

How do I look at a migrant?

**An analysis of the address and positioning of the spectator
in *No Man's Land***

MA Thesis

Contemporary Theatre, Dance and Dramaturgy

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Abstract

In this thesis I will present an analysis of the address and positioning of the spectator in the performance *No Man's Land* by Dries Verhoeven and explain how this leads to a corporeal experience. *No Man's Land* is a performance in which the spectator is walking through Lombok while being guided by a migrant and hearing through his headphones a voice-over telling stories about the struggles of migrants. To analyze the construction of the experience of this spectator, I will use three theories and concepts from a different discipline than theatre studies. Focalization, from the field of narratology, will function as a tool to look at how the spectator is made aware of his active role and his physical presence. The cognitive theory of conceptual blending will be used to explain that the spectator has to shift between different modes of perception. Embodied simulation, a theory from cognitive neuroscience, will be used to address how simulation can and cannot be useful to understand the stories that are being told by the voice-over. By means of these theories and concepts I will claim that the perception of the spectator is destabilized and that he is invited to actively engage with the topic of migration and reflect on his assumptions and prejudices about this topic. Through this analysis I will not only lay bare the dramaturgy of the construction of spectatorship, but also further explore the potential of what other discourses have to offer for the field of theatre studies.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

TRYING TO UNDERSTAND MY OWN EXPERIENCE-----	4
WHAT HAVE I EXPERIENCED? – AN INTRODUCTION OF THE CASE STUDY-----	6

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

FOCALIZATION: A CONCEPT TO GIVE PERSPECTIVE-----	11
DOUBLENESS OF THE SPECTATORIAL BODY -----	13
UNDERSTANDING THROUGH SIMULATION -----	16

ANALYSIS

THE POWER OF THE GAZE -----	19
THE ATTEMPT TO CREATE FITTING BLENDS -----	22
THE ENABLING AND DISABLING OF SIMULATION -----	26

CONCLUSION

DESTABILIZATION OF PERCEPTION AND THE CORPOREAL EXPERIENCE OF THE SPECTATOR -----	31
LIST OF SOURCES -----	36

INTRODUCTION

Trying to understand my own experience

In 2013, at the beginning of an evening in September, I stood at the central train station of Utrecht. I was standing in a line next to 19 other people. We all had headphones on and holding a paper in our hands with different names on it. Some passers-by noticed us, while most of the people did not really seem to care why we were standing there. This is the start of *No Man's Land*, a performance by Dutch theatre maker and scenographer Dries Verhoeven. *No Man's Land* was created and performed for the first time in Utrecht in 2008 and has been performed at several places before it returned to Utrecht in 2013.

After this opening as described above, the group dissolved into duos. Each spectator was guided individually by a migrant through the streets of Lombok – a multicultural neighborhood in Utrecht – while hearing through headphones a voice-over telling stories about the difficulties and struggles a migrant encounters by leaving his or her home country. Even though I personally experienced this performance already quite some years ago when I was a young student with only very little knowledge about theatre, it is an experience that still pops up now and then when thinking about theatre and spectatorship in an academic context or when a friend or family member asks me what the type of theatre is that I like. During this walk I felt uncomfortable, I laughed and I was almost moved to tears. I was not sitting passively in a darkened auditorium at a safe distance from the stage on which a fictionalized world was presented – like I was used to – but I became an active participant in a performance in the reality of public space.

But how is it possible that this performance evoked the experience as I described above? How am I turned into an active participant? How does this performance position me as a spectator in such a way that I experience this performance not only mentally by thinking and reflecting on what I perceive, but also corporeally? What, then, would be the meaning of this corporeal experience?¹ Departing from these questions, I came to the following research question that will be answered in this thesis:

¹ When speaking of a 'corporeal experience', it is important to emphasize that I do not consider the body separated from the mind but as inextricably linked to each other. This means that I follow the idea of embodied cognition, as is for instance mentioned by Varela, Thompson and Rosch (2017). They explain that embodied cognition means: "first, that cognition depends upon the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities, and second, that these individual sensorimotor capacities are themselves embedded in a more encompassing biological, psychological, and cultural context" (173).

How can focalization, conceptual blending and embodied simulation be useful for analyzing the way in which the spectator in No Man's Land is being addressed and positioned which leads to a corporeal experience?

As this question shows, I will use three different theories and concepts from other discourses than theatre studies. In doing so I will not only further explore the potential of interdisciplinary research, but this will also enable me to critically analyze the construction of spectatorship in *No Man's Land* from different perspectives. Each theory or concept will be used to discuss one aspect of spectatorship in this performance. This is done in order to give structure to this analysis, because *No Man's Land* is a complicated performance that can be discussed from many different perspectives. The structure of this thesis will be therefore as follows; first I will give a dissection of my personal experience as a spectator in *No Man's Land*. This personal experience will serve as the main point of reference for discussing this performance, but I will also use a text of the performance – as provided by the company of Dries Verhoeven – and several video fragments. Because this thesis is based on my personal experience I will mainly use the 'I-perspective' throughout this thesis and use 'he' as pronoun. After explaining my experience as a spectator in *No Man's Land*, I will describe the theoretical framework, of which I will give here a short overview.

First, I will discuss the beginning of *No Man's Land* through the lens of focalization, which is a concept from the field of narratology where it is used as a tool to analyze the distribution of information in a narrative. Focalization does not only refer to what is being perceived, but also to how things are being perceived. This concept originated in the field of narratology, but Maaïke Bleeker uses the concept of focalization in *Visuality in the Theatre: The Locus of Looking* (2008) to refer to the mediation between "seer and seen" (27) in theatre performances. The second theory that I will use is the conceptual blending theory from the field of cognitive linguistics. This theory has been described by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner and explains that in order to give meaning to what we perceive, we "construct a partial match between two input mental spaces, to project selectively from those inputs into a novel 'blended' mental space, which then dynamically develops emergent structure" (Fauconnier and Turner 2003, 57-8). I will use this conceptual blending theory to address and analyze the doubleness of the body of the spectator, who is both present in the theatrical and the real world during *No Man's Land*. While aware that the conceptual blending theory itself refers to a mental process, I will argue that this theory is also suitable to discuss the corporeal aspect of spectatorship because the blending of theatrical input and input from 'reality' addresses the body in different ways, which both require a different mode of perception. The third and final

theory that I will use is the theory of embodied simulation from the field of cognitive neuroscience. This theory, as described by neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese, explains that “to perceive an action or the intention that determined it – and to understand its meaning – is equivalent to internally simulating that action” (De Marinis 2016, 72). Not only does embodied simulation take place when perceiving an action, it can also be evoked through language (Bergen 2012). I will use this theory of embodied simulation to look at the relation between the physical present guide and the text as produced by the only virtually present voice-over and to see how this relation affects the bodily address of the spectator.

After describing the theoretical framework, I will start with the analysis of the three different aspects of spectatorship that I mentioned above. In this analysis, I will discuss and analyze the role and address of the body of the spectator based on the perspective as provided by the three theories and concepts that I introduced before. Through this analysis I will show that the body of the spectator in *No Man’s Land* is never solely addressed on one level; he is both observer and object of vision, he is both present in theatrical space and real space and he is both seer and listener. This doubleness in the address of the spectator leads to a destabilization of his perception. Through this destabilization, the spectator gets activated and is invited to reflect on how he thinks and perceives: the spectator is put to work with his own thoughts and prejudices.

By focusing on one performance in this thesis I am able to give a detailed analysis of the construction of spectatorship in *No Man’s Land* and provide a threefold interdisciplinary perspective on how spectatorship can be studied. As I have already briefly mentioned, the concept of focalization has been applied to theatre studies before. However, the two other theories – embodied simulation and conceptual blending – has not been used to study non-dramatic performances like *No Man’s Land* before. Therefore this thesis is also an exploration of the potential of these theories for studying the object of the field of theatre studies.

