





Current Trends in Contemporary Choreography: A Political Critique

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In his 2011 bestseller *Work! Consume! Die!*, the notorious British comedian Frankie Boyle complains that culture is firmly in the grip of the political authorities and capitalist system:

I think punk was the last time they let anything happen. After that, they decided to tighten the fuck up with what was allowed into the culture. Maybe if you work in some marginal area, like comics or sci-fi or *dance*, maybe you are doing something interesting, but the mainstream of culture has got a lot more policed. (2011, 96, my emphasis)

In referring to dance's "marginal" status within the cultural sphere, the leftist Boyle is clearly not thinking of entertainment TV shows such as *Strictly Come Dancing*, but of dance's "high art" genres. But is dance really—as he surmises—a field immune from the impact of dominant ideological and economic powers? Where Big Brother does not wield control over cultural content?

This issue is timely given the current interest in (re)definitions of capitalism and liberal democracy in the wake of globalization, and the questions over the response of the arts in general (and dance specifically) to a new set of econo-political paradigms. This said, my article is neither concerned with dance works that are *overtly* political in terms of their subject matter, such as Johann Kresnik's or Lloyd Newson's, nor those strands of continental European "conceptual" dance—to use a somewhat contested term—which engage in a more or less open discourse about the economic appropriation of the arts and related matters.¹ Rather, my interest is in the recent trend towards participatory, collaborative, and what are termed *immersive*² modes of performance. Aesthetic choices are rarely politically neutral, and the current preference for these strategies—a legacy, as I shall argue, of the 1960s and 1970s postmodernist departure from the "traditional" creative processes of Western theater dance—manifests a certain type of ideological perspective. But this "politics" often dwells beneath the surface of consciousness, in some cases figuring only implicitly in the intentions of creative artists themselves.

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This article will engage with the aesthetic strategies and implicit political stances of such works, questioning the rhetoric of many of their practitioners and commentators who suggest that they are liberatory, transgressive, and challenging to the societal and/or artistic status quo. In so doing, it will draw on a range of early twenty-first-century contemporary dance and performance artists from a variety of countries to illustrate the proliferation of these trends across the Western world, situating and illuminating them within a theoretical framework that integrates dance, performance, business, and political studies. I shall specifically consider how aesthetic forms and audience–performer relationships have aligned themselves with developments in the modern market economy and, as an overarching theme, contemporary political concerns: in particular the widely disseminated discourse about democracy. Allusions to democratic parameters, where they are explicitly voiced, are frequently associated with suggestions of social amelioration and progress—in essence the notion that dance can propagate or at least mirror a freer, more equal, and therefore “better” kind of society.

Choreography, Democracy, and Capitalism

Late 1960s and 1970s performance theories abounded with calls for a democratization of theater and theatrical processes, which also encroached upon postmodern dance. These discussions were intertwined with a critical assessment of two decisive factors in public affairs—the political and financial systems—tending to associate traditional theater forms with undemocratic (or at least not “sufficiently” democratic) governmental structures as well as capitalist economics. Few writers are as succinct as Norman Brown in *Love’s Body* (1966):

Representative institutions depend upon the distance separating the spectators from the actor on the stage; the distance which permits both identification and detachment; which makes for a participation without action; which establishes the detached observer, whose participation consists in seeing and is restricted to seeing; whose body is restricted to the eyes. . . . Representative institutions depend upon the aesthetic illusion of distance. The detached observer, who participates without action, is the passive spectator. The division of citizens into politically active and passive is the major premise of modern political (party) organization. (1966, 119–20)

Importantly, Brown regards the conventional architecture of the theater—which divides audience and performers through the curtain line—as analogous to the institution of representative democracy in which politicians make decisions on behalf of a largely passive electorate. He proposes as a remedy a direct, participatory form of democracy as embodied in works by, for instance, the Living Theatre. Yet, the restrictions of the proscenium space with its “passive audience” have not only been construed within a framework of politics, as Brown illustrates, but have also been implicated in a critique of capitalism. Take for instance Richard Schechner, who criticizes the theater for being modeled on the “mercantile process.” Theater audiences, on his account, equate to customers and buyers, and the strict division between the backstage area (the domain of the “workers”) and the ornately decorated front-of-house with its aura of upper-class opulence replicates the division between a factory in which goods are produced and the shop where they are displayed and sold to clients: “Thus, in all these ways, the proscenium theater is a model of capitalism” (Schechner 1988 [1977], 183).

The decrease (or demise) of authorial control and intention in artworks has also been presented as an act of resistance to the societal status quo and notions of capitalist property rights. Roland Barthes’s 1967 text on “The Death of the Author,” in which he posits that “in literature it should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the ‘person’ of the author” (2006, 41), not only proved to be highly influential for literary critics, but also paved the way for a process of rethinking of the authorial role in other arts.

In Roger Copeland's strongly worded passage, as a result of Barthes's work, "individual authorship came to signify the totalitarian—or theocratic—practice of insisting on a single 'official' meaning (or interpretation) for every text. Authorship thus came to be pejoratively associated with the arbitrary exercise of *authority*" (2011, 45). Shared productions, such as collaborative projects, were deemed to be more egalitarian and less hierarchical than works created by a single artist; this line of thought dates back to Richard Wagner's conception of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as an art-world corollary of the requirement for "the passing over of egoism into Communism" (Wagner 1993, 78).

In terms of audience–performer relationships, a decrease in authorial control has often implied the activation of the spectator at the expense of the design or intention of the author or director. Audience participation in theater is perceived by some as a pedagogical instrument and form of artistic activism that is intended to empower oppressed groups of the population by transforming them into creative agents. This was perhaps most clearly expressed in Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (2008), a reinvention of theater inspired by the uprising of the proletarian movement in Brazil. By initiating a dialogue between actors and audience, the latter were enabled to impact on, and so alter, the performance itself.

These discourses all share a deep-seated belief in the efficacy of art as a mirror of society and tool for political change. It is probably fair to say that dance artists' discussions of the political implications of artistic forms were never as rigorous or differentiated as those in the neighboring discipline of theater, despite the fact that some publications readily applied the label of "democracy" to postmodern dance, such as Sally Banes in her publication on the Judson Dance Theater, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theatre, 1962–1964*. Yet, the rejection of theatrical dance conventions such as illusion and the proscenium stage can clearly be seen as "political": just as a picture frame distinguishes (visual) art from non-art, the institutional frame had marked dance as autonomous, "high," and, by implication, elitist. The new radical dance aesthetics, exemplified by postmodern choreographies such as those of the Judson Dance Theatre, displayed similar features to innovative theater work: performances used quotidian movement, took place outside traditional venues, valued presence over representation, and/or were created by dance "collectives."

