

## **Practising equality? Issues for co-creative and participatory practices addressing social justice and equality**

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### **Summary:**

We increasingly find co-creativity and participation as central aspects of practices across art and design (including architecture). The politics of social justice and equality continue to underlie and inspire these practices. The discourse on Web 2.0 addresses co-creativity and participation, but from quite different perspectives. One of the key aspects of these discourses is the extent to which they recognise context as a critical factor. The other critical factor is the understanding of equality, not in terms of a general social aspiration, but rather as a function within a creative practice. We believe that practices can offer distinctive understandings to debates on social justice and equality. Practitioners seeking social justice and equality describe the importance of involving participants and co-creators, not through evenness of participation, but rather through discernment opening out to larger audiences.

**Keywords:** aesthetics, art, co-creativity, design, equality, participation, Web 2.0.

### **Introduction**

In New York, if you are selling watches and handbags from a table on the street, you need a license, to be on a legal street, and to be on a legal spot. A legal spot is ten feet from a crossing, twenty feet from the door to a building. Your table has to be eighteen inches from the curb. It cannot be more than eight feet long, three feet wide and two feet high. You can store stuff under it, but not next to it. If you follow all these rules then the police can only move you on if there is an emergency or a major event.

All this information and more is contained in the *Vendor Power* poster (2009). *Vendor Power* is a project within the Center for Urban Pedagogy's (CUP) *Making Policy Public* programme. CUP pairs policy advocates with graphic designers to produce fold out posters. CUP chooses project participants through a jury process and facilitates their collaboration. In this case the policy advocates were *The Street Vendor Project*, which is a 700 member organisation working to protect their rights and promote vendor-friendly reform.

CUP's programmes, and *Making Policy Public* in particular, demonstrate the potential for a design practice to contribute to social justice and equality. In conventional design terms the clients of the *Vendor Power* project are the street vendors, though in this case a core group of organisers within a wider association are participants in the process and the whole association are recipients of the product. The design process is clearly focused on opening up access and information to that client group. The design for the *Vendor Power* poster demonstrates simple graphics and text using the five common languages of members of association. The text explains the most commonly violated laws. The poster is easily and simply duplicated and disseminated. The design process was oriented around a set of issues that addressed social justice and equality for a marginalised group.

As such the *Vendor Power* poster is a good example of a design process, and it is in the difference in the relationship between CUP, the designers and The Street Vendor Project, that co-creativity and participation is demonstrated. The wider *Making Policy Public* programme, of which it represents an iteration, is instigated by CUP and engages with a range of organisations and associations that are advocating in policy contexts and engaged with the everyday life of the city.

This project demonstrates aspects of participatory design as summarised in a recent issue of *Co-Design* by Greenbaum and Loi: equalising power relations; situation based actions; mutual learning; as well as democratic practices (2012, 82). We will return to the full list later. Clearly *Vendor Power* is seeking to equalise power relations by making information that affects individuals' ability to make a living easily accessible. As a design project *Vendor Power* is precisely a 'situation based action' which comes out of its context (and the whole *Making Policy Public* programme is inspired by and effective within its context). The project clearly involves 'mutual learning,' between designer and advocacy group, and between advocacy group and the people it represents. Finally and importantly *Vendor Power* engages 'democratic practices,' but not in a simplistic sense. If the City of New York proposed to change policy on street selling it would develop the policy and then consult on it by seeking to receive the widest possible response to a public consultation. When CUP seeks to engage with public policy through a co-creative and participatory process the end result is the widest distribution and use of the poster, but the process of its production is collaborative but not democratic in the same sense. We believe that understanding the practices of co-creativity and participation reveal a complexity around working with issues of equality and social justice.

Paul Harris, film practitioner and educator, is interested in the emergence of co-creativity and participation as new trends in the production of media, in particular in relation to film and television. Chris Fremantle, researcher and producer in public art, is interested in the challenges of co-creative and participatory work in public contexts. The aim of this article is to explore the specific issues for social justice and equality arising from co-creative and participatory practices through examples, including the design focused organisation Center for Urban Pedagogy and the artist Suzanne Lacy, juxtaposed with relevant theory drawn from the literatures of art, design and Web 2.0. Co-creative and participatory practices are not limited to artists and designers. Charles Leadbeater's *We-Think* (2009) and Clay Shirky's *Here Comes Everybody* (2008) both describe these processes in the context of Web 2.0. Our examples have been chosen to challenge practices to change as well as to evidence processes of seeking change in society.

