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Rethinking Bristol:

Articulating and contesting ‘green’ imageries of an entrepreneurial city

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Introduction

Recently, 'greenness' has become an integral part of the enterprising repertoire that is used strategically by, for instance, municipal officials to put their city ahead of rivals. Whereas 'greenness' is heralded as a pertinent means to 'save the city' (Beyes, 2015, p.208), this view relates to Harvey's (1989) tenets of urban entrepreneurialism of cities competing at national and global marketplaces, creating jobs, attracting investors, and forming new industries.

This paper makes Bristol, which has recently been awarded the 'European Green Capital 2015', its focal attention. The 'European Green Capital', an initiative by the European Commission's 'green cities fit for life' project, forms a paradigmatic case of the quest toward urban sustainability and green cities. Many in Bristol, and the southwest region of England more generally, would agree with the officials of the 'European Green Capital' that 'greenness' forms a unique opportunity for improving the environment, but also for transforming the future course of policy and practice, not simply within the city-region but nationally and even internationally. The 'European Green Capital 2015', which puts forward an authoritative account of Bristol as a 'green city', themes of food, nature, transport, resources and energy are constructs for sharing learning and changing everyday practices and the basis of programmes, walks and events across the city throughout 2015. In the particular case of Bristol, which is known for its transport problem, the transport construct has been placed squarely on the agenda, which reflects 'that transport systems have played a major role in the shaping of space and time' (Giesecking et al., 2014, p.286). Official statements from the Bristol Green Capital Partnership thus purport lessening the use of cars, hence CO₂ emissions, encouraging residents cycling to and from work, so as to make Bristol 'a low carbon city with a high quality of life for all' (<http://bristolgreencapital.org>). There are though differing, and at times incompatible assumptions informing the imagery of Bristol. This (i.e. the existing of competing narratives) suggests the 'need to decipher the variegated articulations among the disparate spatial, political-institutional and environmental elements of the emergent planetary configurations' (Brenner et al., 2011, p.237).

This paper offers a tentative outline of our investigation. This involves, first, investigating the role of the 'European Green Capital' as a particular way of enacting

Bristol as a 'green city', the basic objective being to highlight the political aspects behind the Green Capital initiative and the possible implications of these actions. And second, homing in on alternative ways of enacting Bristol via aesthetics and people's everyday lives. We present this as a positional paper that draws from our recently awarded BA/Leverhulme small research grant. We are at a transition point between the first phase of the research examining the green narratives of the 'European Green Capital' programme in video-clips, films and Art installations and the second phase of conducting urban walks with practitioners to generate their views of green projects enacted in the city.

We are, in part, drawn towards theorizing of narrative from three perspectives (Steyaert and Beyes, 2009). We thus highlight the 'celebratory narrative' of Bristol as a 'green city' governed by the European Commission and local authorities in Bristol. Further, we explore and map two alternative ways of enacting Bristol, which are referred to, owing to Steyaert and Beyes, as respectively 'counter-narratives' and 'prosaic narrations'. We contribute to these debates and discussions in exploring city spaces of transformation. The main contribution we make is to illustrate and evaluate the frictions and ruptures between hierarchical attempts at shaping Bristol and the more embedded, highly localized performative usages and interpretations of the city. In drawing upon theorizing of space, we attempt a differing view from the structural frameworks of top-down (local government) versus bottom-up (read local groups and organizations) with which to engage in our analysis. As Brenner et al. (2011, p.225) argue 'established paradigms of urban research now appear increasingly limited in their ability to illuminate contemporary urban changes and struggles'. The paper thus seeks to address the following aspects which have been largely neglected in discussions in the field of human geography of space: the political and local social context of narratives (Hubbard, 2012 and Gillen, 2009 respectively) and, second, the possibility of conceiving of alternative interventions. We thereby pursue the following three interrelated objectives:

- 1) Registering narratives as the primary mechanism through which Bristol as a 'green city' gets conceived;
- 2) Using objects in the form of an Arts installation and videos to identify tensions and paradoxes within the enactment of Bristol as a site of green living; and
- 3) Providing discussion of relevant and meaningful alternative material and

symbolic assemblages of Bristol as a green city to better understand and anticipate practices and possibilities of social change.

