

THERE IS AN ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

There is a proverbial elephant in the room. It is a big one. It's been there for a while now and no matter how hard we try to deny it, it's there and it is not going anywhere until we address it. The way we as humans interact with our environment needs to change. Whether local, national or global, if we don't alter the way we interact with our habitat before long it will be completely depleted. Inherently people avoid change; therefore most of us want to repress every indication that we do in fact need to talk about that elephant in the room. This makes us disregard serious malpractices in society, such as consequences of the collapse of a garment factory in Bangladesh that manufactures t-shirts for H&M or Zara. Shortly after incidents like these have occurred we pick up where we left off, buy a cute halter neck t-shirt where we can get it cheapest. Because it is convenient. The fact that a 1000 plus lost their lives while producing these clothes should bear no consequence to our behaviour, should it? It should. According to Brecht humans are a part of society, therefore they must be able to reform society. „Theatre is an assembly in which ordinary people become aware of their situation and discuss their interests“, Brecht following Piscator.¹ The de-familiarizing approach that Brecht induced, or the de-contextualized manner in which the German collective Rimini Protokoll triggers awareness by connecting the individual to the social, resembles the way I aim to challenge normalized viewpoints. However intimidating I personally might be by the challenges at hand, ignoring the problems will not make them go away. Art is my tool to contribute, to open people up, and stimulate creative thinking processes. My personal belief system acts as a catalyst, in which the roles of artist, citizen and researcher are interrelated and mutually influential. Let's start by observing that grey enormous creature in the room, and admit to the overwhelming nature of its presence. The creative thinking that will contribute to a solution starts here, by acknowledging and discussing every aspect of this dilemma. By having a dialogue, without suggesting that any attempt to change society is futile or pretending that our contribution as individuals is insignificant. A play, an installation or performance offers an entry to discuss complex subject matter. By designing performances where the public participates in the work, the interaction with the content becomes of an experiential and emotional nature. By getting emotionally involved an active connection with the topic takes shape, through participation a thought process could be jump-started. Such a disturbance within the conceptual framework² and the instant re-evaluation of the personal belief system, might offer a short moment of reflection. The audience member then becomes both distant spectator and active interpreter of the event, an exchange between real life and the performance has occurred. This form of interaction allows participants to co-own the performance, embody it and add it to their collection of experiences. This refers to a structure in which form and content are closely related, one that communicates meaning. It does however require spectators to be active interpreters, those who are willing to engage in a dialogue. Through inter-linking a physically active form with a mentally challenging content, critical consciousness in the spectator might be evoked. The challenge lies in presenting the socio-political content in such a manner that the participant feels their actions would represent the choices they make as a consumer in the outside world. That way the theatrical form proposes an additional layer that communicates meaning. A physical act as representative for the participants choice, would link the interaction to the origin of the food on our dinner table, the clothes we wear. Through such a physical connection to the content, action is linked to choice. Other than an article, a book or a video clip on YouTube, the embodied experience of attending an actual event connects engagement to our day-to-day life.

‘Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.’³

¹ Rancière, Jacques, (2009), *“The Emancipated Spectator”*, translated by Elliot, Gregory, London, Verso.

² Hans-Thies Lehman argues that “Theatre becomes political when our conceptual framework, including political notions, is interrupted and deposited.” Lehman, Hans-Thies, (1999). *“Postdramatic Theatre”*, New York, Routledge.

³ Barack Obama, (2008), Speech Feb. 5th.