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From wasteland to wonderland: The hypermedia(tiza)tion of urban regeneration in Leeds' Holbeck Urban Village by Giorgia Aiello

Abstract

In this paper, I examine Holbeck Urban Village (HUV), Leeds' flagship urban regeneration project and a textbook case in approaches to planning and redevelopment via the popular notion of 'urban village'.

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Introduction: Exploring a developing destination

Not unlike in major cities such as London, Sydney and Singapore, urban planning activities in second-tier and mid-sized cities have become increasingly focused on the development and promotion of the city's competitive advantage (Thornley, 1999).

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industrial heritage, achievements in science and technology, contemporary museums and arts festivals, sporting spectacles and pedestrianised cultural quarters, and stylish boutiques and restaurants" [1]. This fairly heterogeneous, though by no means truly diverse repertoire of urban regeneration is tied to a quest for attention towards almost any aspect that may make a city distinctive, and in particular to those traits that may make it stand out as 'world class'. As Evans (2005) notes, the adoption of this formula has been led by institutions and cultural intermediaries who "control the territory and the rhetoric" of urban regeneration, rather than "local community involvement and the sense they might have of their 'place'" [2]. It is for this reason that it becomes all the more important to understand what specific forms of imagination underlie the spectacularization of urban regeneration in the name of competitiveness.

With these basic premises in mind, in this paper I examine Leeds' Holbeck Urban Village (HUV), a site that offers insight into some of the key ways in which these trends and tensions manifest themselves in relation to the conceived, perceived and lived space of a landmark urban regeneration project (Lefebvre, 1991). In doing this, I conceptualize the urban built environment as a key form/force of mediation and mediatization (Aiello, 2011; 2012). On one hand, the urban built environment materially communicates specific discourses that selectively constitute subjectivities and constrain the everyday lives of local communities (the built environment mediates the performances of our everyday life). On the other hand, it is mobilized as symbolic currency — via predominantly visual media — for the remote publics found across powerful global marketplaces such as tourism, public communication, real estate, and commerce (the built environment performs for mediatized communication). In the specific case of HUV, I focus on the interplay between mediation and mediatization, insofar as the visual-material performances of the urban village may be heavily constituted by top-down multimodal discourses found in an impressive amount of public and planning-related media. For this reason, I adopt an analytical approach that combines Lefebvre's theoretical argument on the production of space with a critical appraisal of the relationship between the multiple media that quite literally 'make' the village (Lefebvre's conceived space) and the visual-material dimensions of HUV's built environment (perceived space).

Not surprisingly, across the many communication materials that promote and publicize it, HUV is defined as a 'developing destination'. The urban village's businesses and workforce as well as the infrastructure of renovated heritage buildings and newly built complexes are mostly in place, though still in the process of being expanded and further developed. Arguably, however, HUV is not yet fully in place as a full-fledged 'place'. And as Bell and Jayne (2004) write in relation to the 'quarterization' that has been typical of post-industrial urban regeneration, "such enterprises demand identification with particular narratives of place" [3]. Most often, such narratives predate and even overdetermine physical and social enactments of urban regeneration.

Systematic research on HUV ought to focus on the relationship between both the economic and symbolic dimensions of urban regeneration and the policies, economics, stakeholders, communities and overall structures and practices that underlie the production of HUV as a site of urban regeneration and, ultimately, as a "place" in its own right (*cf.*, Unsworth and Smales, 2010). However, here I am specifically interested in the spatial production of HUV via its multimodal communication. This is because communication (via planning and promotional media) is central to now common "practices of 'quartering' cities — of designating and branding particular spaces in an attempt to produce new forms of urban living and urban competitiveness, most commonly in a post-industrial context" [4]. It is in this sense that the physical characteristics of cities themselves are increasingly considered and orchestrated as key visual-material performances for a host of public communication materials and other media, and with the aim to make a city's competitiveness known and in fact most visible on a global stage.

Based on a critical analysis of a web of planning and promotional media that are publicly available online, I will argue that the lived space of HUV is *hypermediatized*, as it is imagined and imaged for key lifestyle publics via top-down multimodal discourses. This kind of process is in line with "the hypermediatization of the social that prevails in informational capitalism" [5]. However, it is not only the social but also the more properly material dimensions of our everyday lives, and of our cities in particular, that are increasingly mediatized. In this regard, in my analysis I note how specific dimensions — and, as I'll explain, 'textures' — of envisioned lived space are mobilized multimodally in the communication of HUV to achieve distinction within well-established genres and formats of urban regeneration. I will then posit that this is also a *hypermediated* approach to urban regeneration, as the imaginations and images that constitute the visual-material performances of the urban village are in turn productive of

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very specific and therefore also limited (embodied) subjectivities and (emplaced) communities (*cf.*, Aiello, 2011; also, Stewart and Dickinson, 2008).

The dialectic that I have just described ought to be examined empirically, in particular with an ethnographic focus on the ways in which concrete lived space relates to envisioned lived space, both synchronically and diachronically. This said, the key aim of this article is to draw attention to the increasing hypermedia(tiza)tion of the material and social dimensions of urban regeneration and to start outlining some of its key manifestations and principles. And while the scope of this analysis here is eminently limited and in fact framed as a broader discussion of HUV, the article also aims to generate concepts for the development of a broader critical and theoretical framework for the study of major contemporary approaches to urban regeneration from a communication and media studies perspective.



