'Ooh, baby, do you know what that's worth?' : Considerations of sustainable approaches to collaborative practice.

Colclough, S. (2020). 'Ooh, baby, do you know what that's worth?' : Considerations of sustainable approaches to collaborative practice. *Intersections (Postgraduate Journal - Arts , Humanities , Social Sciences)*, *1*(2), 18-23. https://doi.org/10.21251/zq6c-x898

Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal

Publication Status:
Published (in print/issue): 03/07/2020

DOI:
https://doi.org/10.21251/zq6c-x898

Document Version
Author Accepted version

General rights
Copyright for the publications made accessible via Ulster University's Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy
The Research Portal is Ulster University's institutional repository that provides access to Ulster's research outputs. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact pure-support@ulster.ac.uk.

Download date: 03/12/2023

Inter sections

Ulster University Postgraduate Journal

Issue 2 | July 2020

{Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences}

Contents

Title	Author	Page
Acknowledgements Editorial	Jane Morrow, Marc Olivier & Jan Uprichard	3
Fragment Mouth: *Performance documentation*	Dominic Thorpe	5
A Sustained Solitude: *On building community*	Laney Lenox	10
Peculiar Projections of the Demiurge	Joey O'Gorman	14
'Ooh, baby, do you know what that's worth?': *Considerations of sustainable approaches to collaborative practice*	Sheelagh Colclough	18
Re-evaluating the Language of Pain	Niamh McConaghy	24
The Bond Between Live Art Actions and a Deeply Mediatised Culture	Eleni Kolliopoulou	30
Language Standardisation in Modern Irish: *Complaints sustaining discourse?*	Jonathan McGibbon	34
In Process	Pauline Clancy	42
'More Acid Than Woodstock'	Millie Light	46
Harm and Hope: *How we relate to our rubbish*	Kavita Thanki	48
Breached	Aislinn Cassidy	52
A Natural History of the Unbuilt	David Haughey	54
Spring Calling	Lucy Jarvis	60
Exploring the Queer Other through a Northern Irish Lens	Patrick Hickey	62
Marketing Sustainability: *What next?*	Bronagh Magee	64

'Ooh, baby, do you know what that's worth?': Considerations of sustainable approaches to collaborative practice.

Sheelagh Colclough

Supervised by: Dr. Chérie Driver, Prof. Karen Fleming & Dan Shipsides

Dominant ideologies act to squeeze out the very possibility of possibility (Duncombe and Lambert, 2017). As its starting point, this article considers what thinking may need to be drawn upon for future (trans-) or (re-) formations of collaborative practices. Its primary concern is with collaborative art, which covers a dynamic set of practices including community, participatory and socially engaged art, amongst others. The sometimes semantic, historic, or ideological differences within this arts substrate can be broadly collapsed into their shared foundation in collaborations based on human interaction and connection. Casting an unapologetically wide theoretical net, this article will contemplate the issues we need to grapple with in order to develop more sustainable human relationships - the bedrock of all forms of collaboration. Sustainability here is viewed from an ethical perspective, concerned with issues of agency, expression and equity. Specifically considered are notions of social and ideological disobedience (Wilde, 2018; Holloway, 2015), pedagogies of thought and practice (Freire, 1970; Leistyna, 2004; Buck-Morss, 2016), the framework of (cultural) rights and the contestation of the idea of the arts or artists as purely professional (Matarasso, 2013, 2019; Ryan and Whelan, 2016; Rogoff, 2013). In essence, this article locates itself in the practice of *thinking* as the essential precursor to *doing* and ultimately *becoming* 'more fully human' (Freire, 1970:21). In considering the sustainability of collaboration, thinking *is* the practice.

