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From audience to participants: new thinking for the performing arts

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From audience to participants: new thinking for the performing arts. Facing excess capacity and changing demographics, theatres are struggling to maintain audiences, while their marketing and outreach strategies often fail. Our participation studies reveal that theater-goers increasingly value venues, not just performances, challenging owners and directors to curate settings as part of their offerings. People also seek active engagement in artistic creation and expression, even co-curating. But productions remain closely tied to Euro-American fine-arts conventions, rarely reflecting working-class, racial, ethnic, and youth cultures. Recent decisions to build or renovate large performing arts venues in the US and UK have taken these new sensibilities into account in a variety of ways.
KEYWORDS: theater; participation; co-curation; flagships.

Da audiência aos públicos participantes: novas formas de pensar as artes performativas. Enfrentando "muitos lugares vazios" e uma demografia em transformação, os teatros lutam para preservar os seus públicos, embora as suas estratégias de *marketing* e captação de audiências falhem frequentemente. Os nossos estudos sobre participação revelam que os espetadores de teatro valorizam crescentemente as salas de espetáculo, e não apenas as *performances*, desafiando os proprietários e diretores a adotar uma atitude curatorial relativamente aos espaços de apresentação, tornando-os parte da sua oferta. Os espetadores procuram também um envolvimento ativo na criação e expressão artísticas, inclusive na co-curadoria. No entanto, as produções teatrais permanecem profundamente ligadas às convenções artísticas euro-americanas, fazendo raramente eco das classes trabalhadoras, das culturas raciais, étnicas e da juventude. As mais recentes decisões relativas à construção ou renovação de grandes salas de espetáculo dedicadas às artes performativas nos Estados Unidos e no Reino Unido têm levado em conta estas novas sensibilidades de diversas maneiras.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: teatro; participação; co-curadoria; instituições culturais estratégicas.

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From audience to participants: new thinking for the performing arts[1]

ARGUMENT AND METHODOLOGY

Our respective research projects on participation (Brown et al. 2011) and arts infrastructure (Markusen, Evans, and Radcliffe, 2012) have involved exploratory, grounded studies that reveal new challenges for the arts in general and performing arts, including music, in particular. In this essay, we draw on others' research and our own to first pose a fundamental challenge: collapsing the distance between audience and performer. Changing audience attitudes create this challenge, the subject of Section I. However, existing artistic conventions and physical arts venues prevent easy adaptation. In Section II we explore evidence culled from Brown and colleagues' empirical studies on how arts participants view the venues in which they experience drama and music, and why it is difficult for producers and artists to respond (Brown and Novak-Leonard, 2007; Brown, Novak-Leonard and Kitchener, 2008; Brown, Novak-Leonard and Gilbride, 2011; Novak-Leonard and Brown, 2011). We also address the dominance of certain western arts forms and conventions and show how some large arts organizations have been able to overcome them. In Section III, drawing on field research by Markusen, Evans, and Radcliffe (2012), we explore prominent cases of new performing and visual arts capacity newly built or added to in several second tier cities: the UK's Manchester, Newcastle-Gateshead, Sheffield and Minneapolis in the US, some with success, others without. In the final section we address the distinctive challenges of theaters and theatre companies, whose work is extraordinarily complex with both cooperation and hierarchy among producers, artists, and support workers.

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1   Lecture presented as "Performing arts venues: the participatory challenge," International Colloquium, ICS-ULISBOA, Lisbon, Portugal, November 15, 2012.

We cite some examples of participatory performance that suggest directions theater might take in the future.

COLLAPSING THE DISTANCE BETWEEN
PERFORMER AND PARTICIPANT

In many countries there is visible over-capacity in the performing arts, especially in certain subsectors like classical music and experimental theatre (see for instance, Kennicott, 2013). From the point of view of producers, presenters, and performers, the problem is to how to increase audiences and other forms of support for their work. For potential audience members the challenge is choosing which performances to patronize, addressed by Lucien Karpik in his contribution to the International colloquium "Desvendando o Teatro: Criatividade, Públicos e Território" (at ICS-ULISBOA, 2012). Arts researchers observe that contemporary performing arts enthusiasts wish to be more engaged and interactive with artists and performers (Conner, 2008) and that they care more about the venue hosting the performance than in the past – its emotional, aesthetic, and social functions (Novak-Leonard and Brown, 2011; Brown, 2012).

