

Chrissie Tiller on

The Spectrum of Participation



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“IT’S ONE OF THE GREAT JOYS OF TRAVEL, AND INDEED LIFE, TO COME ACROSS SOMETHING SO UNEXPECTED AND MIND-BENDINGLY WONDERFUL IN THE MIDST OF WHAT APPEARS TO BE THE BLEAKEST OF PLACES, THAT ONE’S IDEAS OF WHAT’S POSSIBLE CHANGE ENTIRELY.”¹

Thinking about this piece on the spectrum of practice I believe is art and participation, I am indulging in ‘useful’ procrastination. Today it takes the form of flicking through a Lonely Planet Guide. Then I come across the statement above. It is indeed one of life’s unexpected ‘joys’, that what I go on to read is about a small town in Sicily called Favara. Previously known for two things, ‘some of the highest unemployment in Italy’ and its ‘many ugly buildings’, for the past four years lawyers Andrea Bartoli and Florinda Saieva have been transforming it, through participatory arts practice, to, ‘a better piece of the world, a small community committed to inventing new ways of thinking and living.’ ‘Art’, in Bartoli’s mind, being, ‘the best way to bring people together and make something worthwhile’.

Wanting to learn more I go online and discover not only the Farm Cultural Park site but the F.U.N. (Favara Urban Network) project: a space for dialogue, research and experimentation for local citizens and artists alike. Too late to visit Favara, it prompts me to think about Pistoletto’s inspirational Cittadellarte in Biella, where I have been. Like the Farm Cultural Park, Cittadellarte brings local people and artists together; ‘placing art in direct interaction with all the areas of human activity which form society.’ And, because I am writing this in August 2014, I go on to think of other participatory programmes I’ve been involved with, Theatre Day Productions in Gaza, the Stari Grad Centre in Belgrade during the NATO bombings and Faustini’s Agência de Redes da Juventude in Brazil: all organisations committed, in what are often the most adverse of circumstances, to using participatory art to bring about transformation for the communities they live and work in.

In doing this I recognise these organisations are at the

1. Lonely Planet: Sicily p. 249
2. Arnstein, S. R. (1969) ‘A Ladder of Citizen Participation’ *JAIP* Vol. 35, No. 4, July, pp. 216-224.
3. Helguera, P. (2011) *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, A Materials and Techniques Handbook. New York: Jorge Pinto Books
4. S. Brown, A., L. Novak-Leonard, J. L. (2011) *Getting in on the act: How Groups are Creating Opportunities for Active Participation*, James Irvine Foundation, WolfBrown: Focus
5. Meissen, M. (2011) *The Nightmare of Participation*, Sternberg Press
6. Kester, G. H. (2011) *The One and the Many*. Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context. Duke University Press
7. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/dec/12/heygate-pyramid-london-estate-evicted-condemn-artwork> and <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/piano-drop-stunt-artist-catherine-yass-turner-prize-ballroom-tower-poplar-9596914.html?origin=internalSearch>
8. <http://www.teatrovalleoccupato.it/>
9. <http://www.wandersonranch.org/programs/symposium-series/making-the-change-they-want-to-see/>

heart of what I consider to be Participatory Arts practice: born from a passion to be in 'direct interaction' with the rest of society, offering the possibility, through creative critique and shared art making, to imagine other ways of being. Without this desire to understand and engage with the realities of the lives of our participants it seems much of what happens in the name of art and participation ends up as little more than a patronising form of audience development. Development for something we as artists/arts institutions have already decided will be 'good' for those who are not part of the well educated, comfortably off elite who make up our regular audience.

In creating the spectrum, 'Beyond the Audience', for the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, I wanted to produce something that might begin to facilitate honest conversations between artists, arts organisations and funders about participatory practice: a means of speaking about the work within the wider framework of art, culture and social change. There are inevitable dangers in trying to capture something as dynamic as participatory arts within a diagram or table; even if suggesting it is part of a continuum. At the same time I feel it is important we are able to articulate our practice. I wanted to distinguish between work that draws on notions of co-creation, collaboration, or interaction as part of its aesthetic, while having little or no social purpose, and that which is committed to the genuine democratisation of the creative process. I also wanted to put down a marker between art as consumption and art as a shared creative act.