We do not offer a philosophical definition of social justice and equality. Rather we highlight the political motivations of practitioners to address specific issues of social justice and equality and focus on the ways in which they act to address the issues.

Practitioners across art and design, including architecture, tend to use slightly different and sometimes overlapping terminologies such as participation, co-creativity, co-design, social practice, service design or community engagement to place emphasis on different aspects of the central ambition.<sup>1</sup> We are not going to attempt to define each of these or offer a hierarchy, but rather accept co-creativity and participation as a broad terminology which we will nuance through our examples.

We are also not going to offer an explanation of why artists and designers are using co-creative and participatory practices, though we are going to highlight the extent to which practitioners reference political inspirations.

Although the roots of co-creativity and participation pre-date the communications technology developments enabling Web 2.0, that development has functioned as a catalyst and escalated the rate of development. This has resulted in a far greater attention to co-creativity and participation. We recognise that as a result there is also a process of mutual influence between creative practices, commercial interests and policy priorities: no one is fully autonomous or fully authoritative. But we are not suggesting that artists, designers and programmers are all doing the same thing. They are all involved in creative activity, but artists make art, designers design and programmers programme, and in the case of Web 2.0 for example, they develop environments where people can interact.

Our thesis is that whilst in each of these disciplines there are those that seek social justice and equality in society, within the practices this is achieved through constant negotiation and careful judgement rather than democratic processes. We imagine that there are two metaphorical ways to act on the aspiration to a more equal society – one is through a democratic model in which the widest enfranchisement and largest number of people are included. Democracy might be argued to deliver 'evenness.' Our second metaphorical understanding of equality and social justice is through empowering, developing the capacity to make judgements in the sense of discernment.

Sophie Hope in the introduction to *Participating the Wrong Way?* has articulated this as two conflicting ideas, on the one hand the democratisation of culture and on the other cultural democracy (2011, 1),

In my practice-based research I explore methods of cultural democracy as collective critical reflection to negotiate and contest the limits and problems of the democratisation of culture exemplified in artists' commissions to effect social change. By cultural democracy I mean a way of thinking and acting that recognises the cultural expression and critical knowledge of individuals and communities. Through my PhD I argued that this notion of cultural democracy does not sit happily with the more dominant top-down practice of democratising culture, which implies cultural provision based on predefined economic, aesthetic and social values. Cultural democracy, I suggest, disrupts expected forms of participation and communication of culture, drawing attention to the inequalities and inadequacies of democratisation of culture...

For her both concepts are oriented around ideas of social justice and equality, but the one, the democratisation of culture, is attempting to achieve some form of 'evenness' of access to culture, and the other, cultural democracy, values the critical engagement of anybody in their context and culture. The Cultural Policy Collective's pamphlet *Beyond Social Inclusion, Towards Cultural Democracy* (2004, p1) emphasises a reading of democratisation of culture as '...a process aimed at engaging members of "excluded" groups in historically privileged cultural arenas.' In contrast they state that, '...our arguments for cultural democracy emphasise people's rights to public space and the public sector as domains of democratic expression.' and go on to argue that, 'Cultural democracy emphasises the importance of reflective knowledge and meaningful communication for a healthy polity.'

This argument is central to the understanding of participation and co-creativity, particularly when these practices are seen across art and design and when they are juxtaposed with the discourse of Web 2.0 to which we now turn.

### **Discourse in Web 2.0**

Leadbeater and Shirky seek to understand the emergence of collaborative creativity as manifest through digital communications technology, widely labelled Web 2.0. Although these could be accused of boosterism and do not have the rigour of academic writing such as Grant Kester's *The One and The Many* (2011) or Claire Bishop's *Artificial Hells* (2012), which we will also be drawing on, they provide important insights.

Both Leadbeater and Shirky have articulated Web 2.0, and more importantly for our purposes co-creativity and participation, in terms of a revolution. Leadbeater says, drawing on an analogy with the 17<sup>th</sup> century English Levellers movement (2009, xxxiv), 'Whether we miss this opportunity to create more equitable, collaborative and participative ways to organise ourselves will be one of the big stories of the next decade.'

Shirky frames it in similar terms (2008, 23),

...the various local changes are manifestations of a single deep source: newly capable groups are assembling, and they are working without the managerial imperative and outside the previous strictures that bounded their effectiveness. These changes will transform the world everywhere groups of people come together to accomplish something, which is to say everywhere.

