Merkel, Janet (2015) 'Coworking in the City', ephemera: theory & politics in organization, 15(1): 121–139.

1 author:

Janet Merkel
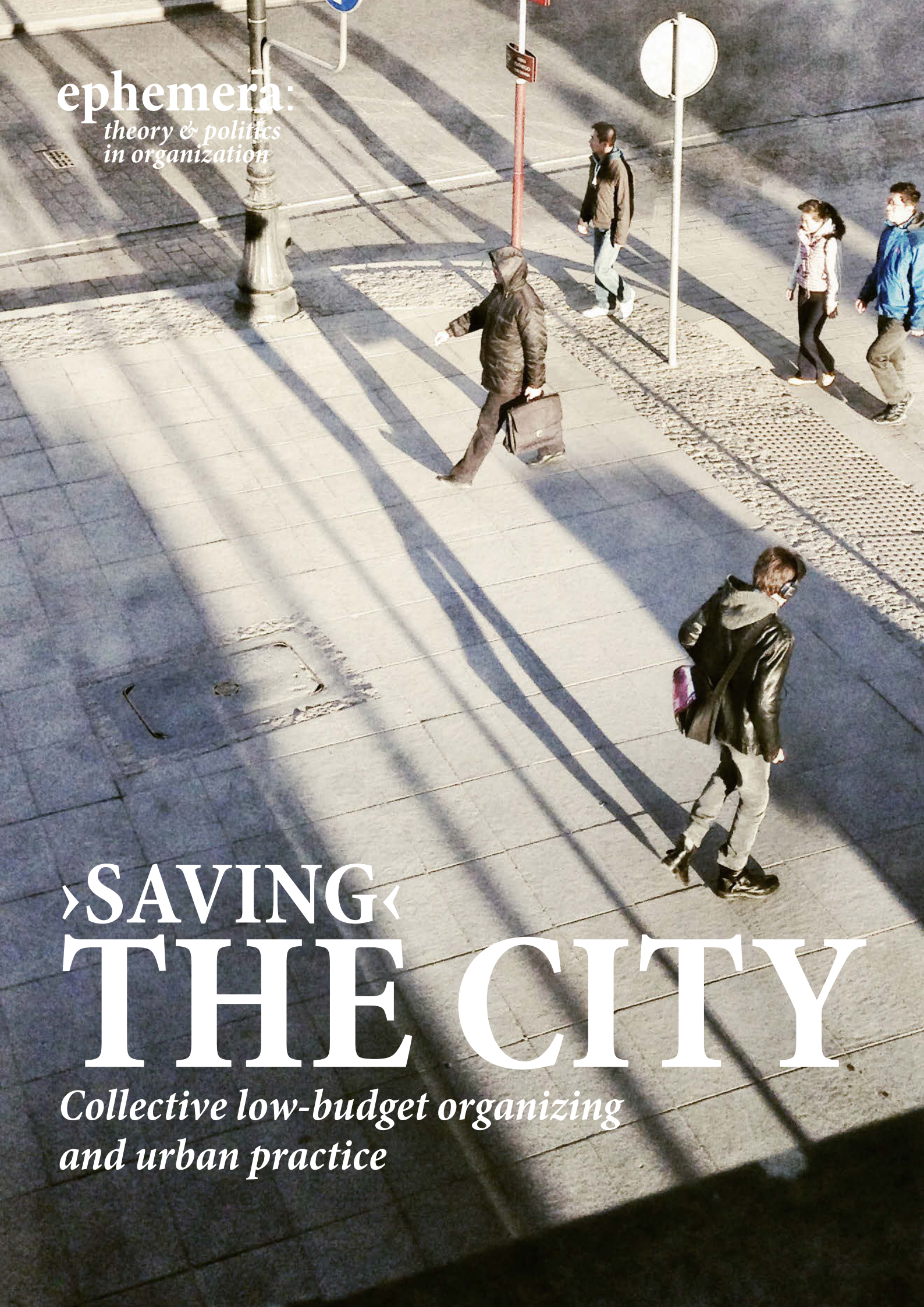Technische Universität Berlin
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THE CITY

*Collective low-budget organizing
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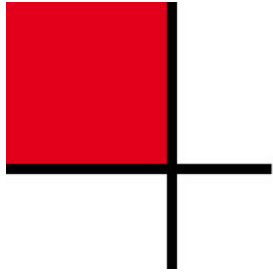
theory
ephemera encourages contributions that explicitly engage with theoretical and conceptual understandings of organizational issues, organizational processes and organizational life. This does not preclude empirical studies or commentaries on contemporary issues, but such contributions consider how theory and practice intersect in these cases. We especially publish articles that apply or develop theoretical insights that are not part of the established canon of organization studies. e*phemera* counters the current hegemonization of social theory and operates at the borders of organization studies in that it continuously seeks to question what organization studies is and what it can become.

politics
ephemera encourages the amplification of the political problematics of organization within academic debate, which today is being actively de-politized by the current organization of thought within and without universities and business schools. We welcome papers that engage the political in a variety of ways as required by the organizational forms being interrogated in a given instance.

organization
Articles published in *ephemera* are concerned with theoretical and political aspects of organizations, organization and organizing. We refrain from imposing a narrow definition of organization, which would unnecessarily halt debate. Eager to avoid the charge of 'anything goes' however, we do invite our authors to state how their contributions connect to questions of organization and organizing, both theoretical and practical.

'Saving' the city: Collective low-budget organizing and urban practice

Paula Bialski, Heike Derwanz, Birke Otto and Hans Vollmer

Table of Contents

Editorial

Articles

Notes

A study in practice

Reviews

'Saving' the city: Collective low-budget organising and urban practice

Paula Bialski, Heike Derwanz, Birke Otto and Hans Vollmer

Introduction

In recent discussions and popular accounts of social practices such as urban gardening, car sharing, coworking, food cooperatives, ticket sharing, and waste recycling, there seems to be an underlying assumption that such trends tend to organise the city differently. Often descriptions of these accounts are discursively linked to the economic reality of austerity politics, an impending threat of resource scarcity and demographic change in large cities of contemporary welfare societies, which seem to prompt many people to develop innovative, alternative or entrepreneurial ways of coping with the challenges of the 'the order of the day'. These practices of urban dwellers show a re-evaluation of the notion of scarcity, waste and consumption, a collective way of organising on a low budget and an appreciation of slower, simpler, self-organised and local ways of producing and consuming. They contrast starkly to those more top-down, centralised, market- or state-based, resource-intensive and costly infrastructures, production patterns and consumption practices that have characterised urban life in these cities for a long time (Harvey, 2013; Graham and Marvin, 2001; Venkatesh, 2006).

This raises various questions, such as: to what extent does for example a possibility of flexible car sharing through online services change attitudes towards car ownership? Is travelling using online hospitality networks (e.g. 'Couchsurfing') more sustainable than relying on large chains of resource intensive hotel accommodation (e.g. Bialski, 2012; Rosen et. al., 2011)? Does DIY-building constitute cheaper alternatives to ready-made (Brodersen, 2003; Drotschmann, 2010; Grubbauer, this issue)? Or, will second-hand shopping,

clothes swapping and 'dumpster diving' curtail mass consumption and a throwaway culture (Gregson and Crewe, 2003)?[1] To what extent do these practices contribute to a 'powered down' civil society (Urry, 2013) or cultures of frugality, cooperation and sharing, and what are their long-term effects on urban space? The increasing attention to such practices enunciate their political relevance while posing new questions regarding the relation of these practices to capital, the state, sustainability and citizen responsibilities (e.g. Hoedemækers et al., 2012; Beverungen et al., 2013). As the city is made up of multiple methods of organising, forming such 'heterotopias' (Foucault, 1970) of collectively organised low budget solutions often means to conceive of 'liminal social spaces of possibility' (Harvey, 2013: xvii). These practices tend to organise differently, apparently striving to create an urban environment that relies on more self-organised, local, autonomous, and resource efficient forms of organisation, which in turn somehow changes the political, economic, and social setting in cities. 'This "something different"', so Harvey 'does not necessarily arise out of a conscious plan, but more simply out of what people do, feel, sense, and come to articulate as they seek meaning in their city lives' (*ibid.*).

Low-budget urbanity: Saving and the city

This special issue of *ephemera* is focused on recent research that aims to map, describe, and track these social practices of collective organising on a low budget in cities today. Focusing particularly on an empirical interest in saving practices of urban everyday life, such saving practices can be considered as both 'expressions of a self-imposed frugality, as well as a need to save costs' (Färber, 2014: 123), thereby constituting a field of tension between saving as an ethical practice and/or imposed order.[2] Often these low budget ways of organising entail a complex meaning of economising, also expressed in the double meaning of the English term 'saving'. Stemming from the latin, 'salvus', the term derives its roots form 'intact and healthy'. 'Saving' as a verb can also take on the notion of

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1   Other examples include urban farming and cooperative gardening (Schmelzkopf, 1995), local currency systems (Hughes, 2005), transport ticket sharing (Färber, Otto, Derwanz, forthcoming), house squatting (Neuwirth, 2005), up-cycling of sewage and trash, and other forms of re-using and re-valuing urban resources.

2   The special issue emerged from the research background of the editorial team – most of whom were affiliated at one point or another with a research initiative at the urban-development-oriented HafenCity University in Hamburg, Germany. The interdisciplinary research project *Low-budget urbanity: On the transformation of the urban in times of austerity* explored how saving and economising practices change the city and/or notions of urbanity. The research initiative's case studies ranged from ticket sharing in intercity train travel to online hospitality networks (e.g. 'airbnb'), eco communities focused on saving natural resources and DYI-homebuilding in a number of German cities.

rescuing. Furthermore, it means to keep something, sometimes in order to use it later, at other times just to maintain and not spend it.[3] Unpacking the meaning of saving therefore calls for an approach beyond merely an economical or sociological perspective. The complexity of 'saving' calls into question the interplay between organisations, resources, lifestyles and moral economies (Thompson 1991; Arvidsson and Peitersen, 2013) in various fields of practice and therefore demands more interdisciplinary ways of study. In doing so, not only notions of time and money, but also sustainability and sociality, can become normative entities of saving. Thus, 'saving the city' includes the imperative to economise (save money, resources, time, etc.) while at the same time harbouring the desire to 'rescue' – recollecting an urban civil society via mobilising the public, helping neighbourhoods, creating public spaces, and heterogeneous possibilities of living to cope with today's and future challenges. Such 'challenges' include growing inequalities, avoiding the waste of money and resources with their voluntary work while redistributing, reusing or preserving the metabolism of cities in manifold ways – via art (Beyes, this issue; Henke, this issue), architecture (Petcou and Petrescu, this issue; Herman, this issue), sharing (Psarikidou, this issue; Foden, this issue) or co-operation and co-production (CiT-Collective et al.; Podkanstka and Podkalicka; Merkel; all this issue). Thus, the title of '"Saving" the city' alludes to a multitude of what is considered resourceful – money, nature, the built environment, social relations, time, aesthetics, or the just city.

Besides saving, the second pillar of this issue is the importance of the urban setting as a place where specific saving practices are enacted or represented. Urban space or specific urban qualities are usually characterised with notions of density, population size and heterogeneity (Wirth, 1938), as the place of surplus value production (Harvey, 2013), and as complex networks of relations that link various sites across the globe, both virtual and 'real' (Brantz et al. 2012). At the same time, cities today are 'spaces and places where most of the world's populations now live; they are the centers of economic power and wealth, but they also are where the most vulnerable in society, particularly the young, the old and the poor are concentrated' (Donald et al. 2014: 3). Moreover, cities are spaces in which 'heterogeneous values flourish and where social wealth is produced in common and shared, not merely through the market and mediated by capital' (Frenzel and Beverungen, 2014: 6). The self-organised, collective saving practices

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3   In regard to the city, the widely used adjective 'safe', however describes 'secure' spaces implying free and fearless behaviour. Here, the safe neighbourhood or safe city are discourses framing a social balancing act between a growing surveillance and police armament on the one hand, and a gender-sensitive design of the public space on the other hand (Laimer and Rauth, 2014).

presented in this issue can be considered as enabled by and shaping these 'complex encounters, connections and mixtures of diverse hybrid networks of humans and animals, objects and information, commodities and waste' (Sheller and Urry, 2006: 2).

Appearances of collective urban saving practices

The call for papers for this special issue had the intention to collect case studies and thought pieces from various situations and localities in order to contribute to a discussion on collectively organised low budget urban practices and to unfold commonalities and potentialities. We collected contributions from an interdisciplinary set of researchers as well as urban 'practitioners' such as planners, activists and artists. We particularly invited contributions with a perspective on the everyday that aim to describe the perceived reality of the people who save. This goes beyond a perspective of everyday economics, or unreflectively and strategically-practiced patterns of formal or informal economic behaviour (Arnstberg and Boren, 2003: 7). It inquires into different scales and values of economising and the various global to local links and the discursive emblems entangled in urban saving practices, thereby showing the tension between a normative judgement of what is voluntary simplicity (Huneke, 2005, Doherty and Etzioni, 2003) or what is bare need (e.g. Barr, 2012, Daly, 2009). Such a perspective should avoid the danger of polarising or simplifying motivations for saving as either out of necessity or out of lifestyle.

While editing this issue, we became immersed in various descriptions of such practices, and witnessed an ever-increasing mass-media hype (e.g. The Economist, 2013; Geron, 2013) with new examples of 'city-saving' projects, and other institutionally-funded programs arising, often linked to the emergence of the so-called 'sharing economy' (Botsman and Rogers, 2010).[4] Still, some analytical questions remain: 'why' exactly people save is not easily answered. To find answers to this question, and even before discussing the political potential of such practices, it is also helpful to go back to why such practices emerge and where they come from. What do these practices mean today (and what did they mean in the past) to the people involved? In other words: where and how are they socially and historically rooted? In order to overcome established, purely economic perspectives on saving, our aim was to explore the economic motivations, the social dimensions and the cultural spheres that are created by urban saving practices. The interdisciplinary range of submissions addressed the

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4   Like the 'We traders. Swapping crisis for city' project organised by the German Goethe-Institut that aims to internationally distribute the knowledge produced in various 'collaborative city' projects in Madrid, Turin, Berlin, Lisbon and Toulouse.

awareness, knowledge, how-to methods, motivations and critiques of engaging in these practices.

One of the things that has become apparent in these descriptions is that instead of being reliant on professional expert systems, which were so prevalent in the pre-digital, pre-networked world, these practices are also growing because of an increasing access to do-it-yourself knowledge (Friebe and Lobo, 2006). The underlying mentality behind these grassroots movements seems that the actors cannot only 'do-it-themselves', but can also 'do-it-themselves-better'. It shows that the lack of trust in large socio-economic systems is also a large motivator to engage in such practices. The examples, such as coworking (Merkel, this issue), alternative agro-food networks (Psarikidou, this issue), online exchange platforms (Foden, this issue), green-space projects (Herman, this issue) and of course neighbourhood initiatives (CiT-Collective et al., this issue) – to name a few – lay out ways to overcome economic or resource scarcity by drawing on self-organised structures rooted in co-operation and co-production.

What these practices seem to underline is a post-individualistic ethic, which comes out of a mere realization that space in cities has to be shared. With that realization, it seems more and more en-vogue to be responsible for a city, to take a bike rather than a car to work. Reputation, status, and respect in many urban subcultures are constituted in the engagement in such city-saving, frugal practices. Indeed, in media representation and self-descriptions, the more one saves, the 'cooler' one seems to be perceived because of how much one is doing for others (see Podkalicka and Potkańska, this issue). In other words, frugality and the sharing of resources often becomes a status symbol. As a new stage of capitalism, this frugality is celebrated as 'sharing economy' (Botsman and Rogers, 2010; Agyeman et al., 2013), in which the sociality of sharing becomes monitised. We also observe the revival of old and traditional practices put into new usages. These traditional practices are often supplemented and revived with new forms of technologies, such as internet sharing platforms or specifically developed apps. The internet provides an unprecedented kind of infrastructure to foster social and material organisation, and quickly gathers a critical mass to spread various modes of knowledge and participation.

Collecting the critiques

These practices as well as research on them have been criticised from many angles and perspectives. The main (and perhaps most obvious) ongoing critique is that such 'movements' are not forming any sort of alternative, but are just entangled in a neoliberal, consumer model (Heath and Potter, 2005). Critics argue that the described practices remain small-scale local experiments which are

nothing more than little and temporal islands reserved for a concerned but exclusive middle class, and a selective urban creative milieu in a number of welfare societies (Friebe and Lobo, 2006, Auerbach, 2012). What also must be questioned is the limited potential of such practice for upscaling, redistribution and broader structural change by creating strategic alliances (Harvey, 2013) as they are more threatened to be crushed by an ever-encroaching welfare state retrenchment (see e.g. Peck, 2014). Moreover, Marvin and Hodson have pointed out that if sustainable city development is scaled up, it often produces powerful exclusionary mechanisms between a rich elite living in protected 'premium ecological enclaves' and the rest of the urban population (e.g. Marvin and Hodson, 2010). In other words, such practices often are appropriated to foster the redevelopment of urban areas through financial investors who make it attractive for a rich urban class, and who contribute to the negative consequences of gentrification (Henke, this issue; Frenzel and Beverungen, 2014). The critical questions are whether such experiments really address larger structural issues such as poverty and uneven distribution (Hilbrand and Richter, this issue); to what extent they engage critically with the 'seductive powers of the notions of urban flexibility, temporariness, resourcefulness and "creativity"' (Ferreri, this issue: pp. 189); and how sustainable they really are (Ziehl and Oßwald, this issue)? It is also obvious that outside the global north, low-budget practices, frugality, and improvisation in cities are permanently present (McFarlane, 2012). However, as this issue is limited to cases from the global north and welfare societies (Munck, 2008; Rosa and Weiland, 2013), the question remains to what extent and at what moment are citizens possibly forming a critical mass? In order to address some of these critiques, we would like to end this section with a quote from our interview with John Urry in this issue:

> I'm slightly less bothered by the issue of whether or not these practices are limited to a certain class or gender. Things have to start somewhere. So it's actually the starting that is pretty significant, and it has to come from a specific social group. The car came from a specific social group too – young men driving and developing cars as speed machines, and subsequent use changed. So the question is: does it spread? Does it move? So I think it is worth to talk about this more – these many efforts, which push these various phenomena out, to move them out beyond the young, male model. (Urry et al., this issue: 224)

Three discourses framing '"Saving" the city'

The issue has gathered submissions from sociology (Foden, Psarikidou, Tellmann, Urry), urban studies (Hilbrandt and Richter, Merkel), cultural studies (Gandini, Podkalicka and Potkańska), architecture and urban planning (Grubbauer, Petcou and Petrescu, Herman, Ziehl and Oßwald), geography (Ferreri), organisation studies (Beyes) as well as from a range of activist urban

practitioners. Given this diversity, we would like to position the contributions in three discourses that link to various discussions to frame the debate: a) austerity urbanism, b) degrowth/postgrowth, and c) urban intervention/right to the city.

Austerity urbanism

One line of inquiry proliferating in urban studies and urban geography concerns the effects of, and relationship between, the recent economic and financial crises and urban centers (see e.g. Peck, 2014; Donald et al., 2014). Jamie Peck is perhaps the most prominent representative of this debate, and one who coined the term *austerity urbanism* to problematise the impact of neoliberal urban policies on cities. He argues that austerity measures are the defining principle characterising market-based urban reforms, even though they are not a stable or fixed condition with clearly defined measures, policies and practices. While austerity urbanism is in no way a generalisable process, but rather changes over time with distinctive local productions according to its institutional, geographical and cultural contexts (Peck, 2012; see also Peck et al., 2009: 50), the smallest common denominator is the imposition of market-based policies based on the *principle of austerity*. This principle appears in the guise of various practices: e.g. structural adjustment and good governance, privatisation and public-private partnerships, welfare retrenchment and active social policy. Acting under the legitimacy of permanent fiscal constraint has perpetuated the rule of market selectivity, and austerity seems to become the political economy *zeitgeist* of our time, defining the common sense to constantly see a need 'to cut back and safe' as a permanent condition.

While austerity urbanism describes the rescaling of austerity measures from the state to the urban and the economic, political and social implications of such politics of decentralisation, privatisation, etc. (Peck, 2013); it also shows how 'democratic processes are being undermined' by relying on technocrats and urban administrators in charge of austerity measures acting 'in the name of financial expediency' (Donald et al., 2014: 4). It draws out the uneven effects of such politics hitting mainly the poor, young, elderly and racialised city dwellers (*ibid.*). Mayer describes how the effects of austerity programmes are made visible most clearly by those who bring their protests to the streets. While the industrial city and the Fordist city model still provided institutionalised arenas for protests and discontent through unions, Mayer argues that neoliberal urbanism offers fewer sites and openings for such collective struggle (2012). Already 15 years ago, Graham and Marvin's seminal work *Splintering urbanism: Networked infrastructures, technological mobilities and the urban condition* (2001) drew out how privatisation processes, legitimised by saving imperatives, started to erode the unifying character of technical urban infrastructures in cities, which were based

on a Keynesian welfare state notion of a common good. The process created 'premium network spaces' that are limited to certain urban elites, while leaving the rest of the urban population to decay or disconnected networks (Graham and Marvin, 2001, see also Marvin and Hodson, 2010). Yet, while existing institutional arrangements, political compromises and collectivist, social-state policies and redistributive systems seem to be systematically destroyed, they also create new infrastructures for market-oriented economic growth, commodification, and capital-centric rule (Peck et al., 2009: 55). It is here, where these policies and systems are often linked to creative and entrepreneurial tendencies with a positive value for transforming cityscapes, exploiting cultural creativity and entrepreneurial activation (Mayer, 2012). In sum, austerity urbanism produces uneven urban development amongst and within cities, and limits municipalities' capacity to act. Much of the above-cited literature focuses its understanding of urban development primarily on the context of strategies of capital and the hopelessness of structural inequalities.

While these studies focus on the characteristics and impacts of 'austerity urbanism', they rarely describe the reactions and practices that people develop in such circumstances. How are their daily living conditions affected by these measures? How is daily life organised in the austere city?

For example, the note from Michael Ziehl and Sarah Oßwald in this issue emphasises the potentials that arise out of certain need-and-austerity-induced creative practices. Their contribution 'Second hand spaces: User practices in times of austerity and urban transformation' (this issue) describes their collaboration with the municipality of Bremen, a German city known for verging on bankruptcy. Here, their project was to make space available for creative and entrepreneurial activities that would otherwise be inaccessible for certain people because of rising rents. The ambition of the project was to conceptualise it from the outset in a more 'sustainable way' and urge the city to 'do justice to the importance of *second hand spaces* for sustainable urban transformation (...) allowing users to share the values they create, and remedy their precariousness' (Ziehl and Oßwald, this issue: 275). Urban activists like Ziehl and Oßwald aim to engage creatively with situations of scarcity while also recognising the many pitfalls that are implied in these practices, such as their own precarious employment. Mara Ferreri's note in this issue discusses this paradox theoretically, showing how 'the currency in common parlance of terms such as pop-up shops, guerrilla and interim uses bears witness to the existence of a shared imaginary of marginal and alternative temporary practices' and how temporary use has been celebrated uncritically as a 'new form of urbanism with the "temporary city" as its paradigm' (Ferreri, this issue: 182). Drawing on Doreen Massey's time-space relationship, Ferreri's note acts as a 'sympathetic

provocation' that attempts to question the tension between short-term projects and longer term power relations (*ibid.*). In a similar manner, Hanna Hilbrandt and Anna Richter's article in this issue points toward the risks of uncritically 'celebrating' such practices, as they believe is done in much of the literature. Following but also interrogating Jamie Peck's critique of austerity urbanism, they state that collectively organised low budget practices provide a response to austerity that 'neatly fits into the neoliberal repertoire of shifting responsibilities downwards, devolving the costs of austerity to lower scales' (Hilbrandt and Richter, this issue: 167). It is much more important, they state, to focus on neglected aspects of poverty and people who have to deal with 'no budget' situations such as bottle collecting, temp-work, street vending or unpaid academic work.

Between these two opposite ends of the debate of low-budget urban practices (positive engagement or critical dismissal), Ute Tellmann's article in this issue lays out the theoretical foundations of scarcity, providing a solid groundwork for discussion. She revises two different ways of how the notion of scarcity has been perceived historically: the intention to save as an important step for civilization as presented by Thomas Robert Malthus, or on the contrary, as a barrier for economic growth as in the macroeconomic perspective of John Maynard Keynes. The articles philosophical perspective helps us to think of scarcity as a historically developed and western concept that acts 'as a social device for inculcating modes of futurity,' stating that:

> Issues of scarcity and austerity mobilise antagonistic assumptions about what it means to face economic reality. They entail specific notions about what the bounds of the economy are or should be. They are tied to polemics about who abides in the realm of imagination and fiction and who is clear-headed enough to see the order of the day. (Tellmann, this issue: 22)

This shows that the notion of scarcity contributes to a construction of demands, which make certain resources appear limited. Its critical interrogation, however, can also reveal the links and connections between valuation, scaling and perhaps a more positive notion of a culture of frugality.

Forms of commoning, frugality and DIY as degrowth practices

In our interview on 'low-carbon societies' in this issue, the sociologist John Urry answers questions about a precarious future, stating that the bigger environmental picture makes clear that scaling down in one way or another is inevitable. One of the ways to speed up this scaling-down, says Urry, is to somehow make modest life more fashionable. The question is, how? Perhaps some answers can be found in the degrowth or post-growth context challenging

the economic growth paradigm of modern societies. This social movement (that was originally termed *Décroissance,* as it usually refers to French, Italian and Spanish social movements questioning the growth paradigm) became a European-wide movement in the last decade.[5] With its geographically and philosophically heterogeneous sources, it not only introduces an ethical-political dimension but also criticises the basic understanding and structures of society from the perspectives of ecological economics, social economy, economic anthropology and activist groups (Martinez-Alier et al., 2010). As Barbara Muraca points out, the movement has two roots: economical and environmental (Muraca, 2013). With key insights from André Gorz, Ivan Illich, Serge Latouche or Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen to name just a few, it differs from other perspectives:

> Generally degrowth challenges the hegemony of growth and calls for a democratically led redistributive downscaling of production and consumption in industrialised countries as a means to achieve environmental sustainability, social justice and well being. (Demaria et al., 2013: 209)

When Demaria et al. describe degrowth as aiming at environmental sustainability, social justice and well-being, they emphasise certain values that stand behind practices described in this issue. Thus, it is important to re-introduce these other categories beside economics and structural injustices underlined in the austerity research within critical urban studies. In this line, the article by Psarikidou in this issue focuses on alternative food networks in Manchester and Birmingham that promise to provide their own local remedies to urban effects of austerity and resource scarcity. Their actors develop strategies that draw on personal networks, barter systems, voluntary labour and fair-trade ethics – practices that directly shape a local community and therefore the urban setting. It takes a critical approach to question the perspective of innovation based on the economic growth paradigm and argues that it could be valuable to understand such collaborative projects as innovative forms of reorganising the economy.

Another discourse underlying many of the practices described in this issue is the notion of commoning – as originally described by Elinor Ostrom (2005), and brought up more recently by authors such as Peter Linebaugh (2008, 2014) or Massimo de Angelis (initiator of the online journal 'the commoner'). The most outspoken example is the Londoner New Cross Commoners project portrayed in a roundtable discussion about organisation in grassroots initiatives (CiT-Collective et al., this issue). Following Ostrom's question of how commons are successfully managed, the activists discuss and reflect upon their own forms of

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5   See e.g. http://leipzig.degrowth.org/en/what-does-degrowth-mean-to-us/.

self-organisation. In this case of an activist group in one of London's deprived neighbourhoods, it applied to their aim to act differently against market competition and state regulations and therefore, creating commons. In their words:

> A commons is a resource whose use is negotiated, decided and regulated by its users on a direct and non hierarchical basis. A commons is not a resource that everybody can use, it is a resource that can be used by people who take part in the processes of negotiating and re-negotiating its regulations – people who take part in commoning. Such a commons is something that has to be taken care of against the control of the state and the privatisation of the market. (CiT-Collective et al., this issue: 240)

Urban collectives like the New Cross Commoners in London exemplify that in an urban setting which is being put under an 'austerity regime' and/or being gentrified, practices are at play that are different from capitalistic production – questioning private ownership and other fundamental concepts like working for a wage, competition and the market (Exner and Kratzwald, 2012: 24). However Harvey, in regard to Ostrom, reminds us that horizontal organisation finds its limits when solidarity groups leave the small scale (Harvey, 2012: 70).

Mike Foden's article in this issue analyses online gift-based exchange networks and reuse in online social networks. While interviewing Freecycle and Freegle users, he exemplifies the sometimes unintended exclusion of certain groups from these processes of gifting and exchange. Social inclusion and exclusion related to digital labour are also explored in an article and note about coworking spaces in this issue. In 'Coworking the city', Janet Merkel studies the rising phenomena of coworking spaces as shared and flexible workplaces for precarious but ambitious freelancers and start-up entrepreneurs, often described as members of an urban creative class. They seem to find each other in a collective, community-based organisation that is free, open and non-committal. Merkel states that coworking spaces can therefore be regarded as a new form of urban social infrastructure – possibly replacing those that were established by a more fordist organisation. Similarly to Merkel, Alessandro Gandini's literature review in this issue addresses the rising popularity of coworking spaces in many cities of the rich north. By reviewing the emergent literature on coworking spaces, he asks: to what extent do these spaces really allow knowledge workers to find ways to accommodate their nomadic work life and alleviate their precarious working conditions? He highlights the contradictory nature of such places as they oscillate between the organising potential on the one hand, and the danger of creating another 'creative class bubble' on the other hand, which only reinforces neoliberal mechanisms of individual survival.

One of the prevalent empowering processes at play is that of re-skilling, which in turn reactivates certain practices. As knowledge is being redistributed, it has widespread social potential. Older everyday practices like knitting, gardening and preserving food for example are choice-based practices that are taken on by certain societal groups some could easily call 'hipsters' (Podkalicka and Potkańska, this issue). Aneta Podkalicka and Dominika Potkańska explore the question of representation of these increasingly en-vogue western practices, specifically as they appear in a post-communist Polish setting. In their article about Polish saving practices as portrayed in the Polish media, they unfold transcultural movements of trends in a specific national and generational context.

While it is often argued that processes of re-skilling places the knowledge and power to act and change ones immediate surroundings in the hands of the citizen, such everyday practices are rarely studied or explored systematically as Monika Grubbauer states in her piece about DIY home-remodeling. She explores amateur-led architecture as one such form of DIY urbanism and questions the relationship of 'high architecture' versus the skills acquired by laymen through everyday spatial practices, called vernacular architecture. This example as a form of DIY urbanism elucidates laypersons' understanding of architecture in the context of their daily routines and everyday ways of thinking, by focusing on practices and practical skills rather than on value judgments.

Urban interventions and the right to the city

The third discourse that relates to many of the contributions in this city regards the more practical ambitions of creating public spaces through urban interventions. When considering work on re-imagining the city, Harvey reminds us that academics all too often forget the role played by 'the sensibility that arises out of the street around us', which triggers us to conceive and practice other urban lifestyles: the feelings and imaginations provoked, for example, by building large scale development projects, by the helplessness felt when walking past homeless people, the enjoyment of large crowds on a summer day in a public park, the despair of the marginalised, the boredom felt by unemployed youth, the fears provoked by rising rents, the frustration of traffic chaos or the unease caused by smog or noise, the creativity sparked by vacant spaces lying idle, or the exhilaration or annoyance of street demonstrations. In other words, thinking about cities starts on the streets more than at academic desks (Harvey, 2013: xi). In addition to the empirical case studies and theoretical reflections, this issue includes a section called 'study in practice' collecting contributions from urban planners, (landscape) architects, urban activists and urban artists/curators. These authors provide their own accounts of their projects of urban interventions

and thereby differ in style and format from the more 'academic' papers found in the other sections of this special issue. Their format provides some insights into the relationship between theory and practice on a different level as the authors reflect on their practices, describe the organising issues they face and their challenges and ambitions.

The collection of the texts in this section touches upon issues of political activism, the production of urban space, participatory planning processes, urban interventions and tactical appropriation of space in a field, which in the last 10 years often finds itself under the umbrella term of the right-to-the-city-movement (World charter for the right to the city, July 2004). In its core, the movement and most of its sub-groups relate to French philosopher Henri Lefebvre, who in 1967 wrote the seminal essay *The right to the city,* and which today has become a slogan and empty signifier that has been picked up by academics and activists alike. That right was a 'cry and a demand' to reinvigorate everyday life in the city, which to Lefevbre seemed alienated, without meaning or playfulness (Lefebvre, 1996: 158). The 'cry' is directed against the dominance of capital-centric urban planning, meaning mainly the creation of high-rise buildings, highways and consumption-orientated, privatised spaces. The 'demand' calls for access to the resources that the city provides and for a city, which is created by the people who inhabit it, fostering an open space of democratic politics that harbours the possibility of constant reinvention. In other words, urban life is a constant and collective struggle (Harvey, 2013: 4). The first note in this section, the 'Activist roundtable', is a virtual conversation of political actors – four urban grassroots initiatives from Los Angeles (U.S.), Vienna (Austria), London (U.K.) and Hamburg (Germany) – who discuss the practical organisation of their work: their methods, skills, motivations and material resources. While a growing number of participants and bigger projects are a sign of success for these initiatives, they are also faced with financial challenges and the difficult quest for autonomy and non-precarious labour conditions. All of these cases have the explicit aim to radically shift city politics towards the integration of under-represented, marginalised groups.

At the level of urban planning, we witness an increased interest in participatory planning processes. For example, after a series of failed large construction projects in Germany (Hamburg Opera House, Stuttgart Train Station, Berlin Airport etc.), many city residents have become increasingly critical and engage in the development of more participatory urban planning processes. Those citizens who have sufficient capacities (e.g. urban planners, students, activists, architects, pensioners etc.) can in fact influence design processes. The note from Krzysztof Herman – an activist, urban planner and landscape architect – is about initiating, supervising and implementing urban interventions. He states that a low-budget

and intervention-based approach allows the landscape architect to step down from the 'imagined "designer" (or "demiurge"), and to come out from behind his desk to advise and act in a citizen or NGO-led project' (Herman, this issue: 280). The concept of ZwischenZeitZentrale described in the note 'Second hand practices' is another example, where urban planning aims to become more participatory, but here with the cooperation between the municipality and urban activists (Ziehl and Oswald, this issue). Whereas these contributions mainly focus on the physical space, other additions in this section approach the negotiation of urban space in a more holistic way, noting how these practices are also attempts at the social reproduction of common life (cf. Frenzel and Beverungen, 2014: 2). The architects Doina Petrescu and Constantin Petcou introduce a bottom–up framework for resilient urban regeneration – a collaborative, citizen-led network of facilities, which can serve as a model for sustainable city life. Their current project, created in a small city near Paris and titled 'R-urban' is a grassroots intervention that aims to meet social, economic and environmental needs of their participants through the collective creation of a common space. In sum, the 'study in practice' notes in this section range from small practical interventions to new models of living in the city. What is common to all of these examples is their active participation in co-designing and co-producing the urban environment. Yet, the approaches and tactics of these groups are specific to the respective politico-economic and cultural regimes as well as spatial circumstances. Similar to Lefevbre's cry and demand, the last note in this section can be read either as resignation or as a 'wake-up call to the city and its dwellers, a reminder of the necessity to preserve the affordable and lively spaces of possibility, instead of producing un-dead taxidermies of art' (Henke, this issue). Here, the curator/artist Lutz Henke elaborates on his recent urban intervention, which he calls an 'act of auto-iconoclasm'. In 2008, he and the graffiti artist Blu painted a larger-than-life caricature of a businessman chained by his golden watches on the fire protection wall at one of Berlin-Kreuzberg's few remaining waste lands. The mural became one of the most famous graffitis in the scene, and appropriated as an iconic symbol of Berlin's 'poor, but sexy' tourist image. Six years later, the group decided to make the artwork disappear by painting it black. This act was interpreted as one against gentrification, rising rents and the role of creative urbanites in contributing to this process. To Henke, this act, as well as many of the other collective low-budget urban practices described in this issue, hopefully 'prompts a dialogue with the city's reality, stressing the capability and social function of (...) interventions where others fail to advance' (Henke, this issue: 295).

A similar, albeit theoretical point, is made by organisational scholar Timon Beyes, in his note in which he discusses the various ways in which art is summoned to save the city. Lining up the different modes how artists as urban

entrepreneurs engage with the city, he points to the spectacle, grassroots development and social work. Following Rancière, however, Beyes adds a fourth mode of observation, namely in understanding urban interventions in their capacity to arouse dissensus. On the example of the *Dorchester Project* and *Huguenot House* by the artist Theaster Gates, he shows how contemporary art creates an 'urban laboratory for repurposing and recycling resources of all type, and for establishing new forms of collectivity and cultural life in forgotten, neglected pockets of the city' (Beyes, this issue: 209). Just as Blu's black mural and many other practices introduced in this issue, they have a 'singular potential of questioning, irritating and intervening in the habitual forms of organising urban life' (*ibid.* 217) through an act that shakes up conventional perceptions and provokes urban imaginations of different collective practices of organising.

acknowledgments

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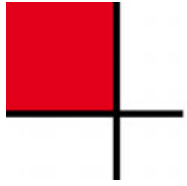
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Austerity and scarcity: About the limits and meanings of liberal economy

Ute Tellmann

abstract

The starting point of this article is the observation that current debates on austerity and scarcity go beyond questions of economic policy. Issues of scarcity and austerity mobilise antagonistic assumptions about what it means to face economic reality. They entail specific notions about what the bounds of economy are or should be. As such, they can tell us something about the way debates about the meaning and limits of liberal economy are structured. This article sets itself the task to start unpacking the conceptual and genealogical making and unmaking of the links between scarcity and liberal economy. It argues that scarcity should be understood as a variable social device for inculcating modes of futurity. Scarcity as a device entails the articulation of modes of economic individuation and collectivisation, and is inextricably tied to a moral economy of worth.

Introduction

The recent proliferation of austerity measures such as budget cuts in public services, wages and pensions have turned forms of 'extreme economy' (Merriam-Webster, 2014) into a palpable reality in many countries. As researchers of public health tell us, the austerity cuts following the financial crisis can be understood as literally that: they cut the 'body economic' while they increase the number of suicides and infectious diseases, worsening health conditions for years to come (Stuckler and Bansay, 2013: ix, 140). Geographers speak of novel types of 'austerity urbanism' that are evolving (Peck, 2012). The most visible and dramatic consequences are municipal bankruptcies, financial emergency measures and a reduction of basic services (*ibid.*: 637). Some voices suspect that entirely new and creative forms of de-economisation and post-neoliberalism

might ensue, given that large areas even lack the resources for maintaining minimal economic circulation.

The political and economic meanings of these austerity measures are highly contentious. On the one hand, they are understood as a regrettable but unavoidable purging of inflated values, overburdening debt and unsound finances. They are seen as a return to realism in economic matters. Even those who do not subscribe to neoliberal notions of the state and market argue that the finite nature of resources has been ignored in politics and finance alike before the crisis. From this perspective, the time has come to face harsh decisions about how to allocate resources in a post-affluent society (Krippner, 2011: 22). On the other hand, current austerity policies are found to be so fundamentally ineffective and erroneous in achieving what they set out to do that they appear as a political strategy based on ideological beliefs running counter to all evidence. They have not brought the peace, prosperity and lower levels of debt they promised – instead, quite the opposite has happened in the immediate wake of these measures: the effects of austerity policies are portrayed as more debt, greater class division and added instability (Blyth, 2013: 220, 229).

As I would like to show in this article, these arguments about austerity and scarcity not only concern different schools of economic policy. They run deeper. Issues of scarcity and austerity mobilise antagonistic assumptions about what it means to face economic reality. They entail specific notions about what the bounds of the economy are or should be. They are tied to polemics about who abides in the realm of imagination and fiction and who is clear-headed enough to see the order of the day. As such, they can tell us something about the way we have set up debates about the meaning and bounds of economy. What types of economy are imaginable? What does it mean to recognise limits in resources? Why is scarcity linked to realism in matters of economy, rather than abundance?

This article sets itself the task to start unpacking the conceptual and genealogical making and unmaking of the links between scarcity and economy. Its focus is on the liberal tradition of modern economics. It should be noted that the emphasis on scarcity or finitude for defining the meaning of economy is not specific to liberalism alone (Foucault, 1973). But given that liberalism very much defines the current horizon of political and economic debate, it takes cent stage in this argument. The article selects a limited number of economists and definitions as specifically relevant regarding the role and meaning of scarcity and austerity for liberalism. Far from claiming to offer a full history of scarcity in liberal economic thought that would cover all the nuances, this paper has a more limited purposes: it seeks to provide historical insights into how scarcity is even for liberalism a

contentious issue. In addition, it aims at outlining an analytics of scarcity that can be used for understanding contemporary measures of 'extreme economy'.

The first section provides important background information. It looks at the conceptual anatomy of the connection between economy and scarcity as it has been established in modern economics. As will be demonstrated arguments about scarcity tend to shade into arguments about biological necessity, morality and politics that are incongruent with the explicit definitions of scarcity. In the second section I will look at how this definition of economy through scarcity has developed genealogically. In the third section I will attempt to use this genealogical reading of scarcity for theoretical purposes. My intention is to explore how one can study contemporary arguments about scarcity and austerity measures in a novel way. My hope is to go beyond polemics about realism and imagination, illusion and sobriety, frugality and recklessness in addressing what scarcity is about.

Scarcity and economy: The anatomy of a conceptual bond

What is economy? Hardly any current textbook of economics will answer this question without referring to scarcity.

> Do you dream of driving your brand-new Porsche into the driveway of your oceanfront house? [...] Unfortunately, both as individuals and as society we face a constraint called scarcity. (Gwartney et al., 2010: 6)

With this simple question and an equally simple answer, the textbook seeks to define the notion of economy and the science of economics: in essence, they are about how a society or an individual deals with the fact of scarce resources. The famous and much-quoted definition by economist Lionel Robbins therefore still applies: 'Economics is the science which studies human behavior as a relationship between given ends and scarce means which have alternative uses' (1932: 16). Not even the mainstream in economic sociology would nowadays quarrel with this basic contention that scarcity constitutes matters of economy (Smelser and Swedberg, 1994: 3).

Alternative definitions of economy have also been suggested, notably the 'substantive' definition of economy as organising livelihood (Polanyi, 1957: 243). But there is a very dominant and widespread understanding that the formal definition of economy through scarcity, choice and calculation is an apt one. It promises to make no assumptions about which need or desire is worthy, purports not to moralise, and does not restrict itself to issues of survival and need. As Nicholas Xenos has specified in his seminal book on *Scarcity and*

modernity (1989), the centrality of the notion of scarcity in liberal economics is a result of taking the desires of the individual as a starting point for the analysis, while refraining from judgments about what kind of desire is more virtuous than another. Xenos contends that conditions of finitude can only become a generalised and eternal reality of scarcity because and in so far as desires are taken as a given and placed beyond discussion and contention. Presupposing individual desires changes how limits or finitudes are perceived and experienced:

> For us [...] there are not periods of scarcity, or specific scarcities of specific things. For us there is simply scarcity. (Xenos, 2010: 35)

Xenus thus alerts us to the fact that a peculiar conversion of meaning takes place if an experience of finitude or limitedness is cast in terms of scarcity. Limits are not qualitative and regional, but general and ever present: scarcity becomes quasi-ontological. This has conceptual implications for articulating the notion of economy.

First of all, defining economy in terms of an allocation of scarce resources in a context of unlimited desire has as its flipside an understanding of abundance as non-economic. As the neoclassical and canonical economist Carl Menger puts it, if

> men not only know that the satisfaction of all their needs for [...] goods is completely assured, but know also that they will be incapable of exhausting the whole available quantity of such goods for the satisfaction of these needs, [we should call these goods] non-economic. (1976: 94)

As a consequence, liberal economic thought remains silent in the face of plenty. In a recent article, the sociologist Andrew Abbott explained this foundation of liberal economics on the notion of scarcity in the following words: 'In the context of excess, there is no scarcity, hence there can be no prices, no budget constraints, and no basis for choice' (Abbott, 2014: 12). But how plausible is the assumption of scarcity in a world where many problems are caused by excess, 'such as massive pollution, sprawling suburbs and glut of information', he wonders (*ibid.*: 1). Given that abundance is no subject matter of economics by definition, this question will have to go unanswered.

We can therefore identify a first major consequence of seeing scarcity as the basis of economy: it makes it impossible to think about abundance in economic terms or to understand how abundance plays a part in an economy defined by scarcity. This can be illustrated by looking at innovation and invention. Innovation needs to consume resources for outcomes not yet known. One spends without knowing if and when the resources involved will pay off. They might turn out to be wasted in the slow, uncertain and often unsuccessful

process leading to new products or markets. It is hence not very surprising that the issue of innovation is frequently used to highlight the limits of liberal interpretations of economy as scarcity (Latour and Lepinay, 2009; Beckert, 2002). As soon as innovation, creativity or change come into focus, the definition of economy through scarcity appears as an obvious setback – it is too closely linked to a situation where an individual faces a set of *given* goods or services.

Secondly and consequently, if scarcity is defined by a relation of potentially unlimited desires to a context of given and limited resources, the notion of choice becomes paramount. In the liberal tradition, the definition of economy through scarcity is inextricably tied to a moment of decision. The subject has to choose, needs to hierarchise and prioritise his or her preferences – either because the supply of goods is limited or because the time to enjoy them is limited. In a context of scarcity, choosing one thing always means to forego another, and to bear the risk of this decision. The meaning of economy is therefore tied to a scene where a subject decides. There is always an individuated entity observed in relation to choices that need to be or have been made. Mostly, this entity is understood to be a single individual, the economic actor, torn by desires, finitudes and preferences. The economy or society as a whole appears only as a result of aggregated choices (Schabas, 2006: 14). This multiplicity of individual choices, the result of calculating the best use of resources in a context of scarcity, is seen to provide for the best allocation of available resources.

Thirdly, this constitutive relation between scarcity and choice has further consequences for the peculiar type of rationality we call economic. Given that resources are scarce, rationality always resembles an act of optimisation amongst various courses of action: acting rationally means to achieve more with less. In this sense, economising becomes the equivalent of saving. It is tantamount to a restrictive management of expenditure. On the surface, modern liberal definitions of economic rationality therefore seem to chime with an ancient definition of economy as frugality. The notion of economy as a 'frugal' use of resources goes back to the ancient meaning of economy as defined by Aristotle, amongst others, and in use up to the 18th century. In this definition, economy was linked to the ideal of careful management of one's household (Schabas, 2006: 4f). But this rather generalised meaning of economy is circumspect, and a modest use of resources should not be misunderstood as being synonymous with more modern definitions of economic rationality as minimising resources for maximising outcomes. The latter is closely wedded to methodological individualism and a formal account of scarcity, whereas the former addresses the substantive needs and resources of a collective unit: the *oikos*. The terms frugality and saving can have rather different implications depending on the formal or

substantive definition of scarcity and, even more decisively, depending on the entity it is associated with.

To sum up, the definition of abundance as non-economic per se, the individuating notion of choice and the formal definition of economic rationality as an act of minimising resources for maximising outcomes in a given situation are the three elements associated with scarcity in the modern tradition of liberal economics. This account of economy claims to eschew any reference to scarcity as a simple fact of nature and prizes itself for dispensing with moral definitions of desires and needs. Nevertheless, this purportedly non-moral and non-substantive understanding of scarcity turns out to persistently evoke biological and moral resonances undermining its self-description. I would like to end this first section by illustrating this puzzling presence of biological and moral aspects in the formalist economic discourse on scarcity. This will be done in a rather non-systematic and anecdotal manner. Detecting such moral and biological references in diverse strands of liberal economic thought only serves to highlight a puzzle, but not to solve it or make any systematic claims about it.

Although economic thought has been characterised as having 'denaturalised' the question of economy (Schabas, 2006), assumptions of scarcity have often been associated with questions of survival, of needs and environmental limits. Environmental concerns have been marshalled to bolster arguments about scarcity. In these ecological critiques, scarcity is not related to needs, but absolute: what we are dealing with are the geophysical and biological limits of Earth. Regardless of these different notions of scarcity, commonalities between liberal economics and certain types of ecological critique do exist. The argument being that the economics of scarcity answer and serve the ecological demands for a less wasteful and more sustainable use of resources. What is this link between ecological and economic limits about? Is there any constitutive connection between formal definitions of scarcity and substantive ones, even if liberal discourse claims the opposite? At this point, we cannot yet answer this question, but only take note of a curious presence of references to issues of survival, biological necessity and natural limits in modern definitions of scarcity, which otherwise explicitly opt for a formal account of limits. Stanley Jevons (1965), for example, one of the founding fathers of neoclassical economics, was preoccupied with the limits of coal and the relation between sun spots and economic growth. At the same time, Jevon's writings turned economics into a most formal and 'denaturalised' utility of accounting. Likewise, neoliberalism shares this tendency to evoke biological references in its account of scarcity, even if it has a very different take on the economic actor, her choices and the limits she faces in all other respects. Friedrich Hayek, perhaps the most famous representative of neoliberal thought, can serve as a case in point. Otherwise known for his account

of economy in terms of information and coordination, Hayek does not subscribe to the notion of equilibrium or the simple account of maximising behaviour neoclassical liberalism is known for. To him, the piecemeal aggregation of information is the key to understanding markets. But even though Hayek regards knowledge as potentially unlimited, he nonetheless retains a notion of scarcity on the level of matter and life (Hayek, 2006: 39). Hayek argues that the lifestyle of the population depends on the market order (Hayek, 1988: 131). He argues that the market is a matter of life and death, given that we are dealing with limits imposed by the material world (*ibid.*). Again, we find a puzzling presence of biological references in establishing the meaning and limits of an economics of scarcity. How to deal with this puzzle is the task of the following section. Before that, there is another puzzling presence to take note of: the persistence of moral arguments in the economics of scarcity.

Although modern liberal economic theory claims to abstain from moral arguments, scarcity and the attendant restriction of resources appear to be not only an economic, but also a moral virtue. Saving instead of squandering resources has accrued an air of righteousness and virtue. Max Weber (1958) has famously argued that a religious valuation of work and parsimony has been a necessary and constitutive aspect of the historical emergence of the specific form of capitalism he calls occidental. It is defined by continuous acts of rationalisation, i.e. by acts of minimising the means for maximising the ends. Weber argued that this religious esteem for parsimony, saving and work had an important role to play for inculcating the capitalist ethic, but becomes dispensable once it has been put into place. But pace Weber there are still many instances where this interlacing of economic and moral arguments for saving and scarcity can be observed. The discourses on debt are exemplary in this respect. As the historian of culture Leon Calder has noted, debt used to be associated with 'thriftlessness' in the nineteenth and twentieth century (1999: 24). It was presented as undermining the values of scarcity, which are about 'discipline, hard work, budgeting, and saving' (*ibid.*: 31). In these discourses about debt, scarcity not simply appears as a fact of economic life, but as saturated with moral valence. The moral admonition and blaming of those in debt as having failed morally and economically shows the extent in which the definition of economic rationality resonates with a moral coding of what is proper. Again one can see that, despite scarcity and saving being introduced as value-neutral and formal presuppositions of modern economics, one still finds impurities. How did our notion of economy turn into such a conglomerate of resonances oscillating between finitude, desire, biology and morality?

Genealogies of scarcity: Moral economies of futurity and collective economies of expenditure

Genealogies, as Foucault defined them, are a specific mode of doing historiography (Dean, 1994; Foucault, 1977). The attention is focused on tracing the impure and contentious origins and multiple elements of what appears to be a simple fact – such as scarcity. A full genealogy of scarcity would be beyond the scope of this paper, of course. But based on broader research into how life and money have played a role for defining and re-defining the liberal notion of economy (Tellmann, 2013; Tellmann, forthcoming), I would like to present two snapshots of this genealogy. Specifically, I am interested in elucidating the impurity of scarcity as an economic fact: the role of bioeconomic necessity, the moral resonances it evokes, and the question which entity economising acts refer to. My genealogical research is focused on two figures of liberal economic thought that were crucial for defining or redefining these issues of biology, morality, individuation and economic collectivity: Thomas Robert Malthus and John Maynard Keynes. They can be regarded as opposite poles of the manner in which the meaning and significance of scarcity have been defined in liberalism. Taken together, they provide us with information about the melange of biological, moral and political arguments found in statements concerning economic scarcity.

Malthus is widely known as a demographer and political economist who made the issue of 'bioeconomic necessity' (Dean, 1991) paramount for liberal discourse. Malthus is usually seen as having tied classical political economy to question of nature and life. This occurred through his notion of population. With Malthus, scarcity bore relations to the fear of overpopulation: bodies procreating in abundance, ignorant of the finitude of Earth herself. Malthus has served as an important reference point for many ecological critiques of growth. Looking at this work will tell us something about the puzzling presence of biological finitude in economics of scarcity.

A genealogical reading of Malthus turns out to challenge the ecological interpretation of scarcity. Contrary to the first impression, Malthus was not concerned with the absolute limits of natural resources at all. He puts this succinctly: '[A]lowing the produce of the earth to be absolutely unlimited, scarcely removes the weight of a hair from the argument' (1986: 461). Another specification is added:

> In this supposition no limits whatever are placed to the produce of the earth. It may increase for ever and be greater than any assignable quantity; yet still the power of population [will be in] every period so much superior. (*ibid.*: 13)

This means that Malthus is not talking about absolute limits. Neither does he speak of local and initial limits of natural resources: '[Nature's] first intercourse with man was a voluntary present', he says, pointing out that there is 'extreme fertility of the soil' and mostly abundance in natural production facilities (Maltus, 1986: 392, 271; 1986b: 113). Curiously, environmental or ecological concerns are not paramount for understanding scarcity, yet issues of survival and population are clearly present.

Malthus' discourse on population and food is less about natural limits and universal scarcity per se than it is about the objects of desire and the temporality of their fulfilment. Malthus did not take the multiple desires of men for granted as Xenos argued for the liberal tradition (1989). Malthus was worried about the kind of desires corporeal beings might have, and feared a lack of desire for objects that required work and patience to be consumed. He was preoccupied with the risk of an overpowering immediacy of bodily needs: procreation and food. Steeped in the colonial hierarchies of European modernity, Malthus placed the immediacy of physical desire amongst those he regarded as less civilised. Savage life was the true embodiment of the principle of population, understood as a life force that would 'start forward at every temporary and occasional increase of food' (Malthus: 1986: 171 and Fn 20). It is only among 'animals and the uncivilised states of man' that this phenomenon of turning abundance into scarcity can be found: 'Resources that are not distributed to the lower classes would give no stimulus to population' (1986: 28). In this account of scarcity and population, issues of survival and need are therefore mediated by a cultural hierarchy that distinguishes a worthy, civilised life on the one hand from an unworthy, uncivilised one on the other. The biological resonance of finitude is tied to a civilisational hierarchy of becoming human and civilised, placing 'savages' with 'animalistic' urges at the bottom.

In this account of population growth and its limits, economic and moral facts are constitutively intermingled: certain life forms, deemed to be savage and closest to nature, are not to be trusted with the given abundance of resources. 'Savage life' would 'eat away' the possibility of economic progress. Confronting 'savage life' with a scarcity of resources therefore means enforcing a consideration of the economic future. In this discourse, scarcity can be seen as a means of teaching 'savage life' to wait, work and desire objects produced over time. Scarcity inculcates a sense of futurity in those assumed to be 'too savage' to think ahead, save and wait. Scarcity of resources is therewith not a fact, but a device enforcing the use of resources in light of a future fulfilment of object-related desires.

Far from being a non-moral or non-regulatory discourse on desire, scarcity therefore entails a moral economy. I am deliberately using the term moral

economy here to highlight the constitutive interlacing of economic and moral categories in modernity. The term 'moral economy' has been most famously coined by Edward P. Thompson (1971). He used it to explain the motives and resources of riots and rebellions emerging in the context of industrialisation and marketisation at the end of the 18th century. To him, 'moral economy' denoted a pre-modern set of 'passionately held' beliefs about obligations, rights and duties perceived to be violated by the emerging new order. More recently, the term 'moral economy' has been broadened to include the variable sets of affects, standards and sentiments sustaining modern practices, claimed to be independent of this web of values and sentiments (Daston, 1995: 4; Fassin, 2009: 1257). Following this more recent use, the term 'moral economy' here refers to the inescapable hybridity of accounts of economic worth and value. Malthus' argument about population growth and its natural limits implicates such a 'moral economy'. Scarcity functions as a device for teaching 'savages' the 'proper' use of given resources because they cannot be trusted to do so on their own. Seen this way, the links between scarcity, saving and economy become ever more tenuous and complex. They now appear as variable and moral means for creating economic futurity.

The tenuousness of the relation between economy and scarcity and particularly its moral undertones were exposed and unravelled at the beginning of the 20th century in the writings of John Maynard Keynes, still an implicit and explicit reference point for all critiques of austerity and scarcity today. Many of the current critiques of austerity measures turn to a Keynesian notion of macroeconomics and demand management to make their case. Putting it bluntly, the Keynesian argument against austerity rests on the assumption that spending and consumption cannot be restricted by everybody without worsening the situation of unemployment, poverty and depression: 'If we all save (the very definition of austerity), we all fail together as the economy shrinks from want of demands' (Blyth, 2013: 128). Consumption is thus seen as a key for keeping the economic engine running. Keynes showed himself amazed that 'there are still people who believe that the way out can only be found by hard work, endurance, frugality, improved business methods, more cautious banking and, above all, the avoidance of devices' (Keynes, 1972: 336).

In the context of a genealogical reading of scarcity, Keynes' writings are also interesting for other reasons than the intervention they enable in policy debates. Keynes' problematisation of scarcity targets its moral connotations. More specifically, he exposes the moral righteousness of saving and restraint as connected to scarcity. Keynes describes the act of saving money and attendant restriction of consumption as governed by a religious preoccupation with immortality. He muses that for the liberal economic subject

jam is not jam unless it is a case of jam tomorrow and never jam today. Thus by pushing his jam always forward into the future, he strives to secure for his act of boiling it an immortality. (Keynes, 1972: 330)

The act of saving is owed to an 'instinct to restrict' as cultivated by 'old gentlemen tightly buttoned-up'. Keynes likens this moral notion of saving to a cultural convention pervading the financial system: 'bankers', he asserts 'are the most romantic and least realistic of all persons [...] it is part of their business to maintain appearances and to profess a conventional respectability'. A banker, he continues, 'is not one who foresees danger and avoids it, but one who, when he is ruined, is in a conventional and orthodox way along with his fellows, so that no one can really blame him' (Keynes, 1972: 156).

But moral ridicule and revaluation not yet amounts to re-conceptualising the ties between economy and scarcity. Keynesian anti-austerity politics rely on a second shift, which consists in posing the question for which entity saving and scarcity are indeed economical. What is the value of saving if one seeks to produce economic futurity not for the individual alone but for the 'economy as a whole'? Keynes argues that our notion of economy, insofar as it does not apply to the individual alone, cannot be defined by scarcity alone. He diagnoses a 'fallacy of composition', which reasons 'by false analogy from what is prudent for an individual' to what benefits the economy as a whole. It seeks to 'conduct the state by maxims which are best calculative to enrich an individual' (Keynes, 1972: 232; 1973: 131). The argument about the 'fallacy of composition' does indeed result in the politics of demand mentioned above. But something else is at stake as well: the very question of how to conceptualise the actual entity to which one's notion of economy applies. If it is no longer simply an individual and the aggregation of individual choices, what is it then? And how does the notion of economy change if this entity changes?

For Keynes, the answer to this question resided in a national concept of macroeconomics that was based on a novel conceptualisation of financial circuits. As Timothy Mitchell (1998) has argued, this national notion of 'the economy' has acquired such a self-evident meaning that one easily forgets how recent its 'invention' is in the twentieth century. Mitchell problematises the manner in which Keynes conceived of the macro-economic entity mainly in terms of monetary circulation while assuming that growth is possible 'without any problem of physical or territorial limits' (Mitchell, 2011: 139-140). In this respect, Keynes is found to ignore the one condition of possibility on which his notion of economy rests, and the question of limits it poses: the consumption of cheap and easily available oil that did not appear in the measures of economy in terms of GNP, national income and labor. It is indeed the case that what has come to be known as Keynesian policy of macroeconomic growth, especially as

they have been played out in development policies, is justifiably criticised today – not only on ecological grounds but also because they are so firmly wedded to a specific type of 'methodological nationalism', a growth imperative, and the expert management of a macroeconomic entity defined by an established set of statistical variables that have been black-boxed.

But the genealogical line of investigation that guides this analysis can also be used for other purposes than a critique of nationalised notions of macro-economy. One can retain the questions raised by Keynes without necessarily adopting the answers of Keynesianism. If one factors out Keynes' answer to the question what economy is if not a type of efficiency linked to individual conduct, one is left with an analytical and theoretical problem. This concerns the way one conceptualises the entity the notion of economy refers to. Considering and reconsidering the 'value of saving' is tied to questions of economic collectivity or individuation. What kind of totality does economy refer to, and what is changed in our notion of economy if our concepts of this totality change? The Keynesian critique of scarcity has made this a pressing issue, even more so if the Keynesian answer to this question is no longer self-evident.

Scarcity as the study of how economic futures are made: Budgets, orders of worth, and economic collectivities

The genealogical reading has yielded – in economic parlance – some valuable returns. It has highlighted that the meaning of scarcity is more complex and varied than expected: it appears as a social device that is suffused with a moral economy of worth, closely tied to an understanding of economic futurity, and inextricably linked to an act of individuation. It defines particular entities for whom or which an economy and a future is invented. I am using the term 'invention' here because it supports an understanding of the variability and prosthetic quality of such tools for defining economy. Scarcity is not a general economic truth, but a particular and malleable device that sustains specific modes of individuation and economic futurisation. As such, it allocates and orders where abundance applies and where restriction is called for. How can we turn this re-articulation of scarcity into an analytical framework for current economic practices?

In this concluding section, I would like to link the genealogical findings to a discussion of recent developments in social and political theory aimed at rethinking economy. This calls for some methodological justification and explanation. Usually, a genealogical analysis is used to 'alienate' ourselves from the self-evidence the social order has acquired. The historical 'estrangement' is

already a worthwhile outcome of a genealogical analysis (Dean, 1994; Foucault, 1977). Genealogies allow the question of what should be included in one's own conceptual repertoire to be left up in the air. No theoretical commitment is necessary. At the same time, genealogical analysis does not prohibit such commitment to a particular analytical perspective, of course. Foucault himself oscillated between subjecting notions to genealogical analysis before or while using them as part of his own theoretical toolbox. Combining genealogical and theoretical analysis means going back and forth between the novel understandings generated through the act of historicization and the theoretical commitment to a particular perspective an analysis is based on. This unstable middle ground between genealogy and theory can be claimed in various ways. Within the limitations of this article and for my current purpose, I will use the findings of the genealogical analysis of scarcity as a guide for selecting a number of theoretical and analytical perspectives that can be fruitfully combined and supplemented with them. This procedure lays no claim to being complete. It is rather to be understood as a starting point for turning a historical analysis into an analytical framework.

The first and most fundamental finding I take from my genealogical analysis is the insight that scarcity is a problematisation of economic futurity. This makes the temporal dimension paramount. Scarcity is a device for engendering economic futurity. Niklas Luhmann had a similar take on scarcity, arguing that we should only speak of it if the experience of a limit is tied to a question of futurity (Luhmann, 2009: 260). But what Luhmann was less intent to emphasize: it is a variable and specific device that can be molded differently.

What enables us to think about scarcity as a variable social device that organises the experience of limitations and abundance in the light of an understanding of economic futurity? What theoretical toolbox will help us spell out how this device is inextricably linked to an act of individuation or totalisation? And how can we advance an analysis of the moral economy of worth implied by the question of who can be entrusted with given resources? Three different but related approaches can be brought to bear on these questions: the study of budgeting as a technique of economisation as developed by governmentality studies, the study of 'orders of worth' as promoted by the convention school, and the political and social theories that explore novel conceptualisations of collectivity and totality. I will discuss each in turn.

