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Reflections on collaboration

Chris Fremantle highlights key themes and issues around collaboration making use of a-n's extensive archive of texts on the subject.

Introduction

Collaboration is a description of a relationship, or perhaps it's a description of a quality of relationship. Artists are continually in or developing relationships with others whether with their audiences, patrons, collectors, commissioners, project managers, curators, funders or technicians.

'Relationship' in this context disguises the reality of 'power relations'. Artists very often see themselves as without much power. Most relationships are with others who are perceived to have more power (ie all of those listed above). Is the word 'collaboration' then a description of a new dynamic between artists and those with whom they have to have relationships, or at least a signal of hope for that?

John Plowman, artist, co-founder, and curator for Beacon, a visual arts organisation working in rural Lincolnshire, frames this clearly in 'Our name is legion' (June 2009), "Whether it is the gallery, museum or commissioning agency, a space is created within which three constituencies – artist, institution and audience – co-exist in a hierarchical framework."

He goes on to say, "This is a framework that Beacon has engaged with since 2004, where the notion of collaboration has underpinned the nature of each of its projects to date. Projects which, rather than privileging the art object per se, focus on the exchanges that take place between the artist, institution, and audience."

Kelly Large, an artist who worked with John Plowman on a Beacon project, says by way of counterpoint: "I'm not a collaborator, I just get mistaken for one a lot. I suspect this is because my practice interacts with the social. ... I want to use this colonisation of public space to explore the power-play between the multitude and the individual, and the visibility or invisibility these positions afford in different social arenas."

Collaboration, conceptually and literally, reframes power relations. When talking about individuals, collaboration implies shared aims and objectives, win-win, equality. Collaboration in a work of art (as opposed to between two or more individuals) is perhaps less clearly about equality or win-win, and might be simply about willingness to be involved in making or revealing something.

Our name is legion, Kelly Large's project for Beacon, involved working with secondary schools in Sleaford, Lincolnshire. The resulting artwork required a large number of young people from two schools to do something they do anyway, pour out of school into Market Square, the centre of town, but to do it in a way that revealed itself more clearly: they all wore high visibility vests between leaving school and arriving home. As Kelly Large says, "This would either create a spectacle of participation or non-participation depending on whether students chose to take part."

So is that collaboration? Who is collaborating? Who 'wins' and what do they 'win'? What does equality mean?

Assumptions about collaboration

For an artist collaboration can mean working to common agendas, it might be a short hand for being prepared to meet someone else's need, engage with the world and public policy. So 'collaboration' might be in opposition to 'autonomy' and 'criticality'.

Collaboration also extends beyond the relations normal to artists' practices (curators and project managers as well as other artists); artists work with scientists, urban planners, technologists, gardeners, and this is usually described as collaboration. Artists also work with communities, neighbourhoods, inhabitants; this is more usually described as participation.

Sans Façon, the working identity of the long term collaboration between the architect Charles Blanc and the artist Tristan Surtees, in 'We Have No Choice: Collaboration As A Place You Don't Expect' (June 2009), articulate this when they say, "Collaboration' is a term often used to describe working with people with a specific skill on the development of one part of a project... This is fine as far as it goes, but generally these experiences do not open up the true potential of collaboration as a process. Collaboration should ideally take the project somewhere else - a place where you didn't expect it to end up, as the input of all the collaborators reshapes the project into something altogether new."

Do we sometimes think of collaboration as a glamorous trans-disciplinary activity, as suggested by Sans Façon? Do we miss the reality that collaboration is a description of a respectful co-operative working relationship which serves mutually agreed ends? Sans Façon goes on to say, "A collaboration is more effort, more time, more organisation and more energy than working on your own. The level of unknown is far greater and it can feel very scary when you have a deadline, but this is what makes a collaborative project worth the effort: it multiplies the possibilities, taking the project to unexpected places."

Collaboration can be a description of, as Sans Façon puts it, "working with people with a specific skill on the development of one part of a project". It can describe a working relationship characterised by equality where traditionally the relationship has been hierarchical, such as between curator/project manager and artist. Or it can be about enabling risk-taking, to go "somewhere else."

