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Editor: Claire Blencowe

Controlled Natures: Disorder and Dissensus in the Urban Park

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Abstract

This article addresses the distinction between 'the commons' and 'enclosure' as a historical and present tension within the study of urban space. The article focuses upon urban parks, commonly presented as sites for the imposition of bourgeois codes of conduct; as 'moral geographies' (Driver, 19) enabling the suppression of an autonomous working class culture. While urban parks are commonly presented as the antithesis of the urban commons, using the theoretical work of Jacques Rancière, the article foregrounds instead the moments of creative resistance and aesthetic appropriation that characterised Victorian working-class use of urban green space. It argues that, rather than spaces of enclosure, parks might be explored instead for their re-introduction of the commons as practices of dissensus. Rather than imposing this past upon the present through the enduring symbolic barriers and governmental regimes that constitute green space, the article argues that we might look instead to the moments in which new languages of appreciation, experience and ownership are formed by marginalised groups - in particular young people.

Introduction

Walking around in the park
Should feel better than work:
The lake, the sunshine,
The grass to lie on,

Blurred playground noises
Beyond black-stockinged nurses -
Not a bad place to be.
Yet it doesn't suit me.

Extract from Philip Larkin's *Toads Revisited*

Not only for poets, landscape designers (Cranz, 1982), historians (Conway, 1991, 2000) and observers of public health, both mental (Barton and Pretty, 2010; Bowler *et al*, 2010) and physical (Bird, 2004; Wheater *et al.*, 2007), a walk in the park has in recent decades been enjoyed by cultural and moral geographers (Lawrence, 1993; Matless, 1997), scholars of race and ethnicity (Byrne and Wolch, 2009) and non-representational accounts of visibility (Wylie, 2002) and alienation (Olwig, 2005).

For it can be an instructive trip. At the heart of the city, the park presents a negotiated abundance of nature, a re-imagining of the rural landscape mediated by the complex ecology of the city (Gabriel, 2011). The urban park is *release* – from life saturated by economic, temporal and spatial pressures – yet, as displayed in Larkin's account, there is a wealth of aesthetic sadness in the urban park, a *failure* to live up to a certain imagination of 'nature' as perfectly and pleasingly *uncontrolled*. The park harbours both extremes of order and disorder; on the one hand it is the shocking sight of a group of youths lounging amidst piles of rubbish, shrouded in loud music and aggression, or the fear that takes hold at night in the absence of street lights and CCTV networks. On the other, the verdant lawns and manicured flower-beds are lamented by historians and social scientists for their excesses of control (Marne, 2001; Taylor, 1995; Firth, 2003). The municipal park emerged in a period of the rapid enclosure of 'the commons'; as a space that is bordered, managed, policed, guarded, owned and observed it has long been associated with the loss of the truly 'open' commons. Contemporary years have seen the same spaces, rejuvenated through Heritage Lottery Fund grants, subject to new forms of surveillance and banishment.

Approaching these tensions between containment and opening through the work of Jacques Rancière, I seek in this article to give a novel reading of the role of the urban park in its relationship with this romanticised 'commons'. The article argues that, if 'the commons' is less a state to be regained than an opening to equality inscribed in space, in contrast to the narrative placing the park as indicative of the 'enclosure' of the commons the park may be seen as indicative instead of methods for introducing the commons into the city.

This argument rests on the unusual approach Rancière takes to the concept of the aesthetic, one that forces a questioning of how the social sciences approach aesthetic experience. Having examined the "sociologisation of the aesthetic" that frames critical perspectives on contemporary experiences of public space, the article proceeds to set out the two principle designations, as I see it, of green space as harbouring politics of enclosure. The first is the enclosure of experience; the shaping of the wild nature of the park with the appetitive pleasures of the working-class subject. Examined are historical accounts of the emergence of the first municipal parks and the park movement, paying particular attention to the *Select Committee on Public Walks*, whose presentation to parliament marked a pivotal moment in the birth of the free-to-access park (Conway, 1991). The second is the enclosure of shock; the distribution of disruptive bodies, behaviours and objects that seeks to avoid any disturbances in the aesthetic expectations of a given space.

The article follows, however, Rancière in identifying the key *political* moment to be not these logics of enclosure, but rather the suspensions and disturbances to these forms of containment. Rancière enjoins us to consider the aesthetic not only as experience, but also as *suspension*; the suspension of our particular position as determinate subjects we experience in an aesthetic relation. A final section, having introduced the basics of Rancière's theoretical framework, the article notes the multiplying inconsistencies, suspensions and re-appropriations of these forms of enclosure, and develops a critique of the notion that these logics of containment are *all there is*.

Aesthetic commons

A principal reason for considering aesthetics in the context of urban space is the rise of a more strategic, wide-ranging and invasive policing of what we are likely to see (Deleuze, 1992; Rose, 1999). Like other urban spaces serving as platforms for diverse uses and experiences, over the past two decades public parks have

been subject to an increasing range of techniques, brought together under the term 'anti-social behaviour', designed to limit, disperse or discourage instances of aesthetic shock (Burney, 2005; Prior, 2007; Squires, 2008). In sum, a range of analyses have made abundantly clear the extent to which the aesthetic is the site of politics and power. Made clear in these developments is the extent to which, when discussing aesthetics, we are discussing *community*. To consider the beauty of a flower bed or verdant lawn is to recognise the level of *correspondence* between our own aesthetic experiences and those of others, our belonging to a community of users both past and present. Correspondingly, it raises the limits of this togetherness; why is this experience not respected by others; the motorbike rider and fly tipper, the tagger or arsonist.

