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Vectors of Participation in Contemporary Theatre and Performance

SRUTI BALA

This article explores the notion of participation in contemporary theatre and performance on two levels, namely how participation is shaped within performance, and how performance participates in the public sphere. Using recent examples from Sudan, Russia and Lebanon/Netherlands, I investigate how the political premises underlying the call for participation are reimagined aesthetically, and, conversely, how artistic strategies of shaping audience participation render visible the failures and possibilities of people's participation in the public sphere. The connection between these two dimensions of participation is made by engaging the concepts of 'representation', 'collectivity' and 'theatricality', which I call 'vectors of participation'. I discuss how the artistic representation of an idea is complementary to political representation, how the demand for collective participation in the public sphere transforms into collective creation in the artistic sphere, and how theatricality in spectatorship is linked to the political call to bear witness.

This article is concerned with the theorization of participation in contemporary theatre and performance. The question of participation can be formulated in two different, albeit interconnecting, ways: first, how do people participate in performance, how do the addressees of art take part in and partake of the processes of its making? Second, how does performance participate in political life? This is partly an expansion of the first question from the micro to the macro scale, since performance practices can be viewed as markers of a larger social reality. However, the question also relates to the dynamics of participation in a public sphere which is governed by entirely different conventions than those applicable to artistic participation. While these two questions point to rather different types of participation and different models of artistic practice, they are nevertheless closely intertwined, and this article addresses some of the ways in which the two dimensions of participation may be conceptually connected. Whereas the political and social issues surrounding participation have long been a matter of intense debate and research in the social sciences, I believe it is crucial to critically assess the contributions that can be and have been made from the disciplinary perspective of theatre and performance studies. How can theatre and performance studies supplement the social sciences in developing careful metacommentaries on social and political issues related to participation? What understanding of participation emerges from analysing the aesthetics of performance practice?

The performance examples I draw on as I move to address these matters respond to the questions of both how audience participation is shaped within a performance and how performance participates in the public sphere. I argue that when both kinds of participation are addressed, a certain self-reflexive mode emerges, wherein participation is not only a new theme or subject of art, one among a vast array of possible subjects, is not only something new to think about, but rather prompts new ways of thinking, and thus transforms the governing principles of artistic practice. Core to this investigation is the way in which the political premises underlying the call for participation are reimagined aesthetically. By this, I do not mean that there is a watertight compartmentalization separating the political from the aesthetic dimensions of participation, but rather that each of these has very different implications and calls for different modes of engagement.

Although highly influential in arts research, approaches to participation developed by social sciences, are not, I would argue, entirely adequate to the task of analysing participation as a generative principle in performance practice. The socio-political concept of participation departs from either a rights-based discourse (civic participation as a right) or from an identitarian discourse (participation as an indicator of affiliation to a community).[1] These imply that participation is theorized in terms of being a means or an end in itself. Hence the argument is either that people's participation in civic processes, in decision-making or in systems of governance ought to be valued as the objective, since the fact of participation itself is empowering, no matter what the outcome of the activity may be, or that civic and community participation is a tool, a valuable means to achieve a broader desired end.[2] While such understandings of participation have doubtless had a major influence on theatre and performance artists, the question of what an artistic field of work can offer back to complement social-science-based conceptions of participation seems equally urgent and important.

Arts research has addressed the theoretical concerns pertaining to participation in a variety of ways: by assessing artistic responses to policy changes that prioritize or limit public participation, by developing a vocabulary for categorizing various participatory art forms, by engaging the notion of participation through concepts such as spectatorship and dialogue. The meaning of the term 'participation' itself remains contested in all these different usages, just as there is arguably little cross-disciplinary discussion around commonalities and shared concerns between these fields. The term 'participation' is employed to mean anything ranging from involvement to co-ownership, from critical intervention to collaborative creation. The relevance of participation in the applied, community arts, for instance, hardly seems to resonate in the theorization of participation in visual or performance art.[3] Yet it would be wrong to assume that theatre and performance somehow possess an integrated, self-evident capacity to enable participation. Rather, I believe it is necessary to ask under what conditions we may speak of participation as a generative principle in theatre and performance.

