

Dance, Politics & Co-Immunity

Thinking Resistances

Current Perspectives on Politics and Communities in the Arts, Vol. 1

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## The (Micro-)Politics of Social Choreography Aesthetic and Political Strategies of Protest and Participation

The cover of the December 2011 issue of the US magazine *Time*<sup>1</sup> featured a face veiled by a golden cloth. Underneath the title: *The Protester*. The magazine had declared this persona, the anonymous protester, to be their personality of the year. In doing so, *Time* magazine wished to honor those, who have committed themselves to the protest movements and claimed the streets as a new site of a democratic culture of participation: from the protests taking place in the Arabic world, to the demonstrations against the budget cutbacks of European governments, against nuclear energy, right up to the Occupy Movement in New York. "There is this contagion of protest", says *Times'* editor-in-chief Richard Stengel. "These people who risked their lives... I think it is changing the world for the better."<sup>2</sup>

In these protest movements a new globalized political culture of participation is emerging and operating on a local level in urban spaces. The protesters are demanding a more democratic culture or – in the already established democracies, which I will concentrate on in this text – new forms of participation and involvement<sup>3</sup> that go beyond the processes of authorization and legitimization already inherent to representative democracy.

Taking place almost parallel to the emergence of these new public manifestations of a political culture of participation, performers and choreographers, but also established institutions of culture and education, as well as local politicians have (again) been developing a growing interest in participatory performance and choreographic projects in the public sphere since the 1990's. Artistic distrust of the established institutions of art, such as museums, operas or theaters, has drawn

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1 "The Protester," *Time Magazine*, 178 (25) (2011).

2 Richard Stengel in an interview by Today on December 14, 2011, compare: [http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/45657166/ns/today-today\\_celebrates\\_2011/t/time-magazine-reveals-its-person-year/#.TwXarDhxExC](http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/45657166/ns/today-today_celebrates_2011/t/time-magazine-reveals-its-person-year/#.TwXarDhxExC), accessed on January 6, 2011.

3 The German language differentiates between "Teilnahme" and "Teilhabe", both of which are commonly translated as "participation" in English; strictly speaking "Teilnahme" is "taking part" and "Teilhabe" is "having part". In the following text, we will resort to using the words "participation" or "taking part" for "Teilnahme" and "involvement" for "Teilhabe".

these projects to the public sphere and here in particular to the “non-places”<sup>4</sup>, such as train stations or airports, the now theatricalized urban spaces of consumer culture, where these projects transform pedestrians into audience. Or these projects take place in marginalized urban areas or municipal institutions, where artists, in most cases, work with the local population or the specific clientele of that institution, which has commissioned the project from them.

This text seeks to demonstrate the interrelationship of these two movements in art and politics existing parallel to each other in time, but otherwise seemingly independent from one another. The main questions that I will look at here are:

How is the term participation defined in these different social fields, the realm of art and that of politics? How can the relationship between these new forms of political participation as expressed in civil protest and an aesthetic understanding of participation be described? And finally, why are these new forms of political and artistic participation taking place now, after the 1960’s and 1970’s?

I will attempt to answer these questions from a social-critical perspective against the backdrop of the idea of social choreography. My two main observations thereby are: firstly, that, in a neo-liberal, post-Fordian society, the discourse surrounding participation is taking place against the backdrop of the neo-liberal principle of the *Care for the Self*<sup>5</sup> and a post-Fordian regime of creativity<sup>6</sup>. If we take into consideration that in today’s *Liquid Modernity*<sup>7</sup> the boundaries between the social fields have become permeable and that the principles defining the field of art have become the guiding principles of “new capitalism”<sup>8</sup>, we must secondly ask ourselves how art as a space of critical reflection, which always also draws its energy from its difference to other areas of society, must be redefined in light of the dissolution of social boundaries.