### Holbeck Urban Village in (con)text

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Leeds waterfront was a hotbed of industrial production. Deindustrialization left the waterfront desolate and the city centre without a masterplan (Unsworth and Smales, 2010). Hence, up until the end of last century, the waterfront area immediately south of the relatively small Leeds city centre that is now occupied by HUV was often referred to as a 'wasteland'. Leeds' massive regeneration process started in the mid-1980s, with a strong focus on the waterfront and on kick-starting growth in the central area through business and retail-led development. The city's regeneration process "received another boost with the election of the Labour Government in 1997 and its commitment to urban renewal through the growth of core cities and the creation of sustainable communities" [6]. Over the last 15 years Leeds' former industrial and commercial centre has been extensively redeveloped to accommodate professional, residential and both retail- and leisure-oriented uses [7].

Located along the Leeds-Liverpool Canal and designated an urban village in 1999, HUV sits on Leeds' earliest industrial site and is couched between the Leeds central railway station and the working-class neighbourhoods Holbeck and Beeston. HUV is currently home to engineering and creative businesses, cafés and restaurants, and residential complexes. As a deindustrialized 'brownfield' site, the area covered by HUV was an ideal candidate for urban regeneration, and a textbook case in approaches to planning and redevelopment via the now popular notion of urban village (Bell and Jayne, 2004). As such, it synthesizes some of the key exigencies of post-industrial capitalism (Aiello, 2011; also *cf.*, Gendelman and Aiello, 2010). These are an emphasis on cultural production and creativity as privileged areas of economic activity, the communication of distinctive identities and of markers of difference such as heritage and local 'colour', and the deployment of generic architectural genres and 'formats' that are now globally recognized and prized, like the combination of glass, steel, wood and unusual stylistic features.

As an iconic urban regeneration project, HUV is part of a broader 'vision' and strategy for the Leeds city centre and Leeds as a whole. In line with some of the general trends outlined above, the three main aims of this city-led strategy are:

- Going up a league as a city — making Leeds an internationally competitive city.
- Narrowing the gap between the most disadvantaged people and communities and the rest of the city.
- Developing Leeds' role as the regional capital, contributing to the national economy as a competitive European city [8].

While the first and third points of this vision are clearly related to symbolic and economic competitiveness at national, European and international levels, the second point highlights some of the social stakes and aims of Leeds' further development. Despite its relatively privileged economy and steady growth, Leeds is also home to some of the most deprived communities in the country, with highest concentrations in neighbourhoods located in the immediate periphery of the city centre. In the face of the global economic recession, this community-oriented strategic aim is immediately subsumed under competitiveness. The Leeds City Centre Strategic Plan states that "[t]he city's aspiration to 'Narrow the Gap' cannot be realised unless there is continued economic growth — Going up a League" [9].

As part of this overall strategy, over the last decade £4.3 billion worth of major development schemes have been completed (Leeds Initiative,

2011). HUV is one of these major development projects and is considered key to raising Leeds' profile nationally and internationally. HUV is home to the Round Foundry, a 'strategic hub' for the creative and digital industries (CDI) in Leeds. City-led growth strategy emphasizes that "[t]here is scope to capitalise on current strengths and assets including the software and gaming sector and developments such as the Round Foundry and Holbeck Urban Village". There are also plans to "[e]stablish a design institute similar to Barcelona and Stockholm and based around our existing areas of Holbeck Urban Village" [10]. Alongside this emphasis on its status as a flagship CDI-driven regeneration project, HUV is also considered one of four key regeneration projects "that connect the city centre to the inner areas of Leeds" [11].

In this planning context, HUV has its own 'vision', which is divided into four main aims:

- to improve connectivity between the city centre and the surrounding communities of Beeston Hill and Holbeck and in doing so create new opportunities for employment, living and leisure. These are priority neighbourhoods in the Leeds Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.
- to establish a new creative quarter focused on new media and digital technologies that will strengthen Leeds as a regional business centre.
- to preserve the area's unique character, combining the architectural legacy with new high quality and contemporary design.
- to create a mixed use, sustainable community with a distinctive sense of place, which exemplifies best practice in urban regeneration and sustainable development [12].

The first two points of this set of aims are clearly linked with broader city-led strategy in relation to planning and regeneration, whereas the latter two points are more specifically tied to the symbolic stakes and rewards attached to specific characteristics of the urban built environment and the added value of design, sustainability and place-making practices. Needless to say, the economic and symbolic dimensions of urban regeneration are deeply intertwined and by no means divisible (Sassen and Roost, 1999).

It is precisely due to the centrality of communication in the material and social development of contemporary urban life that it becomes all the more important to examine urban regeneration projects like HUV, which are based on principles of urban renaissance — a key trait of contemporary British urban policy. The urban renaissance model, which has increasingly been adopted across countries, entails that regeneration ought to be based on plan-led approaches to creating a combination of economic competitiveness, design excellence, environmental sustainability, and social connectivity (Punter, 2011). Rooted in New Labour and 'Third Way' politics, this policy framework aims to balance "competitive individualism and personal freedoms with notions of social justice and the creation of a more socially inclusive and engaged community" [13]. With reference to the urban renaissance framework, Leeds' strategy in relation to urban revival aims to "ensure the continued success of the city centre and to make sure this benefits the often deprived neighbourhoods surrounding it" [14]. In practice, this has meant that "continued investment in quality public realm and major development in the city centre will sit alongside action to secure revival in areas like Holbeck Urban Village; the Leeds Waterfront; and the huge development potential in the Aire Valley" [15].

