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London After the Spectacle Year, Who Claims Which Space and Who Gets it?

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1 ABSTRACT

This aim of this paper is to look at the lull after an exceptional 'year of spectacles' in London and how the development industry is pursuing property-led growth with government support. Their spatial strategies are discussed in the context of alternative scenarios for urban change, proposed by Erik Swingedouw in terms of the 'post-political city'[1] and by Henri Lefebvre in his writings on the paths to difference[2] and the right to the city.[3]

2 ABOUT THE POLITICS OF SPACE

A generation apart, but in what could be arguably considered pre-revolutionary conditions, Henri Lefebvre and Erik Swyngedouw were/are reflecting on an alternative to the global, neo-liberal, capitalistic model of urban change, its underlying social relations and governance. Lefebvre wrote the "Differentialist Manifesto" (Le Manifeste Differentialiste) in 1970 after his involvement in the protests of May 1968 in Paris. His concern is with the hegemony of the global model which confounds growth with development, and he explores possible alternatives of paths rather than end-state models for the production of 'urban' space.[4] Also preoccupied with the dominant model of (urban) governance and prospects for alternatives Swyngedouw uses 'police' ('le police'- the existing social order), 'politics' (la politique) and 'the political' (le politique), terms he borrowed from Jacques Ranciere[5] to critique what he perceives as the post-political, post-democratic period following the global financial crisis of 2007.

Both Lefebvre and Swyngedouw are focusing on theoretical deliberations about the nature of urbanisation, the former from a philosophical, historic and political-economy point of view, the latter from a geographic-environmental and political science perspective of reinstating urban justice, equality and freedom.[6] They both analyse and denounce the hegemony of the dominant model of society (the new order as moral and political order[7] – the neo-liberal order[8]) and explore alternative urban transformations. Lefebvre is reconstructing 'difference' as a way of gaining a universal sense of alternative paths toward differentiated urban social relations.[9] For him, the modern world – progress – this chaos – starts to make sense if one distinguishes among conflicts and confrontations, "the titanic struggle between homogenising powers" (which have access to enormous means) and "differential capacities".[10] Swyngedouw, through identifying

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[1] E.g. Erik Swyngedouw. 2009. The Antinomies of the Post-political City: In Search of a Democratic Politics of Environmental Production. In: International Journal of Urban and Regional Research. Volume 33.3, September 2009. Pp 601-620.

[2] Henri Lefebvre. 1970. Le Manifeste Differentialiste. Idees, nrf.

[3] Henri Lefebvre. 1971. Le droit a la Ville I; Espace et Politique, le Droit a la Ville II. Editions anthropos, 1971/1972.

[4] Henri Lefebvre. (1974) 1991. The Production of Space. Blackwell.

[5] 'the police', the urban policy order, – 'la police', 'le policier' – is the organisation of society where everyone has an assigned place. 'Politics ' – 'la politique', is a process of emancipation. 'The political' – 'le politique', is the place of encounter of the two heterogeneous processes above, one governmental, the other emancipatory. These terms are proposed by Jacques Ranciere, cf. e.g. Au Bords du Politique. Osisris. 1990. La Fabrique Editions 1998, Folio 2003. They are taken by number of current thinkers about the post-political city.

[6] Erik Swyngedouw. 2010. Polis: Designing the Post-Political City and the Insurgent Polis. In: Civic City Cahier 5, Bedford Press, London. http://www.thepolisblog.org/2011/06/eric-swyngedouw-on-designing-post.html The Post-Political City. 2007. In: Bavo (2007) Urban Politics Now, reflect series, NAI Rotterdam. http://www.scribd.com/doc/56916007/The-Post-Political-City

[7] L'ordre nouveau comme l'ordre moral et politique (Henri Lefebvre, Le Manifeste Differentialiste; homogene et different, p 49).

[8] 'Le policier'- determining the limits which the existing order declares to be possible. Erik Swyngedouw, Frank Moulaert, Arantxa Rodriguez. 2009. Spaces of neoliberalism, urban restructuring in North America and Western Europe. Ch9. Polis.

[9] "…Is it possible to conceive a strategy of difference?... Thinking which conceives the processes and social relations as a whole can assume this role…Henri Lefebvre, Le Manifeste Differentialiste, p 101 op.cit"

[10] Lefebvre, Le Manifeste Diferentialiste, Ch I: Homogene et Different, p 49, translated JR.

