

# CULTURE AS CONTRADICTION IN URBAN REGENERATION

## Sanitization, Commodification, and Critical Resistance in Liverpool One

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### Abstract

This essay uses critiques of the homogenization of urban regeneration practices over recent decades to examine Liverpool ONE (L1), a privately owned, open-air retail development in the center of the historic city. The argument considers the role of a particular concept of culture in enabling major projects, which frequently involve the conversion of public resources into private assets, to be projected in a benign light. Countering this trend is a core mission for New York-based activist artist, Reverend Billy and his Church of Stop Shopping Choir; an inspiration to young artists in Liverpool. Since opening, L1 has functioned as a focal point for critical cultural interventions, whereby artists draw attention to the enclosure of urban democracy that results from the corporate takeover of established commercial streets. This essay examines two interventionist projects which deployed the potential of performance to critique Liverpool ONE: *Duke Aid*, executed by undergraduate performing arts students from Liverpool Hope University (2009), and *Ghost Town* (Liverpool Gothic Festival, 2013), written and performed by Alice Colquhoun and Izzy Major.

### Keywords

corporate culture; critical cultural practices; *Duke Aid*; *Ghost Town*; global city; privately owned public land; Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping Choir; urban democracy; urban regeneration

### About the Author

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Liverpool is located in the North-West of England, and its architectural diversity, which sees antiquity and the contemporary jostle for space, gives witness to the long and checkered past of a port city. Liverpool's streets are lined with grand Georgian and Victorian houses and commercial buildings, a residue of its former "glory" days of colonial commerce and the Atlantic slave trade. Images of its often remarkable examples of urban architecture now have a double existence: originals are reflected in shiny, contemporary, steel and glass structures which have come to dominate the skyline in the last two decades. The physical juxtaposition of old edifices against new points to Liverpool's civic positioning as a "progressive" global city; new architecture pays homage to Liverpool's recent economic vigor, while older buildings are a physical reminder of the city's rich historical culture. The survival of its fine architectural features is a story of resilience, destruction, and regeneration. Liverpool suffered airborne devastation during the Nazi blitz, the implementation of numerous "brutalist"<sup>1</sup> urban regeneration projects of the 1960s, and the full force of Margaret Thatcher's neoliberal government (1979-1990). Thatcher's policies devastated England's formerly great northern cities, eliminating manufacturing industry and local public service provision. One consequence of the lost decades of the 1980s and 1990s was the city council's decision, early in the twenty-first century, to sell off the city center to a private company. A network of streets on what was, historically, public land in the heart of Liverpool has become the sole property of the Duke of Westminster, and has been demolished, redesigned, rebuilt, and branded as Liverpool ONE (L1 or, sarcastically, Hell One): one of the largest shopping districts in the North West of England,

Liverpool ONE is one of Europe's leading retail and leisure destinations, set near to the historic waterfront. Built around the existing streets of Liverpool, our 1.65 million sq ft contemporary open-air complex is a stylish must-visit for those who love to shop, eat, drink and relax. Liverpool ONE has over 170 stores, bars and restaurants, a 14-screen cinema, an indoor adventure golf course as well as a Green Flag accredited five-acre park. Spanning across five areas, including Paradise Street, South John Street, Hanover Street, and the Leisure Terrace. Stores include high street favourites such as Topshop, John Lewis, Debenhams and so much more. ("Our Business")

The secrecy with which the city council cloaked the privatization of a core part of the city center ensures that, for the most part, the general public have no idea that, while engaged in retail activity, they are actually on private property and are subject to trespassing laws. This fact, coupled with a general extinction of many small-scale independent local shops in favor of large multi-national global companies, has made L1 an ongoing focus for critical cultural interventions, as artists draw attention to the enclosure of urban democracy that results from the corporate takeover of established commercial streets. This essay will review the homogenization of urban regeneration practices over recent decades and discuss the

role of a particular concept of culture in enabling major projects, which frequently involve the conversion of public resources into private assets, to be projected in a benign light. It then considers two interventionist projects which deployed the potential of performance to critique Liverpool ONE: *Duke Aid*, executed by undergraduate performing arts students from Liverpool Hope University (2009), and *Ghost Town* (“Liverpool International Gothic Festival”), written and performed by Alice Colquhoun and Izzy Major.

