

**KAAI**  
**THEATER**

**THE  
HUMANE  
BODY**

## **FROM SEEING TO FEELING**

**VERA TUSSING** The Palm of Your Hand II  
**ANNE JUREN** Anatomie

**VERA TUSSING & ESSE VANDERBRUGGEN** Sharing  
**SAÏD GHARBI & ANA STEGNAR** What do you see when  
you can't see?

**17>18/11/2017** – Kaaistudio's  
dance performance/workshop

**EXTRA** join us for a post-performance discussion with Anne Juren, Vera  
Tussing, and Piet De Vos

## 'WE CARRY THE TRACES OF THESE ENCOUNTERS WITH US'

Vera Tussing in conversation with Eva Decaesstecker (Kaaithheater, 2017)

***A performer reaches for your hand. She lets it slide over her arm, across her shoulders and down her other arm.***

**This is one of several tactile encounters that are proposed in Vera Tussing's performance *The Palm of Your Hand*. Tussing was invited to recreate this performance in a version that would include a blind and partially sighted audience. In this interview, she gives us an insight into the recreation process: 'There is always a balance to be struck between ensuring that you do not ignore people's specific needs, and not calling attention to people who don't want it'.**

**Touch and encounter are key in *The Palm of Your Hand*, as in many of your works. Where does this fascination come from?**

There has been a long trajectory in my work that explores how dance and performance can be perceived via different senses. This curiosity goes back more than ten years, and predates the invitation to recreate pieces to include blind and partially sighted audiences.

In 2007, I collaborated with Albert Quesada on a trilogy of three short pieces: *Beautiful Dancer*, *Your Eyes* and *Oh Souvenir*. The focus of this exploration was to consider dance as an acoustic experience. I took this idea further in *Sound Bed*, a sound-movement installation from 2011, in which dancers move speakers on wheels around a single audience member, to choreograph an acoustic journey around them.

My last three creations all evolved around ideas of tactility, connectivity and how the audience can be invited into physicalized networks of tactile relations and encounters. Where *T-Dance* (2014) engages in one-to-one encounters but still operates in the classic theatre staging, the idea of dance as a tactile encounter was further developed in the 'tactile dance piece' *The Palm of Your Hand*. The audience surrounds the performance space in an ellipse shape – and is always in immediate proximity to the unfolding work. The dancers enact tactile encounters with audience members, while following a choreographic structure. *Mazing* (2016) also explores this kind of theatrical set-up – but with less of a fixed choreographic structure, and more room for the negotiation process between performer and audience.

**In 2016, Kaaithheater and The Place invited you to take part in the European network *The Humane Body*, which seeks to open up the experience of dance performance to a visually impaired audience. In this framework, you made a reworked version of *The Palm of Your Hand*.**

We – my team of performers (Gorka Gurrutxaga Arruti, Zoltan Vakulya, Solene Weinachter) and I – didn't have long for the recreation process, and it was clear to me that I needed advice on how to proceed. Alongside with most of my recent work, *The Palm...* is a show that is very much perceived in an interactive way. In addition, there are certain work processes that suit my way of working and I decided to stick to them. The most valuable way for me to inform myself about the recreation process was to show the performance in its current state with an audience from the blind and partially sighted community. After the performance, we began a dialogue on how to 'remake' the work to let it communicate beyond sight.

**What did you learn during the recreation process?**

Lots! And there is still more to come. Learning how to negotiate through touch is a very intense

process, and puts us in a heightened sense of presence and dialogue with whomever we are in contact with. I enjoy the fact that the work enables this mode of communication. I also enjoy the challenge that it places on us as performers. Every time we perform this show, we as performers touch and get touched by around 60 people. We carry the traces of these encounters with us.

