



Between rhetoric & reality

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The Russian literary critic and socio-linguist Mikhail Bakhtin defined 'dialogism' as "meaning created through dialogue between actors, grounding the meaning of words entirely in their situated social usage"¹. Bakhtin emphasizes that one's own perspective is always limited, and in order to understand one's self, we are dependant on the knowledge our other can provide. To illustrate the concept, Bakhtin uses the scenario of two people looking at one another. From their particular (limited) perspective, each is unable to see certain things, for example, their own face, whilst the other person can see those things, and provide a description. One's own knowledge is always partial, and yet the understanding one gleans from one's other, is also always partial because one is only ever able to *reflect* on the meaning given by one's other. Given the limited perspective of the self, we can only gain understanding at the "boundary" of our own and someone else's consciousness. Dialogism, then, refutes the idea of a single consciousness; meaning can only be wrought in the act of communication with our other.

Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture presents the opportunity to enquire how we might understand the event's dialogic character. From 2002 onwards, Liverpool Culture Company under the auspices of Liverpool City Council began developing a series of narratives about their aims for 'creativity', not just for the City's year as European Capital of Culture 2008 but for the broader re-assignment of Liverpool as a 'Creative City', a concept pioneered in the late 1980s by the director of the think tank *Comedia*, Charles Landry: "The Creative City idea advocates the

need for a culture of creativity to be embedded within how the urban stakeholders operate. It implies reassessing the regulations and incentives regime and moving towards a more 'creative bureaucracy'.² Through these narratives, attempts were made to finalise the meaning of creativity for Liverpool's residents, particularly in the manner in which creativity was situated as a deliverable entity to communities by such a group of "urban stakeholders".

Existing critiques of Capitals of Culture have tended to interrogate the authoritative claims of the legacy of the event³, its legitimacy as a vehicle for urban re-structuring⁴, or the consequences of symbolic re-invention of 'identity' of bidding or host cities⁵. This article engages specifically with the community involvement dimension of Liverpool's European Capital of Culture (ECoC 2008), with the residents of the city who participated in this dimension of the event, to problematise how understandings of creativity in everyday life are shaped by multiple and contradictory contingencies. It suggests that we cannot therefore understand ECoC 2008 as a totality. To this end, Bakhtin's work on dialogism may present a useful theoretical framework in which to unpack the complex chains of meaning surrounding creativity, and may be a useful basis from which to explore how meanings of creativity emerge from communication between different 'actors' in the community involvement dimension of Liverpool's European Capital of Culture – Liverpool Culture Company staff, residents, the 'business community', cultural workers, and artists working outside the ECoC 2008 funding initiative.

Multiple and sometimes contradictory

interpretations of creativity are evident in the discourses surrounding ECoC 2008. By understanding this dialogic turbulence as a series of expressions in pursuit of significance, the power relations embedded within ECoC 2008 become more apparent. We are able to witness how, in the development of cultural policy in the city, certain understandings of creativity prevail, whilst others are marginalized or completely absent. But, "what the public sphere may be becoming should not be hampered by assuming that it will repeat the forms and processes that have made it what it is today"⁶, and rather than finalise meaning as merely a culmination of reducible occurrences, a dialogic reading that exposes "the conditions of emergence that give rise to alternative voices, not political subjects seeking accommodation within dominant political culture"⁷, might allow us to explore the processes of that struggle for significance.

The construction of creativity

Liverpool City Council's endorsement of ECoC 2008 was based on making creativity into a tangible force for neoliberal change both in modes of governance in the city and in the way communities interact with these modes of governance. These objectives are apparent in a key text published by the City Council, called *The Art of Inclusion*⁸. This document was published to advocate for the presence of community arts projects as part of the regeneration agenda for the city. Creative Communities, established by the Liverpool Culture Company in 2005 as a sub group within its Executive Board, its self-imposed remit

was “to build community enthusiasm, creativity and participation”⁹. Its projected budget from 2005 to 2009 was just over £11 million. A Senior Manager within Liverpool Culture Company (from my interview with him) describes the specific setting for which the document was intended: “The audiences for [*The Art of Inclusion*] were senior policy and decision makers in central and local Government as well as professionals across all local government portfolios”.

