TWEETING IN THE THEATER: IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM, JOIN 'EM

May 15, 2010

Let's face it: no matter how politely or emphatically we ask our audiences to turn off and put away their mobile devices, people are taking photos and video, texting and reading, and otherwise doing annoying and inappropriate things with their individual personal screens in the sanctum of the theater.

In The New York Times on March 21, 2010, Michiko Kakutani in an article entitled [Texts Without Contexts](#), writes:

> "People tweet and text one another during plays and movies, forming judgments before seeing the arc of the entire work."

But artists have also been early adapters of technology, and Twitter is no different. Take these three examples:

The **San Diego Opera** launched its opera history project [#operahistory](#) on twitter in November of 2009, starting in 1580. The company has over 150 lists and 1,500 individuals following them.

Dance Theater Workshop's [Twitter Community Choreography](#) project invites users to send in dance instructions via twitter, that are then carried out by the staff, videotaped, and uploaded. They recently launched another project, #dancebytes, which reverses the dialog, providing instructions to followers and inviting them to upload their video dance interpretations. 100 lists and 1,500 individuals are now following DTW.

Choreographer **Zvi Gotheiner** brings the tweeting and pic taking directly into the theater in his new work *Zoom*. Audience members are free to take photos with their smart phones, and images they email are incorporated into the visual design of the show. In another sequence, text messages from audience members are shared with a dance on stage and projected on the screen behind her. Later, dancers call some of the audience members on their phones from the stage, and invite them into the performance space to take their pictures, which are also placed into the visual flow. While the cell phone numbers and other data captured during the performance is deleted after the show, the photos remain on Flickr as a permanent record. Without sacrificing aesthetics, *Zoom* exploits the technology in a way that engages the audience but also serves to illustrate in many ways that our relationship with it is not neutral.