Machinic assemblages of publicness in Bristol's Bearpit.

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the concept of publicness through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's machinic thinking. Centring on the case of the Bearpit, a roundabout and public space in the city of Bristol (UK), I examine recent shifts and transformations in public culture. The article narrates the ways in which relatively small interventions facilitate new connections and organize public assemblages. The paper makes four main contributions. First, it develops an approach for the study of publicness that highlights the interactions of machinic assemblages of material and immaterial component parts. Second, it suggests that specific forms of publicness are mediated by *bright objects* which stitch together and organize ecologies of connected machines. Third, it outlines publicness as a dynamic, plastic social form. Finally, the paper argues that the struggles for a compassionate public culture in the Bearpit are not necessarily set on a fixed trajectory toward co-optation or a return to revanchism, but rather, are part of an incessant process of unfolding and becoming-public where the concerns and contestations of publicness are made visible.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines a small but central public space in Bristol (UK) known as the 'Bearpit'. Following almost two decades of decline, in recent years the site has been targeted by various grassroots and city-sponsored initiatives aimed at improving conviviality (Shaftoe, 2008) and the overall quality of the space. Caught up in these undertakings, and the focus of this paper, are the ensuing shifts in publicness of the Bearpit. By publicness, I mean not only the ways in which people struggle over issues such as use, behaviour, and inclusivity (Németh, 2012; Németh and Schmidt, 2011) but also how social dispositions are informed and mediated by connections with the more-than-human (Bennett, 2010) and aesthetics of the built environment (Frank and Stevens, 2006; Amin, 2015).

Interpreting urban space and its components as assemblages of interconnected machines (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983 [1972]; 1988 [1980]), the paper examines the ways in which relations, (un)couplings, and (dis)connections in the Bearpit contribute to and mediate publicness. The paper draws on an empirical base (discussed later) developed over several years of study and engagement with the site and individuals who participate in the Bearpit's management, use, and public-becoming. Broadly speaking, this fieldwork narrates the emergence of patterns of publicness from the coupling of diverse corporeal and incorporeal machines such as human bodies, the built form, discourse, laws and policing tactics, and the biopolitical regulation of bodies.

This focus on relations and couplings connects with a wide cross-disciplinary interest in theorising the heterogeneous yet connected component parts of the city as an assemblage (Hillier, 2009; 2011; McFarlane, 2011a, 2011b; Dovey, 2012; Lancione, 2013; Campbell, 2013; Grove and Pugh, 2015; see also the special issue in *Area* 2011). Largely framed by the schizoanalytic philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1983 [1972]; 1988 [1980]), thinking with and through assemblages directs research inquiry to the ways in which the city is always under construction, 'produced as an unfolding set of uneven practices

that are … never inevitable' (McFarlane, 2011a: 221). These potentials and possibilities for something *other than* are central to ways in which assemblage thinking has been applied to urban theory (Daskalak and Mould, 2013). In line with this scholarship, my engagement with assemblages and machinic relations reflects an awareness of the agency, vitality, or vibrancy of matter (Bennett, 2010). In particular, I follow scholars in fields such as urban studies and geography (Latham and McCormack, 2004; McFarlane, 2011a; McFarlane, 2011b; McFarlane and Anderson, 2011; McFarlane and Anderson, 2011; Miller, 2014; Koch and Latham, 2012; Minuchin, 2013; Amin, 2014; 2015; Amin and Thrift, 2016), anthropology (Larkin, 2013; Harvey and Knox, 2012; Easterling, 2014) and archaeology (Hodder, 2012) who have drawn attention to the ways in which things and objects such as buildings, artefacts and urban infrastructures are entangled and contribute directly to the construction of the everyday life.

Further, the paper adds to recent debates around the role and potential of assemblage to contribute to critical urban theory (McFarlane, 2011a; Brenner *et al.*, 2011; Farías, 2011). Partly responding to the upswing in usage of the concept, Brenner and colleagues (Brenner *et al.*, 2011) set out a programme that seeks to attune the micro-dynamics of assemblage thinking to the wider structural politics of urban life. The authors argue that certain (ontological) strands of assemblage analysis 'contain significant drawbacks' (*ibid,* 225) by deflecting structural concerns (e.g. capitalism and the institutions of the political economy) in favour of an empirical project focused on localised material relations. To be effective as critique (and as part of a project of critical urbanism), they argue, assemblage approaches must be linked 'to the intellectual tools and political orientations of critical geopolitical economy' (*ibid,* 237). Yet, as Farías (2011) notes, assemblage urbanism seeks to move away from such totalising narratives of the city and social change. In their place is a form of inquiry that facilitates an open and experimental engagement with the city (or any other entity). Moreover, such an approach does not preclude the study of structuring forces or the production of urban inequality. Rather, by examining relations between the connected parts, assemblage analysis involves 'unveiling the actual practices, processes and socio-material orderings' (*ibid.:* 370) that contribute to the

conditions of urban inequality and marginalisation (McFarlane, 2011a). In this paper, I contribute to these debates through development of an approach to urban assemblages which pays particular attention to the ways in which 'bright objects' (Bryant, 2014:202) mediate or structure the becomings of other machines.[i]