The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu uses the term “strong discourse”¹⁰ in his account of how neoliberal forms of governance have been normalised by various actors in government, education, and the media. His term describes discourses whose truth claims are perpetuated because they circulate only amongst groups likely to be consensual to that discourse. The authors of *The Art of Inclusion* are clearly aligned with the selectively chosen “urban stakeholders”, with whom they share a belief in the redemptive potential of the creative city, these include “the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership... Housing Market Renewal Initiative... Capital of Culture Business Club... Department for Culture Media and Sport”.¹¹ Creativity is being mediated by these specific urban stakeholders, through the desire to establish “Sustainable communities... support employment opportunities” and reduce “social exclusion”.¹² Both the authors of the document and its intended audience of policy makers and professionals form Landry’s notion of a “creative bureaucracy”, and sustain their legitimacy through texts like *The Art of Inclusion* which circulate within these limited consensual spaces. The meaning of this designated role of creativity is thus only negotiated within these spaces. The rationale behind the creative activity posited by Creative Communities lies entirely within the realm of what they perceive as successful outcomes. Apart from leaving no room for either neutral or negative responses from participants, it also tacitly places the participants of the Creative Communities Program as beneficiaries.

In *The Art of Inclusion*, creativity is made meaningful through a process of fixing and ordering. For example, ‘regeneration’ is referred to as a destination that will be reached: “With local people on-side with their communities at the outset, the journey has every chance of reaching a successful conclusion”.¹³ A further example of how the meaning of creativity is fixed comes through the language of empowerment which peppers the document. What emerges is a disciplinary ethos in which the participant is responsible for demanding the kind of creativity which the Creative Communities programme legitimises: “To create demand for culture amongst people who are not currently motivated”¹⁴; “to ensure the programme impacts positively on skills development and job creation”¹⁵; “positive ‘social capital’ is increasingly recognised as a major influence upon an individual’s life chances”.¹⁶

The idea that participation in community-based culture-led regeneration necessarily leads to employment opportunities is a guiding narrative for the Creative Communities initiative. Job creation provides the motivation for the regeneration industry to focus on particular geographical areas where unemployment has been identified¹⁷ despite there being scant evidence for creativity as an economic booster. Job creation in the creative industries has been problematised by writer and policy analyst Kate Oakley, who notes that: “Instead of being attempts to release the imagination and innovation of local communities... public money is spent developing amenities that appeal to outsiders – the pay off presumably being that the jobs and growth they are deemed to bring, will trickle down to local communities. Thirty or more years of research on this suggest that the evidence for beneficial trickle down effects is non-existent.”¹⁸

The Creative Communities initiative, looked at for its dialogical processes, exemplifies Michel Foucault’s account of the manner in

which discipline operates in modern society. He suggests that for discipline to operate at optimal efficiency, the subject of the discipline is first fixed geographically, then, the quantitative scale of the group is altered in order to correlate with the available production apparatus., the guiding rationale being efficiency:

“...discipline fixes; it arrests or regulates movement; it clears up confusion; it dissipates compact groupings of individuals wandering about the country in unpredictable ways... through perpetual assessment and classification [it is] a power that insidiously objectifies those on whom it is applied.”¹⁹

We can understand *The Art of Inclusion* as an agenda of the uses of creativity, set by the City Council and its stakeholders. This leads to a tension on the issue of ownership and authorship of community activity. The document states: “Creative Communities gives people ownership of the activities, they are actively involved and enjoying what is often a totally new and unusual experience”²⁰, and, “By starting with a positive peer culture, more interaction and higher aspiration, an almost organic mode of improvement can begin.”²¹

On the one hand, Creative Communities is proposing a culture of autonomous community activity in which local people have ownership of their own affairs; on the other hand, Liverpool Culture Company promote themselves as the “enterprise” which can “deliver” this, and firmly place themselves as the author of a process which leads to emancipatory ends for communities. By affirming themselves as authors of the initiative, Liverpool Culture Company are reducing association and ownership of their own affairs by communities, if they are to experience any degree of power. Thus the structure that *The Art of Inclusion* emerges from is not equipped to recognise the multifarious otherness that exists in the realm of creative activity within communities and cannot take account of the full spectrum of motivations behind individuals’ creative endeavours.

To suggest that the document does not recognise otherness is not to say that it does not engage in a process of *othering*. Having tied participation in Creative Communities to outcomes such as growth in confidence and preparing participants for the job market, the Culture Company can then establish non-participants of the Program as apathetic towards these outcomes. To illustrate this point, I refer to one of my interviews with a manager within the City Council (referring to the ‘Corpy’ or Corporation, that is, Liverpool City Council):

City Council Manager: “I’m talking about residents, residents will say ‘Oh, the Corpy will do that for me, the Corpy does it, you know, why aren’t you doing that for me?’, you know ‘Why aren’t you making that decision for me?’, you know, quite frankly, you’re an individual, you’re capable of making your own decisions, and you’re capable of being independent, but quite frankly, there are communities in this City, who have a reputation for being particularly labour intensive in terms of the support they need, and Council Members, because this is the way it’s been, have a view that the council wade in and do things for them, if all else fails, the Corpy must come in and sort things out, we haven’t got the resources, the Council’s resources are finite, we can’t contentedly live that way, we need to raise people’s expectations of themselves, and their confidence levels, and with some capacity building, and some confidence building, gradually release the apron strings.”

