



Jessie Brennan (ed), *Re:development: Voices, Cyanotypes and Writings from the Green Backyard*, London: Silent Grid, 2016.

This is a unique book. The first thing to hit you is the colour: a bright blue cover that reflects the startling imagery within.¹ Layered in amongst the pithy essays about a fascinating community growing project in Peterborough, and the associated political struggle to protect it from redevelopment, are a series of what I learnt to be “cyanotypes”—photographic blueprint images created by camera-less chemical exposure to sunlight. This makes for a striking presentation of found objects—brilliant white “negatives” set against a deep cyan background. Among them are a seemingly random collection of materials and tools, animals and plants—including a screwdriver, toothbrush, hops, mugwort, a broken bottle top, a dead robin, an ashtray—that various gardeners and fellow travellers in what is known as the “Green Backyard” have offered up as personally or collectively significant to the life and soul of the project.

Cyanotypes, we learn in the introduction by the book’s editor, artist Jessie Brennan, were traditionally used by architects, planners and engineers in the 19th century to copy plans and designs, and became known as blueprints—hence the term “blueprint planning” to denote top-down, technocratic, comprehensive urban renewal. Her pointedly political redeployment of the cyanotype method here turns blueprint planning on its head—an artistic device that brings to light what too often falls through the cracks between the lines drawn by planning professionals. The cyanotypes provide a kind of agitprop for the campaign to save the Green Backyard from property development, a clever subversion of conventional planning, representing a grassroots notion of development: the growth and development of human beings, a distinctly convivial collective way of life, and the plants and animals that cohabit this special space.

The Green Backyard was initiated in early 2009, on a disused allotment site in central Peterborough, overgrown and abandoned for 17 years, as a community space open to anyone

¹ See <http://www.jessiebrennan.co.uk/publications/> (last accessed 18 April 2017).

who wanted to grow food or simply commune with fellow residents, led by activists who sought out a different rhythm of life to the frantic pace imposed by neoliberal consumerism.² Unfortunately, the forces precipitated by the 2008 financial crisis—that had, we are told early on in the book by Sophie Antonelli, one of the co-founders of the project, “actually served to crystallise this value and catalyse a movement of enthusiasm for radical change in a city long-complacent and passive” (p.29)—were the very same that triggered the Council to push for eviction and redevelopment, in response to austerity-driven budget cuts to pay for the bank bailout.

Despite its charged political subject matter, there is a deeply sensory aspect to the book, evoking the hands-on quality of life in the Green Backyard, which asks to be touched and handled like a vegetable freshly pulled from the earth, and draws you in through its tactile pages—old-newspaper-rough with fine filaments woven into what feels almost like a hand-crafted textile, held together at the top edges by a fold in the paper where you would ordinarily expect a separation such that, rather curiously, every two pages are attached. In the sections on cyanotypes, between the inner folds, difficult to reach in the recess of attached pages, hide the captions that help describe the images. These captions, in bright blue ink, are written by the cyanotype’s curators—those local residents, gardeners and activists who have chosen a meaningful object to give “voice” to what makes the Green Backyard so special. Interspersed amongst these pages conjoining voices with cyanotypes are the “writings”—short essays by a variety of academics, researchers, artists, writers and activists, whose diverse and interesting content comprises the remainder of the book, and which I will focus on primarily in this review.

Taken at face value, the volume offers us a discursive exploration of the kind of community growing projects we find increasingly the world over, as part of associated urban trends towards “do-it-yourself”, “insurgent” or “makeshift” urbanisms that have received particular academic attention of late, especially in critical geography and urban studies (Iveson 2013, Tonkiss 2013). More specifically, *Re:development* can be read as yet another,

² See <http://www.thegreenbackyard.com> (last accessed 18 April 2017).