Projects like HUV differ significantly from other now widely examined processes of urban regeneration and approaches to urban planning. 'Urban villages' like HUV are the outcome of top-down planning that is usually applied to brownfield sites ('wastelands'). However, they are not germane to modernist planning frameworks such as those underlying the interventionist physical development of 'utopian' urban enclaves — mostly for the working-class and the poor and mostly on the outskirts of cities — which marked the work of twentieth century architects like Le Corbusier (Harvey, 1989; Hall, 1988). At the same time, HUV embodies a process of urban regeneration that is quite different from the 'classic' formula of gentrification — wherein traditionally working-class and/or ethnic neighborhoods become living and work destinations for queers and artists, which then leads to an uptake in the desirability and market value of such neighborhoods and therefore also the economic and geographical displacement of their original residents (Zukin, 2008; Makagon, 2010).

As an urban regeneration project pursuing differentiation and distinctiveness within and as a means to global competitiveness, HUV may be considered as a carefully planned and imagined combination of Richard Florida's influential, though highly controversial notion of 'creative city' and the New Urbanism model developed in North America as a response to urban sprawl and suburban segregation (*cf.*, Aiello, 2012). On the one hand, HUV is a former industrial area that was reconverted into a site of creative labour and cultural production, in line with growing policy interest

in intellectual resources and 'brainpowers' as resources for economic success [16]. On the other hand, 'diversity' and 'lifestyle' are equally designed into the area's planning and uses. Hence, the development of its lived space is largely constrained by such economic and symbolic imperatives.



### **An envisioned wonderland: The hypermediatization of Holbeck Urban Village**

As I explained earlier, the notion of mediatization pertains to the "transformation of many disparate social and cultural processes into forms or formats suitable for media representation" [17]. In other words, mediatization is process whereby the form and content of key contemporary institutional spheres such as sports, religion, news, and politics are altered to fit into the 'media logic' of the widespread representational genres and formats that are typical of print and, especially, television (Altheide and Snow, 1979). While it is obviously not via the traditional media logic of televised entertainment that mediatization occurs in relation to HUV and similar projects, planning and promotional media associated with urban regeneration are in and of themselves carriers of specific visions/versions of urban space through the communication genres and formats that are regularly exchanged among professionals and institutions. HUV has its own logo, a dedicated Web site, several sister Web sites, a promo film, an official Flickr account, a brand bible, an audio tour guide, a host of official publications with different target audiences, and initially also had a designated Facebook 'local business' page by the name "The Village Post — Holbeck Urban Village". While the perceived space of the urban village is still in the process of being developed built and populated, its communication and overall mediatization via a range of planning and promotional media — its conceived space — is fully developed and articulated.

As a physical site, HUV boasts 33 listed buildings, including Temple Works, a former flax mill with an unusual façade in the style of an Egyptian temple. Temple Works is a Grade I building, which means that it is not only of special architectural and historic interest, but is also officially listed as one of a handful of particularly outstanding heritage buildings across the country. Over the last few years, several of these heritage buildings have been renovated and redeveloped through private-public partnerships. Temple Works is now a cultural and contemporary arts venue and other heritage sites like the Round Foundry, Marshall's Mill and Tower Works have been turned into office and studio space for branding and design firms, digital and new media businesses, and the cultural and creative professions. This said, the renovation and reconversion of these listed buildings is still very much in progress and in fact, in the wake of the economic recession, is ever more so actively planned and promoted.

One of the key publications that are available on the HUV Web site is a 67-page long planning framework that sets the requirements and constraints that will guide the material and physical development of the urban village over years to come. On the basis of this document's guidelines, the urban village will continue to be developed as a mixed-use area, insofar as within each individual development there should be "a range of different types of activity", "usually separated out vertically, having different uses at different levels" [18]. Another prominent aspect of the envisioned material substance and physical appearance of HUV is a sustained focus on "[t]he creation of one simple theme" which "will connect the entire public realm together, reinforcing and unifying the character of the area" [19]. In practice, this goal will be achieved by relying on "a limited palette of high quality paving materials, street furniture and lighting to create a seamless public realm throughout the area, whether publicly or privately owned" [20]. More specifically, some of the materials that should be used throughout HUV are "diamond sawn Yorkstone paving, tumbled Yorkstone sets, Marshall's Tegula sets or similar, wide grey granite kerbs and grey granite sets for the gutter detailing" [21]. From a visual-material standpoint, new buildings across HUV "should develop a modern architectural language" while also having "a waterside character" and being "'tweedy' in contrast with the smooth/slick façade treatments that are common elsewhere in the city centre" [22]. Overall, they "should each have their own identity and yet appear as different members of the same family" [23].

In sum, the perceived space of HUV is envisioned as deploying variation within continuity and distinctiveness within homogeneity. This planning vision is detailed through a number of considerations about the application of specific materials and techniques. For example, within the development of a unitary theme, a sense of "variety and design flexibility" for the urban

village's public realm "will be created through different uses of light and texture with local details and materials in specific places" [24]. In addition, throughout the planning document, a series of statements are made about technical requirements for new development and construction. For example, with the aim to make the urban village into a "truly sustainable area" [25], it is required of developers that "at least 10% of the total value of materials used in the construction project must be derived from recycled and re-used content in the products and materials selected" [26].

