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**D4.2**

**Workshop for Stakeholders and  
Experts: Minutes**

**31.08.2017**

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**D4.2:** Minutes of Workshop for Stakeholder and Experts (Brixton)

Location: High Trees Community Trust, Herne Hill Road

Date: 15.07.2017

**Lead beneficiary** - KLU

**Due Month:** 18 (August 2017)

This document summarises the discussions that took place at the WP4 TRACES stakeholder workshop “Visualising Contentious Heritage in Brixton: Creative Practices in the Politics of Heritage”, held at High Trees Community Trust (London) on 15 July 2017 in collaboration with Design Activism and Research Hub (DARH) at London College of Communication. The discussions are grouped into themes rather than reflecting the exact order of the discussion.

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## TRACES Stakeholder Workshop: Minutes

# Visualising Contentious Heritage in Brixton: Creative Practices in the Politics of Heritage

### Details

Date: Saturday, 15.7.2017, 10.00 – 16.00  
Venue: St Martin's Learning Centre, High Trees Trust, Tulse Hill, London  
Pre-Meetings: 1.7.2017: Brixton stakeholders met for a guided tour at Cressingham Gardens photo installation (17:00 – 19:00)  
3.7.2017: Pre-meeting with Propagate collective (London College of Communication (19:00-20:00))

### Schedule

10:00 – 10:15 Introducing TRACES: Practicing Contentious Heritage (TRACES WP4)  
10:15 – 10:30 Introducing Propagate: Producing Visuals to amplify grassroots social struggles (Propagate Collective)  
10:30 – 11:30 Projects  
Concrete Heartland: Heygate digital video (Rastko Novaković)  
Brixton Map: Heritage as Emotions (Brixton Bagage)  
Sanctum Ephemeral: Photo installation at Cressingham Gardens (Mark Aitken)  
Carnegie Library: Pursuing living heritage around a listed building (Campaign Save the 10)  
11:30 – 11:45 Break  
12.00 – 13:00 Open Discussion  
14:00 – 16:00 Perceptive Walk at Lambeth Country Show, 'Village Green'  
Stations: Save Cressingham, Brixton Historical Society, Herne Hill Historical Society, Ritzi Campaign for Living Wage, Library Campaign, Nubian Jak Initiative for a Black and Caribbean War memorial, Love Music Not Racism.

## I. Background of the workshop

### Brief Description

This workshop addressed the politics of heritage through the lens of urban citizen campaigns in the London neighbourhood of Brixton. It brought together people involved in projects that visualise urban heritage in and around Brixton against a background of rapid urban change. The aim was a) to come to a better understanding of contentious heritage through the lens of urban citizen campaigns in Brixton b) to analyse creative heritage practices. This included different approaches to institutions and community involvement, as well as the importance of everyday practices as part of creative visualisations.

## Workshop setting and participants

The workshop was conceived in communication with the Propagate collective and Brixton-based community groups and supported by Tony Credland and Tzortzis Rallis from DARH. At a pre-meeting with participants, we visited the photo installation Sanctum Ephemeral guided by Mark Aitken. A preparation meeting with the propagate collective was held. The workshop was framed as a small reflexive session. Groups and individuals involved in producing visuals relating to Brixton heritages were invited. Nine people involved in visual projects and several campaigns participated. Campaigns are listed under references. The projects discussed are:



**Concrete Heartland** (2014), digital video covering the two years before the demolition of the Heygate Estate

**Brixton map** (2015), flyer in support of Save the Arches campaign

**Sanctum Ephemeral** (2017), photo installation at Cressingham Gardens estate

**Visualising Carnegie Library** (ongoing, involves aesthetically marking the closed library building)

Two participants presented projects they created as individuals, their names are given in the respective sections. Additional visual projects were mentioned and are included in the references. Participants' countries of origin or family backgrounds include, besides the UK, Germany, Greece, New Zealand, Slovenia, and Spain. The discussions were largely framed by a white, EU-related perspectives. However, participants were acutely aware of the Afro-Caribbean heritage in Brixton.

