

# Bakhtin, digital scholarship and new publishing practices as carnival

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Digital scholarship is causing disruptions to established academic practices that have long framed how we share knowledge and do research. The web is increasingly vital to all forms of academic scholarship. Using key theoretical concepts from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, we question what it means in relation to social science when digital scholarship is considered by some to be 'carnavalesque' in relation to established academic practice. We draw upon our experiences of editing and curating a collection of works, commonly known as a Book of Blogs published online as *Dialogues of sustainable urbanisation: Social Science Research and Transitions to Urban Contexts*. The idea of the book was that it would encourage multivoicedness around the topic of sustainable urbanisation. We reflect upon how the Book of Blogs aims to foster a dialogical, unfinalised approach to social sciences research. Seventy chapters or 'blogs' from 83 researchers were included in the collection. Such engagement with the Book of Blogs format emphasised that this approach to scholarship spoke to many as a way to be heard. Therefore, we include our reflections on the implications of networked participatory scholarship in the digital sphere for our professional identities and academic careers, alongside example lessons and practicalities of curating and editing a Book of Blogs. We conclude with considering how social theory, particularly a dialogical epistemology, influences our digital scholarship and the ways in which we perform academia.

## Keywords

Bakhtin, Digital scholarship, Book of Blogs, Dialogics, Carnival, Social science

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## **Introduction**

Within academia, the web is enabling many people to embrace new forms of scholarly writing and publishing. This paper reflects on the editing, curating, and publishing of a collection of written work (see Condie and Cooper, 2015) in a form that has become known as a Book of Blogs (e.g.: D'Souza and Jones, 2013; D'Souza and Gratton, 2014; Woodfield, 2014). The Book of Blogs reflected upon here contains 70 chapters or 'blogs' from 83 authors on the topic of sustainable urbanisation and the transitions towards living in urban contexts. In this paper, we make use of key theoretical concepts originating from the work of the philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), which have become more central in recent times within Western humanities and social sciences thinking. Although it is important to note that Bakhtin's work has a much longer trajectory in Russian scholarship (Frank, 2005; Sullivan, 2012). Bakhtinian concepts are drawn upon to understand how new forms of digital scholarship, particularly blogging and self-publishing, facilitate and constrain research dialogues.

We take the position that the Book of Blogs is a dialogic act. Language or dialogue is central to Bakhtin's work where all meaning resides in the dialogical relations between people and groups (Gardiner and Bell, 1998). Although Bakhtin did not set out techniques by which to analyse dialogue, he did call for the 'dismemberment of understanding into individual acts' (Bakhtin, 1986, pp. 159-160) to make the whole act visible. In other words, by examining the 'concrete doings' (Cresswell and Hawn, 2011) i.e. the production of a Book of Blogs, we can more rigorously interpret how that 'concrete doing' is situated in contemporary social science practices and reflects scholarly 'culture as dialogue' (Bell, 1998).

A 'Bakhtinian' lens is applied to consider how social scientists represent sustainable urbanisation and the transitions to urban contexts, particularly how the Book of Blogs captures and orientates towards the voices of others. We consider whether this example of digital scholarship represents 'carnival' (Bakhtin, 1984b), a concept that has been applied within contemporary social theory to understand circumstances or situations where dominant hierarchies are disrupted and new social practices come into being. We also consider the impact that such scholarship has on the professional identities or 'dialogical selves' and those who participated in the project, including ourselves. We end with a discussion of our experiences of applying a dialogical framework to digital scholarship to help inform the decisions of others who may embark upon this pathway to publishing.

## **The Book of Blogs and an unfinalised social science research**

The Book of Blogs at the centre of this paper emerged from an International Social Science Council (ISSC) meeting in November 2014 of early career researchers, appointed to work on the topic of sustainable urbanisation in a global context. The early career researchers gathered in Taiwan for a weeklong seminar to discuss the

transitions to urban contexts from a social science perspective. Given the enormity of the issues facing societal transitions towards an increasingly urban future, alongside the varied urbanisation processes in play that are embedded within specific historical, cultural and political contexts, the seminar's duration 'was not long enough to hear the diverse perspectives within the room, let alone incorporate the plethora of viewpoints beyond it' (Condie and Cooper, 2015, p. 1). During the seminar in Taiwan, the early career researchers agreed that the plural 'sustainable urbanisations' should be used to acknowledge how urban contexts are diverse, fluid, and ever-changing (Condie and Cooper, 2015). What is happening in one place can be similar in some ways but can also vary in other way compared to other places.