When the terms creativity, regeneration, and community are brought together in such a document as *The Art of Inclusion*, we are looking at the “intimate link between economic and moral value”²², at a formalised process of the making of personhood, where creativity is an exchangeable value, and the self is based on the accrual of particular modes of creative capital.²³ This specific understanding of the self is highly pervasive in forms of arts-based community regeneration. Participation is understood

as something of a key to accessing cultural capital, which in turn is expected to lead to other forms of social integration, particularly increased employability and social mobility. The particularised version of empowerment, which *The Art of Inclusion* claims to bestow on participants of the Creative Communities initiative, is part of a self-making process the successful end of which is the enterprising self which Professor of Organisational Behaviour, Paul du Gay²⁴ situates as “[the acquisition of] cultural capital in order to gain employment; hence making the responsibility for un/employment an individual responsibility rather than a capitalist demand for labour and exploitation.”²⁵

Dialogism as critique?

‘Creativity’ as proposed by ECoC 2008 can be understood as an unequal struggle for contested meaning amongst different inhabitants of the city. Aside from an argument as to whether ECoC 2008 is beneficial, the City Council and its partners are obliged to produce ways of knowing the event primarily as ‘significant’. This is re-produced by local and national media, as well as in academic research,²⁶ whilst other groups and individuals question the significance of the event on the basis that the event fails to acknowledge the existing, multifarious ways of being, both of creative workers and residents in the city.

Community Organisation Manager: “We’re still having to make that argument [for funding]. We are having to force their [Liverpool Culture Company’s] hand really, they’re saying to us ‘Why should we have to fund you, you’re just a music venue, and lots of other people do that.’ And we’ve had to put forward the argument... we’re an academy, a nurturing organisation that works with young people, gives them the opportunity to perform on stage... It grieves me really. I’m sitting here, the organisation’s got £5,000 left in the bank, that will not see us through the financial year. We’ve just had a benefit concert done for us by Elvis Costello, that’s paid off a lot of debts and that, and people like him recognise the value of the work we do, the developmental work we do, you know when a kid walks in and doesn’t know how to play on the stage, or what a monitor is, or where to publicise their events, it really grieves me that the culture company is not automatically saying ‘You are on our essential list for funds this year or an organisation that we fund.’”

Liverpool Based Visual Artist: “...the [city] centre’s kinda key because its not so much the centre, it is physically they’re doing the centre and hoping there will be a trickle down I think it’s called, but...there’s also this thing at the top of a pyramid called high culture and there’s going to be a trickle down that way.... What the City of Culture has done, is actually fucked up both ways, so it’s ignorant of high culture and it’s been unable to engage with people and actually make their lives better at a grassroots level, but it’s some how missed the boat in both directions, yeah, ultimately, that just needs to be done, I don’t know if it’s cultural though, at a basic level. People need to feel safe and they need to, they need the basics sorting out, there needs to be a reduction in crime and all that kind of thing. But there is a vast gulf between the sort of culture that comes in with the Turner Prize... this high thing that we’re looking up to, and that seems to have landed on Liverpool, and then there’s this massive disparity, there’s nothing going on in between.”

The above quotes convey that official discourse has attempted to petrify particular understandings and uses of creativity according to their own construction of a participating public. In so doing, they have failed to adequately account for the already existing motivations and desires of the existing publics in the city. In addition, given the rigid structure of a cultural programme which exists to advocate other areas of City Council policy, they fail in their own aims to enrich the populace with cultural capital through a process of self-making where the self is realised as an entrepreneurial entity.

Within the linguistic terms of Bakhtin’s analysis of the speech act, we can understand *The Art of Inclusion* as an example of “official discourse”.

According to Bakhtin, at the extreme end of “official discourse” is the totalitarian tendency not to recognise otherness; such discourses “abhor difference and aim for a single, collective self... they assume no other selves beyond the one they posit as normative”²⁷. A problem is that the processes that flow from these discourses are not the result of a conversation between the multifarious groups who have a stake in the outcomes of these processes. However, dialogism insists that meaning emerges from conversation, that the utterance can never be understood from the “I”, that it is always a function of the “we”, and that the utterance, rather than reflecting what is experienced outside of language, is itself “a deed, it is active and productive”²⁸.