Leadbeater provides a list of conditions for participation and co-creativity. Using *We-Think* as a conceptual shorthand (as well as the title of his book in which case it appears in italics), Leadbeater defines these conditions by the consequences of their absence (2009, 84),

*We-Think* will not work where there is no core around which a community can form; where experimentation is costly and time consuming, and so feedback slow; where decision-making becomes cumbersome or opaque, beset by complex rules; where the project fails to attract a large and diverse enough community. It will not take off if tools to add content are difficult to use; if contributors cannot connect to one another; if communities cannot govern themselves effectively and so either fracture or ossify. For many important activities, *We-Think* will make no sense at all: performing medical operations, cooking meals, running nuclear reactors, railways or steel mills.

Leadbeater distinguishes ends-driven design processes in which collaboration is dependent upon well-defined procedures (as in medicine) from those increasingly foregrounded as a result of the digital communications revolution that are focused on constructing convivial, social spaces that require levels of responsiveness and flow across individuals.

These are directly parallel with Greenbaum and Loi's description noted earlier. The full list is (2012, 82):

Born in worker struggles in the 1970s, primarily in Scandinavia, the guiding principles underpinning participatory design still stand.

These include:

- equalising power relations – finding ways to give voice to those who may be invisible or weaker in organisational or community power structures (Mulder & Wilke, 1970), which is embedded in;
- situation based actions – working directly with people and their representatives in their workplace or homes or public areas to understand actions and technologies in actual settings, rather than through formal abstractions, which in part can give rise to;
- mutual learning – encouraging and enhancing the understanding of different participants, by finding common ground and ways of working,

which hopefully is fostered by;

- tools and techniques – that actually, in practical, specific situations, help different participants express their needs and visions, which does require;
- alternative visions about technology—whether it be in the workplace, at home, in public or elsewhere; ideas that can generate expressions of equality and;
- democratic practices – putting into play the practices and role models for equality among those who represent others (Greenbaum & Kensing, 2012).

Greenbaum and Loi's list is a set of actions, a manifesto, to create the conditions that Leadbeater describes as being required for co-creativity and participation.

### **Discourse in art**

Grant Kester's dialogic aesthetics has been central to the theorisation of participatory practices in the arts over the past decade. *The One and The Many* (2011) explores contemporary collaborative art practices, particularly in a non-European context. He has over a number of years, drawn out the poetics and aesthetics of collaborative practices on the ground, based on extensive research. He introduces his concerns by highlighting the growing number of artists using participatory and co-creative process to create work with others (2011, 1):

Why have some many artists over the past decade and a half been drawn to collaborative or collective modes of production? ...While each practitioner comes to collaborative work with a unique perspective, these individual creative choices, taken in the aggregate, reveal much about both the current political moment and the broader history of modern art.

Kester goes on to suggest, albeit in a very different language from either Leadbeater, Shirky or Greenbaum and Loi, some key characteristics of artists' collaborative projects (2011, 125):

In the most successful collaborative projects we encounter instead a pragmatic openness to site and situation, a willingness to engage with specific cultures and communities in a creative and improvisational manner ... , a concern with non-hierarchical and participatory processes, and a critical and self-reflexive relationship to practice itself. Another important component is the desire to cultivate and enhance forms of solidarity ...

Kester reiterates 'non-hierarchical,' a common theme across all three descriptions of conditions of practice. He also highlights 'self-reflexive relationship to practice' which may correlate to Greenbaum and Loi's 'mutual learning' and Leadbeater's 'feedback.' One of the differentiating characteristics is the recognition of site, situation or context as critical to co-creative and participatory practice. For Kester the interrelationship of 'site and situation,' 'specific cultures and communities,' is a vital contributor to creative practice. Greenbaum and Loi also acknowledge the importance of 'situation based actions.' In contrast neither Leadbeater nor Shirky seem to recognise context as a significant factor. The significance of site seems to be as the location for activity, to be framed or operated upon, rather than part of process, whereas for the artists and designers that Kester is describing, site is only one aspect of the expanded concept of context. Context encompasses multiple dimensions including the social, political, historical, economic and environmental. Some artists go so far as to subscribe to the rubric 'context is half the work'.<sup>2</sup> Kester says (2011, 101):

... this is a labor that occurs through the thickly textured haptic and discursive exchanges that unfold in these projects over a period of months and even years. It is linked in turn with a cognitive movement, a reflective shuttling or oscillation, between contingency and freedom, figure and ground, immersion and distanciation, which generates new insight.

