

Response by Kevin Hobbs

Hello Ute,

I very much appreciated how you jumped into the deep pond of ecological debate with both feet. I struggle with the challenge of theatrical representation when it comes to climate change. Theatre, it seems to me, has become such a separate entity from world-wide concerns—at least in the popular culture. Therefore, I applaud anyone who attempts to break through the fortified skin that disconnects humanity from earth's reality. As you wisely said, “There is no ‘outside’, not even in the arts”. I’m one of ‘those people’ (people who are sometimes pilloried for arguing that the world is an interconnected, holistic place that cannot be examined in pieces but only appreciated in its entirety) who believe that artists have a responsibility to live in two worlds—actual world (real intention) and art world (symbolic action). And boy, we could have a significant phenomenological discussion on that concept, but I won’t digress!

Instead, I will express my meditations on the activist impulse that theatre can inspire. You speak of the social and energetic conditions that theatre conjures. I agree, particularly when it comes to the social entanglements of generational, economic and political influences. We artists are also generational, economic and political influences and through theatrical performance we can imagine not only a present reality, but a future possibility co-created by us and the audience. In my teaching and theatre-making I have shifted some of my terminology to ‘human animals’ and ‘non-human animals’ in an effort to remind myself and anyone in earshot that I am as much a part of this world as the birds eat-

ing the berries in my backyard and the cactus sitting on my windowsill. There is no subject/object dichotomy. Sometimes my students roll their eyes and, yes, a change of words won't solve the climate crisis, but it contributes to the necessary—nay, critical—revisionism of humanity's place on earth.

Can we theatricalize revisionism? Absolutely. I think of your example, “*Weltenwandel*”, which had a set of recycled packaging and costumes from a second-hand store, is perfect. Recently I saw a performance by “Bread and Puppet Theatre Company”, which has dedicated itself to the kind of environmental approach to theatre-making over the last fifty years.

I am aware of “Rimini Protokoll's” work, and it seems they are pushing to something more than an audience's awareness of climate crisis to an ‘embodiment’ of the crisis. This effort of embodied understanding leads me ask—in the spirit of your students who want activists to “practice what you preach”—can we go one step further? Can we not only ‘theatricalize’ but ‘perform’ world revisionism? Can we embody change?

I ask this question because performing-for-change is on my mind. My own PhD work is examining how performance pedagogy may lead medical students to becoming Health Advocates. This kind of advocacy involves physicians taking a lead in supporting individual patients or widening their scope to more community-based work. Such work can also concern environmental and climate change. My research questions investigate how we as educators expand understanding of health advocacy for medical students who are also trying to navigate the demands of medical schools that focus solely on the body's bio-medical processes? Can these medical students think about the wider world and then perform change, transforming both themselves and the world? Well, it turns out there is a hunger with this new generation of medical students to do just that and make a change. They just need guidance. I am trying to provide such guidance through pedagogies of theatre and performance.

And so, it seems, your students hunger as well. We as artists/teachers do what we can. We place the needs of our students at the center and see what kind of planetary transformation results. Fingers crossed.

Kevin