Since my concern is to examine the link between the participation of the public within performance on the one hand, and the participation of performance in the public sphere on the other, I have chosen three performance examples, where these dimensions are connected through what I call 'vectors of participation'. I use the figure of the vector in the sense of an arrow that shuttles back and forth between two or more

dimensions, not simply transporting ideas from one field to the other, but affecting and transforming each of these fields in the process. The sheer diversity of performance practices indicates that there are productive links to be made across genres, as well as across geographies. The cases analysed in this study range from a Sudanese community-led theatre production to a video-film by a Russian artist collective and a Lebanese–Dutch performance intervention. I was introduced to these works at various cultural venues in the Netherlands over the course of the last three years, so to some extent these choices might be viewed as exemplifying the circuit and circumference of my own personal theatre/performance viewing. That said, the emergence of such works at this specific historical moment is a marker of the wider 'social turn' in contemporary performance, wherein participation is a crucial element.[4]

Methodologically, I identify one concept from cultural and performance theory for each of the three cases, this to serve as a vector for connecting the two modes of participation. The concepts are 'representation', 'collectivity' and 'theatricality', all terms that are well established in the theoretical vocabulary of theatre and performance studies. I engage these three concepts as vectors of participation to facilitate an understanding of how the political demand for participation transforms into an aesthetic response, and, conversely, how artistic strategies that shape audience participation render visible the failures and possibilities of people's participation in the public sphere.

I turn first to the 'representation' vector and to a recent production by Sudanese theatre director Walid Al-Alphy, which featured in an arts festival in the Netherlands in 2009. My concerns are twofold: the participation of the audience understood as aesthetic representation, and the participation of the performance in the public sphere thought about in terms of political representation.

Participation and representation: Walid Al-Alphy's *The People of the Cave* (2009)

The German language has three distinct terms for what could all be translated into English as 'representation'. Political representation is expressed with the word *Vertretung*, whereas the notion of *Darstellung* stands for aesthetic depiction or representation. The third term, *Vorstellung*, refers to what might strictly be translated as 'imaginative representation'. Gayatri Spivak's 1988 essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* famously addresses the consequences of collapsing the different realms of representation,[5] and provides a complex analysis of the interplay between *Vertretung* and *Darstellung*, which resonates at the core of the question of how performance participates in the public sphere.

In her analysis of the term 'representation', Spivak departs from a statement by Marx in his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852), wherein Marx, referring to the lowest strata of the working class or unemployable sector (lumpenproletariat), claims that it does not have its own representatives but must be represented by a member of another class, since there is no unified sense of class subjectivity: "They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented."[6] Spivak pays attention to the shift made visible through translation, whereby aesthetic representation too easily runs together with political representation of the Other and as constitutive of the Self: 'The event of representation as *Vertretung* (in the constellation of rhetoric-as-persuasion) behaves like

a *Darstellung* (or rhetoric-as-trope), taking its place in the gap between the formation of a (descriptive) class and the non-formation of a (transformative) class.'[7] Spivak calls for alertness and sensitivity to the ways in which certain people are excluded from the realm of self-representation, to the fact that no matter how much the subaltern speak, their voice is not heard, they remain invisible, or only visible in terms of the aesthetic and political representation of others.

The struggle for participation is, therefore, often articulated in terms of the struggle 'acted out' in respect of these two realms of representation. In 2009, an arts festival called The Other Sudan took place in the Netherlands, promoting the diversity of cultural experimentation and independent artistic work in the Sudan. A play written and directed by the young theatre director Walid Al-Alphy, titled *The People of the Cave*, featured in this festival. This production was initially performed at the Al-Bugaa independent theatre festival in Khartoum, where it won an award and was later modified for an international audience.[8] The play, adapted from an episode in the Quran, known as the Sūrat al-Kahf, is situated in a cave, where five men flee from a tyrant and fall into a miraculous three-hundred-year-long sleep.[9] When they wake up, they hear reports on a radio about bombardments, chronic illnesses and attacks on villages. The men fight amongst themselves to choose a king, who then leaves the cave promising to help the others but never returns. One by one, the people of the cave desert each other and look to their survival in the midst of war. In an interview, director Walid Al-Alphy remarked,

> In Sudan, everyone is part of the war. There are perpetrators and victims, but beneath that there is shared responsibility. The new sultans in *People of the Cave* threaten their followers, but the followers themselves are afraid to leave the cave to see the world with their own eyes. They remain in their dormant state.[10]