Keywords: *community art, participatory art, collaborative practice, socially engaged art, cultural rights, sustainability*

1. 'In Praise of Disobedience' (Wilde, 1891)

Infamous felon Oscar Wilde wrote 'progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion' (1891:5). Wilde's life and works are a reminder of the transience of social mores and the hard-won cost of human rights. Rights set out as inalienable in innumerable declarations of nation states, are finite in terms of our shared responsibilities to each other, and our shared task of maintaining the common good (Locke, 2016). In practice, to paraphrase George Orwell (1945), some rights are more equal than others, as evidenced by the rapid twenty-first century expansion of the 1% billionaire class and their 'right' to make a profit despite the human, social or environmental cost (Giridharadas, 2018).

Artist Nico Dockx and sociologist Pascal Gielen (2018) identify 'commonism' as emerging from the wreckage of globalisation's profit-as-progress monotheism, drawing on ideas of both the medieval and digital commons; collectively owned, shared and managed resources. Dockx and Gielen acknowledge commonism's ontological subjectivity, but nonetheless 'buy into' its central premise.

> *It is a belief, a make-believe that claims realism. At least it claims to stand closer to our contemporary ecological and social reality than capitalism. But it is also nearer to how social relationships really function, and much closer to what humanity in general is about.* (Dockx and Gielen, 2018:55).

In her consideration of commonism, philosopher Susan Buck-Morss (2016) counsels against *a priori* reactions which calcify practice.

> *It is a mistake to adopt anarchISM or socialISM, TrotskyISM or IslamISM, radicalISM, or parliamentarianISM as a system of belief determining one's actions in advance. Conditions change, and practice needs to respond to new situations.* (Buck-Morss, 2016).

Academic Kevin Ryan and artist Fiona Whelan (2016) cite the four stages of social movement theory - emergence, coalescence, bureaucratisation and decline - in their consideration of the tensions within professionalised collaborative art practice. Echoing Buck-Morss, Ryan and Whelan suggest the 'ISMisation' of creative collaboration runs the risk of experiential necrosis, the kiss of death for a people-centred process which depends on what theorist Grant Kester calls dialogical aesthetics; 'found in the condition and character of the dialogical exchange itself' (1999).

Thus an adapted, applied, Wildean social and ideological disobedience is apposite for our times; one which demands real time relationality, an engagement with each other and the world in which we now find ourselves. A disobedience which is not only sustainable, but one which can help sustain us.

2. 'Anger is an Energy' (Lydon, 2015)

Sociologist John Holloway (2005) argues that rage, not reason, is the primogenitor of thought. While Holloway concedes our rage levels are different and dependent on our individual experiences, he maintains that we all begin life with a scream. Holloway contends that the exploitation and oppression that many endure, (and which we all witness as interconnected and interdependent global citizens), acts to feed this primal scream, but is muted through study: 'There is no room for the scream in academic discourse' (Holloway, 2005:3). Holloway suggests the myth of doctrinal objectivity is a contributing factor in dissipating the urgency of humanity's cry, as it places academics as somehow outside the scream-filled social structures which we all inhabit; busy categorising people as subjects, not fellow citizens. Holloway, with a nod to philosopher Antonio Gramsci's 'pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will' (2005:8), presents the scream as imbued with both 'horror-and-hope' (2005:8), arguing that contained within the act of its utterance is the elemental desire for something better. As Holloway outlines, anger can be counted as a renewable resource to be put into the service of both (trans-) and (re-)formation of human relationships.

Musing on the first postgraduate *Punk Scholars Symposium*, academic Mike Dines considers the paradoxes within an academic 'hierarchy of credibility' (2017) present even in a field of study such as punk; commonly populated by practitioners committed to the ethics of do-it-yourself collaborative practices. Writer and community arts practitioner François Matarasso positions punk alongside the UK community arts movement, mirroring the collective development of 'a political consciousness' through 'a very wide range of artistic action that was mostly ignored by established arts institutions', further broadened by 'the artistic expressions' of arriving commonwealth communities (2013:219). Practitioner turned academic, Owen Kelly (1984), has also noted the role social contexts played in both movements. The rise of cultural democracy, which Kelly describes 'as an idea which revolves around the notion of plurality [*and* ...] equality of access to the means of cultural production and distribution' (1984:152), emerging within the practice of community art in the 1960s and 1970s, is noted too by Ryan and Whelan, manifesting in Ireland as 'a deeply political "counter-cultural"

ethos' (2016). Matarasso invokes Article 27 of the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*: 'Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community…' (2019:44) as distinguishing 'participatory art' from 'community art' in the latter's commitment to 'a rights-based approach characterised by an aspiration for emancipatory social engagement' (2019:48).

