

Participation and Creative Autonomy: The Changing Role of Artists

Ine Therese Berg

Abstract

In this article I analyze the implications of different forms of participation on the role of artists and their creative autonomy. Through a conceptual clarification around core ideas that are commonly associated with the pairing of participation and art, I discuss recent development in artistic practices. The concepts artistic autonomy and creativity have been central to the development of the professional role and identity that artists in the performing arts field have today. With this as a backdrop, I map out the conceptual differences between *creative participation*, *aesthetic participation*, *democratic participation* and *civic participation*, and how they impact artists. The article mainly draws on recent theory in performance studies and applied theatre, as well as sociological perspectives. Finally, I discuss how contemporary artists often combine different roles, even within a single work.

About the author

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Participation and Creative Autonomy: The Changing Role of Artists

The recent years audience participation in theatre and performance has emerged as a new research field in theatre studies following what we can call a participatory turn in the culture and in society in general. However, the role of artists in the wake of this participatory turn has been less discussed than that of the audience. Thus, through a conceptual clarification around core ideas that are commonly associated with the pairing of participation and art, I will in this article discuss recent developments in artistic practices. The concepts artistic autonomy and creativity have been central to the development of the professional role and identity that artists in the performing arts field have today. Underpinning the discussion are the questions - what does creative autonomy look like in the 21st century? Do we need new concepts to describe the role of artists today? If so, what are potential risks?

Through the 20th century the role of artists has undergone substantial development closely related to fundamental societal change affecting the access both to art and to art education, arts funding, and diversifying institutional frameworks supporting artistic practices and dissemination of art and performance. The developing role of artists can, in sociological terms, be divided into two distinct movements, fetishization and democratization.

Institutionalization of the notion of artistic autonomy and art for art's sake draws on philosophical aesthetics from Kant to Adorno for its legitimation. Within this frame the role of the artist is tied to virtuosity. More generally, creativity has become a valuable asset in a post-industrial society that emphasizes values commonly associated with artists: like self-realization, individual freedom, and risk-taking.¹ While the idea of the artist as genius in many ways has been replaced by the notion of the critical function of art and artists, the autonomous field of art awards a unique place for the role of the creative artist in society.

Nevertheless, there has been a diversification of how we understand the role of the artist, as is reflected in the title of this article. This can be understood as a consequence of politically radical movements in the 1960s that were vitally reflected in the arts but is also a part of increasing specialization in both art and society. In *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu² demonstrates the historicity of the role of the autonomous

¹ Mangset and Hylland, *Kulturpolitikk* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2017), p. 103

² Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996)

artist showing how a dichotomy between autonomy and heteronomy is embedded in the constitution of art as a distinct field of culture, particularly in the literary field and within visual art. Bourdieu argues that the art field is grounded in the belief of the “...quasi-magical powers attributed to the modern artist”.³ In contrast, he claims that the value of art is in fact relational and therefore historical, and that the difference between autonomous and heteronomous art is discursively produced and rests on the principle of internal and external hierarchization.⁴

The growth of the autonomous field of art has led to a range of specialized professions like critics, curators, art dealers, and gallery owners that contribute to and uphold the field through processes of consecration and accumulation of symbolic capital with the artist as the symbolic figurehead. Although the art field is deeply ambivalent to the market a fetishization of the artist and works of art lays the basis for a growing commercial market for modern art⁵, what I in this context would describe as a mythologization of creation and creativity.

It is in the 1960s that participation begins to be conceptualized as a distinct form of artistic practice. Bourdieu’s class-conscious sociological critique corresponds with a cultural political focus on cultural democratization that alongside 1960s counter cultural and political grass-roots movements, started to place a larger emphasis on participation and a more diverse understanding of art and culture. The focus in cultural policy turned to cultural capacity building and cultural rights⁶. This shift mirrors a de-hierarchization in society in general, and in the arts in particular. Artists in many fields sought to challenge existing institutions by forging new relationships with the audience and emphasizing creativity as a generalized human capacity. A somewhat under-communicated history of the avant-garde is that many radical artists in post-war US and Europe quit the art world and sought instead to bring artistic strategies into fields like healthcare, education, and social work.⁷ (Rasmussen, 2014) In Bourdieusian terms, such practices fall under a field of heteronomous cultural production and have often come under attack as instrumentalist.

