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Untangling creativity and art for policy purposes: ethnographic insights on Manchester International Festival and Manchester Day Parade

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This paper draws on anthropological fieldwork of a civic parade in Manchester from 2010 to 2012 to argue for engaging with creativity as a *process* rather than an attribute of a particular sector or individual. It shows how the focus on funding and supporting 'creative industries' defined as 'cinema, television, music, literature, performing arts, heritage and related areas' actually excludes and diminishes the potential for others to engage with ideas and creative processes. Two major events in Manchester's cultural calendar – *Procession* by artist Jeremy Deller, produced by Manchester International Festival and Manchester Day Parade, a council-led civic celebration – both combined community groups with artist input to put large-scale structures and people on the city's streets. In this ethnographic analysis, I argue that the 'creativity' sought from these artists is their adaptive and productive approach to making ideas tangible. By focusing on creativity as a process rather than a character trait, there is even greater potential for stimulating a 'creative' city.

Keywords: ethnography; Manchester; policy; creativity; parade; culture

Introduction

> A theme is something expansive, open and sitting in, leading you to a world of imagination and complexity and layeredness, rather than literal, closed, specific. It's also about poetics isn't it … (Manchester Day Parade Director, Interview 2011)

Public and civil society domains use creativity and innovation rhetoric when determining how they can stimulate cultural and economic regeneration in their cities. Over 15 years ago, a UNESCO report said 'let's put culture on the agenda' to stimulate creative economies in developing countries. The report went on to argue that

> creativity and culture are processes or attributes that are intimately bound up in the imagining and generation of new ideas, products or ways of interpreting the world that have monetary and non-monetary benefits that can be recognised as instrumental to human development. (Bringsjord and Ferrucci 1999)

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A decade later in a study prepared for the European Commission, consultants KEA observed that creativity could act as a lever for innovation, social progress and European integration (KEA 2009). In 2013, the EC launched CREATIVE EUROPE distributing €1.46 billion in funding to be used over the next seven years for the 'cultural and creative sectors' defined as 'European culture, cinema, television, music, literature, performing arts, heritage and related areas' (Creative Europe 2013). At the fund launch, Amanda Nevill, CEO of the British Film Institute said 'the UK is a leader in creativity, and our creative industries are recognised as key engines for economic growth' (British Film Institute 2014).

The 'creative' city has become a grounded site for policy development and economic stimulation. Its origins reside with Florida (2002) and Landry (2000) who led in the development of methodologies to identify 'creative' cities. This process of measurement was highly effective in both establishing cities as viable entities for strategic development and creating a club that ambitious civic leaders vied to join. Landry and Florida Indexes are now combined with others such as Sharpie, Silicon Valley Creative Communities, Creative Vitality, European Creativity to provide consultation on fostering creative cities across the world (Hartley *et al.* 2012).

This call to 'cultural and creative sectors' and to 'creativity' itself comes without clear definition of this nebulous concept. Over the past two decades, academic discussion has focused on the inter-relationship between creativity, arts and culture as industries (for a summary of most recent debates, see O'Connor and Shaw 2014). Meanwhile however civic administrators have embraced the functional aspects of these indexes as a way of driving economic productivity. Landry may have warned against instrumentalising of arts, culture and digital sectors as creative agents and ignoring wider social creativity (Landry 2011); Florida may have emphasised the potential of a new 'creative class' to use their innovative abilities to resolve contemporary problems (Florida 2012); Pratt may have warned against policy transfer (Pratt 2010) but meanwhile policy makers, civic administrators have progressed rapidly with promoting the 'creative economy' and focusing on sectors such as art, music, film and digital media to stimulate income in urban contexts.