In fact Kester, discussing the approaches of some NGOs and development organisations, offers a description of the problem (2011, 136):

Conventional NGOs and development agencies rely on a teleological orientation to site, entering into a given context with a predetermined set of technical or administrative solutions. The knowledge that they gain about a site is useful only to the extent that it can facilitate the successful deployment of these existing techniques. As a result, the site itself can never be generative, nor can it act back on or transform the consciousness of the development agent or the underlying logic of the remedial program dictated by the formal development process.

There is an important distinction here. For CUP the City of New York is the context for the work, the site of, in Greenbaum and Loi's terminology (2012, 82), 'situation based action – working directly with people and their representatives in their workplace or homes or public areas to understand actions and technologies in actual settings.' CUP's programmes, including *Making Policy Public*, and the individual projects such as *Vendor Power*, are rooted in the specificity of the context and in fact are inspired by the context. They clearly set out to operate on the context. But they also emerge from the context and are shaped by it. That is not to say that individuals, projects and events described in *We-Think*, or *Here Comes*

*Everybody*, are not deeply and creatively engaged with their context, but context is not recognised as a significant factor in these key texts on Web 2.0.

Having briefly considered the extent to which the various discourses describe the conditions for co-creative and participatory practices, we are going to turn to the extent to which there are political inspirations for these practices.

Leadbeater traces a specific political dimension of We-Think in the emerging computer industry of the 1970s. In one example amongst a number Leadbeater describes this with specific reference to a project involving Lee Felsenstein called 'Community Memory' (2009, 43):

Felsenstein had developed this convivial approach to the use of computers as a tool for everyday self-expression and collaboration after reading the work of the radical philosopher Ivan Illich, whose ideas provided the backdrop to much of the discussion among the high-tech bohemians of San Francisco.

The role of institutions, a central subject for Illich amongst others, is a key tension in the emergence of We-Think as described by Leadbeater. Pioneers of the computer industry in the 70s were developing technologies that enabled peer-to-peer communications and thus co-creativity, but these were (and are) as useful to institutions as they are to collaborative communities. The tension with institutions, whether policy-driven bureaucracies or market driven corporations, recurs throughout these different practices.

Where Leadbeater highlights the radical critical influences that underlie what we now recognise as co-creative and participatory thinking in the 70s, these issues are also of current importance to cultural organisations in their relationships with co-creativity and participation.

From the perspective of the arts, Claire Bishop describing her own project in *Artificial Hells* she says, 'Some of the key themes to emerge throughout these chapters are the tensions between quality and equality, singular and collective authorship, and the ongoing struggle to find artistic equivalents for political positions.' (2012, 3). She traces these complexities through 20<sup>th</sup> Century practices and questions of equality and politics are central to her attempt to tease out the aesthetics of participatory art.

From a different, organisational perspective, Rudolf Frieling, curator of 'The Art of Participation,' a major survey exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art highlights the tensions between institutional use of Web 2.0 for amongst other things audience development and the ways that individual artists are using participation and co-creativity. He says (2008, 12):

The prominence of what has become known as web 2.0, as well as our museum's proximity to technological culture in the San Francisco Bay Area, has inspired SFMOMA to question its role in a world that has fully embraced the new tools of social networking. In this respect, *The Art of Participation* is

an urgent response to a radically changing environment. But far from being positivistic about this development I propose instead that we look at ways in which artists have addressed and continue to address these issues in their specific (and often entirely subjective) ways.

Frieling neatly captures the judgement between two positions: the institutional, which can be read as potentially uncritical, embraces participation in social networking as a mechanism for audience development, as compared with the myriad of very often political participatory projects developed by artists that attempt to foreground the interests and concerns of the host community. We might see a parallel with Sophie Hope's articulation of the democratisation of culture and cultural democracy. But that's not to say that institutions cannot and do not engage in and support critical practices, after all CUP is an institution, albeit considerably smaller than SFMOMA. The difference might be thought about in terms of who benefits or extracts value from the co-creative or participatory process.<sup>3</sup>

### **Practices – Design**

Just as Leadbeater and Freiling highlight the political roots and continued contestation of Web 2.0 Jonathan Charley, theorist and historian of community architecture, writing on emerging architecture and design practices in the introduction to Scotland's Venice Architecture Biennale exhibition 'Critical Dialogues', says (2012, 14):

Such social idealism is characteristic of the history of 'other ways of doing architecture,' whose origins we can trace back through time, past the architecture programmes of the welfare state and 1920s avant-garde, all the way to the utopian socialism of Robert Owen and Charles Fourier. In brief, capitalist building production and patterns of urban development have always been shadowed by their critique that has challenged its orthodoxies, and regularly raised a banner on which is inscribed, 'rights to the city.'

