic Stats

Performers: 2

Performance time: 150 minutes, with interval

Audience figures: 25 (approx.) participants, for 5-10 minute individual, pair or group performances; a further 40 (approx.) spectators, observing intermittently

Number of laughs: 47 (approx.), of varying length and quality

Number of interesting conversations: 12 (approx.), of varying length and quality

Number of thoughts provoked: Indeterminate

Quantity of feedback: Six post-show conversations and two post-show e-mails

Wages earned: £0.00.

What we actually did

Set: We built a claustrophobic nook with a table, three chairs, and a flipchart on which was written the crucial words “ALWAYS GET A RECEIPT”

Costume: The interrogator was made up in an ill-fitting uniform in various shades of brown, greased hair, and a badge which read “SECURITY”. The filmer wore plain, simple jacket and trousers

Performance: The interrogator approached loose audience members and asked them to accompany him; after the first couple of performances, a queue of people formed waiting to be interrogated.

On entrance, audience members were asked to place their bags on a table and empty their pockets. The interrogator began by asking for receipts for items in their possession: clothes, bags, trinkets, whatever looked interesting. The direction of the performance was then led by audience response; judging by what made people laugh or say interesting things, the interrogation would go deeper into particular possessions, or progress to the next stage.

Possible stages:

- Asking them to read the sign out loud, and discussing “best practise” of ownership documentation
- Interrogating pictures on a camera or camera phone, asking for receipt of permission from cows, cars and friends
- Scrolling through tracks on an mp3 player and asking for proof of purchase for each in turn

- For couples or friends, asking for proof of ownership of each other
- Discussing where individuals took possession of the words they were speaking, and asking if they had obtained permission
- Inquiring about ownership of thoughts, feelings and minds

Participants were filmed and photographed throughout. When the interrogation reached a natural or interesting conclusion, participants were asked to sign a complex legal form signing over their images to Open Source Theatre. They were then given a “receipt” in the form of an information sheet about the show and asked to leave.

Images and Film



Film footage available at <http://www.youtube.com/user/harrygilestube>

Things which were good

- The performance worked best when it progressed rapidly into philosophical conversation, taking place between a bored security guard and a laughing and perplexed participant
- Notable conversations: debating image property rights with a software developer; establishing a theory of language as being the common property of all, contradicted by the intellectual property of the OED; discovering that several participants had plotted together and come in with pre-prepared fake receipts for their possessions; discovering that several people were quite happy to admit to casual theft
- The flipchart, a last minute addition, added just the right level of absurdity, and provided a reliable joke to turn to if the conversation risked being dull
- The flow of audience members was constant, and people almost never resisted the game of the piece – they were eager to play along
- Our plan to obtain permission to use people's images was successfully incorporated into the piece as an extra layer: the filming put people on edge, and gave a context for discussing image ownership

- We had fun.

Things which weren't

- Our setting within the wider context of Scratch Interact was a bit haphazard, so we weren't able to “abduct” unsuspecting audience members as much as we'd wanted. That people were queuing detracted from the unsettlingness of the initial moments. Once this performance is incorporated into a wider performance, this should largely be solved.
- We didn't manage to solicit enough written or recorded feedback, so communication about the show was one-directional. A feedback point should be incorporated into future iterations.
- There was a philosophical arc to the performance, but no narrative arc. Several participants wanted to know if bad things were going to happen to them, and so we needed to have developed a story of the wider context. This led to the ending being awkwardly time-determined, without a satisfactory conclusion.
- The conversations were best when they were at their most interesting, and weakest at their most accusational. An effort should be made for people to think about interesting things.

What Next?

We're now looking for a home for a beta version, in which this performance, and perhaps a second performance element, will be incorporated into a visual/tactile installation. This will be the next stage before creating a fully-fledged performance, and will enable us to test the installation element and improve the performance elements. This minimal version of STEAL THIS PLAY can also be used in the future as an example of Open Source Theatre's work, to be used when offered small-scale showcasing opportunities. It will be worth testing it with different kinds of audiences.