

Episode 4 with Sofie Lebech

A call for a response

Introduction

Hi, you are listening to Steinunn Knúts Önnudóttir in Malmö and this is the fourth episode of Transformative Encounters. Today I have invited my second supervisor Sofie Lebech, an associate professor here at Malmö Theatre Academy, a performance maker, and a theorist based in Copenhagen. The recorded conversation is only a part of a longer session we had tackling questions on audience dissonance and what kind of spaces my work creates. The particular topic is a response to a few incidences where guests to my performances used their freedom to deviate from the structure the work provides. As the work is quite open, a deviation does not sabotage the experience, but other guests can be affected, depending on the scale of dissidence. But let us now get on with it and hear what Sofie has to say.

Summary

The conversation with Sofie is an ongoing reflection on the relation between life and the arts and is grounded in friendship and collegiality that did not start nor does it finish here. If I try to summarise this recorded part of our conversation, I would like to begin with Sofie's own PhD project that she mentioned briefly. In her research she deals with research-based-performance and how it can create a space for thinking and reflecting and becomes a gesture that performs a call for response to its audience. Sofie's 'call for response' really resonates with me in what I am trying to create with my encounters, and I can see how audience dissonance, a theme we discussed, can be understood as a response that the work has called for.

Sofie talks about pedagogy and compared the classroom situation to a participatory performance - a space for transformation, thinking and reflecting, that made me think of Bleeker's thinking through performance. Sofie described the classroom as an unstable space, and I guess you could also call what I do unstable. The format I am

using for the performative encounters is based on question making as a tool. Questions are created to stir the balance and open a space of contemplation, in that sense it can create vulnerability that can lead to a feeling of alienation or not belonging, setting people up for failure. I need to admit that my work does not have a universal design that fits all even though I try to create an open and accepting space. People will come with different perspectives and respond in accordance with their background and beliefs. What a single guest will encounter is difficult to calculate, as the structure provides a mirror and people will get confronted with themselves. Guests always respond to the work in a personal way and sometimes even in defence. In the cases when people have deviated from the structure and shown dissidence in my work it did not make any difference for the work. It gave these individuals freedom to express themselves and exercise independence within the structure. It became the work for them. Can you call that dissidence? How can you be dissident in a work that gives space for dissidence?