However, the practice of 'emancipatory social engagement', or the current creative outburst of global citizens' anger which we consume daily as news, can be subject to manipulation, particularly when it sits within existing participatory structures riddled with power differentials. As curator Janna Graham notes, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the insulating effects of cultural class membership conferred by the professional identity of 'artist', such separations 'distance the production of social content from social consequence' (2010:127).

3. 'The bureaucratisation of the mind' (Freire, 1990)

Theorists and practitioners alike have reflected on the 'bureaucratic turn' within participatory arts (Bishop, 2012; Hope, 2011; Jeffers and Moriarty, 2017; Kelly, 1984; Matarasso, 2013, 2019; Ryan and Whelan, 2016). As Ryan and Whelan (2016) note in the evolution of collaborative practice within the framework of social movement theory: with professionalisation comes bureaucratisation and inevitably institutionalisation. In the case of the UK as Bishop (2012) has noted, artists were instrumentalised as agents of the (New Labour) state, facilitating trickle down 'engagement' and 'regeneration.' Artist and academic Sophie Hope (2017) traces the lineage of this creative social amelioration to Victorian missionary 'civilising' logic, aligning with educator Paulo Freire's conception of 'false charity' (1970:21), a softening of oppressor power wherein rights are converted into privileges which can be bestowed, as well as removed from above. Matarasso's central thesis that 'everyone involved in participatory art is an artist because an artist is defined by the act of making art' refutes the Enlightenment idea of '*being* rather than *doing*' (2019:49) [author's italics] enshrined in the 'lone genius' theory of art. This professional insistence on delineation 'between artist and non-artist, thereby establishing an asymmetrical power relation' (Ryan and Whelan, 2016) speaks to Freire's 'bureaucratisation of the mind' (Ryan and Whelan, 2016), wherein the dialogue essential to exchange becomes orchestrated turn-taking and 'epistemological curiosity is discouraged or deadened' (Leistyna, 2004:20). In this scenario, cultural collaboration disassociated from the collective practice of rights between equal partners runs the risk of creating unsustainable dependencies, contained within an anaesthetising 'ISM'.

Buck-Morss observes the cognitive dissonance at the heart of global capitalISM, symptomatic of the kind of mental bureaucracy that Freire describes as deskilled indoctrination instead of empowering criticality and agency. Buck-Morss highlights the logic glitches whereupon the free market has more global support and protection than governments give their citizens.

> *The new tautology: Our subjection to the capitalist ethic produces the objectivized spirit of capitalism, which reproduces the capitalist ethic, in an eternal return of the same* (Buck-Morss, 2016).

4. 'Heaven is a place on earth' (Nowells and Shipley, 1987)

When Belinda Carlisle sings about a metaphysical notion of paradise made concrete as a tangible lived experience; by a shared epistemic value of 'love coming first' (Nowells and Shipley, 1987) she echoes the wisdom of Freire and his pedagogical parameters for true dialogue; love not domination, humility not elitism, faith in the power of (wo)man to be fully human and hope as a challenge to be responded to. Now that's what I call a sustainable methodology! Whether

it is termed utopian thinking or peace building, imagining the future we want and how we might get there is an essential collective requirement, something far too important to be left to market forces. Activist Steve Duncombe and artist Steve Lambert focus on the concept of utopia as an essential component in the realisation of change:

> *We will share our theory of power with you now: the dominant system does not dominate because most people agree with it; it dominates because we cannot imagine an alternative* (Duncombe and Lambert, 2017:257).

