

## **Walking Into The Future With Confidence.**

*A reflection on PRAKTIKA II by Anthony Schrag*

This text begins with (1) a framing of the 'wicked problem' of participatory art projects, then moves into (2) notions of the 'Anthropocene' as a mechanism for imagination, and (3) ends by applying both these concepts to the PRAKTIKA II workshop held in Huntly in December 2016 that looked at the future of participatory art in Scotland. This last section includes (3.1) lists of each 'action point' that was developed by tables-of-experts within the PRAKTIKA II workshop, and (3.2) an analysis of common themes and notions. It concludes with (4) a statement about the future.

### **1) Wicked Problems**

*Wicked Problems* is a term that scientists, thinkers and philosophers have coined to address those complex situations that have neither an easy solution nor certain, simple remedy. 'Wicked' here suggests *resistance to resolution*, rather than evil, and issues such as climate change, effective governance, and global human migration are examples of such problems. They cannot be solved quickly - or indeed at all - and even attempting to solve a *part* of the problem might lead to other aspects of the issue getting worse. They illustrate the complex, interconnected nature of life in the 21st Century.

While not as threatening or immediately pressing as climate change or migration, 'Participatory Arts' are also a wicked problem because these artworks are process-oriented and not based around the production of inanimate art objects. They involve making art with people and their situations, not inert materials like paint or clay or paper, and therefore operate on a substrate of contradictions in which ethics, authorship, agency and power are challenged.

The works demand we ask questions of their functioning: for example: Our works are often placed in lieu of social-work, but does that mean we are social-engineers, and do we have the right and/or resources to do that effectively? If our processes are collaborative, how do artists or curators of such jointly-created projects claim unique authorship or I.P.? If we have specific ideas of what our works should achieve, are we manipulating people who might feel differently? Is that ethical? If we aim to 'make a difference' with our works, is there a mutual, cohesive understanding of what we all mean by 'difference' and would we all recognise when it was 'different'? Can 'make different' also mean 'make worse'? Can art effectively address and solve social inequalities? What of those people who have an activist bent within their work: should - and *can* - art make the world better? Under what criteria do we define 'better'? There is a general leftist bent to the politics of this work, but is it not equally true that the rightist thinkers have rights too? Should not their perspectives of neoliberalism, global capitalism and anti-socialist approaches be equally respected? If there is no 'right' way to do this sort of work, is it also conversely true that there is no 'wrong' way?

These are perhaps academic and semantic questions, but consider the following four works that occur in 'real situations' and all focus on a similar subject:

Emily Jacir's *Where We Come From* (2001-2003) is a work where the artist - a Palestinian immigrant in the USA - developed a film from a series of collaborative performances she did with other immigrants around the world. From this work, is it right that we only remember Jacir's name, and that she benefits (culturally/economically) from the input of other vulnerable people, and her career is furthered by their (hidden) traumas?

*Conflict Kitchen* (2010) by Jon Rubin and Dawn Weleski in which the artists' developed pop-up restaurants in the USA (as well as other manifestations in other parts of the world) which serve food from the countries with which the United States is in conflict: for example Iran, Afghanistan, North Korea, etc. Also featuring educational programming, they have perhaps a sensationalistic and simplistic approach to international conflict (most notably in binarising the Palestine/Israel conflict) however, the real question is how it is 'art' and who authors it? How do we understand this work as more than just a restaurant from which the artists

financially benefit? If the patrons have to pay to eat there, are they not the ones 'making' the art?

Tania Bruguera's *Immigrant Movement International (2012-2015)* explored how art could be 'useful' to recent immigrants to New York by developing new models for support including setting up child-care facilities, or creative ways to fund legal advice, or free IT classes. The work, however, was sited in a geographic area where immigrants arguably already *had* the most 'useful' support in the form of formal, governmental & NGO agencies but also informal networks that emerge from immigrant neighbourhoods. It would have been a very different project if it had been located in a right-wing, white neighbourhood who employ illegal immigrants as cheap manual labour. In this sense, was it just a token gesture and not actually 'helpful' to anyone?

Santiago Sierra's artwork *Polyurethane Sprayed on the Backs of Ten Workers (2004)* where 10 Iraqi immigrant workers were selected and hired by the artist to work with him and have their bodies violently sprayed in a hardening foam to create sculptures, and from which they had to painfully extract themselves. The very core of the work is the illumination of the ethical vulnerabilities of migrants, but in order to do that, he must exploit them: is it right that a small ethical violation be enacted to highlight larger, structural ones?