The conceived space of HUV, in the guise of planning and promotional media, actively shapes and largely predates its perceived space, that is, its further physical development and configuration. It is in this sense that, as a material space and a concrete place, HUV is hypermediatized. As a cultural and social process rooted in specific professional practices and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991), urban regeneration may very well be "constrained to take on a form suitable for media representation" [27] — both in relation to its planning, earlier, and promotion, later. As a more broadly social context of urban life, HUV is in the making and in fact actively imagined and heavily orchestrated across the same planning and promotional media that forecast and showcase its material characteristics and physical capabilities. In other words, it is not only the perceived space of the urban village that is hypermediatized, but also and most importantly its *envisioned* lived space.

According to Lefebvre's tripartite approach to spatial production, lived space is the always complex and dialectical combination of conceived and perceived space (Lefebvre, 1991). As Purcell (2002) writes, lived space "represents a person's actual experience of space in everyday life" and, for this reason, is "a constituent element of social life" [28]. In the case of HUV, and arguably also across the increasing spread of similar 'urban villages', there is a manifest attempt to infuse the conceived space of top-down urban regeneration with the 'texture' of lived space. The notion of texture pertains both to the actual grain of matter (see Conley and Dickinson, 2010) and "an illusion of tangibility", which can be achieved "across different media and can have tactile as well as visual and aural manifestations" [29]. As a "synaesthetic semiotic resource" [30], texture contributes to creating 'ambience' via identification with the provenance and experiential qualities of given cues [31]. In other words, texture can be mobilized as a resource that communicates difference, both in material and symbolic terms.

Based on such general understanding of this key notion, then, how is the 'texture' of lived space infused into a top-down urban regeneration project like HUV? On the one hand, this is done through the careful planning of perceived space, for example through the mixed-use approach to development and public realm requirements pertaining to the use of local materials, the availability of public seating and quotas for the presence of public spaces within individual development. On the other hand, the proliferation of media representations of 'life' in HUV associated with planning and promotion alike contributes to creating points of attachment with, while also foreclosing, specific sensorial, aesthetic, relational and overall both material and symbolic possibilities for the envisioned lived space of the urban village. This is especially significant in light of concrete initiatives and interventions on the perceived space of the village which are aimed at pouring a certain 'feel' for HUV's lived space into its conceived space (*i.e.*, its multiple planning and promotional media).

When I first started researching HUV, I ran into an online property advert related to the urban village, with the heading "from Wasteland to Wonderland". At the time, the perceived space of HUV was very much still in the process of being developed, and the advert pointed to the potential that the until then derelict area had, not only for material, but also for symbolic development. And it is exactly a 'wonderland' of sorts that is hypermediatized as the envisioned and even projected lived space of HUV, across the planning and promotional media that explain and showcase the urban village. Ultimately, it is *not* lived space itself that I set out to discuss here, but rather some of the major ways in which these hypermediatized spatial realms point to the (re)production of given lifestyle practices and identities, in connection with the material and physical characteristics of the built environment. In other words, this broadly critical and theoretical discussion is aimed at foregrounding the significance of envisioned lived space for the material and social actualization of cities. In the next three short sections I identify *food space*, *green space*, and *design space* as the three areas of spatial production that must be scrutinized in relation to HUV and similar urban regeneration projects. In doing so, I note how these specific dimensions of lived space are mobilized multimodally in the communication of HUV to achieve distinction within well-established genres and formats of urban regeneration.





### Food space

As Bell and Binnie (2005) have written in relation to Manchester, “food spaces are increasingly central to urban regeneration and place-promotion schemes, woven into the experience economy, and used as markers of metropolitanism and cosmopolitanism” [32]. The redevelopment of urban areas into residential areas and enclaves of consumption goes hand in hand with the introduction of often aestheticized or ‘gourmet’ eateries, markets and cafés. Not surprisingly, then, references to food are scattered across HUV’s planning and promotional media. This focus on food, and specifically on food consumption, is in line with the mixed-use approach to planning and its envisioned social impact. The relocation guide to Leeds that is featured on the HUV Web site promotes the area as “a vibrant mix of cafes, delis and local pubs including Leeds’ first micro-brewery, sitting alongside apartments and open courtyards”.

As a marker of differentiation and cosmopolitanism, regenerated areas often offer a combination of the ‘local’ and the ‘exotic’ — the latter being a way of eating the ‘other’ (hooks, 1992) without including actual social and cultural diversity. Interestingly, most of the multimodal references to food in communication related to HUV (and most of the actual food outlets that are present on site to date) point distinctly to the ‘local’ and the ‘European’. Despite the significant presence of South Asian, Caribbean, and Chinese communities across the city (and the demographic diversity that sets apart the Holbeck neighbourhood), HUV is largely communicated and materialized as a place of gastro-pubs like the Midnight Bell and the Cross Keys which, for example, figure prominently in the HUV Flickr account set named “Great places to eat and drink”. Along the same lines, the HUV Web site has a ‘Lifestyle’ section that includes an outdoor café scene as a header image, and a photo gallery in which images of gastro-pubs, picnics, delis and cupcakes figure prominently alongside images of outdoor activities, music gigs, art galleries and both buildings and people from the neighbouring local communities.

