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Editorial: Participation and PAR

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When we initially put out the call for this issue, we had been ruminating about the potential—and pitfalls—of engaging in participatory practices as research; and by participatory we mean performances that require the direct input of an audience in relationship to the performer, dramaturgy or space. Works by Nicolas Bourriaud, Shannon Jackson, Gareth White, Claire Bishop, Jen Harvie and Baz Kershaw explore the political, social and performative aspects of an increasingly participatory turn in art practices; it is fascinating to observe the way participatory practices are also supplanting more passive modes of spectatorship in a broader cultural context. Following Jacques Ranciere’s *The Emancipated Spectator*, a multitude of academic and performance-based responses have emerged that test the fluid, and often complex boundaries between “activity” and “passivity,” suggesting that these positions no longer take place in a simple binary paradigm. Certain and recurring terms are now attached to performance, as ways of defining—and, significantly, *marketing*—these practices: terms such as “immersive” (Machon, Alston, Worthen), “embodied” (Broadhurst, Edinburgh, Allegranti, Shaughnessy), “augmented” (Birringer, Causey, Auslander), “engaged” (Lavender, White), “one-on-one” (Schulze, Alston), and “interactive” (Dixon, Benford, Giannachi). These epithets are frequently borrowed (appropriated?) from the social and “hard” sciences, and this raises the question as to what this suggests about the paradigm/s within which participatory practices may be investigated, and what sorts of methodologies utilized. One particularly exciting aspect of this wavering boundary line between passivity and activity that participation encourages, is that implications are emerging that extend beyond the arts *per se* and into larger societal concerns, urging forth a new paradigm of inter- and trans-disciplinarity.

With all this in mind, we asked: what are the implications of participating in and with performance as research? When existing as a member of a performance project, what are the ways in which one might develop an objective/subjective dialectic? When inviting outside participants into your research as a way of assessing the aesthetic and social impacts of the work, what are the possible attendant ethical responsibilities? How do we articulate the methodologies of embodied and participatory research in order for others to expand their own questioning? When designing participatory performance, what are the social implications of the process? What expectations do we take into research projects that require the participation of others?

Participation certainly exists in many forms, with many epistemological pathways through performance practices—and each one leads to a multitude of new questions regarding how we might plan, implement, and document these modes of performance. While many of the authors listed above have engaged deeply in the material, they are often more concerned with aesthetics and observation from *outside*. The challenge we presented to our contributors was to think from *within* the work, in order to develop language/s and protocol/s for expanding these practices, and being able to share the discoveries and processes more widely.

We begin this new issue of *PARtake* with the collective documentation of an event that sparked our chosen theme: *The Art of Participation Forum*. This event took place over two days in May, 2016, at the University of Kent in Canterbury, UK. This gathering brought together an international group of artists and academics, all involved in a wide spectrum of participatory arts. The event's curators sought to explore the inherently practical phenomenon of participatory arts by *doing* as well as discussing—a practice-as-research approach. The Forum embraced a non-hierarchical format, in which all attendees both led and participated in a session; this fostered a strong feeling of co-ownership and community. The resultant article—a combination of reflections, observations, and instructions from a selection of attendees—explores the idea of participation from the outlook of (both/and) theory and practice, and examines concerns such as game play, dissensus, group-think, compromise and manipulation. The final element of this curated selection is a Twine, within which readers can follow particular themes while discovering bonus content; this honors and explores the playful nature of both the Twine and the Forum itself.

Within participatory performance practices, especially as their many renderings expand and develop, the issue of creating—or even resisting the boundaries of—ethical relationships is one that scholarartists Michelle Young and James Layton explore in their respective articles. Young outlines the creative and ethical process of staging a site-specific oral history community theatre project in her former housing estate in Omagh, Northern Ireland—the site of a horrific terrorist act of car bombing in 1998. From the perspective of artist/facilitator, Young chronicles the process of residents sharing their own life stories in an investigation of memory, identity and place. Both for Young, who initiated and drove this project, and the residents/creators themselves there was a productive—and sometimes fraught—ambivalence inherent in the intersection between ethics and aesthetics in the work.

In “A Unity of Experience: The Shared Rhythms of Only Wolves and Lions,” Layton, using auto-ethnographic methodology, documents the participatory performance *Only Wolves and Lions*, wherein the audience shares a meal, conversation, and provocation. Through investing time in the shared activities of preparing and eating a meal, a sense of solidarity developed as participants, together in the context of a theatrical event, addressed the crisis of a lost sense of community. Layton explores ways in which individual rhythms gradually became a collective, shared rhythm through participation—a sense of rhythm/duration distinct from the homogenous, clock-measured time that regulates economic production as an authoritarian force in late capitalist society.