albeit an unusual and imaginative, case study of “guerrilla gardening” that mobilises discourses around the “commons” and the “right to the city”, as documented by contributors to this journal, myself included (Eizenberg 2012, Thompson 2015). Anna Minton’s short essay in the volume, for instance, retraces many of the same steps over the critical urban terrain she covers in her excellent book, *Ground Control* (Minton 2012), particularly around the financialisation and privatisation of land, state-led accumulation-by-dispossession, and the “right to the city” as a political response. As a form of community development based on cooperation, mutual aid and solidarity, the project can just as easily be read from the “community” or “diverse economies” perspective developed by J.K. Gibson-Graham (2008). With aspirations to become a community hub or anchor institution—the Green Backyard has plans for an onsite café serving locally-grown food; a specialised learning centre and performing arts venue catering for Peterborough and the surrounding region; and incubation space to nurture the next generation of community-led social enterprises—the project is very much a part of the “social and solidarity economy” (Scott Cato and North 2017).

From my own experience in this area, I’ve been lucky enough to witness how a grassroots street gardening project in Liverpool has developed over the past few years, likewise in the aftermath of the neoliberal crash and budget cuts, into a successful campaign for a community land trust (CLT), saving the area from demolition and redevelopment, creating new jobs, bringing empty homes back into local use, and providing space for community enterprises. Art was part of the story here too, with Assemble, the architectural collective for Granby Four Streets CLT, being the first architects ever to win the Turner Prize, in 2015;³ exhibiting a similar “do-it-together” philosophy that blurred the boundaries between art and regeneration, doing and owning (Thompson 2015). But this is perhaps where the similarities end. In this review, I argue that this book about the Green Backyard, like the project itself, is more than just an academic account of a politically radical community project: it is an artistic intervention that invites us to see the world differently; to be more conscious of how we record collective memories of place, and of how we position such

3 See <http://assemblestudio.co.uk> (last accessed 18 April 2017).

campaigns politically to protect their futures without compromising their pasts—and it achieves all this beautifully.

Of all the essays in the volume, Dougald Hine’s “Spelling It Out” is for me the most striking, one which will no doubt inhabit my thoughts for some time to come. Hine develops a brilliant yet simple framework for communicating and representing such projects as the Green Backyard—applicable to any grassroots campaign struggling to protect or re-appropriate the space to grow. He breaks down the challenge of communicating to different audiences into three distinct languages: an “inward”, an “outward” and an “upward”. The inward language is “the way that those at the heart of a project make sense of what they are doing, the way of seeing the world that makes it possible”; the outward is “the language in which people who meet your project at ground level, in the course of their everyday lives, start to talk about it”; and the upward is “the language of power and resources: the language of funding applications [enough said!], the language of those who are in a position to interpret regulations and impose or remove obstacles”. This seems to me a very neat explication of the basic dichotomies presented to us all as communicators of politically-propelled projects: how do we go about reconciling speaking to all these very different though equally vital audiences, in the often untranslatable registers they each require? To my mind, Hine puts in clear and tangible terms what many of us, including myself elsewhere in this journal, have tried to capture in more abstract, often convoluted terminology, by mobilising some kind of complex conceptual schema—Lefebvre’s (1991) triad particularly comes to mind; it’s not too far a stretch to translate “inward” and “upward” language, respectively, into “lived” and “conceived” space—rather than state the issue bluntly. Hine’s essay is certainly blunt; refreshingly so. He’s worth quoting at length here, if only for the entertainment factor, especially for people who read (and/or write) *Antipode* reviews:

...in the absence of an Outward language, be cautious about attempting to explain a project that exists mostly in your dreams and schemes to a neutral audience. The Inward language is like a set of in-jokes: to those involved, it is a web of meaningful

connections, but to the uninitiated it is just boring. In the worst case, this hardens into the phenomenon of those ancient mariners who haunt certain kinds of conference, keen to talk you through a PowerPoint deck the length of a Victorian novel which explains their model of the world and how it could be bettered. I don't doubt that at the root of each such model lies a powerful experience of insight, but I would rather eat your cake before I decide whether I am interested in the recipe, and if you keep trying to feed me recipe after recipe, I may begin to wonder if you actually know your way around an oven.

