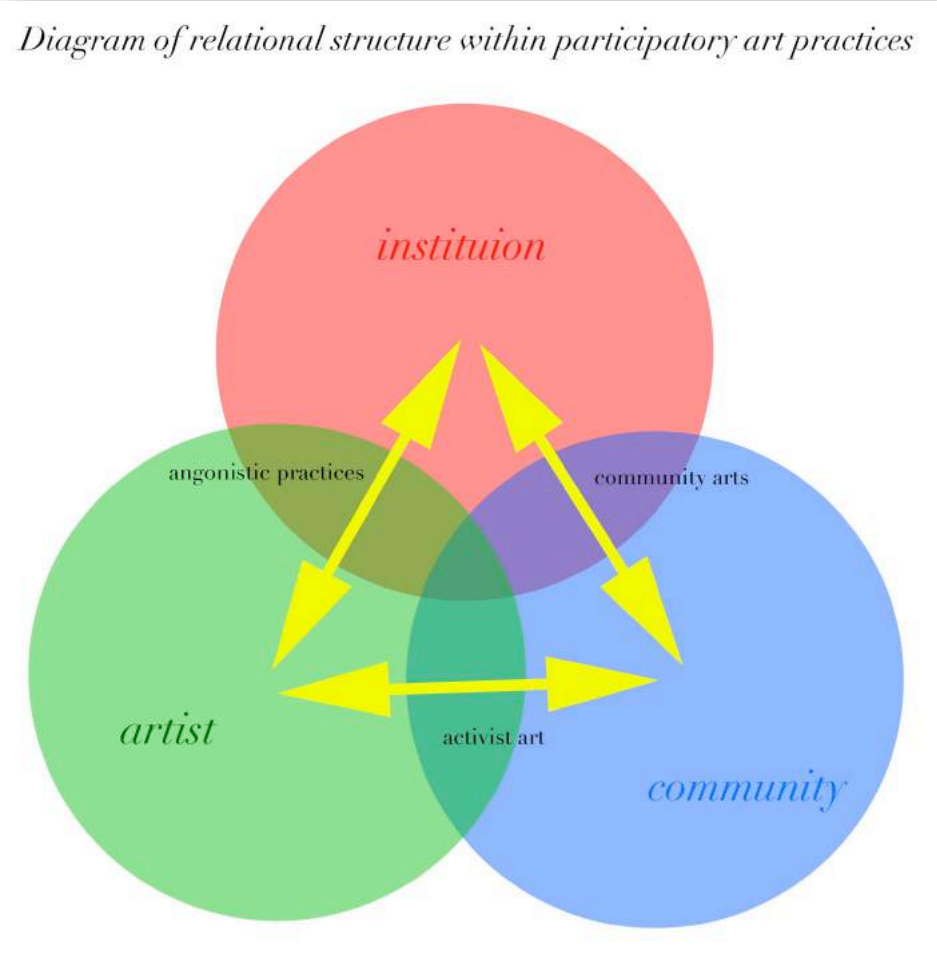

The Triad of Participation

- working with people -

Or

Cheeky Asshole Wankers.

Introduction

This text contains a selection of three short(ish) articles which presents and proposes some new ideas about art and artists who choose to work with people.

It does contain certain words which are not normally found in academic writing, and this is not intended to cause offence, but rather propose new dynamics which might help us explore and critically examine the world of artists and arts organisations working within the public realm.

The impetus for my research stems from extensive experience in the current and growing field of participatory art projects which are primarily organised by institutions and facilitated via artist residencies and placements within organisations and communities. As such, my research explores the intersecting fields of institutions, artists and communities, specifically in regard to how 'conflict' can be used to critique the intent of institutions and artists.

I am indebted to Intellect Publishers, who have included an edited version of the first section of this Triad - The Benefit for Being A Bit of An Asshole - within their *Journal of Arts & Communities* Vol 6. 2&3 Special Edition dedicated to ArtWorks. Do read that for other excellent insights.

These texts do not constitute formulaic classifications of the practice as a whole, but rather descriptions of the practice as I have experienced it. I have explored these in further detail within my Ph.D., much of which can be accessed via my website:
www.anthonyschrag.com

Part I: The Benefits of Being A Bit Of An Asshole[1]

> (I am indebted to writer Morven Crumlish for bringing the clearest definition of the asshole to the fore - it was she who digitally fingered me in the right direction of Aaron James' book.)

My PhD supervisor does not like me swearing: she has been known to counter my foul language with the response: "*an intelligent lad like you can come up with better language than that.*"[2]

And yet (she also dislikes me starting sentences with 'and'), against her better and more cultured entreatments, I am continuing to write this crassly titled text. Indeed, the rub of the matter lies in her call to be 'better;' to aspire to the academic mores suitable to my role as a PhD fellow; to be more 'cultured;' to rise to a certain state of being that is polite and refined; to aspire to a place that is good and ordered and clean. (Unlike the asshole.)

These are indeed valued states to which it is worth aspiring, and the foul rankness of all that is waste - all that which represents our human fallibility and bestial organic-ness that is the asshole - is not necessarily a utopia worth building, but allow me elucidate that it is not specifically the asshole with which I am concerned. Let me clarify with a definition from the New Oxford American Dictionary (2009):

> **asshole** |ˈɑːshəʊl|
> noun (vulgar slang)
> 1) the anus
> 2) an irritating or contemptible person.

It is this latter definition that interests me, and an inquiry into the definition of 'contemptible' highlights my quarry, specifically its third entry :

> **contempt** |kənˈtɛm(p)t|
> noun
> 1) the feeling that a person or a thing is beneath consideration, worthless, or deserving scorn
> 2) disregard for something that should be taken into account
> 3) the offence of being disobedient to or disrespectful of a court of law and its officers (as in: '**contempt of court'**)
> 4) the offence of being similarly disobedient to or disrespectful of the lawful operation of a legislative body (e.g., its investigations).

What interests me here is how an 'asshole' can also be someone who is disobedient or disrespectful to a formalised body of power (i.e., a court): The asshole (the person, not anus) is the one who acts counter to a standard set of rules and regulations that are enforced by the dominant hegemony.

There is one last clarification that requires we probe 'the asshole' (the notion) slightly deeper before we continue.

Aaron James's book *Assholes: A Theory*[3] allows us to further finger into the dark recesses of asshole-ness, and while his publication mostly explores how to 'deal' with an asshole, he does make a useful contention that an asshole (person) does not necessarily or intentionally set out to ruin people's day - that, he suggests, is more the realm of the psychotic, the sociopathic or the rude. Rather, an asshole "*allows himself to enjoy special advantage… out of an entrenched sense of entitlement*[4]." He/she is oblivious to a multiplicity of social approaches and ignorant of the structures that are required for a smooth social functioning. As one reviewer of James' book

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[1] I am semantically and grammatically sticking to this spelling as opposed to "arsehole" - as Oliver Burkeman suggests: "*an 'arsehole', I think, is slightly more of a fool, and less of a villain, than an asshole.*" (Oliver Burkeman, The Guardian, Friday 30 November 2012)
[2] Email to author, Oct 19. 2012.
[3] James, A. *Assholes: A Theory*. London, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2012.
[4] ibid

suggests, "*We're outraged not by the phone-shouter's noise, but his refusal to grant that our interests count*."[5]

I agree with this definition and therefore for the sake of my argument - as will become clear later - I should adjust my title to be 'The Benefits of Being a Bit of a (Wilful) Asshole.' However, I will not change my title due to both my assholishness as well as the rhythmic and aesthetic qualities of its current form. Additionally, I feel the connotation of wilfulness is clear within in the syntax of the sentence which proposes benefits in being '*a bit of*' an asshole - suggesting that there is a performative and conscious element in *choosing* assholeness, rather than being oblivious to one's assholery. Additionally, I write this text as a participatory arts practitioner, and not as a theorist, and hope this too suggests the active choice in becoming an asshole (person), and that this stands in counterpoint to James' suggestion of an asshole's obliviousness. Thus, this text presents an argument for being an intentional asshole within the practice of participatory arts.

Participatory art projects occupy an interesting terrain at the intersection of art and a 'general public' (or specific public - i.e., a community) and they become more complicated with the introduction of cultural policy via public funding, usually from government bodies (i.e., Arts Councils or Local Authorities). Within the contained institutions of galleries and museums, art and artists work within a hermetic sphere that doesn't necessarily impact a populous outside the framed and standard 'art audiences,' but in the introduction of the intersection spheres of influence - art, 'the public' and the institution - the waters become muddy with the conflicting intentions.