The business-oriented promotional publication “A creative location for business” that is available through the HUV Web site features a section titled “Working lunch”. The section is clearly aimed at communicating an appealing image of HUV as a place to work and take breaks. Not unlike Flickr images portraying stalls of local foods and produce, this section linguistically points to the abundance and diversity of available foods. It does so mainly through ‘lists’ indicating the on-site presence of “freshly prepared smoothies, sandwiches and sushi” as well “everything from breakfast butties to pie and chips and school-dinner puddings” in established eateries like David Street Café. In another section of this document, the photos and names of creative professionals who work within the urban village are paired with quotes such as “If you’re in a foul mood, you just go and get a smoothie from Out of the Woods and someone will cheer you up” and “I like coming to work here. It’s not just about the office: it’s a place where I know I can find a great cup of coffee and a good piece of toast in an independent, home-grown café or restaurant — which makes me feel that I am somewhere rather than anywhere”. Overall, a significant portion of HUV’s envisioned lived space revolves around the opportunities for diversity, community and authenticity offered by food consumption and commensality [33].



### Green space

Together with contemporary urban policy’s concern for environmental sustainability, Leeds’ overall “failure to add new green open space” [34] in central urban areas may very well be at the heart of a strong emphasis on the ‘greening’ of HUV’s public realm. Both the ‘Lifestyle’ and ‘Development’ sections of the HUV official Web site include extensive reference to the creation and usage of green space within the urban village. The entrenchment of green *perceived* and green *lived* space is made evident through the presence of this theme across sections and through a series of references to the ‘transformation’ of disused brownfield sites into lush open space.

Out of the five subsections found under ‘Development’, four pertain to projects that focus on or integrate significant aspects of ‘greening’ and environmental sustainability. The Green Corridor is a “project to green a historic walking route between Holbeck and Leeds city centre”. On the Web site, the project is linked to physical and social connectivity. HUV’s Marketing Officer Leanne Buchan is quoted in the following way:

The Green Corridor project will help

reconnect the communities of Beeston and Holbeck to the city centre and Holbeck Urban Village and is a key link in our 'Urban Gardening' campaign which is now in its second year. We hope that the 'greening' will help to transform the south side of the city centre so that residents and workers alike can enjoy the area.

Other featured projects include Wonderwood, "a temporary hybrid of art and park, which aims to inspire future development and encourage community spirit in the urban village", and the greening of Sweet Street, "once a 'no go' zone blocking access and disconnecting communities" now being improved by local charity Holbeck in Bloom through "a planting scheme around the turning circle incorporating fresh herbs and fruit bushes".

Under 'Lifestyle', a guide to the urban village states that "if you only have a short time to spend exploring the area there are a number of green spaces springing up for you to find a spot to make the most of the summer sun". In addition, a series of events and initiatives are planned and promoted in relation to the overall projected green space of HUV. These include an urban gardening initiative, featured under 'Lifestyle'; Little Picnics, an initiative where local cafés prepare picnic lunch bags for people to bring to various grassy spots in HUV and along the canals during the summer months; the UK Green Film Festival, the brainchild of HUV-based Igloo, "a specialist development and regeneration manager committed to a policy of sustainable development"; and the Wildlife Design Competition, which was launched to inspire "artists, designers, architects and creative thinkers from around the globe to sharpen their pencils and create the follies of the future, enticing wildlife and bio-diversity back into the urban village". Images of people lounging around on grassy meadows, flowers in bloom against a backdrop of industrial buildings and council estates, as well as close ups of endangered species (including birds and ladybugs) are abundant across sections.

Across these featured projects, which are all still very much in progress, there is not only a trope of community-making and connectivity that is (heavily) communicated, but also a theme of creative 'transformation' of HUV's public realm. As a regeneration project, the area covered by Wonderwood was "transformed from gravel to grass, creating a beautiful and practical solution to a halted building site". Likewise, the Green Corridor project is often framed as having transformed a derelict area into green space. In addition, in the course of completing the renovation of Tower Works, and "to celebrate the green transformation of the area", the Leeds-based design agency Unit was given the task "to create a piece of 'Turf-itti' — a large-scale installation made entirely of real turf which spelt out the word 'Transform' on the foreground of the Tower Works development and was visible from the air". Photographs of the installation were featured across HUV promotional media. Overall, HUV's envisioned lived space relies heavily on greening as a means for transforming the perceived space of HUV into a lived space that combines (post)industrial practices with environmental awareness and nature-oriented community life.



### Design space

The last, perhaps more subtle area of spatial production that characterizes HUV's approach to envisioned lived space pertains to design. Design is typically considered "as a motor for regeneration" [35], to the extent it becomes crucial for urban regeneration projects like HUV not only to engage in design-led planning and (re)development, but also to ensure and communicate the presence of 'brand names' of architectural design and public art. For example, the HUV brochure "A Creative Location for Business" highlights that Manor Mills has been developed "in partnership with award-winning residential design company YOO", which is "a Philippe Starck company", has "raised the bar in über-chic interior design" and has worked on all visual aspects including communal areas, building façades, and overall interior design. References to design 'celebrities' such as Starck are echoed in the official Web site, where for example the 'Light' Neville Street project is featured as an iconic public art project "led by Leeds-based Bauman Lyons Architects" that "integrates work by Berlin-based sound & light artist Hans Peter Kuhn featuring thousands of LED lights to generate a random pattern on the east wall each day". Similarly, the "Relocation Leeds" publication reports that "Holbeck Urban Village itself is a mix of renovated Victorian properties and new architecture, designed and built by such well-respected names as Bauman



Lyons Architects”.

