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Who is taking part? Political subjectivity and Glasgow's Commonwealth Games

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Abstract

This paper examines the problems of locating political subjectivity in the midst of the Glasgow Commonwealth Games of 2014 and takes as its starting point Ranciere's contention that politics cannot be defined on the basis of any pre-existing subject. The Commonwealth Games, as both policy vehicle and a form of knowing the world, constructs subjects through the invocation of 'legacy'. This involves assuming a consensual populism within which social problems are identified and rectified through the eventfulness of the event. However, leading on from Ranciere's contention above, this paper suggests a critical perspective where the event itself is de-centred in order to move beyond the citational response to mega-events: that policy

constructs subjugated subjects. The paper proceeds by examining how the logics of local residents of East Glasgow elude subjugation in their encounters with the official discourses of the mega-event. It outlines the ways that political subjectivity is brought forth in two discursive spaces: first, within Games Legacy Evaluation Reports. Second, a public meeting organised by Glasgow City Council as part of their Get Ready Glasgow series. These spaces are considered alongside recent academic criticism that focuses on the corrective elements of social policy relating to sporting mega events.

Key words: post politics, Ranciere, performativity, sports mega-event, Commonwealth Games

Introduction

This paper examines the political subjectivity of residents in a city experiencing a mega-event – specifically the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow 2014. I argue that a de-centring of the games-event is required to avoid the problem wherein critical responses to mega-events circulate around the official discourses, generated by the Games organisers and their partners. This may prevent the development of a nuanced understanding of residents' political subjectivity, which is implicated in official discourses, but not wholly defined, or contained by them. The motivation for the paper arises from my personal involvement as a contributing researcher and organiser in Glasgow Games Monitor (see Gamesmonitor2014.org), an independent and unfunded research activist group, inspired by the London Olympics Games Monitor group. We sought to create spaces for discussions on the effects of regeneration policy and practice in East Glasgow. Much of Glasgow's Commonwealth Games infrastructure was

focused in the Dalmarnock area of East Glasgow (Porter et al. 2009). The Games as an event created a stimulus for Games Monitor's existence and the group's engagement with residents in the Dalmarnock area (which involved) convening housing meetings, doing critical walks, writing newsletters and research papers. These activities, however, necessarily exceeded the direct effects of the single event of the Commonwealth Games 2014. For example, the closure and eventual demolition of the Accord Centre in Dalmarnock to make way for a coach park for the Games (Games Monitor 2013b) initiated a wider consideration of cuts to social care budgets in Glasgow. Furthermore, in 2012–13 we undertook research into the Urban Regeneration Company Clyde Gateway, who were appointed by the Scottish Government in 2007 to attract private investment into several neighbourhoods in East Glasgow, including Dalmarnock and Bridgeton where the Commonwealth Games Village and related infrastructure was built. Consequently, Clyde Gateway has invoked a rationale and language of 'Games Legacy throughout its public-facing activity (Clyde Gateway 2016). One of the claims Clyde Gateway made, which Games Monitor sought to verify, was their facilitation of the building of 10 000 homes in Glasgow, a claim that turned out to be false (see Games Monitor 2013a). For the purposes of this paper, however, my point is that in our discussions

with residents on housing access, cost, tenure and the problems tenants experienced around making meaningful contact with housing associations and local government actors, there tended to be a perpetual de-centring of the Games event in Games Monitor's activities. In light of this, the critical problem this paper draws attention to is that in the presence of a mega-event, the political subjectivity of the resident of the host city is constructed through (and therefore situated by) the event. This occurs not only in the promotional campaigns and policy frameworks of the coalitions organising and delivering the event, it is also apparent in critical responses from academic researchers. The paper considers Ranciere's writing on post-democracy and Butler's notion of performativity to suggest how we might more usefully approach the construction of an excessive, unfixed political subject. One that is neither the 'corrected subject' constructed by cultural policy, nor the dominated or constrained subject seen in recent academic responses to the Commonwealth Games in particular (Paton et al. 2012).

Crisis? What crisis?