Lenses and forms of analysis

The aim of this piece is to highlight key themes and issues around collaboration making use of a-n's extensive archive of texts on the subject. There are approximately thirty-five articles tagged with 'Collaborative Relationship' in a-n's archive. They have all been written between 2008 and 2012 so they represent a very current overview of reflection on collaboration.

Almost every article is made up of more than one statement, authored by one of the collaborators. Most are two statements, a few are three, and there are a couple of joint statements. This in itself is important because each collaboration is described by more than one person. Multiple descriptions are particularly useful when relationships are the fundamental subject.

There are several lenses, or ways of analysing, that might be brought to bear on the accumulated material. It's useful to look at the distribution of roles. Of the thirty-five articles, all include a statement by one artist. Other statements break down roughly as follows: twenty project managers, six other artists, four curators, three specialists or experts (psychologists, scientists, gardeners), a business and a local authority planning officer.

Many of the project managers and curators work for specialist arts organisations operating in the public realm including ArtsAdmin, Beacon, Forest of Dean, Modus Operandi, Situations, UP Projects. Others work for Museums and Galleries as Education or Public Engagement Officers, or more directly for Local Government in Arts Development posts.

The artists represent a wide spectrum of practices, though there is a consistent engagement with the social, so although the articles represent collaboration between a small number of named people, the projects involve sometimes much larger numbers of people. The projects include many of the major threads of interest in contemporary practice including ecology and environment, disability arts, revealing local social cultural contexts, social empowerment, as well as establishing new platforms (or organisations) for practice.

Another interesting number exercise is to look at how relationships documented in the articles were initiated. Not every article explicitly states the way that the relationship, self-defined as

collaborative, came into existence, but even with that caveat, the figures are revealing. Something like seventeen of the articles involve the artist being invited to work on a project. There are only three that are the result of open selection processes. Another thirteen are artist initiated. Some carefully avoid reporting on the mode of 'coming together'.

Artists need project managers to realise ideas. Simon McKeown, artist, and Paul Darke, in this instance project manager, articulate one set of reasons in 'Motion Disabled' (January 2012), "...I had devised a project which I believe was highly innovative and tackled a theme and practice not previously explored or utilised. I knew from the outset that I could not do a project of this complexity on my own: digital work is complex, slow and difficult to achieve. I have extensive experience in working in large creative teams, (over 100 people worked on Driver 3 for instance) and I knew I needed help."

Paul Darke described his reasons for collaborating as producer/project manager, "...when Simon asked me to work as a producer on *Motion Disabled* I was not only willing but excited at the prospect of working with a fine artist, digital specialist and technologist - and perhaps even a contemporary genius of the disability arts world."

Artists can be looking for particular contexts in which to develop new work. Victoria Clare Bernie described her motivation for seeking to work with a Marine Biology Laboratory in Scotland in 'Painting the sea bed with sound: the science and the art' (May 2010) as, "I came to work at SAMS (Scottish Association for Marine Science) Laboratory at Dunstaffnage near Oban on the west coast of Scotland as a consequence of a great deal of research, a lot of talking to strangers. I had been looking for an opportunity to work differently in relation to the Highland landscape. I wanted to be able to see change on a daily basis, to study the workings of the landscape at the level of minutiae, to understand it as a lived and worked space and not the silent, melancholy, uninhabited terrain of popular imagery."

Some of the articles describe long term working relationships, encompassing multiple projects. Sanna Moore, talking about her collaboration with Sally Sheinman in 'ArtDNA' (July 2008), says, "I would say my relationship with Sally is a friendship as I have now known her for more than five years and my working relationship with her is always very much in collaboration, trying to achieve something ambitious which at first has a lot of obstacles in the way."

Sally Sheinman goes on to say, "Sanna assumed all responsibility for the health and safety approval and I got on with planning and developing the actual piece. The fact we had worked together before meant the separating of responsibilities was natural."