Before going into more detail, I will first outline how the term participation is understood in the context of civil protest movements, then give a short summary of forms of participation found in contemporary

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4 Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, 2 engl. edition (London: Verso, 2008).

5 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality – Vol. 3 – The Care for the Self* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

6 Compare Andreas Reckwitz, *Die Erfindung der Kreativität (The Invention of Creativity)* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2012).

7 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

8 Luc Boltanski & Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007).

choreographic projects and thirdly, try to position these political and aesthetic forms of participation in the wider context of social and political theory.

### Political Participation and Civil Protest

*Stuttgart 21*, the protest against the democratically legitimized construction of a new train station in the German city of Stuttgart, the ongoing protests against the storage of nuclear waste, the bourgeois resistance against the planned liberalization of the school system in Hamburg, the protests of the Occupy Movement in Frankfurt and in many other cities – these are just a few examples from the protest culture of the year 2011 in Germany. They are all cases of civil protest putting up resistance against municipal, national or international politics via local initiatives and referendums. The initiators of these protest movements come – unlike in the protest movements of the 1970's, such as the women's lib, gay rights or the peace movements – from a wide range of social backgrounds: not only are younger and largely left-wing oriented people or marginalized social groups joining in, but also older and more conservative citizens.

In the first new historical wave after the 1970's, these protest cultures are practicing an extra-parliamentary form of political participation: not *involvement*<sup>9</sup> as constitutionally guaranteed in the framework of representative democracy, where participation is concentrated on conventional i.e. legally codified, guaranteed and regulated forms of participation and finds its expression in the election of representatives. Instead – in both right-wing, as well as left-wing protest movements – focus has shifted to a form of participation, which could be defined as *taking part*<sup>10</sup>, i.e. as an unconventional form of participation de facto practiced by citizens beyond the institutionalized forms of representative democracy. This is an understanding of participation by citizens in democratic societies that undermines the regulations and movement ordinances dictated by representative democracy, such as e.g. the approval procedure for civic participation, which as in the case of *Stuttgart 21* lasts about 15 years, and establishes new forms of participatory democracy. For emancipative and legitimatizing reasons, as well as in that they increase effectiveness, these developments are marked as desirable in the framework of civil society, inasmuch as that they are regarded as a democratic evolution of representative democ-

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9 "Teilhabe": see footnote 3.

10 "Teilnahme": see footnote 3.



racy that seeks to maximize the political involvement of as many as possible in as many areas as possible. At the same time, they undermine the basis of the legitimization of institutionalized democracy and question the embedded democratic procedures and decision-making processes as steered by the elected representatives.

However, political participation today is not only taking place against the backdrop of a changing political, social, economic and media-driven world, which can be characterized by catchwords such as: the end of the welfare state, post-Fordian models of production, consumer culture, theatricalized cities, mediatized socialities. It is also taking place in a different way than in the 1970's. At that time, civil protest was fundamentally about the political implementation of constitutionally guaranteed human rights such as the equality between the sexes, abolition of racial segregation, recognition of homosexual partnerships, resistance against war and violence. These were protests in which the art scene also decisively participated e.g. through the founding of the *Art Worker's Coalition* by US-American artists in 1969: an organization, which called for a reform of museum politics and protested against the discrimination of women, homosexuals and people of color in the art world. The current protest movements are, however, about opposition to decisions made by political parties, against tedious nontransparent processes of authorization, the corruption of politicians and top business managers and against lobby politics. This political resistance against politics itself – also understood in terms of Pierre Rosanvallon as a form of co-existence and a form of collective action<sup>11</sup> – today takes place against the backdrop of a neo-liberal society of the *Care for the Self*, a post-Fordian regime of creativity and a politics of the image hustled along by digitalization and medialization.

### Social Movements as Social Choreographies

These new forms of political participation formulate themselves in the public sphere. They are in most cases performed fully aware of the ambivalence, power and vulnerability of the body: in demonstrations or the occupation of buildings, street crossings or train tracks, in chaining themselves to buildings, suspending themselves from bridges or in sit-ins, or for example in the reckless hanging of protest banners.

