

PRESENTATION KLÆKKEN 09.03.17

My research is on playwriting.

On writing plays.

I have called my research from one to a hundred.

I have given myself the task to explore how to write a play, or plays - that presents a multitude of perspectives. Polyvocal texts that has at its core the fact that we live in communities. Together. To look at that which influences "us" – not just me.

My main question is: What can a play written from such a perspective look like? How do I write it, and what kind of ethical and formal implications will it have? And how will these implications leave their trace on the work I do and how I reflect around it?

ETHICAL TENSION

It all started with a feeling of an ethical tension.

It was there - in minute things. Buying a cheese and a jumper on the same day. Realizing that the price of the cheese and the price of the jumper was the same and no longer just get filled by the joy of getting my hands on such a cheap peace of garment. Feeling something close to shame wearing the jumper, eating the cheese – because I am not ignorant. I know that the production system behind the cheese and the production system behind the making of the jumper is totally different. And I know that I, in some way are caught in that system. And that I, as a consumer, no longer can claim innocence. I am **in on it**. It benefits me, and I am trapped by it. It is ON me. IN me. And what that IS is not just an idea, not just something from a documentary or a headline. It is a reality experienced by multitudes.

What I am wearing and what I am eating is the result of how the world works. Of the trade agreements, systems of exploitation, small and large ecological disasters, and then on the other hand: Our own lush landscapes, the ability to protect the small farmer – even that now under siege. I know that I am trapped in an economical system called capitalism. In other words – I can choose not to get involved in politics. To stay away from it as much as I like – and it would still be there. I eat it, I shit it, I carry it with me. I can choose not to write about it – but whether I like it or not – I am entangled in

it. And I can feel the tension. The tension between what I am as an artist and what I /live as a consumer. I can feel it as something physical. So – all this stems from deeply personal experience.

In 2014 I wrote the play “S O A R E”. It was my first attempt to bridge the gap. Of understanding the crises I myself as an artist was in. And in that work lay the foundation for what I am doing now and presenting here today.

My research has been going on since October 2015.

The last four and a half months I have not been working on full machine since I have had to fill the function as professor in playwriting and will be doing so until June. So I am just on 65% capacity.

But I am still researching – so - What have I been working on?

The first year I tried, through praxis, reading and contemplation – to find out what kind of task I had given myself.

I also got involved with projects that I thought would challenge me. And I did several public presentations for institutions and at festivals.

One of the collaborations was the project *Stat og Ekstase* – or *State and Extacy*.



Photo from the performance in Harstad June 2016:

In the project five artists working in the performative arts came together to make a collective. The topic we chose was: What we have in common? Not as artists, but in society. We decided to work in three stages. With three performances, or interactions with an audience. And everybody had to contribute to these interactions. And everybody had to be on stage.

In the first round, we wanted to look at two very different, but communal, phenomenon. State and ecstasy. And we wanted to look at the state as something positive and ecstasy as something reachable.

Both themes was interlinked and worked into a performance that we played three times at Festspillene I Harstad in June last year.

I myself brought with me the questions from my artistic research and started developing texts dealing with my acute feeling of this ethical tension.

And I brought with me pictures like this one.



Photo: A man working in cotton production facility Anwar Pradesh

Preparing for the performance - We worked in a series of collaboratory and exploratory workshops, making material as we went along. Physical material like movement and dance. Text – both poetic and personal. The over all dramaturgy was planed together as well as the seating of the audience and the lighting of the space. Most of the work was finalized in the space itself.