In previous years, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) was similarly hailed as a tool for instrumental goals such as fostering economic development, social progress and European integration. In their paper, Green *et al.* argue that ICT became a mechanism through which European bureaucrats and city administrators worked together with their political counterparts to realise particular conceptualisations of cities and communities. They showed how the 'imperative to connect' worked as a motivating ambition for the Manchester City Council executive during 1990s (Green *et al.* 2005, p. 807). Civic ambitions for a creative city was the new mechanism for achieving particular agendas *outside* a creative economy context. The creative industry context was one of many ways that city leaders sought to develop their urban ambitions. As Pratt and Hutton state there is a 'need for a more nuanced analysis of the creative economy, one that is attentive not only to regulatory and organisational factors, but attuned also to the socio-economic-political situatedness of the creative economy' (Pratt and Hutton 2013, p. 94)

In the 2000s, I combined working as a digital consultant in Manchester with developing sustainability-related community projects and studying to become an anthropologist. These different roles provided opportunities for multiple perspectives on the inner workings of Manchester City Council, community activists and local organisations involved in city-making. During workshops, meetings and in

city promotional material, I noticed this emphasis among Manchester's city leaders on culture and creativity primarily as economic drivers (Symons 2014). In 2009, I was present at a publication launch when Leadbeater, a cultural consultant to Manchester, argued for a redefinition of cultural policy to recognise people's *everyday* creative practices rather than just focusing on specific creative industries. A tense atmosphere developed in the room as it became clear that the Chief Executive of Manchester City Council perceived Leadbeater's proposition as critical of the city's chosen direction (Leadbeater 2009, Symons 2014).

For key decision makers creativity and cultural strategies were useful primarily because they provided the 'engine' for generating economic growth. While academics and critical thinkers challenged this appropriation of creativity, or as Peck would have it, incorporation into the 'neoliberal agenda' (Peck 2005), civic administrators were getting on with an approach that was proving productive and useful. This paper focuses on research findings from 2010 to 2012 when I carried out fieldwork among the makers of a civic parade in Manchester. As I spent extended periods of time with council officials, parade makers, local community groups and artists, I developed a proposition for understanding creativity as an adaptive and productive process working towards a tangible goal. In this paper, I argue that this conceptualisation of creativity allows for the support of creative industries for economic purposes *alongside* a wider nurturing of creativity as an adaptive process. My research provides evidence for the value of the creative sector itself and also how the working practices of artists can be productively shared with wider communities. For cultural policy makers, this approach strengthens the value of the 'cultural sector' as it becomes a site of learning and demonstrating *how to be creative*, a process that can be shared across different social contexts.

Understanding the 'creative layer' in a creative city

> The development of a credible creative city strategy is a field that will rely upon a sound evidential base of understanding about the operation and environment of the cultural and creative industries, and a clear and concise evaluation of policies. (Pratt 2010, p. 18)

In his review of the developing creative city agenda, Pratt argues that understandings of creativity need to be developed 'more keenly' (Pratt 2010, p. 18). Ethnographic research is well placed to provide an understanding of the nuances involved and rich description of the particular contexts within which certain understandings and manifestations of creativity may emerge. Management theorist, Sharon Parks argues for exploring art processes to facilitate an understanding of creativity. She claims that 'the artist necessarily works in a profoundly interdependent relationship with the medium – paint, stone, clay, a musical instrument, an orchestra, a tennis court, a slalom run, or food' (Parks 2005, p. 210). She then asserts that if a leader, like an artist,

> can understand the nature of the system that needs to be mobilized (the underlying structure and patterns of motion), he or she can become artfully adept at intervening in ways that are more rather than less likely to have a positive effect in helping the group to move to a new place, creating a new reality' (Parks 2005).

Through ethnography, I found such 'adaptive' behaviour among parade makers whose 'artfully adept intervening' helped 'move people to a new place, creating a new reality'.

Understanding creativity

Analyses of creativity across arts, literature and music, computing, science, psychology and management disciplines have similar perspectives on the creative process. As E. Paul Torrance, a psychologist specialising in creativity says, 'all seem to have something in common, and yet each is slightly different' (Torrance 1979, p. 43). In many cases, their research points towards creativity as an adaptive productive process. Charles Limb, musician and hearing specialist worked with neurologist Allen Braun to put jazz musicians into a functional magnetic resonance imaging machine to take pictures of their brains while improvising so that they could learn about 'deep creativity' (Limb 2011). This chimes with Ingold's take on improvisation as a *generative process* where outcomes are produced in the making with the maker following proceedings rather than determining them (Ingold 2010, p. 17). Ingold's analysis of improvisation as following the flow of matter, also aligns with leading creativity theorist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi working with psychology and management theory to define creativity as a form of 'flow'. His insight was gained through studies of artists and musicians at work and extended into a model for working in a focused and motivated way (Csikszentmihalyi 2009). Csikszentmihalyi's recognition of the dynamism between flow and process is echoed by cognitive scientist, Margaret Boden who identifies a creative idea as 'new, surprising, and valuable' in concept, method and style (Boden 2007) and argues for creativity as a *systematic process*, essential for the development of Artificial Intelligence models .