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11 Pierre Rosanvallon, "Für eine Begriffs- und Problemgeschichte des Politischen (On a history of the Definitions and Problems Surrounding the Political)", *Mittelweg* 36, *Zeitschrift des Hamburger Instituts für Sozialforschung* 6 (20) (2011): pp. 43–66. Translator's translation.

In these social movements the word *movement* – the corporeal activity – should be taken literally. A fact, which has hitherto not been paid much attention to in the theories of social movements, but which is of special interest from the perspective of a critical theory of modernity that locates the cultural patterns of society above all in the physical practices of the everyday, their micropolitics. For here the body is not only the medium of protest, inasmuch as that it is the carrier of the signs and symbols of protest. In fact, it is only in the choreographic organization of the body that the protest itself becomes performative, in how the bodies occupy public spaces, camping, stripping, freezing. The *dis-placement* (the circumvention of the topographical order), the *de-positioning*<sup>12</sup> (the abandonment of one's own position) of the bodies lying on the streets, letting themselves be chained to each other and carried away, demonstrates the vulnerability of the private and intimate body and is thus in itself a protest against the public sphere and its choreographic order as a realm of power. At the same time, these physical protests take into account an aesthetic form of protest by creatively and theatrically staging their happenings and organizing them with humor and irony. These corporeal forms of protest complicate the differentiation between the aesthetic and the political, because they are simultaneously performances of the political and of the politics of media images. In their creative practice, political acting does not exclusively take place as resistance to, but also as part of the post-Fordian regime of creativity.

Demonstrations, sit-ins, tent cities or flash mobs are social choreographies, which can in turn change, disrupt and undermine the choreographic order of the public sphere. They can come into conflict with the inscribed macro-structures of the panoptic urban space, of urban development and city planning, transportation infrastructure, social segregation, spatial marginalization and pauperization of city districts, which are likewise choreographed spaces. As choreographies, which produce ephemeral systems of order, the protest movements demonstrate a contemporary understanding of choreography that seeks to define choreography not as a predetermined system, but as a collaboratively generated process in which all participants take part. Choreographed protest can be read as *real-time-composition*, as a rule-governed improvisation, created performatively as a form of choreographic order in the moment of performance. Due to the unpredictability of political protest developing as *real-time-composition*, the situational decisions made by the participants and their ability to act

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12 Compare: Sandra Noeth, unpublished manuscript of the opening speech for SCORES NO4 "Under Protest", Tanzquartier Wien, December 2011.

creatively under time pressure in a politically charged situation, while simultaneously taking into account the movements of the others and interacting with them, all become especially significant.

Parallel to the manifestations of these political forms of a new culture of participation, choreographers are developing participation projects, which also bring together the social and the aesthetic in unusual ways. These are often projects, which simultaneously separate choreography from dance and abandon the customary sites of theater to conquer public spaces. "Choreography is not necessarily bound to dance, nor is dance bound to choreography. Choreography is about 'organizing bodies in space, or organizing bodies with other bodies, or a body with other bodies in an environment that is organized'"<sup>13</sup>, writes William Forsythe.

Both the choreographed forms of a political culture of participation, as well as these contemporary choreographies are – and this is what I wish to point out here – social choreographies. In my understanding the concept of social choreography means creating a connection between the social and the aesthetic by attributing to the aesthetic a fundamental role in the description of the political and the social. Choreography is here understood as a performative structuring of body practices in time and space, as an analytical category that allows reflection of the social, as well as exposing the relationships between the aesthetic and the political, both in art and politics. Social choreography, as defined by Andrew Hewitt<sup>14</sup>, is a performative concept that defines choreography neither as a purely aesthetic phenomenon, nor as a metaphor or representation of the social, as has been the case in the context of the sociological discussion on *liquid modernity* over the last few years. Instead, social choreography is understood as a *real-time-composition* that is equally distinguishable as an aesthetic, as well as a social practice.