In alignment with the view that illusionary art is a tool of bourgeois oppression (see Counsell 1996, 212) while its opposite is democratic and liberating, the audience–performer relationship was redefined to provide avenues of novel, non-hierarchical interactions. By eschewing fourth-wall naturalism and contemplation, works by Trisha Brown such as *Yellow Belly* (1969) anticipated current trends in which the spectator is acknowledged as an important interpretive force, and the audience and artist are assigned (in principle) equal status. Famously, some of Deborah Hay's and Anna Halprin's works (such as *Parades and Changes* in 1965) included audience interaction. In the same vein, criticism was leveled at established hierarchies, such as the top-down structures of dance companies, and circumscribed, mostly technique-based movement vocabularies, whether in ballet or modern dance. Contact Improvisation, which originated in the 1970s, engaged partners in physical situations of trusting interdependence that eschewed prescribed techniques and were regarded as truly egalitarian and free.³ Similarly, British New Dance, which writers such as Judith Mackrell (1991, 50) view—rightly or wrongly—as more politically charged than its American counterpart, pursued a progressive agenda by enabling amateurs to participate and increasing the dancers' contributions to a work through improvisation.

In short, postmodern dance could be seen as engendering a democratization of dance's production and reception. And ideas of egalitarianism, anti-authoritarianism, and freedom still underpin much contemporary choreography, at least in the Western world. American choreographer and academic Larry Lavender, for example, has described his current artistic oeuvre as "unfastened . . . from hierarchical choreographer–dancer relations, proscenium-based divisions of artistic experience, and the artistic conceit of reproducibility through 'set' movement performed each time in the same way" (Lavender 2011, 17). While such work is not always explicitly presented as manifesting

“democracy,” there are self-evident crossovers. As democratic politics fosters shared decision-making, some contemporary dance promotes a choreographic method based on equal opportunity for all in shaping the decisions affecting the production. Everyone is allowed to make a case for changing the existing framework, and there is intent to engender a communal identity, akin to that envisaged between the citizens in an “ideal” democratic state. The choreographer, in taking account of the various dancers’ ideas and contributions when devising the work, behaves as a sort of “delegate.” In even more egalitarian work, he or she may simply act as a facilitator, with the dance effectively an amalgamation of the numerous participants’ inputs—comparable to a direct democracy where citizens determine policy for themselves without any intermediate representatives (as happens, for instance, in referendums).

In the 2000s, performances that turned spectators into active participants by requiring them to move rather than remain seated, interact physically with performers, or wander around the site as one would in a museum, have been very much *en vogue*. Forms rooted in the anti-authoritarian protest and counterculture movements of the 1960s, such as “happenings,” promenade pieces, installation works, and site-specific pieces, are experiencing a major comeback. As audiences are, by virtue of their literal participation in these works, integral to their meaning-making processes, many⁴ regard them as advancing levels of aesthetic appreciation above and beyond the mere consumption or contemplation associated with traditional art forms. A flurry of publications in theater studies have recently set out to explore the phenomenon of immersive theatre (Machon 2013; White 2012).

Dance, along with theater and indeed music, has increasingly sought to provide immersive experiences that actively engage audiences, rather than leaving them as the passive recipients of onstage events. Probably one of the earliest and most radical examples is William Forsythe’s and Dana Caspersen’s installation work *White Bouncy Castle* (1997): a 40-meter-long, inflatable castle, akin to those found in fun fairs, where participants are invited to bounce around for a limited time period after paying an admission fee.⁵ The piece’s conception leads quite literally to the collapse of the performer–audience dichotomy: arguably, people are choreographers (producers), dancers, and spectators all at once. Thus, this work may be seen as the culmination of Forsythe’s efforts to “counteract the very authority of the choreographer, which he re-envisioned as curating the dancer’s collaborative freedom on stage” (Franko 2011, 99).

Like participatory or immersive performance, collaboration is an umbrella term that covers a wide spectrum of *modus operandi*. There are, for instance, *intercultural* collaborations or fusion techniques that testify to a globalization of dance trends: just to name one of many, the collaborative project *Kathakbox* by Birmingham-based Sonia Sabri Company and its involvement of specialists of different ethnicities from kathak, hip hop, contemporary dance, and African Caribbean dance. *Interdisciplinary* productions engage artists from different spheres, such as Carol Brown’s and Dorita Hannah’s site-sensitive collaborations across dance and architecture, including *Her Topia* (2005) which took place in Athens, and *Tongues of Stone* (2011) which re-imagined the city of Perth. Keeping abreast of new technology, *online* collaborations have been established between participants in diverse locations, for instance in the UK artist Joseph Hyde’s work *me and my shadow* (2012): an immersive event in which participants in four different countries interact via motion capture devices in a shared virtual space.

Collaboration also occurs as dancers, passers-by on the street, or other amateur performers combine to generate movement material. Examples encompass Larry Lavender’s inclusion of “donated” movement by random people walking past a museum in Dunedin, New Zealand, resulting in *Global Movement Synthesis* (2008); and the project *This Town Is a Mystery* (2012), organized by Headlong Dance Theatre in Philadelphia, in which audience members were invited to four homes in the city to enjoy dance theater performances by family members and a subsequent communal potluck dinner. Or take *Chain Reaction* (2012), a recent fringe production integrating installation and performance as part of a summer residency on a former industrial estate in Hackney, London. The female

artist, Alicia Radage, was suspended from the ceiling with a mud-filled bowl in her arms and the audience were asked to push and swing her above a large canvas, effectively making *them* the producers of a visual art work as the mud spilled onto the surface below with Radage merely the instrument of their creation.

Such works are part and parcel of an artistic trend across Western democracies. Susan Foster has observed that an understanding of choreography as “collaborating” has become prevalent since the 1980s. She argues that composition is now conceptualized as “a dialogue among all those participating in the project” and that the role of the choreographer has shifted from being “the inventor of dance movement” to the “manager, facilitator, or director of all those involved in the collaboration including dancers or artists working in other mediums” (Foster 2008, 25). And while Foster does not explicitly mention the political implications of this “decentering” of the author, Claire Bishop, a theorist of participatory (including performance) art, asserts that the “gesture of ceding some or all authorial control is conventionally regarded as more egalitarian and democratic than the creation of a work by a single artist” (2006, 12). It might moreover be seen as a counterpoint to the excessively individualist nature of free market capitalism espoused by new-right 1980s politicians such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher (see also Copeland 2011, 58).

