

Performance + Cognition: Exploring trans disciplinary perceptive strategies in performance art

My work as a performance designer directly relates to contemporary society, and is intended to evoke socio-political awareness, however engagement is difficult to get an audience involved in. I create participatory performances that aim to evoke **a small moment of awareness** in the audience, in order for them to reflect on their behaviour and values. My artistic work and therefore the practice based research, are directly related to the spectator therefore audience perception is considered to be the research theme.

Theory on how our brains process information while interacting with other human beings is applied in the designs. The artistic research aims to explore transdisciplinary perception strategies in performance art. Focus is on the spectator's perception while interacting with the (social) context of a performance experience, on how to develop strategies that affect the enactive perception process that is part of the autopoietic feedback loop between spectator and performer.

This autopoietic feedback loop, a concept introduced by Erika Fischer-Lichte[1] refers to the relationship between performer and audience during a performance. Attending a performance event requires a spectator to interact with a performative space, the performer(s), the content and the spatial design of the work. The subsequent interconnectivity between spectator and performer results in an emotional involvement[2], whereby the experience is connected to the individual, historic and cultural context in an on-going feedback loop. A dynamic essential for the construction of meaning and the decision making process in humans. While interacting within the performance the brain/mind/body system constructs a somatic marker[3], this is where a physiological response is linked to an emotional occurrence that subsequently contributes to a revision of the subjective conceptual frame.

By implementing (embodied) cognitive theory and performance theory in the creative process I should be able to tap into human information-processing systems that allow me to stimulate the audience to reflect on social-political subjects. Cognitive science can be insightful to theatricality, audience reception, meaning making and identity formation. By applying abstract scientific knowledge to the artistic practice this project aims to open gateways in the domain of audience perceptivity and increase audience receptivity.

[1] Fischer-Lichte, Erika. (2008), *"The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetic"*, London: Routledge

[2] According to McConachie and Hart "Most spectators engage in empathic observation as soon as a performance begins, watching facial expressions and body language in human exchanges to figure out what is going on. This is not the same as reading the body as a sign. It is a mode of cognitive engagement involving mirror neurons in the mind/brain that allow spectators to replicate emotions of a performer's physical state without experiencing that physical state directly." McConachie, B. and Hart, E.L. (2010), *"Performance and Cognition: Theatre studies and the Cognitive turn"*, New York, Routledge

[3] Damasio, A.R, (1995), "Descartes' Error", p.13