



The Blind Theater

5 manifests for the female sensuality

A project by Stahl Stenslie

Experience

The Blind Theater turns the body into the stage of a sensorial theater. The piece plays with the body as the central stage of a different theatrical experience.

Upon entering the theater, the visitor is met by a personal guide. This guide follows the user through the whole play, a half hour long dive into a different sensorial reality. For the first time, the blind gain full access to the theater and –on the other side- the sighted gets the sensation of the blinded.

The Story

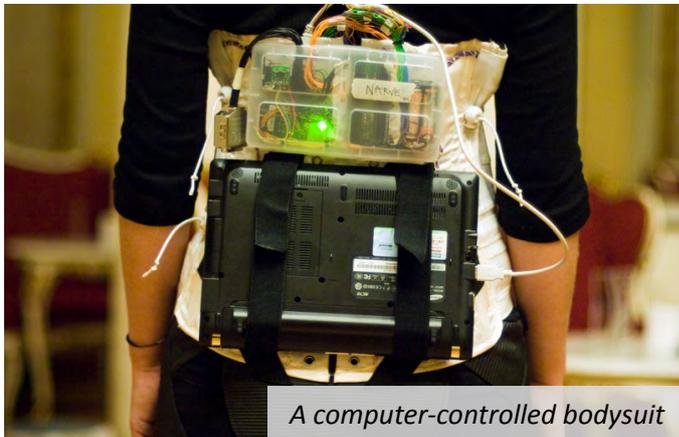
The play is built around five different experiential and sensual portraits of what it means to be woman. Five international artists have each written their story about the inside of female identity, from the sexual to the frustrative. These are: Shiva Falahi, Edy Poppy, Narve Hovdenakk, Veronika Bökelmann, Kate Pendry.

The Bodysuit

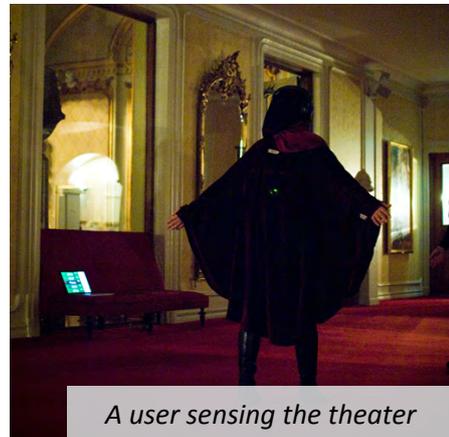
Entering the theater, the user is blindfolded. Then s/he is dressed in an electronic, computer-controlled bodysuit. This bodysuit becomes the new skin of the user, slipping him or her into the corpus of a story told through touch and binaural, 3 dimensional sound. The suit imprints one of the five different stories about being a woman directly on the body. The bodysuit renders the story physical, the experience becomes a real, personal and intimate play with female identity. As the stories are physically told, they really do happen. With and through your body.



The bodysuit is a stand-alone application based on mini-pc's in combination with custom built Arduino controller-board. It is an open-source project working with the development of haptic and tactile storytelling.



A computer-controlled bodysuit



A user sensing the theater

The Place

The first performances of *The Blind Theater* was played at night during the festival of contemporary theater (Samtidsfestivalen) at the Norwegian National Theater in Oslo in 2009. The theater was turned dark at midnight, transforming the building into a sensual sculpture. Letting the visitors blindly move through the Dark Theater underlines how the body becomes the new and introverted stage of the play.



*Midnight performance at
The Norwegian National Theater*

The New Theater

The blind sensuality experienced wipes out the difference between the performer and audience. Together the space of the theater and the introversion of the play create a sensuous-democratic space of experience for both blind and sighted. In our visually dominated culture it opens the theater to a blind and blinded audience.

The Blind Theater represents a new, experimental theatrical experience through the following:

1. It is a Theater for the Blind: it tries to make a complete and meaningful theatrical experience for a new audience; the blind. The theater achieves this through physical touch, text and sound.
2. Experimental Text: the text is also written for the blind, challenging the way we write text and how we develop text based expressions
3. Interactive Theater: it is an interactive theater where the audience is both on-watchers, participants and performers
4. Eksperimental Expressions: the project blurs the borders between media, art, literature, performance and theater.
5. Open Experiment. The project experiments with the theater reduced to a corporal and mental space of experience only. What happens when the theater is gone dark? When you can see no more? What happens when the blind and the seeing sense the same?
6. Binaural, 3Dimensional Sound Theatre. The piece use binaural, three dimensional sound that appears natural to the ear. The visitor wears a headset to experience the intimate and personal sound. The combination of physical stimulus and movement around in the blind space with sound gives a strong sense of structure and spatial experience.



