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MAKING SENSE OF PERCEPTION AND POWER IN PARTICIPATORY PERFORMANCE: HORIZONS OF CHANGE AND POLITICS OF THE SENSIBLE IN LOIS WEAVER'S WHAT TAMMY NEEDS TO KNOW, TELLERVO KALLEINEN AND OLIVER KOCHTA-KALLEINEN'S COMPLAINTS CHOIR, AND CLAUDIA BOSSE'S DOMINANT POWERS. WAS ALSO TUN?

The public defence of Joonas Lahtinen's doctoral dissertation in Theatre research was held via Zoom at the University of Helsinki on 11 December 2020. Prof. Fintan Walsh (Birkbeck, University of London) acted as Opponent and Prof. Hanna Korsberg (University of Helsinki) as Custos.

While the history of participatory practices in the arts reaches back to the avantgarde movements in the early 20th century and beyond, it is especially since the 1990's that they have been gaining more and more in popularity, both in Finland and internationally. As fellow scholars have pointed out, participatory practices entail ideological assumptions, limitations and exclusions that demand critical attention. These critical reservations range from the assumedly naïve belief in the transformative power of affirmative co-operative action to the rather limited scope of active agency that many participatory projects offer to their participants, to the harnessing of participatory art to the service of Neoliberalist social policies, and to the questioning of the plausibility of the very term "participatory art" on the grounds of its elasticity.¹ However, the existing critical analyses have not comprehensively discussed the role that the human perceptual apparatus – that is, our ways of perceiving, meaning-making and knowing – plays in the emergence of power relations in participatory performances. My doctoral dissertation operates on the premise that such accounts can help us make sense of both the political relevance of participatory performance situations, and of the processes of exclusion and inclusion such situations involve.

My dissertation consists of a theoretical part and three case study analyses. In the theoretical part, I present a novel performance analytical framework for addressing the ways in which artistic performances engage and affect their participants, and for understanding the culture-bound dynamic of perception, power, knowledge and the body both in participatory performance situations and in our everyday lives. This framework also provides a novel account of the material-performative human perceptual apparatus. Drawing especially on the views of Jacques Rancière, Marcel Mauss, and Michel Foucault, the main concepts of my framework are "sensory fields", "experience fields", and "body techniques". As for the verbalization of personal experiences through performance analysis, my framework draws on Joe Kelleher's and Alan Read's notions of "theatre images."² The main

¹ Alston 2016; Bishop 2012; De Marinis 1987; Freshwater 2009; Harvie 2013; Jackson 2011; Kester 1995; Kunst 2015; Rancière 2007; Rogoff and Schneider 2008.

² See Kelleher 2015, 3, 5, 22, 137; Read 1993, 53–54. In my use, "theatre images" refer to written descriptions of specific memorable sequences, scenes and spatial arrangements of a performance project as well as ambiances and feelings that the project has aroused in the researcher through "live" or "mediatized" encounters. That is, theatre images function as the "interface" for grasping and bringing together the relationships between the performance events; my experiences as a participant; and the analytical framework.

concepts of my analytical framework allow the researcher to pay explicit attention to his or her subjective experiences of the performances – in a “live” situation or through documentary material – without compromising and relativizing the analysis and the conclusions the analysis leads to.

Employing the analytical framework, I interrogate what I call “politics of the sensible” – that is, modes of participation, underlying assumptions regarding the participants and the efficacy of the chosen participatory strategy, potential inclusions and exclusions, and horizons of change – in Lois Weaver’s, Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen’s, and Claudia Bosse’s projects, each of which employs a different strategy to discuss and facilitate “change” within its specific rationale. Lois Weaver’s *What Tammy Needs to Know* (Helsinki, 2006) and *What Tammy Needs to Know About Getting Old and Having Sex* (London, 2008) address sexual empowerment, identities and the transformatory potential of sharing knowledge. Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen’s *Complaints Choir* focuses on the potentially empowering qualities of collective song composition process and choir singing. I analyse three choirs: the Complaints Choirs of Helsinki (2006), Singapore (2008), and Vienna (2010–). Claudia Bosse’s and theatercombinat’s *dominant powers. was also tun?* (Vienna, 2011) interrogates the power-invested relationship between recent revolutionary political events in northern Africa and their narrativizations, as well as the problematic of democratic change.

In my dissertation, the term “sensory field” describes pre-individual and non-voluntary activity that we do not have access to in our daily lives. Sensory field refers to forms, intensities and elements that the senses of a human being register amidst the continuous flux of stimuli that surrounds it. However, the human mind automatically seeks to take sensory affects into language and turn them into experiences of a self-conscious “I”. That is, one’s affections on the sensory field are “turned” or “translated” as reflected and conscious experiences, feelings, and emotions. In this process, the particular sensory field turns into an experience field insofar as the affects and sensations that the sensory field gave rise to can be rendered meaningful.³