For this reason, although the spectrum builds on the work of Arnstein's² Ladder of Citizen Participation and Helguera's³

and others attempts to define participation in terms of socially engaged art, I have chosen to omit what Arnstein identifies as the merely 'tokenistic', or what Helguera calls 'nominal'. Neither have I chosen to include activities where the participant remains in the role of spectator: what Brown et al⁴ note as 'the receptive audience', 'enhanced engagement' or 'crowd sourcing'. It seems to me, if we want to have a real debate about participatory work we need to start with work

that not only has relevance for participants' own lives but offers genuine opportunity, for those who rarely have that possibility, to contribute to the creative act and making of meaning.

I recognise that long-term engagement, the possibility to be firmly embedded within a community and be part of its on-going transformation, as the organisations

mentioned above are, is a rare privilege. The realities of funding, time and place mean most participatory projects inevitably involve some kind of negotiation between the ideal and reality. We are almost always part of other social agendas, whether it be health and well-being, regeneration, community development: often treading a bumpy road between what Meissen⁵ suggests might be just another form of 'placation' and offering possibilities for real transformation. And, as Grant Kester suggests in, 'The One and the Many'⁶, there is 'no arts practice that avoids all forms of co-option, compromise or complicity'. Art is never neutral. Neither is the work of the participatory artist: we enter into this work because art and society are part of the same ecology.

So what might a spectrum of participatory practice add to the mix? In the end I think it has to do with being transparent

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about our intentions: being clear with ourselves and those we are working with *why* we, as artists, are engaged with a particular group of participants, a particular issue or in creating a particular piece of collaborative work. This means taking on the responsibility and the time to understand the social, political and economic contexts in which our work is situated: acknowledging the power structures, of which we, as artists, are part. And using this learning as a starting point for an open dialogue with our participants. There have been an alarming number of examples⁷ of participatory projects, in the context of regeneration in particular, where the very communities they are supposed to be engaged with are in vociferous opposition to the way the work is being used. Finding a way to voice our intentions, our understanding of the communities we are working with and the possibilities within a particular project might also make us more able to be honest with funders about what 'success' might really look like.

In a week of zeitgeist moments some of the other things I came across included; news of Teatro Valle in Rome⁸ where the theatre has become an open space for a new kind of civic participation, links to a seminar in Colorado where artists such as Mel Chin, Tania Bruegera and Steve McQueen have come together to discuss 'Making the Change They Want to See'⁹. And a quote from Leonard Bernstein. 'Art' Bernstein says, 'never stopped a war and never got anybody a job. That was never its function. Art cannot change events. But it can change people. It can affect people so that they are changed...because people are changed by art - enriched, ennobled, encouraged - they then act in a way that may affect the course of events...by the way they vote, they behave, the way they think.' It is in a commitment and an intention to collaborate with people to make art that not only reflects their realities but offers possibilities that the power of participatory art lies: wherever the actual practice finds itself on the spectrum.

Chrissie Tiller is founder and director of the MA in Cross-Sectoral and Community Arts, Goldsmiths College, London University.

IN SHORT... WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Produced two more exciting events including the sold out Keynote and Masterclasses with Claire Bishop of SITUATIONS in Cork and the provocative Dawn of Wizards event with Loitering Theatre; prepped the final stages of The Prosperity Project; Managed the Second Round of the Artist in the Community Scheme, with inspiring applications from across artforms; to support the Arts & Health/Arts & Disability commissions, with George Higgs and Aideen Barry; managed the next stage of the River Tolka Commission (Meath, Fingal and Dublin City areas) and teamed with Artangel on an exciting new commission with Jesse Jones and Sarah Browne, titled 'In the Shadow of The State'.

Per Cent for Art Commissions

In line with Create's remit to create opportunities in collaborative arts and to encourage public art with a participatory aspect, Create is delighted to be working on a number of new Commissions as part of the Per Cent for Arts Scheme and HSE Cork.

Full details at www.create-ireland.ie



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Arts Council Artist in the Community Scheme

Bursary Award 2014: Collaborative Dance REMINDER

The Arts Council Artist in the Community Scheme Bursary Award 2014: Collaborative Dance aims to support individual professional dance artists working in the area of collaborative dance, or with groups of non dancers. The purpose of the Bursary Award is to support and nurture professional arts practice and it is specifically aimed at a dance artist/s who have a track record of working collaboratively with groups.

The Bursary Award of €10,000 provides the selected artist with the time and resources to carry out research, reflect on and re-consider the questions associated with creating dance work with non dancers or those who are not professionally trained.