Participation and the role of artists

The article proposes four ways of conceptualizing the changing role of artists in relation to participation: *creative participation*, *aesthetic participation*, *democratic participation* and *civic participation*. These concepts appear in the literature on participatory art and theatre, and here I suggest that they represent different discursive approaches to the artists’ role and creative autonomy more than descriptive models of existing practices. Thus, I discuss these four different forms of

³ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 259

⁴ Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 217-218

⁵ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993)

⁶ See for instance Bonet and Négrier, “The Participative Turn in Cultural Policy”

⁷ Rasmussen, «Feltet barn og teater» (The field children and theatre)

participation, not as a taxonomy of the role of artists at various stages of creative autonomy, but as heuristic concepts that serve to illuminate changing and dynamic interpretations of the role of the artist. I will come back to an example of how the role of contemporary artists may in fact implicate all these concepts in the final section using Boltanski and Thévenot's concept of *equivalence*.⁸

So far, I have primarily drawn on concepts from cultural sociology to establish a conceptual and contextual background to discuss the role of the artist within. Going forward, I among several references draw on research in the field of applied theatre to discuss the diversification of the role of artists in the wake of a cultural turn towards participation. Here I find a sustained discourse on participation, that alongside concepts like democratization and creativity has been less prominent in theatre studies.

Aesthetic participation

In both art and theatre research we find different models of audience participation developed in order to categorize different ways of participating, often structured as a ladder⁹ where participation is ordered from the limited involvement to stronger involvement.¹⁰ British theatre researcher Astrid Breel, for instance, suggests that there is a difference between *interaction*, *participation*, *co-creation* and *co-execution*. She focuses on what it entails for the audience, but evidently, the role of the artist is the other side of the coin:

[I]nteraction (where the work contains clearly defined moments for the audience to contribute within), participation (when the audience's participation is central to the work and determines the outcome of it), co-creation (when the audience are involved in creating some of the parameters of the artwork), and co-execution (where the audience help execute the work in the way the artist has envisioned).¹¹

As we can see from this taxonomy, it retains the notion of the *artwork*, as well as *artistic vision*. The different forms of participation are all clearly framed as an aesthetic experience and not as for instance a social event. In the book *Aesthetics of the Invitation* British theatre researcher Gareth White writes that what I categorize as *aesthetic participation* feels like a different experience from a traditional theatre performance because it requires a different form of activity from the audience.¹² His examples are performances that are more or less scripted, and it is clear that the ability to create experiences that audiences find meaningful, provocative, challenging, exciting, and entertaining is an artistic competence. White uses media researcher Janet Murray's term *procedural authorship* to describe the relationship between the audience and the artist in

⁸ Boltanski and Thévenot, "The Sociology of Critical Capacity"

⁹ See also Sherry Arnstein's classic model, "ladder of participation" in Arnstein, "A ladder of citizen participation"

¹⁰ Hovik and Nagel, *Deltakelse og Interaktivitet i Scenekunst for Barn* (Participation and Interactivity in Performing Arts for Children); Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010)

¹¹ Breel, "Audience Agency in Participatory Performance: A Methodology for Examining Aesthetic Experience.", pp. 369-370

¹² White, *Audience Participation in Theatre* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 4

participatory theatre practices. “Procedural authorship means writing the rules by which the texts appear as well as writing the texts themselves. It means writing the rules for the interactor’s involvement, that is, the conditions under which things will happen in response to the participant’s actions.”¹³ As White points to in this quote and in his further use of this concept procedural authorship is that audience participation in theatre does not erase the creative autonomy of the artist.