The paper proceeds as follows. We begin with a brief introduction of the thinking of space and place. Entangled in this discussion is of the socio-material aspects in differing strands of thinking. We then outline methodological aspects pertaining to assemblage theory in part as a process of creating a collage of differing views of the city, and as a way of engaging in questions of how cities might be otherwise – utilizing assemblage to frame alternative possibilities (McFarlane, 2011). Our paper illustrates differing assemblages of Bristol, and such approaches and practices; it shows social-material aspects are seen as crucial in the imagination of contemporary urban entrepreneurialism. This is followed by a preliminary discussion of the ‘European Green Capital’ Award in which we offer context. Finally, we provide three assemblages and conclude with an outlook of the next phase of our research project.

Space and Place

In general terms, our investigation of Bristol takes its cues from theories that conceive of (urban) space and spatiality as ‘social and cultural, as well as quasi-material, productions’ (Merriman et al., 2012, p.4). (Urban) space is thus seen as constructed along what might be seen a flow of strands of thinking, or as Merriman et al. (2012, p. 4) note ‘as abstract and concrete, produced and producing, imagined and materialized, structured and lived, relational, relative and absolute.’ Based on these premises, we view the city in general, and Bristol in particular, as an inherently contested space as it is shot through with different, and often contradictory and incommensurable interests.

We thereby hark back to the work by Steyaert and Beyes (2009), which offers a pertinent conceptual framework for charting three forms of spatial narratives: ‘celebratory narratives’, ‘counter-narratives’ and ‘prosaic narrations’. In more recent work, Beyes and Steyaert (2012) find these notions as having long been considered by human geographers and organizational theorists to consider the organization of the city – such as David Harvey’s rise of entrepreneurial politics in cities. The ‘celebratory narrative’ is of a ‘success story and utopian-like narrative’ (ibid, p.13). Utopian imagery is posed to challenge traditional views of the city, and offer

alternative possibilities for the future. Levitas (1990) argues that utopia expresses the desire for better ways of living as a ‘quest for grace’. She argues ‘the creation of Utopias—and their exhaustive criticism—is the proper and distinctive method of sociology’ (ibid, xi). Harvey (2000, p.196) too has returned to these themes to advocate a ‘spatiotemporal’ or ‘dialectical utopianism’ that is ‘rooted in our present possibilities at the same time as it points towards different trajectories of human uneven geographical developments’. While he still insists on the need to define choices and confront issues of closure so as to define ‘that port to which we might want to sail’, other critics influenced by critical approaches to organizational studies and critical management studies suggest that utopia does not offer a view when we do not know where it is we are aiming for.

McFarlane (2012, p.2811) says, ‘[u]rban entrepreneurialism as we have come to know it, is a far-reaching ideology for urban management characterised by three central elements: competition between cities to attract increasingly mobile sources of capital investment; the powerful influence of market ideologies over the trajectory and substance of urban development; and a side-lining of distributional politics in favour of growth and wealth generation.’ McFarlane (ibid) argues ‘[y]et it is also more than this [...] (it is) the attempted production of a particular kind of city’, one with a ‘non-oppositional practice’. Yet, as Hjorth (2004) highlights by looking more in terms of space and entrepreneurial aspects, the focus of bringing everyday life is used to consider the celebratory narrative of utopia as well as to consider power. This resonates with scholars, such as Smith and Stirling (2010, non-paginated), who insightfully asked ‘[w]hose sustainability gets prioritized?’, indicating that certain powerful actors have positioned themselves within on-going political processes, thereby ‘mobilizing support, influencing agendas, and redirecting investments and other commitments’.

There can be no doubt that the ‘celebratory narrative’ of urban entrepreneurialism has become a central reference point for cities seeking global recognition. According to McFarlane et al. (2012, p.2811), ‘[a]s ideologies of entrepreneurialism expand and are reshaped globally, there is a need for a dialectical approach to grasping this contradiction between simultaneously deepening dominant logics and exceeding them’. Placing a transnational initiative, the ‘European Green Capital’, against a Bristol-based Arts installation of ‘prosaic narrations’ from collaborations with local

groups and as the ‘counter-narrative’ from videos made by young filmmakers living in a disadvantaged area within Bristol, our approach draws attention to how the contestation of a particular case of urban entrepreneurialism gets played out through objects and materials.

Expanding on Merriman et al. (2012) work of (urban) space as emanating from distinct social, cultural and material productions, we refer to these practices of ordering objects and materials as ‘assemblages’, which is deemed a helpful concept for highlighting how narratives are aligned, related and assembled with non-symbolic, material elements and objects. We hence consider not simply the counter-narratives of Arts projects and the celebratory narrative found in the imagery and branding of ‘European Green Capital’, but as the consequence of a practice of those using these tools and messages. By juxtaposing the three assemblages, we embed the narratives in local contexts and histories that shape, translate and differently enact Bristol in accordance or in contrast with the imagery of urban entrepreneurialism put forward by the ‘European Green Capital’ programme. Before tentatively outlining differing assemblages of Bristol, some notes on our methodology are in order.

