SLUM IT IN STYLE:

THE PRSC AND COUNTER-DISCURSIVE URBAN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY IN STOKES CROFT, BRISTOL

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Abstract

This project examines the impacts of recent urban development discourse in Bristol from the perspective of the '*People's Republic of Stokes Croft'* (PRSC) – a Community Interest Company based in one of Bristol's most deprived and centrally neighbourhoods. The PRSC's unique vision of Stokes Croft's future developmental trajectory is unpacked and contrasted with those applied elsewhere in Bristol through New Labour policy discourses based around the twin themes of 'community' and 'culture'. The PRSC construct their own counter – discursive development strategy based around both of these concepts, but apply them in very different ways, in turn exposing incompatibilities between grass roots understandings of community and culture and those discursively imposed by government. The study contributes to evidencing pitfalls in New Labour's development strategy, highlighting problems in the social theories acted upon in government discourse as well as the institutional apparatuses put in place to enforce their style of 'government at a distance'. An adapted form of Fairclough's 'Critical Discourse analysis' is applied as a means of unpacking both party's rhetoric and manifest discourses.

Specifically, the oft – cited critique of contemporary urban policy being responsible for the homogenisation of space is figured as being particularly threatening to Stokes Croft's unique standing as (what Michel Foucault has termed) a *heterotopia*. The PRSC's attempts to protect and enhance this status through the curation of street art and by marketing the area as a 'cultural quarter' and 'outdoor art gallery' is then interrogated for its effectiveness and viability as counter-discourse. The study concludes by suggesting that the development of the PRSC's intermediary brand of

independent, grass roots governmentality will likely be necessary in ensuring the usual complaints of social injustice associated with conventional urban development policy are avoided in Stokes Croft.

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1. Introduction

Figure 1.1: Westmoreland House, Stokes Croft, Bristol

1.1. Stokes Croft: Bristol's Stylish Slum

Upon entering Stokes Croft from the north of Bristol, one is immediately confronted with the ominous presence of *Westmoreland House* (figure 1.1). As a dilapidated 1960s office block looming over the street with its dull – brick façade smattered with graffiti, such a structure might be seen to stand as an appropriate introduction to this unique part of the city. Capturing the dereliction resultant from the area's post – war history of neglect and unsympathetic commercial development, it epitomises a long decline that has left Stokes Croft a concentrated space of urban deprivation in an otherwise affluent city.

Westmoreland house is now iconic within Stokes Croft. More than just a static symbol of troubled and contested past; it is a dynamic canvas through which community members have challenged the development strategies of local government:

Figure 1.2: Westmoreland House Mural installed by the People's Republic of Stokes Croft

Westmoreland House has been waiting for a 'refit' since 1984. Next to this, windows are decoratively boarded up with work by other artists whilst the 'hype' of refit circulates amongst the council and developers. Within these works there is expressed an affinity with place transcending anger and desperation, instead revealing a community holding onto hope for change, calling for attention and taking redevelopment into its own creative hands. If Westmoreland House is indeed a 'slum' for the many homeless frequenting Stokes Croft, these works attempt to reconfigure

deprivation as something that need not be without its own appealing styles and aesthetic. This is the fundamental belief of the People's Republic of Stokes Croft (PRSC) – a radical community organisation seeking an alternative mode of urban development by bringing art into the everyday environment, re-imagining urban beauty in its own terms and embodying local cultural identity in the streetscape.

1.2. Stokes Croft: Key Geographical Context

Stokes Croft lies within the periphery St.Pauls, a Super Output Area within Bristol with an index of multiple deprivation at 60.98, 583rd most deprived of 35,482 nationwide (DLGC, 2007). Ashley ward, housing St. Pauls, currently has five of its seven SOAs within England's most deprived 10 per cent. Juxtaposed with the wealth of the neighbouring gentrified commercial city centre and affluent suburbs, this contrast typifies trends of polarisation seen more widely across the city. Stokes Croft's position within Bristol's geography of multiple deprivation is shown in figure 1.3. In spite its geographical profile, however, Stokes Croft has become a space of contested repute. On the one hand, its empty buildings (22% of ground floor units are vacant), scruffy streetscape and high levels of homelessness (7.7% of its residents are based in hostels) have given rise to external perceptions of the area as unwelcoming to pedestrians and unattractive to commercial development (statistics according to Colin Buchanan and partners, 2006). On the other, Stokes Croft's relatively cheap, centrally located properties have become popular amongst an alternative community working in the creative industries and quite literally tracing their presence onto the streets. As a conservation area combining listed buildings with an independent cinema, niche shops, art galleries and studios, Stokes Croft stands as a unique mosaic of urban structure, punctuated with street art and a distinct bohemian sensibility. The boundaries of this conservation area are mapped in figure 1.4. Four key sites of contested development regularly referenced in this study are also located: Westmoreland House, 'The Bear Pit', 'Turbo Island' and the City Road/Stokes Croft vacant corner site (see appendix Glossary, p.71)

Figure 1.3: Super Output Areas by Multiple Deprivation in Bristol

Source: Bristol City Council (2007)

Figure 1.4: Stokes Croft Conservation area and listed buildings

Source: PRSC (http://prsc.org.uk/map.htm)

1.3. 'Don't Develop Stokes Croft, Let Stokes Croft Develop': The People's Republic of Stokes Croft

'PRSC will seek to promote and bring to fruition the notion of Stokes Croft as a Cultural Quarter, as a destination. PRSC will seek to promote creativity and activity in the local environment, thereby gaining prosperity, both financial and spiritual…PRSC believes that the strength of the local community resides in its creativity, tolerance and respect for each other.'

PRSC Mission Statement, March 2009

(See Appendix A, p.74)

'The mission is to help Stokes Croft to recognise its special qualities by improving the streetscape through direct action, by creating a sense of identity, a sense of belonging and of self-worth. PRSC is determined to safeguard the unique character of the area.'

PRSC Website, March 2009

The People's Republic of Stokes Croft (PRSC) gained status as Community Interest Company in February 2009, holding as its key aim the development of Stokes Croft in a sustainable manner sensitive to existing community needs and priorities. Crucially, this involves questioning top-down strategy in favour of approaches designed and driven by the local community, deemed to be the sole means of assuring cultural autonomy is retained as a definitive component of Stokes Croft's community identity. Whilst this status is recent, the group have been in operation on a smaller scale for a number of years previous to this, using art installations to revitalise neglected sites with an aim to simultaneously fostering community cohesion and provoking local engagement with developmental issues affecting the area. As a parallel to this, the PRSC work to encourage the growth of creative industry in Stokes Croft and establish the area as a recognised cultural quarter, expanding facilities for artistic and

community activity by acquiring freehold property for use as studios, rehearsal rooms and community centres whilst safeguarding already existing infrastructure. They also promote small scale activity aimed at directly making a difference to the streetscape, such as involving the homeless in litter removal and generally maintaining public property. The PRSC's mission statement and developmental strategy are supplied in appendix A, pp. 74-92. Importantly, the company deem their action necessary due to neglect of Stokes Croft by local government and enterprise, and relevant because of the effect this has had on the area:

> 'It is precisely because Stokes Croft has been neglected, that people of all backgrounds and circumstance have learned to co-exist in an enclave of tolerance that few from outside this magical area can begin to understand…there are many areas where there are gaps in the normal commercial landscape. This can be seen as a disadvantage, a gap- toothed smile. PRSC sees only opportunity, the opportunity to flavour forever the visual nature of our quarter.'

PRSC Website, March 2009

The 2008 'Quality of Life in your neighbourhood' survey indicates the PRSC's claims for community appear to be well founded, with 69% of Ashley Ward residents believing they influence local decisions as part of a community working together (compared with 54% citywide). The PRSC aim to use these community strengths in conjunction with its unique style of creative and cultural capital in order to develop their own brand of regeneration strategies as antithesis to wider discourses enacted in Bristol, viewed as a threat to the area's cultural inheritance and unique social fabric.

1.4. Towards a Grass Roots understanding of Community and Culture in Regeneration Strategy

Given the increasing PRSC member numbers in the midst of city centre sprawl and the recently developed 'Gateway Enhancement Project' (see Colin Buchanan and

partners, 2006), it is clear that despite New Labour policy installing new structures for community involvement in regeneration strategy there is growing concern that their discourses are not capable of representing or safeguarding a perceived community and cultural presence in Stokes Croft. Much work has been conducted into analysing the effectiveness of the discursive projects in place as part of New Labour's approach to community and cultural - driven regeneration (as reviewed in Chapter 2), but this study seeks to further debate by exploring how these strategies impact the ways in which groups claiming to be representative of a distinct community interest (such as the PRSC) channel their experiences into organising counter-discourse at a grass-roots level. This is an essential component of evaluating the micro-scale consequences of contemporary regeneration strategies more broadly, in that it exemplifies some of the ways in which governance structures set the remits by which 'community' (a slippery concept in itself) is manifest in spheres of governance and appropriated for use in regenerating urban space. This case study seeks to bring to light, and attend to new questions over, the degree to which New Labour's regeneration strategy can be deemed to be truly 'community – led' and loyal to upholding a distinctive cultural form in spaces typically evasive of the operations of hegemony.

Being motivated by concerns over the need to identify how the PRSC's counter-discourse is organised, chapter 3 outlines some key Foucauldian theory and methods related to the concept of discursive formation theory, advancing a critical discourse analysis as a route to unpacking the more nuanced relationship between state, culture and community. Chapter 4 applies these methods in a detailed exploration of the counter-discursive rhetoric and street – level activity practised by the PRSC. Finally, a concluding chapter draws together the key findings of the study, highlights its limitations and points towards future trajectories for development in Stokes Croft.

1.5. Key Lines of Enquiry

In order to examine how the PRSC construct, present and act upon their own regenerative discourses as a way of forwarding understandings of the micro-scale

behavioural impacts of wider contemporary urban policy in Bristol, this study firstly identifies the features of policy discourses which the PRSC are responsive to. From here it then explores the ways in which community and cultural identity in Stokes Croft are imagined within PRSC rhetoric, before examining the ways in which these imaginaries are put on display within the artwork they trace onto the streetscape. The extent to which the PRSC's activities can be considered to be 'counter – discursive' will then be assessed by examining where their bottom-up regenerative discourses diverge from discourses of the Third Way. From this, the impacts of New Labour communitarianism on the Stokes Croft community can be identified, alongside impacts of culture-driven regenerative strategies on cultural space. Answers to the following key questions are sought as a means of synthesising these lines of enquiry:

How are community-led regeneration discourses framing the way the PRSC conceptualise and mobilise the Stokes Croft community for regeneration?

