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Depoliticization, Participation and Social Art Practice: On the function of social art practice for politicization

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to explore how the process of depoliticization occurs in neoliberal governance, with the aim of identifying approaches to counter its control over the way we live together.

Depoliticization is a process of neoliberal political and social organization that undermines democracy. An instance of how depoliticization happens is through a lack of accountability in the way that government devolves responsibility through non-governmental agencies or quangos. Arts Council England is a quango with an increasingly instrumental policy agenda. Arts-based participation is being fostered through policy agendas; art projects which are funded in this arrangement are expected to promote social inclusion or audience engagement. While this is superficially laudable, a reduced gap between state policy objectives and commissioned artistic outcomes sees artworks utilized as interpretive publicity for policy objectives. In this way, the funding of the arts can be considered as part of the wider process of depoliticization.

Yet we argue, contra much of the depoliticization literature with its formalist understandings of power, that politics is not limited to the actions and non-actions of the state alone, and can be radically understood as an everyday process. In this conception of politics, we conclude that certain forms of art practice, those that employ social praxis and critical citizenship through critical pedagogical and participatory methods, can

perform a politicizing function and thus potentially reshape democracy in more emancipatory ways.

Words **232**

Keywords:

Neoliberalism, depoliticization, social art practice, participation, political efficacy, politicization,

Introduction: The function of social art practice is to demonstrate the process of politicization

The goal of this article is to expand our understanding of processes of depoliticization, politicization and anti-politics in UK modes of governance and discuss its impact on the funding of art and culture.

This topic has been a key aspect of our art practice since 2004, when we started to make artworks that described the contemporary function of public art. For example; *The economic function of public art to increase the value of private property*, Free art Collective (Beech, Hewitt and Jordan, 2004), *The social function for public art is to subject us to civic behaviour*, (Free art Collective 2005); and *The function of public art for regeneration is to sex up the control of under-classes*. (Free art Collective, 2007). See also Andy Hewitt's essay, *Privatizing the Public: Three Rhetorics of Art's Public Good in 'Third Way' cultural policy*, which identifies three rhetorics of state-funded art, 'art as a form of cultural democracy, art as an economic driver and art providing solutions for social amelioration.' (2011: 21).

We describe the conditions in which neoliberalism is applied, resulting in depoliticization within the current political structures employed by the UK government, in order to explain an aspect of what Stuart Hall has called the 'unchallenged hegemony of neoliberalism' (2002: 28). The point of this argument is to consider if particular types of social art projects can offer some resistance to depoliticization through the methods of production that they employ.

This article is divided into two sections. The first part of this article draws attention to the literatures around depoliticization and anti-politics. The concept of depoliticization helps us understand the ways in which neoliberal ideology takes effect within modes of governance. For example, some citizens are less inclined to engage with politics due to a continuing mistrust in the process of politics, and the uncertainty that people have regarding the political establishment (Bertsou: 2019, Corbett: 2020, Jennings and Stoker 2015). When referring to Thatcher's methods of government, in his 1986 article Bullpitt first called this type of structural intervention 'statecraft' (Bulpitt: 1986).

Political participation is in decline due to processes of governmental depoliticization, such as the employment of statecraft (Bulpitt: 1986), anti-politics (Jennings and Stoker: 2015) and a gap that has emerged between political structure and political culture. There appears to be little attempt to develop democratic processes in which we reproduce ourselves through acts of political exchange. These political conditions have impacted upon individual and collective feelings of political efficacy (Pateman:1971). Hall describes the problem of the debasement of political democracy as,

[The] massive manipulation of public opinion and consent by a swollen echelon of political public relations and focus group polling; the way special interest lobbying outweighs the cumbersome practices of public argument; the consistent adaption of policy to the agendas of the media, which become a more authentic ventriloquizing 'voice' for the 'people' themselves. (2002:27).

A lack of diverse opportunities to develop social associations (waning of civil society organisations, change in working habits, etc.) have led to a decline in political deliberation. Pattie et al, note that this produces atomized citizens and 'the rise of individualistic forms of participation at the expense of collectivist forms of participation'. (2004:282).