## II. Context Setting Presentations

### TRACES and purpose of the workshop

Marion Hamm situated the workshop within the Horizon 2020 project "Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritage with the Arts – from Intervention to Co-Production" (TRACES). TRACES focusses heritage work on conflict and difference with the aim to strengthen a new European imagination. This focus makes Brixton an interesting research site, as difference is engrained in its social fabric. It was argued that recent campaigns for the preservation of existing facilities constitute heritage work in the contentious setting of urban regeneration. According to campaigners, the planned replacement of existing housing estates, along with increasing gentrification leads to a process provocatively called "social cleansing". Brixton heritage work sits between residents' claim to remain and the local council's claim to positive urban development. Formal registration of buildings as heritage protects the facades, but leaves the intangible heritage as lived by their users unprotected. Nevertheless, campaigners have used this as an argument against evictions and the commercialisation of community assets.



The purpose of the workshop was to understand how the politics of heritage play out in this contentious setting. It was discussed how citizens are using visual representations to harness the emotive and subjective side of heritage in the current contentious setting.

Participants of the workshop made numerous references to Brixton’s heritage throughout the workshop. They are familiar with Brixton’s history, partly through their own experience, partly through a thriving collective memory that reaches beyond individual residence in Brixton. It is reproduced in everyday communication, through the naming of streets and squares, exhibitions at the Black Cultural Archives, informal memorials such as the one for David Bowie, or formal ones such as the Black and Afro-Caribbean War Memorial, the distinctive musical heritage, and not least in local street parties and festivals such as the Lambeth Country Show. To give some background, a brief summary is provided here. Brixton living



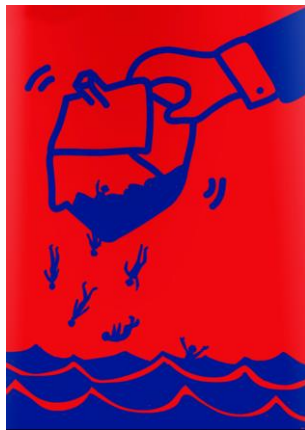
heritage as it stands today developed from the encounter of different groups of newcomers in a neighbourhood marked by change. From trendy shopping and entertainment capital of South London in the interwar period it had fallen into decay. World War II bombing added to an existing housing crisis. The first large group of immigrants from the West Indies, known as the “Windrush generation”, settled in Brixton. With markets, entertainment venues, and a distinctive street live, they shaped the face of the neighbourhood. Eventually, decent homes were provided by the ambitious post-war British social housing building program. In the 1980s, squatters and artists added a thriving subculture. In everyday life, friendly race relations developed amongst a predominantly working class population despite institutional racism. Today’s mixed audiences at music gigs

and festivals can be traced back to the 1950s, when “No Colour Bar dances” were held at Lambeth Town Hall. The iconic 121 Railton Road squatted social centre was first opened by the Brixton branch of the Black Panthers, before it was handed over to an anarchist collective. Police repression targeted at black residents led to three riots in the 1980s and 1990s. In mainstream public opinion, Brixton was stigmatised until recently. The current Lambeth urban regeneration program is seen by many residents as a threat to the distinctive lived heritage of the neighbourhood. As community assets such as social housing estates, libraries, shops and venues are replaced by up-market establishments and expensive flats, long-term residents are finding it difficult to afford live in the increasingly gentrified neighbourhood. Against this background, it was argued that the campaigns for the preservation of existing facilities constitute heritage work.

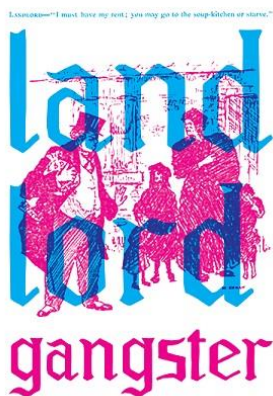
### **Propagate Approach: A community-led approach to visuals**

The Propagate collective was set up in 2015 with the remit to produce visuals to amplify grassroots social struggles. After offering two examples of their work for discussion, they gave an overview of the workshop format they developed in their practice in London and internationally. It was emphasised that bringing together community and graphic design expertise benefits both the communities involved and the quality of the visuals.

The rationale of propagate workshops is to make the collective's expertise as graphic designers available to communities. Participants' stories and realities are combined with the visual skills of the collective. The energy of participants feeds into the poignancy of the produced visuals. In the process, issues can acquire a broader character or become more local. "Our workshops are very open", Propagate explain. Different needs can be accommodated: "Someone may just want a poster to stick up in their social centre. Or a group wants to generate a strong visual presence at a national demonstration." The visual approach allows bringing different communities together, such as activists, neighbours, people who have been involved in projects for years and others who are new in London. It was noted that given more time, there is a potential for deeper verbal reflection on specific emotional and social issues.