Questioning Postmodernist Rhetoric

Some criticism has recently been leveled at participatory work in dance’s neighboring disciplines, mainly on aesthetic grounds. Speaking of a music concert by the London Contemporary Orchestra, which played works by Xenakis and Morton Feldman and was staged in the abandoned railway tunnels beneath London’s Waterloo Station, reviewer Andrew Dickson from *The Guardian* newspaper complained that the freedom to explore the area “came at a price: the sheer number of people moving around meant that it was near-impossible to hear the thing that most of us, presumably, were there for: the music itself” (2011).

But little criticism has as yet been directed at the *econo-political* implications of this type of work. The assumption that audiences invariably desire or in some sense need to interfere actively with a performance (or performance space) has often been left unquestioned. And, both in choreographic practice and theoretical writings on dance, we have become used to operating with terms that endorse a departure from conventional working methods and interpretive strategies. Take for instance the familiar talk of “challenging boundaries,” “defying binaries,” “thinking outside the box”; the poignant declaration by arts collective Duckie who see their work as “mixing the arthouse with the dosshouse” (quoted in Smith 2002); or the mission statement of Headlong Dance Theater, who seek to create “opportunities for shifts of consciousness and awareness” (Headlong n.d.).

The question is not whether such works are good or bad, accomplished or simplistic. What intrigues me is the frequent suggestion that they are liberatory, innovative, and anti-establishment, and thus (by implication) politically progressive. Political and economic parameters in the 2000s have surely changed dramatically from those of the 1960s, 1970s, and even the 1980s. So, while the experimental, collaborative, and cross-disciplinary work that emerged in the climate of the 1960s might have been socially transgressive *then*, it does not follow that it remains so today. In the following remarks, I shall take issue with the uncritical adoption of postmodernist rhetoric, in the process drawing attention to trends in modern market economics—a realm, which, while demonstrably at the root of much thought and debate on artistic developments, has received insufficient attention. Focusing on the emergence of the so-called *experience economy*, I shall assess the claims of innovation and difference with which we are bombarded in current discourse on contemporary performance.

As Bishop (2006, 12) recognizes, since the 1960s, the wave of participatory and collaborative art has most commonly been theorized against the backdrop of Marxist theorist Guy Debord’s highly

influential text *Society of the Spectacle* (1967). Debord argues that the “spectacle” is a product of advanced capitalism and the mass media society, and describes a societal system in which the image (representation) has superseded real-life human relations (action) so that “All that once was directly lived has become mere representation” (1994, thesis 1). Consequently, spectacular society has led to an impoverishment or even negation of life—“the more he contemplates the less he lives” (thesis 30)—and with it diminished authenticity, knowledge, human perception, community spirit, and critical thought.

Debord’s suggestion that physical involvement acts as a necessary precondition for social change corresponds with the central role accorded to physicality, immediacy, and presence in the ideologies of the New Left that heavily influenced political life in the 1960s and 1970s era, reflected through activist practices such as sit-ins and demonstrations that were intended to create physical and social bonds between their participants. In an article published roughly forty years later, Jacques Rancière argued that theater had reacted to the call for a denunciation of spectacle and iconophilia by reconceptualizing the spectator’s role in a twofold manner:

On the one hand, he must be pressed to switch from the status of the passive viewer to the status of scientist who observes phenomena and looks for their cause. On the other hand, the spectator has to leave the status of mere observer who remains still and untouched in front of a distant spectacle. He must be dragged away from his delusive mastery, drawn into the magic power of theatrical action where he will exchange the privilege of the rational viewer for the possession of its true vital energies. We acknowledge those two paradigmatic attitudes epitomized by Brecht’s epic theatre and Artaud’s theatre of cruelty. On the one hand, the spectator has to become more distant, on the other hand he has to lose any distance. (2004, n.p.)

Trends in current contemporary dance testify to these two divergent avenues, both of which require the spectator to eschew his (alleged) passive role as a mere viewer. On one hand, the phenomenon of the lecture performance picks up the thread of a reflexive 1960s format that was developed as a sub-genre of Performance Art (among others, by Robert Morris, Joseph Beuys, and Yvonne Rainer).⁶ Such works, although they might on occasion include interactive sections, mainly further their audience’s critical intellectual distance by thematizing the relation between art and epistemology, confronting aesthetic creation with a discourse on the conditions of its production, reducing movement to the point of stillness, and highlighting the educational role of the artist. In Western Europe, this is associated with artists such as Jérôme Bel, who tellingly regards himself as a “philosopher of dance” (Bel in Gladstone 2011), and Xavier Le Roy, who was aptly described by Bojana Cvejić as a “scientist cum dancer” (2010) on account of his professional background in molecular biology (in which he holds a Ph.D.). In Le Roy’s *Product of Circumstances* (1998), the cross-pollination of choreographic and scientific research is made explicit in the stage set, which resembles an academic lecture theater, and is reinforced by the choreographer’s theoretical excursions into scientific research, complete with slide shows of CT scans and statistical analyses.

The opposite end of the spectrum is represented by a large body of choreography in which the audience is drawn into the theatrical happenings, thus diminishing, if not negating any distance from the performance. Consider, for example, the following online description of the Forsythe piece *White Bouncy Castle*:

The visitor’s unavoidable inclusion in the idiosyncratic kinetics of Dana Caspersen and William Forsythe’s “White Bouncy Castle” creates a choreographic space where there are no spectators, only participants. The choreography that appears is the result of *complete physical destabilisation* and the resulting *social absurdity* [my emphases]. (Forsythe, n.d.)

Here, physical engagement is paramount. Notwithstanding the piece's conceptual nature, it does not seek to intellectualize or rationalize the performance (as an experience) but rather to induce sensations and feelings such as euphoria in its participants. Critics have been fiercely divided. *Guardian* reviewer Adrian Searle's witty use of onomatopoeia—"Boingy, boingy, boing, boing. A bouncy castle. A great big white bouncy castle. That's it" (1997, n.p.)—was countered by sculptor Antony Gormley's reproachful response: "Thank heaven for those who want to cross boundaries, invite the unexpected and allow people to do things they would not otherwise do" (1997, n.p.). Whatever one's view of the piece—which I suspect largely hinges on one's expectations of an artwork *per se*—the announcement that there are "no spectators" is noteworthy, as it palpably echoes Debord's call for a "theatre without spectators." This again gestures towards continuities between late 1960s discourses and present-day choreographic practice.