To give a brief background to the context in UK, it was New Labour's rise to power in the 1990s and their 1997 election win that brings the complicated terrain of participatory practices into sharper relief. The election was a key moment within the field of participatory art practices as it precipitated a new found optimism after 18 years of conservative policies. Writing not long after that election, Jane Kelly captures the mood and its relation to an expanded practice of participatory art:

> The election of the 'new' Labour Government, while it has inherited not just the economic and social wasteland that is late 20th century Britain, but also much of the Tories' political baggage, has also opened up a space for the question of the role and function of culture in the broadest and art in the narrower sense... The question of art's function, of spectatorship and audience, of creating a situation for art's production which can avoid the worst excesses of commodification, the appropriate forms and techniques for a late 20th century, computerised and digital culture, all these questions are being asked again.[6]

Importantly, the rise of New Labour predicated the establishment of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) in December 1997. This was significant in that it identified 'exclusion' as a major social problem, and as such proposed new cultural policies that advocated art as one method of addressing the issue, thus highlighting art's functional role within a public sphere, as iterated by the newly set-up Department of Culture Media and Sports' (DCMS):

> Arts and sport, cultural and recreational activity, can contribute to neighbourhood renewal and make a **real difference** to health, crime, employment and education in deprived communities.[7] (My emphasis)

What this 'real difference' was going to be and how it was to be manifested suggested an instrumentalisation of participatory practices that could veer dangerously close to 'social engineering' and the criticisms launched against this approach - and against inclusion in general - were rife and I include a few of them here to give a contextualisation to that critique: Ruth Levitas describes the policy's vicious capitalistic tendencies that exposed class-based hegemonies and gender-bias inequalities embedded in the policies;[8] Sophie Hope speaks of their reductive qualities

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[5] Oliver Burkeman, The Guardian, Friday 30 November 2012 http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2012/nov/30/change-your-life-asshole

[6] Kelly, Jane. Stephen Willats: Art, Ethnography and Social Change Variant issue 4. www.variant.org.uk)

[7] DCMS (1999a) p. 8

[8] Levitas, Ruth. *New Labour and Social Inclusion: Citizenship and Social Exclusion Panel*. University of Bristol, Bristol. 2002

in terms of democracy;[9] David Beel speaks of a multitude of flaws when implemented in institutional contexts;[10] the Cultural Policy Collective is effusive in critique of the profoundly anti-democratic nature of the governmental approach, its "*reductive logic of the marketplace*" and it being a sign of "*growing crisis of democratic legitimation and social justice;*[11] Andy Hewitt speaks about New Labour's *Third Way* cultural policy being a "*distortion of the public sphere;*[12] Jonathan Vickery claimed it was a strategy of public relations and a way for the government to "*construct civic identities*" that were amenable to the state.[13] These examples revealed not only a resistance to this way of working, but also highlighted the complicated intermingling of policy and participatory projects. Grant Kester, writing from a USA perspective suggests:

> The new public art draws, both consciously and unconsciously, from the history of progressive urban reform….The history of welfare and social policy, and the accompanying issues of class, professional status, cultural difference, and fiscal sociology, are seldom referenced in discussions of community art, but I would argue that this history is of central importance for a full understanding of community art practice, perhaps now more than ever...Obviously the institutional apparatus that administers and supports welfare is much larger than that which supports community art, but the growing interest among foundations [read as funding bodies] in "community" issues is precisely such that the distinction between community art and welfare or social policy is in some cases quite fine….To this extent then, the source of arts funding, whether from public agencies or from private foundations, has a considerable ideological significance.[14]

The above critiques suggest a critical analysis of the policies of participation is important in understanding how and why the policies were established and enacted so that those involved in participation projects become aware to what ends the projects are being used. The examination is also important to ensure the artist's critical agency within the participatory realm is not unintentionally co-opted into enacting hegemonies desired by the state. This, I argue, is of fundamental importance and is the first allusion to the spectre of the asshole. The structures that are devised and enacted by public institutions may have a mandate bestowed upon them by their electoral capital, and whose job it is to democratically manifest the society as per the wishes of the populous, an artist has no such requirements (within limits). This freedom offers the potential for the artist to be the 'a bit of an asshole' as I am suggesting he/she can be, allowing him/her to be disrespectful or disobedient to bodies of power - thus ensuring he/she does not replicate unethical power structures. Before I present examples of this argument, it is important to bring the discussion of participatory practices into a more contemporary understanding.

A common prelude to most statements regarding arts and funding in today's world, "*in this current economic climate*" has become the go-to justification for lack of financial support and is a prelude to a litany of rejection, closures, lack of funding, and a general dearth of economic investment in the arts.[15] However, in my personal experience as a practicing participatory artist *in this current economic climate*, I have never been more gainfully employed than since the crash of 2008, and I suggest this is because notions of 'working with the public' justifies public arts spending in ways that the traditional model of funding artists (i.e., a single artist working alone in a studio to make objects for galleries) does not. Similarly, the current Coalition Government's dual approach of austerity (i.e., a justification for public spending required) and advocation of 'The Big Society' -

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[9] Hope, Sophie. *Participating in the 'Wrong' Way? Practice Based Research into Cultural Democracy and the Commissioning of Art to Effect Social Change.* University of London. London. 2012

[10] Beel, David. *Reinterpreting the Museum: Social Inclusion, Citizenship and the Urban Regeneration of Glasgow. University of Glasgow. Glasgow.* 2012

[11] Culture Policy Collective 2004

[12] Hewitt, Andy. Privatizing the public: Three rhetorics of art's public good in 'Third Way' cultural policy. Art & the Public Sphere, 1:1, 2011, 19-36

[13] Vickery, J. T*he Emergence of Culture-led Regeneration: A policy concept and its discontents*, Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, Coventry: University of Warwick. 2007

[14] Kester, Grant H. Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art. *Afterimage* 22 (January 1995)

[15] The statement also denies an analysis of the "current economic climate" wherein the richer have become richer[16] by presenting the economics as a *fait accompli* - closing off any inquiry into how the inequalities have happened and in what ways the system promotes further inequalities.

which promotes people and communities 'working together' (cheaply) - has provided the background upon which funders - particularly governmental agencies - seem to now be *more* likely to justify funding for public art projects than in past years. Additionally, as Local Authorities now fund the vast majority of participatory practices,[16] this presents a 'state-monopoly' of public art projects and therefore it could be said that participatory projects are in danger of becoming an extension of a state-run mandate, and the artists employed on the projects are in danger of becoming council employees, with all the trappings that may entail. Along side this, publicly-funded, policy-enacting agencies (museums/galleries) must be seen to fund projects that are safe, nice and good for everyone, because as a public body, they cannot be seen to fund projects that are dangerous, exclusionary and based on the selfish needs of a few - therefore for creating a 'state aesthetic' for public projects that are safe, nice and good for everyone: almost the antithesis of an asshole.

Finally, the vast majority of Local Authority projects that involve art and the wider public are enacted via education, learning and outreach departments that are inherent aspects of publicly funded galleries and museums and this leads to one final conflict of participatory arts that stem from public policy: are they 'education' or are they 'participation'? The former is a process of 'knowing/unknowing;' a power system of knowledge, and the assimilation of 'those who don't participate' into 'normal' structures via hierarchies such as schools and correctional facilities (i.e., prisons). The latter - participation - suggests a more collaborative and egalitarian process that has no premeditated outcomes. While the two are often collapsed, and complexly interwoven - no doubt participation involves some education and vice versa - the clarification of whether a state-funded project is educational or participatory will reveal whether or not a project it is engaged in a form of social engineering to "*construct civic identities*" amenable to the sate, or if it is a true collaborative approach that is based on a dialogic, relational model with a mutual, shared and common inquiry. Knowing which way the project is envisioned is the key to the critical analysis of the participation policies I mentioned above.

It is at this point that I would like to reveal my 'asshole,' firstly in the form of two examples from my own practice, and then with three examples from other artists.

