AUDIENCE AS PERFORMER

The Politics Of Audiences Who Make Art

Submitted by *008008* to the University of Exeter as a dissertation towards the degree of *MA in Drama Research*

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I certify that all material in this dissertation that is not my own work has been identified and that no material is included for which a degree has previously been conferred upon me

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ABSTRACT

This research explores audience interaction and participation in art. It focuses on ideas of agency and democracy in the working methods of such artists as Blast Theory, Janet Cardiff, WochenKlausur and Oda Projesi. It therefore looks at the examples of games, audio walks, and dialogical art, which these practitioners work in. It discusses whether creative audiences can achieve to be of equal status to the artist through certain methods of interaction, and could therefore be called audience performers/artists, blurring the line between the performer and the audience. The main critical discussion it includes is that between Grant Kester's *Conversation Pieces*, and, in opposition, Claire Bishop's *Participation* and *The Social Turn*. Furthermore it seeks to discuss a practical approach, not merely an academic one, and should provide a guide book on these practitioners and a discussion on their methods of interaction and participation.

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INTRODUCTION

In starting my practice as a director, I was interested to see how other artists approach working with and around their audiences. I specifically say other artists (rather than other directors), as I find a transdisciplinary approach in art important in general, and think that looking at one genre only (e.g. theatre, or fine art, or performance art) is too limiting in order to work creatively. I believe in an art that does not only speak to, but with its audiences, and tries to be as little coercive as possible. I am not sure however, whether I believe in an art that provides some kind of agency for its audiences. The case studies presented in this research are of interest to me, that's why they have been singled out: they provide an approach I find interesting and that I am trying to relate to my own practice. As a director I would argue that interactive art is always intrinsically political, if not by content, then definitely by the methods used to interact with the audience. As an artist I must ask myself if the methods I use are ethically viable and achieve what I want to achieve, at best by not oppressing the audience, who, and I have to be aware of that, may not want to interact.

I think directors need to engage with their audiences, and one of the more extreme ways to do this, is to create interactive pieces of art, such as interactive performance, and participatory installations. In any work of art, artists need to be aware of their audience, and how this audience, or these audiences[1] are put in relation to the work of art (whether this be in fine art, or performance). This is the reason why I, as an artist and director, want to interrogate different artists,

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[1] Throughout this research I will be using the singular of audience, and the plural audiences interchangeably. This should not take away from the fact that audiences are always plural, there are multiple audiences within an audience, as Susan Bennett has pointed out in *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*. Therefore, the reader shall be aware, that even when the singular audience is written, this audience is in fact made out of plural audiences, even if this is not explicitly mentioned.

and their relations with their audiences, with a focus on interactive or participatory arts practices and performance. I will be investigating an idea of audiences who perform. By perform I do not mean a social sense of the performance of everyday-life, but a specific act of creation in relation to the artwork. It is this interaction with the work of art, and/or the artists that throws up questions of coercion and oppression of an audience, by forcing them to do something they would not do otherwise, as Helen Freshwater points out in her handy and concise guide *Theatre and Audiences*. Moreover, and moving against this idea of oppression, we see an emergence of a social and political movement of the development of agency through participation and a democratisation of art projects and processes, which was especially prominent in the 1960s, but dates back as far as Greek theatre. Important here are Augusto Boal and his spect-actors, who take actions against and find solutions for their oppressions. Since Boal's practice is difficult to transfer to Western political settings, as has been argued in Mady Schutzman's article *Activism, Therapy, or Nostalgia? Theatre of the Oppressed in NYC*, and in Douglas L. Paterson *A Role To Play For Theatre Of The Oppressed*, we will be looking at the work of WochenKlausur and Oda Projesi instead, as I find them more appropriate in this context. The democratisation of art projects should be conceived as the active involvement of audiences in the making of a work of art, and who are of equal standings to the artists and possess equal say (and thus, or that's the idea at least, are without oppression, as everyone is given an equal opportunity to participate in and change the work of art and the structures which govern it). The terms oppression and coercion in this research focus on whether audiences are forced to do something, or given free will and free reign in creating and performing the work of art together with, or as separate from the

artists. Moreover agency is used in the sense of overcoming this oppression (or every-day-life oppressions), and as a political catalyst for triggering change. All these terms have to do with the politics of art, which is meant as the social and power structures that underlie the methods and content of the work of art. Wether they are political is not really the question. Far more important is "in what way are they political"? Where do the methods used and the content portrayed place the power, and do we find a definition of equality or democratic say in the work of these artists?

Written by an artist, this study uses audiences as a starting point, to try and configure how artists and audiences can work together, rather than being set apart as different (and in the case of audiences often as seemingly inferior), to create a work of art. The terms audience interaction and participation are vital in this research. Gary Izzo, in *The Art of Play*, has written on the dichotomy of these terms and the difficulty in defining what they mean. For clarity and readability both will be used interchangeably in this context. Izzo's own research is less interesting for us in this research, since he concerns himself with interactive entertainment, whereas I look at mostly political art. Interactive and participating audience members are performers, they are audiences who become performers, and thus, at least by linguistic definition, should be seen as of an equal standing in terms of hierarchy, and direct influence on the work of art, rather than being inferior to the professional performers and artists.

Much of the study on audiences however, has focused on either the semantic reception of a piece of art or its phenomenology (important here is Susan Bennett and her book *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, as well as semioticians such as Elaine Aston and George Savona *Theatre as a Sign System*, Keir Elam *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*,

Jens Roselt *Phänomenologie des Theaters*, and Marco de Marinis *Dramaturgy of the Spectator*). With the exception of de Marinis and Bennett, none of these will be mentioned. They are important, as they engage with audiences and how we, as audiences, perceive a piece of art. Nonetheless I find semiotic and phenomenological approaches are written about widely, and I am more interested in the political aspects of interactive practices. Moreover all this research has been undertaken by academics, not by practitioners. One reason why Herbert Blau, and his study on *Audiences* is not mentioned, is that it seems too academic, and therefore removed from praxis, to consider. Freshwater in *Theatre and Audiences* mentions the need for practitioners to engage with these issues and to engage with their audiences, and to not see them as separate, but as a vital part of performance (after all there is no performance without a spectator, as Brooks declared). Every artist needs to consider that their work has political implications, some of which are inherent in the very structure of their practice, as we will see in the discussion about Blast Theory and gaming structures.

The first chapter will focus on the artist collective Blast Theory. It will explore games, and their structures and rules, through the examples of the performances *Kidnap* and *Rider Spoke*. Blast Theory mention the concept of "user generated content" and explore this seeming power transfer to the "user" (audience). Even though the term user generated content is mostly used in connection with the web, and in relation to platforms such as Wikimedia, and Youtube, as well as blogs and podcasting, Blast Theory use it to refer to their games and performance narratives, since the audience can directly influence these. Here user generated content refers to audience interaction and audience as performers who produce "user generated content" (Blast Theory, 2011b: np).

The ongoing debate whether user generated content on the internet is democratic will not be discussed, instead the focus will be on its use in Blast Theory's work. If the reader feels inclined to read more on this topic, I would like to point them towards Andreas Proschofsky's article in *derstandard*, which discusses open source technology and the limits of user generated content. By the same token Nilay Patel's article on the control of Google over its user generated content might be of interest too. Thirdly, Ina Freudenschuss and Sue Gardner criticize Wikimedia for their lack of opportunities for female authors, a fact which makes it undemocratic and are thus additional important reads on this topic, outside of the art world.

As Blast Theory use gaming structures within their art, it is important to discuss *Homo Ludens* by Johan Huizinga. Even though it was written in the 1930s, some of the concepts Huizinga writes about still seem to be of importance in contemporary culture, as his book forms the basis for almost all research on gaming and play done today. It is also the starting point for the following two important studies. Markus Montola, Jaakko Stenros, Annika Waern; and Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin have written extensively about play and games. Montola et al's *Pervasive Games* in particular, details the performativity of games and play, discusses different genres, and different approaches to designing games and playful performances. *Second Person* by Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin on the other hand, is less concerned with what is a game, instead they focus more on how is it played? "[…]telling a story in a novel is not the same as enacting it in a video game. Stories are experienced differently between the tabletop, the computer, and the stage." (Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin, 2007: xiv). Those two studies certainly argue for games as performances,

therefore I will not argue the same point anew here. Nonetheless, if the reader is interested in this debate, they shall be referred to the above.

One other way of approaching the work of Blast Theory, is through the lens of multi-media performance. Gabriella Giannachi links the politics of their work with the fact that they often incorporate new media elements. This is the closest of an analysis of the politics of an artists methods that can be found outside the "participatory-social-arts-sector" (an example of what I generalisingly call participatory-social-arts, is of course theatre of the oppressed, but also the work of Oda Projesi, and WochenKlausur that will be mentioned in more detail later). Giannachi's study *The Politics of New Media Theatre* explores how technology, culture and society are intrinsically linked and how dislodging technology on several levels may affect social and political interaction. Her research is interesting, not only when talking about Blast Theory, but also when exploring such concepts as interactivity, economic performance and the politics of knowledge.