Yet, by considering politics as more than a state-orientated process (Jenkins: 2011) situated in cultural exchange and association (Pateman: 1971) we are afforded the possibilities of thinking beyond the governance of liberal democracy.

In the second section of this article, we set out the context of social art practice. We are particularly inclined towards social art practices that are concerned with revealing social injustices and those projects that utilise deliberative processes as part of participatory skills (Sholette: 2018). This is usually apparent in critical and activist art practices.¹ In our account, we decline from citing specific artworks, (examples of various forms of politicizing artworks are included other papers in this SI, in particular McLauchlan's account of the way in which Harrison addresses public policy through their art practice. Also see d'Alancaisez, specifically the account of Forensic Architecture's work as an example of art functioning to reveal hidden politics, and finally see also the introductory essay by Jordan & Bruff where Jordan reflects on a workshop event by the Partisan Social Club and Bruff analyses the impact of a module he designed which presents international politics through cultural practices); rather we list the key characteristics that lead to what we argue further on in the paper as a 'politicising difference' (Jenkins 2011:157).

We also refer to strategy statements from Arts Council England (ACE) and Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), with the intention to demonstrate that the policy agenda prescribes the parameters of artistic responses to commissioned projects. Here 'social inclusion' and more lately 'levelling up' seem to be the way in which art projects are utilised to evidence the value of arts and culture for society. Although art projects can bring people together we question what is expected of art, artists and participants in these arrangements. We argue that the reduced gap between state policy objectives and commissioned artistic outcomes sees artworks utilised as interpretive publicity for policy objectives. This leads to the performing of inclusion as opposed to enabling genuine discussions about the way we live together. In this way, the funding of the arts can be considered as part of the wider process of depoliticization.

¹ There are too many practices to mention but the sake of this article we have in mind Adelita Husni-Bey, Forensic Architecture, Free art collective, Ultra Red. It is worth noting that these are contemporary visual artists and collectives, and distinct from community-based theatre groups.

We conclude that although the political landscape looks bleak, there are possibilities for art practice to counter the depoliticizing tendencies of neoliberalism. Social art projects can increase forms of political efficacy as well as reveal the existing infrastructures of depoliticization; hence supporting (re)politicization. The purpose of this discussion then is to understand the way in which neoliberal governance operates, in order to reflect upon ways to counter depoliticization by revealing the anti-democratic processes it creates.

We anticipate, in other words, that social art practice has a role in enabling the more radical democratic exchanges that Jenkins (2011) and Pateman (1971) allude to.

Politics is not limited to state apparatus

In his co-edited book, 'Anti-politics, Depoliticisation and Governance' Matthew Wood (2017) defines the term depoliticization:

Depoliticisation in its simplest form involves placing the political character of decision-making at one remove from the central state. This means decisions that are usually the responsibility of ministers are delegated to quasi-public bodies that either advise or implement those political decisions, or rules are created constraining ministerial discretion. (Wood: 2017 n.pag)

He notes that quasi -public bodies are created to bring together industry and academics as experts not simply to make recommendations to central government but to develop strategy and implement policy. The result is that these contrived, semi-public organisations, commonly termed quangos ², are left to 'manage the political implications of the decisions they are tasked with.' (ibid) For instance, when decisions associated with the setting of a budget or how and where to allocate funds are considered to be unpopular by the public, then the responsibility is placed with the quango and not

² Quango (Quasi Autonomous Non-Governmental Organisation) is not an official term. The Cabinet Office lists Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB) in its annual Public Bodies publication, also known as arm's length bodies (ALB's). NDPB – "a body which has a role in the processes of national Government, but is not a Government Department or part of one, and which accordingly operates to a greater or lesser extent at arm's length from Ministers". (Gay 2010: 57).

central government. This ‘devolvement’ of decision-making means that government can choose whether to align themselves with the outcomes of this process or distance themselves from it. As Burnham explains, ‘State managers retain, in many instances, arm’s-length control over crucial economic and social processes, whilst simultaneously benefiting from the distancing effects of depoliticisation.’ (Burnham 2001: 127).