Fundamentally, the play enunciates a critique of structures of governance that instil fear in people, stultify them and turn them against each other. As a production it exemplifies theatre as an institution participating in public debates and taking a stance on current issues. At the same time, this struggle for public visibility and recognition was complementary to an aesthetics that allowed for spectators to participate in the performance on their own terms. What this performance most impressed upon me was that the political urgency for theatre-makers to participate and gain a voice in the public sphere was closely intertwined with the urgency of generating ways for audiences to partake of the sphere of the performance itself. The social and political demand for citizen participation was transformed into the aesthetic realm in *The People of the Cave*. First, this was achieved by means of cultural resources: the language and narratives from the Quran. Without pointing a finger at contemporary political figures or directly touching upon ethnic differences (one of the most sensitive issues in the civil war in Sudan), the play strategized to realize a global (rather than localized) critique of power. The religious text was retrieved as a regime of representation that speaks on behalf of the people (*Vertretung*), in order to represent a story (*Darstellung*) that struck a chord with the audience, without one type of representation seeking to replace the other.[11] Using the rich vocabulary of Quranic language, which lent itself to multiple interpretations, the play sought to emphasize the shared responsibility of all involved in the war. Ultimately,

while the people in the cave depicted a universal human (war) condition, this did not rule out its representation of a particular political situation in Sudan. In brief, the realm of signification (*Darstellung* or artistic representation) allowed people to participate, to be open to, listen to and engage with a critique, in ways potentially enabling of a realm of persuasion (*Vertretung* or political representation).

The stark visual register used in the performance served as the second means of transforming participation from the political to the aesthetic realm. The actors were dressed in loincloths, as if calling upon spectators to fill in the blanks, to decide what clothes they ought to be wearing and, by extension, what type of human they were meant to represent. Rather than openly speak out against the militarization of Darfur, where the systematic use of rape and public humiliation of women constituted a weapon of ethnic cleansing, the director opted to depict masculinity in a manner that was far from being militant. Five scrawny actors huddled together in a cave, their adolescent voices cracking now and then, weeping on each other's shoulders, falling into each other's arms, calling upon the audience to make sense of how the aggressive version of masculinity in fact dehumanized them and stultified them into centuries of sleep in the cave. The Sudanese group did not come together in order to stand for (*vertreten*) a particular political programme. Rather, as a group, they presented a performance which in and of itself stood for (*darstellen*) a range of interpretations.

During the performance after-talk, the director was asked by a non-Sudanese member of the audience how it was possible that they were allowed to participate in international festivals, when their play itself implicitly critiqued the nation state, which, paradoxically, had supported their touring internationally. Was this, then, an instance of dissident artists unwittingly turning into representatives (*Vertreter*) of a seemingly progressive national cultural policy? Walid Al-Alphy's response demonstrated that the company was acutely aware of the risks in this regard. For them, their choice to travel abroad with government backing (funding), knowing their work might be misperceived or misrepresented, was an ethical choice. Moreover, it is also a choice that shifts the question of participation from the sphere of performance to the political sphere. The cave and the world outside were metaphors for the theatre and the world outside. To avoid stepping out of the cave would have been to avoid the possibility of participating in the world.

Giorgio Agamben points out that every discourse on ethics must realize that

> there is no essence, no historical or spiritual vocation, no biological destiny that humans must enact or realize. This is the only reason why something like an ethics can exist, because it is clear that if humans were or had to be this or that substance, this or that destiny, no ethical experience would be possible – there would only be tasks to be done.[12]

The ethical moment in *The People of the Cave* is located in the performers' insistence on questions of aesthetic representation, which required leaving certain judgements to be made by audiences, no matter how clear-cut the political stance of the theatre company may have been. The choice of an extremely open form of representation, namely a parable and minimalist staging devices, made the performance vulnerable to misappropriation or

manipulation. The use of the Quranic narrative had the capacity to provoke resentment, just as it could also have been viewed as supporting a hegemonic political position. Yet if the group had sought to determine more fully or 'fix' these interpretative possibilities, there would have been no ethical struggle. Rather, their creativity needed to be guided by a perceived sense of possibility and potentiality in the act of participation. Hence, whereas the dynamics of participation in the public sphere are governed by the realm of political representation and visibility, in the sphere of the performance participation is transformed into the aesthetic realm of representation, which expands the possibilities of meaning-making and of interpretation. In brief, the way in which Walid Al-Alphy and his group engaged with the politics of representation, in terms of both aesthetics and the public sphere, namely how the production sought to make contemporary issues visible, is illustrative of how participation served as a transformative principle in their work.

