

The Performativity of Intimacy in Theatre

A research towards the potentiality of intimacy in contemporary affective participatory theatre



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ABSTRACT

This thesis researches and explores the phenomenon of intimacy in sensory-corporeal-based encounters in contemporary participatory theatre exemplified in three case studies: Tino Sehgal's *Kiss*, Wunderland's *Sommerfugleeffekter* (Eng: *Butterfly Effects*) and Dries Verhoeven's *Guilty Landscapes: Episode 1 – Hangzhou*. This thesis perceives intimacy in theatre as a (syn)aesthetic phenomenon that fuses and connects perceptions of closeness with distance and difference in a multitude of sense-making processes. The notion of '(syn)aesthesia' is by Josephine Machon described as a multitude of perceptions and processes of somatic and semantic sense-making(s) dominating contemporary affective performance in both as means of expression and reception. The connectivity of closeness within distance and difference is by Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink perceived as the circumstance of intimacy in theatre. What generate intimacy in theatre is modes of interaction and engagements of senses and corporeality that is maintained through elements of mutuality, which is theorised by Bennett Helm. The analysis of the case studies shows that intimacy is not to be understood as one specific experience. Instead three different intimacies – affected by (syn)aesthetic perceptions and processes of closeness and distance evoking emotions and sense-makings – are generated as a result of the three performances' different modes of affectivity, engagement and interaction. This research concludes that intimacy can be evoked in a theatrical setting despite theatre's reproducibility and the unfamiliarity of performers in close encounters through new deconstructed understandings of closeness and distance in a society of today dominated by intermedial and technological influences. The ambivalent and challenged experiences of intimacy in theatre create potential for reflection over the role and phenomenon of intimacy in the social world.

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INTRODUCTION:

Setting the Frame for Intimacy in Theatre

In reflecting on my experiences of three performance pieces (*Kiss* by Tino Sehgal (DE/GB) in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, 2015; *Sommerfugleeffekter* (Eng. *Butterfly Effects*) by Wunderland (DK) in Aarhus, Denmark, 2009 and *Guilty Landscapes: Episode 1 – Hangzhou* by Dries Verhoeven (NL) in Utrecht, 2016) a pattern started to form, both in the type of experience and the manner of affectivity. All performances seemed to *want* to engage with me as a spectator by physically reorganising and rethinking the position and the role of the spectators, from observers separated from the act to ‘spectators-participants’ physically taking part in the action as sensitive beings, or becoming the subject of the performance themselves. In various ways, all the performances seemed to work through sensory-bodily stimulations that were more than just the results of bringing the spectators' bodies into the middle of the action as participants. All performances tried to affect the spectators' bodies through sensorial and corporeal stimulation in order to generate a feeling of intimacy as a mechanism for evoking interaction and engagement. The intimacies evoked had all a different character as a result of different combinations and modes of affectivity. While experiencing and participating in the game-inspired structures of these performances I felt a bodily and mental ambivalence, both in being immersed in the intimacy by experiencing closeness and mutuality that the performances obviously tried to evoke, and in being obstructed in these actions by elements of distance, resistance and difference within the theatrical frames themselves. As a result, I became more clear that intimacy in theatre in order to be experienced as closeness had to include an acceptance of distance; as theatre in its ontology of not being reality implies an element of distance, difference or resistance. These experiences and speculations of contradiction and ambivalence made me pose the question: *what is the link between performance which thematises the body of the spectator and the production of a feeling of intimacy?*

Contemporary participatory theatre performances that evoke multi-sensorial and corporeal experiences in audiences are a type of performances that base their relation to spectatorship on Claire Bishop's understanding of participation and

participatory art. In this respect “people constitute the central artistic medium and material, in the manner of theatre and performance” (Bishop 2012, 2), which will be this thesis’ take on participation. This type of performances builds further on this notion of participation in thematising bodies in close proximity via the use of touch among other sensory experiences. The thematisation of the act of sensing is in André Lepecki and Sally Banes’ introduction to the anthology *The Senses in Performance* (2007) through Mary Roth described as a transmission of the senses that aims “to bring the audiences to their bodies” (2007, 4) in an understanding of corporeality as something disrupted from the subject. “Transmissibility of the senses” is according to Roth “one of performance’s most powerful performatives” (2007, 4).

The multitude of the use of sensory and corporeal stimulations that are being observed as a tendency in contemporary participatory theatre and the multitude of aesthetic experiences that these performances induce in audiences, as well as the multi-sensorial and corporeal experiential discourse that contemporary theorists and analysts have and write in, is the kernel of Josephine Machon's fused notion of ‘(syn)aesthesia’ (Machon 2009). In this term Machon fuses different perspectives on sensing both understood as ‘sensation’ and ‘sense-making/making sense’ as including the above-mentioned multitude of sensory and aesthetic processes in contemporary participatory performance and emotional sense. (Syn)aesthetic-sense “defines the intuitive human sense that makes sense/*sense* of the unrepresentable and the inarticulable” (Machon 2009, 20), which is seen in the ambiguity of intimacy.

Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink theorises and argues for the existence of intimacy in theatre in the article “Radical Intimacy: Ontroerend Goed Meets *The Emancipated Spectator*” (2012). She argues for this by perceiving intimacy as “connectivity” of “closeness within distance or difference” (Groot Nibbelink 2012, 420) in the evocation of real emotions and engagement in the specific encounters of performers and spectators despite the fictional frames of theatre. This argument for the existence of intimacy in theatre despite its fictional frames goes against some critical opinions arguing that intimacy cannot exist within theatre because theatre is a construction (Groot Nibbelink 2012, 414-415). Other critical voices acknowledge the evocation of intimacy in performance but criticises its reason in arguing that

- 1) the production of intimacy in a theatrical frame in the focus on spectators as a

heterogeneous group is bringing forward individualism, which goes against the collective aim of participation and produces nothing but self-disclosure; the spectator perceives nothing but narcissistic self-recognition (Alston 2013, White 2012) and

- 2) participatory theatre can be seen as a type of theatre that is a product of neoliberal values in its practise of participation and precarisation (Kunst 2015).
- 3) Participatory theatre is a result of a culture political turn towards a democratic culture in the inclusion of audiences that challenges the quality through instrumentalisation (Bishop 2012) Chapter 1.2. will expand on these elements of critique of participatory theatre and its production of intimacy.

These points of critique are interesting to count in in the observation of how intimacy works in participatory theatre, but this thesis' take on intimacy is primarily based on the above-mentioned theories of Groot Nibbelink and Machon. Fusing Groot Nibbelink's perception of intimacy as connectivity of closeness within distance and difference with Machon's perception of (syn)aesthesia as a multitude of perceptions and processes of sense-making this thesis perceives intimacy in theatre as a *(syn)aesthetic phenomenon that fuses and connects perceptions of closeness with its opposite; distance and difference in a multitude of sense-making processes.*

Etymologically the word 'intimacy' and its verbal form 'to intimate' stem from Greek and means 'close friend' and 'becoming friends with'. With this etymology in mind as well as with a look into elements of intimacy in friendship (Helm 2013) this thesis will bring forward the element of 'mutuality' as an engine that generates and maintains intimacy. Participatory theatre strives for generating senses of mutuality in order to make spectators feel willing to share and in order to trust transformation processes where they are motivated to take action and become co-creators of the content. This element is a factor for establishing intimacy in theatre but it is yet conflicted by the theatrical frame itself and its element of reproducibility, which is often attempted hidden in sensory-corporeal participatory theatre and sometimes highlighted as an element of distraction.

The intention with this thesis is to detect and investigate how and under which circumstances intimacy as a (syn)aesthetic phenomenon of connectivity appears and

is evoked in the case studies mentioned above as an example of contemporary participatory theatre that evokes sensory-corporeal experiences in ‘spectators-participants’.

Connecting intimacy to theatre can conventionally be understood as a natural correlation resulting from the co-presence of audiences and performers in the theatrical event. The intimacy in this case would count for the natural proximity between audiences and performers that is in fact the ontology of theatre. It would appeal to the unique feedback loop that is created in the specific co-presence of spectators and performers in the here and now: the exchange of reactions, of energies, between stage and auditorium that are being experienced during the event.

The intimacy that is addressed in this thesis has a more direct character; what Groot Nibbelink would call ‘radical’. It appears in performances that make use of active spectatorship through (syn)aesthetic fusions of bodily involvements, interactions, affections and what they produce of emotions, imagination and memory in a theatrical setting and not with intimacy on a broader psychological level. Focusing on bodily interaction in the production of intimacy elements of sexual intimacy will automatically come to mind, which is acknowledged but not further thematised. Some performances such as works of the Danish/Austrian theatre collective Signa with e.g. *Salò* (2010)¹ a durational work of 14 days the duo Florentina Holzinger & Vincent Riebeek (NL/AT) with e.g. the performance *Wellness* and the performance *Bimbo* by Boogaerdt and Van der Schoot (NL) stretch the elements of touch, proximity and closeness to extremes in terms of provocatively including sex, abuse, violence among other elements to the ‘stage’. These performances work through a principle of resistance through provocation and challenge that arguably ‘shake’ their audience through uncomfortable sensations and emotions, embarrassment, intimidation and disgust. These performances do problematize intimacy in theatre but do not, in my view, produce it as they only induce sensations of distance and resistance and not of emotional closeness.

In Chapter 1 the conceptual framework of Groot Nibbelink’s theory of intimacy as connectivity and Machon’s notion of ‘(syn)aesthesia’ is unfolded and connected in order to define my usage of the concept of intimacy. This first chapter

¹ For more information: <http://signa.dk/projects?pid=53972> [accessed 10-08-2016].

will also serve to contextualise the landscape of affective participatory theatre and the criticism it has received in the recent years, which is primarily focusing on it as being irresponsible and unproductive. This thesis' take on participatory theatre is directed towards the elements of intimacy that in the direction of Groot Nibbelink is seen as a possible element of potentiality (Groot Nibbelink 2012, 420). In Chapter 2 the three case studies (Tino Sehgal's *Kiss*, Wunderland's *Sommerfugleeffekter* and Dries Verhoeven's *Guilty Landscapes*) are analysed in order to show how they differently generate different (syn)aesthetic experiences for spectators and how intimacy appears and is obstructed in these (syn)aesthetic systems. In this process different other theoretical notions – of Phillip Zarrilli's 'outer body' and 'inner body-mind', David Shearing's 'the voyeur within', Maaïke Bleeker's 'Corporeal Literacy' and Chiel Kattenbelt's (among others) 'intermediality' – in order to catch the nature of the different intimacies generated. The conclusion sums up how intimacy can be understood in the realm of theatre; how it operates as a machinery in affective participatory theatre of today and potentially create new understandings of interaction, sensory-corporeal engagement and participation in between perceptions of closeness and distance.