What we consider to be participatory performances require different working methods and dramaturgical framing devices to accommodate the fact that the audience has become artistic material, and concepts like procedural authorship help point to the artistic skill involved. Projects that can be categorized as incorporating aesthetic participation where the audience are an intrinsic part of the fabrics of the performance are increasingly presented within art institutional frameworks, like performing arts festivals or regular theatres, often choosing to present work ‘out of house’. As I show in the article *Norwegian Theatre – a blind spot on cultural policy’s participatory agenda?*¹⁴ there is a risk involved. While the notion of aesthetic participation affirms the artist as a creative driving force in the theatre, artists still need the consecration of gate keepers like Arts Councils, theatre critics, and artistic directors, meaning that their work must be acknowledged as professional art. As I argue, participation from non-artists requires artists to rhetorically emphasize the aesthetic dimensions of the work and of their professional role. Funding opportunities depend on the strength of the artistic concept, past project-experience, but also the professional status of the artist who is applying and the other people contributing to the production. If the co-creative participants are amateurs the project risks falling outside the formal criteria that many Arts Council operate with, namely that they support professional artists. In other words, the criteria of success both commercially and critically is related to artists’ ability to frame the performance as a work of art closely tied to their creative autonomy, an experience that can be marketed to and recognized by peers, and audiences as such.

Democratic Participation

Political theorist Carol Pateman’s definition of participation can distinguish different participatory strategies from each other. Her political definition hinges on the possibility to influence the outcome of a decision-making process, fully and equally, or at least partially.¹⁵ Thus, democratic participation implies shifting from a vertical understanding of culture, to a horizontal one: moving from making theatre *for* someone, to making it *with* them. This definition and the political discourse on democratic participation is not necessarily considered relevant to the majority of professional, commercial and experimental theatre artists, since it so strongly emphasizes participants’ influence on both process *and* outcome. However, if we step to the side of the

¹³ Ibid. p. 31

¹⁴ Berg, "Norwegian Theatre – A Blind Spot on Cultural Policy’s Participatory Agenda?"

¹⁵ Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970)

autonomous theatre institutions and look instead to the field of drama and applied theatre, the discourse on democratic participation is strong.

According to Professor in Applied theatre and drama, Helen Nicholson, applied theatre as a field designates a diverse set of practices. In its genealogy is workers' theatre from the beginning of the 20th century, Freirean and progressive pedagogics, and community theatre.¹⁶ Participation is at the center of these practices and can be seen as a break with hierarchical and bourgeois theatre, and hegemonic culture. Emanating from this radical tradition means that applied theatre practitioners see their creative practice as a way of bettering the world. In other words, we are dealing with a heteronomous field of cultural production.

In terms of the creative autonomy of artists, a focus on process rather than product means that creative agency is shifted onto participants rather than a single author, whether they are other professional artists or non-artists. Democratic participation thus moves away from the quasi-magical belief in the artist as genius and emphasizes creativity as an intrinsic human trait. Placing participation within Kantian aesthetics, White writes "...each of us has a spirit capable of animating the mind towards combining imagination and understanding in free play, as is evident in our capability for judgements of taste".¹⁷ Applied theatre practitioners often work with groups of people or communities that are perceived as having little access to the means of cultural expression, and they use artistic methods to uncover and discuss inequality experienced by the participants. The role of these practitioners then, is to unlock the creative capacity of the individual participant. According to Nicholson there has traditionally been a skepticism towards too strong of an artistic focus among applied drama practitioners and this in part stems from a concern over "an uneven balance of power".¹⁸ In other words, since the ideal of the democratic process is a core value there is a fear of imposing external and restrictive quality standards on the participants.