In the performing arts, as in spectator sports, the roles of performers and viewers are strictly delineated and segregated by the structuring of spaces in which the action takes place. In televised or filmed performances audiences are completely detached from performers, so that the latter never even hear the roar of the crowd, their laughter, or boos and bravos. In live performances interaction between the two is possible but has been severely limited by artistic conventions and technological developments.

Most musicians – classical, jazz, or pop – perform on a stage that is raised above the audience or otherwise distanced from them spatially and psychologically. British musicologist Christopher Small (1998) depicts this scene in his account of classical musicians entering the stage before a performance. They banter with each other and tune-up, ignoring the audience members who sit only a few yards from them:

> All public behavior sends a message about the relationship of those who are exhibiting it to those who watch it. It seems to me that the message of these musicians' onstage behavior is that of their professional exclusivity, of their belonging to a world that the non-musicians who sit beyond the edge of the stage cannot enter... They will address not a single word to the listeners in the course of the performance; we shall not hear their natural voices but only the ritual voices of their instruments as they play... [Small, 1998].

Technological change has reinforced this experiential distance. As Lynne Conner shows in her essay, "In and out of the dark" (2008), the introduction of lighting into the performing arts in the 19th century thrust audiences into complete darkness, making it much more difficult for them to interact with performers. In ancient Greek and Shakespeare's Globe theatres, audiences often shouted out responses to actions on stage, threw eggs and other objects, or demanded that singers repeat an aria.

Artists' attitudes toward audiences, which is acknowledged only during the final conventional act of applause, is cultivated by schooling. Based on years of studying classroom arts teachers and parents' attitudes, Larry Gross (1995), in "Art and artists on the margins", concludes that discovering and anointing the talent of the few is the major purpose of elementary and secondary art teachers, conveying to the rest of us that we does not have talent. Real artists thus inhabit a "reservation on the psychological periphery of Western culture" (Gross, 1995, p. 4) where the rest of us cannot go. Most American parents do not care whether their children study art: it is not really a fit occupation, and arts skills are not thought of as valuable for other kinds of careers:

> Parents, schools, and peers convey in a variety of forms the message that art isn't quite "real" and that its ambivalent, peripheral status is appropriate to those who are "called" to it [Gross, 1995, p. 17].

Citing anthropological work, Gross notes that in more primitive societies, however, everyone learns to play musical instruments, dance, and sing. Because they have experienced the challenge, they know very well who excels and accord virtuosos a place of honor.

The distance between performers and audiences is not reducible to artist training, behavior, and technology. It is rooted in Euro-American political economy and institutions that restrict the definitions of art and artist and who they serve. At the high end our system for training and promoting artists is inherited from royalist traditions in which monarchs and nobility, and later wealthy merchants and industrialists, chose and employed artists to compose and perform music, sculpt, and paint. Eventually, built on new industrial wealth, large institutional spaces such as museums, opera houses, and concert halls evolved to reach more of the populace, allowing them to experience art and music and drama (Blau, 1989), but only as passive attendees, often far from the stage.

An ideological shift accompanied this process. In the view of Lawrence Levine (1988), art became sacralized in this period, as elites deliberately constructed a cultural hierarchy marked by distinctions like "high" or "low," fine

art vs. craft and popular arts. Great art needed to be treated with awe and respect, insulating elites from the masses. People should only clap at appropriate times and otherwise remain silent. This "cloak of culture" silenced American audiences. Its observance gained strength with the 20th century creation of non-profit organizations as the chief purveyors of high art. Conner (2008) notes that throughout the early 20th century many Americans belonged to audience leagues that offered platforms for voicing opinions about arts events. But by century's end few channels existed for public commentary on or debate about particular artistic performances. She pointedly compares this negligence with extraordinary coverage of sporting events, reminding us how co-workers often debate yesterday's games but rarely converse about cultural events (movies, perhaps, excepted).

