

# Close

Nicola Hepp – SNDO – 24 may 2005

At a performance it could be the case that the performer turns his body into the piece of art. But some performers go beyond that: they turn their audience into the piece of art. They are capable to pull their audience across a border. Like Nicola Hepp did in her performance 'Close'. It was just us, as an audience, who could create something together; just by letting it happen for the moment. For me it was a sudden change of thinking, I had to get used to this change of idea first.

Still we had the capability to choose our position in the performance. Before it all happened we were told that whenever we would feel uncomfortable or inconvenient, we would be able to step aside and take the position of a viewer instead of the position of a participant. Being told this in advance gave a special tension to all of us. None of us wanted to be a viewer from the start: it was our natural curiosity to the unknown.

We entered a dark studio. Beforehand we were all fastened to a string which made us connected to each other. Fifteen strangers surrendered to each other. We went through it, we experienced the moment: the moment where in you are insecure of what might come next. I had to believe in it, and have trust in the others who went through the same experience.

Together we were pulled into a corner. A man was pulling the string. As an audience we were confronted with a first clear border: a cultural border. Because of the pulling on the string, it was unavoidable to touch each other. Else we would fall down together. In the Netherlands it is quite unusual to touch one another; especially strangers. We are very distant people. Now, we had no other choice. I felt the breath of the others; I felt the warmth of the others. To me, it was a strange sensation. Where do I leave my hands? What to think of? What do others think? These questions confronted me directly with my own body; with the borders of my own body and therefore the borders of the body of the others.

When we were released, our view spotted an enlightened square on the ground. It changed from perspective, and brightness. Because of this, the ground under my feet became insecure. I wasn't sure where I was standing. Quite automatically my view changed to my own feet; to the place where I was standing. We were challenged to do some research to the situation where we landed in. 'What does this situation mean to me?' The more we got used to the situation, the more at ease we felt. We started to do some research with movements as well. Because of the sounds, our movements quickly looked like a dance. It became a play, a game to action – reaction, passive – active behaviour, our body, the balance, the laws of gravity. I became very aware of the moment itself: I let myself be into the moment. I surrendered to the moment, and was turned in one corner to the other. I turned around. Every moment of one individual was felt by the others. The reaction of the others to my movements confirmed the existence of my body.

Slowly more and more people left the string, until it was just me and the string. I felt alone: yes I felt abandoned and I even missed the people around me. All of the sudden I was alone in that

immense studio. Everyone looked at me: again I was directly confronted to the being of my body, to my being itself. Every detailed movement was noticed by the others. I played with the fact that I was being watched at. How do people behave when they are being watched at?

Close was a performance where I came not only close to the others, but also closer to myself. Closer to my body and the way my body moves in a certain space within a network of people: a network with her own possibilities as well as her own restrictions.

**Evelien van Ruijven**