How are government cultural policy discourses in Bristol influencing the PRSC's own use of culture as a means of regenerating Stokes Croft?

2.0. Literature Review

In order to effectively analyse the PRSC's constructions of counter-discourse, it is first necessary to outline contemporary discourses through which power relations between state and society are articulated and the associated 'conditions of possibility' (Foucault, 1966) available to the group within the frameworks of these discursive hegemonies. This crucially involves reviewing recent discussions of the successes and failures of New Labour's Third Way politics, which have aimed towards an 'urban renaissance' in deprived city space nationwide through a devolution of power encouraging communities to play an active role in the development of regeneration strategies. Secondly, given the PRSC's plans to use art and culture as a main route to regeneration, it is necessary to examine the application and consequences of recent cultural policy discourses in Bristol in order to contextualise the group's counter-discursive approach.

These two central features of New Labour's politics – community and culture - amount to an attempt to devolve power to local government as part of a switch to a new form of 'governance', involving the assumption that communities can act as autonomous agencies responsible for moulding their own developmental trajectories. In practice, installing these changes has been highly contentions, made clear in a vast array of critical literature revealing both active citizenship and culture as 'slippery' concepts (Lister, 1997, p.14, and Garcia, 2004, respectively) that complicate and frustrate the regenerative strategies of communities and government alike. At the heart of much of this literature lies the question of the compatibility of Third Way rhetoric and neoliberalism, and ultimately uncertainty over the stability of New Labour political philosophy.

After reviewing these debates, this chapter concludes by drawing together the key issues likely to be influential to the successes of the PRSC's strategy. In particular, links are made to literature discussing the application of New Labour community and cultural policy across Bristol in order to help understand how far the regeneration of Stokes Croft constitutes an attempt to smooth uneven geographies across the city. Importantly for deprived areas such as Stokes Croft, literature critical of New Labour's approaches argue that marginal spaces may be threatened by the same community and culture-driven policy heralded by central government as the solution to urban inequality.

2.1. Rolling – back Neoliberalism: Community into Policy

'We all depend on collective goods for our independence; and all our lives are enriched - or impoverished - by the communities to which we belong. A key challenge of progressive politics is to use the state as an enabling force, protecting effective communities and voluntary organisations and encouraging their growth to tackle new needs, in partnership as appropriate'

(Blair, 1998, p. 4)

Today's direct use of community in regenerative strategy has its origins in local politics during the late 1980s. During this period, residents became increasingly involved as managers of regeneration in projects such as City Challenge and the Single Regeneration Budget, developed in response to urban planning research revealing failures in property-led regeneration to improve conditions for residents in deprived areas (Dargan, 2007). These involvements of community, however, remained subordinate to regenerative practices that followed conservative neoliberal market - led approaches seeking increased private sector investment as a priority (Marinetto, 2003). It was not until a shift from govern*ment* to govern*ance* was officially sought in New Labour political discourse (Goodwin and Painter, 1996) that the social cohesiveness of place, and therefore community involvement, became directly aligned with a route to democratic, sustainable economic success for neighbourhoods. New Labour's (unofficial) intellectual guru Anthony Giddens endorsed this approach:

> 'The theme of community is fundamental to the new politics, but not just as an abstract slogan. … "Community" doesn't imply trying to capture lost forms of local solidarity; it refers to practical means of furthering the social and material refurbishment of neighbourhoods, towns and larger local areas'
>
> (Giddens, 1998, p. 79)

Central to New Labour's political discourse, then, is a firmly held belief that there already exist active, altruistic and responsible communities that present an alternative approach to governing besides the common options of state bureaucracy and professional elitism. This was a central feature of a 'new conventional wisdom' (Goodlad and Meegan, 2005) propagated after New Labour's ascension to power in 1997 that 'transformed democratic socialism into a synthesis of stakeholding and communitarianism' (Levitas, 2005, p.124). Central to this new rhetoric is the enforcement of individual responsibility through the twin pressures of the global economy and community accountability, a 'Third Way' between left and right that sees community involvement in the economy as a way of mediating the socially

damaging and undemocratic tendencies of regeneration left in the hands of the free market. This approach is part of a movement termed 'Roll Back neoliberalism' by Peck and Tickell (2002), seeking to reverse the damages and uneven geographies caused by free markets under more starkly individualist neoliberalism 'rolled out' under Thatcherism and supported associated structural forces beyond the influence of the local (Atkinson, 2003). However, for New Labour communitarianism to realistically soften the effects of neoliberalism, Amin (2005) notes that government places trust in communities to be able to provide a cohesiveness that fosters civic pride, responsibility and participation. In turn, this is believed to generate the social capital deemed necessary to enhance institutional trust networks needed to sustain economic growth. New Labour's strategies are seen within these analyses to be conductive of a distinct form of 'government through community' (Rose, 1996, p. 332), requiring individuals, as part of a neoliberal system, to behave as 'a form of capital to be processed, refined and invested', but for them to do this 'within a context of an obligation to the community to be productive' (Finlayson, 2003, p.166).

As part of this new direction, almost all regeneration schemes developed under New Labour since 1997 have stipulated that they must be managed in partnerships inclusive of local residents' input in all stages of the decision making process (Dargan, 2009). As an measure of the extent of the community turn under New Labour, the first three rounds of Single Regeneration Budget (under Conservative power) yielded only seven community-led projects; the fifth round yielded 22 successful community and voluntary sector-led bids, accounting for 43 percent of the allocated regeneration funding (Foley and Martin, 2000, p.483). Such changes to participatory governance have been argued to mark notable improvements in communications and resource use (Sherlock et al, 2004) whilst also fostering better educational institutions, civic co-operation and overall individual empowerment (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004).

2.2. Community Policy in Practice: Critique

New Labour have cited the use of community strategy as a central co-ordinating and connecting mechanism in their move towards what is commonly termed 'joined up governance'(ODPM, 2003). In this claim, working ties of mutual accountability are traced between the state, private sector and community as a means to ensuring political devolution has an effective and tangible impact on democratising policy formation and service delivery. However, a growing pool of work has since challenged the efficacy of these connections, and claims that communities have marginal and ineffective roles in partnership structures (for example, Percy-Smith and Wells, 2007; Davies, 2009). Critics note that regeneration schemes embracing civic engagement are often marred with exclusionary practices, inefficiency, incoherency and an inability to reach conclusions quickly enough for funds to be successfully spent (Dargan, 2009; Campbell, 2005; North and Winter, 2002). In some cases, community workers have also documented a 'dark side to community planning' where partnership forums are used as platforms by community residents to vent their frustrations with government bodies in an abusive manner (Wilson, 2005). Similarly, North (2003) has studied two communities acting in regenerative projects in deprived areas of South Bank, London, and shows that despite being engaged in strategy formation, communities with discourses constructed against the main thrust of local or central government policy (as the PRSC claim to have) had little power to effectively influence the decision making process. This impotence was partly due to strategic behaviour by other partners designed to coerce the community into believing they were included in development (a strategy commonly known in academic literature as 'therapy' (Arnstein, 1969)), where active confrontation of counter-hegemonic positions is subordinated to frictionless, coercive types of community informing and consultation. These failures to practically and smoothly engage communities in regeneration has led to a general sense of disillusionment amongst academics as to the capacities of New Labour's aims to 'roll back' the dominance of neoliberal market discourse in regeneration strategies.

Further to this there is evidence that much of the civic engagement occurring in regeneration strategies may be unavoidably shallow due to the underlying nature of

partnership structures. Holman (2008) uses social network analysis to demonstrate the hierarchical nature of partnerships in regenerative schemes in Portsmouth. Her analysis finds that citizens are commonly incorporated into partnerships already established prior to individual projects, in which hierarchies and modes of operation and negotiation are already existent, effectively marginalising community contributions before they are articulated and allowing economic coalitions to be more successful in achieving their developmental goals. Similarly, Duncan and Thomas (2000) find that community participants often have ill-defined (if at all existent) roles and responsibilities within management structures, preventing effective contributions to the decision making process. This work is part of a growing bank of evidence highlighting fundamental problems inherent in partnerships containing professional, networked negotiators and community groups with a contrasting (often more radical and informal) approach to discussion. This difference is often blamed as perpetuating perceived divisions in partnerships that lead to feelings of despondency amongst community representatives, and commonly prematurely position radical discourses as illegitimate forms of action (Dargan, 2009; Foley and Martin, 2000; Campbell, 2005). This point is perhaps of key relevance to groups advocating radical regenerative strategies such as the PRSC, and raises questions over the extent to which they are likely to be capable of influencing planning. Simply put, community participation in these structures remains empty without a more profound redistribution of power.

2.3. Community Rhetoric: Ideologically Flawed?

'For the privileged, community often means securing and enhancing privileges already gained. For the underprivileged it all too often means 'controlling their own slum'

Given the recurring theme of practical problems in community-driven regeneration schemes, it is not surprising that a majority of critics of community rhetoric believe the root of the problem to go deeper than institutional and civic incompetence into a fundamentally 'uncritical and poorly conceptualised idea of community' (North, 2003, p.124) perpetuated by central government. At the core of the argument made by New Labour that communities can lead their own regenerative agenda is an assumption that divergent groups and individuals are capable of internalising their heterogeneous characteristics and constructing consensual plans of action to be applied in negotiation (DETR, 1997). This is a problem when, as Foley and Martin (2000, p.486) argue, 'community aspirations are nowhere near as homogenous as government pronouncements frequently imply'. Further to this idealism, Dargan (2009) notes that policies guiding effective partnership activity (for example, the aforementioned DETR, 1997) too readily assume that, in the context of regeneration, communities of interest are spatially identifiable, and therefore have shared interests in channelling regeneration toward a specifically targeted space. Dargan's critique is well rehearsed and rooted in the community theory of Wellman (1979) who argues that responses to perceived urban disorganisation by communities do not always amount to more cogent, densely tied interpersonal networks offering social support to deal with contingencies. Instead, in the context of greater means of communication, travel and work opportunities, communities are linked through heterogeneous and broadly dispersed networks no longer tied down to place. This argument has since been updated in Harvey's (1989b) widely referenced concept of time-space compression, which suggests urban space can no longer be guaranteed as a container of communities consisting entirely of locally – sourced knowledges. These suggestions of complex heterogeneity in postmodern communities offer a profound undermining of New Labour social rhetoric and endanger capacities for regeneration sourced from communities as tangible spatial entities.

