

If the audience want to dance, why don't they?

Valentijn Visch, Design Aesthetics, fac. of Industrial Design Engineering, Technical University Delft, the Netherlands.

Alessia Cadamuro, Design Academy Eindhoven, the Netherlands.

Art offers experiences. Often this artistic experience involves emotions. For instance, watching the Guernica may upset you, Rothko's chapel may calm you, or the Mona Lisa can make you feel socially attached. However, these paintings do not only elicit an emotion but makes you think as well. For instance about love, being or war. Artistic experiences thus contain emotions as well as thoughts. The following paper will investigate the potential of bodily experiences to the art experience by motivating a dance performance audience to participate in a performance.

A necessary feature enhancing the art experience is the art context such as a museum, a theatre or a cinema. An art context makes you like to experience emotions you don't like to experience in reality - such as disgust at the human race in Lars von Trier's film Dogville. Moreover, the art context makes you think about the works. People think might think more about the meaning of Mona Lisa's smile than about the meaning of their neighbours' smile. The context of art provides the art consumer with the determination of a product as being art, and thus potentially interesting for thoughts, and the context provides the art consumer with a safe fictive environment for a wide range of emotional experiences.

Dance offers experiences just like other artmedia do. When going to a ballet, the audience might experience emotion and thoughts. In contrast to other artmedia, the medium dance is not only 'consumed' as art but practised as well by the majority of people. Almost everybody dances once in a while and likes this. I don't think the overlap between art practice and art consumption is that high in any other art medium. Perhaps the medium singing comes close. But painting, sculpturing, or acting are art media that most of the people have practised once in their lives, but not throughout their lives like dance. Dance is even performed throughout the ages and cultures as well – for instance, cave drawings of dance dating from around 7000 BC are found in the Indian Bhimbetka rock shelter paintings (see Fig. 1).

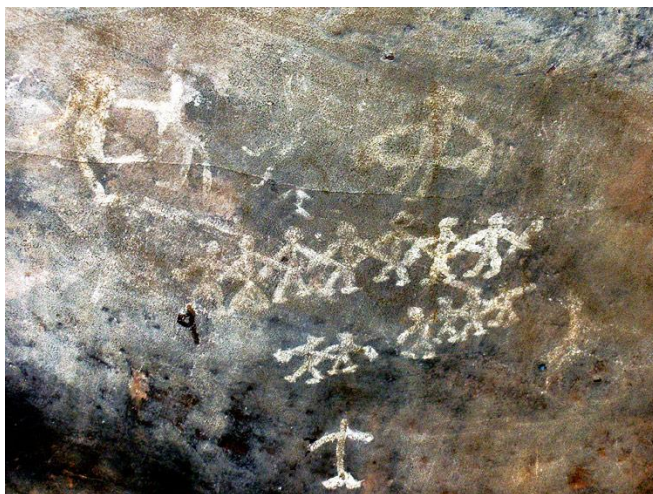


Figure 1. Indian Bhimbetka cave drawing showing people dancing in a row.

The historical causes for dance behaviour are difficult to obtain and they might change like religions or dance styles. From a psychological perspective, the motivation to dance can be understood when applying the psychological need theory of Deci and Ryan (1991) to it. They presented, based on behavioural research experiments, three basic psychological needs. Fulfilment of these needs motivates people and non-fulfilment of the needs demotivates people. The first need is the need for autonomy: people want to make their own choices and don't want to be controlled. In relation to dance practice, autonomy can be found in choosing your own individual movements during a dance. The second need is the need for competence. People like it when they are challenged, when they can learn something, and when they can apply their skills. During dance, people enhance and train their dance skills. The last need is the need for social relatedness. People like to form social relationships and social interaction. Naturally, dance is practised as a social activity as well.

So, the experience of watching dance as an art consists of emotions and thought and the experience of dancing is intrinsically motivating since it consists of psychological need fulfilment. These two modes of dance experience, watching and performing, are however not as sharply separated as they might seem at first sight. When watching a dance show, the audience might feel the urge to dance as well. As is shown from a previous dance by Ingrid Kristensen "A study of the Visual Sense", the audience told that the "the sensuality [of the show] appeal to [their] body", that they "wanted to move" and "wanted to play". This activation of dance desire when watching dance can be explained by the process of embodied cognition (see Barsalou (2008)). This theory holds that all cognition is grounded in, and linked to our experiences. Bodily experiences not only generate thoughts, but thoughts can also generate bodily experiences. When you think of a car crash you just survived, all the experiences linked to the thoughts become active to (little) extent: you (re-)experience the car crash as well as the accompanied fear and bodily movements that you made. When we see a car crash in the cinema this effect might even be stronger by making you duck in your cinema chair. Perception not only remains in the mind but also effects your body. Upon seeing a smile, we might feel the urge to smile ourselves in order to understand what we see (see Niedenthal (2007) for an overview). When seeing a dance performance as an audience, the audience members might, in order to understand the dance, make some small movements themselves. Making these small movements, which might only consist of some muscle tensions mimicking the dancers' movements and emotions, can on their turn remind the audience of the joy of their own dance experience and enhance their motivation to dance. The motivation of the audience to dance inspired Ingrid Kristensen to insert two small audience participation parts in her "Sensing" performance. In the beginning of the performance, the audience entered the performance hall and were asked by tango dancers to dance (see Figure 2). At the end of the performance the audience could participate by rising from their chairs and swing slowly to the music. During the performance the majority, but not the full audience participated in both moments.



Figure 2. Audience participation during Tango dancing at the beginning of “Sensing”.
Photo: Anders Vejen Andersen

A central question on audience participation is if the audience *likes* to participate. As shown above each member of the audience may like to dance, but she/ he might not like to dance at each opportunity. When I asked the audience after the performance if they danced and if they liked this, they scored higher on dancing than on liking. It thus seems that the audience felt a bit *forced* to participate. There seems to be some limiting factors at work inhibiting the audience to realize their dance motivation. I think that there are three factors inhibiting the audience to dance. The first factor is the social context. Although the audience may like to be socially connected to each other as an audience, they might not like to be evaluated by each other on their dance skills. That the social impact of the context can be very strong in inhibiting intrinsic motivation is shown by stage fear. Secondly, the audience might not be mentally prepared to dance. When they came to the show they expected to passively sit and watch. Changing this expectation might result in a negative motivation - the audience might experience a feeling of losing control over their situation which might conflict with their need for autonomy. Thirdly, the audience might not be physically prepared to participate. When entering a dance performance in their formal evening clothes, it might take some effort to perform and enjoy their own physical bodily movement.

In order limit the dance inhibiting factors, we organised a short collective and playful warm up with the audience just before the performance started. During this warm up the audience was asked to a) walk the stairs in a playful way, b) imitate some simple and funny physical movements of a dancer – such as lifting a leg; c) imagining and express an emotion. We hoped that this warm up would 1) motivate the audience to participate because of its playful and safe nature, 2) decrease the fear for social evaluation among the audience, 3) prepare the audience for participation cognitively, and 4) prepare the audience for participation physically. It turned out, that the warm up enhance the participation quantity (more audience members danced) as well as its the quality (the liking of the participation was increased). We concluded that a playful warm up can motivate the audience to participate in dance and increase the dance experience positively. Moreover, we showed that the traditional art experience consisting of emotions and thoughts can be successfully enriched by a bodily participation component. Future research has to show the exact additive value of audience participation on the art experience as well as the specific motivational effects of the warm up components on audience participation.