The distinctive roles of performer and passive consumer, and the growing interest in blurring the line between them, are reflected in the ways that the American National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and other nations' counterparts measure arts participation. Begun in 1982, the periodic US Survey of Public Participation (SPPA) in the Arts asks respondents whether they attend one or more of benchmarked performances – live jazz, classical music, live opera, musical or non-musical plays, ballet – or visit an art museum or gallery. They are also asked whether they engage in personal arts creation and performance, or participate via electronic media. In 2008, the last SPPA, three-fourths of US adults reported participating in at least one of these three modes (Novak-Leonard and Brown, 2011). Only 30% of respondents reported participating in theater, mostly through attendance. Over time, the NEA has broadened the types of events and venues included in the benchmarked set. For instance, in 2008 they included attendance at salsa concerts: in California, participation rates rose by three percentage points (Markusen et al., 2011). In their call for a multi-modal assessment of arts participation, Novak-Leonard and Brown (2011) recommended giving greater weight to arts creation and to participation through electronic media as metrics for assessing engagement.

In industrialized societies, where the Euro-American model still dominates, many arts lovers are asking for more opportunities to engage with accomplished artists and arts performances. Aspiring to co-author meaning, "Consumers increasingly expect, and more often than not are given, a high degree of interactivity and engagement in their leisure pursuits" (Brown, 2012). Connor (2011) uses the term "sovereignty" to connote the authority that audiences want over their arts experiences. But their ability to co-curate is often blocked by the conventions of art-making (Becker, 2008) and by the physical space in which performance takes place. Brown, Leonard-Novak, and Gilbride (2011) offer a five-part typology of ways that people participate in

the arts, from least engaged to more engaged: spectating, educational enrich-ment, crowd sourcing, co-creation, and audience-as-artist. In research studies probing small arts organizations in California (Brown, Novak-Leonard, and Kitchener, 2008; Kitchener and Markusen, 2012), the authors offer readers in-depth case studies of pioneering efforts at active participant engagement.

THE CHANGING SIGNIFICANCE OF VENUE

Because people wish to be more actively engaged in performance and because our inherited spaces for performance make this difficult, the conception, design, and reconfiguration of venues are important to reshaping the per-former/participant relationship, and thus to encouraging participation. This reality "challenges artists and arts organizations to think more broadly and more creatively about *where* audiences encounter art… (as a result) "artists and arts organizations are choosing to create and present art in a wider range of settings that both animate the art and capture the imagination of audiences in new ways" (Brown, 2012).

People who attend the performing arts "have deeply-seated emotional feel-ings about arts spaces, often characterizing them as "friendly," "welcoming," "cold," or "intimidating" — attributes often ascribed to people, writes Brown. "Venues also take on symbolic meanings, either based on actual experience or transmitted through social networks. Some… feel that formal arts ven-ues impose stifling social norms" (Brown, 2012). Brown invokes Bourdieu's findings on the experience of many museum visitors: "a profound feeling of unworthiness and incompetence" (Bourdieu, 1991).

Despite restive audiences, arts organizations are often slow to respond. When keeping the lights on as often as possible becomes a financial imperative there is little incentive to think about moving the art to alternative settings (Brown, 2012). Yet this is happening in contemporary performance:

> Meaningful exchange occurs with greater frequency in many other settings, from old breweries to planetariums, abandoned subway platforms, barges, cinemas, and community bookstores…it seems now that all the world's a stage [Brown, 2012].

Brown cites the rise of site-specific festivals, experiments with temporary or "pop-up" productions, and the use of outdoor space for video presenta-tion, and dance, music, and theater performances. More artists are choosing to curate the settings for their work as an integral part of the production.

The concreteness of physical venues is important. Yet as the history of the American housing for the poor programs demonstrate – tearing down

public housing does not eliminate poverty, and in Europe, as in New York and Chicago, high rises are not synonymous with dysfunction – we should be wary of reifying venues as the crux of the participatory problem. It *is* possible to attract participants by changing programming within existing space, even if that space is conventional and built for another time. Below, we show this in the case of large music centers.