A recent strain of community rhetoric critique is summarised in Harvey's quote given at the start of this section – that of inherent dangers of idealising an urban

mosaic of communities (if, of course, they can exist individually as homogenous, spatial entities) as a democratic approach to urban planning. In an in-depth Marxist analysis of Baltimore's developmental trajectory in 'Spaces of Hope' (2000) he argues that 'community' is often used as a tool by empowered classes in order to practice elitism over unprivileged members of society, most commonly manifest in the (sub)urban landscape as gated communities. Treated by the controlling classes as efforts toward utopian visions of space, they perpetuate practices of exclusion, define themselves through differences evident between themselves and others, and internalise social control, surveillance and repression. Harvey terms these spaces 'degenerate utopias' (also referred to as 'bourgeois utopias' (Harvey, 2000, p.139)) – where the dialectic is repressed and commodity culture is perpetuated rather than critiqued. The effect is the propagation of 'uneven geographies' and polarised patterns of deprivation as affluent and mobile communities continue to differentiate and distance themselves from others in an attempt to secure isolated and protected comforts.

Work such as Harvey's has informed a recent revival of concerns over how conceptions of community can be rendered consistent with difference. As Delanty (2000, p.47) argues, from this perspective New Labour can be accused of 'overplaying the organic ties between individuals and social forms…failing to articulate rights, freedom, and individual or group agency… [assuming they] operate in the context of normative community arrangements'. Implicitly, governmental action that fosters localised community cohesion needs to be sensitive to offset potential effects of wider social fragmentation.

2.4. Cultural Policy and Bristol's Urban Geographies

In order to foster community cohesion sensitive to both internal and external difference, culture has been mobilised in parallel with community rhetoric as a central component of the New Labour urban renaissance agenda. These claims of community and cultural connectedness are evident in work such as that of Maffesoli (1996),

claiming postmodern individuals now live in emotional communities defined by affectual and aesthetic criteria characterised by openness and fluidity organised around culture (i.e. lifestyle and image) rather than closed spatialities. Taking up beliefs similar to these, 'cultural citizenship' emerged under Thatcherite roll-out neoliberalism as a response to the simultaneous emergence of cultural diversity and demise of the welfare state as a form of social mediation during the 1980s (Peck and Tickell, 2002).

During this phase, however, culture was predominantly applied for economic functions serving agendas of city competitiveness aiming to foster diversification, service sector expansion and specialist place marketing (Featherstone, 1991). Academics studying the merging of culture and hard neoliberalism commonly link it with the suppression of culture's critical edge by uncritical populism (Miles, 2004) limiting it to the comparatively benign function of passive consumption. When applied to inner-city regeneration schemes, this had the effect of reproducing middle class harbourside enclaves designed on the back of conservative forms of 'high culture', perpetuating a reproduction and circulation of forms of cultural capital that squeeze out alternative cultural projects from high profile and profitable locations. In work drawing on case study material from across Britain, Europe and America, Stevenson (2004, p.125) makes the claim that 'there is now considerable evidence that cultural planning is deeply implicated in creating spaces of middle-class consumption and enclaves of exclusivity'. Bianchini and Landry (1995) view this bias as constituting a direct disarmament of the cultural capital located in peripheral spaces, which consequently incur a loss of ability to impart new skills, confidence, teamwork and inter-cultural understanding to their communities. Miles (2004, p.902) sees this as resulting in a 'loss of capacity to accentuate difference, provoke dissent and enforce civic empowerment' within these communities, limiting practical possibilities to exercise more radical culturally-informed views on regeneration. The perseverance of middle-class bias in Bristol's own harbourside development has been highlighted by Bassett et al. (2002), who link the local community's ability to successfully play a role in the development process to their affluent, middle-class

consistency and semi-retired professional skill base. As a related effect of this, Bassett et al. note the failure of a proposed centre of performing arts to materialise during Bristol's inner city regeneration process as an example of a failure to develop infrastructure designed to bring about a more inclusive city centre.

2.5. Culture, Policy and Community Cohesion

Whilst Bristol's own harbourside project exemplifies the continuation of exclusionary cultural urban forms operating within contemporary inner-city regeneration and gentrification, under roll-out neoliberalism New Labour have sought to democratise these processes by tracing more explicit links between culture, the economy *and* community, in turn making it ripe for exploitation in regenerative strategies beyond city centres:

> Culture can make communities. It can be a critical focus for effective and sustainable urban regeneration. The task is to develop an understanding of the ways—cultural and ethical—in which even the 'worst estates' can take part in and help shape the relics of their city as well as their locality.
>
> (Catterall, 1998, p.4).

Under these beliefs, culture and art are trusted as having use for economic redistribution and redevelopment. Matarasso (1997) makes the argument that funding community participatory arts and culture holds the capacity to combat social exclusion by exerting a positive impact on personal development, social cohesion, community empowerment and self – determination. Despite the attitudinal surveying approach adopted to qualify these claims facing significant criticism for its inability to objectively establish the impact of complexly subjective arts participation (Merli, 2002); Gibson and O'Reagan, 2002) show that New Labour extend the use of Matarasso's study towards legitimising cultural investment as a tool for neighbourhood regeneration:

"Art and sport can not only make a valuable contribution to delivering key outcomes of lower long-term unemployment, less crime, better health and better qualifications, but can also help to develop the individual pride, community spirit and capacity of responsibility that enable communities to run regeneration programmes themselves."

(Department of Culture, Media and Sport, PAT 10 report, 1999; Quoted in Bristol Creative Neighbourhoods' 'Neighbourhood Arts Strategy, 2005)

Unemployment, crime, poor health and educational underachievement are, according to New Labour rhetoric, symptomatic of failed communities. But here arts are figured as being able to provide a supplementary role in assisting communities in achieving the participation necessary to combat these problems. Belfiore and Bennett (2009) see this *participatory* capacity as the underlying logic of New Labour's advocacy of neighbourhood arts strategies. As such, local arts and cultural projects have appeared across deprived neighbourhoods in Bristol alongside centrally-targeted policy designed to boost commercial cultural industries and regenerative cultural infrastructures (Bassett et al, 2003). The origins of these projects are traced back to local Labour policy influence in the latter half of the 1990s, and have undergone a resurgence following a downturn after the abolishment of Avon in 1996. Arts – based projects in deprived schools have been successful in both improving exam performance and boosting locality perceptions (for example, Kelly and Kelly's (2000) study of ACTA in Hartcliffe and Kimberlee et al's (2000) study of the Knowle West Media Project). Whilst these examples may illustrate the merits of participatory arts projects, Miles (2004) is cynical that, in a majority of cases, their popularity within local government is more to do with their appeal as 'short cut' to addressing the more complex issues underlying social exclusion, rather than their ability to actively engaging those truly marginal in communities. Furthermore, questions over impacts of culture on community have been raised which challenge the use of culture and art in wider, geographically - evening neighbourhood renewal strategies. Atkinson (2004, p.109) argues that 'communities and individuals are classified on the basis of their 'cultures' and the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are drawn accordingly' –

claiming a fundamental contradiction in projects linking community with culture, and a perpetuation of mixed messages over the values of cultural diversity. Implicit in this critique is that as community participation increases, those outside of participation become increasingly marginal, and voluntary activity comes to be defined not as an act of altruism, but an obligation placed upon the cultural citizen by government (Powell and Geoghegan, 2004).

2.6. Rupturing Discursive Hegemonies: Implications for PRSC Counter – Discourse

The discourses discussed here make up the model through which subjects are managed and processed by New Labour for the purposes of urban redevelopment, and as such are necessary to consider when analysing how the PRSC approach their constructions of counter-discourse. In particular they set the conditions through which oppositional discourses can be imagined and impose limitations on the ability for these to be effective. Rose (1996, 2000) figures New Labour's distinct style of governmentality as 'ethopolitics':

> '[Community is] a new territory for the administration of individual and collective existence, a new place or surface upon which micro-moral relations among people are conceptualised and administered'
>
> (Rose 1996, p. 331)

Here, the shift from government to governance is seen in as new form of 'government at a distance' where administration of subjects is not explicitly traced to the state, but hidden within the state's discourses requiring individuals to construct their own ethical sensibilities so that they are accountable to the communities to which they belong. Government is thus achieved 'at a distance' as communities

seeking involvement in redevelopment schemes are required to 'internalise a series of policy narratives, rules and targets that have been defined by the centre and to govern themselves accordingly' (Atkinson, 2003,p.107)

Rose's concept of 'government at a distance' reveals that institutionalised expertise remains the conduit of governmentality in a distinctly Foucauldian sense; governments both produce and govern communities simultaneously, and produce the necessary powers within individuals in order to sustain these productions. For governmentality to work 'at a distance' under New Labour rhetoric, communities must remain recognisable entities, in turn setting strict limitations on the ability to construct counter-discourses of community that figure them as anything but a coherent, homogenised collection of shared interests. This difficult task, as we shall see, is what the PRSC hope to achieve by positing themselves as an intermediary body of expertise qualified to oversee that the 'community' produced by the government does not compromise on Stokes Croft's already existing identity and heritage. This in itself involves intercepting government discourse, translating it into a counter-discourse deemed suitable to the local context, and then acting upon it themselves, an intermediary form of governmentality with its own form of productive and administrative power. With this in mind, it is important to ask whether or not the actually manifest discourses discussed in this chapter are being successfully intercepted and countered by the PRSC in a way that ensures Stokes Croft retains access to the appropriate markets and government support systems necessary for redevelopment.

Given this paper's prescription to Foucauldian theories of governmental operations bearing a significant impact on the way space and subjectivity is defined and functions (expanded on in the following chapter), this review has essentially highlighted some key recurring discrepancies between New Labour rhetoric and the structures of practiced policy that any discursive study into urban politics needs to be aware of. Importantly, issues of cohesiveness, closure (both socio-economically and spatially) and heterogeneity need to be examined within the PRSC's

conceptualisations of community and culture, alongside considerations as to the ways in which the organisation treat these two phenomena as interacting. To these ends, it is necessary to examine how PRSC treatments differ from those of the government and other local community groups in Stokes Croft and St. Paul's, and how this affects their ability to mobilise a working regenerative agenda. This will in turn involve studying how they foster community involvement and mobilise local creative capital in ways which ensure the retention of cultural integrity necessary in the neoliberal economic framework of place-marketing.