Henri Lefèbvre argues that a city’s vibrancy and general health depends on streets which accommodate and invite freedom of expression and spontaneous interactions—including revolutionary acts. As cities compete for global status under neoliberalization, reinvention has become the signature of urban regeneration projects, which paradoxically, replace living urban centers with soulless, homogenous shopping precincts. Liverpool ONE fits this brief, redesignating a large urban area as a privately owned “retail destination”; one of a growing number of “privately owned public spaces” in Britain. A cradle of commerce, its privately owned streets adorned with large, uniform, faceless buildings, are a direct challenge to Lefèbvre’s understanding of the civic purpose and possibilities of city streets. A private security firm patrols the streets of Liverpool ONE, censoring and policing spontaneity, let alone potentially revolutionary behavior. This is the context in which to consider the role of artists in articulating a critique of what, following Lefèbvre, might be described as corrosive, identity-erasing, profit-driven regeneration projects.

The ancient premise of the city—the polis as a republican ideal, a site of civic equality, and a forum of social, political and economic debate—has been consistently undermined over the centuries (Delanty). Accordingly, some now see cities as “bases of the globalist capitalist class” with “little resemblance to imaginings of the times when urbanism stood for citizenship, civic behavior and the ideal public sphere” (Amin 10). The role of the citizen, albeit confined to privileged social classes in the ancient city/polis, was still very much conceived, and practiced, as part of a collective. Most matters were dealt with in a democratic manner, with public spaces and communal amenities adding to the sense of a self-governing and contained community. At first sight, the Greek polis may be seen as an admirable institution; however, Delanty is quick to remind us that such cities, founded on supposedly democratic foundations, also had shortcomings: “It appears that the price for the inclusion of some is the exclusion of others. Thus the Greek communitarian ideal of the polis may be seen in a negative light as constructed around strong codes of us/them” (13). It could be argued that the notion of democracy, as exercised by the ancient Greeks, continues to operate as an unacknowledged bedrock of contemporary Western cities, insofar as economic power dictates mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Influential twenty-first-century thinkers, such as

Naomi Klein and David Harvey, argue that a capitalist insistence on looking at the individual in terms of material consumption, married to a neoliberal obsession with privatizing public amenities, is a verifiably sinister combination of forces. The cultural dynamic produced by this coming together actively encourages individualism at the expense of the collective and, in turn, has had detrimental effects both on public perceptions, and lived realities, of relationships between people and cities.

Saskia Sassen was one of the first theorists to use the term “global city,” predicting that cities which were in a position to offer “knowledge-rich” environments, accompanied by progressive technological development, would become central to the workings of the global economy, and thus become recognized as “global cities,” and key enablers of globalization. The aggressive pursuit of global city status since then has seen regeneration projects and reinvention schemes become signature practices worldwide. In the Western world, cities historically dependent on “heavy” industries, like mining and shipbuilding, experienced managed decline, deteriorating greatly toward the end of the twentieth century. These urban centers have had to reinvent themselves to try and counteract the severe social and economic problems resulting from the demise of their industrial economies, and they were all too open to alternative approaches which seemed likely to breathe life into local capitalist economies and institutions. According to Abrahamson, most cities adopted “the globalization response,” seeing establishment as global cities as a way to survive, by becoming “competitive” and, eventually, economically sound (4). This globalization response applying a generic formula has been acknowledged as a significant driver in the spread of a homogeneous global culture. The most immediately visible realization of cultural standardization is apparent in the architecture of global cities: “Across different societies and cities, skylines are changing, and the same faceless, shining buildings are rising, often owned by the same corporations” (Hassan 24). Hassan extends his argument by referring to cities of the West as an “identikit city that you can practically buy off the shelf” (24). The drive to attract and accommodate multinational corporate giants has, according to Hassan, colonized city landscapes, displacing or erasing national cultural particulars, ironically creating ‘placeless’ cities. The real contradiction occurs because such global cities, no longer recognizing for their productive capacities, have become dependent on the value of their cultural and entertainment attractions, that is, as long as they can be neatly packaged for market consumption. The profit driven “cultural revival” of cities has become established as a successful means of creating a particular brand which aids marketing, to the extent that, by 2007, Hassan argued that it had reduced urban complexity to a mere commercial logo,

