

Thesis Abstract

The thesis provides an analysis of three plays – *My Arm* (2002), *An Oak Tree* (2005) and *The Author* (2009) – by Tim Crouch, one of the most prominent contemporary British theatre-makers. Particular attention is paid to Crouch's use of innovative dramaturgical methods in order to activate his audience. Despite its increasing popularity, audience participation has been a rather neglected area of theatre studies, therefore the thesis includes a brief overview of the discourse as well as an introduction of related concepts and movements, such as experimental theatre and In-Yer-Face theatre. The focal points of discussion are, among others, spectatorship, particularly the theory of *The Emancipated Spectator* (2008) as proposed by Jacques Rancière, and Émile Coué's concept of autosuggestion, both very prominent in all three plays. Essentially, the main focus of the work is on the specifics of Crouch's treatment of the audience and the methods, both theoretical and practical he utilises to achieve an activated audience while keeping the said participation meaningful. Crouch argues against using dramaturgical tools purely for their shock value and offers a vision of theatre where imagination and autosuggestion are significantly more impactful than elaborate props and overly realistically-looking characters which he achieves through continuously challenging his audience, as well as actors, to become active co-creators of the theatrical event particularly by asking them to use their imagination in order to visualise the scenes and to create a personal connection to the play. The involvement is prompted by various methods ranging from the use of random objects provided by the audience members as representation of characters (*My Arm*) through to establishing a sense of sympathy between the audience and the actor by involving an actor who has not had the chance to read the script (*An Oak Tree*). Becoming a co-creator, however, comes at a price, as Crouch alerts the audience to in his most discussed play *The Author*, a disturbing reinvigoration of the legacy of In-Yer-Face theatre where he engages with the challenging notion of ethics and personal responsibility in theatre.