Over 20 years Keith Sawyer has repeatedly emphasised the improvised, emergent and also *collaborative* process of creativity (Sawyer 1992, Woodman *et al.* 1993, Sawyer 1995, Sawyer 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2007, 2013, Moran *et al.* 2003, Sawyer and DeZutter 2009). He creates a distinction between product creativity 'activities that result in objective, ostensible products – paintings, sculptures, musical scores – which remain after the creative act is complete' and improvisation where 'the creative process is the product; the audience is watching the creative process as it occurs'. This distinction is important because it draws out the tangible outcomes produced in a creative process as well as the value of the making itself.

These interpretations across disciplines actually align well with creativity as an adaptive productive process in working towards a tangible outcome and this approach is reinforced in anthropology. In particular, Hastrup argues for creativity in the way '"newness" enters the world' as a feature of human agency; novelty is not focused on the generation of a new thing, per se, but on the creation of new *possibilities* (Hastrup 2001, p. 29 my emphasis). This perspective combines well with Friedman, who argues that 'creativity in the structural sense can be understood as the *improvisation of structural variation*' (Friedman 2001, p. 59 my emphasis).

Anthropologists also provide a route away from creativity as residing only in particular individuals or sectors. Löfgren (2001) calls for attention to 'everyday creativity' and urges readers to consider what a non-creative culture or actor might look like. Leach's analyses takes this further. He develops insight gained from the

Nekgini-speaking people on the Rai Coast of Papua New Guinea, where he finds '(C)creations, whether they be new persons, or new knowledge, are the outcome of relations between persons, land and spirits' (Leach 1998, p. 19). 'There is no single authorship of new forms or things in Nekgini. This is because all power to grow things, and all knowledge comes from the land' (Leach 1998). While individuals are recognised as bringing about creations, they do not and cannot deny others who are resident and working the land, connected to these creations. Even creative ownership of the birth of a child is shared.

Leach uses local people's understanding of creation as inherent in all things to show incongruity of Euro-American notions of private property. In *Modes of Creativity* Leach claims notions of creativity reside in 'Euro-American conceptualisations of the intellect' where creativity is contingent and can be 'encouraged or discouraged, stifled or suppressed' (Leach 2004b, p. 170) i.e. it is optional. He compares this with the embodied 'creative force' among Nekgini speakers who directly situate themselves in productive processes i.e. creativity is inevitable. This movement into the intellectual domain made it possible to associate creativity with particular individuals and industries. The intellectual ownership of a creative idea allows its appropriation by the market economy.

Leach argues that by locating credit for creativity in the individual, there is difficulty 'registering exactly the kind of dispersed creativity that collaborative endeavour and interdisciplinary work exhibit' (Leach 2004a, p. 27). He critiques intellectual property law which lays claim to what should be an ongoing and emergent process of making. In a 2007 analysis of collaborations between scientists and artists, Leach shows how disagreements developed due to lack of accreditation (Leach 2007). In one case, an artist failed to acknowledge the facilitator's role in bringing the artist together with a scientist, instead claiming that they met through a 'wonderful coincidence' and in another, a scientist became disgruntled because an artist did not credit his contribution to the works on display. With 'dispersed creativity' where 'creativity itself lies in the *relationships between differentiated elements* … The particularity of the outcome (its novelty, value, unique appearance or whatever) is a function of a kind of initial dispersal of agency and knowledge' (Leach 2007, p. 22 my emphasis).

This perspective helps challenge representations of artists as innately creative individuals by demonstrating how artists provide a particular role in a productive process. It also presents an opportunity to situate the value of the creative activity in the process rather than the tangible output. Leaving aside economic arguments for the time being, if the process is learnable and shareable then the final product, the tangible outcome, can become less important.

Leach brings this argument to the free software movement (Leach *et al.* 2009) sharing a concern with lawyer Lawrence Lessig, who argues that creativity as free expression has been located round individuals and organisations due to a corporate attention to the value of intellectual copyright (Lessig 2004). An artist or software developer as individual provider of discrete works is easier to acknowledge as *auteur* facilitating claims for copyright.

