Fieldstudy 9 marks the end of a one year research project, Road: Artists and the Stop The M11 Link Road Campaign, 1984–1994, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and Photography and the Archive Research Centre, University of the Arts London.

The M11 Link Road was completed in 1999 and stretches just three miles, from Redbridge roundabout to Hackney Marshes, but destroyed almost 400 homes, displacing hundreds of people. Originally proposed in the 1960s, the M11 Link Road caused immediate controversy and the Save Wanstead Action Group (eventually to become the No M11 Link Road Campaign), was founded. In the 1980s artists had started to move into the area drawn by low rent, yet in the 1990s many found themselves unwitting participants of one of the most controversial road protests in the UK.

Road: Artists and the Stop The M11 Link Road Campaign, 1984-1994, investigated not only how residence on the M11 Link Road route affected artists’ production, but also how far artistic production became a central part of the campaign from leaflets to sculpture, painting, installation and the functional architectural structures created by the protestors; tree houses, observation towers and treetop walkways.

Significant moments during the research were a public film screening at St John the Baptist Church, close to the M11 Link Road in Leytonstone, attended by over 100 people and reuniting many who had been involved in the protest; four public seminars held at Photography and the Archive Research Centre, University of the Arts London, with speakers including artists, protesters, archivists and critics; and documentation of three major archives, Museum of London, Vestry House Museum and Local Studies and Archives based at Ilford Central Library, plus a number of public and private image archives which were beyond the original scope of the project.

At the heart of the research is the production of an oral archive; interviews with twenty artists that lived and worked on the route of the M11 Link Road, before and during the protest. This series of interviews brings the artists’ voices to the forefront of the research and provides a unique opportunity to hear their experiences first hand. Many of these interviews can be found at Photography and the Archive Research Centre’s website www.photographyresearchcentre.co.uk

Fieldstudy 9 brings together a selection of artists’ works, documentation, leaflets and posters from the campaign alongside short extracts from the artists’ interviews. Full documentation is held at Photography and the Archive Research Centre, University of the Arts.

We are deeply indebted to the artists, photographers, museums, private collectors, archivists, galleries and individuals for their generous response and support.

Research was carried out by Aliann Marchant and Hannah Liley under the direction of Val Williams, Director, Photography and the Archive Research Centre, University of the Arts London.
In 1980 the Department of Transport offered Acme Studios short-life houses that had been compulsorily purchased prior to the building of the M11 link road in East London. Acme set these houses to young and emerging artists, enabling the movement of artists, through economic necessity, to the abandoned spaces of the East End. During the 1980s to the mid 1990s, from Leyton to Wanstead in East London, existed the largest artists’ colony in recent times. It included sonic artists, painters, sculptors, filmmakers and photographers, and in the early 1990s was at the centre of the No M11 Link Road Campaign uniting artists, local people and activists, against government departments and the police. The artist Jeffrey Dennis stated that ‘the artist’s’ community in Leyton was curiously unique in the history of such colonies in London. In Hampstead, Chelsea, Camden or Wapping, artists were the unwritten ‘advanced guard’ for gentrification... But our (that is the artist) influences in Leyton was almost completely delimited by the road construction (1). The area would subsequently become a focus of the ‘anti-road movement’ in the early 1990s and received extensive media coverage.

Artists and activist filmmakers documented the demolition of the houses satied on the M11 Link Road route, for instance John Smith’s 1994 film ‘Blight’ which uses reminiscence and documentary to produce an elegy to a lost community. The events of the No M11 Link Road Campaign became the catalyst for a number of artistic counter cultures, the activist film collective ‘Undercurrents;’ an alternative news company, videoed events at the height of the campaign. The Campaign was also the focus of early editions of schNEWS. (2). Since 1987, leyyton Artists Group have been opening their studios to the public. But unlike most other open studios ours are in the houses we live in, in a community of adjacent streets threatened with demolition by the planned M11 road extension. We belong to a larger local culture united against a common threat... (2).

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The derelict houses became sites of placement for artists’ work created as a response to the area’s changing landscape; Housewatch, a collaboration between a number of artists, created a series of site specific works projecting film onto the inside of windows of terrace houses lighting them up at night to be viewed from the streets. Paul Noble’s ‘heritage’ plaques stating ‘this house was once a home’ were sited on a number of derelict house frontages and ‘Close To Home’ by Alison Marchant, an enlarged family photograph covered a doorway already blocked up by corrugated iron. The resonances of a fast changing environment are embedded in the on-going practice of artists such as Graeme Miller and John Smith.