In discussing the aesthetic and commonality as linked in this way, we are raising the *suspension* of our particular selves. Rather than individuals engaged in an experience determinable by our own composition in time, space and society, we are instead considering a *suspension* of who we are, as bodies composed by a connection with objects that cuts across individuals. Again, there is a good reason for considering this suspension to have political dimensions. The Occupy movement in New York, London and elsewhere, presented the gesture of suspending the pre-determined uses and audiences of public space as a *sui generis* political act. To engage in action with no pre-determined political goals or outcomes, only the aesthetic act of creating a new distribution of roles and experiences, becomes meaningful in an economic and political climate that appear beyond any meaningful change (Žižek, 2012).

These developments chimed with the concept of 'the commons' (or 'the common'), a concept that been seized upon by several contemporary thinkers (see Hardt and Negri, 2009; Linebaugh, 2009; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2010) as an evocation of commonality and sharing without the implications of consensus and communion denoted by the term 'community'. The tents and inchoate forms of action stirred thoughts of pre-enclosure spaces and the promise of a more equitable and egalitarian organisation of economy. What I seek to do in this article is display how, in considering the commons as this aesthetic suspension, it may be presented less as a specific historical space to be recreated than a disruptive moment that suspends an established distribution of acceptable behaviours. I argue finally that the public park, with nature as play and experimentation, has been a privileged site within the urban environment for this disruptive moment.

The sociologisation of the aesthetic

The social sciences have tended to reject a romantic approach to aesthetics (Armstrong, 2000), in which aesthetic experience, as wonder and awe, as both originary connection to nature and transcendent connection to the divine, would to some extent lie outside of an individual's social position or determinable capabilities. To foreground the primacy of the social, on the other hand, is to approach such questions in terms of different aesthetic capabilities. The seminal text, when considering this rejection, is Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984). Bourdieu demonstrated how individuals' reactions to artistic objects were determined by their socio-economic background. When given an abstract photograph, working-class participants would react to the *reality* of a photograph, judging whether or not it fulfilled a certain determinable function. Such individuals "lacked the specific competence" (44) to understand 'artistic' photos, whether 'abstract' or of unusual subjects, and were eventually forced in these cases to "admit defeat" (46). Forced that is to recognise their own non-understanding inasmuch as bourgeois photography was accepted to be beyond their frames of comprehension, such moments demonstrated to these subjects the reason for their social exclusion. Thus described by Bourdieu is the aesthetic as an operative fiction distributing places within society: maintaining the illusion of the disinterested, super-sensible experience serves to display to individuals the necessity of their being dominated within this structure. In short, because they do not understand bourgeois photography, they must remain in the subordinated roles of manual labourers. Following De la Fuente (2000), we may label this approach, through which the sociological understanding of the world proceeds by delimiting aesthetic judgement in line with societal categories, the 'sociologisation of the aesthetic'.

Described in the below sections are critical approaches to the creation of public parks – critical that is of the liberal narratives that celebrated their democratic, equalising and educative qualities – that adhere to this formula of demarcating aesthetic capabilities in line with societal positions. As will be discussed, these identifications of an enduring logic of *enclosure* that characterised the Victorian public park rely upon a clear demarcation of the aesthetic capacities of the working classes. These perspectives make clear the implications for our contemporary use of green space: the implications of freedom, pleasure, hide the existence of rigid symbolic codes regarding acceptable behaviour and subtle barriers that marginalise and exclude certain social groups. In presenting, through the work of Jacques Rancière, a challenge to this hierarchical superiority of the social with regard the aesthetic, the article presents also a challenge to the reading of urban parks as enduring spaces of 'enclosure', and seek to do this through that most evocative area of behaviours; disorderly or anti-social conduct. Thus, before moving on to examine these critiques and a 'Rancièrian' response to them, it is necessary first to establish how this 'sociologisation of the aesthetic',

and a focus upon the enclosure of experience, continues to structure social scientific approaches to 'disorder'.

Anti-social aesthetics and the enclosure of shock.

As 'New Labour' came into power in 1997, amidst millenial talk of 'Cool Britannia' and a new multicultural settlement (Modood, 2007:10), the rather more murky business of 'anti-social behaviour' was widely agreed to be the most pressing political issue facing the nation (Burney, 2005:1). Critics (Ashworth *et al*, 1998; Squires, 2007) of anti-social behaviour policy implemented by New Labour have focused particularly on the claim that, rather than serving any rehabilitative purpose, Anti-Social Behaviour Orders and the other interventions introduced to combat the plague of anti-social individuals indicative of 'Broken Britain' were being used by police to *manage*, rather than rehabilitate, difficult populations. Futhermore, rather than strengthening community through the fostering of collective action, in tending towards enforcement-based practices, and a notion of community based upon a morally virtuous subjectivity, they fostered instead the exclusion and marginalisation of significant sections of the working poor (Prior *et al*, 2006).

