RESEARCH ARTICLE

Resisting the Creative Economy on Liverpool's North Shore: Art-Based Political Communication in Practice

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The speed and scale at which Liverpool is redeveloping is indicative of global advances in market-driven geo-economic restructuring, while the creative economy model has been one of the central tenets of urban regeneration over the past forty years. This paper focuses on the construction of a new creative quarter on Liverpool's North Shore Dock, and the modes of creative resistance that are being enacted by some residents in the area. Drawing on qualitative fieldwork that has been carried out over the past two years, this research foregrounds the tensions that exist between two different forms of creativity, and the ways in which these are negotiated, in particular through the use of community-oriented film screenings as part of an activist repertoire that was developed by one artistic collective in the campaign to save their building from demolition. Overall, the paper offers some insight regarding different (often opposing) forms and ideologies of urban redevelopment, pointing towards an alternative politics of place that distances itself from the ever-expanding sphere of the market and the so-called creative economy.

Keywords: Activism; urban redevelopment; creative economy; gentrification; cities; resistance

> 'Are we entering the city of joy or the world of unredeemable boredom?'
> (Lefebvre 1995: 119)

The speed and scale at which the city of Liverpool is redeveloping, mainly upon the back of surplus private capital investment, is indicative of global advances in market driven geo-economic restructuring (Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer 2012). A recent investment prospectus brochure by Regenerating Liverpool states that the city now attracts £1billion worth of investment per annum towards a pipeline of £14billion in investment schemes (Regenerating Liverpool 2019a). The Centre for Cities has found that Liverpool and Barnsley are the two areas of the UK that have been hit hardest by the Conservative's austerity budget cuts, with Liverpool bearing an £816 reduction to council services funding for every person living in

the city (CFC 2019). A recent report in *The Guardian* (Thorp 2019) points out that between 2010–20 Liverpool has seen an overall 64 per cent government funding cut. This situation undoubtedly makes the task of enacting less market-oriented forms of redevelopment within the city more difficult. As David Harvey (1989) has pointed out, over the past few decades city governance has become increasingly bound up with entrepreneurial discourses that promote competition in and between cities, while at the same time the dominant form of urbanisation being carried out in cities all over the world often entails forms of accumulation by dispossession. In this context, planners have attempted to re-define Liverpool as a 'creative city' (Campbell 2019) using a range of communicative practices that tether 'creativity' to profit-oriented discourses. However, this process has been contested in numerous ways.

The so-called 'creative economy' model has been one of the central tenets of urban restructuring over the past forty years (Peck 2005). This paper focuses on the Ten Streets redevelopment project, a recent and ongoing effort to construct a 'creative quarter' on Liverpool's North Shore Dock that the city's mayor, Joe Anderson, has declared will 'redefine Liverpool's economy over the next thirty years' (Regenerating Liverpool 2019b). The 'Ten Streets' referred to are ten streets situated within the wider 'North Atlantic corridor', which has been divided into multiple redevelopment zones in accordance with the Atlantic gateway strategy of Peel Holdings, an investment group who aim to develop the city region into a 'competitive territory *par* excellence' (Harrison 2014: 2316).

This research focuses specifically on one sector of the North Atlantic corridor – a length of ten streets running parallel to each other – because it has been earmarked for the construction of a 'creative quarter', which refers specifically to the establishment of 'creative' businesses and organisations as revivers of economic growth. While John Harrison writes that city-regionalism has 'produced nothing more than a patchwork quilt of assorted, weak and often contradictory and overlapping initiatives that have failed to live up to expectation' (*ibid*), Peter North and colleagues (North, Nurse and Barker, 2017) have framed Liverpool's ongoing redevelopment within a debate around cities and the neo-liberalisation of progress on environmental sustainability. It has also been argued by scholars working in a range of fields that the creative economy has served as little more than a 'veneer for business interests' (Hesmondhalgh et al. 2015), that 'creative cities' actually fail to perform any better economically than other cities (Miller 2009) and that employment in the creative industries is often characterised by precarious and ancillary service positions, and not by stable jobs that value artistic creativity (Peck 2005, Oakley 2011, Kratke 2012, Banks 2017, Mould 2018). Thus there has been a great deal of critical engagement with questions around culture-led urban regeneration (Oakley 2015, Oakley and Ward 2018), not least from those asking questions around cultural value judgements and unequal allocations of power between social groups (Walmesly 2016, Belfiore 2018).