What have I experienced? – an introduction of the case study

In the following section I will give a description of the different aspects of the performance *No Man’s Land*, based on my own experience as a spectator. *No Man’s Land* is a multilayered performance which operates at multiple levels at the same time and therefore this description is also a first start in structuring the analysis of the corporeal aspect of spectatorship in this performance. In the theoretical framework, which follows after this description, I will formulate the subquestions – based on the different aspects that are described below – that will serve as tools to arrive at an answer to the question what the role and the address of the body of the spectator is in *No Man’s Land*.

The beginning

We, a group of 20 people, are standing in a line next to each other in the big hall of the central train station in Utrecht. We all bought a ticket for this performance, and before the performance starts we receive headphones and a paper with a non-western name on it. While standing in a line, I hear music fragments through my headphones, mixed with noises from the train station. Together we form a collective body of performance spectators, while at the same time we are also observed by some travelers who pass by. It is funny how some people pay attention to us and are obviously wondering why we are standing there, while most of the people stay in their rush for catching a train or heading home. Waiting for something to happen, I observe the space around me and look closely to find out who could be part of this performance.



Photo credits: Maarten van Haaff

Then, after standing in a line for a while, people that look non-western gradually stand still in front of us with their eyes closed. The noise that I heard through my headphones is replaced by an aria of Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. The people in front of us open their eyes and start to lip-sync Purcell's aria. When the song ends, these people approach one of the spectators one by one and invites him or her to follow. Gradually the collective of body of spectators dissolves into duos of a guide and a spectator and walk away from the train station.



Photo credits: Maarten van Haaff

The walk

Now I am walking alone with my guide, which is in my case a woman. We walk through Lombok, which is a multicultural neighborhood in Utrecht where people with a different background, young and old, live together. We have to stick to the rules of public space; if the traffic light turns red, we have to stop. Sometimes she dances along with the music that I hear.. After a walk of about 30 minutes, I see other duos popping up from different directions and we approach a construction site where small wooden cabins are placed; one for each duo.



Photo credits: Maarten van Haaff

The end

I am invited to enter a cabin and take place on a chair with my back towards the door. My guide takes off my headphones and starts singing in a language of which I think that it is her mother language. After the singing she leaves the cabin. On the wall in front of me a blurred image appears that slowly focusses, which I then recognize as my guide holding up a paper with 'Gido' on it. She disappears after a brief moment which is apparently my cue to leave the cabin. The other spectators also leave their cabins, while looking for their guides which have disappeared. There is no possibility to applaud for them or have an after-talk with them.

The voice-over

While I follow my guide, I hear through my headphones a fluently Dutch-speaking voice. The first time I hear this voice – which is also the first moment my guide stops and looks me in the eye – I think that this could be a pre-recording of the voice of my guide. But this thought is quickly being undone because the voice tells me after a few sentences that the voice I hear is the voice of an actor:

This is me.

These are my hands.

These are my legs.

This is my face.

This is not a theatre costume.

This is not a Dutch appearance.

I am a foreigner – or migrant, that sounds better.

A refugee.

Political or economical – you don't know that yet.

And maybe even a Muslim.

Or I'm just here on holiday, that's also a possibility. That is the most cheerful version.

This is not my voice.

This is not my language.

This is the voice of an actor.

See, I may still look like a stranger,

Like some kind of character from a comic strip from a distant country, who stands in front of you, a little uncomfortably.²

During the walk, the voice-over tells different kinds of stories that are all related to the topic of migration. It is not a clear narrative that I hear, but only fragments. Most of the fragments have the structure of a possibility and started with “I could tell you that...”. The fragments are not only about the difficulties a migrant encounters while fleeing from his or her home country, but also address the way I look at migrants and in that way addresses my prejudices and thoughts about them.

This description of the performance *No Man's Land* should be helpful for the reader who has not experienced this performance him- or herself to understand the following analysis. While this description touches upon many aspects of *No Man's Land* that could be interesting for further analysis, I have decided to analyze only three aspects of spectatorship in this performance. This is done in order to give a more detailed and focused analysis, which leads to a better understanding of the usefulness of the theories and concepts that together create my theoretical framework for discussing the role and address of the body of the spectator. In the following section I will give a detailed description of these theories and concept and explain where they come from and how they can be relevant when analyzing the address and positioning of the spectator.

² Translation by Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink as presented in *Nomadic Theatre: staging movement and mobility in contemporary performance* (2015). In this PhD dissertation, Groot Nibbelink dedicates a chapter to the performance *No Man's Land*, in which she analyzes how the encounter between spectator and migrant is being staged, with a focus on the mobilization of the spectator and the space in which this takes place.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Focalization: a concept to give perspective

The beginning of the performance *No Man's Land*, by which I refer to the part that takes place at the train station, is the first moment at which a relation is created between myself, a spectator, and my surroundings. Part of this moment is also my first encounter with my guide. This beginning therefore positions me and installs a certain mode of perception that will work throughout the entire performance. To dissect the way in which this takes place, I will use the concept of focalization. Because this concept refers to the mediation between what I perceive and how I perceive, as I will explain in the following section, it is useful to analyze the beginning of *No Man's Land* through the concept of focalization to answer the question how I am positioned and invited to perceive. In the section below, I will explain what the concept of focalization entails and where it comes from. Besides that, I will also address how this concept has already shown its usefulness for theatre studies.

According to the online *Living Handbook of Narratology* focalization can be defined as “a selection or restriction of narrative information in relation to the experience and knowledge of the narrator, the character or other, more hypothetical entities in the storyworld.” The first person who brought up this concept was Gérard Genette. In *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980), Genette uses this concept as an alternative to the term ‘point of view’ that would not suffice in distinguishing between “mood and voice” or as he – more concrete – puts it: ‘point of view’ does not address the distinction between “the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who is the narrator?* or, more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*” (Genette 1980, 186). Genette does not give a proper definition of focalization, but he does give examples of novels as points of reference for explaining the difference between internal and external focalization. He uses for instance *Madame Bovary* as an example of internal focalization, in which the reader perceives the story through the eyes of one of the characters so the information the reader gets depends completely on what the character tells. In narratives with external focalization, for which Genette refers to the work of Dashiell Hammett, “the narrator says less than the character knows” (189-190). Based on this distinction, the concept of focalization as used by Genette refers to the distribution of information to the reader, where it is not only about the information itself but also about the way in which this information is distributed.

Cultural theorist Mieke Bal gives in *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (2009) a more concrete definition of what, according to her, focalization is. Bal refers to “the relations between the elements presented [in a story, *my addition*] and the vision through which

they are presented with the term *focalization*. Focalization is, then, the relation between the vision and that which is ‘seen,’ perceived” (145). Bal, like Gennette, also makes a distinction between internal and external focalization but uses different terms. When the focalization is created by one character that takes part in the narrative as an actor, she names this actor a ‘character-bound focalizer’, comparable with the internal focalization as introduced by Gennette. If focalization is created through “an anonymous agent, situated outside the fabula”³, this is called an “external non-character-bound focalizer” (152). What the definition of Bal in my opinion adds to the way in which Gennette explains the concept of focalization, is the inclusion of ‘vision’ and ‘perception’. Although Bal uses both terms to refer to narratives and fictional characters, this can be considered as a first step in making focalization a useful concept to analyze spectatorship in theatre performances as the following example of Maaïke Bleeker will show,

An example of how focalization could be a useful concept to analyze spectatorship is provided by Maaïke Bleeker in *Visuality in the Theatre: The Locus of Looking* (2008). In this book she uses the concept of focalization to dissect the way in which a relation is constructed between the spectator and what he sees. Bleeker says that focalization refers to the process of mediation between “seer and seen”, in which focalization not only addresses what is being seen but also the position from where it is seen (27). To show how this concept can be put to work, Bleeker uses the performance *Artifact* by choreographer William Forsythe as an example. In this explanation she also makes the distinction – like Gennette and Bal – between internal and external focalization. As an example of an internal focalizer, Bleeker mentions a female performer who invites the audience to ‘step inside’:

Having reached the front of the stage, she halts, stretches up, looks at the audience and says ‘Step Inside’. She thus literally becomes an internal focalizer, explicitly inviting the audience to do what many performances implicitly assume will occur: abandoning the observer’s position in the auditorium and imaginatively projecting oneself into the world onstage. (28)

By inviting the audience to ‘step inside’, she invites the audience to come and see the world from her perspective. When taking her invitation literally, the audience should get out of their chairs and step into the world on stage. However, because this is theatre, the spectators stay seated and only imagine themselves being in the world on stage. This means that there is a

³ Bal explains ‘fabula’ as follows: “A fabula is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors” (5).

difference between the place from where they perceive the performance imaginatively and their physical position. This difference is in this case highlighted by an external focalizer, which is described by Bleeker as “the anonymous agent through whose eyes we as audience see the performance” (31). The external act of focalization in *Artifact* that Bleeker refers to is the moment at which the safety curtain comes down with a bang and ‘throws’ the audience back in their seats, while they were still projecting themselves into the world onstage. Through this act, as Bleeker explains it, the spectators become aware of their bodily attachment to the position from which they perceive and they experience that seeing is not a disembodied act.