One of the first things we learned in the re-creation process was how much we were communicating visually in the piece – and indeed in our process – despite the fact that this was an exploration of tactility. There is an almost unconscious set of assumptions around sight that one doesn't even notice until they are pointed out. It can be manifested in very little things, such as automatically using phrases with visual verbs when you're talking about a choreographic pattern. We often don't realize that our language has an undercurrent of a visual bias. In our dance training, we were also taught how to be quiet and walk without making excessive noise. But when working with blind and partially sighted people, this leads us to mask our presence completely!

Luckily, our team of experts from the community<sup>1</sup> was very fast and very vocal in its critiques – but also in its encouragement of how we should proceed and improve. One major discovery for us was being told to be less 'gentle' in our execution of the danced material and our interactions. Instinctively, we felt that we needed to be *more* careful – but this seemed to be completely wrong. It was a very thought provoking and really enjoyable learning process. Questioning one's automatic assumptions can really lead to new, interesting places.

### **Which adaptations did you introduce to make the performance more accessible to a visually impaired audience?**

Aside from reworking many of the choreographic principles of the piece, we turned the volume up on most of the non-visual elements. I worked with Michael Picknett, my long-term sound collaborator, to create additional sound tracks for the bigger movement patterns in the work, giving those actions more of an acoustic dimension. In collaboration with my light designer Bert Van Dijk, we also added a tactile dimension to the tickets, which we hand out at the beginning of the show. In that way, the audience can trace the basic set-up of the room which is the ellipse shape. It also includes some details about the basic pattern that the performers repeat within that set-up.

As the show focuses on touch, we also went through a process of reconsidering the costumes. A wider differentiation of fabrics would allow each of us to stand out on a tactile level. I also proposed that the costumes could add to the acoustic scape of the work – come and see the show if you are curious about how this works! Sofie Durnez helped me to realize the current costumes of the show. For the last part of the performance – which is a visual one – Solene Weinachter does a live audio transcription.

### **Prior to the performance, the visually impaired audience is invited to a touch tour, where they are given a tactile 'image' of the scenery and costumes.**

The creation of the touch tour to introduce elements of the work to our blind and partially sighted audience members was a moment that deepened our exploration of the piece within the frame of vision and the lack of it. It also is an essential opportunity to give them the information they need to join the rest of the audience for the show.

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<sup>1</sup> Saïd Gharbi, Ibrahim Tamditi, Jempie Vermeulen, Tonia In Den Kleef, Yannick Heeren

An interesting thing we encountered was that sighted audience members frequently wanted to join this process – and then would often start closing their eyes in order to simulate blindness. Needless to say, we really had to dispel the idea that a sighted person closing their eyes is NOT a way to simulate actually being blind! Rather, the recreation was a way to explore how the same movement sequence and performative context can be experienced via different sensory moments.

**Which position do you give blind and partially sighted audiences during the performance?**

Very early in the recreation process, our expert team asked us: ‘Please, don’t call us out as the blind people in the room’. Personally, I am not keen on labelling and grouping people in the work (or elsewhere). Nonetheless, there is always a balance to be struck between not calling attention to people who don’t want it, and making sure we do not ignore people’s specific needs. I am very aware that this balance is not always an easy one to strike for myself and the performers, but I think – and hope – that there is room for it within the sensibility that the work proposes. The central aim of the work is to remain open enough to allow for non-sighted, partially sighted and fully sighted audiences to experience the piece amongst each other.

The essential politics of the work, even prior to the recreation process, was to make sure that we didn’t perform *at* people, but *with* them. Each touch encounter in the piece is negotiated throughout their duration. We are not assuming any form of immediate consensus in the work. We seek a negotiated encounter and always try to acknowledge the audience’s presence in the moment of performance. In order to give space for this process – the work maintains a certain hierarchy. The choreographic structure is very clear and present for the performers – but it always comes second to the touched encounter, and can hence be abandoned. We frequently have audience members who withdraw from the touch encounters, and we encourage people in the touch tour to signal to us if they don’t want to be touched. This allows the performers to be responsive and to acknowledge difference, rather than assume the audience is a homogeneous group. For me this is a sign that the work allows its audience to act and react to the performance.

