Analyse ideas of social mobility associated with 'The New Socialism' proposed by Kevin Kelly in relation to the design philosophy of Cedric Price and the 'Non-Planners'

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In a climate where former labour minister Alan Milburn believes "we still live in a country where if you are born poor, you die poor" (BBC News 2011), and the deputy prime minister, Nick Clegg, is under great scrutiny due to his strategy on social mobility 'opening doors, breaking barriers' (released April 2011), directly contradicting government actions; university tuition fee increases, cuts to education maintenance allowance and benefit schemes to name a few, social mobility is a factor that is of great global concern.

An analysis of the term 'socially mobility' reveals it to describe a measure of how easily a group or individual can move vertically from their current social hierarchical status, influenced by aspects such as wealth and income, race and gender, class and current social status, access to education, and occupation. The ideal for increased social mobility is a system that bases its values on the meritocratic, as Kevin Kelly describes in his text on 'The New Socialism': "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need", an idea indicative to socialism that allows ubiquitous access to everything for all. In this text I will further discuss Kelly's ideas on a new digital socialism and oppose them against Cedric Price and the Non-Planners, who planned, instead, to use free market capitalism to appease the bureaucratic welfare state that was in place at the time non-plan was published, in the late 1960's. During this I will consider how each text associates its self, whether aiding or lessening, within the context of social mobility previously considered.

Socialism, as Kevin Kelly describes in his text, is perhaps the most fitting word to describe a form of virtual landscape that is emerging from quantum advances in public ease of access to the online world:

"I use socialism because technically it is the best word to indicate a range of technologies that rely for their power on social interactions"(Kelly 2009 p121)

He discusses a tool of production and distribution that has evolved to increase individual autonomy and transcend bureaucratic monopolistic states. He is simply talking about the internet. Think about Twitter, or Facebook, or Flickr, all forms of social media that one can upload to or download from, tag themselves in, add information about locations or significant times and dates to, and it extends much further than that. There are many learning resources online, TED for example, an online resource for higher education lectures, or Digg and Reddit which allows users to vote on web links that they feel are most important, Wikepidia, Youtube, Yelp, the list is limitless. The point we are concerned with however, is not the content of these websites but what this actually means in terms of social mobility, and it is this; in this virtual world you are not limited by race, gender, age, or education, or any of the normal factors because they simply do not exist. You have access to everything, you can find anything, learn any subject, become whoever you want to be, talk to anyone anywhere regardless of location, say what you want (within the limits of the website you are using), and if for some reason you can't there will always be a coder or programmer willing to help. Never before have you been allowed such freedom to become equal to your peers. Access to all of this knowledge is free of cost or contribution but why if makes no economic sense? Kelly explains why this has occurred in parallel to the capitalism of our physical society:

"instead of money, the peer producers who create the stuff gain status, enjoyment, satisfaction and experience" Kelly 2009 p122), the factors that influence social mobility are being rewritten by a new socialism, wealth and income replaced with knowledge and experience, and unlike before you have the freedom to be able to change your own circumstances and move up the social strata; if there even still exists one in this wholly egalitarian virtual world.

Bill gates describes this ideal as "A malevolent force bent on destroying the monopolistic incentive that helps support the American Dream", (Kelly 2009 p121)his support for free market capitalism is one shared by Cedric Price and the Non-planners, Reyner Banham, Paul Barker and Peter Hall. The Non-plan was a text that was first published in 1969

in an edition of 'New Society' and its purpose was to propose a form of 'non-planning' that would be able to cater for the myriad of needs of society that planning and current government had failed to do so. The end of the 1960's was an era of great political change, there was public unrest about the paternalistic welfare state and its failures to achieve social mobility. Price believed that it was the rigid authority and bureaucratic personal such as planners that were to blame for this; they halted any spontaneity that would allow for society to grow. Jonathan Hughes details non plan effectively in 'After Non-Plan, Retrenchment and Reassertion'

"The authors of non-plan had, in 1969, sought to address the imbalance of power, to make design more responsive to the public by reasserting the relationship between the architect and the client – thereby simultaneously taming the preconceptions of architectural arrogance and short circuiting the planning authorities", (Hughes 2000 p168)

Non-planning was to reassert the individual, by providing a flexible, non-permanent, infrastructure that would allow for organic and natural growth depending on individual need.