Indeed Hirsch and Macdonald explicitly situate the development of notions of 'creativity' as part of a Western trajectory associated with people taking individual responsibility and realising their potential. This became coupled with imagination so that acts of creation were 'testifying to individual distinctiveness and personal identity' (Hirsch and Macdonald 2007). For them, the Romantics encouraged the

view that the creative imagination produced something new and unprecedented, related to revealing the divine. Extending this analysis, it seems that associating artists so directly with creativity extrapolates the artist from working in a particular role into an artist as a particular kind of being. It is here in this shift from *role* to *identity* that the current emphasis on certain people working in 'creative industries' can be located.

Anthropologist Robert Borofsky argues that trying to encapsulate creativity is like 'trying to grasp the wind' (Borofsky 2001, p. 69). Art, literature and music practice are often used as sites for analysis and inspiration for 'creative activity' drawing from the assumption that 'the arts' is an appropriate place to look when seeking insight into the creative process. I did the same thing when looking for a field site for my PhD research to explore creative processes. I assumed creativity would be found among artists and went looking for an art event where people were collaborating to produce something undetermined. This tendency in both academic and policy contexts to equate creativity with art practice was echoed in Manchester where political strategies identified 'creative sectors' as art, music, theatre and digital (Manchester Cultural Strategy Team 2002). It is within this context that many events in Manchester became regarded as creative cultural products through which political ambitions for economic development were mediated. These initiatives reveal two compelling issues:, firstly, a tendency in academic contexts to understand creativity as a process but still look for it primarily in art-like communities; and secondly among policy makers, a concern with monetising creative expression. Through fieldwork with parade makers in Manchester, I came to see how advocating sharing creative thinking by artists with non-artists would help challenge preconceptions. Representing creativity as an adaptive and productive process in the working towards a tangible goal would open it up in interesting ways. Indeed cultural policy makers may well prefer to emphasise creative expression as an adaptive and productive approach to idea development, rather than just characteristic of those working in particular industries.

Creative Manchester

Manchester provided a particularly rich site to explore the development of the creative city agenda. In his analysis of political involvement in the urban property boom of 1990s, Hatherley criticises the way 'the Council' manipulated urban spaces. He bemoans the selection of Manchester as a 'creative city' by Florida in the highly influential list of creative cities worldwide (Florida 2005). Hatherley describes how Manchester's music scene in the 1980s and 1990s was internationally prolific but key figures in the music scene were actually 'kept outside' by the Council for years until the economic value of these cultural legends became more apparent. It was only through creative city rhetoric that they were 'brought in' and involved in Council cultural strategies (Hatherley 2011, pp. 115–156).

Hatherley condemns this embrace of creativity by the Council and also condemns Urban Splash founders Bloxham and Johnson, two 'post-rave coalition' musicians and artists, who later worked with the council as local building entrepreneurs to become property millionaires. Hatherley writes about urban change and represents his perspective as a consensual view of cultural dynamics in the city. At the time, I was also aware of antipathy between the council leadership and the

artistic and activist communities. By the time of my fieldwork however, dynamics in the city had started to change as I was soon to discover.

Untangling creativity in Manchester

In the mid 2000s, the Major Events team at Manchester City Council was working with Walk the Plank, an arts organisation, to develop a feasibility study for a civic parade as part of a new 'Manchester Day' to 'celebrate of all things Manchester' in the city centre for a summer's day in June. At the same time, Manchester International Festival (MIF), an arts bienniale in the city, also supported by the City Council, was working with artist Jeremy Deller to produce *Procession.* In 2009, artist Jeremy Deller presented *Procession* as 'a tribute to, and a showcase for, the city's colourful outsiders, minority interests and half-forgotten relics' (Hattenstone 2009). Deller worked with community groups in Manchester to make floats for a mile-long parade incorporating boy racers, rose queens, brass bands and chip shop attendants.

On 5 July, they marched down Deansgate in front of 25,000 people to open the MIF festival. A year later, Manchester Day Parade made its inaugural march through the city. Both events combined community groups with artist input to produce large-scale structures and elaborate costumes with people waving and singing as they walked through the city centre streets. These two cultural events in the vibrant city of Manchester were part of a wider civic 'Cultural Ambition' with a programme of events and activities to stimulate a cultural 'offer' in the city centre.