Andrew Millie's (2008a, 2008b) work is exemplary for our purposes here, since it clearly articulates the relationship between the aesthetic and anti-social behaviour that prevails within these critical approaches. This approach can broadly be divided into a 'Bourdean' stage and a 'Foucauldian' stage; first a mapping of particular tastes and judgments particular to individuals and spaces, and second a mirroring of this mapping in spatio-temporal techniques for the distribution of aesthetic pleasures.

Millie proposes that our socially specific tastes, and the particular spatio-temporal context in which these are deployed, underpin any attribution we might make of a behaviour being 'anti-social' (2008a: 384). As a critical approach it presents a noble attempt to return the material to policy analysis, in other words to recognise the situation of events in times and spaces and to recognise that nothing occurs abstractly but in a particular social situation. In line with Bourdieu's work, Millie's project is to de-mystify, through sociological categories, the 'objective' claims that underpin certain aesthetic judgements, and is as such based upon the bracketing out of the aesthetic as this suspension of the purely subjective.

The example Millie gives of the concrete situation of judgements, one frequently used in contemporary discussions of the relativity of anti-social behaviour, is graffiti, in particular with reference to its turn as a cultural artefact from mindless defacement to, in selected circumstances, bourgeois respectability. Thus Millie displays how the distribution of 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' graffiti, between 'spray art' and 'tagging',[1] relies upon shifting interpretations of what is acceptable within urban space. Such a relativity is adequately displayed, as Millie notes, in the elevated position, among middle class observers and Bristol City councillors,[2] of the graffiti artist Banksy (Millie, 2008a:386).

Following Bourdieu, Millie assumes that the aesthetic claim to universality displayed in these judgements, that in which one graffito is celebrated as art while another is denounced as vandalism, is illusory. In the latter case, it follows that if a tagger takes pride in their work, and sees in it a certain beauty, while local residents see only the beauty in the park bench it is scrawled on, then all are only expressing their particular composition as subjects in determinate situations. The line dividing these judgements of taste is purely social, their mutual claims to a certain objectivity are illusions within a constructed matrix of perception. Our perception of an object as beautiful or anti-social is only the expression of our situated, enculturated judgement.

As noted above, the second stage of Millie's analysis, in which he draws our attention to how this matrix of judgments, individuals and spaces operates as a locus of power, owes less to Bourdieu than to Foucault and Deleuze. This analysis builds particularly upon group of authors (Rose, 1999; Dean, 1999) working with Foucault's short lecture on 'governmentality', whose work has brought to light the spatial techniques for the *distribution* of gazes and activities that create certain aesthetic ecologies. The wish to shop, work, live or play in a pleasant environment is itself the site through which various techniques, such as the Anti-Social Behaviour Orders and Dispersal Orders, are both enacted and legitimated. It is in this vein that critics of anti-social behaviour policy have noted the extent to which preventative interventions largely abandon 'rehabilitative' procedures in favour of behaviour management (Chakrabati and Russell, 2008). A particular manifestation of this is the tendency of the police and other 'enforcement' agencies to use ASBOs and other interventions in order to 'cleanse' certain spaces of the 'usual suspects', namely sex-workers (Hubbard,

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[1] Save the few whose spaces were not affected by graffiti, all the group members interviewed considered a strict distinction between tagging, as a territorial practice, and the more artistic forms of graffiti. In the evolution of the discipline however these practices have always been firmly intertwined (Snyder, 2009).

[2] In 2005 a renowned Banksy graffito in the city centre was allowed to stay after 93% of respondents to an online poll on the city council website voted to keep it. The artist has been generally feted in the city, notably in an enormously popular exhibition in the city museum.

2004; Sagar, 2007; Scoular *et al*, 2007), drug users and other 'street-life' individuals (Moore, 2008) and young people (Goldsmith, 2008).

In other words, aesthetics is inscribed in space not only in socially and historically conditioned individual determinations of 'beauty', but through the varying aesthetic techniques that compose the 'urban' in its material complexity. As Millie notes;

> In effect, the untidy are removed or hidden from view so as to beatify the city. 'Popular' aesthetics are catered for in the creation of a safe and sanitized streetscape, acceptable to the shopping, business, leisure and residential majority. (2008a:387)

Described here is the material operativity of the aesthetic. For on this account, not only are there clear societal demarcations regarding who may experience what, but there are also structures of power working to maintain these distinctions. We might observe how certain urban spaces, of which shopping centres and high-streets are the most prominent, are increasingly permeated by techniques, operating upon bodies, spaces and times, that serve to eradicate any disruptions to the pleasant aesthetic in which, as Millie recognises, many of us wish to live. The Anti-Social Behaviour Orders and No-Drinking Zones, we realise, are all part of a system seeking to keep individuals' aesthetic experiences in their proper places. It is here that the parallels with 'enclosure' as a historical process become clear; the sociologisation of the aesthetic, in which individuals aesthetic capabilities are enclosed within clear categories, is mirrored by a *regime of enclosure* that seeks to maintain these distinctions.