Price's ideologies are perhaps best exemplified in his earlier design for the 'Fun Palace'. A structure designed not to appease with its aesthetics, as was attempted after the modernist era of 1960's with vernacular architecture, it was instead fascinated with its function and environment for each individuals use. He took influence from Joan Littlewood's 'A laboratory of fun', it was to be a place where you could "learn to handle tools, paint, babies, machinery or just listen to your favourite tune. Dance, talk or be lifted up to see how other people make things work. Sit out over space with a drink and tune into what's happening elsewhere in the city. Try starting a riot or beginning a painting – or just lie back and stare at the sky" (Price 2003 p30), it was about heightened individual experience, it enabled 'self participatory education' (Price 2003 p31) and entertainment, and was to be accessible not only to the immediate neighbourhood but regional as well. Had this been fully realised it would have been a perfect vehicle for social mobility and perhaps a pre-emptive physical expression of Kelly's digital socialism.

It is clear now why Price and the non-planners believed their plan would be successful in reasserting the individual, but in order to strengthen this new individualistic society a political vehicle was needed and they took example from the American model of free market capitalism. The model that was in place at the time in America can be described as neo liberal market capitalism; Peter Dicken details it in his book 'Global Shift':

"In neo liberal market capitalism, as the term suggests, market mechanisms are used to regulate all or most aspects of the economy; individualism is a dominant characteristic, the state does not overtly attempt to plan the economy strategically" (Dicken 2003 p129), the market place is given the freedom to naturally develop from individual need, fuelled by supply and demand and maintained by competition. As a result the market should remain regulated, prices are kept fair, businesses run in equilibrium, well paid jobs are created and maintained, and as a result these companies pay government taxes well, which, in return, fund social programs for the community. In terms of social mobility, as the market is regulated and prices stay fair, products and services become accessible to all, and more social programmes to help the poor can be introduced as a result of increased government funding from taxes. It was this type of organic ad-hoc and spontaneous growth that attracted the non planners, the North American model was synonymous with freedom itself. They documented in 'Non-Plan' symbols of British trade such as 'Tesco' in the bright playful neon lighting akin to that seen in Las Vegas or Beverley hills, and detailed this as perfect for "restoring[the] vitality and spontaneity to city life" (Franks 2000 p34) that the centralization of the current British government had denied.

What the non-planners failed to do, however, was view this model outside of a sterile and wonderful facade. Free market capitalism in America had its own social concerns as Peter Philips declares in his text 'American Mantra: Free Market Capitalism':

"A closer examination of the American mantra reveals that 'free market' essentially means constant international U.S. government intervention on behalf of American corporations" (Phillips 2001), in such a competitive market it is only natural that companies will want to maximise their monthly profits, they aspire to achieve individual control of a good or service and create monopolies. Such as the ones Bill Gates suggested previously. They, rather than the market, obtain sole control over pricing and this is achieved by setting low wages for labourers. Capitalism works to qualify monopolistic controls and class divides, consumers are charged higher prices, businesses take more profit and pay employees less, the rich become richer and poor become and so accessibility decreases which halts any social mobility. As a result the government has to intervene and create controls to stop monopolistic abuse which returns us

back to a planned centralised state of which free market attempts to relieve. Apply this to the non-plan and as Ben Franks argues, the result would have been "to strengthen the power of multinationals and to impose business priorities on the public. Yet commercial predilections do not lead to lucid spontaneity, but to heteronomous control to check efficiency and the maximization of profit" (Phillips 2001), it would be driven by the monopolistic desires for profit rather than individual need, and to import any means of controls or checks would directly contradict the morals of non-planning. Thus non-plan would fail to provide the ad-hoc growth and therefore social mobility for reasons that mirror the failure of the free market in North America.

Although it seems non-plan would not have directly produced social mobility, I do believe that Cedric Price's theories did have an indirect effect in influencing an increase in social mobility that manifested in the form of the squatting movement of the 1970's. Hakim Bay describes the areas they inhabited as 'Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZ)', these areas were truly spontaneous communities working towards strengthening the working class by providing local events and gigs, and, campaigns and schemes, opening up opportunities not before available to the lower classes. Ben Franks describes them as "short term providing intense excitement and the opening up of possibilities, peak experience" (Franks 2000 p42), it is their impermanent architecture that allows them to create this, they are not a static confrontation to the state and can be flexible to move elsewhere if they do become an issue. I argue that it is latent revolutionaries such as these that put into action a true impermanent, flexible and spontaneous non-plan. By seeking only to strengthen community in an introvert fashion rather than to confront the state on a large scale they create the greatest freedom and thus open up the opportunities for efficient social mobility.

"Revolutions have grown out of much smaller numbers" (Kelly 2009 p125),

Latent revolutionaries, in the form of coders, hackers, and programmers, are also key actors in Kelly's text on new socialism: "but the coders, hackers, and programmers who design sharing tools don't think of themselves as revolutionaries" (Kelly 2009 p125), and I argue that these are the non-planners of the virtual landscape, albeit in a subconscious fashion.