## **VERA TUSSING** The Palm of Your Hand II

17/11 – 19:30 + 18/11 – 21:00 • dance • 45 min.

**nl/** In 2015 maakte Vera Tussing de voorstelling *The Palm of Your Hand*, waarin sociale handelingen en klassieke choreografische patronen heel dicht op de huid zaten van de toeschouwers – zeg maar deelnemers. Nu herwerkt Vera de voorstelling, specifiek om ze toegankelijk te maken voor mensen die blind of slechtziend zijn. Daarom laat ze de choreografie communiceren voorbij het louter zichtbare. Een continue interactie tussen performers en publiek verankert zich in een stilzwijgende verstandhouding. Samen met je medetoeschouwers baken je in ellipsvorm het speelveld af: dit is een dans van aanraking. Ga samen met de performers op deze ontdekkingsreis naar wat het betekent tactiel te ervaren!

- Vera Tussing studeerde af aan de London Contemporary Dance School en werkt sindsdien als performer, danser, maker en regisseur. In haar werk onderzoekt ze hoe dans en performance via zintuigen – vooral tast – kunnen communiceren en welke vormen van samenzijn hieruit kunnen voortkomen. In de Kaaistudio's presenteerde ze *T-Dance* (2015) en *Mazing* (2017). Ze brengt dit seizoen ook nog het duet *Both, Two*. Sinds 2017 is ze artist-in-residence in het Kaaitheater.

**fr/** En 2015, Vera Tussing a créé le spectacle *The Palm of Your Hand* dans lequel des actes sociaux et des motifs chorégraphiques classiques frôlaient de très près les spectateurs – disons plutôt les participants. À présent, Vera Tussing retravaille le spectacle de manière à le rendre accessible aux malvoyants et aux non-voyants. Voilà pourquoi la chorégraphie communique à présent au-delà du purement visible. Une interaction continue entre performeurs et public s'ancre dans une connivence tacite. Avec ses co-spectateurs, on balise une surface de jeu en forme d'ellipse : une danse du frôlement. Partez donc explorer avec les performeurs ce que signifie faire l'expérience du tactile.

- Vera Tussing est diplômée de la London Contemporary Dance School et travaille depuis comme performeuse, danseuse, créatrice et metteuse en scène. Elle se concentre depuis longtemps sur la magie que recèlent le mouvement et le toucher. Aux Kaaistudio's, elle a présenté *T-Dance* (2015) et *Mazing* (2017). Cette saison, elle interprète aussi le duo *Both, Two*. Depuis 2017, elle est artiste en résidence au Kaaitheater.

**en/** In 2015, Vera Tussing created the production *The Palm of Your Hand*, in which social behaviour and classical choreographic patterns were brought very close to the viewers, or rather, participants. Vera is now adapting the production specifically to make it accessible to the blind or visually impaired. To this end, she is making the choreography communicate beyond the merely visible. Continuous interaction between the performers and audience is rooted in an implicit understanding. Along with your fellow audience members, you delineate the stage in an ellipsis: this is a dance of touch. Join the performers in this adventure to discover what it means to experience tactility!

- Vera Tussing graduated from the London Contemporary Dance School, and has since worked as a performer, dancer and director. Her recent cycle of work focussed on how dance and performance can communicate via the senses – particularly tactility – to explore different ideas of community and sociality. She presented *T-Dance* (2015) and *Mazing* (2017) at the Kaaistudios. This season, she is also presenting the duet *Both, Two*. She has been an artist-in-residence at Kaaitheater since 2017.