Each of these works are undeniably 'participatory' in the sense that the central quality of the work was that the artist was not working with inert materials, but other, living entities. Sometimes these other entities' agency is a central concern, and other times the denial of their agency is the focus; but either way, each artist was 'working with people'. Considered together, these works complicate a cohesive understanding of the 'field' of such a practice: We don't all 'work with people' in the same way, and while we often use the same words, but mean very, very different things.

This is the great Gordian Knot of the practice: we do not speak the same language, and instead of building a great Tower of Babel in honour of participatory practices, we seem to only be building smaller echo-chambers. The *wicked problem* of 'socially engaged' practices is therefore doubly confounded by the idea that it is indeed a 'cohesive practice': not only is there no solution to the problems it poses, but we haven't even yet properly phrased the problem/question!

If *Wicked Problems* have no easy solution, should we then abandon them? Sometimes, all these problems induce a paralysis that stops us from stepping forwards for fear of 'doing it wrong'? How can we counter-act the paralysis and find productive steps to success? What does socially engaged arts look like in the future? How do we take the practice forward productively? This notion of how to 'go forward' was the subtext of a recent event called PRAKTIKA II by Deveron Projects (formally Deveron Arts) in Huntly, Aberdeenshire. The organisation turned 21 in December, and as all momentous occasions offer a potential for reflection, they chose to not only look back at previous successes and learnings, but also forward, asking: *We have come this far, and now what next?*

Deveron Projects (DP) is an arts organisation based within Huntly, Aberdeenshire. A small town of 4500 residents, the methodological framework of DP is: *the town is the venue*. With a 50/50 approach - global/local, art/non-art, business/pleasure, etc. - they engage artists as creative problem-solvers to address the issues (both positive and negative) that a small rural town in Scotland faces in the 21st Century. Issues of fatherhood, of youth culture, of commerce, of colonialism (to name a few subjects!) have been addressed over their 21 years of operation, and they have developed a respected tranche of projects that has been academically, aesthetically and socially explored.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see D. Stevenson & R. Blanche (2015) *The town is the venue: "Place-making" at the heart of cultural policy in Imagining Europolis: Culture and Sustainability in European Cities*. London: Routledge. Or see also: C. Cartiere and M. Zebracki (eds) (2016) *The Everyday Practice of Public Art: Art, Space, and Social Inclusion*. London: Routledge; or N. Long. (2014) *Sociality: New Directions*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

They also apply the notion of a *Shadow Curator* within their work. Developed by curator Nuno Sacramento, this is a concept similar to the 'shadow-minister' in the UK government, where a 'critical friend' is embedded into a project to critique, question and challenge projects, and is done so with the understanding that criticality of practice leads to more cohesive and productive works. It was in the spirit of this notion that they developed the original PRAKTIKA event 8 years ago. This event invited 12 artists to Huntly for a 3-day workshop that fostered a peer-group discussion about their work in an environment of mutual trust, hospitality and critical analysis. It aimed to create a critical context for socially engaged art practice in a time where there was little reflective debate about the form, function and position of practice within the Scottish cultural landscape.

This approach of self-reflection and self-criticality has stood Deveron Projects in good stead, and after 21 years of operation, the organisation has produced an incredible wealth of projects, theory, practice and institutional knowledge about socially engaged art. They are well positioned, therefore, to begin to look forward and contemplate how to develop successful participatory art projects for their specific and unique context. As with all Wicked Problems, that future will undoubtedly come with its challenges, but it is how we address those problems that marks a difference: it is in the 'doing', rather than the actual endpoint/output that is important.

## 2) The Anthropocene

The Anthropocene is a proposed period of time that begins when human activities started to have a significant global impact on Earth's geology and ecosystems. In August 2016 the Working Group on the Anthropocene (WGA) voted to formally adopt the Anthropocene and presented the recommendation to the International Geological Congress. Officially, it is described as:

the Anthropocene is distinguished as a new period either after or within the Holocene, the current epoch, which began approximately 10,000 years ago (about 8000 BC) with the end of the last glacial period.<sup>2</sup>

The subject has its own dedicated magazine that invites the "world's most creative writers, designers, scientists, and entrepreneurs [to] explore how we can create a sustainable human age we actually want to live in,"<sup>3</sup> as well as many related publications and conference series in both Sciences<sup>4</sup> as well as the Humanities and Art & Design.<sup>5</sup> In general, the topic is used mostly by climatologists to talk about the future of the environment/ecosystem by presenting the (real) present in relationship in an (imagined) future which emerges through current human activity. Increasingly, however, it is being applied to many different realms to open discussion on how humans will survive/live in a climatically and politically unstable world.

