

## ABSTRACT

### ***Antigone's Diary* – Young Audiences as Co-creators of GPS-guided Radio Drama**

The play, *Antigone's Diary*, is a re-written version of Sophocles' classical play, developed with teenage schoolchildren in the riot-ridden suburb Husby, a 30-minute subway ride away from the centre of Stockholm. Rebecca Forsberg of RATS Theatre adapted the plot into an interactive radio performance with a mobile audience, walking through the suburb and responding via text messages to Antigone's questions after each of the twelve scenes. Young audiences were of especial interest for this project. Therefore, school performances for teenagers are the focus of this survey.

The responses of pupils were studied during and after performances by means of observations, qualitative interviews and quantitative analysis of the text messages that the participants sent in response to Antigone's questions. The seriousness and enthusiasm of young audiences were one of the stunning outcomes of this survey and a number of quotations illustrate the immersive power of this production. Furthermore, this experiment also served as a test bed for the Department of Computer and System Science, to which Rats Theatre is closely tied. The multimedia performance, combining radio drama, mobile audiences in a local environment and the options of interactive participation, demonstrated the potential of participatory experiences to engage audiences in democratic processes that can be applied to issues of political interest and decision making in the public sphere.

Keywords: multimedia performance, mobile radio drama, moving audiences, immersion, participation, democratic involvement.

## BIOGRAPHIES

Manilla Ernst has a Master's degree in Children's Culture and a Bachelor's degree in Theatre Studies from Stockholm University. Her research interests are related to performing arts for children, children and media, children's experiences of culture and children's participation and influence. She works part-time at the Centre for the studies of Children's Culture at Stockholm University. She also carries out surveys for public authorities and theater groups and gives lectures on children's experiences of performing arts.

*manilla.ernst@barnkultur.su.se*

Willmar Sauter, Professor emeritus of Theatre Studies at Stockholm University, has studied audiences and reception processes over a number of years. He has also written on Swedish theatre history, from Bronze Age rock carvings to recent multimedia and digital performances. His theoretical interests are documented in *The Theatrical Event* (2000) and *Eventness* (2006). He has recently published a book on the Drottningholm Court Theatre (2014, together with David Wiles). He was the first chairman of the Association of Nordic Theatre Scholars. He has been the President of the International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR) and served Stockholm University as dean of the Faculty of the Humanities and as chair of the Research

School of Aesthetics.

*Willmar.Sauter@teater.su.se*

# Antigone's Diary – Young Audiences as Co-creators of GPS-guided Radio Drama

MANILLA ERNST AND WILLMAR SAUTER

A group of teenagers are standing in the middle of the square in the suburb of Husby, a thirty-minute subway ride from Stockholm City. They have headsets connected to smartphones and are listening to the theatre performance *Antigone's Diary*. At the square, the teenagers are surrounded by shops and vegetable stalls along the façades. On the part of the square where the scene is playing, a wooden sculpture is chained to a lamppost. In the headphones the teenagers hear how Antigone and her friends are raising a sculpture and they hear a guard who questions whether they have the permission to raise the statue they have brought along. Antigone asks the guard to ignore the law, but he insists that the city belongs to those in power. Antigone replies, "Whoever controls alone controls a deserted city". The scene ends and Antigone asks the audience: "What makes you angry?" The question pops up in the display of the smartphones and those who want to answer it can do so with a text message.

*Antigone's Diary*, a new play based on the Greek tragedy *Antigone*, was written by Rebecca Forsberg, director of the Swedish theatre group RATS Theatre. Sophocles' drama has been transferred from ancient Greece to a contemporary suburb of Stockholm and is staged through the mobile phone's digital technology. RATS Theatre began as a free theatre group in 2008 under the name Kista Teater, and has, since its beginning, been located in the Stockholm suburbs Husby and Kista. Ever since its inception, the theatre group has worked in cooperation with the Department of Computer and Systems Sciences (DSV) at Stockholm University for technical assistance. At the turn of 2012/13 Kista