Bakhtin’s insistence on an analysis of the speech act in its situated social use as communication allows us to move beyond analyses “where discourses and texts are separated from their central role in the process of communication”²⁹ as in the authorship debate amongst French post-structuralists, identified by Barthes in *The Death of the Author*³⁰ and later taken up by Foucault. The debate intended to shift our understanding of the author as the sole originator of meaning in the text by rejecting the enlightenment ideal of the lone genius. This has in turn led to the criticism that Bakhtin, by stressing the social usage of language as it is found in the everyday, neglects to look at structural power relations, i.e. the meta-conditions which inform everyday speech acts such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. But by looking at language in its situated usage, the intonations of speech, the use of irony or parody or other devices, we can understand that there is a knowledge of superstructures there in everyday speech; that the manner in which people make sense of creativity in their everyday lives escapes the totality advocated of creativity in the realm of policy objectives.

Dialogism has recently been utilized as a tool to expose how communication took place between different actors in instances of situated regeneration initiatives. Gunson and Collins have written about the gap between the rhetoric and reality of a regeneration “partnership”. The rhetoric referred to the manner in which residents would be full partners in planning and delivering a regeneration strategy for their area. The process broke down when the local government office failed to engage in the process of the *ideal* speech situation; an emancipatory model of rational communicative practice, as put forward by Jürgen Habermas in his concept of an active public sphere, i.e. where the ongoing speech act is free to take place unconstrained by economic and administrative rationalization, and where public opinion formed through discursive relations can influence political action. Habermas held that whilst the *ideal* speech situation is not ever fully attainable, we should nevertheless aspire to it in the manner we communicate in the public realm. For Bakhtin, however, the on-going dialogue is the permanently unfolding attainment of productive communication.

Undertaking these communicative ethics in the moment of a situated contest should help people to understand their other’s perspective, and might make possible an inclusivity that enables “subordinate actors to seek a greater symmetry of voice”³¹. Such a prospect of an “unequivocal respect of otherness”³² may sound like an emancipatory endpoint that we should eventually hope to attain, however, for Bakhtin, this misses the point. The ongoing-ness of dialogue that Bakhtin suggests holds the emancipatory *ideal*, in that it continues to create meaning and out of that the further possibility of meaning: “Even *agreement* retains its *dialogic* character, that is, it never leads to a *merging* of voices and truths in a single *impersonal* truth”³³.

But, as political theorist Iain MacKenzie has written: “Rather than assume that the public realm is a space occupied by political groups that reflect identity-forming contexts, we can view the public realm as conditioned by events that create



significance-groups. The idea of a ‘significance group’ expresses the mode of its constitution rather than hiding this under a banner of identity or class or some other model. In other words, we can give an account of the emergence of a variety of new political formations within the public realm, one that does not rely upon the traditional model of excavating or revealing already existing, if obscure, ‘natural or intrinsic’ aspects of human identity. [...] Shifting from identity-based to event-based assumptions about the public sphere constitutes a move away from the ‘ideal’ nature of the ideal of accommodation toward an emphasis upon the nature of ‘real’ accommodations within the public sphere; that is, towards a view of politics that is not distorted by presupposing that there are ideal modes of interaction in the public sphere. [...] It also implies that the concept of the public sphere is best grasped by analysing its dynamic features, its becoming, rather than by trying to hypostatise it as a simple representative of a political world that we think we know in advance of our apprehension of it.”³⁴

Towards a dialogic understanding of *Four Corners*

Four Corners is a “flagship project” of the City Council’s Creative Communities Program. It also formed part of the Council’s Culture Program for ECoC 2008 when work from the project was exhibited at the Bluecoat Art Centre. As such, it represents the confluence of the discursive fields of community, creativity and regeneration, and ECoC 2008; fields both occupied and contested by a multifarious set of actors. But a dialogic understanding of creativity is not accounted for because the project is constrained by the centripetal impulses within the discursive field set up by the organisers of the project, namely the City Council and Arts Organisations in the city. We might refer to this as the official discourse of the project, which first of all brought the project into being. It provided the rationale for the project, it guided the practice of the project, and eventually finalised the meaning of the project to participants and audience. However, from the perspective of participants, the occurrence of the *Four Corners* project represents one intervention, amongst many others, in their ongoing experience. This points to a dialogic understanding of creative experience, where involvement in *Four Corners* is one part of a multiple, embodied process of socially situated expression “about the experience of particularity and contingency”³⁵.

Four Corners represents a technocracy of civil servants and art workers who seek to create a setting in which the conspicuous consumption of creativity can occur, and the meaning of that setting can then be translated back into the structural necessities of wider policy. The

catalogue that accompanies the *Four Corners* exhibition states: “Evidence directly from participants shows that the project has increased confidence, given people ‘fresh energy’, ‘a thirst for more’, and ‘has made people realise that they are doing something positive with their lives’. What a legacy”³⁶.