What Bleeker here showed by using the concept of focalization is that it is a concept that can be used for understanding the relation between what is being perceived and how this is being perceived and to analyze how this relation is constructed. Particularly relevant for this thesis is that through the concept of focalization, Bleeker has been able to show how the bodily position of the spectator affects the way in which the performance is perceived. In my analysis of the address and role of the spectator in the beginning of *No Man’s Land* – which will follow after the introduction of the two other theories that will be used in this thesis – I will use the concept of focalization in a similar way to Bleeker and show how a relation is constructed between the spectator and what he perceives.

Doubleness of the spectatorial body

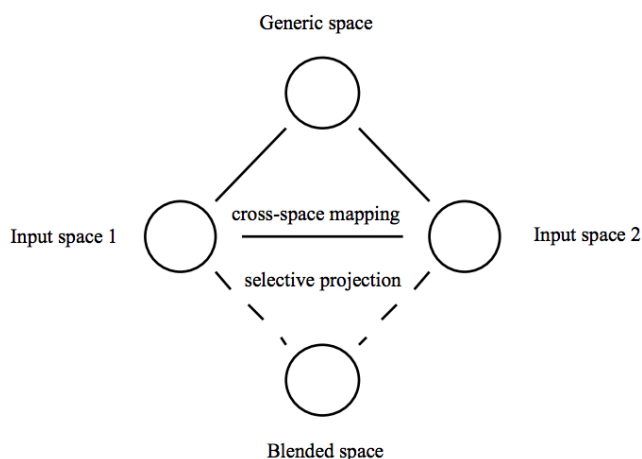
Part of the construction of the relation between the spectator and his perception is the space in which the performance takes place. In the case of *No Man’s Land* this space is the public space of Lombok. The fact that this performance takes place in public space, places the spectator at the same time in the theatrical space and the reality of public space. So here again the notion of doubleness plays an important role in the way the spectator is addressed. To analyze how this doubleness effects the way the spectator is addressed, I will use the conceptual blending theory – a theory from the field of cognitive science. The reason for using a theory from this field is that it contributes to my search for theories outside our discourse of theatre studies that can be relevant to analyze and discuss spectatorship in theatre performances. In the following section I will elaborate on this conceptual blending theory and explain how this can be useful for analyzing spectatorship.

The theory of conceptual blending is described by cognitive linguist Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner. Cognitive linguistics is a sub-branch of the extensive field of cognitive science, which “is primarily concerned with investigating the relationship between language, the mind and socio-physical experience” (Evans and Green 2006, vi). The theory of conceptual blending is one of the main theories of this field of cognitive linguistics and is described by Fauconnier and Turner in their book *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind’s*

Hidden Complexities (2002). They explain this theory by using a riddle from Arthur Koestler's *The Act of Creation*:

A Buddhist Monk begins at dawn one day walking up a mountain, reaches the top at sunset, meditates at the top for several days until one dawn when he begins to walk back to the foot of the mountain, which he reaches at sunset. Make no assumptions about his starting or stopping or about his pace during the trips. Riddle: Is there a place on the path that the monk occupies at the same hour of the day on the two separate journeys? (39)⁴

Before I start with an explanation of how this riddle can be solved using the conceptual blending theory, I will show a figure that Fauconnier and Turner use in their article “Conceptual Blending, Form and Meaning” (2003) which explains this theory in a visual way.



Thus, for answering this riddle two things have to be blended; the ascent and the descent. Fauconnier and Turner say that in this case we have a mental space for the ascent and another mental space for the descent, which matches with input space 1 and 2 in the above figure. Mental spaces are “small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action” (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 40).⁵ In this case, the two mental spaces are compared to see what they have in common – the cross-space mapping in the above figure. The generic space then contains what both mental spaces have in common. In the fourth space, the blended space, both mountain slopes – the ascent and the descent –

⁴ The answer to this riddle is yes; there is only one place that the monk will occupy at the same hour of the day. However, this answer is irrelevant for their argumentation.

⁵ Gilles Fauconnier elaborates on the mental spaces theory in *Mental Spaces: Aspects of Meaning Construction in Natural Language* (1994).

are projected on the same mountain slope which would then lead to the conclusion that the monk 'meets himself' on the path. This encounter of the monk meeting himself is something that is in neither mental spaces; it is something new that comes fourth out of the blending of the two mental spaces. The 'new' thing that comes out of this blending is what Fauconnier and Turner call 'emergent structure' (41, 42).

Fauconnier and Turner claim that this process of conceptual blending "plays a fundamental role in the construction of meaning in everyday life, in the arts and sciences, and especially in the social and behaviorial sciences" (Fauconnier and Turner 2003, 57). So what could this theory bring for theatre studies?⁶ In *The Way We Think*, Fauconnier and Turner give an example of how this theory is applicable for analyzing the doubleness of actor and performer in dramatic theatre performances. They say that the person on stage is a blend of a living person – character – and an actor. "While we perceive a single scene, we are simultaneously aware of the actor moving and talking on a stage in front of an audience, and of the corresponding character moving and talking within the represented story world" (266). It is the role of the spectator to connect both input spaces and blend them into one person on stage. In this process of blending the spectator does not integrate every aspect of their perception into the blend, which they call 'selective projection'.

Many aspects of her [the spectator's, *my addition*] existence (such as sitting in a seat, next to other people, in the dark), although independently available to her, are not to be projected to the blend. Her normal animacy and agency, her motor powers and her power of speech, her responsibility to act in response to what she sees, must all be inhibited. (267)

This blend of actor and character that Fauconnier and Turner describe here only applies to dramatic theatre performances, but nevertheless it is an interesting example of how this theory is applicable to a theatre performance. As mentioned previously, this theory will be used in this research to analyze the effect of the doubleness of the spectator, who is both present in the theatrical space and in the reality of public space. While aware of the fact that the conceptual blending theory is an explanation for a mental process, I will show that this theory can be used to address the twofold way in which the body of the spectator is being addressed in *No Man's Land*.

⁶ See Cook (2010) and McConachie (2008) for more examples of how the conceptual blending theory can be applied to analyze dramatic theatre performances.

Understanding through simulation

As previously mentioned in my explanation of the experience of the spectator in *No Man's Land*, I heard through my headphones a voice-over speaking. This use of a voice-over instead of the voice of the guide that is walking in front of me influences the way in how the spectator is addressed. To analyze how the spectator is addressed through both the guide and the physical absent voice-over, I will use the theory of embodied simulation. This theory comes from the field of cognitive neuroscience, which is a discourse that gradually finds its entrance into the field of arts. As Clelia Falletti, Gabriele Sofia and Victor Jacono point out in the introduction of their edited collection *Theatre and Cognitive Neuroscience* (2016), in this new interdisciplinary field much research has been done and articles have been published about dance, visual arts and music can be studied, but theatre remains relatively absent (xvi). Therefore it is very relevant to introduce here a neuroscientific theory and apply it to a mainly text-based performance like *No Man's Land*.