Participation and collectivity: the temporary art soviets of Chto Delat (2010)

Whereas the Sudanese community-led theatre production adopts an approach to participation wherein political critique is expressed in a gentle, non-confrontational manner, and where the inclusion of audiences in different regimes of representation is of utmost importance, the next example radicalizes the political call for participation, by transforming it into a question of artistic methodology. Here, the vector connecting participation as a political and as an artistic concept is 'collectivity'.

The artistic collective Chto Delat? (literally 'what is to be done?'[13]), from St Petersburg, Russia, champions a form of artistic collaboration called 'temporary art soviets'. These are along the lines of early twentieth-century Soviet workers' councils. The collective consists of a core group of visual, performing and conceptual artists who also engage in short-term collaborations either with other artists or with members of the general public. Chto Delat works with and in a variety of media, ranging from newspapers to visual-art exhibitions, installations, video projects, radio plays and performances. Their recent performance work, titled the *Songspiel Triptych*, consists of a series of video-films that appear to be, though in fact are not, recordings of stage performances, employing choral dialogues, conventions and formats of stylized acting often associated with theatrical dramaturgy, yet presented in the medium of film, where the camera serves as the viewing eye of the audience who are seated in front of a proscenium stage. This genre is best described as video-film, analogous to the genre video-dance.[14] The triptych consists of operatic, dramatic narratives, which, as the term *Songspiel* suggests, pledge allegiance to the combination of musical elements and spoken dialogue that was popularized in the 1920s by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill in so-called 'functional-music' formats (*Gebrauchsmusik*), such as the school opera (*Schuloper*), the learning play (*Lehrstück*) and the *Songspiel*.[15] Chto Delat's bilingual publications, their participation in exhibition and events in the West, and the availability of their work on the Internet suggest that their work is addressed to audiences outside Russia, and that the group is increasingly part of the internationalist-oriented, independent art circuits of the West.

The third work in the series, *The Tower: A Songspiel* (2010),[16] treats the issue of people's participation in decision-making processes. It responds to the controversy in

Russia surrounding the building of a skyscraper approximately four hundred metres high in St Petersburg by the oil and gas company Gazprom. The proposal for the Okhta Centre instigated a number of grassroots-led protest campaigns and fierce debates on heritage and modernization in the city, involving municipal authorities, corporate lobbies, artists, civic groups and residents. The project was eventually cancelled by governor's decree in December 2010 and relocated to the outskirts of the city, although the gas company continues to own the site. Chto Delat created *The Tower: A Songspiel* in collaboration with campaigners, using media sources to create the script. However, the concept of participation in this piece is not only a thematic consideration, but is rather integral to the creative process: collectivity characterizes all aspects of the work. The participation of community members in the production of the *Songspiel* is core both to the artistic concept and to the broader political critique of non-participation.

Tower: A Songspiel opens with a shot of a group of people standing onstage. The group is representative of a cross-section of the population, from the young, wealthy bourgeoisie to migrant workers, from senior citizens to student activists. As they begin their song-narrative, with their faces looking upwards into the camera and the piano audible in the background, different sections of the group sing out their outrage at their exclusion from public decision-making processes: 'This is our country, but our voice is not heard'; 'We have no rights in the eyes of the strong and the mighty'; 'We believed that our country would show us its gratitude, but our country has no use for us'; 'It is better to emigrate'; 'We are victims'.[17] The stage is split into two levels, where the masses stand on the lower level and a few members of the ruling elite sit around a table on the upper level. The spatial division indicates both the verticality of the tower and the hierarchical society it stands for.[18] On the top level of the stage, itself a metaphor for the Gazprom Tower, we see representatives of corporations, the commercial art market and the church gather around a table, holding forth in monologues delivered in a highly exaggerated style. On the lower level, the 'common people' are clustered according to recognizable social milieu, each subsection of Russian society singing their own choral refrain.[19]