In addition to branding HUV as a ‘design enclave’, HUV planning and promotional media communicate the idea of HUV as a community of style. Throughout HUV media, the urban village is associated with terms like “character” and “distinction”. The aforementioned brochure describes the village as being “full of little design quirks”, and the HUV brand bible highlights that the urban village is going to provide “distinctive spaces for some of the UK’s leading creative professionals” and that, therefore, the supporting graphic of the HUV brand should “bring out the character of the area” and highlight the area’s distinctive skyline. Along the same lines, the creative business brand relies on the “visual appeal” of “a more artistic” graphic supported by images portraying some of the more distinctive architectural and public art details of HUV. In addition, the HUV promotional video highlights the importance of design, both verbally and visually. In the video, HUV is described as a “hidden gem” in the heart of Leeds, followed by the statement that “there is nowhere else like it”. Meanwhile, more abstract visuals of red and orange origami paper boats float on a stream of water and, at times, are placed in settings like cafés and the offices of creative businesses, pointing to the ‘creative’ and ‘vibrant’ nature of this place.

Finally, in the business-oriented brochure I mentioned earlier, HUV is described as having “more to offer this style savvy sector than a place to do business”. In the same publication, professionals working in the creative and digital industries are quoted as they praise HUV for its distinctive design and stylistic traits:

We’re now in a beautiful converted mill next to the landmark Tower Works — distinctive because it has a factory chimney styled on Giotto’s Tower in Florence which I love to look at each day. We’re closer to our clients and we’re also right in the heart of an area that happens to be one of the city’s best kept secrets.

It’s an increasingly vibrant and stimulating place to work in, with a creative feel about it, and plenty of high quality office space. There’s a good community atmosphere here, and every time I step out of the office I bump into someone I know.

In both cases, the area’s stylistic distinctiveness is associated with an enhanced sense of community, not only among creative professionals but also between them and their clients. Overall, the envisioned lived space of HUV is planned and promoted as a community of taste rooted in the knowledge and appreciation of architectural detail and design.

### ■ **Planning for the future: Urban regeneration and the (hyper)mediation of lived space**

My definition of hypermediation [36] here is linked to and an extension of Silverstone’s (2002) and Couldry’s (2008) theoretical work on mediation, and my own previous conceptualization of the urban built environment as a form/force of mediation and mediatization (Aiello, 2011). By taking further Couldry’s argument that “the media” should no longer be seen “as a privileged site for accessing a common world” [37], I have previously argued that the urban built environment should be considered as a form/force of mediation in its own right (Aiello, 2011). As Livingstone (2009) explains, it may be more useful to speak of “mediation” rather than “media”. This is because “mediation” enables us “to avoid tying down the focus to specific media (radio, press, television, etc.)” and to account for processes of transformation and hybridization in “the dual centerpiece of the communication field — mass communication and interpersonal (or face-to-face) communication” [38]. Broadly, mediation can be defined as “the processes by which a given social dispensation produces and reproduces itself in and through a particular set of media” [39].

In elaborating on Silverstone’s (2002) foundational approach to this concept, Couldry (2008) defines mediation as a non-linear “process of environmental transformation which, in turn, transforms the conditions under which any future media can be produced and understood” [40]. From a planning perspective, urban regeneration projects like HUV privilege and in fact hypermediate a top-down sense of “place identity” [41] and “a utopianism of spatial form” [42]. The conceived space of HUV’s

planning and promotional media drives a series of choices and interventions pertaining to its perceived space which are however also heavily infused with the 'textures' of lifestyle, taste and community. It is in this sense that the process of planning and promoting HUV has significant implications not only for this area's physical configuration, but also the ways in which its lived space can be (re)produced and understood.

Contrary to what Zukin (2008) observed in areas like Lower Manhattan, in HUV — and in similar urban villages — the regeneration process is not characterized by a movement from an initial establishment of alternative or grassroots consumption practices in an otherwise working-class and/or ethnic neighborhood to the gentrification and corporate redevelopment of the area followed by the further (re)introduction of markers of authenticity and the overall lifestyling of urban space. For those who work and live in HUV, the establishment of "outposts of difference, that is, spaces where they can freely perform their own consumption practices" [43] is designed into the conception of the urban village and predates its full physical and demographic development — in other words, the lived space of HUV as a place in the making is hypermediated. Hence, HUV's conceived space also hypermediates its lived space, insofar as the planning and promotion of its infrastructure is not only infused with but also reliant on the texture(s) of areas of spatial production such as food space, green space, and design space. And, more specifically, food space, green space and design space are emblematic of the "ethos of urban vitality, social mix and community" [44] that characterizes urban renaissance policies.

Much of Leeds' overall approach to its 'urban renaissance' and to HUV in particular originates from the "first 24 Hour City Conference in 1993 which articulated a vision for the city based on ideas of European-ness (especially through allusions to being the 'Barcelona of the north'), 24 hour café society and city centre living" [45]. HUV is part and parcel of "the aspiration of Leeds to become one of the principal cities of Europe, maintaining and enhancing the distinctive character which the centre already possesses" [46]. And, naturally, this process of transformation — or of mediation — is characterized by "asymmetric relations" [47].