"Coming together" and "urgency" were mentioned as important elements. The workshop "Graphics against the housing crisis" (2015) was organised alongside artist-run venue no.w.here. Through their combined networks, organisers brought together activists from housing groups from several London boroughs, including Brixton. The poster is an appropriation of developer-newspeak word "decanting" to describe evictions. The choice to depict evicted tower blocks as a detached home raised attention. While tower blocks often symbolise urban alienation, the child-like drawing evokes feelings of homeliness.



Another workshop was organised in the run-up to the national demonstration against a new housing bill (March 2016). The landlord-gangster poster combines traditional visual language with current problems. The word "landlord" is juxtaposed with the word "gangster" against the backdrop of a Victorian print depicting an eviction scene. Taking up the widespread stigmatisation of housing estates as 'infested by gangs', the negative stereotype of the gangster is deferred to the figure of the landlord. It was noticed that this poster would have worked 30 years ago. London heritages are still visible today, they can be used to create new perspectives for ongoing problems.

### III. Visual Projects

#### Map: Reclaim Brixton

The group Brixton baggage brought a folded leaflet which shows a broken heart in bright red. They explained the context: The slogan “Reclaim Brixton” points to a street party in April 2015, when people from different Brixton communities – young and old, afro-Caribbean, white British and EU-immigrant, artists, (ex-)squatters amongst others – came together to celebrate and reclaim the Brixton they saw bit by bit disappearing. The leaflet unfolds to show a hand-drawn map marking locations threatened with demolition or eviction as part of the ongoing urban renewal. On the back is a collection of quotes by local traders in the central Brixton railway arches who had been told that they would lose their shops due to refurbishment. The purpose of this leaflet was to provide a “tool” to visualise the separate struggles in the context of the wider changes occurring in Brixton. 2000 copies were distributed. The leaflet, in its almost naïve style, prompted an exchange on its emotional qualities and the use of the icon of the heart was discussed.

**RECLAIM**

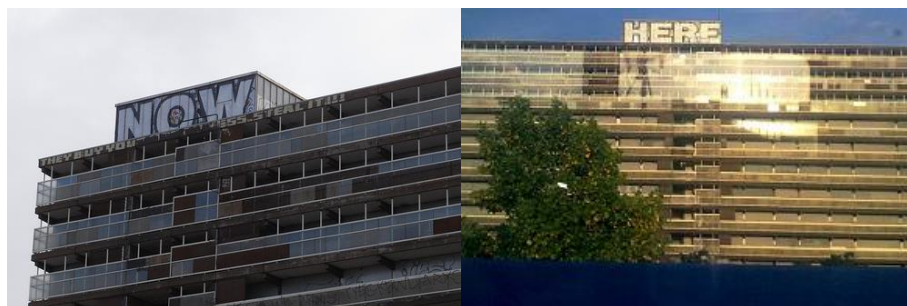


**BRIXTON**

#### Digital Video Concrete Heartland: Afterlife of a 1970s Housing Estate

Rastko Novaković introduced the digital video “Concrete Heartland” (2014). It “exposes the social cleansing of the Heygate estate”, which was demolished in 2014 despite strong protest of its inhabitants. As one of the film-makers lived on-site, the video project was embedded in the self-organisation of the remaining residents and their friends. The video combines footage of the almost-empty estate, a council consultation meeting and resident testimony. Inserted are chanted sequences of the council’s regeneration masterplan, performed by past and present residents, community activists and critics of the Heygate plans. The result is an eery, angry and touching collage of artistic and documentary elements.

It was noted that the title of the video also makes reference to the “heart”. The video was widely shown in London and internationally. Using artistic elements in addition to factual information, it sparked numerous reflexive interactions critical of urban regeneration projects that fail to take city dwellers on the lower end of the social scale into account. The workshop discussed a visual representation of a large graffiti on top of the Heygate estate which acted as social commentary:



Until demolition, the graffiti was widely visible. The words “Now” and “Here” insist that the estate, as place and as people, still remains. The relationship between people and place as part of a heritage setting was picked up in the open discussion.