As the above quote from the exhibition brochure is designed to illustrate, there is an assumption that being ‘creative’ is full of benefits.³⁷ This rationale, privileging participation in a regime of creative activity through which a set of highly particularised motivations are reinforced, is about the individual accruing the correct kind of cultural habits to function in the Creative City construct which forms the basis for Liverpool City Council’s vision of post-2008 urban governance: “Cities in the future will be differentiated not by their physical environment but by the quality of experience they offer. Liverpool is... moving completely away from old style city governance to a new model where creativity is at the core...”³⁸

Liverpool City Council’s Creative Communities strategy dictates that the creative act exists to mediate Council policy. The *Four Corners* project has run annually since 2006 and works around a theme. In 2007 the theme was: “What makes a neighbourhood”. The exhibition catalogue written by the project’s Creative Director describes *Four Corners* as “seeking to embed culture, in its widest sense, and the arts, into day-to-day activities of the city council’s regeneration portfolio”. The project therefore mediates council policy through its roster of events. A language of reflection through celebration pervades the exhibition catalogue for *Four Corners* 2008: “capturing memories, aspirations and supporting community cohesion”. Effectively, this shapes highly controversial housing market renewal (HMR) activity in Liverpool into a neutral visual art product.³⁹

In 2002, Liverpool City Council stated that changes they intended to make to the city’s housing stock were intended to attract “middle income households, particularly in those areas which offer the best opportunities for mixed housing developments – the eastern fringe and the inner core”⁴⁰. In ‘Housing Market Renewal and Social Class’, Chris Allen, of The Manchester Institute of Social & Spatial Transformations, re-affirms working class communities’ resistance to the gentrification agenda of Liverpool City Council’s housing policy. He states his case using interviews with residents in the Kensington area of the city, an area that has seen mass imposition of compulsory purchase orders on residential property, and whose residents brought Liverpool City Council’s HMR activity to a public inquiry where the seeming inevitability of the gentrification agenda was brought into question. Allen problematises the prevailing housing market doxa, wherein it is assumed everyone either

has the aspiration to, or already has, an existing position in the housing 'market'; that is, where one's house is not simply somewhere to dwell, but represents a purchasable product that occupies a position within a space of positions:

"Working class people experience rather than contemplate houses, they seldom talk about 'housing' in conversation... the task then, is to 'sell' the programme of change to people. This is achieved by shaping the conditions of communicative transmission and reception so that the dominant view prevails within Kensington. Such is the nature of institutional arrogance that is produced by adherence to the dominant housing market doxa that, even when confronted with resistance, this is understood as a problem of communication rather than a problem borne of a conflict of interest."⁴¹

There is a distinct shaping of the conditions of communicative transmission and reception occurring in the *Four Corners* project, which rotates around their theme of 'What makes a neighbourhood'. Official discourse in the form of Creative Communities situates residents' experience of HMR, albeit in an indirect way, as a finalised, and idealised entity to be 'showcased' and celebrated. HMR as a site of conflict, struggle and resistance cannot be accounted for. Below, a creative communities manager gives an account of how residents benefit from this way of understanding things:

Manager within Culture Company: "[N]ot intruding on neighbourhoods or community members in some way, but enabling them to tap into their creativity and address issues that are relating to them, about their community, or lack of community wherever they live. And the majority of the time, lots of houses are being knocked down, lots of upheaval... a lot of people stay in one place, live and die there, and it's quite an upheaval really... and we've tried to use Creative Communities to a certain point, to celebrate that within what we're doing and give people a voice through creativity... we are using different tools to address those issues for them, so that Joe Bloggs understands why their house is getting knocked down and can actually scream and shout about it through a poem or a dance or something that can be expressed and can be put on a platform to be showcased and shared with other people, so people know where they live, or used to live..."

This is the disciplinary dimension of this particular construction of creativity. Within a bounded space and time of a regeneration project, actual lived experience is mediated by the technocracy of 'experts' in forms of theatre and broadcast media, where there is apparently little

room for a conversation about the rationale of that policy, rather it becomes a matter of "coping" with that policy:

Artist, *Four Corners* project: "...what I want to do is say how can we articulate this pain, how can we articulate this trauma, how can we do it in such a way that it goes from being particular, but eventually becomes universal so that anybody else experiencing the work in some way will understand something fundamental about what it is, what home is about, what it is to lose your home, to have your home razed to the ground, and whether we can move on and survive from that. And I think as the three years have gone on, I think there is an emergent aesthetic which is definitely art, but is also dealing with the regeneration of the city..."

The manner in which a resident of the city experiences an aspect of council policy is thus morphed into a 'neutralized' but not neutral cultural product. The experience shifts from ongoing lived experience to a finished piece of artwork, where meaning can be finalized and then referred to via fine art discourses.