Choosing a Brechtian mode of recited song, gestic acting and defamiliarizing effects, Chto Delat eschew the tired critique of conventional realist dramaturgy, and self-ironically tease out the problems of collectivity in participation. The obvious lack of synchronicity in the mouthing of the lyrics makes the spectator immediately aware that those who speak are not the same as those whose voices are heard. This is particularly obvious in the case of those marked as ethnic or migrant minorities, as well as the senior citizens' faction in the choir, unable to keep pace with the music. The physical gestures and movements accompanying the lyrics are not expressions of psychological states or decorative elements, but markers of a recognizable socio-political attitude.[20] These distinct gestures indicate a typical social class, yet the hyperbolic depictions of those class positions rule out any empathetic viewing relations. The rebellious students flinging their arms and flicking their long hair are just as exaggerated as the publicity manager, ludicrously loosening and tightening his necktie. Even the objects onstage, such as the oversized, old-fashioned cardboard telephone on the centre table, minus a number dial, but with a huge red cord that eventually entangles everyone on both levels of the tower, are depicted with irony. *The Tower: A Songspiel* does not offer a celebratory vision

of equitable participation in public life. Rather it climaxes in a *tableau vivant* in which the telephone cord on the raised platform transforms into the bloody red guts of the capitalist system, cancerously spilling out onto the people below, who either struggle to climb onto them (only to become entangled and strangled), or ignore what is happening and instead try to be amused and distracted.

Performed in May 2010, a few months before the final legal decisions on the tower were reached, *The Tower: A Songspiel* project proactively intervened in the public debates around the Okhta Centre construction in St Petersburg. The video-film offers a metacommentary on the discourse of the New Russia that the tower claims to represent. By making the film available on their website and via social media, complete with English subtitles, the project invites international audiences to participate through comments and responses. At the same time, the working model of Chto Delat, of collectively creating a film with the involvement of those directly concerned with the issue, points to the centrality of collective participation in their artistic concept. The group emphasize that they seek to make films politically, rather than just make political films.[21] This is evident in the choice of several non-professionals as actors in the performance, and is foregrounded in the artistic statement of the group:

> Chto Delat works through collective initiatives organized by 'art soviets', inspired by the councils formed in revolutionary Russia during the early 20th century. These 'art soviets' want to trigger a prototypical social model of participatory democracy, translating an open system for the generation of new forms of solidarity into the realm of contemporary cultural work. The 'art soviet' takes on the function of a counter-power that plans, localizes and executes projects collectively.[22]

The group sees itself as genealogically linked to a tradition of productionist art, represented by figures such as Rodchenko, Kandinsky and Malevich, 'which conceived itself as a species of collective artistic labour',[23] seeking to create a model of collective, not merely collaborative, artistic production that could potentially change social and political structures at large. The distinction between the collective and the collaborative is crucial, since the group is explicitly interested in reviving the political dimensions, not simply in adopting the rationale, of working together due to allied interests and shared working formats.[24] By inviting people from the general public to join a 'temporary art soviet', Chto Delat applies the critique of the lack of public participation to their own creative field. Interestingly, participation is posed as collective creation, where different people contribute in different ways, rather than assuming that everyone does everything equally. Collectivity is thus perceived neither in terms of identity politics nor in terms of location, and thus differs from sociological and anthropological theorizations of collectivity.[25] Chto Delat's conception of participation, though oriented towards a Leninist cultural vanguardism, is concerned with questions of devising, coordinating and sharing ownership of a collective process within the artistic field. It allows for new ways of thinking and enabling collectivity in the realm of political participation, by making collective creation a constituent feature of their artistic practice.

Both in the work of Chto Delat and in the production *The People of the Cave*, audience participation follows a conventional format. In the Sudanese play, spectators

remain in their positions, although they are actively involved in the work of reinterpreting a story. In the case of the *The Tower: A Songspiel*, there are three circles of audience communities: the innermost circle consists of people who join the 'temporary art soviet' and participate in the production process of the video-film; the second circle comprises visitors to exhibitions where the film is shown; and the third, outermost, circle consists of the online viewers of the film. The final example, to which I now turn, further complicates the question of participation by placing the spectator at the core of the artistic practice, transforming the act of self-aware spectatorship into a vector of participation in the public sphere.

