**Navigating Pop-up Geographies: Urban Space-Times of Flexibility, Interstitiality and Immersion**

**Abstract:**

“Pop-up” has become a ubiquitous expression over the past decade and is used to designate a diverse range of temporary and mobile places and events. While pop-ups are increasingly noted in Geographical literature they rarely given the spotlight, usually mentioned alongside related forms of temporary urbanism. However, I argue that pop-up demands direct attention as the readiness of diverse groups, including retailers, governments, cultural organisations and charities, to take up the term suggest its logics have a particular purchase in contemporary cities. Surveying the emerging literature on pop-up geographies, I propose that pop-up is an arena in which space-time is being reimagined in ways that are increasingly influential. Specifically, I identify flexibility, interstitiality and immersion as three of pop-up’s key spatiotemporal imaginaries and explore the urban processes which each imaginary implies and enables. I argue that these ways of imagining and distributing space-time have a particular instrumentality in cities characterised by recession and austerity but also widespread redevelopment and gentrification. Against this backdrop, I explore the ambiguous politics of pop-up’s spatiotemporal imaginaries, considering the often contradictory ways in which they are mobilized by a broad range of urban actors.

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**Introduction**

“Pop-up” has become a ubiquitous expression over the past decade and an increasingly influential imaginary in cities of the global north. Although used to describe a diverse range of practices (Ferreri, 2015), the term usually refers to places which occupy a site for an intentionally temporary amount of time. On any given day numerous pop-up bars, shops, restaurants and cinemas can be found in trendy areas of cities like London, Berlin and New York. Many occupy vacated commercial buildings or derelict city sites, while others operate out of shipping containers stacked in car parks or take place on roofs, boats or even piles of discarded fridges (Pratt & San Juan, 2014). Pop-up is now a fashionable choice for creative start-ups and a popular marketing tactic for global brands including Nike and Kopparberg. But, while it has found success as a business tactic, pop-up is also recognised as a ‘compensatory or diversionary urbanism in the face of political retreat and economic recession’ (Tonkiss, 2013, p. 316). Pop-up evolved in response to high urban vacancy rates after the economic crisis of 2008; valued as a cheap, fast response to the ‘blight’ of empty properties and stimulus for regeneration during recession (Colomb, 2012; Andres, 2013; Tonkiss, 2013). Pop-up culture is also a spatiality of austerity urbanism (Peck, 2012; Ferreri, 2015); used to grant space to third sector organisations or welfare services where funding has been reduced or cut. Indeed, the label is increasingly used for temporary places of welfare provision, including pop-up social housing and legal advice clinics in London, and pop-up housing for the homeless in Brighton and Amsterdam.

As the trend grows in prominence and diversity pop-ups are receiving attention from Geographers. However, pop-up is rarely given the spotlight, usually mentioned as part of a wider field of temporary, ad-hoc and interventionist urban practices labelled variously as DIY urbanisms (Iveson, 2013), tactical urbanisms (Mould, 2014) and insurgent place making (Merker, 2010), or discussed within explorations of interim space-use (Colomb, 2012; Groth & Corijn, 2005; Nemeth & Langhorst, 2014; Andres, 2013; Tonkiss, 2013), gentrification (Harvie, 2013) and the politics of public space (Pratt & San Juan, 2014). While pop-up is rightly located within this broader collection of practices and issues I argue that it demands direct attention. The readiness of diverse groups including retailers, governments, cultural organisations, artists and charities to take up the specific term ‘pop-up’, as well as its increasing solidification in policies surrounding planning and regeneration (Mould, 2014; Groth & Corijn, 2005) suggests that ‘pop-up’, as a type of temporary urbanism, embodies a set of imaginaries and practices of spatiotemporal organisation which have particular purchase across the contemporary city; resonating with a broad range of actors. In light of the growing prominence and influence of pop-up, this paper identifies and explores the ways that pop-up culture imagines and distributes space-time. The paper is divided into three sections, across which I analyse three of pop-ups most significant spatiotemporal imaginaries to illuminate the kind of ideas about space-time that are being evoked and deployed in the production of pop-up places and, crucially, to question what those ideas achieve in the wider city during a moment defined by recession and austerity but also rapid urban redevelopment and gentrification.