The urban formula of success—first tried and tested in places like Barcelona and Bilbao—has become an increasingly narrow one, with diminishing results. It reduces

cities to participation in a kind of cultural arms race, competing with iconic buildings, galleries and museums, riverfront developments and squinty bridges. (24)

In pursuit of global status more cities, pursued a reputation for “excellence in art and culture” as a pre-condition essential to realizing “true global pretensions” (Rennie Short 75); in the words of Liverpool Mayor, Joe Anderson, “I have great ambition for this city, and culture, to me is the rocket fuel for its continuing regeneration” (“Liverpool: A Cultural Capital” 3). Cultural capital underpins a city’s global credentials, and cities themselves are key enablers of the globalization of culture. According to Appadurai, cultural globalization can best be conceptualized through the multiple “sites” or “realms” in which “cultural flows” are continually shaping and reshaping the world (295). He identifies five such “flows,” all of which are housed in the modern city: “ethnoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes.” As such overarching global cultural “scapes” become established as ways of seeing, and are applied in principles for urban governance and planning, Appadurai suggests that local practices are repositioned in relation to a “tentative global culture” which dominates and erodes them. The penetration of the local sphere by global culture is visible in the re-articulation, in local contexts, of values and ideologies embedded in global cultural references. It is a clear paradox that the pursuit of “cultural originality” for market profit, as a global city’s “unique selling point” (USP), leads to the erosion, as a direct consequence of cultural globalization, of local cultural identities. The pursuit of a homogenized global city, in other words, produces bland, unremarkable, physical environments, while local cultural particulars are sanitized and reduced to commodity status, by means of biennale events and culture capital designations. This reduction of the complexity and multifaceted layers of a city fabric to a diminutive cultural logo, reflects Malcolm Miles’s concept of “imagineering” in relation to regenerative approaches to the contemporary city and how the everyday reality of being an active local person fails to comply with a global city’s agenda: “In the symbolic economy by which cities compete for global recognition images made for external perception freeze out those of everyday life” (36). This sanitization and erasure of the “everyday” in favor of the cosmetically engineered glossy images of a city not only informs the marketing snaps of a place but has a living consequence for those whom the space should house and service. In *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class* Selina Todd critiques the impact of such aggressive approaches to regenerating cities. In relation to Liverpool, she cites a local resident’s experience of “feeling like a stranger in my own city centre,” a comment she interprets as a response to “how little Liverpool now offered working-class people in terms of housing, jobs and shopping” (345).

To many people concerned at this trend, and, especially, artists, this can only be countered by asserting that a city’s soul lies in its inhabitants. It is the

distinctiveness of the people's culture, and their ability to take, and embody, a sense of ownership over their city, despite the pressures brought to bear by signature neoliberal practices, that contains a kernel of hope for humanity. Liverpoolians have a particularly strong sense of local "Scouse" identity, to the extent that supporters of Liverpool Football Club have been known to chant, "We ain't English; we are Scouse!" During the Capital of Culture year (2008), dissenting views were expressed in graffiti, such as "Scousers are the Culture." The slogan was a direct protest at the over-commercialization of the event and the lack of recognition of potential local contribution. "Scousers are the Culture" asserts that it is people, and not location, that make a city distinctive, a view shared by Doreen Massey. She argues that a populace has a central role in forming a city's identity, and extends her analysis of urban space to consider significant spatial relations between individuals and buildings, individuals and institutions, and others (164). She investigates how local spatial formations may reveal the operation of power relations, in negotiations between individuals and their environment, and how local democracy may be enhanced by exposing those relations. She concludes that relationships of spatial power in urban spaces can be altered by human actions, political will, and ingenuity, as people hold power, especially when they act collectively. Lefèbvre complements Massey (1999), arguing that urban space has been shaped to support oppressive hegemonic systems, enabling the bourgeoisie, literally, to keep the proletariat in their place, in spaces designed and defined by the powerful (11). David Harvey takes a similar view, arguing that private ownership of commercial property is the single most influential factor in establishing terms of economic power and control. Thus, the regeneration of Liverpool ONE as the city's commercial cradle, prompts fundamental questions about twenty-first-century neoliberal policies, which have enabled, in this case, thirty-five city center streets to be transferred to the property portfolio of one man: The Duke of Westminster.