In recent years, studies of liberal governmentality have brought questions of budgeting and accounting to the fore. Linked to the broader field of the social study of accounting and finance, there is an elaborate scholarly debate on how economisation is shaped by budgeting techniques. Budgeting is an indispensable

technique for turning scarcity into a palpable and manageable reality. This is not to say that every budget is necessarily about 'scarce resources and hard choices'. Budgeting can also be used as a social technique for 'allocating funds to meet norm-defined needs', as Stephen Collier (2011: 164) points out in his study of the Soviet economy's transition to a market economy. But, as he continues, 'the ideal typic view of budgeting' assumes that 'revenue constraints expenditures' and hence 'imposes the fundamental fact of scarcity' (*ibid.*: 168). Max Weber had already pointed out how the accounting technique of 'double entry book-keeping' is a *sine qua non* for putting economic rationalities of saving and optimisation to work (Weber, 1996: 39-40; Carruthers and Espeland, 1991). Budgets are hence enactments of scarcity for particular units. Scholars working with a Foucauldian perspective on governmental technologies have demonstrated how individuation and responsibilisation are linked to such enactments of scarcity. Accounting figures are involved in 'making up' economic entities and lend visibility to their actions: 'To know oneself here means to know the costs of one's actions, or the extent to which one has achieved a particular financial result or norm' (Mennicken and Miller, 2012: 8). Accounting methods enable the singling out of items that should be the object of optimisation, saving or improved efficiency. Budgets are calculative tools that make acts of economization possible (Caliskan and Callon, 2010). From this vantage point, to study scarcity would be to examine budgetary enactments of it. From the genealogical reading above we can add two foci as having particular importance: firstly, how does budgeting entail modes and models of producing economic futurity? And secondly, how are the processes of 'making up' or individuating economic entities tied to enactments of scarcity?

As the genealogical reading of Malthusian fears of scarcity has shown, the devices of scarcity are embedded in cultural orders of worth. They are part of a moral economy where specific types of behaviour are classified as more civilised or worthy and more economical at the same time. Saving and deferment, restriction and restraint emerged in a project of civilising, mobilising and temporalising modes of living. Instead of the usual juxtaposition between morality and economy, a genealogical reading of the nexus between scarcity and population has uncovered a constitutive entanglement of normative and economic orders.

Recently, this interdependency has become a focus of interest for economic sociology again. Specifically the debate on 'economies of worth' has picked up on this intermingling of economic and politico-cultural modes of valuation (Boltanski and Thevenot, 2006; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). As David Stark attractively framed it, 'the polysemic character of the term – worth – signals concern with the fundamental problems of value while recognising that all

economies have a moral component' (Stark, 2009: 7). Questions of economic valuation shade into 'evaluative frames and judgments that can all be traced back to specific politico-institutional configurations and conflicts' (Fourcade, 2011: 1769). Models of normative and political justification that articulate various types of hierarchy, distribution, or subjectivity are therefore traceable in economic categories of value, worth, cost and benefit (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). Presently, the study of 'economies of worth' is focused on how particular models of 'justification' or particular assessments of 'quality' are brought to bear on situations where economic valuation takes place. From a genealogical vantage point, one can deepen and broaden this debate. Instead of relying on rather 'static' accounts of a limited number of models of 'orders of worth' distilled from historical analysis (Vatin, 2013), genealogy opens up a more varied field of inquiry into moral economies of scarcity. The question here is how cultural divisions and fears are mobilised in arguments relating worth to scarcity – or abundance. Whose use of resources appears as a danger to all? Cultural orders of worth are not only based on fixed models of various polities, but also on mobile divisions and hierarchisations of norms, as the genealogical reading of Malthus has demonstrated.

As mentioned above, scarcity is more than anything a device for inventing economies. It translates limits into social codes and constraints. Understanding it as a specific economic device implies an assumption of its particularity. This tasks us with specifying where it is applied and enacted in a social body. While economic science portrays scarcity as a general corollary of the desiring subject, the devices for turning 'extreme economy' into a necessity of conduct and organisation are not general: they do not apply everywhere to the same degree. One way of understanding this varied enactment would be to link it to a study of how modes of individuation and collectivisation are embedded in dispositifs of scarcity. The genealogical reading of scarcity has brought to the fore issues of defining the entity scarcity refers and applies to – just as scarcity entails an individuating device, it also links up with a notion of the economy as a whole.

Models of economic collectivity or totality are not only at work in the obviously politicised accounts of 'the economy' Keynesianism is known for. Michel Foucault has pointed out in his lectures on governmentality that the liberal dispositif of scarcity can entail an articulation of economic totality which is not necessarily tied to a national, managed macro-economy. He explicitly links his discussion of liberal notions of scarcity with that of how levels of the 'individual and the collective' are newly articulated in this governmentality. Foucault reframes these poles in terms of the relevant object of intervention, arguing that the liberal dispositifs of scarcity take the population as the pertinent level, distinguished by 'an absolutely fundamental caesura' from 'the multiplicity of

individuals who will not be pertinent'. As opposed to portrayals of liberalism in terms of its radical individualising foundations, Foucault points out that we are dealing with a particular framing of a figure of collectivity that is divested of shared experience. For liberalism, scarcity is no longer a 'scourge' that organises a common experience of hunger, a 'kind of immediate solidarity, the massiveness of the event'. Instead, liberal dispositifs of security will break up this massiveness by allowing that for

> a whole series of people, in a whole series of markets, there was some scarcity, some dearness, some difficulty in buying wheat, and consequently some hunger, and it may well be that some people die of hunger after all. But by letting these people die of hunger one will be able to make scarcity a chimera and prevent it occurring in this massive form of the scourge typical of the previous systems. Thus, the scarcity event is split. The scarcity-scourge disappears, but scarcity that causes the death of individuals not only does not disappear, it must not disappear. (Foucault, 2007: 42)

Foucault contends that liberalism engenders a particular notion of economic collectivity that is absolutely crucial for the way it situates, frames and problematises questions of scarcity. Foucault's analysis confirms the importance of thinking about how dispositifs of scarcity not only articulate the individuated entities an 'extreme economy' applies to, but also an economic totality of circulation and collectivity. Liberalism is not unified and self-same as a political logic, and problematisations of 'the' economy are changing historically. What this calls for is a study of these articulations of economic collectivity or totality in economies of scarcity.

Coda: Scarcity and austerity

In lieu of a proper conclusion to this tour de force through the conceptual, historical and analytical discussions of scarcity, I would like to return to my initial observation on scarcity and austerity. The issue of scarcity, as I suggested at the start, is particularly entrenched in polemics about being realistic in matters of economy. The aim of this article has been to transform this polemical rendering into a more nuanced understanding of scarcity as a social device open to various articulations and modulations. Economic orders are artifice in the best sense of the term: they are creative inventions. To what extent scarcity entails a recognition of ecological limits, to whom it applies, and how it relates to novel economies of living are all up for invention and critique.

Today, scarcity has emerged as a hotly debated and politicised issue under the name of austerity. But is scarcity really just another name for austerity, or are austerity measures the mere application of scarcity? How these questions are

answered depends on how exactly austerity is defined. The recent debate on austerity measures holds a very precise meaning: it addresses a budgetary policy of fiscal retrenchment by the state. It signifies the 'policy of cutting the state's budget to promote growth' (Blyth, 2013: 2). In this case, austerity specifically pertains to the public management of resources and the role of the state in the economy. It addresses the relations between market and state and specifically demands that expenditure be restricted or services cut from the public sector.

Even if austerity is to be differentiated from scarcity in this specific sense, the inclination to call for these cuts in public services is not unrelated to above notions of the latter. The individuating understanding of economy as a choice between scarce resources renders (liberal) economic thought particularly 'suspicious' where the state and public management of resources are concerned. There is a lingering suspicion that artificially imposed entities such as a state can only lead to less beneficial and less efficient choices in the allocation of scarce resources. The political class, especially in a democracy, is regarded as prone to subordinating the spending of economic resources to the political game of securing a majority, and their own political careers. As an economic actor, the government will therefore occasion choices for limited resources that are not geared to produce growth but votes. Hence, the ultimate reality of scarcity is better served by economic actors beyond the state: only proper individuals make appropriate economic choices. As Mark Blyth has pointed out in his 'natural history of austerity', this 'sensibility' to the state leads to 'austerity policies'. Austerity is therefore linked to an assumption of scarcity even in the absence of a 'well-worked out "theory of austerity"' in liberalism (*ibid.*: 99).

Austerity and scarcity are thus not necessarily synonymous, but can be made to overlap completely, depending on one's definition of austerity. If it is not specifically addressing issues of state finances and cuts in public spending, austerity currently refers to the experience of harsh or extreme forms of economy. In the latter case, austerity can be regarded as potentially synonymous with the modern notion of scarcity. It hinges on the definition of economy as an individuated experience of choice in a context where limited resources are faced with unlimited desire.

This is not to say that the meanings of austerity and scarcity are fixed. If austerity is understood as part of a cultural policy of 'permanently consuming less' (Braham, 2013: 10) to interrupt patterns of consumption and growth, one is confronted with something else than 'harsh' economies of choice. Instead, a politics of desire and consumption is at stake, called 'anti-consumerism or eco-austerity'. We are not dealing with methodological individualism. To what extent these cultural politics of desire and consumption disrupt the moral economy of

scarcity outlined above is an open question. It is hardly possible to do justice to these forms of inventing alternative forms of austerity, and to discuss their implications and political meanings, in this context. They could be seen as experiments in recasting the meaning of economy, austerity and scarcity. The papers in this special issue on 'collective low-budget organising' engage with these experiments on an analytical level. Both the analytics of scarcity and the practical attempts of challenging inherited patterns of consumption and living in a situation of enforced austerity might benefit from a discussion of how the connections between economy, austerity and scarcity have been established historically. As Henri Bergson has put it, the novelty of the future is a correlate of the depth of the past one can mobilise.

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Saving time, saving money, saving the planet, 'one gift at a time': A practice-centred exploration of free online reuse exchange

Mike Foden

abstract

Online reuse networks seek to reduce waste by connecting people who have something they no longer want with others who might have a use for it. The intention is that 'everyone wins': givers are saved the hassle of disposal, recipients save money and the ecological burden of consumption is eased. Existing research has tended to focus on individuals' motivations for involvement. As part of a wider study of how alternative consumption practices become embedded in everyday life, this paper follows a different line of enquiry, taking its orientation from how theories of practice conceptualise what people do and how this changes. The initial emphasis is on establishing 'what sort of practice' free online reuse is, what makes it different from other ways of acquiring and disposing, and on identifying its constituent materials, competences and meanings. The focus then shifts to how these elements are variably integrated in the performance of reuse. First, what are the implications for how people go about giving and receiving when small details are changed relative to other similar practices? Findings suggest that technologically mediated reuse 'communities' connect some people but exclude others. Eliminating money from the exchange process gives participants access to goods they would otherwise struggle to afford, but at the same time raises questions as to how goods are allocated, potentially privileging other unequally distributed material and cultural resources. Second, the meanings of reuse vary from context to context, in turn corresponding to different kinds of performance. Any given performance can, meanwhile, belong to a number of different practices at the same time.

Introduction

Last week a man in a hatchback came to collect a big, half-broken 'four-by-twelve' speaker cabinet that, for the past five years, had served as a makeshift shelf for our recycling boxes. It was a relief to see it go, at last replaced by a more effective storage solution, but loading it out brought back unexpectedly fond memories: years spent lugging the thing in and out of pubs, clubs and community centres; up and down stairs, service lifts, fire escapes; round and round motorways and ring roads.

Four days earlier I was carrying a nest of tables – no longer needed and taking up space – out to a couple's car; they were helping their daughter set up home for the first time. I apologised that the tables were dusty. They said it was fine.

A few years ago I picked up a huge wooden desk from a family in the neighbourhood. It looks like the sort that school teachers used to sit behind. Sometimes I imagine how it was used, what sat on desktops before desktop computers. How I'll look back on all this time I currently spend sitting at it, trying to write.

When we give and receive these items for free, in the process connecting with nearby strangers online, what is it that we are doing? De-cluttering the home? Clearing space for new things? Avoiding a trip to the municipal dump or the charity shop? Tying up emotional loose ends and unravelling new ones? Giving a gift to someone in need? Getting something we want for free? Saving much-needed money to spend elsewhere? Realising the dormant or forgotten value in things, extending their useful lives? Expanding social networks? Building community? Reducing waste and our harmful impact on the planet? Radically prefiguring a postcapitalist economy?

As part of a wider study of reuse practices – finding value in items otherwise classed as waste, and trying to put them (back) to use – this article focuses on what I call *free online reuse exchange.*[1] Adopting an approach informed by theories of practice (e.g. Shove et al., 2012), my concern here is with 'what kind of practice' this phenomenon is, identifying its key features as a form of giving and receiving, and attempting to distinguish it from other, similar or overlapping

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1   Reuse exchange denotes that surplus items are donated or sold outside of originating households (Gregson et al., 2013). By free I mean that nothing is offered in return. By online I mean that givers and recipients establish contact via an Internet-based mechanism, distinguishing this form of giving from, say, those involving existing family and friends. For the sake of brevity and variety, I also use the terms *online gifting* and *online reuse*.

practices. By temporarily abstracting free online reuse to its constituent 'elements', I set out to investigate what happens when small details of how we acquire and dispose of things – for instance the rules of exchange, or the mechanism for connecting people – are changed. I also explore the variations in performing a given practice that are implicated in its reproduction and transformation.

This paper will look at two particular online 'gifting communities': Freecycle and Freegle. Both are networks of local, volunteer-run groups that use electronic message boards and mailing lists to 'match people who have things they want to get rid of with people who can use them' (Freecycle, 2006). Members post messages to their local group offering or requesting goods free of charge, others respond to these posts, and givers and recipients meet in person to complete the transaction.

Background

Freecycle originated in the US in May 2003 as a way of finding homes for unwanted things – initially office equipment and domestic furniture – not catered for by existing recycling schemes or second-hand spaces (Botsman and Rogers, 2010). Freegle was then established in September 2009 as a UK-based alternative by ex-Freecycle volunteers unhappy with what they felt was an erosion of local autonomy. Groups migrated, intact, from one organisation to the other, retaining membership and functionality (Glaskin, 2009; Lewis, 2009). Although differing in organisational structure and decision-making processes, Freegle closely resembles Freecycle in its ethos and day-to-day operation, at least from the perspective of its members.[2]

This article will focus primarily on experiences of reuse *in cities* within the predominantly urbanised United Kingdom. At their core, reuse networks are concerned with two historically 'urban' problems: waste and social disintegration. It is worth briefly noting how each issue informs the discursive backdrop to the emergence of online gifting, even if a thorough critique is beyond the scope of the present discussion.[3]

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[2] Several participants in my research were members of both Freecycle and Freegle groups. Some were more aware than others of the historical reasons for their separation, but experiences of the two were typically discussed interchangeably.

[3] Both issues are already the subject of extensive critical discussion. The notion of a 'throwaway society' is challenged by Rathje and Murphy (2001), Gregson et al. (2007a; 2007b) and Evans (2012). For critique of the individualisation thesis in its

First, Freecycle and Freegle exist to divert goods from landfill. Large concentrations of people in settled locations have always faced the dilemma of what to do with their refuse (Melosi, 2005; Kennedy, 2007). The connection between city living and problematic waste generation has, however, become particularly pronounced in (late) modern, (post-)industrial societies (Gandy, 1994; Zapata Campos and Hall, 2013), partly reflecting a quantitative increase in consumption compared with traditional village life. For Smart (2010: 165), profligate consumption arises from macroeconomic reliance on a continual turnover of goods: 'Waste is a direct corollary of the objective at the center of consumer society, to continually increase the supply of commodities' through novelty and obsolescence (see also Bauman, 2007). Strasser (1999) sees waste as a matter of 'sorting': the high turnover of goods stems from changes in what we classify as wanted and unwanted, combined with a decline in the skills and time required to mend and re-purpose soiled or damaged things.

Second, online reuse networks are fundamentally about *connectivity*: putting people in touch with other people. From the outset, urban sociology has been concerned with the impact – usually negatively framed – of cities on how people relate to one another (Lin and Mele, 2013). More recent accounts note an intensification of individualising processes during the 20th century (Bauman, 2001a; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). While traditional forms of solidarity were replaced in the modern city by still relatively solid modes of association – citizenship, nationality, political affiliation, class consciousness – late modernity, it is argued, entails a further erosion of these categories, leaving individuals increasingly isolated and responsible for making their own way in the world. Putnam (2000) takes a much shorter view, charting a decline in civic engagement following a peak in the 1950s and a corresponding decline in the cohesive force he calls 'social capital'.

Dedicated research on Freecycle and Freegle is limited, but slowly growing. The first publication was a small-scale quantitative study (Nelson et al., 2007) of participants' different motivations: a desire for a 'simpler life', 'self-oriented needs and wants' (free stuff, saving money), environmental considerations, and helping others. With its focus on primary motivations, the study gave little consideration to competing rationales, such as being simultaneously motivated by private gain and ethical concerns, let alone how different priorities were negotiated in practice.

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various guises see Wellman and Leighton (1979), Ladd (1999), Boggs (2001), Fischer (2005) and Dawson (2012).

Elsewhere Freecycle is explored as a gift economy, specifically one characterised by what Sahlins (2004) terms generalised reciprocity. Strangers 'freely give' without expecting a direct return, understanding that this activity will sustain the group as a whole, perpetuating the continued giving of gifts (Nelson and Rademacher, 2009: 906; Willer et al., 2012). Guillard and Del Bucchia (2012) take a different tack, examining the 'interpersonal encounter' between giver and recipient rather than wider group solidarity. Freecycle and similar mechanisms 'liberate' givers from a number of anxieties otherwise associated with giving: eliminating the 'risk of refusal', allowing the giver to meet the recipient and imagine the object's future, and facilitating 'an expression of spontaneous gratitude, which enhances the giver's self-esteem without engaging them in a bond of dependence' (Guillard and Del Bucchia, 2012: 59-60).

Research focus and approach

Existing research, then, emphasises individual motivations and tries variously to explain participation or understand its meaning for participants. Comparatively little consideration is given to *how* people come to use these alternative means of getting and giving: how do alternatives establish themselves as part of a repertoire of conceivable, possible, appropriate, even normal ways of consuming? How is the use of Freecycle and Freegle accommodated alongside other, ongoing patterns of acquisition, use and disposal?

These questions, central to my own research, assume 'behaviour change' to be more complicated than individuals consciously choosing a different course of action. Such an assumption is at odds with what Shove (2010) calls the 'ABC model', the broad paradigm underlying dominant policy approaches which sees attitudes as the *determinants* of behaviour. Disconnects between attitudes and behaviour – the value-action gap – are explained in terms of a series of external, contextual factors, personal attributes and cognitive understandings of habit (e.g. Stern, 2000).[4]

Instead, Shove advocates a *practice*-based approach to understanding what people do and how that changes. Emphasis is shifted from individual agents, their behavioural orientations and the constraints they face, to the emergence, development and disappearance of social practices. Crucially, this approach identifies a recursive relationship between two senses of 'practice': *performances*

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4   For a critical commentary on the 'ABC' model, a summary of its theoretical underpinnings in social psychology and examples of relevant implementations in public policy, see Shove (2010) and Hargreaves (2011). For an extensive review of approaches within this broad 'behaviour change' paradigm see Jackson (2005).

'enacted in specific moments and places', and their relatively enduring but always contingent patterns, or practices-as-*entities* (Shove, 2010: 1279). Practices are sites of both reproduction and innovation. Each individual action is 'governed' by 'a set of established understandings, procedures and objectives' often pursued 'without much reflection or conscious awareness' (Warde, 2005: 140). However, 'practices also contain the seeds of constant change' (*ibid.*: 141), only existing in their repeated performance, itself subject to significant variation. Normality is at best provisional, requiring 'constant reproduction' (Shove, 2010: 1279).

My own research uses practice-based understandings of reproduction and innovation to explore how people come to engage in alternative ways of consuming, considering the biographies or 'careers' (Shove et al., 2012) of both the practices and their practitioners: how different (social) patterns of getting and giving emerge and evolve, and how they are adopted into (individual) people's lives. This paper focuses on the first of these questions.

I draw on both primary and secondary data: Freecycle and Freegle's online documentation; in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 24 members in four UK cities (Brighton and Hove, Coventry, Edinburgh and Sheffield); and, to a lesser extent, online surveys of 4400 Freecycle members and 4608 Freegle members, resident throughout the UK.

The elements of practice

My intention is to map the boundaries of free online reuse as a practice, seeking to (a) isolate the particular components (Schatzki, 1996; 2002) or elements (Shove et al., 2012) that make it identifiable from other forms of acquisition and disposal, and (b) consider the implications of these distinctive features for how people go about getting and getting rid of things. A number of conceptual questions concerning the approach will be raised in the process.

What makes isolated doings and sayings 'hang together' as an intelligible practice, distinguishable from other practices, are their shared elements (Schatzki, 2002). Conversely, interconnections between elements are formed and sustained only 'in and through integrative moments of practice-as-performance' (Shove et al., 2012: 22). Following Shove and colleagues I use three distinct categories of element to structure my analysis: materials, meanings and competences. Materials are 'objects, infrastructures, tools, hardware and the body itself' (*ibid.*: 23). Meanings refer to 'symbolic meanings, ideas and aspirations', while competences include 'skill, know-how and technique' (*ibid.*: 14), often formalised in procedures (Warde, 2005) or rules (Schatzki, 1996; 2002).

'Mapping' practices-as-entities, and the elements which compose them, is useful for understanding social reproduction and change – essentially how practices emerge, survive, evolve and die out – in four ways. First, it allows practices to be defined and distinguished: what makes it meaningful to treat isolated acts as part of the same practice, or to think of one practice as distinct from another? Second, it draws attention to interdependencies between elements, enabling an analysis of what happens to other elements, and the practice(s) they constitute, when one element changes. Third, it provides a benchmark for analysing variations in performance, and the impact of those variations on the practice. While 'ideal' ways of performing can be codified as rules or instructions, actual performances do not necessarily adhere to these codes (Warde, 2005, 2013). Fourth, it can highlight 'overlaps' between practices, either through shared elements or through performances which are simultaneously examples of more than one practice (Schatzki, 2002). Similarly, this allows consideration of the impact of elements migrating from one practice to another, or from one social or spatial context to another (Shove and Pantzar, 2005, 2007).

Here I use the practice model as a heuristic device to explore free online reuse exchange as a sort of 'experiment' (leaving aside the epistemological connotations of that term) in organising consumption differently. Drawing on the above four points, I frame discussion around four key research questions:

1. What elements define free online reuse 'as a practice' and distinguish it from other practices?

2. What happens to acquisition and disposal when these distinctive elements are introduced?

3. How do performances of online gifting vary?

4. Where are the points of overlap with other practices?

Findings (1): Defining free online reuse exchange 'as a practice'

First, I look at the key defining features of free online reuse. By temporarily separating out its constituent parts – materials, competences, meanings – I draw attention to what is distinctive about the practice (as well as beginning to identify specific points of overlap with other practices), before stressing strong interdependencies between the different elements. Later I will apply these abstractions to the experience of engaging in online reuse in order to address the remaining three questions above.

Materials: Jam jars and the World Wide Web

Key to delimiting free online reuse are its material elements: objects, infrastructures and technologies. The clearest example is the interface used to connect people: online messages posted to a group forum and emailing list. This of course presupposes access to certain other technologies and infrastructures, not least an Internet connection and a computer, smartphone or tablet.

Material elements also include the objects given and received. Examples cited in interviews varied enormously, from scraps of fabric and empty jam jars, via baby clothes and children's toys, to furniture, domestic appliances, bikes and cars. Of particular interest is how different objects were associated with different meanings, together helping to account for variations within the practice and connections with a diverse array of other practices. I will return to this in part two of the findings, below.

Focusing momentarily on material elements begins to establish what makes Freecycle and Freegle distinctive. The physical differences from, say, visiting a retail outlet or a civic disposal site are immediately apparent. Even within the informal second-hand sector there are differences worth noting. Online message boards and mailing lists are more dynamic than classified adverts in newspapers, but they remain less interactive than auction sites such as eBay. The infrastructure distinguishes online reuse from traditional ways of passing goods on to family and friends as 'hand-me-downs', putting the giver in contact with a much wider audience of potential recipients.

However, there are also considerable continuities – shared material elements – with other acquisition and divestment practices. Posts on Freecycle and Freegle closely follow the format of printed and online classified adverts. More generally, Internet-based technologies are widely used for buying and selling goods, while the types of object given and received are by no means unique to online reuse groups. Consideration of the material elements has begun to identify boundaries between online gifting and other proximate practices, but is not sufficient in itself.

Competences: Rules and their skilled negotiation

A second set of elements are competences (Shove et al., 2012), practical understandings and rules (Schatzki, 1996, 2002). It is arguably the latter, the

formalised rules and guidelines, which most clearly sketch out distinctions between free online reuse and other, materially similar practices.[5]

Most fundamental is the rule that all items must be given free of charge. Transactions offering or requesting money in return are expressly forbidden, as are swaps of goods for other goods (Freecycle FAQ, Freegle Wiki). This immediately sets free online reuse apart from many other ways of exchanging goods. First, the absence of money distinguishes it not only from formal retail, but also from much second-hand economic activity. Second, the one-way nature of the transaction – the explicit instruction that 'there are no strings attached' (Freecycle FAQ) – stands in contrast to gift-giving between family and friends, within an ongoing cycle of reciprocity and obligation, deeply bound up in the maintenance of those relationships (Guillard and Del Bucchia, 2012).

Online reuse also entails competences in the narrower sense: skills, abilities and know-how. These arise in response to, and as a complement of, the objects, technologies and rules discussed above. Realising the dormant usefulness of things often presupposes a creative eye and the manual skills to fix up or re-purpose (Strasser, 1999). And just as forums and mailing lists require Internet access, they also rely upon users' computer literacy and familiarity with the conventions of online communication.

Moreover, changing the rules of exchange – eliminating financial value as a legitimate indicator of an object's worth – requires new ways of deciding who gets what. The giver is responsible for choosing between numerous potential recipients. Unlike an online auction, where an item goes quite literally to the highest bidder, here the connection between ability to pay and acquisition is removed. The giver is forced to find other criteria for choosing.

Meanings: Waste, community and the gift

One further set of elements – a practice's 'symbolic meanings, ideas and aspirations' (Shove et al., 2012: 14) – are perhaps the most difficult to apprehend, being largely intangible. In this regard I attempt to glean the 'social and symbolic significance of participation' (*ibid.*: 23) underlying online reuse from the explicit statements each organisation makes about its aims or goals.

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5   The rules and guidelines discussed here are taken from two sources, the Freegle Volunteer Wiki (http://wiki.ilovefreegle.org) and Freecycle FAQ (http://wiki.freecycle.org/). I indicate in the text where each of these sources is drawn on.

Freecycle's stated mission is 'to build a worldwide gifting movement that reduces waste, saves precious resources and eases the burden on our landfills while enabling our members to benefit from the strength of a larger community' (Freecycle FAQ). Three notions are particularly pertinent here: waste, community and gifting. First, waste generation levels are identified as problematic, as leading to environmental degradation and the depletion of natural resources. Similarly, Freegle's published aims, two of which are to 'promote the keeping of usable items out of landfill' and to 'promote sustainable waste management practices' (Freegle Wiki), reflect interrelated concerns with waste and sustainability, while drawing attention to another problematic aspect of waste: that 'usable items' are going unused. If, as we saw earlier, waste is a matter of sorting (Strasser, 1999; Douglas, 2002; Kennedy, 2007), then reuse is about reclassifying: reclaiming value that was temporarily hidden, forgotten or inaccessible. It acknowledges value as socially constructed, as contextually contingent, and not only that one person's rubbish is another's treasure, but that things have biographies, moving in and out of states of being valued (Appadurai, 1986; O'Brien, 1999; Gidwani, 2012).

Second, Freecycle aims to help its members 'benefit from the strength of a larger community'. And third, closely related, is its commitment to promoting a 'gifting movement': 'By giving freely with no strings attached, members of The Freecycle Network help instil a sense of generosity of spirit as they strengthen local community ties' (Freecycle FAQ). Of interest here is what might be meant by the term 'community', a notoriously difficult concept to pin down, but one that invariably 'feels good', at least in its imagined form, if not in its outworking (Bauman, 2001b: 1). At first sight the interactions (directly) facilitated by online reuse networks bear little resemblance to the ideal-typical *Gemeinschaft* (Tönnies, 1963 [1887]) rooted in tacitly shared understandings, homogeneity and enduring kinship-type relations. Instead they tend towards formality, relative anonymity, and the accomplishment of utilitarian ends, closer to Tönnies' notion of *Gesellschaft*, Granovetter's (1973) weak ties, or Wellman and Leighton's (1979) 'liberated' communities. Online reuse, according to Freecycle's mission statement, is explicitly about increasing the number of people with whom one can potentially exchange resources.

Alternatively to a focus on the nature of social ties, Cohen (1985: 12) foregrounds the symbolic dimension of community, whereby 'the members of a group of people (a) have something in common with each other, which (b) distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other putative groups'. While interactions between members of Freecycle and Freegle are typically brief and functional, these members are, at least in some cases, attracted by shared meanings: aversion to waste; 'generosity of spirit'; even the idea of (lost)

community itself. In this respect, participants resemble an 'imagined community': one whose members 'will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson, 2006: 6). Their ongoing connection is with the local reuse group as a whole, rather than with any particular member. If it is an imagined community, however, then it is one sustained only through repeated yet discrete, concrete, face-to-face interactions between people. This brings us to another way of thinking about community: in terms of the social capital that holds it together, encompassing 'social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' (Putnam, 2000: 19).[6] Intriguingly, whereas reciprocal obligation has traditionally been associated with building and maintaining solidarity (Komter, 2005), in Freecycle it is giving 'with no strings attached' that is explicitly equated with 'strengthen[ing] local community ties' (Freecycle FAQ). Online reuse networks are predicated on a generalised understanding of reciprocity; again, members identify with the group itself, as opposed to with specific others within it, and it is this identification that sustains their future involvement (Willer et al., 2012).

Freegle's aims say little about growing community per se, but they do reveal a commitment to building grassroots responses to waste, seeking to 'promote and support local community groups working in the area of reuse', and to 'empower and support volunteers' (Freegle Wiki). This raises one further notion of community, especially relevant to informal, extra-monetary economies. Community is defined here not primarily by a type of social relation, a shared identity or understanding – although these remain important – but by an opposition: 'community' refers to social, economic or political spaces that are in some way *other* to the market and the state. Notwithstanding significant conceptual and ideological differences between these perspectives, it is the 'community' of New Labour's third way and the third sector (Levitas, 2000), of community governance (Bowles and Gintis, 2002), community self-help (Burns et al., 2004), and community economies (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

Elementary interdependencies

Temporarily considering different elements in isolation highlights just how closely they are connected: they are interdependent and evolve in response to one

6   Note that Putnam's usage differs from Bourdieu's narrower definition of social capital as the 'actual or potential resources which are linked to … membership in a group' (1986: 248). While Putnam sees social capital as a cohesive force, for Bourdieu it is a socially constructed and unequally distributed resource to be mobilised by individuals as they try to protect or improve their position within a given field.

another (Shove et al., 2012). The use of Internet-based technologies, for example, requires specific skills. Rules and guidelines, as formalised *competences*, operationalise certain *meanings* – abstract ideas applied to particular practices – and in turn take on a *material* form when written down. And the story of Freecycle's emergence (Botsman and Rogers, 2010) can be told in terms of interdependent elements. It started with a material problem, that is, material defined as a problem, a conjunction of materials and meanings: good stuff going to landfill. Then a mechanism comprising competences, material infrastructures and technologies was set up to deal with that problem. As the practice spread it evolved, spawning further technological innovations, rules, guidelines, skills, different meanings and ideas, responding to variations in performance, and in turn helping to shape future performances. It is to this experience, to the varied doings of online reuse, that the discussion will now turn.

Findings (2): Free online reuse exchange 'in practice'

Having isolated what distinguishes free online reuse from other practices, I will now draw on interview material to address the second and third research questions outlined above: exploring what happens to performances of acquisition and disposal when distinctive elements are introduced, and investigating internal differentiation within the practice of online gifting. First, in considering 'what happens', I look at intended and unintended consequences, what does and what doesn't change, with respect to two sets of interdependent elements: (1) Internet-mediated communities, addressing a perceived need for greater connectedness (meaning) through technology (material); and (2) moneyless economies, embodying commitments to gifting and generosity (meaning) in the rule that items must be given free of charge (competence). I will then turn to 'internal differentiation', concentrating on how online reuse means something different to different people, or to the same people at different times, or in relation to different material objects.

Internet-mediated communities? Connections and disconnects

In contrast to giving and receiving through family and friends, the online infrastructure allows participants to connect with a wider group of people previously unknown to them. Some understood this as addressing a more anonymous contemporary experience – the classic urban problem as identified by successive generations of sociologists – or, as Ruth put it, 'there's a lot of people out there who really don't know their neighbours'.

A minority shared first-hand stories about forming new relationships, but for most the interactions with fellow users were brief and functional. If online reuse

networks can be considered communities, they bear closer resemblance to the weak, utilitarian ties of 'liberated' communities (Wellman and Leighton, 1979) than to the traditional *Gemeinschaft* (Tönnies, 1963 [1887]). As Paul commented, it might make more sense to think of these exchange mechanisms as a proxy for close-knit relationships, rather than as an opportunity to develop them:

> Freecycle is a useful system for plugging the gap that's formed because we don't have open discussions in the street about what your needs are ... But you can put an anonymous message up saying, you know, I need this, and I think that's easier for us. (Paul)

The ability to connect with a whole city facilitated the matching of diverse, and in some cases extremely niche, needs or tastes with a corresponding breadth of available things. Participants wouldn't necessarily know someone with a particular item to give away, or who needed a particular item; the online network increased the probability of being put in touch with the relevant people.

Communities are defined by their boundaries: by who is inside and who is outside (Cohen, 1985). While online reuse networks facilitated connections, participants also raised concerns about their capacity to exclude. Some were frustrated at repeatedly 'missing out' on items, lacking the time or facilities to regularly check new messages. Unequal access may reflect wider social inequalities, with divergent Internet use still structured by an unequal distribution of financial and cultural resources (White and Selwyn, 2013).

Another material barrier to access is the unavailability of appropriate transport, especially an issue for large items, or when the giver and recipient live in different parts of a city:

> It's alright if you've got a car and you can go and pick them up. It's alright if you live in [a neighbourhood] where lots of things seem to be being swapped. But if you're trying to get something and you haven't got transport and you can't pick it up, or you live outside the central bit of [the city], it's really quite difficult. (Alice)

Living in the wrong area, or having limited access to particular material resources, restricts participation. Concerns were also raised with regard to a related form of competence: IT literacy and fluency in communicating online. The interface was widely seen as outdated and much less user-friendly than familiar social networking and online shopping experiences, reducing both its accessibility to the less 'tech-savvy' and its appeal to potential new users.

Both organisations have attempted to overcome barriers to participation, developing new customised interfaces, 'My Freecycle' and 'Freegle Direct', to simplify the user experience. Both Freecycle and Freegle have also attempted to

mitigate the effects of unequal Internet access by recommending a fair offer policy. Users are encouraged 'to take a period of time to see what responses [they] get before deciding who to give item(s) to', thus giving 'those who don't have continual access to the Internet a fair chance to reply' (Freecycle FAQ). The fair offer policy provides evidence of free online reuse as an adaptive practice, responsive to unintended outcomes of its distinctive materiality (the online mechanism) and introducing further adaptations in competences (as formalised in written guidelines) to better conform to its meanings and purposes (widening participation in reuse, keeping more things out of landfill). In practice, however – in the doings – fair offering adds further complications, as we shall see below.

A moneyless economy

The issue of how goods are allocated – how givers choose between potential recipients – brings the discussion back to another key distinguishing feature of online gifting: the rule that all items must be given free of charge. Removing money radically challenges the conventional relationship between the person getting rid of an item and its potential recipients, with the ability to pay no longer tied to the likelihood of successful acquisition.

Research participants described how they had personally benefited from this opportunity to get things for free, especially when financial means were diminished or when facing an increase in outgoings: relocation for work or study, separation from a partner, the arrival of a new child, a period of unemployment. In several cases this meant furnishing an entire house or flat with little money. One participant relayed how she had moved cities while going through divorce. At the time she was 'struggling financially, emotionally, mentally ... struggling on every level'; setting up home without spending money was not only practically beneficial, but emotionally rewarding:

> I am very, very proud when people come into my house and I say I have furnished this house on Freecycle. (Sarah)

However, eliminating money also brings its own dilemmas. A new set of competences had to be learnt by givers and would-be recipients alike: how to decide who to give to, and how to maximise one's chances of being chosen. Furthermore, the fair offer policy discourages reliance on another commonplace rule for deciding who gets what: 'first come, first served'.

Participants gave differing examples of how they made this decision. A typical priority was to save time or reduce hassle. Some spoke of the practical advantages of careful deliberation, like guarding against a recurring problem of 'no shows'. Over time and through experience, participants felt better able to judge who was

likely to turn up, for example noting the perceived effort put into wording a response to an offer post. Others, by contrast, again for reasons of convenience, felt unable to follow the fair offer policy, to take the time to consider the relative merits of potential recipients, and so gave the item to the first person who emailed. This approach was especially popular when givers 'just want something gone' as quickly as possible. In many cases approaches were combined:

> I really did not have the time so I would rather just give it away to the first person, or of course if I received three or four replies to my post in the same day, of course I would choose probably the nicest one, or the one I thought was more in need of that object. (Gabriella)

Beyond convenience, these two attributes – niceness and need – kept on recurring as reasons for choosing a recipient. Typically the person chosen might be perceived to be the most polite, the one with whom the giver most closely identified, the one most able to articulate their need for the item or how they intended to make use of it.

From the other side, as a recipient, Sarah felt that she was more likely to be given an item if she outlined her material circumstances – 'if I email someone and say I'm a single mum on benefits' – although she was wary of presenting a 'sob story'. Two of her examples underline the role of learning and practical experience in becoming a skilled giver and recipient:

> There's one woman who … specifies that if you email her asking for it and you don't put a story then you won't get it. … Presumably because she's experienced, she's used to getting a lot of responses so it kind of helps her decide.

> You learn as you use it … half of it is [making] your case, you know, like saying I'm a single mum – blah blah blah – but also half of it is people want to know what you're going to use it for, who your family are … And if they can kind of picture you and get your story then that gives them satisfaction. Especially if it's something that has been in the family and used by two sets of children and really, really enjoyed, and has happy memories. (Sarah)

This latter quote highlights how Freecycle and Freegle, freed from the constraints associated with the ability to pay or 'first come, first served', can facilitate 'care-full' transactions not unlike handing down treasured things to friends or relatives (Gregson et al., 2007b). However, these different ways of choosing 'who gets what' throw up further unintended consequences. Some participants were not comfortable with judging, and being judged by, fellow group members. Choosing recipients by their perceived politeness, writing skills

or shared circumstances depends on their possession of particular forms of cultural capital,[7] leading to potential bias by social class, nationality or ethnicity:

> It's almost like when people put things on it they're judging the responses. So if they get a response from someone who perhaps isn't very good at English, they won't reply to that person, because they haven't been very polite. (Alice)

Trying to choose the most 'needy' recipient is equally problematic. Some were reluctant to base such a decision on a single short message. Even if a worthy recipient can be 'correctly' identified, it is questionable that users feel compelled to make themselves vulnerable, offering up their personal stories to a (comparatively) powerful arbiter for judgement, or that a patronising, paternalistic relationship is created between giver and receiver, recast as benefactor and deserving poor.

Despite the formal absence of money, performances of free online reuse can contribute to the reproduction of existing market-mediated inequalities and power relations. Moreover, monetary value itself continues to have an influence, albeit indirectly. Certain financially valuable items were more sought after, reflecting their prestige or association with quality – 'you know, brand new from John Lewis; that sounds great' (Sarah) – or the amount recipients could save by not having to buy them. This, in turn, made acquisition more competitive, further reinforcing the pressure on givers to choose the 'right' recipient.

Meanings and their objects

This section has so far served to highlight some intended and unintended consequences of online gifting: where participants' experiences conform to and deviate from expectations, reproducing and challenging what is recognisable as the practice-as-entity. I have begun to illuminate performances that are noticeably distinctive, yet remain clearly identifiable as the doings and sayings of free online reuse. I will now further explore this internal variation by turning to the different meanings of reuse: to different people, at different times, in relation to different objects.

First, participants cited numerous purposes or motivations, at times differing from Freecycle and Freegle's stated aims and ethos (cf. Nelson et al., 2007; Arsel and Dobscha, 2011). Discourses around waste and its environmental

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7   As a counterpart to economic and social capital, cultural capital refers to the 'embodied', 'objectified' or 'institutionalised' cultural resources valued (or otherwise) in a given social setting. Examples range from physical and mental dispositions, ways of speaking or walking, via artefacts such as books and paintings, to educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986).

consequences were, unsurprisingly, almost ever-present. 95 per cent of survey respondents used Freecycle or Freegle to 'cut down on waste', while 84 per cent cited 'conserving the planet's resources' as a motivation. Similarly, interview participants frequently described landfill, resource depletion and climate change as direct or indirect outcomes of wasteful consumption practices, expressing a desire to reduce their contribution to these issues.

Some expressed strong commitment to the gift economy model, aside from their own direct benefit as recipients. Several participants referred to the principle of 'paying it forward', a form of generalised reciprocity (Sahlins, 2004; Nelson and Rademacher, 2009; Willer et al., 2012), where gifts are given without any expectation of a direct return. For example:

> ...you might not be in a position to give me anything right now, or you might never be in a position to give something to me, but you might be really good at being a friend for the guy down the road. (Paul)

Alongside these other-oriented purposes, many users were primarily trying to fulfil a more mundane goal: getting something they needed or wanted, or getting rid of something they no longer had use for. Financial and practical considerations such as affordability and convenience were at least as prominent as what could be termed ethical engagements. As Sarah put it, before going on to detail her well-reasoned objections to overconsumption and waste, 'I would say first and foremost it is about getting stuff for free'. And with regard to the convenience of giving things away: 'They can come and collect the stuff, we get rid of the stuff, everybody's happy. It was really just the easiest way to do it' (Gabriella). Crucial here is the need to look beyond primary motivations and consider the multiple, complementary and contradictory meanings with which practices are imbued. For many participants, online reuse networks simultaneously meant a source of free stuff and a way of consuming ethically. They were, at once, a convenient disposal mechanism, a way of reducing waste and of giving generously.

Second, research participants highlighted how their use of Freecycle and Freegle meant something different at different times. As shown above, particular transition periods tended to foreground online reuse as a means of acquiring free stuff. At other times, when in a more secure position or moving on again, the same participants saw Freecycle or Freegle as a means to give things away, to 'pay forward' the generosity they had been shown, or as a convenient way to clear a home.

Third, different objects, and participants' relationships with them, carried different meanings, resulting in quite varied performances. Certain items were

more sought after than others, reflecting their market value, but also their anticipated quality, durability or scarcity. Different engagements with objects can be illustrated especially well in relation to how people allocated the giving of goods. Items one had an emotional attachment to or that had some history, or those seen as having more value, were carefully directed to 'good homes'. As we saw earlier, this might reflect identification with a recipient, with their demonstration of need or description of how they will use an object. For items regarded with little emotional attachment, online gifting was more commonly a convenient way to get rid of something unwanted, a burden taking up space, without the trouble of driving to the tip. In such cases, givers were quite happy to settle on the first person to come along. These items might be seen as 'junk', no longer valued by the giver, but a process of letting go might also have already taken place:

> I've come to the decision that I can accept that this stuff can now go, so I want it gone before I change my mind. And also it's like once you view the stuff differently, it's not personal, it hasn't got an attachment. It's then rubbish. (Sarah)

Again, Strasser's (1999) notion of waste as a matter of sorting is brought to mind. Relatedly, Freecycle and Freegle were often part of a suite of different 'conduits' for acquiring or disposing of goods (Gregson et al., 2007a). While charity shops, for example, were seen as a good source of cheap, second-hand clothes and a good place to donate them, many of them will not stock larger items of furniture, or electrical items. Freecycle was initially set up to fill this gap and it continues to do so. These conduits were, furthermore, related hierarchically. When looking for specific items, Freecycle or Freegle was a starting point before deciding to spend money elsewhere. Similarly, Gabriella spoke of selling items on eBay. This was understood as 'feeling stupid' for having spent money on something unwanted, and subsequently trying to recoup the costs, rather than a strict financial decision. In a parallel situation, when clearing a house of things a previous tenant had left behind, she 'had absolutely no intention of making any money out of it'. Other participants described attempts to give items away in more informal ways before settling on online means:

> Some of the stuff I give away, I give to friends and family; other things I put on Freegle. It's very much in that order. (Ruth)

Finally, the variety of meaningful objects – material-semiotic interdependencies – exchanged, the different performances they entail and the positioning of these mechanisms in relation to other conduits are of particular relevance for my fourth research question: how online reuse is not only internally differentiated, but also overlaps with various other practices. On the one hand, getting rid of items evoking little emotional attachment via Freecycle or Freegle – the 'rubbish'

identified by Sarah – is understood as a more convenient alternative to, and demonstrates considerable overlap of meaning with, driving junk to the tip. It would seem reasonable, then, to consider performances within this subset of online reuse *simultaneously* as examples of another practice called, say, 'waste disposal'. By contrast, 'care-fully' choosing the recipient of a much-treasured possession shares meanings with giving hand-me-downs to family and friends, with Freecycle/Freegle merely extending the network of potential people to give to. Performances within this subset of online gifting could also be seen as an engagement in 'donating' practices, or similar.

Discussion and conclusions

I set out in this article to discover what it is that people are doing when they give and receive goods free of charge via online reuse networks. More specifically, I aimed to define and delimit free online reuse as a practice – isolating its constituent meanings, competences, material elements (Shove et al., 2012) and the interactions between them – and to (metaphorically) map both its boundaries and points of overlap with other types of acquisition and disposal. The key distinguishing features, perhaps unsurprisingly, were found to be: an online infrastructure, its associated technologies and competences; the rule that exchanges must be one-way, with 'no strings attached'; and overarching symbolic associations with reducing waste, building community, and the gift.

Defining a practice already pared down to 'free online reuse' would always involve a degree of tautology. However, the abstracting process, facilitated by an 'elementary' approach to conceptualising practices, enabled not only establishment of the practice's parameters, but also a route to considering, via qualitative interview material, the impact of these distinctive, interdependent elements on how people acquire and dispose of things. Emerging insights relate both to the nature of online reuse and to methodological and conceptual issues pertaining to the practice-based approach.

Set against a perceived crisis of solidarity or connectivity in contemporary, (post-)industrial cities (e.g. Putnam, 2000; Bauman, 2001a; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), Freecycle and Freegle position themselves as strengthening a form of community, one unlike the traditional *Gemeinschaft* of pre-modern rural life (Tönnies, 1963 [1887]). Instead it is a form of association characterised by weak ties, sustained through repeated one-off interactions, yet also held together by shared meanings and a generalised form of reciprocity, bearing some resemblance to both Wellman and Leighton's (1979) 'liberated' communities and Anderson's (2006) 'imagined' community. In practice, the online mechanism

was seen by interview participants as facilitating useful connections for the exchange of resources, but also as excluding certain others from making these connections, due to their comparative lack of access to technologies, or fluency in their use.

A similar ambivalence surrounded the notion of online reuse exchange as a moneyless economy. The absence of money was celebrated by both those benefiting from free things and those deriving satisfaction from helping others in need. Giving for free also provided a way of passing on items considered no longer sufficiently valuable in financial terms to make attempted sale worthwhile, yet not deemed ready to be thrown away. However, removing the ability to pay as a way of determining who gets what left a vacuum to be filled: how else would this decision be made? Goods might be allocated on a first come, first served basis, potentially excluding those without constant access to online communication means or transport, disproportionately those with fewer economic and cultural resources (White and Selwyn, 2013). Alternatively they might be given to the most 'polite' respondent, or the one with whom the giver most easily identifies, privileging certain valued forms of cultural capital, ultimately closely linked to the possession of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). In either case there was evidence that, although in some ways challenging inequalities and power relations associated with capitalist market exchange, non-monetary transactions can also serve to reproduce them.

A further observation was that free online reuse meant different things to different people, in different circumstances or in relation to different objects. Different meanings corresponded to different kinds of performances. As Schatzki (2002: 87) observes, a given performance, or a given element, may simultaneously belong to any number of different practices-as-entities, causing overlap between those practices. My interviews suggest that some acts of online reuse might simultaneously be enactments of other practices, for example 'waste disposal' or 'donating', depending on the value assigned to the objects in question.

Taken together, these findings raise several important questions for the further study of social practices in general and, more specifically, alternative consumption practices. First, there remains a need for contemporary practice-based approaches to better accommodate, or at least sit more comfortably alongside, ways of theorising power and inequalities (Shove and Spurling, 2013; Walker, 2013). This would imply a conception of unequally distributed resources, carried by individuals, but shaped by and only realisable in the 'doing' of particular practices. One response might be to delve into the insights of practice theories past, such as that of Bourdieu. Through the lens of economic, cultural

and social capital, each only valued according to the logic of specific fields of practice (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), online reuse networks could be interpreted as mechanisms that reduce the need for forms of economic and social capital valorised in other consumption practices (money, or knowing the right people), but increase the need for certain types of cultural capital (computer skills, 'politeness').

Second, reinvigorated objects diverted from the waste stream cannot help but draw attention to value and its contingency on social, temporal and spatial context, as well as on the circumstances of those assigning it (Strasser, 1999; O'Brien, 1999; Gidwani, 2012). Key to research participants' own accounts were: negotiations of differently valued materials; valuations that change over time or vary from one person to another; careful selection between different 'conduits' for acquiring and disposing of different types of things; and the interplay of competing or complementary, more or less commensurable forms of value and values (financial, practical, ethical, aesthetic, symbolic, etc.). A dilemma in writing about these experiences within a practice-theoretical framework is how to avoid reverting to one of a number of 'rational choice' perspectives, with an isolated agent processing and confronting an external world, for instance the aforementioned 'ABC model' (Shove, 2010), where individually held values are assumed to determine individual behaviour. This dilemma raises the question of whether some quite different, more 'entangled' or 'distributed' notion of calculative/'qualculative' agency could be reconciled with a practice-oriented approach (Miller, 2002, 2008; Callon and Law, 2005; Stark, 2011).

Third, recognition of different practices as overlapping – sharing elements and performances – presents a potential contribution to the study of diverse economies, discursively disrupting the paralysing reification of capitalism as an all-powerful economic system, while studiously avoiding overly simplistic distinctions between market and non-market, formal and informal activities (Williams, 2005; Gibson-Graham, 2006). That performances of online reuse mobilise elements of both 'capitalist' and 'non-capitalist' practices can be read fatalistically: even the simplest of attempts at creating moneyless exchange mechanisms are doomed to failure in a hopelessly commodified world. Alternatively it is a finding full of possibility: what if many other, similar performances of consumption are already dependent on 'non-capitalist' as well as 'capitalist' meanings, competences and materials? Coupled with an understanding that it is in both diversity of performances and the migration of elements from one practice to another that established patterns of doing are reconfigured (Shove and Pantzar, 2005, 2007), insights from practice-based approaches offer one way of theorising how social change, big or small, takes

place, adding a few more cracks (Holloway, 2010) in the apparent edifice of socially unjust and environmentally unsustainable capitalism.

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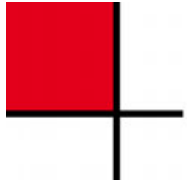_with_freecycle_in_the_uk.html]

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Rethinking innovation through a moral economy lens: The case of alternative agro-food and mobility practices

Katerina Psarikidou

abstract

In recent times of crisis, innovation has been recognised as a critical response to the multiple social and economic challenges contemporary societies have to face. Diverse organisations and actors have been constructing visions and imaginaries aiming at identifying various 'sustainable innovations' (Urry, 2011; 2013) that promise to provide their own remedies for such challenges. In many cases, however, such innovations appear to evolve into conservative, top-down projects of exclusion whose contribution is reduced to the production of constant economic growth and the participation of specific 'innovators', while overshadowing the role of other networks or actors involved in such processes (Felt et al., 2007; Suchman and Bishop, 2000). Among these organisations and actors, an increasing number of alternative economic organisations and initiatives have emerged that aim to develop their own pathways for transformation and change. Drawing on findings from the Liveable Cities and FAAN research projects, this paper is focused on a selection of alternative agro-food and mobility practices in the cities of Manchester and Birmingham, in order to explore their potential to constitute alternative innovation practices. More specifically, after an exploration of the different definitions, concepts and discourses variously used to describe, but also challenge, the concept of 'innovation' and its dominant understanding in policy and research (EC, 2013; Felt et al., 2007; Tyfield, 2013; Geels and Schot, 2007), this paper employs the political economic discourse of the 'moral economy' (Sayer, 2000; Booth, 1994; Thompson, 1971), as well as sociological and anthropological theories of value, money and commodities (Graeber, 2001; North, 2007; Zelizer, 1989; Appadurai, 1994). In doing so, it suggests an alternative perspective for approaching innovation through a moral economy lens. More specifically, by exploring the particular moral economic characteristics of alternative agro-food and mobility practices, it suggests going beyond a narrow understanding of innovation by situating it in the moral economy of such practices and the wider set of social values and symbolic meanings attributed to them.

In recent times of crisis, innovation has been recognised as a critical response to the multiple social and economic challenges contemporary societies have to face.[*] Diverse organisations and actors have been constructing visions, research and policy agendas aiming at the identification of different innovations which could provide pathways towards potential transformations and change. In many cases, however, these innovations appear to evolve into conservative, top-down projects of exclusion whose contribution is reduced to the production of constant economic growth and the participation of specific 'innovators', while marginalising the role of other networks or communities involved in such processes (Felt et al., 2007; Suchman and Bishop, 2000). Among these organisations and actors, an increasing number of alternative economic organisations and initiatives have recently emerged that aim to develop their own strategies. In a way, they have come to construct critical loci for the articulation of and experimentation with various potentially 'sustainable innovations' (Urry, 2011; 2013). By employing and participating in diverse allegedly alternative socio-material practices claimed to save both money and resources, these networks of actors and organisations are said to bring their own responses to various socio-economic crises that challenge contemporary societies (Low-budget urbanities, 2013; Community Economies Collective, 2001).

Despite the many practices that could fall under the above description, this paper focuses on two different sets of alternative 'saving' practices, the alternative agro-food and the alternative mobility practices, both of which are intended to embody alternatives to the dominant agro-food and mobility regimes as well as the various socio-economic inequalities attributed to them. By 'alternative', this paper refers to the wider set of socio-material practices which are 'alternative' in terms of methods – e.g. production, distribution, consumption – but also in terms of the economies and economic relations enacted through these practices. Also, by using the term 'alternative' in terms of economies, it focuses not only on economic practices that engage in non-monetary and low-budget relations of exchange, but also on those where, as will be shown below, money becomes 'media', or else the means for accomplishing more diverse sets of goals and purposes (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Thrift and Leyshon, 1999; Zelizer, 1999).

Drawing on research conducted for the *Liveable cities* (http://liveablecities.org.uk/) and *FAAN* (www.faanweb.eu) projects, this paper focuses on a selection of alternative agro-food and mobility initiatives that not

only employ or promote alternative agro-food or mobility practices – such as community gardens, permaculture, cycling, car-sharing etc. – but also engage in an array of alternative economic practices constructed around the particular materialities related to the above practices – such as informal networks of exchange, co-operatives, social enterprises, etc. For the purposes of this paper, my investigation is focused on two of the UK's largest cities, Manchester and Birmingham, both of which are currently challenged by socio-economic inequalities, as also manifested in the different food and mobility security issues within both cities.

More specifically, by looking at the alternative economic characteristics of such practices, this paper suggests an alternative perspective for approaching innovation through a moral economy lens – and, more specifically, through the particular 'moral economy' of alternative agro-food and mobility practices. To initiate such an investigation, this paper starts by exploring different definitions, concepts and discourses that have been variously used to describe, but also challenge, the concept of 'innovation' and its dominant understanding in policy and research (EC, 2013; Felt et al., 2007; Tyfield et al., 2010; Geels and Schot, 2007, etc.). It then turns to the employment of the political economic discourse of the 'moral economy' (Sayer, 2000; Booth, 1994; Thompson, 1971) as well as sociological and anthropological theories of value, money and commodities (Graeber, 2001; North, 2007; Zelizer, 1989; Appadurai, 1994). In doing so, the paper argues for the potential of these practices to constitute alternative innovation practices that can challenge the dominant understanding of innovation by situating it in the particular moral economic characteristics of such practices, the wider sets of symbolic meanings, and the social values attributed to them.

Innovation: A contested concept

Innovation has been recognised as a critical dimension for the pursuit of future transformations and change, especially in times of crisis. However, traditionally, innovation has ignored various alternative economic organisations and practices and their potential to provide their own response to diverse socio-economic challenges. Among various economists and political scientists, Joseph Schumpeter (1942) was one of the first to underline the centrality of innovation as a key driver for change through economic growth. Mainly associated with technological advancements, innovation was introduced in his *Capitalism, socialism, and democracy* as a critical dimension for the 'creative destruction' of

capitalism, which he suggested as the necessary precondition for economic development and change[1].

Despite the historical roots of such observations, this linear post-war model of 'science' to 'technology' to 'social progress' has been central to the articulation of more recent conceptualisations and understandings of innovation and their role in future economic growth (Sirilli, 1998). In particular, in recent times of global crisis, innovation appears as a response to various challenges contemporary societies have to face. The European Union's Lisbon Agenda (2000) as well as the more recent Europe 2020 Innovation Union (2010a; 2013) become manifestations of the centrality of innovation for overcoming such obstacles. As stated in the Innovation Union pocket guide, 'the main economic drive of economic growth in the EU is innovation... Innovation is our best option to help get the European Economy back on track... [to] innovate our way out of the crisis' (2013: 3). In this way, innovation is suggested as the best means for not only 'enhancing competitiveness', but also 'creat[ing] growth and jobs' and 'tackling major societal challenges such as climate change, energy and resource security, health and ageing which are becoming more urgent by the day' (EC, 2010a: 2, 6 and 7). Explicit references to a more 'inclusive growth' also highlight the social character of such innovations: as evidenced in the Horizon 2020 priority themes, such innovations are not only reduced to meeting the principles of 'smart' and 'sustainable' growth, but also of a growth which can tackle issues of poverty, social exclusion and inequalities, while securing equal opportunities in education and employment (EC 2010b: 6; 2011: 9).

By engaging with such narratives, these documents not only provide evidence of the centrality of innovation in responding to crises: as Felt et al. suggest (2007), they also facilitate the perpetuation of a master narrative in which innovation is narrowly perceived as the motor of economic growth through profit maximisation and competitiveness, as well as the development of laboratory-based techno-scientific knowledge. In this way, democratising processes become marginalised by dominant frameworks that promote capital-intensive techno-scientific developments through private sector or industry-driven interests and public-private partnerships (Levidow and Neubauer, 2012; Pigeon, 2012). Thus, as Suchman and Bishop argue, innovations appear to evolve into a 'conservative project', mainly becoming the 'preferred alternative to stagnation' or 'resistance

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1   According to Schumpeter (1942), the reproduction of capitalism lies in a process of 'creative destruction', which he describes as the 'process of industrial mutation that incessantly revolutionises the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one'. Such process was regarded as the engine behind economic progress; with the introduction of new ideas and innovation, entrepreneurs could be capable of challenging existing firms and bringing economic growth.

to change' (2000: 331). Despite referring to principles of 'inclusiveness', they tend to constitute top-down practices of exclusion whose production or orchestration is limited to the participation of specific 'innovators', while marginalising or overshadowing the role of other networks, creative communities or civil society in the production of such processes (Felt et al., 2007).

Such observations encourage an exploration of alternative ways of conceptualising and understanding innovation. In their attempt to develop a critique of the dominant framing of innovation, Felt et al. (2007) suggest a more inclusive and participatory process of 'collective experimentation', manifested in 'distributed innovation' among a diversity of actors and options. Thus, Von Hippel (2005) talks about new types of 'open' or 'user-centred' innovations – what Urry (2013) calls 'consumer innovations' – and suggests their centrality in a further 'democratisation of innovation' processes through the participation of a wider community of users of products and services, or of individual consumers. Such attempts at 're-inventing' innovation encourage us to reconsider the role of other bottom-up innovations in the materialisation of transformation and change. But, as Tyfield et al. (2010) crystallise through the use of the concept of 'disruptive innovation', they also help us to re-think innovation in a much broader way, going beyond traditional players, as well as its direct association with profit maximisation and high-technology. In a way, they encourage us to further explore the potential situatedness of innovation in different currently marginalised small-scale, bottom-up 'niches' (Geels and Schot, 2007).

This paper hence aims to investigate the potential of innovation in the small-scale, bottom-up practices undertaken by wider communities of actors. By doing so, it aims to challenge the dominant understandings of innovation associated with constant economic growth through profit maximisation and various techno-fixes. With the aim of contributing to the above attempts at a conceptual openness of the term, it aims to suggest its own alternative way of approaching innovation through a moral economy lens, and, more specifically, through the particular moral economy of alternative agro-food and mobility practices. Before turning to such an analysis, however, an investigation of the different theoretical insights into 'value', 'money' and 'commodities' appears essential for unpacking the particular economic characteristics which can also help us re-think innovation through a moral economy lens.

Value(s), money and commodities in modern society

Ever since the earliest stages of industrialisation and urbanisation, an 'economising logic' has come to play an increasingly important role in constructing the foundations of societies and their innovation processes. The economy became an autonomous sphere governed by its own laws, where its magnitude could be measured by the commodification potential of land and labour (Booth, 1994); trade became an honourable business, and humans were gradually transformed into 'homo oeconomicus', into 'rational', self-interested maximisers led by a 'calculative' and 'instrumental rationality' and a constant desire to achieve material gains and maximisation of their utility through appropriate means (Weber, 1978; Evans-Pritchard, 1967). In a way, as Polanyi describes (1957), economic relations have gradually become 'disembedded' from social relations, shifting from traditional relationships of 'mechanical solidarity' to contractual relationships of 'organic solidarity'[2] able to free both markets and people from traditional ties, moral values and obligations (Durkheim, 1964; Hayek, 1976). As some came to describe, a detraditionalisation process was accompanied by a promise of personal liberation and, ultimately, the promise of a good life and the pure pleasure of autonomous, self-governed and self-responsible individuals – mainly translated through the possession and consumption of market-offered goods (Heelas, 1996; Abercrombie, 1994; Bauman, 1987).

For some, detraditionalisation has also come to signal a stage of 'demoralisation' of economies and a shift away from the moral economies of traditional societies (see Scott, 1976; Thompson, 1971). The latter has been supported by the gradual disembeddedness of economic relations from social relations (Polanyi, 1957) and the loss of an economy based on relationships of reciprocity, moral solidarity, mutual assistance and trust, village egalitarianism, subsistence ethics and survival of the weakest (Scott, 1976; Thompson, 1971). It has however also been encouraged by the perpetuation of a reductionist understanding of value as economic value, mainly translated into money and a specific price that could reflect the 'worth' of a product (Dodd, 1998). In modern economies, money has become the universally exchangeable commodity or 'common unit of

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2   In *The division of labour in society* (1964), Durkheim argues that in pre-modern societies, with their low division of labour and little mutual dependency, members of society are bound together by a 'collective conscience' of shared beliefs and values, periodically revived through ritual. However, in modern urbanized society, with its developed division of labour, urbanisation, geographical mobility and social and cultural diversity, collective conscience is weak and prior forms of 'mechanical solidarity' give way to a more individualised form of social solidarity, namely an 'organic solidarity', which could coexist with the norms of the rationalised ethos of capitalism.

measurement' that could enable relationships of exchange by acting as a method for valuing other, non-equivalent commodities. In a way, it is perceived as the commodity that can operate as a 'medium of exchange' and store value, and, thus, objectify the value of other commodities. As Marx (1978) and Simmel (1990) observed, money was the commodity with the capacity to not only commodify objects and labour, but also all aspects of social life.