Existing work on pop-up gives a varied account of its impacts and affiliations. Pop-ups are said to give ‘new visibility to users until now excluded from the structures of power’ (Tonnelat, 2013, p. 160) but also identified as vehicles of gentrification which displace vulnerable populations (Harvie, 2013). Some commentators suggest they can de-familiarise spaces (Iveson, 2013), uncover lost layers of meaning (Lashua, 2013) and imagine alternative futures (Pratt & San Juan, 2014) while others point to their role in rebranding places in line with normative visions of the creative city (Colomb, 2012). On the one hand, pop-ups are deemed to offer opportunities for imaginative critique (Pratt & San Juan, 2014), while on the other they are identified as instrumental in increasing precarity for artists and creative practitioners (Graziano & Ferreri, 2014; Deslandes, 2013). In exploring pop-up’s spatiotemporal imaginaries I consider these contradictory processes, recognising pop-up as a site of tensions around how the contemporary city is imagined and produced.

The first of the three imaginaries I consider is flexibility. As I explore, pop-up valorises places which are quick to construct, relocate and remove, organising space-time in a way that assures its plasticity in the future. I suggest that this imaginary denotes both mindfulness towards waste and a mode of producing and maintaining precarity for certain demographics in order to keep sites open to investment. Secondly, I consider interstitiality as an imaginary advanced by pop-up culture where it manifests as an aesthetic of in-betweeness to dominant spatial organisations. I consider how interstitiality can create interruptions within prevailing spatiotemporal distributions, but also how, in occupying the cracks of neoliberal space-times, pop-up can smooth over those cracks and perpetuate the dominance of neoliberal ideals. Lastly, I explore ‘immersion’ as a way of imagining and producing space-time in pop-up culture, where it denotes fantasy, discovery and transformation. I explore how pop-up’s immersive imaginary enables ‘serious play’ (Pratt & San Juan, 2014) through which urban issues are imaginatively addressed, but also suggest that immersion is instrumental in re-imagining and rebranding places to facilitate gentrification.

**Flexibility**

Simultaneously a noun and a verb (a pop-up/to pop-up), pop-up signifies urban forms which are at once entities and processes, evoking flexibility as perhaps its most central spatiotemporal imaginary. Specifically, flexibility manifests in two key ways. Firstly, pop-up asserts the flexibility of urban sites, suggesting they can be continuously transformed by a series of different temporary uses. Secondly, pop-up produces places which are themselves mobile, able to relocate at short notice and adapt to new sites. The clearest example of this is the use of shipping containers as pop-up architectures which can be moved across the city and stacked in new configurations. Combined, these two ideals of the openness of space for transformation and the mobility of urban practices produce a vision of a flexible city always orientated towards the future; ready to give way to new configurations.

The versatility of pop-ups is often positioned as a form of mindfulness. Pop-ups, because flexible, can make the most of ‘wasted’ space-times (Tardiveau & Mallo, 2014; Rall & Haase, 2011; Tonkiss, 2013; Tonnelat, 2013; Ferreri, 2015). They respond quickly to vacant sites to provide, for example, a temporary cricket pitch for Afghani refugees awaiting the results of their asylum applications (Tonkiss, 2013) or a cinema which makes an abandoned petrol station into a site of entertainment before it is redeveloped (Pratt & San Juan, 2014, pp. 168-169). In this sense, flexibility denotes an ethical prerogative to treat space-time as a scarce resource in expensive and crowded cities, particularly at a time of recession and austerity (Ferreri, 2015, p. 184). Against this prerogative, pop-up emerges as an exemplary, agile urbanism capable of extracting latent value from temporarily disused sites.

Through pop-up, the imaginary of flexibility is thus promoted as more than a temporary response in ‘times of economic uncertainty’. It becomes a valuable urban model, providing ‘reduced economic risk given shorter durations of projects’, the ability to ‘unlock the potential of sites now rather than in ten years’ time’ (Bishop & Williams, 2012, p. 3) and, importantly, the ‘generation of a form of capital flow which does not come into conflict with the immobility of real estate’ (Bishop & Williams, 2012, p. 25). It is argued that pop-up can lead the way in promoting the ‘innovation, fluidity and flexibility’ needed in twenty first century cities (Bishop & Williams, 2012, p. 220).