A further definition of audiences can be found in Paul Kosidowski's article *Thinking Through The Audience*. It is a rather short call out to directors not to forget that they are working for an audience, not against them, and that audiences are as vital for performance, as are performers. Kosidowski links this appeal to a definition of audiences as economic forces, since they pay for their ticket (and for the drink at the bar afterwards too). When we link the politics of user generated content and audiences who pay for the "privilege" of participating in art, we need to consider a whole new field of copyright law. The content generated by the user, or audiences, could legally not be sold to them, as they own the copyright to it by definition. And yet they pay for the privilege of being allowed to generate such content. This is a very interesting issue here

and, as far as I am aware, has not been discussed in great detail yet. This research will not explore it in much depth either, as it is too vast to cover in this context. However, I wholeheartedly want to encourage anyone who reads this, to analyze the issue of copyright protection of content in participatory and interactive art further.

Another artist who uses technology to explore interaction is Janet Cardiff. Her work focuses on interactive installations and audio walks (often conceived together with her partner George Bures Miller). Here the semiotics of performance and reader-reception theories come into play much more prominently again. Marco de Marinis's *Dramaturgy of the Spectator* theorizes the concept of spectators who form part of an active dramaturgy of performance through their meaning making processes. Here too, Bennett's theories on how we form meaning in performance, can be seen as a starting point from which we can explore the politics behind interactive audience performers. In Janet Cardiff we find less of a game element than in Blast Theory. Her work situates itself in the one-on-one interaction of the work of art with the single audience member and their imagination. This method throws up very interesting constellations of agency and coercion. It includes areas of interest such as psychogeography and walking practices. *Autobiography And Performance*, by Deirdre Heddon is prominent here. Even though Heddon does not focus on Cardiff's work, her research throws up the same questions that are asked by Cardiff through her usage of site-sensitive and site-specific elements, as well as a very personal engagement for and with each audience member. We are looking at self-actualisation and agency through performing, imagination and walking to affect change, and the possibility of interaction on an individual level (and therefore seemingly with little coercion).

The third chapter in this study discusses Oda Projesi and WochenKlausur. The two use a participatory practice in art, to approach social problems. The issue with this method is twofold. For one, interaction that is lead by an artist runs the danger of a top-down way of working, rather than a bottom-up one. As Christian Kravagna, in *Arbeit an der Gemeinschaft* acknowledges, the artists might either be put in the position of, or be perceived as, healers, gurus, shamans and so forth. This, of course, is detrimental to the effect and message that those participatory arts practices want to convey and achieve. The second problem is that of aesthetics. Claire Bishop is a prominent proponent of the notion that art, needs a certain aesthetic. What exactly she means by this remains fragmented and unclear. On the one hand she discusses the need for non-coercive participation and interaction, on the other hand she seems reluctant to relieve the artists of the power over the artwork. If this power is given to the audiences, we find that the end-product often seems to lack the properties of "proper art". Grant Kester and Nicolas Bourriaud disagree. For Kester the aesthetic lies in the dialogue, and in turn he calls this art dialogical art. Bourriaud focuses on the relational aspects of art, and therefore explores the notion of a relational aesthetics.

Especially Kester's *Conversation Pieces* will be discussed, and antagonized by Bishop's *The Social Turn*, and *Participation*. The concepts discussed here are applicable to all of the practices above and culminate in the probably most pressing question of: can art fulfil the definition of art and be participatory on equal bases of artists and audiences? Moreover can the content of art be political, as well as its methods, and what politics are we speaking of? To find an answer we need to look at the variety of practices above, in order to create an understanding of the subject at hand, and possibly to develop an own arts

practice which includes the findings of this research. A further point that needs to be made, is that I approach this topic from a director's perspective. This means that I am not the typical audience member, a fact that makes it difficult to argue from their side. As far as possible, I will not try and assume feelings or standpoints, as these may be different for each audience member. Instead I will try and focus on the methods used to create interactive art.

The particular artists and productions used to discuss these have been picked out, because they are of interest to me, not because they should be seen as exemplary for interactive art, or as the most important works of these specific artists.

1. BLAST THEORY

Blast Theory's work blurs and explores the boundaries between performance, art, and gaming. Their work incorporates frameworks, devices and structures from the before-mentioned to produce what might be called pervasive performance. A kind of performance that permeates into everyday life, and from an outsiders perspective might not be perceived as different from it. Often featured are pervasive settings within urban sites, sometimes featuring performers, often featuring audience as performers and "user generated content" (Blast Theory, 2011b: np).

Two productions will be explored in more detail in this chapter. They are *Kidnap*, and *Rider Spoke*. The structures and frameworks used in these productions can be seen across the whole spectrum of Blast Theory's work. While their production *Kidnap* did not make use of new technologies as extensively as newer productions usually do, it followed similar structures and explored similar content: the audience at the centre of the performance.

All performances presented here use the audience as performers. The audience creates the content of the performance (or game) with the help of frameworks set by Blast Theory. What happens when "user generated content" (*ibid*) enters the realms of performance? If they become a controlling force, and possibly present a democratic shift of power, then we need to ask, what ethical and political issues do we face? The outcome might be that there is an idea of liberation or coercion when we overthrow more traditional audience – actor settings. If that is the case, we need to reconfigure and redefine those terms audience, performer, stage space, and audience space. It would perhaps be more useful to refer to co-created, or user contributed content and co-inhabited,

or co-created space. Or does "user generated content" (*ibid*) in this instance shift the power entirely to the user?

Firstly, it might be good to find out how Blast Theory define their audiences? The terms user, player, user generated content and game all imply audiences as performers and as actively shaping performance (*ibid*). One concept we can definitely see is that they are also seen as an economic force, as defined in Kosidowski, since they have to purchase tickets. Does this capitalist idea mean that their work cannot be political or fully democratic, because you pay for the privilege to participate (as Nicolas Bourriaud would suggest)? Moreover, and to stay with Bourriaud, is Blast Theory's art relational, in that it seeks to perceive the audience as a community, in which intersubjective encounters are produced? This would ultimately create an environment with the aim of bringing people together in order to participate in a shared activity and might thus present us with models of interaction in real life (Bourriaud, 2009: 14).

Kidnap was one of Blast Theory's first productions that featured audience members as protagonists in a narrative, co-created by them. An interesting concept that comes into play here, is a strong component of audience-imagination, and a sense of indirect involvement. You became part of the performance as soon as you heard about it. You became an audience member whether you wanted to or not. In fact even now, the myths surrounding this production form new audiences. Simply engaging with the production makes you an audience. As soon as you hear about it, you cannot but at least think about it. You might imagine what it is like to be kidnapped. You might think it is unethical. You might wonder how they did it, or who would volunteer for such a project. You might think it is silly and not bother more. All these are engagements with *Kidnap*. Blast Theory sought out engagement on all levels,

especially at this indirect level. One form of experience of *Kidnap* as an audience, was knowing about it (Tandavanitj, 2011: np).

As with real kidnapping, talking about it is part of the "story". Gauging audiences' reactions is part of the game of kidnapping. The kidnapper wants to spark a reaction, point towards an issue, and so forth. This first type of involvement is also the most free and democratic, since you have complete freedom in your imagination and thus are not restricted in how you form the performance.

The second, and more direct involvement as an audience member was that of a person who signs up to be kidnapped. Only two were chosen in the end to actually be kidnapped, but many more signed up.

> On the 15th of July 1998 **Blast Theory** [*sic*] will kidnap two members of the public chosen from a hitlist of entrants who have registered their willingness to be kidnapped.
>
> One month before the **Kidnap** [*sic*] takes place, on the June 13th, ten entrants are selected at random and put under surveillance. You will not know whether you are on that list or when we will be coming.
>
> Next, two of those ten will be selected at random and the two lucky winners will be kidnapped. (Blast Theory, 1998: np).

Consenting to be kidnapped by signing up, whether it be in play (as a joke among friends – "I am brave enough to sign up"), or as seeking out the experience, you enter a further relationship with the performance. It is more direct then just hearing about the production. You have to become pro-active in seeking out to become a performer. This is a controlling activity that actively shapes the performance. For instance, if no-one signed up, then the performance would not happen. Of course the indirect audience members mentioned above are not passive. They are active in decoding signs (see my bibliography on Aston & Savon, Elam, de Marinis and Bennett for further

reading on semiotics and reader-response theories). However they are not pro-active[2]: They do not make controlling choices which might change the performance narrative (the fictional story). You know you might be shortlisted and followed if you sign up. This has an impact on your every day life. There is a perceived pervasivity of the performance into every day life behaviour and increased performativity of those audience members, since they become part of the fictional narrative of the event (Giannachi, 2007: 50).

With a certain amount of money, you could choose specific "treats" such as a sleeping bag, special food, and so forth, which would be priced differently. Furthermore you had to choose a safeword and pay money (£10) to enter. The performativity of identity is touched upon by Jacues Rancière and Judith Butler (please see bibliography for further reading). Both see identity "as constructed by society" and consequently "as performed". We find a new definition of audience here, that of the performer. We stop being merely observers as the word audience would suggest, and become pro-active generators of content. All further levels of engagement and interactivity are still under this definition of "audience" and all feature, what Blast Theory call "user generated content" (Blast Theory, 2011b: np). It's here where the discussion becomes interesting. When do we cease to be audiences and become performers. Since arguably we are always performing identities (Butler and Rancière), we might need a different definition. Blast Theory have suggested the "user". Do these users go

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[2] Pro-active is indeed laden with connotations. Even though it will not be possible fully, I would like the reader to try and ignore these. There is a clear lack of terms here and the existing ones have been discussed and used by several opposing sides on different terms. To exchange the word for active, however, does not serve purpose, as this too has been used on opposing sides. A semiotician and a game designer would both use active and mean two different ideas. In our case the stress of a taking charge from the audience to become a performer is the focus. This should not be taken as a political statement, it just means that the audience (in order to become a performer) must invest some thinking and physical energy.

hand in hand with a political agenda? Blast Theory's definition of user and again, user generated content seems to suggest so. The user is given the possibility to change the performance narrative. This could be seen as a theoretical agency over the narrative.