Even though participatory strategies having seeped into art institutions, there is nevertheless a persistent dichotomy between pure theatre for aesthetic ends and applied theatre.¹⁹ A common criticism towards participatory art practices popularized through the work of Claire Bishop,²⁰ is that due to instrumentalization of the arts, artists are tasked with fixing structural social ailments. The consequence is neither good art, nor efficient solutions to complex social problems, since artists are neither social workers, nor have the resources to fix deeply rooted social and economic inequality. However, rather than seek legitimacy because drama and theatre is useful for purposes such as learning, individual development or conflict solving, White, along with Nicholson, are among those that argue for the artistry involved in applied theatre making. As such, an emphasis on the aesthetic dimension is a way out of this dichotomy, where focus on democratic participation is not a negation of the skills or professional identity of the artists. In terms of

¹⁶ Nicholson, *Applied Drama* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 11-12

¹⁷ White, *Applied Theatre* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p.64

¹⁸ Nicholson, *Applied Drama* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 57

¹⁹ See for instance White 2013, op.cit.; Rasmussen, op.cit.; Nicholson, *ibid.*, 2014)

²⁰ Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics"

creative autonomy such a notion of democratic participation entails sharing creative agency rather than shifting it.

Creative participation

The previous forms of participation are discursively linked to practices that belong to subfields with different economic and organizational logics, but nevertheless overlap in some theatre and art institutions, practices and projects such as in “bürgerbühne”- or citizen theatre projects that are run by publicly funded theatre institutions, like Staatsschauspiel Dresden, Aalborg Teater, or co-produced as the project Bergen Borgerscene by The National Stage, Bergen.²¹ Creative participation is perhaps harder to recognize as a distinct subfield of participatory theatre practices, but differentiating it is a way to highlight a shift in artists’ creative autonomy that I unpack through the already established concepts *creative economy*, *experience economy* and *delegated labor*. Cultural sociologists Lluís Bonet and Emmanuel Négrier²² write that the interpretation of participation, the role of professional artists and audience shifts between different cultural political paradigms that co-exist.²³ In the paradigm they name “creative economy” the meaning of participation is based on the idea of consumption, as is visible in the concept “prosumer” – that implies that audiences and essentially everyone, become both a producer and a consumer.²⁴ This idea is closely connected with the concept of the *experience economy* that moves from manufacturing and selling goods to producing and selling experiences.

A way of selling more experiences is by enhancing them, and creative participation is one way to do this. The intention is that involving the consumer in customizing goods and services according to their personal needs and taste will increase satisfaction, brand loyalty, and the likelihood of sharing their positive experience.²⁵ Within the discourse on participation and experience economy, the critics of neoliberalism understand these bids for our creative participation as a form of exploitation of labor. While a neoliberal ideal is individual freedom and self-actualization (which closely relates to the romantic ideal of the creative, autonomous artist), a critical perspective frames creative participation as an opportunity to profit on these ideals, on behalf of the creative participant who only has limited choice on the nature and character of this participation, and sometimes whether to participate at all.²⁶

²¹ <https://www.staatsschauspiel-dresden.de/ensemble/hinter-der-buehne/buergerbuehne/>, <https://www.aalborgteater.dk/borgerscenen/>, <https://www.fleslandhavre.com/borgerscenen.html>

²² Bonet and Négrier, “The Participative Turn in Cultural Policy”

²³ A primary focus on stimulating *excellency* is essentially a top-down approach that focuses on access to high-culture, *cultural democratization* encompasses a shift towards providing broader access to this high quality culture, while *cultural democracy* shifts towards stimulating participation in a broader range of cultural activities, in Norwegian ‘det utvidede kulturbegrepet’. The fourth paradigm “creative economy” emphasizes economic potential related to the growth of cultural industries. Ibid., pp. 65-67.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Pine and Gilmore, *The Experience Economy* (Harvard Business School Press, 2011)

²⁶ Alston, *Beyond Immersive Theatre* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016)

In the book *Fair Play*, Jen Harvie's critique of participatory art and performance is performed through the concept *delegated performance*.²⁷ Here she writes that the prosumer, or the productive consumer, takes up the labor that previously was done by others, and in return gets to make more choices, potentially tailoring their experience more to their own preference. The concept of creative labor can be said to take the idea of democratic participation that everyone can be creative and turn it into something that is possible to exploit commercially. Harvie writes that such exploitation is pervasive, but often goes unnoticed "...in much contemporary art and performance, where audiences are regularly called upon to participate, contribute to and at least co-create the performance also for free and sometimes, more precisely, at the *cost* of a fee".²⁸ Increased reliance on the creative labor of non-professional participants engenders several problems that are endemic in networked culture. Two of the issues Harvie addresses is who is left out if free labor becomes an expectation and who gets the credit? While a recognized artist profits from delegated creative labor since the performance (or should we say work?) is accredited to their name, volunteers and participating audience often appear as an anonymous mass who offer their time without remuneration.