The paper has four main contributions. First, conceptually, it develops a relational and machinic framework for inquiry into diverse and multiple forms or patterns of publicness. It advances this through a study of the Bearpit framed by Delezue and Guattari's thinking about the make up and transformation of assemblages. Second, the paper finds that localised forms of publicness apparent in the Bearpit are actively constructed and reproduced via the (uneven) coupling of human and non-human machines. The paper argues that the powers, capacities and abilities of particularly powerful machines or bright objects (Bryant, 2014) work to assemble and organise other machines, contributing to transformations in social and ethical dispositions and the nature of publicness. Third, rather than identifying any inherent characteristic or essence, the concept of publicness is portrayed as *plastic* – a social machine which bends and twists along with machinic connections and relations. Finally, while the paper narrates the existence of multiple actualisations of publicness, the struggles toward an alternative public culture in the Bearpit offers a counterpoint to much of the literature in urban studies that is critical of recent transformations in and of public space.

The paper's structure is as follows. First, I will discuss recent debates in urban studies, geography and planning concerning public space and publicness. I then lay out the theoretical underpinnings of the study focusing on the role and interactions of machinic assemblages. Subsequently, I introduce the Bearpit and provide a contextual setting while detailing key moments of change over the past several years. This stage-setting is followed by a narration of transformations in the nature of publicness the Bearpit focusing on the construction of a temporary pavilion and performance structure. The paper then reflects on how these examples apply to wider understandings of the concept of publicness. The

article concludes with a recount of the findings and final thoughts about the Bearpit within the context of wider concerns regarding the contemporary condition of urban public space.

PUBLIC SPACE AND PUBLICNESS

There is a significant and ever expanding academic literature that critically engages with public space and publicness. A large portion of this scholarship has centred on the transformation of public space over the last several decades. through processes associated with neoliberalisation and urban revanchism (e.g. typically middle-class sentiments and policies that seek 'revenge' against marginalised groups and individuals. See: Smith, 1996). Public space research engagement is wide-ranging, covering processes of: securitisation (Blakely, 1997; Graham, 2010; Németh and Hollander, 2010), surveillance (Fyfe and Bannister, 1998) and vigilant citizenship (Newman, 2013), regulation and ordering (Low and Smith, 2006), creative appropriation (Franck and Stevens, 2006) the punitive and revanchist city (Smith, 1996), militarisation (Davis, 1992; Graham, 2010), and commercialisation or privatisation (Mandanipour, 2003; Low, 2006; Minton, 2006; Mitchell and Staeheli, 2006; Miller, 2007; Kirby, 2008; McGuirk and Dowling, 2009; Madden, 2010; Németh and Schmidt, 2011).

Commentators often critique these developments, suggesting that the contemporary regulatory and provisioning mechanisms of public space are leading not only to the erosion of truly democratic space (Davis, 1992; Sorkin, 1992; Zukin, 1995; 1998; Davis, 1998; Minton, 2009; Németh and Hollander, 2010; Németh, 2012) but also diminishing opportunities for social learning through contact, dialogue, and exchange (Varna and Tiesdell, 2010; Németh and Schmidt, 2011). Indeed, urban planners and designers have long seen 'free and unfettered circulation in public space' as a formative part of the production of sociality and participation in democratic life (Amin, 2012: 69-70). It is here, in the ideal urban public spaces of the city where tolerance and understanding towards others is said to grow and flourish (Kosnoski, 2011). As Galvis points out, these perspectives, including the emergence of post-revanchist policies and

tactics of inclusion and participation, are often championed as vital for the production of 'egalitarian public spaces' (2014: 1460).

However, while not denying the importance of public space to social life, researchers have also called into question the extent to which these ideal democratic spaces might be ghosts, 'never actually realized in history but haunting our frameworks for understanding the present' (Iveson, 2007: 6). Contrary to common thinking, some suggest that fleeting engagements in public space with those who are different might actually be disadvantageous towards the production of social understanding (Watson, 2006). Peter Sloterdijk explains that these acts of seeing, rather than be constitutive of social learning, are more likely to

>*…assure the seer of his secure position in the middle of his own surrounding space; it affirms him in his distantial, non-merging forms of intercourse with the protagonists and opponents who populate his human environment.*
>(Sloterdijk, 2011: 140 quoted in Amin 2015: 249)

Instead of dissolving fear or constructing a new, more progressive form of urban sociality, these fleeting encounters and everyday interactions may actually contribute to the collective boundaries of distanciation associated with intolerance, racism and prejudice (Valentine, 2008; see Wilson, 2016 for a critical review of the concept of encounter). Valentine and Sandgrove (2014) argue that any destabilisation of prejudice is likely to require more nuanced understandings of social reproduction and in particular, recognition of the role that everyday routines, orientations, and histories play in the construction of ethical and moral dispositions. Galvis (2014) takes this further and questions the singular pursuit of social harmony (e.g. a 'place for all') and points out that even so-called progressive or post-revanchist social practices of participation and inclusion can contribute to (if not exacerbate) social inequality and marginalisation of the poor.