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the 'non-part', the part of society with no properly defined place within it, is using the universal as a starting point to re-politicise public civic space.

The simultaneous generation of scarcity and abundance is another theme they have in common. They adopt a different take though on social movements and their effectiveness in bringing about fundamental societal transformation and urban change. Lefebvre is more optimistic about their possible contribution to urban change than Swyngedouw who, in his more recent writings, sees them as an inherent part of the existing, in his view deficient urban governance which has inbuilt instruments to tame or absorb them. They both refer to human rights, and the right to the city, as well as to utopia as the ultimate imagined path towards change, again in a slightly different light. Perhaps these rather abstract critical explorations of urban justice may shed some light on the production of space in London in the current contradictory and divisive climate of austerity.

3 LONDON, THE 'SPECTACLE CITY'

There exists a political consensus that 2012 was an exceptional year for London. It found itself in a permanent state of pageant and delivered a plethora of world class spectacles which may well have masked the effects of the crisis at the heart of London's financial sector and the hurt of scarcity. Epitomising the society of spectacle, London had been groomed for exceptional celebration to attract spectators from all over the world.

*1_dia London Spectacle city: Queen's diamond jubilee celebrations, source: http://static.guim.co.uk/sys-images/Guardian/Pix/pictures/2012/6/3/1338744517609/The-Thames-Diamond-Jubile-054.jpg

In rapid succession London staged the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the Olympic Games, the Cultural Olympiad, the Gay Pride Parade and the international Frieze art fair, besides numerous global political summits, premieres of films with the fastest ever return on investment, while the Lord Mayor and the Mayor of London were rivalling with fireworks. Did the vertiginous speed and ephemerity of events, instantly diffused worldwide, indicate the path from spectacle society to digital society, from the real to the virtual world which, according to Michel Serres,[11] is transforming the perception as well as the experience of space and time?

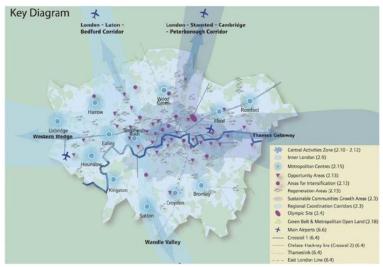[11] Michel Serres. 2012. Petite Poucette. Manifeste, editions Le Pommier.

2_dia Thames with Shard and City skyscrapers, source: http://medias.photodeck.com/889602a8-22b3-11e1-bd22-8147863a0125/View %20from %20Tower %20Bridge %20panorama2_pr_xlarge.jpg

A counterpoint to this trajectory into digital society is the material urban development which London has completed during that time in its traditional physical environment: the 'Shard', the highest skyscraper in Western Europe designed by 'starchitect' Renzo Piano,[12] and, equalling the Victorians, major transportation infrastructure like the multimodal interchange in Stratford near the Olympic site and work on the new east-west Crossrail to ease commuter traffic. Besides the Olympic mega-buildings themselves, all these material changes took place in the context of the Mayor of London's expansionist ambitions laid down in the new London Plan.[13]

The mayor, together with corporate business and other key stakeholders in London insist that 'the show must go on'. The consensus model evoked by Lefebvre and Swyngedouw as well as by the latter's urban populism have certainly been a contributing factor to keeping London among the key world cities, retaining and attracting foreign visitors, the best talent and global inward investment. London continues to benefit from the lion's share of public finance, despite austerity measures imposed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer which are hitting the lower paid Londoners hard.

How can London keep this momentum going when the economy is hovering around no growth and austerity measures are likely to stay in place for the foreseeable future? Despite London's job losses, including in the financial sector, unemployment is far higher in the north of the country. Those experiencing hardship remain unconvinced that London should continue to be privileged, and they doubt London's claim to be the economic engine of the nation and the necessary driver of recovery everywhere else. Therefore, the question of who would benefit from London's continuous growth and who would lose out remains at the forefront of current political debate.[14] This does not prevent the governance lobbies from demanding a world-class hub airport[15] and more high speed rail[16] to guarantee London's competitiveness in the global market.