While artists like Yoshimi Kihara photographed the M11 Link Road demolitions and clearances from the window of her house in Filderkrok Road, and Steve Johnson documented the on-going campaign as resident anti-road protestor, also significant were artists who were drawn to the No M11 Link Road Campaign by their own personal and professional interests; photographers Tom Hunter, Gideon Mendel, Nick Cobbing, Maggie Lambert, Alison Butler, Steve Johnson, David Hoffman, Jason Royce and Nick Middleton. At the time of the No M11 Link Road Campaign the creative uses of public space to address issues of political and cultural significance functioned outside the mainstream art market. The artist Terry Smith visited the area between 1992 and 1994, gaining access to the condemned houses from where he began the project Site Unseen. During this period Tom Cousins and Christine Bunie set up the art house in Clarendon Road, hosting an exhibition of work by artists and protesters.

A comprehensive No M11 Link Road Campaign archive was donated to the Museum of London consisting of a large collection of photographs, news cuttings, ephemera and legal papers. Vastey House Museum and Ilford Central Library also hold collections of early anti-M11 Campaign information, news cuttings, maps and plans, and an extensive collection of back issues of campaign newsletters, from the 1980s to the present. Alison Marchant & Hannah Liley

(1), Jeffrey Dennis, ‘Was that Bohemia?’ Written in 2004, on the anniversary of its demise, a small memoir on the activist community in Leyton.

(2), 1990 Whitechapel: Open East End Open Studios ‘Introduction by Andrew Flux, co-ordinator East End Open Studios.'
Opposite:
Museum of London,
M11 Link Campaign
Handbill,
Claremont Road / The End Of The Beginning

The Rooftop Protest that launched a thousand protests, 1994
28 November, the first day of the final eviction of Claremont Rd

"Taken during the actual eviction. It was a freezing cold November day and the final protester was taken down 8 days later from the very top of 'Dolly', the 100 foot scaffold tower affectionately named after the street's eldest protester who was born in house number 32 nearly 93 years previously".

Following spread:

Postman nonchantly delivering mail, 1994
28 November, the first day of the final eviction of Claremont Rd

"Postman below the eviction. He [the postman] walked quite amiably through the cordon of 700 police officers and 400 security guards to deliver the last mail Claremont Rd would ever receive."

The Rooftop
The End Of The Beginning
a celebration of creativity

In History, Civilisations Rise & Fall.
On 2nd December, 1994, the Independent State of Claremont Road became a heap of rubble. They bulldozed our vibrant community and turned it into a site for a new road. But their hard hats, security fences and machines just cannot kill the spirit.

"The End Of The Beginning" is intended to be a zine. In remembrance of the street and in particular, the eviction week which is now a significant event in history. Please send any images, drawings, words, poems, respect to villagers, to the tower, dreams, insights or any other bits of your brains you would like to share.

Clare Zine - 80, Elm Road, Leytonstone, London

Jason Royce

The Rooftop Project that launched a thousand protests, 1994
I suppose I’m one of those people that the past is the past and that’s that.

The roof has come off Leytonstone High Road and the whole of London was on fire and you could smell the burning flesh and you could smell the burning and you could feel the heat and you’ve got some roasted chestnuts for breakfast and the fire engine came along and you’re watching this and he was just watching that and the fire engine came along and the whole of London was on fire and the whole of London.

The narratives of the hundred or more people interviewed for the work are archived in their complete form at The Museum of London, but function in the landscape as fragmented voices and unfinished narratives, inviting completion by the listener. The stories that reach furthest back touch on the time when the houses were yet to be built – a hundred years before their demolition when a girl stood by Bent’s Farm on Grove Green Road. Now they interact with the shifting presence of the listener in the shifting present. LINKED is narrative made lace, more gap than substance. Its net embraces the unpredictable play of real events in real time and invites connection – reconnection even – of the damaged narrative tissue of this swathe of East London. It broadcasts night and day and can be received freely (see linkedm11.net).

Graeme Miller, 2009.

LINKED, 2003 ongoing, created and conceived by Graeme Miller. An Artsadmin project commissioned by Museum of London.

