THE THEATRE LOBBY EXPERIENCE: THE AUDIENCE’S PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

What meaning does the audience give to the lobby? Using the qualitative methodology grounded theory, analysis of directed interviews were collected for this study, and the following theory emerged: An audience member with enough time, space, and awareness encounters a person, an activity or some material goods that seizes his or her attention, resulting in a connection with the static, the public, the private or the performance. Consequently, the audience member experiences an individualized and memorable event experience. Three conditions are required for “attention:” space, time and something or someone compelling to the individual audience member. Under the right conditions, an audience member gives attention to the building, its contents, people, or activities inside. The attention leads to an interaction with some of these various elements, which leads to a memorable lobby experience. Four categories of lobby experiences emerged: a private experience, a public experience, experiencing the static, and performance preparation.

In addition to the resulting theory, this study revealed that the background and training of each respondent affected his or her understanding of the lobby experience. *Theatre-insiders* are individuals who have knowledge of the production process. *Theatre-supporters* are those individuals who attend performances but have no significant background or training in theatre. Both types of audience members are important to theatre. The theatre lobby provides humans the opportunity to connect with others, the past, the present and even the potential. It is possible that any of these connections will lead to a significant and memorable theatre-going experience.