

8:8 - Die Gegenüberstellung

"With the performance installation «8 : 8 - Die Gegenüberstellung» the Zurich theatre collective mercimax presents a sophisticated play of truth and deception, appearance and reality. How much information is needed to turn someone into a suspect? Eight performers are lined up in front of eight spectators who are then asked to form their opinion of those on parade, based on how they look and what they say."



A description: We wanted to know how much information one needs from someone, to start to have prejudices about them and what it takes that you think, that the person opposite may be a criminal. The first 10 minutes of the performance are non-verbal: a choreographically worked line-up. We actually tried to start off with being as neutral as possible; just bodies in a neutral space. We offer a lot of time to look at the performers (they reorganise their bodies in space from time to time). But you also get time to look at their profiles or backs. Nothing else - no sound either. So as an audience you are in the role of an observer with almost no other information. Probably you will start to discover details about the performers physics or you start to imagine who these people are - or you get bored (!).

In the second part of the presentation the performers line-up sitting on chairs and tell the audience facts and short stories about who they are - and they generally mention if what they had just said is true or not - or partly true. They talk about what is important to them, what makes them angry or happy and they talk about what they regret - and about moral misdoings, offences and even a crime. For now, we have two versions of the show: one with a longer story from a lady, 62, who in Athens, shot her lover 20 years ago. The second version of the longer story is the one of a 20-year-old Macedonian, who accidentally shot his girlfriend in the head (she survived and has totally recovered).

We generated almost all the information by the performers - or as we

call them "Komplizen" or "accomplices". They have invented even the lies they tell.

In the end we "zoom in": audience and performer sit only 30 cm apart. The performer places a headphone on the head of the person opposite: You will be told a personal story and listen to a song, which is of personal value for the performer. During this time the performer is looking into your eyes. You only get to sit with one person and you get only his personal story, so it is kind of an exclusive moment. The performers are non-professionals or "normal people with real stories".

Very often the audience members start talking to each other after the show; exchanging their experiences. Many are no longer sure what to believe.



Point of departure: In 2010 a 53 per cent majority of Swiss voters approved a proposal for the *automatic expulsion* of foreign offenders convicted of crimes ranging from murder to breaking and entry, drug-trafficking as well as social security fraud. It denies judges discretion over decision of deportation.

A counter-proposal by government and parliament, which called for a *case-by-case examination*, won only 46 per cent of the vote.

Further inspiration for this piece was our interview with Hansueli Gürber (the chief advocate for teenage criminals of the City of Zürich):

"The more you get to know about a person and his background, the harder it becomes to judge and condemn him or her."

By: Karin Arnold & Jessica Huber / Sound Technic: Mischa Robert /
With: Tom Benke, Reinhard Biehl, Michelle Ettlín, Eva Gagel,
Aleksandar Milanovic, Ramin Mosayebi, David Orwoll, Manuel Speck

Length: +/- 25 min.

Place: A room that is at least 8 to 8 meters.

We need: 16 chairs, 8 headphones, just very basic lighting: either normal room lights (and if nec. a bit of frontal light) or very simple stage light.

To do the show 4 times per evening is realistic. We wouldn't consider more than that.



The show can be done in German or English with more or less the same members of the crew.

There is also an interest from our side to only bring part of the cast with us and find some new participants from the City we are doing the show in.

Critic

« All that we can see... »

"The form that mercimax has found to treat the topic of judgement and prejudice, appearance and reality, is obvious, logical - and sublime at the same time! There is a direct reference to reality and therefore an almost graspable urgency;

- the audience is involved into the piece and the question of personal guilt/fault. For every finger-pointer will fall back on us. Mercimax shows with "8:8 Die Gegenüberstellung" something that we all know, but never take to heart - as we all jump to conclusions."(...)
Kulturkritik, Elena Ibello, 29.8.12

Further information on www.mercimax.ch