Experience and the Modern Economy

The term "experience economy" was first depicted and investigated in depth by businessmen and academics Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, who, in their 1999 book, argue that it constitutes the fourth stage of economic production after the agrarian, industrial, and service economies. The outputs of the experience economy are distinguished by a direct engagement of customers—now conceived as guests—and the provision of differentiated experiences in which they may immerse themselves, often actively. The shift in focus from the physical features of a product to the engagement of the customer *with* it, for instance through enhancing sensorial interactions, goes hand in hand with the creation of memorable experiences that are inherently subjective and personal: "No two people can have the same experience—period" (Pine and Gilmore 1999, 12). Pine and Gilmore see experiences as replacing the outmoded idea of the commodity as an undifferentiated product: "No company wants that word applied to its goods or services. Merely mentioning commoditization sends shivers down the spines of executives and entrepreneurs alike. Differentiation disappears, margins fall through the floor, and customers buy solely on the basis of price, price, price" (1). They conclude that "companies that stage experiences, on the other hand, increase the price of their offerings much faster than the rate of inflation simply because customers value experiences more highly" (14).

We thus arrive at the realization that performance theory and current business studies share a common cause against the standardization and mass production associated with the commodity: an ideological adversary of critical art when seen from the first perspective, and an obstacle to maximum profitability from the second. Even more surprisingly, perhaps, in order to achieve product differentiation and to escape the uniformity trap, Pine and Gilmore turn to performance theory itself as a framework and point of departure for sales strategies. Notably, they refer to texts by Richard Schechner, the very person who had warned forty years earlier about the division of classes witnessed both in traditional theater practice and the mercantile system, in the hope of liberating theatrical art from capitalist consumer society. As indicated by the subtitle *Work Is Theatre and Every Business Is a Stage*, Pine and Gilmore's book is scattered with literal and metaphorical allusions to theater. While the function of the service economy was to "deliver," that of the new experience economy is to "stage"; the seller is no longer a "provider" but a "stager," the buyer no longer a "client" but a "guest," and so on (Pine and Gilmore 1999, 6).

The kinds of experience in the new economy may be manifold. They include, in the food industry, the Rain Forest Café, with its numerous locations in the U.S. and overseas, where guests can dine surrounded by waterfalls watching tropical birds, fish, and even crocodiles; in the computing and cyberspace industry, stores that offer interactive, Web-based competitive gaming; and most prominently in the entertainment and leisure industry's theme parks, a trend inaugurated by Walt Disney as early as 1955. The most exciting and unusual experiences are said to be those that permit immersion, meaning that the guest "goes into" (Pine and Gilmore 1999, 31) the experience and becomes

an active part of it. Business strategies have thus accommodated and wholeheartedly embraced the very avant-garde impulses proposed by Richard Schechner and his colleagues.

The parallels between the experience economy and certain contemporary dance forms are, I believe, obvious. Indeed, in Susan Foster's theoretical writings on post-1980s collaborative forms of dance, the notion of "experience" is notably prominent. Dance, she argues, is now construed as "the presentation of a positioning of movement in a particular location that will offer an experience, not a message, to the audience" (Foster 2008, 25); and in contrast to traditional concepts, spectatorship now means "to engage in an *experience* of/with bodily identity" (26, my emphasis).

Let us briefly observe some (further) concrete examples. *Back of the Bus* by the New Zealand Java Dance company, whose stated mission is to "capture audiences with visceral impressive dance that communicates" (Java, 2011), conducted audiences on a coach tour through various cities, allowing them to disembark at certain stops including the bus station and other locations to experience short dance works (see Photos 1 and 2). A successful piece, whose critics praised its "kinesthetic" quality and the closeness between audience and performers, it experimented with altered perceptions of both space (being seated inside a moving vehicle) and time (which did not "stop" as in a darkened auditorium but flowed as the city's landmarks were seen to pass by).

Photo 1. Scene from *Back of the Bus* by Java Dance Company. Performer: (f–b) Natalie Hona and Rosie Christie. AWESOME Festival, Perth. Photo: Jarrad Seng.





Photo 2. Scene from *Back of the Bus* by Java Dance Company. Sacha Copland. Otago Festival of the Arts. Photo: Tom Hoyle.

Sleep no more (2003 London, 2011 NYC), by the British physical theatre company Punchdrunk Theatre, provided audiences with a welcome drink (wine, beer, or non-alcoholic), and asked them to put on masks and remain silent before taking them into a disused warehouse in Manhattan, which they could either explore at leisure or follow a series of theatrical and choreographic scenes inspired by Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (see Photos 3 and 4). This work combined many of the characteristics of Pine and Gilmore's experience economy: as in a theme park, in which multiple areas within the location offer a variety of stimuli, there were rooms dedicated to different themes. One, for instance, was filled with simple metal beds, resembling a turn-of-the-nineteenth-century orphanage. The stimulation of multiple senses was also emphasized: while the visual field was restricted by the wearing of masks, taste sensations were supplied by the drink as an "overture" and tactile ones as the performers touched visitors throughout the event.

Resisting Capitalism?

Collaborative and participatory performances of this kind respond to the current Zeitgeist and the possibilities offered by new media. Some are very skillfully executed and extremely enjoyable to watch (or rather, partake in). But do these artists really push boundaries and challenge societal norms—aims that are often implicit in the claims of companies and choreographers who describe their work as "critical," "questioning our habitual way of perceiving," and so forth? And do they, moreover, successfully stand against the arbitrary, undemocratic power structures that 1960s performance theories saw as being tied to commercial vested interests? With the development of the experience economy, it stands to question to what extent recent trends in dance performance successfully avoid the "commoditization trap" and present alternative paradigms to the dominant economic system.

As outlined earlier, the rise of participatory, collaborative art was intimately connected with a critique of the "spectacle," which in dance was rooted in the tradition of aristocratic (and thus elite) forms of court ballet that served to showcase the power of the state. However, in today's globalized media- and business-focused societies, the spawning of alternatives to "spectacle" is no longer



Photo 3. Scene from Sleep No More by Punchdrunk Theatre. (l-r) Nicholas Bruder as Macbeth and Sophie Bortolussi as Lady Macbeth with audience member. © Yaniv Schulman.

sufficient to resist dominant power structures. One might even contend (though some caution is necessary) that the heyday of passive “spectating” is drawing to a close, if indeed its demise has not already been heralded. We can observe that in particular since the new millennium, a host

Photo 4. Scene from Sleep No More by Punchdrunk Theatre. Matthew Oaks (center) with audience members. ©Yaniv Schulman.



of interactive and participatory media—such as reality TV, multiplayer computer and video gaming, and platforms such as wikis, blogs, tagging, and social bookmarking—have flooded consumer markets. These are slowly but surely replacing the traditional audience modes of passive watching and listening. If it is true that the spectacle belongs to a previous economic age and outmoded societal structures, it makes little sense for present-day artists to rebel against it.