It is expected that the successful applicant will share the learning arising from the Bursary with the wider dance community and collaborative arts sector. Create will work in partnership with Dance Ireland in providing information sessions and on the selection process

For further information on the application, contact Katherine Atkinson, Professional Development, support@create-ireland.ie

Deadline for applications: 24 October at 5pm.

Arts Council Artist in the Community Scheme

Second Round 2014

There were four awards in the area of research and development in the Second Round and five R&D with mentoring awards in the areas of dance, theatre, music and visual arts.

Project Realisation

Community; Artist; Project title; Context; Artform; Location

Short Term

Dodder Angler Club; Martina O'Brien; Fly Tying; community of interest; visual arts; Dublin

Enable Ireland Limerick Adult Services; Spoken Dance; The Thursday Club; arts and disability; film; Limerick

Long Term

Arklow Rowing Club and Blown Identity; George Higgs; River Borne; community of interest; music; Co Wicklow

North Inner City Folklore Project; Owen Boss; Vardo; arts and cultural diversity; visual arts; Dublin

Dive North: Malin Head Shipwrecks; Marie Barrett; Fathom; community of interest; film; Donegal

Panel

Jim Culleton, artistic director, Fishamble: the New Play Company; Siobhán Mulcahy, Clare Arts Officer; Vaari Claffey, independent visual arts curator. Observers: Liz Powell, Head of Arts Participation, Arts Council; Eimear Harte, Arts Participation Officer, Arts Council; Seamus Crimmins Music Advisor, Arts Council.

COLLAB Arts Partnership Programme (CAPP)

Partners: Create-Ireland (coordinating partner) Agora Collective, hablarenarte., Kunsthalle Osnabrück, Live Art Development Agency, Ludwig Museum - Museum of Contemporary Art, M-Cult and Tate Liverpool.

Create is delighted to announce its success in its collaborative bid with European partner organisations to Creative Europe Culture Sub-Programme 2014-2020 (The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency)

The ambitious joint proposal with arts organisations in the UK, Hungary, Spain, Finland and Germany marks a first for an Irish arts organisation, in that it is the largest funding amount from European cultural funds for a project led by an Irish cultural organisation. The proposal to establish a Europe wide partnership to enhance professional opportunities and training for collaborative artists received excellent feedback results from the Creative Europe Culture sub programme Evaluation Committee panel.

The COLLAB Arts Partnership Programme (CAPP) will initiate an ambitious transnational programme to be delivered over a period of 46 months. The different strands of the work programme will cumulatively build skills and competences and offer professional development opportunities for artists through a series of workshops, artist residencies, arts commissions, presentations and a final cultural showcase to be held in 2017. At the heart of the proposal is a cherished goal to improve and open up opportunities for collaborative artists, and enhance their European mobility.

The COLLAB Arts partnership developed from an original pilot project – the European Learning Network with Create, Live Art Development Agency, Tate Liverpool and m-cult, Finland.

WELCOME TO CREATE NEWS

This is the seventeenth edition of Create News. Create News is published twice yearly in May and October and with one extra digital edition.

It is sent free of charge, features a guest writer and offers the latest information on Create events and services. If you do not wish to receive further editions, please write or email us at info@create-ireland.ie. You will automatically receive copies unless you ask us to remove your details from the list. If you would like to receive a personal copy of Create News please email info@create-ireland.ie and include details of name, address and postcode

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SAVE THE DATE

Create Networking Day For Collaborative Arts

A day of networking & sharing with guest artist panels

Venue: IMMA, Kilmainham, Dublin 8

When: 1 December

Time: 10.00 – 18.00

Cost: 12 euro (lunch included)

After the success of last year's Networking Day we're all set to gather the collaborative arts sector together again to celebrate, share, provoke and discuss. This year, our National Networking event will take place in IMMA. Create and curator Michelle Browne conceived the day originally as an opportunity for collaborative artists to meet other artists and also to get inspired by the amazing work in the area of collaborative arts worldwide.

Attendees will have the opportunity to connect with their peers, interact with surprise guest artists, receive practical information and be inspired by dynamic and vibrant collaborative arts projects created here and elsewhere. Further details on our exciting range of guest artists will be available on create-ireland.ie. Bookings via www.create-ireland.ie or Jane O'Rourke, 01-4736600.

NB: For Create members the event is free of charge.

