

The Word 'Cope' and the Word 'Change'.

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'Something is pushing them to the side of their own lives.' (Larkin 1971)

The problem I have with the term 'intervention' is that it is an 'active' verb – in human terms, someone has to be the one (more actively) intervening, and someone has to be the (more passive) beneficiary of such intervention. Because of this, the risk with the term is that it can come to mean the objectification of other people i.e. someone (usually someone in a more privileged socioeconomic position) gets to decide whose lives need intervening in, and how. Whilst borne out of good intentions, this objectification of other people is one of the ways in which the 'rational community' (Biesta 2006, pp.60–70) maintains its hegemonic grip on the means of cultural production.

Because the term 'intervention' reinforces a world view where this separation between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' is taken for granted, it also reinforces the very thing we say we're trying to diffuse i.e. the boundary between the 'rational community' and those outside of it. If we are 'intervening' in people's lives, we risk turning them into 'objects' emphasising not only their exclusion from the activities we are seeking to include them in, but perhaps more significantly, emphasising our own position as members of the 'rational community' which defines the terms of such exclusion. When Philip Larkin ruminates on what is pushing the middle-aged working class couple in his poem 'to the side of their own lives', presumably he doesn't assume that it's anything to do with the middle-class poet's gaze which falls upon them and problematises their existence through the cultural lens of his own?

In other words, we might literally be part of the problem. For some, the orthodox approach to the democratisation of culture as an 'intervention' in people's lives to change / improve them has already 'reached a dead end' (Gross et al. 2017, p.19). Whilst the current resurgence of initiatives to redress inequalities of cultural participation – Everyday Creativity (Hunter et al. 2016), Cultural Democracy (Gross et al. 2017), Artistic Citizenship (Elliott et al. 2016) – are to be welcomed, we also need to ensure they don't become hijacked by the 'rational community' of art and culture as simply a further means of maintaining cultural inequality, especially whilst championing cultural democracy. New philosophies of cultural practice and new directions in cultural policy can only be considered effective if they bring about structural change in the means of distribution of resources. Otherwise, they may simply become another way for those within the 'rational community' to justify our practices, and maintain our grip on resources.

I've yet to meet anyone working within the cultural sector who believes that they – or their institution – are part of the problem. And yet some of us must be. Simply going about our business of using music to make the world a better place may be an act of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977) against those who are unable to participate in that ideal. How we develop greater 'vigilance' (Bourdieu et al. 1991) in ensuring that this is not the case is something which should concern us all. Whether we see the middle-aged couple in Larkin's poem as victims to be rescued, or simply victims to be spurned / ignored, when we collude with the poet in viewing them as victims at all, we are already depriving them of agency.

So, what kind of 'frame' might help the people in Larkin's poem to be citizens rather than victims? Paradoxically, and despite my misgivings about the term, music as intervention might provide one such means of emancipation from the deadlock of cultural orthodoxy, providing an alternative social reality to the one experienced in the everyday lives of citizens.

Although certainly not ideologically 'neutral', active music-making might be seen as one of the few ways that individuals can still experience the kind of equality, mutuality and social interdependence which have been eroded over time by the requirement for citizens to participate in the neoliberal social contract. At its simplest level therefore, making music together may be a way of intervening in the right of every human being 'to participate in the cultural life of the community' and 'to enjoy the arts.' (United Nations 1948). However, we might also see it as a more political kind of intervention i.e. one of the few ways we have of being able to intervene in the attenuated ideological conditions of global capitalism in our everyday lives, precisely because it affords us the opportunity to experience our fellow citizens in an alternative relationship of equality and mutuality.

Viewing participatory music-making as an intervention in the political – not just the social - lives of citizens gives it the potential to be more than just an intervention in how people experience their current social reality. It can also provide a window on alternative mutual and compassionate ways of 'being' with our fellow humans, a politicised way of saying 'neither nor' (Žižek 2014, p.66); of rejecting the inequality implicit in the neoliberal social contract altogether. It can help everyone involved raise important questions about the social nature of the call to participate in global capitalism.

In another poem from the same anthology, Larkin asks us 'where can we live but days?' (Larkin 1971) Global capitalism has become such a fundamental part of our everyday lives that we take its existence pretty much for granted, to the extent where it becomes increasingly difficult to even recognise it *as* an ideology. We might therefore ask, 'where can we live but under the attenuated social conditions of global capital?' Making music together might be one such place.

Because of this, I prefer to talk about 'dissensus' rather than intervention. In the words of Arrested Development, 'the word 'cope', and the word 'change', are directly opposite, not the same' (Arrested Development 1992). While 'intervention' might provide a way for citizens to cope better with the impact that global capital has on their everyday lives, 'dissensus' provides a frame for rejecting the nature of the social contract under global capitalism altogether. Dissensus is, 'not a confrontation between interests or opinions. It is the demonstration (manifestation) of a gap in the sensible itself' (Ranciere 2003, p.38). 'A dissensus is not a conflict of interests, opinions or values; it is a division inserted in 'common sense': a dispute over what is given and about the frame within which we see something as given.' (p.69)

To 'dissent' is then more than just to make minor adjustments in the allocation of public resources for cultural participation, but to raise more fundamental questions about cultural value, and the various 'frames' through which we come to see particular cultural activities as having value and being worthy of public support in the form of government subsidy. The idea of 'intervention' here also carries with it the imperative to do something about the unequal and undemocratic distribution of resources to facilitate cultural participation (Neelands et al. 2015; Gross et al. 2017; Cultural Policy Collective 2004). Rejecting the false

dichotomy of 'excellence – inclusion' is an important step in this regard, as it means a rejection of the orthodox 'frame' wherein we have come to view cultural participation: 'we don't want X, but we also don't want its inherent negation, the opposition to it that remains within the same field' (Žižek 2014, p.66). The language of excellence hasn't altered the reality of many people's cultural experience, but neither has the language of inclusion, because they both come from the same world, and co-constitute it. Progress means rejecting both, and instead being willing to make an 'epistemological break' (Bourdieu et al. 1991) from our cultural histories and traditions in order to make space for a more culturally democratic paradigm of cultural participation.

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