As I read Rancière's work, he does not seek to contradict or falsify these latter forms of power. He *does*, however, challenge the notion that the mapping of aesthetic capacities are *all there is*. He claims that to subscribe to these orderings of experience is to continue their policing of experience; the regimes of enclosure, maintained through techniques of behaviour management, *rely upon* an unquestioning acceptance of these demarcations of proper aesthetic capacities. As we turn now to how critical accounts have portrayed the enclosure of experience in supposedly wild and freeing natures of the Victorian urban parks, it is worth repeating the argument of this paper; that the truly critical gesture is not to reveal these structures, but rather to bring to light the multiple moments in which they are transgressed; it is to display

the contingency of the story that is told about those who are unable or unwilling to partake in the 'high' aesthetic pleasures reserved for the privileged.

The loss of the commons and the enclosure of experience

'They hang the man, and flog the woman,

That steals the goose from off the common;

But let the greater villain loose,

That steals the common from the goose.'

(Anonymous poem of 17th Century)

Though cities had private gardens and commons, and London had the Royal Parks which had been made progressively open to the public over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Conway, 1991:12), the concept of the publicly accessible, municipally funded park is relatively recent, dating to the significant urban expansions of the mid Victorian era. Yet on many accounts (Marne, 2001; Firth, 2003; Taylor, 1995), the urban parks that emerged in this latter period simply *continued* the theft, described in the well known anonymous poem of the 18th century,[3] whose effects they were intended to mitigate. Highlighted in these accounts is the extent to which these emerged less from a concern for public enjoyment than paternalist fears regarding the moral health of the "humbler classes" and a more visceral fear of the popular movements, particularly Chartism and the Reform League, for which public spaces played both a symbolic and practical function (Roberts, 2001). These critiques present a specific case study within the wider argument that the middle and upper classes in the Victorian era maintained, against a backdrop of material inequality, their wealth and power not through force but the imposition of middle class values (Stedman-Jones, 1971; Donajgrodzki, 1977), in this case the genteel qualities associated with a gentle stroll.

Indeed, when Parliament was presented in 1833 with the *Report from the Select Committee on Public Walks* (hereafter SCPW) (Slaney, 1833), extensive focus was placed upon the new working class subject that would emerge from greater provision of green space:

A man walking out with his family, among his neighbours of different ranks, will naturally be desirous

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[3] Steals the common from the goose

to be properly clothed, and that his Wife and Children should be also; but this desire duly directed and controlled, is found by experience to be of the most powerful effect in promoting Civilization, and exciting Industry. (Slaney, 1833:9)

The 'park movement', of which the *SCPW* may be seen as a founding moment (Conway, 1991:21), was not only born of the pace of enclosure and 'problem' of recreational space in England's urban centres, but also of the embarrassing visibility of working class recreations; the "drinking houses, dog fights and boxing matches" (Slaney, 1833:8); pastimes to which men were 'driven' by the paucity of options for more sedate recreation available to them. The reformers arguing for greater access to parks were part of the wider movement, driven by a belief that leisures and pastimes should be sites for improvement, to foster 'rational recreation' (Bailey, 1987). Another factor to be considered is the depth of an anti-urbanism among the wider reform movement, manifested in a belief that the city had a deleterious effect upon morals (Rozenzweig and Blackmar, 1992; Sennett), and as such the imperative that 'breathing spaces'– a metaphor with both societal and physical resonance – be integrated into the planning of the city (see Loudon, 1833:698). As well as being the "lungs of the metropolis" (Slaney, 1833:15) the public parks was its *conscience*: a 'machine to fix a broken society' (Young, 2004:3).

Thus Anthony Taylor notes the manner in which, though presented as spaces of free enjoyment, unwanted activities, principally public meetings and prostitution, but also gambling, courting and other more innocent pastimes, were 'ruthlessly purged' from the 'imagined utopia' of the park. Taylor continues that the claims to inclusivity advanced by the park reformers were rendered absurd by the preoccupation with shaping the behaviours of the working classes:

> Above all, whilst providing access to new green space, it at the same time sought to regulate and police that space. The urban parks of the 1840s and 1850s were accordingly regulated spheres, scrupulously maintained, and patrolled and policed by the hated park-keepers, who became a part of working-class demonology in their own right, co-operated with the police, dressed like them, and used fences, gates and padlocks to exclude. … Far from creating a space in which the classes might mingle, the parks rather reinforced existing social divisions in London.

Paulene Marne's study of Sefton and Stanley Parks in Liverpool demonstrates the extent to which claims for inclusivity on the part of the park reformers belied strong symbolic barriers inscribed in the park spaces (438). She notes in particular that, where women were encouraged to use certain park spaces, their doing so

was heavily circumscribed, and "was attained at the expense of the freedom of others" (439), principally working-class men. Marne notes the exclusion of the local Irish residents (who made up a quarter of the late Victorian population of the city and were concentrated in the poorest neighbourhoods) through the banning of "anyone 'attired otherwise than in a decent manner'". This symbolic exclusion of ethnic groups raises the extent, more comprehensively examined in the North American context (Byrne and Wolch, 2009), to which the idealised vision of nature was predominantly *white*; premised upon an imagination of a rural British identity unsullied by the heterogenous social texture of the urban.