'Rights to the city' might be the motto of the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) in New York. CUP reveals the underpinnings and invisible operations of the urban environment. They achieve this through participatory and co-creative work involving the practices of art, and architecture.<sup>4</sup> Damon Rich, one of the founders of CUP, discussing the motivations for establishing the organisation with Nato Thompson of Creative Time, described the people and projects that inspired him (2010):

Sparked by Martha Rosler's "If You Lived Here...", Archigram, Rodchenko, and the idea of an Institutional Critique of architecture, Jason and I, who had studied together, organized a series of events—exhibitions, film screenings,

walking tours, youth design projects—to celebrate the 100th anniversary of New York City's first building code.

*Building Codes* (2001) was the first project undertaken by the core of individuals who went on to form CUP. *Building Codes* utilised multiple methods, as noted above, to investigate and celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of New York City's Tenement House Act. The following year CUP developed partnerships with community organisations. We can see that issues of social justice and equality have been at the heart of the programme since its inception. The first project produced after the formation of CUP, *Garbage Problems* (2002) was developed with High School students and this thread of work has continued for more than 10 years under the programme title *Urban Investigations* and we have already highlighted the *Making Policy Public* programme.

### Practices – art

We can further extend the range of political inspirations as we turn to Suzanne Lacy, artist and academic, whose *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (1994) set the agenda for socially engaged practice for many years, through aligning her practice with feminism as well as working class/labour organising. In *Leaving Art* she introduces her writings from the 70s saying (2010, 2), '...personal stories were the foundation of second wave feminism, the territory was mined for its political implications. Artists and other cultural producers bore witness to previously unexplored realities.'

Lacy, in using the terminology of bearing witness, stresses one of the key modes of practice in this field, where the emphasis is on giving voice to those who are not just weaker in social or organisational contexts, but those whose realities are not normally heard, let alone articulated in or through the arts. Lacy's project *Three Weeks In May* (1977) exposed the extent of rape in Los Angeles. She comments on her own website, 'These works were set in a milieu of cultural silence on the actual incidence of sexual violence.'

The project, as with CUP, used multiple methods, including two large maps of Los Angeles installed in the City Hall Mall. One showed an accumulating pattern of reported rapes, and the other map addressed 'solutions.' She goes on to describe other elements of the extended performance (2010, 102):

Over thirty public and private activities modelled strength, resiliency, and mutual support. Elected officials called press conferences and participated in rallies and activist events. Artists created intimate rituals, performances, and public theater. Activists produced radio programs, speak-outs, self-defense demonstrations, and a rally at City Hall.

Continuing the description, Lacy describes the importance of the second map which

addressed solutions, revealing contact information for services, justice, and advocacy groups in Los Angeles: rape hotlines, rape treatment centers in hospitals, counseling centers, special committees of advocacy organisations, and criminal justice departments.

Lacy, taught and deeply influenced by Allan Kaprow, developed *Three Weeks in May* as an extended public performance at the scale of the city and with a 3 week duration (Lacy, 2010, 321), '...it was Allan's theories that allowed it to move into the public, using the frame of the city to contain a variety of "acts," from reflective conversations to media interventions.'

*Three Weeks in May* was rooted in the specific issues of justice and equality in the context of Los Angeles. Whilst Lacy recently remade the work in 2012, again in Los Angeles, this time entitled *Three Weeks in January*, and further developed it as *Storying Rape* for the Liverpool Biennial in 2012, in each case it is engaged in a specific locality working with local organisations and addressing the issues as they are experienced by individuals. It is important not to become obsessed with the authenticity of the original, and to recognise that projects can iterate into different contexts. Context, site and situation are critical and not merely the places where things happen, and issues, such as sexual violence, are recurrent and shared.

We can see that designers and artists with exemplary co-creative and participatory practices all articulate motivations and inspirations rooted in issues of equality, whether that is focused on 'rights to the city' (CUP) or the breaking of cultural silences (Lacy). We are going to further investigate these examples focusing more specifically on the issue of the scale of participation looking in particular at Lacy's *The Roof is on Fire* (1993-94).