## **ANNE JUREN** Anatomie

17/11 – 21:00 + 18/11 – 19:00 • performance • 70 min. • in English

**nl/** Hoe kan een mentale choreografie je een gevoel van beweging geven? In *Anatomie* creëert Anne Juren een bewegingsscore voor ingewanden en lichaamsfuncties. Terwijl je met gesloten ogen op een matje ligt, leidt ze je met haar stem doorheen je lichaam en je geest. Als onderzoek voor deze 'dans' werkte Juren rond de blinde vlek, samen met mensen met een visuele beperking. Hun ervaringen werden het materiaal om tot een choreografie te komen die plaatsvindt *in* je lichaam.

- Anne Juren is een Franse choreografe, danseres en performer die woont en werkt in Wenen. In haar werk probeert ze het begrip choreografie uit te breiden door het lichaam verschillende fysieke, sensitieve, kinesthetische en mentale ervaringen te laten ondergaan. De grens tussen publieke en private sfeer stelt ze hierbij telkens in vraag. In 2014 stond ze in *WoWmen!* met *Magical*, samen met Annie Dorsen.

**fr/** Comment une chorégraphie mentale peut-elle procurer un sentiment de mouvement ? Dans *Anatomie*, Anne Juren crée une partition de mouvements pour viscères et fonctions corporelles. Alors qu'on est allongé sur un tapis, les yeux clos, sa voix nous guide à travers notre corps et notre esprit. Pour la recherche effectuée pour cette « danse » – recherche qui s'est articulée autour de la tache aveugle –, Anne Juren a travaillé avec des personnes mal voyantes. Leurs expériences se sont transformées en matériau pour créer une chorégraphie « dans » le corps.

- Anne Juren est une chorégraphe, danseuse et performeuse française qui vit et travaille à Vienne. Son œuvre tente d'élargir le concept de chorégraphie en faisant éprouver au corps différentes expériences physiques, sensibles, cinétiques et mentales. Elle remet chaque fois en question la frontière entre sphère publique et privée. En 2014, elle était à l'affiche du festival *WoWmen!* avec *Magical* en compagnie d'Annie Dorsen.

**en/** How can a mental choreography give you a sense of movement? In *Anatomie*, Anne Juren creates a movement score for entrails and bodily functions. While you lie on a mat with your eyes closed, she uses her voice to guide you around your body and your mind. To research this 'dance', Juren worked on blind spots, collaborating with visually impaired people. Their experiences became the material to create a choreography that takes place *in* your body.

- Anne Juren is a French choreographer, dancer and performer who lives and works in Vienna. In her work, she attempts to expand the concept of choreography by subjecting the body to a variety of physical, sensory, kinaesthetic and mental experiences. She always questions and challenges the distinction between the public and the private sphere. In 2014, she and Annie Dorsen performed *Magical* as part of *WoWmen!*.

## **VERA TUSSING & ESSE VANDERBRUGGEN** Sharing

18/11 – 16:00 • dance • 60 min.

**nl/** Het Conservatorium van Antwerpen organiseert jaarlijks een symposium rond inclusieve dans. Vera Tussing en Esse Vanderbruggen gaven er een workshop rond het toegankelijk maken van voorstellingen voor een publiek dat slecht of niet ziet. De resultaten van die workshop willen ze nu met je delen.

**en/** Koninklijk Conservatorium/AP Hogeschool organizes an annual symposium on the theme of inclusive dance. Vera Tussing and Esse Vanderbruggen presented a workshop around the accessibility of performances for an audience who are visually impaired or blind. They will now share the results of this workshop with you.

## **SAÏD GHARBI & ANA STEGNAR**

What do you see when you can't see?

18/11 – 17:00 • workshop • 60 min. • in Dutch, French and English

**nl/** Met je ogen kun je de wereld zien. Maar er zijn ook andere manieren om te ontdekken wat er rondom jou gebeurt. Tijdens deze workshop ervaar je op een ludieke manier wat het betekent om blind te zijn, door te voelen, te luisteren en zelf te dansen. Saïd Gharbi begon in 1992 te dansen bij Ultima Vez en Wim Vandekeybus. Later creëerde hij zijn eigen voorstellingen als acteur en danser. Hij werd blind op veertienjarige leeftijd.