Liverpool ONE opened its doors for trading in May 2008, in the middle of Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture. In a relatively short time thereafter, "the largest open air shopping centre in the UK" became according to Liverpool ONE's own website, the country's fifth most popular retail destination. The genesis of this massive private venture on public land dates back to 1998, when the Liverpool City Council commissioned a retail study of the city's center. Cushman and Wakefield concluded that a radical re-development of over 42 acres was needed, if Liverpool was to become a competitively sound retail center, one of the many requirements for global city status. In 2000, the Duke of Westminster's development company, Grosvenor Group, secured the contract as developer, and started work on site in 2004. Fourteen years on, while the initial masterplan has been realized, small pockets of development continue along some of the boundaries of Liverpool One. The project has been a success on many levels, and numerous reports on file at the city council testify to its achievements, especially in terms of its economic impact

on the city. So, while Liverpool ONE can be acknowledged as a successful retail and leisure facility, its development is a textbook example of neoliberal practices, in that a large, core area of a major city is now privately owned, with all the restrictions on access and practice that that entails.

While local people stroll through the shopping district or socialize in Chavasse Park—which appears to be communal, municipal space—the reality that their presence is an encroachment on private property is embodied in the highly visible presence of Liverpool ONE’s security firm, uniformed in red jackets. Private ownership and policing of a vast urban area runs contrary to Lefèbvre’s vision of the street as an active agent in enabling spontaneity and meaningful human interaction. Spontaneity and randomness are completely curtailed in Liverpool ONE, as even buskers must go through an audition process, and secure a permit, to stand, fully armed with guitar and bucket, on a tiny patch of the Duke’s land. The auditioning process for buskers, along with the overly prescribed, and what could be seen as “tokenistic” community arts projects run by Liverpool ONE, sanitizes and controls “culture” in the service of image and the projection of the “brand” of Liverpool ONE. Though this shopping precinct is presented to consumers as an integrated cog in the commercial hub of the city of Liverpool, the privatization of the streets, which is not necessarily known or ordinarily evident to people, reflects Lefebvre’s “desolate premonition [that] there are consequences to eliminating the street [...] the extinction of life, the reduction of a city to a dormitory, the aberrant functionalization of existence” (cited in Harvie 788).

However, this essay argues that there are alternatives to such powerful and controlling forces, including dissenting interventions by performance makers, who use their art as a weapon to educate, inform, and provoke reaction. The twentieth century saw the emergence of street performance which had an overt political agenda. Artists groups such as the Situationists in Paris (to which Lefebvre was connected), Russian, German, and British Workers’ Theatre Movements, agit-prop, Happenings in America, and Boal’s invisible theatre in Brazil, offer a history, during the twentieth century, of purposeful and effective street performance. All these artist groups shared practices embedded in anti-capitalist critique, and sought to problematize capitalist relations of production, consumer behavior, and the privatization of municipal amenities. They set out to empower the public, by provoking debate about social agency, collective will, structures of power and ways of reclaiming ownership of the city itself. In the examples on which this essay focuses, audiences for critical interventions are shoppers, who very often appear zombified and isolated; the goal of intervention is to offer glimpses of human renaissance among Liverpool ONE’s “huge, deathly grey buildings” (*Ghost Town*, 2013), to validate local identities, and encourage community cohesion. According to Darby, the city is a site “comprised of rules, regulations, spaces and stories that

are all interconnected and can be followed or played with” (48). Performative acts, for the most part, “play” with such rules, using content and form with the potential to subvert the uniformity demanded by the conventions of capitalist shopping transactions. Such acts question, and can enable understanding of, the limits in which people now live, interact, and acquire agency in the contemporary global city.