Images of blinded users during performance

Audio

The following soundfiles of the binaural sound compositions that users could hear during the play. The soundfiles are produced for playback on high-end audio headphones (like Sennheisser) able to reproduce the complexity of the compositions:

- 1: Compilation and sound mix of the five soundsources/plays: Blind Magic
- 2: Shiva Falahi sound: shivafinal
- 3: Narve Hovdenakk sound: Narvefinal
- 4: Edy Poppy sound: Edy Poppy – Sound for her text
- 5: Veronika Bökermann sound: Veronicafinal
- 6: Kate Pendry sound: Katefinal

Project team:

Concept and artistic direction: Stahl Stenslie

Dramaturgy: Kate Pendry

Text: Veronika Bökermann (Germany), Shiva Falahi (Iran), Narve Hovednakk (Norway), Kate Pendry (England), Edy Poppy (Norway)

Artistic Programming: Jonas Jongejan (Denmark)

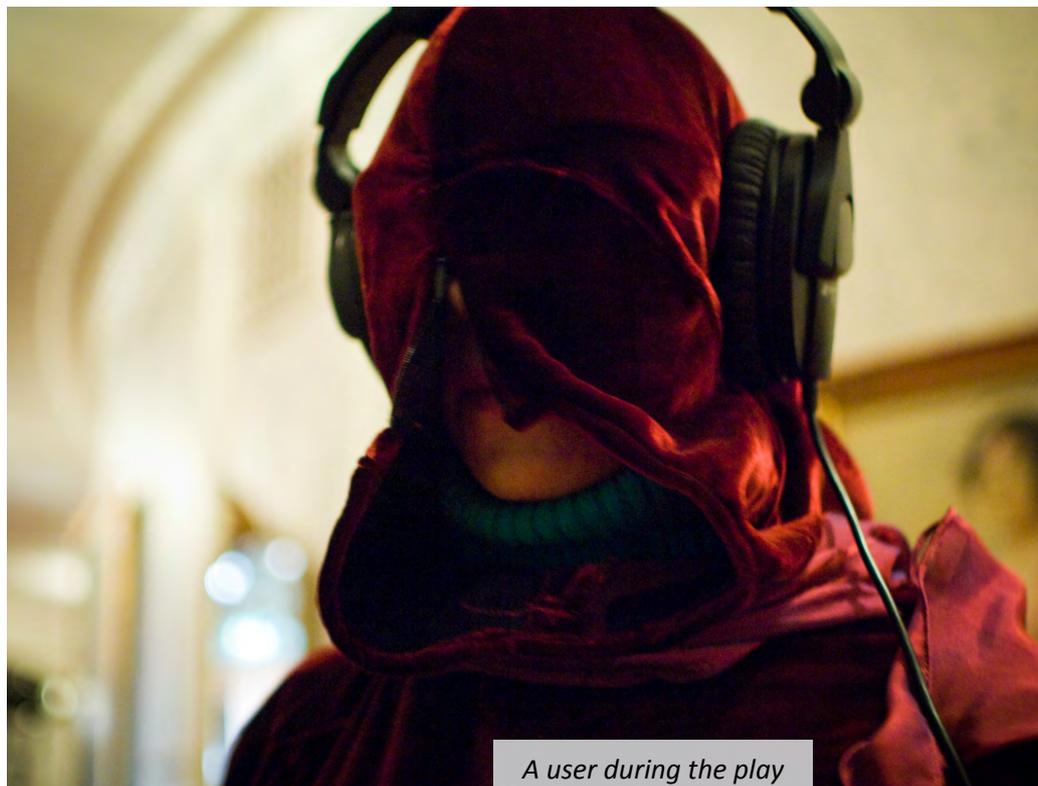
Sound: Truls Kvam and Kate Pendry

Costume designer: Ingvild Hornseth

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A user sensing the theater



A user during the play