Choreographies do not exist separate from social norms and structures, but instead perform them. The concept of social choreography therefore does not primarily explore the social aspect of choreography in the sense of a social aspect of aesthetics. Instead social choreography broaches the issue of the aesthetics of the social as the organization of bodies in time and space.

Connected to the concept of social choreography is the idea of a centrality of the aesthetic in social figurations and the social and political

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13 William Forsythe in: Stephanie Rosenthal, ed., *Move: Choreographing you. Art and dance since the 1960s* (London: Hayward Publishing, 2010), p. 105.

14 Compare Andrew Hewitt, *Social Choreography. Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2005).



in aesthetic practices. Thus the concept of social choreography positions itself in opposition to the notion that choreography is a concept limited to dance and also to the idea that the social in choreography concentrates itself in contexts and frames and is not a genuine component of the aesthetic order of choreography itself.

Accordingly, the concept of social choreography has two perspectives: from the perspective of dance studies, it investigates the performativity of the social in choreography and from a sociological point of view, it examines how the political and the social is inscribed and can be generated in performative practices. From this perspective, the analysis of political movements on the one hand and choreographic participation projects on the other are two sides of one coin, and it is their structural similarity and contemporary parallelism that I wish to elucidate here via the term participation.

### Forms of Participation in Artistic Projects

In contemporary choreographic projects, participation manifests itself not so much against the backdrop of specific cultural-political beliefs – as was the case on the 1970's – but rather against the backdrop of wider conceptual, artistic and theoretical reflections on the concept of choreography itself: how choreography can be created as an arrangement of bodies in time and space, not as rules, as law, as representation but as structure, produced performatively in a practice of rule-finding. In contemporary choreography three aesthetic concepts of participation can thus be derived from these observations.

#### *1. Implicit Forms of Participation*

In the case of implicit forms, participation takes place via a conceptual, but not active involvement of the audience. In fact, this type of work is designed in such a way that the artists have inscribed the interaction with the audience into the concept so that the audience can sense and experience this in the performance itself.<sup>15</sup> This form of participation was developed further in particular after World War II in interdisciplinary artistic collaborations e.g. by Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage and Merce Cunningham at the Black Mountain College in

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15 Compare Katharina Rost, Stephanie Schwarz & Rainer Simon, "Turning In/Out. Auditory participation in contemporary music and theatre performances," *Performance Research* 16 (3) (2011): pp. 67-75.

the 1950's. In 1952, Cage composed 4' 33''— a piece only consisting of the sounds within the concert hall. That same year Rauschenberg painted his *White Paintings*, of which an integral part is the shadows of the visitors. These pieces do not exist without an audience; it is only through and with an audience that they obtain meaning. A contemporary choreographic example of this form of participation is the piece *Le Sacre du Printemps* by Xavier Le Roy (2007), in which he addresses the audience as his orchestra, while Xavier Le Roy takes on the role of the conductor. This piece integrates the audience conceptually and can only be understood in the interactive relationship between artist and audience. For months, Le Roy studied a video of Sir Simon Rattle rehearsing *Le Sacre du Printemps* with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and then developed his choreography out of the conductor's movements. Participation here takes place via imagination, memory, anticipation, whereby the audience functions as an indicator for the dynamics that Le Roy develops during the performance.