Before we do that it is important to acknowledge that, whilst we can demonstrate that co-creative and participatory practices have deep political roots in the desire for a more equal society, the political edge has in the recent past perhaps been eroded. François Matarasso, whose research, *Use or Ornament* (1997), was widely quoted and underpinned many local, regional and national policy initiatives, has more recently reflected on the trajectory of 'community arts' to 'participatory arts' the UK context. In *All in this together: The depoliticisation of community art in Britain 1970-2011* Matarasso says (2013):

The path from 'community art' to 'participatory art', whilst seen as merely pragmatic by those who made it, marked and allowed a transition from the politicised and collectivist action of the seventies towards the depoliticised, individual---focused arts programmes supported by public funds in Britain today.

We can see a connection between the use of the word 'solidarity' by Kester above, and Matarasso's use of the word 'collectivist,' as well as in CUP's methods, but as we turn to understanding these words in practice, we'll be faced with complexities about what these equalities mean in practice.

## **Democracy or judgement?**

Lacy describes the reality in the context of working in Oakland, California, on a ten-year programme of projects with young people from Hispanic and African-American communities. Speaking during the *Working in Public Seminars* (2006-2008), she said, describing the work leading up to a *tableau vivant* involving two hundred and twenty young people as performers, a large audience for the event, and a larger audience for the media coverage, 'In *Roof is on Fire* we met every week with a team of 40 kids. They felt that they were the leaders. Out of that 40, there were ten who met and decided the questions.'

One of the challenges that is characteristic of the arts is the scale of participation that can be achieved. Lacy describes working closely with small groups of individuals to foreground key issues and then taking these into larger scale performances which represent the experience of individuals to third audiences. But so often the headline is focused on the largest number of people involved.

Here the literature on Web 2.0 is useful. Shirky describes participation in a range of social networking and digital platforms. He recounts numerous examples of the relatively small numbers of people actually involved in the co-creative process. So the number of people involved in authoring content for Wikipedia is a fraction of the number registered as users, i.e. the numbers that *could* contribute in relation to the number that *do* contribute. He makes a compelling argument that we need to understand that participation in co-creative activity conforms to the 'power law distribution,' i.e. that a few people make a significant contribution and a lot of people make a much more limited contribution (2008, 125):

The most salient characteristic of the power law is that the imbalance becomes more extreme the higher the ranking. The operative math is simple – a power law describes data in which the *n*th position has 1/*n*th of the first position's rank. In a pure power law distribution, the gap between the first and second position is larger than the gap between the second and third, and so on.

Shirky goes on to say:

... the imbalance drives large social systems rather than damaging them. Fewer than two percent of Wikipedia users ever contribute, yet that is enough to create profound value for millions of users. And amongst those contributors, no effort is made to even out their contributions. The spontaneous division of labor driving Wikipedia wouldn't be possible if there were a concern for reducing inequality.

This point is critical because, whilst Shirky seems to be offering a 'naturalistic' interpretation, i.e. that what is natural is correct, he is highlighting the complexity

embedded in the idea of equality. Wikipedia is driven by a radical politics of free access to information, an absolutely fundamental form of equality. Yet creation, and in this case participatory co-creation, is not served by direct imposition of simplistic assumptions of evenness which might also be framed as democracy.

Whilst this point is made in the context of the impact of the digital revolution, it is also manifestly true in other forms of co-creative and participatory work as we are seeing in Lacy's *Oakland Projects*. Lacy is clearly seeking to empower young people, and is highly motivated to reduce inequality, but within the process of producing the creative work, she describes the small numbers deeply involved. Whilst Lacy would absolutely resist Shirky's naturalistic interpretation (as would the authors) that participation and co-creativity would not be possible if there was a concern for reducing equality, she acknowledges that dialogue is the key rather than evenness. The conflict is not about the reality of the pattern of involvement in co-creative and participatory activity – a small number of people are deeply involved and a larger number are less direct contributors, but between whether this is simply a natural, and spontaneous state to be accepted, or whether active engagement and empowerment to participate is possible or effective. Shirky suggests that action to engage and empower would undermine co-creative and participatory processes, whereas Lacy puts exactly that at the heart of her practice. But it is important to also correlate this with the discussion on democratisation of culture and cultural democracy. Here Lacy would position herself firmly in the camp of cultural democracy, seeking to 'bear witness' to lived realities, rather than engage 'excluded groups' in mainstream culture.