Now a decade after her book was published, the economic model of social media platforms is increasingly criticized for turning users into unpaid content producers that exchange their attention for addictive sensory stimulus, thus there might be more awareness around the dilemmas that surround a cultural economy based on prosumerism.²⁹ Approaching audience participation as a form of labor seems to be on the agenda in the performing arts field, specifically showing itself in the concern over audience fatigue with shows where they are 'put to work'. This might be amplified after several years of global lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic saw an increase in pedestrian, site specific, at-home DIY performance kits and one-to-one performances.

In the context of this article, it is interesting to ask if the delegation of creative labor from the artist to the audience is a delegation of autonomous creativity. If so, what are possible implications, particularly for artists? Although prosumerism in the form of delegated performance according to Harvie can lead to equality of opportunity, new modes of expression, economic self-sufficiency and independence, learning new skills and cross expression, and not least fun for all involved, she reminds readers that this may suppress the work that professional artists were previously paid to do.³⁰ Also, delegation of work away from specialized laborers to lay audiences may not only lead to a de-valuation of art, and performances of lower quality, but the rhetoric of self-sufficiency might in the long run legitimize cuts in funding. On an overarching level, what these critical perspective offers is that the focus on individualism that actually underpins much participatory and delegated art and culture damages social relations and principles of social equality.³¹ Linking practices of delegation embedded in current theatre and

²⁷ Harvie, *Fair Play* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

²⁸ *Ibid.* p.28

²⁹ See for instance Fisher, Eran, "How less alienation creates more exploitation?"; Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019)

³⁰ Harvie, *op.cit.*, p. 50

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 75-77

performance culture to prosumerism show the flipside of current fetishization of individual creativity, and such a critical discourse is necessary to nuance an often one-sided celebration of the aesthetic and democratic potential of audience participation.

Civic Participation

The last discursive category is civic participation. In the literature I surveyed for this article, a common point was that the meaning of citizenship and civil society, which the concept civic participation is closely related to, is not always clear. In a study from 2016, education researchers Wolfram Schulz et al. define civic participation as the manifestations of the individual's actions in their communities, a very open definition that can hold several different actions, like decision making, influencing and community participation.³² Politics researcher Jean Grugel writes: "Civil society is crucial for democracy because it is the space between the public and private spheres where civic action takes place", and also describes it as "the arena of associations, of individual and community agency".³³ In other words, the notion of the civic can be understood to relate to individuals' actions in a specific community.

Adapting Schulz et al's terminology to theatre we can understand theatre's civic role in society to come through influencing and community participation. Thoughts might drift towards Ibsen and the realist theatre program of putting social issues under scrutiny and public debate. Theatre's ability to do this is still among its primary legitimations, even though the idea of theatre as a public sphere has been challenged, not only by mass media but also by questions of the historical uneven access to this public sphere. As Christopher Balme argues in *The Theatrical Public Sphere* it is a paradox that theatre's importance in the public sphere in Western society has greatly diminished despite increasing democratization of society and culture, retreating into positions of commercial entertainment or a place of "consecrated aesthetic absorption".³⁴ Looking at theatre artists' civic participation in the public sphere in terms of political influence, you find similar challenges. I must add that many politically engaged artists struggle with visibility and as I see it, with being taken seriously as legitimate social actors in the public sphere. The legitimacy of artistic expressions and their specific mode of communication is increasingly under pressure. There are several examples of this in Norway, from the reception of and discourse around the