Unelected elite technical experts are appointed to lead quangos, and although the optics of this action is one of devolvement and the apparent reduction in central control, these technocratic processes of management circumnavigate participatory democracy. For example, political responsibility is directed towards local development agencies who are not attached to local authorities or elected councillors. When referring to Thatcher’s methods of government, in his 1986 article, ‘The Discipline of the New Democracy: Mrs Thatcher’s Domestic Statecraft’, Bullpitt first called this type of structural intervention ‘statecraft’ (Bulpitt: 1986).

Wood sums up the process of depoliticization by asserting,

.... depoliticisation can be a highly effective strategy for governments seeking to displace responsibility for contentious decisions, and make those decisions appear non-political by manipulating the public’s ‘normal’ discourse around what is and isn’t a matter of ‘politics’. (Wood: 2017 n.pag)

The invention, by government, of arms-lengths agencies contributes to the rise of anti-politics and related terms such as post-democracy (Beveridge and Featherstone: 2021). Post-democracy is defined by Wood as, ‘where power resides with corporations and public institutions and elections are hollowed out, with the whole idea of democracy losing its meaning.’ (Wood: 2017 n.pag).

Writing about the 2015 UK general election Jennings and Stoker say, ‘The “anti-politics” phenomenon is complex but is reflected in negative attitudes towards mainstream politics and political parties among citizens.’ (Jennings and Stoker 2015 n.pag). They also note that citizens are not necessarily disinterested in politics but have developed a

distrust for politicians and the way politics are practised. They claim that this sense of *disillusionment* is driving populist politics, yet at the same time, the lack of choice and accumulating distrust of politicians through the distortions and half-truths associated with debates about austerity, deficit and public spending means that citizens fail to get a sense of their political choices (ibid).

More recently, scholars such as Bertsou (2018) and Corbett (2020) explore the levels of mistrust in politics created by the rise of celebrity politics as a key theme of democratic deconsolidation or anti-politics. Bertsou describes the discontent that citizens display:

A building consensus among political commentators and scholars of public opinion is that citizens are 'pissed off' with politics, that they distrust the political system and the political establishment, and that they are prepared to break the rules and reject mainstream parties and politicians.' (Bertsou 2018: 213).

Corbett comments on the discussion about the decline of democracy following President Trump's election in the US:

Within months of Trump's election, democratic deconsolidation was at the forefront of popular debate, at least in liberal-progressive circles. Comparative politics scholars found themselves explaining to the media that democracy might be in decline and that the US showed many of the warning signs that typically precipitated democratic collapse. Drawing parallels with the 1930s fascism became common. Corbett (2020:179).

Wood (2016) describes anti-politics as not necessarily a disengagement with politics but rather a limiting of participation in politics under a neoliberal agenda:

A key aspect of this concern is what Gerry Stoker (2006) calls 'anti-politics' – a

condition in which institutions, policies and discourses associated with neoliberal ideas of self-interested individualism and market efficiency foreclose or discourage participation in politics and the public sphere. (2016: 521)

These contributions have been valuable, because they enable us to arrive at a deeper understanding of the processes that have been taking place, sometimes well away from the public eye. Yet as Jenkins (2011) argues, a conceptualization of politics must be firstly assumed in order to arrive at the notion of depoliticization in the first place. She notes, 'it is difficult to ascertain whether 'depoliticisation' has taken place without drawing on a conceptualisation of the political.' (2011:158). Furthermore, she is dissatisfied with what she calls 'a general tendency to think about (de)politicisation in a way that is underpinned by a negative and sovereign notion of politics.' (2011: 157). The problem she suggests is, 'This distinction also means that the 'politics' within these modes of governance is bound up with the actions, non-actions and limits of the state alone.' (2011:158). Jenkins believes that this restricted conceptualization of politics leads us to think about depoliticization as the only mode of governance; moreover, that that such depoliticization can only be observed through the actions of the central state. For Jenkins, politics must be understood in a wider context in which she includes, 'contingency, conflicts, flows of power, capacities for autonomy and collective life.' (2011:159). She sees politics as 'a generative, indeterminate process, which is inherently unstable, complex, value-laden, contested and, ultimately, concerned with agency.' (ibid). By reminding us of the contingency and agency embedded in the process of politics it allows us to observe potential depoliticizing processes well away from the central state as well as, in consequence anticipate where progressive repoliticizing change might come from, too.