Since the PRSC's beliefs in the capacity of both community and culture to be applicable as regenerative tools tally with New Labour rhetoric, there would appear to be, in theory at least, some opportunities provided for the organisation to effectively enact counter-discourse. However, as this review has shown, merging these two hugely 'slippery' concepts in an effective manner is far from straightforward. Despite critique and academic pessimism, there *is* evidence of community and culture being put to use successfully in regeneration schemes elsewhere in Bristol, but this has implications for grass-roots imaginings of community and culture. The PRSC's case stands as an ideal study through which the impacts of central discourse can be unpacked, and will help toward determining whether or not these processes truly allow local groups to 'make their own future' (figure 2.1)

Figure 2.1: Asserting Counter – Discourse

Source: PRSC

3.0. Method

Having identified central issues in contemporary discourses on community-led regeneration and cultural policy, we can now turn toward an interrogation of the PRSC's own constructions of counter-discourse as a means of examining the impact of Bristol's urban policy at a grass-roots level. Setting out these preliminary conditions is necessary as a precursor to such an analysis because the Foucauldian-based theories and methods applied here rely on some fundamental assumptions about the relationship between the spatial hegemonies manifest as a result of, and reproduced through, discourse and the way communities and cultures are imagined, actualised and acted upon within the remits and repressions set by such discourse. These preliminary Foucauldian theories are outlined, alongside limitations associated with their methodological application, before this study's own form of 'critical counter-discourse analysis' (an adapted form of Fairclough's (1995) critical discourse analysis) is explained.

3.1. Foucauldian Premises of Discourse and Counter-Discourse

> 'Discourse is regulated and systematic…the rules delimit the sayable. But they do not imply a closure…In practice, discourses delimit what can be said, whilst providing the spaces – the concepts, metaphors, models, analogies, for making *new* statements within any specific discourse.'
>
> (Henriques et al, 1984, p. 105)

Put concisely, Foucault (1966) explains the discursive formation as a huge, organised dispersion of statements allowed to persist throughout history that eventually comes to specify the set of rules used by powerful bodies for the organisation and production of different forms of knowledge in a given space. Discourses are linked directly to lineages of historical agencies of power, which set the preconditions for newly discursive propositions, utterances and speech acts (the collection of acts Foucault terms collectively as 'statements') to have meaning. As such, he traces the discursive formation across a series of heterogeneous bodies: institutions, techniques, social groups, perceptual organisations and so forth, which

structure the principles which 'govern beliefs and practices, 'words and things', in such a way as to produce a certain network of material relations' (McNay, 1994, p. 69).

It is not necessary to discuss Foucault's epistemology in depth here given that the applied method draws upon a modified conceptualisation of the idea, but it is important from the perspective of the PRSC to note the key feature that discourse is highly political in nature. Power struggles occur both in and over discourses internalised by the government and enacted through policy, so that disrupting and changing discursive practice becomes an important element in social change, and necessarily has to occur prior to changes in governmentality. It is this precondition of social change – the radical disrupting of hegemonic discourse - which the PRSC seek to achieve.

Foucault's notion of discourse is often criticised for leaning too closely to structuralist reductionism, whereby social life is transformed into an 'infinite text' and everything is 'dissolved into discourse' (Lecourt, 1972; MacDonell, 1986), giving the impression that, although the power exerted through discourse necessarily entails resistance, this is generally contained by discourse and entails no threat to hegemony. However, Foucault (1972) is keen to note that discursive formations do not define static objects and concepts, only the fields of their possible transformation. Therefore, those subjected to discourses can form counter-discourse, and every social discourse involving truth claims, he argues, encounters a counter-discourse that challenges its legitimacy. As the voiceless begin to speak a language of their own making they can be seen to be beginning to actively resist the power repressing them. The very act of speaking, in this sense, is deemed political by Foucault, so that the groundings of counter-discourse can be defined as 'the hoped-for result of *practical theorising*' (Moussa and Scapp, 1996a: 91). This is the case of the PRSC, who, in constructing their own languages of culture and community in line with 'bottom-up' qualitative experience of Stokes Croft (rather than top-down languages prescribed by government rhetoric), can be seen to be enacting a theoretical counter-discourse that

aims to clear space for new urban forms to become manifest. However, theory is not capable of producing counter-discourse alone, and the PRSC also aim to empower the local community with a creative and critical capacity to influence development strategy in ways which need not conform to governmental discourse. At this latter stage, we can begin to conceptualise the PRSC's artistic activism as an effort towards the materialisation of counter-discourse.

3.2. Three-Dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis

'One cannot simply 'apply' Foucault's work in discourse analysis, it is a matter of putting Foucault's perspective to work within textually-oriented discourse analysis and trying to operationalize his insights into actual methods of analysis'

(Fairclough, 1992, p.38)

Having conceptualised the PRSC as constructors of counter-discourse through statements in text and artistic activism, Fairclough's 'critical discourse analysis' can be indirectly drawn upon in order to interrogate their activity more profoundly. Critical discourse analysis fundamentally treats language as a form of social practice, assuming the creation, circulation and reproduction of texts as a major mode through which discourses, and in turn power asymmetries, become manifest and take root within space. Fairclough's method is advocated as a mode of addressing the aforementioned reductionist criticisms of Foucault's discursive formation theory, and embraces an agenda seeking to interrogate lay manifestations of discourse more thoroughly.

Fairclough plugs the gaps between discursive formation *theory* and tangible socio-political *context* using a 'three-dimensional' analysis of discourse, incorporating the analysis of hegemonic discursive practices, the analysis of texts associated with the studied discourse and the analysis of the social practice of which that discourse is a part. In order to be robust, Fairclough envisages this as an interdisciplinary method,

incorporating an analysis of the properties of texts alongside a consideration of their modes of production, distribution, and consumption. These textual practices should be supported by an analysis of social practice within institutions, a deconstruction of the relationship between social practice and power relations, and a consideration of how these processes connect to hegemonic projects at a societal level. This is a bold attempt at ensuring that all scales of discourse operation are covered, and Fairclough cites this as being necessarily 'interdisciplinary' because of the associated problems with taking on study of a potentially large, dispersed and complex network within a single academic discipline.

Chapter 2 has reviewed insights into the operation of hegemonic governmental community and cultural discourse projects provided across a number of academic disciplines, in turn providing a framework to which the PRSC's counter-discourses can be connected and contrasted. This acts as a means of satisfying Fairclough's initial 'dimension' of analysis in a modest study such as this (i.e, the identification of hegemonic discursive practices). From here, the study can now turn towards his two subsequent dimensions: exploring textual and rhetorical constructions of (counter) discourse and the social social practices with which these texts are associated (art activism).

3.3. Towards a Critical Counter-Discourse Analysis of the PRSC

For the purposes of this study, texts made publicly available by the PRSC will be subject to textual analysis as a means of developing an understanding of how their use of rhetoric aims to theorise counter-discourse and clear a space for activism. These texts are the PRSC's mission statement, developmental strategy and website (provided in Appendix A), which make up the main body of written text used by the group to publicise their activity. However, given the relatively limited availability of PRSC texts at this early stage in their organisational existence, this study also makes use of in-depth interviews conducted with each of the group's board of directors. This is a method designed to 'enhance the corpus' (Fairclough, 1992: 227) of available

discursive resources and, more usefully, probe PRSC understandings of their own counter-discursive practices and the impacts their activities have within broader hegemonic discourse. The board of directors have been chosen since these are the agents through whom the PRSC's actually-constructed rhetorical discourses are most clearly demonstrated. Members of the group outside of this core are responsible for voting in board members, and so the board can be assumed as representative sample as possible of complete PRSC membership given the study's limited resource availability. Similarly, the board are the most active members engaged with, and informed of, the issues and politics held forefront by the PRSC. Many other members are less-active supporters of PRSC activism in more general terms, lending their skills and attendance to projects they feel are of individual relevance.

Finally, as a means of connecting the PRSC's rhetoric to social practice, and satisfying Fairclough's third dimension of critical discourse analysis, selected artworks associated with the PRSC in Stokes Croft are subjected to visual anthropology. These are analysed as a means of identifying how the PRSC are substantiating their beliefs in what they claim Stokes Croft's community and culture to be defined as, and how these seek to subvert existing developmental projects in the area.

Fairclough's approach is suited as much to analysing counter-discourse as it is hegemonic discourse because it effectively seeks to demystify the more nuanced workings of lay textual practices: practices which can equally challenge hegemonic discourse as much as sustain it. Thus, instead of seeking to trace links between texts and hegemonic discourse, the focus here is to identify the unique features of the PRSC's counter-discursive rhetoric and activity that seek to resist and rupture hegemonies. This will not involve the type of linguistics – based textual deconstructions which predominates Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analyses proper, which would be impractical given the study uses texts in a variety of forms containing a lot of useful data with a role to play in the construction of counter-discourse. Instead, the focus is placed upon identifying and criticising the underlying theories,

concepts and practices used by the PRSC to substantiate their counter-discursive function more broadly. This is an adequate mode of answering the questions identified previously in subsection 1.5. Once these are revealed, it will be possible to determine how the PRSC are currently avoiding being 'swallowed up by the tentacular institutions posited by Foucault's theory' (Moussa and Scapp, 1996a: 92), and how far their methods constitute an effective and operable alternative discourse for the future of Stokes Croft.

4.0. Analysis

In chapter one the following two questions were asked as a means of clarifying the objectives of this study:

How are discourses of community – led regeneration framing the way the PRSC conceptualise and mobilise the Stokes Croft community for regeneration?

How are Government Cultural policy Discourses influencing the PRSC's own use of culture as a means of regenerating Stokes Croft?

This section synthesises the answers to these questions according to three main components pertaining to the PRSC's construction of counter-discourse. Section 4.1 identifies the specific features of Bristol's urban policy discourse which the PRSC express frustration over, before section 4.2. explores how these antagonisms are responded to in modes of rhetoric. Then, as a means of testing how the PRSC translate this into tangible counter-discourse, some examples of the group's work on the streets of Stokes Croft are examined in section 4.3, during which considerations are made as to how these constitute a claim for, and contribute towards the

establishment of, Stokes Croft as heterotopia. This final feature is figured as a primary method through which the group seek to avoid becoming absorbed into governmental discourse and establish Stokes Croft as a space produced through powers outside the operations of hegemony.