Buck-Morss echoes this problematic stasis whereupon the world's 99% are in 'a mutually dependent social relationship' with the devils we know, insistent on 'believing that the bad old is better than the possibility of the new being good…' (2016).

However, care is needed in (trans-) or (re-) forming our collaborative cultural practices. The temptation to flatten participants into inflexible and unchallenging processes is to rerun the instrumentality of Freire's participatory turn-taking, typical of many people's lacklustre educational experiences. Artist and academic Susanne Bosch cites the Convivialist Manifesto and its recognition of conflict as socially 'necessary and natural' (2018:66) inevitable due to difference within groups, stating that to deny this is a futile exercise. The manifesto identifies two types of threats that face the world: entropical ('material, technical, ecological and economical') and anthropogenic: ('moral and political') (2013). The ability to deal with the existential issues of the former are essentially dependant on humanity's ability to fathom the latter.

> *In short, we have to make conflict a force for life rather than a force for death. And we have to turn rivalry into a means of co-operation, a weapon with which to ward off violence and the destruction it entrains.* (Bosch, 2018:66)

As Graham identifies, citing philosopher Félix Guattari, any form of egalitarian collaborative practice demands a 'constant negotiation' of 'rules and roles' between all parties, discovering how 'to think collectively' (2010:136) as part of the process in order 'to mobilise "a population able to impose its interests"' (2010:134).

5. 'On Being Serious In the Art World' (Rogoff, 2013)

Academic Irit Rogoff makes a case for (re-) instatement of seriousness in an art world which she characterises as made up of 'individual acts of creativity, invention, excelling, and branding rather than notions of common ground' (2013:63). She points out that all attempts at 'serious' professional cultural production whether they are located in the 'gigantic museums' or 'self-organised groups' (2013:68) are triangulated as art and ultimately homogenised as 'visual excitements, displayable objects, or other "consumables'" (2013:69). Rogoff recognises this as a paradox wherein the processes of critique and reflexivity become neutered by their siloed categorization as creative outputs, with no structural or holistic implications. As with the university 'sector' trapped within a dominant ISM, Rogoff underlines 'the internalisation of market values' where 'transferable knowledge' is commodified to become 'cultural entrepreneurship' so becomes 'the dominant reality of the art world' (2013:69). Proposing a methodology which could be called upon to break this circular reproduction of the capitalist ethic (Buck-Morss, 2016), Rogoff offers us 'atmospheres of seriousness' (2013:70) adapting philosopher Bruno Latour's idea of 'atmospheres of democracy' (2013:70) wherein it is not the institutionalised elements of procedure which dictate action or inaction

but the coalescing of people around an issue or concern. Rogoff suggests that awareness of market logic does not have to mean an impotent acquiescence to it, in that 'remaining *unconvinced* is one stratum of the sharing of seriousness – not instrumentalised as either protest or analysis, but rather as a state of being' (2013:70). Folded into Rogoff's notion of seriousness as a state of being is the potential of targeted enquiry.

> *In the university we know that the questions we ask are far more important than the answers we might provide, that the questions are our potential for changing the basis of our thought.* (Rogoff, 2013:73)

Residing within our collective ability to question ourselves and one other, lies our innate and potentially infinite natural resource of 'epistemological curiosity' (Leistyna, 2004:20) and with it the potential of (trans-) and (re-) formation of disciplines - academic and artistic - which are reliant on it. The future sustainability of these fields, heavily underpinned by collaboration in one form or another, requires the renewal of criticality; *thinking as a practice*, to be put to the service of each other.

References

Bishop, C. (2012) *Artificial hells: Participatory art and the politics of spectatorship*. London: Verso.