## 2. Participation as Taking Part<sup>16</sup>

In the case of participation as *taking part*, the audience is active, but moves beyond the mere framework of a conceptual *pre-scripted*. Instead the audience takes an active role in shaping the choreographic structure in the framework of the material offered. Current examples for participation as *taking part* are the *choreographic objects*<sup>17</sup>, which William Forsythe and Dana Caspersen have developed over the last two decades. One of these is the *White Bouncy Castle* (1997), originally commissioned by Artangel, London. "The White Bouncy Castles transfers the various states of physical-spatial organization, which choreography is concerned with, to a state of autonomy, which requires no further channeling influence", says Forsythe.<sup>18</sup>

It is a project that questions the concept of choreography, the substance of art and the artistic space itself in and through the participation of all persons involved. Here participation manifests itself in how the participants themselves create and personally design the choreography. Through their actions in the 30 x 11 meter bouncy castle, they produce a choreographic order of the ephemeral, which is unique in

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16 Compare footnote 3.

17 Compare: William Forsythe: <http://www.williamforsythe.de/publications.html>, accessed on January 7, 2012.

18 William Forsythe: [www.zeit.de/lebensart/2010-08/huepfen-deichtorhallen](http://www.zeit.de/lebensart/2010-08/huepfen-deichtorhallen), accessed on December 17, 2011.

every one of its moments and cannot be repeated. It is the production of a community, which is open, unpresuming in its identity and continuously redefining its *we*.

In a more recent project entitled *Knotunkot* (2011), the visitors participate in a social choreography structured in two distinct and simultaneous parts. In one corner of the space, visitors collectively assemble and disassemble a large object. It is a metaphor for society as a figuration, whose density and strengths are the results of the actions of both the individuals and their interactions. In the other corner, the visitors speak with each other about how the society should be structured and which beliefs, assumptions, values and norms form the basis of our actions.

### 3. Participation as Involvement

“The Art of Participation consists in creating a scenario in which a number of people actually want to participate in”<sup>19</sup>, this is how *Geheimagentur*, a Hamburg based performance group, characterizes the underlying principle of participation projects. Here participation is based on the active *involvement* of the audience in the piece, in the sense that the audience moves within a framework provided by the artist. In contrast to methods that only simply present such processes, these projects also aim, as they themselves formulate it, at working both for a non-exclusive audience as well as detaching the viewer from his or her passive consumer position in favor of taking up an active and co-producing role in the process.

Due to current funding politics, such participation projects are numerous. I would like to discuss one current example: Deufert/ Plischke’s most recent project *Emergence Room* (2010, Vienna). Deufert/ Plischke, Berlin based *artistwins* have been experimenting over the last years with formats in which they encourage the audience to take part in their artistic processes. Their basic assumption is that artistic processes cannot be represented.

Accordingly, the processes, which we jointly or individually experience in the creation of a work of art, are often not comprehensible from the outside. The only possible way to thus communicate artistic working processes is, so Deufert/Plischke, to integrate the outside into the process. In their view, partaking in a work of art thus replaces the mere representation of participation. Their interest, as they formulate it, lies

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19 Geheimagentur, “The Art of Being Many,” *Performance Research* 16 (3) (2011): pp. 36–44.



not in performatively staging participation, as has been a widespread tendency in theater over the last few years, but in allowing others to partake in the creative process itself.

In their project *Emergence Room*, they therefore built a choreographed room in a museum in Vienna<sup>20</sup>. The room contains a specific arrangement of objects, texts, audio material, images, etc. that all raise certain issues. They lead the visitor/participant into the empty space and give them materials such as fabrics, paper, balls of yarn and invite them to do something with them, such as simple games with wool, etc. After a few days, dense proliferations of wool and various topographies developed, which weren't originally planned, simply emerged and continued to grow in and through the actions of the visitors. This social choreography created a choreographed space, a self-materializing movement notation that found its manifestation in the balls of yarn, knots and notes.