Thirdly, there are ten entrants who are selected and put under surveillance. This is one step up from number two, since it involves actual surveillance. You might not only imagine being under surveillance, you actually are. There were reports that people noticed being followed (Blast Theory 2011b: np). It changed their behaviour to a more extreme extent then number two. Immediately we notice that the more direct the involvement with the piece, the more restricted the actual content generation of each user, or audience member gets. Indeed this is wanted, since otherwise the kidnapping scenario would not work.

The fourth and last involvement was the most direct and most narrative controlling: being kidnapped. Only two audience members were in that position. All their actions would change the narrative. Thus speaking of audience is hardly applicable anymore. They have become performers:

> Although they claimed that they never felt threatened or hurt, and maintained that they even trusted their kidnappers, they were also quite visibly disturbed by the piece and its dynamics of total relinquishment of control (ibid.) [*sic*]. Interestingly, they were both in and out of control. Thus, they did appear to be *acting*, because they were under surveillance *and* because they were to some extent inevitably conscious of their own performance, but they also appeared to be *acted upon*, in that ultimately they functioned as an experiment, a theatre of science. (Giannachi, 2007: 50).

Kidnap, while seemingly a coercive performance event, actually presents us with a fairly interesting version of the idea of "user generated content" (Blast Theory, 2011b: np), and audience as performer. The reason it is interesting is

that, even though kidnapping in itself is a coercive act, and oppressive for the audience (since they are the ones being kidnapped), it also forms the basis of the performance and all members of the audience were willing to be put into this position. It could be compared to a sado-masochistic relationship with two consenting adults, or, in a less extreme way, to the willingness of entering a haunted house attraction in a theme park, or watching a horror movie. These are inherently oppressive activities, to which we, as audiences, seem to subscribe happily and willingly. Therefore they represent less of an ethical problem, since we are informed about the nature of the event beforehand and actively decide (for whatever reasons) to enter this relationship with our (future) oppressor. Moreover we become performers, because the performance is rooted in this relationship and interaction between oppressor and oppressed and has at its basis coercion. We do not, however, get full control over the process, a fact which would suggest "user generated content" to be undemocratic. Indeed we generate content, but in what form and how we are manipulated, is not in our control. Thus we stay immobile in this role of generator, which is not that of a creator in equal terms or, perhaps, co-artist, but a puppet, used by the artist.

In Blast Theory's work the emphasis seems not on giving audiences a push into agency (as has been suggested to be the case with other works of interactive performance – see Freshwater's *Theatre and Audience* for examples). It is more centred around a game approach of being able to play and try out scenarios you cannot (and in this case probably do not want) to experience in real life. Kurt Lancaster finds this extremely important,

> […] some people want to engage in behaviors [*sic*] that cannot be
> normally expressed in normal daily environments, nor can they find

room for this self-expression within mainstream theater. […] by transforming spectators into performers, [they] provide to some extent framed arenas for such active social expressions […]. (Lancaster, K., 1997: 77-78).

Example number two, *Rider Spoke*, on the other hand, is a performance by cyclists for cyclists (Blast Theory, 2011a: np). As a participant you get a bike (alternatively you can bring your own), safety equipment, and a small tablet computer with earphones. You start to ride your bike. You are allowed to go anywhere you want, the place is only restricted by the time you have (about an hour) and how far you can physically go, as well as internet connections (hence it takes place in urban areas). You can "hide" in certain places and leave recorded messages. The content of the messages is up to you, but the set of questions asked, is predetermined by Blast Theory. When you have left a message, you can either look for other participants' messages, or seek another hiding place to answer another question. The phrasing of the first question is extremely important, as it defines what relationship you enter this performance with. "Give yourself a name, and describe yourself." (*ibid*). Give yourself a name implies a game. This is important, since it makes people more at ease and ready to play and engage with the performance more openly (Tandavanitj, 2010: np). It implies that you do not have to play as yourself, you can make up a character (as is frequently the case with games). Thus it relieves you of all responsibility of the content of your performance, as it is your character speaking, not you (but maybe your character is you). No one will know whether the messages you leave are real thoughts or memories, or whether they are entirely made up. Ethically this is significant, since *Rider Spoke* seems to have sparked very personal answers to the posed questions and the audiences as

performers and generators of content, are not embarrassed or singled out by what they generate. In this case we do not seem to be talking about interaction as coercion. The audience is truly a generator of content and therefore a performer through answering those questions. Whether that is a democratic act is, again, questionable. Yes they use the devices presented to play and manipulate the performance. Nonetheless there is only so much they can manipulate. In fact the only freedom they have is in their answers to the questions and their choice of hiding place (and even that is limited although because of technical aspects which I will not go into detail here). Audiences do not have a say in the structure and frameworks governing the game. Similar to actors in more traditional theatre, they are directed by these frameworks which work as an extension of the artist group Blast Theory. It follows that a game is not really democratic, if its rules are not decided on by its players. However in order for Blast Theory's work to be critical art, they need certain structures in place, to produce their desired critique of society. It is a careful interplay between signs and open narrative content. Now the question of art and aesthetics comes into play. We might say that in order for Blast Theory's work to provide the critique they wanted, it needs to take place within certain frameworks.

Grant Kester in the book *Conversation Pieces* asks the question "What does it mean for the artist to surrender the security of self-expression for the risk of inter-subjective engagement?" (2004: 8). Blast Theory does not fully surrender their self-expression, since they put frameworks in place as they use game modes, they push you towards a specific direction (*Kidnap* clear story line, *Rider Spoke* specific questions, etc.). As we can see performer audiences are not necessarily democratic, since artists such as Blast Theory do not actually

give them enough freedom to break out of these frameworks. They let you create the story, but always within the game's rules. Democratic art on the other hand ideally lets you change the framework if it turns out to be unsuited for the wanted outcome. Moreover it places an emphasis on dialogue, which is a free form in as far as it allows more than one framework to be used to make conversation happen. Kester argues that there is a form of political art centred in such a dialog – dialogical art (Kester, 2004: 10) – which allows for such freedom. This is not the case with Blast Thoery's work. Blast Theory uses a conceptual framework of a game, and then a specific framework for each project, such as the bikes and audio recordings, and riding for *Rider Spoke*, and the kidnapping in *Kidnap*.

Claire Bishop opposes Kester, by discussing a tension between the need to be aesthetic (to be art) and political. Blast Theory work in Bishops favour, as they do not give up full control of their performances, but set them in a specific way, as to provide a certain aesthetic. What Bourriaud would be inclined to point out is that there is a certain aesthetics in the relation between people, and, Kester supports him. While Kester and Bourriaud are, perhaps, more in favour of community art (this will be discussed in detail in chapter three), Bishop approaches this topic similarly to Blast Theory. Their aim is a certain political message, not to ultimately create an environment with the aim of bringing people together in order to participate in a shared activity, since they control what message the performance portrays. Later chapters will go into more detail on Kester's and Bishop's arguments.

Moreover, what clashes in Blast Theory's work, is an ideological drive towards an empowerment of the user, with the drive to document it, which, in turn, takes away this power. If I want to be part of the performance I agree to be recorded,

filmed and photographed. While this is of course important in a culturally historic context, for arts research and personal development of the theatre company, it does interfere with possible personal privacy needs of the user. Both *Kidnap* and *Rider Spoke* provide good examples. While *Kidnap* plays with this duality of surveillance and voyeurism, *Rider Spoke* has an ethical problem with it. A lot of the messages recorded by the users are very personal in nature, and yet they are archived and some have made it into the trailer. Ethical questions of data retention acts currently being discussed in the European Union spring to mind. Can I record a personal conversation with a friend over a phone? What about in a performance? Can the company in power record and store what messages I leave? Of course Blast Theory do not intend to use such content unethically and I would never assume to imply such. However the sheer act of retaining such data is problematic. More so, if it is then made publicly available via the British Library. If iPhones store data about their users and it is a massive problem, then surely shaping a performance with your own personal input and recording this is similarly problematic. I do not talk about the fact that in *Rider Spoke* the users leave recorded messages, I talk about retaining these messages after the end of the performance event and then making them publicly available (via the British Library). What clashes are individual privacy needs with the need for making culture publicly available and accessible. As an academic I would argue that the second is more important on a larger scale. However, personally, I am very aware of my own privacy needs and would want them protected. In case of the ethics of audience performance this privacy need is vital and needs to be taken into consideration. In the case of a democratic art movement, the public availability is important. Therefore *Rider Spoke* is unethical, but has possibly gained back some of its democratic value.