This then leads us to the question of political participation. In her classic article 'Political Culture, Political Structure and Political Change', Carole Pateman's advances on Almond and Verba's 1963 book, 'The Civic Culture' to review 'questions of political stability and change in our own society' (Pateman 1971: 291).

Pateman's work explores 'political participation and apathy' including 'political efficacy and competence' (ibid). Political efficacy is the belief that one can make an impact on political affairs (1971, 300). Whilst she retains Almond and Verba's (1963) concept of 'political culture'- which links the over-arching structure of politics with the individual practice of politics - she complains that it has not fulfilled its promise. Pateman quotes Pye's definition of political culture as, 'the adding up of the discoveries of individual psychology in such a manner as to make community-wide behaviour understandable of individual actions.' (cited in Pateman 1971: 291). For Pateman the difficulty is that 'political participation [which] does pose a problem of 'community-wide behaviour' has hardly been recognized.' (ibid). Therefore, the challenge is with the social pattern of political participation, a lack of engagement with the political situation results in low rates of political participation, and this tends to be related to individual's socioeconomic status. Pateman, upholds that a political socialization process produces 'a developed sense of political efficacy', (1971: 301). And whilst previously, scholars, in this case, Almond and Verba, have reached conclusions on political participation by assuming that the existing political structure (within modern democracies) is stable, and therefore responsive to citizen's needs Pateman calls for a multidimensional political efficacy. She says,

it is not just the impact of the national political structure that helps 'shape' the political culture, but authority structures, that is, political structures on a wide definition of the term 'political', in various social spheres; the impact of the authority structure of the workplace being particularly important. (1971: 303)

Pateman's article was written in 1971, and the reliance of individual experiences of the workplace towards feelings of political apathy have been interrogated, not least through feminist literature. The different ways in which we engage in work has changed, leaving less opportunity for the type of socialization through work that Pateman refers to. What is interesting, though, about Pateman's argument is the way that she identifies the relationship between political structure and political culture. This helps us think about the importance of relational association in social and cultural life, and in particular for this article the importance of creating productive encounters through social art projects.

For example, Archon Fung describes six ways in which associations enhance democracy, which include,

fostering civic virtues and teaching political skills, offering resistance to power and checking government, improving the quality and equality of representation, facilitating public deliberation, and creating opportunities for citizens and groups to participate directly in governance. (Fung 2013: 515)

Associational forces are identified as, family, geographical habitation, peer groups, traditions, customs and religion on the individual. The general freedom to associate with groups according to the choice of the individual, and for the groups to take action to promote their interests, has been a necessary feature of democratic society. Fung says, 'the most important contribution of associations may be either direct participation in public governance or political resistance.' (Fung 2013: 517).

To summarise this section, terms such as depoliticization and anti-politics ought to be viewed as contested and not merely descriptive terms, because they have a tendency to overlap when seeking to make sense of similar processes. Collectively, they help us begin to understand the ways in which neoliberal ideology takes pragmatic effect within modes of governance.

However, both Pateman (1971) and Jenkins (2011) demand a multifaceted approach to politics, signalling that there are ways to resist and navigate the processes of depoliticizing, not least in the politicizing techniques of encounter. Pateman calls for a multidimensional approach to understanding political culture through the recognition that more robust psychological aspects of political socialization need to be considered when reflecting on the profile of political efficacy. Moreover, she emphasizes political efficacy as part of the contingent relationship between political structure and political culture. Jenkins likewise calls for a more complex view of politics by utilizing Foucault's ideas of genealogy (Foucault: 1977): her analysis invites a position that is less binary, more contingent and not confined to state politics alone (Jenkins 2011: 158).

If we accept that the concept of the political exceeds liberal formulations of the state, asserting that the state in this formation is not a given, then this affords us possibilities for alternative models of politics. Pateman (1971) and Jenkins (2011) identify the

shortcomings of liberal democracy through its prescribed modes of deliberation and its convention of limiting political content to party politics and state policy. Impacting upon political reconfigurations is not limited to engaging with current modes of governance: we *can* affect the construction of new values and opinions, through association and communication. Correspondingly, social art practices demonstrate how politics is not bound to the legitimacy of institutions or agencies. Socially productive art practices maintain an articulation of politics that is situated within association and communication. Social art projects create associations through pedagogical, dialogical and participatory practices. Artworks that aim to uncover social injustices create new knowledge which in turn is communicated through exhibition and display.