The title *Dialogues of sustainable urbanisation: Social Science Research and Transitions to Urban Contexts* was used to capture the plurality, fluidity, and perhaps even uncertainty around the future of sustainable urban places emerging from the ISSC seminar; it implies that conversations are necessary. There is no doubt that this book exists in its current form as a product of our academic training. The influence of social theory can even be evidenced in the first word of the title: in '*Dialogues*' lies the voices of others, Mikhail Bakhtin being one of those influential voices.

The act of creating a Book of Blogs can be interpreted as an attempt to avoid 'monological', 'finalising' discourses of sustainable urbanisation, which in turn, acknowledges the unfinalised nature of the people entwined within those urbanising processes. For Bakhtin, an 'unfinalising' social science is one where research dialogues are more ethical since they do not attempt to fix and finalise research participants and topics of inquiry (Frank, 2005). Bakhtin's (1984a) literary analysis of Dostoevsky's novel 'Poor Folk' shows how the character Devushkin, who in recognising himself in another story, did not wish to be represented as 'something totally quantified, measured, and defined to the last detail: all of you is here, there is nothing more in you, and nothing more to be said about you' (p. 58). Thus from a Bakhtinian perspective, researchers should not 'Devushkinise' their research participants, and the power to finalise people with social science discourses should be scrutinised (Frank, 2005).

The Book of Blogs fosters an 'unfinalised' approach to social science scholarship by making more space for a wider range of perspectives, writing styles, and authors. It does so primarily by using the web to escape restrictive elements of publishing in traditional academic formats (e.g. books and journal articles). This was an attempt to invoke a 'carnival' in academic writing (Bakhtin, 1984b), which 'shakes up the authoritative version of language and values, making room for a multiplicity of voices and meanings' (Elliot, 1999, p. 129). A Book of Blogs can be seen as a way to embrace 'carnival' but with some form of rigour to ensure its credibility, use and inclusion in mainstream academic publications. For us, this is vital to the scholarship of sustainable urbanisation, where marginalised and stigmatised communities can be silenced or unheard; this is particularly important when such communities are more

likely to be negatively affected by urbanisation processes (see Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer, 2012). It is also vital to provide a space for a more diverse group of social science scholars to share their work and their findings.

As editors, we did not want to ‘Devushkinise’ the contributors by over-editing and peer-reviewing their content, or constructing over-arching narratives to knit individual pieces together, particularly given our position as White Western academics working within Western universities. At the same time, we did not stop contributors, or in Bakhtinian terms ‘speakers’, ‘Devushkinising’ their research participants and the people situated and implied within the dialogue of their work. That is not to say that all contributors wrote about sustainable urbanisation in a way to have that ‘final word’, but it does acknowledge that many pieces within the Book of Blogs are influenced by the essentialism, objectivism, and positivism that structures many of the social science disciplines. Furthermore, many of the blogs reproduce mainstream academic writing styles, mainly those of scientific journal papers.

Despite all of the above, as a collection, the blogs in the book would be more likely placed at the dialogical end of a monologue-dialogue continuum, the evidence for which comes from the level and scope of interest the call for contributors gained. The Book of Blogs contains 70 chapters of work from 83 authors within and beyond the social sciences, universities and academic institutions, and from a range of countries. Therefore, the call for contributors spoke to many as a way for their scholarship to be heard.

## **Digital Scholarship as Carnival**

In a seminal report called ‘scholarship reconsidered’, Boyer (1990) identified four functions of scholarship: discovery; integration; application and teaching. Although these functions can be transformed to the era of digital scholarship, Ren (2015) notes that a reframing of this model is happening due to the more open and collaborative nature of scholarship (e.g. networked participatory scholarship (Veletsianos and Kimmons, 2012)), which is facilitated by the web. We argue that this networked participatory component of digital scholarship can be interpreted as ‘carnival’. Bakhtin’s writings on the concept of ‘carnival’ invoke an exciting prospect of disruption; the disruption of established hierarchies and social systems as what is ‘characteristic of Bakhtin’s carnival is a world turned ‘upside down’ or ‘inside out,’ where life becomes unpredictable’ (Mclean and Wallace, 2013, p. 1520). As Elliot (1999) notes that ‘carnival’ involves the shaking up of languages and values to hear alternative and multiple voices. Therefore, ‘carnival’ can be a useful concept to understand the current changes we are seeing in the ways in which scholars are using the web. Open publication practices arguably represent a ‘carnival’ in academia, one that facilitates new knowledge, networks, and voices across a variety of topics. We position the Book of Blogs within this ‘carnival’.