While the park movement inaugurated by the *SCPW* was slow to build momentum, by the end of the Victorian era significant areas of land had saved from enclosure and made available for public use. Yet this escape from enclosure, these critical perspectives highlight, harbours another, more insidious form of containment. As opposed to the unmanaged commons, the landscapes of the new urban parks were carefully managed expressions of a utilitarian reformism enacted through a deterministic vision of nature as a kind of moral and intellectual tonic. Kenneth Olwig (2005:34) describes this process as the *commodification* of landscape, in which the commons, harbouring shared practices and customs that had developed and co-existed there across generations, were identified as waste to be replaced by a carefully managed space "estranged from its substantive social meaning, the land of a people as *res publica*". In sum the park continues the enclosure of the commons because it performs a kind of commodification of the freedoms experienced in the open spaces that preceded the urban expansions of the Victorian era. Rather than opening the body to new experiences, it encloses the body in fixed rhythms. Rather than opening forms of aesthetic pleasure, it inscribes into green space fixed languages of ownership. The creativity, contingency and openness to others that ran through the commons is entirely closed off in favour of strictly managed common body.

In the third section we will address the problems with this approach, focusing in particular upon the assumption that the aesthetic experiences of the working classes who were enclosed in this way can be determined within such a immutable hierarchy. Before turning properly to this Rancièrian critique, it is worth sketching the similarities of approach between the critical observations on the management of behaviour and the emergence of the municipal urban park, inasmuch as both discourses ascribe to a 'sociologisation of the aesthetic'. The implicit assumption I wish to highlight here, for reasons that will become clear below, is that this distribution of experiences maintained by a structure of domination is itself

an accurate reflection of the distribution of sensual capacities between groups. As stated above, I wish to question the assumption that this distribution of experiences is *all there is*.

Returning to contemporary anti-social behaviour interventions, well described by Millie is the manner in which the term 'anti-social behaviour' serves to demarcate and construct a system of regulations and enforcements based upon perceived differences between aesthetic life-worlds. Yet in this irresolvable difference there is the assumption that, say, the working class populations only consumed parks in the terms laid out for them by the reformers in the park movement, or that the group of teenagers who are removed from a green space through a Dispersal Order cannot experience it with the same aesthetic pleasure as the community group who garden it. It is the assumption that the suspension of the cognitive faculties in an aesthetic experience, the manner in which our determinate modes of cognition are *transcended*, is an ideological illusion and may be fully explained by our background and the time and space in which we are composed. Marginalised, in other words, are the complex languages through which young people in particular articulate their own attachment to particular park spaces.

Precluded in these two accounts of the aesthetics of the park, the first charting the emergence of the park as *enclosures* of experience, the second as an enclosure of shock, is any permeability regarding the boundaries of experience. They preclude any possibility, that is, of the distribution of capacities being transgressed in an aesthetic encounter. What the critical accounts of the emergence of public parks struggle to incorporate is the proposition that working-class populations might have created their own aesthetic languages for enjoying the manicured parks and ordered flower beds, or that young people inhabit a complex ways of owning and making sense of spaces which, it is often the case yet rarely noted, they are the most frequent users. Asserted in these accounts, that is, is the *political* claim that the places a structure of power assigns to certain individuals are the places they inhabit, and that one's relationship to power must begin from displaying to individuals the part they play within a structure. I argue that such accounts contribute to, rather than disrupt, the spirit of enclosure they seek to critique. In the next section we turn to Jacques Rancière, in whose spirit these critical observations have been formed, and whose project has been formed upon directly opposing these latter assertions before setting out how this claim may be challenged.

Rancière and aesthetic equality

Jacques Rancière is part of the generation of philosophers, of whom Jean-Luc Nancy and Alain Badiou would be the other leading voices, whose philosophical trajectories have been shaped by a desire to re-capture philosophical questions seen to have been lost in the work of Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida. If for Nancy this question is community, for Rancière it is democracy. As one of his key introducers to English-speaking audiences explains, "[h]is unflinching defence of a radical version of democratic equality has made him one of the key references in contemporary political thought" (Deranty, 2010:1). As noted above, the principle terrain of this defence has been the question of aesthetics, and the principle villain therein Pierre Bourdieu. Thus in setting out this radical articulation of equality, we will finish upon a very different entanglement of space, behaviour and aesthetics than that presented above, one that will open out a different perspective on green space to be pursued in the final section of the article. To describe Rancière's unique approach, I will focus here upon a number of concepts that have been explored in his work, among them the 'distribution of the sensible' and the 'uncertain community'. The key terms for this discussion however will be Rancière's re-framing of 'police' and 'dissensus'. If the techniques of power described above are framed by the former term, the radical value of Rancière's work, as I see it, lies in his taking us *beyond* the critical approaches it names, inasmuch as the moment of 'dissensus', and its centrality to the 'aesthetic regime', form the very specific notion of transformative democratic practice he sets out.

Thus we will begin with the 'distribution [*partage*] of the sensible', and the multiple meanings the phrase carries. As both to share and to divide, *partager* implies the forms of distribution described above, in which a shared sensual landscape is established by dividing between individuals specific sensual capacities, including the partitioning off of those who *cannot* understand or perceive in certain situations – a group described by Rancière as the "part which has no part" (1999:30). Thus as Rancière describes it, the term denotes "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it" (2004:12).