Nevertheless, while we may no longer automatically designate public space as an exclusive or privileged space of deliberative citizenship, social learning or urban

sociality, these sites often maintain a hold on the public imagination as locales of possibility (Amin, 2008; Simpson, 2011; Padawangi, 2013). Further, even as many contemporary public spaces are said to fail when measured against traditional notions of the 'truly' public, novel ways of using and claiming space through practices such as muralling and graffiti (Iveson, 2007; 2010), guerrilla and DIY urbanism (Hou, 2010; Buser *et al.*, 2013; Iveson, 2013), play and creative intervention (Pinder, 2005; 2008; Stevens, 2007), skateboarding (Borden, 2001), parkour (Mould, 2009), urban exploration (Garrett, 2010), and myriad political-playful movements (Daskalaki and Mould, 2013) suggest that the nature and concept of publicness is actively caught up in the re-imagination and contestation of varied urban spaces. In this paper, I follow this line of thinking where urban public space is understood as ambiguous, never certain and always a site of negotiation and exchange between and amongst human and non-human entities (Amin, 2015).

SCHIZOANALYSIS AND MACHINIC ASSEMBLAGES

My approach is framed and inspired by Delezue and Guattari's 'schizoanalytic' thinking about machines and assemblages. At the heart of this work is a positive or productive understanding of desire which, is always shaped by social forms and patterns including the interactions, relations, social norms and conventions of society (Goodchild, 1996; Smith, 2007). In seeing desire as productive, schizoanalysis does not focus on *what something means*, or the kinds of *qualities* it is said to *have*. Rather, it is attentive to *what something does* (i.e. what it produces). For example, speaking to the productive qualities of a book, Deleuze and Guattari explain,

> …we will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities… a book itself is a little machine; (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988 [1980]: 4).

For social research, this indicates an exploratory targeting of the workings and transformations associated with connected or coupled entities. What does it do?

How does it work? These are archetypal Deleuzian pathways in the direction of affective and materialist examinations of phenomena. Translating this schizo-analytic approach to the concepts and contexts of public space and publicness suggests a turn away from essential qualities or characteristics and to the workings and power dynamics between component parts or what Deleuze and Guattari (1983 [1972]) refer to as machines.

In examining publicness, these component parts include both material (e.g. benches, surfaces, trees, people) and immaterial (e.g. regulations, laws, norms of behaviour) machines. Indeed, whether we are talking about humans, trees, automobiles, numbers, laws or planning documents, we are in the world of machines. Crucially, this machinic ontology does not imply that the world is made up only of mechanical, rigid or static entities. Rather, machines are 'mobile producers of connections' (May, 2005: 125) that are never reducible to a single actualised set of couplings. As such, the qualities of machines varies along with the context within which it is situated and the flows which are produced. For example, while a public space may be perceived to have a fixed identity or essential qualities (e.g. conviviality or as a key site of civic deliberation), this representation is only one actualisation of a site's virtual capabilities. A machine, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is 'a system of interruptions or breaks' (1983 [1972]: 36). That there are always alternative ways of being via couplings and connections suggests the plasticity or 'pluripotency' (DeLanda, 2002: 58) of machines. As such, understanding the political possibilities of any assemblage (such as a public space), must involve the identification or mapping of the interactions between machines, including 'how these interactions affect one another, and how they structure the movements and becomings of which a machine is capable…' (Bryant, 2014: 49) – in other words, the interactions that construct particular patterns of organisation, such as the asymmetries and hierarchies associated with urban space (Farías, 2011).

Moreover, relations between coupled machines are not static. Rather, flows can always be separated and rearranged (Sendra, 2015). With respect to publicness, this suggests a focus on how relations or couplings are forged and the extent to

which they produce or diminish capacities within individual entities. For example, a highly policed and regulated space might be said to diminish the capacity for creativity and expression. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari as well as 'object oriented ontology' Bryant (2014) uses the notion of a bright object to explain how certain machines structure relations and produce hierarchies. For the study of urban assemblages, bright objects draw attention to socio-material processes where human or non-human machines overcode and organise the paths of subordinated machines. In the next section, I apply this machinic framework to a study of Bristol's Bearpit.