3_dia Mayor's London Plan 2011, key strategic development diagram, source GLA

4 AFTER THE 'FIREWORKS'

The 2011 census data revealed the contrast between London's rapid population growth, well above expectations, and stagnation in other parts of the country. The available maps of the economically active population in England and Wales, or of car ownership illustrate the difference between the north and the

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[12] although overtaken by the Mercury Tower in Moscow soon afterwards.
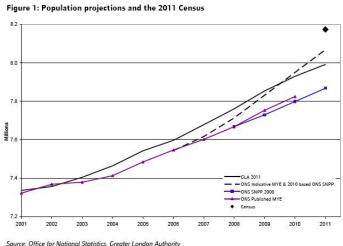
[13] London Plan 2011. http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/planning/londonplan

[14] E.g. Doreen Massey. The Political Struggle Ahead. N: Soundings, number 45, August 2010. Pp6-18. Lawrence and Wishart.
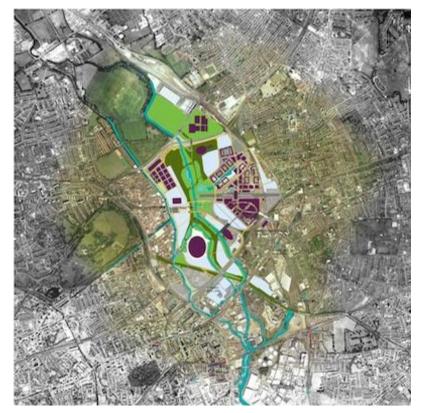
[15] Thames estuary airport designed by Foster + Partners. http://www.kentonline.co.uk/medway_messenger/news/2013/february/11/boris.aspx

[16] High Speed 2 route proposal. http://www.hs2.org.uk/

south.[17] Spatial analyses of this data by the Greater London Authority show growing unevenness and divergence also within London. Overall, London's population increased by one million in 10 years from 7.17 million in 2001 to 8.17 million in 2011.[18] For the first time, the indigenous British population was in a minority with 44.9 %. London Boroughs with a high immigrant population were among the fastest growing ones, where household sizes are larger than average, and overcrowding tends to be higher.

Figure 1: Population projections and the 2011 Census

Source: Office for National Statistics, Greater London Authority

4_dia London population growth 2001 – 2011, source: Greater London Authority, Datastore

5_dia Legacy area and its nebula, source: ‚Design for London', GLA

Although no income data maps are available, it is known that London Boroughs with high numbers of immigrants constitute the poorest parts of London. The East End has been traditionally a reception area. The boroughs there have a significantly higher proportion of social housing and pressure for affordable housing remains intense. Encouraged by the changes brought about by the Olympic Games, symbolised by one of the

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[17] http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2246288/Census-2011-UK-immigrant-population-jumps-THREE-MILLION-10-years.html

[18] Cf. interactive atlas, GLA datastore. http://data.london.gov.uk/census

biggest new shopping centres in Europe,[19] the local mayor of Newham is not keen to maintain a large disadvantaged population and sees an opportunity to obtain a greater social mix in the development foreseen on the Olympic site. He resists the potential influx of poorer residents who will no longer by able to afford their social housing elsewhere, especially in central areas when the housing benefits will be capped in spring 2013. Quite the reverse, he welcomes housing for high income households which is expected to be provided by private developers, once they have managed to get hold of land[20] from the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC). This new successor agency of the Olympic Park Legacy Company[21] is now in charge not only of the development of the Olympic site but of many areas around it where it has inherited public land holdings and for which it has become the planning authority with compulsory purchase powers, substituting for local authorities.[22]

The mayor of Newham most certainly follows the dominant growth model and has little time for the alternative local social movements which are demanding a different development model for themselves.[23] In this sense, Swyngedouw could well be right with his interpretation that small scale, fragmented groups who attempt to produce an environment for a different lifestyle are being side-lined or displaced by what he calls post-political 'policing'. A current deal under discussion is a large university campus which University College London (UCL)[24] is planning on the site of an existing social housing estate still inhabited.[25]

Why UCL is not willing or able to build on available brown field land, for example on the Olympic site, or in the nearby recently established Enterprise Zone in the Royal Docks[26] with prime sites on waterfronts and where a new university campus has been established recently[27] may be explained by the hegemonic growth model, rather than by alternative possibilities of generating genuine socio-economic development in this impoverished area.

6_dia Carpenter Estate today, already decanted in parts, despite resident resistance, source: http://www.demotix.com/news/1347789/shame-newham-council-carpenters-estate-london#media-1347751

Can Lefebvre's concepts, elaborated in the Production of Space,[28] shed some light on these current and intensely conflicting development choices? He proposes a unitary theory of physical, mental and social space which simultaneously represents the political, implies concealing ideology, and embodies technological utopia. His dialectic approach to the continuous interplay between human action and space rests on a

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[19] Westfield, financed and built by a 'global' consortium and compulsory gateway to the Olympic games 2012.