As the grip of neoliberal capitalism continues to tighten and inform city structures of commerce and civic living, the need for twenty-first-century artists to expose and challenge the hegemony of dominant ideologies, and the cultural economies



**Fig. 1.** Liverpool Hope University undergraduate student engaged in a form of Boal’s Invisible Theatre, for which she has taken on the role of a Charity Worker seeking signatures on a petition.

they serve, is more acute than ever. The performance artist William Talen, known as Reverend Billy, uses “abominating semi-ironic preaching to rag[e] against the noxious effects of consumerism, transnational capital, and the privatization of public space and culture [initially] in New York city [and now much further afield]” (Lane cited in Harvie 911). His performance is a form of social activism, in which Reverend Billy and his Gospel Church of Stop Shopping Choir give on-street and in-shop sermons. His performance persona—that of the evangelical preacher—is a direct attempt to disrupt everyday, repetitive, consumer behavior, and inspire or encourage people to step back, and consider their learned consumer habits through a critical lens. Principally, he uses radical public performance practice as a vehicle to plead with people to recognize their oppression by a corrosive, ubiquitous, consumer society. He also points to shoppers’ complicity with their own oppression, urging people to reject passive consumption, and reclaim personal and collective civil agency.

In 2009, a group of undergraduate students from the Department of Drama, Dance and Performance Studies, Hope University, inspired by the work of Reverend Billy, devised and implemented an artistic intervention on the privatized streets of Liverpool One. The overarching aim of *Duke Aid*, rich in satirical overtones, was to raise awareness, by making a public collection of money to enable the “poor Duke of Westminster,” who, at that time, sat in third place on Britain’s “rich list,” to move up to second place with the public support of Liverpoolians.

The students, festooned with *Duke Aid*, logo t-shirts and buckets, stopped people on the city center streets bordering Liverpool ONE and delivered the following script:

Hello, how are you today? Are you rushing? Are you busy? Can I have just five minutes of your time?

I just want to tell you about an amazing man who is only the third richest man in the UK. He owns a lot of the streets surrounding Liverpool One as well as Liverpool One. Don't you think it's ludicrous that he doesn't own this one.....?

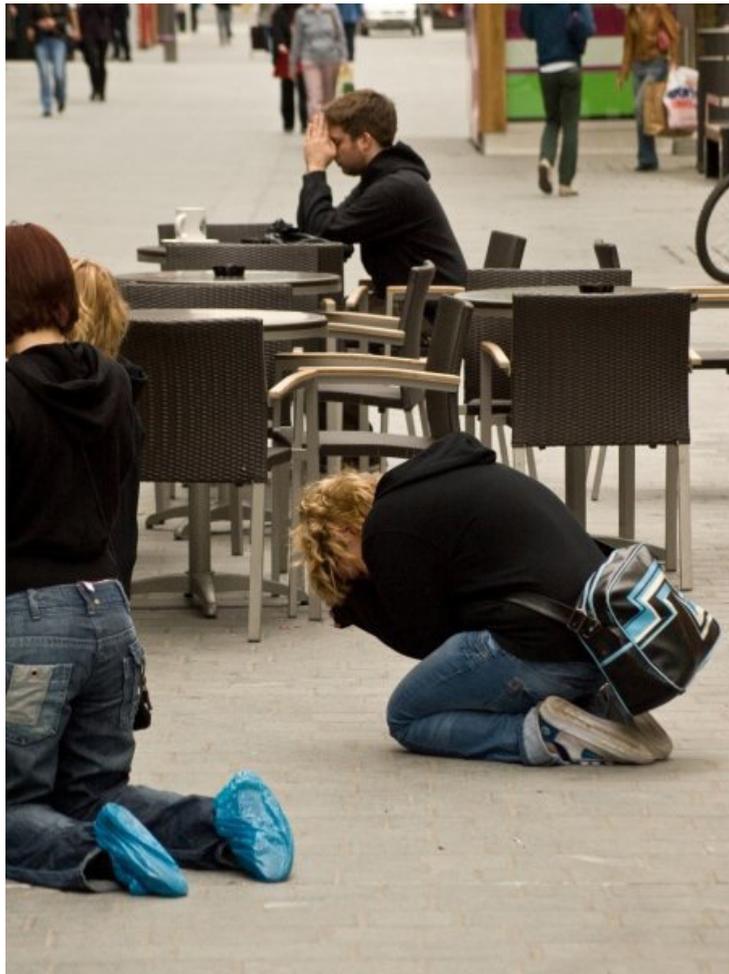
Our organisation is called Duke Aid, and we want to make him privatize all the lands of Liverpool. We love privatisation.