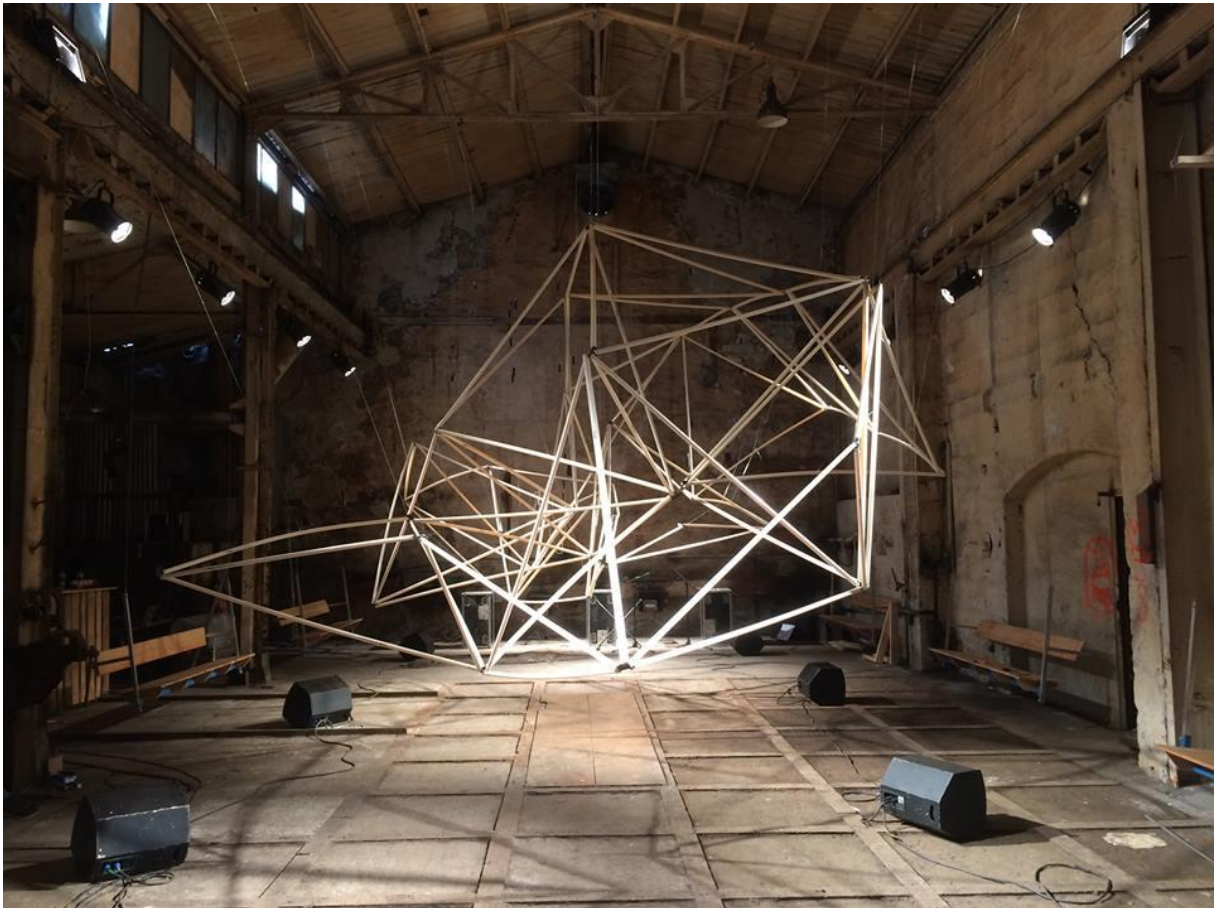
An old foundry. The foundry was to function as a symbolic bridge between the town and the new oil quarter, between the past and present, and between fishing (trawlers in the harbor) and oil (Statoil building a new office building as we worked and performed the production).

Here are two text examples: *In my dreams I place myself in the innards of a Sweatshop. Deep inside a cotton hell. Swamped in the eternal racket of the industrial machines. Lost in a place where my civil rights does not reach. Where my human rights cannot help me. Where I am the other. Not norwegian. Not HERE. But THERE. Without papers maybe. Or born in a country with so few economical regulations that I am completely at the mercy of the marked. My hands, my body, my future – all that is me turned into a commodity. Bought and sold. Here there is no protection. Here I am,*

completely exposed.

We had wanted to work on a big scale, but to have the audience close – the solution was to bring them into the performance in a gentle and generously rocking way. putting them on swings all along the walls – Letting the performance as it drew to a close, simmer out into something resembling a social gathering at an exhibition, or a party.

To not take away the distance and their ability and possibility to watch what was going on – but to inter-weave them into it, and keep them present in our consciousness, continuously showing them that they were not forgotten.