In 2007, the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) in Glasgow was presenting its 3rd biannual Social Justice programme exploring human rights and contemporary arts. The theme of that project was sectarianism, and specifically how it played out within the realm of Glasgow. A historically contentious subject to address due to the cultural divisions that run along both religious geographical and class divisions,[17] the project had an instrumentalised approach with the intention of having an ameliorative impact on those who were to experience the programme.[18]

The design of the Social Justice programmes usually featured a larger, gallery-based exhibition at GoMA surrounded by smaller outreach and education projects that were more participatory in nature. Through an open call for a socially-engaged artist, I was selected to lead one of these outreach/education programmes that would work with youth based in the east of the city - Toryglen, Easterhouse and Shettleston - via a series of workshops to explore the topic. The project was run in parallel with a writer-in-residence, and the selected writer - Magi Gibson - and I devised an over-lapping project that looked '*menchies*' (a Scots word for graffiti tags) as something that was related to text-based work, but also to visual art. We felt it also lay at the intersection of geography and identity, which were the salient notions of the theme. It very quickly became apparent to Magi and I that the issues the youth faced seemed only superficially based in conflicts of sectarianism, and were more the outcomes of systemic poverty, and our art project - indeed, *any* art project - could not ameliorate this social inequality effectively. Ethically, too, I was

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[16] Eleonora Belfiore (2002): *Art as a means of alleviating social exclusion: Does it really work? A critique of instrumental cultural policies and social impact studies in the UK*, International Journal of Cultural Policy, 8:1, 91-106

[17] Deucher, R and Holligan, C. *Territoriality and Sectarianism in Glasgow: A Qualitative Study.* British Academy, 2008. For further information about sectarian experiences within Glasgow visit: http://nilbymouth.org

[18] This is evident in the initial applications for the project, for example: "*The emphasis throughout the residency will be one of social inclusion, with the artist and writer working particularly with groups from Glasgow's communities that have high levels of deprivation, and little access to the arts, in line with the Council's policy of delivering its services equally to all*." Submitted to Author by main applicant, Social Inclusion Officer Katie Bruce, Oct 2012. Issued by Scottish Arts Council, 2006.

uncomfortable with this realisation, since I was being paid a handsome sum to work with the unemployed, or children of the unemployed.

As such, I felt there was a disjunct between the policy intentions of the project (to address and help fix issues of sectarianism within Glasgow) and the reality of those who were the recipients of the project (those living poverty).

I therefore focused on how to to explore this mismatch, and instead of attempting an ameliorative intervention into the dispossessed youth, I instead attempted an intervention into those who instigated the project. Called *The Legacy of City Council Arts Projects,* I invited the curators, advisory board, and civil servants and representatives from the charitable trust who guided the project to come to GoMA to meet and discuss the "*mismatch between place and policy,"*[19] but when they arrived, I had arranged a 'kidnapping' of these cultural workers and bundled them into waiting taxies to take them out to one of the areas of the project (Toryglen) where they were sat in a muddy field, surrounded by the residents of the housing estate. The intention was to have this discussion, but have it in a place that was away from the marble and neoclassical structures of power and instead in the very real, disrupt-able, cold and noisy location that was the everyday reality of those citizens involved with the project.

Here, the Asshole (me) enacted a bit of 'contempt of court' in that the event went against established modes of a traditional participatory practice (i.e., it was 'with' the institution, rather than the public) thus being disobedient to those structures, but it also upset the dominant hegemony by disregarding the traditional respect paid to curators, civil servants and trust representatives in favour of an alternative social approach. The Asshole created a situation that was "*ignorant of the structures that are required for a smooth social functioning*," but it was through this situation that the flaws of the intentions - the enacted policies - could be revealed, critiqued and neutralised.

A similar project - also featuring myself as the 'asshole in residence' - was a developed as part of the Standpoint Futures (Public) residency in which I was invited to develop a public/participatory artwork. The institution had provided an opportunity where I could, if I wished, take part in an community festival tried to "*make everyone get along with each other."*[20] The Shoreditch Festival was the main community festival of the Shoreditch Trust - "*a charity formed in 2000 working to support communities to address the causes of disadvantage in the most deprived areas of London Borough of Hackney…[and] tackle inequality and exclusion across deprived and disadvantaged neighbourhoods*." Specifically, they work from a context of the poverty of the East End of London and the issues raised by the various different immigrant groups in the area - Turkish, Eastern European, Afro-Caribbean, as well as the 'indigenous' Caucasian groups. The Trust and the Council had approached Standpoint as they were aware they had a 'public artist' in residence and wanted to offer the 'opportunity' (read: unpaid contribution) to develop a participatory artwork as part of their annual Shoreditch Festival. The festival is aligned to the Trust's objectives, and is a family-friendly festival that incorporates arts, music and the various trappings of a stereotypical community festivals - face painting, magicians, balloon animals. I met with representatives Hackney council and Shoreditch Trust to discuss the scope of contribution they were interested in and it was during this initial meeting that the "*make everyone get along with each other*" quote was uttered.

I was interested to explore how '*making everyone get along with each other*' was an impossibility within a pluralistic democracy, and to have the intentions to do this seemed to stem from a policy that denied the multifarious cultural identity of the locale. The result of these considerations was an artwork that manifested in a *5-A-Side Tug-Of-War* in which the differing and opposing ethnic groups from the local area came to 'fight it out' via the tug-of-war mechanism. Because of the physics of the competition, there could be no 'winner' but there could a 'loser,' so the game became about navigating/forming alliances and breaking/forming relationships to defeat a stronger opponent. In this sense, the game acted to reveal the wider social interactions that were occurring, giving form and spectacle to the preexisting tensions.

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[19] Quote from Mark O'Neill, then Head of Museums of Culture and Sport Glasgow, at Legacy project.
[20] Lucy McMenemy, Hackney City Council, in conversation, August 2011.

The asshole aspect here came in moving *towards* the tensions the councils wanted to eradicate and rejecting the dominant narrative of community arts by contemptibly disregarding the wishes of those in command. In this context, the asshole action presented the understanding that tension is what gives culture structure, and it denies/disregards the will of the local authority who would see art projects as a way of erasing difference and multiplicity.

What I have been suggesting is that the Asshole is he/she who is willing to be disobedient to those who set the rules; he/she is willing to call those rules in question, to ensure they are not amoral or unethical or uncritical. The Asshole within participatory practices is the artist that is willing to take the risk to bite the hand that feeds in order to produce both critically aware art projects as well as expose problematic policy and power dynamics.

Moving away from my own practice, I would like to present Artur Zmijewski's and his video work *Them* as an another example of an 'asshole' within participatory practices. *Them* is an authored documentary film of an event organised by the artist to explore notions of collective identity, nationalism, co-operation and interaction between opposing ideological groups in his native Poland:

> Zmijewski came of age bombarded by opposing ideologies. At art school, he and his peers were encouraged to finish each other's work, a sure-fire method to get students thinking about how meaning takes shape. A recurring concern throughout his work, Zmijewski would explicitly put this strategy to the test in his grimly funny 2007 piece Them. Four groups – Polish nationalists, Catholics, Jews and socialists – first make posters symbolising their beliefs and are then invited to amend each other's handiwork. After much ripping and graffiti-ing, the groups turn on each other, eventually burning the work and throwing it out of the window. Left with nothing, they seem to have reached an impasse, or possibly, less pessimistically, a place where, free of insignia, they might consider their situation anew.[21]

The work, while problematically edited, as Zmijewski himself admits,[22] presents a situation of conflict rather than participation. Indeed the very notion of a participatory project is called into question by the introduction of active opposition between the social groups.

Here, Zmijewski embodies the Participatory Artwork Asshole by organising a real-life situation wherein the conventions of participation - a situation where people *work together* or *collaborate* - are disregarded and ignored: He actively presents a situation wherein conflict might arise. The notion of working together is held in contempt, as he reveals this impossibility of that intention. It is, however, only through the mutual recognition of that impossibility that the participants '*might consider their situation anew.'*

Unlike the previous work in which the Asshole is in contempt of a specific authority and their intentions, here Zmijewski is in contempt of the nature of participation itself. However, it was via the assholish intention that he reveals the true complexity of a multiple and diverse society, and through which he presents the only possibility of a real and lasting social transformation. Imagine, for example, how a non-asshole might have found a way to work with such diverse groups and what insights (or not) they would have reached via encouraging consensus, rather than the illumination of the dissensus that actually existed. Via his assholish nature, Zmijewski complicates participation to explore its possibilities within the social sphere.