In 2010, I started an 18 month ethnography following the Manchester Day Parade producers Walk the Plank, artists, community groups and council officials as they collaborated on the production of this 'community-led' parade. I participated as a project manager, steward, artist and performer in the parade itself. I got to know the key organisers of the parade, attending meetings and following the process of parade making. During this period, I also interviewed people from MIF including the artist Jeremy Deller, the project manager assigned to him and the Festival Directors. Through these discussions I was able to develop insight into the differences and similarities in producing Manchester Day Parade and *Procession*, Deller's MIF artwork. In particular, I noticed that in both cases artists were sought out because they know how to shape ideas into tangible entities, working adaptively and productively. This insight brings clarity to the increasing emphasis on a civic creative economy agenda and how cultural policy makers and civic officials need to look beyond the output of artists to focus on their process. It is their *activities* that provide significant learning about creativity, with potential replicability in other contexts.

A tale of two parades

Deller's *Procession* stimulated consternation among some civic officials at the local council. During the build-up to the event, national newspaper the Guardian published an article about his artwork (Hattenstone 2009). This article was directly quoted the following day at the Communities and Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Manchester City Council. 'CN/09/36 Manchester Day Update Report' was item six of six matters discussed in the meeting. In the minutes to the meeting, the Council members 'expressed disappointment' that a previous

commitment to 'developing the concept of Manchester Day' had not progressed quickly enough to hold their own parade in 2009. Instead there was to be this parade for MIF with several challenging sections such as floats of "unrepentant smokers", "boy racers", "big issue sellers" and "goths" – information clearly quoted from the Guardian article. It seems that council preparations for a Manchester Day "concept", which pre-dated Deller's artwork was disrupted by the artist's ambitions for celebrating Manchester. His ideas presented a challenge to the politicians' concern with representing Manchester as a place of unity and cultural diversity.

Despite these differences however, the meeting minutes subsequently note that 'the council had engaged with key stakeholders and were [sic] hoping to apply the lessons learned from the organisation of the Procession parade of the Manchester International Festival' I later discovered that the Manchester Day Parade director was inspired by Deller's artwork and drew on his approach in the development of the Manchester Day Parade. The process of parade making was replicated even if the outsider groups popularised by Deller were largely left out.

The following year, 2010, the Manchester Day Parade made its inaugural march down Deansgate, a floating world of aliens, robots and planes with an estimated audience of 40,000 people. Themed 'Out of this World', the parade was a spectacle of dancing, stilt walking, bright colours, live music and huge wheeled structures led by the figurehead of 'Spirit' (based on the Rolls-Royce car bonnet ornament). The parade involved over 1800 participants from 90 community and social groups across Manchester, supported by freelance artists and co-ordinated by the arts charity, Walk the Plank. Similar to MIF, the celebration attracted sponsors from organisations such as a multinational engineering services company, a major food retailer, a national building company and many other private sector companies. The Council contribution ranged from political leadership and the 'Major Events Team' to food distribution, road planning, safety, refuse management and crowd control.

In 2011, 2012 and 2013 the parade once again marched down Deansgate, following a similar route, with many of the community groups from 2010, again co-ordinated by Walk the Plank and supported by Council staff and Councillors. Each year was themed differently – in 2011 *A Voyage of Discovery*, 2012 *The sky's the limit … a celebration of heroic achievements* and 2013 *Wish you were here*. Each parade promised and delivered a visual and aural display of noise, colour and movement. I carried out fieldwork during the making of the 2011 and 2012 parades, firstly as a parade organiser and then as a parade participant. The field site was the parade itself situated in parts of Manchester city centre as spaces animated by the parade participants and the processes through which this animation was made possible.

The 2011 theme was *A Voyage of Discovery* which also provided a metaphor for the parade making process. At formation meetings the Parade Director would hold a room spellbound with her vivid description of the parade. It would start with a galleon, similar to the ship on the Manchester coat of arms, surrounded by mermaids, waves and fish. These would be followed by explorers and discoverers – Aztecs, Indians and Arctic explorers, reflecting points on the globe. The discovery section focused on people and culture, with Jasmine tea and chopsticks for China and Garibaldi, the unifier of Italy astride his horse. Medical discoveries were also present with a beating heart and a huge hospital bed. Scientific discovery was represented by people dressed as DNA molecules and environmental figures. Flight and time travel i.e. discovery in the air, was characterised by depictions of the

Wright brothers and HG Wells, followed by a giant Gulliver as an explorer from literature. Personal discovery came via the tree of life.