Social Art Practice and Democratization

For the purpose of this essay, we refer to art projects that form associations by providing an alternative to state-supported educational structures - usually aligned to political activism - and one in which actions are performed together 'to connect to a shared present' (van Eikels: 2019: 159). As well as artworks that comment on the political culture in which they are produced.

The history of social practices is located in the history of the avant-garde, with a desire to connect art to everyday life (Kaprow: 1983), as well as an up-turn of dominant bourgeois and political culture (Bürger: 1984).

Social artworks develop out of participatory art processes, which include education methods, dialogue and discussion: these are now accepted as standard techniques in the production of contemporary artworks (Lacy: 1995, Kwon: 2002, O'Neill and Wilson: 2010). Social art practice is associated with an impulse to democratize both art production and society. The artist as producer of deliberation and participation was born out of the radical counter-aesthetics of the 1960s and is evident in community arts' 'new genre public art', (Lacy: 1995) in which artists worked with specific social constituents as well as the Artist Placement Group who believed that, 'context was half the work', (Harding, 1996).

In 2010 the 'educational turn' in art, was defined by O'Neill and Wilson, who describe the prevalent use of pedagogical models as used by curators as well as artists engaged in critical art projects. They explain how lectures, classes, workshops and *discussions* have long been considered forms of dematerialized art practice, as well as operating as a supporting role for exhibitions of art in museums and biennials (O'Neill and Wilson: 2010: 12).

Community art and public art contexts are central to the artworks produced, manifesting in an engagement with particular communities or specific sites of production. These artworks are usually developed through a programme of group workshops. Miwon Kwon (Kwon: 2002) has described the art historical trajectory from site to location, explaining how artists have explored ways to enter into deliberations with publics, with outcomes not defined in terms of material, but by processes of interaction between the context and local participants and the commissioned artist.

Tania Bruguera and Alistair Hudson as Arte Útil have embraced the usefulness of art for society (Arte Útil, <https://www.arte-util.org/about/colophon/>), yet others have cautioned of aligning art with the provision of tasks associated with social reproduction warning that this 'can cohere with, rather than confront the paternalism of the state and capitalism.' (Abse Gogarty 2017: 124). Abse Gogarty explains,

'the notion of usefulness has permeated the field of social practice more broadly, with 'use value' frequently posed as an undisputed moral good, and a category that might be wrested from its socio-economic relation to exchange value within capitalism.' (Abse Gogarty 2017:118).

Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, in his text, 'A Note on Socially Engaged Art Criticism', identifies social art practice's relationship to the trajectory of art practice after the 20th century avant-garde. He describes social art practice as 'four overlapping practices: relational aesthetics, institutional critique, socially engaged art, and tactical media'. He explains,

'we are trying to account for phenomena whose identities are in no way fixed but are in movement, and that, for instance, former oppositions between the avant-garde's anti-institutional "over-politicization" and anti-aesthetic institutional critique are gradually changing.' (Rasmussen: 2017)

Social art practice is multi-faceted; it generates a complex set of social relations between the outcome and the audience, it has a primary audience of those involved in its coproduction as well as a subsequent secondary audience that is produced when the resulting artworks are displayed and published. (Jordan: 2013). Social art projects extend the reachability of a social network, thus creating a wider communication base for the sharing of values as well as the making of new ones. Its relationship to supporting community empowerment is complex and is much debated within the field, with opposing positions adopted by practitioners including the convivial (Bourriaud 2002), the antagonistic, (Bishop 2011).

Numerous scholars have lamented the way in which socially engaged art practice is employed by UK government to address social problems. Berry and Iles, in 2009 observe that, 'A rising crescendo of criticism may finally be denting the blithe confidence of the 'Creative City' formula and its liberal application to all manner of post-industrial urban ills.' (Berry and Iles: 2009 n.pag). Their concern is that a,

'post-conceptual order of aesthetics..... masks the unaltered or worsening conditions that affect the urban majority as welfare is dismantled, public assets sold off and free spaces enclosed.' (ibid).

