

"Ordinary people show themselves in *The Common People*," Annette Embrechts, Volkskrant, 30.05.2016. \*\*\*\* <https://www.volkskrant.nl/theater/gewone-mensen-geven-zich-bloot-in-the-common-people~a4309910/>

## **Ordinary people show themselves in *The Common People***

**Jan Martens and Lukas Dhont want to restore physical encounters. They do so successfully, until repetition strikes. Thus the successful Spring Festival in Utrecht ends with an ordinary retreat.**

**Annette Embrechts, 30 May 2016**

How special is it to watch ordinary people for three and a half hours? Quite fascinating, in any case the first half. By the end the powerful concept of *The Common People* contains a flaw, so that this original performance by choreographer Jan Martens and film director Lukas Dhont dies out.

But before that you witness short, surprising encounters between two strangers who have followed preparatory workshops in separate groups. Two participants are led, blindfolded, onto the stage, each with a secret assignment. One participant undresses the other to a certain limit. Another guesses at the partner's features at first glimpse. A third wraps himself tenderly around the other's neck or waste. Quite intimate for strangers – the embrace is total.

This physical contact yields poignant moments. The 44 participants show themselves nicely and act in trust. How great that trust is appears when we temporarily exchange the encounters for an installation, where almost all the smartphones of the participants are collected, including their pin codes. We can nose about in messages, photo albums and playlists. But no matter how voyeuristic, the viewing of physical encounters feels more intimate and says more about the human need for contact.

Martens and Dhont want to restore physical encounters. They do so successfully. Until the assignments to get to know one another repeat themselves, the countdown begins and the theatre empties out. That is how this successful edition of the Spring Festival ended, with many extreme projects, long after midnight, with a banal retreat.