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Article:

The Politics of Participatory Art

The two books reviewed in this article engage with 'participatory art', in which artists mobilize people as the central medium of their work. Grant Kester's The One and the Many argues that such works have the potential to generate new communal forms that challenge neoliberal hegemony; whilst Claire Bishop argues that in dispensing with the negating praxis of the avant-garde they all too frequently end up reproducing its logics. Here, I suggest that if the binary that structures both their arguments is overcome a productive synthesis of their arguments can be made, although this still leaves unanswered a number of questions about the role that art might play in social change.

In February 2006 the art historian Claire Bishop published 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents' in the magazine Artforum, in which she was highly critical of dominant trends in 'participatory art' practice and the discourses surrounding it. She argued that the field was marked by the renunciation of aesthetic judgements in favour of a 'Christian' ethics of collaboration, rendering it incapable of producing interesting art or making disruptive political statements. Among the targets of her critique was fellow art historian Grant Kester, whose 2004 book Conversation Pieces is a key text of this 'social turn'; and he responded with a letter, printed in Artforum's May 2006 issue. In it, he argued that 'Bishop seems determined to enforce a fixed and rigid boundary between "aesthetic" projects ("provocative," "uncomfortable," and "multilayered") and activist works ("predictable," "benevolent," and "ineffectual")', (22) rather than considering alternative understandings of aesthetics that stem from ethically sound social practice in which the artist facilitates the collaborative production of work. The May issue also included Bishop's response to Kester's response, which argued that his 'righteous aversion to authorship can only lead to the end of provocative art and thinking' (22).

These arguments form the basis for the two books reviewed here, which will be of interest to scholars exploring alternative forms of political organisation; and to those interested in the relationship between politics, ethics and aesthetics. Both books have been largely well-reviewed – Kester's for opening participatory art criticism to new evaluative criteria (Cole, 2012; Smith, 2012; Cartiere, 2013; Calder, 2014) and Bishop's for historicizing participatory art whilst critiquing widely-made claims for its artistic and political value (Widrich, 2013; Martin, 2013; Watt, 2014) – although I draw on more critical reviews below. Whilst Bishop and Kester's exchange was conducted in a rather ferocious manner (at one point Kester writes that 'all that is lacking' from Bishop's critique 'are accusations of child abuse and the clubbing of baby seals' [2006: 22]); and though their positions are generally understood as being mutually exclusive, I use this review to gesture towards a productive synthesis of their arguments. Doing so, however, requires an engagement

with much of the theory that Kester dismisses; re-evaluating Bishop's rejection of bottom-up collaboration; and rejecting the opposition between affirmation and negation that structures both authors' arguments.

Despite their disagreements, a degree of common ground can be established between Kester and Bishop from the offset, for they both position themselves as hostile to the manner in which forms of participatory art are utilised to generate 'social inclusion': an ameliorative approach to social problems that fails to engage with their structural causes (Bishop, 2012: 13; Kester, 2011: 198). Thus, they both condemn Frančois Matarasso's Use or Ornament (which, published by the New Labour thinktank Comedia, has exercised considerable influence on UK cultural policy over the last fifteen years) for the manner in which it positions participatory art as a tool to 'create...submissive citizens who respect authority and accept the "risk" and responsibility of looking after themselves in the face of diminished public services' (Bishop, 2012: 14); and for 'seek[ing] to acclimate the working class to the forms of subjectivity demanded by capital, but not to question the demands themselves.' (Kester, 2011: 198).[i]

The source of Kester and Bishop's disagreements can be located in the way these critiques are developed, however. For Kester, the issue is that the projects in question do not engage with existing conflicts and so encourage only a superficial form of engagement ('participation'), in which the goals and methods of social change are pre-determined by the state; as opposed to a 'collaborative' approach in which they are collectively worked through from the bottom-up. Though not made explicit, the point here is that bottom-up artistic practice – which Kester labels 'collaborative' – is to be preferred on ethical grounds to top-down artistic practice, which is labelled as 'participatory'. The collaborator has more agency than the participant and thus, for Kester, such work is superior.