Finally it is worth noting that there are no significant examples of failed collaborations. There are references to prior collaborations that did not work, and there are numerous references to the challenges of project development. Obviously it's extremely difficult to write about failure, though working with failure is a key strength of creative practices.

Characteristics, qualities and attributes

In order to reveal the commonalities and differences and learn something about collaboration, there are two useful, if very different, pieces of writing.

Firstly, Missions, Models, Money (MMM) published a collection of materials under the heading of *Enabling Effective Collaboration*. MMM, on the organisation's website, describes itself as, "a passionate network of thinkers and doers whose vision is to transform the way the arts use their resources to support the creation and experience of great art."

It operates as a think-tank for the arts sector. The materials on collaboration result from a two-year period of work (2008-2010) including pilot projects with a number of organisations including the National Performing Arts Companies in Scotland, Opera North and Leeds University. MMM's programmes focus on particular issues, and collaboration was a key focus for a period resulting in a set of materials to support the sector. The current focus is on models of financing.

Secondly, Grant Kester, whose articulation of dialogic aesthetics has become a key reference point for those interested in understanding socially engaged practices, has recently published *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (2011). This new text explores different aspects of collaboration, understood as a mode of working in communities where those communities are not merely recipients of the work, but contribute creatively. At the heart of this new text is an argument which values the process of collaboration, understood as living within a community and seeing from a shared perspective,

without losing space for criticality and autonomy.

This precise point is made in the piece 'Victoria Baths' by Alison Kershaw and Gill Wright (October 2009). Alison describes herself as "artist" albeit moving away from the "sphere of contemporary art", Gill describes Alison as "freelance arts co-ordinator and curator". Alison says, "...my practice meant being an artist who is connected to a team of people, all bringing particular skills and experience to the table. Yet in order to maintain my artist's stance, I see myself as partly detached, becoming an interested observer, critical eye and a catalyst for new work."

Gill also says, "It has been important I think for her to remain in a freelance position, giving her something of an independent voice when it comes to artistic developments, which at the same time she is very much part of the Victoria Baths 'family' ..."

MMM's focus on collaboration is on working with organisations, and individuals playing key roles in organisational development, rather than individual practitioners involved in project activity.

From MMM's perspective (2010) collaboration can sometimes be driven by funders, "creating a culture of shallow opportunism." But they believe that there are important reasons in seeking to develop a 'healthy ecology of the arts' to use collaboration based on "a carefully considered, hard-headed assessment of mutually desired goals."

MMM's essay in this collection, 'Competencies, qualities and attributes (CQAs) required for collaborative working' lists ten CQAs. Other lists are available. In fact you can find lists enumerating anything from two to at least twelve characteristics of collaboration.

Rather than focusing on a list, I'm going to suggest that there are some issues: shared vision, learning, and communication. The resource provided by the a-n archive on 'collaborative relationships' illuminates and nuances these issues through real experiences.

A significant proportion of the collaborations are organised around social or environmental issues where the individuals share an interest, concern, and vision to achieve some change.

For example, in 'Motion Disabled' (January 2012), Paul Darke says, "Disability arts covers work which is made by disabled people that has an understanding of the oppression and marginalisation of 'disability' - recognises it as a social construct in much the same way as gender, race and sexuality has been explored by black, feminist and gay artists. It has a long UK and worldwide history and, as such, disability art does not often campaign; rather it reflects, deconstructs and engages at a deep level with the notions of the normal and the abnormal. It is not a dry academic practice, rather a fantastic unexplored area and one that should interest us."

Another example is the collaboration between Anne-Marie Culhane and Ruth Ben Tovim ('A little patch of ground', November 2011), who although they started with different interests found the complementarity which has led to longer term collaborations. Ruth Ben Tovim says, "The work I was focusing on when we met in 2008 (taking over disused shops in Sheffield and reopening them as spaces for people of all ages and backgrounds to drop in and share stories, memories, ideas, collections about everyday life) seemed to chime with Abundance - in its impulse to reach out beyond a conventional art world context and re-frame something that has been neglected or forgotten. I think we still share these interests... We started our collaboration just as Anne-Marie was leaving Sheffield with Encounter Abundance - when Abundance took up home in our Encounters shop enabling people to swap local produce and fruit and share stories about food, feasting, growing, cooking, celebrating. This was our first 'fusion'."

Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, eminent post-conceptual ecological artists, talk about the 'ennobling problem'. For the Harrisons, this is the issue around which, setting aside ego, a number of different people, usually from different disciplines, can organise themselves. For the Harrisons, these problems are systemic problems of environmental degradation or crisis which require new ways of thinking about eco-cultural well-being.

MMM talk about 'Seeing Systems' and 'Building Shared Vision' and there is an important respect in which there is a need for the collaboration to enable something to happen which otherwise would be out of reach of the individuals. It is equally important to see the larger context of the work.

There are a couple of important caveats. By no means are all the successful collaborations built around issues. Many, including 'Our name is legion' cited in the Introduction, are about

artworks which reveal an aspect of life or create something beautiful and challenging. More than that there can be particular challenges around the different agendas of those driven by policy agendas and those driven by creative practice.

But underlying the potential problems, the need for a shared sense of purpose is fundamental to collaborations. This is rather nicely said by Helen Jones, Exhibitions Curator at the New Art Gallery Walsall, speaking about Ania Bas' residency in 'Ania Bas: In Residence' (Dec 2009), "Ania embraced being part of the gallery team and worked directly with all departments; from cleaning staff to security, the programming team to the finance department. It was rather unusual for me not to be the channel through which all residency information was shared and publicised. The gallery as a whole was her collaborative partner."

An important aspect of having a shared vision is learning, something that comes up throughout the a-n resource. In some cases one collaborator does most of the learning, well described in the article 'Movement' (March 2011) where the collaborative partnership of Yoke and Zoom, Alexander Johnson and Nina Coulson, worked with ACORP, the Association of Community Rail Partnerships, to bring the disused toilets into an art gallery. In other cases it is a characteristic of the whole.

David Cottrell articulates an artists' perspective on this issue when he says in 'Hill33' (February 2011), "I suppose that as you continue, you assume that things may get simpler. In fact, unless you allow yourself the luxury of repetition, each project involves its own novel complexity."

Anne-Marie Culhane, again from 'A little patch of ground' (November 2011) says, "Collaboration extends beyond the boundaries and possibilities and teaches you more about the world and yourself. It challenges and can break patterns."

This is an important aspect of MMM's analysis: they characterise it as 'Wanting to Learn'. MMM distinguish aspects of organisational learning from individual learning, but they also emphasise the transformational impact of learning, "At an individual level, learning is more concerned with gaining knowledge, understanding, and skills. At an organisational level, it is more concerned with evolving perceptions, visions, strategies, and transferring knowledge. At both levels, it is involved with discovery and invention - ie recognising, creating, or exploring new knowledge to generate new ideas or concepts."

MMM quote a participant in one of their pilots saying, "I have discovered myself fighting for things I didn't know I cared about quite so much. I mean championing public engagements is really interesting. My career as an artistic director [has meant] being the person who has to fight off the marketing teams in order to try and make the work I want to make. And so discovering that actually I was the person who really cared about not just how we talk to the public, but whether we could change the way the public behaved towards us..."

This highlights the issue of risk that also recurs in the a-n resource. Risk is usually understood as a negative, something to be avoided or mitigated. This is true of failure as well. Artists and other creative practitioners have a complex relationship with both risk and failure. It is perhaps one of the most important aspects of creative practices.

Jon Lockhart describes the benefits of his working relationship with Fiona Heathcote ('Saturdays', June 2011) in terms of, "...the trust of your collaborator gives you the confidence to take risks which is a massive consideration within a collaborative relationship."