However in order to fully understand this argument and 'new socialism' we must again look past the sterile facade of the virtual that Kelly presents us with. Up on investigation it appears that this virtual revolution faces the same sociological context that the Price's squatters of the 1970's did; Kelly's new digital socialism is constrained within covert free market capitalist boundaries. Lets considers those coders and programmers again:

 "one study estimates that 60,000 man years of work have poured into last year's release of Fedora Linux 9"(Kelly 2009 p124), they are working free of charge producing very fine high market value goods, and although we already know why they choose to work for free (discussed previously) we need to realise who the real economic beneficiaries are, besides the consumer. In this case it is not directly Linux themselves, but rather companies like red hat who provide, at a cost, the technical support, or set up and further programmes, for such collaborative softwares. Their reported revenue for 2011 was $245 million with a predicted increase of up to 25% year-after-year; the seemingly free virtual world is supporting the capitalistic profit based values of the physical state. Even social networking sites like Facebook, or search engines like Google, sell advertising space hence again supporting the capitalist mantra.

A study into global internet usage revealed that out only 2,095,006,005 out of the worlds 6,930,005,154 has access to or have used the internet, that is approximately thirty percent, or less than a third, who are able to get online. Considering that how can this system be as free as Kelly claims? Access to the solid infrastructure (computers, smart phones, etc) that supports this virtual world is not universal, so what appears to be a tool for social mobility contradicts its very morals when viewed from the physical. Further to that in order to access the virtual you must first conquer the social mobility obstacles, such as money, presented by capitalist monopolies that prevent the lower social strata and less developed from affording the physical hardware that is the sole gateway to the egalitarian world of the new digital socialism. Perhaps it is this missing link between the politics of the virtual socialism and the physical capitalism that prevent the system realising its full potential for social mobility. The nature of this new socialism is, however, beginning to have an effect on the politics of the physical world as Kelly points out:

"The force of online socialism is growing. It is dynamic spreading beyond electrons – perhaps into election" (Kelly 2009 p125), those who do have access to this world are being influenced as individuals and acting, though again

unconsciously, as a group to effect the outcome of elections and society. I believe as social mobility increases, allowing further access to the online world, the effect of the group through the individual will increase, and the barriers between the physical and virtual decrease. In history sociological and political stances have either concentrated on the individual or the group whilst trying to alleviate the barriers of social mobility as Peter Dicken describes:

"societies vary in the extent to which people, in general, are motivated to look after their own individual interests – where ties between individuals are very loose – and those in which ties are very close and the collective (family, community, etc) is the important consideration" (Dicken 2003 p126)

Non-plan and new socialism have both demonstrated that it is possible to run capitalism and socialism parallel to each other by considering the group and individual simultaneously, through the model of impermanence; in non-plan the squatters where not static, they remained flexible and able to dissolve or grow where appropriate, using capitalism to some benefits and the internet remains a constant non-static feature, websites or ideas can pop up or be removed with relative ease and the whole system is that of choice, the internet can support any values you desire.

"rather than viewing technological socialism as one side of a zero sum trade off between free market individualism and centralised authority, it can be seen as a cultural OS that elevates the individual and group at once" (Kelly 2009 p124)

In its support for both free market capitalism and its opportunities to make profit, and its manifestation as a vehicle for social mobility it is able to consider the individual and the group at the same time. It is a landscape festering with "ad-hocracy" (Kelly 2009 p121),as well as "a design frontier and a particularly fertile space for innovation" Kelly 2009 p121), it "demands no rigid creed" (Kelly 2009 p121), and is designed to "heighten individual autonomy and thwart centralisation" (Kelly 2009 p121), at the same time it supports the free market, through the communal co-operation and collaboration of millions of willing volunteer latent revolutionaries. To conclude my argument, was this not the landscape that Cedric Price and the non-planners alluded to, one of freedom, spontaneity, entertainment and individualism all within the borders of free market capitalism? I believe had there not been the recessionary limits and troubled views of technology in the 1970's, described in Jonathan Hughes 'After non-plan':

"The recessionary climate of the 1970's soon curtailed the techno-optimism of the previous decade" (Hughes 2000 p174), and "having promised a future of health, wealth and happiness, technology only appeared to have ushered in the menace of airborne international terrorism, the catastrophe of global nuclear war and the threat of unemployment owing to automation, robots and computers" (Hughes 2000 p174), then architectural schemes such as Archigram's 'Plug-in city', or Price's 'Fun Palace' would have reached uncompromised potential. Thus strengthening the link between the virtual and physical social landscapes by creating vital nodes of architectural infrastructure that would act as mobile community gateways to the online world; they would set precedent to future architectural schemes to act as thresholds for social mobility.