The methodology of this research and the perspective from which this thesis 'is looking' are described in the following paragraph.

Methodology and Scopes

Methodologically, this thesis moves hermeneutically between using theories, concepts and definitions to define my specific perception of the term 'intimacy' that is then used to analyse the intimacy appearing in the case studies and using the case studies deductively to explain the fusion on theories in my definition of intimacy.

The method used in Groot Nibbelink's dissertation *Nomadic Theatre – staging movement and mobility in contemporary performance* (2015) was indicatively the inspiration for the method used in this thesis. In an extended introduction, Groot Nibbelink builds up her definition of 'nomadic theatre' through a fusion of theories but heavily influenced by Gilles Deleuze's ideas on process, movement, relation and variation (Groot Nibbelink 2015, 17). From there, she moves to an exploration and

exemplification of this notion through case studies.

In line with this methodology, this thesis unfolds in Chapter 1 the context in which intimacy is produced in performance that affect spectators sensory-corporeally and emotionally. It introduces and contextualises how theorists, practitioners and critics have written about the topic to define, value and criticise elements of participation in experience-based theatre genres. Machon's concept of (syn)aesthesia and Groot Nibbelink's perception of intimacy as connectivity of 'closeness within distance and difference' are brought forward here in particular to explain the ambiguity and contradiction that this thesis' perception of intimacy arguably contains; of curiosity and closeness, as well as of fear and distance, through which a response to the critique is attempted given in the focus of what intimacy in theatre does to and with audiences.

The specific understanding of intimacy as a (syn)aesthetic phenomenon of perception of connectivity of closeness and distance is brought up in Chapter 2, where it is used in order to investigate how intimacies in the different case studies are generated amongst participants as a result of different (syn)aesthetic experiences of stimuli and affects, emotions, corporeal and mental associations, memory, imagination and language. The case studies help as well to understand the mechanism of intimacy in the realm of theatre. In respect to this notion, Groot Nibbelink also points out in her dissertation how Deleuze's theories mentioned above are used because of their ability to show how mobility and movement work in and through theatre (Groot Nibbelink 2015, 26). In thematising how intimacy works among audiences and performers, one becomes arguably more aware of what elements of sensory-corporeal stimulation, interaction and participation produce in a theatrical frame.

The analysis of the case studies is based on experience of being present in the performances understanding intimacy as something both evoked and experienced. Therefore the analysis makes use of a first-hand perspective. Groot Nibbelink uses similarly this approach towards analysing in her article "Radical Intimacy: Ontroerend Goed Meets *The Emancipated Spectator*".

In bringing Groot Nibbelink's perspective of intimacy as connectivity and Machon's notion of (syn)aesthesia together, this study aims to take up an inclusive

and combined approach. By ‘inclusive’ is meant that the study does not want to favour or value intimate performance over other types of performances but instead wants to explore what intimacy as a mechanism is built of and what it produces in the scope of affective contemporary participatory theatre. Intimacy understood on a broader psychological level goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

The type of intimacy in theatre explored through the case studies seems to challenge an arguably more traditional understanding of intimacy as a positive social phenomenon alone² and as a phenomenon dominated by familiarity and physical proximity. The study therefore also investigates the definitions of intimacy given in different dictionaries and through criticism in order to see how contemporary participatory and affective theatre both builds on – and challenges these ‘normative’ definitions in its placing in the in-between of closeness and distance.

Beginning from Claire Bishop’s perception of participation as alteration of spectatorship into modes of engagement and part-taking, the thesis moves theoretically through Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological perspective on perception as grounded in the body and the senses and in the language, history and time that surrounds it. Machon’s notion of ‘(syn)aesthetics’. This notion builds on this foundation in bringing the semantic processes of sense-making (back) to the body in reminding the perceiver of valuing experiences of sensation as a part of sense-making. Groot Nibbelink writes as well in relation to the phenomenological tradition in valuing first-hand experiences as a research source. Inspired by this methodology this thesis uses as well first-hand experiences of performances as material for the analysis. This method of analysing can arguably be lacking an element of objectivity but a certain subjectivity can arguably also create a sensitivity towards the elements of stimulation and imagination as part of the creation of intimacy that the performances seem to evoke in audiences.

The relevance of this thesis seems to exist in its giving attention to the element of intimacy as generated, affected and experienced in participatory theatre. In this attention this thesis produces – through a combined approach of theory and case study – knowledge for practitioners and theorists about how theatre and intimacy are

² This is among others expressed in Karen J. Prager’s *Psychology of Intimacy*, (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995), p. 21-44 (which is also referred to in Groot Nibbelink’s article “Radical Intimacy: Ontroerend Goed Meets *The Emancipated Spectator*”, p. 415 (2012)).

related, how intimacy is evoked in theatre and what it does to participants in close encounters with performers, which all together generate awareness of interactions and encounters in the social world in general.

The case studies that this study uses to exemplify the use and experience of intimacy in affective contemporary participatory theatre are described in the following paragraph.

Intimate Performances: Case Studies

The case studies that this thesis will use in order to exemplify and discuss the concept of intimacy as a (syn)aesthetic phenomenon in sensory-based and corporeal theatre are performances that activate audiences through corporeal and sensorial engagement and through interaction. The act of sensing and the embodied potentiality of sensing that Machon's notion of (syn)aesthesia points at are thematised in these performances through limitations of some senses causing the activation of others. They are as well chosen for their production of imagination and emotions. The performances differ in structure, in stimulation system, in their approach towards presence and distance in including elements of intermediality or not. However, they all approach the production and potentiality of intimacy as a conflicting and ambivalent concept of closeness and distance.

Tino Sehgal's *Kiss*, which I experienced in the Stedelijk Museum of Contemporary Art in Amsterdam in 2015, is the first to be examined. This piece was first performed in 2002 but was at this time part of a bigger project called *A Year at the Stedelijk: Tino Sehgal*³ where one or two works based on movement and physical human interaction by Tino Sehgal was performed continuously throughout the opening hours of the museum for a month. Following this principle a new piece or two were performed each month throughout the year 2015. *Kiss* is picked because of its thematisation of visual void and the sensory-corporeal activation that this produces: bodily sensations as well as (syn)aesthetic activation of imagination and

³ Info on the exhibition *A Year at the Stedelijk: Tino Sehgal* can be found on: <http://www.stedelijk.nl/en/exhibitions/a-year-at-the-stedelijk-tino-sehgal> [accessed 10-08-2016].

inner sensation. Visitors enter and exit the performance space as wished. Through the element of darkness a choreography performed by two naked dancers is experienced.⁴

The second performance I have chosen to analyse is the total installation *Sommerfugleeffekter* (eng: *Butterfly Effects*) by the Danish theatre company Wunderland (founded by Mette Aakjær), which I experienced at ILT Festival in Aarhus, Denmark, 2009⁵. The performance is chosen for its multi-stimulation of senses in its presentation of a sensorium; an interior of a house with different rooms that present elements that appeal to the senses of touch, smell, hearing and vision and the physicality of the body. In order to experience this performance, spectators enter this sensorium one by one. They experience it and interact with it and with the few performers involved. The performance is built up as a journey through different rooms in a house and simultaneously as a journey through the different senses of the body and the embodied memories that these stimulations evoke. The dramaturgy of the performance is built on the structure of a game: an audience member enters individually the installation, is dressed in a bathrobe and slippers, and is told to leave the room when a bell rings and enter the next one along a line indicated by small foot prints on the wall in the main corridor. Following this principle, each audience member has a certain amount of time to experience each room before moving on to the next one. The audience member is always the only audience member in the respective room but when he or she leaves the room another audience member enters it. Following this structure all rooms are always occupied for a number of hours, allowing one new audience member to enter every time one leaves the performance. In some rooms the audience member is alone to experience the environments and in others the audience member experiences one-to-one encounters with performers. Almost all rooms lead to the same corridor, which is the only place where audience members meet other audience members. The analysis of this performance will dig into what happens in the different experiences of sensory perception and memory.

Gulity Landscapes: Episode 1 – Hangzhou by Dries Verhoeven, experienced at Spring Festival 2016 in Utrecht, the Netherlands, is the third case study to be

⁴ In another month of *A Year at the Stedelijk: Tino Sehgal Kiss* was performed in an illuminated room in another part of the museum.

⁵ Info on *Butterfly Effects* at webpage of Wunderland: <http://wunderland.dk/index.php/performances/butterfly-effects> [27-07-2016]. Registration of performance: <https://vimeo.com/52541829> [27-07-2016] (code to access video: butterfly)

examined in this thesis. This performance is part one of a series of four. The installation, performed for one spectator at a time, is chosen for its creation of an intimate one-to-one encounter between spectator and performer (in an Asian factory interior projected on the wall), which is experienced through the means of projections and cameras. The performance stimulates kinetic movement in the interaction and transforms the spectator into a performer. Modes of looking are therefore thematised in this piece as well as responsibility of taking action.

CHAPTER 1:

Contextualisation, Critique and Conceptual Framework

1.1. Contextualising Sensory-Corporeal Attention in Contemporary Participatory Theatre

The type of theatre that the above-mentioned case studies exemplify is chosen based primarily on its relation to Claire Bishop's notion of participation and participatory art, in which "people constitute the central artistic medium and material, in the manner of theatre and performance" (Bishop 2012, 2). The participation focuses in this type of theatre mainly on redefinitions of the roles of the artist/performer and the spectator and of artistic object:

To put it simply: the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of situations; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term project with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a 'viewer' or 'beholder', is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant. (Bishop 2012, 2)

The importance of the perceptual experience of corporeal involvement as a result of spectators being turned into participants – being the 'material' of performance – is theorised by Josephine Machon, among others. In the introduction to *(Syn)aesthesia – Redefining Visceral Performance* (2009) Machon focuses on how the theatre style that she is redefining creates attention towards the act of sensing in itself

[...it]tenables practitioners and audience members alike to tap into pre-linguistic communication processes and engages with an awareness of ‘the primordial’ via such sensually stimulated perception. Merged with this is the potential to engender a certain feeling of transcendence, of comprehending ideas, experiences and concepts in a unique way (Machon 2009, 1).