However, for others, this same process of detraditionalisation cannot be associated with the end of 'moral economies' as, according to Sayer (2000) and Booth (1994), all economies constitute moral economies. This not only suggests the attachment of a more inclusive meaning to the term 'economy' by referring to all forms of provisioning, including those inside and outside the cash economy, as well as both formal and informal economic activities, involving production, distribution, consumption and exchange (Sayer, 2006; Gibson-Graham, 1996; Community Economies Collective, 2001). It also points us to the moral judgements and dispositions, valuations, norms and behaviours, or else, what Sayer calls a 'tacit lay morality', that are always present or latent within economic relations (Sayer, 2000; 2006). Such 'tacit lay morality' is not only reflected in processes of justification of specific economic actions through the economic agent's association with a specific moral world[3] (Boltanski and Thevenot, 1999). It also becomes evident in the possession and consumption of specific goods and commodities due to the specific immaterial values – or else, following Baudrillard (1972), the 'sign values', associations or social and cultural meanings – attached to them on behalf of their users. From this perspective, commodities acquire a value which goes beyond their exchange value and its usual association with monetary value (Sayer, 2003). Their use value gets reconceptualised around not only the satisfaction of basic human needs, but also the achievement of skills or satisfaction that can be obtained through participation in a practice or a particular type of relationship (MacIntyre, 1981; Sayer, 2003). Along these lines, labour and money also become reconceptualised as they come to constitute means for accomplishing purchase practices that would lead to the acquisition of commodities for their use value (Sayer, 2003).

The above analysis provides some clues to the wider spectrum of values that might be attributed to contemporary economic relations, money and commodities. In *The gift*, Marcel Mauss (1967) encourages us to consider the

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3   Boltanski and Thevenot (1999) claim that we live in a plural world where actions can be justified in multiple ways depending on the person's world of justification. They identify six worlds of justification – domestic, industrial, civic, market, fame, inspiration – according to which different groups of people justify their actions to those who disagree.

social nature of all economic relations, and hence go beyond a reductionist approach to values in economic relations as purely economic values. In particular, he encourages us to develop a different anthropological understanding of value, based on which value is the meaning or importance a society ascribes to an object. David Graeber offers a similar approach to value, according to which it constitutes 'the way actions become meaningful to the actors by being placed in some larger social whole, real or imaginary' (2005: 254). In this context, the commodity becomes decontextualised to the extent that, according to Appadurai (1994), it can exist outside of capitalist economic relations by referring to any object that someone can acquire in exchange for something else, or that they would be willing to give up in order to get something that is more desirable to them. However, money also acquires a more inclusive meaning: not only by attending to its potential to work as a 'medium' for the acquisition of some other goods or relations whose significance lies in their 'use' or 'sign value'; but also by attending to its potential to take on different forms, and thus become the 'media' – or, according to Zelizer (1989), the 'multiple monies' – through which money becomes socially and culturally defined and obtains multiple uses and meanings depending on the different monetary forms and contexts deployed (Thrift and Leyshon, 1999).

All the theoretical approaches and enquiries above provide inspiration for understanding the situatedness of the dominant framework of innovation within the prevailing 'economising logic' of the 'homo oeconomicus', but also for investigating its potential to be framed by a more inclusive meaning of 'the economic', and the diverse set of values related to it. In a way, they encourage us to realise the tacit moral economic character of all innovation processes, a fact reflected in the moral judgements, valuations and claims embedded in the justification of all innovation practices – for example through their promissory narrative of providing a response to multiple crises. In other words, they encourage us to realise that all innovations have a moral economy, and, based on that, urge us to further investigate innovation through a moral economy lens, and, more specifically, through the lens of the particular 'moral economy' of alternative agro-food and mobility practices. They provide grounds for exploring the nature and particular characteristics of the economic practices related to these agro-food and mobility practices, and further examine the particular moral economic characteristics and sets of values that can help us develop an alternative approach to innovation: an innovation that can go beyond its dominant understanding and associations with constant economic growth.

The moral economy of alternative agro-food and mobility practices

The background

Across the UK, the recent austerity measures, increasing levels of poverty and unemployment, cuts in public services, unequal access to goods and services, phenomena of social exclusion and health inequalities have all triggered public concern and stimulated interest in the organisation of different initiatives that are intended to provide their own response to such challenges. Food insecurity and transport poverty have undoubtedly been recognised as significant parameters for growing socio-economic inequalities (FAO, 2009; Rothengattter, 2011), which have also resulted in the emergence of various alternative agro-food and mobility organisations (Renting et al., 2003; Psarikidou and Szerszynski, 2012a; Horton et al., 2007) addressing such issues. Drawing on findings from web-research and interviews with representatives of various organisations involved in the alternative agro-food and mobility sectors[4], my analysis focuses on an array of alternative agro-food and mobility initiatives in Manchester and Birmingham – two of the UK's largest cities, and ones which are currently challenged by a combination of crises manifested in increasing socio-economic inequalities.

With a population of 483,800 people, Manchester currently ranks as the second most deprived core city in England[5] (Manchester City Council, 2011a). The recent economic recession – also triggered by the city's historic economic dependence on industrialisation and its gradual post-war decline – have significantly changed the city's socio-economic landscape. Currently, many areas suffer from unemployment, poor physical and mental health, social exclusion and unequal

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4   The material used for this paper comes from research conducted by the author for the EPSRC *Liveable cities* (http://liveablecities.org.uk/) and EC FP7 *FAAN* (www.faanweb.eu) projects. Findings for the alternative agro-food practices in Manchester have been extracted from internet websites, official documents and a series of 4 out of 11 semi-structured *FAAN* interviews with representatives of different organisations and initiatives involved in the alternative agro-food sector. Data concerning alternative mobility practices in Birmingham come from internet sources, official documents and 5 out of 12 semi-structured *Liveable cities* interviews with representatives involved in different organisations and initiatives involved in changing Birmingham's mobility system. For the purposes of this paper, specific interviews have been carefully selected from the ranges provided in each research project, helping the author to construct a comparative and complementary analysis of similar initiatives in the two different sectors.

5   According to the 2011 Indices of multiple deprivation, Manchester ranks as the second most deprived local authority in England for income deprivation, third in terms of employment deprivation, and fifth in the extent of deprivation throughout the city (Manchester City Council, 2011a).

access to employment, education and health – particularly for vulnerable sections of the population, such as women, disabled people, black and minority ethnic communities, young and older people (Manchester City Council, 2011b). As for the agro-food sector, with the majority of the food imported as part of global agro-food chains and the more recent increase in food prices, there are growing concerns about food insecurity, food poverty and malnutrition, but also obesity, poor dietary habits and mental health problems that are all claimed to have contributed to an increase in food deserts, as well as unequal access to food of good nutritional value[6] (Food Futures, 2007; Small World Consulting, 2011).

With the second largest population in the country[7], Birmingham is its third most deprived city and one of the key sites of socio-economic inequalities and deprivation[8] (English indices of deprivation, 2013). Its recent socio-economic inequalities and high rates of unemployment [9] are not unrelated to Birmingham's historic economic dependence on its currently declined car industry (Cherry, 1994). The dominance of cars[10] provides significant evidence for the wider mobility security issues and the various socio-economic and health inequalities constructed around them (Centro, 2011). More specifically, the recent economic recession has particularly served to exacerbate phenomena of fuel and transport poverty – also manifested in the rising oil prices and public transport fares (Birmingham City Council, 2013b). As a consequence, social exclusion and unequal access to employment, education and health, as well as poor physical and mental health have all come to constitute important aspects of the city's socio-economic inequalities that diverse sets of organisations in the city have attempted to address.

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6   Only 16 % of adults within the city have a balanced, healthy diet, while approximately 15% of the school children are obese. Depression and other mental health problems are attributable to diets with low nutritional value, while mortality rates in Manchester remain among the higher ones in the UK (Food Futures, 2007).

7   Approximately 1.1 million people in the city itself and 2.5 million in the conurbation.

8   According to the 2010 Index of multiple deprivation, Birmingham is the most deprived city in both income and employment deprivation, with 40% of its population living in 10% of the country's most deprived areas (Birmingham City Council, 2013a).

9   Currently above the national average and affecting 13% of the population.

10 Based on statistics for morning peak journeys, car driving currently amounts to 42.2 % of everyday travel, followed by buses with 29.2 %, rail with 27 %, and metro and cycling with less than 2 % (Centro, 2011).

The initiatives

In response to such crises, the alternative agro-food and mobility initiatives under investigation employ an array of alternative economic practices providing an alternative 'economic imaginary' (Jessop, 2008) based on saving both money and resources. Thus, by focusing on the specific areas of food and mobility, these initiatives aim to challenge the dominant agro-food and mobility regimes, and the socio-economic inequalities within them through the development of alternative economic relations. By doing so, they are simultaneously also intended to address the wider spectrum of socio-economic inequalities and suggest their own 'alternative innovations' in response to crises. Such attempts are also prevalent in relevant city council reports, which acknowledge the centrality of both food and mobility in tackling major socio-economic problems in both cities. As stated:

> The food system is complex and impacts on health, the environment, regeneration, social cohesion and the local economy. As a city we have a great opportunity not only to improve the food eaten here but in doing so to contribute to many other priorities for the city and so improve the health and quality of life of our residents. (Food futures, 2007)

> Our planning system penalises people who cannot afford a car... As we take the difficult decisions necessary to tackle the impact of the global recession we are determined to do so fairly, protecting the most vulnerable and prioritising equal opportunities for all. (Birmingham City Council, 2013b)

Yet despite their common aspirations of challenging the dominant agro-food and mobility systems and inequalities prevailing within them, these initiatives vary in terms of the economic practices they employ in order to meet their common goals and objectives. Based on the specific characteristics attributed to the term 'alternative' in the introduction above, and in particular the specific understanding of the term 'alternative' in relation to economies, this paper focuses on the investigation of a diversity of alternative economic practices that relate to the area of food and mobility. These practices are not only related to initiatives that engage in non-monetary or low-budget informal economies and networks of exchange. They also refer to initiatives that, despite their situatedness in formal market economies and participation in money-based economic relations of exchange, are developing alternative ways of going beyond a narrow understanding of money, labour and commodity and their overarching association with the accomplishment of capitalist, profit-maximising economic relations. Thus, based on these criteria and for the purposes of this paper, the initiatives under investigation are divided into three different categories:

a. Citizens' initiatives:

    i. Citizen-led initiatives set up by local community members who are interested in permaculture and the principles of organic agriculture and undertake, organise or support several community food-growing projects across the city (Interview RS290708).

    ii. Citizen-led initiatives set up by local community members interested in developing more collective ways of commuting within the city through car-sharing schemes (Interview AG210613).

b. Workers' co-operatives:

    i. A workers' food co-operative, owned and run by its workforce, which supplies fresh produce on a daily basis and sells local, organic and fair-trade products, provides employment for its members and people with learning disabilities, and encourages co-operation with other local businesses and co-operatives while donating 5% of its turnover to projects consistent with its principles (Unicorn, 2013).

    ii. A workers' bicycle co-operative, owned and run by its workforce, which repairs and sells discarded or donated bikes or bike parts, while offering maintenance or training courses for individuals and supporting the creation of self-help support networks through the organisation of tool clubs in its workshops (Bike Foundry, 2013).

c. Third sector organisations:

    i. A social enterprise initiated by the community voluntary sector, that aims to engage mental health service users, young people and the community in healthy local food permaculture growing, cooking and retailing activities and thus provide work-based learning opportunities, and 'moving-on' services which help people improve skills, confidence and overall health in order to join mainstream society (HeLF, 2007; Manchester Mind, 2013).

    ii. A social enterprise that aims to engage vulnerable parts of the population – such as people with specific learning needs and mental distress, the unemployed, women and ethnic minorities – in cycling-related activities as a means of delivering mental health wellbeing and recovery, as well as enhancing their future learning, training and employment and sustainable opportunities in the city (Cycle Chain, 2013; Urban Cycles, 2013).

    iii. A charity that runs many different sustainability projects, including a mobile greengrocers providing affordable, fresh produce in areas of Manchester with low levels of social and physical mobility or access to fresh foods (MERCi, 2012; Interview MB160109).

    iv. A charity that runs different projects in order to make slow forms of transport more inclusive, accessible and easier for larger parts of the population (Sustrans, 2014; Interview LD110713).

Their moral economic practices

Some of the initiatives listed above engage in alternative, low-budget economic practices that go beyond a monolithic focus on money as the only means for accomplishing economic relations of exchange. In Manchester and Birmingham, both community food-growing projects and car-sharing schemes provide the space for saving money and resources through the development of informal networks of exchange and a 'gift economy' (Mauss, 1967) embraced by relations of mutual aid and trust, and a feeling of reciprocity and mutual obligation to return a gift or service of at least comparable value.

In Manchester, for example, citizens overcome the conventions of mainstream economies by engaging in more co-operative ways of agro-food production and consumption, and a culture of a peer to peer unmediated economy based on mutual self-help support and sharing of food which becomes a product of communal effort. Or as one of the representatives of a citizens' initiative involved in setting up food growing projects puts it:

> If you have an overabundance of produce, you are not allowed to sell anything that's grown on an allotment. This is good in one way because it encourages people to think outside the box about what they can do to store vegetables or work in a more public community-spirited way and swap things. (Interview HSK020909)

Along similar lines, in Birmingham, in times of economic recession, citizens develop their own informal networks and arrangements of car-sharing whose reward usually appears in other, non-monetary, material and non-material, terms of goods or services. As one of the people involved in an informal network of car-sharing explained:

> Probably there is no financial gain; it is like a network of friends and your friend is not going to say you owe me £72.86 for fuel this year. It might well be that... we just have a meal or when we're out I'll drop in a bottle of wine or they look after my son on a Saturday so it's just things that friends do. (Interview MS180713)

In this manner, the different materialities and services involved in the accomplishment of the above economic relations of exchange help us attribute a more inclusive meaning to the notion of 'commodity' that can go beyond its situatedness in profit-maximising economic relations for the production of surplus value. As described above, in the case of community food growing projects, food products become objects of informal, non-monetary barter economic relations of exchange that extend beyond the conventions of formal trading relations and their primary focus on the use of money. In the case of car-

sharing, the lift is a service whose return is offered in the form of other non-measurable goods or services – such as a bottle of wine or baby-sitting. In both cases, by participating in such economic relations, both objects and services constitute commodities that get re-contextualised around their use value, whereas their exchange value goes beyond its dominant interpretation as monetary value and its usual association with profit maximisation.

Due to the wider spectrum of associations attributed to these practices, commodities are also attached with a wider set of 'sign values'. The latter is prevalent in the new forms of socialities and friendships emerging in the development of community food-growing and car-sharing practices in both cities. In a way, such alternative economic practices not only constitute means for saving money through an engagement in the above-described informal networks of non-monetary exchange relations, but also provide the space for social relations and the empowerment of local communities.

More specifically, in Manchester, social isolation constituted a major incentive for the materialisation of various community food-growing projects which then became pivotal for the enhancement of social cohesion and community development in various areas within the city. Thus, through their active participation in various community food-growing initiatives, residents of local neighbourhoods get to know one another, create new friendships and become socially integrated in their local communities. As one of Manchester's community food activists described:

> … in an area like Hulme, when I started to talk about social isolation, not only do we lack a food culture, we just lack a community culture generally. So by setting up local food produce it's a great way of getting people to have exercise and engage with each other – it's a social integration and it's also they get to grow food and eat healthy food. (Interview RS300708)

In Birmingham, car-sharing has also become a means of developing new forms of sociality, sociability and common belonging. Thus, in this case, the 'commodity' of the car acquires a 'sign value' associated with its capacity to not only help individuals engage in new social relations and interactions, but also to develop their social skills and links between each other. Thus, while sharing journeys, people not only find the opportunity to make new friends, but also to sustain friendships that have initially been constructed around the practice of car-sharing. The personal story of one of the network's active members is indicative of this particular character of the practice of car-sharing:

> The key thing is getting on with the person you are sitting next to and we get on very well… A[] and I started doing it a couple of years ago, it might even be three years… we have now become friends and basically we have a bloody good laugh.

> Driving back home is now the time for catching up with another friend for that 20 minute drive in the morning; it might be quite personal... that's the time we can relax and have a personal conversation. (Interview AG210613)

However, as discussed above, such alternative economic characteristics also go beyond a narrow association with non-monetary economic relations of exchange. The emergence of food- and cycling-related workers' co-operatives in Manchester and Birmingham provides some evidence of the significance of other initiatives which, despite their engagement in the mainstream market economy and currency system, can contribute to tackling socio-economic inequalities through a reconfiguration of the 'economic' and an attachment of a diverse set of social and cultural meanings to their economic practices. Thus, even though such initiatives participate in conventional economic relations of exchange, money and commodities become socially and culturally re-defined due to the wider socio-political meanings and associations attributed to them by their users (Thrift and Leyshon, 1999; Baudrillard, 1972). In the case of the food co-operative in Manchester, for example, the retailers' purchasing and trading practices of 'fair trade' products embody expressions of an ethics of care and solidarity towards disadvantaged proximal and distant, human and non-human, others that might be also subjects of global economic crises and injustices. As stated in their principles:

> We trade preferentially in products which follow the 'Fair Trade' ethos and alert our customers to the problems of cash crop agriculture. We are concerned that much of world trade is to the disadvantage of poorer nations with a consequence for people's health and lives. We aim to trade in a manner which supports a sustainable world environment and economy. (Unicorn, 2014)

However, a similar ethic of responsibility, social solidarity and care is not only reflected through the active participation of such initiatives in practices of 'fairtrade'. In various cases, the marketplace provides the space for challenging the dominant market economies not only through the establishment of more humanised trade relationships, but also through networks of co-operation and common belonging, and moral obligations of mutual assistance and work-sharing. The economic organisation of a co-operative is indicative of such a direction. As discussed, both co-operatives, run and owned by their workforce, provide the space for the articulation of an alternative economic vision in which food and mobility become the means for establishing not only fairer working conditions, but also a more socially just, non-hierarchical economic system based on the principles of community self-governance and collective ownership (Unicorn, 2013; Bike Foundry, 2013). As said by one of the representatives of the cycling co-operative in Birmingham:

> [We] started with a love of cycling, a desire to remove ourselves from wage labour over which we had no control... Together we wanted to create something that went beyond the restraints of '9-5'. A radical, non-hierarchical workers' cooperative seemed like the obvious solution.... Our benchmark of success is not only financial viability, but making sure that we remain a democratic workplace which is rewarding to work in, and that we are contributing to the social revolution. (Radical routes, 2012)

In this way, a gradual decommodification of the labouring processes is manifested not only in the rejection of money as the primary goal of action, but also in the development of more equitable processes of participation and decision making. As explained in the case of the cycling co-operative, all members obtain an equal share and contribution to the ownership and running of the business, and, thus, become central in the performance of an 'emancipatory politics' (Habermas, 1987) for community governance that can go beyond traditional hierarchies, dependencies and restraints. The marketplace becomes the socio-political space for the manifestation of a 'purposive political act' of the self-reflexive individual for self-control and community self-governance (Giddens, 1991; Szerszynski, 2005). The active and equitable participation of retailers in these alternative, self-governed labouring processes becomes an expression of a more collective 'project identity' (Castells, 1997) that, as described above, aspires to lead to a 'revolutionary' joint political action for the pursuit of a wider socio-economic transformation in times of crises and economic recession.

A similar observation can also be made with regard to various citizens' participation as voluntary labour in different agro-food and mobility practices. Their voluntary work in the above food and cycling co-operatives, but also in most charities and social enterprises under investigation, is vital for the future sustainability of such initiatives. Their active involvement in these initiatives becomes not only a manifestation of a personal 'life politics' of the contemporary self-reflexive individual (Giddens, 1991), but also an expression of an ethics of solidarity and care towards initiatives that aim to challenge the dominant economic system. In a way, it constitutes another form of a 'purposive political act' through which an individual's personal and lifestyle choices of volunteering become a step towards the articulation of a project for a not only personal, but also greater societal transformation that can tackle social inequalities and environmental injustices within the agro-food and mobility systems, and beyond (see Szerszynski, 2005; Horton, 2003). As one of the volunteers working for one of Birmingham's cycling charities said:

> I like the fact that it's environmental... I like to work collectively with other people for a better society and environment. As a volunteer, I am learning to work in a way that is more fair and equal. I help people to walk and cycle more of their

everyday journeys. And this makes me feel better... I have an impact on the community. (Interview BL 210613)

However, voluntary labour is not only part of an enactment of a collective project identity on behalf of citizens and consumers. Aspects of labour decommodification through voluntary, non-wage labour have also been prevalent in other third sector organisations within both cities. With a vision of responding to the multiple economic crises, these alternative economic organisations engage in a wider set of agro-food and mobility practices which are used as a means for social inclusion of 'unemployed' or other 'economically inactive' parts of the population (Gibson-Graham, 2006). By acknowledging the possibly elitist nature of the above described labour processes, their aim is to transform voluntary labour into a means of ameliorating socio-economic inequalities and securing equal opportunities for the economically deprived parts of the population.

For example, in both social enterprises, mental health service users, people with sensory or other learning disabilities, and rehabilitating offenders constitute voluntary labour for the accomplishment of various agro-food and mobility-related practices – such as growing, cooking and distributing food, but also repairing and selling bicycles – whose commodities become integrated in the mainstream market economy. By involving vulnerable parts of the population, these alternative socio-material practices not only contribute to a more egalitarian and socially inclusive organisation of local economies, but also to the establishment of a more humanised trading system whose commodities become objects for the expression of solidarity and support towards disadvantaged others. In doing so, their commodities also reflect a wider set of 'sign values' (Baudrillard, 1972), or what one of the interviewees called 'a fair price' (Interview MB160109), which becomes associated with the wider social visions, purposes and goals of their projects for social inclusion and justice. Or as one of the representatives of a social enterprise in Manchester describes it:

> It was a good idea to create more opportunities for mental health service users... to learn how to cook differently, work in cafes, grow food... [they] just have the therapeutic element of being outside and growing... we are trying to make it inclusive for people who have certain needs, mental health needs and can't always work in mainstream jobs.... (Interview RP190808)

Thus, despite their association with the mainstream economy, third sector organisations contribute to a reconceptualisation of monetary economic transactions as morally justified actions (Boltanski and Thevenot, 1999) that also succeed in going beyond the natural habitats of affluent consumers. By engaging people from disadvantaged communities in an array of socio-material agro-food practices involving skill and judgement, these organisations have played a significant role in not only enhancing community engagement, but also in

tackling socio-economic inequalities through the provision of equal access to food, services, employment and educational opportunities. Manchester's mobile grocers, for example, has been set up to provide affordable, fresh fruit and vegetables to residents living in food deserts throughout the city. By aiming to reach the most vulnerable and socially deprived parts of the population, this initiative plays a pivotal role in the gradual decommodification (Sayer, 2003), but also gradual resocialisation of the economic processes. Residents of different food deserts not only have access to fresh food, but also obtain access to knowledge about different varieties of plants, fruits and vegetables, as well as techniques for cooking and growing their own food. In this way, the marketplace becomes the space for the exchange of knowledge and ideas, but also for empowering local communities and establishing new social relations of mutual aid and trust between retailers and consumers. As one of the representatives of the mobile grocers put it:

> Some of our customers don't see another person for a whole week... when they come on the van and they have a chat with the driver and they haven't actually been out of the house for a week... it's more for people's mental well-being that they actually have someone to talk to and it's a regular face, it's not just whichever person is on the check-out looking miserable... it's a natural interaction. (Interview MB160109)

Thus, community building and social inclusion become central in the organisation of such initiatives – a fact also demonstrated in the case of cycling training courses in Birmingham. Acknowledging the socially exclusive character of the current mobility system, such initiatives mainly target people who have been adversely affected by the consequences of recent economic crises. In doing so, they aim to use cycling as a means for addressing socio-economic inequalities within the mobility system and beyond. As the representative of a social enterprise that supports cycling in cities said:

> At the moment one of our real cautions is that cycling is becoming increasingly elitist... we particularly have a trust in work with non-traditional groups... people who could deliver the highest level of social impact... people who are on low-income [and] will spend a fifth of their income travelling to and from work....so they are service industry employees... people who clean offices... chamber maids in hotels... all these people live within a cycleable distance, so argument would be they ought to be the priority; we need to forget about affluent suburbs and focus deliberately on that point; not of the highest need but of high social impact. (Interview AS280613)

Thus, reminding us of the class hierarchies that are embedded in contemporary societies, such initiatives become harbingers for the creation of new spaces of 'social centrality' where ideas of the good society are put into practice (Hetherington, 1998). By engaging a wider spectrum of the society in cycling

practices, they aim to contribute to the establishment of a fairer and more equitable society in which all members can have equal access to goods, services and opportunities. For example, as explained above, by providing affordable cycling equipment as well as training sessions to economically deprived parts of the population, they aim to increase those groups' accessibility to their work or other working opportunities which are currently proving prohibitive because of their excessive travel distance and expenses. Thus, by doing so, they attribute a more inclusive aspect to such alternative economies through their attempt to not only create a more socially just and inclusive mobility system, but also use it as a means for a wider socio-economic transformation through the provision of equal opportunities for engagement in the city's social and economic life.

The alternative agro-food and mobility practices studied here thus unfold various combinations of characteristics that can help us speak in the language of the 'moral economy' and, more specifically, the particular 'moral economy' that is embedded in such practices[11]. They provided clues to a moral economy that, in the case of the community food growing and car-sharing citizens' initiatives, goes beyond money as the primary unit of exchange in order to establish relations of mutual self-help support, sharing and co-operation among proximal others. But, it also provides a medium for the development of new socialities and friendships which, in specific cases of socially deprived areas, can also contribute to the enhancement of social cohesion, community engagement and common belonging. However, they also provided evidence of a 'moral economy' that, despite its engagement with the mainstream economy, can become a vehicle for the pursuit of wider social benefits, goals and objectives. In the case of the food and cycling co-operatives, for example, the use of fairtrade products became an expression of ethics of care and solidarity towards both proximal and distant others, whereas the introduction of non-hierarchical processes of participation in the running and ownership of the economic organisations manifests an emancipatory politics for the establishment of fairer working conditions, self-governance and determination. Both become expressions of a more collective 'project identity' (Castells, 1997) which, as in the case of the voluntary labour used by different charities and social enterprises, aspires to lead to a wider socio-economic transformation based on a more egalitarian and inclusive organisation of social and economic lives – a fact that also becomes manifest in the provision of equal access to different goods and services as well as employment and educational opportunities, for vulnerable and economically inactive parts of the population.

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11   For a further analysis on 'The moral economy of civic food networks in Manchester', see also Psarikidou and Szerszynski (2012b).

Rethinking innovation through a moral economy lens

The above analysis of the 'moral economy' of alternative agro-food and mobility practices encourages us to develop an alternative approach to innovation that can challenge its dominant association with an 'economising logic' (Weber, 1978). By focussing on the alternative economic characteristics of such practices, it encourages us to develop an alternative conceptualisation of the term that aims to situate innovation in the particular 'moral economic' characteristics, symbolic meanings and social values attributed to their practices.

As discussed above, despite the centrality of innovation in driving socio-economic change, a dominant understanding of the term has contributed to its direct association with constant economic growth through profit maximisation and laboratory techno-science (Felt et al., 2007; Levidow and Neubauer, 2012). However, such narrow conceptualisations are not without internal contradictions: first, despite its attempt to respond to socio-economic crises, innovation results in perpetuating a particular economic system which has been widely accused of being one of the causes of such crises; second, despite its intention to contribute to future transformation and change, innovation results in becoming a top-down, socially exclusive 'conservative project' (Suchman and Bishop, 2000) mainly contributing to the reproduction of the existing socio-economic order which it aims to address.

Such a problematic opens up some space for exploring alternative frameworks for conceptualising innovation around some other, currently marginalised, small-scale, bottom-up practices. As discussed above, the concepts of 'distributed' (Felt et al., 2007), 'open', 'user-centred' (Von Hippel, 2005), 'consumer' (Urry, 2013) and 'disruptive' (Tyfield et al., 2010; Geels and Schot, 2007) innovations have been used in order to suggest a more inclusive meaning of the term through the establishment of more collective forms of participation and a further democratisation of its processes. Such concepts have also provided inspiration for this paper to develop its own alternative framework for conceptualising innovation through the particular lens of the political economic discourse of the 'moral economy': a framework which has helped us realise the moral economic character of all innovation processes – a fact which also becomes reflected in the discourse on crisis resolution that is commonly used by different innovators in order to provide moral justification of different innovation processes and practices. By doing so, it has also encouraged us to investigate innovation through the lens of a particular 'moral economy', this of some small-scale alternative agro-food and mobility practices. It has urged us to re-think innovation by situating it in other economies and the other, non-monetary, social and symbolic values and meanings attributed to them.

As seen above, the alternative agro-food and mobility practices in Manchester and Birmingham engage in an array of alternative economic practices that seek to provide their own response to crises and the socio-economic inequalities related to them. More specifically, by employing multiple economic forms – monetary and non-monetary, based on productive, reproductive or voluntary labour, based on formal or informal networks of exchange, the exchange of both material and immaterial goods and services, the articulation of use, exchange, but also other socio-cultural and 'sign' values and meanings attributed to money and commodities – such initiatives constitute part of an alternative 'economic imaginary' (Jessop, 2008) intended to provide alternative solutions in times of crisis. Thus, by doing so, such initiatives provide some fertile ground for an alternative conceptualisation of innovation that is situated in the particular moral economy of alternative economic practices: an innovation that can be organised around relations of sharing and co-operation, social cohesion, community development and self-governance, an ethic of care and solidarity towards proximal and distant others, of equality and social inclusion of the disadvantaged. They provide clues to the potential of other small-scale, bottom-up practices to constitute alternative innovation practices. And, in doing so, they help us re-think innovation by situating it in a more inclusive understanding of the 'economic' (Gibson-Graham, 1996; 2006) and the particular moral economic characteristics (Sayer, 2000; Booth, 1994; Thompson, 1971; Scott 1976 etc.) and the specific sets of values and relations (Baudrillard, 1972; Appadurai, 1994; Mauss, 1967; Graeber, 2001 etc.) – economic, social, cultural, environmental – attributed to them.

However, it is important not to overstate the extent to which the above practices can currently constitute alternative innovation practices. Despite the significant 'moral economic' aspects attributed to them, in many occasions, both agro-food and mobility practitioners expressed concerns about the initiatives' future vitality. Despite their attempts to reach the most vulnerable and socio-economically excluded parts of the population, many of them remain 'elite practices' (Birtchnell and Caletrio, 2013), manifestations of an individualistic, middle class life-political project of transformation that also remain exclusive towards parts of the local populations. Also, according to others, some of these practices embrace high-budget aspects, usually hidden in the economic organisation of the initiatives and expressed in the lack of financial and policy support towards their practices. Thus, future research needs to address these questions that appear crucial for exploring the future potential of these practices to go beyond the specific lock-ins of the current economic system. It needs to investigate the ways such initiatives can go beyond a 'niche' level (Geels and Schot, 2007) and establish an alternative regime that can transform their alternative 'economic imaginary' (Jessop, 2008) into a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' (Merton, 1948) which

can also succeed in shaping future socio-economic realities in its own image. In other words, it needs to explore the potential of such innovations to constitute long-term 'sustainable innovations' (Urry, 2011; 2013) that will be able to challenge the lock-ins of the existing systems.

However, the above analysis provides some space for rethinking innovation through alternative agro-food and mobility practices. In particular, by focusing on the alternative-economic characteristics of these practices, it contributes to rethinking innovation through a moral economy lens. By pointing to the potential of alternative economic practices to constitute alternative innovation practices, it opens up some space for challenging the dominant understanding of innovation usually contributing to the reproduction of the existing socio-economic order (Suchman and Bishop, 2000). By situating innovation in the moral and diverse economic characteristics of different socio-material practices, it encourages us to develop a more holistic and inclusive understanding of the term and explore the innovation potential of other, currently marginalised micro-practices. In doing so, it can also provide some space for opening up new opportunities for enhancing the future vitality of such initiatives. By highlighting the particular moral economic aspects, as well as the wider benefits deriving from the social relations and other, non-economic values related to their practices, it can have an impact on a future re-orientation of official support and funding towards those 'other' projects and initiatives which mostly remain silenced and ignored by current research and policy agendas on innovation.

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On the meaning of popular representations of low-budget urban practices in Poland: The case of cultural translation[*]

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abstract

In recent years, the Polish mainstream media have engaged in commenting on diverse economising urban practices including balcony gardening, street universities, barter systems, handicraft, food collectives and so forth. This paper explores the manner in which these practices are represented in the Polish popular press and online media stories, and how this can aid our understanding of Poland's contemporary consumer formations, especially concerning the relationship between past and present portrayed. Various interconnected reasons have been cited as a background for their current popularity, including a valued return to tradition, anti-consumerist sentiments, their fashionable status in Western capitalist economies, and the financial and social rewards they offer. Our analysis reveals complex ways in which 'traditional' and familiar domestic activities such as knitting, gardening, repairing, or popular social institutions from the past such as milk bars, are being recast as socially valuable and 'cool', and generally associated with visible, choice- and value-based practices of young, highly educated people with a high level of cultural capital. We explain this ongoing semiotic process by the concept of 'cultural translation' (Lotman, 1990), highlighting some of the tensions in the way popular media are implicated in a different valuation of identical practices, and thus in social change. We also reflect on the practice of cultural translation as experienced in the course of collaborating on this paper.

Introduction

How are urban low-budget practices represented in Polish popular media – in a context where conditions of scarcity are living memories in times of relative, if unevenly distributed affluence? And most of all, what can an analysis of these representations tell us about the production of meanings with regard to contemporary urban consumption practices in Poland?

This paper uses a discourse analysis of media representations to discuss the diversity, salient aspects and tensions surfacing in and by way of media depictions of low-budget practices in the Poland of today. The questions guiding our analysis arose from a review of the literature and concern the connections between past and present practices, discourses of thrift and austerity, and the relevance of thrift-related skills in economising practices. The sense of historicity in popular discourse is conceptually significant: understanding the past is an essential requirement for shaping the future of our society (Turraine, 1977). We were interested in examining the motivations provided for current economising practices, how they are being positioned in relation to Poland's past experience and present developments as a post-socialist economy, the skills they entail, and the degree to which 'urban low-budget' practices are represented as new or long-standing, adopted within or across generations, portrayed as ordinary or fashionably 'cool'. To answer these questions, we applied a critical discourse analysis to media representations of low-budget practices across popular press and online media stories, producing a variety of representative examples and themes discussed in this paper.

We consider our analysis useful as a diagnostic if preliminary tracing of the contours of today's popular imagining of urban low-budget practices emerging in Poland. The paper contributes to the growing international thrift/low-budget scholarship by providing a complementary perspective from the relatively under-analysed post-socialist context undergoing transformation here. This reveals and theorises a curious mix of economising practices distributed along class lines and based on choice or necessity, while morphing 'old' socialist into 'new' aspirational and trendy lifestyles associated with 'collaborative', 'low-budget', 'value-led' or 'eco-consumption' aspects. The argument stresses the role of dynamic semiotic processes in the media as an important agent by which low-budget practices are inscribed with value and meaning as reflective and productive of the social context in which they occur. We argue that translation is a mechanism through which these practices are made sense of and shaped in and by way of media representations. The theoretical model of translation applied here opens up novel possibilities for analysing low-budget practices in Poland and other countries by a textual, inter-cultural and comparative reading – treating

low-budget practices as part of the dynamic and interactive local and international system.

The paper is structured in three parts. It begins by bringing together the English- and Polish-language literature to situate our analysis. Polish literature on contemporary low-budget practices is emerging, providing us with a timely opportunity to put it in relation with the English-language literature on thrift. We will then briefly discuss the experience of working on this paper as an insightful but challenging act of translation. The second part will discuss several representative examples of Polish low-budget practices with identified key themes, aspects and tensions. The final discussion section then theorises these Polish examples by applying Lotman's concept of translation (1990), and proposes directions for further research.

It is important to note in the introduction that consumption practices are specific and operate at the intersection of global, national and local influences. The Polish case is interesting as it contributes a perspective where the context has shaped economising practices in different ways than those familiar from developed capitalist economies in the West, where much of the extant literature on thrift and low-budget is localised. A country with roughly 40 million people (not including the large diasporic community), Poland can be considered as a peripheral cultural space defined by a minor language and as an important economic player in Central Eastern Europe at the same time. It has a relatively large market showing an economic growth of 3.9 % in 2010, one of the better results amongst the stagnating economies of other European countries. Poland's recent history is significant, with the communist period (1945-1989) being associated with relentless negotiations of political, social and material constraints in households. This period conjures up long shopping queues, an inefficient ration stamp system, and the now nostalgically evoked relationships based on necessarily strong, informal social ties, collaboration and trust, crossing over into underground economies. In a situation of material scarcity, family and neighbourhood relationships were an important currency allowing products and services to be obtained and exchanged. Imaginative household management, thrift and industriousness were commonplace, based on and begetting skills and competences. The transition to a capitalist market economy in 1989 kicked off a process of economic growth with the availability of new consumer markets, resources and products. Gaining membership of the European Union in 2004 gave a further boost to the Polish economy, but the country's GDP per capita remains significantly below the EU average, with unemployment rates continuing to rank amongst the highest in the Community, despite economic catch-up strategies. Poland's economy was resilient up to the global financial

crisis; a steady economic growth had seen the country's GDP rise to 4.3 % in 2011, and then drop to 2.0 % in 2012.

Today, a sense of nostalgia for the communist period and its slight social disparities is especially prevalent amongst the older generations. The transition has entailed a range of unintended negative consequences, including steadily growing economic stratification, accompanied by palpable social and political unease between the haves and have-nots. In Poland's popular discourse, this situation is reflected by references to 'winners and losers' of the transition. In the early 90s, a great number of state-run enterprises were privatised, causing mass layoffs. Former historical divisions between a 'Poland A' of large cities versus a 'Poland B' of small towns and villages not only survived, but even increased after the changeover. The rise of the private enterprise sector with foreign investment has mostly strengthened the economic performance in already well-developed regions. Academic literature notes that less educated parts of the population, living in deprived or rural areas where conditions are not as good as in urban environments, were further disadvantaged by the structural changes, branding them as 'transition losers' (Jarosz 2005; Parysek and Wdowicka, 2002).

Academic contexts

The context of the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis has led to a growth in thrift, 'austerity' and ethical consumption-related literature addressing different economic, cultural and historical aspects of contemporary economising practices (for a synthesis, see Podkalicka and Tang, 2014). Rebecca Bramall (2013), for example, highlights the complicated ways in which the past feeds into contemporary forms of 'austerity culture' in a context of British popular culture. James D. Hunter and Joshua J. Yates (2011) offer a historical account of the significance of thrift in America's cultural life – arguing for an expanded understanding of thrift as a philosophy for 'the good life', rather than a set of practical tools used to get by. There's also been a proliferation of cultural studies on public initiatives and everyday practices related to thrift across cultural contexts, including food cooperatives, 'permablitz' (Lewis, 2014), craft collectives (Orton-Johnson, 2014), shared accommodation (Bialski, 2012), or mending (König, 2013). Collectively, these works elaborate on how traditional activities such as repair or knitting, once associated with necessity, utility and the private domain of (often gendered) household work, are evolving into expressive, social, leisure and value-motivated practices heavily mediated by digital technologies. These trends reflect a shift from the participation in formal political structures and institutions towards 'the growing politicisation of life and lifestyle practices' in everyday life (Lewis and Potter, 2011: 5).

The geographical literature has also touched upon thrift as a household consumption practice, for example in relation to commonplace activities in the reuse and recirculation of material goods (e.g. Gibson et al., 2013; Lane and Gorman-Murray, 2011, for Australia). Empirical studies, including those from post-socialist contexts, emphasise the important role of skills and social networks in practices of thrift and economising. Focusing on Poland (and Slovakia), Alison Stenning et al. (2010) have shown how skills and circuits of exchange developed in the past (i.e. under scarcity) now coexist with new skills learnt in response to capitalist markets and infrastructures. For instance, 'traditional' gardening and cooking skills and local shopping routines continue to persist alongside 'new shopping skills' associated with bargain hunting in hypermarket promotions (Stenning et al., 2010: 173). Similarly, in her study of consumption practices in post-Soviet Estonia, Marget Keller identifies thrift and related skills as part of 'sˇoppamine' (recreational shopping), characterised by a considered, often laborious calculation aimed at efficiency (2010: 73). Indeed, recent theories have identified skills and capacities as one of the salient dimensions of thrift in English-language literature (Podkalicka and Potts, 2013).

The interest in 'new' low-budget practices is gaining popularity in Polish scholarship. Ewa Majdecka's examines a present 'not-to-buy trend' in Poland, identifying the under 30 year-olds (mostly women) and Internet users as its main participants. While practices of exchanging (e.g. clothes), borrowing (e.g. handbags), mending and remaking objects (e.g. furniture) seem familiar, Majdecka (2013: 150) argues that they are different – motivated not by limited access to consumer goods, but by lifestyle and anti-consumerist values and economising, with the Internet playing an important role as a facilitator. 'Depending on interpretations', Majdecka concludes, 'we can talk about [the not-to-buy trend] as continuous with 'old traditions' or a common name for different phenomena and practices' (Majdecka, 2013: 150). Agata Grabowska (2010) focuses on Polish practices of renting goods and services, mainly including citizens aged between 25 and 45 in the 'borrowers' demographic, mostly women living in large and medium-sized cities, and driven by various changing motivations summarised as 'chic and cheap', 'aspirational-elegant', 'gadget-lovers' and 'eco loco'. Grabowka argues that 'the Polish borrowers are different to the Western ones in that they are often ashamed of borrowing', and that 'the eco motivation is relatively rare; tends to occur in declarations'.

There are also emergent studies of Polish food cooperatives as examples of new social movements facilitating access to healthy, organic, local, affordable food and creating active communities amongst their members – especially for the younger generation (Bilewicz and Potkańska, 2014: 2). Krystyna Romaniszyn (2011) takes a broader view and offers a critique of the rise of alternative

consumption under conditions of surplus in today's Poland, arguing that, after years of limited access to goods, it is very hard for Polish society to restrain its consumption. In one of the contributions, Agata Neale suggests that 'green consumerism', for example, marks a reorientation towards a new paradigm where the emphasis is no longer on the quantity, but on the quality of products as a key driver for consumers, referring to it as 'the ethics of restraint in consumption' (Neale, 2011: 115).

This emergent work adds to the established analysis of consumption practices under the communist regime (Łaciak, 2005; Sztompka and Boguni-Borowska, 2008; Romaniszym 2004, 2011; Adamczyk, 2012), which views economising practices (or thrift) as a necessary response to the 'shortage economy'. Poland's transition to a capitalist economy and the attendant consumption trends are largely theorised as a shift from restraint to over-consumption. As Bogdan Mróz observes, for example:

> The advancement of sustainable consumption in Poland is a tall order indeed. After decades of ascetic consumption, the Polish consumers will not be easily persuaded to exercise self-restraint, the more so as the world of industry, commerce, media and advertisement sends them compelling signals with enticement to increased consumption. This constitutes a major challenge for central government, local authorities and consumer-education NGOs, while also providing them with room for initiatives and actions to further sustainable consumption. (Mróz, 2010: 14)

Heidrun Fammler (2011) notes that for Poland and other Central Eastern European countries in transition, the ideas of low-budget, value-oriented and sustainable consumption can appear to conflict with the priority given to economic growth and unlimited consumption, with a discourse of desire arguably dominant in post-Soviet countries after years of scarcity and limited access to market goods.

To interrogate media representations of low-budget practices in Poland, we build on this diverse literature, especially the works by Stenning et al. and Keller for post-socialist contexts. The discussion of 'ambivalent valuations of the general process of transition from scarcity to abundance, central control to individual volition, relative equality to growing economic stratification' (Keller, 2010: 80) is a relevant context to our study. So is the framework of 'diverse economies' (Gibson-Graham, 2006), which much of the social research reviewed is indebted to. Our analysis is influenced by a useful broadening of conceptions of thrift and low-budget practices beyond the traditional categories of need and scarcity to an expression of desirable and aspirational lifestyles. This conceptualisation is particularly important in relation to Polish consumption patterns, where the

choice- or value-led dimensions of consumption are emerging in, of interest for and slowly being theorised by Polish scholarship.

However, despite the growing interest in new international consumption trends related to thrift and low-budget practices, there are relatively few up-to-date studies from post-socialist contexts undergoing significant transformation. This article fills this gap by offering a diagnostic account of the semiotic field and the ways in which contemporary low-budget practices are negotiated and mediated in Poland. Our discourse-analysis approach is valuable in exploratory and broadly comparative terms – showcasing a diversity of practices and their emergent meanings in relation to one another, informed by convoluted local and international cultural influences. This textual reading of themes, aspects and tensions usefully complements the class-based analyses of thrift-related practices familiar in Western contexts (e.g. Williams, 2002) or as rooted in post-socialist conditions (Stenning et al., 2010). The broad textual mapping of the field can serve as a basis for future empirical studies in Poland, as well as comparisons with international examples. The article contributes to an essential understanding of 'low-budget practices' by noting culturally specific as well as unique aspects of the Polish case, while proposing a general theoretical framework of translation (i.e. a schema for explaining a set of historical and interactive cultural processes – Lotman, 1990) for thinking about new urban low-budget formations.

Methodology

Our study[1] was based on a critical discourse analysis of media representations of low-budget practices in Poland. We adopted the concept of a critical discourse analysis centred on three dimensions including the use of language, transfer of ideas and processes of social interaction to identify the state of knowledge, the hierarchy of values, opinions and attitudes, assumptions, culture and pragmatics of communication typical for a specific time, place and situation (van Dijk, 2001). Applied to media representations, this helps to uncover the vectors of the public debate and popular discourse on 'low-budget' practices. Following the media and communication approach, we understand popular press stories as representations of 'the ways in which our cultural and language group undertakes its particular repackaging of the real' (Bowles, 2006: 75). These

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1   The idea for the study emerged during the participation in a series of workshops run by the 'Low-Budget Urbanity' research network Hamburg, March 2013. The workshops provided the authors with an opportunity to discuss the shared interest in inter-cultural research into contemporary thrift and low-budget practices. The subsequent research and analysis were conducted in Poland and Australia.

mediated representations operate in a two-fold manner: they make sense of the social world they are connected to, and they have a constitutive potential as a discourse shaping the public imagination and social relationships. As 'meaning-generating mechanisms' (Lotman, 1990), texts are useful for revealing 'how people are making sense of the world' (McKee, 2001: 8). Seen from this perspective, the popular texts analysed by us are useful for understanding what kind of collective frameworks, discourses and local or international knowledge they mobilise (including the ones contained in the 'low budget' practitioners', activists' and experts' accounts they feature) as they dynamically mediate, reflect and shape the meaning of 'low-budget practices' in Poland's contemporary culture.

We conducted a broad search across popular press and online media stories (excluding fiction, TV lifestyle programming or social media self-presentations as beyond the scope of this paper) sourced from two databases: the newspaper archives at Warsaw University Library and the Google news archives, across multiple keywords. We chose to focus on the period following the Global Financial Crisis (2008-2013) that had seen the growth of the popular and academic interest in thrift practices. The material to be analysed was selected from various sources with different circulations and target audiences to include a wide range of representations and views. 'Gazeta Wyborcza', for example, is a popular daily newspaper, published in a print and an online version. With its focus on a progressive social perspective and interactive content including user forums and contests, 'Gazeta' has a significant readership amongst young, highly educated residents of metropolitan cities, playing an active part in co-shaping the consumer preferences in this market. Other articles analysed were published in different web portals dedicated to business (http://pierwszymilion.forbes.pl), politics, public affairs (www.natemat.pl,), science and technology (www.compu.pl), non-governmental organisations, and civil society (www.ngo.pl). We also analysed web portals providing local news to local communities (www.trojmiasto.pl, www.mmwarszawa.pl). While 'Gazeta Wyborcza' and the portal ngo.pl mostly cater to the middle class, web portals such as (www.trojmiasto.pl, www.mmwarszawa.pl) are also popular amongst blue-collar workers.

Our search turned up a range of texts covering various examples of low-budget practice, which we reviewed with regard to our research questions. Through the sampling process, we selected a dozen of articles and applied an *open coding* technique available in Atlas.ti. We coded texts to identify common, recurring themes and narratives. Upon reaching a saturation point where the narratives of 'low-budget' practices across different texts revealed similar and recurrent

patterns, we selected our examples as representative of the larger popular press representation of the topic.

Inter-cultural research: Challenges and opportunities

We conducted a discourse analysis of popular Polish-language texts, but the analysis itself and much of the critical literature underpinning it has been written in English. This created a range of analytical and practical problems because specific concepts have different meanings in English and Polish. Concepts such as 'thrift' are variously construed and used across different socio-economic contexts, making an act of translation not just necessary but often tricky. For example, 'thrift' and 'frugality' are often used interchangeably in English-language scholarship, to the dissatisfaction of scholars such as Evans (2011) who propose a clearer theoretical differentiation between the two. Even across major English-language countries such as the US, UK or Australia, the content and significance of either 'thrift' or 'frugality' will vary in the dominant discourse and vernacular. Take the example of the 'low-budget' descriptor, proposed as an organising category by this special issue to refer to a variety of observable practices that by and large do not require much in the way of financial capital. Being hard-pressed to apply this meta-term in the discussion presented here, we faced, like Iveson (2013), the challenge of theorising emergent, hugely diverse and multiple micro-scale urban practices. The term 'niskobudżetowa/y/e' does function in the Polish language, mostly in reference to 'tanie' (= 'cheap') but also more broadly as 'oszczednościowy' (= 'thrifty'). But the articles we analysed deploy varied concepts referring to motivations as diverse as 'money saving', 'thrift', 'industriousness', social justice, anti-consumerism or ecological awareness to express personal and collective values. One of our early reflections therefore concerned the manner in which we were to mobilise the idea of 'low-budget' and 'thrift' in writing about Polish examples. We were cognisant of overlapping ideas such as 'gospodarność' or 'oszczedność', both translated as 'thrift', and their presence in the Polish discourse of popular culture. There is also another recognisable and normalised term that refers to the popular attitude of 'kombinować' (Kusiak, 2012) in the Polish vernacular. Understood primarily as 'looking for a solution', according to the Polish Language Dictionary[2], it also has a strong colloquial meaning: to cleverly carry out plans, 'conduct suspicious or dishonest business', to put a spin on things. Undoubtedly tainted by negative connotations with practices bordering on the illegal and off the books, in its positive sense the term conveys a sense of entrepreneurial wit. Some of these connotations surfaced in the examples we used. The actual English word 'thrift'

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2   See definition at http://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/kombinowa%C4%87.

is very rarely used in the Polish mass media and if it is, mostly in reference to the notion of a 'thrift shop', but also in a recent hit song by independent musicians from the US. Other terms borrowed directly from the English language do apply in Polish popular discourse, such as 'freeganizm' (= 'freeganism'), 'freeshops' or 'secondhandy' (= 'secondhand' in relation to shops).

We are aware that 'well-travelled' concepts such as 'collaborative consumption', 'economy of engagement' or even 'middle class' cannot be taken at face value. We tried to critically reflect on their purchase in a Polish context by tapping into our own cultural understandings of the Polish situation, consulting, wherever possible, both Polish- and English-language literature, and offering a thick contextualisation. We acknowledge that this process is charged with intellectual uncertainties and frictions: having set out to explore popular representations of low-budget urban practices, we found ourselves spending a great deal of time deliberating over how this can be communicated accurately and meaningfully, translating back and forth between languages. All translations from Polish into English are ours.

The meaning of low budget practices in Poland

In this section we will focus on several representative examples from popular Polish writings to discuss their characteristics and significance.

Example 1: 'Uliczny uniwersytet' ('street university'): Sharing DIY skills and know-how

The new ways of valuing DIY skills are perfectly captured by the emergence and appeal of so-called 'street universities' hosted in squats throughout Poland. From the beginning of the 90's, squatting has become popular in Poland, with young people occupying abandoned buildings in Warsaw and other Polish cities as an expression of their disappointment with the results of the transition (Wróbel, 2013). Young activists, members of the 'Wilcza 30' (also the actual address of the squat) community, are running one of these Universities, 'Syrena', in Warsaw[3], offering free workshops for knitting, photography, bike repairing, Spanish lessons, degrowth discussion groups, and screen printing. Popular narratives of 'street unis' conjure up a participatory ethos of engagement and activism, presenting the appropriated physical spaces as community-led hubs where participants from all over the city can learn new skills, and think collaboratively and purposefully about sharing them with others. The discourse of sharing (rather than buying or individually owning new things) provides the pivot around

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3   See: http://www.syrena.tk/.

which their role is seen to revolve. They are depicted as empowering for the individual as well as the community: 'I like the fact that you can make something out of nothing, by myself. Some skills such as sewing and knitting are being transferred from generation to generation in the countryside, but in the cities this knowledge disappears' (Dubrowska, 2013).

Kamil Fajfer (2013) presents the history of another Warsaw-based squat called 'Elba', and the complex process of negotiation with local authorities concerning the option of renting the building for continuing the initiative, which was ultimately not crowned by success. The squat survived until March 2013 and hosted a free gym, a cafe, an indoor skate rink and a curriculum of workshop classes. Cumulatively, the image of Warsaw-based squats to emerge from their popular representations is that of an important political intervention in the urban space, where by reclaiming unutilised spaces, they can fill 'a certain cultural or even catering business gap' (Erbel in Władyka, 2012), and positively transform the social and cultural life of the city. Re-branded as 'street universities', they stand for a mix of somewhat romanticised community agency and governance, for an alternative educational space where skills can be exchanged informally and free of charge, and for a political potential, but at the same time also serve as a reminder of the limits of grassroots social mobilisation. Many of the skills and practices shared at the 'street uni' are arguably rooted in Polish tradition and commonly found amongst the older generations, but here they are 'packaged' as extending communicative abilities, as aiding decision-making and collaborative problem-solving – turning the university into a school for fashioning citizenship (Dubrowska, 2013).

The overall cultural value of squats in Warsaw is addressed in the following, if somewhat populist commentary, which we will discuss later on in our argument about the role of translation:

> We [Poles] do not have to imitate the 'other' – we have our own imagination. In thinking about local places, we don't have to look abroad but we need to strengthen the positive tendencies that have been emerging in recent years. It is no longer obvious that we need to look for examples from abroad. In Poland right now there are many initiatives aligned with our legislative system and offering responses to our imagination (Erbel in Władyka, 2012)

Example 2: Balcony gardening: Vegetable cultivation made 'cool'

Growing vegetables in the garden or on the balcony is a long-standing activity, but until recently, popular media in Poland considered this practice to be the province of highly skilled hobbyists. It was mostly discussed in niche hobby magazines such as 'Pod Osłonami - uprawy w szklarniach i tunelach' ('Under the

cover – cultivation in greenhouses and tunnels', 'Ogrodnik' ('The Gardener'), or 'Nowoczesny Sad' ('The Modern Orchard') catering to a very narrow group of enthusiasts rather than a broader audience. Our analysis revealed a subtle shift in how these practices are now being framed. For example, Urszula Jablońska (2013) writes: 'You become a balcony gardener incidentally. Everybody has a pot with basil or rosemary on the windowsill'. The actual activity requiring various levels of gardening competence (and portrayed as proceeding 'naturally' from growing basic herbs to tomatoes) is perhaps less noteworthy than the narratives that surround it. The article includes a set of tropes we recognise from other articles discussed here: a reference to similar experiences from different cultural domains (here London), ideals blended with pragmatic considerations, practicalities of the labour involved (e.g. access to knowledge and products), and fun. As one of the balcony gardeners explains poignantly:

> I think everyone who has access to a bit of space should grow plants; this strengthens the power of nature in the city. Digging in the soil is revitalising, energising and satisfying. The satisfaction is even greater if you can have a tomato for breakfast that you have grown yourself. (Jabłońska, 2013: 40)

Practitioners' biographical narratives are used to craft a link between their previous and current practice on a personal level, as in the case of a balcony gardener who evokes memories of owning a 'box with veggies' as a child and is now setting one up for her own child (Jabłońska, 2013). The practice is presented as heavily networked, utilising existing and emergent circuits of knowledge, social capital and market forces, as practitioners move through the city and the Internet acquiring, swapping and exchanging indigenous seeds, seedlings, pots and boxes from friends, strangers and 'famous' suppliers in Warsaw such as 'Mr Herb' ('słynny pan Ziółko'). As the practice reportedly spreads, the requirements for social visibility are stepped up. The balcony garden can be seen as a signal of 'green' competence and values. One person observes astutely: 'You can read balcony enthusiasts' blogs, but it is more fun to join the Facebook group, where you can show off a photo of your balcony and answer practical questions such as 'What do you spray on plants?' (Jabłońska, 2013).

The practitioners in Jabłonska's (2013) article are unequivocal about the value of the practice for them being pleasure-driven, rather than capable of replacing traditional shops in a self-sustaining manner. Not productive enough to meet an average household's needs, the practice is rather seen as a social and ecological experiment of self-discovery, trenchantly captured in the following reflection: 'We are used to having to spend eight hours at the desk every day to earn money in order to buy food. For us, balcony gardening is a form of experiment to prove that it is possible to work less because you can grow your own food' (*ibid.*).

Warsaw-based balcony gardeners are presented as aware of the fact that growing vegetables in backyards used to be an everyday practice, for example in communist times. It would be interesting to consider this example in relation to another longstanding and common practice, that of allotment gardening (see also Stenning et al., 2010). But it is the association with the socially sanctioned positive meanings of urban renewal and community gardening forged in the West that is highlighted as a background for turning this practice into aspirational and 'cool' in a Polish media context. And indeed, this is directly voiced by one of the balcony gardeners portrayed in the 'Grown on the balcony' article. She wonders if the practice is no longer 'shameful' because it has been transformed by its popularity in Western Europe, where it is regarded as an emerging social trend.

Example 3: Knitting: Back in fashion

Another example of a low-budget practice that requires skills and is currently presented as gaining popularity is knitting. In his article entitled 'Knitting is fashionable again? Crowds want to learn it', Dominik Werner (2013) describes the motivations of the attendees of knitting lessons at the Instytut Kultury Miejskiej (Institute of Urban Culture) in Gdansk. Knitting is not presented as a response to the economic crisis, because handmade products are admittedly more expensive than mass-produced ones (see also Orton-Johnson, 2014). In Werner's coverage, the practice being revived in a perceived desire to reclaim traditional customs and history is strongly anchored in Polish tradition. One interviewee emphasises the links to her own biography: 'In my house, knitting has never disappeared, but I could not learn it well before, and these workshops have helped me'. The knitting group is reported to play an important role in community building, as noted by one of the co-organisers:

> People do not need our tips, but they still come in to exchange opinions and to talk with each other. It is like a 'koło gospodyń wiejskich' (a rural women's organisation) but we are not ashamed of it. It shows that people need contact with one another. (Werner, 2013)

The once 'shameful' domestic duties pursued by women are being recast as 'attractive', and as a sign of independence while the role of women is changing in Polish society. Practices such as balcony gardening and knitting are not only able to provide opportunities for learning or developing forgotten practical skills, but are also represented as a communicative arena of distinction in their transfiguration into something socially desirable and cool.

Example 4: Bary mleczne (milk bars) in Warsaw: From relics of the communist era to must-visit locations

In the communist period, milk bars were most popular locations, selling traditional Polish breakfasts and dinners at affordable prices as they were subsidised by the government. In the early 90s, hamburger and kebab stalls became very popular among Poles with the market economy, at the expense of common milk bars, increasingly interpreted as a relic of the bygone economy of shortage. People reacted against the communist dullness and uniform familiarity by turning to a 'Western style' life epitomised by fast food and, for those with higher disposable incomes, 'elegant restaurants'[4]. As a consequence, milk bars lost their commercial viability along with much of their social relevance. This situation has changed in recent times, with milk bars re-emerging as desirable and 'socially inclusive' places offering healthy, fresh and local food at reasonable prices.

One of the most popular milk bars in Warsaw nowadays is a place called 'Prasowy'. 'Prasowy' used to operate in the centre of Warsaw from 1954 to 2011. When the city authorities decided to tender the place for rent at market prices, 'Prasowy' became a space for civic engagement and grassroots protests which the current manager, Konrad Hegejmajer, describes as 'an intergenerational fight for 'Prasowy' (Majak, 2013). The protest resulted in the local authorities issuing a preferential rental tender under the condition that the location be continued in the tradition of a low-budget restaurant. Wojciech Karpieszuk (2013) begins his article with this description:

> Milk bars became the most popular canteens in Warsaw. There are hipsters wearing fashionable zero-lens glasses, pensioners, students and white-collar workers sitting side by side and gorging themselves on meatballs with beetroot or dumplings.

This juxtaposition of 'hipsters' and 'dumplings' is as humorous as it is revealing. The analysed articles frame milk bars as places the city should be proud of. The availability of their affordable food is presented as not only linked to the chance of saving money but especially, in a somewhat grotesque rhetorical move, to egalitarian values and social inclusion. Jarosław Zielinski says:

> Milk bars have always had a democratising quality. This hasn't changed. In Prasowy, one and the same queue will feature variously dressed people with different socio-economic standing. Milk bars are practically the only place where they can meet. And they connect over dumplings. (Karpieszuk, 2013)

Unlike the early 90s, when students constituted its typical customer base, the Prasowy bar now attracts a cross-section of consumers. As its manager observes: 'Our guests are local residents, people working in the area and, of course, young

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4   See http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2013/08/poland.

people spending their time in the nearby Zbawiciela Square, where several trendy cafés and bars are located' (Karpieszuk, 2013). 'Prasowy' is thus imagined as a place where people with low budgets mingle with others eager to explore a low-budget lifestyle.

There are a couple of reasons for the shift in cultural perception of milk bars among different social groups as presented in popular and academic discourse. Błażej Brzostek from the University of Warsaw argues: 'For young people, the communist period represents retro land, a lost world which they only know from photographs. It is interesting for them' (Karpieszuk, 2013). For older generations, there is also an important element of nostalgia for the communist period as a time of adolescence and perceived slight social inequality, with the bars arguably presenting a levelling ground. Above all, the articles capture the perceived sentiment of asserted desire for home-made food at reasonable prices, without social complexes or cultural cringe. The manager of 'Prasowy' observes: 'Prasowy' has shown us that the sentiment for milk bars is strongly linked to the places where they once existed or still exist, but their form is far away from today's expectations' (Majak, 2013).

Example 5: The 'Warsaw Jars'

The media have also focused their attention on a subset of Warsaw's population who actually come from smaller cities. For them, Warsaw is the place where they work while they spend their weekends and money at their home locations, mostly provincial towns and villages. This group of people is disparagingly referred to as 'słoiki' ('Warsaw Jars'), conveying the notion of saving costs by bringing back food supplies from the province every week. Even if the label 'Warsaw Jars' is only applied in the Internet, as Wąsowski (2013) argues, it is still a clear sign of growing disparities amongst Warsaw's residents, and a related urge to boost the self-esteem of natives by mocking 'others' (Blumsztajn in Wąsowski, 2013). We also noted that Warsaw City Council has recently launched a social campaign 'To wróci do Ciebie. Rozliczaj PIT w Warszawie' ('It will come back to you. Lodge your tax return in Warsaw') to encourage new Warsaw residents to pay their taxes there. The campaign is intended to loosen ties with their places of origin.