MACHINES AND PUBLICNESS IN THE BEARPIT

The work presented here is the outcome of a robust engagement and research programme spanning the years 2013 to 2016 (the majority of empirical data presented here was conducted between November 2014 to November 2015). This has included attendance and participation at over 20 community group and council meetings, over 50 observations of the site documented in field notes and diaries, photographs and video, active participation in multiple arts and play initiatives in the space, as well as over 60 interviews and informal discussions with site users, traders, artists, and other community interests. The study has been further enriched by my role as an active participant as an occasional volunteer with the Bearpit Improvement Group, which has enabled me access to a wide range of documents and discussions pertaining to the space. Analytically, the paper draws on this material, centring on the articulations and couplings of machines and how their relations construct or contribute to social dispositions and affects of publicness. Of course, it would be impossible to account for all assemblages of publicness, even in a single public space. As such, the paper centres on a single controversial object – a temporary pavilion – and associated assemblage. Physically present in the Bearpit for only 8 months, the pavilion draws attention to the ways in which the coupling and organisation of machines can transform understandings and experiences of publicness. Before examining these events, I will briefly introduce the site and discuss some relevant physical and organisational developments that have taken place therein.

A roundabout way to a public

Figure 1: the Bearpit (author photograph, February 4, 2014)

The Bearpit ('formally' known as the St James Barton Roundabout) is a roundabout constructed in late 1960s during the peak of modernist urban planning in the UK. The space was the outcome of efforts seeking to ease city centre traffic congestion through the construction of an urban motorway (Evening Post, 1967a; 1967b; 1968). While the motorway project was only partially completed, it produced a series of large roads and junctions within the central area of Bristol. At the Bearpit, the final roundabout design included a large below grade open space at the middle (originally intended to serve as a through road) accessed by pedestrians via four interlinked tunnels. Designers made efforts to produce a pleasant urban space[ii] in what was originally intended to be a roadway. Nevertheless, the open, public space area was largely cut off from other city activities. According to the accounts of several interviewees and contacts with long-term familiarity[iii], not long after construction the roundabout was already considered dangerous and a place to be avoided, particularly at night. This is a perception that has been difficult to dispel (Bristol Post, 2010). However, over the last several years a number of initiatives have been undertaken to improve the space and combat the fear of crime. The most visible of these attempts have come via the Bearpit Improvement Group (BIG), a community interest company that formed in 2010 with the intention of

improving the ambience of space, increasing use and accessibility and developing the Bearpit as a showcase site for local artists and independent traders (BIG, 2012). According to one of the group's founding directors, the BIG takes an 'organic and incremental approach to improvements' in order to make the site more welcoming[iv]. Another BIG director expressed a future vision of the Bearpit as '...a place for everybody... the sort of place where paths come together and everybody can feel comfortable with each other'[v]. Both statements reflect the group's desire to carefully advance access, diversity and inclusion while being sensitive to the needs and experiences of existing users – most notably rough sleepers and street drinkers who have long been associated with the Bearpit. At times, these expressions call upon conceptions of an abstract, universal citizen (Galvis, 2014) (e.g. who is 'everybody' in the statement above). Indeed, some individuals who had slept rough in the Bearpit indicted that they did not feel part of this future 'everybody', expressed disappointment with recent changes and sensed they were being pushed out of the space[vi]. However, it is worth noting that the BIG does not always speak with a single voice and many members have prioritised the rights of marginalised individuals (particularly the homeless) to occupy the site[vii].

In 2011, following the BIG's establishment of market trading and an outdoor art gallery, the city council designated the site as a Community Action Zone (CAZ). While the CAZ does not directly coincide with a particular set of powers (and is in fact not written down) it is often invoked at BIG meetings and in discussions with council officers as a means to resist and (at times) bypass certain aspects of council bureaucracy.[viii] As a former BIG director explained, 'the Community Action Zone is ... basically a verbal agreement between us and the council, almost a gentleman's agreement that we will work together and make something happen... there's no legal basis to it'[ix]. The arrangement was intended to both recognise the importance of community-led engagements and allow the BIG some certainty that they are key stakeholders and decision-makers in how the space develops. In 2015, the BIG further formalised their stake in the Bearpit and negotiated a site license with the city council[x]. In exchange for taking responsibility for certain aspects site management (e.g. trading), the licence

grants the group authority to use the objects and structures in the space for the benefit of the community. While this arrangement brings the organisation closer into the fold of city bureaucracy, it also allows for a small amount of autonomy for the group to pursue small-scale improvements with only limited oversight. Analyzed from the perspective of expression, the CAZ, the site license and these more general moral dispositions (e.g. compassion towards homeless) can be understood as incorporeal or semiotic machines. For example, this discourse produces transformations in the social being of individuals by modifying the way corporeal machines relate to one another and modified the overall trajectory of the site (see Koch, 2016). In this case, relations between members of the BIG, the city council, site users and visitors, and the territory of the Bearpit are (to varying degrees) organised and transformed via incorporeal machines.