4.1. Discursive Antagonisms to PRSC Rhetoric

4.1.1. Failing Mechanisms of Governance

Perceived problems in local governance structures and a consequential lack of trust in these to develop Stokes Croft effectively and representatively lie at the heart of the PRSC's raison d'etre, and frame much of their rhetoric as explicitly counter-discursive. Local governance structures are seen to operate inefficiently at a micro scale (within the local community - council- private sector partnership, St. Pauls Unlimited and the Stokes Croft Steering Group), and deemed undemocratic both internally and when applied at city-wide levels. In terms of inefficiencies, familiar complaints are made of community-led strategies being ways for the council to pay 'lip service' to the community, and their taking on a benign 'talking-shop' characteristic are apparent, which entails temporal lags rendering mandates or action plans undemocratic by the time they are acted upon. As one member (also head of a large business in Stokes Croft) noted of the Stokes Croft Steering Group meetings:

> 'I haven't been going to them... there's no continuity. There's an awful lot of talking.[…] They need to go to the city council, show they have the support of the community and…so to get the support of the community they've got to set up a talking shop[…] they're never quite sure they've got a mandate to take to the city council and get anything done. I mean, it has led to things happening before…um, you know, they've dug up the road now. I dunno what they're spending on it, but I was talking to Chris and he said well, it's taken them eighteen months…since they first started talking about this, not a lot of people agree with it but it's happening, and so…it's happening. And it's possible that

they'll just completely redo the whole thing over again in about 12 month's
time.'

<div align="right">(Appendix B, p.137)</div>

Another member notes problems during the consultation processes of the recent
Gateway Enhancement project:

'What really frustrates me is when they say 'well, yeah, you know, we consulted
with the community three years ago and therefore we're now gonna crack on
and do what we wanna do. Well hang on, the world's totally changed […] for
them to plough on with the plan from three years before[…]it's crazy. And,
um…the truth of it is that the council are changing their minds all the time and
the community have to roll with their punches'

<div align="right">(Appendix B: p.114)</div>

PRSC board members note amicable relations with individual government members,
instead citing structural failures as the root of their frustrations. These failures
encourage the PRSC to distance themselves from St Pauls Unlimited, which, as a
body seen to be aligned more closely with government interests than those of the
community, come to be treated with hostility by some members:

'St. Paul's Unlimited and the council are very, very closely linked together […]
as a concept the council theoretically should be doing what we want, what the
people want. But they actually have a massive vested interest in looking into
things for their own benefit.'

<div align="right">(Appendix B: p.97)</div>

The impacts of this distancing of community and local government bodies for
cohesive governance structure is made apparent by PRSC members with first-hand
experience of local business engagement with the Stokes Croft steering committee. St.
Pauls Unlimited's associations with bureaucratic, restrictive and slow discourse stand
in contrast to the PRSC's independent status, regarded as a feature which allows them

to be more effectively provocative and hands-on in their approaches to enacting development. Crucially, this has an effect on the way the PRSC are becoming connected with local business, as the Stokes Croft Steering committee (also known by their old name 'Bristol East Side Traders') struggle to convince local businesses of their ability to effectively influence local governance circles:

'[W]e've been talking to the planners about what we do with our building here, and they've actually written to me and said, 'well what you need to do is to get some kind of feedback from the local community, we suggest you go and speak to the People's Republic of Stokes Croft.' [laughs]…Not Bristol East Side Traders, but the PRSC. Because the Bristol East Side Traders have got the, you know, the city council putting in someone to chair it and they've been paying for posts and then withdrawing the funding and putting it in again. So, 'cause it's not really seen as an independent group. Whereas PRSC – independent group. […] If they say something we at least know that they are talking for the community.'

(Appendix B, p.137)

Further to these problems, the well-established issue of firstly defining 'community' and then reconciling their view with that of private developers is noted by a PRSC member who also chairs the meetings of the steering group:

'I would love it if there was more clarity on who that group are**...** or who is the voice of the community… 'Cos at the moment it's kinda got the historic name Bristol East Street Traders and it's a hell of a lot more than just the traders. But occasionally the council sort of use that against us mainly to say 'well it's all about traders'. And that's certainly not the case.'

(Appendix B, p.111)

From these accounts, it would seem that a key proponent of PRSC counter – discourse is a lack of faith in the ability of local governance bodies to successfully negotiate

differences in interests between the market and local community, here leading to the marginalisation of the community voice against traders; a perceived failure of local governance structures to effectively 'roll-back' the dominance of neoliberal operations in development strategy by bringing the community into a previously existing partnership already geared towards favouring the private sector. This is further evidenced in consistent community opposition to recurrent development plans put in place for Westmoreland house – a building PRSC believe the community can acquire for their own use over private developers transforming them into residential property:

> 'We would absolutely oppose any development of Westmoreland House that had no community aspect, and, in particular, would oppose any development that had a 'gated community' at its core.'
>
> (PRSC Game Plan, Appendix A, p.78)

In drawing attention specifically to the dangers of developing Westmoreland House in a way as to establish a 'gated community' in the area, the PRSC are particularly hostile towards polarising developments that, as one member put it, 'dump in high quality housing and wait for the rich to move in' (Appendix B, p.115). These are seen not only as shallow quick-fix solutions to deep-seated problems, but also as dangerously diluting to the existence of community cohesion and cultural integrity the PRSC rely upon for their own approaches and support.

Governance is similarly viewed as an inadequate means of combating uneven geography because of polarised class differences across the city and uneven concentrations of disposable resources. One member expresses their perceptions of community involvement in development strategies in middle – class Clifton:

> '[I]f you go to planning meetings you'll find that…plans go on forever about the reduction of a little bit of grass next to Clifton College […] and it'll have gone to the third appeal and each appeal costs forty thousand pounds. Those

areas, and the kind of people that live in those areas, with their incomes and wealth, are very good at operating the system. Whereas down here people are more concerned about…survival.'

<div align="right">(Appendix B, p.96)</div>

The group cite these biases as responsible for establishing Stokes Croft as a 'dumping ground' for other wealthier areas of the city, giving the exclusivity of drug rehabilitation centres, homeless shelters and commercial hoardings in Stokes Croft as evidence of a targeted government strategy of social problem displacement. Similarly, the geographies defining units of governance are seen to marginalise Stokes Croft more locally. Other needy Ashley Ward neighbourhoods represented in St Pauls Unlimited have been successful in 'apportioning the huge funds that have been allocated to St. Paul's' (Appendix B, p.96) won through the government's New Deal for Community plans, but the marginal position of Stokes Croft to these similarly deprived neighbourhoods (due to the steering group's difficulties in successfully negotiating within the local partnership) again contribute to a perceived distancing of Stokes Croft from governance systems and need for grass-roots counter discourse.

4.1.2. Trends in Cultural Policy

A central feature of the PRSC's mission is the official establishment of Stokes Croft as Bristol's cultural quarter, a status already claimed of the area in the content of their art. This would be a way of legitimising and protecting Stokes Croft as an enclaved heterotopia, where cultural expression from a broad and complete range of subjects would colour the streetscape, further discussed in subsection 4.3 below. One regularly circulated PRSC slogan - 'We are all artists' - captures this attitude and establishes a necessary condition for their fully functional heterotopia. The value in this vision is given body by claiming an independent culture for Stokes Croft in juxtaposition with the commodified, homogenous cultural city centre (subversively referenced here as the 'Temples of Mammon'), regarded a bland and benign Other against the area's own cultural assets:

'Stokes Croft has been seen by local government as an embarrassment, this unease emphasised by its proximity to the new temples of Mammon […] We categorically reject the view of Stokes Croft as a run-down, shabby area, and prefer to highlight its strengths. Stokes Croft is a vibrant area with a high concentration of independent, creative organisations and businesses, and boasts an interesting and eclectic range of buildings.'

(Appendix A, p.75)

A prominent theme in Bristol's cultural policy of recent years has been the development of cultural attractions based in the gentrified city centre, particularly the recent harbourside development (Bassett et al, 2003), which has come to be associated predominantly with middle class consumption. According to the recent Bristol City Centre Strategy (Bristol City Council, 2005b), the Harbourside remains a priority area for development through arts, culture and entertainment, whilst the key 'topic' of focus given for Stokes Croft (much to the disappointment of the PRSC) remains 'retail'. Members were critical of this concentration of cultural funding in the city centre during interviews:

'We've got the cube, the best independent cinema in…we've got great music, we've got Jamaica Street art studios and we've got some of the best street artists in the world here. So if all it requires amongst the officialdom is that recognition[…] if they can find twenty million pounds to spend on the foyer of the Colston Hall [a theatre and concert venue in the centre associated with middle class consumers], never mind the actual building, surely they can find a couple of million to buy back […] the Carriageworks… And the two hundred and fifty thousand pounds it would take to buy back turbo island, which the council originally sold to the advertising people in a conservation area. When you actually delve into it there is one scandal after another that has been perpetrated in Stokes Croft.'

(Appendix B, p.101)

These criticisms are consistent throughout much PRSC rhetoric, drawing materialist connections between gentrification as a mode of redevelopment and using the centre as an Other against which the case is made for the bias and injustice of urban policy discourse across Bristol as a whole. References are made to the cultural centre as elitist and exclusionary, claiming their own artistic visions (here, those proposed for vacant spaces at 'Turbo Island' and the City Road junction) as holding more universal appeal:

> 'The sites would be a continuing pleasure for motorists and pedestrians alike, and would be for all, inviting favourable comparisons with the existing art institutions whose audience is selective and arguably elitist.'
>
> (Appendix A, p.79)

In pitting street art and institutionalised (high) art forms against each other, the PRSC highlight serious issues associated with leading redevelopment strategy by something as subjective as art. Nevertheless, in challenging the legitimacy and relevance of dominant high brow forms, they make claim to circulate a style of art reflective of a distinct Stokes Croft character and capable of genuine resonance within the local community. Subsection 4.3 provides some examples and discussion of the PRSC's engagement with the problem of subjectivity and community representation in the work they curate. Interestingly, the most recent character appraisal document published for Stokes Croft evidences the PRSC's disruptions of artistic hegemonies, and hints tentatively towards an official recognition of their heterotopian vision of juxtaposing architectural heritage with contemporary street art.

> 'Relatively recently, a large amount of spray painted street art has emerged in Stokes Croft; which many local residents feel has become a defining characteristic of the area. The contribution street art makes in the area is extremely subjective and difficult to define[…]If well considered and carefully

managed, some quality spray-painted art works may have the potential to enliven an otherwise dull streetscape'

(Bristol City Council, 2007b, p.18)

Despite these concessions, discussions of street art in the document are far more timorous than appraisals elsewhere for buildings with an apparently unquestioned 'positive influence' on local aesthetics. Of course, in singling out specific aspects of the environment as desirable, others are marginalised as negative, making difference pronounced in an area with an architectural landscape as varied as Stokes Croft. It is this tendency for council discourse to define cultural assets on behalf of the community that naturalises their own discourses and provokes the PRSC into constructing counter-discursive aesthetics for themselves, and appropriate the 'negative' features of the environment as canvases for art.