To put it briefly, the theory of embodied simulation explains that when we see an action being performed by someone else, we understand this action through an internal simulation of that action without executing it. Not only does this process of embodied simulation take place when an action is perceived, it is also activated through language and it also takes place when perceiving someone else's emotion. But where does this theory of embodied simulation come from? The embodied simulation theory finds its roots in the discovering of the mirror neurons in the brain. In 1996, a group of neuroscientists from the University of Parma published an article in which they showed the results of an experiment they conducted on the brain of macaque monkeys. The researchers found out that "in area F5 of the monkey premotor cortex there are neurons that discharge both when the monkey performs an action and when he observes a similar action made by another monkey or the experimenter" (Rizzolatti et al. 1996, 131). In this same article, they showed the results of a similar experience done with human beings, which showed that also in human brains "the observation of a movement activates the premotor cortex" (137). These discharging neurons that are described here, are called the mirror neurons. These mirror neurons form the basis of the theory of embodied simulation.

Vittorio Gallese, one of the researchers in the above described experiment, published many articles about this embodied simulation, which he describes as "to perceive an action or the intention that determined it – and to understand its meaning – is equivalent to internally simulating that action" (De Marinis 2016, 72). Gallese here mentions that embodied simulation not only enables the perceiver to understand the action itself, but also enables understanding of the intention that lies behind the action. This experience of intentionality enables us to fill in

certain gaps in the perception of movement.⁷ Next to the intentionality of movement, embodied simulation can be used to address the perception of objects and the space in relation to the body of the perceiver. When for instance perceiving a chair, we perceive this as a potential object for interaction and internally simulate that potential interaction (Gallese 2005, 44).

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, embodied simulation can be evoked through language. Benjamin Bergen explains this in *Louder Than Words: The New Science of How the Mind Makes Meaning* (2012):

It [the embodied simulation theory, *my addition*] hypothesizes that language is like these other cognitive functions in that it, too, depends on embodied simulation. While we listen to or read sentences, we simulate seeing the scenes and performing the actions that are described. We do so using our motor and perceptual systems, and possible other brain systems, like those dedicated to emotion. (15)

This claim of Bergen is useful when discussing text-based performances from the perspective of embodied simulation. Especially in the case of *No Man's Land*, where the text is not accompanied by actions that might create a better understanding of what is being said, as is mostly the case in dramatic theatre performance. What Bergen in this fragment also briefly mentions, is the connection between emotions and embodied simulation. This notion of embodied simulation as enabling the understanding of other's emotions is further explained by Gallese, who claims that when we perceive someone else expressing an emotion we use "the same neural mechanisms that are normally activated when we act or experience similar emotions and sensations" (Gallese 2006, 57). So in order to understand emotions, we internally simulated ourselves having that emotion.⁸

In this chapter I have explained where the theory of embodied simulation comes from and what it entails. This theory has mainly been used to study visual arts (for instance Gallese 2005 and Gallese and Sinigaglia 2011), but has not shown its relevance for theatre studies yet. In this thesis, I will use embodied simulation as a tool to look at the relation between my guide and the physically absent voice-over to be able to analyze how this plays a role in the address of the spectator. In the analysis of this relation and the experience of the spectator, I

⁷ Gallese further explains this intentionality by referring to a research in which the mirror neurons were tested on monkeys in two situations; in the first situation, the monkey could see the entire action, and in the second situation the final part of the action, the moment at which the hand reached the object, was hidden. This research showed that more than half of the recorded neurons responded also in the second situation (Gallese 2005, 32, 33; based on Umiltà et al. 2001).

⁸ For further research, it would be interesting then to look for answers to the question what the difference is between seeing someone else expressing an emotion and having an emotion yourself.

will explain how embodied simulation is being enabled and disabled in the case of *No Man's Land*.

In the previous three chapters I have set the stage for the analysis of the address and the positioning of the spectator in *No Man's Land*. I have explained what the concept and theories are that will be the theoretical framework for this analysis. In the following analysis I will stick to the structure as used in the theoretical framework. This means that first the concept of focalization will be used to analyze the beginning of the performance, then the conceptual blending theory to address the doubleness of theatrical and public space and in the final section of the analysis the theory of embodied simulation will be used to analyze the relation between the voice-over and my guide.

ANALYSIS

The power of the gaze

In this first part of my analysis of the address and positioning of the spectator, I will focus on the beginning of *No Man's Land* and formulate an answer to the question how this beginning addresses and positions the spectator from a corporeal perspective. To answer this question, I will use the concept of focalization of which I gave an extensive explanation in the theoretical framework. In this theoretical framework, I have shown how Bleeker uses focalization as a concept that refers to the mediation between the perceiver and what is being perceived. By using the term 'mediation' she emphasizes that focalization not only pays attention to what is being perceived, but also addresses the question how this is being perceived. Focalization as a concept can therefore be useful to analyze the relation between the spectator and what he perceives and how this relation is constructed. In this section I will show that the relation that is established in the beginning of *No Man's Land* is based on the notion of doubleness; the spectator is both observer and an object of vision himself. Through this double role, the spectator becomes aware of how his act of looking is embodied.

Because focalization points to the relation between what is being perceived and how this is being perceived, it is good to start with an explanation of what I see when I am standing on the train station in a line next to 19 other spectators. Basically I see nothing more than people who are walking. Because I bought a ticket for a performance and I expect something to happen, I perceive my surroundings a bit more profound than I would do in everyday life if I would be standing on that same spot waiting for the train. Many thoughts are going through my head while observing; what kind of job does that woman have? Is that man running to catch his train or should he be in time at home for dinner with his wife and two children? Why are some people walking against the current? Is that a Dutch girl or a tourist? Because I was expecting an encounter to happen I was also looking for the performers. So every time a person looks differently, walked into a different direction than the rest of the crowd or stood still for a while, I considered if he or she would be part of the performance. At this moment it is unclear what is part of what Umberto Eco calls the "performative situation" (1977, 117). Eco defines this as a situation in which "a human body [...] stands for something else to a reacting audience" (117). In such a performative situation this body has to be taken as a sign. Since I do not know at this moment of the performance who is part of the performance and who is not, I read my entire surroundings as a potential sign by which I emphasize the performativity of the situation I am in. The doubleness of real and theatrical space that I here touch upon, will be further explained in the next chapter when analyzing this doubleness through the conceptual blending theory.

So what I perceive in the beginning of *No Man's Land* does not really differ from what I would normally see when standing on that same location. However, the position from where I perceive this is different and also influences the way in which I perceive what is going on at the train station. In other words, the question how I perceive seems to be very relevant in this case. We – the group of spectators – are placed in a line next to each other in public space. We all wear headphones and hold in our hands a paper with a non-western name on it. Here you could say that we are being staged as well. We are visible for everyone who walks by and some of them are obviously wondering why we are standing there. Neither I know exactly why we are standing there. In this case, what we are looking at looks back at us; our object of vision turns us into their object of vision. This means that we are not merely anonymous spectators waiting for a performance to happen as is normally the case when seated in the auditorium of a black box theatre, but we are clearly acknowledged as present. Because our bodies are being looked at, I get a feeling of awkwardness and vulnerability. This feeling is enforced by the fact that we are staged in this way and not invited to escape from this position.

Standing there in public space while being perceived by others makes me aware of my own bodily presence and also acknowledges that my gaze is not neutral; it is dependent of my bodily position. A line can be drawn here with how Bleeker introduced the concept of focalization by referring to the performance *Artifact* as a case study. Bleeker explains that the contrast between the internal and external focalizer in this performance gives the spectator the experience that he is “bodily attached to his viewpoint” (32). The internal focalizer is in that case a female performer who invited the audience to ‘step inside’ the world as presented on stage. After been invited to step inside this world, the external focalizer comes into play: a safety curtain comes down with a bang. Through this external focalizer the audience becomes aware that they have been sitting in their chairs all the time, also when they replaced themselves into the world as presented on stage. So the spectator becomes aware of how his body is connected to the way he is perceiving, which it is in that way similar to the positioning of the body in *No Man's Land*. However, in *No Man's Land* this awareness is created more gradually after standing there for a while and being observed by the people who pass by.