In terms of physical development, the group's first material intervention involved the installation of movable seating in 2011. Soon after, the city council allocated a portion of its Section 106 money (contributions from nearby development projects) to purchase and install shipping containers which now serve as market stalls and storage facilities. In 2014 the council commenced a £1 million redevelopment project which included new surface level crossings and a pathway around the outskirts of the Bearpit, removal of one lane of automobile traffic, construction of stairs leading in and out of the site, new lighting, landscaping and a full resurfacing of the paved areas of the site. The final design allows pedestrians to avoid the subways when entering the space or to circumvent the site entirely by using the surface crossings and walking around the Bearpit at road level. These machines structure and organise material relations in the Bearpit allowing for (and discouraging) association and contact between bodies. In the next section I turn to experiences surrounding the pavilion in order to draw attention to transformations of publicness and the role of 'bright objects' in machinic relations.

Activating occupancy and contact in the Bearpit
During the summer of 2015, the BIG sponsored a 7-month *Art in the Bearpit* project. The centrepiece of the effort was a small pavilion, described as 'part-

sculpture and part-shelter' and commissioned by Hand in Glove (HIG) a local arts collective that organised the events. The pavilion served as the setting and operational base for a series of performances that were envisioned to disturb and disrupt 'everyday life of the city' (HIG, 2015a) and counter perceptions of the Bearpit as a dangerous, 'no-go' zone (Bristol Post, 2015). The project was framed by a participatory arts ethos (Bishop 2012) in which audiences were encouraged to shift away from passive roles and towards active engagement in performative events (Roe and Buser 2016; for further discussions of the role and potential of arts-based interventions in public space see Pollock and Sharp 2012; Askins and Pain 2011; Pinder 2008).

According to the arts team, the pavilion's hazard graphic style (imagery typical of signs placed at construction sites, power stations or on vehicles containing hazardous materials) was intended to challenge some of the assumptions made about everyday visual language and to encourage reflection on threat, risk and danger.

Figure 2: the pavilion – hazard and risk re-appropriated as urban welcome mat (author photograph, September 25, 2014).

According to the artists, the pavilion:

> '...prompts the viewer to challenge their perception of what is deemed 'unsafe', offering a sheltered and hospitable alternative to the danger one might expect to encounter' (HIG, 2015b)

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This re-appropriation of both visual and spatial narratives (of hazard graphics and the 'dangerous' Bearpit) fed into a wider reimagining programme that sought to challenge common assumptions about the Bearpit. This included performative and participatory events such as a 'Sunday Lunch' held in the centre of the space where artists, passers-by and others sat down for a four-course meal as well as a Bearpit sleepover. In addressing emotions of fear and anxiety, artists engaged the space as a 'venue of public address' (Iveson, 2007: 32) in order to debate the boundaries between what is considered public and private, to examine risk and safety, and to investigate through arts interventions what these ideas might mean in the specific context of the Bearpit. These debates also connected to wider societal concerns regarding homelessness, addiction, mental health and the role of public space as a site of tolerance and inclusion in times of austerity, challenging the marginalisation of these citizens within public space in the (post)revanchist city.

In addition to these discursive roles, the pavilion was also a physical object set into a corner of a contested and often tumultuous, sometimes chaotic, public space. As such, while the structure served as the staging ground for artistic performances, outside of these events it was put to a variety of other, non-programmed uses. Indeed, once put in place, it became clear that the structure would not only serve as a space for quirky arts events. According to the artist:

> ...when we were putting it up, on the last day when everyone was helping to finish it off, a couple of people that slept there [in the Bearpit], they asked if they could help to like varnish it and finish it, they said, 'we'll be using it, this is going to be shelter for us', they were actively wanting to help to finish it (interview with artist, January 15, 2016).

During my observations, in addition to rough sleeping I witnessed its use as space for children to play, for eating lunch, skateboarding and general hanging around. It was also commonly occupied by street drinkers, drug dealers and drug users and eventually became almost exclusively associated with anti-social behaviour. Overcoding other machines of this urban assemblage, the pavilion

quickly took on the role of a bright object, structuring relations in the Bearpit and organising the paths of movement and become of those who frequented the space. In a recent visit, empty cans of cider, beer and used needles littered the area behind the pavilion. Traders, police and other individuals I spoke with noted an increase in criminal activity (e.g. violence and drug dealing) in the Bearpit that was often situated in the vicinity of the pavilion.