Although there are many definitions of digital scholarship, there is a tendency to focus on the use of technology, collaboration, and an open and sharing culture (Veletsianos and Kimmons, 2012). The decisions we made in both the design and dissemination of the Book of Blogs were embedded within the 'digital' that is now typical of contemporary academic practices. Without the 'digital', the Book of Blogs would not exist in its current form. How then, might creating a 'Book of Blogs' in and on the web be interpreted as 'carnavalesque'? Is it 'carnival' if we are following the trends and movements already under way, creating the new mainstream? Bakhtin (1984b) noted that 'carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because the very idea embraces all people' (p. 7). Taking that definition, 'carnival' in social science research can be located within the advancements of digital scholarship, given that the 'digital' now embraces most, if not all, forms of scholarly work. We aim to be 'carnavalesque' in our scholarship, particularly as in doing so, our academic work has more potential to be dialogical, participatory, and polyphonic in online spaces (e.g. Brown and Van Herk, 2013; Brown, 2015).

An obvious place to start is with the practice of blogging. Blogging can be considered a new form since it is dependent upon the web and only exists online. However, blogging borrows from past forms such as keeping journals and diaries of reflections and everyday happenings. Yet Mclean and Wallace (2013) argue that blogging has a 'carnavalesque atmosphere' in 'that bloggers can unmask the sacred and subvert what is authoritative, rigid, or serious through discussions and opinion postings' (p.1520). Although Mclean and Wallace's work focused on political bloggers, it relates in some ways to how academics are seemingly having greater voice or opinion within online spaces. The web offers the potential to amplify unheard voices by providing opportunities for people to share their work in a networked, digital and open manner. However, existing social inequalities can be reproduced in online spaces where digital exclusion and access impact upon those with less power (Carah and Louw, 2015). For example, researchers from non-Western countries, those who publish in a language other than English, and those in their early career, may have less voice in online spaces than others.

Blogging is a form of self-publishing that can be situated within a wider turn towards academics gaining more control over how they distribute and disseminate their work. However, in relation to publishing, Pearce, Weller, Scanlon, and Ashleigh (2010) report a cautionary tale in that established 'publishing conventions' have remained fixed in the technological advancements taking place within academia. Part of this has been influenced by the shift to online journals from print journals (Pearce at al., 2010). The same hierarchies of who gets to publish where can thus be easily reproduced in the digital sphere (e.g. due to fees for open access publishing). However, there are a growing number of studies exploring the impact of having a digital presence on academic work, such as having a presence on social media platforms (Costa, 2015; Weller, 2011) and blogging (Mewburn and Thomson, 2013) for example. Scanlon

(2014) also suggests that digital scholarship may change publication practices in two ways: 'due to the impact of open access publishing and the prominence of Web 2.0 technologies and social media for scholarly communication' (p.15). Thus, Pearce et al., (2010) point out that there is a juxtaposition within Higher Education, which is at the forefront of some aspects of technology development (e.g. research and development), but a long way behind other sectors in other areas (e.g. the distribution of research findings).

As we are continuing to move into the age of the digital scholar, we feel greater consideration and integration of alternative forms of publishing (e.g. Books of Blogs) as outputs of academic value should be explored. Veletsianos and Kimmons, (2012) highlight that a key challenge for technology-enhanced scholarly practices are that they are often met with 'scepticism and reluctance' (p. 767) due to the additional demands they place on academics. Mewburn and Thomson (2013) reflect on how cautious universities can be of academics' use of web 2.0 tools with many developing and issuing guidance. In addition, there is an increasingly blurred relationship between institutions and academics in relation to who controls publications, similar to that which is seen with traditional journal articles. Despite this, through an analysis of academic blogs, Mewburn and Thompson (2013) note that a shift is being seen in some institutions with blogging being encouraged to help showcase work, events and topics which may not avail themselves through more traditional publications alone.

Bringing a collection of blogs together as a Book of Blogs may go some way to demonstrating how scholarship can be done differently, in a networked, participatory way. The Book of Blogs aimed to redistribute some of the power relations towards 'the other'. Any form of self-publishing awards the authors greater agency and control over their work. This style of publishing allows a choice over the way it is moderated and mediated, and greater autonomy to authors. This leads to both facilitators and barriers to the project; for example, a lack of peer-review is likely to impact how the work is received in terms of quality, but on the other hand, the web/method provides a space for a more diverse and eclectic mix of articles. Through the ability to be flexible in style and content within a Book of Blogs, there is an opportunity to embrace the 'carnival' of digital scholarship.