The Parade Director told me in interview,

> I think it is our job as artists or an arts organisation to provoke something that goes away from literal and naturalist and towards the poetic, metaphorical, imaginative. (Parade Director, Interview 2011)

When emphasising 'opportunities for imaginative journeying', Parade Director, May[1] described artists as *provocateurs* pushing people who would otherwise be 'too literal or naturalistic'. Similarly Parade Design Coordinator, Amelia, claimed community groups could not think in a 'big 3D creative way'. For her, the Parade needed artists to achieve a particular level of quality and standard and also to make it 'uncomfortable, playful, tricky, not what Councillors think necessarily' (Design Co-ordinator, Interview 2011).

Each stage of the parade development shaped these emerging ideas giving them detail and physical tangibility as the parade day drew near. May described this as an imaginative journey, progressing from an initial strapline, *A Voyage of Discovery*, populated by ideas from the community groups and then developed and embellished by artists. The 'job' of the artists was to keep these ideas open to 'push' people towards things that they hadn't thought about already. Their challenge lay in trying to maintain the integrity of the idea from the community group whilst also producing something specific that worked effectively on the day in terms of scale, movement and colour (Symons 2015).

Contextualising ideas

Gell argues for art objects as 'vehicles of complicated ideas' that 'radiate meaning' (Gell 1998, p. 215). He proposes that art objects are those which that hold a 'residual power' and have a 'mobilising effect' on the communities who engage with them. The situation of *Procession* and the Manchester Day Parade as Gellian art objects and vehicles of complicated ideas facilitates analysis of them. In the following section, I show how the apparent similarities and difference between these two parade-like entities are explained by the 'constraints governing the[ir] production' (Gell 1998, p. 215).

Procession was an artwork that externally looked similar to the Manchester Day Parade. It brought together community groups to parade through the city centre dressed in costume and waving from handmade wheeled constructions. It happened in the same city and followed a similar making process. However each parade was conceived and represented very differently. In the case of *Procession,* the participants were 'enveloped' within the artist's vision. As the MIF Project Manager stated, the main difference between *Procession* and Manchester Day Parade was that *Procession* 'was Deller's project'. He was the lead artist who interpreted the whole thing, 'it was his manifestation really'. She continued,

> While May (Walk the Plank's Director) was [all] about giving ownership to people participating in the parade, in Procession, even though people were very much representing themselves, they were all enveloped within, represented through Deller's eyes. I mean he didn't want them to pretend to be anything other than who they were, but he effectively curated that representation of Manchester. (Interview, 2011)

The emphasis on developing an idea, taking inspiration and influence from different places and responding adaptively and iteratively to the production process may appear similar to the Manchester Day Parade process but in MIF's case, the artist controlled the whole process. The Parade, established by politicians partly in opposition to *Procession*, emphasised the ideas of Manchester communities. Artists were still mobilised and involved but they were asked to realise the community groups' ideas rather than their own. A key distinction emerges between these two events. One is artist-led, the other is artist guided.

Deller deliberately sought to promote and celebrate the independent activities of Manchester communities. His aim was to tell a story with Procession, get together 15–20 'moments and ideas' about the town and create a narrative portrait of it as a place in time, bringing in constituent parts including alternative realities and fantasy. During interview, he told me that he wanted to 'play around with culture … be a bit cheeky and rude'. So where Walk the Plank focused on enabling Manchester communities to project an image of themselves into the public realm, Deller preferred to project his representation of people in Manchester who were overlooked, taken for granted or even anti-social (many of whom never featured in the subsequent Manchester Day Parades). Deller focused on showing people's 'real' lives and activities that did not ordinarily get highlighted or emphasised in a public way. Deller's work with the community groups was also part of his ongoing practice exploring the 'beauty and strangeness of everyday'. He enjoyed 'playing around with culture', seeing 'how far he can go with things … taking them to the brink' (Deller Interview, 2010). Another artwork by Deller is The Battle of Orgreave. In 2001, he worked with former miners from the community of Orgreave and actors to re-enact a critical dispute between the miners and police during UK strike action and counter-response from a Thatcher led police force in 1984. A film was made of the re-enactment and formed a central part of the retrospective art exhibition of Howard's work at the Hayward Gallery in 2012. Deller was not afraid to confront uncomfortable issues.