[20] As legacy development is expected to be private sector led, there are no regulations considered hindrances regarding the use of land and access to housing. Judging from recent examples of 'luxury' housing provision by foreign investment companies or even through buy to let arrangements many of these dwelling stay empty as their expected capital appreciation far exceeds short term rent incomes, let alone any form of 'controlled rent' arrangements.

[21] and other local development corporations, including various now defunct Thames Gateway Corporations (covering land along the Thames estuary to the sea).

[22] LLDC: http://www.londonlegacy.co.uk/about-us/london-legacy-development-corporation/

[23] e.g. Community Land Trusts, Community Forum, Stratford Renaissance Partnership, Local Regeneration Consortium, Self-Build Architects, and many more have been marginalized and did not benefit from the various legacy budgets.

[24] Newham's proposal for the regeneration of the Carpenter Estate. http://www.newham.gov.uk/Regen/GreaterCarpen tersNeighbourhoodResidentNewsletter.htm

[25] Eg. The residents of the Carpenter Estate against UCL proposal. See below

[26] http://www.newhamrecorder.co.uk/newham-life/organisations/london_s_royal_docks_to_be_enterprise_zone_1_838 959 www.royaldockslondon.com/

[27] UEL: University of East London. http://www.uel.ac.uk/

[28] Henri Lefebvre. 1991. The Production of Space. Blackwell (La Production de l'Espace. 1974. Anthropos). Pp 32-33.

conceptual triad, comprising 'spatial practice', 'representations of space' and 'representational spaces'. Would his concept of social space produced under the capitalist system, which has to encompass biological reproduction (the family), the reproduction of labour power (the working class) and the reproduction of the social relations of production (constitutive of capitalism) leave room for at least some alternatives to the currently dominant, negotiated rather than planned development process?

He most definitely includes this possibility when he discusses 'from the contradictions of space to differential space' and refers to 'alternative society' and 'counter-culture'.[29] Not only does he acknowledge the existence of such alternative movements from the bottom-up – protest, ecological, communal – because they "allow to break the barriers of the forbidden", but he also considers them as an inherent part of the dialectic of spatial practice and a necessary force of the dynamic of the production of space. What remains debatable is the extent to which such local movements are able to remain part of the urban process in the longer term. The conflicts around the Olympic site show clearly divergence, or at least the will to differentiation, the claim to 'being other', which represents in its own way a universal right to the city for all parts of the differentiated society, so very present in the East End of London. The jury is still out on medium term 'footholding', let alone the long term establishment of culturally, economically and socially diverse groups alongside each other and the 'habiter' produced by the dominant model of growth. For the time being at least this is an outlook which runs contrary to the gentrification process in the making on and around the Olympic site.

5 URBAN 'MOMENTS', SINCE THE ECONOMIC BANKING CRISIS 2008

London's transformation as a global city has been divided for some time into international, development-led physical growth, accompanied by socio-economic polarisation. The latter is becoming apparent in hardship which is creeping from the bottom of society up the social strata. It is also expressed in physical change of London's urban space and, in particular, in its representational spaces. During the recurrent phases of economic crisis these trends become more visible. It could be argued that the current, post-spectacle moment is somewhat different as it compounds the aftermath of an exceptional state of profligate expansion with its inherent characteristics of economic downturn, moreover in a different context of polity, of Swyngedouw's 'polic(y)ing', or Lefebvre's 'political space'.

When governance is strong and firmly top-down, supported by outstanding resources, it would seem logical that the dominant model of growth would increase its hegemonic position. To some extent this appears true, at least on the surface. The development industry exercises a central place in London's urban change. Very large sites, often 'brown fields', meaning with discounted land values, are made available to the development industry, frequently with direct and indirect subsidies. The Olympic site is a point in time, as were Docklands three decades ago. The public good, or what is left of it, is negotiated not regulated ex ante, while the private interest, with property rights at its heart, is given a free reign. Paradoxically, two questions come to mind. Why do such developments take almost a generation to get realised, and why would this process leave any room for alternative manoeuvres?

