

Performance Research

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# **ON THE DIALECTICS OF CHARISMA IN MARINA ABRAMOVIC'S THE ARTIST IS PRESENT**

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# ABSTRACT

While 'charisma' can be found in dramatic and theatrical parlance, the term enjoys only minimal critical attention in theatre and performance studies, with scholarly work on presence and actor training methods taking the lead in defining charisma's supposed 'undefinable' quality. Within this context, the article examines the appearance of the term 'charismatic space' in relation to Marina Abramović's retrospective *The Artist is Present* at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 2010. Here Abramović uses this term to describe the shared space in which performer and spectator connect bodily, psychically, and spiritually through a shared sense of presence and energy in the moment of performance. Yet this is a space arguably constituted through a number of dialectical tensions and contradictions which, in dialogue with existing theatre scholarship on charisma, can be further understood by drawing on insights into charismatic leaders and charismatic authority in leadership studies. By examining the performance and its documentary traces in terms of dialectics we consider the political and ethical implications for how we think about power relations between artist/spectator in a neoliberal, market-driven art context. Here an alternative approach to conceiving of and facilitating a charismatic space is proposed which instead foregrounds what Bracha L. Ettinger calls a 'matrixial encounter-event': A relation of coexistence and compassion rather than dominance of self over other; performer over spectator; leader over follower. By illustrating the dialectical tensions in *The Artist is Present*, we consider the potential of the charismatic space not as generated through the seductive power or charm of an individual whose authority is tied to his/her 'presence', but as something co-produced within an ethical and relational space of trans-subjectivity.

# STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION

This output examines the relationship between charisma, dialectics and ethics in the practice of performance artist Marina Abramovic. The research planning, designing, conducting, interpreting and publication of this output was undertaken equally by both authors. The article intentionally combines equal contributions from each author's field of expertise: Senior brought insights and knowledge of contemporary performance to the output, offering an innovative and rigorous conceptual analysis of charisma in Abramovic's work. The design of the collaboration itself speaks to the Stern Review's call for greater 'interdisciplinarity and collaboration' in academic research.

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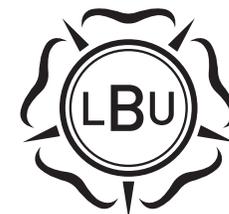
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