Figure 3: bottles and cans of alcohol, needles, and rubbish in the vicinity of the Pavilion (author photograph, December 1, 2015)

This illegal behaviour gave the structure further power as a site of debate and machine of publicness. As noted above, the BIG has long expressed the view that the site should be inclusive and diverse. In practical terms, this has meant supporting the homeless who sleep in the space, as well as being accepting of street drinking. According to a former BIG director 'when I joined the group there was a consensus that street drinkers, homeless people who sleep out overnight and a lot of drinkers were generally congregating down here during the day, were a community, part of the local community and there's basically nowhere else for them to go. We felt it was not really part of what we wanted to do, to get rid of them or move them on'[xi]. Nevertheless, following refurbishment, expectations were high that fears of crime and anti-social behaviour would diminish and that an independent and inclusive vibe would thrive. The presence of skaters, a new *Bearittos* restaurant, and an active arts and cultural programme

(the HIG work as well as other outdoor exhibitions and events) were all seen as mechanisms to increase safety, vibrancy and diversify use of the space without driving away existing users. However, this re-imagining has not played out according to plan as illegal activity and anti-social behaviour has tended to dominate discussions and debates about the future of the Bearpit (Bristol Post 2015). According to police figures[xii], in the 12 months between November 2014 and October 2015 there were 104 crimes recorded at the site with the highest number (19) occurring in October 2015 (the majority of these incidents were categorised as anti-social behaviour). While it is difficult to pinpoint the precise cause of the increase in violence and anti-social behaviour (many of those I spoke with suggested the closing of a nearby squat has placed pressure on the space, others blamed recent cuts in public services; there has also been an increase in reporting of crime by traders), much of this activity centred on the pavilion. As such, there was disagreement within the BIG with regards to whether the pavilion should become a permanent feature of the Bearpit or be removed once its intended purpose as a performance space was complete. One BIG director argued that the structure was becoming central to the existence of homeless people in the city and felt it was essential to maintain and keep for as long as possible.[xiii] Nevertheless, soon thereafter the city council issued a Community Protection Notice (CPN) directly implicating the pavilion in the promotion of anti-social behaviour. The notice is remarkable in its recognition of the pavilion as a (il)legitimate actor in the space. It states: 'this structure is having a detrimental effect of a persistent or continuing nature on the quality of life of those in the locality and is unreasonable'[xiv]. As a bright object, the pavilion summoned and made a public visible. However, in this case, the structure's capacity to facilitate anti-social behaviour was determined to be 'unreasonable' and detrimental to the safety of those who use the space. The BIG was ordered to remove the structure or face a fine of up to £20,000.

During its 8-month occupation of the Bearpit, the pavilion was a regular space of engagement and topic of debate. However, the structure's dismantling provided further opportunity for deliberation and discussion. In this role, it served both as a venue and object of public address. Over the course of a day, the dismantling

team (which included the author) engaged in several discussions about the structure as passers-by asked questions and expressed their thoughts and opinions about recent events in the Bearpit. These included, for example, the value of the structure to the homeless, reflections on austerity and public services, frustration with the city council, disappointment with those who used the structure for illicit purposes, as well as glee and relief to see it removed[xv].

During these episodes, the pavilion contributed to the nature of use and behaviour in the Bearpit and was directly implicated in 'the making of urban subjectivity and political orientation' (Amin, 2014: 137) of those who have used the space. This included those individuals directly occupying and using the structure as well as passers-by and traders who have come into contact with individuals suffering from addiction, mental health issues and homelessness. However, absent a programme of engagement or support, much of the contact experienced via the pavilion was fleeting and negatively felt. Unfortunately, rather than contribute to awareness and understanding of the plight of the homeless or the deleterious effects of addiction, these moments of contact have tended to promulgate fear and anxiety. Evidence of this can be seen in a subsequent increase in police tactics of dispersal (including 46 formal and informal bannings from the site), two Bearpit 'beat surgeries' and a 'day of action' targeting drug dealing and shoplifting in the area. To further the point, one individual who has previously slept rough in the Bearpit described his feelings about the loss of the pavilion as such: 'We were peed off! The pavilion was a nice place to sit out of the sun when it was too hot or to get cover from the rain … lately they are taking everything away from where the homeless are'[xvi]. This included not only the Bearpit, but also other sites in the city where homeless individuals were known to gather.

As a bright object the pavilion modified socio-material relations in the Bearpit. Performative events notwithstanding, the physical structure has served as a multi-functional shelter (for relaxing, rough sleeping, drug dealing, drinking) which has brought bodies into contact. Its relation to wider assemblages of publicness has also been caught up in the expressive, semiotic machines of the

BIG's more compassionate policies of inclusion as well as more recently, revanchist police tactics and ultimately, its portrayal as 'unreasonable' and illegitimate in the eyes of the city council.

Rethinking Publicness

In the previous section I considered the pavilion structure, exploring how this machine was involved in the organisation of publicness in the Bearpit. Comprised of a range of machinic component parts, the resultant public assemblages evidence the dynamic and more-than-human construction and contestation of public culture. In this section, I reflect on what these machines and associated assemblages suggest about the nature of publicness and public space more generally, highlighting two main ideas. First, I draw attention to the summoning power of bright objects and the ways in which the material culture of public space influences the nature of human experience. Second, I discuss the *plasticity* of the concept of publicness including its tendency to evolve through various connections, disconnections and reconnections (May, 2005).

