Narrating Urban Entrepreneurship: A Matter of Imagineering?

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> A city that does not curate its image and manage
> its story is out of date.
> *Sharon Zukin*

> Then, there are the myriad experiments that set
> out to invent flexible models
> of imagination and narrative outside the enforced
> routines of consumption.
> *Nigel Thrift*

The battle between cities with regard to their creative possibilities has evolved into a process of multiplying ever-new images and variegated stories of urban attractiveness and success. Engineering 'cool' images and 'hot' stories about one's city is now a central endeavor in the narratives of urban policy-making that center more and more on the idea of the entrepreneurial city. The making of an entrepreneurial image is enacted through various narrative genres that lie somewhere between place making and place marketing, between branding and boosting, between restoration and revanchism, between iconic architecture and megaspectacle. This 'imagineering' is not only part of the way cities try to (re-)present themselves as entrepreneurial to various audiences through a real 'image inflation' (Zukin 2008: xii) but is also inscribed in the various ways urban creativity and entrepreneurship can be studied, researched and imagined.

In this chapter we aim to differentiate the political narratives of the entrepreneurial city as we emphasize the need to understand the politics

of narration and make a plea for critical reflexivity in our forms of re-
searching and theorizing. We will thus try to investigate how the politics
of narration is intertwined with the narration of political concepts and
will argue that the narrating of urban entrepreneurship can raise very dif-
ferent images and discourses of city life beyond those that are currently
engineered. We will distinguish between a grand narrative, a counter-
narrative, and an assemblage of more ambivalent little narratives, which
we call prosaic narration. While the distinction between these three
types might be seen as a bit too simple and 'straight', we believe that by
juxtaposing these different forms of narration and alternating between
them, we can help problematize the engineering of the city as entrepre-
neurial and imagine alternative views both of city life and of what is un-
derstood as its creativity.

Reflexivity requires that we reflect carefully upon the ways of exam-
ining how the relationship between cities, entrepreneurship and culture
has been established in narratives of policy-making in the last 25 years.
Thus, the imagineering of the city is connected to the way that research
itself is critical of how certain images and narratives are kept prominent;
it can provide other kinds of stories in which the city is addressed as an-
other kind of space, a heterotopia (Foucault 1986; Steyaert 2006). We
will argue that it is time to go beyond the choice between a celebratory
and a critical analysis of urban entrepreneurialism. By investigating cit-
ies through non-representational narratives, we can orient the narration
of urban entrepreneurialism towards a politics of everyday life (Thrift
2008), 'a politics of what happens' (Thrift 2008: 2) and of the 'ordinary'
city (Robinson 2006).

The rise of the entrepreneurial city and the grand narrative of the creative class

Whether we look at Manchester which 'has long been seen as the defini-
tive entrepreneurial city' (Mace/Hall/Gallent 2007: 60; see also: Quilley
2000; Williams 2003) or Barcelona which convincingly connects the
spectacle of new and old architecture with economic dynamism
(McNeill 2001; Marshall 2004; Luna-Garcia 2008), an almost endless
series of cities have been called 'entrepreneurial' or have been given a
'creative label'. The list includes former industrial towns and postmod-
ern cities, middle-sized towns and world cities. No end of how – to
books provide readers with tools to develop their cities as entrepreneu-
rial (Goldsmith 1999) or creative (Landry 2000). All of this activity il-

lustrates how it has become *bon ton* to combine city development with entrepreneurship, creativity and culture.

The turn to the entrepreneurial city can be seen as part of a wider 'entrepreneurial shift' since the 1980s (Locke/Schöne 2004; Steyaert 2007) which also suggests that we connect the trope of the entrepreneurial city with the creativity discourse. The latter's emergence at the dawn of the entrepreneurial shift is illustrated by a book by Åke Andersson (1985), a Swedish professor of regional economy. In *Kreativitet: Storstadens Framtid* he outlines the role of creativity for future urban development, taking Stockholm as its case study. This book can be said to be a pioneering work, anticipating the next waves of creativity, carried out by Landry (2000) and Florida (2002), among others.