It is in the context of participatory art practice in the UK and Europe that Claire Bishop's book 'Artificial Hells' is formulated. Bishop calls for agonistic artworks within the format of participatory projects, (Bishop: 2012). This relies on art taking an agonistic approach to its production, content and site, and at the same time generating an exhibitable output.

Bishop utilizes Mouffe's concept of agonism to remonstrate with Nicholas Bourriaud's seemingly convivial exchanges developed through artworks that align to what he calls 'relational aesthetics' (Bourriaud: 2002). Bishop's claim for antagonism conventionally calls for the 'artwork' to *emerge from* the social or participatory art project, her proposition is committed to protecting a sense of autonomy for the artist and artwork. Bishop believes this autonomy can lead to a critical and political art, where art is assigned the function to provoke critical reactions through revealing hidden aspects of global capitalism.³

Writing in 2015, Loretta Lees and Claire Melhuish remind us that little evidence is provided to support the 'quasi-social fact' that 'arts-led regeneration is a tool to combat social exclusion' (Lees and Melhuish: 2015: 242). Given the complexity of evaluating programmes of art-led regeneration which are similar to 'management consultancy reports' they 'offer suggestions for constructing a new and more robust evidence base.' (Lees and Melhuish: 2015: 256).

The use of educational strategies, participatory modes of production, and arts ability to visualize and represent ideas means social art practice is affected by forms of depoliticization. However, problems of instrumentalization by patronage and state funding are well debated and some art projects are specifically developed to confront and reveal these issues.

Social arts practitioners that foreground multifaceted types of participation can support political engagement that occurs beyond and complementary to, the modes of governance emphasized within the depoliticization literature. These include participation in the production of artworks which utilises dialogue, discussion, critical analysis, making skills, introduction to political topics, and knowledge production as an alternative

³ Bishop is working on a review book of *Artificial Hells*, working title 'The Art of Assembly' which will be published in 2022. The book will develop what Bishop sees as omissions from the first book, technological interaction, the rise of the right, Black Lives Matter, concluding that participation has reinvented itself to articulate care as a major factor of a social art practice. See here https://art-of-assembly.net/2022/03/14/upcoming-claire-bishop-revisiting-participation/?fbclid=IwAR2PbU3oNVWv2fzOGU0uZbyT1Nllp-v_1K7A-v7uBNrLLWWiGM4FIn70H4s

to state-supported educational structures. Participation in this context also extends towards artists projects that reveal political conditions, developing communications with publics through 'publishing' artworks and seeking opinion formation through insights provided in the artworks.

Policy objectives versus cultural outcomes

Arts Council England (ACE) is an independent charity as well as an arm's-length non-departmental public body, unofficially termed a quango. They are accountable to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). ('Let's Create' development plan 2021).

ACE's 2020- 2030 strategy document is entitled 'Lets Create' (Serota: 2020). It is an optimistic and upbeat read, declaring an egalitarian function for arts and culture. It aims to address social challenges, proposing that ACE will confront, 'inequality of wealth and of opportunity, social isolation and mental ill-health' as well as 'the accelerating climate emergency.' (Serota: 2020: 4). Arts and culture are described 'as having a role to play in supporting local economies and talent, health and wellbeing, and children and young people'. (ibid).

Serota offers Jeremy Deller's and Rufus Norris' 2016 work, *We're here because we're here*, as an exemplar for the type of projects that can achieve greater inclusion. *We're here because we're here* saw 1400 volunteers dressed in First World War military uniform appear unexpectedly in locations across the UK, as a modern memorial to mark the centenary of the Battle of the Somme. (<https://becausewearehere.co.uk/>). *We're here because we're here* was a song that First World War soldiers sang to the tune of Auld Lang Syne. The repeated lyric communicates both the bleakness of their situation and their acceptance of it.