I find the Anthropocene a useful tool of 'future prospecting' because it asks us to think about how 'now' will be remembered by 'the future - i.e., it gives us a chance to reflect on how we want to be remembered by future citizens by thinking about our actions in the present. The concept reminds us that we *will* make an impact on the world around us, so must consider the ways in which we want to mark our time on this earth? How do we influence the future *now*, and what do we want that *future* to be? Applied in the context of Socially Engaged Art Practice, it invites us to think about what the future of the practice 'could' be, and how we can plan for a successful future of this practice?

The idea of 'success' and 'future' however, always makes me nervous. Great and noble plans that aim for the stars often collapse in the wreckage of their impossible expectations; think of Socialist Russia, the Titanic and New Labour. I am suspicious of utopias.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://anthropocene.info/> (Accessed Dec 16, 2016)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.anthropocenemagazine.org/>

<sup>4</sup> For example: Geographies of the Anthropocene, The Royal Geographic Society Conference 2015, University of Exeter,

<sup>5</sup> For example: Agents in the Anthropocene: Trans/Disciplinary Practices in Art and Design Technology at Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam, 26-28 January, 2017.

In *Picture Imperfect: Utopian thought for an Anti-Utopian Age* (2005) by Russell Jacoby looks at different types of utopias and their place within western thought over the last 150 years. One of his key points, while not new, is that utopias are important because it is through them that we develop aspirations, and from those aspirations our politics:

Utopian thinking does not undermine or discount real reforms. Indeed, it is almost the opposite: practical reforms depend on utopian dreaming....Utopian thought consists of more than daydreams and doodles. It emerges out of and returns to contemporary political realities. As I see it, this contradiction defines the utopian project: it partakes at once of the limited choices of the day and unlimited possibilities of the morrow.<sup>6</sup>

Utopias therefore have an important ideological element, because they promise a better world via political action. However, it is impossible for each person's utopia to be 'true' because everyone has a different idea of what utopia should be: we are, thankfully, all different and require different things. Thus, utopias lead us to conflict. This is not necessarily problematic: Žižek<sup>7</sup> suggests that we should work towards our individual utopias, but must do so knowing they will fail. In other words, the impossibility of utopia ever being 'true' should not stop us from trying to get to that better place. *How* one tries to get to that 'better place' is the very grist of this subject.

There is a thought experiment applied to climatology in the context of Anthropocene that is also applicable to any project management approach that aims to ensure 'future success'. It goes something like this:

- 1) Apocalyptic-Imaginings: First, we must imagine the project's failure: its total, utter and complete collapse. We should be able to contemplate in every degree its most miserable end.
- 2) Failure-Circumstances: Secondly, once we have imagined this, we must then clearly imagine the 'failure-circumstances' that led to that failure. These 'failure-circumstances' emerge by answers questions such as: *what was the narrative of its ending? How did it fail? What processes were at play in its death? What conceptual notions (global/local/social/philosophical/spiritual etc.) were at play that affected our project? What practical steps did we miss or forget in planning that resulted in our project's catastrophe? etc.*
- 3) Success-Mechanisms: Thirdly, after we have a clear understanding of all the factors, facts and situations that lead to the failure, we must then work backwards, methodically and carefully, to plot out 'success-mechanisms' to counter-act those potentials failure-circumstances. For every failure-circumstance, plan a success-mechanism.
- 4) Daily-Implementations: Lastly, we must begin to implement the success-mechanisms procedures in tactically implantable ways: bite-sized, graspable, and enactable steps and focus our energies on these daily implementations. Ensuring these small steps are followed - while keeping an eye out for any possible missed failure-circumstances' - will lead to a project's success.

This approach allows large-scale, conceptually-heavy and long-term projects to be managed in the day-to-day, and takes the abstract sting of 'ideas' allowing them to be managed in daily reality. It is an attempt to break the paralysis of Wicked Problems and the pressures/expectations of future success. Instead, the aim is to develop manageable action-points and daily implementations that might begin to frame a practical, productive pathway forward.