**en/** You can see the world with your eyes. But are there other ways to discover what is happening around you? This playful workshop shows you what it is like to be blind, by feeling, listening and dancing yourself. Saïd Gharbi, who has been blind since the age of 14, started dancing for Ultima Vez and Wim Vandekeybus in 1992.

# FROM SEEING TO FEELING

Visual stimulants often dominate productions. But what happens when you have to rely on your sense of hearing and touch? Upon the invitation of Kaaithheater and European partners, Vera Tussing and Anne Juren create work that can be experienced by people who can see, but also by those who are blind or visually impaired. Moreover, in a workshop you can experience what it is like to move without being able to see.

FRIDAY 17/11

19:30

**VERA TUSSING**

The Palm of Your Hand II

21:00

**ANNE JUREN**

Anatomie

SATURDAY 18/11

16:00

**TUSSING & VANDERBRUGGEN**

Sharing

17:00

**SAÏD GHARBI & ANA STEGNAR**

What do you see  
when you can't see?

19:00

**ANNE JUREN**

Anatomie

21:00

**VERA TUSSING**

The Palm of Your Hand II

22:00

**Post-performance talk**

Anne Juren, Vera Tussing &  
Piet De Vos

## credits

### **ANNE JUREN** Anatomie

**choreographer & performer** Anne Juren | **sound designer** Paul Kotal | **set designer** Vladimir Miller | **sound engineer** N.N. | **foley artist** Céline Bernard | **bodies** Hélène Marcelle, Cinzia Robbiati, Jeanne Pruvot Simonneaux | **artistic assistant and internal eye** Camille Chanel | **production manager** Alexander Matthias Kosnopfl | **production** Wiener Tanz- und Kunstbewegung, Impulstanz | **support** the cultural department MA7 (Vienna)

### **VERA TUSSING** The Palm of Your Hands II

**direction** Vera Tussing | **by and with** Solene Weinachter, Vera Tussing, Zoltan Vakulya, Gorka Gurrutxaga Arruti, Wei Wei Lee | **research** Erik Nevin, Meri Pajunpää, Esse Vanderbruggen, Typhaine Delaup, Ben McEwen, Esse Vanderbruggen | **research, feedback** Lucie Beauvert, Michael Picknett, JS Rafaeli, Alexander Vantournhout | **recreation assisted by** Saïd Gharbi, Ibrahim Tamditi, Jempie Vermeulen, Tonia In Den Kleef, Yannick Heeren | **audiovisual research** Emanuele Costantini, Alessandra Rocchetti, Benjamin Sommabère, Zoilly Molnar | **costumes** Lucie Beauvert, Lucie Libotte, Lilit Hovhannissian | **sound design** Ruben Martinez Orio, Michael Picknett | **light design** Thomas Vermaercke, Benoit Pele, Bert Van Djck | **production and diffusion** HIROS | **thanks to** Kate Goodwin, The Royal Academy of Arts, The Work Place at The Place | **co-production** STUK (Leuven), Life Long Burning/workspacebrussels | **support** the Culture Programme of the European Union | **research support** the National Lottery through Arts Council England | **commissioned by** The Place **with additional support** from Klein Verzet, Dance East, Pavilion Dance South West and Royal Academy | **residencies** STUK (Leuven), WILD CARD RESIDENCY, Ultima Vez & CND Montpellier / Life Long Burning, EU Culture Programme, The Place (London), workspacebrussels (Brussels), PianoFabriek (Brussels), BUDA (Kortrijk), Graner Barcelona, Kaaithheater (Brussels)

*Sharing* by Vera Tussing and Esse Vanderbruggen is conceived within the framework of the Koninklijk Conservatorium/AP Hogeschool.



*From Seeing to Feeling* is curated within the framework of European network The Humane Body, with the support of the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.



THE  
HUMANE  
BODY