This research carries out a qualitative analysis that is similar in its methodological approach to the work of Kate Newman and Elvin Wyly (2006) who emphasise the importance of 'intensive, qualitative understanding of the multifaceted experiences of residents, community organisers and other individuals living and working in gentrifying neighbourhoods' (Newman and Wyly 2016: 25). Drawing on interviews with residents and business owners within the ten streets that have been conducted intermittently over an approximately two year period, this paper offers a range of critical 'on the ground' perspectives of the redevelopment, before focussing on the ways in which one particular business/residency (an arts gallery, practice facility and recording studio called Dumbulls) campaigned against their possible closure using forms of communicative action that were centred around community film screenings and the formation of a creative space based on principles of autonomy, anti-corporatism and DIY culture (Iveson 2013). Having occupied, renovated and recently purchased what was

formerly The Bull, an old dockers pub built around 1840, two members of the Dumbulls collective now live in the space permanently, with all profits from events (many of which are free or pay by donation) going towards the upkeep of the building and other events costs. A recent offer by developers to purchase Dumbulls was refused, and the building was later marked for demolition (along with a number of other premises) in the initial Ten Streets strategic redevelopment framework (SRF). It is the release of this document that catalysed a range of creative and artistic responses from Dumbulls and others in an effort to stop their buildings being 're-purposed' or demolished. The present research took place within and after this planning and consultation period.

The type of creative resistance that Dumbulls enacts is not simply a 'cooler' version of, nor a mere precursor to, a gentrified creativity wrought by the creative cities model. Nor, however, can it be said that it completely negates the 'sphere of the market'. As has been discussed by Simon Winlow et al. (2015) neoliberal market expansion not only tolerates, but *actually requires and assimilates* forms of artistic rebellion and resistance as frontiers of commodification in the development of a 'resistance market'. Nevertheless, as Peter Lindner (2018) has pointed out, this requirement for endless expansion does not completely destroy the possibility of effective resistance to neoliberal processes of accumulation by dispossession. Indeed, many scholars have argued that the disparity between neoliberal theory and its concrete, localised materialisation allows for new spaces and practices of resistance to emerge (Brenner and Theodore, 2002, Harvey 2005, Dzudzek and Linder 2015, Lindner 2018). With this in mind, this paper foregrounds the tensions between two broadly different, often oppositional, forms and ideologies of urban development and 'creativity', and the ways in which these were articulated and negotiated at the local level. The aim is not to analyse gentrification as such (Smith 1979, Smith and Williams 1986, Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008, Moskowitz 2017) but some specific forms of artistic/communicative resistance that began to develop in tandem with plans for the construction of a 'creative quarter' within the specific context of the city of Liverpool (for a focus on similar studies carried out in different cities see Novy and Colomb 2013, Iveson 2013, Aiello, Tarantino and Oakley 2017, Lindner 2018). Recent studies focussing on the socio-economic history of Liverpool include Rink, et al. 2012, Frost and North 2013, Marren 2016, Campbell 2019.

Contextualising the Ten Streets area and its development in terms of David Harvey's analysis of uneven geographical development (2009, 2011), this paper explicates the ways in which some people within the area have (largely successfully it seems, and for the time being) mobilised against the acquisition of their premises, residencies, and in many respects their way of life, by a large redevelopment project. Dumbulls can be seen as offering potential counterpoints to the urban growth ideology of creative cities because it is a space that allows for de-marketized (though as I have pointed out above, not entirely un-marketized) forms of creative experimentation to flourish, at a distance from the need to make a profit. Overall, the paper aims to provide some insight as to how we might move beyond the creative-entrepreneurial paradigm of city development towards an alternative 'politics of place' (Oakley 2015, Ebrey and Miles 2017). Before moving onto the specific case of Liverpool, however, it is important to discuss the ways in which multifarious discourses around creativity and urban development are communicated and interact with each other.

Communicating the city: Policy and protest

While there has been a great deal of criticism directed at creative cities policy, Lindner's 'critique of the critique' (2018) is useful for the ways in which it understands the disparity between policy and its actual, 'on the ground' implementation. The significance of local context becomes all the more apparent when we consider how, when and why creative cities

policy meets and interacts with different forms and discourses of governance, each of which, according to Lindner, are altered through their processes of interaction, resulting in various 'articulations' and mutations of creative city policy. What much of the existing criticism omits is a focus on *outcomes* rather than the mere 'consequences to be expected' from implementing such policies (Lindner 2018: 102). As Lindner further argues, 'critique of creative industries script is often much less an inductive diagnosis of effects than a deductive prognosis of future implications' (*ibid*). Aiming to bridge this divide (specifically in a study of creativity policy in Frankfurt) Lindner employs 'assemblage thinking ... [which] offers the possibility of avoiding the inconsistency between ideological programs and practices' (Lindner 2018: 103). In mapping the various assemblages of creative cities policy outcomes within Frankfurt, Lindner points towards the ways in which:

> These assemblages accommodate, envelop and conceal, conserve and carry on the potential for opposition, and allow it to pop up at unexpected places and times. Above all, they can produce new forms and content of critique rooted in encounters, relations and friction between the constituent parts of the assemblage itself (Lindner 2018: 112).