The spectacle of the *We're here because we're here*, event brings to mind what Raymond Williams (2014) calls a 'stately sense of cultural policy' (in Karvelyte 2021: 141). One reading of *We're here because we're here* could be that the work enforces the *idea* of the state through the *demonstration* of the state, here in its militarised form.

Williams has it, that the display of state power 'is as important as maintaining this power and order.' (in Karvelyte 2021: 142).

Karvelyte explains how we often fail to 'recognize them [these events] as cultural policy initiatives'. (2021: 143). She says,

During royal weddings, coronation ceremonies, and presidential inauguration days we are presented with a number of cultural practices and rituals that manifest the majesty of the state. This ultimately helps to garner a greater level of respect and recognition for the state from the international community and/or local public. (ibid).

The UK City of Culture (UKCC) scheme, funded by the DCMS aims to utilize, culture as the catalyst for investment in places to drive economic growth and regeneration, promoting social cohesion and instilling pride in places and making them more attractive to live and work in and visit.' (UK City of Culture 2025: full application guidance, 4 January 2022).

To rephrase this statement, the DCMS puts arts and culture as a supporting factor of the economy. This relegates art to being a tool for the implementation of cultural policy, thereby creating a form of depoliticization within the funding of art and culture.

The use of culture as a way to address economic challenges that have arisen from the dismantling of the welfare state is well debated (Mcguigan: 2004)

Indeed, various display practices, including mega-events and signature constructions, render culture more tangible, which, in effect, makes it appear more 'useful'. In times of 'evidence-based' (Belfiore, 2004) policymaking, this makes it easier for policymakers to justify their support of the arts. (Karvelyte 2021: 144).

Claims that culture can promote social cohesion has led to ACE calling for groups, organizations and artists to specifically design projects to include cultural groups in the

production and consumption of artistic events (Serota; 2021). Yet when we acknowledge that a key function of social art practice is to demonstrate the process of political socialization, art can offer more than the 'recognition of inclusion'. Social art projects do this through the development of associations and the creation of moments of politicization adding to what Pateman describes as a multidimensional political efficacy (1971, 301). They can enable a complexity of positions to emerge through the sharing of opinions, as Iris Marion Young says,

it is both theoretically and politically more productive to pluralize categories and understand them as differently related to particular social groups and issues. (1997: 149)

Nicholas Serota, chair of Arts Council England, and author of the 'Let's Create' strategy talks about the desire to dissolve barriers between artists and audiences, the document communicates a sense of affability which assumes the way to social inclusion is through genial moments of togetherness. This is where Jenkins' (2011) use of Foucault's genealogy (1977) may help us to politicize the depoliticized. It aids us in understanding that living together democratically also needs moments of antagonism and occasions of perspective in order to reach empathetic understandings between different people. She says,

I believe that genealogy operates as an analytically informed strategy for politicisation by confronting and undermining 'aspectival captivity' to maintain the possibility of disagreement, rather than ideological distortion and the achievement of consensus. (2011: 171).

Mikael Carleheden utilizes Honneth's definition of genealogy which he says is 'to criticize a social order by demonstrating historically the extent to which its defining ideas and norms already serve to legitimate a disciplinary or repressive practice' (Honneth in Carleheden: 2020: 8). Carleheden provides an explanation for us of the term aspectival captivity,

'Aspectival captivity' is about a closure of what in fact are open possibilities. If we, through *problematization*, are able to disclose these possibilities, then they are primarily merely to be seen as other possibilities. (Carleheden: 2020: 16)

David Owen (2002) describes 'Aspectival captivity' as our 'subjectivity, reflexivity, judgements, justifications and actions being dependent on a particular perspective.' (in Carleheden: 2020: 16).

Through directing us to think about genealogy in the context of depoliticization, Jenkins is reminding us that as subjects we continue to be reformed by the social, economic and political structures that surround us, more significantly she urges us to think about the potentialities of difference as a productive way to construct democratic societies.

Social art practitioners, such as Adelita Husni-Bey⁴, the Pedagogy Group and the Partisan Social Club use the format of the workshop as a method of participation. By shifting the emphasis from the production of a shared artwork, usually foreground in participatory practices, towards the activity of learning together these artists identify topics to study that encourage shared political debate. (Jordan, 2019). The topic of the workshop and the encounters that participants experience during the workshop will lead to the creation of new associations.