This type of performances are according to Machon hard to characterise as a contemporary genre in theatre, because it uses different elements of different times, which can be traced back to early ritual practise as well as to Noh Theatre, Kathakali and Greek Tragedy. Such ancient practices resonate also through early contemporary theory and practice, with Artaud’s ‘Theatre of Cruelty’ representing one particularly important example throughout the theatre history with Antonin Artaud to mention one important example (Machon 2009, 1-2). Machon’s genealogy shows that this type of theatre is not a new phenomenon. Yet this style is an assemblage of elements that are perceived differently from the perspective of today’s intermedially-trained perceiver (Lepecki & Banes 2007, 4). Our contemporary understanding of perception is – according to André Lepecki and Sarah Banes in their introduction to *The Senses in Performance* (2007) and with a base in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology – interconnected with language, imagination and memory: “perception always happens laced with temporality and language: perception is fraught with the anticipation of a future and the memory of a past and with the linguistic materiality of the human body” (Lepecki & Banes 2007, 6). Lepecki and Banes sum up this phenomenological understanding of the relation between the elements influencing perception in the notion that

language, memory, affect, sensation, perception, and historical and cultural forces find themselves in a deep chiasmatic inter-subjective relationality, where each element in the relation is continuously crossing and being crossed by all the others. (Lepecki and Banes 2007, 6-7)

Understanding the multitude of perception as a relational and inter-subjective phenomenon sets the ground for the concept of Machon’s notion of ‘(syn)aesthetic

cognition' as a multitude of perceptions of sense-making processes fusing sensation with cognitive processes of meaning-making, which will be further unfolded later in this chapter.

This style of theatre, which builds on ritual practise and a phenomenological understanding of perception, has received multiple names by theorists and practitioners. In the article "Radical Intimacy: Ontroerend Goed Meets *The Emancipated Spectator*" Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink calls this tendency 'theatre of experience', which she borrows from Jacques Rancière⁶. Through this term, she wants to underline this type of theatre's experiential character in the way that it produces experiences that do not have a completely set outcome or ending but follow the structure of a game as its dramaturgical strategy for audiences. Spectators, as a heterogeneous group of individuals or in small groups, follow rules or guidelines set up by the makers but have at the same time the freedom to respond to- and interact with these structures or environments. The performance, understood here as the performative set-up and/or the set of guidelines, function as an *experimental* frame in which modes of interaction, participation and responses are explored and experienced. The experimental character that this type of theatre also contains is therefore perceived through its half controlled, half improvised structures, which results in a situation in which each individual performance becomes an experiment with the involved participants (Groot Nibbelink 2012, 420). The work of the Gent-based theatre collective Ontroerend Goed⁷ and the performance *The Smile Off Your Face* (discussed by Groot Nibbelink in above-mentioned article) is an example of this theatre of experience that challenges audiences to encounter intimacy in the performance evoked through proximity and touch as well partly through elements of mutual sharing.

The Danish theatre Carte Blanche led by artistic director Sara Topsøe-Jensen experiments as well with a theatre and performance practice that intermingles sensory-corporeal research with theatrical elements of staging and game structures for

⁶ Rancière finds participatory theatre highly criticisable for its neglecting of the importance of physical distance between stage and auditorium as a needed factor for audiences to become emancipated (Groot Nibbelink 2012, 417).

⁷ More information on Ontroerend Goed's theatre and performance practice: <http://www.ontroerendgoed.be/en/contact/> [accessed 08-08-2016].

instance in the research project *Kunsten At Lytte* (Eng: The Art Of Listening).⁸ In shape of workshops this project explores not only the act of listening as a result of hearing but challenges the acts of sensing in general through thematisation of the singular senses and in thematising synaesthetic processes. Through thematisation Carte Blanche works towards becoming more fully present in the acts of sensing not understood as they are reaching towards a certain presence but towards an openness that makes one able to keep questioning.

Josephine Machon (in *Immersive Theatres* (2013)) and Gareth White (in “On Immersive Theatre” (2012)) call this tendency of theatre ‘immersive theatre’, pointing towards the way audiences ‘dive’ into the performance in terms of space and content; are surrounded by it and become participants in it. By this naming, they stress the intermingling of the performers’ space with the spectator’s and the “physical, sensual and participatory” (Machon 2013, XV) approach of affection taken up in this process.

This tendency of participatory theatre is expressed by Cantabile 2 (regional theatre in Vordingborg, Denmark) as ‘human specific artwork’, which they define in the following:

In the center of Human Specific artwork is the human being. Within this work encounters between individuals are facilitated. The ambition of this facilitation is to enable performers and spectators to be both receptive and responsive to one another in order to render openness and vulnerability in a mutual exchange. An exchange which occurs in the ”here and now”. In the frame set of a Human Specific artwork, there is space devoted to genuine encounters, interaction and presence in a sensuous and aesthetic universe (Cantabile 2.)

In this statement, Cantabile 2’s almost anthropological approach to theatre and performance practice and research becomes visible. The work is centred on the ‘human beings’ in the performative situation; on positions of reception and responses among performers and spectators who all become participants in the situation and the specific encounter. They focus on the ‘vulnerability’ and ‘openness’ that co-exists in a

⁸ More information on Carte Blanche’s theatre and research practice: <http://www.cblanche.dk/en/en/about-carte-blanche/> [accessed 08-08-2016] and the project *Kunsten At Lytte* at <http://www.cblanche.dk/en/the-art-of-listening/> [accessed 07-09-2016].

‘mutual exchange’. The theatre stage becomes a space of exploration of human kind, of private and public behaviour, on sensorial and corporeal interaction with the world and people around us. Through a removal of the act of playing roles, *Cantabile 2* attempts to create real encounters between participants, as they argue that acting creates distance between performers and spectators, which makes it harder for audiences to interact and share:

We think that as soon as the spectator recognizes the performer as playing a role, he will be reassured by the existence of a distance, a fictitious reality, which keeps a safety line between him and the performance. Instead the actors reveal intimate aspects or even secrets from their personal selves. Or they share with the spectator a physical or mental activity, which is truly happening in its simplicity here and now. (*Cantabile 2*.)

What *Cantabile 2* here describes are aspects of intimacy that actors need to initiate in the performative frame in order to make spectators interact and participate with the spectators in the performance. Intimacy in the respect of *Cantabile 2* means creating the opposite of distance in the act of performance. In this optic distance is a negative element that prevents spectators in fully engaging with the interactions and instead make them ‘hide’ behind a ‘safety line’ of the ‘fictitious reality’. But the element of “distance within closeness” is what Groot Nibbelink contrastingly perceives as what constitutes intimacy in theatre (2012, 420). This will be further unfolded later in this chapter. The intention of theatre as a platform and sphere for human research is to a certain degree similar to Antonin Artaud’s intention of the ‘Theatre of Cruelty’ that attempts to affect through ‘shaking’ audiences. Artaud’s theatre is however more ‘cruel’ as it

does not fear to go as far as is necessary in the exploration of our nervous sensibilities with rhythms, sounds, words, resonances, and warblings whose quality and surprising combinations are part of a technique whose secret is not to be divulged.” (Artaud 1958, 77)

Banes and Lepecki in *The Senses in Performance* bring forward a mode of looking at performance through “the performative power of the senses” (2007, 2-3), which point

at how a focus on the senses generates a different economy as well as new possibilities for political and social encounters (2). This notion is interesting for this research in its creation of a new discourse within performance; in bringing attention to affective elements that have always been part of the theatre's language but have not before been thematised to this extent by its focus on the full sensory-corporeal experience.

Other theatre and performance scholars like Stephen Di Benedetto in *The Provocation of the Senses in Contemporary Theatre* (2010), Maaïke Bleeker in her notion of 'corporeal literacy' as a term that generates awareness of embodied processes in a mediatised culture (2010) and the book *Performance and Phenomenology: Traditions and Transformations* (2015) co-edited with Jon Foley Sherman and Eirini Nedelkopoulou as well as Alan Read's *Theatre, Intimacy & Engagement* (2008) among many others have theorised, legitimised, mapped and given value to genres of theatre that use sensory-corporeal engagement of bodies (performers as well as spectators) as a motor. Groot Nibbelink points in her article at Read's understanding of intimacy's potentiality of being the equivalent to engagement, which she brings on to be the foundation of thinking intimacy as a relational term of association and connectivity (Groot Nibbelink 2012, 413). Connecting this notion to Machon's (syn)aesthesia, intimacy can even further be understood as a (syn)aesthetic phenomenon that *engages* different modes of sensations with sense-making.

1.2. Critique

Participatory theatre and theatre that make use of experiential elements and separation of audiences into small groups or into experiences for only one audience member at a time (one-to-one performance) are however among many theorists highly criticised. This criticism sees participatory theatre in line with 'neoliberal values' instrumentalising art towards the audiences. Critical perspectives on affective participatory theatre and 'theatre of experience' are taken up by among others Claire Bishop in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012), Bojana Kunst in "The Institution between Precarization and Participation" (2015),

Adam Alston in “Audience Participation and Neoliberal Value: Risk, agency and responsibility in immersive theatre” (2013) and in Gareth White’s “On Immersive Theatre” (2012). Bishop’s main critique is concerned with the “tensions of quality and equality [and of] singular and collective authorship” (Bishop 2012, 3) and how art through participatory intentions is being instrumentalised in its opting for social change and as a result of neoliberal culture politics (Bishop 2012, 5). The critique of Kunst and Alston is mainly based on this last point; at the turn towards audiences in frame and content that participatory theatre takes up. Kunst argues that this tendency is a result of neoliberal values, which cause precarious and participatory tendencies in the arts, which she argues this type of theatre is an example of (Kunst 2015). Precarious, because the neoliberal values create an economically difficult situation for artists to survive in, which make the art take more ‘save’ choices towards what audiences want, which explain the element of the tendency of participation. Alston criticises as well the direction that ‘immersive theatre’ has taken towards the experiencer understood by the way experience-based performance basically mirrors the audience-experiencer that (narcissistically) only gains knowledge about him- or herself as the focus on his or her own experience (Alston 2013). Differently from Kunst, he sees this tendency in participatory theatre as a movement towards acts of self-disclosure that produce individuality, despite its participatory and social intentions questioning the responsibility of participatory art. The self-disclosure appears in the individualistic and seemingly personal (but in reality reproductive) experience of self that the respective spectator-participant gains in the performative frame. Alston criticises ‘immersive theatre’ for primarily attempting to be original and personal towards the heterogeneous group of individuals, because the reproducibility of theatre obstructs the real potential of these values. In Groot Nibbelink’s perspective exactly this reproducibility and constructedness of theatre is what generates the potentiality of ‘radical intimacy’ on stage of crossing the border between private and public (Groot Nibbelink 2012, 415). Gareth White is as well critical of ‘immersive theatre’ from an ontological perspective: “immersive theatre can only achieve what other forms of performance can achieve: a relation in which the event of a work of art occurs between its material being and the person who

encounters it,” (White 2012, 233). White is instead interested in what ‘interiors’ are implied in the term ‘immersive theatre’.