Discussion

Our analysis has yielded a number of related points. First, it showcases a diversity of low-budget practices ranging from public, participatory initiatives such as squats, milk bars and knitting to privately enacted, socially valued everyday lifestyle practices such as balcony gardening, and finally the devalued

economising by 'Warsaw Jars'. Secondly, we identify a number of key themes and aspects of the analysed media representations. The key issue relates to the dynamic process by which mundane socialist economic tactics are transformed into trendy lifestyles associated with aspects like 'collaborative', 'low-budget', 'Western' 'value-led' or 'eco-consumption'. We argue that this fluctuation of meaning can be explained by the concept of cultural translation.

Theorist of cultural semiotics Yuri Lotman has outlined five stages of the cultural translation process when one culture comes into contact with another (Lotman, 1990). This cyclical process entails alternating capacities of reception, transformation and the generation of ideas by a given culture. 'Translations, imitations and adaptations multiply', argues Lotman, whereby imported ideas are first idealised and 'domestic' traditions devalued. This then reverts to a state marked by

> a tendency to restore the links with the past, to look for 'roots'; the 'new' is now interpreted as an organic continuation of the old, which is thus rehabilitated. Ideas of organic development come to the fore. (Lotman, 1990: 147)

From a sociological perspective, the invention or reinvention of practices is brought about by a range of social and market processes that could just as well be seen as 'translations', where new elements (including images and artefacts) circulate and are actively integrated with and shaped by existing, previous or related practices, in an interaction between consumers and producers (Shove and Pantzar, 2005). Using the spread of the practice of Nordic walking as an example, Elizabeth Shove and Mika Pantzar argue that it is best understood as a 'successive, but necessarily localised, (re)invention' (2005: 43).

At the representational level, there is a great deal of tweaking and reworking of local and foreign cultural references. Polish examples are being compared to parallel social movements in Western capitalist economies, and often narrated as modelled on practices originating elsewhere where the concepts, activities and organisational dynamics they integrate and take on in a Polish context are concerned. Many articles acknowledge distinctly indigenous influences, drawing attention to ideas and examples from the Polish past, thus enabling the contemporary instances to be placed in a historical and dialogical context. 'Home' influences are woven in as part of the unfolding reconfiguration of what people have been doing for many, many years into 'a *new* form of fun [which] is itself impressive' (Shover and Pantzar, 2005, emphasis in original). Elizabeth Shove and Mika Pantzar (2005: 46) put it this way in reference to Nordic walking, successfully 'commodified and marketed as fun', although it is essentially based on walking, which 'people have been doing for 1.6 million years'. In Polish historically situated accounts, readers are reminded of how the

meaning of organising concepts can shift over time. The example of the concept 'spółdzielnia' ('cooperative') is telling in this respect. The experience with the communist system arguably provoked a negative view of the notion in Poland. This meaning could only be reworked once the communist context had faded from public memory, allowing the concept to signify something positive for a new generation of consumers looking to rebuild a culture of cooperation (Potkańska, 2013). Similarly, the example of knitting workshops highlights the transformation of a once gendered and 'embarrassing' activity into a desirable, skilled practice reclaimed by today's self-professedly liberated and independent women. Different generational contexts and cultural points of reference affect the social perception and application of mundane activities: what was once shameful for or 'taken-for-granted' by older generations is now associated with social capital and kudos.

The articles we analysed enable a cursory understanding of some of the mechanics of cultural translation that are socially consequential. Media images shape the meanings of contemporary consumer culture in Poland. Markets respond and contribute to the semiotic and material possibilities of the moment, constituting practices of consumption (Shove and Pantzar, 2005). The space of 'semantic potential', as Lotman puts it, is 'complex' (1990: 104). Different co-existent ideas from 'domestic' (Poland) and 'imported' (West) culture circulate and 'restructure each other' (Lotman, 1990: 146). As Lotman notes:

> [Cultural translation] demands favourable historical, social and psychological conditions. The process of 'infection' needs certain external conditions to bring it about and needs to be felt to be necessary and desirable. (1990: 147)

The relationship between the locally indigenous and 'alien' (Lotman, 1990) is directly evident in the commentary on what is perceived as the declining need to 'imitate 'the other' in relation to Warsaw's squats (Erbel in Wladyka, 2012), which can be interpreted as corresponding to the later stages in Lotman's scheme, weighted towards valuing what is local.

We would suggest that the entire project of consumer formation in Poland (and elsewhere) can be usefully explained by the framework of cultural translation – with echoes to the 'domestication' lens employed by Stenning et al. (2010). The situation of consumption in Poland stands out, marked as it is by the experience of post-socialist transformation and persistent socio-economic tensions. And although we have noted that the concepts of ethical, lifestyle-related or alternative consumption increasingly feature in Poland's public debates, their meaning is also specific – itself the consequence and substance of cultural translation. It is therefore important to sharpen the analytical categories applied – precisely because the historical predicaments and today's social changes in Poland provide

multiple layers to unravel beyond well-travelled concepts or a construed theoretical separation between the frameworks of 'shortage' and 'catch-up consumption'.

In our analysis, we chose to focus on a consideration of skills – and noted that much of the media discourse frames skills and competences as privately and publicly valuable, enabling people to be less wasteful, more resourceful and more fulfilled. Rosenberg (2011) extends this argument by the notion of self-governance and self-improvement. Desirable social and practical skills are perceived as accumulated capital enabling people to change their career trajectories or even their lives. Practitioners' accounts mobilise the rhetoric of sharing (of skills and competences) to drive this narrative. A related effect is the signalling process, where people learn thrift-related know-how to make it publically available and attractive as a sign of cooperation (Podkalicka and Potts, 2013). The way the example of balcony gardening is represented shows how skills of planting and looking after vegetables or plants can be shared and communicated through blogs and social media, lending visibility to the results and benefits, offering them up for coordination and collaboration. Also, street universities are represented as focused on creating additional social capital and value by enabling people to exchange knowledge and skills such as bike mending or speaking Spanish.

In this sense, these Polish representations resemble accounts of low-budget urban practices from other Western cities, constructed by drawing on empowering discourses of self-expression, social connection and value-led consumption. Much of this work highlights lifestyle politics as a productive trope for understanding contemporary political activism and social transformation (Lewis, 2014: 4). Our analysis further substantiates this, illustrating how low-budget initiatives generate social, cultural and political outcomes. Urban squatting, for example, is perceived as a grassroots initiative aimed at leveraging public resources for the community's cultural development, indicating the purchase of communal values also in a formal political context (e.g. the cited social commentator Erbel as a Green Party candidate for President of Warsaw). Similarly, 'new' milk bars are exemplary of the social impacts of traditional political activism based on street protests and value-led consumption.

But squats in the form of 'street universities', or 'milk bars' as trendy urban landmarks, still differ from also present, necessity-driven strategies for keeping poverty at bay in household economies (Stenning et al., 2010). Our analysis highlights interesting tensions in the way identical skills can be variously valued, depending on their context and application. Just take the example of 'balcony gardening' being promoted as 'cool' and juxtapose it with the phenomenon of the

'Warsaw Jars', connoting an embarrassing, rural or provincial status and activity. This quite despite the fact that both practices draw on useful skills and competences essentially to do with gardening and the preparation of food. We therefore highlight social class as a crucial factor in how a particular image of urban low-budget practices is forged and communicated in the media and discourse of popular culture. What this discursive divergence implies, we suggest, is a reflection of experiential and social divisions within Polish society.

Popular representations centre on choice-based low-budget practices enacted largely by young, highly educated professionals as a form of lifestyle, sharing the stage with the image of the 'Jars' as a vivid reminder of the persistent imperative to 'make do' (or even 'survival strategies', Stenning et al., 2010). The latter falls outside the empowering framework that essentially describes 'Poland A' (which can be argued to show similar consumption patterns as Western cities), while 'Poland B' follows the narratives associated with the 'shortage economy' of socialist Poland.

We consider the disentanglement of how low-budget practices are formed and enacted by different demographics, and how 'new', publicly visible activities relate to well-established social practices such as foraging, goods repair, allotment gardening, vegetable and fruit preserving, the use of discount shops, or hobby pursuits is a much needed and exciting study area. The prosaic and habituated instantiations of 'thrift' or 'industriousness' are clearly part of social life alongside mediated 'new' initiatives, but their 'ordinary' status renders them either invisible or even devalued, hinting at the persistent social divisions between the rural or provincial and the metropolitan or upwardly mobile. This could help to determine the manner in which 'ordinary households', as in Stenning's study (2010), contribute skills and relationships to the contemporary fabric of the city and its emergent, more 'visible' economic and social practices, rather than positioning 'low-budget' practices as strictly subversive or alternative to mainstream tactics, which the subcultural language in some articles appears to prefer.

Conclusions

The interest in low-budget practices is growing in the West following the Global Financial Crisis. Academic studies have explored the political potential of low-budget urban practices for reshaping consumption and democratising cities, while calling for more work able to theorise them in all their diversity (Iveson, 2013). Much attention has been drawn to the shift from practical, utility-led aspects to value-led lifestyle consumption. The interest in contemporary

consumer formations, its visible sites and mediated manifestations, is also increasingly a topic in the popular press and emergent Polish academic studies. The intention of our study was to investigate media constructions of low-budget practices in a context where conditions of scarcity are part of the living memory in times of relative, if unevenly distributed affluence. We adopted a discourse analytic perspective of media representations as a way of uncovering the little understood parameters and meanings of changing consumption patterns in Poland. In doing so, we paid special attention to the extent in which low-budget practices are depicted as being rooted in informal, socialist and pre-socialist economic and social activities.

While 'semioticising processes' (Lotman, 1990) are underway, the media discourse approach has provided a number of valuable insights that contribute to our understanding of 'low-budget practices'. In contrast to much empirical work focusing on a single urban low-budget practice (e.g. couch-surfing, car-sharing, etc.), this approach has enabled us to map a range of aspects of low-budget practices, variously linked to nostalgia, curiosity for the past, Western fashions, anti-consumerist sentiments, the appeal of alternative economies, and a host of social and financial rewards. We note that the representations of Polish low-budget practices in the popular press are not homogenous overall, despite a clear narrative focus on the young and professional as key groups involved. For young Poles born after the transition, many low-budget practices are depicted as being appreciated as extraordinary and cool, similar to the West. But the representations in the media exclude and draw in the Polish past at one and the same time. Some examples narrate cultural influences from the West over domestic continuities as drivers for these practices. The example provided by the re-emergence of milk bars in Warsaw is interesting as it clearly bridges the gap between the Polish past and present and productively exploits it as generative and innovative. Here we encounter a language that interweaves evocations of changing urban life (including today's growing social stratification) with references to a new Polish 'hispterism' and the avant-gardist potential of bars on a European level.

The curious mix of low-budget practices in Poland derives from and engenders a multiplicity of entangled motivations, models, applications and experiences that require sophisticated theoretical tools and detailed studies on the ground. The problematised link between thrift-related skills and social class is one such dimension that could be usefully explored further. With the growing academic and policy interest in 'thrift capital' and its potential for creativity and social innovation, the Polish case could be illuminating. It is useful on the analytical level, we argue, to consider various low-budget practices in relation to one another and alongside other operative concepts such as 'kombinowanie' as part

of a larger semiotic and social system. For this reason, this article makes the case for a broad translation framework, operating at different levels of critical reading, analysis and comparison. Translation is useful as a theoretical framework to explain how low-budget practices are formed and imbued with meaning at the intersection between dynamic local and international cultural influences and socio-economic contingencies. The value of translation is also highlighted by the type of engaged inter-cultural research we have pursued here, helping us to refine the terms, categories and communicative techniques to effectively describe and analyse what is generally a broad notion of 'low-budget practices'. There is a real opportunity for offering a richer historical analysis of how current ideas and practices of 'low-budget' (or thrift) have evolved over time. This discourse analysis is a first step in this direction. Polish studies could serve as important sources for a historical and comparative perspective on the international literature about low-budget practices, as well as the mechanisms explaining how cultures are made and remade.

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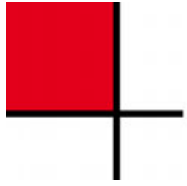
Coworking in the city

Janet Merkel

abstract

In the aftermath of the financial and economic crisis of 2007 and 2008, a new type of collaboratively oriented workplace has emerged in cities. These coworking spaces and the associated practice of coworking exemplify new ways of organising labour in project-based and largely freelance occupations as found in the cultural and creative industries. But coworking spaces are not just flexible shared office spaces for creative professionals 'working alone together' (Spinuzzi, 2012). Coworking promotes a collective, community-based approach to the organisation of cultural and creative work where a particularly important role is accorded to the coworking host, whose activities are described as a curatorial practice aimed at creating a collaborative atmosphere and social relationships. Coworking spaces can therefore be regarded as a new form of urban social infrastructure enabling contacts and collaborations between people, ideas and connecting places.

Introduction

Starting with the financial crisis of 2007/2008 and subsequent global recession, there has been a sudden rise of collaborative, shared working spaces – so called coworking spaces – in cities worldwide. *Deskmag*, an online journal for coworking, claims that there were more than 2500 spaces around the world by the end of 2012. Their number has grown significantly from 730 reported coworking spaces in February 2011. In Berlin alone, there are now over 70 coworking spaces, out of 230 in Germany (Deskmag, 2013b). While this phenomenon is predominantly developing in cities, it is not confined to the global north of Europe or North America. There are spaces emerging in Africa, Asia and South America, too.

In this article, coworking refers to the practice of working alongside one another in flexible, shared work settings where desks can be rented on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. The term coworking space designates particular spaces created to facilitate this kind of coworking. Since almost every form of labour could be described as coworking alongside colleagues, and companies could therefore be described as coworking spaces as well, both terms will be restricted to working alongside one another in flexible, shared work settings in this article. Coworking will be examined as a new urban social practice that characterises new ways of organising labour and enables mutual support amongst freelancers and self-employed persons. As flexibly rentable, cost-effective and community-oriented workplaces, coworking spaces facilitate encounters, interaction and a fruitful exchange between diverse work, practice, and epistemic communities and cultures. Even the names of these workspaces play with the conjunction of community, space, and the emergence of new ideas to indicate new orientations, practices, and processes in knowledge generation, e.g. Affinity Lab, Agora, Betahaus, Buero 2.0, Camaraderie, Cluboffice, Common Spaces, COOP, Creative Density, Hub, Makespace, Seats2Meet, ThinkSpace, or Toolbox.

So far, coworking has mainly been discussed by the practitioners themselves in blogs, conferences or wikis, and presented as an utterly positive work experience. Since the phenomenon only emerged recently, there is as yet little critical understanding and social-scientific analysis of coworking, its assumed effects, and how it relates to cultural, economic, political and social transformation processes in cities (see, for example, Lange, 2011; Spinuzzi, 2012; Moriset, 2014). This article is based on a research interest in coworking and coworking spaces that evolved while I was using coworking spaces myself in the empirical fieldwork for my Ph.D. My experience with these spaces showed that coworking hosts play a crucial role in enabling interaction amongst coworkers. In some spaces I felt like an anonymous customer, just like in a coffee shop, whereas in others I was immediately introduced to other coworkers, invited for lunch and evening events, and asked for my specific skills and interests. This discovery inspired me to explore how coworking hosts, usually the owners or operators or in some cases professional community managers, experience, understand and interpret their work, as well as the social and material practices and strategies they use to enhance and facilitate interaction, creativity and productivity amongst coworkers in a coworking space. The study design is explorative and inductive and focused on the question how coworking hosts facilitate collective work. The empirical evidence included here is based on twenty-five semi-structured interviews conducted with coworking hosts in Berlin, London and New York since the summer of 2012. These particular cities were chosen because of the density and variety of coworking spaces on offer for freelancers there, making them more likely to provide rich cases for empirical investigations of this

phenomenon. Half of the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Because of time constraints, many hosts preferred informal interviews and preferred to invite me to a tour of their coworking space, a shared subway ride, an evening event or a quick coffee somewhere, making proper documentation impossible. In these situations, I took notes at the time and wrote field reports immediately afterwards. I coded the material according to the questions and recurring themes in the interviews. In addition to this, several online sources such as blogs and websites about coworking, coworking handbooks written by practitioners, and in particular media interviews with hosts are treated as documents and used as secondary sources to support, contrast and contextualise findings from these formal and informal interviews (see Prior, 2003). All names and other identifying details have been changed for this presentation.

The article is structured as follows: First, a brief review situates coworking as a social practice in contemporary forms of urbanism and discusses coworking as a strategy of coping with structural changes in cultural labour markets and particular features of freelance work. Then the specific role of coworking hosts is discussed as they play a crucial role in stimulating exchange among coworkers and in building a community around coworking in the city. The notion of curating is introduced to explore the social and material strategies used by coworking hosts to enable and facilitate interaction and collaboration amongst coworkers. In the final part, coworking spaces are then examined as a new type of urban sociomaterial infrastructure enabling networks of communication across people and cities.

Situating coworking in contemporary forms of urbanism as a social practice

Ever since the beginning of the twenty-first century, culture and creativity have been regarded as key economic resources in urban development. Culture and creative industries, in particular, have been promoted as the new urban growth sectors (Krätke, 2011). Even though most sectors of the culture and creative industries proved to be rather resilient to the economic crisis of 2008 (Pratt and Hutton, 2013), artists and freelance creatives have been seriously affected by the recession and subsequent introduction of austerity measures (Peck, 2012) in cities and countries that dramatically changed social and cultural policies. Additional pressure for these professionals arose from the constant 'upgrading' and 'reurbanisation' of cities through gentrification processes. Thanks to the growing inflow of investments into premium housing and office buildings in cities, the global urban strategy of gentrification has served to significantly increase rents overall, forcing low-income residents out of inner cities areas and

making it difficult for creative professionals, especially in the early stages of their career, to obtain and maintain a flat, let alone an additional office or production space in the city (see Lees et al., 2008; Bain, 2013).

While coworking spaces have emerged as a bottom-up, and to start with often improvised, solution to the recession and structural changes in urban labour markets, they are also related to current attempts at renegotiating urban commons in a process of negotiating shared spaces, resources and values (Ferguson, 2014). Similar to the proliferation of community gardens, neighbourhood councils, and artistic interventions that reclaim and re-appropriate urban spaces as 'sites for active and democratic engagement' (Ferguson, 2014: 15), coworking might also be interpreted as an emancipatory practice challenging the current neoliberal politics of individualisation (see Lazzarato, 2009). As a collective, community-based approach to the organisation of cultural and creative work, it might be able to provide an alternative space for the free exchange of ideas, while enabling support networks and promoting the negotiation of shared spaces, resources and values amongst coworkers.

Coworking spaces can be described as new because they differ from older models of shared office space (self-organised or not) in their short-term letting of desks (per day, week, month) and consequently their flexibility, mobility and constantly changing social make-up. Coworking is furthermore presented as culturally embedded in the discourse and practices of collaborative consumption, the 'sharing economy' (Botsman and Rogers, 2011) and the open source movement (Forlano, 2009; DeGuzmann and Tang, 2011). Coworking is hence not just about working 'alone together' or 'alongside each other' in a flexible and mostly affordable office space. It is also underpinned by a normative cultural model that promotes five values: community, collaboration, openness, diversity, and sustainability. This 'collaborative approach' is always underlined as a distinctive feature that sets coworking apart from other forms of shared, flexible work setting such as satellite offices, hot desks, coffee shops or business incubators. These coworking values are therefore perpetually promoted in self-descriptions of coworking spaces:

> IndyHall is not about the desks. The desks are a vehicle for being a more effective worker and a more active contributor to your city. By putting a community's best interests first, we've created a work environment focused on openness, collaboration, community, sustainability, and accessibility. The common thread is this: we all know that we're happier and more productive together than alone. (IndyHall, 2014)

In this paper, I will consider coworking from a social practice perspective (Schatzki et al., 2001). By engaging and participating in coworking, coworkers

obtain a practical knowledge and shared understanding of this particular activity and consequently sustain, reproduce and also change it over time. The definition of what coworking and its particular 'doings and sayings' mean is therefore subject to constant renegotiation by its community of practitioners, the coworkers, who engage in this 'organised collection of activities' (Schatzki, 2014: 17) and can therefore fluctuate between coworking spaces. A crucial role in facilitating coworking as a collaborative approach and translating coworking values into the space seems to be played by the coworking hosts, who will be the subject of the next chapter.

The practice of coworking is also no longer confined to coworking spaces, but may be performed in other places or physical arrangements. Some of these take the form of 'jellies' (weekly or monthly meetings in coffee shops, rented spaces, or occasionally organisations like Space, a provider of artist's studios in London that hosts coworking jellies). In other cases, companies open up their offices for temporary coworkers (e.g. Flavorpill or the now defunct Loosecubes in New York City). Emerging in parallel to coworking spaces are a variety of makerspaces, fablabs and hackerspaces. These spaces are community-based, too, but aimed at grassroots manual or digital fabrication in self-directed projects (Smith et al., 2013).

As coworking evolves and becomes more common as a social practice amongst freelancers worldwide, the latter are subjected to an increasing differentiation intended to cater to specific professional groups and their needs. There are now dedicated coworking spaces for musicians, for writers and for social entrepreneurs, or even spaces that combine childcare facilities with coworking. The ongoing expansion of coworking can be described as a decentralised yet highly reflexive global movement. Coworking hosts and enthusiastic coworkers come together at barcamps and international conferences to discuss and promote coworking. There are even visa programs where coworking spaces collaborate internationally, so that coworkers can travel and use other spaces with their membership cards.

The current proliferation of coworking spaces has several causes and roots. First, coworking spaces can be described as a bottom-up solution or collective strategy for coping with structural changes in the general labour market and in the organisation of work, particularly in the labour markets of the creative industries (Christopherson, 2002; Gill and Pratt, 2008). The spaces accommodate work practices that are typical for mobile, project-based, freelance and self-employed work which could be carried out 'anywhere' with a computer and Internet access. Working in a shared workspace is a strategy for minimising individual risk as coworking spaces match the flexibility and financial situation of their workers

with specific resources for sustaining freelancers and self-employed persons in a highly competitive and volatile job market (Merkel and Oppen, 2012). It is hence no surprise that the proliferation of coworking picked up speed after the economic crisis of 2008, even if the first coworking space to be called that, 'Spiral Muse,' had been established in San Francisco in 2005 as a reaction against business centres considered 'unsocial' for freelance and self-employed professionals (e.g. hot desk offices that only provide business services), and against the unproductive working life in home offices (DeGuzmann and Tang, 2011; Deskmag, 2013a).

Given the long-standing study of artists in the sociology of work, an impressive body of research has emerged that explores labour conditions in creative industries, and in particular the freelance work situation of creative professionals, exposing a 'very complicated version of freedom' (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: 4) where the freelance situation is often more of a constraint than a voluntary choice. Current research highlights the characteristics of creative work such as precarious employment with low and sometimes non-existent wages, multiple jobs, extensive emotional stress and dense social networking, a blurring of the distinction between private and professional contacts, identity investments, and self-exploitation (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; Neff, 2005). Freelance and self-employed professionals moreover need to master the financial, organisational and social aspects of their work life on their own, as well as their occupational training (Merkel and Oppen, 2012).

A commonly cited reason for freelancers to seek coworking spaces is to escape the boredom and frustration of working alone and constantly mixing the spheres of work, leisure and home. By using a coworking space, they establish a structured day at the office and draw a line that distinguishes their work from their private life, enabling them to balance the two (Neff, 2005; Warhurst et al., 2008; Wittel, 2001). Coworking can also be a strategy for compensating the loss of social contact with colleagues. The definition of coworking in the coworking wiki, an online platform for the coworking movement, for example states:

> The idea is simple: independent professionals and those with workplace flexibility work better together than they do alone. Coworking answers the question that so many face when working from home: 'Why isn't this as fun as I thought it would be?' Beyond just creating better places to work, coworking spaces are built around the idea of community building and sustainability. Coworking spaces agree to uphold the values set forth by the movement's founders: collaboration, community, sustainability, openness, and accessibility. (Coworking Wiki, 2014)

The third global coworking survey (Deskmag, 2013b) reports that 58 % of coworkers used to work at home before they joined a coworking space.

Interaction and communication are among the most frequently cited reasons for joining a coworking space. Coworkers claim that 'social interaction' (84 %), 'random encounters and opportunities' (82 %), and 'sharing of information and knowledge' (77 %) are the features they like most about their coworking space.

Another reason for the emergence of coworking spaces is provided by the new information and communication technologies spawning a growing number of remote workers and employees working from home in mobile, project-based, freelance and self-employed jobs (Spinuzzi, 2012). The Freelancers Union (2012) in the US reports that 13 per cent of the American workforce (21.1 million people) are now working as fulltime freelancers and an additional 32 million as part-time freelancers. In other words, a third of the total American workforce is engaging in contingent forms of labour. Although the introduction of new information and communication technologies originally inspired fears about the 'death of the city' (Pascal, 1987), selected urban centres have shored up an increasingly unequal concentration of accumulated capital, economic resources and technological innovation, ensuring a greater geographical clustering of economic activity and less equal distribution than ever (Sassen, 2001). Apart from that, working in front of a screen all day creates a new need for face-to-face encounters, lending cities a new importance for human interaction as densely populated places. The coworking space *WeWorkLabs* in New York, for example, refers to itself as a 'physical social network' (WeWorkLabs, 2012). The constant growth in the number of remote and freelance workers has been accompanied by new strategies for coping with the disadvantages of this work situation. While coffee shops and organised coworking meet-ups became a preferred workspace for many remote workers over the past decade, coworking spaces have emerged as a new and more appropriate solution:

> The irony of being able to work anywhere is that there isn't anywhere designed for people who can work anywhere, so a movement formed around that and that is the coworking movement. (Tony Bacigalupo, cited in Jackson, 2014: Chapter 5)

Working in a coworking space furthermore provides freelancers with opportunities for appreciation and recognition from their peers. The social networking in a space can be used for critical feedback concerning one's work, but also for building a reputation (Becker, 2008). Besides the social advantages of coworking, there is also a financial incentive for freelance or self-employed professionals to rent a desk in a shared office space temporarily, rather than their own office space. The current rent increases in cities make it increasingly difficult to even get or maintain an office space in addition to one's flat, forcing ever more people into home office or alternative solutions. Indeed, many coworking hosts explained that the idea for a shared office space emerged when the economic crisis hit in 2008 and jobs dried up, forcing them to give up their

office space or rent it out to other freelancers. Coworking consequently appears as a cost-effective alternative that holds a promise of improving the business, making new partners, and increasing productivity and support.

Curating social relationships: The specific role of the coworking host

While coworking spaces provide physical proximity and a 'plug and play' infrastructure for flexible workforces, most coworking hosts claim that the physical proximity and simultaneous presence of coworkers will not necessarily lead to interaction, collaboration or relational closeness in the sense of common interests, shared values, worldviews and interpretation frameworks (see e.g. Ibert, 2010). It appears that only 'being there' is not enough because coworkers often just work alone alongside each other without much interaction or cross-fertilisation (Spinuzzi, 2012). While research on the geographies of knowledge creation claims that spatial closeness can increase the likelihood of certain types of relationships and learning (Bathelt et al., 2004), coworking spaces demonstrate that just providing a space and shared context is not sufficient. What is needed instead is social animation, engagement and 'enrolment' (Callon and Law, 1982) into participating in the distinct social practice of working together collaboratively. Hosts are therefore called upon to create different modes of enrolment within the spaces to facilitate encounters, interaction, collaboration and mutual trust amongst the coworkers.

My analysis of interviews pointed to two types of host, differentiated by how they understand and interpret their own activity: the 'service provider' and the 'visionary'. While the service provider concentrates on the work aspect associated with facilitating a good work environment and providing attendant services, the visionary host is more concerned with enabling the 'co' aspects of coworking such as communication, community and collaboration among the coworkers. These hosts are usually also the founders and/or managers of the space. They embody and practice the coworking values in their daily activities and feel responsible for the coworkers in their space. Hospitality is their major concern. Since coworking is strongly associated with cultural values of collaboration and sustainability, these hosts consider it their main responsibility to care for coworkers and enable a lively community within the space, but also beyond it. These hosts describe themselves as the nurturing 'mother of the space' (Julie, Berlin 2012), as a 'conductor' (Ellen, London 2012), or 'social gardeners' (Peter, Berlin 2012), terms which indicate a considerable amount of affective and emotional investment (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011: 159-99) in their hosting activities. Julie, a freelance graphic designer who runs a small coworking space in Berlin with a partner, for example explains:

> We are like a small family hostel with all the responsibilities for the well-being of our guests. But, we are not pushing it. (Julie, Berlin 2012)

As the quote indicates, Julie and her hosting partner prefer to have coworkers organise themselves, to let them make suggestions, and then try to facilitate the realisation of their ideas, e.g. concerning events, furniture, or collaborative projects. It is important to them to participate in neighbourhood events and offer their premises as an exhibition space for local artists. Anna, a freelance journalist in a Berlin coworking space, has meanwhile taken on the responsibilities of a host in a more self-determined manner because the actual operator is more interested in the space as such than in engaging the people within it:

> Well, I demanded that because at our two social events we had last year so much was already happening between the coworkers. The thing is, if you do not do anything, nothing will happen. Just the fact that people sit in a space together does not lead to new ideas and projects. You have to stimulate and facilitate exchange, otherwise there is no added value of coworking. (Anna, Berlin 2012)

Ellen, a theatre producer and consultant in London, has established a coworking space dedicated to supporting creative processes while drawing on her own experience as a coworker in other coworking spaces:

> Most coworking spaces are just literally a congregation of people that come and go for work. But there is not a conductor propelling them to go from point A to point B or looking at the process how people come up with ideas and implement them and execute them. While there might be some 'learning by osmosis', we are helping our members to understand and facilitate the creative processes behind. (Ellen, London 2012)

In contrast, Peter, a computer scientist with a consultancy background who runs a coworking space in New York with more than 400 members, claims:

> It's all about relations. Above all, we want to build up a great community. We have our town hall meetings once a month where we make our big decisions together and everyone has a say in the space. We want people to feel like in a residency, to feel like they have ownership. (Peter, New York 2012)

Hosts use different social and physical strategies to animate and stimulate interaction and collaboration among coworkers. Socially, they initiate events and regular meetings, or develop formats for introducing coworkers to one another such as blogs where new members are presented and can meet, or bulletin boards at the entrance where members can put up a profile or search for help and specific skills. Or hosts get members in the coworking spirit just by talking, connecting, recommending, and caring in their daily work. They report that eating together, such as having lunch together or clearing the fridge on Fridays, has proven to be the most effective socialisation mechanism. Additionally, there

are organised talks by members, as well as seminars and courses. Educational programmes are a common feature of almost every space. These courses and peer-to-peer learning groups cater to the coworkers' interests and needs, but are usually also accessible for the larger public, without requiring a membership card. To enable more synergies, a growing number of spaces select their coworkers according to their skills and thus their 'fit' with other coworkers. The usual model is nonetheless the drop-in coworking space that allows spontaneous daily, weekly and monthly passes.

The physical design of the coworking space, with its open floor plan, arrangement of tables to enable eye contact between coworkers, or actual location of social areas (kitchen, meeting rooms, sofa corner) play an important role in turning it into a collaborative space. The design has an influence on the flows of movement in a space and the interaction patterns between people (Dorley and Witthoft, 2012; Sailer and McCulloh, 2012). Almost all hosts have explicit ideas about its effects on the coworking space, and describe how they trained themselves in designing collaborative spaces while still trusting their aesthetic know-how, and how they watch coworkers' behaviour in the space while rearranging it constantly.

> I wanted to create a homey atmosphere conducive to work purposes. Not a white office space with cheap Ikea furniture and neon light that might appeal to everyone. But it's a work in progress. I rearrange all the time. (Julie, Berlin 2012)

> The space is purposefully designed for having a diversity of options to work. And you can see throughout the day people gradually moving from their desks towards the sofas. Or, in the morning the breakfast bar is very crowded because everyone wants to stand a bit and enjoy a coffee while reading or talking. (Sarah, New York 2012)

> For some people it is like a second home, so we try to make it as pleasant as possible. It is a creative writing space so we keep everything conducive to the process. (Andrea, New York 2012)

> Aesthetics is so important. It gives people pride and encourages them to come to work here everyday. (Peter, New York 2012)

In addition, whiteboards with scribbles, rounded table corners or transparent conference rooms serve as visual clues and openings for communication and collaboration among the coworkers. Hosts believe that particular wall colours or strategically placed plants affect the interaction potential of a space, thus turning coworking spaces into highly symbolically structured or curated spaces. As one coworking host explained to me:

> We use a lot of yellow in the space because it releases dopamine, which is good for motivation and cognition. (Ellen, London 2012)

The host's activities can be analytically described as a form of curating or as a curatorial practice. While the terms curating and curatorial practice originate from the art world, both have undergone significant symbolic transformations in the past, having essentially improved their social and cultural value in all the arts (Krzys Acord, 2014). The aspect of caring and selecting has long been a primary task of museum curators. In recent years, the role of mediating between the artist and public by making visible 'that which is compiled in a state of becoming' (von Bismarck, 2012: 48), and by engendering 'dialogue by bringing artists, places and publics together' (Puwar and Sharma, 2012: 40) has come to the fore in curatorial activities. The use of the terms curator or curatorial practice is no longer limited to the person of the curator in the art world. There is a growing body of literature that emphasises curating as a form of cultural intermediation between the production of cultural goods and the production of consumer tastes in cultural and creative industries (see Hracs et al., 2013, for example). This may include fashion bloggers who lay down spring's latest must-have items and call themselves curators, record storeowners who select and strategically place new music for their customers, or organisers of design festivals pooling and presenting a selection of artefacts (Williams, 2009; Moeran and Pedersen, 2011; Potts, 2011).

Curating is introduced here as a distinct concept because it is primarily aimed at establishing relations by assemblage rather than value formation and the legitimisation of cultural goods, as is the case in cultural intermediation (Maguire and Matthews, 2012; O`Connor, 2013; Taylor, 2013). The Swedish curator Maria Lind for example describes contemporary curating as follows:

> Today I imagine curating as a way of thinking in terms of interconnections: linking objects, images, processes, people, locations, histories, and discourses in physical space like an active catalyst, generating twists, turns, and tensions. (Lind in Wood, 2010: 53)

Following Lind, the social and material activities of coworking hosts can be understood as curatorial practices, as the intentional creation of interconnections between people, ideas, objects and places within a new context and narrative. The host's activities of curatorial practice can be summarised as *assembling* and *arranging* (people, spaces, objects), *creating* and *signifying new meanings* (collaboration, community, sustainability, openness, and accessibility), *reframing* (work differently), *caring* (enabling community) and *exhibiting* (the work space and its community), all in order to create new work-related and social experiences in the city.

There is also a second aspect of curating that is helpful in understanding the activities of coworking hosts. As curators, they act as 'cultural entrepreneurs'

(Swedberg, 2006) who spin stories and new meanings from their own activity, the coworkers and the specific space. Lounsbury and Glynn use the term 'cultural entrepreneurship' to denote aspects of entrepreneurial activity which manufacture meaning by rendering the 'unfamiliar familiar' (2001: 549), using metaphors or analogies. Cultural entrepreneurs not only leverage social and cultural dynamics to come up with novel combinations, but also embed their activity in narratives and stories 'to reduce the uncertainty typically associated with entrepreneurship' (*ibid.*: 546).

The hosts are moreover themselves an embodiment of post-Fordist labour conditions. Following Luc Boltanksi and Eve Chiapello (2006), Marchert (2012) claims that curators meet all the criteria for a project-based polis:

> His abilities, from pure organizing skills to the knack for marketing himself and others, in other words, are highly socially desirable and breathe the 'new spirit of capitalism'. (Marchert, 2012: 32)

Coworking hosts are usually freelancers, too, who need to hold other jobs besides their hosting activities, because running a coworking space is rather fragile as a business model, with many hosts struggling to keep their spaces going. By curating a coworking space, hosts take on the role of a catalyst and enabler, thereby creating new forms of urban sociomaterial infrastructure where people can meet, exchange ideas and work.

Thinking ahead: Coworking spaces as urban infrastructures

Coworking spaces, often featuring more than 200 fluctuating coworkers, are sites of random encounter. They throw together a diverse set of actors who then need to negotiate a shared space. They therewith provide a good empirical angle on the question of 'how the company of strangers can become a basis for identity formation and collective creativity' (Amin, 2012: 37). These strangers can develop interpersonal ties, but do not necessarily have to. Thanks to their openness, flexible rents and high fluctuation rates, coworking spaces resemble cities in their specific set of social structures and in how people behave in a public place, apart from the crucial fact that they have to pay to get into most coworking spaces. The concept of 'urban encounter' (Valentine, 2008; Watson, 2006) comprehensively captures the different meanings this form of randomness can imply: from fleetingness via interaction potential right through to encounter as a transformative experience. These encounters can feature several dimensions with various social effects. They can be visual, aural, dramaturgic or performative, communicative or interactive, just like encounters in a public space.

Following AbdouMaliq Simone's suggestion to extend the notion of infrastructure directly to people's activities in cities, coworking spaces can be understood as a new type of urban sociomaterial infrastructure whose main purpose is to coordinate and facilitate an alternative, community-based organisation of labour. Simone uses the notion of infrastructures as 'platforms' for action and coordination, describing them as 'complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons, and practices (...) a platform providing for and reproducing life in the city' (2004: 408). Coworking spaces organise interaction within them but also with one another, enabling networks of communication, and can thus provide a platform for economic, political and social action.

Coworking spaces act as interfaces with the creative milieu in the city and beyond. Cohendet, Grandadam, and Simon (2010), for example, define three different strata in their 'Anatomy of the creative city', each of which meets the functions required for developing a creative milieu, and whose interaction shapes the dynamics of creativity in cities: 'underground' (skilled individuals), 'middleground' (epistemic communities and communities of practice) and 'upperground' (institutions and organisations). Coworking spaces, being part of the 'middleground', could be considered as an intersection of these strata, mediating between the 'underground' of creative individuals and the 'upperground' of companies and organisations:

> An active middleground translates, transforms, and confronts local ideas with knowledge and practices issued from different parts of the world. It is a node of multiple connections of varying intensity and geographical distance. Spaces are necessary to nurture the middleground, to activate the cognitive role of local places, to widen the local buzz to other communities, to strengthen the global pipelines, and to help bring the local underground to the surface. (...) These spaces provide various lanes through which different communities establish permanent informal interactions with each other in order to confront ideas and to tap creative practices from other domains of knowledge. This reveals a complex maze of creativity (or forum), home of myriads of knowing communities, which promote creativity in diverse activities and modes. (Cohendet et al., 2013: 1704)

This intermediary function of coworking spaces is most clearly apparent in the proliferation of start-up scenes in cities (see, for example, Foord, 2013 and Nathan et al., 2012, on the newly emerging digital cluster in London's East End). In this respect, coworking spaces provide crucial coordinating functions for young start-up entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, and potential public policy interventions in cities. Most self-organised peer-to-peer learning groups in start-up scenes are organised by way of coworking spaces, and take place in them. And many coworking spaces turn into 'pre-incubators', occasionally accommodating more than a hundred tech start-ups (see Moriset, 2014, or Capdevila, 2013, on coworking spaces as microclusters). This makes coworking spaces hubs of

knowledge production and knowledge dissemination, providing situations of knowledge exchange along with professional project contexts (Grabher, 2004) and the informal gatherings in nightclubs, bars and restaurants that create the 'buzz' of a city (Currid, 2007; Storper and Venables, 2004) for creative professionals.

Coworking spaces can coordinate social and political action by gathering different interest groups. For example Berlin's *Supermarkt,* a coworking space located in a former supermarket in the district of Wedding, which is providing a platform for new social and political activists' grassroots movements and a coworking space for meet-ups, international conferences, and workshops (Supermarkt, 2014). *Supermarkt* places itself in a discursive space revolving around alternative forms of organising and brings people and ideas together, locally as well as globally. One recurring topic at *Supermarkt,* for example, involves critical reflection on freelance work situations and potential forms of self-organisation, such as supporting a newly created freelancers movement (Freelancers Europe, 2014).

Furthermore, coworking spaces serve as interfaces with the local community and the surrounding neighbourhoods. Most coworking spaces show a strong identification with and commitment to their local surroundings, engage in community work or provide a gathering space for community meetings at night. Often a café is used to make these spaces and their activities visible in the neighbourhood and accessible for everyone. But given current urban restructuring processes and the growing pace of gentrification in cities, coworking spaces also need to face their ambivalent role of being 'pioneers', raising the symbolic value of a particular area and becoming victims of gentrification processes at the same time (Lees et al., 2008). Many spaces are located in inner cities areas that are now being subjected to significant 'upgrading' and 'redevelopment'. This situation creates an uncertain future for them: they either need to become more entrepreneurial or to raise their fees, which could result in young freelancers with less income being unable to afford them, thereby undermining their openness.

Conclusion

The proliferation of coworking as an urban social practice highlights alternative ways of organising labour in the city of the twenty-first century. While the self-organised, bottom-up character of this phenomenon and its spread after the economic crisis suggest a collective cost-saving practice, the flexible rents and cost-effectiveness of sharing a coworking space is only one of several reasons driving freelancers and coworking hosts. Escaping the social isolation of the

home office, being among likeminded people facing the same challenges and problems, gaining access to valuable knowledge and recognition, and enlarging one's professional network are also strong motivations for freelancers to engage in coworking. As a social practice, coworking shares some social (community), cultural (sharing) and economic (saving) motivations with saving practices such as car sharing or airbnb. But coworking differs from and points beyond practices of 'low-budget urbanism'. Coworking is deeply embedded in the distinct production logics of cultural and creative industries with its project-based organisation and knowledge dynamics required for constant innovation (see, for example, Capdevila, 2013). It presents a strategy for coping with the insecurities and precariousness of creative labour conditions by means of a collective, community-based approach to the organisation of cultural and creative work. However, as the empirical research illustrates, coworkers frequently just work alone together without much interaction, mutual support or community orientation, which gives coworking hosts a special role in translating the coworking values into the space and in facilitating team play.

This paper has applied the notion of curating to an analysis of the daily activities of hosts in facilitating encounters, interaction, collaboration and mutual trust among coworkers. Coworking hosts assemble and create relations and meanings, and endeavour to stimulate new work experiences amongst freelance professionals. As a result, coworking has enabled new forms of solidarity and cooperation among freelance professionals, but also beyond that. How coworkers perceive this curatorial work has not been the subject of this empirical investigation and needs further research. The objective was to highlight that coworking spaces are not just shared office spaces but highly curated. The essay sketched out some of the multiple potentials of these spaces for providing a sociomaterial infrastructure that enables networks of communication across a diverse set of people within and across cities, and a platform for new economic, political, and social action.

The growing diversification of spaces claiming to be coworking spaces, from hackerspaces and fablabs to pre-incubators and companies or organisations claiming to introduce coworking as a means to stimulate random encounters and creativity amongst their employees, suggests a need for future research paying attention to the commonalities and differences between diverse types of coworking space. Additionally, more research is needed to examine in greater detail what constitutes coworking as a social practice, what are its particular 'doings and sayings', and the material arrangements in which it is performed (Schatzki, 2014). At this moment in time, we lack the systematic and in-depth socioscientific analysis of coworking and its assumed interactional effects, exchange processes, or reciprocity rules in sharing or collaborating required to

fully comprehend and understand the extent in which these shared workspaces change the organisation of labour in cities, represent an emancipatory practice, and where the additional potentials (innovations, new economic activities or political activism) of these new urban sociomaterial infrastructures might lie. In addition, there is also a need for more systematic research on how coworking relates to and engages with contemporary processes of urban transformation.

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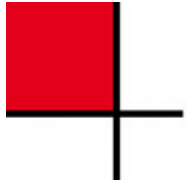
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Not everything is new in DIY: Home remodelling by amateurs as urban practice

Monika Grubbauer

abstract

Self-organised forms of intervention in urban spaces are currently much debated in urban studies and the fields of architecture and urban design. The paper argues that the more conventional and long-standing remodelling of homes by amateurs in Europe and North-America is largely ignored in these debates. Tying in with the literature on vernacular builders in the Global North and South and recent user-centred accounts of architecture in the social sciences, I explore home remodelling from the sociological perspective of practice theory. Based on a case study of an on-going remodelling project of a single family house located in Darmstadt, Germany, I provide a conceptualisation of DIY home remodelling with regard to three main characteristics of social practices as discussed by sociologists Theodore Schatzki and Andreas Reckwitz: repetition, collectivity and socio-materiality. This allows us to grasp the multiple ways in which these activities extend beyond the confines of the building site, the project or the individual homeowner. Ultimately, it is the fact that home remodelling projects in European and North-American cities are not merely explained by the rationale of cost saving which makes them potentially equally urban as the interventions discussed in the literature on DIY urbanism. If concepts such as agency and authorship in the debates about DIY urbanism are to be developed further, it is vital to deepen our understanding of the widespread everyday modifications, alterations and conversions of homes by amateurs and to explore the interlinkages that exist between these two fields of action.

Introduction

Self-organised forms of intervention in urban spaces have gained prominence in urban studies and the fields of architecture and urban design. These practices share an interest in public spaces as sites of encounter and appropriation, and they are very often characterised by a scarcity of resources. The low-budget

approach of most of these projects manifests itself in a creative engagement with the materiality of urban spaces, with practices of appropriation, re-use and makeover, often facilitated by the input of architects, planners, designers, and artists. Scholars have both embraced (Douglas and Hinkel, 2011; Crawford, 2012; Lehtovuori, 2012) as well as critically interrogated these forms of participatory, self-organised and often temporal interventions as new forms of (austerity) urbanism (Stickells, 2011; Grubbauer, 2013; Thorpe, 2013; Tonkiss, 2013).

In contrast, the more conventional remodelling of homes by amateurs is largely ignored in the literature on urban interventions. This literature is mostly concerned with projects that are both more public in nature and usually led by some members of the creative class, both of which seemingly qualifies them as essentially 'urban'. However, the self-organised remodelling of homes in European and North American countries is an established practice which has also become economically very significant over the past decades. Since the 1960s scholars from both architecture and the social sciences have been engaged with this phenomenon. They have challenged the distinction between 'high architecture' and vernacular practice (Upton, 1991) and shown how particularly residential buildings designed by architects change over time due to collective interventions and alterations across generations (Boudon, 1972; Brand, 1994; Scott, 2007). These practices of home remodelling are far from being merely economically motivated but rather culturally and symbolically loaded and rooted in everyday life (Rapoport, 1968; Bourdieu et al., 1999; Atkinson, 2006; Oliver, 2006 [1992]). However, what has been rarely discussed is whether and how these practices can be seen as genuinely *urban* in nature, the vernacular being associated with traditional, local and more rural forms of architecture.

This paper explores home remodelling as urban practice from the sociological perspective of practice theory. It ties in with the literature on vernacular builders and user-centred accounts of architecture in arguing that home remodelling projects beyond calculation and concerns for minimising costs are also fundamentally shaped by daily routines of dwelling, by cultural preferences, improvisation and learning through experience. To illustrate this argument I will draw on an exploratory case study of an on-going remodelling project of a single family house located in Darmstadt, Germany, which also serves as small guest house. My aim is to show – for the European context – that amateur home remodelling activities can be regarded as social practices that are potentially equally *urban* as those discussed in the literature on DIY urbanism. For this, a more in-depth consideration of the concept of social practices is needed than those provided in the existent literature on urban interventionist practices and the recent studies of the interface between buildings and theirs users in the social sciences (Strebel, 2011; Jacobs and Merriman, 2011; Jacobs et al., 2012). To

argue this point, I will provide a conceptualisation of DIY home remodelling with regard to three main characteristics of social practices as discussed by sociologists Theodore Schatzki (1996; 2010) and Andreas Reckwitz (2002; 2008b): *repetition*, *collectivity* and *socio-materiality*. I will show how this kind of conceptualisation allows us to grasp the multiple ways in which these home remodelling practices extend beyond the confines of the building site, the project or the individual homeowner. In conclusion, I will argue that it is the very fact that DIY-remodelling practices are *not* merely explained by the rationale of cost saving that also allows us to conceive them as urban practices.

The paper is structured in the following way: The first section provides an overview of the literature on home remodelling and discusses why it is largely ignored in the recent accounts of DIY urbanism. In the second part of the paper, the two strands of scholarship are discussed which I draw on to advance a conceptualisation of home remodelling as social practice, namely the long established field of vernacular studies and the more recent practice-centred approaches to architecture in the social sciences. Third, the case study is introduced and the processes of remodelling and challenges encountered by the homeowner are presented. The fourth section gives an interpretation of these activities from a praxeological perspective and in the conclusion I end with arguments for conceiving of these social practices of altering and remodelling of architecture as urban practices.

DIY home remodelling and the architectural profession

In what follows I shall focus on the type of home remodelling that we find in Western contexts by laypersons who act simultaneously as building owner, building contractor, 'site engineer', decision maker, and sometimes even as the craftsperson carrying out the actual work. As self-proclaimed experts in planning and design issues, they choose *not* to delegate these tasks to architectural professionals, although parts of the technical implementation and execution, or building inspection and the acceptance of the construction work can nonetheless (but must not necessarily) be carried out by professionals. Apart from purely functional and technical requirements (such as the laying of new pipes or the replacement of electric cables), also design aspects figure in the process, involving tasks that require creative decisions and solution strategies, however small they may be: selecting materials, choosing colours, deciding on a particular design element, specifying the position of entrances and passages, ceiling height, room layout, and so on. Alterations and conversions usually pertain to modifications of people's everyday environment – the home, or holiday home, the premises of the family business – and are taken up for a variety of reasons:

they include technical defects, lack of space, and unsatisfying living conditions which can lead to the desire to modify people's environment and reshape the way they live.

In the cities of Europe and North America large portions of the 20th century housing stock are subject to such forms of remodelling, refurbishment, upgrading and various kinds of alterations by the owners. The sites of these actions have been and continue to be often initially highly uniform neighbourhoods, such as the semi-detached houses of the British suburbs (Oliver et al., 1981) or working class neighbourhoods in German cities, both built between the two world wars, as well as post-war single-family home neighbourhoods, often in suburban locations. Society-wide processes of home remodelling began first to take place in the 1960s when working and middle class home owners enjoyed new levels of prosperity and pre-war houses did not meet the needs of the emerging post-war life style. The significant economic growth of the DIY sector in Europe and North America, however, started only in the 1980s with the establishment of specialised companies that catered to the needs of the self-builders (Roush, 1999). The market expanded continuously until the late 1990s, after which sales have been more or less stable and companies such as U.S. Home Depot or the German Bauhaus have been expanding internationally to make up for declining growth rates on domestic markets. At present, there is a whole industry of building supplies stores catering to home-owners, and assistance is provided through TV shows, guidebooks, specialised trade fairs, and online communities. The core markets of the DIY industry are found in North America and Europe, Germany being by far the strongest market in Europe, with the three largest German companies Obi, Bauhaus and Hornbach being also among the TOP 10 building supply companies in Europe (Dähne Verlag, 2013: 4). Various surveys suggest that the clients of the DIY industry while certainly a highly diverse group (Williams, 2004) are clearly not among the low-income segments of the population, rather on the contrary. Vannini and Taggart (2014) report for the case of the U.S. that the majority of those participating in self-building (about 2/3) come from social-economic indexes ABC, highly to relatively affluent groups. Similarly, a German survey of the income-levels of Bauhaus clients reveals that they are considerably above the average of the German population (VuMA, 2014). Historic accounts of DIY show that there have been times in which economic considerations and necessity prevailed in giving rise to DIY home maintenance and remodelling in Europe, such as the periods after WWI when DIY constituted a financial necessity for the impoverished working and middle-classes or during the period of reconstruction following WWII with its lack of skilled labour (Goldstein, 1998; Atkinson, 2006). The DIY remodelling of homes today is certainly in tune with the *zeitgeist* and not primarily explained by economic rationality. However,

viewing it merely as a mass-marketed phenomenon does not do it justice either, as Paul Atkinson (*ibid.*: 5f.) argues in pointing out how DIY activity has acted and continues to act as democratising agency in:

> giving people independence and self-reliance, freedom from professional help, encouraging the wider dissemination and adoption of modernist design principles, providing an opportunity to create more personal meaning in their own environments or self-identity, and opening up previously gendered or class-bound activities to all.

Most usefully, we should accept the inherent contractions that arise of the collapsing roles of amateur and professional as well as consumer and producer (Brown, 2008: 360) and keep the multiplicity and diversity of motifs that simultaneously enter contemporary DIY home remodelling activities in mind:

> Part self-expressive hobby, part ostentatious consumption and skill display, and part convenient utilization of handy money-saving skills DIY building and home-improvement symbolise and exercise knowledge capital, lifestyle choices, and autonomous control over possessions and their personalisation. (Vannini and Taggart, 2014: 271)

We find some architects, designers, photographers and theorists fascinated by the results and impact of amateur home remodelling projects, both in positive and negative ways – a recent example being the discussion sparked by the blog 'Ugly Belgian Houses' of a Belgian amateur photographer, who has made a passion out of documenting bizarre Belgian residences that ignore any conventional aesthetic rules and role-models (e.g. Baus, 2013; Weisbrod, 2013). In general, the remodelling of homes by residents, however, has been of marginal interest to scholarship in the field of architecture which reflects the problematic relationship of the profession with the user (Hill, 2003; Rambow and Seifert, 2006; Brown, 2008). While the user is important to consider in the design process, the profession also depends on securing its monopoly on authoritative knowledge and making sure that only buildings and spaces produced by architects acquire the title of architecture (Cuff, 1992). Modernism understood and depicted users as passive and predictable, employing various tools of abstraction such as drawings, photography and architectural handbooks that served to 'normalise' the human body and the architectural experience (Ackerman, 2002; Imrie, 2003; Hill, 2003; Emmons and Mihalache, 2013). Nevertheless, we find important work of architects and architectural theorists who have drawn attention to the processual and open-ended nature of architecture ever since the debates on the politics of participation and user control of the 1960s. Examples include the work of Herman Hertzberger (1991), John Habraken and his colleagues of the *open building* community (Habraken, 1998; Kendall and Teicher, 1999) or scholars engaged in post-occupancy

research in the Anglo-Saxon context (van Voordt and van der Wegen, 2005). Since the late 1990s we can note more generally an interest to rethink concepts of authorship and agency within the discipline of architecture (Awan et al., 2011; Anderson, 2014; Till, 2014), much of it inspired by the work of Henri Lefebvre. At the same time, we can see a reworking of the relation between architects and users through the renewed experimentation with participatory approaches, concepts such as co-production or design-build programs (Hill, 1998; Jones and Card, 2011; Jones et al., 2012), all of it also contributing to the current discourse on Do-it-yourself urbanism.

Many of these new approaches to agency are operating in the urban realm and are meant to contribute to enhancing public urban life, or indeed, as some argue to 'produce' urbanity (cf. Baier et al., 2013; Dell, 2013). Architects and designers certainly find new terrains of action in these new urban practices. While they are apparently 'acting outside of the profession' (Crawford, 2012: 84) they are simultaneously establishing new claims on authority which are reflected in the current shift of the architectural academy and the curricula of architectural schools towards an urban focus as Dana Cuff has observed (Cuff, 2014). Amateur home remodelling in the context of European cities is of no particular concern in these articulations of the discipline's 'urban desire' (*ibid.*: 95): it is not driven by any particular intellectual or political project, lacks the input of the creative class, is seemingly concerned only with private spaces – single-family homes often located in suburbs (the anti-urban par excellence) – and is never so crucial in securing livelihoods and survival as in the cases of self-help building in the cities of the South. However, my suggestion in this paper is that if the concepts of agency, authorship and self-made urbanism are to be developed further, it is vital to deepen our understanding of the widespread everyday modifications, alterations and conversions of homes by amateurs. Significant work beyond the discipline of architecture to support this claim is found in two fields of research which I will discuss in the following section: first, the field of vernacular studies and second, studies of architecture within the social sciences informed by sociological theories of practice.

Vernacular builders and architecture in everyday life

The first strand of scholarship which I wish to draw on is the multidisciplinary field of vernacular studies, made up by architectural historians, preservationists, anthropologists and geographers concerned with the actions of non-professionals in building or adapting their homes. Studies of vernacular architecture have traditionally been concerned with the pre-industrial and, particularly in Europe and North America, mostly rural building heritage. This has implied a focus on

the documentation and classification of *authentic* buildings 'that have to be studied and appreciated in their "pristine" state, and that accordingly need to be safeguarded from the onslaughts of modernisation and change' (Vellinga, 2006: 83). However, a number of scholars within the field have long called for more dynamic, integrative and future oriented approaches that do not reify the categories of vernacular and modern (AlSayyad and Bourdieur, 1989; Upton, 1993; Asquith and Vellinga, 2006b). One of the most important voices in this respect, architectural historian Dan Upton, has specifically criticised his colleagues within architectural history for limiting their scope of work by accepting 'in principle the design profession's account of architectural invention as a master narrative of the creation of the human landscape' (1991: 195) the result of which is the distinction between architecture as high culture and the vernacular as low (*ibid.*: 196). For Upton, the categories of high and low are historic and socially constructed and should constitute the topic of historical inquiry not the basis of analysis (*ibid.*: 197). In the face of ongoing processes of modernisation, economic globalisation and cultural hybridisation scholars such as Upton (1993), Glassie (2000) and Vellinga (2006) suggest to focus on the merging of modern and traditional rather than the reinforcement of the dichotomy between these two categories.

The evident shift of urban growth to the Global South over the past decades and the fact that the vast majority of population in the cities of the Global South is living in various forms of informal settlements has also spurred attempts to conceptualise slums as the new vernacular (Rapoport, 1988; Peattie, 1992; Kellett and Napier, 1995; Kellett, 2005). Architect and anthropologist Peter Kellett, for instance, notes with reference to his work on informal settlements in Latin America how these settlements 'may well appear disordered, chaotic and unplanned [...] [but] do in fact respond to purposeful decisions and actions which are based on culturally constructed images of what dwellings and settlements should be like' (2005: 23). Central to this are the meanings of 'home' and the 'imagined futures' (Holston, 1991) that self-help builders aspire to, all of which asks for culturally grounded approaches to complement political-economic analyses (AlSayyad, 1993). Klaufus (2000), for instance, shows how residents of informal settlements in Ecuador use form, style and materials as markers of social distinction. While local buildings traditions do play a role in this, they are complemented by global cultural products and imported architectural design sourced through transnational migrant networks (Klaufus, 2012).

The crucial aspect of these debates about the vernacular in the Global North and South for the study of home remodelling by amateurs is that most of the authors mentioned above arrive at the following conclusion: it is the process in which knowledge about building traditions, techniques, and values is transferred that is

ultimately of more interest than the categorisation, classification, documentation of the built objects by themselves (Oliver, 1989; Upton, 1993). The authenticity of a building on the grounds of its age and structure is no longer the decisive criteria for the vernacular which allows very well to understand home remodelling as practice in which vernacular and modern building are merged. However, the suggested focus on the processes 'of the transmission, interpretation, negotiation and adaptation of vernacular knowledge, skills and experience' (Asquith and Vellinga, 2006a: 7) does obviously pose methodological challenges, especially for architectural theorists, historians and practitioners, and we need to turn to sociological concepts to develop that focus further.

The second strand of scholarship, which I consequently wish to draw on to conceptualise practices of home remodelling, is found in the social sciences, particularly in human geography, where practice approaches to architecture have considerably gained in visibility over the past decade (Lees, 2001; Jacobs, 2006; Kraftl and Adey, 2008; Rose et al., 2010, Strebel, 2011; Jacobs et al., 2012). The work of geographer Jane M. Jacobs is particularly influential. Practice approaches have also entered the field of building sciences with scholars exploring, for instance, user practices in domestic retrofits that aim at reducing energy and emissions (Bartiaux et al., 2014; Gram-Hanssen, 2014; Judson and Maller, 2014). These studies share a focus 'on the more-than representational or performative aspects of architecture' (Jacobs and Merriman, 2011: 218); they explore how architecture is lived in, appropriated, sensed and interacted with in everyday life following sociological theories of social practices (Bourdieu, 1977; Schatzki et al., 2001; Latour, 2005).

Among these practice-centred examinations of architecture we find a number of studies focusing on forms of building use and maintenance work that re-make the fabric of the building (Edensor, 2011; Jacobs and Cairns, 2011; Strebel, 2011). Strebel's analysis of maintenance practices of concierges in a multi-storey housing estate in Glasgow is insightful in pointing towards the difference between merely finding practices *in* buildings and examining 'housing and architecture as sites of continuous *building work*' (Strebel, 2011: 259, emphasis added). Strebel argues that the housing estate as a

> living building [...] is performed in and through the successive scenes of interruptions, troubles and disturbances that concierges continually encounter and the ways they solve these problems in order to keep the building going. (*ibid.*)

This aspect of (ad hoc) problem solving as part of building work is equally fundamental for the remodelling of homes by amateurs as social practice, as we will see in the discussion of the case study. While the concierge is a special case in his/her professional dedication to a particular building, practices of dwelling

will almost inevitably entail some building work as Jane Jacobs and Peter Merriman note:

> Inhabitants and users are necessarily everyday designers, or at least re-designers: intervening in the fabric of a building (knocking a door though here, changing a window there, wallpapering everywhere) or re-programming its planned for activities (using a study as a bedroom, a dining room as a lounge, a former factory as an art gallery, a window to suicide by). (2011: 216)

Strebel, Jacobs and many of the above cited studies draw on Actor-Network-Theory for conceptualising the interaction of human and nonhuman actors based on Bruno Latour's 'flat ontology' (2005). Strebel, for instance, argues explicitly in favour of 'a more symmetrical understanding of "building work"', criticising that in many culture-centred studies of the use of architecture 'from the outset, people and what they do are considered as being separate from the building' (2011: 248). But when do we speak of practices? Does any action performed by the concierge high-rise in the course of his maintenance work already constitute a social practice? This doesn't become quite clear from Strebel's account neither do we find an answer to this in Jacobs and Merriman's above cited comprehensive overview of practice approaches to architecture (2011). From the latter it seems that virtually anything that people *do* in, around and with buildings can be understood as practice: living, sleeping, working, owning or visiting a building, maintaining or cleaning, driving past, skateboarding as well as 'free-running' around a building are all referred to as practices by Jacobs and Merriman (*ibid.*: 213).

In contrast, in the following discussion I wish to adopt an understanding of social practices which bears on Theodore Schatzki's social ontology according to which 'materiality helps compose sociality and social phenomena' through 'nexuses of practices and material arrangements' (Schatzki, 2010: 123). While the material arrangements in Schatzki's conceptualisation resemble the networks of actor-network theory, practices as conceived by Schatzki have no equivalent in actor-network theory. As a result, actor-network theory is, as Schatzki argues, 'unable to study relations between practices and material arrangements' (2010: 135). However, this is exactly my interest is in this study on home remodelling projects as urban practices. Drawing on Schatzki, I take 'practice' to be a concept that redefines the relationship between the cultural and the social. In this understanding, social practice is the proper site of the social, defined as 'routinised types of behaviour necessarily dependent on a knowing-*how,* and held together by practical understanding', according to Reckwitz (2008a: 111, original emphasis). The following in-depth analysis of a case of home remodelling will illustrate this conception, foregrounding the importance of practical, implicit and routinised knowledges in dealing with unexpected challenges and difficulties.

Learning and the unpredictability of things

I will draw on an exploratory case study conducted in 2010-2011 to illustrate my arguments. For more than two years I regularly took accommodation in a small hotel in Darmstadt, Germany, run by the owner Mr Müller[1] for over twenty years. The study takes up observations made during my regular stays in the hotel, uses data from an extended interview with the owner and also refers to several on-site inspections of the house together with the owner. Additional background information was obtained in regular talks with Mr Müller over the years concerning his past accomplishments and future plans to remodel and refurbish the house.[2]

The case as such is ordinary: it is a guest house located at the city's suburbs in a mixed residential area with single family houses and social housing estates from different historical phases in the twentieth century. Mr Müller purchased the single family house in 1990 as a family residence, and the structure has continually been altered and extended ever since. The family's domicile is located on the ground floor, both upper floors contain six apartments in all, available for rent to hotel guests.