Basically, we can put you on the mailing list and we can send you more information on the Duke's status. The website is dukeaid.org, and why not join our Facebook group, called Duke Aid 2009.

Thanks for your time.

The following is a response from participating student, Pooja Sitpura, on the intervention's public reception:

As we imitated charity workers accumulating signatures for *Duke Aid*, most members of the public were happy to sign the petition to expand privatization, and further secure more land and ownership of public spaces, unaware of the conditions this poses for the freedom of the local majority. We questioned whether the public understood what this all meant for them. Only one person out of thirty I spoke to questioned *Duke Aid*; when he recognised the satire, he was confused at how I had managed to generate so many signatures.



**Fig 2.** A student, engaging in an “act of worship” outside Starbucks, wears plastic slip-over shoe coverings, as part of an intervention to make people aware that the public are actually walking on private property.

The students performed six other interventions that day, including:

**PROTECTING THE DUKE'S MONEY:** In this action, people were asked to wear plastic slip-over shoe coverings to protect pavements, and reduce the costs of maintaining and cleaning the Duke's private streets.

**PRAYERS TO PRODUCTS:** Students collected outside a selection of large corporate multinational shopping outlets such as Starbucks, Topshop, Apple, among others, and enacted a "proclaim and pray" intervention. They preached and performed worship of controversial facts about the businesses' trading and employment practices.

As a witness to the work on the day, I noted this as the intervention that caused the most "alarm" for L1's private security firm. They tried to stop the students' action, insisted on knowing who they were and "who had got them up to this?" Tutors from the university were approached and told to reprimand the students.



**Fig. 3.** Students engage in a public demonstration of ironic prayer to multi-national companies, known for their controversial tax arrangements, and unethical subcontracting practices in the Global South.

THE PILE: A woman laden down with multiple bags and boxes bulging with consumer goods kept falling over, and was dependent on the “goodwill” of passers-by to help her up. The items that fell out of the bags were random, such as shoes, clothes, potatoes, images of the Duke, mini-shrines to the Duke, and others.

SOLD: This intervention was a performative demonstration of how Liverpool ONE was sold and privatized; transferred from being the property of the people of Liverpool, into private, commercial, ownership. Each of the students wore a white T-Shirt with “SOLD” in large red letters printed on the back. They positioned themselves along the ground level of L1, each outside a shop, either facing the walls or display windows with their back to passing members of the public, or lying on the ground, face down. Emerging from these poses, the students then presented a contemporary movement piece, which finished with each performer being linked by a large red ribbon which was intended to represent an endless and impenetrable chain of multinational shops.