Yet visions of urban flexibility long predate pop-up. In particular, a markedly similar imaginary is evident in the plans of the 1960s Archigram movement and, in particular, Archigram member Peter Cook’s designs for a ‘plug-in city’ made up of itinerant units ‘designed for change’ (The Archigram Archival Project, 2010). Cook’s visions of places ‘swinging from cranes, clipping on, plugging in’ and floating’ (Pinder, 2011, p. 177) sound much like the pop-up cinemas that float down canals on barges (Pratt & San Juan, 2014) or pop-up shipping container architectures which are transported from site to site. And indeed Cook’s ‘permanence ratings’ (The Archigram Archival Project, 2010) for his imagined city eerily foreshadow pop-up. He suggests shopping locations should exist for 3-6 years, within which sales space changes every 6 months, an accurate account of the temporalities of pop-up malls like London’s boxpark or Re:Start in Christchurch, New Zealand, although his suggestion of a 15 year duration for housing units triples the planned durations of Lewisham’s pop-up council housing which will move site every 4 years or less (Lewisham Council , 2015).

Yet if Archigram’s visions of flexible cities prefigure pop-up, the political ambivalence the movement is often accused of foreshadows pop-up’s own ominous politics. Although Archigram’s aesthetics evoked liberation (Pinder, 2011) it was arguably not liberating for urban citizens but rather a pedagogical normalisation of ‘aspects of capitalist urbanisation and its creative destruction’ (Pinder, 2011, p. 182). Likewise, pop-up’s flexibility is understood to liberate wasted space-times, yet, like Archigram’s mobile units, pop-ups enable an optimal capital flow by overcoming the immobility of real estate, signalling ‘the materialisation of a capitalist fantasy” of ‘expansionary and nomadic drives’ (Pinder, 2011, p. 183) which will ultimately result, not in increased opportunities for socially orientated projects but the solidification of capitalist dominance of land-use.

Furthermore, the comparison with Archigram only elucidates certain aspects of the kind of city that pop-up’s imaginary of flexibility encourages. As a response to the building boom that followed war time austerity in the 1960s (Sadler, 2005, p. 14) it emphasises the expectant role of pop-up places in opening up sites to continuous capital investment but does less to draw out how such flexibility translates into precarity for less powerful actors in pop-up’s own context of recession and continuing austerity. While pop-up might unlock value quickly for developers or provide low risk, short term business opportunities for retailers, for others pop-up’s impact lies not in the embracing of an open future but in the precarity of an insecure present.

In particular, flexibility engineers two forms of precarity in pop-up; precarity of place and labour precarity. Firstly, pop-up normalises the idea that some claims to space are provisional and temporary. The promotion of pop-up within the arts and creative industries has made temporariness almost synonymous with creativity, undermining the need for long-term resources in those sectors and glorifying precarious situations (Mould, 2014; Graziano & Ferreri, 2014). Furthermore, creative pop-ups are often ‘obliged to justify their projects, at least in part, on the promise of returning capital to abject urban space’ (Deslandes, 2013). Graziano and Ferreri, for example, explore the realisation by graduate artists using pop-up places that their hard work primarily benefited the landlords of the properties by increasing footfall and re-attracting long term commercial investment (Graziano & Ferreri, 2014). Ironically, such pop-ups thereby undermine their own claims to space; showcasing the merits of a site to others who will ultimately displace them (Colomb, 2012). Pop-up becomes a ‘locus of displacement’ and space of ‘conflict between current and future uses” (Tardiveau & Mallo, 2014, pp. 458-459).

Of course precarity of place is not an incidental bi-product of the openness to investment that flexibility also denotes. We can see that the normalised precarity for artists and other underfunded actors using the pop-up format enables the openness valued by investors, as the former become place holders which ‘keep vacant sites warm while development capital is cool’ (Tonkiss, 2013, p. 318) but can be swiftly moved aside when investors are ready because of the short notice periods and temporary contracts which define pop-up. This dispensability of pop-up places of course becomes even more concerning when it applies to welfare and service provision, as in the case of Lewisham Council’s (London) plans for pop-up council housing, which will be literally moved on when more profitable uses of land are available.