Another work that presents such a complex notion of participation is Christoph Schlingensief's *Please Love Austria.* In this work, Schlingensief presented a shipping container rigged with webcams that contained 12 illegal immigrants which the public could 'vote out' via the internet. The project lasted six days and was situated in the heart of Vienna as part of the 2000 Vienna International Festival. Described as a 'reality TV event' by Schlingensief himself, the project is explained on his website:

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[21] http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/aug/18/artist-of-week-artur-zmijewski
[22] Bishop, Claire and Tramontana, Silvia (eds.), Double Agent, London: ICA, 2009, pp. 99–106

> Amid intense public interest, twelve participants introduced by Schlingensief as asylum-seekers spend one week in a cordoned-off, CCTVed shipping container complex next to the Vienna opera house. Blue flags representing Austria's far-right populist FPÖ party are hoisted on top of a container.
>
> As onlookers applaud ambiguously, a sign bearing the slogan "Ausländer raus" ("Foreigners out") is unveiled and then attached to the container together with the logo of the Kronenzeitung, Austria's biggest-selling tabloid. Excerpts from speeches by FPÖ chairman Jörg Haider resound across Herbert-von-Karajan-Platz. With clear references to the BIG BROTHER TV show, the Austrian population are asked to phone in and vote out inhabitants, the two least popular of which are ejected each day. Votes can also be cast via the Internet, where Webfreetv broadcasts events from the container live - 24 hours a day for a period of six days.
>
> The square is regularly visited by high-profile "patrons" such as acclaimed writer Elfriede Jelinek and political figures Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Gregor Gysi, who then obligingly provide status reports.
>
> Every morning at eight o'clock, two residents are ejected from the container to be deported to their native country. The winner can look forward to a cash prize and the prospect, depending on the availability of volunteers, of Austrian citizenship through marriage.[23]

Schlingensief himself played ringleader to this circus, standing next to or on-top of the counter with a megaphone and enjoining people to participate in voting out who they felt was not worth being a citizen, interviewing political leaders, and interacting with the large crowds that gathered outside the container that either admired or denounced the ‘installation’ depending on their own personal politics. A group of activists attempt to break into the container to ‘free’ the immigrants, and police were involved in several scuffles between the various political persuasions. Crucially, however, the work never presented the politics as ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ but rather, instead, actively revealed them and in this instance, Schlingensief problematised the dominant hegemony by revealing the alternative perspectives on the matter. He collapsed the politics and different ideological approaches of immigration into a singular spectacle that revealed, in visceral and telling manner, the structures of the politics, the relationship between the media and governmental policies, and the nature of participatory democracy.

The assholeish intention here was not to kowtow to specific ideologies and stereotypes of participatory art’s supposed leftist agenda, but rather maintain a frustrating political ambiguity. He was disobedient to established codes of art and politics, and in this way complicated and problematised a simplistic (political) thinking in favour of a more realistic reflection of the world. Most assholishly, however, was that he disregarded the ethics of involving a disempowered group (immigrants) in the manner in which he did. It was only in doing so, however, that he could expose the population’s own complicity in their relationship with racist politics. Being *a bit of an asshole* in this case caused more discussion and debate about Austrian immigration policies than the existence of a real and well-established detention centre, only a few miles from his theatrical re-staging.

The previous two examples - and the last one that I will discuss below - take place outside of the UK’s current context, and so should not be seen as responding specifically from the problematic policies to which I have addressed above. However, as an artist who is currently entrenched within that context, I have amalgamated their strategies into my own, ensuring a unique, effective and timely critique. Similarly, the previous two Assholes respond to general modes of participation, and they have been ‘in contempt’ of the generalised modes of participation, rather than to a specific authority/body of power, as in my work. The last Asshole I’d like to expose specifically explores participation within the gallery setting.

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[23] J. Jessen. Please Love Austria. www.schlingensief.com (Available Online - Accessed Decmber 2, 2014)

Graciela Carnevale developed the work '*Action for the Cycle of Experimental Art, 1968*' to be conceived as part of a large programme of works organised by the Grupo de Artistas de Vanguardia (Group of Avant-Garde Artists) in Rosario, Argentina between May and October 1968. Carnevale describes the work as follows:

> The work consists of first preparing a totally empty room, with totally empty walls; one of the walls, which was made of glass, had to be covered in order to achieve a suitably neutral space for the work to take place. In this room the participating audience, which has come together by chance for the opening, has been locked in. I have taken prisoners. The point is to allow people to enter and to prevent them from leaving . . . There is no possibility of escape, in fact the spectators have no choice; they are obliged, violently, to participate. Their positive or negative reaction is always a form of participation. The end of the work, as unpredictable for the viewer as it is for me, is nevertheless intentioned: will the spectator tolerate the situation passively? Will an unexpected event – help from the outside – rescue him from being locked in? Or will he proceed violently to break the glass?[24]

Claire Bishop goes on to describe the outcome of the work:

> After an hour, the visitors trapped inside the gallery removed the posters that had been placed on the windows to prevent communication with those outside. Excitement – and the sense that this was all a joke – inevitably turned to frustration but, contrary to Carnevale's hopes, no one inside the gallery took action. Eventually it was a person on the street who smashed one of the windows open, and the private view-goers emerged to freedom through the ragged glass orifice. Some of the people present nevertheless believed that the rescuer had ruined the work and began hitting him over the head with an umbrella.[25]

Via the assholish action of locking up gallery visitors and walking away with the key, Carnevale's intention did not defer to a notion of participation where all possible outcomes have been considered, but rather provided a circumstance that encouraged a real sense of agency from the participants. Disregarding the notion of 'how people should be treated' (specifically art audiences) she presents the possibility of new readings, and critiques the assumptions of how one should participate, both with art and with a public. These could have only developed from being a '*bit of an asshole*' to her participants and not if she stayed within the confines of how one 'should' participate with people.

I present this case as a conclusion to my suggestion that participatory artists should be a '*bit of an asshole*' as it not only reveals the possibility of the many and varied ways in which one can be an Asshole (even within a gallery context) but because it also provides a metaphor of 'breaking out of the gallery.' If we consider the museum/gallery as a symbol of an institutionalised system art, then to break out from it might present new thinkings, modes and understandings of its possibilities. The unprofessional actions of being an Asshole and the call for artists to be more on an Asshole - as reflected by the unprofessional and reoccurring use of this term throughout this text - may, at first, seem in contradiction to the very notion of participatory art practices, but it actually presents the practice at its most effective: critical, aware, un-instrumentalised and engaging. It is only through *being a bit of an Asshole* that we can present participatory practices as an viable and tenable artist practice, as opposed to a tool of policy and hegemony.

This is not to suggest that one should *only* be an Asshole - indeed not: the ethics of engaging with real life demands we consider our participation socially and ethically. Nor does it suggest that there is only one type of practice for participatory projects - the multiple perspectives, practices and possibilities of working with people should be always celebrated. What I am suggesting is that there is a benefit to being **a bit** of an Asshole. And though the sphincter may be tight and difficult to stretch to fit around multifarious practices, we should coax the Asshole in us all to emerge and listen to what it might have to say.

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[24]As quoted Bishop, Claire. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso, 2012 p 120
[25]Bishop, Claire. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso, 2012 p 121

Part II: The Artist As Social Worker Vs. The Artist as Social Wanker

A recent conversation with a student doing her dissertation on 'social betterment through art' has led me to realise the need to explore the oft proposed praxis of ‘artist as social worker’ within participatory settings. When one’s practice involves working with people, this becomes a persistent concern - how and why are we interacting with the public and to what end? It is a concern that pertains to the instrumentalisation of art and requires an exploration of the semantics of the terms that grow out of the practice of ‘participatory art:’ When we choose to work with people, are we a socially engaged artist? A community artist? A community-engaged artist? A community-based artist? Someone with a social practice? A dialogical practice? A relational practice? A participatory artist? An activist artist? A public artist? Someone who does public art? Or someone who just works with other people? Each of these terms will connote a different relationship with the public with different desired outcomes and while I would reject a simplification and elision of these terms into a single monolithic and formal practice, I similarly reject the lack of clarity that comes when these terms are used interchangeably. This is particularly apparent in the diversity of intent - especially relating to the ‘betterment’ agenda - that is revealed when interacting other practitioners within the participatory realm. We may all be working with people, but we all seem to be doing it very differently - and for very different reasons.

Diagram 1.1: *Branch diagram of ‘Participatory Art Genres’*. A. Schrag, 2014.

As a practice, *working with people* is still relatively nascent and forming: there are no over-arching formal bodies or collective agreements on the specific definitions of the sub-genres of the practice. Therefore, before I discuss the ‘social betterment through art’ concern, it is important that I provide my own distinctions of the above terms.

While there are variations and additional verbs to clarify meanings (i.e., community-based vs community engaged: one signifying a locational practice and the other signifying an engagement *with* from an external body) broadly, the main terms in use are: community arts, activism art, socially engaged art, dialogic art, relational art, public art. I have excluded ‘participatory’ practices in this list of definitions as this seems to be the over-arching terminology that defines the practice as a whole, in the same way that ‘painting’ incorporates the many different type of paintings. Below, I give a brief description of each of these sub-genres, and have also included an example after each.