Despite the desire to do things differently in terms of the type and style of publication, in order to add credibility and ensure the Book of Blogs was seen as a worthy collection of work, we sought a publisher to support the publication of the project. We explored the potential of the ISSC acting as publisher as well as established academic publishers with little success. The main barriers to finding a publisher were the light touch nature of the editing process, the lack of peer review, and the speed at which the project was delivered. The Book of Blogs was ultimately published by one of the editor's affiliated university, which then provided support with online distribution, media coverage, and obtaining the required ISBN's for different versions of the book. Many contributors to the Book of Blogs wanted their work to be visible within

academic citation systems such as Google Scholar. Thus as editors, we wanted to ensure that the publication would be searchable on such platforms to add to its credibility as a scholarly, citable collection of work.

For Bakhtin, dialogue can be theorised as centripetal in pushing towards agreement and monologue, and centrifugal in seeking multiplicity and disagreement (Shotter and Billig, 1998). Although we used a non-traditional academic publishing format in the Book of Blogs, we have to consider the centripetal forces pulling the Book of Blogs towards the traditional and monological in terms of academic publishing and scholarship. Indeed, critics of Bakhtin's 'carnival' have called into question how existing power structures, hierarchies and traditions can be reinforced within a 'carnavalesque' movement (Elliot, 1999).

To expand upon 'carnival' as a movement that reinforces tradition, the Book of Blogs is interpreted as a 'book', the most classic of academic publication formats and thus 'uncarnavalesque' in form. In the abstract of this paper, we talk about blogs in quotation marks ('blogs') and include the term chapters as a synonym without. This was not on purpose with the intention of making an example here, but rather it provides evidence that attempts to invoke a 'carnival' within academia that are always in dialogue with established scholarly practices. The boundaries between 'carnival' and the 'status quo' can be considered blurry and complex as, even within this article, there is a mix of thinking of the contributions as chapters within a book and as blogs with more voice. We recognise that many of the pieces are based on research, written to disseminate findings with accurate formal referencing in place. Such writing reproduces academic conventions. Importantly, though other contributions focus on community events, research networks, researchers' experiences and their emergent ideas and solutions to urban issues. The Book of Blogs is a different kind of scholarship.

The Book of Blogs arguably demonstrates what Brown (2015) denotes as 'tensions' between the old and the new, the printed and the digital, as the entire editing process of scholarship undergoes radical change. The 'Book of Blogs' sits within the 'carnival' of digital scholarship where the 'the power of our printed past' (Brown, 2015, p. 13) lives on, perhaps even for good reason. It is important to avoid positioning 'carnival' as good, and traditional as bad. Furthermore, established academic publishing practices are dialogical too. For example, the peer review process creates a dialogue, albeit the dynamics between authors and peer reviewers may be far from equal. The move towards open peer review in online spaces can be interpreted as 'carnavalesque', as can comments and responses to published articles both on journal webpages and in other digital spaces, particularly blog sites and social media platforms. A more open, networked and digital approach can thus facilitate the distribution of power to hear the voices of others, particularly those who may otherwise remain unpublished and thus unheard.

## **The voices of others**

The idea to crowdsource a Book of Blogs on sustainable urbanisation was not a ‘unique utterance’ (Bakhtin, 1986) in that it came from somewhere. To borrow from Mikhail Bakhtin’s writings on dialogism, the voices of others were within our own in embarking upon this project: others who have produced collections of written works and named them as a ‘Book of Blogs’ (e.g. D’Souza and Jones, 2013; Woodfield, 2014); others who have influenced the way we work and write such as theorists and mentors; and those whom we were aiming to include and engage in dialogue. At the same time, as every dialogic act gives rise to something ‘unique and unrepeatable’ (Shotter and Billig, 1998, p. 13), our book can be considered a ‘unique utterance’ in the context of sustainable urbanisation, the first to be produced using the Book of Blogs format by those working on urban social issues.

Influencing our desire for such ‘multivoicedness’ or ‘polyphony’ (Bakhtin, 1984a), we wanted to move beyond the monologue of sustainable urbanisation and ‘disrupt the ‘status quo’ (Condie, 2015, p. 236) as much as possible, in particular we want to be part of a movement that goes beyond the established voices that finalise sustainable urbanisation. We tried to engage authors from around the world, and those from both academic and non-academic backgrounds to increase the richness of the content, and also gain a more ‘polyphonic’ picture of the topic of inquiry. The blog style of writing that was required for authors to use was designed to aid the ability to differentiate this project from the normal style and language used in peer-reviewed journals. This was in part designed to help with the accessibility of the publication and encourage non-academics, and students to contribute (Mewburn and Thomson, 2013). This was an explicit attempt at a more inclusive form of scholarship that is conscious of other voices, an explicit attempt to listen and through dialogue ‘consider what others have to say’, which is, in Bakhtinian terms, *‘better scholarship’* (Bell, 1998, p. 57). For Bell (1998), when non-academics are involved in academic work that is written in a more accessible way and made relevant for those impacted by it, ‘the invitation to listen and respond has been sincere’ (p. 58).