In practice however, the artistic-theoretical and political aspirations of such projects can only be reconciled with great difficulty. The project is instead faced with a problem that is structurally inherent in most participatory art projects, namely the yawning chasm between the theoretical promise of and political aspiration towards participation and the actual aesthetic practice of art. This conflict between the promise of community and the betrayal of art isn't new. And so, the still unresolved problem, which the participation project of Deufert/Plischke shares with other community projects, is a paradox: on the one hand, it implies an equality of artists and non-artists, and on the other, leaves the invention of rules, the selection of the material, etc. in the hands of the artists. And ultimately, it's moreover a project in which the artistic quality of what is produced by the visitors/ contributors and the aesthetic reflection of that which is produced only play a minor role in the project. The effect has been that, in light of the participatory art projects of the 1970's, these projects have been disqualified as mere social-pedagogical activities and the pedagogical idealism that they contain has been discriminated against.

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20 In Berlin, "Emergence Room" took place in the summer of 2011 on the grounds of the Uferstudios in a circle of construction trailers surrounded by screens so that it was impossible to look in from outside.



## The Political and Sociological Context

The participation projects of today must be read against a different artistic and social background than those the 1970's. Although, the goal of activating the audience still applies as in the tradition of the participation projects of the 1960s and 1970's, in performance art, fluxus and happenings. Some contemporary projects have even retained the emancipatory moment of performance. However, these objectives have begun to waiver under the influence of a neo-liberal concept of *Care for the Self* and the context of a politics that has elevated the post-Fordian principle of creativity to the guideline of society after the end of the welfare state. In the wake of a dismantling of social policy, cultural policy has been awarded the role of replacing it. This shift has produced new fundamental principles in cultural policy such as the concept of children as creative investigators and explorers. How thus should choreographic projects of participation be contextualized against this backdrop of this dispositive of creativity in a new contemporary society?

### 1. *The Political Context*

Open-ended processes, mutual giving and taking, the finite nature of the process, the externalization of the personal and the dispute of the mutual are all typical for political movements of participation and also characteristics, which many participatory art projects share conceptually.

It is no coincidence that a political philosophy of community is also experiencing a revival parallel to the manifestations of new political protest movements and the revival of participatory art projects. Philosophical or rather sociological theories have, on the one hand, played a decisive role in the shift today towards post-conceptual, socially and politically active art, even where it already existed in similar art discourses and practices that anticipated contemporary theory and practice. On the other hand, these theoretical approaches to community reflect the potential of new forms of socialization that have become possible in the course of a neo-liberal and post-Fordian reorganization of the social and the dissolution of the boundaries of social fields.

Theories of community by Nancy, Agamben, Negri and Hardt, Virno or Esposito here provide the theoretical basis. Giorgio Agamben<sup>21</sup> speaks

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21 Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1993).

of a forthcoming community of random singularities beyond any form of legally mediated relationships. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt<sup>22</sup> re-formulate, as does Paolo Virno<sup>23</sup>, the multitude as a “multitude of singular differences”, for which they choose the politically difficult metaphor of the swarm. In contrast to Agamben, who he considers to be too a-historical, and Hardt/ Negri, whom he accuses of a subjective-euphoric approach, Roberto Esposito<sup>24</sup> articulates a concept of community not based on a concept of identity or semantics of the individual. His goal is to solve the tension contained in community between “identity as negation of what we have in common with the other and community as the negation of the individual, which distinguishes us from the other” with the terms “*communitas*” and “*immunitas*”<sup>25</sup>. He does not wish to ascribe *communitas* to a trait or affiliation, but to a shared obligation, duty or commitment. And it is, and herein he agrees with Nancy, neither to be understood as an a priori substance, as a being, state or subject or a united body or rather physical unit, nor as a relationship constituted through mutual acknowledgement. Community, so Esposito, is instead composed of the mutual relationship of giving and taking. Its counterpart, the *immunitas*, is the opposite: its striving to defend the individual interrupts the cycle of mutual giving and taking that is constitutive for the *communitas*. A community can only escape from this dialectic, if it continuously questions itself with regard to its own openness, finiteness, and foreignness. For Nancy, the principle of every community is therefore its incompleteness (*inachevèment*), its partitioning (*partage*) and the production of unpredictable processes contrary to community as a unity based on the image of the body (*désœvèment*).