In 'A little patch of ground' (November 2011), Anne-Marie Culhane highlights the risk in taking an approach that breaks the pattern of the arts, "My perception is that we seem to be able to consistently override ego elements in our collaboration. We are both exploring the same territory and it feels important to support each other in this. We are taking risks all the way as we are continually trying out new material and approaches. Placing the 'ecological self' uncompromisingly at the centre of a collaborative participatory art process feels fairly new."

Theresa Liang and William West, co-curators of LiangWest, consciously worked with their peer group rather than seeking to work with more established practitioners, say ('Boyfriend Material', July 2010), "There is always the chance that it may not work, and we acknowledge that it's a huge risk to develop untested ways of working, but models don't exist just to be copied - we should ultimately challenge and reinvent them."

Victoria Clare Bernie suggests in 'Painting the sea bed with sound: the science and the art' (May 2010) that the failure of a project idea resulted in a reframing of her practice towards a more ambitious objective, "The work of the residency, *Slow Water*, is an attempt to map the present condition of water in Scotland. An impossible project - likely to fail - but in that failure it

has changed my practice fundamentally. Where I had for some years developed an almost microscopic language of digital video sound and image installations documenting the movement of insects and water surfaces, I now work between a micro and a macro world.”

Valuing risk-taking and tolerating failure, important factors for MMM and others in creative practice as well as in collaboration, also relate directly to adaptability and the ability to respond to changing circumstances.

Risk is not always because of the ambition of the artwork. Sometimes collaborations build trust and enthusiasm between individuals beyond the capacity of the host organisation to itself engage and support. For instance in ‘The Whitworth Social’ (February 2009), Andrea Hawkins describes the first public engagement event resulting from a new strategy adopted by Manchester’s Whitworth Art Gallery. She describes one of the key aspects to good collaborations, particularly with institutions, the brief, or in this case the Project Definition document, “The practical stuff was important if the project was to get off to the best start, therefore we needed to understand our roles and establish clear boundaries. I think it helped that I drew up a Project Definition document that set out the basic purpose of the collaboration, the timescale and budget. Importantly it reiterated that the artist led the project and the gallery was there to support and facilitate.”

Whilst the event was a success, it is clear that parts of the organisation have not fully adjusted to its new strategy, or that the strategy has not taken account of organisational culture: “Basically we discovered that our curators worked to projects with a long lead-in time and found it difficult to respond quickly to relatively short notice. We were also hampered by a reduced support team, including technical support, on the night.”

Andrea Hawkins is an experienced professional who previously worked at Arts Council England. She had also worked with Lucienne Cole, the artist, before. Their confidence in collaborating together was high, but the Whitworth Art Gallery was perhaps not “used to” collaborating with an artist and had not done “public engagement” before.

The project described in ‘Peer Plaques’ (October 2008) exemplifies a key aspect of the challenges manifest in creative practitioners working with institutional structures. In this project Kevin Carter and civic architects were asked to develop work that “articulated the experience of Burnley’s communities in regard to the area’s massive Housing Market Renewal Programme (HMR).”

Carter says, “The project was not seen as particularly controversial by the Planning Unit, as it involved the use of comments made by the public about their areas, which were seen as fairly typical of the sorts of comments received all the time, and already made public through council websites and public consultation documents. However, some council officers held concerns about the appropriateness of some of the more negative comments, as they were to be displayed in areas which had been suffering from decline for many years where some local residents (and agencies) had worked hard to improve things within the neighbourhoods... The delays and difficulties of resolving these issues proved highly frustrating for the artist and all involved, and there was a need for trust and openness to allow the relevant officers to work internally to overcome these concerns and to ensure the project’s successful delivery.”

Again the capacity of the organisation to support collaboration is at issue. Louise Kirkup, Planning Officer, says earlier that, “The Planning Unit of Burnley Borough Council has a long history of working with a range of artists on community engagement and environmental improvement programmes, and there is generally support within the Unit for developing creative and innovative pieces of work as a key part of the regeneration process.”

The challenge arose when the project engaged with other officers and elected members. Some of the elements of the work directly related public perception of failure by the local authority, and where failure is something that artists talk about a lot, its not something that bureaucracies are keen to highlight.