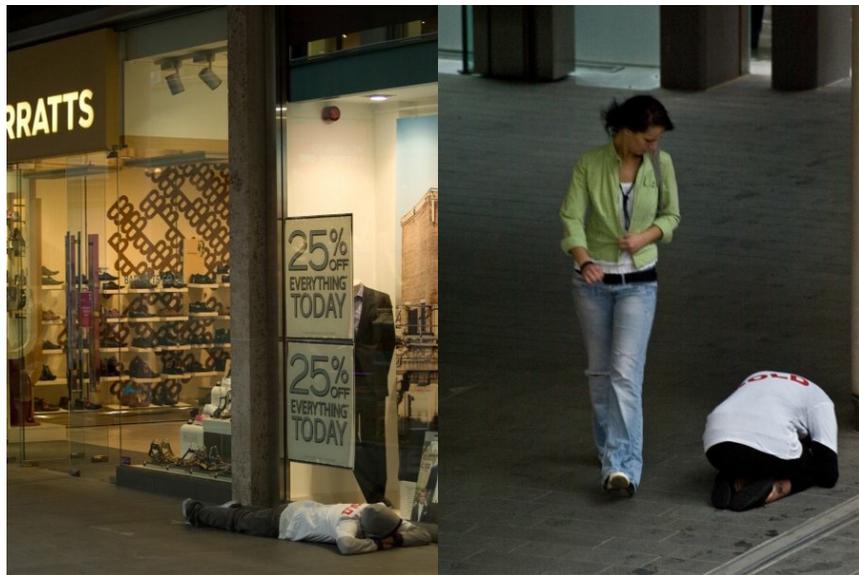


Fig. 4. SOLD: students randomly positioned, alone and isolated, around the shopping district, provoking questioning looks from passers-by.

STANDING: Performers stood close to ATM cash machines, in a zombie-like state, and declared to anyone who came to use the machines that they were “maxed out” and they had “no money left” after a series of extravagant shopping sprees.

THE PICNIC: This was a cumulative intervention which brought all the students back together, and took place on the green area at Chavasse Park. It was a mock-celebration of the Duke and his shopping center. It was also a critical platform to collectively discuss and reflect upon the day’s experiences, and what had emerged as the most pressing issues underpinning the interventions.

Pooja Sitpura offered the following reflection on the entire project:

There was an atmosphere of uncertainty and bafflement as we roamed the shopping centre. Some people realised that something out of the ordinary was going on; others seems to ignore or try to dismiss the circus like activities. Others looked on, baffled. Most of the interventions were interactive, which engaged the public. These were the most interesting of happenings from a student and arts activist perspective.

In 2013 Liverpool hosted The International Gothic Festival, for which performance-makers, Alice Colquhoun and Izzy Major devised *Ghost Town*: a critical response to shopping in Liverpool ONE. The premise of this performance is the artists’ intention to playfully expose the similarities between characteristics associated with gothic literature (horror, terror, entropy, demise, disease, and human torment) and shoppers in urban regeneration environments (displacement, abandonment, and terror), while gesturing to such tropes is obscured by disingenuous, romantic, narrative conventions. Colquhoun and Major worked with the motif of abandoned places, concentrating on how the built environment ignites certain feelings among those present, adopting a similar thesis to that of Massey. Deteriorating buildings are powerful presences in gothic literature, allegories for the demise of society at large (as in works by Poe, Shelley, Le Fanu, Stoker, and many others). Accordingly, *Ghost Town* was staged in a constricted space in the crypt of St. Luke’s, Liverpool’s neo-Gothic “bombed-out church”—a memorial to the depredations of war—left deliberately derelict, following a direct hit by a German incendiary bomb, during World War II. Thus, they position the idea of the gothic “ruin” and projected images of the newly regenerated Liverpool ONE, side by side. Liverpool ONE is read as a contemporary gothic site, in which, as “we seek the city of progress, all items of value have been removed” (*Ghost Town*). The latter part of this phrase cites the wording of an official notice placed on a building in Liverpool, prior to demolition, to deter people from entering.

Colquhoun and Major playfully disrupt and question the cosmetic perfection of the newly built Liverpool ONE by juxtaposing its architectural “newness”

alongside the “decay” and “corrosion” of the deathly consumers wandering through them. For them, the newly generated area of Liverpool One, despite its shiny new façade, is a mantle for the deep corruption and demise of society, “Where sins are committed and never confessed, here you will find your signs of progress” (*Ghost Town*). Ultimately, this performance was a provocation for the audience, unapologetically posing questions of public/private ownership and the “zombified” culture of needless consumerism. The play draws on a gothic terror of the spread of incurable diseases, in this case the contagion of capitalism, “We are indeed part of the problem but the disease won’t exist without us” (*Ghost Town*). According to Major, “the gothic theme thrives in bad times,” so *Ghost Town* critiques largescale urban regeneration projects, usually measured by economic statistics, as, for the most, part ruinous of the soul of a city and its inhabitants.



