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Chrissie Tiller

Hvem bestemmer? - om makt og deltakelse i kunstfeltet

Utdrag fra boken *Power Up* (Creative People and Places, 2017) av Chrissie Tiller. Boken undersøker sentrale spørsmål knyttet til inkludering og deltakelse innenfor kunstfeltet i Storbritannia. Tiller gjester TekstLab-festivalen G*lokale Stemmer,* oktober 2018.

WHO DECIDES?
10 QUESTIONS ABOUT POWER AND SHARED DECISION-MAKING.

1. POWER
Can decision-making be shared if one group of people have most of the power?

2. RECIPROCITY
Do we have reciprocal partnerships with our communities?

3. CULTURAL CAPITAL
Cultural capital can reinforce inequalities. How do we value the cultural capital of our participants?

4. PRIVILEGE
Are we in the arts always coming from a place of privilege? And what do we want to do about that with our participants?

5. PARTICIPATION
Is increased participation about climbing a ladder or encouraging people to find their way along a continuum?

6. VALUES
What part do your personal values and story play in your decision making?

7. ETHICS
Ethics or aesthetics? Where do our responsibilities lie in making art with others?

8. COLLABORATION
Is the process of collaboration a separate art practice?

9. POLITICS
Is shared decision-making part of creating political as well as social change? And is it with a small or a capital 'p'?

10. ....

POWER: *the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behaviour of others or the course of events*

'Sharing is not based on equality of assets, but on what you have, so yes, in theory. You 'just' need people willing to give power away.' Critical Friend.

The question posed was about sharing decision-making: implicit within that, the role played by power. In trying to unpick the two I found myself wanting to ask (myself) further questions. I didn't manage to answer them in any totally satisfactory way. But I include them now as what might be a useful starting point.

Engagement in the arts is about enabling people to:
   • Speak truth to power[1]?
   • Reflect the social realities of power?[2]
   • Ameliorate the effects of power[3]?

Or all of the above?
Power is not something we speak about often in the arts. Although Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony[4]', or the notion that power is driven by our general acceptance of the ideologies, beliefs, world views and values of the dominant group, impacts as fiercely on culture as it does on any other of our social institutions. Especially when addressing questions of 'quality' or 'excellence' or who is invited to make judgements around 'value'. Or, those conversations John Seabrook dismisses in 'NoBrow' as, 'taste as power pretending to be common sense'.[5] It is also, as Jancovich notes, at play in almost every level of decision-making[6]: in how the arts are funded, what kind of arts are funded and who gets supported by the public purse.
    Until recently, the place this hidden power plays in upholding the values and interests of the dominant culture have largely been ignored. At least at a policy level. The debate centring mostly around how we might bring about, 'the chimera of social inclusion[7]' through the further 'democratisation' of (legitimate) culture.[8]' There have been few, if any, initiatives, suggesting we might undertake a 'broad, rather than a simply token, redistribution of cultural resources.'[9] Or the kind of power-sharing that might challenge the dominance of the cultural elite and bring about about real diversity and meaningful inclusion. As Arts Council itself notes, 'Significant disparities in...arts and cultural opportunities and engagement [10]' are still part of our cultural landscape. Any true form of 'Cultural Democracy,' remaining a pipe dream – until now, perhaps.
    This is partly because the capacity to really bring about any shift of power, Gramsci would say, is still held by that select group of cultural mandarins who believe, 'WE know best'. A belief Nina Simon, in her piece on participatory museums, calls out as the presumptuous, 'Our job is not to give the people what they want but what they need,' mentality[11]. It is a mentality encompassed in the belief that decisions about the arts and cultural funding are best made by those who understand the 'art' debate: particularly from the viewpoint of having been part of a major arts institution. 'Aesthetic judgments', are, 'expressions of power' in themselves, as Deborah Fischer notes, and culture is still divided into, 'peo-