As the book was never translated, it was not likely even to make it into a footnote, but Peter Hall picked it up in his urban epos on *Cities in Civilization*: 'So the Swedes are right: creative cities, creative urban milieux, are places of great social and intellectual turbulence, not comfortable places at all' (1999: 285–286). Hall's 'magisterial book' (LeGates 2000: 201) presents an expansive overview of cases and theories to explain how cities have evolved into 'golden ages' or 'belles époques', forming creative crucibles and innovative milieus. Emphasizing social and cultural turmoil, Hall argues that 'creative urban societies often emerge as new classes, whose wealth derives from entrepreneurship and trade, and who challenge traditional propertied elites' (ibid.: 201). Hall connects the emergence of creativity with cosmopolitanism based on an influx of young immigrants and proposes that a fluid class structure, and the tension this brings along between old and new social groups, fosters innovation. Thus his position is that creativity is part of a tension between 'classes' rather than involving the performance of a 'new, creative class'.

The latter view became prominent at the time Hall's book was published. During the wave of the so-called 'new economy' the connection between cities, creativity and economic success became a dominant formula (Hjorth/Steyaert 2003). While the belief in the new economy faded quickly, Richard Florida (once an urban planner, now a professor of business and creativity in Toronto), was able to elevate this 'new credo of creativity' (Peck 2005: 740) to a wide acceptance in circles of (urban) policy makers as a kind of '*new* new economy' (ibid.: 743). Florida argues that urban economic development is to be formed within a cocktail that includes entrepreneurship, creative life styles and a diverse, creative class. Florida's logic of argumentation – which Peck (ibid.: 741) calls 'a sales pitch' – aims to re-install a grand narrative

(Lyotard 1984), which promotes an optimistic, if not utopian image of urban policy making, and is supported by a practice of boosterism.

What Florida (2002) sees as the 'rising' creative class is a group of so-called creative 'professionals' – from artists to scientists, from entrepreneurs to venture capitalists – who turn their lifestyles, values and tastes, as well as their relationships, into the main point of departure for combining work, leisure and living; in doing so they seem to complement such identifiable 'classes' as the working, service and agriculture classes. Creativity thus gravitates to specific locations, as creative people tend to 'cluster in places that are centers of creativity and also where they like to live' (Florida 2002: 7). For Florida, this is not a small change, but a 'sea-change'; indeed, 'it is the emergence of a new society and a new culture – […] a whole new way of life' (ibid.: 12).

In addition to attracting talented professionals, Florida further advises cities to seek technological prominence and to encourage a multicultural environment. These three elements are combined in a magic formula of 3 Ts: talent is connected with technology and tolerance. In this formula, the connection to art and culture is not first on the list, but art is seen as the close associate that combines well with technological nerds and with cosmopolitan and queer lifestyles. In an interview as he launched his book in 2002, Florida summarized his view by stating that 'cities must attract the new 'creative class' with hip neighborhoods, an arts scene and a gay-friendly atmosphere – or they'll go the way of Detroit' (Dreher 2002: 1; quoted in Peck 2005: 740).

As a consequence, Florida inscribes a strange mixture of figures into a narrative of mega-optimism and elitism. Artists, nerds, homosexuals and others are needed to enact the urban imagineering projects and to play a prime role in aestheticizing the urban landscape and concocting spectacles and mega-events. Art, sexuality, and in the end, city life itself, become commodities. For instance, Florida's emphasis on the gay and lesbian community has been contested both by conservatives who find that it undermines the values of family life so central in these conservative narratives (Peck 2005) and by the gay and lesbian community which finds itself staged in a spectacle of creativity where 'queer difference is now exploited as a material and semiotic resource in the commodification of the city' (Grundy 2003: 4).

