

CFP Performance Paradigm 14, Performance, Politics and Non-Participation

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I would prefer not to. —Bartleby, the Scrivener (1853)

Like Bartleby, the legal clerk who famously decides that he would prefer not to, this issue of *Performance Paradigm*—an open-access, peer-reviewed journal now in its 14th year—investigates the politics and performance of non-participation. The figure of Bartleby appears everywhere in political theory and philosophy: in Gilles Deleuze’s “Bartleby, ou la formule” (1989); in Giorgio Agamben’s companion piece (1993; published in English 1999); in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Empire* (2000); and in Slavoj Žižek’s *The Parallax View* (2010). In performance, his spirit manifests in Noor Afshan Mirza and Brad Butler’s project *Museum of Non-Participation* (from 2007). In performance scholarship, he recently appeared in Daniel Sack’s *After Live: Possibility, Potentiality and the Future of Performance* (2015). Perhaps we hear him in phrases such as “don’t do it on my account” and catchphrases such as “computer says no”. We might even see him, his slogan printed on a bag or a t-shirt. What are we to make of the fact that more than 160 years after Bartleby first appeared, both pizza ads and productivity coaches proclaim: “No is the new yes” (Huffington Post 2012; Kellaway 2017; Schwartz 2012)? And what is the difference between the “no” and the “non” when it comes to participation? One can choose not to participate (refuse) or one may be excluded from participation, which is altogether different. Is to refuse important in and of itself or should it build towards action; is it, in fact, more a type of action—a striking against—than non-participation?

Participation and performance have been well theorised by Jen Harvie (2013), Josephine Machon (2013), and Adam Alston (2016), among others. This journal issue extends that work by examining participation’s silent siblings: withdrawals, refusals, boycotts, strikes, and even the occasional sulk in the corner. So many participatory performances rely on a mode of compulsory conviviality that eventually becomes coercive. In Helen Iball’s memorable phrase, spectators generally want to “give good audience” so that the artist’s work may “work” (Heddon, Iball and Zerihan 2012: 124). Except when they don’t. Sometimes audiences don’t feel like swallowing the strawberry (Heddon, Iball and Zerihan 124) or tipping the bucket icy water over the performer (Cairns 366). Or, having done so, they feel remorse not only at their actions but at doing the artist’s bidding so easily (Cairns 366). On other occasions, audiences *do* want to participate but find themselves excluded because an artist has not factored in different regimes of the senses and their associated accessibility needs. On still other occasions, artists and audiences have conscientious objections—to structures, to sponsors, to subject matter—in which case they might boycott the event (Warsza 2017). In these instances, the artist never arrives at the scene of the performance and this becomes, in turn, the artwork.

The irony of inviting you to *participate* in this issue of *Performance Paradigm* is not lost on us. Nevertheless, we seek papers on any of the following topics listed below. We also welcome other provocations, suggestions and replies:

- Non-participation versus refusal and the question of volition
- Suspension, inaction, non-production, inoperability
- Withdrawals, boycotts, strikes, and strike-breaking
- Voting and abstaining
- Interactivity, unhappy compliance, and cheery refusals
- Diversity, access, and “differential inclusion” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013)
- Uninviting aesthetics (to rewrite White 2013)
- The operations of consent in theatre and performance (see LaFrance 2013)
- Permissions, waivers, and disclaimers

- Curfews, bans, and censorship
- “I can’t work under these conditions!”
- Humour as refusal
- On “slow scholarship” (Mountz et al 2015) and other academic subversions of the participatory imperative

Please send proposals of approximately 300 words to Caroline Wake (c.wake@unsw.edu.au) and Emma Willis (emma.willis@auckland.ac.nz) by Monday 15 January 2018. Full articles will be due on 31 May 2018 for publication in December 2018.

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