Methodological Considerations

In line with our BA/Leverhulme bid, the aim is to examine the assemblage of the ‘European Green Capital’ programme as well as assemblages, which enact Bristol differently. In line with Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualisation, a focus on assemblages allows us to move beyond an exclusive focus on symbolic phenomena such as talk, text, images, etc., and to inquire into the disjuncture ‘between the actual and the possible, between how urban inequality is produced and lived and how relations might be assembled otherwise’ (McFarlane, 2011, p.210). Assemblages and associated thinking from actor-network theory - ANT (Law and Hassard, 1999; Latour, 2005) is drawn upon, as Law (2004) described the choosing of options for undertaking qualitative research as the ‘method of assemblage’. Henceforth, we have chosen assemblage as a method to examine how transformation of Bristol as a green city is enacted with which to illuminate some of the differing interpretations of how the city might transform.

In our argument of assemblage, we use art and design, or aesthetics, as a means to critique the processes and outcomes of urban entrepreneurialism that are so

dramatically transforming cities in the interests of powerful social groups (Pinder, 2005). He says ‘intervening in public space against its narrow definition around powerful interests, so as to reassert the significance of encounter, sociality, playfulness and to consider how these might be sustained’ (p. 403). To this end, we study publically available data of the European Green Capital 2015. As Law (1994, p.102) says ‘it is that some materials last better than others. And some travel better than others. Voices don’t last for long, and they don’t travel very far.’ What we looked for were materials available on the world-wide-web as their function of communicating spread across time and space.

In this paper we are reluctant to simply embrace the official’s perspective, since we believe there is a need to reintroduce a sense for how the European Green Capital initiative not only opens up but also closes down opportunities for constituting Bristol as an urban space. Hence, to bring to light some of the tensions and predicaments of the EU initiative, we home in on how an Arts and design installation in Bristol, called ‘Doing Things Separately Together’, sheds light on how different social groups simultaneously occupy the city and thereby variously confront and contradict the European Green Capital Award. This is a type of imaginary space, of maps created by layers of images and representations (Hubbard & Hall, 1998). We then turn to videos created by young people in relation to their views of the future and of the Green Capital 2015 initiative. Juxtaposing the official narrative of the European Green Capital 2015 with narratives of aesthetics allows us to gain a clearer understanding of how accounts of Bristol as a ‘green city’ are articulated, but also opposed, and re-enacted as imageries of vivid language and evocative images. As Ward (2003, p.125) poses, ‘the process of narrating change appears to affect the form taken by that change.’

Beyes’s (2006, p. 270) says: ‘A theatre of entrepreneurship has a lot more to offer than commerce and economic drive’. The imagery of the Green Capital initiative is publicly visible in materials and can be seen as those supporting the initiative seeking an alternative from the traditional views of the capitalist system, however, there is more complexity to be seen. It can be mapped to certain spaces to not only represent the city, but to promote the city with images of green-minded people choosing to cycle from where they live, to the space where they work in order to lower CO₂ emissions. Bristol though, as we allude to, is not one space but more as a collage of

differing places. We highlight that such activities are also associated to those areas perceived as ‘posh places’ and to those seen as disadvantage, where imageries of the Green Capital initiative is not in every day thinking/practice. It is key not to neglect the political aspects of whose voices might be marginalized and their needs and those more privileged in the narratives. Somewhat of an ‘us’ and ‘them’ scenario in the city, as voiced by a young person saying that he cared as much about sustainability, as much, or more than the ‘posh parts’ (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1sK08bk0tM>). Another view though is offered by five young adult film makers, living and working in the same disadvantaged community in Bristol; we draw upon their short videos questioning a green future to represent counter-narratives as telling of their experiences. Thence, we do not assume Lefebvre’s discernment of class as one group against the other.

Methodologically, by using assemblages our paper illustrates the disruptive potential of aesthetics, and whilst it might be seen as outside of the traditional bounds of entrepreneurship research, such approaches and practices showing social aspects are seen as crucial in the imagination of contemporary urban entrepreneurialism. Whence, reflecting the European Green Capital 2015 from the vantage point of a particular Arts-design installation and of five videos puts an opportunity in front of us to think of, and empirically study how ideas of Bristol as a ‘green city’ are conceived, contested and potentially altered.