A counter-narrative: Harvey's concept of urban entrepreneurialism

Those who currently embrace the politics of the entrepreneurial city by subscribing to the grand narrative sketched out above must remember that this idea is part of a lasting, entrepreneurial shift which was masterfully captured by David Harvey (1989). In his seminal article in the *Geografiska Annaler*, he describes how the discourse of urban governance moves from managerialism to entrepreneurialism. While the discourse of the entrepreneurial city might try to present itself as 'new', Harvey situates the rise of the connection between the city and entrepreneurship in the 1970s: 'the shift from urban managerialism to some kind of entrepreneurialism remains a persistent and recurrent theme in the period since the early 1970s' (1989a: 5). Thus, according to Harvey, the phenomenon of civic boosterism and entrepreneurialism has long been a major feature of urban systems. It arose when the economic and fiscal base of many large cities started to erode, especially in industrial cities; then, it was argued, cities required new and innovative models of governance.

The discourse about a 'spatial economy' (Fujita/Krugman/Venables 2001) began at economic colloquia as advocates of a closer link between the public and private sectors also held government responsible for promoting local areas to attract new businesses and entrepreneurial activity. The new adage of governance was 'to maximize the attractiveness of the local side as a lure for capitalist development' (Harvey 1989a: 5). Goodman's (1979) assessment of government as 'the last entrepreneurs' illustrates the belief in the urgent application of the entrepreneurial recipe, even if it did not mean the end of this argument (du Gay 2004).

Thus Harvey's analysis is timely as it connects to the developments towards what has been described as a post-industrial, post-Fordist, postmodern metropolis (Soja 2000), where new modes of organizing transport, work and shopping change the appearance of cities, along with their social structure, which can be characterized as 'a veritable archipelago of elite enclaves, fragmented neighbourhoods and "edge" cities' (Hubbard/Hall 1998: 1). This was the era of the enterprise culture as instigated by the neo-liberal economic politics of Thatcher and Reagan, which propelled the entrepreneur to the forefront as the symbolic figure of the new imaginary of urban (economic) life. This was the era of the yuppie culture where the golden boys of Wall Street were keen to sublimate their profits in narcissistic lifestyles (Hjorth/Steyaert 2006).

However, this entrepreneurial optimism, that brings forth 'a futuristic vision of a visually enticing city of dreams', is 'entwined with a post-

apocalyptic scenario of urban unrest, deprivation and despair' (Hubbard/Hall 1998: 1). Such dystopian images notwithstanding, what Harvey finds most striking is the 'general consensus' then 'emerging throughout the advanced capitalist world that positive benefits are to be had by cities taking an entrepreneurial stance to economic development' (1989a: 4). In fact, he sees it as remarkable 'that this consensus seems to hold across national boundaries and even across political parties and ideologies' (ibid.: 4).

Harvey (1989a: 8) focuses on three features of this entrepreneurial shift. First, as the influence of business interests increases, so does the number of public-private partnerships. Second, local governments engage in entrepreneurial and speculative risk-taking and assume activities which had been associated solely with the private sector. Third, the focus shifts from a political economy of territory to one of place where attention is drawn to the construction of a specific place and away from the broader problems of a region or territory. In summary: 'The new urban entrepreneurialism typically rests […] on a public-private partnership focusing on investment and economic development with the speculative construction of place rather than amelioration of conditions within a particular territory as its immediate (though by no means exclusive) political and economic goal'.

Urban governance in an entrepreneurial mode is then enacted through a combination of strategies: 1) respond to international competition based on local advantage and investment; 2) develop a local service-oriented economy; 3) assemble a wide range of supportive services in high finance, media and government; and 4) make central resources available regionally. With regard to urban regeneration, Harvey underlines what he calls 'the up-grading of the image' (1989a: 7) of cities and the emphasis on appearance, style, spectacle, display and imagery. 'Above all', he writes, 'the city has *to appear* as an innovative, exciting, creative, and safe place to live or to visit, to play and consume in' (ibid.: 9, our emphasis). This entails an orientation to quality of life, cultural innovation, postmodern design, consumer attractions (such as convention and shopping centres, marinas, exotic eating places) as well as urban spectacles including festivals and cultural events. For Harvey, it follows that other cities imitate these strategies; then, instead of being unique, cities seem to look more and more the same: 'How many successful convention centres, sports stadia, Disney-worlds, harbour places and spectacular shopping malls can there be?' (1989a: 12). Furthermore, he says the social costs of urban entrepreneurialism are immense; witness the increasing disparity in wealth and income and the processes of

urban impoverishment, dispossession and displacement (see also Harvey 2008).