### Outdoor photo installation: Sanctum Ephemeral



Artist Mark Aitken led reflections on his outdoor photo installation *Sanctum Ephemeral*. Workshop members had previously visited the installation at the 1970s Cressingham Gardens Estate in Brixton, which is awaiting demolition despite a sustained campaign by its residents. Sanctum Ephemeral consists of eight large photographic portraits of residents in their homes, installed on the brick walls of the estate. Additional portraits are published in a newspaper format. Workshop participants noted that the photos convey a quiet, intimate atmosphere. At the same time, they appear to be carefully designed. The Artist lives on the estate and participated in the campaign “Save Cressingham Gardens”. He relates that for him, the photo project provided a way to engage with the reality of the estate in a manner he describes as “life-affirming”, in contrast to anger and exhaustion. Over 18 months, he worked on the project. It was up to them to his fellow residents to choose their poses. The project was funded by the arts council and part of the London Festival of Architecture. The installation does not claim to be a community project or action research, although it has emerged from Cressingham Gardens, where residents need to deal with the prospect to lose their homes. The artist read from the Sanctum Ephemeral publication:

“People let me into their homes. I hear stories; gather evidence. Some of it makes sense. Some of it troubling. The rooms, the memories and the inhabitants reflect each other. Empty rooms as full as those overflowing. We talk about making pictures. We shape inanimate tableaux. An ephemeral trust develops.”

### Carnegie Library: Marking a Building as Contentious Heritage



People involved in the Defend the 10 campaign to save public libraries in the Borough of Lambeth demonstrated how a grade II listed building was turned into a visualisation of a heritage under contention. Situated in a purpose-built Victorian building, and supported by the “Friends of Carnegie Library”, the public library had catered for a wide range of social and age groups. In March 2016, Lambeth council closed the Carnegie Library as part of the austerity



measures. Library users opposed the council’s plans to replace the library service by a gym to create income. They occupied the building for ten days. As part of a campaign for the preservation of the library service, users are adorning the railings and the ironwork at the closed door with yellow ribbons and notes on the value of libraries throughout the year. Gatherings are still held in front of the library. Workshop participants discussed the visual practices used to maintain the relationship between people and place. It was noted that Carnegie library is a grade 2 listed building, but that this only protects the outside appearance, leaving the living heritage that used to reproduce itself within the building unprotected.

#### IV. Perceptive Walk at Lambeth Country Show



After the morning session, the workshop moved on to a perceptive Walk at the nearby Lambeth Country Show. Established in the 1970s, this event is an eclectic mix of activities and exhibits. A competition for the best food sculptures exists side by side with medieval jostling, guerrilla Morris dancing, and, most importantly, a high-ranking music festival spread over several stages. For many residents, the Country Show is a fixture in their annual calendars. It reproduces Brixton’s mixed heritage. The photo shows the stall of Nubian Jak, an initiative which put a Black and Afro-Caribbean War Memorial on Windrush Square in Central Brixton in 2017.



The country show includes a dedicated area for local campaigns and initiatives. Here, connections between the current campaigns, each with their T-Shirts, stalls, buttons, leaflets and banners, became visible. This photo was taken in front of the stall of the Herne Hill society. The depicted lady was one of the people running the stall. Her T-shirt and buttons mark her as a supporter of the Library campaign.



Defend the 10 used the Country Show for a photo opportunity, which was published on the campaign website. By choosing the large letter sculpture “Lambeth” as a backdrop, they positioned themselves as part of the borough. The workshop visited the following stations: Save Cressingham, Brixton Historical Society, Herne Hill Historical Society, Ritzi Campaign for living wage, Love Music - Hate Racism, Library Campaign

#### V. Results/Discussion

Discussing visual heritage projects which emerged from a campaigning context showed that heritage is a deeply political issue. We framed heritage as a triangle of time, place and people. Brixton heritage relies on the communities that carry it as well as the buildings and a shared memory of the past. The current urban regeneration program

breaks the link between residents and place: “They are ripping the heart out of Brixton” was an often-heard comment on the eviction of the Brixton arches shops. While the central public square in Brixton was named to honour the Windrush generation, many of its members and descendants are being forced out of Brixton. Policy-makers need to acknowledge that built heritage, such as the Carnegie library, relies on individual and organised users to remain intact.