A large body of texts, notably by the autonomous Marxist “Italian laboratory,” including authors such as Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, and Maurizio Lazzarato, have recently examined the shift from industrial society with its mass production of material goods toward the “creative work,” which is common in post-Fordist societies. The new type of labor associated with the updated model of capitalism is *immaterial*, “where labour produces . . . goods such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, and communication” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 290). These authors perceive major commonalities to exist between art (and/or the artist) and broader economic developments.⁷ Artists, on their account, may be viewed as model entrepreneurs, notably because the precarious nature of their work (which tends to be insecure, flexible, casual, etc.) has come to define current employment practices more generally, especially for younger generations. Hence, we observe a shift of the artist’s position from the periphery of society—occupying a bohemian or genius outsider status—into the very center and limelight of current economic and employment practices.

Crucial to our context, however, is the nature of this new species of labor that involves the production, experience, and manipulation of affects, such as passion and sociality, and the promotion of new, creative forms of subjectivity—very different from those of the traditional worker who was passively subject to his employer’s demands. Immaterial labor not only exercises one’s emotional and communicative abilities, but crucially “involves social interaction and cooperation” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 294), implying that participation, collaboration, and human contact are at the very heart of contemporary capitalism. This rapprochement between the artistic and economic spheres as posited by the Italian laboratory—mirroring in many ways Pine and Gilmore’s alignment of work, theater, and experience—is essentially ambiguous. On one hand, immaterial labor is tied up with a risk of exploitation consisting in “the injunction to ‘be active, to communicate, to relate to others’ and to ‘become subjects’” (Mitropoulos following Lazzarato (1996), 2005, 91; see also Gill and Pratt’s discussion, 2008, 19). But on the other hand, the autonomy and creativity of labor allow workers to become protagonists and potentially engender change (Gill and Pratt 2008, 5).

Clearly, if participation and cooperation are central both to present-day working practices and to much contemporary choreography, it raises a question of whether the latter reflects—rather than opposes—the recent shift toward new forms of producer and consumer culture. Maurizio Lazzarato highlights the importance of cooperation in business environments, first among workers themselves and secondly between workers and consumers: “The activation of both productive cooperation and the social relationship with the consumer is materialized within and by the process of communication” (1996, n.p.). In dance, this equates to the collaboration between dancers and choreographer (who has ceded some of his/her authority), and between performers and their audiences (aka consumers) as is seen in participatory or immersive work. Lazzarato also emphasizes that, “The move beyond the Taylorist organization of services is characterized by the integration of the relationship between production and consumption, where in fact *the consumer intervenes in an active way in the composition of the product*” (1996, n.p., my emphasis). It is easy to see how the compulsion for workers and consumers to be “creative” finds its dance equivalent in works co-produced by choreographers and audiences, or in radical cases (e.g., *White Bouncy Castle*) by the audience alone.

Following Lazzarato’s claim that “the goal of our postindustrial society is to construct the consumer/communicator—and to construct it as ‘active’” (1996, n.p.), audience participation could be seen as buying into and proliferating the ideas of activation and formation of creative subjects that are so central to post-industrial conceptions of labor. The production of interactive

experiences, the immersion of the “guest” in or within the product, the individuation and personalization of affects tailored toward the participant (consumer), the emphasis on process rather than product, the highlighting of physicality, the engagement of the senses, the creation of themes or multiple spaces—all are objectives shared both by recent performance practices and developments in corporate marketing and post-Fordist economics.

The similarity between the current performance Zeitgeist and contemporary business strategies may well induce a suspicion that the performing arts have become enshrined in, or internalized by, the very pillars of the capitalist system that experimental artists in the 1960s set out to undermine. This is not to deny that participatory, collaborative works had a critical and radical impetus in the 1960s in their endeavor to turn audiences into socially responsible citizens and further democratic dialogue. But now, under totally changed economic and political parameters, they might be seen as morphing into a tool for the dissemination of post-Fordist economic norms. As Claire Bishop poignantly observes, “Through the discourse of creativity, the elitist activity of art is democratized, although today this leads to business rather than to Beuys” (2012, 16).⁸

As the boundaries and meaning of aesthetics have extended while the gap between art and economics has narrowed, how are we now to understand the difference between a visit to, say, an ordinary commercial theme park attraction and an interactive physical theater or dance experience? A precedent has already been set by Marisa Carnesky, an award-winning artist whose promenade work *Carnesky’s Tarot Drome* I attended in 2012 in the London Old Vic Tunnels: an imaginatively conceived piece featuring individual face-to-face interactions with actors and dancers portraying the various cards of the tarot deck (see [Photos 5](#) and [6](#)). Carnesky has also designed a large-scale “ghost train” ride featuring live performers, which is now permanently installed in the UK’s amusement capital, Blackpool. In the context outlined above, how are we to determine which of these is art and which is merely a “creative product”? On what basis is one piece assigned to the sphere of bourgeois entertainment culture and the other construed as an artistic and thus (potentially) anti-establishment enterprise? The fuzzy distinction between aesthetics and creativity, and the renunciation of conventional theater spaces with their semiotic signifiers (black-outs, curtains, etc.), make such questions increasingly difficult to answer.

Political Emancipation?

The participatory impulse of the 1960s generation was rooted in an assumption of art’s efficacy as a tool of resistance to the status quo: in essence the view that art is potentially a form of political critique or indeed activism. But it would seem that many current dance artists’ claims to be critical or radical remain somewhat vague, with little indication of how or why their works express any criticism. Indeed, in times of perceived apathy, when political party engagement and voter turnouts are at all-time historical lows, establishment politicians have seized on the opportunity to employ dance as a vehicle for their own social agendas. The New Labor government in the UK (1997–2010) is an apt example, with Tony Blair consciously promoting and funding art (including dance) as an instrument for achieving his vision of a reformed society:

Years ago, before coming to Government, I said that we would make the arts and culture part of our “core script.” In other words, it was no longer to be on the periphery, an add-on, a valued bit of fun when the serious work of Government was done; but rather it was to be central, an essential part of the narrative about the character of a new, different, changed Britain. (Blair 2007, n.p.)