Similarly to White’s analysis of interiors in ‘immersive theatre’ is this thesis’ exploration and investigation of the (syn)aesthetic multiplicities of connectivity and engagement in intimate encounters in participatory sensory-corporeal theatre.

1.3. Conceptual Framework

1.3.1. (Syn)aesthesia as a Multitude of Perceptions of Sense-Making

The term ‘synaesthesia’ means ‘together-perception’ or ‘together-sensation’ (Machon 2009, 13), which (in medical terms) encompasses how the perception of one sensory stimulus can be fused with the perception of another sensory experience, as for example how a taste or a sound can cause an image and a sensation of a tactile shape or a colour. For Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his corporeal phenomenology and understanding of perception as a process of embodiment, ‘synaesthesia’ describes how the different senses in sensorial perception fuse together to extract meaning from life-world stimuli in creating meaning of the stimuli given in the world that is lived (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 262-275). Josephine Machon’s notion of ‘(syn)aesthetics’ in *(Syn)aesthetics – Redefining Visceral Performance* (2009) builds on this point, connecting corporeal and sensory perception and emotional processes to sense-making of the world in general. In the use of parentheses she wants to emphasise (syn)aesthesia as a “fused sensory perceptual experience and a fused and sensate approach to artistic practice and analysis” (Machon 2009, 14) including a fusion of the double meaning of the word ‘sense’ as ‘sensation’ and ‘sense-making/making sense’ (2009,14). By highlighting the prefix *syn-* she emphasises a tendency in contemporary performance that aims to evoke multi-sensory and corporeal *experiences* for spectators-participants in use of multi-stimulating *means*. This prefix encompasses a multitude of aesthetic perceptions contained in this concept: in the *experience*, the *practice* as well as in the *theorisation* of this type of performance.

‘Aesthetics’ stems from the Greek word ‘aísthēsis’ that etymologically means

“the perception of the external world by the senses”.⁹ Our understanding of the concept of aesthetics is however also heavily dominated by the philosophical understanding of the concept expressed by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten in 1750, predecessor of the modern conceptualisation of art. In *Aesthetica* (1750), Baumgarten expresses that Aesthetics is the science of the “liberated arts and the art of the thought of beauty”¹⁰ (Baumgarten 1992/1750). That is also in Baumgarten’s perspective connected to perceptive cognition. Machon focuses in her definition of (syn)aesthetics on aesthetics as *aísthēsis*. She locates the aesthetic in the relational and affective qualities of experiencing ‘visceral performance’ (as she terms sensory-based performance) including how stimulation of the senses and the physicality of the body generate emotional reactions and associations that are stored in the body as corporeal memory, which is at the same time the foundation of corporeal imagination. The embodiment of perception, memory and imagination is also what David Shearing points towards in his observation of ‘the voyeur within’ dominated by an ‘innate desire to touch’ (Shearing 2015). It builds the groundwork for Philip Zarrilli’s terms ‘inner body-mind’ and ‘outer body’, which in an act of embodiment need to be thematised in order to become more fully present in the situation (Zarrilli 2007). These points will be followed up in chapter 2.

Grounding her argumentation in developmental studies, Machon argues how synaesthetic perception, emotions and intellectual knowledge are interconnected in (syn)aesthetic cognition in the way they are all grounded in or produced at first through bodily and sensorial experiences, stored in the body and semantically added emotion, symbolic and verbal sense: “In short, synaesthetic cognition describes (syn)aesthetic appreciation in that it is affective and experiential, semantic sense cannot be disassociated from somatic *sense*” (Machon 2009, 20) as (syn)aesthetic-sense “defines the intuitive human sense that makes sense/*sense* of the unrepresentable and the inarticulable.” (2009, 20). In order to appreciate (syn)aesthetic-sense an “interpretative (re)cognition” (2009, 20) of the multitude of perceptions and processes shaping sense-making in general is required of audiences. In this process of becoming aware of the process of interpretation, sensory-corporeal processes needs to be

⁹ Oxford Dictionary: ‘aesthesia’:

<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/aesthesia> [accessed 15-08-2016].

¹⁰ Freely translated from Danish.

allowed to come prior to understanding (2009, 20-21). In order for a performance to be wholly (syn)aesthetic “there must be this element of disturbance and (re)cognition within appreciation, which can be unsettling, alarming even and/or exhilarating and liberating.” (2009, 21). Becoming aware of one’s presence (both for performers and audiences) in a performance situation through appreciation of (syn)aesthetics creates awareness of elements that generate involvement, closeness and willingness to share, as well as creating awareness of elements that obstructs involvement, closeness and willingness to share. This is the ‘disturbance’ and the ‘(re)cognition’ that this thesis is interested in and will explore through the concept of intimacy that is by Groot Nibbelink perceived in a theatrical frame as connecting closeness and distance (Groot Nibbelink 2012, 420). It will also be explored through its etymology and in the way it works through generating a feeling of mutuality described by Bennett Helm.

1.3.2. Intimacy in Theatre as Connectivity

Intimacy in theatre, which is looked upon through Ontroerend Goed’s performance *The Smile Off Your Face*, is by Groot Nibbelink in her article “Radical Intimacy: Ontroerend Goed Meets *The Emancipated Spectator*” (2012) existing in the evocation of emotions that do not necessarily need to be positive but can also reveal emotions of awkwardness and embarrassment. As a result of this intimacy can be evoked within a theatrical frame despite theatre’s fictional nature and setup. She argues that intimacy in *The Smile Off Your Face* is evoked through the close encounters with performers, in the stimulation of the senses, in the obstruction of the sight, and the spectator’s reduced the ability to move freely around in the space. The intimacy appears primarily in the close encounter with one performer that is intensified with the sensation of touch and the evocation of imagination, which she argues is much stronger in evoking intimacy than any other sensation. The encounter caused emotions of both trust and comfort but also embarrassment. Groot Nibbelink sees no reason for only counting positive emotions as intimate emotions (as done by Karen Prager in *The Psychology of Intimacy*, 1995) but includes all emotions that enter “one’s personal sphere” (2012, 415).

Intimacy appears as a result of spontaneous emotional and bodily response but

evoked within a theatrical frame, which to Groot Nibbelink “prevents intimacy becoming an instance of ‘true’ or therapeutic self-disclosure” (2012, 415). She argues further that theatre and intimacy are not instances that exclude the existence of each other (through which point she disagrees with several critics) but that intimacy appear within a theatrical frame in sensory affection, appearance of emotions, that caused by bodily stimulation always are real (2012, 414-415). The intimacy experienced between the performer and the spectator in the close encounter in the performance “‘moves’ intimacy out of the realm of authenticity or psychological evaluation, and foregrounds the involvement of both performer and spectator in the theatrical encounter” (2012, 415) caused by the way the work “points towards the act of *staging*” (2012, 415). This ambivalence between experiencing elements of closeness and engagement evoked by synaesthetic stimulation and at the same time being disturbed in that through the pointing at the act of staging is similar to the element of disturbance that according to Machon is needed in (syn)aesthetic appreciation in the process of (re)cognising interpretation processes. Groot Nibbelink perceives intimacy in theater more precisely as “closeness within distance and difference” (2012, 420) allowing elements of distance and difference to disturb the closeness sensed as a result of sensory-corporeal perception proximity and the evocation of imagination and emotions.

This thesis makes use of this argument and shows further how the theatrical frame of theatre performances in pointing towards the act of staging create a space of freedom, of resistance, that transcends the private and enters the public through pointing towards what gives theatre its ontology. It gives the intimacy experienced between performer and spectator a layer of reflection. In Machon’s notion of (syn)aesthetics an element of disturbance is also needed in order to recognise the corporeality in cognitive processes. Intimacy is through Groot Nibbelink seen as a concept evoking bodily affection, emotion and reflection, which on a large scale are incorporated in the principles of Machon’s (syn)aesthetics. (Syn)aesthetic cognition fuses ‘sense/*sense*-making processes’ that can be perceived as close sense-making processes of embodied knowledge while distance sense-making can be perceived as more rational or semantic knowledge. Intimacy can in this regard be understood as a (syn)aesthetic phenomenon of connectedness of processes of closeness and distance.

The element of closeness within intimacy is in case of *The Smile Off Your Face* playing with factors of personality, familiarity and physical contact despite theatre's element of constructedness. These elements will be looked at in the following paragraph regarding familiarity and mutuality.

1.3.3. The Intimacy of Mutuality in Friendship

Etymologically the word 'intimate' stems from the Latin words 'intimus' meaning 'innermost' or 'close friend' and 'intimatus' that as a verb means 'to make known'.¹¹

The word 'intimacy' has three overall traces of understandings:

- 1) related to being in a familiar, close, personal and affectionate relationship or friendship
- 2) having sexual intercourse and
- 3) being in a situation and/or a place that affects the feeling of comfort, warmth and familiarity or in an atmosphere that creates the feeling of being in a private situation "suitable to tell a secret"¹².

The third understanding is interesting when looking at intimacy in theatre, as theatre historically works through the principle of copying; through the concept of mimesis. This third understanding underlines the possibility of experiencing intimacy in a situation "as if" one was experiencing it with close friends or family or in a familiar environment. It leaves an option open for intimacy to be experienced in an environment and in a situation where elements of trust and closeness are created as a substitute for familiarity.

In an article on 'friendship' (1.2 Intimacy: Friendship. 2013) for Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Bennett Helm analyses friendship in the light of intimacy. An intimate friendship tells something about the depth and closeness of the relation; the intimate friendship is experienced as the closest kind of friendship you can get. An intimate friendship also accounts for the amount of insights that are shared mutually between the parts as well as the bonds of trust this factor creates. The

¹¹ intimate. Dictionary.com. *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Douglas Harper, Historian. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/intimate> [accessed 09-06-2016].

¹² intimacy. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/intimacy> [accessed 07-06-2016].

intimate friendship is constituted by “mutual self-disclosure”, which is explained as the invisible “bond of trust” that emerges when sharing private insights with another part and expecting that other part to do the same thing. The changing position between showing vulnerability and receiving as well as acknowledging other people’s vulnerability is the foundation of this bond of trust (Helm 2013). The intimacy exists as well in the mutual switching of positions between taking responsibility for taking action and initiative in the relationship and in the mutual sharing of ideas and values. The intimate friendship contains a sort of mirroring effect, but more active in a way that one simultaneously creates recognition of self in other as well as acknowledgment of the other for what he or she is and does (Helm 2013).