In sum, the distribution of the sensible concerns what is able to be experienced, or "what can be said, made or done" (2004:85), in certain zones, and the careful management of these dividing lines. The management of this distribution, as the holding of those fragile dividing lines that render some utterances perceivable while others are merely noise, Rancière labels the *police*. As Chambers (2010:63) notes, while Rancière's concept of the police does offer a general description of the role of the institutional 'police force', in reality a polity with a strong police order will have little use for an actual police force, whose intervention is only needed when the former is disrupted. For 'the police', as the political management of this clear distribution

of what can be experienced, denotes a far broader system of containment, of which the sociological accounts in their demarcation of aesthetic capacities play an important role. This is because these accounts, in marking out the possibilities of experience, take only aesthetic *consensus*, in other words the *affirmation* of the distribution of the sensible, as their material of study. Rancière enjoins us to examine instead how the distribution of the sensible as the *set of possibilities* of sensual experience suggests also the possibility of *dissensus* – of the disruption of this distribution and as such of the police order. What Rancière finds disclosed in the work of Friedrich Schiller, and in the 'aesthetic regime of art' of which his work is indicative, is the extent to which what is able to be experienced transcends one's subject position. The distribution of the sensible described by Schiller is less a set of stable divisions than a principle of constitutive indeterminacy, one that renders the allocation of particular aesthetic capabilities to particular individuals fundamentally *unstable*. The aesthetic experience for Rancière is less an expression of taste than this act of *dissensus*; the breaking of that connection between what one is and what one is able to see. The democratic action of aesthetics is to be placed not, as in Bourdieu, in revealing the structure that determines aesthetic capacities, and thereby affirming them, but in *transgressions* of this structure.

With this in mind we may turn, finally, to community. In *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004), Rancière notes how certain political acts or literary statements, in practising such a suspension, "reconfigure the map of the sensible by interfering with the functionality of gestures and rhythms", and may as such be seen as the enactment of "uncertain communities" (40). For the community, in such practices, would not lie in a consensus or togetherness, but in the very calling into question of the "distribution of roles, territories and languages" (40) that demarcate the 'parts' or 'lots' that compose the community. What Rancière recognises in the aesthetic regime is a radical mode of practising community, one in which what is 'in common' is not a property or consensus, but the presupposition of an *equality* dissimulated by this distribution of parts.

Rather than the 'uncertain community', I propose that it is more appropriate to refer to this moment of radical equality as the 'commons'. In other words, through Rancière we may see the commons not as a historically past space but as the suspension of that division separating those who know how to sense, and be active, and those who do not. The commons does not harbour equality as similarity, but rather equality as a political event in which the presupposition that *all* are the same enacts a re-configuration of the distribution of the sensible.

Rancière notes how this presupposition, as enacted by the 19th century teacher and pedagogist Joseph Jacotot, disrupts the justification for students' remaining silent, for the democratic presupposition of equality serves only to demonstrate "the sheer contingency of the order" (1999:30) that precludes their voices. Thus in the case of Jacotot's radical pedagogy, the student, whose lot it is to listen, learn and be formed in the image of an imparted knowledge, in short who is subject to a distribution of roles in which their voice does not count, or emerges only as the senseless babble of anti-social grunts, was able take a 'part' where previously they had no part. The 'commons' is not a thing but this moment in which a radical presupposition of equality disrupts a determining hierarchy. As Todd May describes it;[4]

> It is not that people necessarily demand equality, or even think of themselves consciously as presupposing equality (although often they do). Rather, it is there, in their political practices. (2010:72)

In other words, the presupposition of equality lies in the suspensions and transgressions of the distribution of the sensible by the commons. If in Jacotot's openness to these suspensions he created conditions for the enactment of *dissensus* that the commons is, Rancière's political demand lies in the continual re-engagement of this moment. It is a demand directed against the dominant forms of critical engagement with the social, which as noted above are described by Rancière as contributing to the *policing* of the distribution of the sensible – in short to the *neutralisation* of equality. The 'sociologist' (by which Rancière primarily intends Bourdieu) remains bound to the police order inasmuch as he considers his work to be one of *unveiling*, of revealing what was hidden, and as such establishes a position of mastery over the subject who may see and experience only that within the bounds of what their *ethos* allows them. Sociology is from its formation "a war machine against allodoxy", a refusal of "the dehiscence between the arms and the gaze" (2006:7).

Parks revisited

This refusal, I argue, has been present in the accounts discussed thus far, concentrating as they did upon the ways in which aesthetic experiences are controlled; how they are *enclosed* in a process mirroring the loss of

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[4] May is describing in this passage the 'demos', the term used in *Dissensus* (2010:32-3) in an equivalent role to the 'uncertain community' here.

the physical commons. Written out of these accounts, or moreover included as minor exceptions to the general rule of enclosure, are the manifold ways in which these spaces were, and are, appropriated in diverse and un-prescribed ways by local populations. In drawing upon these exceptions to the rule of aesthetic containment, I wish to indicate the presence of the commons; of moments where supposedly marginalised communities create from green space their own aesthetic languages and experiences.

A first critical point to note is the extent to which the identification of the park movement and the birth of the municipal park as the establishment of a certain *order*, risks overstating the capacities of the reformers. These critical accounts assume, for example, that the manicured urban parks comprised the only open space available to the working classes. Emma Griffin (2005) notes how little contemporary discussion there was of a lack of open space and the extent of disused space available for various recreations (175) owing to the spatially dispersed nature of growth in England's industrial centres (Trinder, 2000). In other words, the notion that the unmanaged spaces of the commons were fully eradicated, with the manicured and managed parks taking their place, overplays the smoothness of the urbanisation process in its enclosure of the open, the common and the hidden.