Perhaps we've all been guilty of this at one time or another, and perhaps I'm guilty of it here, but the beauty of this volume is that it somehow manages to avoid all that: there are no ancient mariners touting boring recipes to be found haunting its pages.

This is not to say that the essays lack academic depth, or indeed are all quite so punchy—there is definitely a variety of registers here, some inhabiting more of an outward, others more of an inward, language; a few steering into the terrain of upward language, but only when having to explain legal issues or the more technical points of the political campaign. Linking most, if not quite all, of the academic contributors is a shared affiliation with the Bartlett School of Architecture and Development Planning Unit at University College London—partly the product of Jessie Brennan's visiting research fellowship at the Bartlett. This mix of (action-)researchers specialising in the relations between space, architecture, social history, psychology and radical politics, with writers from more freelance, artistic and activist backgrounds, gives the book a certain flavour yet also a diversity of tone that never strays into "academese" or intimidating and tedious conceptual jargon: a lively, direct, open and playful approach that doesn't assume too much knowledge.

For instance, Dougald Hine is one half of the Dark Mountain project; the other being the environmentalist, nature writer and novelist, Paul Kingsnorth, a long-time friend, incidentally, of George Monbiot. Their Dark Mountain Manifesto, provocatively titled "Uncivilisation", caught the imagination of a generation and helped fuel a movement around

environmental justice and the corruption of “civilisation”—that hubristic civilising project building steam in the Enlightenment which celebrates humanity as separate from nature, and recognises no limits to our exploitation of resources and technological control and mastery over our environment.⁴ The general style of *Re:development* seems to embody one of the eight principles of “Uncivilisation”: “We will not lose ourselves in the elaboration of theories or ideologies. Our words are elemental. We write with dirt under our fingernails” (Kingsnorth and Hine 2009). It feels probable that in some cases this may literally be the case; many of the contributors have indeed been regular visitors to the Green Backyard, digging in the dirt and tapping away at their laptops interchangeably.

It feels as though these actions—digging and writing—are in some way intrinsically bound up with each other in the Green Backyard. The issue of researching, recording and archiving life there seems almost as central a part of the project as gardening itself. Several contributors have been long-term active participants, such as geographer Ben Rogaly, whose essay recounts the participatory action research he’s been undertaking with the Green Backyard—as part of an AHRC-funded fellowship—taking an oral history approach to recording life histories of Peterborough residents. And, of course, the entire basis of *Re:development* is Jessie Brennan’s work on archiving, through artistic representation of residents’ voices and found objects, different facets of life in the Green Backyard.

Brennan explains that “cyanotypes bring to mind initial ideas and ambitious ideals ... revealing utopian dreams, what may-yet-become” (p.20). While this reflects the utopian-socialist roots of both the discipline of town and country planning in the early 20th century and the ambitious utopian modernism of post-war urbanism, Brennan situates the Green Backyard against these totalising and technocratic framings, by alluding to a kind of unfinishedness, a work in progress, an experimenting in the here and now with initial ideas, rather than setting in concrete long-term plans. This embodies the kind of “pragmatic anarchism” associated with Colin Ward (see White 2007); its collective do-it-yourself makeshift approach is cut from the same cloth, if not of the same function, as the long

⁴ See <http://dark-mountain.net> (last accessed 18 April 2017).

“hidden” history of self-build and temporary housing and back-to-the-land experiments that Ward (2002) traces through cotters, squatters, plotlanders and homesteaders. Part of this sense of “temporariness” also reflects the lack of certainty felt by the garden’s users, who lease the land from Peterborough City Council, but who are now threatened with eviction to make way for a housing development as part of an “Opportunity Area” to create an enhanced “gateway” to the city centre, in the now familiarly alien lexicon of the regeneration game. Indeed, there is a constant sense across all of the writings and voices in *Re:development* of a “doing” things in the present; a dynamic immersion in time and history, aware of the historical significance of writing about and representing a project that may go one of two ways, that has yet to be decided by the Council’s decision or, perhaps at a later date, a court’s ruling.

