

Reflections in the aftermath of *Ways of Seeing*

Over the past few weeks, a heated debate has taken place around *Ways of Seeing* by Pia Maria Roll, Marius von der Fehr, Hanan Benammar and Sara Baban. As a co-producer and presenter of the piece, Black Box teater too has been the focus of much media attention and public debate.

Black Box teater supports the idea that art can be confronting, disturbing, uncomfortable, that it can cause controversies and debates. However, we do not encourage, nor accept further polarization of the public debate. We condemn all forms of violence; let it be in the realm of language in social media or, worse, through acts. They indicate the failure of a possible reasoned debate.

Over the past few weeks, we have indeed witnessed an unwanted escalation of the debate. And the artists involved in *Ways of Seeing* have been subject to threats so serious that they were reported to the police. These are consequences we sincerely admonish. We are also saddened by the fact that Laila Anita Bertheussen, the wife of Minister Tor Mikkell Wara, endured emotional stress as a result of her house being filmed in *Ways of Seeing*.

Theater is political, in the sense of being a change agent. That said, Black Box teater does not have a political agenda as such. We think of the theater as a gathering space where different voices can be heard, where ideas, visions and perspectives can be shaken through the aesthetic experience.

Ways of Seeing has raised a very important debate that resonates within the Norwegian society today. By exploring the topic of surveillance, the line between what is legal and what is illegal, *Ways of Seeing* has brought into the public debate important questions regarding the boundaries between private and public space. Moreover, with a calm, albeit confrontational and activist tone, *Ways of Seeing* examined important themes, such as the structure of racism, postcolonial issues, the struggle of peoples' fighting for their rights and the liberation of their homeland. All this has unfortunately been overshadowed during the recent debates.

In *Ways of Seeing* the artists have used images of the houses of politicians, investors and agents behind rightist and right wing publishing organizations and NGO's, as well as NATO. This method has provoked, created controversy and generated friction. We should underline that the artists stayed within a legal setting when filming the houses and they did not reveal any secret information. That said, we are aware that the methods chosen by the artists have raised ethical questions.

Ways of Seeing was co-produced by Black Box teater. It premiered on November 21st, 2018 and was presented until November 30th, 2018, with eight shows at Black Box teater. We stand behind our program and Black Box teater carries the responsibility for presenting the show.

Black Box teater is a programming theater, supporting and presenting independent Norwegian and international artists and companies.

Composed of fifty to sixty different productions a year, with a combination of co-productions/premieres and guest-performances, Black Box teater's program prioritizes works that challenge what art can be both in terms of form and content, and works that resonate with current and urgent issues in the world. The program of Black Box teater pays attention to various voices and reaches out to a diverse audience; children, families, youngsters and all generations.

The notion of risk is part of our DNA and contributes to a vivid Norwegian independent performing arts scene. Our commitment to present a production relies on discussions with the artists about their first ideas and intentions that we find convincing and relevant, and on a mutual trust. Black Box teater collaborates with the independent scene. This implies that the artists have full autonomy to define the content and methods of their work, as long as these stay within freedom of expression and Norwegian law.

The ambition of Black Box teater relies on humanistic values, on diversity and inclusion. Black Box teater wishes to be an agora, a meeting place where debates can take place in a civilized manner. Nothing is further from this ideal than threatening people.

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