This overestimation of the power of the reformers occludes also the agency of working-class individuals in shaping the new municipal parks. A seminal text in this respect is Roy Rosenzweig's (1985) study of the role of immigrant Polish populations in the shaping of parks in Worcester, Massachusetts. Rozenzweig argues that that

> proponents of the social-control formula suggest that the object of reform designs – the urban worker – was both inert and totally pliable. By viewing park reform exclusively from the "top down," they ignore the possibility that workers might have taken an active part in conceiving or advocating parks and assume that workers uncritically accepted the park programs handed down by an omnipotent ruling class. (1985:127)

In the United Kingdom the role of 'workers' in is poorly understood, principally because the records available – minutes of committee meetings, documents detailing lease agreements and acquisitions, newspaper reports – focus upon the bureaucratic process at the expense of local experiences and forms of expression.

Taking my own city, Bristol, as a case-in-point, an account of the birth of its major green spaces drawn from such 'official' sources would proceed by detailing the series of leases, gifts and purchases over the second half of the nineteenth century. Bristol lagged behind the other urban centres in the provision of green space, the city Corporation being "slow to anticipate the need for public parks and slow to respond to the public demand for them" (Young, 1998:182). What such accounts omit, as Young notes, is the consistent pressure that was placed upon the corporation from 'ratepayers, residents or workers for the establishment of a park in a particular district, for the hastening of the acquisition process, or for the provision of some facility within a developing park." (1998:180). The creation and shaping of several parks attained in this period, Young argues, depended upon the direct, but largely unrecorded, involvement of local individuals and groups. The clearest articulation of the involvement of local working population in the case of Bristol is given in the pamphlet, published in 1871, entitled *The Cry of the Poor; Being a Letter from Sixteen Working Men of various trades, to the Sixteen Aldermen of Bristol* (Sixteen Working Men, 1871). The pamphlet decried the dearth of green space in the south and east of the city, stating that;

"[Clifton and Durdham Downs] are mainly for rich people who can afford to live in that neighbourhood: it would take us an hour's walking, after the hard toil of the day is over, to get to these beautiful spots, and then another hour to get home, thus making pleasure a toil.' (4)

Of particular interest is the manner in which the pamphlet seeks to make its point by expressing this pleasure in the language of genteel enjoyment and aesthetic refinement. It describes the flowers one would hope to find in such a 'people's park', given that "at present we see little better than daisies and dandelions", continuing to express the desire to "feel the grass under our feet, or sit with our wives on a summer's eve and watch our children play." (Sixteen Working Men, 1871:4-5)

Following the critiques of the park movement described above, such a document may be firmly placed within the *embourgeoisement* of the working classes occurring over the Victorian era. Such expressions represent no more than the power of the park as a moral geography; its success in shaping the unquestioning subjectivities that would forestall the rise of another Chartism or Reform League. What I wish to highlight is the importance of the gesture of appropriating these aesthetic pleasures *for* the working population of Bristol as a disruption of the notion that they were below or unworthy of such experiences. The document questions the assumption that the articulation, and appropriation, of aesthetics of the park was not the preserve of the philanthropic middle classes. Perhaps the most prominent and long-lasting

example of how the symbolic codes inscribed in parks were exceeded and re-appropriated is the regularised association football becoming the site for specifically working-class tribalisms (Bailey, 1987:186).

As Marne concludes, "in the final analysis it is 'the people' who creatively produce public space through their use of it and the values they ascribe to it". By citing these examples, my aim is to demonstrate how the imposition of bourgeois codes of conduct, of encouraging and inciting individuals to temperance and calm, assumes a smooth process imposed, without creative resistance, upon working class populations. Yet these latter were, in different ways, developing their own particular attachments to park spaces. The full history of how 'the people' appropriated green spaces, developing their own languages of aesthetic pleasure, is yet to be written. What Rancière highlights is the importance of writing it; to change the story written about the working class in which disruptive subjects were forced into middle class moulds as part of a process of power; to change the narrative wherein disordered youths are forced into more manageable expressions of discipline and belonging. The political act is to draw attention to the contingency of these stories and to act on the presupposition that these distributions of aesthetic capacities, in the end, do not hold.

Continuing into the present, rather than approaching parks in terms of distributions of aesthetic capacities, and their becoming the site for certain techniques of power, we might look instead to the moments in which new languages of appreciation, experience and ownership are formed by young people. Rather than taking the determining spatial image to be the brightly lit and passively surveilled[5] Multi-Use Games Area, we might take instead the skate park, with its complex frameworks for acceptable graffiti and the interaction of different vehicles. More controversially, we might take the image of the ecstatic carnival of driving stolen vehicles. Jeremy Brent, whose text *Searching for Community; Power and Representation on an Urban Estate* (2009) details his experience as a youth worker and the tension between his understanding of, but ultimate distance from, the young people with whom he worked, describes his surveying a scene, in a local wooded area, of burned-out cars and motorbikes;

> Going around the area in the day (at night I would have been out of time and out of place), I could get a sense of the excitement that the young people must have felt, as well as seeing the destruction caused. It was like a scene after a carnival. I could almost hear the shrieks of delight from the evening before. (160)

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[5] One technique to promote 'passive surveillance' is the placing of facilities within view of nearby houses.

