

Knowing through Art: Enhancing Access to Knowledge Production through Participatory Art-Research

Ninette Rothmüller

nirothmu@uni-osnabrueck.de

Dept. of Education and Cultural Studies, University of Osnabrück, Germany

Dept. of Cultural and Communication Management, Zeppelin University, Germany

Abstract

This paper investigates modes of enhancing public access to joint processes of knowledge production through embodied and/or artistic forms of knowledge inquiry, as well as by means of the creative activation of architectural sites through participatory artistic interventions. Looking at performance-based art-research works in the US and Germany together with the author's own participatory art-research, the author explores the ways in which individual experiences, as well as theoretical engagements, are equal and reciprocal forms of reflective knowledge production. Working interdisciplinary, the author employs a non-exclusive focus on the wider field of the life sciences and biomedicine in order to allow for a thematically focused investigation of the multilayered relationalities between art practices (and its materializations) and participatory forms of knowledge production. The author examines the ways in which participating in art-based knowledge production opens up possibilities for diverse populations to participate in knowledge production in complex fields that are very likely to impact directly on various individuals and populations in the near future, such as the life sciences. This focus has been chosen as the life sciences create crucial new injustices and ethical challenges, impacting the lives of many. Although joining a public discussion can be understood as a right of citizenship, it is, furthermore, crucial to the development of inclusive ethics; here inclusive of the voices of disempowered populations. However, knowledge that is needed to reflect on developments in the life sciences is hard to access, as language used in the field is highly coded and, thus, partly purposefully, exclusive.

KEYWORDS: accessibility, aesthetic knowledge, art-research inquiries, citizenship rights, life sciences, participatory art, performance, site as actor

Introduction

As an artist and cultural studies researcher, I analyze various forms of data - including spatial designs, texts, legal documents, forms of visualizations, spoken word, maps, and historical data - intertextually and interdisciplinarily. Furthermore, I produce participatory art as a means of activating inclusive analyses and engaging various populations with issues at stake in the social study of the life sciences and related biomedical practices. Conducting analyses at the very interface between art practice and theory, I am interested in how meaning and knowledge materializes, is generated, circulated, and produced through joint creative engagements with various materialities and/or through various media. Likewise I am interested in the impact of knowledge produced – in various forms, including embodied forms – on both a societal and an individual level. Throughout this paper I refer to the multimedia art installation ‘Of Women’ which is the participatory art-research component of my interdisciplinary doctoral studies. Produced through participatory engagement in multiple sites, the installation was exhibited at Blanchard Gallery, Massachusetts in 2006. In referencing an art-research project that I led, this paper interweaves the analyses of contemporary art-research conducted by others, with analyses of my project, in order to acknowledge embodied experiences made throughout the conceptualization, production and showing of ‘Of Women’ as crucial sources for knowledge production.

My approach frames artistic and embodied forms of research as having the potential and the capacity to produce varied sets or forms of knowledge, which in turn can offer various populations diverse entry points to, or heighten the accessibility of, an issue at stake. Due to, for example, the familiarity with either the format or the cultural script of a particular creative encounter – such as a performance or a theatre piece – these formats can provide access to complex research topics through multiple creative experiences that are offered, such as involvement with visual and sonic components or spoken words, etc.. In contrast to reading an academic paper, which oftentimes presents final findings and defines authors as both producers and owners of the knowledge to be disseminated, artistic forms

of knowledge production can be inclusive of the notion that creative and interactive processes mobilize knowledge between various actors and thus diversify the voices defining the outcomes and/or future questions. In doing so, these processes de-hierarchize knowledge production. Additionally, knowledge created in these ways, as the projects discussed in this paper exemplify, oftentimes lends itself to an open-ended and thus future-oriented discussion, acknowledging that there is no end to knowledge itself; rather, it is subject to constant re-negotiation. Notions of objective knowledge are thus challenged in processes that allow for various forms of knowledge to materialize in numerous ways which are open to the transformation of knowledge through personal engagement by which seemingly objective knowledge is confronted by one's own narration. In such processes, ownership of knowledge can be gained by various actors, which allows for various populations to access a citizen's right to partake in the joint production of knowledge and values activated within a society. In my work I understand the designed environment – as a socially activated site – to be an 'actor' within processes of knowledge production, which thrive in the intertwinement of spatial, social and cultural scripts re-enforcing each other.