Although culture and creativity can be mobilised in the service of financial profit, this process could (and does, according to Lindner) give rise to unintended consequences. Johannes Novy and Claire Colomb have demonstrated this in their study of how cultural producers, despite (or because of) the increased instrumentalisation of arts and culture enter protest movements in a struggle to communicate alternative discourses of the city. These authors focus on how creative cities policy was articulated throughout the Media Spree project in Kreuzberg, Berlin (to use one of their examples) via its interaction with 'an existing dense fabric of artistic, musical and sub-cultural activities' (Novy and Colomb 2013: 1825). In its efforts to utilise Kreuzberg's 'alternative image ... as a key asset which could serve as a catalyst for the clustering of creative industries in the area' (*ibid*) the Media Spree project unintentionally gave rise to a hugely successful anti-gentrification movement that eventually moved 'beyond the particularities of the individual project and into the realms of a more general critique of the urban development policies of the Berlin senate' (Novy and Colomb 2013: 1826). Although Novy and Colomb's study does not focus on the shifting discourses of creative policy and protest, for Lindner this (perhaps unsuccessful) 'articulation' of creative policy may demonstrate the rift between neoliberal theory and practice, as well as the unintended consequences that arise.

   Similarly, the Ten Streets project has sharpened distinctions between alternative discourses of creativity, giving rise to unintended consequences such as resident mobilisation against some of the plans. Between approximately January 2017 and January 2019 I was able to carry out research on this subject through an ethnographic process of 'deep hanging out' (Geertz 1998, Walmsley 2018), which stresses the importance of long term immersion in a given social setting in order to capture the microscopic ways of being in the world enacted by subjects, which then serve to illuminate their relations to objective structures. I first became aware of the Ten Streets development through participation in a network of artists, cultural producers and music venues based in and around the area. Rather than 'recruit' research participants, as a frequent visitor to Dumbulls I developed a relationship with the collective over time, which enabled me to carry out interviews, as well as to hold informal discussions with group members and other residents in the ten streets, and to attend public and private meetings, screening events and club nights. While this paper is heavily informed by this 'microscopic' perspective, I also conducted ten semi-structured interviews of around ninety minutes in length, each of which focussed primarily on the subjects' interactions with the Ten Streets development project. Of these interviewees, six were members of the Dumbulls collective, and four were residents and business owners in the area who worked on similar

artistic projects, or ran music venues, studios and/or practice spaces. Given the geographic size of the area, this is a large enough sample to gain an understanding of the ways in which existing creative businesses view these new efforts to construct a 'creative quarter'. Due to the slow moving nature of the redevelopment, interviews took place at different points throughout the two year period (during which I was intermittently working on other projects), and tended to take place at points just after there had been a significant occurrence concerning the redevelopment, such as the release of a new document or a new point in the negotiation between residents, developers and Liverpool City Council. Interviewees asked not to be named, as at the time these negotiations were ongoing, and will continue into the future in different forms as the development progresses. There is/was a sense among interviewees that talking openly about certain matters may have as yet unforeseeable personal and/or collective consequences. Therefore each person has been given an alias, such as 'Karen', and only information that is absolutely necessary has been provided regarding their status.

Context: De-industrialisation and regeneration

Liverpool's gradual shift from an industrial port city to an economy heavily invested in culture and tourism is (as one might expect) most apparent within the city centre. Despite the billions in private investment that are being poured into the city, the UK's 2015 indices of multiple deprivation found Liverpool to be the fourth most deprived local authority district in the country (UK Gov. 2015), with the most severe deprivation being found at the 'inner core' which surrounds the city centre (LCC 2015). The ward of Kirkdale, where the North Shore Dock is located, is currently the most deprived lower super output area (LSOA) in Liverpool (*ibid*). Of course, the present situation has historical antecedents. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Liverpool was built by a system of merchant capitalism into one of the most important cities for British trade and imperialism. Between 1870–1914 the city was part of a globalised economy that in one year (1857) shipped almost half of all British exports (Wilkes-Heeg 2003, 40). This 'take-off phase' of globalisation 'was based on a system of raw material production at the [global] periphery and manufacturing in the core' (Wilkes-Heeg 2003: 38), as well as Liverpool's favourable position to the west of the UK, which made it easier to trade with the Commonwealth. After 1913 capital began withdrawing from the city, reflecting a decline of British imperial power and the UK's status as an exporter of manufactured goods. As commonwealth trade declined and European trade increased, Liverpool's geographical location became inconvenient, and the focus of activity shifted decisively to east coast ports and those in the south, such as Southampton.