Kidnap and *Rider Spoke* need to be seen in different critical models. *Kidnap* clearly shows signs of the 1990s movement of shocking avant-garde art. The idea of rupturing the consensus of what is art is situated in a therapeutic concept. In *Rider Spoke*, on the other hand, the idea of user generated content has manifested itself (over time – since *Kidnap* can be seen as one of the first works by Blast Theory with this approach) into a very individual and personal journey, away from public view, similar to audio walks. The focus is not how the public reacts to a rupture in the definition of art, but how the individual audience member (the user) reacts to stimuli given to them. In *Kidnap* we see a lack of clarity in what values it seeks to promote, where it is situated, it is suspended in meaning. *Rider Spoke* is not followed by an immediate public outrage and discussion on its values and principles. It provides personal space for its participants, as well as for outsiders. And yet it seems didactic in nature, since it seemingly gives power to its users. At least in the fictional world of the performance.

A further question arises throughout participatory or interactive art, but especially when the audience make the work of art. It is the question of using the audience, a question not only of coercion and oppression, but of capitalism (which might be seen as part of both afore mentioned issues). If I use the audience to make a work of art, and then sell this work of art, is this not an exploitation of my audiences' creativity? Equally, and this becomes apparent especially in Blast Theory, what if I invite the audience to a dialogue but they have to pay for that privilege? Can I say my work is democratic and gives the user back some power if I do not invite everyone to join, but becoming part is linked to an exchange of monetary terms? Of course it is not as easy as this. Artists have to live and eat and pay their bills also, as do social workers and

activists. When faced with more and more cuts in subsidies in the arts and social sectors, an important income becomes selling your art (often to your potential audience). The audience, once again, but partly involuntarily, is pressed into the role of an economic force. And still, art cannot be truly democratic, or bottom-up, if it privileges some people over others. This is a very complex debate and it is difficult to argue for either side, since the current political system we live in is based on capitalism, and thus money is at the heart of almost all political issues we face. Even problems with racism and homophobia are connected to capitalist ideals and usually feature sentences such as "immigrants take our jobs away"[3], but this is not the place to discuss such concerns. It would be the time though. Still, the issue whether Blast Theory's work exploits audience performers could be resolved by a more art-supportive society. Furthermore, we should reconsider, whether we judge value in monetary terms or otherwise.

Giannachi in *The Politics of New Media Theatre* mentions that, "[b]y directly intervening in the interactivity, they [Blast Theory] directly influence what we see and how we see it. This is precisely where their work is most directly political." (2007: 59). She goes on to quote Adams from Blast Theory:

> Thematics is one thing but the set of internal relationships in an interactive work is paramount and this is where the most fascinating things are going on and by not announcing a concept or theme so clearly you invite people to inhabit these spaces and then be implicated much more directly in the relationships that emerge and the ways that technology is mediating their relationships with other players. (*ibid*).

This holds some validity of course. Nonetheless it is strange that the company does not even seem to consider the potential ethical problems that the simple

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[3] Statement not supported by the author.

act of recording holds. I do believe I need to clarify here, that I am fully aware that leaving out the recording of *Rider Spoke* is missing the point. Nonetheless it seems odd that it has never been discussed, especially since they are all archived (and anonymized) and will be made available publicly soon. The sheer ethics of user generated content do not seem to have been investigated at all.

Indeed Blast Theory's work is highly political, but "user generated content" (Blast Theory, 2011b: np) does not make them more democratic. In fact it is cleverly used to disguise a manipulation of the audience. Manipulation needs to be seen as coercive. Blast Theory's performances and games show an inherent political critique, but not through their use of "user generated content" (*ibid*), but through them being works of art with a message. The structures the company uses is only partly the political message, it's rather the whole performance that is important. The fact that some of the structures in place might be politically charged is wanted, but not a message in itself, and definitely not representative of democracy, as their audiences are only part of the puppetry used to stage the (political) message.

Perhaps Blast Theory's work is too conceptual to provide a truly democratic dialogue. The concept and framework precedes the performance. Even though the performance is then shaped by its audiences, it still does not allow enough freedom to completely change it and it does not emerge from the ideas and concepts of its audiences.

> Für dieses Verständnis von Partizipation sind vor allem zwei Punkte festzuhalten: das "Publikum" (nun ja Mitproduzent) ist bereits in die *Entstehung* des Kunstwerks eingebunden, und nicht erst in die

> Aktualisierung einer vorgegebenen Partitur, wie in anderen Modellen
> [...]. (Kravagna, 1998: 9)[4].

The starting point of Blast Theory's work is not the dialogue within a community by and for which the performance will be produced. They do not allow their audience to create the performance from start till finish, rather they allow them some control over some aspects of the narrative and their actions as performers. Blast Theory, as so often, are situated in-between being context provider and content provider (Kester, 2004: 1). Even though most of the content is provided by the audience, for them to be classified as a context provider only, they need to give up some of their control and manipulation of the audience and frameworks. Indeed Blast Theory's politics lie not in the fact that their audience generates performance, rather it lies in their blurring of the real and virtual and their underlying investigation of mediatised cultures. What emerges is an audience performer (or user) who is still being directed. They lack the choice and methods to undermine and break free of the structures that govern their moves. The performance is less determined by them, then by the artist, and thus lacking a sense of democratic participation and agency.

For this process to be truly democratic, however, the audience would need to be in full control of what happens when and how. This is not the case here. As Freshwater further explores, the "freedom to choose is profoundly compromised by the limitations of the system in which choices are made." (2009: 70). Game structures have limitations, one of them are rules. Another is how the games have been designed. What Blast Theory really does is redefine the audience as generators, or producers of content. That the structures are not created by the

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[4] Translation (by me): We need to state two points for this kind of understanding of art: the "audience" (now the co-producer) is already involved in the *development* of the work of art, and is not solely actualizing a prescribed *score*, as is the case with other models [of art].

user, shows an intrinsic disproportionate distribution of power. The one making the rules is usually the one in power.

Of course games would not work without rules, but Blast Theory seems to claim, that by providing the user with the opportunity to create part of the experience, they provide them with agency and feature less oppression than other types of interactive performance. However they just hide the fact that their audiences are manipulated also. Are audiences as performers therefore doomed to be manipulated and will always lack full democratic power unless they decide to make performance by setting it all up themselves? In every system you seem to have power structures that are somehow oppressive. As Jacques Rancière would argue, even when writing about oppressed people and classes (in this case audiences), the simple act of writing as an academic is already somehow oppressive. Unless the audiences themselves analyse their status as performers, it is thus difficult to argue about their oppression. I am arguing from a director's perspective too. Rancière argues that, emancipation is possible, since it "redistributes the system of sensible coordinates" (2007a: 3). He advocates removing spectatorship, and, in terms of theatre, including an active, participative audience (Rancière, 2004: np), thus: an *audience as performer*. He does not specify how this is supposed to happen unfortunately, and consequently leaves us in the dark on how the distribution of the sensible could be incorporated into such an approach. Blast Theory's "user generated content" (2011: np) does not seem to be entirely convincing as such an approach, due to the lack of control in terms of structure by its audience performers. The next two chapters will look at two slightly different approaches to the same problem and will discuss performing audiences in the context of

audio walks and community art as a potentially non-coercive, and truly dialogical and thus democratic way of audience interaction.

2. Janet Cardiff

Audio walks present us with a different *modus operandi* from pervasive games. They do not feature rules. Instead they focus on the psychogeography of the audience participant. The audience is defined as listener, follower, and walker and their interaction lies in their dialogue with the walk. Artists like Janet Cardiff seem to focus on your engagement with the site, as well as their own, and on creating a dialogue between those ways of perceiving.

"Among theatre practitioners it has long been known that the actual placement of the spectators within the theatrical space and their relation to the playing area are central to the way in which the performance is received." (De Marinis, 1987: 104). Marco de Marinis explores the idea of a *dramaturgy of a spectator* through semiotics and audiences' meaning making processes, also in relation to the placement of performance, and of the audience. Only through the meaning making process of the spectator, can the performance realize its full semantic and communicative potential (*ibid*). Cardiff's work focuses on these two elements. The audience is physically put at the centre of performance. The performance surrounds you, and, as audience, we are placed as a protagonist within it. We become witnesses and observers but we are also active in creating the narrative and in bringing it to fruition, as we imagine it. We realize the work of art through our imagination. Daniel Zyman talks about how Cardiff (re)defines her audiences:

> The voices are talking to "you" and you are not an abstract viewer, disassociated from the object of aesthetic perception. You, the audience, are in a constant process of development, establishing relationships with outer and inner worlds and engaged in a continual metaphorical reading. (Schaub, 2005: 13).

This is more than just a reading of signs, it's an active creation of a fictional world.

In an interview with Atom Egoyan, she explains the experiences she wants to create with her audio walks. "With the audio walks I want people to be inside the filmic experience and have the real physical world as the constantly changing visuals of the screen." (Egoyan, 2002: 62). She goes on, "[e]very person will have a different experience of the piece depending on what happens around them or where and when they walk." (*ibid*). Again we find the audience as active, interactive and participatory. What ideas of coercion and agency do we find in audio walks? In what way do audiences create performance in this genre? And how does an idea of democratic involvement emerge? Or does it even emerge? It could be argued, that audio walks are similar to the art works that Bishop, Kester and Bourriaud explore in their discussions on interactive art: They steer away from traditional performance, in that there is a sort of "art object", a pre-recorded entity. Nonetheless this recording is to be seen in its relation to its audience, and thus in its relational form. Cardiff focuses entirely on the dialogue her work creates with the audience, who sees itself perform on a very personal, and intimate level. This can be seen in her audio walk through London called *The Missing Voice (case study b)*.