The controversy surrounding the boundaries and the dubious identity of the we and the contestation of the common ground are thus the fundamental preconditions of community. They become apolitical, when they take the question of community for granted. From this perspective, community can only be seen as political, when it defines

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22 Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001).

23 Paolo Virno, *Multitude Between Innovation and Negation (Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents)* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotexte, 2007).

24 Roberto Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community* (Cultural Memory in the Present) (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2009).

25 Robin Celikates, “Communitas-Immunitas-Bios. Roberto Esposito’s Politics of Community” in: Janine Böckelmann & Claas Morgenroth, eds., *Politik der Gemeinschaft: Zur Konstitution des Politischen in der Gegenwart (Politics of Community: On the constitution of the Political in the present)* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008), pp. 49–68, here: 51. Translator’s translation.

itself as a community without a foundation in something shared prior to its establishment (for example shared ancestry or shared tradition). But this also means that every politics of the community can always also be a politics versus community i.e. against the illusion of a to-be-constructed or yet to-be-attained identity. The voicing of a we is therefore also always a disputable statement, not an observation of collective identity. It is in this sense that Chantal Mouffe also argues the case for a revival of the political. Against the post-political vision of consent and appeasement, which she considers the more serious political risk, she advocates a politics of difference, inasmuch as that it is precisely the confrontation as such from which democratic politics draws its energy.<sup>26</sup>

But how is participation in this sense of collaborative action possible in a globalized, unbound, denationalized, neo-liberal society?

## 2. *The Sociological Context*

In the context of a globalized, post-Fordian, denationalized, neo-liberal society that has dissolved its boundaries, participation projects are subject to new demands. For as a result of the dismantling of the welfare state in favor of a cultural society that has abolished all concepts of class and left behind the so-called *creative class* as the only fraction still standing, art has been assigned new responsibilities. Art no longer merely legitimizes itself from within, attaining it (social-) critical potential from precisely this fact. On the contrary, Adorno's critical dictum: "Insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness"<sup>27</sup>, must itself be called into question in conjunction with the dislimitation and disintegration of the social. In a neo-liberal society, art's claim towards legitimacy is increasingly derived from the dictum that the artist, as member of the creative class, can be made socially responsible in the context of the concept of civil society.

On the other hand, artistic projects are also progressively being asked to compensate for cutbacks in other areas of social policy and this is increasingly one of the reasons that such projects are being funded at all. They are thus being assigned even more of those functions that have traditionally been the job of social work and political education: social integration and participation.

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26 Chantal Mouffe: *On the Political* (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2005).

27 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London/ New York: Continuum Inter Publishing, 2004): p. 297.



Participation projects today are therefore subject to an ambivalence, which forces them to render a contribution to cultural education, while being aware that this is only possible at the price of the dissolution of the boundaries of art itself. In the case of the most prominent figure of the art-politics-participation-debate in Germany, in the oeuvre of Joseph Beuys, artistic work referred to “shaping everything in the world. Not only artistic design, but also social design ... as well as other questions of design and education”<sup>28</sup>. Accordingly, to him everything was art: his enigmatic objects, as well as his candidacy for the Green Party, his performances, as well as the establishment of the “Independent International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research” in 1974. And contemporary choreography since the 1990’s has also left no doubt as to its claims to artistic status: everything can be artistic practice – from a social project to a bouncy castle, a party, a lecture, an interview or a lecture performance.

However, set against the backdrop of a neo-liberal society, aesthetic strategies of participation are confronted with new questions: how can artistic practice retain its critical potential as the boundaries of art dissolve? And how can it do so without catering to neo-liberal demands? These questions impose themselves on us when we take into consideration that with the end of the welfare state in connection with problems in urban development, failed efforts at integration and deficiencies in education, more and more of art – and in a *liquid modernity* also more and more of dance – is being called on to find solutions for the damage done to the social. Is it not precisely those politically encouraged and financially supported participation projects, which today run the risk of becoming the willing accomplices of the neo-liberal straitjacket in the sense of: create your own space, your own product and find your own audience?