Earlier forms of globalisation based on state imperialism, and in particular British colonialism, have over time become supplanted by a new international division of labour that 'has seen manufacturing locate to the [global] periphery and semi-periphery' (Wilkes-Heeg 2003: 38). The main drivers of this shift have been finance capital and multinational corporations, while the role of the state has been reduced to ensuring the functioning of markets and the deliverance of nature to capital (Parenti 2011, Moore 2015). Thus the large-scale de-industrialisation and depopulation of Liverpool throughout the latter half of the 20th century can be attributed to changes in global trading patterns and the emergence of this new division of labour. As part of this, Liverpool suffered the effects of branch plant closures as corporations began to relocate their manufacturing bases to the 'global periphery'. According to Stuart Wilkes-Heeg, in the period 1975–78, 50,000 job redundancies were made in Merseyside (Wilkes-Heeg 2003: 49). Richard Meegan (2003) notes that 'over the longer period, 1978–1991, 37 per cent of jobs disappeared (a loss of just under 9,000 jobs per year). The local economy was devastated. Unemployment soared and out-migration accelerated' (Meegan 2003: 58). In 1987 the Labour Party expelled 47 Liverpool councillors who made up the so-called militant socialist tendency, a significant step in the Party's movement away from socialist policies towards a newly emerging

neoliberal 'centre-ground' (Frost and North 2013). The 1995 dockers strike occurred at a time when 'Thatcher's Trade Union Acts had suffocated a once militant British trade union movement' and 'there was growing belief amongst Liverpool's dockers that national union officials and the Labour Party establishment was no longer interested in their concerns' (Marren 2016: 468). Thus, according to Brian Marren:

> The containerisation of shipping cargoes and the subsequent job losses was the final knockout blow for many of Liverpool's working class … From 1989 to 1992, approximately 80 per cent of dockworkers left the industry. Between 1989 and 1995, the number of employees at the Mersey Dock and Harbour Company (MDHC) dropped from 1,100 to 500. The TGWU [Transport and General Workers Union], representing nearly all dockers, was marginalised in most ports, and its leading activists were blacklisted and labelled union militants (Marren 2016: 466, 468).

In this context, contemporary regeneration and de-industrialisation are both part of a global process of uneven geographical development. David Harvey, for example, highlights how:

> Capital creates a geographical landscape that meets its needs at one point in time, only to have to destroy it at a later point in time to facilitate capital's further expansion and qualitative transformation. Capital unleashes the powers of 'creative destruction' upon the land. Some factions benefit from creativity, while others suffer from destruction. Invariably this involves a class disparity (Harvey 2014: 155).

Just as large numbers of people suffered greatly as a result of de-industrialisation, so others continue to be maligned and threatened in the contemporary period of regeneration.

Recent migration to the ten streets

Although many wholesale and smaller manufacturing businesses have remained or become operative in the ten streets area over the past thirty years, these have recently become mixed with creative businesses and residences (often the work and living spaces are one and the same), as artists and some small businesses began to occupy and renovate empty buildings, many of which suffer from post-industrial rot, but which nevertheless provide cheap accommodation/working space. As such, the area has been described by some residents as 'lawless' because 'you can get away with anything down here' (personal communication, October 2017). This tongue in cheek characterisation suggests a perceived lack of institutional structure that arises from the ten streets having been largely ignored by Liverpool City Council for the past forty years. Here the 'getting away with' may indicate criminality (and the area does have such a reputation within the city), but it also entails the ability to live in relative distance from the financial and material restrictions of 'the market'. This relative freedom allows artists in particular to take risks and experiment, with some having subsequently developed larger studios and practice areas that are now used by people from various parts of the city. Along with cheaper (and sometimes legally questionable) living situations in the area comes the ability for artists to obtain materials due to their close proximity to industrial businesses. As 'Karen', an artist living in a former warehouse, explains:

> What's great about this area is there is everything here. You can get wood, you can get metal, you can get things welded. You can get your car fixed, you can get your tires fixed … You can park, so you can get loads of stuff. It really is a useful part of town (personal communication, October 2017).

The migration of artists to the ten streets around 2010–15 is largely attributable to the recent redevelopment of the Baltic triangle, an area in which many had formerly lived, and which had a similar physical infrastructure of cheap to rent, former industrial buildings. 'Dave', a small business owner who had recently been forced to move from the Baltic Triangle to a warehouse on the ten streets, gives his perspective on the current development of the latter.