This approach triggered critical responses from both left-wing and conservative voices. The former includes sociologist Ruth Levitas, who argues that it merely veiled rather than actually overcame social problems, leaving intact the “class-based character of society” within the stable parameters



Photo 5. Scene from Carnesky's *Tarot Drome* by Carnesky Productions. Performer: Marusha Geymayer-Oblak as *The Tower* with audience member. Photo: Sarah Ainslie.

of essentially capitalist forms of exploitation (Levitas 1998, 188–9). The objections of the right, meanwhile, can be summarized by *Telegraph* journalist Rupert Christiansen's acerbic comment:

The Arts Council has been reduced to the status of a government agency, largely staffed by robotic bureaucrats, who only know how to fill in forms and meet targets. The Arts Minister, meanwhile, plays puppetmaster, invisibly pulling the strings so that the arts will fulfil their role in a grand strategy of social inclusion without really understanding how the marionette dances. (2008, n.p.)

The issue at stake is whether such politically driven investment in dance—motivated in part by opposition to Margaret Thatcher's infamous statement that “there is no such thing as society”



Photo 6. Scene from Carnesky's *Tarot Drome* by Carnesky Productions. Performer: Suri Sumatra as *The Empress* with audience member. Photo: Sarah Ainslie.

(1987, n.p.)—was a welcome development, affording art more power to impact on external affairs, or whether art merely became the stakeholder of a disingenuous and discredited brand of state politics.⁹ Both views have their adherents, but from the specific perspective of art's role as a liberatory and anti-authoritarian force, Blair's incorporation of dance within his political "narrative about . . . Britain" appears deeply problematic.

There is a growing body of scholarly literature in the theater arts that expresses concerns about the agenda pursued by the New Labor government, whose discourse of social inclusion revolved around the promotion of ideals such as cohesion and accord through cultural means in an attempt to counter the individualism and inequality of the Thatcher era. Participation in art was of central importance to this project. The 1997 report *Use or Ornament?* by François Matarasso, which arose from empirically based research into "The Social Impact of the Participation in the Arts" (the report's subtitle) and which cited fifty benefits of such participation, had a wide-reaching impact on British arts policy. Under the subtitle "Active, Engaged Citizens," the document states that involvement in art "opens routes into the wider democratic process and encourages people to *want* to take part" (Matarasso 1997, 77). Several pages on, we read that "participatory arts projects are wholly in accord with these new, inclusive approaches to community and social development" (85). As Liz Tomlin inferred in a paper delivered at the 2013 FIRT conference in Barcelona, the importance assigned to participation by the Arts Council and the obligation to create new audiences as a precondition for funding might well have brought about the significant increase in participatory theatre in the UK. (Undoubtedly, the same observation applies to dance too.)

While the "inclusion" discourse seems at first glance to be principled and just, one might question the way in which New Labor sought to align the arts with the modern market economy under the opportune label of creativity. For instance, Point 38 of the Matarasso document mentioned above claims that participation in art can "erode the distinction between consumer and creator" (1997, 11). Note how this choice of words is resonant of business and marketing; there is no mention

of audiences or spectators here, but rather of consumers. Such alignment between political, aesthetic, and business concepts has, as some scholars argue, led to the production of art that is affirmative rather than critical. As Michael McKinnie writes, the function of the arts in New Labor's policy

... is to confirm and reproduce dominant social ideals, and, in the process, encourage a sense of mutual well-being. New Labour's understanding of the arts, therefore, is wholly affirmative. Its policy does not acknowledge that art might be critical, subversive, or socially dissonant, conceptions of art which Labour Party policy once thought possible, and, to a limited degree, tried to encourage. (2004, 188)

Levitas concurs, reasoning that "while inclusion, as the obverse of exclusion, is repressive of conflict, it simultaneously, and for the same reason, conjures up a vision of a good society. If this vision is collapsed into the present . . . , it becomes a defence of the status quo" (1998, 188). If we accept this line of argument, then rather than being potentially an instrument *against* the prevailing system, art is being pressured to conform to trends dictated from above: denying artists genuine choice over their working methods as a consequence of specific policy and public funding directives. Participatory dance might thus be seen as playing into the hands of the political elite and furthering the agenda and values of the incumbent government.

Leaving party politics aside, the issue at stake is whether the function of art is to be antithetical—advancing a new or alternative social order (a view advocated in the writings of Frankfurt school theorists such as Theodor Adorno)¹⁰—or whether it should act as an instrument to reinforce existing societal tenets. German philosopher Juliane Rebentisch addresses this question in a recent book chapter. Referring to the art critic Nicolas Bourriaud, whose well-known exploration of relational aesthetics based on ideas of communication, encounter, and participation arguably combats social exclusion in similar way to Blair's policies, Rebentisch argues:

Instead of asserting art's autonomy in order to represent a utopia unattainable to any concrete politics, art is to become an instrument of the practical-political realization of what is micro-topically possible: assisting in achieving social participation. In effect, however, this theoretical shift merely implements a paradoxical sublation of art into life that once again cements the difference between the ideal practice of art and a less-than-ideal reality. However, this difference can no longer be conceptualised as aesthetic difference, but reinstalls itself as social difference. For the communicative practice of art still operates in the sheltered space of the art institution, relating to its other—a non-ideal reality—from the distance of privilege. (2013, 90)

Many of today's tendencies, which are doubtless driven in part by current arts policies, seem to reinforce prevailing values. They frequently advance, for example, an idealistic and somewhat facile conception of democracy based on communal togetherness and consensus. Take for instance the Belgian choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, an associate artist at Sadler's Wells. He proclaims of the 2005 collaborative work *Zero Degrees*, which according to its DVD cover "challenges, prompts, and inspires" that, "Every single identity is a link between two others. You feel like you really get somewhere because something is shared. If people were educated in those terms we'd have a real melting p[o]t, not a point of conflict" (*Zero Degrees* DVD booklet 2008). Such concepts of harmony and integrity, having been abandoned as ideal properties of the traditional "beautiful" artwork, are being reintroduced through the back door as features of the social process of creation, or qualities of the participants. Similar observations can be applied to immersive work. Boris Groys, a philosopher and expert on socialist and postmodern art, argues that, "When the viewer is involved in artistic practice from the outset, every piece of criticism he utters is self-criticism" (Groys 2008b, 21). The bonds created between the performer and the spectator (aka guest), and the assumption of the audience's complicity in the piece might make the latter

less likely to assess the work critically than they would from the more impartial perspective of a conventional stage performance.