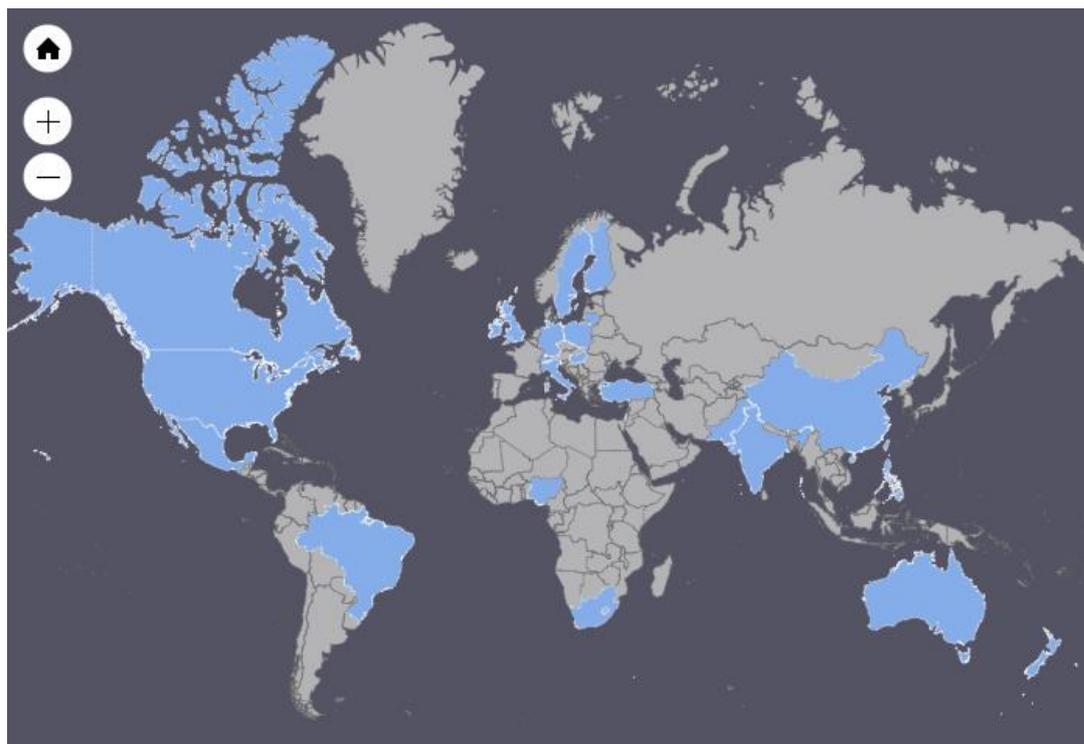
Whilst we have met Bell’s (1998) call for participatory dialogical scholarship in some ways, we failed in others. One key challenge was connecting with, and recruiting potential authors from a diversity of backgrounds and countries to the project. As the book was linked to the ISSC World Social Science Fellow scheme from its conception, formal support was provided through a press release outlining the aims of the Book of Blogs and how people could get involved (ISSC, 2014). Whilst the call for contributors stated that ‘all contributions would be considered’ (ISSC, 2014), the largest proportion of authors were academics, with only one describing themselves as an independent researcher, compared to the others who were attached to institutions. We did, however, attract a number of authors without academic titles such as Doctor and Professor, both those who are starting in their academic careers and those outside

academia. In the interests of creating a more dialogical space, we removed all authors' titles in an attempt to enhance the participatory approach and balance the relations between authors in the book.

The endorsement of the ISSC was essential to recruiting authors, so too was the organisation's vast global network of social science researchers who were accessible via the ISSC mail list. However, this recruitment strategy means that the 'Book of Blogs' as an alternative publication was also dependent upon academic traditions and established ways of disseminating information amongst scholarly communities to call for contributors. For greater reach, we also made use of social media platforms, particularly Twitter where we use a hashtag (#ISSCBookofBlogs) to discuss and promote the book. Although social media platforms arguably remove the barriers to previously unreachable networks of people and broadens the distribution of information, we still found there was a limit to the diversity of the authors, both in relation to the countries people were from and also people's backgrounds.