1) *Community Arts*: Stemming from the Community Arts Movement described above, this ‘older’ form of a participatory practice came to the fore in the 1970s and ’80s as a practice rooted in the artist working in collaboration with communities, which were usually those perceived as being in a disadvantaged state (poverty, substance abuse, etc.) and whom artists “sought to empower though

participatory creative practice."[26] It often resulted in community-based and community-constructed objects – i.e. community murals/mosaics similar to the work developed by David Harding during his time as the Town Artist (1968–1978) in Glenrothes.[27]

2) *Socially Engaged Practice* (SEP): SEP is in line with notions of 'social betterment', like Community Arts, but is also concerned with the systems that sustain community oppression. However, it is less concerned with direct political action (like Activist Art below) and more with a commitment to social change and development via consciousness-raising. It often, though not necessarily, results in public events authored by the artist, in collaboration with participants. An example of this is Jardín Botánico de Culiacán's *Palas por Pistolas* (2007) in which the artist collected guns from a community and then melted them into steel to fabricate shovels that he then used to dig holes in order to plant trees.[28]

3) *Activist Art*: this practice is strongly aligned with leftist politics and dedicated to the emancipation of participants and the liberation of the society via a critique of oppressive (Capitalist and Neoliberal) regimes, with a primary concern being direct intervention into power structures. It is primarily event-based, although it can assume other means, such as posters, graffiti, publications, etc.. An example of this would be The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army who merge clowning with civil disobedience to enact non-violent direct action in situations of protest.[29]

4) *Dialogic*: described above and associated with Grant Kester, this way of working is fundamentally concerned with artworks framed as conversation and exchange, configuring the public not as an 'audience' but rather as a collaborator. It aims to avoid the paternalism which might be engendered via an 'outsider' working within a community that is not his/her own and demands the power structures to be more egalitarian between the artist and the participant, where both can be influenced by the other. It often results in a plethora of outputs, both gallery-based and public. The work of Oda Projesi is a good example of this work where three artists have been collaborating with neighbours in an area of Istanbul developing workshops, drawing sessions, discussion groups, community picnics, parades and other community events as way to provide space for dialogue and discussion on topics that were important to their lives, including community politics.[30] This approach can be often seen to be similar to Community Art, however it differs in the relationship it has to the 'art institution: whereas CAM was purposefully sited outside the art world, Dialogical works have a more blurred relationship to contemporary art. For example: Oda Projesi hired a room to exhibit artworks in a traditional gallery format, and exhibits the documents of their time with their Neighbours in other galleries and art contexts out with of that neighbourhood.[31] In other words, unlike CAM there is not an intentional break from the traditional art institution, and dialogical artists are "interdisciplinary. It operates 'between' discourses (art and activism, for example) and between institutions (the gallery and the community centre or the housing block)."[32]

5) *Relational Aesthetic*s: a practice described by Nicolas Bourriaud that is based within the (conceptual/physical) structures of art institutions and sought new, more social ways of engaging with publics other than with traditional object-base works. They are primarily structural and/or events-based artworks, and occur primarily within institutional frameworks – i.e. gallery constructs and biennials. An example of this would be Liam Gillick's designed environments staged in galleries that encourage and frame a variety of social relationships.[33]

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[26] Bishop, Claire. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso, 2012 p. 177.
[27] D. Harding (n.d.) 'The Town Artist'. Undated, David Harding Website: www.davidharding.net/townartist, (Available online – 16 October 2014).
[28] 'Palas Por Pistolas'. (n.d.) http://pedroreyes.net/palasporpistolas.php, (Available online – Accessed 16 October 2014).
[29] 'Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army'. (n.d.) http://beautifultrouble.org/case/clandestine-insurgent-rebel-clown-army/ (Available online – Accessed 11 December 2014)
[30] 'Oda Projesi' 2007. Oda Projesi Website, http://odaprojesi.blogspot.co.uk/. (Available online – Accessed 11 December 2014).
[31] 'Installation Art'. (2006) http://www.installationart.net/Chapter6Conclusion/conclusion04.html. (Available online – Accessed 14 March 2015).
[32] G. Kester. (2000) 'Dialogical Aesthetics: A Critical Framework For Littoral Art' *Variant Magazine*. Glasgow. Variant, Issue 9. Special Supplement.
[33] 'Liam Gillick' (n.d.) Tate Website, http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/liam-gillick-2592. (Available online – Accessed 18 May, 2015).

6) *Public Art*: these are works that are funded or approved by public bodies, such a Local Authorities and (while not exclusively) they are more-often-than-not sculptural or semi-permanent. They primarily iterate a public concern and/or interest and often result in objects placed in the public sphere. An example of this would be Antony Gormley's *Angel of the North* (1998).[34]

A further breakdown of these terms is necessary to discuss the *intent* of each of these works, and this can be illustrated by the diagram above that features the above terms and their 'domain.' By domain, I mean *that which gives the work its meaning*; the frame through which the work's presence in this world is justified. As above, this does not constitute a binding or rigid structure, but how I am defining this practice for my own purposes:

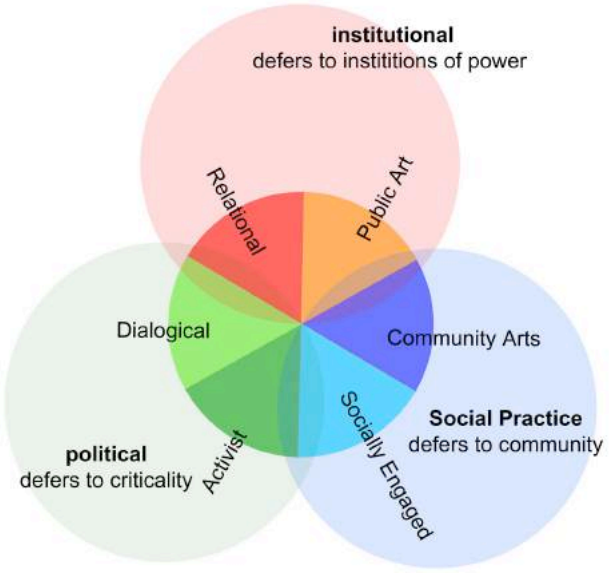

Diagram 1.2: *Interacting Venn Diagram of Participatory Art Genres, and their derivative power sources*. A Schrag, 2013.

Within the diagram, the definitions are clustered into pairs, each pair sitting into one of three spheres: institutional, political or social practice. Within the Institutional sphere, the working processes - relational and public art - defer to the institutions of power that define the works intention: Public art is funded and ordained by public bodies and Relational works are concerned with new types of (public) relationships within the art galleries/museums. Both defaults to the power of the authority that funds/organises them, and therefore the intent of their work is to recapitulate and reinforce that power, either of the public institution (ie, local government) or to the institution of art (museum/gallery). The general mood of these works are serious and deferential.

The Social Practice sphere illustrates that both Socially Engaged art and Community art defer to the community and their needs and desires. The works do not necessarily therefore contain any criticality of the systems that sustain the social sphere, but instead work from within those systems and the intent is to sustain a status quo - and defer to the construction of - community. The general sentiment of these works are nice and convivial.

The Political sphere defers to a criticality via Activism art and Dialogical artworks. The intent within them is to critique the politics that sustain oppression via either direct action (activism) or exploring a mutual line of inquiry between artists and participants which initiates a transformation for those engaged (dialogic). While not wholly replicating Grant Kester's Dialogical Aesthetics, Dialogic intent is similar in that that the works created aim to find a consensual meeting point that can transform society into a more egalitarian condition. The general mood of these political works is politically 'charged'

There are two last clarifications that should be discussed in regards to these definitions. Firstly, two more spheres of intent should be placed overlapping the whole diagram - they cannot be

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[34] 'Angel Of The North' 2015, Gateshead Government Website, http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/Leisure%20and%20Culture/attractions/Angel/Home.aspx. (Available online – Accessed 11 December 2014)

represented visually, as they are both the substrate on which these circles are places and can be present (and/or absent) in all spheres: these circles represent education and participation.