Glasgow Games Monitor organised a public meeting in March 2014 to bring tenants and residents of the Bridgeton and Dalmarnock areas of Glasgow together to discuss their experiences of social landlords, rent levels, tenure and availability of housing. We had booked a room in a Community

Centre in the Bridgeton area some weeks in advance of the meeting, and had advertised this as the location on posters and flyers. This meeting was part of a series of Games Monitor events across 2013–14 that looked at the specific issue of housing in Glasgow. Promotional material for the meeting was delivered door to door in the area and these leaflets and posters made reference to the 'housing crisis'. This term – also used by NGOs, charities, local and national government – refers to: a national lack of affordable housing in both urban and rural areas; serious problems with the maintenance of existing stock; rising costs incurred by tenants; and a dwindling number of housing units being built by local authorities (Shelter Scotland 2015; Whiteford 2015; Bury 2012; National Housing Federation 2014). With less than a week before the meeting, the manager of the Community Centre contacted the group to tell us that the meeting could not take place there (Games Monitor 2014) and gave the following explanation:

Bridgeton Community Learning Campus pride themselves in raising the hopes and aspirations of our community and its residents and on this occasion the Board of Directors have decided that your public meeting does not fit the criteria for this. To date I have had no complaints or concerns in regards to a housing crisis, however, if this was the case then Bridgeton Community Learning Campus would seek to involve the appropriate

parties in order to deal with it as amicably as possible without creating unnecessary unrest. (Correspondence with Glasgow Games Monitor from Bridgeton Community Learning Centre Manager 13 March 2014)

The meeting was re-scheduled for a month later and took place in a nearby high school library, booked through Glasgow City Council's arm's length organisation 'Glasgow Life'. What this episode clearly showed was that there are real and significant challenges to creating the kinds of communal spaces (both material and discursive) that acknowledge that housing is political, and that residents are political subjects. The community centre manager's response adds substance to the claims made in the post political debate within critical urban geography, a body of literature that explores the retreat of the political from public space (ZCiCzek 1999; Swyngedouw 2007 2009). It is a debate that builds on the insights of previous work on the retreat of antagonism in party politics (Mouffe 2005). However, in this paper I seek to contextualise the problem of locating and asserting political subjectivity of the Glasgow residents during a mega-event with reference to Jacques Ranciere's 2001 essay Ten theses on politics. This is a work that allows for a de-centring of the event, with the suggestion that 'politics cannot be defined on the basis of any pre-existing subject' (Ranciere 2001: Thesis 1). In

this context different groups with a stake in a given situation take 'parts'. He suggests 'political struggle is not a conflict between well-defined interest groups; it is an opposition of logics that count the parties and parts of the community in different ways' (Ranciere 2001: thesis 6). Ranciere's theorisation of the part of no part, the excess that has no part in the aesthetic police order, is a useful reference point for understanding the way that the mega-event is an intensified aesthetic regime where everything has its place, a point I will return to later. Swyngedouw describes Ranciere's iterations of the political as being at the point of encounter between the two heterogeneous processes of '"governance" or "the police", on the one hand and the process of emancipation, or the political, on the other' (2014, 128). The 'police' refers to both the actions of the state and the ordering of social relations. They aspire to an order in which everything has its place, and is categorised in what Ranciere terms the 'partition of the sensible', a conception of society as total in which all groups perform specific functions and occupy determined spaces (Ranciere 2000). Importantly, it is not so much that a pre-existing group is excluded and then contests this exclusion. Rather politics are those actions that reject existing identifications through a process of political subjectification, by a 'part of those who have no part' who demand the reinvention of the existing aesthetic regime. The political

is therefore not a matter of trying to enter into this aesthetic regime, to attempt to call on the state to rectify wrongs, it is rather the constant emergence of an excess to this aesthetic regime, a disruption to it. Ranciere considers the principal subject of politics as 'the supplementary part' in relation to the police order whose 'principle is the absence of void and of a supplement' (Ranciere 2001, thesis 7), in other words a presupposition of a matching of 'functions, places, and ways of being, there is no place for any void' (2001, thesis 7). Prior to a fuller exploration of how this relates to Glasgow's Commonwealth Games, the paper now proceeds by reviewing the literature on mega-events that emphasises their catalysing capacity for protest movements.

Urban mega-events: a catalyst for political articulation?