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<sup>6</sup> R. Jacoby. (2005) *Picture Imperfect: Utopian thought for an Anti-Utopian Age*. New York, Columbia University Press. P. 146

<sup>7</sup> S. Žižek, (2009) *First As Tragedy, Then As Farce*. London: Verso.

Considering the pressures of the future and the problematics of participatory arts, this was the aim of the PRAKTIKA II event, and it was hoped we could reflect on not just the future of Deveron Projects, but on the future success of all participatory projects operating in Scotland.

### 3) PRAKTIKA II

As with all Deveron Projects planning, notions of 50/50 was a key factor in the planning of PRAKTIKA II and guests were chosen from the diverse fields that influence the planning and execution of socially engaged projects. As such, an intimate workshop of 25 people was decided, made up of 5 artists, 5 academic researchers, 5 community members, 5 funders and 5 policy makers/governmental representatives, each combined into 5 groups of 5. The idea was to break down the silos of specific knowledge and mix these 'experts in their fields' into small groups that could develop cross-pollinated knowledges and bridge approaches, therefore strengthening the interconnected approach.

Deveron Projects' *Town is The Venue* methodology was similarly applied - perhaps with unintended significant resonance - as the venue for the event was held in the local Old Age Pensioner's Hall. With its pink and yellow wallpaper, small stage, photos of past presidents and members, hand-made crafts and personalised touches of those that regularly use the hall, it was a poignant reminder of the 'real life' of people that could be impacted by participatory artworks. We were not planning projects for rarefied spaces, but for lived contexts such as this one. The users of this hall were 'regular' townsfolk and were probably not interested in 'art'. As such they were on my mind throughout the event. They were the silent partners in the room and the 6th member of each group of experts. The notion of 'Old Age Pensioner' too - while a delicate subject - suggested to me people who embody *time that has passed*, and who have a resource of knowledge, history and local culture that was significant to an event which was about imagining the future of an arts organisation in a small town.

The event began with a historical framing by Claudia, who presented a fictionalised history of a 'small Scottish town'.<sup>8</sup> While obviously about Huntly, the speech had been denuded of specific references and could mean *any* local town, and this provided the opportunity to look beyond Huntly and imagine a fictionalised Scottish 'any town', and how socially engaged artworks might function in those contexts.



After this framing, the notion of the Anthropocene was suggested as a way to 'future retrospect' the role of socially engaged arts within that 'any town' and each table of experts were invited to develop 5 'action points' that would help us get to this future, to be followed by a communal group discussion. It was suggested that each group spend a short time

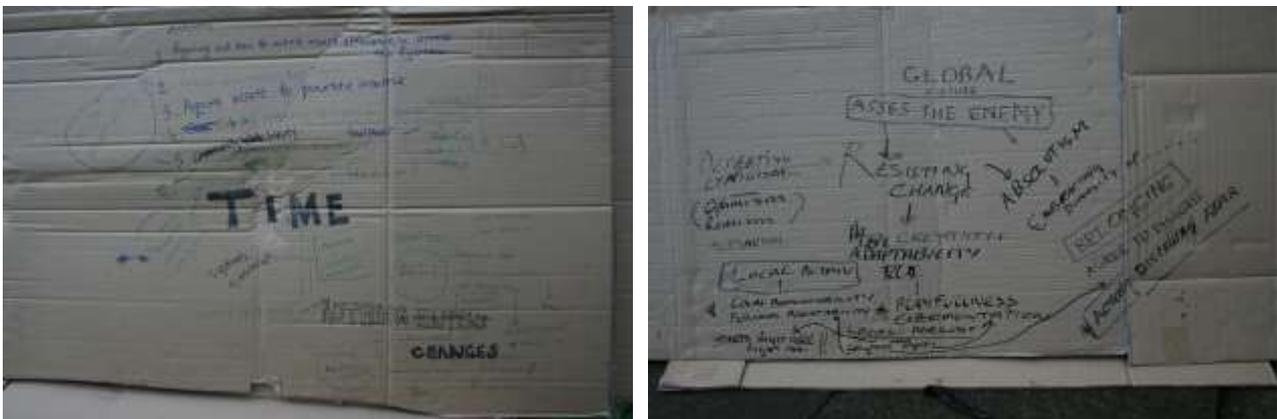
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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix 1

thinking about what their future Scottish 'any town' looked like, and how socially engaged and participatory arts practices might contribute to that future.