In hindsight, Harvey's analysis was most clairvoyant, and in our view is still quite valuable in a contemporary context where cities are increasingly competing on a global scale, selling themselves based 'upon the creation of an attractive urban imagery' (1989a: 13) and being compared and measured with regard to their potential to attract a creative class. When we call his analysis timely, we must remark that Harvey might even have underestimated the increasingly prominent role of culture, creativity and the aesthetic in the shift to urban entrepreneurialism. To be fair, Harvey was already relating the entrepreneurial urbanism to a political aesthetic:

Local coalitions (of city management and the regional private sphere) have no option, given the coercive laws of competition, except to keep ahead of the game thus engendering leap-frogging innovations in life styles, cultural forms, products and service mixes, even institutional and political forms if they are to survive. The result is a stimulating if often destructive maelstrom of urban-based cultural, political, production and consumption innovations. It is at this point that we can identify an albeit subterranean but nonetheless vital connection between the rise of urban entrepreneurialism and the postmodern penchant for design of urban fragments rather than comprehensive urban planning, for ephemerality and eclecticism of fashion and style rather than the search for enduring values, for quotation and fiction rather than invention and function, and, finally, for medium over message and image over substance (1989a: 12–13).

While this eloquently formulated observation reflects Harvey's analysis of the condition of postmodernity (see Harvey 1989b), twenty years later we see that his critical analysis has not been able to call a halt to the by now overwhelming spread of this urban aesthetic; the situation now requires a complementary, analytical strategy, as we will discuss in the next section.

In search of prosaic narratives

While the discourse of creativity, occurring in several waves, has increasingly been appropriated into optimistic tales of urban entrepreneurship, it is clear from Harvey's critique that critical voices began quite early to question this success story and utopian-like narrative; they also documented the dystopian side of the connection between city and creativity. Others picked up on Harvey's critique, which was extended, both

empirically and conceptually, almost ten years later in Hall/Hubbard's (1998) edited volume *The Entrepreneurial City*, illustrating what they called the 'burgeoning cross-disciplinary literature on urban entrepreneurialism' (ibid.: 3). The book tried to capture the central debates around the entrepreneurial city and to map the new modes of governance implicated in the economic, social and cultural transformation of cities. It provides several illustrations of how changing the image of a locality is a central component of entrepreneurial governance, suggesting that 'it is perhaps best to consider the entrepreneurial city as an imaginary city, constituted through a plethora of images and representations' (ibid.: 7).

These counter-narratives have been valuable, responding to the tendency to reduce city governance to myth making and spectacle styling, but they have not been able to shift policy-makers from seeing the entrepreneurial city as a preferred script. While we can trace a clear genealogical history from the contemporary narrative of urban creativity back to the entrepreneurial efforts of de-industrialized cities, we must remember that '[t]he script of urban creativity reworks and augments the old methods and arguments of urban entrepreneurialism in politically seductive ways' (Peck 2005: 766). The emergence of the creative industries and the valorization of the cultural economy in the 1990s have ossified the association between the urban, the entrepreneurial and the cultural, making them harder to critique. According to Boltanski/Chiapello (2006), among others, the entrepreneurial spirit has recuperated the strategies of artistic critique at the advantage of its own ideology; in doing so, it has made traditional critique look ineffective.

Thus we see a constant attempt to present the relationship between the urban and the entrepreneurial as self-evident, forcing researchers themselves to keep trying to change and recreate their strategies of analysis and critique. We argue that in order to make the relationship between entrepreneurship and the city more ambivalent we need to invent alternative forms of critique that can not only document how the styles of seduction have altered but also affirm other uses of the city-space and invest(igate) in the de-commodification of the city. The question now is how to move beyond the dichotomous representation that divides the analysis of city life in two too clear camps; this analysis seems to (re)present the city as either Pleasantville or Panicville (Virilio 2005), as either urban dream or metropolitan nightmare (Gundle quoted in Harvey 1989a) or as the site of either an 'experience economy' of play and passion (Hjorth/Kostera 2007) or a 'fear economy' of surveillance and security (Davis 2002; Thrift 2005).