Preliminary Results

We seek to examine the following three narratives (celebratory narrative, counter-narrative and prosaic narrations) as three differing assemblages:

Assemblage 1: Celebratory Narrative

The European Green Capital 2015: The city as utopia

We begin by examining the political narrative of the ‘European Green Capital 2015’. This assemblage is of two parts: images used to promote ‘greenness’ prior to the Bristol Green Capital and those created to engage with people during the 2015. As above, imageries of the city are as an abstract metaphor of a type of utopian place. Figure 1 was the official imagery commonly used prior to January 2015 to promote the green capital initiative. It was the imagery on the Bristol 2015 website as well as

those of partner organizations.



Figure 1: Utopian view of Bristol from Green Capital website

To first describe Figure 1; it shows the Clifton Suspension bridge, the University of Bristol, Clifton cathedral, balloons representing the balloon festival based in Clifton and on the edge, the gorilla sculpture from Bristol zoo, again based in Clifton. Thus, imagery in this view is primarily depicting the Clifton village and would be particularly familiar to those living and/or working in this area. However, Clifton is but one part of the city. More to our point, Clifton village is one of the most affluent areas in the city. What we highlight is that Bristol, specifically Clifton, is no longer embedded but uprooted from the wider city; the imagery illustrates the root systems with stones falling away.

This view aligns with Lefebvre's forms and functions of utopia, between the possible and the impossible, and possible paths towards alternatives (Pinder, 2015). Though as Pinder points out, Lefebvre was writing in a different context in 'response to different debates and concerns' (p.30). We suggest though this metaphor of utopia as free-floating in the air is in part an ideal (of some) of a desire for a better way of living for the future world in the clouds and portrayed by Levitas (2007) as a political utopianism of 'looking for the green'. To return to what Pinder highlights is that the 'possible-impossible' needs to be open to contestation. Here is a challenge for Bristol; the utopian image though being of wonderment but where interventions surely are not necessitated, as it is a land on its own, a space free of all other influences, which perhaps loses itself in the clouds. Thus we suggest this narrative is also abstract and free-floating and potentially disconnected from everyday life.

As reflected in referencing ‘green’, environmental issues underpin the Green Capital narrative – particularly climate change. Those promoting it speak of the city preparing for an ‘opportunity to take the next step’ (<http://www.bristol2015.co.uk>), hence a process of future change.



Figure 2: Low carbon Bristol image from X to Y

Figure 2 is from an award winning website of Bristol as a low carbon city. (<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital/low-carbon-bristol/>). It is embedded in the place and shows a process of transition from one scenario X to another Y of cycling, wind farms and seemingly free from pollution and airplanes. Thus, this imagery differs from Figure 1 in being grounded in the place and instead plays with the notion of time and a future scene of utopia in 2050.

Further, the ‘European Green Capital’ narrative has taken a more politico-corporate approach including policy-making of how the city is managed. Those in the partnership promoting the ‘European Green Capital’ initiative, including the films shown to the European Green Capital jury (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9hGttzIaOM>), have created a narrative, which promotes the kind of entrepreneurialism discussed before. This narrative is further linked to marketing in that a common phrase being ‘the eyes of the world’ will be upon Bristol, moreover a replicable model, the ‘Bristol model’, of change is being posed for other cities. The Green Capital narrative thus reflects debates of cities competing for investment: ‘The benefits for Bristol will be manifold. Not only will it attract inward investment and visitors to the city, but it will reinforce our reputation as

a leading sustainable city in the UK and Europe' (bristolgreencapital.org). As such, the Green Capital narrative can be seen as a marketing tool of interlinked ideas: including the ideal of investment and creating employment.

In 'selling the city' as the Green Capital, this is not to suggest that the imageries ('celebratory narrative') has been constant. The initial tagline was of a 'laboratory of change' for activities to develop and support change; this story was seemingly dropped for that of the 'green city'. Yet, more recent changes to the website query if the terms 'green' and 'carbon' might have held back their ambitious plans. There are events seeking to consider how projects engaged in branding and promoting their green messages (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2BO3piyupw>). For instance, a manager of the Green capital partnership spoke of stories and narratives to engage and support the initiative. He said the term 'green' might prove problematic and that the Arts were crucial in doing this; he also stressed the need for resources and seeking both government and private sector sponsors (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvqSQieA3BA>).

In following this narrative, the rhetoric is of celebrating entrepreneurship and having a 'creative' and 'fun' approach, the Bristol Green Capital initiative has a grant award scheme to support both strategic (up to £50,000) and local community projects over 2015. Yet, it also appears as framed in terms of competing with previous European Green Capital cities:

'Bristol has successfully managed to secure more grant money than any previous winner of the EU Green Capital Award, and innovative plans across the city will emerge as they benefit from additional funding. We are proud of the part that the Partnership has played in helping different groups to find support and collaborative partners to realise their projects, and look forward to supporting them to make the most of the 2015 year'.