³² Schulz et al., *IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2016 Assessment Framework* (Springer, 2016), p.20

³³ Grugel, *Democratization: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p.93

³⁴ Balme, *The Theatrical Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p.3

performance *Ways of Seeing*,³⁵ to the debates around art and performances dealing with Breiviks' terror attacks on the 22 July on the Government building and on Utøya³⁶

Turning to the notion of *community participation* I again come back to research in applied theatre where the artists' role in relation to the idea of *citizenship* is an emerging discourse. Helen Nicholson uses the political philosopher Chantal Mouffe's concept of *agonism* to propose a radical articulation of applied artistic practice as citizenship.³⁷ Mouffe emphasizes political struggle as essential for democracy and criticizes the Habermasian liberal interpretation of the public sphere that focuses on consensus and therefore suppresses dissent. Mouffe sees a potential for arts to occupy a critical space, and Nicholson thus quotes her: "Critical art foments dissensus that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. It is constituted by a manifold of artistic practices".³⁸ On the potential of theatre as an agonistic practice, Nicholson suggests that theatre allows us to "inhabit alternative subject positions" and "to witness the world of others"³⁹ and builds this on the dual understanding of citizenship and theatre as a relational practice. Inhabiting and witnessing the position and world of 'the other' has a potential for criticality, a core value in the autonomous field of art, and is also a way to break out of a closed and self-referential art world circuit. I see this as a proposal to think the aesthetic and the social together.

Nicholson refers to Shannon Jackson who in *Social Works* delivers a strong argument for understanding autonomy and heteronomy in art, not as dichotomous, or opposites, but as a dynamic;

The social here does not exist on the perimeter of an aesthetic act, waiting to feel its effects. Nor is the de-autonomizing of the art object a de-aestheticization. Rather, the de-autonomizing of the artistic event is itself an artistic gesture, more and less self-consciously creating an intermedial form that subtly challenges the lines that would demarcate where an art object ends and the world begins. It is to make art from, not despite, contingency...⁴⁰

³⁵ The reception of performance *Ways of Seeing* that premiered in 2018 developed into a political scandal in Norway. Artists Pia Maria Roll, Hanan Benammar, and Sara Baban work with activist artistic strategies and in one part of the performance they included their own recorded footage of the facades of the homes of politicians and financial elites that they understand to serve the racist agenda of the far right and support increasing surveillance of citizens. Reacting to this criticism and what was seen as a breach of privacy politicians on the right used the media to de-legitimize the artists and also suggested to defund several theatres and festivals and hence restrict what is possible to say from a theatre stage. Additionally, there was a false flag operation by the wife of the Minister of Justice that tried to blame the artists for attacks on their family home that was one of the homes that was filmed.

³⁶ See for instance Bönisch, "Uenighetsdramaturgier"

³⁷ Nicholson, *Applied drama* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

³⁸ C. Mouffe 2007, in H. Nicholson, *ibid.* p. 29

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Jackson, *Social Works* (Routledge, 2011) p. 28

In the frame of civic participation and the creative autonomy of artists, I invite the reader to consider the notion of de-autonomizing as an artistic choice or, as Jackson calls it, an artistic *gesture*. The notion of participation as gesture is also central in Sruti Bala's *The gestures of participatory art*. Here, Bala writes;

I argue that participatory practices are best appreciated in the register of the gestural. As a unit of theatrical or performative action, the gesture is simultaneously an expression of an inner attitude as well as a social habitude. It extends beyond the stage of theatre or performance into the sphere of civic life.⁴¹

Thinking alongside Bala, this means that how an artist approaches participation reflects their attitude to the audience, but also their space for maneuvering the social and cultural field that they operate in, and that participatory strategies can be interpreted as an expression of how artists understand their civic role. My own view is that to understand the role of artists as one of civic participation, is to accept a certain contingency or openness to eventualities and indeterminacy of social relations, and contingency of the status of the work of art. In a space of indeterminacy there is a shared space for both the artist and the participant to let their different competencies and perspectives meet, not to reach a consensus but to create both aesthetic and worldly effects.

