

SUZANA MILEVSKA

Paradoxes and Conundrums of Participatory Art — The promises and hopes of participatory arts for democratisation of society

● WORKSHOP

Nothing is wrong with participatory art, per se. Yet another issue is what kind of socio-political conditions and juridical structures call for, allow and/or prevent the participatory art to fulfil the given promises for social and cultural change. Paradoxes and Conundrums of Participatory Art is imagined as a curated participatory self-reflexive conversation that will eventually result with a collaboratively composed cross-disciplinary questionnaire. I've already discussed elsewhere some of the crucial contradictions and frustrations of the participatory art practices in the context of neoliberalism-driven cultural movements.

For example in the text «Infelicitous Participatory Acts on the Neoliberal Stage»¹ I looked at the challenges that participato-

PARTICIPANTS:

Elena Adasheva
Anastasia Albokrinova
Alina Belishkina
Tatiana Danilevskaya
Ekaterina Finkelstein
Olesya Gonserovskaya
Varvara Granicheva
Ekaterina Kipiatkova
Vladimir Kolbatov
Anastasia Kozakova
Lera Lerner
Daria Malikova
Suzana Milevska
Joana Monbaron
Medeya Paatashvili
Alena Podnebennaya
Marina Romanova
Natalia Shipakina
Arseny Vesnin
Marina Voronova
Aglaya Zhdanova

¹ <https://www.p-art-icipate.net/infelicitous-participatory-acts-on-the-neoliberal-stage/>

symposium* of the 2nd Curatorial Forum / symposium.curatorialforum.art/en

curators: Alina Belishkina, Yana Klichuk and Joana Monbaron

ry arts face due to the systemic and institutional conundrums in contemporary societies and prevent the potentialities of such practices from realisation and fulfilment of their aims. Some of the important issues to be discussed are related to different processual hierarchies between the artists, participants and institutions stemming out the socio-political and economic systems and structures that condition the work conditions, means and relations of production, etc. The main paradox of participatory art, however, stems out the promise of social change because the question of whether it's possible to substantially change society with art that is produced by art institutions and structures created by that very same society still remains an unresolved puzzle.

The final outcome of the workshop: **The Questionnaire of Participatory Art** will gather the most relevant and urgent questions about the aims, potentialities, and failures of participatory art. The Questionnaire is not conceptualised only as a usual repository of questions, but it also functions as a participatory and collaborative research tool that invites the participants to formulate their own questions and to «feed» the questionnaire in a processual and collaborative way. This will eventually enable them to develop new participatory artistic, curatorial and educational research methodologies. Last but not least important the Questionnaire can be used as auxiliary educational tool in alternative educational and curatorial projects that focus on participatory art or in academic context.

METHODOLOGY AND PROTOCOL OF THE WORKSHOP:

16th November (Monday)

online event consisting of introduction, examples, Q/A

Suzana Milevska:

Introduction: 50-60 min

Total duration: 2'30".

Q/A session, open discussion including answers to some of the preliminary questions for the Questionnaire that have been submitted by the applicants in advance their applications.

Participants' profile:

young professionals of various professions: artists, academic researchers, art historians, ethnographers, art and museum educators, curators, etc.

19th November (Thursday)

offline: deadline for sending additional questions

20th November (Friday)

offline: completion of the Questionnaire of Participatory Art

QUESTIONNAIRE OF PARTICIPATORY ART

Collaboratively Composed Questionnaire

I. PAST

I. 1.

HISTORY AND DEFINITIONS OF PARTICIPATORY ART

- When did the term “participatory art” appear first and how did it differ from the other similar art practices (e.g. happenings, social interventions, community based art, relational art...)?
- Did the use of the term coincide with the emergence of participatory art practices or it trailed behind?
 - Was the term and the concept influenced by the societal and political turn towards participatory and deliberative democracy?
 - Is there only one definition or the definition of participatory art depends on the context of its production and context of its theoretical conceptualisation?
 - Did its definition change over time?
 - Can we call any art that interacts with the public participatory, or are there other defining criteria?
 - Is there a minimum number of participants in order to regard and classify an art project as a participatory one?