Secondly, pop-up’s imaginary of flexibility is instrumental in intensifying the labour precarity long noted within the creative industries (Dawkins, 2011; Jakob, 2013). As a format for start-ups and micro-businesses, pop-up is encouraged through both government and privately funded schemes including a ‘pop-up business-incubator’ in the Bronx, New York (Spielberg, 2014). Such schemes offer pop-ups as ‘test beds’ for business ideas. However, rather than providing permanent employment, they put the onus on individual responsibility for ‘making’ rather than ‘taking’ a job (Gunnell and Bright 2001 in Graziano & Ferreri, 2014). For these reasons, Luckham has compared pop-up business in Australia to internships, because young people are expected to work enthusiastically despite low financial rewards while their labour directly benefits established businesses (Luckman, 2014). Furthermore, in being presented as training or employment opportunities, pop-ups camouflage ‘the broader lack of infrastructural support’ at a time of funding cuts (Harvie, 2013, p. 111), particularly in the arts sector where pop-up is pitched as a solution to that lack (Graziano & Ferreri, 2014). For politicians such as Boris Johnson, Mayor of London, advocating pop-up constitutes a show of support for culture without requiring actual investment (Harvie, 2013, p. 124). Again, it is clear that pop-up enforces precarity for some which enables flexibility for others. By shifting the responsibility for innovation onto young creative industry workers pop-up unburdens employers and governments of the responsibility to provide training and employment and reinforces ideals of competition over provision. Pop-up carries an ‘unvoiced assumption of total personal flexibility’, normalising not just pop-up places but also ‘pop-up people’ who exist in a state of ‘precarious or intermittent employment’ (Ferreri, 2015, pp. 185-186).

Pop-up’s imaginary of a flexible, future orientated city therefore intensifies both the fast capital turn over and the ideals of individualised risk which have long been prerogatives of capitalist development. Post-recession geographies, typified by empty properties, forestalled development and funding cuts are reimagined as a landscape of opportunities and while this opens up those space-times for use, it also normalises the precarity of artists, charities, welfare services and creative entrepreneurs while keeping the city open to development. Pop-up emerges as a mechanism through which to mobilize the turbulence of recession and austerity towards a new normal characterised by profitable flexibility and a related precarity.

**Interstitiality**

Pop-up’s flexibility imaginary evokes a bird’s eye view from which to look down on an ever shifting urban fabric. But zooming in on pop-up sites themselves reveals a second imaginary of interstitiality which relates to the spatiotemporal in-between-ness of the locations pop-ups occupy. Many commentators label pop-ups as ‘interstitial’ (Groth & Corijn, 2005; Tonnelat, 2013; Lugosi, et al., 2010; Tonkiss, 2013), denoting inbetween spaces which exist in the cracks of dominant urban orders (Brighenti, 2013), or ‘residual spaces’ (Villagomez, 2010), ‘left out of ‘time and place’ (Groth & Corijn, 2005, p. 503). Here, pop-ups are envisaged as spaces of alterity, disrupting both the rhythms and aesthetics of city spaces by repurposing sites temporarily using ad hoc materials and furnishings. However, while pop-ups pose a visual interruption this does not necessarily indicate a disjuncture with other urban processes. The interstice, although traditionally characterised as a leftover space, is not separate from the broader processes of the city but a site in which urban trajectories and imaginaries are dynamically constituted; mechanisms of rather than gaps within the urban fabric (Brighenti, 2013, p. xvi). This ‘evental’ (Brighenti, 2013, p. xviii) conception of the interstice is crucial to understanding the tensions that interstitiality embodies within pop-up where it has two conflicting impacts in the city. On the one hand, by existing in the spatial and temporal margins of more routine urban configurations, pop-ups expose the cracks in those systems and offer alternatives. However, by the same token, pop-ups close up those gaps by occupying them, posing a distraction from the sites where dominant systems have broken down and precluding practices that might use those cracks more radically. At the crux of pop-up’s interstitial imaginary is therefore a complex politics of visibility (Brighenti, 2013) in which pop-ups are implemented in both creating opportunities to demonstrate other uses of space, and in disguising and foreclosing those opportunities.

