

STRUCTURAL CHANGE: STRATEGIES, BARRIERS AND REFLECTIONS

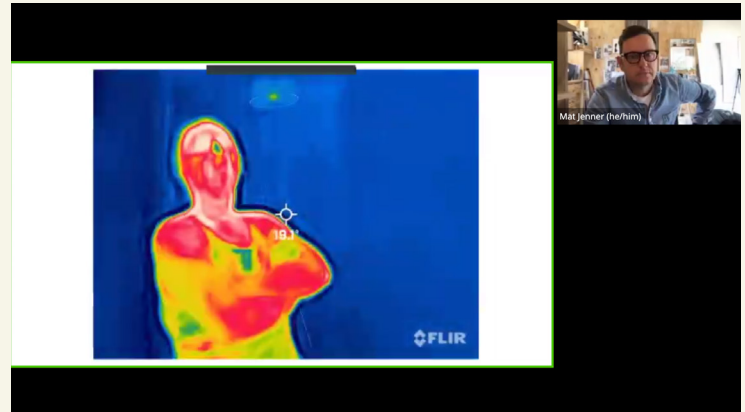
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14 June 2022

Structural change: Strategies, barriers and reflections is a text written in response to **How can socially engaged practice inspire structural change?**, the second of a series of six online *Constellations* ° *Assemblies*. The event took place on 18 May 2022 and was held within UP Projects' digital participation space, **The Hall**.

How can socially engaged practice inspire structural change? was moderated by Jes Fernie, independent writer and curator, and invited Mat Jenner, artist and founder of **TACO!**, and Nephertiti Oboshie Schandorf, Artistic Director at **Peckham Platform** to explore how socially-engaged art projects can have an impact on people's lives and enact change in different sectors of society.

Jes' introduction outlined three different strategies that we put in place to try to enact change, distinguishing between projects that offer participants one-off experiences; projects that may involve changes to the material conditions of specific groups of people over a set period of time (i.e. a year-long education programme for children in refugee camps); and projects that institute structural change on a long term basis (i.e. increasing the wage of cleaners).

The introduction also raised three questions that address the issues artists, communities, and organisations are faced with when realizing these projects: how can socially engaged art methodologies be effective within a neoliberal extractive capital system? What would alternative ways of financing socially engaged projects consist of?



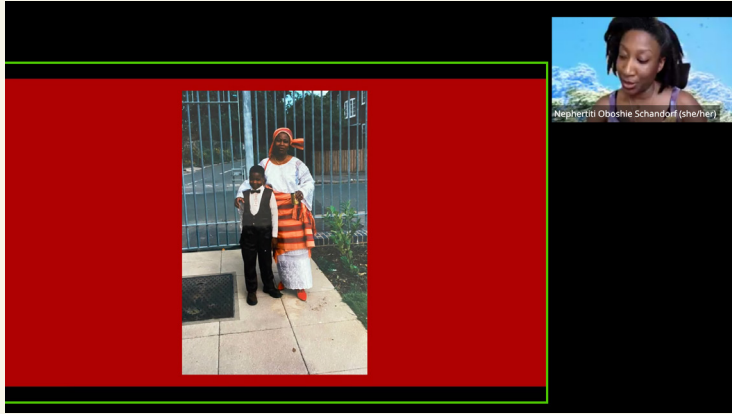
Mat Jenner - *Got Damp!*, Avril Corroon,
How can socially engaged practice inspire structural change?,
18 May 2022

How do we recognize and ideally limit the emotional labour required from artists to deliver these projects?

Through the lens of this framework that maps out both the strategies and the barriers to social change, the speakers responded using different approaches.

Mat talked about four projects produced in the UK over the course of the past 10 years: the *Growing Project* commissioned by Grand Union; *Company Drinks* by Kathrin Böhm commissioned by Create; *5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours* by Maria Eichhorn commissioned by Chisenhale Gallery; and *Got Damp!* by Avril Corroon commissioned by TACO!. What brings together these projects is the way in which they have in their own different ways created space and time for people to form relationships and build communities. Should we make art for a community? Or should art create a community? Quite often, as Mat argued, what we think of social practice falls within these two parameters.

Nephertiti responded to the question at the core of the event by exploring the meaning of the word "social" and by talking about her social practice experiences prior to working in the arts. These included working with legal advisers at grassroots level, as well as growing up visiting Africa House in Dalston, a space in East London where families from African diasporas have socialised and accessed legal advice around housing, immigration, and education.



Nephertiti Oboshie Schandorf - Personal images,
How can socially engaged practice inspire structural change?,
18 May 2022



Jes Fernie, Nephertiti Oboshie Schandorf, Mat Jenner,
How can socially engaged practice inspire structural change?,
18 May 2022

Nephertiti talked about how these experiences have played a key role in centering her creative practice to support those who are frequently excluded from the decision-making process, often leading to complex issues such as displacement, economic hardship, rapid gentrification.

Some of the key points that emerged during the conversation include embedding non-extractive practices in our work as socially engaged art practitioners, reflecting on the legacy of projects and on the power dynamics between art organisations and artists.

Acknowledging that the emotional labour and the responsibility felt by artists working with communities can at times be perceived as overwhelming and extractive, how can art organisations provide artists with the support needed to build relationships with communities?

Can we create systems that, as well as enacting quantifiable and measurable social change, can offer communities spaces to rest and be unproductive?

How do you exit a project when it comes to an end? What tools can artists and art organisations offer communities to ensure change is sustained beyond the life of the project?

The second *Constellations* ° Assembly event has raised valuable points about some of the conditions that enable social change, namely time and power. While a commitment to longevity is a fundamental aspect of positively impacting people's life, according to author and academic Massimo de Angelis, we don't understand "change only in terms of the components of social systems, but also in terms of the set of social relations (...) that constitute social systems as unity" (*Omnia Sunt Communia*, 2017 p. 85). A conversation about social change is inevitably linked to power dynamics, how we organise, and make decisions which will be further explored in *What is the role of democracy in social practice - can all voices be heard?*, the third event from this series taking place on 15 June 2022. Why is power fundamental to impacting and affecting change? And how can this be decentralised to support the legacy of projects and their long-term impact?

You can now watch *How can socially engaged practice inspire structural change?* as an **accessible event recording** with closed captions and BSL interpretation.

Constellations is curated by UP Projects and delivered in partnership with Flat Time House and Liverpool Biennial, and is generously supported by Art Fund, Arts Council England, The Barrington Hibbert Associates Access Fund, and the Constellations Patrons and Supporters.