In the Manchester Day Parade, 'artist' was a role, a category assigned to particular people working freelance for Walk the Plank. They were introduced to community groups, to the Council, to me and in publicity material as 'parade artists'. They were drawn from a wide network of freelancers who worked regularly with Walk the Plank, as well as others who applied through a recruitment process specifically for the parade. I spent months working alongside several of these artists and found a commonality of approach similar to the attitudes of the parade organisers themselves. This was characterised by an intractability on problems and issues, a willingness to explore and use alternatives, open-mindedness, a determination to deliver regardless and a making process that relied on both structure and serendipity – using processes to produce work but at the same time willing to go with chance occurrences or circumstances that arose.

However I also found that while the parade producers referred to these people as 'artists', most did not self-identify in that way. Many had theatre backgrounds and described themselves as prop-makers or makers of costumes or special effects. Several did 'community art', making a living through work in schools and community centres. Others were musicians, students or worked in bars. Most combined different kinds of paid work both within and outside art and making realms. These people worked in an 'artist' role and their purpose was to lead on the 'making' of parade sections, guiding the turning of community ideas into real, tangible entities.

In both *Procession* and Manchester Day Parade, the artists' primary contribution lay in their determination and expertise in developing ideas into something particular. The critical difference between them is that in the Manchester Day Parade, artists were put *in service to* the community to help realise their ideas for display in the public realm; in *Procession*, Deller explored his own problems or questions about society through a vision of his own making, drawing on the city for inspiration and participation. Following Gell, it becomes clear that teasing out the motivations and interests of those involved in art projects shows how these 'vehicles of complicated ideas' are constructed and perceived in very particular ways – embodiments of the agency and ambitions of those engaged with them.

Artists as creative agents

The 'creativity' sought by policy makers and urban planners therefore is found in the practice of the artists – how they go about realising a particular idea. Deller's expressed aim as an artist was to 'make ideas happen' and most of his work involved drawing attention to people's experiences in the form of 'social engaged art' (Bishop 2012). The 'creativity' manifested by the artists working on the Manchester Day Parade was the support they gave in developing community groups' ideas. Production of a parade section was not a linear process where the artist just produced a physical representation of the idea described in the application form written by each community group. The parade artists would bring something of themselves to the design process. While Deller was focused on realising his vision for *Procession,* he also relied on people in the area to inspire him – he aimed to reveal what was *already there*, the overlooked cultural life of the city such as goths or boy racers.

Both Deller and Parade Director, May identified artists as *provocateurs*. May's intention to 'push' people who would otherwise be 'too literal or naturalistic' and to take them on an 'imaginative journey' suggests emphasis on the interpretation of an idea rather than representation of a group. In the field of the philosophy of science, consideration of the difference between representation and interpretation focuses on the extent to which the output is faithful to the system it is describing (Nordmann 2002, Contessa 2007). It seems that May's expressed desire to move away from the literal to the metaphorical can be understood as an attempt to move away from faithful representation towards allusive interpretation. In this way the art object 'hints at' its subject (Pattison 1910).

This distinction between interpretation and representation is important because it helps artists articulate what is special about what they do but also how they can and do help people to develop their ideas. It explains why some artists would never work on this parade as it does not provide an opportunity to work through their own preoccupations. However it also shows how people who do not identify as artists could be called artists in the parade. Some parade artists were experienced at developing their own interpretive ideas as well as collaborating on the production of ideas from other contexts such as the theatre. Their primary role in both cases was to provide the productive, adaptive aspect of idea development which is so important in the realisation of ideas into tangible entities – this is the 'creative layer', as Design Co-ordinator Amelia called it.

Drawing on Sennett's observation on cooperation as 'an exchange in which the participants benefit from the encounter' (Sennett 2012, p. 5), attention to turning

ideas into tangible entities enables a productive focus on output where creativity is a way of *thinking through* the generative process rather than a character trait held by certain individuals. Artists are specialists in this process because of their ability to make interpretations of ideas into something tangible.