This is a distinction that Bishop does not draw. For her, 'collaborative art' is simply another name for 'participatory art' (1). Where Kester celebrates art that cedes autonomy to collaborators (at least as he sees it), Bishop believes that doing so is politically limited, as it neutralizes art's capacity to challenge social conventions; and aesthetically dubious, as it leads to uninteresting artworks that fail to be of interest to those outside the immediate collaborative sphere. Artwork cannot be judged on ethics alone, and if ethics is to be retained as a useful concept for political art criticism it should entreat us to pay attention to the 'symbolic ruptures' of a given project, and 'the ideas and affects it generates for the participants and viewers' (26). The artist's responsibility is not to minimize their power vis-a-vis participants, but to use it to generate 'unease, discomfort...frustration...fear, contradiction, exhilaration and absurdity' (Ibid.).

The One and the Many

The One and the Many's focus is on 'site-specific collaborative projects that unfold through extended interaction and shared labor, and in which the process of participatory interaction itself is treated as a form of creative praxis.' (9) Many of the works it engages with have occurred 'outside of traditional art venues...and were produced in conjunction with local communities, neighbourhoods or sites of political resistance' (Ibid.). Their popularity, says Kester, has increased as dominant narratives cease to hold the power they once did (3, 6). Whilst it is clear that Kester is not an uncritical supporter of all such practice, he believes it can offer a productive way of moving beyond modernism's 'bourgeois' insistence on the power of the 'genius' to break the shackles of conformity; and the avant-garde's faith in shock, dislocation and critical revelation, helping 'transform our perceptions of difference and...open[ing] space for forms of knowledge that challenge cognitive, social, or political conventions.' (11)

The core of Kester's argument is developed in the Introduction, and is elaborated across three lengthy chapters that mix readings of collaborative and participatory art with theoretical observations. The first of these offers a description of three projects frequently returned to as exemplars of successful collaborative practice – Park Fiction in Hamburg; Ala Plastica's AA Project in Río de la Plata, Argentina; and Dialogue in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh. Park Fiction grew out of (and worked alongisde) squatting and residential activism in the St. Pauli district of Hamburg to successfully fight off plans for 'luxury' housing and offices on the banks of the Elbe. Claiming the land as public space, they utilised their position as artists to instigate a participatory planning process, which eventually lead to the space being developed as a park. Ala Plastica's AA Project drew inspiration from pollution-absorbing reeds in the Río de la Plata basin to engage residents in processes of spatial and cognitive mapping in order to collect local knowledges. These were used to imagine alternatives to a proposed rail bridge, designed with the interests of capital and the state in mind. Dialogue, meanwhile, worked with the Adivasi tribe to design a system of water pumps providing clean water; and to create social spaces for women and children.

For Kester, these projects blur the lines between artistic practice, planning, education and political activism; and must be judged according to a cautious, contingent criteria that blurs aesthetics with ethics. They are pluralistic, dialogic and improvisatory, with the artists ceding considerable control to collaborators rather than simply imposing their vision: they privilege the 'many' over the 'one' (113); and work in the here-and-now rather than training the viewer 'for social interactions we aren't prepared for in real life' (42). Despite privileging collaboration over individualism, however, these projects do not subsume the desire of the individual, constituting 'a form of research into the production of collective and individual identity' (Ibid.). Although Kester is unclear about precisely how identities are transformed through such activity, many of his arguments here are powerful; and although his primary concern is to encourage the art world to take such projects seriously, those

interested in alternative forms of social and political organisation would also do well to engage with such projects.

Frustratingly, however, Kester's analysis lacks engagement with those who collaborated on these projects. What worked for them? What criteria are used in evaluating what 'worked' (ethical, aesthetic, political, practical, etc.)? What lessons could be taken forwards for future practice? How did collaborators experience their 'collective and individual' identities, and did these change during the project? Without such reflection, the efficacy of such projects to those who did not experience them first-hand is severely limited. Its absence also prompts questions about Kester's celebratory accounts, which rarely engage with failures or difficulties these projects ran into: a vital – and often revealing – task. Furthermore, there is a lack of reflection on the privileges and powers enjoyed by the artists in these projects: simply asserting that they work collaboratively is insufficient, and it would be interesting to know how – if at all – artists undercut their various privileges vis a vis their collaborators (cf. Kenning, 2009; Francis, 2013: 6; Charnley, 2011: 48).