The urban mega-event is a proliferating feature of urban life (Hiller 2000). Some defining characteristics of sporting and cultural mega-events include their transience, cultural significance and the use of drama and spectacle to underline particular values of local, national or international importance, and highlight the agenda of institutions and elites who are involved with them (British Library 2015). Critical responses to urban mega-events largely stem from political economy paradigms that link the event to the politics of the state (whether national or municipal), the role played by urban elites including

the promotion of private sector interests, and the reprioritisation of the 'urban agenda' (Harvey 1989; Brenner and Theodore 2002; Peck 2005). Analysis of how the power of local urban elites is initiated, sustained and able to grow (Logan and Molotch 1987) has been brought to bear on the mega-event (Logan et al. 1997) and has informed accounts of the mega-event as a vehicle of urban entrepreneurialism (Hall 2006).

Sporting and cultural mega-events have been framed as catalysers for residents to engage in resistance. Boyle and Hughes (1994) acknowledge how such events may well trigger off community opposition and provide a focus around which locals can articulate their anxieties about what the broader shift may mean to the community. (1994, 454) Boykoff, in an account of protest around the Vancouver Winter Olympics of 2010, calls the event 'the avatar of an unaccountable world order of power, wealth and spectacle, wreaking permanent social damage on the urban environment' (2011, 45). He argues protestors self-identify as 'a convergence of movements' around 'the Olympic moment' which 'are finding ways to organize with greater flexibility, spontaneity and lateral solidarity' (2011, 46) and goes on to suggest that the Vancouver Games gave longtime Vancouver activists a positive boost and refreshed the ranks with energetic younger protesters who were given a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to soar over the hurdles that might

have been present during 'normal' political times. (2011, 59)

However, given that the temporal duration of the mega-event and 'normal political times' can both be characterised by market-driven contingencies, and because the event (and its legacy) comes to be cited in relation to a far wider array of policy aims, the clear demarcation between event time and normal time becomes harder to identify. Ward (2003), looking at Manchester's experience of hosting the 2002 Commonwealth Games, argued that urban entrepreneurialism demands more not less state intervention, particularly in the form of a greater show of police in force and numbers in a targeted 'war on crime' in East Manchester. Ward (2003) demonstrates how the spatial reconfiguration of a host-city is accompanied by the imposition of behavioural norms with which residents are expected to comply. Such imposition is also evident in the number of accounts of the Beijing Olympics that comment on the state's attempts to modify behaviour in civic space as a result of the event (Brady 2009; Maguire 2011; Broudehoux 2011; Marinelli 2012). These commentaries, while augmenting our understanding of the contentious processes surrounding state action during an event, nonetheless are generated in direct response to policy. Whereas Gray and Porter (2015), through their focus on the manner in which mega-events become a

vehicle for applying an 'everyday state of exception' (Agamben 2005; Benjamin 1999) to visit the suspension of the constitution, and the extension of military authority into the civil sphere' (Agamben 2005, 5), illustrate the impossibility of the clear distinction between Boykoff's (2011) 'normal times and event times'.

Boykoff's argument that mega-events prompt a refreshed energy in insurgent movements presents a paradoxical relation where the event presents a common cause against which diffuse sets of demands can organise. In the way that diffuse causes gather together around the mega-event, the representation of protest actions, particularly in the media, but also in academic research, tend to posit the event as being in direct relation to protest, even when the utterances of protesters are speaking about issues that exceed the discursive space of the mega-event. The Scottish Government's pre-Commonwealth Games legacy reports dramatise the potential of the Glasgow resident to be a more civic-minded and physically fitter subject. In so doing, the reports reflect their authors' presupposition that there is a normal distribution of positions, and the accompanying idea that there are dispositions proper to such classifications. In order to create the rupture in this order, a rupture that Ranciere calls politics (thesis 3), the event itself must be decentred from public debate in order that we might move beyond using the

terms of the mega-event as our dominant frame of reference. Whether analysing the event according to the Scottish Government's boosterist logic of an assumed legacy (Scottish Government 2012, 2014; Mayor of London and UK Government 2013) or in Boykoff's terms of how events revive a dormant protest and insurgent movements, the political subject is always in a direct relationship to the event in these accounts. Yet the protestor's political subjectivity is not fixed in relation to the event, it exists prior to, outside of and beyond the event taking place.

The way these ruptures emerge and unfold, and their multiple and contradictory nature, has been somewhat marginalised in theoretical debates that focus on the nature of political. In the following sections, I explore the narratives and counter narratives on how Glasgow's 2014 Commonwealth Games become meaningful to different interest groups, how the aesthetic regime Ranciere describes is constructed, and how that process is generative of an 'excess' taking different forms of articulation, and making contradictory demands. I begin with reference to the Scottish Government's first report on the Commonwealth Games Legacy. Published in 2012, the report sets out the criteria on which the progress of Games legacy is judged (Scottish Government 2012).