ple who get to make judgments of sentiment and taste', and, 'way more people who feel like they are (always) receiving judgments of sentiment and taste.[12]'
    Paradoxically, the arts and culture are increasingly tasked with ameliorating the social impacts of these misbalances of power: while little is done to challenge, 'the divisive power of capital'[13] that remains one of their main causes. Perhaps in the eventual hope that 'incorporating the 'excluded[14]' into the mainstream might be enough to bring about the social change that is needed.
    One suggested solution to shifting this balance has been to 'widen the range of voices' involved in decision-making: reducing the power of the 'cultural elite' at the same time by instigating a 'redistribution of funding'[15]. It is not a totally new approach. As early as the 1980s, the GLC 's Community Arts Committee were diverting funding to projects that 'demonstrated the participation of communities in both decision-making processes and production'[16], in a bid to give a voice to the working class. In the context of the GLC at that time, it was also part of a wider political commitment to greater equity and a valuing of working class culture in itself.
    The need to include more voices in its decision-making has been a major focus of the Creative People and Places programme. But, as many of the teams and directors responded, inviting people into the process is not always sufficient in itself. Real sharing of power involves a giving away of power by those who already possess it. And, as noted at the 'People, Place and Power' conference, this power can be held in a myriad of different ways. It is in the language we use, the knowledge we own, the social and cultural capital we possess. Sharing power is about who gets to speak and who doesn't in terms of decision-making, but it is also, importantly, about: 'whose voices count', and 'whose voices go unheard.' The dominance of certain voices continues to be a feature of the arts and cultural sector: particularly in the public realm.
    A recent piece of research on sharing power and decision-making for the Carnegie Trust[17] looks at how we might challenge that by grasping the different ways in which power can be understood. The first framework speaks of power possessing 'different forms':

   • the visible (e.g. arts policies, political agendas, local authorities),
   • the hidden (e.g. membership of elites)
   • the invisible (e.g. cultural hegemony)

Invisible power, it is suggested, often implies an acceptance by everyone, including the powerless, that the agendas driving inequality are unchallengeable. The largely unquestioned pursuit of the neo-liberal agenda in arts and cultural terms.
    Other frameworks offer the possibility of seeing power more contextually. And, in that sense, something which can be 'held' or 'shared'. Within a framework they name 'Spaces,' the researchers suggest it is possible to create places, 'where opportunities for formal and informal interaction help people to shape the decisions and rules that affect their lives[18]' In a context where access to public space is rapidly disappearing, this model seems particularly relevant. And a useful 'trig point' for programmes such as Creative People and Places?

The extent to which power is really shared in any of these spaces, the authors go on to note, is dependent on whether they have been set up to be, 'closed', 'invited' or 'created & claimed'.

THE CLOSED SPACE

In the closed space there may be some amount of public accountability but decision-making largely happens, 'behind closed doors.' Despite clear moves being made towards greater public accountability and diversity, there are many who still perceive this as the current Arts Council, and wider government, funding model. In a context where large institutions still receive most of the funding and certain voices continue to be privileged by the media, it is difficult for people not to sense decision-making processes remain in the 'closed space', 'influenced by vested interests of those (already) in receipt of funding and a narrow range of voices.[19]' Although there are those who would argue 'the closed space' is much more frequently to be found at a curatorial/programmer level, wider questions of, 'Who makes the decisions', 'On what basis?' and, 'Whose interests do they represent [20]?' continue to be posed.

THE INVITED SPACE

In creating and investing in a programme that is very much place-based and led by consortia made up of, 'local grassroots community groups and art/culture organisations, museums, libraries and other partners,' Arts Council has taken up the challenge to create an alternative space: one where those who are not part of the small elite feel equally 'invited.' Not only to be given access to existing programmes but to be part of shaping the arts and culture they want to see in their own area. By focusing on 'shared decision-making' it has also committed itself to learning how this shift of power might shape its, 'approach to future projects.'[21] Whether what is being learned eventually finds itself reflected in the funding criteria for major institutions or national funding policies is still open to question. Unlike Creative People and Places programmes, a national funding body is a, 'large ship to turn around.'

CPP programmes have largely started with the concept of the 'invited space', taking similar but different approaches to tackling sharing of power and decision-making. In the 'invited' space created by initiatives such as Community Bridgebuilders or SceneMakers, local people are clearly welcomed to the table and encouraged to be part of the conversation. Mostly this has been through, 'taking part in decision-making panels to decide what community projects received funded'[22] or playing advisory roles in ensuring the art work commissioned is, 'relevant to local communities'. Some CPPs have created groups such as Appetite Builders, or Cultural Connectors whose role is to actively encourage community participation. In many the invitation has quickly extended to include opportunities for these groups to get, 'involved in all aspects of the programme, from arranging trips and visits, sitting on funding panels, assisting artists, curating and producing festivals, leading workshops, taking photographs, doing office work and stewarding... to helping interview staff and freelancers.'[23]

Despite many successes, a number of directors were concerned whether the balance of power has really shifted. Especially when, 'delegation' still operates within carefully, 'constructed parameters'. While many described actively encouraging groups, 'to take control ...deciding what to do and when to do it,' they also recognised, 'the initial guidelines are set by us'. Even when community members have been invited to, 'create the criteria,' for certain commissions, the original selection of artists had often been 'curated' by CPP teams.