Kester opposes these collaborative projects to textual forms of artistic production, in which the artist retains autonomy from social interaction and produces a painting, installation or event (the 'text') to be displayed in a gallery (and here Kester includes much nominally participatory work). In such works, the 'one' (the artist) is privileged over the 'many' and the world 'becomes an extension of the artist's suum, a kind of reservoir from which he or she may draw at will in elaborating his or her particular vision' (114). Kester claims that the production and framing of these textual works is governed by a 'quasi-hegemonic' discourse drawn from 'post-structuralism', which fetishises the 'rupturing' of the viewer's self, and of the viewer's relationship to dominant culture (48, 111). Art is thus taken to have a negative function, although – correctly – Kester argues that this often ends up 'reinforcing a particular sense of identity among art world viewers (as liberal-minded risk takers)' (35, cf. 63). Drawing on the work of the late Eve Kofosky Sedgwick, Kester argues that this approach to art draws on the 'paranoid consensus' of marxism, structuralism and psychoanalysis, with their obsessive drives to 'expose' power relations rather than seek to build positive alternatives within the present. He also draws on Paul Starr to lambast 'post-68' politics for refusing to compromise with impure power structures, apparently preferring to wait until after a radical overhaul of society before taking steps to improve the conditions of daily life and beating a retreat into the privileged world of textual production in the meantime (45-46).

Kester's argument is much less convincing here, and as it is developed he lumps marxism, psychoanalysis, 'post-68 politics', 'continental philosophy', structuralism and post-structuralism into one singularly ill-tempered pot. There are, of course, commonalities between these approaches; but it is debatable whether any one of them is a coherent enough category to be mobilised in the manner that Kester does, let alone when they are conflated with one another; and there are a large

number of highly questionable – and sometimes bizarre – claims. A small sample of these includes assertions that Alain Badiou is a post-structuralist (54); that post-structuralists exhibit an 'extreme scepticism about organized political action' (54, cf. 121); and that Hardt and Negri refuse to consider any engagement with current political structures (120-121). At best, such claims are gross simplifications; at worst, they are demonstrably wrong.[ii]

This is frustrating because many of these approaches resonate with – or could enhance – his own framework. Post-structuralism's attention to the specificities of power, its emphasis on working from the bottom-up (whilst globally networking site-specific groups), and its privileging of the contingent over the certain would have much to offer his readings of AA Project and Park Fiction in particular.[iii] Meanwhile, autonomist marxists' readings of Spinoza's concept of the 'multitude' provide tools for re-reading the relationship between the 'one' and the 'many' in a manner that resonates with Kester's postition (Hardt and Negri, 2005; Virno, 2004; Gilbert, 2013).[iv] Likewise, their sympathy for prefigurative forms of political organisation overlaps with Kester's position, but is vastly strengthened through their commitment to structural critique (Eden, 2012). Most crucially for the argument I make below, however, is Kester's claim that accepting the impossibility of communicative exchanges operating free from conflict leads to political paralysis or aesthetic deferral to an idealised future (a belief that perhaps animates his failure to satisfactorily interrogate the power relationships between artists and collaborators) (46-47; 223). Far from this being the case, such an acceptance can lead to precisely the form of collective and individual reflection that Kester believes these projects encourage; and often functions as a driving force for activist practice (Trott, 2014).

Kester's lack of consideration with the praxes that he claims that collaborative art blurs with is also to be regretted. Social movements, activists, educators, NGOs and planners have all engaged with forms of bottom-up collaboration and participation (and often involve artistic practice – participatory or otherwise – in their praxis); and there is a considerable amount of literature reflecting on, for example, the relationship between project leaders and participants; and 'expert' and local knowledges – many of which draw on the post-structuralist and marxist traditions that Kester is so quick to critique (anarchism, subaltern studies, and feminism are also important influences[v]). Informed by these engagements, such work frequently offers in-depth analyses of the tensions and power relations that such groups internally contend with (see, for example, Hickey and Mohan, eds. 2004 for debates around participation in global development; or Maeckelbergh, 2012 on the role of conflict in the Spanish 15M protest movement). Engaging with such work also calls into question Kester's claim that collaborative art differentiates itself from these 'quotidian' forms of collaboration through self-reflection and a focus on the inherent creativity of exchange, as this is precisely what many of them do. Thus, questions must be asked about precisely what is artistic about this collaboration (Charnley, 2011: 49-50).