And while we were discussing this – and finding ways of doing this – the place started to influence my texts. It was no longer just about cotton. It was about metal. Metals beings shaped and formed by kilns in places like this:

I'm on my back

I am naked

I put my hand on my sex

I feel no shame

I am thinking about Bauxit

Dug out from the mines of Pahang

Red soil

dense like clay

beaten into powder

carried across the see

sucked into giant straws in a form resembling sugar

refined

heated

Filtered until its light

And white

like cocain

A silvery-white, soft, nonmagnetic, ductile material

I lay here

I am - electric

toxic

hard

amiable

public like an eye

blinking in a governmental building

In the program we stated:

“THE STATE & ECSTASY” is a performance with dance, installation, music and poetry. Five committed denizens of the theatre join together in a collective with existential and political themes.

The result is a subjective individualisation and freedom, and the inner desire - through arts and politics - to reach collective ecstasy.

When we were given the THE PLACE it deepened the topic and influenced the form.

So we made a collective, I wrote text and we worked together and we made a performance. But I did not write a play.

I wrote a part of a whole consisting of different types of texts – one was danced, one was a sculpture in space – one was interaction with the audience. Performing arts yes. But not a play.

2016

During 2016 I continued sketching and trying out texts. Finding the topic. Finding the setting. I did a lab on a text collage of texts written on the 22nd of July. That too the same week in Harstad.

On this presentation I worked together with theatre director Nina Wester and we produced a reading that involved survivors, relatives, priests, officials, the Major and representatives from the festival. Three of the writers behind the material read and actors read the main parts of ABB and some of the main “characters”.



I also wrote a short play on children being refugees in Europe – called “where the children sleep” doing exploratory readings at the SAND festival in Kristiansand and Vårscenefest in Tromsø.

In the staged reading, I reintroduced the circle, letting children read the text of the children, and grown actors read the text of the adults. In this reading I also placed one of the audience in front of each of the readers – creating a one on one situation to see if that created a different space for reflection and.

Photo from rehearsals – child actor turning away from his “audience” – and towards the other readers.



I did a monologue on sight at an international theatre festival in Italy, in an old hotel in Vitorchiano as a part of a EU Collaboration called EU Collective plays.

The monologue was in both Norwegian and Italian.

The actress was both a kind of hostess, taking the audience through the building. Taking them into different rooms and experiences. But she was also guiding them through layers of time. Visiting events and situations that had taken place in the hotel the last 500 years.

Together with the actress, Sarah Mc Donald I worked a lot with addressing the audience. Trying to make the form and the acting as direct and communicative, as expressive as possible despite with the poetic quality of the writing and the piece somewhat mythical backdrop.

Photo: Actress Sarah Mc Donald interacting with a man in the audience.



As I developed and wrote these smaller pieces, I made sketches for two very different full length plays in two very different formats. One language based play with the working title “Detroit” and one piece that combines text and dance called “Sweatshop”. And while doing so I had to ask myself – what actually is a play? What is its limits and what is its possibilities. How many perspectives can a play really hold?

WHAT IS A PLAY

I look upon a play as a system of parts constituting a whole.

Each of these hybrids or collectives of texts, constitutes a universe. These universes are made up of series rules that produces given and coherent expectations - and you can

say that these universes talk or speak, that they have a voice and this voice is not the voice of the writer, or the voices of the characters - it's the utterings or the addressing of the whole of that text.

The Greeks in their theorizing around rhetoric's, on how to make a text, and on how to make that text have the desired influence on the reader or the audience it addresses they located the place of invention, or the moment of creation. Aristoteles connected this "voice", or the "place" that the text speaks from to this face of Inventio.

In theatre, this creation is not a singular event.

You can say that the writing of the text is one inventio, developing performative concepts around it is an inventio - and the performing of the text as a performance is another. Some will argue that the job of the performance is to find the real text. Its deep and hidden and only meaning and that that always lies in the first inventio. Others see the text as just one of many starting points for an interpretation that can lead to different addresses and that stems from different inventios. That the job of the performance is to conceptualize, or re-conceptualize the text. This has led to many directors and actors preferring "open" texts. Or texts that are not so defined, or has a form that gives itself to different interpretations. Texts that can be read, understood and performed in many ways.