Participation and theatricality: Lina Issa's performance intervention *Where We Are Not* (2009)

The idea for the performance project *Where We Are Not* (2009) by Amsterdam-based Lebanese artist Lina Issa arose out of the artist's own legal situation. Having appealed against the rejection of an extension to her Dutch residence permit (refused for bureaucratic reasons) and awaiting the outcome of the appeal, Issa found herself in a situation where she was unable to leave the Netherlands. If she had left the country, she would have been refused re-entry. These circumstances created what she called, possibly referring to Giorgio Agamben, a 'state of exception' that did not grant her legality in her place of residence and simultaneously made it difficult to travel to her home country. As an artistic response to this predicament, she cast a replacement and sent Aitana Cordero, a Spanish dancer and choreographer, to Lebanon for ten days, shortly before the Summer War of 2006, as her stand-in, messenger and recording device. Cordero visited different people and traced what constitutes the idea of 'homecoming' for Issa. She performed several tasks that Issa assigned to her, all relating to very intimate and personal ways of inhabiting a place as one's home. These tasks were outlined in a diary that Issa gave to Cordero just before she boarded the flight to Lebanon. They included instructions such as: 'Kiss my aunt as you cup her head with your hands and give her my greetings, say: "*Lina betsalem ˆạlay kteer*"', or 'Go with Nagham to the spot called "Balayet" where we used to play as kids, smell the soil there, take a look at the texture of the rocks, the people, the houses . . . Find a moment to give the lemon, salt and knife to Nagham and ask her to peel it.' Cordero herself also kept a diary of her two-week visit to Lebanon, noting her own experiences as a stand-in, including notes on how the tasks assigned to her were carried out, but also the frustrations and misunderstandings that arose from the performative experiment, from being a receptor on behalf of someone else, from the poetic attempt to embody another person without role playing, from the inability to transmit a sense of homecoming, or from compensating for the loss that a body experiences in migration.

Instead of a private meeting, Cordero and Issa spoke to each other about the experience during a staged performance/reading of *Where We Are Not*, which took place a few months after the Lebanon visit. During this event, which was restricted to a maximum of six audience members at a time, visitors were first asked to wait in a room that was bare except for a few chairs and a video screen.[26] The only instruction

given to participants was to select four people to go to the next room at the point when everyone instinctively felt that eight minutes were over. The second room had a table with Issa's diary on it, and participants were invited to read through it at leisure, together or individually, and then select one person to go to a third room. Here the visitor met with both artists, Issa and Cordero, and was first greeted with an embrace. Then the visitor was asked to select one page from the diary pertaining to one particular day of the visit, which was then read out and discussed in a personal, informal conversation. This was a special moment of the encounter, since the communication between the artists about the homecoming experiment took place in the presence of a visitor.

How does the act of theatrical spectatorship address participation in *Where We Are Not*? Rather than activating spectators and calling for them to transform into performers, the emphasis of the performance intervention was on participating through a heightened awareness of being a spectator. This example demonstrates that participation in theatre and performance can be theorized not only in terms of who is onstage, who is allowed to be the agent of artistic exchange, but also in terms of the act of the encounter between seer and seen. It implies that participation occurs through the theatricality of an event, through its quality of heightened perceptibility. I use the concept of theatricality to refer to situations that emerge only when the condition of being aware of being a spectator is fulfilled.[27] It is potentially applicable to any act or event, both within and outside the artistic realm, where there is a self-aware presence of spectatorship in an active form. Theatricality is what allows for a caged animal to become worthy of receiving attention and be applauded by a circus audience, and it is the condition that is not fulfilled when the same animal grazes on a field and the same people fail to notice it while going for a walk.[28] By being aware of taking on the position of spectator, the act viewed is marked as perceptible. Performance practices such as those in *Where We Are Not* throw new light on theorizing participation, by highlighting the vector of theatricality that binds the participation of the public in performance to the participation of performance in public life.[29] This is not primarily because spectators are encouraged to become active or to participate in the performance event, or become its co-producers. The main focus is not on activating spectatorship, which would in a sense imply that spectatorship is in itself a passive act.[30] Rather, it is about enabling people, both artists and audiences, to make things worth paying attention to.

In the realm of the performance itself, different people contribute to the work of spectatorship. The stand-in artist Cordero, who takes the place of Issa in going home to Lebanon, does not employ a realist approach to the task of feeling someone else's sense of home. Rather, she assumes her position as a spectator of someone who is not there and attempts to embody this presence next to an absence. Friends and family of Issa constitute another type of spectatorship, as they too are made aware of their own perceptions of the relationship with her, enhanced or irritated by Cordero's presence. Visitors to the performance/reading of *Where We Are Not* perform a third type of spectatorship, at times trying, through the diaries, to piece together what actually took place in Lebanon, other times asking questions that led to a conversation between everyone present.