Blurring the boundaries

Many artists that work with the theatre today take an approach where aesthetic participation, democratic participation, creative participation and civic participation are all in play. In a recent interview with the German company Rimini Protokoll who enjoys a high degree of international success with work that prominently features various forms of audience participation, Daniel Wetzel makes a point of saying that they never call their work art.⁴² They do however call it theatre, and work with ways of opening what theatre can be beyond the enlightenment model. I mention this to draw attention to the fact that in many cases, the creative role of the artist is not primarily tied to being autonomous, but rather to his or her ability to employ artistic competency and aesthetic strategies in relation to the people and world around.

One consequence of a diversification of what can be considered artistic practice is that the distinctions between autonomy and heteronomy become less relevant, in fact this is a consequence of a sociological perspective that shows how autonomous art is an idealist construct. In the real world, a position free from economic or political concerns is untenable, even for artists that resist the marketization of art and culture. In his PhD thesis *Regulating Autonomy*, cultural policy researcher Bård Kleppe uses sociologists Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot's model of six common worlds to challenge the idea that artistic autonomy is the sole

⁴¹ Bala, *The Gestures of Participatory Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 15

⁴² <http://lab.cccb.org/en/rimini-protokoll-theres-not-such-a-big-difference-between-us-and-the-audience/>

legitimator in the theatre field.⁴³ Rather, the complexity of the structures that support the institutional theatre field means that artistic directors and artists employ a range of justifications to legitimate their own choices and actions. He writes that Boltanski and Thévenot “claim that justification must be done according to a set of common worlds, and that these worlds limit the social actor when he or she wishes to claim universality in their reasoning”⁴⁴ These six worlds, in abbreviated form are: *the inspired world* that values creation and inspiration, *the domestic world* that values tradition, lineage, and family, *the opinion world* that values recognition of others and conventional signs of public esteem, *the civic world* that values collective goods and equality, *the market world*, that values profit and laws of the market, and finally, *the industrial world* that values productivity, rationality, and competencies.⁴⁵ Clearly, different discourses of participation as I unpack them above can be compared to these worlds in the way they emphasize the value of participation differently. What is essential here, as is Kleppe’s point, is that contemporary theatre and performance depend on the collective efforts and meeting of a wide range of institutions, agents and functions to come into existence.

The different understandings of participation that are circulating today only adds to this complexity. In the article *The Sociology of Critical Capacity* Boltanski and Thévenot write: “Situations close to one another in space and time are justified according to different principles. And the same persons have to move through these situations.”⁴⁶ The role of artists today can be seen as a good example of this. Artists employ a wide range of justifications for their artistic work and in relation to their professional identity, and they choose the ones that are appropriate to the situation and context that they engage in. As I show in the article *Norwegian Theatre – a blind spot on cultural policy’s participatory agenda?* some artists are highly aware of the different discourses of participation and can strategically integrate it in their rhetoric arsenal, while others have trouble negotiating the sometimes contradictory expectations that comes with crossing between fields.⁴⁷

Boltanski and Thévenot’s concept *equivalence* is another useful perspective in finding common ground across different frames of reference:

To make an agreement (or disagreement) possible, particular persons must divest themselves of their singularity and converge towards a form of generality transcending persons and the situations in which they interrelate. Persons seeking agreement have therefore to focus on a convention of equivalence external to themselves.⁴⁸

In other words, artists collaborating with non-artist participants from different backgrounds enter what I call a negotiation. Rather than hold on to a discourse or professional language that might not be recognized by the other party, they make use of conventions that are familiar and shared

⁴³ Kleppe, *Regulating Autonomy* (UiS, 2017)

⁴⁴ Ibid. p 45-46

⁴⁵ Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, in Kleppe, *ibid.* p. 45-46

⁴⁶ Boltanski and Thévenot, "The Sociology of Critical Capacity", p. 369

⁴⁷ Berg, "Norwegian Theatre"

⁴⁸ My parentheses, Boltanski & Thévenot, *ibid.*, p. 361

by all. As in the concept of civic participation this entails recognizing that artmaking is always in flux between autonomy and heteronomy.