I suggest that every performance gives rise to a particular sensory field, which in this context means the specific material, kinaesthetic, visual, aural and haptic situation created by the performance, as a combined effect of all its participants and elements. It is through this sensory field that the participants form a conscious experience – an experience field – of the event. Whenever we talk about or analyse a performance situation, we talk about our partial and subjective experiences rooted in the sensory field of that situation; it is not possible to describe or reason about sensory fields “as such”. The artists bring crucial elements to the sensory field by means of their actions and the scenography that they have created, but they do not and cannot take complete control of the sensory field of the event. This is because sensory fields and the experiences that they arouse in participants are always situational; they depend on the specific bodily constellation, expectations, moods and reactions of each participant that cannot be fully predicted in advance.⁴

Living in a specific society, we constantly assume and learn collective body techniques, and learn to express and interpret feelings and emotions in order to survive and thrive in that society. These techniques are also ways in which we adapt – or do not adapt – to the behavioural codes of the society, and ways through which others perceive and assess us. In this ongoing social process,

³ Hurley 2010; Lahtinen 2015; Pitts-Taylor 2016; Sullivan 2013; Rancière 2011.

⁴ De Marinis 1987; Lahtinen 2015.

we also continuously create a sense of “self” and of our subjectivity. Body techniques “embody” social norms, values and hierarchies in that they produce and manifest accustomed ways of using one’s body “properly”; of reacting to other bodies “properly”; and of having a “proper” relation to one’s own body in various social situations. I consider all acts and ways of speaking – not only the basic techniques to produce speech through the interplay of the mouth and related body parts but also vocabularies, colloquialisms, and so on – to be body technical activity.⁵

Each participatory performance demands and rehearses participants’ specific bodily and communicative skills – that is, specific body techniques – thereby producing specific relations of power and specific forms of agency concerning its participants. Within the rationale of that performance, certain skills and behavioural patterns appear as desirable, and some others as not. This also applies to Weaver’s, Kalleinen and Kochta-Kalleinen’s, and Bosse’s projects, all of which required proactive participation, yet with different emphases. Weaver’s *What Tammy Needs to Know* performances focused on the expressive speech of the individual participants, whereas in the *Complaints Choir*, the emphasis was strongly on the expressive, harmonic and unified group singing and on the collective song-composition process. Both in the *What Tammy Needs to Know* performances and in the Complaints Choirs of Helsinki, Singapore and Vienna, it was essential to conform and adhere to the predefined form and procedure of participation, developed by the artists beforehand. *Dominant powers*, for its part, focused on the proactivity of the individual participants; on their attentiveness and on their choices as to how to navigate and move about on the site and what stimuli to follow.

Drawing on Rancière, I suggest that politics is not solely about distributing power, visibility, and capacities for action within some social body but also, and foremost, about who and what are visible; who and what are “legitimate” parts of the society in the first place. That is, politics is about the very practices of “ordering” and “challenging” reality; about the processes of making bodies, issues and things sensible both materially and discursively.⁶ I believe that artistic performances are capable of playing with and challenging the hegemonic order of reality: what it consists of, and who and what have a part in it. Ultimately, this is why they have political relevance.⁷

However, an artistic performance can adhere to and reiterate the order of reality in certain respects and challenge it in some other respects. Besides locating productive transformatory potential and tendencies in all of the case study projects, my analyses bring about critical perspectives and notions that have not been addressed in previous research on Weaver’s, Kalleinen’s and Bosse’s projects. As to Weaver’s *What Tammy Needs to Know* performances, I located potentially exclusive tendencies in Weaver’s participatory strategy based on verbalization and extrovert behaviour, and thereby offered an alternative to the prevailing affirmative readings.⁸ I also addressed the compliance of Weaver’s participatory strategy and ethos in the performances with a post-Fordist mode of work and explicitly analysed their reliance on the psychosexual subject assumption. As to the *Complaints Choir* project, unlike previous analyses I thematised the problematic sides of affirmation, authority and uniformity inherent in the project. Instead of seeing anti-capitalist possibilities in the project in its current form, I located issues – such as non-remunerated work input; the promotion of extrovert

⁵ Crossley 2004; De Marinis 1987; Foucault [1975] 1995; Foucault 2003; Lahtinen 2015; Mauss [1934] 1992.

⁶ Rancière 1999; Rancière 2004; Rockhill 2004.

⁷ Rancière 2008.

⁸ See e.g. Dolan 2015; Harvie 2015; Underwood 2007.

and bold behaviour and of cooperation skills; the ethos of creating “feelings of community” seen as a therapeutic measure; and the potential process of “professionalization” of the singers – that make the project conform rather neatly to the ethos of post-Fordist Capitalist economy.⁹ Lastly, in *dominant powers. was also tun?*, the reliance on proactivity, navigating on one’s own on the performance site, and the de-central non-theatre location, gave rise to a potentially exclusive ambience that limited its audience base to art aficionados. Moreover, while the performance destabilized and challenged glib classifications of “nation” and “democracy”, it problematically hinted at demographic representation at the level of video interviews and the naming of the volunteers’ choir that were part of the performance.

While I have developed the analytical framework primarily for performance analytical purposes, it may also offer productive inputs for artist-researchers, curators and art educators in planning and reflecting on their projects, and for scholars in areas such as epistemology, semiotics, and political science. I hope that the considerations that I present in my dissertation will contribute to our understandings of the complex dynamic of perception, power, materiality and performativity in performance situations, in our daily lives, and in the formation of reality.

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⁹ See Liinamaa 2009, 131–132.

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