

## Participative dance performances

Last autumn, I participated for the first time, as an active spectator, in three different dance performances in Barcelona organized by the Mercat dels Flors. I will analyze in this post two of them which seemed interesting to me from the way they used the public participation. My objective is to analyze the elements used to implement the participative process and the contribution this new type of participative performances brings to the performing arts creation and to its spectators.

The first performance, [Hello!Earth \(Projecte Barcelona\)](#), consisted in a route in a cityscape in Barcelona. A responsible took first our belongings that he kept away in a secret place. He only left us with our mobile and a plastic bracelet with a mobile number on it. Dressed up as rabbit from head to toe, the voice of an mp3, plus the participation of artists, guided us in the streets of the Poble Sec neighborhood. They made us run, jump, wag the tail, investigate the streets. We even traveled in the space inside a tippi which served as a space shuttle. Yes, yes, I swear! During the second part of the route, we took off our costume and started a trip trough our senses. In an unhabitated flat, bare feet, blindfolded eyes, we danced a moment with another unknown person. The end of the route finished in a bar, the group seated at a table, drinking to its first experience in a participative performance.

The second performance was the creation of [Sra Polarowska & Ruemaniak](#). A man with a black suit, slicked-back hair, who seemed to come from the 50's, picked us up in front of the theater and took us to some sort of abandoned warehouse, where he asked us to get on a car. Two people, layed on the floor as if they were dead, under the other car parked next to our, got up and started moving in a dislocated way. The radio of our car switched on by itself. Another woman appeared behing some construction work and headed towards us. That is how the story started. We observed with curiosity and silently these people that seemed to come from another world. I did not understand what was going on but it did not matter. I liked the strangeness of these characters, how they moved and danced under country music. I liked the Far West's clothes of the 50's and 60's with the cowboy boots. At some point, they blindfolded our eyes, did to us small massages on the hands and shoulders and we danced with them. What a moment! I did not want this moment to stop. Then, the man with the black suit drove us outside the warehouse. He told us to be discreet about what happened. Before he left, he gave is an envelop to each of us. Inside was a polaroid photo of mi with a gun pointed at my tempe. I had not dreamed, it was true. Hallelujah!

The two performances share the following elements:

- ▲ The “mystery” is a core element in each performance because it prepares the sensivity level of the spectators, which is key in the participative process. It is reflected in the following form: the spectator does not know what the performance and his participation consist in, he is informed at the last minute of the meeting point.
- ▲ Performance site-specific
- ▲ Movement-based performance: the body is the central point of the performance. Everything

- is designed from the body, around the body and for the body.
- ⤴ The public is protagonist: the spectator experiences, feels and makes
  - ⤴ The stage does not exist in such way
  - ⤴ Reduced group of spectators: 6 and 3 people
  - ⤴ There are more artists than spectators
  - ⤴ Multidisciplinary approach: there is a mix of different artistic disciplines to create the performances.
  - ⤴ The public is in touch with the artists: he does with the artists
  - ⤴ Use of a lot of objects during the performances: the objects in common were the mp3, photos and music
  - ⤴ A souvenir is offered at the end of the performances: a free drink, a photo

It's interesting to see how each performance exploited these elements, the emphasis put on each one to answer to the objective. The Hello!Earth project aimed to give the opportunity to the public to discover its environment with other eyes. Sra Polaroiska & Ruemaniak made enter the public in the performance.

“Dance! - you can't stop the revolution” of Hello!Earth (Projecte Barcelona) was an unexpected route developed specially for Barcelona, that relied on the participation of the artists, citizens and spectators from Barcelona. The artists participated in the design of the route to make appear the social context of the city. The neighborhood of Poble Sec offered its houses that served as stages. And the collective experience of the spectators was the performance itself. It was a cocreation participative process: all the actors involved in the performance contributed to its design, its development and its content.

“Apuntes sobre animales, encuentros y autopistas” of Sra Polaroiska & Ruemaniak created an experience-piece for the spectator who entered as a protagonist in the story that was unfolding. It was like if the spectator entered as a protagonist in the course a movie. The form of participation used was, what we call at A+C+C CoCreació, interactive ([read this post](#)). As a public, we did not create content, neither influence the performance. Our intervention was framed: the actors knew what they were going to ask us to do and at which moment.

In the two performances, the protagonist spectator played the games. In Hello!Earth, the design of the route favored the interaction within the group. Also to compensate a probable feeling of anxiety generated by the ignorance of what was going to happen, the spectators remained together most of the time.

On the contrary, there was no communication among the spectators of Sra Polaroiska y Ruemaniak. It was not the aim of this performance. Additional factors intimidated the public: there were more artists than public participating during the performance, the artists knew what was going on, not the spectators.

It's interesting to see as well the color of the component mystery in each performance. The mystery in Hello!Earth was a surprise. With the costume, you knew you were going to have a laugh. The costume is a tool to forget oneself and allows to see things another way. The route reminded a bit of a gymkhana, something recreational, like a treasure hunt.

The mystery of Sra Polaroiska & Ruemaniak was more worrying. On one hand, the public had more information about the performance but on the other hand, this same information was somewhat disturbing: the synopsis of the performance described unusual characters and situation. Listen to Country music is also unusual for people from Barcelona. The dislocated moves of the dancers gave a sensation of uneasiness. And the man with the black suit spoke to us in with an emphatic voice. At the end of the performance, we commented that we all liked it, especially the moment of the blindfolded eyes. I think now that this is because there were so many strange things in this performance, that dancing with blindfolded eyes allowed us to let it go.

I don't know if Hello!Earth made me see my environment in another way. I was not able to fully relax with the costume, so I never let it go totally I suppose. The unfolding of the performance was like a serie of activities without clear transitions between each one. It brought me back to the reality between each activity and did not let me enough time to see my environment with new eyes. However, the performance left me with good feelings.

The project of Sra Polaroiska & Ruemaniak filled me with enthusiasm. Even if I did not participate in the creation of the content, it allowed me to let it go and enter in the story, be in another world. The closed stage offered more intimacy than the streets. The experience of the spectator during the performance was fluid. The collective Sra Polaroiska & Ruemaniak used the elements of the performance with more strength and answered to its objective with accuracy.

We see that the objective, the components and the design of the project will determine the type of participation of the public. It will be key to condition the state of mind of the public to favor its participation: its senses must be awake and available to react and respond to the project's proposal. The public must have an optimal experience.

I think participation offers to the public a unique and more intense experience that sitting in a theater. The artists through participation have an intimate communication with their public and can make innovative proposals. Each participative show is for the artists a unique and different experience everytime, which enriches them as professionals.

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Sources: <http://www.nativa.cat/2010/12/sobre-apuntes-sobre-animales-encuentros-y-autopistas/>