4.2. Rhetoric in PRSC Counter - Discourse

Much of the PRSC's rhetoric is explicitly counter – discursive in that it establishes the aforementioned injustices suffered by Stokes Croft as direct products of governmental discourse, before positing solutions to these by tailoring new discourses based on interpretations of community and culture more relevant to the realities of Stokes Croft.

4.2.1. Community and Cultural Difference

PRSC rhetoric fundamentally imagines Stokes Croft as a dynamic heterotopia that houses a fluid community perpetually engaged in mutual exchange with their sensory environment. When questioned on how the PRSC figured 'community' in their projects, one member explained that they were 'precise on being imprecise' (Appendix B, p.95). Their mission statement demonstrates as much:

'The Community is: Those who live in, work in or pass through Stokes Croft and its surrounding areas'

PRSC Mission Statement, March 2009 (Appendix A, p.73)

Here, community is not defined by any sense of camaraderie or shared interest, nor is it solely confined to a distinct or surveilled spatiality (the map given as 'the best fit with the community demographic' in the mission statement is 'subject to change at any time' (Appendix A, p.73)). As another member put it, 'this community here…is a non-community I think, in the sense that it's so varied.' (Appendix B, p.140). The PRSC instead identify the Stokes Croft community as a celebratory medley of difference that should not be homogenised during regenerative discourse. The claim that one qualifies as a community member simply by passing through Stokes Croft or its surrounding areas is radically different from governmental communities bound within neighbourhoods or super output areas, and quantified by a claim that a walk through Stokes Croft will inevitably be punctuated by some sort of unique phenomenological encounter:

'[T]here are a lot of people who pass through here, and so, um, there is a certain sense of anonymity here. And that allows some weirdness and some kinda strange behaviour[…] I defy you to take a walk in Stokes Croft without seeing or hearing or being engaged in a slightly off-kilter experience'

(Appendix B, p.103)

Figuring Stokes Croft as a site of continual becoming poses a distinct challenge to governmental requirements of the individual to be productive for their community in a conventionally socio-economic sense. Instead, the group claim a type of critical creativity as a key feature of the productive individual (appendix A, p.73), an asset less tangible for processing, refinement and investment in markets than typical forms of neoliberal government-produced behaviour such as entrepreneurialism (Lemke, 2002) or internalised community competition (Atkinson, 2003). The figuring of

community in a more fluid and heterogeneous sense is used by the PRSC as a means of preventing the Stokes Croft subject from being absorbed into governmental discourse, and empowers them with a capacity to be critical and reactive to hegemonic requirements of New Labour governmentality. This is deemed to be vital as a long-term economic investment in that it allows Stokes Crofts' culture to retain the independent strengths deemed vital to its marketable appeal as a cultural quarter and outdoor gallery. To compromise on this would not only be damaging to economic potential, but would also dilute the capacity for art to contribute to the sensory experiences claimed to be conductive of a new and emancipatory pride in place:

> 'We have residents saying, for example that they work at the hospital and they used to avoid this stretch, although Jamaica street was the easiest way to get to the BRI they would go up Ninetree Hill, go up and behind to avoid this area. It was a bit like, intimidating, like and ugly and dark and grey and everything. And now they say they pass because they like to check what's new. I mean, we have people coming in here and going 'what's new, can you direct me to…what is the new piece?' So it's definitely bringing in new people, and their footfall is felt by the businesses'

> (Appendix B, p.146)

4.2.2. Grappling with Democratising Counter - Discourse

In positing their own counter-discourses on community and culture, the PRSC are constructing a claim to space that, though seeking to be inclusive and representative, inevitably involves an increased bid for power requiring careful mediation if it is to be communally democratic. Whilst 'audacity' is deemed necessary in order to rupture hegemonic discourse (appendix B, p. 104) and whilst their works are probably more accessible to the wider community than officially sanctioned public art, examples involving the application of their necessarily belligerent black-on-yellow PRSC branding (see figures 4.1 and 4.2) exemplify problems with balancing their own style

of authoritative claims to space against the spontaneous, independent and diverse space they seek to protect.

Figure 4.1. PRSC 'Cultural Quarter' branding on Turbo Island

Figure 4.2: Claiming Space by branding

If these provocative claims to space are a necessary part of PRSC activism, what will become of their audacity when, as a Community Interest Company, they are required to prove they are democratically representative of the Stokes Croft community? Members speak of their ability to be audacious as an independent group pre-CIC status because they are not officially required to be accountable to the community:

'And there'll always be some people who're gonna be pissed off and not gonna be supportive of what you're doing […] I think you kinda have to look through that and question your intention. And if your intention is really positive and you know you've got the right intentions and you know you're doing it for the good of all, then all people's fears and reasons for being suspicious are all…they're not valid, really.'

(Appendix B, p.120)

But the same member concedes that these intentions will necessarily face scrutiny within a CIC:

> '[O]nce you've got going [as a CIC], that's when you really need to make an effort to be culpable and publicly accessible and inclusive.'
>
> (Appendix B, p.120)

Though the PRSC's CIC status is only recent, changes are already notable in the way the group present discourse. A study of their newly released Mission Statement (Appendix A, p. 73) shows no mention of 'government neglect' compared with the explicitly anti-establishment tone opening the pre – CIC 'Action Plan' (Appendix A, p. 75 - 91) from September 2008, and a toning down of their distinctly hybrid form of neutral formality and charged colloquial informality, favouring the former:

> 'The need for this kind of action was, and is, necessary given that Stokes Croft has arguably been deliberately neglected by the authorities over the past thirty years, and continues to be so.'
>
> (2008 Action Plan introduction, appendix A, p. 75)

> 'PRSC will seek to maximise return from the resources that have traditionally been Stokes Croft's lot.'
>
> (2009 mission statement, Appendix A, p.73)

Whilst this slight de-radicalisation should not be taken as evidence of the closure of hegemonic discourse around the PRSC just yet, it exemplifies the way the new arenas the group now find their selves entering may force them into frame their activism differently. From interviews it is clear that members hold their independence from the systems of government as their key strength, and allows for the display of potency and conviction in the PRSC's action plans. This contrasts with the more modest mentioning of Stokes Croft's creative strength in the action plan drawn up by St. Pauls Unlimited, operating independently but for the purposes of the official council-

led Gateway Enhancement Project (see St. Pauls Unlimited, 2006). These plans are seen as agreeable but ultimately too apprehensive to effectively and sustainably deliver the radical and imaginative solutions the PRSC believe necessary for Stokes Croft's future as a cultural quarter, a sign of the operations of discourse governance systems.

'[W]e need to be far more radical than that, and I think we really, really need to be doing things that will set Stokes Croft apart...If we're gonna spend money on lighting, let's make the place into a luminaire [...] let's make the whole place into a massive outdoor gallery that's a place for the world to come to'.

(Appendix B, p.100)

A crucial difference the PRSC claim in their developmental counter-discourses against those evidenced in the Gateway Enhancement Project (Colin Buchanan and Partners, 2006) and St Pauls Unlimited is that theirs, in focusing on affective arts-based activities connected to the community at a grass roots level, aims at enhancing and improving the 'social fabric' of Stokes Croft rather than its simple physical structure:

'They've managed just about to do a few bits of roadworks down there, down the front, which is not gonna change the area's social fabric…it's gonna make it look a tiny bit nicer.[…] What we've been saying is, well, look…there's a desire for this, and it seems sensible, and it's responsive to the local community who want it. And while…while we want to fit in with the action plan, because most of the action plan is good stuff, we don't need a *new* action plan in order to implement what we're doing.

(Appendix B, p.122)

In skirting the fringes of community accountability and the structures of governance where the discursive power of governmental policy is enacted, the PRSC have, so far, been able to sustain a rhetorical counter-discourse that remains critical

and avoids becoming swallowed by the institutions of hegemonic discourse. Whether or not this can be retained as the group mount a more legitimate claim to space will crucially depend on how they balance cultural integrity with community representation when acting upon rhetoric. So far, this has been dealt with using a distinct style of representation in art, which we now turn to discuss.

4.3. Testing Rhetoric: Performing Counter – Discourse

4.3.1. Representing and Reproducing Stokes Croft as Heterotopia

'There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places - places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.'

(Foucault, 1986, p.24)

Stokes Croft exhibits characteristics akin to Foucault's notion of heterotopia in both structural and social form, and this is utilised by the PRSC when acting upon their rhetoric in the street art they curate and design. Heterotopian space is understood by Foucault as having:

'the curious property of being in relation with all other sites but in such a way as to suspect, neutralise or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect … [heterotopia] juxtaposes in a single real space several spaces, several sites that are themselves incompatible'

(Foucault, 1986, p. 24-5)

It is precisely the neutralisation and inversion of the operation of hegemony within Stokes Croft which the PRSC hope to support and enhance through the use of art as a tool. Their works mark out spaces where discursive operations have somehow been

ruptured or unable to penetrate into, drawing attention to alternative conditions of possibility that unsettle normative modes of thinking about the operations of power within space. Within Stokes Croft there are an abundance of architectural and subject juxtapositions and a distinct sense of 'alternate ordering' which Hetherington (1997) notes as a distinct feature of heterotopia. The homeless sleep amongst historically protected buildings, the PRSC proudly display Stokes Croft fudge and postcards from their headquarters opposite a massage parlour, and clubbers spill out into the busy streets of the flurried morning commute begins. As such, when asked to define the Stokes Croft cultural aesthetic, one PRSC member replied, 'it's where everything's allowed and possible' (appendix B, p. 142). As previously noted, the plural relations inherent in heterotopia underlie the group's loose and oppositional understandings of community and culture, and afford the space a sense of freedom from regulation, or an ability to conduct anti-order behaviour. In some cases this even amounts to an ability to defy legal restrictions apparent in hegemonic space:

> '[W]hy is it kind of acceptable for street drinking to take place here but not in Clifton?…if you're seen with a can of White Ace on Whiteladies Road the police will be after you very quickly. But here, no. Because there's a climate of tolerancy here. And that's not necessarily a bad thing. Um, and we have to find a way of dealing with those issues. That's what's exciting about it, you have all these issues.'
>
> (Appendix B, p.102)

The PRSC's own unique way of 'dealing with these issues' involves exploiting the heterotopian capacities of non-regulation and tolerance in Stokes Croft. Much of their work with street art is illegally conducted in view of the public, yet they are able to command community and institutional respect and gain recognition as a Community Interest Company. As part of being able to sustain these conditions necessary for their own survival, the PRSC's brand of street art is distinctly representative of heterotopian vision itself.