Artificial Hells

Artificial Hells' opening chapter is a revision of her Artforum essay 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents' and is – by Bishop's own admission – something of a polemic. In it she 'appeals for more bold, affective and troubling forms of participatory art and criticism' (7), believing critics such as Kester to venerate a cosy form of artistic practice that reproduces the logics of 'social inclusion' rather than challenging the structural causes of exclusion. While Kester claims that art discourse centres on the power of the individual artist to rupture the sensibilities of the viewer, Bishop laments a turn to shallow and facile talk of consensual 'community' and the denigration of the individual producer, as if this is enough to distance artworks (and artists) from neoliberalism (12-20). In this discourse, she believes, talk of 'aesthetics' and 'quality' are shunned for fear of appearing elitist, with the result that value judgements – necessary for political orientation – are disavowed (8); and that participatory art becomes of little interest to 'spectators' – those who encounter the work through documentation rather than as a participant. Thus, 'art enters a realm of useful, ameliorative and ultimately modest gestures, rather than the creation of singular acts that leave behind them a troubling wake.' (23) Park Fiction is not mentioned, but one can easily imagine the critique being applied here: attractive though its park is, it is an undeniably 'modest' intervention in a city that is largely governed in the interests of capital, and – nominally, at least – the participatory planning processes instigated by the group are similar to the 'consultations' so beloved of contemporary governance.

Despite her critique, Bishop is not against participatory art per se, but insists that participation should not be the be-all-and-end-all of artistic practice. Rather, it should function a means for exploring discomfort, dissensus and antagonism – a constant call to arms against the stagnant status quo (whether capitalist or otherwise). Throughout the rest of the book, she analyses participatory art practices from 1917 onwards – from Bolshevik Proletkult's commitment to mass spectacle to contemporary 'relational aesthetics', with its emphasis on in-gallery participation as a way to create temporary, 'microtopian' spaces. Along the way she engages with Latin American performance theatre, the British Community Arts tradition, artistic practice in the Eastern Bloc and more besides – certainly much more than can be productively engaged with in the space of this review. Music even makes a brief appearance, with Bishop discussing the work of Persimfans – a conductorless orchestra active in the Soviet Union in the 1920s – and Arsenii Avraamov's 'hooter symphonies', composed for the sirens, hooters, whistles, guns and horns of Soviet cities.[vi] These are 'clustered' around three historical moments: the 'collective' moment of 1917, the existentially-informed critique of alienation and authority that surfaced in 1968, and a turn to 'identity' and 'community' following the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Bishop's argument is not so much that participatory art 'reacted' to these eventful moments, but that it prefigured and responded to the

cataclysmic changes embodied in them (and, indeed, was part of them).

Bishop's commitment to negation and disruption does not mean that she lacks contextual specificity. Whilst she is able to trace broad trends across time and space – claiming, for example, that the privileging of immediate experience over lasting artistic significance in much of today's participatory art discourse can be traced back to Prolekult's interventions in post-revolutionary Russia (36) – she also negotiates the specificities of the historical situation in which each of these forms took place. Thus, Futurism – which one might expect Bishop to laud for its apparent disruption – is critiqued because its audience displayed such a willingness to be agitated (47); whilst the 'consummate subtlety' of Collective Action Group (active in and around Moscow in the late 1970s and early 1980s) is praised for the manner in which it utilised participation to provide for the self-organization of individual desires against a stultifying bureaucratic backdrop, without romanticising these desires as inherently liberatory (154-162).

This is not always so successful, however. Whilst Bishop is right to critique the apolitical nature of much community art (and the manner in which it has functioned as an unofficial extension of – or replacement for – the welfare state), her lament that the field as a whole is insufficiently disruptive for fear of alienating participants fails to take into account the power relations between the artist (more than often white, and from a relatively privileged background) trying to 'disrupt' the sensibilities of 'underprivileged collaborators' (190). Whilst disruption should not be discounted as an artistic strategy, it must occur within a framework of responsibility towards the communities in which one is engaging (particularly when they are already 'disrupted' by the effects of poverty, gentrification, police harassment, etc.). This responsibility may take the form of Kesterian collaboration (though clearly artists can also act responsibly without ceding their power), although – as I note below – this itself may involve disruption. This issue re-iterates the importance of engaging with the experiences of collaborators or participants in art projects, something Bishop – like Kester – fails to do (Francis, 2013: 6).

A further problem stems from the fact that Bishop's argument is driven by the assumption that top-down intervention is necessary in order to inject or expose dissensus in the social field. For her, collaboration – as Kester understands it – cannot be 'disruptive'. This is at odds with her discussion of critical pedagogy in Chapter Nine, which she presents as a form achieving the right balance of shock and participation, and thus something that participatory artists should look to learn from. Yet critical pedagogy – as she notes (267) – is built on increasing the agency of the student in relation to the educator, in order that the curriculum be opened up to explore the diverse experiences present in the classroom, and the intersecting oppressions that produce them.[vii] The educator's role, then, is not to introduce dissensus, but to facilitate a participatory (or 'collaborative') space, which leads to the emergence of dissensual experiences that already exist within the social fabric;

and the collaborative production of knowledge from these experiences (cf. Charnley's call for a collaborative art built around dissensus, 2011).