In 2016 I worked on smaller pieces that gave me ample opportunity of researching the texts behavior, its universe and the ways I could let it address an audience.

I am now approaching the second face – and since I want to combine a singular or individual point of view with that which we have in common, I have been turning to the polyvocal or to the hybrid forms.

THE HYBRID

For me the play is a hybrid. A brick a brack, or an assemblage kind of genre.ⁱ Consisting of dialogue, stage directions, monologues, bits of information etc. Its not like poetry and prose. It's a scene by scene kind of textform. Segments interlaying and clashing against each other in an inter-woven system. Its dirty – and its fake. Its fiction. It represents made up worlds relating to our worlds. Not real ones.

And that has consequences.

In that respect does not need to tell the truth – not even about human nature. It just needs to feel truth. Or present a logic that feels true. Every play, resembling our not - are just versions of rows of events being played out in time and space – and these events are received by an audience. It's the audience that verifies it, approves it and gives what goes on in the play meaning and substance.

If they buy it – it's on.

It is this contract between the maker, – and the audience that makes up its reality.

He or she has to accept the rules of this particular universe. The behavior of this particular beast. That is the basis for the interchange and feedbackloops of signs and meaning within the text. It is like a dance where audience and text interact, and as long as we trust each other anything can happen.

This is for me theatricality.

And it is built on imagination and transformation.

Peter Brooks states in his game-changing book “the empty space”, that all you need to make a performance is a space and an audience.

Then the rest follows.

We can walk the moon, tear down the Tzar, visit the slaves of Rome, follow a mad king or enter a Dostojevski novel. We can move from universe to universe. A chair can become a space rocket, a woman a man, a girl a wolf.

This act of pretense, trust and transformation is for me the basis of my artform and the basis of my craft.

If theatre in the form of a play is a mimetic artform, like so many insists on it being – it is just that. It mimics. It tries to look like reality – but it isn't IT. It is and will always be a mere spectacle. A mirroring. A mirage. Not the actual dust swirled up by the hooves of the horse as the rider passes by, but a collection of signs that reminds us of that dust. That's why theatre is not bound by space and time. It can, like our minds when we remember or imagine that which is going to happen – take us to places that we have never been. Or bring us back to places that have already gone. Even places that does not exist – or only exists here. Because we decide for it to do so. ⁱⁱ

A play is not a story.

Its something that happens.

Its an event. It's a place that happens in time and actions – and then falls back in silence.

In days like these, when the future can seems blurred and harder to imagine – theatre can make it possible for us to see a future that is not yet there. To create *possible* worlds. Where that which is not yet visible show itself. We can go to the place where the tension shows itself, even see it being resolved. Or face an ethical questions and give it a face.

Ranciere says: that it's in the possibility of creating alternative worlds, the political potential lies. He sais. (Ranciere "Ten thesis on politics") *Political argument is at one and the same time the **demonstration** of a possible world where the argument would **count** as an argument, addressed by a subject **qualified** to argue upon an identified object to an addressee who is required **to see the object and to hear the argument that he normally has no reason to either see or hear.***

This is where fiction meets politic.

Where the one meet the many.

Where reality rubs shoulder with the play.

And here lies the potential of the "new" as invention.

2017

In the year to come I will write two plays.

To be able to let these text go between the one too the "many", I cannot allow myself to see the world just from one angle. My gaze must be shifting. Even when I have a narrator – the narrator cannot be the only authority in the play. Something else must be at stake, I have to create a disturbance in the stream, or I have to create a polyvocal narrator.

This is my task no.

To find a universe with rules that are clear enough and nimble enough to make this shifts feasible and bearable.

I have to find a topos that creates a space for multiple events to take place at the

same time. For different voices to speak and make room for different perspectives that co-exist. I have to take myself there – and I have to take my audience there.

I need to find a nomadic form.

A form that takes me from me as a writer, out into the many, and then back again in circles, outbreaks and bounces.