The understanding of intimacy that is used in this thesis appearing in theatre performances is built on these notions on intimacy in friendship but without the factor of familiarity or relation with the other person with whom the intimate encounter is experienced. Instead they built on making ‘acquaintance friendship’ (Helm) valuable and intimate through the principle of sharing; private stories, experiences and corporeal experiences as it is for instance the case in the Danish theatre Carte Blanche’s installation *Life Live!* where audiences step into an environment where they in small groups get to share insights through an establishment of trust via primarily spatial conditions but also through other sensory-based elements. The relational space of potentiality between participants in the event becomes the centre of attention and the kernel around which the performance as a setup is turning. These situations and setups are both constructed in the fact that some people have planned and worked out a format, a structure and a concept for the performance and are simultaneously infused with moments of improvisation in the actual meetings of people as well as the evocation of sensorial experiences, imagination and memory, which trigger spontaneous emotional reactions. Through different modes of activation, sharing (corporeal and verbal) and involvement, the third definition of intimacy – an intimate environment – can be reached. Even though they are created in an obviously constructed and performative set-up. This will be explored in chapter 2, where three different performances will be examined for their individual intimate evocation.

The performative potential in theatre lies in the relation between performer, spectator-participant and environment. Similar is the potentiality of experiencing

intimacy from a spectator's point of view positioned in the relation between what is being received and perceived of sensory-corporeal sensations from performers, other audience-participants and the materials and circumstances of the environment and situation of the performance and what is being given (in an act of participation), which together create a sense of mutual sharing that create a bond of trust. The experience of mutuality is what often what affective participatory theatres (e.g. *Cantabile 2* as seen earlier) strive for in the way it makes individual spectators feel more engaged and willing to share. Creating full mutuality in theatre is though a paradox caused by the constructedness of the situation and of the way spectators are expected to participate in a certain way.

This thesis take on intimacy is as a result of the above mentioned perceived as a (syn)aesthetic phenomenon of connectivity of processes of closeness and distance that is constructed and maintained through elements of mutuality. This perception will be used in the analysis of the

CHAPTER 2:

Analysing Case Studies: Approaching the Ambivalence of Intimacy in Theatre

2.1. Approaching the Mechanisms of Intimacies

In the following chapter, Tino Sehgal's *Kiss*, the total installation *Sommerfugleeffekter*, by the Danish company Wunderland and Dries Verhoeven's *Guilty Landscapes* are analysed in order to investigate how they stimulate and activate audiences' sensorily-corporeally and how intimacy is created in this process. The analysis focuses mainly on how the performances relate to – and challenge the hierarchical primacy of the sense of vision and how this challenge generates other tactile, auidial and olfactory experiences.¹³ The analysis focuses as well on how the performances, in bringing the respective audiences to the centre of the event, create

¹³ The sense of taste is in this analysis not thematised, as this element was not automatically brought up in the performances.

potentiality for spatial and corporeal experiences of distance, proximity and touch. In bringing up the focus of these elements in the three performances, this analysis investigates how a combination of obstruction and stimulation of senses evoke intimacy perceived as a (syn)aesthetic phenomenon of perceptions and connectivity. The analysis asks therefore how the performances individually stimulate and affect participants in the performances in the creation of intimacy and how the intimacy in the individual performances works.

The elements of vision and distance are additionally looked upon in order to reveal how the performances challenge the theatre conventions of separating stage and auditorium, counting vision as well as hearing as the primary senses of experiencing theatre. This last point comes forward in the etymology of the word ‘theatre’ that stems from the Greek *theatron*, which means “a place of/for seeing” (Schechner 2007, 10). In order to see one needs distance. Schechner notices as well in this etymological research how the word *seku* – which is the “founder of Greek theatre” – does not only mean “see” and “sight” but also “say” (2007, 12), which connect the sense of sight to the sense of hearing in the roots of theatre. Challenging the sense of sight and hearing (in primarily leaving out the element of speaking) in performance change the mode of engagement through the incorporation of other senses and bodily presence in the creation of meaning.

The convention of placing audiences with a distance to the action is, in these performances, obstructed: as the audiences are transformed into active spectators-participants who become co-creators of the performance with their respective responses and presence, shifting through different modes of interaction and engagement. In *Sommerfugleeffekter* and *Guilty Landscapes*, only one audience member is let into the performance at a time, which obstructs a traditional understanding of the audience as a collective. In *Guilty Landscapes* the interaction stays a one-to-one encounter between the performer and the spectator, while the spectator in *Sommerfugleeffekter* is made aware of the collectivity of an audience when meeting other audience members during the performance. The ambiguity between personal and reproducible that this aspect highlights is taken up in the analysis and discussed within the concept of mutuality as part of what produces “closeness within distance or difference” (Groot Nibbelink 2012, 420). In *Kiss*,

visitors walk in and out of the performance space as they please. The performance installation has no beginning and no ending but continues throughout the opening hours of the museum. They therefore experience the presence of an audience through olfactory and tactile perceptions but not through the sense of sight. Making a clear distinction between stage and auditorium in these performances becomes equivocal, as performers and spectators now share the same space and arguably responsibility for participation and involvement.

The three performances will in the light of this be analysed for how they critically deal with and challenge the conventions of theatre as a place to observe with a distance and how they in the deconstruction of these elements evoke *intimacies*. The analysis will further detect the way the performances produce three different kinds of intimacy and how these different intimacies can tell about our everyday encounters with and in the social world. Interestingly, the analysis will also look into what intended intimacy produces: does it actually produce a sensation of closeness? Or is this closeness complicated by a certain co-extensive movement of obstruction?

Machon's notion of (syn)aesthesia, Groot Nibbelink's perception of intimacy as connectivity of closeness within distance and Helm's understanding of intimacy as an act of mutual sharing will be used to understand the production of intimacy in these performances. In these performances the specific combination of affections and interactions will be analysed in order to get closer to the mechanism of intimacy generated in participatory theatre.

2.1.1. The Potentiality of Visual Void in Tino Sehgal's *Kiss*

I entered the permanent exhibition of contemporary art in Stedelijk Museum in winter 2015 with no expectations of what the piece *Kiss*¹⁴ (2002/2015 by Tino Sehgal) would bring me: peace, experiential knowledge, and momentary freedom from normative theatrical discourse primarily based on vision. This 'break' from normativity was mainly related to the placing of this piece or installation in a museum

¹⁴ In an artist talk in the Stedelijk Museum on May 28 2015, Tino Sehgal refused to call his work 'performance' in an attempt to remove the work – as placing it in a museum already is a manifestation of – to another discourse than the one of performance art and theatre. Link to the event: <http://www.stedelijk.nl/agenda/forum/tino-sehgal-content-context>.

space – a sphere of visibility – and the void of direct visibility that the piece brought up in the absence of light, creating a different, (syn)aesthetic sensitive visibility based on an assemblage of sensations. This void of normative vision also critically thematised the act of seeing and vision in/on art in general.

The rooms on the first floor were filled with colourful and noisy pieces of contemporary visual art that alarmingly reached out for my attention, which made it hard to find the room in which Tino Sehgal's piece was located. The room housing *Kiss* had a completely different character. I entered a dark room without any descriptions or signs. I was not able to see anything; the darkness surrounded me, pressed itself up against me as a physical mass of black that I voluntarily pushed myself into. Slightly tense, alert and with my eyes wide open I tried intensely to get a glimpse of a contour of something breaking the massive dark. My hearing sharpened, focused on detecting what the room contained. I realised at that moment how seldom I experience darkness in that calibre: almost never. I grew up in the city where it never really gets dark because of streetlights and where the opportunity of turning on the light is almost always an option. But in that dark room in the centre of Amsterdam, there was no opportunity to switch on the light (I had left my mobile phone in the wardrobe as I entered the museum). The unknown of the situation awakened my attention, and I soon found myself sitting on the floor, up against the wall in the dark room that I had found by searching with my hands. Something in the room made me feel relaxed. A sensation of warmth and a sweet smell of body aromas – a natural smell, not superficial as from perfume. The room was charged with a sensation of presence and attention. I heard the sounds of subtle whispering and quiet steps of walking carefully in the dark.

Slowly, my eyes started to get used to the darkness, and I could now glimpse of the contours of two people in the middle of the space moving in slow motion. In an intimate embrace. The contours told me that they were a woman and man, both naked. If I looked directly at them I could only see a blur, but when I looked slightly to the side I could see the contours clearer. In the darkness my face and my actions were more or less invisible for others, as much as other visitors were more or less invisible to me. There was a certain freedom in this limitation. A freedom of not being watched and a freedom for the imagination to fill out the missing gaps in what I could not see

clearly. Sitting in the darkness, I experienced how my system slowed down in the void of visual stimulus: I sensed how my body was tempted to explore the freedom that it was given. What could one actually do in this room? Could one do more than just try to observe? What did being an observer in this room mean? In this case it meant detecting contours from changes in the dark and letting the imagination be activated. The almost invisible position in the dark from where I was looking at the almost invisible two naked people intimately dancing made the situation simultaneously thrilling and awkward; ambivalently placed between being a voyeur in the position of being invisibly looking, but without actually being able to see clearly in the absence of light.

Is there such a thing as imaginary or inner voyeurism? David Shearing discusses in the article “Intimacy, Immersion and the Desire to Touch: The Voyeur Within” (2015) this phenomenon. By ‘the voyeur within’ is meant an innate desire in us to come closer and to touch, even in our imagination when it is not physically possible (Shearing 2015, 71). Shearing brings up how audial stimulation can be perceived as intimate proximity, almost as a sensation of touch, that create a sense of inner voyeurism in the desire to be fulfilled as real touch (Shearing 2015, 86).

Similarly to this the smell that I experienced in the dark room of *Kiss* gave me a sensation of being in close proximity to the performers and the other visitors as well as it intensified the intimacy in the activation of my olfaction. The direct limitation of my sense of vision forced my other senses to co-operate in navigating in the dark and in creating meaning of the sensory information given. My attention was directed towards the dancers in the dark primarily by the smells and the subtle sounds of bodies moving. Experiencing their intimate presence in the room I became aware of my own voyeuristic position of looking in between other experiencers-observers at a private, yet abstracted, intimate scenery. I shared in this room this an almost physical experience of presence with other experiencers-observers whose imaginations as well as mine filled in the gap of what we were obstructed in seeing.

Once every 5-10 minutes, the silence was obstructed by one of the two dancers who spoke out loud the title of the piece, the year it was made and the name of the maker, as reading out loud a sign under a painting: staccato and revealing no personality. This was the only clear indication of the acts in the dark being Tino

Sehgal's piece. These moments of speaking created a certain distance to the close but yet ambivalent emotions of voyeurism created in between the dancers, their movements, the situation of visual void and the corporeal and imaginative activation created through this.