Cardiff sets the scene by describing it. Her voice seems like a narration and situates the audience as a performer in the fictional world of the walk. Her instructions can be followed by you, but are not binding. It is your decision whether you follow them or not. In this way she raises the audience's willingness to explore, with the audio walk, this fictional world. You want to follow her instructions to experience the full experience. I call the narrative, the story, and the world of the audio walk fictional, because it has been

constructed. In fact it is being co-constructed by you, while you listen to it. Indeed Cardiff's walks feature a clever blurring of the lines between real and fictional, live and recorded, and live in the dialogue between the two. Still the walk is constructed and will therefore be referred to as fictional. By describing a scene and "forcing" you to imagine it, she plays on the interactivity of the spectator (or indeed *true* audience – since you listen). She acts as a narrator, a person in a narrative, as a character and positions you as a co-creator (with the help of your mind) of the story. Your imagination and eyes are as important as her directions. Direct address seems to be one of the most powerful tools of her narration. Cardiff throws the audience into situations and guides them through them. They cannot actively change the recording of the walks. But they can choose not to follow the directions and indeed have complete freedom in their imagination. It is the freedom of interpretation, creativity and semantic meaning. Without the part of the audience, the walk would not function.

Being part of a walk seems like walking through a book or being part of a film. She opens an imaginative dialogue with her audiences, as they become protagonists in her walks. Recording techniques such as binaural recording give the walks a three-dimensional feel. Especially striking is the effect of her voice, at times, it seems as if she is in your head, then moving around the space. Cardiff's narration moves from being an inner monologue, to a character walking next to you. Carol Peaker from *The Weekend Post* reviews *The Missing Voice*:

> Everyone has noticed that when they listen to music on a Walkman their sense of reality and perception shifts. But no artist has ever woven together sounds and ideas to make a soundtrack to real life. In Cardiff's work, the movie is no longer on the screen, the art is no

longer in the museum; it's in the forest and on the street, and in our heads. It's in life itself. (Artangel, 2001: np).

Cardiff herself says about her audio walk *The Missing Voice*:

I see the device of the walkman as a way to have surrogate relationships. I talk with some-one intimately, create a relationship, but I am at a safe distance. It is a coward's way but I hope that my pieces give people a sense of knowing someone a little, even if it is only with a unknown voice, a missing one. (Artangel, 2001: np).

In *The Missing Voice (case study b)* Janet Cardiff guides the listener through the walk of a woman who follows a woman. You once become the audience, the voyeur, the stalker, the stalked. Interdispersed with scenes from films you are thrown into different scenarios and roles. Yet this act is not as coercive as it sounds. Every walk is an individual experience and centred around your personal imagination and interaction with it. As mentioned before, you do not need to follow the directions she gives you. There are no rules and no pressure from other audience members, as it is an individual single experience of you with the walk. No one else is present. No one else knows what you listen to. And yet to fully experience the walk, you need to follow her directions. Again, as with Blast Theory's work, we see a performance which would be incomplete without the audience as a performer within it. As Egoyan mentions, "[T]he degree of interaction is profoundly respectful, yet extremely invasive." (Egoyan, 2002: 62). Moreover Nigel Barret reviews *The Missing Voice*. "[…]What Cardiff has given us is a chance to appreciate the power of sound and the way it plays with your thoughts and memories." (Artangel, 2001: np). The idea of interaction being present in memory is a truly thought provoking one. We often talk about semiotics, reader response theories and physically active participation, but we seem to forget the fact that there might be more mental interaction than just how we decode signs. Cardiff's work cleverly plays at the intersection of your

own memory, the memory of a space and her own, whilst creating a new kind of memory through the performance and the interaction with the listener. Her voice is always respectful, never harsh or patronising. She gives you the feeling of wanting to interact and follow her. You want to find out what happens next. Part of that seems to come from the narrating voice giving away seemingly very personal thoughts and stories. You immediately imagine how the story might progress, sometimes this is true and sometimes the walk surprises. Your own interpretation of the other characters, people and figures you meet, the scenes you see, and the places you visit, does as much in shaping the story, as the prepared narrative. The simple action of walking and imagining is the true creator of the story. Other separate entities such as the time of day that you choose to take the walk, the weather, and so forth, all influence your perception (more so than in normal theatre).

It's like falling down the rabbit hole. Like entering an alternative world. We find ourselves in an identity crisis, as we form a new identity of ourselves and are constantly challenged on it throughout the walk. "A walker is at once part of the world around him and also enclosed in a private universe, the master of one's own secret thoughts." (Schaub, 2005: 76). Schaub mentions the idea that walking distances the walker slightly from the world around them. This could be paralleled to Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* and thus make walking a political act. By walking we are slightly distanced, and can therefore analyse and critique what is happening around us. Moreover we can analyse ourselves and (re)shape our identity and how we are identified in and identify with the world surrounding us.

"Walking enables reflections that might transform the commonplace." (*ibid*) Such is the politics of walking. You might not be physically active in forming a

new world, but you are imagining one, a fact that is vital for an idea of agency and democracy. Furthermore you are analyzing what you perceive on your walk. Imagination is the pre-requisite for change. If I cannot imagine a different world, how can I build it?

Nonetheless Aruna D'Souza critiques Cardiff's art:

> Cardiff's work forces you into imagined relations with spectral presences that surround you, relations that can be profoundly comforting, as in *forty-Part Motet* [*sic*], or threatening, as in *The Paradise Institute*, while simultaneously pointing out your powerlessness in the face of the spectacle taking place. (D'Souza, 2002: 161).

Cardiff does not claim (such as other artists, e.g. Blast Theory) that her work is political, democratic or empowering. I wonder whether it is. You always have the freedom to not do what she tells you, and your engagement with the piece is always on a very personal and intimate level. But you cannot actively change the narrative of the piece in terms of what the story line will be, you can only change your engagement with it. Thus D'Souza is right in that Cardiff's pieces point out the powerlessness of the audience. Nevertheless they also point out the power of your imagination. As hippie-like as this sounds, a person that cannot imagine change, won't even try affecting it. As Baz Kershaw, in a keynote lecture at the University of Exeter remarked, "The future is always before its time." – you imagine it before it happens (Kershaw, 2011: np).

And still, D'Souza finds that,

> [M]uch of Cardiff's work and her collaborations with Bures Miller rely on active participation (to go on the walk, to explore the room, to run hands over the table) or at least a refusal of the spectator's usual passivity (as in the film works). (D'Souza, 2002: 161).

She goes on, "[y]et to experience the art is to be placed at the center of sometimes menacing and always fragmented narratives where you are strangely ineffectual: you cannot determine their outcome, they move on despite you." (*ibid*). Nevertheless, and I agree with her here, it is the relationship with the place and the walk that makes Cardiff's work what it is.

> This is the fundamental ambiguity that makes Cardiff's work particularly compelling: she defies your attempts to isolate yourself in the midst of the crowd or to lose yourself in either the narrative fantasies of cinema or the transcendent experience of the art museum, even as she denies you a stable or comfortable position in the real world of social relations. (*ibid*).

As mentioned before, this unstable position puts you in a state of crisis, in which you need to re-identify yourself and your surroundings. This could be termed a fundamental political act. Her walks are self-forming. While the content of her art is not political, the methods used to make it are.

The audience performer creates personalized spaces, a concept discussed in auto/biographical performance and theatre of memory. Deirdre Heddon, in *Autobiography and Performance*, talks about place and the walker's potential to create and break up personal, as well as public spaces. She mentions the figure of Baudelaire's *flâneur*[5] of nineteenth-century Paris as an active producer of new connections. Furthermore she engages with De Certeau, who states a walker's potential to realise a city and therefore points out walking's radical potential. Additionally Heddon finds a phenomenological approach – walking as a getting to know yourself, which, again, is linked to a political act of realisation and "placemaking" (Heddon, 2008: 103-105). She consequently makes a point

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[5] The fact that the *flâneur* was decidedly male, of course has to do with the time when the figure originated, in this context please consider the female version also.

that "[C]onceiving of place as 'performed' and made is politically important." (*ibid*: 111). Cardiff's walks urge the listener to perform and create the space of the performance. Therefore, "[…] place functions as a 'moral' geography and is used to demarcate or mark those who belong from those who do not (Cresswell, 1996, 2004) [*sic*]. People then, are also 'placed'." (*ibid*). What Cardiff is actively doing is breaking up the space, so the audience can fill it with their imagination. This act of breaking up, gives you the possibility to re-place yourself, not only in the course of the walk, but possibly also in real life. Heddon further explores this idea, "[P]laces, like the bodies located in them, are embedded within and produced by historical, cultural and political vectors." (*ibid*: 112). By deconstructing these vectors, by blurring the line between real and imagined, facts and fiction, Cardiff assigns the audience the role of a re-imaginator of them and thus helps them reconfigure those spaces. We are not talking about a coercive act here, but about a freeing of assigned intent.