But this sense of “unfinishedness” is perhaps more significantly an aspect of the philosophical perspective that guides Brennan’s art and the community growing itself. The inspiration behind the book is Brennan’s earlier work for the Green Backyard: in 2014 a photographic image of the garden on a billboard intended to spark local debate, entitled “What Is Necessary Here?”;⁵ and in 2016, a large sculptural installation spelling out the words “If This Were To Be Lost”.⁶ In the final essay of the volume, Jane Rendell reflects on the unusual “subjunctive” tense in which the latter is framed, and how this actively anticipates in the present a sense of loss that has yet to happen. Brennan reveals how she was inspired by the late geographer Doreen Massey’s relational, dynamic and “unfinished” conception of space as a “cut through ongoing histories” (Massey 2011) or in Massey’s (2005) quintessentially evocative vocabulary, a “throwntogetherness”, a “simultaneity” or “constellation” of social relations and “stories-so-far”. Indeed, we learn in Ben Rogaly’s essay that, shortly before her sad and untimely death in March 2016, Massey had followed up a chance encounter with Brennan and was planning her first visit to the Green Backyard, excited and committed to contribute something to this collection. The frequent references

5 See <http://www.jessiebrennan.co.uk/what-is-necessary-here/> (last accessed 18 April 2017).

6 See <http://www.jessiebrennan.co.uk/if-this-were-to-be-lost/> (last accessed 18 April 2017).

here to Massey's (2011) essay as part of her most recent partnership with the psychogeographer and filmmaker Patrick Keiller in their project on "The Future of Landscape and the Moving Image" suggests the way in which Brennan invites us to read the cultural landscape of the Green Backyard through her cyanotype imagery, just as Keiller's long, still camera shots depict the changing landscapes of Britain in his iconic *Robinson* films.⁷

"The Future of Landscape and the Moving Image" reflects on the histories of enclosure that shape our sense of place, and although the concept of the "commons" is rarely mentioned throughout *Re:development*, it is very much there between the lines, animating many of its central narratives. The Green Backyard shares much with the ethos of "commoning" that historian Peter Linebaugh (2014) identifies as the everyday practices that reproduce the life of the commons. Brennan's introduction quotes David Crouch and Colin Ward (1997) on their history of allotments: "the word 'allotment' implies deference and allocation, qualities that indicate a relationship between the powerful and the powerless"—a neat insight which contains within it the history of enclosure of the commons, and the offering of allotments, an allotted piece of land, for the newly-urbanised working classes to help feed themselves under the increasingly exploitative and alienating working conditions imposed by industrial capitalism. The Green Backyard transforms a space formerly occupied by allotments, with their individualised allotted parcels, into an open commons. Brennan and many other contributors to this volume, such as Barbara Penner and Robert Biel, are keen to emphasise the highly political nature of gardening as a radical and potentially anti-capitalist act. There is nevertheless a sense sown in the book that gardening is at the same time apolitical: a simple and eternal act of physical doing; attending to growing things in dirt that somehow transcends all ideological debates and worldly distractions, and perhaps provides an escape route out of all this into a somehow more real, grounded reality. It is this connection to nature(s) and to place that draws people from all walks of life, and from across the political spectrum, to the Green Backyard.

⁷ See <https://thefutureoflandscape.wordpress.com> (last accessed 18 April 2017).