Another element obstructed my experience of involvement and closeness in a different way. While sitting in the room, several visitors turned on the light of their mobile phones as they entered the space in order to immediately reveal what this room contained. This act proved the innate desire to unconceal and understand, but it also showed how interconnected we are with technology, automatically including the flashlight function on the mobile phone as an extension to human vision. The circumstance of immense darkness and the process I had gone through myself in experiencing the time it takes the eye to get used to darkness generated awareness of how technology extends our perceptual panel, which in everyday life is often only experienced in the absence of it, for instance in the absence of a mobile phone. There are many theories of and writings on the relations between humans and technology and the cyborg as a fusion between human and machine, this thesis does not deploy such a conceptual framework. Rather, this point is made in order to simply show how technology influences the way we perceive. This element obstructed more directly the experience of darkness and what it produced as the space was lit up and everything made fully visible. Even though it was just a short moment, the magic of the darkness, its potentialities and its blurring of concrete material, were disrupted. Seen in another light, this lightening up the space and the participants brought a certain illumination to the situation and enhanced the voyeuristic theme as it made the before invisible quasi-voyeurs into real voyeurs being confronted in their act of watching an intimate scenario.

Meaning was (syn)aesthetically established through the perceptions of smells, sounds, limited observation of movement and contours as well as through the tactility of the darkness while becoming aware of discourse and symbolism of darkness as well as the concept of voyeurism that was ambivalently experienced as a result of my imagination evoked in a museum space of visual art and even in a dark room where the act of seeing was obstructed. Simultaneously the planned speaking-out facts about the piece in the piece by the performers and the unplanned illumination of the space

by the visitor's mobile phones disrupted the closeness felt in the acceptance of the circumstance of darkness and of the subtleness of the affectivity. Instead these elements pointed towards the act of staging in directly bringing forward the facts that make this piece a piece of art and in revealing the actual spatial environment of the museum space. Both in the (syn)aesthetic perception of this piece and in above-mentioned elements of staging, obstruction is present in the intimately conflicting experience of voyeurism despite its rationale.

Kiss works through the absence of physical touch of spectators and through the void of vision in creating a voyeuristic intimacy of imagination. Its affectivity is subtle but effectively working through the principles of curiosity and – with Shearing – the desire to touch. Elements that bring visitors into the illusion of voyeurism work together with elements of distance in as a mechanism creating an intimacy – understood here as an ambivalent phenomenon of hinting.

2.1.2. Sensory-Corporeal Stimulation and the Evocation of Embodied Memory in Wunderland's *Sommerfugleeffekter*

In *Sommerfugleeffekter* (eng: *Butterfly Effects*) by Wunderland the spectator passes through different environments (rooms in a house) that stimulate different senses and invite him or her to take up different corporeal positions. Both the sensorial stimulations and the corporeal situations awake embodied memory and through playfulness curiosity.

In the first room, I was invited to leave my shoes and jacket. In return, I received a pair of slippers and a bathrobe. I was here told the 'rules' of the game: that I had to move to the next room indicated by small footprints on the wall when a bell would ring. The first environment to be experienced was a completely dark room only lit up by a line on the wall of fluorescent paint. Following the line, I encountered a person who carefully placed a round glass ball in my hands and closed them around it. In possession of the ball, I continued my journey to the next rooms, where I was most often alone and only sometimes encountering a performer. In a room a whispering voice told me to close my eyes. It did not take long before someone placed her hands on my waist from behind and started walking with me in a 'dehumanised' manner: the

steps were long and had a non-rhythmical pace. The sound of 'its' breathing was as well not human. The only human recognition experienced was the touch of the hands on my waist that were recognisably female. The encounter with the 'creature' was despite 'its' otherness not uncomfortable or frightening because the meeting and the establishment of the contact was careful and warm, evoking a feeling of safety and trust. With my eyes closed and in a close embrace, I started to become mobilised, gently pushed to move forward objected to experience how this type of movement was different from my normative way and pace of walking. The performer was positioned behind me and our communication was non-verbal and based on touch. Mesmerised in the strange encounter I responded to the gentle pushes from the back and followed her weirdly shaped movements until she made me stop and made me lie down on my side. She lay down beside me, facing my back and started caressing me on my arm and side. I experienced this act as challenging but comfortable in its direct use of intimate contact-based codes, which bodily reminded me of childhood. With my eyes closed I felt helpless but taken care of. In this room all visuality was happening on the inside of my eyelids, in my imagination, as a result of my closed eyes. By not seeing, my focus centred on the sense of touch, on the presence between us and the shared movements we created and formed together in a kind of fusion of human and creature.

After being caressed, and with the safe sensation of holding the glass ball in my hands, I left the room and entered another, which appealed very differently to my senses. This room was bright, and my sense of vision was again allowed to function. I was alone in this room free to experience it in a personal way. In the room was one big green grass hill and there was nothing else to do than crawling onto it. The smell of grass and dirt was present and highlighted through the strangeness of experiencing nature inside a house. My curiosity and attention was drawn to two goggles that were placed on the grass hill that showed to enlarge two small insects. The experience of contrasts between inside and outside, between the large grass hill and these small insects however enlarged by the goggles as well as the contrast between the action of looking at a small visual detail and the corporeal action of mounting a grass hill dominated this environment.

Throughout the journey through the different rooms in the house I carried the glass ball. It became the through-line on which the dramaturgy of the performance was built. In one of the last rooms, a performer – also rather ‘dehumanised’ through the attachment of horns of a deer – approached me and started interacting with me through the means of the glass ball: in turns, we played with it and passed it on to each other. She was the one initiating the interaction but as the play with the ball continued, I invested more in my playing with it and the interaction seemed more equally engaged. When the bell rang, I received the ball again and entered the last room of the installation. In the room, a big white snake-like pipe was taking up most of the space. The pipe led to a basin of water where I could see other glass balls like mine. It became clear that the action in this room was to place my ball in the pipe and see it enter the basin and to leave the room without the ball as the presence of balls showed that other spectators-participants had done.

This moment of seeing the balls in the basin was the second time that I was reminded of the fact that I was an audience member amongst other audience members, despite experiencing most of my journey through the rooms alone or in one-to-one encounters with performers. The first time was in the corridor with the footprints on the walls between the rooms where I directly saw (not only the marks of, as in the case of the basin) other spectators-participants dressed similarly in slippers and bathrobes, and through this was reminded of the collectivity of an audience. The bathrobe and slippers both enhanced the sensation of feeling safe and in a homely environment while it at the same time pointed towards the act of staging as the spectators-participants were turned into characters, surrounded by the performance in every way. This element simultaneously obstructed the experience of singularity and personality. Placing the glass ball in the pipe I, as part of a group, marked the end of the performance: the balls created a frame for the dramaturgy of the performance. Simultaneously it brought the performance to the conventions of theatre in an act of staged spectatorship. By shooting away the glass ball, I experienced a separation of intimacy in a distribution of self into the glass ball that had accompanied me during the journey of this performance and helped the interaction with performers. During the performance, it was the means to interact and now, after shooting it away, it

became a symbol of me as a spectator-participant among others; another one that had passed through the house and experienced the performance.

These two elements that made one aware of the act of staging and the collectivity of an audience produced a distance and a difference to the closeness and intimacy of the personal sensorium of the different environments of the rooms. Through sensory-corporeal stimulations these rooms attempted to bring spectators-participants to their bodies in making them experience how the body, through the elements of touch and movement, sounds, smells and tactile experiences and elements of mutuality (seen in for instance the moving together with the ‘creature’), could evoke emotions of trust and safety through bodily association and memories of childhood. This, even despite the strangeness and the unfamiliarity with the ‘dehumanised’ performers. Balancing these two strategies the performance both produced and obstructed the element of closeness and engagement in the creation of intimacy while it, in this balancing act, generated awareness of corporeal processes of memory and of participation. This corresponds to the elements of staging in case of Ontroerend Goed’s performance *The Smile Off Your Face* that Groot Nibbelink brings up in her article.

The materials in the rooms that stimulate – for example a little bed full of grass, which invites the spectator to lie down and enjoy the smell and the tactile sensation of grass and the element of experiencing of the grass hill inside – are, in their associative multi-stimulation, synaesthetic constructions. The multi-sensory and corporeal experiences affected by these elements become (syn)aesthetic in their evocation of a fusion of sensory-corporeal cognition in the bodily sense-making in sensory-corporeal memory with imagination and meaning making through language. Between sensation, corporeality, memory, emotion and confrontation, intimacy is generated; firstly, in becoming aware of how memory can be evoked through sensory and corporeal stimulation and the language and discourse it produces; and secondly, how the spectator-participant is confronted with him- or herself being in a constructed setup, called-upon but simultaneously free to experience, and to a certain extend, react.

2.1.3. Intimacy in Dries Verhoeven's *Guilty Landscape: Episode 1 – Hangzhou* Between Presence and Virtuality

The performance *Guilty Landscapes: Episode 1 – Hangzhou* by Dries Verhoeven has a rather different character than above-mentioned case studies: it includes elements of intermediality.¹⁵ Its function in this thesis is, however, to show how intimacy also appears in performances in which the actions and interactions are the result of different mediatic processes. The intimacy that will be unfolded in this section is evoked through virtual means. Presence and closeness are in these terms not only perceived as elements of actual proximity and physical sharing of space but are also understood through a perception of space as time, which is (brought up by, among others, Sarah Bay-Cheng and Birgit Wiens' in their chapter "Portal: Time and Space" in *Mapping Intermediality in Performance* (2010)). Presence is for Bay-Cheng to be understood through Gilles Deleuze's concept of the 'rhizome' (2010, 85), as a network of instances of 'being online' that maps presence not through space but through temporality.