The remodelling work started with Mr Müller's initial step to register as a hotel operator and obtain the administrative authorization for running an accommodation business. This procedure was quite a challenge in terms of persistence and assertiveness, as Mr Müller describes during the interview:

> Well, like I said, I was running a fairly large restaurant at the time therefore it seemed obvious to be moving towards the hotel business. So I got on the nerves of those guys at the building inspection office and the regulatory agency long enough to get a hotel license. I eventually succeeded because some 40, 80 – almost 100 m² of additional residential space was created in the process [...] I guess ... Darmstadt's officials, at least some of them, have now probably more regrets than

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1 Name changed.

2 Remarks on methodology: An episodic interview with a high proportion of narrative elements was chosen to grant access to the experiential world of the layperson and his implicit stock of practical knowledge. The extended interview of 2,5 hours was embedded in an open, self-reflexive approach to the field, and flanked by the development of a grounded theory. Also, it proved crucial that the interview was conducted in situ. This allowed the interviewee to describe the processes close to, within and on the objects themselves. Talking about renovation experiences in the case of Mr Müller implied the reactivation of past actions, which had a very physical component: for instance, when the interviewee picked up objects, touched surfaces or re-enacted bodily movements. During our interview Mr Müller frequently and vividly described the drilling, hammering or removing of plaster by using the corresponding gestures. The interview on the spot allowed for the change of location within the house, and for on-site inspections of the objects in question.

hair on their heads for granting me permission, but still they did, so that's that, it's done and dusted, I am not going to back-paddle now; and what my children want to make of it in the future is up to them.

During the last two decades the structure was extensively renovated and altered: It started with the conversion of the loft and the upper floor into apartments available for renting, complete with bathrooms and kitchenettes. Meanwhile parts of the interior fittings had to be replaced again, a terrace was laid on the upper floor and the building façade facing the garden got wood-panelled; just recently the roof was given a new tiling and insulation. The different renovation phases were financed stage by stage: When to take which building measures partly depended on technical demands, but also to a large degree on the interests, preferences and passions of the owner, who describes himself as a person 'with a grass-green heart' since energy-efficient design principles are of paramount importance to him. Having no higher education grade or vocational training of any kind, Mr Müller – born in 1942 – was not trained as a structural engineer but aspires to expand his knowledge and skills on building techniques. He describes himself to be a person who likes to 'juggle as many balls as possible', and he is dreaming of enrolling as senior citizen student at university to take courses in green building and sustainable construction.

The remodelling of Mr Müller's house over the past two decades is clearly not to be understood as a linear process. On the contrary, the project was replete with imponderabilities and fraught with hurdles: from licensing to financing to finding experienced tradesmen and dealing with mistakes along the way. The process as a whole, and each phase of the renovation in itself, was always open to changes in strategy and compromises, dependent on both the engagement with other parties involved, i.e. city officials, craftspersons, neighbours, and the handling of things, i.e. materials, the fabric of the building, their qualities and defects. Other studies on self-building and home remodelling confirm this picture:

With existing structures, the 'unpredictability of things' during a renovation process is distinctly higher than with a new building. Many a surprising discovery is only made by *doing things*, by intervening in the structure and 'getting it done'. It is not until the existing structure is demolished that the layers beneath are brought to light; only then hidden structures and materials become visible, and the spatial impact of a new room layout cannot be experienced before the wall is actually torn down. Erecting, installing and applying new material also has unpredictable aspects – the effect of a colour will only show by applying it to an object, and the functionality of technical features manifests itself during the installation process. It is at these points when plans are changed and replacements or readjustments are made. All this is even more relevant in cases

such as the one described here, where an already existing house was bought and then remodelled with only rudimentary plans at hand because the date of construction lies so far back. Dealing with all these challenges, surprises, and failures means that alteration processes are clearly also learning processes, as Mr Müller's descriptions suggest:

> You see, I had already self-built a house in 1964/65 together with my father and I quite enjoyed the experience, and I've learnt a few lessons seeing the mistakes my father had made, I tried to transfer the experience while building this rather large 150-seat restaurant in 1976, 'cause I always had a huge interest in constructing and engineering, that's probably why I do a lot of thinking about building materials and regulations and all sorts of things all the time, and so you acquire just more and more knowledge. I understand a tiny bit about [...] dew points, I know how to calculate it, where it's gotta be measured, for instance outside here. I know a thing or two about windows and what is absolutely essential. At the time I installed the windows 17 or 18 years ago they were considerably better than required by the standards, well, and nowadays I'd take windows that are triple glazed. [...] So you see, you slowly start to build up knowledge over time, and with the things I don't know I can always ring up [my friend] Albrecht and he'll be telling me how it's done.

As evident in the description above, the behaviour and activities of the layperson in the context of remodelling architecture can neither be described as rule-governed or norm-following, nor can the operations be explained in terms of rational decision-making. The practical knowledge expressed in these types of behaviour is used to distinguish between suitable, good and unsuitable practices, and cannot be separated from the acting individual, hence it cannot be represented as a static inventory or 'explicated' as a set of propositions (Reckwitz, 2008a: 117). Practical knowledge is not *knowing that* but *knowing how,* and thus it is 'only in the *act of dealing with* problems, in the way things are used and procedures are applied that [this type of knowledge] "is brought into action"'(Hörning, 2001: 28, original emphasis). Applied to the practice of DIY-remodelling, this implies that the key to success is not so much being in possession of technical expertise, but rather that the person carrying out the task has developed a 'practical sense' of how to possibly obtain this expertise and actually implement it in practice; it is about counterbalancing the lack of expertise and acquiring the appropriate know-how, or, as Mr Müller puts it: 'So, I've just been genning up on this.' The crucial point is thus not the knowledge a layperson *has* or *possesses*, but rather how they put to *use and apply* this knowledge which is brought into action by dealing with unexpected challenges and difficulties. While self-builders certainly do anticipate and design their actions, setting strategic goals, however, does not *precede* the action; it is situationally embedded in the circumstances governing the action, that is, it is part of the 'informal logic of action' in Reckwitz' terms (2008a: 126).

Mr Müller benefits from a practical sense he has developed through previous experience at the time when he and his father built a house in the 1960s. His father had, in turn, 'learned a lot' from Mr Müller's grandfather, who ran a small painting business. On the other hand, Mr Müller has established a network of friends and advisors to consult over the years. His longstanding friend Albrecht is an architect who – if necessary – draws up plans, and another friend, who works for the building contractor Hoch-Tief, recommended craftspersons and provided Mr Müller with the professional *Hilti* drill driver that has been his most reliable tool for over twenty years. Then there are local craftsmen and experts with whom he has made good experience in the past, such as the owner of a nearby sawmill, and even hotel guests who are often trained structural engineers and technicians working at the Technical University in Darmstadt located in the vicinity. Other suggestions and input that Mr Müller has picked up in the past cannot be assigned to specific individuals, but result from accidental encounters with things and places, from solutions seen elsewhere, and bits and pieces of information accumulated over time:

> I've seen this somewhere, I can't remember where, and I certainly didn't want to tack a roof batten in the space between the rafters and come with heraklith boards from beneath, and plaster filling, and white paint. This is nonsense, it's just too much work. I must have seen this kind of timber shuttering by pieces somewhere, I don't recall, it was years and years ago, stored in my mind and suddenly it was there, and then I found this sawmill that sold me these boards. The wood is untreated down to the present day, *yep.*

Of course, cultural symbolic orders, values and patterns of interpretation also play a significant role in home remodelling processes. They are, however, seldom explicated but instead take effect as 'perceptions of what is appropriate, right and plausible' (Hörning, 2001: 23). People's taste preferences and the kind of housing they are seeking form part of a socially shared 'cultural repertoire of meaning and interpretation' (*ibid.*: 20) – the way people present themselves to the outside world, how they live, what they perceive to be appropriate to their social status, etc. Likes or dislikes are always influenced by the cultural symbolic order, yet the cultural is expressed in the ways of *doing* things, it thus literally feeds back into social practices. In the case of Mr Müller, cultural norms and aesthetic role models were challenged by the sense of the homeowner for practical and cost-saving solutions. Mr Müller installed metal scaffolding which is used on construction sites on three facades of his house on a permanent basis. The scaffolding functions as plant gantry and provides easy access to the façade for maintenance work. The ready-made character of the design solution prompted the neighbour to protest against it. He felt offended and didn't want to put up with the unconventional exterior appearance of the house next to his. As he could not make a legal issue out of it, he eventually had to settle with it but the

conflict extended over years and had lasting effects on the relations between the two neighbours.

Home remodelling as social practice

It is one thing to demonstrate the significance of practical knowledge for DIY-remodelling processes by non-specialists. It is another to answer the question whether these processes can be defined as a type of social practice. There are three aspects of social practice, which are at first sight incompatible with this:

First, there is the imperative of repetition and routine: not every act already qualifies as practice. Practical understanding evolves in repeating acts, and it is only through *repetition* that routinised types of everyday practice develop whose meanings are socially shared. Yet remodelling one's home or shop premises is something 'out of the ordinary', an *extra*-ordinary event characterised by its non-repetitiveness rather than day-to-day routine. And although remodelling can sometimes come to be 'normal/the norm' (as in Mr Müller's case) and extend over a long time, the objects and building materials dealt with, and thus the problem-solving strategies, could be regarded as different on each occasion. Second, social practices are typically characterised by some degree of *collectivity*: For a practice to qualify as 'social' it does not necessarily presuppose intersubjective or interactive structures in the traditional sense (cf. Reckwitz, 2008a: 117). A necessary condition, however, is collectivity, i.e. the requirement that the practice be socially shared, socially understood and expected (Hörning, 2001: 112) which in turn is predicated on the repetitivity of similar acts performed by different people (Schmidt and Volbers, 2011). As to the DIY-remodelling of architecture, it seems not immediately apparent why it should be analysed as a collective phenomenon. Home reconstructions and alterations are singular interventions, unique in character, highly individual and extremely diverse in nature. Thirdly, artefacts play a central role in practice theory. Prompting repetitions, artefacts motivate social practices in a variety of ways. Following Reckwitz, a social practice is basically a skilful bodily performance linked to a meaningful way of handling and using *things* (2008a: 113). Structural alterations and refurbishments, however, imply that precisely the essence of those things is at issue: they get to be replaced, renewed, and rebuilt. Here, the habitual 'dealing with things' is cancelled and the *scripts,* which regulate their handling, are put out of force since the artefacts themselves are being transformed.

To resolve the above issues and argue for a conceptualisation of DIY home remodelling as social practice, I want to put forward the proposal that action strategies in the context of DIY-remodelling – i.e. action-planning, decision-

making, problem-solving – should be treated as part of the behavioural routines and cultural patterns of interpretation regulating the use of architecture in everyday life (which precede processes of change and alteration). There is much to indicate that the remodelling of architecture by laypersons can be considered as a form of 'acting differently [from usual]' (German: *Andershandeln* in Hörning's parlance, 2001: 19), defined as the fundamental ability to opt for alternatives and bring about changes in social practice when faced with newness, irregularities and unexpected occurrences. It is in the process of remodelling itself that routinised forms of behaviour and ways of interpretation are put to the test; they are reflected, reassessed and updated by *doing things*, viz. through problem-focused, practical action. Or, put more simply: amateurs will inevitably fall back on the experiences made in and with these structures, materials and objects over time when they decide (for whatever reasons) to remodel and alter built structures that form part of their everyday live. Confronted with the need to change *something*, amateurs always determine their strategies in view of the material objects in the surrounding space, and they articulate and clarify interests, needs, deficits, and scrutinise circumstances relative to the extent to which architecture and objects help or hinder everyday activities.

As a consequence, the remodelling of architecture is not conceivable without recourse to pre-existing routines of dealing with and handling things or objects, even if these objects cease to exist in the process. This is reflected in the interview with Mr Müller, when he explains how earlier experiences and practical dealings with objects (the shower tray, the taps) constituted an underlying motive for action and justified improvements and alterations.

> Well, we did it that way, I mean I would've always done it that way, no matter if the flats were rented out or used for commercial purposes in the end – I would have done the baths in exactly this same way: no shower tray but with a downward slope instead, because I served in the armed forces for 4 years and I really got to appreciate the advantages of cleaning showers with a scrubbing brush and clear the dirty water into a floor gully. No more kneeling or bending and no need to clean the odd rounded corners with a cloth, you just handle the job more elegantly.

> You might have noticed that all the taps in the house are wall-mounted. While we were in the process of constructing the restaurant in 1975/76, my father had to go to hospital in Marburg for a week to get surgery due to a rupture. When I visited him there I had to use the bathroom, and washing my hands I noticed that the tap was wall-mounted and plumbed-in – which was a very unusual thing at the time. And since I was sick and tired of these annoying taps that come from underneath the sink, and all the lime deposit for which you need a toothbrush and chalk to get it cleaned, I decided on that very day that from now on the taps in my own house shall be wall-mounted as well. And this is how I'm still doing it in the small apartment my wife bought herself, although she keeps telling me that I have lost it [...] simply drill through the sink and get it done, she says. But I keep telling her that she'll have to put up with the filth and the mould forever if I don't [...]

As to the first issue of *repetition* and routine, we can therefore contend that while remodelling projects face different problems and extend over different periods of time, the nature of the learning processes involved is comparable: they will always require obtaining appropriate know-how and sourcing expertise, they will entail coping with the unexpected, and they will pose the challenge of solving problems with limited financial resources. Also, the second condition of *collectivity* is resolved when linking remodelling practices back to behavioural routines and cultural patterns of everyday life. These practices of dwelling, working etc. are necessarily collective and socially shared within a specified cultural context. Only the collective character allows gaining help and assistance, sourcing information from informal networks and using advice from various sources. Finally, the third issue of the transformation of *artefacts* through which established ways of 'dealing with things' are called into question, can also be answered by conceiving the remodelling of architecture as bound up with pre-existing socio-material practices. The practical experience and action Mr Müller refers to in order to explain his decisions during the remodelling process need not necessarily be connected with the object to be modified. In Mr Müller's case, the decisive factor for installing tiled frameless shower bases in his house was his experience of having to scrub shower rooms during the years he served in the army. It is thus the accumulated, practical knowledge acquired through multi-locational practices of dwelling, working, but also through personal hygiene, maintenance or cleaning activities that allows the amateur to act and opt for alternatives in the process of remodelling.

Conclusion

As the case study and the literature review indicate, it seems reasonable to correlate action strategies in processes of self-organised alterations of built structures with the everyday routines and practices of living, working, celebrating, family cohabitation, etc. in and around the house's architecture. Thus, preferences and skills in dealing with and re/designing architecture spring from real life everyday routines and practices. These routines and practices ultimately generate the practical experiences, which amateurs need when they decide to remodel and alter built structures that form part of their everyday live and, most importantly, when they learn 'how to do things themselves'. These practical experiences are intrinsically connected to the materiality of things, objects, and structures that make up architecture in everyday life. It is the self-organised form of DIY-remodelling projects that challenges the way 'how things are normally done' in the amateur's everyday routines. It provides the amateur with the opportunity to put routinised forms of behaviour and implicit ways of interpretation to the test and it has the potential to bring about changes in social

practice because of the newness of each situation, the irregularities and unexpected occurrences.

The potentially urban nature of the DIY-remodelling practices discussed in this paper come to the fore when thinking about the multiple ways in which these practices extend beyond the confines of the building site, the project or the individual homeowner. First, experiences made elsewhere shape the practical skills, the improvisation and the decisions necessary in the process of home remodelling by amateurs under conditions of financial constraints. Place-specific solutions and building traditions are likely to be merged with prefabricated, mass-produced and imported products. Second, the lack of formal education and technical expertise makes DIY-remodelling projects almost by definition networked and collective endeavours, something which is very much in contrast to the connotation of DIY as individualistic, self-reliant, and self-sufficient as noted by Vannini and Taggart (2014: 271). Obtaining help and support is usually bound up with social interaction, reciprocal relationships and the building of informal networks, all of which is contributing to urban social life. Third, people's taste preferences and perceptions of what they perceive to be appropriate, reasonable or apt in a given situation are influenced by cultural norms and values. These are socially shared in a given cultural context but rarely explicated or reflected upon. As cultural dispositions are inscribed into the social practices of home remodelling, those practises equally contribute to re-shaping norms and values. Finally, alterations of the outer appearance of the houses as well as functions and densities impact on urban spaces and – over time and collectively – on urban quarters at large. Ultimately, it is the very fact that DIY-remodelling practices are *not* merely explained by the rationale of cost saving and – in the context of Western European cities – are not on principal survival strategies that also defines their contribution to the urban: these are practices that extend beyond the single project, they create networks, span time and generations, and they give people choices to make in personalising their project (Brown, 2008). In consequence, there is no fundamental difference between the DIY home remodelling practices of amateurs and the practices of urban intervention discussed in the debates on DIY urbanism other than that the first is confined to private homes and the latter focused on shared urban spaces. A particular challenge for future research is to explore the interlinkages that exist between these two fields of action and practice in the European city.

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Reassembling austerity research[*]

Hanna Hilbrandt and Anna Richter

abstract

This paper draws out some of the ambivalences of the bourgeoning work on urban practices of sharing, collaborating and saving and their recent conceptualizations: In political economy accounts of neoliberal urbanism, these practices are seen as a means of coping with – and thereby often reinforcing – larger structural transformations that reproduce urban inequality (Peck, 2012). More agency-oriented approaches highlight their collaborative, political potential to argue that these practices may open up the possibility to shape neoliberal urbanisms in alternative ways (Färber, 2014a). This paper attempts to move beyond such potentially constraining conceptualizations. First, in a theoretical discussion, we attend to both lines of thinking and seek to critically acknowledge their traps and constraints. Second, we relate low budget practices to concerns about poverty. Our theoretical approach and the introduction of practices that could be better described as no budget practices allow us to question some of the assumptions that are underlying the emerging discourse on how to best conceptualize such responses to scarcity. In conclusion, we call for a closer scrutiny of the empirical realities and contexts within which low budget practices are embedded in order to avoid the possible trap of exaggerating or ignoring their effects.

Introduction

Austerity urbanism (Peck, 2012; Tonkiss, 2013) has provoked considerable debate in urban scholarship. If a good part of austerity research has focused on explaining and critiquing the larger structural transformations producing the current conjuncture (Peck, 2012; Mayer, 2012), recent interest has turned to the ways in which people cope with resulting constraints in everyday practice

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through collective low budget organizing. Färber, for instance, conceptualizes these 'ways in which [...] people relate to one another in established and newly emerging low budget practices, and in situations of austerity' (2014a: 120) with the notion of low budget urbanity (henceforth LBU)[1]. Although not always explicitly labeled LBU and sometimes distanced from its conceptual ideas (Bialski et al., 2014; Rosol and Schweizer, 2012; Ferrell, 2006; Shantz, 2005), this programmatic account is based on a series of studies that have explored a variety of small-scale, quotidian, and entrepreneurial or community driven forms of engagement with a view to understand how these may work to bypass or reconfigure dominant global trends (Krätke, 2011; Stahl, 2013; Müller et al., 2008; Rapp, 2009)[2]. Scholars have identified an inventory of strategies that are seen to creatively make more with less and cushion the cutting back of public provision, services and responsibilities: Urban gardening initiatives provide a frequent example to inquire whether a generation of gardeners is currently planting a better society (Halder and von der Haide, 2010; Rosol, 2010). Scholars study dumpster diving as 'anarchist political praxis' (Shantz, 2005) that promises implicit emancipatory potential (Ferrell, 2006). In a similar vein, authors point to a culture of (informal) co-working as well as to second-hand cultures and alternative trading spaces (Gregson and Crewe, 2003; Hughes, 2005) as new sites of commoning (Baier et al., 2013).

To revisit a concept-in-the-making, we embed the discussion around these practices within a recent controversy about the ontologies that frame urban studies: The interest in these practices emerged, in our view, against the backdrop of a debate around urban austerity driven by political economy. In the context of this literature, strategies of sharing and saving, as well as other means of coping with austerity are seen as the most recent indication of the seemingly unavoidable results of neoliberal rule (Mayer, 2012). According to this position, these practices risk to mimetically embrace the restraints of neoliberal policies. In contrast to these assumptions, this special issue stresses solidarity and new forms of urban cooperation in an attempt to move beyond the predefined trajectories of political economy approaches. Here, forms of low budget engagement do not merely feature as a new form of organization or the symbol of precarious living conditions. As solidary and co-operative forms of production and consumption, they are seen to invoke the emergence of an alternative that

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1   As LBU is a relatively young research programme and Färber's article constitutes its most comprehensive conceptual framing to date, our intervention relies both on her paper as well as on our own review of this discourse.

2   We draw on low budget practices as one set of sharing and saving practices to represent – *pars pro toto* – a whole discourse of collaborative practices that are discussed in this special issue.

may lead a way out of the political constraints of austerity and neoliberal modes of production (Rosol and Schweizer, 2012; Pacione, 1997).

Although such practices may, in fact, produce a number of often surprisingly successful strategies of resilience, such coping under an 'extreme economy' (Peck, 2012) should not be examined uncritically. The issue addressed in this paper is threefold: Firstly, we formulate a methodological concern with the ways in which both approaches theorize urban practices associated with low budgets and their workings in contemporary urbanization under austerity. By critically interrogating the limitations and applications of these existing framings we argue that an *a priori* understanding of low budget practices as either an indication of the roll-out of neoliberal rule and/or as a contingent assemblage replete with emerging possibilities hampers the study of these practices. To be clear, we do not take issue with either of the concepts as such. Rather we suggest that an open exploration of these practices should neither presuppose that they 'save the city' (as the title of this special issue suggests) nor that they are ineffective in dealing with urban inequalities.

Secondly, we argue that an open-ended investigation into responses to scarcity necessitates widening the boundaries of this research programme. If its central concern is to study new forms of (low) budget organizing, we point to the silence on poverty – that one would assume was a central concern of this perspective – as an apparent shortcoming of this agenda. Although it is acknowledged that some forms of coping on a low budget are occurring out of necessity and point to a lack of material means and an imposed abstinence (Bude et al., 2011; Bialski et al., 2013), much of the literature is concerned with forms of voluntary restraint and its moral and communitarian value (Doherty and Etzioni, 2003; Putnam, 2000). We argue that accounting for the practices of those most disadvantaged by the economy adds to an understanding of everyday urban practices on low budgets. Poverty and no budget[3] practices provide a powerful starting point to call into question some of the underlying assumptions of solidarity and emancipation on the one hand and co-optation and consolidation on the other that are presupposed in this discourse.

Thirdly, we suggest a reading that allows for a critical exposition of the ways in which 'existing urban realities support oppressive and exclusionary social structures and practices while at the same time projecting alternative visions' (Cunningham, 2010: 268f). In the light of ongoing privatizations, a growing

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3   The difference between low budget practices and no budget practices lies not so much in the size of the budgets; neither is it a difference of practices but rather of motivations: no budget practices are based more on necessity than on choice.

sense for entrepreneurialism, as well as the continuing rolling back of welfare, emerging practices of sharing and saving may present instances of complicity with neoliberalism. Yet, if we seek to make room for the possibilities these practices may offer we have to examine their specific effects and engage in more detail with their possibly contradictory outcomes.

This argument is structured in three steps. Section one sets the scene. It contrasts both theoretical framings sketched out above and discusses the constraints of these approaches for studying low-budget practices. We go on to suggest that opening up these framings through the inclusion of practices that emerge out of poverty would allow for a more holistic research programme. In section three, we conclude with our own suggestions for studying responses to austerity which, we hope, will make room for attending to their (possibly) transformative potentials as well as to wider structural transformations.

Theoretical framing: Constraints or possibilities?

Our first concern in this paper is a methodological one. As the constraints of austerity have become an omnipresent discourse in (the study of) neoliberal urbanism, much research has sought to uncover the implications of neoliberalism from a political economy perspective (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). If the strategies to overcome scarcity, featured for instance in this special issue, flag up an opening for possibilities and change, the lens through which they are studied similarly constitutes an attempt to leave the well-trodden path of structural constraints with their restricted leeway for thinking contingency and transformation (Rosskamm, 2014: 132). In scrutinizing how current research approaches frame everyday practices of saving the city we aim to uncover the constraints of these two dominant approaches. Both theoretical framings, we argue, run danger to preclude an open exploration of the practices in question.

To understand this backdrop we briefly return to some of the core arguments of this work: In a recent paper, Peck (2012: 629) describes austerity urbanism as a contested political project that 'transforms the political calculus for all involved'. In the current conjuncture, it comprises three interrelated processes: destructive creativity, deficit politics and devolved risk. Firstly, austerity conditions intensify creative destruction, as saving measures (or cuts) further attack especially those facilities and mechanisms that work towards a more progressive (and yet somewhat Keynesian) market logic, i.e. redistribution. Rather than resulting in a 'spontaneous emergence of deregulated or free markets' (*ibid.*: 631), for Peck such measures intrude further into the remnants of redistributive welfare statism. This leads to more – rather than less – and qualitatively different state

action and represents neoliberal practice performed through privatization and voluntarism. Secondly, deficit politics present the context within which especially those policy areas can easily be abandoned that traditionally have attempted to offset the most blatant effects of inequality (such as unemployment benefits). As such, these measures target those who are already stretched and strained, let alone those who have only recently been affected by the crisis. Deficit politics deepen austerity rather than balancing its unevenness (Slater, 2014). Thirdly, both the austerity measures supposedly responding to the crisis and the responsibility for bolstering their worst effects are devolved and downloaded onto local authorities and, in succession, to individuals. Peck (2012: 632) argues that 'austerity is ultimately about making *others* pay the price of fiscal retrenchment'. These *others,* in his line of thinking, are those inventing and enacting practices with low and – *in extenso* – no budgets. From this perspective, low budget practices present a response to austerity that neatly fits into the neoliberal repertoire of shifting responsibilities downwards, devolving the costs of austerity to lower scales (regions, cities and neighbourhoods) and expanding a punitive law-and-order state onto those most affected by the resulting constraints (Peck and Theodore, 2012; Smith, 1996)[4].

Beyond Peck's more theoretical stance, local reactions (of community involvement) to the rolling back of welfare and the rolling out of an enabling, workfarist state have been drawn out in detail (cf. Mayer, 2013; Rosol, 2012; 2006; MacLeavy, 2009). A series of studies has noted how self-organized and participatory practices lead either to more formalized arrangements or to islands of potentially progressive projects that remain more or less temporal and local without necessarily engaging with larger issues around injustice or inequality (cf. Mayer, 2011). In the strong version of this argument, for instance put forward by Mayer, even those practices that 'might appear as the fulfillment of earlier grassroots empowerment claims [are] actually part of a new mode of governance that has emerged in and for neglected and disadvantaged areas and communities' (2003: 110). On a similar note, Colomb has noted that temporary uses and urban underground cultures have been promoted, officially institutionalized and integrated into urban growth strategies (2012: 140; see also Groth and Corijn, 2005; Rapp, 2009). Rosol and Schweizer (2012: 713) advance this more nuanced version of the argument: They discuss to what extent urban gardening projects 'based on principles of Solidarity Economics are in a position to develop new economic forms based on solidarity'. Their conclusion is ambivalent. Rosol and Schweizer find that 'neo-liberal policies are presented

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4   Wacquant's (2007a, 2007b) studies of 'advanced marginality' and the lives of 'urban outcasts' offer analytical and ethnographic accounts of how austerity works from a political economy perspective.

almost worldwide and without alternative' and that 'it is not possible for ortoloco [a 'community-supported agriculture' project] to carry out its activities entirely outside the complexities of the global economy or the capitalistic pressures that distort its activities' (*ibid.*: 721). Yet they also suggest that projects of co-working, co-organizing, saving and sharing 'continually stretch the borders of the possible' (*ibid.*).

While we cannot possibly do justice to the variations and complexity of this work, framing low budget practices through a meta-narrative of structural constraints declares *avant la lettre* that these practices tend to consolidate the workings of austerity. How can we attend to their possibilities if we denounce *a priori* that low budget practices could in fact foster more democratic practices? And who are we as researchers to assume to be able to predict the long-term effects of self-made, low budget, collectively organized practices? While an awareness of the tensions and contradictions of neoliberal rule does not necessarily preclude an account of progressive imaginaries and openings within macro-political constraints, political economy approaches tend to stress the risk of cooptation and normative charge (cf. Mayer, 2003). In other words, the political economy assumption of a coherent political project with clear outcomes could be seen to presuppose the hopelessness of these emerging initiatives.

It is against this backdrop that the current special issue suggests to supplement the previously described politico-economic framing with an understanding of how these practices come to matter as emergent formations, practices, objects, discourses and histories. While no overarching conceptual frame unites low budget studies, this work is coherent in the (sometimes unarticulated) attempt to refine the structural politico-economic explanations by considering moments of agency, actor-networks and sociomaterialities involved in contemporary formations. Consequently, this approach to theorizing 'from within' differs from the epistemological approaches political economy perspectives offer in a number of ways.

Firstly, if political economy perspectives tend to frame even critical and/or subversive responses to neoliberal urbanization in terms of co-optation, they already predetermine the directionality of such practices through the (neoliberal) conditions within which they emerge. As such conceptualizations leave little (or no) room for more variable or alternative developments, research on low budget practices tends to start from an implicit dissatisfaction with the difficulty to theorize moments of agency and resistance and their various articulations (McRobbie, 2012; Färber, 2014a). According to Färber, 'agencies must be taken into account as taking their effect in parallel with austerity measures, and only occasionally in relation to them' (2014a: 133). Studying these agencies is often

guided by a practice-approach, which stresses the sayings and doings of agents and actants, rather than structures. Bialski, for instance, studies how online social networks such as 'Couchsurfing' have led to the emergence of informal, collaborative, grassroots travel practices, yet also discusses the exclusions these practices (can) produce (2012; 2013).

Studying emergent practices 'from within' allows for a shift of perspective to the contingencies and disruptions within the workings of neoliberal urbanization. This shift results secondly in a search for responses to austerity, particularly on the local level and from the bottom up. Thus differing from political economy approaches that focus on the macro, the local dimension offers research on low budget practices possibilities to chart moments of agency. Pacione's (1997) study of local (and alternative) currencies is a case in point.

Thirdly, a good part of low budget research stands out for paying attention to socio-material formations and, in line with actor-network-theory, for attributing agency to these objects, or actants. Färber, for instance, has recently suggested theorizing low budget urbanism as assemblages to account for the ways in which discursive and material practices continuously compose urban constellations (2014a; see also Ureta, 2014; Shore and Wright, 2011).

Fourthly, we note a bias for potentials that are found in punctual interventions in the urban constellations and are seen to leave traces that may lead to long time change. In line with the austerity debate, research on low budget organizing tends to be framed within the context of economic crises. Yet it comes to different conclusions about the nature of urban transformations than more structuralist perspectives. Rather than perceiving global formations as hindering individual agency, this approach tends to focus on the arrangements and possibilities within and despite these constraints. This perspective can involve a tendency to conceptualize assumed potentials from a normative, rather than analytical, perspective, where they are implicitly valued in advance as desirable and positive. Urry, for instance, discusses how people 'develop personalized life projects through being freed from certain structures, [...] extend and elaborate their consumption patterns and social networks' (2011: 213).

In sum, these assumptions allow low budget thinkers to overcome some of the constraints of political economy frameworks. Yet, this approach to studying (low budget) practices and forms of organization 'from within' comes with its own problematic baggage: On the one hand, studying assemblages 'from within' is in itself an inconsistent endeavor. The framing of this research posits austerity as a pre-given and fixed context. This contradicts a reading of such practices as assemblages, in which formations are continuously reconstructed, emerging and

contingent. Rejecting structural perspectives is not, as Tonkiss helpfully remarks, 'to say that forms of social and economic organization [...] are not structured in ways that are reproduced and embed power in quite stable or systematic modes' (2011: 587). Where agency and practice are studied from within, the context within which these may emerge and materialize is implied, even if it is not explicitly subject of the analysis. On the other hand, the assumed 'openness' of this approach is closed down from the beginning, when the aim of the project is predefined as one that primarily 'lends a voice to the potentialities' (Färber 2014a: 122). A full analysis of those matters that are of concern in research on responses to austerity must include practices that are less promising. This brings us to the second part of our paper, which is about the choice of what matters as a 'matter of concern'[5] (Latour, 2004).

Learning from no budget practices

A necessary methodological premise of agency-centered perspectives is that the researcher has to question the selection and classification of her material at any moment (Kamleithner, 2014: 118). What relations one actually follows, Kamleithner suggests, depends on the political consciousness of the researcher and thus necessarily builds on normative assumptions. Clearly, any research interest needs to define a field and a direction: The current research into low budget practices focuses on alternative, collective and cooperative projects and the ways in which they organize 'the city in parallel and/or in contrast to centralized, state-based infrastructure' (Bialski et al., 2013). Our second concern in this paper is to examine a specific spectrum of the low-budget practices that have so far been omitted from the framework: If research into practices based on low budgets – unspecified as to whether financial, social or symbolic budgets are at stake – examines only practices defined through the quality of their relations (namely solidary ones), it excludes those practices that have emerged from dire need, for instance, in the context of benefit reductions and very low paying labor. Poverty, however, matters to the study of low budget practices and thus this research programme. Why are bottle collecting, temp-work, street vending, low or unpaid academic work not looked at when researching culturally meaningful socio-material formations that articulate urban economic crises in terms of low budget practices? Priming the research on low budget practices with those practices that we labeled no budget practices not only widens the focus of this

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5   Latour takes issue with the construction of matters of fact and argues for a realist stance towards matters of concern. Pun intended, 'matters of concern' are not only those things that are (or should be) of concern for research, but also concerning in the sense that they are (or should be) bothering or disturbing the researcher as well as the reader (Latour, 2004).

programme. It also invites us to question some of the assumptions underlying the emerging discourse around LBU as well as to rethink the effects of these practices. To trigger this reconsideration, the remainder of this part draws out some of the similarities and differences of the related conceptualizations of low and no budget practices.

First, and most centrally, the notion of no budget practices (like their low budget counterparts) captures efforts to sustain or replace initiatives or projects that fell victim to social policy cuts and fiscal constraints. Both related sets of practices thus clearly emerge out of scarcity; yet where low budget practices occur either out of necessity or choice, no budget practices ensue out of necessity. In some of the literature, saving, sharing and low budget practices are explored as an ethical alternative to neoliberal capitalism (Rosol and Schweizer, 2012: 713; Tonkiss, 2013). Based on solidarity and collective organizing, rather than competition, low-budget initiatives are assumed to provide, as McRobbie suggests, 'a pathway for local growth, meaningful non-standard jobs and a merging of craft with ethical and sustainable practice' (2012: 1). They have led others to conclude that sharing and saving practices present 'living proof that other ways of thinking and acting are possible' (Rosol and Schweizer, 2012: 713). Yet, the somewhat premature focus on solidarity and especially its moral elevation to a potential 'savior' of the city (posited in this special issue) limit this research programme to a set of practices that could simply be called voluntary activities, civic engagement, participation, solidarity economies, communitarianism or activism. The inclusion of activities that work to supplement budgets at the very bottom of the economy has an analytical payoff in that it allows asking open questions about the motivations, cultural meanings and effects of low budget practices in people's everyday lives. And it permits to meaningfully engage with the implications of findings: As low budget practices may not only be about saving and sharing, but also about surviving, the presumption that low budget practices promise potentials or produce solidarity may be premature.

Second, where low budget projects manage to thrive despite or even because of the burdens implied by improvisation and self-provisioning, they often require high levels of input from their members, users or activists. The term 'low budget practices' captures essentially a reality of smaller means, yet the relational qualifier 'low' remains as ill defined as the apparently economic understanding of 'budget'. In contrast to no budget practices that often require little prior knowledge or capacities, the skills and voluntary input of often educated, but low- or unpaid participants in activities framed as low budget practices can arguably amount to relatively large 'budgets'. 'Budgets' or 'costs', in our understanding, refer to related aspects: the social and cultural precondition of engaging in communal practices on the one hand and the actual enactment of unpaid labor

on the other (cf. Bourdieu 1983; Mayer 2003). Measured in purely capital-oriented terms both points would be associated with high monetary costs. This is not to say that no budget practices do not involve skillful organization; our point is that the educational, social, political or other means that are necessary for enacting low budget practices need further conceptualization. The current lack of clarity leads to an analytical problem: the focus on low budget practices dissociates poverty from what matters as concern. Where the organization of basic goods or the realization of a less deprived lifestyle may be paramount, coping may appear as an individualized fight for scarce resources. The inclusion of no budget practices into the research agenda could trigger a discussion of the various (social and other) forms of capitals invested into sharing and saving practices as well as their manifestations and effects.

Third, both sets of practices and their articulations differ in terms of their self-perception and perceptions by others. At times, low budget practices tend to work with a particular 'cool' aesthetics of informality, which could easily be associated with ingenuity, resourcefulness and entrepreneurial flexibility. These virtues are not merely mapped onto real life practices by hopeful academics. They equally derive from the self-presentations and self-publications of some of these projects, which 'strive to distinguish themselves, or explicitly distance themselves, from the capitalist way of organizing the economy' (Rosol and Schweizer, 2012: 714). Consider, for instance, the representations of gardening initiatives, which tend to stress their innovative ways of harvesting gains beyond economic calculations through a kind of rough but caring look. But the informal aesthetics of self-organized initiatives can also work to market such projects or allow them to capitalize upon this style. No budget practices come with imaginaries of a different kind: Representations of self-built housing, for instance in the recent media coverage of the (no budget) dwelling practices in a vacant plot in Berlin-Kreuzberg, the Cuvrybrache, soon led to labeling this place 'the slum of Berlin', stigmatizing both the site and its inhabitants. To consider the representation of such no budget practices within a research programme on responses to austerity not only allows questioning the assumptions and expectations through which these practices are framed. It also facilitates a distinction between the worldly effects of practices of sharing and saving and their cultural representations and thus provides a crucial corrective to research into low budget practice as currently undertaken.

Whilst agreeing that practices such as car-sharing or urban gardening might in fact 'produce new forms of value' (Bialski et al., 2013: 2), the additional analytical dimension of no budget perspectives could help making sense of 'the relation of these practices to capital, the state, and citizen responsibilities' (*ibid.*) when the

consequences of austerity policies force more and more people to complement their benefits by diving through bins.

Beyond constraints or possibilities: Studying practices under austerity

Following our three concerns with the current framing of low budget practices our suggestion is to study sharing and saving practices in the light of these shortcomings, yet without falling back into the equally constraining structural(ist) logic. To recap, we argued that framing these practices through more structural approaches runs danger of closing down any potential for alternatives. At the same time, we suggested that the current framing of low budget practices 'from within' reduces its conceptual openness to a narrow focus on possibilities and potentials. In closing, we attempt to reconcile these positions with a conceptual approach to low-budget practices that goes beyond their simple denunciation whilst attending to the constraints of the contemporary conjuncture:

Recent conceptual work on neoliberal governance that is more attentive to the ambiguities of political programmes, the permeability of governmental strategies and the uncertainty of the contemporary conjuncture may help to move beyond a one-sided critique of low budget practices. In a series of accounts, John Clarke has offered a notion of governance that departs from the assumption of a coherent political project with clear-cut outcomes in practice (2005; 2012; see also Newman and Clarke, 2009). He reminds us that '[i]n analysing ... ideological schemes or governmental strategies, we need not to mistake the fantastic projections of those who would rule for their real effects' (Clarke, 2012: 209). Instead, he calls for a more differentiated analysis of the emergent organizational forms, diverse forces and unreliable agents that influence governance in the contentious landscapes of the city where the intended effects of politics rarely materialize in foreseeable ways.

These arguments echo recent criticisms of conventional understandings of neoliberalism made by Barnett (2010), Ferguson (2007; 2011) and others. These authors suggest that critical theories of neoliberalism, which denounce the potential possibilities inherent within the neoliberal project as necessarily leading to a reproduction or increase of urban inequality, may be premature. Not only, as Barnett (2012) suggests, may these 'deterministic' perspectives exaggerate the constraints of local actors through broader economic forces. They also remind us that co-optation, activation and the like might not be the most important issues at stake, when alternative or experimental activities manage to reconfigure urban polices within or through these constraining conditions. As Ferguson notes,

'some emergent political initiatives that appear at first blush to be worryingly neoliberal may, on closer inspection, amount to something a good deal more hopeful' (2011: 67). In this line of reasoning, and crucially for a discussion of low budget practices, it hardly matters that projects are embedded in or complicit with a politics of 'activation, empowerment, responsibilization and abandonment' (Clarke, 2005). What does matter, however, is that they challenge this conjunction and its inherent injustices.

In sum, these arguments invite us to move beyond the more deductive approaches of political economy perspectives and the more inductive approaches of agency-oriented perspectives. We therefore suggest following a more transductive approach that not only leaves behind the dualist either/or of possibilities or constraints, but also attempts to remain focused on concrete contexts and actual practices. Our paper concludes with two broader suggestions for researching no or low budget practices.

Firstly, we suggest that the local policy responses and programmes within which specific practices are embedded require close scrutiny. We are inspired here by Tonkiss' (2013) powerful argument for the importance of attending to policy contexts. By arguing that the effects of practices of sharing and saving depend on the specific policy frameworks within which they emerge, Tonkiss relates various bottom-up to top-down practices and engages with the political and social implications of both emerging practices and policies: While paying attention to the interstices in which alternative urbanisms are tested and tried, she equally explores the policy arrangements that variably promote or disrupt such civic activities. In this line of thinking, co-optation 'is not simply a danger spotted by sharp-eyed and disabused social critics; it is a condition of the work these practitioners [people involved in urban interventions discussed in Tonkiss' article] do if they want to make space' (Tonkiss, 2013: 323). These points suggest that research into low budget practices needs to directly relate to the policy responses. What practices are promoted and which are suppressed? To what ends?

Secondly, considering calls to post-colonize the production of knowledge and to 'terminate easy claims to theorising on the basis of a small selection of wealthier cities' (Robinson, 2011: 4), we suggest that the research agenda would benefit from including non-Western contexts. If the current debate on low budget practices has largely focused on high-income countries, widening this discourse to include urban practices from the so-called Global South brings us yet again to the question of poverty. A more global research programme would point to the crucial fact that some of the practices that in the present discourse on low budgets are seen to be producing solidarity are perhaps better described as

survival strategies that help to overcome economic uncertainty (Southworth, 2006). Or they are the very ordinary ways in which large parts of the world population organize their everyday lives. In other words, while describing the newly emerging low budget practices is an inherently important part of the research agenda, so is a contextualization of how these practices come to matter and whether they are based on choice or necessity.

Conclusion

The framework of studying low budget practices is currently positioned within a two-sided political/discursive field, the two poles of which are an uncritical celebration of its practices and effects on the one hand and the (equally uncritical) denunciation of its constraints on the other. The aim of this paper was to suggest that sharing and saving practices should be discussed more openly. To this end, we introduced two key theoretical approaches relevant to research on low budget practices. Firstly, we referred to a discussion of austerity framed through its political economy and understood not only as a condition but also as a neoliberal governance programme of cuts and enclosures. We suggested that relying on this discourse alone may lead to overlooking actual potentialities of these practices. Here, we agree with Chatterton that, '[l]ike an Alice in Wonderland who has found herself in the city, we need to dream six impossible cities before breakfast' (2010: 235). Such an 'urban impossible', a city yet to come (Simone, 2004), requires a 'wider political imaginary to intervene in the unfolding story of the city and calls for a radical appetite for change to inform the work of urban researchers' (Chatterton, 2010: 234). A necessity for change amounts to no less than the responsibility to attend to the potentials presented by engaging proactively with more solidary practices. Austerity research needs to make room for the possibilities that may emerge from studying sharing and saving practices and yet continue to resist co-optation, especially with ecological and social injustices in mind. Secondly, we addressed the framing of low budget practices as agency-oriented and assemblage-related in order to draw out some of the problematic assumptions underlying this emerging research focus. In particular, we stressed the broken promise of openness and argued that the focus on potentialities presents, in fact, a conceptual closure.

To unbolt the limited focus on low budget practices, we introduced no budget practices as an additional analytical perspective and as a way to address a central constraint of current research into low budget practices, namely its missing engagement with poverty. This omission raised three concerns: firstly, this research focuses somewhat prematurely on potentials and solidarity. As we demonstrated, sharing and saving practices are central features of poverty.

Secondly, low budget practices need to be confronted with their wider and potentially hidden costs. This includes a consideration of the motivations that inform sharing and saving practices. Thirdly, both (self-)perception and (self-)representation of low budget projects demand a critical distance towards the normative assumptions that are underlying their practices to distinguish more forcefully between the desired and actual effects of sharing and saving practices.

In conclusion, we discussed how to restrain from taking the complicity of low budget practices in reproducing austerity as a given and from exaggerating their potential. We offered two suggestions for researching urban everyday practices that arose from this debate. These were, firstly, the need to be more attentive to the policy context in which emerging and changing practices are embedded in order to identify the frameworks in which low budget practices can cause effective change (see Tonkiss, 2013). Secondly, we suggested that it would be useful to include studies of low budget practices in non Western contexts into the research programme in order to discuss these practices through a more historically and geographically informed perspective. We agree with Schafran (2014: 328) that as 'urbanists [we] need to make peace with our modernist impulses, and work collectively to develop a paramodern sensibility'. Given the ambiguous workings of sharing and saving practices *vis-à-vis* austerity policies this sensibility is particularly urgent.

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The seductions of temporary urbanism

Mara Ferreri

In the current discourse of low-budget urbanity, there is a special place for projects and practices of temporary reuse. While the idea of temporary urban uses is often understood as encompassing a highly heterogeneous variety of practices and projects, and defying strict definitions (Bishop and Williams, 2012), the currency in common parlance of terms such as pop-up shops, guerrilla gardens and interim uses bears witness to the existence of a shared imaginary of marginal and alternative temporary practice (DeSilvey and Edensor, 2013; Hou, 2010). It is a complex composite imaginary, which draws upon and is constituted by often radically different and contrasting practices and positions. The differing and at times highly incompatible genealogies are a central component of its allure: 'temporary reuse' appears to be a floating signifier capable of encompassing a wide variety of activities and of fitting a broad spectrum of urban discursive frameworks.

Its core promises and narratives, however differing, are remarkably seductive and capable of attracting spatial practitioners' energies and sensitivities across a range of political positions, which includes experimental and alternative fringes of mainstream architecture, planning and cultural production. This note attempts to offer a few critical entry points into the seductions of low-budget temporary urbanity and its ambiguities and assumptions. Drawing on the analysis of a range of public statements and texts, it will discuss the construction of 'the magic of temporary use' and the implications of the discourse of temporary urban connectivity for organising and self-organising under conditions of austerity urbanism.

The magic of temporary use

> Temporary use has already become a magical term: on the one hand, for those many creative minds who, in a world ruled by the profit maxim, are trying nevertheless to create spaces that reflect and nurture their vision of the future; and, on the other, for urban planners to whom it represents a chance for urban development. (Urban Catalyst, 2007: 17)

Temporary urban use has been heralded as a new form of urbanism and the 'temporary city' as its paradigm. In the early 2000s, the 'magic' performed by temporary use was pivoted on the promise of combining two seemingly irreconcilable agendas: urban planners' targets for urban development and practitioners' need for spaces alternative to the 'world ruled by the profit maxim'. Temporary projects, it was argued, enabled to experiment and pilot low-budget, sustainable, more localised forms of site-specific coming together (aaa/PEPRAV, 2007), often with the more or less publicly stated hope of influencing wider societal dynamics in the long term. At a time of relative economic prosperity and investment in urban development schemes, temporary projects allowed forms of direct appropriation and use at the margins of mainstream urban practices, and at times aligned with campaigns and forms of neighbourhood organising to identify and preserve public spaces and buildings from neoliberal dynamics of privatisation (Isola Art Center, 2013).

The ground for the shift from marginal to mainstream was arguably prepared by the professionalization of temporary uses through publications addressed at planners and urban policy-makers, such as the Urban Catalyst Project (2001-2003), which gathered strategies, typologies and examples of temporary reuse across Europe, and their survey of almost 100 temporary uses (2004/2005) which became the basis for the popular *Urban pioneers: Temporary reuse and urban development in Berlin* (Urban Catalyst, 2007). While the notion of 'pioneering' was not intended by the authors to evoke in any way the critique of the relationship between 'pioneering' practices and the new urban frontiers of gentrification discussed by Neil Smith in his seminal *The new urban frontier* (Smith, 1996), their idea of pioneering practices and spaces combines the often disadvantageous and raw material conditions of low-budget and DIY temporary practices with specific 'frontier' urban sites in cities undergoing rapid transformations. Following a 'romance of danger' (*Ibid.*: 189), this is the familiar narrative of pioneering 'unused', unpolished and derelict buildings or land.

A core appeal of temporary urban projects is thus the lure of the experimental and the pioneering, which takes on an embodied spatial dimension in the exploration and physical occupation of underused, neglected and marginal sites, as well as a dimension of praxis, where the spatial frontier becomes analogous to

the frontier of innovative and experimental practices. The 'magic' evoked in the initial citation assumes the rhetorical function of reassuring practitioners and property owners that this pioneering does not have to create antagonistic tensions with neoliberal urban development, and that pockets of creative autonomy where exploration and innovative praxis can take place outside market dynamics, are possible and even (temporarily) desirable.

Austerity London and beyond

In the aftermath of the global financial crisis, and its political response in many Western European countries through regimes of 'austerity urbanism' (Peck, 2012; Peck, Theodore and Brenner, 2012), the promised magic of pop-up, interim and meanwhile uses has rapidly become a panacea for many urban ailments, shifting from the margins to the very centre of cities. Vacant spaces have been increasingly presented by urban policy makers as the most visible negative symptom of the global recession, and as detrimental to the return of consumers' and investors' confidence. In an effort to counter negative perceptions, temporary projects seemed to offer a quick-fix solution in the form of positive visual and experiential fillers, which could transform a failed or stalled redevelopment project into an item of attraction for event-based tourism (Cambie, 2010).

The recent assimilation of temporary use into mainstream urban policy and planning is perhaps best exemplified by the work of the former Director of Design for London, Peter Bishop, and the photographer Lesley Williams. In the preface to their book *The temporary city*, they explain the governance framework of such a shift:

> Many city authorities in Europe and North America that are charged with the task of encouraging the revitalisation and redevelopment of urban areas are now finding that, for the most part, they lack the resources, power and control to implement formal masterplans. Instead some are beginning to experiment with looser planning visions and design frameworks, linked to phased packages of small, often temporary initiatives, designed to unlock the potential of sites. (Bishop and Williams, 2012: 3)

Bishop and William's anthology of practices is disturbingly eclectic: from large-scale public funded festival and architectural projects, to commercial branding experiments using pop-up shops, to instances of 'counterculture and activism' which include squats and other 'temporary autonomous zones' (*Ibid.*: 31). The celebration of a range of temporary urban uses comes as a direct address and encouragement to architects, planners, policy makers and other urban professionals to learn from artistic and socially-engaged practices and projects

and to think about ways of 'unlocking the potential of sites' towards the not-so-implicit ultimate aim of urban development.

In other words, the 'pioneering' examples of temporary magic are celebrated as exemplifying the kind of upbeat, experimental and creative practices needed to temporarily keep up the pretence of constant urban growth (Zukin, 1995) in the absence of real means to do so through official practices of place-marketing and re-branding. That this may be the language and rationale of neoliberal urban policy-makers in Britain is not unpredictable. Haunted by the image of boarded-up high streets, non-commercial temporary empty space reuse has been advocated through policies and public funding schemes throughout 2009 and 2010 'to help reinvigorate ailing town centres during the recession' and to encourage 'temporary activities that benefit the local community' (DCLG, 2009), particularly through arts-related activities (ACE, 2009). What is truly interesting about the discourse promoted through its associated schemes, guidelines and publications, is the extent to which it has been incorporated and drawn upon by practitioners on the ground, and the conceptual implications of such incorporation.

Since 2009, an array of professional networks, for profit and not-for-profit organisations and companies have gained visibility and proposed themselves as intermediaries and facilitators of low-budget projects of temporary spatial reuse, particularly in London[1]. As could be read on the website of the Meanwhile Project, an organisation set up to promote temporary leases for vacant shops:

> empty properties spoil town centres, destroy economic and social value, and waste resources that we cannot afford to leave idle. Vibrant interim uses led by local communities will benefit existing shops, as well as the wider town centre, through increased footfall, bringing life back to the high street. (Meanwhile Project, 2010a)

Short blurbs such as this are a call to arms to spatial practitioners, artists, urban professionals, as well as an effective summary of the overall argument in support of temporary uses. The text offers a clear and concise interpretative framework to think about spaces and people, which is appealing and seductive, as it reproduces the mainstream discourse of austerity while at the same time making it a moral imperative to intervene within it. In a condition of (alleged) social and economic scarcity, spaces and people are presented as 'wasted resources' that 'we' – an appeal to civil society (Ahrensbach et al., 2011) – cannot 'afford to leave idle' in times of recession. At the same time, the true purpose of such community-led

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1   It is worth mentioning the Meanwhile Project and the report *No time to waste... The meanwhile use of assets for community benefit* (2010); Space Makers Agency and the Empty Shop Network, see also Dan Thompson's report *Pop-up people* (2012).

activities (increased footfall, that is, trade) is revealed as the economic imperative that 'we' should all strive for. The 'meanwhile' project may be community-run, community-led and community-funded, often through in-kind support, but 'our' shared long-term aim must be to support, and ultimately be supplanted by, profit-making high street activities.

Even with projects and practices that stop short of justifying their existence with the rationale of economic revitalisation, the themes of 'wasted spaces' and 'wasted resources' are recurrent. At the heart of this discourse lie two interconnected and seductive narratives: an imaginary of fluid and ephemeral urban connectivity, on the one hand, and a normative temporal horizon marking the boundaries of 'meanwhile', temporary urban uses, on the other. Critically analysing these narratives may be useful in order to tease out two of temporary urbanism's core ideas.

Urban connectivity 'on demand'

The first implicit reasoning behind temporary urbanism concerns connectivity: it reinterprets both people in need of spaces and unused spaces as social and economic 'waste'. The immediate, obvious solution to this double issue appears to be offered by the creation of mechanisms through which the two can be connected. Instead of addressing the causes of the (enforced) scarcity of available and low-budget spaces for non-commercial uses, and the socio-economic conditions that cause urban vacancy, this is a tempting simplified narrative in which symptoms are confused with causes, and solutions are offered through purely administrative, or managerial, action: vacant spaces need only to be connected more efficiently with those who need them, and scarcity will disappear.

The first seduction of temporary low-budget projects is therefore one of organisation and self-organisation: it compels to mobilise and *activate*, to connect. Yet the object of these organising activities is merely the perceptible surface of urban dynamics of inequality and scarcity. Adding urgency to the call, the connection needs to happen immediately, dynamically, as the availability of temporary resources (people, vacant spaces) is itself contingent and short-term. Drawing an analogy with new forms of flexible industrial production and its corresponding labour organisation, this is an 'on demand' model of urban connectivity.

An important and unvoiced assumption of total personal flexibility underlines this narrative. Practitioners and projects' coordinators are expected to be

'plugged-in' to 'fill' site-specific resources, which presupposes, at times naming it explicitly, the existence of networks of individuals – 'pop-up people' – in precarious or intermittent employment, which can be mobilised at a short notice and be available on a full time or near full time basis for an intensive period of time (Thompson, 2012). In celebrating flexibility and agency, this narrative neglects the contingent arrangements necessary for projects of temporary use to take place: the uncertain preparation, the delays in gaining access to sites, in finding resources and funds to sustain them, the need to draw from personal networks at short notice and the organisational issues that this can bring to an urban project, just to name a few.

The stress on the resourcefulness, agency and ingenuity of urban practitioners is not only a successful rhetorical device to brush aside material considerations: it also offers a mode of identification with the values of flexibility and connectivity under conditions of scarcity. Lacking material resources, it allows the celebration of precariousness and insecurity as a position of power, rather than of powerlessness, in regard to the possibility of intervening in urban dynamics.

In the meanwhile

If the first narrative refers to practitioners, the 'creative minds' of the opening quote, the second concerns the relationship between temporary projects and the interests and agendas of policy-makers and urban planners. As clearly stated in the preface of *Urban pioneers*, there are two types of temporary urban projects:

> There are fleeting, transitory events that reside only for a moment in the city or alternatively, those that 'stay out' at one location for a longer time, until its more classical use once again becomes viable. (Urban Catalyst, 2007: 18)

Event-based uses and longer uses, thus, both equally temporary as the finitude of their duration is determined by the temporal boundary of a returned viability of 'classical uses', that is, of profit-making activities. In this scenario, the term 'meanwhile' rather than 'temporary' clearly indicates the ways in which what is lived as temporary by practitioners and users, is otherwise seen as a parenthesis in the longer term plans of property owners and developers (Andres, 2013). At the utmost, practitioners and coordinators organising these plans can hope for their activities being incorporated in the blueprint of future plans in the form of incremental development (Temporary Mobile Everlasting, 2012).

In this 'meanwhile' narrative, the fast and flexible connectivity of people and spaces is thus constructed as alternative and marginal, but not antagonistic, to the mainstream imperative of urban growth and development. If temporary

urbanism fundamentally reproduces and subordinates its incarnations to existing logics of real estate investment and speculation, then temporary practices of reuse seem to indicate, rather than a utopian future, further dispossession and accumulation of wealth in the hands of a privileged few. The appropriation of collectively produced creative value through ephemeral coming-together at the neighbourhood level has been questioned by several commentators, particularly in relation to values of networked and informal urban sociability (Lloyd, 2004; Arvidsson, 2007).

Beyond questions of recuperation, the temporal marginality of such projects is produced as positive and 'alternative' through conventional associations of short-termness and unexpectedness with dynamism, and long-termness and stability with fixity. The cherished and seductive flexibility, openness, prototypical and experimental nature of the 'temporary city', and of the many collective, low-budget projects that shape it, are to be contrasted to the allegedly closed, structured and determined urban 'everyday'. This apparently theoretical point might be useful to critically analyse the implications of the two seductions of low-budget temporary projects for the conceptualisation of modes of intervening in urban time-spaces.

The times of saving the city

If time and space are to be conceived as multiple, relational and mutually constitutive, then urban time-spaces too need to be understood as multiple and co-produced (May and Thrift, 2001). Slippages and old conceptualisations of time-space, however, still permeate mainstream urban imaginaries and the languages used to define them. As noted by geographer Doreen Massey, such conceptualisations often draw on past theorisations of the relationship between time and space grounded in a dichotomy where 'space stood for fixity and time for dynamism, novelty and becoming' (Massey, 1999: 268).

This distinction between urban space as fixed and temporary action as dynamic can be found in the unspoken assumption that temporary urban practices bring dynamism and mobility to the (allegedly static) social and built fabric of cities. In the 'meanwhile' discourse, space can be transformed in only one temporal direction, i.e. a trajectory of never ending urban economic and real estate development, while social, artistic or political projects of common use and re-appropriation, being an exception to this mainstream imaginary, are relegated to inhabit the space of temporariness. Not only this vision denies the existence of a multiplicity of time-spaces, but it also designates certain urban actors (such as

social entrepreneurs, activists and artists) as the sole agents capable to 'performing' such a rupture.

Contrary to this, and returning to Massey, it is central to retain an imagination of space as

> [T]he sphere of the existence of multiplicity, of the possibility of the existence of difference. Such a space is the sphere in which distinct stories coexist, meet up, affect each other, come into conflict or cooperate. This space is not static, not a cross-section through time; it is disrupted, active and generative. (Massey, 1999: 272)

By disregarding the open dynamism and multiplicity of urban time-spaces, rather than offering solutions to spatial scarcity, the promotion of temporary use can be seen as symptomatic of and mystifying another kind of scarcity, which could be called a *temporal scarcity*.

In celebrating temporary low-budget urban projects as forms of urban ingenuity and spatial re-appropriation, it is easy to forget that in their flexibility they also embody forms of temporal foreclosure. With the predicted growth of London and its ever-increasing land and property values, despite – and some would argue, because of – the global recession, vacant spaces are only temporarily available to those very ephemeral groups tasked with carrying out the 'creative' activities capable to bring life back to the sites. Moreover, while singular projects and spaces might be perceived as 'temporary' in the subjective experience of practitioners and their fleeting audiences, their temporariness is becoming an increasingly permanent trend as meanwhile and temporary leases proliferate, and urban planners learn the lesson.

The appeal to practitioners, professionals and activists to engage in the (temporary) disruption of what is portrayed as mono-rhythmic city may thus be simultaneously the greatest seduction and the greatest mystification of temporary low-budget urbanism. Deconstructing this narrative means to deflate the expectation of immediate change in order to retain conceptualisations of the city as continuously produced through dynamic and multiple space-times, and requires an ability to think about longer-term and wider alliances and forms of organising beyond the connectionist ideal of flexible and precarious urban actors.

On a more theoretical level, critically deconstructing the ways in which time and space are pitched against each other in the temporary urbanism narrative offers a different way of imagining temporary reuse towards a radical openness of the (urban) future.

In Massey's words:

> [T]ime needs space to get itself going; time and space are born together, along with the relations that produce them both. Time and space must be thought together, therefore, for they are inextricably intermixed. A first implication, then, of this impetus to envisage temporality/history as genuinely open is that spatiality must be integrated as an essential part of that process of the 'continuous creation of novelty' [...]
>
> [This] cannot be 'space' [...] as temporal sequence, for here space is in fact occluded and the future is closed. (Massey, 1999: 272)

Progressive urban spaces cannot be solely thought of as temporal sequences, as a meanwhile coming-together in the form of urban 'projects' where the dynamic and relational becoming of the specific site, and of broader urban processes, is foreclosed by a pre-determined temporal horizon and by the pre-emptive reasoning of profit-driven urban development.

This note aims to act as a sympathetic provocation. Neither a pre-emptive critique, nor a wholesale celebration of temporary urban use, it attempts to question the tension between the immediate seductions of temporary projects as forms of direct localised action, and the longer-term power relations at play which all too often relegate such practices to the realm of pop-up spectacle. Ephemerality and economic marginality (or low-budget urbanism) are central to ideas of the makeshift city (Tonkiss, 2013), but so is also a certain inability to visualise and imagine a future distinct from such 'on demand' urban connectivity.

The mainstream proliferation of ideas and practices of temporary urban use urgently demands a shared critical ability to recognise and understand the seductive powers of notions of urban flexibility, temporariness, resourcefulness and 'creativity', and their implications for imagining cities to come. A critique of the expected foreclosure of urban time-spaces should bear as a constant reminder of what is politically and socially at stake in 'low-budget urbanity' and its potential (in)ability to produce radically different urban futures.

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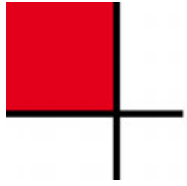
The rise of coworking spaces: A literature review[*]

Alessandro Gandini

Introduction

How has the aftermath of the global economic crisis transformed the practices and meanings of work in the knowledge economy? Current literature suggests that nonstandard forms of employment have become commonplace within a highly individualised labour market in which urban professionals work as a casualised, project-based and freelance workforce (Cappelli and Keller, 2013; Osnowitz, 2010). This raises the question of the extent to which knowledge workers are encouraged in finding new ways to live a nomadic and precarious worklife in this fragmented professional context. This literature review addresses one of the most interesting phenomena to recently emerge: the diffusion of coworking spaces.

The spread of coworking practices transformed 'coworking' into a buzzword with increasingly high expectations concerning the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of workers in the knowledge economy. This 'vibe', however, is somewhat similar to what followed Richard Florida's enthusiastic claim of the 'rise of the creative class' (2002), whom he forecast to be the drivers of economic growth in the early 2000s. With this literature review I aim to provide a critical reflection on the 'celebratory' framework that surrounds the representations of proliferating coworking spaces. The question I discuss is how to interpret the coworking phenomenon in the landscape of the knowledge labour market, as it is

connoted with the expectation of being the 'new model of work' in the context of the 'collaborative and 'sharing' economy (Botsman and Rogers, 2011). Among existing contributions, in fact, little evidence is available to assess whether such practices will bring skill enhancement and tangible empowerment for urban knowledge workers – or end up reiterating an illusory enthusiasm and ultimately reproduce inequalities and shortcomings similar to those attached to the rise of the 'creative class' and 'creative cities' (Florida, 2002). A wide and diverse body of literature has recently flourished around the theme of coworking, addressing this topic from the perspective of academic and practitioners mostly as concerns the emergence of collaborative models of work and distributed organisations. However, though with notable exceptions, most contributions in the literature builds on the assumption that coworking represents an inevitably positive innovation, with few dwelling upon empirical findings and rarely offering a critical understanding.