Theatre became RATS Theatre and a part of DSV. The acronym RATS stands for "Research in Artistic Technologies for Society" and the purpose of the collaboration is to investigate possible encounters between theatre and digital technologies. A large part of the cooperation between DSV and RATS Theatre concerns the development of digital technologies in relation to spectators in order to test new opportunities for audience participation, thus promoting dialog with society. To what extent this participation in a theatrical performance can be interpreted as a test bed for more politically targeted involvement will be discussed in the conclusion of this article. First, we will discuss how mobility was taken to an immigrant suburb, moving audiences and digital communication that transgress the limitations of time and place. After a brief presentation of the dramaturgical concept of this mobile drama, we will focus on young audiences' reception of the performance and discuss how their opportunity to be part of the performance created a strong sense of participation. The response of young people to this performance also gives a hint of the democratic appeal that this approach points toward. From the perspective of Computer Science, the performances of RATS Theatre confirm that participatory digital techniques should be employed in the development of e-government, providing options for citizens to engage in public decision making.

## STAGING MOBILITY

As digital technology has developed and been more integrated into performing arts productions, the

encounter with audiences opens up for unexpected options. Today's digital innovations offer interactive possibilities and the spectators are no longer only recipients of the performing arts, but can also examine, modify and transform productions. The audience becomes part of the artistic expression and are co-creators of the finished work.<sup>1</sup> When RATS Theatre invites the audience to participate in their productions, they are not just engaged in the digital staging, but are also asked to air their own opinions and comments.

During their first operating years, RATS Theatre had no premises, which led them to cooperate with local businesses as well as temporary locations in the area. Instead of looking at their rootlessness as an obstacle, they saw it as an asset and their mobile existence became their artistic method. Movement out of sheer necessity also touches the basis of migrating existence. The theatre group lacks a stable location, and the performance makes the spectators move from place to place in a suburb that is dominated by migrants and their children. While their parents still struggle to make Husby their new home, far away from their original dwellings, the young generation have made this environment their own, although overshadowed by the traumatic experiences of their elders.

The suburbs Husby and Kista where RATS theatre and DSV are located and where the performance is staged are neighbourhoods of opposing social conditions. Husby was planned and built in the early 1970s with the first tenants moving in a few years later. Today, 12 000 inhabitants live there and 84% of them are not born in Sweden or they are children of immigrant parents. On the square where the performance started, one finds a pizzeria, a kebab restaurant, some grocery stores, a dry cleaner, a pharmacy as well as a public assembly hall. Husby is stricken by high unemployment and a low level of education among its inhabitants. Kista is located one subway stop before Husby and is called the Silicon Valley of Sweden. Despite their geographical closeness, there is a world between the suburbs of Husby and Kista. Concentrated in this area are several of Sweden's leading companies in new technologies and IT with 25 000 employees. Kista also has a big shopping mall with all the world's best known

brands.



Fig. 1. The beginning of *Antigone's Diary* on Husby Square, Stockholm, Sweden. Photo: Manilla Ernst.

Back to the teenagers in the square of Husby. Before listening to the first scene where Antigone and her friends raise the sculpture, the young audience receives the information that Antigone has disappeared, but that her diary has been found. To join the search for her traces, they have to enter their name or a fake alias into the smartphones. *Antigone's Diary* can be described as a GPS-guided radio drama in twelve successive locations. The performance is designed as an application for smartphones and audio files are played when the young audience approach the predetermined venues. To orientate themselves on their walkway through the performance, the teenagers have a map that appears on the phones' display as well as the voices and the music being played in the earphones while they move on. After each scene, the participants, as mentioned above, are invited to respond by means of text messages to questions asked by Antigone. Once such a message is sent off, the participants can read other responses while they walk to the next location.

Afterwards, it is also possible to find the responses on the theatre's webpage. This part of the performance creates a dialogue between the participants and is significant for the experience. Since many of the participants are locals from Husby or neighbouring suburbs, the mobile adventure also provides a new view of their own quotidian environment.