This approach invokes the nature of the *role* provided by artists as gifted individuals revealing what is sensed by the community – 'the creative individual expands the community's awareness of itself' (Hastrup 2001, p. 40). The artist is still an important individual in the process because they help create tangible experiences and metaphors which provide the community with an opportunity to reflect on itself. In MIF, artists such as Deller were supported to reveal their interpretation and understanding of a world through self-expression, developing their own narrative into a tangible entity which can be shared by others. In the Manchester Day Parade, artists supported community groups to share their sense of themselves, with the artists drawing on their own repertoire of inspiration, ideas and experiences to develop a tangible entity that seeks to express and represent the community. The purpose or intention of the activity drove how the artist role was manifested and represented but the end result was something tangible, visible for others to witness and experience.

The key difference between these artworks lay in the distributed ownership of the Manchester Day Parade compared to *Procession*, the MIF 'artwork' that preceded it. *Procession* had a similar configuration of artist + participants + project management as the Manchester Day Parade and yet it endures as an artwork, within artist Deller's repertoire and formed part of his 'retrospective' in 2012, a standard artist exhibition tradition reflecting back on an existing body of work. There is a distinct difference between how Deller as an artist was presented and understood and the Manchester Day Parade artists. The former was the idea-originator, the interpreter of a social context whose output was an artwork; the latter were recruited to support others to realise their ideas.

The understanding of idea development as a cooperative creative endeavour is part of existing cultural understandings. In her analysis of participatory art practice, Bishop observes that

> the worlds of music, theatre, film literature, fashion and theatre have a rich vocabulary to describe co-existing authorial positions (director, author, performer, editor, producer, casting agent, sound engineer, stylist, photographer), all of which are regarded as essential to the creative realisation of a given project. (Bishop 2012, p. 9)

Walk the Plank, whose origins lie in street theatre and performance, drew their working arrangement from a structure where the final result is recognised as collaboration between many different people. Even though the development of *Procession* was similarly collaborative, the final artwork was framed as Deller's vision. Contemporary artists often end up positioned at the centre of their work with others' participation in the making process made invisible when the work emerges into the public realm, despite artists' continual engagement in 'dialogue and creative negotiation with other people' (Bishop 2012).

Conclusion

In this paper, I explored the tension between two parades in Manchester, both produced by arts organisations, both funded and supported by the city council, to

consider what people want from artists when they involve them in civic ambitions. I argued that the value of artists for civic officials does not necessarily lie in the end product or the industry they work in but in their adaptive, responsive approach to realising ideas. This distinction should be made more explicit both for valuing artist contributions and in supporting other non-artists in the creative development of their ideas.

The emphasis on creativity as an adaptive process in the realisation of ideas appeared through fieldwork among the makers of the Manchester Day Parade and interviews with individuals involved in the Manchester International Festival (MIF). In both cases, people identified as 'artists' provided the role of 'creative guides' to help realise the 'ideas' of 'the community'. In the Parade, artists oriented their activities around ideas submitted by community groups for what they wanted to happen on parade day. In the MIF, the whole organisation is oriented around artists, their ideas and the questions or problems they want to interrogate through art practice.

Leach argues that when ideas are attributed to the individual who initiated the project, then distinctions can be maintained between those who are creative and those who are not. When there is an emphasis on the collaborative nature of shared projects, the important role of the artist as 'idea champion' can be maintained, but a sense of people's creativity can be distributed across everyone involved in the activity. The Manchester Day Parade, in its distributed nature, takes some steps towards delivering on this potential.

In this way creativity becomes an approach, or engine, used to develop ideas, as fuel. Parade artists, MIF artists and council officials work creatively to mobilise their own or others' ideas using the skills they have developed to respond productively to circumstances as they arise. These ideas narratively shape the emergent entities. The realisation of ideas into tangible reality leads to compromises and these compromises are culturally and contextually determined, feeding the dynamics of the process and shaping the end result. For cultural policy makers, artists as creative agents in the productive process of developing tangible outcomes has considerably more social potential than artists as producers of specific cultural artefacts.

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1. 'May' and other staff names at Work the Plank are pseudonyms.

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