Stefano Harney describes, 'study' as getting together with others and determining what needs to be learnt together; spending time with identified material without worrying about the endpoint or the credits accumulated (Harney, 2018). Study, encounter and association enable the exchange of opinions, which in turn leads to the forming of new values.

⁴ Ard is a video installation reflecting on 'Cairo 2050', a government-backed and privately funded metropolitan development plan of epic proportions, which threatens the existence of many informal settlements such as Gezirat al-Qursaya and Ramlet Boulaq. The video was produced in collaboration with filmmaker Salma El Tarzi, activist Nazly Hussein and participants from both settlements. During the workshop, held in a theatre in Cairo in November 2014, the group was encouraged to analyse the military's newly established 'public benefit' law in relationship to the language present within the Egyptian constitution, observing how neoliberal urban planning policies, sovranational financial institutions and free-trade policies pose a direct threat to their livelihood. A maquette of the 'Cairo 2050' plan, provided initially as a backdrop became an active tool in reshaping and redefining legislation through the participant's hands. The film is shown in conjunction with the modified maquette.

image 1 & 2 Husni-Bey

Kai van Eikels has described two types of workshops adopted by artists. One version is an alternative to state-supported educational structures for sharing - usually aligned to political activism and the other type in which actions are performed together 'to connect to a shared present' (van Eikels: 2019: 159).

Workshops are sites in which the problematizing of issues can be shared, not all encounters in the workshop are convivial but through shared study differences of opinions can be tolerated. Workshops are one example of artistic practice that operate as a place for opinion formation and can reveal, resist and counter modes of depoliticization.

Conclusion – On the lookout for alternatives

This article sought to advance our understanding of the role of arts and culture in relation to the neoliberal processes of depoliticization that have been playing out through modes of governance in the UK. We found that theories of depoliticization show that the government attempts to limit representational democracy through applying neoliberal techniques of control. Yet the notion of depoliticization tends to reduce the everyday practice of politics to formal spaces of governance. As Pateman and Jenkins suggest, we think political opinion is formed in cultural exchange and through associations.

We show that the participatory processes developed within arts practices are useful tools that facilitate the implementation of state arts policy. This is in line with governmental modes of depoliticization. Participatory arts events provide a feeling of being included, but this can result in the production of 'cultural policy initiatives', (Karvelyte 2021: 143) which limits engagement to harmonious outcomes and neglects confronting economic and cultural differences and inequalities.

As well as identifying the way in which policy utilizes artistic projects as a form of instrumentalization, we considered if particular artistic approaches could navigate forms of depoliticization to establish methods for politicising. We are not arguing for maintaining aspects of artistic autonomy but rather we are calling for an analysis of the *complex and reciprocal determinations* (Emirbayer and Sheller 1998) that are fundamental to associational life, i.e the neo-liberal state, and the capitalist economy etc.; this relates to Jenkins' call for a definition of the 'broader relationship between depoliticizing and politicizing dynamics.' (2011: 158). She proposes that utilizing Foucault's version of genealogy as a critique can help us develop new ways of thinking through politics that enable us to reflect upon specific material conditions. We think that a type of genealogy of critique can be enacted within social art practices. First, by the formation of new associations; exchanging experiences through attentive listening produces empathy and creates receptive attitudes to the development of new values (Farinati, L and Firth, C: 2017); opinion formation can then literally occur within these collective spaces as a result of dialogue. Second by practising and embodying participatory skills, new habits are shaped and can be transferred to other encounters in social life (Van Eikels; 2022). Finally, critical intervention and artistic declarations on the cultural landscape can be produced and displayed as artefacts which in turn impact upon opinion formation via spectatorship.

We believe that social art projects that reveal and confront social injustice through the communication of ideas are a means to politicization. Social art practice can resist strategies of depoliticization through the production of artworks that develop relational association within politically charged contexts as well as operate to reveal dominant political strategies of control. Jenkins says, 'The object of politicisation is to confront domination, when power relations become blocked or depoliticised in ways in which we can imagine no alternative.' (Jenkins: 2011: 169). We are on the lookout for these alternatives.

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