It’s also important to recognise the difference between the specialist arts organisations familiar with curating and producing contemporary art in public contexts (eg ArtsAdmin, Beacon, Modus Operandi, Situations, UP Projects) and other larger less specialised organisations such as local authorities, health boards. The former specialise in taking risks, whilst the latter organisations are fundamentally risk averse often having in place robust policies and procedures to minimise risk.

MMM talk about “Building critical mass for change within an organisation”. In an organisational context the challenge is to engage people in the process, enabling them to contribute their

own ideas, experience and knowledge. MMM also highlight the need to build a shared vision through enabling individuals to articulate and re-articulate their own personal visions. This is where 'shared vision' and 'learning' connect up.

The actual power of an organisation exists in the structure of its human network, not in the architecture of command and control superimposed on it. Tacit knowledge - the critical information that makes organisations functional - is in fact transferred not through established channels within the formal hierarchy but instead through informal relationships. The quality, type and extent of those relationships are much more influential than most leaders recognise. As Karen Stephenson says in 'Trafficking In Trust: The Art and Science of Human Knowledge Networks', "Relationships are the true medium of knowledge exchange, and trust is the glue that holds them all together."

Of course activating or revealing this is sometimes the role of the artist. In a slightly oblique way this is what Kevin Carter is saying when he talks about the role of the artist in community engagement on behalf of a planning department as, "...focusing more on the subjective first person relationship with a space than (as previously) a third person's objective view of a place in general."

At the heart of this is of course communicating. Time and again in these articles, it is the quality of communication between the collaborators that comes through as critical to successful relationships.

Communication is what builds values and enables learning, and as a shared activity, this can strengthen collaboration, as described in 'Margate Rocks' (June 2008), "There were many reasons for the successful relationship that grew. Jessica values the research and development of artist's practice and gave us space to continue this for the commission. In fact, as the curator, she undertook frenetic research alongside our own work, constantly feeding us with information and possible direction whilst challenging our own ideas and research activity."

Communication is also about reality of collaboration which is that two or more people are doing something together. It is therefore essential that all those involved have the maturity to deal with disagreements, and the skills to reach decisions. Lynn Harris describes this in the article '[deletia]' (September 2008), "Sometimes within this process we disagree about how to finalise a work in progress. But because we respect the nature of working in a shared space, these disagreements never turn into jealousy, competition or one-upmanship (usual tactics in any market where individual gain is paramount), but allow us to democratically eek out each perspective to arrive at the most appropriate conclusion for the work."

This point is further developed by Brian McClave in the article 'Time Lapse' (March 2009): "There is the ability from both sides to criticise without offending the other person. There needs to be an equal level of respect for each other's practice so that when someone dismisses an idea you have, you see it as a creative step rather than a negative one."

Communication can also be an issue if it becomes charged. Margherita Gramegna says in 'Artists Don't Bite' (December 2008), "I felt comfortable enough with Louise and Laura to express my anger at times. Sometimes, without friction things don't happen. And fundamentally I trust them. I trust their judgement, their knowledge and I respect them. They know that I sometimes react passionately - because I get so involved - but they have always reassured me, and things between us have always ended up OK."

Louise Francis and Laura Knight describe the relationship as follows, "Of course, we had our fair share of arguments about how the project should progress. Margherita is very passionate about what she believes, but that doesn't always mean it's right for 'on the street'. She has a huge amount of energy and this really drove the project. This energy could be exhausting too so it had to be channelled."

MMM, in addressing the question of confronting issues and managing conflict, highlight the distinction made between emotional conflict and task conflict. One of the challenges in developing collaborations is precisely the relation between the importance of achieving shared values and the challenges of emotional conflict - values are emotionally rooted - and the danger is therefore that communication is undermined. However MMM also highlight the beneficial aspects of conflict.

These are the pragmatic aspects of communication in collaboration. Artists sometimes feel that collaboration goes beyond achieving a common objective and breaks down the need to identify individual contributions.