Material culture and the summoning power of bright objects
Existing within the wider 'summoning environment' (Amin, 2015: 244) of the Bearpit, the pavilion brought individuals and groups together and enabled new space rituals. Furthermore, as part of a wider assemblage of public space, this machine operated as an arbiter of the right to claim, occupy and appropriate (public) space (Lefebvre, 1996; Mitchell 2003; Iveson 2007). In this light, the pavilion was not only implicated in the production of new bodily connections and relations, but also the experience of community, solidarity and struggle for recognition (Amin, 2014: 137).

Bryant refers to machines such as these which organise and structure the movements and relations of other machines as bright objects. These material or immaterial entities '*capture* other machines in their orbit' and influence paths of becoming (Bryant, 2014: 203 italics in original). For example, amongst the street drinkers who frequent the Bearpit, addiction can be a bright object which, while not determining precise actions, severely limits and structures movement,

development and capacity. Within the confines of the Bearpit, the pavilion operated as a bright object. While the pavilion did not wholly structure actions and outcomes, it played an important role in the nature of public assemblages – organising other entities, stitching together ecologies of connected machines and 'structuring of everyday life' (Dewsbury 2011: 149). Moreover, plugged in to the wider Bearpit ecology, the pavilion played a significant role in the assembly and production of an urban commons where the participation of certain disenfranchised individuals was evident. Yet, the inability of this machine to produce a tolerant and convivial space led to its eventual disassembly.

Figure 4: Disassembly of the pavilion (author photograph, December 1, 2015)

Following Sendra (2015), these experiences of (dis)assembly can be understood as beneficial or positive in at least two ways. First, installation and removal of the pavilion has been an opportunity to learn from experience and improve the Bearpit. Indeed, installation of the pavilion was always a process of inquiry into how the space might be 'otherwise' (Sendra 2015: 832). Of course, the precise impact of the pavilion on sociality and publicness could not be predicted. Indeed, the pavilion's role as a bright object works in relation to the diversity of machinic connections within the particular context of the Bearpit at this unique moment of its transformation. This is a crucial lesson for urban planning and design as well as those more generally interested in public space as the effects of physical

interventions on notions and practices of sociality, civility, and publicness are likely to be less than certain (Amin, 2015).

Secondly, as a site and object of public address (Iveson 2007), disassembly of the pavilion organised and summoned an urban public and in the process brought attention to the conditions of homelessness and addiction in Bristol. Despite the recent turn to revanchist policy and practice, the Bearpit is one of the few public spaces in the city that almost seems on the edges of city regulation and where the impacts of broader social policies are regularly on display. It is in this role as a bright object, with the power to summon other machines into its orbit (e.g. homeless, street drinkers, commuters, traders, artists, charitable and socially-engaged organisations) that the Bearpit emerges a site for public deliberation and contestation.

Re-connecting to debates about the potential of assemblage analysis in critical urban theory (McFarlane 2011a; Brenner et al 2011), the concept of bright objects is helpful in that it shows how taking non-humans seriously in the production of publicness does not mean a flattening out of socio-material objects. Rather, it involves an open process of inquiry into the unequal distribution of resources, agency and capacities in urban life (Farías 2011).

The plascicity of publicness
The unpredictability of urban interventions mentioned above hints at the dynamism of public space and broader relations of publicness (Iveson, 2007). Publicness is not a uniform, unchanging concept. As an expressive machine and construct of social engagement with material and immaterial components of the world, there is no essence to publincess, but rather, a characteristic plasticity or pluripotency (DeLanda, 2002; 2006). Publicness stretches, twists and bends along with coupled physical and discursive components or machines. In the case of the Bearpit, assemblages of publicness are constructed via myriad connections with other machines including, but not limited to, humans (e.g. police, artists, traders, street people, commuters, shoppers) legal sanctions and orders (e.g. ASBOs), political and social conditions (e.g. austerity, addiction) and the built

environment. Here, machinic interactions continually inform struggles over use, behaviour, occupation, inclusivity/exclusion and the nature of social dispositions toward the other (Amin, 2014). This multiplicity of human and non-human interaction reinforces understandings that extend the borderlines of the human subject and recognise the role of material agency in everyday life. It is a way of seeing *with* the city as a negotiation; a collaboration and a struggle.

Further, this interaction between bodies exposes the characteristic plasticity of social machines and social forms such as publicness, where 'crystalized moments' and moments of stability within a 'wider rhizomatic process' (Daskalaki and Mould, 2013: 15) always carry a capacity to break with the taken-for-granted. This plastic ability for the production of other realities reflects Sendra's (2015, 833) arguments for the inclusion of 'unbound points' within urban public spaces where improvisation and creativity is possible. Here, public spaces are imagined as 'unfinished' (*ibid* 831) and adaptable, ready to be manipulated and recalibrated through further machinic operations.