This contribution aims to use a question put forward in the call for papers for the 'The Art of Research' conference: 'How does an exploratory approach towards creative processes and materials contribute to the production of new knowledge?' as a point of departure for an interdisciplinary investigation of the multilayered relationalities between art practices (and its materializations) and participatory forms of knowledge production with a non-exclusive focus on the wider field of the life sciences and biomedicine. Questions arising from this field are as complex as research processes, with scientific developments occurring at a rapid pace and potentially impacting directly on various individuals and populations in the near future.

The paper draws on my reflections on a course I taught in a US architecture program at Smith College in Massachusetts in 2012 called 'Topics in Architecture. Art in Space – Interdisciplinarity in Motion', as well as my PhD research, which focuses on the interface between art (and its embodied production processes), the life sciences and biomedical practices, and the establishment of new forms of knowledge and global injustices. The qualitative conversational data referred to in this publication has been gathered as part of my PhD research and has been analyzed jointly together with visual data and data gained through the participatory project 'Of Women', in order to investigate issues crucial to the

research field in a manner inclusive of various actors, as well as various entry points into and intersections between data.

Within the interdisciplinary architecture course I taught, students were led to practically engage with and analyze the capacity of design practices, and materialities resulting from these, as powerful components within the activation of political and cultural beliefs, such as the inclusion or exclusion of certain population groups within a society. Students were further led to critically engage with social maps and scripts of designed materialities. They learned to analyze design practices as impacting on the social mappings and scripts activated at a site, which in turn impacts on access to processes of knowledge production taking place at the site that is available to certain individuals or populations. Students gained insight into how spatial design practices can be understood as crucial factors within knowledge production processes, which per se are inclusive of some forms of knowledge rather than others, and thus raise questions about the access to knowledge production processes through the subjective activation of sites' multilayered agendas, by individuals and populations alike. My main concern was to ask how artistic forms of knowledge production, such as embodied forms of knowledge production, as activated in performance practices, can enter the process of knowledge production as powerful co-producers?

Within my own research I am interested in how participatory art production processes allow for subjective embodied experience to be activated as a site of knowledge production. I am interested in understanding more about how materialities come to matter on the level of embodied experience, as they co-create and interact with social geographies of inequalities, thereby mapping actors involved in a hierarchical manner. My interdisciplinary PhD project comprises two components: first, a written qualitative analysis of texts, legal documents, visuals, art work and qualitative interview conversations held with experts¹, such as life science researchers, women having experienced an encounter with biomedical practices, theorists and midwives; and, second, a participatorily produced art installation emerging from the same study, called 'Of

¹ In the PhD research project referred to here, I employ the term conversations rather than interviews as the interactions during my data collection phase came to be formed more as conversations between people who share an avid interest in the broad topic of reproductive and genetic technologies, and the wider life sciences, but who come to the topic with varying degrees of specialist knowledge from particular disciplinary and life experience. Research conversation partners, here called experts, included biomedical researchers, midwives, women who had experienced biomedical treatments, social science researchers, artists, etc.

Women', which was publicly co-produced on Cyprus, in Germany and the US, and exhibited in the US. I understand this interactively conceptualized and produced installation – which when on display invites further modes of engagement and joint knowledge production processes between various audiences, such as visitors, co-producers etc. – to be key to how I suggest facing challenges in contemporary embodied research.