CLASSIFICATION

diversity vs. unification of methods in participatory arts depending on whether the projects are initiated and organised by art institutions (museums, art galleries, festivals, etc.), individual artists and collectives, or activist organisations and grass root initiatives

I. 2.

- Are there crucial differences between various participatory art projects depending on who initiates and organises them?
- Is participatory art necessarily linked to social change, fight for equality and other minority issues? Or can participatory art only carry the idea of involving society for the sake of involvement, non-distance, co-creation?
- Are inclusive art and performance art also participatory art, or are they separate directions, although they also assume audience involvement?

I. 2.

- Is there a crucial difference between participatory art projects that are organised by art institutions and independent ones that are initiated by artists and art collectives?
- What is the impact of art institutions on the participatory art projects organised within their programmes – and how these projects differ from participatory art projects when they take place in socio-political activist context?
- Should there be a common ground, a common sine-qua-non rule?

CONCEPTUALISATION

I. 3.

- Which theories and theoretical concepts are most relevant for defining and understanding of participatory art?
- Is participatory art doomed to be “infelicitous” speech-act by default?
- Is participatory art co-opted or it can resist recuperation?

RELATION BETWEEN PARTICIPATORY ART AND OTHER ART PRACTICES

I. 4.

- Which previously existing art practices share similar goals and structures with participatory art projects?
- Which experiences and methods inspired, informed and influenced participatory artists?

II. PRESENT

POLITICS AND CULTURE OF PARTICIPATION

- Is the participatory and deliberative democracy the necessary socio-political condition for the emergence of participatory art?
- What are the major political challenges of participatory arts in globalised and neoliberal context?
- Which path proved to be more productive for participatory/community artist-run projects: to involve local artists who are deeply aware of the context or foreign artists who have different perspectives - in terms of research, contribution and results?

III. 1.

RELATION BETWEEN PARTICIPATORY ART PRACTICES IN TRADITIONAL ART SPACES AND IN DIGITAL MEDIA AND ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKS

- Should there always be a mediator as an art institution between an artist and community within a participatory project?

II. 2.

- What is the true importance of and need for boundaries that are to define “an Institution”, “an exhibition”, “a museum” and how blurry can they be when discussing participatory art?

- Where are the borders in the contemporary process of inclusiveness of various actors and disciplines in the process of generating culture that allows or prevents certain activity to be situated in the field of ‘art’?

PARTICIPATION AND AUDIENCE: INSTRUMENTALISATION, EXPLOITATION, ETC.

- How to define the difference between genuine participation and instrumentalisation when speaking about the role of the audience in participatory art projects?

II. 3.

- There are definitions and ladders of participation but in practice the border between making something with people, making for, and using them as instruments to do something is vague.

- Do we need some rules and markers to ensure the correct way to produce participatory art?

- Can ‘participation’ be forced/ initiated by one side of the process regarding its need for placing particular figures in the political field with another side silent and non-responsive? (f.ex. artist community wanting to include local government/ inhabitants of the area in an issue with creating a cultural space with no counter motion on the other side)

AUTHORSHIP

- Who is entitled to authorship and copy-right credits of participatory art projects?

II. 4.

- What is the position/the role of the artist who initiated the work/the process of participatory art?

- And what might be the most appropriate name for the person who initiates the participation, if the artist is not regarded as the author of it?

PARTICIPATION AND COLLABORATION

- Is the aim of participatory art to involve the people to make them think about the initial art idea or every person has to create a new idea of their own? (e.g. in museum context)... Or do they have to cooperate and to create common ideas?

II. 5.

- Is there a place for reciprocity within participatory art projects? (to be re-formulated by the author)

- How does the concept of collective authorship resonate with the practices of participatory art?

- Could boycotts, protests, calls for strikes and other critical projects in regards to the conditions of participation and collaboration or even calls against participation also be considered as participatory art projects?

ARTIST GAMES AND PARTICIPATION

II. 6.

- Are the artist games necessarily participatory art projects given the preliminary prescribed rules?
- Is there a strict border between game and participatory art?

ETHICS OF PARTICIPATION: VOLUNTARY VS. FORCED PARTICIPATION, UNFULFILLED HOPES AND PROMISES, AGGRESSION, ETC.