Setting aside this issue, Shirky makes an important point about the process of co-creative development (2008, 139):

The people most enamoured of describing Wikipedia as the product of a free-form hive mind don't understand how Wikipedia actually works. It is the product not of collectivism but of unending argumentation. The articles grow not from harmonious thought but from constant scrutiny and emendation.

When we set this alongside Lacy's description of the process of producing *The Roof is on Fire* during the *Working In Public Seminars* (2006-08):

At the rehearsal, the adults took over. I turned into a militant general in the middle of a performance – 'Be there, do that ..'. The kids came up to us afterwards and said, 'Wait a minute. This is not cool. You need to include us all the way.' We explained to them that it was difficult to do so when you are representing the vision, the voice and the experience in the work and when you don't have art experience. There was a complex negotiation that went on around that point between the rehearsal and the performance. I'm not saying that either side had a complete autonomy, but it was a negotiation. It explains to you how the aims of the work and the expectations of the people

entering the work are a much more open field than one might see from looking at the end result.

The tension that Lacy describes is a recurrent challenge for co-creative and participatory practices, where the artist, designers and architects brings to bear, in Lacy's case for example, extensive experience of constructing *tableau vivant* performances. She articulates her understanding of the tension between on the one hand the specific expectations of the participants she and her team are working with, and on the other hand the normal expectations of the audience attending an event.

If we turn to Wikipedia, although the processes are superficially different there are fundamental similarities. A user of Wikipedia authors an article and submits it for editorial approval. The editor reviews the article and ensures that it conforms to the required style. There are operative power relations in both cases. Both are on one level driven by meeting the expectations of the audience. They may also be driven by other factors connected with the internal power relations to disciplines or practices. At another level both are characterised by argumentation rather than synthesis or autonomy. Lacy notes that the performance was the result of negotiation rather than autonomy, Shirky that Wikipedia is the result of scrutiny and emendation rather than harmony.

Where the two begin to differ is in the understanding in Lacy's case of an aesthetic focused on that negotiation. Lacy actually highlights two different aesthetics: the one dialogic of the process of participation, and the other, more traditional, of the event as experienced by the audience. This point is critical and it recurs in a number of contexts. Whilst we don't necessarily think of those participants and co-creators as a 'primary audience' because audience is constructed as passive and these individuals are involved in the production of the work, there are specific challenges around the 'secondary audience,' the people to whom the results of participation and co-creation are presented. Bishop highlights these complexities, 'In using people as a medium, participatory art has always had double ontological status; it is both an event in the world, and at one remove from it. As such, it has the capacity to communicate on two levels – to participants and to spectators – the paradoxes that are repressed in everyday discourse...' (2012, 284).

Lacy's description of the complexities of the process with the young people involved in the development of the performance is not merely complex because it involves young people. It is in the judgement of the process of participation. Kester describes in terms of aesthetic, saying (2011, 115):

We might speak, then, of a meaningful loss of intentionality in dialogical practice as the artist opens out to the effect of site, context and the collaborative Other. Here the mindful surrender of agency and intentionality is not marked as a failure or abandonment (of the prerogatives of authorship or the specificity of 'art'), but as a process that is active, generative, and creative.

In the twin descriptions of practitioner and theorist we see the description of a very different aesthetic, a formation of judgements involving in this case young people in a particular context, manifestly not professional artists. We see that the participation is not simplistically democratic, but is deeply rooted in ideas of equality, in the artists' avowed inspirations as well as in the aims of work.

## **Conclusions**

In the end we are left with questions. Whilst clearly the discourse of Web 2.0 and that of participatory art and design speak to the same issues in very different ways. They share a common thread of political motivation driving them to engage with issues of equality. The common political motivation is in fact also complex, multifaceted and leads to different points of focus for these practices – we have seen two key examples from art and design, one which focused on 'bearing witness' and the other on 'rights to the city'. From a Web 2.0 perspective the political motivation is on connecting people, structures with limited or no hierarchies, and the freeing of information.

We started with a question about how we unpack the idea of equality, whether the ideas of democracy and judgement were implicit, and what challenges came with them. This question remains. The tension between a group of people working together to create something, and the wider idea of democratic participation is not one that can be resolved.

