

Tactile Theatre

On the (im)possibility of communication and intimacy in the work of Enrique Vargas and Felix Ruckert

In this paper I aim to develop an alternative theoretical framework to analyse so-called 'tactile experience theatre'. Since these performances dismantle the representational code of theatre – looking turns into feeling, distance into proximity, passivity into activity and collectivity into individuality – traditional semiotics seem inadequate. The phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty may be more useful in defining the relation between self and other, with terminological tools such as 'intercorporéité' and 'chair'. Merleau-Ponty's redefining of the sense touch in his later works - he breaks with Husserl's thought of touch as a merely immediate self-reflection – allows us to dismantle the illusion of authenticity and intimacy that many spectators/participants experience when touch is involved.

Bio

Katleen Van Langendonck studied Literature and Philosophy at the University of Leuven and Université VII, Paris. She worked for five years as assistant curator at the theatre and dance department of deSingel, International Art Centre in Antwerp. At this moment she is research assistant at the department of Theatre Studies of the University of Antwerp. She teaches Dance and Gender and is working on a Ph.D. on theatre and tactility. She has contributed to the journals De Standaard, Etcetera and Theatermaker. Some recent publications include 'De hartslag van het bed' in *Groot Toneel. Teksten over jeugdtheater* (Els Van Steenberghe (red), Bebuquin, 2003) and 'On feminists who do not call themselves feminists' in *B-Book. After B-Visible* (Concept Frankfurter Küche, Realisation Vooruit, Gent, 2004).