It is also possible to transcend narrow Euro-American conventions that attract mainly white, high educational attainment people to bring in working class and diverse participants. Two examples come to mind, one from the visual arts, the other from theater. The New York Guggenheim's *The Art of the Motorcycle*, a 1998 exhibit of more than 100 beautifully designed motorcycles, attracted more visitors to the museum than any other exhibit before or after. People in leather jackets lined Fifth Avenue for many blocks to see it, day after day (it was, however, panned by the critics). In Minneapolis, a 2003 Guthrie Lab Theatre adaption of Barbara Ehrenreich's non-fiction *Nickel and Dimed* probed the author's experience working as a minimum wage worker at a big box retailer, a motel, and as a waitress, exploring the working poor. The play was held over for many weeks, and people with union jackets packed the seating. The commissioning of many contemporary operas with new political and ethnic themes (for instance, *Satyagraha, Grapes of Wrath, the Bonesetter's Daughter*) also holds out hope for greater inclusivity and patronage. Perhaps the message is as important as the vessel, a point we return to in concluding.

BUILDING AND ALTERING VENUES TO MAXIMIZE PARTICIPATION

Our inherited performance and visual art settings are problematic for the mission of collapsing distance between audience and performers. As Ben Cameron (2010), a seasoned theater leader in the US argues, many purpose-built arts venues "were designed to ossify the ideal relationship between artist and audience most appropriate to the nineteenth century." The infrastructure of arts facilities is fixed and slow to change, even in new theaters:

> The problem is exacerbated when new facilities are modeled on old ones, perpetuating a long line of derivative thinking by architects, theater consultants, and their clients, who seldom take the time to consider what future generations of artists and audiences will require [Brown, 2012].

Yet many artists, musicians, and theatre companies are choosing to curate the settings for their work as an integral part of the production, placing them in new, often public spaces.

But what about the existing stock of theaters, concert halls, opera houses, art museums? They encompass and deploy with ease the considerable equipment that enhances the performance experience: stage sets, amplification, lighting, and, a recent addition, multi-media complements. How are new arts-dedicated venues being designed, built, and altered to reach and accommodate audiences who wish to engage? The following examples of failure and success illustrate the enormity of the challenge as well as creative solutions, drawn from a comparative study of new arts facilities (performance and visual) constructed between 1990 and 2010 in several UK deindustrialized cities (Markusen, Evans, and Radcliffe, 2012) and a brief look at the new Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis.

Recent debates about creative placemaking and arts as economic development explore the issue of scale (see, for example, Dean, Donellan, and Pratt, 2010; Grodach, 2008, 2010). Since the construction of Bilbao's (Spain) Guggenheim Museum, many cities have encouraged and invested in large flagship arts facilities to create sustainable jobs and revitalize inner cities, often betting on tourism. Despite the mixed results of the Bilbao investment (Plaza, 2000a, 2000b, 2006), its reliance on an external investor/owner/operator, and its first mover advantage, building large new arts venues became a fashionable and widespread urban initiative in the 1990s and 2000s, in both Europe and the US. It was not a new idea – it had been used frequently since the late 1900s, though often for multiple agendas. As Blau (1989) shows for the US, flagship arts palaces housing opera, symphonies, and visual "fine" arts played a central role in displaying the wealth of a new bourgeois class and providing them a place to gather and celebrate.

In recent years European Regional Development policies have sanctioned and encouraged the use of structural funds, aimed at deindustrialized regions, for arts capital projects. In the UK, Arts Council funding (financed from the UK Lottery) and city investments have complemented European money, with city governments assuming a leadership role in such projects. In the US, $16 billion was spent on 725 cultural construction projects between 1994 and 2008, for a median cost of $11.3 million. A major study of this building boom found no clear pattern of spillovers (negative or positive) on other local cultural organizations, arts employment and payrolls, and the greater community, and also documents several cases of failure and underperformance (Woronkowicz, 2011; Woronkowicz et al., 2012).