The “community” celebrated by residents facing demolition of their homes can only exist when urban planning provides affordable housing along with those at market rates. Festivals such as the annual Lambeth Country Show provide continuity in time, where a mixed and diverse crowd assembles and reproduces the positive heritage of the neighbourhood. Institutions like the Black Cultural Archives, citizen self-organisations such as friends groups or tenant groups, and also the more temporary campaigns, play an important role in transmitting and actualising Brixton heritage beyond the symbolic level.

A brainstorm about ways to visualise connections between different campaigns in Brixton resulted in some ideas: A photo occasion publicised on social media to show off as many campaign T-shirts as possible. Designing and promoting a T-Shirt displaying the logos of all campaigns. Extending the Reclaim Brixton map through a series of explorative heritage walks. A social media campaign asking Brixton residents to publicise photo and statement on Brixton heritage. A propagate workshop on a specific topic to which all campaigns can relate.

Elements of community-led, creative heritage approaches were collected. In the projects presented, the initiators were part of the communities they worked with. Thus, community involvement in the planning phase was feasible. In funded projects, this can be complicated, as applications often need to be made at an early stage, before the actual creative process starts.

In the case of Carnegie library, it was the community itself which took action, not least on the basis of neighbourly relations and the existing friends group. The digital archive “Heygate was home” was embedded in a dedicated action research project, where people from the concerned communities took the lead. The Propagate collective regard themselves not as the initiators of visual projects, but rather as facilitators: “You teach us what is the problem.”

Occasions for coming together need to be found. A sense of urgency is often conducive to participation. This can be the imminent demolition of a cherished building, an upcoming demonstration, or events such as the design week, the Lambeth heritage festival or the festival of architecture. At the same time, process was mentioned as an important element in all projects. Time is needed to develop and realise ideas.

It has proved valuable to draw on everyday practices and experiences both for reflection and aesthetics. The decoration of Carnegie library draws on practices of commemorating the dead. Sanctum Ephemeral was based on everyday poses. The Reclaim Brixton map was based on spatial and social knowledge of residents.

Online campaigns (e.g. selfies) were mentioned as a different mode of laying claims to heritage and place. The social media campaign “Attempt: vent your rent” received considerable attention from mainstream media. It drew on a practice popularised during the occupy protests. People were asked to write down grievances, and post a photo of themselves holding the statement on Twitter using a dedicated hashtag. This created a new, digitally networked temporary community of experience by visually connecting people who share the problem of high rents for sub-standard lodgings. In the hand-written statements in felt-tip on cardboard, the message comes through: “I am angry”.

## VI. Links

- Aitken, Mark: Sanctum Ephemeral. Outdoor photo installation at Cressingham Gardens. Online: <https://photovoice.org/sanctum-ephemeral-outdoor-photo-installation-london-festival-of-architecture/>
- Attempt: vent your rent (20). Evaluation on the campaign website “generation rent”. Online: <http://www.generationrent.org/ventyourrent>
- Ball, Steven/ Rastko Novaković (2014): Concrete Heartland. Digital Video, 25 mins. Artistic Documentary on Heygate Estate. Online: <http://concreteheartland.info/>
- Cooper, Anne and residents from the Cressingham Gardens estate (2017): 306: Living under the shadow of regeneration. London, Devotion Press. Online: <https://cressinghamvoices.wordpress.com/>
- Cressingham Gardens (2014). Documentary, 20 mins. Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGRf-SEnyPk>
- Defend the 10. Homepage of Lambeth library campaign. Online: <http://defendthe10-lambeth.org.uk/>
- Friends of Carnegie Library. Homepage of citizen group. Online: <http://friendsofcarnegielibrary.org.uk/>
- Heygate was home (2014). Digital archive, part of action research project *Challenging ‘the New Urban Renewal’*, which developed community-led alternatives for sustaining existing communities. Online: <http://heygateshome.org/>
- Jones Kaatje (2016): Save Carnegie Library. Campaign Video by Leilani Films. Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrsTC3lKoOo>
- Propagate (2015). Homepage of graphic design collective. Online: <http://propagatecollective.tumblr.com>
- Remember Olive Morris (2008). Initiated by Ana Laura Lopez de la Torre. Online: <https://rememberolivemorris.wordpress.com>
- Syndicate (1999). Visual activist collective. Online: <http://cactusnetwork.org.uk/syndicate1.htm>
- Save Brixton Arches. Campaign Homepage. Online: <http://savebrixtonarches.com/>
- Save Cressingham Gardens. Campaign Homepage. Online: <https://savecressingham.wordpress.com/>