Daniel Zyman in *Janet Cardiff: The Walk Book* writes about the politicality of Cardiff's narrations. "They help us – with uncanny success – to visualize dreams as a precursor to reality, or even an integral part of it." (Schaub, 2005: 11-12). He goes on to discuss the emergence of political agency within an audience performer. "Equipped with headsets, walking around and following Cardiff's words and stories, we sense that past, present, and future collapse into a dense, expanding field of possibilities." (*ibid*: 12). He further describes how Cardiff opens up a "new horizon of possibilities" (*ibid*). Rebecca Solnit too explores the dynamics of walking.

> The rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts. This creates an odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests that the

> mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it. […] And so one aspect of the history of walking is the history of thinking made concrete […]. (Schaub, 2005: 77).

Schaub adds the same thoughts that have just been discussed, the idea of opening the mind to new possibilities through an act of walking. "Propelling the boyd forward through space, one foot at a time, facilitates discovery and opens the mind." (*ibid*: 78). It seems that this approach of a performing audience is non-coercive, as its rooted in the audience's imagination. The outcome, of course, is only to be fully realized outside of the performance, when those thoughts are applied to real life. While a lot of Blast Theory's engagement with audiences does involve a great deal of imagination on the audiences' parts, their experiences are still structured by the rules of the games. The difference to Blast Theory's work lies in the fact that while both somehow manipulate their audiences, Blast Theory applies rules and other audience members as controlling agents. Cardiff, on the other hand, does not seem to have control about what her audiences do and how they perform. This is highlighted by the fact that all performances are individual, one-on-one type experiences, it is just you and the recording.

Nevertheless, Schaub does find some coercion in Cardiff's work. "Cardiff consciously inverts those typical uses of technology and broadens the spectrum of sensory experience by **forcing the spectator to interact** [*sic*] with the surrounding environment." (*ibid*: 25). I would suggest that we find a rather unlucky use of the word force here. While it holds true that the sensory experience does make you interact. It seems like an explorative process, rather than a coercive act. Throughout this page Schaub keeps using the word force. Personally, I have not felt forced by Cardiff's walks. In fact I felt quite the opposite, the freedom to explore and open up to a new sensory experience.

This is a highly personal statement of course, but it seems important to mention. Where I agree with Schaub, however, is when she talks about identity. "When **forced to synchronize** [*sic*] ourselves with the disembodied pre-recorded voice, our sensory impressions are amplified and we want to reassure ourselves about our own bodies as sensory beings. We strengthen a sense of ourselves from this experience." (*ibid*). Cardiff's work clearly follows a dialogical approach, as her art centres itself in the dialogue between her work and her audience. It is most fruitful and most interested in the very dialogue between the listener and the artwork. Therefore it can be seen as a context provider, rather than a content provider (Kester, 2004: 1) and consequently as a non-coercive means of co-creation and audience interaction. "The success of an audio walk, or video walk, is dependent on the collaborative participation of the audience." (Schaub, 2005: 23). The audience members come forward as almost equal to the artist, as they are given the power to create on top of what Cardiff provides them with. She gives away the power over the walk, not however, the power over the recorded track.

The question arises whether this interaction is the only truly free and non-coercive form of interaction. Maybe WochenKlausur's and Oda Projesi's work in chapter three convinces us differently. There is something about the act of listening and imagining that is curiously democratic and empowering. It is the fact that it is extremely difficult to overpower your own act of listening and impossible to stop you from thinking and imagining. When someone listens *they* are in full control of what they listen to, what they choose to remember and what they ignore. When someone thinks, they are equally in full control of what they think about. The mind is the only place, in which we are truly free.

What we see in Cardiff's work, is a focus on the audience as a performer through their imagination. They are a solo performer, since the audio walk is only realized through them and their walking, it does not exist in its own right. As the interaction happens mostly on a personal mental level, it seems less coercive then direct interaction with another performer. Moreover audience performers are not restricted by rules, or by social conventions through other audience members, since the whole performance is an individual experience. Nonetheless, the audience performers are not able to change the actual recording, and are thus, similar to Blast Theory's work, merely generators, and do not gain a democratic sense of power on an equal level to that of the artist. Cardiff presents a transition between the methods used by Blast Theory and those used by WochenKlausur and Oda Projesi, who, together with their audiences, re-create an aesthetic environment.

3. WochenKlausur and Oda Projesi

Moving on from Blast Theory and Cardiff, to an area of art which involves its audiences in the construction of the art project itself, might be useful, in order to further explore a notion of audience performers that is not restricted by rules or a pre-recorded "art object". Both WochenKlausur and Oda Projesi start their work from a dialogue with their audience. In this case the audience is usually a small community or group in a certain area and connected to a certain issue. With WochenKlausur these change with each project. In the case of Oda Projesi, especially the first projects in Galata were aimed at the same community, yet yielded very different outcomes.

What is described here is an audience that is seen as an active performer, in a performance, which has a democratic feel, in that it seeks its audiences' opinions. It is shaped by its audiences, and shapes its audiences. Its constraints are formed in dialogue with its audiences. They do not merely perform or provide content within a rigid set of rules, or perform to themselves, but they engage with each other, as well as with the artists in a dialogue on what form is appropriate and what content is appropriate for the art that is being created. An aesthetic environment that allows for the exploration of issues and change is created. That at least, is the idea. WochenKlausur and Oda Projesi, through their practice, form their very own definitions of audience performers and are engaging in a very different definition of art, than that which we have seen in previous chapters.

The first collective we will look at is WochenKlausur. Grant Kester explains their work in the following way: "WochenKlausur's projects can be generally divided between what might be termed "collaborative" and "advocacy-based" works. Collaborative projects involve the generation of new institutional and spatial

arrangements in consultation with specific groups, communities, and individuals." (Kester, 2004: 98). Their "advocacy-based" work tends to be less collaborative and does not actually include a definition of audience as performers, and therefore will not be featured in detail in this investigation of their work, as it proves to be of less importance in this context. If the reader would like to know more about these projects however, I would point them towards Grant Kester's *Conversation Pieces*, as well as WochenKlausur's own homepage, which is available in English also.

One fact which has to be mentioned is concerning the staged aspects of their work. It seems, that their "advocacy-based" projects include a higher level of staging, and creation of artificial worlds, than those which are "collaborative". In their "advocacy-based" work, WochenKlausur represent their audiences. This calls for more political role-playing than their collaborations. For example, they tricked the leader of the Socialist Party and the mayor of Zürich, into taking part in a set of discussions to aid drug-addicted women in the area, by telling them the respective other had already agreed to participate if the first would do the same. This was an "advocacy based", cleverly staged intervention. It involves imaginative problem solving, acting and staging. Others might just call it lying though. And then again, theatre is an art of "lying", a construction of fake worlds.

Indeed it is ethically highly questionable whether achieving the good through lying is a democratic method, as it does not distribute power equally amongst all participants (if we consider information to be power). Nonetheless the point of the seemingly less "arty" (in the traditional sense of the word) nature of their work, once audiences get involved through a process of collaboration, is important. Their "advocacy based" work seems to be more artistic and

conceptual, than their "collaborative" counterparts. This, in turn, throws up questions of who can make art and do you have to be trained for it or not? It seems the more power the artists hand to the audience, the less "artistic" (for the lack of a better word) the work becomes. This is what Bishop critiques, when she says that such work is no different than social work (Bishop, 2006b: np).

One project in which WochenKlausur gave their audience the freedom and power to create their own agenda, was an intervention in the small town of Ottensheim, just outside the city of Linz, in Austria. It was an *Intervention on Community Development* in 1997. It might be argued that art is only truly democratic, when its audiences have power, not only over the content, but also over the methods used to make it. A big part in this is played by open ended projects, where the end and form of the projects is not pre-determined by the artists, and is developed in collaboration with its audience, who perform what they find appropriate and important in the given context. While the artist may present opinions, guidance, and make propositions, the audience only has agency when they can discard these (if they feel they are inappropriate to the agenda) and when the outcome is ultimately also their decision, and not solely that of the artists'. Consequently however, as we can see with the project in Ottensheim, the outcome may not be the most artistic or aesthetic in a traditional sense of those words. Instead, and as Kester argues, there emerges a different aesthetic. That aesthetic is the dialogue. This art could be called dialogical art, a definition of art that is very different from that in the previous chapters. In the case of the intervention in Ottensheim, the outcomes were three IGs (interest groups), which brought forward action plans to develop the community. For the IG youth group, this took the form of establishing a youth

centre, and building a skate ramp together with Ottensheim's young people. Both of these are not artworks in a traditional sense. While the skate ramp surely needs a certain level of skill to build, it neither is aesthetically pleasing, nor serves a clear conceptual purpose, other than that of its intended practical use: to roll down it on a skateboard or on rollerblades. Nonetheless WochenKlausur's intervention can be deemed artistic: They use unconventional methods to creatively tackle issues, and think critically across disciplines. Moreover, to see such interventions as art, affects a social valorisation of them, and thus provides a higher probability for social change (WochenKlausur, 2011: np). All three, WochenKlausur, Kester, and Kravagna additionally see art as the main centre for a critical investigation of society, something which does not seem possible in other areas (e.g. social work) to a similar extent. Indeed the open ended nature of WochenKlausur's work, and the involvement of the audience in the decision making processes which influence the methods as well as the content of the artwork, are vital for a truly democratic definition of audience performers and form the roots of their agency. This definition features audiences who are of the same hierarchy as the artists, and as the other performers. Therefore the border between audience and performer/artist has disappeared. Only when this border has disappeared, has the audience gained true agency and is freed from oppression. A shift in power seems the way to do this. Important for it are collaboration and co-creation, rather than one-sided artist-audience dependencies.