My argument is that the parallels to the political participation movements lie in this neo-liberal context. These protest movements are equally ambivalent in their relationship to neo-liberal society and governmental politics: on the one hand, they are euphorically celebrated as a more direct form of democratic participation, on the other hand, there are also forms of protest that can also be interpreted as a neo-liberal attitude of individualized *care for the self*, as an effect of governmental politics. In doing so, they occasionally merely represent the individual interests of specific hegemonic groups: as in the case of the bourgeois protest against the abolishment of the *Gymnasium* in Hamburg, in which parents from well-to-do families joined forces to

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28 Conversation between J. Beuys, B. Blume and H.G. Pranger, 15.11.1975, *Rheinische Bienenzeitung* 12 (1975): pp. 373–377.



represent their special interests and with the help of the tools of participatory democracy brought about the end of an ambitious school project in Hamburg.

From this perspective, participation in artistic productions and political participation cannot be seen as two separate discourses and social fields, the field of the art and the political field, as auto-poetic systems with their own rules, norms and values. In the words of philosopher Jacques Rancière, they can be seen as two forms of the “division of the sensual”. Accordingly, choreographic participation projects and choreographic forms of protest are the interwoven strategies of a “politics of the kinaesthetic” and “kinaesthetic policy”. Accordingly, political participation should be less understood as an institutional strategy or as a field subsidized by politics in contrast to art as a purely aesthetic practice or an impulse for cultural education. Instead, the political is here formulated normatively and focused on one aspect: political activity, which is according to Rancière “something that removes a body from its natural place or the place that is naturally assigned to it, which makes visible what should not have been seen, and which makes comprehensible as speech something that would normally be considered noise”.<sup>29</sup>

Aesthetics should therefore not be described as art theory and the aesthetic not just as a form of perception. Instead, we must examine how the aesthetic is inscribed in political practices – and how these practices with their norms, rules and habits, already act in guiding sensual perception inasmuch as they provide social orientation, delineate the social and political space and in doing so regulate social perception. And it is precisely the political dimension of the physical-sensual, of movement perception, which constitutes the dimension of *kinaesthetic politics*<sup>30</sup>: political activity is understood as the sensual practice of visualizing and transforming cultural and social codes, especially in the public sphere – even in ways that contradict the “police order”, as Rancière calls it.

Political and aesthetic intervention in the “police order” is an important and indispensable step. These aesthetic forms of participation are, in my sociological argument, political, when the aesthetic practice rangles structures, norms, habits and conventions – not only calling them into question, but also changing them. In other words: They are political when they produce a critical difference to the “kinaesthetic reality

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29 Maria Muhle’s foreword in: Jacques Rancière, *Die Aufteilung des Sinnlichen* (Berlin: b\_books Verlag, 2006), p. 9. Translator’s Translation.

30 André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: performance and the politics of movement* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

of the modern age”<sup>31</sup>. And finally they are political, when they exist not just as functional networks, but also create a sense of community. Not as an objective, but as a precondition of the practices themselves.

From this perspective, participation in artistic projects should not (again) be dismissed as a mere trend. Rather it would be an important and worthwhile task to write an alternative history of choreography with a focus laid on participation projects; a history that inquires into the conditions and possibilities of creating community in corporeal figurations. In such a line of inquiry, choreography could also be more clearly defined in its sociological dimension, by examining the order of movement in its social und physical temporality and cultural spatiality and in terms of the rhythm of taking part and involvement.

*Translated from the German by Elena Polzer /  
ehrlliche arbeit – freelance office for culture.*

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31 Peter Sloterdijk, *Eurotaoismus: Zur Kritik der politischen Kinetik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), p. 25.