Pop-up tourism and the 'cult of the temporary'
(Temporary Urbanism: Fixing the City in Post-Pandemic Times)

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Pop-ups. What are they?

- **Temporary installations** in **underutilised or unremarkable spaces and thoroughfares of cities** designed to **realise certain performances and experiences that are recognisably 'touristic'** and out-of-the-ordinary

- **Goals and objectives:** attracting footfall, spending and publicity; re-imagining place(s), community development, promoting behaviour change, fundraising, etc

- **Low cost(?), adaptive reuse** of existing structures and spaces

- From pop-up shops to **pop-up tourism**

- **Multiple mobilities** of people, objects, capital, information, etc

- Trend towards **ephemera, simulacra and event-based tourism**
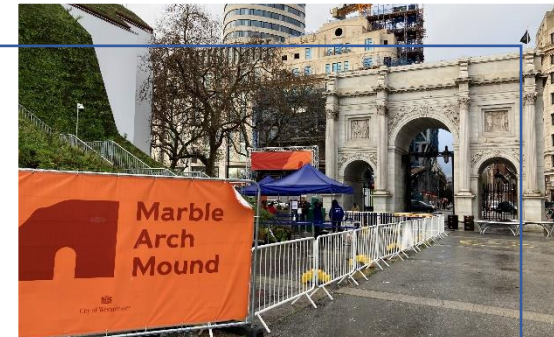
Examples

Urban beaches

Christmas markets

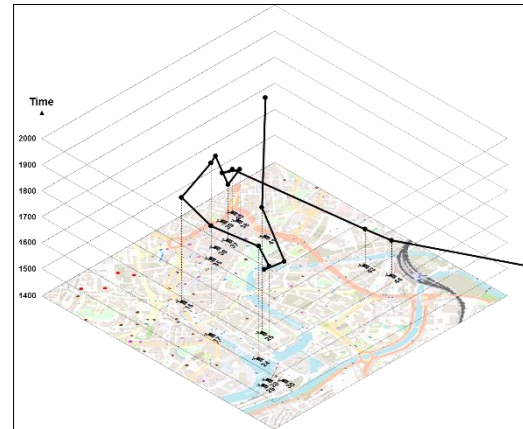Temporary parks

Immersive cinema

Vacation streets

One-offs

Volume and value statistics, selected pop-ups

Gromit Unleashed (2013)

Banksy's Dismaland (2015)

- **80 fibreglass statues** of 'Gromit' around Bristol, UK
- **1.18m visitors**, generating **direct spend of £77m** on accommodation, travel, refreshments and gifts
- **Boost of £123 million** to the local economy

- **Art exhibition** and dystopian theme park, Weston-super-Mare, UK
- **15,000 visitors** from UK and beyond, over **5 weeks**
- **Boosted the local economy** by an estimated **£20m**

Driving forces

- Dangerous **climate change**

- **Risk and fear** (terrorism, pandemics)

- **Changing attitudes** towards long-distance travel (socially unacceptable)

- **Financial crisis**, widening gap between rich and poor

- New and improved **technologies, materials**

- **Squeezing of leisure time**, new ways of (not) working such as four-day week, universal basic income, digital nomads, etc

- **Carbon quotas**, **embodied energy** in buildings and the built environment

- **Rising cost of travel** (oil scarcity)

Typology of pop-ups

? Nodal or linear/ dispersed (sites or sights, trails)

? One-off or recurring

? Static or dynamic (different uses and users depending on time of day?)

? Free to/ for all or paid entry

? Planning, top-down or community-led

? Duration (days, weeks, months)

? Legacy, lasting change (of land cover and use, behaviour) or mirage/ echo

The 'good', Paris Plage(s)

- Brainchild of former socialist mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë

- Annual event, initiated in 2002, transforming Seine riverbank into a 'beach'

- Circa 3m visitors per annum

- Originally cost €2m, paid for by the City in partnership with public agencies and private companies

- 2,000+ tonnes of sand, grass and wooden decking used to form three distinct 'beaches'

- Complemented by palm trees, deck-chairs, hammocks, beach huts, 28 metre swimming pool, concert stage, etc
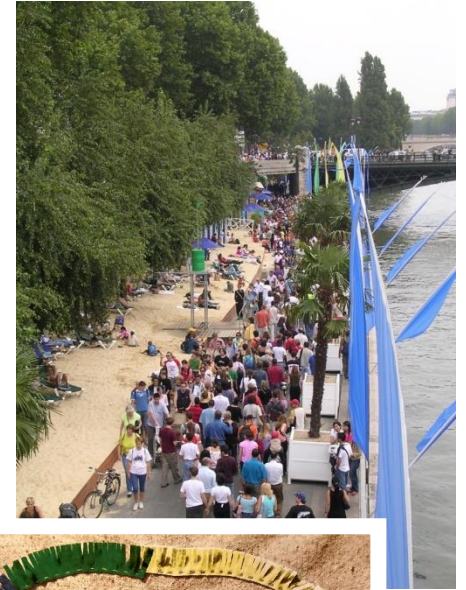
The ~~'bad'~~ controversial, <u>SEE Monster</u>