### 3.1) PRAKTIKA II - Action Points

The aesthetic framework of the Deveron Projects birthday celebrations was 'cardboard'. It is material I use regularly myself in my own work because it is easily accessible, cheap and functions as a "material that does not intimidate."<sup>9</sup> It is not a frightening material: anyone can find it and use it, and to use it suggests functionality rather than 'art', and therefore does not exclude (non-art) participants. In my work, I have found that using cardboard relaxes people engaging in a project, because they do not need to be a skilled craftsman, or be able to draw/paint expertly. In other words, there is nothing precious about cardboard, and when it is used in events, I have found the focus becomes about the conversations and exchanges, rather than making 'excellent artworks...and it is the dialogue that is important. The set-up for the groups used the same approach, and each table was designed to allow note-taking, doodling and marking on cardboard worktops. These also became the documentation of conversational processes.



The notion of the 'action points' were intended to be specific, actionable and practical points, much like the 'success-mechanisms' of the thought experiment above, but we welcomed more esoteric and philosophical suggestions. Indeed, each group developed their own individual and stylistic responses to the problems, and in no particular order, the groups responses to this event were:

#### GROUP 1: GENERATING CONFIDENCE

- 1) How do we safeguard against artists 'mining' a town and its community for the artists' own purposes? (i.e., 'using' people, as opposed to 'working with' people.)
- 2) "Socially Engaged Practices" must be seen as responsive, rather than formulaic; The practice is not set of rules, but a set of circumstances, and we must resist them being instrumentalised or inflexibly formalised.
- 3) The 'Arts' should not be perceived as the *only* part of culture, but rather as an embedded part of a more nuanced and sophisticated conceptualisation of culture which includes all the actions and activities in a community: football games, pubs, OAP card evenings, the farmer's group meetings, shopping, etc. I.e., art as an element of a holistic culture.
- 4) How do we encourage a sense of confidence in each person's own cultural generation, rather than support the notion that culture is a passively consumed process (and 'provided' by artists/arts organisation)?

<sup>9</sup> T. Hirschhorn, (2000) in O. Enwezor (2000) *Thomas Hirschhorn: Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake*. Chicago. The Art Institute of Chicago. p. 29. (Emphasis added), in C. Bishop. (2004) 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics' *October*, Vol. 110. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. p. 75

- 5) We must engender diversity, but diversity-with-dialogue. Difference in cultural expression should not be a 'given', but a constant negotiation: how should we foster those productive (but difficult) interactions?

#### GROUP 2: WHAT IS POSSIBLE? WHAT IS PROBABLE? WHAT IS PREFERABLE?

- 1) Rural towns can experience "Social Isolation" meaning that the town (as a whole) might be distant from other social centres, but also perhaps that groups *within* that town exist within bubbles and silos.
- 2) How can art organisations deal with that Social Isolation? What is the role of an arts organisations within a rural town? One suggestion is to become a 'hub' for sharing skills and for building community via those skills re-purposing
  - *Action Point*: An arts organisation can be a place for these bubbles to burst together; a crossing point to re-articulate skills that are not being applied.
- 3) The places where these bubbles bust and silos break-down does not necessarily need to be an artistic project, but it could use artistic methods, such as inquiry, reflection and creative expression.

#### GROUP 3: ASSESS THE ENEMY; ACTION DISPELS FEAR

- 1) What are the perceived (future) threats of the Local and of the Global?
  - *Defeatism + Cynicism*
  - *Resisting Change*
  - *Absolutism*
- 2) How do we address these threats?
  - *Defeatism + Cynicism*: Optimism/Realism and Activism
    - This requires local accountability and personal accountability: This will resonate to global accountability.
  - *Resisting Change*: fostering creativity, adaptability and flux:
    - This requires that we nurture playfulness and experimentation
  - *Absolutism*: Embracing diversity and belonging
    - This requires that we all learn to agree to disagree.
- 3) Within all of these processes, action will dispel fear and provide a context where local action can begin to make long term local change.