This attempt to change the dualistic representation can be illustrated by a minor but, we think, symptomatic recent debate within the field of

urban studies (Latham 2006a, 2006b; Cochrane 2006). In the *Journal of European Urban and Regional Studies*, the geographer Alan Latham staged an intervention into what he perceives as the 'limitations' of Anglophone urban studies (2006a: 88); his example is the interest in and the corresponding studies of the (development of the) city of Berlin. Latham identifies a consensus at work in current discussions in English-language urban studies: an implicitly shared understanding of what is 'driving' the development of the European city, of what processes call for scholarly attention and, therefore, of what is seen and what is left out.

This consensus concurs broadly with the counter-narrative of the entrepreneurial city as geared towards an intensified entrepreneurialism. Consequently, this scholarly consensus extends to the worrisome effects of the 'entrepreneurialization' of cities that are usually denoted by phenomena such as gentrification, boosterism, and gated communities as well as social technologies such as new surveillance mechanisms and Business Improvement Districts. Latham (2003; 2006a) traces several widely shared and interrelated propositions: an intensified orientation towards consumption, a 'hyper-aestheticisation of the everyday' (Latham 2003: 1701) and neo-liberal governmental strategies go hand-in-hand with a diagnosed globalization of cities and an increasing polarization by wealth and income as well as increased social exclusion.

The counter-narrative has itself become a compelling and dominant narrative of Anglophone urban literature that, according to Latham, has been 'applied' to Berlin. Apart from studying how Berlin has been re-imagined through place-marketing 'and the symbolic spectacle of global architecture' (Cochrane/Jonas 1999: 152, and ignoring for now the fact that these authors also identify the coeval imagineerings of Berlin as national capital and 'normal' city), he sees the new 'invention' of the Potsdamer Platz as the most obvious case that demonstrates the dominance of economic power and consumerist urban development (e.g. Marcuse 1998; Allen 2006). Certainly, the construction of the Potsdamer Platz seems to be an almost ideal-typical example of the 'potential tragedy […] that the menu from which big cities seem to be permitted to choose their futures appears to remain so limited' (Cochrane/Jones 1999: 161).

The question, therefore, is not whether such analyses might miss the point; in fact, they vividly reveal the power of urban entrepreneurialism at work, so to speak. Rather, the question is what the shared agenda of Anglophone urban studies does *not* permit us to see. That is, what happens if, in Latham's words, the 'Anglophone consensus […] comes to be the account that matters most' (2006a: 91)? One risk is that this particular discourse – its significant merits notwithstanding – may fail to notice

the diversity *between* (European) cities. As Latham points out, Berlin has a distinct history of urban planning and renewal that, even now, continues to deviate from the clear-cut neo-liberal or 'entrepreneurial' model which apparently determines urban development in larger (Western) cities.

For us a more important danger is in overlooking the 'contemporaneous heterogeneities of space' (Massey 2005: 5): the plurality of spatial trajectories that produce urban spaces. This is not limited to the example of Berlin, of course. But it is somewhat ironic that at the same period when the Potsdamer Platz was being conceived, built and put to use, Berlin was becoming an object of inquiry as a hotbed for experimental, 'autonomous' and often minor spaces, for so-called 'counter-urbanities' in multiple expressions (e.g. Latham 1999; Oswald 2000; Cupers/Miessen 2002; Groth/Corijn 2005), including a host of endeavours to resist or playfully parody consumer culture and the privatization of space. Thus, as Latham puts it, the problem is that through dominant critical patterns of thinking, 'we end up with accounts of Berlin which […] miss many of the more interesting and exceptional phenomena which are shaping Berlin' (2006b: 377).

Both Latham's diagnostic reading of urban theory's dominant (counter-)narrative and his call to open up to the plurality of spatio-urban trajectories fit well with our broad distinction between grand narrative, counter-narrating and what we call the prosaic narration of spatial performances that moves beyond orthodox theoretical orderings. Perhaps not surprisingly, artistic performances and their potential to reconfigure what we can perceive, see and speak are of considerable interest here (Rancière 2004; e.g. Beyes 2009). Instead of reinforcing the domestication of artistic events, Amin/Thrift (2002) point out, 'the most exacting, exciting and enticing attempts to produce […] new modes of belonging have been taking place in contemporary architecture and performance art as they have tried to redefine – in practice – what is meant by place as liv*ing* rather than liv*ed* space' (ibid.: 48, our emphasis).