I will first engage in a reflective analysis of the production processes involved in 'Of Women' in relation to those of 'Undesirable Elements', a production of New York City based Ping Chong + Company. Later, I will look at the production 'Pimp Your Brain' put on in Germany. All three act as examples of the ways in which art-research practices, performances and exhibits draw on various forms of knowledge production processes and aim to diversify discussions about complex and/or sensitive topics by offering various entry points.

Participatory Art Engaging Various Publics

Art as a means and a method to engage the wider public in dialogues, and therefore in modes of knowledge production, has a very long stable history. Since at least 497 BC art as mode of engaging the public has been used in order to create dialogues about issues at stake, both socially and politically (Cox et al 2009, Nisker 2010). Still, some art forms have a more continues history in engaging the public than others. Theatre, for example, can claim a firm history in having fulfilled a function to bring political, ethical and social dilemmas to the attention of the public, including offering space for public engagement on various conceptual levels. Lewando Hundt et al explain that applied theatre is increasingly used to engage the general public and professionals alike in discussing both policy making and practice in the field of health, including issues regarding biomedical developments (Lewando Hundt et al, 2010). Lewando Hundt et al look at the function of live theatre in addressing issues and challenges that pre-natal screening, both in policy and practice, might bring. Cox et al also address the role of theatre in engaging the wider public in a discussion in the field of biomedicine, focusing on health policy development regarding pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (Cox et al 2009). Oftentimes, theatre as a means of public engagement is either combined with other forms of art, such as media art or visual art, in order to address issues through various media, but also to make use of

various forms and methods of producing and presenting art in partly participatory manners.

The recognition of images as significantly knowledge producing within the life sciences (van Dijck, 2006; Arnold, 2000; Blizzard, 2007; Draper, 2002; Wernstedt, 2004) combined with my experiences as an artist led me to work with participatory art, namely developing the project 'Of Women' as a means of analysis alongside my writing. I follow a feminist tradition, whereby "[F]eminist researchers combine many methods so as to cast their net as widely as possible in the search for understanding critical issues (...)" (Reinarz 1992, p. 201). In short, the art installation 'Of Women' combines sound, consisting of looped narrative conversation excerpts taken from the conversations with experts and re-recorded in the US, together with a sculptural component, consisting of a hanging (female) metal torso produced in Cyprus and Germany, whose shiny and uneven exterior serves as an image-distorting projection surface. The images projected onto this torso are of images that conversation partners pointed me to as visuals that are driving diverse discourses in the life sciences and biomedicine. Thus, the authority to define the visuals that are a part of the show was performed by people who are likely not usually concerned with conceptualizing art exhibits. The shiny torso furthermore reflects the images of the gallery visitors, as they look at it or pass by. Thus their images then visually blend with the projected images, putting the viewer into the visual story that is being told and thus creating a direct embodied encounter.



Figure 1 'Of Women' torso detail taken during production

Just to remind us, the study this publication is based on, and of which 'Of Women' is a component, focuses on the life sciences. Some practices within the life sciences and

biomedicine make people and bodily substances, such as eggs and organs, travel through different spaces which inhabit different meanings – high-end hospitals, shady clinics that are open one day and are closed for good the next, ‘travel agencies’ that organize organ transplantations across borders and bodies. In turn, I have also made the production of ‘Of Women’ travel. People I have met in the various locations have joined in the production of the art work, reforming the production process.

Following Bertasio and Marchetti (2010), making art as a means of analysis is “developing a new language,” which bears the strength, so they suggest, of transcending “pure informational content” and can, I would add, integrate quite well with a methodological approach, which originates in the analysis of discourses, yet aims to push the same further. Bertasio and Marchetti call for a sociological-artistic approach to the study of art, an approach which emphasizes the subjectivity of the artist, the aesthetics of art and does not reduce art to a location within the realm of exchange. They state that artists

“invent new languages or that they elaborate the ordinary one implies that their objective is not transferring information about their mental state but generating aesthetic knowledge, that is, adding a new value to their images and feelings, a value which transcends pure informational content. For this reason, the artists’ message is always new, ambiguous and polysemic, and enriches the range of our knowledge.”