Figure 4.3: PRSC – Curated Artworks adorning Westmoreland House

Figures 4.3 and 4.4 show a collection of artworks completed by various artists based in Stokes Croft curated by the PRSC. Westmoreland House and the adjacent carriageworks provide an ideal canvas on which to juxtapose different works, a technique itself representative of heterotopian co-existence used commonly in works elsewhere (see appendix C). The individual pieces themselves are of similar content; one example shows different ethnic groups together in a utopian space (figure 4.6) whilst others depict the natural world utopianism peeling away (figure 4.7) or highlight issues of sustainability and the ills of urban sprawl (figure 4.5).

Figure 4.4: Collected Artworks adorning the carriageworks exterior

Figure 4.5: PRSC Carriageworks Installation detail 1

Figure 4.6: PRSC Carriageworks Installation Detail 2

Figure 4.7: PRSC Carriageworks Installation detail 3

The highly figurative and symbolic nature of most of the works on Stokes Croft are typical of street art and applied as a way of ensuring community accessibility and political pertinence. This type of reassertion of the low-brow stands as a claim to a genuine cultural inheritance and an antithesis to the elitism the PRSC see in the high-

brow conceptual art galleries of the city harbourside. Near to Westmoreland House, street art covering the Magpie squat shown in figure 4.8 marks it out as a distinct space outside the operations of hegemonic discourse. Further south, Coexist (another Community Interest Group with strong links to the PRSC - see Appendix B, p.119) announce their intentions to bring together the community in Hamilton House with a PRSC – curated piece, again depicting cohesion within the Stokes Croft heterotopia (figure 4.9).
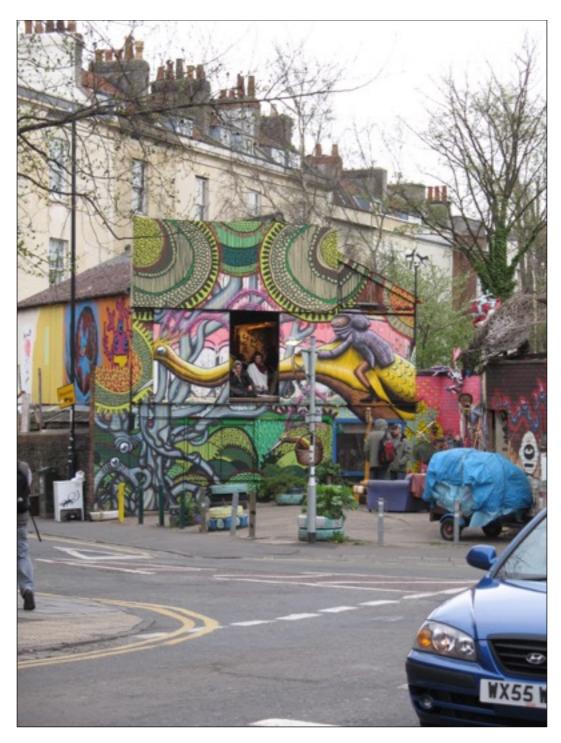
Figure 4.8: Marking heterotopia: The Magpie Squat

Figure 4.9: PRSC/Coexist collaborative artwork, Hamilton House

All of these examples trace the PRSC's philosophy of fluid community into the streetscape – anyone passing through Stokes Croft is incorporated as part of the community by the very fact that they are invited to question the processes of power in the social ordering of hegemony (quite literally in the work in figure 4.10 below); they are presented with heterotopian visions revealing social ordering and culture as a *process* of discourse, not a fixed entity. Thus, subjects, cultures and collections of cultures and subjects – *communities* - are continually involved in processes of becoming, rendering Stokes Croft particularly slippery within New Labour's urban policy discourse figuring communities and cultures as tangible and processible.

Figure 4.10: Challenging Hegemony

4.3.2. Art and the Dialectical Utopian Project

In seeking to sustain Stokes Croft as a heterotopia, the PRSC's approach to art curation holds on to a utopian vision seeking to specifically nurture the area's cultural difference. For Harvey (2000) this is a crucial feature for a successful dialectical utopian project, and distinguishes the PRSC's from other degenerate utopias in Bristol which have sought to suppress the uncertainty and chaos residing in the culturally diverse heterotopia. Such discourses have produced residual subjects in the homeless street drinkers and anti-consumerist bohemians who now find themselves displaced into Stokes Croft and playing a part in revealing space in its heterogeneous form. Where the degenerate utopias of the centre embrace closure as a necessary part of their realisation, the PRSC's project instead might be seen to be aiming toward Harvey's idea of the 'dialectical utopia'. Though his version of utopia is a non-homogenising socialist transformation, this political bent is not sought by the PRSC who claim themselves as distinctly apolitical (Appendix B: p.112). Nevertheless,

parallels can be traced in the underlying principles of his dialectical utopia, which 'recognises that societies and spatialities are shaped by continuous processes of struggle' (Harvey, 2000: 189). To this end, the PRSC see the open, ephemeral and universally accessible urban canvas as a medium through which struggle can be documented, discussed and provoked by the contributing community. A recent piece expresses this philosophy in its adoption of Hokusai's wave (figure 4.11), itself an iconic symbol of impermanence and struggle.

Figure 4.11: PRSC building art, Jamaica Street

A closer study of some of the works on Stokes Croft reveals the marks of struggle and contestation in the form of defacements, subversions and tags. In a high profile event occurring whilst conducting this study, Stokes Croft's famous Banksy piece 'The Mild Mild West' came under attack (figure 4.12) from activists bringing with them a critique of regeneration led by street art:

'Graffiti artists are the copywriters for the capitalist created phenomenon of urban art.'

'Graffiti artists are the performing spray-can monkeys for gentrification.'

(Appropriate Media website, 03/04/2009)

Figure 4.12: Stokes Croft street art under attack – Banksy's 'Mild Mild West'

Source: PRSC

This example reveals the capacity for street art on Stokes Croft to act as a sort of forum for the community in the area. Following this stunt, the PRSC witnessed

perhaps the biggest singular show of community support for their agenda as Appropriate Media's website, hosting a place for visitors to leave comments, became inundated with retaliation and attacks from angry locals (Appropriate Media website, 03/04/2009) turning out their support for the use of street art as a means of turning Stokes Croft into a destination (the Banksy piece already stands as a sort of tourist attraction for the area). Following a consultation with the community, the PRSC repaired the mural and invited Appropriate Media to meet the community for discussion (a request currently without response).

Whether or not the PRSC's repair can be read as a form of censorship in Stokes Croft's dialectical process is a debatable issue which the PRSC will have to address as they attempt to manage the use of Street Art more officially on Stokes Croft. To this end, the PRSC have made attempts to induce more structured and inclusive discussion in Stokes Croft on the developmental issues they face by erecting bulletin displays inviting 'opinions and rants' and voting boards inviting passers by to express themselves on a relevant debate or topic (figures 4.13 and 4.14).

Figure 4.13: Stokes Croft Bulletin Board

Figure 4.14: Stokes Croft 'Public Referendum Voting Board'

These forums are different from those in Bristol East Side Traders or council-led neighbourhood arts participation projects in that they are situated directly in the heart of heterotopian chaos, outside the influence of discursive limitations in place within official systems of governance. In inviting individuals to simply 'make their mark', the dialectical process is opened up to the complete community (including those simply 'passing through'), even to those unwilling to comply with conventional forms

of expression in operation in hegemonic space. This may appear to mark a step towards Harvey's most fundamental requirement of utopian space:

> [The] urban terrain is opened for display, fashion, and the 'presentation of self' in a surrounding of spectacle and play. If everyone, from punks to rap artists to the 'yuppies' and the haute bourgeoisie can participate in the production of an urban image through their production of social space, then all can at least feel some sense of belonging to that place
>
> (Harvey, 1989, p.14).

These facilities provided by the PRSC can be seen to provide a simple and effective entry point for the 'presentation of self' that would eventually come to constitute the production of an inclusive heterotopian urban image. But the disorder within the heterotopia itself undermines the PRSC's attempts to develop a workable mandate here in the same way as it complicate Stokes Croft's insertion into systems of governance, transforming the board into the ambiguous melee of expressionism shown in figure 4.15. A similar (though perhaps more coherent) realisation of a dialectical heterotopian canvas was achieved by the PRSC in projects on Jamaica Street (figures 4.16 - 4.18 , also see examples in appendix C for further detail), which collated input from professional artists and a broad range of local community members into a gallery of juxtaposed and varied individual works.

4.3.3. PRSC Counter – Discursive Utopianism: Where From Here?

If the PRSC's counter – discourses are to be seen as a form of 'intermediary' type of governmentality seeking to produce and enact a distinct set of power relations in Stokes Croft, it is clear that their bid for increased power and presence in the area could have profound impacts on the area's 'community' and culture. However, throughout this chapter it has been shown that their counter-discourses strive to produce a less restrictive governmentality than those centrally determined by the state. Their blurring of community in effect requires individuals to have an active, reciprocal relationship with their sensory surroundings as a means of externalising

heterogeneity, oppositional viewpoints and criticism rather than internalising them for the sake of a 'functional' definitive community identity. As heterotopia, Stokes

Figure 4.15: Stokes Croft Public Referendum Board detail

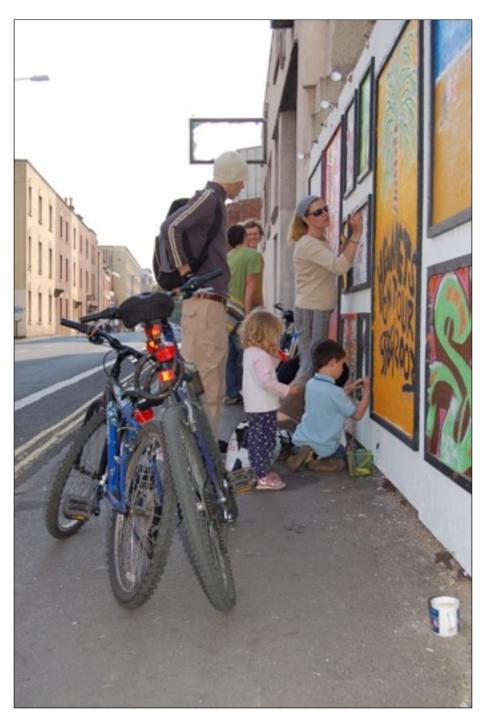Figure 4.16: PRSC Jamaica Street Project

Figure 4.17: PRSC Jamaica Street Project in progress

Source: PRSC

Figure 4.18: Jamaica Street Project Detail

Source: PRSC

Croft's alternative cultural assets are then given expression and protected against the homogenising pressures from the State and commercial market. The PRSC's own governmentality might be summed up in their slogan 'we are all artists'; they hope to produce subject behaviour which fosters an active community of creative individuals. Their cultural activity is then marketable, but in a way which is robust against the hegemonic Other and therefore sustainable as alternative.