In the second essay, Sophie Antonelli describes the long process of campaigning, initiated with her father, co-founder Renny Antonelli, to save the community garden from being sold off for a quick buck by the public landowners, and what the space means to the countless people that participate in its reproduction. The thing they are most proud of, she concludes, is that the Green Backyard “grows people first and plants second. Tomatoes and tulips are really just a pleasant addition to the more important main crop: the lives and personal stories which give a place its soul” (p.32). The Green Backyard is known as a “community garden project” rather than a “community garden”, because it grows communities as well as vegetables. The anthropologist and anarchist theorist David Graeber (2001) makes a remarkably similar point in his brilliant book on value: that the economy is erroneously geared towards the production of objects, or products, when it should be about producing people, in the most expansive social sense. Graeber narrates the history of “value” as an argument between Heraclitian dialectical perspectives which treat value as only realised through flow, as activity, and more empiricist theories from a Platonic tradition which derive their view of value as “stored” in objects, such as money or property. We are bewitched by capitalism and the complexity of globalising networks of production into fetishizing their products as that which “holds” value, rather than seeing such objects as merely serving in the ultimate task of producing and reproducing people and society and of course the environment we rely upon to survive.

This is something I’ve written about in relation to the way in which planners tend to treat housing as a fetishized product rather than lived process, building on Henri Lefebvre’s dialectical theory of the production of space and the insights of anarchist writers Colin Ward and John F.C. Turner, that dwelling is a verb rather than, or at least as well as, a noun (Thompson 2017). Self-build housing co-ops are not simply about the provision of a material building in which to live, but rather the collective process of designing, building and managing living-together. Equally, community gardens like the Green Backyard are not simply eco-modernist forms of producing food products, nor are they focused on the production of natures as aesthetic objects, but are rather about the *very process* of creating

and constantly recreating a way of life that supports the full development of human beings as one part of nature.

The concept of commodity fetishism that Graeber (2001) develops from Marx to characterise our contradictory treatment of value underpins our inability to locate the true source of value, not in products, but in people and other elemental natures. This is the very same force that blinds us from recognising our essential interdependence with the natural world from which we recklessly and excessively draw, yet contradictorily hold conceptually apart from us, “humanity”, as that separate thing out-there called “nature”. Robert Biel, whose essay here unearths a rare manuscript on the history of the allotment system told through the eyes of a Chartist, has also written a fascinating and richly dense book on *The Entropy of Capitalism* (2013) in which he applies systems theory to historical materialism to construct a novel account of how capitalism must inevitably end, through entropic exhaustion of the ecological (including human) resources it parasitically plunders. Industrial global capitalism, founded on Cartesian dualism and Enlightenment empiricism, has severed our ability to perceive the link between the products we continue to buy with unsustainable abandon, and the systems of exploitation of both humans and natural resources that enable such plenty. So too has it driven a wedge between this system of social reproduction and the natural environment upon which it depends for its inputs.

This is the “metabolic rift” between humans and the environment that Marx first foresaw in the 1840s, when—we are told by Barbara Penner in her fascinating essay, “Pee Bale Politics”—he first observed the early development of mass waterborne sewerage systems following the invention of the flushing toilet. Although not explicitly stated, commodity fetishism—in various guises, but particularly in hiding the gaping metabolic rift from institutional view—appears to be a theme central to the narrative and political message of the book. Penner recalls how Marx predicted that ecological destruction would inevitably follow from the transition from a circular economy, in which “humanure” was systematically recycled as fertiliser for crops, to one in which our waste is flushed immediately out of sight, as if by magic (a physical incarnation of the systematised process underlying commodity

fetishism if ever there was one), to be centrally treated and returned to the hydrological cycle at great energy exhaustion. Like many essays in the collection, Penner somehow manages to squeeze a great deal of informative and lively discussion of wider political, historical and theoretical points into a tiny textual space that explains the ethos and practicalities of life in the Green Backyard—in this case the onsite dry composting toilet and the pee bale. She highlights its practical amenity—“a space that physically makes it possible for people to spend longer periods of time at the garden in comfort”—and also the pleasure that can be had, particularly popular amongst local boys, of weeing into a straw bale and seeing your own piss return to the earth, to be put to good use in the growing of veg, knowing it’s all part of the same cycle. Yet she also draws our attention to the political aspects of this seemingly mundane act. Despite distancing the Green Backyard from the kind of eco-anarchist intentional communities that pioneered these simple methods of human waste recycling, Penner nonetheless underscores the deeply anti-capitalist posture of any method that “transforms ‘waste’ back into something productive”; that “deals with waste less invisibly”; that “highlights the historic and cultural specificity of our own ‘flush and forget’ waterborne systems”.