Thus, in advocating their initiative, promoters make use of the economic narrative of entrepreneurship in order to gain legitimacy. As such, this assemblage supports Harvey's argument (1989) of cities gaining sponsorship, which was reflected in early versions of the 'European Green Capital' website primarily listing their sponsors.

This narrative though took an unexpected turn in October 2014, when the manager

was asked to leave suddenly, in part for not being ‘transparent’; it was reported that the ‘phase’ the initiative was entering was not seen to be supported by his skill-set and instead there was the need of engaging with local context and promoting the associated grant scheme to promote local activities. (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-29472188>; <http://www.bristolpost.co.uk/European-Green-Capital-head-axed-pound-100k-year/story-23037032-detail/story.html>). Seemingly in this talk of phases, he was seen to be doing the right thing at an earlier time. Perhaps though his actions simply had gone too far from the perceived image for the city. Whatever the interpretation, it does suggest that Harvey’s (1989) framework of the ‘basic logic of capital’ is not the entirety in how the Green Capital narrative is unfolding.

We now turn to the second part of the assemblage. Notably, in late December 2014, those promoting the initiative changed its imagery announcing: ‘The Bristol Green Capital Partnership website is undergoing development to improve it’s accessibility for existing and new member organisations. You can still find information on the Partnership and how your organisation can get involved, but please join us again as we re-launch the site in early 2015.’ The re-launched imagery recreated a brand ‘In it for good’ (<https://www.bristol2015.co.uk/about/brand-story/>), (<http://www.bristolmedia.co.uk/news/1932/bristol-2015-european-green-capital-reveals-branding>).



Figure 3: Current Green Capital brand

To introduce the rebranded project on their re-launched website, the Bristol 2015 created a ‘brand story’: ‘We’ve created a circle to symbolise these actions. It’s our circle, a circle for good. We’re all in it together’

(<https://www.bristol2015.co.uk/about/>). Here again the metaphor of utopianism is in seeking a better future. This slogan notably omits ‘green’ and/or ‘carbon’. So saying, it is still green in colour.



Figure 4: Do 15

The ‘Do 15 in 15’ (Imagery as in Figure 4) is one of the first activities promoted under the new ‘In it for good’ branding. This implies virtue of green activities to act for the better of society; hence having moral implications (Jones and Spicer, 2009). It calls for Bristol residents to pledge to go ‘over and above what they currently do to make the city happier and healthier explains Zoe Sear from Bristol 2015. Participants will select 15 things to do differently within the year, and beyond, to celebrate our time in the green spotlight. If everyone makes relatively small changes in their everyday lives it could have a huge cumulative impact’ (<http://www.cse.org.uk/news/view/1971>). For instance, the following is from a organization engaged in Bristol Green Capital activities sharing their examples – seemingly to encourage others to reproduce:

‘The ‘Make a suggestion’ option allows people to contribute their own actions. These can range from simple (say, turning the tap off as you brush your teeth) to something more imaginative (and demanding) like attending a neighbourhood meeting to raise the topic of energy efficiency.

As a member organisation we had our brains picked for ideas (especially on energy) to be included as actions. Here are a few of the best we’ve committed to as individuals:

Simon has reduced the time his home central heating is on by 15 minutes each day.

Cat is going to fill in 15 draughty gaps in her house.

Tim will build a pond to encourage wildlife into his garden.

Kate will sow enough seeds to grow 15 types of vegetables.

Ruth is making internal insulated shutters for the windows of her cottage

before the winter.

Follow [#do15](#) on Twitter to see what others have been pledging’.

On the face of it, the ‘Do 15 in 15’ initiative offers a pragmatic means of encouraging wider social change. So saying, as Bill et al. (2010, p.172) pose ‘The spectacle of entrepreneurship tends to be seen as the script for entrepreneurship, and as it is reproduced in various settings the script becomes more real than the everyday activities being carried out as people are entrepreneuring’. As they caution, ‘Making actors play the script increases the chances of immediate gratification for policy-makers – more Entrepreneurs are seemingly created – and has few negative short-term consequences, making it treacherous’ [ibid].

Assemblage 2: Counter-narratives

The city as seen in moving images – five videos, 2014.