The Jamaica Street project would appear to be the nearest prototype of what the PRSC's fully inclusive heterotopian outdoor gallery might look like, should they ever be successful in materialising it on a wider scale. Harvey argues that the heterotopia, as conventionally understood in a Foucauldian sense, 'has the virtue of insisting upon a better understanding of the heterogeneity of space, [but] it gives no clue as to what a more spatiotemporal utopianism may look like' (Harvey, 2000, p.185). It has been argued here that the PRSC's heterotopian vision of the urban environment as an ephemeral canvas stands attempts a solution to this problem in providing both

moments of spatiotemporal closure necessary for the materialisation of utopian form *and* moments of transitional struggle as each work ages, becomes challenged and eventually replaced. This cycle would be sustained as a way of ensuring Stokes Croft developed a bottom – up manner defined by the active community.

To the frustration of top-down developers and systems of governance seeking the coercion of the PRSC as a group with increasing reputation as a community representative, their project remains problematic because it bears symptoms similar to other utopian projects of social process, which 'have the habit of getting lost in the romanticism of endlessly open projects that never have to come to a point of closure (within space and place)' (Harvey, 2000: 174). The PRSC will only be able to reassure central institutions that their plans are legitimate when they can demonstrate that their activities are engaging the community legitimately and representatively in dialogue, something they seek to ensure under their new banner as a culpable Community Interest Company. This is essential to ensuring Stokes Croft remains represented in its complete and totally heterogeneous capacity and is able to ward off homogenising development strategies more permanently. Only once this groundwork has been achieved will they be able to take on the tougher challenges of seeking an all-inclusive heterotopia, conducting their own effective and active form of governance and cultural protectionism.

5.0. Conclusions and Limitations

5.1. Stokes Croft's Dilemma

As a heterotopia in which the operations of hegemonic discourses are exposed, suspended and subverted, Stokes Croft has proven itself a highly slippery customer in Bristol's urban policy strategy. On one hand development and change in some form or another is a necessary tool in the battle against the deprivation that blights many lives in the area, but on the other the conventionally prescribed developmental trajectory now emergent under New Labour's community-led, culturally – driven strategy remains at odds with a significant proportion of the community making their voices heard through the PRSC. Though New Labour claim to be driving regeneration in a manner sensitive to local agenda, inefficiencies in the systems put in place to ensure this are leaving a distinct part of the community disillusioned and struggling to enact discourse autonomously. The group's complaints were symptomatic of problems noted more broadly across New Labour policy study literatures, pointing to problems more deeply seated in restrictive governmentality enacted off the back of short-sighted, homogenising conceptualisations of community and culture.

To this end, governmental uses of community and culture might be seen to be actively *disempowering* to heterotopian idealism and distancing grassroots organisations from systems of governance, highlighting a need, for the case of Stokes

Croft at least, to radically revise theorisations of space and society. Fairclough arrives at a similar conclusion in his critical discourse analysis on New Labour policy:

> '*Perhaps* the most fundamental contribution New Labour could make is in taking measures to encourage and facilitate *real dialogue and debate*…New Labour's political discourse could be made more open to *difference*'
>
> (Fairclough, 2000, p.16, emphasis added)

More than just another dead-end critique of New Labour's discourses on community and culture, though, this study has used the PRSC's alternative modes of embracing communally and culturally - led regeneration as a means to exploring more radical avenues of facilitating dialogue and opening up political discourse to 'real dialogue and debate' and 'difference'. This has been sought as a means of addressing the often-neglected issue of the tangible, grass – roots consequences of contested central policy discourses. The group's work exemplifies the use of heterotopia a way of conceding that 'community' and 'culture' *are* indeed slippery concepts, but that this need not be seen as a barrier to development, and should be harnessed as a means to establishing Stokes Croft as a destination renown for its heterotopian agenda – a unique feature capable of being part of the area's place-marketing strategy. Whilst the PRSC's counter-discourses remain untested in their infancy as a CIC, the increasing climate of distrust in governance systems and growing strength in the resolve of those supporting alternative cultures and urban visions in the wake of reproduced, homogenous urbanities will likely boost the PRSC's popularity. The challenge, then, is to manage popularity and inclusion in a manner different to the systems of government that are homogenising heterotopias and urban utopian projects – no easy task.

5.2. Study Limitations

Any study using *critical* discourse analysis as a method faces difficulties in substantiating the claim to be productive of valid, objective knowledge. Academics

have previously accused critical discourse analysts of 'interfering with the scholarly task' (Hammersley, 1997, p.242) based on their tendency to assume a positional stance in order to be critical. This positional bias has a number of dangerous consequences, not least the way in which it assumes both a knowledge of the intrinsic operations of discourse (which have been discussed earlier as part of massive and historically complex networks of spatial power), and a knowledge of the injustices and social problems caused by these discourses and in need of rectifying. The result of this is often, according to Haig (2004), an overblown practical and self-important ambition for effecting social change and a subsequent over-interpretation of texts pertaining to the discourses under discussion. The dangers of such an approach might be the promotion of alternatives with their own unseen problems, or even worse, the unfair dismissal of already effective policy.

Whilst efforts have been made to explore discourse and counter-discourse in a three – dimensional manner as a means of understanding discursive operations as far as possible given modest resource availability, this study certainly shows a number of limitations relating to biased readings of discourse. This problem is compounded when, in an interview setting, it was necessary to appear gratifying to the PRSC's agenda in order to build trust between interviewer and interviewee. Whilst interrogating the PRSC's own statements of their engagement with urban policy was necessary as a means of getting a reliable account of *perceived* impacts of urban policy at grassroots level, this study would be of more use as a critique of urban policy discourse if it interrogated it from a more complete range of positions. In particular, accounts from councillors, planners and policy analysts would help flesh out discursive processes and the operations of local partnerships more thoroughly, especially when PRSC members explained that they were naïve about how these groups operated, especially behind the scenes and within other wards (for example, see appendix B, p.111). As Fairclough states, the hugely dispersed nature of the discursive formation necessarily requires Critical Discourse Analysis to be interdisciplinary and embrace input from a broad range of academic and professional perspectives, and this study is hindered by a predominant focus on literature from

geographers and social scientists. Further crucial positional issues are apparent in any researcher interpretation of the PRSC's art, an inevitably subjective process. Whilst these interpretations have read the street art in Stokes Croft through from a figurative rather than theoretical viewpoint, a further exploration of the PRSC's project might firstly question the artists' own readings and compare these with local community interpretations more thoroughly. This might help the PRSC in legitimising their plans further, or at the very least help their understanding of the consequences of their work more completely.

Nevertheless, this study is different from a majority of critical discourse analyses in that it goes beyond stale criticisms of urban policy discourse, and is bold in embracing the opportunity to effect social change and move toward what Martin (1999) calls 'Positive Discourse Analysis':

> 'If discourse analysts are serious about wanting to use their work to enact social change, then they will have to broaden their coverage to include discourse of this kind – discourse that inspires, encourages, heartens; discourse we like, that cheers us along. We need, in other words, more positive discourse analysis alongside our critique; and this means dealing with texts we admire, alongside those we dislike and try to expose'
>
> (Martin, 1999, p.196-97)

Though a 'positive discourse analysis' moves into dangerous academic territory, these dangers can provide impetus for potentially transformative counter-discourse to be more thoroughly unpacked, criticised, refined and democratised. Whilst this study has sought to do this to some extent, an improved discussion of the PRSC's counter-discourse would need to involve an exploration of the relationship between the community and the PRSC from the community's perspective, something which remains hazy (though it is worth noting the group have never had any correspondence asking them to stop, besides the Appropriate Media stunt – see appendix B, p.96). The

dynamics of this relationship should, however, become clearer as the group pick up speed as a Community Interest Company.

5.3. Stokes Croft on the Cusp of Change

'Something *is* going to happen here, it's just a matter of what.'

(PRSC member Chris Chalkley, Appendix B, p.100)

Whilst this study was underway, many of the street artists whose works I had been studying on Stokes Croft were busy elsewhere in the city. The Royal West of England Academy, a grade II* listed building located - as it is known to the PRSC - 'up the posh end' in Clifton, was hosting within its grandiose walls their latest exhibition, 'Crimes of Passion'. Showcasing work by fifty of Bristol's most prolific street artists, the show was a record-breaking success, attracting nearly 10,000 visitors and forcing the academy to extend its run.

I attended a tour of the exhibition organised by the PRSC, plugging it as 'probably the most important exhibition of the year, if not the past several years'. Many of the artists on display (in what might usually be criticised by the PRSC as an elitist middle class art institution) had gained their reputation working in the poverty - stricken streets of Stokes Croft. The initial idea of the tour had been to gather an entourage of Stokes Croft's homeless community and descend upon the gallery as a way of subverting the conventional social hegemonies in such an institution, or at least get some of them off of the streets for a while. As it turned out, the tour was attended modestly by local shopkeepers, students and other PRSC supporters, with representatives from the most deprived sector of the local community notably absent.

This example is analogous to wider difficulties faced by the PRSC as a dedicated, activist group working within, and on behalf of, an often disinterested or disillusioned deprived community. It may well be that the PRSC's counter-discourse has already

reached a critical milestone in the battle against hegemony; street art now appears to have enough popularity for the group to more forcefully stake their claim for a new period of economic opportunity and for this to alleviate apathy in the areas of the community where their efforts are held back. But with the displacement of cultural capital once associated with Stokes Croft into 'the posh end' comes an indication that the discursive ingestion process is already underway. The PRSC have their work cut out as more institutions outside of the area threaten to appropriate these assets for their own spatial fixes, or worse still, end up defusing street art and alternative culture altogether. Rather than being viewed as proponents of a counter-discourse itself contradictory to the spontaneous character of Stokes Croft, during this period of heightened potential the PRSC's interventions may be vital to ensuring any rewards reaped from the area's cultural assets remain where they are needed most.