> I've noticed recently there's a definite feeling of angst among myself and my friends. There was talk for years of developing the Tobacco Warehouse [the largest brick building in Europe, due to become luxury flats, and the centrepiece of the Ten Streets development] and it never really happened. Then it just happened really quickly, and then suddenly there were planners making meetings, saying 'oh we want to do all this', and making nice pictures where they've just completely knocked out people's buildings, which they currently work in, and it's a bit like 'oh right, wow'. Because essentially these companies have millions if not billions to throw at their projects, and it does feel like we could get pushed aside, which has happened in other parts of the city. An obvious example is the Baltic Triangle, where it was quite a creative hub for artists and such, and venues as well. But what happened was they stuck up a load of flats everywhere and a lot of people lost out, and some of those people have moved up here and started doing things here [the ten streets], which has created a bit of life in this area, which is good, but it seems to have happened partly because of the problems which low-budget creative types have had in other parts of the city (personal communication, October 2017).

Others felt as if their way of being in the world had been classed as 'illegitimate' by the very forces who aim to enclose the cultural value that they have created. As 'Claire', an artist living in the ten streets, puts it:

> I'm not even legitimate. I can't say I exist down here [in the ten streets] … We all have to be legit and stay in line. We can't be DIY or underground, we have to be this and that, stick to the rules. And it's like 'hang on a minute, aren't we the reason this is an interesting area?' There are loads of amazing businesses around here and no one's talking about them. We're only here because we're all survivors … Our culture, DIY art culture, gets reappropriated by someone who's a little bit further up the pecking order than us … I don't give a fuck if they're nice people or not. I just feel like I'm watching my culture get absolutely smashed to the fucking ground and we're told that we're not legitimate and we just get moved on because who's got our backs? (personal communication, October 2017).

Karen reported having to move cities three times in the past five years as a result of gentrification.

> I'm only here because I had to leave […] I'm going to be homeless in a couple of years again, without a fucking doubt … because they've criminalised my way of living. It's absolutely draining. My dad's not going to just chuck me a grand at me and be like 'ah, it's alright'. I don't have that. And I'm not trying to get the violins out because I'm proud of my culture and where I come from … I just need somewhere to live. I can't do this anymore (personal communication, October 2017).

This is not to suggest that these residents are entirely against redevelopment. The broad point of view is that it is badly needed, particularly in terms of infrastructure. The proviso is that redevelopment should not force existing residents and businesses out of the area through

heightened rents, a prospect that is all the more foreboding considering multi-million pound projects such as the new Everton FC football stadium, due to be built at Bramley Moore dock, and the £5.5 billion Liverpool Waters cruise liner terminal being constructed to the South at Princes Dock. Both of these developments border the ten streets. It is unclear how the construction of a football stadium to the north, as well as the development of a cruise liner terminal to the south, ties into the idea of the ten streets area as a 'creative quarter'.

Dumbulls: The campaign

There has been a great deal of scholarly work on the ways in which artists contribute to urban development (Zukin, 1989, 2009, Murzyn-Kupisz and Działek 2017) and, more specifically, how artistic collectives have attempted to subvert, resist and occasionally even collaborate with top-down impositions of the creative economy model within various localities. Examining some of these, Aleksandra Nenko et al. (2017), draw a distinction between top-down spatial logics enacted by city authorities and economic elites, and bottom-up logics often tenuously brought to bear by local communities. At the same time, however, the authors problematize this binary through a discussion of the nuanced, locally specific tactics used by artistic collectives to communicate resistance and alternatives to the creative economy model of city regeneration. The activist repertoire that was developed by Dumbulls during the Ten Streets planning and consultation process primarily aimed to draw public attention to the organisation as a community hub with strong links to cultural institutions in the city centre. In this way the organisation sought to 'legitimise' itself while countering a specific (re)characterisation of the area as a wholly derelict 'blank slate', a phrase which the Dumbulls collective had personally complained to developers about their use of. As 'Gary', a musician and member of the collective, explains:

> They [the developers] put a statement online saying it [the ten streets] is a 'blank slate', as if there's no one down here anyway so they can do whatever. So I spoke to one of them [the developers], saying how there's lots of people living and working down here already, and that it's not a 'blank slate' at all … He apologised to me, and said it was a 'PR faux pas' … It gives you some idea of how much research they've actually done on this area (personal communication, February 2018).