Transcending the “pure informational content” in my project happens very practically by feeding the key issues arising from the conversational material and from the visual data collected ‘back’ during the exhibit of the installation. Furthermore, through the public production of art – and through taking field notes during this process – the content of the conversational data and the visual data is literally set into motion as it, in the case of the installation produced, travels from mouth to mouth and from co-producing hands to co-producing hands. During the interactive display of ‘Of Women’, both the conversational material and the visual material worked with in my research, are activated, and thus become the objects of a public gaze and public engagement. This, in turn, means that the very process of analyzing the data and adding to it took place at various sites and was exposed to various impacts that these sites and the actors within them offered.

Publicly producing the art pieces for ‘Of Women’ while synchronically analyzing key

issues arising in the verbal data collected through qualitative conversations, my embodied experience as artist was crucial to the analyses process. However, I would suggest that this practice not only acts as a form of analytical self-reflection, but also works towards providing theoretical discussions in the field of art-based research with a practical example of using art as a methodological tool to involve knowledge and to activate knowledge production. By bringing the production of art into my research as a method and/or tool of analysis, I aim to explore the potential that making art has to reposition the artist-researcher as an embodied 'author'. What could the production of art which is developed out of the conversational material, and/or thinking differently about the conversational material, bring to the overall analysis within a research project? Does production of art as a self-reflective process, as well as a public exposition of the research, allow for different and/or additional findings? Does this approach offer possibilities to develop new methodological and theoretical approaches for investigating the Life Science and biomedicine? In the following section, I will place my reflections on 'Of Women' into conversation with reflections on a participatory-theatre production.

Undesirable Elements

The New York City based Company Ping Chong + Company serves as a contemporary example of participatory art (theater) concerned with both, with political, cultural and social issues at stake as well as with the interface between art and technology, in some of its productions. One of the company's non-traditional productions, called 'Undesirable Elements', is in their words described as "community-specific interview-based theatre works examining issues of culture and identity of individuals who are outsiders within their mainstream community" (Ping Chong + Company). It is produced with both a local host organization and community members on site during a residency of company members. During the working process, company members invite community members to be interviewed, so as to understand more about the challenges within a specific community. Following the interviews, a script, intertwining casted interviewee's individual narrations "together in a chronological narrative touching on both political and personal experiences" is written (Ping Chong + Company). Always performed by the participating community members themselves, each staging is thus a tailored outcome of the community engagement within a specific social and cultural site.



Figure 2 'Undesirable Elements' Salt Lake City, Image provided courtesy of Ping Chong + Company

Furthermore, with performances taking place within the community, they challenge the socio-geographical space in which participants “felt like outsiders” (Mandell 2014) by breaking the taboo to share this experience, thus opening it up as a crucial part of the social identity of a diverse community.

Likewise, ‘Of Women’ takes as its lead the narrations of people of a certain community; here, the community of women who were in the category of experts as defined within this study and agreed to participate in conversations with me. However, instead of re-writing the narrations, as done in ‘Undesirable Elements’, and having them be spoken by the community of participants from which they originated, in ‘Of Women’ the stories that had been shared are used as they were spoken, yet the women speaking them are partakers in the participatory recording production which took place in 2006 in the US. The original narrations were produced by women who shared the definition of expert within this study. The recording process introduced these narrations – through embodied interaction with them, that is, through one’s own vocalization of them – to women who, as far as I know, had no prior experience in the field of my research. In [‘Of Women’], the women who recorded the narrations were from within the same age group as the original speakers, yet from another geographical background. We first engaged in a discussion of the conversation sequences to be recorded and then vocalized these specific sequences, which can be understood as making them travel through one’s body. Through having female volunteers engage with and record sequences from the stories that had been shared, the expert’s narrations are thus opened up to be imagined as experiences which, on various levels or to certain degrees, might be shared by diverse (female)

populations.