A note in the counter-narrative is that the Bristol European Green Capital narrative, Bristol’s official ‘green city’ plans, has been seen to lack transparency and criticized for NOT engaging with local people and businesses. At the hand-over ceremony in January 2015, engagement was highlighted as crucial and that a ‘missing criteria’ was engaging young people (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-oQTSdRYhc>).

For this assemblage we pull together images from the Centre for Moving Image Research, based at UWE. They invited young people to apply for bursaries to make short video-films in response to Bristol's status as 2015 European Green Capital (<http://www.bristol247.com/channel/news-comment/features/documentaries/young-film-makers-question-a-green-future#>). To note, unlike the political narratives, which are anonymous, each of the films is identified with the film-maker: Candice Pepperall - *Green Blue*; Carlo Hornilla – *Ink*; Johnny Dadds - *The Waste*; Sam Haylings and Adam Trimnell - *Green or Greed?*.

Johnny Dadd’s film looks at the reality of re-cycling and the fact that ‘there is nothing clean or natural about recycling.’ He said: ‘If we are to fully embrace ecological sustainability then we must stop, contemplate and embrace our waste and the things we prefer not to think about, what we ignore and disavow: waste and filth.’ Another example is the video *Green Blue* contrasts the notion of future time expressed in the celebratory narrative and the utopian view of the future portrayed in the Green capital narrative; instead Pepperall’s narrator says of looking for tomorrow and a brighter

future what he say saw was 'As dawn brought tomorrow I woke to today'. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5LPYQxhZg&feature=youtu>).



Figure 5: Little girl waking and opening the curtain to a new day
Candice Pepperall - *Green Blue*

These narratives created by separate artists all were responding as a counter-narrative to the question: Is the future green? Is a seemingly 'No'. Yet, nor do they entirely fit within Lefebvre's view of 'representations of space' as alternative spaces to contemporary capitalism created by artists. Instead they appear what he termed 'fresh contradictions' as they do not to see the Green Capital narrative as a means to get away from the socially produced patterns and relationships. The young film-makers sense of space and time are not socially constructed as fitting the Green Capital notion of abstract space as a utopian view which is an alternative perceived as better in the future; as in Figure 5, their imageries seemingly are of their children as waking up to a new day, preparing to go to work and raising their children in a space and time seemingly perpetuated by a capitalist system.

There is another context in that the geographic community is disadvantaged. The imagery of this assemblage is of living within marginalized neighbourhoods in the city. However what each neglects to show is forms of inequality and deprivation. The underlying context is not represented in these films, nor are signs of struggle generated in living at the margins. Hence, we whilst we find the imagery and narrations of these films compelling, they appear as incomplete in helping to unravel wider questions of how power, inequality and struggle relate to their lives, and more specifically of if or how the green agenda within the Green Capital initiative has any influence upon how they re-imagine their lives.

Assemblage 3: Prosaic Narrations

The city as depicted on a canvas - Doing Things Separately Together, 2014



Figure 6: Photo Stuart Whipps

Figure 6 is an image of the ‘Doing Things Separately Together’ installation. First, the juxtaposition of the title ‘Separately – Together’ intrigues us. And though we acknowledge the installation offers a tenuous link to prosaic narrations, it is of ten circular maps, each constructed from stories with local ‘specialists and groups’ to offer alternative representations of the city (<http://warrenandmosley.com/category/all-works/2014-doing-things-separately-together/>). Collaborators for the installation are Axel Wieder. Research: Anthony Elliott, Libita Clayton. Graphics: William Richardson, Jake Gunn (<http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/23324/>).

Similar to the counter-narrative, this assemblage is also in response to the celebratory narrative. Where the celebratory narrative has constructed five themes for the Bristol Green Capital, the following is from the exhibition guide:

‘The display in Gallery 2 presents *Doing Things Separately Together* an Atlas of Bristol: a series of maps which have been collaboratively produced with local groups and experts. Through discussion with a number of formal and informal groups, information was gathered on 30 different subjects relating to the use of the city; ranging from the locations of CCTV and surveillance, the geological landscape underpinning city life, to sites of social and political unrest. [...] Topics include unbuilt transport schemes, Bristol’s banking history, carnivals, how football divides the city, and places of leisure’.

It was part of an exhibition *The Promise*, which explored changes in ‘the relationship between a city and its residence’, especially with changes around the green agenda as Bristol takes on The European Green Capital status. ‘The exhibition explores the potential futures of cities, and the role of architecture, design and the arts within these potentials. Besides the design of physical spaces in the city, the project will also engage with the role of the imagination, and how we construct for ourselves an image of the city that we can share and with which we can identify’ (<http://www.arnolfini.org.uk/whatson/the-promise>).