I cannot portray the world I will enter as unison choir. The voices must be as diverse as each and every one of us and the text on the whole must be flexible. Like a container that can hold multitudes. It must be able to make room for what Ranciere would call who-ever. I think that I have to think in a three-dimensional space and in parallel actions. Even in parallel times and parallel perspectives. A smooth and changeable space, to put it in Deleuzian terms, where the major organizing principle is distance, not value. Where what is close – and what is far away is what constitute the dynamics. At the moment I am working on the hypothesis - that this could be solved by making a three-dimensional space and placing the audience inside it.

A THIRD SPACE

One medium that has a great potential for parallel action and three-dimensional space is audio and the audio installation. For us playwrights – the audio play. Or the radio drama.

It is due to that I have spent the last three weeks in the studio at NRK, trying to make text into a polyvocal space, with several voices present at the same time.

The story in SOARE follows four character and one narrator.

One of the characters – Samuel – has returned home after a really bad day at work and ended up in an unpleasant and awkward confrontation with his domestic help Anna.

Now he is returning to his bedroom – where his wife Hanne is waiting for him.

This is where I am now.

The next month I will be preparing for the next step and in the autumn I will start working with placing texts in the room. Going from sound into a live setting involving audio, live actors, lighting – and then I will invite in an audience – placing them inside

this composition. Working with distance and closeness, the relationship between live action and sound.

So – to sum up: All through this I am having one issue at the forefront of my mind. And to be tedious, to know that we are all still on the same page – this issue is – to go from 1 to a hundred. To make polyvocal texts that presents more than one perspective. Plays that explore equally what we have in common, and individual issues and agendas. And here I again want to enfaces. **Equally as interested in.** Not more than, or instead of. It is all about a relation between the individual, the subject and its environment. The singular and the plural.

And while working along lines like these I write.

Texts come out.

Text about monster cities.

About underwaterworlds and moonscapes.

Dystopias and pastoral scenes.

And then personal texts like these:

Then the sleeplessness. The restlessness. And I start avoiding people. Touching them.

Them touching me. Avoiding being in the same room as other people. I stand there, all off a sudden, in the middle of a crowd shouting, in the supermarket, shouting. I am at this couples dinner, and I have gotten up of my chair. I am at this stag-night, at this coffe bar and I am screaming. Screaming into their happy, self contented faces :

- NO. No I do not feel free!

- No! I am not depressed. You are not listening. That was not what I was saying! That was not what I ment! I do not want to go home! I am not drunk! I feel fine! Don't touch me!

It is as I've eaten something that've turned bad. And its stuck in my throat. It's a swelling. Its my tongue.

And I go away for a while.

Just get away for a while. And I stand there by the window in my hotel room, in a strange town. The traffic machine. The skyscrapers. The multinational financial

corporations. The neonlight commercials – and the city is a big, breathing, hunting animal underneath me - and when I get home I am no longer able to stop myself –

ⁱ **Assemblage theory** is an ontological framework developed by [Gilles Deleuze](#) and [Félix Guattari](#), originally presented in their book [A Thousand Plateaus](#) (1980). Assemblage theory provides a bottom-up framework for analyzing social complexity by emphasizing fluidity, exchangeability, and multiple functionalities.^[1] Assemblage theory asserts that, within a body, the relationships of component parts are not stable and fixed; rather, they can be displaced and replaced within and among other bodies, thus approaching systems through relations of exteriority ^[1]

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assemblage_theory

ⁱⁱ Like in the opening prologue of William Shakespeare play «Henry the IV» -

O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention,
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
Assume the port of Mars; and at his heels,
Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword and fire
Crouch for employment. But pardon, and gentles all,
The flat unraised spirits that have dared
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object: can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France? or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?
O, pardon! since a crooked figure may
Attest in little place a million;
And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,
On your imaginary forces work.
Suppose within the girdle of these walls
Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
Whose high up reared and abutting fronts
The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder:
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;
Into a thousand parts divide on man,
And make imaginary puissance;
Think when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth;
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
Carry them here and there; jumping o'er times,
Turning the accomplishment of many years
Into an hour-glass: for the which supply,
Admit me Chorus to this history;
Who prologue-like your humble patience pray,
Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play.