The role played by communities' understanding of, 'who controls the purse strings' was frequently highlighted. 'There is power in who holds the money' one director commented, whilst another explained she was, 'very aware...that the real power often comes in a monetary form. 'We' still sign off the invoices and 'we' are still the ones legally accountable, and our panels realise that. In one panel, our partner organisation contributed financially to the final event. The balance of power was suddenly different.'

«The importance of offering communities the possibility to participate in art that not only celebrates their history and heritage but also allows them to engage critically with the real issues facing them cannot be underestimated.»

Who holds the power is not only a question of money. In a world where, as Susan Sontag notes, 'Rules of taste enforce structures of power' and are 'inextricably woven into our system of social class[24]', CPP directors spoke of having to reassure community members their opinions were equally valued. One described, 'a participant (who was also the chair of a local community association) asking, 'are we doing ok?' after they had contributed their thoughts on a selection of artists. Another director was honest enough to suggest it can be, 'an uphill struggle' to bring participants to a place where they begin to see themselves on, 'an equal footing'.

Having the confidence to voice your opinion, when there are those in the room who already possess the know-how and the language to speak about work in a professional context is not easy. While noting, 'there is also 'power' in the experiences, knowledge and connections people bring to the table,' another director felt it was, 'still difficult. Our approach to community commissioning is about putting the decision-making power in the hands of the community...But... this doesn't truly hand over power. Panel members know their mentors are more experienced and knowledgeable than themselves and that influences things.'

One response was to suggest it might not necessarily be about creating an 'absolute balance' but more about being open about the invitation. Another that it was about recognising it might still be about, 'a gentle negotiating of power... where the most important thing' was to, 'ask the right question at the right momen*t.' Others felt it must start with the conversation where people were able to be, 'honest about who

has what type of power'. And in 'being consciously aware of where we place our power.'

Some sensed the 'invited space' might still seem patronising to community members. Especially if participants' ability to contribute to the debate seemed to be found surprising:

'What struck me was how thorough and detailed their observations ... were. They had read everything in minute detail... checked the budgets, and websites of the artists. This is not a passive group of decision making novices, but a very passionate and earnest group of people who take their responsibility seriously...

CREATED AND CLAIMED SPACES

In the 'created or claimed space' there is a recognition power is not something unchanging or fixed. It is 'dynamic' and 'can be found in the hands of the many:'[25] What matters is creating the spaces for this to flourish. Speaking about power's different 'expressions', a recent Oxfam report[26] identifies four possible paradigms:

• 'power over,' which involves excluding others
• 'power to' which is about our capacity to take action
• 'power with' which comes through collaboration
• 'power within' or personal 'empowerment' – which often emerges from opportunities to develop 'power with'.

One of the important (though not uncontested[27]) claims made for the arts is their potential to create a sense of 'power within' through creating opportunities for people to work collaboratively. As one CPP director, quoting Aboriginal artist/activist Lilla Watson, explained, creating 'power with' is about finding solidarity with your community through collaboration and co-creation: 'If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. If you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.'[28] It is also dependent on whether, having given people a voice in creating, commissioning or curating work, 'they feel that voice will continue to be listened to' and that they will be able 'to influence future outcomes'. In order to do that, communities need to see themselves not only as participants but 'co-creators' and 'initiators' of programmes.

Sensing the tension that can still exist around the 'invited space', a number of CPPs have chosen to develop the, 'created and claimed' space through commissioning work that engages more directly with the social and economic context of the areas in which they are working. In particular, it has involved radical new partnerships with artists who reflect these communities and come from a background of socially engaged practice. And, importantly, working with artists who understand the 'theoretical framework and ethics[29]' that inform such a practice.

The importance of offering communities the possibility to participate in art that not only celebrates their history and heritage but also allows them to engage critically with the real issues facing them cannot be underestimated. This is work that not only asks rigorous questions, like the bait prompt, 'does this project something to say about the world we live in?' but also, 'directly reflects, challenges and questions the politics of our times.[30]'

Most CPPs would see the establishment of 'created and claimed' spaces as their final goal: especially if the programme is to prove sustainable once this particular strand of funding has disappeared. Finding ways to challenge current power structures is a crucial part of this. If the ethos of the programme is to be reflected at a national level, this would mean creating a system that seeks to go beyond the arts capacity to 'ameliorate' the effects of long term dis-investment. It must be able to offer space to encompass what Chantal Mouffe describes as the 'antagonistic'.[31] And to go beyond policies that accept, 'the existing terms and conditions of the public sphere and seeks to modify, extend or otherwise reform them' to being prepared to change 'the public sphere itself[32]'.

'Culture' Holden suggests, can no longer be 'something that is 'given', offered' or 'delivered' by one section of 'us' to another.'[33] It needs to be something, 'that we all own and make:' by encompassing 'power with' as well as 'within'.

www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk

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