The work of art in the age of mechanical co-production

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Photo by Steve Pool
Projects we will be taking about today

**Artists Legacy** – What do artists do on community projects

‘**Imagine**’ – the cultural context of civic engagement

‘**Taking Yourselves Seriously**’: artistic methodologies for social cohesion

Drawing on **arts and humanities methodologies**

**Co-production** as a methodological starting point

Funded through the ARHC’s **Connected Communities** programme
Connected Communities - Programme Aim

*To research ‘community’ with, by and for communities*

• Understanding the changing nature of communities in their contexts, and the role of communities in sustaining and enhancing our quality of life

Through...

• Interdisciplinary research with a strong arts & humanities element
• Collaborative research with communities at all stages of the research process
Co-production as a methodology

• Drawing on histories of community development
• Valuing ways of working outside the university
• Recognizes that knowledge does not always lie within the university
• Requires shifts of power and control
• Involves everyone writing the bid together
• Creates critical thinking spaces outside the university
• Produces work that sits in different spaces, for different audiences
• Draws on an eclectic mix of methodologies, constructed from the ground up
Some of the methodologies used for co-production

- Action research (Coghlan & Brannick 2010; PAR - Rahman 2008)
- Dialogic Co-Inquiry spaces (Armstrong and Banks 2011)
- Communities of practice (Hart and Wolff 2006)
- Collaborative ethnography (Lassiter 2005)
- Practice as research (Kester 2011, Barrett 2007)
- Reflective practice (Schon 1983)
- Arts methodologies (Coessens et al 2009)
- Research-creation (Manning 2019, Springgay and Rotas 2013)
What do artists do when they work in community projects? They draw on....

• Community arts
• Social engaged arts practice
• Relational aesthetics
• Participatory arts
• Arts for health
• Artists in schools
• Art outside the gallery
• De-materialized artists
What is artistic knowledge?

....creative knowledge cannot be abstracted from the loom that produced it. Inseparable from its process, it resembles the art of sending the woof-thread through the warp. A pattern made of holes, its clarity is like air through a basket. Opportunistic, it opens roads. (Carter, 2004, p.1)
Material knowledge

By Zahir Rafiq
Artistic methodologies

Experience operates within the domain of the aesthetic, and knowledge produced through aesthetic experience is always contextual and situated. The continuity of artistic experience with normal processes of living is derived from an impulse to handle materials and to think and feel through their handling (Barrett 2007)
Artists in community projects

- instrumental
- conceptual
- New object
Our research study – what we did

• Scoped all the abstracts from the AHRC Connected Communities’ funding programme (about 300 projects)

• Looked at when the language was ‘an artist will be used to’… and when it was more interesting and the role of the artist was more open

• Conducted follow up interviews with 9 projects including artists, academics, community partners

• Coded these through Nvivo and came up with …
Ways that artists work:

• **Instrumental**: Artists being used in an instrumental manner to deliver....

• **Conceptual**: Artists being involved in the conceptualization of the project or research

• **New Object**: Points at which collaboration, methodology or arts practice considerations point towards the creation or consideration of a new object of study.

*Thanks to Hugh Escott*
Artists’ personal practice – ‘ego’

Behind the cutting edge you need a blade – what sometimes gets forgotten is the weight of the blade behind it – that weight comes from an alloy of, amongst other things, tradition and history and meaning

(Paul Evans, artist)
How do artists work – book chapter

The studio – a manifesto

The studio is a conceptual space where groups form and grow things.

It emerges from something we recognise as working already.

It involves a group of people who operate beyond the structures of the university.

It transcends individual projects.

It recognises different types of expertise – all participants can emerge as ‘experts’.
It is not fixed. It is adaptable and responsive to particular situations.

It is a space of action, process, and practice – essentially engaged.

It cannot contain everything. Its contents are assembled for a shared purpose.

It can produce co-authored work but can also foster conditions for individual insight and practice.

It draws on the methods of arts practice but is not a place to produce art.

It is not a physical space, a digital environment, or a structured set of meeting.

It can operate through any of these but is at root an approach and not an institution (Steve Pool)
The “incidental person”

In 2012 while planning a large scale ESRC grant proposal "Imagine" we decided to commission an artists placement. The project was to explore through a trans-disciplinary approach the role that the creative imagination places in communities’ potential to aspire to and more critically build better futures. Rather than use the model of artist in residence who responds through practice to a given situation or set of relationships we chose to adopt the approach of the artists placement group (APG). Founded by Barbara Steveni and John Latham in the mid 1960's the APG developed the notion of the "incidental person".

It was this encounter with the de-centred subjectivity which we strove to reproduce and weave through the fabric of the program of research.
As Kate mentioned we are nearly five years into this project that's a long time - equivalent to the length of the second world war. Within this time I have felt completely incidental, at the edge of things and my subjectivity within the project has dissolved into a series of images and interventions that have made little sense to anyone else involved. A analogue tape recorder recording people’s hopes and desires for the future, a ballot box to collect "Hope" a gilded book, a few bits of writings and clips of films. If I had to describe my contribution I would say it was incidental, nothing to put your finger on. In my intention to de-materialise I did on many occasions simply disappear.
‘Taking Yourselves Seriously’

AHRC follow on project looking at **arts methodologies** for **social cohesion** in partnership with ARVAC

**Partners** include a school, an adventure playground and a Muslim women’s group exploring narratives of failure and success

Collaborative space of knowledge production – **critical thinking group**-  with social cohesion experts from across the city region’s communities

Working with **poets** Andrew McMillan and Helen Mort and **visual artists** Steve Pool and Zahir Rafiq.
Our aim

This project draws work that identified and explored contributions by artists to co-production.

Working closely with our new partner ARVAC (Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector)

We will co-produce relevant and useful resources that will be used nationally to inform critical approaches to the use of creative and artistic methods within community/university knowledge production.

Re-situating knowledge production practices within communities.
In sum:

• The sites and spaces generate the thinking
• Models and genealogies of arts practice are threaded through projects, but are sometimes opaque to partners
• Artists produce spaces for practicing social cohesion in different ways, often relationally and multimodally
• Expertise outside the university needs to be properly acknowledged on university grants
• Stuff comes from stuff, emergence, process is the thing
• Collaboration is everything.
COLLABORATION IS EVERYTHING... THANKS TO....

All the collaborators on the projects for their images and ideas particularly:
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Opening image by Steve Pool from a recovery workshop held at Manchester Metropolitan University.
The AHRC Connected Communities programme