When I entered the empty room of the performance, alone, a projection covering a whole wall was turned on and a film started. The projection revealed a factory interior where Asian workers were standing by textile machines working. The sounds of the machines in the film were intense and uncomfortably loud, but I could not lower the volume. In the room was one object: a sign that explained the 'medium' of the performance, in the tradition of the visual arts. Screens, cameras, Internet connection and '2 persons' were among other things mentioned on the list. Meanwhile, I had placed myself on the floor to watch the film on the wall. A woman stepped away from her machine and faced me/the camera. I watched her and she watched me. Then she sat down in the position I was sitting in. A suspicion was shaping itself in me, which caused me to lift my arm. When I saw the woman on the screen doing the same thing I realised that, what I first assumed was a film was a live transmission, and the woman facing me was a real person present in the same time as me – but not in the same place. Until now, I had been the one in control of the

¹⁵ The concepts of 'intermediality' and 'intermedial performance' are theorised by among others Chiel Kattenbelt, Sarah Bay-Cheng, Andy Lavender and Robin Nelson in *Mapping Intermediality in Performance* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

interaction between us, but when the woman saw that I understood what was going on, she took over. Instinctively eager to show that I understood the roles of the game, I started mirroring her movements. She waved me closer to the screen and I moved closer until I almost touched the wall. The woman lay down and I did the same thing. We laid here for a while facing each other; smiling and waiting for one or the other to take initiative for action. The woman lifted her hand and moved it closer to the camera/me and I did the same, resulting in an ambivalent experience of virtual touch; of proximity despite distance, presence despite virtuality. The projection worked like a window through which the interaction between two people was going on. The projection and the copying effect could simultaneously symbolise a mirror through which I saw myself (in the woman) in the projection. We had our hands here for a while before she slowly withdrew hers and rose. I still copied her. As we were fully standing we looked at each other for another moment before she waved at me, turned around and walked back to her weaving machine. The interaction was over and the scenario seemed again like a film; not real, not now. A couple of moments after, in total 10 minutes after I entered the room, the transmission was cut and the room left dark and empty. Ambiguously touched, I left room.

In retrospective, I am surprised how little it took to create intimacy and a personal relation with this woman despite our communication through a screen. The woman on the screen interacted and communicated through body language with the spectator, which is normatively a contradiction and impossible in films as they are recorded, but which is made possible through the function of webcams and Internet. Even though the use of webcams is well known in our highly technological society as a tool to have visual and auditive communication in real-time, the use of it in this performance tricked me, as I initially thought that the projection was a film.

In reflection over the title, I felt guilty about the fact that I so easily could relate and involve myself in the interaction because it basically was about me as a spectator, but how hard it is to relate to the actual situation of hard-working factory workers in Asia. It was not before the film stopped that I realised what the '2 persons'-indication on the sign meant; that I was one of the persons in the installation. Turned into a material in the art piece, I found myself in a double position of being a performer and an observer, at the same time ambiguously receiving and producing the

intimacy in my participation. This double position generated the ambiguity of the intimacy perceived as the in-between of closeness and distance in part taking and observing in a virtual sensation of proximity and touch.

The ambiguity in the experience of the interaction with the woman on the screen appeared arguably also because of an intermingling of conventions between visual arts and performance art. The piece entered the sphere of visual arts mainly because of the indication sign with the title, artist and materials. In complement it entered the sphere of performance art mainly as a result of the liveness of the interaction between performer and spectator. The work contains elements that are fixed and elements that are performative and changeable depending of the person watching and interacting. I was surprised as a spectator about the interaction as my expectations were confused. Firstly, I expected the work to be in the realm of performance because the piece was programmed as part of a theatre and performance festival, but as I entered the room my expectations changed slightly and I changed my mode of looking. Reading the '2 persons' indication changed again my mode of looking into looking for moments of performativity and participation. What made this piece interesting was the potentiality of interaction – the potentiality of what the spectator could make the performer do or what the performer in this close and seemingly private encounter could make the spectator do. It played with the sense of touch in imitating touch virtually and the whole realisation process of the potentiality of interaction made me feel touched without physically being touched.

Summing up, *Guilty Landscapes* reveals how lack of physical and spatial presence can nevertheless create intimacy through modes of interaction, through bodily mirroring and a seemingly generation of mutuality and equality in the interaction. The theme of guilt, present in the title, becomes meaningful as we realize that our experience stop at our (narcissistic) selves: I do not really see the person in front of me but more her activation of me, how she makes me move, how she caresses me virtually and gets to know me non-verbally. Essentially, this does nothing but reinforces my experience of self. Mesmerised into the sensation of mutuality by the closeness and seemingly personal relation we create together through virtual and emotional sensations of touch, I am simultaneously aware of the temporality of this intimacy and the reproducibility of the scenario that is repeated, as a factory, when the

next spectator enters. The element of mutuality – that Helm sees (see Chapter 1) as a generating factor for intimacy in friendship, as it creates equality and a sensation of safety, trust and willingness to share – is seen in the seemingly shared action-taking in the copying game. This element is used to establish and maintain the intimacy that is in this performance generated in the (syn)aesthetic fusion of physical and rational distance with bodily and emotional sensations of closeness and presence through interaction and the intermedial imitation of proximity and touch.

2.2 The Performativity of Intimacy

As seen in the analysis of the individual performances, each performance produce intimacy as a result of (syn)aesthetic fusions of closeness and distance. Each intimacy produced has a different way of working as a result of the specific (syn)aesthetic combination of sensory-corporeal stimulations and cognitive processes. All the performances work through a void of representational meaning both in terms of being almost non-verbal and in not following the dramaturgy of a plot or a story. Instead, as means of expression and as a dramaturgical strategy, the emphasis in the performances is on corporeal and sensorial experiences generated in the actual encounters between people.

The intimacy constructed in *Kiss* is primarily a result of the circumstance and spatiality of darkness. The darkness materialises the obstruction it creates: in the almost tactile experience of pressure towards the wide-open eye. It becomes a motor for corporeal and sensorial perception and stimulation of imagination, and triggers simultaneously curiosity and fear for what potentially can happen. Through darkness, the obstruction or limitation of sight is perceived, resulting in an alertness of other sensorial stimulations of sounds, smells and tactility – but not directly touch. Seeing and touching are, anyway, experienced synaesthetically through the other senses: smells, sounds and sensation of movement create bodily awareness of proximity and create inner pictures of the scenario of the two naked dancers, which is not clearly seen. The experience of the vibrations of sound become tactile, and the olfactory perceptions of body aromas reveal pictures of bodies in movement that intimately transcends my body and my other senses through being connected to my breath.

These synaesthetic perceptions become (syn)aesthetic in the realisation of my position of ‘looking’, which ambivalently is experienced as a mode of looking despite the limitation of my sight. The synaesthetic sensations cause, in an act of (syn)aesthesia, my mind to feel guilty in experiencing the position from where I am – not actually – looking, but sensing the presence of the dancers’ intimate encounter as voyeuristic. The encounter is clearly an abstraction of private sexual intimacy, but is still in the situation experienced as private. This connection shows the elements of somatic sense making in the process of semantic sense making.

The element of not seeing is, in *Sommerfugleeffekter*, different from this element in *Kiss*. In the room where the spectator-participant encounters the ‘creature’ in *Sommerfugleeffekter*, invisibility is a result of his or her voluntarily closed eyes. The sight in *Kiss*, on the contrary, limited by something outer: the circumstance of lack of light that causes, as mentioned, an almost physical sensation of tactility. Both kinds of visual void are driven by elements of curiosity and fear of the unknown. The voluntarily, but encouraged, closed eyes cause absolute obstruction of sight, an evocation of imagination and a focus on the sense of touch in this close encounter. In the rest of the performance, visuality is used to navigate audiences through the sensorium and to cause curiosity. The element of the enlarged insects observed through the goggles is thematising the act of seeing, which is highlighted, among other thematisations of sensorial experiences, throughout the performance. The performance generally activates through synaesthetic associative elements and environments that (syn)aesthetically connect sensation to memory and language, but without the element of spoken language. Differently from *Kiss*, which works through a principle of subtle hinting, *Sommerfugleeffekter* works through a principle of directness and outspokenness in its multi-stimulation and inclusion of physical interaction with spectators-participants.

Phillip Zarrilli writes in the essay “Senses and Silence in Actor Training and Performance” in *The Senses in Performance* (2007) about the ‘outer body’ and the ‘inner body-mind’ of performers in actor training. He points out that “[t]hematizing the body-mind allows one’s awareness to be more fully ‘present’ within an act of embodiment” (Zarrilli 2007, 49). Through ‘outer body’ he understands the sensations and experiences of the surface-body that also connects the body to the surrounding

world, and through ‘inner body-mind’ he understands sensation of the inside of the body that are most often addressed in negative experiences: for instance the feeling of nausea or pain. By putting attention to these processes, one becomes arguably more present in the experience of one’s body. Even though Zarrilli uses this in a context of actors, a similar attention can be given in case of spectators in participatory theatre, who simultaneously acts in and experience the performance (e.g. seen in the element of the bathrobe and slippers). The element of touch is ‘touching’ upon both Zarrilli’s outer body and the inner body-mind, as it is both something that connects the body to the outer world and other people, but it is also experienced as an experience of tactility in the body, which ‘touches’ one emotionally. In the fusion of being touched and touching the performer, in the close encounter in *Sommerfugleeffekter*, one becomes aware of one’s physical as well as one’s emotional boundaries. Also the element of mutuality is seen in this interaction: in losing grip of what is motivated and what is initiated action.

The element of touch between spectator and performer is, in *Guilty Landscape*, simulated, but physically impossible as a mode of interaction caused by the virtuality of the encounter. In relation to *Guilty Landscapes*, Maaïke Bleeker’s notion of ‘Corporeal Literacy’¹⁶ is remarkable. What is meant with the term is an attentiveness towards the “bodily character of[...] perceptual, cognitive practices” and the way it “draws attention to the relationship between bodily practices and modes of thinking commonly associated with the mind” (Bleeker 2010, 40). In the multimedia and intermedial culture of today, modes of physicality, corporeality and gesture are ‘forgotten’ in the addition of layers of mediation processes. Similarly to Machon’s (syn)aesthetics in the way it focuses on bodily processes as part of cognitive sense-making, this term is meant to acknowledge the development of technology but to create awareness of “corporeal dimensions of the way in which we read and process information” (2010, 43) in a “next step in a continuous co-evolution of humans and technology” (2010, 40). In *Guilty Landscapes* the ambiguous experience of being in a present encounter with another person in the ‘now’, but obviously not in the ‘here’, as the present encounter is transmitted through screens and cameras, is immediately

¹⁶ Being aware of the extendedness of this concept, only a limited understanding of it will here be used.

accepted in my body in the production of intimacy. My body accepts this presence and plays along in an act of mutuality, in the attempt to physically touch the performer's hand through the video projection – as if it was a window. In light of this term and in the acknowledgement of the current developments of technology that I am – through my experiences with virtual presence (for instance live transmission on Skype) – part of, the ambiguity of my corporeal experience between confusion and willingness can be understood. Intermediality – understood here as the layers of different actual places, virtual spaces of shared temporality and theatre – through which the performance works, is adding a layer to the experience of intimacy. In intensifying the element of closeness within distance, intermediality fuses virtual possibility with actual sensation, which is connected in (syn)aesthetic somatic/semantic meaning-making and creates new discourse: new understandings of presence, closeness and distance. Experiencing intimacy, despite actual physical proximity and through the means of screens and cameras, is a witness of perception being in constant movement towards new ways of understanding connected to the surrounding world.