In terms of its broader political implications, theatrical spectatorship as a mode of witnessing is what makes it possible for Issa's state of illegality to become visible. Here,

instead of positing spectatorship as a passive position assumed by the audience, the vector of theatricality suggests that the participation of art in the public sphere has the capacity to make people realize: a seemingly simple act of witnessing, when consciously undertaken, can potentially help to generate public reflection and action on issues that may otherwise remain hidden. The political call for participation is transformed into the artistic practice of *Where We Are Not* by integrating theatricality into the generative principle of the art project.

Vectors and horizons

The mathematical notion of the vector denotes an object that has both magnitude and force, an arrow that aims in one or more directions and thus serves as a vehicle from one point to another in a multidimensional field. Read metaphorically, the vector field conjures a horizon of imagination, which opens out an array of possibilities. When this horizon includes several dimensions, such as the artistic, the social and the political, or the past and the future, the vectors in this field serve as directional forces; they take ideas from one dimension to the other, allowing these dimensions to bear upon each other. Conversely, one could say that when a vector forges connections between two or more dimensions, what emerges is the possibility of a horizon. The vector is thus a productive figure of interconnection, which sustains the shaping of horizons.

In this article, I have used the figure of the vector to speak about concepts that bear upon both how we think of participation in the artistic sphere, and how we imagine participation politically. I believe it is fruitful to consider these two dimensions in terms of directional forces that are shaped by them and in turn transform them. The vector of 'representation' asks how the artistic representation of an idea is complementary to the need for political self-representation. The vector of 'collectivity' transforms the demand for collective ownership in the public sphere into the practice of collective ownership in the artistic sphere. The vector of 'theatricality' critically pushes the artistic question of spectatorship towards the political question of paying attention to ignored realities. Participation thus becomes a generative principle in those performance practices where social or political conceptions of participation are interpreted in an artistic register, and conversely where this register critically complements and broadens existing socio-political frameworks.

NOTES

1 A rights-based view is argued in Seyla Benhabib, Ian Shapiro and Danilo Petranovic, eds., *Identities, Affiliations, and Allegiances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). An identity-based argument is presented in Gerard Delanty, *Community* (London: Routledge, 2010).

2 The theorization of participation in terms of means and ends frequently appears in disciplines such as development studies. See Giles Mohan and Kristian Stokke, 'Participatory Development and Empowerment: The Dangers of Localism', *Third World Quarterly*, 21, 2 (2000), pp. 247–68.

3 Two recent issues of the journal *Performance Research*, 'Participation and Synchronization', 16, 3 (2011), ed. Kai van Eikels and Bettina Brandl-Risi, and 'On Participation', 16, 4, (2011), ed. Laura Cull and Caroline Gritzner, discuss this disciplinary divide to some extent, focusing on participation with reference to synchronization and philosophy, respectively.

4 Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (London: Routledge, 2011); Claire Bishop, ed., *Participation* (London: Whitechapel, 2006) are two of the recent texts that specifically invoke the concept of participation with reference to what is termed a 'social turn' in the arts.

5 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 271–313.

6 "Sie können sich nicht vertreten, sie müssen vertreten werden." Karl Marx, 'Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte (1852)', in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, eds., *Werke 8* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 1960), p. 198.

7 Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', p. 277.

8 This information was provided to me by Mieke Kolk, one of the curators of the festival, and jury member at the Al-Bugaa Theatre Festival, where the play was originally awarded a prize. See also curatorial introduction on www.artsafrica.org/othersudan/index.html, last accessed 1 May 2012.

9 The episode is based on the Christian allegory The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. See Roberto Tottoli, 'Men of the Cave', in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (Georgetown: Brill, 2011), p. 374.

10 Marjolijn van Heemstra. 'Sudanese Theatre on Violence and Responsibility: An Interview with Theatre Director Walid Al Alphy', October 2009, http://krachtvancultuur.nl/en/current/2009/october/people-cave, last accessed 1 May 2012.

11 Intisar S. Elzain, 'Archaeology in Performance: The Retrieval of Rituals', in Mieke Kolk, ed., *Rituals and Ceremonies in Sudan: From Cultural Heritage to Theatre*, Khartoum International Conference Proceedings, Intercultural Theatre: East Meets West Series, No 3 (Amsterdam: Institute for Theatre Studies, 2006), pp. 48–53.