The following extract is of the exhibition:

‘So instead of simply presenting the form of the city and the impact on the people, this presents an interaction between the place and human activity. For example, things shown on the maps include areas of historic social unrest contrasted with leisure activities, where Bristol’s banking has taken place, how football divides the city in connection with politics and where the surveillance cameras, seagulls and supermarkets dominate. This I recommend you see for yourself to appreciate the detail.

It seems the exhibition at this point continues to consider people in their masses. However the circular theme to the room and the illustration of how different things and diverse groups inhabit the same space alongside each other, sparks ideas of the continuity of human habitation rather than the struggle. Essentially it seems people come and go, problems occur are resolved and reoccur, and the land remains the constant’ (<http://heliconmagazine.co.uk/?p=1081>).

This excerpt of the visitor to the supports the imagery of the ‘prosaic narration’, in the following we highlight the issues of power at the heart of one of the maps of social unrest (Figure 7).

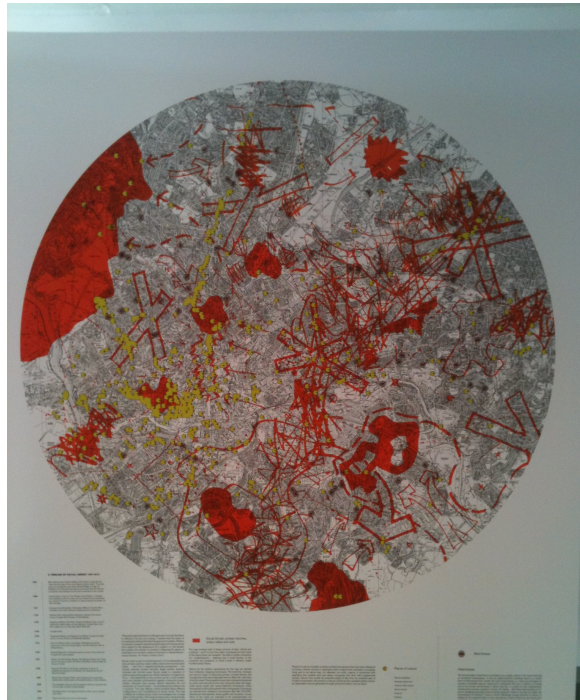


Figure 7: Map social rest and unrest

This assemblage differs from the other two in that first, the artistic-architects offered official and unofficial sources of data offering a timeline from mob attacks of 1087 from the ‘selling of white slaves to Ireland’ through to a suffragette being ‘horsewhipped’ in 1909 to the 2011 anti-Tesco riots in Stokes Croft. As the installation offers ‘a dialogue’ with a number of local specialists and societies, there is no single vision or shared goal; instead differing interactions in differing spaces in the city. It is this layering which we are especially drawn towards.

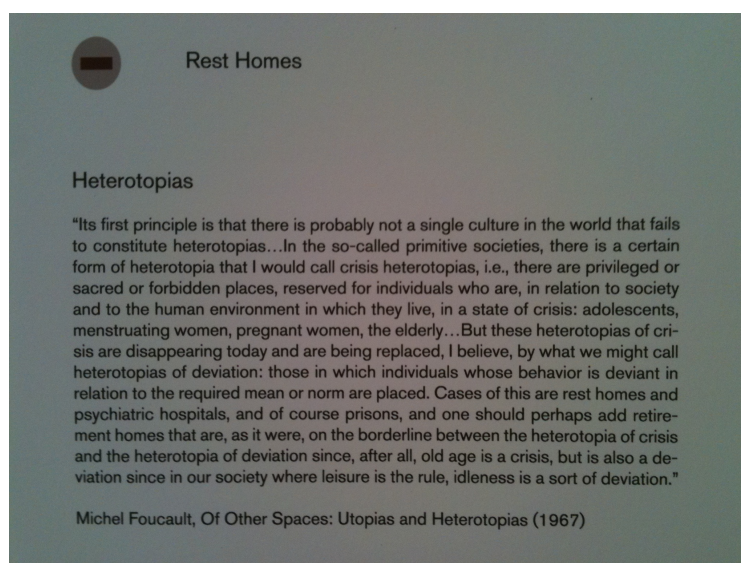


Figure 8: Utopias and Heterotopias

Czarniawska (1998) commented narratives, including those written in documents and promotional materials offer a utopian view of social change. However, ‘counter-narratives’ always already bear the risk of simply turning utopian into dystopian stories. Consequently, we endorse Olwig’s (2002) estimate that ‘it is time we move beyond modernism’s utopianism and postmodernism’s dystopianism to a topianism that recognizes that human beings, as creatures of history, consciously and unconsciously create places’ (cited in Ingold, 2007, p.167). Figure 8 is an example of where they also offered such analysis; here specifically in terms of places of deviation from utopia to offer topics of crisis in the city. This narrative follows Soja’s (1996 as cited in Beyes & Steyaert, 2012) spatial vocabulary of ‘heterotopic’ space, endowing space with meanings, which divert from the ‘celebratory narrative’ and also those of the ‘counter-narrative’. These ‘prosaic narrations’ are attentive to ““specific”, “potential” or “other”, spaces and timings, which [...] allow transition and transformation’ (ibid.).