In 'Of Women' only excerpts of the narrations were spoken in order to intensify the exhibit visitor's listening experience due to the looping of the collection of relatively short excerpts so that visitors would most likely hear the excerpts at least twice. Similarly to 'Undesirable Elements' the possibility for audience members to experience a certain intensity while being confronted with the narrations was intended. In 'Undesirable Elements' such intensity is aimed for by acknowledging that all stories collected arise from within the community of which the audience is likely to be composed and by bringing these stories together in one dense narration. The intentional intensity in 'Of Women' was produced by selecting sequences rich in certain emotions that were being described and through the continuous repetition of these excerpts.

The showing of 'Of Women' took place in an on-campus gallery during my time as a visiting artist-researcher at Mt. Holyoke College in the US. In addition to the show components discussed thus far an ad seeking a paid egg donor, which had been published in the newsletter of the private women's college at which the exhibit was held, was displayed on the gallery wall aiming to connect the narrations listened to in the gallery setting with the audience's everyday life. As oral feedback I received during the exhibit² and visitor's notes in the feedback book illustrate, upon first listening to the narrations they may have felt unrelated to one's own life; however, reading the ad in parallel triggered self-reflective processes that exhibit visitors, and especially students, carried into discussions with others.

Using biomedical developments as a discursive site for participatory art work for me brings the necessity to be reflective of actors involved. This reflection can be understood as an inner political action; a moment of drawing my analytical gaze and awareness to the actors within the art piece produced, but also to the relationship created between actor groups due to the conceptual approach the art work takes, or due to the display modes or exhibition sites. Such inner reflection can be read as an ethical activity within art practice, as it reacts to the fact that several actor groups within biomedical practices, such as ill-informed 'donors' of bodily substances, might find themselves relatively powerless within a system, and aims to act in a manner that is conscious of the location and situation of various actors of the art production. In the case of 'Of Women' I took a long time

² I was present throughout the show in or nearby the gallery.

reflecting on the fact that we would record sections of the narrations. The anonymization of the conversation data was part of the agreement with conversation partners for this study. Pragmatically speaking re-recording the material did not only secure the anonymity, but opened the narrations up to reflection on what it means to record these – to become the voice that speaks the story. We discussed this process in the group of women interested in re-recording sections, drawing awareness to the relationship established between the expert conversation partners in my study and the women re-recording the narration sections. One woman decided not to record a sequence, which I regard as a sign of the discussion having facilitated reflection processes, enabling participants to make informed decisions about contributing to the exhibit.

During the participatory production phase of ‘Of Women’, as well as when analyzing interdisciplinary works of others, a question that comes to my mind repetitively, is the question as to whether women who shared the narrations used in the art work can, possibly to a certain degree, also be framed as participants of the wider art process, for example as they, as is the case in [‘Of Women’], provide the narrations the script consists of. Working in a site-sensitive manner in art productions for me includes ‘processes of mirroring’. With processes of mirroring, I mean analytical processes that, on the one hand, look at the distribution of power within the discursive site the work focuses on and, on the other hand, questions these, challenges these or mirrors these in an aware and sensitive manner in the art piece.

The production methods used within ‘Of Women’ relate to methods applied in contemporary participatory theatre works, such as the work done by the Company Ping Chong + Company, trying to learn from the long history that theatre has in engaging various publics, but also opening up complex, partly scientific, subject matters to joint processes of reflection. Both productions aim to emphasize or else suggest that stories told by the participating individuals can speak for experiences and knowledge gained by various others. The productions challenge the characterization of these experiences – and concerns about them - as private matters, recasting them socially shared ones.