Commonwealth Games: everyone has their part

Sporting mega-events can be read as an example of public-relations-driven 'fast policy' (Peck 2011), particularly as they have unfolded in the UK since Glasgow's European Capital of Culture year in 1990. Notions of 'legacy' have become a more significant part of the aesthetic regime of the mega-event, forming a part of bid processes and subsequently as a public relations vehicle. Conjuring of future legacy promotes the event as a legitimate exercise with meaningful social benefits (International Olympic Committee 2007, 2.13; DCMS 2007). Assigning legacy involves constructing a world where the future capacities of heterogeneous groups are named and assigned their proper place in the order of things, a collective belief in the rightness of these particular capacities and the modalities of their performance is assumed and dramatised in public policy documents in the form of 'promises' (DCMS 2007) and aspirations. From the focus on making people physically active and in getting people to volunteer in both the London Olympics 2012 and Glasgow Commonwealth Games 2014, it appears that the categorisation of people who are physically and 'civically' inert is a significant one.

In 2009, two years after Glasgow had been announced as the successful bidder for the Commonwealth Games, the Scottish Government made its first pronouncements on the scope of the legacy of the Games (Scottish Government 2009). The legacy was organised into four themes of Flourishing/Connected/Sustainable/Active. These themes are cited in subsequent policy utterances on Games Legacy and can be read as a demarcation of the ideal response to the Games by individuals and groups of citizens. The 'Active' theme is the most explicit call for individuals to be inspired by the Games to become more physically active, but within this theme there is also a call for greater levels of 'community engagement':

We will aim to strengthen multi-sport provision ... this will help achieve, for communities, the opportunity to develop community pride, improve the engagement of particular groups such as minority ethnic communities and people with disabilities. (Scottish Government 2009, 17) The theme of 'connected' constructs a particular kind of subject as responsive to the requirement to participate in cultural activity:

Cultural activities: These will be developed to engage and stimulate people in Scotland, and in particular groups and individuals who would not otherwise have

an opportunity to participate. (Scottish Government 2009, 28). Criticising such modes of subjectification requires that we move beyond the discursive realm constructed by the coalitions of interest that author the mega-event.

Pelletier brings together the arguments of Ranciere and Judith Butler in order to augment an understanding about how to 'maintain the possibility of emancipation without presupposing fixed identity categories' (2009, 10). Ranciere suggests political struggle is not a conflict between well-defined interest groups; it is an opposition of logics that count the parties and parts of the community in different ways. (Ranciere 2001, thesis 6). Butler's development of performativity, when applied to analysis of the Games Legacy policies, allows us to consider how the logic of the event's organisers becomes the dominant and limiting discursive basis of criticism of the event.

In Gender trouble, Judith Butler argues that within the operation of juridical power, the 'subject before the law' is both produced and represented by juridical structures: the political construction of the subject proceeds with certain legitimating and exclusionary aims, and these political operations are effectively concealed and naturalised by a political analysis that takes juridical structures as their foundation. (1999, 3)

This highlights the problem of what can be said within the structural constraints imposed by the technocracy authoring reports on legacy (see

Scottish Government 2012, 3). The tendency is to attend only to that which appears on the agenda of those who both fund the event and coordinate and disseminate research into it (Smith 2005).

The life-cycle of the mega-event can be read as an example of 'the anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning [as] the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object' (Butler 1999, xv). Rather than there being an interior essence that is given occasion to be disclosed, 'it is an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon itself' (1999, xv). In the case of the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, I am suggesting that the authoritative disclosure of the legacy discourse is that social problems are both summoned into existence by it (a physically or civically inert population; BME and disability 'groups' as outside of a mainstream of social life; bringing about feeling of pride where none exists at the moment) and those problems are then solved by the presence of the event. Criticism, as in Paton et al. (2012), then proceeds via an explication that these policy formations are stigmatising people, and that this process is the real problem. Although this provides a critical perspective on the mega-event, an alternative to circling around the claim of policymakers is that people encounter policy via different logics and may not share in the particular

constructions of subjectivity that are assumed in the discourses of policymakers. An example of this is briefly explored below.

