SUE COHEN Somali Kitchen at J3

Somali Kitchen was one of the developments out of a Productive Margins' co-produced research project "Who Decides What's in My Fridge?" exploring how those living in disadvantaged areas experienced the regulation of food habits, invisible rules and spatial controls. It was developed as an intervention against the proliferation of takeaways selling cheap, processed food around local schools, a "political" intervention that determined the produce, the means of production, the division of labour. In response to this, the artist Anne-Marie Culhane designed a Shed on Wheels – a Nomadic caravan, and co-curated with the Somali women's group, and the community kitchen at Co-Exist, the cooking, artifacts, spice grinding and cultural activities. Over 600 people from different communities came to the Somali Kitchen at J3 on a hot day in July.

With the interaction between the interdisciplinary social science research and artistic project, Somali Kitchen at J3 became a form of prefigurative politics. By disrupting and celebrating the physical and social space and by making Somali women visible within those spaces, the project imagined a way of being yet to come. City Council Cultural Services and the Housing Association ruled out a community room or café based in the mixed development after the economic crash. Neo-liberal market forces appropriated the space. Somali Kitchen disrupted regulatory controls, reminding some working for these agencies on the ground of what could be. Somali Kitchen is now a pop-up social enterprise that has since re-visited J3.

Two key aspects that speak to the theme of prefigurative politics are process and authorship. Is there anything to learn from these going forward?

Process
Most of those interacting with Somali Kitchen didn't recognise it as participatory art: "Looking back, it didn't feel like an arty thing that one, it felt sunny. All of Productive Margins things are ambiguous." Should ambiguity be regulated? Is arts practice transferable if it exists in ambiguous terrains? How can you regulate *for* engagement in arts practice?

One way is through the briefing and appointment process. The interviewing of artists provided a critical juncture in the overall project, which had experienced a range of internal research struggles. The interviews became the stage when community participants were asked to fully participate. Suad Yusuf, a prime mover in the development and heritage of Somali Kitchen, said of the project: "*The highlight? Recruiting the artist. It was an eye opener.. I learnt a lot. It was one of the best sessions in my life. How do you select? - A fair process, it's fascinating.*"

Two separate panels were set up – a community forum that engaged with the aesthetics of the artist's practice and an interview group of community representatives and academics. The forum came to an entirely different opinion to the interview group and a compromise had to be negotiated. The conflict helped to galvanise a shared purpose.

Authorship
In virtually all the co-produced art work of Productive Margins the process and the ensuing works brought people into some kind of conflict about ownership – between artist and community, between community and academics, between community participants themselves. Can regulation for engagement help to mediate the differences? As Lowe argues, "agreeing the process for participatory art is one matter, agreeing aesthetic criteria

another but one of the most contentious arenas can be authorship and use." Participation does not necessarily erase authorship or indeed use of the ensuing work. (Lowe, T.) Following Bishop, "the tensions between quality and equality, singular and collective, authorship and the ongoing struggle to find artistic equivalents for political positions" have played out across Productive Margins. The ways in which these tensions have been mediated point towards art's potential to inform different political practices.

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