For Swyngedouw at al,[30] "the search for competitive development has become the leading objective of the new urban polic(y)ing … to reassert the position of cities in the consolidating global economy". This is certainly London's political position. Even if one would agree with Swyngedouw's notion of post-democracy, during which "urban regeneration is increasingly framed in a common and consensual language of competitive creativity, flexibility, efficiency, state entrepreneurship, strategic partnership and collaborative advantage",[31] the ensuing development process is neither homogeneous, nor continuous, nor universal. Precisely, because such potential regeneration sites are so large, so derelict, so unmanageable, in such unfashionable locations, they are prone to infiltration, to what Swyngedouw terms 'the political', which enables contesting, resisting, dissident groups to invade such spaces, appropriate them at least temporarily, and apply their own projects to them, with their own creativity, flexibility and entrepreneurship. The timeframe is of the essence in this cat and mouse process, but the hegemonic system is learning and pre-

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[29] Henri Lefebvre. 1970. The production of Space, op.cit, Ch 6 sections XVIII-XX.

[30] Erik Swyngedouw, Frank Moulaert, Arantxa Rodriguez. 2002. Neoliberal urbanisation in Europe, large scale urban development project and the new urban policy. Antipode 34 (3) pp 542-577.

[31] Eric Swyngedouw. The post-political city. 2006. In: BAVO (2007). Urban Politics Now, Reflect Series, Netherland Architecture Institute. Rotterdam.

empting, hence the blue fence around the Olympic site, surmounted by electrically charged razor wire. Despite all these precautions, some artists managed to 'infiltrate' what happened on the site. One of them, Jom Woodall, was monitoring the development process with three cameras day and night and created an audio-visual history of the present for all the other displaced people to see and to act upon.[32]

Opposed to that, the development industry had to create its own narrative. Arguably these narratives are reflecting Lefebvre's differentiation, albeit from the top-down rather than across socio-cultural groups. The narrative of the Olympic Games was global and guided by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and its culture. London's second financial city, Canary Wharf, took this opportunity to revive its narrative, by benefiting from the proximity of the global exposure which the Olympic Games offered East London. The largest private property owner on the Isle of Dogs produced new masterplans,[33] revived its construction efforts, diversifying into luxury housing, shopping malls and other commercial premises, in competition or as a reinforcement of the constructions which emerged on and around the Olympic site.

7_dia Canary Wharf extension, Wood Wharf (project) in the London Docks, source:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Wood_Wharf_Development.jpg

The City of London Corporation exposed its own narrative at the Cultural Olympiad, under the banner of 'Developing City'.[34] At a lavish exhibition and during breakfast talks the City promoted its long term future of 2050, green and sustainable, by colonising the Thames – the only still protected, truly generous open space in London – with 'green' islands to accommodate the 'developing city' and satiate its space bulimia. This fascinating self-projection took place in an unfinished new building, one of many located at the very heart of the City, above a tributary river of the Thames where excavations uncovered important Roman ruins. The City Corporation's self-image was portrayed as 'the resilient city', quite appropriate considering that it has managed to preserve its medieval, pre-democratic status and will continue to do so, unchallenged. This self-representation shows that the homogeneity and the hegemony of the dominant growth model adopts various forms of 'police', although their generic 'raison d'etre' is congruent with the dominant, speculative, free market development model.

Detached from use value or need for such types of buildings, and regardless of economic crisis or politics of austerity, the process which drives exchange value of real estate pushes property development ahead relentlessly, despite the detrimental effect of glut on rents. The production of space in this case is the

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[32] Alyssa Moxley. Jim Woodall's Olympic State, an observation story. In: Theatre of Dissent, adventures in London's Olympic State. 2012. Hilary Powell & Isaac Marreno-Guillamon (eds). Marshgate Press.

[33] Cf. Wood Wharf development. www.canarywharf.com/...wharf/...wharf/WW %20at %20Canary %20...

[34] http://www.newlondonarchitecture.org/exhibition.php?id=368&name=the_developing_city

reflection of the workings of the political economy, a material expression of the capitalistic post-political state. The City of London, like many CBDs accommodating capitalist financial centres is the concrete expression of this hegemonic process. There, skyscrapers multiply, compete with each other's heights, are periodically stopped in their track for lack of debt finance, get destroyed to make way for ever higher densities, simultaneously driven by increasing land values while pushing them up in turn.

The West End does not look idly on and builds and builds, according to slightly different drivers, but as integral part of this hegemonic meta-system of real estate-led, albeit often fictituous economic growth. Clearly, in places with such high densities there is no idle land available for spontaneous, temporary uses. Besides, confined to just one square mile the City is easier to 'police' than hundreds of hectares out of sight and civilisation in the East End, until they are recuperated by the same hegemonous growth model.