This literature review aims to give a different angle of interpretation. Should we consider coworking phenomena as inevitably positive, as the 'vibe' seems to support, or should we be alerted to an emerging 'coworking bubble', as recently suggested (Moriset, 2014), given that coworking is being increasingly used for branding, marketing and business purposes? This question will be discussed by examining the people using coworking spaces, their motivations, expected outcomes and perceived benefits. It also considers how questions of social relations and organisational arrangements fostered in coworking spaces are presented in the literature. Do coworking practices and organisational arrangements effectively bear the potential to provide urban freelance knowledge workers with a physical space to reorganise and their mobile and nomad worklife – who now regularly live at the borders of offline-online practices of interaction and the production of work – and what are the eventual ramifications of these practices? These questions represent central issues that impact broader topics in the literature of knowledge work – such as the changing nature of work practices, the functioning of knowledge labour markets, the nature of value across knowledge networks and even a growing discourse around proto-dynamics of class recomposition (Arvidsson, 2014).

What is coworking?

Coworking spaces are shared workplaces utilised by different sorts of knowledge professionals, mostly freelancers, working in various degrees of specialisation in the vast domain of the knowledge industry. Practically conceived as office-renting facilities where workers hire a desk and a wi-fi connection these are, more importantly, places where independent professionals live their daily routines

side-by-side with professional peers, largely working in the same sector – a circumstance which has huge implications on the nature of their job, the relevance of social relations across their own professional networks and – ultimately – their existence as productive workers in the knowledge economy.

Contemporary coworking originates in 2005 in San Francisco. It brought the possibility of envisaging a 'third way' of working, halfway between a 'standard' worklife within a traditional, well-delimited workplace in a community-like environment, and an independent worklife as a freelancer, characteristic of freedom and independence, where the worker is based at home in isolation. This third way was coined 'coworking' without the hyphen, to indicate the practice of working individually in a shared environment – and to differentiate it from *co-working* (with hyphen), which indicates working closely together on a piece of work (Fost, 2008) – although often these terms are used interchangeably.

As outlined by Pratt (2002), the San Francisco Peninsula was one of the leading areas in new media production in the early 2000s as a result of a 'hybrid' infrastructure of interaction able to connect technologies, spaces and people. Pratt notes that San Francisco, located at the end of the Silicon Valley with a high concentration of technology industries and hardware companies, satisfied the requirements of a contemporary 'product space'. This was due to an efficient socio-spatial division of labour and cultural ambience naturally entailed into a 'bohemian' environment – a vibrant culture infused with political activism and socially-organised work patterns based on social networks and tacit or shared knowledge (Pratt, 2002). Since inception, the idea of coworking has quickly spread to become, ultimately, a 'trendy topic' bearing huge expectations concerning the future of knowledge work. Johns and Gratton for instance, define coworking as the 'third wave of virtual work' (2013: 1), that seeks to restore 'co-location' in the digitalising mode of production where tasks can be performed anywhere, anytime. A proliferation of coworking initiatives and ventures can be currently witnessed in different cities worldwide, for a somewhat self-proclaimed 'coworking movement' that now aligns with other similar 'trendy' concepts which flourished in the post-crisis economy, such as 'startups', 'social innovation' or 'sharing economy' (Botsman and Rogers, 2011). This literature review locates coworking principally in relation to these approaches to challenge the often overenthusiastic framework of interpretation and confront it with the existing empirical data.

Coworking shows a significant global diffusion together with an impressive annual growth rate, particularly since 2007-08, interestingly coinciding with the onset of the global economic crisis. Moriset (2014), using data collected by the international online editorial Deskmag, a well-reputed online reference for the

coworking movement, shows how coworking is largely diffused in the so-called 'creative cities' of advanced economies, such as London, Berlin and Paris in Europe, San Francisco and New York in the US, but also embraces a larger perspective, with a reported presence of 129 spaces in Japan, 95 in Brazil, 60 in Australia and 39 in Russia (Moriset, 2014) with a growing presence in China (Lindtner and Li, 2012).

Moriset's (2014) exploratory study reports an overall number of 2,498 mapped spaces worldwide. This appears to be just a downward estimate since a growing number of businesses of different sorts are currently opening coworking 'sections' within their activities, indeed without formally registering as coworking spaces. In his work, coworking spaces are epitomised as 'third places' between home and work. He argues that coworking is a global phenomenon that maintains strong local roots, as it frames into policies which point towards the emergence of creative districts around urban environments – and casts a light on the risks of a possible 'coworking bubble', given that the profitability of these initiatives is often still low (*ibid.*).

In order to directly address the latter issue, we should take into account that since the earliest coworking phenomenon reports, the primary rationale of coworking is not, in principle, business-oriented. On the contrary, a significant element that seems to characterise coworking practices is an 'open source community approach' to work (Leforestier, 2009), intended as a collaborative practice that seeks to establish communitarian social relations among the member-workers. According to an article on Network World, coworking is conceived as a 'movement' or a 'philosophy' characterised by four common values: collaboration, openness, community and sustainability (Reed, 2007).

Alongside practitioner-oriented research, a growing stream of academic empirical work has arisen concerning coworking practices. In a study of collaborative production in Berlin, Lange (2011) outlines a definition of coworking spaces as bottom-up spaces participated by workers who strive for independence, collaborative networks and politics, and that share a set of values in a 'collective-driven, networked approach of the open source idea translated into physical space' (Lange, 2011: 292). The idea underlying this assumption is that social relations are the main factors of productivity across coworking spaces, conceived as collaborative environments where microbusinesses and freelancers deploy new production opportunities in non-hierarchical situations. Those accessing coworking spaces are mostly 'culturepreneurs', a term Lange coined to identify knowledge professionals with multi-functional skills and irregular career paths, operating as self-entrepreneurs within scarcely-institutionalised economies (Lange, 2006). This term stresses both the cultural' dimension that

connotes coworkers, and the eminently entrepreneurial trait of their activity, that is framed into a non-competitive and largely 'socialised' philosophy of work perpetrated into a production context made of small-size actors, which does not imply hierarchical relations and where organisational arrangements are constantly renegotiated (Lange, 2006, 2011).

In a study of coworking spaces in Austin (Texas), Spinuzzi (2012) sustains that coworking is the most eminent example of the new models of 'distributed work', that seem to be the incoming trend in the organisation of labour in the knowledge economy. Distributed work is intended to be a flexible organisational arrangement whereby different subjects pursue objects and produce outcomes across network-based, collaborative schemes of production. Among the subjects, Spinuzzi includes, not only the coworkers but also the proprietors, known as 'hosts', who play a crucial role in the organisation of the space by being hybrid figures who both lead the space and also *cowork* within it. Spinuzzi provides a more business-oriented and entrepreneurial perception of coworking practices. The coworkers in Spinuzzi's account are not just 'workers' or 'professionals' – rather, mostly 'non-employee enterprises', meaning individuals who run a self-enterprise with no employees, looking to increase profit and business turnover through a managerial cultivation of social relations. Spinuzzi calls this a logic of 'good neighbours' or a 'good partners' approach, a partially communitarian organisational rationale by which business outcomes are pursued through temporary partnerships and collaborations among peers working in the space, resulting from a combination of complementary skills and social relations (Spinuzzi, 2012).

These two readings implicitly suggest we should interpret coworking spaces as places that freelancers and independent workers access with the purpose of fostering networking practices that the literature on knowledge work identifies as the 'engine' of their professions, epitomised in the expression 'it is all about who you know' (Blair, 2001; Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2011, 2012). A recent survey distributed among coworkers enrolled in the different spaces across Milan seems to confirm this insight (Colleoni and Arvidsson, 2014). First, the research offers the profile of a largely male workforce made of freelancers or self-employed professionals ranging in age from 24-44, with a multi-functional set of competencies and not a single professional specialisation. Both traditional intellectual professionals directly related to the creative industries (architects, designers, etc.), and 'digital professionals' such as community managers, social media content producers and PR or branding consultants, make up part of the fluid aggregation of coworkers in Milan. This means that across coworking spaces we can find a 'multi-functional' set of professionals whose skills are both the result of education and training as well as of 'commonly available'

knowledge, especially knowledge that directly pertains to the digital economy. The average gross income per month is reportedly between 1000 and 2000 euros that is quite low considering the condition of 'partita IVA' (the self-employed status in Italy) is characterised by high tax rates (Ranci, 2012) and combines with Milan's comparably high rental cost (Global Property Guide, 2014).

More specifically, in terms of the intrinsic relation between business-oriented networking practices and coworking, this study shows that the expectations from participating in a coworking space among Milanese coworkers explicitly relate to the need of getting a sense of community (48%) and entertaining networking activity (34%) (Colleoni and Arvidsson, 2014). Besides the somewhat self-evident claim of accessing coworking spaces to overcome isolation and experience worklife in a physical space (55%), coworkers in Milan declare their activity has a peculiarly instrumental aim; the construction of a network of contacts and the acquisition of a reputation in the professional scene. This should be seen as strategic to access social capital resources that lead to jobs and income. A large majority of workers declare having expanded their network of clients (61%) and collaborators (62%) by accessing a coworking space in a mutual process that enables interdependence among workers (Colleoni and Arvidsson, 2014). Also, an overall 52% of coworkers report that their earnings have increased since participating in coworking spaces.

Taken together, these different contributions seem to concede that coworking environments provide a space for urban-based freelance, often precarious workers to reterritorialise the physical organisational structure previously offered by firms, which are now diminishing from the emergence of a well-delimited new spatial organisation but with flexible boundaries and affiliations. However, a striking aspect affects the attitudes and the outcomes fostered by accessing a coworking space. Though working in similar sectors, in fact coworkers do not seem to feel competitive – rather, they are seeking to bring 'the social' back into their working life (Clark, 2007). This dominant value-oriented interpretation of coworking spaces as 'communitarian' places where coworkers operate as 'complementary' figures rather than potential competitors remains a challenging issue.

In fact, although coworking spaces are populated by professionals working in the same industry, whose activity includes a never-ending process of networking and a recursive search for jobs, it may be reasonable to imagine that the competition for contracts among them is not completely suppressed. Rather, it is likely to take place among microbusinesses, composed of individuals who get together to form what should be seen as an 'associated brand' – a small and flexible managerial

entity, frequently changing in scope and associates depending on the tasks that are created for success in a specific market. I call this strategy a 'networked mode of organisation', a loose modality that is located between collaboration, competition and cooperation, which I have encountered frequently in my research on freelance networks in London and Milan (Gandini, 2014). Therefore I suggest that the literature should more deeply explore this issue of competition and how it is embedded in professional networks, to seek meaning of social capital across coworking spaces – where an organisation is loosely regulated by design, thus favouring informal interaction.

The coworking organisation

Among the papers that tackle coworking practices from a strictly organisational perspective, the study by Capdevila (2013) offers a theory of coworking spaces as 'microclusters' that enable knowledge transfer among members from a network-based perspective. In their analogy with localised industrial clusters, where organisations and firms entertain network relations among themselves with the purpose of building trust relations, Capdevila argues that coworking spaces are territories where microbusinesses and freelancers coexist and collaborate on a variety of actions and tasks. Thus, coworkers tend to be involved in the establishment of communitarian relationships of trust among themselves, largely escaping the competitive frameworks to engage in different forms of negotiable collaboration.

While reiterating the same non-competitive dimension of coworking, the account provided by Capdevila describes a complex socio-economic scene based upon networked dynamics of interaction, where old and new organisational practices coexist in an instrumentally coherent 'rationale' that leverages on social capital to access network resources with expected economic return. Capdevila stresses how, with the end of the Fordist era, the traditional industrial clusters are being replaced by 'innovation networks' constituted by networked microbusinesses, whereby larger firms operate as 'anchors' and attract new businesses into the cluster. In his view, coworking spaces provide the necessary intermediation to this network activity, as well as a physical platform for this purpose (*ibid.*).

The relevance of personal networks and the acquisition of social capital to pursue economic success requires workers to associate, thus enabling the 'distributed' and 'networked' organisations mentioned above. This is confirmed by findings emerging from research on coworking spaces in Milan. We have seen how the possibility to engage in collaboration with peers with complementary skills emerges strongly as a factor of productivity, together with a strategic 'business-

like' approach towards reputation construction, and is seen as a key resource from which to capitalise (Colleoni and Arvidsson, 2014). Concerning organisational logic, the argument presented is that coworking spaces are functional in constructing networks and 'new' reputation-based social capital in a context where the 'old' ways of social capital leverage to access jobs, such as family ties, are no longer effective. The pursuit of a personal reputation emerges in this context as the most prominent factor for coworkers in terms of productive outcomes and organisational arrangements, as it plays an 'intermediary' role in accessing network resources and generating valuable outcomes. As a result, from this perspective the 'communitarian' and 'value-oriented' approach to work should therefore be seen under a different nuance, mostly as the necessity to share a 'habitus' that pertains to a creative community (Colleoni and Arvidsson, 2014).

These contributions suggest how coworkers in coworking spaces seem to imply a specific sort of 'economic rationale', that sees networking practices as functional to the acquisition of a reputation. This seems to emerge as the element that keeps these different social actors together in the same space, and which projects them into the broader socio-economic 'creative scene' of the city. As a result, coworking spaces seem to function, not just as hubs, as most of the literature suggests, but mostly as *relational milieus* providing workers with an intermediate territory to enact distributed organisational practices made of continuously negotiated relationships in a context where professional social interaction is simultaneously physical *and* digital. This intermediate territory, contrary to what is sustained by Moriset (2014), is by no means a mere drop-in office with low inter-professional interaction where collaboration remains incidental. Instead, coworking spaces are territories that are accessed purposely to construct and maintain network relations and perpetrate a market position.

The reason for this claim is that coworking practices efficiently respond to the necessities of the contemporary knowledge worker, among which, networking is central. This reading induces us into thinking that coworking is not merely an 'open source approach to work' (Lange, 2011; Leforestier, 2009), rather a manifestation of a broader transformation in the employment and organisational regimes in the knowledge economy, based on the socialisation of value production – whereby coworking spaces seem to be functional to enable the circulation of information that leads to valuable outcomes.

However, the existence of such potentially positive effects towards workers and the urban economic networks brought by the diffusion of, and the access to, coworking spaces across cities should not prevent us from being critically engaged towards this phenomenon – as it seems to be the latest outcome of a

project that has substantially failed in its own scope: Florida's (2002) claim in *The rise of the creative class.*

Coworking: Another 'bubble' in the knowledge economy?

The interpretation of coworking spaces in the contemporary urban knowledge economy suggests that coworking practices may effectively provide the potential for a physical reterritorialisation of 'nomad' working practices (O'Brien, 2011). As seen, these spaces should be regarded as the most prominent manifestation of a more general rethinking of work that has its roots in the shared and highly-networked forms of collaborative production embedded in the urban territory – the function of which is to operate as an intermediary between actors entangled in network-based processes of organisation and valorisation. However, a critical approach to coworking practices seems to be equally sustainable. As also suggested by Moriset (2014), we may be ultimately confronted with a 'coworking bubble' – the extent to which remains to be seen.

Over recent decades, the most prominent discourse concerning the transformation and regeneration of western urban environments and socio-economic scenes was the realisation of 'creative cities' (Landry, 2000; Power and Nielsen, 2010; Musterd and Murie, 2010). This vision went hand-in-hand with the supposed 'rise of the creative class' (Florida, 2002), which was defined as a variously articulated ensemble of individuals working across media, advertising, fashion and other creative sectors who were supposed to live and prosper within cities whereby the expansion of creative industries operated as a trigger for economic growth and development. The enthusiastic claims made by Florida in the early 2000s, together with the broader vision of an age of economic prosperity resulting from the conjuncture of leisure and work, based upon the talent of creative professionals (Florida, 2002) have in fact arguably failed to materialise. Both Peck (2005) and Pratt (2008) criticised Florida's argument for being as attractive as it is elusive, in that the celebratory framework of the creative class neglected the social inequalities and class divisions, making those diluted within the 'coolness' of the emerging economy – and making the creative class a list of professional figures rather than a class as traditionally conceived in sociological terms. The diffusion of coworking spaces became visible on a large scale approximately a decade after Florida's manifesto, and shows what I argue to be the unfulfilled promise of the creative class.

Some of the most influential and recent studies in the context of urban economies and creative industries (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Pratt, 2008; Grugulis and Stoyanova 2011, 2012) have shown how knowledge workers are largely

freelance, precarious professionals characterised by a necessity to entertain relationships and manage social capital across their professional network as a decisive source for incoming jobs. They have to develop a self-entrepreneurial ethos and perform self-branding strategies in a highly identitarian, entrepreneurial landscape (Cremin, 2003). More than a decade later, many creative people who were promised permanent jobs in media firms have now more or less voluntarily transformed into different sorts of subjects – freelancers, 'startuppers' and even 'changemakers' (Bandinelli and Arvidsson, 2013) – shifting with different degrees of satisfaction among project-based work, subcontracting and the establishment of an individual enterprise with varying levels of stability and certainty.

In other words, we are now confronted with the backlash of the 'creative class mantra', which emerges in perilous combination with the greatest recession since the 1930s, to leave a multi-faceted workforce facing rising unemployment rates, especially among the younger generations, together with a decreasing availability and desirability of firm-based careers (EEOR, 2010). The extent to which coworking spaces have become a catch basin for precarious workers remains in question. The instances described above in fact combine with issues of free labour and unpaid or low-paid jobs (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2013) that are frequent and cross-cutting in terms of class relations – indeed, often snubbed and overlooked as if these traits naturally make up a creative worklife. Thus, as sustained by Arvidsson (2014), through the rise of these atomised entrepreneurial subjects of neoliberalism beyond the creative class we may be witnessing the proto-diagram of a 'new social' that would perhaps converge towards new forms of class recomposition, where these workers recognise themselves as a new 'class' of knowledge professionals sharing the same economic interests (Arvidsson, 2008, 2014).

Ultimately, coworking spaces may even be beneficial in this regard since, differently from Florida's claims based on lifestyle and success, coworking spaces do not just restate a physical dimension but principally act as new intermediaries for value production, thus potentially igniting the acknowledgement of common economic interests among coworkers – a potential 'coworking class' presently unaware of any collective subjectivity or consciousness. Whether this will lead into a full process of class recomposition, however, remains to be seen, as the mere existence of political claims among creative people often remains silenced beneath the 'coolness' of participating in the creative lifestyle.

This silencing is due to the diversified body of freelancers-coworkers that should be seen as a 'double-sided' economic subject, made up of both precarious workers and 'new entrepreneurs' contradictorily coexisting with different

attitudes in the same relational milieu. This is why 'neo-Marxist' critiques that simplistically call for a 'revolution' of precarious freelancers (Fuchs, 2014; Clark, 2007) are romantically attractive but fail to comprehend not only the ethos of freelance workers, which is closer to the pre-modern bourgeoisie, than to the modern industrial working class – rather, more so in fact, the powerful 'biopolitical' strength of a system that leverages upon 'passion' and 'coolness' for social recognition (McRobbie, 2004), in a context made of limited unionisation and politicisation, and very little self-reflexivity.

The plurality of the subjects involved in the rise of coworking, from academics to policy makers, up to coworkers themselves, will have to seriously take into account the contradictory nature that coworking spaces come to embody in the broader debates regarding the 'sharing economy', in order to disentangle the diverse issues that lie under the surface. The coworking movement does not benefit from a 'buzz' that resembles the blind celebratory framework which used to relate to the idea of the 'creative class', the reiteration of which would configure not merely a new 'bubble' in the knowledge economy – rather, a surprising survival of the neoliberal age (Crouch, 2011).

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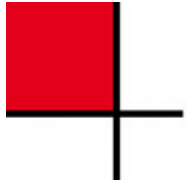
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Summoning art to save the city: A note

Timon Beyes

> Gathered, gathering, stripping, then stacking. Stacking, restacking, moving, and shifting. Piled lath, piled old-growth piles, potent and latent, piled histories, accumulations, and other such notions. Neatly and sometimes not so neatly, the gathered things start to suggest forms. We see the forms, and our need (ambition) sometimes determines what happens with the pile. The piles. The stacks are alone at the studio. The result of lots of hands and hammers, pull bars and moving straps, time spent thinking, dreaming, and sorting. We are the hunter-gatherers, ever funding the accumulated, the forgotten – the oh so stackable.
>
> Theaster Gates, *Accumulations*. (Gates, 2012: 70)

One of the most-discussed works on display, or rather in progress, at 2012's *documenta 13* – the contemporary art extravaganza that takes place every five years in Kassel, Germany – was called '12 Ballads for Huguenot House'. It consisted of the restoration of an abandoned building in the centre of Kassel – the *Hugenottenhaus*, originally built by migrant workers from France in 1826, partly damaged in World War II, left to rot since the 1970s – and of bringing the house back to life. Parts of the restoration were done with debris taken from the gut-demolition of a house on the South Side of Chicago, home of Theaster Gates, the artist behind the 12 Ballads. Living in the patched house with its builders – mostly formerly unemployed workers from Chicago' South Side and from Kassel – and guests, Gates added video-screenings of Chicago-based musicians performing in deserted South Side buildings and staged evening discussions, meals and performances, among others with his own band, called the Black Monks. As a visitor of Gates' 'service of emergent engagement' (2012: 42), I remember stumbling into an eerily beautiful and enchanting space. Up and down make-shift stair cases, along improvised corridors and in differently reshaped rooms, I encountered a bricolage of remainders, craftily repaired structures, artist-designed furniture made from other leftovers, temporary

kitchens and sleeping spaces, video installations of music performances, and architectural drawings and sketches of the on-going restoration. On the ground floor, two members of the Chicago cast of workers were playing table-tennis, generously enduring being watched and having their pictures taken by visitors of the *documenta*.

12 Ballads for Huguenot House was a spin-off of, and directly related to, Gates' 'Dorchester Project' on Chicago's South Side. In 2009, in the midst of the financial crisis, the artist began acquiring unused and abandoned property and restoring it by hiring previously unemployed and unskilled workers from the local neighbourhood, partly financed by money from the global art circuit. (By the time of writing this, Gates owns 12 properties in the area.) By now, the Dorchester Project houses, among other things, an archive of sixty thousand glass lantern slides the University of Chicago wanted to get rid off, a library based on the stock of an architecture bookstore that had to close, a large discarded record collection as well as performance and meeting spaces. It entails an 'Arts Incubator' opened in conjunction with the University of Chicago. It turns a run-down public housing project into a mixed-use complex, part art colony, part home to low-income families.

Gates' artistic practice of creating urban laboratories by collaboratively repurposing and recycling resources of all types is a particularly intriguing example of contemporary art's manifold experiments that take the organization of the urban as their material in terms of form and content (Beyes, Krempl and Deuflhard, 2009). Indeed, '[c]ontemporary visual art is an urban phenomenon' (Osborne, 2013: 133). Gates' interweaving of installation and performance art, do-it-yourself culture, community activism and urban regeneration sets up, frames and guides this note, which is dedicated to the question of how art is summoned to 'save the city', not unlike other activist practices discussed in this issue. The nature of this 'saving' is contested; it takes on different meanings and forms. After briefly introducing what could be called contemporary art's turn to the urban, the remainder of this note seeks to tentatively disentangle the knot of art, urban space and organizing. Interweaving the example of Dorchester Project/Huguenot House with recent critical debates around the role of art in urban development, I analytically distinguish between different modes of how art is summoned to save the city: as spectacle, as grassroots development and as social work. The etymology of 'to summon' is striking in this respect. Its Latin roots entail 'to call', in the sense of calling upon to do something, but also 'to arouse' and 'to excite to action'. Art is summoned, then, to revitalize urban development in the entrepreneurial city, to save its economic prospects and contribute to its social cohesion.

However, as Josephine Berry Slater and Anthony Iles write,

> the spectrum of analysis of urban regeneration must necessarily entail an aesthetic one since public art and architecture are not only often complicit within this stage of development but also offer moments and forms in which power and counter-power negotiate, clash and find articulation. (2010: 7)

Simultaneously, therefore, urban sites like Huguenot House summon artists to engage with city living – and perhaps, artistic interventions can help saving the city by pointing towards different ways and articulations of organizing urban life. Accordingly, there might be a fourth way of making sense of art's potential to save the city, which I suggest to call 'dissensus mode': It is attuned to art's situational potential to reconfigure what can be perceived, felt and done in a city.

The city and contemporary art

'[T]he future of art is not artistic, but urban', Henri Lefebvre speculated in 1970 (2003: 173). In light of the contemporary discourses of both urban and artistic development, his statement can be read as particularly clairvoyant in a two-fold, interrelated way. First, as art world discussions around buzz words such as 'urban art', 'public art', 'site specificity' and 'community art' indicate, and while it would be misplaced to try to limit the expanded field of contemporary art – its manifold spaces as well as infinite possible material forms – to questions of urban life, 'the phenomenon of urban living evidently matters more and more both in the art artists endeavour to make and in that which is held to come within the province of art' (Whybrow, 2011: 26, emphasis omitted). Such art is often specifically sited in its attempts to mediate 'broader social, economic and political processes that organize urban life and urban space' (Kwon, 2002: 3). As Peter Osborne writes in his recent book on the philosophy of contemporary art,

> [t]hese are changes in the social relations of artistic production and the social character of exhibition space that involve taking cultural forms of an evermore extensive character as the objects of a new constructive – *that is organizational* – intent. (2013: 160, emphasis added)

Moreover, as Dorchester Project and 12 Ballads for Huguenot House demonstrate, this 'organizational intent' extends to artistic experiments with practices of 'saving the city'. Almost typifying what the performance theorist Shannon Jackson (2011) tries to grasp with the notions of 'support structures' and 'infrastructural politics', Gates' art work becomes an urban laboratory for repurposing and recycling resources of all type, and for establishing new forms of collectivity and cultural life in forgotten, neglected pockets of the city, or – with regard to Chicago's South Side – in economically poor urban areas considered to be dangerous and unruly. As the artist expresses in no uncertain terms in his

documenta statement: 'My practice is a catalyst for cultural and economic development. I leverage artistic moments to effect real change' (2012: 23, quoted in Austen, 2013);[1] and elsewhere: 'I'm creating a kind of ecology of opportunity' (*ibid.*).

As terms like 'leverage' and 'opportunity' might indicate, there is a second way to read Lefebvre's statement about the urban (and not artistic) future of art – one that the great thinker of space and the city, it is safe to assume, would be appalled by. Because at the same time, this kind of urban art seems to subscribe to or itself perform the contemporary imperative of urban transformation, where art and culture are called upon to economically save the city. At least in Western cities the question of urban development in general and urban regeneration in particular is closely connected to what Zukin in her pioneering study of New York's cast-iron district called 'the artistic mode of production' (1989: 176), denoting revitalization strategies for post-industrial cities in which artists and the sector of the visual arts play a dominant role in upgrading a district or a city's built environment, its image and attractiveness. Indeed, the much-discussed shift towards entrepreneurial urban governance (Harvey, 1989) and the related quest to attract the 'creative class', perhaps even the diagnosis of contemporary urban development as a 'cultural performance' (Amin and Thrift, 2007: 153) seem to be based on the rise of the artistic mode of production and its corollary, the proliferation of spaces of cultural consumption (Beyes, 2012).

Given the importance of the artistic mode of production for urban development *and* the becoming-urban of artistic experiments, then, researching new forms of organizing the city would benefit from summoning urban-artistic experiments (Beyes, 2010, 2012; Beyes and Steyaert, 2013). Correspondingly, inquiries into collectively organized urban practices to save the city need to take on board what

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1   Among the many aspects of 12 Ballads for Huguenot House in particular, and Theaster Gates' work in general, which these sketchy descriptions miss out on, is the question of race, of making one's way as a black artist by working in, and on, an economically devastated district mostly populated by African-Americans. As his *documenta* statement proclaimed, 'I'm using ethnic labor, black labor, to rebuild Huguenot House. (...) Over 100 days we'll play host to the spirits of Huguenot House, calling them out through music, dance, and congregration. We'll conflate a German past with a black present' (Gates, 2012: 23). It seems obvious that the choice of Hugenottenhaus and its own history of migration and migrant labor (as well as, more broadly, Germany's troubled history) is related to the parallel and different African-American history of migration, persecution and class relations, as they shape life on Chicago's South Side today. As to Gates himself, according to Jackson (2012: 22, original emphasis), 'only by embracing the much softer constraints of *his* era – the relatively benign expectations imposed on *him* by progressive whites in the art community – can Gates hope to transform the landscape of possibility for his own art'.

Rosalyn Deutsche in her seminal book *Evictions: Art and spatial politics* has called the 'urban-aesthetic' discourse (1996: xi) that penetrates contemporary art *and* urban development, and that seems to be underpinning both the instrumental appropriation of the labour of art and the sheer proliferation of artistic practices in the city.

Calling upon art for urban regeneration: Three modes

How, then, is art summoned to do the work of organizing 'for' urban revitalization? I tentatively outline three modes: spectacle mode, grassroots mode and social work mode. I should note that these developments have taken hold after the golden years of the so-called 'modernist "turd-in-the-plaza" school of public art' (Whybrow, 2011: 24). I thus do not touch upon the *drop sculptures* that 'rained down' on inner cities especially in the 1960s and 70s. As Kwon (2002: 60 et seqq.) argues, the emphasis on such art *in* public spaces has been shifted to art *as* public spaces and art in the public interest. Whereas in the turd-in-the-plaza school, the art work's 'relationship to the site was at best incidental' (*ibid.*: 63) – these sculptures, or so it seems, could be dropped anywhere – today 'a more intense engagement with the outside world and everyday life', with non-art issues and non-art institutions, has taken hold (*ibid.*: 24).

Spectacle

First, the spectacle mode relies on large-scale architectural flagship projects designed to become cultural icons as well as on becoming part of the global art circuit by staging biennales or related artistic mega-events or luring blockbuster exhibitions to a city's exhibition spaces. Arguably, Kassel's *documenta*, perhaps the heavyweight of contemporary art events, is a focal point of this circuit – even though it has a longer history than most comparable events and while it is generally regarded to be less commercially oriented than, say, the (even older) Venice Biennale. These mega-projects are discursively articulated as vehicles for urban renewal and redevelopment based on success stories like the Guggenheim Museum at Bilbao. Here, spectacular 'high art' is called upon to symbolize urban cultural prowess and to enhance a city's image, attracting tourism and investment. Osborne diagnoses the emergence of a 'transnational art industry' (2013: 165), which would signal the incorporation of contemporary art in the culture industry and would be manifested through new practices of organizing art in the city:

> The contemporary project-based urban art of international exhibition spaces is largely the outcome of negotiations between artists and curators, museum or exhibition authorities, and corporations, councils and governments (at local,

regional, national and international levels). These practices of organization, co-ordination and negotiation (...) are crucial mediations of art with urban social forms. At their broadest, they articulate a new kind of exhibition space: a capitalist constructivism of the exhibition-form. (*ibid.*: 161)

Theaster Gates' art practice is part of this 'transnational art industry' and its annexing of urban locations as exhibition space. His Huguenot House project was described as the 'heart' of *documenta 2012* (Boese et al., 2012), and his rise in the global art world has been meteoric. 'Chicago's Opportunity Artist' (Austen, 2013) or 'real-estate artist' (Colapinto, 2014: 24) has also been called 'the emperor of [art's] post-medium condition' (Jackson, 2012: 17), as well as, worst of all, 'poster boy for socially engaged art' and 'Mick Jagger of social practice' upon his inclusion in ArtReview's 'Power 100 list' of 2013 (place 40, up from number 56 in 2012) (ArtReview, 2014). Knowing fully well what is at stake here – and how the colour of his skin, his provenance, the area he lives in and works from might by now add to his allure due to the 'little shiver' white liberals get 'from their fantasies of black rage' (Jackson, 2012: 19) – Gates quite adamantly affirms the potential that his contribution to the spectacle mode offers to his 'infrastructural politics', to use Shannon Jackson's term. A recent *New Yorker* profile characterized the self-described 'hustler' and 'trickster' (Colapinto, 2014: 30; Gates and Christov-Bakargiev, 2012: 15) as trying to beat 'the art world at its own hustle' in order to 'fund culture in a neglected ghetto' (Colapinto, 2014: 30). In Gates' words:

> I realized that the people who were calling me up and asking me if they could have a deal right out of my studio – that they were, in fact, just thinking about the market, and that I would leverage the fuck out of them as they were leveraging me. (quoted in Colapinto, 2014: 25)

Accordingly, the effects from an undertaking such as Kassel's 12 Ballads might be far from sustainable. The twisted do-it-yourself economy of deconstructing a building, processing its materials and reusing them in another building applied to Huguenot House, too – all the re-fashioned debris from Chicago was catalogued, again dismantled and taken out of Huguenot House to be brought back to Chicago, this time to the Museum of Contemporary Art, where it was turned into a new immersive installation piece called the '13th Ballad'. As I am writing this, Huguenot House has returned to its empty slumber. Moreover, the success or the sustainability of Dorchester Projects seem utterly dependent on the artist's personality, esteem and network (Colapinto, 2014). What would happen if he would take his spectacle somewhere else?

Grassroots

Second, especially Gates' Dorchester Project can be inscribed into a different mode of summoning art to save the city: the semi-autonomous model of urban renewal and economic development based on apparently authentic, grassroots artistic and bohemian activism. Arguably, it is most forcefully articulated by the urban economist Richard Florida, the author of the best-selling book *The rise of the creative class* (2002). Here, the so-called creative industries in general and artists in particular are summoned to re-activate urban life and to help facilitate a more bottom-up process of economic regeneration. In what amounts to an affirmative, policy-oriented, well-timed and empirically rather contested actualization and generalization of Zukin's afore-mentioned diagnosis of the artistic mode of production, having artists and art spaces nearby is advocated as a pivotal means to the end of urban competitiveness in post-industrial times (Beyes, 2012). Florida's recipes have attracted fierce criticism both politically and methodologically. The issues of gentrification and displacement, already pointed out by Zukin (1989), feature prominently here. Such organisational effects are a world apart from images of benign and conflict-less urban revitalization; they involve 'the wholesale, and frequently shockingly brutal, "cleansing" and "pacification" of inner-city areas to make them "safe" for middle class residents' (Latham et al., 2009: 182). And of course, a class analysis that transcends class divisions and class struggle is a profoundly strange one – Florida's consensual tale of the friction-less emergence of the creative class as new social subject amounts to an ahistorical fantasy. Consequently, his theory shows only gestural regard for social issues such as inequality and the division of labour.

Of course, both content and force of Gates' artistic practice cannot be imagined without the history and presence of poverty, class warfare and racial discrimination. As such, it is fundamentally at odds with depoliticized fantasies of harmonious cultural-cum-economic progress by way of art and artists. Nevertheless, Dorchester Project has been called '[t]he kind of art space white people want to see in a black neighbourhood' (Jackson, 2012: 18). Looked at through the lens of the grassroots mode, it seems like a picture-perfect example of urban revitalization by way of art. Recall the *documenta* statement: this is an art that presents itself as wanting to effect cultural and economic change. There is an obvious entrepreneurial spirit at work in the buying up of houses and converting them into spaces of culture and congregation for the disadvantaged, which has been interpreted as 'an expression of [Gates'] emboldened Americanism, his acceptance of a kind of freewheeling, free-enterprise, free-market situation as the only reality he's ever known, or ever dreamed of knowing' (Jackson, 2012: 20). Again, the artist seems as well-aware of all of this as he seems untroubled.

'Gentrification won't need my approval or disapproval', he is quoted as saying (Colapinto, 2014: 31).

Social work

Third, effecting cultural and economic change entails collaborative work with community members. What I suggest to call the 'social work mode' is primarily focused upon artistically representing the community and servicing the parts that are seen to not adequately participate in its make-up, where processes of collaboration thus tend to constitute the 'object' of art. Interestingly, then, 'community' refers to people that are economically, socially or culturally distinct form artists or the conventional art audience (Kester, 1995) – witness Gates' manifold activities with inhabitants of Chicago's South Side. In this case, art is framed as a pedagogical catalyst for solutions to social problems. In her inquiry into the nexus of art, creativity and urbanism, the artist Martha Rosler quotes a 1997 report for the US National Endowment for the Arts, which in an exemplary fashion recommends 'translating the value of the arts into more general civic, social, and educational terms', 'finding a home in a variety of community service and economic development activities – from youth programs and crime prevention to job training and race relations – far afield from the traditional aesthetic function of the arts', and which highlights 'the utilitarian aspect of the arts in contemporary society' (2011a: 13). Likewise, in the UK the (New Labour) 'government between 1997 and 2010 rendered the Arts Council explicitly beholden to social engineering, using culture to reinforce policies of social inclusion' (Bishop, 2012a: 175).

As well as being summoned to create economic prosperity through urban regeneration, artists are also summoned to counter exclusion and mend the social bond. With regard to 12 Ballads for Huguenot House, the curator of *documenta* 12, Christov-Bakargiev, openly and somewhat worryingly stresses art's labour of the social. 'It is', she writes, 'as if by awakening the object it might be possible to awaken its subjects to their communal and social vocation' (Christov-Bakargiev, 2012: 7). It is, then, as if it would need art and artists to awaken urban dwellers from their anti-social slumber and remind them to properly contribute to the community.

Diffusing dissent

In sum, and notwithstanding their substantial differences, the three modes tentatively put forward here share a functionalist, assimilative and consensualist ethos. Art is summoned to save the city by integrating itself in and contributing to a certain manner of understanding and enacting urban organization (Kwon, 2002; Deutsche, 1996). As already indicated above, the consensus of

contemporary urban development seems to have a name: the entrepreneurial or creative city.

> In this light, the cultural transformation (...) into 'spectacular' cities of (and for) consumption, populated by a harmonious and cosmopolitan citizenry, has been hypothesised as perhaps the most important element of entrepreneurial forms of local politics (Hubbard and Hall, 1998: 8).

Artists and their work are therefore key drivers of what has been dubbed the 'new urban entrepreneurialism' (Miles and Paddison, 2005: 833). Despite their apparent differences, then, all three modes – constructing urban spectacles, enabling grassroots development, and doing social work – hinge upon the consensus that artistic and cultural practices are a key means through which to revitalize urban space, bringing creative economic regeneration and social cohesion. As Malcolm Miles (2005: 893) argues, however, this way cultural production becomes a 'means to defuse dissent'. Through being enveloped in a seemingly dominant imagination and model of urban organization, the cultural producers are inscribed within a functional set-up of roles, possibilities and competences. They therefore become part of 'a certain manner of partitioning the sensible' (Rancière, 2001: paragraph 20) – a being-caught in a structure of what is visible and sayable about art doing the work of organizing the city, and of what can and cannot be done in it.

But can we do away with Theaster Gates' art, and myriad other artistic experiments, like this? Can we neatly inscribe art's expanded and urban practice into our ready-made categories of critical analysis?[2] Moving into the final section of this note, I return once more to Huguenot House and Dorchester Project and attempt to articulate a more cautious, situational and urban-aesthetic approach to how we, as scholars of a city's organizational forces, might summon urban-artistic experiments.

Arousing dissensus: A fourth mode

'I do not know whether to be more pleased or apprehensive about art-world artists engaging in, as the sign on the door says, "social practice"', Rosler comments, while later on asking us to consider, too, that 'the cultural sphere, despite relentless co-optation by marketing, is a perpetual site of resistance and

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2   Or, conversely, can we neatly dismiss such art endeavours *as art* on the grounds of clinging to or restating properly art-aesthetic criteria of what counts as art? See Bishop (2012) for an attempt to reflect upon the boundaries of art and not-art that seems to wish to resurrect proper and expertly aesthetic criteria by drawing upon, strangely enough, Rancière's work.

critique' (2011b: 15, 20). Can we go beyond calling upon artists as helpmates in the image of some kind of cosmopolitan urbanism á la Florida *and* beyond the conventionally critical school of thought, namely to see the use of art and aesthetics as a mere symptom of power relations, if not a veil thrown over oppressive social structures? After all, in their different ways both analytical paths reaffirm consensus: the narrative of the entrepreneurial city holding sway over the artistic mode of production. But would this mean that an organizational theorizing interested in the effects of art can summon – call upon, cite – artistic practices only to stay on the side of consensus? Recall the etymology of 'summoning': can we not summon art differently, perhaps in terms of being aroused by it, excited to scholarly action?

As a preliminary answer, I conclude by outlining the contour of a potential fourth, dissensus mode of summoning art to save the city. After all, and as Lefebvre tirelessly pointed out, if city-space is perpetually assembled from a multitude of organisational forces, then it constitutes an invariably open form. An urban-aesthetic perspective that situates the intelligibility of urban-artistic experiments within the conditions and processes of the production of urban space, rather than in relation to these conditions, would thus depart from the assumption of urban space as open form and would be attuned to the capacities set in motion through artistic practices: to what art can do within the constraints of how a city is organized. As Rancière (2007: 80) writes, '[t]he aesthetic question is (...) a matter of sensitivity to the configuration of a space and to the specific rhythm of a time, a matter of experiencing the intensities that space and that time bring'. This kind of urban aesthetics therefore provokes the organizational scholar to engage with struggles over what can be felt, seen and expressed. It urges us to locate the moments and situations in which the relation between the very material order of space, affect, speech and visibility is suspended and redrawn, and where aesthetic experience is pushed 'toward the reconfiguration of collective life (Rancière, 2009: 41).[3] It is worth to go back to Dorchester Project and Huguenot House one more time in order to ponder what this 'push' might mean. While it is doubtlessly possible to inscribe Gates' activities into a critical analysis of art's incorporation in a contemporary regime of urban development – as spectacle, as grassroots revitalization, as social work – such a critique would have a lot to answer for. For one, there is Gates' shrewd tactics of using the art world hustle for his own ends, establishing a do-it-yourself

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3   In this sense, the aesthetic dimension inheres in every social transformation – as a kind of rupture of sensation and affectivity that messes up seemingly self-evident correspondences between perception and signification. '[T]he first political act is also an aesthetic one, a partitioning of sensation that divides the body and its organs of sense perception and assigns to them corresponding capacities for the making of sense' (Panagia 2009: 9).

economy of recycling, resurrecting and reinventing all sorts of urban structures, materials and seemingly out-dated cultural goods that today's market economy and institutions of culture and learning have made redundant or superfluous. And even though the artist admits that so far, 'the impact of Dorchester Projects has been largely symbolic' (Colapinto, 2014: 31), the collaborative attempt to breathe life into forgotten or neglected places and artefacts demonstrates a way of establishing self-organized spaces of exchange as well as of cultural and manual labour that contemporary urban development schemes usually lack (Colapinto, 2014). The work of saving discarded elements of urban culture, of enlivening run-down urban areas, of offering employment and cultural vitality by turning all of this into a vast project of contemporary art constitutes an achievement that both confirms how art is summoned to save the city and points beyond it. It bears witness to the capacity of urban dwellers to appropriate and 'save' their surroundings, and it problematizes how we deal with urban culture and a city's socio-economic problems. Therefore, it indeed turns into a symbolic quest for how collective life under dire circumstances might be reconfigured. More reflectively framed than in the forthright *documenta* statement cited above, Gates has put it thus:

> While I may not be able to change the housing market or the surety of gentrification, I can offer questions within the landscape. To question, not by petitioning or organizing in the activist way, but by building and making good use of the things forgotten (quoted in Jackson, 2012: 20).

Perhaps it is precisely the expanded field of contemporary art, and the numerous artistic experiments at work in cities, that have a singular potential of questioning, irritating and intervening into the habitual forms of organizing urban life. After all, it is the unique strength of (this kind of) art that it has 'a double ontological status: it is both an event in the world, and also at a remove from it' (Bishop, 2012b: 45). Because it cannot be reduced to activism or conventional political struggle, it has the capacity to provoke and enlarge our capacity to imagine other ways of urban collaboration and how we make use of a city's artefacts and physical spaces, up to reimagining how urban economies take shape. In other words, art's inventiveness in experimenting with or effacing its boundaries up to the point of its own disappearance as a distinct practice is precisely what makes it so relevant for the question of alternative organizational practices and forms. Such art operations consist in, to use Miwon Kwon's term, (2002: 155) a 'critical unsiting'. They intervene in and temporarily reorganize the relational configuration of sites. This way, art has the potential to problematize the *terms* of urban debates – like exclusion and revitalization – and to unsettle the divisions of roles, possibilities and competencies – for instance, of whose voices and actions can enact urban change. Therefore, 'dissensus mode': the notion of dissensus brings together dissent and the sensual, denoting interventions on a

given organization of the sensible that, in Rancière's words, 'shake up our modes of perception and (...) redefine our capacities for action' (Rancière, 2007: 259). As my reading of Huguenot House and Dorchester Project suggests, such art practices resist or even transcend easy classification – as spectacle, as grassroots development, as social work – and the kind of grand narrative that I have re-enacted above. They therefore summon scholars of the urban condition and its processes of organizing to adopt an urban-aesthetic sensibility in order to explore and make visible these poetic cuts into the urban fabric.
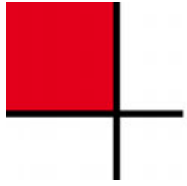
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Collective low-budget organizing and low *carbon* futures: An interview with John Urry

Paula Bialski and Birke Otto

Introduction

In his recent book *Societies beyond oil* (Urry, 2013), the sociologist John Urry historically traces the growing reliance on oil in welfare societies caused by a growing dependency on inventions made possible by coal fired steam engines. The car, long distance travel via train and plane, mass production and consumption of cheap goods and the consequent types of industry-based work have co-shaped and organized daily life in the city and its urban forms. Whereas the energy dense, storage-able and mobile qualities of oil seemed plentiful and cheap for a long time, Urry's book is a thought-piece on four different future scenarios looming now after peak oil, as stagnating economic growth and an aging demographic reorganize social, political and economic life. Some of these scenarios are grim – depicting resource wars, high tech and exclusionary ways of living, and the detriments of a more resource-efficient but mainly digital life without much movement or face-to-face interaction. The last scenario however is that of a 'low carbon society' and has a more optimistic, at times even romantic, outlook of how societies may cope with scarcity while still enjoying the pleasures of relatively wealthy societies. The scenario is based on experiences and ideas of organizing life with limited resources by 'de-energizing' the way societies are organized. According to Urry, such powering-down assumes that prosperity, equality and welfare can be maintained despite lowering consumption of goods and services (Urry, 2012: 205). Still, the majority of people in the UK, for example, believe that their children will have a lower standard of living than themselves, but Urry reminds the reader that such a discouraging outlook goes hand in hand with a re-valuation of what is considered a good living standard –

as something not narrowly defined by GDP measures alone. The fact that less young people in the described welfare societies value the ownership of a car – neither as status symbol nor as necessary means of transportation – is only one expression of such a trend (*ibid.* 208). The contributions of the present *ephemera* special issue, 'Saving the city: Collective low-budget organizing and urban practice' show many more of such examples: people exhibiting a new valuation of what was formerly considered waste by creating online reuse-networks (Foden, this issue), re-appreciating collectively organized and affordable provision of food in *milk bars* in Warsaw (Podkalicka and Potkańska, this issue), exploring car-sharing options and organizing food-cooperatives in Manchester and Birmingham (Psarikidou, this issue), using vacant urban spaces creatively for small scale entrepreneurial activity in Bremen (Ziehl and Oßwald, this issue) and so on. Such 'green shoots of a powered down future', as Urry would call them (Urry, 2013: 204), can be considered as an appreciation of non-economic values, such as community support and cooperation, self-organization on local scales, slower lifestyles, and trust, all of which have gained a higher regard than material ownership or having a large income. In these examples, the lack of the latter does not necessarily seem incompatible with maintaining a particular life style. Moreover, they seem to reorganize the city in ways which the influential American urban planner Jane Jacobs already promoted in the 1960s: slow modes of travel, neighbourhood cooperation, more face to face talk, residences mixing with businesses, less urban zoning, and the absence of extreme differences of income of those living near to each other by way of producing goods and services in a simpler way and repairing them nearby (Jacobs in Urry, 2013: 213).

There may be some romanticism lurking in Urry's vision of 'low carbon societies' and it raises ample questions about issues of scaling, (in)equality, exclusion, North/South distribution and other tensions implicit in such practices. Representatives of a more critical urban studies may reject Urry's trust in small-scale local experiments as little and temporal islands reserved for a concerned but exclusive middle class present in welfare societies and whose potential for up-scaling, redistribution and broader structural change by creating strategic alliances is crushed by an encroaching welfare state retrenchment. How are questions of poverty and uneven distribution of these life-styles addressed in such future scenarios? How can such practices be scaled up to the city without producing exclusionary mechanisms, and how can it stimulate people's incentives to change? These are some of the questions that we aimed to address in our interview with John Urry.

Interview

P and B: In your book, you write about a possible future based on a wide array of groups, organizations, experimenting conceptually and practically with many post-carbon alternatives. So maybe to start off, can you provide us with some specific examples of alternatives?

John: If we look globally, we'll probably see tens of thousands of ideas, prototypes, innovations, groups, and campaigns devising alternative car systems, alternative homes and alternative energy systems, to then the things I am interested in, which are the prototypes of ways of living which are someway or another concerned with the carbon footprint. So what I was trying to catch here were the semi-organized phenomena that are emerging, a kind of low-carbon, global civil society, in which of course each is not only in and of themselves, but in various kinds of ways, exchanging, collaborating, modelling, using examples from one another. So it's low-carbon civil society as an emergent phenomenon.

P and B: But we can see, of course, that this is a lifestyle choice – the decision to live more locally or ecologically. Yet also these sorts of practices are emerging out of necessity and cost-saving. Those who have been affected by austerity in Spain or Greece have stated that they do turn to online flat-sharing networks like 'Airbnb' in order to rent out part of their flats to survive. So can you comment on the link between austerity and this move towards a low-carbon society?

John: I suppose I am talking about two kinds of things. In a way, one is what you call an individual lifestyle. But then there are those kinds of developing models and alternative prototypes of a central system that might instigate more of a political shift. And of course it is sometimes one and the other, and they do connect. So I totally agree that austerity would appear to be kind of stimulating these alternatives, however some of them sort of predate this. That would be very fascinating, and perhaps that's what some people in your issue are doing – is examining the interplay of discourses of austerity, and discourses of low-carbon, and how those interconnect, and are interconnecting, and are producing something that is sort of different. And it kind of relates to the idea of peak travel, and peak car, for which there is a limit – so the peaking of that and at the same time the fact that this started pre-2008, pre-austerity, but which clearly is austerity-linked and something we clearly seem to be reinforcing and then reflected in the way the decreasing proportion of people who have driving licenses or are driving cars.

P and B: This is a very hard question for any researcher studying such subcultures. In what instances do these practices take hold and become a larger phenomenon which

becomes cemented in society, and in which cases do they stay limited to just the hipster urban niche?

John: I definitely don't have an answer to that. But I mean I think that language of what is a niche, and what becomes a system change is very interesting and something I have been discussing recently with researchers who work on cycling and e-bikes. But these phenomena are interesting because of the relations that drive them. I can not be particularly bothered about some more people starting up cycling – but what these practices do, be it in Central London or wherever, is that they provide a model of inspiration to other activities. So it is the potential national and international impact and relationalities that may come to be established which is what may move a niche to be something more part of a system.

P and B: So the netting and embedding of these practices in larger networks?

John: Absolutely.

P and B: Well another question we have is that most low-carbon practices, at least initially, require more investment than something that is already established. As you say, we are reliant on our established network, so why would we go off and invest in a new network and a new system? For example, in the Low-Budget Urbanity research project, we study among other things ecological communities which break outside of their standard, established water filtering system provided to them by the city, and invest in another more resource efficient self-built system through small-scale technologies. So aren't these alternative practices just going to stay a middle-class phenomenon? For those who can financially afford a low-carbon lifestyle?

John: I'm slightly less bothered by the issue of whether or not these practices are limited to a certain class or gender. Things have to start somewhere. So it's actually the starting that is pretty significant, and it has to come from a specific social group. The car came from a specific social group too – young men driving and developing cars as speed machines, and subsequent use changed. So the question is does it spread? Does it move? So I think it is worth to talk about more the many efforts to push these various phenomena out, to move them out beyond the young, male model.

P and B: So then wouldn't the question not be about who is adopting it, and what group is adopting it or not, but what is the technology that creates this seed of change. You mentioned in your book that we are now not thinking about the practices that we can develop to scale-down on oil consumption, but rather we are waiting for an innovation that would directly replace oil.

John: Yes indeed. But I suppose my point would be that there is no technology without its social uses, and the way in which these technologies are embedded in practice. Often that is expressed by saying that there has to be a business model. And I like to say that there has to be a business and a sociological model. Like a true empiricist (laughs). What are the patterns of life, or as Elizabeth Shove would say, what are the new forms of practices that various technology may come to be embedded. And nothing will become a system unless its both of those – the social and the technological. The social and the material getting to be assembled together as an astute new system which then makes it difficult to take over, difficult to imagine the world before that system took over and imagine a re-worlding. So my question, because I have no answer to this, is what would produce a low-carbon, re-worlding?

P and B: So perhaps let's talk about policy measures. You wrote that it took 50 years for the rich North to bring about a significant reduction in tobacco smoking. Despite the scientific evidence, smoking was ubiquitous. So the other question is, how do we power-down fast enough? Do you see any concrete possibilities for scaling down? Is it about policy?

John: I think it's about everything. But I don't know if I could tell you the order. It's about policy, it's about new kinds of sociability that seem more fashionable. What might make luxury and richness unfashionable? How could somebody sitting in their Jacuzzi in their 4-star hotel think more modestly (laughs)? How can modest lives be fashionable? And that relates very much to societies and norms. The disapproval of excess. So it is policy, it is cultural change, and it's new kinds of technologies and economies that somehow make that possible. And it's nowhere near there, and certainly not there in a way in which we can imagine future being conceived of, outside of the rich of the North perhaps. But the rich North is quite interesting, and of course it's still the most powerful bit of the world. So what happens here is significant. And I sort of now see a kind of plateauing. But somebody might say in criticism – 'well that's all jolly interesting John but there was as much of this force and experimentation in the 1970s', which I also talk about in Societies beyond oil. I think the 1970s is very interesting – this is when there was a lot of interesting post-oil discourse and environmentalism is one of those visions that stemmed out of that. So the 1970s is an interesting period – with calculation, experimentation, car-free days. Jimmy Carter was putting solar-panels on the roof of the White House in the 1970s. So there is a set of trends that was pretty interesting then. But what happened also then, among other things, was a neoliberlization with Regan and Thatcher, and they started stomping on that from 1979 onwards. Which introduces the questions of power and economic and political systems in all this. So this is one of the massive problems in talking about this.

P and B: Then can the shift happen where prosperity and economic wealth is replaced with a networking wealth? Where what counts is that we know where we can borrow goods, whom we can share with, where the local market is happening? Perhaps this is what the whole discourse around the sharing economy is proposing a new future with the increase in access and information?

John: I totally agree that's an interesting possibility. But there's lots of things that get in the way of that. Massive amounts of things get in the way of that. Yet it's kind of got a small momentum, and it has to start somewhere, and I don't quite care where it starts. But the question is, can it grow, can it be generalized, what are the conditions of the existence of you know, such a lower carbon, sharing system, and one of the things I talk about in *Societies beyond oil* is this 'do you reverse the existing system, or do you develop a new system, which somehow in the end makes the old one redundant?' [...] Putting a system into reverse gear when it's going fast, or fairly fast, is extraordinarily difficult. So I like these buttons that we fool around with, that generate new systems that somehow over time makes the initial system redundant. Which is a bit like mobile phones and landline phones or I suppose the internet and pre-existing telephone forms of communication, or fax machines. I think fax machines are very interesting historically. I remember when every office had to have a fax machine, it was like the really, really cool thing to have in an office. Or the really cool thing was to have a fax number. People would say: 'oh yeah, I'll send you my fax number'. And you'd think they were terribly important people. [...] So the whole history of socio-technical change is, I think, the most important resource for thinking futures.

P and B: One of our last questions is about the city. Rather than relying on resources that are sourced from beyond the city (the farm, or the oil refinery), there are urban trends that try to create urban life cycles that makes cities less independent of external resources. How do you see these developments, what capacities do you see in cities to organize low carbon societies and powering down?

John: Those are all pretty interesting, and some cities do develop that now on quite an impressive scale. And some cities will have policies and coalition of interests. And some ways in which people will be communicating more because they bump into each other in their part of their localized networks. But reversing large-scale agriculture seems to be quite a massive challenge, in a situation in which the population is growing. So probably massive reductions in agriculture outputs if you were really to localize, is pretty tricky. And what is a city, if you're thinking of Shanghai, or Beijing, or Seoul, to do? This is such a scale of food resources or water, and so far oil, that you need to generate to support 25 million people. I mean a farmers market in the middle of Lancaster is very easy, but a

farmer's market in the middle of Shanghai – they would have to travel two hours to get there. So I think it's all sorts of things about scale that are tricky when talking about alternatives in cities. Some of that is more to do with again, sort of models and visions.

P and B: The last question is a more personal one. You discuss in your book that the possible futures can be either a dark and full of resource wars, or one of an increase on community life and networks of support. Looking at what is happening in the world, did you get more pessimistic over the years? Or perhaps have you shifted your view of how society will adapt?

John: Well when I talk about offshoring in my newest book (Urry, 2014) – I guess I would be more pessimistic, although I don't like using those categories. I think the scale of the forces which are moving societies in a fully, strongly, high-carbon way, are pretty phenomenal. And if they were not dented much by 2007/2008, they require a lot to be dented let alone reversed, I suppose. And one of the reasons for that is this huge growth of what I would call the whole variety of offshoring processes. One of which I would see would be the problem of tax. You said that low-carbon innovations require funding – and they also require funding in ways that seem fair. And tax is not fair. And obviously Occupy movements, etc., have protested this and brought on a new politics of taxation onto the agenda. Almost every major company in the world is a tax avoider, if not a high evader. So the scale of avoidance is embarrassing. Routledge, which is owned by Taylor and Francis, which is owned by Ingenta – which is based in Switzerland for example... you can't avoid it. And this means that most of these major entities are not paying their fair share, or anywhere near their fair share. So they are inducing the rest of the population to pay their fair share, to have a sense of 'sharing' and mutual obligation. And this is really, really demanding. So while you have this low-carbon civil society on the one hand, doing interesting things, you also have this proliferation of interdependent offshore worlds, which are going in quite the opposite direction....

P and B: Thank you so much John for that.

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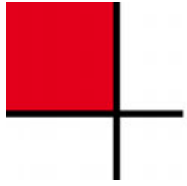Email: j.urry@lancaster.ac.uk

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Grassroots initiatives as pioneers of low-budget practices: An activists' roundtable

CiT-Collective, Gängeviertel, New Cross Commoners, Revolutionary Autonomous Communities, Heike Derwanz and Hans Vollmer

Introduction

Grassroots initiatives around the world try to balance neighbourhood responsibility with politics. As David Harvey writes: 'The urban obviously functions [...] as an important site of political action and revolt' (Harvey, 2012: 117). He regards territorial organisation and spontaneity, volatility and rapidity as characteristic features of urban political movements (*ibid.*). Other writers dealing with critical urban theory describe the political and economic tasks relevant groups need to perform. In this round table we wish to inquire into these performances. To this end, we have taken Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer's finding that the accumulation strategies one finds in cities not only concern capital, but can also be local and highly specific (Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer, 2012: 1) as our starting point for asking the activists themselves how these other strategies and urban change come alive on a grassroots level.

RAC-LA from Los Angeles, the *New Cross Commoners* from London, the *CiT Collective* from Vienna and *Gängeviertel* from Hamburg answered our questions concerning the manner in which they organise to 'save the city'. In this round table, 'saving' the city refers to all the various notions of saving: refashioning a civil society by mobilising the public, helping neighbourhoods or urban society in general to cope with current and future challenges such as growing inequality, avoiding the waste of money and resources in their voluntary work by redistributing, reusing or preserving items within the metabolism of the cities, or

in many other ways. Some are aligned with the 'right to the city movement'[1], a name coined by Henry Lefebvre, nowadays an umbrella organisation for activists 'fighting for democracy, justice and sustainability in our cities'[2]. They share similar ideals, interests and motivations, but have developed diverse ways of pursuing them. All four of them, centred on the fight for space, resources and collectivity, sent contributions in response to our call for participation and contributed their experiences with organising themselves. After sending a questionnaire to four representatives, we compiled them for an activists' round table which introduces their initiatives and shows how they work. Our questions concerning the 'how-to' are focused on methods, skills and calculations like the juggling of finances versus autonomy. The questionnaire enabled us to place different experiences and organisation models side by side, hopefully without losing their original voices.

Who are you?

RAC-LA: For more than 7 years, *The Revolutionary Autonomous Communities-Los Angeles* (*RAC-LA*) have distributed, on average, over 150 baskets of food (vegetables and fruit) every Sunday, affecting the lives of 450-600 persons. *RAC-LA* is based around McArthur Park, downtown Los Angeles, and consists of approximately 35 members with an additional 300 supporters. *RAC-LA* is overwhelmingly made up of the working poor, in many cases migrant workers (not 'immigrants', which assumes the existence of a 'border'), in the main from Mexico and Central America, though there are black, white and members of Asian descent. In addition to our food program, *RAC-LA* distributes free cooked food made by our members to those we serve: the homeless, the poor and those without documentation, has 'Know Your Rights' seminars, has an attorney (member) who gives legal advice, and a physician (member) and nurse (member) available for health inquiries on our two feast days (May Day and 1st Sunday in November). In addition to those regularly scheduled events, *RAC-LA* gave a presentation and hosted the final day of the Anarchist Bookfair in LA (on December 8, 2013).

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1 Their aims are: 'We fight for concrete improvements that result in stronger communities and a better state of being for our friends, families, and for our children's futures. Our organisations take on campaigns to win housing, education, transportation, and jobs. We struggle for community safety and security, neighbourhood sustainability, environmental justice, and the right to culture, celebration, rest, and public space' (Perera, 2013).

2 Original slogan from the website: http://www.righttothecity.org.

Figure 1: RAC-LA distributing food. (RAC-LA)

NXC: The *New Cross Commoners* is a collective of people living, working, studying in New Cross, an area in the South East of London. Many of us consider what we do as a sort of activism. It is an activism organised not around campaigns but around issues, needs and desires. It is activism as a process organised around our everyday lives. It is also activism as a collective learning process, learning from the neighbourhood, learning from each other, learning from the texts we read together. The question is: how can we do things differently, away from the competition imposed by the market, away from the hierarchy imposed by the State. The shape of the collective is difficult to define, at the moment (January 2014) there are something like a dozen people who see themselves as part of the collective. The composition of the collective has been a subject of discussions from the beginning: how to respond to the complex social composition of the neighbourhood and, at the same time, how to sustain the consistency of the collective?

Figure 2: The New Cross Commoners (New Cross Commoners)

CiT: The *CiT-Collective* (Culture is Transformation) is an independent group of urban activists with the aim of a collective appropriation of the former *Gaswerk Leopoldau* in the north of Vienna, and bottom-up city planning strategies in general. The group, founded in summer 2011, consists of architects, city and landscape planners, artists, researchers, theorists, social workers and people related to the field of art and culture. The collective gathers knowledge about participatory processes, needs, ideas and spaces of cultural activists and cultural workers in Vienna and beyond and brings this knowledge into city politics and city planning situations.