We have suggested that art and design might have a better articulation of the importance of context to the co-creative and participatory process, that 'context is half the work', a sensibility not evident in the two texts of Web 2.0 we considered. But we have also seen that these two texts highlight aspects of the co-creative participatory process that are not articulated in the art and design literature, particularly around who participates and to what extent.

We have shown that Shirky's articulation of the dynamics of Web 2.0 shares much in common with Lacy's description of working with young people in Oakland in California. Kester and Lacy articulate this as an aesthetic, an exercise in the formation of judgements, but a very different one from earlier formulations.

Is the articulation of the aesthetic of co-creative and participatory practices in art relevant to other practices in design and architecture, and in fact is it relevant to think of an aesthetic to practices in Web 2.0?

We might particularly look to practitioners of service design, or community consultation in the urban realm, to articulate their understanding of equality and where, with whom and how they are exercising aesthetic judgements.

We might need to explore the processes by which co-creative and participatory work is made normative by policy, and how conflict with that policy, or other hegemonic structures, exists within co-creative and participatory practices and projects.

### **Biographical notes:**

Professor Paul Harris is currently Head of Gray's School of Art at the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen. In 2002, Paul became Professor of Screen Media and subsequently Creative Director of the Institute of Arts, Media and Computer Games at the University of Abertay Dundee, where he delivered a number of consultancies into the Scottish Computer Games industry and was instrumental in establishing the White Space interdisciplinary learning environment and the National Centre for Excellence in Computer Games Education. Paul has served on BBC Scotland's Music, Arts & Entertainment, Independent Review Panel, and was until recently Chairman of the Angus Digital Media Centre, Chair of the Project Advisory Board of the Scottish Executive's Future Learning and Teaching funded Moving Image Education project, a Board Member of Scottish Screen, and Chairman of the Scottish Screen Investment Panel. He has been a member of the Advisory Board at the Centre for Excellence in Media Practice (CEMP), and was until recently a member of Learning and Teaching Scotland's Advisory Council and Board of Directors. He is currently a member of the Regional Advisory Board for Scottish Enterprise, Tayside, and is a member of Scottish Enterprise's Digital Media Industry Leadership Group. Paul has championed the computer games industry and digital media sector in Tayside and across Scotland over the past 10 years, delivering presentations and addresses in both Holyrood and Westminster, and giving keynote addresses at many national and international conferences and summits, as well as many media interviews on the value and impacts of the games industry.

**Chris Fremantle** is an independent researcher and producer working in public and environmental art. He has been an external research associate with Gray's School of Art, the Robert Gordon University, for ten years, initially as a partner whilst he was Director of the Scottish Sculpture Workshop, and more recently as a co-author and adviser. He was Research Assistant on the AHRC Nature of Creativity Award 'The Artist as Leader' research project, and was on the Steering Group for 'Working in Public Seminars'. More recently he undertook a Research Residency at Gray's School of Art. He was producer for Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison's 'Greenhouse Britain: Losing Ground, Gaining Wisdom,' and more recently has led the 'Working Well: People and Spaces' Strategy for NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde's New South Glasgow Hospitals. He is a co-producer on Creative Scotland's national public art development programme. He contributes to the 'Art, Space and Nature' MFA at Edinburgh College of Art and established 'ecoartscotland' as a platform for research and practice in 2010. He is a member of the Executive of the Scottish Artists Union.

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## Notes:

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1 For example, Claire Bishop says in the Introduction of her analysis of participatory art and the politics of spectatorship, "This expanded field of post-studio practices currently goes under a variety of names: socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, interventionist art, participatory art, collaborative art, contextual art and (most recently) social practice." (2012, p1.)

2 This expression was coined by Barbara Steveni and John Latham, founders of the Artists Placement Group in London in the mid-sixties. It was picked up by David Harding and has been central to the ethos of the Environmental Art programme at Glasgow School of Art. Kester discussed the Artists Placement Group in depth in *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (San Diego: University of California Press, 2004).

3 There are emerging models of organisational practice that challenge this apparent dichotomy. The Centre for Contemporary Art in Glasgow, through force of circumstances, has adopted an open source model of programming where instead of being an arts centre with some cultural organisations renting offices, its programming is assembled with all these organisations. For a while there was no position with the title curator.

4 CUP recently received the Curry Stone Design Prize (2012) for their work and the citation reads:

CUP provides a rare, mutually beneficial exchange among community organizations, advocacy groups, and designers, helping them to speak each other's languages and demystify the complexities of urban systems.