In her essay on the legal difficulties around protecting everyday green spaces, such as village greens, woods and community gardens, Jane Holder argues that campaigns such as the Green Backyard imply a “relational ethics”, as developed by critical geographers. She believes Sarah Whatmore’s (2002) work on “hybrid geographies” and the “relational configurations” spun between humans and non-humans, for instance, can help us identify connections between “everyday struggles” over local areas of land and large-scale environmental degradation, and concerns about human health and wellbeing. The challenge is for the significance of these connections to be recognised in legal processes as a matter of environmental justice and with a view to the law making a positive contribution to the social construction of “everyday utopias” (p.84). Embedding connections between local actions and global forces in political and legal processes is no less a task than peeling away the tightly-

fixed mask of commodity fetishism that blinds society from accepting our intertwined fate with each other and all other natures.

Towards the end of the volume, we learn in a wonderful essay by Maria Walsh that Brennan has archived over 100 cyanotypes of found objects and over 100 recordings of the gardens' users speaking about their significant object of choice. Walsh explores the work of Jacques Derrida on the "archive" to present the tensions in Brennan's work, and indeed that of all social scientists interested in recording history as it happens, such as Rogaly's participatory action research here. Paraphrasing Derrida, she counterpoises memory to the archive: the former is the "simultaneous passing and preservation of an event", a record that feels close to "spontaneous, alive and internal experience", but which always fades with time, threatened by loss; whereas the latter inscribes in code and stone, orders through signs, and provides a crucial public record of this fragile "living memory", which, "in being thus preserved, is always in danger of being betrayed and of ossifying". In some sense, then, creating an archive is the objectification of memory as a lived process.

Walsh goes on to ask whether it is possible to create a "living archive" made "available for collective *use*"—and suggests that Brennan's work with the Green Backyard comes close to achieving such an experimental utopia. We can relate the reimagining of the archive in this way to the kind of co-production of knowledge we strive for in critical geography. The participatory action research central to the work of Brennan, Rogaly and others in this volume is essentially about bringing the acts of digging, weeding and planting together with the acts of archiving, representing and writing, until they merge and reflect each other in interesting ways—coming to represent the deeply *cyclical* time of living and gardening over the *linear* time of the historical archive. Of note here is the active tense in which the book is written, itself a kind of living archive, and the way in which it tells a chronological narrative of political events in a cyclical way: revisiting events and aspects in greater depth further on in the book, in a kind of circling in on, or digging down into, the foundations of the project, revealing layers as we go.

One of the most fascinating of Walsh's insights is her interpretation of Brennan's audio archive as one which "de-fossilises the material object and turns it into a 'recollection-object'". We can say the same for the cyanotypes: these "found objects", in Laura Marks' (2000: 124) words quoted by Walsh, are "fetishes" which "condense time within themselves and that in excavating them, we expand outward in time". In this way, Brennan's cyanotypes can be read as a kind of *inverse* commodity fetishism—"fetishes" which employ an anti-fetishistic logic. This way of looking at the world bears resemblance to Patrick Keiller's fictional character Robinson in the film *Robinson in Ruins*, which Massey (2011) quotes in her now-familiar essay *Landscape/space/politics*: "Robinson had once said he believed that, if he looked at the landscape hard enough, it would reveal to him the molecular basis of historical events, and in this way he hoped to see into the future."

Rather than mystifying and obfuscating from the senses the socially layered and spatially complex history of an object's production, Brennan's cyanotypes—like Keiller's landscape shots—explicitly invite us to read into them, to speculate about their past lives, to conjure forth connections with other objects and other lives; they trigger reveries about their histories which may indeed motivate us to dig deeper and actually trace back their connections, or at the very least become conscious of the wider systems and ecologies of which they, like us, are merely a part. This is of course what the voice archive provides: an oral history of precisely these connections. And so taken as a whole, as they are intended, alongside the writings, the book acts as a collective artwork of a "living" archive: moving us to think differently. Although it can be read simply as an introduction and compendium to an interesting community growing project and the difficulties its users face in keeping it alive, so too can it be read as art with a distinct subject: that of "value" and where we place it in the world.