This example points to some ways in which images of the city are communicated and disrupted, a point that will be examined in more detail below. Information on the Ten Streets development is largely communicated to the public through local print and online publications such as the *Liverpool Echo*, *Place North West* and *Liverpool Express*, all of which view the development uncritically if not favourably, as if 'growth' as such is inherently benign (see Liverpool Express 2017, 2018). The basis of this media portrayal (or at least a part of that basis) resides in the sheer density of approval of the creative industries paradigm among developers, council members, and people working in the media. As Oli Mould writes:

> There is a plethora of policy literature that all purports to similar ideals – to implement policies of 'creativity' to help upscale the city's social well-being, infrastructure, cultural participation and economic vitality. However … they also use the language of creativity uncritically … as a byword for positivity and unproblematic functionality. Such language has become 'fast urban policy'. This means that they are the policies of contemporary urban governments designed less to tackle the root causes of many difficult social, cultural and economic challenges … and more to excuse and justify activities that

promote and valorise economic production and profit- making for interested private (and public) stakeholders at the expense of everything else (Mould 2018: 17).

It is worth re-emphasising that between 2010–2020 Liverpool will have lost 64 per cent of its government funding, a fact that may make this form of 'fast urban policy' all the more appealing. Yet Liverpool also has a history of more community-led instances of regeneration that is rooted in a 'do-it-yourself' mentality (Taylor 2011). This set of DIY tactics has been examined in some detail by Kurt Iveson (2013), who argues that individualised practices and the 'unintended' uses of urban space could potentially be linked and politicised through a form of urban politics built around a 'right to the city' discourse. In the case of the ten streets, the image of 'benign growth' was countered publicly (or at least problematised) largely by a music scene that often suffers from the 'regeneration' of venues into luxury flats or student accommodation. A debate took place among smaller print and online publications such as *Bido Lito*, a newspaper that focuses on new music and creative culture in the city, as well as websites such as The Skinny, The State of the Arts.co.uk and Getintothis.co.uk, who publicised an exchange that had taken place on Twitter between one of its journalists and Liverpool City Council, the result of which was that the latter then made a public declaration that Dumbulls was 'not under threat', despite the plans outlined in the Ten Streets SRF (Getintothis.co.uk 2017). According to Dumbulls member, 'Karina', this was the point where the collective began to feel that their multifaceted, six month long campaign, was beginning to have a positive effect:

> The whole thing was really stressful. Privately we were going to all these meetings with councillors, planners, we were meeting up with the architects … In total I think we spoke to about nine professionals about it [the demolition of the building] from all different areas … And then we had the public bit where we recruited all these people to work on various different bits of the campaign, and we had everyone sending in feedback forms, writing what Dumbulls means to you and all that … Obviously Reel Merseyside [the program of community film screenings] as well … and then all of a sudden there was a wave of local music media getting onto it, the *Bido Lito*'s and *The Skinny*'s, and so you had all those guys catching on to there being a story around us … So before you know it we've got this huge campaign. We've got the public, all the people who live in the area and come to our venue writing how much they want it to stay, we've got different venues saying it, and then we've got actual councillors saying 'we will support you'. The thing where we knew it had changed was there was a Twitter post where […] had challenged the council, who then said that we were safe. So at that point we didn't just have to try and trust that what they were saying was true. We've got it written down publicly now (personal communication, April 2018).

The ten streets regeneration, as well as the campaign itself, has had a personal effect on some members of the Dumbulls collective, who have struggled to understand how their seemingly insignificant organisation could be implicated in national and global processes of uneven geographical development. As 'Gavin', an artist, collective member and cultural worker, commented in retrospect:

> Our weird little world of music and film and creative expression, which I truly believe is just a form of healthy living in order to get through whatever weird stuff we put ourselves through in our normal lives, this way to release and communicate and to enjoy other people's abilities, for that to somehow tie into this insane thing that was

unfolding. You just had to sit back and go 'what the fuck is going on here?' It's absurd … Nothing validates this place [Dumbulls] more than the whole idea of what's going on around it. We couldn't be more attached, and we couldn't be more dis-attached … We couldn't be more naively, unknowingly involved in it as we are easily painted as part of it (personal communication, September 2018).

As noted above, the forms of activism developed throughout the Dumbulls campaign were predicated on a form of DIY creativity that involves working autonomously, often with limited resources, a close to zero budget, and a system of mutual benefit structured upon non-hierarchical, or what Deleuze and Guattari (1982) have called 'rhizomatic', social relations and networks. This form of creativity is markedly different from the corporatist mode advocated by the creative economy discourse with its combination of 'democratic citizenship and competitive commercialism … tailored to both "new labour" and late capitalism' (Pope 2005). It is historically rooted in squatting culture, 'trash aesthetics' (Stam 2003), and exists in a constant tension vis-à-vis systems, whose primary motivation is to make a profit. For these reasons it resists 'colonisation' (Habermas 2009) by market forces. As noted above, however, it does not completely stand apart from such forces. Dumbulls should not be viewed as some sort of bulwark against the expansion of capital in the same way, perhaps, as other militant and trade union organisations in Liverpool have been. Yet the mode of creativity Dumbulls enacts does offer some small examples of alternative forms of urban development, the value of which lies primarily in its distance from the market, the freedoms that this distance entails, and the kinds of community oriented space that may be created as a result. As Gavin puts it:

> What we call our DIY culture and our way of doing things is as much a disease on this area [the ten streets] as a tapas bar and ten pounds a pint … This idea, this thing that we do, it's a privileged pastime. It's a healthy, privileged pastime … It's just that we hope we have more of a community conscious idea of our place in all of this, which is clearly missing from other people's re-generational ideas. And I would never say for a second that 'we're way more conscious than those guys'. It's just that what we do naturally lends itself to a community … When a company that is not physically in that area is operating to do something they're not doing it in the same way, I presume. From what I can tell they sit in other buildings with people who are doing similar projects from all over the world. So their view, their way of being, is a little less attached to the actual area than the view of a group of people who are in the area, bouncing off each other, chatting away, learning, conspiring, thinking and trying to work out what the fucks going on … We [Dumbulls] are privileged enough, now that we own this building, to not have to worry about a financial return, but that's clearly not the same business model as someone that redevelops an enormous, beautiful old building … There's definitely going to be strange goings on with those two things existing in the same area (personal communication, September 2018).

Here, Gavin is commenting not only on the tensions between DIY and corporate forms of 'creativity', but on his own group's place as an artist collective within the wider Kirkdale community. Questions begin to arise as to which members of this latter community have access to the kinds of spaces Dumbulls creates. The comment that 'we are just as much a disease on this area as a tapas bar' suggests a self-deprecating and guilty view regarding this relationship. Yet he also suggests that this is perhaps mitigated by Dumbulls capacity (or at least the desire) for community building, and, as such, this constitutes a different 'articulation' of creativity than the 'outsider' or corporate forms of the Ten Streets development. Another Dumbulls member,

'Jane', spoke of these two different forms of creativity and the potential consequences of their interaction, stating that the development represents:

> A very corporate and manufactured idea of what a creative place is. The same as the Baltic Triangle is basically, even though they [the council and developers] keep saying they're going to learn from their mistakes … It just doesn't feel comfortable, and I know a lot of people around here have been struggling with it. Hopefully we'll have a chance to shape that, and that's what I'm hoping for with this consultation, that we'll get a say, and that the DIY, independent spaces that have been here for a while get to stay, and it won't be lots of outside people coming in and just ticking their boxes … They can't just come in a bulldoze over everything is what I'm saying (personal communication, April 2018).

Dumbulls: Community film screenings

Dumbulls form of DIY centred creative resistance is best exemplified in the community film screenings programmed as part of their campaign against closure. Typically, the setup included a projector in a shopping basket that was hung from the ceiling, a white sheet hung on the wall opposite (which acts as the screen), and an arrangement of 30–40 chairs. The projector itself was borrowed from a local film group, the L15 projector and cinema co-operative, who lend their equipment to anyone who would like to screen a film, the only proviso being everybody on the group's Facebook page receive an invite (about 700 people overall, although usually no more then 20–30 actually show up). Entry fee to Dumbulls screenings is charged by donation, while food is cooked in the Dumbulls kitchen and served on the same basis. Films are usually introduced by the filmmakers, and screenings are often followed by an audience discussion. Given that the program is often comprised by a selection of shorts, audience members often chat to each other between films. This set of 'community exhibition practices' constitutes what Miriam Ross (2013) has called an 'interstitial viewing space' that is situated somewhere between the highly regulated space of the corporate multiplex 'in which the audience member could effectively be absent' (Ross 2013: 449) and the conversely relaxed, person-centred space offered by the home viewing of films. As Ross notes, interstitial viewing spaces are often predicated on a breaking down of the proximity between audience and screening equipment. The kinds of interaction that occur between audience, text and space can be contrasted with the more systematised set of behavioural principles that are enacted within the modern multiplex in which, according to Ross, 'we are governed rather than asked to participate' (Ross 2013: 452). Community film exhibition 'offers an alternative to the standardized viewing of film texts that [is] promoted through commercial networks' (Ross 2013: 451). The active participation that is encouraged with and among audience members in this space means that:

> Networked audiences are connected through these community groups rather than the multimedia conglomerates that currently reach out to wide numbers of home-viewing audiences … In this way cultural activity as a shared social bond is emphasized at a time when the movie theatre frequently aims to anonymise its participants and home viewing increasingly moves towards individual screens (Ross 2013: *ibid*).