These kinds of artistic urban interventions are processual, dynamic, not static, and 'they rest on a particular understanding of architecture, somewhat in line with Benjamin's notions of architecture as "tactile appropriation", as constantly being transformed by its use, its boundaries renegotiated by habits.' (ibid.: 49). And yet, the metaphor of performance leads us beyond the realm of art, into very practical imaginations and creations of encounters, affects, unforeseen relations, play, liminality, protest and transformation (Thrift 2000; Thrift/Dewsbury 2000). From serious or carnivalesque performances of resistance (Lyle 2008) to the affective enactments and reorderings of urban geographies by home-

less people (Cloke/May/Johnsen 2008) or to the reclaiming of the urban agenda by informal actors reanimating indeterminate spaces (Groth/Corijn 2005), the urban fabric produces manifold manifestations and and new forms of expression which allow change to happen.

Again, this is not to gloss over the oppressive and damaging consequences of entrepreneurial urbanism which the critical counter-narrative lays bare. But it seems all the more urgent to enrich our understanding of cities in neo-liberal times by exploring stories that present alternatives to the dominant critique of urban entrepreneurialism, because it is here that we might 'imagine possible futures beyond the narrow confines of a globalized, neo-liberal, free-market model' (Latham 2006a: 91). Conceptualizing urban space as an effect of assemblages of heterogeneous interrelations and interactions, as an open, unfinished and relational 'becoming space', first and foremost engenders the *possibility* of politics (Massey 2005: 149ff.). In this sense, the discourse of prosaic narration leaves no other choice than to refrain from advocating for or prescribing a new mode of urban governance. Following Lefebvre's notion of 'the right to the city' (1996) and Amin/Thrift's articulation of a 'politics of the common' (2002), we believe the focus must shift from a particular form of urban democracy and governance to 'the city as a site of politics in motion' (Amin/Thrift 2002: 155): 'The ideal city […] would be the *ephemeral* city, the perpetual *oeuvre* of the inhabitants, themselves mobile and mobilized for and by this *oeuvre*. […] The right to the *oeuvre*, to participation and *appropriation* (clearly distinct from the right to property), are implied in the right to the city' (Lefebvre 1996: 173ff.; original emphasis).

Inquiries into the mundane and artistic performances of city life cannot be disentangled from the politics of narration and critique. To attend to these prosaic events, academics will need to change their narrative performances by engaging with what Thrift (2008) calls non-representational theorizing. Challenging classic narrations and semiotic accounts and their interest in how meaning is produced and articulated, non-representational accounts 'emphasize bodily and technological engagements with urban space through affect and ontology' (Hetherington/Cronin 2008: 6). Non-representational theorizing can lead to an important shift in understanding how the narration of urban creativity moves from a discursive level of meaning-making to a performative, neo-materialist level that takes on the intensities and affects through which creative space is assembled. Such a different style of narrating can be related to a detailed, prosaic narration (Steyaert 2004) and a performative narration (Thrift 2000), both of which pull in everyday but intense stories and other fragments of urban life, as well as to a narration

that practices the possibility of fabulation, that is imagining the future becoming of a collective urbanity (Hjorth/Steyaert 2006). Rather than set out a grand political scheme or try to counter it, we suggest that by increasingly circulating little narratives, we can collectively move the engineering of images towards a practice of imagination that can help bring forward an intensive urban life. Beyond a theoretical diagnostics of grand (counter-)narrations, we suggest engaging with a form of living space inquiry by attending to the intensities, connections and blockages in everyday urban interaction. Such an affirmative politics narrates the city as a heterotopia where affects, ideas and possibilities are assembled and where the grand narratives are not denied but are instead deterritori-alized and launched again. A heterotopic politics of urban creativity thus requires a different narration of entrepreneurship *tout court*.

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