#### GROUP 4: ARE WE ACTUALLY POWERLESS? WHAT CAN WE DO/NOT DO?

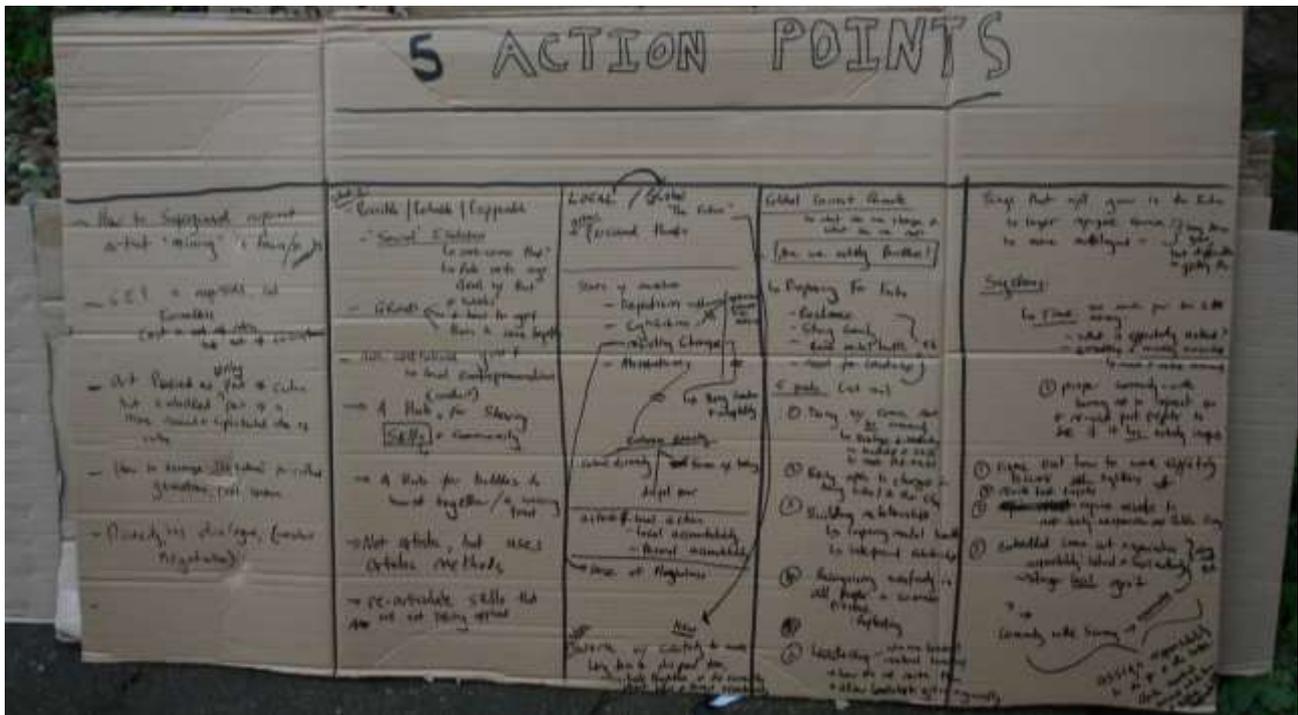
In preparing for the future we require: Resilience, Strong Community, Good Mental Health and a need for Leadership. To achieve this, we require:

- 1) *Doing with and not to a community*. (Dialogue and understanding)
- 2) Being open to change and being critical of that change
- 3) *Building relationships* (Improve mental health and interpersonal relationships)
- 4) *Recognising creativity in all people* (it is a common practice; we can all reflect)
- 5) How can we discover and nurture leaders? How can leadership grow organically

#### GROUP 5: DIFFICULTIES IN SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT

- 1) FUTURE SYSTEMS: in the future, there will be both a larger refugee community and a more multi-lingual culture (in Huntly). This is a good thing, but what will be the difficulties faced in the system's growth? How do we adjust for this?
- 2) TIME: groups are often asked to do too much for too little money: how do we effectively do what they are asked to do?

- 3) **RESPONSIBILITY:** it is suggested to revisit and reassess past projects in a proper community-wide survey to see if Deveron Projects' work has been effective: to examine how the projects were done, what they achieved, and how they could be done better?
- 4) **ASSETS:** it is suggested to acquire assets so as to not be overly-reliant on public funding
- 5) **CLOSER INVOLVEMENT:** we should embed community art organisations (not just Deveron Arts) in many different agencies, (i.e., Schools, Local Authority) and this will encourage stronger local governance



### 3.1) PRAKTIKA II - Analysis

After each group had reported on their 'action points' David Harding - artist, teacher and writer - led a collective group discussion. David was present and guided the first PRAKTIKA event, along with artist Rosie Gibson. David is a giant on the socially engaged landscape, both in Scotland and further afield and his influence on this kind of work is entrenched after he set up one of the first art departments that was dedicated to artists working with people outside of the traditional art/gallery framework: the celebrated Environmental Art course at the Glasgow School of Art, producing generations of socially engaged practitioners within Scotland. David's role as chair of the group discussion was therefore a significant reminder about the legacy and significance of this type of practice within this country.