Of course the question still remains whether audiences gain that agency outside of the artworks they collaborate in. Whether they feel the same agency in their life outside of this audience-artist dialogue. If they do, it is almost impossible to prove. Nonetheless I believe that through the process that

WochenKlausur and Oda Projesi start, the audiences should be able to try out ways of approaching a dialogue in any situation. In their collaborations they are developing the tools for dialogue. These are transferrable skills. The projects give everyone (artists, audiences and officials alike) the possibility to try out approaches and ideas. That is really all it is, but it is extremely valuable. And for that one project, in that particular context, hierarchy barriers and inequalities seemed to be broken down successfully, since the IGs were audience-lead. Having lived in Ottensheim for thirteen years, I would argue that what emerged out of this project is still part of the life of this town today. The political party Pro-O, and the Friday market (to name a few), have become identifying entities for the town.

So can art only be truly democratic and truly provide its audiences with agency, when it sacrifices what we understand as art in a traditional sense? Is an idea of a democratic audience performer only possible in this context? Or are audience performers intrinsically doomed to be somehow coerced within their performance, and therefore audience and performers are always unequal.

The Turkish arts collective Oda Projesi might help us investigate this issue further. We find that their work is both artistic in a dialogical, as well as a more traditional sense of the word. They too include audience performers in a specific community, and yet their work is different from that of WochenKlausur. It too starts with a discussion. It includes artists, as well as neighbours and both are on equal terms:

> Activities vary, but a common denominator is that they are not about showing or exhibiting a work of art but about using art as a means for creating and recreating new relations between people through diverse investigations and shaping of both private and public space. (Lind, 2004: np).

Maria Lind further explains Oda Projesi's methods. "It is a working model based on relations between people and on social creativity rather than on self-expression, and is characterised by co-operation." (*ibid*).

Oda Projesi's most elaborate work are their ongoing projects in the neighbourhood of Galata in Istanbul. It started with an empty room, and soon changed to a bigger scale. Their first project was called *About A Useless Space*. The empty room used for it featured several projects after that, created and changed over longer period of time by artists and audiences alike. It was open for all suggestions and the ways it was utilized could not have been any different from each other. First, Oda Projesi create a meeting point, as Seçil Yersel mentions. "We didn't want to repeat the usual concepts offered by "art" spaces to "audiences", so instead we first tried to create a meeting point. […] In a sense, it was really about a space that could become a place. Since it was open for shaping, we invited people to it, both our neighbours and people from the art scene [...]." (Networked Cultures, 2011: np).

Lind criticizes, what she calls the "reverse exclusiveness", of their work. "Those who are attracted to and captured by the project have more access to this art than the usual art public." (Lind, 200: np). This seems like a rather odd point to make. Everyone can be included in Oda Projesi's work, but the "usual art public", as Lind calls them, is not interested enough in the social groups and communities that engage in this kind of art. The reverse exclusiveness is not enforced by the artists, but by one part of the (potential) audience who does not choose to look into those kinds of art places and communities. The project in Galata for example, was open to anyone. However most audiences and collaborators came from their neighbourhood. Furthermore, while the "usual art public" does not seem interested in this kind of art, it is in their own free will,

and, and this is very important, so is any kind of art interest. A "reverse exclusiveness" can be applied to any art form or genre. If I am not attracted to, or captured by a certain artist, I will be unlikely to engage with them, whether this is community art, theatre, or painting.

Clair Bishop in her article *The Social Turn* discusses Oda Projesi's work similarly.

> Oda Projesi argue that they wish to open up a context for the possibility of interchange and dialogue, motivated by a desire to integrate with their surroundings. They insist that they are not setting out to improve or heal a situation—one of their project leaflets contains the slogan "exchange not change"—though they clearly see their work as gently oppositional. By working directly with their neighbors to organize workshops and events, they evidently want to produce a more creative and participatory social fabric. They talk of creating "blank spaces" and "holes" in the face of an overorganized and bureaucratic society, and of being "mediators" between groups of people who normally don't have contact with one another. (Bishop, 2006b: np).

Bishop recognizes that they achieve this, and therefore acknowledges Oda Projesi's audiences as audience performers, and as equal to the artists. Therefore she sees them as providing a redefinition of both artists and audiences, and as a democratisation of art. Nonetheless this redefinition, as well as the redefinition of what is art itself, is criticized by Bishop, as she finds it nothing other than, what might largely be called, social work:

> But their conceptual gesture of reducing the authorial status to a minimum ultimately becomes inseparable from the community arts tradition. […] [T]here is little to distinguish their projects from other socially engaged practices that revolve around the predictable formulas of workshops, discussions, meals, film screenings, and walks. (Bishop, 2006b: np).

She further explores the notion of *aesthetic* to be important in an art context and criticizes Oda Projesi's approach.

> Indeed, because their practice is based on collaboration, Oda Projesi consider *aesthetic* to be "a dangerous word" that should not be brought into discussion. This seemed to me to be a curious response: If the aesthetic is dangerous, isn't that all the more reason it should be interrogated? (Bishop, 2006b: np).

I think Bishop misunderstands the main idea behind Oda Projesi's work. Her failure to recognize that some words may be rather inappropriate in some contexts strikes me. Intrinsic to the breaking down of different hierarchies between artists and audiences, is the need to discard of traditional concepts that might provide an oppression against audiences, especially if these are untrained in the arts. By terming something aesthetic, there is an implied, added pressure for it to be beautiful in a traditional art context. It also suggests the pressure to create an artwork, even if that may be unsuitable for the given project and given issue. Most of the projects of Oda Projesi (and this holds true for WochenKlausur also) are open for whatever style, form, or idea may emerge from, or during it. If the outcome is "just" a discussion and nothing else, than that is fine too. If the outcome is a painting, or 12 hour performance, that is fine too, as long as it fits the needs of the people who work on it. In short, labelling something aesthetic implies pre-requisites for the work being produced, and thus needs to be seen as coercive towards the people who co-conceptualize and co-produce the work: the audience. Oda Projesi decidedly do not want such connotations, in order to provide an environment without pressures, and without inequality. Therefore, however, a new definition of art needs to be sought, and indeed the proposed dialogical art by Grant Kester fits very well into this concept. "In these projects, on the other hand, conversation become an

integral part of the work itself. It is reframed as an active, generative process that can help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities, official discourse, and the perceived inevitability of partisan political conflict." (Kester, 2004: 8).

Kester suggests that, "Dialogical projects, in contrast [to "banking" style art – Paulo Freire], unfold through a process of performative interaction." (*ibid*: 10). WochenKlausur are rather adamant that their work is termed in such a way. They see it as important for the process. This could be said of Oda Projesi's work too. "The artistic identity is based in part on their capacity to listen, openly and actively, and to organize scenarios that maximize the collective creative potential of a given constituency or site." (*ibid*: 24).

Therefore it should be seen as logical that art needs to reconfigure its own definition and be open to a new approach of how, and by what it should be defined. "According to Greenberg it is the task of each art medium in the modern period to gradually refine the formal characteristics that clearly differentiates it from other media." (*ibid*: 37). Kravagna too, finds the unpredictability and experimental character of such art less oppressing than other art forms, also because the audience is not pre-defined as such. He critiques that in more traditional art, a lot of audience interaction takes place, but not all of it views the audience as equal in practice (even though most perceive them as equal in theory, practice shows a different picture, as we can see with Blast Theory in chapter one) (Kravagna, 1998: 5). This is especially prominent in the rhethorik of the "New Genre Public Art". "Die Rhetorik der NGPA [New Genre Public Art] verschleiert kaum den Prozeß des "othering"

[...]." (*ibid*: 4)[6]. Especially the more traditional interactive art genres often view the artists as shamans, gurus, or healers. We speak of a "pastoralisation" of art (*ibid*: 5).

Therefore we need to find a way of bridging the gap between, and finding new definitions of "audience" and "artist", and we need to invest in social spaces and the relationship with those.

> Wenn Kunst als Kommunikationsform gedacht wird, dann muß sie sich nicht in der kommunikativen Beziehung zwischen Künstler und Publikum erschöpfen, sondern kann in bestehende soziale Räume und deren Beziehungen investiert werden. [...] Für dieses Verständnis von Partizipation sind vor allem zwei Punkte festzuhalten: das "Publikum" (nun ja Mitproduzent) ist bereits in die *Entstehung* des Kunstwerks eingebunden, und nicht erst in die Aktualisierung einer vorgegebenen Partitur, wie in anderen Modellen, etwa der Fluxus-Künstler, oder in die Umsetzung einer von mehreren vorgegebenen Möglichkeiten. (*ibdi*: 9).[7]

Kravagna clearly mentions the breaking down of the difference between audiences and artists, and the idea of equal participation and power. Furthermore, he mentions the necessity to redefine art, as Kester et al have tried, as a dialogical process. Important here, is the way in which participation and interaction happen, not the actual art work itself, as I have mentioned before. "Die Form der Beteiligung und die Beteiligten selbst werden konstitutive

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[6] Translation (by me): The rhetoric of the NGPA hardly obscures the process of 'othering'.