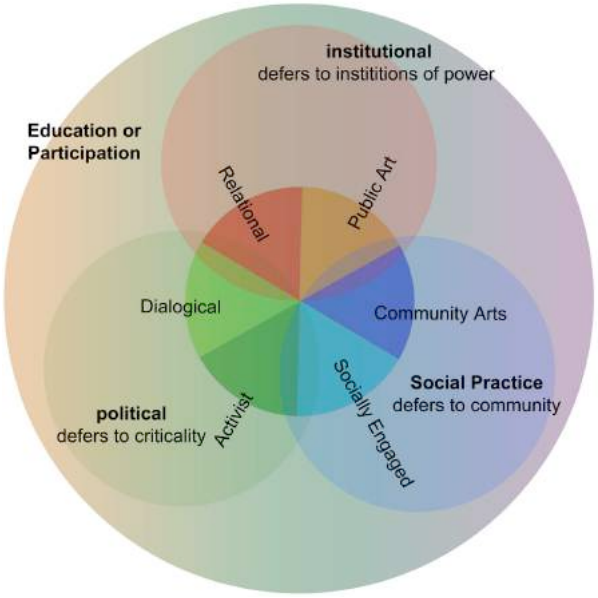

Diagram 1.3: *Education OR Participation as part of Interacting Venn Diagram of Participatory Art Genres, and their derivative power sources*A Schrag, 2013.

These two exist in constant tension, and are the very fabric of the question of intent when working with people: does an artist/institution/community want to engage in a 'participatory' project or and 'education' project? In latter - education - is a process of 'knowing/unknowing;' a power system of knowledge, and the assimilation of 'those who don't participate' into 'normal' structures via hierarchies such as schools and correctional facilities (i.e., prisons) into 'good citizens'. The former - participation - suggests a more collaborative and egalitarian process that has no premeditated outcomes. While the two are often collapsed, and complexly interwoven - no doubt participation involves some education and vice versa - the clarification of whether a project is educational or participatory will reveal its intent either as a form of social engineering to "*construct civic identities*" amenable to the sate, or if it is a true collaborative approach that is based on a dialogic, relational model with a mutual, shared and common inquiry.

Lastly, I would add a final term that is not situated within the diagram, but like the education/ participation praxis, can occur across the different spheres, and specifically at the intersections of the different forms of practice. This term is 'conflictual participatory practice' or an *agonistic approach*. I would suggest this represents a new way of thinking through this type of participatory practice that can clarify intent and promote new ways of working. Agonism art derives from Chantal Mouffe and her understandings of an agonistic approach to both politics and philosophy. It is an approach which critiques power, but does so not as a binary and oppositional enemy, but as an adversary: something/someone ultimately aiming for the same goal, but whose utopias may very well collide. As a method of working, it closely aligned to a 'dialogic' practice, as above, but frames itself via dialogic disensus (as opposed to consensus) in order to reveal the *intent* of a project first and foremost, both as content of the work but also in its mode of participation. The general feel of these works are confrontational and uncomfortable.

Additionally, it is important to differentiate between the dialogic intent of an agonistic approach to the dialogic intent of Grant Kester's Dialogical Aesthetics: agonistic intent is critical of the *political,* whereas Dialogical Aesthetics defaults to a criticality of *politics* - the former is concerned not with manifesting a specific utopia, but unravelling and revealing the political hegemony; the latter is critical of a specific oppressive politics and seeks to create the world in a more egalitarian manner (See for example Conversation Pieces (Kester, 2004) P 69 - 81.) I have written about this elsewhere in my texts on the '*Politics Vs Political*' debate, but briefly explored, I propose a concern for *politics* sets up an oppositional 'right vs wrong' dichotomy that only reinforces a dominant hegemony's position via soft power. In other words, by setting up a construct in which one force is placed in power (for example, bankers) and another is a victim of that power (for example, average

citizens) actually reinforces the position of power of the force in charge, and gives less agency to the 'victims' because they have, by their own agency, declared themselves eternal victims of a more powerful force. In such a way, many activist art projects that aim for emancipatory outcomes are perversely enshrining the might of those they seek to unsettle, thus rendering the activist art projects useless. Agonist art, in contrast, aims to expose the political structures, rather than fight in the name of politics.

Examples of agonistic art would be: Chrsitoph Schlingensief's *Please Love Austria*, Artur Zmijewski's *Them*, and my own work, *Legacy of City Arts Projects*. It was the objective of these works to explore the intent of 'institutions,' or of 'community,' or of 'politics,' thereby revealing the power dynamics at play within those spheres and it is only through the revelation of those intents can we begin to discuss 'social betterment through art.' In other words, once we know what the intent and reason of an artist or institution has for working with people, then we can clarify what is meant by 'social betterment through art.' If a work is Relational, betterment can be decoded as deferring to specific kinds of 'authority'; if it is Social then it can be deigned as assisting and formulating 'community' and social bonds; and if 'Political' then betterment can be seen as revealing and critiquing power dynamics. If it is a combination of two or more of these spheres - i.e., social and political - then it can be said to be agonistic, and the subsequent opportunity of a multiple perspective gives the work the potential to present a wider critique and insight to notions of 'social betterment through art.'

I will return to the agonist mode of participatory practice below and explain it further, but for now, through the above clarification, we can begin define what each different type of participatory artist might mean by 'social betterment.' Knowing this allows us to decode the works and through what processes we judge them, thereby allowing us to understand the intentions of why an artist might be working with people and for what reasons - this returns us to the 'artist as social worker' praxis.

The discussion I had with the student which spawned this text stemmed from the following Grant Kester quote:

> Both the community artist and the social worker possess a set of skills (bureaucratic, diagnostic, aesthetic/expressive, and so forth) and have access to public and private funding (through grants writing, official status, and institutional sponsorship) with the goal of bringing about some transformation in the condition of individuals who are presumed to be in need.[35]

Kester's proposition to collapse the two careers of social work and artist reveals a common conceptualisation of participatory practices in its relation to social betterment, specifically about the artist working with people and how and why he/she does this (and upon whose authority). Kester presents this argument by eliding the *Social Worker* with that of the *Artist* because of some similarities he sees in what participatory artworks try to do, and what social workers try to do - ie, bringing around transformation to those 'in need'

My concerns about this collapse are twofold - one is about practicalities and the other is about intention.

Firstly, however, I have (non-prescriptively) defined different types of artists above, and so it would be useful to similarly define the social worker: A Social Worker is someone *employed* to provide social services (especially to the disadvantaged). Additionally, the social work *profession* promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. (International Federation of Social Work)

I have highlighted two key words in the above - 'profession' and 'employed' - as I think these provide a clue to my first concern with Kester's proposition of the 'artist as social worker' which relates to practical issues. A *profession* suggests a practice with specialised training, formalised schools of thought and education. Similarly the notion of '*employed*' suggests someone who is part of a larger organisation with structures, hierarchies, institutional policies and various different levels

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[35] Kester, Grant. *Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art. Afterimage* 22, January 1995

of support. Therefore, to conduct social work requires specialised training, regular funding, inter-agency co-operation, systems of support and guiding policy/theory in order for it to achieve its goal. In contrast, an artist is a single individual or group without social-work training or institutional support or even regularly employed in a structured system, or even indeed, can he/she be said to cohesive identity to help define him/her. So, on a practical level it would be highly problematic to assume the artist could effectively or practically conduct the business of social work without the practical structures surrounding him/her.

Similarly, and regarding my secondary concern of intention, social work is often run out of governmental agencies or funded by them, thereby operating within a public mandate that gives it the ethical framework to act on/with/for such disadvantaged people. (Granted, it is more problematic for my argument that there are wholly private organisations which run aspects of social work, but I would argue these are the exceptions rather than the norm.) An artist, by contrast has no public mandate that justifies him/her to act upon/with/for a public group of people, thus making his/her actions of engaging with them ethically problematic at worst and paternalistic at best.

This is also illustrated by (and a concern of) the institutional intent of art projects within participatory settings in regards to 'social betterment.' The social worker operates within an institutional setting whose policy is holistic, and has strategies about how and what needs to be done to achieve their social work goals - it may be different from other social workers and there may be a plethora of perspectives of how to achieve goals, but there are a set of decided upon policies within agencies that guide a social worker's project. Again, b contrast, an artist (if not working alone) does so from with a gallery/museum context, which has multiple intentions, but primarily is concerned 'art' and as such, an artist working on a 'social betterment' agenda either becomes a tack-on or an addendum to a wider programme at best, or at worst, an ersatz government employee enacting propaganda via publicly funded art gallery outreach programmes.

If the institution does manage to embed participatory practices effectively - and there are few who have - then this work falls close to the 'is it art' vortex, which can be - when done well - incredibly exciting, but when done poorly, can drain one's reason for living in seconds. The 'doing it well' is done via clear intentions and an alignment to criticality via the agonist approach above - but that is for a different article. For now, we're left with a the concern that the artist (even working with an institution) is a poor substitute for a social worker and it would be dangerous to suggest one could do the other, leading down the instrumentalised path where the artist is the state's cheaper option to proper and appropriate social work.