There are other valid conceptions of democracy and “togetherness” than those embraced by the Blair government: ones that accept opposition and antagonism as major constituents of a democratic politics. Take the French philosopher Jacques Rancière: rather than highlighting participatory equality and mutual dependency, he portrays democracy as in essence a messy and chaotic affair, rooted in struggles and dissent from the prevailing discourse. There is a continual negotiation between, on one hand, people’s often excessive desires and rejection of rule by others, and on the other “a form of government” (2011, 47) that seeks to reign in individual excess: “Democracy implies a practice of dissensus, one that it keeps re-opening and that the practice of ruling relentlessly plugs” (54). Such a perspective invites a rethinking of the relation between the political and the aesthetic: not one that is entirely dominated by conviviality, but which accepts friction and tension as integral parts of the social and artistic fabric.

While many voices continue to emphasize the benefits of joint authorship in sociopolitical, health, and ethical terms,¹¹ a blind eye has too often been turned to the political problems with collaborative projects. As many politicians will testify, finding democratic consensus often amounts to locating the lowest common denominator. Recent U.S. politics provides examples of the concession of principled objectives in order to secure a sufficiently widespread agreement, as seen for instance in Barack Obama’s watered-down reform of healthcare. In the context of art creation, such compromise might involve coalescing around a basic set of identifiable principles and aesthetic choices on which all participants can agree—not necessarily to the benefit of the work in terms of its sophistication, or its capacity to express a radical message. Roger Heaton, writing on composer–choreographer relationships, complains that “the fruits of collaboration, with a meager handful of notable exceptions, are like anything designed by committee: they creak with compromise” (1995, 12).

There are admittedly more optimistic accounts of collaboration, such as Rudi Laermans’s, who regards contemporary artistic group work as superseding “traditional forms of labor division” (2012, 94), as they are based on “modes of ‘team building’” (95) and “agreed procedures” (94), which foster “egalitarian regimes of production, discussion and decision-making” (95) and result in a “unity of the difference” (98) that unites “humankind beyond class, gender or ethnic differences” (96). There can be little doubt that some forms of creative practice, especially those pursued as “research” in the sense Laermans considers, aim to achieve such objectives, or that a reflective stance by artists towards their collaborations is clearly desirable. However, even in cases where ground rules for interaction are carefully established in advance, there can be gulfs between theory and practice. For instance, where several people are involved, the majority might place their objectives above those of any given individual with the consequence that certain participants are sidelined or suppressed.

In Politics “proper,” the separation of powers is used to guard against the tendency for authority to concentrate in a single institution, protecting against the danger (in extreme cases) of democracy morphing into mob rule and the “tyranny of the majority,” a term associated with John Stuart Mill (1859, 13). In a similar vein, Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau (1985) argue that some democratic models, in their efforts to build a majoritarian consensus, run the danger of depriving minority groups (including classes, races, or religions) of their rights and suppressing divergent opinions. In essence, then, there are (at least) two types of problem with “democratic” decision-making in application to art: (i) seeking universal agreement leads to difficulties in making *any* decision, and thereby might compromise aesthetic quality; and (ii) if opting instead for “majority rule,” one runs a risk of overlooking the voices and interests of dissenting minorities within the group.

A few researchers have recently begun to sound caution about a lack of explicit agreements or consent on ethical issues during collaborative devising processes—casting doubt on Laermans’s

somewhat idealized view. Christopher Bannerman, head of the London-based multidisciplinary ResCen (Centre for Research into Creation in the Performing Arts), whose work is committed to bridging practice and academia, has had multiple first-hand experiences of collaborative working modes. He warns of the “physical and psychological risks” of “democratic ensemble work” (Bannerman and McLaughlin 2009, 70), for instance when participants are asked to disclose their inner emotional lives to others as part of a creative process, or (one might add) when forceful personalities dominate at the expense of shier ones.

Some immersive works raise similar questions about pressure being placed on members of the public to participate, which could be perceived as intrusive or embarrassing: far from promoting democratic values this may deny “real” choice and agency to the individual. *Guardian* reviewer Dickson complains that such practices “smack of triviality as well as a low-level fascism in their treatment of the ‘up for it’ audience. Nor is there any underpinning philosophy: it’s just party time, and you’d better join in” (2011, n.p.). Radical German choreographer Felix Ruckert admits that audiences of his productions such as *Hautnah* (1995) and *Ring* (1999), which emphasize extreme intimacy in spectator–performer encounters, often find themselves in situations they perceive as “stressful.” He justifies this by saying (among other things) that it “sharpens their perception” (in Reardon 1999, n.p.), and that the confrontation of intense emotions and playing with power structures are central elements of his performance strategy. Nonetheless, issues of respect, agency, and the need for boundaries in audience participation are vital issues that arise in this and similar contexts.

In my own experience where audience participation is concerned, it can often be quite prescriptive and not allow for individual aberrations or liberties. For instance, in Tino Sehgal’s *These associations*, which was part of the 2012 Unilever series at the Tate Modern in London, the performers/volunteers approached audience members to talk about significant moments in their lives. When a young man with an American accent came to speak to me, the conversation was anything but mutual: he reeled off a seemingly pre-prepared speech without responding to my attempt to engage with him in more constructive dialogue.¹² Punchdrunk’s *The Drowned Man* (2013)—a work I recently attended in London, which featured an outstandingly atmospheric set and startling performance vignettes from the cast of dancer-actors—did not fully, as suggested in its program notes, “reject the passive obedience usually expected of audiences” (Punchdrunk 2013, 16). Despite the opportunity to walk around and experience the action from one’s chosen standpoint, interaction was limited by a team of black-masked stewards who prevented spectators from participating in the “wrong” ways. One enthusiastic member of my party was admonished for ringing a hand-bell discovered on set, and another for drinking from a glass (which looked deliberately placed to invite the action) and climbing an earth-mound that turned out to be for the performers’ exclusive use. It seemed that the commitment to audience involvement was qualified: anyone who appeared to affect the pre-rehearsed plot, even trivially, was immediately relegated to the role of a bystander.

Conclusion

The aspiration of late 1960s and 1970s performers to transform audiences into politically responsible citizens and explode previous conventions of art reverberates to some extent in the collaborative, participatory work being produced today. The overcoming of social difference and prejudice is, for instance, at the core of Headlong’s *This Town Is a Mystery*: “breaking bread with someone annihilates stereotypes,” the company suggests, referring to the post-performance communal dinner shared with attendees (Headlong, n.d.). The fact that such statements have a benevolent ring and promote welcome civic values should not, however, lead us to overlook the more deep-seated problem of the adoption of performance parameters and terminology by both political and economic establishment forces.