[7] Translation (by me): If art is seen as a form of communication, then it does not have to end in the communicative relationship between artist and audience, but can be invested into existing social spaces and their relationships. [...] We need to state two points for this kind of understanding of art: the 'audience' (now the co-producer) is already involved in the *development* of the work of art, and is not solely actualizing a prescribed score, or in the realisation of several pre-determined possibilities, as is the case with other models [of art], such as that of Fluxus artists.

Faktoren inhaltlicher, methodischer und ästhetischer Aspekte." (Kravagna, 1998: p10).[8]

In both Oda Projesi's and WochenKlausur's work the audience becomes a performer, and as such, they are given freedom in the shaping of the performance, including the methods used to make it. The artists conceptualizing the performances, make them deliberately open ended, and try to develop, together with the audience performers the tools of performance and art, rather than imposing these onto them 'as all-knowing healers'. Their work does not feature a pre-determined meaning, or point that it wants to make, since all that is dependent on the audience to perform their own visions. This work thus differs from Blast Theory's in that the audience does not merely generate content, they are also in control of it and control the form of the whole project, because they are responsible for the structures that govern it. It differs from Janet Cardiff's work in that it has a clear political aim, and the audiences do not only imagine change through given stories, but imagine the stories from scratch too. The performers and the audiences merge. The artists give away their own control, change their role from the all-knowing artist to participant and hand it over, thus blurring their own role with that of the audience. The audiences become artists, performers and agents of their own ideas, and thus fulfil those requirements suggested by Kravagna and Kester.

One problem that is conceived through this way of working, is that of "what kind of art is this"?

> But while the works of WochenKlausur, Lacy, and others are performative to the extent that they see the identity of the artist and the participant as produced through situational encounters, they are

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[8] Translation (by me): The kind of participation and the participants themselves, become constitutive factors in terms of content, methods and aesthetic aspects.

> not subsumable into the traditions of theater, to the extent that these depend on the concept of the "performer" as the expressive locus of the work. (Kester, 2004: 90).

This is exactly what I criticize about contemporary, interactive theatre, that the concepts of "performer" and "audience" are outdated. I would argue that theatre and art need to re-determine these two definitions. Especially because the works and artists presented in this study move away from such old definitions and they are not the only ones. A general move in what might be called alternative theatre seems to be towards re-defining the roles of audiences and performers, something that ironically brings us back to Greek theatre. Art is a creative method of engaging with an idea.

Even though dialogical art seems to actively encourage equality and ethical working conditions in their practice, there is one important issue that needs to be investigated. It is the issue of what artists might gain from artistic collaboration with their audiences. It could be argued that artists are exploiting the communities they work in, by using them as a creative force. "These practices are less interested in a relational *aesthetic* than in the creative rewards of collaborative activity—whether in the form of working with pre-existing communities or establishing one's own interdisciplinary network." (Bishop, 2006b: np). Bishop's argument seems cynical but it is an important question we need to address. I would argue that two aspects of WochenKlausur's and Oda Projesi's work do not make it exploitative of it's audience performers. For one the audience has the possibility to withdraw, or end collaboration at any time and on their own free will. Secondly, the artists do not gain much from their collaborations. They neither become rich, nor are they particularly internationally famous. What they do gain is an exchange of knowledge, which is a collaborative action and works both ways. As long as one

side does not take overhand, I do not see a reason for criticism. Moreover, if we start perceiving a mutual dialogue, in which both sides learn something from each other, as exploitative, then maybe we need to re-consider our values. An environment of trust needs to pre-date collaboration, otherwise our society is doomed. "[...] Accusations of mastery and egocentrism are leveled [*sic*] at artists who work with participants to realize a project instead of allowing it to emerge through consensual collaboration." (Bishop, 2006b: np). Kravagna finds this criticism also. As mentioned before, he links this to the idea that artists are "better human beings", "shamans", or "healers", also termed "pastoral art". This is definitely a valid criticism. Nonetheless, it is remedied by the working methods of both WochenKlausur and Oda Projesi. Both collectives try to break down the boundaries between artists and audiences by giving away as much of their power as possible to their audiences. As audience performers they do not only perform or create, they also conceptualize. This tiny but significant detail makes the difference between oppression and democratic power, and thus between traditional and empowered audiences. Audience performers are not automatically empowered. They only gain agency once the boundaries between performers and audience, artist and viewers, are broken down completely. Nonetheless, and here I agree with Bishop, we need to engage critically with our practices and constantly analyze and evaluate them. Any society that takes ideas without questioning them, inevitably reverts to totalitarianism.

> For these and other supporters of socially engaged art, the creative energy of participatory practices rehumanizes—or at least de-alienates—a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalism. But the urgency of this *political* task has led to a situation in which such collaborative practices are automatically perceived to be equally important *artistic*

> gestures of resistance: There can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of collaborative art because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond. While I am broadly sympathetic to that ambition, I would argue that it is also crucial to discuss, analyze, and compare such work critically *as art*. (Bishop, 2006b: np)

Therefore,

> WochenKlausur's work is [thus] not a priori art or non-art. It becomes art through its recognition, and that comes about within institutional mechanisms. Every art remains a fully harmless raw material until these mechanisms take this raw material and circulate an opinion about it. (Collados, Rodrigo, de Serdio, 2010: 278).

Kurt Lancaster in his article on audience performers *When Spectators Become Performers* argues for the importance of participation, "Participatory theater productions, unlike traditional productions, give room for audiences to express themselves in many ways and in many settings." (Lancaster, 1997: 82 – 83). He further states that, "these types of productions provide arenas where people can socialize, and not feel cut off or removed from the performance, or even from society in general." (*ibid:* 83). Moreover he mentions Turner, who explains the context of performances as "scanning devices" which help contextualize, articulate and give meaning to the difficulties and conflicts of the present. (*ibid*). Thus the participation is vital. WochenKlausur, as well as Oda Projesi, both work in this area. They provide ways of dialogue and contextualisation of current problems, on a micro level. Their audiences become performers in this dialogue, as they, together with the artists, seek a way of expression, and possibly a way of overcoming these issues. Even though their styles are extremely different, this is something they have in common. Their working methods, as well as their content are political. Janet Cardiff on the other hand,

seems to utilize political methods, while investigating non-political topics. Lastly Blast Theory seem to be employing both, political methods, as well as political content. However Blast Theory's methods are far less democratic than those of Oda Projesi and WochenKlausur. Maybe asking whether they are political is the wrong question. Maybe in what way is the more important one to ask. Blast Theory's methods are a start at a democratic approach to making art, however, their audience is not given total freedom (and thus power), since they work within Blast Theory's rules and constraints. Oda Projesi and WochenKlausur develop these rules with their audiences – making them far more effective as articulations and contextualisation of current issues. Janet Cardiff is a difficult one to place in this context. The true problem with Janet Cardiff's methods and content is, that they are producing a one sided dialogue. The audience cannot talk back. As much as she leaves you the freedom of your own imagination, she does not allow you to use it in interaction with other audiences within the performance. Even though her style fosters your imagination and therefore her methods are intrinsically political (as discussed in chapter two), her content is less so.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion looking at the politics involved in interactive art, it has become clear, that the only non-coercive means of interaction or participation (in relation to the presented examples) is when the artists give up as much power over the work of art as is needed for the audiences and artists to be on equal levels of power, and to have equal possibilities and equal say. I believe this is important not only in the content of the art project, but also in the methods which are used to create it. How this is tried is different for different practices. Games seem to be the most coercive of these, with the inclusion of rules that are pre-determined, and not regulated by the audiences themselves. Audio walks offer the possibility of complete freedom of the mind, but restrict in the conventions we put on ourselves (I have to follow the audio walk) and are not applicable to more than one person at a given time. Thirdly, dialogical art, still raises the question of, "what is art"? I believe very strongly that Kester and WochenKlausur have answered this question. Moreover I think it is vital to constantly keep redefining what we understand as art, otherwise we run the danger of putting ourselves into boxes and labels, who, I believe, are the biggest threat creativity and artistic expression face in our society. I therefore call for an inclusion of dialogical art into a definition of art. If we look at earlier movements in art history, we find that most then new, or 'avant-garde' movements were not recognised as art at first, but had to fight for that recognition. A well suited example is DADA, who, despite its own definition, is now being sold as "high art", a fact that seems ironic.

Since interactive and participatory arts practices feature creative audiences (both in the sense of creating and of being imaginative) there needs to be a re-definition of the people involved in a work of art. Audiences have become

performers and artists. Furthermore, the politics of audience performers lies in their standing as equal to the artists. Only then can we start to conceive non-coercive, non-oppressive participation and interaction. I as an artist, as a director, have to constantly question what message I send through my practice, not only through its content, but also, and equally as important (although still widely overlooked), through its methods. For one, if audiences pay for the privilege to take part in an art project, they are already seen as different from the artists, who get paid to do the same. This is still mostly where the difference lies. Only the examples of chapter three actually discard of a definition of audiences as economic forces, a privileged position not many artists can boast to be in. Yet again, buying tickets for art only becomes an issue if the audiences are creative and creating, and if it features use generated content.

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