From this contextual framing of the ethical implications of participation, from both the artist and audience perspectives, we then move on to four articles that investigate methodologies for developing, implementing, and responding to participatory performance. Each contributor argues for deeper and more rigorous ways of thinking through participatory PAR work. In her paper “Only the Envelope: An Artistic Exercise in Data Retention,” Vahri McKenzie documents her PAR project *Only the Envelope*, which combines different research methodologies to explore not only the ways we share personal information in the public sphere, but how we might expand the ways we document our practices as scholartists. In this live art installation, a “scientist” invited visitors to participate in an “experiment” consisting of wearing a wireless eye-tracking device; this surveillance technology generated data about viewing behavior, while at the same time dramatized the act of observation, thus complicating its epistemology. McKenzie’s performance research led to unanticipated findings and the creation of new audiovisual documents—but were they “the work” or “records” of the work? This article engages with the traditional debate in performance studies about the supposed ephemerality of performance, investigating the space in which the division between the performance and the documentation blurs—another fluid boundary that contests a binary paradigm.

Joanna Bucknall’s article, “The ‘Reflective Participant,’ ‘(Remember)ing and (Rember)ance”” argues that experience is central to immersive, interactive, and participative dramaturgies and is the central feature of the work which poses a complex challenge to strategies of analysis and approaches to documentation. Bucknall draws out the epistemic logic of the practice-based (PBR) strategies she has developed for documenting and disseminating the nature of the audience’s role, through the role of the “reflective participant,” the process of “reflective

hypermnesis” as an act of (remember)ing, and the production of experiential documents of (remember)ance.

Lee Campbell proposes a new methodology for practice-as-research in his article “Anticipation, Action, and Analysis,” through a critical evaluation of his participatory work *Lost for Words*. Campbell argues that slapstick can offer useful insights into the operations of the physical body in participative art performance; he uses slapstick as a vehicle to explore interruptive processes related to bodily incongruity and repetition within collective bodies of participant audience members. Campbell’s three-stage methodology provides a useful framework for examining collectivity and conviviality within participatory processes.

In “Participatory Theatre as a Practice as Research Tool for Engaging with Young Men to Interrogate Masculinity and HIV in Malawi,” Zindaba Chisiza documents a series of participatory theatre-based workshops conducted with a group of male students from the University of Malawi. The aim of these workshops was to confront cultural constructions of masculinity that potentially lead to unsafe practices facilitating the spread of HIV. Chisiza illustrates how participatory theatre-based methodologies serve to empower these participants to openly discuss sexuality and gender identity, and argues—again, from inside the project—that this strategy is necessary to address a systemic problem surrounding the spread of HIV in Malawi.

One key aspect that has emerged throughout this issue of *PARTake* is the foregrounding of research and documentation from *within* the artistic process—participation as not only the experience of the audience, but of the practitioner. On offer here are not “aerial” views of participatory practices, but views shared from inside the work. This supports the re-mapping and re-thinking of boundaries as not fixed and excluding one side from the other, but inclusive, porous and a space that joins maker and audience in a complex world of encounter. This aspect is explored fully in the final article in this issue, “I-Reflexes: The Affective Implications of Bodies in Dance Improvisation Performance” by Paula Guzzanti. From the perspective of the dance improviser and drawing on the embodied meaning-making model of affect developed by social psychologist Margaret Wetherell, Guzzanti explores factors influencing decision-making in the midst of performance. *I-Reflexes* involved interaction between a solo-dancer, a sonic artist, a musician and the collaborative participation of the audience using their mobile phones. Ringtones were used to trigger unplanned reflex-like movements in the body, and explore what this might suggest in terms of decision-making in dance improvisation practice. Here we see the idea of the encounter

chronicled and unpacked in careful detail—one significant reflection that emerges is that the act of perception brings the world into the body of the improviser, while simultaneously the physical experience of affect places the improviser’s body in relation to other bodies in the “world.”

We offer reviews of three works/processes that are both timely and relevant to the ways participatory theater can also be a form of ethical and political practice. The first considers Taylor Mac's *24-Decade History of Popular Music Marathon*, St. Ann's Warehouse in New York City (2016). Using Jacques Derrida's theory of “l'avenir,” best translated as the “unexpected visitor,” Sean Edgecomb examines the concert, which pulled liberally from popular music published in the years 1776-2016 in an attempt to collectively exorcise the specters of the patriarchy and exonerate the oppressed in what Mac deems a “radical faerie ritual.” The review particularly explores elements of queer dramaturgy, song selection, choreography, audience participation and costumes.

In her performance review of the Washington, D.C. premiere of Lisa Loomer’s *Roe* (a co-production by Arena Stage, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and Berkeley Repertory), Angela Sweigart-Gallagher investigates how this particular production has taken on new urgency in the shifting political climate caused by the election of Donald Trump. Finally, Sean Bartley reviews the 2016 production *Elements of OZ* by the Builders Association and describes the interactions between the production’s onstage action, recorded and live-streamed sequences, and innovative smartphone app using augmented reality. Bartley proposes that this production fundamentally explores *process* rather than artistic product.

This issue of *PARtake* collages together process, documentation, and analysis in ways that merge these three terms. The articles demonstrate (and validate) the multiplicity of positionings from which it is possible, maybe even necessary, to examine participatory performance practice/s. It is our hope that the work here encourages you to invent new ways of addressing, exploring, and expanding work that can be an ethical and vibrant contribution to a political world climate that is—in many ways and places—growing increasingly wary of democratic participation; more embedded in exclusionary bureaucratic and decision-making practices. As we approach our work critically, ethically, and openly, artists can continue to make an impact on the broader culture/s in which we find ourselves. So, to work!