I have a last brief point about this concern about collapsing the fields of 'social work' and 'art' before I conclude with reference to the title of this text. To collapse the fields into one devalues both; it disavows the unique specialisms in each - art's ability to ask deep and probing questions and social works ability to be wholly committed to social betterment. This does not suggest that the separate worlds can never collide, only that it would be dangerous to as Kester suggests to replace one with the other because they would both be made weaker, not stronger.

So where does this leave us - those artists who work with people? How and why can we discuss 'social betterment through art' if it is not via the mantle of social work?

My proposition refers to this text's title - *The Artist As Social Worker* Vs.*The Artist as a Social Wanker* - and alludes to the notion of a conflictual participatory artwork and argues that the artist not be the a benign and ameliorating force for 'good' but rather a more aggressive character.

The word *wanker* in this context stems not from the pejorative for a masturbator, but rather for the uniquely British slang for "*a contemptible person*." In a more international context is can refer to a "*jerk*." As I have alluded in the Asshole *text* above, someone who is contemptible is guilty of the offence of being disobedient to or disrespectful to accepted structures authority and order (as in: 'contempt of court').

The 'Social Wanker' then is the artist who freely employs strategies that are disobedient or disrespectful to systems of order and power. Referring back to the diagram - and keeping the notion of agonism close to hand - this understanding becomes clear when considering the intersecting spheres of intent. For example, a work whose 'political' intent is further complicated by

the disobedient Social Wanker who disrespectfully adjusts the intent to include the ‘institutional’ or the ‘social’ can, in doing so, reveal much more about the intents and power dynamics at play between and within spheres than staying stoically and benignly in a single and known sphere. In other words, by being disrespectful to specific intents and systems of power, the Social Wanker can provide multiple ways of thinking and be critical of hegemonies, allowing a multiplicity of perspectives and avoiding the recapitulation of the spheres that limit social experience.

The social betterment that this provides allows participants and audiences to break out of the spheres of intent that limit them and offers the potential for transformation - allowing those involved in the project to see the world for what it is and its interactions afresh. I therefore propose the artist interested in social betterment be less of a social worker and more of a Social Wanker. It is only via this mode that true and ethical social betterment can be possible.

The Reign of the Cheeky Monkey

This is the third and final text of my “Triad of Participation” and aims to expand on my two previous conceptualisations from the articles above by further elucidate the inter-relational dichotomies between artists, institutions and communities with whom they work, specifically in regards to the framing of working with people as ‘education’ or ‘participation’.

As with those previous texts, this does not constitute a formulaic classification of the practice as a whole, but rather descriptions of the practice as I have experienced it. Unlike the other texts, I shall attempt to keep my swearing to a minimum.

This text begins with a reference to a project by Incidental People called ‘*Pontification, Prevarication*' at the National Museum in Cardiff which I feel succinctly illustrates the issue of 'participation' and 'education' and how that plays out in the context of a participatory projects.

The written documentation of the project describes how the collective designed a museum-based programme that was premised, driven and formulated by lies - lies from the artists, lies from the participants, lies from the institution: all intentional and used as a methodology to explore the premise of an ‘educational’ project. The project contrasted the notions of pedagogy and participation and explored how to ethically and humorously engage an institution in its own self-reflection.

As I've said within the *Asshole* text above, education is a process of ‘knowing/unknowing;’ a power system of knowledge, and the assimilation of ‘those who don’t participate’ into ‘normal’ structures via hierarchies such as schools and correctional facilities (i.e., prisons). Participation suggests a more collaborative and egalitarian process that has no premeditated outcomes. While the two are often collapsed, and complexly interwoven - no doubt participation involves some education and vice versa - the clarification of whether a state-funded project is educational or participatory will reveal whether or not a project it is engaged in a form of social engineering to “construct civic identities” amenable to the state, or if it is a true collaborative approach that is based on a dialogic, relational model with a mutual, shared and common inquiry.

What the 'Pontification, Prevarication' project above did was to problematise the relationship between education and participation within a museum context and thereby reveal the power dynamics in play, thus neutralising their unethical impetus. The project did this via a ‘uniquely British’ trait of cheekiness, and being ‘cheeky little monkeys.’

Before I explore this trait and how it functions in the realm of participatory projects, it is important to briefly unpick the pedagogy vs participation dichotomy. Unfortunately, the best way to do this is via everyone favourite obtuse and impenetrable Frenchman, Jacques Ranciere.

The definition of pedagogy literally means “*to lead the child*” (OED) and it evokes images of a child being dragged to the front of the class by an angry school marm, or a headmaster pulling an unruly student by the ear down the corridor: it evokes a vision of all the things that are morally and ethically wrong about 'education' - authority, uncreative rote-learning, and the attempt to create educated citizens in a certain and specific form via violence.

Ranciere suggests that this is not a Victorian, dated model of education, but that contemporary education is based on a such ideals and it predicates a false promise of providing emancipation through learning. This is false because it is premised upon a notion that those that those 'who do not know' should be filled with ‘knowledge' by those that ‘do know.’ Ranciere suggests that this form of education is flawed as it assumes a pre-conditioned inequality - that there are certain kinds of knowledge to be valued and those without that knowledge are lacking. Simply put, the current emancipatory education in the west is a system wherein the actual *system of emancipation* recapitulates inequality though the assumption of the correct things that need to be learned/assimilated to be granted liberation.

Within his novel, The Ignorant SchoolMaster, (1987) Ranciere tells the tale of a teacher of French Literature who takes a job teaching French Literature in a Dutch university, despite him having no Dutch and the students having no French. This relationship is metaphorical of the 'knowing/

unknowing' system of education, but is also synonymous with many of the current museums/ gallery/public art projects that present one group of people that 'know' and one group of people that 'don't know' - be that knowledge of art, culture, history, class, notions of ‘civilisation’ or any myriad of ideologies.

How the hero of the book - Jacotot, The Ignorant Schoolmaster - ‘teaches’ the students is via organising his lessons

> ...around an object which they can nonetheless study together - a bilingual edition of Fénelon’s Télémaque. With the help of an interpreter, he asks the students to read it by using the translation, to review continuously what they are learning and then to write, in French, what they think of the book. Having expected work of lamentable standard he is surprised by the quality of the students' work. Although he has taught the students precisely nothing, they for their part have learned to read French Literature.... This experiment leads Jacotot to revise his prior assumptions, notably the assumption that in order to teach, a teacher needs to be in possession of knowledge that s/he can then explain to the students...From this [Ranciere] concludes there is no necessary link between teaching and having knowledge. In other words, the inequality which education is designed to address should be remedied not by seeking to transfer knowledge (be it either through progressive or authoritarian means) but by establishing a relationship of equality between master and student, between the one who demands that intelligence manifest itself and the other who develops his or her own intellect.[36]

This succinct presentation of Ranciere’s concepts point towards an understanding that if an educational process that aims redress inequality is, in fact, actually predicated upon that very inequality, it therefore would be impossible for it to be employed in an emancipatory manner.

This point is highlighted by the instrumentalised approach of “Social Inclusion” and is further illustrated if one considers the education programmes within art museum/gallery settings and how often they are designed to "lead the child" towards some sort of understanding that is possessed by the museum/gallery/artist - be that skills, concepts or insights about art, culture or even politics. Importantly, these programmes do not necessarily pertain to actual children, but could refer to the equally infantility presented working class, juvenile delinquents, ‘deprived’ communities or the elderly, and illustrates Ranciere’s point that outreach/education projects are often designed/ intended for those that *do not participate* in the correct form of existence - children without knowledge, uncultured working class, the criminal underclasses, the poor or the isolated/infirm. These programmes - and even progressive education programmes are presented as an emancipatory experience - are still predicated on knowledge flowing from the 'knower' to the 'unknower' and therefore can never be truly emancipatory, as they are just recapitulating the dominant hegemony.

Rather, as Ranciere suggests, real 'education' can only occur when there is an equality between those that are in power and those that are not - between those with 'something to teach' and those that 'wish to expand their intellect on their own terms.' There is a wider discussion in The Ignorant Schoolmaster about class and relevant concerns about democracy within his thesis, but the salient point in regards to 'participatory projects' is that the majority of 'emancipatory education' that many arts institutions (and artists) undertake are unethically and problematically designed - regardless of well-meaning intention - and thus 'education' within participatory settings can only replicate power structures, rather than offer real and honest emancipatory insights.