Several of the large, new UK arts venues have failed (Markusen, Evans, and Radcliffe, 2012). Manchester's Urbis, designed to be a museum of the modern city, celebrate the historical uniqueness of this textile city, and produce the unexpected, opened in 2002 on a cleared site in the City Center (Hetherington,

2007). For this architecturally staggering, sleek building (Hatherley, 2010, pp. 134-136), Manchester invested 30 million pounds, mostly from the UK Lottery, and the Manchester City Council devoted 1 million UK pounds to annual operations. Urbis hosted some critically acclaimed exhibits, including one on Hidden Manchester, exploring where people do not go (tunnels, bell towers, subterranean rivers) and a controversial *Art of Revolution,* exhibiting Black Panther Minister of Culture Emory Douglas' posters from the late 1960s, but from the start suffered poor attendance. Though City managers encouraged the curation of better quality and *ad hoc* innovation in later years, Urbis never generated the expected traffic or covered operating revenues, in large part because the City had rushed to take advantage of ready capital for the building without a reasonable plan for or resources committed to operations. The City shuttered it in 2010. It stood starkly empty and disconnected from its surroundings for more than two years. In the summer of 2012, it re-opened as a National Football Museum whose financial viability is uncertain.

The National Centre for Popular Music (NCPM) suffered a similar fate in Sheffield. Four fanciful and pleasing metal mushrooms resembling drums clustered together close to the main train station. NCPM hoped to draw a national audience with its celebration of contemporary music and culture. A modestly-scaled project of 15 million GBP (Great Britain Pounds), relying heavily on UK Lottery Funds, it opened in early 1999, employing nearly 80 workers. But planners woefully over-estimated NCPM's draw at 400,000 annually: in the first six months just over 100,000 people visited. The City tried to save the Centre by lowering admission prices, bringing in new artistic leadership, and asking creditors (mostly local) to form a CVA (company voluntary agreement), which they did (and lost everything they were owed subsequently). The Centre closed permanently in 2000 and was lightly used as a live music venue until, in 2003, Sheffield Hallam University, opening a new downtown campus nearby, bought the building for less than 2 million GBP for use as its Students' Union.

Not a failure but controversial for several reasons, the relocated Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis chose a "starchitect" strategy and landed huge public grants to tear down its historic (1963) Ralph Rapson (prominent local architect) theater to build a towering (and many would say intimidating) structure, designed by Jean Nouvel. It is perched high above the Mississippi River, surrounded by parking garages, high end condos, and a ghastly new and largely uninhabited public park (Figures 1 & 2). The Guthrie consolidated its Lab Theater, previously in the City's warehouse district, into the new building, a blow to that quarter, and added a proscenium stage and a black box theater to its recreated thrust stage. On its opening day in 2006 the city's top theater critic wondered publicly on the front page whether the Guthrie could fill

FIGURE 1
New Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.

FIGURE 2
New Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, Streetscape.

Both photos credit: the Guthrie Theatre.

its expanded seats (Royce, 2006). Years later, the new building requires more upkeep and a bigger share of total outlays that come at the expense of its artistic and production costs (Royce, 2012). The theater is presenting smaller companies on its three stages, rather than shouldering full productions of its own, especially on its proscenium and black box spaces. Small companies cannot turn down these opportunities, because of the Guthrie's marketing machine, but the theatres that normally host them are left without productions and rent. Recently it has become a major presenter, using its internal hotel and stages to host productions from New York, London, and elsewhere.

In contrast Sheffield's venerable Crucible Theatre, a thrust stage built on the original Guthrie model in the same era, chose a more modest strategy: modification. Considering but rejecting a proposal to tear down and rebuild, the leadership chose a major refurbishing that would open the theatre to the newly-built pedestrian City Centre and include a stand-alone two-story building housing a café and actor apartments nearby. It produces major retrospectives of serious work (e. g. a David Hare festival in 2011) and draws participants from cities like London and Edinburgh. It is both financially successful and contributes to the vibrancy of the city's redone core.

Two new Newcastle-Gateshead UK flagships also provide a study in contrasts. Leaders of the two cities, facing each other across the River Tyne and suffering from the implosion of area coal mines and shipping, embarked on an extraordinary 200 million GBP arts-based revitalization effort, the Newcastle Gateshead Initiative (NGI), with strong support from Northern Arts, the region's Arts Council (Comunian, 2010).

