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Input

Workshop II
Performing Arts and Culture in the City:
New Fields of Action for Cultural and Citizenship Education

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Popular Culture and Inclusion/ Exclusion in Urban Public Space

It is certainly the case that culture – high, popular and the enclaves between – can be a mobilizing force for encouraging citizens to use public spaces (see Bianchini and Parkinson 1992, Landry, 2000). The NECE conference in Trieste showcased a number of innovative contemporary case studies where social media, in particular, was increasingly being used to bring people together in public space. In cities across Europe there are cases of creative and dynamic urban interventions. The community theatre project ('The angel, the street and happiness') from Amsterdam is an exciting example of bottom up, ground-breaking work in social inclusion. The organisers of this project highlighted the need for pre planning and follow on work. This has resource implications and requires solid funding or the goodwill and unpaid labour of those involved. In times of austerity, when arts funding is at the forefront of cuts, the viability of formal funding looks uncertain. The Bubble project from Vilnius revealed that social networking activities have a major role to play in encouraging new uses of public space in a world where the notion of public space is in its infancy. However, as Gabriele Klein noted, the whole notion of public space is entirely context specific. Klein highlighted how the notion of public space in Italy, for example, is entirely different to other national, regional and socio-political contexts. To debate this issue at European level is both fascinating and challenging.

In my paper I seek to discuss a case where popular culture has changed the face and profile of the UK city of Manchester. I will highlight the conditions that allowed for popular culture to flourish but I will also highlight the problems and difficulties that have emerged along the way. I want to consider whether popular culture had an impact in creating new, or different, public spaces.

Manchester is the third largest city in the UK. It was the birthplace of industrial revolution – a city mainly built on the textile industry. A city where the 'conditions of the English working class' were so terrible they were a much used case study in order to examine the exploitation of the urban poor. Like many other western industrial cities, during the 1970s Manchester experienced severe deindustrialisation, economic and urban crisis. The city (and wider region) suffered from high levels of unemployment. There was a dearth of cultural facilities and lack of use of the city – especially in

the evenings. In addition to the ravages of deindustrialisation Manchester experienced a great deal of modernist planning which also saw the destruction of sites of urban engagement (Mole, 1996).

The period, in which these negative effects were at their most severe, the mid to late 1970s coincided with the emergence of punk. Although punk was not 'invented' in Manchester it certainly caught the imagination of a number of disaffected young people in this city and the surrounding area. Manchester's punk inspired pub and club scene has been extensively documented (see Savage (2005), Middles (2009), Haslam (1999), Milestone (1996)) and celebrated in Celluloid (such as in the feature films *24 Hour Party People* (2002) and *Control* (2007)). The impact of punk in Manchester mobilized groups of young people to become engaged in new forms of cultural production. The ethos of punk was that you could do it yourself. There was no need for professional training or high levels of cultural capital. People were empowered by punk to create their own fashions, make music, to set up fanzines and club nights. Bands such as Joy Division and The Buzzcocks came first. A few years later they were followed by the Smiths, then the Happy Mondays, Stone Roses and Oasis. Significantly many of these bands stayed in the area. The impact of this was that a supporting infrastructure for cultural industries began to develop in the city. A significant facet of this infrastructure was directly connected with Factory Records. Tony Wilson was an innovative leader who, as a journalist and presenter at Granada TV, was able to use his positions and contacts to promote the cultural scene. In neighbouring Liverpool 15 years earlier, bands such as the Beatles had no choice but to leave the city. In the 1960s most regional British cities had no media and cultural industries apart from local newspapers, radio and TV. The popular music industry was squarely clustered in London. That record labels were established in Manchester was to have an important role to play in the denouement of the Manchester story.

Concurrent to punk and post punk another lesser-known but equally significant underground culture was in flow. This was the northern soul scene. Although not restricted to the north of England the scene was very active in the Manchester area. This, like punk, involved a number of pop cultural entrepreneurial activities including DJing, buying and selling records and organising club nights (see Hollows and Milestone, 1998).

What was happening by the early 1980s was that a distinct regional cultural infrastructure was emerging. This happened in other UK regional cities too (such as Sheffield and Bristol). This was significant because it presented a hegemonic challenge to London's control of the nation's cultural production infrastructure. However it should be noted that under Labour's Ken Livingstone's leadership of the Greater London Council radical new approaches to community based cultural production and investment in seedbed cultural industries was taking place. There were new approaches to cultural development, which were increasingly focused on working class culture, Black and minority ethnic groups, women and other groups who had hitherto been excluded from cultural production. The GLC approach was significant because as well as trying to make the arts and cultural more inclusive they also saw the economic potential of culture and supported the development of new cultural industries. In deprived northern UK cities some Local Authorities tried to invest actively in new cultural production infrastructure as a way of trying to combat the loss of jobs in the area. The northern English city of Sheffield for example set up the world's first municipally funded recording studio and Audio Visual Enterprise centre. It also developed a cultural industries quarter. This had mixed success. Manchester was very successful in establishing itself as a pop city. Compared to Sheffield Manchester had the advantage of an international airport, northern headquarters of national media organizations and a huge higher education sector. A lot of Manchester's success was due to luck and happenstance. By the late 1980s pop tourists were flocking to the city, the city's universities experienced improved university applications and the cultural industries sector grew (see O'Connor 2001).