In the wake of an uneasy rapprochement between these spheres, the function of participatory work is not obviously to liberate audiences, or to offer alternative visions of society. It might instead be seen as often being socially affirmative: furthering values that coincide with the wishes of current governments or powerful economic interests. These may or may not be progressive, but in any case, participatory art today occupies a different space than it did a few decades ago, often mirroring rather than challenging accepted features of business, political, and social life.

In the context of current choreography, the renunciation of traditional choreographic devising processes and promotion of new forms of audience involvement are often hailed as signifiers of social progress. This, again, is questionable. Clearly, gestures of rebellion made sense at a time when the theater, the museum, or concert hall were institutions that wielded power, authority, and performed “gatekeeper” functions as they did in the 1960s. But now these bodies have long since been stripped of their exclusive role, replaced by other forms of cultural authority (cf. Groys 2008a, 18–9). What was a provocation in times past might now merely be an adaptation to market forces, such that when artists question traditional aesthetic concepts and the institution of theater today, they are no longer undermining the market but simply adjusting to its logic. The desire to resist the “hegemony” of more traditional performance could thus potentially morph into a new and different culture of conformism.

My remarks are intended primarily as a diagnosis of current trends rather than a normative statement on artistic quality. I certainly do not wish to denigrate participation *per se*, and personally have found many such productions cleverly conceived and interesting. It is evident, however, that qualities of reflection and deliberation, in our fast-moving times, are frequently rejected as “uncool.” The stance of Headlong Dance Theatre—which seems typical of much current opinion—is that “being the show is better than watching the show” (Headlong, n.d.). Better in what regard? When the younger generation races through TV channels, fast-forward DVDs to skip “boring” scenes, play computer games with a flick of the wrist, and are constantly urged to interact with various media—and fast!—it seems the practice of contemplation and the act of concentration on still or slow-moving images (or indeed, no images at all) are increasingly sidelined in favor of activities that engage the person in more immediate ways.

It is unsurprising that such preferences are being widely reflected in our performance practices. But as Jacques Rancière (2004) reminds us, spectatorship is not necessarily a passive state, but can encompass the active translation and interpretation of the material presented by the artist. Moreover, interaction need not be literal or physical but can be part and parcel of the viewing or listening process. As Umberto Eco pointed out in 1962 in “The Poetics of the Open Work” (with specific regard to music), there are different degrees of possible collaboration by the addressee depending on the openness of the artwork itself, including “the *theoretical, mental* collaboration” (1989 [1962], 11) required when interpreting a piece. This clearly applies to dance as well.

It is important to recognize that the pieces discussed in this essay involve the audience in very different ways: in *Back of the Bus*, they are still mostly seated though literally transported into changing environments, influencing the performance mostly through their position in the vehicle. At the other end of the spectrum, *White Bouncy Castle* represents the participants’ full involvement as quasi-performers and choreographers themselves. Many such works bring the issue of the aesthetic versus the non-aesthetic into sharp relief, raising questions of whether they are just fun or “high” art, a mere funfair exhibit or an artistic enterprise. In an interesting way, they even question the validity of this question itself. Yet, if art is to effect a change in consciousness, then a more differentiated perspective on the political dimensions and intentions of such work would be desirable. Whether or not a piece is anti-establishment or liberatory obviously depends on various factors in its composition, message, or mode of presentation. But it is not as crystal clear as some practitioners would have it that participatory performance is self-evidently progressive. The very opposite is sometimes the case.

Notes

1. See for instance Gabriele Klein's discussion of Jochen Roller's piece *Perform Performing* (2012, 4–6). Klein's essay is included in a recent special issue of *Performance Research* entitled "On Labour and Performance," which contains several articles discussing pertinent issues—see also Bojana Kunst's (2012) piece in the same publication.

2. Immersive works, following Josephine Machon's definition, "seek to exploit all that is experiential in performance, placing the audience at the heart of the work. Here experience should be understood in its fullest sense, to feel *feelingly*—to undergo" (2013, 22).

3. Sally Banes has commented on the "social and political connotations" of this form, which she sees as encompassing "freedom and adaptation" as well as "trust and cooperation" (1977, 20).

4. One of the most influential advocates for such work, albeit from the perspective of the visual arts, is Nicolas Bourriaud who also makes specific references to democratic parameters; see his book *Relational Aesthetics* (2002).

5. Originally commissioned by Artangel, London, under the title *Tight Roaring Circle*, it has been shown in various locations in the last fifteen years, most recently in June/July 2013 at the Berliner Festspiele (http://www.berlinerfestspiele.de/de/aktuell/festivals/foreign_affairs/fa13_programm/fa13_programm_forsythe/fa13_veranstaltungsdetail_forsythe_63458.php). According to the Web site, the admission prices are €4 for adults/ €2 for children, for a fifteen-minute experience.

6. For further discussion of lecture performances see Patricia Milder (2011).

7. For a more substantive overview see Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt's (2008) excellent summative account of pertinent issues around immaterial labor and cultural work, including an introduction to the main arguments of autonomous Marxism and its substantive criticism.

8. Bishop is referring here to Beuys's idea that everyone can be an artist. In dance, of course, we can go as far back as Rudolf von Laban and his "democratic" movement choirs composed of amateur dancers.

9. In another national context, concerns about political lobbying to influence decision-making have been voiced about the National Endowment for the Arts, founded in 1965 as an independent agency of the United States Federal Government. See for instance the discussion of the Karen Finley case in Beavis (2003, in particular 46–68). By comparison, the situation in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark is aptly depicted by Lena Hammergren (2011).

10. In Adorno's texts, this is associated with modern art's autonomy: "Insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness" (1997, 227). Mass culture is subject to conformism and is thus socially affirmative, whereas "authentic art" offers social criticism and can thus be a corrective to the capitalist order.

11. See for instance Karen Barbour's 2008 relevant article on *Dancers and Choreographers in Collaboration*, which describes the shift from "traditional" dancer and choreographer roles to "co-creators" (49) in terms of providing dancers with "affirming" or "empowering" experiences and "a sense of personal fulfilment" (48). By contrast she highlights the "didactic or overtly tyrannical practices of some choreographers" (44) in conventional choreographic settings.

12. For reasons of balance, I should note that *Guardian* journalist Laura Cumming (2012) had an experience quite contrary to my own.

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