Conference on Spectatorship

Wednesday 23/03/2011; 10am – 18pm
Balzaal Vooruit / Ghent (Belgium)
Registration is required, and can be done on the conference website:

Concept
After two festivals on the topic “The Game is Up”, the question of spectatorship in the contemporary performing arts came up: In many performative events the “spectator” is no longer a silent, physically distant observer/viewer. The distance between stage and audience, that has been regarded a hallmark of theatrical performance (Pavis) is being radically erased in recent performances who move, walk and guide their spectators through theatre buildings and public spaces. Spectators, or rather participants, become obviously active agents whose presence constitutes the process of the performance: The activity of the spectator, that has been situated firmly within the audiences psyche by Aristoteles (catharsis) and within the audiences minds by Bertold Brecht (critical distance), is “getting physical” (after the political theatre of the 1970ies) once more. Theatre Theory follows the practice, and Fischer-Lichte (2004) discusses the “feedback loop” between performers and audience as a vivid energy that constitutes each theatrical performance: No performance without the spectator’s presence. But, what is a spectator, or rather: In which ways are spectators active and present in nowadays performances?

Academic discourses constantly re-define concepts of spectatorship. After semiotics, sociology and reception aesthetics, who rather consider “the spectator” as a fixed entity whose place in society, process of meaning-making and taste can be researched upon, we consider spectators as constantly shifting entities who are constituted in the processes of performances, and vice versa. Thus, we rather ask for their (bodily and sensorial) activities and relationships to the performers.

In the scheduled conference, we will thus discuss historical developments of spectatorship since the Baroque, recent discourses of “spectators” moving bodies in urban spaces, and the relational aesthetics of currently shifting positions of performers and spectators.
Programme:

10.00h : Welcome + Introduction of the festival by Tom Bonte (Vooruit)
10.15h : Introduction by Christel Stalpaert & Katharina Pewny (S:PAM, Ghent University)

10.30h - 12.00h: The Ambiguous Spectator (Chair: Katharina Pewny)
- Bram Van Oostveldt (University of Amsterdam) and Stijn Bussels (University of Leiden): Spectacles and Sensation: The Desire for Experience in 19th-Century Visualisations of History (preliminary title)
- Evelien Jonckheere (Ghent University): How well-behaved was the audience anno 1895? A comparative analysis of variety theatre and conventional theatre in Ghent.
- Artist talk by Sarah Vanagt about 'Just Fabric' (Work in Progress)

12.00h - 13.00h: lunch

13.00h - 15.15h: New Media challenging the Eye (Chair: Sofie Verdoodt)
- 13.00h - 14.00h:
  - Artist talk by Ariane Loze about 'MÔWN' (2009), 'Hinterhof' (2011) and Vantage Point (Work in Progress)
- short break
- 14.10h - 15.10h:
  - Artist talk by C&H about ‘We have no Choice’ (performance of ‘The Game is Up’-festival)
- short break
- 15.20h - 16.00h: Book presentations

16.00h - 16.30h: coffee break

16.30h - 18.00h : Encountering Public Spaces: Shifting Loci of Looking (Chair: Chirstel Stalpaert)
- Maaike Bleeker (Utrecht University): The Locus of Looking Revisited. (preliminary title)
- Artist talk by An van Dienderen (KASK) about ‘Vertaalcabine (Scattering of the Fragile Cherry Blossoms - Part II)’
- Artist talk by Ant Hampton about “Autotheatre” (‘Etiquette’, ‘The Quiet Volume’ & ‘The Bench’. The performances are part of ‘The Game is Up’-festival)

18.00h-18.15h: Concluding words
Conference presented by Ghent University’s S:PAM (Studies in Performing Arts and Media) and Kunstencentrum Vooruit, as a part of the third festival “The Game is Up!”. The conference will be held in English.

Concept: Katharina Pewny, Christel Stalpaert / Dep. of Theatre, Performance and Media Studies, Ghent University
Organization: Jeroen Coppens, David Depestel / Dep. of Theatre, Performance and Media Studies, Ghent University, Vooruit / Tom Bonte
For the entire programme of the festival, see http://www.vooruit.be.

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