David's led discussion explored many elements of the suggested action points, but reflecting on them later, and taken as whole, there are several thematics that collectively emerged from these diverse groups, namely: cultural plurality, interconnectedness and nurturing individual creativity.

#### 3.1) Cultural Plurality:

That this should emerge in discussion framed by socially engaged practices is not surprising, as the history of 'working with people' is often tied to questions of cultural democracy and resistance to 'high-art' mandates. Indeed, the lineage of contemporary socially engaged practices arises out of the Community Arts Movements of the 1960s

that was in direct “opposition to elitist cultural hierarchies.”<sup>10</sup> The practice could indeed be generally seen to seek-out/entrench a more nuanced understanding of culture: one that does not suggest that art *is* ‘culture’ but that ‘culture’ is the amassed collection of linked human activity, and art is only a small part of that. Culture could be linked by nation, by class, by shared experiences, or by history. In this instance, the ‘culture’ of Huntly includes farming, commuting to Aberdeen, the Oil Industry, alternative energies, churches, local Scouts and Girl Guide groups, Boy Racers and their cars, The Huntly FC Saturday Night Disco, Skiing, to name a few elements. The experts within PRAKTIKA II recognised that art is *part* of that culture, and is not/should not/cannot be seen as favoured among those activities, but a malleable, flexible, movable activity within that culture. It is something that is able to get into cracks between actions and events to encourage individual creativity and interconnectedness.

### 3.2) Interconnectedness:

This subject is similarly a central concern to socially engaged practices: the methodological approach of the practice focuses on how to bring different individuals and groups together to explore linked and different concerns. It is, after all, a practice that is called ‘participatory’ arts, emphasising an interconnectedness between those participating within the artistic experience. In this context, however, the gestalt of PRAKTIKA II was suggesting that social practices could foster more of this interconnectedness through-out the town. Rather than bringing together diverse peoples, it could instead be applied in a *formal* way, and inserted into disconnected things: for example, Local Governance or School Boards could be brought together with Wind Farms in productive ways to address social isolation, or to educate residents about contemporary farming practices. In other words, the practice itself could be the mechanism for deeper interconnection through the town.

### 3.3) Individual creativity:

Individual creativity emerges when a place is both culturally plural and interconnected, where there are sufficient resources for all members of the town to be confident in expressing their own individual and unique creativity. Indeed, in the narrative of the previous two over-arching themes, this could be said to be the ‘endpoint’ of such process-based works. If socially engaged practices could be seen to have a ‘goal’, would it not be a place where the town no longer just becomes *the venue*, but also the *canvas* for an entire community? Perhaps the goal of all socially engaged artworks is to achieve a Beuysian utopia where everyone is an artist, and it is no longer the role of commissioned experts to encourage individual creativity, because citizens are already confident enough to be creative, reflective and expressive. It would signal the ‘success’ of a place like Deveron Projects if it was no longer needed or necessary. This is utopian dreaming, I recognise, but in the face of the paralysis of Wicked Problems and the future of the Anthropocene, such dreaming is perhaps our only weapon.

## 4) Conclusion

The ideas that emerged out of PRAKTIKA II are broad-brush thoughts that do not offer practical, daily-implementable success-mechanisms, but rather gives us a framework for future working. The original PRAKTIKA event was 3 days of reflection, insight, discussion, critique and debate for 12 people. PRAKTIKA II had 2 hours to address the future of such practices for an entire nation. In this comparison, we must not have too many expectations, but I think there are two salient notions that resonated with me when we left that OAP hall.