Participating authors were located in the UK and Europe, North America and Canada, New Zealand, Pakistan, Mexico, South Africa, Nigeria, India, Philippines, Israel, Brazil, Australia, China, Taiwan (see Figure 1 below). Interestingly, some authors were working in one country and writing about sustainable urbanisation in another (e.g. Chapter 34 Wilmsen, 2015, Chapter 35 Zhang, 2015, Chapter 40 Tzanelli, 2015). Despite, the 'traditional' network and prestige associated with the ISSC, alongside the 'contemporary' use of social media, there were still a number of areas globally that we did not reach in terms of contributors in the final publication. The highest proportion of authors came from the UK, which is not surprising given both editors' locations.

*Figure 1 Location of contributors' affiliations, created using amCharts*



Whilst the effort to gain multiple voices on sustainable urbanisation gathered 70 pieces of work, ‘first world’ western countries dominated the locations and origins of the authors. This is reflected by Mewburn and Thomson (2013) who highlighted the issue of using blogs reaching global audiences, and in analysing the wordpress.com blog map; they report almost no activity in Africa, South America and parts of Asia. Their findings correspond to the areas that this project struggled to reach. What we do not know is whether failing to recruit contributors in certain countries and regions, other than those highlighted in Figure 1, was due to the information about the Book of Blogs not reaching researchers in these areas or that information did reach them but other barriers prevented engagement (e.g. language issues). Currently, using the analytics available, it is difficult to understand why particular countries and regions are excluded from this project.

One potential reason for non-participation could be that the book’s format significantly diverges from well-established, academic outputs and thus does not ‘count’ in contemporary measures of academic work. The Book of Blogs can be considered as in dialogue with the voices of others within those academic systems since ‘to express an utterance is to invoke the whole background of communal practices insofar as an utterance carries with it the repertoire of expressions used in a community’ (Cresswell and Hawn, 2011, p. 5). Our reflections here, as well as in the Book of Blogs, are anticipative of ‘the other’, of the responses from scholarly voices, critics and peers within the ‘mainstream’ (Frank, 2005). What will they think of this work, its aim, and its quality? What will they think of us?

## **Digital dialogics and academic identities**

As early career academics we are conscious that, in going forward in our professions, we are unable to ignore the emerging possibilities of knowledge dissemination and the impact that digital information and methods of communication have on our roles as scholars (Cavanagh, 2012). Being at an earlier stage in our careers and having backgrounds in technology-related projects, perhaps we were also more drawn to digital, open publication methods and face fewer pressures around where to publish. Anderson and McPherson (2011) reflect on a potential difference between early career scholars and more established scholars in relation to the digital age:

It should not come as a surprise if younger generations of scholars begin to regard static, all-rights-reserved academic publishing with suspicion, as an artefact of an older model that can hinder the production and dissemination of knowledge. (p. 143)

However, as previously noted, our utterances always come from somewhere in that they are contextualised by the institutions and communities that we participate in (Hermans, 2004). The voices of others – of individuals, groups and cultures - are within our own in our academic work. When academic texts are theorised as ‘active’, writing ‘is always essentially dialogic’ in that text acts ‘as like a speaker in a conversation’ (Smith, 1998, p. 64). Considering the Book of Blogs as ‘active’, who is speaking, who is heard, and how are academic identities constituted within the dialogue of the text? What does participation in such a project accomplish for our academic identities?

There are many aspects of the Book of Blogs that reflect traditional aspects of scholarship and thus work to position contributors (including ourselves as editors) as credible academics. Bringing together a global collective of social science researchers arguably positions us as networked, digital scholars who are keen to embrace new forms of knowledge production and dissemination. One of the challenges of a project like the Book of Blogs is keeping this community of authors connected and ‘dialogical’ following the publication output. In the production of the Book of Blogs, few of the authors have ever met each other or the editors. This changes the nature of collaboration and working. The focus becomes written communication through email, across social media and through the platform for the Book of Blogs. There are a growing number of examples of academic works that are being produced by people who have met virtually, with the web breaking through past geographical restrictions and leading to collaborations that may not have happened otherwise. We need to look for ways to ensure that conversations live on and continue to develop, whilst also welcoming new voices on sustainable urbanisations along the way.