The criteria for selecting films is loosely based on screening those that are locally made and/or about the history of Liverpool. The choice of the name 'Reel Merseyside' highlights an incentive toward countering 'official' discourses and images of the city with an alternative or in this case 'reel' (which could also mean localised) set of perspectives, the strength of which lies in its dialogism, as opposed to the comparatively monological voice of city

planners driven primarily by a growth/capital expansion agenda. 'John', a Reel Merseyside programmer, musician and social worker, put it this way:

> Redevelopment tends to homogenise … I don't think spaces and communities are particularly well represented, especially when whole cities are redeveloped. Part of what we've been trying to do is make sure people, myself included, have an understanding of our history, but exhibiting local filmmakers is about trying to give people representation … I'll show anything, however difficult or obscure. We [Dumbulls] have a lot more freedom [than other arts institutions and cinemas in the city] because we do everything for nothing, and because we're small we can give people the space to do whatever they want … I've never thought of us as curators so much as we are facilitators. Even if a film is a bit difficult, it's not like just sitting at home on YouTube scrolling through nonsense. You've got people who have created this thing and they want to express it, and we can give them that avenue (personal communication, March 2019).

This statement points to a situation in which 'illegitimate' forms of cultural expression are either subsumed within the parameters of the ever expanding creative economy or shutdown altogether, in a process of what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1995) have described as the 'excision of the incommensurable', that is, the annihilation of that which resists any place within a system of relations instrumentalised towards meeting the needs of capital. Yet the incommensurable is precisely that which spaces like Dumbulls nurtures, and it is in the Reel Merseyside screenings that a public sphere of filmmakers and audiences began to solidify around this notion, as a form of 'counter-public' (Fraser 1992) that stands apart from (but, once again, not completely outside of) the market and the larger, more profit-oriented arts and cultural institutions in the city. Ironically, this congealing of many incommensurable components – films with no economic future, donation based fees, and an interstitial viewing space in which, as John explains, 'we literally just built everything out of shit bits of wood and stuff' (personal communication, March 2019) – is that which allowed Dumbulls to make an argument that their organisation actually *fits in* with the developers supposed vision for the construction of a 'cultural quarter'. John further comments on Dumbulls tactical use of film screenings, noting in retrospect that:

> We never wanted to create a tension or clash [with the developers and council] because that would be dangerous. People said 'should we protest?' [about the possible closure of the building] and we didn't think in this instance that would be particularly helpful. We realised that we had to make the case of how we tied into their plans. That we didn't contradict that … When the SRF came out it was worrying. Part of that document marked us as grade C, meaning we don't add anything to what they said was the 'character of the area', and we were like, well, we've been showing local films and bringing together a bunch of different artistic communities. The council had said 'we want something culturally different'. And when we felt the space was being threatened that's when we went 'well coincidentally we're actually doing some culturally different stuff' … So we had something tangible to show to the people who had come up with this language (personal communication, March 2019).

Conclusion
In this way Dumbulls was able to cast itself as 'legitimate' precisely by pointing towards its cultural and creative points of difference, or what could be described as the organisation's 'incommensurability' with the creative economy model. As noted above, it is within such

incommensurable and/or interstitial space that forms of creativity are able to flourish, unbeholden to profit requirements. More specifically, this was the Dumbulls precise and tactically articulated version of creativity, which was also put forward as a form of defence against the form of creativity articulated by the Ten Streets project. In keeping with both Lindner's and Novy and Colomb's conclusions, the result was that plans for a 'creative quarter' that existed on paper (that is, in theory) had to be altered in the process of their material implementation. Of course, this implementation was made more difficult because Dumbulls own the building, and as such have a lot more power and control than other, similar organisations in Liverpool and elsewhere. As an ongoing redevelopment, it remains to be seen what form this particular 'assemblage' of creative cities policy will take, and, importantly, where and how local actors such as Dumbulls will be able to communicate their visions of urban development and influence its trajectory in the area. Nevertheless, the argument presented here around the need for certain areas/spaces/venues/organisations within cities that are allowed to operate (and, importantly, are *funded* to operate) at a deliberate and consciously guarded distance from the inherently expansive sphere of the market and capital relations remains valid, and should, perhaps, be considered as a prerequisite for urban planners that value a genuine cultural diversity, rather than one in which the localised differences that rouse our worldly experience are simply 'absorbed within the calculi of political economy' (Harvey 2013: 100). While Dumbulls activity naturally lends itself to forms of 'creative resistance' to the 'creative economy', it is also, as has been shown, capable of facilitating community, particularly by providing a space for those whose work is generally unacceptable within the cultural parameters set by larger arts institutions. Thus there is a clear role for arts and cultural spaces and practices in contributing to some form of social 'cohesion', as there is scope for further research on the relations between social and environmental sustainability, particularly insofar as activists operating at both ends of this spectrum find a common ground in their needs and desires for urban subversion.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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