Modes of looking are, in *Guilty Landscapes*, the motor for the interaction and the establishment of intimacy, which is channelled through cameras. In the act of observing the 'landscape' of the factory interior, the spectator thinks he or she is the only one looking, but suddenly when the woman steps out from the interior and looks at the spectator through the lens of the camera, the spectator is made aware of the fact that he or she is observing. Transformed, from passive observer to active onlooker and participant, the spectator is now also being observed. Also in this moment mutuality is what is carrying the interaction forward in the act of equalising the relationship between spectator and performer.

Summing up, this chapter unfolds how the different performances produce intimacy as a result of (syn)aesthetic perceptions of closeness and distance. Through obstruction of normative ways of spectating theatre, audiences are made aware of their position of looking, made responsible for it and invited to experience 'seeing' as an act of synaesthetic and collective perception. Elements of tactility and touch, or simulation of touch, as a mode of interaction through (mutual) sharing of situations and corporeal activation is as a result of sharing of space (which in *Guilty Landscape*

is discussed and challenged through the use of medias). Through these elements, it is interesting to see how the performances experiment with intimacy and produces new understandings of it through, how it is evoked and what it can be perceived as.

CONCLUSION:

Towards the Potentiality of Intimacy in Theatre

This thesis has researched the phenomenon of intimacy in contemporary participatory theatre based on sensory-corporeal affection and how it works in the encounter with involved spectators. The perception of intimacy that is used in this research is based on a fusion of Josephine Machon's notion of '(syn)aesthetics' understood as a fusion of perceptions of sense-making, Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink's notion of intimacy as "closeness within distance" (Groot Nibbelink 2012, 420) and Bennett Helm's notion of mutuality in his unfolding of intimacy in friendship.

Intimacy in theatre is, through these theories, perceived as a (syn)aesthetic phenomenon of fusions of somatic and semantic sense-making processes (Machon 2009) connecting elements of closeness to elements of distance (Groot Nibbelink 2012) that are maintained through elements of mutuality (Helm 2013). Through this fusion of theories, ambiguous and contrasting elements are looked upon as part of the creation of intimacy in theatre, as semantic sense-making is evoked through breaks in somatic sense-making processes. Theatre ontologically contains an element of distance or difference that differentiates theatre from real life even though emotions that are spontaneous and responsive can be evoked through and appear in a theatrical frame.

Through the case studies this thesis has investigated how intimacy, perceived as a fusion of the above-mentioned theories, is created and appears through activation of bodies through sensational affection, kinetic activation, emotional evocation and corporeal associations such as memories and imagination in the encounter with the performance and the performers. These elements are explored through the case

studies: *Kiss* (2002/2015) by Tino Sehgal, *Sommerfugleeffekter* (2009) by Wunderland and *Guilty Landscapes: Episode 1 – Hangzhou* (2016) by Dries Verhoeven.

Kiss works via obstructing the sense of sight resulting in a synaesthetic activation of other senses and corporeal sensations in the creation of meaning, while the (syn)aesthetic experience of connecting these sensations to emotions, imagination and reflection brings forward an experience of being a voyeur. The intimacy is generated through the experience of voyeurism in this situation, while performative distance acknowledged through the speaking out loud of the title, artist and year of the piece. The element of mutuality is less present in this piece than the following case studies, but is present through the element of invisibility that is apparent for all participants in the event. Despite this element of mutual invisibility, the feeling of being an inner voyeur is still present in the experience. The sense making that is here being generated in *Kiss* makes sense through the non-expressive and goes beyond linguistic discourse in its position in the bodily situation of visual limitation. Intimacy appears in the liberating potentiality and the awkward voyeurism of being an invisible witness to something obscured and hidden yet made into abstraction.

In *Sommerfugleeffekter*, the spectators-participants who enter the total installation one by one are activated through the whole sensorial pallet. They enter the performance and the environment when they enter the house; dressed in a bathrobe and slippers in the first room, they are simultaneously characters and experiencers. The intimacy experienced in *Sommerfugleeffekter* is produced by the multi-sensorial experiences that make one become present in the experience of one's body, the embodiment of sensation and the (syn)aesthetic processes of association of sensorial perception with memories and embodied knowledge. The different sensory and corporeal stimulations in the performance are given in order to thematise the act of sensing itself, which is carried through by elements of playfulness, difference and unexpected synaesthetic experiences. The element of *playfulness* is seen in the creative and associative linking of sensorial experiences that do not necessarily logically connect. The sensational experience is made *different* by for instance placing a grass hill indoors, as well as the element of *unexpected synaesthetic experience* is experienced through the combination of sensorial experiences that are not

normatively linked – as, for instance, the tactility and smell of grass in a bed – still, these sensations can in a frame of playful association of childhood become meaningful. What intensifies the intimacy is the use of touch and direct kinetic and physical interaction among spectators-participants and performers, which evokes ambiguous emotions bringing the spectator-participant both ‘deeper’ into the ‘immersion’ of the environment and further away from it, evoking both trust and awkwardness. In this act the spectator-participant’s willingness to participate is tested and one become conscious of how one as a spectator-participant is participating, and if one is participating in the ‘right’ way instead of just responding. This shows an instance of somatic and semantic sense-making of closeness within distance that intensifies the intimacy in the performance, which is even further exemplified in element of ‘the costume’ of bathrobe and slippers.

Guilty Landscapes: Episode 1 – Hangzhou generates intimacy through the ambiguous experience of closeness within distance in virtual presence through video transmission. In a contemporary and intermedial understanding and acceptance of space as time (as presence is more a matter of sharing the same temporality, in being ‘online’ at the same time, than it is about sharing location), the circumstance of experiencing the performer through cameras and video projection is immediately accepted and the presence is anyway sensed as spatial and the ability to touch possible. This is happening in (syn)aesthetic cognition of perceptions of presence; in simultaneously understanding presence somatically and semantically. This (syn)aesthetic and ambiguous experience of presence is carried out through the creation of a sense of mutuality in the activation of the spectator-participant’s body. Through a mirroring act, a seemingly equal possibility and responsibility to move and to make the other person move is established. This mutuality is, though, not actually equal in the way that the situation is constructed. The mutuality effect is meant to create closeness, personal relation and intimacy in the situation of actual distance. One realises, however, after experiencing the intimacy and closeness of the connection between the performer and the spectator-participant, how temporary and reproducible the intimacy in this performance is in the factory-like re-establishing of interaction with a new experiencer every 10 minutes. Taking the title into account, one sees how Dries Verhoeven seemingly wants to criticise this intimacy that the

spectator-participant experiences caused by the physical involvement through the sense of vision that does not create actual action in the real world but only interaction in the theatrical frame. This element of critique corresponds to the critique given by Adam Alston, Bojana Kunst, Gareth White and Claire Bishop in their focus on participatory theatre performances being instances of self-disclosure and individualism. Creating this distance to the topic while actually generating intimacy *Guilty Landscapes* creates awareness of how intimacy actually is generated among people in the highly technological and globalised society of today through an understanding of closeness as a matter of temporal togetherness.

All performances produce their respective intimacy through primarily their environments and spatial circumstances. The intimacy produces in *Kiss* has a subtleness to it of being evoked through hinting and through absence, while it in *Sommerfugleeffekter* is produced as a result of multi-stimulation and directness. *Guilty Landscape*'s intimacy makes use of elements of both other intimacies but adds a layer of media(s) and technology that reveals how these surrounding elements influence our perception.

In accordance with the ideas of Groot Nibbelink (2012), the intimacy produced in this type of participatory theatre¹⁷ is not to be understood as a reinforcement of narcissistic and hedonistic tendencies of neo-liberal values (the accusation critics primarily levy against sensory-corporeal, participatory theatre), but instead elements of this culture are used to create awareness of this culture as well as of processes of interaction, participation and engagement with the (social) world in general (2012, 420), which is very clearly seen in case of *Guilty Landscapes*. The performances of the case studies avoid only being instances of narcissistic and hedonistic self-disclosure and to enhance individuality (Alston 2013) in their pointing towards acts of staging through elements that create distance within closeness and that connect audience members to each other. An example of this is for instance the element of the seeing other participants in bathrobe and slippers in *Sommerfugleeffekter*, which simultaneously reinforces a sensorium of touch and

¹⁷ In her article "Radical Intimacy: Ontroerend Goed Meets *The Emancipated Spectator*" (2012) she refers to what I call sensory-corporeal participatory theatre as 'theatre of experience'.

emotional evocation while it reminds the spectators-participants of being audience members amongst other audience members.

Critically, Gareth White concludes in his article “On Immersive Theatre” that immersive theatre¹⁸ does not reach new insights into the ontology and the experience of theatre, but stimulates “the relation in which the event of a work of art occurs between its material being and the person who encounters it” (2012, 233). Agreeing with this statement to a certain degree, Groot Nibbelink replies that “[e]ncountering and/or valuing this connectivity [ed: of intimacy as closeness within distance and of audience members as a heterogeneous group] is not a guarantee, but it is certainly indicative of the potential of radical intimacy in performance” (Groot Nibbelink 2012, 420).

Taking these two statements into account as well as the other critique that participatory theatre (under many names) has received, this thesis has not attempted to value participatory theatre that make use of sensory-corporeal stimulation over other types of theatre. Rather, it has sought to unfold the phenomenon of intimacy that I have observed as typical of this type of theatre’s mode of engagement or dramaturgical strategy. The critique of Alston, Kunst, White and Bishop is interesting because it shows that intimacy in theatre *works* – another question is then *what this element in theatre produces*, which seems to be a hot topic in the theatre world today. This thesis has been interested in discovering *how* this element of intimacy works in performances that evoke multi-sensorial experiences in audiences through participation. This question could be further explored in an expanded research of intimacy, where more anthropological and psychological aspects of are brought in. Meanwhile, the intimacy observed and experienced in the case studies and theorized through the fusion of theories is an element that gains value in this society of neo-liberal values and technological developments in the way that it brings awareness of these same elements in their own frames. The research also shows that intermediality and technology play a part in our contemporary (syn)aesthetic understanding and experience of intimacy as closeness within distance or difference as also these terms today are twisted and turned in regard to our surroundings intertwined in our

¹⁸ Understood as theatre performances where audiences are surrounded by a theatrical environment in which they often become part of the act. Sensory-corporeal participatory theatre can also be understood under this category.

(intermedial) understanding of the world. The production of intimacy in affective participatory theatre makes use of the performativity of the senses to reveal hints of how the performance of intimacy in the social world is constructed, maintained and developed.

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