It is often argued that by occupying vacant buildings or sites pop-ups demonstrate alternative uses of space-time, working not just in the physical but the conceptual ‘margins’ of the city (Tonkiss, 2013, p. 313). Exploring this potential, both Iveson (Iveson, 2013) and Tardiveau and Mallo (Tardiveau & Mallo, 2014) have taken up Ranciere’s politics of aesthetics which explains how dominant understandings of how space-time should be distributed can be disrupted through an act which shows their contingency. For Ranciere it is the ‘placing of one world in another’ (Ranciere, 2010, p. 38) which disrupts ways of seeing and offers new alternatives, a phrase which is evocative of pop-up places which create temporary places in the margins of other spatialities, and in doing so can suggest alternative productions of space-time. By offering, for example, a mobile park instead of a parking space (Merker, 2010) or a tea party instead of an unused plot (Tardiveau & Mallo, 2014), pop-ups can show that the imaginaries which determine how space-time is used are contingent and can be rethought in ways that ‘challenge the sociospatial status quo embedded in…space” (Tardiveau & Mallo, 2014, p. 457). In this sense, pop-ups are interstitial spaces which, conceptualised dynamically, can be seen to prompt reassessment of how space-time should be imagined and distributed; offering a ‘performative critique’ of urban organisation (Brighenti, 2013, p. xix).

Yet pop-ups are also implicated in disguising and precluding opportunities to use space differently. If interstitiality involves occupying urban cracks then pop-ups are as much about filling up those cracks to distract from them as using them as a platform for new visibilities. This has been identified in two main areas. Firstly, temporary use can distract from vacancy’s implications. Colomb has argued that in Berlin there is a perceived need to fill up ‘urban voids’, lest they undermine the discourses of reurbanization and densification purported by politicians. Rather than hiding empty plots with canvasses, pop-ups are a better cover up for the ‘absence of investment’. They cheer up ‘dreary’ streets, distracting from recession, (Department for Communities anad Local Government & Pickles, 2012) while simultaneously advertising space to long term investors. Pop-up can thus be seen as a way of positively narrativising post-recession spatialities, distracting from ‘evidence of the flight of local capital’ by reframing it as an opportunity for immediate use and future development (Deslandes, 2013).

Secondly, because pop-ups are usually commissioned and monitored by intermediary organisations, pop-up culture makes possible the weeding-out of illegal or undesirable occupations of interstices. Pop-up’s sites are those which might once have been squatted or raved in and many share the aesthetics of those more clandestine temporary uses of space. Pop-ups can therefore can create the *impression* that ‘alternative’ uses of space are being accommodated while actually official and implicit selection processes, and legal requirements, favour certain uses over others; namely those which are profitable and tied to neoliberal economic priorities (Peck, 2005). These favoured temporary uses can then undermine othes. Colomb writes that in Berlin ‘only certain types of entertainment-related, “ludic” temporary uses are portrayed to fit into the image of a young, vibrant, creative city. The caravan sites or alternative living projects that have squatted on vacant plots in Kreuzberg are, unsurprisingly, not displayed’ (Colomb, 2012, p. 143) in promotional imagery in Berlin, reinforcing a hierarchy of temporary use. Furthermore, the way in which pop-ups identifies ‘vacancy’ reveals a normative approach. Many ‘vacant’ spaces are ‘not “dead”’ at all but contain urban wildlife, “micro-political activity” (Cupers & Miessen, 2002, p. 123), “alternative cultures” (Shaw, 2005), or provide ‘“spaces of transgression” for marginalized social groups, youth, or artists’ (Colomb, 2012, p. 135) or sites of refuse for ‘the homeless and those deemed marginal to society’ (Lashua, 2013, p. 125). Yet these uses are not recognised when spaces are designated as empty and readied for pop-up occupation.

As interstitial spaces pop-ups can then be understood as sites which exist within the margins of dominant distributions of space but are also instrumental in defining, debating and policing those distributions. Pop-ups can challenge ideas about who and what city space-times are for but, at a time when “the gestures of occupying and re-making *terrains vagues* and leftover spaces now come as readily to property developers, alert to the speculative possibilities of ‘acting interstitially’, as they do to green nomads and architectural co-operatives’ (Tonkiss, 2013, p. 318), pop-ups can also foreclose those contestations.