- Interactive art installation on site of the former Tropicana outdoor swimming pool, Weston-super-Mare (UK)

- Decommissioned North Sea oil platform

- Four levels including a wild garden, linked by a 12m waterfall

- One of ten 'massive' projects that comprise UNBOXED, a £120m year-long events programme initiated as the 'Festival of Brexit'

- "It spent its life taking from the earth, now hopefully it will give something back" (Martin Green, Chief Creative Officer)

- "An irresponsible use of public money" (DCMS Committee)
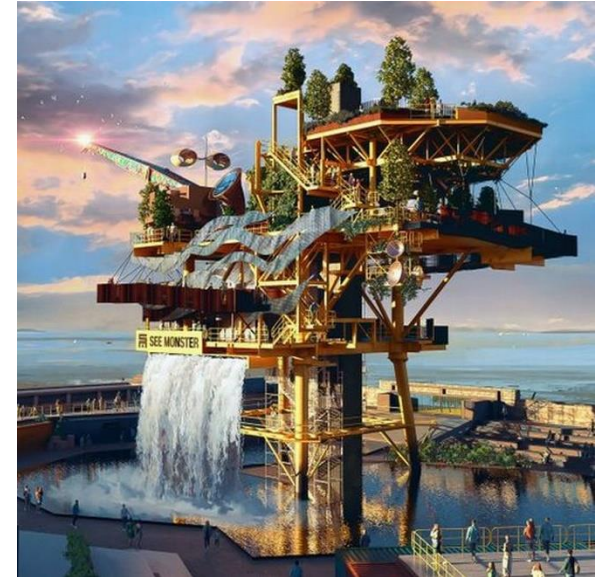
The 'ugly', Marble Arch Mound

- London's latest 'folly' (in every sense of the word!)

- 25 metre fake hill designed by Dutch studio MVRDV

- Designed to lure shoppers back to Oxford Street, in the wake of the pandemic and growth in online sales

- Cost over £6m to build, open from July 2021-January 2022

- Poor quality planting, bare patches of sedum matting

- Entry charge abolished after poor ticket sales, publicity

- Westminster City Council blamed for "loveless execution" of design and £3m overspend

Spatial semiotics

- **Significant contrast** between the installation and its urban surroundings, provoking curiosity and **generating the 'wow' factor** (out-of-context)

- **Props, outfits** help create and sustain the illusion (e.g. water atomisers)

- Visitors know it shouldn't be there, and revel in its inauthenticity, but **behave as if it were 'the real thing'**

- A space for **social mixing** (rich-poor, young-old, locals-tourists)

- **Strategic and serial reproduction** of nature, culture(s)

- 'Instagrammable', **designed for online** as well as on-site consumption

- **Suspension of everyday/ mundane** mobilities

The 'cult of the temporary'

- A phrase **coined by geographers Ella Harris (Birkbeck) and Mel Nowicki (Oxford Brookes)**, writing for The Guardian

- **Athens cited as a centre of pop-up culture**, with mobile bars, cinemas, supper clubs and restaurants revitalising empty lots in the City, vacated during debt crisis

- Also **'pocket parks'**, compensating for loss of green space to urbanisation

- **Shipping containers** used to rebuild Christchurch's RBD, following 2011 earthquake

- Charities, local authorities using pop-ups to tackle **homelessness, food poverty**

- **Companies have jumped on the bandwagon** with novelty shops, space-finding, etc

- Temporary urbanism **normalises and glorifies the precariousness of urban life**, and **distracts from structural problems of capitalism** (a stopgap in the face of a crisis)

Hultman and Gössling (2008: 81)