8_dia Vision 2050 for the heart of the City of London, John Robertson, architects http://www.jra.co.uk/projects/exhibitions/12/the-developing-city/

9_dia Olympic site, aerial view http://www.londonlegacy.co.uk/mayoral-development-corporation-to-move-to-westfield/

6 WHERE NEXT?

Even when there is saturation, overproduction, glut, and a few property companies are going bankrupt it is not for long. The economic cycle will recover eventually, so cranes lie idle just for a while, debts will be

written off, and the momentum will be reactivated. As land is finite, especially urban land and land in places of centrality, competition is fierce, so any less lucrative use of land will need to be displaced according to the logic of this system. For that reason, there is little chance that those who were displaced from the Olympic site will find new housing when it will be produced eventually. It will be well out of there reach financially, and they will have settled elsewhere for it will take a very long time to develop this site, especially as no time limit is imposed on this free market property development process, despite taking place on land which was purchased with the public purse and owned by the public sector. Moreover, privileged accessibility – high speed rail interchanges and fast connections to international airport hubs are attractors for the mobile international business class and of little use to deprived local neighbourhoods dependent on local, often unskilled employment.

Unfortunately, the opportunity of spectacle does not present itself everywhere and other areas, in the West End for example, come up with different solutions. Under the pretext of scarcity local authorities aim to displace low income people, the unemployed, the disabled from high land value sites, away from their social support structures to other cities in the north of the country. They attract global excess capital to the most expensive sites instead where gated condominiums, most of them staying empty, are erected. The scarcity programme reveals itself as a powerful spatial segregator.

10_dia One Knightsbridge, photo Judith Ryser

11_dia Bar 25 Berlin, source: http://www.tip-berlin.de/kultur-und-freizeit-stadtleben-und-leute/countdown-bar-25-berlin

Where does this process belong in Lefebvre's analysis of the production of space and in Swyngedouw's post-political, post-democratic condition? For the former, it may not correspond to his idea of differentiation which underlies his dialectic. For the latter, the variations of the hegemonic model may simply confirm its resilience and staying power, and may make total social change even more remote. In these circumstances, is there any possibility of alternative urban development, of greater diversity, of a post-democratic return to democracy or, better perhaps, an advancement towards a post-post democratic model, in the form of assemblages between innovative and creative productions of space? Is it possible to imagine a post-post political scenario, considering that both Lefebvre and Swyngedouw conceive the production of space as fundamentally political? Meanwhile, where does this leave what regulates the city de facto, what produces the urban space at present? Will it be just more of the same? With perhaps minute forgotten spaces which

may be colonised differently, at least on a temporary basis, like in Berlin, where obviously pressure on land is not comparable with London – a world city and seat of global finance?

7 CONCLUSION: SOME HOPE?

"Differentialism is not a system. Is it a matter of debate on difference? No. It is about living. Not about thinking but being differently". This is how Lefebvre ends his differentialist manifesto. Are there examples of such different ways of living? Two urban situations come to mind in London, Coin Street on the Southbank of the Thames[35] and Bromley By Bow Centre,[36] an island of communal calm and serenity in the middle of the cosmopolitan London East End kaleidoscope. Both these urban spaces are resilient, as they have lasted for more than two decades against all mainstream odds. They started very much in terms of 'spatial practice', to the point of making things, of building their own world with their internal resources and with what the hegemonic system was discarding.

12_dia (left) Coin Street, London. 13_dia (right) Bomley by Bow centre, photos Judith Ryser

It could be argued that by now they form an integral part of the urban fabric, albeit slightly different from mainstream places if observed with a critical eye. They produced a representational space of their ideal of 'living differently'. Their spatial praxis over time was also influenced by 'the politic', as they reinvented how they were going to materialise their wanting, thinking, doing things differently, as consenting individuals towards a common goal. Their self-managed collective decisions guided them in inventing their representations of space and the way they constructed and, most importantly, are living their representational spaces.

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[35] Coin Street Community Builders are those who initiated the transformation of the Coin Street area and are still managing the site http://www.coinstreet.org/

[36] The Bromley by Bow Centre originated from the reform church but has become an inclusive local public service for the local cosmopolitan neighbourhood. http://www.bbbc.org.uk/