

Chris Gilligan.

Contextual Statement :

Theatre Club – A Documentary Film of a Participatory Social-Theatre research project.

The subject of this work is two-fold in that it tests strategies impacting positively on well-being in the lives of its participants through uses of both Anthropological Documentary Film making and Participatory Community Theatre making. The work is based on interdisciplinary, practice based research conducted over a twelve-month period, completed in September 2016. The work engages with the problem of social exclusion and isolation, asking can the effects of arts participation be quantified as a means of improving the well-being and social recovery of its participants.

It draws on two distinct known methodologies, that of the ‘observer effect’ in ethnographic film-making and the ‘recovery star’ methodology used commonly by mental health authorities in the U.K. The film’s director draws on his training in ethnographic participant-observation, exploring the performativity of social and emotional vulnerability (required in the field of anthropological filmmaking) The facilitators thus set out to navigate the ethical tensions between the fields of arts and social care practice. It evidences firstly that involvement and subsequent creative expression in participatory arts practice can produce empirical outcomes in terms of its efficacy as an aid to well-being and secondly, that levels of well-being can be evidenced and measured both intrinsically and extrinsically through the secondary ‘documentation’ process of the practice.

Its originality lies firstly in the methods of participant recruitment, testing ethics of participation by implicitly engaging latent social needs as an unseen ‘hook’ for subjects. To this end its novelty also lies in the uses of contemporary popular cultural reference points (the subverted model of TV talent shows as framework for inclusion).

The research practice also creates new modes of interdisciplinary collaboration between the anthropologically driven practice of documentary film making ‘in the field’ and participatory theatre making, placing the ‘filmmaker as reactive observer’ within a secondary but socially constructed anthropological practice.

The work is important because it implicitly creates meaningful, measurable and life changing impact in the social rehabilitation of its participants’ whilst testing new and somewhat paradoxical meetings between social care and arts practice.