Two flagship projects – the high end Baltic Contemporary Arts Centre, a fine arts venue in a renovated flour mill, and Sage Gateshead Music Centre, a newly-built music complex on cleared riverside land – demonstrate very different strategies and outcomes for NGI's cultural venues. In the view of some local critics, the Baltic, beautifully refurbished and opened in 2002 at a cost of 50 million GBP, two-thirds from the UK Lottery Fund, often remains empty because it focuses on high-end artists from London and elsewhere and on attracting tourists, but does not welcome regional artists to exhibit or connect with it. The Baltic launched an "Own Art" scheme encouraging regional residents to buy art, and this has had some positive effect on area artists (Comunian, 2010). The Baltic has also suffered extraordinary directorship turnover. The extent to which the City of Gateshead is subsidizing the financial operations of the admission-free Baltic is not clear.

In contrast, the leadership of the Sage Gateshead Music Centre has charted a diverse programming strategy that animates its stunning new structure most weeks of the year. It was built at a cost of 70 million GBP, most of it from UK

Lottery Funds but some from locally headquartered Sage Group PLC, a large international private sector software University spinoff. Sage Gateshead is owned by a complex North Music Trust, the fiduciary responsibilities of which are not transparent. From the start the Centre has hosted performances in many musical genres, involving artistic originators Northern Sinfonia and Folkways, a regional folk music agency. It hosts classical performances in its main concert hall, jazz in its atrium (with people hanging over balconies and standing on escalators (see Figure 3) and free rock gigs on outdoor patios in warmer months, with featured groups drawn from top international performers to regional favorites. It runs a vigorous music educational outreach program that brings in paying customers from surrounding communities. As a result, the venue is heavily embraced and patronized by the regional population.

Glasgow's Royal Concert Hall, built as a part of the city's 1990 City of Culture designation and envisioned as an anchor for a huge new city-center pedestrianization, opened in late 1990 after serious cost overruns and numerous design glitches. It has lost money, on the order of 1 million GBP over the years, partly because it relied heavily on high-end performances of Scottish Ballet and Scottish Opera. Ironically, its greatest financial returns and attendance,

FIGURE 3
Sage-Gateshead Music Centre, Gatesehead/Newcastle-on-Tyne, UK International Jazz Festival.

Photo credit: Mark Savage.

including international draw, come from its annual January two-week Celtic Connections festival, launched in 1994, which drew 35,000 its first year and is now pulling in well over 120,000, spread across 14 venues city-wide.

In an effort to overcome its offstandish presence in downtown Los Angeles, an area often devoid of evening and weekend activity, the Los Angeles Music Center began an Active Arts program in 2005 to help people re-engage in artistic experiences. Its greatest success, among others, is its Dance Downtown event Friday nights, with a different dance genre every week, a teacher on a temporary stage to teach the dance form, and musicians placed on ground level, with stand lights – no longer the center of attention on an elevated stage (Figure 4). The point of Dance Downtown is not to lure people into the Music Center, which it mostly does not do, but to help build, in the longer run, a more actively arts-participating citizenry in Los Angeles.

Many of these flagship projects suffer from a preoccupation with what Graeme Evans calls "form over function" (Evans, 2011). In the Lottery and EU funding heydays of the 1990s through 2006, money for new buildings was easy to come by. These public projects vied with each other to land the most prestigious architects and often,deliberately chose the most outlandish architectural statements. Architectural critic Owen Hatherley excoriates many

FIGURE 4
Music Center, Los Angeles, California, USA

Dance Downtown Series, Photo credits: Los Angeles Music Center.

of these projects in his under-researched but provocatively entitled book, *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain* (Hatherley, 2010). Competitions to be the European City of Culture exacerbated an outward-looking, showcase emphasis, anticipating tourist patronage rather than targeting regional participants as a step toward building a broader audience.

These particular new increments to performing and visual arts capacity in the UK failed for multiple reasons, but in each case, they failed to heed the signs of restive audiences, a new sensitivity to the feeling of venues as places, and a new yearning for more active participation. They failed to attract the audiences that they anticipated. Where they have been most successful – SageGateheads' catholic attitudes toward musical genres, Glasgow Concert Halls' Celtic Connections that builds on regional musical distinctiveness, and the Crucible's city-friendly refurbishing, the distance between performers and participants has been partly bridged by providing small and more interactive performance spaces, moving out-of-doors, and being good neighbors.