Pimp Your Brain

Employing knowledge activated in discussions during my architecture course taught – and thus also bringing students’ voices and ‘the studio-classroom’ as a creative

knowledge-producing site into my analyses – I will turn to investigating how one can understand participatory art work focusing on biomedical practices as a discursive site with which to activate the architectural site it is displayed or performed within.

In Germany during 2009, I came across the following image, which suddenly appeared everywhere in the city, on stickers stuck to public toilet stalls, on buttons worn on jackets, printed on a flyers, etc.



Figure 3 Project logo retrieved 06 2014 from the Pimp Your Brain Program published at <http://www.pr.uni-freiburg.de/pm/2009/Pimp>

At first feeling uncomfortable seeing the image, I started analyzing it, and bonded with it. Approximately two weeks into this analytical journey, during which I kept track of my thoughts in a notebook, I saw a flyer with the image and the words ‘Pimp your Brain’. Feeling as though I had a piece of information, I also felt excluded. ‘Pimp your Brain’, is not the language of my generation and, being English, it is not the language that is often spoken in Freiburg im Breisgau, the city in which the image appeared. I searched the internet and found more information.

The image acts as a logo for the ‘Pimp your Brain’ inter-generational and interdisciplinary symposium and related events. ‘Pimp your Brain’ was the title of a one-year project that was about to result in an academic and artistic symposium to be held at the city’s theatre, which would include lectures, public expert discussions and participatory art installations and multi-media theatre performances developed by and/or performed in by local high school students. The students had collaborated with medical scientists. Information found on the web page of the University of Freiburg im Breisgau reads, „Zusammen mit Medizinern, Ethikern, Regisseuren und Dramaturgen beschäftigen sich seit November 2008 circa 50 Freiburger Jugendliche im Alter von 16 bis 18 Jahren mit aktueller neurotechnologischer Forschung. Ihre künstlerische Auseinandersetzung stellen sie jetzt vor. Sie präsentieren ihre Ergebnisse im Wissenschafts- und Theaterprojekt (...) der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg zusammen mit dem Theater

Freiburg und Freiburger Schulen (...).³ Thus, this project brought together a diverse group of institutions and populations, producing and challenging knowledge in the field of biomedicine in various sites, through various actors and with and for numerous audiences.

Following the (not only) feminist understanding art, in its engagement with actors and sites, can no longer be understood to have an end in itself. As art historian Lucie-Smith explains: “Meanwhile feminist theoreticians elaborated new critical approaches to artwork and its function within an aesthetic and social context. Many of these were derived from French structuralist and post-structuralist philosophy – that is, the work of art was not seen as an end in itself, nor as a complete, self-sufficient entity, but as something that modified the situation in which it was put, and that changed character and meaning as the situation itself changed.” (Lucie-Smith, 2000, p. 210). In other words, aesthetic experiences that one has with art and/or processes of knowledge production prompted through art, are as site-specific as the work. Art thus interacts with populations, but also directly feeds back and interacts with the spatial site within which it is activated. Thus, art produces discursive and architectural spaces as much as it is produced by them. On this basis, we can understand that opening up the architectural space of the city’s theatre to question and answer discussions with experts, to academic lectures and to participatory performance and installation-based work, as done for the ‘Pimp Your Brain’ series, can provide new insights into how the architectural and artistic space of the theatre might be activated in the future. Furthermore, it can be understood in relation to Passerin d’Entrèves’ work on philosopher Hannah Arendt and the right to active citizenship. Passerin d’Entrèves states:

“The constitution of public spaces of action and political discourse depends therefore upon the existence of a common, shared world and upon the creation of numerous spheres of appearance in which individuals can disclose their identities and establish relations of reciprocity and solidarity.” (2000, p. 69).