This troubles the binary Bishop offers at the book's conclusion, in which there are two (opposed) ways in which participatory art seeks to create 'a communal, collective space of shared social engagement'. The first is to affirmatively create a 'utopian' space in which an alternative is proposed; the second is to operate on more dystopian terrain by making felt the 'alienation', 'injustice' and 'illogicality' of the status quo, leading to a dialectical negation of this negation (275): an opposition that Kester also subscribes to (albeit coming down in support of the opposite side to Kester). Through further engagement with Park Fiction, what I now want to argue is that these two forms are perhaps not (necessarily) so opposed as Bishop and Kester suggest.

A Synthesis? Affirmation and negation; not affirmation or negation

Park Fiction, I contend, provided both a 'utopian space' and made felt the injustice of the status quo, although these two operations cannot be fully separated from one another (indeed, utopias from Thomas More onwards have frequently performed this dual function of critique and affirmation). Its utopian space emerged in the planning procedure, which took the form of an affirmative, bottom-up process; but which – importantly – never became 'neutralized by consensus' (Schäfer, 2004: 46-47). Not only was there a degree of antagonism internal to this utopian process, but collaborators experienced just how hostile existing forms of governance are to such bottom-up organisation (Kester, 209; 274-275; Schäfer, 2004: 44), very likely resulting in alienation from the status quo (that I have to say 'very likely' here is testament to the importance of interrogating the experiences of collaborators in such projects). Neither 'artificial' nor hellish', Park Fiction was, nonetheless, not simply compensatory: its affirmative stance begetting the discomfort that Bishop calls for, both within the project and in its relationship to the dominant logics with which it had to contend.

There is, however, a problem of scale here. Although Bishop is critical of Proletkult's artistic quality, it serves as a reminder of the scale of ambition that participation once had; and although Park Fiction is an inspiring project, the park finds itself dwarfed by ongoing commercial developments along Hamburg's waterfront. Whilst Kester suggests that collaborative art projects contribute 'to an emerging mosaic of oppositional practices...both local in effect and international in scope' (something supported by the project's renaming as Gezi Park Fiction, St. Pauli in June 2013), his claim that '[i]n the absence of an imminent overturning of the "system", change becomes sustainable and extensive only through a cumulative process of reciprocal testing that moves between practical experience and reflective insight' (212) is altogether too modest: no matter how many of them there are, such local practices will necessarily remain insufficient in challenging

capitalism – a system that most certainly does not require scare quotes, and which is more than content to contain, oppress or recuperate such local practices. The absence of an imminent revolution (not, of course, that revolutions can be predicted) is no reason to abandon structural critique, and whilst there are obvious difficulties facing artists who would like to expand such practice beyond the relatively local level (Bishop, 284),[viii] considering how (or perhaps if) artistic collaboration might fulfil its dual function of affirmation and negation on a broader scale becomes an increasingly important question.

It is here that consideration needs to be given to Bishop's 'spectators' – those who did not directly collaborate in the production of the work but come to engage with it in other ways – in order to consider the 'ideas and affects' the work opens up for them (although here I prefer to talk of 'those who encounter' the work rather than 'spectators' in order to avoid occularcentricism: it is important to account for the diversity of sensory and relational experiences through in which one may encounter work) (cf. Siegelbaum, 2012: 217; Schwan, 2013: 255). For Park Fiction, this would mean considering the way the park impacts on those who visit it: does it inspire them to think how the world could be otherwise? If so, is this simply an affirmative experience or does it also engender critique of the status quo? Do park users practice different forms of collaborative interaction (play, picnicking, etc.) when using the park? Does the collaborative design process make itself felt in the park; and if so, what are its strengths and weaknesses? Given that far more people will experience the park than collaborated on its design and establishment, attending to these questions (with their Kesterian mix of aesthetic, practical and ethical concerns) is vital if the political efficacy of the project is to be fully considered.