Kate Genever, who worked with two poets (Ann Atkinson and Jo Bell) on two commissions for the Peak District, says in 'Companion Stones' (October 2010), "I have been thinking what collaborative working means. It's more than working with others to create an outcome that fulfils a commission, I work with many people to do that and I wouldn't call them true collaborative relationships. Instead collaboration is where genuine cross fertilisation and a professional equality occurs, where the idea is made better through deep conversation and purposeful talk and the end product is no longer whose but ours."

Volkhardt Müller also frames this in 'Random Acts of Art' (June 2010) as, "From an artistic collaborator I would expect conceptual or practical input that shapes the work to a degree amounting to co-authorship."

This level ambition for collaboration is not something that can be achieved by planning or by audits that ensure that all collaborators have the appropriate characteristics, qualities or aptitudes to fully engage.

Stories of collaboration

Stepping back from the detail of the specific issues, of shared vision, of learning and of communication, and detailed narratives of collaborative relationships, we might ask why collaboration is important, and in particular why it seems to have particular relevance now?

Grant Kester's *The One and the Many* is an in-depth inquiry into a number of long-term collaborative practices and projects in different parts of the world. These include *Park Fiction*, a project in Hamburg, Germany, which has sought to counter normal modes of regeneration through long term critical engagement with the its own communities and the city planning authorities. Picking up the point made by Alison Kershaw and Gill Wright about the positioning of the artist in the Victoria Baths project, Kester says of *Park Fiction* (2011, p205), "The process of creating the park required the ability to shift between an expressive modality, mindful of multiple subjectivities and desires, and a tactical modality which would allow the *Park Fiction* team to negotiate effectively with the city (the process of 'being in bed with bureaucracy', as they describe it). The capacity to shuttle between these two modes was crucial to the project's success."

This point is a key observation in *The One and the Many*, set in counterpoint to an avant garde use of the aesthetics of shock and disruption. Kester's analysis of the collaborative methodology of long term dialogic projects, understood as work, is revealing, "...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." (2011, p101)

Kester not only provides a durational analysis of the work of collaborative projects, highlighting a specific form of 'movement in practice' not captured by a focus on characteristics and aptitudes, he also suggests that collaborations have a direct political relevance. Kester makes the case that the operative assumptions of collaborations (including respect for local cultures and contexts; willingness to shuttle between criticality and negotiation; building shared vision through the articulation of individual experience, values and visions) are counter to neo-liberalising tendencies. He characterises these as privileging the market, disregarding local cultures, and imposing technical or economic models which appear to have worked elsewhere. In contrast he suggests that, "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... ." (2011, p125)

Kester's construction of collaboration, as a counter to market driven and globalising modes of operation, brings us back to the question of power relations, and unpacks a political context.

Conclusion

It is useful to highlight key recurrent aspects of collaborative relationships evident in the range of articles in a-n's archive including sharing an interest, concern or vision; learning and communication, but every collaboration is distinct, just as every locality is distinct.

Across the thirty-five articles these subjects recur, but each experience is also distinctive, and this distinctiveness needs to be attended to. We might generalise and say that communication is critical. We might say that the quality and regularity of communication is an important factor, and it probably is, but there is a whole field of specificity. Each and every article contributes something to the understanding of the dynamics of collaborative relationships - sometimes it's the ones that you don't expect, the ones focused on areas of practice remote from your own, that are the most revealing.

But Sans Façon in *We Have No Choice: Collaboration As A Place You Don't Expect* (PAR+RS, June 2009) also offers a warning, which may be a good point on which to conclude: "It is worrying to think collaboration may be the next trend for working in the public realm and that unwilling, ill equipped and unsupported artists and other specialists will be effectively forced to work in this way. There is a danger of watering down the quality of the work by having to make too many compromises between the parties to keep the collaboration going.

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We welcome your collaboration as a submission for online publication. These should be in the form of one 600 word piece each from the practitioner and commissioner, curator or project manager discussing on the working relationship, the intentions for and delivery of a project and the issues and outcomes arising from the engagement. Send to edit@a-n.co.uk