A change occurs in the way of perceiving when gradually the performers, the migrant-guides, come into play. They appear one by one in front of us with their eyes closed, which makes me understand that they are the people that are part of the performance. Now it is clear that we are the audience and they are the performers, which makes that I have a clear focus on them and consider them as my main object of vision. These performers are part of the performative situation, which makes me consider them as signs even though I do not know yet how to ‘read’ them. After a while they open their eyes and start lip-syncing the Purcell aria we

hear through our headphones. During this song they look straight at us, which again acknowledges our physical presence and emphasizes the fact that we are no passive, anonymous observers; we are clearly included in the performative situation. After this song, this performative situation created by performers and spectators is turned into smaller parts: one by one a migrant-guide invites one of the spectators to follow him or her for a tour through Lombok.

The concept of focalization has been useful here, because it includes the position from where things are being perceived instead of focusing only on the content of what is perceived. If you would look here only at the content of what I perceive as a spectator, this would not say anything about what this performance tries to convey. What I perceive – before the guides appear – does not differ from what I could see everyday. But in this situation, where I stood with headphones on in a line with 19 other spectators while awaiting something to happen in the space in front of us, this space appears differently. This space becomes a potential theatrical space in which a performance is about to take place.

Because the way in which we, spectators, are positioned, turns us into an object of vision for those who are walking through the train station – and later also for the performers who are looking at us while lip-syncing the Purcell aria. Being an object of vision myself I become aware of my own bodily presence and because we are both spectator and object of vision, this awareness of my body affects my mode of perception. In this way, I am made aware that looking is an embodied act.⁹ But how can this experience be meaningful in relation to migration, which is the topic of this performance? This beginning of the performance let the spectator experience what it means to be looked at and let me experience how uncomfortable that can be, which is a feeling that migrants might experience on a daily basis. Also, because the spectator is invited to take up different roles, he gets activated in taking up someone else's viewpoint which forces the spectator to question his own way of looking and thinking. Throughout this performance, this activation will lead to a rethinking of your own assumptions about migrants and migration. Further on in this thesis I will give a more detailed account of how other aspects of this performance lead to this rethinking and questioning.

In this chapter I have already briefly touched upon the doubleness of theatrical space and the reality of public space in *No Man's Land*. In the following chapter I will elaborate on this and provide a new perspective on this doubleness by using a theory from the discourse of cognitive science, namely the conceptual blending theory.

⁹ For a further understanding of the relation between perception and the activity of the body see Alva Noë's *Action in Perception* (2004).

The attempt to create fitting blends

In the previous chapter I have shown how focalization can function as a tool to analyze the beginning of *No Man's Land*, which led to the conclusion that the spectator is both observer and object of vision at the same time. Through this double role, the spectator becomes aware of his own mode of perception and is activated in questioning and rethinking what and how he perceives. What I will argue in this chapter, is that this activation is partly created through the fact that the spectator is present in both the theatrical space and the reality of public space which require different modes of perception. I will show that the theory of conceptual blending, which is the main theory that I will use in this chapter, is useful in addressing this doubleness and that it is the inability to blend or the deconstruction of a blend which functions as a main strategy of addressing and positioning the spectator.

Let me first recap what this theory of conceptual blending entails. Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner – the cognitive linguists who developed this theory – explain it briefly as follows: “The essence of the operation [of conceptual blending, *my addition*] is to construct a partial match between two input mental space, to project selectively from those inputs into a novel ‘blended’ mental space, which then dynamically develops emergent structure (2003, 57, 58). This theory has been mainly used to address questions of language and narratives and how meaning-making occurs on a linguistic level. However, Fauconnier and Turner claim that this process of blending plays a role in our everyday life. Important to mention here is that the conceptual blending theory refers to a mainly mental process, where I will show that it can be used in a way to understand how the body of the spectator is addressed and positioned.

In *No Man's Land*, the spectator is present in two worlds at the same time; a world that is created through the text as told by the voice-over and the physical presence of the guide, and the world of the reality of public space through which I walk with my guide. The interplay between both spaces is what creates spectatorship in this performance. To further analyze this interplay between the theatrical space, by which I mean the space that is created through the performance, and the public space, I will first introduce the concept of theatricality.¹⁰ There are many different definitions of this concept, but I will refer here to the concept as defined by Josette Féral in “Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language” (2002)¹¹ of which I will later explain why I use this definition:

¹⁰ Tracy Davis and Thomas Postlewait mention in the introduction of their edited collection *Theatricality* (2003) that the idea of theatricality has many different meanings and ways in which it has been used. They make a distinction between two ways in which the concept of theatricality can be used; aesthetically and philosophically. In this thesis I will use it in the aesthetic context.

¹¹ The article that I here refer to is the translation by Ronald Bermingham (published in 2002) of the original article that was published in 1988 in French, called “La théatralité. Recherche sur la spécificité de langage théâtral”.

Theatricality produces spectacular events for the spectator; it establishes a relationship that differs from the quotidian. It is an act of representation, the construction of a fiction. As such, theatricality is the imbrication of fiction and representation in an “other” space in which the observer and the observed are brought face to face. (105)

Féral here mainly claims that theatricality comes forth out of its difference with the quotidian space, which would be in the case of *No Man’s Land* the public space of the train station and Lombok. The relation that Féral describes between both spaces is also addressed by Ragnhild Tronstad and her definition of theatricality, but she uses the word ‘real’ to describe Féral’s ‘quotidian space’. Ragnhild also mentions the role of the spectator in creating theatricality:

Theatricality is to be found in the relation between two spaces: the real space and a fictional space. The real space is the actual physical one, while the fictional space is a virtual or imagined space created either by the actor, or by the spectator alone. For theatricality to happen, the spectator must see the “real” space through a fictional framing, which makes this space occur differently. (2002, 217)

Here Tronstad implies that to consider something as theatrical, the spectator must be aware that he is perceiving a performance. The spectator then ‘adds’ a fictional layer to what he perceives in order to be able to see the real space as a theatrical space. This framing as a ‘responsibility’ of the spectator can be brought into relation with what Chiel Kattenbelt names ‘aesthetic orientation’: “theatre is not constituted by the performativity of the situation as such, but by the aesthetic orientation of the perceiver” (2010, 30). In the previous chapter, I have mentioned that in the beginning of *No Man’s Land* it is not clear who has to be considered as part of the performance and ‘read’ as a sign. When taken into account the aesthetic orientation of the spectator in that moment, this would imply that the performativity of the situation is emphasized and that the spectator perceives everything through a fictional framing. In both definitions of theatricality as provided by Féral and Tronstad, I find this notion of fictional space problematic. In the case of *No Man’s Land*, the space is not perceived through a fictional framing and I would also not say that a fiction is constructed. It is true that a relation is constructed with the real space, but this is not done through representation. Framing in this case is done in order to steer your perception of the real space. This real space, which I would rather call the quotidian or public space, is blended with the theatrical space, which is the space that is created by the voice-over and the physical presence of the guide. As a spectator,

I am part of both spaces and therefore I am 'living in the blend' as Fauconnier and Turner would call it, since I am continuously blending this real space with the theatrical space. What is remarkable here, is that this blending not always works: on the one hand, I have to act as if I am strolling through public space, while on the other hand I am part of a theatrical performance which requires a different way of acting and perceiving. As Fauconnier and Turner explain, conceptual blending involves selective projection, which means that not everything is to be projected into the blend. Before the performance starts at the train station, we get some instructions about the rules we have to follow during this performance. We have to follow our guides and stick to the rules that normally also apply in public space; for instance it is mentioned that we should not pass the street if the traffic light is red. In this way, it is made explicit that these aspects are not to be blended with the theatrical space.