Opposite:
Grayson Perry
M11 Link Campaign Ceramic pot
Museum of London, M11 Link Campaign

Following spread:
Nick Cobbing
M11 Protest Eviction, c.1994
David Hoffman Photo Library

To you in centuries to come
In the hope of this pot surviving whole. I ate my lunch
in workmen’s cafe then wrote
these words for a rich man’s
table. The day is cold, the air
is still. This studio is
condemned to be flattened under a
carpet of concrete over
which you may ride in some
strange vehicle only dreamed
of in this age of oil. Even
the pigeons are being made
homeless in this street.
This land was once a
small orchard, a few trees survive
beside the railway line
apples pack their address
leave the address
I tend to which
their desks.
I may prove

Nicholas Middleton
Clarendon Road, 2nd August 1994
I remember painting the stairs, the wooden stairs, I remember painting them sort of a primrose yellow, a pale primrose yellow because we definitely needed to make out a sort of a homely feel that was separate from the downstairs studios, which had a small scale industrial feel really and wasn’t homely, so I remember feeling quite important, to paint those stairs that yellow colour, because it was a bit brighter and lighter, and also because that hallway was so freezing, and chilled, and dark.

[Sheila Whitaker]

I wanted to live on my own and work on my own and have space to live and work on my own and the ACME housing association properties that I had been to before allowed me to do that. It was quite a good deal really — £10 a week I think, maybe £10 a month for a house: two bedrooms, three bedroom basement, garden, and I had studio space and lived there. It wasn’t very comfortable because it was cold and draughty but that was the reason I had it in the first place, and why it was so cheap.

[Peter Owen]

It felt really hostile when I first moved there because at that time I think there were only two or three other artists living in the street and most of the people that lived there had been there for generations... it was quite a close knit sort of east London community. And although everybody knew that their houses were under threat from the road, we saw the evidence really of the fact that things were physically changing... That relationship really changed over the time that I lived there, and by the time I had lived there for quite a few years and the real squatters started moving in, then those people saw me as being a pillar of the community, with people were the enemy.

[John Smith]

Rolls Royce would appear in the road as major West End dealers would bring collectors out to this no man’s land, as it were compared to this West End, you know, the gallerists liked the bit of rough; going to this no man’s land, as it were, to go nervously into an ACME house and buy somebody’s work. That was quite a regular phenomenon, I could see it now, because I think the collectors and the galleries liked the bit of rough: going to the coal face as it were, where these people wereaveraging making their art – you know, there was a kind of credibility to it, that just by being there in the area, if there weren’t already enough exposure to that.

[Grayson Perry]

I remember thinking it was the most heavily documented demo ever, after ever prototyping the road was lit with empty vanity cigarette cases!

[Grayson Perry]
PARC’s major current project is Fieldwork, an exhibition and book exploring the career of the photographer Daniel Meadows, in partnership with Photoworks UK, Birmingham Central Libraries, National Media Museum and Ffotogallery Cardiff. The exhibition will open in October 2011 at the National Media Museum.

Brigitte Lardinois and Paul Lowe have recently been awarded a JISC award under the scheme Enriching via Collaboration for the project NAM, around three archives from the Vietnam War.

PARC is the founder organization of the Journal of Photography & Culture, co-edited by Val Williams, Kathy Kubicki and Thy Phu, with Monica Takvam as Assistant Editor.

PARC has also led on two major AHRC research projects, on British photography in the 1970s and on the Acme artists who lived and worked on the site of the M11 Link Road. In 2009, PARC collaborated with LCC’s Faculty of Media in the first Big Conversation, between Martin Parr and Grayson Perry.

Core members of the Centre include Wiebke Leister, Tom Hunter, Patrick Sutherland, Brigitte Lardinois, David Moore, Paul Lowe and Pam Shelton.

For information about its activities and past and future events, see PARC’s website at www.photographyresearchcentre.co.uk

This issue of Fieldstudy was originally edited by Alison Marchant and Hannah Liley; revised and re-edited by Lorna Crabbe with a further version by PARC staff in 2009 to incorporate oral history material.

Recent PARC activities include When Photograph Meets Film, part of the LCC Expanded Cinema programme for BA students, and a collaboration with MA Design Writing and the BT Archive, featured in Fieldstudy 13. PARC is also a partner in the Journal of Photography & Culture seminar series with the University of the Creative Arts and the Photographers Gallery. For more information about the seminars and booking details, see www.photonet.org.uk

For information about its activities and past and future events, see PARC’s website at www.photographyresearchcentre.co.uk

The ROAD oral history interviews, from which extracts appear in this issue, will be available online at the PARC website. The Photography and the Archive Research Centre and the Journal of Photography and Culture host Facebook groups which are open to all.

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