To conclude this article, I will exemplify this negotiation and use the notion of switching between social worlds to reflect on how different roles of artists and concepts of creativity can be active within one performing arts project. *Lulleli for Fruholmen fyr*,⁴⁹ by Berstad, Carlsen, Ryg Helgebostad, and Seljeseth was a theatrical event in three parts that took place in august 2016, on Ingøy, a remote island outside of Hammerfest in Finnmark. The first part was an ambulatory performance with different attractions spread around in the landscape that happened at the same time as a live radio broadcast. The second part was a performance taking place with audience seated in a hillside with the ocean and Fruholmen lighthouse in the background. The audience watched actions in the distance while listening to a pre-recorded track with stories and musings about life on Ingøy. The third part was a “bryggedans”, a party joining artists, local participants and volunteers, and the general audience in a warehouse on the fishing dock, lasting into the small hours. The artists produced the project, together with Dansearena Nord. It was funded by the Norwegian Arts Council, as well as with regional funding and local private sponsors, and the event was tied in part to the anniversary of the lighthouse. These organizations have very different agendas, thus the ability to switch between different justifications belonging to different social worlds to legitimate the artistic practice, was key in successfully funding *Lulleli for Fruholmen fyr*.

Nevertheless, this extends far beyond the potential size of budgets. The artists did not belong to the local community that they made the project with, and their creative intentions were not shared across social worlds, thus including other agendas was a necessity. This was particularly pertinent as the project depended on various forms of participation throughout its course, both the participation of audiences on the day, the delegation of work to the local village association and to local amateurs, as well as collaborating artists flying in. To complicate it further there was a diverse set of audience; the inhabitants of Ingøy, audience coming in from the city of Hammerfest and other places in the region, friends and family of the artists, and visiting critics and researchers. My field work in Ingøy showed that the aesthetic references even amongst the locals were extremely diverse, some participants had hardly ever visited a theatre, some had circus as a primary reference for the event, while others were active in local cultural activities and had some references to contemporary theatre. This means, the ability of shifting between justifications from common worlds is vital – not only by making art that is open to different interpretations, but in terms of Boltanski and Thévenot, creating an equivalence and reaching a compromise between different systems of value.

⁴⁹ The participatory nature of the project has been explored more extensively in Berg, I.T., 2022, *Aesthetics of Contribution. Participatory Adventures in 'Lulleland'*, in Arntzen, K.O & Carlsen, T., *Landscape Theatre and the North. Lullelic Reflections*. Orkana Forlag, Stamsund

Initially I asked - what does creative autonomy look like in the 21'st century? And do we need new concepts to describe the role of artists today? I propose that the artists behind *Lulleli for Fruholmen fyr* deliberately draw on different forms of participation in an inclusive way so that creative autonomy is shared amongst artists and other participants. It might seem like a relatively unique example, and indeed, in many ways it is. Nevertheless, it represents a larger trend where artists normally associated with autonomous, often experimental theatre, dance, and art expand and situate their practice in ways and contexts that we would normally associate with pedagogical or applied theatre. Others develop their practice into a more commercial enterprise, like tourism. As such, it is an example of the need for concepts that move away from a silo thinking that is based on sharp distinctions between fields that today increasingly are interwoven in actual practice.

“Attached” to the traditional role of the autonomous artist there is a set of preconceptions and ideals related to working methods and artistic value that do not necessarily reflect the contextual nature of aesthetic value after the participatory turn. For many theatre practitioners the ideals never matched their working reality in the first place. Certainly, there is a risk of throwing the baby out with the bathwater whereby the role of the artist is devalued, and the specificity of artistic practice is lost in sameness. Nevertheless, if we want to avoid that artistic practices are subsumed under commercial and political interests, there is a strong need to rethink aesthetics and the civic role of theatre and artists in the 21st century.

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