When walking through public space, while being guided by a migrant, I hear a voice-over telling stories through my headphones. This means that I have to blend both activities: walking in public space and listening to a voice-over who tells me – or could tell me, because most of the stories start with “I could tell you that” on which I will elaborate in the next chapter – different stories about migration and also tells me several times what I am probably thinking at that moment. This blend points to a paradox in the way I am positioned. On the one hand, I find myself in an active position; I am walking in the open area of public space instead of seated in a chair in a theatre and clearly acknowledged as a co-creator of the performance. Through the text that is being told, I am invited to critically reflect on what I hear and my way of thinking. On the other hand, I am in a passive position; I am merely following my guide, only listening to what is being told without responding to the assumptions that are being made about what I am thinking. I want to talk and act, but the setting prevents me from doing so. In that way, a parallel can be made here with the experience of migrants; “I could tell you that I fled in total for 1,5 days, but that I am being called a ‘refugee’ now for 22 years” is a sentence that my guide said. This sentence points to the idea that whatever a migrant does, he will always be perceived as a refugee no matter how good he integrates himself in our society. He cannot speak for himself; other people will decide how he is perceived.

This tension between activity and passivity is also created in the beginning of this performance, as I discussed in the previous chapter. The spectator is not only perceiver, he is turned into an object of vision as well. When trying to blend both activities – observing and being observed – this would turn out not to be possible because both activities are defined by what the other activity is not: they are opposed to each other. This impossibility to blend leads to an unstable act of perception where the spectator is made aware of his own bodily presence and how this affects the way he perceives. Because the spectator is living in the blend of both

being an observer and object of vision at the same time he is therefore constantly changing and adjusting his way of perception. This adjusting of the perception that works throughout the entire performance, is also influenced by the text. The following fragment is what I hear when I am standing for the first time face to face with my guide.

This me.

These are my hands.

These are my legs.

This is my face.

This is not a theatre costume.

This is not a Dutch appearance.

I am a foreigner – or migrant, that sounds better.

A refugee.

Political or economical – you don't know that yet.

And maybe even a Muslim.

Or I'm just here on holiday, that's also a possibility. That is the most cheerful version.

This is not my voice.

This is not my language.

This is the voice of an actor.

See, I may still look like a stranger,

Like some kind of character from a comic strip from a distant country, who stands in front of you, a little uncomfortably.

Because this is the first time that I hear the voice-over, this is also the first moment at which I blend what I see with the text I hear. The text is separated from the physicality of the body; the voice that I hear is not produced by the body that is standing in front of me. Initially I understand this text as if it is a pre-recorded story told by the guide, in order to make what I perceive correspond to what I hear. In that sense, I am trying to create a fitting blend and I succeed in that. I see a woman with indeed a non-Dutch appearance who could be a refugee. But then, in the second part of this fragment, this idea that the text that I hear is a pre-recorded story told by the guide is made undone because it is made explicit that the voice I hear does not come from the woman who is standing in front of me. What is happening here, is a blend that is being

deconstructed. What initially seemed a working blend, turns out to be not functional anymore. This first fragment makes the spectator aware of how he projects what he hears and thinks on what he perceives. The spectator gets activated through a destabilizing in his perception; he has to adjust his perception and keep in mind that what he sees might not be what it is. This encounter therefore is also a first invitation to look beyond your own prejudices.

To conclude this chapter, I want to reflect on what conceptual blending has shown about the address and positioning of the spectator. When looking through the perspective of conceptual blending at how the spectator is being addressed, it turns out that in *No Man's Land* blending does not always succeed and therefore troubles the perception of the spectator. The spectator is placed in a seemingly active position, but at the same time he is staged in such a way that he is only able to passively follow and listen to the voice-over. Here the blending of the concepts of activity and passivity does not work. Similar to this opposition of activity and passivity, is the fact that the spectator is positioned as both a spectator and an object of vision. These are two activities that are also not able to come together in a blended space. Another strategy of this performance, is that it invites the spectator to blend what he hears with what he perceives which seems to turn into a fitting blend. However this seemingly fitting blend is being undone and shown that what you first thought matches no longer with what you are actually seeing. Next to these strategies of creating non-fitting blends, the blending of theatrical space and real space functions as an important strategy to both destabilize and steer your perception. While being present as a spectator in the theatrical space, which is in this case the intimate space created through the voice-over and the physical presence of the guide, you are activated in applying the way of thinking as created in the theatrical space to the public space you are walking through. This theatrical space will be the main focus of the following chapter, in which I will use the theory of embodied simulation to address the effect of the blending of the voice-over and the physical presence on the address of the spectator.

The enabling and disabling of simulation

In the following chapter I will focus on the voice-over and the physical present guide. I will analyze how the spectator is addressed through these both inputs from the perspective of embodied simulation, a theory from cognitive neuroscience. Before I start with that analysis, I first briefly recap what the theory of embodied simulation entails. The theory of embodied simulation is based on the discovery of the mirror neurons, which are the motor neurons that are “activated during the execution of actions and its observation performed by someone else” (Gallese 2017, 43). Embodied simulation refers to the process that we understand actions of other people by internally simulating what we perceive without executing the action itself. Not

only does this embodied simulation play a role in understanding actions that are being perceived, this simulation is also evoked through language and necessary to understand stories that are being told or read (Bergen 2012). Besides this understanding of actions and language, embodied simulation also enables us to understand the emotions of other human beings (Gallese 2006). To summarize, embodied simulation refers to the process of simulation internally what we see or hear in order to understand someone else's actions, stories or emotions. It is this simulation that will be the main point of reference of the following analysis of how the spectator is addressed through the voice-over and the guide.

First, I will look at how both inputs separately – the physical of the guide and the textual of the voice-over – evoke or require embodied simulation. The guide guides me through the streets Lombok and decides where, when and how fast we are walking. Sometimes she dances to the music I hear through my headphones. Sometimes she stops, which makes me stop as well, and looks at me. When she looks at me, her facial expression is most of the time neutral, except for some moments at which she gently smiles at me. The actions she performs do not carry meaning in themselves, which means that simulation is not necessary to understand these actions. As pointed out before, embodied simulation also takes place in order to understand emotions but since the emotions that are expressed by the guide are very minimal, embodied simulation here is not needed. Would this then mean that embodied simulation does not play any role with regards to the physical presence of the guide? The answer is no, and to show this I will bring in a quote of Vittorio Gallese, one of the 'founding fathers' of the embodied simulation theory. "The variety of MMs [mirror mechanisms, *my addition*] present in our brain [...] allows us to recognize others as other bodily selves, enabling basic forms of intersubjective communication and mutual implicit understanding" (Gallese 2007, 44). As Gallese claims, embodied simulation – which is based on the mirror mechanism – makes us perceive other people as human beings with a "similar brain-body system" (Gallese 2005, 32), which would enable communication. In the case of *No Man's Land* there is no textual communication between me and my guide, which means that the only communication that is enabled here is the physical communication. In that sense, a 'promise' of embodied simulation is not redeemed entirely. Gallese namely claims that embodied simulation enables communication and make me perceive an other human being as someone with a similar brain-body system. Even though I perceive her as a human being, her lack of textual expression makes me communicate with her in a different way than I would normally do when encountering a human being. Because she does not speak and only communicates via her body, a physical connection is created between her and mine body. This physical connection

points out that we are both present in the same time and space.¹² By creating this shared space and time through our bodies, my physical presence is emphasized. The awareness of my own physicality is enforced too by the moments at which she looks at me. As stated in the chapter where I analyzed the beginning of *No Man's Land*, I am both observer and object of vision, which is a similar experience to the moments when me and my guide are standing face to face during the performance. This results in that I here again experience my act of looking as being embodied.

