Living on the Edge in the ‘Forgotten City’:

Utopia, Dystopia, and Public Housing in Northern England

(Sociology Seminar, Keele University, 2009)
Objectives

• Investigate Bransholme in the context of recession.

• Structure of Paper:
  – Recession and Depression
  – Regeneration as Discourse
  – Being-in-Bransholme
Hull: Ruined City

• According to the Centre for Cities Hull has never managed to transform itself into a post-industrial city.

• It suffers from ‘stand-alone-ness’ and a chronic shortage of skills.

• Result: Hull finishes bottom of Centre’s multiple deprivation index.
Thesis

• I suggest regeneration strategies will never work in Hull because they come out of world that is radically different from that of the marginalised working class.

• In the final section of the paper I demonstrate why this is the case through a consideration of Being-on-Bransholme.
Conclusion

My conclusion is, therefore, that rather than problematising particular cities and their populations, and imagining that these cities and populations need to be regenerated, the problem of urban decay is one of neo-liberal economic policy and that this is what needs to change.
Regeneration as Discourse

• Regeneration as Post-Thatcherite Hyper-Rational Utopianism.

• Regeneration as bureaucratic talk that fuses socialistic notions of community and the policy of laissez faire capitalism in an impossible utopian form: caring capitalism.

• Regeneration as capitalist urban utopia.
Welfare Utopia

• Howard’s Garden City.

• Le Corbusier’s Radiant City.

• Critics: Jacobs and Newman.

The New Poor

• 1980s: ‘Right to Buy’ produced New Poor. Those who could not afford to own property.

• Rise of MUD (Moral Underclass Discourse). Poverty is now naturalised and floods the poor person’s being (Levitas).

• Systemic critique is now impossible: TINA
New Labour

• New Labour inherit the Conservative situation.

• New Labour Britain remains the society of the gap.

• Regeneration is for the sake of the economic good.

• The other is cast out and left to rot in marginal spaces.
Regen Architecture

- Urban Regen Company
- Local Strategic Partnerships.
- Partnerships.
- Flagship Projects.
Regen in Hull / Alien Architecture

- The Deep
- St Stephens
- Princes Quay
- Kingswood School
‘The Deep’
St Stephens
Princes Quay
School
Two Worlds

• Regen is metro-centric. Peripheral Regen trades off a fantasy of caring capitalism.

• Hull Forward / One Hull: Futurist fantasy plus Socialistic Utopia hides violence of neo-liberal condition.

• The truth of marginality may be found in investigations of peripheral spaces, such as Bransholme.
Being-in-Bransholme

• 2007 Floods exposed the marginality of the population.

• Bransholme appears as ‘zone of social abandonment’ characterised by inter-generational social exclusion.

• As a result of this situation, Gregory talks about the rise of neo-liberal apartheid cities.
(Dis)United Kingdom

• Charlesworth’s term captures the gap between official middle class regen culture and working class culture, a culture of despair and ruination, in New Labour Britain.

• Regen simply does violence to the latter by disembedding the underclass further and disrupting their being-in-the-world.
The Myopia of Regeneration

• Regen culture cannot understand working class culture because it views it as a ‘landscape with figures’ (Charlesworth). It is methodologically flawed.

• It regards them as flat scenes of ruination that need to be bull-doazed and rebuilt in its own image.

• It cannot comprehend the banal horror, the despair, of wasted lives in a wasted world.

• ‘Hull-Crap’ / ‘Bransholme-Crap’ thus disclose the world of the gap.
Against Neo-Liberal Regen Discourse

• The society of two nations, the society of the gap, needs to be understood in its phenomenological complexity.

• The logic of the market cannot succeed is regenerating crap towns or crap estates because it remains a zero-sum game where there can only be one winner.
• Mark Featherstone

• Sociology Department, Keele University, Keele, Staffordshire, ST5 5BG.

• Please do not cite without attribution.