A critical appraisal of this hypermediation of HUV's lived space is especially important in light of some of the stated aims of this urban regeneration project. As I explained earlier, and in line with overall city strategy, one of the key stated aims of HUV is "to improve connectivity between the city centre and the surrounding communities of Beeston Hill and Holbeck" [48]. The same planning document states that another aim for HUV is "to develop a balanced and stable residential community" and that this should be done also by meeting "some of the identified need for city centre housing for people on lower incomes who cannot currently afford city centre living" [49]. In order for this to occur, and with regard to HUV's perceived space, the planning framework "requires a diversity of residential types in terms of size, tenure and price" [50]. Both aims are also synthesized in the first paragraph of the 'About' section of HUV's official Web site:

The vision for this area of Leeds is more than the creation of buildings, offices and apartments: it is about creating a sustainable community developed with consideration for the surrounding areas of Holbeck and Beeston and how the urban village connects these communities to the city centre.

However, this stated vision for redevelopment in the name of sustainability and connectivity has entailed the demolition of hundreds of council homes, many not far from HUV, "with plans for thousands more to go to make way for mainly private housing" [51]. And as Green (2007) states, the Leeds City Council "rather than have city-centre developers designate some of the luxury flats for affordable housing they must, instead, contribute a percentage of their money to already existing public housing outside the city centre" [52]. This effectively means "[f]unneling the cash to council estates rather than into affordable city centre housing" [53] and therefore also increasing ethnic and class-based segregation.

The economic base of such segregation is augmented by the physical configuration of the city and by competing perspectives on key issues pertaining to the urban built environment. In 2006, the activist artist group WochenKlausur were invited by Bauman Lyons Architects, the architecture firm behind HUV, "to do a project in this district in order to lift the isolating border between economically and culturally privileged districts like the City Center or HUV and deprived areas in Leeds" (WochenKlausur, 2006). The project was named *City Co-operation* and involved a series of conversations between communities and businesses from Holbeck and HUV on the abandoned viaduct that was considered as a major source of

problems for both Beeston and Holbeck, and which was therefore highlighted as an ideal site for greening and overall redevelopment. Though, what emerged from these conversations is that Beeston and Holbeck residents felt most affected by “a motorway that was cut through the neighbourhoods, creating a chasm between the once united communities and utterly destroying a sense of place” [54]. In addition, the redevelopment of the area now covered by HUV *de facto* moved prostitution from the Dark Arches — the area under the railway station that is now part of Granary Wharf — to Holbeck itself, thus aggravating rather than bridging the divide between this working-class neighborhood and the city centre as a whole.

The top-down approach to urban regeneration and, in particular, the hypermediation of lived space that sets apart HUV were subjected to criticism in “*Ripples Out*”, a documentary on HUV that was commissioned by the Economic Inclusion Directorate of the regional development agency Yorkshire Forward, and was produced in partnership by Lippy Films and the Leeds-based charity Together For Peace. In the documentary, a group of Holbeck residents is given a tour of HUV. They comment on the exclusive and exclusionary nature of its public space and businesses, noting that the village only caters to young adults with no children, and overall to ‘café culture’. In addition, a local activist on a wheelchair is shown as she attempts to access the village from the south side (where Holbeck is located), only to encounter a series of physical barriers — including missing gateways and design ‘quirks’ that make it difficult for wheelchairs to move easily across pedestrian areas.

It is known that Labour and New Labour’s stated social inclusion and communitarian aspirations “were tempered by a strong thrust towards reductions on welfare dependence, downplaying poverty as the main cause of social deprivation” [55]. This is also reflected in urban renaissance approaches to regeneration. Projects like HUV embody and promote a top-down approach to urban regeneration, not only through the highly structured orchestration of perceived space, but also through the hypermediatization and hypermediation of lived space. One can argue that, most likely, over time these top-down regeneration projects will become inhabited, used and transformed in more complex, if not unpredictable, ways. While this may be true, it is only through participatory — though much slower and perhaps more chaotic — processes to urban planning and design that “those who live in the city — who contribute to the body of urban lived experience and lived space — [...] can legitimately claim the right to the city” [56].




## Conclusion

There is no doubt that disused industrial areas like the one now covered by HUV need to be recuperated and improved, both for economic and social reasons. However, an analysis of projects like HUV may shed some light over “technologies that produce consumable images of difference in which to enact, perform, and walk homogeneity” [57]. In other words, the hypermediat(izat)ion of lived space entails the planning and promotion of “images of difference” (including the availability of diverse and abundant options for food consumption, access to green open space, and membership in a design enclave) and “varieties of localities” [58] which are nevertheless rooted in much more generic communities of taste and lifestyles that are typical of advanced capitalism.

The multimodal communication of HUV via multiple planning and promotional media reaches well beyond the communication of the urban village’s business facilities and development capabilities (which is indeed prominent). In this regard, key areas of spatial production that are central to the multimodal communication of HUV contribute not only to imagining, but also materializing the lived space — rather than simply the perceived space — of HUV. Clearly, HUV is both a top-down, plan-led urban enclave and a lifestyle oriented, market-led regeneration project. As such, its planning and development go hand in hand with its promotion, branding and communication. Precisely because of the central role that *mediatization* — and in fact hypermediatization, rather than planning or economics alone — plays in the material and social production of HUV, it becomes all the more significant to examine urban regeneration projects of this kind. In addition, and by virtue of their hypermediatization, projects like HUV also entail the *mediation* — and, as I argued, hypermediation — of the social in relation to target lifestyle publics.