Instead, Ranciere proposes a different sort of emancipation and my proposal is that this Rancierian educational experience runs along the same lines the ‘participatory projects’ I presented in contrast to education above: dialogic and relational projects that enshrine equity between the 'master' (ie, those in power) and the 'student' (ie, those who are not). It is only through this equity that true ‘participation’ can occur and the potential for emancipation can emerge.

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[36] Pelletier, C. Emancipation, ‘Equality and Education: Ranciere's Critique of Bourdieu and the Question of Performativity.’ *Discourse*, October, 2008

To illustrate this point, consider the Incidental People mentioned above, in designing their Museum of Lies project, they looked at a way the project isn't

> ...just about the politics of creative participation. It is also interested in different approaches to learning and engagement within Museum contexts. In conversations with our partners at National Museum Wales, we discussed how an emphasis on accessible learning in museums across the UK can meant that they gloss over the uncertainties, the leaps of faith, the necessary fictions underlying both archival exhibitions and historical practices as a whole...We wondered – what if both the museum and the project producers let go of their traditional roles? What if an educational museum project sought to cultivate mystery as well as clarity? How should we go about this? How could we create a project that was coherent but did not dictate the terms of its own construction?....As a way of exploring both of these dynamics, we chose to work with the idea of lies. (Incidental People website)

In presenting a project wherein not only the concepts of the the project were placed in equity, but also the participants and the institution, the artists developed an ethical and engaging participatory project that was not only insightful to all those involved, but also presents insight into the structures that formulate, limit and constrain participatory projects, while also revealing the ethical issues attached to educational programmes. I suggest that this sort of participation can only happen when the artist is set up as a sort of mediator between the institution (a representative of the master) and the public (standing in for the student): to be a sort of middle ground, a translatory text; a living embodiment of the bilingual *Télémaque* text between the institution and the community.

As the vast majority of participatory projects are now funded, designed and co-ordinated via institutions (as opposed to individual artist run projects) this relational dichotomy between the artist, the institution and the 'public' is not only becoming the main format of 'participatory art projects' but also a vitally important dichotomy to interrogate. Within this relational interchange, it is my contention that it is the artist's role to ensure that equity between parties is present. It is only once the this equity is created that the potential for both emancipatory insights can develop and those that wish to seek to expand their own intellect can do so without being moulded into the form of the powerful institution/state. Elsewhere, I have called this 'emancipatory insight' the Potential For Transformation and it is a sort of holy grail of ethical participatory projects because it does not assume a transformation, nor does it suggest what that emancipation can be, only that it provides the context for the transformation to occur, the exact form and shape of it being left in the active hands of the participants to, like Jacotot's students, *develop his or her own intellect*.

How a participatory artist does this - as I have suggested elsewhere - is by *being a bit of an asshole* and/or a *social wanker*, but it can also occur via cheekiness. And this is where the cheeky little monkey comes scampering into my thesis, chucking faeces about like it were confetti at a wedding.

Those from an international context who might not know the specific nuances of cheeky and cheekiness, the author, Dr Farrah Jarral suggests that cheekiness is hard to describe, and it seems best to define what it's not.

> It's not quite the same as audacity - it takes itself less seriously than that. And it's not as rude as impudence because cheekiness never sets out to truly offend. Cheekiness, then, is neither high-minded nor aggressive. Its hallmark is good-hearted humour, a certain cheeriness of spirit. Often it is loud - think of the effectiveness of the whoopee cushion left on the unsuspecting teacher's chair. But it can be just as deadly when silent, or even sartorial. Cheekiness isn't just funny, though. It has the power to deflate pomposity faster than any whoopee cushion….Despite the chances of social humiliation, it is a low-risk way of breaking the rules and protesting. It says, in a gentle way, that you do not consent to something - some dynamic, some power structure, some constraint imposed on you by a bigger force. [37]

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[37] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-24531486

Indeed, this is the very nature of the Incidental People project mentioned at the beginning of the text, who via a good-hearted humour protested against the dynamic of the educational institution, and in doing so, facilitated the 'potential for transformation' not only with the institution, but also with the participants.

How an artist is cheeky will be dependant on their context and their skilful negotiation of relationships and expectations of both the institutions and the communities, and so I would be hesitant to suggest a formulaic structure of *how* one is cheeky. Instead, I would suggest that it is via cheekiness that an artist can create a good-natured equity between those of disparate powers, and that this is an essential action within the participatory realm due to the ethical concerns of 'working with people' mentioned above. I would hasten to add, additionally, that it is a trait not wholly limited to the realm of participatory arts and is visible in many other forms - David Shrigley's humorous drawings, the tongue-in-cheek videos of Erica Eyres, the street art works of Banksy, even the monolithic 'Fountain' by Duchamp could easily be read as a cheeky interventions into the system in which the artist is working. As Jarral suggests, cheekiness is multifaceted in its approach and while the asshole or the wanker might have contain an underlying sense of aggression (which can also be challenge to hegemonic structures of order and restraint) cheekiness:

> is a way of creatively, often playfully, injecting resistance into the quotidian. It creates a space in which to push back against inequality, against commoditisation, colonisation, against the rules that say who you can talk to, what you are allowed to talk about, and how you talk, what your aspirations can be, what constitutes success or beauty, or how you are supposed to wear your masculinity or femininity. Scratch the surface, and you will find that beneath the silliest acts of cheekiness, there is often a deeply important matter that is being negotiated.[38]

Being a bit of a cheeky monkey myself, I have explored this in many ways in my own work. For example, in 2013, I was invited to develop a response to the bicentenary of the Highland Clearances in a small village in Scotland by the Timespan Museum and Gallery. I was aware that the museum was invested in the exploration of the Clearances as a locally unique circumstance on which they could capitalise. I was also aware that it gained international cache attracting many national and international visitors that brought income into the village via the 'returning Diaspora'. As such, I was interested in how an institution might or might not be over-compensating in their exploration of the topic, and whether or not it was as pertinent to the locals as it was to the (financial) life-blood of the institution. I was also keenly aware of the local youth who were indoctrinated into the mythology of the Clearances at quite a young age via the exhibitions the Heritage Committee of Timespan presented at the museum, talks in schools and other village events.

I was curious, then, to develop a critique of this educational framework and explore how I could present a more egalitarian and participatory project, and thus I asked the Heritage Committee of Timespan to divide into two groups, each one to present a case *for* or *against*: to argue either '*The Clearances are Still Happening*' or '*The Clearances are Over*' in a mock trial. I informed them that I had found an incredibly important judge, who was impartial and not invested in either outcome, and would they agree that whatever argument the judge sided with would be considered a binding social contract? They agreed to the proposal and set to preparing their cases. What I did not inform them until the moment they entered the 'courtroom' (i.e., the gallery) was that the judges

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[38] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-24531486

would be made up of the 23 Primary School children, and it was they that would decided the case of the Clearances. I wanted the event to highlight the fact that it is the youth who are receptacles of perceptions on history, who are the keepers of 'how we talk about history' and so it should they who decide what might or might not be relevant. The school children listened to the cases and decided at the end of the debates that "The Clearances are Over" which presented a challenge to those within power (the institution/the schoolmaster/the Heritage Committee). This cheekiness playfully undermined the power of the decision-makers: it placed their interests and the children's ability to develop their own intellect in equity and provided the Potential for Transformation to all involved - allowing the children to formulate their own understandings which history is important, but also setting up a non-political modality that challenged the institution to explore its own political hegemony on its own terms.

The event - titled: History on Trial - acted within the Rancierian formulation of education - i.e., an ethical participatory project - by using cheekiness as a methodology as a '*low-risk way of breaking the rules and protesting.'*

Jarrel presents an argument that:

> Cheekiness is the checking of power…. Our lives are monitored, constrained and pressured both explicitly and implicitly in almost every waking minute of our existence. Open protest, staring down tanks, self-immolation, is hard, but if we can't bring ourselves to mount a full-scale rebellion, we can still exercise our right to cheekiness in little everyday ways - loudly, quietly, in song, art, or style, jokes or poems, to push back for the things that, deep down do mean something to us.[39]

Being cheeky then stands as nuanced critique of power stands in stark opposition to a political activism of other artists that aim to undermine traditional hegemonies by direct action or oppositional critique. As I have argued above this more activist-led challenge to hegemonic orders turns the arena of the social (and the 'artistic') into a competition between one idea of utopia and another – it does not reveal the actual power structures, but merely replicates the dynamics between opposing ideas. It reiterates politics: it does not reveal the shape of the political. By this, I am suggesting that the light-touch of cheekiness can be more an effective contribution to developing emancipatory insights and the potential for transformation than direct confrontation.

[39] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-24531486