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*The Lady In The Factory In Hangzhou.*

He belongs to the category of people who check the news on their phones once a day. He used to be much more dependent on current affairs, reading newspapers, watching television or using the internet, until he realized that this committed his time without receiving anything in return so he decided to limit his access to once a day. Though to say that he “did not receive anything in return” is not that accurate, since the Dutch artist Dries Verhoeven transformed our “gaze” onto the news into a video installation. The first episode of four, of the series *Guilty Landscapes* presented at EMST (for Athens Festival), is filmed in a factory in Hangzhou, China. In the shot, a woman amongst factory machinery is in an interactive relationship with each audience member (each audience member is alone, in a room). Verhoeven has selectively visited four locations in the world that are considered “problematic” and wonders: Do we treat the people who live and work there as victims and does this automatically put us in a position of power and give us a sense of authority?

And what would happen if the “news” returned our gaze? What would they “see”?

Last year, the same artist, within the Fast Forward Festival of the Onassis Cultural Center, created a spectacle/experience on Parliament Square in the center of Athens: *Phobiarama*. In this installation, the audience members are taken on a ride through a haunted house. It is a “train of political ghosts” with television monitors placed in various places and “threatening” presences shadowing the viewers. In 2014 he presented “No Man’s Land” in which audience members were guided through the city of Athens by an immigrant. During the walk, they wore headphones through which they heard him tell his story.

As much as the description of these “actions” arouses a wide range of emotions, (interest, rejection, indifference) it also raises questions. Verhoeven states “we exorcize our demons only when we look at them straight in the eye”

“Never before have we been so safe and simultaneously so terrified”, he says and reminds us: “Our sensors of fear are in our brain: in the ventricle, in the neurons that activate our reflexes when we are in danger. Lately, our ventricle has been working overtime. Politicians, the media, marketers and terrorists are forcing us into a constant state of panic. They are targeting our fear receptors with great success. Which are the real threats though and which are conspiracy theories?”

Verhoeven’s questions run through his entire body of work. Fear is instigated by the gaze and vice versa. Are journalists merely mediators or do we encourage fear? We definitely “co-form” the gaze in the bad sense and the good sense of the word. Our involvement in the “issue” has levels and filters.

If there is something that Verhoeven also makes us think about it is this: Is the journalist a viewer and if so, can each viewer also be a potential journalist? The woman from Hangzhou invites us to confront our own reflection. She watches us and she imitates us. She challenges us to follow her mood and her movements. Some viewers cooperate and some others resist. Depending on the role and the emotional disposition that we each choose for ourselves. The willingness to be exposed and to try, or simply to document what is happening as a stranger, as a passer-by. To “see” what is happening and to feel later as we process the facts and analyze them, to write, selecting consciously or unconsciously, one word instead of the other. *Guilty Landscapes* brought ambivalence and anxiety, curiosity and empathy, smiles and sorrow, shock (yes, Verhoeven also describes viewers in shock), and indifference. Contradictory feelings, which make our emotions and our thoughts, take a small step. Not necessarily a step forward. Perhaps a step deeper, or to help a knot or a question come undone. Even if the question was never asked. Out of fear or out of guilt.