When the teenagers leave the square, they have a two-minute walk to a nearby schoolyard. The real sound of children playing in the schoolyard mixes with the voices talking in the headphones. In the play, Creon tells the citizens of Thebes that Antigone's brothers are dead and that he has buried only one of them, Eteocles. Polynices will however remain unburied to be eaten by dogs and birds. Creon says that whoever defies this order will be condemned to death. Antigone is upset and her voice in the earphones asks the participants "When is it permissible to refuse an order?". In the following ten scenes, the teenagers follow Antigone as she prepares and implements her brother's funeral, then as she is arrested by the police and subsequently buried alive. The twelfth and final scene brings the participants back to the square where they started. In their headphones, the listeners can hear mass protesters shouting in Arabic, a recorded quotation from the turmoil on the Tahir Square in Cairo. And the last question is about what freedom means to each individual participant.



Fig. 2. The park in which Antigone illegally buries her brother. Photo: Manilla Ernst.

Each location reflects, more or less, what goes on in the headphones. The scenes where Antigone buries her brother is, for instance, placed on a height.

Some tall pine trees create a shade over an area with a small waterfall that is drained and filled with rocks of various sizes. While the park below is lush, the rocks and pines express a barren environment.

The staging of *Antigone's Diary* focuses on the young audience as the main agent of the performance.<sup>2</sup> The text of Sophocles' classical play has been scrutinized and reworked by RATS Theatre's artistic director Rebecca Forsberg in close collaboration with a group of teenagers from Husby.<sup>3</sup> The questions that are asked at the end of each scene have been thoroughly discussed with the young participants – that is probably the reason why these questions aim at broad, general problems of high importance for young people such as freedom, brother- and sisterhood, anxieties and secrets.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the responses of the participants, which everybody could read on their mobile telephone's display, added in an unpredictable way to the dramaturgy of the performance. The interactive responses did not change the plot of the play, but they contributed vividly to the involvement of the listeners.

The participants had to define the visual spaces of each scene in the suburb of Husby through the audio experience. Although some locations helped the audience to imagine the place, the individual's interpretation was challenged more than during plays performed in a regular theatre. The young audience also had to identify and imagine the characters from the voices and bind together the fragmented plot. Thus, they completed the impulses of the performance with their own imagination, their knowledge of the locations and the interactions that the text messages invited them to.

#### YOUNG AUDIENCES: INTERACTION AND IMMERSION

The empirical material for this article is taken from Manilla Ernst's master's thesis and consists of interviews with and observations of young participants.<sup>5</sup> In total, she observed six performances and carried out qualitative interviews with 28 pupils between 13 and 16 years old from three different schools located in the area. The observations served the purpose of studying the pupils' body language, their



tacit responses and their degree of concentration during the performance. In the interviews, which were recorded, the teenagers had the opportunity to verbalise their experiences after the performance. These well-established methods have been successfully tested in a number of surveys concerning young audiences.<sup>6</sup> The interviews and observations indicate that the young audience enjoyed being part of the performance as well as its mobility. Before examining the young audience's experiences, we will frame the context of the empirical material we analysed.

In recent decades, a new paradigm of childhood has emerged, which is characterized by the basic concept that a young person's life has to be understood as a social construction.<sup>7</sup>

The young audience's behaviour and the way we chose to discuss their interactions with new technologies has to be referred to the interdisciplinary field of children's culture. In all cultural expressions, children's participation is permeated by adult values and norms, which are continuously debated and redefined. The interest of involving children and young people in adult-produced culture is based upon the theoretical foundation in research fields such as childhood sociology and childhood studies. The concept of childhood varies over time and changes according to social, cultural and historical conditions as well as parameters such as gender, class and ethnicity.<sup>8</sup> Children are thus not passive recipients of cultural and social patterns, but are agents who are able to supply, as well as change, the cultural and social life world they share with adults.<sup>9</sup>

Norms and ideals about children, childhood and adolescence are apparently in flux. The emergence of new technologies such as computers, social networking, computer games and mobile phones have come to change children and young people's positions further. The view of children and young people as competent becomes especially prominent in media research. Through their 'natural' proximity to digital media, young people become more interactive, creative, innovative, curious, open-minded, democratic and globally oriented and challenge generational systems and power relations between children and adults.<sup>10</sup> In the interviews, the young spectators very much confirmed these new insights

in childhood studies.