Figure 3: Performance by CiT Collective in the disused Leopoldau gasworks (CiT Collective)

Gängeviertel: The *Gängeviertel* initiative started on August 22, 2009, around Valentinskamp, in the inner city of Hamburg. The *Gängeviertel* is a non-commercial urban space in the heart of one of the most expensive office locations in Germany. It occurred out of the first successful building occupation in Hamburg for twenty years. Over the last 5 years the occupiers have established studios, workshops, offices and event venues by refurbishing the old buildings to the extent possible with the resources available. With the foundation of a cooperative, the *Gängeviertel* is undergoing a structural change in its organisational model as a registered association.

Figure 4: The Gängeviertel buildings (Franziska Holz)

Why did you start? What is your motivation?

 RAC-LA: The initiative that led to *RAC-LA* and culminated in the launching of the Food Program in November 2007 began in the wake of the police riot in MacArthur Park on May Day of that year, wherein the LAPD launched brutal attacks upon a march for human rights initiated by migrant workers, their families and people having but not necessarily claiming 'citizenship' in the US. The idea of mutual assistance (not charity) as a vehicle for building a non-hierarchical model of a revolutionary organisation via such mutual aid in the form of a food assistance program was launched. *RAC-LA* is today an exportable model of self-agency on the part of members of the working class and as such constitutes important work.

NXC: In February 2013 we came together as the *New Cross Commoners* to learn from forms of self-organisation in New Cross, and also in an attempt to organise our lives differently and contribute to the existing collective experiences happening in the area. It was not just learning from the neighbourhood but also from the city at large with its squats and social centres, with its occupations, with its campaigns and demos, with the life of other collectives some of us had experience of. As students or ex-students many of us had a frustration with Goldsmiths[3], with the way it exists as a separate entity from the life of New Cross, with the self-referentiality of a knowledge too often designed to feed the academic system. The *New Cross Commoners* has been thought as a process of learning differently, a process where people could learn from theory as well as from the neighbourhood and from various experiences of self-organisation. This is what makes this learning (micro)political. Another motivation for coming together was a desire to become gradually independent from wage labour by experimenting with the sharing of resources, with collectivised forms of production and reproduction, with forms of cooperation, with community based economies. A third and more basic motivation is to make our life in the neighbourhood less alienating by connecting with other people who have a desire of changing New Cross for the better by organising bottom-up.

CiT: The main motivation of the collective and its collaboration network is to perform their 'right to the city' by negotiating new public spaces for practices of cultural and social transformation. By researching and practising urban common strategies, possibilities and productions, we emancipate ourselves from an everyday paralysing situation and formulate our own aims and strategies regarding the city as a social and political space. This is a process within networks and collaborations to create a positive utopian contribution to contemporary theory, production and mediation in the field of city planning and the production of space.

Gängeviertel: Many of the *Gängeviertel* activists had lost their studios and apartments as a result of the progressing gentrification process, or were threatened by steep rent hikes. The prospects of finding adequate spaces on the real estate market appeared slim at best in the eyes of the protagonists, most of whom had very few financial resources. Rents in Hamburg were rising rapidly, and urban niches for cultural activity and affordable housing were disappearing day by day. Instead of taking counteractive action and providing for affordable housing and working spaces, the city government opted for costly lighthouse projects that gave further impetus to the upward price spiral. The occupiers originally wanted to make a statement in opposition to this policy. But once they

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3   A college of the University of London situated in New Cross.

got the chance they developed the aim to realise a lasting alternative social model in the *Gängeviertel* based on self- administration and openness.

How do you work? What are your methods and forms of working together?

RAC-LA: Anyone can join *RAC-LA* by participating in the work that we do. When *RAC-LA* began it did so with a group of a dozen or so activists. Since that time all but two of the founders have gone on to other work. But these have been replaced by members of the community who came because they needed the food and who saw what we were doing and decided to join. There is no longer any distinction of moment that divides the activists from these members of the working class.

The innate purpose which drives *RAC-LA* is the building of a model of a revolutionary organisation through a mutual aid food program. What we are doing is technically illegal as we have no permit to do our work in the park. In addition, *RAC-LA* needs to block off parking spaces for the arrival and loading and unloading of both the vehicles of compost-seeking gardeners as well as the trucks bringing the food donations. As it is illegal this has been an excuse for police interventions. In spite of all of this, members of *RAC-LA* 'cop-watch' (with video cameras) all such incursions. In the process of distribution we try to achieve maximum equality. Picking-up food at farmers and wholesalers and distributing food according to the number of people desiring parcels of food is voluntary work sans the incentive of payment – though most workers opt to receive baskets of food at the end. *RAC-LA* is thus a mode of cooperative production, where one works for the benefit of all and is, in turn, benefited by the work of all.

No one assigns anyone to any sector. Anyone can do any job. In our methods of production, the first order of business is the unloading of the vehicles bringing the raw materials of *RAC-L*'s production, fruits and vegetables to our location. Separately, a group of 4-6 people measure and package quart-bag-size packets of rice and beans. *RAC-LA* has full intentions of creating value-adding jobs for its members as well as the community at large. When tabling at other events, members of *RAC-LA* will cook and offer food for donations with a portion of the surplus above the costs of the items cooked going to the comrade who did the work, and a portion to the organisation. Also we have created a line of organic soaps which will employ some comrades in their production as well as sale. Also *RAC-LA* t-shirts and handbags are prized by other comrades and we offer them for donations at every event we table or participate in. But our food program is our base for launching other projects like our garden, our exercise program, our

soap- and t-shirt-making efforts. This is the hard work, the real work, of readying ourselves, our comrades and our neighbours to take up the struggle for and the building of a new way of life: new vistas, new horizons, new visions made manifest through such work.

NXC: The *New Cross Commoners* is an open collective, and this openness is something that is actively pursued. Openness doesn't simply mean that what we organise is open to everybody, it means that we try out ways to engage with different people by organising different activities. When we read theory together, we read very slowly, not so much to understand the meaning of a text but to understand the connections it can have with the neighbourhood and our life as part of it. Still, a reading session would attract certain people and not others. The people's kitchen as we conceived it[4] has been thought for this as well, to get other kinds of people engaged in activities that would also make us think together about our life in the neighbourhood against the many forms of enclosures produced by capitalism: enclosures of knowledge, housing, food and food production, and care. We have been discussing the problem of homogeneity since the very first Commoners meeting. De Angelis defines the commons as characterised by a 'non-homogeneous' community (de Angelis/Stavrides 2010). It is not easy to increase the degree of non-homogeneity of a collective: for us it is a matter of creating new terrains where consistency can be created through a diversity (of class, race, gender, age, ability) that does not get erased or ignored.

The organisation of the *New Cross Commoners* is not hierarchical, and it is anarchic in a literal sense because there is no leadership. But this issue is more complicated by the fact that only a few of us initiated the process, after a long period of discussions. In such a case it is not easy to redistribute power and responsibility: they get conferred even when they are unwanted. It was very useful for us to propose the format of the 'people's kitchen' to other local collectives as well, so that even if for the moment some perceive the *New Cross Commoners* as somehow leading the people's kitchen, the dynamics got redistributed, new people took responsibility for this new 'project', and this makes the whole process more complicated, but allows for others to come to the fore, with their interests, desires, experiences. More specifically about the organisation: we have two mailing lists, one for activities open to everybody (readings, visits/walks, people's kitchens, workshops etc.) and another one for 'commoners', that is people who get involved in the organisation.

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4   The people's kitchen as we organise it involves the usual food skipping, cooking and eating together, but also discussions around tables: the attempt is to bring together the conviviality of the people's kitchen with discussions about issues affecting our lives in the neighbourhood, so that the people's kitchen could function also as a platform to organise other activities.

CiT: As a collective, *CiT* embraces each member's individual skills and experience. We communicate in person and directly trough meetings as well as using the Internet or individual sub networks. Tasks are worked out by specific members of the group or if necessary in sub-groups and through delegates. All main decisions and results are talked about and decided upon in consensus.

We are working within different formats – written, spoken, performative, visual, audio and moving image. We instigate political negotiations and understand ourselves as part of the DIY movement, amateurs with high compatibility to technocracy. Our main agenda is the conceptualisation, the development of visions. We sit down and talk, try to listen to each other as much as we can, bring forward all cases and stay mindful and respectful towards diversity in the group. Collective writing through open source tools, sharing of files, images, insights, regularly inviting in collaborative activists, politicians, inhabitants and locals to discussions and multi-layered forms of exchange. We apply the concept of 'actocracy'. If no one opposed to an idea, any person can go ahead and proceed with an action.

We publish our outcomes, information and results on our mailing list at our regular meetings and/or at our webblog. Thus we reach not just people from and in Vienna, but all over the world. We prepare press work and keep contact with journalists. We are in conversation with various departments of the city government and keep in touch with specific municipal authorities for the sake and purpose of knowledge transfers.

Through workshops (Urbanize-Festival 2012 and others) we collect wishes, ideas and needs of visitors and local residents. Post-cards, e-mail campaigns and (online-) petitions are means to mobilise political protest and for initiating discourse among citizens and politicians, as well as through press work, publications, articles, university classes, talks, panels, radio shows and academic papers. Artistic interventions, tactical media, performances, street art, invisible theatre, film screenings and cultural activities in public spaces allow for inclusion and urban communing to create an issue and talk about new options and perspectives.

Gängeviertel: The occupation of the *Gängeviertel* (2009) was disguised as an art and courtyard festival and advertised throughout the city. Exhibitions and performances that had secretly been prepared for weeks became visible for thousands of visitors by opening one door after the other, which had been locked for years. This tactic of cultural appropriation generated a positive response from all parts of the city's society. Today there are exhibitions, concerts, film showings, readings, discussions or workshops taking place nearly every day. Hundreds of

visitors come each week and take advantage of the free program of events and activities.

Where the association is primarily responsible for the design of the program, the cooperative is going to manage the houses after the renovation. For the ongoing renewal process, a 'building commission' was founded to mediate between the architectural office, a private development agency and, if necessary, the municipality.

The weekly general assembly is the most important organ, to ensure self-administration in a complex organisational structure. There is a basic consensus of how to work together. The association and the cooperative as formal institutions are hierarchal organisations. The members elect their chairmen, who can act after they informed and asked the general assembly. This is an informal committee where all relevant decisions are made on the basis of grass-roots democratic principles. The meetings are mostly open to everyone and thus also serve as a point of contact for outsiders who wish to become involved. The principles are: partisan and religious independence, openness, commonness, self-management, preservation and non-commercial use of the place. Several working groups, temporary or consistent, are responsible for certain tasks (cultural program, public relations, planning).

As the *Gängeviertel* is an open place and fluid social system it is hard to draw a line between in- and outside. There is something you can call a hard core of round about 80 activists but new people and ideas are very welcome. Venues can be used by all kinds of groups for non-commercial events and activities. Space is limited and there are some unwritten rules of how to behave: no violence, respect to others and so on. Unfortunately all kinds of social collectives produce excluding behaviour, like common symbols and language that might deter other people. But most of the members are aware of this and try to avoid this exclusion.

The *Gängeviertel* uses social networks (Facebook and Twitter) and runs two webpages (das-gaengeviertel.info, gaengeviertel-eg.de) to share events, dates and news, mostly about cultural and political issues. A monthly newsletter or the 'Übergänge' (transitions), which is part of a newspaper published by the municipality to inform neighbours about the ongoing renovation process. In 2012 the *Gängeviertel* released the publication 'Mehr als ein Viertel' (more than a quarter).

What are your resources?

RAC-LA: The greatest resource that *RAC-LA* has is the quality of its constituent members. Being revolutionaries whose ultimate aim is the destruction of the existing capitalist economy and its state apparatus, *RAC-LA* accepts no assistance whatsoever from that existing state. We are not a 501.c.3 - U.S. tax code reference number for an officially recognised non-profit organisation. Donations to us cannot therefore constitute an income tax deduction for our donors; donors who thus have no incentive to so donate to us save the presentation by and the representation of our organisation by the *RAC-LA* members who have made the initial contacts and stay in contact with these our donors. Our second greatest resource is the people that we serve. For, in the main, this is how it is that *RAC-LA* continues to be a growing dynamic. *RAC-LA* makes no 'recruitment drives'. There is no pressure exerted by members to 'do this so as to get that'. Members recruit themselves. And do so only out of the good that is in their character. Seeing others working voluntarily with no thought of compensation beyond 'Thank yous' impels a person into self-evaluation. A private introspection that, given the right type of person, can lead that one to do that which he/she has come to admire, i.e. join *RAC-LA*. This is the method to the model that is *RAC-LA*.

NXC: At the moment, the *New Cross Commoners* have no budget. So far the funding we got was very little and it was used mainly to cover production costs[5]. In our exploration of the neighbourhood we came across different resources that people use collectively, both material and immaterial, resources used for production and for reproduction. We could associate different kinds of resources with different places explored: housing for Sanford housing co-op, food for Common Growth communal garden, knowledge for the New Cross Learning (former public library), care for the New Cross poetry workshop. The *New Cross Commoners* itself have been dealing with knowledge (to self-organise a production of knowledge that comes from theory as well as from the experience of a specific context), care (to take care of the formation of a collective, to take care of our differences, to take care of our potentials) and more recently food (skipping food for the people's kitchen and cooking together not for charity and not as a service/entertainment), but it might be reductive to categorise resources in such a way.

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5   We got 1,000 pounds from the Goldsmiths design department and we used them to pay travel for people coming to visit us, materials for workshops, and for this publication:
     http://newxcommoners.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/nxcpublication_2013.pdf.

In more concrete terms we have often been using Goldsmiths as a resource for meetings, but also cooking, printing and making photocopies, getting materials for workshops and using the library. For us it is a way to reclaim Goldsmiths as a public place, to crack the enclosure of knowledge academia produces.

A resource in New Cross are also the several local collectives organising from below, sometimes in dialogue with public institutions, like New Cross Learning, a former public library closed because of the cuts and then reclaimed and run by locals. A tool we use and often go back to in order to interrogate the potential of local resources are maps like this one http://nxc.smappamenti.org/, which came out of a workshop we had as part of Party in the Park, a local free festival. These mapping exercises are more than simply a matter of locating and transcribing what exists in New Cross, they are a tool to think what does not and should exist in New Cross, where enclosures are produced, what should be reclaimed and collectivised. They are a tool to discuss together, to incite people's imagination, to see what we got already, what has been taken away, what we could make use of. People as well can be considered as resources, against a neoliberal ideology of 'human capital' and 'human resources' based on exploitation and self-exploitation.

To talk about resources is to talk about local economies, and in this respect we will soon experiment with local economies also through The Field, a small building owned by a private landlord that some of the commoners got rent-free for a few years[6]. We are talking about the possibility for The Field, besides being a meeting point for locals and for activist collectives, to make some profit by selling food and drinks. At the same time the space will also offer a free use of tools and facilities. A community economy has to be fed not only by public money and private income but also by sharing and exchanging (skills, labour, goods) that do not involve the use of money, by self-productions (food, energy, clothes, cleaning products, medicines) and collective uses of resources: this might allow a partial withdrawal from a monetary based economy.

The question of ownership is important in the context of the commons. As a collective the *New Cross Commoners* does not own anything. A public square is not a commons in itself because the citizens cannot make a free use of the square, there are rules which regulate the use of the square, and those rules have not been decided by those who use the square. A commons is a resource whose use is negotiated, decided and regulated by its users on a direct and non hierarchical basis. A commons is not a resource that everybody can use, it is a resource that can be used by people who take part in the processes of negotiating

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6   http://thefieldnx.wordpress.com/.

and re-negotiating its regulations – people who take part in commoning. Such a commons is something that has to be taken care of against the control of the state and the privatisation of the market.

CiT: A crucial resource for the *CiT-Collective* is the space in which we can work and that allows us to talk and listen to each other. A space to cultivate the community through social and cultural practices that emphasise creativity and ever redefined learning. This space can be (nearly) everywhere. It is also on us to generate this space, not on others to give it to us. Simultaneously a main source for the group and our work is the idea and practices of a collective/solidarity distribution of resources within Vienna (and beyond). We demand a direct democratic, creative and bottom-up planning process opposed to top-down, profit-oriented practices of exclusion as witnessed in today's city politics. Our network, which allows communication and collaboration with similar projects and groups all over the world, and the sharing of experiences and tactics within these networks, are as such a fundamental resource and aim at the same time.

There is no financial budget, just personal/collective resources so far. No plan to apply for sponsorship/subsidies until we get the planned project Gaswerk Leopoldau into practice. If not, it could happen that the collective applies for subsidies within a framework of other projects if necessary.

Gängeviertel: The fundamental resource of the *Gängeviertel* is its place with the twelve historic houses. Individual donations and pro-bono services help to organise events, which are mainly made possible by the unpaid labour of the activists, artists, architects, film-makers, cooks, and all kinds of craftsmen. Social networks, including many actors of the cultural scene and the Right to the City network of Hamburg, contribute and support the *Gängeviertel* with knowledge and experience (e.g. from former squatting projects). But the most specific resource and capital of the collective is its heterogeneous but coherent social structure.

All buildings belong to the municipality. After a building is renovated the *Gängeviertel* cooperation is going to leasehold them. But conditions are not negotiated yet. In the eyes of the activists the municipality has to waive profits and regard the activists' high amount of voluntary work in the process. In general there is no budget and no paid position. Only some of the temporary jobs for the most responsible and time-consuming functions in the frame of the renewal process are paid. These wages are paid by visitors' micro-donations and funding from the municipality. In addition, the cultural office funds some galleries in the *Gängeviertel* with project-linked payments. But in general the activists are paying for their success with self-exploitation.

How do you balance autonomy and institutionalisation?

RAC-LA: *RAC-LA* was founded and constituted as a long-term project – not as a quick, easy 'solution'[7]. When we began a comrade voiced the admonishment that we were undertaking a 15-20 year project, with the first 5 being committed to gaining the trust of the community, the second 5 or so would be establishing ourselves as a force in the neighbourhood, and the third 5 being the beginnings of the exercise of that ability to influence and change our surroundings. In this, we will be greatly assisted once we find a place for a *RAC-LA* community centre that is close to the park and affordable for us. Towards that we have saved money and are ready to lease if and when a location in the area comes available.

The 'balance' referred to in the query just above flows as a matter of course from the 'first fundamental' that the organisation, development and evolution of *RAC-LA* has proceeded from: the equality of worth of every member sans regard for age, race, language, 'nationality', sex or sexual preference. This is readily relatable to the 'autonomy' portion of the above inquiry. As for 'institutionalisation', the word has an echo of a 'finished product', like dried solid cement. For *RAC-LA*, 'institutionalisation' would perhaps be better replaced by 'institutionalising', i.e. the creation, experimentation and, if need be, negation of ideas and/or practices as we try to learn how it is that we want ourselves to be. For, and this is the 'prime directive', 'we cannot get to where we have not travelled'.

NXC: There are often compromises to be faced when getting funding, and it is vital to be able to mitigate them. The only 'compromise' with the Design Department which gave us some funding for the first year of activity was that we had to produce a publication as an outcome. To get compromised through public funding might also mean to deal with a public institution in direct ways, and in the best scenario this might open a process of dialogue, negotiation, confrontation that can have a political relevance, it can have an impact on the institution itself or at least on some of the people working for it.

An institution is not necessarily something evil, it depends how we understand it and what kind of institution we are talking about. 'Institutionalisation' could be seen as a goal if we understand it in these terms: in five or ten years the *New Cross Commoners* could exist as a revolutionary collective and an institution of the commons without having to rely on the singularity of the commoners composing it today.

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7   http://fourstory.org/features/story/who-are-rac-la-and-what-are-they-doing-in-macarthur-park/.

In order to answer this question it would be useful, especially in the context of New Cross, London and the UK, to talk about 'Big Society'. This is a programme the current Tory government has promoted to 'support and develop talent, innovation and enterprise to deliver social impact' (this definition is taken from the Big Society Network website).[8] In other words, Big Society is a way to exploit people's desire to do good, build communities, improve their neighbourhood as a way of filling the holes that the erosion of the welfare state, the cuts and the austerity measures are provoking. It is like saying 'dear citizens, the government doesn't have much money to help you anymore and now you have to help each other' – but this has to happen now under the government's 'facilitation' and control. Whenever you do something for your 'community' on a voluntary basis you have to ask yourselves: to what extent am I playing the Big Society game? Is it fair for public money to feed the financial market instead of the welfare state and do I want to be complicit with this? We could answer to this problem like this: we build communities, improve our neighbourhood, as long as we don't do this for someone else, for charity, and as long as we do also fight in some way against the privatisation of the market and the control of state, as long as we can obstruct gentrification, the multiplication of enclosures, the commercialisation of our lives.

CiT: As long as the *CiT-Collective* is not officially part of the planning process (Gaswerk Leopoldau), we were not forced to institutionalise ourselves. But in the future it is possible that we have to do so if we want to make any sort of official contract in terms of using the former gasworks for our means. For that matter, the foundation of a parallel organised NGO-association (KIT Kultur in Transdanubien) is a first step we took in this direction. But the *CIT-Collective* itself is a (fluid) collective and as such in general not an institution at all. Our autonomy and solidarity is a core content of our position as a independent structure and social-political actor.

Gängeviertel: To reach the goal of self-organisation and – management also after the renovation in negotiation with the municipality, the *Gängeviertel* initiative founded the cooperative. In the eyes of some activists this progressive institutionalisation poses the risk that the *Gängeviertel* could lose its openness and its character as an experimental free space. On the other hand, through the process of institutionalisation, they hope to build a more reliable foundation upon which to live and work. From the standpoint of de Certeau's distinction between strategy and tactic, institutionalisation can be seen as a transition from the tactic of cultural appropriation to a strategy through which the occupants of the *Gängeviertel* hope to overcome the precarious status of their situation.

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8   http://www.thebigsociety.co.uk/.

Principles, strategies and lessons learned

RAC-LA: To paraphrase Marx in the 'Critique of the Gotha Plan'[9]: Only then, when we have eliminated the social and economic bases of greed – will society be able to inscribe on its banners that we have at long last made the transition from 'each according to his greed', to 'each according to his need'. Towards that end, *RAC-LA* has discovered that one of the asserted 'problems' of communism solves itself. It has been alleged that when goods no longer have a price that greed will run rampant leading to gross inefficiencies. What has been seen in *RAC-LA* is that when we have a surfeit (sometimes we have an extreme amount of a certain item) and we 'communise' it, that, at first, people will take as much as they can, i.e. wildly out of proportion to their needs or even desires. What happens? They with effort lug it home where a portion of it remains unconsumed and rots. They have to throw it out. They do this once, twice, by the third or fourth time many have learned.

Another 'problem' is that of the disassociation of work from compensation, of effort from reward. The spirit that binds *RAC-LA* together is the celebration of working with and working for each other. Of course we have problems. All of us joined *RAC-LA* suffering from the PTSD that is endemic to capitalism. When disputes flare, we solve and resolve these by placing and examining the problem in the context of seeking 'what is right?' and not 'who is right?'.

RAC-LA is an experiment, an experiment of anarchist-socialism[10] operating within the very bowels of the beast that is capitalism. And as an experiment we must try things. Some work. Some do not. The point, however, is that we try. And that we learn.

NXC: We don't have a manifesto, but there are some principles that also emerge from the documentation gathered in the *New Cross Commoners* website[11]. An important principle is that of an experimentation with a temporality of care, to

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9   In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly – only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each   according   to   his   needs! https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm.

10 http://revolutionaryautonomouscommunities.blogspot.com/2011/02/experiment-in-socialism-racs-free-foo..html.

11 http://newxcommoners.wordpress.com/.

follow a sustainable pace, to avoid burnouts but also to allow for different kinds of speeds to be taken into consideration, for different issues and desires to emerge, to be perceived, to be taken care of. This is the meaning of 'going slowly to go far', starting from a micropolitics, a politics of subjectivity, of a becoming collective that requires care.

A second principle has to do with the necessary connection between micro- and macropolitics, between a politics of subjectivity, desires, conflicts and care, and a politics of institutions, rights, decisions, campaigns. Commoning is not just a matter of changing lifestyles, of buying less and sharing more, it is also a matter of fighting enclosures, of reclaiming a collective use of resources, of opposing the government's austerity measures, of withdrawing from the market and its logic of competition. The *New Cross Commoners* attempt to bring together the 'positive' of a creative experimentation with the 'negative' of a critical analysis, by starting from the micro to engage with the macro. For example, a practice of commoning around care cannot be separated from the struggle against the closure of Lewisham hospital. Otherwise you might end up either paralysed by the enormity of what is unjust, or inadvertently complying with the dominant system.

Another connected principle is to start from the middle, from where we are, who we are, and what we do. This principle comes from a feminist tradition that takes experiences and living conditions as starting points for a critical analysis that moves onto action. We live in London, we live in New Cross, we share a precarious condition. At the same time there are differences, we are not all precarious in the same way. To start again and again from the middle means to recompose our differences without erasing or ignoring them. It is a way of starting now, with what we have, instead of preparing for something to come in the future, or getting paralysed in the present. And it is a way of undoing an 'us and them' dynamic that we see so often when it comes to social engagement.

CiT: The act of a participatory/bottom-up/direct-democratic planning intervention and planning process, without making the same mistakes like economic exploitation and political adsorption as many other creative planning projects faced. Acting as a coming voice. Speaking out positions to confront hegemonic principles and power productions. Generate utopian pictures, ideas and aims to practise the production of a critical common voice in opposition to political and economic stakeholders. One key principle of *CiT* is therefore not to fix one use and state of the (city) space, but to implement a floating self-transforming system of (cultural) usages and to take a clear (political) position at the same time.

Gängeviertel: The *Gängeviertel* as a collective has something one can call a joint action. Like a colleague once wrote, it 'finds its form within the process of acting' and follows a direction 'based on overlapping interests of individuals around a situation'.

If their strategy proves successful, the activists in the *Gängeviertel* will have secured yet another part of their 'right to the city'. Henri Lefèbvre sees this in part as the production of one's own urban space, which represents a social change. The *Gängeviertel* is already a symbol of opposition to a purely investor-oriented urban development policy and to gentrification, and of the appeal for free spaces and self-determination. Now the initiative is working on transforming that symbol into an alternative urban space from which the actors themselves and the people of Hamburg can derive sustainable social and cultural benefits.

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R-URBAN or how to co-produce a resilient city

Constantin Petcou and Doina Petrescu

abstract

This note addresses contemporary processes of resilient co-production within the city. With its specific focus on the case study of a project called R-Urban, it aims to present a bottom-up project initiated in a suburban town near Paris. R-Urban is a bottom–up framework for resilient urban regeneration initiated by atelier d'architecture autogérée (aaa). This note advocates new roles for architects and planners in this process of co-production. It addresses questions raised in trying to implement the R-Urban strategy in Colombes, a suburban town with 84,000 residents near Paris. This strategy explores current possibilities for co-producing urban resilience by introducing a network of resident-run facilities that form local ecological cycles and engage in everyday eco-civic practices. The note demonstrates that progressive practices addressing the need to reactivate and sustain cultures of collaboration, and which proposing new tools adapted to our times of crisis and austerity, are conceivable in local action and on a small scale.

The co-produced city

Co-production has become a buzzword in our times of austerity: it posits the necessity to engage citizens personally in the provision of public services in a context where these services have become inefficient and need reforming, and where the welfare state is no longer there to organise them. If co-production is currently seen as an economic and social solution to this problem[1], we also

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1   Co-production is receiving ever greater attention in policy-makers speeches and think tank reports. They are aware that 'co-production has emerged as a critique of the way that professionals and users have been artificially divided, sometimes by technology, sometimes by professional and managerial practice, and sometimes by a spurious understanding of efficiency. It provides an alternative way for people to share in the design and delivery of services, and contribute their own wisdom and experience, in

understand it as a shift in the power relationships revolving around services and production. In a context of urban transformation, co-production is also able to become a political project rooted in Lefebvre's idea of the social production of space (Lefebvre, 1991). It is not only about the manner in which public needs are to be met, but also about citizens' rights. In this case, the citizens' right to the city does not only mean the right to occupy space in it, but also mean to decide how it is developed, managed and used. Also, given the imperative to adapt and find solutions to the long term environmental and economic crises societies face today, our cities need to become more resilient, need to organise in order to adjust and thrive in rapidly changing circumstances. This need for resilience, which cities have little capacity to deal with at this moment in time, in fact comes with a right to resilience for all citizens, a right to be informed about, decide, act upon and manage the future of cities. This would be a truly ambitious co-production project that should involve the entire urban population. Such a project needs ideas, tools and spaces, time and agency. It needs agents and activators. Can architects be such agents? What tools and means can be used at times of crisis and scarcity? How can progressive practices be initiated while acting locally and on a small scale? How can civic cultures of collaboration and sharing be reactivated and sustained in economic, environmental and social terms alike?

R-Urban, an agency of co-produced urban regeneration

These are some of the questions we tackled with R-Urban, a bottom–up framework for resilient urban regeneration, initiated by our research-based office, atelier d'architecture autogérée (aaa).

R-Urban is one of the many small-scale initiatives to have emerged in response to the slow pace of governmental procedures and the lack of consensus in further addressing the challenges of global crisis and evaluating their consequences for people's lives. New approaches to urban regeneration are desperately needed in times of economic crisis, and could benefit from the increased social capital attending the diminishment of financial capital. R-Urban was conceived as an open source strategy enabling residents to play an active part in changing the city while also changing their ways of living in it.

This strategy creates a network of citizen projects and grassroots organisations around a series of self-managed collective facilities hosting economic and

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ways that can broaden and strengthen services and make them more effective' (Boyle and Harris, 2009).

cultural activities and everyday practices that contribute to boosting resilience in an urban context. The network, which acts through locally closed circuits, starts at a neighbourhood level and progressively scales up to the city and regional level. In a Guattarian ecosophical vein (Guattari, 2008), the strategy considers social, ecological and economic aspects as equally essential for resilient processes. R-Urban addresses communities from urban and suburban contexts, involving a diversity of actors (i.e. residents, local authorities, public organisations, professionals, civic stakeholders) to take various responsibilities in the project's governance. In contrast to other regeneration projects conceived by specialist teams and facilitated by managerial structures, the architects and planners here take an active role as initiators, facilitators, mediators and consultants in various civic partnerships brought about by the project. This leads to a more effective, faster and more sustainable implementation, and allows for greater participation of non-specialists in co-producing it. The projects are conceived as processes that not only result in a physical transformation of urban contexts, but also contribute to the social and political emancipation of those living and acting in them.

Although anchored in everyday life and committed to radical change, R-Urban is also part of a specific tradition of modelling resilient development starting with Howard's Garden City (Howard, 1889) and Geddes's Regional City (Geddes, 1915), and continuing today with the Transition Town (Hopkins, 2008). But in contrast to these models, R-Urban is no direct application of theory, but tries to develop an exploratory practice and a theoretical analysis, both of which constantly inform one another.

As opposed to the Garden City concept, R-Urban does not propose an ideal model of transformation, but deals with the collapse of modern urban ideals, and their many failures in addressing the future. Also, R-Urban picks up from the Regional City concept the idea of regional dynamics, but in this case on the basis of bottom-up initiatives of local residents. It considers both large-scale processes and small-scale phenomena. Global concerns are addressed locally, but within the existing conditions. The R-Urban transformation is realised in successive stages by investing in temporarily available spaces and creating short-term uses able to prefigure future urban developments.

R-Urban also incorporates many Transition Town principles, although it does not necessarily operate on a 'town' scale, but negotiates its own (e.g. a block, neighbourhood or district), depending on actor participation. No pre-existing communities are targeted; instead, new communities formed through the project must agree on their own rules and the principles to be followed in its management. With its civic hubs and collective facilities, R-Urban tries to lend

visibility to the networks of solidarity and ecological cycles it creates. Architecture plays an important role here: that of hosting and showcasing resilient practices and processes, and of rendering tangible and concrete what would otherwise only remain a discourse. Also, architecture is not only physical, but social and political as well. The inspirations we took from social theorists and philosophers like Guattari, Gorz, Lefbvre, Harvey, Negri and Holloway have been constantly challenged by the reality of our active research approach.

R-urban in Colombes

After three years of research, we proposed the project to various local authorities and grassroots organisations in cities and towns of France. We conceived of it as a participative strategy based on local circuits that activate material (e.g. water, energy, waste and food) and immaterial (e.g. local know-how, socioeconomic, cultural and self-building) flows between key fields of activity (e.g. the economy, housing and urban agriculture) already contained or implemented in the existing fabric of the city. In 2011, R-Urban started in Colombes, a suburban town with 84,000 residents near Paris, in partnership with the local authorities and a number of organisations, as well as with the involvement of a range of local residents. In its initial four-year period, the project is intended to gradually create a network around a number of 'collective hubs', each of them serving complementary urban functions (i.e. housing, urban agriculture, recycling, eco-construction, local culture), that bring together emerging citizens' projects. Within a context of welfare services being withdrawn, these collective facilities will host self-provided services and citizen-run production units that will simultaneously play a strategic part in locally closed economic and ecological cycles[2].

Colombes offers a typical suburban context with a mix of private and council housing estates. Suburbia is a key territory for R-Urban: although specific to a modern conception of city, it is one of the most crucial territories to be redeveloped and regenerated in the interest of resilience today. With its mix of private and council housing estates, Colombes is confronted with all kinds of suburban problem, such as social or economic deprivation and youth crime, typical of large-scale dormitory suburbs and the consumerist, car-dependent lifestyle in more affluent suburbs with generally middle-class populations. Colombes nonetheless also has a number of advantages and assets: despite a high unemployment rate (17 % of the working population, well above the

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2   For more information, see http://r-urban.net.

national average of 10.2 % in 2012), Colombes features many local organisations (approximately 450) and a very active civic life.

Drawing strength from this very active civic life and from Colombes's cultural and social diversity, we started by launching several collective facilities, including recycling and eco-construction projects, cooperative housing, and urban agriculture units, which are cooperating to set up the first spatial and ecological agencies in the area. Their architecture showcases the various issues they address, such as recycled local materials, local skills, energy production and food cultivation, by means of specific devices and building components. The first three pilot facilities – Agrocité, Recyclab and Ecohab – are collectively run hubs that catalyse existing activities with the aim of introducing and propagating resilient routines and lifestyles which residents can adopt and practice on individual and domestic levels, such as retrofitting properties to accommodate food cultivation and energy generation.

Agrocité is an agricultural unit comprising an experimental micro-farm, community gardens, educational and cultural spaces, plus a range of experimental devices for compost-powered heating, rainwater collection, solar energy generation, aquaponic gardening and phyto-remediation. Agrocité is a hybrid structure, with some components run as social enterprises (e.g. the micro-farm, market and cafe) and others by user organisations (e.g. the community garden, cultural and educational spaces) and local associations.

Fig. 1 Agrocité inauguration. Agrocite: Urban agriculture hub in Colombes, near Paris, 2013. (aaa)

Recyclab is a recycling and eco-construction unit comprising several facilities for storing and reusing locally salvaged materials, recycling and transforming them into eco-construction elements for self-building and retrofitting. An attendant 'fab lab'[3] has been set up for the residents' use. Recyclab will function as a social enterprise.

Ecohab is a cooperative eco-housing project comprising a number of partially self-built and collectively managed ecological properties, including several shared facilities and schemes (e.g. food cultivation, production spaces, energy and water harvesting, car sharing). The seven properties will include two subsidised flats and a temporary residential unit for students and researchers. Ecohab will be run as a cooperative.

R-Urban's collective facilities will grow in number and be managed by a cooperative land trust that will acquire spaces, facilitate development, and guarantee democratic governance[4].

In parallel, the strategy will be propagated on larger scales: regionally, nationally, Europe-wide. The art and architecture practice 'public works', R-Urban's partner in London, is currently developing a connected project in Hackney Wick: R-Urban Wick.[5] The first R-Urban facility in Hackney Wick is a mobile production unit: Wick on Wheels (WOW). This unit encourages collective production in situ, using local materials, resources and knowledge. It is a participatory project engaging with residents and local artisans to produce, reuse and repurpose.

Flows, networks and cycles of production and consumption will emerge between the collective facilities and their neighbourhood, closing chains of demand and supply as locally as possible. To overcome the current crisis, we must try 'to produce what we consume and consume what we produce', as the French philosopher André Gorz puts it (Gorz, 2008: 13).

R-Urban interprets this production and consumption chain broadly, well beyond the material aspects to include cultural, cognitive and affective dimensions. The project sets a precedent for a participative retrofitting of metropolitan suburbs where the relationship between the urban and rural is reconsidered. It

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3   'Fab lab' is short for 'fabrication laboratory', a small-scale workshop equipped with various fabrication machines and tools enabling users to produce 'almost anything' (Fab lab, n.d.).

4   For more information about the R-Urban cooperative land trust, go to http://r-urban.net/en/property/.

5   This collaboration is supported by the Life+ programme in a partnership between aaa, the City of Colombes and public works.

endeavours to demonstrate what citizens can achieve if they change their work routines and lifestyles to collectively address the challenges of the future.

The 'right to resilience'

'Resilience' is a key term in the context of the current economic crisis and lack of resources. In contrast to sustainability, which is focused on maintaining the status quo of a system by controlling the balance between its inputs and outputs, without necessarily addressing the factors of change and disequilibrium, resilience addresses how systems can adapt and thrive in changing circumstances. Resilience is a dynamic concept with no stable definition or identity outside the circumstances producing it. In contrast to sustainability, which tends to focus on maintaining an environmental balance, resilience is adaptive and transformative, inducing change that harbours vast potentials for rethinking assumptions and building new systems (Maguire and Cartwright, 2008). Although the current resilience discourse is not to be embraced uncritically without paying heed to the sometimes naïve and idealistic comparison of social and biological systems and their adaptability to engendering wellbeing, the concept of 'resilience' itself has the potential to include questions and contradictions addressed in terms of political ecology[6].

R-Urban maintains that urban sustainability is a civic right and creates the conditions for this 'right to sustainability' to be exercised, not only as a right to rely on and *consume* sustainability (provided by the remains of the welfare state or bought from private providers), but as a right to *produce* it (allowing citizens' involvement in decision-making and action). Although sustainability is on the agenda of many urban projects today, this does not necessarily imply that all these projects are political in their approach to the issue.

A politicoecological approach like that of R-Urban will not just positively and uncritically propose 'improved' development dynamics, but also question the processes that bring about social injustice and inequitable urban environments[7]. Some voices such as David Harvey (2008) argue that the transformation of urban spaces is a collective rather than an individual right, because collective power is necessary to reshape urban processes. Harvey describes 'the right to the city' as the citizens' freedom to access urban resources: 'it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city' (Harvey, 2008: 23). In this sense, R-Urban follows Harvey's

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[6]   We are here joining the ranks of political ecologists who criticise the superficial understandings of politics, power and social construction popularised in resilience rhetoric (see, e.g., Hornborg, 2009: 237-265).

[7]   Some of these ideas were first developed in Brass, Bowden and McGeevor (2011).

ideas and facilitates the assertion of this 'right' through appropriation, transformation and networking processes, and the use of urban infrastructures. R-Urban perhaps differs from Harvey in scope, as it does not seek to institute a large-scale global movement opposing the financial capital that controls urban development, but instead aims to empower urban residents to propose alternative projects where they live, and to foster local and greater networks, testing methods of self-management, self-building and self-production. In this respect, R-Urban is perhaps closer to Lefebvre's idea of 'the right to the city'. Lefebvre imagines a locally conceived emancipatory project, emphasising the need to freely propose alternative possibilities for urban practice at a level of everyday life. He proposes a new methodology, called 'transduction', to encourage the creation of 'experimental utopias'. Framed by existing reality, this would introduce 'rigour in invention and knowledge in utopia' as a way of avoiding 'irresponsible idealism' (Lefebvre, 1996: 129-130). Lefebvre (1996) underlines the key role of urban imaginaries in understanding, challenging and transforming urbanity and opening the way to a multiplicity of representations and interventions. From this perspective, R-Urban is a 'transductive' project, both rigorous and utopian, popular and experimental. It is a bottom-up approach based on the aggregation of many individual and collective interventions which complement each other, forming metabolic networks that stimulate circulatory changes while simultaneously informing one another. Such networks will accommodate multiplicity and valorise imagination at all levels.

R-Urban could hence be suspected of aligning itself opportunistically with the 'Big Society' principles recently proposed by the UK's Tory prime minister, David Cameron, to implement 'the idea of communities taking more control, of more volunteerism, more charitable giving, of social enterprises taking on a bigger role, of people establishing public services themselves' (Cameron, 2011). But the essential difference is that R-Urban is not responding directly to the onset of the financial crisis and is not embracing a program of economic resilience in which the state is absent: such a program would explicitly promote the reliance on unpaid work to mask the disappearance of welfare structures and the massive cuts in public services. The R-Urban strategy is not relegating economic responsibility to citizens because the state is unable or unwilling to assume it any longer, but claims the social and political right to question the state's power in terms of its role and responsibility. Local authorities and public institutions are integrated in the strategy as equal partners, assuming the roles of enablers, sponsors and administrators. In addition to urban residents and civic organisations, public institutions (e.g. city councils, regeneration offices, public land trusts, schools and cultural agencies) are also invited to take part in this experimental utopia, and to challenge their routines. It is not only the residents

who must 'change themselves by changing the city', as claimed by Harvey (2008), but also the politicians and specialists presently in charge of a city.

As such, R-Urban is not only about grassroots innovation to meet social, economic and environmental needs, but also about political critique and ideological expression, affirming the necessity of new social and economic agencies based on alternatives to the dominant socio-technical regime. R-Urban gives its self-organised constituency the means to act locally on a neighbourhood scale, and creates opportunities for actions and activities that could change their future. It affirms their 'right to resilience'.

Concentrating on spatial agencies and civic hubs, R-Urban tries to supply tools and spaces that will manifest citizens' existing resilient initiatives and practices. Spatial planning processes contribute to expressing ecological cycles in tangible ways, and help facilitate citizens' experiences of making and doing.

In parallel to its civic hubs, which represent a new ecological urban infrastructure, R-Urban also puts new political and democratic tools in place: forms of self-governance supporting the emergence of different kinds of formal and informal economic organisation across the network. These are all part of a cooperative civic land-trust, the entity which will govern the entire R-Urban project. Being transferable and multipliable, these tools are realised in cooperation with other partners and concerned citizens.

Micro-social and cultural resilience

Unlike other initiatives exclusively dealing with sustainability from a technological and environmental perspective, R-Urban advocates a general 'change of culture', understood as a change in how we do things, in order to change our future.

R-Urban proposes new collective practices, which, in addition to reducing the ecological footprint, also contribute to reinventing near-at-hand relationships based on solidarities (i.e. ways of being involved and deciding collectively, sharing spaces and grouping facilities, rules and principles of cohabitation). The transformation needs to take place on the micro-scale of each individual, each subjectivity, to build a culture of resilience. As Rob Hopkins puts it, 'resilience is not just an outer process: it is also an inner one, of becoming more flexible, robust and skilled' (Hopkins, 2009: 15). The culture of resilience includes processes of reskilling, skill sharing, social networking and mutual learning. These micro-social and micro-cultural practices, usually related to individual lifestyles and activities (e.g. food cultivation and waste collection, car-sharing,

exchanging tools and skills with neighbours), elicit attention to details, singularities, and the creative and innovatory potentials found on the level of everyday life. R-Urban maps this local capacity to invent and transform in detail, but also, in parallel, the administrative constraints that block it, proposing ways of bypassing them by way of restated policies and structures.

Commons and commoning

The issue of commons lies at the heart of discussions revolving around co-produced democracy. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004) define commons as something that is not discovered but produced biopolitically:

> We call the currently dominant model 'biopolitical production' to underline the fact that it involves not only material production in straight economic terms, but also affects and contributes to producing all other aspects of social life, i.e. the economic, cultural and political. This biopolitical production and the greater number of commons it creates support the possibility of democracy today. (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 9-10, author's translation)

A sustainable democracy should be based on a long-term policy of commons as well as the social solidarities understood as such. 'Creating value today is about networking subjectivities and capturing, diverting and appropriating what they do with the commons they give rise to' (Ravel and Negri, 2008: 7, author's translation).

According to Ravel and Negri (2008), the revolutionary project of our time is all about this capturing, diverting, appropriating and reclaiming of commons as a constitutive process. This is a reappropriation and reinvention at one and the same time. The undertaking needs new categories and institutions, new forms of management and governance, spaces and actors – an entire infrastructure both material and virtual.

R-Urban endeavours to co-produce this new infrastructure which is simultaneously a reappropriation and reinvention of new forms of commons, ranging from collective, self-managed facilities and collective knowledge and skills to new forms of group and network. The facilities and uses proposed by R-Urban will be shared and propagated on various scales, progressively constituting a network that is open to various users and includes adaptable elements and processes based on open-source information.

Rather than buying it, the R-Urban land trust currently established in Colombes bypasses the fixation on notions of property and negotiates land for (short and long term) uses rather than ownership. The right to use is an intrinsic quality of

commons, as opposed to the right to own. As in previous projects, a specific focus here is on urban interstices and spaces that evade financial speculation, if only temporarily. This is also the position of Holloway (2006) who, having analysed various forms of and initiatives for transforming society, concludes that 'the only possible way to think about radical change in society is within its interstices' and that 'the best way of operating in interstices is to organise them' (Holloway, 2006: 19-20, author's translation). This is exactly what R-Urban does: it organises a range of spatial, temporal and human interstices and transforms them into shared facilities, it sets up a different type of urban space, neither public nor private, to host reinvented collective practices and collaborative organisations, it initiates networks of interstices to reinvent commons in metropolitan contexts. This type of organisation involves forms of *commoning*, ways of ensuring the expansion and sustainability of the shared pool of resources, but also ways of commonality as a social practice.

R-Urban's future

R-Urban is on its way. Agrocité, the first civic hub of the R-Urban strategy, has been built. The pioneering activities to have emerged as early promoters are currently revolving around specific micro-economic activities: a school for compost services on a regional scale, a community-supported agricultural scheme, a chicken coop, beehives and a continual workshops for promoting *savoir-faire*. At the same time, we have initiated activities for tracking, collecting and re-using/recycling specific local waste. In combination with the networking of local actors, these activities have helped us establish RecycLab, which hosts social economies, local recycling and eco-design activities. We are working on improving the economic models of these two R-Urban units and preparing the administrative and financial arrangements for the third, EcoHab. The R-Urban land trust is developing as a cooperative network involving all R-Urban stakeholders and partners in the management of all R-Urban facilities, properties and infrastructures.

In the coming years, we will nurture the diverse economies and initiate progressive practices in the R-Urban network in Colombes. We will reactivate cultures of collaboration and sharing. We have designed R-Urban to be a process and infrastructure that can grow with time, being easy to appropriate and replicate. We will be testing it for a while, before leaving it to burgeon by itself. Will it succeed? For how long? These questions are to be answered in a few years' time. For now, it is a visionary attempt to realise more democratic and bottom-up processes of resilient regeneration in a suburban context, a process specifically designed to be appropriated and followed up by others in similar contexts.

This note aimed to introduce the case of a bottom-up, resilient regeneration project, advocating other roles for architects and planners as initiators and mediators of change and as social innovators able to put radical social and political theories into practice. This note on the R-Urban project nonetheless underlines the notion that radical change is not going to happen in modern society without the involvement of many. Change needs to be multiplied and propagated rhizomatically, in a multitude of self-emancipatory processes amongst those wishing to change their current lifestyle. As suggested by Holloway,

> [I]f we want to take seriously the idea of self-emancipation ... we need to look at people around us – the people at work, in the street, in the supermarket – and accept their own way of being rebellious, despite their external appearance. In a self-emancipated world, people shouldn't be taken for what they seem. They are not contained by their assigned identities, which they overpass and break into pieces, going against and beyond them. (Holloway, 2006: 2)

R-Urban is for people who are now 'at work, in the street, in the supermarket'. It is up to them to take the effort further, 'against and beyond themselves', towards a radical change of society.

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Practices in second hand spaces: Producing value from vacancy

Michael Ziehl and Sarah Oßwald

Temporary uses have become an established tool in European cities for reactivating vacant sites and supply financially weak users with space. But what is often represented as a win-win situation for users, owners and the authorities is also characterised by precarious conditions for the users. They need to take the interests of different stakeholders into account and are forced to adapt structural givens with low-budget investments. To deal with this, they rely on alternative practices like sharing, do-it-yourself, collective self-organisation, try-outs, recycling and flexible operation. We have been able to experience this for ourselves as temporary users and two of the four founders of ZZZ – the ZwischenZeitZentrale. ZZZ is a funded agency, financed by the local authorities of Bremen (Northern Germany) with the aim of initiating and supporting temporary uses in vacant spaces. The aim of this note is to highlight the users' alternative practices and their potential for bringing about urban transformation in a more sustainable manner. To this end, we will discuss the development of five temporary uses within the framework of the ZZZ, and in reference to the concept of *second hand spaces* we have developed on the basis of our experiences.

From the concept of temporary use to *second hand spaces*

Urban transformation has meant that many industrial areas and ordinary buildings fell vacant for good. Many offices, shops, houses, buildings and factories became empty relics of former decades as needs and practices changed. In many German cities, temporary use has emerged as an established tool for reactivating theses vacant sites to try out new uses and provide affordable spaces in expensive urban areas, even if regulations for rebuilding and use are very

tight, and local authority departments occasionally pursue conflicting strategies. The term 'temporary use' pays scant regard to the numerous qualities of the phenomenon, however. It stands out by only highlighting the limited lifetime of the use. The term promotes temporary use as a stopgap for the real estate market and became a buzzword emphasising the reduction of vacancy costs. "Temporary uses' and 'urban pioneers' are valued as a 'means to an end' rather than as alternatives to dominant (capitalist) forms of urban development' (Colomb, 2012: 143). We propose the concept of *second hand spaces* (Ziehl et al., 2012) to emphasise the sustainable effects of temporary uses on urban development, instead of underlining their limited duration. The concept of sustainability with its three sectors of ecological, economical and social (including cultural) impacts requires that projects have to generate positive effects on all of these three levels in a balanced way to lastingly improve cities. The term sustainability unfortunately tends to be misused, especially by politicians and developers, to portray developments as valuable even if they generate effects on only one of the three sectors. Many people moreover mistakenly assume that sustainability is another expression for long-term impacts. We are often confronted with this confusion when we highlight the sustainability of short-term projects.

Second hand spaces are often found within the scope of temporary uses. They permit spaces to be used on favourable terms. A short-life let can match user's needs – organisers of exhibitions, movie-screenings, pop-up stores and pop-up restaurants need unique spaces for temporary uses. Start-ups are looking for spaces where they can try out a new (business-)idea. But the attendant investments are not affordable for most users. Particularly where uncertain and short periods of use are concerned, investments can be very risky: the higher the expenses, the longer the time required to amortise them. Another barrier is obtaining permission from the authorities to change the use of a property. Every building is legally dedicated to a specific use. To change this use can be awkward for owners, the authorities and the neighbourhood. In many cases, the responsible department demands expensive conversion measures. But many temporary uses fortunately obtain permits for using spaces at favourable terms, and the authorities can make concessions. For the operators of *second hand spaces*, these circumstances give rise to a precariousness situation, however. They need to invest time and money without assured concessions and lifetimes.

All *second hand spaces* are first and foremost distinguished by the fact that they result from a more or less self-determined adaptation of buildings and brownfields to the changed needs of their users. They evolve against a background of different demands on urban spaces and provide opportunities for interaction, participation, and start-ups at reasonable rents. The financially weak users of *second hand spaces* start off in a more or less rough space and with an

uncertain or short duration of use. As a consequence, they develop an individual aesthetic distinguished by simplicity and an improvised quality informed by the atmosphere, traces, remains, and history. In the process, they recycle the tangible and intangible values of vacant sites for economic, ecological, social, and cultural reasons, redefine them, and create something new from them.

ZwischenZeitZentrale Bremen

We developed the concept of *second hand spaces* out of our experiences as operators of ZZZ – the ZwischenZeitZentrale Bremen. ZZZ is an agency that sets up interim spaces, funded and financed by the local authorities of Bremen. As a result of historic peaks of deindustrialisation, the Free City of Bremen in North-Western Germany ended up with the highest debt per person of all the German *länder* – 30,000 Euros per resident. Budget constraints are therefore the kind of austerity Bremen has to cope with. The administration is seeking to try out new approaches in dealing with the challenges posed by structural change and new forms of labour: First of all, the Hanseatic city wants to revitalise vacant buildings and brownfields as a place for industry. Secondly, as a university city, it tries to keep young graduates in town. This way, the City of Bremen has combined its lack of financial resources und the abundance of vacant sites productively: In 2009, the Senator for the Economy and Ports of Bremen, Bremen's Senator for the Environment, Construction, Transport, and Europe, the Senator for Bremen's Finances, Immobilien Bremen (an authority acting as the owner of Bremen's council properties), and Wirtschaftsförderung Bremen (an authority promoting trade and industry in Bremen) all united in a call to set up an office for temporary uses, to reopen vacant buildings and sites and test new ways of reusing them.

In an interdisciplinary team of four, we were commissioned to start up ZZZ as an office to support, advise and initiate diverse projects, and to wake up vacant buildings and brownfields with new uses and users. The concept behind ZZZ is to make space available to people's ideas that would otherwise be unfeasible because of excessive rents. In principle, anybody with space requirements that cannot be met by the regular real estate market is taken into consideration as a user. The pertinent contract terms are carved out individually, but basically adhere to the principle of relatively favourable rents for a fixed-term use. In return, the users are prepared to adapt their demands and concepts to the property, and to invest a great deal of voluntary work in upgrading it, as ZZZ has no budget to offer for reconstruction work.

ZZZ has nonetheless managed to open up around fifty vacant spaces for new uses since 2010. We have always primarily considered our role to be that of a user advocate, and try to negotiate the best possible conditions for them. But we know very well that projects can only be accepted and successful if we succeed in meeting the needs of all the stakeholders. We therefore try to shape projects from the outset in such a way that they have a preferably positive impact on users, owners, local authorities and the citizens. Other tasks include very intensive PR efforts to generate greater public acceptance of temporary uses. We need to fight objections to temporary uses, particularly amongst private owners whose real-estate holdings think that they have immense spatial resources at their disposal. But most property owners are apparently not very interested in the direct advantages of temporary uses such as lower overheads, the structural upgrading of property and making it known to the public, as well as the protection provided from dereliction and vandalism. We are furthermore often confronted with expectations that vacant buildings can be let at the usual market terms in the near future. The doors to many private properties hence frequently remain closed despite years of vacancy. The council's real estate also often only becomes available once the authorities' favoured marketing schemes are ruled out or have failed. The time slots are usually very short indeed.

Practices in second hand spaces

The inter-agency context of ZZZ is helpful to initiate and maintain temporary uses, as it substantially simplifies access to public property as well as municipal decision-makers. The users nevertheless need to cope with ambitious periods of use and concessions with little in the way of a budget. For managing this, the operators and users we have worked with in the ZZZ framework came up with special practices. By virtue of sharing, do-it-yourself (DIY), collective self-organisation, testing, recycling and flexible operating hours, they start utilising and developing spaces according to their needs. In the following we will illustrate these practices by way of five *second hand spaces* initiated and arranged by ZZZ.

Sharing

We need to differentiate between the sharing of material and immaterial goods. The *Sportamt* project in Bremen's former Department of Sports building is an example of sharing material assets. As a collective of political activists and cultural prosumers, the people behind the *Sportamt* project are not focused on an individual economic benefit. All earnings from hosted events are reinvested in the infrastructure for the cultural program and renovation of the derelict building. The users have furthermore established a sharing infrastructure at the

site. A shared workshop and 'tool bar' are for example open to anybody wishing to become involved. Most studios are also shared. This is different from *Plantage 9* – another workspace in Bremen to be named after its address. All of the thirty users here have their own room where they work in very different jobs. That they identify themselves as a group is reflected in the joint label *Plantage 9,* a shared logo, a joint website and an annual, jointly organised Open Day. The users emphasise an immaterial public profile to be perceived as a group working under one roof, and have reinterpreted a former void as a presentable address for their operations.

Fig.1: Temporary garden cafe at Sportamt (© Michael Ziehl)

Do-it-yourself

We have made out two different DIY practices in relation to *second hand spaces*: designing and producing things you usually buy, and fixing and rebuilding spaces you usually hire craftsmen for. The *Glasbox* project, for example, is at first glance a shop for handmade items. But actually it is much more. As a platform

for handcrafted products 'made in Bremen', *Glasbox* simplifies the marketing of self-made products and motivates people to create and manufacture their own products. Although the shop is run by just one person, about fifty producers are behind the concept and test the marketability of their ideas. The shop already had to move twice in two years owing to short-life contracts. All three locations were renovated by the shopkeeper with support from her friends. The self-built, flexibly designed interior furnishings enabled her to move after only one year without losing too much of her investment.

From the outset, *Neuland* was a limited three-month summer residency of a local music club. The people involved transformed a former rehabilitation centre into a self-styled venue for events like concerts, theatre performances, public discussions and parties. The users' experience in DIY-practices of building, converting and repairing enabled them to realise the project. *Neuland* also benefited from the technical skills of the diverse and widespread network behind the club.

Fig. 2: Opening of Glasbox at its first location (© Michael Ziehl)

Collective self-organisation

Neuland and *Sportamt* are organised as collectives. Both are characterised by attempts to share, and to remedy cultural, social and political issues. The

members make decisions on a consensus-driven and egalitarian basis. On the one hand, this kind of organisation suits their collective way of working and living. And on the other, it's a necessity for handling large buildings such as factories, office blocks or schools originally designed for many people. User groups that are organised collectively are better able to deal with vast spaces and complex room schedules. Another example for collective self-organisation is provided by the *Palace of Production*. Under the slogan 'Workers of the new world of work unite!', this project has brought together about 70 professionals with different backgrounds to pursue their work in a diverse and supportive community. The contributors lived and worked in the former sorting department of the 'Bremer Woll-Kämmerei' (BWK), a disused wool combing factory in the north of Bremen, for one month. The building provided them with over 4.500 square meters of variously sized rooms, including small offices, larger studios and vast workrooms. The group jointly filled the building with a diverse and specified program of uses. In addition to their own workrooms and studios, they also installed coworking spaces, a shared kitchen in one of the former laboratories, and finally organised a common exhibition in the vast attic.

Fig. 3: Temporary workplace at the Palace of Production (© Michael Ziehl)

Testing

With the help of *second hand spaces*, uses can be tried out in ongoing urban renewal processes. They are usually not developed on the basis of master plans or

business plans. Their future is more open and indeterminate. Their users generate the places step by step. They test their intentions on a smaller scale and make careful investments. For example, most of the users of *Plantage 9* and also the shopkeeper of *Glasbox* were unsure if they would be able to earn a living from their business ideas. The relatively low rents enabled and motivated them to test their concepts. Given the low rents and incremental investments, the risk of 'failure' is reduced. In these cases, *second hand spaces* drive an entrepreneurial urbanism. The *Palace of Production* was designed by ZZZ to find out if the area is appropriate for 'creative workers', considering its problematic location in the periphery of Bremen. In the medium term, the local authorities want to transform this industrial area, which mostly consists of abandoned buildings, into a more diverse part of the city. At the end of the experiment, some participants from Bremen wished to stay on and continue using the vacant building for their work. But as the authorities regarded them as obstructive to the ongoing urban renewal process, they were ultimately not allowed to. Instead of supporting an incremental process, the responsible planners preferred to make a clean sweep and follow their master plans.

Fig. 4: Studio at Plantage 9 (© Michael Ziehl)

Recycling

As most users of *second hand spaces* lack money and time, they make very inventive and resourceful use of any items they find. Wooden cable drums from

a brownfield were transformed into seats and tables, for example. A stage was built from abandoned metal shelves found in an empty storeroom. And the wooden boards of a disassembled drywall were used to create a sculpture on the roof of a hangar. The practice of recycling originally arose out of a shortage of materials or from financial hardship. But it has since emancipated itself from this. As an economically and ecologically sensible practice it stands for thrift and sustainability. Even whole buildings can be 'recycled' – if they are used as found and no reconstruction work is done. The people behind *Neuland* and *Sportamt*, for instance, transformed a former rehabilitation clinic and a former office building into cultural hotspots without changing their architectural fabric. Former surgeries were hence used as exhibition rooms and former offices as studios. This manner of recycling has both active and passive aspects, as it exercises an influence and is influenced in turn while the buildings are adapted to one's own activities, and the latter are adapted to the opportunities afforded by the site.

Flexible operation

Setting up *second hand spaces* often calls for compromise and flexibility on the part of their users in terms of time and space. The users of the *Sportamt*, for example, demonstrated flexibility were the time aspect was concerned. Because the building's heating system had been dismantled, the users adjusted their utilisation concept and limited their use to the year's warm period instead of spending great amounts of money on a new system in a building with hardly insulated walls. In the case of *Glasbox*, the proprietor had to be flexible in terms of space. The first location was situated between sex shops in a deserted pedestrian zone, the second one at the back of an expensive shopping street. *Glasbox* has meanwhile opened in the 'creative quarter' of Bremen and appears to have found its place in the city.

Effects on urban transformation

Users' practices are characterised by the unstable conditions inherent in *second hand spaces*. Due to the precarious situation of most of the users, they would be unable to maintain or develop *second hand spaces* in the long term even if they wanted to. They need to give way for regularly tenants or real estate developers. Some have to leave because concessions run out or their contract is not extended. Given our experiences working for ZZZ, we nevertheless believe that *Second hand spaces* can support the development of urban society in a sustainable way. We have witnessed how they have contributed to turn Bremen into a more vibrant city, opened up new ways of participation for urban dweller that want to

involve themselves in urban development and carry the potential to strengthen social coherence amongst its participants. The described projects have helped to create new job opportunities for creative workers, established places in the urban structure that are more open to the public and can furthermore help to save physical resources. In the following we will illustrate some of these impacts. A city like Bremen is not changed by a single project, but a multitude of them can transform it, and the residents' attitude, over a longer period of time.

Tension between openness and exclusivity

The *second hand spaces* initiated by *ZZZ* have addressed a wider range of actors than conventional development projects, which usually attract investors with business objectives. Instead of money, users have invested their social and cultural capital as well as their muscle power and time. From this they have created some unique urban spaces that are in many cases at least partly open to the public like for example the *Sportamt* and the *Neuland*. In this sense, *second hand spaces* question the ways we use our city and how we define public space. The projects have challenged the increasingly regulated, privatised and diminishing forms of public space in Bremen. But rather than bemoaning the erosion of the public realm, this collective body of work focuses on new possibilities to open up places for lifestyles and subcultures that have to space in the city. Practical experience has shown that this aspect of bringing different lifestyles and subcultures together can also cause serious problems, however. The users of the *Sportamt*, for example, on the one hand need to deal with complaints from neighbours about noise, tags and graffiti. And on the other, the project itself often attracts very homogeneous user groups. The operators of *Sportamt* deal with the tension of wanting to be an open place for everyone, but on the other hand being predominantly a place attracting mainly left-wing leaning, which create symbolic barriers of exclusion for other interested participants. This aspect is relevant for nearly all *second hand spaces* initiated by the ZZZ. Even if we try to provide cheap spaces for all kinds of people, the ones who will mostly be attracted are artists and culture workers, because they are used to adjusting to precarious working conditions. Bringing people together while also maintaining projects that establish openness, diversity and adaptability are two different pairs of boots.

Inclusion of low-budget users and practicing democratic decision making *Second hand spaces* motivate financially weak users to take part in urban developments that would normally be excluded by high rents. They help residents gain access to spaces for exploring and highlighting what they need from their environment. They are therefore able to influence the design and thinking of their cities – at least to some extent. At the same time, *second hand spaces* open up places where

local conflicts can be negotiated by conflicting parties directly. For example, the users of the *Sportamt* concurred with complaining neighbours on the basis of common interests and tactical alliances against the planning authorities. In contrast to individualisation and competition, *second hand spaces* in Bremen were usually self-organised by collectives with flat hierarchies. In many cases the users act in a collective manner. On this basis, the contributors gain vulnerable experience in grassroots democratic decision-making processes that help to establish other tools of negotiating city development and planning. But not all user communities are successful in doing so. Most of them have to establish an association because a legal form is required to sign contracts and rent spaces. This implies a hierarchical form of (self-)organisation with different grades of responsibility. Organising in an association can ultimately undermine the aim of running a location with non-hierarchical structures.