Rather than opening up the spaces of communication that enable a democratic dialogue between council and resident about the consequences of that policy, the person who has experienced or is about to experience that particular council policy is encouraged to become a participant via the schema of cultural regeneration; their experience is shaped by this schema and an account of their experience is then *shared* with the transient group of audience members, also participants of the cultural regeneration schema. A key critical point here is the way in which the official discourse operates to assert this process into a supposedly empowering one for the participant, via the inter-personal and technical skills they are believed to have picked up along the way. As a discourse analysis of *The Art of Inclusion* shows, one of the abiding narratives that accompanies creative intervention projects in communities is that voice is 'given' to the unheard, and participants feel empowered as a result. Evidently, there is a tension around the authorship of creative projects in communities. Once more, the structural nature of the Creative Communities strategy means that a multiple authoring of projects exists, involving civil servants, arts workers and residents. However, it is the City Council, via the Culture Company, that persistently makes the claim that it has provided that space in which dialogue can occur: "At the core of Creative Communities is a simple aim – to harness the creativity of Liverpool's people by making creativity an integral component of everyday life"⁴².

There is a certain ontological certainty expressed by this quote, namely that creativity is *not* an already-existing part of people's lives. This assertion reflects the manner in which creativity is captured by the technocratic environment of cultural regeneration initiatives. It has to be bounded and knowable through a conspicuous display of resident involvement, like a gallery exhibition, and, as has been indicated, the meaning of the creative or social activities of a group are then mediated through a set of official discourses. This is problematic because participants of the *Four Corners* project are already part of existing self-organising groups, who have found their own means of creative expression which *Four Corners* then mediated according to its agenda of cultural regeneration. I interviewed a number of people who participated in *Four Corners*; some were members of an over-60s group who meet in a community centre in a suburb of Liverpool City Centre, some were members of a group of writers living with multiple sclerosis. Both groups emerged out of a desire to provide their community with an opportunity for social interaction, mutual support, and particularly in the case of the MS writers, an outlet for ongoing creative expression. One of the MS writers puts the importance of the group into context:

MS Writers' Group member 1: "But there is a parallel really about what happens in the group in terms of regeneration, and what we felt was happening within the city, we were sort of a microcosm of what was happening because when I joined the group, what I felt was the positivity within the group, the idea was that yes we had this disability, we are all walking wounded, but we were regenerating ourselves, we found some outlet that we could draw on to express ourselves, we were still up and functioning and we could contribute. So in that sense it was an engine of regeneration in all of us and I think that the fact that people come and turn up every week, says something about that sense of belonging, the energy that comes from the group to keep us going, it does provide that focus for us, in fact that fuel."

In the case of the over-60s group, one member describes the importance of their weekly meetings:

Over 60's group member 1: "Concerning this place, what do I do as an old woman? Well I just try to keep alive and just keep breathing in and out! ...As an old age pensioner, or a senior citizen, we need this place to function for other people, 'cos there is no other thing in the area, non-denominational. The church run things, but the church is funded. We don't get funded, our little group. Only now and again people upstairs can get grants for us, and that's for speakers, or to do things, but our little group itself, is just self-funding, but we need someone to sort of, the idea of it is to drop in, and I think it's vital for this area, because there is a lot of old people here, and the ones that do come, it's two hours out, and it gets them out of the house. And it's somewhere for them to go, now it started with five of us, suggesting this... and we sort of feel responsible now because we started this baby and it's growing isn't it."

Both groups exemplify a process where acts and products become meaningful through the ongoing process of dialogue and interaction. This dialogic way of being presents a very different ontology from the official discourse. This may present a problem in the development of policy objectives in the making of Liverpool as a creative city in the sense that the already existing ways of being of fully- or semi-autonomous groups in the city (Bakhtin's 'counterpublics') are not being recognised in their own pursuit of expression. Creativity in the writers' group entails an ongoing back-and-forth process, which results in the development of pieces of work, and also the development of writing skill. The City Council sees its own role primarily in 'delivery' of creative interventions, ultimately towards an emancipatory end of "giving voice" within the model of identity-orientated movements. In the case of the *Four Corners* project, this ontological tension partially resulted in what members of the group felt was a



misrepresentation of their work and their values as a group:

MS Writers' Group member 1: "...it was a big buzz for us to have our work up there as a group, but, I just looked at the group as the film ended, across the line, just sat there, and the faces were thinking where were we in that film, all the work we put in, where were we? We really committed to doing it, put the work in and just felt it wasn't represented properly... that was the impression we got, that we were representing something of what the Culture Company had commissioned, and I suppose we were, but we felt we weren't shown to be representing what was the best of us and what we put in."