- Is there a certain aggression and forced participation during the interaction in the context of participatory art
- How experience and ethical issues of interaction with the hero/community developed in documentary cinema/theatre could be extrapolated on participatory projects in the field of contemporary art?

II. 7.

- What happens when the participation ends? What happens when the participants' hopes are disappointed, and the initiators leave and the projects result with unfulfilled promises?

- How participatory projects could become a strategy for overcoming colonial knowledge / narcissistic knowledge of large art institutions?

- Is it possible to extinguish human and society aggression with participatory art?

- Should participatory artists be exempted from adhering to the most relevant policy "Do no harm" ("Primum non nocere") when working with vulnerable communities because they are artists and not social workers?

- Could participatory art empower the community with which it engages, and as a result of that, to fulfil its "promises"? If yes, how to make sure that the empowerment takes place?

ECONOMY OF PARTICIPATION — BUDGETING, MONETISATION, REMUNERATION...

II. 8.

- How does the economy of participatory art work?
- Do participatory art projects by default expect that all investments (e.g. time, preparation work, knowledge, reproduction time, other efforts) one has to offer while being involved in a participatory project is always already unreimbursed labour?

II. 8.

- Who profits, and what is the profit from participation?
- What are the non-financial benefits from participation in participatory art projects for the audience?
- Economy of time, economy of ideas, economy of labour. As artists, we come to the communities and ask people to participate.
- What do participatory art projects really ask for? Artists ask for people's time, for sharing their ideas, and actually produce something, provide labour. How one could make sure that the projects do not become extractivist?
- How could the community profit from the short-term economy of participatory art? How could such an economy produce value for the community?
- What radical interventions could participatory art make to change existing structures of power and economic and social hierarchies, instead of reproducing them?
- How should one compare, evaluate and distribute the profit between the initiators and the participants given the difference between the contribution, dedicated time, etc.?
- Who and what gets remunerated?
- Are the voluntary participants entitled to any honoraria and fees?

EVALUATION OF PARTICIPATORY ART

II. 9.

- Is it necessary to evaluate participatory art in terms of success or failure?
- What can't one afford to evaluate?
- Does the artist's charisma help or hinder the success of the project?

III. FUTURE

III. 1.

ARCHIVE

- Should we archive participatory art?
- If yes, in which form and by which means?
- And if the art is archived, how to make sure it doesn't get commodified?
- How could we control art's use and avoid that people/institutions would benefit from it wrongfully – for example in opposition to the initial socio-political intentions?
- How can participatory art be documented, and is it possible to keep it somehow in the museums?

III. 2.

PARTICIPATORY ART, DIGITALISED ART AND FUTURE ART INSTITUTIONS

- Does participatory art need museification?
- What are the prospects of survival of participatory art/museums during the global pandemics?
- What is the level of initial object's distortion when digitilised?
- How to make participants of the project continue their activities after the artist is gone?
- What is participatory art in the late 2020, how has it transformed?

III. 3.

PANDEMIC AND ITS INFLUENCE ON PARTICIPATORY ART

- How the pandemic affects care in the context of participatory art given the physical distance, lockdowns, quarantine?
- How could we extend the participatory practice to online using tools, e.g. via AR/VR, Instagram masks, Online rooms, Hybrid events, etc.?
 - How can we care but not normalize?
 - How can we lose control and let the situation be as it appears or even celebrate it?
 - Will participatory art ever be the same after COVID-19?

How participatory methodology has transformed in 2020-s in comparison to 2000-s?

What are pros and cons of these changes?

III. 4.

PARTICIPATORY ART AND FUTURE SUBJECTIVITIES

- How can we think about participation in connection with the notions of relationality and personhood/individual?
- As individuals with specific positionalities in various socio-cultural contexts, what strategies should we adopt to promote participation in our research/art/social projects?

III. 5.

POETICS OF PARTICIPATORY ART IN FUTURE

- If participation in the art project is an ocean, how the light houses should look like?
- If participation is not an ocean, and not a forest, and not a party, and a hat full of surprises, how can we get there?