In his book *The Gift*, Lewis Hyde (1979) approaches precisely this question of value from a different but related perspective to Graeber's (2001), citing countless examples of ancient and contemporary gift economies around the world which see value as essentially a *relationship* between people, or between people and the rest of nature. In such gift

economies, value is created only through these relationships, as a form of becoming, and there can be no abstract value retained by static objects. This, Hyde contrasts to a capitalist economy, which, seemingly for the first time in human history, is founded upon the interruption of circulating gift relationships by the drive to take gifts out of the relational realm as “products” to be accumulated as personal profit, allowing for capital accumulation. To do this, we have invented fetishistic ways of trapping value in things, capturing otherwise relational flows into “stores” of value, such as money. The real value of the Green Backyard is in the multiple interrelated collective acts of digging, sowing, planting, tending, harvesting, eating, playing, pissing, composting, sharing, celebrating, dancing, communicating, writing and archiving that constitute it as a gift constantly being renewed and circulated among the community and indeed anyone who seeks refuge in its space of peace and conviviality. The threat to the Green Backyard is that desire of the City Council, aligned with the very motive that drives capitalism, to take that gift out of circulation, to freeze it as an asset to be traded as a commodity that stores within its fixed spatial boundaries the false promise of speculative profit.

One of the things the book fails to consider, however, is the structural and political forces that have led Peterborough City Council to pursue redevelopment of this parcel of land rather than support the further development of the project. The City Council, like so many others across the UK, is engaged in a desperate search for alternative sources of funding, to plug the gap opened up by budget cuts administered by a Conservative government hell-bent on austerity, an ideological project popularly vindicated by the apparent “need” to bring down the huge public debt resulting from the bank bailout (see Crewe 2016). Liverpool City Council, for instance, has faced cuts of 58%; where do they find the money to fund basic and statutory public services like health and social care? For many councils, the answer is to be found in selling off publicly-owned land to housing developers for a quick injection of cash and the longer-term generation of council tax revenues—all the more for luxury flats and executive homes. But this amounts to short-termist asset-stripping and doesn’t account for the cumulative social value that projects like the Green Backyard create for so many residents

who may otherwise require additional council-provided services, such as mental health, as well as the countless environmental and social benefits with positive multiplier effects for the city as a whole. In such a difficult climate, the Green Backyard needs to demonstrate this value in the technical and inevitably quantitative “upward” language of funders and government agencies.

Such “social value accounting” or “impact measurement” may well prove anathema to the values of the Green Backyard activists, who instinctively resist quantification and bureaucratic rationalisation, not just because this runs against the grain of their project, but because it in turn invites direct comparison with things like luxury housing developments, and therefore opens the door to potential commodification. If such projects are to be successful in proving their worth to councils and other gatekeepers, social value assessment appears to be the kind of “upward” language they will have to learn. This is a recurring lesson in my own current research in Liverpool, where I’m working with colleagues at the Heseltine Institute for Public Policy and Practice at the University of Liverpool to study the scale, scope, social value and political potential of the city region’s social and solidarity economy at a crucial moment in the devolution process and at a time of intensifying austerity. We’re aiming to present findings to the newly-emerging city-regional actors, such as the Combined Authority and Metro Mayor, that demonstrate the value of solidarity for devolved governance and its potential for progressive urban transformation; but we keep getting bogged down in the same old debates about social impact measurement. If *Re:development* has anything useful to say here, it’s that there is an alternative: stories, narratives and images that construct persuasive visions of the future can be far more powerful in gaining trust and building support. This collection is the most effective articulation I’ve yet come across that captures these tensions; that expresses in outward language the difficulty of balancing the demands of inward and upward in building social and solidarity economies.