THE CHALLENGES FOR THEATER

Theater is perhaps the most difficult of all the performing arts to open up to interaction and co-curation. It is more social and complex in its creation, production, and presentation. A playwright develops a script. A dramaturg interprets it for a director, who auditions and chooses a cast. Each actor shapes his or her role, a negotiation with the director and other actors. Key support people design the lighting, stage sets, music, and sometimes video, all in consultation. Musicals require another layer of artists, choreographer, music composition, and direction that must be coordinated with the others. When dramatic performances come together well, their power is often extraordinary. While film-making has some of these properties, live theater demands cooperative curation in a way that no other art form does. Such coordination makes it all the more difficult for audiences to join in.

When productions take place in formal theater venues, the placement of audience, lighting, and conventions about respect and silence lengthen the psychological distance, even though we may be rapt and emotionally moved by the performance. Many theater companies now offer discussions after shows in which actors and directors listen to comments from participants and respond, sometimes taking feedback into account in future stagings. In Garrison Keillor's weekly *Prairie Home Companion* radio show, broadcast nationally from venues around the US, guests are invited to sing along with performers, and some do. Some mystery theater productions incorporate audience members in the cast, wearing props and reading lines. Yet this is not true co-curation.

Efforts at participatory theater are emerging in many places, abroad and in more experimental theater companies. In Brazil, Theatre of the Oppressed, founded in 1971 by director Augusto Boal, incorporates "spect-actors" who explore and perhaps transform the reality in which they are living. Similar theater groups have formed across Latin America. In the US, New York-based Living Theatre was founded in 1947 by Judith Malina and Julian Beck. Her 2013 show, "Here We Are," was described by critic Catherine Rampell (2013) as "part examination of historical anarchist movements, part indictment of the current sociopolitical order and part team-building love-in… (in which) audience members are assigned to an ensemble member, a sort of minder who begins the evening by tracing feet… and offering foot massages." Other participatory theater troupes address community problems. For example, Search for Common Ground, a theater group, recently travelled to Burundi, surveyed people about refugee and land conflicts, designed short plays around these, and engaged those who came:

> Members of the audience can then step in, give their point of view and share their experiences with land conflict. People can also decide that if a character wasn't played well or if characters could have acted differently to avoid the fight, the scene can then be played again with the audience member. After each suggestion, the rest of the audience has to agree with it. If this doesn't happen, someone else comes in and makes another suggestion and this goes on until everyone agrees with the way the conflict should be solved [Search for Common Ground, 2012].

This is co-curation, financed by an NGO and not from within the arts community. Other US versions are more audience-pleasing, acknowledging the desire of audiences to be entertained as well as hoping to cover costs. Some participatory theater exercises simply ask the audience members to move from room to room, or location to location—an example is the recent production of Checkhov's "Seagull" by the New York Classical Theater Company, where audience members move, out-of-doors, from venue to venue (Lee, 2013). Others invite audience members on stage for cameo roles, as did a production of "Here Lies Love," a participatory disco-musical at the Public Theater in New York, where audience members volunteer to dance on stage with actors masked as John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon and other contemporaries of the Filipino Marcoses (Giridharadas, 2013).

Scholars like Lynne Conner of Colby College and directors like Diane Paulus of Harvard-based American Repertory Theater are providing intellectual leadership for such interactivity. Giridharadas' review of "Here Lies Love," quotes an interview with Paulus:

> Artists must cease to "blame the audience" for not coming, and instead involve theater-goers so as to compete with their other entertainments....Maybe we, as artists and producers, have to think about how we make our work, how we invite the audience, what's the level of engagement [Giridharadas, 2013].

Experimentation and innovation is the strong suit of the arts, and is especially robust in theater. Whether in venerable playhouses or in parks or on the streets, theater will survive, just as it has survived a century of film and video. Its venues are already highly diversified, and it is not endangered in the way live classical music performance is in the US. The participatory impulse in contemporary life is its contemporary challenge. We hope that our future research and that of others will document the response.

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