**Immersion**

If interstitiality relates to a sense of inbetweeness in urban space, then pop-up’s immersive imaginary offers adventures deep into those fissures. Immersion has been described as ‘the sensation of entering a space that immediately identifies itself as somehow separate from the world’ (Griffiths, 2013) and this resonates with what pop-ups mean when they market themselves as ‘immersive’; namely that they incorporate elements of fiction or fantasy which differentiate them from the routine spaces of the city. Some immersive pop-ups are themed around popular fictional worlds; for example ‘Christabel’s Mad Hatters Brunch’ takes inspiration from *Alice and Wonderland* to invite dinners ‘down the rabbit hole’. Others engage with geographical areas, including a series of supper clubs entitled ‘conflict kitchen’ which explored conflict through the cuisine of specific nations. Immersive pop-ups can also conjure forgotten pasts or imagined futures, reanimating empty hardware stores dating back to the 18th century, or using temporary cinemas to project possible futures for an inner city flyover (Pratt & San Juan, 2014, p. 169). Within all these iterations of immersion what is signified is an imaginative journey, be it to distant places, historical times, projected futures or fictional worlds but one which, crucially, is achieved not by *leaving* the site but by making that space imaginatively elsewhere.

The way in which immersive pop-ups mediate imaginaries of different times and places positions them in a lineage of ‘landscape objects’ (Della Dora, 2009) and itinerant spectacles (Clarke & Doel, 2005) which, as well as literally travelling from place to place, also enable imaginative journeys that transform geographical imaginaries. For example, Floating Cinema, a specially crafted cinema-boat which travels London’s waterways to screen films (Pratt & San Juan, 2014) is reminiscent of the itinerant showmen who, in the seventeenth century and onwards, carried peep show boxes from village to village, displaying images of distant lands (Della Dora, 2007). Likewise, the way that immersive pop-up cinemas select and decorate sites in keeping with the films they show is evocative of how early sites of film spectatorship used immersive elements to intensify the experience of being ‘elsewhere’. For example, in 2010 Secret Cinema screened *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* - which is set in a mental institution - in a hospital, with ushers dressed as doctors, while Hale’s Tours, an early 20th century travelling filmic attraction, screened footage of railway journeys in an imitation railway carriage with staff dressed as guards and conductors (Clarke & Doel, 2005, p. 55). In such immersive events the site is more than just an entry point, it becomes *part of* the fantastical world presented, enabling a haptic encounter and enhanced experience of it.

However, if early itinerant spectacles produced and transformed geographical imaginaries of far-away places, immersive pop-ups also transform perceptions of the sites they pop-up in. What is significant in immersive pop-ups is not just how they mediate the worlds they are themed around, but the impact that the events have on perceptions of the sites which host them (Lashua, 2013; Pratt & San Juan, 2014). As with flexibility and interstitiality, pop-up’s ‘immersive viewing practices’ (Griffiths, 2013, p. 2) are also riddled with political tensions in terms of the impact they have on ways of seeing and producing sites. On the one hand immersion can enable the discovery of lost layers of meaning (Lashua, 2013) and produce a critical understanding of space (Pratt & San Juan, 2014). But on the other, immersion can transform sites into a space of play for those with high disposable incomes, at the expense of alienating or displacing the populations of the areas they occupy (Harvie, 2013; Lugosi, et al., 2010; Pratt & San Juan, 2014).

Arguably, immersion is a means by which pop-up romanticises relatively deprived areas and thereby readies them for gentrification. In her book *Fair Play* Harvie has explored the tensions between pop-up’s ability to ‘intervene politically in how people see the world’ (Harvie, 2013, p. 123) and their role in generating cultural and thereby economic value. For example, journalist Oliver Wainwright has described how a series of immersive pop-up events in the Balfron Tower a social housing block in London, mediated between the building’s council tenants being ‘decanted’ and the block being turned into luxury flats. The site was transformed for events including an immersive performance of Macbeth, pop-up exhibitions and an artistic recreation of an ‘authentic’ 1968 Balfron flat. At all these occasions the site itself was in the limelight; equally as spectacular as the events happening in it. Pop-up’s immersive viewing practices thereby facilitated the transformation of the block into an enigmatic landmark worthy of being listed by the national trust (Wainwright, 2014) and thus a desirable home for wealthy residents of London.