Brent's account is careful not to romanticise this aesthetic life. "These are not sustainable communities" (163), he states, noting that even without the intervention of the police the ecstatic nature of the experience precluded any enduring community culture. Yet he notes also the enjoyment and investment in the disciplinary aspects of these performances – in other words the levels of order and learning amidst these seemingly disordered and destructive gatherings. Thus instead of determining the park and its practices as an aesthetic field to be interpreted, we might turn to the manner in which Brent, as an observer, recognises the equality of the young people's uses of the space; the manner in which he experiences also the exhilaration, excitement and productivity of the illicit practices taking place there.

This leads us to a rather more speculative proposal on the role of the park within the city, namely, the idea that parks are uniquely *experimental* spaces. Within an increasingly segmented urban environment, green space provides a platform for new experiences, conjugations of aesthetic pleasure and disciplinarities. The critical narratives described in this article have accounted very well for the introduction of nature into the city as a carefully managed balance of control and disorder whose goal is the containment of disruptive and unruly bodies. I am proposing a new narrative; the continual emergence, at the seams of the park space, of nature as experiment, contingency and play. Despite continual attempts to control and manage green space, the continual return of communal illicit experiences – and of new ways of sharing and expressing these experiences – suggests that the park has been a particularly rich site for that disruption of a certain story in which all conform to their determinate aesthetic capabilities. I propose a re-imagination of the park as a privileged site for the commons, and as such a site for re-thinking the meaning of 'community'. By taking the park, as a space of experimentation and play, rather than the residential neighbourhood, as the ground of community; we might open new avenues for incorporating community into urban planning and development that avoids the tendency towards techniques for the management and containment of the 'usual suspects'.

Conclusion: the park ecology and its aesthetic disruption

The urban park is, as Byrne and Wolch note, a "socially mediated ecology with deep roots" (2009:745); an aesthetic space composed of historically situated discourses, techniques, ideologies and experiences. Central to any understanding of this complex ecology is the historical development of a disciplinary system for

controlling *nature*; both that of the appetative pleasures of the humble subject and the wild geography of the unenclosed commons. The strictly drawn lines of hierarchy and exclusion, and the civilizing gaze of the paternal middle-class, remains deeply woven into the material fabric of the park (Firth, 2003; Marne, 2001). The park remains designed, organised and policed to direct gazes and judgements both between users and into the park from the adjacent houses (Taylor, 1995; Lawrence, 1993).

Central to such arrangements of power, as Millie notes, is the cleansing of spaces of disorder. Anti-social behaviours have always taken place in even the most regulated parks (Marne, 2001:436; Conway, 1991:187), whose arrangement has from the outset been designed either to keep such behaviour out or exert a 'civilizing' influence upon it. It may be observed that the 'community' inscribed in the park space is an exclusionary community; it is the orderly, responsible and morally virtuous community collectively enjoying the peace and fresh air (Byrne and Wolch, 2009:747).

The purpose of this chapter has been to highlight a *different* aesthetics of green space. It has been to highlight not only the aesthetic techniques of ordering and governance, but the aesthetic in its disruption of hierarchies and orders; the aesthetic as a suspension of the distribution of the sensible policed by these techniques of governance. It has been to highlight the manner in which 'community' is inscribed in green space not only as the exclusionary community defined by the enforcement of a morally virtuous subjectivity, but as the commons; a constitutive opening to practices of aesthetic *dissensus*. In the final section I proposed that green space has played the role of presenting to the city this different commonality, one comprised not of a sharing within societal boundaries but a suspension or disruption of these boundaries. Through an investigation of this supplementary tension between containment and opening, the article proposed that an engagement with these moments in the history of green space might open the sites for an enduring democratic politics of community. Against the accounts of a controlled, managed and governmentalised nature, the article has sought to present the park as the site of the 'uncertain community', in other words as a figure within the city of how a disruption of the tightly policed roles that divide us might be achieved.

Underpinning these proposals is the Rancièrian presupposition of equality, which I have demonstrated above enacts a break with the Bourdean presumption that the mapping of tastes is *all there is* (and as such that the only possible political intervention lies in revealing to marginalised individuals their inferiority within the aesthetic system). On Rancière's account, the promise of transcendence in the aesthetic is directly

critical, it is the practised and enacted presupposition of equality, one whose effect is the reconfiguration of structures of power. In short, the political intervention is *already* being enacted in multiple practices of aesthetic *dissensus*. Such a thought would not only reconfigure our understanding of aesthetics, but also of community; of what it is we share, what it is we have 'in common'. For returning to this concept of 'uncertain communities', what Rancière is describing, in stark contrast to the communitarian accounts that have dominated social scientific discussion on the subject, is the community as a *political event*; the disruptive act, or *dissensus*, of the 'uncertain community'. What Rancière asks, as a point of departure, is to be open to this aesthetic disruption, to be open to the commons as the illegitimate claiming of a part by the "part which has no part" (1999:30).

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