The way in which the over-60s group has evolved means that it is primarily an opportunity for members of the community to meet and socialise. Their involvement in *Four Corners* meant that their way of being was subject to an intervention whereby specific creative output became a focus for a short time. Aspects of the group members' life experiences were made into the cultural products that would form part of a coherent regeneration initiative. Again, a disjuncture occurs at the point where the existing way-of-being of the group is subject to the intervention of the Council's vision of creative regeneration:

Over-60s group member 1: "When we finished the doors and all the rest of it, we were all invited to a party. [...] So we went, and we heard all the speeches, and we were a bit disgusted really, because we didn't even know who the people were that were talking. Warren [Bradley, leader of Liverpool City Council who sits on the board of the Liverpool Culture Company] was there, he done it, but there was this other one walking round, the meal they put on was fantastic, everything you could think of, but it was more for the dignitaries, not for us, because they had men walking round in dinner suits that were the, what is it, the guards, or whatever you like to call them, the Lord Mayor was there. And all these dignitaries, and there was glasses of wine going and everything...it was a bit overwhelming for us."

Evidently, there are fundamental ontological differences between what creativity and social life mean to different actors involved in the *Four Corners* project in 2008. The City's Cultural Strategy situates creativity according to a number of categories of conspicuous cultural consumption, either in spectacle, as economic driver, or in the iconic, and does not make room for the ongoing, dialogic and mundane understandings and uses of creativity as they unfold in the cultural landscape of the city.

Understanding ongoing encounters

J.K. Hall⁴³ insists that to open the way for an ongoing discussion which allows for the multifariousness of creativity as it occurs in our social lives, there must first be a willingness on all sides to accept the constraints of the speech act in locally-situated contexts. Preceding that, however, there needs to be a mutual desire to base the development of creative practice on a model of an ongoing conversation. Such conditions are not currently being met in Liverpool. The Liverpool Culture Company has discursively produced a public which, while multifarious to a degree (for example, a differentiation is made in official discourse between the member of an existing community and the tourist visiting for the weekend), is still situated according to a consumer logic. This, as Barnett has suggested, reduces public democratic discourse to "deliberation over a pre-selected range of substantive issues carried on according to pre-established conventions of civility".⁴⁴ This begs the question, what then are the conditions of emergence, of becoming, that give rise to alternative voices? How is the nature of the public sphere constituted by events?

The partial data shown here from participants suggests that existing forms of regeneration projects fail to capture the *ongoing-ness* of creative activity, or the possibility of creativity existing in mundane forms of social interaction. The structural nature of the *Four Corners* project

as a means by which to mediate the outcomes of Council policy to residents has resulted in a particularised notion of creativity, one which does not acknowledge the already-existing, vernacular, ongoing, and multiple forms of creativity that take place in social life. The draft Culture Strategy document published by the council in late 2008 defines, "Culture as quality of life – [as] the range of activities and experiences which raise life above the mundane, which allow self expression and which help to define and bind a sense of community and belonging."⁴⁵ However, in order to avoid the hierarchical approach of creating the kind of 'inclusive' creative community envisioned by urban elites such as Liverpool Culture Company – who tacitly remain as gatekeepers of such a community – we can, following Ian Mackenzie's summation of Deleuze's theory of political events, conceptualise the event of Liverpool ECoC 2008 as a juncture in an on-going contest between different significance groups, in pursuit of the expression of significance.

In its vision for a creative city, Liverpool City Council and its partners position creativity as out of the ordinary, as the spectacular and the iconic. The very possibility of a meaningful conversation about the place and use of creative art practice is not opened by statements like the one above that pepper the Cultural Strategy document. A key to understanding the power relations which are embedded in the activities of the Creative Communities initiative is the notion of the author. There will always be a multiple authoring in a creative city, these *include* perspectives which are not driven by imperatives of the spectacular, the iconic, or boosting GDP, many imperatives are simply based on mundane everyday activity. However, Liverpool City Council and its partners continue to render the cultural life of the city as a series of totalities. The event of ECoC 2008 is not capable of acknowledging the counter publics active in the city, who continue to make meaning out of the "intimate moments and spaces of everyday life".⁴⁶