Yet others have explored how immersion can enable attentiveness to the particularities of place, foster senses of community and engage with environmental and political issues. Pratt and San Juan argue that pop-up cinemas encourage ‘serious play’ (Pratt & San Juan, 2014) which denotes a means of extending the imaginative gaze of cinema to examine urban space. Although Pratt and San Juan acknowledge the role of pop-up cinemas in the ‘festivalisation’ of space (Pratt & San Juan, 2014, p. 170), for them serious play is primarily a mode of ludic engagement with local history and environmental issues (Pratt & San Juan, 2014, p. 168). Illustrating this point, they cite a pop-up cinema called Films on Fridges created on Fish Island, London where they argue that the cinema’s use of recycled fridge doors as chairs, tables and a frame for the screen allowed the event to engage with ‘waste, recycling’ and ‘abandoned or neglected spaces’ (Pratt & San Juan, 2014, p. 168). Similarly, Lashua has discussed a pop-up film screening in the car park of Marshall’s Mill, a former flax mill in Leeds where he argues that the immersive event and its festive atmosphere enabled place-shaping processes which reactivated the site’s significance within Great Britain’s textiles industries while also ‘adding contemporary meanings tied to a community’s sense of identify and place’ (Lashua, 2013, p. 130).

Immersive pop-ups and the modes of perception they generate can, then, be a means of re-writing spaces in line with agendas of gentrification, but they can also add or uncover meanings in ways which are attentive to political and social dimensions of space, bringing the usually hidden layers of the city-as-palimpsest into focus (Lashua, 2013, p. 130). Like flexibility and interstitiaity, pop-up’s immersive imaginary is another site of tensions around how cities are produced and, in particular, emphasises the need to consider not just the immediate ludic experiences offered by immersive pop-ups but the way those experiences work to reimagine and reshape the city.

**Conclusions**

The relationships between spatiotemporal imaginaries and socioeconomic conditions have long been a subject of Geographical investigation (Harvey, 1990; Massey, 2005; Pinder, 2011) and in this paper I have argued for the importance of positioning pop-up culture as a site in which spatiotemporal imaginaries are developed which respond to and are influential within the contemporary condition in cities of the global north. Surveying the emerging body of work on pop-up geographies, I have elucidated three key imaginaries within pop-up culture; flexibility, interstitiality and immersion. Firstly, I explored how pop-up’s vision of flexible sites and mobile places enables ‘wasted’ space-times to be put to use while engineering the openness of space to investment and exacerbating precarity. Secondly, I considered how pop-ups as interstitial spaces caught up in a politics of visibility through which spatiotemporal distributions are contested and reinforced. Lastly, I investigated how immersion is deployed in pop-up culture to provoke transformative changes in the perception of urban sites.

These are by no means the only ways that pop-up imagines space-time. There has not been room, for example, to consider the relation between space-times of labour and space-times of domesticity in supper clubs, or the significance of pop-up’s fixation on surprise and secrecy in an era when the rise of smart phone technologies have many lamenting the lost unpredictability of urban experiences. Furthermore, this paper, because of its focus on existing accounts, has looked solely at pop-ups in the global north, yet pop-ups increasingly take place in the global south where the longstanding prominence of informal temporary urbanisms and the different stakes of creative entrepreneurship perhaps mean a different theorisation of pop-up’s logics and impacts is required. The rise of pop-ups in the global south also provokes questions about how pop-ups sit within and against enduring makeshift and informal urban environments across the globe (Vasudevan, 2014; McFarlane, 2012).

In positioning pop-up as a site in which ideas about space-time are not only produced but contested, I have sought to demonstrate that there is no straightforward or singular way to characterise pop-up and its role in contemporary cities. Yet as this new phenomenon solidifies it seems clear that pop-up is increasingly being mobilized towards the creation of cities where critical and creative temporary uses of space are becoming both secondary to, and at times enabling of, processes of commodification, gentrification, precaritization and spatiotemporal control. In this context, it is important to pay attention to how, as temporary and mobile urbanisms become instruments of the neoliberal city, their more radical functions are neutralised or drowned out (Mould, 2014; Colomb, 2012; Tonkiss, 2013) as well as to consider how their critical functions are being retained. Most importantly, as pop-up becomes rapidly more routine and its spatiotemporal imaginaries increasingly taken for granted, it is crucial to remember the contingency of those imaginaries, continuing to question why and how they are produced and what work they do for who.

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