A further consideration is the academic validity of the location of an author’s work and the implications this has for their research ‘identity’ within academic

institutions and wider systems of research impact. This is something that may be impacted by a number of factors: the purpose of the work, the career stage of the authors, and the discipline an academic works within. Measuring the validity of academic work is also in flux with audience reach, and social media tools being incorporated. Although there is still a dearth of guidance around this, the Modern Language Association has recently developed ‘guidelines for evaluating work in digital humanities and digital media’ designed to support departments to account for digital scholarship during different stages of academics careers (MLA, 2016). These guidelines highlight the need to view outputs in their intended format to ensure they are presented in the correct manner. Building on this, Priem, Piwowar and Hemminger (2012) write that once there is a greater understanding and development, ‘altmetrics and traditional bibliometrics [could be] presented together as complementary tools presenting a nuanced, multidimensional view of multiple research impacts at multiple time scales’ (p. np online).

As such we feel that the Book of Blogs deserves a variety of metrics for determining its validity and worth in order to acknowledge the context and the purpose of this form of scholarly output. In deciding to edit and put together the Book of Blogs, we were cautious of how this emerging publication method would be accepted within our own institutions and within the wider academic community. However, a key driver in this book was a desire to keep conversations around sustainable urbanisation going, to have a free and accessible method of distribution, and to ensure the accessibility of the written work for a diverse audience. From the outset, we also believed that a publication of this nature would have wider impact and potentially lead to more conversations and projects in comparison to more traditional publications (e.g. a journal supplement). Although it is perhaps too early to understand the impact of the Book of Blogs, the format did facilitate multivoicedness and is perhaps the start of a network of academics, connected by the themes and issues running through the chapters. Thus, we are keen to encourage and support others to produce similar dialogical works to instigate what Brown (2015) calls ‘real change’:

Participating in the design of new editions, new editing platforms, new editing workflows, then, carries both a profound set of responsibilities and the beguiling promise of effecting real change ... (p. 14).

### **Applying a dialogical approach to digital scholarship**

We tried to ‘do’ scholarship differently and were driven by principles of openness, inclusion and multivoicedness to share and learn more about the transitions to urban contexts across the globe. In practice, taking such a dialogical approach was both enhanced and constrained by the digital world, as well as the well-established publishing conventions of academia.

By drawing upon Bakhtinian concepts within this paper, we have tried to make sense of the work that we have done and to understand our act of digital scholarship as dialogical endeavour and ‘carnavalesque’ practice. However, applying Bakhtinian dialogism to understand the processes of our work and what we have produced is not without challenge. Bakhtin’s theorising around ‘carnival’ was initially applied to the medieval type, and whilst useful in terms of understanding ‘disruptive’ academic practices, it is arguably limited in terms of relevance to the current time. For example, Elliott (1999) notes that feminist critiques of Bakhtin point out the lack of consideration given to gender, where class structures are suspended within ‘carnival’ but patriarchy is not. Thus in applying ‘carnival’, we have attended to the power structures of academia in this paper, but not necessarily to the other social structures that in dialogue with academia. We did nod to the influence of our Western academic identities and institutions, yet we could push further by going beyond Bakhtin to understand power relations within digital scholarship and how some scholars are heard and others are not.

Another point to note is that if ‘carnival’ depends on the suspension of dominant hierarchies, acts of ‘carnival’ are then always in dialogue with social traditions and societal conditions. Thus, our understandings of what is ‘carnavalesque’ are always orientated towards ‘the other’. In our work, we invoked ‘carnival’ by deviating from academic conventions, but at the same time, we reproduced classic features of academic work. The boundaries are blurry between ‘carnavalesque’ and ‘traditional’. Within the Book of Blogs it can be debated, from a Bakhtinian perspective, as to whether we have embraced an inclusive, dialogical form of digital scholarship, or reinforced the existing hierarchies and power dynamics of academia by wanting a traditional looking output. A dialogical conclusion would be that we have done both in that what is ‘carnival’ is in dialogue with what is not.

Bakhtin (1984b) theorised ‘carnival’ as something that embraces all people. Yet our actions as editors demonstrate our trepidation to ‘play’ beyond academic convention. Despite the desire for creative freedom, we (as editors) felt that there was a need to ensure a ‘professional’ output was produced in order to achieve as wide a readership as possible. As such, some of our actions in producing the Book of Blogs demonstrate that digital scholarship orientates towards well-established academic conventions, and perhaps our resistance to truly embracing a ‘carnival’ publication. It could be said that the practicalities of producing the Book of Blogs, even with the range of digital tools to hand, restrained our ‘carnavalesque’ attempts.