Understanding performances to oftentimes engage actors and audiences in an embodied manner, it is interesting for the field of biomedicine that embodiment interacts with how

³ Since 2008 and together with medical doctors, ethicists, directors and dramatic advisors 50+ highschool students between 16-18 years old work on issues arising in neuroscience research. They now present their artistic examination together with the Albert-Ludwigs-University, Freiburg and the city theatre, Freiburg as well as in collaboration with local schools. Pimp Your Brain (2009; translation from German provided by the author)

we relate to various others, but also in relation to past and future selves; including our imagined aging self and future selves outside of our bodies, such as (imagined) offspring. Embodiment furthermore facilitates access to participation in artistic practices and outcomes and, in the case of the multilayered project in Freiburg, without requiring the financial means to buy a theatre ticket. Participation, here, can purely be based on interest in the topic (or the medium in which it is presented).

The 'Pimp Your Brain' project can thus be understood as participatory on various levels. Not only were some of the performative installations the students set up in the theatre and its foyer participatory. Rather, the whole project created a close network of participating institutions and individuals, thus questioning traditional hierarchies in place between some of the actors, such as high school students and medical researchers. Furthermore, the architectural script of the site was challenged indeed, with it no longer being possible to distinguish between actors and audience members by noting where in the building they were located, as participatory installations and performances also took place in rehearsal spaces, corridors, etc. Every niche, every corner of the theatre seemed to have become an experimental laboratory for artistic knowledge production, with actors not being easily identifiable at first or even second sight.

I regard public spaces within the social net of a city - such as the city theatre, with its very specific history in Germany - as fragile spaces. Fragile, as they are spaces composed of both constant flux as well as the ongoing performance of rituals, and thus an inner tension between these two dimensions. I understand it to be the social permeability inherent to the public spaces' fragility, which has the potential to introduce various populations to experiences outside of their 'everyday life' - such as shared artistic experiences. Such shared artistic experiences can provide a rich ground upon which to reflect a topic and think it further in various ways, also based on the fact that such experiences are often inclusive of various forms of knowledge productions, including non-verbal forms, and thus offer modes of participation to individuals with various competencies, abilities, and interests. Thinking a topic further could involve thinking about developments and processes never thought about before, such as biomedical developments, as part of a semi-guided joint artistic experience or else thinking in ways that are new to one's experience, such as engaging with embodied forms of knowledge production.

Such artistic modes of inquiry, as those offered through the various activities 'Pimp your Brain' engaged populations in, offer aesthetic experiences to individuals. Aesthetic

experiences can be understood to contain at least two key components, “its cognitive function, i.e. the genuinely aesthetic production of knowledge, and specific forms of immediate, sensual communication, performed through bodily interactivity” (Aesthetics of Embodiment: Forms of Knowledge and Bodily Communication). Refraining from analyzing the participatory activities of the ‘Pimp your Brain’ symposium in more detail here due to the focus of this paper, I have used this example to reflect on how participatory art in public spaces – here the city’s theatre - within a social geographical entity or grid – here the city – can speak to the creation of social situations that allow various populations to reflect on and to access possibilities to participate in shaping subject matters immanent to the future of human kind. In this sense, equality regarding access to both information and participation is enhanced.

To conclude

Early in 2014 a light bulb installation above the city theatre in Freiburg im Breisgau read ‘Heart of the City’. Making a reference to the anatomical body using the ‘image’ of the heart, but also establishing the idea of the city as a ‘peopled body’ within a society, this installation furthermore resonates with historical notions of public spaces, most of all the Greek agora as a gathering space and a space of shared political and social action. From medical history we understand that, historically speaking, it was the heart’s condition, its beat, that determined whether an individual was considered to be alive or not. Reading the current installation and transferring the idea of the heartbeat to provide information about the status of an anatomical or social system, a human body or else a city, allows us to push the idea of art – especially art in the public sphere – and understand it to be an existential component of the ‘healthy’ development of a society, granting active citizenship rights to participate in the imagination of a human future to its members, by enhancing access to knowledge production through embodied as well as artistic forms of knowledge inquiry and production.

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