Ultimately, if we are not to keep reproducing asymmetric, exclusionary social relations through the production of urban space itself, we should not only pay close attention to the physical qualities of regenerated space, but we also ought to examine and account for the increasing

hypermedia(tiza)tion of lived space. 

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### Notes

- [1.](#) Turok, 2009, p. 13.
- [2.](#) Evans, 2005, p. 18.
- [3.](#) Bell and Jayne, 2004, p. 254.
- [4.](#) Bell and Jayne, 2004, p. 249.
- [5.](#) Arvidsson, 2006, p. 136.
- [6.](#) Chatterton and Hodkinson, 2007, p. 30.
- [7.](#) With a population of over 750,000 and a surface of approximately 560 square kilometres, the Leeds metropolitan district is the second largest in the UK. Like in other UK cities, though, the Leeds city centre is not densely populated. Up until 2008 city centre residents were fewer than 16,000. As of 2012, it was estimated that approximately 20,000 people live in the area, while at least 100,000 people converge on the city centre daily for work and other activities (9th Leeds City Centre Audit 2010).
- [8.](#) City Centre Leeds, n.d., p. 5.
- [9.](#) City Centre Leeds, n.d., p. 22.
- [10.](#) Leeds growth strategy, n.d., p. 8.
- [11.](#) City Centre Leeds, n.d., p. 22.
- [12.](#) Leeds City Council Development Department, 2006, p. 4.
- [13.](#) Punter, 2011, p. 2.
- [14.](#) City Centre Leeds, n.d., p. 26.
- [15.](#) *Ibid.*
- [16.](#) Turok, 2009, p. 16.
- [17.](#) Couldry, 2008, p. 377.
- [18.](#) Leeds City Council Development Department, 2006, p. 7.
- [19.](#) Leeds City Council Development Department, 2006, p. 39.
- [20.](#) Leeds City Council Development Department, 2006, p. 19.
- [21.](#) Leeds City Council Development Department, 2006, p. 39.
- [22.](#) Leeds City Council Development Department, 2006, p. 43.
- [23.](#) *Ibid.*
- [24.](#) Leeds City Council Development Department, 2006, p. 39.

- [25.](#) Leeds City Council Development Department, 2006, p. 29.
- [26.](#) Leeds City Council Development Department, 2006, p. 30.
- [27.](#) Couldry, 2008, p. 376.
- [28.](#) Purcell, 2002, p. 102.
- [29.](#) Djonov and Van Leeuwen, 2011, p. 541.
- [30.](#) Djonov and Van Leeuwen, 2011, p. 560.
- [31.](#) For example, the roughness of a fabric like denim may generate meaning potentials such as "simplicity and functionality, a choice of equality against class society" both by means of identification with the history of "American cowboys and pioneers" (Djonov and Van Leeuwen, 2011, p. 546) and in contrast with the smoothness of other textiles that, in turn, may generate meaning potentials of luxury and exclusiveness.
- [32.](#) Bell and Binnie, 2005, p. 79.
- [33.](#) Bell, 2002, p. 13.
- [34.](#) Unsworth and Smales, 2010, p. 68.
- [35.](#) Bell and Jayne, 2004, p. 250.
- [36.](#) The term 'hypermediation' has been famously used by Bolter and Grusin in relation to their definition of 'hypermediacy' (and in opposition to 'immediacy'). They define hypermediacy as a "style of visual representation whose goal is to remind the viewer of the medium" (Bolter and Grusin, 1999, p. 272). According to Bolter and Grusin, hypermediation (a term they use far less often than 'hypermediacy' itself) is the process by which media viewers/users are increasingly reminded of the 'means' through which media content is conveyed. This notion of hypermediacy/hypermediation is important and in fact widely used and debated in new and digital media studies. However, this is not the definition of 'hypermediation' that I adopt in this article.
- [37.](#) Couldry, 2009, p. 441.
- [38.](#) Livingstone, 2009, p. 3.
- [39.](#) Mazzarella, 2004, p. 346.
- [40.](#) Couldry, 2008, p. 380.
- [41.](#) Day, 2003, p. 83.
- [42.](#) Harvey, 1997, p. 3.
- [43.](#) Zukin, 2008, p. 745.
- [44.](#) Punter, 2011, p. 3.
- [45.](#) Chatterton and Hodkinson, 2007, p. 30.
- [46.](#) City Centre Leeds, n.d., p. 27.
- [47.](#) Couldry, 2008, p. 380.
- [48.](#) Leeds City Council Development Department, 2006, p. 4.
- [49.](#) Leeds City Council Development Department, 2006, p. 11.
- [50.](#) *Ibid.*
- [51.](#) Chatterton and Hodkinson, 2007, p. 32.
- [52.](#) Green, 2007, p. 11.
- [53.](#) *Ibid.*
- [54.](#) Green, 2007, p. 14.
- [55.](#) Punter, 2011, p. 3.
- [56.](#) Purcell, 2002, p. 102; also, *cf.*, Lefebvre, 1996.
- [57.](#) Stewart and Dickinson, 2008, p. 301.
- [58.](#) *Ibid.*

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