Notes

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4. Mooney, G (2004), *Cultural Policy as Urban Transformation? Critical Reflections on Glasgow, European City of Culture 1990*. Local Economy. Vol 19, No 4, 327 - 340
5. Griffiths, R (2006) *City/ Culture Discourses: Evidence from the Competition to Select the European Capital of Culture 2008*. *European Planning Studies*. Vol 14, No 4, May 2006
6. 'From Identity to Event: The Changing Nature of the Public Sphere', Iain MacKenzie
7. Ibid.
8. Liverpool Culture Company (2006), *The Art of Inclusion, Liverpool's Creative Communities*. Liverpool City Council
9. Liverpool Culture Company (2005), *Strategic Business Plan 2005 - 2009* (pg 29).
10. Bourdieu, P (1998), *The Essence of Neoliberalism. Le Monde Diplomatique* English Edition. <http://mondediplo.com/1998/12/08bourdieu>. Accessed April 21st 2009
11. Liverpool Culture Company (2006), *The Art of Inclusion, Liverpool's Creative Communities*. Liverpool City Council (pg 32).
12. Ibid. (pg 32).
13. Ibid (pg 23).
14. Ibid (pg 15).
15. Ibid (pg 17).
16. Ibid (pg 22).
17. Liverpool Culture Company (2006), *The Art of Inclusion, Liverpool's Creative Communities*. Liverpool City Council (pg 33). For a pre-2008 example in Liverpool see: *As Broadcast in Beijing (Liverpool City Council and Merseyside Arts, Culture and Media Enterprise 2001* page D.
18. Oakley, K (2006), *Include Us Out - Economic Development and Social Policy in the Creative Industries*. Cultural Trends, Vol 15. No 4 pp 225 - 273.

19. Foucault 1984, pg 208 - 209.
20. Liverpool Culture Company (2006), *The Art of Inclusion, Liverpool's Creative Communities*. Liverpool City Council (pg 23)
21. Ibid (pg 23)
22. Skeggs, B (2004), 'Exchange, value and affect: Bourdieu and the self' in *Feminism after Bourdieu*. Adkins, L and Skeggs, B. Eds. Blackwell/ The Sociological Review. London (pg 75).
23. Creative capital, although treated as a normative category by Liverpool City Council and its partners, has a critical context of Bourdieu's 1986 text 'Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste'. London: Routledge. In which the cultural value of practices and objects takes is made meaningful through accrual and exchange, however sociologist Bev Skeggs has noted: "Bourdieu's emphasis on exchange, accrual and interest lead again to structural reductions with emphasis on objectification. This ignores the affectual impact of matters of taste, which produce class relations beyond the structural... in the intimate moments and spaces of everyday life". (Skeggs 2004)
24. In Skeggs, B (2004) *Exchange, value and affect: Bourdieu and "the self" in Feminism after Bourdieu*. Adkins, L and Skeggs, B. Eds. Blackwell/ The Sociological Review. London.
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28. Holquist, M (2002) *Dialogism*. 2nd edition. Routledge, London (pg 63).
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33. Bakhtin, M.M (1984) *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. C. Emerson Ed. University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis (pg 95 his emphasis)
34. 'From Identity to Event: The Changing Nature of the Public Sphere', Iain MacKenzie
35. Gardiner, M (2004) *Wild publics and grotesque symposiums: Habermas and Bakhtin on dialogue, everyday life and the public sphere*. The Sociological Review. Vol 52 issue S1 pp 28 - 48 (pg 32).
36. *Four Corners* exhibition brochure pg 38
37. For a critical engagement with creativity as a new moral imperative see Osbourne's 'Against Creativity: A Philistine Rant' (2003) in *Economy and Society* vol 32 no.52.
38. Liverpool Culture Company (2006) *The Art of Inclusion, Liverpool's Creative Communities*. Liverpool City Council (pg 11).
39. In 2007, the *Four Corners* project produced an art work called 'Our House', in which a derelict block of residential flats near to the city centre was entirely covered with doors taken from CPO'ed or renovated houses in the city, inside the block was an exhibition of work created by people in "Liverpool's five communities".
40. Paragraph 68 page 16, *The Liverpool Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy Framework and Action Plan*, published by Liverpool City Council September 2002
41. Allen, C. (2007) *Housing Market Renewal and Social Class*. Routledge. London
42. *Four Corners* exhibition brochure pg 47.
43. J.K. Hall (1993) The role of oral practices in the accomplishment of our everyday lives. *Applied Linguistics* 14 pp 145 - 166
44. Barnett in Logan, O (2009) *Realism and Democracy, the politics of the everyday in photography from the Photo League to Magnum*, MA Dissertation in Cultural and Media Studies, The Open University, Faculty of Social Sciences
45. Liverpool City Council. *Draft Cultural Strategy 2008*. Pg 8; Oakley, K (2006) *Include Us Out - Economic Development and Social Policy in the Creative Industries*. Cultural Trends. Vol 15. No 4 pp 225 - 273
46. Skeggs, B (2004), 'Exchange, value and affect: Bourdieu and the self' in *Feminism after Bourdieu*. Adkins, L and Skeggs, B. Eds. Blackwell/ The Sociological Review. London