New spaces for new forms of work

The world of work is changing rapidly – especially in cities. Due to the ongoing shift from regular jobs to freelance work and the state's withdrawal of social benefits, people are in need of affordable spaces to establish new forms of income and offer new forms of social and cultural service. This potential is not being recognised by many politicians and decision-makers as yet. A manager of Bremen's *Promotion of Trade and Industry* agency, for example, did not appreciate our aim to establish cheap working spaces for freelancers in the *Palace of Production*. He criticised that 'real jobs have to be created' instead. He aimed to reindustrialise the area by locating big enterprises there. Whereas the example of *Glasbox* shows that individual economic developments can indeed arise from cheap workplaces. The proprietor started the shop at an unattractive place and eventually moved to one of the most fashionable areas of Bremen offering a platform for more than fifty freelance producers. In Bremen, *second hand spaces* and their location in large buildings had the effect to bring people with different occupations together. From this, we have experienced that many new co-operations and business innovations resulted from this spatial arrangement. For example, the proprietor of *Glasbox* had met many of her business partners years ago, when she participated in the *Neuland* summer residency project, which only ran for three months. Today, they continue their collaboration by using her shop as a platform to sell their handcrafted products. Even if the projects only have a short lifetime, this period is often so intensive that networks and co-operations last well beyond it.

Preserving and saving resources

Although many properties cannot be let again after losing their original use, their rental prices remain in force, at least in the books. The owners speculate for better times, while the objects remain vacant until the ravages of time, water damage, or vandalism increase or prevent larger-scale investments. Developers are generally less interested in renovating buildings – especially properties from the 1960s and 70s – than building new ones. The users of *second hand spaces* place lower demands on the design and facilities. By reopening them, they have protected buildings from decay, extended their lifecycle and ultimately helped to save resources – which can have a positive, lastingly ecologic impact. *Plantage 9* illustrates how: The building was bought by the local authorities and slated for demolition to give way for the construction of a new road. Due to their tight budget, the authorities changed their plans and left the building vacant. That created an opportunity to reuse the building and slightly transform it. Initially, ZZZ started a one-year interim use. This trial period was so successful that the authorities could be persuaded to reinvest and carefully transform the building into a workplace for micro-enterprises. This process saved all the embodied energy of construction and minimised the required investments.

Vacancy as a resource for generating multiple forms of value

Owing to the transformations currently taking place in our industrial and knowledge-based society, what urban residents require from their urban spaces is also increasingly changing. There is a need to fashion the required adjustment processes as sustainably as possible, also in view of climate change and diminishing resources, while the ecological, economic and social aspects must be balanced. We believe that *second hand spaces* can provide suitable urban planning solutions in this task. Policy makers, urban scholars and city planners need to make up their mind if they would rather regard temporary uses as a means of taming unstable real estate markets, or if they prefer to focus on the users and understand them as active interest groups articulating a changing society (Kil, 2013).

The users' predominant benefit is the possibility to design a place to match their own needs. In doing so, they acquire practical experience in reusing, reintegrating and revalorising buildings and brownfields, while conserving resources without great investments. But despite all these positive factors, they pay the price of precariousness. The same principle also applies when their own activities lead to a revalorisation of rents and the property itself. As Arndt Neumann points out in reference to Klaus Overmeyer (the author of 'Urban

Pioneers' [1]): 'Young newcomers and creative people turn neglected neighborhoods into attractive places. Newly created identities and scenes attract further investments and established entrepreneurs and residents. While the real-estate industry profits from the increasing rents, the 'original triggers of the long-standing transformation process are excluded from the value-added chain' (Overmeyer and Behörde für Stadtentwicklung und Umwelt, 2010: 14). 'Such young creative people become the victims of their own success' (Neumann, 2012: 349). We believe however that while precarious interim users are the first to be kicked out, they merely accelerate, but do not cause the gentrification process. Experience from Bremen shows, that users request locations in high-price areas like the city center, in gentrified areas and where gentrification already started but not in those parts of the city, where gentrification is not looming and rents are going to stay on a low level. Furthermore we experienced that interim uses are only in rare cases deliberately instrumentalized to increase rents. Most real estate developers and owners shun the effort and expect more trouble than benefits. But if interim uses lead to an increasing demand of an asset they do not hesitate to kick them out. This impedes the aim of the ZZZ to establish a trustful relationship between users, owners and developers.

Referring to urban development in Berlin since the early 2000s, Claire Colomb emphasises that 'interim spaces are characterized by a tension between their actual use value (as publicly accessible spaces for social, artistic, and cultural experimentation) and their potential commercial value' (Colomb, 2012: 138). To do justice to the importance of *second hand spaces* for sustainable urban transformation, policy makers, urban scholars and city planners need to evaluate them on the basis of their use value. This is hence not only a question of value, but also one of evaluation. Focusing on the use value could pave the way to the development of concepts allowing users to share in the values they create, and remedy their precariousness. What this would call for as a minimum would be better conditions of use, an opening up of long-term perspectives instead of replacing users with financially stronger stakeholders, and providing them with planning security. The willingness to do so seems to be growing slowly. But at this moment in time, interim users still need to rely on the optimistic attitude that is so vital for taking part in the process at all.

The presentation of five ZZZ projects in reference to the concept of *second hand spaces* has served us to illustrate self-determined uses of vacant spaces. As this

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1   The book *Urban pioneers* published by the Senate of Berlin (Overmeyer and Berlin Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung, 2007) promoted operators of temporary uses as entrepreneurial risk-takers in urban and economic development (Färber, 2014) and became quite influential in the debate about temporary uses in Germany.

note shows, such uses are a basis for establishing alternative user practices. In most cases, the users' situation is characterised by precariousness. *Second hand spaces* can have a sustainable impact on the ongoing urban transformation of the western world nonetheless.

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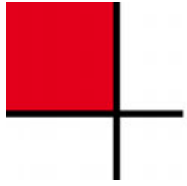ZwischenZeitZentrale Bremen, www.zzz-bremen.de.

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Practices in low-budget landscape architecture

Krzysztof Herman

Landscape architecture projects can vary from small-scale house gardens to undertakings complementing regional and urban planning. From the private property of a single family to the most crucial public spaces in the city, landscape architecture is about shaping, upgrading or restoring the quality of the space around us. The traditional view of the profession as showcased in various 'best practice' albums and exhibitions is usually limited to the aesthetics of prosperity, and often luxury. This image is well-rooted in the history of landscape architecture, a narrative of the wealthy and noble. Be it Versailles, English-style Stowe, Parc Andre Citroen or the private garden of the Donnell family in Sonoma County, California. All of these are iconic, but required serious, extensive investments. Similarly, most of the professional landscape architecture magazines and educators are drawing much of the attention to grand projects and permanent, final design solutions.

The recent exhibition[1] and catalogue of contemporary landscape architecture in member states of the Visegrad Group confirms that assessment. Only four out of forty featured public designs (most of them in public spaces) had a budget below 50,000 euros, while half of them had budgets exceeding a million euros. The average cost of all the 40 exhibited projects was 1,890,000 euros. Three projects stood out amongst these colossal investments: all of them were from the Czech Republic, and all of them had a budget of less than five thousand euros. The first is an initiative by a family aimed at improving the image of the spaces of their

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1   The exhibition 'Contemporary landscape architecture in Visegrad countries' was organised by the Polish Association of Landscape Architects at Warsaw University of Life Sciences and opened on March 22, 2013. The data above are taken from the printed version of the exhibition catalogue with a preface by Urszula Forczek-Brataniec.

home village. Their activities have included tidying up around a former landfill area, bringing in benches, providing something to do for children and planting shrubs and trees. The second of these projects was created in the inner courtyard of an apartment building:

> (...) new architectural solution offers a clear and readable residential space with emphasis on clean lines, used materials and quality craftsmanship. All of this with regard to the reasonable implementation cost and subsequent maintenance care. (...) (Forczek-Brataniec, 2013: 10)

The third was more of a critical art installation, a spatial performance that commented on the ever-growing height of fences and brick walls in the village of Lisen.

These three projects represent a prevailing shift in the manner of practicing landscape architecture, albeit one that is rarely recognised as substantial. Only recently has the profession seen a turn towards such low-budget, often temporary, interventions, and only now are these kinds of projects starting to be recognised as equally important by practitioners, critics, academics and municipal or regional officials. The turn has been marked by pioneering events such as the Temporäre Gärten in Berlin and the emergence of Atelier le Balto in the late 1990s, but also by the publication of *Temporary urban spaces: concepts for the use of city spaces* (Haydn and Temel, 2006) and *Everyday urbanism* (Chase, Crawford and Kaliski, 2008). The strategy of low-budget, intervention-based landscape architecture is in keeping with the 'LQC' (lighter, quicker, cheaper) approach employed by the influential New York City organization 'Project for Public Spaces'. (More on this approach below in Case #3). In this low-budget, intervention-based approach, the landscape architect often steps down from the imagined 'designer' (or 'demiurge') pedestal, coming out from behind his or her desk to advise and act in a citizen- or NGO-led project.

An increasing presence of the contemporary art practices of performance, installation and intervention is also very characteristic for the landscape architecture of the last twenty years. Rylke (2009) notes the potential of a 'processual garden' as a topic and tool in contemporary art (connecting the practice of landscape architecture and gardening with the disciplines of 'Process Art' and 'Processual Art')[2]. In the 2005 edition of Phaidon Press' popular *The garden book*, amongst a great array of historical and contemporary masterpieces of landscape architecture, one can also find two curious examples taken from the

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2   What Process Art shares with Processual Art is a focus on action, activity and performance – and less on the final object –although this is debatable, since the form and aesthetics of the object are not neglected (Damm 2010).

1990s: Chris Parson's Dew Garden (or 'Dew Sweeping' as some other sources have it) is a pattern drawn on the lawn in the early morning that only survives for a few hours and changes on a day-to-day basis, while Tori Winkler's garden is a surreal scene (including spray-painted plants and a white horse) that only persisted as long as it took to take the photograph.

The tendencies described above, as well as the attendance of the workshop/conference 'Low-budget urbanity. Frugal practices transforming the city' (March 25 to 28, 2013 at HafenCity University in Hamburg) have led me to take a deeper look at my own practice of landscape architecture and some of the low-budget projects developed over the last three years in Poland.

Personal, participatory, design-based research

My personal introduction to intervention-based landscape architecture coincided with a study visit to Harvard Graduate School of Design in 2008. Under the guidance of Margaret Crawford, I not only became acquainted with the principles of Everyday Urbanism, but consequently also with numerous temporary low-cost projects such as Rebarb's 'Park(ing) Day' and Marikka Trotter's 'Small Things'. Shortly after my return to Warsaw, I oversaw the organisation of the first Park(ing) Day happening in Warsaw in 2009. The experience later also led to my own doctoral thesis, *Temporary gardens in collective spaces* (Herman, 2011), which describes gardens as non-permanent, ephemeral structures that are not necessarily tied to a piece of land.

This article and all the cases described below are projects taken from my own professional practice and completed in 2013. Even though all three cases employ the language of low-budget, intervention-based landscape architecture, they are each of them dealing with different spatial and social contexts. They were also created to meet very particular needs of their users, and are embedded in a specific moment in time. The examples have been selected to highlight possible practical applications of above-mentioned strategies.

Case #1: Private [rooftop] garden (budget: ~ 300 euros)

A. – a non-figurative painter – is renting workshop space from a military agency. The space is located in central Warsaw on the uppermost floor of an apartment building. She is not allowed to live in it, though she ignores that part of the agreement. A. would like and is seriously considering to buy this workshop space from the agency sometime in the future, but whether that will be possible is very much unclear at this point. For now, the rental is on a year-to-year basis. The workshop has an exit onto a large part of the building's tar-covered rooftop. A.

has for a long time dreamt of her own urban garden and is very attentive and good with plants. She has been collecting seeds given to her by various friends who know about her unrealised passion.

All the above were influencing factors for the rooftop garden. It needed to be light, easily removable (non-permanent) and adapted to the harsh conditions of the either steamingly hot (in the summer) or windswept, snow-covered (in the winter) rooftop. Right from the very beginning, this project was a creative cooperation between a painter and a landscape architect, meant to include the painter's artwork alongside garden elements.

Several decisions were made as a result:

– Annual seeds of ruderal plant species were selected. Several heat-tolerant herbs were planted in addition to this, along with a number of pumpkin plants – favourites of the garden's owner.

– More than fifty recycled jute bags, formerly used for cocoa and coffee, were filled with soil and used as planters. They are easy to move, meaning that new patterns can be created each year.

– Many of the objects found in the workshop and on the rooftop were used: old europallets, wooden barrels and boards (some of them used to create a trellis).

– Only about half the large rooftop was planted, while the remaining space was reserved for a large-scale geometrical painting in silver paint on black tar.

Photograph by Krzysztof Herman

Case #2: Community garden (budget: ~ 600 euro)

The 2013 edition of 'The Awakening' ('Przebudzenie') art project, organised by the Gallery El in Elblag, was exceptional. Invited visual artists and local residents became involved on several occasions – one of which was the 'Kompostex' project. The ambition was to create a composting system run by a group of volunteers. The organic fertiliser would later be used for cultivating a community garden initiated as part of the same project.

It quickly became evident that establishing and maintaining the community garden was going to be a much more serious and weightier task than first assumed.

Probably the most important decision in this process was the choice of place for the garden. The art collective (Parque-no) and the curators had an agreement with the city council and city officials responsible for the urban parks and other greenery, which provided them with a whole range of possible locations. A neglected, raised stonewall flowerbed, overgrown with dandelions, was ultimately picked. It is about ten meters across and located in a park not far from the town centre – a popular destination for dog owners, families with children, and older people. The long-forgotten flowerbed is very close to a small stream, about a hundred meters from a playground and not far from a very popular walking route. The gallery had issued a call for volunteers through various local media in April 2013. The group was quite small at first, but grew as the project reached its peak, with numbers fluctuating between five and twenty over the next seven months. The local fire brigade and a group of inmates from a nearby prison provided additional help for many physical jobs. During this time, the artists organising the project became aware of the new composting system being implemented in the town by the Elblag recycling plant. The plant rents out small containers for collecting compost at home and has donated several of them towards the art project. Some of these were provided to the stallholders of a local vegetable market and a few grocery stores in the vicinity. A group of kids from the neighbourhood helped to collect and empty the containers into a composter built beside the old flowerbed. Workers from a nearby restaurant agreed to keep a few gardening tools in their back-office and hand them out to the volunteers. As the vegetables and herbs that were planted in the garden grew, they were frequently harvested by random, unknown people, and would simply disappear overnight. With the garden being located in a very accessible and public space, the volunteer gardeners and artists had no control over who amongst their broader audience would make use of it, nor did they really mind sharing the crops (if taken responsibly without damaging the entire plant or garden).

At the end of the season, a dinner largely consisting of the harvested vegetables and herbs was prepared. The menu included dishes that many of the gardeners tasted for the first time – stuffed fried pumpkin flowers, cream of lovage, and breaded pattypan squash cutlets. At the time of writing, October 2013, the garden is being prepared for the next season.

Photograph by Piotr Grden

Case #3: Revitalisation of a public square and playground (budget: ~13,000 euro)

The 'Na Miejscu' ('On site') project started in 2012 and was run by the 'Na miejscu' foundation in a partnership with the Skanska Development Company, the Project for Public Spaces (experts from New York City) and two of Warsaw's district offices. It aimed to create programs for revitalising two public spaces in Warsaw. One of them was a large tarmacked square between apartment buildings in the very centre of the city. These blocks of flats, built in the late sixties, are large in size and accommodate around a thousand residents each. Although the most sizeable public space in the neighbourhood, the square remained relatively under-used, especially if one considered the number of residents in the area.

The processes making up the project included several stages:

1. Creation of a knowledge base that included urbanistic analysis, a social map and a documentation of the historic background (autumn 2012).

2. Working with local residents – cultural stimulation aimed at establishing a dynamic and diverse workshop group (winter-spring 2013).

3. Design workshops for local residents and city officials, held by experts from the Na Miejscu foundation and Project for Public Spaces and carried out on the basis of the 'Placemaking' methodology (spring 2013).

4. Design and setting-up of temporary interventions – objects intended to test the practical relevance of ideas developed in the workshops (summer 2013).

5. Observation and analysis of the temporary interventions – learning from the 3-month test period (this part of the project is being carried out at the moment – autumn 2013).

6. Long-term strategies and plans for developing that particular public space. The strategic documents will include guidelines for local government and residents aimed at a successful continuation and development of the sites in terms of social and urban planning (winter 2013/2014).

Financial constraints (the budget for the temporary intervention amounted to circa 13,000 euros) only permitted some of the ideas generated in the workshop sessions to be translated from paper to the physical space. These interventions applied the 'LQC – lighter quicker cheaper' strategy and, although originally conceived as 3-month interim improvements, will in many cases remain in place for a much longer period of time. The latter interventions include:

1. Provision of extra seating – eight additional benches (added to the existing five), two large europallet sun beds/deckchairs.

2. Painting of lines for an included football/basketball field.

3. Painting of lines for two circular tracks for children's bicycle and scooter races, and as running tracks for children and adults.

4. Painting of playing fields on the asphalt (a colourful 'Galactic Playground').

5. Addition of a small stand for the audience of football/basketball games, and a podium.

6. Planting of ivy along the fence, and painting of the fence itself.

7. Addition of information/bulletin boards.

8. Addition of a 'playground in a box' for kids – a set of large foam blocks for building large-scale objects, stored in a library located in the building next to the square.

9. Installation of outdoor fitness equipment.

The temporary low-budget interventions in this case represented a trial period in which their users could intercede with the designers and administrators in the physical space to either provide or leave out, destroy or adapt, refuse or permit new elements. On the very first day, teenagers destroyed the doors of the lockers installed in the podium, which was simultaneously still used more as a climbing wall or obstacle course than as a stand for an audience.

Children transformed simple deck chairs into a fortification or 'base', built in a more secluded part of the square. The benches were almost always occupied and kids formed queues to use the outdoor fitness equipment, while the lines drawn on the asphalt for the football/basketball field and running track were almost never included in their activities and appeared to go unnoticed. At the end of 2013, the evaluation of the temporary interventions was completed and adequate funding secured for the first phase of the square's permanent regeneration.

Photograph by Krzysztof Herman

Photograph by Krzysztof Herman

Conclusions

Low-budget landscape architecture and an intervention-based approach, although not in the mainstream of the profession, have in recent years emerged as a visible trend amongst a growing number of young practitioners in Poland (who partly follow or reinvent trends from other countries). Low-budget practices have of course always played an important role in private amateur gardening, but my intention was to present the incorporation of these strategies into the realm of professional practice in Poland. The strategy not only has strong connotations with the interventionist approach, however, but also a lot in common with temporary, ephemeral, process-oriented architecture and spatial transformations. Haydn and Temel (2006) write that:

> Temporary space is not the recommended tool in every case, the use of which will guarantee improvements compared with outdated methods – in each particular case the general conditions as well as interests, goals and means must be investigated. The inclusion of process oriented methodology in planning for which temporary space stands can bring about big advantages in comparison to a rigidly oriented perception. (Haydn and Temel, 2006: 20)

This not only holds true for temporary space arrangements, but also for low-budget and interventionist strategies. At the same time, there is also a wider range of contexts, projects and situations these approaches are suitable for.

This note has showcased three possible areas for applying the low-budget approach to landscape architecture:

1. Activities carried out as a private initiative. A temporary, low-budget garden was created as a response to a particular model of city dwelling (impermanent residents, short-term rentals, impossibility of establishing a permanent garden)

2. Low-budget landscape architecture for initiating public involvement in a process led by artists, in this case a local composting network and cultivation of an urban garden.

3. Revitalisation processes for public spaces under the aegis of NGOs: interventions built as temporary structures to test design ideas developed jointly with the users of a public space. The approach facilitates instant provision that leads to an efficient verification of solutions.

These three potential fields for practices of low-budget landscape architecture can only provide a small sample from a wider range of possible applications. New applications of the strategy are being developed every season, engendering a dialogue between contemporary arts (performance, intervention, installation), urban activism, DIY-approaches, temporary architecture, new social practices and landscape architecture.
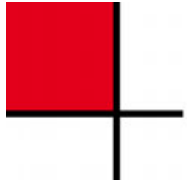
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Kill your darlings: The auto-iconoclasm of Blu's iconic murals in Berlin

Lutz Henke

The sound of a megaphone shrills through a typical cold and drizzling Berlin December night. Some passers-by yell at us in anger as others silently wipe tears off their cheeks. 'It's the first time in my career as an artist that somebody is booing me', says a voice next to me. We stop painting for a moment to watch the small crowd that has gathered on the other side of the fence, about 25 meters beneath our lifting platform. Albeit there is no time for introspection as almost 1000 square metres of brick wall still needs to be covered with black paint until the two murals by Italian artist Blu – often referred to as Berlin's most iconic pieces of street art – will be fully erased. Seven years after the monumental wall pieces came into being, we felt it was time for them to vanish in an act of auto-iconoclasm – expiring along with the fading era in Berlin's history that they represented.
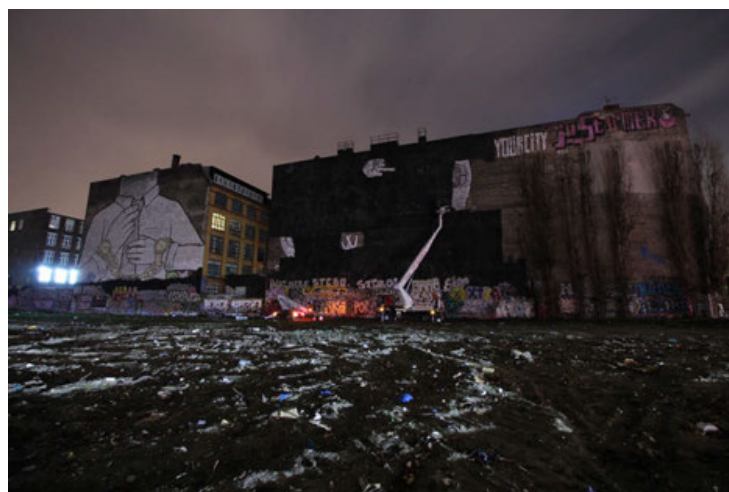

Photo 1: The buffing, December 2014 (credit Lutz Henke)

Photo 2: Black walls, December 2014 (credit Mischa Leinkauf)

During their existence, the murals had evolved into beacons of the former border district Kreuzberg, symbols for the rigors it passed through. The first piece, a collaboration between Blu and French artist JR, depicts two figures in the act of unmasking each other, showing the 'east side' and 'west side' gang signs. It was a contribution to the exhibition 'Planet Prozess' which our 'Kunstverein' (cultural organization) had organized right across the street in a former secret food warehouse in West-Berlin (*Senatsreservenspeicher*). After the fall of the Berlin Wall the building had found itself useless and relocated from the periphery to the centre of the city. Not yet attractive to real estate developers for another decade, it served as headquarters for our artistic endeavours. In 2008, Blu and I had decided to repaint and to renovate the two figures, but instead spontaneously added a second mural on a wall next to them: a businessman chained by his golden watches.

In their monumental graffiti attitude the pieces boldly claimed (and captured) worldwide attention. They even seemed to transcend the status of mere depictions becoming part of what Siegfried Kracauer in 1930 referred to as 'Raumbilder': unconsciously produced spatial images that 'are the dreams of society' (Kracauer, 1964: 70). Unintentionally, we had created an ideal visual representation of the imaginary Berlin of the noughties and its promises: a city of voids granting plenty of space for affordable living and creative experimentation among the ruins of its recent history.

Photo 3: Walls 2008 (credit Lutz Henke)

Photo 4: JR and Blu for Planet Prozess 2007 (credit JR)

These features became the main attractions and the mantra of the recently departed city mayor Klaus Wowereit's notorious 'poor but sexy' Berlin. The murals took their involuntary place in this reality as pilgrimage site of guided street-art-tours, and served as photo opportunities for countless greeting cards, book-covers or as backdrop for band-photos. Even the city used the allegedly subversive aesthetics of resistance for its marketing campaigns.

But by this time the neighbourhood already found itself in the thick of gentrification, with fierce protests against raising rents. And of course art – especially highly visible public art (just think of Banksy) – contributes to this process.

However, while Berlin on one hand prides itself on its art scene, its failed city development and cultural policy squandered much of the city's rare spatial potential, and thereby also jeopardized the existence of its main attraction – the

artists. They found themselves in the paradox situation of being their own nemesis, perpetually contributing to their own displacement.

An 'innovative' touch to Berlin gentrification is that lately it does not content itself with the destruction of the autochthonous art spaces. Depending on the attractive power of art, it tends to artificially reanimate the previously assassinated wild and provisional creativity. The frequently mourned 'murdered city' evolved into the un-dead city of an artificial artistic amusement park. This zombification is threatening to turn Berlin into a museum-like city of veneers with preserved, once-fleeting art forms as taxidermic attractions for those who can afford the rising rents.

Blu's murals can be seen as a *simulacrum* of these developments: the initial elation and spirit of possibilities, the urban changes and arising protests, the squatting and subsequent eviction of its neighbouring waste land, the destruction of our own art space (the *Senatsreservenspeicher*) to build for the 'creative Berlin' – it all is inscribed in the images. A pars pro toto that might help to narrate and discuss this chapter of Berlin's recent history.

Still, why would an artist agree to destroy his own acclaimed work instead of endorsing official attempts to preserve it as a public work of art? Out of despair? Clearly not. Rather out of sorrow, as early online-comments like 'heartbreaking' suggested. Public art inevitably is subject to valorisation with all its pros and cons. And even more important becomes the awareness and retention of responsibility for these valorised creations, e.g. by transforming them into tools to reveal certain processes, clarifying that they happen *not in our name.*

From the first moment of their existence, Blu's murals were doomed to disappear. It is the nature of so-called street art to occupy space in celebration of its uncertainty, being aware of its temporality and fleeting existence. At first every image is an erasure of the reality it comes upon, especially in the public domain. Consequently, it must be capable to not only overcome preceding pictures but also to accept its own death.

The thousands of reproduced and digitally spread-out motifs of the murals certainly will last in an immaterial way next to their new tangible condition. They are part of a collective Berlin imaginary. Now more than ever.

For me the white – well, in this case black – washing also signifies a rebirth, a return from the (soon to be un)-dead: As a wake-up call to the city and its dwellers, a reminder of the necessity to preserve the affordable and lively spaces of possibility, instead of producing un-dead taxidermies of art. It prompts a

dialogue with the city's reality, stressing the capability and social function of artistic interventions where others fail to advance.

Over to you, Banksy.

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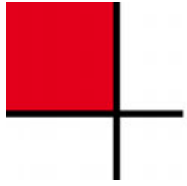[http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/dec/19/why-we-painted-over-berlin-graffiti-kreuzberg-murals]

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Can democracy survive austerity?

Stephen Jaros

review of

Schafer, A. and W. Streeck (2013) *Politics in the age of austerity*. Polity Press: London (PB, pp. 320, $79.95, ISBN 97807456-61681).

Armin Schafer and Wolfgang Streeck, two scholars at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne, Germany, have edited a remarkable volume that attempts to address a political-economic touchstone of modern democratic-capitalism: how to reconcile democratic political processes with the increasing governance of global economic life by economic institutions – corporate and transnational governmental – that are politically nonresponsive to the demands of ordinary citizens and which are dedicated to often unpopular economic policies of austerity (cf. Edsall, 2012). The two editors are among the leading figures of the past decade in the study of global economic policy as promulgated by the IMF and the World Bank and have assembled a stellar cast of contributors to explore these issues. While this book focuses mostly on the political dynamics of the economy of the European Union, it also has insights for scholars interested in studying austerity and democracy in the United States and Asia. The book is both a work of social criticism (the editors and chapter authors almost uniformly adopt a left-critical view on austerity's impact on governance) and a technical description of how austerity policies impact on political decision making. Given that, despite its alleged 'intellectual defeat' (Krugman, 2013), austerity measures in governmental fiscal policy are likely to be with us for some time to come; this book will help scholars of democratic theory apprehend this menace.

Politics in the age of austerity is organized into eleven chapters and no separate parts, each chapter addressing a dimension of the book's theme. The introductory chapter, written by the editors, lays out what they view as the central problems of fiscal austerity and representative democracy. The authors make clear that their primary goal is to trace the impact of the former on the latter, and they do not like what they see. They posit a fundamental contradiction in contemporary advanced capitalist societies between demands made by international bond markets with a stake in low inflation, low taxes on the wealthy and low public debt, and who desire budget cuts; and the demands of ordinary citizens who, faced with stagnant wages, rising unemployment, precarious employment, and pension cuts, want more governmental services. The authors provide evidence that when these contradictions come to the fore, financial markets have more power than 'the people', such that austerity measures are adopted despite their objections. As a result, more and more people view government as non-responsive to their basic needs, and thus do not see the point in participating in formal democratic processes such as voting, and will have to resort to forms of direct action, such as 'Occupy Wall Street'-type movements and even rioting in the streets, to make their voices heard. This is because not only are national governments increasingly less responsive to citizen demands, citizens perceive that their national governments are less capable of being responsive even if they want to be, since much decision-making about fiscal issues has been ceded to trans-national entities such as the IMF, the World Bank, and various European Union commissions.

Alongside this empirical history of austerity, the authors also trace the post-WW2 intellectual history of how scholars of political-economy have attempted to explain economic and political relationships, discussing for example the struggles among Keynesian, Hayekian, Institutional Economics, and theories of Public Choice for hegemony within the halls of academe and of governmental policy making, ably setting the stage for later chapters to flesh out these debates.

Chapters two and three address two effects of fiscal tightening on democratic processes. In chapter two (Streeck and Mertens) the focus is on the spending side, the 'maturation' of the welfare state, meaning the tendency of welfare commitments to accumulate according to the rule of compound interest. Since welfare commitments are often 'mandatory' spending, this means that the fiscal options of present-day legislators are often hamstrung by the policy commitments of yesteryear's who created the welfare programs that now gobble an ever-larger share of the national budget. The authors' analysis of the USA, Germany, UK, and Sweden indicate that discretionary spending has declined markedly over the past 30 years, and while tax increases on the wealthy could theoretically solve this problem, they doubt politicians have the will to do so and

thus foresee a fiscal train-wreck in the near future. This chapter is noteworthy because unlike others, it argues that austerity measures have not affected mandatory welfare spending nearly as much as discretionary spending. Chapter three (Genschel and Schwarz) addresses the issue of 'tax competition', the tendency of countries to successively lower their taxes on corporations and the wealthy so as to attract foreign investment, resulting in a global 'race to the bottom'. These authors show that while there has been no race to the bottom with respect to taxes on wealthy individuals, small countries have undercut the corporate tax rates of larger countries, forcing larger countries to shift the tax burden from mobile to 'immobile' assets, such as labor, to make up the difference. The net result has been a positive effect on fiscal democracy in smaller countries (their politicians have freedom to determine tax rates) but a negative effect in larger ones, as their corporate tax policies are limited by the threat that firms will flee to smaller tax havens while their workers are compelled to shoulder more of the tax burden.

Chapters four through six have a more explicitly European focus, addressing the issues of the 'Swedish example', the European Union, and Parliamentary democracy respectively. Chapter four (Steinmo) examines fiscal democracy in Sweden, a country which has managed to maintain a generous welfare state and yet remain globally competitive. Steinmo argues that the keys to this success are (a) the willingness of Swedes of all classes to de-politicize fiscal policy, leaving it in the hands of technocratic experts, and (b) ethnic homogeneity, which has allowed Sweden to avoid many of the internal social problems that impact fiscal policy in other Western nations. Paradoxically, Sweden has achieved social welfare harmony without much direct democratic input, a notion that challenges the findings of other chapters, which tend to conclude that social welfare spending and democratic participation are positively correlated. The core class-compromise has been corporate willingness to tolerate a generous welfare state, as long as workers themselves fund it, largely through payroll taxes. Since workers perceive strong positive benefits from doing so, these taxes have remained popular. In the end, Steinmo argues that too many aspects of Sweden's situation are idiosyncratic to be of much help to other nations.

In chapter five, Fritz Scharpf analyzes the impact of EU monetary policy on fiscal democracy in the wake of the 2008 financial meltdown. This is a topic worthy of its own book or two, but Scharpf does a fantastic job of wading through the complexities. He explains how the austerity measures taken by the European Parliament (EP), guided primarily by Germany's demands for fiscal austerity in 'crisis' countries such as Greece, Spain, and Ireland, have failed to make these countries fiscally sound while imposing immense hardships on ordinary citizens. Scharpf explains that a major cause of public dissatisfaction with austerity

policies is their lack of 'input legitimacy': Decisions related to austerity have not been freely chosen by the elected governments of these countries but rather have been imposed by more distal institutions such as the European Commission and EP. Scharpf argues that unless European institutions become more accountable to ordinary citizens, the monetary union and the entire European political project are at risk. Furthermore, from a technical point of view, European institutions are unlikely to make wise fiscal choices when those making them are shielded from democratic accountability for their failures. This concern with responsiveness, the connection between citizens and their representatives, is also taken up in chapter six, in which Peter Mair focuses on the example of the Irish government's agreement to implement severe austerity measures in the wake of the 2008 financial collapse despite upwards of 80% of the Irish electorate disapproving of the terms, which essentially forced Irish taxpayers to bail out Irish banks so as to repay European creditors of those banks.

This happened because the Irish government, like the governments of other smaller European states, has become more accountable to European and global institutions that insisted on the bailout, such as the European Commission and the WTO, than it is to its own voters. Similar to chapter two's findings, Mair does recognize that government flexibility to meet the demands of voters is also a function of the results of domestic political legacies as well, noting that in the mid-1980s, Margaret Thatcher's 'radical' conservative government was still running 207 of the 227 programs it had inherited from its Labour government predecessor. This combination of internal legacy commitments and external commitments to supranational agencies has made it difficult for contemporary governments to be responsive to voters even if they want to. This policy 'squeeze' should be troubling to anyone who believes that 'democracy' means not just being able to vote, but to influence policy decisions as well.

Chapters seven through ten shift the focus somewhat to a more explicit discussion of inequality of outcomes, as they analyze which social groups end up as winners and losers under austerity regimes. In chapter seven, Schafer offers an impressive analysis of how austerity policies have become widespread in the western world. Analyzing data from the 1970s to the 2000s across twenty-three American and European countries, he Schafer shows that welfare spending, tax rates, union participation, and voting rates have fallen, while income inequality among socio-economic classes has risen almost everywhere. Using time-series regression analysis, the author is able to show that rising income inequality has a powerful negative effect on voting rates: voter apathy sets in when people realize that their political preferences no longer stimulate government to enact policies that benefit their economic position. This is true foremost among the lower classes who stand to gain the most from redistribution policies, but also relates to

the wealthy, the primary beneficiaries of austerity measures. Everyone cares less about politics when governments are committed to withdrawing from economic management.

This theme of voter participation as a problem for democracy is analyzed more theoretically by Claus Offe in chapter eight, who not only ties declining ballot participation to fiscal austerity, but unlike most other chapters in this volume, attempts to determine what should be done about it. Offe clearly considers it a 'bad thing' when voters don't vote, and discusses alternatives such as mandatory voting, removing procedural barriers to voting, and governmental policy responsiveness. He plumps for the latter, arguing that mandatory voting is undemocratic and elides the problem of why people aren't voting. Likewise, while there are processual barriers to voting in some countries that should be removed (e.g., restrictions on the voting rights of racial minorities and ex-convicts in the USA, as evidenced by the recent Supreme Court decision nullifying important parts of the 1965 Voting Rights Act), by and large procedural barriers across OECD countries tend to be minor. The real danger to democracy lies in government policies that have subsumed social imperatives to market imperatives. Until this approach changes, voter disaffection is likely to continue, a long-run threat to the democratic legitimacy of those governments, regardless of its economic merit.

One factor that all of the preceding chapters seem to share is the belief that 'neo-liberalist' ideology, as exemplified by the writing of economists such as Friedrich Hayek, has become the intellectual basis for austerity measures. But in chapter nine, Colin Crouch argues that austerity programs should raise the ire of neo-liberalists as much as that of Keynesian and social-democratic thinkers. This is because traditional free-market economics, dating back to the work of Adam Smith, emphasizes that markets should be free from state intervention designed to provide special benefits to workers or to corporations, as either introduces inefficient distortions. But Crouch makes the case that while the neo-liberals who are implementing today's austerity measures are keen to stop state policies that intervene in the market to benefit workers, they turn a blind eye to those policies that benefit corporations, such as sharp reductions in corporate tax rates and the privatization of public services. As an example, Crouch notes how in the USA, President Obama was only able to expand health care coverage to uninsured citizens by forcing people to buy health coverage from private corporations. Crouch argues that the most significant cause of rising corporate power is the mobility of capital: firms that do not get their policy privileges enacted in one country can shop around the globe for friendlier regimes, putting pressure on other countries to comply. His solution is the creation of international regulatory bodies that can rein in transnational capital, a less-than-ideal outcome, since

international bodies are by definition more distant from, and hence less accountable to, citizens of any one country.

Chapters ten and eleven attempt to do something social science research has never been particularly good at: predict the future path of democratic development in the age of austerity. In chapter ten, Mabel Berezin argues that the first outcome of the 2008 financial crisis in Europe has been the 'normalization of the right', by which she means the ascendancy of right-wing fiscal policies and of nationalist parties across Europe. This chapter stands out for its analysis of cultural factors that influence the adoption of austerity measures. For example, Berezin argues that radical-Islamist terrorism has led to the emergence of strong xenophobic/nationalist movements in Europe and the USA that inherently favor right-wing fiscal policies, thus aiding global financial capital's quest for greater deregulation and austerity. The extreme right has also benefitted from deep ethno-cultural divisions across Europe that monetary and quasi-political union has failed to mask. Berezin argues that while the total dissolution of the EU is 'difficult to imagine', she predicts a long twilight struggle between the forces for European integration and for extreme nationalism, preventing for the foreseeable future the emergence of a leftist political movement that could challenge austerity regimes.

In contrast, chapter eleven, by book co-editor Wolfgang Streeck, adopts a quasi-Marxian stance that views the present austerity hegemony as just the latest stage in the dialectical movements of capitalist development in the West. Streeck argues that since World War II, elected politicians have been torn by the contradictory demands for social justice outcomes by workers and free-market outcomes by capitalists. Before 1970, strong economic growth meant there was plenty of wealth to go around for everyone, but since then, globalization processes have stifled growth, necessitating satisfaction of these competing wants by fiscal methods that allow for reaching in to the future to make economic resources available for present consumption. During the 1970s, this was accomplished via inflationary policies, which inevitably led to a crisis of economic incentives. With the defeat of inflation in the early 1980s, Reagan-Thatcher era governments accomplished capital-worker peace via deficit spending. When deficit spending created a private investment crisis in the early 1990s (the 'crowding out' effect) and forced cuts in government spending, Clinton-Blair era administrations resorted to deregulation of the home-finance markets (credit cards, mortgages), which enabled worker households to live beyond their means by piling up personal debt and delivering high rates of return to financial institutions and bondholders. However, the accumulation of easy-credit loans and mortgages resulted in the 'toxic assets' financial collapse of the late 2000s, leading to bailouts of 'too big to fail' banks at the price of fiscal

austerity. Streeck is not optimistic about where all of this is leading. He argues that nation-states, rather than reflecting the will of the mass of their peoples, have by market-logic necessity become 'debt collecting agencies on behalf of a global oligarchy of investors' (284) and anticipates that street riots and insurrection may be the last resort for austerity-burdened citizens who no longer have faith in the capacity of democratic institutions to meet their needs.

Readers of *ephemera* interested in the implications of austerity regimes for democratic political processes will find *Politics in the age of austerity* to be a bracing experience. The editors and chapter authors have meticulously documented how austerity regimes have directly impacted on political participation by the mass of ordinary citizens (as spending is cut, voting frequency goes down), on the policy options available to elected officials (they find themselves hamstrung by the demands of financial institutions for deregulation, lower taxes, and bailouts), and on consumer choice (austerity means less money for everyone except the rich to 'vote with their dollars' via spending on goods and services). While these effects are primarily negative, meaning that austerity has had a constraining impact on the average citizen of advanced capitalist countries to elect officials who are able and willing to enact policies they desire and to enhance their quality of lives via consumption, austerity has also mobilized citizenry to forms of direct action that may ultimately prove to have a restorative impact on democratic responsiveness. These include burgeoning participation in NGOs and direct street action such as demonstrations, rioting and the Occupy movement. However, although the authors clearly espouse ideologies that are hostile to austerity, none of them sugar-coat the current situation by positing optimistic scenarios by which the reigning austerity hegemony is likely to be overturned. If anything, the book comes across as mildly defeatist, as several authors argue that there seemingly is no escaping austerity; much as Weber once saw society as being enveloped by an 'iron cage' of bureaucratic logic and institutions, the authors of this volume see a bleak future in which national governments are thoroughly constrained by global financial markets to be servants of the wealthy, while the poor and middle class both pay, the former by cuts in needed services, the latter by higher taxes.

However, there are recent indications that this pessimism may be unwarranted. One such development has been the intellectual damage done to the austerity movement by the revelations that some of the key research papers that underpinned austerity ideology are marked by significant methodological flaws that undercut claims that deficit spending inhibits economic growth (cf. Krugman, 2013). While intellectual setbacks do not necessarily translate into practical policy reversals, the IMF, historically an important transnational advocate of austerity, has recently acknowledged that austerity measures have

failed to work in Greece as their economists had predicted, and have modified somewhat their advocacy of austerity as a solution to the economic growth woes that have persisted since the 2008 financial meltdown (IMF, 2013). That said, as of this writing, European Union policy continues to be dominated by austerity logic. Perhaps this is because economic policy has not only a technical dimension but also a moral one: Even if it can be proven that austerity does not lead to economic growth, some policy makers may continue to advocate such measures on 'moral' grounds. Expressions of this kind can be found in arguments by nationalistic political parties in some European countries that it is unfair to expect, e.g., German and Swedish taxpayers to bail out the banks and citizens of countries such as Ireland and Greece, on the belief that these latter countries got into trouble because their governments and citizens went on unwarranted spending binges and thus should shoulder the burden for their alleged profligacy.

Perhaps most challenging is the question of whether this book's central premise that advanced capitalism is characterized by a hegemonic austerity regime is entirely valid. For example, according to the OECD, what it categorizes as 'real social spending' (social spending adjusted for inflation and changes in GDP) by OECD governments experienced an overall increase from 17% of GDP in 2007 to 22% of GDP since the 2008 financial crisis and has not declined since (OECD, 2012), a finding that is inconsistent with the notion that governments have shrunk their welfare states in recent years.

Of course, this average figure masks some marked differences across countries. For example, Greece and Hungary, two of the countries hardest-hit by the financial crisis, experienced declines in real social spending of 14% and 13%, respectively, numbers that reflect imposition of austerity regimes. But other major democratic countries, such as the USA, UK, France, Poland, Korea, and Japan, have increased their real social spending during this time period, indicating that austerity has not taken hold of the fiscal policies of these countries. Perhaps this book's contributor list, short as it is on contributions from USA and Asian scholars, has contributed to its empirical assumption of austerity hegemony. However, on important measures of democratic vitality such as voter turnout in elections, many of these countries have still experienced a decline in participation, meaning that austerity itself may be just one cause among others as to why citizens of capitalist countries are becoming more disaffected with the efficacy of formal political activities. This calls for future research augmenting this volume's focus on austerity measures to determine other causes of democratic ossification in western capitalist countries.

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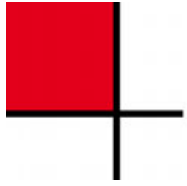
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Of mice and man[*]

Nancy Richter and Cornelius Kurt Donat

review of

Raunig, G. (2013) *Factories of knowledge, industries of creativity*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Aim of the book

'What can strike mean for the creative workers, and industrialists, whose punch clocks know no on and off, but only countless versions of on?' (142). The essay *Factories of knowledge, industries of creativity* by Gerald Raunig deals with the Occupy movement and today's forms of existence and production. According to Raunig, the Occupy movement is a temporary 'reterritorialization', as a form of resistance in a 'deterritorialized society' (13).

Factories of knowledge and industries of creativity are modes of a 'radically dispersed production' (17) which stand for the deterritorialization of society. These forms of deterritorialization can evoke new forms of resistance, as demonstrated by the micro-political practices carried out in the context of the Occupy movement, in order to reteritorrialize space. However, for Raunig, deterritorialization and reterritorialization are not contradictory, but fluid concepts that go hand in hand. Labor unions and strikes in our traditional understanding are not suitable for the amalgam of life and work of creative and knowledge workers and their practices of resistance. With regard to this,

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resistance cannot be directed against existing forms of discipline, but needs to entail a changed mode of subjectivication. In the author's words:

> If we want to understand today's modes of existence and forms of knowledge production not simply as emerging from the sequence of discipline and control we must assert a complex and modulating amalgam of social subjugation and machinic subservience but also draw up possibilities of new modes of subjectivication and forms of resistance especially taking into consideration the changing complexity of this amalgam. (50)

Raunig elaborates on modes of existence and new practices of resistance in our society. Significant actions of the Occupy movement are according to him: long horizontal discussions, ad hoc sessions, tents, self-organized lectures, common meals, permanent presence in public buildings and other micro-political actions. As perceived by representatives of the traditional and established media, these rather disjointed micro-political actions make no sense. This is why the movement received a lot of negative attention and misunderstanding in the media. Additionally, the occupiers seem to refuse to express any kind of political action or program. However, Raunig has set himself the challenging task to investigate new forms of resistance in our society and the logic behind Occupy. He therefore focuses on providing an understanding of our modes of existence and the forms of resistance against them (159).

Structure of the book

The book is comprised of two parts, discussing different areas of knowledge production and industrial creativity. The first part deals with 'factories of knowledge' while the second part focuses on 'industries of creativity'. Raunig intends to show that knowledge production and cultural work are sites of new forms of subjugation and self-government (Foucault, 1993: 203-204), that combine the modulating forces of deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

Both parts of the book start with and refer to Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk, a tale by Kafka (1993). The tale serves to introduce the reader to the terms of deterritorialization and reterritorialization (13). The Mouse Folk is characterized by dispersion and constant movement, as aspects of deterritorialization. This deterritorialization characterizes our current society, the life of creative and knowledge workers, as well as their dispersed forms of production. Josephine's singing, her singularity, leads the mice to assemble, as a form of reterritorialization. According to Raunig, Josephine is one of many, a singularity that can only emerge in the 'multitude' (9) (see Hardt and Negri, 2000). Her singing produces the collective desire for reterritorializion (10). This reterritorialization is only a form of temporary occupation and thus cannot be

dismissed with disciplinary forms of condensation, as known from the factory of industrialization. Reterritorialization and deterritorialization characterize our current social order in the fields of universities as knowledge factories and industries of creativity, as well as related forms of resistance.

In the second chapter of the first part, Raunig introduces the university as the new site of knowledge fabrication. He reflects on similarities to the old factory, but points to a new 'authoritative regime', calling for a changed vocabulary to be perceived appropriately (22). The third chapter deals with examples of the 'modulating university'. Following Raunig, 'the mode of modulation is both a striating, standardizing, modularizing process and at the same time a permanent movement of remodelling, modulating, re-forming and de-forming the self' (29). Raunig provides a compelling list of issues of the current modulating academic/university system (31). In chapter four, he disapproves the discursive critique on this system (e.g. drawing by Gerhard Seyfried on the cover of a university-critical book, see Wagner, 1977). In his view, the critique resembles the old fordist production regime and is therefore not sufficient to understand the current problems of knowledge workers (41). Chapter five includes a digression to Michel Foucault and his work 'courage of truth' (Foucault, 2011) that deals with the Greek model 'parrhesia', the chance to speak freely. This model serves as an example to discuss the mode of knowledge production. Knowledge, from this perspective, is not embodied, stable and fixed but gets constructed in the movement of the inquirer to those who are guided by the inquirer. The task of both groups, the inquirer and those who are guided, is to engage in 'self-care' (59). This understanding of knowledge production supports Raunig's overall argument and provides an understanding of knowledge that is not to be conceived as static. In chapter six, he applies this understanding to articulate a fundamental critique against the authoritative 'truth tellers' and expert systems that have become prevalent in our time and culture (67). Chapter seven is the last chapter of part one and points to examples of resistance against existing authoritative regimes of knowledge factories and aims to reveal their underlying mechanisms (see e.g. the occupation of lecture halls as a form of student protest in Vienna October 2009) (70).

In the second part, Raunig shows that industries are more than the sum of their factories. Concentrating on this assumption, this second part mirrors the structure of the first one where Raunig has provided an understanding of the knowledge factory in which the production process entails a new sociotechnical order. In the old industry, reterritorialization was enabled by a relation of time through a prior relation of space (discipline) (94). In contrast, the 'creative industries' consist of micro-enterprises formed by self-employed cultural entrepreneurs. The creative industries do not assemble and allocate the workers

at one place, nor do they engage in time allocation. However, due to their project-based work and market oriented character, they gather access to the total time of the worker (104). In chapter three, Raunig points to the entrepreneur as the role model of these industries and the problems this brings about (105). Chapter four deals with the industrial turn that reflects the evolution of the creative industries (121). In chapter five, Raunig presents the development of an artistic project in Northern Italy that turned from a site of the creative industries into a political art project (125). Chapter six is used by the author to reflect upon possible forms of resistance against the established regime of the creative industries. He insists that new and appropriate forms of interruption have to be found in a recurring process (147). Just like the first part of the book, this last chapter points to the Occupy movement as a mode of resistance calling for a fundamental transformation of society.

Raunig provides reasons why the Occupy movement cannot be understood by employing current approaches in political theories and methods. A new vocabulary and a qualitative understanding of the complex constellations and interactions in our society seem to be necessary in order to grasp the existing social and sociotechnical order and the forms of resistances it evokes.

Factories of knowledge: 'The complex and modulating amalgam of social subjugation and machinic subservience'

According to Raunig, the university is the new factory (24). However, it is a factory of knowledge production that does not work like the old 'industrial factory' but has given way to a new sociotechnical order. It does not only produce knowledge, but a social relationship that comprises an authoritative regime and aspects of subservient self-government as well as resistive modes of subjectivation (26). Raunig is interested in the interactions of this new constellation or 'assemblage'. To the author, the factory is not just neoliberal or authoritative, nor does the university as a knowledge factory inhabit the same mode of social subjugation and machinic subservience like the disciplinary regime of the old 'industrial factory' (see Foucault, 1994; Deleuze, 1990).

In order to support this argument, Raunig lists some problematic issues of the knowledge factory which he assumes to be prevalent in many universities and cultural contexts. Instances include: an increased assessment of nearly all aspects of research and teaching; a disciplinary regime that resembles the schooling system; a strange conflation of enforced bureaucratization and entrepreneurship; the fetish for excellence; the demand for external funding; the precarious life situation of researchers (especially non-professional teaching staff without

permanent position); the elimination of study programmes without market value; the power of private accreditation agencies; a state that does not withdraw but expects universities to act economically, etc. (see also Parker and Jary, 1995; Willmott, 1995). These aspects, in parts or in sum, are likely to be experienced by almost every student and employee in academia, and are used by Raunig to point to the dispersed mode of knowledge production in the university.

The university, as a knowledge factory, still supports disciplining practices, but these are regularly linked to practices of self-government that also produce 'late-modern subjectivities' (26). Raunig implicitly draws on the work of Michel Foucault (1993) who linked 'techniques of domination' and 'techniques of the self' in the concept of governmentality. Considering these techniques of government, Raunig insists that it would be short-sighted to perceive the university only as an authoritative regime that aims to dominate students and teachers. It is therefore important to recognize that it is not only the university that 'drills' the students. The students are also supporters of the modulating system of the university (Foucault, 1993). This insight is a crucial aspect for Raunig. As he writes: 'The world modulates us and we modulate the world around us' (105). These processes, by which the self is constructed or modified by itself (Foucault, 1993: 203-204), lead to a certain way of thinking about the university and related forms of resistance. From this point of view, resistance cannot only criticize authoritative and dominating systems but needs to focus on new forms of self-government. For Raunig, a possibility to resist the regime of the modulating university would be not to behave only reactively to an existing authoritative regime, but also to become productive in terms of new practices and self-relations so that new forms of knowledge production can emerge.

Resistance and new modes of subjectivication in the knowledge factory

Micro-politics and disobedient forms of knowledge production, within and outside of the university, are part of a new form of resistance that Raunig calls desertion (27). Resistance, as desertion, is an instituent practice which aims to form a new sociotechnical order by establishing micro-political actions that reteritorrialize space (27). According to Raunig, the Occupy movement is such a new form of resistance. It is an act of reterritorialization that took place in many European universities (e.g. in 2009/2010 in Vienna). The slogan 'Demand nothing, Occupy everything' is illustrative for a non-normative movement that avoids presenting new political programs including proposals for major reforms. Occupy also avoids forms of classical leadership and membership and thus the representation of groups by single actors.

Because of this unassertive behaviour, traditional media have described and subsequently criticised the occupiers as not having any plan or goals. By this, traditional media demonstrated a lack of understanding for these forms of resistance. Occupy consciously undermined the mass media logic, e.g. by rotating press speakers and the de-personalization of statements. People were only speaking *from* the movement, but not *for* the movement. They were speaking as one of the many (73). The enacting of 'non-representational practices' was a mode of reterritorialization (70), of gently striating or streaking space (14), in order to reclaim public space. In contrast to traditional media, social media helped to create independence by acting as a communication channel and dispersing information which expanded the movement beyond the territory of the university. Interesting questions arise from the Occupy movement and the usage of new media. Instead of asking 'who speaks?', the focus is on the permanent movement of discussions. Not asking for the speaker is crucial for practices emerging from new media. The Occupy movement is only a temporary assemblage around a singing Josephine, a reterritorialization that should not be dismissed as a movement back to traditional forms of disciplinary organization. The Occupy movement may rather be understood as a movement that wants to invent new ways of living, eventually leading to a new social order in the long run.

Industries of creativity: The modularized society

Both the knowledge factory and industries of creativity entail a new sociotechnical order that often lacks an understanding of the underlying relationships. According to Raunig, the factory of knowledge is not only an assembly of machines and the industry of creativity is also not only an assembly of factories. Both form an assemblage that includes a complex and modulating combination of social subjugation and machinic subservience and certain forms of resistance against this 'modulating amalgam'.

There is no orderly arrangement, no linearity, no fixed time regime or lasting territory that denotes the creative industries (91). That is the reason why Raunig proposes that instead of thinking in terms of entities, scale and quantities, we might be far better off considering factories and industries in terms of socialities, social relations and the complex exchange between bodies and things.

The cultural industries of the early 20th century, unlike the creative industries today, followed the paradigm of serialization and standardization (96). In contrast, our current post-fordist working environment has resulted in creative industries that are marked by outsourcing creative workers, contracting creative

work and thus creating insecurity and precariousness for this group of workers. Only the core management functions of large corporations provide stable working arrangements, while all others are increasingly becoming part-time and limited contract workers.

Whereas the fordist factory focused on producing reliable and efficient working subjects, the creative industries highlight the figure of the self-employed 'cultural entrepreneur' (94). The context of the entrepreneur is often set in micro-enterprises as well as temporary and ephemeral work, contrary to the work within huge and long-term corporations. The entrepreneurial life-world is denoted by a drivenness and subservient deterritorialization that provides access to the total time of individuals, combined with an endless valorisation of the creative work force. From these developments, a precarious 'creative class' (Florida, 2004) emerges, that seems to support and desire a post-fordist lifestyle. As Raunig states, 'we are cogs in an increasingly modularized society, and at the same time we modulate ourselves and the world' (105). Raunig mentions certain characteristics of the new creative class such as their independence, low incomes and the precariousness of their work. Creatives tend to lose state support, and instead of adequate insurance policies, politicians invest money in the 'construction' of creative industries. Another tendency is the rising power of consultants who actively model and propagate the creative world they can 'capitalize on'.

Most of the aspects of Raunig's analysis of creative workers are not new. Several authors have already pointed to the origin and the characteristics of the creative industries and discussed the creative as a role model for the contemporary flexible and self-responsible worker (e.g. Boltanski and Chiapello, 2006; Loacker, 2010; Richter, 2014). However, the strength of Raunig's approach lies in connecting these diagnoses with forms of resistance. He is interested in the relationship between current social changes and their related forms of resistance.

Resistance and 'industriousness' in the creative industry

In chapter four Raunig begins by asking what is new about the creative industries: 'What can it mean when the apparently different and contrary terms of creativity and industry conjoin?' (111). He provides three complementary explanations that shed light on the term of creative industry.

The first explanation for the increased conjoining of creativity and industry is the establishment of the realm of the creative industries by political programmes across Europe. Since the 1990s, public funding is directed more and more

towards economic aspects. For example, Tony Blair's politics was intended to promote creativity as affirmative of and not critical towards the economy and state apparatus (113). Second, a more sociological explanation is provided by Raunig, pointing to the 'democratization of culture' which dates back to the 1970s. This movement resulted into an obligation for everyone to be creative in our time and culture. Third, Raunig mentions the modes of subjectivication in the fields of cultural and creative industries. He points to a conflation of 'self-active subservience and externally determined subjugation through a totalizing system' (118) that marks the cultural and creative industries. The 'creative imperative' is thus not only the effect of servility, but also of a desire of the creative.

However, Raunig also indicates another meaning of the term industrious that does not follow the economization of time (121). The English word 'industrious' points to another kind of industry 'as an inventive reappropriation of time, as a wild and no longer servile industriousness allowing smooth and striated times to newly emerge in the flows of reterritorialization and deterritorialization' (122). Raunig underlines the aspects of busyness and wild industriousness that are just emerging and that are opposed to a servile form of industrialization.

He illustrates these observations by retracing the history of the factories in Northern Italy (Isola). He points to Isola as an example of an artistic project that originally started as a site of the creative industries, but turned into an industrious project, in a non-servile form of industriousness. Until the middle of the 20th century, Isola was a meso-industrial area at the edge of Milan with large factories (123). One of those, Stecca, was built in 1908 and later sold to Siemens. Around 1970, a de-industrialization of the former industrial complexes took place and, in the sequel, provided space for alternative modes of organizing and living. Space was reappropriated by so called counter-cultural initiatives (124). These initiatives preferred the spatial possibilities of old industrial houses for enacting and presenting their artistic work. A soft gentrification took place, as more and more artists joined the old industrial monuments, establishing new working and living practices (130). Pushed by political and economic interests, Isola soon turned into a site of the creative industries, followed by bourgeois art lovers, who raised the rent index and caused a retreat of former working class and migrant families. Around 2005, the idea of turning Stecca into an 'incubator of creativity' was born by politicians and economic actors. One of the factory's most important qualities was the limitation to temporary use, which led to only short-term involvements by artists (133). Due to these short-term engagements, no critical attitude evolved that could have interfered with political or economic interests. However, around 2001, some artists started their own project called 'Isola Art Project' (134). This project was focused more on everyday problems of

the residents and not merely on the monumental site of the old industrial places. Instead, artists started initiating a dialogue with residents. Through this act, an art centre supported by the residents was established. Stecca became a symbol for the invention of a different industry of creativity: an industrious project (135). The emphasis was on the diverse interests of craftspeople, residents and artists (134). For Raunig, this project entails a new meaning of the word industry. This 'industriosity' involves micro-political actions that are depictured by the author as a possibility of reappropriating time in the flows of deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

Raunig explores several examples of artistic and creative resistance similar to these developments in Northern Italy. For him, forms of resistance must carry out both movements: the movement of deterritorialization and the movement of reterritorialization. Applying old forms of resistance as reterritorializing responses, like national unions or class strikes, are not perceived as adequate reactions and may also easily be counteracted. New, more appropriate forms of interventions must be found, again and again, in order to destabilize the given 'time regimes'. As aforementioned, the modulating amalgam of the creative industries promotes access to the total time of individuals. This time regime cannot be resisted by only acting against an existing order. By inventing micro-political activities instead, individuals engage in establishing new practices and self-relations.

Raunig provides further examples of this kind of resistance. He mentions demonstrations in the context of the Arab Spring, social forums and the Occupy movement in Greece, Spain and Israel as parts of the new activism of the 21st century. Such a form of resistance is characterized by three attributes: (a) the search for new forms of living and, (b) new organizational forms, and (c) the insistence on re-appropriating time. Following Raunig, activists who practice such forms of resistance adhere to the goal of giving life a new form, thereby calling for fundamental transformations towards non-subservient and non-conformist modes of living. They also call for organizational forms that are non-representationist, non-hierarchical and radically inclusive by non-overstating power and avoiding individual or collective privileges. These modes of organizing are not homogeneous but form an industrious re-appropriation of time and attempt to reclaim public spaces as common spaces. Even if these movements only last for a short time period, they intend to disrupt the existing social order through changed modes of interaction, living and self-relating.

Following Raunig, examples of these micro-political actions include so-called long horizontal discussions, ad hoc interaction sessions in public spaces and buildings, or the sleeping in tents. These activities point to the possibility of

changing our modes of living, or in Raunig's words, 'to breach the time of subserviant deterritorialization' (50). Activists seemingly aim to resist the given time regime which promotes access to the total time of the individual. However, it is worth asking what effect these ephemeral and temporary events can have in changing the 'modulating amalgam of social subjugation and machinic subservience' (50).

According to Raunig, with the Occupy movement has emerged a force to be reckoned with. This force will ensure that its time will not be stolen. However, how can these forms of resistance change our society and fundamental aspects of it, e.g. the tendency of universities to become knowledge factories or the strange conflation of industry and creativity? Have these movements already changed our way of thinking about resistance and the solution of social problems? What impact will they have in the long run? What are the alternatives if we still have not understood how this 'modulating amalgam of subjugation and subservience' works? Deleuze (1990) pointed to this problem.

Deleuze underlined our task to find out which function and purpose we, as creative workers, are meant to serve within a given sociotechnical order. The focus is on practicing and trying, rather than on forging out plans. In fact, after reading Raunig, it is clear he does not believe the solution for resistance lies in formulating purposes and political agendas. Instead, Raunig points to a new and yet to be developed understanding of factories of knowledge, industries of creativity and related forms of resistance. His work is an invitation to think and discuss these new forms. In our opinion this is the most interesting aspect of his book, although there is no answer in regards to the long-term effects of Occupy.

Critical discussion and evaluation

The reader who wonders about the exact purpose and central message of the Occupy movement, might not be happy after having red *Factories of knowledge, industries of creativity* by Raunig. The reader who expects clear answers, terms, theoretical models, linear descriptions or even quotations will probably be even less happy. Raunig's intention is not to give answers to given questions and established structures of thought and action. His work raises questions, which is a strength of his piecemeal style. For example, he asks questions about the university system, the term creative industries and possible forms of resistance. He thereby provides a detailed analysis of contemporary sociotechnical arrangements.

Although it is not easy to capture every detail, reading the text feels like following Raunig into new and uncharted territory, despite the fact others have tried to research, measure, statistically explore and quantify the problem of political resistance in our society. However, Raunig does not seem to be interested in contributing to these explorations. His argument makes clear that we might have to change our way of thinking, our methods and methodology in order to understand current societal changes and forms of resistance they trigger and enable.

We are used to ask: What is the purpose of this? What is the main question? What is the problem? We forget that expressing a problem is an act of making things graspable, often in order to treat them like things we already know. This is not what Raunig proposes. He suggests observing and acting on processes that are still in the making, not known and that will probably never be known. These processes would be misunderstood by giving prompt answers and formulating problems and clear explanations. Reading the book is a worthwhile undertaking because it gives us an impression of what this kind of 'thinking in processes' could look like. It is Raunig's specific way to guide us to understand situations 'in flow' our everyday life entails that makes this book very insightful and illuminating.

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