After each of the surveyed performances, interviews with young participants – usually pupils from the nearby schools – were carried out. Altogether seven groups of 3-6 pupils in each were recorded. When talking to the pupils it was obvious that they were committed to the performance and that they took their participation very seriously. They enjoyed the fact that the performance was staged via their mobile phones. This was mainly due to two things: the focus on sound and the freedom of movement. The voices and the music – and the lack of other theatrical signs – invited the pupils to create large parts of the performance in their minds. They had to image the appearance of the characters and the fictional places they inhabited. In the interviews it turned out that the making of the character and the fact that they had to walk around made the pupils feel like characters themselves.

“When you have headphones and a mobile phone, you think you are within the play. It's like you are in the drama.” (Teenager, 16 years old) “I didn't feel like an audience. It felt like that I was one of them, a character who didn't speak but who could see everything.” (Teenager, 13 years old)

The teenagers confirmed that they entered a co-creation process during the performance. They also appreciated the fact that they had a lot more freedom to move about at their own pace – in contrast to seeing performances in theatres.

Teenager 1: When you go to a regular theatre and sit in the auditorium, then, as an audience, you are never part of the performance

Teenager 2: No, exactly.

Teenager 3: No, you're not supposed to talk or say anything, you only watch...

Teenager 4: ... and you fall asleep!

Teenager 1: It's only for the eyes. This performance was everything. The body, thoughts – all involved. It was very good. (Teenagers, 16 years old)

The way the performance was staged gave the pupils a lot of freedom. They could talk during the performance – and it was allowed. Otherwise, the school context could easily have affected the pupils' experiences negatively, if adults had repeatedly corrected their behaviour.<sup>11</sup> Even when the pupils had the freedom to do whatever they liked during *Antigone's Diary*, it turned out that they were extremely focused on the performance.

Teenager 1: In our class, you know, it is never quiet. NEVER!

Teenager 2: ... chaos all the time...

Teenager 1: Chaos all the time. But that day, everyone was quiet, only listening to what we heard. Answered questions. 'Check this good question, check it, check it! Have you answered? What did you answer?' But when we otherwise make excursions, to museums or something... always chaos! (Teenagers, 16 years old)

What these young people express in the interviews is no less than a testimony of a deep-felt and honest involvement. Rosemary Klich and Edward Scheer have described this kind of response as *immersion*.<sup>12</sup> Their conception of immersive involvement means that for the viewer/listener, or simply the participant of a multimedia performance, the technology of the performance becomes (almost) invisible and instead the beholder enters the fictional or symbolic world of the performance. The hypermediacy, of which Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin speak,<sup>13</sup> seems to disappear in favour of the immediacy of the encounter. Such an immersive effect of the performance on school children could not be automatically expected.

#### CONFRONTING ANTIGONE'S QUESTIONS

Primarily, the audience is involved in two ways in *Antigone's Diary*. They create the performance by combining the elements found in the audio drama and they experience the surrounding environment; this is mostly an individual process. In addition, the audience has the opportunity to interact with the drama by answering the questions that Antigone

asks. This interaction is an optional feature of the performance, but the vast majority of the spectators become easily active participants. The access to other participants' responses enhances a collective process among the audience: they all become part of creating the dramaturgy of the performance.

The analysis of the text messages of the teenagers' responses to Antigone's questions during the performance provides insights into how pupils perceived their role in the performance. The web-based material that is analysed here includes responses from seven school performances. Together, the material consists of 714 text messages from 77 different identities. The youngsters were mostly walking in pairs and thus many more individuals were involved in the responses. The young people who participated in the interviews represented very well the majority of those who sent text messages. The material also includes messages from audience members who were observed but not interviewed.

When analysing the messages they were divided into different categories. The main category consists of proper answers to the questions and consists of 617 messages or 89.3% of the total responses that have been analysed. It is not possible to make a detailed presentation of all the answers from the twelve locations. Instead some may serve as examples. After the first scene, where Antigone and her friends have a discussion with the guard about the sculpture, Antigone asks the audience, "What makes you angry?".