Our research in Liverpool has also revealed that city councils, Peterborough included, are not necessarily the bad guys in all this: they are caught within the net of an increasingly rationalised system and a punitively austere devolution regime that’s asking for ever more

“value” for ever less “money” (Crewe 2016). Something’s got to give eventually. And so it did. In late January 2017, after five years of hard campaigning and discussions with council officers, the Green Backyard secured their future with a rolling 12-year lease and the official support of the city council (The Green Backyard 2017). I would be surprised if this collection—let alone the wider action-research art project informing it—did not have some impact in this decision. That’s the social impact of good storytelling for you. The real value of *Re:development*, then, is the gift it gives, not just to the casual reader, in expressing a more meaningful reality, but to the movement contesting the absurd state we’re in—by demonstrating the value of combining inward, outward and upward languages, and convincing the gatekeepers of this unsustainable political settlement that real value resides in other things, in people over products, in narratives over numbers.

References

- Biel R (2013) *The Entropy of Capitalism*. Chicago: Haymarket
- Crewe T (2016) The strange death of municipal England. *London Review of Books* 15
December
- Crouch D and Ward C (1997) *The Allotment: Its Landscape and Culture*. Nottingham: Five
Leaves
- Eizenberg E (2012) Actually existing commons: Three moments of space of community
gardens in New York City. *Antipode* 44(3):764-782
- Gibson-Graham J K (2008) Diverse economies: Performative practices for “other worlds”.
Progress in Human Geography 32(5):613-632
- Graeber D (2001) *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own
Dreams*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan
- Hyde L (1979) *The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World*. New York: Random
House
- Iveson K (2013) Cities within the city: Do-it-yourself urbanism and the right to the city.

- International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37(3):941-956
- Kingsnorth P and Hine D (2009) "Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto."
<http://dark-mountain.net/about/manifesto/> (last accessed 18 April 2017)
- Lefebvre H (1991) *The Production of Space* (trans D Nicholson-Smith). Oxford: Blackwell
- Linebaugh P (2014) *Stop, Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance*. London: PM Press
- Marks L U (2000) *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. Durham: Duke University Press
- Massey D (2005) *For Space*. London: Sage
- Massey D (2011) Landscape/space/politics: An essay. *The Future of Landscape and the Moving Image* <https://thefutureoflandscape.wordpress.com/landscapespacepolitics-an-essay/> (last accessed 22 March 2017)
- Minton A (2012) *Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the 21st Century City*. London: Penguin
- Scott Cato M and North P (eds) (2017) *Towards Just and Sustainable Economies: The Social and Solidarity Economy North and South*. Bristol: Policy Press
- The Green Backyard (2017) The Green Backyard saved at last! 27 January
<http://www.thegreenbackyard.com/the-green-backyard-saved-at-last/> (last accessed 19 April 2017)
- Thompson M (2015) Between boundaries: From commoning and guerrilla gardening to community land trust development in Liverpool. *Antipode* 47(4):1021-1042
- Thompson M (2017) Dwelling on design: The influence of Logos and Eros, nouns and verbs, on public housing renewal and cooperative alternatives. In M Leary-Owhin and J McCarthy (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Henri Lefebvre, the City, and Urban Society* (forthcoming). New York: Routledge
- Tonkiss F (2013) Austerity urbanism and the makeshift city. *City* 17(3):312-324
- Ward C (2002) *Cotters and Squatters: The Hidden History of Housing*. Nottingham: Five Leaves

A Radical Journal
of Geography

ANTIPODE

Whatmore S (2002) *Hybrid Geographies: Natures, Cultures, Spaces*. London: Sage

White S (2007) Making anarchism respectable? The social philosophy of Colin Ward.

Journal of Political Ideologies 12(1):11-28

Matthew Thompson

Heseltine Institute for Public Policy and Practice

University of Liverpool

matthew.thompson@liverpool.ac.uk

April 2017