After the above elaboration on the physical presence of the guide, I will here first explain how embodied simulation is evoked through the text as told by the voice-over, before I will come to the part in which I explain the relation between both the physical and the textual input and the effect this has on the process of embodied simulation of the spectator. First of all, it is important to stress that the producer of the text is only virtually present. This means that the understanding of the text is completely dependent on only the simulation of what I hear, as Benjamin Bergen suggested previously when explaining that the understanding of language also depends on embodied simulation. In this text that I hear through headphones, situations are described which are all related to the topic of migration. A lot of these stories start with a phrase like "I could tell you that", as is the case in the following fragment:

I can tell you about a prison in France,
About a prison in Kirkuk,
About a prison in Damascus.

I can tell you that I punched 5 teeth out of somebody's mouth.
That a man is a donkey if he does not protect his wife.

I can tell about a little room with a suspended ceiling and a woman that judges my story.

Not only does the voice-over tell stories, she also frequently fills in what I should be or am thinking. As stated in the previous chapter, it is not possible to react to these assertions or assumptions. Partly through this inability to response I am activated to adjust my perceptions and actively start thinking about the assumptions the voice-over makes about how I think and what my opinion is about refugees. When the voice-over tells stories like in the fragment above,

¹² This experience of being in the same space is enforced by the headphones which creates a space that is isolated from the public space we are walking through. Like myself, the guide is also addressed in both the theatrical and public space.

embodied simulation comes into play for understanding the situations that are described. This fragment for instance invites me to position myself as being in the prison, punching the teeth out of somebody's mouth. Through this invitation, I try to embody what it would feel like to fight with someone. In that way, I can experience a little part of what a migrant experiences and through this embodying I can eventually arrive at a better understanding of what a migrant is going through. But it is not always the case that the voice-over describes stories that I am able to embody, which I will show by referring to the following fragment:

I could tell you that my oldest daughter has been raped. That she was raped on a table in front of me by a Sunni and that I was forced to watch it happen. While he was raping her, he pointed a gun at me. I can tell you about the fear in my daughter's eyes. I can tell you about the feeling that flows through the body of a mother at such a moment.

The situation as described here is difficult to embody, if not impossible. You cannot imagine what it must feel like to see someone you love being raped. As Gallese claims, the process of embodied simulation is based on a "reusing of our own mental states" (Gallese 2017, 188), but in this case there is no mental state that I can reuse.¹³ What this example shows can be connected to the "I could tell you"-form that is used in the text. Throughout the text, situations are described that I try to understand by simulating what is being explained. But because many of these situations I have never experienced before, I am not enabled to simulate the actions and emotions as expressed in the stories. Therefore I will never be able to understand the problems migrants encounter. The fact that "I could you" is being used as the main form of these stories, then points to the idea that I would never be able to understand what they – migrants – are going through. 'It does not matter what we say, you could never imagine what it feels like', could be the underlying thought of the voice-over. By positioning me as an unknowing spectator, I am again activated to reflect on how I think and more specifically, in this case, to what extent I am 'unknowing'.¹⁴

The fragment about the rape of the daughter that I described above, is also a useful example for discussing the relation between the text and the guide. As mentioned before, there are moments at which me and my guide are standing face to face. When hearing the story about the rape, we do stand still but at this moment she does not look at me. If you would

¹³ I find this notion of "reusing of our own mental states" problematic because this focusses on the mental aspect of simulation, where in my opinion simulation does not only take place on a mental level but involves the entire body.

¹⁴ It is for this reason that it is striking that the guides have disappeared when we leave the cabins, because I felt the urge to tell her that I do try to understand what she has gone – and is going – through.

discuss this moment apart from the text, it does not mean anything. But through the combination with the horrible story that is being told, the gesture of not looking at me becomes a gesture which conveys that this experience is too traumatic to tell me when looking at her, as if she feels ashamed for telling me this. Because she turns her back towards me, it also feels as if I am not invited to simulate what she has gone through; it prevents me from immersing myself into that specific moment. This prevention from simulation in other stories that are being told happens through another gesture of the guide, namely the dancing. Throughout our tour through Lombok, my guide functions as a carrier of the stories. By this I mean that her physical presence enables me to project the stories that I hear onto her. She gets meaning through the text of the voice-over. This projection then helps me to simulate better what is being described in the stories; I can imagine her in those situations and through this imagination I embody these situations. To prevent me from disappearing into the storyworld, she uses a gesture like dancing to pull me back in the reality of public space.

In this chapter I have shown how the positioning of me as a spectator based on textual and physical input and its interplay can be analyzed from the perspective of embodied simulation. The fact that the guide does not speak for herself and only communicates through her body – which is not what you would expect when perceiving another human being, because according to the theory of embodied simulation you perceive this other human being as someone who basically acts the same as you – makes that the physical presence of me as a spectator is emphasized. On the one hand the presence of the guide enables my process of simulation, but on the other hand she has also the agency to prevent me from simulating the situations and actions that are being told by the voice-over. This voice-over also invites me to simulate the stories that she is telling, but at the same time she implies that I am not able to simulate. Remarkable about this interplay between the voice-over and the guide, is that the physical presence of the guide mainly gets its meaning through this voice-over: she has no voice of herself and only functions as a representation. By shifting between enabling and disabling me to simulate, here again I am invited to actively reflect on my own ideas about migration and adjust my perception.

CONCLUSION

Destabilization of perception and the corporeal experience of the spectator

As a starting point for this thesis, I took the performance *No Man's Land* by Dries Verhoeven that I have experienced myself in Utrecht in 2013. Dries Verhoeven is a theatre maker who makes interesting political performances and installations in which the spectator plays mostly an active role and is invited to actively reflect on his own thoughts. As Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink summarizes it in an interview with Verhoeven: "Dries Verhoeven seeks to redirect the audiences' attention to their own responses, perspectives, and sensibilities, thus rendering the spectators active accomplices of the work" (2018, 43). Because of Verhoeven's interesting perspective on the role of the spectator, I decided to take the performance *No Man's Land* as a case study for testing different theories and concepts for analyzing spectatorship. For this analysis I used the following research question: How can focalization, conceptual blending and embodied simulation be useful for analyzing the way in which the spectator in *No Man's Land* is being addressed and positioned which leads to a corporeal experience? As this research question shows, I have used three theories and concepts from different disciplines than theatre studies to make a critical analysis of the act of spectatorship in *No Man's Land*; focalization, conceptual blending and embodied simulation. By applying different discourses to a theatre performance I have tested what other disciplines have to offer for theatre studies, while aware that we should not merely look at other discourses for finding answers to questions we are dealing with without considering theories and concepts from our 'own' field. Especially when using theories from the fast-emerging field of cognitive (neuro-) science, one should not consider these as better alternatives to those from theatre studies as Amy Cook points out: "it is important that an integration of cognitive science into theatre and performance studies should not simply "use" research from the sciences to "validate" our theories. [...] Statistics and lovely fMRI images should not tempt us to abandon the authority of our knowing" (Cook 2007, 580). The use of the word 'integration' also implies that we should look at how we can make theories from other disciplines workable for our field, which is in my opinion something that should be done in corporation with, for instance, cognitive scientists, as I will further on address when suggesting topics for further research.

Because *No Man's Land* is a multilayered performance that can be analyzed on many different levels, I decided to structure my analysis in three parts where I used in each part a different theory or concept to analyze one specific aspect of spectatorship in *No Man's Land*; focalization as a concept to analyze the beginning at the train station, conceptual blending theory for analyzing the doubleness of the spectator as being both present in the theatrical and real world and the theory of embodied simulation to analyze how the spectator is positioned

through the physical input – the guide – and textual input – the voice-over. The aim of this research has not been to provide an all-encompassing analysis of the construction of spectatorship in *No Man's Land*, but rather to see what the dramaturgical strategies are that can be laid bare through these specific theories and concepts. In the following section I will briefly recap how these theories and concepts have been useful in exploring the strategies that Dries Verhoeven uses to position the spectator in *No Man's Land* and how these are used in order to create a physical experience.