12 Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 50.

13 The phrase 'Chto Delat?' is borrowed from the title of a 1902 text by Vladimir Lenin, *What Is to Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement* (New York: International Publishers, 1969), itself a reference to a novel by the same name by Nikolay Chernishevsky from 1862, widely read as part of the school curriculum in Russia. See Dmitry Vilensky and Gerald Raunig, 'An Issue of Organisation: Chto Delat?', *Afterall*, 19 (Autumn–Winter 2008), www.afterall.org/journal/issue.19/issue.organisation.chto.delat, last accessed 1 May 2012.

14 The terminology for this type of work is admittedly still evolving, while its experimental thrust makes it hard to describe generically. I have, therefore, borrowed the term video-film from dance studies.

15 Nataša Ilić, 'On Chto Delat's Songspiels', *Transversal*, 3 (2011), special issue: Art/Knowledge: Overlaps and Neighboring Zones, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0311/ilic/en, last accessed 1 May 2012.

16 Chto Delat?, *The Tower: A Songspiel*, 2010, http://vimeo.com/12130035, last accessed 1 May 2012.

17 See http://vimeo.com/12130035, 00.00–02.32 min., last accessed 1 May 2012.

18 This was highlighted in the curatorial statement by Simon Sheikh, 'Vectors of the Possible', in BAK (Basis voor actuele kunst) Utrecht, ed., *Press Release*, Utrecht, 2010.

19 There are in Chto Delat's work several cross-references to the historical legacy of the Russian avant-garde. The stage setting and sequence of scenes is reminiscent of Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 film *Strike*; the emphasis on the work ethic amongst the people is a reference to the socialist hero Alexey Stakhanov. See their newspaper *Chto Delat?*, 'Debates on the Avant-Garde', 17 (August 2007), www.chtodelat.org/images/pdfs/17_vanguard.pdf, last accessed 1 May 2012.

20 The Brechtian concept of *gestus* is best translated as a combination of gist and gesture, a single compact physical act that encompasses a social attitude and position.

21 *Chto Delat?*, special issue, 'Make Film Politically: Contemporary Film-Making and the Soviet Avant-Garde' (September 2007), www.chtodelat.org/images/pdfs/si_makefilm.pdf, last accessed 1 May 2012.

22 See artistic statement at http://chtodelat.org, last accessed 1 May 2012.

23 See Igor Chubarov, 'Productionism: Art of the Revolution or Design for the Proletariat?' in *Chto Delat?*, 1–25 (March 2009), www.chtodelat.org/images/pdfs/25_use-value.pdf, p. 5, last accessed 1 May 2012.

24 Bojana Cvejić, 'Collectivity? You mean collaboration,' *Republicart*, 1 (2005), www.republicart.net/disc/aap/cvejic01_en.htm, last accessed 1 May 2012.

25 Vered Amit and Nigel Rapport, eds., *The Trouble with Community: Anthropological Reflections on Movement, Identity and Collectivity* (London: Pluto, 2002).

26 A detailed description of the set-up of the performance/reading is provided at http://linaissa.blogspot.com/p/description-of-projects.html, last accessed 1 May 2012.

27 This particular use of the term is discussed in Elizabeth Burns, *Theatricality: A Study of Convention in the Theatre and in Social Life* (London: Longman, 1972), p. 13; and Christopher Balme, 'Metaphors of Spectacle: Theatricality, Perception and Performative Encounters in the Pacific', *Metaphorik* (2001), www.metaphorik.de/aufsaetze/balme-theatricality.htm, last accessed 1 May 2012.

28 This example from an essay by Søren Kierkegaard (*The Christian Discourses* and *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, ed. V. Howard and E. H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997 [1908]), p. 413) is cited in Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, eds., *Theatricality and Civil Society Theatricality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 129–30.

29 In a study on the 'participation of gazes' in contemporary performance, Adam Czirak argues that spectatorship is a multisensorial act that is vital to human communication. See Adam Czirak, *Partizipation der Blicke: Szenerien des Sehens und Gesehenwerdens in Theater und Performance* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012).

30 This new politics of looking is one of the central points of critique offered by Jacques Rancière in his essay *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso Books, 2011), pp. 1–24.

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