Fig. 5. *Ghost Town*, “Bombed-Out” Church, Liverpool. Izzy Major and Alice Colquhoun in performance, with images of L1 shops projected on the backdrop.

In important ways, *Duke Aid* and *Ghost Town* are resistant gestures which respond to and illustrate Ray’s observation that,

Because a territory has undergone a high degree of economic integration into the global economy it does not follow automatically that there will be a similar degree of social or cultural convergence. Cultures may prove more sticky and recalcitrant than flows of capital, goods and technologies. (32)

This essay argues that, *Duke Aid* and *Ghost Town* represent formidable, property-less weapons which can be wielded by, and on behalf of, a city's people, as their rights to public space are eroded by neoliberal globalization. These critical interventions in the remorseless business of shopping demonstrate how performance may openly challenge dominant, hegemonic, neoliberal forces, by exposing how they are made manifest in the privatization of the core shopping area of the city of Liverpool. In the Global North, it is all but impossible to avoid the impact of globalization and the conditions it imposes on people and their relationship to their own cities, but cultural intervention deployed for social critique can interrupt people's passivity, as individualized consumers, and may enable processes which embody means by which they begin to ponder the ownership of their own cities; an essential precondition for active and questioning citizenship, which is a bedrock of a healthy democracy.

The phrase, "if I were to start anew, I would start from culture" is attributed to Jean Monnet (cited in Delors), one of the key figures in founding what has become the European Union. Whether he used the actual words or not, and whatever multiple interpretations of the phrase exist, the place of culture in, and in spite of, regeneration projects continues to be a crucial one, not least in confronting massive problems with a sense that it is always possible to show a different perspective, to tell an alternative story.

Culture is central to ideas and practices of urban regeneration, and, as the interventions explored in this essay indicate, to critical responses to this important vehicle for the globalization of the local. Civic authorities in Liverpool and the managers of Liverpool ONE are adept at making use of cultural artefacts and processes to project a benign appearance, and deflect scrutiny from important changes in how people live, work, and socialize in the city. This essay has argued that critical culture remains a most effective option to reveal, speak to, and critique the negative impact of globalization, and to problematize its use of corporate culture as a theatrical disguise. In the case of Liverpool, reference might be made to a highly successful case study of personal regeneration, Willy Russell's *Educating Rita* (1981; film version, 1983). The play stages Rita's transformation, from routine work and a humdrum marriage, to intellectual independence and social self-confidence. The means is education, which, in her case, means a part-time degree course at the Open University. The play's narrative maps Rita's growth against her tutor, Frank's, changing frustrations with his student: initially, he despairs of a diamond so rough, it appears unamenable to refinement of any kind; he is shocked when her rejection of her husband and her working-class origins is followed by her rejecting him, and the paternalistic assumptions which structure the tutor/student relationship; he is ultimately redeemed by her assertion of herself as one capable of negotiating between worlds, rather than flatly rejecting one over another. Culture, her capacity to gain access to it, her engagement with it, in the form

of literature and drama, and her eventual willingness to use it as a tool for reflection in and on her worlds, is the key to her transformation. In a troubled moment of self-examination, Rita recounts her mother's sadness during a sing-song at their local pub, and her mother's tearful comment, "We can sing better songs than those." This, for Rita, defines her own regeneration through education as a process of continuing to engage with culture, but to ask questions as to what kind of culture is more likely to generate creativity and affirmation. In other words, she recognizes culture as inquiry into critical practices and ideas important to her and her social class. Rita, a person regenerated by critical engagement, offers a metaphor for the city in which she was imagined: tropes of development, regeneration, or improvement are meaningful only when they refer, in the first place, and above all else, to a city's people.

## Note

1. Brutalist architecture in Europe flourished in the mid-20th century as a feature of modernist urban development. It was known for its bland, concrete, boxlike qualities and seen by many retrospectively as a low point in architectural history. For more information see, Alexander Clement, *Brutalism: Post-War British Architecture*. The Crowood Press, 2012.

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