'Historically' →

Trend ⇢
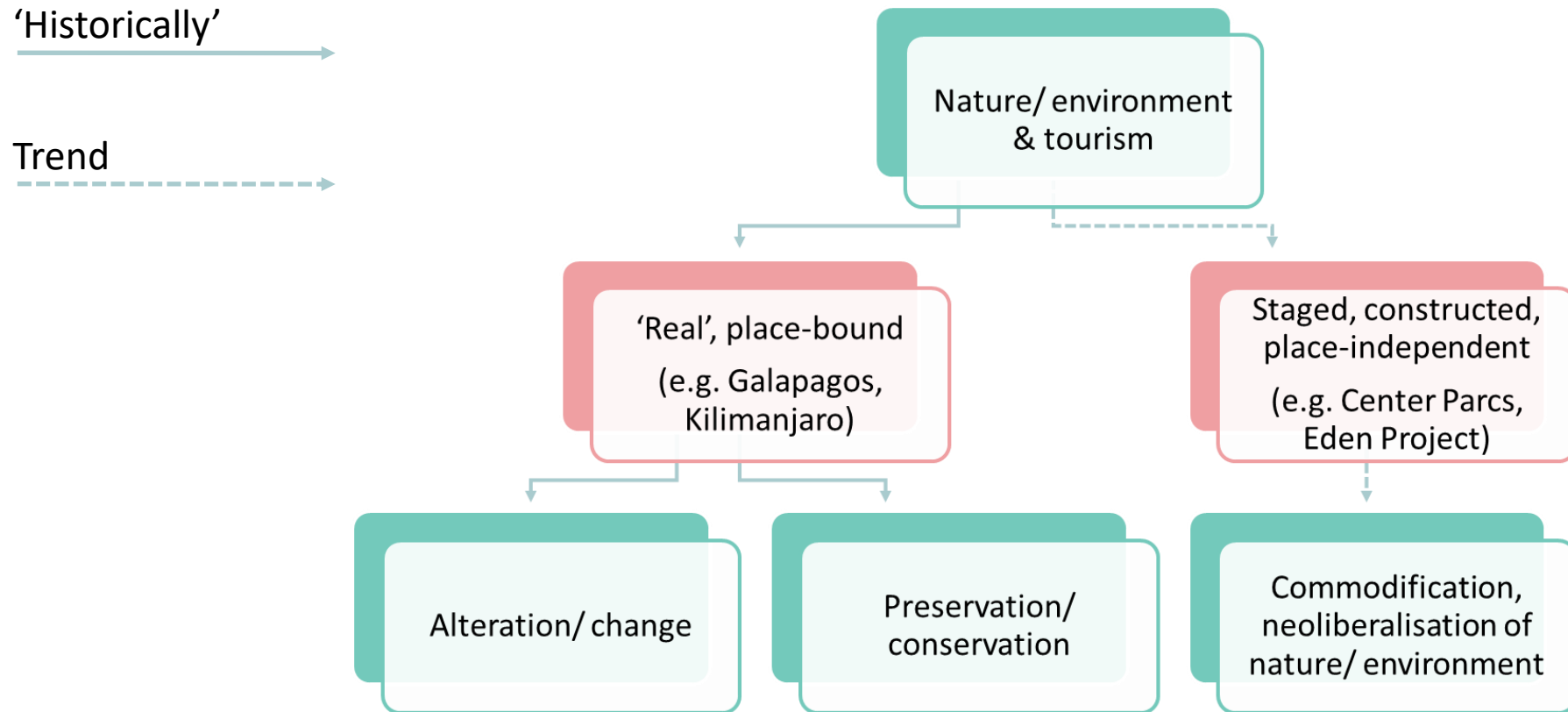
Four generic scenarios
(after Dator, 2009; inspired by futurists including Ian Yeoman and the EFTI)

Continuation
- Resumption of growth as virus evolves to become less deadly or is brought under control through vaccination, and a swift end to hostilities in Ukraine, with attendant social and environmental pressures
- *Pop-ups as a part of neoliberal urban policies, and for the 'left behind'*

Collapse
- Economic, financial and public health crises, and an escalation of conflict beyond Ukraine, precipitate a breakdown in the existing rules-based order; supply chains break down, inflation spirals out of control
- *Pop-ups as a brief escape from/ antidote to a brutish existence*

Discipline
- People consent to constraints on personal mobility and liberty ('it is what it is'), and refocus on survival and fair distribution; reconnection with fundamental values/ truths, rejection of growth for growth's sake'
- *Pop-ups as a sustainable 'staycation' destination*

Transformation
- New technologies – robotics/ artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, space travel – transform lives and offer solutions to the world's biggest problems, including the climate emergency
- *Pop-ups as a test-bed for new ideas, urban futures*

Conclusions

- **This is tourism**, albeit not necessitating an overnight stay in commercial accommodation away from home

- Phenomena of the sort reported here ignored, **dismissed as 'low-brow'**

- Portents of a transition **from long-distance travel and stays in established destinations** – the stuff of traditional tourism – **to locally-based, fluid and arguably more sustainable alternatives**

- **The 'end of tourism'** (Urry, 1995), an argument about de-differentiation of tourism and everyday life under disorganised capitalism

- **Could be re/ created anywhere**, yet contingencies of place are important

- Some **fundamentally geographical things and processes** at work here!

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