Such plasticity is evident in the Bearpit where policies of compassion and care for the marginalised and disadvantaged (whether these individuals are skateboarders, homeless, street drinkers, or addicts) struggle alongside revanchist imaginaries and the securitisation of public space. Yet moments of beauty do appear. While these remain ephemeral and temporary excursions into alternative public cultures, they are part of the flow of publicness and demonstrate that the status quo is not immutable.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have paid attention to the heterogeneous and dynamic make-up of assemblages of publicness. Through a machinic approach, I examined the connections made across a kaleidoscope of material and discursive attributes present in the Bearpit focusing on a temporary arts pavilion. The paper has four main contributions. First, by following Delezue and Guattari's schizoanalytic theory, I set out a relational, machinic framework for inquiry into forms of publicness. Drawing on the concept of machinic assemblages , the paper mapped

some of the relations between connected entities in the Bearpit. I suggest that the approach developed here has strong potential to make further connections between relational theory and practical sites of social and political contestation. For example, by taking physical objects and materiality as the starting point for exploration one finds an alternative methodological viewpoint and opening to investigate urban assemblages (Minuchin, 2013).

Second, the paper suggests that the specific forms of publicness identified in the Bearpit were constructed via the (uneven) coupling of human and non-human machines. I have argued that the pavilion functioned as a bright object which influenced individual social and ethical dispositions as well as the wider nature and experience of publicness in the Bearpit. The narrative draws particular attention to the role of the non-human (e.g. the 'unreasonable' pavilion) in constructions of public culture. Third, the concept of publicness was portrayed as plastic – a social and expressive machine which bends and twists along with machinic connections and relations. The plascicity of publicness also reflects they way understandings of social phenomena are always partial and how there is always something more; a capacity in reserve and a propensity for change.

Finally, while the paper narrates the existence of multiple (often contradictory) conceptions of publicness, I argue that the story of the Bearpit offers a counterpoint to much of the pessimistic literature that has been critical of recent transformations in and of public space. Rather than an 'end of public space', the Bearpit demonstrates how one of the most unwanted, unloved spaces in a city can become a showpiece of social innovation and collaboration. Indeed, through various artistic, community and individual activities, the Bearpit has become an important site in the production of new spheres of public address (Iveson, 2007). A key element of this work has been the pursuit of an alternative urbanism that recognises the rights of marginalised individuals to occupy space and participate in the creation of public culture. However, the upturn in violence and unfortunate return to urban revanchism draws attention to the difficulty of this work as well as the prospects for co-optation of compassionate urban policy (Murphy, 2009; Galvis, 2014). Indeed, there is no happy harmony in the Bearpit,

but an incessant renegotiation of publicness, made and remade by machinic (dis)connections. As such, what is perhaps not yet an alternative pubic culture, or reinvention of public space, is clearly a site of public becoming where issues of inclusion, occupation, austerity, addiction, and revanchism are made visible and contested.

Following from this research, I suggest that there is an important role for assemblage urbanism within critical urbanism and the study of political contestation. Rather than deflecting attention away from structuring elements of urban life (Brenner et al 2011), the Deleuzian / machinic concepts deployed in this paper highlighted the diversity of ways in which the experiences of humans and non-humans are variously (and often precariously) mediated. Indeed, the concept of bright objects offers a relational, more-than-human frame through which to examine such structuring connections. Future research at a diversity of scales, sites and abstractions (e.g. to explore austerity or capitalism as a bright object) would be useful in developing the concept beyond the study of localised material relations.

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[i] Bryant (2014) develops the concept of bright objects as part of a wider project of understanding power relations. Elsewhere (Bryant, 2012) he describes a bright object as a 'hub or key node' that mediates the pathways of connected objects (objects can be human or non-human).

[ii] Interview with retired council planner who had worked on urban design elements of the original Bearpit, October 9, 2015.

[iii] These include discussions with visitors, market traders and others familiar with the Bearpit since the 1970s and 1980s.

[iv] Interview with BIG Director 1, November 5, 2015.

[v] Interview with BIG Director 2, February 11, 2014.

[vi] Discussions with site visitors, December 1, 2015

[vii] BIG board meetings often involve discussion of the role of the Bearpit as one of the few public spaces in the city where homeless individuals can stay without fear of eviction. Nevertheless, these are contested sentiments within the group.

[viii] Observations are based on the author's notes of BIG board meetings (November 11, 2014; November 19, 2015) and an interview with BIG Director 1 (November 5, 2015).

[ix] Interview with BIG Director 3, November 11, 2014

[x] Licence agreement between Bristol City Council and the Bearpit Improvement Group (May 15, 2015).

[xi] Interview with BIG Director 2, November 11, 2014.

[xii] Police.UK data, Avon and Somerset crime statistics for 2014-2015 https://www.police.uk/avon-and-somerset/BC192/crime/all-crime/+veo1PQ/stats/#crime_trend

[xiii] Author's field notes, BIG board meeting, September 9, 2015.

[xiv] Bristol City Council, correspondence with the BIG, 11 November 2015.

[xv] Author field notes of discussions, December 1, 2015

[xvi] Interview with John (name changed), 13 January 2016