9. PERFORMING INCLUSION: INSTRUCTIVE ARTS EXPERIENCES

We are in a tenor of relaxation – I am speaking of the tenor of the times. Everywhere we are being urged to give up experimentation, in the arts and elsewhere


Susan Sontag, the US writer and thinker approached Bosnia and offered her services in anything that might be useful – teaching, office work, as a paramedic or directing a play. The Bosnians indicated that they needed to restore their dignity and asked her to direct a play. They saw the arts as having an important role in relation to Bosnian humanity and it is easy to imagine the contribution Sontag would make in this regard. More generally, the arts have come to be seen as a vehicle for social inclusion, and even, as the UK culture, media and sport minister, Tessa Jowell (2002), contended, a way of preventing crime. This chapter examines the emergence of the idea of the arts as a means of promoting social inclusion and considers the basis on which claims are made about the efficacy of the arts. It then goes on to explore how the arts have, in some cases, become misused and have, once again, been recruited into the play of pathologies, as a form of medicine, targeted at disabled, and other so called vulnerable, people. Inevitably, this has led to the repetition of exclusion for the targeted individuals. There is, however, a more political strand of arts activity, disability arts, which can work upon the mainstream to good effect. This genre is deliberately transgressive, sets out to expose and transform exclusionary attitudes and practices and puts itself in the face of able-bodied people, confronting them with their own banality and prejudice. The political nature and impact of disability arts is examined and its inclusive potential is considered. The opportunities for embodied and rhizomic learning which the arts could offer to children and young people, and their potential contribution to inclusion and social justice, are also explored.

SOCIAL INCLUSION: WHY THE ARTS?

The arts have long been proclaimed as having life enhancing properties, from being a food substitute, according to William Shakespeare, and of having great capacities, as Robert Browning contended, to speak the truth. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987),

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the arts have an important disruptive role in cutting through people’s defences, even though the effect may be temporary:

People are constantly putting up an umbrella that shelters them and on the underside of which they draw a firmament and write their conventions and opinions. But poets, artists, make a slit in the umbrella, they tear open the firmament itself, to let in a bit of free and windy chaos, and to frame in a sudden light a vision that appears through the vent – Wordsworth’s spring or Cezanne’s apple, the silhouettes of Macbeth or Ahab. Then come the crowd of imitators who repair the umbrella with something vaguely resembling the vision, and a crowd of commentators who patch over the vent with opinions (pp. 203–204).

The essences of particular art forms are such that they escape conventional structures and forms. Music, for example, is seen as prophetic (Attali, 1985), able to explore possibilities much faster than other forms of enquiry, and ‘a little bit subversive’ (Said, as cited by Barenboim, 2006). Its open structure both permeates and is permeated by the world and is machinic and rhythmical rather than mechanical and mathematical. Music, for Deleuze (1981):

Deeply traverses our bodies and puts an ear in our belly, in our lungs etc . . . it rids bodies of their inertia, of the materiality of their presence. It disincarnates bodies . . . it gives the most mental entities a disincarnated, dematerialized body (p. 38).

This provides greater scope for connectivity with individuals and for more embodied experiences. Visual art also requires such connectivity and embodied engagement from individuals in order to produce. The artist Paul Klee (1961) describes the period just before art is made as a ‘nowhere existent something’ or ‘a somewhere existent nothing’ (p. 4), which, once established by the artist, leaps into a new order. In Cezanne’s account of making art, he depicts an assemblage of himself and the world to be painted and from which there needs to be some emergence:

At this moment I am one with my canvas. We are an iridescent chaos. I come before my motif, I lose myself there . . . We germinate (Doran, 1976 p. 150).

Dance, the most obviously embodied form, requires individuals to form new relationships with space and with other dancers, which may lead to the formation of new identities. The moving image, according to film director Anthony Minghella (2004), helps to interrupt and punctuate the drone of the voice. Each of these art forms has particular dimensions which make them more or less engaging for different people as participants and as spectators and generalising these as the ‘arts’, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) point out, is inappropriate. Nevertheless, the arts can collectively be seen to take people into new and different places and to effect the kind of deterritorialization which Deleuze and Guattari depicted. There is also a common problem, as Deleuze (1981) notes, of harnessing forces for producing arts and this is caused, in part, by the very exclusionary and elitist nature of the arts themselves. In music, for example, McLary (1985) notes how everyone, both