Firstly, the room was filled with excellent, profound and dedicated thinkers on the subject. Six years ago, in the original PRAKTIKA event, there was little language, theory or critique

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<sup>10</sup> C. Bishop. (2012) *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London, Verso. p. 177.

from which to draw. At PRAKTIKA II, we had award-winning artists, respected academics, leading cultural policy makers, invested local citizens and dedicated governmental agents all talking with each other with a common purpose. While the Wicked Problem of Participation will no doubt still haunt us, we must take confidence - and pride in the fact - that the landscape of Scotland is littered with dedicated, committed, respected and profound thinkers on the subject. Indeed, this is the legacy of figures like David Harding, and of organisations like Deveron Projects: they have forged a sturdy basis, a framework and good ground on which to begin to move forward. We have developed the lens, language and legs in ways others contexts/countries have not, and we must capitalise on that if we are to stay leaders in the field.

Secondly, the issues and subjects that emerged, while difficult to achieve, are useful and important to discuss if we want to aim high. We must not be afraid to address them because we have proved that we have the expertise and agency to tackle them. It took many years for Deveron Arts/Projects to get to the position of strength it now occupies; we can now take some time to address these points, appropriately and efficiently. We are now beyond our difficult insecure teenage years where we lacked the language or skills in our graceless fumbings. This event was an excellent start to that important conversation, and while we may not have achieved actionable, implementable points, I read the experience as a positive one. It took 21 years to get here, and while there is a sense of urgency, we should have the confidence to walk slowly but strongly into the future.

## APPENDIX:

### A small Scottish town

(Written by Claudia Zeiske on the occasion of Deveron Arts' 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2016)

I moved to a small Scottish town 21 years ago. I arrived from a big city in Europe. A place full of cinemas, restaurants, museums, academia, galleries, supper clubs, university courses, latte cafes, smoothie bars ...

The small Scottish town, was quite pretty: Granite houses, cobble stone roads, a castle, plenty of green around it. There was also a ski centre. I ski, and this was great for me.

And what else was going on?

- The boy racers hit the local paper.
- At the school board that I joined, they said the children were becoming too fat.
- They also said the boys are under achieving. There are not enough male role models around, they said. Many of them Dads are offshore.
- There was drinking and fighting at night time, the NHS statistics for the town were ORANGE.
- There was a tattie shop, a shop with nothing but tatties.
- The supermarkets came and the small shops closed, one by one...
- Many people were in debt, they have too many credit cards.

Apart from this, I thought there was nothing going on. What is going on? Is there anything going on here? I had three small children, and I wanted them to come from an interesting place too? So what could I do?

I met two other people, they also came from big European cities. They also thought there was nothing going on. A couple of bottles of wine. And we thought we need to make it happen. Ourselves. The consuming of culture. And then we brought the theatre to town, the exhibitions that came from the city, and the music too. But few people came. What's going on? Why don't they miss it like us?

But then we came across an artist. The artist was talking to people. About their animals, their pets and the ones in the farms. He befriended the people and their pets, and the people and their pets befriended him. He also helped the farmer with the lambing. Day and night. He kept the still born ones. They are still around.

And another artist came. He checked what the role of a father is today? He created a tug o' war between Dads and non-Dads.

And another one came from the big city, and he checked out people's street fighting culture. He played Ennio Morricone deep in the night to the fighters - and the police.

And another artist, she befriended the boy racers, the tubers, as they are called here. And she made a drive in cinema with them and all the other people here.

An artist from far away Africa played with people at Christmas, he turned it at its head, he became Santa with his white helper. He swapped calabashes in turn for ideas, at the bank, at the supermarket, in the train full of shoppers to the city.

And then two came from China who discovered one of the town's amazing sons. A man who went out to teach the bible, but came back with over a hundred philosophy books translated.

And then we invited an artist, a local lass, who learned singing early. She dug out the songs, the tunes and the ballads. And she sung them on the farms, where the tatties once grew.

We looked, and looked, and looked, and there was more and more to discover in this little town. The songs, the houses, the soups, the dances, the paper, the shops, the paths, the trees, the children, the grannies, the commuters, the wheel chairs, the new comers and the old comers...

And so we kept on looking and listening, and we never got bored again. The artists helped us look. The butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker.

And the children grew up. And they can think back of a place that had a lot to look at, a lot to listen, to learn from. A lot to talk about. They learned to look. And so did I.

And this is where I still am. I learned to look. No place is boring. You just need to look.

Now our situation is different. I have colleagues, an award, some money, an office, a business plan, a safety procedure, a carbon footprint counting system. And now there is no more offshore. Farming is now about wind instead of tatties.

So what do we do now? In this small colourful Scottish town.