Bosch, S. (2018) Where values emerge: an in-depth exploration of the Collaborative Arts Partnership Programme's process, discoveries and learning. *In*: Turney E., ed. *Learning in Public: transEuropean collaborations in socially engaged art.* Barcelona: Create and the Live Art Development Agency, 60-81.

Buck-Morss, S. (2016) A Commonist Ethics. *FIELD A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism,* 5 (Fall). Available from: http://field-journal.com/issue-5/a-commonist-ethics [Accessed 8 October 2019]

Dines, M. (2017) *Academia As Subversion:* The Birth of the Punk Scholars Network. *Itchy Monkey Press*. Available from: http://itchymonkeypress.com/mike-dines/punk-scholars-network/ [Accessed 23 October 2019]

Dockx, N., and Gielen, P., eds. (2018) *Commonism: A New Aesthetics of the Real.* Amsterdam: Valiz.

Duncombe, S. and Lambert, S. (2017) Lessons from Utopia. *Visual Inquiry: Learning & Teaching Art*, 6 (2) 253–72. doi: 10.1386/vi.6.2.253_1 [Accessed 21 January 2019]

Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Giridharadas, A. (2018) *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World*. New York: Alfred A Knopf.

Graham, J. (2010) Between a Pedagogical Turn and a Hard Place: Thinking with Conditions. In: O'Neill, P., and Wilson M., eds. *Curating and the Educational Turn. London*: Open Editions, 124–139.

Green European Journal (2013) *The Convivialist Manifesto*. Brussels: Green European Journal. Available from: https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/the-convivialist-manifesto/ [Accessed 23 October 2019]

Holloway, J. (2005) *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today*. London: Pluto Press.

Hope, S., (2011) *Participating in the wrong way? Four experiments by Sophie Hope*. Cultural Democracy Editions. Available from: https://sophiehope.org.uk/research/ [Accessed 20 March 2018]

Jeffers, A. and Moriarty, G. eds. (2017) *Culture, democracy and the right to make art: the British community arts movement*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Kelly, O. (1984) *Community, art and the state*. London: Comedia.

Kester, G. (1999) Dialogical Aesthetics: A Critical Framework For Littoral Art. *Variant*, 9 (Winter) Available from: https://www.variant.org.uk/9texts/KesterSupplement.html [Accessed 10 October 2019]

Leistyna, P. (2004) Presence of Mind in the Process of Learning and Knowing: A Dialogue with Paulo Freire. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 31 (1),17-29.

Locke, J. (2016) *Second treatise of government and a letter concerning toleration.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lydon, J. (2015) *Anger is an Energy: My Life Uncensored*. London: Simon & Schuster.

Matarasso, F. (2013) 'All In This Together': The Depoliticisation of Community Art In Britain, 1970-2011. *In: Community, Art, Power: 5th International Community Arts Festival*, 30 March - 3 April 2011, Rotterdam, 214-240.

Matarasso, F. (2019) A Restless Art: How participation won, and why it matters. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

Nowells, R. and Shipley, E. (1987) *Heaven Is a Place on Earth*. Los Angeles: MCA Records.

Rogoff, I. (2013) On Being Serious In the Art World. In: Butt, G., and Rogoff, I. *Visual cultures as seriousness*. London: Goldsmiths, University of London and Sternberg Press, 63-80.

Ryan K., and Whelan, F. (2016) Beating the Bounds of Socially-Engaged Art? A Transdisciplinary Dialogue on a Collaborative Art Project with Youth in Dublin, Ireland. *FIELD A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism*, 4 (Spring). Available from: http://field-journal.com/issue-4/beating-the-bounds-of-socially-engaged-art-a-transdisciplinary-dialogue-on-a-collaborative-art-project-with-youth-in-dublin-ireland [Accessed 24 October 2019]

Orwell, G. (1945) *Animal Farm*. New edition. London: Penguin Classics, 2010.

Wilde, O. (1891) *The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Other Works*. Reprint, London: Verso, 2018.