A specific area of Manchester became very strong in terms of its pop cultural offering. This area became known as the Northern Quarter. This was an area of the city, which although very central, was outside of the official regeneration zones. Because the area was run down and showing signs of decay, rents were affordable and there was plenty of available space. Because of its central location and affordability the area experienced a flourishing of sites of cultural production, retail and leisure facilities. There were many attractive commercial and industrial buildings, the site of the old market and many traditional pubs. The area had an intimacy and atmosphere that was not available in the other parts of the city that had undergone ill thought out modernisation in the 1960s and 1970s. In contrast to the concrete monstrosities nearby, the rescuing of the northern quarter was bottom up, small scale and ad hoc. The area developed as a site of pop cultural retail and pop cultural production. In terms of retail the market based in a Victorian department store, Affleck's Palace, was crucial. Market stalls could be cheaply rented and this provided new opportunities for small-scale cultural production and entrepreneurialism. Fashion designers, record collectors, pop artists had an avenue to sell their work and make a living. As some of these business grew they relocated to larger premises in the northern quarter. Cultural producers were drawn to the area – fashion designers, graphic designers, record labels, and recording studios. Cafés, bars and restaurants also opened in the area. Here then was a very solid and holistic chain of pop cultural production, consumption and representation. An interesting new form of public space began to emerge – albeit a space squarely aimed at a particular group of young people with high levels of cultural capital.

By the late 1980s early 1990s Manchester was world renowned for its pop music and club culture – much like swinging London in the 1960s or New York in the 1970s. Although they had emerged from the ground up, after a while the City Council realised their significant cultural asset and began to formally support local cultural industries. The city council funded Cultural Industries Development Service provided business support, networking activities and promotion for local cultural businesses (see O'Connor and Gu, 2010)

Increasingly the Manchester music story was incorporated into official narratives about the city and in particular it's marketing material. The Factory Records graphic designer, Peter Saville, was enlisted as the creative director of the city brand. Manchester's regeneration through pop culture is seen as success story and the city has experienced a good deal of what has been described as 'policy tourism'. It is indeed a charming story. If not over romanticized. Where are the women, where are the creative young people from Manchester's black and minority ethnic populations in this narrative? A dominant version of popular culture has been imposed on the city.

But what of Manchester did longer term? What impact has this had on the city? Did the city managers learn from this experience and utilize its home-grown cultural assets in its future regeneration? Of course it is hard, impossible, to talk about the city as a whole. The city council has some power but limited resources. There are other powerful forces at stake in defining urban space and community use. There is much celebration of Manchester's regeneration through pop culture. Some of those involved in the underground punk and post-punk scenes of the 1970s and 1980s are now involved in the mainstream development of the city. The boom (and oversupply) of city centre living has been marketed in terms of providing a hedonistic lifestyle for the 'creative class'. Indeed the late Tony Wilson (founder of Factory Records) was a fan of Richard Florida and Manchester appears to have a high score in terms of Florida's creativity index. Whilst there have been many innovative and positive examples of using Manchester's 'unique' cultural assets (its pop music and gay culture) for regeneration there is also a danger that exclusionary, mono cultural public spaces are being created that exclude large sectors of Manchester's citizens.

Manchester city centre was bombed by the IRA during the Euro 96 Football championships. There were no fatalities. The 70s retail monstrosity, the Andale centre was badly damaged. This was used by the city as an opportunity to reconfigure the city centre and to create a new space, which came to be marketed as 'the millennium quarter'. As part of this that which had been a hippy market in the old Corn exchange building was replaced by 'the Triangle – an up-market retail space targeted at a small layer of rich consumers. Here an important space for non-corporate, non-mainstream retail was displaced by corporate capitalism. The newly designed public space of the Millenium quarter attracted hordes of young people – mainly Goths, Moshers, EMOs and skaters. However these groups have not been welcomed and the work of Joanne Massey clearly shows how these young people are being 'designed out' of the area. For all its claims to be a new city centre public space, its focus as a retail space has brought with it huge levels of regulation and surveillance.

In terms of the city centre there has been a focus on property development – much of it problematic in the light of the crash. There is an emphasis on high-end retail, glass towers and sanitized environments. New public spaces are highly regulated and the overall aesthetic is driven towards conspicuous consumption. The relative success of Manchester city centre renewal is perhaps not matched by corresponding improvements in the lives and life chances of groups who live on the periphery of the city centre. Manchester compares unfavourably across most social and economic indicators.

What spaces are available to create new, alternative, spaces in a city where the old underground has been incorporated into the mainstream? Citizens are interpellated as consumers rather than critical or active producers of 'alternative' forms of social space. The property market, the drive to thematise and commodify everything has created a city centre where there are only consumption spaces, but not public spaces. High levels of social exclusion are implied by this. Only time will tell if the recession and the crisis of greed induced capitalism will open up new urban spaces. What can be learnt from the Manchester example is that whilst alternative culture was able to flourish in under-commodified spaces, that when other spaces were subsequently 'regenerated' the idea of the local, the quirky and the raw was overlooked in favour of the corporate mainstream. An opportunity to create diverse and dynamic public spaces was missed. There is an oversupply of 'sameness' and this approach is showing strong signs of failure.

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