We wanted to produce the Book of Blogs as collaboratively and as dialogical as possible, yet as editors, we had to implement a system of control in order to manage the project. We drew upon existing relational practices between editors and contributors to produce the Book of Blogs effectively and efficiently. Although we used Pressbooks.com, (a collaborative platform where multiple authors can write together), the risks were too great to give open access to all of the contributions. For example, a

contributors' work could be inappropriately edited or accidentally deleted. Thus, many aspects of our method were not 'carnavalesque' at all as some of the existing academic hierarchies were not suspended. However, not being able to claim 'carnival' in this sense should not detract from our efforts and those of contributors to perform a different kind of scholarship and open this up to a wider range of authors. High levels of organisation and co-ordination were fundamental to achieving such a large collection of work.

The 'restricted' access approach to the Pressbooks website was also shaped by the blogs being submitted by individuals or multiple authors who already know each other and work together. On reflection, our approach could have been much more dialogical to encourage new relationships and collaborative writing within the emerging network. We could have used digital tools that are more dialogical to encourage open peer review and conversations on sustainable urbanisation. However, it is important to position the Book of Blogs as a starting point for dialogues of sustainable urbanisations. Since the Book of Blogs has been published online, there has been a proposal to produce spin-off versions in different languages, focusing on blogs for regions unrepresented within the existing collection.

An important part of this Book of Blogs was that it was freely available and open access for all of those who were part of it and who wanted to read it; a disruptive element of the publication in giving away knowledge for free. Hilton and Wiley, (2010) investigated the impact of giving books away free of charge, reporting that the most frequent motivation related to beliefs around exposure, reach, increased distribution and morality. In producing the Book of Blogs for free we also made certain assumptions relating to those who would read the book, as well as assuming this would ensure maximum impact.

In writing this paper and theorising our work through a Bakhtinian lens, we can see how our work could be more dialogical and more 'carnavalesque'. If our aim is for an 'unfinalising' approach to social science scholarship, then our work on instigating dialogues of sustainable urbanisations should continue, and digital platforms that encourage participation and continual discussions must be used.

## **No last words**

In the spirit of Bakhtinian dialogism, we have no last finalising words for a conclusion. If 'language lives' (Bakhtin, 1984a) so too does our language here in writing about the process of developing a Book of Blogs. We have endeavoured to expand upon our understanding of the Book of Blogs, as a dialogue, as a centrifugal force, and as 'carnival'. As a dialogical act, the power of long-established academic traditions cannot be ignored. New and emerging forms of academic publishing practices are in dialogue with the traditional, as Elliot (1999) notes, 'carnival' can reinforce existing power structures. So instead of disrupting and destabilising the monologue, our work here is situated within wider power structures that pull in centripetal ways towards

traditional forms of scholarship and ways of writing. The monologue of journal papers and formal systems of academic recognition reign on and the Book of Blogs remains in dialogue with those systems.

That is not to say that there is no point of working within networked, dialogical frameworks to hear the voices of others, in this case, on sustainable urbanisation. Yet in many ways, a networked participatory approach to scholarship is so much harder to do. It is easier for us as academics to speak than to listen, easier for us to co-write with colleagues we know well than to write with new people we know only through the digital world. For example, we have explicated how we could have encouraged more dialogical relations between the Book of Blogs contributors but why have we not employed a more multivoiced, dialogical approach to the production of this paper? What constrains us is the need to maintain the rigours around academic publishing. However, for our careers and those of the contributors to the Book of Blogs, there is also a need to consider more varied publication types and pushing forward into new ways of talking about our research and new ways of listening to others. We have to stand out and stand up to be heard and the web affords ways to do so.

The publication method of the Books of Blogs has potential to widen discussions around important topics and to network larger number of authors and researchers. However, hosting and distributing finished books at no or a small cost is currently complex and may require different online spaces for different versions. A way to streamline the curation and editing of a Book of Blogs would help, such as the development of a Book of Blogs platform with space for discussion, existing blogs to evolve, and further blogs to be continually added. A format where new contributions could be added continually would embrace Bakhtinian aims of 'unfinalised' social sciences. In addition, such spaces could enable best practice guidance to be generated in an iterative and collaborative way for a sustained 'carnival'.

The Book of Blogs has been fruitful in opening up a number of further potential projects and also potential collaboration and interest in using this format for other topics and research interests. It has also generated discussion, which was the main purpose of the project. Although there is scope for the contributors and readers to continue the discussions, we are very aware of our roles as facilitators in furthering discussions and research collaborations. The web holds the key to establishing ways for contributors to continue to work together.

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