Concluding Thoughts

We do not think these are the only three assemblages; there are surely others simultaneously being created and enacted in the city which opens up space to re-think aspects of ‘a particular type of city’ implied in the ‘celebratory narrative’. We pose, as this celebratory narrative is prioritized, others are (possibly) neglected. Whilst we have drawn upon Beyes and Steyaerts’ three narratives, we felt this approach lacked the inclusion of materials and objects. From this point of view, we have associated assemblages with Beyes and Steyaert’s (2012) plea to consider alternative ways of imaging and enacting narratives of the city space; we in this paper investigate ‘why some possibilities for reassemblage are actualized over and against others that are suppressed or excluded’ (Brenner et al., 2011, p.235). Moreover, we highlight that the strand of the ‘celebratory narrative’ is an anonymous view of alternative possibilities; as Brenner et al. (2011, p.236) say with the struggle of differing backgrounds it is ‘essential to explore *who* (or *what*, as the case may be) is doing the structuring to whom’; hence, how does someone engage with how to change it.

The initiative emanating from policy such as the European Green Capital are being played out in Bristol and region, and the narrative offers a utopian from which to consider future alternatives. What we have found though is that the ‘celebratory narrative’ is not fixed. Further by drawing upon differing assemblages we can offer

differing threads. This is not to discount the imagery – it is alluring. What we consider is that posing one narrative is dangerous in not considering other narratives and everyday activities.

Rather than set up concluding comments, we prefer to end by outlining the second phase of our study alluded to above: We have chosen these imageries to inform a series of walking-interviews we intend to hold beginning this summer. In accordance with assemblage theory, which conjures images of reality based on notions of “mosaic, patchwork, heterogeneity, fluidity” (Little, 2012, non-paginated), we intend to investigate alternative assemblages of Bristol via urban walks. In this way, we use urban walks as an analytical tool to sense Bristol in its very differences. The narrative strands of space are entwined with, for instance, Lefebvre’s (2002) walking. This thread of thinking is picked up by ANT, which commends following the actor and of ‘trail-sniffing, and collective traveller’ (Latour, 2005, p.9). The collective traveller offers differing views from the margins; saying that, we also acknowledge those who might be perceived as within, but are from differing organizations enacting different green projects, and provide insightful ways to reconsider conceptual issues of political positions in terms of where we are located in relation to modernity. Though here Lefebvre’s concept of whom walks and who are the decision-makers is of little use as he conflated these to be inhabitants with the working class. As Purcell (2002, p.106) says, ‘the agenda that inhabitants will pursue cannot be presumed; rather it must be negotiated through a complex politics of scale, identity, and difference, among other struggles’. The key act in the next phase of our research is to literally try out differing transgressions in differing paths taken by different walkers.

As above, in these walks we also will seek practitioner’s views. From a recent event introducing our research project, a practitioner within the Green Partnership came up afterwards and said she identified with this situation as she and others delivering Bristol European Green Capital projects at times felt constrained in what they can say, especially if it differed from those narratives in the original bid. The Bristol Green Capital team devising the bid were based within the local authority; they were successful upon their third attempt in this process which they first saw Nantes (2013) and Copenhagen (2014) as European Green Capitals. Meaning, members of the current team have the narrative of others in earlier bids of the two previous years as their take off point. We note that though the official narrative is changing, it does not

appear to stray far from initial messages from those developing the first bid.

To conclude, Pinder poses (2005, p.399; emphasis in original) ‘... exploring ‘the meaning of living in a city’ at this time is crucial politically. It is not a trivial matter to find different ways of attending to the ‘quality of life’ in the city [...] Nor is it insignificant to explore critically the qualities of streets, squares, parks and other aspects of the public realm in terms of how they are used, imagined and lived. Indeed, doing so is vital given the significance of these spaces for sustaining a vibrant and democratic urban culture, and for defending rights to the city. So too is provoking debate about how they might be different, *better*’.

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