"Fake people. Bullying. Injustice. Bullshit. Fighting. When someone plays cool. Traitors. Annoying people. People who lie. When people are all ego. Idiots. Injustice in the world. People who think they have status. The Police. Waking up for school. Losing on really crappy games. When being ignored. When someone takes my things without permission. When people lie to me. Everything makes me angry. Everything that is annoying. When I do not get the things I want and bullying. Blood and when one is bad. When it is cold. When the computer doesn't work. When it rains in the middle of summer. Exams."

The responses show a variety of thoughts and emotions that upset the pupils. And it shows both things that are caused by other people and what the teenagers do to themselves. In some cases it can also be a physical thing that makes them angry. In the scene where Creon proclaims that Antigone's brother Polynices will remain unburied and Antigone decides to defy power, she asks the audience "When is it permissible to refuse an order?"

"When someone is in need. When you need to. When you're about to save lives. When you are right in the community. In emergencies. When it is about someone's best. In terms of life and death. Rules are made to be broken. When you want. When you think you're right. Self-defence. When you are angry. When you are right. When you risk your life. When you have permission. While in the suburbs. Never."

The responses to this particular question are of great interest from a democratic point of view. Many of these school children have parents, relatives or neighbours who have escaped from dictatorships such as Creon's reign over ancient Thebes. These young citizens are in the process of adopting democratic visions of society and Antigone's situation reflects their own struggle to participate in tomorrow's politics.

With the seventh question, the pupils had the opportunity to respond to, "What makes your heart start beating?". Even on this issue, there were a variety of answers, primarily about personal feelings and physical states.

"Love. When you're with someone you like. Feeling. Electrical impulses. When you live. When the brain sends signals through nerves. Tits. When a bee flies close to me. When I panic. Marathon. When I run fast. Football. When I run a lot and stress. Milk and hardcore. Love and fear."

To the eleventh question, "What is hell for you?", the young audience texted:

"Something you hate. When everyone you know dies. When everything is bad. When something is negative. A bad and ugly place with fire everywhere. A place for the wicked. When I feel powerless. Fire. Where the devil lives! When you die. A place I don't want to see. After Life. War."

Many of the students also wrote "School". Other categories that were identified were responses to the performance as such. These posts were not large in number, in total 14 of 714 messages. On the first question when the pupils had to answer "What makes you angry?" some of them wrote: "This song. This question. The difficulties to answer this question." When Antigone asked the audience "What makes your heart start beating?" someone commented "It beats all the time", another "☺ <33333333".

Some of the questions were more provocative than others. When the question "When would you tell a secret?" was asked, responses such as "None of your business" were posted and to the question "What do you believe in?" the answer "Nothing you idiots" could be found.

There were also a few answers that, in some ways, made fun of the questions. We believe that these messages were written to avoid extra sensitive issues or that the respondents really did not have any other answer. From a participation aspect even these answers are interesting. These members of the audience did not wish to take the opportunity of sharing their thoughts, but still wanted to be part of the performance. There is an obvious interest in wanting to show their presence.<sup>14</sup>

Even if all of the pupils that were observed and interviewed had a very powerful and personal experience, we could also register differences between the pupils who lived and went to school in or close to Husby and other pupils who lived far away. The pupils who already had a relation to Husby were very positive toward the performance, and most of them answered the questions in a proper way. The pupils that had not been to Husby before did not participate with the same concentration and they made fun of the questions much more than the other ones.

## CONCLUSION

During the running time of the production news-casts reported from the uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. This had a strong influence on the young audience and several individuals related explicitly the news reports to Antigone's actions and fate.

"I do not know if she would be executed or what it was. Though I have heard of the real Antigone and she is executed at the end. And it looked like she might have done it in this performance as well and that it would be a revolution after, something like that. It reflects what is happening right now everywhere." (Teenager, 13 years old)

This reaction is hardly surprising, but, nevertheless, noteworthy. *Antigone's Diary* works on a number of political levels. First of all, Sophocles' *Antigone* is and always has been a political play. The confrontation between individual ethics and the power of the state has had reverberations in various times and places, not the least in the wake of fallen dictatorships. The play has inspired dramatists to create new versions of *Antigone* and Rebecca Forsberg's adaptation follows upon such writers as Friedrich Hölderlin, Jean Anouilh and Bertolt Brecht. While the topic of morality against power is intriguing as such, the production of *Antigone's Diary* brings two more aspects into play. One is the local theme, the closeness to the suburb, i.e. the suburb of Husby is not only the setting of the walk, but also its focus: it is right there, in their own streets and parks that the audience finds the traces of Antigone. Husby is in a way elevated to become the scene of an eternal conflict and thus includes both the moving audience and all the inhabitants of this suburb – they all participate in creating the frame of the performance.