Focalization is a concept that has been useful in showing that in the beginning of *No Man's Land* an awareness is installed that the spectator is not an anonymous observer: he is besides an observer also an object of vision and acknowledged as physical present. Besides this, the spectator is also made aware of how the position from where you perceive influences what you perceive. Your mode of perception is different when you know you are being looked at than when you would be seated in the dark of the auditorium of a theatre. By giving the spectator an active role, he is positioned as a co-creator of the performance, which is highlighted by the moment when the spectators are one by one invited by a guide to follow him/her; the spectator is no longer part of a collective body of spectators. Because the spectator is positioned in an active role, he is invited to actively engage in his way of perceiving. Therefore, this beginning is an installation of a mode of perceiving that works throughout the entire performance. The spectator is namely invited to reflect on how he thinks about different aspects of migration, which is the topic of this performance. By using the concept of focalization to explain this active positioning of the spectator, I have operationalized this concept in a different way than in the narratological sense. Where Bal and Genette use the concept as a tool to discuss the distribution of knowledge in a narrative, I have used it to address a mode of perceiving and how this is affected by the physical experience of the spectator.

The conceptual blending theory has served as a tool to look at the various blends that are created in *No Man's Land* and to see how these blends play a role in the address and positioning of the spectator. By using this theory I have shown first of all that in *No Man's Land* there is always a blend of the theatrical and the real space, which means that the spectator is addressed by inputs coming at the same time from the theatrical space – the guide and the voice-over – and the real space, which is the public space of Lombok. Because the spectator is addressed in both ways, he has to shift between different modes of perception. Also, this means that on the one hand he has to act as if he would do when normally walking through public space, while on the other hand he is merely passively following the guide and listening to the voice-over without responding verbally to what he hears. This difficulty to blend makes that the spectator becomes aware of his mode of perceiving and – similar to what the concept

of focalization showed – is activated to reflect on his way of thinking. This reflectivity can also be evoked through the deconstruction of a seemingly fitting blend, as is the case at the first moment when the spectator and the guide are standing face to face, while hearing a voice-over who tells after a few sentences that the voice the spectator hears is just the voice of an actor and not – as you could think initially – the voice of the migrant who is standing in front of the spectator. In general, the spectator is invited to make blends, but because this turns out to be impossible or non-fitting most of the times, his way of perceiving is destabilized. When reflecting on the use of this theory critically, one could argue that the conceptual blending theory is only based on a mental process – which is also in line with the way in which Fauconnier and Turner use it – and that it could therefore not be relevant when discussing the corporeal experience as a result of the address and positioning of the spectator in *No Man's Land*. However, I would claim that the destabilization of the perception of the spectator that is evoked through the difficulties he encounters when trying to make fitting blends, gives the spectator an uncomfortable feeling which is mainly a physical sensation. Furthermore, the ability to blend for instance the concepts 'activity' and 'passivity' requires an understanding of what these concepts mean, which is an understanding based on embodied knowledge.

In the third and final part of the analysis, I have used the embodied simulation theory and looked at how simulation is enabled or disabled with a focus on the physical input – the guide – and the textual input – the voice-over. Because the text is separated from the body, simulation occurs in this setting in a different way than in everyday life. Normally, according to the embodied simulation theory, when perceiving another human being, you perceive him or her as someone with the same abilities to communicate. In the case of *No Man's Land*, the guide is not able to communicate completely like you; she has been deprived from her voice. Therefore the only way of communication between the guide and the spectator is through the body, which – again – emphasizes the physical aspect of spectatorship. With regards to the text, simulation is needed for understanding the stories that are being described. When hearing these stories, you project them onto the guide which makes simulation easier. But most of the stories that you hear are a description of situations which you have never physically experienced, which means that you are not able to internally simulate those situations. So this means that you are positioned as an 'unknowing' spectator; you experience what it feels like to be an outsider. And also, because you project what you hear onto what you perceive – which is a blend that has already been problematized at the beginning of the performance – you are actually performing what this performance at the same time prevents you from doing; uncritically perceiving, while not being aware of your own biases and prejudices.

These three theories and concepts that I have used in this analysis all highlighted the

awareness of the spectator's bodily presence that is created in this performance, which also influences the mode of perception of the spectator. Because, as I have shown, this perception is often destabilized or a shift between different modes of perception is created, the spectator is invited to actively rethink his own way of thinking and acting towards the topic of migration. This all happens during the performance; it is not like in a Shakespearean play that you understand its 'meaning' afterwards. During the performance you gradually shape or adjust your opinion on migration, which makes you a co-creator of the performance. The spectator is positioned in such a way that he can physically experience what a migrant might also experience when fleeing from his home country to the Netherlands. The spectator is positioned as someone who is being looked at because he is staged as an 'other', deprived from the possibility to respond or verbally communicate with his guide and constantly in a vulnerable state of not knowing what he is supposed to do or what will happen. But on the other hand, the performance is organized in such a way as that is very clear what the spectator has to do; follow the guide and listen to the voice-over. It is this doubleness of apparent contradictions that plays a role on many different levels in this performance.

When looking back at the theories and concepts that I have used, I can conclude that even though each theory or concept functioned as a tool to arrive at a similar conclusion, they all functioned in a different way. For instance, embodied simulation as a theory clearly contains a physical aspect, while focalization and conceptual blending do not explicitly incorporate the human body. But nevertheless, these latter two theories have been useful for explaining an aspect of the corporeal experience of the spectator. In the way that I have operationalized the theories and concepts, I have taken aspects of these theories and concepts as gateways into the experience of the spectator in *No Man's Land*. While aware that in that way I might have simplified them, I do find this method for this specific analysis the most suitable. In further research then it could be valuable to do a more detailed research into which aspects of embodied simulation could be useful for understanding the corporeal experience of a spectator of a theatre performance. This does not suggest that this theory is necessary to understand what a spectator physically experiences, but it could potentially be a theory that could be further developed and explored through a collaboration between theatre scholars and neuroscientists. In this thesis, I have referred to articles in which Gallese has already attempted to apply his theory of embodied simulation for studying art, but those articles are an example of how interdisciplinary research does not work and show the necessity of collaboration between two disciplines. In that sense, interdisciplinary research is somehow comparable to the process of blending. Two input spaces (disciplines) come together, see what they have in common and selectively project into one space to create the perfect blend of both disciplines. This blended

space functions as emergent structure, which means that it can then be used to further build upon. In addition to this, it would be even more interesting if theory and practice could join forces, by which I mean that theatre scholars and for instance neuroscientists develop theories together and experiment with them in a theatre space in collaboration with a performance artist.¹⁵

Next to this suggestion for further interdisciplinary research, I would also propose to use the research as presented in this paper as a starting point for a comparative research with virtual reality. The reason for this proposal is that my analysis showed that a main strategy of *No Man's Land* is to destabilize the perception of the spectator, which is also a characteristic of virtual reality when wearing a head mounted display and navigating through a virtual world. How would the corporeal experience differ if I would only be walking virtually through Lombok, being guided by an also virtual present migrant? This could result in an exploration of the limits of the possibilities of theatre performances to generate a corporeal experience and could show what virtual reality can do what theatre cannot do. But for now, the real-life experience of walking through *No Man's Land* has been inspiring enough.

¹⁵ An example of a choreographer who combines theory and practice is Arno Schuitemaker, who has been working a lot with theories from cognitive science.

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Performance Information

No Man's Land was originally created and performed in 2008 in Utrecht, after which it has been performed in Munich, Athens, Valencia, Berlin, Hannover and Amsterdam. My personal experience that I refer to in this thesis is based on the performance in Utrecht in 2013. The text from which I have used excerpts is from the Amsterdam version of 2012. In each city the text was slightly adapted to the political circumstances of the city in which it was performed.

No Man's Land

Director, text: Dries Verhoeven

Director: Marjolein Frijling

Director-assistant: Hannah van Wieringen, Bart van de Woestijne

Dramaturgy: Judith Blankenberg

Sound design: Arnoud Traa

Technique: Kas van Huisstede, Roel Evenhuis

Voices: Malou Gorter (original 2008 version), Bart Klever, Ria Marks (2013)

Photography: Maarten van Haaff