Conclusion

Kester and Bishop's works are to be commended for the manner in which they go beyond a platitudinous approach in which participation is seen as a good in and of itself. They identify that an uncritical approach to participatory art supports – rather than challenges – the status quo, and one of the major values of these books is their powerful critiques of the political quietism inherent to much 'participatory' art practice. Whilst their arguments about how to move beyond this contain many persuasive arguments, they establish an unhelpful binary between affirmation and negation. It would be productive if future work in the field were to explore how collaborative art can simultaneously negate the status quo and affirm an alternative, whilst paying closer attention to the power relations between artists and their collaborators; and follow Bishop's insistence on considering the effects of collaborative art for those who encounter its results but do not engage in its immediately collaborative phase.[ix] This would ideally involve paying detailed attention to practices that collaborative art resonates with, rather than simply asserting a commonality. There is much work to be done to unpack the affective complexity and (potential) political efficacy of

collaborative art.

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i   In a recent essay, Matarasso (2013) is critical of the depoliticization of socially engaged art, a shift he associates with the change in terminology from 'community art' to 'participatory art'. He makes no reference to claims he was partly responsible for this shift; nor to *Use or Ornament*.

ii   Alain Badiou is a Maoist and is highly critical of the post-structuralist tradition (Badiou, 2012). Key post-structuralist thinkers *have* been involved in political organisation – and advocate it theoretically – even if it this often shuns traditional party-based forms (Gutting, 2001: 339; Guattari and Rolnik, 2008); and Hardt and Negri are often criticised by fellow communists for proposing engagement with existing political structures (Eden, 2012: 120).

iii   Indeed, Park Fiction and Ala Plastica both draw on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome – Kester even quotes Ala Plastica's use of the term, twice (26, 141; cf. Schäfer, 2004: 45). Whilst this does not, of course, mean that a superior conceptual framework for their projects cannot retrospectively be constructed, the influence of Deleuze and Guattari on such projects is evidence that 'post-68 thought' does not simply lead to a refusal to engage with existing power structures; at least not the point of paralysis or retreat into textual production, as Kester suggests. Calder (2012: 131) also notes similarities between Kester's position and Deleuze's understanding of identity, although shares Kester's broader critique of Deleuze.

iv   In a conversation with Rhiannon Jones in late 2014, Kester stated that he is working on a new book exploring the co-constitution of the one and the many. He explicitly mentioned Mikhail Bakhtin as a theoretical influence.

v   It is interesting that Kester does not engage with these discourses, given the frequency with which they expose power relations and their influence on contemporary art discourse. Of course, it is one thing to critique largely white, male theorists for 'merely' exposing abhorrent power relations while enjoying positions of privilege, but it would be quite another to do so to people whose gender or race puts them at a structural disadvantage.

vi   It is a shame – although perhaps understandable – that music does not feature more heavily in the two works, as many of the arguments made reflect the positions taken by theorists of musical improvisation, in particular. Kester's arguments resonate with prominent discourses about improvisation's affirmative potential (see, for example, Prévost, 2004); whilst Bishop's arguments recall Ben Watson, who is fiercely critical of such 'feelgood' communal accounts and argues that improvisation should be understood as an 'authentic Modern Art [that] speaks a moment of truth: controversial, nerve-wracking and critical' (2004: 254).

vii   Bizarrely, Bishop cites Summerhill School as a precursor to critical pedagogy. There, the 'radicality' is concerned with the management of the school itself (with students allowed to skip lessons and involved in formulating disciplinary codes); but this does not extend to the implementation of radical curricula in the classroom. Furthermore, Summerhill's fees (currently £3,000-£5,000 a term) are anathema to a truly critical pedagogy, which must necessarily be open to the poorest members of society.

viii For example, Park Fiction's proposed 'Institute for Independent Urbanism' (intended as a more internationally focussed extension of the project) has yet to take root: as of August 2014 it had no web presence.

ix   Kim Charnley's 'Dissensus and the Politics of Collaborative Practice' (2011) engages extensively with Bishop and Kester, as well as the work of Jacques Rancière; and calls for a collaborative practice built around an immanently emerging dissensus, which he refers to as 'the very essence of the poltiical, and of democracy' (48). With this in mind, his forthcoming book *Socio-Political Aesthetics* – which will explore these ideas further – is likely to be of considerable interest. A further point to note here is that this review has focussed on how ostensibly affirmative projects generate negation: it would also be productive to consider whether participants in more dystopic projects also experience moments of affirmative solidarity. The lens of the 'critical dystopia' (Moylan, 2000) would perhaps be instructive here.