For those listening to the voices in their ear-phones, the interaction with *Antigone's Diary* expands from the physical to the mental. The performance triggers emotional immersion and rational responses. This transformation from bodily movement to sensory and intellectual engagement is of the utmost importance for the experience of participation – not only in a theatrical performance but also in society at large. What we have observed dur-

ing the performances, the interviews and in the digital messages are the meandering relations between the physical movements and the freedom these outdoor activities inspired: the youngsters were invited to contribute their own, very often personal thoughts to a public discussion that they were longing to participate in, but rarely had an opportunity to engage in. The freedom they experienced during the walk provoked at the same time a mobility of their thoughts, reflected in their text messages that liberated them to think along new lines of perceiving their own lives in this restricted suburb of their parents. As such, the experience of *Antigone's Diary* becomes a vehicle for democratic involvement and political engagement. The physical movements are transformed into a mobility of the mind. The active citizen sees and hears, thinks and reacts and it all starts in one's own environment.



Fig. 3. A broad international outlook characterizes the twelfth and last scene of *Antigone's Diary*. Photo: Manilla Ernst.

When the audience of *Antigone's Diary* reaches the twelfth and final scene on the square, the participants are invited to reflect upon what freedom means to them. Concerning this question there is a consensus among the teenagers. The majority of them have written "When I get what I want. When I can do what I want. When no one has control over me".

As mentioned above, Husby is not a strange place for the majority of the young audiences. The suburb is, just as for the fictional Antigone, their home and the place where they grew up and live their daily lives. Unlike their parents, the teenagers no longer experience this suburb as an alien place.



For the young audiences, the performance paves a way for leaving the older generation's traumatic histories, supported by the collective process of sharing their participation with friends and moving along neighbouring streets with Antigone's classical dilemma in mind. As expressed in their comments, the young pupils realize that they are not only part of an age-old conflict, but that there might be a future that allows them – and which demands of them – to become part of a democratic society: freedom, equality and sisterhood (on top of brotherhood) are no longer only a utopian ideal.

The responses that we have quoted here are not simply replies to Antigone's question. They also reflect the way the audience is invited into the play. Throughout the performance the participants function as co-creators. Although they cannot control the predetermined course of the production and their responses do not affect the structure of the drama, their voices become a supplement of the play's dramaturgy. The audiences' answers are not edited by anyone. The teenagers' reactions, thoughts and feelings are displayed exactly as they are sent in by means of their text messages. Besides the possibility of individual expression, technology also creates opportunities for dialogue, discussion and interaction between the young people. RATS Theatre has created a platform for participation that can be adapted to each of the individuals' wishes and needs.

This approach fits in very well with one of the research methodologies in computer science. DSV has broad, cross-disciplinary research areas, including Computer Human Interaction (CHI) and e-Government. They focus on how design and development of information systems can be adapted to future needs as well as to the interaction and communications between people and IT systems. In order to understand how technology affects and changes people's daily lives, experiments such as RATS Theatre's productions in the public domain, on web platforms and through mobile phones contribute with practical results. They produce high tech performances that change the audience position from only being an observer to becoming a co-creator. RATS promotes dialogue with society during the research process as well as during the per-

formance. The cooperation with the audience is an important moment of the collaborations between an artistic field and the discipline of computer science.

*Antigone's Diary* ends as it had begun, in the square. In ancient Greece the square, agora, was a central spot in city-states, surrounded by shops and vegetable stalls along the façades. A gathering place for citizens and at the time of Sophocles even women, servants and slaves went about their business there. The square was the place for debates, news and gossip and personal deals were as much a part of public life as the political speeches that addressed the decision-making of the future. Most importantly, today, the openness to engage in the questions and problems of society and equal opportunities to participate in democracy.

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