Glasgow urged to Get Ready!

On 27 May 2014, around two months before the Games began, 400 residents of the surrounding area filled the Emirates stadium to express their anger at how the Commonwealth Games had accelerated a process of draining their neighbourhoods of services and amenities, as well as describe difficulties of living with disruption to transport links (Herald Scotland 2014). The meeting was reported upon in Glasgow's Herald newspaper at the time, but recent searches show the story has disappeared from their website. It was one of a series of 20 meetings organised by Glasgow City Council called 'Get Ready Glasgow'. The meetings were intended to be information sessions, to keep the areas informed of the 'impact' the Games would have on specific areas. An informant from Glasgow City Council's Communication and Service Development Department advised me that minutes of the meeting were not recorded, that information was presented to residents and business owners, who were then invited to ask questions. As such, the audience

was invited to absorb information on items such as which roads would be closed, who would require parking permits, who could expect to use their vehicle during the Games. Residents were asked to fill in a questionnaire (Glasgow City Council 2014) detailing their names, dates of birth, vehicle registration, make model and colour of each car in the household, requirements for homecare, medical care, childcare services that each household may have, and dates and times of these services.

Members of the public attending the meeting raised questions that exceeded the agenda of the event's aim of giving information out, for example comments were made about the claims Urban Regeneration Company Clyde Gateway had made about the number of jobs that would be created through the renewal of the area. The meeting became a space of contestation, arguably, an impromptu one given that the logic of the event according to the organisers was to inform people about how the Games would affect their day-to-day lives and ability to move around the local area. The logic of those attending was to engage in a dialogic encounter with meeting organisers particularly on issues surrounding the controversial claims of job creation made by the Urban Regeneration Company Clyde Gateway (see also Games Monitor 2013b). The resident exceeds the troubling logics of the regeneration industrial complex with the

demand to bring into public space the 'non-agenda' of the Games: that of residents' access to resources, jobs, housing, local government actors and the purpose of the Urban Regeneration Company in the restructuring of the East End.

The chasm that exists between how the different parties (civil servants and residents) perceive the terms of their dialogue is noteworthy. The organisers expect the audience to merely absorb information, the attendees however perceive the occasion in quite different terms, an opportunity to voice collective concerns in a large group setting. A reproduction of the non-reflexive subjectivities of powerful and subjugated do not accurately describe the exchanges during the meeting. We might tentatively suggest that residents created a new area of negotiation, beyond policies that are summoned into existence to legitimate a sporting mega-event, thereby refuting the assignation of a notional proper place for oppositional or dissenting voices.

The above provides the beginnings of an exploration into how the official discourse of mega-events presupposes a matching of 'functions, places and ways of being'. It also acknowledges how 'a no part' of political subjects emerges. It is possible to consider then that political subjectivity emerges

during the Games event, but in a way that is not ordered by the aesthetic regime the Games impose. While the Glasgow resident appears in Commonwealth Games legacy reports through a recitation of the requirement to participate in 'the community', this is met by already existing communities who articulate a broader understanding of the political regime of which the Commonwealth Games is but one dimension.

Thinking in this way might help to move beyond criticisms of mega-events that posit different interest groups as non-reflexive subjects: that is, all powerful urban elites whose delivery of the Games ultimately produces the subjugated residents. Official discourses of legacy have material effects on how people criticise the Games. Recent critical accounts of sporting mega-events respond to the constructs found in official literature, and in doing so re-iterate the presupposed fixed identities that policy imply (Paton et al. 2012; Horne 2011). Such 'critiques of domination based on presumed "dominated" identities pre-empt the very possibility for equality that such critiques are supposed to open up' (Pelletier 2009, 10). Whereas, reflecting on Pelletier's reading of Ranciere's earlier work, The ignorant schoolmaster (1991), 'there is no other means of achieving equality than to assume it, to affirm it, to have it as one's epistemological starting point and then to systematically verify it' (Pelletier 2009, 7). This appears to call for a rupture

between policy-claim and criticism.

A de-centring of the event initiates a questioning of who takes part in the 'aesthetic regime' imposed by the event and allows for an exploration of the different understandings of part-taking at work in those spaces. This offers a useful approach in criticising the mega- event because, in this context, the subject is often limited to acting (and reacting) only within the discursive limits of the mega-event itself, rather than being understood as acting prior to, and beyond the events logics.

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